

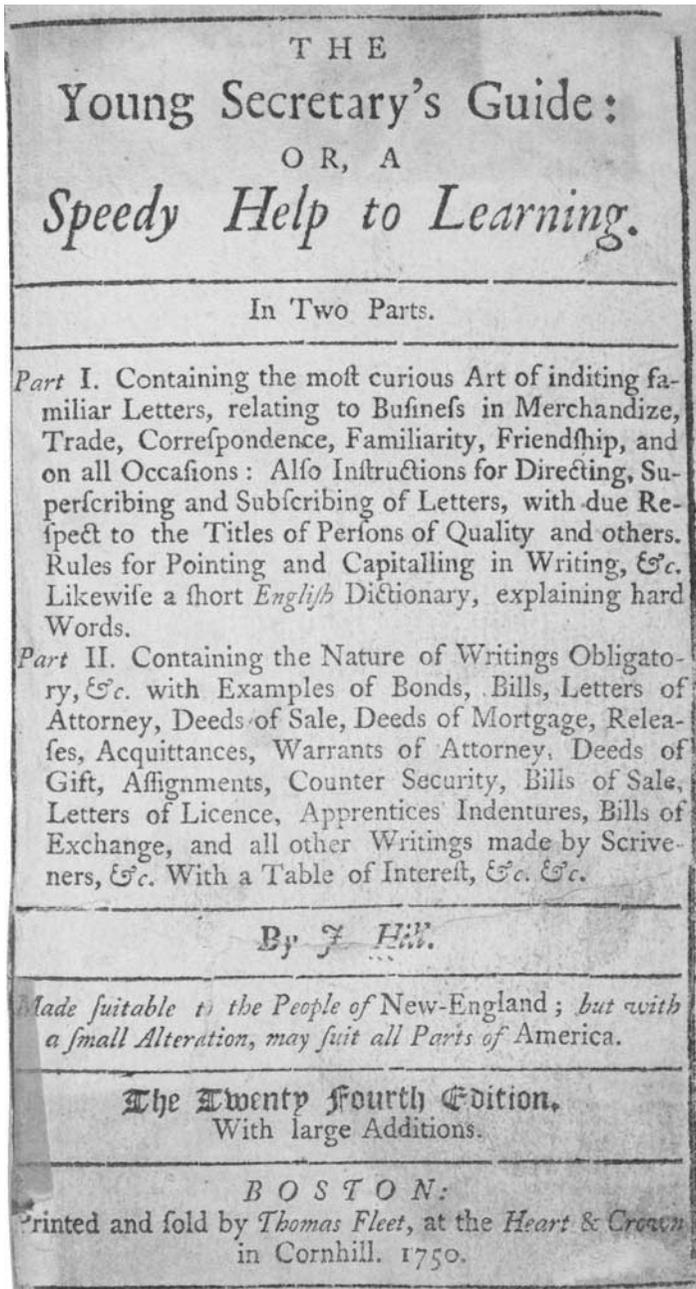
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EMPIRE OF LETTERS

Eighteenth-century English, Scottish and American letter manuals, among the most frequently reprinted books of the era, spread norms of polite conduct and communication, helping not only to connect and unify different regions of the British Atlantic world, but to foster very different local and regional cultures and values. By teaching secret writing, they also enabled transatlantic correspondents to communicate what they wanted despite interception, censorship and the practice of reading private letters in company. Eve Tavor Bannet uncovers what people knew then about letters that we have forgotten, revolutionizing our understanding of eighteenth-century letters, novels, periodicals, and other kinds of writing that used the letter form in print as well as manuscript. This lively, widely researched interdisciplinary study will change the ways we read and interpret eighteenth-century letters and think about the book in the Atlantic world.

EVE TAVOR BANNET is Professor of English at the University of Oklahoma. Her previous books include *The Domestic Revolution* (Baltimore, 2000) and *Structuralism and the Logic of Dissent* (London, 1989, 1991). Her work appears in journals including *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, *The Eighteenth-Century Novel*, *Huntington Library Quarterly* and *New Literary History*.

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EMPIRE OF LETTERS

*Letter Manuals and Transatlantic
Correspondence, 1688–1820*

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Prologue

Despite renewed interest in letter-writing practices and widespread agreement that letters were central to eighteenth-century culture, the manuals which taught those practices and disseminated them down the social hierarchy have been almost entirely overlooked. Eighteenth-century British and American letter manuals taught codes, conventions and practices of letter-writing and letter-reading that have now largely been forgotten, together with the proper conduct of conversation and of familial, social, sexual, professional and commercial life. They were masterpieces of Enlightenment taxonomy that combined, in little space, examples of polite domestic, social, professional and commercial correspondence, instruction in Standard English and proper forms, and conduct book teaching in manners and morals. They often included as models the epistles of now canonical authors, several of whom also wrote manuals of their own. Self-consciously addressed to a broad and mobile public of gentlemen, merchants, tradesmen, military officers and professionals, as well as mariners, maidservants, apprentices and schoolchildren, women of all ages and provincials of all ranks, letter manuals were among the most frequently reprinted books on both sides of the Atlantic throughout the long eighteenth century. They were readily available from provincial as well as London booksellers, and in America from mid-century, could be borrowed from subscription libraries in most colonies or states. Inscriptions in surviving copies show that personal copies were treasured by successive owners, lent to friends, and handed down from generation to generation until they fell apart. The influence of letter manuals may be said to have rivaled even novels as popular as *Clarissa* or *Betsy Thoughtless* in these regards.

In this, their new populist incarnation, letter manuals began to proliferate in England and in British-America at the end of the seventeenth century, at the inception of English efforts to unite the three kingdoms and the American mainland and island colonies within a growing, and

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increasingly far-flung, commercial empire, when letters were the only available technology for distance communication. Extension of “the art of letter-writing” to all manner and ranks of people ensured that, in time, town and country, metropolis and English, Scottish and American provinces, would be firmly, if not always reliably, linked by a multiplicity of epistolary networks permitting trade, war, exchanges of “intelligence,” and putative government control. With population moving back and forth through the three kingdoms and across the Atlantic highway, dissemination of the art of letter-writing also made it possible to maintain what contemporaries called “a good correspondency” among the many families and friends that schooling, apprenticeships, service, indentures, urbanization, emigration, trade, war, government posts and colonization, separated and dispersed. The redeployment of the letter both in its manuscript and print forms – not, as has been argued, print capitalism *per se* – made “administrative centralization” possible, “created unified fields of exchange and communication,” and enabled Englishmen, Scotsmen, and British-Americans to imagine themselves as one transatlantic community.¹ To borrow Alison Gilbert Olson’s suggestive title, letters made the empire work.²

One of the functions of letter manuals during the long eighteenth century was to unite dispersed localities by facilitating the “mutual communication” of persons with different local and regional dialects, pronunciations, mores, memories, levels of education and ranks. Manuals supplied the lacks in a gentleman’s Latinate education, supplemented the limits of a petty school education in the provinces and among the lower orders, and helped produce the many “writers by trade” required by the burgeoning new bureaucracies and by Britain’s commercial and military expansion into the Atlantic world. By disseminating a single standard language, method and culture of polite communication, letter manuals created common ground for the written commerce of people in different counties, kingdoms, provinces and estates in all the old senses of the word commerce – exchange, conversation, traffic, intercourse and trade. They therefore contributed to forging the nation and the first British empire as much as improved roads and transportation, the institution of the post office and of regular shipping routes, the periodical press, and national

See the Bibliography for full title and publication details.

1 Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 42, 47; Grasso, *A Speaking Aristocracy*, 211.

2 Olson, *Making Empire Work*.

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days of celebration or commemoration.³ It should not therefore surprise us to find that their value was still appreciated in America in the 1790s, when strategic thinking was dominated by the daunting size of the country and by the goal of increasing patriotism through education, and consensus through communication.

Nevertheless, the story of letter manuals is not a depressing tale of enforced uniformity and inexorable standardization. As we will see, the migration of letter-writing models down the social hierarchy and across different regions of Britain and America was mediated by repeated translations both of individual letters and of individual manuals into different cultural registers. This happened both centrally in London and locally in the provinces, but in somewhat different ways. Writers and compilers of letter manuals for London printers and booksellers most often imitated and rewrote extant epistolary models to adapt available formulae and conventions to their changing sense of the culture, the fashion, and their target audience. Both descriptive and prescriptive, they also sought to “improve” their users by offering examples of whatever conduct and sentiments they considered proper to people of different ranks, ages and genders with different relative duties and concerns. Local Scottish and American printers, who adapted London manuals for their local markets with similar goals in mind, generally proceeded by selection and reordering rather than by rewriting, using such devices of *compilatio* and *ordinatio* as excision (or abridgement), juxtaposition, clustering, reclassification, sequencing and recontextualization to alter the ideological bent, and even the stylistic choices, of their London “copy.” In these longstanding, traditional ways, they created, often under the same title, what was in many cases an entirely different text. Indeed, some manuals were altered and revised so thoroughly or so frequently from edition to edition that over time, they became quite different from themselves.

In this case, therefore, print was not a fixed and reifying technology. Letter manuals belie the modern opposition between the manuscript environment where “texts are malleable and social” and the print culture where texts are “fixed and possessively individualistic”; and they prevent centralization of printing in London from figuring without qualification as “a politically centrifugal force, designed to serve the core interests of the politically centralized nation-state.”⁴ Thanks to the changing

3 Colley, *Britons*; Clive and Bailyn, “England’s Cultural Provinces”; Bailyn, *Peopling*; Pagden, *Lords of all the World*; Landsman, “Provinces and the Empire.”

4 Marotti and Bristol (eds.), *Print, Manuscript and Performance*, 5, 5–6.

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compilations and adaptations of regional printers, the same models of writing and conduct circulated differently in different parts of Britain and America, at once promoting mutual identification and strengthening distinct provincial identities. For regional and American printers, “anglicization” and “exceptionalism” went hand in hand.

Imitation, with which we will be repeatedly concerned, did not mean copying in the eighteenth century, though it could. Accusations of plagiarism abounded in literary circles at the end of the seventeenth century as theaters, printers and booksellers began to treat literary texts as potentially profitable literary property. Grammarians at the end of the eighteenth century complained that everyone was repeating the same epistolary forms, expressions, sentiments and models. And early nineteenth-century American writers who sought to construct a distinctly American literature treated imitations of English writings with hostility as “a servile aspect of dependency.”⁵ But during the long eighteenth century, imitation as such was not proscribed even by the most rabid critics of plagiarism. It continued to link Europe and the Atlantic world across difference, because everyone was still being taught to write by imitating models. Especially where letter-writing instruction was concerned, it was a commonplace that imitating examples was more efficacious than applying precepts. This did not necessarily make for sameness. As a method of teaching epistolary writing and of generating new letters, imitation was conceived and practiced as a system that only *began* with a phase of transcription and copying. Imitation was supposed to advance, with a pupil’s growing proficiency, through rewording and then through the variation, correction, amplification, inversion or radical adaptation of the model or models in use, to their “improvement” and creative transformation. Familiarity with the same basic models and classes of letter meant that one of the pleasures of reading a letter, as well as an important way of interpreting meaning, involved recognition of the implicit model and of the changes that had been introduced. In these more advanced forms, moreover, imitation was an old, classical and humanist, *techne* that, in Derridean terms, permitted writers to re-mark their letters both inside and outside the culture, conventions and expressions inscribed in their model texts. Inasmuch as the writers and printers of letter manuals themselves used imitation to produce new letters and new compilations of letters, these too represent – and require of us – readings in terms of repetition and difference, in which new manuals are articulated on old,

5 Granqvist, *Imitation as Resistance*, 11; Kewes, *Authorship*; Griffin, *Faces of Anonymity*.

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and letters written in the present are placed in dialogue with letters of the past.

Neither letters nor letter manuals were new in the eighteenth century. The letter or epistle was a classical genre, and the first letter manuals in English date from the Renaissance. Most early English manuals were heavily influenced by Erasmus in the sixteenth century and by Frenchman, Puget de la Serre, in the seventeenth century. Indeed, many model letters in early English manuals were more or less direct translations from classical, humanist or French sources. Until after the Restoration, letter manuals in English generally offered models geared to courtly occasions or to a classically educated readership. They treated letters as a branch of eloquence, and surrounded them with models of oral conversation, or with lists of commonplaces and discussions of rhetorical figures and tropes. Some features of these early manuals were carried over into the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. For instance, classical, humanist and French letters continued to figure as models in some mid-eighteenth-century manuals. Sixteenth-century manuals like William Fulwood's *Enimie of Idleness* (1568) or Angel Day's *English Secretorie* (1599) exemplified different kinds of epistolary writing by using both real and fictive models, and employed humanist methods of classification and instruction. Eighteenth-century manuals followed suit. During the Renaissance and seventeenth century, there were also one or two early exemplars of manuals designed for a non-courtly and non-learned readership, such as *The Merchant's Avizo* (1589) which contained models for all the letters a Bristol factor or apprentice might need to write his master during a short business trip to Portugal or Spain, or *The Secretaries Study Containing New Familiar Epistles Wherein Ladies, Gentlemen and all that are ambitious to write and speak elegantly, and elaborately, in a succinct and facetious strein, are furnished with fit Phrases, Emphaticall expressions, and various directions for the most polish'd and judicious way of inditing Letters, Whether Amorous, Civill, Houshold, Politick, Chiding, Excusing, Requesting, Gratulatory, Or Nuncupatory* by S. S. Gent. (1652). But even here those who are not ladies or gentlemen are merely subsumed under "all that are ambitious." The model letters within are dominated by flowery gallantries and letters of compliment after the manner of the popular seventeenth-century *Academies of Complement*, which were heavily influenced by the French. And the few household or domestic letters that are offered assume possession of a fairly comfortable country estate.

This book opens at the beginning of the long eighteenth century, when most letter manuals began to address the needs of a wider and more

diverse public, to associate letter-writing with grammar and spelling as well as with rhetoric, to include business letters and legal forms, and to act as conduct books for polite domestic, social, professional and commercial manners and morals. I will place this beginning in 1687, when John Hill's trend-setting manual and transatlantic best-seller, *The Young Secretary's Guide, or A Speedy Help to Learning*, was officially licensed. I will conclude around 1820, when the last eighteenth-century models of epistolary writing began, slowly, to go out of print. I do not wish to claim that these dates represent clear-cut beginnings and endings. When we are considering manuals that made a habit of rewriting and reassembling their predecessors' letters, we inevitably enter and leave history *in medias res*. But it does appear that between these dates there was fairly widespread agreement about the format of *Secretaries* and *Letter-Writers*, whom they should address, what they should contain, and what they should do.

During the long eighteenth century, British and American letter manuals were miscellanies of fragments, which came in a variety of related forms. All centered on an anthology of heterogeneous and apparently discontinuous model letters between fictional generic characters or social types (such as landlord and tenant, merchant and apprentice, sister and brother or father and son), that were designed to teach the art of letter-writing by imitation.

Secretaries and *Complete Letter-Writers* generally bound their model letters together in a compendium with a variety of legal forms and precedents and with everything else a person might need to write a polite letter in "proper" English: a short grammar, rules for punctuation, some brief directions for letter-writing, a guide to the forms of polite address, a dictionary of hard words, a spelling dictionary for homonyms, a list of contractions, and instructions for the formatting, appearance and folding of letters. They sometimes also included formulae for cards or for petitions, and verse epistles. As we will see, all these elements of what I will call *compendia* were ideologically weighted in different ways, and the values they persistently conveyed were as important as their utilitarian functions.

Compendia were also truncated into what I will call *Letter-miscellanies*. Letter-miscellanies such as Samuel Richardson's *Letters Written to and for Particular Friends on the most Important Occasions* (1741),⁶ Eliza Haywood's *Epistles for the Ladies* (1749), *The Ladies Complete Letter-Writer*

⁶ *Familiar Letters on Important Occasions* is the title Brian W. Downs gave his 1928 edition of this work.

(1763) or Vicesimus Knox's *Elegant Epistles* (1790) were simply collections of model letters without the compendium's outwork of supporting materials. Some were designed to instruct letter-writers in a more indirect and entertaining manner or for the improvement of style. Some, like *The Art of Letter-Writing* (1762) or *The Correspondent* (1790), offered critical or explanatory comments between letters and sizable introductions to letter-writing practices. Most silently reproduced the kinds of model letters that might otherwise be found in compendia. *Secretaries* and *Complete Letter-Writers* often purloined letters from *Letter-miscellanies*, as well as from each other.

Abbreviated *Secretaries* or *Letter-Writers* were also inserted into even more compendious *vade mecum*s, such as William Mather's *Young Man's Companion, or Arithmetic Made Easy* (1710), George Fisher's *The Instructor, or Young Man's Best Companion* (1735) or Thomas Wise's *The Newest Young Man's Companion* (1758). These taught numeracy, book-keeping, measuring and surveying and other practical skills as well as epistolography, and gave directions for making and preserving ink, for cutting the nibs on quill pens, and for writing secret letters.

Finally, there was an ongoing tradition of "Merriments" or witty take-offs on standard letters, that can be traced back to translations and imitations of Frenchman Nicholas Breton's *A Poste with a madde Packet of Letters* (1602). During the eighteenth century, the popularity of merriments declined in the wake of stern warnings by moralists and conduct book-writers that ridicule was more likely to offend than instruct and amuse. Because merriments like Charles Gildon's *A Postboy robb'd of his Mail* (1692, 1693) or epistolary parts of the *Spectator* (1711) often used a thin fictional thread to connect disparate letters, twentieth-century New Critics tended to read the few they admired as "literature" and to overlook their character as letter manuals as a result. Merriments performed the same functions as other letter manuals – if anything their introduction of a guide, fictional critic or group of critics to comment on the letters they presented enabled them to make their instructions more explicit than compendia could. The difference is that merriments were directed to a double audience: while giving some plain instruction to the epistographically challenged, they used satire, wit and comic distance to recycle manual materials for a more elite, learned or sophisticated readership. Compendia and letter-miscellanies often included a few sample letters of merriment.

The great achievement of the new "English school," and of the letter manuals that publicized its teachings, was to disseminate letter-writing

down the social hierarchy and to make epistolary kinds, codes and conventions familiar to all manner and ranks of people. One might say that the eighteenth century naturalized the idea that anyone can (or should be able to) read and write a letter. Together with the persistence of some of the eighteenth-century letter's formal features into the present day, this long misled us into believing that we still knew all the codes, and that eighteenth-century letters could be read as straightforward historical evidence, or as giving us privileged insights into what people privately thought and truly felt. These preconceptions are being altered by a growing number of excellent, cultural and historical, studies of particular early modern or romantic epistolary practices, of surviving epistolary exchanges and collections of family letters, and of novels using epistolary form.⁷ We now realize that "letters are not unmediated historical artefacts."⁸ We have become increasingly aware that there is still a great deal that we do not know about letter-writing and letter-reading. But we have not gone back to letter manuals to investigate the epistolary codes, practices, presuppositions and ideologies that were taught and assumed.

The only three sustained modern studies of either British or American letter manuals during either the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries are long New Critical and bibliographical essays which date from the 1930s and 1940s.⁹ There have been some important related studies since then: Roger Chartier's ground-breaking work on seventeenth-century French letter manuals, Jonathan Goldberg's brilliant analysis of the writing of letters (in both senses) during the English Renaissance, and Ian Michael's encyclopedic investigation of the teaching of English from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries.¹⁰ But the voluminous corpus of British and American letter manuals during the long eighteenth century remains as close to a completely untapped resource as it is possible to get in eighteenth-century studies. Closer acquaintance with this material will subvert any comfortable assurance that eighteenth-century letters can be read

7 For instance, Daybell, *Early Modern Women Letter Writers*; Earle (ed.), *Epistolary Selves*; Goldgar, *Impolite Learning*; Goodman, *Republic of Letters*; Harrison, *Until Next Year*; Jagodzinski, *Privacy and Print*; Barton and Hall (eds.), *Letter-Writing*; Cook, *Epistolary Bodies*; Favret, *Romantic Correspondence*; Gilroy and Verhoeven (eds.), *Epistolary Histories*; How, *Epistolary Spaces*; Lowenthal, *Lady Mary*.

8 Earle (ed.), *Epistolary Selves*, 1.

9 Hornbeak, "Complete Letter-Writer in English, 1568-1800" (1934); Robertson, *The Art of Letter-Writing* (1943); Weiss, *American Letter-Writers, 1698-1943* (1945). There are some acute insights in Altman's "Political Ideology in the Letter Manual," and a chapter on letter manuals in Dierks, "Letter-Writing, Gender and Class in America."

10 Roger Chartier (ed.), *Correspondence*; Goldberg, *Writing Matter*; Michael, *Teaching of English*.

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reliably either as “a window in the bosom” or as transparent historical documents. Manuals show that letters inhabited an extremely complex and highly developed cultural and rhetorical system which offers a very different interpretative box of tools.

The questions driving this study relate primarily to how letter manuals may be read, how they transmitted and altered discursive practices and cultural norms, and what they can tell us about Enlightenment epistolography and about how to read an eighteenth-century correspondence. I am coining the term “letteracy” to designate the collection of different skills, values, and kinds of knowledge beyond mere literacy that were involved in achieving competency in the writing, reading and interpreting of letters. Under letteracy, I include associated cultural information, such as common conceptions of letter-writing, awareness of current epistolary practices, basic knowledge about where letter-writing was taught and about how it was taught or to be learned, even how to “read” and use a letter manual. The three parts of this book approach the question of what letteracy consisted of, how it was transmitted and how it was practiced, in different but complementary ways, each of which will be introduced more fully at the beginning of each part.

Part I explores the recurrent features of *Secretaries* and *Letter-Writers* on the basis of a wide variety of *London* manuals. Chapter 1 discusses how English manuals represented their target audiences, their contexts and functions, and their relations to everyday life. It also considers the questions relating to literacy and schooling and to the uses and accessibility of the post that arise as soon as one begins to evaluate English manuals’ surprisingly broad sense of their public. Chapter 2 deciphers the now unfamiliar architectonics of eighteenth-century compendia. It explains the content and significance of their various taxonomies, the organization of their letter-collections and the relations between their outwork and model letters. It also describes the epistolary conventions and practices of reading and interpretation that manuals taught, the methods they employed to teach reading and convey ideology, and different ways in which they might be used by people with different levels of education and ability. The emphasis throughout is on what these features of manuals teach us about how to write and read a letter. One of the important things to understand at the outset is that letters were not construed by eighteenth-century manuals, or indeed by writing masters, as a primarily private or closeted genre. When they spoke of reading, they meant reading aloud. The letter, which was conceived as issuing from speech and as returning to speech at the point of oral delivery, was

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a shape-changer. It reconfigured itself through a variety of media – manuscript, print and voice – as it traveled across space and time.

Part II examines the ways in which letter manuals themselves were changed from printing to printing and from place to place as they traveled the Atlantic to America and were redesigned by local printers for different local audiences. Along with bibles, psalters, primers and grammars, letter manuals were among the earliest types of book that were not only printed in Britain and regularly imported into the American provinces, but also reprinted and consciously “fitted” by local American printers to the values and needs of their local customers. The importation, reprinting and adaptation of British letter manuals continued well into the early Republic. It is therefore surprising that so little attention has been paid to them by early Americanists or by historians of the book in the Atlantic world.

A fairly large number of different letter manuals were produced for London booksellers between 1688 and 1820, but relatively few were steady sellers in the sense that the market for them justified more than two or three London editions and encouraged repeated reprints and adaptations in the provinces. The manuals that dominated the English, Scottish and American markets in both these ways – by dissemination from London and repeated reproduction and adaptation in the provinces – and which consequently familiarized comparatively large numbers of people with what letters ought to say and do, are those which have been selected for analysis in this part of the book, which focuses primarily on the collections of letters in each case. Chapters 3, 4 and 5 are organized by the successive London manuals which dominated the home market and gave rise to American and Scottish adaptations. Chapter 3 covers the period from 1688 to around 1740, when John Hill’s and Thomas Goodman’s *Secretaries* were widely reprinted, adapted and altered in America. Chapter 4 covers the second half of the eighteenth century, when Scottish versions of Crowder’s and Dilworth’s *Complete Letter-Writers* were preferred and used as bases for American adaptations. And Chapter 5 considers diverse uses made of Cooke’s popular *Universal Letter-Writer; or Art of Correspondence* from the 1790s on. I have followed a certain number of conduct book subjects across all these manuals to facilitate comparison and highlight change. These include representations of friendship between men, professional life, trade and commerce, the household, apprenticeship and domestic service, the role of women, marriage, education, travel, absence and conversation.

Together, these chapters offer ideological and stylistic analyses of the letter-collections in the compendia that were most frequently reprinted in

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Britain, and cover the surprisingly large number of American imprints that were not mere reprints. The fact that manuals were frequently altered, even by their original printers, means that each manual title represented a variable “series” of versions rather than the label for a fixed book. This has understandably led to some bibliographical confusion in the ESTC. One of the things that Chapters 3 to 5 do, in conjunction with the bibliography at the end, is establish filiations between manuals and show which were versions of which.

Having examined the architectonics and recurrent features of letter manuals, and the ways in which London manuals were transformed and translated into different cultural registers by printers in America and Scotland, this book goes on in Part III to comply with eighteenth-century injunctions that to be adequate, book learning must be complemented by an acquaintance with the world. In a segment on “The Principles of Politeness,” *The New Letter-Writer, or The Art of Correspondence* (1775) insisted that “Secrecy is a characteristic of Good-Breeding.” Other manuals warned their reader-writers to be wary of putting their real thoughts down on paper for more practical reasons of discretion in the face of publicity, interception and censorship. *Vade mecums* gave instruction in secret writing. Chapter 6 addresses such instructions by exploring the culture of secrecy that issued from the codes of politeness and that was reinforced both by the practice of reading letters aloud to one’s “company” and by justified fears of interception and censorship. Without pretending to be exhaustive, it shows how the epistolary *Doppelgänger* of simultaneously public and hidden transcripts manifested itself in various public and private forms of transatlantic communication, and explores some of the ways in which letters communicated what they could not say, and alerted their recipients to what they concealed. Chapter 7 concludes with brief analyses of three canonical literary texts – Crèvecoeur’s first *Letter from an American Farmer*, *The Spectator*, and Franklin’s *Autobiography* – which review and illustrate the matter discussed in each part of the book. This respects and underlines the fact that the eighteenth century assumed a continuity between letters in different areas and levels of culture. Rather than aiming at closure, these texts open letter manuals onto what we have considered “good literature,” by showing that they can alter the way we understand familiar texts.

Novels too presupposed the letteracy to be explored in this book, and were often preoccupied by it. At the beginning of our period, for instance, in *Love Letters between a Nobleman and his Sister* (1684–87), which was roughly contemporaneous with Hill’s manual, Aphra Behn

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uses a narrative frame in Part II to describe her characters' reflections and/or conversations about the letters they read and write. The narrative punctures that naive credulity in the immediacy and sincerity of letters which was allowed Silvia (and the reader) in Part I, by underscoring the difference between what characters think, desire or mean and what they actually write. The narrative repeatedly shows that letters can be manipulative and deceptive even when they are as essentially true in content, sincere in style, and dutiful in sentiment, subscriptions and compliments, as the following letter to Philander:

. . . I conclude [Octavio] a Lover, tho' without Success; what Effects that may have upon the Heart of *Silvia*, only Time can render an Account of: And whose Conduct I shall the more particularly observe from a Curiosity natural to me, to see if it may be possible for Silvia to love again, after the adorable Philander, which Levity in one so perfect would cure me of the Disease of Love, while I liv'd amongst the fickle Sex: But since no such Thought can yet get Possession of my Belief, I humbly beg your Lordship will entertain no Jealousie, that may be so fatal to your Repose, and to that of Silvia; doubt not but my Fears proceed perfectly from the Zeal I have for your Lordship, for whose Honour and Tranquility none shall venture so far as, my Lord, your Lordship's most Humble and Obedient Servant, Brillard.

The narrative undercuts this letter's *prima facie* meaning by explaining that Brillard's purpose is to "hint" at Silvia's "Levity" in such a way as to stir his addressee's resentment without giving him any suspicion that Brillard's own motive is anything but "Duty and Respect to Philander." Its descriptions of Brillard's calculations prior to writing about "how to manage [Philander] to his best Advantage" and of his critical re-reading of his letter "to see whether he had cast it to his Purposes," remind the reader that epistolography was an art of rhetoric, which educated men used to persuade and move others in predetermined ways, and that women generally lacked such classical rhetorical schooling.¹¹ This is also the *terminus ad quem* of Silvia's education in Part II. Silvia's transformation from the "controlled woman" of Part I into the "controlling woman who manipulates her desirability"¹² in Part II, is mediated by a series of realizations about the artifice of the "Rhetoric of Love" as expressed in the language, style, tone, repetitions, flattery and conventions of love letters. These realizations make Silvia an increasingly resisting reader, and teach her to write letters as carefully crafted rhetorical instruments

¹¹ Behn, *Love Letters* (London, 1708), 168, 169.

¹² Todd, "Hot brute," 278.

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for particular effects, rather than as “unthinking, artless Speaking” that expresses the true “Sense of her Soul.”¹³ Letter manuals begin from here.

Towards the end of our period, Jane Austen assumed far greater familiarity with epistolary matters and expected readers, once primed, to be able to determine the character and meaning of interpolated letters for themselves. In *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), for instance, readers are primed through a conversation in Bingley’s drawing room, where Darcy is writing a letter, about how letter-writers betray not only their character, but also their attitude to friendship, through their “stile of writing.” Miss Bingley reminds us that “stile” is manifest, among other things, in the letter’s length, handwriting, formatting, and vocabulary; in the speed or deliberation, ease or restraint of the writing; and in epistolary representations of the degree of familiarity between the parties – all manual topics. One of the ironies of this scene is that Miss Bingley has just betrayed her own character and attitude to friendship in her letter of invitation to Jane:

My dear friend,

If you are not so compassionate as to dine today with Louise and me, we shall be in danger of hating each other for the rest of our lives, for a whole day’s tête-à-tête between two women can never end without a quarrel. Come as soon as you can on the receipt of this. My brother and the gentlemen are to dine with the officers. Yours ever, Caroline Bingley.¹⁴

The narrator generally focalizes the meaning of letters through characters’ interpretations and reactions, leaving the reader to measure the latter against her own reading of the interpolated letters. In this case, Lydia seizes on Miss Bingley’s reference to officers, Mrs. Bennett laments the gentlemen’s absence, and Jane turns the conversation to questions of transportation. Their reading characterizes them. Letterate readers will notice, however, that all ignore Caroline’s “stile of writing.” They fail to notice that the suggestion in the superscription and subscription that Caroline will consider Jane her “dear friend” for “ever” is belied in the body of the letter by her careless over-familiarity and fashionable posturing (“tête-à-tête”) and by the implication in her use of the imperative (“Come. . .”) that Caroline views Jane as very much her social inferior. Caroline’s friendship is also belied by the disrespect and lack of consideration indicated through her omission of the proper sentiments for letters of this kind: “I hope you are not engaged”; “your company you know how we value”; “I am sure I need not tell you we shall do all we can to

¹³ Behn, *Love Letters*, 211.

¹⁴ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 77.

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render [your visit] agreeable. . .” Jane discovers only during a much later visit to London that she has been “entirely deceived in Miss Bingley’s regard for me.” She insists in a letter to her sister that her misplaced “confidence” in Caroline has been “natural” and that in “the same circumstances. . . I am sure I should be deceived again.”¹⁵ But letterate readers, who have understood the value of Caroline’s “regard” from her first letter, will think: “You would be deceived again only if you again ignored stile of writing.”

The bridge between letter manuals and novels is not necessarily to be sought in “the literary familiar letter.” Like Caroline’s letter of invitation or Jane’s letter of news, letters in novels often belong to those apparently insignificant classes of familiar letter which were modeled in letter manuals and did the everyday business of life. Letter manuals and novels both exemplified the same complex eighteenth-century culture of letters, and can also shed light on one another in other ways. I suggest some as I go along. Readers will, I hope, make other connections of their own.

The overall structure of this book assumes as a given the position now taken by both British and American scholars of the Atlantic world, who explore the networks of politics, commerce, culture and communication that crossed national borders and national literatures, and who argue that during the long eighteenth century, America, the West Indies and Scotland were all cultural provinces of England. I am profoundly indebted to the work of Bernard Bailyn, Jack P. Green, David Shields, Richard Bushman, William Spengeman, Susan Manning, Barbara de Wolfe, David Hackett Fischer, Ian Steele, Angus Calder, Ned Landsman and others, who have opened transatlantic studies to the movement of people, ideas, books and goods in important and interesting new ways. Taking a transatlantic perspective alters what we are able to see of our own English, Scottish or American cultures, and repositions what we thought we knew.

Letter manuals were interdisciplinary compilations. I am therefore also heavily indebted to scholars in a variety of disparate literary, cultural and historical fields working on a variety of English, Scottish, French, and American materials, whose work has shown me how to approach, contextualize, or understand the history of, particular aspects of these manuals. I have drawn on modern studies of letters, politeness, censorship, rhetoric, grammar, manuscript culture, conduct books and the art of conversation, on the history of the book and the history of reading, on

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 184.

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social, economic and imperial history, the history of education and literacy, and histories of language, law, urbanization and institutions. My major debts will be evident in the bibliography and notes.

This book can only claim to make some preliminary inroads into as yet largely uncharted territory. I hope that it will draw attention to the interest and importance of eighteenth-century British and American letter manuals and to the further work they invite from a variety of scholarly perspectives.