

Two French Views of Monstrous Peoples in Sub-Saharan Africa

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Les témoignages anciens et médiévaux de l'Afrique subsaharienne mentionnent un certain nombre de nations qui étaient soit physiquement extrêmement déformées, soit avaient des coutumes bizarres et inhumaines. Pendant la Renaissance, de tels récits avaient encore cours, bien que certains auteurs les aient remis en question et même rejetés. Cet article examine les raisons pour lesquelles les auteurs français André Thevet et François de Belleforest ont nié l'existence de telles nations. Les deux auteurs ont emprunté aux théories traditionnelles concernant ces nations monstrueuses, mais les ont adaptées à leur propre point de vue, illustrant ainsi la flexibilité avec laquelle les auteurs de la Renaissance sélectionnaient et interprétaient les savoirs qui leur étaient antérieurs.

Ethiopia is so hot that it produces and engenders the highly venomous serpents, like basilisks and dragons, from which we get the precious stones called hyacinths. According to Orosius, there are two kinds of Ethiopians, one in Lower Ethiopia, the other in Upper, but in both places their natures and conditions are strange, so terrible that you could hardly believe it.¹

This quotation comes from a very brief geographical work compiled by Jacques Signot and published in Lyon in 1560. The book describes the Old World (there is no mention of America) on the basis of ancient sources and gives a conventional view of Ethiopia as the blisteringly hot home of both monsters and riches. What is new in this passage, however, is the remark that the stories of the monstrous peoples of Ethiopia were difficult to believe.

Who were these strange peoples? Signot gives a few examples, citing Pliny the Elder as his source. He writes of creatures that live in Trogadee, a region of Ethiopia: of Troglodytes, who inhabit caves, eat serpents, and run faster than horses; Garamantes, who live together with their women without marrying them; Blemmyae, who have no heads and whose faces are on their chests; Himantopodes, who have no feet and crawl on the ground; and the Atlas tribe, who do not have names and never dream.² Ancient writers such as Herodotus, Pliny, and Solinus had already written that in the distant reaches of the world there lived several such

nations made up of people who either were outwardly deformed or had odd and inhuman customs. During the Middle Ages, the existence of these monstrous peoples was not questioned, and they appeared in encyclopaedias and on maps. Both their location and their precise descriptions varied greatly from one author to another; but most often they were placed in Africa, India, or near the Caucasus mountains.³ The discrepancies among different writers' accounts were increased by the confusion of Ethiopia with India.⁴

In this paper I will examine the reasons why two French vernacular writers of the sixteenth century, André Thevet and François de Belleforest, denied that there were monstrous peoples in sub-Saharan Africa. Although the existence of these peoples was increasingly put into question during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, they had not yet vanished from the face of the earth.⁵ Many summary descriptions of the world still mentioned them. For example, *The Theatre of the Earth* by John Thorie (b. 1568), published as late as 1599, named several peoples with bodily deformities or strange habits living in Africa and India.⁶ Even though the exploration of the world by Europeans advanced without bringing to light any of these peoples, enough uncharted territory remained to offer them a shelter. In a Spanish dialogue discussing several marvellous stories, which was translated into English at the end of the Elizabethan era, one of the characters says:

I know not what to iudge, because of one side so many grave men, and of such authority that we are bound to beleeeve them, write of these monsters, and of the other side, we see and heare of so few now in the world, and of those we scarcely finde any man that can say he hath seene them him selfe, and yet there was never so great a part of the world discovered as is now, for all the which we see not that there are any of these monsters found either in India maior, conquered by the Portugales, neither in west Indies, marry they say that they are all retired to mountaines, & inaccessible places.⁷

Monstrosity and the African climate

Africa in particular was associated with monstrosity and, as the opening quotation from Signot suggests, the reason for this connection was believed to be the excessively hot climate. According to a theory formulated during the Middle Ages but based on ancient ideas, the prevailing climate of a place could affect the physical appearance, customs, and moral character of its inhabitants. Southern regions, including Africa, were deemed hot and humid, and the people living there small and weak. Most importantly, climate explained the skin colour of black Africans:

the hot sun drew the blood to the surface of their skin and made it appear dark, in severe heat even black. The sun also burnt their hair and made it curly.⁸

Heat was believed to be the indirect cause of the generation of monstrous animals in Africa, as was demonstrated by the well-known saying *semper Africa novi aliquid apportat* (Africa is always producing something new).⁹ George Abbot (1562–1633, later the archbishop of Canterbury) followed the ancient explanation for this proverb: “the countrie being hot and full of wildernesses, which have in them little water, the beasts of all sorts are inforced to meete at those few watring places that be, where oftentimes contrarie kinds have coniunction the one with the other, so that there ariseth newe kindes or species.”¹⁰ Extreme climate could also account more directly for human deformities. According to the French writer Antoine Fumée, humans and other animals could produce deformed offspring if the foetus was corrupted while still in the womb. He mentioned two harmful factors which could cause this effect, hot and cold: “just as a lack of the necessary heat keeps animals from developing fully, so excessive heat easily corrupts and dries up what should develop; this is why these monsters are sought for in the farthest reaches of Scythia and Ethiopia, where the cold restrains and the heat diversifies.” Whole nations of deformed people could then arise from the first individuals affected by these climatic conditions.¹¹

Climate also played a role in the thinking of André Thevet (c.1504–1590, the French royal cosmographer from the 1560s onwards), who first wrote about the people of sub-Saharan Africa in his account of a journey to Brazil entitled *Les Singularités de la France Antarctique* (1557). On the voyage out, the ship had travelled south along the west coast of Africa as far as the equator before crossing the Atlantic, and Thevet wrote about the places they had visited or merely passed by. He retold his own experiences of these regions, supplemented by what he had heard and read, in his *Cosmographie universelle* (1575), and then in his *Histoire de deux voyages faits aux Indes Australes, et Occidentales* (c. 1586), which remained unfinished at his death.¹²

It is clear from these accounts that Thevet believed that climate had an impact on animals and humans. He wrote that elephants, snakes, and turtles grew to be very large in Africa because of the heat and—following the traditional explanation of the popular proverb—that the place brought forth new hybrid animals because different species mated at watering places.¹³ As for human beings, they grew big and tall in cold regions and clever in a warm climate.¹⁴ Thevet wrote that the heat of the sun turned the Ethiopians’ skin black by consuming all the finer substances and leaving only the earthy element which retained the colour of soil, “as we see in ash

and burnt wood.”¹⁵ He also maintained that the diverse climates in Africa caused its inhabitants to have different characters and customs.¹⁶

Despite subscribing to climate theory, Thevet denied that it could explain why monstrous peoples were allegedly born in sub-Saharan Africa. Indeed, he claimed that such people did not exist. His most extensive treatment of this matter is a part of a description of southeast Africa. Long before the actual extent of the continent was known, several legendary places had been located in approximately this area: the fabulous Ethiopia, Prester John’s kingdom, Mountains of the Moon, the source of the Nile, and the Biblical Ophir which supplied gold to King Solomon. Some writers also thought it was the seat of the Earthly Paradise, while for others it was the home of the African monstrous peoples.¹⁷

Thevet states that the people living in southeast Africa are savage and he argues that, due to their strange habits and lack of civility, they have been falsely represented as monsters:

[T]hose who live in this country are closer to beasts and savages than to men, ... their customs and habits being entirely strange and different from ours. I think this is also the reason why those who have written about them have pretended that there were these monsters amid this people ... wanting by this to show their great brutality, stupidity and cruelty, not that these things are thought to be true.¹⁸

He further claims that there is no natural reason which could account for monstrosity in this region, since the heat is not sufficiently severe: “I cannot find any natural reason, not according to the consideration of the sphere, which could make me imagine the cause of those monsters in these lands, seeing that the region there is as temperate as elsewhere in the world and consequently the men are as well-formed as we are.”¹⁹ He adds that the people were, in fact, quite beautiful, although savage.²⁰

Thevet had not visited this region himself, and he does not explain why he thought it was temperate. His use of the phrase “consideration of the sphere” suggests, however, that he had reached this conclusion following the ancient theory of climatic zones, which maintained that the Earth was divided horizontally into five parts. The first and fifth of these zones—around both poles—were very cold, the middle one around the equator was torrid, and the second and the fourth were temperate, as well as the only habitable zones for normal human beings.²¹ Since a large part of southern Africa fell within the fourth zone, it had to be temperate and its inhabitants similarly formed as the Europeans living in the other temperate zone. Thevet’s adherence to this theory can also be seen in his statement that the inhabitants of the Cape of Good Hope could not be black and go about naked because of its location far from the equator and because the fact that the promontory “points

straight toward the Antarctic pole” meant that it had to be a cold place: “all sensible people can judge if these places are temperate, and if naked people could endure such extreme cold any more than the inhabitants of Norway.”²²

The natural limits of human monstrosity

A different answer to the question posed by monstrous peoples was offered by the prolific author and translator François de Belleforest (1530–1583).²³ He initially addressed this issue in his translation of the popular work *Omnium gentium mores, leges et ritus* (first published in 1520) by the German author Johann Boemus (fl. 1500), to which he added several notes, both in the margins and in the text, correcting and updating the original. When Boemus mentioned monstrous peoples in Africa or India, Belleforest remarked tersely “these are the old delusions of people who had not yet penetrated this far,” and “all this is nonsense dreamt up by Pliny and his imitator Solinus.”²⁴ This translation was published in 1570, and in the same year Gentian Hervet’s French version of St Augustine’s *City of God* came out, with marginal notes by Belleforest. Augustine had discussed the question of whether the alleged monstrous peoples were unrelated to humans or, instead, descended from either Adam or Noah. Hesitant to resolve the matter for good, he offered a famously ambivalent conclusion which left much room for interpretation: “either the written accounts which we have of some of these races are completely worthless; or, if such creatures exist, they are not men; or, if they are men, they are descended from Adam.”²⁵ Belleforest, however, thought he knew what Augustine’s true opinion was and added a marginal note stating “St Augustine does not believe the historians concerning these monsters.”²⁶

Five years later, Belleforest returned to the topic, discussing it more broadly in his translation of the influential *Cosmographiae universalis libri VI* (first published in German in 1544) by the German cosmographer and Hebrew scholar Sebastian Münster (1489–1552). This time Belleforest’s additions were substantial; in the volume dealing with Asia, Africa, and America, he drew on numerous ancient and modern works. Since he had not himself travelled, his opinions were based on an assessment of the written sources available to him rather than on his own experiences.

Throughout this work, Belleforest denies the existence of monstrous peoples. Despite the fact that he often followed ancient writers, he stated flatly that they had been wrong in claiming that such people lived in Africa and India. Although himself an armchair traveller, he argued that only those who had experience were able to speak reliably about these matters; and, since modern explorers had seen

more of Africa than the ancients and had visited the places where the monsters were supposed to live, they could make fun of the old stories told about them.²⁷

Belleforest makes an interesting distinction between the monstrous peoples who had uncivilized habits and those who were physically deformed. He believed that the inhabitants of sub-Saharan Africa had strange and savage customs. He noted, for example, that they did not wear clothes, that some were promiscuous, while others killed the older members of their tribe if they became ill, and that several had bizarre diets.²⁸ Those inhabiting the Cape of Good Hope were brutal and ignorant people living without law, eating raw meat, and communicating by whistling and sign language.²⁹ On the other hand, although he held that animals there could undergo great changes in their physical appearance—after all “Africa is always producing something monstrous and new”—he was adamant that such changes did not occur in humans: “the same natural reasons do not allow me to believe that this happens in men and serves as a rule, like a characteristic of a nation.”³⁰ He returned to this point several times, rejecting the possibility of whole nations of deformed people in Africa because the human figure was the same everywhere: “I omit the foolish stories of those who have invented men of a shape other than that which nature has given in common to the whole human race ... for I cannot acknowledge impossibilities in nature.”³¹ He also denied that there were monstrous peoples in India and criticized those who had written about them “as if it were permitted to make nature different in the East as regards human beings, who are everywhere always made up in the same way.”³² Like many of his contemporaries, Belleforest believed that nature operated according to rules and could not simply produce any fanciful creature.³³

Belleforest could accept savagery and strange customs among the Africans because this was not a matter of physical form. The explanation he suggested for these behavioural traits did, nonetheless, draw on an idea that had previously been used to account for the monstrous peoples of Africa: the story of Noah’s son Ham. There was no fixed understanding of how the world had been divided among Noah’s three sons after the flood, but some accounts placed Ham in Africa.³⁴ According to the Genesis, after Ham witnessed his father’s nakedness, Noah had cursed Canaan, Ham’s son, and so the entire population of Africa could be seen to have sprung from a cursed family. Moreover, during the Middle Ages Ham had been confused with Cain, who had been cursed by God for killing his brother Abel. Although Cain’s descendants died in the flood, some of the details which came to be associated with him—including his physical deformity as a result of the curse—were transferred onto Ham, who therefore became an ideal forefather for the monstrous peoples.³⁵

Belleforest did not subscribe to this particular belief, but he did think that Ham's story could help to explain some of the realities of Africa: "this country having been the portion and heritage of Noah's son Ham, it seems that it also suffered from his curse, as much for its sterility in many places as for the colour and the fierce and wild habits of its people."³⁶

A brief examination of Thevet and Belleforest's opinions on giants and pygmies will reveal more clearly what kind of divergence from the human physical norm they considered impossible. Giants were not counted among the monstrous peoples, but in the sixteenth century it was widely believed that a number of them lived in Patagonia. Both authors thought that giants existed: Thevet, because the bones of huge men had been found and were displayed as curiosities; Belleforest, because statues representing giants as well as bodily remains of uncommonly big men had been found in South America, and because the people living next to the river Plate were reported to be extraordinarily tall.³⁷ Pygmies, however, were sometimes placed among the monstrous peoples, but Thevet and Belleforest did not agree on them. In his first published work *Cosmographie de Levant*, Thevet argued for their existence, but reversed his opinion later on and rejected them as another fable invented by the ancients.³⁸

Belleforest, on the other hand, did believe in the pygmies. He wrote that he had ridiculed the ancient tales of these diminutive people waging war against cranes in the North, on account of the evidence that northern men were usually tall, and these birds were not so violent as to attack humans. He had changed his mind, however, after reading in a treatise on the peoples of northern Europe by the Swedish historian and archbishop Olaus Magnus (1490–1558) that, according to trustworthy sources, pygmies did indeed live in Greenland and fight with cranes.³⁹ To Belleforest, the existence of pygmies was a sign of the power of God, who "shows his greatness and miracles where he pleases."⁴⁰ In other words, this supernatural intervention into the ordinary workings of nature accounted for the abnormal appearance of this nation. In principle, this explanation could also be applied to any of the monstrous peoples of Africa or India; but Belleforest does not do this. It seems that he felt he could ignore what the ancients had written about those areas they had not visited. When, however, it came to a man from the North talking about his own region, or modern travellers discussing places they had seen for themselves, he was prepared to give them his trust.

It is clear from these examples that both Belleforest and Thevet believed that the bodily shape of human beings had to be uniform across all nations, but that it could vary in size. Even though Thevet found the stories of pygmies and their

warfare with cranes too fanciful to believe, he still held that some very small men really existed in the world.⁴¹ Belleforest could permit these exceptions because he did not consider the large or small size of a person to be a serious departure from the human physical norm. As we shall see shortly, he also admitted that deformed individuals could be born in Europe and elsewhere, but these were single cases and, moreover, “monsters happen by accident.”⁴²

Individual vs. collective monstrosity

Deformed human beings such as conjoined twins belonged to the separate category of individual monsters. Unlike monstrous peoples, they occurred in Europe, and so several people could confirm their existence from personal experience. They were sometimes interpreted as prodigies or portents sent by God to warn of an imminent misfortune like a war or an epidemic; and during the sixteenth century they were the subject of a large number of medical and religious writings.⁴³ Despite these differences, several authors perceived a connection between deformed individuals and the collective monstrosity represented by the strange nations of inner Africa. St Augustine, for one, mentioned the possibility that since individual monsters were born among different nations, monstrous peoples could exist among the whole human race.⁴⁴

While both Thevet and Belleforest denied the possibility of entire nations of monstrous people, they shared the view of other sixteenth-century writers that deformed individuals could be born anywhere in the world. Belleforest rejected the stories of a nation of hairy men as “wholly fanciful, or if they ever existed, it is just like some monsters we see born over here from time to time.”⁴⁵ Thevet wrote that the flat land near the Cape of Good Hope was sparsely populated because it was very savage, “indeed monstrous, not that the people are as deformed as several writers have claimed.” He hastened to add, however, that he did not want to deny that individual monsters—“approved by philosophers, confirmed by experience”—were sometimes born, but rather to refute the far-fetched tales of monstrous nations.⁴⁶

It is interesting to note that both these authors gave an account of the relationship between individual and collective monstrosity that was the opposite of St Augustine’s opinion: although some monsters are born all over the world, it does not follow that monstrous peoples exist among the human race. Africa must have seemed like a very distant place to most Frenchmen, yet by bringing the question closer to home, Belleforest could make this point very clearly: “Although there are monstrous births [*engeances*], they by no means extend in such a way that a whole

country has nothing but hideously shaped people. If a child is born either covered with hair or deformed or with a head like that of a calf, as in recent times has been seen in Paris, does it mean that all the rest of the inhabitants of that region have the same appearance?"⁴⁷ Thevet used a similar argument, but he strengthened it with a real example known personally to him. He mentioned a man living in France, "one of my good friends and a neighbour," whose face and parts of his hands were covered with hair, adding that "it would certainly be a very foolish thing to think that this man was from some country of savages where they are hairy like this."⁴⁸

Furthermore, medical explanations could be found for the birth of individual monsters. Thevet wrote that a child with hair growing all over its body was "an accident of nature," but not a cause for wonder: "these things are not so remarkable, seeing that doctors and philosophers can give reasons for them."⁴⁹ Elsewhere he specified that such an accident could be produced by "some monstrous excess occurring in the damaged generative material."⁵⁰ In other words, he accepted that an individual monster could be caused by the corruption of the unborn offspring—the same explanation that Fumée regarded as the starting point for whole nations of monstrous people.

Thevet and Belleforest were not the only sixteenth-century authors to reject the existence of the African monstrous peoples. Although headless, one-eyed, or dog-headed men and others like them were still mentioned by some travellers and in many compendia of information about the world, they were considered fables by an increasing number of writers.⁵¹ As new information about the distant regions where these peoples had traditionally been located became available in Europe, it was inevitable that belief in their existence waned. This view was not particularly risky because it did not contradict the Bible, which did not mention any of these peoples. Moreover, it cannot have been problematic to disagree with ancient authorities about Africa in the second half of the sixteenth century, since the Europeans' exploration of the continent had already overturned many old beliefs about it: there was no uninhabitable torrid zone, the Indian Ocean was not enclosed by landmasses, Ethiopia was not bursting with riches. Furthermore, since Thevet and Belleforest both re-used some old theories associated with the monstrous peoples but moulded them to fit their own opinions, it is clear that they did not consider previous knowledge to be a monolithic entity, but thought that it was possible to reject certain elements of it and still make use of what was left.

Given that the moderns had had more firsthand experience of Africa than the ancients, writers like Belleforest could easily reject the old tales of whole nations of deformed men on the basis of recent knowledge from the personal observations

of travellers. This is not surprising because firsthand observations were considered more and more important in obtaining reliable knowledge at that time. The examples discussed here have revealed, however, that other factors besides the experience of modern travellers played a major role in these considerations: Belleforest's conviction that monstrosity happened only accidentally led him to insist on the regularity of nature and also to reject the story of Ham's progeny as a justification for physical deformities; for Thevet, by contrast, the precise climatic conditions of Africa played a decisive role in determining his standpoint.

Jean Céard has shown that both Thevet and Belleforest believed that nature's variety was essentially positive, so it did not produce by design such horrible creatures as the monstrous peoples. They believed that nature was not frivolous: it was ordered and made only accidental errors.⁵² It seems, however, that nature acted according to rules only in the creation of human beings, for these two writers granted it more freedom in the design of animals, which they believed always to be appearing in new and monstrous shapes in Africa. This fact, and their conviction that physical deformities in humans were accidental, suggest that they considered the human form sacrosanct.

Notes

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1. Jacques Signot, *La Division du monde, contenant la declaration des provinces & regions d'Asie, Europe, & Affrique* (Lyon: Benoist Rigaud, 1560), p. 59: "[Ethiopie] est si chaude, qu'elle produit & engendre les tresvenimeux serpens, comme basilicques, & dragons, desquels on tire pierres precieuses, nommees Iacintes. Selon qu'escriit Orose, ils sont deux manieres d'Ethiopiens, les uns en Ethiopie la basse, les autres en la haute, mais en quelque partie qu'ils soyent, ils sont de diverses natures, & conditions, si terribles, qu'à grande peine le pourroit on croire." (I have modernized the punctuation in all quotations, expanded abbreviations, and changed the letters v and u to comply with modern spelling. Unless otherwise stated, translations are mine.) Paulus Orosius mentions two kinds of Ethiopians—the "Aethiopum gentes" and "Gangines Aethiopes"—in his *Adversus paganos historiarum*, I.2.92–93. Several ancient authors already divided Ethiopia into two distinct regions; see Malvern Van Wyk Smith, "'Waters Flowing from Darkness': The Two Ethiopias in the Early European Image of Africa," *Theoria* 68 (1986), pp. 67–77.
2. Signot, *La Division du monde*, pp. 59–60. These and other tribes feature in Pliny's list of the peoples living in the interior of Africa; see his *Natural History*, V.8. Numa Broc

- has dismissed Signot as a careless compiler; see his *La Géographie de la Renaissance (1420–1620)* (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale, 1980), p. 71.
3. The origin and survival of the monstrous peoples of India have been charted by Rudolf Wittkower in his landmark article, “Marvels of the East: A Study in the History of Monsters,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 5 (1942), pp. 159–97. John Block Friedman has studied medieval views of the monstrous peoples in his *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought* (1981; Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2000). The monstrous peoples of Africa are discussed in Francesc Relaño, *The Shaping of Africa: Cosmographic Discourse and Cartographic Science in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), pp. 28–41.
 4. See Wittkower, p. 161, n. 4; Relaño, pp. 53–54.
 5. See Friedman, *The Monstrous Races*, pp. 197–98; Jean Céard, *La Nature et les prodiges: l’insolite au XVI^e siècle, en France* (Geneva: Droz, 1977), pp. 275–78, 280.
 6. John Thorie, *The Theatre of the Earth: Containing Very Short and Compendious Descriptions of All Countries, Gathered out of the Cheefest Cosmographers, Both Ancient and Moderne, and Disposed in Alphabetical Order* (London: Adam Islip, 1599), sigs E3r, G1r, M1r, T1v, T3r-v, Z4r, Bb4v.
 7. Antonio de Torquemada, *The Spanish Mandevile of Miracles or the Garden of Curious Flowers*, [trans. Lewes Lewkenor?] (London: I[ames] R[oberts], 1600), fol. 11r. The relocation of monstrous peoples is discussed in John Block Friedman, “Monsters at the Earth’s Imagined Corners: Wonders and Discovery in the Late Middle Ages,” in *Monsters, Marvels and Miracles: Imaginary Journeys and Landscapes in the Middle Ages*, ed. Leif Søndergaard and Rasmus Thorning Hansen (Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2005), pp. 41–64, here pp. 58–60.
 8. See Friedman, *The Monstrous Races*, pp. 37–38, 50–55; Suzanne Conklin Akbari, “The Diversity of Mankind in *The Book of John Mandeville*,” in *Eastward Bound: Travel and Travellers, 1050–1550*, ed. Rosamund Allen (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2004), pp. 156–76, here pp. 158–59; Marian J. Tooley, “Bodin and the Mediaeval Theory of Climate,” *Speculum* 28 (1953), pp. 64–83, here p. 73; Relaño, pp. 31–32, 35.
 9. The phrase varied slightly from one author to another. The wording here is from Erasmus’s *Adages* (III.vii.10).
 10. George Abbot, *A Brieve Description of the Whole Worlde* (London: T. Iudson, 1599), sigs C8v–D1r. The saying and its explanation can be found in Pliny, *Natural History*, VIII.17. It appears already in Aristotle’s *De generatione animalium* (746b7) and *Historia animalium* (606b20), both of which refer to Libya and not Africa.
 11. Antoine Fumée, *Les Histoires* (Paris: Nicolas Chesneau, 1574), p. 92: “ainsi que la faute de la chaleur requise fait que les animaux ne viennent en leur perfection, aussi la grande chaleur corrompt aysément & desseche ce qui devoit avoir quelque progrez; pource [sic] aux extremitez de la Scythie & de l’Ethiopie on cherche ces monstres, où le froid retient, & le chaud diversifie.” See also p. 91, where he develops this idea con-

- cerning pygmies. Fumée's views on the monstrous peoples are discussed in Céard, pp. 288–91.
12. For a good account of Thevet's life and career, see Frank Lestringant, *André Thevet: cosmographe des derniers Valois* (Geneva: Droz, 1991).
 13. André Thevet, *Le Brésil d'André Thevet: les singularités de la France antarctique, autrement nommée Amérique & de plusieurs terres & îles découvertes de notre temps*, ed. Frank Lestringant (Paris: Chandeigne, 1997), p. 50; idem, *Cosmographie universelle*, 2 vols in 3 (continuous foliation) (Paris: G. Chaudière, 1575), vol. 1, fols 78r, 94v; idem, *Histoire de deux voyages par luy faits aux Indes Australes, et Occidentales*, ed. Jean-Claude Laborie and Frank Lestringant (Geneva: Droz, 2006), p. 98. Thevet explains the profusion of large serpents in Africa by noting that the sloping and mountainous country has many good nesting places for them; see his *Cosmographie universelle*, vol. 1, fol. 94v.
 14. Thevet, *Cosmographie universelle*, vol. 2.11, fol. 905v.
 15. Thevet, *Singularités*, p. 88: "les éléments plus subtils consumés ne reste que la partie terrestre retenant couleur et consistance de terre, comme nous voyons la cendre et bois brûlé." Thevet changed his mind later and argued that black skin colour was hereditary and not dependent on a hot climate; see his *Histoire de deux voyages*, pp. 110–111.
 16. Thevet, *Histoire de deux voyages*, p. 98.
 17. For the legends associated with southeast Africa, see Van Wyk Smith, pp. 70, 74; W. G. L. Randles, *L'Image du Sud-est Africain dans la littérature européenne au XVI^e siècle* (Lisbon: Centro de Estudos Históricos Ultramarinos, 1959), pp. 26–28, 47–48, 165–67; Relaño, pp. 33, 54, 197–99.
 18. Thevet, *Cosmographie universelle*, vol. 1, fol. 94v: "Ceux qui habitent ce país tiennent plus de la beste & sauvagine, que de l'homme ... estans leurs mœurs & façons de faire toutes diverses & estranges des nostres. C'est aussi l'occasion, comme i'estime, qui a meu ceux qui en ont escrit, de feindre que parmi ce peuple y avoit de ces monstres ... voulans par cela, dy-ie, monstrier leur grande brutalité, bestise & cruauté, sans que pour cela on estime ces choses estre veritables." Thevet also suggested that someone might have mistaken the large apes of southern Africa for human beings and then spread stories of men covered with hair; see his *Cosmographie universelle*, vol. 1, fol. 94r.
 19. Thevet, *Cosmographie universelle*, vol. 1, fol. 94v: "ne trouve ie raison naturelle quelconque, ny selon la consideration de la sphere, qui me peust faire penser la cause de ces monstres en ces país, veu que la region y est autant temperee qu'en autre part du monde, & par consequent les hommes aussi bien formez que nous sommes."
 20. Thevet, *Cosmographie universelle*, vol. 1, fol. 95v.
 21. See Conklin Akbari, pp. 158–59; Friedman, *The Monstrous Races*, pp. 39, 51–53; idem, "Monsters at the Earth's Imagined Corners," p. 44. Thevet did not, however, believe that some zones were uninhabitable, and he remarked several times that modern

- knowledge had proven the ancients wrong on this point; see, e.g., his *Singularités*, pp. 96–99.
22. Thevet, *Cosmographie universelle*, vol. 1, fol. 93v: “attendu les froidures continuelles qui sont en ces endroits, & que la pointe & contour de ce promontoire, qui vise droit au pole Antarctique, est sur les deux cens septante & trois degrez nulle minute de longitude, & vingt trois degrez trente minutes de latitude... Faisant iuges tous bons esprits, si ces lieux sont temperez, & si les hommes nuds pourroient endurer telle extreme froidure, non plus que le peuple de Norvege.”
 23. For an overview of Belleforest’s varied career, see Michel Simonin, *Vivre de sa plume au xvi^e siècle, ou la carrière de François de Belleforest* (Geneva: Droz, 1992). Belleforest worked for some time as Thevet’s scribe and ghost writer; but their relationship deteriorated into a feud fought openly in their published texts, Belleforest claiming the authorship of some of Thevet’s works and Thevet chiding him for writing about the world without having travelled. For the details of this quarrel, see Lestringant, pp. 167–68, 180–81, 189–222; Simonin, pp. 89–91, 180–86, 218–19.
 24. François de Belleforest and Johann Boemus, *L’Histoire universelle du monde* (Paris: G. Mallot, 1570), fols 4v: “ce sont les songes de iadis de ceux qui encor n’avoient penetré si avant;” 51r: “tout cecy sont des resveries de Pline et de son singe Solin.” See also Belleforest’s comments on fols 18r and 50v.
 25. Saint Augustine, *The City of God*, xvi.8. The quotation comes from *The City of God against the Pagans*, ed. and trans. R. W. Dyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 710. Augustine’s views on monstrous humans are discussed in Céard, pp. 26–29.
 26. Saint Augustine, *De la Cité de Dieu: illustrée des commentaires de Jean Louys Vives ... enrichy de plusieurs annotations & observations en marge, servans à la conference & intelligence des histoires anciennes & modernes, par Francois de Belleforest*, trans. Gentian Hervet (Paris: Nicolas Chesneau, 1570), sig. HH3r: “S. Augustin ne croit pas les historiens sur ces monstres.” Belleforest’s note has been mentioned by Céard in his *La Nature et les prodiges*, p. 281.
 27. François de Belleforest and Sebastian Münster, *La Cosmographie universelle de tout le monde*, 2 vols in 3 (1.1 and 1.11 continuous pagination) (Paris: Michel Sonnius, 1575), vol. 2, cols 1793–94.
 28. Belleforest, *L’Histoire universelle*, fols 14r, 15v, 26v–27r; Belleforest, *Cosmographie universelle*, vol. 2, col. 1793.
 29. Belleforest, *Cosmographie universelle*, vol. 2, col. 1940.
 30. Belleforest, *Cosmographie universelle*, vol. 2, col. 1793: “Je confesse qu’entre les bestes en Afrique ... il peut bien advenir qu’on voye de grandes alterations de figures en icelles, & que pour cet esgard, le proverbe a eu vigeur, que l’Afrique porte tousiours quelque cas de monstrueux, & nouveau; mais que cela aye lieu és hommes, & serve de generalité, comme d’un propre en quelques nations, les mesmes raisons de la nature me defendent de le croire.”

31. Belleforest, *Cosmographie universelle*, vol. 2, col. 1793: "ie laisse a part les folles narrations de ceux qui nous ont faint des hommes d'autre effigie que celle que la nature a donnee commune a tout le genre humain ... car ie ne peux recevoir les impossibilitez en la nature."
32. Belleforest, *Cosmographie universelle*, vol. 2, col. 1587: "comme s'il estoit loisible de faire la nature diverse en Orient, en ce qui est de l'homme, lequel quelque part que soit, est tousiours basty soubz une composition pareille."
33. At that time nature's actions were increasingly seen to be bound by rules and to display a certain order; see Céard, pp. 287–88, 300; Peter Dear, "The Church and the New Philosophy," in *Science, Culture and Popular Belief in Renaissance Europe*, ed. Stephen Pumfrey, Paolo L. Rossi and Maurice Slawinski (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1991), pp. 119–39, here p. 123.
34. The identification of Noah's sons as the forefathers of the peoples of different geographical regions is examined in Benjamin Braude, "The Sons of Noah and the Construction of Ethnic and Geographical Identities in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 54 (1997), pp. 103–42.
35. For Ham and Cain as the ancestors of the monstrous peoples, see Relañó, pp. 34–35; Friedman, *The Monstrous Races*, pp. 94–102. Noah curses Ham's son Canaan in Genesis 9:24–27, and Cain's curse is mentioned in Genesis 4:10–15.
36. Belleforest, *Cosmographie universelle*, vol. 2, col. 1794: "ce pays ayant esté la portion & heritage de Cham [*sic*] fils de Noé, il semble aussi qu'elle ayt participé en la malediction d'iceluy, tant pour la sterilité en plusieurs endroits, que pour la couleur, & les moeurs fiers, & farouches des hommes."
37. See André Thevet, *Le Grand Insulaire, et pilotage d'André Thevet Angoumoisain, Cosmographe du Roy, dans lequel sont contenus plusieurs plants d'isles habitées, et deshahitées, et description d'icelles*, in Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France MS fr. 15452–3, 2 vols, c. 1586, vol. 1, fol. 269r; Belleforest, *L'Histoire universelle*, fols 307v–308r. The long and curious history of the South American giants has been traced by Jacqueline Duvernay-Bolens in her *Les Géants patagons: voyage aux origines de l'homme* (Paris: Editions Michalon, 1995).
38. The reasons why Thevet thought that there was a nation of pygmies living in India can be found in his *Cosmographie de Levant* [1556], ed. Frank Lestringant (Geneva: Droz, 1985), pp. 148–51. His later rejection of them appeared in his *Cosmographie universelle*, vol. 1, fol. 442r.
39. Belleforest, *Cosmographie universelle*, vol. 1.11, cols 1719–20. Whereas Belleforest dismissed ancient tales and trusted a modern report, Olaus Magnus wrote that, although he had heard about the pygmies of Greenland from authoritative sources, he would not have believed the story if Pliny had not also mentioned similar things; see his *Description of the Northern Peoples*, ed. Peter Foote, trans. Peter Fisher and Humphrey Higgins, 3 vols (London: Hakluyt Society, 1996–1998), vol. 1, pp. 105–06.

40. Belleforest, *Cosmographie universelle*, vol. 1.11, col. 1719: "Dieu monstre sa grandeur, & miracles, où il luy plaist." Interestingly, the English writer Thomas Blundeville (c.1522-c.1606), who agreed with Belleforest in thinking that "all men be of one selfe qualitie and shape of body," denied the existence of pygmies as well as of the other monstrous peoples; see his *A Plaine and Full Description of Petrus Plancius his Universall Map*, in his *M. Blundeville his Exercises Containing Sixe Treatises* (London: Iohn Windet, 1594), fols. 245r-278v, here fol. 262r-v.
41. Thevet argues that there are small men in the world but not pygmies in his *Cosmographie universelle*, vol. 1, fol. 129v.
42. Belleforest, *Cosmographie universelle*, vol. 2, col. 1793, marginal note: "monstres sont par accident."
43. The most wide-ranging study of the sixteenth-century literature on monstrous individuals is Céard's *La Nature et les prodiges*. Another interesting account with emphasis on the religious and social aspects of these phenomena can be found in Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150-1750* (New York: Zone Books, 1998), ch. 5.
44. St Augustine, *The City of God*, xvi.8. See also Céard, p. 43; Wittkower, p. 187.
45. Belleforest, *Cosmographie universelle*, vol. 2, col. 1588: "lesquels ie dis du tout fabuleux, ou s'il en fut iamais, c'est tout ainsi que par deça nous voyons naistre rarement quelques monstres."
46. Thevet, *Singularités*, p. 108: "il est fort brutal et barbare, voire monstrueux; non que les hommes soient si difformes que plusieurs ont écrit... Je ne veux du tout nier les monstres qui se font outre le dessein de nature, approuvés par les philosophes, confirmés par expérience, mais bien impugner choses qui en sont si éloignées et en outre alléguées de même."
47. Belleforest, *Cosmographie universelle*, vol. 2, col. 1793: "bien qu'il y ait des engeances monstrueuses, si est-ce qu'elles ne s'estendent point de telle sorte qu'on voye tout un pays ne porter d'autres hommes que ayans figures si hideuses. Car est-ce a dire que si on voit naistre un enfant, ou velu, ou deffiguré, ou ayant la teste faite comme celle d'un veau, ainsi que ces anneés on a veu a Paris, qu'il s'ensuive que tout le reste des habitans de celle region porte une mesme, & pareille forme?"
48. Thevet, *Cosmographie universelle*, vol. 1, fol. 129v: "lon ait veu en France un homme, l'un de mes bons amis & voisin, ainsi velu par le visage, & quelque peu sur les mains... Ce seroit veritablement une grande folie, de penser que cest homme fust de quelque país de Sauvages, où ils sont ainsi veluz."
49. Thevet, *Singularités*, p. 133: "un enfant sorte ainsi velu du ventre de la mère ... cela est un accident de nature... Ce ne sont choses si admirables, considéré que les médecins et philosophes en peuvent donner la raison."
50. Thevet, *Cosmographie universelle*, vol. 1, fol. 94r: "quelque superfluité monstrueuse advenue en la matiere corrompue de la generation." On fol. 129v he writes that the cause can be either an excess or a deficiency of this material. For this Aristotelian idea, see Friedman, *The Monstrous Races*, pp. 114-15. Another French vernacular au-

thor, the royal surgeon Ambroise Paré (1510–1590), mentioned similar reasons for deformed births, including the deficiency and excess of semen, the smallness of the womb and hereditary diseases; see his *Des Monstres et prodiges*, ed. Jean Céard (Geneva: Droz, 1971).

51. A few examples of other sixteenth-century writers who shared this view are mentioned in Relaño, pp. 39–40.
52. See Céard, pp. 279–88.