

# *The Journal of Epistolary Studies*

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## *Letter from the Editor:*

I could think of no better way of launching this journal than by asking members of the editorial board to offer articles for the inaugural issue, and I have added one of my own to round out the first number—I am grateful for their contributions. Indeed, I wish to thank the entire editorial board for their input and support in creating this journal.

Thanks also to everyone at Texas Digital Libraries, and to my department and college—in particular to my dean, Walter Diaz, for release time. My appreciation also to William Flores for the cover design, and especially to Justin White, who was instrumental in helping me deal with the countless technical issues that accompany online publication.

So, here is the first issue of what I hope will be many to come....

*Best,*

*Gary Schneider*

# Literary Criticism in the Epistolary Mode

ANTJE RICHTER

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*Abstract:* This paper is an inquiry into the distinct potential of the epistolary voice in literary criticism. What can writers do in letters to address literary matters that other genres do not allow with the same ease and persuasive power? And if so, what is it that letters can do and how is it done? In this paper, I examine two early medieval Chinese texts about literature—an essay and a letter, both written by Cao Pi—and compare their rhetorical strategies in the light of epistolarity. I draw upon letters about literature by other writers, in particular, by Cao Zhi, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, John Keats, and Gertrud Kolmar. I propose that writers throughout history and across cultures were highly aware of the generic possibilities of the epistolary mode for the writing of literary criticism and purposely employed it in a variety of ways spanning the range from intimate family letter to openly fictional, published letter.

This paper is an inquiry into the distinct potential of the epistolary voice for the discussion of literary matters—an inquiry that was triggered by the strong presence of letters on literature and literary criticism across time and cultures. Is there anything writers can do in letters to address literary matters that other genres do not allow with the same ease and persuasive power? And if so, what is it that letters can do and how is it done? Trying to answer these questions, I will first take a close look at two early medieval Chinese texts about literature—an essay and a letter, both written by the poet and statesman Cao Pi (187–226) in the early third century—and compare rhetorical strategies of each in the light of epistolarity. To test and support my findings, I will then draw upon letters about literature by other authors, in particular, by Cao Pi’s brother Cao Zhi (192–232), by the Austrian writer Hugo von Hofmannsthal (1874–1929), by the English Romantic poet John Keats (1795–1821), and by the German-Jewish poet Gertrud Kolmar (1894–1943?). These letters were chosen for their diversity in several respects: they not only differ in epistolary form and content, but their authors are also of varying prominence in their respective literary traditions. I propose that writers throughout history and across cultures were highly aware of the generic possibilities of the epistolary mode for the writing of literary criticism and employed it in a variety of ways spanning the range from intimate family letter to openly fictional, published letter. The paper also serves as an appeal: letters are still in need of being fully recognized for what they are as literary texts and as a genre with distinct conventions.

## *Introduction: Genre in the West, Very Briefly*

That genres differ in their potential is usually taken to be self-evident, both in China and the west. Western literary thought has produced a great diversity of approaches to genre, from ancient Greek typologies, such as Aristotle’s differentiation of epic, tragedy, and comedy in his *Poetics* in the

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fourth century BCE, to the still consequential, early nineteenth-century formulation of the three “natural forms” of literature—epic, dramatic, and lyric—set forth by Johann Wolfgang Goethe (1749–1832).<sup>1</sup> In the twentieth century, these and other traditional approaches have drawn criticism from all sides, although the ideas of neither Aristotle nor Goethe were quite as simplistic as critics sometimes seem to imply. Both authors were far from offering clean-cut generic categories and did certainly not suppose that there is anything more to genre than formal typology. In recent genre studies, text type and taxonomy have become less important criteria than the social function of texts, including their social performance and practice.<sup>2</sup> Scholars emphasize the openness and interrelatedness of genre categories and focus on “an understanding of genre that connects kinds of texts to kinds of social actions,” assuming that they “reflect, help shape, and even generate what they represent in culturally defined ways (and therefore play a critical role in meaning-making).”<sup>3</sup> While discussions of genre had somewhat faded from discussions of literary thought toward the end of the twentieth century, they appear to be on the rise again, especially in film and new media studies, now often driven by questions of audience response and, ultimately, commercial considerations.

*Cao Pi’s “Discourse on Literature”: Criticism, Genre, and Immortality*

In China, one of the earliest examples of genre-awareness is Cao Pi’s 曹丕 “Discourse on Literature” (“Lun wen” 論文), a short text of less than six-hundred words (Fig. 1). The essay is one of the few surviving fragments from Cao Pi’s largely lost work *Normative Discourses* (*Dianlun* 典論). The “Discourse on Literature” was probably written in 217 or 218, when Cao Pi was heir apparent of a dynasty yet to be formally established. The “Discourse on Literature” is central to Chinese literary thought and has been discussed extensively, but since it will be the foil against which I will read Cao Pi’s letter, let me briefly summarize its structure and basic ideas.<sup>4</sup>

文人相輕，自古而然。傅毅之於班固，伯仲之間耳；而固小之，與弟超書曰：「武仲以能屬文為蘭臺令史，下筆不能自休。」夫人善於自見，而文非一體，鮮能備善。是以各以所長，相輕所短。里語曰：「家有弊帚，享之千金。」斯不自見之患也。今之文人，魯國孔融文舉、廣陵陳琳孔璋、山陽王粲仲宣、北海徐幹偉長、陳留阮瑀元瑜、汝南應瑒德璉、東平劉楨公幹：斯七子者，於學無所遺，於辭無所假，咸自以騁驥驟於千里，仰齊足而並馳。以此相服，亦良難矣。蓋君子審己以度人，故能免於斯累，而作論文。王粲長於辭賦；徐幹時有齊氣；然粲之匹也。如粲之初征、登樓、槐賦、征思，幹之玄猿、漏卮、圓扇、橘賦，雖張、蔡不過也。然於他文，未能稱是。琳、瑀之章表書記，今之雋也。應瑒和而不壯。劉楨壯而不密。孔融體氣高妙，有過人者，然不能持論，理不勝辭，以至乎雜以嘲戲，及其所善，揚、班儔也。常人貴遠賤近，向聲背實，又患闇於自見，謂己為賢。夫文本同而末異，蓋奏議宜雅，書論宜理，銘誄尚實，詩賦欲麗。此四科不同，故能之者偏也；唯通才能備其體。文以氣為主，氣之清濁有體，不可力強而致。譬諸音樂，曲度雖均，節奏同檢，至於引氣不齊，巧拙有素，雖在父兄，不能以移子弟。蓋文章，經國之大業，不朽之盛事。年壽有時而盡，榮樂止乎其身，二者必至之常期，未若文章之無窮。是以古之作者，寄身於翰墨，見意於篇籍，不假良史之辭，不託飛馳之勢，而聲名自傳於後。故西伯幽而演易，周旦顯而禮，不以隱約而弗務，不以康樂而加思。夫然，則古人賤尺璧而重寸陰，懼乎時之過已。而人多不強力；貧賤則懾於饑寒，富貴則流於逸樂，遂營目前之務，而遺千載之功。日月逝於上，體貌衰於下，忽然與萬物遷化，斯志士之大痛也。融等已逝，唯幹著論，成一家言。

Figure 1: Cao Pi, “Discourse on Literature”

The notorious first sentence of the essay, “writers belittle one another; this has been so since antiquity,” introduces a passage reflecting on psychological obstacles to impartial criticism: our lack of self-awareness leads us to overestimate our literary strengths while underestimating our weaknesses, and we go on to project this distortion of judgment on the works of other writers: “People are good at flaunting themselves. But there is more than one literary genre, and few are those writers who are good at them all. That is why everybody takes pride in their own fortes and uses them to belittle the weaknesses of others. As the saying goes: ‘If you have an old broom of your own, you love it like it is worth a thousand pieces of gold.’ This is an affliction caused by not knowing oneself.”

In the next passage, Cao Pi, a poet in his own right, sketches the literary scene of his day. He first identifies a group of poets, now known as the “Seven Masters of the Jian’an period”—authors whose work has been largely lost and who are mostly remembered today for their association with the Cao family.<sup>5</sup> Cao Pi follows this with another reminder of the importance of self-awareness for the critic: “Only if the gentleman examines himself before judging others, may he avoid self-deception and can therefore critically discuss literature.” Cao Pi then turns to each of the Seven Masters, listing individual works they composed or genres for which they were famous or generally defining their literary and personal strengths and weaknesses. Chen Lin and Ruan Yu

are praised for their memorials and letters, in Cao Pi's opinion "currently the most outstanding." The following passage presents a brief catalogue of genres, framed by renewed reminders of the epistemological obstacles presented by the lack of self-awareness—a concern that is something of a leitmotif in Cao Pi's essay:

People usually prize the faraway but disdain the nearby. They look up to reputations but turn their back against reality. Afflicted with not knowing themselves, they consider themselves as worthies.

As for literature, its roots are the same, but its branches are different. Hence: presentations and appeals should be decorous, letters and discourses should be structured, in inscriptions and dirges one values truthfulness, in poems and rhapsodies one desires beauty.

Because these four classes are not the same, those who are skilled in one genre are prejudiced in favor of it. Only a universal talent can master all genres.<sup>6</sup>

Cao Pi's catalogue of "four classes," or eight genres, of literature is as important in Chinese literary history as Aristotle's three genres have been, although Cao Pi's list was obviously meant to be selective rather than comprehensive. Because of the different literary landscape in early China, there is hardly any overlap with traditional western genres: we see none of the three genres that are traditionally traced back to ancient Greek literary thought and only one of Goethe's three "natural forms" of literature—poetry, represented by poems and rhapsodies. If poetry as the preeminent genre of Chinese literature is covered well in Cao Pi's catalogue, prose appears to be unevenly represented by the genres. Given this selectiveness, it is all the more striking that three of Cao Pi's six prose genres are types of written communication. The two that are examples of official communication—presentations (*zou*) and appeals (*yi*)—fall into one group, for which decorousness or elegance (*ya*) is prescribed. Letters are grouped with discourses (*lun*, also translated as "essay," "treatise," and "disquisition") and are expected to be structured or well organized (*li*).<sup>7</sup> This suggests that Cao Pi assumed that letters, *shu*, follow genre conventions that are different from written official communications, here represented by presentations and appeals. It also suggests that letters and discursive texts such as essays are closely associated—an observation that is familiar from western epistolary theory, as well.<sup>8</sup>

In the following section of the "Discourse on Literature," Cao Pi elaborates on the connection between an individual writer's innate *qi*, or vital breath, and his or her literary productions. The single most influential statement from the "Discourse on Literature" may be Cao Pi's declaration that "literature is dominated by vital breath, whose clarity or turbidity is of a certain form and cannot be brought about forcibly." In what follows, Cao Pi characterizes every writer's unique, individual endowment with *qi* by comparing it to the highly individual character of a musical performance.

The last quarter of the essay is concerned with the legitimization of literature, expressed in two spheres. One is political: here Cao Pi emphasizes the importance of literature for the state; the second is individual and possibly personal, and concerns the potential of literature as an antidote to the ephemerality of human life: "nothing compares with the inexhaustibility of literature." This leads Cao Pi to lament the relentless passing of time and to the admonition not "to neglect the occupation [that is, literature] that will last for a thousand years" over the pursuit of more immediate concerns.



Although we can only partly assess the rhetorical structure of this essay, since it may be an excerpt from a larger composition, the transmitted “Discourse on Literature” meets the ideal features of an essay as put forward by Cao Pi himself. It is reasonably well organized, which for the reader translates into lucidity. As we expect from an essay, the text is addressed to “posterity” rather than to a specific interlocutor. Although essays, despite their expository character, often operate with an autobiographical lens, in this case the author remains in the background throughout, with the one exception toward the end, when Cao Pi implicitly acknowledges his own mortality and thus sheds some of the aloofness that informed much of his essay up to this point.

*Cao Pi’s “Further Letter to Wu Zhi”: Mortality, Friendship, and Criticism*

Lamenting the ravages of time and the frailty of human life is crucial, too, in one of the letters that Cao Pi wrote to his old friend and advisor Wu Zhi 吳質 (177–230).<sup>9</sup> This text, written in 218 and only two dozen characters shorter than the “Discourse on Literature,” shares other topics with the essay as well, in particular the assessment of almost the same group of contemporary writers, five of whom had perished just a year earlier during an epidemic. So how does Cao Pi’s letter differ from his essay? Are we seeing just iterations of the same concerns?

Two of the most pronounced features of a letter are its mode of address and the fact of its transmission. While essays speak to a large and usually undefined audience, letters typically address someone specific, and they are part of an exchange. In order to reach their spatially removed addressees, letters are transmitted by a third party. Several features are derived from this basic epistolary situation, some of them textual, others extralinguistic. Due to the time transmission takes, the most consequential of the extralinguistic features is the lag between writing a letter and responding to a letter. It creates a distinct, staggered type of communication that determines a number of textual characteristics. Another important extralinguistic feature is that letters are transmitted in envelopes, as we know from early medieval China, or in other formats that prevented a letter from being read freely. It accentuates the particular directedness and exclusiveness of epistolary communication, both of which are also expressed on the textual level.

The most significant textual features of a letter are based on its inherent dialogicity and self-referentiality. Dialogicity (or reciprocity) denotes a range of textual features that prove a writer’s sustained efforts to engage a specific, usually absent addressee, which in turn also increases the narrative presence of the writer. Self-referentiality describes a letter’s peculiar ability to draw attention to itself. Patrizia Violi writes of the letter’s illocutionary force as being bound up with its “capacity to refer to itself and to its own communicative function independently of any propositional content it may express.”<sup>10</sup> Claudio Guillén makes a similar observation when he describes the letter as “writing proclaiming itself as writing in the process of correspondence.”<sup>11</sup> Both dialogicity and self-referentiality are expressed through manifold and recurring references to the time, place, and other circumstances of a letter’s writing and expected reading, including references to the letter’s materiality; to the addressee and his or her world; to the physical separation between writer and addressee; and to the time lag between writing, reading, and responding. These basic features of the epistolary mode apply to most “real” letters, but they also shape fictional or semi-fictional letters, that is, “imitation[s] of the letter by the letter.”<sup>12</sup>

Let us now take a closer look at Cao Pi's "Further Letter to Wu Zhi" (Fig. 2). Judging by its frame, it appears to be complete, since it has not only a proem and epilogue (here marked in red), but also a prescript and postscript, the outer margins of the epistolary frame enclosing the body of the letter (marked in green).

二月三日丕白。(Prescript)

歲月易得。別來行復四年。三年不見。東山猶歎其遠。況乃過之。思何可支。雖書疏往返。未足解其勞結。(Proem)

昔年疾疫。親故多離其災。徐、陳、應、劉。一時俱逝。痛可言邪。

昔日遊處。行則連輿。止則接席。何曾須臾相失。每至觴酌流行。絲竹并奏。酒酣耳熱。仰而賦詩。當此之時。忽然不自知樂也。謂百年已分。可長共相保。何圖數年之間。零落略盡。言之傷心。

頃撰其遺文。都為一集。觀其姓名。已為鬼錄。追思昔遊。猶在心目。而此諸子。化為冀壤。可復道哉。

觀古今文人。類不護細行。鮮能以名節自立。而偉長獨懷文抱質。恬惓寡欲。有箕山之志。可謂彬彬君子者矣。著中論二十餘篇。成一家之言。辭義典雅。足傳于後。此子為不朽矣。德棣常斐然有述作之意。其才學足以著書。美志不遂。良可痛惜。間者歷覽諸子之文。對之流淚。既痛逝者。行自念也。孔璋章表殊健。微為繁富。公幹有逸氣。但未遒耳。其五言詩之善者。妙絕時人。元瑜書記翩翩。致足樂也。仲宣續自善於辭賦。惜其體弱。不足起其文。至於所善。古人無以遠過。

昔伯牙絕絃於鍾期。仲尼覆醢於子路。痛知音之難遇。傷門人之莫逮。諸子但為未及古人。自一時之雋也。今之存者。已不逮矣。後生可畏。來者難誣。然恐吾與足下不及見也。

年行已長大。所懷萬端。時有所慮。至通夜不眠。志意何時復類昔日。已成老翁。但未白頭耳。光武言年三十餘。在兵中十歲。所更非一。吾德不及之。年與之齊矣。以犬羊之質。服虎豹之文。無眾星之明。假日月之光。動見瞻觀。何時易乎。恐永不復得為昔日遊也。少壯真當努力。年一過往。何可攀援。古人思炳燭夜遊。良有以也。

頃何以自娛。頗復有所述造不。東望於邑。裁書敘心。(Epilogue)

丕白。(Postscript)

Figure 2: Cao Pi, "Further Letter to Wu Zhi"

While prescript and postscript have the function of providing salutation and signature (both of which in early medieval China served to identify the writer of a letter), proem and epilogue are concerned with the embedding of the letter into the communicative thread connecting the correspondents.<sup>13</sup> The proem is dedicated to the recollection and reaffirmation of their preceding relationship, and tries to secure the goodwill of the addressee. In order to "update" their personal relationship, correspondents mention the weather or the time of year as well as the reception or

non-arrival of letters; they report the state of their health and inquire about the others' well-being; they express good wishes and complain about their continuing physical separation. The inherent focus on both the moment of writing and that of reading—the “fragmentation of time” that characterizes epistolary communication—is an important expression of the letter's self-referentiality and dialogicity.<sup>14</sup> The epilogue voices concerns that are similar to those expressed in the proem, among them wishes for good health and the lament of separation. Unlike the proem, which is concerned mainly with the past, the epilogue looks ahead, trying to secure the correspondents' future relationship. This intention is also expressed in a number of elements that typically are reserved for the epilogue, for instance the request for letters or expressions of the desire for a reunion of the correspondents. Finally, there are conventional reflections about the act of writing, especially its limitations compared to a face-to-face meeting. Such reflections appear to have been a favored way of concluding a letter in early medieval China.<sup>15</sup>

The beginning of Cao Pi's letter to Wu Zhi reflects all of the typical concerns of a proem:

On the third day of the second month, Cao Pi lets you know:

Years and months are easy to come by. It has already been four years since we parted. Not seeing each other for three years is lamented as a long time in the ode “Eastern Mountain.”<sup>16</sup> How much more so when three years have been exceeded! How can I cope with my longing for you? Although we exchange letters, they do not suffice to relieve the weariness of longing.

Last year when the epidemic raged, our relatives and friends were struck hard by this calamity. Xu Gan, Chen Lin, Ying Yang, and Liu Zhen all passed away at the same time. Can the pain be expressed in words?

This point in the letter, when four of the Seven Masters have been mentioned, seems to indicate the onset of the body of the letter: an assessment of contemporary literature. Reading on, however, we discover that Cao Pi does not continue as we might have expected, but instead digresses into memories of the past and thus continues to stay with his addressee, Wu Zhi:

In former days, whether traveling or staying at home, our carriages would be connected when we drove and when we stopped our mats would touch. When did we ever lose sight of each other, if only for a moment? When the goblet went round amid the sound of strings and pipes, when our ears were hot from wine and we looked up to recite rhapsodies and poems, I was too careless to realize my own happiness. I assumed that each of us had been allotted a hundred years and that we could forever be together and take care of each other. Who could have imagined that within a few years almost all of us would be withered and fallen? My heart aches if I so much as talk about it.

I have just compiled the writings that our friends left behind and gathered them in one collection, where their names look like a register of the dead.

Again, we might expect that Cao Pi at this point will finally have arrived at the letter's main body. That he has mentioned his editorial work will undoubtedly lead to the heart of the letter. It will indeed, but not quite yet, since Cao Pi again lingers on the thought of his lost friends: “When I think back to our past excursions, I can still see all these masters in my mind's eye, but they have already become dung and soil. Is there anything more I can say?” The blurred boundaries between proem and the body of the letter arise from the character of this letter: despite its distinct literary agenda, it was at the same time also a letter of friendship. As such, it is characterized by a high

degree of attention to the addressee and to the epistolary situation, and thus showing a pronounced dialogicity and self-referentiality: Cao Pi addresses his friend through the lament of separation and of the passing of time, through the evocation of a shared past and the loss of mutual friends, and through expressions of his sentiments about all this. He repeatedly alludes to the epistolary character of his text by declaring that he is at a loss for words, which is both a ubiquitous epistolary topos and an important matter in early medieval Chinese philosophy of language.<sup>17</sup> One way to describe this rhetorical strategy would be to say that the conventional subjects of the proem spill over into the letter's *narratio*, infusing it with a strong epistolary flavor. This amalgamation of general interpersonal concerns, as they are typical of the frame, with particular communicative intentions that are usually reserved for the letter body, produces the rhetorically and aesthetically most convincing of personal letters.

Cao Pi's letter proceeds to reflect on the frequent disconnect between a writer's talent and moral integrity, praising Xu Gan and in turn Ying Yang. But then, when we were sure that he will continue with his characterization of the Seven Masters, Cao Pi thwarts our expectations again by inserting an intensely personal remark: "Ying Yang was always brilliant, and he was intent on creating literature."<sup>18</sup> Both his talent and his learning were adequate for writing. That he could not pursue his fine ambitions is really excruciatingly regrettable. Glancing through the writings of these masters, I had to rub my tears in front of their texts.<sup>19</sup> Grieving for the departed, we turn our thoughts to our own death." The passage following is dedicated to Chen Lin, Liu Zhen, Ruan Yu and Wang Can. Cao Pi praises Ruan Yu's letters as "full of verve and producing ample enjoyment."

Structurally, the end of Cao Pi's letter mirrors its beginning: the actual closing is not clearly separated from the body of the letter. There is talk about friendship, evoking Confucius and the legendary ancient zither player Bo Ya, who both famously grieved for a dead friend, which again mingles artistic appreciation with personal concerns. Cao Pi also contemplates his own advanced age, conceding that it causes him a myriad of worries that often keep him awake through the night. He laments that he has "already become an old man," even if his "hair has not turned white yet," which is not that remarkable, given that Cao Pi was in his early thirties when he wrote this letter. After expressions of modesty triggered by immodestly comparing himself with Emperor Guangwu of the Han dynasty (reigned 25–57), Cao Pi eases into the densely allusive epilogue:

I am afraid I will never be able to go on travels as in the former days. We really must take advantage of our youth.<sup>20</sup> How could a year, once it has passed, be retrieved?<sup>21</sup> The ancients longed to wander all night long, a candle in hand—there is certainly something to be said for that.<sup>22</sup> How have you been amusing yourself recently? Surely there is something to tell. Are you writing? I am looking east, full of distress. I have written this letter to relieve my heart.

This is what Pi lets you know.

The epilogue is as exemplary in its epistolarity as the proem was: addressing the recipient, professing interest in his pursuits, sharing personal feelings with him, and expressing longing for the continuation of the conversation.

Cao Pi, the letter writer, appears to be striving for objective and relevant observations about literature just as the essayist did, but in the letter, as we have seen, he frequently interrupts his reflections about the literary accomplishments of his friends or other critical remarks to make room for very subjective and personal words that effectively evoke the dialogicity of correspondence. In



Figure 3, I have tried to indicate this intertwining of personal and literary reflections by marking different types of utterances in different colors: those parts of the letter body that share functions with the proem and thus serve to enhance the text's epistolarity are marked in red. What remains in black are those parts of the letter dedicated to literary criticism and thus form the *narratio* proper we expect in the body of the letter.

二月三日丕白。(Prescript)

歲月易得。別來行復四年。三年不見。東山猶歎其遠。況乃過之。思何可支。雖書疏往返。未足解其勞結。(Proem)

昔年疾疫。親故多離其災。徐、陳、應、劉。一時俱逝。痛可言邪。昔日遊處。行則連輿。止則接席。何曾須臾相失。每至觴酌流行。絲竹并奏。酒酣耳熱。仰而賦詩。當此之時。忽然不自知樂也。謂百年已分。可長共相保。何圖數年之間。零落略盡。言之傷心。

頃撰其遺文。都為一集。觀其姓名。已為鬼錄。追思昔遊。猶在心目。而此諸子。化為糞壤。可復道哉。

觀古今文人。類不護細行。鮮能以名節自立。而偉長獨懷文抱質。恬淡寡欲。有箕山之志。可謂彬彬君子者矣。著中論二十餘篇。成一家之言。辭義典雅。足傳於後。此子為不朽矣。德楫常斐然有述作之意。其才學足以著書。美志不遂。良可痛惜。間者歷覽諸子之文。對之流淚。既痛逝者。行自念也。孔璋章表殊健。微為繁富。公幹有逸氣。但未遒耳。其五言詩之善者。妙絕時人。元瑜書記翩翩。致足樂也。仲宣續自善於辭賦。惜其體弱。不足起其文。至於所善。古人無以遠過。

昔伯牙絕絃於鍾期。仲尼覆醢於子路。痛知音之難遇。傷門人之莫逮。諸子但為未及古人。自一時之雋也。今之存者。已不逮矣。後生可畏。來者難誣。然恐吾與足下不及見也。

年行已長大。所懷萬端。時有所慮。至通夜不眠。志意何時復類昔日。已成老翁。但未白頭耳。光武言年三十餘。在兵中十歲。所更非一。吾德不及之。年與之齊矣。以犬羊之質。服虎豹之文。無眾星之明。假日月之光。動見瞻觀。何時易乎。恐永不復得為昔日遊也。少壯真當努力。年一過往。何可攀援。古人思炳燭夜遊。良有以也。

頃何以自娛。頗復有所述造不。東望於邑。裁書敘心。(Epilogue)

丕白。(Postscript)

Figure 3: Cao Pi, "Further Letter to Wu Zhi"

Most striking in its expression of epistolary emotion is the passage about Ying Yang that I already mentioned. It suggests that Cao Pi, distracted by his agitated feelings and overwhelmed by a flood of memories, suspends the continuation of his catalogue of literary talents. Thinking of Ying Yang's prematurely crushed literary ambitions, Cao Pi is moved to painful sorrow and eventually to tears, while at the same time turning his thoughts and those of his friend and addressee, Wu Zhi,

to their own mortality. Despite the apparently informal character of this letter, it is unlikely that this passage reflects an impromptu stream of consciousness or inner monologue. The harmonious composition of the letter and its stylistic elaboration suggest that it was not penned spontaneously but with considerable attention to detail, not least because its writer, given his exalted social standing, certainly expected that this text would circulate more widely. Cao Pi masterfully exploited the generic potential in the inherent dialogicity of the letter, which allows the loose succession or even juxtaposition of different subjects and a relaxed train of thought resembling the back-and-forth of a conversation. It also allows for the dramatization of arguments and charges them with personal concern. The epistolary persona Cao Pi has created in this letter—moved to tears pondering the compositions of his dead friends—fabricated and polished as it may be, comes across as authentic enough to lend additional credibility to his catalogue of literary fortes and weaknesses. All this means that he communicates immensely successfully in rhetorical, aesthetic, and personal respects.

*First Point of Comparison; a “Cover Letter”: Cao Zhi’s Letter to Yang Xiu*

The pious beauty of Cao Pi’s letter with its intermingled concerns is not common in letters about literary thought. A famous letter by Cao Pi’s younger brother, Cao Zhi 曹植 (192–232), is a case in point. Written a few years earlier, Cao Zhi’s letter to Yang Xiu 楊修 (175–219) is the first extant letter about Chinese literary history. Slightly longer and also transmitted in its entirety but featuring only a very brief epistolary frame, the letter may at first sight look similar in its focus on the literary scene of the day, including a brief assessment of several of the Seven Masters (Fig. 4).<sup>23</sup> A closer look at the letter soon reveals a picture that is rather different and much less dappled than Cao Pi’s letter.



植白。(Prescript)

數日不見。思子為勞。想同之也。(Proem)

僕少小好為文章。迄至於今二十有五年矣。然今世作者。可略而言也。昔仲宣獨步於漢南。孔璋鷹揚於河朔。偉長擅名於青土。公幹振藻於海隅。德楫發跡於此魏。足下高視於上京。當此之時。人人自謂握靈蛇之珠。家家自謂抱荆山之玉也。吾王於是設天網以該之。頓八紘以掩之。今悉集茲國矣。然此數子。猶不能飛翰絕跡。一舉千里也。以孔璋之才。不閉於辭賦。而多自謂能與司馬長卿同風。譬畫虎不成還為狗者也。前為書啁之。反作論盛道僕贊其文。夫鍾期不失聽。於今稱之。吾亦不敢妄歎者。畏後之嗤余也。世人之著述。不能無病。僕常好人譏彈其文。有不善者。應時改定。昔丁敬禮嘗作小文。使僕潤飾之。僕自以才不能過若人。辭不為也。敬禮云。卿何所疑難乎。文之佳麗。吾自得之。後世誰相知定吾文者耶。吾常歎此達言。以為美談。昔尼父之文辭。與人通流。至於制春秋。游夏之徒。不能錯一字。過此而言不病者。吾未之見也。蓋有南威之容。乃可以論於淑媛。有龍淵之利。乃可以議於割斷。劉季緒才不逮於作者。而好詆訶文章。持撫利病。昔田巴毀五帝三王咎五伯於稷下。一旦而服千人。魯連一說。使終身杜口。劉生之辯。未若田氏。今之仲連。求之難。可無歎息乎。人各有所好尚。蘭茝蓀蕙之芳。眾人之所好。而海畔有逐臭之夫。咸池六英之發。眾人所共樂。而墨翟有非之論。豈可同哉。今往僕少小所著辭賦一通。相與夫街談巷說。必有可采。輦轅之歌。有應風雅。匹夫之思。未易輕棄也。辭賦小道。固未足以揄揚大義。彰示來世也。昔揚子雲先朝執戟之臣耳。猶稱壯夫不為也。吾雖薄德。位為藩侯。猶庶幾戮力上國。流惠下民。建永世之業。流金石之功。豈徒以翰墨為勳積。辭頌為君子哉。若吾志不果。吾道不行。亦將採史官之實錄。辨時俗之得失。定仁義之衷。成一家之言。雖未能藏之名山。將以傳之同好。此要之白首。豈可以今日論乎。

其言之不慙。恃惠子之知我也。明早相迎。書不盡懷。(Epilogue)

植白。(Postscript)

Figure 4: Cao Zhi, “Letter to Yang Xiu”

Cao Zhi, more acclaimed today as a poet than his older brother, probably wrote this letter in 216, at a time when he still cherished hopes of being made heir apparent. These hopes were thwarted in the following year, when their father, Cao Cao 曹操 (155–220), designated Cao Pi. Yang Xiu, the recipient of this letter, was among those friends and political supporters of Cao Zhi who were executed after Cao Pi’s appointment as heir apparent. The beginning of the letter reads:

Cao Zhi lets you know:

I have not seen you for several days. Longing for you I have become weary. I think you must feel the same.

Your servant has had a penchant for literature since I was child, for twenty-five years now. Thus I can briefly describe the writers of our time. Formerly, Wang Can strode without par south

of the river Han, Chen Lin soared like an eagle north of the Yellow River, Xu Gan made himself a name in Qingzhou, Liu Zhen vitalized literature on the coast, Ying Yang left his marks here in Wei, while you from up high command a view of the capital.<sup>24</sup>

In Cao Zhi's letter, the prescript is followed by an extremely brief proem consisting of only a lament of separation. The intensity of longing that Cao Zhi professes seems at odds with the shortness of their separation and with the abrupt onset of the body of the letter, whose remainder is exclusively dedicated to literary matters. The last sentence of the passage quoted above is the last reference to the addressee in this letter before he is mentioned again several hundred words later in the epilogue, resulting in a weak dialogicity matched by the letter's almost complete absence of self-referentiality.

After the catalogue of prominent poets of his day, Cao Zhi moves on to a number of aspects of literary criticism: he praises his father as a benefactor of literature, criticizes fellow poets for their shortcomings, justifies his criticism by casting it as required by the demands of literary posterity, insists that criticism is important for the development of literature, and spends a long paragraph arguing that one needs to be a fine writer in order to be a critic—thus implicitly establishing his critical legitimacy.<sup>25</sup> In the last third of the body of the letter Cao Zhi writes about his own literary work. Unlike his brother Cao Pi, whose letter mentions that he compiled an anthology of the compositions left behind by his dead friends, Cao Zhi shares the news that he has put together a collection of his own poetical works, sent as an accompaniment—a sentence that could be interpreted as an element of self-referentiality and/or dialogicity. The customary self-deprecation following this news includes remarks that denigrate literature compared to matters of the state and are thus often interpreted as expressions of Cao Zhi's political ambitions: how could he, a feudal lord, presume that merely composing poetry would be enough to prove his virtue and nobility?

The body of the letter ends as abruptly as it began. In the brief epilogue Cao Zhi mentions the addressee again, enfolding their relationship within a composite allusion, and finishing with the letter's only element of self-referentiality:

If I am not ashamed of my words, then it is only because I trust that Master Hui will understand me. We will meet tomorrow morning. Writing does not fully capture the heart.

This is what Zhi lets you know.

When Cao Zhi calls Yang Xiu his “Master Hui” he refers to the legendary friendship between the Warring States philosopher Zhuangzi and his intellectual sparring partner Hui Shi 惠施. The phrase he uses to do that contains another allusion to another iconic friendship, that between the powerful Springs and Autumns politician Guan Zhong 管仲 (d. 645 BCE) and his collaborator Bao Shuya 鮑叔牙. Cao Zhi is alluding to this prototypical pair of friends via an epistolary reference, a letter by the eminent poet and polymath Zhang Heng 張衡 (78–139) that reads, “I trust that Master Bao will understand me.”<sup>26</sup> Yet another allusion, a reference to the *Odes*, is nested within the phrase “the one who understands me.”<sup>27</sup> As caring as the sentence “I trust that Master Hui will understand me” may seem, it is essentially self-flattering, since through his comparisons Cao Zhi assumes not only the place of the great statesman and reformer Guan Zhong, who is credited with the rise of his home state, Qi, but also that of the peerless word-smith Zhuangzi.



With its weak dialogicity and nearly absent self-referentiality, the body of Cao Zhi's letter to Yang Xiu resembles a loosely structured essay rather than a letter to a friend. Proem and epilogue are short and almost perfunctory, just as the rare instances of dialogicity within the body (see Fig. 5).

植白。(Prescript)

數日不見。思子為勞。想同之也。(Proem)

僕少小好為文章。迄至於今二十有五年矣。然今世作者。可略而言也。昔仲宣獨步於漢南。孔璋鷹揚於河朔。偉長擅名於青土。公幹振藻於海隅。德槌發跡於此魏。足下高視於上京。當此之時。人人自謂握靈蛇之珠。家自謂抱荆山之玉也。吾王於是設天網以該之。頓八紘以掩之。今悉集茲國矣。然此數子。猶不能飛翰絕跡。一舉千里也。以孔璋之才。不閉於辭賦。而多自謂能與司馬長卿同風。譬畫虎不成還為狗者也。前為書啗之。反作論盛道僕贊其文。夫鍾期不失聽。於今稱之。吾亦不敢妄歎者。畏後之嗤余也。世人之著述。不能無病。僕常好人譏彈其文。有不善者。應時改定。昔丁敬禮嘗作小文。使僕潤飾之。僕自以才不能過若人。辭不為也。敬禮云。卿何所疑難乎。文之佳麗。吾自得之。後世誰相知定吾文者耶。吾常歎此達言。以為美談。昔尼父之文辭。與人通流。至於制春秋。游夏之徒。不能錯一字。過此而言不病者。吾未之見也。蓋有南威之容。乃可以論於淑媛。有龍淵之利。乃可以議於割斷。劉季緒才不逮於作者。而好詆呵文章。掎摭利病。昔田巴毀五帝三王訾五伯於稷下。一旦而服千人。魯連一說。使終身杜口。劉生之辯。未若田氏。今之仲連。求之不難。可無歎息乎。人各有所好尚。蘭茝蓀蕙之芳。眾人之所好。而海畔有逐臭之夫。咸池六英之發。眾人所共樂。而墨翟有非之論。豈可同哉。今往僕少小所著辭賦一通。相與夫街談巷說。必有可采。擊轅之歌。有應風雅。匹夫之思。未易輕棄也。辭賦小道。固未足以掄揚大義。彰示來世也。昔揚子雲先朝執戟之臣耳。猶稱壯夫不為也。吾雖薄德。位為藩侯。猶庶幾戮力上國。流惠下民。建永世之業。流金石之功。豈徒以翰墨為勳積。辭頌為君子哉。若吾志不果。吾道不行。亦將採史官之實錄。辨時俗之得失。定仁義之衷。成一家之言。雖未能藏之名山。將以傳之同好。此要之白首。豈可以今日論乎。

其言之不慙。恃惠子之知我也。明早相迎。書不盡懷。(Epilogue)

植白。(Postscript)

Figure 5: Cao Zhi, "Letter to Yang Xiu"

We may wonder if this text ever was a letter at all or if it was rather an essay in disguise. There is no way of knowing, but if the text was indeed composed as a letter, the reason for its lack of epistolarity may have been that it was, at least on the surface of it, a more utilitarian endeavor than Cao Pi's letter: where Cao Pi seeks exchange with an absent and sorely missed friend, Cao Zhi writes in anticipation and preparation of an imminent meeting. Even more consequential may be that his text accompanied a manuscript gift of his own collected works. Given these circumstances,

the letter to Yang Xiu may never have been sent at all; written on the day before their meeting, it may literally have been the “cover letter” that was handed over along with Cao Zhi’s gift to Yang Xiu. Under these circumstances, one of the main drivers of the epistolary imagination is missing—the wish to bridge the separation between the correspondents through a letter’s content and materiality. The letter may well have been meant to provide a frame for his collected works, guiding their reading as a preface would, another paratextual genre. In the case of this letter, too, it is safe to assume that Cao Zhi expected that his audience would not be restricted to his friend Yang Xiu. Even if Cao Zhi’s text is not infused with the same epistolarity as that of his elder brother, Cao Zhi nevertheless chose his genre wisely, because the letter provided a looser corset than an essay or preface. It also gave the writer the opportunity to insert himself into an otherwise less personal communicative situation and to establish himself at a certain position in a social network.

In personal letters, the presence of a clear communicative purpose is often felt to be slightly problematic and associated with “ulterior motives.” The lack of any particular message or intention, on the other hand, is read as proof of the affectionate, sincere nature of a letter—an observation that was made in the west as early as in ancient Rome.<sup>28</sup> The “purposelessness” of many intimate Chinese letters may have been a reflection of the notion of pure friendship that had been an important ideal since early China: it seems to have been an attempt to create a sphere unblemished by the utilitarian purposes that necessarily dominated much of social life and relationships.

Cao Pi and Cao Zhi were by no means the only writers who expressed their ideas about literature in letters; there are many more, in early medieval China and later.<sup>29</sup> In western literary history, letters about literature are common as well, from ancient Greece and Rome to Dante and up through the centuries.<sup>30</sup> In what follows, I would like to draw on three examples from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in order to test their epistolarity: a fictional letter by Hugo von Hofmannsthal, and two family letters by John Keats and Gertrud Kolmar.

### *Second Point of Comparison; a Fictional Reply: Hofmannsthal’s “Letter of Lord Chandos”*

Hugo von Hofmannsthal (1874–1929) was sixteen when his poems took the literary circles of his home town Vienna by surprise. Although he enjoyed a growing reputation as a poet, he had virtually stopped writing poems by twenty-two, turning to drama and a wide variety of prose works, including critical essays. A letter of Hofmannsthal’s, published as “A Letter” (“Ein Brief”) in the Berlin newspaper *Der Tag* in October 1902, is a compelling document of an intellectual and literary crisis and came to be regarded as a major document of the emerging modernist movement. In addition to its tremendous relevance for literary criticism, Hofmannsthal’s letter has inspired a range of literary responses—another proof of this text’s continued momentousness.<sup>31</sup>

As far as personal letters go, Hugo von Hofmannsthal’s piece is exemplary. Figure 6 shows the beginning of the text, which comprises almost 4,000 words and is thus much longer than the Chinese texts I have quoted above.<sup>32</sup>



*Dies ist der Brief, den Philip Lord Chandos, jüngerer Sohn des Earl of Bath, an Francis Bacon, später Lord Verulam und Viscount St. Albans, schrieb, um sich bei diesem Freunde wegen des gänzlichen Verzichtes auf literarische Betätigung zu entschuldigen.*

Es ist gütig von Ihnen, mein hochverehrter Freund, mein zweijähriges Stillschweigen zu übersehen und so an mich zu schreiben. Es ist mehr als gütig, Ihrer Besorgnis um mich, Ihrer Befremdung über die geistige Starrheit, in der ich Ihnen zu versinken scheine, den Ausdruck der Leichtigkeit und des Scherzes zu geben, den nur große Menschen, die von der Gefährlichkeit des Lebens durchdrungen und dennoch nicht entmutigt sind, in ihrer Gewalt haben.

Sie schließen mit dem Aphorisma des Hippokrates: »*Qui gravi morbo correpti dolores non sentiunt, iis mens aegrotat*« und meinen, ich bedürfe der Medizin nicht nur, um mein Uebel zu bändigen, sondern noch mehr, um meinen Sinn für den Zustand meines Innern zu schärfen. Ich möchte Ihnen so antworten, wie Sie es um mich verdienen, möchte mich Ihnen ganz aufschließen, und weiß nicht, wie ich mich dazu nehmen soll. Kaum weiß ich, ob ich noch derselbe bin, an den Ihr kostbarer Brief sich wendet; bin denn ich's, der nun Sechszwanzigjährige, der mit neunzehn jenen »neuen Paris«, jenen »Traum der Daphne«, jenes »Epithalamium« hinschrieb, diese unter dem Prunk ihrer Worte hintaumelnden Schäferspiele, deren eine himmlische Königin und einige allzu nachsichtige Lords und Herren sich noch zu entsinnen gnädig genug sind? Und bin ich's wiederum, der mit dreiundzwanzig unter den steinernen Lauben des großen Platzes von Venedig in sich jenes Gefüge lateinischer Perioden fand, dessen geistiger Grundriß und Aufbau ihn im Innern mehr entzückte als die aus dem Meer auftauchenden Bauten des Palladio und Sansovin? Und konnte ich, wenn ich anders derselbe bin, alle Spuren und Narben dieser Ausgeburt meines angespanntesten Denkens so völlig aus meinem unbegreiflichen Inneren verlieren, daß mich in Ihrem Brief, der vor mir liegt, der Titel jenes kleinen Traktates fremd und kalt anstarrt, ja daß ich ihn nicht als ein geläufiges Bild zusammengefaßter Worte sogleich auffassen, sondern nur Wort für Wort verstehen konnte, als träten mir diese lateinischen Wörter, so verbunden, zum ersten Mal vors Auge? Allein ich bin es ja doch, und es ist Rhetorik in diesen Fragen, Rhetorik, die gut ist für Frauen oder für das Haus der Gemeinen, deren von unsrer Zeit so überschätzte Machtmittel aber nicht hinreichen, ins Innere der Dinge zu dringen.

Mein Innres aber muß ich Ihnen darlegen, eine Sonderbarkeit, eine Unart, wenn Sie wollen eine Krankheit meines Geistes, wenn Sie begreifen sollen, daß mich ein ebensolcher brückenloser Abgrund von den scheinbar vor mir liegenden literarischen Arbeiten trennt, als von denen, die hinter mir sind und die ich, so fremd sprechen sie mich an, mein Eigentum zu nennen zögere.

Ich weiß nicht, ob ich mehr die Eindringlichkeit Ihres Wohlwollens oder die unglaubliche Schärfe Ihres Gedächtnisses bewundern soll, wenn Sie mir die verschiedenen kleinen Pläne wieder hervorrufen, mit denen ich mich in den gemeinsamen Tagen schöner Begeisterung trug. Wirklich, ich wollte die ersten Regierungsjahre unseres verstorbenen glorreichen Souveräns, des achten Heinrich, darstellen! Die hinterlassenen Aufzeichnungen meines Großvaters, des Herzogs von Exeter, über seine Negotiationen mit Frankreich und Portugal gaben mir eine Art von Grundlage. Und aus dem Sallust floß in jenen glücklichen belebten Tagen wie durch nie verstopfte Röhren die Erkenntnis der Form in mich herüber, jener tiefen wahren inneren Form, die jenseits des Geheges der rhetorischen Kunststücke erst geahnt werden kann, die, von welcher man nicht mehr sagen kann, daß sie das Stoffliche anordne, denn sie durchdringt es, sie hebt es auf und schafft Dichtung und Wahrheit zugleich, ein Widerspiel ewiger Kräfte, ein Ding, herrlich wie Musik und Algebra. Dies war mein Lieblingsplan. Was ist der Mensch, daß er Pläne macht! ...

[ca. 1/6 of the text]

Figure 6: Hugo von Hofmannsthal, "A Letter"

Hofmannsthal not only created a fictional letter writer, "Philipp Lord Chandos," but also an fictional addressee, based on the historical figure of Francis Bacon, whom he equipped with personal features and to whose letter Lord Chandos now, after two years of silence, pretends to reply, setting the time at August 22, 1603. The addressee gains additional substance and credibility because the letter he is supposed to have sent makes occasional appearances in the "Letter of Lord Chandos," in the form of both references and quotations. Hofmannsthal was even more successful in creating the writer of this letter, his Lord Chandos: a twenty-six-year-old poet with his own extensive personal history, with a grandfather and an infant daughter with a proper name, with notable literary works, and with abandoned plans for future works. By fashioning a writer and an addressee along with a history of correspondence, Hofmannsthal provides an "epistolary fullness" that convincingly simulates a letter of friendship. This fullness is supported by another fictional player, an

anonymous editor who placed the letter in the *Der Tag* and provided its brief paratextual introduction.

Into this openly fictional letter Hofmannsthal wove elements that are clearly meant to appear autobiographical, among them both writers' precociousness and the fact that their daughters share a name. Chandos also expresses ideas that are important elsewhere in Hofmannsthal's oeuvre, most prominently the insufficiency of language and the difficulty in grasping the mutability of one's personality throughout one's life.<sup>33</sup> To complicate matters, Hofmannsthal himself suggested an interpretation in autobiographical terms, for instance in his *Ad me ipsum* (1916–28), a collection of notes about his earlier works, and in private letters announcing the publication of the "Letter of Lord Chandos"—sent to several correspondents together with the enclosed published letter.<sup>34</sup> We cannot assume the identity of author and narrator in any fictional text, but the persona of the letter writer in particular is a decidedly flexible entity, in *both* fictional and non-fictional epistolary writing, created by the writer depending on the addressee and the overall communicative situation. That Hofmannsthal has succeeded in merging his own persona with that of Chandos may be another indication of the longing he ascribes to Chandos in the letter, the longing to merge with certain mythological and literary figures, "to disappear in them and talk out of them with tongues."

The most famous passage of the letter is Chandos's confession that he has "lost completely the ability to think or speak of anything coherently"—paradoxically eloquent, as so much else written in the area of language skepticism.<sup>35</sup> This loss followed another loss, that of being able to conceive "the whole of existence as one great unit" where "the spiritual and physical worlds seemed to form no contrast"; Chandos described this lost naiveté as "a state of inflated arrogance." Despite the agony of feeling words crumbling in his "mouth like moldy fungi" and the fragmentation of his perception—"for me, everything disintegrated into parts, those parts again into parts"—Chandos recognizes that the loss of "the simplifying eye of habit" yielded something precious: previously unknown ecstatic, almost revelatory states, and an immense sympathy, triggered by animals, things, and ideas, by "the Present, the fullest, most exalted Present." He writes, "I experience in and around me a blissful, never-ending interplay, and among the objects playing against one another there is not one in which I cannot flow." Describing "these strange occurrences" he admits that he hardly knows whether to ascribe them "to the mind or the body," adding, that "the whole thing is a kind of feverish thinking, but thinking in a medium more immediate, more liquid, more glowing than words."

So why write fictional autobiography in the form of a fictional letter and not an essay about the loss of trust in the intelligibility and expressibility of the world and one's mind? The letter itself suggests that Hofmannsthal chose the epistolary form with good reason, because he lets Chandos express doubt that content can be expressed in *any* form, but that form (and thus genre) has a transformative effect. At the beginning of the letter, following the paratextual introduction, Chandos writes of "his realization of form"—"that deep, true, inner form which can be sensed only beyond the domain of rhetorical tricks: that form of which one can no longer say that it organizes subject-matter, for it penetrates it, dissolves it, creating at once both dream and reality, an interplay of eternal forces, something as marvelous as music or algebra."<sup>36</sup> In light of the particular personal crisis at the center of the letter, it would seem only logical that Hofmannsthal chose not to write an essay with its greater expectation of stringency and formal unity, but rather a letter—and a letter of response (as we will see directly)—as a more suitable medium to convey the idea of fragmentation and confusion. The letter form also permits Lord Chandos to write about episodes from his

everyday life that carry strong allegorical or metaphorical overtones. A pragmatic reason for choosing the letter form may have been that writing letters was thoroughly familiar to Hofmannsthal. Going by his surviving oeuvre alone, Hofmannsthal emerges as an uncommonly prolific correspondent: roughly 11,000 of his letters are extant; they are addressed to approximately 1,000 correspondents.<sup>37</sup> Several other fictional letters (as well as fictional dialogues) in Hofmannsthal's oeuvre also indicate that the form of the "Letter of Lord Chandos" was not a happenstance but that Hofmannsthal was drawn to a way of writing about critical matters that imitated and re-created types of everyday communication.<sup>38</sup>

Let us take a closer look at Hofmannsthal's creation of epistolarity. The usual epistolary frame is embedded into another framing device, the opening paragraph that establishes the epistolary character of the following text and thus ensures that the text be read as a letter. The letter's self-referentiality is evident as well: Chandos repeatedly brings up his friend's letter and his own process of writing (or keeping silent). The letter's most pronounced feature may be its strong dialogicity. Chandos's sustained references to his correspondent—"whose presence alone distinguishes the letter from other first-person forms," as Janet Altman reminds us—help to create a convincing epistolary situation and a history of Chandos's interrupted correspondence with Francis Bacon.<sup>39</sup>

Chandos's arguments throughout the letter are following cues of his own making, though, since they are taken from an entirely imaginary letter, whose existence we have to accept sight unseen. For instance, when Chandos quotes Bacon's letter in the second paragraph—by quoting a quotation from Hippocrates—he introduces the idea that he suffers from a malady of the mind, an idea which runs through the letter as a leitmotif. This conceit of "the letter of reply" is the most conspicuous rhetorical device of the "Letter of Lord Chandos." In pretending to respond to a letter that is withheld from the reader (whether such a letter ever existed or not) writers gain enormous freedom in the creation of their own texts. The imaginary letters they respond to provide an external system of reference and sanctions liberties that otherwise would elicit criticism, in particular sudden and apparently arbitrary changes of topic. What we observed with respect to Cao Pi's letter—the loose succession or juxtaposition of subjects and a relaxed train of thought—is thus potentially yet more pronounced in an imaginary letter of reply: writers can present their ideas in an even less stringent form and in a more personal fashion than a regular letter, not to mention an essay, would have allowed.

How powerful the autobiographical and literary potential of a letter in reply can be was demonstrated in China as early as around 100 BC by Sima Qian 司馬遷 (ca. 145 – ca. 86 BCE). In his magnificent letter in reply to Ren An 任安 (d. ca. 91 BCE), Sima Qian explains why he rather suffered to live with the shame of castration than choose to die by his own hand and leave his magnum opus, the *Records of the Historian* (Shi ji 史記), unfinished.<sup>40</sup> This letter, written at about the same time when Cicero elevated letter writing to an art form in the west, acquired the highest literary fame and developed paradigmatic power for centuries to come, "setting the pattern for more intimate and personal autobiographical writing" in China.<sup>41</sup> Chinese writers have made use of the literary conceit of the letter in reply in following centuries as well; the most famous example in fiction may be the female protagonist's letter in Yuan Zhen's 元稹 (779–831) novella *Story of Yingying* (Yingying zhuan 鶯鶯傳).<sup>42</sup>

Another indirect connection between Hofmannsthal's letter and ancient and early medieval Chinese letter writing lies in their common focus on the limitations of language and writing, as



mentioned above in the description of the typical Chinese epilogue in general and in Cao Pi's letter in particular. Given Hofmannsthal's interest in Chinese and Asian philosophy, this may well reflect not merely an indirect, coincidental connection, especially if we consider other vaguely "eastern" themes that the letter raises, for instance the recurring idea of a cosmic unity with all things and creatures.<sup>43</sup>

Despite its pronounced epistolarity, however, the "Letter of Lord Chandos" shows a different rhetorical pattern from those we have seen above, as the color treatment shows (Fig. 7).

*Dies ist der Brief, den Philip Lord Chandos, jüngerer Sohn des Earl of Bath, an Francis Bacon, später Lord Verulam und Viscount St. Albans, schrieb, um sich bei diesem Freunde wegen des gänzlichen Verzichtes auf literarische Betätigung zu entschuldigen.*

Es ist gütig von Ihnen, mein hochverehrter Freund, mein zweijähriges Stillschweigen zu übersehen und so an mich zu schreiben. Es ist mehr als gütig, Ihrer Besorgnis um mich, Ihrer Befremdung über die geistige Starrnis, in der ich Ihnen zu versinken scheine, den Ausdruck der Leichtigkeit und des Scherzes zu geben, den nur große Menschen, die von der Gefährlichkeit des Lebens durchdrungen und dennoch nicht entmutigt sind, in ihrer Gewalt haben.

Sie schließen mit dem Aphorisma des Hippokrates: »*Qui gravi morbo correpti dolores non sentiunt, iis mens aegrotat*« und meinen, ich bedürfe der Medizin nicht nur, um mein Uebel zu bändigen, sondern noch mehr, um meinen Sinn für den Zustand meines Innern zu schärfen. Ich möchte Ihnen so antworten, wie Sie es um mich verdienen, möchte mich Ihnen ganz aufschließen, und weiß nicht, wie ich mich dazu nehmen soll. Kaum weiß ich, ob ich noch derselbe bin, an den Ihr kostbarer Brief sich wendet; bin denn ich's, der nun Sechszwanzigjährige, der mit neunzehn jenen »neuen Paris«, jenen »Traum der Daphne«, jenes »Epithalamium« hinschrieb, diese unter dem Prunk ihrer Worte hintaumelnden Schäferspiele, deren eine himmlische Königin und einige allzu nachsichtige Lords und Herren sich noch zu entsinnen gnädig genug sind? Und bin ich's wiederum, der mit dreiundzwanzig unter den steinernen Lauben des großen Platzes von Venedig in sich jenes Gefüge lateinischer Perioden fand, dessen geistiger Grundriß und Aufbau ihn im Innern mehr entzückte als die aus dem Meer auftauchenden Bauten des Palladio und Sansovin? Und konnte ich, wenn ich anders derselbe bin, alle Spuren und Narben dieser Ausgubt meines angespanntesten Denkens so völlig aus meinem unbegreiflichen Inneren verlieren, daß mich in Ihrem Brief, der vor mir liegt, der Titel jenes kleinen Traktates fremd und kalt anstarrt, ja daß ich ihn nicht als ein geläufiges Bild zusammengefaßter Worte sogleich auffassen, sondern nur Wort für Wort verstehen konnte, als träten mir diese lateinischen Wörter, so verbunden, zum ersten Mal vors Auge? Allein ich bin es ja doch, und es ist Rhetorik in diesen Fragen, Rhetorik, die gut ist für Frauen oder für das Haus der Gemeinen, deren von unsrer Zeit so überschätzte Machtmittel aber nicht hinreichen, ins Innere der Dinge zu dringen.

Mein Innres aber muß ich Ihnen darlegen, eine Sonderbarkeit, eine Unart, wenn Sie wollen eine Krankheit meines Geistes, wenn Sie begreifen sollen, daß mich ein ebensolcher brückenloser Abgrund von den scheinbar vor mir liegenden literarischen Arbeiten trennt, als von denen, die hinter mir sind und die ich, so fremd sprechen sie mich an, mein Eigentum zu nennen zögere.

Ich weiß nicht, ob ich mehr die Eindringlichkeit Ihres Wohlwollens oder die unglaubliche Schärfe Ihres Gedächtnisses bewundern soll, wenn Sie mir die verschiedenen kleinen Pläne wieder hervorrufen, mit denen ich mich in den gemeinsamen Tagen schöner Begeisterung trug. Wirklich, ich wollte die ersten Regierungsjahre unseres verstorbenen glorreichen Souveräns, des achten Heinrich, darstellen! Die hinterlassenen Aufzeichnungen meines Großvaters, des Herzogs von Exeter, über seine Negotiationen mit Frankreich und Portugal gaben mir eine Art von Grundlage. Und aus dem Sallust floß in jenen glücklichen belebten Tagen wie durch nie verstopfte Röhren die Erkenntnis der Form in mich herüber, jener tiefen wahren inneren Form, die jenseits des Geheges der rhetorischen Kunststücke erst geahnt werden kann, die, von welcher man nicht mehr sagen kann, daß sie das Stoffliche anordne, denn sie durchdringt es, sie hebt es auf und schafft Dichtung und Wahrheit zugleich, ein Widerspiel ewiger Kräfte, ein Ding, herrlich wie Musik und Algebra. Dies war mein Lieblingsplan. Was ist der Mensch, daß er Pläne macht! ...

[ca. 1/6 of the text]

Figure 7: Hugo von Hofmannsthal, "A Letter"

Although Hofmannsthal's letter appears distinctly dappled if studied with this type of lens—references to the addressee and to the epistolary situation, marked in red, make up a considerable part of the text—the dapples appear in neater blocks than in Cao Pi's letter. It is tempting to speculate

that the orderliness and regularity of references to the correspondent and the epistolary situation could unintentionally reveal the fictionality of this letter: the fact that it was carefully constructed without an actual interlocutor or epistolary situation, but with a good, if not exactly perfect understanding of what it takes to write a decent personal letter. It is just as possible, of course, that this effect was calculated and meant to enhance the fictionality of the letter.

*Third Point of Comparison; a Family Letter: John Keats to His Brothers*

In letters written by John Keats (1795–1821) a much less orderly image of the back and forth between personal and literary reflections emerges. T. S. Eliot pointed to just that quality when he said, in a lecture about Keats and Shelley at Harvard in 1933, that Keats's letters "are what letters ought to be; the fine things come in unexpectedly, neither introduced nor shown out, but between trifle and trifle."<sup>44</sup> Keats, the Romantic poet whose brief life and poetic oeuvre have been the object of admiration and investigation for the last two hundred years, was a prolific letter writer, although his letters fill no more than two volumes.<sup>45</sup> His letters are not only mined for biographical data and information about the circumstances surrounding the composition of certain works, but have also been appreciated for their literary and epistolary qualities. To quote T. S. Eliot again, he called Keats's letters "certainly the most notable and the most important ever written by any English poet."<sup>46</sup> Lionel Trilling, in his introduction to a collection of Keats's selected letters, emphasized their unique character when he wrote that "even among the great artists Keats is perhaps the only one whose letters have an interest which is virtually equal to that of their writer's canon of created work."<sup>47</sup>

Several of the approximately 250 letters by Keats's hand are so-called "crossed letters," a technique that was meant to make the best use of a sheet of paper. One of these crossed letters is particularly interesting from a sinological perspective, because Keats crossed his letter with part of an early version of his poem "Lamia" (Fig. 8).<sup>48</sup> This poem has been discussed in connection with the Chinese *Legend of White Snake* (Baishe zhuan 白蛇傳). The roots of this narrative about a snake spirit in human form can be traced back to the ninth century, although it appears to have lain dormant until the seventeenth century, when it started to gain in popularity. Since then, the *Legend of White Snake* has been told in China and other East Asian cultures in a variety of narrative and dramatic forms.<sup>49</sup>



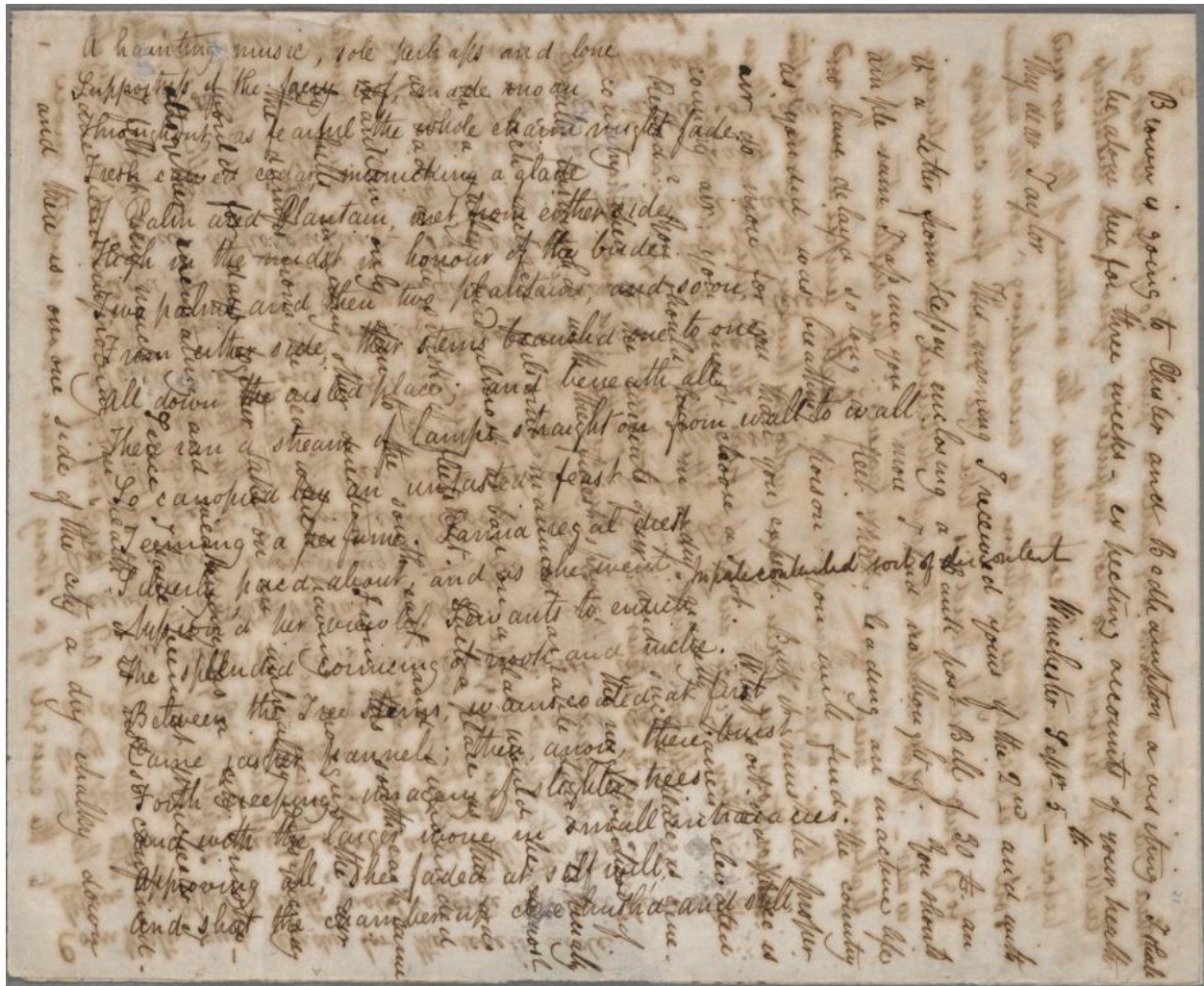
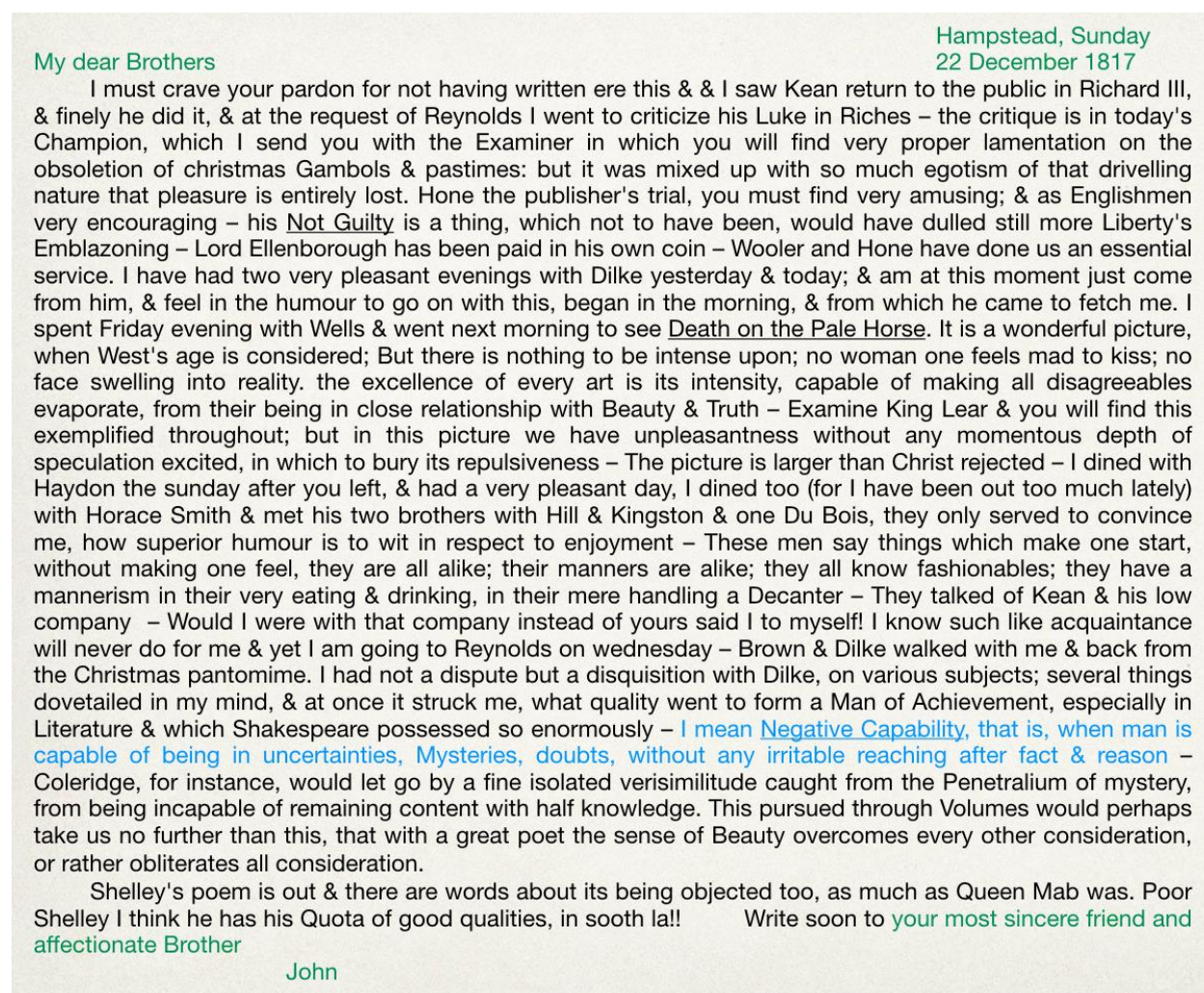


Figure 8: John Keats, Letter to John Taylor, September 5, 1819  
(MS Keats 1.63, Houghton Library, Harvard University)

The letter that serves as our third point of comparison is a family letter, written in late December of 1817 in London and addressed to Keats's younger brothers George (1797–1841) and Thomas (1799–1818), who had left for a visit to the seaside town of Teignmouth in Devon.<sup>50</sup> Unfortunately, the autograph of the letter has not survived, only a transcript in the hand of John Jeffrey (1817–1881), second husband of Keats's sister-in-law Georgiana (ca. 1797–1879). Since Jeffrey also transcribed letters that have survived in Keats's own hand, we know that Jeffrey was far from being a faithful copyist, so that it is quite unlikely that the letter as we have it now is an exact copy of the one that Keats wrote in late 1817.<sup>51</sup> This uncertainty has not done damage to the reception of the letter at all. On the contrary, the "Negative Capability" letter, as it is known today, became one of Keats's most celebrated letters, and might even rank first among those of his letters that were awarded a "title" by later readers and critics, such as the "Mansions of Many Apartments" letter or the "Vale of Soul-making" letter.<sup>52</sup>



The “Negative Capability” letter (Fig. 9) was written over several days and gives a vivid record of Keats’s busy social life during this “drear-nighted December,” to allude to the only poem that Keats wrote that month, as far as we know.<sup>53</sup> Within the letter, hidden among incidental chit-chat, are embedded casual critical reflections. They may not have been taken very seriously by George and Thomas Keats, but were literally “pursued through Volumes” by generations of later readers of Keats’s work. Two of these reflections stand out. While the first, provoked by a painting Keats had seen, is concerned with the essential quality of an artistic product—“the excellence of every art is its intensity, capable of making all disagreeables evaporate, from their being in close relation with Beauty & Truth”—the second observation, which gave the letter its title, turns to the preconditions of the artistic process. Thanks to the letter’s narrative, we know that Keats’s observation was triggered by a process, too.



Hampstead, Sunday  
22 December 1817

My dear Brothers

I must crave your pardon for not having written ere this & I saw Kean return to the public in Richard III, & finely he did it, & at the request of Reynolds I went to criticize his Luke in Riches – the critique is in today's Champion, which I send you with the Examiner in which you will find very proper lamentation on the obsolescence of Christmas Gambols & pastimes: but it was mixed up with so much egotism of that drivelling nature that pleasure is entirely lost. Hone the publisher's trial, you must find very amusing; & as Englishmen very encouraging – his *Not Guilty* is a thing, which not to have been, would have dulled still more Liberty's Emblazoning – Lord Ellenborough has been paid in his own coin – Wooler and Hone have done us an essential service. I have had two very pleasant evenings with Dilke yesterday & today; & am at this moment just come from him, & feel in the humour to go on with this, began in the morning, & from which he came to fetch me. I spent Friday evening with Wells & went next morning to see *Death on the Pale Horse*. It is a wonderful picture, when West's age is considered; But there is nothing to be intense upon; no woman one feels mad to kiss; no face swelling into reality. the excellence of every art is its intensity, capable of making all disagreeables evaporate, from their being in close relationship with Beauty & Truth – Examine King Lear & you will find this exemplified throughout; but in this picture we have unpleasantness without any momentous depth of speculation excited, in which to bury its repulsiveness – The picture is larger than Christ rejected – I dined with Haydon the Sunday after you left, & had a very pleasant day, I dined too (for I have been out too much lately) with Horace Smith & met his two brothers with Hill & Kingston & one Du Bois, they only served to convince me, how superior humour is to wit in respect to enjoyment – These men say things which make one start, without making one feel, they are all alike; their manners are alike; they all know fashionables; they have a mannerism in their very eating & drinking, in their mere handling a Decanter – They talked of Kean & his low company – Would I were with that company instead of yours said I to myself! I know such like acquaintance will never do for me & yet I am going to Reynolds on Wednesday – Brown & Dilke walked with me & back from the Christmas pantomime. I had not a dispute but a disquisition with Dilke, on various subjects; several things dovetailed in my mind, & at once it struck me, what quality went to form a Man of Achievement, especially in Literature & which Shakespeare possessed so enormously – *I mean Negative Capability, that is, when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason* – Coleridge, for instance, would let go by a fine isolated verisimilitude caught from the Penetrarium of mystery, from being incapable of remaining content with half knowledge. This pursued through Volumes would perhaps take us no further than this, that with a great poet the sense of Beauty overcomes every other consideration, or rather obliterates all consideration.

Shelley's poem is out & there are words about its being objected too, as much as Queen Mab was. Poor Shelley I think he has his Quota of good qualities, in sooth la!! Write soon to *your most sincere friend and affectionate Brother*

John

Figure 9: Letter to George and Thomas Keats, December 21–27, 1817

Although it is difficult to determine a first step in the chain of events that led to the formulation of Negative Capability as a decisive precondition of creativity, the Drury Lane Christmas pantomime



Keats attended with his friends Charles Brown (1787–1842) and Charles Dilke (1789–1864) probably played an important role and may even have been among “the various subjects” of Keats’s “disquisition” with Dilke on the way back from the performance, one of the “several things [that] dovetailed in [his] mind.”<sup>54</sup> We thus see the idea of Negative Capability emerging from a succession of different types of communicative situations: the pantomime performance leading to a lively conversation with friends, which was then, probably after further reflection, added to a letter that had been in progress for a few days. Keats described Negative Capability as “when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason,” “of remaining content with half knowledge,” a characterization that has been interpreted in different and sometimes contradictory ways.<sup>55</sup>

Figure 10 visualizes the intermingling of elements—dedicated to dialogicity and self-referentiality (marked again in red and green)—and reflections on art and literature (left in black), resulting in an image that is familiar from Cao Pi’s letter to Wu Zhi discussed earlier.

Hampstead, Sunday  
22 December 1817

My dear Brothers

I must crave your pardon for not having written ere this & I saw Kean return to the public in Richard III, & finely he did it, & at the request of Reynolds I went to criticize his Luke in Riches – the critique is in today's Champion, which I send you with the Examiner in which you will find very proper lamentation on the obsolescence of Christmas Gambols & pastimes: but it was mixed up with so much egotism of that drivelling nature that pleasure is entirely lost. Hone the publisher's trial, you must find very amusing; & as Englishmen very encouraging – his Not Guilty is a thing, which not to have been, would have dulled still more Liberty's Emblazoning – Lord Ellenborough has been paid in his own coin – Wooler and Hone have done us an essential service. I have had two very pleasant evenings with Dilke yesterday & today; & am at this moment just come from him, & feel in the humour to go on with this, began in the morning, & from which he came to fetch me. I spent Friday evening with Wells & went next morning to see Death on the Pale Horse. It is a wonderful picture, when West's age is considered; But there is nothing to be intense upon; no woman one feels mad to kiss; no face swelling into reality. the excellence of every art is its intensity, capable of making all disagreeables evaporate, from their being in close relationship with Beauty & Truth – Examine King Lear & you will find this exemplified throughout; but in this picture we have unpleasantness without any momentous depth of speculation excited, in which to bury its repulsiveness – The picture is larger than Christ rejected – I dined with Haydon the Sunday after you left, & had a very pleasant day, I dined too (for I have been out too much lately) with Horace Smith & met his two brothers with Hill & Kingston & one Du Bois, they only served to convince me, how superior humour is to wit in respect to enjoyment – These men say things which make one start, without making one feel, they are all alike; their manners are alike; they all know fashionables; they have a mannerism in their very eating & drinking, in their mere handling a Decanter – They talked of Kean & his low company – Would I were with that company instead of yours said I to myself! I know such like acquaintance will never do for me & yet I am going to Reynolds on Wednesday – Brown & Dilke walked with me & back from the Christmas pantomime. I had not a dispute but a disquisition with Dilke, on various subjects; several things dovetailed in my mind, & at once it struck me, what quality went to form a Man of Achievement, especially in Literature & which Shakespeare possessed so enormously – I mean Negative Capability, that is, when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason – Coleridge, for instance, would let go by a fine isolated verisimilitude caught from the Penetratium of mystery, from being incapable of remaining content with half knowledge. This pursued through Volumes would perhaps take us no further than this, that with a great poet the sense of Beauty overcomes every other consideration, or rather obliterates all consideration.

Shelley's poem is out & there are words about its being objected too, as much as Queen Mab was. Poor Shelley I think he has his Quota of good qualities, in sooth la!! Write soon to your most sincere friend and affectionate Brother

John

Figure 10: Letter to George and Thomas Keats, December 21–27, 1817

It is important to note, though, that Keats's surviving letters are quite diverse in character. The dappled type is most common in letters to family and friends, where everyday observations are frequently interspersed with literary reflections and excerpts from poems Keats was writing at the time. But there are also letters—usually written to literary figures rather than family members or friends—that are neat essays on literary matters framed by some form of hello, goodbye, and in that way similar to Cao Zhi's "cover letter" to Yang Xiu. A good example of a more essayistic letter by Keats is the so-called "Chameleon Poet" letter addressed to Richard Woodhouse (1788–1834).<sup>56</sup>

The casual and partly cursory narration of the "Negative Capability" letter—skipping many of the day-to-day activities of the week when it was written—and its easy movement from "trifle" to "fine thing" suggests that Keats did not write with the expectation of seeing this letter published, although he may well have assumed that his letters would be saved, copied, or forwarded, as was the case for many letters written at the time. It is unlikely that Keats wrote in letter form because he believed that an essay would have been less effective in communicating his views, but rather because he longed to connect with his absent brothers and share his experiences and ideas with them, and a letter was the only means to do so.

*Fourth Point of Comparison; a Family Letter Again: Gertrud Kolmar to Her Sister*

The letters I have discussed so far enjoy major, even canonical standing in their respective fields, and have each received immense scholarly attention practically since the time they were written. That the same is not true for the letters of the German-Jewish poet Gertrud Chodziesner, better known by her pen-name Gertrud Kolmar (1894–1943?), has a number of reasons. One of them overshadows all others: Gertrud Kolmar's persecution and enforced silence during the Third Reich and her untimely and violent death in the Holocaust. Gender certainly plays a role too: women writers have rarely achieved the fame of their male counterparts, and even when critics are enthusiastic, as they have been about Kolmar's poems, these works are usually described in the limiting terms of "women's poetry." Another reason for Kolmar's relative obscurity may have been her personal reticence and the resulting detachment from the literary scene of her day. Kolmar may not yet be as well-known as the male writers I have discussed above, but as both a towering poet, whose eminence was already recognized during her lifetime, and as a letter writer of the first rank she undoubtedly deserves to be mentioned in the same breath as the Cao brothers, Hofmannsthal, and Keats.

Kolmar, who started writing as a child, published her first book of poetry in 1917, followed by two more volumes of poetry, published in 1934 and 1938, as well as several writings in other genres.<sup>57</sup> Much of her oeuvre has meanwhile been translated into English.<sup>58</sup> Her work has long been obscure, but it seems to be gaining in appreciation. The bulk of Kolmar's approximately one-hundred and thirty letters are addressed to her youngest sister, Hilde Wenzel (1905–1972). A handful of letters to Kolmar's famous cousin, Walter Benjamin (1892–1940), and other luminaries of her time have survived as well.<sup>59</sup> With a few exceptions, Kolmar's letters to her sister were written after Hilde, together with her young daughter Sabine (born in 1933), had escaped to Switzerland in 1938.<sup>60</sup> Kolmar wrote every one of her letters to Hilde knowing that they, as letters sent abroad, were subject to postal censorship and would very likely be read by hostile official eyes before they

would reach their addressee.<sup>61</sup> Under these conditions, the inevitable, innocuous gaps in a letter's narrative that we have mentioned above in connection with Keats's "Negative Capability" letter assume a very different meaning. The things Kolmar does not write about—especially the horrific effects that the increasing anti-Jewish persecution must have had on herself, her father, and society as a whole—lend her letters an ominous character that is often at odds with the dignity, composure, and occasionally even cheerfulness (especially in the parts addressed to her beloved niece) on the surface of the text. Reading Kolmar's affectionate letters to her sister in light of what would prove to be their irrevocable separation, and Kolmar's eventual deportation and death in a concentration camp, is a disturbing and yet illuminating experience.

The context of postal censorship that made writing about much of daily life off limits for Kolmar partly explains why her work as a poet plays such an important role in the letters to her sister. Another reason must have been that Kolmar could no longer publish after the November pogroms in Germany in 1938 and lost every opportunity for public exchange of her work. Under these conditions, correspondence became the only form of communication on matters of poetry and was probably also one of the few remaining outlets for Kolmar's literary creativity. The letters to her sister Hilde include not only autobiographical reflections on her development as a poet and on her earlier works, but also tales written for her niece Sabine ("Püppi"), especially after the girl had started school and began to read and write herself.

The example I would like to introduce here is a letter that Kolmar wrote to Hilde on August 12, 1940.<sup>62</sup> The letter (Fig. 11) starts with a reference to another letter to Hilde, written the day before but not yet sent. In this earlier letter Kolmar had expressed regret that she would have to be brief because she had just written a long letter to a young poet.<sup>63</sup> Both letters to Hilde appear to have been sent together on the 13th, together with two postscripts, also written on the 13th, one by Kolmar and the other by her father.<sup>64</sup> This postal complexity is not unusual: many of Kolmar's letters carry postscripts by her father (although she sometimes also mentions that she is not sharing every one of her own or of Hilde's letters with him) or passages addressed to her niece. Her letters also frequently mention or quote other correspondence, and thus show how important this form of epistolary connection was for a family that had been scattered across the world.



D. 12.VIII.40.

Liebe Hilde,

Nun ist der Brief wider Erwarten doch noch hiergeblieben, und ich kann mich also etwas mehr »ausbreiten«, wie ich's gewollt. Freilich fällt einem das Schreiben leichter, wenn man vor seinem leiblichen oder geistigen Auge einen Brief des anderen liegen hat – wie ein Knäuel, dessen Faden man an sich zieht, um nun drauf los zu stricken. Solch ein Strickknäuel hab' ich heute nicht von Dir; aber schließlich geht es auch so; ich muß mir mein Garn eben selbst verschaffen. Wollen wir mit dem Lesestoff anfangen? Was hab' ich zuletzt gelesen? Seit geraumer Zeit ausschließlich das umfangreiche Lavaterbuch von Mary Sloman-L. Lavater-Sloman, fast jeden Abend im Bett 1-2 Kapitel – das war gegen meine Gewohnheit; aber tagsüber kam ich niemals dazu. Das sehr anregende Werk, in dem eine Fülle von Arbeit steckt, hätte verdient, mit größerer Muße und ausgeruhterem Kopfe studiert zu werden, als ich sie mitbrachte, doch hab ich geliehene Bücher immer bald wiedergeben mögen, selbst wenn mir, wie hier, ein langes Behalten ausdrücklich gestattet ward. Und darum wollt' ich das Lesen nicht auf gelegeneren Zeit verschieben; diese Zeit wäre wohl erst wer weiß wann gekommen; denn die Bäume, Püppis gemalte Bäume, fingen inzwischen an, in meiner Phantasie Wurzeln auszuschlagen, und sobald ich in Bezug auf das Dichten »Selbstversorger« bin, muß ich, wie billig, auf die dichterischen Erzeugnisse anderer Hersteller verzichten. Ich schrieb wohl schon, daß ich die Bäume auf eine von mir geschaffene Insel, die Arlatinsel im Indischen Ocean (1743 von dem gleichfalls von mir geschaffenen französischen Seefahrer Arlat du Moutier entdeckt), versetzt hatte; inzwischen ist aber die Insel, nachdem ich sie mit allen möglichen Tieren und Pflanzen belebt, wieder im Meer versunken. Nur die Bäume hab' ich gerettet und bin dabei, mich nach einem neuen Standort für die umzusehen. Zur Zeit fahre ich zwischen der Landschaft um Ebermergen (Nördlingen, Donauwörth) und der Landschaft um Bad Pyrmont (Höxter, Hameln) hin und her; vielleicht vermenge ich beide Gegenden in einer künftigen Erzählung. Wollen sehen. Ich bin ein bißchen gespannt, was wird, fast so als wäre ich an dem Entstehen des Neuen gar nicht beteiligt. Und es ist ja auch etwas, was »über einen kommt« ... Gern wüßt' ich (ich schrieb Dir's im letzten Brief) ein wenig mehr über Deine »schriftstellerische Tätigkeit«, von der Du mir nur andeutungsweise erzähltest.

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Figure 11: Letter to Hilde Wenzel, August 12, 1940

Kolmar, alluding to the regret mentioned the day before, announces that this will be a letter in which she can "spread" herself out a little more, as she had intended. However, she does not turn to news right away but first dwells on her situation: having to write without the letter from her sister that she had expected. She compares the letter from the other person to "a ball of yarn from which one pulls the thread to start knitting along" and concedes that "such a ball of yarn I don't have from you today, but I'll make do without." This exemplary proem shows both dialogicity and self-referentiality, and it does so in an original and poetic form—Kolmar's image of the ball of yarn exquisitely combines literary connotations of Ariadne's thread with the lowly sphere of female domesticity that Kolmar and her sister had shared in the past. Leaving the proem behind, Kolmar continues to address her sister, asking "shall we start with the reading material?" The following passage focuses less on the content of the book she had been studying than on how

difficult it is to find time to read, and the “clearer, rested head” the book would have deserved. She also mentions that she “didn’t want to put off reading it to a more convenient time,” and adds, apparently in passing, “such a time will come who knows when.” At the time when this letter was written, almost a year into the war, the situation for Jews in Germany had already become very dangerous.<sup>65</sup>

The ominous implications of her last remark are immediately defused by the following passage. Of remarkably poetic quality, it works both on the level of a fantastic story, possibly meant to be told to her niece, and on a metaphorical level. Turning to a picture by her niece, Kolmar describes how “Püppi’s painted trees meanwhile have begun to bloom in my imagination.” She mentions in passing that she cannot read other people’s poetry when she is in the process of writing herself, and goes on to describe the imaginary island where she had planted her niece’s trees and how this place has “sunk back into the sea” with all the creatures she had invented for it. “All I saved were the trees, and I’m just now in search of a new place in which to plant”—another aside that may have been intended to convey a deeper meaning. Kolmar then mentions another facet of her poetic process: “I’m curious how it will all turn out, almost as if I had no part in this new creation myself. After all, it is something that ‘comes over’ a person....”<sup>66</sup> This last remark, rather than setting Kolmar up as special and creating a distance between herself and her addressee, segues into a question about her sister’s recent writings.

The last third of the letter is dedicated to editorial matters: Kolmar asks her sister to correct a typographical error in the printed version of one of the poems in her last poetic cycle *Worlds* (*Welten*).<sup>67</sup> She writes, “otherwise, there will be for a hundred years to come a dispute among scholars whether the place cited commands the authority of the ‘Swiss manuscript’ or of the existing fragments of the ‘Berlin transcription.’ There is a poem by Fontane about which something like this is going on today.” Notwithstanding the slightly ironic flavor of this passage, we are in no doubt that Kolmar is absolutely serious about her poetic legacy. She was fully aware of her own eminence in the history of German poetry, an awareness that fortunately was shared by members of her family who helped to preserve Kolmar’s manuscripts, especially Hilde and her husband Peter Wenzel (1906–1961) despite their divorce in 1942.

The epilogue of the letter is particularly interesting because Kolmar, turning to her sister again, offers an apology for “the exclusive ‘shop talk’ of this letter”—although it is quite obvious that it was far from being exclusive, as the following visualization of the intermingling of the epistolary elements of the letter (in red) with passages on literary matters (in black) shows (Fig. 12):



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Figure 12: Letter to Hilde Wenzel, August 12, 1940

This is not the only letter in which Kolmar apologizes to her sister for “shop talk.” She also often includes comments on letter writing itself and on the expectations she assumes her addressee to hold—citing, for instance, a friend who once reproached her “for not writing letters but treatises, essays.”<sup>68</sup> Overall, Kolmar appears to be deeply concerned with balancing different epistolary needs, her own and those of her addressees. Explaining this simply in terms of gender performance, that is, as self-effacing and overly attentive to others, would be reductive. An important reason for Kolmar’s balanced and controlled epistolary voice is that she clearly saw her letters as writings that would contribute to her legacy, or, as Monika Shafi suggests, as parts of an “epistolary autobiography.”<sup>69</sup> The superficial similarity between Kolmar’s family letters and those of Keats—both writing to siblings they missed and sharing their quotidian life along with intellectual and poetic meditations—turns out to be untenable. It is difficult to imagine a greater contrast between the easy immediacy of Keats’s letters, probably rooted in a profound trust in the medium, and

Kolmar's deliberations in the face of censorship, isolation, persecution, and, at certain point towards the end of her correspondence, probably also the expectation of her own death. How much it must have cost Gertrud Kolmar under these conditions to achieve the epistolary luminosity of her letters is hard to imagine.

*Conclusion: In Praise of the Epistolary Mode*

The five texts whose epistolarity I have probed present five different models of writing about literature in letter form: the family letter that casually expresses thoughts on art and literature, apparently without ulterior motives regarding its wider dissemination (Keats); the family letter that appears to have been written as part of the writer's poetic legacy (Kolmar); the carefully crafted letter to a distant friend about matters of criticism that was obviously written with a larger audience in mind (Cao Pi); the essay on literary criticism, thinly disguised as a letter to a friend and meant to frame its writer's collected poems (Cao Zhi); and the openly fictional letter about a fictional letter writer's intellectual and creative crisis, published in a newspaper but convincingly fashioned as a response to a letter from friend (Hofmannsthal). Four of these letters show an impressive mastery of the epistolary mode, and even the fifth, Cao Zhi's "cover letter," reflects a carefully considered choice of genre despite its weak epistolarity. With one exception, the letter by Gertrud Kolmar, every one of these letters has been of foremost critical relevance in their respective cultural contexts. It also bears mentioning again that these letters are by no means exceptional; if I did not extend the frame of reference here, it is certainly not because of a lack of letters of comparable significance in other periods and cultures.

From the perspective of epistolary studies it is quite remarkable that the fame of these texts rests much more on what they have to say about literary criticism and aesthetics than on the fact that they are letters. Although it is a commonplace that genre shapes the reception of a text or any other work of art, this does not necessarily translate into a general genre awareness. Letters are often relegated to an ancillary role and treated merely as sources: they are mined for neat quotations, biographical data, or information about the background of an author's works with little consideration of the epistolary origins (or epistolary pretenses) in which this information is embedded. In order to grasp the potential of a text fully, though, we need to take its genre into account. In the case of letters this means that we need to acknowledge that these are texts that were once part of a correspondence, or that they, due to an authorial decision, were written in epistolary form and were meant to be read as letters. Recognizing their epistolary character and incorporating it in our interpretations may entail elements of conjecture, as with any other genre reading, but bearing this condition in mind, the interpretative gain can be considerable.

Let us return to the question about the particular potential of letters in the writing of literary criticism and recapitulate the answers that emerged in this review of the one essay and the five letters discussed. Letters perform as well as essays when it comes to discussion of literary or critical topics, but they also have distinct advantages over essays. Good letter writers can harness epistolarity toward their rhetorical ends. The effective performance of dialogicity and reciprocity—which relies on the inscribed addressee as much as on the inscribed writer—enlivens and strengthens a letter's arguments and helps to increase its appeal to readers, who often respond by feeling drawn into an intimate personal relationship.<sup>70</sup> The effective performance of a letter's self-



referentiality, on the other hand, can make an argument more convincing by rooting it in the tangible, concrete lifeworld, whether actual or fictional, of the correspondents; this too can help to entice readers to join a conversation they might otherwise avoid. The downside of these two strengths (and the only possible rhetorical disadvantage of a letter) is that the wisdom a letter puts forward might come across as subjective and incidental. This possibility has not deterred writers throughout history and across cultures to express their critical ideas in letter form, and they have found eager and receptive audiences who might easily have turned away had these ideas instead been “pursued through Volumes.”

## NOTES

I presented earlier versions of this paper at the 222nd Annual Meeting of the American Oriental Society in Boston (2012), in the *China Colloquia Series* of the University of California Berkeley (2012), and at the 10th Annual Chinese Medieval Studies Workshop at Rutgers University (2014). I am deeply grateful for the valuable feedback I received on these occasions, especially from Meow Hui Goh, Wendy Swartz, and Xiaofei Tian. I would also like to thank Jeffrey N. Cox, R. Joe Cutter, Jeffrey A. Grossman, and Jutta Müller-Tamm, who were so kind to read and comment on drafts of this article and thus helped me to improve it.

<sup>1</sup> Stephen Halliwell, *The Poetics of Aristotle: Translation and Commentary* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 33; Erich Trunz and Hans Joachim Schrimpf, eds., *Noten und Abhandlungen zu Besserem Verständnis des West-östlichen Divans* (1816/18), in *Goethes Werke: Hamburger Ausgabe in 14 Bänden*, gen. ed. Erich Trunz (München: Beck, 1981), 2:187–88.

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, John Frow, *Genre*, 2nd edn. (London: Routledge, 2015).

<sup>3</sup> Anis S. Bawarshi and Mary Jo Reiff, *Genre: An Introduction to History, Theory, Research, and Pedagogy* (West Lafayette, IN: Parlor, 2010), 3.

<sup>4</sup> My reading of the Chinese text of this essay is based on *Wen xuan* 文選, comp. Xiao Tong 蕭統 (501–31) (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 1986), 52.2270–73. Studies and translations include Donald Holzman, “Literary Criticism in China in the Early Third Century A.D.,” *Asiatische Studien* 28.2 (1974): 128–31; Wong Siu-kit, *Early Chinese Literary Criticism* (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing, 1983), 19–25; Stephen Owen, *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 57–72; R. Joe Cutter, “To the Manner Born? Nature and Nurture in Early Medieval Chinese Literary Thought,” in *Culture and Power in the Reconstitution of the Chinese Realm, 200–600*, ed. Scott Pearce et al. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 53–71. My translations from this text are especially indebted to the translation by Xiaofei Tian in *Hawai’i Reader in Traditional Chinese Culture*, ed. Victor H. Mair et al. (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2005), 231–33.

<sup>5</sup> The Seven Masters of the Jian’an period (Jian’an qī zǐ 建安七子) are Xu Gan 徐幹 (170–217), Ying Yang 應瑒 (?–217), Chen Lin 陳琳 (d. 217), Liu Zhen 劉楨 (?–217), Ruan Yu 阮瑀 (d. 212), Wang Can 王粲 (177–217), and Kong Rong 孔融 (153–208). For an excellent study of the Seven Masters as a group, see Xiaofei Tian, *The Halberd at Red Cliff: Jian’an and the Three Kingdoms* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018), especially chapters 1 and 2.

<sup>6</sup> On the position of letters in Cao Pi’s genre catalogue see also my *Letters and Epistolary Culture in Early Medieval China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2013), 44–47.

<sup>7</sup> This brings to mind the Greek demand for clarity: see Heikki Koskeniemi, *Studien zur Idee und Phraseologie des griechischen Briefes bis 400 n.Chr.* (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1956), 27–28.

<sup>8</sup> Horst Belke mentions the “subjective, casually improvising, dialogic form of the letter” as being close to the essay in *Literarische Gebrauchsformen* (Düsseldorf: Bertelsmann, 1973), 147. Wolfgang G. Müller points out similarities between the *Essais* of Michel de Montaigne (1533–92) and personal letters of the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, especially because they shared a “radical self-expression and disclosure of their innermost feelings” based on a “plain

and unaffected style.” See Müller, “Der Brief als Spiegel der Seele: Zur Geschichte eines Topos der Epistolartheorie von der Antike bis Samuel Richardson,” *Antike und Abendland* 26 (1980): 138 and 143–44 n. 40.

<sup>9</sup> “You yu Wu Zhi shu” 又與吳質書, *Wen xuan* 42.1896–99. Previous studies and translations of this letter include Ronald C. Miao, “Literary Criticism at the End of the Eastern Han,” *Literature East and West* 16 (1972): 1030–32; Holzman, “Literary Criticism,” 122–25; Burton Watson, “Cao Pi: Two Letters to Wu Zhi, Magistrate of Zhao,” *Renditions* 41–42 (1994): 9–11.

<sup>10</sup> Violi, “Letters,” in *Discourse and Literature*, ed. Teun A. van Dijk (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1985), 160.

<sup>11</sup> Guillén, “Notes towards the Study of the Renaissance Letter,” in *Renaissance Genres: Essays on Theory, History, and Interpretation*, ed. Barbara Kiefer Lewalski (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 80.

<sup>12</sup> Guillén, “Renaissance Letter,” 86. For a good study of epistolarity from the Chinese perspective, see Zhao Xian-zhang 趙憲章, “Lun minjian shuxin ji qi duihua yishu” 論民間書信及其對話藝術, *Qinghua daxue xuebao* 96.4 (2008): 475–509.

<sup>13</sup> Ancient and early medieval Chinese letters do not usually feature an *adscriptio*, that is, a designation of the recipient, in the prescript. Starting in the seventh century, the epistolary format changes to include an *adscriptio* in the prescript.

<sup>14</sup> Guillén, “Renaissance Letter,” 98.

<sup>15</sup> For a more detailed description of early medieval epistolary structures and phrases, see my *Letters and Epistolary Culture*, 75–116.

<sup>16</sup> Cao Pi interprets the line “自我不見於今三年” in the ode “Eastern Mountain” (*Mao shi* 156) as saying, “since we have not seen each other, it has now been three years.” This interpretation is not universally shared; see, for example, James Legge, trans., *The Chinese Classics* (London: Oxford University Press, 1861–72; repr. Taipei: SMC Publishing, 1994), 4:237.

<sup>17</sup> See also my *Letters and Epistolary Culture*, 134–38.

<sup>18</sup> The phrase “was always brilliant” is used in the *Analekts* to describe exuberant literary excellence that needs to be curtailed; *Lunyu* 5.22 (斐然成章，不知所以裁之).

<sup>19</sup> Cao Pi alludes to the phrase “the orphan sobs and rubs his tears” 孤子吟而捫淚兮 in the poem “Grieving at the Eddying Wind” (*Bei hui feng* 悲回風) in the collection *Songs of the South* (*Chu ci* 楚辭), trans. David Hawkes, *The Songs of the South: An Ancient Chinese Anthology of Poems by Qu Yuan and Other Poets* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1985), 181.

<sup>20</sup> An allusion to the couplet “if you don’t take advantage of your youth / you will feel sorrow when you are old” 少壯不努力，老大乃傷悲 in the anonymous “Long Song Ballad” (*Changge xing* 長歌行), *Wen xuan* 27.1279–80.

<sup>21</sup> A similar sentiment, similarly phrased, is expressed in the *Zhuangzi*, “the years cannot be held off; time cannot be stopped” 年不可舉，時不可止; *Zhuangzi jishi* 莊子集釋, comp. Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩 (1844–1896) and Wang Xiaoyu 王孝魚 (1900–1981) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1995), 17.585; trans. Burton Watson, *The Complete Works of Zhuangzi* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 132.

<sup>22</sup> This is an allusion to the couplet “when days are short you are anguished by long nights / why don’t you keep on wandering, a candle in hand” 晝短苦夜長，何不秉燭遊 in the fifteenth of the “Nineteen Old Poems” (*Gu shi shijiu shou* 古詩十九首), *Wen xuan* 29.1349).

<sup>23</sup> Cao Zhi, “Yu Yang Dezu shu” 與楊德祖書, *Wen xuan* 42.1901–05. Translations and studies include Holzman, “Literary Criticism,” 116–19; Miao, “Literary Criticism,” 1028–30; Wong, *Early Chinese Literary Criticism*, 27–37; Richard M. W. Ho, “Cao Zhi: Letter to Yang Dezu,” *Renditions* 41–42 (1994): 12–14. See also R. Joe Cutter, “Letters and Memorials in the Early Third Century: The Case of Cao Zhi,” in *A History of Chinese Letters and Epistolary Culture*, ed. Antje Richter (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 307–26.

<sup>24</sup> The image of the soaring eagle alludes to a phrase in *Mao shi* 236 (*Da ming* 大明); trans. Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, 4: 436 (時維鷹揚).

<sup>25</sup> See also Qian Zhongshu’s 錢鍾書 analysis of the topic “The Writer as Critic” in *Guanzhui bian* 管錐編 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), 3:1050–54, trans. Ronald C. Egan, *Limited Views: Essays on Ideas and Letters by Qian Zhongshu* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 1998), 61–66.

<sup>26</sup> 侍鮑子之知我. This fragment of Zhang Heng’s letter survives in the *Wen xuan* commentary; see *Wen xuan* 42.1904.

<sup>27</sup> *Mao shi* 65 (*Shu li* 黍離); trans. Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, 4:110–11 ([不]知我者).

<sup>28</sup> See, for example, Wolfgang G. Müller, “Der Brief,” in *Prosakunst ohne Erzählen: Die Gattungen der nicht-fiktionalen Kunstprosa*, ed. Klaus Weissenberger (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1985), 79–80. Gertrud Kolmar was also quite

explicit about the inappropriateness of ulterior motives in a family letter, which in her case meant writing about a certain topic, such as language or literature, in the way of an essay or a disquisition.

<sup>29</sup> Well known early medieval Chinese letters about literature include Cao Pi's "Letter to Wang Lang (d. 228)" (Yu Wang Lang shu 與王朗書); Yang Xiu's "Letter in reply to Cao Zhi" (Da Linzi hou jian 答臨淄侯牋); Lu Jue's 陸厥 (472–99) "Letter to Shen Yue (441–513)" (Yu Shen Yue shu 與沈約書), Xiao Tong's "Letter in reply to Xiao Gang 蕭綱 (503–551)" (Da Jin'an wang shu 答晉安王書); Xiao Gang's "Letter to Xiao Yi 蕭繹 (508–554)" (Yu Xiangdong wang shu 與湘東王書).

<sup>30</sup> Ancient Greek examples by authors such as Philostratos of Lemnos (born ca. 190) or Gregory of Nazianzus (ca. 329–90) are quoted in Koskenniemi, *Studien zur Idee*, 20. A famous Roman example would be Horace's (65–8 BC) *Ars Poetica* (ca. 18 BC), a guide to young poets that is also known as *Epistula ad Pisones* (Letters to Piso). Dante Alighieri's (1265–1321) letter to Can Grande della Scala deals with his *Divine Comedy*.

<sup>31</sup> The best known example may be another letter to "Francis Bacon," written by "Lady Elizabeth Chandos," the "wife" of Hofmannsthal's "Lord Chandos." For a collection of more than thirty letters in response to the "Lord Chandos Letter," written on the occasion of the centennial of the text, see Roland Spahr et al., ed., "*Lieber Lord Chandos*": *Antworten auf einen Brief* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 2002).

<sup>32</sup> Hugo von Hofmannsthal, *Gesammelte Werke in zehn Einzelbänden: Erzählungen, Erfundene Gespräche und Briefe, Reisen*, ed. Bernd Schoeller (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1979), 461–72. The Austrian National Library (Vienna) has made a manuscript of the text digitally available at <http://data.onb.ac.at/rep/1002FE77>. Research on Hofmannsthal is thriving; see the online bibliography of the Hofmannsthal Society at <http://hofmannsthal.bibliographie.de>.

<sup>33</sup> An example is Hofmannsthal's 1894 poem "Über Vergänglichkeit" ("On Transitoriness"), translated as "On Mutability" by J. D. McClatchy, ed., *The Whole Difference: Selected Writings of Hugo von Hofmannsthal* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 26–27.

<sup>34</sup> Hofmannsthal, *Gesammelte Werke in zehn Einzelbänden: Reden und Aufsätze III (1925–1929), Aufzeichnungen*, ed. Bernd Schoeller (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1980), 599–627; Jörg Schuster, *Kunstleben: Zur Kulturpoetik des Briefs um 1900—Korrespondenzen Hugo von Hofmannsthal und Rainer Maria Rilkes* (Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink, 2014), 149–50.

<sup>35</sup> This is an observation that seems to have become almost a topos in research on the "Letter of Lord Chandos"; see the collection of references in Schuster, *Kunstleben*, 151 n. 141. Here and in the following I am quoting the English translation of the letter by Tania Stern and James Stern as published in McClatchy, *The Whole Difference*, 69–79.

<sup>36</sup> Stern and Stern in McClatchy, *The Whole Difference*, 70.

<sup>37</sup> Hofmannsthal's correspondence with more than thirty individuals has been published; see Heinz Hiebler, *Hugo von Hofmannsthal und die Medienkultur der Moderne* (Würzburg: Königshausen and Neumann, 2003), 552–53. On Hofmannsthal's letters, see, for example, Anne Overlack, *Was geschieht im Brief? Strukturen der Brief-Kommunikation bei Else Lasker-Schüler und Hugo von Hofmannsthal* (Tübingen: Stauffenburg, 1993) and Schuster, *Kunstleben*. The latter is one of the few studies of the "Lord Chandos Letter" that take the letter's genre into account (see 147–56); another one of the exceptions is Rudolf Helmstetter's "Entwendet: Hofmannsthal's Chandos-Brief, die Rezeptionsgeschichte und die Sprachkrise," *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* 77.3 (2003): 446–80, see especially 478–80.

<sup>38</sup> For an excellent introduction to these fictional and semi-fictional letters and dialogues, some of which only exist as fragments, see the essays in chapter VI.B, "Erfundene Gespräche und Briefe" in Mathias Meyer and Julian Werlitz, eds., *Hofmannsthal Handbuch: Leben – Werk – Wirkung* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2016), 313–33.

<sup>39</sup> Janet Gurkin Altman, *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1982), 87.

<sup>40</sup> "Bao Ren Shaoqing shu" 報任少卿書, *Wen xuan* 41.1854–69. For scholarship and translations see Stephen Durrant, Wai-Yee Li, Michael Nylan, and Hans van Ess, *The Letter to Ren An and Sima Qian's Legacy* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2016).

<sup>41</sup> Wolfgang Bauer, *Das Antlitz Chinas: Autobiographische Selbstdarstellungen in der chinesischen Literatur von ihren Anfängen bis heute* (München: Hanser, 1990), 83.

<sup>42</sup> Wang Jinxiang 王進祥, ed., *Yuan Zhen ji* 元稹集 (Taipei: Hanjing wenhua shiye youxian gongsi, 1983), 670–80. Translations and studies include James R. Hightower, "Yüan Chen and *The Story of Yingying*," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 33 (1975): 90–123; Stephen Owen, *The End of the Chinese 'Middle Ages': Essays in Mid-Tang Literary Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 149–73; Luo Manling, "The Seduction of Authenticity:

‘The Story of Yingying’,” *Nan Nü* 7.1 (2005): 40–70. See also my forthcoming article “The Literary Imagination and the Writing of Letters: Discovering Early Epistolary Fiction in China.”

<sup>43</sup> See Thomas Pekar, “Hofmannsthal’s ‘Umweg über Asien’: Zur Konstellation von Europa und Asien im europäischen ‘Krisen-Diskurs’ am Anfang des 20. Jahrhunderts,” *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* 83.2 (2009): 246–61, especially 255 n. 39, for a bibliography of titles about Hofmannsthal’s interest in China.

<sup>44</sup> T. S. Eliot, *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism: Studies in the Relation of Criticism to Poetry in England* (London: Faber and Faber, 1933), 100.

<sup>45</sup> Hyder Edward Rollins, ed., *The Letters of John Keats, 1814–1821* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958). A richly annotated edition, which places many of the letters chronologically in the context of Keats’s life and work is Jeffrey N. Cox, ed., *Keats’s Poetry and Prose: Authoritative Texts, Criticism* (New York: Norton, 2009). Research on Keats’s letters abounds. For an excellent introduction, see Grant F. Scott, ed., *Selected Letters of John Keats: Revised Edition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), xxi–xxxiii. See also Heidi Thomson, “Keats’s Letters: ‘A Wilful and Dramatic Exercise of Our Minds Towards Each Other’,” *The Keats-Shelley Review* 25.2 (2011): 160–74; and especially 160–61 n. 2 for a list of relevant previous publications. See also the resources provided at <http://keatslettersproject.com>.

<sup>46</sup> Eliot, *Use of Poetry*, 100.

<sup>47</sup> The introduction to Lionel Trilling’s *The Selected Letters of John Keats* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Young, 1951) was later republished under the title “The Poet as Hero: Keats in His Letters,” for instance, in *The Moral Obligation to Be Intelligent: Selected Essays*, ed. Leon Wieseltier (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2008), 228–262.

<sup>48</sup> Letter to John Taylor, September 5, 1819 (MS Keats 1.63); Rollins, *Letters of Keats*, 2:155–59; Scott, *Selected Letters of Keats*, 334–38. On “Lamia,” see Cox, *Keats’s Poetry and Prose*, 412–29.

<sup>49</sup> See, for example, Ting Nai-tung, “The Holy Man and the Snake-Woman: A Study of a Lamia Story in Asian and European Literature,” *Fabula* 8.1 (1966): 145–91; Wilt L. Idema, *The White Snake and Her Son: A Translation of The Precious Scroll of Thunder Peak with Related Texts* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2009).

<sup>50</sup> Letter to George and Thomas Keats, December 21–27, 1817 (MS Keats 3.9); Rollins, *Letters of Keats*, 1:191–94; Scott, *Selected Letters of Keats*, 59–61; Cox, *Keats’s Poetry and Prose*, 107–9. For information on the context of the letter, see <http://keatslettersproject.com/negativecapability/>, a collaborative website created for the 200th anniversary of the letter that describes itself as offering a “portal for all [manner of] negative capability related content.”

<sup>51</sup> John Jeffrey’s transcript is now part of the Harvard Keats Collection (f. 5, seq. 13–14) and digitally available at [https://iiflib.harvard.edu/manifests/view/drs:35522552\\$13i](https://iiflib.harvard.edu/manifests/view/drs:35522552$13i). For a recent study of the ramifications of Jeffrey’s transcription practices, see Brian Rejack’s “John Keats’s Jeffrey’s ‘Negative Capability’; or, Accidentally Undermining Keats,” published in a collection of essays on this letter and its reception: Brian Rejack and Michael Theune, eds., *Keats’s Negative Capability: New Origins and Afterlives* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2019), 31–46.

<sup>52</sup> The “Mansion of Many Apartments” letter, addressed to John Hamilton Reynolds (1794–1852), was written on May 3, 1818; the “Vale of Soul-making” letter, addressed to his brother George and George’s wife Georgiana, was written between February 14 and May 4, 1819. See Scott, *Selected Letters of Keats*, 120–26 and 196–209; Cox, *Keats’s Poetry and Prose*, 242–46 and 311–32.

<sup>53</sup> For the context of this poem and comments on variants, see Cox, *Keats’s Poetry and Prose*, 105.

<sup>54</sup> Trilling has emphasized the role of Dilke’s personality in Keats’s formulation of Negative Capability; see “The Poet as Hero” 250–53.

<sup>55</sup> The articles collected in Rejack’s and Theune’s volume *Keats’s Negative Capability* provide a convenient entry into this discussion.

<sup>56</sup> Written on October 27, 1818 (MS Keats 1.38); Scott, *Selected Letters of Keats*, 194–96; Cox, *Keats’s Poetry and Prose*, 294–95; see also <http://keatslettersproject.com/letters/letter-99-to-richard-woodhouse-27-october-1818/>.

<sup>57</sup> For a complete list of Kolmar’s publications, including posthumous publications, see Kolmar, *Briefe*, ed. Johanna Woltmann (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2014), 311–15.

<sup>58</sup> The most comprehensive edition of Kolmar’s poetry is *Das lyrische Werk*, 3 vols., ed. Regina Nörtemann (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2007); see also *Dark Soliloquy: The Selected Poems of Gertrud Kolmar*, trans. Henry A. Smith (New York: Seabury Press, 1975). Scholarship on Kolmar includes Monika Shafi’s *Gertrud Kolmar: Eine Einführung in*

*das Werk* (München: iudicium, 1995). See also the more recent entry by Kirsten Krick-Aigner in *Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia* at <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/kolmar-gertrud> (2009).

<sup>59</sup> Complete critical editions of Kolmar's transmitted letters in German and in English (translated by Brigitte M. Goldstein) were prepared by Johanna Woltmann; see Kolmar, *Briefe*; and Kolmar, *My Gaze Is Turned Inward: Letters, 1934–1943* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2004). See also Woltmann's afterword (included in German and English in both editions).

<sup>60</sup> Kolmar's letters to her sister are housed at the German Literature Archive (Deutsches Literaturarchiv—DLA) in Marbach am Neckar (access number 93.18.58–60). See also the typed compilation of their correspondence in the Gertrud Kolmar Collection at the Leo Baeck Institute (AR 1346), digitally available at <http://digifind-inguids.cjh.org/?pID=478515>.

<sup>61</sup> Starting from 1940, Kolmar's letters to her sister all bear censorship stamps; see Kolmar, *Briefe*, 295.

<sup>62</sup> Kolmar, *Briefe*, 84–85; all my quotations from the letter follow the translation in *Gaze Turned Inward*, 49–51.

<sup>63</sup> Kolmar, *Briefe*, 83; *Gaze Turned Inward*, 49. The young poet has been identified as Marianne Rein (1911–1941/42); Kolmar, *Briefe*, 250; *Gaze Turned Inward*, 190.

<sup>64</sup> Kolmar, *Briefe*, 86; *Gaze Turned Inward*, 51.

<sup>65</sup> See the “Translator's Chronicle of Selected Nazi Anti-Jewish Legislation, Decrees, Ordinances, and Actions, 1933–43” in the appendix to the English translation of Kolmar's letters; *Gaze Turned Inward*, 175–79.

<sup>66</sup> The ellipses are Kolmar's.

<sup>67</sup> Monika Shafi reads this cycle, written in late 1937 and published in 1938, as already constituting Kolmar's “poetic legacy” or “literary testament”; see Shafi, *Gertrud Kolmar*, 160–64.

<sup>68</sup> See, for example, “Letter to Hilde Wenzel, January 15, 1940” in Kolmar, *Briefe*, 60; *Gaze Turned Inward*, 31.

<sup>69</sup> Shafi, “Turning the Gaze Inward: Gertrud Kolmar's *Briefe and die Schwester Hilde 1938–1943*,” in *Facing Fascism and Confronting the Past: German Women Writers from Weimar to the Present*, ed. Elke P. Frederiksen and Martha Kaarsberg Wallach (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 111.

<sup>70</sup> This point has been expressed throughout epistolary research. Albrecht Schöne, for instance, suggested that a letter's inscribed recipient operates as a role that is offered (Rollenangebot). See his “Über Goethes Brief an Behrisch vom 10. November 1767,” in *Festschrift für Richard Alewyn*, ed. Herbert Singer and Benno von Wiese (Köln: Böhlau, 1967), 213.

# Manipulating the Message: Letters of Gelasius and Nicholas I on Papal Authority

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*Abstract:* Gelasius I, bishop of Rome during the problematic period of Odoacer's replacement as *rex Italiae* in 493, was greatly concerned with the power of the bishop of Rome. While Gelasius was one of the most significant bishops of the first five hundred years of the Roman church, he is primarily known for his letter to the Byzantine emperor Anastasius in 494. His *Epistula* 12 introduced the controversial theory of "two powers" or "two swords." The idea was taken up in the mid-ninth century by another champion for papal primacy, when Nicholas I embedded a quote from Gelasius in his denunciation of the Byzantine emperor Michael III. I examine the use of political rhetoric in ecclesiastical contexts in late antiquity and the early Middle Ages, in particular the way that extracts from such letters could go on to have a life of their own in canon law. Finally, I measure the historical impact of each letter as a form of soft diplomacy.

While Gelasius I (492–96) was one of the most significant bishops of the first five hundred years of the Roman church, he is primarily known today for one letter. His *Epistula* 12 introduced the controversial theory of "two powers" or "two swords," as it came to be known.<sup>1</sup> The idea was taken up by another champion for papal primacy, when Nicholas I (858–67) embedded quotes from it in his excoriation of the Byzantine emperor Michael III.<sup>2</sup> In this article I examine the use of political rhetoric in each case, asking three questions. The first is, what was the historical and political context of the letter, that is, what was it really about? Papal primacy looms large in each instance. Second, what strategies of manipulation did its author employ? These include pulling spiritual rank, uttering veiled threats, and cajoling by allusions to scripture and by obsequious titles. Third, who was the intended audience? The audiences, both the external correspondents explicitly named and the assumed local readers in Rome, played an important role in the shaping of the message. Finally, I measure the historical impact of each letter as a form of soft diplomacy and compare each to a similar example from twenty-first-century global politics.

## *Diplomatic Papal Letters*

Little is known of Gelasius's life before he became deacon and letter writer for Pope Felix III (483–92), who died just before the problematic period of Odoacer's replacement by Theodoric as *rex Italiae* in 493.<sup>3</sup> Both Felix III and his protégé Gelasius were greatly concerned with the power of the bishop of Rome *vis-à-vis* the northern overlords and the emperors based in Constantinople.<sup>4</sup> The resistance he faced at home was the context for his famous decree condemning the pagan festival of the Lupercalia, against Andromachus, leader of a senatorial faction who wanted to continue the pre-Christian traditions of the city.<sup>5</sup> Two other decretal letters had a substantial shelf life. One is his decree on the canon, containing a list of books which were not to be read by Christians or included in the liturgy.<sup>6</sup> The other is the letter under examination

here, written to the Byzantine emperor Anastasius in 494, in which he introduced a controversial new theory of the division of spiritual and temporal power between the bishop of Rome and the emperor.

While we are familiar with the exchange of diplomatic letters between modern leaders of state as a form of soft power, in the fifth century this was a new type of letter. It combined many functions of classical epistolography—including administrative letters, letters of friendship, letters of recommendation, letters of consolation, and doctrinal tracts—but not exactly like any of these.<sup>7</sup> In terms of form, this letter is perhaps most like an imperial edict.<sup>8</sup> It might remind us of Pliny the Younger's letters to Roman emperors Trajan and Domitian or the tracts that early Christian apologists addressed to emperors, such as those by Tertullian or Justin Martyr.<sup>9</sup> But the tone is markedly different. It demonstrates a posturing of latent power—to both a local and an eastern audience. The author claims to have God on his side, with the implied punishment that entails for anyone who would cross the Divinity.

A third of Gelasius's large epistolary output of over 100 letters and fragments concerned more mundane matters of clerical discipline.<sup>10</sup> These include decisions on cases of rape, murder, abduction, disputes over family estates, theft of lay and church property, absconding slaves and bondsmen who had escaped to join the clergy, and the management of papal properties that spread from Sicily in the south to Dalmatia in the northeast.<sup>11</sup>

Another third of Gelasius's correspondence is related to the Acacian schism, sparked by the promulgation in 482 of a problematic document known as the *Henotikon*. The emperor Zeno coauthored this text together with the patriarch of Constantinople, Acacius (472–89), in an effort to gain unity between the Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian factions of the wider church. Pope Felix III rejected the *Henotikon* upon his succession in 483 and condemned Acacius with anathema in 484. Specifically, Felix rejected Acacius's acceptance of two non-Chalcedonian patriarchs, Peter of Alexandria and Peter of Antioch, for the sake of the unity of the broader church. The names of Acacius and both Peters were to be omitted from the Roman diptychs. Acacius, backed into a corner, reacted in kind and broke from communion with Rome. Although Acacius died in 489, the schism that bore his name and the anathemas it spawned endured on both sides for another thirty years. Gelasius wrote *Epistula* 12 ten years into the Acacian schism, in response to increasing imperial pressure on Rome to drop its condemnation of Acacius and other Alexandrian and Antiochene bishops.

### *Gelasius to Emperor Anastasius: Strategies of Manipulation*

When Gelasius took the papal throne in March 492, he inherited a diplomatic nightmare. Zeno had been replaced three years earlier by Anastasius I, who continued to maintain his predecessor's hard line against Rome. Fortunately, Gelasius knew exactly what to do: nothing. He did not write the customary letter to Constantinople seeking approval of his election. For two years, he sent no delegates to the court of Constantinople but simply waited for the emperor to do something to which he could react. Finally, he heard that Anastasius was beginning to grumble and composed his first letter to the emperor in 494.

Prefacing the letter with a weak excuse for not having written earlier because he feared his overtures to the new emperor would not be welcome (chapter 1), Gelasius discusses the two powers, ecclesiastical and royal (chapters 2 and 3), and beseeches the emperor not to allow the church to be torn apart in his time by the case of Acacius (chapter 4). The bulk of the letter tempers the various objections proposed for the defense of the schism (chapters 5–10). Finally, he defends his choices of eternal life over death and the will of God over the will of human emperors (chapters 11–12). Much of the long-winded rhetoric adopted in Gelasius's epistolary output rests upon the bishop of Rome's claim to supreme power over the universal church, as



we will see.<sup>12</sup> This was just one of several strategies of rhetorical manipulation that we can identify in *Epistula* 12.

The first strategy employed by Gelasius may be colloquially dubbed, “Don’t mention the war.” Gelasius never once mentions the mutual anathema of the bishops of Constantinople and Rome that has been going on for a decade, or the fact that Pope Felix III had started it. He does not get around to speaking about the doctrinal causes of the standoff until two-thirds of the way through this lengthy letter (chapter 8). He attempts to shift blame onto the current patriarch, Peter “Mongus” III of Alexandria (477–89), without mentioning the previous non-Chalcedonian patriarch of Alexandria, Timothy Aelurus, who held two periods of office (457–60 and 475–77).

Gelasius’s second strategy is to profess his own humility and loyalty as a true Roman subject of the emperor. He calls himself “My Humility” and expresses deference through his use of titles such as “Your Piety,” “Your Serenity,” and “Your Clemency.”<sup>13</sup> Such titles are unique to episcopal correspondence and used protreptically by Gelasius to express the virtues he wants the emperor to employ towards him.<sup>14</sup> He stresses his Roman origins as follows: “Glorious Son, I love, cherish, and respect the Roman emperor just as one who is Roman born. And insofar as I am a Christian along with him who is ardent for God, I desire to possess knowledge in accordance with the truth. And as vicar of the apostolic see (whatever my worth), I shall endeavour to make good with suitable suggestions according to my measure what I ascertain to be missing anywhere in the full catholic faith.”<sup>15</sup> The title “Glorious Son” reveals his true rhetorical purpose: to position the emperor as an obedient servant of the church and therefore as a subject of the bishop of Rome. The message is clear from the third chapter of this letter: the security of Anastasius’s reign depends on his obedience to the head of the church, ordained by Peter himself. No one could have raised himself by human power alone “to the privilege or acknowledgement of that one whom the voice of Christ set before all, whom the venerable church has always acknowledged and in her devotedness holds as primate.”<sup>16</sup>

A third strategy is to back up papal claims with appeals to New Testament verses, as in the following passage, also from the third chapter: “The ordinances established by divine judgement can be assailed by acts of human presumption, but they cannot be overcome by the power of any of them. And if only the insolence against those who struggle were not so destructive, as what is fixed by the instigator (*auctore*) of our sacred religion himself cannot be distorted by any force! For *God’s firm foundation stands* (2 Tim. 2:19)!”<sup>17</sup> In Chapter 1, as authorization for his stewardship, he cites 1 Cor. 9:16, “Woe to me if I do not proclaim the Gospel” and the classic statement of Peter’s primacy as the “chosen vessel” of the Lord from Acts 9:15.<sup>18</sup> Urging the emperor to refute the heretics, Gelasius cites James 2:10: “For whoever offends in one point is guilty of all” (*Epistula* 12.5); 1 Tim. 1:5: “Love from a heart and a good conscience and sincere faith” (*Epistula* 12.6); and Rom. 1:32: “Not only those who do things that should not be done are seen to be guilty, but also those who approve those who do them” (*Epistula* 12.7).

The fourth and most lasting strategy is to argue that “God is on our side.” Gelasius introduces what was to become known as the “two powers” theory in the second chapter of his letter: “In fact, august Emperor, there are two ways in which this world is chiefly ruled: the hallowed power (*auctoritas*) of the pontiffs and royal power (*potestas*). In these two ‘powers’ the responsibility of bishops is so much greater, to the extent that, at the time of divine judgement, they will render an account even for the very rulers of human beings.”<sup>19</sup> The emperor’s rule is only guaranteed by his obedience to the pontiff’s authority to make judgements in church matters, which trumps the imperial power to govern temporal affairs:

Indeed, my most indulgent son, you must know that you are permitted to superintend through high office of a human kind. However, in your devotedness you bow your head



to the leaders (*praesulibus*) of divine affairs, and from them you await the occasions for your salvation, and, in both taking the heavenly sacraments and being suitably disposed to them, you acknowledge that you must be subject to the order of religion, rather than be in control of it.<sup>20</sup>

The corollary of this division of power is that, just as bishops obey imperial laws, the emperor should obey divine laws, especially in the field of liturgical ministry. Gelasius admits that his own expertise lies outside worldly matters. Assuming a *quid pro quo*, he poses this clearly rhetorical question:

For if the overseers (*antistites*) of religion themselves also obey your laws—as far as they pertain to the order of public discipline—by acknowledging that the imperial rule has been conferred on you by heavenly dispensation, lest their opinions which are extrinsic to worldly affairs be regarded as standing in opposition to them, with what willingness, I entreat you, should you obey those who have been assigned to the most excellent and venerable mysteries?<sup>21</sup>

In his reference to the sacred liturgy there is a veiled reference to the diptychs or the recitation in the liturgy of the names of the saints. Gelasius implies that the liturgy would be polluted by the mention of those under anathema, that is, enemies of the church. The omission of their names was a form of *damnatio memoriae*.<sup>22</sup>

The pope's fourth strategy includes clouding the issue with legalese. Gelasius developed a quasi-legal ideology of Roman primacy based on the Petrine commission and the authority of previous popes, as handed down by their writings and the canons of earlier councils. Above all he prized the canons of the first, third, and fourth ecumenical councils, but notably excluded the Council of Constantinople I (381), which claimed equal honour for Constantinople. Gelasius delivered veiled threats by using strategic omissions, empty professions of humility and obsequious expressions of respect, the metaphorical language of father and son, steward and household, and appeals to the authority of St. Peter with bolstering quotes from scripture. He invented a specious legal argument about the division of power between church and *imperium*, and issued veiled threats of liturgical sanctions and eternal damnation if compliance was not forthcoming. As Gelasius declares at the conclusion of his letter to Anastasius, "truth herself will make it obvious where a spirit of arrogance truly stands and fights." It was left up to the reader to draw the line between what was bluff and what was a real threat.

All this rhetorical posturing poses the question: how much power or authority did the bishop of Rome actually enjoy at the end of the fifth century? There have been two main schools of thought on the theoretical underpinnings of Gelasius's understanding of his own authority as bishop of Rome and vicar of the first apostle, Peter. The traditional view is that of Erich Caspar, who saw Gelasius as accepting a traditional division of power between the secular ruler (*potestas*) and the spiritual leader (*auctoritas*).<sup>23</sup> Walter Ullmann argued for a much loftier conception of the medieval papacy beginning in the fifth century with Leo I (440–61) and a quasi-legal basis for the pope's claim to be the heir of Peter.<sup>24</sup> Contrary to the arguments of both Caspar and Ullmann, George Demacopoulos has demonstrated that it is a testament to Gelasius's rhetorical skill that subsequent generations have understood the pontiff to possess a measure of domestic and international influence that he never actually enjoyed at this time.<sup>25</sup> While Demacopoulos puts all the emphasis on the local audience for *Epistula* 12, I suggest that its eastern audience was at least equally important. Let us now move on to the reception of the letter five centuries on, in another papal letter to an eastern emperor.

*The Afterlife of Epistula 12*

Gelasius's letter to Anastasius failed to make any immediate impact. It is conspicuously absent from Dionysius Exiguus's compilation of papal correspondence for his second recension of canon law documents, known later as the *Collectio Dionysiana*, which he started just after Gelasius's death, as he mentions in his preface to the work. The reason for its omission may lie in Dionysius's irenic agenda, to bring peace between the eastern and western churches after two decades of schism.

The letter was to come into play again in the mid-ninth century, when the bishops of Rome were again fighting an ideological war on two fronts: with the Carolingian kings of the north and with the Roman emperors in the east. Nicholas I, a prodigious letter writer, ably abetted by his secretary Anastasius Bibliothecarius, was at the forefront of the western Roman struggle to assert its independence from the east.<sup>26</sup> As Frederick Norwood put it, "Few popes hold a more dominating role in the history of the Catholic Church than Nicholas I."<sup>27</sup> Nicholas held the see for only nine years and wrote over 150 extant letters.<sup>28</sup> Nicholas was the most frequent user of the term *decretales* to describe his and his predecessors' letters to other bishops, implying that they were applicable for the universal church. By his epistolary diplomacy, he managed to establish his preeminence over the western church of the late Carolingian empire. He aimed to do the same with regard to the eastern church but had less success. He addressed *Epistula* 88 (JE 2796) to the eastern emperor Michael III, in the middle of a crisis over the jurisdiction of the nascent church of Bulgaria, to which both the Byzantine and Roman churches laid claim.<sup>29</sup>

The issue at stake in this letter of September 28, 865, was ongoing disagreement over the deposition of Ignatius, who had been replaced as the Byzantine patriarch by Photius in 858.<sup>30</sup> Ignatius and Photius held opposing views on Roman jurisdiction over Bulgaria, among other things. Photius was also the archenemy of Nicholas's librarian and unofficial secretary, Anastasius Bibliothecarius. Like Anastasius, Photius had overseen epistolary archives in his patriarchate (*chartophylax*) before his appointment. In rejecting Photius's right to take over the highest role in the Constantinopolitan church, in which capacity he served also as advisor to the emperor on matters ecclesiastical, Pope Nicholas was making a play for primacy, with the Bulgarian khan Boris as his prime target. Both Nicholas and Photius sent lengthy letters to Boris in the period from 865 to 866, instructing him on fitting behavior for a Christian prince and his subjects.<sup>31</sup>

Nicholas cites Gelasius several times in *Epistula* 88, along with other popes including Leo I, Gregory I, and Benedict I. In the second of two brief quotations from Gelasius's first tome on the bond of anathema (JK 501), in regard to his "fellow-minister Ignatius," Nicholas quotes Gelasius thus: "with these things [revealed] through imperial judgement, in absolutely no way could he have been [expelled]."<sup>32</sup> He also quotes the law code (*Corpus iuris civilis*) of Justinian and previous emperors, and the acts of church councils, to back up his claim that Rome should be the final court of appeal in any disputed patriarchal appointments, even those of Constantinople. Many Gospel and Pauline texts on obedience and the penalties for disobeying God are adduced to this end.<sup>33</sup> His rhetoric is overblown and sententious, using the usual threats of divine reprisal if his dictates are not followed. He accuses the emperor of hypocrisy for calling himself "emperor of the Romans" while being ignorant of the Latin language.

One of the most potent sources on the imperial duty to obey the bishop of Rome available to Nicholas was chapter 3 of Gelasius's *Epistula* 12 to Anastasius. He quotes this at length, but the first sentence sums up the gist perfectly: "Accordingly, just as a charge of no light weight presses upon the pontiffs to remain silent because of the worship of the Divinity, as is proper, so there is no middling danger for those (heaven forbid!) who despise those whom they

should obey.”<sup>34</sup> Having warned him of the dangers of spiritual disobedience, Nicholas concludes his diplomatic attack with a final quote from *Epistula* 12, stressing the heavenly rewards that lay in store for an obedient emperor:

In the sight of God I pray, entreat, and exhort Your Piety truly and sincerely to accept my petition with no displeasure: I ask, I really do, that you hear my prayer in this life, rather than (heaven forbid!) experience my accusation before the divine tribunal.... [And] on this account, I pray, please do not be angry with me if I love you so much that I wish you to have in perpetuity the reign that you have procured for a limited time, and that you who govern in this world might reign with Christ.... [For] with what confidence, I ask you, will you seek his rewards there when you do not prevent his losses here? I beg you, do not let the statements made about your eternal salvation be burdensome. You have read what is written: *Better are wounds from a friend than [fake] kisses from an enemy* (Prov. 27:6).<sup>35</sup>

Excerpts from *Epistula* 88 were frequently reiterated in canon law collections due to its bold statement of Roman primacy.<sup>36</sup> Indeed the whole letter was once included twice in a single manuscript, along with Nicholas’s *Epistula* 99, also dealing with the Bulgarian question.<sup>37</sup> Like Gelasius in *Epistula* 12, Nicholas’s rhetoric in *Epistula* 88 relies on the idea that the apostle Peter was the origin of the episcopal office and founder of the apostolic succession.<sup>38</sup>

### *A Modern Parallel in American Diplomacy*

Letter exchange between heads of state remains an important part of diplomacy, even in our own electronic age. The rhetorical strategies employed to manipulate the message for maximum impact in Gelasius’s *Epistula* 12 can usefully be compared with the letter of President Donald Trump to Chairman Kim Jung Un. In this letter of May 2018, Trump announced to the North Korean leader his intention to cancel the long-awaited summit in Singapore with the leaders of North and South Korea. The letter was written in response to Kim Jong Un’s pronouncement that South Korea’s president was a “dummy” for allowing western interference in the region. In the international uproar of the following days, the White House administration stressed that Trump wrote this letter himself and did not dictate it. It was not clear from this statement whether the President was taking full responsibility or if the administration was denying any involvement. Trump’s letter reads in part as follows:

We greatly appreciate your time, patience, and effort with respect to our recent negotiations and discussions relative to a summit long sought by both parties ... I was very much looking forward to being there with you. Sadly, based on the tremendous anger and open hostility displayed in your most recent statement, I feel it is inappropriate, at this time, to have this long-planned meeting....

You talk about your nuclear capabilities, but ours are so massive and powerful that I pray to God they will never have to be used....

If you change your mind having to do with this most important summit, please do not hesitate to call me or write. The world, and North Korea in particular, has lost a great opportunity for lasting peace and great prosperity and wealth. The missed opportunity is a truly sad moment in history.<sup>39</sup>

Trump’s letter is an excellent example of his presidential style. “[H]ighly Trumpian in its bombastic swagger, theatrical menace and plangent sentimentality,” it contains veiled but clear threats of nuclear destruction and loss of prosperity on the one hand, while on the other lamenting the loss of the opportunity for the two Korean leaders coming together in person, which

would have been “a beautiful gesture.”<sup>40</sup> Trump makes no mention of the long-running conflict on the Korean peninsula or the U.S. army’s continuing role in the region, just as Gelasius omitted to mention his part in exacerbating hostilities between east and west by not sending the proper letter of recognition to the emperor. Just like Gelasius, the author assumes that God is on his side, an assumption made explicit in his reference to America’s superior nuclear powers: “I pray to God they will never have to be used.” Trump assumes the moral high ground while making obsequious expressions of respect. Similar to Gelasian use of the titles “Your Clemency” and “Your Serenity,” he thanks the North Korean leader for his “time, patience and effort”. He blames the recipient for the breakdown of diplomatic relations and for disturbing the peace of the world by suspending the face-to-face meeting between leaders. The emphasis is on compliance with the President’s wishes for the sake of “lasting peace and great prosperity,” an echo of Gelasius’s promise of a long and prosperous reign for Emperor Anastasius if he complies with the papal dictates. Like Gelasius’s bid for authority over the whole church, including the eastern emperor, who had never recognised Roman ecclesiastical authority to the extent that Gelasius demands in *Epistula* 12, Trump is making a huge bid for power, exaggerating his influence over both the North Korean dictator and America’s ally and protégé in the south of the Korean peninsula. Both the presidential and papal letters amounted to little more than a bluff.

In Trump’s case, the gamble paid off. Kim Jong Un responded to Trump with a formal letter of reconciliation and the promised summit between the leaders of North and South Korea eventually took place in the presence of the U.S. president. In Gelasius’s case, there was no such peaceful resolution, and the stalemate of reciprocal anathemas continued until a new emperor took the helm.

### *Conclusion: The Limits of Epistolary Diplomacy*

Gelasius’s *Epistula* 12 and Nicholas’s *Epistula* 88 reveal that epistolary exchange was the primary means of papal diplomacy from late antiquity to the early medieval period. They reveal how their authors employed rhetorical carrots on sticks to achieve their political ends, even when addressing emperors and patriarchs. The bombastic rhetoric of Popes Gelasius and Nicholas was, however, of limited effectiveness. No reply exists from Emperor Anastasius to Gelasius, and the Acacian schism was to continue until a détente was negotiated by Pope Hormisdas and the new emperor Justin I in 519. Emperor Michael III’s reply to Nicholas, if he made any, likewise does not survive, but after Khan Boris voted to join the Greek church, then under Photius’s direction, Bulgaria was permanently lost to Rome even though it returned to Roman jurisdiction after the council of Constantinople in 870.<sup>41</sup> Roman threats would surely have been more efficacious if there had been a nuclear arsenal at the bishops’ disposal to back up their claims to world domination.

In the west, however, the triumphalist papal rhetoric was more successful. Nicholas’s *Epistula* 88 was a key plank for the reforms to the episcopacy introduced by Pope Gregory VII (1073–85), by which reformers sought to elevate the pope’s authority to make binding judgments and to reaffirm the privileges of the Apostolic See. The bulk of citations from Nicholas’s thirteen letters in Deusdedit’s canonical collection (c. 1087) and that of Anselm of Lucca were taken from this one letter.<sup>42</sup> With their inclusion in the decretal collection of the medieval canonist Gratian in the mid-twelfth century, Gelasius’s *Epistula* 12 and Nicholas’s *Epistula* 88 were often cited by medieval canonists and modern scholars alike as evidence for papal primacy stretching back to late antiquity.

The ongoing importance of the doctrine of two swords or two powers in Roman circles is evidenced by the coverage of *Epistula* 12 in the Italian newspaper *La Stampa* as recently as



2018, where it was cited without any recognition of its origins or reconfiguration in the medieval west, or of its patent lack of impact on its Greek recipients.<sup>43</sup> The very different eastern and western trajectories of two letters on the same subject—papal authority—remind us that historical letters, and especially papal letters, cannot be taken at face value. When we examine the contexts of conflict in which their rhetoric was shaped, we gain a glimpse behind the bluff and bluster at their authors' true powerlessness to influence ecclesiastical decisions made in the east, much less temporal affairs outside their own city of Rome.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Philip Jaffé, Samuel Loewenfeld, and Ferdinand Kaltenbrunner, eds., *Regesta pontificum romanorum, editionem secundam curaverunt Samuel Loewenfeld et Ferdinand Kaltenbrunner (ab condita ecclesia ad annum 590)* (Leipzig, 1885; repr., Graz: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1956) (hereafter abbreviated as JK in text), number 632.

<sup>2</sup> Philip Jaffé and Paul Ewald, eds., *Regesta pontificum romanorum, editionem secundam curavit Paul Ewald (an. 590–882)* (Leipzig, 1885; repr. Graz: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1956) (hereafter abbreviated as JE in text), number 2796.

<sup>3</sup> John Moorhead, *The Popes and the Church of Rome in Late Antiquity* (London: Routledge, 2015), 38, accepts Hugo Koch's suggestion that Gelasius also drafted correspondence for Felix's predecessor Simplicius but this is more difficult to prove: Hugo Koch, *Gelasius im kirchenpolitischen Dienste seiner Vorgänger, der Päpste Simplicius (468–488) und Felix III. (483–492): Ein Beitrag zur Sprache des Papste Gelasius (492–496) und frühere Papstbriefe* (Munich: Verlag der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1935). See also Aloysius K. Ziegler, "Pope Gelasius I and His Teaching on the Relation of Church and State," *The Catholic Historical Review* 27.4 (1942): 413–14.

<sup>4</sup> Odoacer and his successor Theodoric were both Homoian Christians rather than orthodox Catholics. Samuel Cohen, "Religious Diversity," in *A Companion to Ostrogothic Italy*, ed. Michael Shane Bjornlie, Kristina Sessa, and Jonathan J. Arnold (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 503–32, gives a comprehensive survey of religious politics in late fifth-century Italy.

<sup>5</sup> See the arguments put forward by George E. Demacopoulos, *The Invention of Peter: Apostolic Discourse and Papal Authority in Late Antiquity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 73–101. The text is edited by Gilbert Pomarès, *Gélase Ier, Lettre contre les Lupercales et dix-huit Messes du Sacramentaire Léonien* (Paris: Cerf, 1959).

<sup>6</sup> *Epistula* 42, known as the *Gelasian Decretal*, ed. Ernst von Dobschütz, *Libri recipiendi et non recipiendi* (Leipzig: August Pries, 1912). Eduard Schwartz, "Zum Decretum Gelasianum," *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche* 29 (1930): 161–68, questioned the attribution to Gelasius in favour of a sixth-century southern Gallic provenance. It is also treated as spurious by Detlev Jasper and Horst Fuhmann, *Papal Letters in the Early Middle Ages* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2001), 64–65. See however Bronwen Neil and Pauline Allen, intro. and trans., *The Letters of Gelasius I (492–496): Pastor and Micromanager of the Church of Rome* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), 142.

<sup>7</sup> On these types of classical letters and how they were adapted by Christians in late antiquity, see Pauline Allen and Bronwen Neil, *The Greek and Roman Letter in Late Antiquity: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

<sup>8</sup> The Vatican remains to this day the only church headquarters that is recognized as a state in its own right, with diplomatic representation.

<sup>9</sup> Pliny the Younger, *Pliny minoris epistulae recognovit R. A. B. Mynors* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), Books 6 and 7. On the epistolary correspondents of Book 6, see Roy K. Gibson and Ruth Morello, *Reading the Letters of Pliny the Younger: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 47–73.

<sup>10</sup> Forty-two letters survive in full, the rest in fragments. The majority are edited by Andreas Thiel, *Epistulae sancti Gelasii papae in Epistulae Romanorum pontificum genuinae et quae ad eos scriptae sunt a s. Hilario usque ad Pelagium II*, 2nd ed. (Braunsberg, 1867; repr. Hildesheim: Georg Olm, 2004), 287–510, with some additional letters in Samuel Löwenfeld, ed., *Epistolae pontificum Romanorum ineditae* (Leipzig, 1895; repr. Graz: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1959), 1–11. A few fragments are edited by Paul Ewald, "Die Papstbriefe der Britischen Sammlung 2.," *Neues Archiv der Gesellschaft für Ältere Deutsche Geschichtskunde zur Beförderung*

einer Gesamtausgabe der Quellschriften Deutscher Geschichte des Mittelalters 5 (1880): 503–96, in his catalogue of the British collections. On the sources and editions, see, further, Samuel Cohen, “Heresy, Authority and the Bishops of Rome in the Fifth Century: Leo I (440–461) and Gelasius (492–496),” (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2014), 135–45. On Gelasius as a letter writer, see Neil and Allen, *Letters of Gelasius*, 8–11. Letter 12 and a further thirty-five letters and fragments are translated in Part 2 of that volume.

<sup>11</sup> On his management of property, see Kristina Sessa, *The Formation of Papal Authority in Late Antiquity: Roman Bishops and the Domestic Sphere* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 121, 124, 167–69, *et passim*.

<sup>12</sup> The Latin text is edited by Thiel, *Epistulae pontificum Romanorum*, 349–58. It is translated by Matthew Briel in Demacopoulos, *Invention of Peter*, 173–80. I have used my own translation from Neil and Allen, *Letters of Gelasius*, 73–80.

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, *Epistula* 12.1: “On their return to the city, the servants of Your Piety, my sons Faustus the *magister* and Irenaeus, *virii illustres*, and their companions who took part in the official legation, said that Your Clemency had asked why I had not sent my greetings in written form to you.”

<sup>14</sup> I thank Ruth Morello for this suggestion, made during a masterclass on “Late Antique Letter-Writing” at Manchester University, July 7, 2018.

<sup>15</sup> *Epistula* 12.1.

<sup>16</sup> *Epistula* 12.3.

<sup>17</sup> *Epistula* 12.3.

<sup>18</sup> Compare 2 Cor. 4:7. See also Sessa, *Formation of Papal Authority*, 18–19, on the Roman bishops’ application of the metaphor of God’s steward to their management of the ‘household’ of the fifth- and sixth-century Roman church. From the pontificate of Damasus, the cult of St. Peter in Rome played an important part in the affirmation that the bishops of Rome were the heirs of Peter: see Demacopoulos, *Invention of Peter*, 32–38.

<sup>19</sup> *Epistula* 12.2.

<sup>20</sup> *Epistula* 12.2.

<sup>21</sup> *Epistula* 12.2.

<sup>22</sup> Other examples of this practice in the same period are given by Kosta Simic, “Remembering the Damned: Byzantine Liturgical Hymns as Instruments of Religious Polemics,” in *Memories of the Future: Rewriting Texts and Landscapes in Late Antiquity*, ed. Bronwen Neil and Kosta Simic (London: Routledge, 2019), 156–70.

<sup>23</sup> Erich Caspar, *Geschichte des Papsttums 2. Das Papsttum unter byzantinischer Herrschaft* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1933), 70–71; he is followed by Francis Dvornik, “Pope Gelasius and Emperor Anastasius I,” *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 44 (1951): 111–16; and W. Ensslin, “*Auctoritas und potestas: Zur Zweigewaltenlehre des Papstes Gelasius I.*,” *Historische Jahrbuch* 74 (1955): 661–68.

<sup>24</sup> Walter Ullmann, *Gelasius I. (492–496): Das Papsttum an der Wende der Spätantike zum Mittelalter* (Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann, 1981).

<sup>25</sup> George E. Demacopoulos, “Are All Universalist Politics Local?,” *The Bishop of Rome in Late Antiquity*, ed. Geoffrey Dunn (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 142. For the same argument in reference to Gelasius’s *Adversus Andromachus*, see Neil McLynn, “Crying Wolf: the Pope and the Lupercalia,” *Journal of Roman Studies* 98 (2008): 161–75.

<sup>26</sup> On Anastasius’s unofficial role in the papal secretariat under Nicholas, see Bronwen Neil, *Seventh-Century Popes and Martyrs: The Political Hagiography of Anastasius Bibliothecarius* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), 14–17.

<sup>27</sup> Frederick A. Norwood, “The Political Pretensions of Pope Nicholas I,” *Church History* 15.4 (1946): 271.

<sup>28</sup> Ernst Perels judged 153 of the 170 letters genuine in his *Nicolai I. papae epistolae*, Monumenta Germaniae Historica edition (Berlin, 1925).

<sup>29</sup> See Neil, *Seventh-Century Popes*, 28–32. Compare Nicholas I, *Epistulae* 26, 99, and 100 on the Bulgarian question.

<sup>30</sup> Nicholas argued that Ignatius had been uncanonically deposed in 858 and anathematised Photius, prompting the “Photian schism” between Constantinople and the Roman church. Ignatius was returned to office briefly in 867 and replaced on his death by Photius in 877. For a detailed study of Photius’s close relationships, especially with Bardas Caesar, uncle of Michael III—and how these shaped his ecclesiastical career, allowing him to be raised rapidly from layman to patriarch—see Patricia Varona Codeso and Óscar Prieto Domínguez, “Deconstructing Photios: family relationship and political kinship in middle Byzantium,” *Revue des études byzantines* 71 (2013): 105–48.

<sup>31</sup> Photius I, *Epistula* 1 to Boris-Michael of Bulgaria: Despina S. White and Joseph R. Berrigan, trans., *The Patriarch and the Prince: The Letter of Patriarch Photios of Constantinople to Khan Boris of Bulgaria* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1982). Nicholas, *Epistula* 99 to Boris, ed. Perels, *Nicolai I. papae epistolae*, 568–600.

<sup>32</sup> Gelasius, *Tract 4: De anathematis vinculo*, ed. Thiel, *Epistulae Romanorum*, 557–70. Cited in *Epistula* 88, ed. Perels, *Nicolai I. papae epistolae*, 486; see n. 7. The second, much longer passage, from chapter 11 of *Tract 4*, is Perels, *Nicolai I. papae epistolae*, 485–86, lines 36–17, which explains that before Christ there had been some

who were kings and priests, like Melchisedech, but none since; compare Gelasius, ed. Thiel, *Epistulae Romanorum*, 567–68.

<sup>33</sup> For example, Luke 10:14; Matt. 25:24–29; 2 Tim. 3:2.

<sup>34</sup> *Epistula* 12.3 cited in Nicholas, *Epistula* 88, ed. Perels, *Nicolai I. papae epistolae*, 485. He continues: “And if, in general, when all the bishops are administering their divine affairs properly, it is appropriate for the hearts of the faithful to be subject to them, how much more should agreement with the leader of that [pontifical] see be adhered to, whom ... the collective loyalty of the whole church has celebrated continually?” Nicholas’s addition to the text is marked in square brackets; his omission of several sentences are also marked by ellipses.

<sup>35</sup> *Epistula* 12.4–5.

<sup>36</sup> Jasper and Fuhrmann, *Papal Letters*, 115.

<sup>37</sup> Jasper and Fuhrmann, *Papal Letters*, 114–15.

<sup>38</sup> Gelasius, *Epistula* 12.3, cited in Nicholas, *Epistula* 88, ed. Perels, *Nicolai I. papae epistolae*, 485: “Wherever Your Piety turns a clear gaze, never has anybody been able to raise himself by any completely human counsel to the privilege or acknowledgement of that one whom the voice of Christ set before all, whom the venerable church has always acknowledged and in her devotedness holds as primate.” On the Bulgarian issue, see also Nicholas, *Epistulae* 69 (JE 2783) and 71 (JE 2785). See Jasper and Fuhrmann, *Papal Letters*, 10 n. 24.

<sup>39</sup> Donald Trump to His Excellency Kim Jong Un, Chairman of the State Affairs Commission of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, May 24, 2018: Simon Sebag Montefiore, ed., *Written in History. Letters that Changed the World* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 2018), 212.

<sup>40</sup> Montefiore, *Written in History*, 211–12.

<sup>41</sup> It has been suggested that Photius’s possible familial links with the Armenian Bardas Caesar, uncle and adviser of Michael III, gave him an extra stake in the success of the Byzantine mission to Bulgaria: Codeso and Domínguez, “Deconstructing Photios,” 128.

<sup>42</sup> Jasper and Fuhrmann, *Papal Letters*, 120–21.

<sup>43</sup> Eugenio Russomanno, “Gelasio I e la teoria dei due poteri spirituale e temporale,” *Vatican Insider Documenti*, April 10, 2018. Russomanno only names one source: Rajko Bratož, “Gelasio I, Papa,” in *Enciclopedia dei Papi* (Rome: Treccani, 2000), 1:458–61.

# Propaganda, Patriotism, and News: Printing Discovered and Intercepted Letters In England, 1571–1600

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*Abstract:* In this article I propose that the relatively few intercepted and discovered letters printed during the reign of Elizabeth I fall chiefly into three categories: they were published as propaganda, as patriotic statement, and as news reportage. Although Elizabeth and her ministers published intercepted and discovered letters on a strictly ad hoc and contingent basis, the pamphlets and books in which these letters appear, along with associated ideological and polemical material, reveals determined uses of intercepted and discovered letters in print. Catholics likewise printed intercepted letters as propaganda to confront Elizabeth's anti-Catholic policies through their own propaganda apparatus on the continent. Intercepted letters were also printed less frequently to encourage religious and state patriotism, while other intercepted letters were printed solely as new reportage with no overt ideological intent. Because intercepted and discovered letters, as bearers of secret information, were understood to reveal sincere intention and genuine motivation, all of the publications assessed here demonstrate that such letters not only could be used as effective tools to shape cultural perceptions, but could also be cast as persuasive written testimony, as legal proof and as documentary authentication.

The years of the English civil wars are the ones usually associated with the printing of intercepted and discovered letters. The reign of Queen Elizabeth I, however, also witnessed the publication of intercepted and discovered letters, published as self-standing collections, and embedded in books and pamphlets.<sup>1</sup> Although the number of publications containing intercepted and discovered letters was comparatively small, such letters were published with specific, well defined motivations during this period.<sup>2</sup> In this paper, I contend that the intercepted and discovered letters printed during this time fall into three categories: propaganda, patriotic statement, and news reportage.<sup>3</sup> Of these three groupings, intercepted and discovered letters—printed along with associated content clearly ideological in nature—were most often published for propagandistic aims by governments and official institutions. Other intercepted letters not printed under governmental or institutional auspices were published for purposes of nationalism or patriotism; hence, I use the term *propaganda* in this paper expressly to identify material printed by a government or institution whose interests were served by that material, and not to publication by those who were not responding directly to official fiat. Still other intercepted letters, including the largest self-standing collections of intercepted letters printed during the period, were published in the interests of news (and, of course, profit) and whose printing had no direct or explicit propagandistic motive. I hope to demonstrate that those who published any sort of intercepted or discovered letter grasped a crucial feature of correspondence designated as such: that the fact of interception and discovery promised access to the genuine thoughts, motives, and characters of the letter writers, revealing their treachery, duplicity, and malicious intentions in the process; in doing so, these letters



provided unique written testimony that was exploited both as legal proof and as documentary authentication. During the years of Elizabeth's reign, these features of intercepted and discovered correspondence were developed both to advance ideological orthodoxy and to offer compelling news. In short, intercepted and discovered letters were printed well before the press was set loose in 1641, and analysis of these texts—most of which have been little studied—deepen understanding of the practices of Elizabethan print culture.

Letters in general, by contrast, were printed with much more regularity during this period. These include the “copy of a letter” type frequently published in and as news pamphlets.<sup>4</sup> Intercepted and discovered letters are another matter. To be clear, the intercepted and discovered letters I analyze here are letters printed at large. Intercepted letters were sometimes mentioned in news pamphlets, usually identified as the sources of particular pieces of news or else summarized broadly. A news report, for instance, might source a news item as having “beene lately seene by sundry Letters intercepted.”<sup>5</sup> Thomas Digges in his *Briefe Report of the Militarie Services Done in the Low Countries by the Erle of Leicester* (1587 / 7285.2) refers twice to intercepted letters as sources of his report, yet he prints none. Verbatim publication of intercepted and discovered letters was much rarer.<sup>6</sup>

The interception of letters could be managed in a number of ways, but (outside of random muggings of mail carriers) these required a postal infrastructure and considerable human resources to accomplish. The postal system in England was designed during the reign of Henry VIII to serve the government, and Elizabeth tightened official control of the postal system in 1585 and 1591—including the authority to detain bearers supposed of carrying suspicious letters and oversight over all packets going to the continent.<sup>7</sup> The Privy Council opened letters going to and coming from abroad, and government spies and agents on the continent arranged ad hoc thefts of letters or bribed administrators in order to intercept letters.<sup>8</sup> Privy Councilor Francis Walsingham was foremost in leading these endeavors.<sup>9</sup>

Official control of the post suggests that any intercepted letter that saw print in England must have come from the raw material received by Elizabeth's government: either those seized by her own officers or those taken by foreign agents, organizations, or governments and sent along to members of the Privy Council. In other words, unless the English government wanted an intercepted letter printed, it was not printed. However, printers and publishers also accessed foreign news reports, printed or handwritten, from which they derived or translated material for publication in England; as Joad Raymond makes clear, many news pamphlets of the 1580s and 1590s are in fact translations of Dutch and French content.<sup>10</sup> These included letters. It is no surprise, therefore, that those “copy of a letter” publications, as well as references to intercepted letters in news pamphlets, are almost entirely foreign letters (of state) written—when the names of any letter writers are given—by European military, religious, and political leaders. In any case, despite the fact that English printers and publishers had access to foreign content, any letters, intercepted or otherwise, that publishers and printers wished to print would still have been subject to licensing by the Stationers' Company before they could be published in England.

### *As Propaganda*

When Elizabeth's government printed intercepted and discovered letters, it was always for a specific purpose and in response to a specific context—rather than as general or broadcast propaganda;

she and her ministers sanctioned such letters for the press as propaganda sparingly, yet demonstrated an awareness of the effectiveness of epistolary propaganda to shape cultural perceptions and to manipulate political and religious attitudes. The same holds true for Catholic writers and polemicists, who printed intercepted letters as propaganda in English to confront Elizabeth's anti-Catholic policies through their own formidable propaganda machinery on the continent.

The earliest letters of this sort printed by the English government as propaganda are well known: the casket letters of Mary, Queen of Scots.<sup>11</sup> Mary's casket letters have been discussed at great length in prior scholarship but a more penetrating focus on how the printing of the letters was maneuvered, how the reception of the letters was shaped to position the letters as propaganda, illuminates the distinctive uses of discovered letters in print. Of special consequence is to determine why four years passed after the casket letters were initially discovered for the eight letters to see print.

A casket discovered on June 20, 1567, in the castle of Edinburgh was said to have been left behind by James Hepburn, 4th Earl of Bothwell, when he fled Scotland; in the casket were letters supposedly from Mary to Bothwell incriminating her in the murder of her husband, Henry Stuart, Lord Darnley. The letters were discussed during a December 1567 session of the Scottish Parliament, and were the subject of additional discussion during the York and Westminster conferences of October 1568 and January 1569, organized to determine Mary's guilt; during this time the existence of the letters was kept secret from the public at large.<sup>12</sup> While the case against Mary went unresolved, she was to remain a prisoner of the crown in England with James Stewart, 1st Earl of Moray, continuing as regent to the young King James VI, Mary having abdicated in July 1567. Both outcomes were those desired by Queen Elizabeth.<sup>13</sup>

The casket letters were therefore not printed at this time because it served no purpose to print them, as Elizabeth's objectives had been achieved.<sup>14</sup> However, in October 1571 three of the most incriminating of the casket letters were printed in Latin, along with substantial marginalia, near the end of George Buchanan's *De Maria Scotorum Regina* (1571 / 3978), originally written by Buchanan to accompany the presentation of the casket letters at the York and Westminster conferences.<sup>15</sup> The book consists chiefly of the "Detectio," an "Actio contra Mariam Scotorum Reginam," and three casket letters. The "Actio"—which was meant to suggest a legal action in the form of an indictment—was in fact composed by Thomas Wilson, although he is not identified, as the entire book was assumed to be by Buchanan.<sup>16</sup> The book was translated into anglicized Scots roughly a month later by Wilson as *Ane Detectioun of the Duinges of Marie Quene of Scottes* (1571 / 3981) including all eight casket letters. It was also translated into Scots as *Ane Detectioun of the Doingis of Marie Quene of Scottis* and published at Saint Andrews by Robert Lekprevik early in 1572 (3982) also with all eight letters. These last two publications give the first few lines of each letter in French with a complete translation following. Other editions immediately followed. None of the versions but Lekprevik's indicates its place of publication or offers a publisher's imprint (I will henceforth refer to all versions as *Detection*). The collective force of these publications was to make clear that they derived from Scotland—particularly from Buchanan—and not from England or Elizabeth's government.<sup>17</sup> John Guy suggests that William Cecil, 1st Baron Burghley, arranged for printing without Elizabeth's knowledge.<sup>18</sup>

The publication of *Detection* and the four-year-old casket letters it contained was in fact the direct result of the discovery of the Ridolfi Plot of 1571 in which Mary was implicated. Thomas Howard, 4th Duke of Norfolk, potential husband of Mary, was also incriminated. After discovery of the plot and Norfolk's arrest in September 1571, Elizabeth's government authorized publication of the various editions of *Detection* beginning in October, all of which included Mary's casket

letters, to condemn Norfolk's intention to put this fickle, deceitful, and notorious individual (as Mary is portrayed in *Detection*) on the English throne.<sup>19</sup> The casket letters served as ideal documentary evidence to define Mary as such. Of course, the publication of the casket letters in *Detection* was part of a larger propaganda campaign against Mary, undertaken without the appearance of Elizabeth's involvement as Elizabeth took no official action to attain and try Mary, a fellow monarch.<sup>20</sup> However, the principle of *Detection* and propaganda similar to it was "to concentrate on the reputed immorality of her personal character ... to render Mary totally unacceptable as a queen in the eyes of God and man."<sup>21</sup> A response of precisely this sort was in fact articulated by Norfolk, Ralph Sadler, and Thomas Radcliffe, 3rd Earl of Sussex, writing to Elizabeth on October 11, 1568, upon first viewing the casket letters: "The said lettres and ballades do discover suche inordinate ["and filthie" scored out] love betwene her and Bothaill, her loothesomnes and abhorringe of her husband that was murdered, in suche sorte, as every good and godlie man cannot but detest and abhorre the same."<sup>22</sup> When *Detection* came out it offered similar characterizations.<sup>23</sup> The casket letters were therefore meant to work within a complex of condemnatory evidence to serve as documentary, now widely public proof (Alison Weir calls the various editions of *Detection* "bestsellers") of Mary's behavior.<sup>24</sup> As A. E. MacRobert summarizes, "The English government believed that Mary was involved in Norfolk's plotting, and it was therefore opportune to besmirch her reputation through the publication of George Buchanan's *Detection* and the Casket Letters."<sup>25</sup> The publication regime centring on the letters was intended to characterize Mary as an unappealing defender of Catholicism, both in England and on the continent.<sup>26</sup>

The strategy of printing the letters to condemn Mary was both characterological and forensic. That is, the letters were framed both as testaments of character and as documentary proof. Apologists for Mary were, in turn, compelled to defend her character and criticize the evidence. *Detection* makes clear that what Mary wrote in the letters demonstrates personality and disposition: "Call to minde that part of hir letters to Bothwell quhairin sche maketh hir selfe Medea, that is, a woman that nouthur in love nor in hatrit can kepe any meane"; Mary "partly compareth hir selfe with Medea a bludy woman and a poysoning witch."<sup>27</sup> At the same time the *Detection* contains repeated references to the letters as supporting evidence of the claims made elsewhere in the book: "hir awin testimonie, by hir awin letters it must neidis be confessit"; and, more emphatically, "Read her awin letter, her letter (I say) written with her awin hand."<sup>28</sup> In the anonymous *The Copie of a Letter Written by One in London to His Frend Concernyng ... the Doynges of the Ladie Marie of Scotland* (1572 / 17565), which serves as a supporting publication to *Detection*, the author endorses the forensic significance of the letters, observing that the letters "are not counterfait but her owne [demonstrated by] ... the most autentike testimonie of the three estates of Scotland assembled in parliame[n]t."<sup>29</sup> To defend against the condemnation of Mary by these tactics, John Lesley in *The Copie of a Letter Writen Out of Scotland by an English Gentlema[n] ... of the Slaunderous and Infamous Reportes Made of the Queene of Scotland* (Louvain, 1572 / 15503) is therefore obliged to shield Mary from both forensic attacks and character assassination. Lesley wonders, "Can any wise man thinke it likely, that the Queene having alwaies shewed herself so modest, so circumspecte and wise, wold write any such letter with her owne hande?" to counter the proposition that Mary would compose any letters of the sort.<sup>30</sup> Lesley also makes clear that the casket letters are simply no sound legal evidence, writing that one of the damning letters "beareth no date, no subscriptio[n], no superscription, no seale, no[t] one word in it of co[m]mandme[n]t to co[m]mit the vile murder" to counteract the emphasis *Detection* and *Copie of a Letter* put on the forensic value of the letters.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, in referring to the casket letters before they were printed en masse in 1571, Lesley writes of them in *A Defence of ... Marie Quene of Scotlande* (Rheims, 1569 / 15505)

that they “are not able anywise to make a lawfull presumption[n]: much lesse anie good & sustantiall prouf.”<sup>32</sup> Whereas those defending Mary defined the discovered letters as unconvincing proof, those reviling Mary defined the letters—precisely because they were discovered—as compelling evidence of genuine character, sincere thoughts, and unadulterated motives; both the accusations and defenses of Mary increased markedly subsequent to the publication of the letters, as they constituted key evidence on which the arguments of each side turned.

A similar propagandistic purpose marks the publication of the anonymous *A Defence of the Honorable Sentence and Execution of the Queene of Scots* (1587 / 17566.3). It contains an “appendix” that includes the letter Anthony Babington wrote to Mary of the plot to assassinate Elizabeth, as well as Mary’s response in which she acquiesces to the scheme: letters used in part to convict Mary of treason. This is the first—and only—printing of these two letters in England during the sixteenth century.<sup>33</sup> The letters were published well after Mary’s trial but only shortly after Mary’s secret execution on February 8, 1587.

Unknown to Mary and her correspondents, Walsingham had constructed a channel of “secret” communication over which he had complete surveillance.<sup>34</sup> These two letters may be considered as intercepted if we deem Walsingham’s intervention into a conduit of apparently surreptitious exchange to constitute interception; Raphael Holinshed indeed calls them “surprised” letters and Thomas Phelippes refers to them as “letters intercepted.”<sup>35</sup> The two letters were among the evidence presented to Mary by the commission at Fotheringhay Castle during October 14 and 15, 1586; were read during the crown’s presentation of the evidence in the Star Chamber on October 25; and were read in Parliament on November 9.<sup>36</sup> Although authorship of the pamphlet is uncertain, there is evidence to suggest it is by Thomas Martin, doctor of civil law.<sup>37</sup>

The book appears to have been hurriedly put together—is even unfinished—and some sheets exist in different states; indeed, *Defence* has been the subject of some speculation due to its textual and licensing irregularities. The book was registered to John Windet on February 11, 1587, under the title “An Analogie or resemblance between Johane, Queene of Naples, and Marye, Queene of Scotland,” but it was ultimately published as *Defence of the Honorable Sentence and Execution of the Queene of Scots* with its first chapter dedicated to “An Analogie or resemblance betweene Jone queene of Naples and Marie queene of Scotland.”<sup>38</sup> John Payne Collier notes that the last eleven leaves of the book, which contain the two letters, were an “after-thought,” as he puts it, and claims that the “book was put together in great haste.”<sup>39</sup> Besides the two letters, the last group of signatures also contains a letter from Mary to Bernardino de Mendoza, former Spanish ambassador; the affirmation of one of Mary’s secretaries, Claude Nau, of the queen’s method of letter writing; two summaries of the principal points of each of the two incriminating letters by another of Mary’s secretaries, Gilbert Curle; and extensive marginal annotations on the three letters.

Cyndia Clegg has also commented on this book, recognizing in addition that a transcript of the book is in the British Library (Additional Manuscript 48027). It is in the hand of Robert Beale, clerk of the Privy Council, and includes Beale’s notation that the book was authored by Thomas Martin and that it was suppressed by John Whitgift, Archbishop of Canterbury.<sup>40</sup> Clegg, however, believes it is unlikely that *Defence* was a target of suppression; what is more likely is that the printing of “An Analogie” was “stayed until the government could arrange damage control” after Mary’s execution.<sup>41</sup> Recall that “An Analogie” was licensed on February 11, three days after the execution of Mary; however, the execution did not become public knowledge until 18 or 20 days later.<sup>42</sup> “An Analogie” therefore appears to have been stayed and reconfigured in the



meantime in order to prepare domestic and international perceptions of Mary's execution—specifically to portray an image of law upheld and justice served.

Burghley was likely directly behind organizing the revision of "An Analogie." A document he prepared entitled "The state of the cause, as it ought to be conceived and reported, concerning the execution done upon the Queen of Scots" bears a date of February 17.<sup>43</sup> In referring to Mary's execution in this document, Burghley writes of it as "to cause execution of *justice* to be done upon the said Queen of Scots" (my italics).<sup>44</sup> It is quite possible that *Defence* was quickly put together around the time of Burghley's unfinished memo. Furthermore, in a way similar to how "An Analogie" was reconfigured as *Defence*, sale of the second 1587 edition of Holinshed's *Chronicles* was halted by a February 1, 1587, order of the Privy Council to the archbishop of Canterbury so that the book might be revised.<sup>45</sup> One of the principal reasons, as Clegg argues, was that certain components of the 1587 *Chronicles*' narrative of the Babington Plot did not represent the image of law and justice that the Elizabethan government sought to present; the Babington conspirators, therefore, were to be portrayed as "traitors *under the statutory civil law*" and not as victims of a Protestant nation's vindictive zeal.<sup>46</sup> The 1587 *Chronicles* does not quote the two incriminating letters but offers summaries of them, indicating that "the originals themselves [are] extant and surprised."<sup>47</sup>

*Defence* is headed by the legend on the title page, "The execution of Lawe, is injurious to no man." It also contains a chapter on precedents from civil and canon law in justification of Mary's execution. This is how the letters were framed to fit into the discourse: as indisputable legal documents acting as evidence of Mary's guilt. The letters were among the evidence presented during Mary's trial at Fotheringhay, during the Star Chamber proceedings, and in Parliament; and the "appendix" of *Defence* includes other forensic material besides the letters. In short, the intercepted letters play a part in defending the justice of the execution of Mary by emphasizing the cogency of the evidence and the legality of her sentence. Yet if the principal purpose of printing the letters was for forensic documentation, it unclear why the letters were not printed earlier, after Mary's trial, before her execution or, indeed, after Elizabeth signed the proclamation of sentence on December 4, 1586, upon which several publications commending the justice of the sentence and many anti-Mary attacks were printed.<sup>48</sup> The letters had in fact come out in summarized form in Holinshed's *Chronicles* in late January, before Mary's execution, and the existence of the intercepted letters themselves appears to have been well known. Robert Cecil's official compilation *The Copie of a Letter to the Right Honourable the Earle of Leycester* (1586 / 6052) was printed around the same time as the publication of the proclamation of sentence. It contains parliamentary speeches by Lord Chancellor Thomas Bromley and Speaker John Puckering encouraging the execution of Mary as well as Elizabeth's cagey responses. A summary of Puckering's second speech in *Copie of a Letter* refers to reasons for executing Mary "collected out of her owne letters."<sup>49</sup> In full, Puckering had said, "And after in her letters of these treasons to Babington, wrote, 'That if she [Mary] were discovered, it would give sufficient cause to you [Elizabeth] to keep her in continual close Prison'"—paraphrasing from part of Mary's incriminating letter to Babington that in turn reads, "it were sufficient cause geven to that Queene in catching me againe, to inclose mee for ever in some hole, forth of the which I should never escape."<sup>50</sup> In short, the intercepted letters used to convict Mary were publicly acknowledged, intended to emphasize the justice of the sentence and to encourage Elizabeth to order Mary's execution.

However, printing the letters in advance of the execution would have allowed the precise wording to be scrutinized and hence open them to challenge. Mary at her trial had said "That it was an easy matter to counterfeit the Ciphers and Characters of others," that "many things have

often been inserted, which she never dictated,” and in doing so she introduces reasonable doubt.<sup>51</sup> Mary’s original letter was in fact tampered with—a postscript was inserted by decipherer Thomas Phelippes—so any challenges, particularly to Mary’s letter, might call into question the legitimacy of the evidence against her. Walsingham himself was concerned about the suspicions the forged postscript had aroused: “I feare the addytyon of the postscript hathe bread the ielousie,” he wrote to Phelippes.<sup>52</sup> The postscript is indeed absent from the letter as printed in *Defence*. Perhaps this is also why the *summarized* letters in Holinshed’s 1587 *Chronicles* were acceptable and not subjected to censorship (and also did not refer to the postscript); in fact, despite the existence of a number of contemporary manuscript copies, publication of the letters in their entirety appears to have been tightly controlled by the government.<sup>53</sup> After Mary’s execution, the legitimacy of the letters was indeed questioned, for instance, in *Mariae Stuartae Scotorum Reginae* (Cologne, 1587): “they have given out some treasonous letters, conceived between the queen and Babington; it is easily done, for either death or condemnation.”<sup>54</sup>

Since Mary’s casket letters had already been printed as propaganda against her, the impropriety of a monarch’s personal correspondence in print does not seem to pertain in the case of her letter to Babington. The *arcana imperii* rationale likewise is not fit since events were well publicized after the proclamation of sentence; and, like the casket letters, Babington and Mary’s letters do not contain sensitive political matter. The propagandistic use of her letter to Babington indeed resembles that of the casket letters: the casket letters were intended to aid in convicting the duke of Norfolk and to disparage Mary in the public eye by framing them as legal and documentary evidence, while the intercepted letters of Babington and Mary were printed under governmental auspices after her execution to lawfully justify it. Both are propagandistic motivations, but one was accomplished before the fact, the other after the fact.

A rather different species of intercepted letter publication appeared six years later as *A Discoverie of the Unnaturall and Traiterous Conspiracie of Scottisch Papists ... Whereunto Are Annexed Certaine Intercepted Letters ... Printed and Publisched at the Special Command of the Kings Majestie* (Edinburgh, 1593 / 14937). It contains nine letters prefaced by Presbyterian minister John Davidson. The book’s immediate circumstance of publication was the discovery of the “Spanish Blanks” plot in late 1592 and early 1593 by way of letters intercepted by Elizabeth’s government, taken on George Ker.<sup>55</sup> Among the intercepted letters published are a letter from John Cecil to Robert Persons and a letter each from William Douglas, 10th Earl of Angus; James Gordon; and Robert Abercrombie to Jesuit William Creighton. Included also in the book are five letters that had also been intercepted by Elizabeth’s government in early 1589: 1) a group letter from three Catholic Scottish nobles, George Gordon, 6th Earl of Huntley; John Maxwell, 8th Lord Maxwell (styled earl of Morton); and Claud Hamilton, 1st Lord Paisley to King Philip II of Spain; 2) a letter from Huntley to Alessandro Farnese, duke of Parma; 3) a letter from Francis Hay, 9th Earl of Erroll, to Parma; 4) a letter from Robert Bruce to Francis Aguirre; and 5) a letter from Bruce to Parma.<sup>56</sup> The 1592 blanks themselves consisted of blank papers signed by Huntley, Erroll, and Angus to be filled in afterward by an intermediary as pledges to King Philip once terms were agreed upon.<sup>57</sup> Davidson, in his preface to the pamphlet, refers to the order “by the Kings Majestie and his honourable Counsaill, that ... some of the most remarkable letters of the practisers, ... quhilkis wer intercepted with Maister George Ker ... shall appeare, and so the whole together to be imprinted, and set foorth unto the viewe of the world, to the glory of Gods Majestie (the onely revealer of these secreits) to the comfort & edification of his kirk, & the perpetual detectio[n] & shame of the unnatural enemye.”<sup>58</sup> However, it was not King James VI of Scotland who directly

ordered the publication of these letters, as the title page and Davidson's preface suggest; indeed, James may have known of this scheme for Spain to invade Scotland and convert it to Catholicism.<sup>59</sup>

James was presented with the first set of intercepted letters in February 1589, letters described by contemporary historian David Calderwood as "tending to the overthrow of religioun, and bringing in of Spanish forces to that effect," in which the earls promised their aid to King Philip.<sup>60</sup> James temporized. Huntley was briefly imprisoned, but otherwise no action was taken against the offenders despite the encouragement to action Elizabeth expressed in a letter accompanying the packet of intercepted correspondence.<sup>61</sup> Roughly four years later other papers were intercepted, those taken on George Ker, outlining an invasion of Scotland by Spain with the connivance of the northern earls.<sup>62</sup> As in 1589, James acted equivocally, unwilling to side decisively with any faction. While James was loath to act against the earls, he was pressured by the Kirk as well as by England; he took measures against Catholics during the Raid of Aberdeen, but the ministers of the Kirk demanded tougher action.<sup>63</sup> Robert Bowes, England's ambassador to Scotland, writes to Burghley of his "allegations [to King James] that untimely favour was showed towards the rebels and Papists, whereby the due execution of the course promised has not been sufficiently observed."<sup>64</sup> The publication of *Discoverie* was therefore among James's concessions to the Kirk and a response to pressure from England. Indeed, the order for the publication of the book itself appears to have come directly from the ministers of the Kirk with Davidson put in charge of preparing the preface: "Mr Johne [Davidson] was acquaint with the discoverie, and all the intercepted letters, and made a preface to be prefixed to the printed discoverie, and a directorie for understanding the borrowed and counterfooted names," as Calderwood writes.<sup>65</sup> Davidson selected judiciously, incorporating the most damning content: 13 letters Ker was carrying and two of the 1589 letters were not printed.<sup>66</sup> There was a roughly five-month period between when the last group of letters were discovered (in late December 1592) and when they were printed, in late May or early June 1593—certainly before June 21, when Ker escaped from prison (he is mentioned on the title page and in the preface as imprisoned), and after the order to print from the Presbytery of Edinburgh on May 15.<sup>67</sup>

As a concession to the Kirk and to England, the book was published chiefly to castigate the as-of-yet unpunished Catholic earls—"to prevent the farther danger, by assisting the execution of Justice upon the rest of the detected traitors without respect of persones," as Davidson writes in the preface.<sup>68</sup> Indeed, the inclusion of the four-year-old 1589 letters was crucial to implicate the earls: "the letters of 1589 give the presumptive evidence, the colour and force, which are rather wanting in the letters and blanks of the later conspiracy," writes T. G. Law.<sup>69</sup> The purpose of the publication was clear enough in one contemporary report sympathetic to Catholics, identifying the Kirk as behind the appearance of *Discoverie* and implying Burghley used the plot to insist on harsher anti-Catholic measures in Scotland: "The ministers at once printed these [1592] letters, and many others, from the duke of Parma, &c., which they had previously seized [in 1589]; and called the book 'Discovery of the treasons of the Scots papists,' for the purpose of making the Catholics hated. They also caused the King to proclaim them traitors, and by the advice of lord treasurer Cecil, they passed a law making it high treason to have mass performed, or to harbour a priest."<sup>70</sup> It is little surprise that the book came out soon after in England as *A Discoverie of the Unnatural and Traiterous Conspiracie of Scottish Papists ... First Printed and Published in Scotland* (1593 / 14938). It was entered in the Stationers' Register on June 26.<sup>71</sup> None of the subtitle or preface was changed in the London edition—Ker was still indicated as imprisoned even though he had escaped from prison on June 21 (and was still free in October).

As with Mary's casket letters, there was significant delay in the printing some of these letters—four years in the case of the 1589 epistles. The evidence of intercepted letters presented in the publication was built up over the course of two separate interceptions, letters from different contexts yoked together to structure a specific narrative with specific motivations. Moreover, because no publication resulted from the first interception, the printing of the intercepted letters was not intended generic or broadcast anti-Catholic propaganda, but was rather a consequence of pressure mounting on James to deal with those individuals suspected of conspiring with Catholic powers. In his introduction to the letters, Davidson specifically incorporates the language of duplicity exposed by way of providential discovery—that God is “the onely revealer of these secreits”—both to stress that the letter writers' genuine motives were laid bare and to impart divine sanction to this religious propaganda.

Catholic polemicists also exploited intercepted letters in pamphlet propaganda in English. One of these letters is in *An Advertisement Written to a Secretarie of My L. Treasurers of England, by an Inglish Intelligence ... Also ... a Letter Written by the L. Treasurer in Defence of His Gentrie, and Nobility, Intercepted, Published, and Answered by the Papistes* (Antwerp, 1592 / 19885), likely printed sometime in August.<sup>72</sup> Although framed as intelligence, it is not in fact a report sent to a secretary of Burghley from abroad but a piece of polemic by Richard Verstegan, who takes the persona of an English spy and who writes an introductory letter to frame the subsequent summary he is sending—a digest in English of Robert Persons's *Responsio ad edictum* (Antwerp, 1592), which is a reply to Elizabeth's promulgation of 1591 to apprehend and punish Jesuits and priests. *Responsio* contains a letter by Burghley of January 1592 written to Michael Moody, a genuine English informant in Antwerp, in which Burghley justified his government's policies and defended his ancestry. Moody had in fact received Burghley's letter, but the letter was evidently stolen from Moody afterward, copied, and then returned, finding its way into *Responsio* in Latin translation where it is given in segments with Persons's commentary on specific parts of the letter.<sup>73</sup> Though the role Verstegan takes in *Advertisement* is a fictional persona, the letter of Burghley printed as part of the pamphlet is authentic.

While it was not intercepted in the customary way interception operates—that is, taken in transit—the letter is nevertheless designated as intercepted on the title page of *Advertisement*, a statement meant to emphasize the authenticity of the letter's contents: that it is a genuine letter of Burghley. In taking the role of an English intelligencer in this book, Verstegan is in fact impersonating Moody, the informant to whom the letter was written and from whom it was stolen. Moody deeply regretted the theft of the letter and was obliged to explain to William White at court that he was not in fact the “Inglish Intelligence” designated on the title page of *Advertisement*, that he “Has not purposely allowed his name to be printed in that odious book, as an intelligencer, and as having received a letter from his Honour; his having done so would render him infamous wherever the religion of that book is professed.”<sup>74</sup> Although he admitted to having received the letter (and that it was not intercepted en route), Moody defended himself from the accusation that he had anything to do with the publication.

Burghley's intercepted letter is mentioned in the framing news report as “A lettre of my L. Treasurers writte[n] with his owne hande.”<sup>75</sup> In the summary of Persons's *Responsio* that follows in *Advertisement*, Burghley's letter is quoted in part and analyzed in some detail; Burghley's explanation of the edict is challenged, and his defense of his ancestry is mocked over several pages. On the subject of the latter, for instance, Burghley had written in his letter that “his howse is descended of the very old Princes of Wales themselves” and that the name of Cecil was derived “fro[m] Cecilius the Romaine name, whereof there were divers, but especially that famous rich



man named Caecilius Claudius”—all of which is called by Persons “an ambitious fiction of M. Cecill himself, and very ridiculous to all English of the discreeter sort.”<sup>76</sup> Edward Jones called *Advertisement* “a seditious vile book” and despite the attempt at suppression, it made its way into England in both print and manuscript form.<sup>77</sup> *Advertisement* acted as potent counterpropaganda for Spain, which had been deeply troubled by Elizabeth’s proclamation.<sup>78</sup> The letter was also meant to act as evidence that Burghley profited from the disenfranchisement of English Catholics and to demonstrate that he had intervened in the friendship between King Philip and Queen Elizabeth as an evil counselor in what was called the *Regnum Cecilianum*.<sup>79</sup>

*Newes from Spayne and Holland ... Written by a Gentleman Travelour Borne in the Low Countryes and Brought up from a Child in England unto a Gentleman, His Frend and Oste in London* (Antwerp, 1593 / 22994) by Robert Persons (and prepared by Verstegan), is another example of Catholic religio-political propaganda in the guise of news.<sup>80</sup> The pamphlet appeared sometime after September 1, the date given at the conclusion of the discourse. It includes an intercepted letter from Sultan Murad III of Turkey to Queen Elizabeth that was put to propagandistic use in the publication. The intercepted letter was not contemporary since it dated from September 1589 and had appeared in the German periodical *Mercurius Gallobelgicus* after it was intercepted.<sup>81</sup> William Camden writes that in 1593 there

were set forth in Germany certaine scandalous Libles against Queene Elizabeth, as if she had excited the Turke to make warre upon Christendome, and the letters were divulged which she had sent unto the Turke, but most unfaithfully falsified and corrupted, very many things being added, and divers contumelious and calumnious matters falsly and maliciously feigned and devised.... [T]here passed no other thing betwixt the Turke and her, but that her Subjects might trade securely in his Empire.<sup>82</sup>

Yet Elizabeth had, in fact, sought an alliance with the sultan against their common enemy Spain.<sup>83</sup>

The presentation of ideological perspective in the guise of news is evident in the format of *Newes from Spayne and Holland* as the pamphlet was described by a correspondent writing to Robert Cecil: “in the preface the collector declares how, being at Amsterdam, were consorted thither certain travellers, some from Spain and Italy lately arrived, and upon occasion of talk, question being asked ‘What news in Spain?’ the Spanish traveller openeth his bosom and draweth certain papers of all that he had collected at his being in Spain.”<sup>84</sup> Hence, the “Gentleman travelour” who is reporting to his friend and host in England refers in a portion of his news report to England’s “ope[n] dealing with the Turke[,] the publique enemye of al christian professio[n] ... by a playne letter written by the Turk himselfe about three or fower yeares agoone, to the Queene about this matter soone after the defeat of the spanish Armada, which letter [was] intercepted in Germany & printed ther both in the Latin & germane tonges.”<sup>85</sup> The letter from Murad to Elizabeth follows, in turn followed by detailed observations. As in *Advertisement*, the 1591 proclamation against Jesuits and priests is engineered to serve as the context of the letter in *Newes from Spayne and Holland*: “Lord Burley semed to bragg in his proclamation [of 1591] of the most quiet state and gover[n]ment of your common wealth for 33. yeares togeather, while other common wealthes rounde about you have lyved in broyles”; yet the intercepted letter demonstrates “the great hatred & obloquie which your country is in for styrring warres and rebellions on every side.”<sup>86</sup> The letter reveals the hypocrisy of Burghley and England, as the author asks rhetorically: “who would have thought when Ingla[n]d uppo[n] pretence of purer serving of Christ, did first seperate it selfe in religio[n] fro[m] the rest of Christian kingdomes, that it would have come in so few yeares, to that passe, as to make recourse to Christes open enemye & persecutor, & that agaynst Christians?”

More potently, however, it condemns them as heretics by their desire to “put into Christes enemyes handes, so many millions of [King Philip’s] subjects as are in Spayne ... and to put in hazard al Christendome besides.”<sup>87</sup> The 1589 letter is maneuvered to bear on a much later, though specific event: the 1591 proclamation against Jesuits and priests. This intercepted letter, one offering a peek into secret negotiations of state, was inserted into this context to demonstrate proof of Elizabeth as an adversary of Christianity itself. Moreover, as with *Advertisement*, framing the intercepted letter as news in *Newes from Spayne and Holland* invites one to see it as disinterested reportage rather than as ideologically loaded propaganda.

Although the number of discovered and intercepted letters published as propaganda during Elizabeth’s reign was small, the majority of those that were printed were done so belatedly: the casket letters, the Scottish-Catholic earls’ letters, and Murad’s letter to Elizabeth were each four years old by the time they were employed as propaganda, while Mary’s letter to Babington waited roughly seven months for publication after it was intercepted. Moreover, all of these letters were meant to document: some of the letters were intended to document forensically, that is, as legal evidence, as those in *Detection and Defence*. Other intercepted letters, like those of Burghley, the earls, and Murad’s to Elizabeth were intended to document malfeasance, treason, and heresy respectively, but not to act as legal or even as quasi-legal evidence; Burghley, Murad, and the earls were not put on trial, yet their letters were meant to document nonetheless. On the other hand, some of these pamphlets can be distinguished from one another based on the timing of publication: whereas the discovered casket letters published beginning in 1571 were printed with governmental connivance in *advance* of the duke of Norfolk’s trial to disparage Mary in the public eye, the intercepted letters of Babington and Mary were printed under governmental auspices *after* Mary’s execution in order to justify it, while the Scottish Catholic earls’ letters published in *Discoverie* were meant to *induce* charges of treason against Huntley, Erroll, and Angus.

### *As Patriotism*

A number of intercepted letters found their way into the 1598–1600 edition of Richard Hakluyt’s *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques, and Discoveries of the English Nation* (12626, 12626a). The largest cluster consists of 12 letters taken by English privateer John Watts, probably brought back to England in March 1591.<sup>88</sup> D. B. Quinn speculates that these letters could have been given to Hakluyt directly by those who had captured the Spanish vessels, but it seems more likely (as Quinn also proposes) that Hakluyt received them from a government official after they were examined for intelligence.<sup>89</sup> Among the letter writers are the governor of Havana, the bishop of Mechuacan, and a Spanish soldier, writing from locales including Peru, Cuba, Panama, and Mexico. The letters were published in 1600 in Book 3 of *Principal Navigations* in order for Hakluyt to encourage English Protestant patriotism.

As with other content included in *Principal Navigations*, these intercepted letters have little to do with navigation, trade, or exploration.<sup>90</sup> The Spanish correspondents write to request slaves, money, and other resources; express concerns about defense and military matters; and report the scarcity of commodities. However, like his inclusion of accounts of naval battles in *Principal Navigations*, Hakluyt incorporated these intercepted letters to serve a related nationalistic purpose. Indeed, between the first 1589 and second 1598–1600 edition of *Principal Navigations*, England had become a maritime power equal to Spain.<sup>91</sup> This fact is explicitly registered in the 1598–1600 *Principal Navigations* and is expressed precisely in the acquisition of “Certaine Spanish Letters

intercepted by shippes of the worshipfull Master John Wattes written from diverse places of the islandes and of the maine land as well of Nueva Espanna, as of Tierra Firma and Peru, containing many secrets touching the aforesaid countreys” as the heading to these 12 letters in part reads.<sup>92</sup>

England and Englishmen as Spain’s enemy are mentioned a number of times in these intercepted letters. The English are intermittently referred to as adversaries to assail, but the majority of the references are to the English as the assailants. For instance, John Lopez Canavate writes of “the audacious Englishmen being without all shame [who] are not afraid to come and dare us at our owne doors,” while Don John de Miramontes Suasola writes “newes of the enemy, which is comming upon the coast ... certeine Englishmen of war comming thither” in referring to John Chidley’s fleet; the bishop of Mechuacan mentions a fort constructed to defend against the invading English, Suasola reports that “English rovers” are pestering the coast of Peru, and Hieronymo de Nabares relates that there is an “extreme feare of the Englishmen our enemies, that the like was never seene or heard of: for in seeing a saile, presently here are alarmes in all the countrey.”<sup>93</sup> The marginal annotations to the intercepted letters are equally revealing and provide reinforcement to what the Spanish are writing in their letters about the English. The events referred to and Englishmen alluded to in the letters are clarified, but more often episodes and attacks are accentuated: “The Englishmen extremely feared in Peru” reads one annotation, while “The boldnes of the English” is twice added as an annotation to other letters.<sup>94</sup> Of course Hakluyt included a great number of various types of letters to compose his *Principal Navigations*, but the inclusion of expressly intercepted letters imparts a brand of objective authentication to declarations of English power, as the letters from Spaniards detailing English seafaring serve as compelling statements of English maritime prominence.<sup>95</sup>

Hakluyt’s strategy has broader implications, however, since “England, Hakluyt implies, will be God’s instrument in breaking the bondage imposed by Spain on its subjects,” as David Harris Sacks puts it.<sup>96</sup> In other words, Hakluyt’s use of letters intercepted from Catholic Spain alerts us to a dimension of Hakluyt’s nationalism besides his declaration of England’s maritime preeminence—that is, the truth of England’s Protestant faith. For instance, another set of intercepted letters taken by George Popham in 1594, given in abstract, reports the circumstances of the Spaniards claiming the “wonderfull riches in ... [Nuevo] Dorado ... [where] golde ... is in great abundance,” as described in one of these intercepted letters; and in another letter Rodrigo Caranza reports to King Philip specifically of the Christianizing process:

frier Francis Carillo by the Interpreter, delivered him [the cacique] certain things of our holy Catholique faith, to all which he answered, that they understood him well and would become Christians, and that with a very good will they should advance the crosse, in what part or place of the towne it pleased them.... Thereupon the said master of the campe tooke a great crosse, and set it on end towarde the East, and requested the whole campe to witnesse it.<sup>97</sup>

However, Hakluyt believed that Spain’s conversion of new world peoples was only a ploy to obtain their wealth: the Spanish and Portuguese “pretending in glorious words that they made their discoveries chiefly to convert infidels to our most holy faith (as they say), in deed and truth sought not them but their goods and riches.”<sup>98</sup> Therefore, to Hakluyt, the intercepted letters taken by Popham give documentary evidence of the falsehood (and hypocrisy) of Spanish religious pretensions; indeed, the letters are evidence of Spain’s attempt to perpetuate the dominion of the anti-Christ and so buttress Hakluyt’s broader thesis of Spanish imperial and religious tyranny.<sup>99</sup>

The act of printing these intercepted letters also allows Hakluyt to reveal secret matter, sincere intentions, and bona fide motives. Without a doubt, Hakluyt acknowledges the utility of printing secret information, expressly that taken from Spain, in prefacing *Principal Navigations*: “I have used the uttermost of my best endeavour, to get, and having gotten, to translate out of Spanish, and here in this present volume to publish such secrets of theirs, as may any way availe us or annoy them, if they drive and urge us by their sullen insolencies, to continue our courses of hostilitie against them.”<sup>100</sup> Recall that the heading of the 12 intercepted letters taken in 1591 indicates that they contain “many *secrets* touching the aforesaid countreys” (my italics). In other words, Hakluyt’s printing of Spanish secrets in the form of intercepted letters is precisely part of his goal of availing England.

### *As News*

Among the largest self-standing collections of intercepted letters printed during the period under consideration are *Newes from Antwerp, the 10 Day of August, 1580. Contayning ... Sundrie Late Intercepted Letters* (1580 / 692), containing nine letters; and *Letters Conteyning Sundry Devices ... by Card. Grenvelle and Others* (1582 / 19768), containing nineteen letters. Unlike the other large collection, *Discoverie of the Unnaturall and Traiterous Conspiracie of Scottisch Papists*, however, these were not published as a species of propaganda meant to support a specific religious or political agenda; rather, they were intended simply as news reportage.

The full title of *Newes from Antwerp* indicates that it contains “a speciall view of the present affayres of the lowe countreyes: revealed and brought to lyght by sundrie late intercepted letters.... Translated into English ... according to the originall copie printed at Antwerp by William Riviere.” It was printed by John Charlewood, who entered it in the Stationers’ Register on August 4, 1580.<sup>101</sup> It contains letters from correspondents such as Frédéric d’Yve (abbot of Marolles) and Gaspar Schetz writing to correspondents Cardinal Antoine Perrenot de Granvelle and King Philip II of Spain. All but one of the letters are dated in the last half of June 1580. The entirety of *Newes from Antwerp* is in fact a faithful translation of *Lettres Interceptes de Quelques Patriots Masqués* (Antwerp, 1580) including the prefatory matter and the extensive marginal annotations that occur throughout. The subtitle of the English translation indicates that it was printed by Guillaume de la Riviere, but the pamphlet in fact derives from the print house of Christopher Plantin.<sup>102</sup>

*Lettres Interceptes de Quelques Patriots Masqués* was printed in Antwerp in the interests of the Dutch rebels and the Calvinist cause. The author of the preface and marginal annotations may be Jean-François le Petit, former court clerk of Béthune, who became a Calvinist and went to Antwerp where he entered the service of the Prince of Orange.<sup>103</sup> Whoever wrote the preface and marginalia composed condemnatory, sometimes sarcastic text that is fiercely anti-Spanish, anti-Catholic, and anticlerical. Generally, the pamphlet despairs of the possibility of a United Provinces and the hopelessness of peace with Spain. Specifically, the pamphlet indicts as traitors d’Yve and Schetz, individuals who took part in the Cologne conference of 1579 as ambassadors of the States-General to negotiate peace.<sup>104</sup> Because there is no direct reference to England or English involvement in the Low Countries in the preface, in the marginal annotations, or in the intercepted letters themselves, it seems that the English translation of this pamphlet as *Newes from Antwerp* was published simply as straightforward reportage rather than as the ideologically charged polemic it was when published originally in Antwerp as *Lettres Interceptes de Quelques Patriots Masqués*. Indeed, the main title of the English translation—*Newes from Antwerp, the 10 Day of August*,



1580—frames the pamphlet in the context of news, particularly foreign news of the Dutch revolt popular in England during this decade.<sup>105</sup>

*Letters Conteyning Sundry Devices*, printed by Thomas Dawson for Thomas Charde, a similar collection of intercepted foreign letters of state printed two years later, is, like *Newes from Antwerp*, a translation of a foreign publication as stated on the title page (“Lately Intercepted and Published”)—in this case of *Lettres Interceptes du Cardinal de Granvelle et Autres* (Antwerp, 1582) also printed by Christopher Plantin.<sup>106</sup> Of the nineteen letters in *Letters Conteyning Sundry Devices*, eleven are by Granvelle. They are all from April 1582.

On July 12, 1582, English informant William Herle wrote to Walsingham from Antwerp, “I do send yow ... a booke newlye ymprynted of lres intercepted, ytt may plese your honor to take theme in good part, as yow be wont to do.”<sup>107</sup> It is almost certain that the collection of printed intercepted letters Herle sent to Walsingham was *Lettres Interceptes du Cardinal de Granvelle et Autres*, as it appears to be the only collection of intercepted letters printed in Antwerp during 1582.<sup>108</sup> What is unclear, however, is if Walsingham authorized the translation and had the collection printed in England. Christopher Barker—the queen’s printer and a client of Walsingham who did other printing for Walsingham—did not print it; neither did John Wolfe, who published similar sorts of material for Burghley during the 1580s.<sup>109</sup> Hence, although we can trace a line of transmission of these printed intercepted letters from Antwerp to a member of the Privy Council, there is no conclusive evidence that the government initiated the publication of the translation of the intercepted letters. It is more likely that industrious printers and booksellers like Dawson and Charde were capitalizing on popular interest in news of the Dutch revolt—as Charlewood did with *Newes from Antwerp*. No preface, no marginalia, no concluding remarks were added to *Letters Conteyning Sundry Devices* to highlight English political or religious interests, which suggests that the translation of the intercepted letters was to present them as news rather than as unofficial propaganda.

There is little doubt that both *Lettres Interceptes de Quelques Patriots Masqués* and *Lettres Interceptes du Cardinal de Granvelle et Autres* were meant to have ideological impact in their country of origin. These two pamphlets may have had the ideological impact in England that they had in the Low Countries, but the express purpose of publishing either of the pamphlets in England was not as propaganda. It is instructive to understand that the largest collections of intercepted letters published in England during the time were not ordered into print by the government, which indicates that Elizabeth’s administration simply did not envision the printing of foreign intercepted letters as propaganda insofar as they sought to publish or even supported their publication. The State Papers, in fact, records many, many instances of foreign letters that had been intercepted and passed onto the queen and members of her Privy Council, but these were never printed; one such interception in France in 1581 as reported to Secretaries Walsingham and Thomas Wilson, for instance, included letters written by Granvelle, but these were never printed by the government.<sup>110</sup> One of the reasons no doubt was because publishing these sorts of letters—sometimes state letters dealing with sensitive issues—would allow the public too much insight into English politics and foreign policy: what King James I later complained of as trespasses against the *arcana imperii*. This explains why—with but a single exception—no self-standing collections of foreign or domestic intercepted letters were printed as pamphlets in England during the reign of James I or during the reign of Charles I up to 1640.<sup>111</sup> On the other hand, the intercepted and discovered letters of Mary, Queen of Scots—a monarch—do not appear to fall within the purview of *arcana imperii* precisely because of Mary’s threat to Elizabeth’s reign. The English government therefore mobilized a queen’s letters to serve as propaganda by printing them.

Unlike the civil war publication practices of the English Parliament, which undertook a pervasive, ongoing regime of printing the intercepted, captured, and discovered letters of its enemies, publication during Elizabeth's reign was on a strictly contingent basis. Furthermore, comments and observations that so often frame publications of intercepted and discovered letters printed after 1640—detailed discussion of the processes by which letters were intercepted or discovered, and analyses underscoring the meaning of discovered and intercepted letters—are few in the books and pamphlets I examine in this paper; that is, there is little detailed commentary on the fact that these sorts of letters take secret paths, expose treachery, and energize conspiracy. These meanings are implied, even touched upon, but methodical explorations of the complex ways through which discovered and intercepted letters could be exploited in print would not occur in England until the years of the English civil wars.

## NOTES

I include English Short Title Catalogue (ESTC) numbers directly after the year of the publication, as per A. W. Pollard and G. R. Redgrave's *Short-Title Catalogue of Books Printed in England, Scotland and Ireland and English Books Printed Abroad 1473–1640*, accessed through the ESTC database at the British Library. I change “u” to “v,” “i” to “j” and “vv” to “w” in all early modern sources I quote (but not in modern editions or when early modern sources are quoted in modern scholarship). Punctuation in long titles of early modern books is tidied up and I normalize italics in all primary sources; I also extend printed contractions and silently correct nonsubstantive printing errors. I have adjusted Lady Day dating and assume the year began on January 1.

<sup>1</sup> Prior research conducted on the various intersections of letters, print, propaganda, and news during the years of Elizabeth's reign includes Lisa Ferraro Parmelee's *Good Newes from Fraunce: French Anti-League Propaganda in Late Elizabethan England* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 1996); Luc Racaut's *Hatred in Print: Catholic Propaganda and Protestant Identity during the French Wars of Religion* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002); Joad Raymond's *Pamphlets and Pamphleteering in Early Modern Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Gary Schneider's *The Culture of Epistolarity: Vernacular Letters and Letter Writing in Early Modern England, 1500–1700* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005); M. A. Shaaber's *Some Forerunners of the Newspaper in England, 1476–1622* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1929); Paul J. Voss's *Elizabethan News Pamphlets: Shakespeare, Spenser, Marlowe and the Birth of Journalism* (Pittsburg: Duquesne University Press, 2001); and Denis B. Woodfield's *Surreptitious Printing in England, 1550–1640* (New York: Bibliographical Society of America, 1973).

<sup>2</sup> I define discovered letters as those found in one's closet or chambers, usually letters that had already been sent and received. Intercepted letters comprise those taken in transit, not received by their intended addressees—although sometimes copies of the letters intercepted were made and the originals sent on.

<sup>3</sup> In the interest of thoroughness, I would like to observe that intercepted letters were also printed in history writing, though such occurrences were rarer still during this period. One is in John Proctor's *The Historie of Wyates Rebellion* (1554 / 20407), while Raphael Holinshed in the second volume of the 1577 *Chronicles* (13568.5, 13568b) refers to intercepted letters taken during reign of Edward II, one of which is quoted (Proctor, *Historie of Wyates Rebellion*, 42r–v; Holinshed, *Chronicles*, 2:864). Intercepted letters are mentioned as source material in other histories, including both the 1577 and 1587 editions of Holinshed's *Chronicles*, John Stow's *Chronicles of England* (1580 / 23333), and Richard Knolles's *The Generall Historie of the Turkes* (1603 / 15051), but the full texts of these letters are not printed.

<sup>4</sup> Schneider, *Culture of Epistolarity*, 201–10; Shaaber, *Some Forerunners*, 253–54; Voss, *Elizabethan News Pamphlets*, 197–208.

<sup>5</sup> *Good Newes from Fraunce* (1592 / 11273.5), sig. B.2.v.

<sup>6</sup> When Paul Voss writes of “the propensity for intercepted letters finding their way into print in the news quartos” (*Elizabethan News Pamphlets*, 195), he must be referring to instances where intercepted letters are identified as the sources of some specific information or whose content is recapitulated in general within a broader news report. In fact, Voss's bibliography contains no pamphlet with a title including the term “intercepted letter” or the like.

<sup>7</sup> Philip Beale, *England's Mail: Two Millenia of Letter Writing* (Stroud: Tempus, 2005), 139, 177–78.

<sup>8</sup> Beale, *England's Mail*, 176, 178–79.

- <sup>9</sup> Stephen Budiansky writes of Walsingham's control of a "far-flung network of reporters, spies, and purloiners of secret correspondence" (*Her Majesty's Spymaster: Elizabeth I, Sir Francis Walsingham, and the Birth of Modern Espionage* [New York: Penguin, 2005], 115).
- <sup>10</sup> Raymond, *Pamphlets*, 103; see also Clifford Chalmers Huffman, *Elizabethan Impressions: John Wolfe and His Press* (New York: AMS, 1988), 69.
- <sup>11</sup> Modern scholarship has reached the consensus that the casket letters of Mary were forged or doctored. See A. E. MacRobert, *Mary Queen of Scots and the Casket Letters* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2002), 149–53; Alison Weir, *Mary, Queen of Scots and the Murder of Lord Darnley* (New York: Ballantine, 2003), 221; John A. Guy, *Queen of Scots: The True Life of Mary Stuart* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2004), 397, 399–400, 403–4; and Retha M. Warnike, *Mary Queen of Scots* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 177–79.
- <sup>12</sup> MacRobert, *Casket Letters*, 89; Peter Lake, *Bad Queen Bess? Libels, Secret Histories, and the Politics of Publicity in the Reign of Queen Elizabeth I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 19.
- <sup>13</sup> MacRobert, *Casket Letters*, 93–102; James Emerson Phillips, *Images of a Queen: Mary Stuart in Sixteenth-Century Literature* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1964), 53.
- <sup>14</sup> MacRobert offers other reasons why the letters may not have been published sooner after their discovery: "there must have been some collusion between them [the Scottish and English governments] not to do so. Perhaps there was a lack of confidence in exposing them to widespread scrutiny; or their publication might have offended foreign governments; or the Letters may have been withheld as a form of pressure on Mary" (*Casket Letters*, 104).
- <sup>15</sup> Phillips, *Images of a Queen*, 62; Warnike, *Mary Queen of Scots*, 200; MacRobert, *Casket Letters*, 93–97.
- <sup>16</sup> Phillips, *Images of a Queen*, 63, 62.
- <sup>17</sup> Phillips, *Images of a Queen*, 63; Lake, *Bad Queen Bess?*, 44.
- <sup>18</sup> Guy, *Queen of Scots*, 453–54.
- <sup>19</sup> MacRobert, *Casket Letters*, 104; Phillips, *Images of a Queen*, 64.
- <sup>20</sup> Weir, *Mary, Queen of Scots*, 557; Warnike, *Mary Queen of Scots*, 200; Phillips, *Images of a Queen*, 55–56.
- <sup>21</sup> Phillips, *Images of a Queen*, 64, 65.
- <sup>22</sup> *Calendar of the State Papers Relating to Scotland and Mary, Queen of Scots, 1547–1603*, vol. 2 (1563–1569), ed. Joseph Bain (Edinburgh: Her Majesty's General Register House, 1900), 527 (abbreviated CSP hereafter).
- <sup>23</sup> Guy, *Queen of Scots*, 455.
- <sup>24</sup> Weir, *Mary, Queen of Scots*, 557.
- <sup>25</sup> MacRobert, *Casket Letters*, 104.
- <sup>26</sup> Phillips, *Images of a Queen*, 59.
- <sup>27</sup> *Ane Detectioun* (1571), sigs. G.ij., K.ijj. See also Karen Cunningham, *Imaginary Betrayals: Subjectivity and the Discourses of Treason in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 122–26.
- <sup>28</sup> *Ane Detectioun* (1571), sigs. M.ijj.<sup>v</sup>, H.ijj.
- <sup>29</sup> *Copie of a Letter Written by One in London*, sig., B.ii. The pamphlet has been attributed to Burghley and Buchanan.
- <sup>30</sup> Lesley, *Copie of a Letter Writen Out of Scotland*, fol. 13r.
- <sup>31</sup> Lesley, *Copie of a Letter Writen Out of Scotland*, fol. 14r.
- <sup>32</sup> Lesley, *Defence of ... Marie Quene of Scotlande*, fol. 10v.
- <sup>33</sup> See John Scott, *A Bibliography of Works Relating to Mary Queen of Scots 1544–1700* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Bibliographical Society, 1906).
- <sup>34</sup> See Conyers Read, *Mr. Secretary Walsingham and the Policy of Queen Elizabeth*, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1925), 3:1–70, for details of the plot.
- <sup>35</sup> Raphael Holinshed et al., *The Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland*, 2nd ed., 3 vols. (1587 / 13569), 3:1578; *CSP Relating to Scotland and Mary, Queen of Scots, 1547–1603*, vol. 8 (1585–1586), ed. William K. Boyd (Edinburgh: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1914), 677.
- <sup>36</sup> *Cobbett's Complete Collection of State Trials*, 34 vols., comp. T. B. Howell (London: Bagshaw, 1809–1826), vol. 1, col. 1174; *Miscellaneous State Papers from 1501 to 1726* [The Hardwicke Papers], 2 vols. (London: Strahan and Cadell, 1778), 1:228, 230. *Cobbett's Parliamentary History of England*, 36 vols., various eds. (London: Longman et al., 1806–1820), 1:838.
- <sup>37</sup> See John Payne Collier, *A Bibliographical and Critical Account of the Rarest Books in the English Language*, 4 vols. (New York: Francis and Scribner, 1866), 3:252–4; Cyndia Susan Clegg, *Press Censorship in Elizabethan England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 272 n. 86.
- <sup>38</sup> The Stationers' record is quoted in Collier, *Bibliographical Account*, 3:253.
- <sup>39</sup> Collier, *Bibliographical Account*, 3:254.
- <sup>40</sup> Clegg, *Press Censorship*, 272 n. 86.
- <sup>41</sup> Clegg, *Press Censorship*, 272 n. 86.

<sup>42</sup> Clegg, *Press Censorship*, 162.

<sup>43</sup> *Calendar of the Manuscripts of the Most Honourable the Marquess of Salisbury* [The Cecil Papers], 24 parts, various eds. (London: Her / His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1883–1976), 3:223–24. See also Phillips, *Images of a Queen*, 130, on Burghley as principal agent of this sort of anti-Mary propaganda.

<sup>44</sup> See Lowell Gallagher, *Medusa's Gaze: Casuistry and Conscience in the Renaissance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 30–35, for comment on the justice of the actions.

<sup>45</sup> Clegg, *Press Censorship*, 140–41. Burghley was also among the Privy Councilors responsible for the reformation of the publication (152).

<sup>46</sup> Clegg, *Press Censorship*, 167–68.

<sup>47</sup> Holinshed, *Chronicles*, 2nd ed., 3:1578.

<sup>48</sup> See Phillips, *Images of a Queen*, 118–27, for these sorts of publications.

<sup>49</sup> Cecil, *Copie of a Letter*, 25.

<sup>50</sup> *State Trials*, vol. 1, col. 1198; *Defence*, sig. E. of the second gathering.

<sup>51</sup> *State Trials*, vol. 1, cols. 1182, 1186. See also Cathy Shrank, “Manuscript, Authenticity and ‘evident proofs’ against the Scottish Queen,” *English Manuscript Studies 1100–1700*, vol. 15: “Tudor Manuscripts, 1485–1603,” ed. A. S. G. Edwards (London: British Library, 2009), 210. Cunningham (115–20) has also discussed the question of Mary's letters as sound evidence of treason.

<sup>52</sup> John Hungerford Pollen, *Mary Queen of Scots and the Babington Plot* (Edinburgh: Constable, 1922), 26–46, offers the details of Mary's letter to Babington; see 132–33 for Walsingham's August 3, 1586, letter to Phelippes.

<sup>53</sup> See Pollen, *Mary Queen of Scots*, 35–37, on contemporary copies.

<sup>54</sup> The original reads, “sparsierint aliquas literas proditionis, inter Reginam & Babingtonium conceptus, id facillè factu est, utroq[ue] iam aut mortuo, aut condemnato” (sig. B4v).

<sup>55</sup> The 1592 letters are printed in *CSP Relating to Scotland and Mary, Queen of Scots, 1547–1603*, vol. 11 (1593–1595), ed. Annie I. Cameron (Edinburgh: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1936), 3–15.

<sup>56</sup> Andrew Lang, *A History of Scotland from the Roman Occupation*, 4 vols. (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1900–1907), 2:343. See David Calderwood, *The History of the Kirk of Scotland*, 8 vols., ed. Thomas Thomson (Edinburgh: Woodrow Society, 1842–1849), 5:14–35, for all the 1589 letters. Morton's and Hamilton's names are suppressed in *Discoverie* since they have “sensyne returnit to the professioun and defence of the trueth” (sig. Cv).

<sup>57</sup> T. G. Law, “The Spanish Blanks and the Catholics Earles, 1592–4,” *The Scottish Review* 22 (July and October 1893): 17. Francis Shearman sees the blanks less ominously, as blank letters of credit, commonly used at the time: Shearman, “The Spanish Blanks,” *Innes Review* 3.2 (1952): 89.

<sup>58</sup> [Davidson], *To the Reader*, sigs. 2r, 2v.

<sup>59</sup> Calderwood, *History*, 5:251; John Rawson Elder, *Spanish Influences in Scottish History* (Glasgow: Maclehose and Jackson, 1920), 193–94, 202–3. But see Shearman, “Spanish Blanks,” 84, for the view that no evidence exists of James's knowledge of the plotting.

<sup>60</sup> Calderwood, *History*, 5:6–7; Gordon Donaldson, *Scotland: James V to James VII* (New York: Praeger, 1966), 189.

<sup>61</sup> Donaldson, *Scotland*, 189; for Elizabeth's letter to James, see Calderwood, *History*, 5:7–8.

<sup>62</sup> Donaldson, *Scotland*, 190.

<sup>63</sup> Elder, *Spanish Influences*, 199–200; 206–8, 209; Shearman, “Spanish Blanks,” 95–96.

<sup>64</sup> Cameron, *CSP Scotland*, 11:90.

<sup>65</sup> Calderwood, *History*, 5:251.

<sup>66</sup> Law, “Spanish Blanks,” 14. Davidson also writes in his diary on May 26 about the care given to the selection of letters for publication (Calderwood, *History*, 5:251).

<sup>67</sup> Thomas M'Crie, *The Life of Andrew Melville*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: William Blackwood, 1819), 2:27 n. \*: the book “was published under the direction of the ministers of Edinburgh. (Rec[ords] of Presb[tery] of Edin[burgh] May 15. 1593.)” A statement by James Melville that the book was “publist in print at the executioun of the said [coconspirator] David [Graham],” which was on February 15, 1593, is mistaken, and must refer to the fact that Graham's name and date of execution were stated in the full title of *Discoverie (The Autobiography and Diary of Mr. James Melvill*, ed. Robert Pitcairn [Edinburgh: Woodrow Society, 1842], 306 n. 2).

<sup>68</sup> [Davidson], *To the Reader*, sig. 3v. See Shearman, “Spanish Blanks,” 85, for the Kirk's position regarding the handling of the discovery of the plot.

<sup>69</sup> Law, “Spanish Blanks,” 14, 16.

<sup>70</sup> *Calendar of Letters and State Papers Relating to English Affairs Preserved Principally in the Archives of Simancas*, 4 vols., ed. Martin A. S. Hume (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1899), 4:589.

<sup>71</sup> *A Transcript of the Registers of the Company of Stationers of London, 1554–1640*, 5 vols., ed. Edward Arber (London: Privately Printed, 1875–1894), 2:633.

<sup>72</sup> The dedicatory letter heading the pamphlet is dated August 1. G. B. Harrison lists it under August 15, 1592, but does not provide a rationale for this date (*An Elizabethan Journal: Being a Record of Those Things Most Talked about during the Years 1591–1594* [New York: Cosmopolitan, 1929], 161).

<sup>73</sup> Albert J. Loomie, “The Authorship of ‘An Advertisement written to a Secretarie of M. L. Treasurer of England...’,” *Renaissance News* 15.3 (1962), 202–3.

<sup>74</sup> Loomie, “Authorship,” 205–6.

<sup>75</sup> *Advertisement*, 8.

<sup>76</sup> *Advertisement*, 38.

<sup>77</sup> Loomie, “Authorship,” 203; Victor Houliston, *Catholic Resistance in Elizabethan England: Robert Persons’s Jesuit Polemic, 1580–1610* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 54; Jones is also quoted in Houliston.

<sup>78</sup> Loomie, “Authorship,” 203–4.

<sup>79</sup> Alexandra Gajda, *The Earl of Essex and Late Elizabethan Political Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 86; Donna B. Hamilton, *Anthony Munday and the Catholics, 1560–1633* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 143; Stephen Alford, “The Political Creed of William Cecil,” in *The Monarchical Republic of Early Modern England: Essays in Response to Patrick Collinson*, ed. John F. McDiarmid (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 76.

<sup>80</sup> Houliston, *Catholic Resistance*, 55; Paul Arblaster, *Antwerp & the World: Richard Verstegan and the International Culture of Catholic Reformation* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2004), 61.

<sup>81</sup> *Mercurius Gallobelgicus sive rerum in Gallia et Belgio potissimum; Hispania quoque Italia, Anglia, Germania, Polonia, Vicinisque locis ab anno 1588 usque ad Martium anni praesentis 1594 gestarum* (Cologne, 1594), 120. It is likewise in Thomas Stapleton’s *Apologia pro Rege Catholico Philippo II* (Constance, 1592), 89. See Arthur Leon Horniker, “William Harborne and the Beginning of Anglo-Turkish Diplomatic and Commercial Relations,” *The Journal of Modern History* 14.3 (Sept. 1942): 303–16.

<sup>82</sup> Camden, *Annals, or the Historie of ... Elizabeth*, 3rd ed. (1635 / 4501), 419–20.

<sup>83</sup> Horniker, “William Harborne,” 305.

<sup>84</sup> *Calendar of the Salisbury Manuscripts*, 4:498.

<sup>85</sup> *Newes from Spayne and Holland*, fols. 16r–v.

<sup>86</sup> *Newes from Spayne and Holland* fols. 14v–15r, 16r.

<sup>87</sup> *Newes from Spayne and Holland*, fol. 18v.

<sup>88</sup> These are in volume 10 of the 12 volume reissue of *The Principal Navigations* (Glasgow: J. MacLehose and Sons, 1903–1905), 158–78. Other intercepted letters are scattered throughout *The Principal Navigations*. See 9:204, 11:39 and 11:64. But except for a small group of intercepted letters (given in abstract) about Guiana taken by George Popham in 1594 (10:432–39), no marked nationalistic capital is made out of the others.

<sup>89</sup> *The Hakluyt Handbook*, 2 vols., ed. D. B. Quinn (London: Hakluyt Society, 1974), 2:451.

<sup>90</sup> James P. Helfers, “The Explorer or the Pilgrim? Modern Critical Opinion and the Editorial Methods of Richard Hakluyt and Samuel Purchas,” *Studies in Philology* 94.2 (Spring 1997): 170. See also Julia Schleck, “‘Plain Broad Narratives of Substantial Facts’: Credibility, Narrative, and Hakluyt’s *Principall Navigations*,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 59.3 (Fall 2006): 776–77, 785, and 791 on the letters generally.

<sup>91</sup> Helfers, “Explorer or Pilgrim,” 170.

<sup>92</sup> Hakluyt, *Principal Navigations*, 10:158.

<sup>93</sup> Respectively in Hakluyt, *Principal Navigations*, 10:163–64, 170, 168, 169, and 178.

<sup>94</sup> Hakluyt, *Principal Navigations*, 10:178, 162, 163.

<sup>95</sup> Quinn writes of “Hakluyt’s own inclusion of captured Spanish documents [that] gave a new dimension to the 1600 volume. The letters intercepted in 1590 dovetail well with the English record, for their emphasis is on Spanish reactions to English attacks” (*Hakluyt Handbook*, 1:239).

<sup>96</sup> Sacks, “Richard Hakluyt’s Navigations in Time: History, Epic, and Empire,” *Modern Language Quarterly* 67.1 (March 2006): 56.

<sup>97</sup> Hakluyt, *Principal Navigations*, 10:433, 436.

<sup>98</sup> From Hakluyt’s dedicatory epistle to *Divers Voyages* (1582 / 12624), sig. ¶12v. Quoted in Richard Helgersson, *Forms of Nationhood: the Elizabethan Writing of England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 168.

<sup>99</sup> See Sacks, “Hakluyt’s Navigations,” especially 53–57.

<sup>100</sup> Hakluyt, *Principal Navigations*, 1:lxvii. See also Mary Fuller, “Richard Hakluyt’s Foreign Relations,” in *Travel Writing, Form, and Empire: The Poetics and Politics of Mobility*, ed. Julia Kuehn and Paul Smethurst (New York: Routledge, 2009), 41.

<sup>101</sup> *Extracts from the Registers of the Stationers’ Company of Works Entered of Publication between the Years 1570 and 1587*, 2 vols., ed. John Payne Collier (London: Shakespeare Society, 1849), 2:119.



<sup>102</sup> Colin Clair, *Christopher Plantin* (London: Cassell, 1960), 139.

<sup>103</sup> *Nieuw Nederlandsch Biografisch Woordenboek*, 10 vols., ed. P. C. Molhuysen and P. J. Blok (Leiden: Sijthoff, 1911–1937), 7:954.

<sup>104</sup> John Lothrop Motley, *The Rise of the Dutch Republic: A History*, 3 vols. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1868), 3:453.

<sup>105</sup> Shaaber, *Some Forerunners*, 168–69.

<sup>106</sup> One edition of *Lettres Interceptes du Cardinal de Granvelle et Autres* does not designate any printer on the title page (this edition is available at <<http://gallica.bnf.fr>>). Another edition of *Lettres Interceptes du Cardinal de Granvelle et Autres* exists with Plantin as printer expressly stated on the title page and an imprimatur from the duke of Anjou on the verso (available at <<http://www.archive.org>>).

<sup>107</sup> The transcription of this letter was prepared by Robyn Adams and is located at the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) Centre for Editing Lives and Letters, <http://www.livesandletters.ac.uk/herle/letters/269.html>.

<sup>108</sup> See Willem Pieter Cornelis Knuttel, *Catalogus van de pamfletten-verzameling berustende in de koninklijke bibliotheek*, 9 parts in 11 vols. ('sGravenhage: Algemeene Landsdrukkerij, 1889–1920), vol. 1, part 1, 114–22. *Lettres Interceptes* and *Letters Conteyning Sundry Devices* also coincide chronologically insofar as *Lettres Interceptes* was granted privilege by the duke of Anjou on June 26, Herle sent Walsingham the book on July 12, while the translated *Letters Conteyning Sundry Devices* was entered in the Stationers' Register by Charde on July 23 (Arber, *Transcript*, 2:414).

<sup>109</sup> Derek A. Wilson, *Sir Francis Walsingham: A Courtier in an Age of Terror* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 2007), 109; Parmelee, *Good Newes from Fraunce*, 32–33.

<sup>110</sup> *CSP Foreign* (Jan. 1581–Apr. 1582), ed. Arthur John Butler (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1907), 20–21.

<sup>111</sup> The lone exception is the reprinting of *A Discoverie of the Unnatural and Traiterous Conspiracie* in 1603 (14939.5) and in 1626 (14940)—reprintings intending to reconfirm the dedication of the new Stuart monarchs to confronting Spanish and Catholic conspiracies.

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*Abstract:* This essay shows how Charlotte Smith used embedded letters and their framing narratives to convey a detailed, complex, and critical analysis of the dynamics of traditional English society that could not be more openly expressed in 1793. Special attention is paid to the initial encapsulating letter, and to Smith's treatment of clandestine and unseen letters.

In *The Old Manor House* (1793), Charlotte Smith associates letters with Britain's ancient regime. Though Orlando spends the second half the novel in America, there are no letters from America—only a single letter of news from England to inform him of what has happened at the manor during his absence. The letters embedded in this third-person narrative are implanted in English social life, where they embody characteristic aspects of ancient regime society in characteristic epistolary forms. There are letters of command, petition, and reproach, which address English society's foundation in primogeniture, land and inherited wealth, the prerogatives of patriarchy, the abject dependence of ladies without fortunes on husbands and brothers for support, and the dependence of impoverished gentlemen-farmers on their brothers in trade. There are letters of challenge (to duels) that address gentlemen's deployment of the honor code to mark their social superiority and exclude non-gentlemen from their midst. There is gossip about unseen letters, which traces the limits of individual privacy and freedom. And there are secret letters that reveal the conditions under which agency and a small measure of power are available to those subject to others in a traditional hierarchical society where obedience has been declared the duty of all inferiors and where parents, guardians, and counselors play selfish, self-interested, as well as cruelly authoritarian roles. A radical and revolutionary, Smith used the letters embedded in her narrative to indicate why the whole of ancient regime society had to be cast off.

When Sir Walter Scott described Smith as the most "eminent" of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century women novelists, and praised *The Old Manor House* as her "chef d'oeuvre," he highlighted this first half of the novel, particularly as it centered on Mrs. Rayland's letter.<sup>1</sup> This seems surprising only because—except in the case of Aphra Behn, Jane Austen, and Anthony Trollope—we have found so many ways of interpreting even novels that are positively *studded* with embedded letters as if they were not really there. These range from treating embedded letters as intrinsic elements of the narrative that are, in Stephen J. Hicks's words, "both psychologically revealing and also plot furthering," to treating them as the drivers of "postal plots," as Laura Rottunno calls them.<sup>2</sup> We tend to assume that the meaning of the letters embedded in a narrative text is so straightforward, their function so uniform, and their presence so marginal to the real business at hand, that we do not need to give them the same close attention and discriminating critical awareness that we give letters in an epistolary novel.<sup>3</sup> We have the narrative after all. My principal goal in the close and detailed reading of letters in *The Old Manor House* that follows is to show that embedded letters could be used in diverse and complex ways even in the same text; that reading a narrative through its embedded letters not only enriches but often changes our understanding of the text; and that figuring out what a novelist was doing with the letters embedded in her text is more interesting than one might expect. Smith's embedded letters convey to what Fielding called

the “sagacious reader” detailed critiques of British ancient regime society that in 1793 could not be more openly expressed.

The first fully transcribed letter in volume 1, which occupies all of chapters 7 and 8, is that which Scott singled out. It is the letter that Mrs. Rayland writes in response to Mr. Somerive's solicitation of her opinion on his daughter's impending marriage and on the opportunity that now presents itself of putting his son, Orlando, to work in the wine trade with his wife's brother, Mr. Woodford. This is what I call an *encapsulating letter*. Encapsulating letters often appear at or near the beginning of novels to supply what Henry James would call its *donnée*: while performing an instrumental function in the present, encapsulating letters epitomize relationships, summarize situations and/or highlight issues rooted in the past that the narrative is about to develop, and indicate implicit or explicit expectations of the immediate or more distant future that elliptically foreshadow the narrative course of events. As we will see below, Mrs. Rayland's letter encapsulates the principal problems with expectations, in the sense of “prospects of inheriting wealth and property,” and serves as the focal point for multiple scenes that introduce us to the expectations of the principal characters, who characterize themselves by their responses to her letter, as the Bennett family in Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* will do at the reading of Mr. Collins's letter. While epitomizing relationships that are rooted in the past and indicating a range of prospects for the future, this first letter injects a sudden shock of brutal worldly realism into a narrative that has so far described the anachronistic and solipsistic society at the manor, where Orlando has been conducting an ideal, but secret and forbidden, love affair with the orphaned Cinderella character, Monimia, while endeavoring to ingratiate himself with Mrs. Rayland in hopes of becoming her heir. Displacement of stark realities from the narrative to the letter enable Smith to also use it to reveal, and eventually puncture, the wishful thinking and self-deceptive illusions of those inside and outside the manor who depend upon Mrs. Rayland.

The fully transcribed letters embedded in novels were conventionally framed with a narrative describing the circumstances in which they were written, transmitted, and read. The framing narratives describe such things as the occasions for the letter, the writers' motives and designs in writing them as they did, the circumstances in which it they were received, and the ways in which they were read. Here Smith expanded the framing narrative to cover several scenes that record numerous conversations about Mrs. Rayland's letter, and the conflicting opinions and focalized reflections of the several characters involved in soliciting, writing, reading, and responding to it. Expanding the framing narrative in this way served two functions. The first was to “magnify” this letter. Subsequent letters of command, reproach, or petition, which are more rapidly or cursorily situated, tend to blend into the narrative alongside features of the everyday, such as descriptions of interactions, locations, and movement from place to place. Presenting Mrs. Rayland's letter as the focal point of several scenes in which characters converse about it in the course of two long chapters makes it stand out. It pulls her letter into the foreground, as Scott might say, and indicates its importance. The second function of Smith's expanded narrative frame is to exploit contemporary recognition that the importance of a letter lay less in what it actually said than in what other characters expected of it and understood it to mean. We now think of letters as we do of documents, or discuss them like works of art in New Critical theory, as essentially autonomous texts. Eighteenth-century writers thought of letters in more transactional terms: conceived as “written conversation” and “silent speech” or, as we might say, as “speech acts,” letters were communications that inhabited situations they were designed to address and relationships they were designed to maintain, clarify, alter, or otherwise impact. What mattered empirically about a letter was therefore less what it said than how it affected current situations and interpersonal relationships, and this in turn

depended on how what it said was understood or misunderstood, reacted to, and acted upon or not, by those immediately concerned. The scenes of conversation surrounding Mrs. Rayland's letter are therefore not extrinsic to it. They are as much part of her letter as its words, for they are what give her letter its empirical function, meanings, significance, and effects. Smith could exploit this to show how widely these differed from character to character. Narrators often used their framing narratives to guide novel-readers' understandings and interpretations of letters and of the writers and readers involved. But rather than telling us what to make of Mrs. Rayland's letter, Smith put novel-readers in play by leaving us to make our own reflections and draw our own conclusions about the letter, the situation, and the characters both from our own independent reading of the letter, and from the judgments we make about characters' readings and expectations of it.

Though summarized rather than transcribed, the letter Mr. Somerive writes to solicit Mrs. Rayland's opinion about Orlando's future is given a double prefatory frame. Typically, when double prefatory frames are used, what I call the "inner" frame describes the writer's motives for writing the letter and the immediate circumstances of writing and transmission, while the "outer" frame conveys material needed by an intra- or extra-diegetic reader to understand what necessitated the letter or to follow the scene of epistolary communication in a more informed manner than they otherwise could. Here the outer frame, which takes up most of chapter 7, consists of Orlando's long narrative during a clandestine meeting with his beloved Monimia about what has transpired at his parents' house since his uncle Woodford's arrival. Having just successfully arranged an advantageous marriage for Orlando's sister despite her lack of fortune, Woodford has insisted that Orlando's future, too, must be settled. Orlando's eye-witness narrative repeats and comments on conversations with his father in which this "bustling" uncle "declaims against the folly of my dreaming away my time waiting for a legacy from Mrs. Rayland; which after all, said he, the whimsical old woman may not give him."<sup>4</sup> Instead, Woodford offers to take Orlando back to London to teach him the wine trade and make him financially independent. Mr. Somerive agrees that this was "a very desirable plan if Mrs. Rayland did not intend to better provide for" Orlando and that "it was certainly time to know whether she had or had not any such intentions in his favour" (1:167). They decide accordingly to put Orlando's Expectations to the test by writing to ask Mrs. Rayland's opinion of his sister's marriage "by way of compliment" and her opinion of Orlando's opportunity to go into business "by way of sounding her intentions" (1:156) towards him. Orlando "foresees nothing but vexation" proceeding from this letter, and fears that his uncle, who "seldom fails of carrying his point," will succeed in removing him from the manor and thus from Monimia.

In the inner prefatory frame, the narrator describes how "the letter which Orlando so dreaded was written, after great precautions in choosing the words" (1:167) and was sent by a servant at noon the same day. The letter says "that as Orlando was now of an age for which it was necessary to think of his future establishment, thoughts were entertained of putting him into business with his uncle; but that nothing would be concluded upon without the entire approbation of Mrs. Rayland, to whose notice and protection he was so much obliged" (1:167-68). This summarizes what novel-readers should have gleaned from Orlando's long narrative about his father and uncle's conversation, and sets the letter's purpose clearly before us. The narrator now gives Mr. Somerive an additional motive for writing, which distinguishes him from Mr. Woodward, who desires only to benefit his nephew and himself by securing a successor capable of continuing his business after his death. Somerive wants to ascertain Orlando's prospects of inheriting from Mrs. Rayland because—having failed to prevent his eldest son from gambling away sums he had set aside for his daughter's dowry and Orlando's education, and having foreseen that Philip would soon gamble away the rest of his small estate—Mr. Somerive is looking to Orlando to support his

mother and sisters after his death. The letter's prefatory narratives thus demonstrate his father's and uncle's conflicting stakes and expectations of Orlando's future course.

After a formal reading of Mr. Somerive's letter, Mrs. Rayland informs the servant who brought it that she will respond in writing at her leisure. The reception narrative then turns to a conversation with her maid, Lennard, in which Mrs. Rayland "vents her spleen and expresses her dislike of all persons in trade" and vows to abandon Orlando if he "gets these buying and selling notions into his head and chooses that his mother's low origins should continue to be remembered" (1:169). She likes having a handsome and charming young man about her, but has a longstanding dislike of persons in trade.

This conversation underlines a point already indicated in the prefatory narrative. It shows again that a letter was not just a private bilateral exchange between one writer and one addressee. Eighteenth-century letters inhabited a multilateral web of relationships, both at their point of origin and at their destination where they were often read aloud to members of the household-family and friends, and discussed.<sup>5</sup> If it did not always take a family and friends to write a letter, it frequently took a family and friends to read one. Smith's presentation of Mr. Somerive's letter in these terms fields this feature of contemporary epistolary culture to indicate that Orlando's father was treating the decision about his future as a decision to be made by Orlando's family and "friends" (in the contemporary sense of patrons) rather than as a decision that it was his duty and prerogative as Orlando's father to make. This verifies a point Mrs. Rayland will make in her letter and is further substantiated by Somerive's reaction to it. But it also acts as a foil for Mrs. Rayland's untrammelled indifference to other people's views. She has just demonstrated her prerogative and her autonomy in her conversation with Lennard by making judgments and pronouncements about the letter that brook no contradiction. And where Somerive depended on his brother-in-law to help him draft his letter, she will write hers alone.

This lends a touch of gentle mockery to the second reception narrative, which Smith inserted between the arrival of Somerive's letter and Mrs. Rayland's answer, for this supplementary scene alters the answer that Mrs. Rayland was preparing to give it after her conversation with Lennard. Rightly foreseeing the effect that his father and uncle's collaborative letter will have upon Mrs. Rayland, Orlando comes to see her. Though initially received with "repulsive formality," he manages to regain Mrs. Rayland's favor by confessing not only that he has no wish to go into trade, but that he prefers to "stay at home" at Rayland Hall where he can be near her and use her library to "qualify myself for one of the liberal professions against the time when my father can find an opportunity to place me in one" (1:176). Finding that they agree he should remain at Rayland Hall rather than go into trade, Orlando extracts a promise from Mrs. Rayland to "express her sentiments on this matter to his father" to prevent him from pressing the matter any further. Here, then, a little comically, Mrs. Rayland, all unawares, imbibes sentiments from a social inferior that she imagines are all her own; and deflection of the letter's agency results from Orlando's unexpected intervention between cup and lip, reception and reply. Smith addresses the impact of noncorrespondents on the agency of a letter, to demonstrate how, by unexpectedly inserting themselves into an epistolary correspondence, third parties could unexpectedly change reactions to a letter and with them, the expected course of events, even when dealing with autocratic persons like Mrs. Rayland, who were impatient of contradiction or control.

Mrs. Rayland's fully transcribed letter, which follows, is prefaced by the narrator's mildly satirical account of its writing: "having called for her writing materials which seldom saw the sun, and being placed in form at her rose-wood writing box, lined with green velvet and mounted in silver, [Mrs. Rayland] produced at the end of four hours the following letter, piquing herself on



spelling as her father had spelt, and disdaining those idle novelties by which a few superficial letters are saved" (1:177-78). Mrs. Rayland's wealth, her old-fashioned ceremoniousness, her expectation of always being served, her aristocratic family pride and pretentiousness, and the absurd anachronism of her conduct, are all economically rendered here. We can also expect to find them illustrated in her letter:

Raylande Hall, 12<sup>th</sup> day of September A.D. 1776

Sir, my kinsman,

I have received youre letter, and am oblidged by youre taking the troubbel to informe me of youre family affaires, to the wich I am a sinceer goode wisher. In respecte to youre daughter Philippa must begge to be excused from giving my oppinon, not having the pleasure to knowe the gentleman, and being from my retired life no judge of the personnes charractere, who are remote and in bisness, as I understand this personne is; wherefore I can onelye there upon saie, that doubtlesse you, being as you are a goode and carefuller father, will take due care and precaution that youre daughter shall not, by her marriage, be exposed to the mischances of becoming reduced by bankruptcies and other accidents, whereby peopel in trade are of times grate sufferers. –But your care herein for your daughter's securitye is not to be questioned. Furthermore, respecting youre youngest sonne, Mr. Orlando, he is very certaintelye at youre disposal also, and you are, it may tbe, the most competent judge of that which is fitting to be done for his future goode and advantage. I wish him very well; he seeming to me to be a sober, promising, and well-conditioned youthe; and such a one as, were I his nearer relation, I shoulde thinke a pitye to put to a trade. I am at present always glad of his companie at the Hall, and willing to give anye little encouragement to his desire of learning in the liberal sciences fitting for a gentleman, the wich his entring on a shoppe or warehouse would destroye and put an ende to. However that maye bee, I saie again, that you, being his father, are to be sure the propperest personne to determine for him, and he is dutiefullie inclined, and willing to obey you. Yet by the discourse I have had with him there-upoone, it doth not appeare that the youthe himself is inclined to become a dealer, as you purpose.

Heartilie recommending you in my prayers to the Disposer of all goode giftes, and hoping he will directe you in all things for the well-doing of your family, I remaine,

Sir, my kinsman,

youre well wisher

and humbel servant,

GRACE RAYLANDE (1:169-71)

Mrs. Rayland's spelling is archaic and phonetic; by 1788, the spread of standardized orthography had made words spelled as they sounded the mark of the vulgar and uneducated. On a superficial reading, Mrs. Rayland's spelling made her letter ridiculous and detracted from its authority. While Mr. Somerive, his daughter's fiancé, Mr. Fitz-Owen, Mr. Woodford, Philip, and Orlando are sitting over their after-dinner wine, Mrs. Rayland's letter reaches Somerive, and is accordingly ridiculed and dismissed. Philip reads Mrs. Rayland's letter aloud to the company with "comments serving to turn to ridicule the writer, and the sentiments it contained." Offended by the letter's "contempt for shopkeepers," the two merchants, Mr. Woodford and Mr. Fitz-Owen, "agree the opinion of such an old crone was not worth consulting" (1:181). These reactions underwrite the narrator's gentle mockery and suggest that novel-readers can afford to be equally dismissive. But Orlando concludes from watching Mr. Somerive's face that Mrs. Rayland's letter has done all he hoped by "turning the fluctuating and undecided opinion of his father in his direction" (1:181).

The second reception narrative consists of Mr. Somerive's consultation with his wife about how to answer the letter, a conversation that Orlando is invited to hear. Mrs. Somerive, whose

"heart is half-broken at parting with her daughter" and who is unwilling to part with her son as well, "puts the most favorable construction on every expression that related to him" and "*flatters* herself from the purport of the letter, that the affluent fortune of Mrs. Rayland would at last center with Orlando." She therefore argues that "nothing would be so imprudent as to think of removing him" from the manor and agrees with her husband that he should write to Mrs. Rayland that very evening, "leaving the fate of Orlando wholly at her disposal" (1:183). Orlando is, of course, delighted at this outcome, which leaves everything unchanged; and he and Monimia "both now indulged in hope" (1:184) that they would remain together and one day find the means to marry.

Considered as a yardstick of characters' readings of it, Mrs. Rayland's letter belies the Somerives' understanding of its purport as "*flattering*" to their wishes. It shows that if Mr. Somerive's goal in consulting Mrs. Rayland was to "sound her intentions" with regard to Orlando, his letter to her has signally failed to elicit the desired information. Despite her favorable description of Orlando's character, Mrs. Rayland's letter commits her to nothing, except to being "at present" glad of his company at the hall and willing to give "a littel encouragement" to his "desire of learning in the liberal sciences" in her library. Instead of offering to do something for him herself, she "heartily recommends" Mr. Somerive and his family for bounty to "the [divine] Disposer of all goode Giftes." Even more to the point, Mrs. Rayland repeats in every other sentence—and three times in the short section relating to Orlando—that his children's future is their father's responsibility: Mr. Somerive is "the most competent judge of that which is fitting to be done for his [Orlando's] future good and advantage;" his father is "the properest person to determine for him" (1:179, 180). Conduct books on the relative duties said the same.

Attached to Orlando yet reluctant to commit to making him her heir, Mrs. Rayland composes an ambiguous letter that supports its encapsulating functions. Indeed, her letter itself epitomizes the problem arising from the situation rooted in the past that has become an issue in the present: the uncertainty of Orlando's Expectations. Mrs. Rayland identifies and addresses this situation—that Orlando has domiciled himself at the manor to ingratiate himself with her in hopes of becoming her heir—by inviting him to continue in that situation. Her letter also elliptically foreshadows the future narrative course of events by agreeing with Orlando's father and uncle that what has to be decided is what is "fitting to be done for his future goode." Her letter indicates three options for the future: Orlando could go on waiting around hoping his Expectations are good; he could embark on a profession that will enable him to make his own way in the world; or he could inherit a legacy. The novel shows Orlando successively experiencing all three options. And though concluding with his return to England as heir to Mrs. Rayland's property and wealth gives the novel a happy ending, it does not settle the question of what is most fitting or likely to guarantee Orlando's "future good." As a soldier, Orlando has a good chance of getting killed; and as the third of the available options, Orlando's chances of inheriting are one in three, all of which returns us to the uncertainty or chanciness of Expectations.

Upon a hasty reading, Mrs. Rayland's letter can otherwise be dismissed, as the other characters dismiss it, as another absurdly old-fashioned expression of her inveterate hatred for trade and for the nouveau riche East India officials and transatlantic merchants who were, like her neighbor Mr. Stockton, buying up country estates and rivalling the aristocracy in splendor and idleness, licentiousness and display. But a closer look shows that her letter is as sensible, practical, and realistic in its way as Mr. Woodford's bustling observations. Mrs. Rayland makes three very sound points about trade. Her advice to Mr. Somerive to "take care that his daughter by her marriage will not be exposed to the mischances of becoming reduced by bankruptcies and other accidents of persons in trade" (1:178-79) addressed a very real issue during the latter part of the eighteenth

century, when announcements of bankruptcies filled the newspapers, even as it reflected Smith's own bitter experience as the daughter and wife of bankrupt merchants. This advice also echoes reservations about his sister's over-hasty marriage that Orlando had expressed to Monimia in his prefatory narrative. Mrs. Rayland's second point is that unlike the "learning in the liberal sciences fitting for a gentleman," which Orlando is pursuing in her library, "entering on a shoppe or warehouse would distroye and put an ende" (1:179) to his gentility. As a tradesman and "dealer" he would be a gentleman no more. Her last point is that she learned in conversation with Orlando that, though willing to obey his father and do his duty, he has no desire to become a merchant. In other words, his opinion to the future proposed for him ought to be consulted.

The letter—which not coincidentally took Mrs. Rayland's four hours to write—is also a politely veiled indictment of Mr. Somerive's performance as a father. Its three pieces of advice about trade allude to specific paternal responsibilities and intimate where Mr. Somerive has abdicated his proper paternal role. As we know from Orlando's prefatory narrative, Mr. Somerive has not done due diligence himself by investigating his daughter's potential husband or acting to secure Orlando's future, relying instead on the actions of his brother-in-law and the judgment of his wife. Even now, instead of accepting that he is himself "the properest person to determine for him," Mr. Somerive seizes on the slenderest excuse to "leave [Orlando's] future fate wholly at [Mrs. Rayland's] disposal." A gentleman-farmer himself despite his marriage to a tradesman's daughter, he has neglected to weigh the social consequences for Orlando of going into trade instead of into one of the genteel professions. The prey of "fluctuating and undecided opinions," he has failed to apply rational analysis and practical good sense to the problem of Orlando's future, which his indulgence of his eldest son's misconduct has done more than anything else to create. And though present at all the conversations about his future that Orlando recounted in the prefatory narrative, as well as at his parents' deliberations, Orlando has nowhere reported that his father, mother, or uncle have ever consulted him about his preferences or wishes. His father expects that, unlike his "bad" son, Philip, his "good" son Orlando will demonstrate his filial duty by having no will of his own and obeying his father's every wish without a murmur.

Far from "not being worth consulting," then, the "opinions" expressed in Mrs. Rayland's letter expose the self-deceptive illusions of all the other characters engaged in soliciting and reacting to it, along with those of the classes of people they represent. Judged by the yardstick of the letter, Woodford and Fitz-Owen demonstrate willful mercantile blindness to the social and economic downsides of commercial life. Set against Mr. Woodford's readiness to act, which is the immediate cause and subject of the letter, Mr. Somerive and Mrs. Rayland display their prerogative to use their authoritarian power in lazy, ineffectual, and entirely self-serving ways, which indicate how little concrete help or support is to be expected of either of them; while Orlando's dogged pursuit of professional studies despite his father's lack of the money and patronage necessary to place him in one of the learned professions takes on the appearance of wishful, not to say magical, thinking. Judged by Mrs. Rayland's noncommittal letter, the Somerives also demonstrate their blindness to the evils of inherited money when this required a gentleman to waste his youth trading his beauty and attentions for the uncertain gift of an old woman's wealth, and their acceptance of the evils of primogeniture, which made permissible the sacrifice of younger siblings' lives and futures to the whims of "thoughtlessly" spendthrift first-born sons like Philip.

At the conclusion of these epistolary scenes, Orlando is exultant and for good reason. He has "carried his point" with Mrs. Rayland (1:177) and used her to carry his point against his father, as well as against Mr. Woodford, a man who "seldom fails of carrying his point." And he has done so without allowing any of them to suspect that he was engaged in the affair. In the process, he has

demonstrated what he told Monimia in his prefatory narrative: that he “understands [Mrs. Rayland] perfectly” (1:160). Orlando knows how to please her by “appearing grateful without being servile” (1:184), how to pay her the kinds of attentions she likes, and how to placate and manage her even in her most dangerous moods. Orlando has also demonstrated throughout his narrative that he also “understands perfectly” how to present himself to his father and uncle—preserving a respectful silence when they converse, deferring to his elders and offering overt filial obedience, while knowingly engaged in conduct with Monimia that is anathema to them. This corresponds to the broader pattern of his conduct. To Monimia, Orlando is variously lover, consoler, protector, teacher, and friend; and to each of Mrs. Rayland’s servants, he acts a different part. With Lennard, Mrs. Rayland’s powerful maid and Monimia’s aunt, he is respectful and as careful not to infringe on her prerogatives as he is to conceal from her his interest in Monimia and their nightly clandestine meetings. With the downstairs maid, Betty, he acts as a young master ought, commanding and generous with his crowns, while taking care to lock her out of his rooms and ensure he gives her no food for gossip. And so with every other character. “Orlando” is a fluid collection of personae, a shifting collection of selves to suit the successive, ever-changing occasions and relationships in which he is required to manifest a self. Orlando fields a self appropriate for every person, every occasion and his every position relative to others, and uses each to imperceptibly “carry his point,” whatever that may be at the time. Orlando’s versatile assumption of personae enable him to deflect suspicion and construct an array of masks and mirrors to conceal the secret of his relationship with Monimia.

The secret letters that pass between Orlando and Monimia, whose contents are not disclosed even to novel-readers, shed light on Orlando’s assumption of all these personae by indicating the conditions obtaining in ancient regime society as they appeared from “below.” Like the turret room into which her Aunt Lennard locks Monimia every night, the clandestine letters are signifiers of captivity—they testify to her inability to meet or communicate freely with anyone without her aunt’s consent and to the force used to subject her, unwillingly, to the latter’s will. But like the secret door she discovers behind her bed outside which they are left, these secret letters are also signifiers of evasion and escape—letters enable Monimia to communicate freely with Orlando despite her aunt, give her egress from the misery and solitude of her captive state, and are themselves the fruit of the love and book-learning supplied by Orlando, and denied to her by her aunt. The pattern symbolized by these secret letters is repeated elsewhere. Monimia’s Aunt Lennard has her own forms of subjection and evasion. Trapped at Rayland Hall by the inheritance she hopes to receive at Mrs. Rayland’s death, and subject like the other servants to her mistress’s arbitrary will, Lennard has made a show of complaisance while evading the rigors of her situation by working imperceptibly to gain power over her mistress and by affecting, at every opportunity, to act as lady of the manor in her mistress’s place. Likewise dependent on Mrs. Rayland’s favor, which he, too, courts, the butler has evaded her authority and that of the law by clandestinely lending the manor to smugglers as a safe haven for their goods and, in a parody of Mrs. Rayland’s use of her wealth, by using money thus gained to bribe poor maid-servants with gifts to enter his bed. As Smith indicates, then, passive obedience was a Jacobite myth, and so were such Jacobin binaries as tyrant and helpless victim, oppressor and oppressed. Like Orlando, when he intervenes with Mrs. Rayland to shape her answer to his father’s letter, Monimia, when she enters into a clandestine correspondence with him despite her fear of her aunt—or Lennard, when she strives for ascendancy over her mistress—those subject to the will of others also found means of exercising power and imposing their will. The problem was much more than manifestly selfish, corrupt,

and illicit exercises of autocratic power at the top of this hierarchical society led to clandestinely selfish, corrupt, and illicit exercises of power all the way down the social hierarchy.

The unseen secret letters stand in sharp contrast to the fully transcribed letters that are shared and discussed by everyone who happens to be present. But they are analogical as signifiers of captivity. Smith used the letter that Betty, the maid at the hall, delivers to Orlando early in volume 1 to show that characters were equally entrapped within the spider's web of conversations, opinions, and gossip characteristic of a small community where everyone knows everyone's business. Betty reports the contents of this letter to Monimia while she is confined in her turret room. She also recounts that she went down to speak to John Dickman, Squire Somerive's groom, when she saw him riding up, to discover his business at the hall and received from him a letter for Orlando, which she carried to Orlando herself. Betty took careful note of Orlando's reaction—he "seemed monstrous surprised at it"—and when she went back to the kitchen, she inquired why of John. John told her that "he was ordered to wait for his young master, since Madam Somerive's brother, the London merchant, was come down with some of his family, and the gentleman from some part beyond sea who was to marry Miss Somerive, and the wedding to take place out of hand. And so, as Mr. Phil is gone as always ... the Squire ordered John to fetch Orlando to entertain the Company." Neither Betty nor John had read the sealed letter, but there was clearly no point in sealing letters when their contents and all the circumstances requiring them were known and freely shared among servants. But Betty's curiosity was not yet satisfied; she wanted to know how Orlando was reacting to his father's letter. Having gone to see on the pretext of shutting Orlando's windows, Betty tells Monimia that she thought Orlando returned to his father's home unwillingly because she heard him sigh. Since Orlando was careful to tell her nothing, she had resorted to reading his body language: he sighed, reluctant to go, she thought, because he was unlike other young men in "never caring for company" (1:135-37). With the usual order scrambled, reception narrative, prefatory narrative, and epistolary content are all present in Betty's gossiping narrative to highlight the extent to which Orlando is trapped, hemmed in, and defined by the flow of information and speculation about his letters, and by exchanges of opinions about his attitudes and doings that travel through the community from mouth to mouth. Orlando is literally as well as figuratively trapped by such flows of information, since it is from such gossip that his father hears about his prospective duel and comes to suspect his relationship with Monimia. Neither Orlando locking his door nor Lennard locking Monimia into her turret room prevents them from being sucked into the web of communal observation, speculation, and talk. Betty's gossip about Mr. Somerive's letter thus illustrates both the necessity for clandestine communication in a society such as this and the concomitant difficulty of keeping anything secret there. This also helps us to understand why, in eighteenth-century English, the primary meaning of "private" was "secret," "withdrawn from public view" (*OED*) and thus, as here, "unseen."

Only once Orlando has been compelled to leave Monimia and the hall to earn his living as a soldier—thus only once he has become independent of his parents, of Mrs. Rayland, and of the Hall—does he realize that "there was something humiliating to his ingenious mind in all the arts and prevarications which their clandestine correspondence compelled him to use himself, and to teach the innocent Monimia." Economic independence, together with a liberating independence from his father's tutelage and Mrs. Rayland's whims, relieves Orlando of the need to assume personae, and permits him to see them for what they were. Only now does he consider that his clandestine correspondence with Monimia was forced upon them by the necessity they were under to conform to the inimical demands of parents, relatives, and patrons upon whom they depended for their daily bread. He begins to understand why, to pursue a sincere and honorable love, they had



to fall back on “arts” to enact whatever parts were required of them by their relative duties and relative positions in relation to others, and to resort to “prevarications” to disguise the deception they were practicing upon those in whose power they were. Abject dependence on parents, patrons, and superiors in a profoundly hierarchical culture that celebrated dependence as “the cement of society” was what had produced such false and factitious selves, and all the arts and prevarications, deceptions and disguises, that followed in their train.

Smith used embedded letters in this novel to strike some somewhat surreptitious blows at British ancient regime society, where power was diffused and abused throughout a hierarchical system of dependences that was enforced by financial necessity, mutual surveillance, and brute force. These embedded letters therefore open onto a more complex and nuanced representation of life in England than that supposed by critics who see the Old Manor House as a “feudal” society, Mrs. Rayland as “the type of autocratic and traditional authority,” and Lennard as a symbol of “despotism.”<sup>6</sup> As Smith demonstrated particularly clearly by adding unseen letters to the epistolary mix, the distribution and diffusion of power based on property and wealth in a culture still inflected by ancient regime structures and values was responsible not only for the abuses of power of those who governed others, but also for the dissembling selves and ingenious, surreptitious methods of evasion devised by those subject to their self-interested tyranny.

Smith used Mrs. Rayland’s initial encapsulating letter not only to raise questions about Expectations in the sense of a man’s “prospects of inheriting property” but also to investigate the workings of expectations in the larger sense of “a belief that something will happen” based on the prospect of things probably happening in the future as they have mostly happened in the past. Written, read, and discussed *in medias res*, Mrs. Rayland’s letter encloses and attracts a range of prospects for Orlando’s future in addition to those that actually play out—as wealthy aristocratic heir, non-genteel merchant, gentleman-professional, son sacrificed to his family’s demands, impoverished husband of a penurious wife—as well as other futures: the prospect of misery and bankruptcy for Orlando’s sister in Ireland, the prospect of Mr. Somerive assuming his proper paternal role, the dangerous prospect of discovery for Orlando and Monimia. The fact that they do not materialize shows that these are merely possible futures. But their inclusion represents the experienced world as a tissue of events and non-events, where every letter and every moment may be shot through with unactualized possibilities. Smith preempted “the poetics of anticipated futurity” that Emily Rohrbach attributes to John Keats, Lord Byron, and Austen’s *Persuasion*: here “the present appears uncertain precisely because the unknown future is part of its conception... Rather than suggesting a linear movement towards a specified end point or goal, the mist of anticipation opens the present up to multiple possibilities.”<sup>7</sup>

Because Mrs. Rayland’s non-committal encapsulating letter itself embodied the uncertainty of Expectations, Smith could also show how the ontological status of Orlando’s expectations changed over time. For much of the novel, Orlando’s expectations of Mrs. Rayland are thwarted and unreal. Her refusal to do anything for Orlando but provide him with the means of joining the British army in the American war makes his prospects of inheriting her wealth and estate illusory, even as it introduces a prospect for his future that was unforeseen before. But during his absence in America, Mrs. Rayland unexpectedly, even whimsically, changes her mind and her will to make Orlando her heir. Expectations that proved illusory before are now unexpectedly justified and empirically real. Perhaps Mr. Somerive’s “fluctuating and undecided opinions” were more reasonable than they seemed. For *The Old Manor House* demonstrates that there is no telling whether expectations will materialize—whether the future will actualize the possibility articulated by Uncle Woodford that this whimsical old woman will *not* give Orlando the expected legacy or that

articulated by his mother that she *will*—by successively presenting both options. Here the fact that expectations that are illusory at one time can become realities at a later date against all odds illuminates something about the nature of possibility. More uncertain than a probability and less random than chance, a possibility is something that may or may not come to pass. Possibilities partake both of the expected and the unexpected, not least because, should it come to pass, a possibility may do so in unexpected ways and when one least expects. When Orlando returns to take up his inheritance of the manor and close the action that Mrs. Rayland's letter began, it is to encounter unexpected obstacles that it was again possible Orlando might not overcome. These once eliminated, Orlando governs the manor in benevolent, non-authoritarian ways that neither he nor anyone else foresaw when his Expectations were initially broached with Mrs. Rayland. Unexpected possibilities emerging from changing circumstances and changing prospects could thus become vehicles for social change.

This is also what permitted Smith to historicize secret and traditional letter genres by attaching them to ancient regime society, whose characteristic features they documented at a moment when there was, perhaps, still a prospect of their passing away. Expectations that are thwarted and have to be dismissed as illusory can still unexpectedly become realities, against all odds, when one least expects. Despite the Terror in France, there was still a possibility in 1793 that British society might one day be so organized that conventional letter genres, secret letters, and dissimulating selves would disappear, along with the social and economic expectations that cemented the subordination of the many to the few.

Before telegraph superseded epistolary communication in the nineteenth century, letters were an intrinsic and familiar part of everyday day life for people at most ranks. It should not therefore surprise us to find novelists who embedded letters in their narratives subjecting them to the same degree of scrutiny as they did manners, domiciles, oral discourse or clothes, and using them in the same multiplicity of diverse and creative ways.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Walter Scott, *The Miscellaneous Prose Works* (Edinburgh: R. Cadell, 1849): 4:63, 66.

<sup>2</sup> Hicks, "Eliza Haywood's Letter Technique in Three Early Novels (1721-1727)," *Papers on Language and Literature* 34.4 (Fall 1998): 432; Rotunno, *Postal Plots in British Fiction 1840-1898: Readdressing Correspondence in Victorian Culture* (Houndsmills: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2014). See also Catherine J. Golden, *Posting It: The Victorian Revolution in Letter Writing* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2009); Kate Thomas, *Postal Pleasures: Sex, Scandal and Victorian Letters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); and Karin Koehler, *Thomas Hardy and Victorian Communication: Letters, Telegraphs and Postal Systems* (Houndsmills: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2016).

<sup>3</sup> There has been remarkably little scholarship on letters in nonepistolary fiction, and with the exception of some older studies of Aphra Behn's *Love Letters between a Nobleman and His Sister*, Part 2 (1685) and of Jane Austen, most of it is concentrated on nineteenth- or twentieth century texts. See for instance, Simon Sunka, *Mail Orders: The Fiction of Letters in Postmodern Culture* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002); Ann Bower, *Epistolary Responses: The Letter in Twentieth-Century American Fiction and Criticism* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1997); Diane Cousineau, *Letters and Labyrinths: Women Writing/Cultural Codes* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1997); Shari Benstock, "The Printed Letter in Ulysses," *James Joyce Quarterly* 50.1 (Fall 2012): 167-79; and my note 2 above. For Jane Austen, see for instance, Cheryl Nixon and Louise Penner, "Writing by the Book: Jane Austen's Heroines and the Art of the Letter," *Persuasions On-Line* 26.1 (Winter 2005), and Jenny Davidson's chapter on letters in *Reading Jane Austen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017). For more general views, see Liz Stanley, "The Death of the Letter? Epistolary Intent, Letterness and the Many Ends of Letter Writing," *Cultural Sociology* 9.2

(2015): 240-55; Fay Bound, "Writing the Self? Love and the Letter in England, c. 1660-c. 1760," *Literature and History*, 3rd ser. 11:1 (March 2002): 1-19; Claudine Van Hensbergen, "Towards an Epistolary Discourse: Receiving the Eighteenth-Century Letter," *Literature Compass* 7.7 (July 2010): 508-18; and Robert Adams Day's older but still useful *Told in Letters: Epistolary Fiction before Richardson* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1966). For early letters and letter writing, see Susan Fitzmaurice, *The Familiar Letter in Early Modern England* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2002); Rebecca Earle, "Introduction," *Epistolary Selves: Letters and Letter-Writers, 1600-1945*, ed. Rebecca Earle (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), 1-14; Louise Curran, *Samuel Richardson and the Art of Letter-Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Gary Schneider, *The Culture of Epistolarity: Vernacular Letters and Letter Writing in Early Modern England, 1500-1700* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005); and Eve Tavor Bannet, *Empire of Letters: Letter Manuals and Transatlantic Correspondence 1680-1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

<sup>4</sup> Charlotte Smith, *The Old Manor House*, 2nd ed. (London, 1793), 1:154. Subsequent page references are located in the text.

<sup>5</sup> For "household-family," see Naomi Tadmor, *Family and Friends in Eighteenth-Century England: Household, Kinship, Patronage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

<sup>6</sup> See, for instance, Carmel Murphy, "Charlotte Smith's *Old Manor House* and the French Revolution Debate," *Romanticism* 20.3 (2014): 277; Deborah Russell, "Domestic Gothic: Genre and Nation in Charlotte Smith's *The Old Manor House*," *Literature Compass* 10.10 (Oct. 2013): 774; Simon Parkes, "'More Dead than Alive:' the Return of Not-Orlando in Charlotte Smith's *The Old Manor House*," *European Romanticism Review* 22.6 (Dec. 2011): 765-84. For deception, see Loraine Fletcher, *Charlotte Smith: A Critical Biography* (Houndsmills: Macmillan, 1998).

<sup>7</sup> Emily Rohrbach, *Modernity's Mist: British Romanticism and the Poetics of Anticipation* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 3, 1.