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What is a Greek Source on the Early English Stage? Fifteen New Essays

Edited by Silvia Bigliazzi and Tania Demetriou

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Much Ado about Greek tragedy? Shakespeare, Euripides, and the *histoire tragique**

Tania Demetriou

Abstract

This article approaches the relation between Shakespeare and Greek tragedy by looking at one of the main known sources for the Claudio-Hero plot of *Much Ado about Nothing*, Matteo Bandello's novella of "Timbreo and Fenicia", and its French rewriting by François de Belleforest. It considers the generic implications of the transition from novella to *histoire tragique*, in light of the French rewritings' key role in the reception of 'Bandello' in England. After exploring certain intersections between the early modern reception of Greek tragedy and the project of the *histoires tragiques*, it looks closely at the notable presence of Euripides in "Timbrée et Fénicie". It concludes by arguing that, out of all the proposed sources of *Much Ado*, Belleforest's rewriting of this tale is the one most likely to have led Shakespeare to Euripides' *Alcestis*, which it re-proposes as an intertext in the ending of *Much Ado*. This layering of texts seems to have resonated with the playwright for over a decade, since, in *The Winter's Tale*, he is thought to have returned not only to the same moment from *Alcestis*, but also to the same story in 'Bandello'.

Keywords: Shakespeare; Euripides; Matteo Bandello; François de Belleforest; *histoire tragique*; translation; *Much Ado about Nothing*; *The Winter's Tale*

*This essay is for my mother, Vania Demetriou (1947-2022), with all my love – "alas! one cannot so easily come and go in the boat of the Stygian ferryman . . ."

Shakespeare's plays are quoted from the third Arden edition; unless otherwise specified, classical texts are quoted from the online Loeb Classical Library, accessed 4.7.2023, except for Greek dramatic fragments, which are quoted from TrGF; the abbreviation Stob. refers to Stobaeus, 1884-1912. Contractions in early modern printed sources have been silently expanded. All translations are mine. I am grateful to Silvia Bigliazzi, Raphael Lyne, Yves Peyré, and Matthew Reynolds for their comments.

Much Ado, Bandello's Novella, and Belleforest's *Histoire tragique*

The eighteenth and final story in the Third Volume of François de Belleforest's *Histoires tragiques* is that of Timbrée de Cardonne and Fénicie Lionati of Messina and is translated out of the twenty-second novella in Matteo Bandello's *Prima parte delle novelle*. Of the two, Bandello is deemed by editorial convention a likelier 'source' for the story of Claudio and Hero in Shakespeare's *Much Ado about Nothing*. Sheldon Zitner, for example, argues in his Oxford Classics edition of the play that "Belleforest's *Histoires tragiques*, [were] probably not of much use"; Bandello was accessible enough to Shakespeare, since he "was familiar with John Florio's English-Italian dictionaries" and "Bandello's Italian prose is hardly insuperable for a competent Latinist" (Shakespeare 1993, 6). Likewise, the recently updated introduction for the Cambridge Shakespeare simply states this as the *communis opinio*: "it seems most likely that Shakespeare was working from the Italian rather than the French – unless he had some other source no longer known to us." (Shakespeare 2018, 1). In the *New Oxford Shakespeare*, Anna Pruitt seems to allow for access through the French when she mentions parenthetically that Belleforest had translated this story, before describing Bandello and Ariosto as "Shakespeare's two primary sources" (Shakespeare et al. 2017, 1.999). All these editors approach the question as a matter of linguistic access: Belleforest might or need not have been consulted to mediate the Italian. More carefully, Claire McEachern, though only discussing Bandello in detail, notes that Belleforest's version contained "the standard homiletic and rhetorical flourishes" (Shakespeare 2016, 8-9) and does not give a verdict one way or the other. My interest in this essay is in these embellishments and whether they can add a valuable "flourish" to what we know about Shakespeare and Euripides.

There is, in fact, no sound historical reason for privileging Bandello over Belleforest as potential Shakespearean reading matter, and Shakespeareans writing on the novella have tended to diverge from the editors on this matter.[1] In England, French had unparalleled primacy among the modern languages, both as a reading language and as a 'vehicular' language for translation (Demetriou and Tomlinson 2015, 3-6). Shakespeare certainly read English Bandellos done from the French, and the 'French scenes' in *Henry V* – dated to 1599, like *Much Ado* – leave no doubt that he also had French competence.[2] There is one persuasive indication that he read Bandello's "Uno schiavo battuto", a source for *Titus Andronicus*, in the Second Volume of Belleforest's *Histoires tragiques* ("Un esclaue battue") and that the French wording stayed with him (Porter 1996). The story of Hamlet in Belleforest's Fifth Volume – where the material does not come from Bandello – is the account that "stands in the closest known relation to Shakespeare's play" (Maxwell 2004, 554) and it is likely that he also worked with Montaigne in French for the same play (see Nicholson 2020). On the other hand, no one seems to have produced any evidence that Shakespeare went to Bandello *rather than* Belleforest when there was a choice. Indeed, scholars working on the playwright's Italian reading see the issue very differently. Jason Lawrence's probing study of Shakespeare's Italian learning concludes that "the evidence seems to argue for a simultaneous acquaintance with accounts in various languages of the same story" and this chimes with "the language-learning techniques of the time, which actively promote just this kind of comparative parallel reading" (Lawrence 2005, 135). If attentive engagement with parallel versions was a premise of Shakespeare's acquisition of modern languages, it was also germane to compositional practices in the early modern theatres, even more, it would appear, than we have appreciated. In his groundbreaking recent book, Holger Schott Syme makes a persuasive case for not taking the Stationers' Company, which treated a single title as subsuming different works on the same subject matter, as a guide to the playhouses' practice in this respect. Instead, it is probable that "the coexistence of closely related plays in multiple companies' repertories" (Syme 2023, 49) was the order of the day, but, with many of these playtexts being lost, theatre history has tended to conflate titles into single works. Syme's revisionist proposal has considerable implications for how we imagine the playwriting process. On the one hand, dramatists are likely to have seen their writing as close kin to Belleforest's elaborate reworkings of Bandello's versions; on the other, they must have read not only "analogically" (Miola 2000, 4), i.e. across multiple sources on the same material, but also with a special attunement to variations between them. Indeed, to return to *Much Ado*, John Kerrigan has elegantly shown that it is the way the play is "caught up in" a whole "matrix of stories" that seems most generative of Shakespeare's originality: "plumed with many birds' feathers", it continues the multiplicatory workings of this "matrix", sometimes "clon[ing] out of its own materials", elsewhere featuring "redundancies that lead nowhere but are trailed in the variant co-texts" (Kerrigan 2018, 39). The contention of this essay is that it is worth singling out Belleforest's *histoire tragique* within this generative "matrix" and asking whether it could have offered itself to the playwright as something to think with.

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[1] E.g. Mussio 2000; Walter 2014, 96; Hutson 1994, 253.

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[2] See e.g. Steinsaltz 2002; Montgomery 2016, 33-47.

The persistent editorial habit of mentioning Belleforest but focussing on Bandello has its roots in Geoffrey Bullough's *Narrative and Dramatic Sources*. In his introduction to this play's sources, Bullough referred to Belleforest and acknowledged that Shakespeare was "acquainted with the work of . . . [both] Bandello and Belleforest" (1958, 67). But he translated only Bandello's story, reflecting his sense that its "conception" is closer to Shakespeare's than that of the "didactic" Belleforest (73). The long shadow of Bullough's impressionistic appraisal of what might have influenced Shakespeare lingers over modern editions. So does his 'either/or' view of influence. This jars with the mediated workings of reception in general, but it is particularly contentious given the facts of these two authors' transmission in early modern England, which call for viewing the European "work" that was Bandello as "consist[ing] of the originary text and . . . its translations together" (Reynolds et al. 2023, 777).[3] For, as Adelin Charles Fiorato writes, whereas in Italy, "the success of the *Novelle* was as immediate as it was ephemeral" (Fiorato 1979, 619), in France, through the rewritings of Belleforest and his predecessor, Pierre Boaistuau, they became a long-standing "best seller" (623), and it was this celebrity that made them a

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[3] Cp. Reynolds et al. 2023, 777: "A world work consists of the originary text and all its translations together."

European phenomenon. Outside Italy, the reception of Bandello was completely intertwined with the French 'Bandel'. In England, translations of Bandello were mediated by the French rewritings, sometimes based entirely on them, sometimes mingling the two, always reflecting the popularity individual tales had achieved through circulation in French.[4] When English writers spoke of 'Bandello', they were often referring to Boaistuau and Belleforest (see Maslen 1997, 92n, 99n). What is important here is not just that reading these reworkings was culturally widespread, but that reading Bandello at all was enmeshed with what the French *histoires tragiques* had made of his Italian *novelle*. This is evident not least in the generic designation of the stories in English. English Bandellos advertise themselves on their title-pages as purveyors of "tragicall histories", 'tragicall matters", "tragicall discourses", or "tragicall tales", even when their authors are not obviously working from Boaistuau or Belleforest.[5] And after the first wave of translations from Bandello, such descriptors become applied to Englishings of tales from other authors, such as Boccaccio, Jacques Yver, or Fiorentino, who had not directly presented their work thus.[6] The question I am interested in here is whether this strong identification of the novella genre as 'tragic' interacted with the reception of Greek tragedy in a manner that could have been consequential for Shakespeare and *Much Ado*.

The story of Timbreo and Fenicia relates the "diverse accidents of fortune that came about" ("Varii e fortunevoli accidenti che avvennero", Bandello 2008, 272) before the protagonists could be married, to wit, the slandering of the chaste Hero-figure, Fenicia, and her supposed death. In Belleforest's version, when Timbrée falls in love with Fénicie, she is "still very young, being no older than fourteen to fifteen years of age" ("encor de fort bas aage, comme celle qui ne passoit pas guere plus que de quatorze à quinze ans", Belleforest 1569, 477*r*).[7] She is eighteen by the story's conclusion. With her chastity vindicated, she is reunited with Timbrée, but initially, he believes she has died and that he has just been engaged to someone from her family circle:

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[4] In Tomita 2009, of the 19 titles of books that include translations by Bandello, nine (§§ 14, 29, 33, 36, 38, 89, 94, 110, 241) definitely involve interaction with the French, and the remaining ones (§§ 54, 57, 72,7 9, 86, 96, 109, 118, 158, 234) are of tales that had circulated in French. (All the tales translated by Belleforest are listed in Sturel 1918, 57-9). See also the outline of the "mainly bibliographical" Chapter I in Pruvost 1937, 11-12.

[5] Tomita 2009, §§ 14, 36, 36, 38, 79, 86, 89, 158. On the "tragical history" / "tragical tale" as a Tudor genre, see Gibson 2009.

[6] Tomita 2009, §§ 167, 243 (Boccaccio); § 94 (Yver); § 235 (Fiorentino).

> Fenicie deuint grande, & refaitte, & fort gentille, ayant l'an 18 de son aage: & ayant changé presque de toutes façons de faire, . . . quant bien on ne l'eust tenue pour morte, encore ne l'eust on pas recognue de prime face pour celle Fenicie iadis accordee au conte. (Belleforest 1569, 507*r*)
>
> [Fénicie, now eighteen years of age, had grown, and become more refined, and very courteous, and having changed in almost every way . . . even if she had not been thought to be dead, one would have not recognised her at first sight as the Fénicie who had once been given to the count.]

This timeframe makes Timbrée's non-recognition of her as his new bride considerably more realistic than in Bandello, whose Fenicia is sixteen at the start, and, a year later, she has changed "beyond all belief" ("oltra ogni credenza", Bandello 2008, 291) so that Timbreo is completely convinced he has married "a certain Lucilla" ("una Lucilla", 293). In another sense, however, Belleforest's temporal reframing gives the tale a more extraordinary tone: Timbrée subjects himself to years, rather than months, of sorrowful penitence, celibacy, and proving of his reparative alliance-for-life to Fénicie's family; and Fénicie spends all that time living obscurely in her aunt's house "in the country" ("aux champs", Belleforest 1569, 500*r*, 507*r*, 508*r*). These lovers bear out indeed the lesson Belleforest adds to the narrative, as those present at the resolution acknowledge:

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[7] Belleforest reprises Bandello's formulation: "diuers & estranges accidens qui aduindrent" (Belleforest 1569, 475*r*). The Third Volume first appeared as Belleforest 1568. I have not been able to use first editions of any of Belleforest's volumes, but details will be supplied in the notes from the "Chronological bibliography" in Simonin 1992, 233-312. On the Turin editions of the *histoires tragiques*, see Gorris Camos 2018.

> que la varieté de fortune est admirable, & les cas & succez des hommes pleins de grand incertitude, de malheurs, & angoisses, & que les plaisirs sont achetez au pris d'vn long trauail, & non sans sentir mille incommoditez auant qu'on en iouisse. (Belleforest 1569, 512*r*)
>
> [that the changefulness of fortune is wondrous, and the circumstances and events in the lives of men full of great uncertainty, misfortunes, and sorrows, and that pleasures are purchased at the expense of long travails, and not without the experience of a thousand trials before one can enjoy them.]

Undoubtedly "homiletic", this "flourish" accords with a multitude of other changes, tonal and factual, that concertedly endow Bandello's love story with an overt tragic gravitas. Shakespeare did not follow Belleforest's dilated timeframe in *Much Ado*: on the contrary, he radically shrank Bandello's temporality, so that the entire story unfolds over a matter of days, making necessary the device of the "masked" (5.4.12) Hero at the end. But he was not done with the tale of Fenicia when he finished *Much Ado*. Critics have persuasively argued that this story, which likens its heroine to a statue when she is thought dead and secludes her in the care of a distinctly proactive aunt until the time is ripe for reunion, strongly resonates in *The Winter's Tale*, with its "preserved" (5.3.127) Hermione, presented to her husband as a "statue . . . in the keeping of Paulina" in "that removed house" (5.2.102-3, 115).[8] Hermione has to wait not one or four, but sixteen years. If "Shakespeare [read] Greene's *Pandosto* with a strong sense of unfinished business in Bandello's story"

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[8] See Mueller 1994, who sees Shakespeare's reading of this tale as "a remarkably consequential event in the playwright's career" (290). He was the first to draw attention to the importance of the "marble statue" (300) in the story. Bandello says "perdendo subito il nativo colore più a una statua di marmo che a creatura rassembrava" (2008, 280); Belleforest reuses the comparison at the corresponding moment ("elle tomba du haut de soy toute esuanouye, & si descoulouree & amortie qu'vn marbre n'est pas plus pasle ny froid", 1569, 497*r*), and also anticipates it when Fénicie is traduced: "le plus asseuré des trois demeura immobile comme vne statue" (496*r*). Mussio 2000 adds a revealing amount of suggestive detail to the parallels between the tale and *The Winter's Tale*, including Paulina's "clear" derivation from Fenicia/Fénicie's aunt (221-4).

(Mueller 1994, 300), the "wide gap" (4.1.7) of time introduced by Belleforest may have had something to do with it.

Another addition by Belleforest, an internal reflection on the tale's tragic morphology, could have made a contribution to Shakespeare's long experimentation with tragicomic genres. Like Bandello's Girondo, Belleforest's Geronde, the penitent traducer of Fénicie, proposes to her sister at the conclusion of the events; but Geronde takes this step upon "seeing that everything was well, and that the tragedy had turned comic, and sorrow had been transformed into rejoicing and delight" ("voyant toutes choses en bon estat, & que la tragedie estoit deuenue comique, & le dueil conuerty en lyesse, & resiouissance", Belleforest 1569, 511*v*). Belleforest's reflection here opens a window onto a larger phenomenon. As Michel Simonin was the first to show, such use of theatrical language is entirely typical of Belleforest's additions to the narratives, and an important characteristic of his contribution to the European 'Bandello'.[9] The generically conscious intervention of Bandello's translators was an important element in the novella's mediation of dramatic ideas from the continent to English theatre. Bandello himself had offered his stories to readers with a highly inclusive attitude to genre. Fiorato observes that "comic themes, a facet of [what Bandello calls] 'the infinite variety of events' run through the collection, alternating with tragic stories" (Bandello 2002, 28); in fact, comic and jocular tales predominate in the collection as a whole, though unevenly distributed across the four volumes (ibid.). But Boaistuau, who is credited with the "invention of the term [*histoire tragique*]" (Simonin 1982, 471), crafted the first collection of French translations from Bandello in a "single hue" (Cremona 2019, 75). That is to say, he chose six stories on the misfortunes of love, all of them ending in calamity, "except for the first and the last" (76). Belleforest followed in his footsteps in this respect, and even echoed this generic bookending in his first "Continuation des histoires tragiques".[10] Introducing its final tale, that of Dom Diego and Ginevra, he wrote: "the tragic incidents of human misfortunes" ("les tragiques euenemens des malheurs humains"), which bring bitterness, have "beneath the bark of their aloe, a honey sweeter than sweetness itself" ("sous l'escorce de cest aloez vn miel plus doux que la mesme douceur"); but as there is a time and a place for everything, "just as I started my book with a comic story, I end it with a tragicomedy" ("ainsi que i'ay commence mon discours par vne histoire comique, i'en face la fin auec vne tragicomedie", Boaistuau and de Belleforest 1567, 257*r*). It was via Belleforest's rendition that this tale became very popular in England,[11] and many of its readers would have also engaged with the translator's meditation on the emotions and gains of tragedy as a mode, and noted his term "tragicomedy". The fact, then, that a tale with a "comic" issue concludes the Third Volume as well was not a casual choice, and it alerts us to something important: English readers of 'Bandello' absorbed these stories at once influenced by the generic filter of their selective French rewritings, and orientated by them towards an awareness of the tragic and tragicomic affordances of the discursive forms they were reading. Within this context, it is possible to imagine the generically self-conscious touch in "Timbrée et Fénicie" about "the tragedy" turning "comic" rippling through Shakespeare's powerful imaginative encounter with the story across a decade.

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[9] Simonin 1982, 465, more accessible in Simonin 2004, 27-45. I have not been able to consult Simonin's unpublished thesis, defended in 1985 at the *Université de Paris XII-Val de Marne*, where he developed this point fully. See also Campangne 2006, 793 and Arnould 2011, 79, 76.

Belleforest and Greek Tragedy

Belleforest's imitation of the structure of Boaistuau's collection, and his theoretical articulation of its implications for genre, are characteristic of his 'continuation' practice. Boaistuau's blueprint, according to Robert Carr, was a tragic modulation of the "traditional form" of the short story, with the addition of "a more probing psychological inquiry", an "enlarge[ment of] the scope of the form beyond . . . anecdotal amusement", and the enabling of "the narrative to serve as its own expression of an implicit doctrinal attitude" (Carr 1979, 35-6). Belleforest took all this further and made it wholly explicit. Boaistuau eliminated Bandello's jocular tales and included only two happily ending stories among six; Belleforest's "Continuation" changed the proportion to two among twelve, and the comic and tragicomic element progressively disappeared across the hundred or so stories that he would offer in the years to come. Where Boaistuau had accommodated Bandello's objective of readerly pleasure among his stated aims, Belleforest's paratexts focussed on the *histoires tragiques*' capacity to "serve the public" ("seruir au publique", Belleforest 1566, 5*r*) by offering "examples" ("exemples", 6*v*, 7*r*) that would reform contemporary morals.[12] Chiming with this edifying intent, Belleforest brought a distinct narratorial attitude to the genre, his notorious, tireless "homiletic" penchant for discoursing on the ethical and existential implications of the situations at hand, deriving "from the experience narrated . . . pronouncements of general value, with an avowedly edifying purpose" (Arnould 2011, 79). This was the didacticism that made Bullough oust Belleforest from the canon of possible Shakespeare sources. Importantly, this sermonising impulse was part and parcel of Belleforest's idea of the 'tragic', which was shared by the less flamboyantly edifying Boaistuau (Carr 1979), and linked to "the conception, going back to the ancients, and after them the Church Fathers, of spectacle and of the theatre of the world" (Simonin's doctoral thesis, quoted in Campangne 2006, 791). Belleforest's "homiletic . . . flourishes" thus went together with his theatrical lexicon. In concert, they deepened the interaction between the novella and ideas of theatrical tragedy. This interaction was significant. As Hervé-Thomas Campangne says, Belleforest's stories were connected to early modern drama "en amont et en aval" (2006, 792), both indebted to and feeding into the contemporary stage in various ways. But in Belleforest's volumes, there also emerged a certain interplay between the *histoire tragique* and ancient dramatic tragedy, which, from a Shakespearean perspective at least, repays attention.

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[10] The first edition, Belleforest 1559, was published together with Boaistuau's *histoires.*

[11] English versions of it appeared in Tomita 2009 §§ 36, 38, 86, 96, 234.

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[12] The quotations are from the dedication of the second volume, first published as Belleforest 1565.

In one sense, Greek tragedy was there at the very roots of the *histoire tragique.* Fiorato pauses over Bandello's translation of Euripides' *Hecuba* into Italian, complete by July 1539, as "an important moment which leads to the tragic novella" (1979, 442; see also Zaccaria 1982). The translation, situated in the context of a formative period in the development of Italian tragedy, can be said to signal what will become the *novelliere*'s preoccupation with certain tragic subjects: the individual's need to submit to ethical, political, or theological imperatives, and the tyranny of irrational passions that lead to horrible crimes and their chastisement by the universe (Fiorato 1979, 441-4). It is the stories in this 'tragic' key that will captivate his European translators and readers. Bandello's volumes, however, did nothing to present his project as affiliated with ancient tragedy, and Julius Caesar Scaliger, in his numerous encomiastic epigrams to Bandello, never paralleled him to the tragedians of antiquity.[13] In contrast, when Belleforest, who had been a collaborator on Boaistuau's *histoires tragiques*, celebrated that volume, the parallel with ancient tragedy suggested itself: in the ambit of "la Tragedie" (Boaistuau 1559, sig. yiiii*r*), he wrote, Boaistuau's "prose" surpassed the priceless "saincts vers" ("holy verses") of the Greeks and Latins.[14] What he meant probably included, but went well beyond dramatic tragedy, judging from the dedication of his own Third Volume of *histoires tragiques* nine years later. Here, Belleforest defended the discourse of love in his stories. To those who accused him of "tickl[ing]" ("chatouiller", 1569, sig. *3*v*) the younger sort with the jollity of Bandello's amorous tales, he replied that his own pictures of love were about "virtue alone" ("la seule vertu", sig. *4*r*). If he spoke of love, he did so "as a good surgeon, of some putrefaction and impostume" ("tout ainsi qu'vn bon chirurgien, de quelque putrefaction & apostume", sig. *3*v*), aiming to remove the "corruption" of amorous passion "either with fire, or with the violence of a corrosive incision" ("ou auec le feu, ou auec la violence de quelque corrosiue incision"), surgical metaphors which invite comparison with the action of tragic *catharsis* as some contemporary Aristotelians were beginning to describe it.[15] When Belleforest goes on to reflect on ancient precedents for writing about the calamities of those who love irrationally, he leans on a variety of authorities, including the "grave philosopher" Plutarch in *The Dialogue of Love*, but also the poets and dramatists:

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[13] These epigrams are quoted in Fiorato 1967, 380-1.

[14] Belleforest's collaboration is attested in Boaistuau 1559, sig. *iiii*r*, and discussed in Simonin 1992, 51-2.

> Ie laisse les poëtes qui en on enrichy leurs liures, & fait resonner les Theatres du recit de telles occurrences, soit à la comédie, ou parmy la tristesse d'vne sanglante Tragedie, comme de celle de Didon desesperee en Virgile, d'vne Phillis, & Medee en Ouide . . . (*4*r*)
>
> [Not mentioning the poets who have enriched their books, and made their Theatres resound with the relation of such events, whether in comedy, or through the sadness of a bloody tragedy, like that of the desperate Dido in Virgil, or of a Phyllis or Medea in Ovid . . .]

Belleforest's list of models is highly eclectic with respect to forms and media, ranging from "books" to "Theatres", and from the "bloody Tragedy" of Dido in Virgil's epic, to that of Phyllis in Ovid's *Heroides*, and his Medea, in a reference which could point to the *Metamorphoses*, the *Heroides*, or Ovid's lost tragedy for the stage. The amorous *histoire tragique* is defined as a discourse with a prestigious ancient lineage that crosscuts and transcends genres, is even, perhaps, itself a genre. Ancient dramatic tragedy is one of its ancient manifestations.

Elsewhere in the pages of this volume, it was presented as much more than that. If Belleforest lauded Boaistuau's prose histories by comparing them to the tragic poetry of the ancients, praise for his own narrations made the parallel more concrete. In a sonnet printed at the end of the Second Volume, Pierre Tamisier[16] declared that "the tragic Muse" (Belleforest 1566, sig. MMMvi*v*; "la Muse tragique") which had once decorated "the Athenian" ("l' Athenien") had undergone a Pythagorean transmigration and found a new dwelling: exchanging "the rhythm of verse, and its native Greek" ("la mesure des vers / Et son Grec naturel") for "prose and French" ("La prose, & le François"), she made "a new Sophocles thunder with a novel grace" ("d'vne nouuelle grâce, / Vn Sophocle nouueau . . . bruire l'vnivers"). Belleforest was the new Sophocles, his tragic prose a metempsychosis of the tragic verse of Athens. The following year, Tamisier composed an Ode for the Third Volume, which returned to this parallel. "If the course of human life had not been enslaved to all kinds of ills" ("Si le cours de l'humaine uie / N'estoit à tous maulx asseruie"), he wrote, it would have been in vain that:

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[15] On early modern medical accounts of *catharsis*, see Dewar-Watson 2010, where Sidney is described as applying an anatomical take on Aristotle's concept, Dewar-Watson 2018, 94-116, and Hoxby 2015, 62-9.

[16] On whom, see Simonin 1992, 79-80; Quenot 1979; Hutton 1946, 416-21 and Jeandet 1885, 298-304.

> . . . les Tragiques poëtes
> Eussent esté les interpretes,
> Sur theatres Grecz & Romains,
> De la disgrace des humains:
> En uain Sophocle & Euripide
> Eussent retué les Heros,
> Qui d'une estrange Atropos
> On senty le glaiue homicide:
> En uain, Belle-forest, aussy
> Imitant de Bandel la trace,
> Auec toutefois meilleur' grace,
> Auroit conceu mesme soucy.
> (Belleforest 1569, sig. Tt3*r*-*v*)
>
> [. . . the Tragic poets expounded how humans fall from grace in Greek and Roman theatres, in vain that Sophocles and Euripides put the heroes to death again, making them feel the murderous sword of a strange Atropos; and in vain, too, that Belleforest, imitating Bandello, but with more grace altogether, undertook the same.]

These often-reprinted liminary works glorify the *histoire tragique* by presenting it as a descendant of Greek tragedy.

Tamisier was not a Greek scholar, but he was interested in Greek poetry: two decades later, when his translations from the Greek Anthology and of the didactic verse of Pseudo-Phocylides and Pseudo-Pythagoras appeared, he made it clear that he had no Greek and was instead benefitting from "tant de doctes personnages qui les on mis en Latin" (Tamisier 1589, 6; "so many erudite figures who have rendered them into Latin"). He had also read other French poets' translations from the Greek Anthology. He could easily have encountered the Greek tragedians via similar routes, for he lived precisely at the moment when Latin and vernacular versions of them became disseminated on a large scale.[17] The *histoire tragique* evolved in parallel with the discovery of Greek tragedy by a wider audience in France. This synchronicity is nicely illustrated by the fact that the Euripidean translations of George Buchanan – whom Belleforest just missed when he attended the Collège de Guyenne (Soubeille 2002, 372) – had been printed in Paris in 1544 and 1556, while the first complete translation of a Greek tragedian by a Frenchman, that of Sophocles by Jean Lalemant of Autun (near Tamisier's native Tournus), appeared in 1557, a mere two years before Boaistuau's *Histoires*.[18] Tristan Alonge has also recently argued that the evidence of translations into French, if printed and unpublished works are taken together, suggests a notable engagement with Greek tragedy as opposed to Seneca in the first half of the sixteenth century, which later becomes dampened under political and religious pressures (Alonge 2019). Whatever the well-connected Tamisier's exposure to these developments was, his paratexts show that it was possible to see the subject of "tragiques malheurs" treated in these stories as forming a continuum with the tragedies of Athens. And as Belleforest's project grew, the parallel became a *topos*. Jacques Moysson,[19] who had not used the conceit in his liminary poems for Belleforest's earlier volumes, did so in 1570, in his contribution to the first incarnation of the Fifth Volume of *Histoires tragiques* (the volume which included the story of Hamlet). An "Ode" addressed Belleforest once again as "ce Sophocle moderne" (Belleforest 2013, 735), and called upon "all tragic poets" ("tous chantres Tragiques") to cede to him "the laurel crown that lines your brows, and the cothurnus and the goat" ("Le tortiz, qui voz fronts cerne, / Et le Cothurne et le Bouc").[20] Moysson also cited Greek tragedies recently played on the French stage as works surpassed by Belleforest's tragic writings:

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[17] As demonstrated in Pollard 2017, 'Appendix 2' and 'Appendix 3'.

[18] On Lalemant, see Mastroianni 2015.

[19] On whom, see Simonin 1992, 80, 84-6.

[20] The first edition of this material was in Belleforest 1570.

> On a veu la tragedie
> De la pauvre Iphigenie,
> Et la fureur d'Hecuba
> Et celle de la Colchide
> (733-4)

> [We have seen the tragedy of the poor Iphigenia, and the fury of Hecuba, and that of the woman from Colchis]

As Campangne notes in his edition, these references must be to performances of vernacular translations of Euripides: *Iphigenia in Aulis* by Thomas Sebillet (1549), *Hecuba* by Guillaume Bouchetel (1544), and *Medea* by La Péruse (1556). As such, they show clearly that the *topos* elaborated on in these liminary works marks an intersection between the development of the *histoire tragique* and the reception of Attic tragedy in sixteenth-century France and suggests the potential for fruitful interaction between the two.

Belleforest's narratives occasionally activated this potential. "Timbrée et Fénicie" is one such instance. Some of the translator's most elaborate expansions on Bandello come at the point when Timbrée, having failed in his protracted attempt to seduce his lower-status beloved, determines to marry her. Like Bandello, Belleforest describes Fénicie's delight and her thanks to God for rewarding her chastity. But where Bandello goes on to narrate the catastrophe of her slandering with a sentence-long preamble on the variability of fortune, Belleforest is in no such hurry. Instead, he becomes deeply interested in his heroine's devout response to the felicitous outcome:

> Ainsi elle bastissoit en son ame comme les choses humaines sont suiettes à changement, & toutesfois ne donnoit rien à la fortune, à fin de ne faillir, comme celle qui n'ignoroit point que ce que nous estimons auoir quelque puissance sur les occurrences humaines, n'est rien: ains s'il y a rien de bon, c'est Dieu qui l'octroye de sa grace, sans aucun nostre merite, ny par l'inclination des astres: & s'il y a de l'aduersité, aussi est ce le tout puissant qui nous punit par telles calamitez, à fin que ce chastiment nous face recognoistre sa iustice, misericorde, & toute puissance. (Belleforest 1569, 487*r-v*)

> [Thus she contemplated how the affairs of mortals are subject to change, and yet ascribed nothing to chance so as not to err, being not ignorant that what power we think we have over human events is nothing; on the contrary, if any good thing happens, it is God who grants it out of his grace, without any merit on our part, nor does it come about because of the inclination of the stars; and if there is adversity, again, it is the omnipotent who punishes us through such calamities, so that this punishment will make us acknowledge his justice, mercy, and omnipotence.]

A sermonising "flourish" if ever there was one, this will have been among the passages that made Charles Prouty dub Belleforest, in his study of the sources of *Much Ado*, "a second- or third-rate man who fancies himself as a literary figure and a philosopher" (1950, 29).[21] But third-rate or not, Belleforest's philosophising speaks to the contribution of tragedy to theological speculation in this period: as Russ Leo has shown, in the wake of the Reformation, tragedy became a resource for understanding providence and human and divine agencies (Leo 2019). Belleforest's counter-reformation moralisations can be seen as productively comparable to the probing of "tapestries of deed and fortune and judgment inaccessible to mortal view" (Lazarus 2020, 46) that other Christian humanists were finding in the tragedies of ancient Greece.

Such a comparison, moreover, becomes particularly pertinent as Belleforest goes on to refer to Euripides. Bandello prepares his readers for the reversal in the lovers' fortunes thus: "But fortune, that never ceases to hinder people's happiness, found a new way of impeding the marriage that was so desired on both sides. Listen how." ("Ma la fortuna, che mai non cessa l'altrui bene impedire, nuovo modo ritrovò di porre impedimento a così da tutte due le parti desiderate nozze. E udite come.", Bandello 2008, 274). Belleforest radically changes the tone of this comment:

> Mais la misère humaine, & le sort qui nous conduit ne cessant iamais d'empescher le bien d'autruy, ne faillit aussi à donner vn

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[21] For the record, Prouty did consider Belleforest both a likely direct source for Shakespeare's play, and an important influence on the ideological contours of the play. (Prouty 1941, 216; Prouty 1950, 30-2)

> terrible obstacle à ces nopces de chascun tant desirées: Car il n'y a homme, comme dit le Tragic Euripide, qui tost ou tard ne sente les assauts de fortune, qui luy malheurent sa vie, & n'est aucun qui iouisse d'vne perpetuelle felicité. [Marginal note:] *Euripide en la trag. Andromaché.* (Belleforest 1569, 487*v*)
>
> [But as human misfortune and fate that leads us never cease to hinder people's happiness, it did not fail to present a terrible impediment, too, to this marriage so desired by each party. For there is no person, as the tragedian Euripides says, who does not, sooner or later, feel the strokes of fortune bringing misery to their life, and no one enjoys a perpetual happiness. [Marginal note:] *Euripides in his tragedy Andromache.*]

His citation paraphrases Andromache's words to Menelaus at Eur. *Andr.* 462-3: εἰ δ᾽ ἐγὼ πράσσω κακῶς, / μηδὲν τόδ᾽ αὔχει· καὶ σὺ γὰρ πράξειας ἄν. ("if my fortune now is evil, do not make this your boast: yours may be so as well."). This was not a particularly famous tag: the lines do not appear to have been much cited by ancient authors, nor do they feature in Erasmus' *Adagia*, though other quotations from this speech appear there (1.8.38; 3.7.31). They did number among the many *sententiae* regularly marked up in printed editions of Euripides, including the three Latin translations of this play which had appeared since 1541.[22] But Belleforest seems to have come across them as a commonplace in Ioannes Stobaeus' *Anthology* (Stob. 4.48.8), which is divided into topics, and was translated into Latin by Conrad Gessner. First published in 1543 in a bilingual volume designed for versatility and easy finding, Gessner's Stobaeus was indexed with increasing fulsomeness in subsequent editions, and often reprinted, including in France.[23] This quote from the *Andromache* – a play with an intriguingly strong representation in the *Anthology* (Piccione 1994, 180-7) – is found in the section "Non esse gaudendum ob alienas calamitates" (Stobaeus 1543, 499; "One should not rejoice at the calamities that befall others"). A few pages earlier, in the section "Quot inconstans sit hominum prosperitas, cum fortuna facile mutetur in statum deteriorem" (486*r*-7*r*; "How inconstant human prosperity is, since good fortune easily turns into bad circumstance"), Belleforest would have found the locus from Herodotus that he follows up the reference to Euripides with:

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[22] E.g. Euripides 1541, sig. B2*v*; Euripides 1558, 375; Euripides 1562, 255. They were also among the 54 extracts from *Andromache* in Neander's Euripidean 'aristology', accompanied by the comment: "Fortune is master over everyone . . . You, who are great today, tomorrow will be nobody." (Neander 1559, 128-9; "Fortuna omnium est domina . . . Qui hodie est magnus, cras nullus eris").

[23] On the indexing of authors in Stobaeus, the first of its kind, see Blair 2016, 88-94.

> & c'est pourquoy les saiges anciens ont dit qu'il ne faut iamais estimer heureux vn homme auant qu'on aye veu l'accomplissement de sa vie, comme bien se souuint Crese se voyant sur le buscher prest à estre bruslé, & se souuenant des admonitions du Legislateur d'Athenes. [Marginal note:] *Herodote liu. I.* (Belleforest 1569, 487*v*)

> [This is also the reason the sages of antiquity said that one should never esteem a person blessed before seeing the conclusion of their life, as Croesus recalled indeed when he found himself at the stake about to be burned and remembering the advice of the Legislator of Athens. [Marginal note:] *Herodotus Book I.*]

Belleforest had read Herodotus, too (Sturel 1918, 80). But in Stob. 4.41.63, Solon's advice to Croesus "not [to] call a man blessed, but fortunate, before they have died" (Hdt, *Hist.* 1.32; πρὶν δ᾽ἄν τελευτήσῃ . . . μηδὲ καλέειν κω ὄλβιον, ἀλλ᾽εὐτυχέα), is contextualised among numerous iterations of the same idea in Greek authors. Belleforest is evidently aware of this context when he attributes the saw to "the sages of antiquity" in the plural. Significantly, two of the "sages" are Greek tragedians: so common is this reflection in tragedy, that Erasmus' adage "Finem vitae specta" (1.3.37; "Consider the end of life") extracted from Stobaeus Solon's warning to Croesus and juxtaposed it with five variations of it in works by Sophocles and Euripides. More broadly, as Belleforest leaved through this cluster of sections in Stobaeus' florilegium, dedicated to topics such as fortune deserved and undeserved, happenstance, sudden reversals in life for the better or the worse, and how one should react to them, he would have found that extracts from the Attic tragedians predominated.[24] His presentation of the turning point of his own narrative might thus be described as a reflection on the reversals of fate, which makes conscious use of those resources of Greek tragedy that had been made familiar to him through a sophisticated early modern culture of commonplacing the ancients.[25] Through Stobaeus' *Anthology*, he learns from the Greeks that tragedy can be a philosophical modality for "comprehending action" (Leo 2019, 6).

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[24] For an illuminating numerical comparison of quotations from Euripides in the different parts of Stobaeus, see Piccione 1994, 178.

We know, finally, that Belleforest is paying privileged attention to the tragedians in Stobaeus, because, in his introduction to this same story, he meditates on the misfortune that is envy, largely by means of a long quotation from Euripides that he definitely found there. After explaining that the distinctive "vehemence" (Belleforest 1569, 473*v*) of the passion of envy comes from the fact that those in its grip find no happiness in the things they love, he says:

> C'est pourquoy Euripide dit, Quelle est la mere ou quel le pere qui a produit entre les hommes cest extreme malheur, & abhominable aduersité qu'on appelle enuie? Ou est-ce qu'elle habite, ne [*sic*] quelle partie du corps a elle saisie pour sa demeure? Combien il seroit penible, & de grand labeur aux medecins de chasser par breuuages, ou drogueries ceste humeur corrompue & [i]nuisible, veu que c'est la plus grande, & plus dangereuse de toutes les maladies, ausquelles les hommes sont suiets. [Marginal note:] *Euripide.* (Ibid.)
>
> [This is the reason Euripides says: "Who is the mother, or who is the father who gave birth to this extreme misery and loathed misfortune among people that we call envy? Where does it live, which part of the body has it made its dwelling in? How arduous and challenging would it be for doctors to expel this invisible, corrupt humour with potions or drugs, seeing as it is the greatest and most dangerous of all the illnesses to which humans are subject!" [Marginal note:] *Euripides.*]

All this is a translation, with considered minor tweaks, of a fragment from *Ino* (fr. 403 Kn.) for which our only source is Stob. 3.38.8. Gessner was not always able to decipher the names of lost plays in his manuscript of Stobaeus, and thus left some quotations, like this one, unassigned; hence Belleforest's marginal reference simply to "Euripides".[26] The passage, describing the "malheur" (cp. fr. 403 Kn., 1: κακὸν) of jealousy, has an interesting resonance with Belleforest's paratexts to this volume, where, as we saw, he described his tragic stories as excising the "corruption" (sig. *3*v*) of love in his readers like a surgeon. He does indeed seem to have thought through Euripides' medical language carefully: where Euripides' speaker imagines doctors removing "envy" (2; φθόνον) by means of "incisions . . . or potions or drugs" (6; τομαῖς . . . ἢ ποτοῖς ἢ φαρμάκοις), Belleforest specifies, as Euripides does not, that the illness is an "humeur corrompue" and omits the surgical procedure that makes no sense in this context, and was the province of early modern "chirurgiens" rather than "medecins". But, fascinatingly, he seems to return to the metaphor of surgery and "incision[s]" (sig. *3*v*) when he considers the operation of his own stories on vehement passions that bring about calamity in his paratexts. Belleforest's language for what tragic stories do to their readers may or may not be indebted to an indirect transmission of Aristotle's tragic theory, but it is certainly indebted to the tragedian Euripides himself. The *histoire tragique*'s affiliation to Greek tragedy that hovers around Belleforest's volumes as a *topos* that might at first glance appear facile, seems to have yielded something considerably deeper and more active as he composed this story. And one result of this deeper something is that Bandello's story of Timbreo and Fenicia would have reached the hands of a reader like Shakespeare under the tutelage of Euripides.

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[25] On the privileged association between commonplacing and Greek tragedy in this period, see Suthren 2020.

Shakespeare and Belleforest's Euripides

Belleforest's reworkings alter the literary coordinates of Bandello's narratives: his *histoires tragiques* are not simply tonally distinct from Bandello's *novelle*, but throw out filaments of connection to very different literary referents through citations and mythical allusions (Sturel 1918, 82-3). When Bandello's Timbreo falls in love, "each day he was set on fire all the more, and the more he saw [Fenicia], the greater the flame he felt inside him" ("ogni dì più s'accendeva, e quanto più spesso la mirava tanto più sentiva la fiamma sua farsi maggiore", Bandello 2008, 273). Belleforest's Timbrée, however, imbibes through his eyes the "poison of Love" ("venin d' Amour", Belleforest 1569, 477*r*) just "as Dido of old did whilst kissing Cupid, who had taken the face and semblance of little Ascanius of Troy" ("comme iadis Didon en baisant Cupidon qui auoit pris la face & semblance du petit Ascanie Troien"). Timbreo's story and his passions are situated firmly in an early modern mundanity; but Timbrée's (averted) tragedy of love borrows possibilities from that of Virgil's Dido, "kindle[d] . . . to madness", by a transformed Cupid, who "sen[t] the flame into her very marrow" ("furentem / incendat reginam atque ossibus implicet ignem", *Aen.* 1.659-60). Other stories in the Third Volume likewise find occasion to bring the worlds of Virgil, but also Ovid, Ariosto, Dante, and Homer into the orbit of the narrative. It is the same with Belleforest's allusions to the Greek tragedians that his eulogists likened him to. There are a handful of these in this volume, the majority of them to Euripides, and all traceable to Stobaeus.[27] Their distribution and Belleforest's citational handling of them tend to suggest that engagement with the tragedians via Stobaeus became increasingly purposeful in the course of this Third Volume.[28] This may be why "Timbrée et Fénicie", the final story, is the only one to include two such references, with their significant placing giving Euripides a notable prominence within it. And in this context, it requires no special "awak[ing]" of one's "faith" (*WT*, 5.3.95) in Shakespeare's independent investment in Greek tragedy, to imagine him turning from this specific story, to Euripides, in his known wont to "read associatively from text to text looking for connections" (Miola 2000, 4). This matters, because a flashpoint in the discussion of Shakespeare's contact with Greek tragedy has always been the proposal that the ending of *The Winter's Tale* carries the imprint of that of Euripides' *Alcestis*, and the same intertext has been proposed, more recently, for *Much Ado*.[29] If Shakespeare's 'Bandello' was, or was partly, that of Belleforest, it becomes easier to understand why the story of Timbreo and Fenicia and the ending of the *Alcestis* resonated together for the playwright over a decade.

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[26] Stobaeus 1543, 224; on Gessner and illegible names of plays, see Arnott 1967, 95.

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[27] Belleforest 1569, 77*r*: "*Sophocle*", i.e. Soph. fr. 941.15-17 Rd., from an unknown play, cp. Stob. 4.20a.6 (= Stobaeus 1543, 368*v*); Belleforest 1569, 110*v*: "*Euripide*", i.e. Eur. *Temenus*, fr. 745 Kn., cp. Stob. 4.10.3 (= Stobaeus 1543, 345*v*); Belleforest 1569, 227*v*: "*Sophocle*", in fact Eur. *Bellerophon*, fr. 297 Kn. and Eur. *Danae*, fr. 325.1 Kn., cp. Stob. 3.10.17-18 (= Stobaeus 1543, 102, where the first extract is attributed to Euripides and the second to Sophocles); Belleforest 1569, 259*r*: "*Euripide*", i.e. Eur. *Antiope* fr. 187 Kn., cp. Stob. 3.30.1 (= Stobaeus 1543, 206); Belleforest 1569, 377*v*: "*Euripide aux Phenisses*", in fact Eur. *Aeolus*, fr. 15.2 Kn., cp. Stob. 4.21a.1 (= Stobaeus 1534, 379*v*); Belleforest 1569, 387*r*: "*Euripide en ses suplians*", i.e. Eur. *Suppl.* 429-32, cp. Stob. 4.8.1 (= Stobaeus 1543, 337*v*).

[28] Belleforest tends to highlight the 'tragic' provenance of his paraphrases and renditions of Euripides and Sophocles, but this begins with the second reference (introduced with "le grec faiseur de Tragedies, dit" (Belleforest 1569, 110*v*; "the Greek maker of Tragedies, says") and, like the citations themselves, settles into a habit by the second half of the book (where the citations are introduced with "le Tragique Grec dit"/ "le Grec Tragique dit" (e.g. 227*v*, 259*r*, 377*v*; "the Greek Tragedian says"). Increasing purposefulness would be

We are back to Claudio's "masked" bride. In Bandello and Belleforest, the protagonist, having promised not to take a wife before Lionato has had the chance to suggest one, is taken to meet a certain Lucilla/Lucille. Struck by her beauty, he declares that his promise to be guided by his father-in-law *manqué* was not made in vain, and that he desires to marry this woman so long as she, too, consents. They proceed to formalise their union "dés à present" (Belleforest 1569, 508*v*) or "per parole di presente" (Bandello 2008, 293) before "a Doctor who was there" ("un dottore che ivi era", ibid.) in Bandello or "the priest" ("le prestre", Belleforest 1569, 508*v*) who is presently summoned in Belleforest. The identity of the woman, to whom the hero feels a mysterious attraction, will be revealed during the celebratory feast. Not so in Shakespeare's highly condensed concluding sequence, which also involves marriage before a friar and an echo of Timbreo's acceptance speech, but is centred around the "masked" Hero, and merges the moment of marriage with that of recognition:

a compelling context for the prominence of Euripides in the final *histoire*, and its reverberations in the volume's dedicatory epistle.

[29] Mueller 1971, 230-1; Wilson 1984; Bate 1994; Louden 2007; Showerman 2007; Showerman 2009; Dewar-Watson 2009; Shakespeare 2010: 13-15; Pollard 2017, 171-204; Dewar-Watson 2018, 63-7; Suthren 2018. Accounts of earlier discussions are offered in Showerman 2007 and Dewar-Watson 2009.

> CLAUDIO . . . Which is the lady I must seize upon?
> ANTONIO This same is she, and I do give you her.
> CLAUDIO Why, then she's mine. Sweet, let me see your face.
> LEONATO No, that you shall not, till you take her hand
> Before this friar and swear to marry her.
> CLAUDIO Give me your hand: before this holy friar,
> I am your husband, if you like of me.
> HERO [*unmasks*] And when I lived, I was your other wife:
> And when you loved, you were my other husband.
> (5.4.53-61)

Shakespeare's compressed timeframe excluded the possibility of a heroine who matures beyond recognition, but he had other options. In an analogous play by Giambattista della Porta that also made the story unfold in a matter of days, for example, the hero is told that his beloved is still alive before seeing her (Della Porta 1980). But Shakespeare, as Tanya Pollard says, went for an "elaborate presentation of a veiled bride to the man responsible for her death" which "does not appear . . . in any of the play's . . . acknowledged sources", but strongly "suggests the similarly veiled presence of Euripides' [*Alcestis*]" (Pollard 2017, 174). Common to Euripides and Shakespeare, moreover, as Susanne Wofford observes, is not just the device of a veiled bride, but the very strangeness of the husband's being bound to accept an unknown new bride, in stark contrast to the narratives of Timbreo which go to great lengths to 'normalise' the event's emotional probability (Wofford 2018). It is also worth emphasising a point that comes through somewhat implicitly in Wofford's discussion, which is that this strangeness is the result of a strikingly similar dramaturgy, focussed on the symbolic gesture of "taking hands".[30] In *Much Ado*, Claudio is forced to commit to the marriage out of pure obligation, without seeing the stranger; only after he takes Hero's hand in front of the friar does Hero unmask and the awkwardness cede its place to wonder. In Euripides, Heracles pressures Admetus inappropriately to take the veiled female stranger into his house. What Heracles' proposal means is clear: he schools Admetus on the need to remarry, adding, perversely, that he wishes he could "bring your wife back to the light from the dead" (Eur. *Alcest.* 1073-4; σὴν / ἐς φῶς πορεῦσαι νερτέρων ἐκ δωμάτων / γυναῖκα) but cannot. He tells the unwilling Admetus that the woman is to be placed in his "hands" (χέρας, 1113) alone and persuades him grudgingly to receive her with his "right hand" (χειρὶ δεξιᾷ, 1115); Admetus' action of stretching out of his hand is focussed on in deictic language – "put out your hand" (προτεῖναι χεῖρα, 1117); "I am putting it out" (προτείνω, 1118) – and it is only once Admetus "ha[s] her" (ἐχεις; ἔχω, 1119), that she is revealed.[31] This is very close indeed, and it matters that the dramaturgy of the veil and its lifting was virtually the first thing anyone reading the *Alcestis* would have encountered, for it takes up a large part of the ancient *hypothesis*, or summary, which was invariably translated and printed with the drama.[32] After Pollard's trenchantly argued panorama of the evidence, the plausibility of Shakespeare's access to this play is not in question: "*Alcestis* was among the most popular Greek plays in the sixteenth century", not least because of a quality exemplified imprimis by this moment, namely its "generic complexity, especially in its ability to generate affective intensity through unexpected swerves of plot." (Pollard 2017, 179-80). But could Belleforest have taken him there?

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[30] On "taking hands" in early modern drama, see Karim-Cooper 2020, 53-4. On Shakespeare's debt to Euripides for the very different dramaturgy of the statue scene in *The Winter's Tale*, see Suthren 2018, 199-224.

Towards the end of the story, Belleforest adds another mythical reference to Bandello's narrative. At the feast that follows their marriage, with Timbreo sat next to the beautiful 'Lucilla', the narratively significant aunt in whose keeping Fenicia has been, asks him if he has been married before. This prompts him to talk about Fenicia, "whom I loved, and dead as she is, love more than I do myself" ("che amai, e così morta amo più che me stesso", Bandello 2008, 294). After making him tell the story, and reducing the whole company to tears, the aunt masterfully orchestrates their emotions to a climax with a final question, to be followed by the great reveal that will make the story "swerve" towards the comic: "if before this woman was given as wife to you, you could have brought back your beloved, what would you have done to be able to have her again, living?" ("se innanzi che questa qui vi fosse stata data per moglie vi avessi potuto suscitar la vostra innamorata, che avereste voi fatto per poterla riaver viva?", Bandello 2008, 295). Had it been possible to "recover" ("ricomperare", ibid.) her, Timbreo replies, he would have given up half his life, not to mention how much treasure. Belleforest evidently found this Timbreo somewhat lacking in vision in his response to the aunt's high-stakes rhetorical challenge. Redrafting the sequence, he helped his Timbrée out by changing the aunt's question slightly, to "what would you have been willing to do *and endure* to have her again still living?" ("qu'eussiez vous volu faire *& souffrir* pour la reuoir encore viue?", Belleforest 1569, 510*r*-*v*, my emphasis). Timbrée exclaims:

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[31] All of these carried lucidly through in Latin translations of the play: see Euripides 1541, sig. Z7*r*; Euripides 1557, 24*v*; Euripides 1558, 353-4; Euripides 1562, 237.

[32] Euripides 1541, sig. x*r*; Euripides 1557, 3*r*; Euripides 1558, 310; Euripides 1562, 216.

> O Dieu . . . que i'eusse voulu faire? non pas descendre seulement aux enfers, ainsi qu'on dit que feit Orphée pour rauoir son espouse, mais bien y combattre toutes les ombres malignes & l'en tirer à force, ainsi que chantent les fables auoir iadis esté fait par Hercule pour la recouurance de son grand amy Pyrithoé: Mais las! la barque du nautonier stigien ne se repasse point si legerement, & on ne regaigne point telles pertes auec l'effusion de ses thresors & richesses. (510*v*)
>
> [Oh God, what would I have been willing to do? Why, not only go down to hell, as they say Orpheus did to have his wife again, but indeed do battle there with all the evil shadows and get her out by force, as the fables tell was done of old by Hercules, for the recovery of his great friend Peirithous. But alas! One cannot so easily come and go in the boat of the Stygian ferryman, nor do we recover such losses by pouring treasures and riches.]

We are suddenly miles away from the mundanity of Bandello and in the realm of "classical myths of temporary death and rebirth" (Bate 1994, 79): the boat of Charon that rarely brings travellers the other way, the myth of Orpheus almost recovering his wife Eurydice from the dead, and the myth of Theseus willingly accompanying his great friend Peirithous to Hades, conflated with that of Heracles bringing Theseus back to earth, after battling with the terrible guardian of the underworld, Cerberus.[33] It is a small step from here, as it is not from any of the other sources of *Much Ado*, to the highly celebrated myth of Alcestis brought back from the dead by Heracles.[34]

Shakespeare read the story of Timbreo and Fenicia with striking attention to some of its narrative detail. Borachio is a result of such generative attention. To put together the charade that will deceive Timbreo, Bandello's Girondo dresses up one of his servants in fine clothes, and "perfumes him with the sweetest smells" ("di soavissimi odori profumò", Bandello 2008, 277). Bandello continues: "The perfumed servant went, accompanied by . . ." ("Andò il profumato servidore di compagnia . . .", ibid.). A little later, when the deception is unfolding and Timbreo hears him name Fenicia as his lover, Bandello refers to him not as the servant, but simply as "the perfumed one who was dressed to look like a lover" ("il profumato in forma d'amante vestito", 278). Belleforest appreciated this witty touch. And as with all things, he elaborated on it. His Geronde not only dresses up his servant very finely but "perfumed and scented him like one of the most magnificent courtesans of Rome" ("le parfuma & musca comme vne courtisanne des plus magnifiques de Rome", Belleforest 1569, 492*r*). After this, "he who was leading the party, *the perfumed one*, and another went . . ." ("s'en allerent celuy qui dressoit la partie, & *le parfumé* & vn autre . . .", 492*r*, my emphasis). Most strikingly, at the climax of the deception, when Timbrée hears him name his lover as Fénicie, Belleforest calls him "Monsieur le Perfumé" (Belleforest 1569, 493*v*). Finally, since everything proliferates in his narrative, two additional occasions arise for the narrator to use the moniker "le parfumé" / "perfumé" (501*r*, 495*r*) again. A little sparkle in Bandello's narrative has metamorphosed into a prominent choice in Belleforest's version of the deception, which stands out all the more for its contrast to the narrator's general tonal seriousness. Now, Borachio is Shakespeare's corresponding figure in *Much Ado*. His name means 'drunk' in Spanish and he does indeed tell his story "like a true drunkard" (3.3.101). But, riffing on the witticism he noticed in his sources, of turning satirical attribute into an onomastic, the dramatist was loath to cut off Borachio from his origins completely and made him be employed by the Lionati "for a perfumer" (1.3.54), "an occupational identity . . . increasingly associated with fraudulent diversions" (Dugan 2011, 79) at this time. There are, for the avoidance of doubt, no other perfumers in the Shakespeare corpus; nor are there any perfumers prior to Borachio in extant English drama (80). If Borachio's "labor of dispensing scented smoke is linked to other meaningful nothings in the play" (70), it is also itself a "meaningful nothing" playfully generated between the translations of the story at the centre of *Much Ado*.[35] Borachio the perfumer is, it seems to me, a good indication that Shakespeare read Belleforest's "Timbrée et Fénicie" and that he did so with great alertness.

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[33] On Peirithous, Theseus, and Heracles in the underworld, see e.g. Conti 1581, 133*r*-134*r*, 165*r*, 456*r*, 484*r*. Heracles was in fact unable to bring back Peirithous, but Belleforest was not alone in forgetting this (e.g. Ormerod 1606, 44).

[34] An eye-opening account of the myth's circulation is given in Suthren 2018, 166-99.

As Colin Burrow has argued elsewhere in this volume, the question of the playwright's engagement with Greek tragedy has much to gain from seeing Shakespeare as a participant in the tradition of the European novella. I hope to have shown that the French *histoire tragique*, with its distinctive generic inflection, its strikingly self-conscious moments of reflection on genre, and its appreciable interaction with the discovery of the Greek tragedians in France, was particularly strongly poised to play an important role in that tangle of influences. This realisation underscores the value of considering Shakespeare's 'sources' in all their multilingual, transcultural, and translational complexity, and adds a "flourish" to the specific question of Shakespeare's engagement with the *Alcestis*. After reading "Timbrée et Fénicie", I argue, it is not just plausible, but probable that Shakespeare would turn to a play by Euripides on the myth of Alcestis, with his thoughts orientated towards how tragedies can "swerve" towards comedy. The "unfinished business" of this combined encounter would be taken up over a decade later.

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[35] Borachio's creation out of an epithet also bears a fascinating relation to the way his own drunken reference within the drama to the "deformed thief . . . fashion" (3.3.121) conjures that "virtual figure" that interests Kerrigan (2018, 32), the thief "Deformed", who "wears a key in his ear and a lock hanging by it" (5.1.298).

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