

The Epistolary Research Network – Book of Abstracts
Online conference: 30 September - 1 October 2022

1. Maria K. Alberto (USA)

The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien as Epistolary Appendage

Today J.R.R. Tolkien is best known for *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*, but as long-time readers are well aware, these texts form only a small part of his Legendarium, or the body of constructed legends concerning Middle-earth. Moreover, many crucial parts of this oeuvre were only published posthumously, under the editorship of Tolkien's son Christopher. As my project here begins to document, though, one key piece of the Legendarium is not a fictional work at all, but instead, the selection of correspondence published as *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien* (1981).

I argue that *Letters* is often treated as an epistolary appendage to Tolkien's fiction. That is, those who want to read and position Tolkien along particular lines often draw from his correspondence as if *Letters* provides some ultimate insight into the complex – and in places, unfinished – textual assemblage that is his Legendarium.

This project begins with an overview of the surprisingly heterogenous contents of *Letters*, such as who they were written for, which parts of Tolkien's life they draw from, and how Tolkien actually discusses his *Legendarium* in them. I also revisit how *Letters* is often read alongside other posthumous works edited by Christopher Tolkien, including *The Silmarillion* (1977) and the 12-volume *History of Middle-earth* (1984-1996).

I then argue that both Tolkien scholars and contemporary readers of *Letters* are very much accidental readers. Yet despite this, Tolkien's correspondence still shapes discussions of what his fiction "means," who it is for, and what readers can do with it.

2. Nuria Calvo Cortes (Spain)

"What to trust in a sheet of paper": letter-writing instruction to women in 17th century England

Letter-writing instruction manuals became very popular at the end of the 17th century and their printing boomed in the following centuries. In addition, there were other books that included directions on how to write letters together with model letters. One of such books was *The Gentlewoman's Companion*, published in 1673 and attributed to Hannah Wolley. While many of these manuals often mentioned that the letters included in them were original, this companion clearly states that the letters provided are "patterns for your (women's) imitation". This suggests that these letters were never really addressed or sent to anybody, but read most likely by many women. Two main questions arise in this study. Since the model letters are preceded by instruction on how to write letters, the first question addresses the extent to which these models follow those instructions,

both in terms of content and form. Second, as both the instructions and the model letters focus on some specific topics, the analysis will try to shed some light on the topics that would have been perceived as those to be discussed by women at the time. The aim is to contribute to a better understanding of women letter writing practices at a time when the concept of the “self” was beginning to arise, and therefore, a letter lost or miscarried may have been “the utter ruin of the person”.

3. Jocelyn Catty and Laura Salisbury (UK)

Writing into the future and reading back through time: a book of letters as a container of time and care

“As I was driving home one flashlight view showed me the earth after two or three generations”, wrote Olga Jacoby to her doctor in 1910. In *Words in Pain*, the collection of Jacoby’s letters published anonymously by her widower in 1919, Jacoby’s determination to articulate her Rationalist vision, to “die with my fountain pen in my hand”, and to create a legacy not only for her young children but for posterity, sit alongside her agonising observations of her deterioration from a terminal heart condition.

In this epistolary paper, we explore the containment offered by the letter and its simultaneous status as at once a form of self-care and mourning by the writer and a projection of care into the future: the future of her descendants and the unfolding social history of the twentieth century. Three hundred years after early modern women writers found in the posthumous mother’s advice genre not only a form for their care but also a mode of entry into publication, Jacoby’s one-sided correspondence explores her fantasies of what her children may be able to remember of her as well as shaping an identity as a writer.

How her widower’s role in shaping letters into book was influenced by his own mourning, the Great War, and a desire not to associate the book with the controversy surrounding Jacoby’s publicly reported suicide, is explored here. A century later, Jacoby’s great-granddaughter (JC) became a new editor of a centenary edition that was also an act of intergenerational post-memory.

4. Lynn Domina (USA)

Reading Robert Gould Shaw’s Letters Through his Memorials

Born into a prominent New England family, Robert Gould Shaw famously served as a Union colonel to an African-American regiment during the American Civil War. His regiment suffered enormous casualties, and Shaw himself died, during a battle to recapture Fort Wagner in South Carolina. Most readers come to Shaw’s letters through exposure to other literary and visual texts, including Saint-Gaudens’ bronze frieze located in Boston Common, a poem by Robert Lowell frequently read by students of modernism, and most famously, the Hollywood movie *Glory*. Readers of Shaw’s letters who have been exposed to these memorials are predisposed to receive Shaw heroically.

Shaw's letters are frank and personal. After his father had one printed and circulated, Shaw warned his family that he could not be as open about his experience if he were writing for the general public. He clearly intended these letters to be read only by family members. Yet, following his death, his letters were circulated by his family, and we continue to read them today. In this presentation, I reflect on the position of a reader who might already know many things about Shaw, though some of those things likely just aren't true. The letters reveal a fully human individual who both corresponds to and refutes some of his subsequent cultural representations.

5. Aly Flint (UK)

Edith Sophia, conservator of sentimental memories?

The paper investigates the interrelationships between the nineteenth-century cataloguer, the twenty-first century archivist and the academic, by focusing on the little used and un-investigated familial correspondence of the Ogston Hall Estate in the county of Derbyshire.

Exploring how it was the Turbutt women's letters survived, given the adversities that women's 'stuff' had to overcome and also, given the nature of archival repository, this paper argues that Edith Sophia's role as a conservator of sentimental memories was instead creating a living, growing entity and not the dead lifeless dust of the past.

In 1879 Edith Sophia Hall married into the Turbutt family of Ogston Hall; twenty-five years later, she began to catalogue and record the history of her adopted marital family. However, rather than chronologically as a whole, Edith Sophia collated the family's letters into bundles comprising individual family members. And as such, this paper aims to determine the nature and purpose behind Edith Sophia's methodology, and answer the question, what impact might this have on the reader?

It argues that while it was one woman's objective to establish a direct link to the past generations for the future heir to the Ogston estate, Edith Sophia created an alternative matrilineal dynasty, a sorority or sisterhood in letters. Furthermore, the paper determines both the negative and positive impact of the methodologies used in cataloguing the letters into bundles comprising individual family members rather than chronologically as a whole, and argues that the continuity through the generations and extended family connections may become distorted or indeed lost.

6. Sarah Herbe (Austria)

The Use of Letters in Early Modern Paratextual Life-Writing

Biographers, or life-writers, are among those who regularly become "other readers" of letters when they decide to draw on, or even include, a biographee's correspondence in their lifewriting efforts. In the early modern period, the question of whether to include or exclude an author's correspondence is the

linchpin around which many of the theoretical reflections on life-writing revolve. The jury was out on the usefulness, and propriety, of the inclusion of letters in life-writing, but whatever a life-writer's opinion was in this debate around letters, an inclusion of a letter was never made without justification and explanation of its ends; just as the exclusion of letters was often subject to comment. In this paper, I shall draw on a corpus of life-writing found in the paratexts of English poetry books published between 1641 and 1710 (including not only designated "Lives of authors", but also prefaces or epistles to the reader). I shall argue that the inclusion of letters, or information gleaned from them, can, on the one hand, support the construction of a particular public identity of the person who is biographed, and on the other endow a lifewriter with an authority that is based on their access to someone else's letters, as well as on their power to decide what kind of information from these letters they wish to convey to yet another set of readers.

7. Jennifer Hutchison (Australia)

Sadly, we learned that, Jennifer Hutchison, who was due to deliver a paper entitled "Once Upon a Perfect Family, An Epistolary Study", passed away on August 4, 2022. Anyone wishing to learn more about her research will find a link here to her thesis [Once Upon a Perfect Family](#).

8. Martyn Lyons (Australia)

The Other Reader: The Presence of the Censor in French soldiers' Correspondence, 1914-1918

During the First World War, the French military post handled four million letters daily. Writing was fundamental to the life of the soldier, regardless of whether or not he was familiar with the act of writing or with written French. A system of censorship was established, organised by the Postal Control Commission, and its archive provides the material for this paper.

My paper will discuss the workings and effectiveness of the French censorship regime, as well as soldiers' reactions to the threat of censorship. It will look for evidence in soldiers' letters of their acceptance or defiance of official intrusion into their personal correspondence, and consider the ruses they adopted in the hope of evading the censor's intervention.

Soldiers' correspondence is notable for its laconic nature and its banality. I will finally consider some probable reasons for this: were the silences of the letters the direct effect of censorship? Or the effect of self-censorship indirectly induced by the Postal Control Commission? Or were they the result of the soldiers' natural inability to express in writing the true horror of their trench experience?

9. Isabella Martini (Italy)

The Linguistic representation of the Armenian genocide in Letters to the Editor of The Times (1914-1926)

From their appearance in 18th century newspapers, Letters to the Editor (LTE) have consolidated as a public privileged space for high-profile readers to voice their ideological stance and comment on news topics (Torres da Silva 2012; Cavanagh 2019) relevant to a newspaper's ideological agenda. Selected by newspapers' editors to keep specific topics current in the news (Wahl-Jorgensen 2002), LTE have long intertwined with historical events, among which the 20th century Armenian genocide. International humanitarian workers and political personalities denounced the genocide in LTE published in *The Times* (Peltekian 2013; Chabot et al. 2016), making appeals for intervention and expressing their viewpoints by commenting on the events (Bednarek – Caple 2019). If LTE were to meet the ideological agenda of the newspaper's readers of the time, were there recurrent linguistic strategies used to do so? And how is that same ideological agenda processed by contemporary readers when analysing the language used in LTE to represent the Armenian genocide? My research combines corpus linguistics and discourse analysis to study the linguistic patterns used to represent the events surrounding the Armenian genocide in a corpus of LTE of *The Times* published between 1914 and 1926. The quantitative and qualitative linguistic analysis of keywords and of their frequent collocates and clusters combines a corpus-driven approach (Tognini-Bonelli 2001) with corpus-assisted discourse analysis (Partington 2004, 2010, 2015) focused on the lexico-grammatical features expressing ideological stance in the corpus.

Keywords: Historical English, News Discourse, Letters to the Editor, Corpus Linguistics, Discourse Analysis

10. Lucyna Merzec (Poland)

An Illiterate Maid and Her Madam Poet. Correspondence between Józefa Grabowska and Kazimiera Hłakowiczówna (1939–1955)

While researching in the archives of Polish poet Kazimiera Hłakowiczówna (1892–1983), I discovered a collection of correspondence from 1939–1955 (33 letters) between an illiterate [sic] housemaid Józefa Grabowska (1879–1958) and her employer, the poet.

Archival traces of communication of illiterate people such as letters, written by third parties with different degrees of literacy, are rare on a world scale, even more rare is two-way correspondence.

Grabowska's letters to Hłakowiczówna provide insight into the issue of the relationship between illiteracy and epistolography. Letters written by third parties and read by third parties (or in a wider circle) have a specific character; they are multi-styled and incoherent, connecting orality and literacy; they also provide insight into the acquired rules of letter writing, internalized and realized by individual scriptwriters, differentiated according to their literacy level, education and social role.

The correspondence provides insight into communication failures – especially when, aside from written messages, care packages and money transfers are

involved – and successes (mutual visits), which are explained by years of cooperation, knowledge of private customs, and reference to the cycle of calendar holidays (especially name days), among other things.

In my presentation, I will review in detail the role of third readers and scribes in this remarkable collection of correspondence.

11. Monica Mastrantonio (UK)

Grief and Sorrow in the letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu to Mr Montagu – the importance of tracking emotions and connections, and their ethical issues

Most of the Epistolary studies focus on texts and authorship perspectives. To understand letter correspondence from multiple forms, including the positioning of the recipient (the reader of the letter) can bring relevant insight to the discussion and comprehension of an author's network and life. Letter receivers, in the case of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, famous for her *The Turkish Embassy Letters*, vary greatly across her lifetime. From letters to her daughter and son, to letters to lifetime friends and enemies, her correspondence with Mr Montagu remains a constant. Even though they lived apart during most of their lives (him in England and her in Europe), they exchanged letters all throughout it. Lady Montagu leaves England, while pursuing her literary career, and the love affair with Francesco Algarotti, but she never stopped writing to Mr Montagu. In these letters, grief, sorrow, divergences are commonly; and indirectly found. For instance, in the sentence 'Thursday, 9 at night. You dont care to put any date.' This study maps Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's correspondence and offers a framework to epistolary studies aiming to comprehend the movement of letters across time and space. It also highlights subtle changes in moods and feelings towards the same correspondent. The conclusion can show the change in tones and moods in Montagu's correspondence, and together with it, ethical implications are addressed on privacy and publicity of written documentation and the care researchers need to use to guide their interpretations of private relationships of the past.

Key words: epistolary studies, emotions, ethical issues, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu.

12. Linda McGuire (France)

On Creating Terentia: the other readers of Cicero's correspondence to his wife

The journey undertaken by writings from the distant past to reach readers in 2022 is difficult to recreate. This statement certainly applies to Cicero's *The Letters to his Friends*. Book 14 comprises the largest number of letters to a female recipient who once lived in Rome, and contains some of the earliest surviving correspondence in Latin. Although little is known about its transmission, one key step can be identified. Originally believed to be part of a late Republican epistolary exchange, at some point these 24 letters from Cicero to Terentia were turned into a book that circulated under imperial rule.

There is a tendency to forget the editor's involvement and read them only as spousal communications. Today book 14 is regularly mined for information about Cicero's exile, and biographical detail about his wife. Taking into account its later readers, those unintended by Cicero, suggests that Terentia was the real subject. Indeed, it merits being re-examined in light of recent research on Roman exemplarity. This paper will argue that these letters were selected to represent Terentia as an ideal of female behaviour, one best considered independently of the person to whom these letters were originally addressed.

13. Joyce Milambiling (USA)

Accidental Text: When Private Letters are Made Public

In 1918, Helen Schechter wrote 33 letters to her English teacher, a volunteer who taught immigrants at Christodora Settlement House in New York City. The private letters contain the writer's innermost thoughts and desires. The Schechter letters can be viewed as a single, multifaceted text, similar to how Salz (2000) regarded letters written by an immigrant woman from the same historical period: "I would like here to describe a collection of letters as a text about whose creation the author is unaware" (p. xx). As a text, the letters written by Helen Schechter are a unique expression that may well have surprised its creator had she had the opportunity to view them together as a whole. What happens, then, when private letters go public over 100 years later? Described here is the ongoing process of transforming what was conveyed in these letters into a work about the writer, the recipient, and the circumstances of their lives in the early 20th century. The first "other reader" was a librarian who assigned subject headings to the manuscript collection, and the letters were later studied by the present researcher. The overarching task is to interpret the text that these letters represent. Ultimately, since only the letters to the teacher have been found, this half of the correspondence contains valuable clues to who the writer and addressee were, the world they experienced, and the feelings they held for each other.

(Salz, E. (2000). *Selected Letters of Mary Antin*. Syracuse University Press.)

14. Kevin A. Morrison (China)

How Not to Read a Letter: "Blinding Symbiosis" and Private Correspondence

Historians and biographers have long characterized the relationship between a young John Morley—who would go on to become nineteenth-century British Prime Minister William Gladstone's chief lieutenant—and his father as, even at the best of times, strained. When Jonathan Morley learned of John's growing religious doubts and refusal to take holy orders, he cut off his son's financial support in his third year at Oxford University. The two never reconciled. Since there is scant evidence of Morley's relationship with his father while at university, and any letters between them have been lost, historians and biographers have long extrapolated from this episode. Yet even after Morley's personal papers were released in 2000, which includes letters from Jonathan to other members of the family, most scholars have continued to argue, almost entirely conjecturally, that the father was cold and austere.

In this paper, I closely read a single letter from Jonathan to one of John's brothers, William, who, at the age of nineteen, was striking out on his own by entering the cotton merchant trade. I argue that previous scholarship, which has quoted the letter to support unsubstantiated assertions about Jonathan's character, exemplifies what Arlette Farge terms 'blinding symbiosis', in which the researcher 'can no longer even recognise any difference, exception, or contradiction' with the 'working hypothesis' on which one has settled. I suggest that the letter evinces instead quite a different approach to parenting. This, in turn, has significant implications for both biographical studies of Morley and broader methodological approaches to using letters as evidence of biographical claims.

15. Elina Saloranta (Finland)

Do not of course say anything to anyone about what I have said, it is a highly intimate matter and let it just rest

My presentation addresses the question of intimacy in epistolary research. How to deal with secrets and confessions? How to avoid exploiting intimacy?

To start with, I will present two intimate letters. The first one is a kind of MeToo message from 1905. It was written by the Finnish singer Elli Forssell-Rozentale (1871–1943) to her sister Anna Forssell (1882–1970), who was a violinist. In the letter Elli describes a relationship she had had with her teacher in Milan and warns Anna about her own teacher in Munich.

The second letter was written by Anna in 1906 when she had – despite Elli's warnings – fallen in love with her teacher: "The situation is that his wife has been at her parents' place with the child for a couple of weeks and, during that time, he has been miserable at home and I have been with him almost every day, driven in the automobile, gone to concerts..." The letter ends with the words: "Do not of course say anything to anyone about what I have said, it is a highly intimate matter and let it just rest."

To conclude, I will read some replies that the sisters have received from the 21st century. These letters are part of my postdoctoral research "An exchange of letters with the past" at the University of the Arts Helsinki.

16. Qian Su (UK)

Paratextual Intervention for Commercial Sale: Multiple Parties Intervened in Letter Collections in the Middle to Late Seventeenth-century China (1650-1700)

The Proposal: Mainland China fell into turmoil after the collapse of the Ming dynasty in 1644, causing most of the literati to lose their properties. Publishing letter collections became a means of subsistence when mainland China gradually stabilized after 1650. Those literati who were letter compilers, editors, and preface authors attempted to break through compiling ways and target readerships of letter collections in the late Ming period (1573-1644), looking for new sales hotspots. In order to attract a broader readership, they conducted

paratextual interventions on letter collections by prefaces and marginalia, to emphasize the literary and aesthetic values of letters. They orientated readers from learning letter-writing skills to appreciating letter texts. They criticized the aesthetic orientation of diverse vocabulary and gorgeous sentences in the late Ming period and proposed a new aesthetic pursuit of accurate expression of emotions. Since the letter was always considered a minor genre for recreation and stayed in a low position in the field of classical Chinese literature, letter compilers, editors, and preface authors also tried to improve its genre position by guiding readers to experience the moralizing function of letters. Such approaches made letter collections a commercial success, as the intervention of multiple parties weakened the practicability of those collections and highlighted literary values. This paper intends to explore the paratextual interventions of multiple parties in the compiling and editing process of letter collections and consequent commercial influences.

17. Cheryl Weaver (USA)

Postal Horizons: The British Postal Service in Richardson's Pamela, Fielding's Shamela and Haywood's Anti-Pamela

Twenty-first century literary scholarship has begun to examine the effect of postal service development on epistolary fictions. James How identifies what he calls epistolary spaces, referring to the new avenues and opportunities that the British Post Office afforded the general public as it expanded from 1650-1750; in particular, he pays attention to how this public avenue of communication opened up correspondences between individuals. The sole fictional text How explores is Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* (1747); I extend How's work to examine Richardson's *Pamela* (1740) and two works responding to Richardson: Haywood's *Anti-Pamela* (1741) and Fielding's *Shamela* (1741).

This paper provides an overview of British postal development and then examines how Richardson identifies the rumblings of social change along the postal fault line. I argue Richardson anticipates the growth of Britain's General Letter Office, later called the General Post Office, and the need for infrastructure development to ensure secure and efficient personal mail delivery. Further, Haywood and Fielding respond to Richardson not only through critiques of gender and social mobility, but also in ways that suggest how mail delivery systems affect different social classes. While scholarly criticism of *Pamela* covers a wide spectrum that includes editorial revisions, optics, gender, and the epistolary novel itself, more attention must be paid to the pragmatics of letter delivery as presented through early English language epistolary novels. This study situates eighteenth-century British familiar letters within the theoretical framework of public and private spaces, infrastructure, and individual agency as depicted through fiction