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Les Muses de la Nouvelle France

Marc Lescarbot

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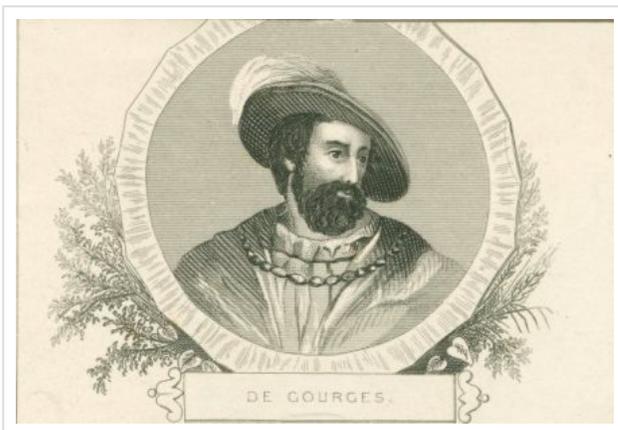
Early Visions of Florida

Poetry • Stories • Chronicles from an American Borderland

Marc Lescarbot, *Les Muses de la Nouvelle France*

*Marc Lescarbot is not a name typically associated with Florida—or with poetry, for that matter. Born in France circa 1570, Lescarbot was raised in a wealthy Catholic family and educated to become a lawyer. Though the law remained his profession for the entirety of his life, he is perhaps better remembered as an author. Among his works are poems such as “Adieux a la France,” translations concerning history and politics, and *Le Théâtre de Neptune*, which is credited as the first European theater piece performed in the Americas.*

*The best known of all Lescarbot’s works is his three-volume *Histoire de la Nouvelle France* (1600), first published in the wake of his journey to Acadia, on what is now the eastern seaboard of Canada. Lescarbot never traveled to Florida during this voyage nor set foot in Brazil. Both regions feature notably within the work, however, as he detailed the efforts of the French nation to maintain a foothold in the western hemisphere. The works below are taken from an appendix to the history.*



The poems concern a part of the French-Spanish conflict that does not feature prominently in Florida’s history. In 1568, roughly three years after the Spanish massacre of the French Huguenots at Fort Caroline, captain Dominique de Gourgues (also spelled Gourgue) led a revenge expedition

against the Spanish who installed themselves at the same fort, renamed San Mateo. Corresponding with the events in Lescarbot's *Histoire*, the key figures within the poems are captain de Gourgues, his lieutenant named Cazenove, and Olotocara, the nephew of a Native American chief named Satouriana. The first poem is dedicated to the memory of captain de Gourgues. No particular name is given in the dedication of the sonnet which follows the Gourgues poem, but the content of the text indicates that Olotocara is the "savage Floridian" whose memory is being lauded.

Lescarbot is one of only a handful of authors known to have written about Dominique de Gourgues and his expedition against the Spanish. In his *Histoire*, Lescarbot mentions that the captain became a national hero in France, following the 1568 revenge attack. But the fame seems to have been short-lived, and little documentation has survived to mention him. According to Lescarbot, as well as Francis Parker (1832-1893) and Charles E. Bennett (1910-2003), the voyage was not sanctioned by the French crown, and was funded independently by the captain and those close to him. This may, in part, explain the lack of documentation. Nevertheless, the story of French success in Florida better fit the patriotic theme of Lescarbot's *Histoire* than did a massacre, and so the narrative of captain Gourgues lives on in verse. In the selection below the French poems are presented, followed by English translations. Spelling and punctuation has been maintained from the 1612 edition of the text, but punctuation has been added.

Translated and Edited by Leah Hart, University of South Florida St. Petersburg

Further Reading

Bennett, Charles E. *Laudonnière & Fort Caroline: History and Documents*. Tuscaloosa: U Alabama P, 2001.

"[Dominique De Gourgue](#)." *The Illustrated Magazine of Art* 4:23 (1854): 291.

Lescarbot, Marc. [The History of New France](#). Vol. 1. Transl. William Lawson. Toronto: Champlain Society, 1907.

_____. [Les Muses de la Nouvelle France](#). Paris: Chez Millot, 1612.

Parkman, Francis. *Pioneers of France in the New World: France and England in North America Part First*. Vol. 1. New York: Little, Brown, 1901.

"ODE EN LA MEMOIRE du captain Gourgues Bourdelois." *L'Histoire de la Nouvelle-France* (1612), 1:19-20.

Gourgues, l'honneur Bourdelois,

Je veux reveiller ta gloire,

Et faire eclater ma voix

Dans le temple de Memoire,
En racontant ta valeur,
Ta conduite et ta prouesse,
Quand, d'un invincible cœur,
Tu mis la main vengeresse
Sur le soldat bazané
Du sang des François avide,
Qui nous avoit butiné
Les beautez de la Floride.
Si-tot que de noz François
Tu entendis la ruine,
Et que le peuple Iberoïis
Occupoit la Caroline,
Tu prins resolution
De venger le grand outrage
Fait à nôtre nation
Par une hespaganole rage.
A tes despens tu mis sus
De bons hommes une bende
Au combat bien resolu,
Puis que c'est toy qui commande.
Tu ne leur dis à l'abord
Le secret de ton affaire,

Comme capitaine accort,
Qui sçais bien ce qu'il faut taire.
Mais quand tu te vis porté
Dessus la terre nouvelle,
Tu leur dis ta volonté
De venger une querelle
Querelle qui les François
Et grans et petits regarde
Et partant qu'à cette fois
Ne faut, d'une ame coüarde,
Reculer quand la saison
De bien faire se presente,
Afin d'avoir la raison
De l'injure violente
Fait aux primers conquesseurs
D'une terre si lointaine
Par des assassinateurs
De race Mahumetaïne.
A cets mots encouragés
Ils se mettent en bataille,
Et vont en ordre rangés
Droit contre cette canaille.
L'un et l'autre petit fort

Ils attaquent de courage,

Et par un puissant effort

Ilz les mettent au pillage.

Mais il n'estoit pas aisé

D'attaquer la Caroline,

Si Gourgues n'eust avisé

Prudemment à sa ruine.

Car l'adversaire estoit fort

D'hommes, d'armes et de place,

Mais nonobstant près du fort

En fin sa troupe s'amasse.

L'Hespagnol estant sorti

Pour lui faire une saillie

Rencontre un mauvais

Qui a sa gent acueillie. Parti

Cazenove donne à dos

Gourgues les rencontre en face,

Qui les font (en peu de mots)

Tous demeurer sur la place

Le reste tout étonné

La Forteresse abandonne,

Mas las! il est mal mené

N'ayant secours de personne.

Car le sauvage irrité

Ne lui fait miséricorde,

Lequel de sa cruauté

Trop fraîchement se recorde.

Mais ceux qui tombent és mains

Des François, on les attelle

Aux arbres les plus hautains

Pour y faire sentinelle.

“ODE IN MEMORY of captain Gourgues of Bordeaux”

Gourgues, gentleman of Bourdelois,

I wish to awaken your glory,

And to shatter my voice

In the temple of Memory,

In recounting your valor,

Your conduct and your prowess,

When, with an invincible heart,

You put a vengeful hand

On the swarthy soldier,

Greedy for blood of the French,

Who spoiled for us

The beauties of Florida.

As soon as you had heard of

Our ruined Frenchmen,
And that the Iberians
Occupied Caroline,
You resolved yourself
to avenge the great outrage
Done our nation
By a rabid Spaniard.
At your own expense, you made
A band of good men,
Thoroughly resolved to fight,
Since it was you who held command.
You didn't tell them at the start
The secret of your plan,
As a good captain
Who knew that he must keep silent.
But when you found yourself here
Upon this new land,
You told them of your desire
To avenge a quarrel.
Quarrel which the French
Both the young and the old saw
And agreed that at this time
They must not, with weak spirit,

Retreat when the season
To do right had presented itself,
In order to understand
the abusive insult
Made upon the first conquerors
Of a land so far
From the assassins
Of the Mahomedan race.
To these encouraging words
They set themselves in battle,
And go in tight order
Right against this scoundrel.
The first and second small fort
They attack courageously,
And through a mighty effort
They pillage them.
But he was not comfortable
To attack Fort Caroline,
If Gourgues hadn't decided
Prudently to its ruin.
As the enemy was strong
In numbers, arms and location,
But despite the nearness of the fort,

In the end, his troupe amassed.

The Spaniard came out

In order to make a sally

To meet a villain

Who greeted his men.

Cazenove^[i] sallied to their back,

Gourgues to meet them in front,

Telling his men (in few words)

All to hold their ground.

The rest were astonished,

The fortress is abandoned,

But alas! They are mangled;

There is no one to help.

For the incensed savage

Shows them no mercy,

As the memory of their

Cruelty was far too fresh.

But those who fell into the hands

Of the French, we hitch them

To the highest trees

To make them sentinel there.

“La mémoire d’un Sauvage Floridien qui se proposoit Mourir pour les François.” *L’histoire de la Nouvelle-France* (1612), 1:20.

Ou truverons-nous un courage

Sembable à cil de ce sauvage,

Qui pour ses amis secourir

Vient lui-meme sa vie offrir,

Laquelle il croit devoir épandre

Pour nôtre querele defendre?

Certainement un homme tel

Droit parmi nous estre immortel.

Et devons louer tout de meme

Le souci qu’il a de sa femme,

Requerant qu’on lui face don

Après son trépas du guerdon

Que meriteroit sa vaillance

Mourant pour l’honneur de la France.

“Memorial of a Savage Floridian who Proposed to Die for the French”

Where can we find a courage

Resembling the lash of the savage,

Who, in order to save his friends,

Came to offer his own life,

Which he thought to spread

In defense of our quarrel?

Most certainly a man so

Right amongst us as to be immortal.

And we should praise just the same

the concern that he held for his wife,

In asking that she be given,

After his death, the reward

Which his valiance would merit

In dying for the honor of France.

[1] Gourgues' lieutenant