

# THE TRANSNATIONAL FORMATION OF THE ENGLISH NOVEL: THE CASE OF MADAME DE VILLEDIEU'S *THE ANNALS OF LOVE* (1672)

## LA FORMACIÓN TRANSNACIONAL DE LA NOVELA INGLESA: EL CASO DE *THE ANNALS OF LOVE* (1672), DE MADAME DE VILLEDIEU

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### Abstract

In the late 1660s and 1670s, Madame de Villedieu (née Desjardins) made a substantial contribution to the evolution of prose fiction, moving the genre from the heroic romance to the *nouvelle* in France, and thus in England. Her *Annales Galantes* (1670), translated as *The Annals of Love* (1672), is a landmark work within the development of the genre. The twenty-one “amorous adventures” that make up this collection contain an impressive array of characters and psychological portraits of individuals enmeshed in a multiplicity of romantic relationships and situations. Drawing from chronicles and historical records and set in Europe and Asia in periods ranging from the early Middle Ages to the modern era, the author presents these stories as factual accounts through her use of sources and reinforces her narrative authority with calculated digressions and metanarrative commentary. This article examines Villedieu’s innovative experiment in history and narrative technique in the literary context of the transition to the *nouvelle* (and the novel) in England. It studies the ways in which narration in *The Annals* abandons the unreliable voices and human-like points of view that characterised the English heroic romances, making use of authorial privilege, literary techniques and discourses associated with truth-telling, such as omniscience, biography and history, while constantly reminding readers of her imaginative reconstruction of the stories.



**Keywords:** Restoration fiction, Desjardins/Villedieu, *nouvelle galante*, history, omniscience, literary metanarration.

## Resumen

Madame de Villedieu (nacida Desjardins) contribuyó sustancialmente al género de ficción en su evolución desde el romance heroico a la *nouvelle* en Francia —y por ende en Inglaterra— a finales de los 1660s y principios de los 1670s. Su *Annales Galantes* (1670), traducido como *The Annals of Love* (1672), marcó ese proceso. Comprende veintiuna “aventuras amorosas” que despliegan una impresionante galería de personajes y retratos psicológicos, envueltos en todo tipo de relaciones y situaciones amorosas basadas en crónicas y registros históricos, tanto en Europa como en el ámbito Oriental, del siglo X a la Edad Moderna. Villedieu intentó infundir veracidad en sus relatos incluyendo una lista de fuentes históricas, y reforzó su autoridad narrativa con digresiones calculadas y comentarios metanarrativos. Este artículo estudia el innovador experimento de Villedieu con la historia y la técnica narrativa en el contexto literario de la transición del romance heroico a la *nouvelle* (y la novela) en Inglaterra. Se analiza cómo la narración de *The Annals* abandona voces no-fidedignas y focalizadores humanos propios de los romances heroicos ingleses, y utiliza técnicas y discursos autoriales asociados con la verdad, tales como la omnisciencia, la biografía y la historia, al tiempo que no deja de recordar al lector la esencia imaginaria de sus reconstrucciones.

**Palabras clave:** Ficción del período de la Restauración, Desjardins/Villedieu, *nouvelle galante*, historia, omnisciencia, metanarración literaria.

## 1. Introduction

Throughout the 1660s and 1670s, English fiction underwent a transformation that has yet to be fully apprehended, especially its transnational dimension. During this time, a variety of new forms and subgenres were imported from the Continent, largely from or via France, which markedly influenced production in the vernacular language.<sup>1</sup> In the early 1660s, British writers such as George Mackenzie, John Dauncey, Percy Herbert and Samuel Pordage endeavoured to naturalise French heroic romances by incorporating domestic politics and using the English literary heritage. However, the genre had become outdated by the end of the decade and was superseded by the short *nouvelle*, introduced in France in the late 1650s by writers as different as Paul Scarron (translated in 1665) and Madame de La Fayette, whose *The Princess of Monpensier* was published anonymously in 1662 and translated in 1666.



The achievements of Marie-Catherine-Hortense de Villedieu, née Desjardins (1640?-1683) have been overshadowed by the prominence given to La Fayette, another eminent *salonnière*. Until 1668, Villedieu authored her books under the *nom de plume* Mademoiselle Desjardins; but, according to DeJean, “When a young man of a superior rank who had promised to marry her (once again secretly) refused to do so, she simply took his name: in the late 1660s she began to be known as ‘Madame de Villedieu’” (1991: 130), though many of her works were published anonymously in both periods. She began her career around 1659 publishing poetry, prose and drama, and was a leading figure in the transition from the heroic romance to the *nouvelle*. She is attributed the creation of the pseudo-memoirs genre in *The Memoires of the Life and Rare Adventures of Henrietta Silvia Moliere* (1672) and, in the words of Ros Ballaster, is “best known for instituting the *nouvelle galante*, short sequences of stories concerned with amorous adventures” (2017: 392). She embraced the *nouvelle galante* in 1667 when, in the preface to *Anaxandre*, she announced that the adventures of the novel “are more gallant than heroic” (Desjardins 1667: n.p., my translation).<sup>2</sup> *Cléonice*, subtitled *Le roman galant* (1669), marks a transition towards the *nouvelle* (Sale 2006: 35). As Giorgio Sale has argued, the piece ushered in a period of Villedieu’s literary experimentation with genres, forms and styles that she would carry over from work to work (2006: 43).

The scope and subject matter of *Annales Galantes* (1670), translated into English as *The Annals of Love* (1672), are consistently —and explicitly— reflective of the *nouvelle galante*. It is thus an excellent text to investigate the impact of the new genre in England and explore the transition from the heroic romance to the *nouvelle* (and the novel) or, to use McKeon’s terminology, the move from writing verisimilitude (*vraisemblance*) to true-to-fact accounts — or claim to historicity (1988: 54; see also McKeon 1985: 165). Villedieu produced a mature, highly entertaining work in which she describes the features of the *nouvelle galante* as she blends history and imagination, and in which she avoids the overwrought style of the heroic romance and its use of unreliable storytellers. Instead, she reinforces her narrator’s skills or “competence” (Lanser 1981: 171), and authorial privilege through narrative techniques and discourses associated with authenticity and truth.

## 2. Restoration Fiction: Romances, Life-Writing and the Nouvelle

English prose fiction of the early years of the Restoration presents an extraordinary variety of genres and hybrid, innovative texts, “though no major English novels appeared” (Turner 2017: 73). It was an age “dominated by experimentation and



lack of coherence [out of which] comes coherence and certain stability” (Bayer 2017: 6), a time when the distinction between popular romance, historical text and novel differed from our current notions (McKeon 1985: 162-163). To understand the extent of Villedieu’s innovative storytelling in England, it is necessary to survey the production of fiction in England, specifically high romances and (auto)biography, since the former was superseded by the shorter, more realistic *nouvelle*, while the latter endeavoured to offer factual life accounts of notorious characters, mainly criminals.

During the Commonwealth, as Victoria Kahn has argued, “in Herbert’s [...] *Princess Cloria* (1653-1661), [...] Richard Brathwaite’s *Panthalia* (1659), and William Sales’s unfinished *Theophania* (1655), we find considerably more scepticism about the arcadian dimension of the romance. Instead, it becomes an analytical tool for reflecting on the causes of the war and the contemporary crisis of political obligation” (2002: 627). In the early 1660s, though Mackenzie’s *Aretina* (1660) also reflected upon legislation and politics, English high romances explored less serious matters, mostly related with conflicts of love and loyalty. For example, Pordage’s *Eliana* (1661) debates the nature of friendship and love, and Bulteel’s unfinished *Birinthea* concentrates on Cyrus’s dilemma between his love for the slave princess and his loyalty to his uncle Cyaxares, King of the Medes. Yet the genre, which drew heavily on verisimilitude and analysed the characters’ psychology, was firmly established among readers and writers alike, as shown by the numerous successful reprints and translations of French heroic romances, and, especially, by John Dauncey’s *The English Lovers* (1661-1662), which novelises Thomas Heywood’s two-part play, *The Fair Maid from the West*. Characteristic of heroic romances, Dauncey structured the narrative using an in-medias-res approach and a multiplicity of narrators instead of reproducing the play’s linear plot and single, heterodiegetic narrator — two of the main structural features that would come to distinguish the *nouvelle*. Strikingly, however, by the end of the decade, high romances fell out of fashion. Only Roger Boyle, at the request of Queen Henrietta Maria, published the sixth instalment of *Parthenissa* in 1669; however, he tactfully put an end to the series on the grounds that “I did once design to have Ended Her story in this Book” (Orrery 1676: Xxx4r), even though the romance (808 folio-pages long) was left unfinished. Nonetheless, unlike in France, the fascination for this genre and its royalist ideals lingered in England long after 1670.

The 1660s saw the creation of several imaginative texts within the life-writing genres, blurring the boundaries between reality and fiction by combining factual events with persuasive styles and techniques meant to reinforce credibility, or at least convey the impression of factuality. Perhaps because of prejudices



surrounding gender or honour, or both, the (male) narrator in *The Life and Death of Mrs. Mary Frith* (alias Mal Cutpurse, and the model of Middleton and Dekker's Roaring Girl) told the adult life of this peculiar picaresque *hic mulier* (c.1584-1659) by using the editor-narrator technique, whereby he pretends to be publishing a "diary", which he claims to be "of her own" (1662: 26-27). The author of *Youth's Unconstancy* (1667, attributed to Charles Croke) chose to call himself Rodolphus and tell the story of his life in the third person, thus distancing himself from his younger, roguish self. Only John Bunyan seems to anticipate the style of the *nouvelle* when he claims that the truth and sincerity of his spiritual autobiography, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, were more fittingly rendered in "plain and simple" (1666: A5v) than adorned or elevated language.

Unreliability haunts the narrators of criminals' biographies, who claim to have witnessed certain events and to have obtained documents and reports from creditable informants, as if they were engaged in a kind of (proto-)journalistic activity. These narrators also discuss the truthfulness of dubious accounts and hearsays, whereby the 'I' of the narrators may show up at any time throughout. For example, an account of the case of James Turner was printed not only in the minutes of the court proceedings, but also in two short chapbooks. Issuing a warning about the fate awaiting thieves, *The Triumph of Truth* aimed to distinguish fact from rumour and calumny. The narrator, for example, tells of two letters in an attempt to reinforce his credibility, and addresses certain rumours such as this one suggesting cannibalism: "one thing is known to many for a truth [...], his preserving some of the Fat or other parts of the Corps of divers persons lately executed for Treason, [...]" (*The Triumph of Truth* 1663: 31). As a postscript, the author refers to a forthcoming publication about Turner, warning readers about the falsehoods it may spread (1663: 32). Likewise, the narrator of the new version, *The Life and Death of James Commonly Called Collonel Turner*, has the same purpose and also discredits the previous one (1664: 13-14).

Lastly, William Winstanley's *The Honour of the Merchant-Taylors*, about *condottiero* Sir John Hawkwood (c. 1320-1394) in Italy, may illustrate the transition from the romance to the historical novel in England, even though Paul Salzman fittingly classified it as a piece of "popular non-chivalric fiction" (1985: 378). Indeed, literary conventions that characterise the romance pervade the portrayal of the hero, while the story, based on chronicles, is presented as "a real truth, though imbelished with such flowers of Poesy as I could gather out of Apollo's Garden, that thou mightest be won with delight in the reading thereof" (Winstanley 1668: A4v).

In England, the *nouvelle historique* and *nouvelle galante* emerged—and eventually took hold—in this context of the decline of the heroic romance and the rise of



life-writing. These two kinds of *nouvelle* are often treated indistinctly, as their main concern is love and their setting a relatively recent past. Notwithstanding their similarity, Paul Salzman has argued that the *nouvelle galante* places more emphasis on intrigue and love affairs, and less on the characters' psychology than the *nouvelle historique* (1985: 309-310). La Fayette's *The Princess of Monpensier* is traditionally regarded as the pioneer of the historical and the psychological novel both in France and England. Since the name of the heroine was the same as a high-profile public figure, the French bookseller remarked in the prefatory note to the reader that the story was not the publication of a manuscript from historical times but rather an invention of the author, who preferred to name "his [sic]" protagonists after historical people instead of romance characters (1666: A4v, A5r). The English translator, however, made the story ambiguously authentic when, in his note preceding that of the French bookseller, he claims to have begun work on the translation only when the original publisher assured him that it was not fiction but a factual account; and many readers may have believed it to be biographical. *The Princess of Monpensier* was not published in English again until the twentieth century, which suggests a modest reception, probably owing to La Fayette's radically innovative method that, as Esmerin-Sarrazin explains, "combines history and fiction and overlaps them so much that it becomes difficult to distinguish one from another; [...] thus offering a redefinition of the concept of *vraisemblance*" (2016: 87). It, however, paved the way for the variety of prose fiction genres that emerged in the last three decades of the seventeenth century. Amorous adventures and scandalous histories, among others, contributed positively to the transition from the romance to the novel in England, thus widening the existing stream of realistic fiction brought into being by the picaresque genre, moral short stories such as John Reynold's highly popular *The Triumph of God's Revenge* (1621-1635), Spanish and Italian tales, and the novels of Scarron, who, in addition to his own production, appropriated stories authored by Alonso de Castillo Solórzano, Alonso Jerónimo de Salas Barbadillo and María de Zayas.

### 3. The Annals of Love

As had happened in France, the English version of *Annales Galantes* (Paris: Claude Barbin, 1670. 12°) appeared anonymously, although Villedieu acknowledged that the book was hers in 1671 in the prefatory note to the fifth part of *Journal amoureux* (Grande and Keller-Rahbé 2006: 16), which was not translated into English. *The Annals of Love, Containing Select Histories of the Amours of Divers Princes Courts, Pleasantly Related* was translated by Roger



L'Estrange (Cottegnies 2022: 52) —genuinely rendering the narratives, tone and style of the source text— and published in London by John Starkey in 1672, in octavo (Wing reference D1187A; ESTC reference R11570). All eight parts are included in a single volume comprising the twenty-one stories (or sections), “containing only matters of Courtship”, as she states at the beginning of the second part (1672: 53). Unlike the heroic romances, neither the character nor the country names are coded, and none of the events are from ancient times. The spatial-temporal scope of the collection spans Europe, North Africa and the Middle East, from the tenth century to the early modern period.<sup>3</sup> Not only does Villedieu superbly accomplish a kind of textual *cabinet of curiosities* of courtship, seduction, love affairs and situations recorded or suggested in post-classical chronicles and history books until that time, but also produces an astonishing typology of psychological —especially female— portraits of royal and aristocratic lovers, most of them ancestors of seventeenth-century European sovereigns.

Villedieu's book marks a significant innovation in English prose fiction in terms of the source and nature of her stories and characters, her historian-like stance, language style and narrative technique. If verisimilitude or realism are considered, *The Annals of Love* brought to English fiction a convincing illusion of factual storytelling and truth, partly because “the historical basis is much more accurate and becomes far more reliable” (Grande 2021: 71, my translation).<sup>4</sup> The fact that most of her characters were both real people and the subject of history books establishes a crucial ontological difference with the realistic fictional characters in picaresque narratives or in John Reynolds' stories of homicides in his *Triumph of God's Revenge*. At the beginning of the preface, Villedieu insists on the authenticity of her accounts and explicitly attacks certain contemporary “intrigues” that blatantly misrepresent history, perhaps referring to narratives such as *The Princess of Monpensier* or her own *Loves Journal* (1671), when she asserts that her stories “are no witty and facetious Inventions, exhibited under true Names (of which kind I have seen lately an ingenious Essay) but faithful touches taken out of History in general” (1672: A2r). In addition, by narrating post-classical historical events featuring members of Mediterranean and other European royalty and related stately dignitaries, she not only establishes a radical opposition to the romances of La Calprenède and Scudéry, which were mostly set in ancient times, but also contends that her new type of narrative takes an altogether different stance in selecting the ‘adventures’ and ‘accidents’ for the plots, and modulating the style of the narrative voice. In the story of “Constance, the Fair Nun”, for example, when the protagonist and her lover (Frederick Barbarossa's son) must take their leave, Villedieu marks a key difference between her literary style and that of the heroic romance by maintaining the neutral, historical tone when she makes reference to heroic romances in explaining her refusal to describe her



characters' emotional storms: "This place would make a marvellous Ornament for a Romance, and I should have a great care how I past it over in silence, were this a Romance, and not a History; but the style of Annals do not suit with Rhetorical Ornations, and therefore I shall refer my curious Reader to the passionate partings in *Cirus* or *Clelia*" (1672: 96). In statements such as these, Villedieu not only explains the features of her "annals" as a distinct genre, but also aims to elucidate what pertains to the heroic-romance effects of verisimilitude and what to the purported authenticity of her stories of gallantry. Such narratives of courtship are obviously not devoid of picaresque elements. These features are most conspicuous in the series of García Fernández stories, in which a pilgrim seduces his wife and both escape to Paris, and in "The Fraticelles" when the friars, "Seeing then this Clutter and publick Ostentation of Love [in the streets of Rome all night long], had been the cause of so much disorder, [...] resolved to carry on theirs privately, and à la Sourdine, without giving any more occasion of Jealousie than needs must" (1672: 114). This picaresque spirit resonates with the narrative tone that Grande has described as deliberately light: "the tone is deliberately light and meant to please a complicit readership that knows how to appreciate the game of historical distortion and delights in it" (2021: 70, my translation).<sup>5</sup>

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### 3.1. History and *The Annals of Love*

To a certain degree, *The Annals of Love* could be compared to the work of Henry Fielding, who was convinced that he was practising and exploring new ways of novel writing. Like Fielding, Villedieu explains the nature and characteristics of her work—the annals and, by extension, the *nouvelle galante*—both in the preface and the body text. The preface, called a "true manifesto of the *nouvelle historique*" by Keller-Rahbé (2010: 127, my translation),<sup>6</sup> opens by explaining the nature and sources of the content. She states that "these Annals of Love are really History, whose Fountains and Originals, I have on purpose inserted in the ensuing Table" (1672: A2r). Although containing several inaccuracies (Keller-Rahbé 2010: 132), this table of bibliographical references at the end of the preface reveals the intertextual link between the stories and their sources, while the reader is encouraged to contrast the historical hypotexts with the novelist's expanded rendering of them (1672: A4r).<sup>7</sup> Both the bibliographical list and the author's comments on her treatment of each source reinforce the authenticity of the stories while asserting their imaginary nature. Therefore, as Keller-Rahbé has stated: "the reader is invited not to rely excessively on the sources but to be guided by the author, who presents herself more as a true novelist and less as a historian" (2010: 132-133, my translation).<sup>8</sup> In fact, Villedieu makes it clear that her fabrications of facts range from writing "almost word for word out of that chronicle" (1672: A4r) in "James King of Arragon", fleshing out



fictional versions of the historical sketch —as in the three about Count García Fernández of Castile— to inventing entire plots, as she acknowledges that “the Amour of Nugnez is suppositious” (1672: A4v). However, the list only covers the first four parts, which are the ones initially published, whereas no reference is made to the sources of the last four. In the latter, Villedieu further distances her writing from a historical account as she, for example, imagines Jacaya’s life (claimed to be Sultan Mehmet III’s son, who must have either died as a young child or never existed), and foregrounds autobiographical elements in the story of “Feliciane”, as she crossdresses to search for the man who seduced her.<sup>9</sup>

Villedieu also declares that her stories do not attempt to depict contemporary people or events —or, in her words, “a scheme of our present Hypocrisy” (1672: A2r)— as earlier high romances often did by encoding character identities and place names. Nevertheless, she seems to hint that this possibility should not be thoroughly dismissed: “If in the Conferences and Passages I have invented, there happens any resemblance with the Intrigues of our Age, it is no fault either in the History or in me, that was writ long before I was born” (1672: A2v). Yet Villedieu’s method of embedding political satire in fiction differs from *roman-à-clef* narratives. Indeed, her innovative book of princely love affairs and scandals has been read as a sly attack on Louis XIV’s policy of centralising power: “Their [La Fayette’s and Villedieu’s] contempt for royal authority [...] voices a post-Frondean nobility’s resentment of Louis XIV’s efforts to curtail its powers, and women found their agency particularly constrained” (Watkins 2016: 260).<sup>10</sup> Although the French monarchy is never directly attacked (except in “The Countess of Pontieuivre”), Villedieu is unforgiving in her critique of the Iberian kings, from whom Louis XIV descended through his mother, Philip III’s daughter Anna of Austria. “Harlots they were both” (1672: 36) is the narrator’s description of García Fernández’s wives. Incest and infidelity taint the depiction of Alphonse VI’s daughters in “The Three Princesses of Castile”, and, in “Jane Supposed of Castile”, impotent Henry IV of Castile is shown soliciting an heir from his wife through adultery consented by the three parties: “She pretended great horror at the first Proposition, that she might have the pleasure of being pressed; and the King did her that kindness, he prest, he intreated, and his Election concurring with the Queens, the good Monarch conducted the Count de Cueva to the Royal Bed with his own hand” (1672: 311).

Although the English translation contains eight wise maxims in verse in addition to many more poetical compositions, the instructive or moral sense of Villedieu’s collection is problematic —or, as she says, “never so irregular” (1672: A3r)— when depicting the immorality of certain historical actions and characters, especially religious and female. On the one hand, she claims, “I might interlace,



and inlay my Examples with profitable Precepts, I observe this Maxime in all of them, to punish Vice, and reward Vertue” (1672: A3r), which, in 1670, Daniel Huet described as “the chief end of a Romance”, or “Fictions of Love-Adventures” in general (1672: 3), while, on the other, as in the examples regarding the Spanish monarchy, her narrator does not seem compelled to judge immorality and impart instruction because of her supposedly truthful, objective fidelity to history. However, she explicitly claims to have modified one of the stories to make it less morally offensive to readers when she remarks that the “custom of promiscuous injoyment in all sorts of people, without choice or distinction”, introduced by Dulcinus and Margaret in Lombardy, was toned down in favour of “the changing of Husbands and Wives” (1672: A4v). This likely explains why the sequel to the story of Dulcinus and Margaret, “Nogaret and Mariana”, is the only I-narration in the book (Mariana being one of the women that Margaret interrogated), though in the end the latter couple does not divorce but reunites.

In relation to the story of Nogaret, who was not a character of royal extraction, it is worth highlighting the incidental comment about letters and nuns at the beginning of “Constance the Fair Nun”: “there have been Letters seen in our days which have taught us, that of all people in the World, none make Love with that confidence and freedom as the Nuns” (1672: 82). This could refer to the letters of Heloise and Abelard, published in Latin in 1616 and popularised at the end of the seventeenth century, but most probably to anonymous *Lettres portugaises*, by Gabriel-Joseph de Lavergne Guilleragues (although for a long time attributed to Portuguese Marianna Alcoforado) —and entitled *Lettres d’amour d’une religieuse portugaise* in subsequent editions— which was first published in France in 1669, and translated by Roger L’Estrange in 1678 as *Five Love-Letters from a Nun to a Cavalier*. Stories with ordinary characters such as these seem beyond her scope of historical personalities and, thus, of her apparent neutrality at judging their love affairs and morality — unlike in picaresque and criminal stories, whose purpose was also the readers’ moral instruction.

Her imaginative expansions of historical episodes involve the addition of what she calls “some ornaments to the simplicity of History” (1672: A2r). These ornaments mainly consist of settings and dialogues that give voice to those silenced by history (1672: A2v), because such accounts of courtship or love affairs would be unpardonable digressions in serious history books: “I have not memories to trust to”, she says, “but my own fancy” (1672: A2v). To justify the objectivity of those fanciful recreations of facts, Villedieu appeals to the universality of human love and loving throughout time. She argued that if her words and dialogues “are not what they really spake, they are at least what they might” (1672: A2v). Likewise, she systematically obliterates tragedies, crimes and catastrophes that do not fall



into the range of matters acceptable for her annals, and suggests that the reader consult the “chronological history” (1672: 51) to learn about them. For example, at the end of the story “Don Pedro King of Castile” (Pedro the Cruel), she explains that “The rest of the Reign of Pedro de Castile is so repleat with Murders and Cruelties of all sorts, that I could not describe them without falling into a Tragical recitation, which I have always carefully avoided” (1672: 204). *The Annals of Love* thus generates a parodic, alternative kind of history, since the chronology is not determined by reigns or wars, but by the accumulation and sequence of courtship stories throughout time: “The Chronology of History not according exactly with the Chronology of Love, there are some years in which no amorous Intrigues are to be found, and there are others in which all the considerable Accidents are Love” (1672: 53). By doing so, Villedieu as implied author, as organiser of the level of the story, separates herself from the imposition of history to generate an alternative pattern, which perfectly suits her creative supplements to historical records, and to attain her chief purpose of pleasing the reader as the last word of the preface emphasises: “[...] the intention of the Author, who meant no more than their [the readers’] divertisement” (1672: A3v). Much of the readers’ pleasure arises from their necessary cooperation with the narrator in reconstructing the historical ‘adventures’ of love.

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### 3.2. Narrative Technique in *The Annals of Love*

On listing her sources, Villedieu also generates a spectrum of different degrees of faithfulness to history, from downright precision to sheer invention. This fluctuating relationship between historical sources and novelistic fabrications not only shows the flexibility of Villedieu’s faithfulness to fact, but also anticipates the intense activity expected from the reader — or the narratee, since there is little difference between the style and tone of the authorial voice of the preface and source list, and the narratorial voice of the stories. Indeed, as never before in English fiction (as far as we know), Villedieu’s narrator often addresses readers to suggest that they either look for further information or co-operate in the construction of the narrative world — both actions helping to invigorate the illusion of reality that characterises the *nouvelle*.

The equivalence between the implied author and the narrator is most evident in statements about the structure and design of the book’s stories and parts and its commentary on historical facts. Indications such as the following were common in high romances: “And now let us take our leave of our new Emperour and Empress, and take a fresh turn about the World, to see if we can find any new Adventure in that Age, that may be fit to close up our Annals of this year” (1672: 106). What is uncommon, and indeed innovative, even in *The Princess of*



*Monpensier*, are Villedieu's metanarrative comments on the features of her *Annals*, especially concerning the theme of courtship and the alternative pattern of organising history, while she frequently suggests the reader consult books to obtain a full depiction of the period, as if the imaginary scenes of the stories were—if not complementary—at least compatible with the chronicles: “I refer the Reader to the History itself to be informed of all the Occurrences. The Annals of Love observe only the more remarkable Passages, and represents them without any regular Order” (1672: 285). Remarks about historical facts, either to grade their rarity and incredibility,<sup>11</sup> or to express her views on them,<sup>12</sup> not only increase the narrator's storytelling competence, but also transport the elements of wonder to the level of plain reality. This new depiction of wonder in English fiction may explain why *The Annals of Love* prompted John Dryden to pen two comedies: “Nogaret and Mariana” inspired the character of Doralice in *Marriage à la Mode* (1673), while “Constance the Fair Nun” provided the serious plot of *The Assignment; or Love in a Nunnery* (1673) (Langbaine 1687: 6-7). Indeed, Villedieu's collection contains several stories that certainly contributed to the emergence of subgenres of fiction in addition to the *nouvelle historique* and *nouvelle galante* such as the oriental tale and the “Scandal Chronicle/Secret History” (Salzman 1985: 368), and to the dissemination of stories like that of Agnes de Castro (Cottegnies 2022: 52).

Restoration romance writers paid careful attention to their narrators' competence and reliability. The frame-stories are conventionally human-like focalisers that stand close to the main characters and thus report what is objectively perceived from an external perspective. Therefore, thoughts, emotions and feelings are only conveyed through action, gestures, dialogues, monologues, letters, poems, notes and even through psychosomatic symptoms like fever and other bodily reactions. The remote past events (i.e. individual stories) are told by homodiegetic narrators, either their protagonists or witnesses. Similarly, writers of life accounts also struggled to attain authenticity and, thus, credibility through technique and textual resources. The anonymous author of one of the biographies, *The Triumph of Truth* (1663), claims on the title page to offer an “exact and impartial relation” of Turner's life told by himself to “an intimate friend” before the execution. In addition to the different reports, the author also includes several letters with the sole purpose “to confirm the truth of these passages” (*The Triumph of Truth* 1663: 16). Those narrative voices of the English heroic romances and life accounts, though competent and likely honest, are not completely trustworthy since all I-narrators are unreliable.

The teller of *The Annals of Love* exemplifies the narrators that Susan Lanser has described as “virtually ‘raised’ to the ontological status of historical authors,



and this semireferential voice is presumed to be communicating the perspective—the imaginative and ideological consciousness— of the author” (1981: 155). The narrator is thus endowed with omniscience and other authorial privileges over the narrative world, an exceptional characteristic in the fiction of the early years of the Restoration outside satirical works or manifestly unlikely stories. Besides guiding the reader through the structure and organisation of the stories, the narrator often explores the characters’ interiority with verbs of mental activity, sometimes through several sentences<sup>13</sup> and other rhetorical strategies, such as euphemisms, in refusing to articulate what she only pretends to know: “the Marquess retired to his own Appartment, so confused and transported with rage, I cannot without crime repeat the flagitious designs he had at that time in his head” (1672: 246). Moreover, the narrator occasionally undertakes activities that, in theory, correspond to the implied author. For example, instead of summarising the content of a letter, she claims to have translated it from the Spanish (1672: 77), questions the capacity of history to convey absolute and impartial truth,<sup>14</sup> and discusses certain differences between the romance and her annals, while justifying part of her narration:

A Romantick Author would not fail to have made him conquer his Enemy, and given the Empire to the Exploits of his victorious Arm; and not without reason, for right being on his side, why should Fortune be against him? however he performed what a man of Courage could possibly do in defence of his Title; but in despite of his Bravery and diligence, he was wounded, defeated, and had much ado to escape the pursuit of his Enemies; I take the liberty notwithstanding to enlarge, and intersperse his Adventures with such Accidents as are least incompatible with the History. (1672: 382)

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More radically, the narrator does not hide the fictional nature of the annals. She openly names a character: “[...] his Astrologer (which we shall call Abdemelec)” (1672: 64) and, as the author informed about fictitious Hortensia in the preface, she also makes clear in the body text that she is producing the imaginary life of a son to Sultan Mehmed III, who died in infancy: “Jacaya, whose History I am writing” (1672: 380), and of yet others that, like the African woman who fell in love with King Sebastian of Portugal, has simply been invented:

I do not think the Reader requires further light in this Adventure, I have enlarged it much to what it is represented in my History, and I assure my self there are many who believe they have perused all the Memoires of that Age, to whom this Princess of Morocco is every where a stranger, except in the Annals of Love. (1672: 379)

The narrator often invokes relatively recent historical chronicles, memoirs and manuscripts. These registers both intensify the truthfulness of the story,<sup>15</sup> which is, thus, necessarily realistic, and pinpoint the ‘amorous intrigues’ that her annals



imaginatively shape. The success of this depends on the reader's willingness and ability to enliven the fictional appendixes to the historical records. When the narrator at times bridges the temporal gap between the present and the historical past, and reports as if she were witnessing the event,<sup>16</sup> it is the reader who sees and constructs, as Monika Fludernik has argued (2009: 7). The highly self-conscious narrator of *The Annals of Love* persists in demanding that the reader not only see and imagine,<sup>17</sup> but also think, understand and judge.<sup>18</sup>

#### 4. Conclusion

As part of the general objective of broadening the understanding of the transnational formation of the English novel in the transition from the romance to the *nouvelle*, this article has specifically drawn attention to Villedieu's claim to historicity and narrative technique in *The Annals of Love*, translated in 1672. This work was the first in Villedieu's collections of stories on historical characters and was followed by many others, including *The Loves of Sundry Philosophers and Other Great Men* (1673), *The Disorders of Love* (1677) and *The Unfortunates Heroes [Les Exilés]* (1679). In addition to the works of Scarron, La Fayette and Villedieu's own, *The Annals of Love* helped consolidate the *nouvelle* (*galante* and *historique*) and contributed to the emergence of other subgenres ("scandal chronicles" and "secret histories" among them), relegating the heroic romance to the past. Nonetheless, the masterpieces of the *nouvelle*, such as Saint Réal's *Don Carlos* (1674) and La Fayette's *The Princess of Cleves* (1678), were yet to come. Even if they can be broadly considered "historical romances about love and betrayal at various European courts", as Watkins has suggested (2016: 260), Villedieu conceived her "annals" as a distinct kind of fiction, self-consciously departing towards forms now associated with the novel.

Villedieu explains her treatment of history, both in the preface and in metanarrative comments in the body text. To this purpose, she provides a list of references with which the reader may contrast her sources with her stories of courtship and love affairs; but, while supporting their authenticity, she also grades their faithfulness, thus generating a spectrum from literal fidelity to complete invention (mostly in the last stories) and, in the process, creating multiple ways of attaining a pervasive sense of plausibility. Compared to the English high romances, which were often set in antiquity or in an unidentified past, her stories take place in post-classical times (from the tenth century to the early modern period); therefore, many protagonists were ancestors of seventeenth-century royal and aristocratic families. Villedieu explicitly concentrates on seduction and love, dismissing serious matters



of political concern. This method of complementing history, however, arouses a sense of moral ambiguity because her apparently objective narration stealthily betrays a rather personal mode of assessing her royal or noble characters and their lovers, inasmuch as her suggestions of admiration or contempt are disguised as a simple rendering of history. In this regard, though she avoids moral judgement or instruction, she embeds her criticism in *The Annals* itself and its picaresque elements, and in the plain style imitating the language of history to recount compromising and scandalous events, either facts or suppositions, especially about the monarchies of the Iberian Peninsula.

The influence of history prompts the rejection of certain features typical of heroic romances that distort reality (such as outpourings of passionate emotions and the excessive idealisation of the main characters). However, her annals do not adhere faithfully to the boundaries of the history-book truth (which is also questioned), but rather imaginatively complement it. In this respect, Villedieu patterns an alternative chronology determined by sequences of courtship affairs, assumes a historian-like role and puts into practice narrative strategies associated with omniscience. As part of the creation of an atmosphere of authenticity, she rejects the figure of the unreliable narrator (typical of both the English heroic romances and the biographies of criminals) to reinforce her narrator's privileges so as to make her equivalent to the implied author, not only by contriving and orchestrating the illusion of historical truth, but also by proposing that the reader (sometimes compellingly) co-operate with her in animating these illusions, albeit simultaneously —and paradoxically— being reminded of their imaginary nature. As has been illustrated, for example, the narrator claims to have consulted several books about particular stories, analyses the characters' minds (one of the most significant technical innovations), and is allowed to name secondary characters, or invent characters and full stories — especially in the last parts of the collection. By this point, Villedieu's readers must have been persuaded to both accept and enjoy her ingenious fabrications from history, which, as she emphasises in the last word of the preface, were ultimately devised for their "divertissement".

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## Notes

1. For the influence of translation on the English novel see McMurran (2010), especially chapter one: "Translation and the Modern Novel" (27-43).

2. "sont plus Galantes qu'Heroïques".

3. These are the stories, indicating the number, title, century, place, sovereign/ ruler involved and first page: 1-2 "The Countess of Castile" and "The Pilgrim" (10<sup>th</sup>, Castile, Count García Fernández, 1 and 4); 3 "Alfreda of England" (10<sup>th</sup>, England, King Edgar, 14); 4 "Don Garcias of Spain" (10<sup>th</sup>, Castile and France, Count García Fernández, 30); 5 "The Duke and Dutchess of Modena" (10<sup>th</sup>, Empire of the West [Aachen], Otho the Great, 37); 6 "The Three Princesses of Castile" (11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>, Leon, Galicia, Castile and Portugal, Alphonso VI of Leon and Castile, and his daughters Urraca, Theresia and Elvira, 53); 7 "Constance the Fair Nun" (12<sup>th</sup>, Rome, Frederick Barbarossa, 81); 8 "James King of Arragon" (13<sup>th</sup>, Aragon, James I, 106); 9 "The Fraticelles" (13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup>, Rome, Pope Boniface VIII, 113); 10 "Dulcinus King of Lombardy" (13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup>, Lombardy, Pope Clement V, 156); 11 "Nogaret and Mariana" (13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup>, France, Guillaume de Nogaret, statesman to Philip IV of France, 163); 12 "Don Pedro King of Castile" (14<sup>th</sup>, Castile, Peter I, 185); 13 "John Paleogolus Emperour of Greece" (14<sup>th</sup>, Byzantine Empire, John V, 205); 14 "Amedy Duke of Savoy" (15<sup>th</sup>, Savoy, Amadeus VIII, 223); 15 "Agnes de Castro" (14<sup>th</sup>, Portugal, Peter I, 251); 16 "The Countess of Pontievre" (15<sup>th</sup>, France, Charles VII/Louis XI, 262); 17 "Feliciane" (15<sup>th</sup>, Tunis/Castile, Count Arevalo/reign of Henry IV of Castile, 286); 18 "Jane Supposed of Castile" (15<sup>th</sup>, Castile, Joana of Castile "la Beltraneja", 310); 19 "The Persian Princes" (16<sup>th</sup>, Persia. Twin sons to Ismail I, 310); 20 "Don Sebastian King of Portugal" (16<sup>th</sup>, Kingdom of Marocco and Fez, Sebastian I, 355); 21 "Jacaya a Turkish Prince" (17<sup>th</sup>, Ottoman Empire, Constantinople, Greece, Poland and Florence, Mehmed III's son who is claimed to have survived, 380). For their plot summaries see Cuénin (1979).

4. "l'ancrage historique est beaucoup plus précis et devient nettement plus fiable".

5. "le ton est délibérément léger, fait pour plaire à un public complice, un public qui sait apprécier le jeu de la déformation historique et qui s'en amuse".

6. "véritable manifeste de la nouvelle historique".

7. On the list, the name "Ramire XVI. Roy d'Oviedo & IV. De Leon" in the French original (Verdier 1663: biiij/v), and "Raymire sixteenth King of Oviedo, and fourth of Leon" (1672: A3v) in the English version, may be confusing since there was no Ramiro XVI, but Ramiro III, which could be that 16<sup>th</sup> King of Oviedo and 4<sup>th</sup> of Leon. Though the author's name and the page are missing in the reference, the itemised source contains the political and warfare achievements of the Count of Castile García Fernández, after which Gilbert Saulnier du Verdier adds a brief report about his unhappy marriages — Villedieu's object of interest (1663: 269-270).

8. "le lecteur est invité à ne pas se fier excessivement aux sources et à s'en remettre à l'auteur, qui se présente moins comme un historien que comme un vrai romancier".

9. As Grande and Keller-Rahbé have remarked, "the autobiographemes take the form of haunting images and motifs, such as that of a clandestine marriage" (2006: 25, my translation) ("les autobiographèmes prennent la forme d'images et de motifs obsédants, que l'on songe par exemple à ceux du mariage clandestin").

10. René Démoris has also described the rise of *nouvelle historique* and *galante* in France as both a consequence and resistance to Louis XIV's absolutist monarchy (1983: 27).

11. "Let not the reader be surprised at this kind of Vow" (1672: 31); "Examples of



this kind are rare" (1672: 37); "His misfortune was too common to be incredible, but the circumstance with which it was accomplished, was beyond all belief" (1672: 78-79).

12. "And thus I have given you the Commencement of this year, not so eminent for Love, as it promised in appearance. These six persons had almost no sooner seen one another, but they were married, and no sooner married, but they differed, so that this place would be more proper for an Historical Abridgment, than the Introduction of an amorous Intrigue" (1672: 55); "and indeed I am of opinion" (1672: 68); "And I am apt to believe with many great Authors" (1672: 355).

13. "She thought that Circumstance would make the Emperour believe that she which spake to him was a Lady of that Rank, and so thinking her unworthy of his Company, leave her to her self, but it fell out quite contrary. Frederick indeed judged of her as she had presaged, but that opinion made his desires more violent: for finding them accompanied with hopes, from their conception, he gave himself wholly up to them without either fear or discretion; he considered Constance afresh, her shape, her air, the sound of her voice, the quickness of her Eye, and the Pleasantness of her Wit: All of them were as charming in appearance, as they were in effect: and flattering his imagination with a thousand fantastical Chimera's, he took his leave of her, the most enamoured Person in the World" (1672: 87).

14. "But there are few Memoires which attribute that to Constances Gallant, which History imputes to the Protector of the Antipope: and thus it is the great Affairs of the World are secretly carried on: They have all several faces, and we see nothing but as the partiality or ignorance of the Historian represents" (1672: 103).

15. The stories are replete with references to history such as "History has represented this Lady so beautiful, it will be needless in me to describe her" (1672: 23); "Margaret his Wife (called in History the Volupuous [sic]) [...]" (1672: 157).

16. "It was pleasant to see the terrour the poor Countess was in" (1672: 66); "It was a pretty piece of Grotesque to see this famous Fraticel [...]" (1672: 153).

17. "It is not necessary to insert how the fair Widow resented so foul an action. I should have exprest the affection she had for her Husband but weakly, if the Reader could not imagine the extream sorrow she conceived for his death" (1672: 51); "I suppose there is scarce any Reader but imagines it, without my description" (1672: 152).

18. "I leave it to the Reader to judge how much [...]" (1672: 49); "There is no Reader I suppose so ignorant, but he knows what the Spanish History reports of Leonora" (1672: 310).



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