

“The Art of Telling the Truth: Women’s Travel Writing in 17th-century France”
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It can be said that both women writers and women travelers gained prominence in seventeenth-century France. Just as aristocratic literary women came to enjoy a certain status as recognized authors and authorities in genres such as the novel, the novella, epistolary fiction and non-fiction, and memoirs, so journeying women became more visible protagonists in writings by women. In Madame de Villedieu’s *Mémoires de la vie de Henriette-Sylvie de Molière* (*Memoir of the life of Henriette-Sylvie de Molière*, 1671-4), for instance, the main character is an adventurous gun-toting, cross-dressing woman moving rapidly from one adventure to the next and one place to the next. Villedieu herself traveled internationally, and her *Recueil de quelques lettres ou relations galantes* (1669) (*Collection of galant letters or reports*) include descriptions of Dutch and Flemish towns. The unauthorized autobiography of Cardinal Mazarin’s niece, runaway wife Marie de Mancini (*Mémoires*, 1676), as well as Mancini’s own version of her European roamings, *La Vérité dans son jour, ou les véritables memoires de M. Mancini, Connétable Colonne* (*The truth come to light, or the true memoirs of M Mancini, wife of Constable Colonna*, 1677), riveted the public.¹ In her dramatic memoirs, political activist Madame de la Guette recounts among other things her travels to Flanders

¹ For an introduction to publications related to Marie Mancini, see Chapter 4 on the memoirs of Hortense and Marie Mancini in Elizabeth Goldsmith, *Publishing Women’s Life Stories in France, 1647-1720*. Burlington: Ashgate, 2001, and the chapter on Marie Mancini in Patricia Francis Cholokian, *Women and the Politics of Self-representation in Seventeenth-Century France*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2000.

(*Mémoires de Mme de la Guette*, 1681). These are just some examples of popular works, many by women, which center around female protagonists on the road. Whether fleeing scandal, on official business, or exercising their spatial mobility, these fictional and non-fictional female characters, narrators, and writers became a more visible and notable part of French seventeenth-century literary culture. For women, access to different geographical spaces went hand in hand with increased access to the space of the page.

In this widening arena of traveling women narrators and writers, Marie-Catherine Le Jumel de Barneville's *Relation du Voyage d'Espagne* (*An Account of Travels to Spain*, 1691) stands out as the first explicitly titled *relation de voyage* to be published by a French woman.² While a first-person narrative recounting a woman's travel abroad was not all that new, a woman-authored text aligning itself with a male-dominated tradition of travel writing certainly was. A prolific and successful writer who held her own literary *salon* in Paris and was a member of the Paduan *Accademia de Ricovrati*, d'Aulnoy (1651-1705) published several historical novels, collections of short stories, and *mémoires*, a good portion of which went through multiple editions and translations within her lifetime.³ The *Travels*, which recounts in fifteen lengthy letters a trip to Spain from February 1679 to September 1680, proved another editorial triumph for d'Aulnoy, with

² Some of d'Aulnoy's works, including this one, were published anonymously, as was typical for woman writers of the time. Such designations as Madame de X**** in the title page made explicit the sex of the author. Joan DeJean writes: "Very few works published in the seventeenth century without an author's name were anonymous in the period's sense of the term; various people's letters prove that author's identities were widely known, at least within the relatively small circle of well-connected and generally well-born Parisian intellectuals who then formed the essence of the public for literary works." Joan DeJean, *Tender Geographies: Women and the Origin of the Novel in France*. New York: Columbia UP, 1991, p. 98.

³ D'Aulnoy's works include *Mémoires de la Cour d'Espagne* (1690), *Histoires de Jean de Bourbon, Prince de Carency* (1691), *Nouvelles Espagnolles* (1692), *Nouvelles ou Mémoires historiques* (1693), *Mémoires de la Cour d'Angleterre* (1694), *Contes des Fees* (1693-7), *Contes nouveaux* (1698), *Contes nouveaux ou les Fées à la mode* (1698), *Histoire d'Hypolite* (1708).

nine editions before the end of Louis XIV's reign (1715) and translations into English, German, Spanish, and Dutch.⁴

The *Travels to Spain* reflect general trends in European travel culture, in which the increasing popularity of travel and travel writing went hand in hand with a new emphasis on the entertainment value of travel accounts. As Justin Stagl duly notes in his *History of Curiosity 1550-1800*, Renaissance methods of travel were losing their relevance during the seventeenth century: "Th[e] mode of experiencing and describing the world [according to the *ars apodemica*] reached its limits when all 'noteworthy' things were more or less known."⁵ When most of the basic facts concerning European topography, urban settings, and customs became common knowledge, travel writers put increasingly more emphasis on the *delectare* than on the *prodesse* of the Horatian axiom. Jean-Pierre Schaub writes that in seventeenth-century French travel accounts to Spain, "tout l'art du voyageur consiste à surprendre avec des matériaux déjà inventés. Puisque l'Espagne fascine, les auteurs ne sont pas avares en traits d'esprit et anecdotes pittoresques." (*All the art of the traveler consists of surprising with material that has already been invented. Since Spain is fascinating, the authors are anything but miserly with their witty remarks and picturesque anecdotes*).⁶ The seventeenth century marks a

⁴ This includes 13 editions in English by 1740. D'Aulnoy's references to the *Travels* in prefaces to other works, as well as comments by contemporaries suggest that the *Travels* was among her most popular works. For example, in some of the works in which her full name appears, she is also identified on the title page as the author of the memoirs and account of travels to Spain ("l'auteur du Voyage et Mémoires d'Espagne).

⁵ Justin Stagl, *A History of Curiosity: The Theory of Travel 1550-1800*. Chur, Switzerland: Harwood Academic Publications, 1995. p.82.

⁶ Jean-Frédéric Schaub, *La France Espagnole: Les racines hispaniques de l'absolutisme français*. Paris: Seuil, 2003) p. 188. All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated. Schaub also notes: "Le récit de voyage a une fonction sociale claire: il permet de briller dans les salons." (*The travel account has a clear social function: it allows one to shine in the salons.*) p. 175.

pivotal moment in European travel writing because narrators begin to more explicitly acknowledge the narrative or fictional qualities of their narrative enterprise *in the text*, allowing new spaces in their accounts to consider the art of travel writing itself.

Still, as Schaub notes, d'Aulnoy's account distinguishes itself from the body of seventeenth-century French texts on Spain: "Il s'agit du plus célèbre récit, avant celui de Théophile Gautier...le livre de la comtesse n'a jamais cessé d'être tenu pour l'un des plus complets, des plus riches et des plus vivants récits de pérégrination française en Espagne." (187). (*It is the most famous account before that of Théophile Gautier. The countess's book has never ceased to be considered one of the most complete, richest, and most vivid accounts of French travel to Spain.*)

How is it that d'Aulnoy's text has been so readily and enthusiastically consumed—to refer to the title of this conference—in her age and beyond? Perhaps the novelty of a woman-authored *récit de voyage* played a part in appealing to the public. D'Aulnoy's possible motives for travel, in addition to her fame as a literary woman, may also have attracted readers: in 1669, d'Aulnoy and her mother were accused of framing d'Aulnoy's husband, François de la Mothe, for a crime of *lese-majesté*. By the time the affair had blown over, two of de la Mothe's alleged accomplices had been executed, d'Aulnoy and her husband were estranged, and d'Aulnoy's mother, considered the primary culprit, had escaped to Spain. D'Aulnoy may have opted for international travel to avoid French society circles following the incident. Although d'Aulnoy never

mentions the reason for undertaking her trip or relates personal matters in the *Travels*, as we will discuss below, her association with scandal was well known.⁷

Certainly d'Aulnoy's choice of country to visit mirrored the tastes of a seventeenth-century French public. Spain was an irresistible topic in French courtly culture as a country associated with exoticism, dramatic tales of love, and the fascinating aura of an empire in decline. D'Aulnoy's *Mémoires de la Cour d'Espagne* (*Memoirs of the Court of Spain*) published a year prior to the *Relation*, had been very well received.⁸ The significant number of published travels to Spain reflect the French fascination with the Spanish monarchy and customs, for example François Bertaut's *Le Journal d'un voyage en Espagne* (*Journal of a trip to Spain*, Paris, 1664), Antoine de Brunel and François van Aarsen's *Voyage d'Espagne* (*Travels to Spain*, Cologne, 1666), Balthasar de Monconys' *Journal des voyages de M. de Monconys* (*Journal of Monconys' travels*, Lyon, 1665-6), and Louis Coulon's *Le Fidèle Conducteur pour le voyage en Espagne* (*The faithful guide for travel to Spain*, Troyes, 1654).

⁷ Because of the lack of historical documentation of d'Aulnoy's travels, and because d'Aulnoy borrows extensively from other sources in her account, there has been ongoing debate over whether d'Aulnoy did actually travel to Spain and elsewhere. See for example René Godenne's preface to d'Aulnoy's *Histoire d'Hypolite, Comte de Douglas*, Geneva: Slatkine reprints, 1979 and, more recently, the introduction to Madame D'Aulnoy's fairy tales, *Contes*, Vol. I, ed. Philippe Hourcade. Paris: Société des textes français modernes, 1997. Although modern critics have uncovered d'Aulnoy's use of sources such as the *Gazette* and the letters of French ambassadors to Spain—ie. the kind of second or third-hand information considered less reliable because not directly investigated by the eye-witness and first-hand chronicler--there is little evidence that her contemporary audience realized this or questioned the "truth value" of her account. As late as 1760, for instance, Italian literary critic and travel writer Giuseppe Baretti, in the portion dedicated to Spain of his *Journey from London to Genoa* (1663), uses d'Aulnoy's text as a principal source of information.

⁸ See R. Foulché-Delbosc's introduction to his edition of the *Relation*, pp.17-18. (Paris: Klincksieck, 1926). His is the most recent edition. D'Aulnoy's *Mémoires de la Cour d'Espagne* centers on the figure of the Queen of Spain, Marie-Louis d'Orléans, who is portrayed as the sensitive and ill-suited consort of the weak Charles II. Spanish literary culture was also obviously of great interest as a sources for writers from Corneille to Molière.

Still, although the European travel writing climate might have been ripe for a text such as d'Aulnoy's, it alone cannot account for the success of the *Travels*. D'Aulnoy's producing such a compelling and unique text stems from, I argue, her appropriation of, and incorporation into travel writing, of the concept of *vraisemblance* (verisimilitude or plausibility), a notion at the heart of literary debates of the time. By introducing a term associated with fiction into the historically grounded genre of travel writing focused on transmitting factual "truths", d'Aulnoy explicitly establishes that telling the truth is, indeed, an art. I also submit, as I will discuss in the second part of the paper, that d'Aulnoy's flexibility and innovation in introducing recognizably literary elements to historical writing is made possible by the literary authority available to women writers in seventeenth-century French culture. Her deployment of literary aspects such as *vraisemblance* is part of a strategy for establishing her credibility and reliability as a female traveler, eye-witness, and conveyor of "the truth" of the experience of travel. As such, the *Travels* functions as a locus for investigating travel writing as a genre, but also in a broader sense for problematizing the perceived distinctions between historiographical and fictional writing. D'Aulnoy uses the more marginal genre of travel writing to conceptualize a new model for representing real events, and openly embraces the "fictional apparatus"—to use Hayden White's term—of what is any narrative discourse.⁹

D'Aulnoy's brief preface marks a key moment in setting up her textual strategies for travel writing. As Adrien Pasquali writes on the autobiographical elements of early

⁹ I refer in particular to White's *Tropics of discourse*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1978.

modern travel writing, the travel writer's authoritative persona as eyewitness and chronicler is typically constituted in a preface or dedication:

le récit de voyage se doit de déterminer une posture discursive, doublement rhétorique dans la mesure où elle s'élabore par convergence des éléments liés à l'énonciation...et de ceux liés à la construction d'un objet de discours. Jusqu'à la fin du XVIIe siècle, cette nécessité était présentée, discutée de façon privilégiée et selon des stratégies [sic] diverses, dans l'appareil paratextuel (avertissement, introduction, préface, etc.).¹⁰

(The travel account must establish a discursive stance that is doubly rhetorical in that it is played out in the convergence of elements linked to enunciation...and to those elements linked to the construction of an object of discourse. Until the end of the seventeenth-century, this requirement was presented, discussed in an overt way and in accordance with various strategies in the paratextual material [introductions, prefaces, etc.])

As part of the creation of a “discursive stance”, the introductory material usually includes motives for travel and a justification of a particular itinerary.¹¹ Yet d'Aulnoy's account offers no explanation as to why she travels to Spain during the harsh winter months—hardly the preferred season of tourists then as now--or why she is traveling alone.¹² The omission may have been made for practical reasons since, as mentioned above, d'Aulnoy's trip to the court of Spain was most likely a timely flight from scandal. Whatever the historical reason, the absence of an explanation within the discursive mode of travel writing is striking: a rare woman traveler-narrator makes no attempt to justify her departure or her destination.

¹⁰ Adrien Pasquali, “Récit de voyage et autobiographie.” *Annali d'Italianistics* (14) 1996: 82.

¹¹ As travel writers more consciously and deliberately depart from the *ars apodemica* and venture into more “literary” or “fictional” domains, they tend to use prefaces and introductions to explain and justify their choices. Of course this general posturing is not limited to travel literature. In general, the more “novel” or bold or outside perceived norms a text is, the more self-consciously explicated its *raison d'être*.

¹² Most women who traveled internationally were accompanying or accompanied by a male relative.

Instead, in her preface to the reader, d'Aulnoy portrays herself primarily as a literary woman and turns to the support of a community of readers and to her travels as a textual project, essentially providing her own manifesto of the art of travel writing:

“Bien qu’il ne suffise pas d’écrire des choses vrayes, mais qu’il faille encore qu’elles soient vrayes-semblables pour les faire croire, et que cette raison m’ait donné quelque envie d’ôter de ma Relation les Histoires qui y sont, j’en ay été empêchée par des personnes d’une Naissance et d’un Esprit si distingué, Qu’il me semble qu’en suivant leurs lumieres je ne peux manquer. Je ne doute point qu’il n’y en ait d’autres, qui ne m’accusent d’avoir mis icy des Hyperboles, comme l’on a voulu le persuader à l’égard des Memoires de la Cour d’Espagne, mais celles qui assûrent avec le plus de vehemence que l’Ouvrage n’est pas juste, pourroient être convaincuës par leurs propres Lettres d’avoir mandé à la Cour la plûpart des choses que j’ay recueillies...Je n’ay écrit que ce que j’ay vû, ou ce que j’ay appris par des personnes d’une probité incontestable...Je me contente d’assûrer que ce qui est dans mes Memoires et ce que l’on trouvera dans cette Relation, est tres-exact et tres-conforme à la verité.”¹³ (p.154-155).

Although it is not only sufficient to write of true things, but it is also necessary that they be plausible [vraisemblable] for them to be believed, and that this reason gave me some notion to remove from my account the stories that are in it, I was prevented from doing so by persons of such distinguished birth and mind, that it seemed to me that I could not err in following their light. I do not doubt at all that there are others who will accuse me of putting hyperboles here, as some tried to establish regarding the Memoirs of the Spanish Court, but those persons who assure with the most vehemence that the work is not accurate could be convinced by their own letters sent to the court of the most part of the information I have gathered. I have written only that which I saw, or which I learned from persons of unquestionable probity. I am content with assuring that what is in my Memoirs and what one will find in this Account, is very exact and most conforming to the truth.

Most striking and unusual in this preface is d'Aulnoy's immediate reference, perhaps for the first time in a travel account, to *vraisemblance* (versimilitude or plausibility). Although she eventually inserts typical claims of providing true and accurate information to her public, her primary focus is her public's *perception* of the text's credibility. *Vraisemblance* was a buzzword in seventeenth-century literary debates and, following Classical notions of mimesis, referred to the appropriateness or

¹³ Quotes of the *Relation* and page number references are taken from the Foulché-Delbosc edition.

expectations regarding various elements—action, style, register, and so forth--of specific literary genres. Bernard de Bovier, Sieur de Fontenelle, a contemporary of Madame d’Aulnoy, thus describes the difference between the truth and the verisimilous in his

Reflections on poetics:

Le vrai et le vraisemblable sont assez différents. Le vrai est tout ce qui est; le vraisemblable est ce que nous jugeons qui peut être, et nous n’en jugeons que par certaines idées qui résultent de nos expériences ordinaires. Ainsi le vrai a infiniment plus d’étendue que le vraisemblable, puisque le vraisemblable n’es t qu’un portion du vrai, conforme à la plupart de nos expériences. Le vrai n’a pas besoin de preuves, il suffit qu’il soit et qu’il se montre. Le vraisemblable en a besoin; il faut pour être reçu qu’il se rapporte à nos idées communes.¹⁴

(Truth and verisimilitude are quite different. The truth is all that is, the verisimilous is all that we judge could be, and we judge it only through certain concepts that grow out of our ordinary experiences. Thus the truth has infinitely more breadth than the plausible, since what is plausible is but one portion of the truth, conforming to most of our experiences. Truth has no need for proof, it’s enough that it be and that it show itself. Plausibility need proof. In order to be accepted, it relates to our common concepts.)

This necessary “conformity to experience”, that is to the judgment and the tastes of a community of readers in a specific historical and cultural context, was an essential element of discussion about narrative, but about fictional, not historiographical narrative.¹⁵ The truth according to Fontenelle and others, stood independently of proof

¹⁴ *Oeuvres*, Amsterdam, 1764, p.111. This passage is quoted in the probing analysis of verisimilitude in seventeenth-century France in Jean-Pierre Dens, *L’honnête homme et la critique du gout. Esthétique et société au xviiè siècle*. Lexington, Kentucky: French Forum publishers, 1981. p.121.

¹⁵ As Gérard Genette writes in his fundamental essay on *vraisemblance*, the concept has everything to do with matching the perceived aesthetic and moral expectations of the audience: “Le récit vraisemblable est donc un récit dont les actions répondent...à un corps de maximes reçues comme vraies par le public auquel il s’adresse...Les conventions de genre fonctionnent comme un système de forces et de contraintes naturelles, auxquelles le récit obéit comme sans les percevoir, et *a fortiori* sans les nommer.” (The plausible narrative is thus a narrative whose actions respond to a body of maxims perceived as true by the public to which the narrative is addressed. The conventions of genre function as a system of natural forces and constraints to which the narrative adheres as if not perceiving them, and *a fortiori* without naming them.) *Figures II*. (Paris: Seuil, 1969). 76. Genette’s considerations of the notion of *vraisemblance*—which he defines as pointing to the arbitrariness of narrative (*récit*)--focuses on two seventeenth-century fictional

or presentation. This dichotomy reflects the Aristotelian tendency to associate truth and reality with history and plausibility with poetry/fiction. As Roland Barthes points out,

Dès l'Antiquité, le "reel" était du côté de l'Histoire; mais c'était pour mieux s'opposer au vraisemblable, c'est-à-dire à l'ordre même du récit (de l'imitation ou "poésie"). Toute la culture classique a vécu pendant des siècles sur l'idée que le réel ne pouvait en rien contaminer la vraisemblable; d'abord parce que le vraisemblable est entièrement assujéti à l'opinion (du public).¹⁶

Since Antiquity, the "real" was on the side of History, but it was in order to better oppose itself to verisimilitude, that is to say the very order of discourse (of imitation or "poetry"). All of classical culture lived for centuries with the idea that the real could in no way contaminate the verisimilous, first because the verisimilous...is completely subject to public opinion.

In her preface d'Aulnoy first highlights verisimilitude, not the real or the truth, in a genre usually associated with historiographical writing.¹⁷ In the rhetorical construction of her persona and her "discursive stance", she admits to almost having excluded certain parts of the text *not* because their veracity could not be determined or because they might have less functional value, but because those parts would not be *perceived* as being true.¹⁸ Of course her statement serves to draw attention to the marvelous and therefore irresistibly

episodes which were hotly debated: Madame de Clèves revelation to her husband of her love for another man in Madame de Lafayette's novel *La Princesse de Clèves* (1678), and Chimène's willingness to marry her father's murderer in Corneille's tragicomedy *Le Cid* (1637). Such debates occurred against the backdrop of the general *querelle des anciens et modernes*, in which questions of adherence to classical prescriptions, genre, style, appropriateness, were intensely discussed. For a detailed and erudite overview of the querelle, see Marc Fumaroli's essay, "Les abeilles et les araignées" in *La Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*. Ed. Anne-Marie Lecoq. (Paris: Gallimard, 2001) 7-218.

¹⁶ Roland Barthes, "L'effet de réel." In *Littérature et réalité*. Paris: Seuil, 1982. p. 89.

¹⁷ Interestingly, d'Aulnoy does not mention *vraisemblance* in the prefaces to her other works. In her *Nouvelles ou memoires historiques* (1693), she adopts a much more typical attitude when she implies, in the preface to the reader, that attention to style can do a disservice to the "truth" of history: "Je n'ay pas eu besoin de consulter mon coeur pour raconter les choses à l'avantage de la Nation Française, car je n'ay qu'à les rapporter fidellemeent, sans emprunter aucun secours de l'éloquence, qui souvent à force d'embellir la narration, fait douter de la vérité." (*I had no need to consult my heart to tell things to the advantage of the French Nation, because I had only to report faithfully, without using the help of eloquence, which often, by embellishing the narrative, sheds doubt on the truth.*)

¹⁸Foulché-Delbosc, does not seem to have understood d'Aulnoy's lesson: he expunges in his 1926 edition four of several Spanish stories in d'Aulnoy text, dismissing them as untruthful tales and therefore unfit for a travel narrative. See Foulché-Delbosc, p. 81.

entertaining aspects of her travels that did make it in her narrative. However, d'Aulnoy makes the striking implication that truth value is subordinate to plausibility in non-fiction.¹⁹ Rejecting Fontenelle's neat categories of truth and verisimilitude, d'Aulnoy implies that even truth—that of her travels, of the information she has gathered—depends on the public's believing it to be true. As she writes, the naked truth is not enough (“Bien qu'il ne suffise pas d'écrire des choses vrayes...”). With d'Aulnoy's preface, manipulating narrative in anticipation of public opinion and responding to parameters of appropriateness come to the fore in a genre predominantly built upon the importance of transmitting facts, that is to say of elements that are traditionally considered immune to change by forces outside of the contexts in which they exist or occur. The representation of “real” experience in a proper, agreed-upon-to-be believable format takes precedence over the inherent truth of facts or events. Anything subject to textual representation can be manipulated, and indeed, must be, to create the effect of the real (Barthes' “effet de réel”) and truth. D'Aulnoy implies that the *vraisemblable* should be an acknowledged part of historical discourse, because historical discourse is subject to the same narrative manipulations as fictional discourse.²⁰ Telling the truth, in other words narrating the experience of travel, is an art form like any other.

What does it mean to adhere to notions of verisimilitude in travel writing? A principal point of travel narrative is to represent that which is foreign, unusual,

¹⁹ This is of course part of pan-European debate in the early modern period, but d'Aulnoy is perhaps among the first to make it such an integral part of a travel account.

²⁰ Discussions about historians' lack of objectivity abound at the time, and sometimes can be found in travel accounts, such as in Pierre Michel's *Relation d'un voyage en Angleterre* (Cologne, 1666), in which he makes the points that historians pick and choose which facts to relate and how to relate them, creating a necessarily biased view of history (see pp. 168-171). The novelty in d'Aulnoy's account is her overt use of literary terminology to speak about a narrative form considered historiographical.

marvelous, and generally outside of “nos idées communes”, to refer to Fontenelle. How, then, can discourse both satisfy the anticipations and aesthetic criteria of the public while at the same time introducing behaviors, events, and information that are (expected to be) removed from the public’s experience?

Schaub’s formulation of travel texts offering the “surprise of the already known” is helpful: “Le plaisir tient ici de la découverte du déjà-vu...Leur lecture fonctionne simultanément comme une surprise et des retrouvailles.” (*The pleasure here consists of rediscovering the already seen. The reading [of these texts] functions simultaneously as a surprise and as a rediscovery*)(Schaub, 188). Many elements of the text serve as a sort of believability trigger. The very title of the work, *Relation du voyage d’Espagne*, implies that the work will adhere to certain conventions of travel accounts, and d’Aulnoy delivers. The *Relation du Voyage d’Espagne* is structured in the typical epistolary form of much travel writing of the time. Especially in the first seven letters, which focus on the journey from Bayonne to Madrid, the *Relation* fulfills the basic expectations associated with early modern travel writing: it provides information about dates and distances traveled, references to the difficulties and perils of travel, practicalities regarding food and lodging (including prices), describes landscapes and urban architecture, gives detailed considerations of customs and social mores, and offers ample reflections on the temperament and personality of the Spanish. The narrator gives topographical names, details about getting proper transportation, and describes monuments, language and dress. She complains about hotel service, cuisine, getting swindled by innkeepers, and slow mail delivery. Perhaps evoking the “storm at sea” *topos* of many travel and more particularly navigational accounts, d’Aulnoy, adapting to travel by land, recalls almost

perishing in a flash flood on her way south from France. She also includes lists of the income of members of the Spanish court, their offices and titles of nobility, and lists of Spanish land holdings in the Americas. D'Aulnoy-narrator covers all the categories that her readers would expect to find, and the plausibility of her narrative is constructed in part by incorporating typical elements of travel accounts.

The *Travels* also gains in plausibility through the inclusion of aspects, many of them “exotic”, considered quintessentially Spanish. D'Aulnoy collects information on the Inquisition, *autos da fe*, the concept of pure blood, and dueling. She gives a vivid description of a dramatic *corrida*, concluding: “Je suis surprise que dans un Royaume où les Rois portent le nom de Catholiques, l'on souffre un divertissement si barbare.” (*I am surprised that in a kingdom where kings call themselves catholic, such a barbaric divertissement is tolerated.*) (406).²¹ The woman traveler marvels at the slaves and beloved dwarves at the Spanish court, expresses shock at the social limitations of Spanish noblewomen, and relays numerous stories and comments on legendary Spanish jealousy. She writes to her female correspondent of the consequences of jealous love: “Si je voulois vous dire tous les événements tragiques je j'apprens chaque jour, vous conviendriez que ce país-ci est le theatre des plus terrible scenes du monde.” (*If I told you of all the tragic events I learn of each day, you would agree that this country is the stage for the most horrifying scenes in the world.*) (446). In many cases, these considerations of Spanish culture are plausible because they fulfill the French readers' expectations of marvelous, unusual, and sometimes violent events and customs with which they associate Spain. The more shocking, in some cases, the more appropriate and verisimilous.

²¹ Page numbers of the *Travels* refer to the 1926 edition of the text.

While the *Travels* gains in plausibility by including elements associated with travel writing and with travel accounts on Spain, it is hardly a typical text. Taken as a whole, the account, conveyed in a nuanced, probing, and at times ironic prose, introduces aspects far removed from the historiographically-oriented prescriptions of the early travel writing. D'Aulnoy's attention to the inner workings of courtly life include detailed portraits of members of the court, especially women, fashion, entertainment, courtly behavior and ritual, relationships, and scandals, do not reflect the tradition of the *ars apodemica*. In addition to revealing the inherent novelties of a travel account centered on a female author, character, and narrator, the text often diverges from the Herodotean privileging of *visa* (things seen) over *audita* (things heard) and from the fact-focused *récits de voyage* in general. D'Aulnoy mixes fiction with the factual imperative of travel narrative, borrowing unselfconsciously from what would have been immediately recognized in her time as conventions of the historical novel or the short story (*histoire*). First, the text is replete with dramatic fictional love tales and anecdotes told by members of the Spanish nobility or recounted by the narrator. Also, along more "fictional" lines, and most notably and unexpectedly for a travel account, d'Aulnoy devotes considerable textual space to conversation, using direct discourse and therefore according a first-person voice to her Spanish interlocutors. Much of the information about Spanish customs—along with local folklore and colorful stories—can be gleaned through conversation with the Spanish natives whom the protagonist encounters. ²²

²² Another fictional device identified by Foulché-Delbosc is the inclusion of fictional characters in the *Relation*.

This novelty and “literariness”, I would argue, are *also* part of d’Aulnoy’s attention to *vraisemblance*. While the plausibility of her text depends in part on its having the expected attributes of a travel text, d’Aulnoy’s credibility as a *female* narrator of the experience of travel depends on her conforming to notions of the “appropriate” French woman writer.²³ D’Aulnoy positions herself on two planes of authority: on the one hand, she is assuming the authority of the traveler and producer of truthful travel accounts, a male model of authority. On the other hand, she presents herself as a woman of letters invested with the authority of women who write in certain forms approved of and even considered superior in women, such as epistolary writing, memoirs, and historical novels. In short, d’Aulnoy manages to work it both ways.

D’Aulnoy’s looking to women-authored texts for a non-fiction genre so heavily invested in notions of authorial reliability and credibility—concepts that were not then necessarily associated with women’s literary production, whether historically oriented or not—reflects that cultural climate at the court of Louis XIV (1661-1715) which has been characterized as “the Empire of Women.”²⁴ The key role played by women as a recognized group in the field of letters in seventeenth-century France has been amply documented. As Joan DeJean notes, one “can speak of a veritable tradition of French women’s writing as early as the 1660’s”, a unique phenomenon in European literary history. Various historical and cultural developments are traditionally associated with the new status of authority and authorship occupied by women as a group: the participation

²³ A crucial term related to *vraisemblance* in literary debates about gender and genre is *bienséance*, or *propriety*. See DeJean, chapter 5, pp. 159-199 for a discussion of these terms as related to women’s writing.

²⁴ I take Fumaroli’s expression from his chapter “L’empire des femmes, ou l’esprit de joie” in *La diplomatie de l’esprit de Montaigne à La Fontaine* (Paris: Gallimard, 1998). The expression appears in Sophie Gay’s *Salons célèbres*. Dumont, 1837. See DeJean’s *Tender Geographies*, p. 195.

of women--often characterized as the New Amazons or “femmes fortes”--in the civil unrest of the Fronde, the increasing literary influence of women’s salons (among the most famous Madame de Rambouillet’s *chambre bleue*, Madame de Scudéry’s *samedis*, Saturday meetings), the creation of a prototype for a new woman of letters, the *précieuse*, an intellectually incomparable (*non pareille*) woman who excelled at conversation and linguistic-literary expression.²⁵

Women writers had also become a dominant force in certain kinds of historical writing. Faith Beasley has argued that it was precisely the epistemological crisis in history and debate over historiographical genre in seventeenth-century France that allowed women writers to redefine historical narrative. Her work on women-authored *mémoires* has meaningful resonances in the more marginal area of travel literature. According to Beasley, Louis XIV’s appropriation of and strict definition of historical writing to construct his image as an all-powerful monarch eventually led to a challenging of history as panegyric and myth building. Among the various terms of debate at the time emerged a distinction that eventually played out along gender lines: the male-oriented *Histoire*, or *histoire générale*, the official narration of historical events, and *histoire particulière*, or a less politically focused and more personalized historical narrative with more prominent female figures and more of which were written by

²⁵ DeJean notes how the absolute monarchy is not necessarily incompatible with the growing impact of women’s writing: ‘I would suggest the following justification the simultaneous rise of Louis XIV’s absolutism and the female tradition: the official policy of assimilation then being put into place denied women writers the possibility of complacency about their own difference and inspired in them an unparalleled awareness of (the exclusion of) otherness’. (12) Certainly the policy of control through assimilation meant that women writers had easier access to the “privileges” necessary for publishing their works.

²⁵ She also describes actual portraits (paintings) from various collections, and d’Aulnoy recounts her own painting and working on “un petit ouvrage”.

women.²⁶ Such redefinition entails the inclusion of women as historical players and varying perspectives of the notion of historiography: “During the “crisis of history”, many of the female authors of memoirs put forth their narratives as serious and necessary contributions to the general knowledge of the past and as alternatives to general history” (Beasley, 39). D’Aulnoy “borrows” from this alternate concept of history by constructing a more openly subjective narrative which nonetheless, like most travel literature, is presented as truthful and primarily informative in nature and is grounded in actual events and situations. The *Relation du Voyage d’Espagne* remains very much about writing history, but in the sense of inscribing one individual’s recollection (in this case that of a rare woman traveler) into a larger historical context.²⁷

²⁶ Faith Beasley, *Revising Memory: Women’s Fiction and Memoirs in Seventeenth-Century France*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990. As Beasley points out, Louis XIV’s appointment of poets Boileau and Racine as royal historiographers helped further muddy the waters in defining historiography. Marc Fumaroli, who mentions mainly women authors when discussing the more personalized memoirs of the later seventeenth-century, sees much of historical writing under Louis XIV as related to a cultural project of creating the heroes of the “*epos du royaume*”, the French kingdom: “Qu’il s’agisse d’*arcana* ignorés ou incompris du vulgaire...c’est partout la même désinvolture vis-à-vis du conformisme scolaire ou académique, la même certitude de faire avec franchise l’inventaire de la vérité. A cette liste de “genres marginaux”, il faut adjoindre les récits de voyageurs, conquérants, marchands, missionnaires, qui élargissent la conscience géographique. Tous ces genres fondent une pédagogie pour élite moderne de héros de l’esprit et de l’action, apte à maîtriser un monde nouveau où l’ancien royaume de France doit prendre sa place. Le genre des Mémoires a sa place marquée dans cet éveil d’une élite à la conscience historique de sa responsabilité vis-à-vis du passé du royaume et de son avenir.” (*La diplomatie de l’esprit*, 238-9). (*Whether or not it is about arcana that is ignored or not understood by the public, one finds everywhere the same distance from scholarly or academic conformity, the same certainty about sincerely assessing the truth. To this list of “marginal genres” [which includes memoirs, letters, studies, essays] should be added the accounts of travelers, conquerors, merchants, and missionaries, which broaden geographical awareness. All these genres create a pedagogy for a modern elite regarding the hero and the spirit of action, able to master the new world where the ancient kingdom of France must take its place. The genre of memoirs has its marked place in the awakening of an elite with a historical awareness of its responsibility vis-à-vis the past and future of its kingdom.*) Fumaroli’s reading, which does not take gender into account, but does help shed light on d’Aulnoy’s attitude and construction of self as a (superior) French woman at the Spanish court. Her persona is perhaps just as much about being French as it is about being a woman.

²⁷ I disagree with Melvin Palmer who, while he does the service of elucidating the uselessness of criticizing d’Aulnoy for her lack of rigor as a historian, claims that she: “was not trying to write history” but was “simply struggling, along with other writers of the time, in the direction of what was to become the memoir and epistolary novel. If she attempted to pass off her fictions and her borrowings as facts from her own experience, she did so because the age demanded verisimilitude, because there were no rules

Given the context of the “empire of women”, one reason for d’Aulnoy’s eschewing any rhetoric to justify her “discursive stance” as a female narrator and protagonist of her *Relation*—a conspicuous absence discussed earlier—is because she doesn’t need to. Just as her unapologetic use of devices usually associated with fiction indicates, she has already been “authorized”.²⁸ This “pre-authorization” comes not simply from her own success as a woman of letters, but from the firmly grounded culture of women’s writing in seventeenth-century France. In order to construct herself as a believable eyewitness and chronicler, d’Aulnoy turns to the most powerful markers of authority she has available as a woman traveler and writer. She establishes her credibility by associating herself with the qualities of a superior (French) woman of letters, such as intelligence, sharpness, and linguistic ability. She constructs her persona as one with *esprit* (or wit), and with a knack for conversation. As an explorer of narrative and genre, she incorporates dialogue and portraits into the narrative, elements found in much women’s writing, and blends categories of *histoire particulière* with *histoire générale*.

For example, she makes excellent use of the *esprit* or wit expected of the *précieuses*, in particular when commenting on the status of women at the court of Spain and on male-female relations. Upon noticing that women spend much of their days

governing the writing of prose fiction, and because prose fiction itself was in low repute, not being one of the respected classical genres as history was.” (Melvin D. Palmer, “Madame d’Aulnoy’s Pseudo-autobiographical works on Spain” *Romanische Forschungen* 83 (1971): 229.

Beasley insists on the historical nature of the *mémoires*: “Modern appellations such as autobiography and self-portrait tend to deny historical affiliation to these works, refusing to view a personalized account of events as a different type of historical writing.” (41)

²⁸ It is interesting to note how differently the English translation presents d’Aulnoy’s work: *The Ingenious and Diverting Letters of the Lady --- Travels into Spain. Describing the Devotions, Nunneries, Humours, Customs, Laws, Militia, Trade, Diet, and Recreations of that People. Intermixt with Great Variety of Modern Advnetures, and Surprising Accidents: being the Truest and Best Remarks Extant on that Court and Country* (1692). The translation has various dedications and letters that bolster the authority of the author as a “proper” woman and emphasize the usefulness of the text.

indoors looking out onto the street through the small openings in the shutters, she observes for instance: "Je trouve que cette Ville-ci a l'air d'une grande cage où l'on engraisse des poulets" (527). (*I fancy this city to look like a great coop in which they feed poultry.*" 363.).²⁹ Or, when commenting on how men frantically pursue their mistresses on the rare occasions they leave their palaces, she quips: "Il y a du plaisir à voir comme ils se crottent, car les rues sont horribles; mais aussi le plus crotté est le plus galant." (564) (*It is really good sport to see how these poor lovers dirty themselves, for the streets are horrid nasty; but then, the more dirty, the more gallant.*³⁰) These and other comments peppered throughout the account function as consistent reminders of the sharp and sometimes amused critical outlook of the narrating female voice.

D'Aulnoy also incorporates elements--such as the portrait and direct discourse--that are more explicitly associated with an established culture of women's writing. Joan DeJean, who argues that women writers were at the heart of the rise of the modern novel, notes for instance how the vastly popular *Madame de Scudéry* modifies the heroic novel popular in her time by introducing the portrait and the conversation, "intended to produce a radical disruption of the narrative flow" (82) and consequently focusing on the interiority of each character.³⁰ These two devices are integral parts of d'Aulnoy's text, which includes literary portraits of members of the Spanish elite throughout the work [such as Don Juan and Doña Eleonora de Toledo].³¹ She uses conversation to bolster her image as a discerning and skeptical French woman [and author of travel literature] by

²⁹ This English translation of d'Aulnoy's text in this quote and those following, as well as page numbers, come from the 1926 London, Routledge edition of the original 1692 English translation.

³⁰ "In particular, the vogue of literary portraits and the lengthy debates or conversations influenced all types of literature, whether historical or fictional" (Beasley, 48).

³¹ She also describes actual portraits (paintings) from various collections, and even mentions that she herself is working on a small painting, "un petit ouvrage".

putting compliments to her in the mouths of others, such as after witnessing a superstitious ritual at the ruins of a castle near Toledo:

“Je n’ai jamais esté en aucun endroit, dis-je en riant, où l’on fasse plus de cas des contes fabuleux qu’en Espagne. Dites plutôt, reprit-il [accompagnier Dom Fernand], qu’il n’y a jamais eu de Dame moins crédule que vous.” (508)

“I never was in any place”, said I, smiling, “where they relied so much on fabulous tales as they do in Spain.” “Say rather,” replied he, “that there never was any woman so incredulous as you, and in telling you this story I did not think I should alter your judgment.” (348)³²

D’Aulnoy-narrator-character also shows her refined use of “l’art de la conversation” --both speaking and writing conversation--,for example when she cajoles her one of her escorts Don Frederic into describing the Spanish:

Lorsque vous serez à Madrid, ajouta-t-il, vous apprendrez, Madame, plusieurs particularités qui sans doute se seront passées depuis que j’en suis party et qui satisferont peut-être plus votre curiosité que ce que je vous ay dit.

Je vous suis très obligée, repliquay-je, de votre complaisance, mais faites-moy la grace encore de me dire quel est le véritable caractère des Espagnols. Vous le connoissez, et je suis persuadée que rien n’est échappé à vos lumières; comme vous m’en parlerez sans passion et sans intérêt, je pourray m’en tenir à ce que vous m’en direz.. Pour quoy croyez-vous, Madame, reprit-il en souïrant, que je vous en parle plus sincerement qu’un autre? Il y a des raisons qui me pourroient rendre suspect; il sont mes Maîtres, je devrois le ménager...Quoy qu’il en soit, dis-je en l’interrompant, je vous prie de m’apprendre ce que vous en sçavez.

Les Espagnols, dit-il, ont toujours passé pour être fiers et glorieux. Cette gloire est mêlée de gravité, et il la poussent si loing, qu’on peut l’appeler un Orgueil outré...Il sont prudens, jaloux sans mesure, des-intéressés, peu oeconomés, cachez, supersitieux, fort Catholiques, du moins en apparence. Il font bien des Vers et sans peine. (204)

“When you come to Madrid,” added he, “you will hear, Madam, several particulars which have, without doubt happened since I was there, and which will perhaps more satisfy your curiosity than what I have related to you.”

“I am very much obliged to you,” answered I, “for your civilities, but do me the favour to oblige me further in giving me the true character of the Spaniards. You know them, and I am persuaded nothing has escaped your enquiries. You speaking to me without passion and interest, I may reckon myself sure of what you tell me.”

³² This of course could be read as an indirect reference to her own work as a weaver of fabulous Spanish and fairy tales.

“Why believe me, Madam,” replied he smiling, “that I shall speak to you more sincerely than another? There are reasons which may render me suspect. They are my master; I must manage them...” “However it be,” said I, interrupting him, “pray tell me what you know of them.” “The Spaniards,” said he, “have always passed for fierce and [vain] glorious. This [vain]glory is mixed with gravity; and they carry it so far that one may call it an extravagant pride. They are brave without being rash; yet they were accused of not being daring enough...they are prudent, jealous without measure, disinterested, bad economists, close, superstitious, great catholics, at least in appearance. They are good poets, and write verses with great facility.” (65-6)

Verbal exchanges such as these serve to set up d’Aulnoy as the protagonist of her tale: curious and able to use language to access undeniably accurate “insider’s” information. It also suggests that a fictional mimetic device such as dialogue does not necessarily take away from the “effect of the real” or plausibility of the event and consequently the perceived accuracy of the information.

D’Aulnoy also weaves together personal experience and official political events (*histoire particulière*, associated more with women’s writing and *histoire générale*, associated more with men’s writing) to demonstrate her status as a French woman of letters (and therefore as narrator of a travel text).³³ For instance, on the occasion of an official celebration at the court of the 1678 peace of Nijmegen between France and Spain, a ceremony from which women are excluded, the Constable promises to let d’Aulnoy and three other foreign women peek in from an adjoining room. While waiting in a *cabinet* for the beginning of the ceremony, d’Aulnoy takes to reading:

Nous demeurâmes quelque temps dans un fort beau cabinet rempli de Livres Espagnols bien reliés et très-divertissans. J’y trouvai entr’autres l’histoire de Dom Quichot, ce fameux chevalier de la manche, dans laquelle la naïveté et la finesse des expressions, la force des proverbes et ce que les Espagnols appellent *el pico*, c’est-à-dire la pointe et la délicatesse de la Langue, paroissent tout autrement que les traductions que nous en

³³ D’Aulnoy consistently assesses her Spanish counterparts’ ability to make conversation and show *esprit*. She notes that Spanish women rarely read or write (343).

voyons en nostre Langue. Je prenois tant de plaisir à le lire, que je ne pensois presque plus à voir la ceremonie. (523)

We tarried for some time in a very fine closet full of Spanish books, well bound and very diverting. There, amongst others, I found the History of Don Quixote, the famous Knight of the Mancha, in which the plainness and the subtlety of the expression, the weight and strength of proverbs, and that which the Spaniards call el pico, that is, the smartness and nicety of a language, appeared quite otherwise than the translations which we have in French. I was so pleased in reading it that I hardly thought of seeing the ceremony.(360).³⁴

Here d'Aulnoy reveals her personal taste in reading and poses as a literary critic, praising the style of *Don Quijote*. In this somewhat liminal moment, she suspends her role of witness-chronicler of *Histoire*, the official ceremony, and moves into the realm of *histoire*, of her own “historical” experience and of the *histoire* (story) of Don Quijote. This “behind the scenes” passage also stages the tension in travel writing between the different roles of the traveler as observer, protagonist, and narrator. This episode has metadiscursive implications, serving as a potential guide for reading and writing travel narrative, and perhaps suggesting that “el pico” is in fact a key element of all narrative, historical or otherwise; and that a well constructed textual representation potentially carries more weight than the direct experience of an event. The fundamental ambiguities and fluidities inherent in the “historical” genre of travel literature become clear in this

³⁴ D'Aulnoy also makes literary assessments of Spanish *nouvelles*: “Ce qu'ils appellent des nouvelles, me semble d'un caractere charmant; ils y gardent toujours la vraye-semblance, et leur sujet est si bien conduit, leur narration si concise et si simple, sans estre ni basse ni rempante, que l'on doit convenir qu'ils ont un génie superieur pour ces sortes d'ouvrages. ...Il est vrai, cependant, que je les trouve outrez dans leur loüanges, et qu'ils n'y gardent pas assez de vrai-semblable. Leur imagination, qui est fort vive, fait quelquefois trop de chemin.” (474)

“*What they call novels seem to me to be of a style and to have an air that charms. They never advance anything but what's probable, and the subjects they take are so well managed and their narration so concise and plain, neither mean nor lofty, that one must needs grant they have a genius which surpasses all others in these sort of pieces...But after all, I must needs say that I think them extravagant in their eulogies, and that in them they keep not near to probability, their imagination, which is very lively and active, sometimes runs too fast.*” (318)

episode, in which a personal encounter with a fictional text—the act of reading and interpretation—becomes as relevant and “real” (or “truthful”, worthy of recollection, and plausible) as an official historical occasion. This moment provides a compelling interpretive key to the *Relation* as a whole in which a woman writer, taking from the authority and recognition accorded to French literature by women, moves into the field of the *récit de voyage* to convey her own position on the nature of and the relationship between historical and literary narrative. Travel writing becomes an ideal space for challenging categories considered fixed, definable, and mutually exclusive— and an enticing new venture in the art of telling the truth.