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The Illustrious Adventuresses

Jane M. Bergeron

University of Notre Dame Australia, jbergeron@nd.edu.au

Carrie Ann Quinn

University of Massachusetts Boston

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THE ILLUSTRIOUS ADVENTURESSES

A theatrical exploration of the 'other voice' in early modern Europe

In the seventeenth century, Marie and Hortense Mancini broke all sexual and culturally established taboos by abandoning their aristocratic husbands and travelling unchaperoned throughout Europe. These two Italian-born women's adventures were well documented by others and even more shockingly, the sisters wrote and published their memoirs; "to defend ourselves against calumny" as Hortense writes in her opening paragraph.

We are creating a play that will re-frame the historical narrative of the Mancini sisters' journey as a poetic, evocative, and thought-provoking piece of original devised theatre that addresses contemporary feminist issues.

Historical Research: the 'Other Voice'

The number one issue that held women back from having a 'voice' in early modern Europe was the appearance of Chastity. The whole integrity of the aristocratic family bloodline depended on her appearing chaste. Excessive speech and too much knowledge was a sign of un-chastity that prevented women from writing and speaking publicly. Hortense's memoir was the first piece of life writing to be published by a European woman under her own name in her lifetime. Marie's memoir was published two years later. By taking their private life stories into the public sphere the Mancini sisters asserted their right to defend their reputations at a time when the 'other voice' was typically silenced.

For the past six months, on opposite sides of the globe, we have been independently researching the Mancini sisters' lives, gathering primary and secondary sources and exploring our own impulsive responses to these sources. Through discussions with one another via email we have developed a back-story to give us a starting point from which to begin the devising process. The back-story is based on facts corroborated by first-hand accounts (written correspondence, court chronicles and published memoirs), interwoven with second and third hand accounts (court gossip, political pamphlets, hearsay, rumours, and perhaps downright lies) translated from French, Spanish and Italian.

Historical Background

These are the key plot moments that have given us our starting point:

- (Slide: Marie & Hortense)

Marie & Hortense Mancini



were nieces of the richest and most powerful man in the French Court - Cardinal Mazarin, advisor to the young King Louis XIV. (Slide: the Cardinal)



Cardinal Mazarin

- Cardinal Mazarin brings Marie & Hortense (ages 14 and 7) from Italy to the French court to secure husbands. He makes his favourite niece, Hortense, heiress to his vast fortune.
- Marie (Slide) and Louis (Slide) are playmates and gradually fall in love in their teens, but are not allowed to marry.



Marie as a young lady



Young Louis XIV

- Louis is betrothed to the Spanish Infanta, and Marie is exiled to a fortress 500 kilometers away in Brouage. Louis sends her love letters and gifts (Slide: Marie w/pearls), including a pearl necklace that she wears all her life.



Marie Mancini

Her uncle, the Cardinal forbids them to continue their correspondence (Slide Quote).

*Marie to her uncle, the Cardinal:
Sept 3, 1659*

“Monseigneur, I think that now Your Eminence will have occasion to be pleased with me for the way I mean to behave. I have begged the king to agree that I should no longer write to him and to have the goodness, for his part, to do the same.”

They are both heartbroken.

- Marie (age 22) is immediately married off (Slide: Colonna) to Lorenzo Onofrio Colonna, Grand Constable of the kingdom of Naples, an Italian Prince and Duke of many territories



Lorenzo Colonna, Prince, Duke

and is sent to live with him in Italy.

- Fifteen year old Hortense (Slide: young Hortense), thoroughly enjoying the amusements & pleasures of court life, becomes friendly with the future King Charles II of England (age 23) while he is in exile at the French court (Slide: young Charles)



Hortense as a young lady



Young Charles II

and he becomes smitten with her, but Charles' marriage proposal is rejected by her uncle.

Hortense is then given in marriage to a clinically mad-mentally unstable French aristocrat, Armand-Charles (Slide: Duc Mazarin), who had been besotted with her since she was 9 and he was 21.



Armand

- Armand was emotionally and psychologically abusive, a religious zealot, and squandered Hortense's money. She bore him 4 children by the age of 20 (Slide:Hortense)



Hortense Mancini

- and upon discovering that he had stolen all her jewels, she demanded a separation, which was granted as long as she was confined to a convent.
- Hortense planned a clandestine escape and fled to her sister Marie in Italy. Over the next few years she would go in and out of convents, unhappy with confinement, asking for Marie's help to escape on numerous occasions.
 - (Slide: Marie dangling pearls) Marie, after 3 children, a cheating husband and with dreams of returning to the French court under Louis' protection (Slide: older Louis)



King Louis XIV of France

runs away from her husband as well, and the two sisters escape to France with their maid, Nanon, and petition the French court for protection from their husbands, demanding access to their fortunes and legal separations. Louis sends Marie a small pension, but she is not invited back to Court. All of which are denied.

(Slide: Quote)

From Mme de Scudery to Bussy-Rabutin. August 1672
(In a letter she wrote about Marie)

“The king sent her ten thousand pistoles...he let her know that he could not see her. She replied wittily to M. de Crequy that she had certainly heard that people gave ladies money in order to see them, but never in order not to see them.”

- Both husbands continue to send search parties and traps for the sisters, in desperate attempts to force their return.
- At this point their travels have become widely known. They have become infamous, scandalous - and rumors and gossip about their cross-dressing, lesbian affairs and lovers spread throughout France and Italy (Slide: Hortense).



Hortense Mancini

Their names became generic terms for women who leave their husbands.

- Hortense writes her memoirs in response to a fictional book published about her life. A year later, Marie writes her memoirs, after a “fake” memoir is published. In their pursuit of freedom of movement, their intention in writing their memoirs was to set the record straight, salvage their reputations, and to provoke the courts to hear their legal arguments.

- The women continue to travel together and separately - Hortense depending on various royal admirers to support her, ends up in the English court where, ironically (Slide: older Charles), she becomes the mistress of King Charles II.



King Charles II of England

- (Slide: Marie dangling pearls/Hortense in gold dress).

Marie and Hortense



- Marie spends much of her time in convents or in the protection of her various admirers.
- Hortense hosts a Parisian literary salon in London where she entertains intellectuals, writers and artists.
- Both women struggle financially all their lives, fighting their husbands in legal battles until the day they die.

Devising the Script

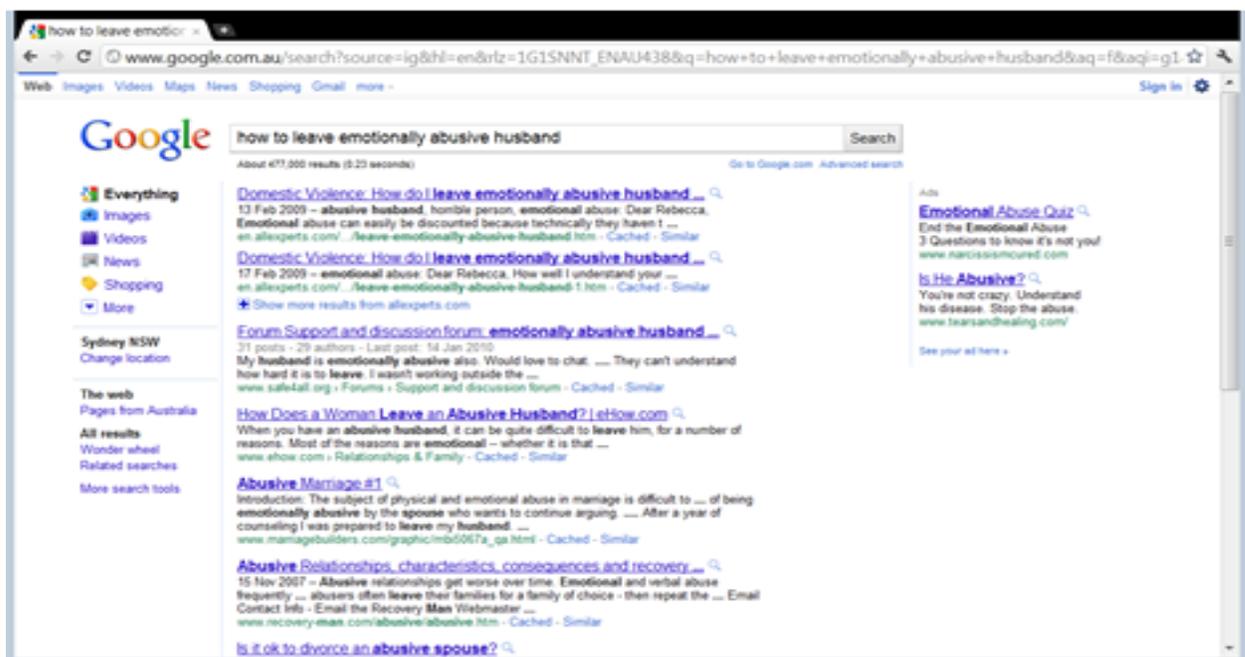
Some academics see a difference between male and female playwriting style. The traditional Aristotelian linear plot structure in which events move in a cause-and-effect progression towards a climax is considered to be more 'male'. In devising, instead of plot, the focus is on the exploration of a thematic idea and the journey is metaphoric or symbolic rather than event-driven. The audience is the constructor of meaning, which like poetry, is often open to individual interpretations. This less linear structure is often considered to be more 'feminine'. To explore the 'other voice' in a theatrical way it seems fitting to use a more feminine structure of play development.

Devising is effectively 'writing on one's feet' and is usually a collaborative process. Research is sifted and tested collaboratively by the ensemble to identify themes that reflect a subject of cultural or political concern to the ensemble. These explorations become compositions that are gradually developed into scenes and then 'cut-and-pasted': interwoven and juxtaposed to create textural layers of meaning. Images or scenes that have been discarded are often reworked and new material may be developed to provide bridges and links between scenes. Editing the work is vital to creating fluidity and the whole must be carefully ordered so as to construct a coherent piece of theatre.

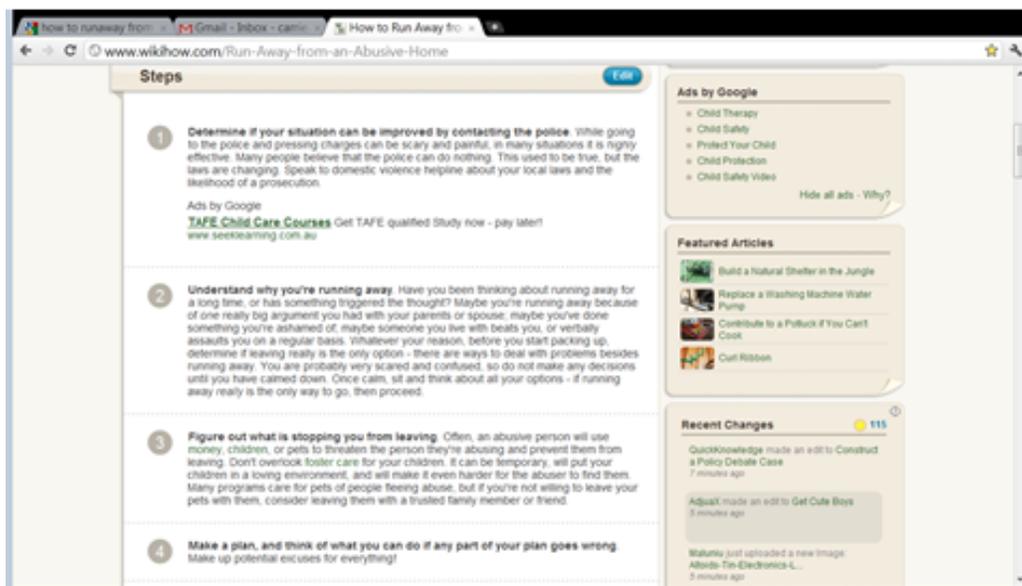
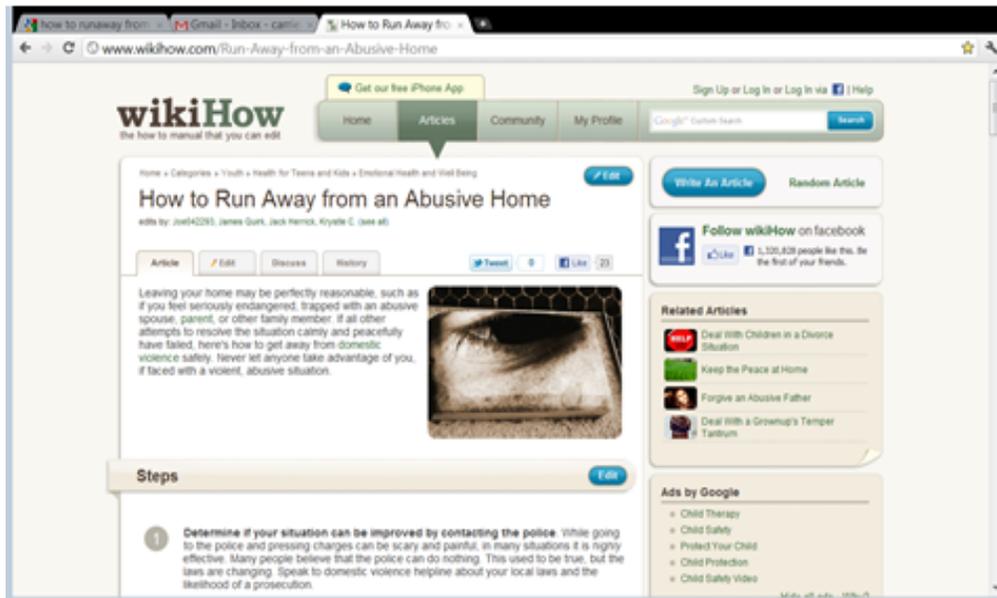
Thematic Explorations

We are interested in the place where past and present intersect. To that end we are exploring the following themes:

1. Boundaries of marriage: gender roles, inequality, legal contracts, freedom of movement, emotional and physical abuse, separation and divorce, financial issues (Slide: Google/WikiHow):



There are 14 points listed on the Wiki "How to Run Away from an Abusive Home" – the same 14 steps the sisters took leaving their husbands in the 17th century.



How to Run Away from an Abusive Home

- Find a place to relocate to where your abuser will not think to look.** If you have a former boyfriend or girlfriend that you trust enough to keep a secret, go there.

 - Do not leave if you've nowhere to go. You will be out on the streets, with limited money and, perhaps, children to look after. You might find yourself involved in dangerous crimes and in horrible situations as you try to get by.
 - Consider where your abuser(s) will look, and avoid those places at all costs.
- Don't keep any evidence of your plans at your house; if your plans are discovered, it will make escaping much more difficult in the long run.**
- Pick up a new identity.** Consider changing your name, and everything else that makes you vulnerable to being tracked down, like your car, license plates, cell phone number, etc.
- Pack any things that you may need and some cash; you may never be able to return back home.**
- Leave quietly and carefully, and make the person you're evading think that everything is as usual for as long as possible.**

 - For example, leave at the beginning of a normal workday, so that your absence will not be noticed until the end of the workday, which gives you 8 hours (this amount can, and probably will, vary depending on your job) to make your move. If your abuser generally lets you have some social time after work with no consequences from them, say you are going out with a friend, buying you more time.
- Notify the police department in your new neighborhood of your situation.** Give them pictures of your abuser(s) so that they will know to be suspicious if that person shows up. Let your new neighbors know, also, if you feel comfortable doing so.
- Take security measures in your new residence.** Get an alarm system, lock your doors

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 **Misti Taylor**, writing detailed craft articles for over ten years, many of which have been featured, such as How to Fold an Individual Booklet into a Flower. She often takes step-by-step pictures for the articles she starts.

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How to Run Away from an Abusive Home

- Take security measures in your new residence.** Get an alarm system, lock your doors regularly, etc.
- Always look over your shoulder; don't let down your guard.** It's not the best way to live, but it's better than being stuck in an abusive situation.
- Get a restraining order against the abuser.** This is a first step in protecting yourself for life: if the abuser comes near you, calls you, e-mails you, they will be arrested. Your abuser will most likely fight this in court and try to place blame in you; if the situation arises where the judge may not issue a restraining order, ask for a dual restraining order, meaning neither of you can go near the other. Keep in mind that a restraining order is just a piece of paper, not a force field. Police cannot be in all places at all times.
- If you feel your life is in danger, consider your options for personal protection.**

 - For many people, a non-lethal option is the best choice. Residual emotional bonds between the abuser can make such options as pepper spray and stun devices a good choice. However, these require close contact to be used effectively, and in cases where drug use is likely, can be useless.
 - If you feel your life is in danger, consider buying a firearm for personal protection. If you do buy a firearm, get professional training; you can contact the NRA for a list of instructors in your area. In the U.S., if you intend to carry the weapon outside of your home, be sure to get the necessary permits and licenses. Civilian ownership of firearms is illegal in some countries, be sure to know your local laws & abide by them.



Show Your wikiHow Pride [see all](#)

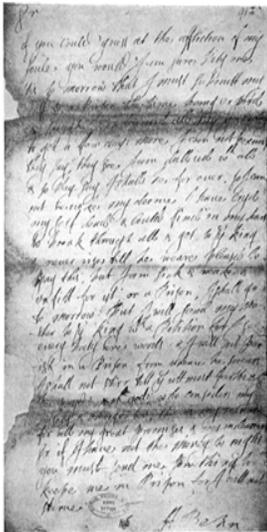


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2. Forms of written communication (Four Slides):



AT&T 8:37 AM

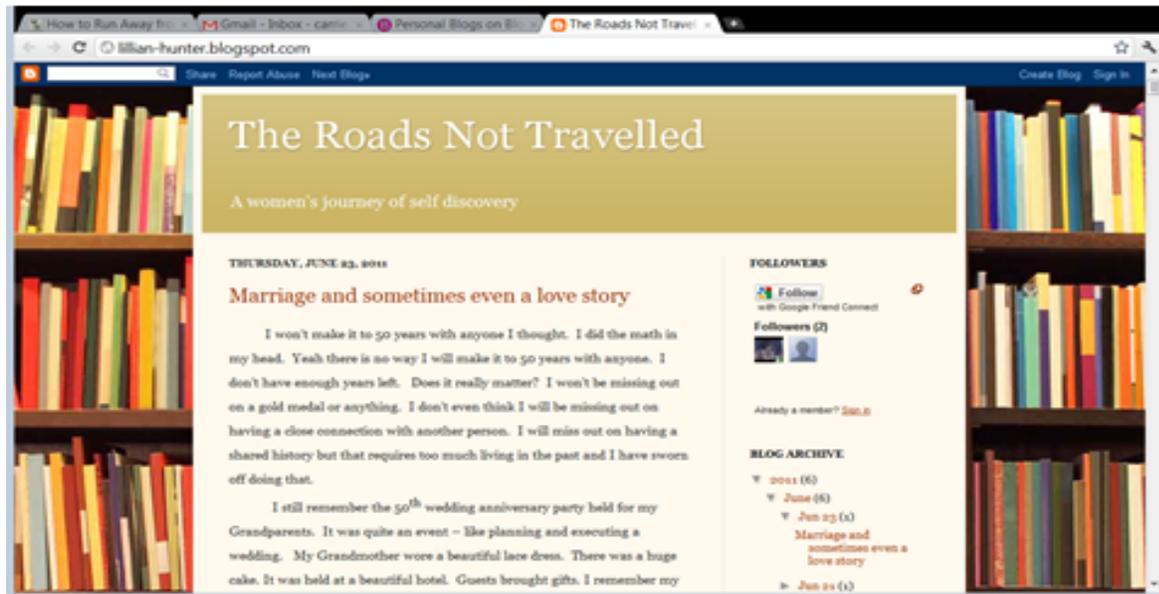
Type="Email":



3. Crossing Borders, travelling, literally. Below is an actual illustration in a gazette depicting the Mancini sisters going through this particular town (Slide: horse and carriage):



And figuratively: cross-dressing, bisexual affairs, travelling as a metaphor for self-discovery (Slide: Blog):



Journeying from the private sphere (female) to the public sphere (the male) (Slide: Salon):



Reading Moliere at a Literary Salon

Creative Inspirations

- Set design: the marriage bed (Slide: The Bed)



Reproduction of State Bed made for Marie in honor of the birth of her first son.

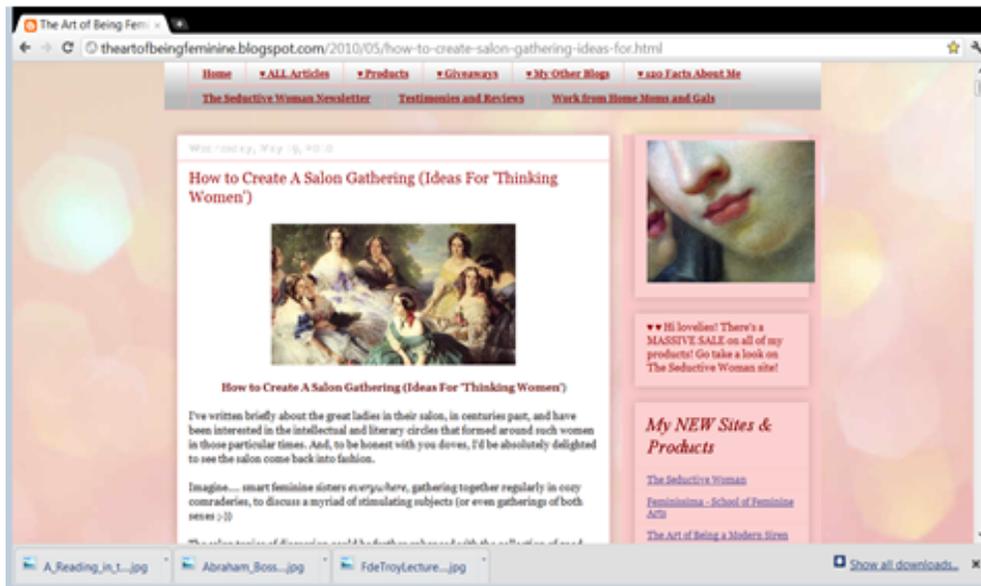
Marie's bed as the central metaphor representing the women's sphere, her private domain where everything about being a woman takes place: the boudoir; sex; birthing; hosting literary 'salons'

- Time period: shifts in time (Slide: Memoirs) and perspective;

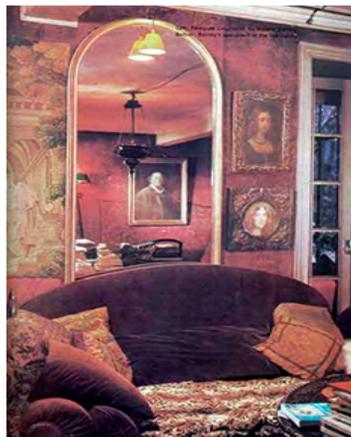
Marie's Memoirs



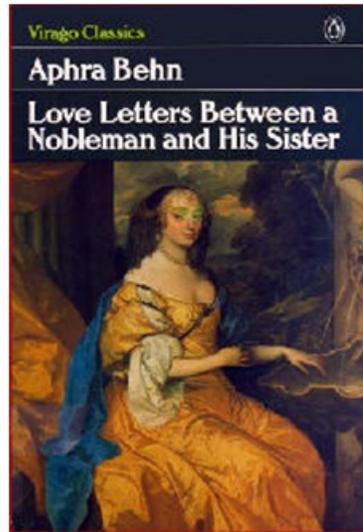
Overlapping of scenes to show parallel themes between past and present (Slide: Salon blog)



- Starting Point (Slide: sofa in a French salon):



Visitors to the Salon would have included various artists, playwrights and writers of the time, including Aphra Behn, who dedicated one of her plays to Hortense, and there is evidence that they had a love affair (Slide: Aphra Benn's plays)



- Structure: intersecting modes of communication: pen and ink/laptop; memoirs/blog; court gossip/paparazzi; (Slide: old lady)

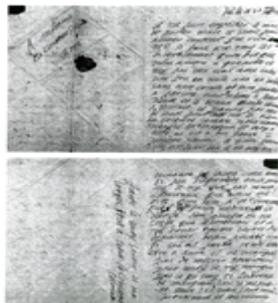


- Textual: lines from Moliere's play, *Tartuffe*. It was said at the time that the character of Orgon in *Tartuffe* was modeled on Hortense's husband, Armand.
- Aphra Benn's poetry (Slide: Poetry book),



Quotes from period correspondence (Slide: Letters),

Letters from Marie

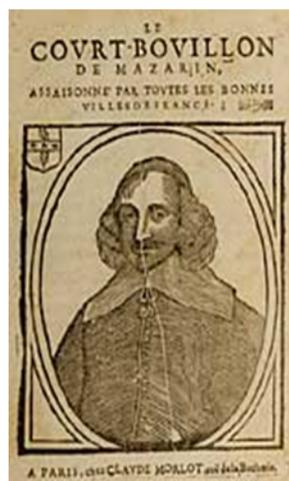


Letter from Marie to Blaise Pascal, 20 September 1675.
Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris. (Photo: "Worm For Tom", Wikimedia.)

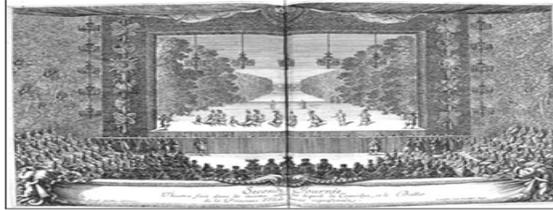


Letter from Marie to her husband, 23 September 1675.
Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris. (Photo: "Worm For Tom", Wikimedia.)
See Appendix for transcription.

quotes from memoirs, pamphlets (Slide: Pamphlet), blogs, emails, social networking, messaging, texting;



- Sound: period music by Jean-Baptiste Lully, contemporary music, for example, *Little Plastic Castle* by Ani di Franco and creating original music by “sampling” or mixing music from both periods to make original new music (Slide: Concert at Versailles):



- Characters: ensemble of 2-4 actors playing multiple roles, as yet undecided, but to include Hortense’s servant, Nanon, who will be able to time-travel thereby connecting past and present, celebrity visitors to the literary salon: these might include famous period and contemporary female figures such as Madame de Pompadour, Gloria Steinem, Germaine Greer, Virginia Woolf, J.K Rowling, Aphra Behn, etc
- and, of course, our illustrious adventuresses (Slide: Classical sisters), Marie and Hortense Mancini.

