

2014

i'ay recours a vous: An Historical and Discursive Analysis of the Lettres Circulaires des Décédées of the Ursuline Order in Old and New France during the Louisiana French Colonial Period

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I'AY RECOURS A VOUS: AN HISTORICAL AND DISCURSIVE ANALYSIS
OF THE *LETTRES CIRCULAIRES DES DÉCÉDÉES* OF THE URSULINE
ORDER IN OLD AND NEW FRANCE DURING THE LOUISIANA FRENCH
COLONIAL PERIOD

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

in

The Department of French Studies

by

Jarrette K. Allen

B.A., Louisiana State University, 2000

December 2014

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to start by expressing my profound gratitude to the New Orleans Ursulines for their gracious generosity and affection as I researched this thesis. The Prioress, Sister Carla Dolce; the Archivist, Mrs. Mary Lee Harris; and the Director of Mission and Ministry, Mrs. Nicole Fuller, welcomed me into their community and went above and beyond in assisting me in locating sources for my research. With warmth, affection, and keen interest in my work, they opened their offices, the door of the ancient vault, and their hearts to me, and I am forever grateful.

Also, I owe a debt of immense gratitude to Sister Marie-Andrée Jégou and the Ursuline sisters in Beaugency, France, who not only opened their archives to me but also twice invited me to their table. The guidance and direction provided by Sister Jégou was an invaluable help in understanding and organizing my work, and the weekend spent among the sisters was a rare opportunity and will always be a cherished memory.

For their assistance and guidance, and for taking time out of their busy schedules to assist me, I would like to thank Dr. Emily Clark of Tulane University, Dr. Elizabeth Rapley of the University of Ottawa, Dr. Thomas Carr of the University of Nebraska, Mrs. Christèle Potvin of the Departmental Archives of Seine-Maritime, Sister Rosemary Meiman of the Central Province of the Ursuline Roman Union, Miss Sarah Flettrich of Louisiana State University, and Reverend Chad Partain of the Alexandria Diocese.

For guidance in the analysis of the corpus and for reading and providing insights into this thesis, I would like to thank my committee members, Drs. Mary Jill Brody and Kate Jensen of Louisiana State University.

Lastly, I have the immense honor of thanking Dr. Sylvie Dubois, to whom I owe the entirety of this research and publication. Without Dr. Dubois, I would never have been introduced to the letters I have studied; I would never have known where even to begin in my research; I would not have understood the procedures of archival research; I would not have known what to do with myself upon my arrival in France; I would not have known how to structure this thesis or to organize my thoughts. To her I owe an indelible debt of thanks, and she will always have my immense and sincere gratitude and affection. From visits to the archives in New Orleans and across France, to an uncountable number of emails and meetings, to an encouraging lunch in a quaint sidewalk restaurant in Montpellier, I pray that this thesis validates her efforts on my behalf.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Archives & Collections

ADBR	Archives départementales des Bouches-du-Rhône, Marseille, France
ADHV	Archives départementales de la Haute-Vienne, Limoges, France
ADN	Archives départementales du Nord, Lille, France
ADPD	Archives départementales du Puy-de-Dôme, Clermont-Ferrand, France
ADSM	Archives départementales de Seine-Maritime, Rouen, France
BIS	Bibliothèque interuniversitaire de la Sorbonne, Département des Manuscrits et des livres anciens, Paris, France
BMAZ	Bibliothèque Mazarine, Paris, France
BNFA	Bibliothèque nationale de France, Arsenal site, Paris, France
BNFFM	Bibliothèque nationale de France, François-Mitterrand site, Paris, France
BNFRL	Bibliothèque nationale de France, Richelieu-Louvois site, Paris, France
CFFS	Center for French and Francophone Studies, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana
HNOC	Archive of the Ursuline Nuns of the Parish of Orleans, The Historic New Orleans Collection, New Orleans, Louisiana, 99-1-L
UCANO	Ursuline Convent Archives, New Orleans, Louisiana
UCAB	Ursuline Convent Archives, Beaugency, France

Primary Sources

ANIII-1	<i>First Book of Annals, Ursuline Convent Archives III, Book 1</i> , UCANO
ANIII-2	<i>First Book of Annals, Ursuline Convent Archives III (cont'd.), Book 2</i> , UCANO
ARCHIII	Private Archives III, HNOC, Reel 16
CB-TI	<i>Circulaires</i> , UCAB, Tome I

CB-TII	<i>Circulaires, UCAB, Tome II</i>
CONP	<i>Constitutions des religieuses Ursulines, De la Congrégation de Paris, 1705</i>
DELIB	<i>Deliberations du Conseil, HNOC, Reel 1</i>
LCNO	<i>Lettres Circulaires des R^{ses} décédées en ce nouveau monastere de la N^{lle} Orleans province de la Louisienne, HNOC, Reel 2</i>
JOURNAL	<i>Journal depuis 1726 jusqu'en 1853, HNOC, Reel 15</i>
LDEF-V1	<i>Lettres de décès et éloges funèbres des religieuses Ursulines de France, BNFA, MS 4990</i>
LDEF-V2	<i>Lettres de décès et éloges funèbres des religieuses Ursulines de France, BNFA, MS 4991</i>
LDEF-V3	<i>Lettres de décès et éloges funèbres des religieuses Ursulines de France, BNFA, MS 4992</i>
LDEF-V4	<i>Lettres de décès et éloges funèbres des religieuses Ursulines de France, BNFA, MS 4993</i>
LDOB	<i>Lettres de décès originales de la fin 17^e, UCAB</i>
NDCU	<i>Nécrologe de divers couvents d'Ursulines, BIS, MS 769</i>
REGCP	<i>Reglemens des religieuses Ursulines de la congrégation de Paris, 1705</i>
RELV	<i>Relation du voyage Des premières Ursulines à la Nouvelle Orléans et de leur établissement en cette ville. Par la Rev. Mère ST. AUGUSTIN DE TRANCHEPAIN , Supérieure. Avec les lettres circulaires de quelques unes de ses Sœurs , et de la dite Mère., as published by Jean-Marie Shea in 1859.</i>
RCCB	<i>Règles et Constitutions de l'Institut et Compagnie des religieuses de Ste. Ursule, A l'usage du Couvent des Ursulines de Bordeaux, 1829</i>

Supplementary Sources

GMRU	<i>Le grand Ménologe de l'ordre des religieuses Ursulines, BNFRL, Fr 13887</i>
LMM	<i>Livre du Monastere de S.te Ursule de Montferrand, ou sont brièvement escriptes les principales choses qui y sont arrivees, avant, pendant, et apres son establissement, qui arriva le 26me juillet 1638, ADPD, 101 J 6</i>

NIV	New International Version of the Holy Bible in English, Zondervan
REQT	<i>Requête des Ursulines de Rouen : Marie Tranchepain, Marguerite Judde, à Mgr d'Aubigné, pour obtenir la permission d'être agrégées à la maison des Ursulines de Magny ; elles avaient été forcées de sortir du couvent de Rouen « par la misère du temps. », ADSM, G. 1828</i>

LIST OF NOMENCLATURE

For the purpose of avoiding confusion in this treatise, it is important to define several key terms as they will be used here. Confusion may arise from archaic meanings, semi-false cognates between English and French, and the terminology with usage specific to the vocabulary of the religious orders. Words listed in italics are French words that, I believe, would lose meaning in translation, and so they will be left in French in this treatise.

- company: An officially approved and consecrated association of lay religious men or women who operate with spiritual and social objectives in cooperation with or parallel to the Church. They may or may not live as a community. The Ursulines and Visitandines were first established as a company before submitting to cloister and taking the solemn vows that converted them into an *order*.
- order: An officially approved group of religious men or women who are consecrated and live as a community, operating under the authority of the Church. They are not of the clergy proper but take solemn vows specific to the objectives and/or values of their institution. The order will be governed by one of the three Rules under which it is instituted.
- congregation: Generally speaking, a *congregation* is the primary organizational structure of religious or secular orders operating under common rules and consecrated communal life. Although religious congregations follow a rule adopted by the order, each congregation develops its particular regulations of practice that govern the individual bodies associated and therefore differ in vows, habits, and rules. Secular congregations may take only simple vows and, for them, taking a habit is optional.
- community: These individual, or local, religious or secular bodies are generally referred to as *communities* and are referred to primarily according to the city or town in which they live and operate.
- Superior: The position of *Superior* primarily refers to the elected or appointed leader of a local community. However, because religious orders fall under the direction and accountability of the Church's ecclesiastical authority, the bishop can also appoint for them a *Superior* when need.
- director: The bishop may also appoint a *director* who serves as a liaison between the order and the diocese and acts as a spiritual leader for and an authority over the community.

- founder: A *founder* or *foundress* is a lay benefactor who provides financial support and/or incorporational efforts, even on occasion the impetus, towards the establishment of a local community.
- dite de*: When a sister took her vows, she would adopt a spiritual name to represent her new life as a vowed nun. The *dite de* is similar to *also known as* when referring to the sister. Her name in the letters therefore will often include her given name, followed by her adopted religious name, joined together by *dite de*.
- office: An *office* here is not a room or a person's position of responsibility. It refers here to a duly ordained and prescribed rite or ceremony within the liturgy of the Church or religious order.
- manuscript: For the purposes of this treatise, a *manuscript* is any writing produced by hand.

As to the nomenclature of how to precisely and concisely refer to the letters that are the object of this study, Rapley (2007) refers to them as *death notices*, Julie Roy (2006) calls them *lettres mortuaires*, and Clark (2007a) names them *obituary notices*.

Dubois argues (2013) correctly, however, that they are not simply notes of death in a register, religious burial acts, or short death notices, and therefore prefers the term *éloges funèbres*: « an apologetic account inscribed in a religious context (and therefore “approved by God”) and written following the passing of a nun » (p. 2). It is precisely when the memory of a deceased sister is presented in a manner beyond just a simple mention, such as in the annals, of the formulaic details of her passing – date and manner of death, place of burial – and is composed in the form of a more biographical *récit* – details of her personal piety and demonstrated virtues – meant to be disseminated, so as to serve as an inspirational example to others, that it is transformed from a simple historical record into an *éloge*.

I will refer to them here as *obituary circular letters* for several reasons. First, it is the best English translation for the term used (“*Lettres Circulaires des religieuses décédées*”) for them in the New Orleans collection and by which they are referred to in Ursuline writings. Next, in

keeping with Dubois, they were not simple notices; instead, they were biographical eulogies, meant to inspire, encourage, and instruct future religious in living pious lives. Finally, being circular letters, they were meant to be circulated. Therefore, the preferred use of *obituary circular letters* will encapsulate the purpose, form, and content of the letters in a single term.

La lettre mortuaire n'est pas un simple billet annonçant la mort d'une religieuse à ses proches, mais une véritable entreprise de sanctification. (Roy, FeL, 54).

ABSTRACT

The Ursulines of New Orleans have been serving their beloved community now for just short of 300 years, ever since they arrived from France in 1727. They brought with them long-standing traditions and values from the Old World and innovated in many ways to adapt to the New. One of these traditions was the sending of circular letters that served as eulogies for their deceased sisters. They maintained this tradition in New Orleans but also developed a unique style, creating a *livre des décédées* (or “book of the dead”) that contains the biographies of the sisters and memorializes them for future generations as models of Ursuline piety and priorities.

This thesis describes the eulogistic tradition as it developed in France among the Ursuline order in general and the obituary circular letter tradition in particular, providing a background for the practice as it was implemented in New Orleans. I will show that the letters not only reveal details about the lives of the individual sisters but also insights as to the values and priorities inherited from France and maintained in New Orleans. Then I will demonstrate how these values and priorities were adapted in the face of unique challenges for life and ministry in Louisiana.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

My Very Reverend Mother,

With eyes bathed in tears and a heart gripped in pain, I have recourse to you to solicit your charity in according to us the suffrages of our Holy Order on behalf of our dear sister Madeleine Mahieu de St. François Xavier...

...barely had she rendered her Spirit when there was in our house nothing but cries and sobbing, as much on our part as on that of the boarding students, orphans, day students, and our slaves; she was widely loved by everybody and the whole city shared in our loss and misses her infinitely. As for me, my heart is filled with the deepest sorrow. (LCNO, p. 195, see Appendix C.1 for original text)¹

Sometime in mid to late July 1728, Mother Marie Tranchepain de St. Augustin, Superior of the newly arrived and tightknit community of French Ursuline nuns in New Orleans, would sit down in the sweltering heat of the Louisiana summer to pen, according to longstanding custom, the above words in what would be the first of three letters to be sent back home to her sister communities in France announcing the death of one of their own, Madeleine Mahieu de St. François Xavier. Sister St. Xavier was one of the other eleven pious and courageous women religious of the Ursuline order, who, right at just a year earlier, in obedience to God and to their « pious designs » and at the request of the Jesuit Father Ignatius Beaubois, had braved a tumultuous crossing of the Atlantic Ocean to come to New Orleans and establish there a community of Ursulines tasked by Louis XV's *Brevêt en faveur des Religieuses Ursulines de la Louisiane* with the care of the Hospital of New Orleans and the education of young girls, « in

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine. My primary concern in translations for this treatise has been for readability, especially when the meaning, and not word choice in the original language, was the primary reason for the quotation. Also, I have taken a literal approach to translation as much as possible, without sacrificing meaning or readability. Additionally, I have chosen a particular method of presentation for any translations of texts and quotations from the original French. First, significant quotations from primary sources are translated in the body of this treatise, followed by a note that the original texts can be found in Appendix C. Second, significant quotations from secondary sources are translated in the body with a note that the translation is mine. Third, any texts from primary or secondary sources that are translated in inline quotations in the body are indicated by the use of the French quotation marks (« »). Finally, any instance in which the word choice itself in French goes to the argument, and is therefore of primary importance, I have left the French in the body, followed by a translation note.

conformity to their institution » (ANIII-1, pp. 1-2). This would have been a particularly heart wrenching task for the new Superior, for, although she must have known this moment eventually would come, she surely had not imagined this tragedy would befall her tiny community so soon after their arrival in this budding colony on the banks of the Mississippi. They had just endured the extreme hardships of « five months of a difficult ocean crossing » of the Atlantic and had just set about their work when this beloved sister, who « changed not in the slightest » and maintained an « ever even mood » throughout the voyage, died an unpleasant death, despite all attempts to prevent her passing, leaving the community in desperate need of « some subject capable of replacing her » (LCNO, pp. 195-198).

The sorrow torturing her and the rest of the community – « as much on the part of [their] boarding students, orphans, day students, and the slaves » – must have been nearly overwhelming as she picked up her pen. The task before her, as it had been for so many of her predecessors in France, was to compose a eulogy that would be copied and dispatched in letter form to other Ursuline communities in the homeland. These letters informed them of the passing of one of their own and requested that they make petition to God, according to their rules, on behalf of the dearly departed. The beautiful words she chose to fulfill her obligation reveal not only the depth of the sorrow she was suffering but also the rhetorical skills and techniques she had inherited from so many of the Mother Superiors who had preceded her.

Generally speaking, in contrast to secular feminine epistolary correspondence and literature *en vogue* at the time (i.e. the writings of the salons or the letters of the marquise de Sévigné), letter writing in a cloistered convent in France was considered to serve little more than an administrative purpose. Gueudré (1964) describes the understood motivation behind such correspondence: « Women diligent in governing . . . absorbed by the labor of administration,

respond to urgent questions, to specific needs, to problems needing resolving *hic* and *nunc* » (p. 48, emphasis original). Although individual sisters often wrote letters to their families, the convents themselves were never tightly woven together in a manner that would have facilitated or encouraged constant intermonasterial communication. So when the Superior picked up her pen to write to her sister communities, the impetus would typically have emerged out of some urgent need in which the community found itself.

One particular occasion would often befall the community in the passing of one of their beloved sisters, and the Superior was then charged with the bitter task of announcing her passing to the other houses of the order. Each *Sécretaire du Chapitre et du Conseil* was tasked by the 1705 Constitutions of the Paris Congregation to notify sister communities of the death:

5. Into other registers, the aforesaid secretary shall also write the entry dates of the nuns, the dates of their clothing ceremonies, professions and deaths, which she shall send to the convents of the order and of others, as the superior will command. (CONP, Part III, Chapter XII, p. 71, see Appendix C.2 for original text)

It is not surprising then that the already established means of the circular letter was employed to inform the sister communities of the passing of one of their own and to request the required intercessions (i.e. “les suffrages”)². Although it is not clear precisely how and when this practice developed in the Ursuline tradition (see below discussion of the history of the tradition), it is clear from reading the letters that it had become a standard practice, perhaps even normative. In the opening of one letter from the community at Moulins-Engilbert, the Superior reveals that the practice was already customary:

very humble greetings in the estimable heart of Jesus Christ. It is in accordance with the custom of our saint order that I urgently request of you and of your religious community the common suffrages for the rest of the soul of our reverend mother... (LDEF-V1, p. 66, see Appendix C.3 for original text)

² Not to be confused with votes, the *suffrages* were ceremonial prayers addressed to the saints on behalf of the departed. A more in-depth discussion is given in Section 5.5.

It was this urgency for the intercessory prayers of the dead that drove the writing of this form of eulogistic writing often referred to as the *lettres circulaires des décédées*. By these letters a community would share both needs and news: the news of the passing of the sister and the need for the suffrages on her behalf.

The pain seizing Tranchepain's heart in those moments was most undoubtedly the same afflicting Sister Marie Geuroult de Saint Bernard, Mother Superior of the Ursuline community in Evreux, France, when, a generation earlier in 1699, the very year Tranchepain had made her profession in Rouen, she penned these words :

My reverend and very dear mother,

Our sorrow cannot be more fully expressed than in telling you, with the most afflicted of all men, that the hand of the Lord has not only touched us but has also overwhelmed us in such an oppressive manner that any consolation we are able to find will be only by way of your holy prayers in obtaining for us a humble submission to the orders that Divine Providence has befallen on one of our very dear sisters.

...It is here, my Reverend Mother, where I confess to you that my pen is falling from my hands and that my tears are washing away what I am telling you. But as we are all equally afflicted, and as it falls upon me to seek for her the aid of our Holy Order, I urgently ask it of you for the relief of the soul of this dear sister, whose name was HELEINE DU BOIS-NORMAND in this world and in religion Sister Sainte Catherine de Sienne. (LDOB, Letter 10, p. 1, emphasis original, see Appendix C.4 for original text)

The New Orleans Ursulines therefore were the inheritors of a long-standing and rich tradition of dispatching/receiving these letters and praying for/requesting prayers for the dearly departed, and they maintained this tradition upon their arrival in New Orleans, remaining faithful to it throughout and even beyond the French period, seemingly until the last French speaking sister passed. As Sister Marie de l'Incarnation would state in her letter of 1833 (nearly a century after arrival), « ourselves fulfilling this duty exactly for all the dear deceased sisters of your community to whom we will always be united in heart and affection, as we are united through

the Rules and the Constitutions as soon as your letters arrive » (LCNO, p. 241, see Appendix C.5 for original text).

This paper will discuss the discourse particular to these letters. Under the umbrella of the history and form of the genre in the Ursuline style, the focus is on the New Orleans tradition. In particular, I will explore the manner in which the writers used direct and indirect directives, idealized models of Ursuline piety, and codified phrases unique to the medium to accomplish the specific objectives of the obituary circular letter in light of the agonizing reality of death, and in keeping with the tradition and values received from their foundress and through their predecessors in France. Themes of humility and respect, accompanied by both feelings of immense pain and yet genuine hope, dominate these understudied examples of convent writing.

CHAPTER 2. THE URSULINES IN OLD AND NEW FRANCE

The life of a religious institute is written in its history. Its foundation becomes a reality in the Church and in the world the moment when, according to God's plan, it answers a more or less conscience expectation and will find spiritual and apostolic conditions favorable to the welcoming of the new grace it brings. (Berquer, 2010, p. 1, translation mine)

In early December of 2012, I was welcomed for a weekend visit with the community of Ursuline sisters in Beaugency, France, by Sister Marie-Andrée Jégou, noted archivist, author, and historian of the Ursuline order. The convent in Beaugency where the sisters live is one of the few remaining Ursuline structures in France and, as such, stands as a monument to and a reminder of a time centuries ago when the Ursulines thrived in one of the most Catholic of all European nations. I was there to do research for this treatise, and Sister Jégou and the others welcomed me with open arms not only into their archives but also to their table, where they asked inquisitively about my work, inquired into what I knew of their sisters in New Orleans and spoke enthusiastically about charity work they were supporting in rural Africa. I could not help but marvel, as Sister Jégou led me into the bowels of this remarkable 17th century convent where the archives were stored, at the continuity of passion exhibited by these dear sisters for the purpose they had inherited from their predecessors centuries earlier.

My interview with Sister Jégou turned quickly into a history lesson on the Ursulines, and I sat there in a 17th century basement mesmerized by all she was telling me. Her eyes sparkled as she began to talk about Sister Angela Merici, foundress of the Ursuline Order, for whom her admiration was abundantly manifest in her smile. Any discussion of the beliefs, work, or tenets of the Ursuline order must begin with Merici, for her legacy of mission and vision can be traced from her, through those who followed in her footsteps in France, all the way to the missionary

sisters who set sail for the New World and there blazed their own unique trails within the framework of their foundress' original vision.

In this chapter, I will describe the original vision and unique form of spirituality that Merici passed on to those who would pick up her mantle in France and in New France. I will show how her legacy continued through crucial transitions and developments in France, noting the main figures who played a role in the progression that ultimately opened avenues for expansion into the New World frontier. Along the way, I will note the particular spiritual characteristics that embodied the ideals of the Ursuline order and the organizational structures that enabled them to thrive for centuries to come. These ideals would be the attributes for which Ursuline Superiors ever since would memorialize their fallen compatriots who died in the battle for the hearts, minds and souls of young girls around the world.

2.1 Founding and Establishment in France

Born in the second half of the 15th century (circa 1474) to an impoverished Brescian family of lower nobility, Angela Merici was drawn to a consecrated life from childhood due to the influence of her father (Mazzonis, 2007, p. 12). Although famous even during her time, owing to a lack of a hagiographer or followers to record the details of her life, relatively few personal details have been passed on (idem, p. 10). In his book, Mazzonis (idem, pp. 10-15) recounts the circumstances surrounding her calling, in which she describes multiple visions of angels and demons. Shortly after the unexpected passing of her parents and her sister, Merici joined the Third Order of St. Francis, which allowed her the increased benefits of religious life without the obligation to marry. She would later have a vision of virgins ascending a stairway to

Heaven that she would interpret as the inspiration for the founding of the Company of St. Ursula.³

According to Mariani (1994a, pp. 73-78), Merici lived a life of fervent prayer and penitence, as evidence by her physical disciplines of wearing a hair shirt and the extreme fasts that surprised even those around her. Her spirituality demanded careful protection of an interior purity that made possible the hearing of God's voice. Through reassurance of the love of God despite earthly troubles, and interpretations of Biblical texts, she would labor to make her personal love for God manifest in the hearts of those around her, irrespective of their gender, social status, or spiritual training. Another of the fundamental elements of Merician spirituality was an emphasis on unity, accord, and fraternal harmony, especially among those who would carry the banner of the Company of St. Ursula.

Merici's spirituality is such that the charisma bequeathed by Angela to her daughters is to make ever-present in the Church the face of the Christ-Spouse and to testify to it to a world by their life and by the word. Following the example of Angela, mother of virgins, the Ursulines would embody this charisma in a spiritual maternity made real above all through evangelistic education and the promotion of the woman. (Mariani, 1994a, pp. 75-76, translation mine).

Mariana points out (1994a, p. 73) that, there is no evidence that Merici herself ever engaged in charitable or social causes, established any charitable institutions, nor even ever was a teacher or catechist, contrary to common belief. On November 25, 1535, however, Merici did establish the Company of St. Ursula « for ladies who, while all the while remaining in the world for reasons dictated by family situations or for personal motives, desired nevertheless to live

³ There is little evidence to support the historicity of Ursula or the celebrated events of her life. She is said to have suffered martyrdom sometime between the 3rd and 6th centuries along with 11000 virgins after refusing her father's wishes to marry and requesting permission to take a pilgrimage to Rome. What is certain is that following years "the experiences of Ursula and her eleven thousand companions became the subject of a pious romance which acquired considerable celebrity" (Poncelet, 1912, p. 226). This is not surprising, considering the common practice of veneration of martyrs. Saint Ursula is often revered as the Patron Saint of Education.

consecrated » (idem, p. 73). At the time it was difficult for a woman who wished to enter religious vocation to do so without a dowry, so the Company offered her an organized and Church-sanctioned structure in which she could answer God's call on her life vocation while remaining in the world and reassuring her family of her financial well-being (idem, pp. 78-79). It was indeed « countercurrent to the mentality of the time », as Mariani puts it (idem, p. 79), for a group of women not to live under the traditional canonical structures of marriage or religious profession, and “[enrolling] themselves under the standard of virginity and [devoting] their lives to God outside the cloister was a truly novel idea” (Heaney, 1993, p. 7). They consequently met with fierce opposition from the establishment. Fortunately, in 1544, with the protection of Pope Paul III's bull *Regimini universalis Ecclesiae*, they not only succeeded but thrived. St. Angela Merici died on January 27, 1540, and was officially canonized on May 24, 1807 (Berquer, 2010, p. 2). In keeping with the exemplary and courageous life she had led, one of her final instructions to those who would follow after her was to always be prudently adaptable: “If according to times and needs you should be obliged to make fresh rules and change current things, do it with prudence and good advice.”⁴

According to Sister Jégou's contribution (1994) to the chapter on the Ursulines in the *Dictionnaire de spiritualité ascétique et mystique, doctrine et histoire*, the Ursulines first established themselves in France in 1592 in Avignon, with the support of Fathers César de Bus and Jean Baptiste Romillon. Combating the Protestant heresy was an objective shared by many religious orders, and the Ursulines would do this by educating young girls in Christian doctrine, as had their sisters in Italy. Initially, they followed the tradition of the original Company and

⁴ *Testament of Reverend Mother Sister Angela* (or the *Legacies*), legacy 11. The *Legacies* were only one of three works attributed to Merici and consisted of a preface and eleven legacies, but has been lost to time. The text of these legacies can be found in the acts of her canonization.

lived with their families. Then, less than two years later, Françoise de Bermond would lead a group of Ursulines to congregate – or live together – and take solemn religious vows in Isle-sur-Sorgue and would become their first Superior (Heaney, 1993, p. 17). Rapid growth saw the number of Ursuline houses grow to 70 in just over 40 years (Jégou, 1994, p. 83). Some traits characterized all Ursuline foundations, and the houses differed slightly on others. All houses shared the spiritual traits of « a life of intense prayer, great apostolic zeal in the eyes of children and adults, an ardent spirit of faith, austere penitence, extreme poverty lived in the confidence of Providence, » while varying slightly on the religious commitments of « a vow or promise of chastity; a vow of obedience; the three simple vows » (idem, p. 83).

Dubois (2013, p.3) points out that during the reforms that began at the end of the 15th century and culminating well into the 16th with the Council of Trent, religious orders began to see themselves as the true earthly imitators of Christ and the faithful began to look for them as God's true mediators. Established religious orders begin to aspire to reform measures, and new orders adopt them as part of their foundation. Between 1450 and 1520 an “imposing number” of new foundations and new vocations are established. She cites Brian and Le Gall's number of 55 new foundations founded between 1600 and 1639 in Paris alone.

In early 17th century France, the “sorry state of pastoral care” (Lierheimer, 1998, p. 215) and the decadence of the French church (Lux-Sterritt, 2005, p. 17) had contributed to the rise of Protestantism. Lux-Sterritt (2005) describes the setting as such:

In the first decade of the seventeenth century, the momentous rise of female involvement in the apostolate was symptomatic of a change in French spirituality, a reaction to circumstances which seemed to call for a reappraisal of women's place in the religious life. First, there was a perceived need to defend the faith against the palpable advances of Calvinism, the widespread progress of which had threatened extensive regions of the country during the Wars of Religion (1562-1598). Second, while Protestantism gained toleration with the 1598 Edict of Nantes, Catholicism itself offered a picture of neglect, riddled with the abuses which must ensue when, for many clergy, religion represented a

career rather than a vocation. Sexual misconduct, drunkenness and the assiduous frequenting of fashionable circles figured high on the list of grievances, along with the more specifically clerical failings of non-residence, lack of training and ignorance of religious duties (p. 17).

The response among the female faithful of the time was a spiritual revival characterized by large numbers of unmarried women separating themselves from the world by entering cloistered religious life and a rekindling of personal devotion in those who remained in the world. In the salons, “the seriousness of unworldly pursuits had come to replace the usual levity of fashionable distractions” and female involvement in reformation was often more ardent than that of their male counterparts, according to Lux-Sterritt (2005, pp. 17-18). The Ursulines in France took up the mantle and ran with it but did so in their own unique way. The Ursulines have always been missionaries by nature, distinguishable from other mere contemplative female religious orders by their singular purpose: not to simply lead lives of quiet reflection and contemplation, isolated from the world and its vices, but to actively pursue the mission of reforming the world of its vices by seeking to teach Christian doctrine and save souls from damnation, effectively “[taking] the piety of the cloister into the world” (Lux-Sterritt, 2005, p. 9).

During the Catholic Reformation, among the female religious orders, the Ursulines’ more public efforts in the education of young girls provided a desperately needed social and religious service, but their activities often conflicted with prevalent gender norms and expectations placed on them by both clerical and secular forces who ultimately had the authority to silence them. As Lierheimer (1998) argues, the Ursulines were often viewed with “distrust and hostility because of their uncloistered status and unorthodox activities”. Their double challenge, then, was to establish their authority to teach and catechize and to do so in a manner that would legitimize their efforts in the minds of their clerical and lay detractors, which they would do by

distinguishing between preaching and teaching and defining their teaching efforts as a domestic activity (pp. 212-213). Their argument was that it was traditional and customary for mothers to provide their children with their first religious training and that, since the Protestants were promoting female literacy, Catholics must do likewise to remain competitive (Clark, 2002, p. 2).

Soon Mesdames Acarie and Sainte-Beuve⁵ began to reflect on the necessity of the Ursulines in Paris to take solemn religious vows, which Merici had resisted in Italy. The times and contexts were, however, changing. Madame Sainte-Beuve sought counsel from her director, Father Gontery, who explained to her that, in order to « ensure the perpetuity of the foundation », the additional step must be taken to « give the character of a religious order obliged to cloister, instead of leaving it under the form of a simple congregation without solemn vows » (Leymont, 1890, p. 158). They petitioned the Pope for approval and called Françoise de Bermond to come to Paris to assist. As soon as she completed the founding of a new establishment in Marseille, she did come to Paris in 1606, finding that Madame Acarie had been busy in the meantime and had a convent, pupils and a school ready and waiting for her to begin the work (Heaney, 1993, p.15). The first official monastery dedicated to St. Ursula was established in 1612 by a papal bull in favor of the group of congregated Ursulines in Paris. Since « the work of Angela Merici grew rich with the Augustinian and monastic tradition » (Jégou, 1994, p. 84), the sisters chose the Rule of Saint Augustine as the basis of their new order.

A great difficulty arose, however, with the vows that the sisters took under this new order. Closure did not allow for the sisters or the public to move freely in and out of the monastery, which naturally prevented them from executing their primary purpose of educating

⁵ The high-born wife of Pierre Acarie, famous for fighting against the Huguenots as a prominent member of the Catholic League, Madame Acarie is best known for founding the French Carmel. She also helped established the Oratory and worked alongside her cousin, Madame de Sainte-Beuve, to found the Ursuline Order in France.

young girls. Successive papal bulls would later grant them a fourth solemn vow, committing them to and facilitating such instruction by allowing them to maintain closure while also fulfilling their teaching duties, effectively transforming them into teaching convents. After Paris in 1612, the primary Congregations later established by papal bulls were those of « Toulouse, 1614; Bordeaux, 1618; Lyon and Dijon, 1619; Tulle, 1621; Arles, 1624; Avignon, 1637 » (idem, p. 84). These eight papal bulls, Jégou continues (p. 84), are the basis of the eight « Congregations of the Order of St. Ursula », or the eight « groupings of monasteries having among them the same spirit while at the same time remaining autonomous. » Mother Bernadette Josèphe Berquer describes this organizational structure as such:

The monasteries are autonomous and dependent on the Bishop of the diocese. They arise from different Congregations: Paris, Bordeaux, Lyon, Toulouse. In a single Congregation, the bull of erection is the same, the Constitutions nearly identical and many customs held in common. The communities accept postulants and train novices inside their walls. They vote to elect their superior. There is complete enclosure. This situation, unchanged since the XVIIth century, is harmonious with the regional idiosyncrasies of the time. (Berquer, 2010, p. 1, translation mine)

Lierheimer (1998) sees the enclosure that had become the norm by the mid-17th century as the ultimate application of the distinction between public preaching and private teaching in the reality of their religious occupation. She also considers the Ursulines to be one order that not only succeeded but thrived, despite the opposition to their public vocation and the limitations natural to enclosure by adapting to it and accomplishing their goals by profiting from the institutional stability it provided (pp. 222-223).

The Ursulines indeed had proven themselves industrious and adaptable, forward-thinking and courageous, just like their foundress had wished. In just 77 years after Merici founded the Company of St. Ursula in Brescia, Italy, these women had ushered in a new era and structure that would ensure the continued success of the Ursuline vocation and tradition.

Mystical with a respect for earthly authority – obedient to God first and then to man – Angela Merici exemplified the values and virtues she hoped to inspire in the future generations of the Company she founded: courage in face of opposition and hardships, interior purity cultivated by penitential devotions, a general love for all of humankind without prejudice, a unity and harmony among those who would devote themselves to the work, and adaptability which future circumstances and missions may require.

2.2 *The Ursuline Mission to New France*

The persons whose virtues are proposed for our meditation are not strong men who have crossed the seas to take the Gospel to the infidels; they are simple women like ourselves, who we have seen sanctifying themselves in our midst, in the practice of the same Rules, in fidelity to the same usages (*Annales des Ursulines de Blois*, 1714).

It is with the above quote from the “*Annales des Ursulines de Blois*” of 1714 that Dr. Elizabeth Rapley opens her *Social History of the Cloister* (2001, p. 1) in considering the Ursulines in France. Yet in the Ursuline mission endeavor to the New World, the historical record indeed gives us stories of many “simple women” who “crossed the seas” like “strong men” to “take the Gospel to the infidels.” And these were no ordinary religious, nor were they ordinary women. In each case, God had been preparing them mentally and emotionally for many years beforehand for missions to the New World. From the Ursuline community in Tours, Marie Guyart dite de l’Incarnation and others would, in 1639, set sail to Canada as the first female missionaries to New France, and, almost a century later, in 1727, due in large part to the trail blazing of Marie de l’Incarnation, two sisters from the Ursuline community in Rouen would indeed embark with others from their community and from communities across the region to New France, facing the task that lay before them as they boarded the ship *La Gironde* in L’Orient, France, bound for New Orleans.

Naturally, they had been first inspired and later even called by the Jesuits. In describing the immense attraction Guyart held for the wilds of Canada, Laporte (2000) imagines that, upon receiving from Father Poncet the Jesuit *Relation de la Nouvelle-France* dated 1634, Marie must have “devoured the document” and “travelled in her thoughts” as she read of the harsh daily realities faced by the missionaries and of the unique culture of the Hurons. “Through these extraordinary reports,” Laporte continues, “the authors of the Relations desired, beyond just informing, to incite the generosity of religious and laypeople; this generosity could be translated into prayers, material goods, or more missionary recruits (p. 17, translation mine). Leslie Choquette (1997) in turn goes into further detail. She discusses the extent to which the women fervently desired to come to the New World but were restrained for several reasons by the religious establishment, and she argues that women like Marie Guyart’s “assertive behavior with regards to New France thus related to their central place with Counter-Reformation piety and their unwillingness to be excluded from one of its characteristic manifestations: the attempted conversion of Native Americans” (p. 147). They only succeeded in embarking for the New World through sheer persistence and, once there, played an influential role in its development. Even after arriving, however, they functioned not on their own terms but on those that “a cautious ecclesiastical establishment, prodded by their protests, reluctantly conceded to them” (p. 149). Again, the work was feared to be too difficult for womankind or it was feared that they were being coerced to go (p. 148). But come they did, and in droves! Their desire to come was so strong and the news received in the communities so inciting that Jesuit Paul le Jeune would write of the Ursulines,

I will say nothing of the Ursuline mothers. They write to me with such a fire and in such great numbers and from so many diverse places that if the doors were opened to their desires, they would make up a city of nuns and there would be found ten mistresses for one schoolchild. Their sex, their ages, sicknesses, very sensitive colics, do not at all

prevent the sacrifice of their persons they make to God. If they could bring with them ready-made cities and pre-cleared lands, I would think we should deliberately charter vessels to bring them over. Otherwise, God hears them just as well in Old France as in New France. The time will come that some among them will obtain what an army of them request, and our Lord will choose from among them. (as published in Thwaites, 1898, p. 58, see Appendix C.6 for original text)

Le Jeune write likewise in 1635:

What amazes me is that a great number of nuns, consecrated to our Lord, want to join the fight, surmounting the fear natural to their sex to come to the aid of the poor daughters and poor wives of the Savages. There are so many of them who write to us, and from so many Monasteries, . . . that you would say they are competing to see who can be the first to mock the difficulties of the Sea, the mutinies of the Ocean, and the Barbary of these lands. (as cited in translation in Choquette, 1997, p. 147).

Marie de l'Incarnation, who set sail only four years later, was also a prolific writer, perhaps the most prolific Ursuline writer ever. It seems that the impetus for such a vast quantity of writing, uncommon among those living the religious, cloistered life, was the circumstances in which she found herself upon arrival and establishment in Québec. The uniqueness of Guyart's situation cannot be wholly attributed to the fact that she was the first woman in her time to be sent out as a foreign missionary. She was also rare among the Ursulines in that she had been married at age 18, widowed at age 20, suffered the failure of a business and had a son whom she had abandoned at age 11 when she made profession at 31. She therefore wrote for 3 reasons uncommon among those who had chosen the same vocation, as Vincent Grégoire (1998) argues: 1) publically to inform her benefactors of her work in Québec and to raise funds for the convent; 2) privately to her son, as any mother would, to communicate with him concerning her life in the New World and to justify her decision to withdraw from him and from the world in pursuit of her religious vocation; and 3) personally « in order to 'relieve herself' from an overflow of spiritual life » (pp. 33-35). Grégoire continues in stating that her 8000 or more letters that she would write « as if enslaved » can be divided into two categories: « letters of information and 'propaganda',

in a rather impersonal tone, and ‘letters of the heart’, as the Ursuline called them, intimate letters replete with secrets, with counsel, or with states of mind » (p. 36).

When Marie de l’Incarnation set sail for Canada in 1639, only 104 years had passed since Angela Merici had stood up to ecclesiastical and secular authorities in Italy and won the right to establish the Company, and just over a quarter century had gone by since Françoise de Bermond and her sisters battled for their identity in post-Tridentine France. The determination to obey God, while still respecting the authority He had given to the Church, and the courage to take the Gospel to wherever He would compel them, was only in keeping with their foundress.

Marie’s legacy, however, – and the legacy of Merici and Bermond – would extend beyond her extensive writings, down the Mississippi River and eventually into Louisiana. According to Semple (1925, p. 5), thanks to the instruction provided by her at the Ursuline convent in Québec, one student born in Rouen, France, Catherine Primot, would, in 1680, become the mother in life and in piety of one Jean-Baptiste Le Moyne, Sieur de Bienville.

2.3 The Ursulines in New Orleans

The story of Mother Marie Tranchepain de St. Augustin and her fellow pioneering sisters who established in New Orleans the first school for girls in what would later be the United States has been told and retold by numerous historians and admirers alike.⁶ The recounting and analysis of their adventurous voyage to New France and their challenges and victories during the years after their arrival in New Orleans, as well as the nearly three centuries of untiring labor of the inheritors of their vision, have been the subjects of Masters theses, doctoral dissertations, articles

⁶ See Baudier (1955, 1972); Clark (2007); Cruzat (1919); Heaney (1993); Renshaw (1901); Semple (1925) for the primary examples of significant texts on the New Orleans Ursulines.

and books ever since the publishing of Tranchepain's *Adventurous voyage* and Madeleine Hachard's letters home to her father in Rouen.

2.3.1 Mother Tranchepain and the First Arrivals

What we know of Tranchepain has been gleaned from a few documents in the archives in Rouen, Aix-en-Provence and New Orleans, the narrative she composed of the voyage to New Orleans, and the obituary letter written about her by her successor. Yet compared to the extensive written legacy of Marie Guyart, there is relatively little known of Tranchepain personally. She seemingly kept no personal journal, composed no treatises on spiritual truths or pious living, and wrote no personal letters to loved ones, at least none that have survived or been published. It seems that Marie de l'Incarnation was indeed unique in the composition of so much literature personal to herself and that Tranchepain was more traditional and practical, either reticent or not seeing the purpose or value in openly discussing her internal struggles. Instead, it is to one of her young protégées, Madeleine Hachard, whom Baudier (1995) would name "the first woman writer of Louisiana and the first historian" (p. 7) , that we owe much of our knowledge of the voyage across the sea, as well as of the first two years after arrival, through the letters she wrote home to her father in Rouen.

The information that has survived informs us that Marie Tranchepain was born circa 1680 to a prominent Protestant secular leader in Rouen, France. According to Reneault (1919, pp. 160-203), She professed into the Ursuline convent in Rouen on February 15, 1703 after converting at some point to Catholicism and petitioning the king for liberation from her Huguenot parents. For having converted, she received a grant of 1200 livres and a lifetime annuity of 200 livres from the king (Reneault, 1919, p. 160, see also REQT). According to Dr. Rapley, the aftermath of the

“Mississippi Bubble” and the Law Crash, which reduced the incomes of *rente-dependant* institutions to almost zero, provide the best possible explanation for the financial struggles and insolvency of many congregations at the time (personal communication). The community in Rouen soon suffered additional severe financial difficulties that had been looming for years and fell into bankruptcy on July 24, 1707, caused by fraud perpetrated by their financial agent coupled with the *amortissement* imposed upon them (Rapley, personal communication). After sending out a circular requesting the assistance of other communities, many of the sisters were subsequently dispersed to other convents. This « misery of the times » and « decadence in the temporal affairs of their community » seem to be the said impetuses for Marie Tranchepain and two of her fellow Rouen sisters, Marguerite Judde and Françoise Mary de la Passion, to flee to the Ursuline house in Magny, France, from where on Dec 14, 1715, they would petition the Monseigneur for a permanent transfer and from where it appears they had no intention to return (REQT, see Appendix C.7 for original text, see also Reneault, 1919, p. 180). In this petition, they state that they had indeed been in Magny for 8 years, which supports the assertion that the Rouen bankruptcy was the ultimate cause of their move. Additionally, by the time Tranchepain and Judde left for Magny, Tranchepain was, for unknown reasons, no longer receiving her royal annuity (REQT, see Appendix C.7 for original text).

They must have returned to Rouen at some point, however,⁷ first because Hachard mentions in her letters to her father that Tranchepain and Judde had only spent time with the sisters in Magny, second because the treaty with the French East India Company that endowed

⁷ Dr. Rapley informed me that “it was always the custom in female monastic orders that the house in which one was professed was the house to which, ultimately, she belonged. She might travel elsewhere but her dowry stayed put, and she might return to the house later” (personal communication).

and facilitated their mission to New Orleans was with the sisters of Rouen, and lastly because by Tranchepain's own narrative, they came to New Orleans from Rouen.

According to the obituary letter written after her passing, after her profession in Rouen, Marie Tranchepain cultivated in her heart « a singular attraction for missions » (LCNO, p. 208) and her wish would soon be granted:

Our Lord Jesus Christ and his Holy Mother made known to her that she would have much to suffer before departing and upon her arrival. All of this, far from dampening her zeal, seemed on the contrary only to serve to render it livelier and more intense. That which she left us in her writings on the dispositions of her heart is admirable and clearly displays the greatness of her courage, that she showed by its results, unknotting, so to speak, with an uncommon generosity, the difficulties the struggles and the sorrows inherent in starting an establishment. Although our Reverend Mother made several attempts, to the extent that she had it in her, to fulfill the designs that she could not doubt Providence had on her, God made know to her that a Jesuit whom she did not know at all, to whom she was totally unknown, and who was at the time traveling in France, was the one whom He had chosen for her guide and supervisor in a strange land where He wanted to avail Himself of her to begin a religious establishment of her order. This Jesuit is the Reverend Father de Beaubois who was obliged to make a trip to France for matters concerning his mission and whose intention was to work towards establishing an Ursuline community in New Orleans, as he had fortunately managed to accomplish in 1726, having proposed to the gentlemen of the India Company the foundation of a hospital of which the community would be given charge. This Reverend Father, having learned of the zeal that burned in our dear Mother, wrote to her of the plans he had for her. I will in no way tell you, My Reverend Mother, of the elation of our fervent missionary in the moment when she saw her wishes granted and even less of what she had to suffer to accomplish that on which she had been contemplating for so many years. Her virtue, her courage, and her skill at showing consideration to everyone, smoothed out entirely the obstacles she had to overcome. (LCNO, pp. 208-209, see Appendix C.8 for original text)

Governor Bienville had solicited the assistance of Father Nicholas Ignatius de Beaubois, the founder and Superior of the Jesuit mission in New Orleans, in procuring for New Orleans a religious order that would provide services at the military hospital and education for young girls. To that end, Beaubois would arrange for a treaty with the Company of the Indies that provided passage for the sisters to New Orleans and provision for the building of a monastery in exchange for services rendered in the local hospital as well as the education of young girls in the colony

whose parents found either the cost too high or the risk too great to send their daughters back to France for their education as they were accustomed to with their sons (Renshaw, 1901, p. 25). The sisters were not immediately able to fulfill their duties at the hospital due to the location across town from their housing. The monastery was soon built, however, and the sisters undertook the work there, which they continued until 1770 when their dwindling numbers prevented them continuing. However, the educational vocation that they took up soon after their arrival “with alacrity and zeal, combating a pitiable condition of ignorance which existed in the province” (idem, p. 29) has never ceased, and they remain faithful to it even today, almost 300 years later.

Over the past three centuries of faithful and unrelenting service to their God and to society, the New Orleans Ursulines have, from their arrival forward, left an indelible mark on Louisiana. Not the first nuns to visit the colony (Semple, 1925, p. 3), but the first ones to make of it their permanent home (Baudier, 1955, p. 8), the Ursulines’ offer of readily available and quality education for young girls of all economic abilities – allowing the daughters of wealthy parents to remain in New Orleans for their education (instead of returning to France) while affording less affluent parents the means to educate their daughters (idem, p. 9) – brought what Renshaw (1901, p. 29) called “the earnest of stability to the colony” and gave to “those who hitherto had felt that they were sojourners in the land . . . the sentiment of the permanency of a home”. The twelve Ursuline sisters who made the voyage to New Orleans could not have fully envisioned all they and their successors would endeavor to and manage to accomplish. As Clark states (2002, p.2), “The Ursulines raised the literacy rate of women in the city to one of the highest in early America; provided a place for women and girls of diverse social and ethnic backgrounds to forge a shared identity; developed urban real estate; and perhaps most

significantly, played a part in the emergence of a vital Afro-Catholic community in New Orleans”.

2.3.2 *New Challenges in a New World*

When Mother Tranchepain and her companions arrived at the mouth of the Mississippi River, they were entering into a new world of which they had only read reports and for which they could not have been fully prepared. Tranchepain describes her impressions in her *Relation du voyage*:

We had scarcely anchored when a favorable breeze sprang up ; we kept on to Balize, which we reached July 23, 1727, five months, day for day, from our departure. Balize is a port at the mouth of the Mississippi . . . Our other Sisters took the long boat with Mr. Massy, our two followers, and two servants of the Reverend Fathers. This little passage, which was only thirty leagues, was attended by incredible annoyance. As the long boat moved too slowly we went on. We set out on St. Ignatius’ day, but we had to lie to every night, and one hour before sunset, in order to have time to put up our mosquito nets, because you are attacked by insects whose sting causes almost insupportable pain. We slept twice amid mud and water that fairly soaked us, and our mattresses were almost always floating in the water. All this tries one at the time, but we are amply rewarded afterward by the pleasure we feel in each one’s relating her little adventures, and that we are utterly surprised at the strength and courage which God gives on such occasions : a clear proof that He never fails us, and that He does not permit us to be tempted above our strength, always bestowing graces in proportion to the trials He sends us.

The ardent desire we felt to reach our destination made us endure our pains with great joy...

It would be too prolix and even useless to endeavor to express the varied sentiments of my heart on beholding a land for which I had sighed so many years . . . In a word, everything leads us to hope that our establishment will redound to the greater glory of God ; and that in time it will effect great good for the salvation of souls, which is our chief aim. For this we need prayers. I solicit them from you, my Reverend Mother, and hope that your zeal will obtain prayers for us from all the communities of the order with which you are in correspondence.

I earnestly hope that the perusal of this letter may inflame hearts with love for Jesus Christ, and prompt the Sisters, whom He and His holy Mother have prepared for us, to come to our assistance. Let the long voyage and hardships we have endured repel no one. Oh ! if they only knew how magnificently God rewards what we do for Him, they would never take into account all the hardships through which they must go... (RELV, as translated by Shea from the edition of the original manuscript printed by himself, 1859, pp. 11-14)

New Orleans was indeed an uninviting and hostile environment for cloistered nuns coming from well-established communities located in milder climates in Europe. Upon arrival, the first to greet them were the mosquitos and they had very little in the way of accommodations and sleeping arrangements. New sicknesses awaited them: « certain sicknesses, like smallpox and measles » (LCNO, letter 7) mercilessly attacked her and the girls in her charge. Tertian fever was one of the fevers in this country that killed quickly and unexpectedly (letter 1). In the first years of the establishment, Mother Tranchepain struggled constantly with the Company of the Indies and her successors would never find much respite from battles against the secular authorities in New Orleans. At least for the financial and political struggles she faced, Mother Tranchepain was surely well prepared, having experienced firsthand the financial hardships that had befallen her home community and had forced her temporary exile to Magny. But for the weather and the insects, and the population that made up the city of New Orleans at the time, not much could have prepared her well.

By 1852, Louisiana was a state in the United States, and the Ursulines had been well established in New Orleans for 125 years. Yet, compared to the impressions related by Mother Tranchepain upon their arrival at the entrance to the Mississippi River, it seems not much had changed in terms of the inhospitable nature of the New World, nor of the fervent and resolute desire of their hearts for the work ahead of them. On July 2, 1852, after arriving at their final destination of San Antonio, Texas, two Ursuline sisters, Mary Patrick Joseph and Mary Augustine Joseph, from the Ursuline Convent of St. Mary's in Waterford, Ireland, wrote a letter to their Ursuline sisters in Galveston. Less than a year after the New Orleans and Galveston communities had sent seven of their own to San Antonio to establish an Ursuline foundation there, the immediate success of their endeavor had compelled them to send for reinforcements.

These two Irish sisters answered the call and, just as Mother Tranchepain and Sister Hachard had done over a century earlier, penned the accounts of the events and impressions of their travels in letters home:

The city of New Orleans is a most unhealthy place; the heat is intense; & the air even scorching: during the rainy season the damp is so great that the walls of the houses are teeming with moisture. The inhabitants of the city are of very varied characters; some are Catholics; others Protestants; and the greater number nothing at all. Every night a house or houses are set on fire: altogether it seems that it must be either great love of God, or great love for money that would enable a person to support the inconveniences incident on a life in this city. (as quoted in McDowell, 1988, pp. 101-102)

Their first stop along the way had been in New Orleans, and the community there welcomed them, boarded them, and provided them with refreshment from their journey and encouragement in their endeavor. They describe their arrival and stay at the New Orleans convent in this manner:

The enclosure door was opened, & our dear Rev. Mother of N. Orleans, *M. Seraphine*, Mother Assistant, *Mère Ste. Claire*, & another, received us from Mgr. & the Chaplain. Our Mother embraced us, & brought us to the Infirmary, where she gave us her blessing; & sat with us, & told us what Mgr. had already informed us of in the early part of the day, that she had Letters for us.

We were at home in a minute with her, & with all the dear sisters here. We are in [sic?] charge of M. Ste. Angele, the most ancient in the house, & the Infirmary. We told her that our last dinner at dear St. Mary's was given to us by the Infirmary, & our first at N. Orleans by the same Officière.

The Rev. Mother speaks no English. She & all the other Religious were surprised & delighted to find that we speak French – they say so well! Our Mother & her dear Community were most uneasy about us for the last week. Holy mass & communion, &c., were [sic] for us several times. *Mère Ste. Angele* particularly anxious. – She is rather like our dearly loved M. Magdalen in features – & in, half like her, & our dear M. Chantal, & M. Teresa. She had been asking the Doctor how she was to treat us early on Saturday.

We passed evening recreation with the Community, fanning ourselves & warring with the Mosquitos, who find us very choice morsels. We slept in a comfortable way last night, & rose to first mass at six – the second mass is at nine O'clock.

Sunday morning we were clothed as Ursulines of N. Orleans, except that as we have not our trunks as yet, we wear our travelling dresses. Rev. Mother is so anxious that our letters should be posted, we cannot enter into more detail until next post. (as quoted in McDowell, 1988, pp.77-78)

So the New Orleans Ursulines found themselves thrust into a New World setting to which they brought centuries of tradition but in which they found themselves confronted with challenges they had never before faced, realities which dictated that they innovate within the parameters of this longstanding tradition. These New World ideals will be discussed further in Chapter 6. What we see in the New Orleans Ursulines inherited from their foundress and the tradition of their order is the keeping of cloister, obedience first to God and then to man, courage under trials, a general evangelistic zeal and love for all people despite race or rank, and the belief in the ever-looming reality of Purgatory. Countless numbers in France and in New France would be honored with eulogies that praised them for all that they were and did that would inspire future generations of pious, brave and fervent Ursulines.

As will be shown in the coming chapters, it is the distinct genre referred to here as the *obituary circular letter* – from the tradition practiced in France to its unique expression in New Orleans – in praising the likes of Merici and the thousands of Ursulines who have followed her vocationally and imitated her personally down through the centuries, as described in this chapter, that has provided and continues to provide inspirational examples of pious character and purpose, and it is in them that we find the best explanation for such admiration.

CHAPTER 3. OBJECTIVES AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

According to Boschet (1951, pp. 139-142), on May 1, 1872, when Abbot Pierre-François Richaudeau, chaplain of the Ursulines of Blois, France, sent a circular letter to all the Ursuline houses known to him around the world, he had already been working for almost a decade to rectify what he and others had come to view as serious neglect on the part of the worldwide order: the almost complete lack of communication among the communities. By doing so, he was supporting and pleading on behalf of an ongoing movement to link together, either by way of periodic circulars or by the publication of the annals, what had always been independent and autonomous houses of the order – later, after succeeding, to be named the Roman Union – for the purpose of facilitating communication among the houses. Lamenting primarily that the suffrages were not being accorded to the deceased – “Surely they knew each other’s addresses, right?” (idem, p. 139) –, he collected and distributed the addresses of 130 houses in France and 70 houses overseas, in the hopes that no deceased sister be furthermore denied the suffrages. Richaudeau quotes one of the most prosperous houses in France (without naming it), who had argued to him that one of the surest means of development would be the communication among the communities concerning their individual plans, improvements, accomplishments, etc. (as well as news and needs, as stated by Berquer, 2010, p. 2) Other feminine orders whose own communities were autonomous were doing it; why couldn’t the Ursulines? He envisions that the circular letters be published every three years, and, on October 15, 1876, sends a circular to the 271 houses known to him, requesting that they begin the process of sending these triennial circulars.

On December 3, 1878, Sister Seraphine, born and professed in France but now the Superior in New Orleans, responds in a circular letter preserved today in the subterranean

archives of the Ursuline convent in Beaugency, France (UCAB, Circulaire No. 1, pp. 1-3, see Appendix C.9 for original text):

I come therefore, quite late it is true, perhaps the last of all, to respond to the call of the good sir Abbot Richaudeau, attempting by way of our circulars to contribute to this large plan of unification among all the houses of the great family of Saint Angela.

She then goes into brief detail of the current misfortune in which the convent finds itself, with dwindling numbers of students and consequent financial struggles, before lifting her tone into one of rejoicing for the news she had been receiving, by way of the circulars, from the other communities:

If we have cause to moan over the current state of our boarding school, on the other hand, we rejoice, and we congratulate the majority of the houses of our Order for their prosperity, and for the great good to which Our Lord permits them to work for His glory and the good of a multitude of souls. We pray God continues to grant them this compensation and this merit, at the same time as we beseech Him to accord the same mercies to those whom persecution or some other cause have reduced, like us, to a sort of nothingness.

Turning then to the primary purpose for the circular letter campaign, she continues:

These last years have been painful for us on several counts, but above all because we have had to bemoan the deaths of seven of our dear sisters, four from the choir and three lay, in less than three years.

At the news of the passing of an Ursuline, we make all the particular prayers, hoping that something might be determined up above. On this subject, permit me, my reverend Mothers and my dear Sisters, to accord to you our complete approval for the manner of suffrages proposed by our Sisters the Ursulines of Varaždin (Croatia, Austria).

She undoubtedly is referring here to some proposal received as part of a circular letter sent, in response to Richaudeau's request, from Austria during this campaign, and, of these circular letters received, she says:

We can say that the circulars have made known to us that the majority of the houses of our Order, whether they make the four or only the three vows (which it seems to me not to make the slightest difference for those who have made the vow of obedience in our institute), and who practice the teaching profession under the authority of the superiors; we may note, I mean, in almost all of the Ursuline houses, despite the diversity of their

constitutions, more or less the same practices, and certainly the same spirit of piety, of simplicity and of zeal that Saint Angela communicated to her first daughters and associates.

What then was this practice that Richaudeau was lamenting had too often been neglected? What custom was he attempting to revive to ensure that the deceased sisters continued to receive their duly needed suffrages and that the Ursuline houses around the world shared in the needs and news of their sister communities? What were these *lettres circulaires* and what part did they play in the edificatory and collective nature among the houses of the Ursuline order? This chapter will discuss the questions I began to ask myself the further I delved into the letters of the New Orleans community and the multitude of others I located in France. I will then discuss the literature relevant to my background research as well as my approach to the analysis of the letters. Finally, I will outline the five themes that I hypothesize will serve to answer my questions.

3.1 Questions Arising Out of the Literature

There is very little written in terms of analysis of the tradition itself of composing and circulating obituary letters that describe the death and life of the members of a religious community. For the most part, when these letters have been studied and referenced in academic treatises, it has been simply to glean from them information relevant to the particular purpose of the treatise, never to analyze the letters themselves or the tradition proper. For example, Notter (1990) uses necrological documents in large part for the data in his demographic study of women religious in Blois, France. Prior to this study, all that I was able to find in way of description of this genre was a few pages in several works that describe such letters in general terms, simply by way of introducing them as the source of the information presented in the particular work. These

publications on the subject are discussed in this section. Also, the Center for French and Francophone Studies (CFFS) at Louisiana State University (LSU), of which Dr. Sylvie Dubois is the Director, is currently conducting a more detailed analysis of the letters, at least in the New World tradition, and Dr. Dubois' conference presentation (2013) on the subject is informative and noteworthy.

In discussing the “qualities that made up the *institut* of the Visitandine” order, Elizabeth Rapley devotes three paragraphs (2007, p. 157) to the evidence that can be drawn from the numerous necrological documents of the order. Before beginning her analysis, she makes several statements concerning the genre: First, that, “as biographies, eulogies have always had their limitations” and “tend to enhance the virtues and minimize the faults of their subjects”, not with the intention of being inaccurate in their portrayals but because the purpose of the eulogies went “beyond biography” to employing the lives of the deceased and the “way in which they could be used to personify the *institut*” to “reiterate the teaching of the founders, as they themselves saw it”. The result was then that:

Over time, a composite picture was built up of the Visitandine vocation. To read the death notices is to see, though perhaps only through a glass darkly, the religious life as it was proposed by one generation of *filles de Sainte-Marie* to the next (emphasis original);

Second, that the *death notices*, as she terms them, “although [originating] in houses all over France . . . followed a fairly uniform pattern of presentation” which she calls an “invisible template” and which typically included the family and background of the deceased sister, her call to religion, her novitiate and profession (and the struggles involved), her life in the final years, her virtues and devotions, her process of sanctification, and finally her illness and death. Third, that “there is a marked uniformity in language and imagery” due to the “closed universe” in

which the Visitandines lived and the devotional works that were available to them, most of which were the various writings of their founders. She concludes here that

they internalized the principles that they found there, and propagated them by repeating them to each other. The death notices can be seen as the shading-in by succeeding generations of the outlines created out by the founders. Across the particularities of these many, many lives, and despite the subtle alterations of spirit which came with changing times, the shape and form of the original *institut* remains discernable (emphasis original).

Emily Clark's *Masterless Mistresses* (2007), is the latest historical work to be published on the history of the Ursuline community in New Orleans, Louisiana, the first established school for young girls in what is now the United States of America. She traces their history of service to New Orleans in parallel with the development of the port city from its infancy, showing how the Ursulines left their imprint on New Orleans from the very beginning, adapting and growing alongside the city, suffering defeats and overcoming manifold obstacles in innovative and industrious ways to maintain their presence and influence on the young ladies who continue to grow into the wives and mothers who help shape the cultural and religious identity of New Orleans and the Gulf South.

In her book, Clark draws heavily from the obituary circular letters, as recorded and preserved in the New Orleans book of *Lettres Circulaires des décédées*, for the biographical and historical information needed. She even devotes just short of five pages (pp. 96-100) to the letters themselves. Similar to Rapley's itemization of the typical ingredients in the Visitandine letters, Clark breaks down the same for the New Orleans Ursulines' *obituary notices*, as she refers to them, into four typical sections: the nun's entry into religion, different occupations filled, religious observances and her death. Beyond providing "vivid evidence of how the women sustained Ursuline spirituality in Louisiana", the obituary letters also confirm that the model of the ideal nun, modeled by the Virgin Mary and prescribed in their *Reglemens*, "remained both

the ideal and the reality for Ursulines in the New World” while “[hinting] that in America the range and intensity of the nuns’ pious work exceeded French experience” (p. 96). For Clark, the letters that comprise the New Orleans book are more than historical records of the community; they are the biographies of the women who shaped it.

Clark also edited a publication (2007) of the letters translated into English of the letters written home by Marie Madeleine Hachard that recounted the early years of the Ursuline establishment in New Orleans, among other writings, including the obituary circulars written by the first Superior, Mother Tranchepain, Tranchepain’s obituary written by her successor, and the obituary of Hachard herself. In introducing this chapter, she devotes two and a half pages (pp. 93-95) to an introduction to the letters. She makes several points here: First, the relinquishing of the nun’s wordly identity and adoption of a new identity, evidenced by her name change, into a corporate body; second, the inclusion of details of the nun’s childhood that layed the groundwork for her religious vocation; and the value placed on the development of each sister’s individual self as it related to the role she played in the community. She states that a reading of the letters reveals the “diversity of gifts” exhibited by the sisters, gifts such as “abject humility, dangerous enthusiasm, iron resolve, and sweet submissiveness”; demonstrates that this diversity of gifts was prized among the community; and shows that “there was no single ideal to guide an Ursuline as she sought to perfect herself in religious life in the strange new setting that was Louisiana” (p. 95). She finishes by stating that

Each of the founding sisters contributed, in her own way, to a manifestation of her order that was unparalleled in previous incarnations of the Company of St. Ursula in France and Canada, helping to create a uniquely American institution (p. 95)

As late as 1865 in Quebec, G. E. Desbarats printed a text entitled *Aids to Epistolary Correspondence; or, Familiar Directions for Writing Letters on Various Subjects. Also, Rules of*

Punctuation.: for the use of the pupils of the Ursuline Convent to aid them in the most appropriate styles and practices of the art of letter writing. He undoubtedly had the circular letters on his mind – or even on his desk! – as he described in great detail the forms, formulas, and techniques most appropriate to the genre:

- to a Superior we ought to be respectful (p. 4), we should never forget who we are, and what the person is whom we address (p. 7)
- from an epistle of *condolence* all pleasantry should be banished : to exhibit the wit which we possess, at such a time, is like smiling at a funeral, to display a beautiful set of teeth (p. 9)
- a mere string of bitter reflections, without any concluding ray of hope being held out...is like striking the stricken deer (p. 10)
- the signature should always be written towards the right edge of the page (p. 19)
- the language adopted at the conclusion of letters, varies according to the rank, age, and other circumstances of the writer and the person addressed
- It is disrespectful to be too concise in this part of a letter, especially when addressing a superior. The forms ascend, by various grades, from the plain “I am, Sir, Your humble servant,” even beyond “I have the honor to be, My Lord, with great respect, Your Lordship’s most obedient, And very humble servant,” &c. (p. 19)

Additionally, Desbarats states that ease, simplicity, and brevity are “the qualities most frequently required” and “of the greatest importance in the epistolary style” (p. 3), for “if we encumber an idea with verbiage it loses its power” (p. 4).

The founders of the Visitandines would certainly have agreed with such prescriptions. Jean Delumeau, in his presentation of the obituary circular letters of the Visitandines (1981), points out that the content of the Visitandine obituary letters had been prescribed in great detail by the founders in two works: the *Coustumier* and the *Responses de Notre Très Honorée et Digne Mère Jeanne Françoise Fremiot sure les Règles et Constitutions pour les sœurs*

religieuses de la Visitation Sainte-Marie, which insist primarily on simplicity and exactitude in the letters (p. 211).

Although Dubois' conference paper, "Les éloges funèbres des Ursulines de France et Nouvelle France: L'évolution d'un acte idéologique, collectif et discursive du XVII^e au XIX^e siècle", is a presentation of the beginning stages of her research on the subject, it provides the most detailed analysis to date, and this paper will follow in large part her analytical framework. The objectives of her research are two-fold: First, to examine the pedagogical knowledges of writing and orthography in Christian education, and, second, to examine the evolution in time and space of the *éloges funèbres*, as she terms the obituary circular letters, as they relate to that knowledge in France and their transfer to New France. She defines the *éloge funèbre* as an edifying apologetic that reveals an act of faith on the part of the writer. Additionally, and as will be discussed further in Chapter 5, it is a *public* and *personalized* document, based on its nature as it relates to canon and secular law. She then places the *éloge funèbre* in its social context of the Ursuline mission during the Counter Reformation and then in its cultural context as it relates generally to the *éloge* in its various forms in high and middle society in France.

She then describes her corpora, collected from Louisiana, Quebec, and France, and describes their form and function, as well as their feminine nature. The second part of her presentation discusses the ideological and collective dimensions of the letters from a pragmatic perspective. Finally, Dubois presents the discursive elements of the letters. All of this will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 5.

A recurring motif concerning the obituary circular tradition seems to be its use and purpose in reiterating the values of the order as received through the centuries and based

primarily on the lives and teachings of their founders. Following from these assertions by Rapley and Clark, several questions arose then for me as I was reading the letters.

1. What was the guiding principle and history behind this tradition? How did it develop and why?
2. What values, in the case of the Ursuline letters, are being reiterated and endorsed? How are the values of the founders and their successors present in the letters?
3. In what ways did the New Orleans *lettres circulaires* maintain the traditions received from more than two centuries of tradition in France?
4. Do the New Orleans *lettres circulaires* reflect – and, if so, in what way? – any innovations that can be traced to the new setting in which they found themselves in Louisiana?
5. What can be gleaned from the letters about the individual sisters? Is Clark correct – and, if so, to what extent – that there was no single ideal to guide a New Orleans Ursuline in her pursuit of perfect piety?

Even with a simple glancing over of the letters, one notices very quickly how much respect is afforded to the recipient: the Superior in particular and the community as a whole in general. Part of this treatise will be an analysis of that notion of respect and the manner in which it is granted in the discourse. The framework that I believe best serves this purpose is the concept of *transitivity* as developed by Paul Hopper and Sandra Thompson (1980) and presented in Duranti (1997). In his discussion of *Transitivity in grammar and discourse*, Duranti presents the notion of transitivity as a clause-based (as opposed to a morphological or word-based) function by which the semantical properties of the clause “carry over” varying degrees of action from the addressor to the addressee. Different *parameters* can be used to determine the degree of transitivity of a clause and to rank clauses according to the degrees of transitivity they possess, and certain clauses can be seen to function in the *foreground* with other discourse serving as *background* to assist or amplify the primary discourse in the foreground. I believe that the framework of *transitivity* is important to this treatise in that it will serve to help understand how

the writers of the letters, as Duranti puts it, “[frame] their speech to present particular perspectives on the world” and how “linguistic structures . . . [are] sensitive to such discursive and interactional goals” (pp. 195-196). This approach will be used in the analysis of humility and respect as presented in Chapter 6.4.

I believe that my analysis of the book of *Lettres Circulaires* not only will provide the answers to the above questions but that this book may indeed be the only possible source of information to answer these questions. One does not tarry long when reading through the documents of religious orders preserved in the archives before realizing that most of the writings that were produced and/or have survived are so stock and rote as rarely to afford a cloistered authoress much opportunity for personal expression in writing, or, as Carr puts it (2007), “imitative and formulaic, often employing an oral style or written without regard to aesthetic ends” (p. 10). Yet when the occasion arose for the sending of some sort of correspondence – accounts of voyages, requests for assistance, communication with secular authorities, or the obituary letters – this was the opportunity for the writer to put, within certain boundaries, her own feelings and thoughts into words. The obituary circular letters therefore were the only vessel by which the values timeless to the order and particular to the individual author could both be reiterated and publically promulgated in a manner and style very personal to the authoress herself and reflective of the environment and unique struggles which the local community faced.

3.2 Hypotheses

Even in my first few cursory readings of the New Orleans book of *Lettres Circulaires* – as initially I was focused primarily on the words and letters and not the content – I noticed that several themes prevailed in the discourse and discussion of the individual sisters. These common

themes are so prevalent that I began to delineate generally the very same ones that Clark lists above. What I noticed above all in most of the letters were five recurring themes: 1) the external and internal challenges faced and trials endured by the sisters in the pursuit of their vocations in the missionary field in New France, 2) their attitudes towards and aptitudes in performing the duties of their vocations, 3) large blocks of texts discussing their outlook, during their lifetimes and on their death beds, concerning their mortality and eternal prospects, 4) a pronounced and ubiquitous language of respect accorded to the would-be readers that pervades the requests being made, the presentation of the content, and even the physical form of the letters, and 5) individual descriptive terms of praise for the nuns for particular traits held dear and considered essential by the community.

With a little bit of background knowledge of the tradition and of the New Orleans Ursulines, and having briefly read through the letters themselves, I developed two hypotheses. First, that from these letters would emerge the image of a community steeped in tradition and holding steadfast to the ideals inherited from its founder but forced to innovate within that tradition to meet the unique challenges of a New World setting. And second that the New Orleans collection would demonstrate how those ideals and innovations came to life in the eulogies of the individual sisters who, through their unique gifts, passions, and faithfulness, labored together to make the foundation a success and, by doing so, created together a unique corporate personality befitting the unique setting in which they found themselves and to which they were entrusted.

CHAPTER 4. CORPORA AND METHODOLOGY

In the Fall of 2011, I was part of a team of graduate students under the direction of Dr. Sylvie Dubois⁸ who visited the archives at the Historic New Orleans Collection (HNOC) in the French Quarter, where a large part of almost three centuries worth of the New Orleans Ursulines' archives and library is preserved. Our task was to search through the microfilm documents to gather data, such as spelling conventions, orthographic tendencies, and phraseologies, for a linguistic study of early 18th century French in Colonial Louisiana. As I was scrolling through the pages, accustoming myself to the handwriting and spelling conventions of the sisters in order to understand what I was reading, I came across a collection of letters that fascinated me on various levels both academic and personal. I soon realized the wealth of information we had found and knew that I wanted to continue studying these letters for my Master's thesis.

This chapter will describe both this corpus of letters that is the primary focus of this thesis, as well as introduce the secondary corpora of letters, found mostly in France, that served as background for the understanding and a basis for the analysis of the primary corpus. I will finish by recounting the process by which I collected and analyzed the corpora.

4.1 Primary Corpus

The New Orleans *mortuaire* preserved today at the HNOC is a traditional one in the sense that it is a single book created to collect and preserve the éloges of the deceased sisters of the community, and the obituary circular letters used had been a traditional method of circulating death notices among communities for centuries previous. As will be demonstrated and described

⁸ This visit was conducted as part of a seminar in French Linguistics with and under Dr. Sylvie Dubois and funded by the Center for French and Francophone Studies (CFFS) at Louisiana State University (LSU), of which Dr. Dubois is the director.

in this section, however, what makes this *mortuaire* unique in format to the New Orleans Ursuline community who created it – in obedience to their regulations and for the purposes of maintaining the éloges in a single volume – is that it uses the obituary circular letters themselves as the sole content for the mortuaire.

4.1.1 Creation of the Corpus from the Book of Lettres Circulaires

The process of analysis began in cooperation with the CFFS when I helped to transcribe the HNOC letters into digital form. The CFFS provided funds for each page of the book to be printed out for future analysis. After returning to campus, the team worked together to transcribe and edit into digital form 52 of these letters, which allowed for cleaner reading, keyword searching, and textual preservation of the collection for the research being done. Numbers were assigned to each letter, and a table was created indicating the year of death, the name of the deceased, and the name of the Superior author. We then divided up the letters amongst ourselves and meticulously transcribed each of them into a separate Word file according to this numbering system. To each file was given a header indicating the same information from the table. For the purposes of these transcriptions, formatting such as abbreviations and superscripts were removed, but other period-specific spelling and capitalization conventions were maintained. It was from these digital files that I performed most of my analysis and from which research is still being done by the CFFS.

In the archives at the HNOC and Ursuline Academy in New Orleans there are also updated and edited versions of many of the older manuscripts. One of these is a version of the book of *Lettres Circulaires*, updated into modern French with the content slightly edited. The CFFS also provided funding for the same process of transcription for these letters. We referred to

this collection as the “edited” version (and to the original collection as the “original” version). I did not analyze this collection for the purposes of this treatise, but I did use it often to assist in clarifying words, phrases, structures, or illegible aspects of the original.

4.1.2 Description of the Microfilm Volume in the HNOC

The volume in which the book is found 1) is bound,⁹ 2) is comprised in the first half of the *Registre pour écrire les receptions des Religieuses de France et postulantes* and in the second half of the book of *Lettres Circulaires*, and 3) consists of at least 372 hand-numbered pages.¹⁰ It can be found on microfilm in the Historic New Orleans Collection (HNOC) at the Williams Research Center on Chartres St. in the New Orleans French Quarter. From this point forward, therefore, I will refer to the entire binding as the *volume*, the first half of this volume as the *Registre*, the book of letters (the primary object of this research) as the *Lettres Circulaires* or the *book*, the transcribed and printed version of the letters in this book (on which I primarily relied for my analyses) as the *corpus*, and the individual entries in the book/corpus as the *letter(s)*, which I will reference by the numbers I have given them in Appendix A.

4.1.3 Description of the Book of Lettres Circulaires

The book of obituary circular letters was created by the New Orleans Ursulines with the purpose of maintaining a *mortuaire* as dictated by their rules and tradition. It is unknown

⁹ From the microfilm version alone it is obviously impossible to determine that the volume is bound. However, Dr. Emily Clark, who has seen the original volume, confirmed to me that it is indeed bound.

¹⁰ Despite repeated attempts to locate the original volume from which the microfilm records in the HNOC were created, I was unable to do so. Therefore, having no access to the original, I can only assert what can be seen in the microfilm version. As the covers are not included in the microfilm version, I can only state factually that there are at least 372 pages in the volume.

whether or not it is the sole death register of the community, but it is a unique *mortuaire* that they created and maintained for the purpose of keeping the éloges in a single volume.

What makes this particular *mortuaire* so unique is that it is composed and comprised, not of the biographical notices that would have been pulled from the *annales* or other sources but instead of the obituary circular letters themselves. Moreover, it is not a collection of letters received from other communities, but a *livre des décédées* of sorts of a particular community whose sole content is hand copies of the obituary letters presumably composed and dispatched and which is internal to the community in New Orleans. In my research, nowhere else have I ever seen a mortuaire of a single community comprised uniquely and solely of copies of obituary circular letters – a *livre de lettres*, so to speak. It seems to be a New Orleans innovation.

The book is a completely handwritten collection that makes up the second half of the volume, beginning on page 194 (first page is blank) and ending on page 371 with an incomplete Table of Contents. At the top of the first page (p. 195), the book is given the title

Lettres Circulaires des Rses décédées en ce nouveau monastere
de la Nlle orleans province de la Louisienne

and its contents can be described as follows:

- 183 : last page of the *Registre*
- 183 - 194 : numbered but blank.
- 195 : the book of the *Lettres Circulaires* begins with the above-mentioned title, and the first letter, dated 1727, begins immediately after the title
- 196 - 347 : the body of the book of *Lettres Circulaires*
- (240 - 242) : three letters written in Spanish
- 347 : end of last letter, dated 1894
- 348 - 354 : numbered but blank
- 355 : a Table of Contents listing the *Registre* in two lines and the book of *Lettres Circulaires* on the third
- 356 - 367 : numbered but blank
- 368 : another Table of Contents for the entire volume, begun but soon abandoned
- 369 - 370 : numbered but blank
- 371 : an incomplete Table of Contents for the book of *Lettres Circulaires*
- 372 : numbered but blank

I believe the page numbering to be early, added between the creation of the book and that of the Table of Contents, for several reasons. First, the orthography is very early and remains consistent throughout the volume, and there is also a repetition of the page numbers and years that looks to be a late addition, seemingly for the purpose of “updating” or re-inscribing them for clarity. Second, the location of the page numbers never seems to be adjusted to the entries, but vice-versa; on several occasions, it is evident that the writer wrapped around the page numbers as she wrote. Furthermore, they seem to be added after the creation of the book because it would be difficult to imagine a reason for why the sister who began the collection would begin on such a random page number as 195. Finally, the page numbers obviously must pre-date any Table of Contents, and, of the one found at the end, the title and the first four entries are identical in hand writing and form to the initial entries in the book but change markedly starting with the fifth.

As for the binding, I believe it to be early and to pre-date the creation of the book beginning in the second half of the volume. If I am correct that the page numbering came after the creation of the book, due to the unlikelihood that the sister would have started on such a random page number, the best explanation for why she did so is that she most likely purposefully started the book in the middle of the volume without counting the pages exactly so as to start precisely in the middle (page 195 being roughly halfway between 372 pages) and then added the page numbers before she created the Table of Contents. This would also explain the blank pages after the *Registre* and the blank pages after the last letter, as space was left for additional entries to be added in both halves as time progressed (We see this also in the collection, discussed in Chapter 5, of a register found in Tourcoing, France). Also, I do not believe the page numbers were added before binding because, with loose-leaf pages, it would have been too easy to start the collection on a more standard page number.

4.1.4 Description of the Letters in the Book of Lettres Circulaires

It must be noted first that the letters in the book are copies of pre-existent texts, not vice-versa. At the end of the entry for the first letter, there is a note that reads

This act having been pulled along with the following two from the book of the annals in order to have a single in particular, in accordance with the regulations, the signature was provided by the secretary of the Chapter, the Superior who signed the first having passed away. (p. 198, see Appendix C.10 for original text)

The original content of the book (the first three letters) came therefore from outside sources, particularly the *Annales*. Although I was never able to locate pre-existent forms of letters 2 and 3, I did locate what seems to be a pre-existent form of letter 1, preceded by an entry noting the return of certain sisters to France for various reasons and followed by a notice of Mother Tranchepain calling together the *Chapitre*, suggesting that the letter was an entry in some recopied version of the *Annales*. Also, many of the letters added after the original three do not begin on a separate page but are added to the space remaining after the previous entry, suggesting that they were copies made into the book of the original text.

Additionally, as late as 1811, Mother Laclotte made a note at the bottom of the first letter attributed to her:

This circular letter being written on a loose sheet of paper, I transcribed it into the registers twelve years later at the death of this respectable and worthy Mother, which means that the two Superiors elected since those sad days did not affix their signature. It is signed by that one of her two companions who came from France with her. (p. 246, see Appendix C.11 for original text)

The most likely explanation here is that, upon assuming the Superiorship, Mother Laclotte found copies of obituary circular letters that had not been entered into the book and subsequently made a point to do so, maintaining the continuity of the book.

Consider also that, at the bottom of letter 8 (p. 223), there is an added note, common to letters I studied in France, that states « from the House of St. Ursula in New Orleans, May 4,

1754 ». The sister had indeed died on February 5 but in 1755. Whoever copied this entry into the book mistakenly wrote the wrong year. Additionally, the three letters entered on pages 240 to 242 are in Spanish and of deaths occurring between 1792 and 1799, but two are attributed to Mother Fargeon, a French sister. The time line fits the Louisiana Spanish period, and the secretary who apparently entered the texts was named Antonia de Sta Monica Ramos. These two other observations can have other explanations but are noted here because they seem to be best explained by the argument that the content of the entries in the book came from outside texts.

Moreover, although they could be and probably are,¹¹ I have no direct evidence to support the assertion that they are exact copies. They are, at the minimum, *actes*, or records, based on – or are representative of – the letters, created from and using the obituary circulars. Because of human error or editing, they may not be verbatim representations of the originals. Finally, since none of the original letters presumably sent back to France seem to have survived the ravages of transport, circulation, fire, and social upheaval to which so many convent documents have been lost, this collection can, again, not be assumed to be a 100% accurate orthographical and semantic representation of the original letters. These copies are however, at minimum, the closest available copies. For this reason, the historical events and biographical descriptions of the sisters, as well as the themes that weave themselves throughout the letters, can be considered to be reliable representations of original content despite orthographical and semantic variations that may exist from the original sources.

Authorship of each of the letters is ascribed to the Superior in office at the time of death of the sister being eulogized (see Appendix B for the list of Superiors credited with the composition of each letter), but whether or not the Superior actually composed each and every

¹¹ Because of the form and physical layout of many of the entries, it is my very personal contention that many, if not all, of them are meant to be exact representations of the original letters, but there is no firm evidence for this.

letter is undeterminable. Although handwriting patterns do seem to be grouped together, indicating the same hand copied letters ascribed to a single Superior, it is unknown whether the Superior herself was always responsible for the copying of the letter into the book. Even if Mother Laclotte seems herself to have done so (considering the note above indicating that she did claim to have copied the letter in, as well as the other letters ascribed to her being written in the same hand), the entries were sometimes (if not regularly) copied into the collection by the assistant or the secretary, to which, it seems, the Superior would inscribe her signature, as required.

It should be pointed out here that the fifth letter is severely damaged; the leaf that contains pages 211 on the front and 212 on the back is so full of holes that the bottom halves are illegible. One might argue that this is evidence against the fact that the volume was bound early, as, water or fire damage being the most likely causes, more than a single page would have been destroyed in such a case. However, it was not uncommon for poorly mixed ink or particularly greasy hands to be the cause of deterioration over time to a single page or multiple pages in a volume. In this case, poor quality ink seems to be the cause, as much of the damage seems to follow along with the words themselves. It also appears that at some point later, after the page deteriorated, some well-meaning person attempted to tape the letter together.

Finally, I have no evidence to assert that any single letter or pack of letters was ever actually sent. Although it seems obvious that this would be true, – and evidenced as well by a collection of obituary circulars received from France in the 20th century and preserved in the archives at Ursuline Academy in New Orleans – no letter in France or Canada has ever been discovered by myself or the CFFS to demonstrate how, or even prove that, the New Orleans community regularly participated in this practice.

4.1.5 Considerations about the Original Creation of the Book of Lettres Circulaires

My analysis of the microfilm version of the book sought also to understand the process by which it was originally created and completed, so that I could better understand and analyze the content provided therein. There appears in all my research to be no external references, citations, records, deliberations, or explanations indicating who created the book, when exactly it was created, why specifically it was decided that the book would take the form it did, or how it was created and compiled. A note at the end of the first letter in the book, which states that it was initially created out of entries in the annals (see discussion above), leads me to believe that the original annals would be the best source for such information. However, as Heaney laments (1993) in the preface to *A Century of Pioneering* that the archival data that would shed light on the early narrative of the New Orleans Ursulines “has many missing parts” and that “what records that existed have long since disappeared” – a fact of which Father Charles Bournigalle complained some 80 years previously “when he thoroughly explored the convent archives with a view to compiling the annals” – (p. v), it seems that this important source has been lost to time. What I found in my research was only what seemed to be intermittent recopies of texts and stories, none of which can be conclusively said to be of the original text of the annals. Consequently, any and all evidence to attempt to answer these questions can come only from one of two sources: first and foremost, internal evidence, and, secondarily, tradition.

Based on the above descriptions of the internal evidence, it is my personal contention that the process of creation of the book of *Lettres Circulaires* can be described as follows. At some point after the death in 1733 of Marie Tranchepain, someone, presumably the Superior, Marguerite Bernard de St. Martin, Sister St. Pierre, decided to create a necrology or *mortuaire*, as tradition and their *Réglemens* dictated. The content, it was decided, would come from the most

readily available source: the obituary circular letters. To begin the collection, the sister decided to do one of two things: either to create two collections, the *Registre* and the *Lettres Circulaires*, using an empty bound volume she already had, or to use the volume into which the *Registre* had already been started, splitting it in half and starting the *Lettres Circulaires* at that point, leaving space to continue both the *Registre* and the *Lettres Circulaires* as would be needed. The collection was entitled *Lettres Circulaires des R^{ses} décédées en ce nouveau monastere de la N^{lle} orleans province de la Louisienne*, and the three letters that had been composed by Tranchepain and copied into the annals became the first three entries in the book. Then Mother Tranchepain's obituary letter, written by her successor, Sister St. Pierre, was added as the fourth entry. At this point, page numbers were added to the entire volume in order to create a Table of Contents at the end. From that point forward, at the passing of one or more of the sisters, a letter/letters would be composed, and probably dispatched, to Canada and/or France to announce her death and request the suffrages on her behalf (see discussion in Chapter 5), and that letter/letters would be copied into the volume as the next entry of the book of *Lettres Circulaires*.¹²

4.1.6 Description of the Discursive Structure of the Book of *Lettres Circulaires*

The New Orleans letters follow the general outline of the letters that had been circulating in France for centuries. A short synopsis of the details of the sisters death, a type of brief announcement of what will follow in greater detail, typically notes the sister's full name, convent of profession, date of death, and sometimes whether she was buried in the convent cemetery. This is not surprising since, as most of the Superiors who wrote during the French period in New Orleans had been born in France, surely they were accustomed to receiving these letters in the

¹² Although not necessarily immediately, as indicated by the letters on pages 238 and 239 being dated the same month but entered in reverse order.

communities in which they had professed. Although the vast majority of the letters in France were printed and distributed, the Ursulines in New Orleans, not having a press readily available, wrote their letters by hand. A typical letter in New Orleans could be formatted as such:

- A header that provides a summary of the details of the deceased's passing, i.e.
Le 5e septembre 1733 est decedé nôtre chere sœur marguerite salaun de Sainte therese, Religieuse professe de la communauté de plœrmel en bretagne et a été enterré le 6 de ce moy elle nous a beaucoup edifié par sa vertu particulièrement sa grande soumission a lobeissance comme vous salé voir par ce qui suit (letter 3, p. 203)
- An honorific salutation, typically: *Ma très Reverende Mère,*
- An introductory statement, possibly:
 - a spiritual maxim or precept about death, i.e.
Si la mort est ordinairement l'écho de la vie . . . (letter 8, p. 221)
 - an expression of intense sorrow, i.e.
Cest avec la plus vive douleur et le cœur penetré de regrets de la perte que nous venon de faire que . . . (letter 26, p. 238)
 - an attribution of the death to the sovereignty of God, i.e.
Le Seigneur vient de nous affliger d'une manière bien sensible par la mort de notre chère Sœur . . . (letter 47, p. 270)
 - an immediate declaration of purpose, i.e.
Nous venons Vous demander les suffrages de notre Saint ordre . . . (letter 36, p. 247)
- biographical information
 - a description of the sister's familial and geographic origins
 - a description of her calling into religious life
 - a description of her virtues
 - a description of how she performed in her vocation
- details of her death
 - the cause of her death
 - sufferings she endured

- last rites performed
- final statements
- a final argument for and/or statement of request for the suffrages
- a final honorific, typically a repetition of *Ma très Reverende Mère*
- final statement of respect, typically:
Vôtre tres humble et tres obéissante servante,
- signature of Superior

4.2 Secondary Documents

The CFFS also provided additional support for the collection of additional corpora in France and Canada. This was done to provide documentation by which the New Orleans corpus could be analyzed in its historical context. It was a collective effort between my research and the CFFS to group all the letters into a single large collection, by which I could complete my research and the CFFS could continue their more in-depth analysis.

The Ursuline *lettres circulaires des décédées* written in France that have survived and been preserved are available for consultation in various locations across the country. A nearly exhaustive inventory of the known existent letters in France was painstakingly compiled by Sister Gueudré in 1960 (Jégou, personal communication, December 2, 2012) and is kept today in the archives at the Beaugency convent, along with a collection of other circular letters that correspond to various movements and events in Ursuline history, including the movement towards the Roman Union. The collection of 93 obituary letters preserved in the archives in Beaugency were bound along with a menologe into a single volume under the description « Lettres de décès originales de la fin 17^e S. volume manuscript, provenant peut être des archives

de l'ancien monastère du Faubourg S^t Jacques à Paris. »¹³. This binding, which appears to have passed from Paris, to Auxerre, and to Abbeville, before coming to rest in Beaugency, is the volume to which Gueudré refers in her inventory as the Abbeville Collection.

Most of the currently existant letters are preserved today in Paris. The largest collection is a four volume set preserved at the Arsenal branch of the Bibliothèque Nationale under call numbers MS 4990-4993. At the Richelieu branch, there are a handful of letters located inside a larger volume under call number FR 25555. At the main François-Mitterand branch, there are a few letters, one of which is from an Ursuline community, preserved in a larger bound volume under the call number RES P-Z-231, as well as a couple of letters located in a volume under call number Ld 172. There is also a single bound volume at the Sorbonne Library classified under call number MS 769 entitled *Nécrologe de divers couvents d'Ursulines*, of which the preface is notable and discussed in this treatise.

Other collections are typically found in the collections of Ursuline documents preserved in the various departmental archives around France. I was not able to visit them all, but I was able to locate the following: at the Archives départementales du Puy-de-Dôme in Clermont-Ferrand, a collection of “notices nécrologiques”, many of which are circular letters, preserved under call number 101 J 6 (microfilm 1 MI 657 R1); at the Archives départementales de Seine-Maritime in Rouen, several letters, some of which are Ursuline, preserved in larger collections, under D 425. It is noteworthy that although, in my research, most of the departmental archives contain collections of Ursuline documents, most of these documents are legal and financial registers not pertaining to my research, and that the inventories in printed form and online do not always list every document contained in a collection. For this reason, I often happened quite

¹³ “Original death letters from the end of the 17th century, handwritten volume, originating perhaps from the archives of the old monastery in the Faubourg Saint-Jacques in Paris.”

unexpectedly upon several letters buried among other documents under a more general title or description.

In Quebec, Dubois (2013, p. 7) has identified and collected copies of 85 original letters¹⁴ and the recopied versions of them that are preserved. These letters begin in 1689 (due to a fire three years earlier that destroyed the monastery and all its registers since its establishment in 1639) and go up until 1800. Interestingly her analysis has determined that, of the Quebec collection, all the writers were natives of France and none of them held the office of Superior at the time of writing.

It is interesting to note also that the the only obituary letters that have been formally published for a wider, non-Ursuline audience are Tranchepain's obituary letters, written from the missionary fields of New France, first published by Shea in 1859¹⁵ as an accompaniment to her *Relation du voyage des premieres Ursulines a la Nouvelle Orleans et de leur etablissement en cette ville*, and a few of the letters written by Marie Guyart de l'Incarnation from Québec, included in the published works of her other epistolary correspondences.

4.3 Methodology

My three main methods of research and data collection were archival visits in both Louisiana and France, personal interviews, and the study of as much literature pertaining to the topic as I could locate in libraries and online. The archival research was performed at the HNOC in New Orleans and in the various departmental archives and libraries in France, as described

¹⁴ I mention these here only for the sake of completeness and because they play an integral part in the CFFS' research of which this work is a part. However, I did not study the Quebec letters, and they did not play a role in this work.

¹⁵ It is important to note, however, that a comparison of Shea's work to the original and updated versions (discussed previously) of the book demonstrates that he used the latter as his source.

above. Wherever I was granted permission to do so, I took photographs (both for my research and for research being done by the CFFS) of the individual letters and other relevant documents for later analysis. In addition to provided funding for the printing of the New Orleans letters from microfilm at the HNOC, the CFFS also funded the digital reproduction in JPG image format of the entire collection of letters at the Sorbonne.

My literature research was conducted in France at the libraries of the University of Limoges, the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris, and the Bibliothèque francophone multimédia in Limoges; in Baton Rouge at Middleton Library and the Special Collections of Hill Memorial Library, both on the campus of Louisiana State University; in Houston at Fondren Library on the campus of Rice University; and at the archives of the New Orleans Ursulines, where I was given a copy of Heaney's *A Century of Pioneering*.

I was granted personal interviews from Sister Marie-Andrée Jégou, Ursuline archivist and historian in Beaugency, France; Dr. Emily Clark of the Department of History at Tulane University in New Orleans, LA; Sister Rosemary Meiman, Province Archivist of the Roman Union in St. Louis, MO; and Sister Carla Dolce, prioress of the New Orleans Ursulines. Guidance and assistance was warmly granted to me by Mrs. Mary Lee Harris, archivist of the New Orleans Ursulines, who provided me with documents housed in the archives at the New Orleans convent, and by the Reverend Chad A. Partain, noted historian and Chancellor of St. Frances Cabrini in the Diocese of Alexandria, LA. Guidance was graciously provided to me by email from Dr. Thomas Carr of the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures at the University of Nebraska and from Dr. Elizabeth Rapley, professor emeritus of the Department of History at the University of Ottawa. Finally, a large number of articles and manuscript documents were located online.

In preparing for the analysis of corpora I had collected, I had to do two things: 1) become familiar with the diverse conventions and individual styles of orthography, calligraphy and penmanship of the time to facilitate understanding and readability, and 2) learn about the methods of analysis and how to apply them to the letters.

Dr. Dubois personally provided most of the insight as to the “old French” I was encountering in the letters. In addition, her 2003 article on the spelling conventions in French Louisiana provided clear direction. A few of these are worth noting here. One example, *i* is often used in place of the modern *j*, and *y* often replaces *i*, so that *i'ay* is the modern *j'ai*. Also, the *ai* of the derivational suffix morpheme for imperfect tense is typically replaced with *oi*, so that we see, for instance, *était* or *étais* written as *étoit* or *étois*. Moreover, the uses of the tilde and superscription for purposes of abbreviation was also common, rendering, as an example, *com̃té* for *communeauté*, *p^r* for *pour*, or *N^{lle}* for *Nouvelle*. Finally, great difficulty in comprehension was often caused by the writers' inconsistent use, or even overuse, of commas and periods to delineate sentences and clauses in their writing. The only solution to this was to repeatedly reread certain phrases attempting to decipher where these markers should or should not be.

Additionally, in order to learn the processes by which I would analyze the discourse in the letters, I did an independent study under Dr. Mary Jill Brody of the Department of Geography and Anthropology and the Interdepartmental Program in Linguistics at LSU. The discourse analysis of the directives found in the letters and the nature of the idealized nun were done as part of this independent study. The concepts have been discussed further in the literature review section of the preceding chapter.

CHAPTER 5. THE OBITUARY CIRCULAR LETTER TRADITION

Convent writing has always tended to be limited in scope and purpose. Literature for the sake of literature rarely served even a menial purpose in religious contexts, much less a priority, and was therefore typically neglected or even sometimes discouraged. The focus of convent writing has always been on what can be considered to be functional over aesthetic. However, this should not be taken to mean that the convents never produced vast amounts of writings worthy of study. « The richness of the feminine institutes », says Gueudré (1964), « are their chronicles or annals, containing the biographies of the nuns whose memories remain the most remarkable . . . works of edification rather than actual history proper » (p. 48) and

Women devout had therefore a precise manner of reading and of reflection: they would copy the words that nourished their souls, while developing a few points according to the inspiration of the moment, the ensemble of which they would use for their personal needs or to instruct their fellows when responsible for them. (pp. 48-49, translation mine)

In his “From the Cloister to the World”, Thomas Carr (2007) describes the different forms of writings produced in the convents as such:

Normative texts, such as constitutions and rules, ordered lives within the convent; epistolary exchanges among nuns, family members, and supporters extended the discussions that took place in convent parlors; chronicles and hagiographic accounts recorded a convent’s memory and sought to establish its reputation in the eyes of the public. (p. 8)

Unfortunately, as Carr mentions (2007, p. 8), most of such writing from the heyday of pre-Revolutionary convent writing has been lost, due to it never having been bound into volumes and to social upheavals during and after the Revolution that would see convents closed and documents confiscated. Additionally, because most of the writings by the Ursulines were kept in-house, they typically fell prey to the same destructive events that ravaged their houses. What survived and remains of this literature in France was eventually collected and catalogued and is today located for the largest part in the departmental archives across the country, in the different

branches of the Bibliothèque Nationale (François-Mitterrand, Richelieu, and Arsenal), in the Mazarine and at the Sorbonne. Additionally, much of it can be accessed online through Google Docs for free.

The primary texts by which the Ursulines organized their communities, therefore, were the *Constitutions*, the *Reglemens*, the *Chroniques* or *Vies*, and the *Annales*, as well as registers such as the *Actes de profession et sépultures* and books kept for financial records. The *Constitutions* and the *Reglemens* were normative texts, foundational documents that described and prescribed the rules, practices, structures, and values of the Ursuline congregations. The primary difference between them, according to Sister Jégou, is that the *Constitutions* determined and established the basis for the religious life or vocation of the sisters, while the *Reglemens* defined and dictated the day-to-day routine of life in the convent (personal communication, December 2, 2012). Clark describes (2007a) the *Reglemens* as “how Ursulines were to spend every waking moment of their days, whether in classroom, cell, or chapel” (p. 94).

It is important to avoid any possible confusion between the *Reglemens* and the above-mentioned *Règles* of Saints Benedict, Francis, and Augustine. As previously discussed, all religious orders in the 16th and 17th centuries, both male and female, would be founded under a Papal-approved *Règle* (or “Rule”), but each would adopt its own *Reglemens* (or “Regulations”) that would govern the particular congregation. So the *Règles et Constitutions pour les Religieuses Ursulines, de la Présentation Notre-Dame de l’Ordre de S. Augustin*, published in 1643, begins with a summary of the Rule of St. Augustine that all Ursulines obeyed and follows with the Constitutions adopted by to the Présentation Notre-Dame congregation of Ursulines. In a similar fashion, the *Règles et constitutions de l’institut et compagnie des religieuses de Ste-Ursule, à l’usage du Couvent des Ursulines de Bordeaux, et des Maisons qui y sont ou qui y*

seraient affiliées, published in 1829, lays out the Constitutions of the Bordeaux congregation, followed by the same Rule of St. Augustine that unites the congregation to all other Ursuline congregations. In other words, all Ursulines were founded under and governed by the Rule of St. Augustine, and each Ursuline congregation would adopt its own internal version of the Constitutions and Reglemens, adding local customs when judged necessary. These precepts would in turn govern each particular community associated with that congregation.

In 1705, the Paris Congregation published *Les Constitutions des Religieuses Ursulines de la Congrégation de Paris* and, in a separate three-livre publication, the *Reglemens des religieuses Ursulines de la congrégation de Paris*. The New Orleans Ursulines adopted these as their guiding documents. The 1705 Constitutions and Reglemens of the Paris Congregation will be discussed later and in more detail as they relate to the Ursulines in New Orleans.

The *Chroniques* and the *Annales* were historical records that did seek on some level to establish the reputation of the convent in the public's eyes. Their primary purpose, however, was to collect and preserve the convents' memories, as Jégou informs, as could serve as the basis for news to be sent to other communities (personal communication, December 2, 2012).

Additionally, they would instruct and edify future Ursulines by serving as examples of piety and demonstrating the values of the order. *Les chroniques de l'ordre des Ursulines recueillies pour l'usage des Religieuses du même Ordre*, by Mère Marie-Augustine Pommereuse¹⁶ and published in 1673, represented in her time "the primary history of the order" (Clark, 2007a, p. 94). In compiling her *Chroniques*, Pommereuse drew in large part – if not primarily – from a compilation of memoirs that she and her collaborators had been sent from individual Ursuline convents around France. Pommereuse compiles and provides her *Chroniques* to the communities

¹⁶ This is the most notable work of this pre-eminent author who Thomas Carr says (2007) is one of the few Ursulines writers who "enjoyed more recognition during their lifetimes than comparable Italian or Spanish nuns" (p. 9).

for their consolation and utility. Clark (2007a) states that, “in setting down the early history of the order, the *Chroniques* were perhaps more instrumental than any other Ursuline writing in articulating the ideals of spiritual motherhood, presenting the rationale for the order’s educational enterprise, and prompting emulation” (p. 94).

The memoirs Pommereuse received were most likely drawn from the communities’ *Annales*, which were historical registers kept individually by each community. For example, the 1705 Reglemens of the Paris Congregation, « in order well to observe that which the Constitutions prescribe », instructs the Secretary of the Chapitre to maintain several « books or registers ». The first is the *Annales du Monastere*

to which shall be deduced the beginning and progress of the house; the names of the founder or foundress, of its first Superior, of those who have most aided in its establishment; the memorable things that have occurred there; the various monasteries that have come out of it; the nuns deceased in the house who have excelled in virtue and holiness in life, marking the day, the month, and the year of their passing, as the location of their tomb; and other things worthy of being left to posterity. (REGCP, Part III, Chapter XII, pp. 136-137, see Appendix C.12 for original text)

This chapter will consider in particular the various types of hagiographical documents prescribed by the *Constitutions* and *Reglemens* and the particular types of texts that developed around them and constituted what can be called the *éloge* in the Ursuline tradition.

5.1 Hagiographical Documents in the Ursuline Tradition

5.1.1 Death Registers

The Ursulines kept registers to record major events in the lives of the sisters, such as profession and vows of the individual sisters of the community and the records and mentions of their passing. They were by nature chronological, in that the events of the community were

entered into the register as they occurred and immediately subsequent to the previous entry. One such example is the one began in 1713 by the Ursulines of la Ciotat, France, *les Actes de vêtures et des professions ; l'entrée des filles dans les saintes épreuves de la Religion, et les mortuaires des Religieuses* (ADBR, 85 Hbis 2). In the case of the la Ciotat register, the first entry is the record of the passing of Sister Anne Estoupan on April 25, 1713; the next one is the mention of entry into the community of Gabrielle d'Hodout on June 24, 1713; the third is the details of the death on July 23, 1713 of Sister des Anges de Fournier; and so on. In reading the register, it is interesting to note the change in handwriting after a while, probably corresponding to a change in secretary for the community.

Many times space would be left immediately following the sister's profession, to which the secretary would return, at the moment of the sister's passing, to add the details of her death. The 1829 Constitutions of the Bordeaux Congregation, for example, were only prescribing a long-held tradition when, in the section describing the *Cérémonies pour les Malades et les Défuntes*, it gives instruction to « [place] at the bottom of the page where the vows are written: the year and the day when, and the place where, the nun passed away, with a few remarks as to the primary virtues she made manifest over the course of her lifetime » (RCCB, p. 319). In such a case, the continuity of date chronology would only be broken by the death entry joined to the original vows of the sister, which would most often be, of course, written by a different hand.

An excellent example of this practice can be seen in Tourcoing, France, when, in 1735, the Ursulines of Tourcoing began a *Livre qui contient les entrées, vetures, professions, et morts, des Religieuses Ursulines de Tourcoin* (ADN, 150 H 1). The book is a register of the acts of profession of each sister and a record, added later, of her death. The first entry is entitled *Formule de la premiere professe des Ursulines de Tourcoin depuis leur établissement du dix huit*

de janvier de l'année mil sept cens trente cinq ("Formula of the first *professe* of the Ursulines of Tourcoing beginning at the time of their establishment on the 18th of January of the year 1735"), the second *Formule de la deuxieme professe des Religieuses Ursulines de Tourcoin* (Formula of the second *professe* of the Ursuline nuns of Tourcoing"), the third *Formule des vœux de la troisieme professe des Religieuses Ursulines de Tourcoin* ("Formula of the vows of the third *professe* of the Ursuline nuns of Tourcoing"), and the subsequent entries following the same pattern with similarly slight differences in verbage. The entry for the first sister, born on July 22, 1678 and professed on February 7, 1736, can therefore be taken as an example of this format (ADN, 150 H 1, p. 1, see Appendix C.13 for original text).

After the title, what follows is a pre-profession description of the sister, giving biographical details such as the circumstances of her birth, her baptism, and her *prise d'habit*, as well as the details of her profession to follow.

Sister Marie Jeanne du Bois dite de Saint John the Baptist, daughter of Jaques du Bois, a farmer in Ennetières-en-Weppes, and of Helene Host, his wife, was born on July 22, 1678, and baptized in the Parish of Ennetières. She received her habit as an Ursuline on January 18, 1735. She made her profession on February 7, 1736, at 58 years of age, in the chapel of this House of Saint Ursula in Tourcoing

Immediately after is the formula of the profession in which she makes her vows – primarily to, of course, poverty, chastity, obedience, and the instruction of young girls – and the dates and signatures required for such professions.

The act of which profession, she made and signed in the following form.

+

In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and in honor of his Very Holy Mother, of our blessed Father Saint Augustine and of the Blessed Sainte Ursule, I, Sister Marie Jeanne du Bois dite de Saint John the Baptist, vow and promise to God poverty, chastity, obedience and to apply myself to the the instruction of young girls, according to the Rule of our Blessed Father Saint Augustine and according to the constitutions of this Monastery of Saint Ursula, in conformity with the bulls of our Holy Fathers the Popes,

Paul V and Urbain VIII, under the authority of [the names of the ecclesiastical authorities and witnesses, followed by the date]

The next profession begins on the next page, but space having been left after the signatures for the death details that will be added upon her eventual passing, the following is added immediately after the above upon the occasion of her passing.

On July 13, 1757, Sister Marie Jeanne Dubois dite de St. John the Baptist passed away at the age of 79, of which 21 professed. Being the first professed of this foundation, she was of it a pure model through her regularity. She loved solitude and silence, very much submitted to her Superiors and charitable towards her sisters. Once she fell ill, death was inevitable. She suffered her ills with much patience and resignation to the will of God. She was blessed in having received all her sacraments with a great piety. Her good life leaves us without any doubt for her eternal rest. She desired fervently to possess God for all eternity. May it be so. Requiescat in Pace

In a similar fashion, Louis de Nussac (1891) informs that the Ursulines of Brive, France, « were interred in the vault of their church as recorded in the death acts inserted into the register beginning in 1736. Previously they would write a necrological notice, a true panegyric, on the same page as the mention of the deceased nun's entry into the convent » (p. 11).

5.1.2 *Nécrologes*

Sometimes the death records in the registers were combined together into a single volume. These *nécrologes* or *livres des décédé(e)s* took on different forms, but their purpose was again to record the memories for internal use in the convent and sharing of news with other convents, in both cases primarily for the edification and instruction in pious living for the reader. Examples of the practice of creating such necrological lists or collections show that they could be very diverse in complexity, ranging from simple lists of brief entries to ornate works to which a great deal of attention and creativity was focused.

One of the most elegant examples is a mortuaire produced by the Ursulines of Arles, who, in 1631, began pulling records from various « other little books and memoires » composed from their founding in the city in 1602. These texts were used to create an ornately decorated and meticulously composed handwritten « obituary book, or memoire and Catalogue of the Deceased of this House » entitled *MORTVAIRE DES RELIGIEUSES DE S.^{TE} VRSULE DV MONASTERE D'ARLES* (“*Mortuaire* of the nuns of St. Ursula of the Monastery of Arles”, ADBR, 84 H 9, p. 3). From the first passing in 1607 to the original creation of the *Mortuaire* in 1631, each entry follows the same basic format, which begins to vary slightly only after the entries of those who died after 1631 were added sequentially to the end, seemingly as each would pass, until the final entry in 1679.

5.1.3 *Ménologes*

Finally, there are the *ménologes*. According to Georges Bottereaux (1993) in the *Dictionnaire de spiritualité ascétique et mystique, doctrine et histoire*, a *ménologe* is a biographical collection organized by months, or a single volume for each month, initially containing the Offices of the Byzantine Rite, the origin of which corresponds to martyrloges in local churches, but that later evolved into forms adopted by religious orders. In this tradition, they were read at certain times during the day or the liturgical calendar as an inspiration to the community. The Jesuits, for example, read the *ménologes* in the refectory at the end of the midday meal. (p. 1024) In the Ursuline tradition, according to Sister Jégou, the *ménologe* would have been read in the evening and would have included the obituary of a sister who had died on that particular day, along with her maxims or favorite sayings (personal communication, December 2, 2012). Like the *nécrologes*, the *ménologes* drew from outside sources such as the

chroniques and the annals to compile a list of remarkable and inspirational figures and events in history. What makes the ménologes unique, however, is that they were organized by calendar date, resembling an “on this date in history” collection. Each day’s entry in the ménologes would present an article on one or several specific types of historical events that ideally had occurred on that day in the past. The entry would then be read on that day as a study of events that had occurred on the same day in history.

One of the most beautiful and extensive ménologes of the Ursuline order that has survived, *Le grand menologe de lordre Des Religieuses ursulines* (BNFRL, Fr 13887), was composed in handwritten form in 1895 and is preserved at the Richelieu branch of the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. The preface to the *Le grand menologe* describes the process the compiler underwent to collect the information. She contacted the *grand couvent de Paris* and requested memoirs from all the communities of the order, promising to collect and publish « a summary of the most beautiful acts of each deceased ». It was meant to be used first for their own needs and then to be made available to the public, in order « to reveal to them that the arm of God is not shortened and that, in the middle of the corruption of the century, He still keeps to Himself chosen souls who not only do not bend their knee before Baal, but who also practice all the virtues that we note in the saints of the primitive Church ». In stating her purpose in undertaking such a formidable yet monumental task, the compiler of *Le grand menologe* epitomizes eloquently and succinctly the impulse behind the éloge in all its different forms:

It is a holy and praiseworthy custom of religious orders to draw up for themselves menologe to preserve for posterity the names and the virtues of the persons among them who have made themselves commendable by their good lives, in order to serve as examples and models to those who, in taking their habits and embracing their institutes, desire to reach the perfecting of their condition. (GMRU, p. 1, see Appendix C.14 for original text)

Each day of the ménologe is « enriched with three different passages »: first, the name of an Ursuline saint, taken from the Latin book *Vrsula vindicata* (a French version of which was entitled *Sainte Ursule Triomphante* and published in 1666), « to show that all holiness comes from the benign influence of these most blessed stars »; second, the establishment of a convent of the order; and third, the names and virtues of the « dead of the same order since its establishment ». The purpose of each of these entries would be 1) to invoke the saint described, 2) to pray for the convent described, and 3) to imitate the virtues of the deceased.

5.1.4 The Obituary Circular Letters

The passing of a sister nun also provided, as Julie Roy notes (2006, p. 54), the occasion to « lift the veil on a heroic life » by way of the obituary circular letter, or, as she terms them, *lettres mortuaires*. But where did this practice come from, and how did it develop? The practice of sending obituary circular letters did not develop with the Ursulines. The practice was already commonplace when « [the] two primary feminine congregations of the Counter-Reform, the Ursulines and the Visitandines » (Bonnet, 1989, p. 434) adopted it as their own means of sharing needs and news and requesting the suffrages.¹⁷ As Philippe Bonnet asserts (1989), the lettres circulaires were « a practice passionately recommended by St. Francis de Sales » and « served as a link between the different houses of the same order », so valuable and numerous that they « occupied significant space on the shelves of conventional libraries » (p. 434).

Goldsmith and Winn (1995) point out that, in contrast to the writings of secular social circles in which publishing their intimate letters was viewed as inappropriate, the *directeurs de*

¹⁷ In arguing that the female monasteries in New France were simply reviving this old hagiographical custom from the homeland, Roy states (without support) that the practice as employed by religious communities was developed by the Carmelite nuns (2006, p. 54). I can find no evidence to support this claim.

conscience encouraged their religious flocks to appreciate and circulate theirs (pp. XXIX-XXX). By whatever vehicle they were dispatched and circulated, what distinguishes the circular letters from other forms of epistolary correspondence such as personal letters was the fact that they were indeed circulated – or passed around – from one community to another.

Being that the practice was common to both orders and that there is seemingly no explicit instruction by any Ursuline writer pertaining to the composition of obituary letters, a review of the practice among the Visitandines as well as de Sale's attention to the appropriate style and subject matter for the letters is appropriate here, as it is just as illustrative for the same tradition as practiced by the Ursulines. St. Francis de Sales and St. Jane Francis de Chantal were the co-founders of the Order of the Visitation of Mary (or the Visitandines) in Annecy, France, in 1610. The Visitandines shared much in common with the Ursulines in that they were established as an order that was later forced to submit to cloister, emerged out of the unique demands of Counter-Reform France, and employed the practice of the obituary letters in an almost identical fashion.

One similarity was the manner typically used to actually distribute and circulate the letters. The method employed by the Ursulines, as described to me by Dr. Emily Clark (Clark, personal communication, September 30, 2013) of Tulane University in New Orleans, was basically the same approach as that of the Visitandines, detailed by Delumeau (1981):

Although nowhere clearly defined, it seems that the system adopted for the circulation of the letters among the different monasteries of the Order was rather complicated. Undoubtedly to avoid overly expensive printing and shipping costs, each monastery would only send its letters to a limited number of other houses of the Order, probably to its closest neighbors. These were in turn charged with dispatching the letter received to another monastery, and so forth and so on. (p. 210, translation mine)

This method is confirmed by several mentions in the letters themselves, most notably a request in 1690 by Sister St. Jean de S. Bazile of Montargis of the Ursuline community of Montargis:

We very humbly implore the Reverend Mothers of the very distant monasteries to no longer send us the circular letters through the post, shipping costs being excessive and sometimes as much as twelve or fifteen sols for a single letter. We will very often make the prayers for those who pass away and, as everything goes from all sides to Paris, we ask you to send your circular letters of our House, by way of your friends, to the Reverend Mothers of Faubourg Saint-Jacques, and we ourselves will be careful to send them surely to you in the same way. (LDEF-V3, p. 2, see Appendix C.15 for original text)

As can be deduced from several notes in the letters themselves, the letters could have been sent through the post or carried by a friend of the community. Perhaps it was because of the cost of receiving letters through the post, as in the case of Sister de S. Basile above, that Sister Augustine de la Conception Dejeu of Montferrand, in 1692, requested of her recipients, « We ask of you no longer to send circulars through the post. We regularly make all the prayers prescribed to us every week. » (LDEF-V3, p. 176) One available alternative, it appears, was to do as did one assistant, Sister Anne de la Sainte Trinité, who wrote a small note at the end of her letter apologizing for the delay in dispatching it and giving for the reason that « I was waiting for a friend who could carry it » (LDEF-V1, pp. 87-88).

It is reasonable to believe that the practice among the Jesuits of sending circular letters, as well as the better known *Relations*, had an influence on the Ursuline practice of sending obituary circular letters. As did many orders, the Ursulines looked to the Jesuits as a model and for direction, which explains why in 1689 Sister St Magdelaine de la Passion, Ursuline Superior in Paris, would write of Sister Marthe Doujat de Saint Bernardin that « Her devotion towards St. Ignatius, St. Francis Xavier, and the other saints of the Company of Jesus, moved her to compile a book of offices in their honor, which she had printed in order to distribute to her friends » (NDCU, letter 3, p. 6). Sharing a common mission and history, this mutual relationship between the Ursulines and the Jesuits naturally extended across the Atlantic into New France. Jesuit Father Joseph Germain wrote in Canada in 1711 that he had sent to Father Lamberville in Paris

all the obituary circular letters that he had written to all the missions to procure for them the intercessory suffrages (Thwaites, 1900, p. 216). Letter writing would indeed have been of particular use and interest to the missionary sisters who crossed the Atlantic to found houses in New France, most primarily because of the distance from usual abodes and isolation from their communities, but also because of the above-mentioned novelty of the missionary endeavor, and they would often have taken their cues from the Jesuits.

It cannot be assumed that all houses participated in the circulation of letters as fervently as did others, as many were already ending the practice even as early as 1690, when Sister Madelaine de la Passion of the Ursulines of Rue Saint Jacques in Paris lamented in a footnote at the bottom of the obituary letter for Sister Marie Husson dite de la Conception,

My Reverend Mother, it is my pleasure to avail myself of the present occasion to tell you that it is in no way with our participation that some of our convents no longer send circular letters. On the contrary, we consider this practice to be very devout and highly useful, and we do not wish to change a thing. (LDEF-V1, p. 69, see Appendix C.16 for original text)

While others made it a regular practice, like in Magny in the same year of 1690, when Superior Sister Marie Françoise de la Sainte Trinité began the letter for Sister Agathe Morange de St. François by bemoaning the fact that « the Lord's frequent visits oblige us often to beseech you for the aid of your holy prayers » (NDCU, letter 14, p. 27).

Originally handwritten, as the techniques for printing were developed and became affordable to the different communities, the standard practice developed of sending the circular letters to be printed. Later, as the Ursulines expanded to the New World, handwritten letters there were more prominent, as a press would only arrive much later (Jégou, personal communication, December 2, 2012). Most of the letters that have survived to present day are printed versions, due probably to the fact that they were therefore more abundant. The physical layout of the

earliest printed letters seems to be styled along the traditions of the earlier handwritten ones, and later, at least in New Orleans, we often see the attempt to model the layout of the handwritten ones after the printed versions with which the Superior, born in France, would have been familiar. By 1687 the practice seems to have already become so common - and perhaps burdensome, in time or financially - that the community at Sainte Avoye had a standard letter printed that could be used to announce any and all deaths in the future, a type of form letter in which the particular details could be handwritten (see Figure 1). Several explanations can be posited for why the Superior would take this approach. The most likely explanation is that it was done to save money by printing in bulk. Less likely is the possibility that other tasks were so demanding that standardization could alleviate the time devoted to producing the letters. In any case, based on the surviving materials, this standardized form letter seems to be an anomaly.

Although there is seemingly no explicit instruction in the Constitutions or the Reglemens to collect and conserve the letters received, a reading of the letters themselves reveals that it was, for several reasons, a common practice to do so, and even to bind them into collections. First, as the compiler of the Sorbonne nécrologe explains, in order to create the ménologes that were read at the Refectoir, it would have been necessary to preserve the letters for future inclusion. Among the missionary nuns in New France, Julie Roy argues that notions of heroisme, a deepseated spirituality, and the novelty of the missionary experience of the “Amazones du Grand Dieu”, as Paul Lejeune would brand them, would often inspire them to conserve their historical documents as relics (Roy, 2006, p. 53).¹⁸

¹⁸ Note that they were also obliged to do so by canon laws, as well as secular laws since Louis XIV.



REQUIESCAT IN PACE .

Des Ursulines du Convent de
Sainte Avoye à Paris.
(*FILL IN DATE HERE*)

MA REVERENDE MERE ,

Salut tres-humble dans le cœur adorable de JESUS - CHRIST
notre-aimable Sauveur. C'est suivant la louable coutume de notre
saint Ordre, que je vous demande tres-instamment & à toute votre
Religieuse Communauté les suffrages ordinaires pour le repos
de l'ame d'une de nos cheres Sœurs , que Notre Seigneur a at-
tirée à luy le (*FILL IN DATE HERE*) âgée de (*FILL IN AGE HERE*)
& de Profession (*FILL IN YEARS HERE*) Elle s'appelloit dans le siecle
(*FILL IN GIVEN NAME HERE*) & dans la sainte Religion
(*FILL IN TAKEN NAME AND LEVEL HERE*) Si par votre charitable secours
Elle est dans peu jouissante de son souverain bien, Elle reconnoîtra
cette grace devant la Divine Majesté. N'oubliez pas aussi, s'il
vous plaît, en vos saintes Prières, celle qui est de toute l'affection
de son cœur,

MA REVERENDE MERE ,

Votre tres-humble & obeïssante
servante en N. S.
(*SIGNATURE OF SUPERIOR HERE*)

Figure 1: Saint Avoye Pre-printed Obituary Circular Letter

Calamity and loss of the collections were not uncommon threats (Roy, 2006, p. 55). Most of the letters being circulated and collected in France before 1789 were destroyed in the events surrounding the French Revolution, an abundantly catastrophic event that brought the practice of

sending circular letters to a virtual standstill as nuns of all orders across France were forced to leave their convents and were dispersed. Over time, the Ursulines recovered somewhat, yet Sister Jégou pointed out to me that the custom of sending circular letters declined again in the 19th century due primarily to the prohibitive cost of printing and dispatching them (Jégou, personal communication, December 2, 2012), referring me to the reproduction of a letter received from New Orleans, dated January 15, 1895, that began by lamenting the fact that sixteen years had passed since their last circular letter of December 3, 1878! This letter of 26 pages ends with the obituary éloges of the sixteen sisters who had passed since the last circular, which the unnamed writer introduces with these words:

But before closing these pages, it would be neglectful to our fraternal affection if we did not also include a few of the edifying memories of our dear deceased sisters. Since our circulaire of December 3, 1878, sixteen have preceeded us to the abode of our Father in Heaven.

She then proceeds to give the éloges of Sisters Séraphine, Sainte-Paule, Sainte-Élisabeth, Sainte-Claire, Sainte-Anne, Sainte-Hélène, Sainte-Madeleine, Saint-Patrick, Saint-Augustin, Sainte-Chantal, Saint-Michel, Sainte-Gertrude, Saint-Alexis, Sainte-Agathe, Sainte-Philomène, and Saint-Félicité. (CB-TII, Circulaire No. 2, see Appendix C.17 for original text)

5.2 The Public and Personalized Character of the Obituary Circular Letter

Although the annals and other registers of the cloistered Ursulines were never meant for outside consumption and were always treated as private records, the obituary circular letters served what can be defined as a *public purpose* with a *personalized format*. It is important to note that the éloges in the Ursuline obituary circular letter tradition, although they may be influenced rhetorically or stylistically by them, are uniquely different from the *éloges oratoires* prevalent at the time and exemplified by such great eulogizers as Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet. First,

the éloges oratoires were generally reserved for nobility or high ranking church officials « of whom was recognized the grandeur of their work or life journey » or those of more modest rank « who distinguished themselves by their attributes » (Dubois, 2013, p. 4). Also, the traditional éloges oratoires were a public discourse composed as such and only afterwards written down and published for dissemination, being that « The oratorical skills of the one who delivered the eulogy often led to the publication of the discourse, and then to a written document » (idem, p. 4). In contradiction, although the Ursulines drew their membership from the upper crust of society, these Ursuline éloges were intended for the Ursuline communities only and, although often read aloud, were by nature written text.

5.2.1 The Obituary Circular Letter as a Public Document

Being careful not to construe public in the sense to mean that the letters were meant to be made available to the general public, as were the *éloges oratoires*, – for they were generally meant strictly for the private use of the communities of the Ursuline order –, Dubois defines (2013) them as *public* in a formal sense for three reasons: the framework of *public* in its legal definition, the linking of the document to an author who holds a *public* position, and their utilisation at least among all houses of the order.

First, they are *public* under the legal framework of their religious nature under canon law. In other words, that they are motivated by an administrative fact that must be reported and accompanied by a pre-existent procedure to report that fact (p. 2), all within a very specific cultural context. The administrative fact to be reported is obviously the passing of the sister; the requirement to report it comes primarily from canon law and the Roman legal tradition in the

11th and 12th centuries; and the procedure by which it is reported develops in tradition and is exemplified in the methods presented above.

Next, the obituary circular letter can only be defined as a *public* document because it is linked uniquely to an office in the order that itself embodies a public nature: that of the Superior.

Geneviève Reynes (1987) has well described the office of the Superior:

The spiritual and also temporal leader of her community, the superior, whether an abbess or simply a prioress, wears the doubly symbolic mark of both paternal and maternal functions. As the representative of Christ and “voice of the Holy Spirit”, she plays a potent role at the head of the monastery, since she is adorned with supreme authority and instituted keeper of the rule, and hence the law. But as mother, which title she carries, she watches over her nuns and assumes the physical and moral responsibility for them. (p. 77, translation mine)

The Superior of the community was the face of the community outside of the convent walls and the final governing authority inside the walls. No entry could be inscribed into the annals¹⁹ nor could any document or correspondence leave the confines of the convent without her approval. Dubois (2013) describes the Superior as holding a public position as the representative of the local congregation, who, as such, produced « public documents concerning persons unknown to the whole of the society » (pp. 4-5).

Finally, the obituary circular letters are public documents in that they were disseminated to the other communities of the order. The letters are, of course, distinguished as the one hagiographical document that is by nature epistolary. Although this “relatively rare form of *écriture féminine*” was one in which women wrote “specifically for a tight circle of other women” (Carr, 2007, pp. 16-17), the above-mentioned public aspect of the obituary circular letter that links it to a specific office, that of the Superior, is preserved therein, for they are in no way hierarchal, i.e. they are addressed from Superior to Superior, creating in the content what

¹⁹ Additionally, monastic register required the approval and signature of the Bishop.

Dubois terms a *mutualisation de l'information* (Dubois, 2013, p.10) otherwise inexistent in other forms of administrative correspondence. Acts entered into the death registers and other necrological documents as described above were generally conserved in-house in the private records of each community. However, the large number of member communities contained in the Ursuline order did assure them a large circulation (Dubois, 2013, p. 5).

5.2.2 *The Personalized Nature of the Obituary Circular Letter*

In addition to being by nature a *public document*, the obituary circular letter is also by nature highly *personalized*. Although it does employ an administrative lexicon, it is not an acquittance or notarial act with a prescribed formulaic aspect, such as can be seen in the annals with the professions, which tend to always follow the exact same wording. Instead, within the confines of a clear structure, as will be seen later with the description of the *lettres circulaires des décédées*, there is permitted an evident spectrum of personalization that results from the individual creativity of the Superior. Dubois (2013) describes the personalized nature of the obituary letter as permitting the writer freedom to include her own narration, evaluations and judgments (p. 2).

The occasion of the obituary circular letter was one of the few in which the author did not retain some degree of anonymity, as had been customary in convent writing dating back at least to the 17th century. Being « of an excessive modesty » the « worldly and religious women . . . maintain a very strict anonymity » in their compositions, to such an extent that, wherever collections are archived today, « it is often impossible to identify the work of a nun. What excessive modesty! », says Gueudré (1964), quoting the marquise de Saint-Martin as proclaiming, « The name of a nun must be as unknown and solitary as her person; she must work

harder to write her name in the Book of Life than on a thesis or work of theology », a view she describes as « unanimously shared » (pp. 47-48).²⁰

More important, however, to the personalized nature of the obituary circular letter is the opportunity it provides to – or burden it demands of – the Superior to demonstrate her individual creativity. A true spectrum of personalization can be seen when analyzing the letters, as they range from the most basic of formats (i.e. the pre-printed letter discussed above) to lengthy, elaborate compositions that demonstrate an adeptness in rhetorical creativity. Those that would dismiss convent writing as mediocre, viewing it as merely imitative or formulaic and lacking any aesthetic ends, reflect, as Carr argues (2007), a “lack of understanding of the conventions of monastic writing” (p. 10). He wonders (2007) if the lack of formal training in rhetoric that characterized feminine convent writing – out of which perhaps naturally emerges a deeper focus on imagery, allusion and historical models – is indeed reflective of the female experience and consequently most appealing to a female audience in particular (p. 17). Goldsmith suggests (1995) that, coupled with the Catholic Reformation’s encouragement to women to examine their souls through an « interior conversation », it was their lack of education and/or culture that predisposed them to a tendency to « chat » with God (p. XXIX). He argues that it is precisely the lack of overt concern for a specific style evident in the writings of those formally trained in rhetoric that deems the feminine letters worthy of admiration (p. XXV). Indeed, it is here that the obituary circular letters truly shine as beautiful and inspiring works of literary magnificence: women religious without extensive formal training in rhetoric, tasked with the compositions of complex literary treatises, in which they were bound to laud the most virtuous traits of a unique individual while at the same time maintaining a tone of humility, and doing so with a simplicity

²⁰ This is not always the case, as some registers in the 16th and 17th centuries were either signed or include mentions of the author.

of language and argument, all the while remaining faithful to the “invisible template” prescribed by the tradition of her predecessors, for, as Carr points out (2007), instead of being plagiaristic, imitatio was a cherished ideal (p. 10).

Unlike other more formulaic writings recorded in the Ursuline registers, the obituary letters provided the Superior with the opportunity to write from her heart in a more personal manner, the result being significant variation in styles. Some are long and highly eloquent, while others are curt and simplistically concise. Some are drenched with profoundly sorrowful or highly ornamental rhetoric, while others are dryly succinct. Further analysis may reveal that the different styles are due to the background of the author and/or the level of importance or belovedness of the particular deceased in the community.

5.2.3 The Visual Format of the Obituary Circular Letter

The general visual form was as follows: a header of some sort, perhaps with ornamentation; a salutation, typically *Ma Très Reverende Mère*; the body of the letter; and finally, the signature in which the Superior almost always declares herself to be the *Très humble et très obéissante Servante* of the one to whom she addresses her petition.

At the top of the printed letters in particular was the name of the convent sending the letter and a date. On the back, placed specifically so that, when folded, it would serve as an addressing, was the convent to which the letter was addressed, usually handwritten in a space allotted for the name, as several copies of the letter would have been printed and each would have needed to be addressed individually. There were the occasion ornamental drop caps to start the letter and even vanities of skulls and morbid designs that reflected the ephemeral and reinforced the gruesome nature of the news being shared.

5.2.4 *The Compositional Structure of the Obituary Circular Letter*

It would be inaccurate to assign a rigid compositional structure for these letters. Although the *Coustumier* of the Visitandines went so far as to prescribe in great detail the « superscriptions, headers, expressions of politeness and seals » that could be used in a Visitandine circular letter (Delumeau, 1981, p. 211), nowhere in the Constitutions or Reglemens of the Ursulines, nor in any of their writings or other foundational documents, is there to be found a prescribed template or model for the layout, composition, structure, or particular subject matter of the lettres circulaires des décédées. According to Sister Jégou, such a particular prescription has never existed; the Ursulines probably followed the current letter-writing style as would have been known to religious and secular alike (Jégou, personal communication, December 2, 2012). Such a style would have developped over time and been influenced by the already existant practice of sending circular letters, combined with the common style of the oratoires funèbres prevalent in high society France. Rapley (2007) talks about an “invisible template” (p. 157) that existed and guided the letters of the Visitandine order; the same can be said of the Ursulines. Any template that existed had surely developed through time, repetition, and common practice. Superiors would write as had their predecessors or would base their form and language on letters received from other communities.

However, the letters do tend to follow a general format that flows necessarily from their purpose. As stated above, the main impetus behind the letters, according to the Constitutions, was to request the suffrages and to provide short obituaries of pious living that could be collected and used to encourage and instruct future sisters in their spiritual walks; most letters begin with a statement of that purpose. Dubois describes (2013) the four biographical elements that follow: 1) a description of her social origin and childhood, 2) a narrative of her exemplary conduct in the

world and her call to religious life, 3) a discussion of her conduct and character in religious life, and 4) a presentation of circumstances of her suffering and death (p. 11). Finally, we see the request of *les suffrages*.

The biographical components lay the basis for and make the case to the reader that the request for the suffrages is warranted by the pious and obedient life lived by the sister. Take for instance such language as New Orleans Ursuline Sister St. Pierre's

Although such a religious life and such an edifying death leave us no reason to doubt the Lord's mercies with regard to her, we do however request of you, My Reverend Mother, to afford her the suffrages of our holy order (LCNO, letter 7, p. 220, see Appendix C.18 for original text)

If indeed the sister had lived such an exemplary life as described, surely she would immediately enjoy the presence of Her Celestial Spouse. However, in the remote chance that she must tarry briefly in Purgatory, the obituary letters would provide the other communities with "talking points" for their intercessions on her behalf, such as in the case of Sister Magdelaine de la Passion of the Ursulines of Paris, who in 1688 asks on behalf of deceased Sister Gabrielle Rainssant de Vieux-Maisons dite de Tous les Saints

Are we not inclined to believe that such a beautiful death will be followed by such a happy eternity? The common suffrages of our Order will be quite able to make that moment come to her more quickly. Afford them therefore to her in the soonest... (NDCU, letter 2, p. 5, see Appendix C.19 for original text)

Yet not even the saintliest of sisters were immune from the fragility of the human condition, as Sister Marie Françoise de la Sainte Trinité, Superior of the Ursulines in Magny, would argue in 1690 in requesting the suffrages for Sister Catherine Boulanger de Tous les Saints:

These good provisions give us hope that she will soon enjoy her sovereign Good, if you help her through the prompt assistance of your prayers and the suffrages of our holy order to make satisfaction to Divine Justice for her human frailties, to which the greatest of saints are not immune in this life (NDCU, letter 9, p. 19, see Appendix C.20 for original text)

5.2.5 Humility and Praise in the Obituary Circular Letter

One of the most important marks of the piety of the vowed religious was the humility that accompanied her promise to chastity. It was deemed so inappropriate for her to even appear to violate this maxim that she rarely discussed her life even with her sisters. However, as Dubois points out (2013, p.2), her death provided the occasion for her to be praised, as this would have been considered sinful in life. Her life lived in humility was therefore freed to be praised in written form.

Mother Tranchepain stated in her obituary for Sister Madeleine Mahieu, the first sister to pass away, a year after their arrival in New Orleans, that « I cannot go into the details of the virtues that she practiced in her youth, having only had the pleasure of getting to know her after she joined us to found our establishment. Her humility kept her hidden unto herself » (LCNO, letter 1, p. 195), and it would be said of Sister Francis O’Keeffe dite de Saint-Augustin, also of the New Orleans Ursulines, that « We know only very few things about her childhood and about her respectable family, for her humility caused her to put into practice the principle ordinary to the saints to speak only the least possible of one’s self » (CB-TII, Circulaire No. 2, p. 21). The obituary letter provided the only appropriate moment for her to be praised, and the Superior would take up this charge with great zeal, careful in the process to maintain her own humility before her fellow Superior, “[weeping] for [herself], therefore, rather than for [the deceased] » (Desbarats, 1865, p. 9).

It is also interesting to note a recurrent device in the letters in which the writer states that more could be said of the sister if that particular additional commentary did not go beyond the “bornes”, or bounds, of a circular letter. This is also found in Mother Tranchepain’s declaration in her very first obituary letter, written of Madeleine Mahieu de St. François Xavier, « if I did not

fear passing the accustomed bounds above all, I would expound further on her other virtues » (Letter 1). Also, Sister Marie Justine de Sainte Thérèse's letter of 1677 who, in informing the community in Bourg, France of the passing of Sister Marie Agathe Marseault dite des Anges, wrote, « There would be still much more to say of her virtues about which we remain silent so as not to go beyond the bounds of a circular letter ». The word *borne* can obviously have several meanings, and, at first glance, this seems to be referring to a template or prescription of content that limited the subject matter of the circular letter, as if there was understood to be certain topics that could and/or must be addressed, but, as discussed several times in previous chapters, none was ever to be found, at least for the Ursulines. A second possibility is that the bornes were a euphemism for negative criticism, as if to say, "Since I really can't say anything bad about the sister in a letter meant to present her in the most positive light possible, I will limit my description of her accordingly." The expression come into clearer focus, however, when, as late as 1837, our Sister Séraphie Ray praises Sister Adélaïde Brunest for a « charity without bounds » (Letter 50) and when Sister Félicité said of Sister François Agathe Gansoul de St. Michel, « She also had a confidence without bounds in the Holy Virgin » (Letter 40). It seems therefore that the *bornes*, instead of being limitations on subject, were actually rhetorical limits on space. The invoking of the bornes therefore is a device meant to sing her praises without limit, just as, in echoing the Apostle John when he said that the Lord Jesus "did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written." (NIV, John 21:25). Monastic writings often used devices alluding back to Holy Scripture, and this seems to be the case here. Sister St. Louis de Gonzague would, in 1762, say of Charlotte Hebert de St. François Xavier: « I would have much to say of how we were edified by the virtues of the dear deceased, but the bounds of a circular oblige me

to finish » (Letter 11), and, in 1731, Mother Tranchepain would write of her beloved, longtime sister, Marguerite Judde, « I would tarry here too long if I undertook to detail the virtues of this dear mother » (Letter 2).

It can be forgiven the eulogists, in the context and tradition of the *éloge* dictates, if she permits herself to be a bit idealistic in her descriptions, or, in the words of John R. Carpenter, « forgiveness must be granted to the author who must fulfill a literary and religious task as well as a purely biographical duty » (1966, p. 170). Or, as Rapley (2001) points out:

Had they wished to persuade others of their value, they certainly had the means. Over the years they produced, or arranged to have produced, many biographies and historical monographs. But these works were designed strictly for home consumption, and their purpose was hagiographical. Their subjects were the institutions or the founders and other women who might qualify for canonization. Intended to edify, these writings seldom allowed even the mildest criticism, the slightest hint of humanity. (p. 4)²¹

This is not to say that the *éloges* are in any way whatsoever fictional or misrepresentative in their description of the deceased sister. The obituary letter was meant to eulogize the sister and commend her to others for her most perfect qualities, so it was not deceptive or negligent to minimize or even omit her shortcomings. These idealic and romanticized depictions can, however, seem ecstatic, as Sylvie Dubois points out (2013): « In plenty of cases, the edificatory nature of the *éloge* is so powerful that it becomes ecstatic, taking on a mystical dimension as such » (p. 2). The reader may be excused for believing the sisters more saintly and perfect than a pure and unbiased biography would demonstrate, should that reader fail to consider the nature and purpose of the obituary letter, which was not biographical *per se*. This would have been the one occasion that light boasting would have been permissible, if not encouraged or even

²¹ Rapley writes here in the context of the dichotomy between literature *about* the religious orders and the literature *by* the religious orders about themselves – “the hostile and generally uninformed writings of the outsiders, and the carefully crafted and sanitized tributes of the insiders” – in discussing the hostility between the two and the difficulties inherent in gleaning objective information concerning old convent literature.

required. Any other time in her life, it would never have been deemed appropriate for the sister to boast of herself, or even for another to boast of her. Death, however, provides the opportunity – even the necessity – for boasting of a life well-lived in the faith.²²

5.3 The Pragmatic Nature of the Obituary Circular Letter

As did all other orders, the Ursulines took the three traditional medieval monastic vows – poverty, chastity, and obedience – and the fourth vow set forth by St. Augustine in his Rule, which required fervor for an apostolic vocation: in the case of the Ursulines, the particular role prescribed by the sister's office in the education of young girls. A characteristic example of Augustine's rule as adopted by the Ursulines is included in the above-mentioned 1705 publication of the Constitutions of the Paris Congregation (CONP, Part II, Chapter VII, pp. 84-86). The second chapter of Part I of the Constitutions then discusses « the perfection and grand union with God, to which Ursulines must aspire in order to carry out their vocation », followed in Part II by admonitions and instructions on the pursuit of poverty (Ch I), chastity (Ch II), obedience (Ch III), charity (Ch XIII), humility (Ch XIV), silence (Ch XV) and modesty (Ch XVI).

Success in attaining or maintaining these ideals was not effortless, despite the enclosed environment in which the sisters lived, worked and worshipped. These ideals must be understood in consideration of the social environment and background which prescribed norms for their religious and sexual behaviors. However, in reviewing the history of religious orders over the centuries, we find manifest examples, especially in pre-Tridentine times, of male and female

²² Any unflattering information given about the sister is indeed rare, but there are examples of such. Marie Tranchepain was said to be so « large and roundish » that her sisters had great difficulty in helping her out of bed once she had fallen ill (LCNO-R2, p. 210).

houses alike reaching the point of such irregularity in these ideals that they became unrecognizable as a community meant to be insulated from the vices that tempted their spirits and their flesh outside of the convent walls.

Indeed, after Trent, when calls for restoration of regularity in religious houses began to be heeded and reforms began to be implemented, it became more and more difficult for cloistered religious to succumb outwardly and demonstrably to the sinful impulses of their flesh and spirit that threatened their primary vows. The offensive in the spiritual war against the flesh, therefore, for those who committed themselves to righteousness, shifted from punishment for actively and outwardly engaging in the actual offense to the aggressive suppression of the inward temptation towards the transgression. In effect, the very temptation to sin was itself deemed to be sinful and must be besieged in both the body and the mind of the sister, so as to never give the Devil the slightest foothold in the daily actions and thoughts neither of the sister individually nor of the community by her possible influence.

5.3.1 Mortifications, or The Battle Against the Self

The most extreme element of steps taken to control the flesh,²³ and often included in the biographies of the obituary letters, is praise bestowed on the sister for the practice of *mortification*, or physical punishment of the corporeal body for the purpose of controlling the sinful desires of the heart. Geneviève Reynes states (1987) that « meticulous obedience to the rule and the practice of physical and moral mortifications are presented as the most important aspects of religious life » (p. 65). Most cases are seemingly mild. Sœur Marie Agathe Marseault dite des Anges, sent as a missionary from the Ursulines of Mâcon, France to Erfurt, Germany, «

²³ In the 17th century, mortifications were also practiced in order to experience Christ's suffering on the cross.

had a very large inclination to the works of penitence, such as the hair shirt, discipline, and sleeping on straw » (NDCU, letter 1, p. 1). A few reach the point of extreme violence perpetrated by the sister on her body. It was written of Soeur Clemence in Monferrand:

Her love for penitence made her to embrace fervently the exercise of many mortifications that she practiced secretly, being an enemy of pomposity and all that would seem to be. We happened across her one winter burying herself waist-deep in the snow and remaining there for quite a while. Disciplines, cilices and other instruments of penitence were quite frequent with her, considering herself one of the greatest of sinners and living in a holy terror and fear for her salvation. (NDCU, letter 7, p. 2, see Appendix C.21 for original text)

The obituary letters often laud the sister for subjecting herself to these violent controls of her nature as an example of the willingness and even eagerness to take all necessary precautions, however unpleasant, to subjugate and overcome her relentless worldly impulses and ensure her salvation. One sister was ostensibly derided in her letter for having gone so far as to disobey the direct command of her Superior to decrease the severity of her mortifications, the implication being that her willingness to go to such morbid physical extremes while disobeying her Superior in the process exemplified the esteemed virtue of physical self-control.

5.3.2 Sickness and Death

Suffering a sickness was often considered a test of the sister's piety and fervor, and she was often commended, not as much for having recovered, but for having suffered the sickness at the hand of God in the first place. It was a mark of virtue to have lived a lot characterized by repeated afflictions of maladies of all sorts. Even on her deathbed, a sister may be eulogized for exhorting her sisters to continue strong and faithful, for not wasting a single moment to teach and instruct, or for not resting even in her last days from prayer and meditation. Lierheimer mentions (1998) in her discussion of the preaching and teaching ministry of the Ursulines (discussed in

Chapter 2 above) that “sick and dying Ursulines continued to ‘preach’ from their beds. Dauphine Lanfreze transformed her sickbed into ‘a preacher’s pulpit’; on her deathbed Françoise de Bourrily ‘spoke only of God and the salvation of souls, and preached eloquently, as if she had a great assembly to convert’” (p. 219).

The moment of eventual death, then, was not, for the pious nun, an unforeseeable, inevitable morbid certainty, the dread of which infected her heart and mind with fear and anguish.²⁴ Instead, death was a promise, a hope of eventual victory that would finally heal her heart and mind, delivering her from the relentless burdens of temptations that characterized life in her corporeal, Earthly body. Death was not to be dreaded; it was to be longed for! And life on Earth, even up until the final moment of death, was only the opportunity accorded her by God to prepare herself for the Promise of Glory.

Supernatural faith, which enlightens souls from their baptism to their death, shines with a particular radiance at the moment of death. (Gueudré, 1964, p. 54, translation mine)

5.4 The Edificatory and Collective Purposes of the Obituary Circular Letter

Never in the daily routine of convent life was a single moment or activity left without taking advantage of the occasion for some pious purpose. Not even at mealtimes were the sisters allowed to keep idle hearts and minds. One section of the 1705 Reglemens of the Paris Congregation describes activities to be observed during mealtimes, the refectory being the ideal occasion to provide the sisters an opportunity for both physical and spiritual refreshment:

1. The nuns shall take their meals with an upright intent to please God and to carry out His will, *restoring their physical strength*, in order to render to Him the service required of them.

²⁴ This was not always the case. In his description of the feminine orders in Blois in the 17th century, Notter (1990) states that this hopeful anticipation for the moment of death was only held by a small number of nuns, the majority of which feared the Day of Judgment (p. 32).

and also,

4. Once all are seated, the Mother Superior shall give the signal, at which point the Reader shall begin the reading, and all shall roll up their sleeves and unfold their napkins, placing one end on the table and the other on herself.

5. They shall listen attentively to the reading, as stated in the Rule and the Constitutions, *in order that the spirit be restored just as well as the body*, and to this end they shall avoid making any noise at all.

(REGCP, Part II, Chapter I, §. VII, pp. 17-18, emphasis mine, numbering original, see Appendix C.22 for complete version of original text)

And they were even instructed on what works could and should be read aloud:

1. Every day at dinner, before anything else, shall be read in French the next day's *Martyrologe*, except on the days when it is read from the Choir, and the Thursday, Friday and Saturday of Holy Week.

2. All during the year shall be read the *lives of the Saints*...

3. Every Sunday, and during Lent, shall be read some sermon or presentation on the Gospel of the day, unless superseded by some other observance, or *the holiday of a Saint whose life was much exemplary*.

and also,

7. *Another possible reading is the Circular Letters of the nuns who have passed away in the houses of the Order, primarily if there is anything remarkable in them.* (REGCP, Part II, Chapter I, §. VIII, pp. 22-24, emphasis mine, numbering original, see Appendix C.23 for complete version of original text)

The primary purpose, therefore, of the *éloge*, in all its forms, was to edify and encourage the sisters in their religious life. It provides examples of pious living by those that had preceded them, preparing and instructing future generations in the ideals and values of the Christian life in general and the Ursuline order in particular. As Dubois states, the obituary circular letter « exerts a moral, virtuous, and beneficial influence and kindles admiration » (Dubois, 2013, p. 2). The Ursuline life-voyage was a grueling endeavor, not to be undertaken lightly. In fact, the daily walk prescribed by Scripture and the Règles in order to reach their ultimate destination could be daunting, both to the young or newly initiated sisters, as well as to older, more-experienced sisters who, over time, could easily find themselves weary of the journey. The obituary letters

personalized the ideals set forth by the Rules, providing imitable examples of the virtues required therein, and set a high-standard for righteous life in the religious context. These standards were purposefully set high indeed by the idealized nature of the biographies, so the obituary letters furthermore reminded the sisters that they were not the first to overcome in the face of such strenuous trials, encouraging them to press forward and not become discouraged.

Monastic practices can often be traced back to Scripture, as can their literary devices. The exhortative nature of the obituary circular letters follows rhetorically the approach taken by the writer of the Book of Hebrews when he exhorts the early Christians:

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. (NIV, Heb 11:1 - 12:3)

Ultimately, are not all biographies meant to inspire? Generally speaking, religious biographies by nature are not essentially about the person; they are about an ideal to be aspired to, and they incite the reader to pursue that virtue in his or her own life by providing models of one or many who have embodied that ideal. The Jews had the stories of their forefathers and their prophets. The early Christians had the apostles. Protestants had *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*. And the Catholic religious orders had their *éloges*.

Although the primary purpose of the *éloges* was edificatory, an ancillary purpose can be called collective (Dubois, 2013, pp. 9-11), in that they provided a basic means of communication between the different houses that, as autonomous establishments, had little or no interaction otherwise. This was particularly true of the various sorts of *lettres circulaires* that vehicled the sharing of news and needs among the communities. The compiler of the collection of circular

letters preserved at the Sorbonne and entitled *Nécrologe de divers couvents d'Ursulines*, states her primary purpose: « a motive of piety towards the deceased in the idea that those who read of them will be aroused to pray to God for them, to imitate their virtues and to praise God who has taken possession of the hearts of such a great number of virgins ». She later reminds her readers of the added benefit²⁵ of such communication: « it is also by a motivation of esteem for this custom to which the largest part of religious orders conform in informing the other monasteries of the death of each nun, which serves as a bond of friendship among them all, and without which they would know almost nothing of each other » (NDCU, p. 1). This « bond of friendship » constructs what Thomas Carr suggests (2007) could be considered a “common identity within a textual community” (p. 8).

Indeed, communities that exist in isolation tend to innovate linguistically and socially from one another and develop unique identities and value systems apart from the those of the community that originally birthed them. The sharing of news, sufferings, needs (to be discussed later), etc. not only served to reinforce the order's values among the hundreds of Ursuline communities spread out all over France – and later the New World – but also would have helped to curb any tendency to innovate independently of each other.

The most opportune moment to exercise both the edificatory as well as the collective natures of the *éloge* would have been the occasion of the passing of one of the sisters, « death permitting the release of the eulogistic word » (Dubois, 2013, p. 2) The *lettres circulaires* that one house would send to sister houses upon the death of one of their own provided the eulogistic biographies that served to inspire and instruct and employed these eulogies as a basis to request their cooperation and assistance in a common concern: the request of the *suffrages*.

²⁵ At least from a 19th century perspective.

5.5 The Prayers and Suffrages for the Deceased, and Other Requests

Upon the passing of one of their professed sisters, or upon the notice of the passing of one from a sister community, each Ursuline community of the Paris Congregation was instructed by their 1705 Constitutions to make intercession to Heaven on her behalf.

1. All shall say in particular for each deceased nun three vigils of three lessons, and beyond the masses and services prescribed by the Roman Ritual, three more low masses shall be said, and as many general communions shall be said as services that must be said. And for the superiors who pass away while in charge, three additional low masses shall be said for her.
2. When a nun passes away, all shall undergo the discipline of the scourge for her, while reciting the psalm *De profundis*, *Requiem* at the end, and the prayer of *Quæsumus, Domine, pro tua*, etc. And those who have some infirmity or reluctance will make some devotion or good work, as shall be ordered for her.
3. When the notice is received of some nun of the Order and Union of the Paris Ursulines, a low mass shall be said for the deliverance of her soul (if the convenience of the monastery permits) and a general communion will be applied to her. If the mass was unable to be said, a general communion shall be said instead.
4. The Office of the Dead shall be said in accordance with the Roman Ritual. (CONP, Part II, Chapter VIII, pp. 84-86, emphasis original, see Appendix C.24 for original text)

Gueudré (1964) describes the practice:

While in this way women express their charity towards their neighbor through alms, the virgins in their cloister, after having renounced earthly goods, pray for those who do not pray, a primary substitutionary role for an ungrateful world who does not serve its God as it should. They also offer their suffrages for the souls in Purgatory, the suffering church of whom their books of piety are a constant reminder of their memory. (p. 61, translation mine)

The *suffrages* were ceremonial prayers²⁶ addressed to the saints on behalf of and in support of the deceased, in supplication that aid, protection, and intercession before God be accorded them (Suire, 2004, p. 210) during whatever time they must tarry in Purgatory, until and

²⁶ Not to be confused with *suffrages*, or votes, such as those received by Gabrielle Hodout, who, in candidacy for her *prise d'habit de novice* into the Ursuline community of La Ciotat, « received by secret vote a plurality of the sisters' votes and *suffrages* » (ADBR, 85 H^{bis} 2).

so that they be soon delivered out from their remaining trials of purification. One of the most important mediators invoked, of course, was the Blessed Virgin, « a figure at the same time powerful, compassionate, and protective. » (Dubois, 2013, p. 3) If the above-discussed *nécrologes* and *ménologes* were meant to preserve the memories of the deceased faithful and to inspire the present and future faithful in their Earthly journey, sending the notice of the sister's passing, accompanied by a resume of her earthly virtues, and requesting the suffrages on her behalf, provided for the comfort and rest of the deceased faithful in the journey to their eternal Heavenly rest. It also provided the occasion for the present faithful to participate in the process of finally securing this their ultimate deliverance.

As communication among the communities was only occasional, and as the temporal and financial costs of producing and dispatching the letters was significant, the communities would often take the occasion of the obituary letter to share other news or make other requests that alone would not have warranted the sending of a circular letter. Examples of this include the occasional request for prayers for the success of upcoming elections, the news of the passing of someone closely aligned to the convent, or even the advertisement of spiritual resources available to the sisters. Take for instance Sister M. de Sainte Bernard de Boucher, Superior of the community in Sémur, who, in 1685, announced the death of and requested the suffrages for Sister Claude Chauveau des Anges. After doing so, she left a note at the bottom of her letter next to her signature that read simply, « I implore you with all my heart to pray to God for the good success of our elections that are due to occur on the 25th of next month » (LDEF-V1, p. 85). Sister Claude de S. Charles, Superior in Montluçon wrote in 1690 to request the suffrages for Sister Charlotte Sicaud de S. François de Sales and, in a footnote at the end, also requested prayers for their recently deceased confessor of 45 years, as well as for a young pensionner who,

although she desperately wanted to « embrace the life of an Ursuline », did not live long enough to do so (LDEF-V3, p. 103). In 1691, Sister Jeanne de S. Basile, Superior of the Ursulines of Montargis, took the occasion of the obituary letter of Sister Marie Berger dite de la Passion to inform the other communities that she had recently printed three devotional volumes *en veau* and was making them available to the other communities for 30 francs, along with eight other works of interest particular to religious life, with prices ranging from 5 to 40 francs (LDEF-V3, p. 22). It was even noted in one printed letter²⁷ that « Urbain Couttelier, Rue Saint-Jacques, at the grand house of St. Ursula, sells books for the day boarders at your monasteries, as well as other devotional books » (LDEF-V3, p. 80). This practice in the 16th and 17th centuries should not be considered opportunistic profiteering. In light of the general purpose of the obituary letter to request the suffrages and also to share needs of and news from the community, it is evident that such footnotes, instead of being unseemly, are quite naturally and most appropriately placed.

²⁷ Possibly by the writer, but more probably by the publishing house that took the occasion of the letter to publish their own advertisement.

CHAPTER 6. THE NEW ORLEANS OBITUARY CIRCULAR LETTERS

In this chapter I will describe and analyze the book of *Lettres Circulaires* in order to answer the questions I have posed in this treatise, using the five themes presented above (Chapter 3, section 2). Each section takes on a single theme, discussing it as it relates to the tradition the New Orleans Ursulines had inherited in France as well as the innovation they were forced to make in New France. I finish with a linguistic analysis of the language of respect, followed by an analysis of the ideal New Orleans Ursuline as evidenced by the manner in which they are eulogized in the book.

6.1 *External and Internal Trials*

One value that held constant and accompanied the Ursuline sisters across the Atlantic was the importance placed on *épreuves* or trials. Two types of *épreuves* are discussed in the letters. The first is external, or those placed on the sister by her family or by the intended community as tests of her suitability for the vocation as well as the difficulties she faced in travelling to and the settling into the New World. The second is internal, or the sufferings sent by or required of her by God that worked to perfect in her the Heavenly virtues He desired. In other words, sickness and self-inflicted mortifications. Sister Marie-Thérèse Ramachard de St. François de Paule was burdened by God, to His glory and her purification, even at a young age:

Our Lord, who wanted to make of her a blood wife, made her, until the age of 20, go through various trials that, purifying her virtue as gold in a crucible, soon set her free from all that which was not of God: disabled for seven years, the prey of the cruelest of sicknesses which often drove her up to the doors of death, she sanctified these days of trials through her patience and her gentleness. (LCNO, letter 8, p. 221, see Appendix C.25 for original text)

It was written of Marie Thérèse Fargeon's request for entry into the novitiate in Pont St. Esprit that « this grace was granted her after she had been well tested » and that, during her life of

service in New Orleans, « so many virtues could not come to their perfection without being tested, and God did not release this faithful spouse from sharing in his cross » (letter 32).

6.1.1 External Trials

Even the very desire to undertake « the difficult labor that is inherent in starting a new work », especially for a young lady, « merited a serious examination of her character and talents » (letter 9), for the New World would impose new demands on her physical, mental, and spiritual constitution. She would face new obstacles to her vocation, new hardships unknown to her sisters in France, new sicknesses, and new populations and cultures to which she was unaccustomed. And just as she had to navigate the perils of a perilous voyage to reach her new home, she had to navigate the new challenges her new home placed on her. This « second vocation » demanded of the missionary nuns « sacrifices much more costly to their nature than the first » (letter 32). One additional sacrifice required of them was leaving their homeland, as it was said of Adelaide Brunest, who left Paris to come to New Orleans, that not only did she have to leave her parents, but she had to leave her *patrie*, which she did « big-heartedly . . . in order to go consecrate herself to God in the new world » (letter 48).

The journey to the New World did not even begin easily for the missionary-minded Ursuline, for she was not given up easily to the undertaking. Often discussed is the reaction of her parents to her decision to enter religious life. Some encouraged her, or at least supported her decision. Some resisted, even with great effort to prevent the profession. Ironically, both cases are presented as evidence of the piety and determination of the sister for her calling, which is never her decision, but commanded her of God. It was often mentioned in the obituary letters in France that the sisters had encountered resistance from their families when seeking to profess

into religious life, in order to combat the common perception that Old Regime convents were filled with women enclosed their by dishonorable parents (Delumeau, 1981, p. 119). The missionary sister however faced the additional hurdle of having to convince her families as well as her communities – both of whom she loved and loved her so tenderly – to allow her to lose them to the New World. Not surprising is that this is particularly true in the first 35 years after foundation, since the whole enterprise was new and fraught with dangers. Indeed it was a recurring theme for Mother Tranchepain, who herself had faced opposition to her conversion from Protestantism (letter 4). Even our now beloved Marie Madeleine Hachard was discouraged from professing by her confessor, « assuring her that it was not there that God wanted her », and in seeking permission to leave for Louisiana, « it cost her many tears to obtain the consent of her family who cast aside such a plan that seemed to them so difficult to carry out » (letter 9). Marie Turpin, Sister Ste. Marthe's father only allowed his daughter to profess after placing her in the pensionat as a time of *épreuve* to reassure himself of her chosen vocation. She would become the first New Orleans creole to be received into the Ursuline community (letter 10). Marguerite Ramachard's family reluctantly allowed her to follow her vocation (letter 24), and Marie Thérèse Fargeon seemed to her parents so determined to enter religious life that they believed themselves incapable of persuading her, allowing her to profess in Pont St. Esprit, France (letter 32). Madeleine Mahieu not only had to wait for her mother to pass away before she could profess into the community at Le Havre de Grace in Normandy, but later, as Sister de St. François Xavier, it was a formidable task to convince her Superior Mother to submit to God's will and release her to the New World for she « labored with no less intensity to keep unto herself a treasure whose value she knew all too well » (letter 1).

The arguments they would make were manifold and creative:

- claiming that her health was weak (letter 1)
- using her delicate constitution as an apparently insurmountable excuse (letter 3)
- consulting doctors who declared her unable to ever withstand 90 leagues on the sea (letter 3)

and the tactics they would employ showed great determination:

- « her brother, having been alerted, spared nothing to prevent her measures, goodwill, tears, rebukes and threats. Everything was used to detain her » (letter 3)
- « [her community in Morlaix, France] did everything in their power to prevent her from coming to us » (letter 22)

Their resistance usually forced the sister to double down in her efforts (letter 3), prayerfully seek assistance from St. Xavier and others, and some way, somehow her supplications would be granted through the intercession of the saints on her behalf. Eventually, the resistor would relent, with great sadness. Sister Marie Turpin's father loved and needed her tender spirit so much at home that « it took every bit of his faith to resolve to make such a sacrifice » (letter 10). It was said of Sister Elisabeth Jérôme Brive Brigeaud de Belair dite Thérèse de Jésus that she prayed to the Holy Virgin for 15 Saturdays in a row, to St. Joseph for 15 Wednesdays, and to St. Xavier for 10 Fridays, at which point her mother relented and sent her consent by mail. Yet even then, when the moment came for her departure, her dear mother made a last ditch effort to prevent her from going, an effort so intense that « any other less firmly held calling than that of our dear sister would have been shaken by such a violent assault » but, of course, « she withstood it courageously » (letter 7). And it was said of Sister Marguerite Judde de St. Jean l'Évangile that her entire family strongly opposed her departure, but that « all the arguments that her parents could offer served only to make her determination and courage to shine forth more and more » (letter 2).

One young girl from a noble family in New Orleans, Charlotte de Mony, after the death of her parents, and finding herself completely unable to convince her brothers to let her join the Ursulines, took daring and desperate measures:

Having lost her father and mother, and living with her brothers, she made several attempts to secure their approval regarding the desire she had to be a nun, but, utterly desiring to stop her, they placed all possible obstacles in her way. Seeing that she could not obtain their consent, she asked to come see the nuns, begged them to open the door for her, and, once in the house, she wished never to go back out and made her brothers agree to the steps she had taken, declaring to them her calling to religious life. (LCNO, letter 41, p. 255, see Appendix C.26 for original text)

Once on the water, on the voyage to the New World, she faced « a life-threatening voyage of 2500 leagues » (3), including « five months of a difficult ocean crossing » (1), but she would undertake it « fearlessly » (3), gladly exposing herself « for the glory of God to all consequences of such a difficult voyage » (7). Not all came from France, however, but their journeys to New Orleans were just as perilous. Marie Turpin came by boat down the Mississippi from Illinois (10). At least two sisters came with the Grand Dérangement that would expel the Acadians from Canada and bring them to Louisiana where they would famously be later known as Cajuns: Gertrude Braud, Sister Ste. Marie Joseph (36) and Rose Leblanc, Sister Ste. Monique, expelled from Acadia and widowed, who would later declare, « I have lost everything . . . through the war, but I have found everything in entering this holy house » (18).

6.1.2 Internal Trials, or Mortifications

If the hardships she faced and the *épreuves* placed on her from her family and community were external tests on the sister, the mortifications were internal tests, and the value placed on them held constant as the sisters carried this practice with them across the ocean. The sister whose mortifications were without “singularité” were prized by Mother Tranchepain (letters 1

and 2). It was even said of Sister Bigeaud de Ste. Thérèse de Jésus by Sister St. Pierre that the mortifications that seasoned a 15-week cycle of prayers for permission to come to New Orleans eventually helped lift the obstacles that prevented her (letter 7).

The severity of the mortifications, as in the French obituary letters, varied greatly. The mildest examples were some form of self-denial at the table (letter 1). Renée Yviguel was said to only eat the food intended for the negroes, or leftovers (letter 12). Charlotte Hebert de St. François Xavier was also said to only eat once a day, always only « the most plain and crude of what there was », but she took it much further, adding to her one daily meal « all that a spirit of penitence may impose, which she continued her entire life, almost always accompanied by hairshirts, cilices, iron chains, bracelets, cilice belts of horsehair, and the disciplines that to her were a daily practice ». Even Sister Gonzague, who wrote her obituary, admitted that this was extreme (letter 11).

Interestingly, none of the sisters born in the New World, either those born in New Orleans or those who accompanied the Cajuns exiled from Acadia, were ever said to have participated in these practices. Yet those who had professed in France and come as missionaries to Louisiana continued to value the practice in New Orleans, especially in the first years after the founding. Seven of the first eleven sisters who died before 1764 (letters 1-3, 7, and 10-12) were praised for what Tranchepain euphemistically called « battling against one's self ».²⁸ However the value placed on the practice – if that value can be determined by its mention in the letters – died off after 1764, resurfacing only twice more, in 1810 and 1827, in the two longest letters written after Louisiana Statehood (letters 32 and 42), both sisters of whom having come to New Orleans from France. The community was forced to moderate the mortifications of Sister St.

²⁸ an expression found in her letter on behalf of Sister Salaun de Ste. Thérèse (letter 3)

Vincent de Laclotte from Montpellier (letter 42), and it was said of Sister Marie Thérèse Fargeon from Pont St. Esprit that the air of tranquility and serenity that accompanied her continual self-violence could only be the resulting effect of great patience and a mortification with which she had been familiar for quite a long time (letter 32).

What drove the perceived need for physical mortification among the New Orleans Ursulines was the same impetus that drove their counterparts in France to self-punishment. A life lived in preparation for eternity must be lived in such a way as to merit God's graces and favor in death, and the repression of temptation and desire was pursued by all means necessary. The New Orleans Ursulines, as had the Ursulines in France for centuries, varied in the degrees to which they feared the judgment of God during their lifetimes. Some did not fear it. Some dreaded it their entire lives. It is not surprising that of the nuns of whom it was specifically said that they did not fear death during their lifetimes, none of them are said to have practiced mortification. Actually, it must also be pointed out that, of the six letters which mention the sister's attitude towards death and the nine letters that discuss her mortifications, only two intersect, but, of those two, the one who feared death, Sister Fargeon, was also the one who most avidly practiced mortification.

6.2 Attitudes toward and Aptitudes for the Vocation

In the obituary letters, the reader also learns of how well a sister performed in her duties as an Ursuline. It is often said that the children loved her, that all her sisters adored her, that she was a model of joy or patience or long-suffering or zeal or determination for all with whom she came in contact. Her devotions often take a prominent place in her eulogy. She would have particularly been devoted to Mary and Jesus primarily, and to this or that saint secondarily.

The Ursulines arrived in New Orleans knowledgeable of the fact that they would be tasked with hospital duties. It was this responsibility, not primarily their traditional vocation of education of young girls, that ultimately facilitated their mission to New Orleans, and they seem to have accepted it only begrudgingly. Yet how the sister instructed those in her care, or worked for the *salut des ames*, seems to be more valued in their obituaries than does any hospital duties. Mother Tranchepain said of Madeleine Mahieu, « nothing made her happier than to see them grow in number; the more ignorant the students, the more she became attached to them » (letter 1). Whatever the task, the Ursulines valued dedication to the work, knowing that the Heavenly recompense for their tireless labor would be as generous as their Earthly efforts, just as Sister St. Victoire would respond to those who would try to compel her to rest from her fervent work on behalf of the community: « the more I do, the more I'll have » (letter 51).

The calling to the mission field was not taken lightly, but it was taken with great enthusiasm. Their motivations varied slightly: « From the beginning » Mother Tranchepain « felt a singular attraction for missions » (letter 4). Sister Bigeaud proclaimed, « how happy I would be to go to a country where, known only by God, I will be occupied only with him » and « thanked God for having so fortunately left Egypt to go to the Promise Land » upon her departure for Louisiana (letter 7). They would hear stories or read missives that would describe the missionary field on the frontier, and they would be compelled to go, such as Sister Fargeon de St. François Xavier, who, after reading « the accounts of several Ursulines who there had devoted themselves » promised God to devote herself to the mission field if He would provide her the opportunity. She would later work hard to procure more workers for her mission field, even if she was never able to see the fruits of her labors with her own eyes (letter 32). Françoise Gavanon, Sister St.

Agathe heard about the America Mission and felt « an intensely hurried desire to go there » (letter 44).

Several came following the disastrous so-called liberations of the convents that accompanied the events of the Revolution. Françoise Agathe Gonsoul, Sister St. Michel labored tirelessly with the boarding students in Pont St. Esprit « until the gruesome period of the French Revolution, which, in 1792, forced all the nuns to leave their convents » and was forced to return home to her family. Twelve years later, having received a letter from her cousin, Sister Ste. André of the New Orleans Ursulines, she came to New Orleans « attempting to revive here the spirit of regularity and fervor of her former, beloved community that she believed incapable of ever recovering in France » (letter 40). Mother Laclotte would be eulogized for great heroism displayed in the face of constant mortal threat in Montpellier during the tumultuous French Revolution before coming to New Orleans (letter 43).

A lot was required by the nature of the missionary endeavor in the New World, and the missionary nun had to be multi-talented in her service to her community. As Clark states, a sister had to be able to provide “practical contributions to a frontier convent” (2007a, p. 73). The frontier endeavor most definitely blurred the lines of any hierarchy in the distribution of labor that may have existed in the well-established convents of Old World France. Consider Renée Yviguel de Ste. Marie who « would grind the corn and the rice, chop the wood, and do the washing », such a menial task that her eulogist described it as « what our most miserable slaves do » in this « new foundation » (letter 12).²⁹ But this was a different context in which sisters had

²⁹ Clark argues (2007a, pp. 99-100) that, in the French homeland, such labor would have been not only unimaginable, but also indescribable. They would have had no reference for imagining that an Ursuline nun of high birth would have been subjected to slave labor. In fact, the Ursulines did not anticipate that enslaved Africans would be the objects of their educational and instructional efforts in New Orleans. They expected to be working to evangelize Indians, as had their predecessors who had established the Ursuline mission in Québec.

to do even menial tasks, and they embraced this unexpected twist of fate with great passion. It was said of Marie Thérèse Fargeon, Sister St. François Xavier, that despite being also occupied with all sorts of undesirable responsibilities, she never forgot her primary objective, the instruction of the students and of the « slaves, from whom she won confidence and esteem » (letter 32). Catherine Eulalie, Sister St. Louis de Gonzague instructed the slaves whom she « persuaded to receive the sacraments » (letter 21). Sister Judde also instructed slaves (letter 2), as did Antoinette Rouveroly, of whom it was said, « nuns and slaves alike all found in her tender charity the help they needed » (letter 43). Indeed, their efforts on behalf of the entire community did not go unappreciated, as it was said of the first sister to pass away, Madeleine Mahieu, Sister St. François Xavier. In her obituary letter, Mother Tranchepain wrote that « barely had she rendered her Spirit when there was in our house nothing but cries and sobbing, as much on our part as on that of the boarding students, orphans, day students, and our slaves; she was widely loved by everybody » (letter 1). The combination of the New Orleans Ursulines applying themselves to such menial and degrading tasks normally reserved for slaves with the newfound task of evangelizing these very slaves alongside whom they worked created, therefore, as Clark states (2007a), « a new marker of virtuosic piety » unique to this New World community (p. 100).

Furthermore, it was not only working with and earning the affection of enslaved peoples that distinguished the New Orleans Ursulines from their traditional counterparts in Old France. Their unique mission to the frontier of Louisiana, that of education as well as hospital duties, brought them greater exposure to the general population, whose admiration and love they soon secured as well. Mother Tranchepain said of Madeleine Mahieu, the first to pass away, « the whole city shared in our loss and misses her infinitely » (letter 1), and Mother Laclotte wrote of

Marie Fargeon, Sister St. François Xavier that « she won the confidence and most sincere goodwill of the community, the general esteem of the public, whose laments and praises she earned. » (letter 32). It would be difficult to imagine a sister in a cloistered community in France being memorialized for such widespread public admiration.

Even the additional requests sent back home that accompanied the letters had a unique New World petition: that more come, and come quickly! Sister Tranchepain makes the request in two of the three letters she wrote, citing a nascent community reduced to eight members, several of which were already in poor health (letters 1 and 3). It was a recurring request for Mother Landelle de St. Jacques, who, in six of her nine letters (letters 16, and 18-22) written between 1766 and 1782, begged for their loss to be consoled (letter 21) by way of reinforcements, replacements for the workers she had lost. She must have felt so burdened by her community having so much work to do and yet having been reduced to thirteen workers (letter 18) that twice she alluded to Jesus' own words in Luke 10:2 and Matthew 9:37-38: « may our Lord send us worthy subjects to replace her and to work in the Lord's vineyard, which is quite abundant, but there are few harvesters to work it » (letters 16 and 22). Sister Marie Magdeleine de Jésus employs the same allusion: « Do not forget, I implore you, our nascent community. Request, I pray you, my Very Reverend Mother, of the master of the harvest, a few good subjects to fill in for those whom we lose » (letter 8).

6.3 The Looming Spectre of Death

We see a great deal of importance placed on the nature of the deceased sister's final sufferings and death. The Superiors often go into great detail to recount her last days as she prepares to meet God. Sometimes the sister is anxious, sometimes trepidacious, but always

resolute and peaceful in the final moment. In death we see her final attainment of what she had been preparing her entire life to achieve: being joined to her Heavenly Spouse. She had died once to the world when she professed, now she dies to the constraints of the world as she passes to paradise. This is a moment for great rejoicing for her, but an affliction from the Hand of God on the community that must continue without her.

Usually accompanied by the proper sacraments, when faced with the realization that she was reaching her final moments, every single sister is said to have died peacefully. It was written that Marguerite Aucoin, Sister Ste. Anne had an unfailing calm and tranquility and that « death frightened her not in the slightest. She watched it arrive with a perfect resignation » (letter 46). Two of the sisters were said to have hidden their illnesses until their sickness became apparent: Marguerite Salaun, Sister Ste. Thérèse kept it hidden for two or three months (letter 3), and Sister Fargeon de St. François Xavier hid it as long as she possibly could (letter 32). Only a total of six letters studied discuss the attitude toward death that the sister displayed during her lifetime, and five of these six feared death. At the risk of implying some change in attitudes over time based on only an eighth of the letters, it is noteworthy that the five of the six who were said to have a fear of death were all written from 1779 forward. The one exception is Marguerite Salaun, who died in 1733 and whose fundamental disposition after braving the perils of death on the voyage to the New World remained thereafter one of courage in the face of death while doing God's will, except on rare occasions and « when from it she would stray a little, she would quickly be called back » (letter 3). When fear of death is mentioned, what seems to be worthy of mention is that it was taken to uncommon extreme, so it could be argued that most sisters' attitudes towards death were too normal to be noteworthy.

The descriptions of the five sisters who did display a fear of death during their lifetimes are indeed remarkable in their intensity. What is equally remarkable is the peace and tranquility that was said to have come over them when finally they directly encountered the prospect of death. It was written that Mother Catherine Eulalie de Lavardière de St. Louis de Gonzague, who herself wrote five of the letters during her Superiorship, « received the honor of dying on the day of His nativity, with an admirable tranquility, dispelling the great fears she had of this final decisive moment of our eternity, which usually held her in continual trembling and remembrance of the judgments of God » (letter 21). Sister Fargeon, who also practiced an unusual amount of mortification, suffered from « a state of interior sorrow that only left her in the last days of the sickness that took her from us, but this troublesome state was also changed into a calm and such an admirable tranquility that she seemed already to be enjoying the reward awaiting her » (letter 32). Charlotte de Mony « had an extreme dread of death, the judgment of God always being cause for dread even for the holiest of souls, but this God of goodness and mercy calmed her fears at this last moment » (letter 41). Adelaide Brunest was, for her entire life, « so completely full of terror over the judgments and horrors of death that she could not even bear to hear anyone speak of them », but « one month before her final hour, such an extraordinary change took place in her dispositions that she desired death, and her sole apprehension was that health be returned to her » (letter 48). Yet the most beautiful turnaround granted by God's grace was to Sister Villerd de Ste. Ursule, who died in 1840 and of whom it was said:

Her perfect resignation to the will of God in life as in death was all the more so remarkable as, during her lifetime, fear of the judgments of God was a source of constant alarm in her soul. But in her last moments, the most perfect calm erased all her fear and anxiety. "Oh! my dear sisters," she would say to those with whom she was at more liberty, "if only you knew how very happy I am! I never would have believed I would

experience such happiness and pleasure at this last moment. Oh! I can't wait to see and to possess my God.” (LCNO, letter 50, p. 273, see Appendix C.27 for original text)

Ultimately, it would appear, honesty was the only policy when discussing the deceased's views on death. However it would be unfitting to describe a sister's last moments as terrifying, for it would be difficult to intercede on her behalf based on all the reasons why she should soon reach Paradise if she herself did not have that assurance at the moment of her death. And even in the case of these five sisters who so feared death, the dread that characterized their lives turned out to be a most commendable argument for their release from purification. If after trembling in their spirits for so long before death, they could die with such peace, surely they were ready for Glory. Mother Tranchepain said it best when writing of Marguerite Salaun, Sister Ste. Thérèse, « her face, much changed by the sickness, immediately regained its natural appearance with a sweetness that we tired not of admiring, and, instead of a certain fear that seeing death inspires, we felt drawn to embrace her » (letter 3).

6.4 The Discourse of Humility and Respect

In Hopper and Thompson, as discussed above, we see a discussion of the *transitivity* of clauses as it relates to the degree by which action is transferred from the speaker to the hearer or, in our case, from the writer to the recipient. Considerations are given to certain parameters such as number of participants, kinesics, punctuality, affirmation, etc. in order to determine the degree of transitivity involved. Here I have analyzed the direct and indirect requests, or *directives*, made by the Superiors in the letters in order to understand to what extent they directly or indirectly expressed humility and respect for the reader, and the function served by this granting of respect. How did the sisters “frame their speech” to show respect, and how does the transitivity of the

linguistic structures show sensitivity to this their “discursive and interactional goals” as described by Duranti (1997, pp. 195-196)?

Users of a language are constantly required to design their utterances in accord with their own communicative goals and with their perception of their listeners’ needs. Yet, in any speaking situation, some parts of what is said are more relevant than others. That part of a discourse which does not immediately and crucially contribute to the speaker’s goal, but which merely assists, amplifies, or comments on it, is referred to as BACKGROUND. By contrast, the material which supplies the main points of the discourse is known as FOREGROUND. (Hopper and Thompson, 1980, p. 280, emphasis original)

What we see in the letters is that a great deal of *background* is presented in order to make the case for the *foreground*. The entire eulogistic description of the sister’s life and character is presented in such a way as to argue for the appropriateness and even necessity of the only purpose explicitly stated in the letters: the request for the suffrages.

The only directives in the New Orleans letters are the requests of *les suffrages* and the request for reinforcements.³⁰ They are fairly consistently included at the end of the letters, just before and often flowing into the signature, but are also often found at the onset of the body of the letter (as stated above). Being couched in highly respectful and deferential language, they are rarely formed with direct imperatives, instead taking on the form of indirect expressions of need or statements of purpose. The initial and final positions of the directives in the structure of the letters reinforces their status as the primary impetus for their writing. Occasionally, the requests may be omitted as understood, but this is rare.

The 62 directives analyzed and categorized in Figure 2 can be described in terms of their transitivity. With the exception of the rare imperatives – i.e. « accordez luy je vous en supplie le secours de vos prieres » (“Accord to her, I implore you, the assistance of your prayers”, letter 17) – the letters tend to carry either high or moderate transitivity. In the highly

³⁰ The original letters may have, as did the French letters, taken the occasion to include other requests, but this is unknowable since, as previously discussed, the letters in the book are only copies of the texts of the originals.

transitive forms, the requests are directly stated. In the moderately transitive forms, the requests are made as statements of need or purpose. Only 8 requests were phrased in the imperative form, and only 1 of those was a direct imperative. The other 7 were followed immediately by a “softener” unique to this context: « je vous en supplie ».

Direct Imperatives :	demandez à notre Seigneur	1
Imperatives with softener :	accordez-lui je vous en supplie	3
	demandez je vous prie	1
	n’oubliez pas je vous en supplie	1
	priez je vous en supplie	1
	procurez-nous je vous en supplie	1
	<i>total number of phrases in imperative form:</i>	8
Highly Transitive Requests :	nous vous demandons	12
	je vous prie	11
	je (vous) demande	8
	nous vous prions	5
	nous reclamons	2
	j’implore vous suppliant	1
	je recommande	1
Moderately Transitive Requests :	j’ai recours à	5
	j’ose (or oserais-je) vous demander	2
	nous venons (vous) demander	2
	nous venons implorer	2
	nous avons recours à	1
	je ne laisse pas de vous demander	1
	j’espère que vous nous accorderez	1
	j’ai l’honneur de vous prier	1
	je me recommande à vos prières	1

Figure 2: Count and Classification of Directives, Listed by Diminishing Force

Prior to analysis and categorization of the directives above, I had theorized that the vast majority of the directives would be in the moderately transitive category, due to the nature of the letters and the normative practice of framing requests and addresses in the utmost respectful terms. It turned out, however, that the highly transitive forms outnumber the moderately

transitive forms 40 to 16. Upon deeper consideration, it was discovered that the moderately transitive forms tend to appear more often in the letters that are highly eloquent, while the highly transitive forms tend to appear in the letters that are more concise and perhaps a bit more formulaic, suggesting that the less personal creativity the writer expressed in the letter, the more transitive were her requests.

In the few directives where the writers used the imperative form, the phrase « je vous en supplie » was found immediately after all but one, suggesting that the writers felt compelled to soften the direct imperative with a supplication (the “en” referring to the imperative). The single case of an imperative without a softener seems to be an aberration.

Two additional cases are worth noting. Letter 29 uses the phrase « veuillez bien aussi vous souvenir de nous ». This is technically a verb in the imperative form, but one that convention has softened into a polite form of making a request, as in the English “please”. It does not appear anywhere else in the letters. The second special case is a fascinating request, completely indirect, in which the request is grammatically completely absent but clearly understood. The writer states that the deceased’s « zeal » as she describes it « se recommande elle-même à vos prières » (letter 39).

Finally, I looked at the instances in which the Superior spoke in the first person to see if she ever attempted to draw attention to herself or her community. So I looked at pronouns such as *je*, *moi*, *me*, *mon*, *ma*, *mes*, *nous*, and *notre*. What I found is that, beyond the requests and honorifics of address discussed above – and the obvious *notre (très) chère sœur* – most every time the writer referred to herself was ultimately to draw attention to the deceased. For instance, Sister Marie Roy de l’Incarnation said that the maîtresse that oversaw Sister St. Joseph de Laclotte’s first communion « m’a souvent dit » that Sister Laclotte always approached the

Sacraments with an increasingly eminent piety as she grew older (letter 42). The author could also use the first person when stating personal knowledge about the sister's life or character, reinforcing and validating the statement. Examples of this are everywhere in the letters.

In only three other instances would the writer draw attention to herself or to her community. The first is the oft-repeated request that she be believed to be addressing her reader with respect, such as when Sister Anne de St. Pierre requests « la grace de me croire avec respect » (letter 6) before her signature, but this is a formulaic expression. The second is the oft-repeated request that additional prayers, beyond the suffrages for the deceased, be lifted up for her or for the community. For example, Sister St. Pierre requests « nous vous demandons cependant ma Reverende Mere de lui accorder les suffrages de notre saint ordre; un peu de part dans vos prieres et celles de votre Sainte communauté pour la notre » (letter 7). The other is when the writer tells of the profound sorrow in which they find themselves after losing the beloved sister and/or when she asks for prayers for herself or her community. Mother Tranchepain does this in writing of Marguerite Judde, Sister St. Jean l'Évangile, whom she must have loved dearly, having been exiled together to Magny after the financial destruction of the Rouen community (see discussion in Chapter 2): « je ne puis vous exprimer la perte que nous faisons en cette chere defunte » (letter 2). Mother Laclotte does as well in writing of Sister Fargeon de St. François Xavier: « Il est aisé de juger de notre douleur, et de l'état d'accablement ou nous fumes plongées, par la perte de cette Chere Mère » (letter 32). In the end, however, even these declarations of despair are still statements of love and honor for the deceased, for only the loss of one so beloved, so pious, so cherished, and on whom we depended so much could cause so much pain and sorrow upon her passing.

6.5 The Ideal New Orleans Ursuline

In order to help place in context the image of the ideal New Orleans Ursuline as revealed by the obituary letters, it is helpful to begin with the narratives of several sisters who either voluntarily left or were dismissed from the community, and the reasons for such. Two stories found in the archives help illuminate the high expectations placed on each sister.

First, we read in the *Délibérations du Conseil* of the New Orleans Ursulines that

On the sixth day of July of the year 1729, veiled novice Miss Claude Massy left our community. All the nuns, having judged her unsuitable for Holy Religion and being all of mutual consent, dismissed her and released her into the hands of her brother, an inhabitant of this colony. (DELIB, p. 13, see Appendix C.28 for original text)

Claude Massy was one of the original members of the group of nuns who arrived from Rouen with Mother Tranchepain in 1727, at that time being the only postulant of the group. Two years later, she had become a novice but, apparently, had demonstrated, either by word or deed, to be so unsuitable for the calling that her fellow sisters dismissed her from the community. The exact reasons are not stipulated, but, whatever they were, it was determined that she was not cut out for the work that lay before the Ursulines in New Orleans.

However, the lessons from the New Orleans Ursulines of Miss Marie Rilleux dite de Ste. Madeleine and Miss Emilie Jourdan de St. François d'Assise (JOURNAL, pp. 50-52, author undeterminable) is much more informative in this regard. An interesting three-page story, written as a polemic of piety and conduct for the sisters, compares the departures of these two sisters under very different circumstances. It is said of Sister Rilleux that she did severe damage to the reputation of the community when, in 1809, she stripped herself of her habit, left the community, asked the Pope to be released from her vows, married, and subsequently left her husband. Being « superficial and of a violent character », Sister Ste. Madeleine's profession was said to have been wisely opposed by some of the members of the community, but that the Spanish mothers, «

touched by her remorse and her beautiful promises after her little lapses », allowed her to profess. Yet, following her profession, she is said not to have sufficiently worked towards « religious virtues » or to the « [taming of] her mood » and to have spent too much time in the parloir, which ultimately led to her abandonment of her vocation and re-entry into the world, where she « gave herself up to all her vanities ».

She is then compared to her « intimate friend », Sister Emilie Jourdan, who, a few years after Sister Ste. Madeleine's departure, followed her « fatal example » and herself left the community, but under very different circumstances. Having fallen ill, she asked permission to go recuperate at her parents' home and annually renewed this request. But her conduct was quite different in her exile, in which she « remained constantly in mourning » and « went out only to attend mass ». In the end, she asked fervently to return to the convent, but her sickness was too severe to allow for transportation, and, at her request, at the very least she was buried in the Ursuline cemetery.

Following the recounting of the stories of these two sisters, the writer exhorts her readers:

May the nuns learn from this example never to become attached to those among their sisters whose conduct is irregular, may they avoid going too often to the parloir, and may they break away from too great a love for their parents. In this way they will obtain the grace to persevere until death in their holy state. (JOURNAL, pp. 50-52, see Appendix C.29 for original text)

It seems from this exhortation that both of these sisters suffered from fatal flaws: Sister Ste. Madeleine from too great a love for the world and Sister St. François d'Assise from too great a love for her parents, although the latter never fully seems to have fallen from the good graces of the community as she was buried in their cemetery and was given an obituary letter. It is clear, therefore, that not all sisters were of the proper character and constitution for the religious vocation in the missionary field in New Orleans, and this explains why the above-mentioned

épreuves took on such importance in the evaluation of their suitability for the vocation. What characteristics then did the Ursulines value in their members? What traits did they value and/or deem indispensable for the vocation?

Gueudré (1964) notes that the religious vocation was seen as « an answer to a call from God » to which a sister's response was to be « voluntary and free ». True devotion was the combination of « a vibrant and practical faith » and an « inseparable charity. » To this she adds several traits of a virtuous woman which true faith was expected to inspire:

- *La charité* (charity), or *l'amour du prochain* (love for fellow man) (p. 58)
- Giving to the poor out of the material possessions with which she is providentially blessed (p. 59)
- Profoundly heartfelt humility (p. 64)
- Temperance, described as *une vertu particulièrement appréciée and une certaine modération faite de discrétion, de mesure, de retenue, de prudence, et qui se retrouve dans ses paroles, ses plaisirs, et même ses occupations.* (a particularly appreciated virtue and a certain moderation resulting from discretion, moderation, restraint, prudence, and which is found in her words, her delights, and even her pastimes) (p. 65)

In requesting the suffrages, the obituary circular letter provided the sister communities with assurances that the deceased would not tarry long in Purgatory and listed her virtues as points for intercession on her behalf should she indeed tarry briefly. In turn, these descriptions and assurances provided by the Superior in the letters provide the perfect opportunity to reconstruct the image of the ideal Ursuline sister. A detailed study of the first four letters (those written by the first Superior, as well as the one written about her), provides insight into what Tranchepain herself directly, and the Ursulines generally, felt was the most praiseworthy traits of the Ursuline sisters. The analysis of these four letters (see Figure 3) reveals 29 distinct traits for which Tranchepain praised her sisters (listed most common to least common).

From this analysis, the only trait for which all four sisters were praised for is an uncomplaining spirit. This seems therefore to be one of the traits – if not the single trait – most

prized in the New Orleans Ursuline community, or at least by Tranchepain. It coincides directly with the other most common traits in Figure 4 of humility (6) and submissiveness (6), as well as *résignation* (3). From here a clear picture emerges that the most prized characteristic of an Ursuline sister was that she completely emptied herself of her own desires and sought only to please God and those God placed over her.

<i>Trait and frequency of mention:</i>	<i>Frequency of mention by letter:</i>	<i>Letter number:</i>			
		1	2	3	4
uncomplaining (6)	humble	3	1		2
humble (6)	fervent	3		1	2
fervent (6)	strong in difficulty	1			5
strong in difficulty (6)	obedient, submissive	3		2	1
obedient, submissive (6)	uncomplaining	1	1	1	3
	sacrificially generous / selfless	1	2		1
sacrificially generous / selfless (4)	undaunted	1		1	2
undaunted (4)	courageous				3
	self-combative			3	
courageous (3)	patient		1		2
self-combative (3)	résignation / submission of will	1	1	1	
patient (3)	prayerful	2			
résignation / submission of will (3)	enthusiastic	2			
	mortification	1	1		
prayerful (2)	zealous for souls		1		1
enthusiastic (2)	zealous for instruction		1		1
mortification (2)	charitable		2		
zealous for souls (2)	regular		1	1	
zealous for instruction (2)	regular even in age		1		1
charitable (2)	hard-working, not idle	1	1		
regular (2)	undoubting		1		1
regular even in age (2)	devoted to the Virgin			1	1
hard-working, not idle (2)	persevering	1			
undoubting (2)	unchanging mood	1			
devoted to the Virgin and to Jesus (2)	compassionate		1		
	simple	1			
persevering (1)	joyous	1			
unchanging mood (1)	content		1		
compassionate (1)	sincere			1	
simple (1)	upright			1	
joyous (1)					
content (1)					
sincere (1)					
upright (1)					

Figure 3: Traits Eulogized in the Letters

Consideration must be given, however, to the fact that each Superior may focus on certain traits that she deems important than others and that she would not deem it appropriate in this circumstance to mention the character flaws of the deceased. Also, one sister being praised multiple times for a single trait may inflate the numbers for that trait. Therefore, it will be incumbent on this researcher to continue the analysis for the remaining 46 letters. In doing so, a more accurate description may emerge, and it may demonstrate an evolution over the span of the French period of the image of the ideal Sister.

Outside of the elements in the form of the letters, very few codified phrases specific to the genre seem to appear, and these phrases are traditional phrases and not typical to New Orleans. The ones that do repeat themselves almost in every letter are the honorifics of address, « Ma Très Reverende Mère » and « [J'ai l'honneur d'être] votre très humble et très obéissante servante »; the consistent description of the deceased as « [très] chère sœur » or « sainte religieuse »; the description of the recipients of the letter as a « sainte communauté »; and the phrases used in the above mentioned directives. These codified phrases that do appear consistently in the letters are all associated with interlocution or description of another. The writer is either directly addressing a colleague, referring to herself, or speaking of the deceased sister. In all cases, she honors the one being spoken to or about and humbles herself. This, like the directives and the ideal sister, is consistent with the form, purpose, and tone of the letters as demonstrating a compulsion to show humility and respect.

CHAPTER 7. CONCLUSION

Edified and encouraged by the example of those who have gone before us, we have no other ambition than to model our conduct on the exact discipline and constant regularity which they supported. (Ursuline Mother Marie-Clotilde in a letter dated September 3, 1790, as quoted in Loridan, 1920, p. 40, and cited in translation by Rapley, 2001, p. 6)

7.1 *The DNA of Angela Merici*

On one of my visits to the archives at Ursuline Academy in New Orleans, as the Prioress, Sister Carla Dolce, and I discussed my current research and possibilities for further studies, she leaned back in her chair with a smile and very concisely and pointedly shared with me her thoughts on the approach any publication should take. “You have to have a focus,” she declared, “and, when talking about the New Orleans Ursulines, I suggest to you that that focus should be the DNA of Angela Merici, the DNA that still permeates who we are as Ursulines here in New Orleans.” What an amazing woman she must have been, Sister Carla argued, for the Pope at that time to have agreed to approve a Company of lay women. What a pioneer she was!

What Sister Carla’s calls the “DNA of Angela Merici” permeates the spirit of the Ursulines around the world even today and is exemplified in the *Lettres Circulaires des décédées*. Linguistically speaking, the analysis of the transitivity of the directives in the letters demonstrates the pervasive and enduring respect continually afforded by the Ursulines to one another. In the description of the ideal nun, we see how the *lettres circulaires* chart the evolution of a new form of Ursuline piety in which elements called forth by the circumstances of the New World were grafted onto the settled constellation of devotional practices that the nuns brought with them.

Indeed, in Angela Merici we see unique characteristics that laid the foundation for the establishment of the Ursulines: unusual strength, courage, non-conformity, sincere penitence, an

interior purity, and certain approaches that enabled their work to expand and thrive: a general appeal, a focus on unity, and the recognition of the need for adaptability. Even today, Ursuline Academy's service and duty to this historically important and unique American port city is unbroken after nearly three centuries. Sister Carla and the New Orleans Ursulines continue tirelessly the labor of love began by Mother Tranchepain and imitated by her successors, faithful and strong women like Catherine Eulalie de Lavardière de St. Louis de Gonzague, Françoise Marguerite Bernard de St. Martin de St. Pierre, Marie Thérèse Landelle de St. Jacques, Marie St. Vincent de Laclotte de St. Joseph, Françoise Alzas de Ste. Félicité, and Sister Séraphine Ray, a painting of whom hangs today in the museum housed at the convent, among others. In keeping with their mission, Sister Carla teaches the young ladies in her charge about love for God and love for their fellow human beings, no matter their race or social background. Even back in colonial times, when this sentiment was not prevalent, the Ursulines in New Orleans held to that commitment, taking in and instructing young ladies of noble birth, orphans, creoles and even their own slaves.

This is the DNA that Angela Merici bequeathed to her Company in Italy, to the Order as it developed in France, to the sisters who would take the mission into the New World, and to the Ursulines who continue today to serve the city of New Orleans almost three centuries later.

7.2 Possibilities for Future Research

The texts of women religious have often borne the cost of the prejudices and particular interests of historians and literature, little inclined to consider history *au féminin*, the chronicling of daily life, mystical aspects and hagiographies, original and unpublished visions or the hierarchical quarrels among the superiors...

Thanks to the new history and to the history of women, the texts of our writers are today as essential as the tales of discovery or conversion of their masculine colleagues and must be the subject of critical publication and republication. (Théry, 2006b, p. 51, translation mine)

Research in the world of convent writing past and present shows a late but fortunately growing interest. There is much to be done to completely describe the varied aspects of literature this venue has produced as it pertains to the lives, work, mission and literature of these writers who have for so long have been isolated from study behind walls and window grills. The greatest impediment to my research was the vast amount of manuscripts and documents awaiting study and the limited amount of publications hereunto attempting to do so. I myself have struggled to focus my efforts and limit my discussions.

To my knowledge, the following can be related as to current study being done today. Dr. Thomas Carr continues study on female religious writing in Canada, and Dr. Sylvie Dubois is working on the convent writings of both Canadian and Louisiana Ursulines. Here in Louisiana, Dr. Petra Munro Hendry at LSU is preparing academic studies on the New Orleans Ursulines from a pedagogical perspective, Dr. Emily Clark of Tulane has published on them from an historical perspective, and Dr. Dubois and the CFFS at LSU are continuing linguistic analyses of the writings in their archives.

Limiting these proposals to the *lettres circulaires* of the religious orders in Old and New France, I believe several studies merit future analysis and publication. First, a comparative analysis of the obituary letters of the Ursuline and Visitandine orders, among others, should provide insight as to the commonality or uniqueness of their respective values and priorities, the devotions that they held, and their attitudes toward death, suffering and eventual hope. In New Orleans, a comparative analysis of what I have referred to above as the *edited* version of the book of *Lettres Circulaires* would hopefully start with a determination of the impetus and agent behind the re-edition. Should that determination be impossible to resolve, however, at minimum an analysis of what the “editor” copied faithfully, corrected, or redacted would likely reveal

changing priorities, themes, values, and linguistic tendencies from the early years through statehood in Louisiana until English became predominate even among the Ursulines. An expert in handwriting could analyze the letters to determine the degree to which the Superior herself composed, or delegated the responsibility to her assistant to compose, the letters and/or record them into the collection. Finally, and perhaps crucially to a global analysis of this genre, a compilation of all available letters and a complete inventory of their details and locations, would most assuredly be of the utmost importance to further informed study in the genre.

7.3 The Ursuline Outlook of Today

The forecast for the continued survival of the Ursuline Order in the United States in the coming years is unfortunately bleak. In certain regions of the world, the Ursulines continue to grow and thrive, but the average age of the sisters today, coupled with dismal prospects for recruitment, is leaving the very existence of not only the Ursulines but of all religious orders in the U.S. in great peril. Their prayer is that God stem the tide of social factors and influences that create the disinterest preventing recruitment and threaten their survival. I join them in this fervent hope. If however the current trend continues, the *lettres circulaires des décédées*, properly preserved and accurately studied, will safeguard their memories and the examples they set on Earth in their service to God and in keeping with the model of their foundress. May it ever be.

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APPENDIX A: LIST OF LETTERS ANALYZED: THE DECEASED

#	Year	Name of Deceased	Pages
1	1728	Madeleine Mahieu, Sister St. François Xavier	195-198
2	1731	Marguerite Judde, Sister St. Jean l'Evangile	199-202
3	1733	Marguerite Salaun, Sister Ste. Thérèse	203-205
4	1733	Marie Tranchepain, Sister St. Augustin	206-211a
5	1742	Sister St. Josèphe	211b-213a
6	1747	Jeanne Melote, Sister St. André	213b-215a
7	1752	Elisabeth Jérôme Perine Bigeaud de Belair, Sister Ste. Thérèse de Jésus	215b-220
8	1755	Marie Therese Ramachard, Sister St. François de Paule	221-223
9	1760	Marie Madeleine Hachard, Sister St. Stanislaus	224-225a
10	1760	Marie Turpin, Sister Ste. Marthe	225b-226a
11	1762	Charlotte Hebert, Sister St. François Xavier	226b-227
12	1763	Renée Yviguel de St. Goustant, Sister Ste. Marie	228
13	1763	Françoise Marguerite Bernard de St. Martin, Sister St. Pierre	229a
14	1764	Marie Jeanne de St. Marc, Sister Ste. Radegonde	229b-230a
15	1764	Marie Caillau de Baumont, Sister Ste. Therese	230b
16	1766	Anne le Boulanger, Sister Angélique	231
17	1768	Jeanne de Cormoray, Sister St. Gabriel	232a
18	1773	Roze le blanc, Sister Ste. Monique	232b
19	1779	Anne Cane, Sister St. Augustin	233a
20	1779	Marie Magdeleine Laverme, Sister St. François Regis	233b
21	1779	Catherine Eulalie de Lavardière, Sister St. Louis de Gonzague	234
22	1780	Françoise de Plessis Quémener, Sister Marie des Anges	235
23	1782	Antoinette de Cane, Sister Ste. Angelle	236a
24	1782	Marguerite Antoinete Ramachard, Sister St. Bernard	236b-237a
25	1786	Thérèse Lardas, Sister Ste. Marthe	237b
26	1788	Marie Thérèse Landelle, Sister St. Jacques	238
27	1788	Marie de la Mercie Lopez Silvéro, Sister Ste. Ursule	239
28	1792	<i>Sister Ste. Madeleine (letter in Spanish, not analyzed)</i>	240
29	1795	<i>Sister Ste. Eulalie (letter in Spanish, not analyzed)</i>	241
30	1799	<i>Sister St. Étienne (letter in Spanish, not analyzed)</i>	242
31	1805	Félicité de Rolan, Sister St. Jean l'Évangéliste	243
32	1810	Marie Thérèse Fargeon, Sister St. François Xavier	244-246a
33	1811	Anne Thérèse Chandron, Sister Ste. Thérèse	246b
34	1817	Marianne Rey, Sister Ste. Thérèse de Jésus	246c
35	1817	Marguerite Carrière, Sister St. Charles	247a
36	1818	Gertrude Braud, Sister Marie Joseph	247b
37	1818	Siser St. François Jourdan	248a
38	1820	Françoise Olivier de Vésin, Sister St. Marie	248b-249a
39	1820	Marthe Délatre, Sister St. Antoine	249b
40	1822	Françoise Agathe Gonsoul, Sister St. Michel	250-252
41	1825	Mary Rowling, Sister St. François de Sales	254
42	1826	Charlotte du Mai, Sister Ste. Thérèse	255-256
43	1827	Marie St. Vincent de Laclotte, Sister St. Joseph	257-263
44	1833	Angélique Bougie, Sister St. Louis de Gonzague	264-265
45	1833	Antoinette Rouvéroly, Sister St. Xavier	266
46	1833	Françoise Gavanon, Sister Ste. Agathe	267
47	1834	Rosalie Brutin, Sister Ste. Scholastique	268
48	1834	Margueritte Aucoin, Sister Ste. Anne	269
49	1835	Françoise Alzas, Sister Ste. Félicité	270
50	1837	Adélaïde Brunest, Sister St. Augustin	271
51	1837	Christine Magdier, Sister St. André	272
52	1840	Villerd, Sister Ste. Ursule	273
53	1842	Webb, Sister Ste. Victoire	274

APPENDIX B: LIST OF LETTERS ANALYZED: THE WRITERS

#	Year	Name of Deceased	Pages
1	1728	Marie Tranchepain, Sister St. Augustin	195-198
2	1731	Marie Tranchepain, Sister St. Augustin	199-202
3	1733	Marie Tranchepain, Sister St. Augustin	203-205
4	1733	Françoise Marguerite Bernard de St. Martin, Sister St. Pierre	206-211a
5	1742	Françoise Marguerite Bernard de St. Martin, Sister St. Pierre	211b-213a
6	1747	Françoise Marguerite Bernard de St. Martin, Sister St. Pierre	213b-215a
7	1752	Françoise Marguerite Bernard de St. Martin, Sister St. Pierre	215b-220
8	1755	Marie Magdelaine de Jésus	221-223
9	1760	Marie de Ste. Thérèse de Jésus	224-225a
10	1760	Marie Thérèse Landelle, Sister St. Jacques	225b-226a
11	1762	Catherine Eulalie de Lavardière, Sister St. Louis de Gonzague	226b-227
12	1763	Catherine Eulalie de Lavardière, Sister St. Louis de Gonzague	228
13	1763	Catherine Eulalie de Lavardière, Sister St. Louis de Gonzague	229a
14	1764	Catherine Eulalie de Lavardière, Sister St. Louis de Gonzague	229b-230a
15	1764	Catherine Eulalie de Lavardière, Sister St. Louis de Gonzague	230b
16	1766	Marie Thérèse Landelle, Sister St. Jacques	231
17	1768	Marie Thérèse Landelle, Sister St. Jacques	232a
18	1773	Marie Thérèse Landelle, Sister St. Jacques	232b
19	1779	Marie Thérèse Landelle, Sister St. Jacques	233a
20	1779	Marie Thérèse Landelle, Sister St. Jacques	233b
21	1779	Marie Thérèse Landelle, Sister St. Jacques	234
22	1780	Marie Thérèse Landelle, Sister St. Jacques	235
23	1782	Marie Thérèse Landelle, Sister St. Jacques	236a
24	1782	Marie Thérèse Landelle, Sister St. Jacques	236b-237a
25	1786	Antonia Maria Perez Ramos, Sister Ste. Monique	237b
26	1788	Antonia Maria Perez Ramos, Sister Ste. Monique	238
27	1788	Antonia Maria Perez Ramos, Sister Ste. Monique	239
28	1792	<i>Marguerite Perrine DuLiepure, Sister St. Ignace (letter in Spanish)</i>	240
29	1795	<i>Marie Thérèse Fargeon, Sister St. François Xavier (letter in Spanish)</i>	241
30	1799	<i>Marie Thérèse Fargeon, Sister St. François Xavier (letter in Spanish)</i>	242
31	1805	Marie Thérèse Fargeon, Sister St. François Xavier	243
32	1810	Marie St. Vincent de Laclotte, Sister St. Joseph	244-246a
33	1811	Marie St. Vincent de Laclotte, Sister St. Joseph	246b
34	1817	Marie St. Vincent de Laclotte, Sister St. Joseph	246c
35	1817	Marie St. Vincent de Laclotte, Sister St. Joseph	247a
36	1818	Marie St. Vincent de Laclotte, Sister St. Joseph	247b
37	1818	Marie St. Vincent de Laclotte, Sister St. Joseph	248a
38	1820	Marie St. Vincent de Laclotte, Sister St. Joseph	248b-249a
39	1820	Marie St. Vincent de Laclotte, Sister St. Joseph	249b
40	1822	Françoise Alzas, Sister Ste. Félicité	250-252
41	1825	Françoise Alzas, Sister Ste. Félicité	254
42	1826	Françoise Alzas, Sister Ste. Félicité	255-256
43	1827	Marie de l'Incarnation Roy (assistante)	257-263
44	1833	Françoise Alzas, Sister Ste. Félicité	264-265
45	1833	Françoise Alzas, Sister Ste. Félicité	266
46	1833	Françoise Alzas, Sister Ste. Félicité	267
47	1834	Marie Thérèse Ray, Sister Ste. Séraphine	268
48	1834	Marie Thérèse Ray, Sister Ste. Séraphine	269
49	1835	Marie Thérèse Ray, Sister Ste. Séraphine	270
50	1837	Marie Thérèse Ray, Sister Ste. Séraphine	271
51	1837	Marie Thérèse Ray, Sister Ste. Séraphine	272
52	1840	Marie Pélagie Morin, Sister St. Étienne	273
53	1842	Marie Pélagie Morin, Sister St. Étienne	274

APPENDIX C: ORIGINAL FRENCH TEXTS

Because the texts I am studying predate the post-Revolutionary standardization efforts of the late 18th century, there is a variety of orthographical tendencies present in the texts. I have transcribed the texts as printed or handwritten (in italics), without correction or updating of grammatical, typographical, or orthographic variations.

1. *Ma Tres Reverende Mere*

Les yeux baignes de larmes et le cœur saisy de douleur i'ay recours à vous pour solliciter votre Charité de nous acorder les sufrages de notre St ordre en faveur de notre chere soeur Madeleine Mahieu ditte de St françois xavier...

...a peine eut elle rendu l'Esprit que ce ne fut plus dans notre maison que cris et que sanglots tant de notre part que de celle de nos demoiselles pensionnaires, orphelines externes, et nos Esclaves, elle s'étoit fait aimer generalement de tous [et] toute la ville a pris part a notre perte et la regrette infiniment. Pour moy i'en ay le coeur pénétré de la plus vive douleur

2. 5. Ladite Secrétaire écrira auffi en d'autres Registres le jour des entrées des Religieuses, celui de leurs Vêtures, Professions & Décès; lequel elle mandera aux Couvens de l'Ordre & autres, que la Supérieure lui ordonnera.

3. tres humble salut dans le coeur adorable de iesus Christ cest suivent la coustume de nostre st ordre que ie vous demande instenment et a vostre religieuse communauté les suffrages ordinaires pour le repos de lame de nostre reverande mere...

4. Ma reverende et tres-chere mere,

Nôtre douleur ne se peut mieux exprimer, qu'en vous difant avec le plus affligé de tous les hommes, que la main du Seigneur, non-seulement nous a touchées; mais qu'elle s'est apesantie sur nous d'une maniere si accablante, que nous ne pouvons trouver aucune consolation que par le moyen de vos saintes prieres, en nous obtenant une humble soûmission aux ordres que la Divine Providence a tenus sur une de nos tres-cheres Sœurs.

...C'est icy Ma Reverende Mere où je vous avoüe que ma plume me tombe des mains, & que mes larmes effacent ce que je vous dis. Mais comme nous sommes toutes également affligées, & que l'on se repose sur moy pour lui procurer le secours de Nôtre S. Ordre, je vous le demande instamment pour le soulagement de l'ame de cette chere Sœur, que se

nommoit HELEINE DU BOIS-NORMAND dans le monde, & en Religion Sœur de Sainte Catherine de Sienne.

5. *accomplissant nous-mêmes exactement ce devoir pour toutes les chères sœurs Défuntés de votre Communauté à laquelle nous serons toujours unies de cœur et d'affection, comme nous le sommes par les Règles et Constitutions des l'arrivée de vos lettres*
6. *Je ne diray rien des meres Vrfulines, elles m'escriuent avec vn tel feu, & en fi grand nombre, & de tant de diuers endroits, que fi on ouuroit la porte à leurs desirs, on compoferoit vne ville de Religieuses, & il se trouueroit dix maistresses pour vne escholier. Le fexe, l'aage, les maladies, les coliques tres-sensibles n'empeschent point le sacrifice qu'elles font à Dieu de leurs personnes, si elles pouuoient apporter des villes toutes faites, & des terres toutes defrichées, ie ferois d'auis qu'on frestast des vaisseaux tout expres pour les passer, autrement non, Dieu les entend aussi bien en l'ancienne France, qu'en la nouuelle. Le tps viendra que quelques vnes d'entre elle obtiendront ce que demande vne armée, nostre Seigneur en fera le choix.*
- 7a. *Nous supliions votre grandeur, de nous accorder la permission de nous agreger dans cette Comuneauté Des Ursulines de Magny, ou nous auons le Bonheur d'estre depuis huit ans, que nous nous sommes veües reduites par la misere des tems, & la volonté de nos parens a sortir de celle de Roüen, ou nous auons eu l'auantage de faire nôtre profession. Nous trouuons dans cette maison tant de regularité et de paix, & nous y experimentons une sy grande charité, de la part, Des Reverendes meres et vertueuses superieures qui la gouvernent, et de celles qui la composent ; Que nous croyons ne pouoir mieux reparer la perte que nous auons faites de nôtre premiere retraite qu'en nous assurant le reste de nos jours dans celle-cy.*
- 7b. *une de nous n'ayant qu'une pension de deux cents livres, qui ne luy a été laissée qu'a condition quelle resteroit à magny ; L'autre ne recevant plus rien de celle que le Roy luy auoit accordée, en consideration de sa conversion a la foy ; et la troisième étant soeur converse*
8. *Notre Seigneur J. C. et sa sainte Mere lui firent conoitre qu'elle auroit beaucoup à souffrir avant d'y aller et lors qu'elle y seroit arrivée, tout cela loin de relentir son zelle sembloit au contraire ne servir qu'a le rendre plus vif et plus ardent, ce qu'elle nous a laissé dans ses Ecris sur les dispositions de son coeur est admirable et fait bien voir la grandeur de son courage, qu'elle a montré par les effets, denouant pour ainsy dire avec une Generosité non commune les difficultés, les peines et les chagrins inséparables des commencements d'Etablissement. Quoy que notre R^{de} Mere eut fait plusieurs tentatives pour remplir autant qu'il étoit en elle les vûes qu'elle ne pouvoit pas douter que la providence n'eut sur elle, Dieu lui fit conoitre qu'un Jesuite qu'elle ne connoissoit point et dont elle n'étoit point conûë qui passoit actuelement en france étoit celui qu'il lui*

destinoit pour Guide et pour conducteur dans une terre Etrangere ou il vouloit se servir d'elle pour commencer un Etablissement de R^{ses} de son ordre ce Jesuite est le R^d Pere de Beaubois qui fut obligé de faire un voiage en France pour les affaires de sa mission et qui étoit dans le dessein de travailler à Etablir une Co^mte d'ursulines a la N^{lle} Orleans comme il en est heureusement venu a bout en 1726 aiant proposé a M^{srs} de la Compagnie des jndes la foundation d'un hopital dont la communeauté seroit chargée ce R^d Pere aiant appris le zele dont bruloit notre chere Mere lui écrivit les vûes qu'il avoit sur elle Je ne vous diray point Ma R^{de} Mere qu'els furent les transports de ioye de notre fervente missionnaire dans le moment qu'elle vit sés voeux exaucez et encore moins ce qu'elle eut a souffrir pour executer ce qu'elle méditoit depuis tant d'années, les obstacles qu'il lui falut surmonter, sa vertu, son courage, et son adresse a ménager les Esprits ont tout aplany

- 9a. Je viens donc, bien tard il est vrai, peut-être la dernière de toutes, répondre à l'appel du bon M. l'abbé Richaudeau, en essayant par nos circulaires de contribuer à ce grand projet d'union, entre toutes les maisons de la grande famille de Sainte-Angèle.
- 9b. Si nous avons à gémir sur l'état actuel de notre pensionnat, d'un autre côté, nous nous réjouissons, et nous félicitons la plupart des maisons de notre Ordre de leur prospérité, et du grand bien auquel Notre-Seigneur leur permet de travailler pour sa gloire et le bien d'une multitude d'âmes. Nous prions Dieu de leur continuer cette consolation et ce mérite, en même temps que nous le conjurons d'accorder les mêmes grâces à celles que la persécution ou quelque autre cause ont réduites, comme nous, à une sorte de nullité.
- 9c. Ces dernières années ont été douloureuses pour nous, sous plusieurs rapports ; mais surtout, parce que nous avons eu à déplorer la mort de sept de nos chères sœurs ; quatre de chœur et trois converses, en moins de trois ans.

A chaque annonce de décès d'une Ursuline, nous faisons toutes des prières particulières, en attendant qu'il y ait quelque chose de déterminé là-dessus. A ce sujet, permettez-moi, mes révérendes Mères et mes chères Sœurs, de vous témoigner notre entière approbation pour le mode de suffrage proposé par nos Sœurs les Ursulines de Warasdin (Croatie, Autriche.)

- 9d. Nous pouvons dire que les Circulaires nous ont fait connaître que la plupart des maisons de notre Ordre, soit qu'elles fassent les quatre, ou seulement les trois vœux, ce qui me paraît bien ne faire aucune différence pour celles qui ont fait le vœu d'obéissance dans notre institut, et qui exercent l'enseignement sous l'autorité des Supérieures; nous pouvons remarquer, dis-je, dans presque toutes les maisons d'Ursulines, malgré la diversité de leurs constitutions, à peu près les mêmes pratiques, et certainement le même esprit de piété, de simplicité et de zèle que Sainte Angèle a communiqué à ses premières filles et coopératrices.

10. *Cet acte aiant été tire avec les 2 suivant du livre des annales pour avoit un en particulier selon les reglements, la signature a esté suplée par la secretaire du Chapitre, La Superieur qui a signé le premier étant decedée.*
11. *Cette lettre Circulaire étant Ecrite ; sur une feuille Volante, je l'ai transcrite sur les registres douze années après à la mort de cette Respectable et digne Mère, ce qui fait que les deux Supérieures qui été élue depuis cette triste époque n'ont pas aposée leur signature, elle est revêtu de celle de ses deux compagnes venues de France avec elle*
12. *auquel fera deduit le commencement & progrez de la Maifon, les noms du Fondateur, ou Fondatrice ; de son premier Superieur ; de ceux qui ont le plus aidé à l'établissement ; les choses memorables qui s'y sont passées ; les divers Monasteres, qui en sont sortis ; Les Religieuses decedées en la maifon qui auroient excellé en vertu, & sainteté de vie , marquant le jour , le mois , & l'an de leur decez. Et le lieu de leur sepulture. Et autres choses dignes d'être laiffées à la posterité.*
- 13a. *Soeur Marie Jeanne du Bois dite de Saint Jean Baptiste, fille de Jaques du Bois fermier à entier en Wepes, et D'helene host sa femme, naquit le 22 de Juillet 1678. fut Baptissé en la Paroisse d'entier, elle prit l'habit D'ursuline le 18 de janvier 1735. elle fit sa profession le 7 de fevrier 1736 agée de 58 ans, en la chapelle de cette Maison de S^{te} Ursule à Tourcoin*
- 13b. *L'acte de laquelle profession, elle à fait et signee, en la forme qui suit.*



Au Nom de nôtre seigneur Jesus Christ, et en l'honneur de sa tres sainte Mere, de nôtre Bienheureux Pere Saint Augustin, et de la Bienheureuse Sainte Ursule, Moy Soeur Marie Jeanne du Bois, dite de Saint Jean Baptiste, voüe, et promets à Dieu Pauvreté, Chasteté, obedience, et de m'emploier à l'instruction des Petites filles, selon la regle de nôtre Bienheureuse Pere Saint Augustin, et selon les constitutions de ce Monastere de Sainte Ursule, conformément aux Bulles, de nos Saints Peres les Papes, Paul V. et Urbain VIII. sous L'autorité de [les noms des autorités et témoins ecclésiastiques, suivi par la date]

- 13c. *Le 13 de juillet 1757 Sœur Marie Jeanne Dubois dite de St Jean Baptiste est decedée agee de 79 ans et de profetsion 21 f'étant la premiere professe de cette fondation elle en fut l'exemple pur par sa regularité elle aimoit la solitude et le silence fort foumise a ses superieures et charitable envers ses foeurs sa maladie fut une de faillance elle souffrit ses maux avec beaucoup de patience et de résignation a la volonté de Dieu elle eut le bonheur de recevoir tous ses sacremens avec une grande piété, sa bonne vie ne nous laifse aucun doute de son repos eternel elle desiroit avec ardeur de posseder Dieu pendant toute l'eternité ainfi soit il, Requies Cat in Pace*

14. *C'est une sainte, et loüable coutume des ordres Religieux de ce dresser des menologies p^r. Conserver a la posterité, les noms, et les vertus des personnes qui sy sont Rendües Recommandables par leurs bonne vie, afin de servir dexemple, et de modelles, a ceux et celles qui en prenant leurs habits, et embrassant leurs institut desire arriver a la perffection de leurs état.*
15. Nous supplions tres-humblement les Reverendes Meres des Monasteres éloignez, de ne nous plus envoyer des Lettres circulaires par la poste, les ports estant excessifs & quelquefois de douze ou quinze sols pour une seule Lettre. Nous ferons tres-souvent des prieres pour celle qui decederont ; & comme tout se rend de tous côtez à Paris, nous les supplions d'envoyer leurs Lettres circulaires pour nôtre Maison, par leurs amis, aux Reverendes Meres du Fauxbourg S. Jacques, & nous aurons soin de nous les faire rendre seurement de la même maniere.
16. Ma Reverende Mere , je suis bien aise de me servir de l'occasion presente , pour vous dire que ce n'est point avec nostre participation que quelques-uns de nos Convens ne font plus de Lettre Circulaire : au contraire nous estimons cette pratique tres-devote & fort utile , & nous ne voulons rien changer.
17. Mais avant de clore ces pages, il manquerait quelque chose à notre fraternelle affection, si nous ne reproduisions quelques-uns des souvenirs édifiants de nos chères défunes. Depuis notre Circulaire du 3 décembre 1878, seize nous ont devancées dans la demeure de notre Père qui est dans le ciel.
18. Quoi qu'une vie aussi religieuse, et une mort si édifiante ne nous laisse aucun lieu de douter des miséricordes du seigneur à son Egard, nous vous demandons cependant ma Reverende Mere de lui accorder les suffrages de notre saint ordre
19. N'avons-nous pas sujet de croire , qu'une si belle mort fera suivie d'une heureuse éternité. Les Suffrages ordinaires de nôtre Ordre pourront bien luy en avancer le moment. Accordez-les luy donc au plutôt...
20. Ces bonnes dispositions nous font esperer qu'elle jouïra bien-toit de son souverain Bien, si vous luy aidez par le prompt secours de vos prieres & les Suffrages de nôtre saint Ordre à satisfaire à la divine Justice pour les fragilitez humaines, dont les plus Saints ne sont pas exempts en cette vie
21. Son amour pour la penitance luy faisoit embrasser avec ardeur l'exercisse de quantité de mortifications qu'elle pratiquoit secretelement estant ennemie de lofantation & de tout ce

qui paroît, on l'a surpris en temps d'hiver se plonger dans la neige jusques à la ceinture & y demeurer long temps, les Disciplines, Ceintures & autres instrumens de pénitence luy estoient fort frequents; s'estimoient une des plus grandes Pénitences, vivant dans une sainte tremor & crainte de son Salut.

22.
 1. Les Religieuses prendront leur repas avec une droite intention, de plaire à Dieu, & d'accomplir sa volonté, en réparant les forces corporelles, pour lui pouvoir rendre le service qu'elles doivent.
 2. Toutes se trouveront à la Bénédiction de la table, & s'y comporteront comme il est prescrit au Cérémonial de l'Office divin.
 3. La Lectrice étant montée en la chaire, & les Religieuses ayant fait l'inclination vers le Tableau ou Image, la Mere Supérieure se mettra à table, puis l'Assistante, & ensuite les autres Religieuses: entrant par les deux bouts de chaque table, en sorte que chacune soit en son rang.
 4. Etant toutes assises, la Mere Supérieure donnera le signal, auquel la Lectrice commencera la lecture, & toutes releveront leurs manches, & déplieront leurs serviettes, mettant l'un des bouts sur la table, & l'autre sur soi.
 5. Elles écouteront attentivement la lecture, comme disent la Règle & les Constitutions, afin que l'esprit ait sa réfection aussi bien que le corps: & pour ce sujet elles éviteront toute sorte de bruit.

23.
 1. Tous les jours au dîner, avant toutes choses, se lira en François le Martyrologe du lendemain, excepté les jours qu'on le lit au Chœur, et le Jeudi, Vendredi & Samedi de la semaine Sainte.
 2. On lira d'ordinaire le long de l'année la vie des Saints...
 3. Tous les Dimanches, & le Carême, on lira quelque sermon, ou exposition sur l'Evangile du jour, s'il n'y intervient quelque autre solennité, ou la Fête de quelque Saint, dont la vie fût fort exemplaire.
 4. La Règle de Saint Augustin se lira d'ordinaire le Jeudi au soir...
 5. Le samedi au soir on lira en François l'Épître & l'Evangile du lendemain; ce qui se fera aussi les veilles de Fêtes, & tous les jours du Carême, & des Quatre-Temps. Et la veille des jours qui se font au Chœur quelque cérémonie particulière, on la pourra lire dans le Cérémonial de l'Office divin.
 6. Si les vies des Saints ne suffisent, on fera lecture de quelque Livre pieux, comme l'abrégé des Annales Ecclésiastiques de Baronius; les Histoires Ecclésiastiques des Indes, & du Japon; & autres Livres que la Mere Supérieure trouvera à propos.
 7. On pourra aussi lire les Lettres circulaires des Religieuses décédées des maisons de l'Ordre, principalement s'il y a quelque chose de remarquable.
 8. Les jours de jeûne à la collation, on continuera la lecture du dîner. Et en Carême, on pourra lire quelque exposition sur la Passion de notre Seigneur dans le Bouquet de myrthe de l'Amante sacrée, d'Etienne Molinier, ou dans la vie de JESUS-CHRIST, de Ludolphe de Saxe, Chartreux, ou autres.

24. 1. Toutes diront en particulier pour chaque Relieuse [sic] décédée, trois Vigiles à trois Leçons ; & outre les Messes & Services portés par le Rituel Romain, on dira encore trois Messes basses ; & on fera autant de Communions générales , que l'on doit dire de Services. Et pour les Supérieures qui décéderont en Charge , on dira de plus pour elles trois Messes basses.
2. Quand une Religieuse sera décédée , toutes prendront la discipline pour elle , la longueur du Pseaume *De profundis* , *Requiem* à la fin , & l'Oraison *Quæsumus* , *Domine* , *pro tua* , &c. Et celles qui auront quelque infirmité ou indisposition , feront quelque devotion ou bonne œuvre , ainsi qu'il leur sera ordonné.
3. Quand on aura avis du décès de quelque Religieuse de l'Ordre & Union des Ursulines de Paris , l'on fera dire une Messe basse pour la délivrance de son ame , (si la commodité du Monastere le permet) & on lui appliquera une Communion générale; si l'on n'a pu faire dire la Messe , on fera encore au lieu une Communion générale.
4. L'Office des Morts se dira selon le Rituel Romain.
25. *Notre Seigneur qui voulait enfaire une épouse de sang, la fit passer jusques a l'age de 20 ans par diverses épreuves qui épurant sa vertu comme lor dans un creuset la détacherent bientôt de tout ce qui n'étoit point dieu: infirme pendant 7 ans en proie aux maladies les plus cruelles, qui la conduisirent souvent jusqu'aux portes de la mort elle sanctifia ces temps d'épreuves par sa patience et sa douceur.*
26. *Ayant perdu son Père et sa Mère et vivant avec ses frères, elle fit quelques tentatives auprès d'eux pour avoir leur agrément relativement au désir qu'elle avoit d'être Religieuse ; mais ceux-ci qui vouloient absolument l'arrêter auprès d'eux y mirent tous les obstacles possibles ; voyant qu'elle ne pouvoit obtenir leur consentement, elle demanda de venir voir les Religieuses, les pria de lui ouvrir la Porte, et une fois dans la Maison, elle n'en voulut plus sortir, et fit agréer à Messieurs ses frères la démarche qu'elle avoit faite, leur déclarant sa Vocation pour la vie Religieuse.*
27. *La résignation parfaite à la volonté de Dieu pour la vie, comme pour la mort, était d'autant plus remarquable, que pendant sa vie la crainte des jugemens de Dieu était dans son âme de continuelles alarmes. Mais à ses derniers momens le calme le plus parfait a fait disparaître toute crainte toute inquiétude. Oh! mes chères sœurs, disait-elle a celles avec qui elle était plus libre, si vous saviez combien je suis heureuse ! je n'aurais jamais cru éprouver tant de bonheur et de jouissance à ce dernier moment. Oh! qu'il me tarde de voir et de posséder mon Dieu.*
28. *Le sixieme jour de juillet de l'enné 1729 est sorty de nôtre communauté Mademoiselle Claude Massy novice voilé, toutes les Religieuses ne layant pas jugé propre a la S^{te} Religion lon renvoyé toutes d'un commun conssement, et remise entre les mains de Monsieur son frere abitant en cette colonie.*

29. *Que les Religieuses apprennent de cet exemple à ne jamais s'attacher à celles d'entre leurs soeurs dont la conduite est irrégulier ; qu'elles evitent la frequentation des parloirs, et qu'elles se détachent du trop grand amour des parents. C'est ainsi qu'elles obtiendront la grace de persévérer jusqu'à la mort dans leur S^t Etat.*

VITA

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