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ILLUSION AND DISILLUSIONMENT

TRAVEL WRITING IN THE MODERN AGE

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Travel, Adventure, and Self-Fashioning: A Frenchman's Journey to New Orleans in 1729

Elizabeth C. Goldsmith

ON A COOL DAY in March of 1729, a young man stood on the docks of the French Atlantic port of Lorient, waiting to board a ship that would take him to a new post and a new life in the distant colony of Louisiana. Missionaries and soldiers were paying passengers, and familiar to the crews of transatlantic ships departing for the Americas from France. But Marc-Antoine Caillot was neither. He was a copy clerk, employed by the French Company of the Indies, being sent by his employer to serve on one of the many concessions that the powerful company held around the globe. Louisiana, in fact, was a colony that had been managed more by the Company of the Indies than by the French crown. Caillot's posting to Louisiana would run from July 1729 to May 1731, the year in which the Company handed control of the colony back to the French royal state.

A Company clerk sent to the Louisiana colony in 1729 would have had mixed feelings about the assignment. The sensational collapse of John Law's investment scheme in 1720 meant that Louisiana quickly had become one of the least desirable destinations for anyone interested in making a career in one of the French colonies.¹ By 1729, New Orleans and surrounding outposts had been put under a new administrative team from the Company of the Indies. Attention was turned toward finding a way of reaping profits that would persuade skeptical French businessmen to reinvest in the colony. Against considerable evidence to the contrary, reports were sent home of the suitability of the land around New Orleans for tobacco production. Company administrators, many of them new to the territory, drafted reports that ignored the historical tensions with Indian nations that occupied much of the land being converted to tobacco plantations. When Caillot arrived on the scene in July 1729, these tensions were again coming to a head.

Caillot's story is one that was only rediscovered in 2004, when his manuscript turned up at an auction in Montreal. It was purchased, carefully

researched, and edited by Erin Greenwald, and published in English under the title *A Company Man* by the Historic New Orleans Collection Museum and Library.² Caillot's narrative is an important addition to a small cluster of extant accounts, each quite distinct in tone and approach, written by French travelers to New Orleans in the early eighteenth century.³ Caillot, writing in a highly personal voice, is a narrator who composed his work with other writers in mind. He draws explicitly on literary models to construct his own traveling persona, and tries to keep himself attached to, and to promote, a particular idea of French identity in this early moment in the history of transatlantic travel. He narrates his voyage in a lively and playful style, seeming to take great pleasure in his writing, while also facing huge challenges trying to communicate his story to readers in a way that will be both honest and entertaining.

In his youth, Caillot's family was connected with the royal French household. His father was first footman at the Château de Meudon, residence of Louis XIV's oldest son. Marc-Antoine's siblings were eventually given positions in the royal household, while he was offered a clerkship in the Company of the Indies. Trained in the Company's Paris headquarters, he was posted to Louisiana at the age of twenty-one. After returning to France two years later, he was reassigned to the Indian Ocean headquarters of the Company of the East Indies, in Pondicherry. Caillot would stay in the service of the Company of the Indies until his death in 1758 in a shipwreck off the coast of India. By then he had built a successful career for himself, married a niece of a highly placed administrator in the Company, and become quite wealthy.⁴

Over one half of Caillot's account is the story of his voyage from Paris to New Orleans, first across France to the coast of Brittany and the port city of Lorient, from where he set sail for his Atlantic crossing on a ship called the *Durance*. He left Paris on February 19, 1729 and set sail from Lorient a month later, on March 16. His sea voyage to New Orleans took four months, with a stop in Saint Domingue (now Hispaniola, or Haiti), then across the Gulf of Mexico and up the Mississippi on a smaller boat.

The remainder of Caillot's narrative is an account of the Louisiana colony, descriptions of people, animals, plants, fish, food, customs, and above all conflicts between the colonists and the Natchez Indians. Aggravated by

2. Greenwald subsequently has published a detailed study of Caillot's narrative as illustrative of the history of the French Company of the Indies. See Greenwald 2016.

3. The principal works in this cluster are Le Page du Pratz 1758, Hachard 1728, and Dumont de Montigny 1753.

4. See Greenwald 2016, 153–60.

1. Law created France's first national bank, merged it with the conglomerate Mississippi Company, and encouraged massive reckless investment in company shares. See Murphy 1997.

a particularly ruthless French military commander – de Chépart – who had confiscated Natchez lands, these conflicts had been coming to a head in the months prior to the clerk's arrival. The tensions culminated in a war between the Natchez and the French that started in November of 1729, just six months after Caillot's arrival. Company resources were diverted to retaliation, civilian militias were formed, and Company employees, including Caillot, were recruited. Immediately after the French victory in 1731, and also following a fire that destroyed most of his possessions in the house where he had been living, Caillot requested a transfer. He left to return to France on May 4, 1731.

For over 200 years, this manuscript remained unknown to all but the very small audience who first read it. It was probably written, or at least completed in 1731, as Caillot was waiting in France to be re-posted after his return from Louisiana. At some point after that it was stored in either a Company or a private archive in France, and most certainly for some time it was archived in a Breton convent, because our first record of it dates to 1939, when it was brought to Canada by an Augustinian nun from a convent near Lorient. Purchased in 1940 by the Quebec provincial government, it was catalogued in archives of the Quebec Museum of Fine Arts and forgotten until 2004, when it was put up for auction.

It is likely that Caillot was familiar with some of the earlier accounts of French exploration in Louisiana and the Mississippi valley. In his own memoir he engages with the famous expeditions of Robert de La Salle and the many failed attempts to discover the mouth of the Mississippi river.⁵ These events were recent enough to inspire in him a certain pride as his own boat headed up the river, though he acknowledged continually how difficult the navigation was. He included, among the many illustrations he produced for his manuscript, a detailed map of the Mississippi at its point of entry into the waters of the Gulf of Mexico, and added labels describing precisely how one had to navigate around the islands in order to proceed upriver. Maps are an important element in his narrative. The manuscript includes maps of the city of New Orleans and several of the islands, forts, and settlements in southern Louisiana.

But for Caillot, the experience of the voyage was at least as important as the destination. While his illustrations and maps are drawn with a care for precise detail and accuracy, they also are placed in the narrative to help capture his own subjective experience of the events that he describes in the text. He is his own illustrator – he produced both the manuscript text and the nu-

5. An account of La Salle's 1687 expedition, during which he was murdered by some of his own men, was published in France by a member of the expedition, and widely circulated. See Joutel 1713.

merous watercolors that accompany it. It was extremely rare for the author of a travel account also to be the artist who illustrated it. In fact, in France, travel narratives in Caillot's time did not typically include illustrations at all, and when they did, they were often borrowed from other accounts.⁶ His bold full-page watercolors stand out all the more in this respect.

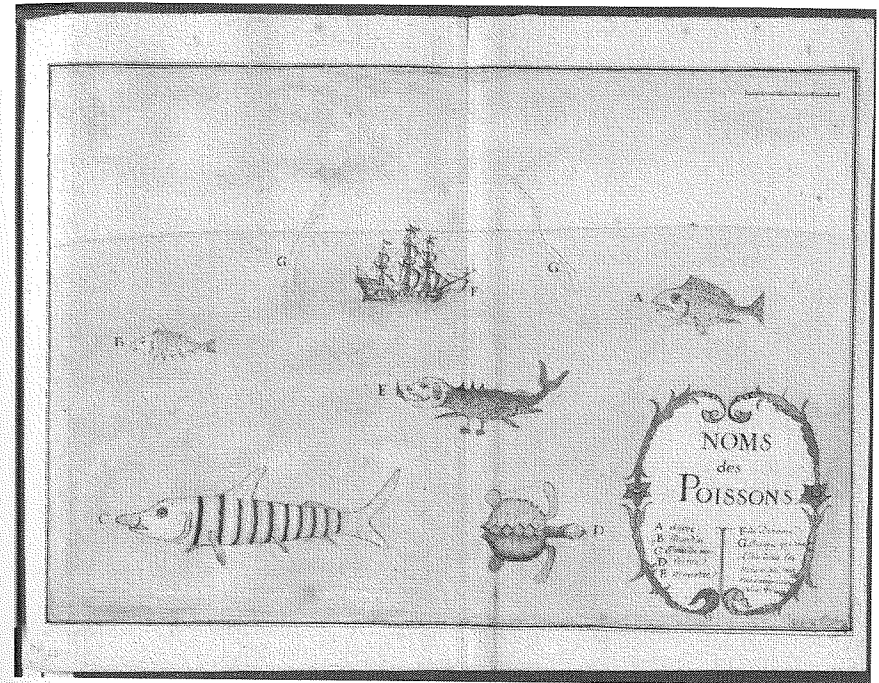


Fig. 1. "Noms des Poissons." The Historic New Orleans Collection, acc. no. 2005.0011 plate 17

In an illustration of new varieties of fish encountered on the sea voyage he includes a tiny image of his ship, looking vulnerable, placed between two waterspouts in the background. In the foreground one of the fish is labeled simply *monstre* (see Figure 1). His map of New Orleans evokes a familiar European space – it shows a city laid out on a grid, with a busy port area in the foreground. Illustrations of the colonial outposts in the wilderness, by contrast, show a few tiny structures and cultivated gardens surrounded by a huge undifferentiated forested area that takes up almost all of the space in the illustration. His most detailed drawings are of the two ships on which

6. On illustration practices in early French travel narratives and comparison with Portuguese and Dutch accounts, see Requemora-Gros 2012, 388–407.

he traveled. The *Durance*, which carried him to Louisiana, looks severe and technical, floating on a flat sea, with sails down. The *Durance* illustration contrasts dramatically with Caillot's depiction of the ship he finally boarded to take him home. The *Saint Louis* is drawn merrily bobbing through the waves in full sail. As a decorative touch, he adds an imaginary gun emitting a cloud of smoke in a farewell salute (Figure 2).

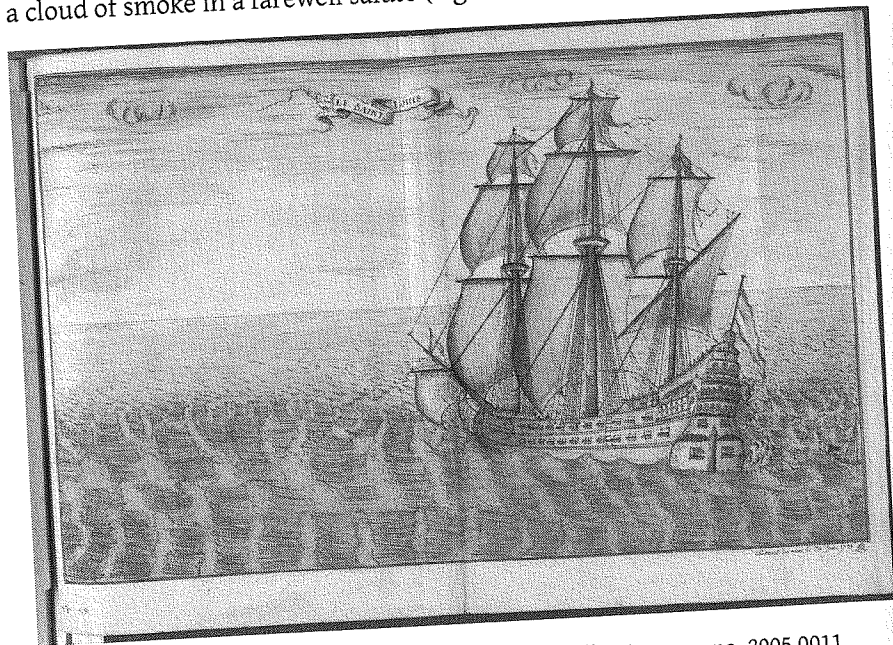


Fig. 2. "Le Saint Louis." The Historic New Orleans Collection, acc. no. 2005.0011 plate 21

Unlike the accounts produced by earlier French travelers to the Mississippi Delta, like La Salle and Henri Joutel, Caillot's text does not invoke collaborators to authenticate and fill out his story. He is the mapmaker, the draftsman, the narrator and the principal player in the story he tells. But, also in contrast to many authors of travel accounts in his time, he does not seem to be arguing a particular political or business position. He is not defending his own role in the colonial milieu against calumny or misrepresentation by others. He makes no legalistic gestures toward documentary evidence to support his reports of historical events. Nor does he quote from letters, contracts, or interviews with officials.⁷ Caillot's project is avowedly

7. The accuracy of Caillot's account of historical events is possible to verify, however, and has been thoroughly annotated by Erin Greenwald in her edition of the narrative.

personal, written after his return home, from notes he took on the voyage and, he says, for the entertainment of a small circle of friends. As far as we know, he never tried to publish it.

In setting out to write the story of his voyage, Caillot's first gesture is to apologize for his poor style, and to claim that he is telling the simple truth. He sets himself up, as early modern memoir writers often do, as a reluctant writer, responding to the urging of friends who have already heard him tell parts of his story. Here is his prologue:

It having been proposed to me to share with you, in an abridged form, a brief account of the particulars of my journey to New France, I feel I must warn you about the bad style of the author before carrying this to fruition. I must also advise you about faults that I may have committed here due to my lack of ability. But, on the other hand, those who will read this account will do me honor to give credence to it. To my knowledge I have not said anything untrue. Indeed, I am far from using certain exaggerated digressions, as many historians have done in their works, for the purpose of ornamentation and to attract to themselves the applause of a few people who are infatuated with fable.⁸

So, we are meant to understand that he was a traveler neither "infatuated with fable" nor catering to readers who are, and who did not even initially set out to write his travels. We don't know precisely what kind of written record he may have kept of his voyage as it was happening. But he was a record keeper by training – a copy clerk, after all, and his drawings are those of a skilled draftsman – maps, views of cities and settlements, watercolors of the ships he traveled on, and some of the more unusual fish he observed. But when he remembers his travels and writes them as remembered, he also draws on literary models for his own voice and actions, choosing to refer to himself as a kind of picaresque hero, a "knight errant," like Don Quixote, he says, that most famous of infatuated fabulists.⁹

Caillot's story begins in Paris. He cites the date of his departure (February 19, 1729), and describes his sadness at leaving both the place and his family

8. Caillot 2013, 1. I have deviated from the published translation and rendered Caillot's phrase "infatués par la fable" as "infatuated with fable" and not "infatuated with their fable".

9. Like the missionaries discussed by Eugenio Menegon in this volume, Marc-Antoine Caillot left on his voyage from the port of Lorient, on a ship owned by the French Company of the Indies. Caillot's styling of himself as a gallant adventurer, however, is in marked contrast to the approach to travel taken by the missionaries, who worked diligently in advance to firm up their social networks and prepare themselves for the material conditions of shipboard life, as Menegon outlines.

and friends there. But he immediately reports that his traveling companions were able to convince him of the importance of changing his somber mood if he wanted to survive "even more than a quarter of the way."¹⁰ So he starts by embracing what he calls the "charming strategy of availing myself of some Bacchic liquor." From that moment on, he sustains his forward momentum by relentlessly seeking pleasure and diversion in even the most challenging moments of his travels. Aware that this survival strategy involves a certain amount of self-delusion as well as an artificially produced altered state of mind, he compares himself to Don Quixote:

the eagerness I had to leave the place where I thought I had left all my sorrow made me urge my horse forward with such violence that one of its front feet slipped, causing me to fly over his head, harnessed pretty much like Don Quixote, except, instead of a lance, I had my musket at hand leaning against the saddlebow and my hunting horn around me. They both were quite banged up, for as a result my musket was broken in half from the fall. This is how I left.¹¹

And so chevalier Caillot sets out on his adventures, like Don Quixote with his real weapon broken, but equipped with a musical instrument that he will produce on numerous occasions during his voyage to help him in his effort to cultivate beauty and pleasure in the face of adversity. Like Don Quixote, Caillot seems to believe that "where music is, no evil thing can be."¹² Once arrived in Louisiana, he will continue his practice of introducing music into the wilderness, retreating to the woods to play his hunting horn when he feels particularly lost.

His identification with Don Quixote is specifically mentioned again when during the transatlantic crossing his ship encounters what they fear to be a pirate ship, and the men on board grab all the weapons they can find: "there had never been any knights errant from the time of Don Quixote better armed than we were."¹³ Later, when he arrives at the house of a Parisian settler on the Mississippi it seems to him to be an enchanted palace, complete with an elegant feast that makes his heart beat faster, he writes, "like Sancho Panza's did, when by chance Don Quixote found himself at a country wedding and his faithful squire filled his stomach for the time that he had been obliged to fast."¹⁴

Don Quixote is only used loosely as a model here, but it is clearly a way for

10. Caillot 2013, 2.

11. Caillot 2013, 2.

12. Istel and Baker 1927, 434.

13. Caillot 2013, 26.

14. Caillot 2013, 73.

Caillot to think about and present a literary image of himself to his readers. Drawing on the familiar figures of the knight and his servant, the traveling clerk presents himself as both noble and base, idealizing and earthy, heroic and cowardly. Caillot's approach to his adventures mimics Don Quixote's in several respects. He pays court to women who in reality are not at all ideal. He imagines a house as a palace, a wedding party as a court feast, a hostess as a princess, an Indian boy as a classical Cupid. But as narrator of his own adventure, he presents himself as an actor and takes a playful, ironic distance from his own follies. In this respect, he is closer to another popular figure from legend and literature, and one who figures prominently in Caillot's dramatic imagination, namely his hero, Don Juan, always the actor, who views existence and adventure as an endless masquerade.

Caillot may well have become familiar with both Don Quixote and Don Juan through one of the staged versions of their stories, particularly popular in France. In the case of Don Quixote, Caillot may also have encountered the story through the many printed illustrations that circulated independently of the novel.¹⁵ His narrative is theatrical and visual. He refers to his fondness for theater and masquerade on numerous occasions, including one early on in the text where, still en route to the port city where he was scheduled to depart, he attends productions of two plays by Molière – *The Imaginary Invalid* and *Don Juan*. This latter reference is particularly interesting, since Molière's play focused on the themes of loss of identity and how outward signs on the body, such as costume and demeanor, can be manipulated to destabilize traditional hierarchies and serve personal ambition. Molière's Don Juan is very preoccupied with travel, conquest, and masquerade. Like Caillot, he has wandered far from home in an unfamiliar landscape. His path across this landscape is plotted in a series of seduction scenes. Don Juan is a traveler and a conqueror. He compares himself to Alexander the Great and peppers his speeches with metaphors of colonial conquest and New World discovery to describe his amorous exploits:

There's nothing sweeter than overcoming the resistance of an attractive woman, and I bring to that enterprise the ambition of a conquering general, who moves on forever from victory to victory, and will set no limit to his longings. Nothing can withstand the impetuosity of my desires: I feel my heart capable of loving all the earth; and like Alexander, I wish that there were still more worlds in which to wage my amorous campaigns.¹⁶

15. On popular versions of Don Quixote in France, Bardon 1931; Showalter 1972, 1136–44; and Roussillon.

16. *Don Juan*, I, 2.

Don Juan the conqueror of women is a model for Marc-Antoine Caillot. Although he sees himself as a playful imitator of the master as he follows in the footsteps of the European colonizers of New France, Caillot wants to be what the *galant* novels of his day termed a "gentle conqueror," substituting seduction for violence and playful masquerade for deception and treachery.¹⁷

It is noteworthy, too, that Caillot is traveling in Carnival season, something that he mentions several times at the outset, when he and a traveling companion "go masking to pass the time" in the same town where they attended the production of *The Imaginary Invalid*, and again later when they meet two young women who invite them to a masked ball.¹⁸ The most detailed descriptions of life on board the ship are his explanations of rituals involving disguise and masquerade – the most dramatic being the "baptism of the tropics" initiation ceremony that passengers were forced to undergo when the ship crossed the Tropic of Cancer. This ritual involved all of Caillot's favorite activities – costuming, music, parade, and surprise. He is fascinated and readily joins in the masquerade, lending his hunting horn to the "bizarre symphony," and carefully reporting every detail of the ceremony that culminated with each passenger being dunked in a tub of water on deck.¹⁹ The crew members performing this rite of passage are heavily painted and look fierce. They frighten their victims. But several times Caillot points out that his anxiety about what will happen to him is relieved by his ability to laugh – especially when the ritual was ended.²⁰

Caillot's choice of literary models for his narrative is in keeping with his determination to write his travels in a burlesque vein, one that had become quite popular in real and fictional stories of travel and adventure by the early eighteenth century.²¹ Laughter, in general, occupies a prominent place in seventeenth-century French travel narratives. It can function to provide a reassuring distance between the narrator and the newness of his experiences. Humorous and often self-deprecating anecdotes of romantic encounters abroad were popular digressions in travel accounts and were thought to be almost a requirement if the author hoped to retain the attention of readers.²²

17. On this "modern" heroic figure in French novels of the period, see Welch 2012 and Welch 2011, especially Ch. 5.

18. Caillot 2013, 8, 13.

19. Caillot 2013, 29–34.

20. See Menegon's essay in this volume, for another reference to this shipboard ritual. Unlike young Caillot, the missionaries en route to China did not enter into the illusion of what they called the "ridiculous masquerade."

21. This point is documented in Bertrand 2007.

22. On this point see Requemora-Gros 2012, 183–88 and 480–86.

Travel writers like Challe, Chapelle and Bachaumont, Regnard, Dassoucy, Courcelles and her friends Hortense and Marie Mancini, use laughter and irony to make light of their difficulties on the road. Readers were meant to be entertained and impressed by the author's capacity to sustain this tone in the most challenging of circumstances.²³

In the first part of his narrative, while he is still in France and then while he is on the boat taking him to Louisiana, Caillot describes himself in a kind of rehearsal mode. Each place he stops en route to the Breton coast brings unfamiliar experiences and he describes how he responds to these, emphasizing his own resilience in the face of adversity, especially with the help of laughter and pleasure seeking, and always trying to keep company with "pleasant" people. He notes his successes with the ladies he meets, his good luck at receiving invitations from the best society in the towns where he stays, and he is "charmed" when he arrives at the port city of Lorient and meets some young women who are embarking on the same boat on which he is scheduled to leave. He describes his transatlantic crossing as a series of lighthearted adventures, the more unpleasant among them (such as seasickness, storms, threat of pirates and shipwreck, disgusting food) quickly finding happy resolutions, through Caillot's obstinate good nature and consistently playful response to unwelcome events. On board the ship his priority is always to be "gallant" in the face of adversity, attending to the female passengers whenever they are frightened by storms or the threat of pirates, enthusiastically entering into the more playful rituals of shipboard life, and keeping his own fears in check, always ready with an ironic quip when others are fainting, panicked or desperately praying for the ship's salvation.²⁴ He conducts himself like his hero Don Juan, undertaking an elaborate fake courtship of one of the more gullible young female passengers. This episode he describes as a "farce," a theatrical exercise that gives him the opportunity to practice using the language of love (he includes some of his own flowery speeches), a role that he says he played like an amateur: "I did the best I could, like a man with little experience in that language."²⁵ When he makes his verbal overtures to the lady, he has a friend hide behind a door as an audience observer, and he describes himself using phrases that evoke Don Quixote:

23. See Goldsmith 2007.

24. In using the term "gallant" (Fr. *galant*) I am referring to a worldview and aesthetic style cultivated among the French elite in Caillot's time. It is characterized by an outward display of casual sophistication and a "modern" interest in forms of art evoking idyllic worlds where the inhabitants cultivate refinement. For studies of the *style galant* in literature, see Viala 2008 and Denis 2001. For a summary, see Goldsmith 2015.

25. Caillot 2013, 36.

As for myself, I went in with a very sad countenance, and I sat in one of the corners of the cabin. She did not hesitate at all to come over to me and ask me the reason for my sorrow, and why I was so lost in thought, and whether I should not be overcome with joy, since we were destined for one another. At these words I let out a long sigh that almost turned into a huge burst of laughter, but miraculously I kept it in.²⁶

Like Don Quixote, Caillot rehearses courtship methods on a lady who in reality is not beautiful. But unlike the "knight of the sad countenance", he knows what he is doing, and has an ironic sense of himself.

By the time the *Durance* made its first landing after crossing the Atlantic, supplies of food and water had run dangerously low. The atmosphere among the crew and passengers was anything but festive or playful. But as soon as land was sighted and the ship headed for the provisioning post of Saint Louis on the island of Saint Domingue, Caillot's gallant good humor – and good fortune – returned. "I took the course of a gentleman and amused myself by fishing through one of the artillery room's portholes, where I caught eight hundred little fish that were good for frying," he writes.²⁷ With the approach of his destination, though, Caillot shifts the tone of his narrative. His account as a whole is divided in two quite distinct parts. The first is the story of his travel adventures punctuated by romantic escapades and episodes involving trickery and surprise. The second part starts after he has settled in Louisiana and he turns to the description of events, places, and people who would presumably be unfamiliar to his readers in France. In between, as the ship makes temporary landing on the island of Hispaniola, Caillot and his comrades have some escapades that get them into trouble. They manage to return safely to the ship by means of bribes, and favors from sympathetic ladies. To mark their gratitude the group puts on a performance, moving among the anchored ships and then around the fort as though enveloping the traveling community in a protective web of music and beauty:

Then we went from ship to ship the rest of the night, with an orchestra consisting of four violins, bagpipes, a viol, two recorders, a transverse flute, a tromba marina, a tabor, and my hunting horn. All these diverse instruments created quite a pleasant music because of the echoes, which, the further we went away from the harbor, the more they rang out. The sea, being very calm, favored us a great deal.

26. Caillot 2013, 39.

27. Caillot 2013, 48.

We retired about four o'clock in the morning after making a circuit around the fort with all of our instruments.²⁸

When, more than a hundred pages into his manuscript, Caillot finally undertakes a description of Louisiana, he seems to become more of an ethnographer. First he describes Indian customs, clothing and other matters, but he still tries to interject the light, ironic tone of a young sophisticate and to present glimpses of Indian life as exotic performance, with himself as sophisticated viewer. He describes Indian dances as comical, like the Breton dances he had observed in France just before leaving. He says that during the calumet or peace pipe ritual the Indians sit like monkeys, also making him laugh. His comparison of Indian boys carrying bows and arrows to "little Cupids in the woods" is suggestive of a landscape painting by Poussin or Claude Lorrain, with small classical figures populating a contemporary countryside.²⁹

But he moves back and forth between this slightly disdainful distance and something closer to the urgent style of an early gazette writer, occasionally with startling results. By the time the manuscript was completed the French population back home had learned about the violent confrontation between the French settlers in Louisiana and the Natchez Indians.³⁰ In Caillot's account, the most striking of his shifts between a playful, *galant* tone and the more serious tone of a journalist comes in the middle of his account of the war with the Natchez. After a shocking description of the torture and mayhem of the first Natchez raid on the colonists, he abruptly changes the subject, as though taking flight into a fantasy of Old World pleasures.

We were already quite far along in the Carnival season without having had the least bit of fun or entertainment, which made me miss France a great deal.... I went to the office, where I found my associates, who were bored to death. I proposed to them that we form a party of maskers and go to Bayou Saint John, where I knew that a lady friend of my friends was marrying off one of her daughters.... I did not delay in assembling a party,... When we were ready and just about to leave, we saw someone with a violin come in, and I engaged him to come with us ... by another stroke of luck, someone with an oboe, who was looking for the violin, came in to take the violin player away with him, but it happened the other way around, [and] ... they stayed. I

28. Caillot 2013, 60–61.

29. Caillot 2013, 111.

30. At least one internal reference in the text (see p. 90) suggests that the manuscript was completed close to 1731.

had them play while waiting for us to get ready to leave.... we ended up with eleven in our party. Some were in red clothing, as Amazons, others in clothes trimmed with braid, others [dressed] as women. As for myself, I was dressed as a shepherdess in white. I had a corset of white dimity, a muslin skirt, a large pannier, right down to the chemise, along with plenty of beauty marks too. I had my husband, who was the Marquis de Carnaval; he had a suit trimmed with gold braid on all the seams. Our postilion went in front, accompanied by eight actual Negro slaves, who each carried a flambeau to light our way.³¹

The masquerade and festivities that follow become a kind of escape back to France, or introduction of a French ritual into the violent Louisiana landscape (this may be the first description we have of New Orleans Mardi Gras).³² In terms of the narrative style, it is an abrupt and elaborate return to his playful tone. There is a description of the wedding party with seduction scenes, drawing on the conventional vocabulary of romance based on metaphors of captivity, enslavement, assault, and suffering to describe how he was "wounded" by falling in love with one of the young women at the ball. It is a scenario evocative of French novels, complete with girls who turn out to be boarders in a nearby convent pursued by young gentlemen who vie for their attention, and winding down with the male partygoers comparing notes and concluding "There was not a single one of us who had not made different conquests."³³ Then, just as suddenly as it began, the interlude ends: "The hour of our departure finally arrived, and we said good-bye to the lovely company and to the bride and groom. We left around five-thirty in the morning, lamenting the end of the Carnival days. This is how I spent them in the land of Mississippi; now let us return to the narrative of the Indian war."³⁴

What can we make of this unharmonious blend of narrative tones that Caillot assumes in the story of his adventures that he has left us? Any reader will be struck by the disruption that occurs once he encounters the "new world" of Louisiana. Had he originally been hoping or intending to be able to experience and later report his voyage in the literary mode of Don Quixote or Don Juan? Was he trying to sustain the mood that he had so energetically cultivated since his first departure from home, when he invokes

31. Caillot 2013, 134–35.

32. For an excellent analysis of French reaction to the Natchez attack and the ways in which Caillot's description conveys the mindset of the colonists, see White 2013.

33. Caillot 2013, 139.

34. Caillot 2013, 141.

a kind of fairy-tale account of his escapades on the last day of Carnival? When Caillot does abruptly abandon the mode of romance and burlesque to turn to descriptions that seem more "realistic," is it safe to assume that his new voice is one in which the novelistic imagination has disappeared altogether? Has Caillot the self-described actor and dreamer suddenly become Caillot the modern ethnographer, gazetteer, and naturalist? In his descriptions of the horrors of war, torture, and massacre, he invokes no literary precursors and includes only one illustration, a tiny drawing inserted in the manuscript, of a captured Indian woman being tortured. His language in these descriptions is short on metaphor and uncharacteristically devoid of personal commentary. Other accounts of the French wars with the Natchez, written by Caillot's contemporaries, have shown just how inventive (and illustrated) these reports could be.³⁵ At the end of Caillot's description of the bloody conflicts between the French and the Natchez, his narrative returns to a more impressionistic tone. He observes, as though to reassure himself and his readers, that the Tunica Indian chief, who had allied his warriors with the French, had been transformed almost into a Frenchman, wearing French clothes and embracing Christianity. "This chief has been baptized," he writes, "and happily is almost Frenchified."³⁶

When Caillot does finally get on a boat to return to France, he also describes that moment as one enabling him to return to the pursuit of pleasure and a state of happiness: "I left New Orleans on April 1 in the year 1731, as happy to the same degree as I had been sad upon arriving there."³⁷ Before leaving he had made a special appeal to be allowed to return home, citing homesickness – an ailment that was treated in his time as a physical malady, even potentially fatal.³⁸ The first ship he boards runs aground on a sandbar off the coast, but the passengers escape and return to shore. Finally, he manages to book passage on another ship that would take him home. His illustration of this vessel, the *Saint Louis*, seems to embody his own sense of relief and renewed playful exuberance.

Caillot's story raises some interesting questions about travel and the history of travel narrative in this early period just before the advent of tour-

35. On this point see Sayre 2002. For a thorough overview of reporting on the events see Balvay 2008.

36. Caillot 2013, 144.

37. Caillot 2013, 156.

38. The word 'homesick' entered the English language sometime in the eighteenth century. In French the phrase is 'mal du pays,' and before the nineteenth century, as in Caillot's text, the phrase to indicate homesickness was 'maladie du pays,' indicating something closer to physical sickness. Until the twentieth century, the disease of homesickness was thought to be potentially fatal. For a history see Matt 2014.

ism. What are the limits of the French *galant* mode, which a young writer like Caillot seems so determined to carry with him, and keep with him, on his voyage to the borderlands of the French colonial territories? And what literary models – more hidden than Don Quixote and Don Juan in Caillot's account – might persist, or be in the process of being invented, in travelers' descriptions of even the most violent and historically verifiable encounters with Indian nations and their cultures? In an essay on the survival of romance in the age of realism, Nicholas Paige has shown how Don Quixote worked as a model for French romance writers at the end of the seventeenth century. Rather than discouraging readers from seeing themselves in the romance plot, Cervantes had the opposite effect.³⁹ Caillot's use of Don Quixote and Don Juan as models for his own self-fashioning is similar. In Caillot's design of his own adventures, to borrow Paige's phrase, "the real world does not take the place of romance; it is rather romance that colonizes the real world."⁴⁰ In the context of French travel to the colonies, this brings up a more general question: why does Caillot cling to the *galant* tone even in the most incongruous of circumstances? His text seems to demonstrate how the entire colonial project needed its illusions.

The filter of romance and *galanterie* would continue to operate as a reassuring artistic device in representations of indigenous colonized peoples throughout the eighteenth century. In 1735 the composer Jean-Philippe Rameau produced an opera titled *Les Indes galantes*, which included a ballet entrée called *Les Sauvages*. It takes place in a Louisiana forest after the defeat of the Indians by Franco-Spanish troops, and enacts a love story involving an Indian "prince" and a "princess" who is also courted by two soldiers, French and Spanish. The Indian prince wins the lady while the libretto and dancing celebrate a new peace between the Europeans and the Indians. Sixty years later, in his novel eulogizing the Natchez Indians, Chateaubriand would establish the basis for subsequent romantic depictions, in literature and painting, of life in the American wilderness.⁴¹

In 1730, Caillot is of a young generation of French travelers to America who make the trip not to explore or conquer or flee persecution or even to settle permanently in a foreign land. He makes his way to the new periphery of France to put in some time and advance his career interests within an established business institution – the Company of the Indies. He is also a voyager with an acute sense of carrying with him abroad a cultural identity

39. Paige 2011, ch. 2.

40. Paige 2011, 77.

41. See Sayre 2002, 401–7. Chateaubriand wrote *Les Natchez* in the 1790s, after his travels in America, although it was not published until 1827.

that is French. Caught up in his adventure, he tries to sustain and cultivate a playful, ironic, and protective distance from the foreignness of his experiences. He rehearses this strategy from the moment he leaves Paris. He tries to hold on to his ties to French culture and contribute to its introduction and assimilation by the New France that is Louisiana. The fact that he does not quite manage to do so – the inevitability of his disillusionment – is perhaps the most interesting feature of his account.

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