

TERN2023 Book of Abstracts
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Carol Acton (Canada)

'Time to die many times': negotiating time in letters between couples in the First World War

For young couples separated during the First World War, letters would become the primary means of maintaining their relationship. The narrative of time, both the subjective experience of time and the constant awareness of clock time, is central to how they negotiate that relationship through years of separation. This paper explores how the pain of separation was measured through time, as writers express the tensions between present separation, where letters construct the intimacy that was denied the couples in actuality, an idealized past togetherness, and a future time when war, and their separation, would be over. Yet these correspondents were not naïve enough to assume a future. Their lives were suspended: any future was conditional and precarious. Writing in her diary after her fiancé goes to the front, Vera Brittain contemplates an existence defined by the relationship between letters, anxiety, and time: 'Even when letters come, it only informs one of the state of affairs about four days ago, & the writer since then has . . . had time to die many times.' (*Chronicle of Youth*, April 13th 1915) Other writers attempt to manage such anxiety through using clock time as a point of intimate contact, arranging a particular time of the evening when each would think of the other. Written to defy time, these letters are a legacy that allows us to enter into the painful immediacy of that wartime experience.

Iordan Avramov (Bulgaria)

Aspects of Time in Early Modern Scientific Correspondence: Glimpses from the Letters of Henry Oldenburg

As soon as the Royal Society of London was established in 1660, it created a vast correspondence network to collect scientific knowledge in various parts of the world. The man responsible for this was the Society's first secretary, Henry Oldenburg (1619? – 1677), who organized the business so efficiently that the mighty stream of scientific letters to and from London became a chief factor in the Society's early success. Nowadays, the extant Oldenburg letters - there are well more than 3000 of them - are a treasure trove of evidence on all things scientific of that age as well as a witness to the glory of the early modern scientific letter as a communication instrument.

For this talk I propose to look at some aspects of time in Oldenburg's letters. First of all, I shall describe Oldenburg's time management when organizing the correspondence. Secondly, I shall outline how the content of letters was shaped by the way of letter-writing, focusing on both instant and gradual changes. Additionally, I shall analyze a couple of examples of simultaneous action in the correspondence (copies of letters traveling over different routes, letters written to

accompany other letters, etc.). Finally, I shall have to face the elephant in the room; the well-studied subject of the early modern controversies over the priority of scientific discoveries. I shall do it very briefly, noting obvious relevant points (dating of letters) and discussing how the involved actors negotiated aspects of past and future in sorting out their present disputes.

Rachel Epp Buller (USA)

Inhabiting Pandemic Time through Epistolary Praxis

My current creative practice explores letter-writing as an act of care and listening, transmitted across time and space. Words matter to us; words connect us, and we desperately need to find modes of connection to each other in these precarious times. In recent years, I have become increasingly convinced of the handwritten letter's potential to bring us closer to each other, in a gesture that is bound up with time—not only time spent in considering one's words but also through epistolary traits of repetition and duration, waiting and delay.

This conference presentation traces my year-long daily practice of letters handwritten on paper that I marbled in the backyard during the first spring and summer of the COVID-19 pandemic. Begun on March 15, 2020, the *Pandemic Epistles* were a maintenance of connection amidst isolation and a grounding daily gesture in disorienting times. Mailing out gifts of art and words on my daily walks to the postbox became for me a practice of casting out listening like a fishing line, a reaching out with no expectation, only a hope, of reply. In a multimodal presentation including fragments from letters, artworks, and gifts sent and received, I discuss how relational listening and care were reflected back to me, the reciprocal listening the project engendered in what became a series of active correspondences, and how the daily practice of letters allowed me to intentionally inhabit the first year of pandemic time.

Robert Butler (USA)

Letters to Lucifer: 1000 years of corresponding with Evil

Letters are one of the oldest genres in the world of writing. Over the centuries, people have exchanged letters with families and friends, strangers and superiors. Many of these have been analysed for the knowledge they shed on literacy, models and formularies, rhetorical theory, gender and class, and so on. But while scholars have examined letters to and from authority figures, they have more rarely examined letters that appeal to deities, and almost never to gods or goddesses responsible for evil. In the ancient world, missives were written to a number of deities and powers able to wreak harm. In the middle ages, the Christian devil was a fearsome being who nevertheless had correspondents seeking him. In the modern world, declining belief in traditional religion led to a shift in the opinion of the devil, and in the nature of the letters written. The concept of the devil changed over time, and the letters changed as well.

This paper seeks to enlarge the epistolary discussion by focusing on letters written to the devil, the western world's chief figure of evil. The motives for these letters vary dramatically. Some seek power and wealth; others seek only notoriety and satire. But all are rewarding for the light they shine on the values of their own day, and the reactions they elicit in ours. Is the evil figure considered male or female? What about belief systems and their implications? An examination of letters written to figures representing evil might tell us a great deal about our ancestors and their world.

Nuria Calvo Cortes (Spain)

Early nineteenth-century London undated petition forms with two dates in the body of the text

Eighteenth and nineteenth-century English letter-writing manuals often included information regarding how to include dates in correspondence. Also, the spelling of months in letters of the time displays variation, with abbreviations being a regular feature.

The present study focuses on the analysis of the dates present in twenty-four petition forms. Filled-in between 1813 and 1815, they were signed by women who requested the admission of their children in the Foundling Hospital (FH) in London. The forms contained instructions to fill them in with the required information in each gap. None of the petitions is dated, as the forms were personally handed in at the FH and the children were considered for admission at that same time. However, the forms required the inclusion of two dates, one corresponding to the birth of the child and the other to the last time the woman petitioner had seen the child's father. The analysis shows that since these dates were handwritten, variation is observed. Different spellings are observed in the months, either abbreviated or not, and in the days, with or without ordinal number suffixes. Also, on most occasions the year is not included and sometimes either the month or the day are also missing. The results suggest that spelling conventions regarding dates may not have been fully established at the time, that the year did not seem necessary, and that petitioners probably did not always understand the instructions.

Murielle Djomatchoua

Open letters and the making of female history : a critical study of politicized (inter)subjectivities on the World Wide Web

The digital revolution decentered female voices to create transnational networks of support and of activism for radical and systemic change. Making history in open letters operates in the constant re-actualization and re-activation of the issue at stake in such a way that the boundaries between the present, the past, and the future are blurred. In the online open letters emerge new forms of subjectivities that both serve the purpose of self-awareness and public sensibilization while simultaneously calling for (re)action against forms of injustices and oppression. Writing becomes a form of commitment where the boundaries between the "I" and

the “We” are blurred. Who writes within and beyond the “I” who speaks in the open letter is the nucleus of this study. How does temporality affect the singulariti(es) of the “I” meets and fragment the pluraliti(es) of the “We”? What transaction(s) these intersections create(s)? Who is the writer of the open letter and who is /are the audience(s)? And how does the digital platform enhance these confusion(s) of and/or unification of voices? In the case of female writing these questions highlight the political properties of open letters used as instruments and medium of propaganda. The re-appropriation of the subjectivity of the writer creates some forms of imperialism of the “I” on the “We”. The unilateral voices dictate worldviews and orientations that serve the purpose of change at the sideline of imperialism. This paper sets out to analyze these transformations and nuances of the I/We of female digital open letters by focusing on their political properties and reactionary powers.

David Gerber (USA)

Postal Time and POW Time: Personal Correspondence of American Prisoners of War in the Pacific, 1941-1945

Among the transformations in the experience of time associated with Western modernity was the development of *postal time*, by which personal correspondence went from cumbersome and time-consuming technologies of exchange to the rise of routinized, predictable postal systems. The new, increasingly global postal regime enabled letters to traverse borders with astonishing speed. In shrinking the distance between places, postal time gave rise to the feeling of living in near-real time alongside one’s correspondents.

Such was the case within developed societies and between those societies and their colonial empires, such as the American empire in Asia. Among the many privileges Americans stationed in the Philippines at the time of the largest mass surrender in American military history in April-May 1941 had enjoyed was the assurances of postal time, which linked them relatively effortlessly with family and kin in the United States. That changed dramatically with surrender and captivity, at the center of which became POW time, an endless passage of formless days, manipulated by their Japanese captors through cruelty and chaotic administration. POWs continued to be guided by expectations of postal time, assuming that through the International Red Cross they would be able to remain in correspondence with significant others in the USA, and hence live alongside them in near real-time.

Through the examination of the often frustrated and only tentatively achieved exchange of letters during captivity of Brigadier General William E. Brougher, this presentation will analyze the experience of POW time superimposed upon the expectations of postal time.

Francesca Iorio (Portugal)

The journey of French Jesuits to China in 1698. Missionary correspondence in the temporality of travel

The Society of Jesus, founded by Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556) in 1540, from the very beginning of its institution was called to go beyond the borders of the European continent, responding to the need to be a new order dedicated to travel. Jesuits destined for overseas missions, engaged in pastoral and educational works, became, with their introspective method, curious travelers, interested in grasping a multiplicity of political, historical, geographical factors that were transmitted to Europe through the writing of letters and reports.

At stake in this paper is the analysis through travel correspondence of the first trip by vessel to China by the French Jesuits in 1698. Through the presentation of a corpus of unpublished archive materials and printed texts, will be possible to understand impressions the French Jesuits had of Chinese people, nature, art, customs, and habits. Not only this, but another issue under consideration is also to investigate the multi-institutional nature of the trip by cross-referencing trip letters. In fact, the ship was carrying Jesuit fathers from the French mission directly financed by Louis XIV (King's Mathematicians) and was the vessel through which France started its direct trade with China. For this reason, the geopolitical macro-dynamics surrounding this mission will not be overlooked. Finally, the paper reflects on the importance of these types of sources for understanding the circulation of knowledge and people inside the long-distance and global network of Jesuits missions.

Jurga Jonutyte (Lithuania)

Mutually repeatable present: an interval between sent and received letter

The interval between the sent and received letter establishes a specific experience of time, unique dynamic of commonality and individuality. This interval is disappearing from the modern written communication.

Reflecting on this experience, I will draw on the correspondence between close female artist friends in the last decades of the Soviet Lithuania. In the letters, the women do not discuss art and philosophy, but deal with everyday health and household concerns, often addressing soviet institutional helplessness. Urgent small household requests are what allow us to perceive the peculiar temporality of such communication, which existed parallel to their lives as artists projected in modern linear time. On the other hand, in each such request letter, one can clearly hear: 1) certainty about the addressee's agenda, her life rhythm; 2) complete trust in the mutual relationship (most often, a requested action is necessary much earlier than it is possible to receive a response letter). This time mode, based on repetition, creates a pulsating non-linear, common present. A sent letter creates a plane of virtual commonality that lasts until a response and is renewed by repetition.

The interpretation of this experience will be based on the several philosophical explanations of time, self and communal being, particularly, experience of the present (W. James, P. Ricoueur), and dynamics between self and community (M. Blanchot and J. Butler).

Linda McGuire (France)

Two millennia of epistolary editing, or Cicero's *The Letters to Atticus* as 426 decisions

Research on how ancient letter collections were put together never gets far. Extant collections don't contain information about the thinking and processes that resulted in their creation. It does not help that their differences seem to outweigh their similarities. Dating from the late Republic to late imperial period, they vary widely in their contents with poem-letters (Ovid), epistolary essays (Horace) and philosophical letters (Seneca the Younger).

Cicero's *The Letters to Atticus* remains among the earliest and least understood. First attested in the public realm 100 years after Cicero's death, the editor's identity remains unknown, much less this person's decision-making and intentions. Were these 426 letters chosen to provide background on the civil war, capture Republican political life for imperial readers, or offer an epistolary biographical portrait of a prominent senator?

This issue might be addressed by examining the editing process behind letter collections from later time periods. Before his death, Samuel Beckett expressed the wish to publish letters bearing on his work. The preface to *The Letters of Samuel Beckett 1929-1940* details the steps undertaken by the editorial team, in particular the formulation of questions used in the selection process. This paper proposes to apply questions written in the 19th century to a 16-book edition of letters originally edited in antiquity. An initial analysis of book 1 brings to the fore non-political relationships that challenge the popular view of this senator's edited letters as political.

Hélène Miesse (Belgium)

Fighting against time. The expression of urgency in the letters of Francesco Guicciardini before 1526

In 1525-1526, at the heart of the "Italian Wars", Francesco Guicciardini (1483-1540), adviser to Pope Clement VII, urged the Pontiff to conclude an alliance with France and the other Italian states to fight against the territorial expansion of Emperor Charles V. One finds the trace of these incitements in the speeches, written by the author at that time but remained confidential. The abundant correspondence, on the other hand, was the privileged means of action of the statesman to convince his various interlocutors of the validity of his ideas and to push them to act. The urgency is one of the arguments regularly invoked for this purpose in the epistolary texts written before the conclusion of the League of Cognac, on May 22, 1526. In this paper, I intend to identify the expressions used to express this urgency, to distinguish its scope (what is urgent?) and to relate it to the reasons used to justify this generalized haste. The paper will be based on the critical edition of Francesco Guicciardini's correspondence (ed. P. Jodogne and P. Moreno), which is still being published but reached the year 1526.

Madoka Nagado (Hawaii, USA)

The Intersection of Personal and Historical Time in Isabella Bird's *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan*

An English traveler Isabella Bird's travelogue, *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan*, offers a perspective on Japan's cultural and social evolution during the late nineteenth century. Bird's travels through Japan in 1878 covered over 2,800 miles and took seven months, from Tokyo to Hokkaido, and then to Kobe. Through her writing, Bird captures the intermingling of two different historical times in Japan: a traditional way of life that had existed for centuries, and the newly-introduced, Westernized modern Japan. Her writing portrays the struggles and irony of the incorporation of Western culture into the old-fashioned Japanese way of life.

Furthermore, I argue that Bird's writing portrays the coexistence of two different times within herself. Her writing reflects on her own 'time' living in her mind, providing readers with a glimpse into her personal history. While Bird had reservations about the letter format since 'this form of publication involves the sacrifice of artistic arrangement and literary treatment, and necessitates a certain amount of egotism', her use of the letter format, addressed to her beloved sister, allowed her to express her innermost thoughts and feelings, providing readers with a more intimate and personal account of her travels. Bird often goes back to, refers to, and analyses her previous travels and time spent in home, England, while writing about her 'current time' and the people she encountered.

Grace Pundyk (Australia)

Inscribing the wound: witnessing correspondence

In 2003, upon my father's death, I found four letters: three were written by my Polish grandmother, a woman I never knew and who was rarely spoken about, and the other recounted the events that led to her deportation and death in a Soviet work camp some time in the 1940s. The letters were written in Polish, a language foreign to me. Accompanying the letters were several photographs. Despite having since had the letters translated, and despite my increased understanding of the primarily forgotten historical and geo-political narrative that impacted my family, these ghostly items continue to haunt. As narratives of trauma, they expose a familial wound – a woman not only abandoned, homeless, abused and destitute, but whose voice and memory were also kept hidden and silenced for close to 70 years.

As material testimony, the letters constitute evidence and proof infused with uncertainty – not only via the what-is-written, the unwritten, and what dared not be written, but also due to a temporal-spatial rupture, akin to a suspension of time and of hope lost, that challenges locating "events of the text" within a prescribed history. This paper explores the methods engaged to reach a deeper understanding of the messages – explicit and implicit – contained in these letters. It will show how investigating the letters in totality, that is in content (the text), formatting (writing style) and materiality (paper and ink) has been essential for navigating the

precarious interplay between the written and the read and the fraught complexities inherent to intergenerational witness and testimony.

Elina Saloranta (Finland) and Roberta Zanasi (Italy)

M. Foss wrote as usual...

a participatory experiment in empathetic reading

In her seminal volume about epistolarity, Genette Altman stresses that the “temporal polyvalence” of epistolary discourse is one of the distinctive features of the genre. A letter, in fact, represents the pivotal point of intersection of past, present and future, although the present of the writer never corresponds to that of the reader. Altman concludes, therefore, that “the epistolary discourse is caught up in the impossibility of a dialogue in the present” and time intervals are therefore essential components of the epistolary exchange itself.

In light of this reflection on epistolary time(s), which is at the core of this conference, the Finnish artist Elina Saloranta and the Italian literary researcher, Roberta Zanasi, propose a participatory experiment of empathetic reading. Those among the audience willing to participate will be asked to reply to the letters of a mid-nineteenth-century English woman, Martha Foss, who, in 1860, had to leave her illegitimate child at the London Foundling Hospital to continue to lead a respectable life in a society that labelled those like her as “fallen women”.

While recalling the temporal complexity of the epistolary genre theorised by Altman, the experiment aims to question the ideal of historical and academic detachment by giving researchers a chance to relate differently to archival material.

Polina Shvanyukova (Italy)

“Being on the point of departure I have only time to say”: Epistolary conventions of temporality in Late Modern English business letters

In the introductory section to his best-selling business letter-writing manual, William Anderson (1836: xiii) identifies “neatness and perspicuity” as the two main characteristics of the nineteenth-century English commercial style. He then goes on to add that “[b]revity is also desirable, as far as may be consistent with the latter quality [i.e., perspicuity]; for a waste of words is a waste of time, both to him who writes and him who reads a letter” (1836: xiii). For nineteenth-century merchants wasting time meant wasting money. Likewise, not making good use of time at their disposal could result in some “unpleasant consequences” (Anderson 1836: 68), as is illustrated in the model letters offered in the manual. This paper deals with an underresearched epistolary sub-genre of model Late Modern English business letters with a view of investigating the typical conventions of temporality encoded linguistically across a range of formulaic, conventionalised patterns.

Anderson, William. *Practical Mercantile Correspondence, etc.* London: Effingham Wilson, 1836.

Maria Tamboukou (UK)

Gender, Letters and Mathematics: an award letter too late to receive

In 1816, Sophie Germain became the first woman to win *the Grand Prix de Mathématiques*, awarded by the Class of Mathematics and Physics of the French Institute for her theory of vibrations of general curved and plane elastic surfaces. And yet she did not attend the ceremony award, due to a malfunction of receiving the award letter together with her tickets for the ceremony. What she received instead was a cold letter at the eleventh hour advising her that she was invited to attend, which she did not. In considering the letter that Germain never received as a sign of the times, in this paper I look into the role of mathematical correspondence in both including and excluding women from the world of science during the early modern period and beyond. My approach draws on archival research with Germain's mathematical correspondence in the Archives and Manuscripts of La Bibliothèque Nationale de France (BnF) and at the Biblioteca Moreniana de Firenze and emerges from a wider project of writing a feminist genealogy of automathographies.

Lik Hang Tsui (Hong Kong)

From Delayed Transmissions to Timelessness: The Multiple Lives of Letters by Great Masters from Song China

This paper delves into the elusive nature of letters by canonized masters from Song China, as illuminated by a temporal perspective on letters in their original communicative context and also in their "afterlives". The epistolary culture of the Song Dynasty (960-1276) offers valuable insights into the history, culture, art, and thought of the era, as well as the broader world of epistolary traditions. Letters played a crucial role in communication among literate communities, serving not only as modes of transmission but also as cultural artifacts that could enrich, supplement, or subvert the messages they conveyed.

Penned by literati and officials, letters of this time were transmitted through an official postal delivery system, supported by substantial institutional infrastructure. However, "private" letters (*sishu*) to family and friends, being assigned lower priority in the institutional hierarchy, often encountered issues of delays, inefficiencies, and unreliability. The writers, by casually specifying these parameters in texts, made use of "temporal distance" as a vehicle to foreground messages about places that they have experienced and their social relations, both old and new.

However, letters also had lives beyond their original communicative purpose, acquiring new meanings and values over time. For instance, Song dynasty epistolary manuscripts were transformed into calligraphic objects of aesthetic and cultural significance, admired, reproduced, and disseminated by later generations in rubbing collections and other forms. In this context, the timeliness and delivery schedules of letter writing became less relevant, giving way to the timelessness of letters as artifacts.

Frederick von Petersdorff (Germany)
From Epistolary Times to Email Times

Writing and sending emails has become rather common – whereas the number of letters forwarded by post is declining. These two distinct ways of processing and forwarding written information are comparable – despite the differences in the respective technologies of delivery. The aspect I would like to focus upon within this context is the specific use and significance of time stamps – as issued in the case of letters as well as in the case of emails. In other words, I intend, in a first step, to analyse when and why letters and emails receive a time stamp. In a second step, I shall then compare these distinct instances of time stamps being issued, i.e. whenever either letters or emails are being written, then posted and finally delivered. The results of these analyses and comparisons will then, in a third step, enable me to study how the respective time stamps have changed and received a new significance throughout the development from epistolary times to email times.

In my conclusion I intend to show, as well, how these changes resulted in new ways of applying the structure of UTC. Finally, I shall point out that within the scope of the changing temporal setting from epistolary times to email times it should be noted that the underlying spatial setting, too, is changing – as the sender of an email does not need to know the specific location of the addressee at the expected time of delivery.

Cheryl Weaver (USA)
Superscriptions Speak: Privilege and Postal Politics in the Hoffman Family Papers

The paper I propose is based on my research dealing with the conference theme of schedules and delays through postal delivery access during a critical period in United States postal development. During my summer fellowship, I will be in the Historic Hudson region near New York City in archives that hold women's letters detailing the impact of changing postal services and documenting women's postal practices in the early to mid-1800s. Through the Storrs and Hoffman epistolariums (letter collections associated with an individual), I will present the difficulties of practice and engagement with the formal public post and informal private delivery networks.

The historic Hudson Valley region—between Boston and New York City, between New York City and Buffalo, New York—was a pivotal area of U.S. growth and commerce; the accompanying postal developments influenced women's implicit political engagement through early and mid-nineteenth-century postal practice. The Hoffman Collection, which contains letters with numerous references to postal schedules and the pragmatics of postal delivery, will enrich our understanding of how postal access impacted women's communication and letter writing practices. Eliza Storrs's letters describing interpersonal delivery methods and Julia Hoffman's letters articulating anxiety regarding information being sent faster by newspaper

than familiar letter suggest the collection would provide invaluable information on the post. My paper will construct a narrative documenting women's postal engagement through the politicized public post and the crucial period of United States Postal Service development that resulted in increased postal routes and roads while making these services more cost effective.