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Article abstract

Marie de l'Incarnation's Correspondence comprises the missives of a Touraine bourgeoisie widow, mother, tradeswoman, mystic, and missionary educator. The unique circumstances of Marie's letters - the fact that her son became her editor - problematizes the distinction between male lettres and female ignorants that typically guided seventeenth-century thinking with regard to women's epistolary writing.

A NEW-WORLD MODEL OF FEMALE EPISTOLARITY: THE CORRESPONDENCE OF MARIE DE L'INCARNATION¹

Carla Zecher

The correspondence of the Ursuline Marie de l'Incarnation (Marie Guyart Martin, 1599-1672) falls chronologically right between those of Sainte Jeanne de Chantal (Jeanne-Françoise Fremyot, 1572-1641) and her granddaughter the Marquise de Sévigné (Marie de Rabutin-Chantal, 1626-96). Together, the three correspondences span the seventeenth century. Chantal's missive letters—written between 1605 and 1640—were published posthumously in 1644, the year her granddaughter married the baron de Sévigné, by the nuns of the Visitandine convent she had founded at Annecy. Marie de l'Incarnation's earliest extant letters date from 1626, the year of Sévigné's birth; her correspondence ended in the fall of 1671, just before her final illness, shortly after Sévigné's epistolary exchange with her daughter, the Comtesse de Grignan, began (February 1671). Sévigné's correspondence, in turn, continued until her death in 1696.

As was the case with Chantal and Sévigné, Marie Guyart Martin was widowed young and left with a child to raise (Chantal had four children; Sévigné had two). She too had opted not to remarry and subsequently proved herself an excellent financial manager. Chantal had exercised her administrative skills by restoring her deceased husband's impoverished estates, arranging for her children's futures, settling the affairs of her father and father-in-law after their deaths, and supervising the foundations of many of the eighty-seven houses of the Visitation that were established in France during her lifetime. Marie Guyart's husband, Claude Martin, who had been a silkmaker, left her in financial ruin, and she had to liquidate his assets. She went to work for her oldest sister and her husband, who ran a large transport business, and in

their household she developed the management skills she would later employ in overseeing the affairs of the Ursuline convent at Québec. Sévigné, for her part, engaged in the practice of *mésalliance* by marrying her daughter Françoise-Marguerite to the destitute Comte de Grignan; hence, despite her higher social standing, she also had to watch expenses. These *épistolières* are thus representative of three social groups: the noblesse de robe (Fremyot), the bourgeoisie (Guyart), and the noblesse d'épée (into which Fremyot had married, and to which her granddaughter, Sévigné, therefore had access).

In sum, Marie de l'Incarnation's *Correspondance* comprises the missives of a Touraine bourgeoisie who was a widow, mother, tradeswoman, mystic, and missionary educator. Her "salon," as Natalie Davis points out, was a New World convent yard (120)—from which, for three decades (from her arrival at Québec in 1639 until her death there in 1672), she maintained a vast correspondence with relatives, friends, benefactors (actual and potential), Ursuline sisters, and other religious, back in the Old World. Yet although her correspondents were numerous, Marie, again like Chantal and Sévigné, also sustained one epistolary relationship in particular—in this case with her son Claude, who joined the Benedictines at the age of twenty-one, shortly after her departure for New France. Marie and Claude came to share an "amitié spirituelle" like that of Chantal and her mentor, François de Sales.² But since they were mother and child too, their epistolary interaction resembles in some respects the correspondence between Sévigné and her daughter, the Comtesse de Grignan.³

However, a third aspect distinguishes this correspondence from the Chantal-Sales and Sévigné-Grignan exchanges, for in this instance it was Marie's son who actually edited her letters for publication after her death, whereas Chantal's were edited by her Sisters at Annecy, and Sévigné's by her granddaughter, Pauline de Grignan.⁴ Without Claude Martin's unusually extensive efforts at collecting and editing his mother's letters, they would not have passed so quickly (if at all) into the public domain, for very few collections of women's correspondence were published in France in the last decades of the seventeenth century. Sévigné's correspondence did not see print until 1725-26; that it received some earlier attention as well is only because a portion of her letters ap-

peared in a publication of her cousin Bussy-Rabutin's correspondence in 1697. Most importantly, the unique circumstances of the publication of Marie's letters—the fact that her son became her editor—problematizes the distinction between male *lettrés* and female *ignorants* that typically guided seventeenth-century thinking with regard to women's epistolary writing (a distinction that the correspondences of Chantal and Sévigné also call into question, although in other ways).

Whereas Marie de l'Incarnation wrote to the majority of her correspondents in her capacity as a mother superior, to Claude Martin she wrote also as a mother. Dom Albert Jamet commented in the introduction to his 1929 edition of Marie's writings that "*la vie de Marie de l'Incarnation se réfléchit, et pour une part s'explique et se justifie dans celle de son fils, Dom Claude Martin*" (1:72). Indeed, since they had both chosen the cloistered life, Claude's social identity was similar to his mother's, and therefore the mirror model posited for mothers and daughters in the seventeenth century can be applied to this mother and son too. In *Performing Motherhood*, Michèle Farrell argues that Sévigné's epistolary goal was "to express her great love for her daughter, and the world of this love through writing . . . and thereby to ratify through its inscription her role as maternal paragon" (15). She would be the mirror for Françoise-Marguerite, simultaneously presenting a model for her daughter to emulate and relying on Françoise-Marguerite in turn to nurture her own image as a mother. Sévigné undertook in her letters to "train" her daughter to support her own performance of maternity, and the result was an epistolary interaction patterned on the model of "maternal excess" and "filial indebtedness": the mother repeatedly evokes the suffering her daughter has inflicted by "abandoning" her mother in order to follow her husband to his post in Provence (Farrell 88). The Abbé Charles Batteux would later judge Sévigné's effusive literary style, in his pedagogical *Cours de belles-lettres* of 1747, an appropriate model only for "overly tender mothers" (DeJean 192).

Marie de l'Incarnation's only marginally less effusive style is not so easily dismissed as "overly tender." Her separation from her son would last her lifetime whereas Sévigné, after all, was never actually apart from Françoise-Marguerite for more than eighteen months at a time. In Marie's missives to Claude, we wit-

ness another kind of “maternal excess” at work, one generated by *her* feelings of guilt at having abandoned *him*.⁵ To be sure, Marie had fully discharged her duties as a widowed mother before she joined the Ursulines at Tours—supervising Claude’s upbringing until he was eleven and could be boarded at a school and then arranging with her older sister for his financial security. But her subsequent proposal that the Ursulines should operate an overseas mission generated considerable opposition, and just prior to Marie’s departure for Canada her sister renounced her commitment to cover the cost of Claude’s education and establishment in an effort (which proved unsuccessful) to keep Marie in France.

After his mother had set sail, Claude sought to join the Jesuits—no doubt so as to be able to follow her—but was refused. Marie learned about this second-hand through another correspondent, and so her first letter to him from New France was one of maternal chastisement:

Cela seroit trop honteux à un jeune homme bien fait de n’avoir point de cœur. Tirez-vous donc de la pusillanimité, mon cher fils, et estimez que vous n’aurez rien en ce monde sans peine. (*Corr.* 115; Sept. 10, 1640)⁶

This stern letter was not included by Dom Martin in his edition of his mother’s correspondence, most likely because it did not serve his own hagiographic undertaking (the letter is known through a manuscript source). Perhaps he also wished to avoid recalling, at the summit of his career, that he had attempted to join the Jesuits before becoming a Benedictine monk.

Clearly, once Marie had determined to dedicate herself to educating the young “sauvagesses” of New France, the obstacles she faced in satisfying her calling only served to reinforce her belief that separation from her son was the great sacrifice God required of her. Although she reminded Claude often that they would have all of eternity to spend together, the fact that she returned to the topic of her abandonment of him repeatedly over the years indicates how much it weighed on her and implies that she needed to justify it in her own mind as well as his:

Lorsque je m’embarqué pour le Canada, et que je voyois l’abandon actuel que je faisois de ma vie pour son amour, j’avois deux veues dans mon esprit, l’une sur vous, l’autre sur moy. A votre sujet, il me sembloit que mes os se déboi-

toient et qu'ils quittoient leur lieu, pour la peine que le sentiment naturel avoit de cet abandonnement: Mais à mon égard mon cœur fondoit de joye dans la fidélité que je voulois rendre à Dieu et à son Fils, luy donnant vie pour vie, amour pour amour, tout pour tout. (*Corr.* 725; Aug. 16, 1664)

She described her first abandonment of him (when she became an Ursuline) in similar terms, stressing the physical pain she had endured:

Sçachez donc encore une fois qu'en me séparant actuellement de vous, je me suis fait mourir toute vive, et que l'Esprit de Dieu qui étoit inexorable aux tendresses que j'avois pour vous ne me donnoit aucun repos, que je n'eusse exécuté le coup. . . . En vous quittant, il me sembloit qu'on me séparât l'âme du corps avec des douleurs extrêmes. Et remarquez que dès l'âge de quatorze ans, j'avois une très forte vocation à la religion. (*Corr.* 836, 837; July 30, 1669)

These passages, and others like them (e.g., *Corr.* 130, 183-84, 316, 527, 823, 898, 938), anticipate a statement Sévigné would later make to her daughter, which has been much quoted as an example of her excessive mothering. To paraphrase Sévigné:

Il faut qu'il y ait une [Marie de l'Incarnation] qui aime [son fils] . . . qu'elle en soit . . . très éloignée et que les souffrances les plus sensibles qu'elle ait dans cette vie lui soient causées par [ce cher fils]. (2.916; May 6, 1680)

It was through letter-writing—"through an ocean of words" (in Davis's apt terms [103])—that Claude would forgive his mother for the abandonment, and Marie her son for his "saillies de jeunesse" (*Corr.* 898), that they would come to terms with each other as adults and then gradually cultivate a spiritual friendship as well.

As Claude advanced in his duties in the hierarchy of the Benedictine congregation of Saint-Maur, and as Marie's involvement in the Canadian mission stretched into a lifetime, they reported to each other on the activities of their respective communities, engaged in frank discussions about church politics, and confided information about personal devotional practices. Claude, as Davis notes, "now enjoyed playing on the double meanings of 'mother' when he wrote, and Marie enjoyed signing herself as both his mother and his sister" (103). Letter-writing became a

means for carrying on mutual spiritual direction, as Marie herself wished it:

Je suis consolée à un point que je ne vous puis dire de vous voir en des dispositions si religieuses, et je suis de votre sentiment que nos entretiens doivent tendre à la fin où nous aspirons. (*Corr.* 343; Sept. 7, 1648)

Henceforth, Marie and Claude's epistolary interaction would increasingly resemble the Chantal-Sales exchange.

The friendship between François de Sales and Jeanne de Chantal had begun with François acting as Jeanne's director—although eventually she became his teacher as much as he was hers. Similarly, Dom Claude Martin was at first his mother's apprentice, but later counselled her as well. Marie even came to view her son as a superior:

Je n'ay que dix-neuf ans de naissance plus que vous, et ces années là me donnent de la confusion. Vous êtes Religieux que vous n'aviez guères plus de vingt ans, et moy j'en avois trente et un. Enfin vous avez plus travaillé que moy, mon très-cher Fils: achevez, ou plutôt, que Dieu par sa bonté achève son œuvre en vous. (*Corr.* 792; July 29-Oct. 19, 1667)

In one of her last letters, from the fall of 1671, she confided that if it were possible, she would want him to be her director (*Corr.* 931). And in a sense he did assume that role when he took on the project of publishing her writings after her death.

Claude had already extracted from his mother her spiritual memoirs in 1654. Because she had deserted him, he reasoned then, just at the moment when he most risked being lost in the world, she owed it to him to provide a "Relation de sa vie." As a child he had been incapable of understanding the instruction she had offered him—how could she refuse now to share the insights with which God had blessed her? Since he too had embraced the religious life, they should hold their spiritual wealth in common (*Corr.* 525). Thus he anticipated—perhaps inadvertently, perhaps not—the function he would later fulfill as her biographer and editor.

Marie complied with her son's request out of deference to him and to her director—at the time, the Jesuit Jérôme Lalement—who seconded it. She also exacted Claude's promise that no-one but himself or her niece, who was also an Ursuline, would ever

see this document—a promise he did not keep. In the seventeenth century, Linda Timmermans has shown, religious women could compose spiritual texts but were not free to take the initiative themselves; obedience to a male superior was the only motive that could induce them to take up the pen (588). Davis reminds us too that from the early years of Marie's widowhood her directors had all encouraged her to make writing a central part of her religious experience. She took the name in religion of Marie de l'Incarnation because it was as the Word Incarnate that she most often thought of Christ. Further, Davis suggests a connection in Marie's religious life between bodily mortification and the ecstasy of writing, since both could be experienced as consummations of her loving union with God (68,75,263 n. 19).

Nonetheless, despite the importance she accorded to writing in her devotional life, Marie consistently resisted presenting herself to her son as a writing subject by repeatedly representing her epistolary "service" to him as God's work and not her own:

Si ce que je vous écris vous touche, c'est que notre bon Dieu couvre le défaut de mes paroles. Il est pourtant vray que c'est mon cœur qui vous parle. Si mes petits travaux plaisent à Dieu, ils sont à vous comme à moy. (*Corr.* 269; Oct. 3, 1645)

Je suis en danger de passer la nuit à vous répondre en paix ce peu que j'ay à vous dire. Mais que ne voudrois-je pas faire pour vous? Non que je voulusse entreprendre de vous donner des instructions; mon sexe et mon ignorance, eu égard à votre condition, ne me le permettent pas; mais je me sens dans l'impuissance de vous rien refuser. Je suis simplement cette pante entrant dans votre inclination pour l'amour de Dieu qui me lie à vous, outre ce qu'il y a mis par la nature, d'une façon qu'il me seroit difficile de vous exprimer. (*Corr.* 372; Oct. 22, 1649)

Vous m'avez quelquefois témoigné qu'il n'y a rien d'où vous tiriez tant de profit pour vostre avancement dans la vie spirituelle que de ce peu de lumière que Dieu me donne et qu'il me fait coucher sur le papier, lorsque je suis obligée de vous écrire chaque année: cette pensée ne me fût jamais tombée dans l'esprit, mais si cela est, qu'il soit éternellement béni d'un succez si heureux. (*Corr.* 526; Aug. 9, 1654)

To what extent Marie's self-effacing attitude can be attributed to the femininity of her plume and to what extent to Christian humility is difficult to determine. In Timmermans's words,

Où s'arrête la correspondance de charité? où commence la correspondance de direction? Toute la différence ne réside-t-elle justement dans 'l'air', dans l'apparence qu'on y donne? Il suffit de souligner son 'petit jugement', son ignorance, son 'incapacité' et sa 'petitesse', sa soumission ou sa déference, à l'égard de l'ecclésiastique, de la dame, de toute personne à laquelle la lettre est adressée: la correspondante obéit humblement à sa pressante demande. Ce n'est pas nécessairement de l'hypocrisie. (565)

The seventeenth-century party line on women's writing contrived to include them as practitioners of the epistolary genre but excluded them as subjects, representing them "as preferring to be 'of service' rather than aspiring to serious writing, relational rather than professional" (Farrell 38). La Bruyère, for instance, forwards this view in his *Caractères* (1684):

Ce sexe va plus loin que le nôtre dans ce genre d'écrire [les lettres]. Elles trouvent sous leur plume des tours et des expressions qui souvent en nous ne sont l'effet que d'un long travail et d'une pénible recherche; elles sont heureuses dans le choix des termes, qu'elles placent si juste, que tout connus qu'ils sont, ils ont le charme de la nouveauté, semblent être faits seulement pour l'usage où elles les mettent; il n'appartient qu'à elles de faire lire dans un seul mot tout un sentiment, et de rendre délicatement une pensée qui est délicate; elles ont un enchaînement de discours inimitable, qui se suit naturellement, et qui n'est lié que par le sens. Si les femmes étaient toujours correctes, j'oserais dire que les lettres de quelques-unes d'entre elles seraient peut-être ce que nous avons dans notre langage de mieux écrit. (79)

To thus extol women's gift for epistolarity as being innate, and socially motivated, amounts to an assertion of men's exclusive right to literary letters (Jensen 41). This is why today we can only read Marie de l'Incarnation's missives as filtered through her son's pen.

After Marie's death, her son effectively "took her over, incorporating himself into the life of 'this excellent Mother' [in both senses of the word] through publication" (Davis 104). Dom Claude, in preparing for the printer first a biography of his mother (*La Vie de la Vénérable Mère Marie de l'Incarnation, première Supérieure des Ursulines de la Nouvelle-France, tirée de ses lettres et de ses écrits*, 1677) and then an edition of her correspondence (*Lettres de la*

Vénérable Mère Marie de l'Incarnation, première Supérieure des Ursulines de la Nouvelle-France, 1681), engaged extensively in the kinds of editorial activities that Janet Altman has labeled "redressing" and "readdressing": that is, correcting, revising, truncating, and contextualizing the letters for a particular reading public (19). He needed to make sure that his mother was always on safe ground in regard to Church doctrine, that she would appear a trustworthy female mystic (mysticism being somewhat discredited in France in the final decades of the seventeenth century), and that her style would be up to current standards (Davis 129-31, Lonsagne 15-19). Additionally, his desire to make her missives conform to his categories of "lettres spirituelles" and "lettres historiques" led to some cutting and pasting. Unfortunately, even the manuscript sources extant are for the most part in Claude's hand, since he gave many of the original letters away after he had copied them for his own use. Mary Rowan has rightly commented on the subject of Claude's motives that he no doubt was seeking to draw from Marie's wide-ranging correspondence a portrait to satisfy his own vision of the ideal classical saint (66). Moreover, Claude apparently did not view his mother's letters as absolutely irreplaceable historical documents, as we would today, for he believed the Jesuit *Relations* had "said all" on the subject of the Canadian mission—whereas now we see how Marie's writing augments those reports in significant ways (Oury, *Dom Claude* 188). But Claude's editorial actions should also be considered in the context of the kind of scriptorial interaction that typically took place between female mystics and their spiritual directors.

Timmermans explains that among seventeenth-century religious, the male director often acted as "secretary" for the female mystic, assuming responsibility for the dissemination of her writings, either by recommending, or actively distributing, or even publishing them. The secretary also corrected the texts, and this practice was not visited on women's writing alone, for in the seventeenth century all texts that had not initially been composed with a view to publication were subject to revision (Timmermans 544-45). However, while the author might be of either sex, the secretary was almost invariably a man. Notable exceptions are Chantal's edition of the correspondence of François de Sales and the edition of Chantal's own letters prepared by the Visitandines at

Annecy—anomalies that can be explained by the fact that Sales died first, without having prepared the edition of Chantal's letters he had intended to publish. Implicit in seventeenth-century theories of gendered writing such as that advanced by La Bruyère ("si les femmes étaient toujours correctes, j'oserais dire que les lettres de quelques-unes . . . seraient peut-être ce que nous avons . . . de mieux écrit") was the notion that if superior emotional quality (*cœur*) is women's provenance, then thought, wit (*esprit*), and rhetorical consciousness (*style*) are men's, and therefore masculine stylistic travail can improve upon femininity's imperfect epistolary models (Jensen 29, 30). In light of this tradition, Dom Claude Martin's contemporaries would not have considered his editorial hand to be unduly heavy.

Nonetheless, he risked criticism for publishing his mother's writings, for it was an action that showed a lack of humility, and so he took care to defend himself in his preface to the *Vie* by announcing that "Ce n'est pas non plus une chose inouïe & sans exemple, qu'un fils écrive la vie de sa Mère" (viii). He cited three examples of male religious who had composed biographies of their mothers—of whom the most prominent was Saint Augustine, while the other two were drawn from his own community. In this way he boldly affirmed a place for his mother and himself in the history of the church. Yet even in the *Vie*—ostensibly a biography of his mother—he quoted extensively from Marie's own works, and when it came to justifying his editing of her writing, he assumed a modest stance by first referring to himself as a co-author but qualifying this by defining his own relationship to his mother's texts as that of an "echo":

Il y a plus d'un Auteur; il y en a deux, & l'un & l'autre étoient nécessaires pour achever l'Ouvrage. Cette grande Servante de Dieu y a travaillé elle-même, & son fils y a mis la dernière main, en sorte néanmoins qu'il n'y parle que comme un écho qui répond à ce qu'elle dit par ses propres paroles. . . . L'on peut bien certes luy donner icy cette qualité, puisque l'Echo est le fils de la voix, & comme un supplément qui l'étend au delà de sa propre activité, lors même qu'elle n'est plus. J'y ay donc travaillé avec elle. (ii, viii)

Claude's telling allusion here to the supplementarity of his own voice betrays discomfort with his role of secretary. It destabilizes

the gendered hierarchy of *esprit* and *cœur*, *lettré* and *ignorant*, by exposing the undecidability in Claude's own mind of the appropriateness of his redressing of his mother's writing.

A similar undecidability characterizes one of the statements to be found in the Sorbonne's *Approbation* of the *Vie*, where there is some grammatical ambiguity as to whether the "author" of the work is Marie or Claude:

L'auteur du livre est irréprochable, quoique sa louange se trouve en sa bouche et dans sa plume. C'est un fils qui fait l'éloge de sa mère. (qtd. Jamet 1:407)

I found myself replicating the ambiguity when I was preparing my bibliography for this study, as I wondered whether to list Marie's *Vie* and *Lettres* under her own or her son's name. In the end it seemed appropriate to distinguish Claude's seventeenth-century editions of his mother's texts from the twentieth-century critical editions of Jamet and Oury by listing the former under Claude's name and the latter under Marie's. These contemporary scholars have undertaken in turn, and to the extent possible, to "redress" some of Claude's editing.

In the final analysis it seems that if Marie de l'Incarnation's life's work did find its "explanation and justification" (as Jamet commented) in that of her son—i.e. her sacrifice as a mother made possible her vocation as a Mother—the inverse is equally true. The mirror model works both ways. For without denigrating Claude's own considerable accomplishments—he authored several devotional manuals and organized the Maurist edition of Augustine (Davis 129-30)—it is worth noting that his youthful attempt to join the Jesuits (and perhaps even his subsequent decision to become a Benedictine) was more a reflection of his mother's vocation than his own (Oury, *Dom Claude* 40). Further, both of Claude's biographers, Dom Martène in the seventeenth century and Dom Oury in the twentieth, quote heavily from Marie's correspondence in reconstructing her son's life, thereby providing at least as much information about Claude's mother as about the Benedictine himself. Oury even uses Marie's name in his title: *Dom Claude Martin, le fils de Marie de l'Incarnation*.

It is important to remember that because of Marie's status as reputable female mystic (which permitted the composition of spiritual meditations), and her work as a missionary (which neces-

sitated the production of pedagogical texts, particularly in some of the Amerindian languages), the scope of her writing activity was not limited to the epistolary genre. Chantal too had composed spiritual texts. Sévigné, a member of the lesser nobility, lacking the sanction of a religious vocation, confined herself to epistolary writing, and cultivated for herself the identity of "an occasional writer, an amateur writing in a marginal albeit both popular and distinguished genre" (Farrell 34). Marie de l'Incarnation, in her New World convent, spent long hours at intellectual and literary pursuits that she herself recognized as highly unusual for a woman of her station:

Il faut que je vous avoue qu'en France je ne me fusse jamais donné la peine de lire une histoire; et maintenant il faut que je lise et médite toute sorte de choses en sauvage. Nous faisons nos études en cette langue barbare comme font ces jeunes enfans, qui vont au Collège pour apprendre le Latin. (Corr 108; Sept. 4, 1640)

Ces nouveaux habitans nous obligent d'étudier la langue Huronne, à laquelle je ne m'étois point encore appliquée, m'étant contentée de sçavoir seulement celle des Algonguins et Montagnez. . . . Vous rirez peut-être de ce qu'à l'âge de cinquante ans je commence à étudier une nouvelle langue. (Corr. 390; May 17, 1650)

Ces langues barbares sont difficiles, et pour s'y assujettir il faut des esprits constans. Mon occupation les matinées d'hiver est de les enseigner à mes jeunes Sœurs. . . . Je me suis résolue avant ma mort de laisser le plus d'écrits qu'il me sera possible. Depuis le commencement du Carême dernier jusqu'à l'Ascension j'ay écrit un gros livre Algonquin de l'histoire sacrée et de choses saintes, avec un Dictionnaire [sic] et un Catéchisme Hiroquois, qui est un trésor. L'année dernière j'écrivis un gros Dictionnaire Algonquin à l'alphabet François; j'en ai un autre à l'alphabet Sauvage. (Corr. 801; Aug. 9, 1668)⁷

The attention to posterity evidenced here surfaces in Marie's epistolary writing too, which reads more like memoirs than does the writing of the other seventeenth-century *épistolières* with whom I have been comparing her. Chantal's letters tend to be shorter communications about business and familial matters, while Sévigné's replicate the art of conversation as it was practiced in salon circles. But Marie de l'Incarnation wrote as a participant in events of considerable political—one might even say "international"—import

and with clear attention to the role she was playing in making and narrating history.

That Marie well knew, from the first, that her personal missives would be circulated in France (if not that her son would publish them after her death) is demonstrated by the fact that when she wished one particular communication of 1642, addressed to a benefactress, to remain private, she so indicated: "C'est icy la lettre du cœur; car mon autre qui vous parle de ce qui est arrivé en cette nouvelle Eglise du Fils de Dieu peut être commune et communiquée" (*Corr* 172; Sept. 29, 1642). That epistolary writing was a significant component of Marie's professional obligations is demonstrated repeatedly throughout the correspondence, for she spoke often of this burden, especially in letters to her son, when she could let herself go a little:

C'est assez de ces matières, mon très-cher Fils, pour cette année. Je suis si enfoncée dans le tracas des affaires extérieures, que je ne vous écris qu'à de petits momens que je dérobe. Avec tout cela je dois réponse comme je croy à plus de six vingts lettres, outre les expéditions des écritures de la Communauté pour la France. Voilà comme il faut passer cette vie en attendant l'Eternité. (*Corr* 320; summer, 1647)

Marie de l'Incarnation, who thus incorporated epistolary, meditative, and pedagogical writing in her life's work, epitomizes what we today might term a *lettré* at a time when *épistolières* were expected to write as *ignorants*.

NOTES

¹ A version of this paper was presented in November 1995 at the Annual Convention of the Midwest Modern Language Association in St. Louis.

² In 1610, Jeanne-Françoise Fremyot, the baronne de Chantal, co-founded with François de Sales (whom she had met in 1604, a few years after her husband's death) the Visitation de Sainte-Marie in Annecy, in Savoy. Unlike Marie de l'Incarnation, Jeanne did not remain cloistered, but moved freely in and out of her monastery as her maternal and religious duties required (on the early years of the Visitation, see Rapley 34-41). Marie Guyart Martin and Jeanne de Chantal probably never met, but Natalie Davis suggests that Marie may well have heard an

account of Chantal's departure for Annecy from a friend, Gillette Roland. Dom Raymond de Saint Bernard, a Feuillant at Tours, ministered as director to both Guyart and Roland in the 1620s. Roland had known François de Sales in Savoy and became one of the founders of the order of the Visitation in Tours in 1633—two years after Guyart joined the Ursulines (Davis 264, n. 33). After Chantal's death in 1641, Marie sent condolences from Québec in a letter to a Visitandine at Tours: "La précieuse mort de ma Révérende Mère de Chantal a été le fruit de sa sainte vie; Dieu soit éternellement Béni en ses Saints" (*Corr.* 154; Aug. 30, 1642). Later, Marie probably also read Chantal's life and letters (Davis 132; 292, n. 251).

³ In the early years of Chantal's correspondence there are a few letters addressed to her daughter Marie-Aimée and later some letters addressed to another daughter, Françoise. To my knowledge, no-one has yet compared these mother-daughter missives with the Sévigné-Grignan letters. Critics of female epistolarity under the *ancien régime* have devoted considerable attention to the Sévigné letters over the last twenty years, but the correspondence of Chantal has become available in a complete critical edition only very recently.

⁴ Pauline de Grignan directed the initial publication of Sévigné's letters and exacted a promise from the editor that he would destroy the original manuscripts after they had been prepared for publication. Additionally, she is believed to have destroyed her own mother's letters. "Pauline then, is responsible for the [Sévigné] *Correspondance* as it is read today—only the grandmother's half of the exchange, and not entirely reliable at that" (Farrell 249).

⁵ Jeanne de Chantal had abandoned her son too, for when she left France for Annecy in 1610 she took only her unmarried daughter with her to the convent and left her fourteen-year-old son with her father in Dijon—like Claude Martin, Chantal's son begged her not to go (Davis 73). Another daughter had married Bernard de Sales, François's brother, in 1609; the third died in 1610.

⁶ All citations from Marie's correspondence here refer to the page number in the Oury edition from 1971.

⁷ These texts are all lost.

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