Women’s Letters as Life Writing
1840–1885

Examining letter collections published in the second half of the nineteenth century, Catherine Delafield rereads the life writing of Frances Burney, Charlotte Brontë, Mary Delany, Catherine Winkworth, Jane Austen and George Eliot, situating these women in their epistolary culture and in relation to one another as exemplary women of the period. She traces the role of their editors in the publishing process and considers how a model of representation in letters emerged from the publication of Burney’s Diary and Letters and Elizabeth Gaskell’s Life of Brontë. Delafield contends that new correspondences emerge between editors/biographers and their biographical subjects, and that the original epistolary pact was remade in collaboration with family memorials in private and with reviewers in public. Women’s Letters as Life Writing 1840–1885 addresses issues of survival and choice when an archive passes into family hands, tracing the means by which women’s lives came to be written and rewritten in letters in the nineteenth century.

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Women’s Letters as Life Writing 1840–1885

Catherine Delafield
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In her published *Diary and Letters*, the novelist Frances Burney set out her own view of the published letter collection when she analysed the letters of Samuel Johnson produced by their friend Hester Thrale Piozzi (1788). For Burney, the letters should have been selected and amended to make them readable, and edited to maintain an exalted view of the ‘ever-revered’ doctor (Barrett 1842d, p. 15). Burney herself was at Court in 1778 and trying to work on the memoirs of her friend Mary Delany by helping Delany to re-read and destroy the letters of a lifetime. Burney read Piozzi’s edition in an unpublished form and used this to renovate the character of Johnson in a conversation with Queen Charlotte (pp. 16–7). She then wrote in a journal letter jointly addressed to her sister Susan and her friend Frederica Locke: ‘The few she [Piozzi] has selected of her own do her, indeed, much credit: she has discarded all that were trivial and merely local and given only such as contain something instructive, amusing or ingenious’ (p. 15). Preservation, selection and the concept of the writer’s own words in print are concerns for any editor of a letter collection. The means of migrating letters into life writing were part of the publishing dilemma Burney left with her extensive collection of family papers when she died in 1840.

Using 1840 as its starting point, this book investigates the role of letters within women’s life writing of the later nineteenth century and explores how life writing emerged from the nineteenth-century letter collections of six women: Frances Burney, Charlotte Brontë, Mary Delany, Catherine Winkworth, Jane Austen and George Eliot. The influential women discussed in this book were presented as exemplary of womanhood despite their public roles. Women’s letters were authorised as domestic duty but for women who had professional writing careers or a public profile there would be speculation about role-playing and fictionalisation. For the purposes of life writing, a letter sent out as a performance of the self was hoarded and objectified and then collected, curated and recuperated as a life in a new context. The narrative was unconsciously created by the original letter writer and would be reconstructed by the reader of the collected form. The letter recovers an historical relational narrative but this is in opposition to the original ‘theatre of usage’ (Stanley 2004, p. 217). Even the discovery of an apparently
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reliable source through concerted research into the process of preservation might also show that the letter has been influenced by contingencies or emergencies, and by other forms of writing.

The Letter as a Vehicle for Life Writing
A personal letter is a document of self writing and may seem to fulfil the criteria associated with autobiography, but the role of writing intent within the letter, of absence made present, of correspondent, collection and future collation, changes the boundaries drawn around the writing moment. A letter brings with it the freight and weight of expectation, social mores, codes of behaviour and the impact of the original burden of correspondence. The ‘life and letters’ style of life writing makes assumptions that a life can be found within letters that themselves have a performative function (Summerfield 2013). Letters use the evolving technology of communication throughout their cycle of transmission and they become a suspect means of life writing in relation to their companion function as a fictional device used to authorise reading in the lives of the newly literate during the eighteenth century. As an emerging genre, the novel adopted the dailiness of letter writing in order to be legitimised as a narrative form, and this fictionalisation, in turn, raises questions about the life to be found in a letter. The life of the letter, and the impact of time, preservation and survival, has additionally prioritised one piece of life writing in epistolary form over another, and the family who inherit have a vital role in writing, receiving, preserving, relinquishing and publishing letters re-valued over time.

The letter as life writing occupies a place on the auto/biographical continuum that should be interrogated using an understanding of the letter-writing choreography and geography within the lives being lived. Women’s letters of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were weighted in a number of ways. Letters were a form of family communication and a site for gossip that may or may not otherwise be shared. The letters bore the logistical marks of their composition and transmission, and some editions are more assiduous than others in explaining or unravelling the survival path of the text. Women’s letters were predicated on travel or separation, and on events that had a value within the sociability of the communication process. The circumstance or place for writing was part of that account. It was from the original writing, response and negotiation for existence that a literary process of self-expression developed. The transition into print involved a further complexity enhanced by the already fraught role of the women exemplar and her public existence constructed by reviewers and in obituarles.

The distinctive style of Hester Thrale Piozzi noted by Burney impacted on another letter writer, and the letter-as-life-writing community is presented in miniature by this single piece of correspondence.
On 11 June 1799, at the turn of the page in a letter written from Bath, Jane Austen exclaimed to her sister Cassandra: ‘So much for Mrs Piozzi. I had some thoughts of writing the whole of my letter in her stile, but I believe I shall not’ (Le Faye 1995, p. 44). In surviving, this letter informs its new readers that Jane Austen has traded a muslin veil for a black lace one as a present for Mary Austen, an outlay of 16 shillings that she hopes will not be too expensive for Cassandra to share ‘on the altar of Sister-in-law affection’ (p. 46). This letter’s onward transmission after Cassandra received it at her Steventon home was by a bequest to their niece Fanny Knight and thence to her son Lord Brabourne, editor of Austen’s letters. The text of the letter was published by Brabourne (1884) and then by twentieth-century editor R. W. Chapman (1932). The physical manuscript was sold to a private collector in 1886 and presented to the National Library of Australia in 1911 (Le Faye 1995, p. 369); a facsimile has also appeared (Modert 1990). The letter displays interest in letterness and refers to available models before it follows a trajectory into curation and life writing. From daily record to collected works, Women’s Letters as Life Writing explores this narrative arc.

The Case Study Texts

The book follows the paths of letters as ‘multifocal’, ‘reciprocal’ and ‘marked by the context of reading’ (Stanley, Salter and Dampier 2012, p. 281; p. 269). It explores the wider community of life writing for the case study women as well as the afterlives created by lives in relation (Culley and Styler 2011). Chapter 1 considers five introductory areas that contextualise the discussion in Chapters 2 and 3 of two foundational texts: Burney’s Diary and Letters (Barrett 1842–46) and Elizabeth Gaskell’s Life of Charlotte Brontë (1857). The model emerging from this discussion is then explored in Chapters 4–7, using four further examples of women’s letters as life writing. Chapter 8 considers both the afterlives of the letters and the hidden lives within.

Chapter 1 introduces the letter as life evidence by providing an overview of life-writing theory relating to the letter before moving on to discuss unseen collaborations in the creation and survival of the letter: correspondence, collection and editing. The chapter then considers how letters become life writing before briefly introducing women’s letters of the nineteenth century.

Chapter 2 identifies a model for the letter as life writing through the work of Frances Burney as editor, diarist and family correspondent. Burney entrusted the publishing of her Diary and Letters (1842–46) to her niece Charlotte Barrett who enlisted her nieces and the publisher Henry Colburn as participants in the final project. The journal letters were also edited by their own dramatis personae since Barrett and Colburn were petitioned by the families of those mentioned in it to exclude some of the
material. The reception – or ongoing community – of the diary and letters
was also constructed through the responses first of John Wilson Croker
(1842) and then of Thomas Macaulay (1843), writing in the quarterly
reviews about the *Diary and Letters* and also about Burney’s *Memoirs*
(1832) of her father. The example of Burney highlights five elements that
inform the model of letters as life writing. Letters are openly traded and
circulated but also withheld. Letters are used as places for self-narration
but may also be fictionalised. Finally, the published letter must contest
any suggestion that it was originally written for publication.

Chapter 3 reinforces and supplements the model by examining the
use of letters in Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Life of Charlotte Brontë* (1857). The
*Life* mines letters for material but also negates them as a genre by trans-
forming extracts into self writing in order to use Brontë’s own words.
Gaskell was responding to reviews and to her own conflicted view of
Brontë. She consciously and openly deployed her own letters to provide
a commentary written to the moment and also used authorship to define
an epistolary pact with Brontë over *Cranford* and *North and South*.
Gaskell’s *Life* adds a further four elements to the model: the importance
of the letter writer’s own words, the role of identity, the place of the
biographer’s life/letters and the overarching narrative of recovery and
duty. According to the Barrett-Gaskell model, exemplary women be-
queath letters that write their lives but must be re-domesticated within
the context of their own fame.

Chapter 4 discusses *The Autobiography and Correspondence of
Mary Granville, Mrs Delany* (Llanover 1861–62) that was in part a ri-
poste to Burney. The descendants of Delany were among those who had
excluded themselves from (or been anonymised in) the *Diary and Let-
ters*. At the same time, the texts occupied the same space because they
were recognised as court memoirs and were promoted for publication on
the basis of royal anecdote. Delany’s image and reputation were already
in circulation before the edition produced by her great-great-niece, but
Lady Llanover tried to answer the reviewers of letters as life writing and
to remove the taint of association with Burney and her family by invok-
ing contemporary sources and the hereditary might of the Granvilles.

Chapter 5 traces the biographical links between Gaskell’s *Life* and
Susanna Winkworth’s *Letters and Memorials of Catherine Winkworth*
(1883, 1886). The latter text was compiled by an editor sister who was
herself a professional editor and translator of letters. Winkworth uses
withholding and trading very consciously and preserves self-narration as
a form of duty to future generations. The chapter draws out comparisons
between Gaskell and the Winkworths as life writers, exploring the role
of translation and family memorials in the privately printed, but publicly
circulated, *Letters and Memorials*.

Chapter 6 examines Lord Brabourne’s edition of Jane Austen’s *Letters*
(1884) as a family record split across letter survivals superintended by
Cassandra whose task was probably impacted by the early volumes of Burney’s *Diary and Letters*. Brabourne’s *Letters* was a memorial to his own mother Fanny Knight but also a riposte to James Edward Austen-Leigh’s *Memoir* (1870, 1871), to biographical records such as that of Sarah Tytler (1880) and to the example of Burney. The chapter considers how the voices of Jane and Cassandra Austen emerge despite the suffocating weight of Brabourne’s accompanying commentary.

Chapter 7 demonstrates how George Eliot’s *Life* (1885) was arranged from her letters by her husband John Cross in part as a response to the ‘Eminent Women’ biography by Mathilde Blind (1883) but also within the context of a range of reviews and obituaries circulating after Eliot’s death. The chapter traces Cross’s interventions and his narrative of recovery that recuperated Eliot’s domestic character and re-presented her as member of the Cross family.

In conclusion, Chapter 8 uses the lives of Christina Rossetti to look beyond the parameters already established and to retrace the letter-as-life-writing continuum. The chapter also provides an overview of the afterlives of the case study texts using an accompanying Appendix. Rossetti’s life was hidden by her role as Pre-Raphaelite model and lyric religious poet, and the chapter concludes with a brief analysis of hidden lives that emerge from within the case studies, focussing on Charlotte Barrett and Elizabeth Gaskell, the ‘authors’ of the model.

Letters are circumstantial and circumscribed life writing because they focus on a life lived at the moment of composition that was later subsumed by other family and biographical agendas. The level of transparency in letters as self writing was affected by the situation and writing intent of the letter writer and by the models of writing and duty being fulfilled through the text. For women, it should be argued that the opportunity and authorisation to write affected their level of empowerment which has been re-drawn by the onward circulation and preservation of those texts. It is in the passage to retrospective memoir that the letters are mired in new ways of thinking and in the new tradition of life writing. The very validity of the letter comes to be undermined by the writer’s daring to have found a place for self-expression or a consciousness of writing for future publication.

Letters are, however, a chancy medium for preserving a life in print. Survival, choice and other women writers’ lives have shaped the letter-written life. In their different ways, the authors and editors of the case study texts demonstrate their knowledge of the range, permeability and narrative potential of the letter. In the case of women with exemplary lives that were attractive to publishers, life writing also had to take its cue from the response of reviewers. This book revisits the material conditions for letter writing and addresses some of the issues of editing when an archive passes into family hands, examining how women’s lives came to be written and rewritten in letters in the nineteenth century.
6 Introduction

Bibliography

1 Women’s Letters Becoming Life Writing

There is a generic instability within the letter as life writing. It is a vehicle for recollection and for writing events and collating news, but it has been preserved through the agency of third parties who make choices or collations/curations of letters. The life-writing moment has been recalibrated by an editor and un/authorised reader who provides linking passages to re-genericise the original letter in a new context. The letter migrates through autobiography into biography and into auto/biography (Stanley 1992; Marcus 1994). At a level of interpretation within this new narrative, the letters may, in turn, write the editing biographer’s own life. This chapter introduces the factual and fictional letter in life-writing theory and discusses the collaborative nature of life writing in letters through correspondence, collection and editing. The chapter then explores the letter as life writing and women’s letters of the nineteenth century.

As documents, letters provide both narrative evidence and circumstantial denials of their own veracity. For instance, Arthur Bell Nicholls demanded of his new wife Charlotte Brontë that all her correspondents should consent to the destruction of her letters once received. Brontë, in turn, explained in a letter to her friend Ellen Nussey on 31 October 1854 that Nicholls thought women ‘most rash in letter-writing’ and that he mistrusted ‘the accidental passing of letters into hands and under eyes for which they were never written’ (Barker 1997, p. 394). This letter nonetheless survives, of course, along with approximately 370 other letters to Nussey of the 500 she has claimed were written to her. Three volumes of Brontë’s letters have been edited for a modern audience (Smith 1995, 2000, 2004). The text of 1854 survives but appears to deny its own existence, and history has shown, as Charlotte described it to Ellen on 7 November, that ‘a letter may fall into any hand’ (Barker 1997, p. 395).

The letter as a text comes into existence through acts of writing and sending. Each stage in the progression from written immediacy to collected edition involves a collaborative act, ranging from the application of models established by letter manuals to the conservation of the accumulated texts of a lifetime. The letter is affected by the occasion of writing and the mode of transmission. Its receipt and circulation by a recipient or addressee dictates its survival and onward transmission into
Women’s Letters Becoming Life Writing

A further process of collation occurs during the selection of letters to be preserved and ordered for publication. It is from this process that a written life emerges across a wide spectrum of potential re-readings. The collator may claim that the letters contain the life and allow the writer to speak for herself in her own words, whereas selective and targeted quotation from letters serves the purposes of the biographer. The letter thus follows a process of composition, transmission and reception followed by a first reading, shared reading or re-reading and then a re-transmission, all of which take place within a revised context. Any retention or collection decision that is made re-values the letter as an object or as a memorial, and the new holder of the document assumes a position of power over it. Within a publishing or editing context, this power redefines the ‘epistolary pact’ (Altman 1982, p. 89; Stanley, Salter and Dampier 2012) originally established between first writer and first correspondent. Where life writing takes the form of a letter, the revised audience acts as a ‘fourth wall’ in the onward reception and classification of the letter.

For women of the nineteenth century, the letter at the time of its composition represented a negotiated and authorised space for reflective discussion and communication, for writing a self. The incorporation of such life writing into domestic responsibilities and thence family memorialisation acted as a palliative, allowing women to write but without addressing the causes of their exclusion from life writing. The manuscript letter might be written as part of a family duty or as an exercise in literacy or politeness. Crucially there was already a planned instability within the written text because it could circulate further to both intended and unintended audiences. The printed form might re-stabilise the text within a written or biographical sequence but the letter was now addressing an unplanned audience. When letters are invoked as evidence of life writing and written immediacy becomes retrospective testimony, the life-writing moment is questioned.

Life-Writing Theory and the Letter

The letter at that moment of immediacy is autobiographical writing (Stanley, Salter and Dampier 2012, p. 264) and it has been suggested that autobiography is a retrospective transformation of the self into a text (Fleishmann 1983, p. 33). The letter as life writing is, however, an unstable source for autobiographical moments since the narrative transformation of the self ostensibly occurs further along the continuum towards biography, at a point where the original text is restructured, published and packaged for the consumption of family and future public.

Laura Marcus observes that for the Victorians, autobiography was a sub-category of biography, and that, until the 1980s, there was an andocentric tradition of ‘Great Men’ that excluded the forms of life writing
adopted by women (1994, pp. 1, 273). It has been more recently suggested that it is the ‘great’ who are represented and that most ‘minor’ lives were also hidden until the advent of the Dictionary of National Biography (Atkinson 2010, pp. 4, 11). Despite their exclusion from some of the seminal discussions of auto/biography (Altick 1966; Renza 1977), women’s texts have been brought into the canon. Sidonie Smith suggests that the use of the letter as life writing by ‘culturally silenced’ women threatens the established order (1987, pp. 43–4). Mary Jane Corbett sees a motivation for women who become exemplars and whose written lives have to be shaped by domestic ideology, to represent the private sphere in public (1992, pp. 12, 15). Trev Lynn Broughton approaches the ‘contested terrain’ of life writing by suggesting a need to manage difference and to find ‘alternative myths of selfhood’ (1999, pp. 9, 11). Letter writing in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was a role for a woman in the private sphere despite the fact that she might be operating in public in the roles of author, charity worker, hymn writer or lady-in-waiting. Marcus broaches the subject of letters as texts in their own right and of gender as a genre that changes the operation and reception of a text (1994, p. 231), and the very term ‘life writing’ more readily accommodates women’s and ‘minor’ forms of self-narration (Kadar 1992; Lang-Peralta 1997, pp. 24, 40). The letter can become life writing beyond its fulfilment of domestic roles because it authorises the writer to assert herself as ‘I’ and to identify herself with the logistical viewpoint of correspondent.

The variety within the letter as a genre causes theorising to cross other boundaries of language and discipline. In the narrative theory of the novel, the ‘narrative of transmission’ (Duyfhuizen 1992) maps a process of accounting for the existence or ‘transmission’ of letters, giving the letter a life as well as helping to derive the life of the participants from the text of that letter. The seminal Yale French Studies issue of 1986 offered a number of perspectives for the letter as life writing. English Showalter charted the migration of a correspondence into a self-conscious literary production (1986, p. 126), Mireille Bossis opened the debate on collaboration (1986, p. 68) and Janet Altman considered publication as a ‘reinscription’ (1986, p. 19). From the perspective of social science theory, Liz Stanley defines the letter as dialogical, perspectival and emergent (2004, p. 202–3). In working on the letters of Olive Schreiner, Stanley has reached an understanding of letter collections by coining the term ‘Epistolarium’ and four classifications within it. Letters comprise the extant material of the writer but must also account for all her potential epistolary activity, including what has not been preserved. The ‘epistolarium’ should also include the writer’s correspondents and may finally be compacted into an edited published collection derived or divorced from the manuscript (Stanley 2004; Stanley, Salter and Dampier 2012).
The different schools of thought on epistolary theory maintain their own correspondence. In considering letters as life writing, Stanley’s assumption of ‘reciprocity and exchange at the core of correspondence’ (2012, p. 262) tends towards an absolute definition of letters as sociological evidence rather than as philosophically tuned documents contributing to the adjacent genres of auto/biography. Stanley and Margareta Jolly (Jolly and Stanley 2005) have made a feature of their divergent approaches within the academic study of the letter through a correspondence conducted in public in the journal *Life writing*. In their shared article, Jolly contends that ‘editing letters can be more straightforwardly autobiographical than their original writing’ whereas Stanley maintains her stance that there is an ethical dimension to transcription and selection (pp. 107, 111). The reader has to be able to trust the editor to print representative material. Stanley describes edited collections, as well as the unrecoverable (and unreadable) epistolarium, as ‘unnatural’ (p. 108).

Any theory of completeness or evidence-based reading should be able to accommodate the parallel fact that nineteenth-century correspondence was governed and affected by the use made of an evolving postal service, by the absence of such a service and by the basic need to signal being alive (Thomas 2012). The context of the life writing published between 1840 and 1885 must also include letters in the lives of women at much earlier periods. Mary Delany was born in 1700 at a crossroads between Early Modern and eighteenth-century sensibility. Delany used the letter form as part of her sociability within the Bluestocking circle and as a reinforcement of her family identity. Her letters published in the 1860s were then refracted through a new celebrity culture that undid the earlier pattern of communication and redefined the author of the letters as a safely antiquarian relic.

Furthermore, the letters of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were also in correspondence with their fictional counterparts. Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela* emerged from the market for letter-writing manuals, reinforcing the recognition that factual and fictional letters shared the same models of composition. Frances Burney’s published letters opened with the announcement of her authorship of an epistolary novel, *Evelina*. Jane Austen, who abandoned the epistolary form of *Lady Susan* ‘to the great detriment of the Post Office revenue’ and revised *Pride and Prejudice*, was presented as an admirer of the work of Richardson, especially *Sir Charles Grandison* (Austen 1818, p. xv; Austen-Leigh 1871, p. 84). A symbiotic relationship develops. The factual letter collection receives back a suspicious veracity to be redefined and reinterpreted by the actions of the letter writer in her real life. In the novel, fiction has been designed to appear real and to recommend itself as a truth-telling medium using the everyday form of the letter, and this conversely brings the truth of the letter collection into question.
Theorising about the letter as fiction (Altman 1982; MacArthur 1990; Favret 1993; Cook 1996; Gilroy and Verhoeven 2000) thus redounds on critiques of the letter as life writing providing parallel and interacting models of the letter as evidence and as narrative. In the case of the fictional letter, the story is mapped out and every letter is significant in the unfolding of the plot. The plot of an actual life told in letters is compiled from materials composed in an uncharted sequence that will be reordered and re-contextualised by the memorialist, editor or biographer. Altman additionally argues that ‘published correspondences’ become literature and that there are ‘literary values... implicit in the reinscription of letters as books’ (1986, pp. 18, 19). Rosemary Bodenheimer’s ‘writerly fictionality of letters’ (1994, p. 19) assumes that the new reader is capable of recognising the exploitation of letters and of understanding that the letter was not always written with life writing in mind. Life writing can be achieved through a form that has been popularised as fiction but the level of trust that the letters are about the life is in a constant state of flux. Elizabeth MacArthur observes that letter writers interpret in the midst of events; that ‘a series of present moments of letter-writing predominates, and the future is yet to be decided’ (1990, pp. 3, 9). The unknown outcome is part of the fiction of the novel, reflecting real-life letter writing. Conversely, the letter written in life and published as life writing becomes part of a known, completed future to which the editor of a collection is directing readers through revision or selection within the editing process. There is a suspicion that correspondences in real life might have been conducted as fiction and preserved as fact – that they were maybe destined for publication all along. The very bookness of the letter in published form suggests its potential ‘fictionality’. There is no reason why the letter writers themselves should not be writing in imitation of their fictional counterparts but the fact that *Pamela*, *Clarissa* and *Evelina* were composed through the letters of women will not be forgotten when lives come to be written in the mid-nineteenth century.

**Collaboration: Correspondent, Collector, Editor**

Life writing has been explored recently as ‘communal’ (James and North 2017, p. 133) and as ‘a relational literary form’ (Culley and Styler 2011, p. 238). Linda Peterson (2003) has discussed the family practice of autobiography and Linda Hughes (2016) traces ‘shared life writing’ through correspondence. Cynthia Huff’s work on the ‘imagined communities’ of women’s life writing describes women’s letters in the nineteenth century as sleepers waiting to challenge the ‘narrative possibilities’ for telling a life (2005, p. 15). Huff considers the role of non-textual and digital media in the contemporary recovery of lives (pp. 15–6). In the mid-nineteenth century, a wider range of women had access to the new technology of the
post as well as new means of telling stories through literacy and logistics denied them in previous centuries. Amy Culley too has pointed out that sociability enhances the ‘relational and communal aspects of self-representation’ where the woman writer is not the ‘solitary genius’ of autobiography but presented as part of a family or community (2014, p. 2).

**Correspondent**

At the initial stage of this collaboration, at the autobiographical moment of life writing, a letter is dependent for its existence on an absent correspondent. In its created moment where the separation between correspondents is overcome by a letter, there is, as Esther Milne has suggested, a sense of simultaneity and ‘a shared present’ (2010, p. 59). Through her absence, the correspondent manipulates the letter medium to encourage role-playing and create a letter-reading and letter-writing circle. In receiving letters, the correspondent has also played her part in the creation and deployment of talisman or hostage letters that may influence and distort the reception of the life written later.

Letter writing was influenced by the identity and location of a correspondent. Within letter collections, there are saved sequences of letters devised for specific ‘journalising’ purposes that provide a developed type of auto/biographical evidence. Some were written once there had been a chance for reflection as exemplified in the letters written by Elizabeth Gaskell to her American friend, Charles Eliot Norton. These letters have themselves been collected (Whitehill 1932) and have a retrospective character that distinguishes itself from Gaskell’s day-to-day correspondence on family and business matters. This segmentation of letters by correspondent is a sub-category of collected letters that highlights the identities adopted by the letter writer. Mary Delany in particular has been subject to these segmentations. Nine letters from Delany to Samuel Richardson appeared in his letters published in 1804 (Kerhervé 2004, p. 30; pp. 139–40) and there have been collections of her letters to Frances Hamilton (Letters 1820) and to Lord North (Kerhervé 2009). Gaskell’s letters to Norton adopted her recognisable tone but offered alternative perspectives on evolving circumstances such as her daughters’ engagements: Meta’s that was broken off and Marianne’s to her cousin Thurstan Holland (Chapple and Pollard 1966, pp. 487–93; pp. 502–7; pp. 743–6). Gaskell memorialised and valued her long-distance correspondence and marvelled that the materials of its creation would be received by the Nortons across the Atlantic. On 5 February 1865, she wrote to congratulate them on the birth of a daughter, ‘To think you will really touch this bit of paper!’ and, on 28 September 1857, ‘I feel as if one ought to have great events to write about before beginning a letter into another continent’ (Chapple and Pollard 1966, pp. 474, 743). In the modern edition of Gaskell’s letters, the re-reader can apprehend that her