

### ***Travels into Spain (1691): Madame d'Aulnoy's Perceptions of Spain***

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The main focus of this paper is to explore the early modern discourse around travelling women in the Spanish context, in particular this article investigates the travels of Madame d'Aulnoy, a French woman author and her perceptions of Spain, Spanish women and their environment. The apparently simple decision of travelling and travel writing taken by a woman provides important information about gender relations since:

Historically, travel writing has been the preserve of the well-heeled, muscular and educated men. Most of the 'officially' written Western history is the result of an 'itinerant masculinity' in which women were relegated to 'home,' and men were entitled 'to venture further afield in search of food, capital, or epiphany, dispatching 'home' initiatory tales of survival, conquest and encounters with the exotic and the marvellous. (Alacovska 133)

This fact is worthy of attention when studying *Travels into Spain*, not only because of the description of a long and arduous trip in which Madame d'Aulnoy describes landscapes, roads, historical monuments and weather conditions among many other aspects, but also because, as a woman of letters, she had such noteworthy success in a genre previously dominated by men. Furthermore, what is most interesting about Madame d'Aulnoy's account is that she travels and writes without providing much explanation concerning her being a travelling woman and a mother. She travels almost as if she didn't have to cope with the gendering genre ideology,<sup>1</sup> and self-consciously reassert herself within the genre of travel writing.

North American and Spanish writing on early modern women agency has been an active area of research in the last decades.<sup>2</sup> This presentation aims to add to this discourse by exploring how the agency of a French, well-connected woman was perceived by early modern society. Like Sarah Owens attests in her study of the *Journey of Five Capuchin Nuns* "...[these are] remarkable texts because it is one of the few travel accounts written by a woman for other women of this period. It alters the traditional perspective that only men traveled and wrote eyewitness accounts" (1). In the same line, although written by a very different kind of woman, Marie Catherine le Jumelle de Barneville defies convention by the simple act of writing "nothing but what I have seen." In fact, with this opening statement, Madame d'Aulnoy introduces and writes herself into her account as an eyewitness and mediator between the intended foreign reader and the Spanish environment.

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<sup>1</sup> For more on travelling women in early modern Europe see Zafra's "Ir romera y volver romera: Las pícaras romeras/rameras y el discurso del viaje;" "*Piedra rodadera no es buena para cimienta*;" and also "El caso de 'las mujeres sueltas' Isabella de Luna, prostituta en el ejército imperial/cortesana española en Roma y la Monja Alférez, Catalina de Erauso."

<sup>2</sup> The field is bountiful. A few notable examples include: Nieves Baranda's *The Routledge Research Companion to Early Modern Spanish Women Writers*; Anne J. Cruz's *The Life and Writings of Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza* (2014), Cruz and Suzuki's *The Rule of Women in Early Modern Europe* (2009), Lisa Vollendorf's *The Lives of Women* (2005), or Elizabeth Leffeldt's *Religious Women in Golden Age Spain* (2005) to name but a few.

Moreover with her opening assertion she positions herself as a worthy traveller, well suited to describe the Spanish environment and the surroundings and conditions in which the people of Spain, in particular the women, lived and operated.

Marie Catherine was born in Normandy in 1650, to a family of minor nobility. In 1666, when she was sixteen, she was married to the wealthy Parisian Francois de la Motte, Baron d'Aulnoy, thirty years her senior and known as a gambler and a libertine; apparently he was also very “handsome and well-built” (Foulché-Delbosc 4). Three years and three children, two girls and one boy, later, Baron d'Aulnoy, her husband was accused of treason. Investigation showed the accusation to have been fabricated; Marie Catherine's mother, Madame de Gudannes, whose last name came from her second husband, apparently Spanish, was implicated in making the false accusation. She fled France and went to Spain. Clearly, Madame de Gudannes left France fearing for her life, since the two men implicated with her in the case were executed (Foulché-Delbosc 5). Nothing certain is known about Marie Catherine's involvement in the accusation against her husband, nor what her later relations with him were at this time. Madame d'Aulnoy had five children in total, two of whom were born after she became estranged from her husband, although they bore his name. What we do know is that she disappeared from the Parisian social scene for almost twenty years. She later said that she had spent much of the time traveling, to Spain, for which there is documentary evidence, and to England, for which there is not, and wrote her most popular works based on these trips (Guenther 129). She started her literary life in 1690, at the age of forty, and during the next fourteen years she published ten books, making a total of twenty-seven volumes. She was well known for her fairy tales and her *Travels into Spain* was a bestseller in England, where it had twelve editions, more than in France and Holland combined. *Travels into Spain* was first published in French in 1691 and was translated into English the same year, into German in 1696 and into Dutch in 1705. Strangely enough, this work was not translated into Spanish until 1891, and then only parts. Two centuries later, the complete version was translated in 1962 (Vicens Pujol 374).

In her prologue “To the Reader” of her *Travels into Spain*, Madame d'Aulnoy announces head on and with self-confidence that:

I write nothing but what I have seen, or heard from persons of unquestionable credit: and therefore shall conclude with assuring you that you have here no novel, or story, devised at pleasure; but an exact and most true account of what I met with in my travels. (n. pag.)

In fact, from the very beginning, Madame d'Aulnoy positions herself as a direct observer of Spanish society and its environment and therefore worthy of trust from her potential readers. The text *Travels into Spain* is written in the form of fifteen letters, following the fashionable style of journey novels, that a lady traveler sends to her female cousin in Paris. Furthermore, Madame d'Aulnoy remarks the extent to which she goes in order to offer her reader an accurate description of her experiences:

The exactness I observe in giving you an account of things which I judge worthy of your curiosity puts me often-times on enquiries into several particulars which I should have otherwise omitted, had you not persuaded me that you are a great lover of novelties, and that you love to travel without going out of your closet. (142)

The purpose of her travels seems to be the visit to her kinswoman, probably her mother, although there is no direct mention of her name, and her destination is the Court of Madrid. She leaves France in the month of February of 1679 and arrives in Madrid in March of the same year. Her last letter is dated September 28th, 1680, so after the initial month of travelling to Madrid, she spends most of the time at the Court of Madrid with little excursions to the surrounding areas such as El Escorial, Aranjuez or Toledo. Madame d'Aulnoy is thirty years old at the time and travels with her three year old daughter, most probably Thérèse-Aymée, and an entourage of servants and drivers:

The litters which I expected from Spain being come, I prepared for my departure... each litter has a master that accompanies it... I had two. I took the greatest for myself and my child, and had, besides, four mules for my servants and two for my baggage: to conduct them, there were another two masters and two men. (10)

After San Sebastian she met and travelled with four men, Don Fernand de Toledo, Don Esteve de Carvajal, Don Sancho Sarmiento and Don Frederic de Cardonne, who are coincidentally also travelling to the Court of Madrid. Their places of origin represent four provinces of Spain: Castille, Andalusia, Galicia and Catalonia and the four men are absolute gentlemen since, according to Madame d'Aulnoy "They have travelled over the greatest part of Europe; and this has rendered them so polite" (32). Now in great company, Madame d'Aulnoy will not only be talking about what she sees but also will be able to include the many conversations she has with these educated and well-travelled men and their acquaintances.

Much has been said about the authenticity of the account to which we will not get into (Guenther 129), but we can say that Madame d'Aulnoy was in a way a pioneer, a modern day influencer, who writes before the fashion of traveling to "exotic" Spain became a must among the French and English elite and the literati, known as "The Grand Tour."<sup>3</sup> This fact, is part of the reason the book was such a bestseller in England and not in Spain. And much for the same reasons that... who buys a *Lonely Planet* about Spain in Spain? Or is there a different reason? As Melvin Palmer notes in "Madame d'Aulnoy in England:" "her account although weak in coherence brings appeal to fiction, liveliness with the first person narrator, subjectivity and intimacy" (240). In fact, as Alacovska points out in "Genre Anxiety," Palmer decription of D'Aulnoy's writing fits the preconceived idea that travel writing "embodies the 'masculine' pretensions to rigour, 'objectivity' and 'truth' but it is unfitting with female 'unstructured,' 'sensual' and 'fluid' nature" (133). Therefore, it suggests that this "weakness in coherence" that Palmer makes reference to is meant to

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<sup>3</sup> "The Grand Tour" refers to the XVII and XVIII custom of a trip of Europe (typically to Italy and France and later to Spain) undertaken by mainly upperclass young European men (mostly British) of sufficient means and ranks when they had come of age. Women, (mostly British too) undertook this same rite to passage later in the XIX and XX centuries. See the work by Alberto Egea Fernández-Montesinos, *Viajeras anglosajonas en España* for women who followed on the footsteps of Madame d'Aulnoy such as Katherine Lee Bates, *Spanish Highways and Byways* (1900) and the book for childrens, *In Sunny Spain with Pilarica and Rafael* (1913); Merrydelle Hoyt, *Mediterranean Idylls* (1914); Emmeline Stuart-Wortley, *The Sweet South: Impressions of Spain* (1856); Ellen Hope Edwardes, *Azahar. Extracts from a Journal in Spain 1881-82* (1883); Louisa Tenison, *Castille and Andalusia* (1883); Susan Hale, *A Family Flight through Spain* (1883); Olive Patch, *Sunny Spain: Its People and Places* (1884) and Louise Chandler Moulton, *Lazy Tours in Spain and Elsewhere* (1897).

discredit a female author. This fact is not a flaw but rather what a “real” journey should be. For instance, in *Travels into Spain*, Madame d’Aulnoy faces many challenges (floods, snow, trickery, discomfort) particularly traveling with a child. This is notable during her crossing of the Pyrenees:

It is not without reason that in passing so near you fear lest some one of them should get loose, which would certainly overwhelm one; for you see some which are fallen from the top, and hang in their passage on other clefts; and these, finding nothing in the way, would give a sorry diversion to a traveller. I made all of these reflections at my ease; for I was alone in my litter with my child, who did not at all disturb my thoughts. (31)

This quote makes painfully palpable not only the dangers of travelling over such terrain, but also the added complications of travelling with a child, which on this occasion, as Madame d’Aulnoy readily notes, was behaving and letting her concentrate. After all, flexibility and a balanced demeanor is a requirement for effective travelling, as any good traveller knows. The weather is also a concern for Madame d’Aulnoy. In order to arrive at her destination, the Court of Madrid, she will battle rain, snow and heat with a great deal of determination, self-confidence and practicality. For example, in letter three when she describes the snow that she encountered when crossing the Pyrenees, not only does she discuss the quantity, for such an amount had not fallen in forty years, but she also mentions the free service that is provided for travellers:

The snow were so high that we had always twenty men who made way for us with shovels. You will perhaps imagine that this cost me very much; but here are so well established orders, and those so well observed that the inhabitants of the village are obliged to meet travellers and be their guides to the next, and no one to be bound to give them anything, the least liberty satisfies them. (31)

Her encounters with bad weather and adversity are many along the road and inns of Spain but humour is never far away. In letter five for instance and due to a flood, she finds herself and her child being carried away by two of her travelling companions to the top of a building and in the middle of the night:

“Alas!” I said, “I have travelled a long way to come to drown myself on the fourth story of an inn in Aranda.” All raillery apart, I though seriously my last hour was come, and I was so trouble that I was twenty times thinking to entreat these gentlemen to hear me in confession. I believe that in sequel they would have more laughed at it than I. (140)

Also, as a woman she is going to focus more on other women’s behaviour and her interactions with them are for this reason particularly interesting. For example, from the point of her third letter onwards she notices the oppressive restraints over women travelling and explains that women are not allowed to stay more than two days at an inn on the roads

of Spain.<sup>4</sup> She also goes into detail to explain the extent to which women's enclosure and isolation were enforced but varied depending on location, individual family customs, and class since non-elite women had less impetus to protect familial honour. For instance, it is worth noting the contrast between the appearance of the travelling widow, the Marchioness de los Rios "whose merit and fortune were very considerable," described in letter four, all covered up from head to toe (87) to the girls that managed the little boats near Hendaye, in the Basque Country, described as "very lusty and handsome... I was told that these wenches swim like fishes, and suffer neither women nor men among them" (16). She soon describes them in action at the exact moment that her unfortunate cook, Gascon, is put in his place by one of them:

My cook... was in one of the boats... very near a young Biscaneer who appeared to him very handsome; he contented not himself with telling her as much but would have rudely turned her veil. She, being not used to this sort of plain dealing, without any words broke his head with he oar. (17)

These Amazons, as Madame d'Aulnoy describes, make clear that "they would have my cook's skin if satisfaction were not made proporcionably to the damage done to their companion's clothes" (18). This satisfaction is restored in the form of a sum of money given to the handsome girl in question.

Therefore, Madame d'Aulnoy's *Travels into Spain* challenges the normative view of female confinement, admiring the surprising liberty afforded to Spanish women, including the elite. In fact, contrary to how it might seem at the beginning after noting in her descriptions the isolation of Spanish women and their propensity to seek balconies and windows at any opportunity, D'Aulnoy can't also help but notice that these resourceful women always find a way to do what they want to do. Though D'Aulnoy observes that ladies and gentlemen are very careful not to mix with those of an inferior class, she describes Spanish noblewomen travelling the streets in their coaches with relative freedom (206). She further remarks that Spanish women subvert enclosure, asserting that: "The great constraint they live under puts violent desires in them to enjoy some freedom, and their very amorous nature makes them witty to find out means to bring about their designs" (223). She goes into detail explaining the planning that goes into very carefully crafted rendezvous:

Lent makes no alterations in their pleasure... There are diverse women which under pretence of devotion constantly go to certain churches, where for a year before they are assured to meet him they love; and though they are attended with several of their women, which they call *duenna*, yet as the crowds are great and love makes them ingenious, so they make a shift... to slip on one side into a little adjoining house... hired for that purpose. (223)

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<sup>4</sup> As this popular saying attests, "La liebre búscala en el cantón y la puta en el mesón" ["You'll find the hare in the canton and the whore at the inn."] Inns are common places for prostitutes to carry their business (see Zafra "Las mesoneras" in *Prostituidas por el texto* 93) and is not rare for early modern Spaniards to see inn-keepers and prostitutes as one and the same (see *La pícaro Justina* or Aldonza in *Don Quixote* to name a few). This ordenance to which Madame the Aulnoy is referring to confirms the problem around itinerant or ilegal prostitution and the attempts made by the Crown to control it.

Madame d'Aulnoy attributes their success in escaping social constraints to a network of female solidarity:

...the ladies visit one another frequently, and there is nothing more easy for them than to wear a veil and by the back door go into a chair and be carried where they will. And this is the more practicable because all the women agree to keep one another's secrets inviolably... their discretion cannot be sufficiently praised. It is true, indeed, the consequences would be more fatal if they did otherwise, since they make nothing here of murdering upon a bare suspicion. (327)

The network of female complicity and resistance described by D'Aulnoy may be exaggerated, yet feminist historical work undertaken over the last few decades has revealed ample evidence that early modern women did not always adhere to the passive models laid out for them in prescriptive texts,<sup>5</sup> instead resisting control and exerting influence on their society through a variety of methods.

Another case in point is the environment of the Spanish convents she visits or that she hears others talking about. As Mary Elizabeth Perry brings to attention in the case of the city of Seville:

Convents seeking extra income took in secular boarders, usually girls, whose families paid for their board and education. The addition of these paying guests seemed to dilute the rules of the religious orders as it brought nuns into more contact with the external world. (79)

Madame d'Aulnoy records too, through the account of other women such as the Marchioness de los Rios, that contrary to a place of isolation and contemplation, convents are a place for social gathering, full of entertainment and pleasurable conversation:<sup>6</sup>

There are convents where the religiouses see more cavaliers than the women who live at large, neither are they less galant. It is imposible for any to have more gaiety than they; and, as I have already told you, madam, here are more beauties than abroad. (89)

Nevertheless, underneath that social gaiety Madame d'Aulnoy also considers the lack of control that those women have over their own destinies:<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> See for example Lisa Vollendorf's *The Lives of Women* (2005) and Nieves Baranda's *The Routledge Research Companion to Early Modern Spanish Women Writers* (2018).

<sup>6</sup> Madame d'Aulnoy also describes how convents are the dumping ground for abandoned mistresses including royal mistress. This is the case of the actress known as *la Calderona*, whose story she recounts with all details (and full of gossip, including the plot or urban legend mastered by *la Calderona* to switch babies with the Queen who had also given birth the same year), as told to her by Don Frederic de Cardona in letter three (60). After being the royal mistress of Philip the IV and giving birth to Don Juan de Austria, the only bastard son to be acknowledged by the king, *la Calderona* was forced to retired to the convent of San Juan Bautista in Vallermoso de las Monjas, Guadalajara, where she became the abbess. Madame d'Aulnoy also records the famous line said by yet another of Philip the IV's potential mistress, who knowing her destiny if she agreed, said to the King: "Go, go, God be with you. I have no mind to be a nun" (392).

<sup>7</sup> The voice of Arcangela Tarabotti's *Paternal Tyranny*, in the case of Italy accounts for the despair some women found in convent life. For more information on women's agency in the convent setting both in Spain and Italy see: Electra Arenal's *Untold Sisters: Hispanic Nuns in their Own Works and Divas in the Convent*

These enter so young that they know not what they are made to leave, not what they undertake at the age of six or seven, and it may be sooner. They are caused to make vows, when 'tis often the father or mother, or some near relation, who pronounce them for 'em, whilst the little sacrifice disports herself with sugarplums and lets 'em dress her how they will. (89)

Not only does Madame d'Alnoy offer indirect accounts about convents from other travellers she encounters, such as the aforementioned, Marchioness de los Rios or Don Frederic de Cardona, she also visits a convent adjacent to the castle of Lerma where, as she explains in letter five: "The abbess... came here with several religiouses, who were very entertaining, handsome, witty and young, and discoursing with great exactness of everything." (122) One of the guests of the convent, another "lady of great quality who had retired into their house" (122) announces her interest in meeting the French traveller. We soon learn that the woman in question is the Countess de Lemos, who makes a most memorable appearance and reminds us of the "lets 'em dress her how they will" mentioned before, a sort of elderly early modern Lady Gaga,<sup>8</sup> since:

She had a kind of pattens on, or rather stilts, which made her look prodigious tall, so she was fain to lean on two person's shoulders when she moved... The singular dress of the Countess de Lemos appeared to me so extraordinary that I could hardly get mine eyes off it. She wore a kind of black satin gold-embroidered bodice, and buttoned with great rubies of considerable value. (122)

Madame d'Aulnoy recalls the Countess de Lemos in her letters as a "curious piece of antiquity," (123) nevertheless she proves a great source for countless and colourful well-known gossip, such as the stories of the infamous Christina, Queen of Sweden; the Count of Villamediana and his love for the Queen; and the part that the Count Duke d'Olivares, the King's favourite, and the King played in the seduction of the Duchess of Albuquerque (123-132). Madame d'Aulnoy records these stories as they were told to her by the Countess de Lemos, who was present at Court when they occurred.

Nothing related to women's behavior and space escapes Madame d'Aulnoy. Other houses for women, this time of ill repute are also mentioned by Madame d'Aulnoy: "They use them very severly, and not a day passes that they are not whipped several times: in a certain time they are released, but come out worse than they went in what they suffered making them not a bit the better" (364). Under this description one can recognize the prison for women designed by the nun Magdalena de San Jerónimo, described in her memorial to king Philip II and entitled, *Razón y forma de la galera, y casa real, que el rey nuestro señor*

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and *Nuns Behaving Badly* both by Graig A. Monson. For more about convent education and boarders see the article by Sharon Strocchia, "Learning the Virtues."

<sup>8</sup> Headlines reads "Lady Gaga's finally taken it too far: Bodyguard carries the popstar to photoshoot as she struggles to walk in her trademark block heels. The unpractical stilt-style heels that Lady Gaga insists on wearing have finally proved too much and after a day of modelling, the popstar had to be carried by her bodyguard to the last set for the rest of the shoot."

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-2036678/Lady-Gagas-bodyguard-carries-photoshoot-shes-unable-walk-block-heels.html>

*manda hazer en estos reynos, para castigo de las mugeres vagantes, y ladronas, alcahuetas, hechizeras y otras semejantes* (1608). As the title suggests, the objective of these houses was the confinement and penalization of dishonest women in order to reform them –mission not accomplished according to D’Aulnoy- and also cleanse the nation, mostly of syphilis which Madame d’Aulnoy calls “that cursed disease” (295):

But doubtless this disease is not so dangerous in Spain as in other countries, for they still preserve their hair very fine and their teeth very good. At Court, and amongst the women on the highest quality, they discourse of it as they do a fever or the megrim, and they all bear the distemper patiently... As they know not but the most virtuous women and the youngest child may have it. (295)

The cause of this problem, Madame d’Aulnoy seems to suggest, is not the women, but the men, since “Even youth of quality that are rich begin at the age of twelve or thirteen years to entertain a concubine-mistress... for whom they neglect their studies, and make away which whatever they can catch up in their father’s house” (295). D’Aulnoy notes that not even when they marry do these men quit their mistresses and therefore she concludes that the source of the problem is not the women in question, but lascivious men. In fact, Madame d’Aulnoy penetrates even deeper and points out that the real origin of Spain’s problems is a lack of education since “The young men pass that time which they should employ for their instruction in wretched laziness, either walking about, or courting some lady” (297). Furthermore, Madame d’Aulnoy comes to the conclusion that a lack of travelling, essential to anyone’s complete education, is very much at the root of the problem since: “It is very seldom that a father lets his son travel abroad, but keeps him at home and suffers him to take up what custom he pleases” (297). Travelling, Madame d’Aulnoy asserts, is a necessary requirement if one wants to excel in life, once this prerequisite has been fulfilled: “Heaven hath been so kind to a Spaniard as to give him a good education and let him travel and see the world, he makes better improvement than anybody” (298). In this manner, Madame d’Aulnoy markets her travelling account and becomes a true early modern influencer, who presents her book as an educational tool for both the male and female movers and shakers of the world. At the same time, Madame d’Aulnoy contributes to the early modern discourse on women’s agency by making the image of the mobile public woman acceptable to an audience indoctrinated by the system of honour that views women outside their homes as dangerous and untrustworthy.

In conclusion, with her *Travels into Spain*, Madame d’Aulnoy, offers the reader a first hand account of the Spanish environment, the surroundings and the conditions in which the people of Spain, in particular the women, lived and operated. She accomplishes this task by asserting her position as a female travel writer from the beginning and proves, with the international success of her travel book, that writing without a sense of distress in relation to morality or gender tribulations is possible for an early modern female travel writer.



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