

Framing the Early Modern French Best Seller: American Settings for François de Belleforest's Tragic Histories

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*This article shows how François de Belleforest (1530–83) adapted a variety of historical and geographical sources to meet the demands of the *histoire tragique* genre in composing three narratives set in the Americas. One recounts the destiny of conquistador Francisco Pizarro; another is the story of Marguerite de Roberval, who was allegedly marooned on a Canadian island; the third concerns Taino cacique Enriquillo's heroic rebellion in 1520s Hispaniola. These narratives fostered a tragic image of the Americas that had a considerable influence on early modern readers, inviting them to ponder essential questions about European encounters with the American continent and its inhabitants.*

INTRODUCTION

IN THE PRELIMINARY epistle to his famous anthology of *Histoires tragiques* (Tragic histories, 1559), a compilation of six narratives borrowed from Matteo Bandello's (ca. 1485–1561) *Novelle* (1554), French author Pierre Boaistuau (1517–66) thanked his collaborator François de Belleforest (1530–83) for his work on a translation that “would probably not have been published without his help.”¹ Boaistuau also announced the imminent publication of Belleforest's *Continuation des Histoires tragiques* (1559),² which would mark the beginning of one of the most successful literary collections in late sixteenth-century France and Europe. Between 1559 and 1582, Belleforest published five volumes of *histoires tragiques*, comprising ninety-eight stories of passion, murder, and revenge that were reissued several times by printers in Paris, Lyon, Rouen, and Torino. These early modern best

I would like to thank those who helped me improve this article, especially the two anonymous readers at *RQ*, and my University of Maryland colleague Laretta Clough.

¹ Boaistuau, 6: “qu'à peine fust-elle sortie en lumiere sans son secours.” All translations are the author's except where otherwise noted.

² *Ibid.*: “But since I hope he will soon publish his own translation of the second tome, I will refrain from speaking more in his praise.”

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sellers soon became a European phenomenon, as shown by their translation into Spanish, German, and English.³

A number of factors may have contributed to the unprecedented success of Belleforest's collection. His *histoires* were mostly printed in small and less costly formats that were affordable for a wider audience. By the fifth installment in the series, Belleforest felt he had reached readers of varied stations and competencies:

Withall, esteeming my selfe more than satisfied in this contentment and freedom which I now enjoy, being loved of the nobilitie, for whom I travell without grudging, favoured of men of learning and knowledge, for admiring and reverencing them according to their worthinesse, and honoured of the common people, of whom, although I crave not their judgment, as not esteeming them of abilitie to eternize the name of a worthy man, yet I account my selfe sufficiently happy to have attained to this felicitie, that few or no men refuse, or disdaine to reade my workes, many admiring and wondering thereat.⁴

The novelist envisioned his *histoires tragiques* as a bridge between court culture and a broader readership that included members of the *noblesse de robe* as well as the cultured bourgeois and merchants who were the customers of Jean Hulpeau and other printers in both Paris and the provinces. Belleforest's intent to reach a wide audience is equally apparent in the *argument* that introduces the sixth narrative in his *Cinquiesme Tome des Histoires Tragiques* (Fifth tome of the tragic histories, 1572), where he explains that he is not merely writing for those who fancy "the divinity of poetry" or the "magnificent conceits of our French poets," but rather for "ordinary people."⁵

Michel Simonin has suggested that the success of the *histoires tragiques* was the result of a gap in the commercial literary market of late 1550s France. Belle-

³ Juan de Millis Godínez's *Historias Trágicas exemplares* (1589), for example, are not direct translations of Bandello's *Novelle*. Rather, the Spaniard chose to translate fourteen stories taken from the French *histoires tragiques* due to their pleasant and polished style, and "because they were well received by all" (Godínez de Millis, fol. 4^r), a phenomenon Claudio Curlet, the printer of the *Historias*, attributed to the ethical considerations that Belleforest added to his Italian model. In England, translators Robert Smythe, George Tuberville, and Geoffrey Fenton turned to Belleforest, as did William Painter, who is forthright as to his preference for French versions of Bandello's tales in his *Palace of pleasure*. On English translations of Belleforest's *histoires*, see Pruvost, 1–2; Hook. Heitsch provides an interesting case study illustrating the migration of one of Belleforest's *histoires tragiques* across borders.

⁴ This quotation is taken from the English translation of Belleforest's Hamlet story titled *The Hystorie of Hamblet* (1603), reproduced in Gollancz, 283.

⁵ Belleforest, 2013, 328.

forest's series gained fame just as the reading public's enthusiasm for another Renaissance best seller, the *Amadis de Gaule* series, began to wane.⁶ Although the opportunistic approach typical of Belleforest and his printers no doubt accounts for the commercial success of the *histoires tragiques*, it does not entirely explain their vast appeal among sixteenth-century readers. The writer's ability to respond to varied and often contradictory expectations played a large part in their overwhelming success. As Belleforest often reminds the dedicatees of his books, he saw himself as a moralist writing "for the guidance of life and the formation of good habits."⁷ "Virtue only is what I propose and depict in this painting," he told Claude D'Aubray (1526–1609) in his *Troisième tome des histoires tragiques* (Third tome of the tragic histories, 1569).⁸

Yet Belleforest is also forthright about his ambition to entertain readers with what he calls a "diversity of stories."⁹ The *histoires tragiques* collection provided tales of adventure and passion, as well as political tragedies, *faits divers* (news items), and stories about exotic lands. Their author delighted in his ability to construct narratives that would stir up fear, pity, and countless other emotions in his readers: "Seeing your sad faces, paling from the shameful deed of Boleslas's murder of his brother, and from the terrifying judgment of God's punishment of the damnable mother Drahomire, I therefore did not want to continue discourses so tragic that they no longer bring you pleasure and comfort, but anguish and cause for grief, so I have instead chosen a story dedicated to the pursuit of love."¹⁰ As this quotation suggests, the *histoires tragiques* series, in spite of its name, also included more pleasant tales that did not end in bloodshed or misfortune.¹¹ Well aware that ancient Greek tragedy included plays with fortunate endings, Belleforest understood the need to lower the painful tensions and to relieve the emotional overload induced in his readers by his more tragic and bloody *histoires*, for at least the space of a story. In some cases, Belleforest's narratives even verged on eroticism, as, for example, in his depiction of the *innamorento* (love at first sight)

⁶ See Simonin, 1985, 2:587.

⁷ Belleforest, 1570a, fol. 152: "pour l'institution de la vie, et formation des bonnes mœurs."

⁸ Belleforest, 1569, fol. 4 ("Epistre a noble et excellent Seigneur Monsieur Claude d'Aubray"): "la seule vertu est celle que je propose et effigie en ceste peinture."

⁹ Belleforest, 2013, 4.

¹⁰ Belleforest, 1583, 164: "Voyant vos faces tristes, et palissantes pour le fait indigne du massacre de Boleslas sur son frere, et pour l'effroyable jugement de Dieu punissant la maudicte mere Drahomire, je n'ay aussi voulu continuer les discours si tragics qu'ils ne vous apportent plus de plaisir, et soulas, que d'ennuy, ou argument de tristesse, ains plustost ay choisi une histoire pleine de poursuite d'amour."

¹¹ The idea that *histoires tragiques* were not necessarily in the vein of tragedy was made clear by the inventor of the genre. See Boaistuau, 7.

that precedes the tragic events recounted in the eighth story of the *Septiesme tome des histoires tragiques* (Seventh tome of the tragic histories, 1583).¹²

Over a period of thirteen years, Belleforest created a successful formula, designing a series that staged a cast of recurrent characters: the star-struck lovers whose relationship is forbidden by their families, the jealous husband who takes cruel revenge on his unfaithful wife, the barbaric or despotic foreign prince, the heroic leader who experiences a reversal of fortune, the well-to-do lord who falls into crime, etc. Belleforest's *histoires* also included the embellishments that his public relished:¹³ epistles written by heroes and lovers, military discourses, and long monologues that depicted the scruples of villains, as well as the despair of men and women struck by misfortune. In sum, he found a perfect balance between a tradition that owed much to the *Amadis de Gaule* series, on the one hand, and to the attractiveness of a collection that went beyond the conventions of chivalric romance, on the other.

In later volumes in the series, Belleforest continued to expand on the novelities he introduced into the genre, providing judicial narratives that depicted himself as an eyewitness.¹⁴ Other innovations included tales that recalled the popular *canards* that circulated in late sixteenth-century France. Mindful of his public's "eagerness for new things,"¹⁵ Belleforest also decided to give the series a completely new direction as he prepared the *Quatriesme tome des histoires tragiques* (Fourth tome of the tragic histories, 1570). In the dedication of this volume to Françoise de la Baume (ca. 1537–1608), he explained that he would no longer be satisfied with translating tales borrowed from Bandello's Italian *Novelle*. Instead, he would compile stories selected from writers and historians that he described as "good authors who cannot be suspected of lying."¹⁶

As suggested by the full title of the *Quatriesme tome des histoires tragiques, partie de l'invention de l'auteur françois, contenant vingt-six histoires, enrichies et ornées avec plus de diligence que les précédentes par François de Belleforest* (Fourth tome of the tragic histories, partly invented by the French author, containing twenty-six stories, more diligently improved and embellished than the previous ones, by François de Belleforest), these novellas were not mere translations. Belleforest actually reinvented stories that he had read, in many cases, as he was preparing his *Histoire*

¹² In this *histoire*, a gentleman named Federic asks his beloved to extinguish the "raging inferno of his love" with the "dew of her sweetness": Belleforest, 1583, 228. He later dreams she is covered by an "angry wolf" who uncovers her "private parts": *ibid.*, 231.

¹³ On Belleforest's embellishments and additions to Bandello's *Novelle*, see Sturel, 72–141. Arnould provides an in-depth analysis of Belleforest's style and language.

¹⁴ On these narratives, see Campagne, 2010.

¹⁵ Belleforest, 2013, 579.

¹⁶ Belleforest, 1571, 7: "de bons auteurs, et iceux non suspects de mensonges."

universelle (1570) and his augmented translation of Sebastian Münster's *Cosmographia Universalis* (1544). The fourth book of the *Histoire universelle* and second volume of the *Cosmographie* (1575) depict the Americas. Since Belleforest, unlike rival cosmographer André Thevet,¹⁷ could not pride himself on the firsthand experience afforded by a voyage to the American continent, he relied heavily on works by Peter Martyr d'Anghiera (1457–1526), Girolamo Benzoni (1519–ca. 1570), Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo y Valdès (1478–1557), and more generally turned to the “fountain of the first conquerors of these lands.”¹⁸

It is no surprise, then, that among the novelties in the *Quatriesme tome des histoires tragiques*, readers would find the first *histoire tragique* written about the Americas, titled “Diverses occurrences sur ce qui se passa entre les gens du Roy d’Espagne au nouveau monde, et des seigneurs occis par les menées les uns des autres” (Various occurrences concerning what happened between the Spanish king’s men in the New World, and of the lords who were killed because of their conspiracies). Two other American stories would soon follow: the fifth volume of the *histoires tragiques*—originally published in 1570 under the title *Discours memorables de plusieurs histoires tragiques* (Memorable discourses on several tragic histories)—contains a version of Marguerite de Navarre’s famous Marguerite de Roberval tale and a narrative that chronicles the life of Enriquillo, a Taino cacique who led a heroic rebellion against the Spanish conquistadores in 1520s Hispaniola.

This article will show that through these three American *histoires tragiques*, Belleforest experimented with a new form of narrative that borrowed as much from cosmography and the travel narratives he researched in the course of preparing his geohistorical writings (comprising the 1570 *Histoire universelle* and the augmented translation of Münster’s *Cosmographia* published in 1575) as from the novella tradition practiced by Bandello. Significantly, these stories created an image of the conflicts and wars of the Americas that was informed by the theory and practice of tragedy as defined in Belleforest’s time. Their author also depicted the destiny of three characters who experienced the conquest of the American continent in very different ways: a well-known Spanish figure of the invasion of the Inca Empire, an adventurous young woman who took part in an expedition to Canada only to meet a disastrous fate, and a Taino cacique who chose to resist the tyrannical rule of the conquistadores. In so doing, Belleforest was led to ponder essential questions about European encounters with the Americas.

¹⁷ On the rivalry between Belleforest and Thevet, see Lestringant, 1991, 189–225.

¹⁸ Belleforest, 1575, 2:fol. aiii^r.

THE CONQUISTADOR

Borrowed from Francisco López de Gómara's *Historia general de las Indias* (General history of the Indies, 1552), Belleforest's first American *histoire tragique* describes the conflict that pitted Francisco Pizarro (ca. 1475–1541) against Diego de Almagro (ca. 1475–1538) in Peru and Chile, ending with the assassination of Pizarro in 1541. From the outset, the author underscores both the modernity and the ethical scope of the story he is about to recount: "So that whoever wants to deceive his enemy does not need to go as far as past centuries, nor leaf through the books of the Greeks or Romans: since to speak truthfully, whoever reads what has been written about the Spanish conquests can boast about having had a taste of everything that is crafty, deceitful, and cunning in history."¹⁹ As Belleforest researched the historiography of the Spanish conquest of the American continent in preparation for the publication of his *Histoire universelle*,²⁰ he realized that it included countless tales of betrayal, murder, and bloody conflicts that were ideally suited for the *histoire tragique* genre. In the passage just quoted, he imparts a negative twist to a topos that was often exploited by Spanish historians of the conquest of the Americas and, as David Lupher has shown, by the conquistadores themselves—namely, the idea that Spanish colonists had performed in a distant land deeds far greater than those of the most famed heroes of antiquity.²¹ Although Pizarro is compared to Julius Caesar in the *argument* that introduces Belleforest's *histoire*, the parallel is not motivated by the Roman general's conquests, but rather by his blind trust in his own greatness, which, according to the French writer, led to his brutal murder. In a similar vein, Pizarro is compared to Alexander the Great, not because of the Macedonian king's great exploits, but on account of a shared sense of overconfidence, which allegedly prevented both men from taking the necessary precautions that could have saved their lives.²²

Like many of his contemporaries who wrote about Pizarro, Belleforest used his depiction of the Spaniard's life as an opportunity to reflect more generally on the conquest of the American continent. In his *Les vrais portraits et vies des hommes illustres* (The true portraits and lives of illustrious men, 1584), André Thevet's praise of the conquistador's prowess, destined to be inscribed in "immortal memory," led him to justify the subjugation of the inhabitants of the

¹⁹ Belleforest, 1571, 752: "Tellement que qui veut ruser son ennemy, n'a point affaire de courir jusques aux siecles passez, ny de feuilleter les livres des Grecs ou des Romains: car pour en parler à la verité, qui lira ce qui est escrit des conquestes Espagnoles se pourra venter d'avoir gousté ce qui est fin, cauteleux, et dissimulé en l'histoire."

²⁰ The Pizarro story is briefly recounted in Belleforest, 1570c, fol. 296^r.

²¹ Lupher, 8–31.

²² Belleforest, 1571, 723.

Americas on religious grounds.²³ At the other end of the spectrum, the Protestant pastor Simon Goulart saw in Pizarro's story an example of greed and avarice that would eventually be punished by divine justice: "Pizarro and Almagro, both furiously ambitious, greedy, and cruel Castilians who fought against each other, filled this great kingdom with unrest and civil wars that ruined both of them."²⁴ Quoting Girolamo Benzoni, whose *Historia del Mondo Nuovo* (History of the New World, 1565) harshly condemned Spanish colonial practices in the Americas, Goulart claims that the excesses committed by Pizarro and other Castilians were such that the inhabitants of the Inca Empire believed them to be not men, but monsters "born from scum and excrement from the sea."²⁵

Although Belleforest does not go as far as Goulart, the author of the *Thresor des histoires admirables et memorables de nostre temps* (Admirable and memorable histories of our time, 1614), his condemnation of the deceitfulness of the conquistadores clearly shows his disapproval of their actions in the Americas. In the *Cosmographie universelle* (1575), he suggests that their behavior provoked various forms of divine retribution: "Before I conclude this chapter, I will say that the conquest of Cuzco brought such misfortune to those who discovered it that there is hardly a man among those who led the expedition who did not die violently, whether through war, treason, or punishment."²⁶ The tragic destiny of the conquerors of Cuzco is described in similar terms in the *Quatriesme tome des histoires tragiques*, where Belleforest concludes his Pizarro narrative with thoughts on the tragedies and reversals of fortune that mar the lives of great men and princes. He reminds his readers that Pizarro's fall from greatness was such that no one would even dare give him a proper burial. With this conclusion, the requirements of the *histoire tragique* genre as it had been designed by Boaistuau are met. Tragedy and the tragic are used to bring readers to reflect on *miseria hominis* and the vanity of their own worldly aspirations in the eyes of God.

There is much more at play, however, in Belleforest's Pizarro story. In the *argument* that introduces this *histoire tragique*, the Spanish general is not only com-

²³ Thevet, 1584, fol. 377^v.

²⁴ Goulart, 57: "Pizarre et Almagro, Castillans furieusement ambitieux, auares, cruels, entrez en picque l'un contre l'autre, remplirent ce grand royaume de troubles et de guerres civiles, qui les ruinerent tous les deux."

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 57–58.

²⁶ Belleforest, 1575, 2:col. 2061: "Or auant que mectre fin à ce chapitre, je diray que la conqueste de Cusco a esté si malheureuse à ceux qui l'ont descouvert qu'à grand peine se trouve il un homme seul de ceux qui ont commandé en ce voyage, qui ne soit mort violemment, ou en guerre, ou par trahison, ou par justice." The same idea appears in the *Histoire universelle*: see Belleforest, 1570c, fol. 296; the author believes that the ambition and greed of the Christian conquerors, as well as their infighting and their brutal killings of native kings, have led to their demise.

pared to Julius Caesar and Alexander. In order to quite literally bring home for his readers the tragedies of the conquest of the Americas, Belleforest also establishes a more modern parallel between Pizarro's tardy reaction against the conspirators who want to kill him and Tristan des Moneins's indecision during the 1548 *émeutes de la gabelle* (salt-tax riots).²⁷ He then compares the conquistador's murder with the assassination of Duke François de Guise (1519–63), who is depicted as a victim of his own courteousness: "because if he had used the methods that justice and war allow, he would be alive, and the king perhaps free of so many worries that torture his mind during these first years of his rash youth."²⁸

Pizarro's tragic destiny parallels events that Belleforest described at length in his *Histoire des neuf Roys Charles de France* (History of the nine Kings Charles of France, 1568). During the siege of Orléans, Poltrot de Méré (ca. 1537–63), a Protestant convert, came to Guise to offer his services, claiming to be a deserter: "But as the lord Duke of Guise was on the verge of victory, either through assault, or through intelligence, the enemy who had not been able to vanquish this French Achilles and faithful servant of the crown either with the force of an army, or during so many meetings in various places, in the end defeated him by betrayal and surprise, in the guise of good faith and friendship."²⁹ Belleforest writes that in spite of all his qualities, fortune, and success, Pizarro shared with François de Guise a tragic flaw that López de Gómara also highlights in his *Historia General de la Indias*: he was "brave and honorable; but negligent of his safety and life."³⁰ The *histoire tragique* author finds in Pizarro's destiny an exemplum that sheds light on a political and military tragedy, a "mirror"³¹ that should allow French readers to better understand events from their own contemporary history. The civil war brought about by Almagro's and Pizarro's hubris duplicates the troubles

²⁷ In 1548, a rampaging mob rioted against the *gabelle* tax on salt in the city of Bordeaux. The *lieutenant du roi*, Tristan des Moneins, was brutally murdered as he attempted to negotiate with the crowd.

²⁸ Belleforest, 1571, 723: "car s'il se fust aidé des moiens que la justice, et la guerre promettent, et il seroit en vie, et le Roy peut-estre delivré de tant de soucis, qui luy tourmentent l'esprit par les premiers ans de sa gaillardise."

²⁹ Belleforest, 1568a, 553: "Mais comme le seigneur Duc de Guyse fust sur le point de la victoire, fust par assault, ou par intelligence, l'ennemy qui n'avoit peu vaincre cest Achille françois et fidele serviteur de la couronne, par et avec la force d'une armée, ny en tant de rencontres euz en si divers lieux le gaigna à la fin par trahison et surprise, et sous tiltre de bonne foy et amitié."

³⁰ López de Gómara, 269: "Fue grosero, robusto, animoso, valiente y honrado; mas negligente en su salud y vida."

³¹ Belleforest often presents his *histoires* as mirrors; see, for example, Belleforest, 2013, 725.

that devastated France in Belleforest's lifetime, an observation that the author underscores in the short *argument* that introduces his *histoire*.³²

Belleforest reads the not-so-distant history of the conquest of the Americas through the prism of the more recent history of the French Wars of Religion, a tendency that also resonates, as Frank Lestringant notes, throughout the pages of the second volume of the *Cosmographie universelle*, devoted to the Americas.³³ He therefore joins a group of writers and playwrights who, as Andrea Frisch points out in a recent essay, conceived of the rhetoric of tragedy and the tragic "as a potential instrument of political polemic, rather than as a discourse designed to mitigate tensions."³⁴ Belleforest, translator of the *Remonstrance aux princes françoys de ne faire point la paix avec les mutins et rebelles, A Monseigneur Le Duc de Guyse* (A remonstrance to the French princes, against peace with the mutineers and rebels, to his lordship the duc de Guise, 1567) and author of the *Remonstrance au peuple de Paris* (A remonstrance to the people of Paris, 1568), who has been described as a "virulent pamphleteer,"³⁵ imparts to the *histoire tragique* genre a political function that its first inventor clearly had not foreseen. While Pierre Boaistuau stands out as one of those moralists who Louis Van Delft—quoting Montaigne—has aptly described as *spectateurs de la vie* (spectators of life),³⁶ Belleforest turns the *histoire tragique* into a form of *remonstrance*, a call to arms in the vein of his late 1560s pamphlets. In this context, the infighting that took place during the Spanish conquest of Peru and the Inca Empire becomes an allegory of the violent political and ideological discords of late 1560s France.

In his first American *histoire tragique*, Belleforest is primarily interested in depicting the bloody conflicts that arise when men who are blinded by devouring ambition fail to remember that they owe their station and fortune to their sovereign.³⁷ In his view, just like the noblemen who have joined the ranks of the Huguenots in France, Pizarro, Almagro, and all those who fought for control of newly discovered lands in Peru and Chile had forgotten their allegiance to their king. The actions of a single disloyal man, Belleforest insists, can quickly bring about the downfall of all citizens.³⁸ His story begs readers to stop anyone who

³² Belleforest, 1571, 721: "I feel such extreme grief of heart, when I see how the ambition and greed of seditious men in this kingdom have brought trouble and calamity upon our times and almost all of Christianity, that I cannot pass over any example pertaining to this matter without giving it some consideration."

³³ Lestringant, 1991, 212.

³⁴ Frisch, 112.

³⁵ Richter, 1984.

³⁶ Van Delft, 5–11.

³⁷ Belleforest, 1571, 758.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 724.

would follow Almagro's seditious path, and invites King Charles IX not to postpone the punishment of those who are conspiring against his legitimate sovereignty.³⁹

THE DAMOISELLE

Belleforest soon returned to the Americas with two stories that he included in his 1570 *Discours memorables de plusieurs histoires tragiques*.⁴⁰ The first was widely disseminated in sixteenth-century France, notably through Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptameron* (1559) and André Thevet's *Cosmographie universelle* (1575) and *Grand insulaire* (Island book, ca. 1586–87). It recounts the ordeal of a young woman who was allegedly stranded on a desert island during a voyage to the Americas. The damoiselle, as Belleforest calls her, had participated in an expedition undertaken by her brother. As often in his volumes of *histoires tragiques*, Belleforest presents his narrative as a *nouvelle à clef*: the brother and captain in question can easily be identified as Jean François de la Roque de Roberval (ca. 1500–60), who had been commissioned by King Francis I (1494–1547) to settle the province of Canada. During the crossing, the young woman falls in love with one of the gentlemen in Roberval's company, secretly marries him, and becomes pregnant. Her brother, who soon finds out, is outraged by the couple's behavior and by his sister's failure to ask him permission to marry. He disguises his wrath but prepares to take terrible revenge. Using the pretext of a provisioning stop, he abandons the wife and husband on a desert island. The couple survives as it can, the damoiselle gives birth, but her child dies of hunger. The gentleman soon meets the same fate, leaving his widow alone on the island, "numb with fear and astonishment,"⁴¹ until she is rescued by a passing ship after a few years.

A comparison with Marguerite de Navarre's version of the marooned damoiselle's story—which Belleforest was certainly familiar with—is revealing as to his ambitions. In the sixty-seventh story of the queen of Navarre's *Heptameron*, the damoiselle is the wife of one of the craftsmen that Captain Roberval took on his expedition to "establish towns and forts" in Canada. Simontault, the story's narrator, explains that this man is "a wicked traitor who was low enough to betray his master, and almost caused him to be taken prisoner by the natives."⁴² These characters stand in stark contrast to those in Belleforest's *histoire tragique*, where the

³⁹ A great leader, he writes, is wrong to delay the punishment of those who are conspiring against his life: *ibid.*, 721.

⁴⁰ The dedication to the *Discours memorables* (Belleforest, 1570b) is dated 25 July 1570. The *Quatriesme tome des histoires tragiques* was published in May 1570.

⁴¹ Belleforest, 2013, 174: "transie de peur et estonnement."

⁴² Marguerite de Navarre, 503.

damoiselle loathes the ship's "women of low estate" who have "no name, no grace, nor honesty,"⁴³ and where her lover is depicted as a gentleman whose mastery of arms is matched by his remarkable talent for letters and poetry.⁴⁴ In keeping with Aristotelian theories of tragedy that were being disseminated by playwrights and influential writers of the time, Belleforest needs his "discours assez tragic" characters to be of higher status than those in Marguerite de Navarre's tale,⁴⁵ and he alters the plot accordingly. In the queen of Navarre's version, Roberval is intent on punishing the traitor who has endangered his life; his wife begs the captain to spare him and to be left with him on a deserted island.⁴⁶ In Belleforest's narrative, the ship's captain devises the couple's exile as a horrifying surprise and a cruel punishment. The plot is now founded on a *banissement*, the type of exile that Jean de La Taille highlights in his *Art de la tragédie* (1572) as one of the situations most likely to give rise to the passions and emotions peculiar to tragedy.⁴⁷ Most importantly, Belleforest invents a close family relationship that is absent from the *Heptameron* story: the damoiselle is now the captain's sister. The *histoire tragique* is based on what Aristotle describes as a tragic incident that occurs between those who are near or dear to one another.⁴⁸ Harm occurs among *philoï*,⁴⁹ as in the best tragedies envisioned by the Greek philosopher and the theoreticians who disseminated ideas borrowed from the *Poetics* in late sixteenth-century France.⁵⁰

Although Belleforest repeatedly claims he is recounting true events that occurred a little more than twenty years before he wrote his *histoire tragique*, the degree to which the damoiselle's story is factual remains a matter of controversy. Yet this discussion, however important it is for historians of the Americas, does not fully account for the intended function of the tale. Belleforest is primarily interested in moving his readers with the story of a woman who has to endure the "more than barbaric cruelty" of her brother.⁵¹ The damoiselle's story belongs to the line of the family tragedies that are at the center of most of Belleforest's narratives: a man cruelly punishes his wife;⁵² a young prince avenges the mur-

⁴³ Belleforest, 2013, 145.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 139.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* As Charles Mazouer notes, in the second half of the sixteenth century, most French theoreticians and playwrights systematically associated tragedy with aristocratic characters: Mazouer, 75.

⁴⁶ Marguerite de Navarre, 503.

⁴⁷ La Taille, fol. 2^v.

⁴⁸ Aristotle, 75 (1453b).

⁴⁹ On harm to *philoï* as a central element in the plot structure of tragedy, see Belfiore.

⁵⁰ See, for example, Scaliger, 366; Vauquelin de la Fresnaye, 134.

⁵¹ Belleforest, 2013, 176: "sa cruauté plus que barbare."

⁵² See, for example, Belleforest, 1583, fols. 219^r-250^r (story 8).

der of his father by his own uncle;⁵³ a prince kills his brother;⁵⁴ a father kills his son.⁵⁵ The general storyline remains the same—disputes among *philoï* bring about cruelties and horror that Belleforest describes in detail—but the distinct historical and geographical settings provide considerable variations. Throughout the five volumes of the *histoires tragiques*, the author invites readers on a long voyage that takes them to the Scandinavia of the ancient Danes, to France in the time of the wars between the Count of Foix (1331–91) and the Duke of Armagnac (1319–73), to Agen and Toulouse in the days of Belleforest’s youth, to the empire of Soliman the Great, and, in the case of the damoiselle’s story, to the Gulf of Saint Lawrence. This voyage to the Americas—or, more precisely, to the American continent as the cosmographer/*histoires tragiques* author envisions it based on his reading of accounts written by Spanish, Portuguese, and French travelers—provides the novelty that Belleforest has repeatedly promised his readers.⁵⁶

Yet there is much more at play in the damoiselle story than the excitement of an exotic narrative designed to satisfy the unrelenting curiosity of readers of the *histoires tragiques* series. Writing about the Americas in his *Cosmographie universelle*, Belleforest explains that he favors a multiplicity of “texts, reports, memoirs, and instructions” over the testimony of a single eyewitness.⁵⁷ Unlike rival cosmographer André Thevet, whom he accused of relying excessively on his own limited experience, Belleforest prides himself on having had special access “through the favor of friends” to the memoirs of Jacques Cartier (1491–1557), Captains Laudonnière (1529–74) and Gourgues (1530–93), and many others.⁵⁸ Yet in the damoiselle story, he takes a different stance. The veracity of the incidents at hand is supposedly warranted by the single testimony of the protagonist: “this story, whose account has reached us through the testimony of the Damoiselle herself, freed of the danger that her chaste desire and virtuous love brought her.”⁵⁹ This is not exactly true, as can be inferred from reading the 1580 edition of the *Cinquiesme Tome des Histoires Tragiques*, in which Belleforest admits that he learned of these peculiar events second hand.⁶⁰ However, his insistence on the damoiselle’s per-

⁵³ See, for example, Belleforest, 2013, 253–318 (story 5).

⁵⁴ See, for example, Belleforest, 1583, fols. 147^v–163^v (story 5).

⁵⁵ See, for example, Belleforest, 2013, 187–244, 325–90 (stories 4 and 6).

⁵⁶ See, for example, *ibid.*, 501, 579.

⁵⁷ Belleforest, 1575, 2:fol. aiii^r.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Belleforest, 2013, 139: “ceste histoire, le recit de laquelle est parvenu jusques à nous par le tesmoignage mesme de la Damoiselle delivrée du peril où son chaste desir et amour plein de vertu l’a conduit.”

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 181: “Not that she ever told me the story, since I have never seen her, to my knowledge, but I have heard it from reliable people who have assured me of the truth of the matter that I am about to recount.”

sonal testimony in the original version of his narrative shows that here, as in other *histoires tragiques*, he is primarily interested in depicting an individual destiny through which he can go beyond the general information typical of his cosmographic works. Unlike André Thevet, who inserted his version of the marooned couple in his own *Cosmographie universelle*,⁶¹ Belleforest makes a clear distinction between genres. Where his cosmographic texts are encyclopedic overviews that give precedence to “the true history of epochs, nations, kingdoms, empires, potentates, republics,”⁶² the *histoire tragique* is more akin to the genre of the *vita* as Plutarch understood it, a type of history that, as Jacques Amyot (1513–93) reminded readers of his translation of Plutarch’s works, focuses on “people rather than things, on domestic matters rather than public events, on what is inside men rather than what is outside them.”⁶³

Unlike Plutarch’s *Vitae*, however, Belleforest’s life of the damoiselle is a literary construct that artfully brings together both accurate geographic information and fictitious elements. This weaving of authentic and imaginary components is what gives the *histoire tragique* the modernity of what would today be called historical fiction. In his version of the story, and unlike his contemporaries Marguerite de Navarre and André Thevet, Belleforest gives readers a lengthy description of the transatlantic voyage that brings the French crew to the vicinity of Newfoundland,⁶⁴ as well as a detailed account of the everyday life of men and women who have embarked on a ship whose captain intends to found a colony on the American continent. His depiction, however, is far from realistic. The gruesome conditions of Renaissance sea travel would have left little room for the gentleman’s courtly seduction of the damoiselle, or for the *états d’âme* (qualms and worries) of the two lovers. Among other contemporaries of Belleforest’s who crossed the Atlantic ocean, Jean de Léry describes his voyage as an atrocious experience that entails constant danger, a permanent need to hunt for food, violent confrontations with the crews of ships from rival countries, and repeated storms: “Then we were seized by a surge of the sea that continued for twelve days, during which—even aside from being very ill from the usual seasickness—there was not one of us who was not terrified at the ship’s swaying. Those especially who had never smelled sea

⁶¹ Thevet’s version can be found in his *Cosmographie universelle*: see Thevet, 1575, 2:fol. 1019^r–1020^r. See Bideaux, 191–99, for a modern edition of this text.

⁶² Belleforest, 1575, 1:fol. ij^r: “la vraye histoire des temps, des nations, royaumes, empires, potentats, republicques, et estats de la police mondaine.”

⁶³ Plutarch, 1784, 35.

⁶⁴ The couple is abandoned just after the ship has passed the “isle des rats” (“island of rats”) and the “isle des esprits” (“island of spirits”). For a discussion of the latter’s location according to Renaissance cartographers, see Bideaux, 93–100.

air, nor danced such a dance, and who saw the sea so high and roiled up, thought at each instant that the waves were about to take us to the bottom.”⁶⁵

In sharp contrast with Léry’s depiction, Belleforest’s *histoire* is interspersed with long poems written by the gentleman for his beloved damoiselle. With these poetic moments, and the music the protagonist plays on his lute, Belleforest’s readers—in spite of the author’s claim that the reality of the events he is recounting is far removed from the imagined story of Amadis and Oriane⁶⁶—are transported into the universe of the romances whose success with aristocratic readers the editors of the *histoires tragiques* collection sought to emulate. As Michel Bideaux observes, the verses in which the dying gentleman describes the island where he is to rest forevermore call to mind a poetical *locus amoenus* much more than they do the region of Newfoundland, where the story supposedly takes place.⁶⁷

In view of the possible birth of the damoiselle’s child on the deserted island, Belleforest speculates as to the language that would be spoken by a child born in complete isolation, referring to Egyptian Pharaoh Psamitik I’s famous experiment as related in the *Histories* of Herodotus. Quoting Flavius Josephus’s *Antiquities of the Jews*, he reflects on the discoveries and inventions inscribed on the pillars of the sons of Seth.⁶⁸ Before his death, the gentleman sings verses in which he refers to the legend of Deucalion and Pyrrha.⁶⁹ Such details point to the idea that Belleforest, like many of his contemporaries, envisioned the Americas through the lens of Greco-Roman culture. The world he depicts, however, is not a place where a new golden age can be found. It is a tragic world, as he warns readers from the outset, when he tells them that they are about to read “a rather tragic discourse.”⁷⁰ It is also a world where nature is deficient, unable to allow the couple to thrive and prosper. In this way, Belleforest presents a vision of the Americas as a weak and immature continent, an image that Buffon and others would later develop in their pseudoscientific writings.⁷¹

Interspersed throughout Belleforest’s narrative, lengthy digressions on the “dangerous currents neighboring the country of Mexico,” Gengis Khan’s great empire, or the possibly gigantic size of the inhabitants of the region of the Rio de la Plata are included for purely informational and entertainment value.⁷² Geographic elements that are directly linked to the damoiselle story, on the other

⁶⁵ Léry, 8.

⁶⁶ Belleforest, 2013, 177.

⁶⁷ Bideaux, 184.

⁶⁸ Belleforest, 2013, 168.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 170.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 139.

⁷¹ On this idea see Gerbi, 3–80; Roger, 26–45.

⁷² Belleforest, 2013, 148–49.

hand, are often given a sketchier treatment. Rather than dwelling on the reality of the harsh Canadian winter that castaways such as those he portrays would have had to endure, Belleforest simply depicts the island as a “horrifying desert”⁷³ where “ferocious wild beasts”⁷⁴ roam and where the couple, who has heard many stories about the infamous *isle des esprits*, is left to fear the apparition of ghosts and spirits.⁷⁵ In this dangerous and isolated place, the damoiselle experiences a redemptive journey that echoes Christian as well as classical archetypes. In many ways, the ordeal and resilience of the couple who momentarily triumph over hostile nature foreshadow the modern genre of the robinsonade.⁷⁶ Significantly, this is precisely how Aimé-Ambroise-Joseph Feutry, who translated Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* into French, read and understood Belleforest’s *histoire tragique*. In his *Choix d’histoires tirées de Bandello, de Belleforest et de quelques autres auteurs* (A choice of stories taken from Bandello, Belleforest, and a few other authors, 1758), Feutry rewrote Belleforest’s “Histoire d’une damoiselle françoise,” stripping it of its more tragic elements in order to transform it into a robinsonade-like adventure. In the same vein, Ferdinand Denis and Victor Chauvin included a version of the damoiselle’s tale in their 1863 *Les Vrais Robinsons* (The true Robinsons). In this case, as Arthur Stabler put it, the story was recounted “in a prose in the direct line of descent of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre and Chateaubriand.”⁷⁷

The damoiselle’s tragedy, however, does not merely provide its readers with an exotic setting or with the modern-day exemplum of a woman whose great love and virtue allow her to overcome overwhelming adversity. It echoes questions that Belleforest describes in his *Histoire universelle* and *Cosmographie*, two texts in which the lands of Canada and New France are given a rather succinct treatment compared to that of the Spanish and Portuguese conquests. Documentation about Baccaleos, the region of Newfoundland, Belleforest writes, is so thin that there is little to say other than it is a place where the sea is frozen most of the time and where people dress in pelts “just like in neighboring lands.”⁷⁸ It actually seems to him that those few explorers—he thinks there may have been four or five at most—who have traveled to the northernmost lands in America have been so inattentive and inefficient that they “have only described the mores of their inhabitants as if they had been dreaming.”⁷⁹ This prompts him to quickly

⁷³ Ibid., 167: “ce desert espouvantable.”

⁷⁴ Ibid., 177.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 167.

⁷⁶ See Lestringant, 2005b, 190–91.

⁷⁷ Stabler, 33.

⁷⁸ Belleforest, 1575, 2:col. 2194.

⁷⁹ Belleforest, 1570c, fol. 252: “Et encore ceux qui y ont passé se sont monstrez si peu diligens, que de n’escire que comme en songeant les mœurs des peuples qui y habitent.”

turn to Florida, “where the French have undertaken various travels, and often experienced various assaults of fortune.”⁸⁰

In view of this paucity of documents, and at a time when, as Benjamin Schmidt points out, “scattered reports of Brazil and its riches fired the French imagination far more than the *faux* diamonds brought back from Canada,”⁸¹ the damoiselle’s story is a welcome addition that provides a supposedly true eyewitness account of events that took place during Belleforest’s—and his readers’—lifetime. Significantly, her adventure also echoes a pattern that the author describes in the pages of the *Cosmographie*: as the French attempted to establish colonies on the American continent, they repeatedly encountered failure and defeat. Their utopian undertakings were shattered either by internal strife or by the pressure of Portuguese and Spanish enemies. Such was the fate of Villegagnon’s colony, ruined by disagreements that pitted Catholic colonists against Protestant settlers; such was also the fate of Ribault’s Floridian settlement, which was brutally destroyed by the Spanish in 1565. Although the damoiselle does not face such enemies, her thirst for travel and discovery, her eagerness to “see the rarities that were reported to exist in strange lands,”⁸² are shattered by her brother’s cruelty. Later, her attempt to settle on an island using a few weapons and essential supplies is thwarted by a harsh and hostile environment, in spite of her ingenuity. Belleforest’s message about the Americas is similar to the one that resonates throughout the pages of his *Cosmographie*: although many have ventured across the Atlantic Ocean with more or less successful outcomes, most have gained nothing but the experience itself.⁸³ In the case of the *demoiselle*, however, this experience is extraordinary in nature, since it allows the protagonist to go beyond traditional gender roles.⁸⁴

THE CACIQUE

The third and final story that Belleforest wrote about the American continent is radically different from the Pizarro and the damoiselle narratives, in that it stages as its main protagonist not a European figure, but a Taino Indian. This *histoire tragique*, titled “Comme un cacique ou roitelet en l’isle espagnole se revolta contre le Roy d’Espagne pource que le gouverneur luy avoit denié justice” (How a cacique

⁸⁰ Belleforest, 1575, 2:col. 2194: “La Floride . . . où les François ont fait divers voyages, et expérimenté souvent divers assaults de fortune.”

⁸¹ Schmidt, 36.

⁸² Belleforest, 2013, 137: “veoir les raritez qu’on racomptoit des païs estranges.”

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 136.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 176: “she had made herself skillful at the greatest and most laborious exercises of gallant and magnanimous men.”

or petty king rebelled against the king of Spain because the governor had denied him justice), takes place on the island of Hispaniola, at the time of one of the most famous indigenous rebellions against the conquistadores.⁸⁵ In 1519, cacique Enriquillo led a group of Indians and fugitive African slaves in a revolt against the Spanish authority. The rebels encamped in the remote mountains of Bahoruco and conducted raids of settlements and estates, repeatedly defeating or avoiding Spanish military patrols. The revolt lasted until 1533, when Captain Francisco Barrionuevo successfully conducted negotiations with the Tainos. A peace treaty was signed, granting Enriquillo and his men the right to live freely. In return, the cacique accepted to surrender the fugitive African slaves who had joined his rebellion against the conquistadores.

Significantly, Belleforest also describes the context of this uprising in a chapter of his *Cosmographie universelle* about the island of Hispaniola:

Yet do not think that the Spaniards came to rule this island at their ease, and without bloodshed, since they were dealing with brave men, and bellicose and bold Princes, who were so powerful that for a long time they could not be tamed, as shown by king Canoabo, against whom captain Alonso de Ojeda fought a long and very dangerous war. This Cacique was finally vanquished, and taken prisoner with his brother; both men died of grief at being held captive, and even more of despair that they were going to be taken to Spain. This is also shown by king Guarionex, and by up to fourteen Caciques, against whom Christopher Columbus's brother Bartholomew fought, until their defeat caused the Spanish to remain peaceful on the island, so that Guarionex and his brother Maiobanex having been vanquished, others kept quiet until cacique Henry rebelled against the Spaniards because of an injustice and outrage he suffered, as you can gather from the works of Gonzal of Oviedo, and as I seem to remember having told you in my *histoires tragiques*.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ For a summary and analysis of these events, see Altman.

⁸⁶ Belleforest, 1575, 2:cols. 2209–2210: “Or ne pensez que les Espaignols se soyent enseigneuris de ceste isle à leur aise, et sans effusion de sang, veu qu'ils avoyent affaire à des hommes vaillans, et des Princes belliqueux et hardis, et si puissants, que longtemps on ne les a peu dompter, tesmoin le Roy et Cacique Caonabo, contre lequel eut longue guerre et fort dangereuse le capitaine Alfonse de Hogiede, qui enfin le vainquit, et feit prisonnier avec son frere, et moururent ces deux Caciques de fascherie de se voir captifs, et plus encore de despit de ce qu'on les alloit mener en Espagne, et le roy Guarionex, et avec luy jusqu'à quatorze Caciques, contre lesquels combatit Barthelemy Colomb frere de Christoffle, la deffaite duquel fut cause que les Espaignols demourerent paisibles en l'Isle, de sorte que ce Guarionex et son frere Maiobanex surmontez, le reste se tint coy jusqu'à ce que le cacique Henry se revolta contre les Espaignols pour une injustice et tort qu'on luy avoit fait, ainsi que pourrez recueillir des œuvres de Gonçal d'Oviede, et qu'il me semble vous avoir discouru en mes histoires tragiques.”

Here Belleforest underscores the inherently tragic nature of a conquest that pitted the Spanish against Indian chieftains, who are presented as powerful and heroic princes. Far from being described as savages or barbarians, they belong to the class of “great princes” whose wars and destinies, according to one of Belleforest’s contemporaries, are at the very core of tragedy.⁸⁷ This paragraph also points to an important distinction between two complementary kinds of *histoires*. Readers who are interested in the details of the story of “cacique Henry” are referred to Belleforest’s 1570 *Discours memorables de plusieurs histoires tragiques*, where Enriquillo’s uprising is the subject of a lengthy and comprehensive novella. The author clearly views his *histoires tragiques* as a complement to the universal, Polybian form of history practiced in his *Cosmographie*. Just as Polybius excluded highly dramatic episodes from his *Histories*,⁸⁸ the encyclopedic volumes published as a considerably augmented version of Münster’s work did not leave sufficient room to dwell on the complex details that make up the destiny and fortune of individual figures and personalities.

The *histoire tragique*, on the other hand, allows Belleforest to focus on a specific image, on a fragment. It lets him provide exempla in the etymological sense of the word *eximere*: to take out, to remove, to take away.⁸⁹ This aspect of his work is highlighted in the *argument* that prefaces the Enriquillo story in the *Discours memorables*: “Because examples serve as paintings for the minds of men, and because posterity, if it is any good, strives to fashion itself according to the virtues and achievements of its ancestors, who left the memory of their integrity engraved in the writings of men who know what is to be appreciated in Man, who have no qualms about painting and portraying evil as well as good, and who show the colors of injustice as much as they sketch out justice and equity.”⁹⁰ With its emphasis on exempla and, thus, on individual destinies, the *histoire tragique* represents, as seen previously, a modernized version of Plutarch’s *Lives*, which provided comparisons between illustrious men who lived in different times while

⁸⁷ La Taille, fol. 2^v: “Tragedy then, is a type and kind of poetry that is not ordinary, but as elegant, beautiful, and excellent as possible. Its only true subject is the piteous fall of great princes, the mutability of fortune, exile, war, pestilence, famine, captivity, the heinous cruelty of tyrants.”

⁸⁸ Polybius, 455 (15:36.1–3).

⁸⁹ On this etymology see Lyons, 9.

⁹⁰ Belleforest, 2013, 539: “Entant que l'exemple est celuy qui sert de peinture à l'esprit des hommes, et que la posterité, si elle a rien de bon, s'estudie à se façonner selon les vertuz et perfections des ancestres, qui ont laissé la memoire de leur integrité gravée ès escrits des hommes qui ayment ce qui est aymable en l'homme, ne se soucient de peindre et effigier aussi bien le mal que le bien, et expriment esgallement les couleurs de l'injuste comme ils dressent le crayon de la justice et equité.”

thoroughly focusing on the “signs of the soul” rather than on all their great deeds and achievements.⁹¹

Belleforest clearly lists his objectives in the *argument* that introduces his Enriquillo narrative. First, he explains that he intends to provide an entertaining and innovative tale in keeping with his promise to compose a volume of *histoires tragiques* that would be as varied and diverse as possible.⁹² Second, he emphasizes the exemplary nature of a story whose main topic is the iniquity of a judge who has refused to hear the complaint of a Taino cacique who has been wronged by a Spanish lord. His story extends a reflection borrowed from Machiavelli's *Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio* (Discourses on Livy, 1531) showing “how dangerous it is for a republic or a Prince not to avenge an injury done against the public or against a private person.”⁹³ However, whereas the Italian author illustrates his text with examples borrowed from ancient history (the siege of Clusium, the rape of Pausanias by Philip of Macedon), Belleforest intends to give his readers modern and living exempla that are “adapted to our manners,”⁹⁴ and that are in keeping with the ways of Renaissance men and women.

As he recounts the story of Enriquillo, the Taino cacique who fought Charles V's soldiers in the mountain range of Bahoruco between 1519 and 1533, Belleforest significantly develops details he found in his main source, Gonzalo de Oviedo's *La historia general y natural de las Indias* (General and natural history of the Indies, 1535). Reworking, reordering, and considerably embellishing paragraphs borrowed from the Spanish historian's account of Enriquillo's rebellion, and adding elements taken from Las Casas's *Brevissima relación de la destrucción de las Indias* (A short account of the destruction of the Indies, 1552), Belleforest transforms the Taino chieftain into a full protagonist who delivers a number of speeches that play a crucial role in his narrative. Enriquillo directly addresses Judge Vadillo, decrying his unjust sentence: “What? Is it a magistrate's duty to judge in view of one's status? Is it a judge's calling to deny justice to one who has been wronged, and who, even though he has the means to avenge, still submits to his sentence? . . . No, No! You have taken advantage of us enough, and sustained your tyranny with the saintly name of justice for too long.”⁹⁵ The man who is described elsewhere as a savage has become a spokesperson for Belleforest,

⁹¹ Plutarch, 1919, 225 (*Life of Alexander*).

⁹² Belleforest, 2013, 540.

⁹³ Machiavelli, 195.

⁹⁴ Belleforest, 2013, 540: “adaptés à nos façons.”

⁹⁵ Belleforest, 2013, 548: “Quoy? Est-ce l'office d'un magistrat d'estre accepteur de personnes? Est-ce le devoir d'un juge de dénier justice à celuy qui est outragé, et mesme qui ayant les moyens de se venger, se sommet neantmoins à vostre sentence? . . . Non, non, c'est assez abusé de nous, et plus que trop entretenu vostre tyrannie avec le saint nom de justice.”

who intends to show in his narrative, in accordance with Machiavelli's precepts in his *Discorsi*, that a ruler who commits an injustice toward an individual is likely to face murderous revenge that can go as far as endangering his state or republic.

Enriquillo's speech also introduces harsh criticism of the tyranny and hypocrisy of the Spanish conquistadores, a theme that Belleforest develops in several ways in his novella. In his *Historia general*, Oviedo described the negotiations that ended with a peace treaty between the Tainos and the Spanish in 1533; he mentions in passing that during these talks, Enriquillo "gave several specific excuses and complaints about what had happened, recounting his rebellion from the beginning."⁹⁶ In Belleforest's *histoire tragique*, this brief comment is replaced by a long, moving speech in which Enriquillo recounts the entire history of the conquest of Hispaniola by the Spanish (see the Appendix for a translated version of this speech). The cacique describes the atrocities committed by the conquerors, the spread of contagious diseases that decimated indigenous populations, and the enslaving of Tainos who were treated like mere animals. Unlike Oviedo, Belleforest presents Enriquillo as a protagonist who speaks for all the victims of the conquest of the Americas. His aim is to understand the motivations and psychology of a man who has led a rebellion that he does not hesitate to compare to the 1548 *émeutes de la gabelle*,⁹⁷ as well as to the Sicilian Vespers.⁹⁸

Enriquillo's exemplary courage also leads the novelist to reflect more generally on the inhabitants of the American continent. In the one and only paragraph that made mention of their existence in his Pizarro story, Indians were depicted as cruel, bloodthirsty cannibals.⁹⁹ Belleforest never questioned the image of the so-called savages that came directly from López de Gómara's *Historia*. However, in his Enriquillo narrative, he reexamines the very notion of barbarism: "So ask yourselves whether these men . . . who simply follow nature, will agree to being conquered and oppressed by great and unjust tyranny, since they abhor any foreign dominion. If they do submit to it, it is only to examine it, because it seems to carry a hint or image of virtue. That is why I do not want to call them Barbarians, since their soul surpasses the harshness of those who stray from civility."¹⁰⁰ A few

⁹⁶ Oviedo y Valdés, fol. liv^r (5:7): "E diçiendo esto dio muchas desculpas particulares é quexas de lo que con el se avia fecho: relatando desde el prinçipio de su açamiento."

⁹⁷ Belleforest is referring to the 1548 riot against the *gabelle* tax on salt in the city of Bordeaux.

⁹⁸ The Sicilian Vespers is the name given to the massacre with which the Sicilians began their revolt against the French-born king Charles I, who had ruled the Kingdom of Sicily since 1266. Its name derives from a riot that took place in a church outside Palermo at the hour of vespers on Easter Monday, 1282.

⁹⁹ See Belleforest, 1571, 755.

¹⁰⁰ Belleforest 2013, 543: "Or pensez si ces hommes . . . suyvant simplement la nature, sont pour souffrir qu'on les renverse et accable avec l'iniquité d'une grande tyrannie, puis

years before Michel de Montaigne published his famous essay "On Cannibals," Belleforest found in the historiography of the Americas an example of courage and *honnesteté* (gallantry) that he deems worthy of "the most excellent and brave captains whose story we can read in ancient and modern history."¹⁰¹ Like Montaigne's essay, Belleforest's *histoire tragique* is designed to bring readers to reconsider their prejudice against savages and to grasp the extent of the atrocities committed by Europeans in the Americas,¹⁰² as well as at home during the Wars of Religion.

Significantly, the *argument* that introduces the Enriquillo narrative contains an anecdote borrowed from Alvise Cadamosto's (ca. 1432–83) *Navigazioni* (1507) that shows that true cannibals may not be who and where Europeans think they are. People living in the region of the Gambia River, Belleforest writes, refused any form of acquaintance with foreigners. This was not due to their inherently savage nature, but rather to their fear of white men, whom they believed to be cannibals who enslaved black men in order to eat them.¹⁰³

As mentioned earlier, Belleforest views his Enriquillo *histoire tragique* as a complement to the chapters of his *Cosmographie universelle* that deal with the Americas, and, more specifically, with the island of Hispaniola, including the following depictions of the Taino Indians:

I will tell you what is mentioned by Pierre Martyr: in the land of Guaccaiarimà, there are wild men, not hairy as we think, and as they are represented, but who stay away from trafficking, and the company of others; they are found in the woods, and caverns and grottoes in the mountains, and they live off fruits and what the earth provides freely. They have no laws, no lords, and speak to no one, and when they are captured, it is impossible to tame them. In sum they are like beasts, except for their body, because they are well shaped and proportioned; they go naked, and run as fast as a deer, and it is as difficult to catch them as it is to tame them. However the other inhabitants of this island, I mean those who are native to the country, whom I will call Haitians,

qu'ils detestent toute seigneurie estrangere, ou s'ils la reçoivent, ce n'est que pour la voir, ayant quelque image et effigie de vertu; voilà pourquoy ne les veulx appeler Barbares, puis que leur ame excède la rudesse de ceux qui s'escargent de l'honnesteté."

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 578.

¹⁰² Belleforest's examination of the notion of barbarism also echoes a tradition that appears in the accounts of many of the earlier conquerors of the Americas, and that became a central theme of Las Casas's writing (especially in his two *Historias*, which were not published until the nineteenth century). On this tradition, see Lupher, 237–88.

¹⁰³ Belleforest read the anecdote in Ramusio's *Delle Navigazioni et Viaggi* (Of navigations and voyages), which had been translated into French by Jean Temporal in 1566. See Ramusio, fol. 116'.

are naïve and simpleminded, and only care to live idly in the shade, so that they do not need too many things, since they go naked, and have all sorts of fruits that the earth produces for them, which are enough to feed them.¹⁰⁴

Here Belleforest simply provides readers with generic images of the inhabitants of the American continent, as is generally the case throughout the pages of his continuation of Münster's encyclopedic work, a book that deals with the patterns of "migrations, conquests, changes and ruin" of successive civilizations:¹⁰⁵ people in Cuzco sacrifice their children every month and paint their idols' faces with their blood;¹⁰⁶ the cannibals of Brazil are bloodthirsty savages who do not hesitate to roast and eat the newborn progeny of their enemies "just as we do with veal, lambs, and goats."¹⁰⁷ These depictions borrowed from Francisco Xérez (1495–ca. 1565) and Oviedo are occasionally supplemented with more nuanced thought concerning the laws and customs of the "occidental Indians."¹⁰⁸

Writing about the inhabitants of Brazil, Belleforest borrows from Peter Martyr an anecdote that features an old Indian who advises Columbus to treat his fellow tribesmen with respect, and expands on the Taino belief in the punishment of the souls of those who have acted badly and cruelly:

This *harangue* surprised Columbus (not without reason), who did not think he would find so much philosophy in the mind of this barbarian. I have mentioned it here for you so that you can see that these people are not as bestial

¹⁰⁴ Belleforest, 1575, 2:cols. 2205–2206: "Je vous diray ce qui est allegué par Pierre Martir, c'est qu'en la contrée de Guaccaiarimà, il y a des hommes sauvages, non qu'ils soyent velus, ainsi qu'on pense, et qu'on nous le paint, mais qui se tiennent separez du commerce, et compaignie des autres, ont leurs habitudes ès boys, et par les cavernes, et grottesques des montaignes, ne vivent que de fruits, et de ce que la terre leur produit gratuitement: ils sont sans loys, ny seigneur, ou accostent personne voir ayans esté pris, il a esté impossible de les apprivoiser, en somme ils sont du tout bestiaux, sauf que de la figure, car ils sont bien proportionnez, et formez, vont tout nuds, et courent aussi viste qu'un Cerf, et à grand peine les peut on rattaindre, comme encor on n'a peu que les dompter. Au reste les autres habitans de ceste Isle, j'entens ceux qui sont naturels du pays, et que j'appelleray Haitiens, sont fort simples, et de peu d'esprit, ne se soucians, (comme j'ay dit) que de vivre à l'ombre oisivement, aussi n'ont ils besoing de guere grandes choses, comme ceux qui vont tous nuds, et ausquels la terre produit tant de sorte de fruits, qu'ils leurs suffisent pour leur nourriture."

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 1:fol. Iiij.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 2:col. 2056.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 2:col. 2072.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 2:col. 2084. Belleforest mentions Xérez as one of his sources in *ibid.*, 2:cols. 2056–2057. Xérez served as Francisco Pizarro's secretary and published an account titled *Verdadera relación de la conquista del Perú* (True account of the conquest of Peru, 1534).

and crude as they are alleged to be. I would even say they are purer in their designs than we are, although we have good books, as well as the enlightenment of reason. We do not use the teachings of the former, nor the guidance of the latter, whereas they, guided only by the former, put many thoughts into a few words, as you can see. You can also consider that since the flourishes of language are unfamiliar to them, they never utter a word that does not carry weight.¹⁰⁹

Although this thinking echoed Belleforest's considerations on barbarism in his Enriquillo story, there is a major and significant difference between his *Cosmographie* and his *histoire tragique*. In the former, Indians are invariably part of a collective. Even though Belleforest promises to dwell on differences between various tribes, successive vignettes represent groups of Indians at war, worshipping idols that are compared to devilish images, and practicing cannibalistic rituals. On the other hand, the *histoire tragique*, with its focus on individual exempla and destinies, affords considerations of a different kind: it is the ideal setting for a complex portrait of a Taino Indian. Not only does Belleforest attempt to understand the goals and psychology of the cacique who led the 1519–33 upheaval against the Spanish, he also depicts the drama and paradoxes of the life of a Christianized Indian. In many ways, Enriquillo brings to mind the figure of the "traveler" described by James Clifford:¹¹⁰ a knowledgeable informant who masters two cultures and who is "not as savage as one would have thought,"¹¹¹ a "rather eloquent" translator, Belleforest indicates, "who spoke the Castilian language quite well, and could use Latin rather pertinently."¹¹²

In spite of the essential role played by Enriquillo in Belleforest's narrative, his exemplary courage and rhetorical skills are matched by those of an equally important protagonist. Captain Francisco de Barrionuevo, Charles V's envoy to Hispaniola, negotiated the peace treaty that put an end to a rebellion that had gone on for fourteen years. In Belleforest's novella, his diplomatic skills make him the

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 2:cols. 2094–2095: "Ceste harangue estonna (et non sans cause) Colomb, qui ne pensoit par trouver tant de Philosophie en la teste de ce barbare et laquelle je vous ay mise icy, afin qu'on voye que ce peuple n'est ny bestial, ny tant grossier qu'on le chante, ains j'oseray dire plus pur en ses desseins que nous, qui avons les bons livres, avec la lumiere de la raison, sans que pour cela nous usons, ny des enseignemens des uns, ny de la conduite de l'autre, là où ceux cy guidez de l'un seul, vous voyez quelles raisons ils ont en peu de parolles: comme aussi vous jugez que le fard du langage estant d'eux esloigné, ils ne disent parole qui ne porte, et laquelle ne soit de quelque grand effect." The anecdote is borrowed from Peter Martyr's *De Orbe Novo*, decade 1, book 3: see Martyr, 1:102–03.

¹¹⁰ Clifford, 19.

¹¹¹ Belleforest, 2013, 551: "Mais luy qui n'estoit pas si sauvage qu'on eust cuidé."

¹¹² Ibid., 550.

very personification of men the author calls “the wise advisors and shrewd officers of a good prince.”¹¹³ Belleforest did not retain all the details that Oviedo accumulated in his *Historia* in order to depict Barrionuevo as a heroic figure of the conquest of the Americas. Yet in his *histoire tragique*, the Spanish captain’s exemplary behavior clearly balances that of Enriquillo. Barrionuevo is the incarnation of the European *homme civil* whose main concerns are justice and the common good. This ideal complements Enriquillo’s exemplum, for in spite of all his virtues and bravery, the Taino chieftain, Belleforest writes, is “marked by the vice of rebellion,” and shares many of the flaws common to those he calls “insular people from faraway lands.”¹¹⁴ In his *histoire tragique*, the praise of the noble savage does not call into question the legitimacy of the conquest of the Americas, yet Belleforest views this subjugation in Manichean terms, opposing the misdeeds of the morally corrupt judge and evil colonizer Pedro de Vadillo to the diplomacy and courteousness of the brave and just conquistador Barrionuevo. Whereas the first refuses to treat Enriquillo according to the “equity of the law and royal edicts,”¹¹⁵ the latter presents the cacique with letters patent signed by Charles V, offering forgiveness to the Taino rebels and justice to their wronged chief. Barrionuevo’s speech echoes the terms of the Requerimiento (the Spanish Requirement of 1513), defining the Tainos as subjects and vassals of the Spanish emperor, with all the rights and obligations this status entails. As do many of Belleforest’s *histoires tragiques*, the story of Enriquillo revolves around a judicial matter. Laws have been broken (wrongfully, in the case of Vadillo; for good reasons, in the case of the cacique). How then can a just sentence be passed on those who have not abided by them? Such is the question that Belleforest seeks to answer, emphasizing the “gentleness” of Charles V’s justice.¹¹⁶

Although Belleforest’s narrative ends quite well, with the signing of a treaty that grants Enriquillo and his men the right to trade and to live free in the mountains of Bahoruco,¹¹⁷ it depicts the European discovery of the Americas as a series of cruel and bloody events. Like the other two narratives previously reviewed in this article, it is the prose equivalent of the tragedies that were being written and staged in late sixteenth-century France. Belleforest, who was seen by some of his contemporaries as a “modern Sophocles,”¹¹⁸ made it very clear that the sto-

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 578: “les sages conseillers et les fins officiers d’un bon prince.”

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 579.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 550.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 562: “And so the justice of Emperor Charles proved to be most equitable in this matter, since he chose to offer peace to this new subject of his, whose land he occupied by a *droit de bienséance*, rather than to wage war and to wrong him twice, punishing him after he had been offended, and persecuting him after seizing his riches.”

¹¹⁷ On this treaty, see Traboulay, 44–45.

¹¹⁸ Belleforest, 2013, 733.

ries he wrote after he stopped translating tales borrowed from Bandello were “no longer about love, or comical, but harsh, and tragic.”¹¹⁹ This is especially true of his Enriquillo narrative, which opens with verses borrowed from Sophocles’s tragedy *Polyxena*, in which Agamemnon underscores the difficulty of a ruler’s task: “For the helmsman of an army could not give in to all to render favors to all. Indeed, not even Zeus, whose royal power is mightier than mine, is approved by mortals either when he sends rain or when he would lose his case.”¹²⁰ Belleforest glosses the Greek playwright’s verses to explain that a ruler’s most important duty is to impart justice with equity. He then designs his Enriquillo story as a political tragedy based on a simple premise: what happens when a powerful man, such as Judge Pedro de Vadillo, does not abide by his duty to obey the laws and customs approved by his sovereign? The result is a series of catastrophic events that entail thirteen years of “misfortune and ruin”¹²¹ for the inhabitants of the Bahoruco region and their Spanish conquerors, who every day witness looting and devastation, living under the constant threat of “horrible vengeance.”¹²² In this narrative, as elsewhere in the fourth and fifth volumes of his *histoires tragiques*, Belleforest is indirectly commenting on the French Wars of Religion, and more specifically on the men he accuses of extending the conflicts in order to profit from them.¹²³ Here as in the Pizarro narrative discussed earlier, the *histoire tragique* works as a form of *remonstrance* akin to Belleforest’s polemical political pamphlets, where he warns and severely judges all those who would be tempted to subvert the established laws and tradition of their country.¹²⁴

Belleforest’s Enriquillo story is also interspersed with substantial harangues delivered by its main protagonists. These intricate speeches are evocative of the long monologues typical of the tragedies of late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century France. Just as the main character in the 1613 *Tragédie française d’un More cruel envers son seigneur nommé Riviere, gentilhomme espagnol, sa Damoiselle et ses Enfants* (The French tragedy of a cruel Moor, directed against his lord named Riviere, his wife and children) delivers a monologue containing a detailed outline of the vengeance he is about to take on the master who has humiliated him for many years,¹²⁵ Enriquillo warns Judge Vadillo of his upcoming reprisal: “If justice

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 725: “Ces Histoires, donc, ne sont plus amoureuses ny Comiques, ains severes et Tragiques.”

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 535. Translation is from Sophocles, 266–67.

¹²¹ Belleforest, 2013, 570.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 566.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 578.

¹²⁴ See, for example, Belleforest, 1568b.

¹²⁵ *Tragédie française d’un More cruel*, act 3 (unpaginated).

fails me, the sword will avenge my dishonor, and arms will settle the dispute that judges leave unpunished, as if it were some illustrious act, and as if a sin that is forbidden by law deserved any praise."¹²⁶ Belleforest's Enriquillo story is, in many ways, a revenge tragedy. Not only does it chronicle the vengeance of the "son of a king,"¹²⁷ it also echoes the structure of plays that relied on the concept of delayed divine vengeance. This idea was alluded to by Aristotle, who recounted the story of the statue of Mityls at Argos, which fell over on his murderer while he was a spectator at a festival, causing his death. The author of the *Poetics* noted that the tragic effect of pity and fear was best produced by this kind of incident "because even among chance events we find most awesome those which seem to have happened by design."¹²⁸

Belleforest gives readers a variation on this theme: although he has been recalled to Spain by Charles V, Pedro de Vadillo knows that powerful friends in court will spare him from any kind of punishment for his mistreatment of Enriquillo, but the evil judge perishes during a terrible storm at the mouth of the Guadalquivir River. Expanding on Oviedo's account of Vadillo's death, Belleforest writes that the tempest pursued the ship for several days, until the Spanish judge was "submerged with all his ill-acquired fortune that reeked of the blood of the poor people he had oppressed."¹²⁹ Belleforest thus reminds his readers that divinity might not immediately exert revenge against evil men in order to comfort the souls of their victims. Instead, it often places these men at the pinnacle of success and fortune only to take it all away.¹³⁰ Like the playwrights of his time, Belleforest provides a historical example of divine justice, which repairs the failures of human justice. His *histoire tragique* is akin to tragedies where the destruction of persecutors, as J. S. Street explains, "no less than that of more amiable figures, was a reminder of the mutability of fortune to which all men are subject, and of the divine plan governing this apparent disorder."¹³¹

The cacique's story also underscores the excesses of the "furious Spaniards,"¹³² who are portrayed as usurpers and tyrants whose cruelty knows no bounds.¹³³

¹²⁶ Belleforest, 2013, 548–49: "Ce sera le fer qui vengera mon deshonneur, là où la justice me defaudra, et les armes qui vuideront le different que les juges laissent sans punition, comme si c'estoit quelque acte illustre, et comme si le peché defendu par la loy meritoit quelque louänge."

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 553.

¹²⁸ Aristotle, 63 (1452a). This idea is also the subject of Plutarch's treatise *The Delays of Divine Justice in Punishing the Wicked* (ca. 100 CE), a text that Belleforest quotes several times in his *Cinquiesme Tome des Histoires Tragiques*.

¹²⁹ Belleforest, 2013, 563.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 257.

¹³¹ Street, 218.

¹³² Belleforest, 2013, 545.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 552.

Belleforest shares Bartholomé de Las Casas's point of view on those he calls "conquering wolves," as well as his early view on African slaves.¹³⁴ The *histoire tragique* of Enriquillo reveals a markedly anti-Spanish slant that also appears in Benzoni's violent diatribes against the conquistadores in his *Historia del Mondo Nuovo* (1565), a text Belleforest often quotes in the second volume of his *Cosmographie*.¹³⁵ This anti-Spanish bias is even more evident in the version of the Enriquillo story that was published in the 1580 edition of the *Discours memorables de plusieurs histoires tragiques*, in which he repeatedly criticizes the Spaniards for their cruelty and tyrannical rule.¹³⁶ With its depiction of the horrors of the Spanish conquest of the Americas, Enriquillo's speech prefigures the 1596 *Harangue d'un Cacique Indien, envoyée aux François pour se garder de la Tyrannie de l'Espagnol* (A speech by an Indian cacique, sent to the French to warn them to guard themselves against the Spaniards' tyranny), whose anonymous author undoubtedly read Belleforest. In this pamphlet, written from the point of view of the Politiques in the context of Henri IV's rise to power, an Indian chief cautions Frenchmen against the Spaniards' conquering ambitions.¹³⁷ The true savages, he warns them, are the conquistadores, whose greed and brutality have caused the death of millions on the American continent.¹³⁸ The cacique's eloquence, as well as his portrayal of the Spaniards, parallels those depicted by Belleforest in his Enriquillo story; in both cases, French and European readers were introduced to an Indian

¹³⁴ Belleforest approves of the harsh treatment of slaves who had joined the ranks of Enriquillo's rebels. Since they were bought by the Spaniards, he writes, "they were obliged to serve their masters as slaves": Belleforest, 2013, 561. Las Casas at first approved of the use of African slaves in the Indies, although he later came to regret this position. See Clayton, 136–37, 420–28.

¹³⁵ Benzoni's *Historia* had been translated into French in 1579 by Urbain Chauveton, who added his own anti-Spanish comments to the text.

¹³⁶ Many of the additions to this text indicate that Belleforest was actually drawing from the French version of the *Brevissima Relacion*, titled *Tyrannies et cruautés des Espagnols perpétrées ès Indes occidentales, qu'on dit le Nouveau Monde, brièvement décrites par l'évêque don frère Barthélemy de Las Casas, pour servir d'exemple et d'avertissement aux XVII provinces du pays-bas* (Spanish tyrannies and cruelties, perpetrated in the West Indies, commonly termed the New World, briefly described in the Castilian language, by the bishop friar Bartholomew de las Casas, to serve as an example and warning to the XVII provinces of the Low Countries. Antwerp: Ravelenghien, 1579). Interestingly, the ultra-Catholic Belleforest is therefore drawing from the Dutch post-Alba propaganda that compared the horrors of the Spanish conquest of the Americas to Spanish behavior in the Low Countries.

¹³⁷ A modern edition of this *Harangue* is given in Lestringant, 2005a, 205–09. The Politiques were a party of moderate Catholics and Huguenots who sought political stability and were ready to make temporary concessions in order to avoid the total collapse of the state.

¹³⁸ According to the author of the *Harangue*, the number of Indians went from five or six million to six thousand after the arrival of the Spaniards. See Lestringant, 2005a, 207.

who, as Frank Lestringant notes, had been transformed into an allegory of “humanity unjustly oppressed.”¹³⁹

CONCLUSION

In Belleforest’s collection, as well as in the overall production of *histoires tragiques* in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century France, tales from the Americas are a distant second to narratives about the Ottoman Empire and Northern Africa. The genre is subject to a phenomenon that Geoffrey Atkinson described long ago, showing that Renaissance printing presses produced twice as many books about the Levant and the Orient than texts concerning the Americas.¹⁴⁰ Yet, as he distanced himself from Bandello and aspired to create a new literary form,¹⁴¹ Belleforest realized that tales from the Americas were ideal material for the *histoire tragique* genre. They provided contemporary and memorable exempla, and brought readers into an unfamiliar universe in accordance with his desire to create narratives defined by novelty and variety. Most importantly, they were full of fear, blood, and harrowing experiences that perfectly captured his tragic vision of the world. In spite of his repeated claims to veracity, Belleforest’s tales essentially reflect the rules and spirit of tragedy as they were defined in late sixteenth-century France. In the fourth and fifth volumes of the *histoires tragiques* series, the American continent is where Pizarro and Almagro, like a modern Eteocles and Polylices, fight for control of Cuzco and the newly discovered territories of Chile. It is where a brother’s cruelty leads to the death of his sister’s husband and child. It is a place where political tragedies comparable to the assassination of François de Guise take place, and where rulers and princes could find lessons that paralleled those given in Machiavelli’s *Discorsi*. It is where the iniquity of a judge triggers a cycle of bloody violence and revenge. It is a place ideally suited for situations that Jean de la Taille described in his *Art de la tragedie* as entailing “tears and extreme misery, and not things that happen every day naturally and because of common reasons.”¹⁴²

Like contemporary Elizabethan drama, the *histoires tragiques* adopted Senecan tragedy as a model in their representation of violence and revenge. Moreover, they provided what Christian Biet calls a “historic detour” in order to bring readers to

¹³⁹ Ibid., 206.

¹⁴⁰ Atkinson, 10.

¹⁴¹ On Belleforest’s overall contribution to the *histoire tragique* as a literary genre, see Sturel, 35–141; Simonin, 1985; Arnould.

¹⁴² La Taille, fol. 2^v: “larmes et misereres extremes, et non point de choses qui arrivent tous les jours naturellement et par raison commune.”

reflect on the Wars of Religion.¹⁴³ This detour, however, is not in line with the official politics of *oubliance* that both Biet and Andrea Frisch have described in recent essays.¹⁴⁴ Belleforest's stories were written before the Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre, by an author who was in many regards an ultra-Catholic activist. Rather than inciting them to forget rivalries and appease tensions, Belleforest's narratives invite readers to blame misguided leaders and all those he considers to be enemies of rightful French sovereignty, in Europe as well as in the Americas.

Although they share many of the features characteristic of tragic theater in late sixteenth-century France,¹⁴⁵ Belleforest's *histoires tragiques* were not mere prose tragedies. Their originality lay in the multi-level reading they afforded. Learned "doctes"¹⁴⁶ and cultivated readers could find in them texts written by an author who emulated Sophocles, Plutarch, and the great writers they so admired. Those who sought the lessons of history could be reassured by Belleforest's moralizing intent, as expressed in the short *arguments* that introduced each of his narratives. More importantly, the *histoires tragiques* introduced characters and issues that were profoundly "de nostre temps" ("of our times") to a wide and diverse reading public,¹⁴⁷ as their author repeatedly emphasized. Along with more familiar figures, they depicted men and women who found themselves on a continent that, for Renaissance readers, was as mysterious and terrifying as it was exotic. And beyond the curiosity that tales from the Americas could produce among sixteenth-century French readers, Belleforest's *histoires* also dealt with essential questions about the colonization of the American continent. How and why did the New World become the theater of violent conflicts that replicated the wars of the Old? What were the merits of attempting to master such a harsh environment and hostile nature as those described in the tale of the damoiselle? In the case of the Enriquillo narrative, the *histoire tragique* even contributed, along with texts such as Urbain Chauveton's translation of Benzoni's *Historia*, to the creation of a French version of the "black legend" of Spain, while also bringing to life a figure that would haunt the imagination of Europeans. A few years be-

¹⁴³ Biet, 2016, 299.

¹⁴⁴ The connection between the development of a form of tragedy specific to late sixteenth-century France and the politics of pardon and *oubliance* promulgated through successive edicts by the French Crown beginning in the 1560s is underscored in Frisch, 104–71; Biet, 2014; Biet 2016, 295–301.

¹⁴⁵ On this aspect of Belleforest's *histoires*, see Campagne, 2006.

¹⁴⁶ Belleforest, 2013, 328.

¹⁴⁷ See, for example, the full title of Belleforest's fifth tome: *Le Cinquiesme Tome des Histoires Tragiques contenant un discours memorable de plusieurs Histoires, le succez & evenement desquelles est pour la plus part recueilly des choses aduenüs de nostre temps* (The fifth tome of the tragic histories, containing a memorable discourse on several histories . . . of our times).

fore Montaigne's relativist depiction of the Brazilian *cannibales*, Belleforest staged a Taino Indian whose plight and discourse invited readers to reflect on their own savagery and barbarianism, as well as on the relationship between races and civilizations. The author of the *histoires tragiques*, however, does not necessarily share the enlightened tolerance of the author of the *Essais*. In many ways, his Enriquillo story posits a form of virtuous colonization, conceived in response to the excesses of the Spanish in the Americas, one he also describes in the pages of his *Histoire universelle*.¹⁴⁸

Whereas his cosmographic work never achieved either commercial success or critical acclaim,¹⁴⁹ Belleforest's *histoires tragiques* did bring him great literary fame. Although he could be accused of boasting in his repeated claims to a near universal readership,¹⁵⁰ the multiple reissues that printers in Paris, Lyon, Rouen, and Torino gave his *histoires* show that they became what one might be tempted to call true best sellers in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.¹⁵¹ The lengthy encyclopedic chapters on the Americas that appeared in the *Histoire universelle* and the *Cosmographie* were read by few, yet many a French Renaissance reader was most certainly acquainted with the three American *histoires tragiques* of the conquistador, the damoiselle, and the cacique. Indeed, these narratives appeared in a series of books that Jacques Yver (ca. 1548–72) described as being so successful that young men and women often used them to make what would today be called a fashion statement: "Sometimes I consider for myself, reader, what great and illustrious praise Bandello's *histoires tragiques* have received throughout France, so much that it is shameful today, amongst well bred young women and learned courtiers not to know them; so much that even those unable to embellish their speech with them, embellish at least their hands with them for show."¹⁵²

The publication of the *Thresor des histoires tragiques* (Treasury of tragic histories, 1581), a compilation of speeches and epistles taken from various volumes in

¹⁴⁸ Belleforest describes his fantasy of a French form of colonization that is not motivated by greed, but rather by a desire to help "the poor people in these lands" in the *Histoire universelle*: see Belleforest, 1570c, fol. 252^v.

¹⁴⁹ See Bernstein, 31; Simonin, 1992, 21, 210–11.

¹⁵⁰ See, for example, how he claims that his fame extends throughout Europe and foreign lands in his epistle to Jean Louis de Nogaret at the beginning of the *Septiesme tome des histoires tragiques*: Belleforest, 1583, fol. a iiiij^r.

¹⁵¹ On the reception of the *histoires tragiques* in France, see Simonin, 1992, 228–31; Pietrzak, 99–106.

¹⁵² Yver, 520: "Considérant quelquefois à part moi, bénin lecteur, combien grandes et illustres louanges les histoires tragiques de Bandel ont acquises parmi notre France, jusques à gagner tant de grâce, qu'aujourd'hui c'est une honte, entre les filles bien nourries et entre les mieux apprins courtisans, de les ignorer; même ceux qui n'en peuvent orner leur langue, en ornent à tout le moins leurs mains par contenance."

the series, points to another aspect of the success of the *histoires tragiques* collection, and to the fate of Belleforest's American tales. The anonymous author of the *Thresor* explains that the *histoires tragiques* were widely read and extremely well received, particularly because of the speeches, rhetorical pieces, and dialogues that could be found in them, which could be used by all men and women who desired to speak the French language properly and elegantly.¹⁵³ The *histoires tragiques* were thus presented as a manual of eloquence, and as one of the finest products French culture could offer.¹⁵⁴ In this context, selected speeches by the conquistador, the damoiselle, and the cacique became *morceaux d'anthologie*.¹⁵⁵

APPENDIX

Cacique Henry to the Indians¹

It seems that these Christians believe that we, who have welcomed them in our country courteously, are beasts that are destined to carry all the burdens they please to throw on our shoulders, and that our possessions, wives, and children have no other use than to satisfy their blind greed and the unbridled desires of their evil lasciviousness. They believe (my friends) that our poor people, who they rule through usurpation, have nothing in common with man, have no more feeling than a stone or insensitive rock, and remain unaffected by their vainglorious brutality and impudence. But I hope, if you are ready to believe me and follow my advice, to make them change their minds, and make them understand that at least we have the same apprehensions that guide the instinct of beasts, and that we have engraved in our minds the image of revenge against those who offend us, and that we will seek to free so many of our relatives and friends, who are being held captive by these wolves, who usurp our country and riches.

You will perhaps remember how, when they first came into this country, they inhumanely treated Cacique Gao Camagari, who was the first to welcome them in this land, and how they dreadfully killed the kings who ruled this island, using our own strength and arming us against each other, in order to bolster their weak power. You know that before these men who fled their own land came to ours,

¹⁵³ *Le Thresor des histoires tragiques*, "au lecteur" ("to the reader").

¹⁵⁴ Belleforest himself linked the publication of his *histoires tragiques* to the alleged superiority of the French language as early as 1559, when he wrote in his dedication of the *Continuation des Histoires tragiques* to Charles Maximilien, Duke of Orleans (1550–74), the future King Charles IX: "I will not hesitate to say frankly, that the glory of our language has a certain something better than all those that are called vernacular": Belleforest, 1570a, fol. 152^v.

¹⁵⁵ "Anthology pieces."

¹ Translated from Belleforest, 2013, 551–55.

we had never known contagious disease, nor mortality, but the heavens pursuing their wickedness turned against us as well as against them, and our tribes people who had no knowledge of medicine, not being subject to indisposition, have suffered their wrath, so that you can now see a country almost all deserted and miserably barren.

Not only have they infected us with this disease, stolen our possessions, brought down our *cemis*,² forced us to baptize our children, robbed the caciques of their kingdoms and dominions, put to death those who wanted to keep their freedom, but you can feel when you obey them how well they treat those who have humiliated themselves and accepted them as lords. You are well aware that if they spared you, it was in order to torment you more, using you for tasks that are more unpleasant, difficult, and daunting than death itself. Can you see their slaves the Moors who are ready to rebel, because they can no longer bear the orders or the tyranny of these cruel lords? Are you weaker than the blacks? Are you destined to be the Spaniards' slaves? Are you less brave than these Africans? Will you suffer slaves to be bolder than you, who stood up to the Caribs, and terrified the armies of the very same men who now want to enslave you? Will it be said that you now let your courage and resolve be defeated, without showing the slightest bit of bravery? Will it be remembered that we are men without discernment, that we do not know what valor is, or that we do not know that it is better to die than to live long in such disgrace? You know what outrage I have endured, and how basely I have been treated. If it is right to unjustly imprison the son of a king, such as me, if it is permitted to take his wife and to banish him from cities with infamy and without respect for his rank and nobility, I will gladly let you deny me any help and let myself be defeated by those who (once I am dead) will overcome you. These men will not leave a single one of us alive in this land, as they are already beginning to show by taking our children to foreign lands, and perhaps selling them in the faraway countries of their Christian neighbors. But if you have any friendship for one of your princes, if the memory of my predecessors is still freshly engraved in your minds, if you pity my misery and feel sorry for my misfortune, who can prevent you from taking up arms, to assail those tyrannical Christians, and to finally drive them out of this country, just like they stole it from our ancestors? It you want to set yourselves free, and rid yourselves and your children of the yoke of servitude, if you want to grow richer and live at your ease, let us rise (my friends), let us rise against these tyrants, and let us show them what we can do. Let us show them that if we let them take hold in our lands, it was not because we did not have the means to resist them, but because we hoped for some relief, if they became our neighbors

² According to Taino tradition, a *ce mi* is a god, spirit, or ancestor. It is also the name given to a sculptural object housing this spirit.

and allies. If we are to be overwhelmed, it is better, and more desirable, to die fighting like brave and courageous men, than to live as slaves, and to let the infamous name of cowardice and pusillanimity deny us the reputation of righteous men who would not stand to be disrespected. See how fortune is on our side, keeping them blind in their ease, and how they are not on their guard, because they do not suspect us. Let us attack them unexpectedly without sparing anything, so that in the future they will learn not to offend anyone, and so that their judges, making themselves more equitable, will not condemn those who have been wronged, instead of severely punishing those who have committed a crime.

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