

**TERN2024 BOOK OF ABSTRACTS**  
**4-5 October 2024 (Virtual)**

Batsheva Ben-Amos (USA)

***Treasured Texts: 50 years of correspondence and Friendship between two Folklorists.***

In his book *A Good Friend is a Treasure: Five Decades of Correspondence Between the Folklorists Dan Ben-Amos and Wolfgang Mieder*, (2023), Mieder edited the email correspondence between these two internationally known folklorists, a correspondence that turned with time from primarily a professional communication to a deep friendship. The publication of this epistolary collection, which in its original form had no materiality, transforms the form and function of the text, as it is re-contextualized and its meaning to the writer and the reader changes.

I plan to analyze the correspondence, focusing on questions such as how does a more formal correspondence between professional colleagues turns into friendship, what is the function of including a third party of non-writing passive readers—the wives—in the correspondence, turning it from a person to person to a family to family correspondence; what are the roles and identities the parties assume, what other genres are included in the correspondence as an aid to fortify the friendship.

In addition to the generic functions of letter writing, those of communication and maintaining the relationship, the publication of this collection adds functions. By preserving and publishing the correspondence, Mieder worked through his personal grief. He also commemorated his friend and colleague Dan Ben-Amos. Additionally, he documented the kind of work and collegiality behind the scenes that went into the building of the history and development of the field, shedding light on the work-ethic of these two folklorists, who are among the elite of founders of modern Folklore, highlighting the human beings behind the scholarship.

Jérôme Bourdon (Israel)

***The letter as telepresence***

This paper proposes to redefine the letter as an ancient and key form of telepresence, a term coined in 1980 and now used both in the professional world and the academia, in order to refer to the experience of feeling present in distant spaces and/or with distant people, through technology, mostly computers and VR tools. Analysts of such tools would certainly consider the letter as “low-tech”. But it has long offered a vast array of presence resources. Based on the remarkable progress of epistolary history in the last 40 years, this paper will compare epistolary telepresences with contemporary ones, focusing on four themes: 1. Materiality. As physical objects, letters have unique affordances: personal handwriting and signature, physical transmission, unique tactile and olfactive sensory qualities (including addition of perfumes). 2. Embodiment: in letters, the body has long been

incarnated through detailed verbal description (ekphrasis), which the addition of images (drawings embedded into the text, portraits, analogue photographs). Voice conversation (with or without recording), and digital “images offer different, but not necessarily more “advanced” resources. 3. Rhythms: the promise of speed is shared by epistolary and digital cultures. Modernity’s repeated (and often not kept) promises of “death of distance” and “real time” are also linked to a new sense time and space, full measurable. 4. Publicity: despite the hype about a digital “blurring of borders” between the public and the private, epistolary cultures all have had their own troubles, and their way to negotiate this contrast.

Rachel Epp Buller (USA)

***Dear Human: Imagining Other Worlds through Letters***

What defines the epistolary form? Who can write or receive a letter? Must a letter be written? What are the expectations for response? And perhaps most importantly, what else might the epistolary voice make possible?

This multigenre presentation explores how US artist Christa Donner uses an audio form of epistolary praxis to bring attention to human relationships with local ecologies. In *Dear Human*, a project first developed for Chicago’s West Ridge Nature Park in 2021, Donner creates audio letters addressed to humans from the point of view of some of the park’s many inhabitants. The artist turns to the epistolary mode as an intimate manner of address through which to channel a tree, a pond, a deer, and other natural beings. Seeking to convince fellow humans of the imperative of listening, of paying closer attention to the natural world around them, Donner invites her human collaborators to walk as they play the audio tracks, listening with their whole bodies to the beings in their vicinity.

I discuss Donner’s work in part through the lens of feminist speculative fiction, invoking the ideas of Joanna Macy and Marge Piercy to describe how and why Donner uses the epistolary form to imagine possible futures. I also intersperse narrative excerpts from my own longstanding correspondence—and thinking together—with Donner throughout my reflections on her artistic practice. In our epistolary exchanges, we imagine together what it might look like to care expansively, to better attune to our multispecies kin, to listen and live differently.

Kathryn Carter (Canada)

***19th-century Irish Letters as Material Artefacts of Migration***

The letters of Irish emigrants are material artefacts of displacement that tell us about the lived experience of migration from Ireland to British North America in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. I have been examining these letters using a critical approach which attempts to answer a question recently posed by Australian life writing scholar

Gillian Whitlock who asks “what the turn to new materialisms brings to thinking about life narratives” (35). I hope to develop from this line of inquiry a vocabulary and framework that can incorporate marginalized voices into the historiography of 19<sup>th</sup>-century Irish emigration to British North America. I also want to imagine how to decolonize the archive, and (knowing how much is missing there) formulate new ways of reading what is already there. Canadian archivist Linda Morra reminds scholars that ‘how [archival] materials circulate and what role they perform in relation to shifting affective economies is pivotal to the understanding and constitution of social categories and to the identities of persons, institutions, communities, and nations’. (2020: 3). The proposed paper will search for theoretical frameworks to acknowledge the *material* form of transatlantic correspondence to Canada in the pre-Confederation period and its significance within shifting affective economies. The proposed theoretical framework will help to articulate both the process and precarity of creating social categories and identities for 19<sup>th</sup>-century Irish emigrants as they contribute to the nascent formulation of the nation state we now call Canada.

Nuria Calvo Cortes (Spain)

***“Is a petition form a letter?” Reflections on Late Modern London petition forms***

For years, letters were the only way of communication between those who did not share the same physical space. A letter served many intentions, one of which was to make a request, at times done in the form of an explicit petition. This explains the inclusion of a section on petitions in eighteenth and nineteenth century letter writing manuals. There seems to be an agreement regarding the inclusion of petitions in the same genre as letters despite having their own features. In any case, petitions share many characteristics with other epistolary texts, including their structure and format.

The proliferation of printing houses in Britain led to an increase in printed material used in everyday life and petitions did not escape this. In the early 1800s the Foundling Hospital in London started to issue petition forms for those who wanted to have their child admitted to the institution. These forms substituted handwritten petitions in order to facilitate the petition process. The present study analyses some of these petition forms and compares them to the petitions present in letter-writing manuals of the time. The aim is to clarify to what extent these forms can actually be considered letters or not. The preliminary analysis suggests that they are not very different from those petitions in the manuals, and therefore, they can be included under the umbrella term of “letters”.

Diane Deblois, Robert Dalton Harris (USA)

***Oppenheimer’s Table Doodles as Letters***

In November 1947, Robert J. Oppenheimer chaired a meeting of the United States Atomic Energy Commission in Washington DC. The participants, which included top physicists as well as military officials, left pages of doodles that were “swept” from the room by security, but also were labelled and filed along with a table chart. Now unclassified, can these doodles be considered letters? We know each ‘sender’; we can discover context (aided by an understanding of theoretical physics); and it was assumed that the doodles communicated sensitive information. We will examine six of these ‘letters’ - one each written by Oppenheimer, Enrico Fermi, Isador Rabi, James B. Conant, Sumner Pike, and a U.S. Army General.

Maria de Ceu Estibeira (Portugal)

***On Reading The “Letter On The Genesis Of The Heteronyms” by Fernando Pessoa: a fictional letter or a biographical narrative?***

From the moment Fernando Pessoa decided to get involved in the creation of the heteronyms and other literary personalities, he built an entire system of connections, which culminated in what he named as a “drama in people”. In fact, the creation of so many personalities was based (among other aspects) on specific biographies, birthplaces, family relationships, and literary influences that formed a literary web of similarities and differences. The aim of this paper is to show how in a letter, written to a friend in January 1934 and known as “The letter on the genesis of the heteronyms”, Fernando Pessoa presents the most important biographical details of his heteronyms and other personalities and how some of these details may contrast with previous dated documents, which proved that sometimes Pessoa hesitated or contradicted himself in what concerned to the genesis of the heteronyms as well as created a fictional letter to justify a fictional literary universe.

Sindija Franzetti (Sweden)

***Defining the Indefinable: The Essence of Interpersonal Communication in Katherine Mansfield's Not-Letters***

In epistolary discourse, the definition of what constitutes a letter remains both fluid and contested. Katherine Mansfield's correspondence, marked by repeated assertions that "this is not a letter," serves as a compelling case study for examining the boundaries and essence of letter-writing. This paper proposes to explore Mansfield's epistolary statements, such as "This is not a letter. It is only my arms round you for a quick minute," and several others that similarly disclaim the status of her communications as letters, while paradoxically engaging in the act of letter-writing. Mansfield's refusals and subsequent elaborations—"only a message," "a kind of intake of breath," and "a note written on a table piled with paper chains"—highlight the intimate, ephemeral, and multi-sensorial dimensions of her correspondence, which resist conventional categorization.

This study will argue that Mansfield's deliberate refusal to categorize her messages as letters function as a literary strategy that amplifies the intimacy and immediacy of her communication, situating the recipient in a space of heightened emotional and sensory engagement. This refusal also highlights the limitations of the physical letter in fully capturing the breadth of human emotion and connection, thus challenging the traditional boundaries of the epistolary genre. Mansfield's epistolary practice, with its blend of the tangible and the intangible, the said and the unsaid, invites a reconsideration of what constitutes a letter. It suggests that the essence of letter-writing transcends the physicality of paper and ink, encompassing instead the act of reaching out and of attempting to bridge the spatial and temporal divides between individuals.

David Gerber (USA)

***Prisoner of War Radiograms, 1942-1945: Electronic Letters via Shortwave Radio***

On the morning of 16 November 1942, Bellingham, Washington resident Earl Fitzgerald was sitting at his shortwave set trolling the radio band for hobbyist broadcasts. Instead, he found Radio Tokyo, and heard brief messages, voiced in the name of men who claimed to be prisoners of war, sending greetings to their families.

These radiograms were virtual postal communications. Traditional postal communication was possible, but subject to delays and disruption. Radiograms were enabled by the Japanese for propaganda purposes. Their content was carefully controlled. For families of prisoners of war these virtual personal letters were often the only evidence they had that their captive son or husband was alive. For prisoners they served at least two purposes, reassuring their families, and signaling the circumstances in which they were living. "I am fine," a radiogram might say, "but if you can send me a package....," and there followed a list of all the essentials that could keep a man alive without spelling out he was malnourished, wearing ragged clothing, and often sick. For Fitzgerald, that morning's broadcasts began years of service to POW families. He communicated with hundreds of them what he heard on shortwave and began correspondence that formed close bonds. For the US government, Fitzgerald's activities posed a dilemma: he was providing a service beneficial to national morale but was, in effect, an agent of Japanese propaganda.

This presentation will examine the radiogram and the nexus of state and private interests that sought to control it.

Christina Glatz (Austria)

***Letters and e-epistolary in contemporary fiction: A comparative view on aesthetic and functional aspects***

This paper will focus on both the rapid rise of digital epistolary communication or e-epistolarity, which is defined as online communication including a sender and receiver, and how it has impacted contemporary literature on the one hand and the return of the traditional letter form on the other. Both forms, it seems, have facilitated a powerful comeback of the epistolary mode in contemporary literature resulting in a thriving genre in the new millennium. However, this rather recent return of epistolarity juxtaposing modern and traditional forms and contexts calls for new approaches to these coexisting forms of epistolarity within literary studies. This article aims to contribute to future research in this special field of studies and theorizes both aesthetic and functional aspects of epistolarity.

For this paper, I will compare the traditional novel *Dear Clara* (2003) to two multimedia novels, *What She Left* (2015) and *ttyl* (2005) that show exactly how e-epistolarity and other electronic communication formats have found their ways into contemporary literature and how they revive the traditional letter form. The first novel analyzed *What She Left* (2015) by T.R. Richmond focuses on the multimedial use of epistolarity and combines both the traditional letter form and electronic communication devices such as messages, emails or chats. In comparison, the second novel *ttyl* (2005) by Lauren Myracle exclusively uses forms of electronic correspondence which nicely demonstrates the comparison of isolated e-epistolarity versus the coexistence between e-epistolarity and the traditional letter form.

Deborah Golden, Jessica Jacobson, Ruth Sack (Israel, South Africa, UK)  
***When is a Letter a Memory Game?***

Within the conventions of what is considered to be a letter, letter writers have some leeway to make adaptations – in frequency, format, contents, and tone. In letters written regularly between family members, a degree of uniformity regarding what is accepted as an appropriate family letter is bound to emerge; in letter writing that takes place over a long period of time, such uniformity may undergo changes. This paper emerges out of our ongoing work on an archive of family correspondence comprising several thousand letters, dating from 1944 until the early 2000s, exchanged between geographically dispersed members of a South African Jewish family. The paper juxtaposes the relatively uniform and stable template of the family letter that was set in place very early on in the family correspondence, with a shift in that template in the 1980s, as the letters came to be used to create a collective archive of childhood memories by means of an epistolary game. Played by three brothers, by that time in their mid-fifties, the game – called "Roots" – consisted of challenging each other with detailed questions about their boyhood in Kimberley. For the three writer-players, Roots was nostalgic in both substance and form - it was about childhood memories, evoked by means of childlike, competitive, teasing play. Thus, rather than the letters' customary focus on the here and now - including family news, business affairs, discussions of culture and politics – the letters shifted in purpose to include the work of memory.

Sam Kaislanieni (Finland)

***A typical letter in 17th-century England***

This paper explores a corpus of some 3,000 letters from 17th-century England and tries to tease out some answers to what a typical letter of the time looked like. My focus is on visual and material aspects of the letter rather than its contents: what format of paper is used, how the letter is folded and sealed, how long the letter is, and how layout is used. The aim of quantification in this study is not to calculate an 'average' letter, but by also using information on the correspondents and the writing of the letter, to look at social variation in letter-writing practices over the 17th century. At the time, people were acutely conscious of social standings, and social relationships were portrayed as well as negotiated through all aspects of culture, including letter-writing.

For example, in 1607, the Earl of Salisbury chided his son William for folding his letters like a grammar school student, rather than like a gentleman. And in 1616, Sir John Holles berated his son about folding, layout, and choice of paper: "yow seale up your letters so ill, and leave so scant a margent, that without tearing, your letter can not open, and your paper is so thin that one may reade it on the other syd" (Letters of John Holles vol. I, p. 132)

I expect that variation in epistolary material practices correlates with the social ranks and roles of the writers, but also with the relationship of the writer and recipient.

Kat McDonald-Miranda (USA)

***When Letters are More Than Letters: The Epistolary Culture of Bureaucracy in Sixteenth-Century Scotland***

The sixteenth century saw a deliberate expansion of the royal bureaucracy in Scotland, from the size of the court to the reach of its statutes. This growth was in spite of, and in many ways due to the upheavals caused by the four monarchs and eleven regents who ruled the kingdom over the course of the century. Through the changes, letters were an indispensable form of communication. The Stewart monarchs wrote letters to domestic subjects and foreign dignitaries affirming alliances, seeking support, and perhaps most importantly asserting the royal prerogative. The letters crossed into different lands and were written in different languages to achieve their intended ends. For example, amidst the religious changes unfolding during the 1560s, letters to and from the papacy show that each side sought to return the kingdom to the Auld Kirk. However, the Casket Letters, the primary pieces of evidence against Mary, Queen of Scots that instigated her forced abdication and eventually cost her her life, demonstrate the political infighting between the different Scottish factions. In these cases, the letters were more than

letters, more than words on parchment. This essay will explore the epistolary culture of the royal bureaucracy in Scotland during the reign of Mary, Queen of Scots. It will compare these sets of letters and argue that they were one of the means by which the royal identity was shaped and reshaped during the long sixteenth century.

Linda McGuire (France)

***Cicero's Letters to his Friends 14.20: the short and long of defining a Roman letter***

A letter student Dius sent to his father Aurelius Horion is largely composed of the names of family members he missed (*P.Oxy.* X 1296). Greeting those back home was a common feature of ancient correspondence. What if a letter contained not a list of greetings but instead instructions? That is what Roman senator Cicero sent his wife in 48 BCE. The original exchange, carried from Venusia to Rome, was later selected along with 23 others to become an epistolary book. Apart from the opening (Cicero to his Terentia) and closing (Good-Bye), it contains none of the epistolary elements he regularly employed like inquiries after her health. A study on the length of Cicero's letters gives an average of 295 Latin words, this one has 48. And yet Cicero does not offer an explanation for the contents' nature and length, something he often did with other recipients.

If letters are defined as any text written on a physical medium and transported to someone in another location, then it qualifies. Yet what determined acceptable contents and letter length in Cicero's world? This paper will revisit a selection of the shortest letters in his epistolary corpus, especially those which comment on recipients' expectations, along with similar evidence in Pliny's *Epistulae*. It will argue that relying on overly inclusive definitions prevents researchers from taking into account the epistolary norms of a specific society. Every aspect of a letter (physical medium, contents) was significant, something any letter definition should recognise.

Jesús Candelario Menacho (Spain)

***On the Language of Email Spam***

In November 1975, Jon Postel discovered that there was no way for a server to refuse a message. This server could be hacked through bulk mailing without any impediment. Spam emails are a recent topic of investigation since the arrival of the Internet came into our lives around fifty years ago. These emails are unsolicited, coming from an unknown sender and sent massively. No previous relationship with the sender or a fictitious account are also part of this issue. Some details and features of spam emails will be given in this talk.

The fact that spam emails are a recent invention makes their research to be quite arduous. Scholars seem to be more focused on the avoidance of the reception of spam emails rather than on their linguistic content. For this talk, I propose to analyze the most significant characteristics of these letters through a corpus of 313 emails. These were selected from a Gmail account created for the purpose. Firstly, I shall describe the definition and history of these letters. Secondly, I shall pinpoint the methodology used for the analysis of these texts in a corpus application. Additionally, I shall select some specific terms that are essential to understand how spam emails work. Finally, I shall choose two texts from the corpus, exemplifying some of the most relevant points and discussing the common features of these letters.

Mikko Rapo (Finland)

***Bureaucratic yet personal – letters to Finnish resettlement authorities after WW2***

Defeated by the Soviet Union and forced to cede around 10 per cent of its pre-war territory, the Finnish society was by confronted by several problems after WW2. War reparations, demobilization and resettling the displaced Karelian population demanded state intervention. The Land Acquisition Act, enacted in May 1945, granted displaced Karelian people and war veterans the opportunity to acquire farmland or residential plots with governmental assistance. Communication with resettlement authorities primarily occurred through written correspondence and all the hundreds of thousands of letters exchanged between 1945 and 1958 have been archived. Typewritten official complaints, hastily penciled pleas for help, general enquiries and letters abusing the authorities or denouncing families competing for the same piece of land are all archived side by side. How should this polyphonic collection of letters be analyzed? In my paper, I explore the analytical possibilities and challenges presented by the archived letters. While these letters served a bureaucratic function, the quest for the individual voice was central as the writers strived to differentiate themselves from others with the same statutory right to governmental assistance. The context of the writing affected how the writers presented themselves and distinguished the bureaucratic letters from private letters to friends and family. Yet the letters to resettlement authorities dealt with very personal questions from material grievances to feelings of despair and anger. By combining different genres of writing and crossing the boundaries between personal and impersonal as well as private and public, the letters represent a hybrid form that merits analytical attention.

Stephani Richards-Wilson (USA)

***Willi Graf of the White Rose: Wartime Writing and Resistance***

Wilhelm Joseph Graf (Willi Graf) was a twenty-five-year-old German medical student when he was executed in Munich on October 12, 1943, for high treason. He

was a core member of the Nazi resistance group called the White Rose. The group consisted of university students, mentors, and other helpers including one professor who was also executed. They crafted, copied, and distributed flyers calling for nonviolent resistance to Hitler and the Nazis. Much of what we know about Willi Graf came from Graf himself. He kept diaries and wrote letters seeking authentic human connection among friends and family during the chaos and violence of war.

He was frequently transferred, on the move, and deployed to the Eastern Front twice as a combat paramedic in the Wehrmacht. The Nazis weaponized words but so did the resistance. Graf believed words carry power. He was the most mature, level-headed, and quiet of the core White Rose members. He selectively weighed and carefully chose his words amid Nazi censorship. Those who saved his letters did so at great personal risk. Once he was apprehended by the Gestapo, he was tried in a sham of a show trial, and convicted as a traitor to Nazi Germany. The fact that much of his wartime correspondence survived is a testament to the humane and genuine human relations he cultivated in the inhumanity and deception of the Third Reich. My paper will explore Graf's correspondence and how he used words to convey meaning on his path to resistance.

Giedrė Šmitienė (Lithuania)

***Personal Collections of Letters as Tangled Web of Different Social Interrelations. The Epistolary Legacy of Janina Degutytė***

The presentation explores the variety of letters in collections of whole life. It explains how the individuals engage with and adapt to this diversity. Correspondence, therefore, is not merely about sending and receiving letters but also about interrelationship and accordance (T. Ingold), that form as the foundation of letter communication.

This presentation is based on long-term research that has collected all letters of the poet Janina Degutytė and her two friends the painter Bronė Jacevičiūtė and the doctor Lena Rapalienė. The collection contains not only the letters exchanged among the three women but also all letters received and written by each of them. Covering the period from the 1950s to the 1980s, the collection contains letters with poems, calligraphic letters with sketches, letters focused entirely on medical treatments, brief notes on domestic matters, existential revelations, and letters from people with varying degrees of literacy (including written or painted children's letters or letters from elderly individuals). The presentation particularly focuses on letters written from liminal places, such as concentration camps beyond the Arctic Circle (Gulag) or during military service, that are part of these collections. This source is valuable for reconsidering the concept of a letter. In this presentation, letters are approached to be written primarily for maintaining a relationship with the addressee. The presentation uses theoretical insights by scholars studying epistolary materials (Liz Stanley, Helen Dampier, Janet Altman) and those by

phenomenological anthropologist (Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Tim Ingold), including the theories of the fundamental human need for relationships.

Lik Hang Tsui (Hong Kong)

***Proems as Letters: Medieval Chinese Greetings in Poetic Form***

This presentation argues for the inherent overlap between poetic and epistolary genres in Song China (960-1279), challenging the conventional classification of these texts in literary anthologies. By focusing on the inseparable nature of poems and their prefaces in epistolary exchanges among Chinese literati, I aim to shed light on the dynamic social practices of text production and circulation during this period.

Through an examination of surviving manuscripts and individual author collections from the Song dynasty, particularly from the eleventh and twelfth centuries by Li Zong'e (965-1013), Han Jiang (1012-1088), Mi Fu (1051-1107), and Chen Yuyi (1090-1139), I will demonstrate that the integration of poetry with prefaces took two distinct forms. In some cases, the letter itself was a poem, with the preface contextualizing the occasion and framing the entire missive as a poetic composition.

In other instances, poems were included as attachments to letters, serving as literary exchanges and tokens of friendship. When these materials were collected and classified in literary anthologies, they were often placed under different genre headings, such as shi poetry or epistolary sub-genres. The forced separation of these hybrid-form poem-letters in anthologies obscures the interplay between poetic and epistolary elements, undermining our understanding of the cultural context in which these texts were produced and circulated. By interrogating this practice, this presentation seeks to illuminate the limitations of rigid genre classifications and their impact on our perception of the textual landscape constructed by letter writers in Song China. It will also encourage us to rethink how medieval Chinese letters were transformed when being anthologized. The presentation also invites scholars to reconsider the ways to reach a more context-sensitive understanding of the textual landscape that letter writers constructed in Song China.

Zoushiyu Zhou (USA)

***Talking the Sickbed: Epistolary Poems Exchanged between the Su 蘇 Brothers***

In Chinese literary history, a letter has often been parceled and labeled as personal but genuinely aimed at asking for patronage, promoting oneself in a career, leaving messages or admonitions for family members, and even supplementing an author's self-depiction. In these cases, recipients on the table are not imperatively needed. Instead, it is easy to figure out that an author targeted a specific receiver or a broader scope of audiences to achieve one's political goal or shape others' understanding of himself. In this project, I focus on two personal letters written as

poetries transmitted between a pair of brothers Su Shi 蘇軾 and Su Zhe 蘇轍, who are the most glorious brothers in Chinese history due to their literary works. The letter sent does not have political implications but expresses the younger one's description of life and desperate feelings caused by his health condition; Also the older brother's response contains his warm comfort. Based on the text, my questions are as many: To what extent letters transmitted between brothers for personal issues is different from those letters disguised for certain purposes? Does the relationship between senders influence their formatting? More specifically, did later compilers or they themselves intentionally remove greetings and closing? Stretching beyond these letters and their connotations, the content can also prop how we, readers in the current generation, read into these two authors from perspectives neither historical nor schemed or envisioned by themselves.