A COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH TO THE EPISTOLARY FORM IN LETTERS OF VICTORIAN WOMEN WRITERS

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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A Communicative Approach to the Epistolary Form in Letters of Victorian Writers

Abstract

Although the letter has long been valued as an object of material culture, as an autobiographical text, and as a means of communication, literary critics have paid the epistolary form itself little attention. My study, therefore, describes the form as it is found in letters by Victorian women writers. It is based on an extensive collection of unpublished letters, supplemented by published editions, of approximately thirty-five British and American women writers during the 1820s-1870s. In formulating my approach, I have drawn on sociological, psychological, linguistic, and literary theory, particularly rhetoric, formalism, literary stylistics, and discourse analysis. My study demonstrates how careful analysis of the epistolary components leads to more accurate interpretations of letters and hence to an increased understanding of the lives and contexts of their authors.

The study begins by examining how critical assumptions derive from epistolography with its emphasis on taxonomy and rhetoric. Although the basis for these assumptions is often sound, categorical statements obscure rather than clarify the paradoxical characteristics that delineate the form's parameters. Next, the specifically epistolary components of a letter text are examined: then the epistolary "body" is discussed in its physical aspects and in its construction by the topics. The letter's specific components, its physicality, and the topics are linked as structural components and they influence, and are influenced by, the responsive process of recognition, recollection, and requital. Epistolary discourse is constructed both as a response to an
interactional situation and as an invitation to future interaction. In the final chapter, the role of friendship in synthesizing the discourse's pragmatic and creative aims is examined.

With an increased understanding of the form's structure, aims, and rhetorical strategies, the letter emerges as a highly complex text. The letter cannot be adequately understood as a closed text without a complete text because the parts function together to construct its meaning. As an open text, a unit of a correspondence, the letter needs to be viewed intertextually because epistolary meaning is dialogical. Though the study is not primarily biographical or sociological, its material provides evidence pertinent to such studies of Victorian women authors.
Letters are but written conversation as [Henry] Chorley says, so perhaps you will kindly regard this letter as a morning call from me, without the trouble of my presence.

Townsend Mayers to Professor Owen
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Introduction

Correspondents value the letter as a means to communication: people who wish to speak to one another when they are not close enough for conversation use simple, everyday writing materials and an uncomplicated form for their words to communicate over a distance greater than the human voice can carry. Historians and biographers value the letter as an object of material culture, an artifact noteworthy for what it says about people and their times. Unlike correspondents who value letters at least initially as means to communication, historiographers value letters as the products of communication, ends to discovery, which can, in turn, become the means to new knowledge about a specific person or an historical period. Judging by the number of letter collections published in the last three centuries alone, "common readers", as Virginia Woolf terms them, also value the letter. Why? There are perhaps as many reasons as readers, but a single characteristic can probably be attributed to them all: curiosity. Common readers may have the inquiring mind of an historian, the eagle eye of a detective, the gossip’s penchant for scandal, the moral rectitude of a zealot, the philosopher’s scepticism about meaning, or the dilettante’s desire for amusement: at bottom, nevertheless, is an insatiable curiosity about themselves as human beings. Whatever the role or pose, curiosity about others is a human attribute. Because letters record what it means to be a person in relation to other human beings, readers value them.
As a physical object--document, testament, souvenir, memento, artifact--the letter has always been endowed, however quixotically, with value. Postal services have built reputations by discharging their regal trust reliably--if not always promptly: children learn early the consequences of their obligations as bearers of notes and letters: chronicles of literary crime include notorious forgers of letters; the "possessed" steal letters in fiction or in life. Even letters not from the "hand of genius" are judged valuable artifacts by correspondents, family members, friends, enemies, and lawyers alike, not to mention archivists, social historians, and antiquarians.

Paradoxically, the very value of letters ensures preservation and destruction, obliteration and restoration, collection and dispersal, in unpredictable patterns. Letter writers request or report the destruction of letters, although not always effectively or truthfully, as the surviving testimony of "burn this letter" continues to bear witness from the fourteenth-century Paston letters on. Early biographers report the destruction of letters which surface years later in museum repositories; later biographers lament the disappearance of letters available to earlier chroniclers. Relatives destroy, mutilate, truncate, encode, or withhold the letters of famous or infamous family members; other relatives, wittingly or unwittingly, perform valuable services as obsessive archivists. Private money outbids public in the purchase of the valuable artifact from the hand of genius; public institutions reap the harvest in endowments or dispersal sales. Private legacies are transformed by the public courts into liabilities. Collectors collect letters, curators amass, and editors edit according to the shifting values of their times and their culture.
Why, then, have literary critics virtually ignored the letter as a literary text? How is it that the "common reader" in search of assistance to explore "the meanings conveyed by language" in the epistolary form is required to wander the byways of biblical scholarship, ancient rhetoric, and studies of eighteenth-century authors and epistolary novels? These are all interesting paths in themselves, but indirect routes to find out about a form whose primary purpose—whatever its afterlife—was communication. The letter's common readers are almost invariably common writers; that is, almost everyone who reads letters, as literature or in everyday life, also writes them at least on occasion. Perhaps the very commonness of the epistolary form has contributed to the arbitrary values reflecting biographical and historical biases that literary critics have accorded it either as a text or as literature. Can such a simple, practical form, easily learned by children and unskilled writers, really be worthy of the literary critic's attentive scrutiny? Apparently not. Whatever the reason for its neglect, common readers are left to wander by the light of their own experience. There is no comprehensive guide to the letter as a literary form.

The letter's raison d'être is to communicate; accordingly, this study adopts a communicative approach to the epistolary form. It is an approach derived from sociology, psychology, linguistics, and literary theory, particularly formalism, literary stylistics, and discourse analysis. The latter two, of course, both cross-disciplinary formulations in themselves. From whatever perspective, communication has three aspects: transmission—the event itself (interaction); information—what is communicated; emission and reception—the output and input of signals. Walter
Buckley, in *Sociology and Modern Systems Theory*, describes how engineering and sociology can come together in studying communication: "'Information theory' deals with events between a signal source and a receiver, but not with the nature of these termini themselves and the conditions under which the signals transmitted between them become 'meaningful' information. . . . This framework [a sociological construction] emphasizes that 'information', as a carrier of 'meaning', is not an entity that exists some place or flows from one place to another, but a *relation*, or 'mapping', between sets of structured variety, embodied--for our present purposes--in goal-oriented adaptive systems and in their environments; and that 'communication' involves a *process of selection* from such sets" (92). From this point of view, a letter might be described as a goal-oriented adaptive system, enscribed for the purpose of communication in an environment, and that communication involves a process of selection from a textual "set", an interpersonal "set", and an environmental "set". Such a conceptualization, however, seems a long way from a literary mode of expression.

Yet it is not as far as it appears. Communication so described includes the components of speaker and audience, an environment, and a discourse--the components, in other words, of the science of rhetoric. Rhetoric, as Edward Corbett defines it, "is the art or the discipline that deals with the use of discourse, either spoken or written, to inform or persuade or motivate an audience, whether that audience is made up of one person or a group of persons" (3). Rhetoric is concerned with the formulation of strategies to achieve an end: the "process of selection" in other words. Many current studies of communication, from sociological, educational,
linguistic and literary perspectives, acknowledge their indebtedness directly to rhetoric. "Communicative" and "rhetorical", when used adjectivally to describe discourse, its production and reception, may be fundamentally synonymous. Nevertheless, despite my own indebtedness to rhetoric, I have chosen "communicative" rather than "rhetorical" to describe my approach to the letter.

Rhetoric, as Corbett points out, "has traditionally been concerned with those instances of formal, premeditated, sustained monologue in which a person seeks to exert an effect on an audience" (3). It has not, therefore, been particularly concerned with the "stop-and-go, give-and-take form of the dialogue" (3). Although letters as texts are usually presented by editors as collections of monologues by a single speaker/writer, and although literary critics usually study them in much the same way, letters are, in practice, parts of dialogues between a speaker and an addressee. No letter is written without the intention ("seeking to exert an effect") of informing somebody of something, even if the something or the somebody is imaginary. Hence, no letter is written without the intention of eliciting a response in the reader, and whenever possible, by the reader. Therefore, "communicative", to my mind, points more directly to the dialogical aspect of the epistolary form, than does "rhetorical" as it has been traditionally interpreted.

Secondly, "communicative" suggests an action or event in which something takes place between an emitter and a receiver. This depersonalized language of the systems theorists may help to lower the barriers raised by biographical and historical biases, and to enable one to see a letter as one act of communication of many between
people in a social system: family, group, community, network, society. Seen in this way, a letter becomes a text linked to those which precede and follow it, as well as to those contemporaneous with it, in one historical time but in two different biographical times, the writer's and the recipient's. The letter, as a communicative act, event, or episode, can be "mapped" in relation to the letters written before and after to the same addressee: to the letters written at or around the same time to different addressees; to the letters received, and written, at or around the same time by the addressee; and to other forms of communication between the participants such as face-to-face meetings. That is, it can concurrently be seen chronologically, synchronistically, and interpersonally. Furthermore, all letters as communicative events have an equivalent value as acts. The briefest "social" note, the business letter, the letter of introduction, condolence, or complaint, the love letter, and the friendly (intimate) letter can properly be considered simply as types of communication acts or events. That is, voicing a complaint, conveying sympathy, transacting business, expressing love, are all regarded as being equivalent events, no one way of acting having more or less value than another. In this sense, a letter is regarded merely as the means by which an act requiring communication is performed.

To adopt such an apparently reductive view of the letter as merely one communicative act or event among many is to run the risk of incurring considerable resistance. The assumption of this premise is apparently to abandon moral and aesthetic judgments about ways of acting in the world as a person, and about creative expression. "Life writing"--autobiographies, diaries, journals, and letters--are generally
valued by onlookers either because the writer has made a significant contribution to the culture of his or her time, or because the chosen form provides a vehicle for artistic expression, or because the form furnishes documentation in the shape of a detailed record of a life passed as an individual in a society at a specific time. The practitioners of these forms of writing, however, use and value them for somewhat different reasons. Whatever the personal benefits conferred by all the forms of life-writing, the forms share certain pragmatic aims, the letter’s being to communicate with an other or others for a purpose. Although the writer’s intention, a part of purpose, may be difficult to discern or describe specifically, a letter’s functions can be defined and described through analysis of the text and its context. No literary evaluation of a poem is diminished by the critic’s abilities to define and describe the functions of its metre, rhyming scheme, and figures of speech. The poet’s ability to use these functions for discernible purposes forms a part of the critic’s aesthetic evaluation of the text, of the poem in comparison with other poems, and of the poet as an artist. Evaluation, as M.H. Abrams suggests in his ordering of critical activities, is the last of the critic’s duties: "Criticism is the study concerned with defining, classifying, analyzing, and evaluating works of literature" (35). When a letter is viewed as an event involving two participants, a writer and a reader, communicating through language, the urge to judge whether or not the participants can be evaluated by their social roles, and whether or not the content has historical, theological, or philosophical interest, aesthetic merit, or style is deferred. Attention is focussed instead on two fundamental questions: how does the letter communicate information, and what
purpose does this information serve? Neither of these questions can be answered even
tentatively without defining and analyzing the letter text's parts and their functions, a
rudimentary enterprise of literary criticism. It has been argued, of course, that some
or even all letters are not literature; nevertheless, all are written texts and so can be
described according to their composition—their form and structure. Because no critical
methodology exists for comprehensively describing the epistolary form, I have
attempted to formulate a way to describe it as it is found in letters of Victorian women
writers. If a form can be described, then the meaning communicated through language
can subsequently be analyzed, interpreted, and evaluated. The communicative approach
is, above all, a pragmatic one.

My study is based on a collection of about two thousand unpublished letters of
Victorian women writers, amassed from archives in the U.K., the U.S., and Canada.
Published letter collections, in nineteenth-century and twentieth-century editions,
supplement my letter collection. The criteria for defining the collection are (1) that the
letters be written by or to women who could be described as published writers, during
(2) approximately a fifty-year period, roughly 1820-1870.9 The letters, therefore, are
between women and between women and men. Most of the women were actively
earning and consolidating their reputations in the 1830s-1850s. Approximately fifteen
women, two American, are well represented in the collection; another twenty-five or
so, some of older or younger generations, are also represented. In the process of
amassing the letters, I have read many more—between women who were not writers,
and between men of the period. I have also studied how the letters were gathered for
preservation and presentation (often in Autograph Collections), and whenever possible, I have compared manuscript letters with published versions, especially those of the nineteenth-century, to learn more about editorial judgments and the concomitant epistolary values.

I was drawn to these letters while searching for an answer to a number of related questions. Did Victorian women writers really live and work as anomalous, usually isolated individuals as they are so often portrayed (George Eliot, Charlotte Brontë, and Elizabeth Barrett Browning come immediately to mind), or were they, in actuality, part of a female literary coterie, itself an integral part of the male "preserve" (as it is so often depicted) of literary production? If they were among the literati of the period, did they have significant friendships with their female and/or male colleagues, or were they merely acquaintances? And if they did, what was the influence of these friendships on their development as writers? Tracing the networks created by their correspondences appeared to be one way to answer the first question. Reading their letters to discover the nature of their friendships might answer the others. Yet, even with the letters before me, the second and third questions proved difficult to answer. From one perspective, all the letters seemed to differ, one from another, because each was a unique text. From another angle, all the letters were similar because, all being written by people who wanted to talk to other people, they used the same medium. How could I possibly determine whether friendships were significant, and if so, how, unless I could analyse a letter? These were not fictional letters whose purpose was to forward the action of a plot; they were real, and seemingly had no clearly discernible
pattern at all. My study, therefore, focuses on finding a way to analyze letters as a first step in answering these or similar questions. Reversing the usual practice of reading and analyzing letters for information about the correspondents' lives, I have brought my understanding of these women's lives to my analysis of their correspondences. I have attempted to clarify how the similarities which emerge from a large number of diverse types of letters reveal characteristics of the form itself, and to illustrate how the differences in particular correspondences reveal the singularity of the writer and the uniqueness of the participants' relation. I also examine how we derive some of our assumptions about the form, assumptions which so often underlie our evaluative statements and sometimes distort or diminish our critical pronouncements.

The characteristics of the group I have chosen to study have implications for the results. To a certain extent, these women are a homogeneous group: most are British, from the mid- to upper-middle class; all were well, if often self-, educated; almost all were involved in "reform" activities of various kinds; almost all travelled extensively or frequently; as female writers, they had a definable social role. On the other hand, they are diverse: most religious affiliations are represented; some were married, others not; some of the married had children, others not; some were financially secure, others not; some supported their families, others were supported by them; some are known otherwise than as authors (Fanny Kemble and Florence Nightingale, for instance). From a sociological perspective, their class and gender homogeneity suggests an awareness of, if not adherence to, the same social code; from a literary perspective, their similar educational levels and skills as professional writers
suggest familiarity with writing, an awareness of textual conventions and possibilities, and a literary tradition. These attributes, of course, are not necessarily representative of every letter writer of this or any other period, yet their letters as communicative acts or events must be recognizable as such to achieve their pragmatic aims.

All my generalizations about epistolary practices are derived from the practices of this particular group of people at a certain historical period. Three modifiers, however, are cumbersome; therefore, wherever I have felt that broader generalizations are justifiable, I have omitted some or all of the attributes. Broader generalizations such as "Victorian letter writers" or even "letter writers" are based on my observations of epistolary practices across Victorian society, and across centuries, in a variety of textual forms. Comparative studies of different groups of epistolarians would be necessary to describe the form more precisely in any one period. Communication between people is structured on one level by prevailing social conventions, and on another, by conceptions of the person (self). As both of these change, so does the letter. Literary criteria, especially aesthetic, are also reflected in the letters of any particular period. Careful analysis of epistolary texts, therefore, helps to illuminate culture, and the roles that men and women play in its formation and representation.
Style

Defying standard typographical conventions, I have tried in quoting from the letters to present their texts so as to give a visual sense of the handwritten originals. All the original contractions, spellings, abbreviations, punctuation, and line and word spacing are represented, but superscript letters have been lowered. The epistolary dash is represented as it is in handwriting, with a space before and after ( - ), rather than with two hyphens conjoining the text: its comparative length is also represented. Underscoring is shown as underlining (i.e., not in italic type). Ellipses are reproduced as in the manuscript or published texts: to avoid confusion, my own are enclosed in square brackets. I also use square brackets to indicate my interpretation of illegible words in manuscript texts. Carets surround words and phrases inserted by the writer above or below the line.
Acknowledgments

This study would not have been possible without the generous support of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the University of Toronto Travel Grant Fund, and the London House Association of Canada. It would not have been completed without the unfailing encouragement and patience of Professor John M. Robson. I wish to thank the following libraries, their trustees, their curators and their staffs: (U.K.): Birmingham University Library; Bodleian Library, Oxford; British Library, London: Dr. Williams’s Library, London: Fawcett Library, London: Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge; Girton College Library, Cambridge; John Ryland’s Library, University of Manchester; Library of University College, University of London: Manchester Central Library; Manchester College Library, Oxford: National Library of Scotland: Paleography Room, University of London; Reading Public Library: Society of Friends Library, London; Theatre Library, London: (North America) Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, Radcliffe College, Cambridge; Berg Collection, New York Public Library, Boston Public Library: Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge; Thomas Fisher Library, University of Toronto.
Notes


2. Mrs. Erskine reports in *Anna Jameson: Letters & Friendships* (London: Unwin, 1915): “Of the quantities of letters that came from Lady Byron only two remain and these were written long after this date [1838], all the earlier letters were evidently destroyed when the unhappy quarrel of 1852 severed their long friendship” (164-5). There are now approximately one hundred letters between the two women on deposit in the Bodleian Library, Oxford University.

3. An interesting discussion about the disappearance of holograph letters available to the nineteenth-century editors of *Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli*, and of editing practices, is to be found in the introduction to the *Letters of Margaret Fuller Ossoli* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell UP, 1983-).

4. James Martineau copied many of Harriet Martineau’s letters to himself into a journal in a type of shorthand before destroying the originals. His code has since been deciphered. James Martineau Papers, Manchester College Library, Oxford.

5. See Malcolm Elwin, *Lord Byron’s Family* (London: John Murray, 1975). Ralph Lovelace, Lord Wentworth, Lady Byron’s grandson, was determined to find out the truth about his grandparents’ disastrous marriage and to defend her conduct. Eight years after her death he succeeded in obtaining her papers from the trustees. Stung by the renewed criticism of her prompted by Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Vindication of Lady Byron* (1869), he “assiduously . . . traced her correspondents and their heirs, acquiring from them all her letters that had been preserved” (4). His collection now forms part of the Byron/Lovelace Papers on deposit with the Bodleian Library, Oxford University.

6. Mary Russell Mitford bequeathed her library and her letters to her servants K. and Sam Sweetman but the wording of the bequest seems to have been unclear. When the first collection of her letters was published, they sued and were awarded twenty pounds sterling. Mr. & Mrs. Sweetman vs Mr. L’Estrange & Mr. Bentley, Master of the Rolls, 5 July 1871. See Caroline Duncan-Jones, *Miss Mitford to Mr. Harness* (London: SPCK, 1955), 105-107, for some parts of letters on the subject.
7. In the introduction to *Henry James: Selected Letters*, Leon Edel writes: "My goal as a selector of James's letters has been not only to print as many significant letters as possible, but also to restore to certain letters in [Percy] Lubbock passages trimmed by the family" (xvii). Edel adds: "I felt it important to be a restorer as well as a selector. And then Lubbock had created a particular image of James, which I felt needed rounding out" (xix).

8. "After all the primary aim of literary criticism [is] the exploration of meanings conveyed by language" (Anne Cluysenaar, *Introduction to Literary Stylistics* (London: Batsford, 1976), [15]).

9. As Victoria did not come to the throne until 1837, "Victorian" when used adjectivally to describe the women and their letters is not, strictly speaking, accurate. There is not, however, a single common adjective to describe the period between the "Regency" and "Victorian" periods. I make a distinction between "Victorian" and "earlier in the century" only when necessary.
Chapter 1
The Essential Parameters of the Epistolary Form

One of the prose forms first learned by children is the letter. From the *progymnasmata* of the Greek schoolboy to the letters penned by contemporary schoolchildren to hockey stars, the constancy and simplicity of the epistolary form's structural components, and the versatility of its function, have made the letter the ideal vehicle for the practice of rhetoric and composition. Unlike more esoteric forms such as the lyric, the short story, or the essay, or even simpler forms requiring self-sustained motivation such as the journal or diary, the letter is a form available to, and used by, virtually every literate person in society. But the very familiarity of the "familiar" letter has earned it, if not exactly contempt, at least a rather astonishing indifference from literary critics and scholars despite the centuries of its use by writers in all genres: novelists, poets, philosophers, and theologians, among others. If the form is noticed at all, it is usually with the confidence that as we all know how to write and how to read a letter, its formal properties and aesthetics require no critical elucidation. Thus our assumptions about the form, acquired from our early education, rest undisturbed.

In the unlikely case that we are called upon to describe or define the attributes of the familiar letter, we might suggest that it belongs to the realm of private discourse, being both personal and directed to one (specified) recipient, and so is
characterized by spontaneity (unselfconsciousness), self-revelation (intimacy), and immediacy (of the present moment). Approximations of this description underlie the assumptions of most editors of letters and biographers. For example, in an essay on biography, an early nineteenth-century literary critic writes: "Letters, written in the genuine confidence of self-disclosure, offer, certainly, the most important materials to biographical composition. . . . letters lay open the communication of [the writer's] very thoughts and purposes." 

A twentieth-century critic, Howard Anderson, writes more specifically in The Familiar Letter in the Eighteenth Century, but with the same assumptions:

For a biographer there can be hardly any documents more reliable, more valuable, and more essential than the whole corpus of a writer's correspondence, once the full texts are available; if it is properly used, not to afford carefully selected illustrations for some preconceived judgment, but to provide in its entirety the detailed evidence of many different witnesses to check our hasty impressions and to prevent us from misinterpreting things that were said in a certain way for a particular person at a particular moment. (2)

Both critics stress the revelation in a letter of the writer's personality or character while at the same time acknowledging the letter to be an act of purposeful communication with a particular respondent. Yet there are surprisingly few studies which attempt such an analysis of a writer's correspondence as that suggested by Anderson's comment. How exactly, we might ask, does a letter writer reveal his or her character, especially its multi-faceted aspects, in his or her use of a literary form available to everyone who can write? And in using stylistic or literary criteria as indicators of a writer's character, does one not, in fact, face the danger of committing
the same kind of fallacies which bedevil the biographical interpretation of an author's oeuvre?

A not unrelated, but still more puzzling question, is how correspondence is evaluated for its literary, rather than biographical, merits. It is more difficult, for instance, to describe the assumptions which underlie such evaluative statements as Anderson's about eighteenth-century letters: "The [eighteenth-century] letter belongs to a human relationship in a way that is rarely seen in either earlier or later periods. Just as the writer's purity of style must act to reveal his character, so the 'substantive' nature of the letter must constitute a link between the correspondents" (277). As letters are always written within the context of human relationship--that is, from one person to another even if the other is sometimes fictive or a collective--it is difficult to see why eighteenth-century letters are different from those of other periods based either on this premise, or on the premise that the content of eighteenth-century letters functions more effectively to unite individuals in a relationship.

Equally mysterious is the critical basis for Gordon Haight's evaluation of George Eliot's letters:

George Eliot's letters are not like those of a Walpole or Chesterfield, planned and composed with care, revised perhaps and copied with an eye on posterity. They will be read less for their intrinsic literary qualities than for the light they cast on her life and books. They are good letters, however, and have been praised by discriminating critics. (1:xli)

Haight's underlying values seem to be close to those of the original definition of the familiar letter--personal, spontaneous, and unselfconscious--with a colouring of Anderson's belief that eighteenth-century letters are exemplary models of the
epistolary form. What is not clear, however, is the basis for his judgment that the Eliot letters are "good" letters, although somewhat deficient in "intrinsic literary qualities", worthy of praise by "discriminating" critics. My purpose is not to suggest that any of these critics are wrong in their assumptions about letters in general, or about the letters they are evaluating in particular, but merely to point out that their critical opinions are based to a large extent on a set of assumptions about the epistolary form that appear in practice to be somewhat limited, by both biographical and historical values, and by the absence of a critical methodology for describing epistolarity.3 Their statements contribute little to our understanding of what the epistolary form's intrinsic qualities are, or even how it functions to reveal character; yet, without such knowledge, we are unable to make useful evaluative statements about either letters or their writers.

Perhaps the definition of the familiar letter is too limiting. It can be tested by hypothesising its opposite: the familiar letter belongs to the realm of public discourse: although the writer may formally specify a recipient, other readers may intentionally or unintentionally be addressed or acknowledged, and thus the letter is a consciously constructed text which depicts the writer as an actor in a social context at a certain historical moment. This is close to some of the assumptions underlying Haight's comparison of the Eliot letters with those of Walpole and Chesterfield, eighteenth-century texts carefully composed for an audience larger than the designated recipient. Yet could contrary hypothetical definitions be considered sufficiently valid to be held and applied simultaneously by the same critic? This is the question raised by Janet Altman in her study of epistolary fiction, Epistolarity: "How can we speak of what is
particular to the epistolary form when the letter can in one context demonstrate properties that are exactly the opposite of those revealed in other contexts?" (185). Her answer, "the paradox of epistolarity is that the very consistency of epistolary meaning is the interplay within a specific set of polar inconsistencies," (190) suggests that one of the properties intrinsic to the form is the mediation of identifiable polarities.

Writing within a context of negotiation between self and other, whether that other is perceived as the blank sheet of paper, a specific person, or society in general, letter writers invoke polarities such as public and private, absence and presence, spontaneous and deliberated, for specific purposes. These purposes are best examined by describing in detail two of the paradoxical pairs: public/private, and absence/presence. The examination will also reveal the basis for many of our assumptions about the epistolary form.

The contrast between the public and the private is perhaps the most difficult to reconcile of the polarities raised by the hypothetical definitions of the letter. So imbued are we with separating public and private realms and discourses that we construct taxonomies of letters based on the writer's intent or purpose, rather than on differences in the form itself. In an effort to maintain the separation between the public and the private, we may be inclined, for instance, to replace "private" with "personal", and so create a distinction between "public" letters written expressly for publication, such as letters to newspapers and other periodicals, or collections in book form, and "personal" letters, those not written expressly for publication. Yet given the opportunity to compare two letters written on the same day, to the same recipient,
about the same subject, one written for publication and the other as a private communication. The most apparent differences between the two are not those of form, but of content.

Harriet Martineau’s two letters to William Lloyd Garrison, the editor of the American abolitionist paper, The Liberator, show how the form remains the same in a public and a private context. Writing on November 1, 1853, Martineau protests the attack on the character of the publisher G.J. Holyoake that had appeared in The Liberator. One letter was intended for publication and the other not as it was clearly labelled "Private." In the "public" letter, she concentrates her argument on defending Holyoake against the charges made by the article’s author W.J. Linton. Her letter opens: "My dear Sir / I see with much surprise & more concern an attack in your paper upon the character of Mr. G.J. Holyoake, signed by Mr W.J. Linton [. . . ] Of Mr Linton it is not necessary for me to say any thing, because what I say of Mr Holyoake will sufficiently show what I think of his testimony." In her private letter, however, she attacks Linton’s character, an attack open to legal or personal repercussions if it were to be made public, for she calls him "a malignant, wayward, irrational back-biter, who never kept a friend, & is at war with the whole human race."

Both letters, nevertheless, use the same structural components and formal elements; both are familiar letters.

Distinctions between what can or should be made public, and what not, however, are not always so readily apparent to recipients. Indeed, in writing letters to those in a position to publish them, nineteenth-century letter writers usually
specifically inform the recipient whether the letter may be published in whole or in part, either by sending two separate letters simultaneously, or by designating parts of a single letter’s contents as public or private. As the structure of the body of a letter is flexible, the omission of sections can be accomplished with little or no alteration to the remaining text. In these circumstances, a failure to make specific the letter’s intentions might indicate disingenuousness on the writer’s part. The public/private (personal) distinction becomes particularly hazardous, of course, when publication is attempted by a person other than the designated recipient, to whom the writer’s intent is not expressly conveyed.

A classification of a similar kind, between “business” letters and those written for other purposes, although useful on the surface, becomes equally unworkable in practice. It leads more to elucidation of business procedures than to an understanding of the epistolary form. Even a brief survey of the letters preserved as “state” letters, such as those of nineteenth-century British Prime Ministers, shows the distinction to be arbitrary. Topics considered by twentieth-century corporate practitioners as inappropriate for business letters, such as health or the well-being and activities of family members, are not infrequent topics in nineteenth-century ministerial letters. The letters between many writers and their publishers, such as those between Charlotte Bronte and William Smith, or Harriet Martineau and John Chapman, are certainly not confined exclusively to the generation and publication of manuscripts. As in any other context where writers wish to confine the transmitted information to the recipient alone, business letters may close with a request for their destruction. Thus, Harriet
Martineau concludes, in a letter of commentary to G.J. Holyoake on a review of Darwin's *Origin of Species*: "Please burn this scrawl."5

Indeed, nineteenth-century letter writers in general seem to have ordered the whole of their correspondence in a "business-like" manner. Letters received were docketed with the date and name of the writer; sometimes the date of response was noted: perhaps a copy of it was kept; and letters were retained in an orderly enough fashion for retrieval. Autograph collections frequently bear evidence of the plundering of personal files to supply the collector. Elizabeth Gaskell, writing to Harriet Martineau about the controversy over the identity of the author of *Clerical Sketches*, and hence *Adam Bede*, laments (parenthetically) that she cannot quote from a letter she had received several years previously because she cannot find it: "(I have hunted everywhere for Miss Ewart's letter of 57 to prove dates, & first statement of facts, - which are all apt to slip one's memory, but I can't find it or them, for I think there was more than one)."6 While certainly candid, such a confession would not increase a sense of the writer's orderliness or reliability in the eyes of the recipient.

For nineteenth-century letter writers, at least, the distinction may be more appropriately expressed as that between "business" and "social" letters, if by social we mean interaction for pleasure or unspecified ends. If correspondents usually interacted only in one way, the writer might alert the reader to any changes in the interactional context to prevent misreadings. As the same type of stationery was used for both social and business correspondence, writers could not depend on their readers being alerted to changes in the interaction's context by the appearance of the letter. Unlike
the visual appearance of contemporary business letters, the layout of the Victorian letter was the same in both contexts. Business and social letters differed in style principally by a shift in focus from general relational matters to a specific topic, although the personal relationship between writer and recipient was not entirely neglected. A letter from Charlotte Cushman to Elizabeth Gaskell requesting her support for Eliza Cook’s journal may help to clarify the point. Cushman begins her letter:

Dear Mrs Gaskell
I am going to write you a few words upon a business matter. therefore shall beg you to allow me to come to it at once - without preface or apology. if it seems brusque or rude I shall only pray that you will forgive what will be in truth but an ignorance!

Cushman alerts Gaskell to a change in the habitual interactional context between them and, at the same time, upholds the existing goodwill by her apology for any appearance of indifference to her reader, or ignorance of conventions governing epistolary interaction. The epistolary form reflects the context of social (public) interaction and codes of social behaviour through what is said and the manner in which it is said and, indeed, must do so because its structural components and formal elements in themselves are unable to do so. Nevertheless, the urge to distinguish the familiar letter from those written for the public realm is, if not well-founded, at least well-grounded, in the history of the epistolary form.

A brief review of the history of the letter will show how the intertwining of epistolography with rhetoric has set a pattern in the epistolary theoretical tradition which has persisted to the present. The thousands of early Christian letters and the
papyri recovered from Egypt show that there were already well-established epistolary traditions in the Semitic and Greek cultures which pre-dated the formulation of the science of rhetoric. Because rhetoric was derived from oral discourse, and only secondarily applied to written discourse, the letter as a form has always been seen as only tangentially related to rhetoric. As S.K. Stowers points out in *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity*:

> Letter writing remained only on the fringes of formal rhetorical education throughout antiquity. It was never integrated into the rhetorical systems and thus does not appear in the standard handbooks. This means there were never any detailed systematic rules for letters, as there were for standard rhetorical forms. The rules for certain types of speeches, however, were adapted for use in corresponding letter types. (34)

When the interest in rhetoric dwindled after the Classical period, rhetorical formulations continued to be carried on through their embodiment in epistolography and epistolary theory. Thus, despite their rather ambivalent connection, rhetoric and epistolography have travelled the centuries linked together.

The principal rhetorical divisions were derived from the three main settings for oral discourse: the law courts, the senate, and ceremonial occasions such as funerals. The three divisions, then, were the judicial (forensic) which was concerned with passing judgments on events in the past, its focus being truth or justice; the deliberative which was concerned with the course of action in the future, its focus being motivation and dissuasion; and the epideictic which was concerned with praising (or blaming) an individual in the present, its focus being the upholding of traditional values. The social context determined the kind of discourse required and hence the
rules to be followed. In any patronage system for social stability and advancement, epideictic discourse plays an important role: thus, in the Greco-Roman cultures most types of letters were associated with the epideictic (Stowers, 27).

Once the kind of discourse was determined and the materials for the speech were amassed (inventio), their arrangement within the speech was the concern of dispositio. In general, the arrangement was as follows: exordium--the introduction, narratio--the relevant facts or circumstances (from the past), confirmatio--the body of the argument or the proof, refutatio--the countering of opposition, and the peroratio--the summation and conclusion. Each type, however, altered the arrangement slightly to accommodate specific needs: the judicial inserted propositio (premise) before the confirmatio; the deliberative, because it was concerned with the future, tended either to omit the narratio altogether, or place it after a propositio and omit the refutatio. The epideictic was the loosest of all in arrangement, requiring only an orderly sequence of topics between the exordium and the peroratio, although narratio was often a basis for them. The general arrangement of five parts was adapted symmetrically for the letter: salutatio (greeting), exordium (often renamed captatio benevolentiae--the establishing of goodwill), the narratio, the peroratio and the conclusio (closure). Or sometimes the five parts were: salutatio, exordium, narratio, petitio (request), and conclusio. The symmetry, however, is more a convenience than a reality, for the arrangement is remarkably similar to the epideictic dispositio with the addition of the specific epistolary features, the salutatio and the conclusio. Nevertheless, rhetoric's establishment of the three main divisions of discourse has been very influential in the
classification of letters according to the social (public) context, the intentions of the speaker, and the kind of response desired from the audience.

Although the art of rhetoric "stood still, if it did not retrogress" during the Middle Ages, epistolography (ars dictaminis) ascended to a high art, particularly in twelfth-century Italy. But the rules for letter writing, derived from ancient rhetorical formulary books, remained virtually unchanged. It was not until the sixteenth century that there first appeared two books which were to have a marked influence on the epistolary tradition in English. The first was Erasmus's *De Conscribendis Epistolis*, which was published in 1512, and the second was Angel Day’s *The English Secretary*, which first appeared in 1586 and was revised in 1599.

Erasmus’s volume is devoted to both epistolary theory and the teaching and practice of letter writing. Consequently, it is both conventional, in drawing upon the established rhetorical tradition, including its use of models derived from Cicero, Pliny, and Horace, and unconventional, in adapting convention to fit better the theory of letter writing to the practical exigencies of daily life. Erasmus retained for letters two of rhetoric's principal divisions, the judicial and the deliberative, but expanded the third, the epideictic, to three separate classifications: the didactic, the demonstrative, and the familiar. The first two of his three new classifications captured aspects of the epideictic: the exhortatory or admonitory, and the laudatory or reprehensory aspects respectively. The third class found room for the "friendly" letter, the type so highly esteemed in the Classical period but which had found no place in the principal rhetorical divisions. His system, far more flexible than the rhetorical tripartite division,
was made even more useful by his recognition that the literary form of the epistle "must be adapted as far as possible to the immediate occasion, and to contemporary topics and individuals" (25:114). This meant that, in practice, letters appropriate for particular situations might mix several classes. For instance, "it is generally agreed that a letter of recommendation is a mixture of two classes, the persuasive and the demonstrative," (25:182) or, "not all letters of friendship fall into the same class" (25:203). In his discussion of the various aspects of style, Erasmus recognized that, although "the best style [is] that which is most suited to the topic, the place, the occasion and the characters of the listeners" (25:18), in general, the style of the friendly letter (specifically of Cicero to Atticus) was sufficient: "In a letter on ordinary subjects (unless there is a good reason for special treatment) atticism will be quite satisfactory" (25:15). Yet despite the practicality of Erasmus's approach to epistolography, his taxonomy of letters, based on the social context and intention of the writer, has tended to mandate a solid structure which has distracted subsequent theorists from the form itself.

Angel Day focussed in The English Secretary on providing a simple manual for letter writers in the form of an introduction to rhetoric, a compilation of its figures, and a comprehensive collection of the various types of letters. Continuously reprinted for almost half a century, The English Secretary was an extraordinarily successful book. As his model, Erasmus, had done before him, Day both simplified the system of his predecessor and made elaborations of his own. Day reduced Erasmus's five classifications to four by abolishing the didactic class and assigning its types to the
deliberative class. As well, he reshuffled the types in the other classes with the
principal effect of enlarging Erasmus’s class of familiar letters. Superimposed on
Erasmus’s structure were two larger divisions: the general and the special, with all but
one class, the familiar, coming under the special class. In other words, Day clarified
what Erasmus had only suggested: that, in practice, most letters were of the familiar
class and only on special, specific occasions would a letter writer wish to resort to the
instructions for composing a particular type. Day separated the epistolary from the
rhetorical elements by returning to the general rhetorical dispositio (exordium,
narratio/propositio, confirmatio, refutatio, peroratio), although admitting that all the
parts were not always used, and by designating four elements as specifically
epistolary rather than two (salutatio, conclusio).

Day’s four epistolary elements were the salutation, the farewell, the
subscription, and the address. In his description of them, we see both a more
sophisticated recognition of epistolarily sensitive areas, and the foundation of certain
conventions which have lasted, with modification, to the present. Day recommended
that the salutation be simple but the closure, which included the farewell and
subscription, be more elaborate. Ideas of humility and duty should be conveyed in the
closure, usually in the penultimate sentence. The subscription included not only the
signature but also the final sentence. Relative social positions were indicated by the
proximity of the signature to the bottom of the page: the higher the addressee, the
lower the signature of the writer, a formality sometimes requiring the stringing out of
the final sentence into a number of phrases. Although the emphasis on the practice of
rhetoric has been diluted to more general discussions of occasion and recipient. Day’s work established the model for letter-writing handbooks which has never been superseded.

Many of our assumptions about the epistolary form centre on the confusion of the familiar letter with the "friendly" letter. Within the rhetorical tradition, "familiar" refers to a relative lack of formality or complexity in the disposition of the parts of the text and the style of writing. As we have seen, the epideictic division of rhetoric, the division most closely associated with letters, required no more than an orderly arrangement of topics between the introduction and the summation. Day’s types of letters in his general (or familiar) class, the class growing out of Erasmus’s partition of the epideictic division, reflect a wide range of general materials, a breadth also typical of the epideictic: narratorie (description of past events and circumstances); nunciatorie (delivery of news “to those far from us”); gratulatorie: remunetratorie (“a grateful relation of courtesies”); jocatorie (a desire to give pleasure); objurgatorie (rebuke to “kindred or servants”); and mandatorie (command).

Style in discourse is divided into three levels: high, medium, and low. The higher style is associated with preaching; the medium with teaching. The most significant aspect of the lower style is that it invites, or is associated with, a response. Conversational style is thus dialogical, not monological as are the medium and high styles. The overt hierarchical structure of the speaker/audience relation characteristic of the medium and high style is mediated through dialogue into one based on equality or equivalency, although high/low distinctions are not necessarily abolished. Hence the
epithet "friendly" is used to signify the type of interaction characteristic of conversation, but not necessarily the exact social positions of the participants. Familiar letters, as a class, are used as a means of social interaction and thus express a desire to engage in interaction with another, but the establishment and promotion of friendship may or may not be the intention of the writer. The confusion between general social interaction exhibited in conversation (face-to-face interaction) and a type of social interaction, friendship, is extended by the application to epistolary style of values associated with friendship, such as candour, honesty, and fidelity. An illusory continuum is the result: familiar--friendly--personal--natural--spontaneous. It is illusory because, at best, it pertains only to a specific type of social interaction. An excellent example of this illusory continuum, constructed by an arbitrary separation of public and private, and a confusion of friendly (intimate) with familiar, is provided by Elizabeth Drew in *The Literature of Gossip*:

But one form of writing is exempt from this deliberate patterning process [of being 'fashioned . . . for its effect on a public audience']: the familiar letter. . . . Familiar letters are written originally for an audience of one. They are regardless of fame and futurity. . . . It is a person-to-person communication. Direct 'self-expression', so dangerous in conscious art, is of the very essence of a good letter; personality is its hallmark. . . . 'Gossip' has an older meaning too, with its suggestion of the close intimacy and friendliness which links the regular exchangers of letters. (14-15)

Nor should other characteristics of epideictic discourse be overlooked. The association of the epideictic with public, ceremonial occasions is captured by the familiar letter's use of ritual openings and closings, traditionally designated as specifically epistolary, and by its conformation to etiquette, the codes of behaviour
required by social interaction amongst individuals in any given society at any given
time. An individual's performance is used by others to assess worth and ascertain
character—the biographical focus of the epideictic. The familiar letter, then, is
"personal" in so far as it pertains to people interacting in a social context as
individuals, not primarily as representatives of social functions, in accordance with the
codes of conduct established by that society.

The context of social interaction and the conventions governing it foreground
the public/private polarity for letter writers. As we have seen, writers must define the
context and signal their intentions for the letter if their correspondence is conducted in
the overtly public realms of publishing or other business. Yet these requirements are
not necessarily dispensed with by an apparent change from public to private in the
context of the correspondence. The letter writer's control over the text is relinquished
from the moment the pen is laid down, for the letter, in order to reach its recipient,
enters the public realm. Letters consigned for delivery may be lost, stolen, mislaid,
delayed, or misappropriated, even if the consignee is the most trusted of bearers. Thus
letters can become "public" any time by being delivered to an unintended recipient.
Public space, in fact, is one of the co-ordinates of a letter text, for a letter is defined
as communication between two people who are separated. In order to redefine that
space, or, in other words, to "make private" what is public, letter writers may not only
define the context of the interaction and signal their intentions for the text, but may
also delineate the nature of any or all of three spaces: their own space at the time of
writing, their recipient's space at the time of reading, and the space of or within their text.

By convention, the space of the letter writer is regarded as private, even if the act of letter writing occurs where other people are present. In Harriet Martineau's novel, *Deerbrook*, a conversation between a governess and her pupil, Fanny, makes clear that even a child is aware of the convention:

>'But I thought you were convinced, some time ago, that you should not watch people's countenances, to find out what they are thinking, any more than----'.
>'I should read a letter they are writing,' interrupted Fanny. (271)

Yet, for children and women, space designated as private may be redefined as public by the social conventions of a patriarchal society. Typically, children's letters are subject to scrutiny by their parents; married women's letters are open to inspection by husbands. A letter from Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell to her sister-in-law, Elizabeth Gaskell, shows not only how marriage has redefined her own letter-writing space, but also how marriage delineates the nature of the space where the response to her letter will be read:

>When I finished my last letter Willm [her husband] looked at it, and said it was 'slip-shod' - and seemed to wish me not to send it, but though I felt it was not a particularly nice letter I thought I wd send it, or you would wonder why I did not write. But I was feeling languid and anxious and tired, & have not been over-well this last week, and more-over the sort of consciousness that Wm may any time and does generally see my letters makes me not write so naturally & heartily as I think I should do. Don't begin that bad custom, my dear! and don't notice it in your answer.15

Certainly not many writers have occasion to be so explicit about the marital constraints on their private space. Instead, they may signal that the act of writing the
letter, or its contents, has been revealed to another by using the closing part of the letter to convey that information. In the transmission of greetings which frequently occurs in the farewell, writers identify not only the recipients of the greetings, but also the person(s) sharing their "private" space. In a letter of June 1, 1839, to W.F. Watson of Edinburgh, Mary Howitt closes: "Mr Howitt unites in kind regards." William Howitt, therefore, has either read the letter or has been told of its composition. That this type of utterance is normally not fictive--a mere formality or nicety--is demonstrated by the need writers feel to clarify that a spouse or another member of the household is absent, in circumstances where such joint greetings would be expected. In a letter to Elizabeth Gaskell, Mary Howitt designates her daughter as a person sharing her writing space: "Annie unites with me in kind love." Finally, as a letter from Mary Howitt to Mrs. Gilbert demonstrates, writers can identify recipients to whom news and greetings are to be conveyed other than the addressee, as well as identifying the "participants" in the writing space: "Pray make Miss Greaves fully aware that we are much obliged by her politeness & are indeed sorry that we are so unfortunate just at this time - / With kindest regards in which William unites." The intimacy of the writer-recipient relation is considerably diminished by the combination of the enlargement of the writing space and the undermining of the interaction's exclusivity.

If the writer wished to alert the recipient that his or her letter has been read in a public space, that signal usually is given towards the beginning of the letter, the
place where the context of the interaction is established. Thus Lady Byron writes to

Robert Noel:

I have not yet said how sorry we were (for Mrs J was with me when I recd your letter) for your illness - but the nature of it leads me to hope you are now restored - Mrs J herself was taken so ill a few days ago, that she was obliged to employ another hand to write to me, begging that I would not wait for her letter to you which I was to have enclosed.19

Anna Jameson was the intimate friend of both Robert Noel and Lady Byron, while Lady Byron and Noel were cousins. Byron’s signal not only alerts Noel that the contents of his letter have been shared, but it also provides him with information about his friend that he might not obtain otherwise. As well, it serves to allay his anxiety if a letter to him from Jameson is delayed, as Byron adds that Jameson is now better. Although the exclusivity of the writer-recipient relation is somewhat undermined, the friendly relation amongst the three is upheld by this strategy.

The conventions surrounding letter writing and reading point to the tenuous boundaries separating public space from private. Public space is usually delineated by its contrast to domestic, private space. Yet within the domestic realm, as has been shown, space must be specifically designated as private for it to be so. Letters amongst family members, in particular, were public documents, liable to be read to or by other family members. This presented a perplexing situation for writers who wished to convey information only to one particular recipient. When reading a letter aloud to family members, a letter’s recipient was required to be adroit at skipping parts deemed, or perhaps signaled, as private. While for some writers the public nature of the domestic space was problematic, others might look on this public/private dilemma
lightheartedly, as Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell does to her sister-in-law: "Now for a grand Johnsonian sentence which I beg you will read aloud to elevate me in the Dimockian eyes." 20 In general, family members accepted the limitations on the private spaces for communication amongst themselves and regulated their writing habits and contents of their letters accordingly. Particularly amongst extended family members, the sharing of a letter’s contents could actually be used to advantage to save the writer needless correspondence with multiple family members, or the embarrassment of having to disclose information not usually made public in person.

Within the space of the text itself, areas may be designated as public or private. Letter writers may not have the printing or preservation of their letters specifically in mind, however, to signal that a part of a letter is private space, for what they are concerned about is the nature of the information conveyed in that part. Generally speaking, it is not what the writer overtly reveals about him or herself that is worrisome, but what is said about other people, especially if it is judgmental. Short of requesting the destruction of the entire letter, nineteenth-century letter writers tend to use two phrases to signal private space within the letter: "in confidence" (or confidentially), and "entre nous", and each has a subtle but distinct use.

"In confidence" conveys that the information which follows is not meant to be shared with others. The phrase suggests both that the writer is relying on the discretion or trustworthiness of the recipient, and that transmitting the information does not injure the trust between the source and the writer. The dual nature of the phrase, however, leaves the writer in a rather ambivalent position, for the information so
conveyed tends to be for the benefit of the writer, rather than for either recipient or source. A somewhat lengthy excerpt from a letter of Harriet Martineau to the American publishers, Ticknor & Fields, provides a striking example:

Let me ask of you to receive what I say as a confidence, when I tell you that I am in possession through Florence Nightingale & our late lamented Secretary for War, Lord Herbert, of much confidential information, known to few persons out of the Administration, on the state of affairs under which our armies suffered so cruelly in the Russian War. I have published (3 years since) on the Sanitary condition of our soldiers, abroad & at home: & I used, under F. Nightingale’s sanction, some of the special information with which she has furnished me. The lapse of time, & the relaxed pressure of the subject here enable me, I think, to be more open now than then, & especially, I could say things in America that I might doubt about publishing in London. The facts so closely concern your citizen-soldiers at present that I can think of nothing so likely to suit you [. . .]21

Clearly, Martineau is trying to sell an article with contemporary relevance to her American publishers, yet why should she, a well-respected writer with a solid reputation for the reliability of her information if not of her opinions, invoke the public/private polarity so vividly in her bid to be successful? By bringing both poles into play, Martineau achieves two purposes. First, she establishes her elevated position as the authorized vehicle for the transmission of state secrets, adroitly manoeuvring around any issues of integrity by clarifying that she has had permission to divulge the information and has used discretion in her previous publication of it. Secondly, she flatters her recipient by deeming him worthy of being a part of the process (an appeal to his vanity), and appeals to his ambition as an (American) publisher by the exclusivity of her (English) information. Yet despite Martineau’s skill, the use of the
public/private polarity in this way reveals a lack of self-confidence and perhaps a compensatory name-dropping.

The phrase "entre nous" is also used to designate a part of a letter as private space, but with a somewhat different purpose. Through the use of the pronoun "us" and the mediator "between", the private space of the text is extended to embrace the writer and recipient in an equivalent position within it, the effect of which is to emphasize the intimacy of the friendship between the correspondents. What takes place in the interaction within that space may well be of an unauthorized or self-revelatory nature. For example, in a letter to her close friend, Arthur Penrhyn, Dean Stanley, Harriet Grote writes: "I regret to add that her Grace seems to me to be much out of health - (I suspect. Liver - entre nous) tho', as might be expected, her spirits are extremely elated by the 'rout' of the odious Gladstone ministry!" In closing she emphasizes the context of their interaction by addressing him as "best of friends". Yet despite the appeal to friendship, this too is a risky use of the public/private polarity, for the information so conveyed comes perilously close to gossip. It is quite possible that Grote is suggesting that the Duchess’s ill-health is the result of excessive drinking, an impression bolstered by the emphasis on the word "liver" and perhaps even by the emphasis on "spirits". Hence Grote and Stanley achieve solidarity at the "expense" of a third person through commentary and innuendo that might discredit her in Stanley’s eyes.

Grote very rarely designates private space in this way; many letter writers avoid both phrases entirely. On the whole, strategies such as these to designate private
space within a letter text were risky, not only because of their tendency to reflect the
writer somewhat equivocally, but because the whole text, unless destroyed, was liable
to scrutiny by others. The writer could only signal "private" space, but could not force
the recipient to act on the signal.

The obvious conclusion after surveying a vast mass of correspondence is that
Victorian letter writers loved to share their letters by circulating them around their
personal networks. Although recipients might show discretion by merely quoting from
a letter received in a letter to another person, the practice of sending the letter itself
seems to have been very common. For instance, in the controversy over the identity of
the author of Clerical Sketches, Miss Hennell, a mutual friend of Gaskell and
Martineau--George Eliot as well--was also included in the epistolary interactions.
Maria Martineau, writing for her aunt Harriet, opens a letter of December 8, 1859:
"My dear Miss Hennell / Here are more letters for you to see! Please return them as
soon as you can ." As the controversy centred on the authenticity of Mr. Liggins's
claims to be the author, the exact testimony, limited though it may have been, of each
"witness" was considered to be necessary to arrive at a verdict. Thus letters took on
the functions of both testament--a public document purporting to be real and true--and
witness--the testimony of an observer whose private experience is authenticated by
being made public.

As authenticity or veracity is largely established by consistency, both
defendants and prosecutors resort to furnishing multiple samples for examination. In a
controversy with John Chapman over the financing of the Westminster Review, in
which Harriet Martineau accused Chapman of duplicity, a short note from Martineau to Chapman illustrates how both used the display of letters as evidence. Martineau opens her letter: "I am entirely of Mr Grote's mind about frankness all round; & I am obliged both to him & to you for the sight of your letter to Mr Courthauld. The packet goes forward today (sealed) to Mr Courthauld. As I had to answer Mr Grote's note of suggestion & inquiry, & as you are to see him on Monday, I have said my say to him, with the request that he will show you my letter."²⁵

The displaying of letters, of course, was not restricted to the resolution of controversies, as an amusing example in a letter by Mary Russell Mitford illustrates: "Of poetry he [Carlyle] is intolerant - at least two friends of mine, Elizabeth Barrett and Mr Bennett, each sent him a present of their books, and received answers so nearly alike (I saw both of them), that it seemed to me a set form, kept for the purpose."²⁶ Nevertheless, the judicial purpose is still present, the similarity of the two letters testifying to Carlyle's apparent lack of appreciation for poetry. The displaying of letters, then, is closely connected to one function of epideictic discourse, the examination of an individual's character to provide either a model for emulation, or a model whose flaws are to be avoided, for even if letters are furnished as evidence to be judged, the character of the witness always forms a part of that process.

If the limitations in private space and the common practice of circulating letters were not enough to make letter writers conscious of the public nature of epistolary discourse, there is another point to be considered in the letters of Victorian women writers, and that is the growth and development of another genre, biography. At what
point, we might ask, does a writer become aware that she (or he) has gained a public "profile" of sufficient interest that a biography will likely be prepared after the writer's death? A biography which will be presented as either a collection of letters, or as a combination of letters and narrative, the "life and letters" approach so common in Victorian biography, or even both. The question is of particular relevance to this group of women writers because many were biographers themselves. It is an interesting question, but one to which I can supply only a partial answer.

As many of their letters reveal, Victorian women writers were uncomfortable about the conflicts between and among their role requirements. Victorian gender ideology emphasized a domestic, "private" role for women: writing for publication, of course, conferred a public status. Fame, the motivation for writing a person's life (biographically or autobiographically) conferred an unambiguous public status. To show awareness that one's letters might, could, or would be published indicated an unequivocal acceptance of a public stature. Women writers, therefore, were reluctant to acknowledge openly what might become of their letters. Hence, Mary Russell Mitford's comment to Sir William Elford is most unusual: "What a fine job the transcriber of my letters will have! I hope the bookseller of those days will be liberal and allow the man a good price for his trouble, no one but an unraveller of state cyphers could possibly accomplish it." But as Mitford often worried about the illegibility of her handwriting, her comment reflects her anxiety rather than a preoccupation with celebrity.
Yet there are indications that the subject, if not openly spoken about, was not entirely ignored. What clues I have found come from yet another controversy with Harriet Martineau at its centre: her decision of 1842, reached while she was suffering from a supposedly mortal illness, later cured by mesmerism, to recall all the letters she had written previously. Although Martineau's reasons are interesting in themselves, the repercussions, in the form of responses from other women writers, shed more light on how women writers viewed the possible publication of their letters. Even as late as 1844, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, in a response to John Kenyon about a letter he had enclosed for her viewing, writes: "Such letters always bring me to think of Harriet Martineau's pestilent plan of doing to destruction half of the intellectual life of the world, by suppressing every mental breath breathed through the postoffice. She was not in a state of clairvoyance when she said such a thing." By implication, we may surmise that, as she knew herself to be a part of the "intellectual life of the world," Barrett Browning would be aware that her letters were "public" property.

Anna Jameson's response to Martineau, written on January 17, 1843, is worth quoting extensively, for not only does it reveal interesting discriminations between public and private, but also shows how a letter's recipient feels affronted if her (or his) ability to discriminate the boundaries of public and private discourse is questioned. Jameson's letter opens:

Had I, my dear Harriet, obeyed the impulse of the moment, I should have replied to your last letter at once & I should have expressed in strong terms the pain and astonishment I felt on reading it. You wish that I should burn or surrender your letters? The request seemed to me so extraordinary, so inconsistent with the brave, honest, clear spirit I have always admired & respected in you.
that I paused & waited till I should have your reasons at length.\textsuperscript{30}

Jameson had written to a mutual friend, Mrs. Ker, to whom Martineau had made a full presentation of her principles: Mrs. Ker transcribed them for Jameson. Jameson continues her letter by saying that if Martineau wishes to make an exception for herself, Jameson will comply; however, if Martineau is making it "a general principle & assume it as every lady's right in all cases, then I protest against your reasons and against your right - with all my soul & with all my strength." Despairing of being able to persuade Martineau to change her mind, Jameson nevertheless gives her reasons:

It appears to me that you are giving the most deadly blow to mutual confidence, to what you call freedom of speech, that ever yet was given [. . . .] Shall we then make a principle of fear? Shall we openly allow that we are afraid to speak or write what we think & feel, lest our words be repeated or published to our own or others wrong? I grant you that accidents have happened - & may happen again from our own or others indiscretion; let such experience make us wiser & when we fear treachery or carelessness, let us defend ourselves against it - but rather than I would make a law upon the subject, taking away our free will & free spontaneous trust in ourselves & our friends, rather than deliberately set up such an example as one to be universally followed, or assert such a principle as you have done. I would suffer every letter I ever wrote in my life to be placarded at Charing Cross & every word I had ever uttered to be blown thro' a speaking trumpet to the four winds of heaven. I think it the most detestable treachery to keep or show some kinds of letters: I think it the extreme of weakness & cowardice to destroy others of a different character & if, in this discrimination, I am to have no right of judgment whatever, then I am not fit to be trusted in any thing, nor fit to be yours nor any lady's friend. I have kept a few of your letters & parts of letters, for special reasons; because they were honourable to you & to me, because they contained valuable truths, because they gave me strength and comfort & might perhaps prove a revelation of hope, strength, comfort to others.
The vehemence of Jameson’s reply and her belief that letters were both testaments and witnesses, suggest that Jameson was fully aware of the public dimension (and value) of letters, hers included. According to her executor (and biographer), Geraldine MacPherson, the only written documents Jameson specifically requested to be destroyed were her diaries. Martineau forestalled biographers by writing two volumes of her own autobiography the next time that she was ill, and by appointing her own biographer, Maria Weston Chapman, to supply a third volume.

The tension between the public and the private, then, is an essential characteristic of the familiar letter. In general, letter writers regard the letter as a form of private discourse, but one whose privacy is maintained only by its recipient abiding by the same convention, using a discretionary power that could not be called into question. In practice, letter writers were required to acknowledge the letter’s public dimension by designating their text in whole or in part as a private communication. or, conversely, by acknowledging that the writing and reading of their text might take place in a space not strictly private. The ambivalence of the public/private paradox leads letter writers to consciousness about the literary form they are employing: thus, it is at the moments of self-reflexivity that the tension generated by the paradox surfaces and can most easily be examined. Intersecting with the public/private polarity is the other essential polarity of epistolary discourse: absence and presence. Involving both spatial and temporal co-ordinates, absence and presence signify the polarities of “separation and union”, as well as “then and now”. The poles of this two-fold continuum, along with the public/private continuum, outline the essential
parameters of the epistolary form. Although the spatial and temporal co-ordinates of the absence/presence polarity cannot really be separated, it will be helpful to look first at the spatial dimension.

As we have seen, the essential premise of epistolary discourse is the separation of two people who wish to communicate with each other. Blinded perhaps by the tradition of epistolary fiction in which lovers are parted, or heroines are removed from the safety of their parents or guardian, to be reunited, if at all, by the conclusion of the novel, we overlook a basic signification of the word "separation". Nothing can be separated that was not once joined or united. Thus, in the study of epistolary discourse we attend to only half the polarity, "absence", and withdraw our attention almost entirely from the opposite end, "presence". And if we think about presence at all, we are likely to think either metaphorically or even metonymically of the representation of a person, and not of a flesh-and-blood human person who is conversing in face-to-face interaction with us. Representational thinking can be useful in considering the absence/presence paradox, but only if it does not disguise the basis of the polarity: face-to-face interaction and written interaction.

In the epistolary novel, when once united correspondents part, their narrative, constructed by their letters, begins; when the correspondents are reunited (unless they part again) the narrative stops, for there is no one else to tell their story. This is a fictional device, but not an epistolary one. Sequences of letters between correspondents are not organized with any purposeful or intentional narrative construction; they cannot be because, almost without exception, they are organized around a random pattern of
face-to-face interaction and written interaction. Thus, the gaps can be neither recovered nor reconstructed in the letters of any one pair of correspondents. That task can only be attempted by an external reader using multiple correspondences and other biographical materials. We may protest that a correspondence may be carried on for years between people who never meet, even perhaps who have never met at all. It can be, but it is not likely to be sustained for a long time. And of the many examples which come to mind, almost all, upon careful examination, reveal that the correspondents meet at least occasionally. Although seeming to go against the grain of our ideas about epistolarity, the supposition of this basic premise of the absence/presence paradox is very helpful in examining the letter’s formal and structural elements.

If the epistolary novel begins after the separation, where does epistolary interaction begin? A simple question, but one which is difficult to answer, for rarely does a correspondence survive absolutely intact. Amongst Victorian women writers, correspondence seems to begin in one of two ways: as the result of a face-to-face meeting, or, far more rarely, with the delivery of an author’s published work accompanied by a letter, a gesture which elicits at least the courtesy of an acknowledgment. This opening strategy is one which depends on the public dimension of the epistolary form. Victorian etiquette required a person known to both parties to perform an introduction of one to the other, a ceremonial rule or ritual, there being no physical reason why two people, unknown to each other but who find themselves in proximity, cannot speak to each other. In the case of a published author sending her
work to a person unknown to herself. her book, which now belongs to the public realm, performs the act of introduction for her. The public pole of the accompanying letter is emphasized by reflecting the writer as a person accorded status in the public community. Thus, the book introduces the letter. As with any introduction, no more than an acknowledgment is required: subsequent interactions, either face-to-face or written, may or may not take place. Yet for women writers especially, who sometimes lacked the opportunities to meet face-to-face with other authors, it was an effective strategy for enlarging their personal networks and for interacting in a context which reflected their social roles as authors. In this situation, first or initiatory letters are very interesting as they establish the basis for future correspondence, and demonstrate how the initiator wishes to be seen, and responded to, by the recipient.

Taking as a basic premise that most epistolary interaction is initiated through face-to-face interaction, some "first" letters of correspondences of which numerous letters survive can be examined to see how this aspect of the absence/presence polarity manifests itself. Mary Russell Mitford is known both as an epistolarian, and as a woman who spent virtually all her life sequestered in the small rural village of Three Mile Cross, the setting of Our Village. Taking these two points together, we may suppose that her social interaction was initiated and confined mainly to epistolary interaction. Yet the "first" letters of four substantial correspondences in my collection show that all were dependent on a face-to-face interaction for initiation. My choice of letters from the "private" side of the public/private polarity, that is of friendly (intimate) letters, is deliberate, for if these manifest the basic premise of the
absence/presence polarity, those from the more "public" realms of business and "social" interaction will do likewise. I have selected the "first" letters to Barbara Hofland, T.N. Talfourd, Emily Jephson, and W.C. Bennett; all except Emily Jephson, a friend of Maria Edgeworth, were writers.

Mitford's "first" letter to the novelist Barbara Hofland, dated May 11, 1821, begins: "Your dear letter, my dearest Mrs Hofland, deserves a longer answer than I am likely to give you on this shabby piece of paper - but I am busy - that is to say I ought to be busy. & dared not trust myself with a whole sheet, from the certain knowledge that I should indulge myself with prattling to you instead of sitting down doggedly to my proper occupation." Clearly not an initiatory letter as it is written in response to one from Mrs Hofland, the context is defined as a very friendly one ("dear", "dearest") in which Mitford "prattles" to Mrs Hofland, habitually at some length. The childish manner of talking denoted by "prattle" is appropriate to the situation of a younger, less well-established woman (writer) writing to an older, more famous woman (writer) who has an affectionate indulgence for her. The greetings of the closure depict a social context in which family members are known to each other: "Kindest regards from our Trio [her father, mother and herself] to yourself & Mr H.". Mitford and Hofland had indeed met when Mitford visited London with her family in 1817.

Hundreds of letters, spanning more than a quarter of a century, survive of the correspondence between Mitford and T.N. Talfourd, dramatist, M.P., judge, and an intimate friend from her earlier years as a writer. My "first" letter is dated June 21,
1821, and opens: "I can but thank you again & again, my dear Sir, for your exceeding kindness. & lament more than ever the trouble that I give you - I assure you this regret is not a form of words but a real feeling - I am so sorry to trespass on your valuable time - so very sorry - & yet when you bid me write & tease you with my doubts & difficulties I have not resolution to relinquish the comfort of telling them to you & the benefit of your advice." The "telling" is more than metaphoric for the interactional context has been established face-to-face; this letter is a response to his invitation to her to write, and may well be the first of their epistolary interaction. The context of (longwinded) apology on Mitford's side, and advice and comfort on Talfourd's side, is established and is also characteristic of their correspondence as a whole. Although this one does not, subsequent letters frequently close with greetings from her family, the context in which Talfourd and Mitford first met. Many letters anticipate meetings or reflect back on meetings; that they took place is evidenced by the numerous hiatuses in the correspondence.

Mitford's "first" letter to Emily Jephson at Castle Martyr, Ireland, is dated July 10, 1824. It opens: "Your letter gave me - I will say gave us for I could not refuse my dear Father & Mother a participation in what had given so much pleasure to myself - the sincerest gratification. Now that I can no longer hear of you through our dear friends, it will always be the truest pleasure to hear from you. Mr Monck [M.P. for Reading] has the goodness to permit all my letters to be enclosed to him - & I am sure that if, at any time, stress of business, or mere weariness of writing, should make me seem dilatory in reply; you will have the goodness to attribute it to the right
cause - to any except that which is impossible, forgetfulness or want of affection towards you - [You] will, with your usual indulgence, forgive me accordingly." The initiatory interactional context can be reconstituted. Emily Jephson had met the author, Mary Russell Mitford, in a social setting provided by "our dear friends"; sufficient interaction has since taken place for Mitford to know of Jephson's "usual indulgence": both Jephson and "our dear friends" have left the neighbourhood; and, as a result, Jephson has initiated a correspondence to bridge the gap created by the removal of the mediator--the interlocuter--between them. After establishing the conditions under which she is willing to undertake a correspondence, Mitford's first letter concludes with a query, an overt invitation for a response: "Are you not glad that I am come to an end of my list & my Letter: come to the thousand loves & good wishes that attend you from all here? Adieu!" The correspondence, based on a shared love of reading and gardening, and supported by infrequent meetings (Jephson continued to reside in Ireland), lasted many years.

The final example is from a voluminous correspondence between W.C. Bennett, writer, bookseller, and a beloved, faithful friend of the last decade of Mitford's life. The "first" letter, dated January 13, 1848, opens: "Any afternoon next week that suits you dear friend I shall be delighted to see you - only give me two or three days notice - The Princess [Tennyson's poem] has fine things but it would never have made a reputation - I hope your Poem is not in blank verse" and closes, "Say every thing for me to dear Mrs Bennett." Clearly there is no way of knowing whether this is, indeed, a "first" letter, for the face-to-face interaction between them is
given precedence over epistolary interaction; nevertheless, Mitford's letter is a response to Bennett's suggestion, probably in writing, of visiting her. The literary context of their interaction, of books read and manuscripts to be criticized, is sketched in this brief letter in the short utterances which, strung together, are imitative of a face-to-face conversation. Despite the many surviving letters, the frequency of the face-to-face interaction between Mitford and Bennett makes the construction of epistolary links difficult.

These four examples show a range of styles and tones of expression reflecting not merely the writer's youthfulness or age, but also the relativity of the ages, sex, and social status of both participants. Yet despite these differences, all four letters establish the face-to-face interaction as the basis for epistolary interaction. All four define a context for the interaction: each establishes a "friendly" basis but highlights slightly different roles for the respondents. All four letters make use of the public/private polarity and its strategies for enlarging and diminishing personal space and intimacy. Although Mitford was an accomplished epistolarian, she was not singular; as with any other writer in a literary form, her achievements, rather baldly stated, derive from her ability to combine sound knowledge of formal elements and structural components with an imaginative use of language. Her letters, then, merely exemplify the practices of other letter writers and, indeed, when the same scrutiny is applied to the others, similar results are derived.36

The implications of this basic premise of the absence/presence polarity, the face-to-face interaction and the written, heighten awareness of the epistolary dynamic.
Unlike the momentum of the epistolary novel's narrative line which builds to a
climax, the momentum of epistolary discourse is not linear or progressive in that
sense. While it is true that each letter in an epistolary interchange builds on a previous
letter, if there is no face-to-face interaction, the momentum generated, the dynamic, is
lower than that generated by frequent face-to-face interaction. That is, face-to-face
interaction gives a "charge" to the epistolary dynamic that no amount of letters can. If
we think of a single letter as a pivot turning between written interaction and face-to-
face interaction, the more frequently both kinds of interaction take place, the more
energy is generated between the interactants. A very early letter by Lady Byron, from
the correspondence between Anna Jameson and Lady Byron, furnishes a good example
of the pivotting between the two kinds of interaction. It opens: "I feel sure of your
pardon for an appearance of neglect when I tell you that since the day of your visit I
have been oppressed by business of a painful nature. My mind is now sufficiently
relieved to enable me to attend, with all the interest it deserves, to the subject of your
kind communication."37 Lady Byron's letter is in response to a "visit" by Jameson
and to a "kind communication" (a letter) from her. Six years later the same two-way
interactional dynamic is operative; Jameson commences a letter: "Dear Lady Byron - it
vexes me to sit down & write you a letter in a hurry - but so it must be - & I have so
much to say to you! - I am not disappointed that you do not come tomorrow - for I
never hoped it - but I am grieved for the cause which detains you - no wonder you
caught cold that miserable day you left London - wind & rain all the way!" In
comparison with Lady Byron's earlier letter, the energy in this letter is palpable as it
swings from the letter itself, to a postponed but still anticipated meeting, to a meeting in the past.

The momentum of the epistolary dynamic has two effects. First, the syntax of sentences tends to break down, leaving short utterances linked by dashes; second, the content becomes less intelligible to an external reader, for internal referents are dispensed with, there being no necessity for them between two interactants who know the interactional context. For an external reader, the effect is very much like overhearing a conversation already in progress. In the letter from Lady Byron just quoted, the body of the letter, where the topic or topics for discussion are introduced, begins: "I at once recollected the article which had given me comfort at the time of its publication -" and continues with commentary about either the author or the subject of the article who is referred to only as "she". We, as external readers, can infer that a certain journal article had been mentioned in the context of a previous interaction, but that the speaker at the time could not give much information about it. Yet this present communication, which we can read, enlightens us no further, for neither article, author, nor subject matter is identified. The dynamic of epistolary interaction can be simulated by imitating the syntactic structure, and by using other more obvious indicators of "writing to the moment", but the contextual "horizon"\textsuperscript{38} of meaning cannot be simulated if the communication is to be intelligible to anyone but the author.\textsuperscript{39}

The correspondence between Harriet Grote and the American lawyer, Charles Sumner, provides an example of how the lack of momentum, if it is not periodically recharged, leads to the eventual withering away of epistolary interaction. Sharing an
interest in Grote's protégée, the dancer Fanny Elssler. Sumner kept Grote informed about her tour of America; Grote responded by keeping Sumner informed of the English political scene. Correspondence was infrequent, partly because overseas post was slow, and partly because, without face-to-face interaction, the energy required to write lengthy, detailed letters was insufficient to the task. Grote's letter of March 22, 1845, approximately five years after the correspondence was initiated, begins:

I will not occupy my little available space & your hungry attention, by apologies for a long silence. It is the misfortune of my life that I make more friends than I can keep up commerce with, on acct of my deplorable health and my overpowering duties; wh, as the capable and ascendant individual of two families, (Lewin & Grote) and as the wife & friend of a bookworm, (averse to the very notion of trouble of detail) devolve upon me, & leave me no time & scarcely any energy for letter writing, beyond those wh cannot be postponed. Let me cut short further preamble by assuring you of the constancy with wh your memory is present to G. [George Grote] & myself - we often speak of you, and wonder if you mean to come over again & renew the friendly feelings which had their rise in the acquaintance we formed with you in 1839-40.

Even in two sentences, the use of words and phrases denoting the flow of energy is striking: "keep up with"; "commerce" (the energy of money); "ascendant"; "energy"; "overpowering"; "rise"; "renew"; as is the conjunction of "present" and "come over again" to visit.

In 1844, however, Grote had written to Sumner in Rome: "I am almost tired of expecting and enquiring about you and begin to think that I must scratch you out altogether of my tablets as a hopeless connection - I have sent you several pacquets and letters by private hands but never can hear any intelligence of you. Do pray let me hear of you & our Roman acquaintances whom Mr Grote & myself often recal with
earnest regard -”. Grote bases her appeal for a response on the mutual (face-to-face) social interaction they have enjoyed together. Even more interesting is her clarification later on in the letter that friendship--even such a long and intimate one as hers with Sarah Austin--could not be maintained by epistolary interaction if it was not re-energized by face-to-face interaction: "I am going to Paris for a month to refresh & revive some valuable friendships, wh have been only maintained by a rare letter for 4 years - Mr & Mrs Austin among the rest, whom poverty necessitates an exile from this wealthy community, & who have not been so near as Paris these 3 years -". While perhaps it is splitting hairs, I believe it is not the friendship that needed "refreshing & reviving" but the written expression of it. Long-standing friendships have a tendency to survive periods of neglect; epistolary connections cannot. Despite a brief charge of energy in the late 1850s when both Sumner and the Grotes were on the Continent at the same time, their epistolary interaction had virtually ceased by the 1860s.

As verbs carry the heaviest burden of the expression of momentum in a sentence, it is not surprising to find that the tenses of the verbs express the pivotal nature of the presence/absence polarity. As has been shown, letters look backwards to written and face-to-face interactions in the past, and forwards to anticipated meetings and responses to letters in the future. The actual times of past events are not simultaneous, however, for a meeting in the past and a letter generated by it will not occur simultaneously. Neither will the anticipated types of interaction of the future. To this may be added the narration (narratio=past) of events in the body of the letter, events that have occurred at any combination of times relative to the past times of
interaction, and to the writing of the letter. Letters also frequently anticipate events: what the writer will be doing, what the recipient will be doing, what others will be doing, and even, as demonstrated, the reading of the letter when it is received.

Epistolary verbs, then, are polyvalent with the only point of reference being the present--the moment of writing the letter, or as Altman expresses it: "The pivotal time in epistolary discourse is therefore the present" (123). Thus, the absence/presence polarity in its temporal dimension frequently manifests a self-consciousness about writing, making the epistolary form highly self-reflexive. Only rarely, however, are letter writers required to acknowledge the ambiguity of the verb tenses, for the interactional context between writer and recipient is well enough understood to make explanation superfluous.

Joanna Baillie, however, responding in a letter to Anna Jameson to her request for a meeting, explains why she will be unable to comply:

You are very good in wishing to see me when you are in Town and near Cavendish Sqr, and I should gladly obey you were I as able as willing: but to get to Town during the time you mention I could not well accomplish, and besides your note is not dated, nor have you stated in what part of Regent’s Park you are going to visit. I suppose your ‘next friday’ means to morrow and then you will receive this note before you leave Notting Hill. ----41

Baillie’s confusion over the interpretation of the date for an event in the future arises from her inability to establish a meaning for "next" within the context of their written interactions. Her own letter, unlike Jameson’s apparently, has a full description of the place and time of writing: "Hampstead thursday morning / May 18h"; Jameson will
therefore understand either why the meeting cannot take place, or why Baillie has misinterpreted her invitation. But such confusions are infrequent.

Intrinsic to the epistolary form, then, are two essential interdependent paradoxes, neither of which takes precedence over the other. Letters, by definition, are public documents because they are written texts which traverse a space between communicants; conversely, they are also private because they orient the communication towards a specified recipient. The public and private polarity is manifest most visibly in the moments when letter writers demarcate private from public space. Such a demarcation reveals an underlying anxiety about the performance of the self in a social context, the self being perceivable only in relation to someone--or something--else. Letters are performative--they enact and they record the performance of the self in its relation to the other. Letters, by definition, are written to a person who is not present for conversation. The absence/presence polarity, with its spatial and temporal aspects, expresses other dimensions of performance: the self who must perform for an unseen audience who cannot provide immediate cues to guide the performance; thus the self who can only see itself reflected in the mirror of the paper: the self-reflexive self. As a stable sense of self is largely conferred by a sense of continuity and consistency in performance, letter writers demarcate the present moment by its relation to other moments, past and, provisionally, to come. The paradoxical characteristics of the epistolary spatial and temporal polarities outline the parameters of its form.
Notes


2. James Anderson Winn’s *A Window in the Bosom: The Letters of Alexander Pope* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon, 1977) is one of the few studies to attempt to describe and analyse a writer’s correspondence.

3. Cf. Bruce Redford’s commentary in *The Converse of the Pen* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1986) about *The Familiar Letter in the Eighteenth Century*: "The majority of the contributors to this volume, . . . treat the letter as a documentary source, a lode of anecdote and observation, not as a verbal construct. The result is to misapprehend, and finally to trivialize, the accomplishment of the finest letter-writers" (7-8).


10. I do not wish to imply singularity to Erasmus’s work. Vives also wrote a *De Conscribendi Epistolol* in 1536. The first rhetoric textbook in English was *Arte or Crafts of Rhetoryke* (1530). Day’s work was preceded by *The Enimiee of Idlenese* (1568), a translation from Italian on the art of letter writing.

11. The emphasis here should be placed on "relative", as I hope to make clear. It was certainly not an "abandonment" or carnavesque "release" as Anderson and Ehrenpreis imply in *The Familiar Letter in the Eighteenth Century*: "from Cicero on,
the whole genre may be viewed as an escape from formality, a release from the sort of rules associated with the 'higher' kinds of literature" (271).


13. Cf. Erving Goffman, Interaction Ritual: Essays on Face-to-Face Behaviour (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967): "In all societies, rules of conduct tend to be organized into codes which guarantee that everyone acts appropriately and receives his due. In our society the code which governs substantive rules and substantive expressions comprises our law, morality, and ethics, while the code which governs ceremonial rules and ceremonial expressions is incorporated in what we call etiquette" (55). Goffman defines a ceremonial rule as "one which guides conduct in matters felt to have secondary or even no significance in their own right, having their primary importance--officially anyway--as a conventionalized means of communication by which the individual expresses his character or conveys his appreciation of the other participants in the situation" (54, emphasis mine).

14. The definition of a letter has always been difficult; however, the numerous attempts, such as an early one by Turpulius, "mutual conversation between absent friends" (Erasmus, 25:20), always include the components of separation, and communication between two people.

15. Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell to Elizabeth Gaskell, [August 19, 1838], Elizabeth Gaskell, The Letters of Mrs Gaskell, eds. J.A.V. Chapple, and Arthur Pollard (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1966), #13, 34. All references to Elizabeth Gaskell's letters, unless otherwise noted, will be to this edition.

16. Mary Howitt to W.F. Watson, June 1, 1839, MS 584 (988), Watson Archive, National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh.

17. Mary Howitt to Elizabeth Gaskell, n.d., University MSS--Box A, John Rylands Library, University of Manchester.


19. Lady Byron to Robert Noel, February 16, 1843, Lovelace/Byron Papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford University.

20. Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell to Elizabeth Gaskell, July 17, 1838, #9, 21. "Dimockian" refers, I presume, to the manner of speaking of the Rev. E.R. Dimock with whom Elizabeth Gaskell was staying.
21. Harriet Martineau to Messrs Ticknor & Fields, September 5, 1861. Autograph Collection, Houghton Library, Harvard University. The use of the "now/then" (absence/presence) polarity may also be noted.

22. Harriet Grote to A.P. Stanley, MS Eng lett d.91 Bodleian Library, Oxford University. It is not clear to me who "her Grace" refers to.

23. Cf. Patricia Meyer Spacks, Gossip (N.Y.: Knopf, 1985). The polarities of public/private and high/low, as signified by class or social position, are important aspects of Spack's description of gossip: "Gossip belongs to the realm of private, 'natural', discourse. it often violates 'the claims of civility', but it incorporates the possibility that people utterly lacking in public power may affect the views of figures who make things happen in the public sphere" (6-7). Certainly neither Stanley nor even Grote was lacking in public power or influence, but neither was of the aristocratic class, although Stanley's wife was. The use of gossip to further intimacy, and its relevance to epistolary interaction, may also be noted: "To think of gossip helps to clarify strategies of discourse shaped by intimate talkers and imaginative writers" (23).

24. Maria Martineau to Miss Hennell, December 8 [1859], Miscellaneous Autographs 45918, British Library, London.

25. Harriet Martineau to John Chapman, June 5, 1858, MS Eng Lett d.2, Bodleian Library, Oxford University.


31. "At those moments when letter writers speak self-consciously of their chosen form, they make these polarities clear" (Altman, 186).

32. Mary Russell Mitford to Barbara Hofland, May 11, 1821, MS Autogr. d.11, Bodleian Library. Oxford University. The earliest published letter between Mitford and Hofland is dated October 4, 1817, Mary Russell Mitford, Letters of Mary Russell Mitford, ed. Henry Chorley, 2 vols. (London: Bentley, 1872), 1:27. It may well be a "first" letter as it opens: "It is so impossible to refuse a request of yours - and a desire of Mr. Hofland's - that the enclosed sonnet arranged itself almost as soon as we parted." However, the nineteenth-century editions of Mitford's letters are so unreliable that I have used for my example a manuscript letter. Both, in any case, establish the face-to-face interaction as the basis for correspondence. The earliest letter recorded from Hofland in Mitford's diary is on February 3, 1819, Mary Russell Mitford, Diary 1819-1823, typescript in the Thomas Fisher Library, University of Toronto; manuscript in the Reading Public Library.

33. Mary Russell Mitford to T.N. Talfourd, June 21, 1821, Eng MS 665, John Rylands Library, University of Manchester.

34. Mary Russell Mitford to Emily Jephson, July 10, 1824, A54973 Macmillan Archives, British Library, London: copies of letters "probably intended for publication" with editorial markings for the excision of passages. The passage I have quoted was so marked.

35. Mary Russell Mitford to W.C.Bennett, [January 13, 1848], Add 3774A, British Library. London.

36. In my rough calculation of 177 of Anna Jameson's letters to her friend, Ottilie von Goethe, only a small group (about 12) do not either reflect on a previous meeting or anticipate a meeting in the future. Of this group, a number are brief notes. Of the remainder, letters #37-43 are the most consistent span where no face-to-face interaction is mentioned; they therefore would merit further scrutiny for other changes in the epistolary interaction of the two friends. See G.H. Needler, Letters of Anna Jameson to Ottilie von Goethe (London: Oxford UP, 1939).

37. Lady Byron to Anna Jameson, March 1 [1834?], Lovelace/Byron Papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford University. The subsequent letter is in the same collection and has been dated [July 9 1840].

38. Cf. Robert C. Holub, Reception Theory (London: Methuen, 1984): "Borrowing and adapting a term from [Edmund] Husserl's phenomenology, he [Hans-Georg Gadamer] proceeds to introduce the central notion of 'horizon' as 'an essential part of the concept of situation' (p. 289). Horizon thus describes our situatedness in the world, but it should not be thought of in terms of a fixed or closed standpoint; rather, it is 'something into which we move and which moves with us' (p. 271). It
may also be defined with reference to the prejudices that we bring with us at any given time, since these represent a 'horizon' over which we cannot see" (42).

39. This characteristic presents a problem not only for the novelist but also for any external reader. As Roger Duchêne observes: "Plus la lettre est réussie en tant que lettre, c'est-à-dire profondément adaptée à la personnalité d'un destinataire complice de celui qui l'écrit dans la complexité d'un contexte vécu, plus elle est, en définitive, illisible à autrui" (Réalité vécue et art épistolaire, 1:114 quoted in Altman, 120).

40. Harriet Grote to Charles Sumner, March 22, 1845, BMS AM 1.4 (v.129.30), Houghton Library, Harvard University. The subsequent letter, dated January 25, 1844, is in the same collection.

Chapter 2

The Components of an Epistolary Text

The simple question of how we identify a text as a letter--a text in epistolary form--may be answered simply by saying that a letter is most obviously identifiable by its use of two structural components: a salutation and a "complimentary close". That is to say, the letter is a text identifiable because normally it is written to a specific, named recipient by an author who identifies himself or herself with a signature. More precisely, we may observe that the recipient's name is embedded in a formulaic phrase separated from the text at the beginning; likewise, the author's name is embedded in a formulaic phrase separated from the text at the end. The salutatio and conclusio, it may be recalled, are the elements designated by rhetorical formulations as specifically epistolary. Upon further reflection, we may add that we expect the letter text to include what Angel Day named the "address", but which I prefer to call the "location identifier". This term more accurately describes the combination of spatial and temporal elements--the place and date of writing--that we assume are to be found at the top, or the bottom, of a letter, and prevents confusion with the address on the outside of the letter or its envelope. These, then, are three structural components of the epistolary form. All are visually apparent as "appendages" to the text, and some or all are frequently omitted or rearranged by biographers, editors of letters, and those quoting from letters in another text.
Yet to adopt the premise that the epistolary structure has only three components, all detachable from the text, seems simplistic, for such a premise is contrary to what we know about textual structure in other genres. Probably no one, for example, would dispute that poetic structure is more than the typographical appearance of a discernible pattern of lines of text on a page; nor would anyone attempt to answer in two or three sentences the question of what constitutes poetic structure. Epistolary structure, we can be fairly certain, is no less complex. Could we, for instance, assemble our three structural components and say that the resulting text is a letter? No. Little communication could take place using such a structure. Could we, then, omit all three components and say that the remaining text is a letter? No. On the basis of our knowledge of the form derived from our own practical experience, we would likely answer negatively, but we might be unsure as to why. The uncertainty of the second response is indicative of a dearth of critical and theoretical thought about epistolary structure, although it is representative of how we have been taught to write letters.

In his very useful book, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, S.K. Stowers observes:

> These [epistolary] opening and closing formulas seem to have been of little interest to the ancients when they reflected on letter writing. Discussion of openings and closings is virtually absent from extant ancient epistolary theory, and in collections of letters the opening and closing formulas are often abbreviated or omitted. Nevertheless, writers were clearly aware that variations on these formulas could be an important element in accomplishing the purposes of their letters. (20)

But the "ancients" did not entirely neglect epistolary theory. Stowers adds:

> When Greek and Roman writers reflect on letter writing, they either discuss the 'body' or consider the letter as a functioning whole.
Modern epistolary research has found very little to say about the body of the letter. This major lacuna has occurred because scholars studying 'epistolary' style have limited their analysis to elements thought to be unique to letters. (22)

In sum, then, modern theoretical studies focus on the specifically epistolary elements, the *salutatio* and the *conclusio*, while "ancient" theorists--the rhetoricians and their followers--focussed on the text as a whole. As Stowers is a biblical scholar, it is not surprising that the scholarship referred to is within that field and, for a large part, is devoted to its specific problems. R.W. Chapman, writing about Dr. Johnson's letters, begins: "I am not aware that any study has been made of the opening and concluding formulas of the letters of any of our great letter-writers" (147). Leaving aside the vexed question of "our great letter-writers," it would seem that little attention at any time has been given to the structural components of the epistolary form.

Where do we begin to untangle the complexities of epistolary structure? Stowers's comments recall the form's history in which epistolography and rhetoric have been traditionally linked. By first separating the specifically epistolary from the rhetorical elements as far as it is possible to do so, each could be examined in turn before the link that holds the two together is studied. This was Angel Day's approach to letters. Day separated the rhetorical *dispositio* from four epistolary components: the salutation, the farewell, the subscription, and the address. Following in the tradition, I rather arbitrarily divide the epistolary text in half. First, the four structural components are studied, and in the following two chapters, the "body" of the letter, and its relationship to the overtly structural components are discussed. Furthermore, I shall
conform to tradition by reshuffling Day's order for the components, looking first at the location identifier, then the salutation and subscription, and finally the farewell.

The location identifier is to be found at the top, or the bottom, of the epistolary text. Although Victorian letter writers as a whole tended to place the identifier at the top right of the letter—a practice made more usual by the increasing use of monogrammed or imprinted stationery as the century passed—many writers in the earlier period placed the identifier at the bottom left, and some used both placements simultaneously. The identifier is composed of two parts, the place of writing, and the date of writing; thus it maps the text's spatial and temporal co-ordinates. It should not be too surprising, however, to discover that the points indicated by the identifier are relative, rather than fixed. That is, they establish certain dimensions of the writing space, a space that is both public and private, and a time—the present of the time of writing—whose significance can only be determined by its relation to previous interactions, whether face-to-face, or written, or both. Even the absence of either or both of the identifier's parts is meaningful, the lack signifying that frequent interaction makes detailed information unnecessary. As anyone who has tried to place in order a pile of letters, dated merely "Tuesday," or "March 5," knows only too well, this practice creates difficulties for the external reader. In general, the larger the geographic space between the epistolary interactants, the more precise will be the location identifier, a precision made necessary by the greater temporal gap between the letter's writing and its reading. Hence, the greater the public space between the interactants, the more precise will be the location identifier, the greater temporal gap between the
times of interaction, or the text’s testamentary aspect, requiring specificity. In general letters written for overseas delivery, and letters written in a business or formal "social" context, are more likely to have a full spatial and temporal location identifier of place, day, month, and year of writing.

A letter of condolence on the death of Dr. Moir, written by Anna Maria Hall to Mrs. [Catherine] Moir, illustrates both how the spatial and temporal components of the location identifier are linked, and how they are linked, in turn, to the formal parameters of the text. The location identifier is split in two: at the top, the spatial component, "Linfield / Addlestone / Surrey"; at the bottom, the temporal component, "July 23-". The letter opens: "I have been so occupied in various ways - that it was only Yesterday I heard of the great sorrow that has visited your house, & of the loss all lovers of the true & beautiful have sustained." The opening sentence establishes the context of the written interaction: someone known so well to both Hall and Moir as to remain unnamed has died; Hall’s response to the situation has been delayed by her being "so occupied": this temporal gap is established, and partially closed, by her writing promptly after hearing the news "only Yesterday." "Yesterday", then, is relative to the date at the bottom of the letter (July 23) and can be established as July 22, but the temporal gap between "Yesterday" and the date of the death cannot be closed by an external reader without the help of other biographical materials.

Following an intervening sentence in which she identifies the subject of the letter as the author known as "Delta", Hall continues: "Some events stand out in brightness all the days of our lives - & the day we spent with you & yours at your own house -
happy & lovely as it was then - is remembered as one of the Lines of poetry in a life of prose -". The temporal polarity of "now and then" is invoked to link the present moment of written interaction to a point in the past when Hall and the Moirs were united in face-to-face interaction--another temporal reference unrecoverable to an external reader without external sources.

The second paragraph of the letter opens: "Whenever we thought of Scotland we thought of those we loved & respected there - & surely Doctor Moir was amongst the first who deserved homage & affection from all who knew him - ". Invoking both temporal and spatial dimensions, "Scotland", the place visited "then" in the previous sentence, the home of the Moirs, is distant in relation to the geographic location of the letter writer. "Surrey". So distant, in fact, that interaction has lapsed between the correspondents, for Hall’s next sentence begins: "You may have almost forgotten me." Hence the spatial component of the location identifier--the address--is given in full, for Hall’s correspondent is unlikely to know the precise location of "Linfield". The sentence just quoted continues: "but I could not resist offering you my truest Sympathy & assuring you that Mr Hall felt quite Stricken by the Sad news." Here Hall returns to the context established in the first sentence of the text, as well as to the first sentence of the second paragraph in which the first-person pronoun of the initial paragraph has given way to the first-person plural. Hall’s "private" space of writing, then, is modified by the inclusion of Mr. Hall at Linfield, although it is not entirely clear whether he has seen the epistolary text itself. The letter concludes with a reference to the spiritual comfort derived from religious belief. Hall’s brief letter
provides a clear example of how the location identifier defines and is defined by the horizon of meaning of the correspondents' interaction, a meaning based on face-to-face interaction, and how the identifier is merely the "visible" portion of a structural component of the entire epistolary text.

A short letter of apology from Harriet Grote to Lady Morgan illustrates how a detailed location identifier can be relative to multiple temporal and spatial locations. Appearing at the bottom of the letter, the location identifier is given as "S. Row. 9 June. 7 P.M.". The letter opens: "Your note was delivered to me here (per post) at 10 minutes past 9 o'clock yesterevening, the 8th June - I could not therefore oblige your summons for yesterday afternoon." As Grote had both a London and a country residence, and frequently travelled between them, "here" is defined by the London address, known well enough to Lady Morgan as to be identified with an abbreviation: "S.[aville] Row". "Yesterevening, the 8th June" is defined by its relation to the date of writing, the 9th of June, and to the date of the missed face-to-face interaction, "yesterday afternoon." The parenthetical "per post" suggests that the delay in receiving the invitation was caused by the means of transmission, an unnecessary delay had the invitation been delivered in person or by a servant, the usual means. Furthermore, any suggestion that the fault might lie in Lady Morgan's negligence or delay in issuing the invitation is eliminated by Grote's parenthetical addition.

The next sentence extends the context of apology to another social occasion: "I regret that I was likewise unable to wait upon your ladyship on the evening of Friday last week." the date of "Friday last week" ("then") being relative to the "now"
of the date of writing. Grote continues: "I was in the country for a few days," a habitual change in domestic location and so requiring no explanation. After extending her "private" space to include Mr. Grote and his apologies, Grote writes: "we are much occupied just now in making frequent visits to his Brother, (the Banker Grote) who is in a very precarious condition of health, at his residence about 7 miles out of town. We are just retd from spending the afternoon there." Grote's geographic space is thus extended to include another country location, the home of her brother-in-law. "Just now," relative to the time of the week in which the letter is being written, is not, of course, simultaneous with the writing of the letter. The location identifier's time of writing, "7 P.M.", indicates that Grote has written her apology promptly after returning home from spending the "afternoon" visiting her sick relative. The letter concludes with a reference to a book (or manuscript) loaned to Grote by Lady Morgan, and to future interaction, either face-to-face or written, when it will be returned. The relativity of the "then"--when the book was lent (in the past), and when it will be returned (in the future)--to the "now" of the moment of writing, cannot be established within the context of this particular interaction. In this letter a structure of spatial and temporal points is based on the present place and the precise time of writing.

Although Grote's and Hall's letters advert to the testamentary function of the epistolary text through the expressed desire to appear responsive as quickly as possible, a final example will show more clearly how the location identifier, particularly its temporal aspect, is related to this function. Writing with a book proposal to the publishers, Simms & McIntyre, Mary Howitt opens a letter identified
merely by "Decr 10": "Gentlemen. / I think that my letter must have crossed yours but in case it has had the [unusual] fate of being lost I will repeat what was my reply to your letter of the 21st [inst]."3 December 10, then, is relative to a letter recently received from the publishers to which no date is ascribed, and to their previous letter dated (November) 21st, as well as to Howitt's response to the latter ("my letter")--now either lost or arrived at its destination--and to her present time of writing. This letter of the tenth of December witnesses Howitt's responsiveness and, if both of her responses are received and compared, testifies to her honesty and integrity. No spatial identifier is necessary as Howitt is writing from her usual place of residence, known to the publishers. The remainder of the letter is devoted to a description of the "vol. which I propose." a focus on a single topic typical of a business interaction. Thus the location identifier is used, in this case, to order the turns of written interaction because they may have been disrupted by the "crossing" of letters: hence, the sequence requires re-mapping. The text of the letter is structured by the need to duplicate Howitt's first response as closely as possible; if it succeeds, the second text will close, or diminish, the spatial gap created by the delay (even loss) of the first letter while also redefining the temporal gap more nearly in accordance with etiquette.

Letters travelling overseas were particularly vulnerable to loss or to crossing--either of the letters between interactants, or of an interactant's several letters one with the other. A sequence of Anna Jameson's letters to her German friend, Ottilie von Goethe, written while Jameson was travelling in Canada and the United States, provides a particularly good example of the complications of spatial and temporal gaps
in social interaction. Jameson's first letter to von Goethe is identified as "New York. November 24, 1836," the full identifier indicating that she has arrived in America. The year is perhaps included because, by the time this letter would be received (in 1837), the current year, 1836, will be over. The opening sentence of the second paragraph maps the position of this letter in relation to previous ones: "I wrote to you, dearest one, from Portsmouth [England], and I also wrote to Sybille. Did you receive my letters, dated Oct. 1?" The rest of the letter is devoted to filling in the gaps between "Oct. 1" and the present moment of writing.

The second letter has a very detailed location identifier. To the top left, "No 2 January 5 - 1837": to the right, "Toronto, Upper Canada / December 24 (Weinacht) 1836." In the first letter, Jameson had said, "I must write to you at length from Toronto": thus, the spatial identifier of this letter confirms that she is true to her word. The full right-hand temporal identifier draws attention, parenthetically, to the special significance of the date in the history of their friendship, for Jameson's letter begins with the recollection of the previous Christmas Eve spent together:

If my heart were not with you, dearest friend, my own best Ottile! on this night, if my thoughts were not around you and yours, I should have no heart, no soul left for earth or heaven. But where are you? Are you with your children and family, are they with you? It pains me to think that I cannot imagine you in the same house where we spent the last Weinacht together and that I cannot fancy to myself the place and things around you.

As in the first letter, much of this lengthy letter is devoted to reporting on her activities from the time of her first letter to the present. Such lengthy letters, however, take time to write. Thus the left-hand identifier refers to the time of the completion of
the letter and to its place in the interactional sequence if the two letters should cross or one be lost. In the letter's conclusion, Jameson explains her usage: "I conclude this letter on the 5th of January and send it by New York, and I will write again in a few days and send my letter to England with the dispatches and all my letters I will number as this. And note down the date and tell me if any is missing." The last sentence shows an ambiguous subject for the verb "note," an interesting slide between the "I" of the previous sentence and the "you," the addressee, for both Jameson and von Goethe would need to "note" the dates if Jameson's request was to be satisfactorily fulfilled.

By the time of the writing of the third letter, identified as "Toronto, January 18, 1837." Jameson is not only frustrated by the lack of response to her letters, but anxious to testify to her own responsiveness in a friendly interactional context. The letter opens:

I seize every opportunity of writing to you, my dearest, my own dearest Ottilie! But I fear that all my letters may not reach you. Still you will have the assurance (tho' only one out of three should find you) that I think of you and love you and will never omit an occasion to prove my love. I wrote to you from New York, from Toronto about three weeks after my arrival and this is the third letter. Since I landed in this New World, I have not received one line of intelligence from any one in Europe. Am I not to be pitied?

One month later, "February 12, 1837," her appeal for sympathy has still not been answered. The letter opens: "I write with your picture before me, dearest Ottilie and would to God that instead of your silent, insensible image it were your living speaking dear self!" In the second paragraph, Jameson returns to this theme to try once
again to elicit a response, and to establish her own willingness to participate in written
interaction by giving a history of her letters:

I have no letters from you, meine Allerliebste - not a line, not a word! My heart dies within me, of anxiety. I have a letter from Sybille, an
answer to a letter of mine written on the 3 of October; I wrote to you
the 1st of October and also a long letter about the 20th of September
and sent by Hamburg. This was important and I wish you may have received
it. I wrote from New York, and twice from Toronto since my arrival. This
is my 4th letter from America, - and yet not a line from you, whom I
love more dearly, more truely, more deeply than words can express.

But one week later, "Toronto, U.-Canada, February 19, / 1837," Jameson was
able to write: "I put aside a long letter I had begun, and which you shall have
sometime or other, and I write now to say that I have received two letters from you, -
one dated in October and sent to London by Mr. Lynch and enclosed in a letter from
my sister Louisa: the other, dated November 1 and 2, by Hambourg and New York. I
received this morning - almost 4 months after it was written!" Yet all was not well,
for the interaction's lengthy temporal gap and Jameson's inability to establish its exact
sequence created new problems in knowing how to respond. Jameson's letter
continues:

My dearest Ottilie, all the pleasure I have in hearing from you is
spoiled by apprehension, - ungrateful as I am! I have been pining to
hear from you. And when I took your letter in my hand I felt only delight.
Now again I am all anxiety and fears. You say you received a letter from
me - what letter, dearest? - what date? for heaven's sake be exact in
always acknowledging my letters. . . .

In this letter's opening section we may note a rather paradoxical reversal in the
absence/presence polarity. "Then" not hearing from you had caused me worry and
anxiety (the "now" of the previous four letters); "now", on the receipt of your
responses. I am anxious because I cannot establish to what it is in my letters ("then")
that you are responding. Thus despite the full location identifiers in the correspondence
between them, their significance could not be understood without a clear chronology,
because a horizon of meaning is historical, and cannot be established without a
documented sequence of events. Face-to-face interaction is the most reliable basis for
an interaction's history, for even if the interactants remember neither exact dates nor
the exact words of an exchange, most remember what has occurred in such an
interaction: that is, they remember the event itself.

The problems in communication caused by the temporal and spatial gaps
between the two friends continued to plague their correspondence and altered its
course. Jameson gave up trying to keep von Goethe informed of her activities between
her letters, and even resigned herself more philosophically to being unable to be as
responsive as she would like to be to the minutiae of everyday living. One of the last
letters she wrote from America to von Goethe, identified top left as "Direct to 7
Mortimer St..." and top right as "New York, Oct 20, 1837," opens:

Your long letter of several sheets dated from Leipsig in May and June
reached me about the 20th of September. I was then packing up to leave
Toronto. My future was not settled and of the past I had so much to say,
and your letter had caused me so many painful feelings, that I had no
courage to take up the pen merely to write a few lines, and I had no time,
no head for a long history. Before you receive this letter the feelings
described in yours may be passed, or may have received a new direction;
only one thing seems certain and unchangeable, the evil influence of
passions and feelings uncontrolled.

The location identifier points to both the "now" of the present moment of
writing and to the "then" of Jameson's future geographical position in England. The
temporal marker is relative to many points in the past, a relativity indicated by the multiplicity of verb tenses. It points to the May and June of von Goethe's last letter, to its arrival on the 20th of September, to Jameson's activities at the time, to a "future" which has now passed, to Jameson's feelings in response to the letter, to von Goethe's expression of feelings which may "now" have changed, and even to Jameson's "long history", pre-dating. we may suppose, von Goethe's moment of writing, but "now" too detailed to remember and record. All relate to the present and to the "one thing [which] seems certain and unchangeable," a moral issue, the evil caused by unregulated emotion. The location identifier, then, points as much to the absence of communication between the two friends as it does to the presence of a communicatory text, this letter of October 20, 1837.

If the location identifier signifies no more than the marking of a point whose meaning is relative to the past and future of the correspondents' interaction, it does signify one constant in a sea of flux: life itself. The epistolary text is both witness to, and testament of, the writer's continuing existence. Harriet Grote's response to Harriet Martineau's letter of condolence on the death of Mr. Grote provides a clear, but not exceptional, example. It opens, without salutation:

> your letter struck me with a sort of semi awe, for I had hardly conceived of you as still a living woman! I had often very often - asked myself the question 'How and or if H.M. is dead?' & yet no woman of her extraordy mark cd have passed away & I not aware of it!

> well, my dear faithful H. you live, then still! so do I. I shd add 'alas'! were it not that my heart tells me it is fitting I should do so, even at the price I pay for my prolonged existence - How else could any thing, worth having, be given to the world, concerning the great & good man whom I have lost?"
The location identifier, added down the side of the letter, is full: "The Ridgeway, Shiere, Guildford / 22 June 1871." As Grote and Martineau had not interacted either face-to-face or on paper for some time, the full address of Grote's present country house functions both to inform Martineau and to indicate Grote's isolation imposed by grief. In the fourth paragraph Grote writes: "I am here 'till the last ceremony shall have past over - on Saty 24h my life's Partner will be laid in Westr Abbey - R.I.P. - I shall. early next week (D.V.) return to Sav. Row. & endeavour to meet the cloud of business. obligas wh awaits me." The full temporal identifier marks the present moment of writing in its relation to the date of Mr. Grote's death, his funeral, and Grote's return to London, "early next week", if she is still alive and well, and documents the existence, at this present moment, of life--hers as well as Harriet Martineau's. Needless to say, this aspect of the location identifier's significance surfaces most prominently in the letters of the distressed, the sick, or the elderly, but it is never entirely submerged because it is the only fixed meaning the location identifier has.

Like the location identifier, the salutation and subscription also mark the letter as a witness to, and testament of, the history of the correspondents' interaction. Likewise, they also structure the epistolary text. Most visibly, of course, they mark the text as an epistolary text. the communication between two people who are separated being visually represented by the distance between the names and the intervening words linking them together. And, as has already been noted, the names are embedded in formulaic phrases. The first question to ask, then, is why epistolary texts use
conventionalized procedures—procedures that have remained substantially unchanged over the centuries—to initiate and terminate the interaction.

The work on social interaction of the sociologist, Erving Goffman, concentrating primarily on the interaction between two people, sheds helpful light on epistolary practices. In *Interaction Ritual: Essays on Face-to-Face Behaviour*, Goffman delineates his field of study not only in this book but also several later ones: "Every person lives in a world of social encounters, involving him either in face-to-face or mediated contact with other participants" (5). Epistolary interaction, of course, is a form of mediated contact between participants. In making contact with others, despite our desire to act "naturally"—or our belief that we are doing so—our interaction is governed by our need to be seen by others in the best possible light. According to Goffman’s terms, the front we present is our "face". In fact, so anxious are we to maintain our face that we are willing to make a bargain: if the other will preserve our face, we, in turn, will preserve the other’s. Thus Goffman writes: "Just as the member of any group is expected to have self-respect, so also he is expected to sustain a standard of considerateness; he is expected to go to certain lengths to save the feelings and the face of others present, and he is expected to do this willingly and spontaneously because of emotional identification with the others and with their feelings" (10). We have already seen just such an example of "face-work" in Harriet Grote’s letter to Lady Morgan in which Grote was anxious not to imply that Lady Morgan was at fault for the missed social interaction. And, so far, I think this concept presents few difficulties.
What is of particular interest is the double view of self that the adoption of Goffman's premise implies. That is, the self is constructed of a simultaneous sense of itself (subject) and self-as-seen-by-another (object). In interaction, the double view is revealed as an expressive ("natural") self and a sacred (socialized) self. Thus Goffman writes: "So far I have implicitly been using a double definition of self: the self as an image pieced together from the expressive implications of the full flow of events in an undertaking; and the self as a kind of player in a ritual game who copes honorably or dishonorably, diplomatically or undiplomatically, with the judgmental contingencies of the situation" (31). As interaction with others is carried on primarily in talk—not discounting, of course, gestures and body postures—spoken communication is very carefully organized to protect self, preserve face, and prevent miscommunication. Hence Goffman observes: "In any society, whenever the physical possibility of spoken interaction arises, it seems that a system of practices, conventions, and procedural rules comes into play which functions as a means of guiding and organizing the flow of messages" (33-34).

Of the conventions and procedural rules described by Goffman, two are of particular significance to epistolary practices, and both pertain to the establishment of boundaries. First, "A set of significant gestures is employed to initiate a spate of communication and as a means for the persons concerned to accredit each other as legitimate participants" (34). Second, "Participants restrict their involvement in matters external to the encounter and observe a limit to involvement in any one message of the encounter, in this way ensuring that they will be able to follow along whatever
direction the topic of conversation takes them. . . . These rules of talk pertain not to
spoken interaction considered as an ongoing process, but to an occasion of talk or
episode of interaction as a naturally bounded unit" (35). Finally, I will add one more
of Goffman's observations before turning to investigate their epistolary implications:
"In attempting to discover how it is that these conventions are maintained in force as
guides to action, one finds evidence to suggest a functional relationship between the
structure of the self and the structure of spoken interaction" (36).

The epistolary salutation and subscription function as boundary markers for one
"episode" of interaction. They designate the participants in the interaction, and limit
the interactional occasion to the present time of writing. They also indicate the way in
which the writer views his or her relation to the recipient, and how the writer wishes
to be seen in relation to the recipient. Furthermore, by employing formulaic or
ceremonial phrases as "significant gestures" for defining the interaction, the dual
nature of the self as both "natural" being and sacred object is displayed. The epistolary
text, then, functions on two levels, one revealing the signator as a person, the other
revealing the subscriber as a socialized individual who interacts with others according
to social codes. This balancing act is represented within each of the two boundary
markers, and between them; the intervening text shows the subtle adjustments felt to
be necessary to maintain the balance. Correspondents vary their use of the formulas
and conventions according to their understanding of the interactional context and for
their own particular purposes. The salutation and the subscription are linked, and
together they structure the epistolary text.
Anna Maria Hall's letter of condolence to Mrs. Moir, already discussed in terms of its location identifier, is an appropriate place to begin studying the salutation and subscription. For her salutation, Hall chooses the formula, "my dear", and a form of naming that indicates the social status (here marital) of the addressee: "Mrs Moir". Within the range of choices for naming prescribed by Victorian etiquette, "Mrs Moir" is as personal as Hall could be. The subscription is: "My dear Madam / faithfully yours / Anna Maria Hall." The salutation and the subscription are symmetrically balanced by the repetition of the same "formula + name" phrasing; thus, the interaction terminates with a sense of equilibrium. But the distance between the interactants is subtly altered by Hall's choice of "Madam," a more formal or impersonal gender marker, for the subscription. Why? As a spontaneous gesture of sympathy, Hall has addressed her friend as a person--another woman--a woman whose husband has just died. But Hall has avoided any reference in her letter to the personal (intimate) connection between her addressee and the subject of the letter, Doctor Moir, and even between herself and Moir, for the relationship she emphasizes (somewhat heavy-handedly) is one of literary affiliation. During the course of the letter, the distance between the interactants is widened by the enlargement of the private space of writing (the shift in pronouns from "I" to "we"), and by the recollection of the temporal and spatial gaps between them. Hall certainly cannot claim an intimate friendship with Mrs. Moir; thus, her letter closes with a relation marker in the subscription more appropriate to their interactional history. The second phrase of the subscription, "faithfully yours," slightly modifies the balance once again by stressing Hall as a
"faithful" (true) delineator of their interactional history and of her own sentiments regarding it. Hall's text reveals her to be a reliable witness, and is, in itself, a testament of her "friendship" with Mrs. Moir and her husband.

Within Victorian etiquette, the range of choices for naming was fairly narrow—or fairly wide, depending on one's point of view. Most impersonal were the gender markers, "Sir", "Gentlemen", "Madam", or "Mesdames"; that is, humanity is divided in half according to gender, but an individual is not separated out from his or her group. Social class markers are interwoven with gender markers: "Sir" implies that the man so designated has the social status of a gentleman. Titles—social class and/or role markers—such as "Lord", "Lady", "Doctor", could also be used as formal or impersonal designators. These markers delineate the ritualized or socialized level of the interaction; that is, the social (public) aspect of the public/private polarity is emphasized. At the opposite end of the scale was the choice of forename alone ("Ottlie", "Harriet"), a choice restricted almost entirely to use within the family. The context of intimate friendship provided the sole exception, but the choice of using the forename was not made lightly. Amongst the many letters between women in my collection, some of whom were intimate friends over a lengthy period, very few use the forename in the salutation, or use it only in exceptional circumstances.

About midway on the public/private continuum was the choice of social status marker + surname: "Mrs Moir", "Mr Smith", or the combination of title + surname: "Lady Morgan", "Doctor Chapman". Although this practice does not seem very innovative from a twentieth-century point of view, R.W. Chapman makes the
interesting observation: "I do not find 'Mr.' from any [epistolary] writer, man or woman, before 1770" (153). This development may be an influence of Romanticism on epistolary practices. In his discussion of "deference", Goffman describes one of its manifestations as "avoidance rituals", and adds: "Avoidance of other's personal name is perhaps the most common example from anthropology" (63). Thus, the relatively new practice in the Victorian period of combining a marker with the surname is indicative of a modification of the social code and a redefinition of the concept of self. Within the epistolary text, Victorian women writers tended to avoid naming others, using instead role markers such as "my brother", "your sister", "the doctor", or markers plus abbreviated surnames, "Mr W.", "Mrs ____".

Victorian letter writers could be quite creative within the restrictions of naming conventions. When business is being transacted, a combination of gender marker as well as social status marker + surname functions to preserve an appropriate distance between the interactants, but directs the text to a specific recipient. For example, Mary Howitt's letter to William Chambers, with a location identifier of "The Elms, Clapton / March 15." uses the salutation "Dear Sir," the subscription, "I am dear Sir / Yours very sincerely / Mary Howitt," and in the bottom left-hand corner, the designator, "William Chambers Esqre." The business context is established in the opening sentence: "I have to acknowledge the receipt of 16.16.0 for the use of sundry poems in your Juvenile Library for which I am much obliged." The second paragraph, however, expands the context by adding a new topic: "I thank you for the trouble you
took about poor Mrs Wall." The addition of Chambers's name to the bottom of the
text reflects the slightly more personal aspect of the interaction.

By way of contrast, Howitt's letter, identified as "Nottingham Mar. 15 1834."
to the unnamed editor of the Birmingham Journal, uses a similar strategy in reverse. The salutation is "Dear Sir," the bottom left-hand designator is "To the Editor of/The Birmingham Journal," but the subscription is merely "Yours / M. Howitt." The very brief text, composed of two sentences, explains this variation, for Howitt ends with a request for "whatever notice you may give" of a book she has enclosed for reviewing. Uncertainty about the propriety of her request and its outcome is reflected in the closure. A brief, ambiguous subscription--yours truly? yours sincerely? yours gratefully?--follows and the interaction terminates by rebalancing the equilibrium with a social role designator in the bottom corner to equal the "Sir" of the salutation.

Another variation of the practice was to put the recipient's name at the top and then follow underneath with a salutation composed of a formula + gender marker, a practice still in use today.

When it came to writing letters to friends, however, the challenge was greater, the Victorian convention (and the English lexicon) being too restrictive to accommodate the subtle gradations of intimacy. The formula itself offered a small range of expression, for it could be altered from "dear" to "my dear" to "dearest," although I can find little evidence of real distinction between the first two. In general, I concur with R.W. Chapman that "my" is an unobtrusive way of indicating affection: "‘my’ goes more naturally with terms of endearment than with terms of respect" (150-
151). The formulaic phrase of the subscription could use variations of "your affectionate" or "your loving", but even here the range was fairly small. The most commonly adopted solution was to use a role marker in the salutation, but to choose one that reflected the relational role, rather than the social role. As editors of Victorian letters know only too well, there are hundreds of letters in any one person's correspondence with a salutation of "Dear friend", and a subscription of "your friend", "yours", "yours affectionately" + signature, in which the addressee remains unnamed.

The effect of face-to-face interaction on the development of intimacy (or occasionally the reverse) can often be followed by noting the changes in the salutations and subscriptions of a lengthy correspondence. For instance, Harriet Martineau first met the Rev. William Ware when she was visiting America in 1835. Accepting an invitation to visit him, Martineau used the salutation, "Dear Sir," and subscription, "Yours very truly / Harriet Martineau." As Martineau had prior engagements, her acceptance of his invitation had to be delayed, but when she was ready to come, she announced her plans in a letter dated "Feb. 8 1836," using a salutation, "My dear Sir," and a subscription, "I am, dear Sir, respectfully & truly yours H. Martineau." Her visit was enormously successful. Martineau feeling loved by the Wares in a way that she had rarely felt before. Thus her letters following her visit use a salutation "Dear friends" and a subscription, "Dear friends, ever your affectionate / H. Martineau." Recharged enough by a second visit, their epistolary interaction continued for several years after Martineau's return to England.
In 1839 the Wares arrived in England. A letter identified merely as "Ambleside. Saty evg" is indicative of their opportunities for face-to-face interaction, for it opens: "Dear friend / All right! - no company; & if there was, they shd make way for you. - be they who they may. You will find your room ready, any day, - & a warm fireside or cool green field, according to weather. - & we, grey & bald old folks, will sit & talk over old times." But after the Wares' return to America, the momentum generated by their visit began to flag. Martineau's letter of 1840 opens: "Dear friend / Your letter was not only an unspeakable pleasure to me, - it was a great relief. I had suffered many a pang from the deferred hope of hearing from you, & feared that time & absence were acting upon you differently from what they have done upon me." Although their correspondence can be followed no further than 1843, it would appear that "time & absence" took their toll, the correspondence dying without the energy generated by face-to-face interaction.

Children were usually addressed by their forenames; however, for letter writers who were not kin such a "familiar" usage might seem incompatible with the context. Mary Howitt's letter to Elizabeth Fox Tuckett, a child approximately eight years old, shows how the creative use of gender and relational markers could maintain the appropriate distance yet still convey a feeling of affection.¹⁸ The salutation is simple: "My dear little girl"; the subscription is more complex as Howitt moves the salutary balancer in the subscription to the farewell: "Good by my dear little girl." She follows this with another part of the farewell, the conveyance of greetings to other family members, but in pointedly asking the child herself to convey the greetings, Howitt
flatteringly stresses privacy: "You must give my love to your mamma." The subscription continues the second sentence of the farewell, maintains a steady focus on the recipient, and uses a relational marker for the signator to convey affection: "And believe me to be / Your affectionate friend / Mary Howitt." For the most part, however, if children were written to at all, the use of such strategies was unnecessary, the forename being appropriate for the interactional context.

When men wrote to their friends, they could display their intimacy in a way that women could not. Men could drop the gender or social status marker and use the surname alone, thus, "Dear Lewes". The practice appears to be a gradation between the more formal, "Dear Mr. Lewes", and the familiar use of the forename alone, "Dear George". I have only seen one example of a similar use by a woman. Mary Shelley, writing to John Payne, uses a salutation, "My dear Payne," and a subscription, "I am truly yours M.S.". Her unconventional usage reflects the rejection of many aspects of Victorian gender ideology by the Continental social circle in which she had lived. John Payne, the addressee, was still living on the Continent and, indeed, Shelley writes in the body of her letter: "I detest England." Shelley, in fact, extends her practice to all the people named in the letter, whether male or female. Less uninhibited women might choose to use "special" names for their correspondents. To each other, Sarah Austin and Harriet Grote were "Cummer", a Scottish word connoting friend; Anna Jameson was "Mona Nina" to Elizabeth Barrett Browning. But this practice of coining names was exceptional rather than usual.
Instead of manipulating the formulas and the naming conventions in their friendship letters, Victorian letter writers frequently chose to bury the salutation in the opening sentence, the place where the context is established. That is, the "public" space between the interactants was "visibly" abolished, and the "private", intimate, in-the-presence-of-one-another space was recreated. This practice conveys a sense of spontaneity, or unselfconsciousness about writing, for it gives the impression of a speaker who has so much to say that he or she cannot wait to go through the conventional motions or ritual. As may be recalled, all Anna Jameson's letters to Ottilie von Goethe quoted previously embed the salutation in the opening sentence.

A letter written by Harriet Grote to Lady Holland in Paris shows how the distance between them imposed by social rank is respected, yet their intimate relation is also emphasized by the creative use of the salutation and subscription. The location identifier is "History Hut / Slough / 12 July 1856." The letter begins:

'Tis all very fine, this talking of Holland House opening its gates once more - But I am afraid it will turn out as deceptive as the summer itself, which is so unlike summer as to compel us to have fires daily - (wood fires, after the fashion of Lord Holland's room in Paris, however.) Well - I do not see my way to any opportunity of meeting you, dear Lady Holland, during your stay in England - And, accordingly, write to express my regret that I shall be no more in London after the 18th instt but that I shall be buried in these woods (D.V.) for the rest of the long days, (one may not speak of Summer) &., 'need I add?^ forgotten by the world.

In the two paragraphs of the letter's opening, Grote separates the interactional context from the epistolary occasion. The first paragraph is in the mode of a friendly, on-going conversation in which the commonplace topic of the weather, that standard initiator of conversation between people, is used. Their familiarity is emphasized by
Grote's references to the type of fire Lord Holland prefers in his room in Paris, and to a previous topic of conversation, the re-opening of Holland House. The second paragraph establishes the context of apology. Grote will be unable to meet face-to-face with Lady Holland, the subject matter of the rest of the letter in which she explains her reasons why, but leaves open the possibility that Lady Holland may suggest how they could achieve their meeting.

The letter closes: "Therefore I pray & beseech you dear Lady, to take some leisure moment to throw a ray of light on the immediate future, for the guidance of your devoted humble servt / H. Grote." As she had embedded the salutation in the second sentence, so Grote embeds the part of the subscription, "dear Lady," in the concluding sentence, separating it from the remainder, "your devoted humble servt." with a request. The social distance between them is respected by the return to the gender/social status marker alone, without the surname, and by the quite formal—if somewhat old-fashioned—formula, "your humble servt," dextrously altered by the addition of "devoted" to reflect, once again, the relational history. By splitting the vocative, "dear Lady," away from the subscription, Grote is able to use it rhetorically as an appeal—a re-capturing of her audience in spontaneous, emotional identification. "Syntactic conclusions," as R.W. Chapman names them, have the effect of a very elegant termination to the interaction—the effect, perhaps, of the performer who leaves the stage with a graceful bow. On the whole, they do not appear to have been widely used by Victorian women letter writers, but when used, as Grote has done, to balance an embedded salutation, they are stylistically satisfying.
Burying the salutation is one thing, but omitting it altogether is quite another. It implies that, for some reason, the writer resists imagining himself or herself in the presence of the addressee. That reason can very frequently be irritation or anger, of the writer with the recipient, or of the writer responding to those feelings in the recipient. Harriet Grote's letter to Francis Place, identified as "Dulwich Wood 8 July 10 P.M.," provides an amusing example of the latter case. The letter opens: "I believe you would see abundant cause for your 'not hearing from me', if you knew how continually I have been engaged for the last fortnight." A numbered list of her activities follows. By appearing to embed the salutation, Grote recreates a relational context of face-to-face interaction, continuing on a conversation which has, for some reason, been interrupted. A conventional salutation, however, fails to materialize. Instead, Place's disembodied voice is invoked by Grote quoting his words to her, "not hearing from me," words which have been said, not in conversation, but in writing. Grote may, or may not, feel that Place is genuinely annoyed with her for not responding to his letter(s); she imagines, however, at least in this letter, that he is angry with her, and thus establishes a context for the present genuine, but rather playful, apology. She closes her letter with a request for a face-to-face meeting: "Will you come on Sunday week?", and subscribes herself, "Yr fatigued & sleepy, but truly / H.Grote," the time indicated in the location identifier attesting that she has written promptly in response to his complaint, immediately before going to bed.

Not all writers who drop the salutation are responding to fairly minor annoyances and irritations, real or imagined. Harriet Martineau's letters to John
Chapman, written during the final stages of their quarrel, provide a clear example of how much can be conveyed about the relational history of the participants' interaction by the salutation and subscription alone. Martineau had known Chapman from the late 1830s, and had corresponded with him on an infrequent basis to the 1850s. Their mutual involvement in the Westminster Review, however, seems to have brought them into much closer contact, and Chapman became, at least for Martineau, a trusted friend. Her letters to him in the early 1850s use a salutation, "Dear Mr. Chapman," and a subscription, "Yours very truly / H. Martineau." By December 3, 1857, Chapman is addressed as "Dear friend," and Martineau subscribes herself: "Yours ever / H.M.-". An unusually playful letter of January 8, 1858, opening, "Dear friend." has ironic overtones for the external reader in light of what was soon to happen. It closes: "The cold revives me as a dram does a drunkard; wh is well, as I am overful of work. - I am. my dear Slanderer, your faithful / Malignant Demon." Note that Martineau could not, even playfully, call Chapman "my dear Slanderer" in the subscription, if it was not equalized by the "dear friend" of the salutation.

The quarrel began in June 1858. As may be recalled, the displaying of their letters to other correspondents as evidence of good faith was the first indication of a misunderstanding. Martineau's letter uses the salutation of the previous friendly (intimate) letters, "My dear friend," but the subscription is a shade cooler, "Yours truly / H. Martineau," a surname being used instead of the earlier initials. In the following letter of July 4, 1858, however, the relational context has visibly altered. Commencing
without a salutation. Martineau's letter opens: "To take your second note first," and works backwards in the second paragraph of the letter to the first note:

As to the surprise expressed in your prior note at my not having answered immediately your letter of 27th of June, - it seemed to me fairest, & also most effectual to put into your hands the whole case, - (much altered by three intervening letters) - before entering upon a final understanding & settlement of opinion on the whole affair.

By omitting the salutation Martineau clarifies that she is no longer imagining her friend as an interactional participant, but is judging the testimony of his integrity expressed in his "note(s)" and "letter".

Chapman's letter when "heard" proved to be ineffectual. In her response of July 16, 1858. Martineau again opens without a salutation, this time referring her present letter to his letter of July 4: "As I proposed, I have taken time to consider your letter, reading & rereading its statements with the care which naturally attends a desire to see the matters in controversy from the same point of view that you do." But despite the use of her full signature and no subscription, Martineau's closing sentence was not definitive enough to close their interaction: "Amidst your complaints of ill-usage on every side, I think it must occur to you that ordinary plain-dealing, such as is understood in all business transactions, would have rendered these troubles impossible. / Harriet Martineau."

Chapman's response, as Martineau surely expected, must have been an apology, for she opens her final letter: "Dr Chapman," and leaving a two-line space to indicate the distance between them, continues: "I accept your explanation & apology in regard to the concluding sentence in your last letter to me." The closing sentence, of
the text and of the interaction between them, concludes with a farewell but without a subscription: "The same instances which I specified as they became disclosed to me are the ground of my judgment now: & as there has been no change, there remains nothing more to be said. / H. Martineau." When participation in an interactional context is imagined as being no longer possible, both the salutation and the subscription are omitted, for both orient the epistolary text towards the addressee, and display the writer's understanding and appreciation of their relational history.

So far, the focus has been on the naming of the recipient. Although it is more difficult to be as precise about the ways in which writers choose to sign their letters, that is, to name rather than describe themselves, a few observations can be made. As the Martineau letters show, the general range is between a full signature, using forenames and surnames, to an abbreviated one, using initials. On the surface, this may appear to reverse the conventions governing the naming of the recipient; in fact, they are the same. The use of the full name reflects the public identity of the signator as a person; it is the form used in signing a document. The use of initials reflects the "avoidance ritual" of naming, but in this case the naming of the self is avoided. That is, the writer is showing deference to his or her public (social) self, by avoiding naming the private ("natural") self. The recipient, being familiar with the person of the writer including his or her voice and orthography, would have no difficulty, however, in identifying the letter writer, for no other socialized individual is exactly the same person as the letter's writer. Midway in the range is the combination of an initial and a full surname. Victorian letter writers observe with their own forename the same
taboo as with others, and may choose in their letters to friends to use a "special" name for themselves, although such usage for themselves is even rarer than its use for the addressee. An interesting study of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's correspondence can be made on this point. Her family "pet" name was "Ba", a name which she took to her new home on marriage, both Robert and her son, Peninni ("Pen"), calling her by it. She extended its use to intimate friends of her new family such as Isa Blagden and Anna Jameson, but in her more private friendships she used it more sparingly. In the correspondence with Mary Russell Mitford, she almost always used the salutation, frequently embedded, "dearest Miss Mitford," or "dear friend," and usually subscribed herself, "your affectionate / E.B.B.". A short while after her marriage, however, she started on occasion to use both names simultaneously. "E.B.B.- Ba," and in the last few years of Mitford's life, she usually signed herself, "Ba".23 In general, the double usage may reflect a double view of herself as an affectionate friend ("E.B.B."), and as a loving woman in her domestic setting, "Ba". The latter usage may be an attempt literally to include Mitford, who was by now older, not well, and totally alone, in the family, for Mitford, not unnaturally, felt somewhat excluded from E.B.B.'s new life in Italy. As neither form of name for herself in her correspondence with Mitford is used consistently, the use of the special name invites a careful scrutiny of the letter text for a reason. In fact, any change in habitual naming practices, of either recipient or writer, is worth noting.

Like the rhetorical conclusio, the farewell of the epistolary text signals that the end is in sight. As we have seen, the location identifier and the salutation and
subscription all point to the history of the participants' interaction. The location
identifier's emphasis is on the history—the documentation of events in the lives of two
people and their interaction; the concern of the salutation and subscription is with the
relational aspect of that history. All three structural components of the epistolary text.
therefore, look to the past. The farewell’s concern, on the other hand, is with the
future—the future of the interaction between the participants, and the future of the
epistolary text. Closure in the epistolary text strives to achieve contradictory aims. The
text itself must end (conclusio) and one episode of interaction must be terminated. On
the other hand, the writer wishes to express a desire for continuing interaction,
possibly even a more intimate relation. The farewell seeks to reconcile these
contradictory goals.

The epistolary farewell indicates to the addressee that the interactional context
is drawing to a close in much the same way as a participant’s glancing at a clock or
watch and changing body position signals to the other participant that departure is
imminent. Imminent, but not immediate, for even in a brief farewell, much remains to
be accomplished before separation. Goffman’s comment, expressed in a footnote,
suggests the kind of work that the farewell attempts to do:

Greetings, of course, serve to clarify and fix the roles that the
participants will take during the occasion of talk and to commit
participants to these roles, while farewells provide a way of unambiguously
terminating the encounter. Greetings and farewells may also be used to state,
and apologize for, extenuating circumstances—in the case of greetings for
circumstances that have kept the participants from interacting until now,
and in the case of farewells for circumstances that prevent the participants
from continuing their display of solidarity. These apologies allow the
impression to be maintained that the participants are more warmly related
socially than may be the case. This positive stress, in turn, assures that
they will act more ready to enter into contacts than they perhaps really feel inclined to do, thus guaranteeing that diffuse channels for potential communication will be kept open in the society. (41)

The epistolary farewell is likely to be concerned with two topics: the cessation of writing, and the establishment of a context in which a response will be forthcoming. But what might also be observed is that the greetings and farewell reflect the "comfort level" of the interaction—that is, the amount of anxiety generated by the relational history of the participants. Thus, in an interaction with a high "comfort level", the farewell will usually look forward to the next interaction, either written or face-to-face, while stressing the intimacy of the participants' connection through greetings to the addressee's family or social circle. In an interaction with a lower "comfort level", anxiety will be expressed in the farewell about the termination of the writing process, the response of the recipient, or the recipient's reception of the ideas and feelings expressed in the epistolary text. But because people frequently feel comfortable with the relation itself (based on its history), but anxious about the messages or possible miscommunications of a particular interaction, both types of farewell are often interwoven.

Sarah Austin's letter, written on "Christmas day" to her "dearest friend," Jane Carlyle, provides a good example of a full farewell which expresses satisfaction with the friendly relation between them, but anxiety about her ability to express her feelings adequately in her letter. The letter concludes: "And now - God bless you. New years or old, make no great difference in my wishes for you, which will outlast a year &. I trust, a world ..". The invocation of God's blessing is frequent in letters with a high
comfort level in the relational history. The second sentence of the farewell, however, expresses an anxiety that has been uppermost in Austin's mind throughout her letter: "Write to me dear dear friend & believe that my affection & deep esteem are not the feebler for any want of time to tell of them." This sentence returns to the interactional context established in the opening sentence: "Writing to you, which ought, from all 'natural causes' to be one of my greatest & dearest pleasures, is become a sort of dread & pain & oppression - I feel as if I had no means of saying anything because I have so much to say -". A response from Carlyle, allaying Austin's anxieties about the (inadequate) expression of her sentiments, will testify to Austin's understanding of the relational history.

Two sprightly letters from Elizabeth Barrett to Mary Russell Mitford, full of the energy generated by their frequent face-to-face interactions, illustrate how within the context of a secure relationship the expression of anxieties in the farewell actually promotes intimacy. Through description, the present time of writing is highlighted, a time liable to be interrupted or terminated at any moment. Nevertheless, the writer seizes an opportunity for communication. Barrett's letter closes: "The Hedleys here! The knock at the door, followed by the foot on the stair! & now I must come to an untimely end . . [sic] & you must walk lightly on the clay of my sins. Really I feel as if I had not poured out my gratitude to you for your goodness in coming to see me! My hands are not clean! only my heart."25 Without the interactional context of the opening sentence, the farewell might sound contrived--self-conscious, over-literary--certainly not genuine. However, the letter opens: "This little paper just proves what a
'beggarly account of empty boxes' I am going to send you again. I have been so busy - & the Hedleys are about to come . . listened for in every sound at the door . . & I have not a free half hour this day - & the pens have conspired against me & wont be written with, . . to make matters worse. Well - The pic-nicers offer this grateful homage to your 'seigneurie' & accede to all you propose - but for tuesday." By describing the immediate context so vividly, Barrett draws Mitford into familiarity with her world, and thus creates an intimate interactional context before arriving at the epistolary occasion (the arrangement of a date for a picnic). But what she has not done, and does not do in the course of the letter, is express to Mitford her appreciation of Mitford's visit a week before. The apology of the farewell, then, is an expression of anxiety about a genuine omission, a lapse potentially hurtful to her friend.

Three days later, a change in the plans for the picnic necessitates another letter. Barrett opens her brief letter: "I write just one word as you see, to announce that if you do not object to wednesday, it is the day thought of at present." The second paragraph consists of the farewell: "There! - I cannot write any more . . the post being imminent! But - I heard from Mr Home at Broadstairs the other day - & he speaks of going to you at the end (I fancy) of this next week -." Barrett gracefully concludes her brief letter by implying that, if time permitted, she would be happy to talk with Mitford at length, and includes, as an example, an item of news which cannot wait for the next written interaction. The farewell is imposed rather than desired.
A final example will show how, if the comfort level of the interaction is low, anxiety about the reception of the epistolary text pervades the entire letter, and finds full expression in the farewell. Sarah Austin wrote to William Gladstone, with whom she had had very little interaction for a number of years, about possible employment for her son-in-law, a difficult letter to write at best. Her letter, with a location identifier of "Ventnor / I of Wight / 4th Jany 1853," opens: "Dear Mr Gladstone / It would be more becoming perhaps, if I were to begin this letter by presuming that you have forgotten me, & by offering you all the apologies due from a total stranger." Austin here acknowledges the spatial and temporal gaps of their interactional history, excuses the "personal" salutation, but implicitly reveals through the use of the conditional form of the verb, that she is, in fact, counting on his remembrance of her for a favourable reception for her letter. The farewell reveals how she feels about writing to him, feelings which have resulted in a poorly presented letter, for she has had to run the farewell and subscription together at the very bottom of the page: "Shame & remorse forbid me to turn over my leaf & I subscribe myself in the smallest space, your's, dear Sir, with every sentiment of respect & gratitude, Sarah Austin."

The farewell does not, of course, always express anxiety about the future of the participants' relation, or the possible misinterpretation of the text. It may focus, instead, on augmenting friendly relations by transmitting greetings to other people known to both the addressee and the writer. This strategy emphasizes the public (social) pole of the participants' relation. The attachment between family circles, for
instance, is emphasized in a letter from Mary Howitt to Mrs. Moir. Written to accompany a gift of books to the eldest child, the letter also discusses the health of a younger child, as well as matters of interest to Dr. Moir, before it closes: "My husband desires me to present his most cordial regards & best wishes for your fireside circle in which I truly unite."28 "Fireside circle" includes the addressee, all those who have been written about, and any other members of the family group who have not been mentioned specifically. Rather than emphasizing the intimacy of their relation, Howitt’s farewell to Mrs. Moir promotes attachment between their families, that is, their domestic role as mothers is highlighted.

The farewell, like the salutation and subscription, reflects the interactants’ relational history. Because the people named are known by both correspondents, the farewell indicates whether the participants have interacted face-to-face, and whether the interaction has taken place in a "private" (domestic) or more public setting. A letter of condolence, written by Anna Maria Hall to her publisher, Mr. Blackwood, indicates their business relation has a personal dimension. Hall says in her farewell: "Permit me to assure you of my sincere sympathy - and to entreat you to convey to your Mother and family when [sic] the good wishes of a comparative stranger may be named to them ----."29 According to Victorian etiquette, if she had not met Blackwood’s mother personally, as she had occasion to do when she visited Scotland, Hall would not have been able to extend her sympathy, but instead, would have confined the expression of her feelings to her recipient alone. And if she had known
Blackwood's mother better, rather than being a "comparative stranger," she would have written two letters, one each to mother and son.

Finally, the variety of naming conventions used in the farewell indicates the writer's relation with the people named. For instance, Fanny Kemble first met her friend, George Combe, in 1831 while touring Scotland as an actress in her father's Company. Writing from the United States in 1837, Kemble closes her letter with greetings to many people known to them both: "Give my love to Cecy, to your brother & Miss Cox - also to dear Mrs. Harry & Lizzie when you see them. Commend me to all friends." Combe had married in 1833 during the time Kemble was living in the United States; however, as his wife Cecilia was Kemble's cousin, a daughter of Mrs. Harry Siddons, Kemble was entitled to address her familiarly, using a diminuitive of her forename. But she was not entitled to address Combe's brother, Dr. Andrew Combe, with the same degree of familiarity; he is designated by his role marker within the family circle. "your brother." Miss Cox, Combe's niece (I believe), and an occasional correspondent of Kemble's, is named more formally than is Lizzy Siddons, Kemble's cousin and now Combe's sister-in-law. Mrs. Harry Siddons is accorded the status due to her as Combe's mother-in-law. Thus the way in which people are named in the farewell reflects not only the writer's relation with them but also the addressee's.

With its orientation toward the future, the farewell seems to be an ambiguous form of closure for the epistolary text. Despite the farewell's return to the opening sentence of the letter, and despite the subscription's symmetry with the salutation, can
a text which so insistently refers to its beginning really be closed? And if not, where is the closure in epistolary texts? The answer is to be found at the beginning of this discussion: in the discussion of the location identifier, and in the epistolary implications of Erving Goffman's work.

A discussion of boundary markers in Goffman's Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience aids understanding of another epistolary paradox, the interdependence of the literary text and the surrounding world. Goffman observes:

Activity framed in a particular way--especially collectively organized social activity--is often marked off from the ongoing flow of surrounding events by a special set of boundary markers or brackets of a conventionalized kind. These occur before and after the activity in time and may be circumscripitive in space; in brief, there are temporal and spatial brackets. These markers [. . .] are presumably neither part of the content of activity proper nor part of the world outside the activity but rather both inside and outside, a paradoxical condition already alluded to and not to be avoided just because it cannot easily be thought about clearly. (251-2)

We have seen how all the epistolary text's structural components depend as much in their usage on the world outside the text--the history of the participants' interaction, their relative social positions, and their relational history--as they do on what occurs in the text itself. And we have seen how two of the components act as boundary markers for the written interaction, although, in themselves, they by definition cannot convey the entire message of the epistolary communication. And we have seen how one component, the farewell, functions not only to alert the recipient that the end of the interactional text is in view, but also to anticipate a response in another interactional event. Finally, as may be recalled, the only definite, or fixed, meaning the location identifier can have is the documentation of the letter writer's life at the moment of
writing. The closure of the epistolary text, then, must lie in the world outside the text: in the writer’s life. Thus death is the closure of the epistolary text.

The death of the epistolary text may occur, figuratively or literally, on three levels. If the written interaction is not "recharged" by face-to-face interaction, the momentum generated by writing dwindles and eventually dies away. Epistolary interaction comes to a halt, unless it is revived once again by events unanticipated by the epistolary interactants. If the interactional context is "killed" by the actions of one of the participants, written interaction—the generation of epistolary texts—also dies. The refusal of Barrett Browning’s father, after she married, to read her letters, or write to her, is perhaps the most familiar example. Finally, the death of the writer is the death of epistolary interaction. The closure of any one letter, then, is delayed until the next interaction, a repetition of endlessly deferred desire.
Notes

1. Anna Maria Hall to Mrs Moir, July 23. [1851], MS 10256, National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh. Dr. Moir died July 6, 1851. He edited seven volumes of Felicia Hemans's works.

2. Harriet Grote to Lady Morgan, June 9 [1855], MS Eng Lett c.783 (71), Bodleian Library, Oxford University.

3. Mary Howitt to Messrs Simms & McIntyre, December 10, n.y., Ms Eng 328, Boston Public Library. Square brackets indicate where the text has been partially obliterated by wear.

4. Anna Jameson to Otilie von Goethe, November 24, 1836, G.H. Needler, Letters of Anna Jameson to Otilie von Goethe, #50, 61. All references to the correspondence between Jameson and von Goethe will be to this edition. Needler's editorial policies are very sketchily explained in his preface. He writes: "The substance of the few longer omissions is given within square brackets, the shorter ones are indicated in the accepted way by dotted lines. The sentences, or even here and there a paragraph, which I have left out contain only conventional repetitions or trifling details" (v). The most frequent omissions appear to be salutations and opening sentences, an unfortunate deletion of "conventional" material from my point of view. The location identifier presents additional problems. Needler writes: "A chief editorial difficulty has been the rearrangement of the letters in chronological order. But though many of them were entirely undated, the contents usually gave a sufficiently definite clue to allow them, except in a very few unimportant instances, to be placed almost with certainty in the order of date" (v). Though their residences were in different countries, England and Germany, Jameson and von Goethe frequently interacted face-to-face; as a result, the location identifier was modified to reflect their closeness or distance. Needler appears to follow the conventional practice of supplying missing parts of the identifier in square brackets, although the derivation of the information--from postmarks or internal evidence--is not indicated. The place and year of this particular letter are given in italics, indicating, at least to me, that they were underlined in the original. However, as the month and abbreviation of Needler's preface's identifier is also in italics--May 24th, 1939--I am unsure enough of his exact practice to comment any further on the significance.

6. Anna Jameson to Ottilie von Goethe, January 18, 1837, #52. 71. Emphasis Needler's?

7. Anna Jameson to Ottilie von Goethe, February 12, 1837, #53, 75.


9. Anna Jameson to Ottilie von Goethe, October 20, 1837, #58, 93.

10. Harriet Grote to Harriet Martineau, June 22, 1871, Martineau Papers, University of Birmingham Library.

11. A more cogent definition occurs earlier: "I assume that the proper study of interaction is not the individual and his psychology, but rather the syntactical relations among the acts of different persons mutually present to one another" (2).

12. "The term face may be defined as the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact" (5). "Line" is defined as the "pattern of verbal and nonverbal acts by which [a person] expresses his view of the situation and through this his evaluation of the participants, especially himself" (5).

13. Goffman summarizes: "In general, then, a person determines how he ought to conduct himself during an occasion of talk by testing the potentially symbolic meaning of his acts against the self-images that are being sustained. In doing this, however, he incidentally subjects his behavior to the expressive order that prevails and contributes to the orderly flow of messages. His aim is to save face; his effect is to save the situation. From the point of view of saving face, then, it is a good thing that spoken interaction has the conventional organization given it; from the point of view of sustaining an orderly flow of spoken messages, it is a good thing that the self has the ritual structure given it" (38-39).

14. Goffman defines "deference": "By deference I shall refer to that component of activity which functions as a symbolic means by which appreciation is regularly conveyed to a recipient of this recipient, or of something of which this recipient is taken as a symbol, extension, or agent" (56). He defines "avoidance rituals": "Avoidance rituals as a term may be employed to refer to those forms of deference which lead the actor to keep at a distance from the recipient and not violate what Simmel has called the 'ideal sphere' that lies around the recipient" (62).


17. Harriet Martineau to William Ware, October 15, 1835, MS Eng 244, Boston Public Library. All the subsequent letters between them quoted here are in the same collection.

18. Mary Howitt to Elizabeth Fox Tuckett, [1845], MS Box 5.16 (2), Society of Friends Library, London.

19. Mary Shelley to John Payne, April 21, 1826, Ch. H. 8.40, Boston Public Library.


21. Harriet Grote to Francis Place, July 8 [1836], Add 37949, Place Papers, British Library, London.

22. Harriet Martineau to John Chapman, December 3 1857, MS Eng Lett d.2, Bodleian Library, Oxford University. All the letters quoted subsequently between Martineau and Chapman are in the same collection.


25. Elizabeth Barrett to Mary Russell Mitford. [2 July 1845], #405, 3:124.


29. Anna Maria Hall to [Mr. Blackwood], April 1, 1845, MS 4075, National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh.
30. Fanny Kemble to George Combe, November 17, [1837], MS 7241 7242, Combe Papers, National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh.

31. The quotation alludes to a previous statement: "In general, then, the assumptions that cut an activity off from the external surround also mark the ways in which this activity is inevitably bound to the surrounding world" (249). "Frame" is defined: "I assume that definitions of a situation are built up in accordance with principles of organization which govern events--at least social ones--and our subjective involvement in them; frame is the word I use to refer to such of these basic elements as I am able to identify" (10-11).
Chapter 3

The Physicality of the Epistolary Body

When we speak of the "body" of a text, we are usually referring to that part of the composition which lies between the introduction, or opening section, and the conclusion, or end section. In a letter text the body consists of the utterances falling between the epistolary interactional markers. Yet all texts also have a physical body, a book's body, for instance, being composed of a binding, perhaps decorative end papers, pages of paper, some blank, some printed with words, and often illustrations. The physical body of a text affects the purchaser or recipient before the text is read, and the reader during reading. Likewise, the physical aspects of letters are also influential. Pictorial representations, for instance, often display letters as objects that convey meaning in themselves, exclusive of, or in addition to their content. The physical nature of the text—the size of the paper, the pens and ink used, the handwriting—can all signify directly, as well as constrain, or structure, the letter's text. Typography (letterpress and layout), although not tactile in quite the same way, can be considered the physical presentation of written discourse. Letter writers employ a variety of "typographical" devices, such as underlining and line and word spacing to influence the reading process. We cannot properly speak of the structure of the epistolary body without taking its physical nature into account.

The epistolary markers—the location identifier, the salutation and subscription, and the farewell—also "visibly" structure the epistolary body. In formulating structures,
the rhetoricians described the epideictic *dispositio* as an orderly arrangement of topics between an *exordium* and a *conclusio*. The epistolary body's internal structure can be examined by focussing in any one letter on the choice of topics, their placement, and the connectives that link one topic to the next. But although the composition of the letter text may be studied in this way, the actual selection of topics, and even their arrangement, appears to be rather arbitrary, with little apparent logic other than the topics' appropriateness for the situational context, or their applicability to what is known about the writer's life. It is not until the body's composition is examined in the interactional context that we can begin to understand its structure. The epistolary text is a response to another interaction, face-to-face or written, except in the very rare circumstances when it initiates an interaction between strangers. Responsiveness to the other--the communicatory medium, the interlocuter, and the communicatory text--structures the epistolary body. The responsive structure is influenced by external and internal factors. The physical nature of the medium, and the social conventions governing epistolary interaction, I will call "external" factors; the participants' interpersonal relations, and their communication, I will call "internal" factors. While bearing in mind Goffman's observation that the boundary markers of an activity's frame are simultaneously outside and inside, external and internal, I shall proceed by examining the epistolary body from the outside to the inside.

The very sight of a letter--or, paradoxically, its absence if one is expected--begins to generate the attitude of responsiveness required of the recipient. Ideally, the
recipient must be receptive to the epistolary text and responsive to and in the
interactional context. That is, the recipient is motivated to "read" the letter correctly
and respond, in an appropriate manner, by initiating another interactional event. Social
codes, etiquette, govern the response of the recipient on the public (social) level;
feelings of sympathetic emotional identification influence the response on a private
level. As we have seen, the epistolary markers look both backwards to the previous
interaction and forwards to a desired future interaction. The recipient's responsiveness,
then, is captured, held, and fostered by a process of recognition, recollection, and
requital, a process the epistolary text replicates. The epistolary "body" presents itself
first as a physical object, stimulating the responsive process by recognition.

Recognition is initially a response to stimuli received through the senses:
hence, epistolary interactants express their feelings associated with recognition in
sensory images, usually of sight and sound. But it might be recalled that Anna
Jameson expressed her immediate feelings on recognizing Ottilie von Goethe's long-
awaited letter in tactile imagery: "And when I took your letter in my hand I felt only
delight."2 Harriet Martineau, in a letter to William Ware, expresses her feelings of
recognition in images of sound, a particularly poignant choice for a woman who was
partially deaf almost all her life. Martineau opens: "Your letters are always a great joy
to me. They tell me exactly what I want to know, & set me down between you. I
always consider them quite as much Mary's & William's [Mr. and Mrs. Ware] & I
hear your very voices as I read."3
Elizabeth Barrett confides her feelings of excitement, reverence, and gratitude in response to a letter from William Wordsworth in an oral tactile image: "A letter from Wordsworth! Don't tell anybody, but I kissed it." She had opened her letter to Mitford by using a combination of sight and sound images to convey her feelings of recognition in response to a letter from her friend:

Thank you my beloved friend, for your delightful thrice welcome letter, which at my bed-side 'bade good morrow' just as I opened my eyes for the day [. . .] Never lark sang more pleasantly than your letter did! By the look of it, on the outside, I, who am a prophet, knew that he was rather better than otherwise; but, to be sure, to be so well as that, did reach beyond the best of my hopes.5

Although its recognition images are clear, Barrett's letter is murky in its referents, specifically of "he" and "that", to anyone without knowledge of the interactional context. Mitford's father had been very ill; Mitford's current letter reports that his condition has improved. How Barrett knows that he is better from the sight of the letter alone is not revealed, although a letter of a week later gives at least a suggestion: "My beloved friend, your little bit of dear letter quite frightened me today, at the first sight - but nothing seems to be worse & you do not complain yourself of illness."6 A bulky epistolary body may suggest leisure and freedom of care sufficient enough to write a full letter.

Character analysis through handwriting is no novel idea, especially for epistolarians who are as sensitive to the appearance of the writer's orthography as they are to the size of the letter. Ill-health, of body or mind, is conveyed through the
handwriting, at least to those perceptive enough to read the signs. Not relying on the sensitivity of her recipient, however, Harriet Martineau writes in a letter to Mr. Macmillan: "My handwriting will show you that I am worse in health. I have lost ground markedly of late."7 Sounding the opposite note six years later, Harriet Grote responds to a letter from Martineau: "It is needless to add that I grow more & more feeble, & am quite lame at times with rheumatism so much for my poor old machine! Your's. I hope, may yet last out a bit, for your handwriting tells me you still have some energy granted you."8 Anna Jameson, on the other hand, writes in the farewell of her letter to Lady Byron that she does not know how to read the sign: "& O take care of yourself - Your handwriting vexes & perplexes me - it is so unlike your usual writing."9 Whether interpretable or not, all the signs point to the connection between health and the ability to write letters.

In one circumstance, the signal sent by the writer’s handwriting leads to a rather unexpected sort of recognition, at least for the external reader. Writing to her friend Fanny Wedgwood, Harriet Martineau opens a letter: "I was somewhat disappointed, in the midst of my pleasure, at seeing your hand-writing this morning. I hoped a few lines from Mr W. or Eras: [Erasmus Darwin] would be the next; and I have been looking for such these three weeks."10 The news Martineau is so anxiously anticipating is the birth of Wedgwood’s expected child. On that occasion, Wedgwood’s "ill-health" would prevent her from writing to Martineau in her own hand. We might note, in passing, the connection between "ill-health" and women’s
normal physicality, "ill-health" being a euphemism chosen to convey information about menstruation, pregnancy, miscarriage, and delivery.

When they were unable to write themselves, letter writers frequently used an amanuensis. In later years, Grote and Martineau kept their nieces busy; Florence Nightingale employed various hands; Gaskell and Stowe used their daughters; Jameson and Lady Byron made do with friends. Mitford, alone, seems to have written all her own letters. The use of an amanuensis for all but the signature immediately signified to the recipient that the letter writer was incapacitated. I am not entirely certain, however, whether the amanuensis ever addressed the envelope, for few envelopes survive in proportion to letters. If the amanuensis addressed the letter, the moment of recognition would be postponed until the signature was read, if the hand of the amanuensis was unknown to the recipient. If the same hand was habitually employed, the moment of recognition would double, the recipient first recognizing the amanuensis’s handwriting and then its significance. Either way, the handwriting signified the letter writer’s ill-health, while the letter-writer’s own hand signified at least enough health for letter writing.

Mistaken recognition, and hence erroneous interpretation, could be the result, however, if both the amanuensis and the letter writer were a recipient’s regular correspondents. A brief note from Anna Jameson to Bessie Parkes shows how daughters customarily served as their mothers’ amanuenses, and how scrambled communication could become as a result if mother and daughter wrote a similar hand.
Jameson opens her letter: "My dear Bessie / pray do apologise to your Mamma for me - I supposed her note to have been written by you - I will call on Mrs Parkes & make my excuses in person the first day I am in town -".\textsuperscript{11} Unlikely as it may seem when education was not standardized, Maria Martineau also wrote a hand remarkably similar to her aunt Harriet’s, a potentially confusing coincidence for Martineau’s correspondents, as Maria wrote many of her aunt’s letters in the ten years they lived together. Finally, correspondents could also signal their lack of health, and a resulting confinement to bed, by using pencil to write instead of the messier ink and quill pen. Florence Nightingale frequently communicated confidential information to Harriet Martineau in this way; almost all the female letter writers of my study did likewise on occasion.

So vital is the connection between health and letter writing that the absence of an expected response immediately signified the ill-health of either the respondent or the respondent’s immediate family. Thus Anna Jameson, in a letter thanking Jane for a present of Thomas Carlyle’s "delightful book" explains: "I wrote to you about six weeks ago - a note of enquiry to which I recd no answer & more lately having heard with regret that you had been ill (like everyone else) I made an arrangement with Mrs Chadwick to drive over to Chelsea & see you - illness prevented this."\textsuperscript{12} In the farewell of her letter, Jameson requests a witness to and testament of Jane Carlyle’s better health: "do, dear Mrs Carlyle, let me know something of you under your own hand?" In the context of their relational history, Jameson can hardly imagine there
could be any other reason than ill-health for Jane Carlyle’s failure to respond to her "note of enquiry," although the question mark conveys Jameson’s anxiety about her understanding of that history.

In a business context, or any other where the relational history is less well-understood, the recipient’s failure to respond is more open to interpretation. Three letters written by Harriet Martineau to her publishers, Bradbury & Evans, show how interpretation is linked to the relational history. Writing to Mr. Lucas on January 27, 1862, Martineau notes: "I have some fear that Mr Evans might be ill. Don’t trouble him, please: but I wrote 3 weeks since, asking a question, & I have had no answer. It does not matter much, except for the fear of his being ill." Martineau is not being imperious; a letter in which a question is posed requires a prompt response, and having no reason to doubt David Evans’s responsiveness, she can only conclude that he is ill.

Two years earlier, Martineau had corresponded with Evans about the republication of some material from Household Words. Not liking to proceed without clarifying that she owned the copyright, Martineau had written to William ("Harry") Wills, but as she reports to Evans, she has had no response:

It is now ten days since I wrote to Mr Wills, & I have no answer. I know his letters follow him when he leaves home so that, if he is anywhere in the kingdom, mine must have reached him. But he may be on the Continent. I should be sorry to have to give up my strong impression of his gentlemanliness & amiability; but I doubt his being quite his own master in any matter in wh Mr Dickens is at all concerned."
Having no great love for Dickens, Martineau partially blames Wills’s failure to respond on Dickens; nevertheless, if he were a "gentleman", he would write. Ill-health cannot be the reason for his failure in this case, for she has reason to think that he might be travelling.

Five days later, Martineau again writes to Evans to clarify where Wills is, and why his response might have been delayed:

No news of Mr. Wills! But I find he does not always leave his address for his letters to follow him. He is in Edinburgh now; but he did not arrive there till some days after I wrote. Still, I don’t give it up yet. For his own sake I hope he will write.

Note that Martineau desires a response not necessarily for her own convenience, but for the sake of Wills’s character and reputation. The absence of a response acts either as a witness to the ill-health of the recipient, or as a testament of the poor manners of the recipient, an ignorance of the social code which casts aspersions on his or her character.

"Ill-health" may connote a troubled mind as well as a disturbed body. In a friendship context where the "natural" expressive self is more open to view, the absence of an expected response may signify that the self is turned inward, engrossed by thoughts and feelings inexpressible either to the self or to a sympathetic other. Thus Lady Byron, explaining the delay of her response as ill-health, opens a letter to Anna Jameson: "I would not write to you till I could get out of the Oh & Ahs style, I am only just able to do so now -". Note that neither clause is subordinate; the
conditional form of the first verb ("would write") provides the necessary connective and indicates how "necessarily" the clauses are related.

Two letters from Elizabeth Barrett to Mary Russell Mitford, separated by a two-month gap, clarify the connection between letter writing and the ability to be expressive of the self, and highlight the judicial aspect of epistolary discourse. The first letter, written on July 18, 1842, opens:

Before your letter came my dearest dearest friend, I was on the edge of one just ten times - & now, since its coming, I have suffered some three days or four to pass without a word. The truth is, I have felt rather depressed & disagreeable - in the sort of spirits which inclines one to lean back from one's friends for their own dear sakes, - & I thought to myself that you wd be quite as well. . . [sic] in fact, quite better, without having anything to do with me.\textsuperscript{16}

Twelve letters and two months later, in the postscript to a letter written on September 27, 1842, Barrett returns to the period of her unresponsiveness:

There is a little more time - and now I will tell you what helped to make me so silent some time ago. I was naughty first, you know - that is agreed - & besides troubled in my imagination - Once upon a day [. . .].\textsuperscript{17}

The postscript continues by recounting how her brother Septimus had been injured in horseplay with his tutor during their father's absence from home. Despite the connections between "silent," "depressed & disagreeable," and "troubled in my imagination," it is difficult to reconstruct the context, and see the relevance of her brother's accident, her father's absence, and being "naughty," without a knowledge of the interactants' relational history. To be very brief, Barrett and Mitford were partly
drawn to each other by the similarity of their dependent relations with their fathers. As their letters reveal, both struggled on occasion with feelings of ambivalence about the self-abnegating roles they each played, a role sanctioned by Victorian gender ideology, but which they each resisted, at least partially, by writing. As the epistolary form conjoins the two dimensions of the self, a sub-text of rebellion can be read in their letters: hence, "naughty".18

Because the social (public) context of epistolary interaction makes responding imperative, letter writers must signal if a response is not required. But the signal must be carefully worded to avoid offending the recipient by seeming to travesty their relational history. Knowing that Martineau is not well, G.J. Holyoake manages simultaneously to convey his appreciation of her letters to him, and his reluctance to trouble her: "A letter from you at any time, is a gratification, and at this time a treasure, yet I pray you do not consider yourself under the slightest obligation, either of courtesy or kindness to answer any thing of mine either directly or indirectly."19 The phrase "courtesy or kindness" delineates the two levels of the interaction, "courtesy" signifying responsiveness on the public (social) level, "kindness" on the private, relational level.

Letters of condolence, in particular, require careful balancing in signalling that no response, at such a time, is to be expected, yet that the recipient's welfare is important to the writer. In a letter of condolence to an unidentified addressee ("my dear friend"). Harriet Martineau conveys, in the opening of her letter, her
unwillingness to violate the private space of grief by a gesture required by the public (social) ritual of mourning: "I hardly like to intrude upon your thoughts at such a time; but it seems natural & right to speak to you while my mind is so much occupied with you & with him who is gone." In the farewell of her letter, Martineau clarifies that despite her concern for her friend, no response is needed:

Of course, you will not dream of writing to me at present. I am sure I shall not dream of hearing from you when you should be spared all unnecessary effort. At all times I shall be thankful to know of your welfare. - as far as welfare is yet possible to you. But the Crosfields (who are absent at present) & the Forsters, & other friends can usually give me tidings of you.

Martineau's reliance on mutual friends to convey news about her bereaved friend is a more forthright indication than G.J. Holyoake's "directly or indirectly," of the interrelatedness of epistolary interactions with a larger audience than merely the designated participant.

A letter of sympathy from Joanna Baillie to Anna Jameson, on the death of her father, shares the attributes of Martineau's letter of condolence, but uses them quite differently. Baillie's letter opens: "Lady Byron was with us yesterday afternoon and we [her sister and herself] learnt from her that all your anxiety on your dear Fathers account is come to a desirable though melancholy end." Rather than concluding her letter by saying that their mutual friend, Lady Byron, will keep her informed of Jameson's welfare, Baillie writes at the end of her second paragraph: "I shall take it very kind if you will write me a few lines, whenever it is quite convenient for you
(not one day sooner) and hope they will contain a good account of yourself and those you love." Here the two levels are acknowledged, but the relational level is given precedence. "Take it very kind" indicates that Baillie would like to have a response to her letter, a request she can make given their relational history; the parenthetical "not one day sooner" indicates that Baillie is aware of the social codes governing mourning. Baillie’s third paragraph, separated from the first two by a two-line space, shows on what basis she requests a response. It opens: "I am glad to hear from Lady B that you are busy writing a continuation of your guide book, or at least preparing for it: nothing is so good for recovering the spirits, after any melancholy trial, as congenial occupation." A response from Jameson will witness her "recovering spirits" and testify to her willingness to accept Baillie’s counsel. The letter’s farewell draws the three paragraphs together: "Hoping then to hear from you what I wish."

Although displaying the attitudes to responsiveness characteristic of a letter of condolence, Baillie’s letter is shaped by the relational history of Jameson and herself. Their history began as a result of their mutual friendship with Lady Byron; it developed through frequent interaction into one of friendship in which Baillie’s seniority, in age and as a writer, was deferred to but not usually overtly recognized.

External and internal factors influencing the recognition of grief and mourning in Victorian society are manifest on the epistolary body. Letter writers used stationery printed with a black border to indicate to their correspondents the death of a family member. Within certain limits, the wider the border, the more immediate—temporally
and spatially (relationally)—the death, but an excessively wide border was ostentatious, hence "vulgar". The border became narrower as the mourning period passed.

Respondents, however, appear to have been under no obligation, at least in writing, to acknowledge their recognition of the signal, for nowhere have I found any mention by the recipient of the addressee's bereavement as conveyed by the use of mourning paper alone. My only explanation for this apparent omission is that Victorian letter writers used mourning paper to signal the deaths of distant family members as well as those close to them. If the correspondents were interacting frequently, the deaths of immediate family members would be known through other forms of notification, and the appropriate response, a letter of condolence, would have been made immediately. That is, the signal conveyed by the stationery was to be expected and so required no further comment. If the death was of a more distant family member, or if the correspondents were more distant socially, the explicit recognition of the signal was either, in the first instance, unnecessary, or, in the second, a liberty unwarranted by the interactants' relational history.

This observation is substantiated by Harriet Martineau's comment on her use of mourning paper to Fanny Wedgwood. She says: "My black-edge is - you will think for Mrs. Follen, - but no, - Americans don't usually wear mourning; and I don't like it. It is for dear aunt Margt [Rankin], - the very last of the older generation on both sides of the house."22 Martineau's clarification is prompted not only by her desire to comment on the deceased's lack of foresight in the arrangement of her financial affairs, but also
by her recognition of Wedgwood's probable response, that is, no response to, as well as misinterpretation of, the signal given by her stationery. Sometimes correspondents wrote to their friends on mourning paper turned upside down, so that the black border was on the back of the letter, or on the blank side of the paper if only a single leaf was used for a short note. This strategy allowed correspondents to signal in a socially correct way, but to cancel the signal as an unnecessary marker in the particular context in which they were writing. Harriet Grote's response to Martineau's letter of condolence in which she expressed her pleasure at Martineau's continued existence used this strategy.

Although writers were obliged to respond to letters, and although they very frequently expressed anxiety about an apparent dilatoriness in responding, writers could, on occasion, use the testamentary aspect of letters as proof of their responsiveness, even if the evidence was not an immediately written letter. In a long-delayed response to a letter from Anna Jameson, Harriet Hosmer sends two photographs as evidence of her responsiveness. Her letter opens:

Just ten months ago this very day, as I find by the date of your letter now lying before me, you were good enough to write me the kindest of letters, containing a little criticism, more praise and still more encouragement. Now what have I to say for myself for letting ten months roll on without a civil word of acknowledgement? Nothing but that I acknowledge my transgression and my sin is ever before me; but meantime I have not been idle and perhaps have been giving a still stronger proof of my sense of obligation to you by adopting your suggestions and profiting by your criticisms, than if I had filled four pages with thanks.23
Hosmer announces that a mutual friend will bring Jameson photographs of her sculpture, "Zenobia"; in her letter she describes the improvements she has made, as well as her dissatisfaction with some of the effects she has produced. Her letter, then, although seeming to testify to her lack of manners, actually witnesses her responsiveness to Jameson's criticism and encouragement. And if it also witnesses Hosmer's disregard for "civility", that would not be incongruous either, for Hosmer, an American sculptor living in Italy, led an unconventional life by English standards.

Among the external factors influencing the epistolary body's structure, the size of the paper chosen for a particular communication shaped the discourse and could also signify, at least indirectly. As standard stationery changed over the century, a brief description will be helpful for understanding its significance in epistolary communication. In the early years of the Victorian period, a usual sheet of letter-writing paper was approximately as wide as a modern North-American "letter" sheet, but several inches shorter, making it more nearly square. If the letter was accepted, the postage was paid by the recipient, according to weight, that is according to the number of sheets used for the letter. Thus letter writers were obliged to fill a sheet as compactly as possible if they did not want to burden their correspondents with additional expenses, or even themselves, for paper was expensive. As a result, lengthy letters were frequently "crossed"; that is, the sheet, when full, was rotated 90 degrees clockwise, and the writing continued over the previous text. Envelopes were used infrequently; the letter was folded into an envelope shape and sealed with wax or a
wafer. Hence writers were obliged to leave a space on the back of one sheet for the address, and they frequently left margins in the section of the letter where the removal of the sealing wax might tear the paper. If necessary the paper could be cut in two for a short letter.

As styles changed, so did the stationery. Letter-writing paper became, conversely, both larger and smaller. That is, a larger sheet of paper was folded in half lengthwise, giving the writer four sheets of the usual size, bookstyle, to write on. But not all written interactions require so much paper; as a result, a smaller style of folded paper became popular, a size more nearly resembling our modern "note-paper", or "hasti-notes", but taller and slightly narrower, more rectangular in shape. This size was better suited to folding for insertion into a small envelope. An even smaller version of the same style of stationery was available for brief notes. By the time the penny postal system arrived (1840), the old style of stationery was almost obsolete for written communication within England. As the new postal system did not cover mail for overseas delivery, correspondents often continued to use the larger size of paper (two or four leaves) for their overseas letters.

A change in styles is, of course, the result of many factors, mainly technological. Not the least of the factors influencing the changes in Victorian stationery was the juxtaposition of the presentation of the self with the presentation of the epistolary body. A well-written letter meant not only a text whose language was grammatically and syntactically correct, and correctly spelled, but also a text that was
written in a legible hand, free from ink blots and corrections, and well-enough spaced on the paper to fill it without crowding or leaving large areas blank. Blank spaces implied either that the letter's writer had little to say to the recipient and hence demonstrated a reluctance to participate in interaction, or that the letter's writer was extravagant and wasteful, a moral culpability. A letter that was too crowded, or crossed, implied that the letter's writer was not sufficiently organized to structure the text so as to fit on the paper, and hence was guilty of verbosity, or that the writer was insufficiently equipped with stationery suitable for various types of communication. Because these implications inhere in the presentation of the epistolary body, letter writers frequently comment on the presentation of their own texts, and sometimes judge others according to the presentation of their texts. Elizabeth Gaskell, for instance, comments on the size of her paper to her new sister-in-law: "Here's a sheet of paper for you! I only hope it may come to you on a wet day. I shall put down every thing; not knowing whether you will care to hear it, or not, but I have not much time, and I must write straight forward whatever comes into my head." Her comment, and her letter as a whole, show her wish to communicate, and hence, her desire for an intimate relation. Sarah Austin's letter to William Gladstone requesting employment for her son-in-law (Chapter 2), and Mary Russell Mitford's short response to Barbara Hofland (Chapter 1), both illustrate the writer's concern with the presentation of the self on paper of a size appropriate for the occasion as well as the reader's interpretation of that choice and thus the writer's interactional intent.
Anxieties about the presentation of the self usually surface, as we have seen, in the farewell of a letter. Commentary on epistolary presentation, on the other hand, generally appears in a postscript, or in the opening sentence of the letter where the context is established. Mary Howitt, for instance, adds after the subscription to her letter to W.H. Prideaux: "Pardon my disproportionate envelope -".\textsuperscript{25} A letter written by Elizabeth Gaskell to F.J. Furnivall illustrates how the opening sentence, the farewell, and the postscript are linked to each other in their expression of anxiety and commentary about self-presentation. The location identifier is "Blackwood / near Southampton / July 18"; the salutation is: "My dear Sir."\textsuperscript{26} The postscript of Gaskell's letter contains the commentary on the presentation of the epistolary body: "I have snatched at any paper. Please excuse it." The farewell expresses anxiety about the presentation of the self: "I write in a terrible hurry. I hope you can read it." The opening sentence establishes the interactional context: "I have only just received your letter, forwarded to me from home: and as I am on the point of leaving for Normandy I am afraid I can do but little, personally; but I have written two letters to two people." Gaskell's selection of paper is determined at least partially by her absence from home; her handwriting and perhaps her choice of paper reflect the haste in which she is writing; thus, together they witness Gaskell's responsiveness and testify, indirectly, to the value Gaskell gives to her interaction with the addressee.

The extent to which the text fills the page reflects the interactional context, the relational history of the participants, and the willingness of the writer to communicate
with the addressee. An apparent "overflow" of words helps to define a context where
the development of friendship is the aim, by signalling that the writer, unwilling to
terminate the interaction, is constrained by the size of the paper. Writers used the left-
hand margin along the fold on the front leaf, the top space before the salutation, and,
very occasionally, the gutter inside, for the farewell, subscription, and perhaps a
postscript in letters where friendship was important. On the older style paper, the
writer might cross a part of the first leaf without implying lack of forethought or
verbosity. The limits on overflow, although undefined except by the size of the paper,
were there nevertheless. It was uncourteous to expect a recipient to read much crossed
writing, a tedious but not impossible procedure, and it was inconsiderate to burden
even the most sympathetic of friends with reading, and responding to, a very lengthy
letter. The limitations, then, on any one epistolary interaction were defined by a
recognition of self-indulgence, or self-absorption, on the one hand, and an awareness
of the recipient's willingness and ability to be responsive (requital), on the other.

A letter from Fanny Kemble, written on older style paper from the United
States, to her friend George Combe, who lived in Scotland, provides a good example
of the anxieties surrounding responsiveness and presentation in a written interaction.
The letter opens with the joking about the length of time between interactions--and
Kemble's "sauciness"--habitual in their letters:

My dear Sir, before accusing me of leaving your last kind letter
to me unacknowledged too long, I beg you to remember that yourself
have given me the excellent example of due deliberation before answering -
having thus I flatter myself fairly shut your mouth before you have had
time to open it - I must tell you that I had indited to you good [sic] three sides
of a letter some months ago, & by some carelessness or other lost it out of
my portfolio, by which accident you have been deprived of many wise words
whose loss I am sure you will duly appreciate, & deplore.27

The opening sentence witnesses the lack of "due deliberation" and the "carelessness"
characteristic of the entire letter.

Kemble uses the front margin and the top space of her four-leaf paper to
continue her text with more commentary of interest to Combe who was a phrenologist,
"only think of my present phrenological opportunities," before concluding with a
farewell and subscription. Her friendly "overflow" crossed a part of the original text
but not to an extent so as to require commentary. The last two leaves of her paper,
however, are fully crossed. This part of the text opens: "in reading to day a paper
about Poland the inquiry which you made of me some time ago, & which I most
shamefully forgot to answer has recurred to me - You have not of course waited for
my tardy information, but such as it is, here it is." The additional text concludes with
an altered farewell: "I hope my dear Sir you will more easily forgive me than I can
myself for having neglected sooner to answer your enquiries on this point - I do not
think of it without great regret & self reproach - forgive too my tormenting you by
crossing my vile handwriting." And to make a bad thing even worse, Kemble crosses
the first leaf with a correction to the information of her additional text: "My husband
tells me that the land offered to those polish refugees was cleared & only required
cultivation." Kemble's lack of "due deliberation" has resulted in a poorly presented
letter, a letter which signals its transgression of the limits of overflow as well as the writer's transgression of both levels of interactional responsiveness.

A writer's commentary on self-presentation can often be quite amusing and, even more to the point, can sometimes lead to interesting observations about the text, the writer's epistolary habits, and even the writer's character. The farewell of Mary Russell Mitford's letter to R.A. Davenport, written in 1813 when Mitford was twenty-six, concludes with a comment about her handwriting: "I talk of mercy & inflict upon you such a letter! A letter where the evil Genii of mistake & tautology seem to have presided & of which the best I can hope is that the writing is so illegible that you will not be able to decipher it."

Elizabeth Barrett chose for Mitford's handwriting the word "caligraphy" to refer to a proper name she could not decipher accurately. Mitford's writing was unusually compressed, a trait exacerbated in her later years by her habit of using very small pieces of paper for her letters--sometimes even scraps of paper no larger than two inches by four inches, cut from old envelopes or unused areas of writing paper. Thus Mitford signalled her frugality, even penury, by her choice of paper, and by her cramped handwriting. Because it was the result of her laborious endeavours to support a spend-thrift father, her visible self-abnegation was much admired as an example of womanly virtue. Her choice of stationery in later years, when not using scraps, was a size smaller than the usual note-paper, but larger than the miniature version. Elizabeth Barrett also favoured the self-diminishing style of presentation; she used the same size paper as Mitford and wrote in a very minute
hand. As a result, her lengthy letters to Mitford sometimes might appear to exceed interactive limits, a transgression she points out in the farewell of a letter: "And now I must gather together & count up my little sheets. Surely I have written half a quire to you - Miserere! -".30

In the mid-1840s, after her recovery from her first illness, Harriet Martineau built herself a house in the Lake District at Ambleside. She was very proud, understandably, of this symbol of her independence and self-reliance. From the late 1840s on, she wrote to her correspondents, on occasion, on stationery engraved with one of two portraits of her home, a choice of paper always worth noting. The postscript of a letter written on the engraved paper in 1850 to William Lloyd Garrison—certainly not a "first" letter—contains the commentary on her self-presentation: "P.S. This letter-heading, - the portrait of my house, - is no piece of dandyism of my own. It is a pretty present from two artist friends. The bay-window is the study where I work. The roses &c. are climbing up fast."31 What it does not explain is why Martineau chose, on this particular occasion, to use the paper to give her American correspondent a visual representation of her home. The opening sentence gives the context: "This is just to say that if you should ere long receive £10 by the hands of my friend Miss Grey Loring, I hope you will accept it for the Liberator, as my very humble offering in your great causes." However, as she explains, her gift is contingent on her receiving payment from an American publisher; if she should not be paid, she cannot afford to contribute despite her long-standing desire to do so. A further
comment links the postscript to the interactional context: "Now, I have provided for
my own independence, - at least, for some years to come: & I may indulge my
longing to throw my mite into your treasury, & that of the Standard." Her pretty,
substantial, house is the symbol of her success, not only as a professional writer, but
also as a solid, middle-class Victorian who has achieved social status by industry not
inheritance, the status so earnestly sought by Dickens and Trollope among others.
Success manifested in philanthropy.

The "typography" of a handwritten letter visibly structures the text and is an
aspect of its physicality; hence, it can be considered an external factor. As we have
seen, external factors are connected to the presentation of the self on the two
interactional levels, as social being and as person. The typography of the text, which
guides the reader's interpretation, aids in understanding the discourse's significance.
Standard typographical conventions are adapted to handwriting and to the epistolary
form, but they may also be adapted to suit an individual writer's requirements.
Because typographical conventions usually reflect a "house style", that is, the
publisher's particular usage and not necessarily the writer's intent, literary critics, apart
from bibliographers, tend to overlook their significance. Sociolinguists, however, who
usually study spoken language, have had to devise complicated and often idiosyncratic
conventions for representing oral discourse typographically. Letter writers fall
somewhere between writers for publication and linguists in their attempts to express
themselves "typographically" in a handwritten context based on the oral use of language. Their adaptations of conventional usage merit scrutiny.

Paragraphs are the conventional signal to the reader of a change in topic. Letter writers on the older style single-sheet stationery, constrained by the size of the paper and the expense of the paper and the postage, often replaced the conventional line change and indentation with a horizontal gap of an inch or two to signal that the topic has consciously been shifted. The wider the space, the more disconnected the topics. On the newer-style paper where the constraint of expense was less, writers usually followed the convention although they might not indent if the line change was obvious. But as in Joanna Baillie's letter of condolence to Anna Jameson, writers might, on occasion, leave a two-line space. Following the epistolary convention of the wider the space, the more disconnected the topics, we might assume that Baillie was signalling a radical change in the direction of her text. In one sense she was. She was signalling a "radical" change in a letter of condolence's conventional expression by recommending that Jameson "recover" herself as quickly as possible by writing--for the public, and to herself. Her signal might also work in another way. The expression of feelings in the first two paragraphs was dictated by the occasion, connected to her relations with Jameson, and focussed not only on Jameson but also on her mother and sisters. If Jameson chose to read the letter to her family, the two-line space would alert her to a "private" passage that she might not want to share. The farewell and
subscription were adapted to either "reading". The modification of typographical conventions for line and word spacing can signify in a letter on several levels.

The disregard of paragraphing conventions may signify that friendship is being stressed. If we reflect on a conversation we have had with a friend, we may be surprised at how far the conversation drifted, perhaps even to the extent of forgetting or omitting to say what had initially been uppermost in our minds to communicate when the interaction began. This responsiveness is represented in intimate letters by the absence of conventional sentence designators, especially the period, and by the absence of indicators for topic changes. The writer’s words are visibly left to drift, tied to the breath and anchored to the page only by dashes. Many writers in such a context may disregard paragraphs altogether, or use them only to signal that they are responding to another part of the addressee’s letter. Paragraphs, then, might replace or augment the conversational connectors such as "by the way", or "as you were saying", or the more elliptic demonstrative pronouns used to relate the speaker’s words to a listener’s previous utterance.

The ellipsis is used, typographically, to indicate a gap, a space created either by a speaker or by the omission of some of the speaker’s words. Letter writers infrequently use the ellipsis, except to indicate that more could be said on a topic but exactly what, is left up to the reader to imagine. Temporal gaps in the present time of writing are usually ignored unless they are of particular relevance to the occasion. Elizabeth Barrett Browning, however, adapted the ellipsis to her own idiosyncratic use.
When writing to friends, like most writers, she used a dash as link, but also an abbreviated ellipsis--two dots--to indicate a tiny gap unrelated to the breath. It is as though the writing self detaches momentarily to look inwards, to scan the thoughts and feelings, to feel the pulse, before turning back to the page to amend the utterance in progress. Her style gives her letters a three-way effect--a pas de deux with a shadowy third partner--rather than the interplay of the dialogic I/You.  

Responding to a letter from Elizabeth Gaskell, Barrett Browning's reply provides a sample of her practice as well as a good example of commentary on self-presentation. The location identifier is "Bagni di Lucca - / October 7": the opening sentence provides the interactional context: "Your letter followed me to this place where we have been living for three months an exquisite summer-life, somewhat in the manner of dwellers in tents . . which is my native manner I think . . for there must surely be gypsey blood in me, unless gypsey soul should be enough for the purpose." The second paragraph opens: "I turn to a second page (which looks ungrateful) to thank you for your most kind & interesting letter - How it pleased me that you should care to write to me so much of yourself - and, now, how I seem to know you and to hold your hand! -". The opening of the third paragraph establishes the grounds on which Barrett Browning will respond to Gaskell's letter: "But I shall not tell you of my past as you have told me of yours." The remainder of the long letter is about her husband and her child, a mixture of the recent past and the present.
The fourth paragraph provides a striking example of the difference in signification of the dash and her abbreviated ellipsis:

Here is one anniversary I like to remember . . . nay, two . . . my wedding-day, above seven years ago . . . and my child's birthday. For all the rest I cultivate Oblivion, and am in this assisted by a natural gift of inaptitude for numbers & days of the month, & years. But these seven years I am ready to talk of to anybody - I like to talk of them, to lift up the folds of them, & to thank God for all the happiness hid in each - If there are shadows even here... a little rent or a little stain . . it has not been the fault of my husband - no indeed -

Here the two places where she uses her ellipsis, at the beginning of the paragraph and at the end, balance each other in tandem. The first suggests a mixture of feelings, perhaps triggered by "anniversary," surrounding the recollection of her wedding-day, although their nature is not specified. The second returns to those feelings and describes them a little more fully, but still cryptically. It is tempting to rush in to plug the gap with biographical details, but if temptation is resisted, a Romantic sensibility attuned to the loss/gain polarity can be perceived. The farewell of her letter expresses no anxiety about self-presentation; a postscript, on the other hand, provides her commentary: "I dare send you a letter of personalities because I liked yours so much - Keep the Law with me henceforward even so - an I for an I" [doubly underlined]. Her double underlining draws attention to the semantic signification of her pun: the personal pronoun "I", and the Old Testament version of just requital, an "eye for an eye." Even such a brief glimpse suggests how responsiveness--recognition, recollection, and requital--permeates the text on multiple levels.
Brackets, round or square, are used conventionally to indicate explanatory addenda. The round indicate that the speaker is explaining his or her own words; the square, that someone other than the speaker is providing the insertion. Epistolary writers follow conventional usage, but they may also use the parenthesis in either style to signal a change in voice. The change might be thought of as similar to a solo actor who signals shifts in persona by changing hats. Many examples have already been displayed. Barrett Browning’s commentary on self-presentation in her letter to Gaskell is one: "I turn to a second page (which looks ungrateful)"; Joanna Baillie’s parenthetical insertion in her letter of condolence to Jameson is another: "whenever it is quite convenient for you (not one day sooner)"; Gaskell’s letter to Martineau quoted in the first chapter, yet another: "(I have hunted everywhere for Miss Ewart’s letter of 57 [. . .])". All three examples show that the shift is from the voice of an "I" speaking to "you", to a "writer" who knows the rules governing epistolary discourse and their ramifications. The parenthetical insertion is made to prevent misreading by cancelling a signal unintentionally given by the text and its presentation, a signification damaging to the writer’s self-presentation. Thus Barrett Browning wishes to cancel any impression of self-absorption; Baillie likewise in making a request so apparently heedless of her recipient’s feelings; and Gaskell tries to amend her failure to provide testimony through quotation by admitting her inability to find the evidence, a transgression almost equally as damning but at least honest. Of course, not all round brackets contain addenda of this type, but many do.
Square brackets can be used to indicate a change in voice but of a slightly different kind. Like the round brackets, square brackets indicate that the writer is speaking in an altered voice, but the new voice belongs to a role different from the usual one in speaking to the addressee. That is, the separation is not of speaker and writer, but of the roles a person plays in a relationship with another. Two examples from the correspondence between Florence Nightingale and Harriet Martineau may help to clarify the point. Prompted by Martineau's articles in the *Daily News* on her work, the Army, and India, Nightingale wrote to Martineau late in 1858, enclosing a confidential report written by her for the War Office that she thought might interest her. It did. Martineau offered to write a series for the newspaper, and suggested that the articles might be put together in book form, exactly the response, I surmise, that Nightingale was hoping for, as she also used Gaskell and Stowe, in their own individual ways, to inform the public and shape opinions. Although Nightingale had written, and continued to write reports and books herself, in her relation with Martineau she downplayed her role as a writer by deferring to Martineau's "superior" judgment; however, whenever she wished to challenge Martineau by a display of "authority", she used square brackets for her "new" voice.

A letter dated "March 19 / 59" opens:

I have only & very hastily glanced thro' the M.S. just received. It appears to me quite to keep up its spirit. But I think, & I am sure the soldiers will think, that the relief & the effect of the Battle of the Alma is necessary - written, that is, as you would write it. It is wanted to bring out the miserable commencement
of the Plateau.

[The Times Correspondent gives good details of the Alma.]\textsuperscript{36}

The farewell follows in a third paragraph and Nightingale subscribes herself "Yours ever gratefully / F. Nightingale."

Two days later, Nightingale wrote again, opening her letter: "I feel for two reasons that it is desirable to work up the Instructional matter into a narrative by introducing the battles." The second paragraph begins:

My two reasons are 1. that it will be impossible for me to gain admission into the Regimental Libraries for this book, unless the Instructional matter is disguised in narrative [no Chaplain or Inspector would sanction it] - 2. that no careless person (& soldiers too are careless) would even read it without the battles.

The first parenthetical insertion, in square brackets, is a voice of authority, not of the "author/historian/eye-witness" this time, but of Nightingale in her role as Army authority. The second parenthetical addition, in round brackets, is inserted to provide information about soldiers that might well be common knowledge or obvious--soldiers are people and may be careless. Nightingale used this strategy quite frequently in her letters to Martineau; Martineau herself used it on occasion to other correspondents.

Of the typographical practices used by letter writers, underlining is not only the most "visible", but also the most common. Underlining is used for emphasis, a description so succinct that the reasons for its use may pass unnoticed. Whatever the reason, the effect on the reader is to make the underlined words or phrases more prominent than the rest of the text: it or they may be read, even half-consciously,
before the entire text is read sequentially. Thus they can function as an effective
signal. Foreign words, for instance, are by convention underlined. The French phrase,
"entre nous", must therefore be underlined, a useful signal to the reader, who may be
reading the letter aloud, that a "private" space is being demarcated. Even with Barrett
Browning's "Miserere", in her letter to Mary Russell Mitford, the underlining flags a
transgression, a trespass requiring special indulgence, and an effective signal that
functions either initially or retrospectively to alter the reader's perception of the writer.

Underlining may be used to make instructions more prominent so as to impress
them on the reader's mind and to signal their whereabouts in the text if the reader
should later reread the letter. The directives may be of a temporal or spatial
(geographic) type, or they may be in the nature of a command. In a brief note to Mary
Clarke Mohl, Florence Nightingale underlines a temporal direction to differentiate it
from another time mentioned in the text: "I find Mrs. Bracebridge has made another
list of commissions to be done today, so that we shall not be able to be with you
before 7 o'clock this evening, or if you are going out tonight, will you tell us & we
will come at 5 -".37 In a letter clarifying the stages of a journey she is making with
Mrs. Harry Siddons, Anna Jameson emphasizes a location where Lady Byron could
contact her: "we leave Lancaster tomorrow at 10 - go on to Birmingham at once &
shall go to the Railway Hotel - as being every way the most convenient - I believe it
is the 'Queen's Hotel' - at the Birmingham Station -".38 Anna Maria Hall, writing to
Mr. Swain in her role as the editor of a gift book, emphasizes her requirements:

"return me the proof by the last post."\(^{39}\)

Underlining may also be used lexically. The underlined word(s) may be coined, deliberately misspelled, out of keeping with the writer's diction, or unusual in some other way. For instance, Fanny Kemble in writing to George Combe, opens her letter: "A thousand thanks my dear friend for your kind assistance without which I must inevitably have fulfilled my woman's destiny of being scrunched against the wall in this Trust deed business."\(^{40}\) It is virtually impossible even silently to read her "scrunched" without differentiating it from the rest of the sentence. Speakers call attention to a word by changing the pitch, tone, or loudness of the voice. Writers do likewise by underlining. Emphasis, then, is not only a literary convention, but an oral practice for altering the significance of an utterance. In Discursive Acts, R.S. Perinbanayagam observes that in normal discourse "an articulator can deliberately use the sounds of discourse to stylize his or her texts to indicate intentions and define the parameters of a self" (35). To understand the significance of underlining in letters, it will be helpful to clarify what a speaker's voice changes signify.

The four prosodic elements of discourse are prominence, tone, key, and termination.\(^{41}\) The underlining that makes a word or words more "visible" in a text--more prominent--is also an oral feature. Although we may not be aware of much difference when we read an underlined foreign word or directive, a slight initial hesitation when reading aloud may indicate prominence. Tone, in oral discourse, refers
to variations in the pitch of the voice by raising or lowering it. Interrogatives are
terminated orally by a raised tone, a signal replaced on paper by a question mark.
Imperatives, on the other hand, are usually indicated by a lower tone, a signification
inexpressible typographically. They may be terminated, however, with a rising tone to
suggest doubt about the speaker's authority or to temper the force of the command.
Likewise, writers may cancel, or at least mitigate, the peremptoriness of an imperative
by terminating the utterance with a question mark or an exclamation mark. Thus Anna
Jameson terminated her "do, dear Mrs Carlyle let me know," with a question mark to
cancel an impression of inappropriate imperiousness as well as to signify anxiety. Key,
as in music, designates relative pitch. If a pitch is higher than the previous tone, a
contrast is expressed; if a mid-tone is chosen, an additive function, or necessary
relationship, is being confirmed; a low tone is equative to express that there is "no
flouting of expectations here or no unanticipated consequences, and both speaker and
auditor know that this is what usually happens" (37). Using the three "key" functions,
contrastive, additive, and equative, we can examine why certain words in a text, and
not others, are underlined.

Kemble's letter to Combe continues in the third paragraph on the topic of her
plans to adopt her brother Henry's illegitimate child. "Adelaide" is her sister, Adelaide
Kemble Sartoris. Seven words are underlined, a fairly high proportion for a single
paragraph:

What you say about Henry is most true and the charge I am about
to undertake is for the sake of the wretched little forsaken morsel of humanity & not for his - his note to me on the subject would I am sure have struck you as singularly characteristic - he said that the tone of Adelaide's note to him was so very different from mine that he could not possibly acceed to her proposition tho' he accepted my kind offer - how perhaps you may recollect the touching tender appeal my Sister made to Henry on the subject at any rate you will certainly recollect her adjuration to me to line every word I said to him with "cotton wool" lest I should scratch his sensitive conscience - now all the cotton wool was not enough to prevent his rejecting her proposal because she hinted at the possibility of his doing something himself towards the maintenance of his child - As I knew the utter fallacy of any such expectation I made no such reference & my own belief is that instead of her cotton wool or even the mere forebearance of my note I had expressed in the severest terms my indignation at his conduct he would have pocketed the assault with perfect equanimity & accepted my offer of ridding him entirely of the charge of his child with perfect (?)equanimity. I have already had a most unpleasant task in breaking the matter by letter to my father - for of course his permission will be necessary before I can bring the poor baby into his house.

The semantics of "tone" and "cotton wool" are called into question by underlining. That prominence indicates that she is rejecting their semantic implications in the context in which they had been used. Henry is too obtuse to recognize the "tone" of his sister's letter to him because he is too selfish; Adelaide's "cotton wool" (first used in quotation marks to indicate that it was Adelaide's term) is therefore not only unnecessary but even inexcusable in the situation. "Her" and "my" are underlined to express a contrastive function, but their paired underlining suggests their relation to each other. If writers wish to imply that there is no relation because of the contrast, they will underline only one of the pair. "Because" is underlined to convey an additive (necessary) function: Adelaide had suggested that Henry assume some responsibility;
therefore, he rejected her proposal. "Entirely" is underlined to convey an equative function: both Combe and Kemble are of the opinion that Henry is too irresponsible to take any part in looking after his child. In sum, Kemble's underlining reflects the variety of tonal choices available to a speaker.

Of course, readers of epistolary texts, internal or external, would not consciously analyse a letter's underlining. Nevertheless, the implications would be understood. Tone articulates emotion; underlining encodes emotion. Kemble's underlining helps to convey her indignation about the behaviour of her brother and sister. Her strong emotion was probably augmented by her feeling of being pressed and harried on all sides: by her monetary dealings with her estranged husband ("this Trust deed business"), the loss of her own children; her brother's behaviour; her sister's directives; and her frustration with living under the paternal roof once again. Combe was a sympathetic audience, a long-standing friend, an advisor, and a man on whom she could rely to transact her financial business. When reading her letter, Combe would respond to her emotion. In an epistolary text, frequent underlining of a tonal significance both delineates and creates an intimate context. It signals that the expressive "natural" self is being revealed in what is perceived as a safe context. This observation, however, raises another question. Are there limits?

The constraints on underlining are defined by the reader's ability to be responsive: to recognize, to recollect, and to requite. Underlining is a peremptory signal requiring the reader to pay particular attention in decoding the message. If the
reader is overloaded, he or she stops responding. But a reader may also stop responding if the messages are incorrectly coded, or if the messages are cancelled by signals conflicting. A brief note consisting of one sentence from Sydney, Lady Morgan, to Charles Babbage provides an example of how comprehending Morgan's excessive underlining is fatiguing and ultimately irritating. Her letter opens: My dear Mr Babbage - / I am so shut up by bad health & bad weather, that I was utterly unable to wait on you last Saturday (always a privation to me) now do pray come to me on Sunday Evening ^next^ between 4 & 12 you will meet an agreeable tho' small party. & you will much obligd yrs most truly - in [illegible] / Sydney Morgan."

Even if all the signals could be accounted for, the apparent emotion seems disproportionate to the occasion.

Here, once again, the judicial aspect of epistolary discourse comes into view. R.S. Perinbanayagam suggests why epistolary readers are particularly sensitive to the writer's intentions, and how the spontaneous/deliberated polarity is manifest in epistolary texts:

Creativity in the course of the discursive act is not a mere luxury in the dramaturgy of a linguistically minded species, but an imperative without which conviction in one's own productions cannot be demonstrated. Further, the conviction demonstrated by the discursive presentation also indicates the articulator's responsibility for the words issued and the commitment of his or her self to them. These productions must bear the stamp of authenticity and originality, of being freshly minted, of immediacy of apprehension and construction. They must appear to be spontaneous and wrought in felt emotions and attitudes, and above all must be distinguished from mere mimicry. Prosodic mastery then becomes imperative whether one is speaking from one's own conviction or merely
pretending to be doing so. (39-40)

Perinbanayagam's comment suggests that spontaneity is a reciprocal process. The speaker "constructs" by emitting and articulating messages congruent and consistent enough for "immediacy of apprehension" by the listener. In Frame Analysis, Erving Goffman describes the reciprocity of spontaneity as the speaker's "borrowing" spontaneity from the listener (508). Letter writers depend on frequent interaction for a "reservoir" of spontaneity. As we have already observed, face-to-face interaction generates epistolary momentum. Without a mediator--the communicatory medium--the reciprocal responsive process is faster, more intuitively immediate, and more easily corrected either through direct questioning, or by observing the speaker's face and body language. Writers are stimulated by receiving a letter to respond, either on paper, or face-to-face. If the response is delayed for some reason or other, or even interrupted, spontaneity evaporates and response becomes harder and harder. Thus Harriet Martineau, in a letter to William Ware, says: "Now, don't put off writing but go straight to your desk before you fold up this & write me an answer." an appropriate reminder for a correspondent many miles distant. Anna Jameson, it might be recalled, put aside a letter she had been writing to Ottilie von Goethe when she finally received some letters from her. The subject matter of Jameson's abandoned letter would not likely have been inappropriate given the temporal gap at the best of times in their overseas communication. Jameson's gesture reflects her responsiveness
to the immediate stimulus of von Goethe's letters; her written response is shaped by her "reading" of them.

One final typographical device remains to be considered, a device seldom reproduced in the publication of epistolary texts. That is the use of a caret to indicate an insertion into the text of the words appearing slightly above the line. It is worth noting because its use suggests that a text corrected by the addition of words to clarify meaning or amend grammar cannot be considered entirely spontaneous. Insertions signal that the writer is concerned about self-presentation on a social level, for it is uncourteous to send a text whose meaning might be difficult to interpret. On a relational level, carelessness demonstrates a lack of concern for the recipient; in the presentation of the self, mistakes reflect the limitations of the writer's literary abilities and education. On the other hand, obtrusive signs of self-consciousness about writing work against spontaneity, the indicator of sincerity. The insertion, then, must surely send conflicting signals.

The resolution of this conundrum lies in recognizing the nature of the dual presentation of the self the epistolary body reveals. Many letters close with apology for the haste in which the text was composed and written. The evidence of such haste is often visible in the repetition of words ("you you") or the omission of articles, pronouns, and verb parts. The text, in such a case, has clearly not been re-read and corrected. Yet the farewell of a letter written by Anna Jameson to Lady Byron, while expressing anxiety about self-presentation due to haste, also shows an insertion: "This
is but a hurried scribble dear Lady Byron - I had much more to say - to tell you - but must stop -". The insertion would seem to indicate a re-reading of the text, yet the omission of the personal pronoun in "[I] must stop"--acceptable perhaps in twentieth-century letter writing but less so in the nineteenth--indicates that the text has probably not been re-read, an indicator congruent with the apology for the "hurried scribble." As the round-bracketed addendum shows a concern for self-presentation, so the insertion reveals the presence of a writing "superego", an awareness of, or response to, the medium in which communication is taking place. Of course, readers cannot tell with certainty whether a correction has been made while the writing was in progress, or whether it has been made on re-reading. But from their own experience as writers, they can recognize whether this signal is congruent with the text’s other messages. Many insertions into a letter often indicate a mind not focussed on its task, a mind disturbed perhaps by commotion in the "public" space of writing, or distracted by illness, worry, or other emotions. Thus the insertion, too, signifies on multiple levels.

The physical person is presented to the recipient in correspondence through the physical appearance of the epistolary text. In life, a person’s clothing, posture, gestures, and voice all influence the other’s responses. In a letter, the body of the self and the body of the text are juxtaposed with the potential, as in conversation, of emitting contradictory or conflicting signals. Sincerity and unselfconsciousness are transmitted by congruency. Likewise, the epistolary "body", as a physical object,
influences the recipient’s response and affects the interpretation of the text. Appearance, body language, and voice are conveyed in the epistolary text through the medium--paper and ink, the orthography, and the typography. A writing "superego" attempts to minimize potential misunderstandings by indicating an awareness of the interactional medium and its conventions. Unfortunately, much of the physicality of the epistolary body is lost in reproduction and representation. Mimesis is, after all, merely mimetic. With the loss of the text’s physical body goes recognition, a response to physical stimuli and an essential part of response in the reading process. A living body, "breathing through the post office," becomes instead an artifact, a moribund object valued for what it says about, rather than what it says.
Notes

1. Mary Favret in *Romantic Correspondence* draws on a pictorial representation of a letter to give a new "reading" to epistolary works written by women in the late eighteenth century. Beginning with David's *The Death of Marat*, she comments: "I draw attention to this image in order to stress the value of the letter not as a literary vehicle--the epistolary form--but as a figure from everyday life. Furthermore, I want to suggest that the historical, material role of the letter in the late eighteenth century was every bit as forceful in the art and literature of the period as was the formal epistolary tradition" (1). Hence, she asks her reader to "read in this piece of revolutionary propaganda [The Death of Marat], the popular epistle made explicitly political" (4).


3. Harriet Martineau to William Ware, January 25, [1839], MS Eng 244, Boston Public Library.

4. Elizabeth Barrett to Mary Russell Mitford, October 27-28, 1842, #191, 2:60.

5. #191, 2:59.


7. Harriet Martineau to Mr. Macmillan, August 24, 1869, Add 55253, Macmillan General Correspondence, British Library, London. Although I have read hundreds of Martineau’s letters, I could discern no difference in this letter from her usual hand. It appears to me that Martineau was invoking this aspect of recognition for her own purposes.

8. Harriet Grote to Harriet Martineau, April 19, 1875, Martineau Papers, (419), University of Birmingham Library.

9. Anna Jameson to Lady Byron, [March 4 1843], Byron/Lovelace Papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford University.

10. Harriet Martineau to Fanny Wedgwood, October 27, 1839, *Harriet Martineau’s Letters to Fanny Wedgwood*, ed. Elisabeth Sanders Arbuckle, #9, 18. All references to the Martineau/Wedgwood correspondence will be to this edition.

11. Anna Jameson to Bessie Parkes, [March 12, 1855], BRP VI (8), Girton College Library, Cambridge.

13. Harriet Martineau to Mr. Lucas, January 27, 1862, MS Eng Lett d.397, Bradbury & Evans Papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford University.

14. Harriet Martineau to Mr. Evans, September 13, 1860, Ms Eng Lett d.397, Bradbury & Evans Papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford University. The following letter, dated September 18, 1860, is in the same collection.

15. Lady Byron to Anna Jameson, [?1849]. Byron/Lovelace Papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford University.


17. Elizabeth Barrett to Mary Russell Mitford, September 27 [-28], 1842, #179, 2:36.

18. Barrett's use of "once upon a day" to begin her account of Septimus's accident is also noteworthy. George Dillon, in Rhetoric as Social Imagination: Explorations in the Interpersonal Function of Language observes: "Connotations and figurative properties send one off in directions not explicitly recognized on the plane of logical argument" (116), and gives as examples of "figuration", "cliche, analogy, fable." He continues, "figurative language is a force in the text not always subordinated to the general argument or nominal aesthetic intent. The potentially subversive, alogical force of figuration has been illustrated principally in relation to canonical texts of high culture, but the claim is that all writing is subject to the play of these forces" (116); and concludes: "Rather than simply underlining and concretizing the abstract line of argument, the figurative language can ramify and exfoliate into a subtext" (118).


23. Harriet Hosmer to Anna Jameson, August 10 [?1848 or 1849], Erskine.

24. Elizabeth Cleghorn to Elizabeth Gaskell, [July 17, 1838], #9, 16.

25. Mary Howitt to W.H. Prideaux, [April 24, 1845], MS Eng 328, Boston Public Library.

26. Elizabeth Gaskell to F.J. Furnivall, July 18, [1853], ADD 43798 Miscellaneous, British Library, London. Published: #164, 240; the location identifier is given as "Beechwood / near Southampton / July 18."

27. Fanny Kemble to George Combe, November 17, [1837], MS 7241, 7242. National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh. Note that Kemble's use of "yourself" is either an avoidance ritual (avoiding the direct address of "you"), or yet another example of carelessness, an omission of "you" in the phrase "you yourself". Her use might also be a Celtic form.


29. Elizabeth Barrett to Mary Russell Mitford, October 13, 1842, #184, 2:45.

30. Elizabeth Barrett to Mary Russell Mitford, August 30, 1842, #174, 2:24.

31. Harriet Martineau to William Lloyd Garrison, October 23, 1850, MS A. 1.2 v.19 p. 92, Boston Public Library. The Liberator was Garrison's Abolitionist journal edited by Maria Weston Chapman; the Standard was a British journal.

32. Cf. R.S. Perinbanayagam, Discursive Acts (N.Y.: Aldine de Gruyter, 1991). Perinbanayagam explains in the preface his "notion of discourse as an interactional act capable of containing multiple significations, all of them delineating a self and an other in varying forms of dialogues and relationships" (xi). In his text he notes: "The selection and use of signs and their publication demand minute and subtle apprehension not only of the effects of the different signs but of the combined effects of the various signs" (28; emphasis on "publication" mine).

33. Cf. George Dillon, Rhetoric as Social Imagination (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1986). Dillon quotes Walker Gibson: "'A style is not simply a response to a particular kind of subject-matter, nor is it entirely a matter of the writer's situation and his presumed audience. It is partly a matter of sheer individual will, a desire for a particular kind of self-definition no matter what the circumstances'" (14); Dillon points out that "traditional rhetorical analysis views situations as constraints on a writer's
choices" (116); and conjectures: "Indeed, we might reverse the priority in these cases and say that the style determines the situation; it is because the style is what it is that we know the writer conceives of the situation as he does" (115). As all three perspectives are relevant here, I argue that "constrain" means merely "defines the limits of" and is subject to external and internal factors concurrently.

34. Elizabeth Barrett Browning to Elizabeth Gaskell, October 7, [?1853], Eng MS 730, John Rylands Library, University of Manchester. There is no published letter from Elizabeth Gaskell to Elizabeth Barrett Browning in this time period.

35. Erving Goffman notes in Frame Analysis (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1974): "As suggested earlier, whenever an individual participates in an episode of activity, a distinction will be drawn between what is called the person, individual, or player, namely, he who participates, and the particular role, capacity, or function he realizes during that participation. And a connection between these two elements will be understood. In short, there will be a person-role formula" (269).


38. Anna Jameson to Lady Byron [?1844], Byron/Lovelace Papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford University.

39. Anna Maria Hall to Mr. Swain, n.d., MS F 091 S24, Manchester Central Library.

40. Fanny Kemble to George Combe, [January] 30 [1852], MS 7324, 7325, 7326, Combe Papers, National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh. The location identifier is "Sheffield / Friday the 30th." Also indicative of Kemble's emotional state is the deterioration of her handwriting as the letter progresses. "Assault" is also slightly conjectural.

41. I am indebted to R.S. Perinbanayagam, Discursive Acts, 35-40, for my discussion of phonological semiosis. The designators used for the four prosodic elements are D.C. Brazil's.

43. Harriet Martineau to William Ware, April 6, 1837, MS Eng 244, Boston Public Library.

44. Anna Jameson to Lady Byron, [November 11 1842], Byron/Lovelace Papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford University.
Chapter 4

The Internal Structure of the Epistolary Body

Compared to the physicality of the epistolary body, the structure of the letter’s textual "body" might appear to be entirely an internal--skeletal--matter. And in one sense, it is. Yet, once again, it is helpful to identify the external and internal factors of the responsive process to see their influence on the choice and disposition of topics in the letter’s body. External factors, according to my definition, are the physical features of the communicatory medium and the social conventions governing the correspondents’ interaction. The internal factors are the participants’ relations and their communication in a single event, what Goffman terms a "bound interaction." As has been shown, the medium defines the boundaries of the communication by shaping the discourse, a shaping which often signifies on multiple levels; social conventions govern the writer’s and the reader’s responsiveness. The range of topics available to interactants, and the extent to which they can be discussed are also influenced by the external factors. As Goffman noted in his discussion about boundaries, participants "observe a limit to involvement in any one message of the encounter." The choice of topics and their order in a letter are further influenced by the participants’ relational history; communication is constrained, on the one hand, by the writer’s desire to appear responsive to the other (requital), and, on the other, by the desire to elicit a response (recognition). In defining the limits on the range and choice of topics, what is not said is almost as important as what is said and how it is said. My discussion, therefore, will look first at what is not said, omissions determined principally by
external factors, before what is said as conveyed by the choice of topics in the letter’s body.

It can be difficult to discern what "should" not be talked about, simply because it rarely is talked about. But letters do occasionally provide evidence of the unspoken either by reference or by circumlocution, and in Victorian women’s letters two taboos can be inferred: treason and sex. The two general areas, of course, are not unrelated, the "body politic" signifying metaphorically and metonymically. On the social (public) level, treason connotes anarchic speech or acts that threaten the established political structure of the nation: on the relational level, treachery, a betrayal of one’s friends, or a covert desire to injure other people through malicious speech or behaviour. Gossip, it may be recalled, can be both anarchic and malicious. "Sex" covers a wide range of topics, from one’s own sexual desires, behaviour, and fantasies, to gender-specific parts of the body, to pornographic detail, to the sexual behaviour of others. Victorian women writers, in their letters, spoke circumspectly about their own bodies, particularly their reproductive functions, extended the same courtesy to other women’s bodies, never mentioned men’s bodies, and spoke discreetly, if at all, about sexual behaviour.

The censorship of all forms of journalism--writing "of the moment"--is extended from newspapers to letters in times of political turbulence. Mary Favret points out in her discussion of the letter and changing politics in the late eighteenth century: "The letter was an open, democratic form, predicated on a belief in negotiation between disparate and multitudinous voices. According to this fiction, the
letter became the most accessible, and consequently, the most public means of communication. The fiction generated by conservative forces, however, cast the letter as the tool of conspiracy, the epitome of deceit" (33). In England, Corresponding Societies were organized across the country for the purpose of discussing the Revolutionary concepts, "liberté, fraternité, and égalité". As a countermeasure, the Traitorous Correspondence Bill giving the government the authority to open and inspect private letters was passed in Parliament in 1793. But in Revolutionary France, the lettre de cachet was symbolic of the monarchy's tyranny, the letter being used as an instrument to silence subversive subjects through sudden imprisonment. So accustomed are we, however, to thinking of the familiar ("personal") letter as a conservative form, a means of communication whose purpose is to maintain the ties between individuals and a social group by upholding traditional values, that the anarchic force, and history, of the epistolary form may be forgotten. Nevertheless, traces of this force surface from time to time in Victorian women's letters, most overtly in their correspondence overseas.

As France, Germany, and Italy were all in states of turmoil during the Victorian period, it is not too surprising to find Anna Jameson writing to Ottilie von Goethe in 1859: "I have not yet received the account of the Stifter [Damenstifter=Hostels for Women] which you so kindly promised me; the papers have been perhaps lost by the way. We hear much of the disturbed state of the North of Italy; but on these matters I dare not write to you, lest I risk the loss of my letter."² Although Jameson makes no direct reference to German censorship, the semantic shift
from the first "lost" to the second "loss" implies the presence of a public authority capable of affecting their communication.

What is more surprising is a reference by Jameson to the same kind of authority governing epistolary communication in England, the Victorians tending to applaud their own efforts to embrace change through democratic rather than reactionary means. The new Post Office, established in 1840, as an institution was the very symbol of democratic communication. Yet Jameson writes to von Goethe, in 1849:

You are surprised in reading Macaulay, that we endured so long a tyranny under James the Second? We English do not like great sudden changes. And we had a terrible lesson in the civil wars, but when we could endure no longer we set about our work, quietly, resolutely, and successfully. We did not make a great riot, and talk and write and squabble, to end in nothing like you modern revolutionists. Our revolution was not an accident, but the act of a whole nation. I hope they will not stop my letter in the post office because of these sentiments. . . .

So although the new post office offered cheap and efficient service to virtually all citizens capable of writing a letter, it also had the power and authority to limit communication through censorship of the contents.

Letters from the early part of the century had a certain advantage for freedom of expression if they were not transmitted by institutional means or, conversely, if they were franked by a member of parliament. In a letter dated October 28, 1814, although Mitford clearly signals her reader, R.A. Davenport, that the information she is transmitting to him is private, she is not deterred from sharing her "treasonous" sentiments with him, her self-presentation in the letter as a whole indicating that she feels assured of a safe context. Her third paragraph opens: "Do not suspect me of
having forgotten your excellent arguments in favour of the Spaniards." After a slight
digression, she returns to his topic:

You are however quite right respecting our incendiary newspapers -
We can have no pretence to drive them into a certain evil to obtain an
uncertain good - for after all it is pretty clear to me that as far
as kings go they are not much worse off than their neighbours - there
is that magnanimous runaway the Regent of Portugal - & that delightful
Conscriptioner the Crown Prince of Sweden & that bewitching restorer of
Jesuits the Pope - to say nothing of certain Solomons nearer home who
want nothing but unlimited power to have conscriptions & Jesuits of their
own. Now that I have ventured so far on the road to Libel I will e'en dash
boldly in & give you an Epigram (my solitary sin in that line at least)
written on a visit which the Emperor Alexander & the King of Corsica
promised to the Marquis of Blandford [i.e. Duke of Wellington] at
Whiteships near Reading - after all they went to Blenheim instead.
But that does no harm to my Epigram - It is a libel I know - for Mr Perry
[editor of the Morning Post] took Counsel's opinion, so you must keep it
to yourself & pray pray do not tell the Attorney General or Mr Rivington.

The epigram, in which she accuses the Prince of being an "Adulterer, Spendthrift,
fiddler, knave & fool," follows.

Although Mitford carefully avoids naming the Duke of Wellington by the use
of epithets and a regional title, her "treasonous" sentiments against the crown in the
epigram are clear. So too is the linkage, or line of association, between newspapers,
libel, anarchy, and, by implication, the letter. Even more remarkable is Mitford's slide
from social to relational "treason": "Your lenity with regard to Mr. Wise does your
heart so much honour & is so unprecedented in a man of wit that it made me half
ashamed of my illnatured carelessness in propagating it - but Sir W. Elford says he is
really the greatest fool in the world." The intervening sentence between the epigram
and the one just quoted provides the link between libel and shame, and reflects
Mitford's anxiety about self-presentation: "Admire I beseech you the ingenuity with which I have first made you believe that my Epigram is worth reading by talking so much about it & then contrived not to be found guilty of stupidity as well as vanity by writing it in an illegible hand -. As the farewell indicates no anxiety about self-presentation, the anxiety expressed immediately following the epigram relates more directly to the "unauthorized" nature of her subject matter than it does to her self-presentation.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning's comment about Aurora Leigh, made in response to a letter from her sisters, is indicative of the "authorized" silence surrounding women's bodies. She writes: "No religion, no politics, no spirits!! add 'no bodies' - and you shut out my poor poem from most subjects in heaven and earth. Well - you may like some things in it - and that's all I can hope." Yet nine years earlier, her circumlocution about her own body's reproductive capacities is equally as conventional as her sisters' reluctance to speak of the female body at all. In a letter to Mary Russell Mitford, she comments on her "ill-health":

So ill I have been, - not from the old causes nor in the old way - (my chest indeed has made itself forgotten lately, the air of Italy agrees so well with its requirements) but from a new cause, & in a way you will guess when I tell you that I had treated myself improperly for a condition of which I was unaware and brought on a premature conclusion as might, I suppose, be expected. Then, as it was of five months date, of course the trial to the constitution was great.6

Even to her intimate friend of more than ten-year's standing, Barrett Browning cannot use the words, "miscarriage", or "pregnancy" although her meaning is clear. No
more could she a year later, in a letter explaining her current "ill-health", and she even
enjoins Mitford to silence on the subject:

The end of all is, that at any rate there must be a great mistake in the
time. but that lately I too have begun to doubt a little whether the fact
may not exist - Only, pray don't let this be talked of - You will understand
how I have been in a fuss, & involved in questions from every side, which
there has been no answering. Say as few words as you can when you write
- I could not a second time refuse to satisfy your affectionate anxiety - &
you must be sure that I shall always tell you among the very first, whenever
I have something to say important to my own life or happiness. Of course, it
is natural to be rather anxious - one is not more nor less a woman.™

Barrett Browning's reluctance to name her body's condition was not, I think,
evidence of prudery or shame about the body, but an avoidance of a topic the most
taboo of all: women's sexual desire. A comment made to her sisters in a letter shortly
after her marriage suggests the connection between women's reproductive organs and
functions, sexual desire, and illicit conduct: "We heap up the pine wood - that is, he
[Robert] does - he is so afraid of my suffering: indeed I am afraid too: for if I were to
be ill after all, I feel I should deserve to be stoned for having married."™ Stoning, of
course, was a biblical punishment meted out to women for yielding to their sexual
desires. It is not clear to me, however, whether Barrett Browning is using "ill" to refer
to her chronic lung disease, or to a possible pregnancy; in fact, she may have been
allowing both implications to inhere. Even Victorian readers could be uncertain about
the precise meaning to be conveyed by circumlocution, as a postscript in Fanny
Kemble's letter to her cousin, Cecilia Siddons Combe reveals: "Do I understand you
rightly that you are a Mama? if so, I wish you joy of that."™
In referring to other women’s physicality, women letter writers used French words to signify pregnancy, delivery, and miscarriage, an interesting parallel with the use of the phrase "entre nous" to signal private space, indicative of the "risque" nature of both. Thus Anna Jameson, in reporting to Ottilie von Goethe that the Queen is pregnant, uses enceinte: "She is very happy with her husband and they say is enceinte, but it is not formally announced." And in speaking of her sister’s delivery, accouchement: "My poor sister Louisa has had a frightful illness - her accouchement was most unfortunate. Her infant, a most lovely boy, came into the world dead." In explaining to David Masson why she has not responded to his letter earlier, Harriet Grote gives as one of her reasons her niece’s miscarriage: "and the illness of my niece Mrs Lewin, who has been here nearly 3 weeks & still keeps her bed. has added much to my daily duties - she has had a "faussecouche" in fact - and my house has been turned into a hospital."

Social conventions, of course, governed the way in which the female body and sexual desire could be talked about, but they did not prevent communication on a taboo subject altogether, even between men and women. In 1832, as a part of her series on political economy, Harriet Martineau tackled the tricky questions of overpopulation and the Malthusian doctrine, a remarkably daring subject for a woman—a single woman at that—a feat for which the Quarterly Review soundly and maliciously chastized her. Some of the information for her series was supplied by the Radical, Francis Place, who also read and commented on her MSS. Despite the taboo nature of the subject, he was not deterred from taking her to task about her suggested remedy,
late marriages. In his letter to her on the subject of "Redundant Population," Place poses a rhetorical question as the foundation of his argument: "Can or will the people refrain from producing children in such numbers as must insure a continuance of their crimes and their miseries, and if they can will they?" and proceeds to answer it: "I answer not by those [means] suggested by you and others - not by delayed marriages. It is utterly useless to preach abstinence, it is not and cannot be generally practiced. Chastity and late marriages are as much opposed as any two things can be, as opposite as black and white."

In his argument, he cites the absence of information available to women, as an obstacle to Martineau's understanding of the problem: "You can form nothing like a current opinion of these evils, no respectable woman can do so, since all they can ever have on which to form opinions are a few innuendos and occasional displays of neglect and barbarity." A long discussion concluding with a commendation of early marriages follows. In the second half of his argument, he refers to additional evidence, Robert Dale Owens's book on the advisability of young women bearing children, and offers it to Martineau: "You have done so much that I must suppose you are desirous that nothing relating to population should be concealed from you, and I have therefore determined to send you Mr. Owens Book." The unconventional nature of his gift to a "respectable" woman is acknowledged in the letter's farewell, and Martineau is given the option of no response: "You will not I am sure mistake my intentions and you can keep the book or burn it or give it to Mr. Fox - You need not notice it in any way to me unless you please."
Nor was Mary Russell Mitford silenced by a letter from her eccentric and erratic friend, the artist B.R. Haydon, for she showed his letter to T.N. Talfourd despite the nature of the charge Haydon had made or implied. It would appear that Haydon's jealousy of another artist, Mr. Lucas, for whom Mitford had agreed to sit, had got the better of him. Mitford opens: "I send the enclosed letters from very different motives - I shall despatch Mr Haydon's first - is it not very insulting? And is not the insult very uncalled for?" A lengthy description of Haydon's possible motives, and her defence, follows. The letter continues:

But to speak as he does of my sex (or rather of me - for woman in that letter stands for myself it is aimed at me individually) is a most gross injustice - I have not, nor ever had, nor most surely ever shall have such a friend as he describes - If there is one thing above another necessary to me in a friend it is purity & delicacy - look at Mr Harness look at Mr Crowther - look at Mr Russell - look in your own looking glass - & you will see men as pure in mind & in conduct as my own beloved Miss James [. . . ] I cannot tell you how much this attack from an old friend has vexed me - I shall not answer it - How could I! Still less shall I shew it to my father - & I only send it to you that if he speaks of my silence you may know that I am not quite the despicable wretch he is pleased to suppose - Good God that that sort of fault could be imputed to me by any human being! His own mind must be impure -----

Haydon's sexual innuendos prevent Mitford from responding directly to him; only silence can signify innocence. Yet she cannot leave his letter, or his charges against her, unanswered, for Haydon in his pique might either inadvertently or maliciously damage her reputation. Even her refusal to answer his letter could be interpreted as a slur against her character. But by showing Talfourd the letter, she can rely on him to recognize her predicament and, discreetly and effectively, to counter and silence Haydon's remarks and innuendos.
Mitford was not demonstrating undue maidenly modesty in requiring "delicacy" in her male friends; she was merely being prudent. No woman could afford her reputation to be the slightest bit sexually tainted or tarnished. For women who had already put themselves at risk by being artists, musicians, and writers, not to mention actresses, that is, by playing a public role rather than a purely domestic one, the need for prudence was even greater. Yet life being what it is with its illicit loves and pregnancies, these women writers' letters display a fascinating balance between prudence, reticence, or silence on the one hand, and friendship, fidelity, and an active sympathy on the other, a curious counterpoint to such works as Aurora Leigh, Jane Eyre, and Ruth. And it is in the epistolary balancing act, that we can see clearly the link between the two taboo areas, treason (treachery) and sex.

Several years after Anna Jameson became friends with Ottilie von Goethe, the widowed daughter-in-law of the great poet, von Goethe had a brief love affair with Charles Sterling. Late in 1834, she left her home in Weimar and went to Vienna to await the birth of her illegitimate child. Sybille Mertens and Anna Jameson went with her, the two friends helping von Goethe to face her predicament, the former by supplying money, and the latter, her sound practicality. Jameson made the arrangements for the care of the child and persuaded von Goethe to return to Weimar. It was not the first time Jameson had become embroiled in von Goethe's precipitate love affairs, nor was it to be the last. Yet despite their intimacy, and Jameson's familiarity and participation in person and correspondence in von Goethe's everyday life, in her letters she is so circumspect that it is difficult, for both the external and
even the internal reader, to reconstruct the events. In a letter with a location identifier of "Dresden, Tuesday," Jameson writes: "Have just had your few lines from Leipsig - . . . and a hint at some 'unglück' unexpected which has befallen you? . . . Do you no longer wish for me? - With regard to Vienna, if the misfortune you speak of has anything to do with that arrangement, tell me for God's sake. I may have the means of doing good, of repairing any mischief. . . ."  Though dated by Needler to 1833, it would appear that it is of either 1834, 1835, or even 1836.

Jameson stayed in Vienna after von Goethe had returned home, sending reports to von Goethe of the arrangements she was making for the child, and asking for her consent to various financial transactions. In one such letter, dated "Sat. July 11."

Jameson cautions von Goethe about the contents: "I beg of you, dearest Ottilie, for God's sake to be careful of your letters and not leave them lying about. It would be better to destroy all mine as soon as you have considered the contents. - pray do -."

Jameson's caution was well-founded, for both women had taken great risks, the former in supporting her friend, and the latter by her actions. Jameson's letters of this period reveal in their advice how perilous von Goethe's position was despite her famous name and her merits and abilities:

While by your conduct you have shewn that you despise opinion, do not brave it. For God's sake do not enter into any impotent and degrading competition with Society. You have broken thro' its severe laws; take the consequences with gentleness and dignity, and you may keep your place [. . .] Those of your friends who meet you with kindness, treat with kindness, - they deserve it; and those who look coldly on you, do not court nor yet defy."
And in another letter: "You must begin now, and go on by small gradual steps. The first is to conquer back opinion and not provoke the self-interest or the malignity of others to stab you publicly. . . ."  

The kind of peril for Jameson, a woman estranged from her husband and dependent on her pen for her own sustenance as well as that of her unmarried sisters and her aging parents, is illuminated by a letter written by Harriet Grote, the wife of a man of means, to Charles Sumner. Grote is referring to her connection with her protégée. Fanny Elssler, a dancer who had also had an illegitimate child:

I claim, for minds of a higher order, but which I hold also to be strictly bound by an enlightened sense of virtue, the privilege of indulging their imagination and their feelings towards persons out of the pale of habitual intercourse, should occasion arise which may seem to justify it - Now tho' nothing can sound more reasonable than this, it is mightily difficult to procure for oneself this harmless privilege, without running the gauntlet of all the dirty comments of hard minded rich & genteel folks - I have been most industriously reviled for patronizing F.E. here, but as I find people can't do without me, I hope to live down their animadversions, and to do her service and guide her steps as long as circes shall afford me the oppy - I was assured last season that I should infallibly be cut &c if I did not 'drop my liason'. & so forth - I replied 'so be it', & stuck to it. I have never been in such vogue however, as since last Spring [. . .] Every body knows of my connexion with F., and yet every one whom I at all value pays me more court than ever -

Jameson's example of fidelity to von Goethe may have inspired Harriet Grote. For Jameson, it was a matter of principle, as she explained in a letter to another friend:

"Am I then here to scribble and speak pretty words about women, and then, if I see a woman perishing at my feet morally and physically, not stretch out a hand to save a soul alive? And this for fear of shadows, of what the Madame K_____s of this world
might say of me? . . . Never believe I can confound the virtue I honour with profligacy, levity, and folly."

The "malignity of others"--their treachery--is, nevertheless, a constant peril, particularly to those who have rendered themselves vulnerable. And it is here that the external and internal factors (social and relational), as well as the two taboo subject areas, converge in letters. In her response to a letter from von Goethe, Jameson writes:

I answered also your last letter. I told you that I had not betrayed your secret to the Css. Zichy, - how could you suspect me? against all my principles, against all feelings of delicacy, to her - honour, to you. - how could you suspect I would do so? How I came to know that she knew all, and why I did not tell you that you were betrayed. - I explained all this to you."

"Delicacy" (reticence about sexuality) and "honour" (fidelity) delineate the social and relational levels respectively. Six years later, in writing about her intimate friendship with Lady Byron, Jameson says: "I often talk to her of you, and when some time has elapsed without my hearing from you, she asks with anxiety: 'How is Ottilie? Have you heard from her?'. as she did the other day. Of your private history I believe she has heard something; but having more delicacy and discretion than our friend Mrs [Sarah] Austin, she never alludes to it even to me." Lady Byron might well have heard, for her cousin, Robert Noel, was an intimate friend of Jameson and von Goethe.

Jameson, however, had already displayed her "honour" to both her friends in the description of her present time of writing to von Goethe two months earlier:

If I should say to you at this moment I am writing in the most lovely scene, that nothing can be more beautiful than the cloudless sky, the opening spring, the budding green, the waving trees of the woods, the song of the birds; that in the midst of all this my spirits are crushed by the spectacle of misery close at my side. . . . it would be the reality,
and yet I cannot explain it. . . 23

The unexplainable "reality" was that Jameson was staying with Elizabeth Medora Leigh, the child of Lord Byron and his half-sister Augusta Leigh, and the one-time lover of her sister's husband. Lady Byron had brought the destitute woman to England two years earlier: Medora, however, had proven to be extremely difficult, so Jameson was making the necessary preparations for her and her child to return to France. In her response to von Goethe, Jameson manages to be simultaneously sincere, honest, honourable, and delicate. The silence and circumlocution imposed on the two taboo subject areas by both delicacy and honour, however, make interpretation difficult for external readers and perhaps for internal. An erroneous response to "absence" may be the result.

Excluding the two taboo subject areas, the choice of topics available for letters between correspondents is determined by the participants' relational history. As has already been noted, letters in a business context tend to focus on a single topic. But the greater the intimacy between the interactants, the larger the number of topics grows. Nevertheless, the contextual constraints impose a limit both to the number of topics introduced and the extent to which the additional topics can be developed. In the presentation of the epistolary body's text, the additional topics tend to be clustered together, following the main business. In a business interaction, the number of topics introduced and the specifically epistolary elements all indicate the participants' intimacy. Therefore, even in a business letter the development of the participants' social relation can be studied.
Perhaps unexpectedly, letters written in a context where friendship is more overt (or expected) can also be seen as business letters by focussing on the number of topics and their development. That is, a relational history of friendship, even between Victorian women, does not necessarily preclude business. A letter written by Harriet Grote to her close friend, Anna Jameson, shows a business relation is established in the opening sentence that is maintained by the disposition of the topics and their development in the body. The opening sentence establishing the context is brief and focussed: "I return your proofs, with such comments, pertinent and impertinent, as my judgment suggested." The location identifier, at the bottom of the letter, shows that Grote attended promptly to Jameson’s request: "8 Feb. 3 p.m. 3 hours after receiving yours." The second sentence continues the topic dictated by the occasion by responding to a query: "I have no idea where to 'throw a cast' to fish up any facts about your historical worthies." Several sentences with suggestions about searching for biographical information follow. With no paragraph break, Grote then switches to another topic, their mutual friend Fanny Elssler, but she confines her remarks to two brief sentences. The weather and its effect on her social activities follow in two more short sentences. Grote concludes her letter by switching back to the general occasion, "I regret you are so overshadowed by your work," and to the effect Jameson’s preoccupation, and her own relative seclusion because of the weather, will have on a future meeting. Occupying a paragraph to itself, between the body and the farewell, is a brief sentence: "Opera opens 4 Mar.". Jameson sometimes, but not always, accompanied Grote as her guest to the opera: Grote therefore uses a paragraph break
for her brief directive in lieu of the more peremptory underlining so as not to appear presumptuous. Half the epistolary body’s text is devoted to business: in the remainder, two general topics are introduced: news of a particularly significant friend, and a future face-to-face interaction. Thus the letter balances a business interaction with a friendship relational history.

What may also be seen in this letter is how the "occasion" mirrors the participants’ relational history as well as the interactional context. The occasion for Grote’s letter is the return of Jameson’s proof-sheets. Jameson had obviously asked Grote for editing and proof-reading services—in a hurry—before a manuscript went to press. Although Jameson earned her living as a professional writer, Grote did not: nevertheless, Grote did write anonymous articles for journals and numerous letters to various papers, as well as publishing several books later on in her own name. The occasion reflects the participants in their roles as authors: therefore the opening sentence establishes a context appropriate for business. Grote’s phrase, "pertinent and impertinent," points to their relational history, a friendship secure enough to allow a bit of gentle humour, even in a business context. Grote’s style is also visible in her phrase, a style combining linguistic delight and facility with a rather wryly detached mode of self-presentation, indicative perhaps of an underlying lack of self-confidence.

According to the rhetoricians, the exordium’s function is to announce the purpose for the discourse (the occasion), and to prepare the audience favourably. As part of that preparation, the speaker may elicit response on an ethical or emotional basis. The exordium, as a construct, covers "occasion" and "relational history", but
tends to subsume "interactional context" under "occasion". Because the epistolary exordium is very often compressed into the opening sentence of the epistolary body, it is helpful to distinguish its functions separately. That is, the type of interaction--business, "social", friendship (or even enmity)--is not separated from the immediate reason (occasion) for writing the letter. Yet without separating the three, the interactional context, the occasion, and the relational history, the way in which the exordium is constructed to achieve its purposes on these three levels may be overlooked and complex human relationships may be inappropriately simplified.

Expanded exordiums have already been discussed in Harriet Grote's letter to Lady Holland, and Barrett Browning's letter about the picnic to Mary Russell Mitford, where the relational history and the epistolary occasion in a friendship interactional context were separated (Chapter 2).

An unusual letter written by Harriet Grote to Lord Overstone highlights the occasion, the participants' relational history, and the interactional event, by separating them so as to play with the conventions. In doing so, Grote also makes Goffman's "person-role formula" clearly visible. The letter opens: "(Formal) / Madame regrets that she found no opportunity of thanking Lord Overstone, on Thursday evg last, for his obliging contribution to the Female Artist Society, in which she takes a warm interest." Grote uses an epistolary form which might be described as a "social business" form. The salutation and subscription are abolished, doing away with any relational history; in their place, the interactants' social roles are emphasized by the use of gendered role markers, the writer, by using the third person, thereby also
becoming an object. The ritual opening is usually "name + presents his/her compliments": Grote has somewhat modified the convention by truncating her own name and by deleting the formula. The addressee's name may either follow directly after the formula, "to name", or be embedded further on in the opening sentence. As befits a business context, the opening sentence is concisely focussed, and a single topic is chosen: therefore, letters written in this form tend to be brief and, lacking a relational history, they close with no ritual marker. In using this form, Grote identifies herself not only as a social being, but also as a person with a particular role, an officer of the Female Artist Society who, in that capacity, is thanking a benefactor. Nevertheless, she betrays her relational history with her addressee in the boldness of her closing sentence: "But, if his Lordp would lay out a small sum in buying a picture, at the next exhibn. wh will take place, at Lord Wards gallery, in April 1858, it will encourage the ladies in their exertions to sustain the society by their own merits and labour." Grote manages to thank Lord Overstone for his "obliging contribution," while at the same time chastizing him (or brow-beating him by her directive) for not actually buying a picture. Her frequent use of abbreviations also betrays the playful use of the formal style.

The second half of her letter opens: "(Familiar) / I was deeply interested in all that fell from you, dear Lord O, on Thursday evg, in relation to the financial condition of the country - I never heard you talk better, or more lucidly." Here Grote uses a salutation but embeds it to emphasize their friendship. The occasion, nevertheless, is temporally exactly the same as in the previous opening sentence, "Thursday evening".
Thus we can reconstruct the face-to-face interactional event by suggesting that first Lord Overstone and the Grote's met at the gallery, and then returned to the Grote's home, or perhaps Lord Overstone had visited with the Grote's and had made a donation to the Society then. The choice of topics in the letter as a whole pertain to the occasion, but within that constraint, they are defined by the participants' relational history. The paragraph continues with her comments about his (under-appreciated) qualities as a "most farsighted of legislators." The second paragraph opens with commentary about her self-presentation and their relational history: "I do not ask you to forgive the presumption of this expression of my admiration and esteem, dear old friend. ^since^ I cannot offend you, coming as it does strait from my heart & understanding." The farewell, nevertheless, expresses some self-consciousness about self-presentation, and rebalances the "dear old friend" with a subscription symmetrical with the salutation: "& now, having relieved myself of a full heart, I beg to remain, as ever, dear Lord O., yr faithful servant / H. Grote."

But the letter is still not finished! A postscript, as a friendly overflow, rebalances the letter: the scale is tipped again towards a very friendly "private" relational context, and thereby returns to the opening, "public" portion by equalizing extremes. The postscript, in its romp, highlights through mimicry the dialogical aspect of epistolary discourse:

P.S. How you w'd have been amused, had you heard George [Grote], grumbling out of his pillow, after we retired to rest, about the 'impropriety of our having all those great men to dine.'
H. Well, I think you had a very pleasant dinner, after all?
G. Yes - they are, all, most sensible & amiable men - but somehow, I do like 'Lords'!
what incorrigible people one meets with in one's progress throu' life! eh. milor?

H.G.

In letters of condolence, and in letters of introduction, the occasion overlays the interactional context. That is, a "private" interactional context (of friendship) and a "public" (social) business context come together. As a result, the narrow focus on the addressee and the third person, the subject of the letter and the occasion for interaction, limits the choice of topics. For a letter of condolence, the writer may choose from a range of topics such as the circumstances of the death, the survivor's feelings, the writer's relational history with the deceased, and the solace of religion. The choice of those topics and their development will reflect the relational history of the writer and the addressee. In a letter of introduction, the writer can choose from a similar range of topics: the circumstances bringing the subject and addressee together, the character and attributes of the subject of the letter, the writer's relational history with the subject, and the possible benefit to the addressee of the subject's acquaintance. As in a letter of condolence, the choice and development of the topics reflect the interactants' relational history. Both types of letters are usually relatively short, no one topic being extensively developed.

The Rev. William Ware received a letter introducing the actor, William Macready from Harriet Martineau which provides not only a clear example of the range and disposition of the topics in a letter of introduction, but also shows her approach to a rather difficult task. The opening sentence is concise and focussed as befits a "business" letter: "If you are a Minister, you are also a lover of Art. and
therefore I introduce one great Actor to you."26 The boldness of her syllogism reflects an anxiety she explains in her fourth sentence: "In contemplating the prejudice of your countrymen against the stage & actors . . .". The second sentence describes her relational history with the subject: "He is also a dear friend of mine." Thus Martineau, in her exordium, appeals to Ware first on a moral basis, and secondly on an emotional level. The third sentence describes Macready: "If this letter brings you acquainted with him as to show you how scholar-like and gentlemanly he is, how purely and heroically good, and how deeply religious, you will thank me for sending it." Ware will benefit by his acquaintance with Macready because he embodies valued qualities and, by inference, similar to Ware's own. Martineau's insertion, however, slightly tempers her rather extravagant claims by suggesting that these qualities in Macready may not be immediately apparent. The continuation of the fourth sentence ("In contemplating") elaborates on the private aspect of Macready's character: "I have often thought how it would astonish them to know what I know of this very man, of his religious training of his children, of his inability to dispense with his closet hour of retirement at night, as his best refreshment in coming home from the Theatre too weary to speak." The privacy is amplified by the fifth sentence's demarcation of private space: "This is not for all ears; but your's & your brother's are worthy of it."

The second paragraph comes back to the occasion by asking directly, in a query, whether Ware will introduce Macready at Cambridge (near Boston). A third paragraph explains why Martineau cannot do more herself for him, and appeals to Ware, once again, on an emotional and moral basis: "I would do more in this way
myself; but that the fatigue [her first illness] compels me to devolve it upon another. and that I do not know precisely how I stand with some of your wise men on account of my Abolition and other sins." The letter’s farewell, which follows, expresses the high "comfort level" of their relational history, and the interaction, and gracefully acknowledges the interaction’s termination: "Not knowing when you will get this, I merely say good bye and God bless you!" Martineau’s letter shows how despite the constraints on the choice of topics imposed by the occasion, their skilful deployment and an elegant symmetry can result in a well-written, hence persuasive, letter.

A striking contrast is provided by a second letter written on the same day, this time introducing Macready to another of Martineau’s American friends, Charles Sumner. Yet even though the letters sound very different, the same range of topics and use of the appeals appears. The letter opens: "I do not know whether you are acquainted with my friend Macready, but, if not, I am sure you would wish to be. I commend him to your kindest offices." As in the first letter, the single topic of the opening sentence focusses on business. but Martineau reverses her appeals, choosing first the emotional before the moral (the duties of friendship). The following four sentences develop the topics of the value and benefit of Macready’s acquaintance and his attributes: "He is one of our first men in every way. In scholarship, in [torn] in politics (for he is a Republican) and in virtue, public and private, a perfect hero. His friends cannot speak of him without enthusiasm. I feel as if he had even a mission to perform among you in showing you what is the glory and beauty of the Drama. &
what are its humanizing influences over men and society." No word is said about his religion, an attribute apparently of less interest to Sumner than his politics.

In the second paragraph, as in the first letter, Martineau poses a query directly requesting his assistance in introducing Macready: "Will you introduce him, where you think he will be duly valued; and where you are sure I should like to present a representative of my remembrance?" The letter closes with reminders of her affection, another emotional appeal but one which does not mention her invalid condition or her ambivalent stature in America. This letter, however, has been written by an amanuensis: the appeal for pity, therefore, is indirectly conveyed rather than directly stated as it had been in the letter to Ware.

A friendship context, as has been noted, is frequently indicated by the number of topics introduced in a letter. Yet even in these letters the range of topics is constrained not simply by the external factors, but also by the participants' relational history. Not all topics are of equal interest to participants, nor are all opinions held alike. Some topics may be avoided altogether as too hotly contested, but their absence may go unremarked by an external reader. "First" letters between participants are particularly rewarding to study because they introduce the general topics perceived to be of mutual and particular interest, topics which will frequently be the basis for the correspondence if it lasts. Whether the topics will expand into general subject areas, or whether they will multiply, depends on the frequency of interactaction and the extent of the intimacy which develops.
Harriet Beecher Stowe's "first" letter to Lady Byron and the response provide a clear indication of how topics are chosen, how they pertain to the epistolary occasion, and how they develop at least initially. Stowe's letter, noted "my first letter to Lady Byron." is either a copy or a draft and is undated. It opens: "I cannot feel like a stranger in addressing you - first because of this knowledge of you I have acquired thro' our medical friend Miss Folen [sic] & second, because the very few remarks that I had the pleasure of hearing from you in our only interview produced an impression of a heart and mind to which I could not be indifferent, or a stranger." In her first sentence Stowe, while acknowledging that she is a virtual stranger, recalls the face-to-face meeting they have had, a meeting perhaps arranged by their mutual friend. Miss Follen. Recognition, then, is to be based on recollection. The topic of Lady Byron's health has been introduced indirectly. In her third sentence, Stowe comes to the occasion: "The immediate cause of my troubling you at this time is my finding in London a note from Ellen Craft enclosing one to her mother -". Stowe continues by asking Lady Byron to tell Craft, a fugitive slave in whom both she and Lady Byron took an interest, that she will deliver the letter in America. Thus a second, larger topic has been introduced indirectly: the Anti-Slavery movement.

The "clincher", however, comes in the third paragraph and relates to the "very few remarks" Stowe had referred to in her opening sentence. The paragraph opens: " - And now dear Lady Byron there was a subject on which you dropped remarks deeply interesting to me - the state of religion in England -"; her topic is the prevalence of sceptism among young men. This is, indeed, the subject of most interest to Lady
Byron. Stowe brings her letter to a close by returning to her opening themes. First she gives Lady Byron the option of not responding: "Of course I wish you to consider these questions unasked, & me as out of existence, if it is to impose the least of a task on you to reply - I shall expect nothing - nevertheless if it should come perfectly natural & easy nothing could give me more pleasure," a tactful way of suggesting that she would like a response if Lady Byron is well enough to reply. The final sentences return, in order, first to Miss Follen, and then to regret at missing another face-to-face meeting before leaving England. Stowe's farewell balances the termination of the interaction, the closure of the text, and the ultimate closure for epistolary discourse: "But we are within a few steps more of a home when we shall fully know many whom here we only desired to know - In that hope I sign myself yours in the truest love - the love of Christ / H.B. Stowe."

Lady Byron responded in a letter opening: "I did answer your kind letter but before I sent mine. I [illegible] mislaid it - & when found again some weeks after, the topics on which I had written were gone bye - at least under that phase." Almost all the lengthy letter is devoted to "the decaying state of the English Church," the general subject Stowe had suggested in her letter. Part way through, Lady Byron comments on her self-presentation: "I am not at all prone to put forth my own opinions, but the tone in which you have written to me claims an unusual degree of openness of my part -". Lady Byron's final paragraph picks up the topic of her health; her letter concludes ambivalently by expressing an interest in a future face-to-face meeting, perhaps in heaven, but not another epistolary interaction:
There are causes of decay known to be at work in my frame, which lead me to believe I may not have time to grow wiser, & I must therefore leave it to others to correct the conclusions I have now formed from my life experience. - I should feel happy to discuss them personally with you, for it would be soul to soul. In that confidence I am yours

most truly

AI: Noel Byron

There were no other letters until Stowe returned to England a second time two years later. Lady Byron’s letter, even apart from the farewell, had closed down their epistolary interaction because it had failed to complete the responsive process. It may be recalled that the responsive process consists of three parts: recognition, recollection, and requital. It is, however, a three-way, or three-level process, the writer responding to the letter, to the letter’s writer, and to the self (and/or to the medium) more or less concurrently. The point may be clarified by returning to Harriet Grote’s business letter to Anna Jameson. In the second sentence, Grote had written: "I have no idea where to ‘throw a cast’ to fish up any facts about your historical worthies.” Grote’s statement is obviously a response to Jameson’s query: "Where do you suggest I throw a cast," or some such wording. If Grote had left her answer at that, despite its overt signal of recognition in the quotation of Jameson’s words, she would have failed in the responsive process. Jameson would not have asked the question if she did not feel that Grote would be able to give at least some suggestions. Jameson’s feeling would have been based on recognition and recollection about her friend. If she had been mistaken in her part of the process, Grote would, in turn, recognize the mistake, and save Jameson’s "face" by explaining why she is unable to answer the question. But that is not the case here. Grote responds by making four suggestions, but to demonstrate her
own awareness of her friend (recognition and recollection) she must make suggestions which are within Jameson's means to adopt. Furthermore, she must respond "on topic"; that is, she cannot put forth ideas irrelevant to the topic under discussion. Grote offers to consult two of her own books: names a biographical dictionary that Jameson might consult herself in a library; offers to ask her husband, a historian: and volunteers to ask another person with historical knowledge whom she will see later in the week. Thus, she has made a complete requital. In a future interaction--perhaps her next letter--Jameson could, if she desired, develop the topic further by reporting on her success in finding the information, posing more queries, or commenting on another aspect of Grote's suggestions. But in all likelihood this particular topic is now exhausted, and other topics will be introduced instead, Grote having given her several more to respond to if the occasion for the next interaction is a response to her letter. In a business context with a more distant relational history, once the single topic is exhausted, the transaction is concluded.

Lady Byron, on the contrary, has not stayed "on topic", a transgression indicated by her not specifically answering Stowe's queries. She does not respond to the occasion by assuring Stowe that she has given the message to Ellen Craft: she does not answer two of Stowe's specific questions, whether young men are affected in England by the "undercurrent of scepticism" and "Have you read Kingsley's Alton Locke & Yeast:" and she does not say whether she has given Stowe's "love" to Miss Follen. She writes instead a very long exposition of her views on religion, a transgression of the limits of involvement in any one topic of the interaction. Only
once after the salutation does she “recognize” Harriet Stowe as the person she is addressing: “I am aware that I have touched on a point of difference between us.” but she cancels even this much by her following statement: “& I will not regret it.” Lady Byron’s discourse, then, is virtually monological, rather than dialogical. Stowe being almost literally a "soul" "out of existence," not a person. And by introducing no new topics herself, she has made it next to impossible for Stowe to respond, even if she had not felt shut out by Lady Byron’s unwillingness to answer her questions. Lady Byron’s lack of responsiveness may have been due to her very limited knowledge of Stowe as a person, or her habitual guardedness whenever she met someone unknown, hence, potentially untrustworthy. She had, after all, admitted that it was unusual for her to speak so openly about her religious "heterodoxies".

Because the responsive process involves the recognition of the other person as a reader, as an epistolary writer, and as a person (self), in reading even one side of a correspondence an external reader "hears" the other voice as well as the writer’s. Hence we may feel that we hardly need both sides of a correspondence in order to form a mental image and understanding of the correspondents and their interaction. Once we attune our ear to the other’s voice, we can then see how the topics chosen for a specific written interaction are constrained by the responsive process. Letters written in a context of friendship, as a response to a written interaction, provide the clearest examples because the number of topics is larger.

Soon after she had returned to England from America, Harriet Martineau wrote to William Ware a letter which provides a rather lengthy example of the vocal duet in
a friendship interaction. Her letter opens by delineating the occasion, the interactional context, and the relational history: "Dear friends. / Your precious letter met me here - the best comfort since our parting." In the second sentence of the exordium, she highlights their relational history (an emotional appeal) by continuing the ideas of parting/meeting, presence/absence, friendship and family: "It is almost worth while parting, (with the hope of meeting again), to feel the value of love in absence, as such a family letter makes one do." The march of topics--in an "orderly" fashion--then begins: "I have not been home yet." and continues on through the plans for the trip to London ("home"); her plans for her work to come (the book on America); the English political state, the need for her new book, her feelings about writing it, and the value it may have. She concludes this section: "Now you know all I have to tell of myself, except that I am well, & without a care in the world, except for two or three of my family -." The opening part of the letter has been entirely about "self", the only recognition of her reader(s) being one. "You know." Nevertheless, her transitional sentence reveals that she has indeed been demonstrating responsiveness: "Having answered your questions, (the first duty of a correspondent,) I now sigh to know what you are going to do." The report Martineau has given of herself has been shaped, although not visibly or audibly, by the questions the Wares had posed in the letter to which she is responding, a report which may, in fact, be fairly complete for she has described it as "all I have to tell of myself." Still, it is worth remembering that her report has been shaped by their questions, reflects the topics they have chosen, and reveals the way in which Martineau wishes to be seen by them.
In the second section of the letter, Martineau focuses on Mr. Ware, the "you" of the "what you are going to do": "I am sure, Mr W, that you wrote your share of the letter about small things, while great things are upon your mind. I trust there is a letter on the way wh will explain them to me." Her statement demonstrates her desire to be responded to, openly, as a trusted friend. In fact, after a sentence in which she speculates about the way in which he has reached his decision, she reiterates: "I beseech you, keep me fully informed. - in confidence." The word "confidence" suggests an association to a story Martineau has heard about Ware, told "(not at all in the spirit of gossip)," a story which included Ware's acquaintance, Mr. Dewey. After relating the story, Martineau demonstrates her responsiveness to her own text, the naming of Mr. Dewey, as well as to Ware's text: "How can your papers praise Mr D's book, as you say they do?" This is the first opportunity we have had to "hear" Ware's voice. Upon exhausting this topic, Martineau focuses next on another of Mr. Ware's neighbours: "I shall be very sorry for C. [Catharine] Sedgwick, if your change of plans shd remove you from her." a topic which concludes with a shift back to Ware: "But you know her case as well as I do." After touching lightly on the topic of another neighbour, Martineau finally arrives at her main topic: "What put it in your head that you have no capacity for society? And how dare you say this to me, who have so much experience to the contrary?" Once again, then, Martineau has been responding, in her discussion of Ware's acquaintances, to his statement about his unsociability. By association, this leads to commentary about his house, and to a description of her own feelings about unsociability, this time her own tendency for seclusion because of her
deafness. Thus, again, Martineau's self-revelations have been made in response to a topic chosen by Ware, and must be "read" within that context.

Another transitional sentence follows: "I have been putting off the principal subject of my letter; though I was about to write to you upon it when yours arrived." An occasion for interaction has become an internal "principal subject," the arrival of Ware's letter crossing Martineau's intended response to their previous face-to-face interaction. She continues on her new topic: "I had a talk with my brother Greenhow [a doctor]. the other day at Newcastle, about Mary's [Ware's daughter's] eyes." The topic concludes. "Always tell me particularly how she goes on," before, by development, the topic shifts to Martineau's feelings about his children and her appreciation of their "bits of letters." By association with "letters", Martineau introduces a new topic, a hymn book her brother Robert has written that she will send to America, and to "Bronson's [Alcott's] discourse" that she would like Ware to send to her. Martineau's four-leaf older style paper is now full, so she turns it to use the margin and top space for another comment in response to Ware's letter: "The fictitious journal! only it wd have been so much better than the real one," a comment so cryptic that I, at least, cannot decipher it conclusively lacking Ware's text.

Because Martineau is now constrained by the size of her paper, her text begins to break into smaller fragments, cohering only by their references to the topics she has already touched. The top space is used for a very crude drawing of her nephew wearing peacock feathers, her gift from America. Exhausting the margins, Martineau begins to cross her text. Fanny Butler [Kemble], another of Ware's neighbours, is
mentioned. as is her mother. once again, and the return to London. A temporary
farewell, echoing her opening sentence, concludes the letter: "Good bye now, till I get
there. God bless you all! I wish I knew what you are doing, this eleven o'clock on the
11th Octbre. O, with you it is 6 A.M. & you are just rising." Yet, propelled by her
need to keep talking to her friends, Martineau cannot stop. Continuing on after the
farewell, she speaks of her brother James, and her feelings upon returning home,
before closing, finally, with another farewell and a subscription: "Now, dear friend,
farewell for the present. / Ever your affectionate / H. Martineau."

Martineau's letter shows very clearly how the topics are constrained, to a very
great extent, by the need to demonstrate responsiveness. Her text is structured as a
dance: not a dance, however, with a single partner such as a waltz, but a dance like
the minuet, where the dancer passes from partner to partner. The text passes back and
forth between self and other, the writer and the reader, his text and her text. The topics
are dictated by the occasion, a response to Ware's letter, and by the interactants'
relational history. They connect, one to the other, by lines of association, the indicators
of the mental processes of recognition, recollection, and requital. In the mental process
new topics are introduced, the topics to which Ware can respond in the next
interaction. The writing self is revealed parenthetically, and in the symmetry of the
text in which the closing part of the letter returns to the beginning. But by exceeding
the limits of overflow--two entire leaves are crossed--Martineau's text exceeds the
limits of the interaction, a transgression indicative of her reluctance to terminate the
pleasure of communicating with her friends. Her failure to acknowledge the
transgression is indicative of self-indulgence, or self-absorption. The writing "superego" having been overridden by the desire to talk. It might also be noted that Martineau's text could be described psychologically as showing signs of "overdetermination". That is, in its too slavish adherence to Ware's text, it leaves little space for the free flow of her own spontaneous thoughts and feelings about the world as she sees it. Topics are "topical": that is, they are also connected to the world outside the text as it is at the time of writing. Her text, on the other hand, betrays a self-consciousness about being seen by the other. too abject a desire to please and thus to be loved. The constraint on the topics, then, has limits both ways. Lady Byron's response to Harriet Beecher Stowe being indicative of one extreme. Martineau's letter to William Ware, of the other. Yet both betray, in their self-absorption, a lack of connection to the world outside the text.

Although it is true that the other's voice can be heard in one side of a correspondence, the entire message of the other's communication cannot be fully construed without testimony. That is, both sides of a correspondence are necessary to see how the balance between self and other, one text and the other, is maintained. Correspondents do not respond to every topic introduced in a previous interaction, but instead touch firmly enough on the addressee's text (or spoken words) to indicate responsiveness, yet lightly enough to render the self sufficiently present and open to elicit a future response. Nevertheless, it can be worthwhile to observe which topics are responded to, and which are ignored. By comparing both sides of a correspondence, the absence of particular topics between interactants can be perceived, an absence
which may indicate "taboo" subjects between them, or views and opinions not shared. Gaps in response, then, point to differences—in temperament, in willingness to interact, in availability for intimacy, and, perhaps, in character. With only one side of a correspondence, these gaps cannot be seen; only the topics the writer has selected (recognition and requital) are visible. Yet it is the gaps—the differences—that delineate the participants' individuality.

The correspondence between Harriet Martineau and Florence Nightingale can be profitably studied in this way because it demonstrates what might be described as a tug-of-war. As may be recalled, their relational history began with Nightingale's covert request for Martineau's assistance in promulgating her views and opinions. Martineau responded eagerly because she was in awe of Nightingale's achievements as a woman against tremendous opposition, achievements which had benefited an oppressed group, the common soldier, had improved public health, and had opened a door to respectable employment for women. In her fight she had sacrificed her own health; in her martyrdom she had become a prisoner in her room where she carried on regardless. Martineau, too, had sacrificed her health, and had become a prisoner in her house far from London, the centre of action, but she had continued, nevertheless, to wage war against oppression on many fronts primarily by writing for the Daily News. In their self-presentation as invalids, their letters ring all the changes on the epistolary convention of health and the ability to be responsive in writing. In the responsiveness to topics, their letters reveal a relational struggle, Martineau pushing for greater intimacy and connection, Nightingale pushing her back to maintain space. Not
surprisingly, one of Nightingale's strategies was the constraining of topics to the epistolary occasion, thereby confining the interaction to business, and the relation to one of distance. Martineau, on the other hand, tried frequently to enlarge and develop topics, in the process introducing new ones which Nightingale either ignored or, if the gap seemed too large, acknowledged in a rather off-hand way. It was not until after Maria Martineau's visit to Nightingale in the spring of 1863 that a truce was declared, the changed salutation. "dear friend", being the visible indicator of the change in their relations.

A selection of consecutive letters from their correspondence shows how the responsiveness to topics, and thus their disposition and development in any one letter, is connected to the occasion, the participants' relational history, the self, and the world outside the text. Nightingale's letter of "August 21/59" terminates the business that was initiated in the letters we have already examined between them (Chapter 3): the writing of "their" book, England and her Soldiers. The letter opens: "I have so very much wished to write to you myself for the last two months. But this is the first day I have been able to do anything but the most pressing business." Nightingale reports the book's failure to gain entrance to soldiers' libraries, and concludes their financial transactions. The letter closes succinctly: "I hope you are not worse - Believe me ever yours gratefully Florence Nightingale."

The next letter, dated "Janry 19/60," written by Martineau, reopens their correspondence, and is obviously a response to Nightingale's new book, Notes on Nursing, for the epistolary occasion is made clear in the opening sentence: "I have
almost shrunk from writing to you about your 'Notes' &c because I felt so strongly about them that it was difficult to speak without an apparent extravagance which one wd not offer to you. This is a work of genius, if ever I saw one: & it will operate accordingly." The floodgates were open, for it was a topic dear to Martineau's heart. Her very lengthy letter, extensively crossed, witnesses her responsiveness by reporting her own attempts to promulgate, or as Martineau expresses it: "I want to be doing, to help the diffusion of the book." Enlarging her topic, Martineau reports that her niece Maria, too, is busy doing what she can, and adds: "Maria longs, I know, to nurse you. I do think you wd find her as near to your standard of a nurse as anybody in Europe. O! how we quivered over that section 'Chattering Hopes & Advices': How true it is! & how dreary!" A story from her former experience in being an invalid follows.

The second paragraph opens: "If you will not for a moment think it needful to reply, I will add a thing or two. - I see no reference in any of your books to an important precautionary method which it is possible may not have come under your study: - that of putting beds north & south (the patient's head to the North)." A third paragraph of the by now long letter opens: "I will not trouble you further, except just to say, for truth's sake, that I go much further than you in approbation of Homeopathic treatment -" an enlargement of the topic which carries Martineau's letter on considerably longer. A fourth paragraph of two sentences opens: "I do wish I knew how you were": a fifth. "as for me. -". Having completely exceeded the limits of paper and interaction, the letter closes abruptly without a farewell: "I am most gratefully yours H.Martineau."
Nightingale did not feel that it was "needful" to reply to Martineau's expanded topics. Her letter of almost a month later opens: "Many many thanks for your note of the 5th [a second note from Martineau which is missing from the sequence], which I should have answered before, but that I was unable to write." She then comes directly to business: "Nothing would be more generally useful (or, by me, more desired) than that you should treat in your broad way the "'mutual' relations of the sick & well'." Her approbation of Martineau's writing concludes: "So far from wishing to deter you from writing the Article, it would very much deter me from writing this, if I thought I should -": a farewell. "I am so glad to hear that you are something easier / better -," and a subscription follow. Nightingale, however, rebalances the interaction by writing a very long postscript which opens: "I quite agree with you that how to be ill is a necessary complement of how to nurse." Her expanded topic, then, touches obliquely on Martineau's long letter. Her overflow concludes: "Please do not think this letter requires an answer -": the article, in itself, will testify to Martineau's responsiveness.

Martineau replied, after a suitable lapse of time, almost a month later. Her short letter, headed "Of no consequence, & no answer required," opens: "I think it may be just worth while to send you the opinion of your 'Notes' sent me by the greatest woman (as I consider her) on record. - Maria Weston Chapman. - whose name will by and by stand beside Washington's in history, as the deliverer of her country the second & greater time." It concludes: "I will not trouble you with more, as I have no more news on our topics. Yours devotedly / H. Martineau." As Nightingale has furnished her little to which to respond, Martineau has had to resort to the former topic, Notes.
on Nursing, to keep the correspondence going. A second, very brief note, dispatched at the end of the month, reports that the article has been published and her health has been very bad: "Maria has told Hilary [Bonham-Carter, Nightingale’s cousin] that I have been very ill. I am ‘on the mend’, as people say, but have not written letters yet." Nightingale’s response, dated two days later, opens: "I cannot tell you, and this is not a figure of speech, how much I felt at hearing how ill you were - [new paragraph] I trust your life will yet be prolonged." and continues by thanking Martineau for her article. It concludes with a farewell which echoes the opening sentence, and a "carrot" in the subscription for future interaction: "But I cannot but be glad of what you say - / Yours ever affectly & gratefully / Florence Nightingale." Two months later, the cycle started again. Nightingale sending to Martineau a copy of her new regulations pertaining to military health.

The choice of topics in the correspondence between Martineau and Nightingale was dictated by the occasion--the publication of their writings--and thus reflects their roles as authors. It was strictly in this role that Nightingale wished to interact with Martineau. Nightingale emphasized the "private" aspect of her work as an author by leaking confidential reports, and disseminating other information for Martineau, in her capacity as a "public" voice, to rewrite in leaders for the Daily News and in other "popular" formats. Their relational history was based on ill-health: the lengthy gaps between their letters, or the use of an amanuensis, created as well as reflected their status as invalids: their letters were witnesses of and testaments to their social and domestic roles as frail women. Their choice of topics was constrained by their
personal roles as authors and invalids, roles which Martineau wished to expand to include the role of friends. Her attempts to expand their interaction by developing the topics in their letters were repulsed by Nightingale; eventually, however, she was successful, at least in a limited way. The disposition of the chosen topics across their texts reflects their relational struggle, as it does also their struggles to expand the domestic role of women.

The disposition of topics within the epistolary body also reflects a literary world of texts. The rhetoricians had defined three ways in which speakers appealed to their audiences: *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos*. In letters, the ethical and emotional appeals, as we have already seen, pertain to the relational history of the participants and to the participants' status, in a moral and social sense, in the world outside the text. These two appeals appear at once in the *exordium*, the transition point between the world outside the text to the world of the text, and are echoed in the *peroratio*, the marker of a return from the text's world to the outlying world. The logical appeal, on the other hand, is made largely on the strength of the text's construction. Individual topics expand and develop by lines of association to other, related topics. If the lines of association cannot easily be followed by the reader, or if the parts of a topic might appear unduly disconnected, letter writers use more overt markers to marshall their arguments. Connectives such as "first", "second", may be replaced by ordinals, and numbered sections may be further separated by their spacing on the page, the numbering and the spacing serving visually, as well as cognitively, to link the parts through parallelism and accretion. Examples have been displayed in Nightingale's
letters to Martineau, and referred to in Harriet Grote’s letter to Francis Place in which she used a numbered list of her (assorted) activities as witness to her inability to find time to write. Writers may also occasionally refer to the "head" of a section of a letter, the head meaning the subject from which a number of lines of argument flow. Heads can even be visually represented by "headings", indicative of the content of a certain section of text, but this practice, better suited to expository writing, is seldom used by epistolary writers. Instead, letter writers may use temporal "heads" to achieve coherency in their texts, a practice borrowed from another genre (or sub-genre), diaries. When two genres cross, however, a hybrid is born, a new species resembling both parents, but not a true replication of either. Whenever letter writers use multiple temporal headings in their letters, they are indicating that for some reason or other, the epistolary form with its single location identifier is no longer completely adequate for their purposes.

In the early spring of 1836, Anna Jameson returned to England from the Continent. Ottilie von Goethe’s sister, Ulrica, either went with her then, or arrived in England a short time later. Jameson did her utmost to introduce Ulrica in society. Her letters of this period to von Goethe are full of reports on their activities: "Ulrica has a slight cold and has nursed herself today that we may be able to go to the Opera tomorrow. On Wednesday we go to Mrs Buller’s and meet O’Connel (I hope). On Thursday Adelaide Kemble comes here to sing to me. On Friday we meet the sisters at Mrs Austin’s -". By May, the reporting has changed to a diary-style presentation, in which each day’s activities is documented under an appropriate head, such as
"Monday, 9th." Jameson comments on her self-presentation: "So here, my darling Ottilie, is a full and true account of all we have been doing." The documentation continues into June, then stops. Why has a diary, a "full and true account," with each day documented, become so imperative?

The answer is to be found in two short passages, one just before Jameson’s commentary on self-presentation in her letter written in May, the other in a letter written in August. In the first passage Jameson writes: "Mr Phipps is very attentive to your sister. We speak however very little, for I feel that his knowledge of your real position embarrasses me, and I see that it has the same effect on him, so that, tho’ I believe we have esteem and kindness for each other, we are not at ease, and in all probability will not see much of each other when Ulrica is gone [. . .]. Today he took Ulrica to the British Museum, and I went as chaperone merely, . . ." In the second passage, the sequel to the story emerges:

Your sister has left me precipitately . . . and I have been more hurt and vexed than I can express. Remember that I make no reproach to your sister. That she was so blinded by her passion for Romilly, that she had no consideration for any thing else, that she risked her reputation, that . . . the disposal of her time (and mine) all depended on this man. - this was all natural. . . .34

Poor Jameson! Not only was the "expressive" Ottilie von Goethe a handful, but her sister was also. Seeing the "writing on the wall", and perhaps fearing the worst, Jameson had resorted to a diary form for her epistolary self-presentation to witness all her vigorous attempts to entertain Ulrica by introducing her in society, and to testify to her own innocence in Ulrica’s behaviour as a result.
The use of multiple temporal markers as heads in a letter points to the judicial aspect of epistolary discourse. The use of daily entries witnesses the writer's innocent activities: the resulting text is a testament of the writer's honesty, fidelity, and integrity in the interactional context. The diary format in the epistolary form is sometimes used for travel writing as well, with much the same purpose, the writer "proving" that his or her time has been well-spent in viewing and reflecting upon unfamiliar sights, scenery, and societies. The epistolary dance of recognition, recollection, and requital, then, is constrained by the diary form to the world outside the text and the self, a lop-sided partnership at best.

The external and internal factors of the responsive process affect the epistolary body, the mediator between self and other. Communication in the epistolary form is constrained by the physical nature of the medium, by the social conventions governing social interaction through language, by the relational history of the participants, and by the literary conventions governing the transformation of oral discourse into a written text. The topics chosen to initiate and sustain interaction reflect the speaker's participation in everyday life, as well as the points of connection, real or imaginary, between the speaker and his or her audience. Social conventions, politically, ethically, morally, and ceremoniously, dictate which topics may be chosen or how they may be voiced: personal beliefs and practices are also reflected in these choices. On an interpersonal level, the choice of topics and their disposition in letters reflect the participants' relational history, their interaction, and their individuality. These choices can only clearly be seen intertextually, that is, the corpus of a correspondence is
required to see an epistolary text's body comprehensively. Intratextually, the choice of topics, their disposition, and their development reflect the writer's ability to handle the conflicting requirements in discourse structure of composition (the written use of language) and conversation (oral exchange). The resulting text is a synthesis, a creative construction that harmoniously or otherwise embodies the epistolary dance of self and other.
Notes


2. Anna Jameson to Ottillie von Goethe, April 1 [1859]. #208. 224.


6. Elizabeth Barrett Browning to Mary Russell Mitford, April 30, 1847, #441. 3:209.


10. Anna Jameson to Ottillie von Goethe, April 21, 1840. #82. 125.


14. Mary Russell Mitford to T.N. Talfourd, [March 9 1829]. MS Don d.38, Bodleian Library, Oxford University.


16. Anna Jameson to Ottillie von Goethe. July 11, [1835], #19. 25. Needler’s proliferous use of the ellipsis in the letters of this time may be indicative of family restrictions on the content or of his own "delicacy".

17. Anna Jameson to Ottillie von Goethe, June 27, 1835, #23. 26. Note that the previous letter, dated July 11, is numbered as #19.
18. Anna Jameson to Ottilie von Goethe, [1835], #24, 26. Ellipsis Needler’s.


20. Quoted in Needler. viii: no date or addressee is given.

21. Anna Jameson to Ottilie von Goethe, June 27, [1836], #38, 44.


23. Anna Jameson to Ottilie von Goethe, April 27, 1842, #94, 136. Both ellipses Needler’s?

24. Harriet Grote to Anna Jameson. February 8, [1841], Erskine. 192.


26. Harriet Martineau to William Ware, August 22, 1843. Ms Eng 244, Boston Public Library.

27. Harriet Martineau to Charles Sumner, August 22, 1843, BMS AM 1.4 (v. 129.158), Houghton Library, Harvard University. Cambridge USA.


29. Harriet Martineau to William Ware, October 11 [1836]. Ms Eng 244, Boston Public Library. The location identifier is: “Birmingham, Octr 11."

30. I am arguing, then, that bound interactions not only reveal, that is, are based on, a relational history, but also construct it. Cf. Ronald Carter, Paul Simpson, eds., Language, Discourse and Literature: “In its varied forms, discourse analysis is that branch of linguistics most directly concerned with the ways in which texts create contexts, with their organization at this suprasentential level and with their operation as part of a dynamic process between participants” (14).

31. Florence Nightingale to Harriet Martineau, August 21, 1859, Add 45788, Nightingale Papers, I, British Library, London. All the letters between Nightingale and Martineau quoted subsequently are in this collection.

32. Anna Jameson to Ottilie von Goethe, [1836], #34, 37.

34. Anna Jameson to Ottilie von Goethe. August 14 [1836], #43. 49. Ellipses not in square brackets are Needler's.

35. Cf. Roger Fowler, "Polyphony in Hard Times" in Carter & Simpson, eds., Language, Discourse & Literature, who, in describing the difference between written and oral discourse as being primarily the difference between hypotaxis and a type of parataxis, bases his observation on the work of the linguist M.A.K. Halliday: "Halliday . . . maintains that speech and writing have different information structures, and therefore different modes of syntactic organization. Writing, which can be scanned and re-scanned for complexities and qualifications of meaning, is a medium which can accommodate the kinds of indirections which we noted in Harthouse's language. Speech, according to Halliday, is more straightforwardly linear, and it releases its meanings in a sequence of short chunks or 'information units'; these units are segmented off by intonation patterns, rises and falls in the pitch of the voice. Syntactically, they need not be complete clauses, but are often phrases or single words, and often loosely linked by apposition or concatenation. The overall style is not, strictly speaking, paratactic, because the conjoined constituents are not clauses of equal weight; but in its avoidance of clause subordination it is much more like parataxis than hypotaxis" (86). The syntax of Lady Byron's opening sentence in a letter to Anna Jameson, discussed in Chapter 3, and the sentence, "It is utterly useless to preach abstinence. it is not and cannot be generally practiced. chastity and late marriages are as much opposed [. . .]." in Francis Place's letter to Harriet Martineau (this chapter), provide good epistolary examples of this type of oral parataxis: the epistolary dash is another.
Chapter 5
Friendship and the Epistolary Form

In the examination of the letter’s structure, we have seen how the epistolary dance of self, other, and medium seeks an equilibrium by presenting the voices in the text concurrently. We might think of the music for the dance as that of friendship, a perhaps imaginary but no less desired concord between self and other. Ralph Waldo Emerson, for instance, cautioned in his essay on friendship: "Friends such as we desire are dreams and fables" (190). Yet he also explained to his reader that in one’s search for the Ideal, one becomes "pronounced": "you demonstrate yourself, so as to put yourself out of the reach of false relations, and you draw to you the first-born of the world" (190-1). Hence the Ideal in friendship might be described as the desire to be fully known in our best selves.

Not all letter writers, of course, are writing in a context of friendship, nor do all necessarily even desire such a relation with the addressee. Nevertheless, when two people come into relation with each other, the drive towards the Ideal seems to be inherent, although dormant until sparked by an inexplicable essence. Each ignition, even if it rapidly fizzles, forms a step in the process of individuation, the self becoming known ("pronounced") because it is "demonstrated". The epistolary text not only presents the self to the other, but also represents the self, the other, and their relation if a desire for intimate friendship is to materialize. This representation both documents the relation as it is, according to the writer’s perspective, and creates an
imagined, more intimate, "ideal" relation, thus creating a context propitious for its nurturance. Internal and external readers alike, although for different reasons, value this representation in letters, a value indicative of the high value that has consistently been given to friendship.

The ancient Greeks had three words for a friend, each connoting a different aspect of friendship: philos, xenos, and hetairos. The most common was philos, one who was bound to you by blood, marriage, nationality, or political or philosophical beliefs. A philos was not someone necessarily of your choice, but represented your connection to a family, community, or network. Commitment to the relation was reciprocal, the stronger or superior assisting the weaker or inferior, the latter giving respect or deference in return, but the relation was not necessarily a close or intimate one. The word xenos, paradoxically, could be used as an antonym of philos though: it connoted "stranger", "foreigner", "guest", or "host". Thus it pointed to the obligations strangers have to each other if they are brought unexpectedly into relation, the ritual exchange of gifts being an expression of this responsibility. The third word, hetairos, was used to connote a "colleague", "companion", or "comrade", a concept adequately expressed by the phrase "blood brothers", for it signified an intense, emotionally important relation between men. All three terms stressed the importance of reciprocity, but they were neither inclusive nor exclusive of a sexual relation. Although none of the terms specifically assigns value, a hetairos relation had the potential to become the deepest, the most inspirational, and hence the most valuable.
In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle explored the social and moral dimensions of friendship by attempting to categorize friends according to utility, pleasure, or goodness, a potentially constraining taxonomy if applied rigidly, but a useful way of delineating the pragmatic and the ideal aims of friendship. Twentieth-century psychologists, sociologists, and communications theorists, particularly in the last twenty years, have explored the pragmatic aims and benefits of friendship by studying networks—personal, business, and social—role playing, and psychological development. Only a few have given much specific attention to either the moral dimension or the "idealism" of friendship. However, in surveying the work of many psychoanalysts on friendship, Graham Little comments:

I began to form an impression of what was distinctive about friendship. Free-play was one thing, i.e. friendship escaped the rules, customs and pieties of social life. Another was that friendship was about identity, i.e. 'who one was' as opposed to one's status and role. And, thirdly, friendship was about hope, the future, the ideas and ideals and larger-than-life meanings people wanted to give their lives. Roles and statuses were derived from institutional and social 'necessities'; the 'idealism' of friendship lies in its detachment from these, its creative and spiritual transcendence, its fundamental scepticism as a platform from which to survey the givens of society and culture. (144-5)

Letters give creative expression to the relation between two individuals. On a pragmatic level, the letter can make connections between people who may be physically separated in geographic space, socially separated by class, gender, occupation, and political affiliation, psychically separated by temperament, or spiritually separated by religion. Connection is achieved by the presentation of the self to the other through the responsive process; the connection is sustained and developed by the representation of the self, the other, and their relation. As representation is a
creative construction. an imaginative transformation, it has at least the potential for
transcendence. On a personal level, transcendence implies a moving forward or
upward through the release of psychic, intellectual, and moral constraints; on a social
level transcendence implies a redefinition of ideological constructs. Thus the letter can
be both a conservative and a liberating form simultaneously.⁴

When friendship is their purpose, letter writers represent themselves, the other,
and their relation through a variety of creative transformations. For the purposes of
discussion, these transformations will be separated under four heads: equality,
familiarity, sympathy, and intimacy. The order of the four concepts roughly parallels
the development of friendship, but they cannot really be divided, for they are neither
hierarchical, linear, invariably exclusive, nor all inclusive.

The prominence given by the letter to the parts played by the writer and the
recipient suggests an equal role for both. As we have seen, the epistolary text visually
presents the dyad underlying the interaction by naming the writer and the addressee in
the salutation and subscription. These overt markers of a private interactional space
can be modified by redefining the private space of writing, the private space of
reading, and by the transmission of greetings to others. It can also be transformed by
including more than one addressee in the salutation, and by adding more than one
hand in the writing of the text. The epistolary text, however, tends to resist these
transformations when the development of friendship is the goal. Harriet Martineau’s
friendly letter on arriving back in England to William Ware, discussed in detail in the
previous chapter in its disposition of topics, provides a good example of resistance to
the salutation's modification of the dyadic relation. It was addressed, as may be recalled, to "dear friends," both William and Mary Ware being included in the salutation. Martineau's multiple addressee was probably in response to a single letter written in both their hands. for she describes it as a "family" letter, and says in the transition to the second part of her letter: "I am sure, Mr W, that you wrote your share of the letter [. . .]". The transition, nevertheless, marks the point at which the text reflects a resistance to imagining the self in equal or equivalent relation with two people at once. Martineau's connection was to William Ware: the choice of topics in their letters reflects their social roles as writers, intellectuals, practical workers, and spiritual leaders, roles that Mary Ware did not aspire to, at least on a public level. If a relation with spousal partners is equally valued but not necessarily equivalent, letters are sent to each. Fanny Kemble, for instance, corresponded with both George and Cecilia Combe individually, as the occasion arose, although the extant correspondence is primarily with George Combe. This is not to imply that the letters were not intended to be shared, but simply that the imaginary presence of epistolary interaction is dyadic, not multiple.  

Multiple hands seldom appear in a single epistolary interaction although spouses or friends might complete a letter if the initial writer is suddenly interrupted or incapacitated. Harriet Grote's letter of condolence to her brother-in-law, Joseph Grote, on the death of his son, shows how the relation between individuals, not couples, is the foundation for epistolary interaction even in a family (philoi) connection. Her letter begins: "My dear Joseph / I cannot suffer Georges [Grote's]
letter to go, (altho’ I begged him to assure you how entirely I shared his condolence in your terrible affliction) without putting in one line of my own, to express, personally, my deep sympathy for poor Maria & yourself.” Although Grote might have satisfied herself that her husband had indeed expressed her sympathy along with his own, and although she might have appended a postscript to his letter expressing her feelings for herself, she chose instead to write her own letter for enclosure with her husband’s. Thus her letter witnesses her compassion, and testifies to the value she gives to her relation with her brother-in-law. The farewell and subscription display a delicate balancing between the exclusivity of the epistolary dyad, and the recognition of her sister-in-law’s grief: "God send you [singular] strength of mind, & comfort you [plural] both under your [plural] sorrow - to offer you [?singular] common consolation were idle: I know too well what one’s feelings are, under such tribulations, to tender anything more than a cordial sympathy & pity, which I beg you [singular] to accept, & make acceptable to your partner in woe. / fm dear Joseph yr affecte sister / H. Grote.” In such a situation where neither Joseph nor Maria was a blood relation, Grote might have written "woman-to-woman" to her sister-in-law; nevertheless, their relation as individuals overrides gender solidarity. Grote, being childless, being unable to represent herself as a mother. The "person-role" formula describes how the self, other and their relational history converge in an interactional context.

The imaginary presence of the absent addressee is a common topos in friendship (or love) letters. Catharine Sedgwick, for instance, explains to her beloved young niece Kitty how their friendship has developed: "You have grown from being
my pet to be my companion and friend, and from filling that little snug cabinet-corner in my heart you have diffused yourself over my whole existence, and what can I do without you? But I am not without you; you are present to my thoughts - always in my memory of the past, and hopes of the future.\(^4\) By replacing the domestic image of a "snug cabinet-corner," a container for precious objects, Sedgwick points to their changing relationship as a philos relation of aunt and niece moves towards more equality, hence potentially more intimacy.

Family relations imply familiarity through continuity, but not equality, partly because their hierarchical structure is based on sex and age, partly because even same-sex siblings close in age are affected differently by the family dynamics. In a friendly context where intimacy is stressed, correspondents related by blood tend to downplay their family status, that is, their roles as sisters, sister and brother, aunt and niece, etcetera, and represent their connection instead by conveying news about other family members using forenames and little contextual information, or by referring to their common history. Unrelated correspondents may go through a period in the friendship's development of representing the relation as one between members of the same family; if the friendship develops further, however, family role markers are dropped as being inappropriate, an artificial way of describing the connection. Early in her correspondence with Mary Russell Mitford, Elizabeth Barrett asked her: "Have you not 'adopted' me? Am I not your very own relation? - your niece? or at least your friend?"\(^9\) But by 1842, in sympathizing with Mitford's lack of blood relations and fear of being alone, she uses a family role marker only metaphorically:
Believe how deeply I felt that 'alone in the room'. Ah yes, yes! - I feel that bitter distinction. And because I feel it, and because I love and estimate you wholly and fully, understand & admire all your excellence and sympathize in your griefs, . . let me be as a sister in heart to you, my beloved friend . . let me be admitted as a real, close, true relation, and so destroy for you that idea of being 'alone'.

A domestic setting, however, in which the reader and writer are present together is frequently represented in letters as a sign of an intimate context. Harriet Martineau, in a letter to her cousin and intimate friend Fanny Wedgwood, writes in commiseration over an influenza attack: "I wish I had you here, in my very warm room, where the temperature is very even, while the air is fresh. So charming a winter room. I never was in: and here are two sofas and an easy chair, and you might read in silence as many hours as you pleased, and doze or gossip when you liked. How pleasant it would be. if will - my will - could transport you in an instant."

The intimacy of a "private" domestic setting in which two meet without social distinctions is further increased by combining a temporal dimension with the spatial one. As we have seen in Harriet Grote’s letter to Lord Overstone, the antithesis of public space is the private space of the bedroom. An evening hour for the time of writing enhances the sense of a retreat from the structured hurly-burly world of the daylight hours. An alien world is shut out, to be replaced by an interval liberated from temporal and spatial co-ordinates in which two commune freely as equals. Catharine Sedgwick’s letter to Charles Sedgwick, her intimate friend as well as brother, clarifies how the invocation of a domestic space and an evening hour are linked to the representation of an untrammeled interval:

I have taken my pen (would it were a better one), not so much to
gratify you, my beloved Charles, as because I feel the necessity of holding some communion with you - a hankering, a hungering and thirsting to be near you. I usually come to my room at this hour, the time when Elizabeth sallies forth for her evening walk, and give it to those thoughts and feelings that come unbidden, that press upon us - come? they are what constitute our mind and its affections. You know, my dear Charles, that you are with me in these quiet and tender meditations; my brother, more than brother. I know nothing of love, of memory, of hope, of which you are not an essential part.¹²

A letter from Anna Jameson to Lady Byron shows how the "presence" of an intimate friend is constant, ready to be invoked particularly during the evening hours of retirement. The location identifier is "Sunday Night / ie Midnight -". It opens, without salutation, an indication of Lady Byron's vivid presence: "I must write you two lines before I go to rest - & thank you for your welcome little note on which I opened my eyes this morning - before I was awake -".¹³ It continues with thoughts about her next day's activities, and commentary about Harriet Martineau in response to Lady Byron's letter. The third part of the letter becomes more reflective:

I have been thinking that you applied that beautiful passage out of Consuelo to Lady Gosford - you have mentioned most of your friends to me & it seems to fit her best. wonderfully are the gifts of God distributed! - the woman who could be, & do, & feel all that George Sand describes, would not write it - or even imagine it - yet it is equally a part of the life & soul of the one as of the other &c &c &c &c &c ---- I sink into a sort of abyss of thought - & if you were here could think it aloud - but cannot write it all - now -

The lateness of the evening hour precludes a lengthy letter, but so does the subject matter. Jameson's repeated etceteras indicate thoughts that could be assembled with the help of her friend, but which cannot be committed to paper because of their unconventional nature, and because they are not yet fully formed. "Now" is linked to
the location identifier: the underlining points to an additive (necessary) function, a prominence signalling multiple levels of meaning. The equality between friends whose social status was so different is indicated by their shared unusual interest in George Sand, a person of mutual interest to Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Mary Russell Mitford as well.

Sometimes, especially for women, a domestic setting is too confining for the representation of a particular kind of friendship, that of heteroi. Elizabeth Barrett writes playfully to Mary Russell Mitford: "It is lovely weather . . . wood weather! putting into one's head a dream of living for a month in a green wood with a silent Robin Hood & no little John . . . to eat drink & sleep & write ballads under a beech tree or 'birken boughs'! Will you come?" The freedom of such an androgynous existence underpins many of Barrett Browning's representations of their relation, as does her use of the phrase "side by side with you". Much of the discussion in their correspondence was based on their voracious reading habits, an appetite that relished the latest French books, an unconventional taste for women. To satisfy their appetite, Barrett reports to Mitford a plan for subscribing to Rolandi's: "a half plan I have in my head, - which is to subscribe myself to Rolandi for three months, to try the pleasure of searching your catalogue & reading side by side with you [. . . ] But what do you think? what do you say? Speak out like a man, if you please -".

But at other times, their shared lot as women led back to the representation of a domestic setting, such as depicted in a New Year's letter from Mary Russell Mitford:
My father and I sat to-night looking at the fire in silence and in sadness, the wind rising and sighing with its most mournful rather than its more threatening sound through the branches, from which the snow was falling silently - contradicting by sight and feeling (for the cold was intense) the evidence of another sense, as the double Roman narcissus and the white and purple hyacinths shed their delicious fragrance from the window - my father and myself sat pensively over the wood fire, until he said suddenly, 'You are thinking of dear Miss Barrett; so was I. God bless her! How long is it since you have heard from her?' Every night at that time I had thought of you, my sweetest, sitting over the glowing embers, and at last I determined to write to you before I slept. 17

The usually cheerful Mitford was depressed, not only by the advent of another year of hardship and worry, but also by the silence of her closest friend, for no letter had been received from her for several weeks. No response was forthcoming to this one either despite a second appeal, until several weeks later when two letters followed each other in succession. In the second one, Barrett amends her belated and inadequate response by commenting on the pleasure, as well as the pain, that Mitford's representation had given her:

This little sheet must follow the step of my larger letter - I am not content with the latter's competency to say what I wd say - I am constrained to more penitence before you for that unkindness of silence! - And yet how hard to repent, when the offence brought me such a vision of you & dear kind Dr. Mitford sitting over the embers & thinking of me . . all the snow being without . . as it always must, when you are within! Thank you, - both of you! - Do my beloved friend give my earnest & thankful love to Dr. Mitford! - To think of me! - & to let me see you sitting over the fire & thinking of me! - ! Never penitent smiled so before in sackcloth, as I did over that pleasant vision in that pleasant letter which, if my morals were properly balanced, wd have brought me nothing but remorse. I caught myself smiling . . in the sackcloth & in the remorse . . 'for a' that & for a' that' . . with a kind of heir-in-mourning melancholy-mirth! 18
Mitford’s depiction has brought her friend back to responding and responsiveness by representing her as an (absent) part of the domestic scene, an absence felt alike but unequally by her father and herself.

A poignant passage from a letter written to Ottilie von Goethe, barely two years before Anna Jameson died, provides a final example of the conjunction of spatial co-ordinates, equality, friendship, and hope.\textsuperscript{19} Jameson writes from Brighton where her sisters were now living:

\begin{quote}
I have always, at least for a long time past, disliked Brighton! it is a place of vulgar finery, fashionable religion and staring cockneys, and has to me associations of a most painful kind. - You like places in which you have suffered. - Vienna for instance: I do not; they are to me spectre-haunted, and I wish to be out of Brighton . . . . I confess to you, dear Ottilie, that I do not like the idea of going to you with my health so broken as it is now. You are also an invalid. Must we lie on two sofas and look at each other? - tho’ this would be better than nothing, and better than to be separated for more years, till life ebbs away and leaves our best hopes stranded like wrecks on the shore. . . .
\end{quote}

For the peripatetic Jameson, the representation of such an end, though shared equally, is too uncongenial to embrace.

Representation of this type does, of course, make the reader more "familiar" with the writer’s domestic environment and quotidian habits, as well as with her (or his) feelings at the time of writing. Letter writers, certainly at times, try to describe the setting and their way of life, especially if either has changed dramatically by residence in a foreign country, or by a change in occupation or domestic conditions. Anna Jameson, for instance, attempted at first to keep von Goethe abreast of the changes in her life when she travelled to America. Such depictions are valued by the external reader for the windows they open on a society or setting at a particular historical
moment. But in letters where friendship is the goal, familiarity is achieved rather differently. Familiarity depends not on describing differences, but on multiplying the connections between self and other. A philoi relation in which the participants are embedded in a shared community or network is the aim of familiarity, and is an essential step in the development of an intimate friendship. Kinship networks provide a ready-made community, an important factor in these women’s friendships, for information travelled quickly along the networks’ lines of communication. For example, Julia Smith, Florence Nightingale’s aunt, also interacted with Anna Jameson, Harriet Martineau, Lady Byron, Elizabeth Jesser Reid, Elizabeth Gaskell, Mary Clarke Mohl, and Mary Howitt, among others. Hilary Bonham-Carter was a point of connection among Florence Nightingale, Harriet Martineau, and Maria Martineau: Robert Noel was a link among Lady Byron, Anna Jameson, and Ottilie von Goethe. Face-to-face meetings and epistolary interaction interweave these kinship communities, creating and interconnecting new networks in the process.

Letter writers represent mutual connections to networks or communities by permeating their texts with references to the people known to both participants. The transmission of greetings in the farewell represents the writer’s attempt to embed herself (or himself) in the addressee’s personal network—the core group, usually family, who interact with the addressee on a daily, or very frequent basis. The need for a face-to-face introduction, or a mediated introduction, precludes the conveying of greetings to family members and associates if they have not been formally introduced to the writer; hence, the farewell’s greetings represent the writer’s familiarity with the
addressed core network. As has been noted, the transmission of greetings slightly diminishes the dyad's exclusivity through the depiction of the addressee as (merely) one of a group. Such greetings are often omitted if a particularly intimate context is stressed.

Personal networks, however, are made up of more than the individual's closest contacts, for they include everyone with whom the individual interacts regardless of frequency or closeness. Here, once again, the "person-role formula" comes to the forefront. Individuals connect, or associate, on the basis of kinship, or shared interests, or occupations, or social proximity. The social roles played by an individual provide the passport to multiple connections: hence, personal networks depict the individuals' social roles, and enlarge according to the number of roles played. Letter writers depict their social roles and connections to networks by naming other people with whom they are connected, but only if they are also known by the addressee: thus, writers represent the points of connection shared by the interactants, thereby representing themselves and the other in parallel roles as writers, artists, politicians, abolitionists, reformers, daughters, wives, mothers, etcetera. In the process, they also construct and define these roles, by assimilation and differentiation, thereby effecting changes on a social and a personal level.

The person-role distinction is also applied to the naming of individuals. Those with a public reputation / social role, such as published writers, prominent politicians, and acclaimed artists, can be named and discussed even if they are unknown as people, but, at least conventionally, only in the capacities defined by the role. Honour
and delicacy, discretion and prudence, constrain discussion. Personal feelings about others also constrain the discussion between interactants. Mary Russell Mitford, for instance, did not like Barrett Browning’s friend Anna Jameson; Barrett Browning, in turn, did not like Jameson’s friend, Lady Byron; and Harriet Martineau disliked Harriet Grote’s intimate friend, Sarah Austin. The combination of constraints on the discussion of other people can frustrate an external reader trying to trace the connections of a social network, possibly leading to the misinterpretation of "absence".

A letter written by Harriet Martineau to Ralph Waldo Emerson in 1845 soon after her recovery from her first illness shows how the representation of the self and the personal network combine to promote the friendship between the interactants by depicting (and thus creating) their equality and familiarity. Martineau had met Emerson during her American tour of 1836: in the intervening years they had exchanged a few letters and their published books. The opening sentences of her letter depict a changed interactional context in which Martineau presents herself as a well person, no longer the invalid of the preceding four years:

It is with as much wonder as pleasure that I write to you. Here I am, looking out on blue Windermere, on the mountains all sun & shadow, - feeling myself full of health through my whole frame, - strong, peaceful, - well in mind & body. And when I wrote to you last, & when you last wrote to me, nothing seemed more fixed & settled than that I shd never again in this life know the sensation of health, - never again move from my two rooms.23

The opening paragraph continues on the topic of her renovated health and the agent, mesmerism. The second paragraph returns to her new geographic location, cited in the location identifier, "Ambleside / Westmoreland," and amplified in the second
sentence. "Here I am, looking out on blue Windermere." In the paragraph she represents herself as a healthy, self-determining individual through her depiction of herself as a person active out of doors, and interactive with her neighbours, well-known literary and intellectual figures:

And here I am among the mountains. - Wordsworth's & the Arnolds' neighbour, & likely to remain so. For the first time in my life I am free to live as I please; & I please to live here. My life is now (in this season) one of wild roving, after my years of helpless sickness. I ride like a Borderer. - walk like a pedlar. - climb like a Mountaineer, - sometimes on excursions with kind & merry neighbours. - sometimes all alone for the day on the mountain.

A third paragraph introduces the topic of their literary connection ("I delight in your essays. in these places [. . .]"), and begins the process of building familiarity by enumerating their points of connection in a network of mutual acquaintances. As virtually all their shared acquaintances are writers, their parallel roles as intellectuals and writers are also represented. After continuing the topic of his writings for a few sentences, Martineau turns more specifically to her addressee by posing an indirect question: "I wonder whether Bryant can tell us any particulars of you. He is on his way hither, & we look for him daily." William Cullen Bryant, an American writer, was a neighbour of Emerson. By association with "neighbour", Martineau continues: "I went yesy to tell Wordsworth of his [Bryant's] approach, - who promises him a welcome." A description of Wordsworth follows. Continuing on the topic of neighbours, Martineau enlarges it to include others: "The Gregs are my nearest & dearest friends hereabouts. But you know nothing of them, & I have no room to tell you. The Arnolds are a picture here, -". Emerson "knew" neither Wordsworth nor the
Arnold family, but because both Wordsworth and the late Dr. Arnold were "well-known" public figures, Martineau could speak about them in her letter. A few more comments on the Arnolds and then on the general political situation fill the remainder of her paper.

The farewell fills the space along the side and top of the paper. Although her friendly overflow signals the termination of the interaction, it continues the process of multiplying their points of connection in a literary world extending beyond national boundaries. In the names she chooses, Martineau represents herself both as a member of a female literary world and as one who is different, or separate, from it:

I leave you now to write to Fredrika Bremer at Stockholm. What a heart - what a domestic spirit she has! I heard from my dear Janny Carlyle last week: I want them to come & see me. But one never knows what he will do next. Mrs Jameson was complaing of him to me, two days since, for his admiration of Cromwell. - & they may differ, he being C's biographer & she Irish. I am more of his mind than hers. - I am called for a ride to Yewdale. Wish me joy!

Fredrika Bremer, a Swedish novelist of unconventional opinions, was known to the English-speaking world through Mary Howitt's translations: Anna Jameson, also an unconventional female writer, had met Emerson during her American visit of 1837. As Carlyle was the British writer of perhaps most interest to Emerson, Martineau points to her intimacy with the Carlyle family by using a diminutive of Mrs. Carlyle's forename Jane, and by her awareness of Thomas Carlyle's latest literary work, his biography of Cromwell (1845). Martineau's letter, through its representation of herself as an interactive member of an international male and female literary community, makes Emerson "familiar" with her way of life in a new capacity and changed setting.
and promotes familiarity by displaying their mutual, equivalent connections in that network.

Despite its depiction of a social role in a literary network, Martineau’s letter gives little indication of her personal relation with any of the individuals named, except Jane Carlyle. Epistolary naming conventions would suggest that Martineau was more friendly with Fredrika Bremer than with "Mrs Jameson." Yet such was not the case. Martineau and Jameson, at least in preceding years, had been "good" if not "close" friends. They were to continue to interact, in person and on paper, at least occasionally until the 1850s. Martineau’s use of Bremer’s forename and surname is a literary, not personal, usage: her use of a marker + surname for Jameson rather than a similar literary (or personal) form indicates, I conjecture, her personal disassociation from a colleague on a social level. Identity--who one is--is partly constructed in the gap between the social and the personal levels of connection. Martineau chose to align herself with successful female writers: on a personal level she had differentiated herself, or was beginning to, by dissociating from those whom she did not like or respect as individual women.24

If a friendship develops between epistolary interactants, the social level of connectedness recedes, and the personal level of shared interests, the exchange of news and opinions, and mutual self-disclosure takes precedence. Over a period of time, in other words, participants map their points of connection, in the process discarding those in whom there is not, or there is not perceived to be, reciprocal or sustained interest. As a result, the correspondence between participants represents a highly
selective version of either's personal network, making it very difficult for the external reader to trace the interconnections among a social group.

The infrequent opportunities for comparing simultaneous triangular correspondences further augment the difficulty in seeing just how selective representations of connections are. The correspondences of Anna Jameson and Fanny Kemble with George Combe, however, provide at least an indication of the difficulties. The first letter I have located between Jameson and Combe is dated January 4, 1855, but it is clearly not a "first" letter, for the salutation is "My dear Mr. Combe," and the farewell and subscription, "with all cordial thoughts & kindest wishes - for you & my dear Mrs Combe - I am ever dear friends affectionately yours Anna Jameson." The first letter between Kemble and Combe, also clearly not a "first" letter, is dated November 8, 1835; the last is dated February 15, 1852. That is, although the extant correspondences miss overlapping by three years, the use of the epistolary components, the diction, and the tone indicate that the correspondences were, in all probability, partly synchronous. In almost twenty years of Kemble's letters to Combe there is no reference to Anna Jameson; yet, as can been seen in the correspondence between Jameson and von Goethe, Kemble and Jameson were "good" friends--and correspondents--certainly in the 1830s and 1840s. Is it possible that the two women would not have been aware that they had a friend in common? The answer is provided in two of Jameson's letters to Combe, the first dated January 20, [1855]:

Fanny tells me she is going to Edinburgh - - I could envy her, so comfortable she will be with you & dear Mrs Combe - & I shall fancy you all talking over the fire - as we used to do - tell Mrs Combe my next letter shall be to her -
The other reference is in the transmission of greetings closing a letter of March 21, [1855]: "My love to Mrs Combe - & kind remembrance to Fanny."

According to the social conventions governing the naming of persons, Jameson would not have referred to her solely by her forename if Kemble was not her intimate friend and a person at least well known to Combe. Yet in her way of naming Kemble, she also indicates that Kemble is not a habitual point of connection between them in the "community" constructed by their epistolary interaction, except in the exceptional circumstance of her Edinburgh visit. Jameson’s depiction of fireside congeniality represents their own relational history, and her desire to be once again in face-to-face communication in a domestic setting with the Combes, as her friend will soon be.

The epistolary connection between Jameson and Combe was based on literary business for the most part. Jameson carefully criticizing his work, especially his references to art; thus her role of author and art authority grounded their interaction as persons. The relation between Kemble and Combe, on the other hand, was quite different, as we have already seen. Combe was Kemble's financial advisor as well as confidant, a role played by other men in Jameson’s life. The roles played by correspondents on a social and a personal level shape the construction of their "community"; the naming of persons in the letters constructs and reveals their familiarity.

Jameson’s conditional "could envy" points to a less attractive side of the exclusivity of the epistolary dyad and its constructed community, to the possessiveness that often underlies human pairings. As part of the winnowing process that occurs
during the construction of a dyad's community, whether in extended families or in
groups unrelated by kinship, other contenders for the desired love and approbation are
consciously or unconsciously excluded from the competition. The community
represented in epistolary interaction in a friendship of some duration reflects those
who are perceived to be of no threat to the participants’ relation. The revelation of
certain personality traits and aspects of character the participants feel anxious about,
through their reflection in the choice of other friends and associates, can also threaten
the desired relation. The epistolary community is carefully constructed, therefore, to
minimize jealousy and to prevent exposure. Overt examples are difficult to cite, of
course, for deliberate exclusion is hard to find and verify. Jameson's assurances to
Ottilie von Goethe about what had transpired between the Countess Zichy and herself
suggest not only how the fear of betrayal can surface in intimate friendships, but also
how complex and hence potentially unstable relationships can become when personal
networks interconnect.

How zealously individuals can attempt to guard the exclusivity of their
relationships is illustrated by a confidential disclosure Harriet Martineau made to
Hensleigh Wedgwood, her cousin Fanny’s husband. Written in 1843 during her first
illness, her comment is about Emily Taylor, her friend, cousin, domestic companion,
nurse, amanuensis, and one of the instigators of the pension fund which provided
Martineau with financial support for life. She says:

I have been thinking whether or not to say on paper what I should
certainly have said, if I had had the pleasure of seeing Fanny or you.
I think I will, - on the understanding that it is quite private, please,
- between Fanny, you and me. I was dismayed to find, in the winter,
that not only had Emily Taylor got acquainted herself with Fanny, but was thrusting her sister’s family upon you.27

Editorial excision unfortunately intervenes, but the commentary says that "Although Emily Taylor’s nieces come from ‘good-hearted people’, they are ‘of the most ordinary sort’. HM has tacitly reminded Emily that she dislikes her ‘pushing among my friends’.” Martineau’s text continues:

I have no doubt whatever of the goodness of her heart, but the quality of our minds will never agree. No gratitude for her personal kindness can reconcile me for the repugnant intrusion I find she has been in the practice of, in and by my name.

Confidential disclosure of this type, as it may be recalled from Chapter 1, tends to reflect equivocally not on the subject but on the writer.

If one’s friends and associates may reflect badly on one’s character, they can also, conversely, reflect characteristics valued by the self and other. That is, “equal” participation in a community has the potential to enhance the participants’ relation and foster intimacy. In the last five years of her life, Anna Jameson corresponded with Bessie Parkes, daughter of Jameson’s friends the Joseph Parkes, and friend of Anna Marie Howitt (Mary Howitt’s daughter), Barbara Leigh Smith (Julia Smith’s niece), and Adelaide Proctor, who was the daughter of Basil Proctor (“Barry Cornwall”). Jameson’s financial advisor. Although their relation was in part based on Jameson’s social role as a successful female writer, mature woman, and friend of her parents, their intimacy was fostered by Jameson’s keen interest in Parkes’s female friends and by her approbation of their (feminist) activities.
A letter identified "Roma / Friday Night" to Parkes in Florence provides a clear example of how the representation of equal participation in a shared community of female writers and artists promotes the friendship between the older and the younger women, and diminishes the distance created by age, status, and Jameson's "maternal" admonitions and advice. The letter opens:

You see, dear Bessie, I do not lose any time in answering your letter, I had it this morning - you are a charming generous girl to take so candidly & kindly what I said - with no view to fault-finding - or ^to^ the mere convenience of yourself or others.  

After reiterating her advice briefly, Jameson concludes her first paragraph: " - & now I will never return to the subject - they will not make the less impression because you have accepted my old womanish, maternal observations with so much sweetness -".

The second paragraph amplifies the location identifier, "Roma," through a brief description of Jameson's activities there, including news about her niece and her niece's husband, "Gerardine & Macpherson," who made Rome their home. The third paragraph turns to Parkes's geographic location, Florence, opening: "I hope for your sake (& for hers, as it would be a proof of better spirits) that you will see Mrs Browning. I cannot but think & feel much about her - Have you seen the life of Charlotte Bronte - has it made its appearance at Florence yet?" A discussion of the book, concluding, "till men see the truth as regards us women no good can be done - no effectual lasting good," closes the paragraph. A fourth, short paragraph, obviously in response to Parkes's (not located) letter, opens: "I am glad you will see Naples." Jameson concludes her letter by returning to her place of writing, to news of a mutual
friend, Harriet Hosmer. and in the farewell, to her "maternal" role, terminating in a
friendly overflow across the top with a request for news about Parkes's other friends:

Hatty Hosmer has been up here often to see me - she & [John] Gibson
together one evening - Her monument [Zenobia] is receiving the finishing
touches - it will be, it is already very [omission] & pathetic in its mournful
simplicity - you will write to me from Naples will you not? - I have every
confidence in your excellent management & self dependence but I should like
to hear that you are safe & well & something of Barbara & AM Howitt if you
know any thing.

Jameson presents herself to Parkes as an older experienced woman who is
entitled to adopt a maternal role through affection for her addressee. Her letter
represents their friendly relation, however, as one based on developing and changing
the roles of women in society, an interest shared equally if less radically by Jameson's
friends, the writers Elizabeth Barrett Browning, the late Charlotte Bronte, and
Elizabeth Gaskell, and Parkes's friends, the sculptor Harriet Hosmer, and artists
Barbara Leigh Smith [Bodichon] and Anna Marie Howitt. Jameson's letter, with its
encouragement to Parkes to visit Browning, and its news of Hosmer's visits to herself,
fosters the interconnectedness of their networks through stressing familiarity.

Jameson's ability to form warm and lasting friendships with women of the next
generation points to her capacity for sympathy, the quality that invites confidence and
trust. Her peers and colleagues attested to this quality. Harriet Grote, for instance, pays
tribute to Jameson's power of sympathy in the farewell of a letter about her troubled
relationship with Fanny Elssler: "Good night my tender friend! your sympathy is truly
delightful and consoles me for cherishing such a plague within me as a susceptible
heart."29
Sympathy was a quality far more active than the twentieth-century use of the word as "compassion or approval for" denotes, for it covered what we now tend to psychologize as "empathy". Harriet Martineau, in writing to Leigh Hunt about Charlotte Brontë, uses the word in a way that clarifies its nineteenth-century meaning: "A fairer specimen of the true heroic mind I never saw: large & strong, - gentle & composed, - meek & self-possessed, - so sympathizing that her consciousness seems to pass into others, leaving none for herself."

Because active sympathy involved the ability to stand in the other's shoes, so to speak, it was non-judgmental. It could also be reciprocal. Through self-disclosure and self-revelation, the other opened sufficiently to permit the sympathizer's identification with herself or himself. In the process, the sympathizer also opened to permit the other to see and feel the identification. As a result, both participants felt truly responded to and understood. Because it required identification, sympathy was without pity, a subtly distancing emotion of the better-off towards the worse-off. Harriet Grote, for instance, separated the two feelings in her letter of condolence to her brother-in-law. In other words, sympathy was not confined simply to distressing situations, but was invoked or evoked in any situation where there was an assurance or confidence that it would be reciprocated. Elizabeth Gaskell says in the farewell of a letter to her sister-in-law: "Dearest Lizzy thank you for feeling sure of my sympathy - there is nothing that I like better than the trust in my responding feeling."

Trust in the reciprocity of sympathy, as well as recognition of the sympathizer's feelings arising as a result of extending sympathy (action and reaction,
in other words), is displayed in the opening of Harriet Martineau’s letter to Fanny Wedgwood written in the early days of her first illness:

It is impossible to tell you what a pleasure your letter has been to me. What a luxury is such sympathy as yours! I am afraid I have given you pain on my account: but yet I do not repent it, for I am sure we both feel that to understand one another is far better, under any circumstances, than not feeling together. I am impatient to write to you, not only to thank you, but to assure you of my sympathy in your present uncomfortable feelings, and to give you all the comfort I can about myself.\textsuperscript{32}

As her illness was diagnosed as terminal, Martineau is responding, I believe, to Wedgwood’s feelings of dismay, fear, perhaps anger about an impending bereavement and hence a heightened sense of her own mortality.

The power of sympathy enlarges one, for it allows one to experience something outside the immediate experience, including remembrance, of the self. The sympathizer thus grows and develops by experiencing a full range of thoughts and feelings without the anxiety and fear often aroused by direct experience. Hence the sympathizer transcends her or his own limitations imposed by convention, personal history, and temperament. The recipient also enlarges through the sense of security engendered by trust in the sympathizer, and by the opportunity for experiencing the sympathizer’s reaction. Hence the recipient has an equal chance for transcendence. Furthermore, approbation, love, trust, and security call forth the highest qualities in humans, the “good” posited by Aristotle, the “ideal” desired in friendship.\textsuperscript{31} Elizabeth Barrett, for instance, comments to Mary Russell Mitford:

I am delighted beyond what I can express, by all you say of the new literature. I see your sympathies expanding in it, as sea-weed in water. And I respond to all you say. The morality is monstrous and hideous, - but that thrown aside, . . . as such experienced readers as you and I, have
power to throw it, - the vitality and spontaneity of thought & feeling throughout the books, must act upon us nobly. & to our delight. Just what you say, I feel.

The "water" was not so much the "new literature" itself as the security provided by their friendship to explore together the new--the "forbidden" too in many cases.

The reciprocity of sympathy and its power to alter the self is the subject of Jane Sedgwick's letter to her sister-in-law Catharine. Her letter opens:

Never did so precious a morsel fall from your pen as your letter! I would not give it for all Redwood, Clarence, Hope Leslie, and the rest of those very precious books [by Catharine]. It was just what I needed - what I longed for. Of all the abundant good gifts you have received with such liberality from God, there is not one for which you ought to be so grateful as the power of your sympathy [. . . .] I look to you with a certainty that every thrill of pain or pleasure will find its echo in your heart, and this sentiment often stands in place of society to me.

Hence part of the security engendered by sympathy is a reduction in the fear of being alone (existentially) and a corresponding increase in the ability to grow and develop "alone", that is, as an individual. Even the painfully shy, if not agoraphobic Elizabeth Barrett was able to describe the power of sympathy to an old family friend, Mrs. Martin, in a letter responding to her recommendation that she should live in the country:

Oh. I do believe you think me a Cockney - a metropolitan barbarian! But I persist in seeing no merit and no superior innocence in being shut up even in precincts of rose-trees, away from those great sources of human sympathy and occasions of mental elevation and instruction without which many natures grow narrow, many others gloomy, and perhaps, if the truth were known, very few prosper entirely. It is not that I, who have always lived a good deal in solitude and live in it still more now, and love the country even painfully in my recollections of it, would decry either one or the other - but solitude is most effective in a contrast, and if you do not break the bark you cannot bud the tree, and, in short
I could write a dissertation which I will spare you, 'about it and about it'.

Can the "breaking of the bark" actually be seen in letters? Not easily. There are several reasons for this. The developmental process is a slow one, not given to overt expression on a single occasion; although interactants may write about sympathy, thanking each other for it, they are unable to describe exactly how it has changed them. Even in a correspondence of years in which a friendship develops into a profound relation, it can be very difficult to pinpoint exactly how and when the interactants have moved each other to a different way of relating to self or others. If one turns instead to a time of crisis in an individual's life, and to the presentation and representation of the self to others in letters of that particular time, it is next to impossible to find and compare two (or more) letters written at the time, on the same topics, to correspondents with whom the relations are comparable. Nevertheless, the two examples which follow provide some indication of how the power of sympathy in the dyadic relation affects epistolary expression.

The first example is a lengthy letter written by Mary Russell Mitford in 1842 to her American friend Andrew Norton. As it is written roughly at the same time as Martineau's letter to Emerson, covers many of the same themes, and builds familiarity in a similar way, it provides a useful comparison. Mitford presents herself, in the opening of her letter, as a dutiful daughter and a faithful correspondent:

I sit down with notice of repose my dear Mr Norton, determined to send you a long letter, although writing on an open book at my dear father's bedside, reading to him when he awakens, & resuming my letter when he drops asleep. you must pardon at once the form & the quality - In quantity only can I hope to repay my most kind & valued Correspondent,
She opens the body of her letter by thanking Norton for a gift, a gift which she will reciprocate, as she informs him in a postscript written on the envelope flap, by sending him a copy of her opera libretto: "First let me thank you for having been the indirect means of procuring me a great pleasure in the shape of a letter from Mr Ware with a present of his most graceful & classical Letters from Palmyra -." After a few comments on the same topic, Mitford turns to the conveyance of her letters, and therefore to the network of friends and literary connections which link their "community":

I write [to Ware] by the same conveyance that will bring you this - that is to say by the channel of our dear Mr Kenyon whom I see too rarely, but whose kindness always alive is felt almost as constantly as yours. Ah! when I think that I owe his friendship & that of the dear circle across the great sea to that pen- & -ink prowess which I am perverse enough to decry I retract my heresies at once, & confess that it is even good to be so poor an authoress as I am (poor in all senses) to be so rich in that most precious wealth the kindness & sympathy of friends.

Thus Mitford presents herself as an exemplary woman--a dutiful daughter--but represents herself, despite her self-deprecating comments, as a woman with "pen- & -ink prowess," or in other words, as a successful author with an international reputation, secure in a literary community, a representation borne out by the remainder of her letter.

After a digression about her father, she returns to the ordering of her text:

To return to your great kindness: I shall indeed be delighted to possess Mr Stephen's amusing & instructive book - [...] It is a curious co-incidence that the very day that brought me your most welcome letter a friend fresh from London came to tell me that another friend was now engaged in writing for the Quarterly, & had reviewed
Stephen's work for that Journal - in the Tuesday number. This critic is no other than Mr Henry Milton Mrs Trollope's brother, whose late father lived about 4 miles from us, & whom I have known for many years.

Commentary and description follow, mainly about Mrs Trollope whose famous (or infamous) book on America, if not the woman herself, would be known to Norton. In her commentary, Mitford is able to separate her appreciation of the woman from her estimation of her as a writer: "She is (with in my mind great faults as a writer) a pleasant warm-hearted woman." Next in Mitford's list of topics, by association with friends and neighbours, is a person not known to Norton: "I have just lost a dear friend - Lady Sidmouth." But Mitford is not parading her titled friend for Norton to admire. Because her commentary is about the suddenness of her death, she adopts a perspective which allows her to include Norton and his own friends in sympathetic identification, concluding: "I saw her death first in a newspaper - just as happened (as dear Mrs Ticknor may remember) with regard to poor Mrs Kenyon - such is life! -".

In the second paragraph of her letter, Mitford turns once again to Norton's letter: "What you say of Mr. Dickens & what I have seen in our newspapers (copied I presume from your's) reminds me of Mr. Moore's Irish honours during a Tour which he made a few years ago in his native country." An amusing story follows, concluding with a return to the ostensible topic: "I am not acquainted with Mr Dickens but I like the Pickwick Papers well enough to hope that he has enjoyed his honours & can but rejoice at all that unites two nations who ought always to be friends -".
In her final paragraph, Mitford poses first a literary query (to elicit a response), and then continues, through queries, the process of building familiarity by enumerating their connections:

Can you tell me about a person whose work interested me exceedingly for his after destiny - the author of Two Years before the Mast? [. . . .]
And Dr Channing - how is he? and Mr & Mrs Webster & their amiable daughter? - And above all your own selves Mr & Mrs Ticknor & Mrs Norton? Tell me all -

Mitford's warm responsiveness is demonstrated by her interest in all the people whom she has named as persons rather than as representatives of social roles, and by her confirmation of Norton's interest in them for the same reason. Yet all the persons named, with the sole exception of Lady Sidmounth, are literati. It is the power of Norton's sympathy--as well as that of other friends--which calls forth a corresponding feeling, a feeling which heightens her own sense of security and self-worth. In that security she writes as a "full" person, a person of wide reading and intellectual cultivation, yet also a person with likes and dislikes, weaknesses and strengths, prejudices and opinions, humour, magnanimity, and curiosity. Martineau's letter, on the other hand, despite its vivid depiction of herself striding around the Lake District, represents her "self" less fully, for in her naming of persons she confines herself almost entirely to a social level.

Two letters written by Harriet Martineau, one to Fanny Wedgwood on January 11, [1844], and the other to Mrs. [?Caroline] Romilly, March 9, [1844], provide a second example. Together they show how the power of sympathy encourages the recipient to express thoughts and feelings openly, thus creating an opportunity for self-
knowledge. Wedgwood, of course, was Martineau’s intimate friend; Mrs. Romilly, to
the best of my knowledge, was not. Yet in her letter to Mrs. Romilly she reveals a
pattern of thinking about herself that differs subtly from that revealed to Wedgwood.
Much of her long letter to Wedgwood recounts how she came to write *Life in the
Sick-room* (1844), and why she decided to publish it anonymously without telling even
her family about it. She concludes her account:

> And here I think I have told you all I can tell, - as I am sure you
> would wish. It is only just for your own little knot ['(ie. you three)'].
> I will own, finally, that I am very happy, since this happened. A new
> aspect seems given to my whole lot, now it has become of service to others.
> This reconciles every thing. You know this, my friend. You know how your
> own personal fatigues and sufferings are made holy and dear, and how they
> assume the aspect of privileges by their being the essential conditions of
> life to a new human being [Wedgwood was pregnant]. Your bodily sufferings
> are the elements of the life of an immortal being, and your mental anxieties,
> your conflicts under responsibility, all go to enrich its future spiritual
> existence.38

Two months later. Martineau wrote to Mrs Romilly a letter opening with

> apologies for not responding sooner to thank her for a favour conferred. After
describing kindnesses her various friends have shown her, Martineau turns more
specifically to her addressee:

> You wd not easily believe the glow of pleasure your note gave me.
> Its warmth & heartiness cheered me for days. It is a great solace to
> know of one's friends' concern for one's troubles, though I have a
> perpetual dread of claiming more sympathy than my case really requires.
> The truth is, any sort of affliction comes so differently to a family
> person whose health & vigour & happiness are wanted every hour, & to one
> who has nothing to do but to take whatever lot comes, & make the best of
> it. I wd not be superstitious, - (& I think it is not superstition to
> recognize a particular vocation when the order of a person's mind & the
> circumstances of his life together render that life apt to a special
> service;) - without superstition, then, it seems as if my business in
> life had been, & is to be, to suffer for other people's information, -
to be a sort of pioneer in the regions of pain, to make the way somewhat easier, - or at least more direct to those who come after. If you knew what a continued series of disappointments & troubles my life has been, & how directly whatever I have been able to do has arisen out of this, you wd agree with me. - But how slow we are in learning such lessons. Though I had had such long experience before, I never discovered this truth, - never perceived this aspect of my present condition till within a few weeks, - my eyes being opened to it by the eagerness with wh my experience (in the form of an anonymous book) has been received, showing the want there was of such hints as can be given.39

More detailed information about her present state of health follows before this part of her letter concludes: "I shall be ashamed of this scribble as soon as it is gone: but your note is so entirely that of a friend that I have run on as your heart & my own seemed to lead".

It was a rather extraordinary confidence to make. In responding to the sympathy shown her by Mrs. Romilly, Martineau reveals how, in the space of two months, she has transformed her original view of her illness and the fruit it had borne in the form of a popular book--a labour comparable to Wedgwood's "womanly" labour--into a raison d'être for her entire life. The curse of Eve has been reworked into a vocation, a divine calling given only to priests, saints, and martyrs. Although it seems to me to be the very kernel of Martineau's philosophy about her own life, I know of nowhere else where it is expressed so succinctly. Nor is it a coincidence that her thoughts and feelings should have been expressed so cogently to such a friend, for intimacy--a sudden, simultaneous, full sense of self and other--frequently happens without great closeness.

"Intimate" and "close" are often used synonymously, as I have done myself to describe a type of friendship. It would be more accurate, however, to describe a
friendship as close enough to allow an opportunity for intimacy. Intimacy is encouraged by feelings of trust, security, and approbation in the self while in relation to the other. In the intimate moment--for although recurrent it is of brief duration--the self and the other are perceived as sharply differentiated, yet fully one in their humaness and in their love. Emerson's description, free from twentieth-century psychological language and concepts such as dependency, alienation, and boundaries, points to what we now describe as intimacy:

The condition which high friendship demands is ability to do without it. To be capable that high office requires great and sublime parts. There must be very two, before there can be very one. Let it be an alliance of two large, formidable natures, mutually beheld, mutually feared, before yet they recognise the deep identity which, beneath these disparities, unites them. (186)

The three dimensions of friendship connoted by the Greek words show their commonality in his description.

If few friendships ever reach the "high" level posited by Emerson, some few manage to reach a depth where storms and turbulence rarely touch them. The storms may be quarrels and clashes of opinion and belief, or they may be temporary periods of withdrawal or the withholding of "secrets." Or a squall may be provoked even by the inability to express the sometimes discomfiting feelings associated with intimacy. Anna Jameson, for example, is moved to apologize to Lady Byron for her inability to express her feelings in a suitable way during a previous meeting:

Your letter made me smile, then brought the tears - but I could not help it. ^or them^ - the greater part of my heart & soul is always with you - & when I left you - it was as if I had left both behind me - but was it not fine & philosophical to make an attempt at abstraction - & not having Emerson at hand - prisons & schools
seemed the next best thing - but it wont do - & I wont do so any more.40

Oddly enough, intimacy can have an alienating, as well as an attaching effect: too much self-disclosure, too suddenly or too early in a relation, may result in shame or fear.41 This is another reason why intimacy can happen in a natural setting (as a "spot of time"), or in the presence of a relative stranger to whom there are no "strings" attached. Yet its apotheosis seems to be when it is the result of a deeply-felt relation with a loved one.

Intimate moments are difficult for an external reader to perceive in letters, but the effects of intimacy can be observed in the gap between the presentation of the self and the representation of the self. That is, the writer presents herself (or himself) as an attached friend, a presentation congruent with the presentation of the epistolary body. At the same time, the writer represents herself as a person distinctly different from the addressee, a person who values her autonomy, an apparent incongruency with the demonstration of attachment. As most women have far more difficulty with autonomy than they do with merged attachment, such representations in women's letters are infrequent.42 Differences are more frequently indicated by avoidance of topics, use of markers for distance--and silence, a complete unwillingness to engage in interaction.

Elizabeth Barrett comments on the efficacious result of intimacy, despite the discrepancies of age and status as writers, in a letter to Mary Russell Mitford:

    Oh yes, yes! my beloved friend, you are very right I am sure. We do agree really & effectually when, as in so many cases, we agree to differ, - because we, so, agree to be true. If truth were not above all, my place wd be under your feet: but truth is above all, - & therefore you allow me to sit at your side with an equal opinion.43
Mitford and Barrett Browning "quarrelled" about many subjects, especially the value of Mitford's literary work, and the style of Barrett Browning's poetry. When their ardent support for their own opinions angered the other, they apologized. On the surface, neither seemed to change very much, yet each, it could be argued, helped the other in the long term to modify her position, temper her views, and exceed her own limitations. One particularly interesting example, for the light it also sheds on Aurora Leigh, is provided by Barrett Browning's recognition of their differences when ideology, personal morality, and happiness collided in the "matter of K," Mitford's longtime maid and general servant. Briefly, K [Kerenhappuch] became pregnant by Mitford's manservant Ben who left her employ, refusing to marry K; Mitford dismissed her as she was "bound" by Victorian ideology to do. But after much anguish, for K was her household companion as much as her servant, Mitford re-instated her. Barrett Browning did not, at least at first, support this change of mind, but it was one which brought increased happiness to Mitford's household in the form of the child, the marriage of K and Mitford's new manservant Sam, and later the birth of a little girl. The difficulty in accepting her friend's decision can be seen in her self-presentation and representation:

and in the matter of K, why, dearest Miss Mitford, your being pleased and satisfied, makes me both in a measure, believe me. If ever I spoke bluntly on that question, it was chiefly to spare you what, from my own idiosyncrasy, I concluded to be a painful position . . it being to me so very painful not to trust those who are about me, that no advantage could counterbalance the pain. But of course you know best, & can judge best of what is happiest for yourself; and having the assurance of her repentance & reformation, perhaps it is reasonable in you as well as generous and kind, to act as if the past were a blank and no treason had ever approached
Barrett Browning’s ambivalence is conveyed by her qualifications, such as "in a measure" and "perhaps": it is also displayed in the disjunction between "dearest" and "Miss Mitford", in her personal ellipsis, and in the prominence given to "me" (contrastive) and "believe & hold" (additive or perhaps equative). Thus the disjunctions between her presentation and her representation of self betray her struggle to reconcile complex and conflicting thoughts and feelings.

Anna Jameson displays the effect of intimacy, and the responsibility imposed by friendship in a letter written to Ottilie von Goethe shortly after von Goethe’s almost disastrous love affair. Her letter begins:

You pity me with that contemptuous pity which I understand so well, because my letter containing some reproach arrived in an unhappy moment. I am sorry it was so, but while you are worthy to be called my friend I must speak to you as I feel and think, and blame you, when I see you wrong, and this precisely because you always take the privilege of doing exactly what you like in despite of the wishes or opinions of others, even those who love you best. You have the right undoubtedly, but that does not make it right. Never, while I love you, while you are my friend, my own Ottilie, will I stoop to treat you as they treat mad people and spoiled children, always saying ‘O yes’ and ‘to be sure! quite right’, merely because it is not worth the trouble to differ, or to blame.45

Jameson presents herself as von Goethe’s true friend in her long letter filled with endearments and reports about herself, as well as in her responsiveness to von Goethe’s letter, despite its "contemptuousness." There is no incongruency between the presentation of the epistolary body and the presentation of herself as von Goethe’s attached friend. Yet Jameson also represents herself as a woman obliged to be true,
without apology, to her own thoughts and feelings, that is, to her own self. She will neither flatter von Goethe, indulge her, avoid her, nor ignore her. That von Goethe was able to see there was, in fact, no incongruency in Jameson’s presentation and representation of herself is attested by the longevity—and intimacy—of their correspondence.

A final example comes, perhaps surprisingly, from the correspondence between Harriet Martineau and Florence Nightingale. Despite their friendship’s bumpy beginning, Martineau and Nightingale eventually learned to trust each other enough to allow their differences to surface occasionally, and relaxed their usual strategy of withdrawal and the avoidance of topics. Nightingale’s modification of the avoidance strategy uses one of the oldest of rhetorical tricks, that of purporting not to be talking about a particular topic. Hence her presentation defers to her friend’s differences, yet her representation gives voice to her own opinions. Her use of typography to represent multiple voices, thereby obscuring her own, is also effective. Perhaps responding to a topic in a (missing) letter from Martineau, Nightingale opens her own letter without a salutation: "I don’t allude to the Holstein question, farther than by transcribing: - 'the Danish business seems at last to come right [. . .]'.".46

Several sentences follow before Nightingale starts to "edit" the text in the middle of a sentence: "... the stupid jealousy of Austria & the' (violence & ignorance - I put in this, as less hard & more true than the original ^word used^) 'of the English' press." Fragmenting the text with her own words and an inconsistent sprinkling of quotation marks, Nightingale continues:
But at last 'they must give up this 'iniquitous treaty of 1852'.
As for the Queen having 'given assurance - to Prussia', she is &
always has been in dire disgrace with Prussia - And so is her daughter,
the Pr. Royal. (Crown Pr.) - for being German, not Prussian. Anything
more untrue could scarcely have been concocted. [The Queen of Prussia's
visit was forced upon her, if that is what people allude to. But I don't
\^really\^ know what they mean.]

A final paragraph, venting her indignation entirely in her own words, concludes her
discussion before the letter closes without farewell or subscription, "F.N.". The next
day, Nightingale sent Martineau a letter on their current business, the campaign for the
repeal of the Contagious Diseases Act.

Two days later, Nightingale, responding to a letter received in the interim,
wrote again to Martineau. The third and final paragraph of her business letter returns,
once again, to the "Danish question":

I will not say a word about the Danish question. Because, as you say,
we 'differ so widely'. I will only say that what I told you of the Pr.
Royal, & which you say you do 'not' 'believe', I know just as I know
any other matter of fact: just as I know the fact of your opinions.
And I know our Queen & Pr. Royal to have been grossly libelled, which
is my reason for saying this. [The Extract I sent you was from a personal
friend of the Queen's. That however had nothing to do with the Pr. Royal].
Ever yours dear friend F.N.

The correspondence between these "two large formidable natures" ran on unimpeded
by the occasional display of self-assertion and conflicting views for many more years.

Epistolary interactants encourage, sustain, and develop friendship through the
representation of themselves and their relation. They create a "shared space" in which
they can meet as equals, a space not fractured by social and family status
demarcations, but bounded by role performances on social and personal levels. This
space is embedded in a "community", a mutually constructed web of people with
whom the interactants interconnect. Within this space, the interactants represent themselves as symbiotically merged through sympathetic identification and as autonomous persons if intimacy develops. The representation of the self/other dyad can also be observed at a discourse level. As the discussion of the responsive process has shown, the central problem for the epistolary text is maintaining the dyad’s equilibrium. Too much self, or too much other, upsets the balance and closes down the responsive process, a continuous circuit of recognition, recollection, and requital. Letter writers manage this balance by using a combination of five functions in their discourse: request, advise, report, inquire, and discuss. Requesting and inquiring orient the text to the other; advising and reporting orient it to the self; discussing situates the text at a mid-point between the participants. These functions may be presented directly by using the verbs ("I request"), but very often they are conveyed indirectly; hence, they are represented rather than presented. The actions denoted by these verbs, however, cannot always be clearly separated if the verbs themselves are not used. The fluidity of the functional boundaries is indicative of the continuous circuitry of the responsive process.

As we have frequently seen, letter writers use queries overtly to elicit a response. Their effect is almost always to make the recipient feel as though she (or he) is important to the writer, whether the query is a request for information about the addressee, or for the direct benefit of the inquirer. Queries, however, must be carefully posed to avoid offending the recipient by appearing intrusive or demanding, or through the fear of eliciting undesired reactions. Imperatives and interrogatives are frequently
used in a blended form to indicate that the inquirer earnestly desires a response, without giving a wrong impression.

Mary Russell Mitford, for instance, followed her series of questions about Andrew Norton's associates and family with an imperative "Tell me all." Her series of elliptical interrogatives terminating in the imperative perform the dual functions of inquiring and requesting, a double orientation of her text to the other to double the probability of a response. Her humorous hyperbole "all" points to friendship. Anna Jameson, as may be recalled, also blended the interrogative and imperative in her letter to Jane Carlyle, a doubling of function that signified on multiple levels. Writers can also submerge their queries in phrases such as "I hope," "I suppose," or "I wish," another blending of the imperative with the interrogative. Mrs. Siddons, for instance, opens a letter to Fanny Kemble: "among other Letters I give Miss Payne one to you. I hope you will be kind enough to pay some attention to it"^48, a blending of "Will you be kind to Miss Payne?" with "Pay attention to my letter."

Similarly, advising and informing can also be blended, the blurred semantic boundary of "advise" as "give advice" and "inform" suggesting a link in itself. A letter from Fanny Kemble to her publishers, Macmillan, provides an example of the blending of four of the functions:

My dear Sir - I suppose you intend to publish my notes on Macbeth (because you have sent me the proof sheets for correction) & I suppose you intend to pay me for them because you did so before when you published something of mine - if these suppositions are correct may I request you to place any such payment at Messrs Coutts' Bank for me - I am going abroad for a little while and should be sorry to lose any remittance you might send to St Leonards after I have left it -^49
Is this an interrogative. "Are you going to pay me?", or an imperative. "Pay me"?

Does she advise him to pay her at a certain bank, or does she inform him of a change in her usual place for banking because she is going abroad? However the functions' distribution in the text is described, it is clear that all four functions are present in roughly the same proportion; hence, an equilibrium between self and other is achieved.

A "social" letter in the form of a note to the young Ralph Lovelace, Lord Wentworth, Lady Byron's grandson, also written by Fanny Kemble, can be compared with her business letter. After first thanking him for his letter and its accompanying gift of dried flowers, Kemble continues:

I wish you had told me something about your Grandmamma's health - and your own present occupations - & whether you are coming to town to see the Exhibition and whether if you do you think you can find time to come and pay me a little visit - it will give me great pleasure to see you again -

Kemble's brief letter advises Ralph of her gratitude for his letter; it informs him of the topics she has an interest in for a future transaction; it indirectly inquires whether he will be coming to London soon; and it requests a face-to-face meeting with him. But the functions could also be distributed differently. For instance, we might say that it inquires after Lady Byron's health, and that it advises a child how to write a better letter! The point remains, nevertheless, that all four functions are present, working in pairs and chiastically. From a performative aspect, Kemble's letter thanks and invites, two reciprocal functions which are not specifically conveyed by illocutionary verbs.

The discourse balance of the self/other dyad can also be observed in much longer letters written in a friendship context. Mitford's letter to Andrew Norton, for
instance, advises him of her gratitude for his letter and gift (thanks); informs him that she does not know Dickens personally but that she knows the Trollopes; informs him of her father's state of health (etcetera); requests information about Richard Dana; and inquires about mutual friends. Each of these functions is embedded in much surrounding text. the part of the text I describe under the fifth function, discuss, a broad category covering exposition, declamation, and description, all locutions. Letters written in a friendship context have a much higher proportion of locutionary text to illocutionary, the four other functions sometimes being squeezed out to the margins, advising and informing at the beginning, requesting and inquiring at the end. Nevertheless, all four functions should be present in order to maintain equilibrium, and the fifth must be present to promote friendship, for it is in the fifth that the facets of the self are displayed, as well as the private relation between the participants, through representation. Martineau's letter to Emerson, for instance, informs him of her new residence, her renovated health, and who her neighbours and correspondents are, as well as advising him of her continued pleasure in his Essays. But it does not request and the only inquiry is the indirect, "I wonder if Bryant can tell me," a question which will be answered by Bryant, not Emerson. Thus the self/other equilibrium is upset despite the quantity of expository and descriptive material.

If in friendship letters a fifth function is introduced, a function which displaces the four others to the margins, what, it may be asked, does this characteristic indicate about epistolary discourse? The work of linguists on conversation—phatic discourse—suggests an answer. "Phatic communion" was the term first given by Bronislaw
Malinowski in 1923 to a "type of speech in which the ties of union are created by a mere exchange of words," a concept since applied to the study of conversation. Phatic discourse is characterized by ritualistic or formulaic elements, stereotypical topics such as the weather, and "safe" topics (where agreement is likely), usually derived from the immediate setting (the frame) in which the interactants find themselves. Its function is to open up a channel of communication between participants and to maintain contact at an appropriate distance. It may function either as a prelude and postlude to a "core" conversation, or as an entire conversation. Klaus Schneider's description of conversational discourse includes many of the features I have identified in epistolary texts:

It is generally accepted that conversations as well as many other discourse types consist of three phases, core and margins (opening and closing) [. . . .] The core or centre of a conversation is considered the interaction proper, whereas the marginal phases serve a transitory function, bridging the gap between non-interaction and interaction [. . . .] The primary aim of the opening is to define the interactants' relationship, to establish or to re-establish social contact, and, unless the discourse occurs between strangers, to link the current encounter with previous ones. Similarly the closing phase reflects the present state of an interpersonal relationship at the end of an interaction, i.e. to what extent the interaction has reaffirmed or redefined (for better or worse) the relationship. Further, in the closing phase the interactants express the wish to continue friendly relations in the future (even if that wish is not genuine). Apart from this social purpose the margins fulfill a textual or discourse structuring function. After the (re-) establishment of contact etc., openings prepare for the central issue dealt with in the core. This issue, or set of issues, is concluded and summed up in the closing phase before the interpersonal relationship is focused again. (97-98)

The specifically epistolary elements--the location identifier, salutation, subscription, and farewell--are phatic elements as well as structural components in the letter text. The four functional components excluding discuss are also phatic elements
designed to maintain contact: hence, their order and placement also structure the text. To a certain degree, Mitford’s letter to Norton was structured by her first functional component, advise. As may be recalled, Mitford began her letter by advising him of her gratitude for his kindnesses to her as well as those of other friends; gratitude is a theme throughout the body of the letter; and the opening is echoed in the "gratefully" of her subscription. The proportion of phatic elements to "instrumental" elements also structures the text. Kemble’s letters to Macmillan and to Ralph Lovelace are composed entirely of phatic elements. Her letter to Ralph Lovelace forwards their connection on a social level by conducting the "business" of thanking and inviting. At the same time, it preserves the appropriate distance between them. Business (occupational) letters, on the other hand, usually contain few or no phatic elements other than the epistolary components, their instrumental purpose being to forward a transaction, not connection. Thus Kemble’s letter represents an ambivalence or discomfort about conducting (financial) business through its "mis-use" of an appropriate proportion of discourse-structuring elements. the ambivalence of the four functional elements supporting this observation.

Where the development of friendship is the primary purpose of a letter, the proportion of phatic to instrumental elements may be harder to discern if the letter is lengthy. As Schneider’s description suggests, the textual structuring elements, topics, might also be phatic elements. His visualization of the "basic options for topic selection in phatic talk as three concentric circles" is a helpful way of understanding the proportioning:
1) the immediate situation [. . . ] medium level or, with regard to its topic potential, the most neutral and non-committing level (frame elements).
2) the external situation, the outer circle. It represents the larger context of the immediate situation and could be called the 'super-situation'. Its topic potential is the least limited of the three.
3) the communication situation i.e. the interactants, as a subset of the immediate situation; the inner circle of the model. (86)

Schneider notes that the starting point for phatic discourse is always the medium level.

The three concentric circles can be seen as sources of epistolary topics when the promotion of friendship is the aim. The medium level corresponds to the writer's spatial and temporal location. The outer level corresponds to the world as it is from the writer's perspective; the inner level to the correspondents' relational history and to the interactional context--the writing of the letter and the occasion. The necessity for achieving a balance in the distribution of topics derived from the three levels has already been discussed. What is of particular relevance here is that all are phatic elements, the first being the most neutral. Thus the "core" corresponds to the part of the discourse specifically designed for the development of friendship; that is, to the representation of the self, the other, and their relation, or in other words, to creative transformation. Both Martineau's letter to Emerson and Jameson's letter to Parkes contain a high proportion of phatic elements, the geographic settings in particular being prominently displayed as topics. In structuring their texts in this way, both writers represent their desire to maintain a distance appropriate for their bilateral relations with the addressee, expressing either an unavailability for intimacy, or an unwillingness to appear too desirous of intimacy too soon. The sources of topic
derivation, as well as the distribution of the four functional components, yield further insight into the representation of the self/other dyadic relation.

The interplay of the phatic discourse ("oral") topics and the textual ("written") topics as structural or compositional elements leads to a final observation about the epistolary form. Letters, by definition, must contain a minimal number of phatic components, their function being to connect two persons in a social relationship for the purpose of forwarding business. If that business is purely at a social level, the phatic elements are either very high, their function being to promote interaction, or very low, the instrumental function of the business transaction predominating. In a friendship context, two levels are represented, the social by the phatic, and the personal by the representational, the instrumental function being the promotion of friendship as has already been described. Hence, it is in letters written to friends for the purpose of developing friendship that the three principal textual divisions formulated by the rhetoricians converge. From the judical point of view, these letters testify (social) and witness (personal); from the deliberative, these letters promote interaction (social) and individuation (personal); and from the epideictic, these letters depict the two aspects of the self (biographical), the sacred (social) self, and the natural, expressive (personal) self. This convergence suggests why ancient rhetorical formulations could find no place for friendship letters, and perhaps may reconcile some long-standing arguments about how letters in general should be viewed. Because representation is a creative transformation, when letters are written for the purpose of developing friendship, they are more aesthetic than those with simply pragmatic aims. The twin goals of the
"good" (moral) and the "beautiful" (aesthetic), as Aristotle posited them in friendship as well as in art, come together in these letters, a triumph of art over artifact.
Notes

1. Cf. Graham Little, "Freud, Friendship, and Politics" in Roy Porter and Sylvana Tomaselli, eds., The Dialectics of Friendship (London: Routledge, 1989): "All of these [psychoanalysts] suggest a relationship which, though contractual and unequal in part, and though helping and compassionate in part, is distinctively one-to-one, intellectually without boundaries (legal, pious and even logical), intent on defusing without disowning the past and, ranging back and forth, aimed at the future. There is extreme consciousness and blundering unconsciousness, intimacy and distance, absence and presence, intense identification and ultimate autonomy. The claims of friendship may be utopian" (153).

2. Cf. Joel D. Black and Diane Greenberg, Women and Friendship (N.Y.: Franklin Watts, 1985): "But there seems to be no satisfactory answer to the question. On what basis does a woman choose a friend? Like religion, friendship demands an initial leap of faith or daring that may be developed or eventually disavowed. Beyond social class and age factors, which virtually every study affirms to be important, the reasons why two women join in friendship cannot be fully accounted for" (67).


4. The letter's role in bringing women into the Anti-Slavery Movement provides an example of how a form used to conserve the ties among individual networks can, when those networks combine for the purpose of effecting change, have a radical effect. Not only was sufficient political pressure brought to bear through the movement as a whole on the institution of slavery to effect abolition, but women also were set on the way to liberating themselves from the confines of the domestic (private) sphere. See Clare Midgley, Women Against Slavery (London: Routledge, 1992), 44-48, about the formation of the first women's Anti-Slavery Society, The Female Society for Birmingham; also, Louis Billington and Rosamund Billington, "'A Burning Zeal for Righteousness': Women in the British Anti-Slavery Movement, 1820-1860" in Jane Rendall, ed., Equal or Different (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987); and Alex Tyrrell, "'Women's Mission' and Pressure Group Politics in Britain (1825-60)" in Bulletin of the John Ryland's Library, 63.

5. Harriet Martineau to William Ware, October 11 [1836], Ms Eng 244, Boston Public Library.

6. Cf. Emerson: "But I find this law of one to one peremptory for conversation, which is the practice and consummation of friendship" (184). Also Thomas P. Malone and Patrick T. Malone, The Art of Intimacy (N.Y.: Simon & Schuster, 1987): "It is our basic conviction that the keystone of all relationships knowable to humans, the
prototype out of which all our relational models, whether familial, social, or cultural, are derived, is the human-to-human relationship" (2).

7. Harriet Grote to Joseph Grote, December 19, 1847, MS Eng Lett d.456 (182), Bodleian Library, Oxford University.


9. Elizabeth Barrett to Mary Russell Mitford [Late February or Early March, 1837], #9, 1:27.

10. Elizabeth Barrett to Mary Russell Mitford, December 8, 1842, 2:112.

11. Harriet Martineau to Fanny Wedgwood, [February or March 1844], #34.


13. Anna Jameson to Lady Byron [February 19, 1843], Byron/Lovelace Papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford University. Note that antithetical positions are represented by omitting the salutation: the addressee’s constant presence with the writer, and the writer’s refusal (usually through anger) to imagine herself (or himself) in the addressee’s presence, a conjunction of love and hate.

14. Elizabeth Barrett to Mary Russell Mitford, June 28, 1843, #278, 2:258.

15. Cf. Block and Greenberg, Women and Friendship: "[Paul] Wright notes that for men, friendship tends to be a side-by-side relationship, with the partners mutually oriented to some external task or activity; for women, friendship tends to be face-to-face, with the partners oriented to a personal knowledge of and concern for one another" (14).


18. Elizabeth Barrett to Mary Russell Mitford [February 1840], #67. 1:178.

19. Cf. Jacques Derrida, "The Politics of Friendship", The Journal of Philosophy 85: "Friendship is never a given in the present; it belongs to the experience of waiting, of promise, or of commitment. Its discourse is that of prayer and at issue there is that which responsibility opens to the future" (636).
20. Anna Jameson to Ottilie von Goethe, July 24, 1858, #205, 223. Ellipses Needler's. Brighton was associated with Lady Byron; their friendship had effectively ended in 1852.


22. Cf. Peter V. Marsden and Nan Lin, Social Structure and Network Analysis ((Beverly Hills: Sage, 1982): "Over the past two decades . . . and particularly during the 1970s, an approach to studying social structure known as network analysis has developed. Defining social structure as 'a persisting pattern of social relationships among social positions.' . . . this approach focuses attention on relationships between actors rather than on attributes of actors or their group memberships" (9). Ronald S. Burt in Toward a Structural Theory of Action (N.Y.: Academic Press, 1982) describes the "primary group", those who are "connected to one another by strong relations", as "characterized by intimate face-to-face association and cooperation. . . . The result of intimate association, psychologically, is a certain fusion of individualities in a common whole, so that one's very self, for many purposes at least, is the common life and purpose of the group" (37). See also. Beverly Burnside, Depression is a Feminist Issue (Vancouver: Mature Women's Network, 1990), for a concise description of personal networks.

23. Harriet Martineau to Ralph Waldo Emerson, July 2 [1845]. BMS AM 1280 (2076), Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, USA.

24. Martineau was to say of Jameson in her Autobiography, written in 1855: "Lady Morgan and Lady Davy and Mrs. Austin and Mrs. Jameson may make women blush and men smile and be insolent and their gross and palpable vanities may help to lower the position and discredit the pursuits of other women, while starving out their own natural powers" (I:352). an unkind, and by association, contemptuous dismissal of Jameson's and Austin's intellectual abilities and achievements.

25. Anna Jameson to George Combe, January 4, 1855, MS 7348, 7349, 7350, Combe Papers, National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh. The letters of January 20, [1855] and March 21, [1855] quoted subsequently are in the same collection.


27. Harriet Martineau to Hensleigh Wedgwood [September 3, 1843], #29, 64. Emily Taylor was also a cousin of Sarah Taylor Austin.
28. Anna Jameson to Bessie Parkes [May 1857], BRP VI 20, Girton College Library, Cambridge. Bessie Parkes [Belloc] was one of the founders of the 
Englishwoman's Journal (1858), the first "feminist" periodical. Jameson carefully criticized each number until her death, conflating but continuing the roles she is playing here.

29. Harriet Grote to Anna Jameson, April 14 [early 1840s], Erskine, 186. The location identifier is "1/2 past 11 p.m.".

British Letters Illustrative of Character and Social Life, 3 vols. (N.Y.: Putnam's Sons, 1888): "Charlotte Bronte to W.S. Williams, July 21, 1851: 'The moral of it is, that if we would build on a sure foundation in friendship, we must love our friends for their sakes, rather than for our own; we must look at their truth to themselves, full as much as their truth to us. In the latter case, every wound to self-love would be a cause of coldness; in the former, only some painful change in the friend's character and disposition - some fearful breach in his allegiance to his better self - could alienate the heart . . . .'" (I:247).

31. Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell to Elizabeth Gaskell, [July 17, 1838], #9, 21.

32. Harriet Martineau to Fanny Wedgwood, September 14, [1839], #8, 15.

33. Cf. Emerson: "My friends have come to me unsought. The great God gave them to me. By oldest right, by the divine affinity of virtue with itself, I find them, or rather not I but the Deity in me and in them both deride and cancel the thick walls of individual character, relation, age, sex, circumstance, at which he usually connives, and now makes many one. High thanks I owe you, excellent lovers, who carry out the world for me to new and noble depths, and enlarge the meaning of all my thoughts" (174).

34. Elizabeth Barrett to Mary Russell Mitford, October 9, 1844, #363, 3:[1]-2.

35. Jane Sedgwick to Catharine Sedgwick, June 1837, Life and Letters, 269.


37. Mary Russell Mitford to Andrew Norton, May 2, 1842, BMS Eng 1155 (11), Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, USA.

38. Harriet Martineau to Fanny Wedgwood, January 11, [1844], #33, 71-2.
39. Harriet Martineau to Mrs. Romilly, March 9, [1844], MS Autogr d. 21, Bodleian Library, Oxford University. This is the only letter to Mrs. Romilly in my collection. Her name does not appear in any of Martineau’s correspondence, leading me to assume (although mindful of the constraints on the naming of persons) that she was not Martineau’s longstanding, close friend.

40. Anna Jameson to Lady Byron, n.m., 16, n.y., Byron/Lovelace Papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford University.

41. Cf. Joseph Bensman and Robert Lilienfeld, Between Public and Private (London: Collier Macmillan, 1987): "every projection of the intimate self invites a corresponding self-revelation by the other. To blurt out one’s intimate self in the absence of the progressive deepening of social relationship is a demand upon the other for reciprocity that the other may be unwilling to meet. And, strangely enough, such self-revelation is, or can be construed as, an invasion of the privacy of the other" (111). See also for discussions about intimacy, women, and friendship, Helen Gouldner and Mary Symons Strong, Speaking of Friendship ((N.Y.: Greenwood Press, 1987), Chapter 4; and Joel D. Block and Diane Greenberg, Women and Friendship, 71-80.

42. See Luise Eichenbaum and Susie Orbach, Between Women (N.Y.: Penguin, 1989), particularly Chapter 3, for a good concise description of women’s psychological development.

43. Elizabeth Barrett to Mary Russell Mitford, July 4, 1842, #165, 2:2.

44. Elizabeth Barrett Browning to Mary Russell Mitford, August 20, [1847], #442, 3:213-14.

45. Anna Jameson to Otilie von Goethe, August 14, [1836], #43, 48. Ellipsis Needler’s. Both the salutation and the subscription have been omitted by Needler.


47. I describe the functions as being "represented" partly to avoid the linguists’ and speech-act theorists’ terminology of locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts, and partly to point to the effect of larger discourse units which, in their totality, have a meta-communicative function. Cf. Klaus P. Schneider, Small Talk: Analysing Phatic Discourse (Marberg: Hitzeroth, 1988): "Thus this notion of macro-speech act is applied to transaction-size discourse units consisting of a head sequence and several supportive sequences in pre- and post-position. The head sequence includes as a head exchange the respective illocution proper, e.g. an invite, and a reaction. These two moves may, of
course, frame a pre-responding exchange, precede post-exchanges and/or follow pre-
exchanges. The issues dealt with in the supportive sequences belong to the cognitive
frame in question” (72). Because letters are doubly dialogic, presenting and representing
parts of a dialogue, their macro-speech acts can be studied intra- and inter-textually.

48. Mrs. H. Siddons to Fanny Kemble, n.d., MS 10256, National Library of
Scotland, Edinburgh.

49. Fanny Kemble to [Mr. Macmillan], [1868]. Add 55253 Macmillan -
General Correspondence, British Library, London.

50. Fanny Kemble to Ralph, Lord Wentworth. [April?] 27, [n.y.].
Byron/Lovelace Papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

51. Quoted in Klaus P. Schneider. Small Talk: Analysing Phatic Discourse, 23.
Conclusion

Epistolary art, like any other, is complex. Using four "simple" components—a location identifier, a salutation, a subscription, and a farewell—writers construct texts whose complexity when in skilled hands rivals any highly wrought form of literature. Yet the artistry hides beneath a surface simplicity: the artist remains present, open to view, uncalculating, and unabashed. She or he merely talks. But even "small talk", as linguists have discovered, is structured discourse, and even social interaction undertaken for pleasure, as sociologists and psychologists have found, is complicated. Communication, it seems, is not as easy as it appears. Letter writers navigate between the Scylla of social interaction and the Charybdis of writing. Perhaps their cruellest fate is their unknown audience’s ignorance about the hazards of the passage, and their lack of appreciation for success.

A method such as I have chosen for describing the epistolary form in letters of Victorian women writers concentrates on communication. It asks how writers and their (intended) audience construct meaning through talk on paper. It asks what choices are available to the writer, and what meanings those choices convey to the reader. It asks whether all meanings can be recovered by (unintended) readers and, if not, what is lost. It seeks to answer these questions by examining the epistolary text in various ways: as a physical object and as a medium; as an "episode" of talk and as a written text; as a single "event" and as an act frequently repeated; as discourse in written language and as a literary form. The method focusses on structures and strategies.
This steady focus on structure shows, first of all, that a letter is a whole, the sum of parts which cannot be subtracted without mutilating that whole. Although it might be unthinkable to present as entities a poem without its opening and closing lines or stanzas, a play without the first act or the author's stage directions, or a multivolumed Victorian novel without its first few "slow" chapters, there is less compunction about deleting opening and closing sentences, or the overtly epistolary components, in a letter when it is presented to an audience other than the designated recipient. But all these parts in themselves and in their placement in relation to the rest of the text convey information. They define the context in which the letter must be read; that is, they show how the writer views the interactional situation from temporal, spatial, and interpersonal perspectives. They convey the information the writer feels necessary for the recipient to be able to interpret the text according to the writer's intentions, whether those purposes are conveyed directly or indirectly.

Secondly, a focus on structure shows that although the parts of a letter, especially the specifically epistolary components, are determined by the form, there is, nevertheless, a range of choices a writer must make in using the parts. These choices are influenced by the rules of conduct (etiquette) formulated by a society at a particular time, by the relative position (status) of the correspondents in that society, and by the correspondents' relation and the frequency of their interaction. Because the variety of choices is general or shared knowledge, the particular choices made by a writer convey meaning not only to the recipient, but also to other readers if they know
what the conventions are. Minimal location identifiers, for instance, indicate not that
the writer is careless or oblivious to the passage of time, but that the participants are
situated in close enough proximity for frequent interaction to take place. Lack of
symmetry in subscriptions and salutations indicates that the writer desires either to
increase or to diminish the attachment between the participants. The signs of the
writing "superego" in round bracketed addenda or insertions indicate, rather
paradoxically, the writer’s lack of self-consciousness or premeditation before or during
the interactional event. Close analysis of even a single letter, therefore, can yield much
more information about the writer and the writer’s relation with the recipient than is at
first apparent. An understanding of the potential interpretations of the epistolary
components forestalls inaccurate or incomplete analysis.¹

Thirdly, a focus on structure shows that the structure of any one letter is
influenced by its relation to other discourses and texts. A letter is written in response
to a situation which is partly defined by previous discourses and partly by future,
anticipated discourses in so far as they can be influenced by the writer. Oral discourses
are, of course, unavailable in their entirety to any but the participants, but their
influence can often be observed in a letter. The influence of written texts even if no
longer extant or not located can also be observed. Similarly, the structure of future
discourses can be predicted to a certain extent by the structure of the present
discourse. The structure of any one epistolary text, then, is best viewed inter- as well
as intratextually for the meaning to be fully understood. This is a structural
characteristic perhaps unique to the epistolary form, although intertextuality in itself is not.

Once the importance of these three observations is grasped, an external reader can approach a letter with greater sensitivity. Readers will not be led astray by hazy assumptions about the form which are at best only partially accurate, or by their own assumptions about the construction and representation of the self which are necessarily culturally determined. All letters, with few exceptions, are "friendly" because all reflect a desire to communicate without alienating an audience; all letters are "familiar" because they use a style which invites a response whether the diction and arrangement are formal or informal. All letters are personal in so far as they are written by a single author; they are private only by mutual discretion and consent. All letters have pragmatic purposes either overtly stated, as in business or formal social letters, or more covertly, as in the letters exchanged between friends. A sensitive reader is less likely to form an arbitrary opinion about what is to be valued in a particular letter based on a preference for personality or content. Judgments about the character of the writer will also be deferred by an unbiased reader until all the evidence has been carefully sifted and weighed.

The benefits are two-fold. The first is an increased enjoyment of letters for their own sake. Sensitive readers are informed readers; they bring with them an understanding of the requirements of the form, an appreciation of how the parts work in relation to each other, and a delight when the writer accomplishes her (or his) task
with grace, finesse, audacity, ingenuity, or any of the other manifestations of a creative mind. "Good" letters are a pleasure not because we "like" the writer, not because we are particularly interested in the subject matter, but because we can observe what the writer is doing, describe what is done, and applaud when it is done well. The second benefit is an increased capability of interpreting a letter for the purpose of becoming more knowledgable about a large number of subjects. Letters record as well as create, but it is wise to distinguish one from the other when using the letter as a document.

Although neither benefit has been the direct object of study here, both have been, I hope, in evidence. On the basis of the limited number and size of samples displayed, it is possible to observe that Harriet Grote's letters, for instance, are pleasurable because she often plays with epistolary conventions; Harriet Martineau's through her marshalling of the elements in argumentation; and Elizabeth Barrett Browning's from the sudden aptness of her metaphors. Our appreciation is enhanced in all three cases by the ability to describe the epistolary situation in general and in particular. From a documentary point of view, it is possible even with such a limited amount of evidence, to observe that Victorian women writers were interactive among themselves, with other literati, and with the intellectual currents of the time and the issues of the day. The connections are manifest in and across their letters, but it is equally helpful to recognize the limitations on their display in any one text or correspondence. It is also possible to observe that these women were concerned with defining themselves as writers and as women, a frequently conflicted juxtaposition of
roles from social and personal points of view. When the social and personal levels are separated in an epistolary interaction, these conflicts are more clearly delineated.

The benefit conferred by a more precise understanding of the letter as a form of life-writing is of particular interest to feminist scholars because many women have used and continue to use these forms for self-expression both privately and in their published works.

From a literary point of view, it could be argued that the communicative approach to the epistolary form is based on a partial poetics. Aesthetics in the particular sense of rhetorical figures (schemes and tropes) and stylistics have received little specific attention. But such an approach does show that aesthetic appreciation must be based on an understanding of the formal components and how they work together to structure a text. Unlike texts on a larger scale, such as the novel, the drama, or the epic poem, the epistolary text like the lyric poem must achieve its aesthetic effects through economy, precision, compression, and vividness. These attributes vary according to the stylistic norms and cultural values of the period. Without first identifying, describing, and analysing the components, it is not possible to describe a form’s attributes as they are characterized by texts from a period or an individual writer.²

Apart from aesthetic considerations, no poetics of a form could be described as complete without at least some sense of the genre’s tradition. What place, it might be asked, does a particular epistolary text, or an epistolary oeuvre, have in relation to the
genre's literary canon or corpus, and to the tradition within which the author is writing? Classical and scriptural models notwithstanding, the epistolary canon is as yet undefined: hence, any answer to such a question seems premature. Yet the letters of these Victorian women writers reveal awareness of an epistolary tradition and critical standards, derived partly, perhaps, from reading in the genre, partly from their experience as writers, and partly from contemporary rhetoric handbooks. Hugh Blair's popular Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres (1783) in particular. Epistolary novels of the eighteenth century, especially Pamela and Clarissa, were familiar favourites from childhood: letter collections of eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century writers were eagerly read as fast as they appeared in print. Mary Russell Mitford, for instance, in describing her "theory" of the epistolary form, appears to be influenced by her familiarity with eighteenth-century letters, by the literary values of her youth--romanticism--and by her own practice as a writer:

According to my theory, letters should assimilate to the higher style of conversation, without the snip-snap of fashionable dialogue, and with more of the simple transcripts of natural feeling than the usage of good society would authorize. Playfulness is preferable to wit, and grace infinitely more desirable than precision. A little egotism, too, must be admitted; without it, a letter would stiffen into a treatise, and a billet assume "the form and pressure" of an essay. . . . A little character, a little description, a little narrative, a little criticism, a very little sentiment, and a great deal of playfulness.3

Her description to Emily Jephson of Barrett Browning's letters reveals a marked resemblance to Erasmus's description of the letter-writer's style. Mitford
writes: "When I first saw her [Barrett] she spoke too well, and her letters were rather too much like the best books. Now that is gone, her fine thoughts come gushing and sparkling like water from a spring, but flow as naturally as water down a hillside, clear, bright and sparkling in the sunshine." Erasmus had said: "I shall not expect here [in a letter on "ordinary subjects"] the thunder and lightening of Pericles as long as the language flows along like the clear water of a spring with a pleasant gentle murmur" (25:15). Such hints as these, combined with responses to reading letter collections and the critical reviews recorded in letters and diaries, might be gathered for analysis to begin the construction of an epistolary canon and a female epistolary tradition. But such a study would have little value if it was not solidly based on knowledge about the form itself as displayed in the period.

Defining an epistolary canon is further complicated by the protean nature of the form. Texts of various types have consistently used letters as a vehicle, the novel and the biography being the two most important examples, for in the development of both genres the epistolary form has played an important role. In studying these Victorian women writers' letters, this observation suggests there might be a link between their epistolary texts and their literary oeuvres. For instance, Elizabeth Gaskell's second novel, Cranford, although it does not use an epistolary form, makes extensive use of letters and epistolary interaction. Mary Russell Mitford's most popular, early and enduring work Our Village, first imagined as a series of biographical letters from the country, bears the impress of its epistolary conception. Although much of Harriet
Martineau’s work was topical and has long since been out of print, arguably her greatest achievement. Still in print is her posthumously published *Autobiography* (1855). Three important, highly controversial biographical works using the epistolary form in whole or in part preceded its composition: *Life in a Sick-room* (1844); *Letters on Mesmerism* (1845); and *Letters on the Nature and Laws of Man’s Development* (1851), a contentious presentation of her religious opinions. These manifest connections in themselves suggest the fruitfulness of such a study. Yet once again, it can be argued that such a study would be incomplete without an analysis of the form, an analysis based on an ability to identify and describe structure in its use of, or modification of the epistolary components. How could such questions possibly be fully answered as: Why did Mitford eventually abandon the epistolary form for *Our Village*? In what way might she have considered it unsuited to the work as it now appears? Or, Why did Martineau find the form an appropriate vehicle for contentious opinions?

These theoretical questions about genre, however, are well beyond my compass here. But they do return to my starting-point, epistolary theory and epistolography. Epistolary theory has for too long been neglected. It has not kept pace with practice either in life or in letters, "belle" or otherwise. The starting-point therefore is with the letters themselves. Through the careful description and analysis of individual texts, correspondences, and epistolary *oeuvres* both individually and collectively, a comprehensive epistolary theory will emerge. In the meantime, more useful critical
evaluations of letters will confer other benefits. Not the least of these is an appreciation of the epistolary venture as it is communicated by the letters of Victorian women writers.
Notes

1. Carol Lasser's important contribution to the study of female friendship. "'Let Us Be Sisters Forever': The Soral Model of Nineteenth-Century Female Friendship" (Signs (1988) 14:11), provides an example of an analysis left somewhat incomplete by a lack of understanding of epistolary conventions and the way they reflect the relation between participants. She quite rightly observes that the participants adopt familial role markers (sister) and "incorporate each other into their own family networks" (173) as the friendship develops, but she fails to realize that these markers are dropped (as her own examples show) and a selective community chosen from family, friends and peers is constructed if the friendship develops further. Careful analysis of the correspondence from a later period in the friendships would show whether the friendships had developed or diminished over the years.

2. Cf. Keith Stewart, "Towards Defining an Aesthetic for the Familiar Letter in Eighteenth-Century England", Prose Studies 5.2: "this paper will address the question of whether in fact eighteenth-century writers and readers considered letters in terms appropriate to literature and what peculiar and distinguishing expectations they may have attached to them--this in an attempt to answer the question of whether it is possible, at least tentatively, to define an aesthetic which can appropriately be applied to letters of the period" (179). Stewart's interesting and valuable attempt is limited. I feel, by this lack of basic understanding about the form.


5. Cf. Winn: "With his knowledge of the tradition and his sense of worth of his own contribution, Pope saw himself as belonging to the succession of great letter writers beginning with Cicero" (71). Winn's analysis of Pope's correspondence presents convincing evidence in support of his conclusion.
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