Pleasure and Instruction: Generic Conventions in Emma Hart Willard’s *Journal and Letters, from France and Great Britain*.

**Abstract**

The purpose of the present paper is to analyse epistolary and descriptive conventions in *Journal and Letters, from France and Great Britain* (1833) by Emma Willard. The article argues that Willard attempts to combine the standards of 18th-century travelogue with its emphasis on instruction with a new type of autobiographical travel narrative which puts the persona of a traveller in the foreground. In this respect, Willard’s *Journal and Travels*, for all its didacticism, testifies to an increasing value attached to subjective experience, which was to become one of the distinguishing features of nineteenth-century travel writing.

**Keywords**: Emma Willard, familiar letter, generic conventions, women’s travel writing

In his *Journal of a Voyage to Lisbon*, published in 1755, Henry Fielding summed up the purpose of travel books in the following words: “There would not, perhaps, be a more pleasant, or profitable study, among those which have their principle aim in amusement, than that of travels or voyages, if they be writ, as they might be, and ought to be, with a joint view to the entertainment and information of mankind” (23). Fielding was right, as eighteenth-century readers of travel books did expect to find in them both pleasure and instruction (Batten 27–28). The two were closely connected yet the source of delight was not a traveller’s personality but rather his or her skill of accurate observation and gift of insightful reflection. As a result, the majority of eighteenth-century travelogues contained more or less detailed information on national character, customs, religion, system of government, agriculture, commerce, arts and antiquities of a foreign country but revealed little about the traveller’s adventures along the way. In fact, those who wrote too much about personal experiences were criticised for egotism.

These well-defined generic conventions began to change in Europe in the last three decades of the eighteenth century and led, eventually, to the emergence of “the purely entertaining travel book” on the one hand, and “the instructive travel guide”
on the other (Batten 15). The former was more autobiographic, more subjective and more self-consciously literary while the latter was expected to contain reliable information and useful hints for the prospective travellers. Not all readers were satisfied with these changes. As one English reviewer complained in 1843: “we take a volume of modern travels not expecting to discover any new views in the state of politics, religion, literature, or the fine arts” (qtd. in Batten 81). Instead, the reader would become familiar with the traveller whose personality influenced both form and content of the book. However, according to Nigel Leask, lingering ideals of the Enlightenment were still appealing to many authors who struggled “to integrate […] personal narrative with ‘curious’ or ‘precise’ observation, thus balancing ‘literary and scientific discourses’” (6).

Across the Atlantic, similar transformations affected travel writing at the turn of the nineteenth-century. The “Letter from Europe,” a staple feature of many local American newspapers, combined description with personal impressions. Such newspaper dispatches were often compiled into a book-length travel chronicle upon the author’s return home. Their authors “typically claimed the authority of experience and often used that authority to adopt a didactic and in some cases moralizing or pedantic tone” (Stowe 57). In contrast to those travelers who wished to teach and moralize, there were others who, like Washington Irving’s fictional character Geoffrey Crayon, mainly wished to entertain and amuse the readers. Irving’s *The Sketchbook of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.* proved to be an influential model to follow because its narrative persona preferred pleasure over instruction. Another novelty introduced by Irving was a mixture of various genres, both fictional and non-fictional, within the scope of one travelogue (Stowe 58). However, both instruction and pleasure – in various proportions – were expected components of many ante-bellum American travelogues.

1. Emma Hart Willard: A Pioneer of Women’s Higher Education

Emma Hart Willard (1787–1870) occupies a prominent position in the annals of American history of female education as a founder of the Troy Female Seminary, one of the first institutions of higher education for girls and the first teacher-training school in the United States. Born in Berlin, Connecticut, in the family of New England farmers, educated at home and in the district schools, Willard early developed passion for study and self-education (“Emma Willard”). As her biographer affirms, she “had read Plutarch’s *Lives*, Rollin’s *Ancient History*, and Gibbon’s *Rome*, and the most famous of the British essayists” before she was fifteen (Lord 19). Since the age of seventeen she worked as a teacher, then became a principal in several schools for girls and this experience made her aware of “the disparity in educational facilities between the two sexes” (qtd. in Lord 34). In her own boarding school in Middlebury, which she opened in 1814, she successfully
introduced the classical and scientific subjects into the curriculum. At that time such subjects were commonly thought to be suitable only for young men. Encouraged by her teaching experiment in Middlebury, Willard wrote *An Address to the Public; Particularly to the Members of the Legislature of New-York, Proposing a Plan for Improving Female Education* in 1819 where she argued for a necessity to reform state education for girls. Her main argument, which stemmed from the ideology of “republican motherhood,” underlined that the prosperity of a nation depends upon the moral character of its citizens, which is shaped, to a large extent, by the influence of mothers. Thus, the new republic could greatly benefit from improving the state of women’s education because enlightened mothers would raise worthy citizens. “And who knows how great and good a race of men may yet arise from the forming hands of mothers, enlightened by the bounty of their beloved country – to defend her liberties – to plan her future improvement – and to raise her unparalleled glory?” she asked rhetorically in the conclusion of her plea (qtd. in Lord 84).

Though her appeal to the New York legislature did not bring expected results, New York Governor DeWitt Clinton invited Willard to open a school in his state. In 1821 Willard moved to Troy, New York, where the town council had raised money to build a girls’ school and opened the Troy Female Seminary, which attracted girls from well-off families. Since Willard believed that young women should and could learn the same subjects as young men, her seminary paved the way in teaching science, mathematics, history, geography and Latin to girls. Apart from performing her duties as the school’s head, Willard also wrote textbooks, including *History of the United States, or Republic of America* (1828), *Guide to the Temple of Time and Universal History for Schools* (1849), *Last Leaves of American History* (1849), and *Astronography; or Astronomical Geography* (1854) (“Emma Willard”).

In 1831, when Willard made a break from her school duties and set out on a journey to France and Great Britain, women’s transatlantic travels were still quite rare. For example, out of the 231 American visitors who disembarked at Le Havre in 1840 only 42 were women, and the majority of them came as wives accompanying their husbands (Levenstein 29). In fact, most Americans who went on the Grand Tour to Europe in the first half of the nineteenth century were well-off young men from prominent families (Levenstein 23, 27–29). As a 44-year-old widow of independent means, who made her name as a founder of a flourishing school, Willard was, in many ways, an exceptional traveler. However, the way she traveled was quite conventional because as a respectable matron she did not travel alone but went accompanied by her teenage son John, a young lady identified only as Miss D., and her father.

In the first half of the nineteenth century many upper middle-class Americans – both men and women – legitimized their European journeys on the grounds of health. Since at that time dangers and discomforts of a transatlantic sea voyage
were still considerable, it was hard to condemn those who decided to brave them as mere pleasure-seekers (Levenstein 25). Emma Willard definitely wanted to avoid a suspicion that her overseas journey was motivated only by a “selfish” desire to see Europe. Therefore, though she did not specify the nature of her illness, in the very first line of her Preface she informed the readers that she was “obliged to leave [her] institution in the care of [her] sister, and go abroad” in consequence of ill health (iii). Surprisingly, rough sea-faring and daily exercise in clutching to fixed objects on the pitching ship was very conducive to her health since it “put in motion those vital functions, which want of suitable exercise for the body, or too much mental exertion had deranged” (10).

Willard recorded her travel impressions in a private journal and letters addressed to family members, friends and students at the Troy Seminary. The letters were eventually published in the form of a book entitled *Journal and Letters, from France and Great Britain* (1833). Out of 26 letters included in the published book, twenty are addressed to Willard’s younger sister Almira, also a teacher, who took over her duties at the Seminary. These letters are definitely the most personal and informal. In contrast, three letters written especially to her pupils are much more formal and strictly structured around sightseeing walks she made in Paris. Just a few letters addressed to her friends are included in the book. In these cases the addressee’s sex determines pretty much the subject matter; for instance to male correspondents Willard recounts her visit to the French House of Deputies and writes about the current state of political affairs, but in a letter to a female friend, she describes her presentation at the French court and meeting with the Queen.

The purpose of the present paper is to analyse generic conventions in Emma Hart Willard’s travel letters. I am especially interested in the ways Willard combined instruction with pleasure and in the way she used her personal travel experiences for a didactic purpose. My reading of her travel letters follows the path suggested by the editors of *The Edinburgh Companion to Nineteenth-Century American Letters and Letter Writing* who “position the letter as a self-conscious artefact which circulates among both friends and strangers, moving readily between manuscript and print, and from there across multiple genres (autobiography, essay, travel narrative, poem, polemic, etc.)” (Bernier et al. 16).

2. “Confidential communications”: Epistolary Conventions in Willard’s Letters

While in Europe “familiar letters,” a new type of correspondence between family and friends, flourished in the second half of the eighteenth century, in the United States their greatest popularity dates back to the nineteenth century (Bernier et al. 7). Since Willard’s letters were “not originally written for the public, but merely for myself and my confidential friends,” as she explained in the Preface, they
obviously followed conventions of familiar correspondence. Authors of popular letter manuals recommended that such letters should be affectionate, emotional and sincere:

When you write to a friend, your letter should be a true picture of your heart, the style loose and irregular; the thoughts themselves should appear naked, and not dresses in the borrowed robes of rhetoric; for a friend will be pleased with that part of a letter which flows from the heart, than that which is the product of the mind. (Dilworth v)

In the light of these cultural and formal expectations it is now understandable why Willard did not eliminate any personal references while preparing her private correspondence for publication. Instead, female readers – her friends and former pupils – to whom the book was primarily addressed were made “parties in my confidential communications,” as she put it (v). As a result, there was no need to edit the letters and deprive them of personal references because the familiar letter mode remained appropriate to its purpose and audience. Moreover, publication of the book, which eventually included both the letters and passages from a private journal, was presented in the Preface as a result of communal effort (Rutkowska 54–55). Not only did her friends and fellow teachers convince Willard of the necessity to share her travel impressions with the public but also copied the pencil written journal to speed up the process. Finally, the income from the book was to help a newly established Society for the Advancement of Education in Greece.

As a subjective and autobiographical genre, letters are well suited to record travel impressions. The narrative distance between the writer and the addressee is shortened and the movement from narration to description and reflection seems natural (Pfister 11–12). Willard recognized the usefulness of the letters for recording in writing down what may have otherwise escaped her memory:

I wish to preserve, either in my journal, or my letters, some reminiscences of what I have seen, which is best worth remembering, of a land I never expect to revisit. As it is in writing to you that my thoughts flow most freely, I will continue to detail some of my proceedings, in reference to things and persons, in such order as I may chance to recollect them. (257)

This remark, which comes from a letter to Almira written upon setting out from Paris to London, reveals that Willard treats travelling as a serious undertaking – since a journey to London is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, she wants to record her thoughts, impressions of people and places for further reference.

However, this does not mean that she remains a detached and objective observer as many letters reveal her emotions felt in contact with the otherness of the world across the Atlantic. For example, in the first letter sent from France she conveys a sense of excitement and amazement experienced upon landing in Havre. While still on the board of the ship she eagerly looks ashore to make
sure she has reached “what was to me a new world” and finds evidence for it in “strange costumes” of peasants and “a certain something in their manners” (14):

> [W]hen we landed – when I realized that I was indeed beholding that ancient world of which I had so often strained my fancy to give me an idea [...] my joy was intense. I could have acted extravagances, but we belong to a race, who seem cold, because we suppress our feelings. (14)

It was quite conventional to greet the Old World with expressions of happiness, reverence and awe and similar passages became a stock element of American nineteenth-century travelogues. However, for all her joy felt at reaching the desired destination after a long sea voyage, Willard also wishes to present herself as a respectable American lady who remains in control of her emotions.

For most American visitors a journey to Europe offered a chance to see monuments of the past not to be found in their home country. Willard is an animated, inquisitive traveller, happy to have “a life’s wish consummated in seeing Europe” (14). She admires most historic buildings she visits, yet she also admits to being frustrated by their complexity. For example, mentioning fortifications at Havre, she confesses: “I find it difficult to understand all the angular points; and never could follow the projections and indentations, unless I better comprehend the science of making forts” (23). It seems the female tourist’s gaze finds technical explanations tedious, preferring instead more sublime views – “sublime” being one of Willard’s preferred adjectives – of old French cathedrals. Reflecting upon her visit to the famous Rouen cathedral Willard admits to “being smitten with a feeling of sublimity, almost too intense for mortality” (27). Looking at the façade she finally understands how a fifty or a hundred years may be spend in the erection of one building: “when I saw the outside of this majestic and venerable building, the doubt ceased” (Willard 27). Similar unexpected discoveries can be brought even by an ordinary walk: “I had read in poetry of moss-grown and ivy mantled, and had seen it represented in pictures, but I had no idea of it until I came here. The first time of my seeing the true ivy, was I believe growing upon the old wall of Havre” (25). However, she does not like all the tourists sights. She dismisses, for instance, famous fountains at Versailles as “a disgusting and outrageous perversion, and turning upside down of nature” (72), preferring instead the natural look of American cataracts and waterfalls.

The conversational style of the letters is revealed, for example, in remarks alluding to the recipients’ habits, tastes and interests. “I must not [...] forget your republican curiosity about royalty” (43), Willard writes teasingly to Almira from Paris and provides a detailed description of King Louis Philippe as seen through the windows of a neighbouring house where the king sits posing for a bust. In response to her sister’s query about “how things here compare with those at home” she gives a virtual tour of her apartment, depicting in minute details walls, furnishings, parquet floors, wardrobe and fireplace, curtains, windows and
the view from the window opening on the street. The five-pages-long letter is concluded with mentioning the sound of a bell ringing for dinner. As if erasing the physical distance between them, Willard invites her sister for dinner: “You won’t dine with us then? Well, good-bye! When I return, I will give you some account of the entertainment” (19).

In her study of eighteenth-century epistolary conventions, Susan Whyman points to the self-referentiality of the genre. Since letters were so essential as means of communication, references to writing them or waiting for them were part of epistolary conventions and this topic evoked a variety of emotions, both positive and negative (Whyman 13). This observation is also true of Willard’s letters. On March 6th the traveler complains: “packet after packet arrives, and I yet receive no letters from home. My anxiety deprives me of sleep, and preys upon my health. The gay society of Paris is uncongenial to my feelings” (209). The narrative persona that emerges from the letters is that of an affectionate sister and caring daughter, forever mindful of the relatives left at home. When Willard asks her sister to pass the letter to her mother and to Mary, a favourite niece in poor health, she confesses: “There is not an hour of the day that I do not think with anxiety on the state of Mary’s health; and when the letters which I eagerly expect from home arrive, that will be the first thing I shall look after” (46).

Though Willard presents herself as a person in control of her emotional responses, there is one letter in her book where such reserve is abandoned. She reacts with a shock to the news about two deaths in the family: her aged mother and her young niece Mary. The condolence letter written to Almira begins with an image of a grief-stricken Willard: “My hand trembles as I write your name, never before so dear as now. I thank you for that visit which you made, in my name, as well as your own, to Mary, and to mother – dear mother! – dear Mary! gone – both gone forever […]. It is written in tears, – in tears it will be read” (219). The sincerity of these words should not be doubted yet they also fit the conventional response evoked in a popular nineteenth-century book of etiquette while discussing letters of condolence: “it is hard with the eyes blinded by tears and the hand shaking, to write calmly” (Hartley 122–123). In other words, it would be deemed improper to hide one’s grief if the loss is shared.

The main aim of letters of condolence was to express sympathy and offer some words of comfort to the mourner. As advised by another nineteenth-century book of etiquette for women, “it is a very dear and consoling thing to a bereaved friend to hear the excellence of the departed extolled, to read and re-read the precious testimony which is borne by outsiders to the saintly life ended” (Sherwood 210). Willard observes this convention, referring to her mother as “an aged saint” whom “all loved and venerated” and praising “our angelic Mary” for “the extraordinary moral perfection of her character” (219, 220). In the first part of the letter Willard also finds consolation in faith and in acceptance of God’s decrees: “I was resigned – I knew that God was just, and dealt with us after his mercies”
It was also expected to point to the mourner’s charitable work or other worthy activity which could serve as a homage to the departed (Sherwood 214). Accordingly, Willard’s letter does not end on a note of resignation but becomes a call for action addressed to her pupils at Troy.

Nineteenth-century American pedagogues believed that schools should teach pupils both knowledge and virtue (Schultz 110). Willard uses the occasion of Mary’s premature death to teach her students a lesson on the value of piety and morality. Her message – included in the second part of the letter – is to be read to her pupils at the commencement of a new term. The deceased Mary is set as a role model for other students to follow “as an example of piety, of industry, of moral purity, of kindness to her equals, of respect and obedience when these were due, I point you to her” (222). She quotes Mary’s last words to her younger siblings: “Tell them [...] to live by their Bibles,” ending with an admonition: “In these things, my children, be like her, and you will then be prepared to live, or die” (223; original emphasis). There are no travel impressions in this letter; instead, another face of Willard – that of a pedagogue and headmistress concerned with a moral growth of her pupils – becomes manifest.

3. Observation and Reflection: Descriptive Conventions in Willard’s Letters

Eighteenth-century travel authors used two descriptive techniques: (1) observations – specific descriptions of places, people and objects seen during travels, and (2) reflections – the philosophical, aesthetic, moral or political comments that sprung naturally out of these observations. As Batten points out, “each technique aims at conveying a particular kind of instruction: observations teach facts; reflections, the significance that should be derived from facts (82). Willard relies on both techniques in her travel letters from Paris, both those addressed to her sister and those addressed to her pupils.

In the first letter to her pupils Willard establishes her authority, stating that she has learned much about the city from the first-hand experience – as she has lived there for several months – but also from studying maps and guidebooks. Therefore, she assumes a position of a tour guide who takes girls on a virtual trip to visit the palaces, bridges, churches and public parks. As any guide would, she provides specific information on the size of the buildings, explains their historic significance and architectural style. She uses evocative terms such as “majestic,” “remarkable,” “boundless” or “delightful” to add liveliness to the guidebook-type passages.

Willard looks at Paris as an American tourist, full of admiration for the splendour of its edifices, especially Louvre: “Nothing like the view within this palace-court, can be seen on our side of the Atlantic, and little on this. Indeed it is one of the most remarkable spots in the world” (54). Keeping in mind her students’ profit from instruction she makes references to the objects or places
they know well, for example asking them to use the building of the seminary to compare it with the dimensions of edifices she describes or to imagine the river Seine as the opposite of “our own broad, deep, clear Hudson” (54, 55).

Occasional references to bodily sensations are also quite effective in keeping the readers’ attention focused on a virtual walk. “O the vexation of walking over these eternal pavements of rounded stones! – The pain of our feet, puts the sublime out of our heads” (55) – she exclaims on one occasion. Occasionally, Willard expresses her personal preferences: “I am going to take you across my favourite bridge. This is called the bridge of Louis XVI. I love it for the exquisite views it affords of the surrounding scenery, but more especially for the twelve colossal statues of white marble which are ranged along its sides” (58). To keep up the fantasy of having her students with her she offers practical pieces of advice on strong shoes you need to walk the pavements or on prices of books (57). All these strategies aim at imaginatively involving the reader in the descriptions.

Frequently the descriptions of people lead to reflections on cultural differences, national character and manners of the French contrasted with the American ways. According to Batten, if a traveller wished to include reflections in his account, there were four essential qualities to bear in mind: “his opinions should not be too numerous, they should arise naturally out of the places described, they should be original, and they should not prejudicially conflict with accepted moral or political opinions” (110). In Willard’s letters descriptions frequently lead to reflections. For example, a visit to the palace of Versailles becomes an occasion to reflect on the lack of morality in the French royal court. During her tour of the palace Willard is surprised by a variety of mythological scenes painted on the ceilings, usually featuring nude figures. Though on the whole she finds them disagreeable and frivolous, she accepts their ornamental function. What she finds unacceptable is a representation of Christian heaven and of “God the Father as a man” in an adjacent chapel at Versailles:

He, who is accustomed to see in one room the representation of the heathen heaven, in the next that of the Christian – from the necessity of the case, far less attractive to the senses, will naturally mingle their ideas together; and lose, or never acquire those sublime visions, with which God vouchsafes to reveal himself, and his rewards to the pious mind: and he will become attracted by the elegant representations of personified vice, which the heaven mythology presents. And what will be the consequence? Let the sensuality, the unfeeling selfishness, the mean intrigue and deceit of the court, which so long held here their revels, answer the question. (69)

Unlike the French, who can see nothing improper in such juxtaposition of profane and religious art under one roof, Willard objects to “impious” representations of transcendental reality of heaven “with the poor colors of earth” (69). For her, such irreverent attitude to religion explains why the French court became a hotbed of depravity and corruption.
Willard’s puritanism was more than a pose, it reflected a prevailing response of most American visitors to France in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Both men and women were shocked by the number of nude paintings and statues displayed in public edifices and private residences or by the revealing costumes of the opera dancers (Levenstein 68–70). They also found French lax attitude to marital fidelity quite puzzling. The ideal woman of an early Republic was a virtuous wife and mother whose proper behaviour and demure way of dressing confirmed her morality and respectability. Though cultivated and charming, upper-class French women acted in the ways which were unacceptable and improper – they wore décolleté dresses, used make up, fragrant powder and perfumes to enhance their looks and they openly declared they were “no friends of marriage” (Willard 234).

Prudery and lack of proper instruction were two main factors which prevented American visitors from appreciating much of France’s fine art. It also needs to be remembered that even well-educated women travelling to France in the first decades of the nineteenth century were not prepared to appreciate the art of Europe in the rigorously intellectual manner prescribed at the time (Levenstein 62). As a result, Willard judged the works of art she saw in France by their “fitness to produce moral good,” claiming that “what is bad in morals, is bad in taste” (137) and seeing a direct correspondence between French art and bad morals of its fair sex. For all her admiration for the design of the Tuileries gardens, Willard was shocked by a gallery of the nude statues which adorned it. In a letter to her students she refused to describe this part of the garden and later on used the visit as a pretext to moralize on the French sense of propriety and modesty – or rather its lack:

No – my dear girls, I shall not take you to examine those statues. If your mothers were here, I would leave you sitting on these shaded benches, and conduct them through the walks, and they would return and bid you depart for our own America; where the eye of modesty is not publicly affronted; and where virgin delicacy can walk abroad without a blush. (62)

French men and women, Willard states, feel at home in this public space, where they can promenade and flirt, while Americans feel most satisfied in the privacy of their own home. “And truly I believe” – she adds – “that far more happiness is found in our state of society” (62). What follows is a critical reflection on French loveless upper-class marriages, which are transactions carried out by the families of the spouses. Yet, the young girls enter such marriages willingly because as married women they are free to attend places of amusement, flirt and engage in love affairs.

Willard urges her pupils to look closely at the faces of elegant men and women in the garden and contrast them with the American faces they know well: “Give me for real, enduring happiness, the faces of the throng, who issue from the door of a New-England church, rather than those of the crowds I meet in the Tuileries, – and even those who are flippant and gay; and if for the expression of
personal content, how much more, for that of those virtues, which make a land a wholesome residence; – one where we may safely cast in our lot among the people, for this world and another” (63). The real virtue and happiness is to be found in the adherence to firm moral principles and not in breaking them. For all its visual attractiveness, the Tuileries is not “the Garden of Paradise itself” but rather a deceptive and dangerous place where “malignant passions” rule. By forbidding her pupils to mingle with this “flippant and gay” crowd she not only protects their innocence but also asserts the superiority of American moral values. The contrast between home and abroad, Republican America and aristocratic France, frivolous Parisian ways and wholesome New England’s lifestyle is constantly evoked in Willard’s letters with her home culture serving as a norm. Like most nineteenth-century American travellers to Europe Willard is convinced that neither European political solutions nor their aristocratic manners should be imitated by the Americans.

Conclusion

Emma Willard’s *Letters and Journal* is, out of necessity, a hybrid book, a combination of familiar letters and a personal journal with a travel narrative, yet, paradoxically, there are some advantages of such an approach. First of all, a variety of addressees necessitates using a variety of voices – from conversational and intimate in family letters to matter-of-fact and authoritative in “official” letters to her pupils. It also requires of variety of gazes. In her observations of the French lifestyle Willard is a perceptive and practical American tourist, ever eager to learn “many useful things” from the French ladies in the field of domestic economy. Willard the tourist also looks with curiosity at the Royal Family, criticizes French aristocracy – except for the La Fayettes – and comments on the fashionable dresses and hats. Willard the teacher describes the functioning of the schools she visits and points to their good and weak points with expertise. All in all, she discusses both serious and trivial subjects in her account. Unlike Stowe, who reads such variations in tone and subject matter as an example of polyvocality (107), I propose to see them as a consequence of Willard’s successful attempt to combine the standards of eighteenth-century travelogue with its emphasis on instruction with a new type of autobiographical travel narrative which puts the persona of a traveller in the foreground. Therefore, the pleasure of reading her account was to be twofold – it taught the readers about “character and manners” of the French but it also gave them access to Emma Willard’s personal life and views. In this respect, Willard’s *Journal and Travels*, for all its didacticism, testifies to an increasing value attached to subjective experience, which was to become one of the distinguishing features of nineteenth-century travel writing.
In a biography of Emma Willard, written in the 1873, John Lord offers a nostalgic comment which helps us to understand better the role travel letters played at the time of her European journey:

the pleasure which attended the sight of objects of interest was much greater forty years ago then it is now, since we had not heard or read so much about them, and the interest then felt was communicated to friends. Every letter from Europe was a treasure. It passed from hand to hand, from family to family. Now who writes letters even to friends, for what can one say that is new? It was not so forty years since, and perhaps one reason of the interest which letters gave was the exceeding minuteness of descriptions, rarely attempted now. Few travellers now write such interesting letters as once were written, because they take it for granted that everything is already known by everybody. (28)

Looking backwards, Willard’s biographer clearly idealizes her travel letters as fresh, unmediated response to Europe. Echoing Willard’s surprising definition of Europe as “the new world,” he claims her minute descriptions and interesting reflections were treasured because the world they represented was still unknown to most Americans. In forty years the situation was to change dramatically and traditional account of a European tour became a somewhat hackneyed form. Travel letters were no longer written – or read – to instruct and to please but to amuse and entertain as the popularity of Mark Twain’s The Innocents Abroad (1869) proved.

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