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**Reading, Interpreting and Historicizing:
Letters as Historical Sources**

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Introduction

Reading, Interpreting, Historicizing: Letters as Historical Sources

Since antiquity letters have been written to bridge distances, to build networks and to strengthen relationships. Historians have always appreciated letters as valuable sources, literary historians have investigated their literary quality. In this volume, scholars consider letter writing as an important sociocultural praxis, explore letters as an important means of communication, and accept the challenge of this rather complex category of historical sources.¹ This volume is based on the results of a very intense workshop held at the European University Institute (28 February - 1 March 2003) during which historical changes in the use of letters were investigated, individual letters were interpreted through in-depth analyses, and various methodological instruments were tested in terms of their functionality. The volume focuses (as did the workshop) mainly on letters written in the German-speaking territories of Europe and in Italy and includes the study of a letter collection (in Latin) of a Portuguese abbot resident in Florence.

The papers presented at the workshop and collected here cover the development of letter writing from the 15th century to the early 20th century, from the early modern monastic world, and early modern court culture up to bourgeois society.

Contributions have been placed in chronological order so as to make continuities and historical changes visible. Over time, from the correspondences of the early modern court societies to bourgeois society, the incidence of spontaneous and associative reactions grew, as did the claim for “originality”.

¹ Cf. the recent publications : Anne-Marie Sohn (ed.), *La correspondance, un document pour l'histoire*, Rouen 2002; Gabriella Zarri (ed.), *Per Lettera. La scrittura epistolare femminile tra archivio e tipografia*, Rome 1999; Adriana Chemello (ed.), *Alla lettera. Teorie e pratiche epistolari dai greci al Novecento*, Milan 1998; Roger Chartier (ed.), *La correspondance. Les usages de la lettre au XIXe siècle*, Paris 1991; cf. also the bibliographical repertory on secondary literature about letter-writing at http://www.textkritik.de/briefkasten/forschungsbibl_a_f.htm.

The more recent the letters to which scholars were referring, the more important became the discursive content of these letters.

Nevertheless, numerous analogies and related questions were to be found between chronologically distant cases. These connections are due to some specific characteristics of the genre – related to its function for communication: Letters are always written because of *absence* and are destined to create *presence*. From antiquity onwards the writing of letters has been regulated by *norms*, but could allow *spontaneous* expression of one's feelings and thoughts. Moreover, it should always be kept in mind that this specific practice moves between the dimensions of the *individual* and of the *social*.² Indeed, similar interest is shown by different scholars studying letters: they all pay particular attention to their form, to the material presentation, to style, grammar and orthography or the employment of formulas of politeness. In addition, they consider how letters may establish a relation to an Other (superior, equal or subordinate). No scholar can ignore the themes and contents contained in the letters, the social and cultural references they include.³ Letters permit us to gain access to a domestic or intimate sphere, include emotions and perceptions, reflect representations and underlying ideologies, always revealing information about the time in which they were written and about their writers and readers.⁴

Fundamental semiotic analysis of the act of transmitting letters is undertaken in the first paper presented here by Rita Costa Gomes. Learning how to write a letter correctly was part of a specific civility, disseminated first through handwritten collections, then through published correspondences. That writing models were essential for the epistolary experience is also considered by other

² See Daniel-Odon Hurel (ed.), *Correspondance et sociabilité*, Rouen 1994 ; Mireille Bossis (ed.), *La lettre à la croisée de l'individuel et du social*, Paris 1994.

³ The tension between signifier and signified value of letters is very nicely shown in: Lieselotte Steinbrügge, *Marie-Madeleine de Lafayette, Edgar Allan Poe und der zirkulierende Brief*, in: *Wechsel der Orte. Studien zum Wandel des literarischen Geschichtsbewusstseins. Festschrift für Anke Bennholdt-Thomsen*, hg. v. Irmela von der Lühe/Anita Runge, Göttingen 1997, pp. 231-241.

⁴ Cf. Sohn, *La correspondance*, p. 12.

papers: Claudia Kollbach carefully investigates how princely children were educated at the court of Baden-Durlach in the 18th century to become good letter writers. However, Beatrix Bastl questions the claim that norms were always put into action and traces the use of oral expressions in letters written by aristocratic women in Austria (16th-17th centuries). From the second half of the 17th century onwards the French model was particularly strong and its application marked social distinction: Kollbach and Luisa Tasca analyse its influence for the German and Italian case respectively. The normative model was completely disregarded by Luise of Prussia who adopted a self-stylisation based on “naturalness” (see the case examined by Regina Schulte). In the context of normative behaviour, it should not be forgotten that in different historical periods, moralistic, catholic voices were warning against reading letters (Tippelskirch, Tasca).

Using letters as historical sources permits us to reconstruct social relationships and family structures and ways of establishing them: letters exchanged between parents and their children and between siblings appear in the contributions of Arenfeldt, Borello, Kollbach (familial letters rather than private letters). Benedetta Borello uses letters as a means of reconstructing material interests and affection characterizing the relationships between members of the Chigi-family (in Siena and Rome 17th century). Love letters and the construction of a relationship are discussed in the papers by Schulte and Tippelskirch, and Marina Calloni takes a close look at letters exchanged between friends. Another realm of social interaction is touched on by Gomes, Gabriella Zarri and also by Borello who show how important epistolary communication proved to be for monastic circuits. Zarri highlights in her paper the importance letter writing could achieve for nuns. Klaus Margreiter's analysis of letters written in order to obtain nobility demonstrates what forms ‘the presentation of the self’ could take in specific letters. Letters could be associated with politics and could serve as important means of "distinction" (Bourdieu). They could also be sent secretly - as reflections of intimacy. Double correspondences, that were hidden from very

close relatives are studied by Arenfeldt and Schulte, and Borello also shows how certain messages were transmitted only to selected correspondents. The study of different letters shows examples of the transmission of the *allowed*, *forbidden* and *secret*; it presupposes trust and challenges the very notion of trust (Gomes). Margreiter and Tasca show in different ways, how letters can be used to help construct social history.

Using letters as historical sources today raises a further set of questions including that of how (and why) the letters are conserved already touched upon by Arenfeldt, Zarri, Gomes and Kollbach. From her close study of the letters that circulated between the courts of Heidelberg and Dresden (1569-1585) and that were bound together by Anna of Saxony's secretary, Pernille Arenfeldt draws attention to what letter collections might tell scholars about historical social configurations.

A very important issue is the reception, i.e. the very way of reading letters. In this context, several papers allude to the important role in early modern letter culture of the messenger, the intermediary or go-between (Gomes, Zarri, Arenfeldt, Tippelskirch). The role of the messenger would need to be reconstructed from other sources, and might explain some of the blanks contained in letters.

From a different perspective, Emanuele D'Antonio shows how letters can be used to reconstruct possible evolutions of thought, of discourse, circulation and production of knowledge taking the example of letters exchanged between Paolo Mantegazza, Graziadio Ascoli e Ugo Passigli during the last decade of the 19th century on the Jewish question. Calloni affirms further on how important expressing oneself in the form of a letter might be for the interactive affirmation/construction of one's identity. She reads Roselli's letters from exile in terms of their political significance, their repercussions on interpersonal relationships, and the affirmation of personal identity. It is not surprising that D'Antonio and Calloni, studying cases from the end of the 19th and from the

beginning of the 20th century, stress the discursive (political) contents of the letters they study. Hans Erich Bödeker concludes the volume with some commenting remarks.

Different branches of historical research are touched upon through the study of letter culture: the history of writing and reading, the history of religion and the history of ideas, biography, literary studies, as well as cultural, political and social history. As this collection of articles shows in a very exemplary way, the genre entails very different methodological challenges and as a consequence different methodological instruments applicable to analyses texts within this particular category were suggested. However, they all concur in showing that the meaningful study of letters necessitates a good knowledge of the context, of the epistolary codes and of the historically different modes of self-representation.

We owe thanks to Sergio Amadei who provided secretarial and administrative support for the workshop and to Brigitte Schwab for help with the publication of the Working Paper. We are grateful to Giulia Calvi and Barbara Hahn for inspiring contributions to the discussion. Finally, we would like to thank Patrizia Guarnieri and Hans Erich Bödeker who kindly chaired sessions of the workshop.

Letters and letter-writing in fifteenth century Portugal

by

Rita Costa Gomes

During the Spring of 1429 in Italy, two Portuguese men actively exchanged letters about several personal and professional matters. Among those letters received by Abbot Gomes of the Badia Fiorentina and sent by a certain João Rodrigues, we find the following message:

“Most honourable and dear lord. After due recommendation let it be known that I wrote to you some days ago, asking to have the epistles of Coluccio. So I supplicate and ask of you, as a most singular grace, that you make all efforts so that I can have those letters, and let them be as many as it is possible, and please let me know the cost so that I can send you the money to pay for them. And please let me have them in paper, for that will be sufficient for me. The sooner you will provide for this, the more I will be indebted to you. May God all mighty make your honour grow and give you a long life at His service. Written in Rome 8 days of May of 1429.

Your servant, secretary of our lord the Prince
João Rodrigues, canon of the church of Lisbon”¹

This letter can serve as an illustration of the sort of intersection that I would like to explore in this paper, following successive paths of enquiry suggested by each of the four historical characters that are mentioned in it: the addressee, that is the Abbot Gomes; the writer, João Rodrigues; the Portuguese prince (and later king) Duarte and, last but not least Coluccio, who is the famous Coluccio Salutati. Each of these characters suggests a different angle for the analysis of the practice of writing letters in past societies.

¹ *Mujto honrado e precado senhor depois da deujda Recomendaçam uos praça saber que poucos / dias ha que uos escreui por auer a [sic] epistollas de colucio porem uos Rogo e peço por graça sengular / que trabalhades que as posa auer e seiam as mais que sse poderem auer enujandome dizer os dinheiros / que enujarey pera ellas e as aia em papell que me abasta e quanto mais cedo tanto o Reputarey / em maior graça o poderoso deus acrecente uosso stado com longa vida a seu seruiço scrita em Roma / 8 dias de maio 1429 / vester seruitor secretarius dominj infantis /Johannes Roderici Vlixbonensis Canonicus. Biblioteca Medicea-Laurenziana, Ashburnam 1792, Vol. I, Fasc. IV, n° 4a. This collection includes a total of 14 letters written by João Rodrigues. Two of them contain the same request for Coluccio’s letters.*

In the first perspective, evoked by the figure of Abbot Gomes of Portugal, we will consider a general definition of the late medieval letter as exemplified by his letter collection, whose publication we are currently preparing. The late medieval profession of writing letters and its evolution is evoked by the figure of the secretary João Rodrigues. The problems of authorship and readership or, if you want, of letter-writing as a cultural practice in many aspects quite different from the one of our world today are evoked by a well-known Portuguese author such as king Duarte. Finally, with the figure of Salutati we face the general problem of change in epistolary models against the background of fifteenth-century humanism. It is not so much a discussion of the documentary value this particular letter could have for an interpretation of Portuguese or Iberian humanism, however, which will be made in this occasion. I will rather follow a different path, building upon more general remarks about letters as distinctive communicative devices in past societies. A more lengthy explanation would be required of why it does not seem sufficient to prove that a specific author, such as Salutati, was admired and imitated in certain intellectual and professional circles of early fifteenth century Portugal, in order to discuss available historical interpretations of Portuguese humanism.² Such a discussion is well beyond our purpose in the present occasion.

1. Letters sent and letters received

Abbot Gomes, the addressee of this letter, was a Portuguese living in Italy since 1409. He was the head of the Benedictine monastery of Santa Maria of Florence from 1419 to 1441. After his return to Portugal he was to become leader of one of the most culturally relevant and rich religious communities of the

² The first modern historian to have quoted and interpreted one of Rodrigues' letters about Coluccio along these lines was Ronald G. Witt, *Coluccio Salutati and his Public Letters*, Paris 1976, p. 5. See more recently Albinia de la Mare, "Notes on Portuguese Patrons of the Florentine Book Trade in the fifteenth century", in: K. J. P. Lowe (ed.), *Cultural Links between Portugal and Italy in the Renaissance*, Oxford 2000, p. 170 referring to the same text.

country: Santa Cruz at Coimbra.³ His letter collection is, in quantitative terms, the single most important known set of original letters from the 15th century written in Portuguese – although it also includes letters written in Latin, in Italian, in Catalan, and in French. A systematically compiled corpus of all Portuguese letters from the fifteenth century that are presently published would certainly reach several hundreds of letters, a relevant background for comparison with the Abbot's collection. The same task of compilation was done for Castile in the 1980s counting a total of 552 published letters dating from the fifteenth century, and there are still a much greater number of unpublished originals kept at several Spanish archives.⁴ It should be noted that these evaluations were only made from available printed inventories, so they can be considered a mere sample of the probable vast amount of letters extant from this period.

Such an abundance is absolutely expected, if we think of the great number of functions that the letter came to perform in late medieval society. To provide a quick general definition following an author of the thirteenth century, Guido Faba, we might consider letters all texts produced in a dialogic situation, transmitting precise messages defined by circumstances of time and place, and having three objectives in mind: to replace the presence of absent persons, to preserve the confidential character of the message (the “secret”), and to preserve its authenticity.⁵ It is well known that the popes, emperors, kings and secular

³ A biographical study of Gomes (or Gomes Eanes) centered in his Italian years was made by Eduardo Borges Nunes, *Dom Frey Gomez, Abade de Florença, 1420-1440*, Braga 1963. Gomes was a personal name used in several languages of the Iberian Peninsula since the tenth century, not a family name as in modern Portuguese. Eanes was a patronymic. Abbot Gomes did not use a family name and rarely used his patronymic. In Italy, he was generally known as “Gomes of Portugal”, and his name was often corrupted. He was not of noble origin, as many Italian authors have claimed attributing also hypothetical family names to him. As several letters of his collection show, the relatives of Abbot Gomes were merchants and bureaucrats of Lisbon and Oporto.

⁴ Carol A. Copenhagen, *Letters and Letter-Writing in Fifteenth-Century Castile*. Vol 2 – Catalogue, PhD, University of California (Davis), 1984.

⁵ Martin Camargo, “Where's the Brief? The Ars Dictaminis and reading/writing between the lines”, in: *Disputatio. An International Transdisciplinary Journal of the Late Middle Ages, Special Issue – The Late Medieval Epistle*, 1 (1996), pp. 1-18. See also Charles Faulhaber,

lords, ecclesiastics and merchants, all used the letter as a flexible instrument to communicate all sorts of facts, decisions and messages related to administrative, judicial, commercial, or financial spheres of activity. In the hands of the notaries, the letter acquired, by means of a rigid formal structure, a generic function of validation and register of juridical acts. But throughout the medieval period as a whole, the letter served also as a vehicle to communicate all forms of thought and to give shape to individual reflection.⁶

Among historians of early modern and modern times gathered in this working session, it is important to remember that the Renaissance did not discover the genre. Many medieval writers had found, both in Christian thought as well as in the classical heritage, an abundant reserve of textual traditions related to the epistolary genre, perceived and received in many different ways. As Stowers reminds us, 21 of the 24 different writings that constitute the New Testament take the form of letters and both the Acts of the Apostles as well as the Apocalypse contain them.⁷ To this textual mass we should join the rich patristic tradition, as well as the authors of antiquity, in particular the Latin authors, some of them passionately copied and imitated already in medieval times. So the letter is at the crossroad of many specialized disciplines of medieval studies, with particular relevance to diplomatics, palaeography, and the study of manuscript textual transmission. The letter is also a common object to history and to literature, and all this results in a rich methodological field with many interesting sets of questions. Problems which are apparently of simple resolution for most historians, such as, for example, the distinction between “official” letters and

“The Summa Dictaminis of Guido Faba”, in: James Murphy (ed.), *Medieval Eloquence: studies in the theory and practice of Medieval Rhetoric*, Berkeley 1978, pp. 85-111.

⁶ The best general introduction, which we closely follow here: Giles Constable, *Letters and Letter-Collections, Typologie des Sources du Moyen Âge Occidental*, Fasc. 17, Turnhout 1976. See also “Brief, Briefliteratur, Briefsammlungen”, in: *Lexicon des Mittelalters*, Munich and Zurich 1983, Vol 2, pp. 647-682. For available bibliographies: James J. Murphy, *Medieval Rhetoric: a select bibliography*, Toronto 1989, pp. 76-101; Janet Luehring, Richard Utz, “Letter Writing in the Late Middle Ages (c.1250-1600): an introductory bibliography and critical studies”, in: *Disputatio*, 1 (1996), pp. 191-229.

⁷ Stanley K. Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, Philadelphia 1986.

“private” letters, are in fact difficult to solve on those terms from the perspective of cultural history, such as we have observed specifically in the case of the letters of the monarchs.⁸ On the other hand, sources that are placed by diplomatics in a lower hierarchical position, such as the “false” or “forged” letters, are in many cases fascinating objects for analysis from the literary and doctrinal point of view, as well as from the political or ideological one.⁹

In this *mare magnum* of texts that raise complex problems of interpretation, we may follow the suggestion of Giles Constable and add another distinction, availing ourselves once again of a technical treatise from the thirteenth century, the *Summa prosarum dictaminis*: “so the letter is a *genus* (genre), not a specific kind of text (*species*), and in its infinite variety it does not allow for the attribution of definite rules. Yet, we can designate as “missives” all letters which do not confer authority to their receptor, do not transmit legal rights and do not give raise to any necessity, but express and declare only the thoughts of the author and the addressee”.¹⁰ Although produced in great quantities in the later middle ages, especially after the thirteenth century and the growing use of paper as a writing material (all the letters of Abbot Gomes collection are, in fact, written in paper), the “missives” are not so commonly kept in great collections of originals, precisely because they had no legal value and they were not real “public acts”.¹¹ Only special reasons led to their keeping, and they could be kept in the form of registers or copies, not in originals actually received, that is, bearing the physical marks of transmission that now we so eagerly research.

⁸ See the important remarks by Constable, *Letters and Letter-Collections*, pp. 22-23.

⁹ Giles Constable, “Forged Letters in the Middle Ages”, in: Wolfram Setz (ed.), *Fälschungen im Mittelalter. Internationaler Kongress der Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, Hanover 1988, Vol. 5, pp. 11- 37.

¹⁰ Constable, *Letters and Letter-Collections*, p. 12.

¹¹ “Tout en n’étant pas en soi des actes dans la rigueur du terme, [les lettres missives] n’en ont pas moins une forme qui leur permet éventuellement de faire preuve et de devenir le support d’actes véritables”: Georges Tessier, “Diplomatique” in: Charles Samaran (ed.), *L’Histoire et ses méthodes*, Paris 1961, p. 667.

In fact, missives were conceived in the medieval world as somewhat related to messages transmitted orally. The complexity of the communication process referred to or described, for instance, by medieval treatises and by the epistolary texts themselves can be schematically represented this way:

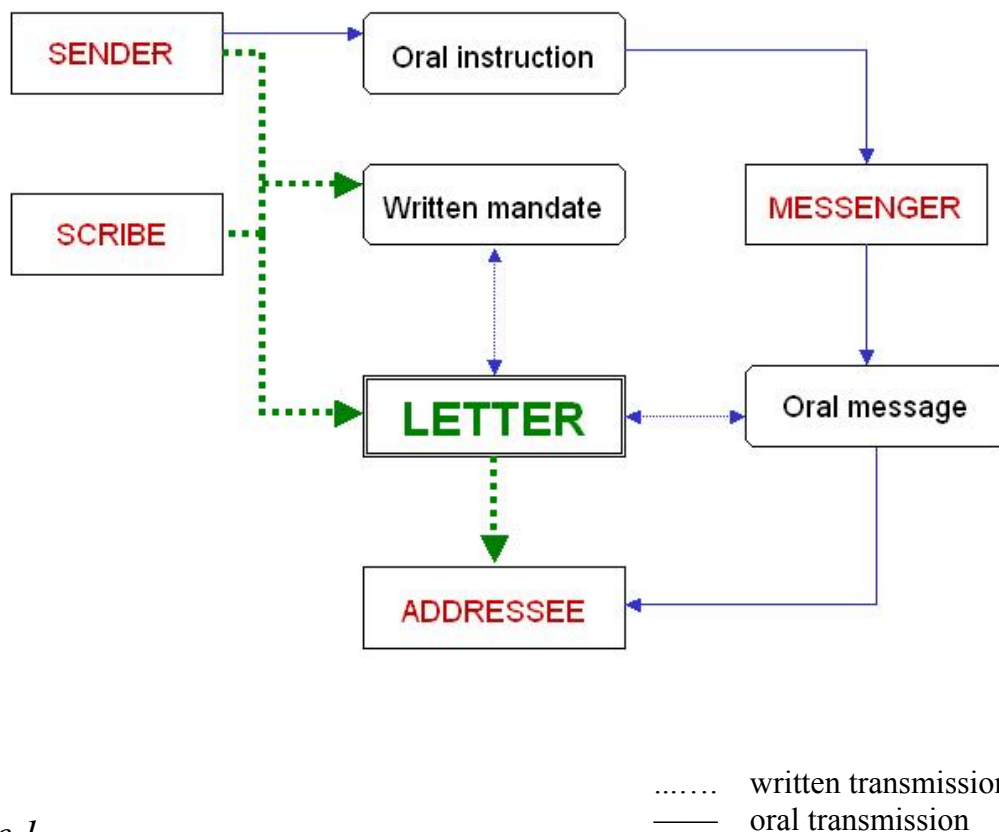


Figure 1

The importance of oral communication is well known to historians of medieval diplomacy.¹² Letters known in Portuguese as “*cartas de crença*” were in fact mere credentials allowing for messages to be conveyed orally. They contain vague and generic statements, for instance: “I send you such and such to speak with you and transmit some things from our part”, or “Please take to be

¹² Donald E. Queller, “Thirteenth-century Diplomatic Envoys: *nuncii* and *procuratores*”, in: *Speculum*, 35 (1960), pp. 196-213.

true what the bearer of this letter will tell you”.¹³ Some rare examples allow us to know something of the content of the communicated message, when the written mandate can be found which seldom accompanied or supplemented the credentials and/or other missives. The written mandate is generally headed by a phrase of the type “this is what you will say to such and such from our part”. It was a text which could be read by the messenger, or simply used as a reminder for an oral presentation, and it was eventually given to the addressee, together with the credential.¹⁴

This close and intricate relation between oral and written communication was also the object of the technical treatises of the age. In the thirteenth century Conrad de Mure, for instance, evoked the usual *topos*: “the speech or *sermo* is to be transmitted to present interlocutors, the letter or *epistola* to the ones who are absent”.¹⁵ However, an important remark should be made, following literary historians. Medieval rhetoric was very conscious that the letter, although it might be considered a replacement of oral discourse, did not function at all like a replica of speech. The epistolary message was changed in a definitive way by the passage from orality to writing, which not only introduced a proper distance but also required specific forms of composition. Statements like those of Conrad de Mure should not be taken too literally, since there were clear limits to the analogy. As suggested in our schematic picture, we should consider a more complex notion of parallel and sometimes converging (but distinct) channels of communication accompanying the current notion of a substitution of speech by epistle.

The same caution must be exercised as to the common definition, which I also quoted earlier, of the letter as a replacement for dialogue or even as a form of

¹³ See for instance A. Dias Dinis (ed.), *Monumenta Henricina*, Coimbra 1960-74, vol 2, pp. 225-6 (letter of October 20, 1415).

¹⁴ See two examples dated 1415: *Monumenta Henricina* cit., vol 9, pp. 30-31 and 42-43.

¹⁵ Camargo, “Where’s the brief”, pp. 3 and 15 (*Sermo habetur ad presentes, epistola dirigitur ad absentes*).

dialogue. Some important remarks have been made by Claudio Guillén about such a common-place:

“a letter as a matter of fact does not reproduce a dialogue neither fully nor in part, except when it quotes one. And it is an essential point to remark that dialogues are special kinds of texts: in dialogues, mimesis does not replace narrated experiences with language, in dialogue words imitate words, and not things”.¹⁶

So by presenting letters as half-dialogues or as communicative devices similar to dialogues, the medieval rhetorical tradition was taking from antiquity a fundamental idea although it would be developing that same idea in specific directions. Again, as Guillén says, “in the history of our civilization letters have signified a crucial passage from orality to writing itself – or a practical interaction between the two. As *écriture*, letters always involve the writer in a silent, creative process of self-distancing and self-modelling”.¹⁷ In the act of *dictare*, that is, of composing the letter, such a distance was always introduced even if the sender was writing it with his own hand and did not have recourse to a scribe or a secretary.

To sum up our argument so far, late medieval epistolary practice was different from that of today largely because written and oral forms of communication also interacted differently. A concatenation of actions was required, in which the letter could be replaced or completed by verbal speech with some advantage, in the condition of course that one could be represented by a true messenger, that is, someone competent enough to communicate what one wanted to say. So in the letters of Peter the Venerable, another famous Abbot of the twelfth century, Peter distinguishes precisely between a simple carrier of letters (*lator*), for instance the traveller occasionally transporting missives; the courier proper (*cursor*) or

¹⁶ Claudio Guillén, “Notes towards the study of the Renaissance Letter”, in: Barbara Lewalski (ed.), *Renaissance Genres: Essay on Theory, History and Interpretation*, Harvard University Press 1986, pp. 77-78, quoting the observations of Demetrius “Phalareus”. The influence of the theories of Demetrius, for instance, on Poliziano, is also mentioned by John M. Najemy, *Between Friends: Discourses of Power and Desire in the Machiavelli-Vettori letters of 1513-1515*, Princeton 1993, pp. 48-51.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

professional carrier; and the messenger (*nuntius* or *legatus*), the one who is trusted by the author of the letter.¹⁸ Sometimes there were linguistic obstacles and the addressee would need a translation, eventually provided by the messenger while reading the letter aloud, so the oral communication was a coadjutor or complement of the written message. On the contrary, the letter could on other occasions be seen as having merely an ancillary function to speech, to be almost like a propitiatory element or a form of validation in the establishment of verbal channels of communication.

While considering letters as historical sources, we should see them as sources in the basic and first place for the study of thousands of such complex communicative acts, in which the roles of the intervenients can be configured, and also analysed, in dyadic ways: the author and the scribe, the addressee and the messenger, the author and the messenger, and so on. Those roles can coincide in the same individual: the role of scribe and author often did coincide, more rarely did the ones of scribe and messenger although medieval texts often refer to the similitude of the trust deposited in both intervenients, and to the dreaded betrayal of the forgerer scribe or of the unfaithful messenger. The letter, however, always subsists by itself, as a fragment marked in a definitive and irretrievable way, in its very nature, by the absence which originated its writing.

How could these fragments be transmitted to us? The collection of Abbot Gomes is made of original letters and related documents, and it can be considered of a casual or archivistic nature comparable to other famous examples of the fifteenth century, for instance the collection of the English family of the Pastons.¹⁹ These should be distinguished from copies collected and organised by the authors themselves, thus resulting from the author's will and selection, as in

¹⁸ Giles Constable (ed.), *The Letters of Peter the Venerable*, Harvard University Press 1967, Vol 2, p. 23.

¹⁹ Norman Davis (ed.), *Paston Letters and Papers of the fifteenth century*, Oxford 1971, Vol 1, xxi-lxxvii.

the famous case of the letters of Petrarca.²⁰ It is crucial in the latter case to respect and carefully study the ways the texts are disposed taking into account the perceived proximity between epistolary self-modelling and autobiographical writing. As Petrarca himself considered his letters, which he successively rewrote and refashioned, to be *animi mei effigies* as well as *ingenii simulacrum*. On the other hand, collections were also made for didactic purposes, and were sometimes designated *summae dictandi* when they were transmitted together with manuals, taking the form of anthologies of examples chosen by their stylistic value and deemed suitable for copy and study.²¹ Thus the missives of famous authors, both authentic or fabricated, or sets of letters having doctrinal or political value were frequently compiled in medieval times. The epistolary mode, as Leclercq states, established “un cadre pour une appréhension facile des problèmes, un ton général d’actualité apparente”.²²

Some texts having really been sent, others fictitious, in most cases put together in a miscellaneous way, there were many compilations of the letters of popes, of emperors like Frederick II, the letters attributed to Alexander, not to mention the famous collection of Abelard and Heloise whose authenticity has been passionately discussed. We should also mention the epistolary collections from Antiquity which in the central and late middle ages were read and imitated, such as the letters of Seneca to Lucilius²³, as were other sets of epistles from the early medieval period like those of Sidonius Apollinaris (430-489) or Braulius of Zaragoza (c. 581- c. 651).²⁴ The reading of the collections of monastic authors available in modern editions, like the letters of Peter the Venerable admirably

²⁰ Franca Brambilla Ageno, “Carteggi ed epistolari”, in: *L’Edizione Critica dei testi volgari*, Padova 1999, pp. 265-270.

²¹ A good guide to the study of these is Martin Camargo, *Ars Dictaminis, Ars Dictandi, Typologie des Sources du Moyen Age Occidental*, Fasc. 60, Turnhout 1991.

²² Jean Leclercq, “Le genre épistolaire au Moyen âge”, in: *Revue du Moyen âge Latin*, 2 (1946), pp. 63-70.

²³ Leighton D. Reynolds, *The Medieval Tradition of Seneca’s Letters*, London 1965.

²⁴ Sidonius Appollinaris, *Poems and Letters*, ed. by W. B. Anderson, Cambridge – Loeb Classical Library, 2 vols, 1936-65; Luis Riesco Terrero (ed.), *Epistolario de San Braulio*, Sevilla 1975.

edited by Constable, or that of Saint Bernard, allows for a correct appreciation of how important the rhetoric of friendship became in medieval times, as it was closely associated with epistolary practice.²⁵

Comparing the letters of Seneca or Petrarca with the ones kept at the collection of Abbot Gomes will maybe seem inappropriate, since there is no perceived “literary value” in the latter, and these have in fact been used by some historians solely for their “documentary value”. A similar distinction was also proposed in literary theory, for instance between “spontaneous” or “natural” messages (letters) and the more “artificial” epistles, but its validity has long been contested.²⁶ This does not mean we should not recognize the huge disparity, in terms of stylistic sophistication and intended value or effect, that late medieval letters might present. A recognition of the importance of epistolary models remains alien, however, to most historians due to an artificial and naive separation between the “historical” and the “literary” dimension of any textual production, and this separation is particularly misleading in the case of letters. As the medievalist Brian Stock reminds us, “the historical is not isolated from the literary, as fact and representation. The two aspects of the experience work together: the objectivity of the events spills over into the subjectivity of the records, perceptions, feelings and observations. The transcribed experience also feeds back into the lived lives”.²⁷ Besides, and that is a point deserving further development, letters proclaim themselves, in characteristic self-awareness, as writing presupposing models.

²⁵ Jean Leclercq, “Notes sur la tradition des *Épîtres* de S. Bernard”, in: *Recueil d'Études sur Saint Bernard et ses écrits*, Roma 1969, pp. 307-322. See also Gillian R. Knight, *The Correspondence between Peter the Venerable and Bernard of Clairvaux. A Semantic and Structural Analysis*, London 2001.

²⁶ According to Guillén, such distinction is in fact “an aftergrowth of the Romantic opposition of *Naturpoesie* and *Kunstpoesie*”, depending solely on “external evidence”: “Notes towards the study...”, p. 85.

²⁷ Brian Stock, *Listening for the Text: on the uses of the past*, Baltimore 1990, p. 29.

2. *The art of letter-writing*

Displacing our focus now into the dyad author/scribe, and taking the point of view of the figure of João Rodrigues, we are precisely faced with the implications of the problem just formulated above. João Rodrigues was a writer of letters, or a secretary to the future king of Portugal, Duarte. His interest in Coluccio's letters was explicitly of a professional type. Who was this man? An ecclesiastic, we know that he obtained several benefices in the diocese of Lisbon in the first decade of the 15th century. In the 1420s he was already at the pope's court, where he came possibly under the protection of the cardinal João Rodrigues de Azambuja, who had been himself Bishop of Lisbon. The role João Rodrigues played at the curia is well known: he was proctor of the Portuguese king.

Proctors were a vital component of the papal court, especially in these times where permanent diplomatic representation was not yet practiced. Besides, not only kings had proctors, but also bishops, cities, certain rich monastic communities had them. Theirs was a professional service, remunerated, which consisted mainly in preparing dossiers, as we would say today, for obtaining decisions and related documents from the curia.²⁸ Another Portuguese proctor of this same period was the more famous Frei André do Prado, who owes his relative notoriety to the fact that he wrote a theological treatise called *Horologium Fidei* for Prince Henry the Navigator.²⁹ The functions of proctors placed them in daily contact with two specific organs of the curia, the papal chancery and the papal chamber, that is, with two gigantic bureaucratic machines of that age. As Robert Brentano explains, "that machine apparently so dry was nevertheless the heart of the administration of the church. And the connections between proctors, bankers and officials of the curia were the vital tissue of that

²⁸ On proctors, see Bernard Guillemain, *La Cour Pontificale d'Avignon, 1309-1376. Etude d'une société*, Paris 1962, pp. 567-72.

²⁹ "Frei André do Prado", in: G. Lanciani/ G. Tavani (eds.), *Dicionário da Literatura Medieval Galega e Portuguesa*, Lisbon 1993, pp. 53-54.

same heart”.³⁰ Moreover, those were also organisations in which intellectual and professional networks developed, more or less permeated by new forms of cultural experience and readership.

João Rodrigues stayed at least until 1430 in the curia, and wrote a dozen letters to the Abbot Gomes, which he signed either as the king’s proctor, as canon (and later dean) of the church of Lisbon, as secretary of the prince and king of Portugal. He returned to his home country in 1436, where he can be traced in that decade as collector of the apostolic chamber. João Rodrigues also served as secretary for the Latin letters of king Duarte, a fact that has not been taken into account in the study of the royal correspondence of this period. The secretary outlived his master, since in 1451 he was the owner of a rural property (*quintã*) in Queluz, near the city of Lisbon.³¹ João Rodrigues was an exact contemporary of the writer Juan de Mena (1411-1456), who served equally as the secretary of the Latin letters of king Juan II of Castile.

The art of the medieval secretary was the art of composing prose letters, that is the art of the *dictamen*, a Latin word which in medieval times refers to “composition” (from the verb *dictare*). This “art” or discipline, *ars dictaminis*, was the object of rigorous codification through the writing of technical manuals. I shall not be long in reminding some basic notions about the evolution of the *ars dictaminis*, even at the risk of some over-simplification. Some decades ago it was thought generally that the *dictamen* was a sudden invention of the eleventh century, specifically connected to the scholarly centres of Bologna and to the abbey of Monte Cassino. But more recent investigations have explored, in a less peremptorious view of things, the connection between learning how to write letters and learning Latin, that is, an equally important long-term undercurrent linking the dictamen to grammar. That older connection probably originated the

³⁰ Robert Brentano, *Two Churches: England and Italy in the thirteenth century*, Princeton 1968, p. 27.

³¹ *Monumenta Portugaliae Vaticana*, ed. A. D. Sousa Costa, Braga 1970, vol 4, pp. 316-317, 347-348, 393, 403, 454, 497; Torre do Tombo (Lisbon), Chancelaria de D. Afonso V, livro 4, fol. 8^v.

first compilations of epistolary formularies, dating as far back as the eighth century. Although these compilations can be considered distant antecedents of the first manuals of the *dictamen*, such as the one written by Alberico of Monte Cassino, it is undeniable that the flourishing of the manual literature provided new methods for learning and practicing letter-writing that were, as Martin Camargo puts it, both “systematic and generative”.³²

Salutatio Salutation	Name of the Author and his/her attributes + Name of the addressee and attributes + Use of specific forms of address
Exordium (Captatio Benevolentiae) Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Qualities of the author ● Qualities of the addressee ● Common qualities (use of common-places) ● Circumstances of the writing of the letter ● Subject-matter of the letter (etc.)
Narratio Main Subject	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Brevity ● Plausibility ● Clarity
Petitio Request	choice of specific modalities (supplication, exhortation, admonition, etc.)
Conclusio Conclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● brief summary of the argument ● amplifications (use of common-places) ● appeal to the piety of the addressee/reader
Place + Time + validation form {final formula or final salutation}	

Figure 2

³² James Murphy, “Alberic of Monte Cassino: father of the medieval *Ars Dictaminis*”, in: *The American Benedictine Review*, 22 (1971), pp. 209-217; Carol Dana Lanham, *Salutatio Formulas in Latin Letters to 1200: Syntax, Style and Theory*, München 1975; William Patt, “The Early *Ars Dictaminis* as a response to a changing society”, in: *Viator*, 9 (1978), pp. 135-155; Carol Dana Lanham, “Freshman composition in the Early Middle Ages: Epistolography and Rhetoric before the *Ars Dictaminis*”, in: *Viator*, 23 (1992), pp. 115-134.

The structure of the letter as announced by the first manuals can be summarised in the preceding table, a mere reminder of some well known characteristics of the rhetorical model they proposed (figure 2). We should stress in the first place the importance of the salutation or variation in the forms of address. Several compilations of these salutation formulas were made by royal secretaries in fifteenth century Portugal, either officially or in manuscripts kept for their own use.³³

Another late medieval Portuguese example is a compilation of monastic origin found in the manuscript collection of the Abbey of Alcobaça.³⁴ Some modern historians have seen in the exuberant detail and rigidity of salutation formularies one crucial aspect of medieval letter-writing and maybe its main originality.³⁵ These formularies indicate that a judicious evaluation of the relative positions of author and addressee was required in order to choose the appropriate format for the letter. The salutation was indeed a fundamental choice for the writer because it determined much of the further content of the composition. The scale of mutual positioning thus constructed revealed, according to Boureau, the “mechanisms of social reproduction” with peculiar clarity.

Another distinction clarified by the precepts of the manuals opposes the *exordium* to the narration, referring to a possible tension between contents that were vague and general, set against a sort of universal and atemporal horizon, and specific times and circumstances necessary to the narration. The Byzantine

³³ Among published compilations dating from the 15th century: *Livro dos Conselhos de El-Rei D. Duarte*, ed. by J. J. Alves Dias/ A. H. Oliveira Marques, Lisbon 1982, pp. 181-200; *Livro Vermelho do Senhor Rey D. Afonso V*, in: Abade Correia da Serra (ed.), *Colecção de Livros Inéditos de História Portuguesa*, Lisbon 1793, Vol 3, pp. 402-419; Álvaro Lopes de Chaves, *Livro de Apontamentos (1438-1489)*, ed. by A. M. and A. J. Salgado, Lisbon 1984, pp. 151-152.

³⁴ Biblioteca Nacional (Lisbon), Códices Alcobacenses, CCCXLIII/47.

³⁵ Giles Constable, “Structure of medieval society according to the *dictatores* of the twelfth century”, in: Kenneth Pennington/ Robert Sommerville (eds.), *Law, Church and Society: Essays in honor of Stephen Kuttner*, Philadelphia 1977, pp. 253-67; William D. Patt, “The early *Ars Dictaminis*” cit.; Alain Boureau, “La norme épistolaire, une invention médiévale”, in: Roger Chartier (ed.), *La Correspondance. Les usages de la lettre au XIXe siècle*, Paris 1991, pp. 127-157.

practice, prolonging late antique uses, made of the *exordium* the longest component of the epistles, largely made of protests of idealized friendship which the author claimed to the addressee with the abundant use of common places, such as the *locus amoenus* as the siege where the letter was written (with birds singing, and all the usual elements).³⁶ The recourse to mutual eulogy was a common form of *captatio benevolentiae*, and medieval manuals distinguished at least five distinct ways to introduce and modulate this eulogy. In the early precepts, the constant reiteration of the ideal of brevity made the narration almost secondary to the *exordium* and especially to the salutations.

But in the central period of the Middle Ages, the letter was becoming an admirable instrument of persuasion and doctrine, precisely by developing the narration together with the *exordium*. From the twelfth century on, and especially in the following hundred years, letters no longer were textual devices aiming most of all at postulating or reaffirming an harmony and a respect for the mutual positions of the dyad author/addressee, but they also became possible instruments to explore an opposition of arguments and to make it evolve by means of the epistolary exchange.³⁷ Now the *narratio* could in fact become the heart of the letter, eventually accompanied by the *petitio* in a single or in several units coupled in the same epistle, or as we would say today, the unity of these two elements (*narratio + petitio*) was the “subject” of the missive.

This main textual nucleus could be kept in and by itself. An ordered sequence of such epistolary exchanges could approximate the development of a controversy, or the telling of a story, in a sort of narrative or argumentative palimpsest. Portuguese historians of the fifteenth century were particularly attuned to this value of epistolary materials, and often used them as privileged

³⁶ Gustav Karlsson, *Idéologie et Cérémonial dans l'épistolographie byzantine*, Upsala 1962, pp. 15-16, 79-80 and 114-117.

³⁷ See the fundamental study of Laurie Shepard, *Courting Power. Persuasion and Politics in the early thirteenth century*, New York 1999, pp. 23-24.

sources, inserted in the narratives to special effect.³⁸ Conversely, some admired passages of prose could in turn become letters, just by adding a salutation and a conclusion to them. So it happened to doctrinal expositions, or to precepts, for instance, to keep one's health like the widely read text written by the Portuguese Pedro Hispano, which circulated as a fictitious letter sent to a well known imperial figure.³⁹

It was the explosion of the professional world of the scribe and the notary which in many ways lead to the specialisation of the later medieval period, and to the distinction between the *ars notariae* and the *ars dictandi*. Resulting from the application of legal categories and methods to a typology of letters, the manuals for notaries were often kept with the formularies proper, their diffusion coinciding in Italy with important changes in cursive writing. The only published manual known to have been written by a Portuguese author, Domingos Domingues of Viseu, is precisely a quite specialised *ars notariae* or *summa dictaminis* (dating circa 1267), dedicated to “those who should serve the office of notary of bishops and archbishops”.⁴⁰

In the best manuals of *dictamen*, like the one of Guido Faba, the theoretical background of the generative approach was kept, as it stems from its links to rhetoric. However, the art of writing letters was to become in late medieval times, in many contexts, solely an introduction to literacy or to basic writing skills.⁴¹

³⁸ Rita Costa Gomes, “Zurara and the Empire: reconsidering fifteenth century Portuguese historiography”, forthcoming.

³⁹ Among the many manuscripts transmitting this popular text the one kept at the British Museum (15th century) takes the form of a “Letter to the Emperor Frederick”, with the appropriate salutation: Maria Helena da Rocha Pereira, *Obras Médicas de Pedro Hispano*, Coimbra 1973, p. 496.

⁴⁰ Ludwig Rockinger, *Briefsteller und Formelbücher des elften bis vierzehnten Jahrhunderts*, New York 1961, vol 2, pp. 515-592. See also G. Orlandelli, “Genesi dell’ *Ars Notariae* nel secolo XIII”, in: *Studi Medievali*, 6 (1965), pp. 329-366. On the formation of notaries in Portugal: Isaiás da Rosa Pereira, “O tabelionato em Portugal”, in: *Notariado Público y Documento Privado: de los orígenes al siglo XIV. Actas del VII Congreso Internacional de Diplomática*, Valencia 1989, vol 1, pp. 615-690.

⁴¹ Marjorie Curry Woods, “The teaching of writing in Medieval Europe”, in: James Murphy (ed.), *A Short History of Writing Instruction from Ancient Greece to twentieth-century America*, Davis 1990, pp. 77-94. For the later period see also Paul Grendler, *Schooling in*

This was the main reason for many epistolary precept-books to become exclusively didactic in their intent, and aiming at quick and efficient recipes presented in the form of schematic puzzle-like composition tables like the ones of Lorenzo of Aquileia, in his *Practica* or *Usus dictaminis*, which was also used in the Iberian Peninsula.⁴² The table of composition devoted to the writing of the letter “between equals and friends”, or, as Lorenzo explains, “letters to friends, partners, brothers, members of one’s family, notaries, scholars, burghers or citizens” has been studied in its relation to the format of the letters of the merchants.⁴³ Henri Bresc observed that some Italian merchants left in testament to their sons their “Lambertano”, referring to no other than the manual of Albertano da Brescia (1220 –1270), also very diffused for learning letter-writing.⁴⁴ The theory of the different parts of the epistle was equally known in the Iberian secular and courtly milieu mostly through encyclopaedic works, especially Brunetto Latini and his “Book of Treasury” – thus becoming familiar to most noble men and women writers of letters.⁴⁵

In spite of the historical observation that epistolary skills after the thirteenth century penetrated in many social fields, including the merchant’s desk and the woman’s sphere in palace and cloister, this late diffusion or cultural vulgarisation of some formal requisites of the dictamen is a more obscure side of the history of

Renaissance Italy. Literacy and Learning, 1300-1600, Baltimore 1989, specifically pp. 217-234 on letter-writing and basic rhetorical skills.

⁴² A good description of the content in J. Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages: A History of Rhetorical Theory from St Augustine to the Renaissance*, Berkeley 1974, pp. 262-263. For its diffusion in Iberia: Charles Faulhaber, “Las retóricas hispanolatinas medievales (siglos XIII-XV)”, in: *Repertorio de Historia de las Ciencias Eclesiásticas en España*, 7 (1979), pp. 11-64.

⁴³ Marion Sitzmann, “Lawrence of Aquileia and the origins of the business letter”, in: *The American Benedictine Review*, 28 (1977), pp. 180-185.

⁴⁴ Christian Bec, *Les Marchands Écrivains. Affaires et Humanisme à Florence, 1375-1434*, Paris-La Haye 1977, pp. 50 and 390.

⁴⁵ Brunetto Latino or Latini (d. 1294) had been a famous *dictator* himself, and orator for the Commune of Florence. His book was very diffused in late medieval Iberia, with 13 manuscripts in Castilian, 3 in Catalan, one in Aragonese (and we might add, one in Portuguese): J. B. Holloway, *Brunetto Latini. An Analytic Bibliography*, London 1986. See for example the Castilian version, *Libro del Tesoro. Versión Castellana de ‘Li Livres dou Tresor’*, ed. by Spurgeon Baldwin, Madison 1989, especially pp. 186-187.

letter-writing than the one regularly highlighted by cultural history and the history of ideas. Epistolary writing is at the centre of the debate about the origins of humanism since the pioneering works of Kristeller, Wieruzowski, and a few others, as the rejection of the dictamen (first of all, it seems, by Petrarca) in its newly perceived rigidity and lack of stylistic *souplesse* is seen as a determinant factor for cultural and literary innovation.⁴⁶ This will bring us back to the figure of the secretary, and to his readings of Coluccio, in the later part of our exposition.

3. How to do things with letters

Before we consider that problem, however, we should quickly focus our attention on the other element of the dyad author/scribe we are considering, that is, on the prince and king Duarte (1391-1438). A cultivated monarch, Duarte had been associated to the government by his father since the decade of 1420, although he ascended to the throne only in 1433. He was the author of two treatises, on moral education and the art of horse-riding, and was also a collector and reader of a notable number of books.⁴⁷ Both his predecessor and Duarte himself have an abundant epistolary production, among which we can find examples of letters possibly dictated to secretaries, either in final form or as brief outlines to be developed by them; examples of epistles composed by the secretaries, from simple notes or aural instructions; and also letters entirely or directly composed by the king, or totally revised and corrected by him.

Exhortatory letters were a common production, such as the one sent in 1415 by the Portuguese monarch to his nephew the king of Aragon, urging him to join

⁴⁶ For a discussion of the first humanism, see Ronald G. Witt, *In the Footsteps of the Ancients: The origins of Humanism from Lovato to Bruni*, Leiden 2000, especially the chapters on Petrarca (pp. 230-291) and Salutati (pp. 292-337). On letters and letter-collections of the humanists: Cecil H. Clough, "The Cult of Antiquity: letter and letter-collections", in: *Cultural aspects of the Italian Renaissance: Essays in honour of Paul Oskar Kristeller*, Manchester 1976, pp. 33-67.

⁴⁷ Luis F. Lindley Cintra, "D. Duarte", in: *Os Grandes Portugueses*, Lisbon s.d., pp. 139-154; João Dionísio, "D. Duarte e a leitura", in: *Revista da Biblioteca Nacional*, 6 (1991), pp. 7-17.

in plans for the final conquest of Granada.⁴⁸ Among the most interesting examples of these exhortations by letter are the texts sent to prince Duarte by his brother Pedro, when Duarte was acclaimed as king, as well as the one sent in turn by Duarte to Pedro “when he was leaving the kingdom”.⁴⁹ There we find a moral discourse of stoic undertones, all centred in the “passions” which prevent man from putting himself in the hands of Providence, a theme especially linked in the case of king Duarte to a reflection on melancholy, a term he often eschews preferring that of “tristeza” (*tristitia*).

Epistles written in vulgar Portuguese also represented a means of political intervention and debate in the times of king Duarte and all through the fifteenth century. Sometimes they took the form of diatribes, that is, of a formulation of adverse arguments and their ordered refutation. These were the aristocratic “letters of counsel” (*cartas de conselho*), a true genre developed in Portugal and generally presenting a mixture of exhortations and persuasory argument. The so-called “Letter from Bruges” attributed to the king’s brother, Pedro Duke of Coimbra, is a well-known example of a whole political program being developed in this form, approaching the length of a *libellus* or small treatise.⁵⁰ These texts sometimes allow for the reconstruction of coherent circles of epistolary exchange involving several of the king’s noble counsellors and members of the royal family, and corresponding to a common enumeration of problems to be discussed. Some of them have been transmitted in truncated form by the chronicles of the age, but they also circulated separately keeping distinctive elements of the epistolary format, such as the initial salutations or the final formulas. The usual denomination of “*pareceres*” (“opinions”) given by modern historians to these texts, linked to some vicissitudes of their subsequent

⁴⁸ *Monumenta Henricina*, vol 2, pp. 227-229.

⁴⁹ The first letter mentioned dates from August 1433: *Monumenta Henricina*, vol 4, pp. 248-257. The second from September 1425: *Monumenta Henricina*, vol 3, pp. 105-109.

⁵⁰ *A Carta de Bruges do Infante D. Pedro*, ed. by A. Moreira de Sá, Coimbra 1952.

transmission, does not take into account the crucial influence of the epistolary format in them.⁵¹

These “letters of counsel” were intentionally conceived by their authors as stylistically polished texts, appropriate for collecting or for use in historical narrative, in short, “worthy of memory”. Occasionally providing doctrinal developments and examples but staying close to the specific political circumstances of the day, such epistles written in vulgar included mostly long narrations presenting ordered reasonings and refutations of contrary opinions, and they flourished until the last decades of the century. One later example is the letter sent by the Castilian Fernando del Pulgar to the Portuguese king Afonso V in 1475, in which we can find the usual trilogy of arguments of the Portuguese “letter of counsel” (service of God, honour of the royal crown, good of the kingdom), proving the diffusion of the genre also in the neighbouring kingdom.⁵²

These kinds of letters in the fifteenth century played a determinant role in the creation of aristocratic textual communities. Writing practices were thus articulated with certain social spaces or human figurations, and with characteristic roles associated directly or indirectly with the world of the court. Other epistolary genres in vulgar were also developed in such circles, like the “letter of battle”, a textual device for ritualised insult taking place in chivalric contexts of tournaments or combat festivals.⁵³ A fruit of the familiarity with basic aspects of the dictamen in secular and non-professional circles the “letter of counsel” reveals a taste for stylistic subtlety and elaboration among secular

⁵¹ These texts represent, in fact, a genre close to both the Castilian “cartas doctrinales” and the “cartas mensajeras”. See about these Jeremy Lawrance, “Nuevos lectores y nuevos géneros: apuntes y observaciones sobre la epistolografía en el Primer Renacimiento Español”, in: Victor García de la Concha (ed.), *Literatura en la Época del Emperador. Actas de la Academia Literaria Renacentista V*, Salamanca 1988, pp. 81-100.

⁵² Fernando del Pulgar, *Letras*, ed. by Paola Elia, Pisa 1982, pp. 53-58. This letter was incorporated in Pulgar’s “Crónica de los Reyes Católicos” as well as in the chronicle of Andrés Bernáldez.

⁵³ The transmission of such letters was the task of a special kind of messenger: the herald. See Martí de Riquer, *Lletres de Batalla, Cartells de Deseiximents i Capítols de Passos d’Armes*, Barcelona 1963, especially vol 1, pp. 112-126; Antonio Orejudo, *Cartas de Batalla*, Barcelona 1993.

aristocratic writers which also expresses the validity of the traditional association between the epistolary form and the cultivation of rhetorical competences. The traditional interpretation of the authorship of such texts, based on a quest for an exclusive individual attribution, plays down the perception of the dyadic relation hypothetically involved in their composition, which naturally demands a more careful study of the figure of the secretaries than has been made so far in the Portuguese context.⁵⁴

The relative sophistication of the early fifteenth century Portuguese texts gives us some clue both to readers' expectations and to a shared writing competence in epistolary production. The secretary, especially a professionally trained *dictator* like João Rodrigues, was also an agent of cultural transmission inside the court, and his search for models in Salutati not only brought to fruition many letters written in Latin – as respectful as in Coluccio's "public letters" of the medieval *dictamen* – but is also coherent with other stylistic sensibilities of the aristocratic public whose bilingualism (Latin versus vulgar Portuguese) could present a variegated profile. This because Salutati was also an admired writer of "familiar letters" of a new type, which he did not consider appropriate to audiences and circumstances similar to official public correspondence, but were particularly suited to political and ethical debate among small circles of correspondents.

From the point of view of king Duarte, however, the novelty of the "letters of counsel" resided equally in the personal tone achieved in this form of communication. The recourse to epistolary transmission of a new kind became indeed for late medieval kings a way of cultivating what Max Weber would call a "personal regime" of governance, dependent on parallel and multiple channels of communication both inside and outside the more institutionalised and bureaucratic mechanisms of royal government. So the figure of the fifteenth

⁵⁴ See the brief remarks of A. Almeida Calado, *Frei João Álvares. Estudo Textual e Literário-Cultural*, Coimbra 1964, p. 121; Aude Viaud (ed.), *Lettres des Souverains Portugais à Charles Quint et à l'Impératrice*, Lisbon/Paris 1994, p. 20.

century secretary also refers to new discursive instances of power emerging in the proximity of kings and great lords. As we shall see in our final remarks, the central problem to be raised there, as well as in many other social contexts, was the problem of trust.

4. Letters and the generation of trust

We recalled earlier that the awareness of writing models is central to the epistolary experience, being the main reason for the interest of the Portuguese royal secretary in possessing a copy of the stylistically sophisticated and much admired epistles of *Salutati*. That awareness ultimately explains the success of manuals for writing letters and these still have many interesting things to tell us about the epistolary form, its social use and purpose, specifically when models are confronted with remaining texts and these are considered as sources for the study of specific communicative events. If we take, for instance, the definition of Guido Faba used on the onset of our talk, letters should assure both authenticity and secrecy of the messages conveyed.

Authenticity seems to be a fundamental aspect of the epistolary form which is not only inseparable from the dialogic nature of these texts, but is also related to material characteristics such as the use of a variety of validation signals, of which the signature is a relatively late example. Recent attempts at an history of the signature as a social practice show that its emergence is connected to the gradual disappearance of the practice of the subscription, since the twelfth century.⁵⁵ Distancing itself from the declarative nature of the subscription, which was in a way mimetic of oral forms of validation, the signature in fact attributed a new meaning to the act of writing one's name among the growing variety of

⁵⁵ Béatrice Fraenkel, *La Signature, g n se d'un signe*, Paris 1992; Claude Jeay, "La naissance de la signature dans les cours royale et princiers de France (XIVe-XVe si cles)", in: Michel Zimmermann (ed.), *Auctor et Auctoritas. Invention et Conformisme dans l' criture M di vale*, Paris 2001, pp. 457-75. On the Portuguese case, see Jo o Pedro Ribeiro, "Disserta o IX. Sobre os Signaes p blicos, Rubricas, e Assignaturas empregados nos Documentos do nosso Reino", in: *Disserta es Chronologicas e Criticas*, vol 3, Lisbon 1857, pp. 10-36.

manuscript signs apposed in texts, such as notarial signs and monograms, and facing the concurrent use of seals. The legal value of autograph signatures, for instance, seems to be well established in most European contexts by the sixteenth century. In the late medieval period, the generalisation of the signature in missives is clearly a condition for authenticity of epistolary messages, as we can see in the letters of Abbot Gomes collection. Signatures, however, could be made by the secretaries as “their lord’s hand”, in the case of princes and ecclesiastical magnates, and the autograph seemed to be perceived, still in the fifteenth century, as a special way of transmitting the wills of the authors as they specify in writing that he/she signed with their own hands.

Secrecy, on the other hand, depended mostly upon mechanisms of control of the dyads of communication, particularly author/scribe and author/messenger. Secrecy is not a characteristic solely internal to the epistolary message itself, a fact which many treatises of didactic literature for princes and secular lords often referred. On the contrary, it rests equally on directness and transparency in the processes of writing and of transmission of letters. Due to the plurality of the intervenients, the ways people were related in the epistolary process were, therefore, a main point of concern. So in both of these characteristics of epistolary communication – authenticity and secrecy – as defined by the medieval manuals of letter-writing, trust plays a crucial role.

We should, however, amplify our view of this fundamental relation between the epistolary form and trust, reflecting more generally on how trust could be generated and maintained in the societies of the past, arguably less integrated and differentiated than modern ones. We would like to suggest, as a concluding contribution of this paper, that there is indeed some structural, internal element in letters which facilitates and generates interpersonal trust.

Letters propose a jointly experienced “presentness”, a state of simplified, clearly defined personal relationship in which a message is conveyed, and the

message is thus simultaneously enabled by mutual trust, and reaffirms it at each communicative act.

Because it implies a suspension of time, the epistolary form can be seen in fact as a very old device expressing that “orientation to the present” that, as Luhmann clarifies, is “required for the formation of trust”.⁵⁶ To be sure, different times can be distinguished and appear to be intertwined in one missive: the time of the production of the text itself, the actual time needed for the act of transmitting it, and the times (these might also be plural) of the actions narrated or mentioned in the letter.⁵⁷ The suspension we are referring to, which (as Guillén notes) renders the letter similar to the modern newspaper report, establishes a close relation between the first two scales of time, i.e. the times of writing and of receiving the message, creating a specific effect of a mutually experienced present by the writer and the addressee. This common present horizon enables the emergence of trust. More precisely, trust requires an anticipation of the future, being an orientation of behaviour that reduces a whole spectrum of possibilities for future action based in present states of a relationship. And the letter, in the societies of the past, helped bring that present state into existence for both author and addressee.

This connection is clearer precisely in the cases in which no new content nor apparent exchange of information can be traced in medieval and early modern letters, the texts functioning more as previous commitments or formal requisites for certain actions to be performed, or certain relationships established. So the constant reiteration of friendship in epistolary form, giving birth to a rather repetitive and formulaic textual production in which the expression of emotions and affection would be merely instrumental, has been associated by modern historians with the constitution and maintenance of client-relations and forms of

⁵⁶ Niklas Luhmann, *Trust and Power*, Chichester/New York/Brisbane/Toronto 1979, p. 16.

⁵⁷ Gérard Genette, “Figures du récit”, *Figures III*, Paris 1972, pp. 228-234.

patronage.⁵⁸ Letters of this kind served mainly as vehicles of interpersonal trust. In our view, they did so not only in terms of the language and the concepts used in them for defining friendship and patronage, but because, as sociologists Simmel and Luhmann suggest, “trust can only be secured and maintained in the present. Neither the uncertain future nor even the past can arouse trust since that which has been does not eliminate the possibility of the future discovery of alternative antecedents”.⁵⁹ As a process of communication, letters generated those experiences of a shared present from which trust could emerge.

The epistolary form in its relation to trust is also relevant to the “archaeology” of some financial practices of late medieval times, and the functioning complexity of well-known mechanisms like the letter of change.

As Raymond de Roover has established, this specific type of missives came to replace the more formal and legally established *instrumentum ex causa cambii* or the contract of change, which was a notarial act. This replacement, occurring in Genoa or Florence towards the middle of the thirteenth century, not only eliminated the formality and the slower process of the notarial instrument, but allowed also for a rational utilization of the fundamental differentiation of places that always exists between author and addressee of a missive. Merchants used this specific element of the epistolary form in order to circumvent the religious prohibition of credit and banking operations, by making them coincide with an operation of change between different locations.

But I would also underline another aspect of the use of missives for such material purposes as change and credit operations, and that is the rather immaterial factor that they presuppose: trust. As de Roover states, behind the generalisation of the letter of change lays the historical reality that “the signatures of the agents of banking societies having credit in many different places” had

⁵⁸ Dale Kent, *The Rise of the Medici Faction in Florence, 1426-1434*, Oxford 1978, pp. 83-104. See also Anthony Molho, “Cosimo di Medici: *pater patriae* or *padrino?*”, in: *Stanford Italian Review*, 1 (1979), pp. 5-33.

⁵⁹ Luhmann, *Trust and Power*, p. 12.

become, “in fact, of equal worth to that of a notary”.⁶⁰ This worth was on its turn based upon the patient and daily maintenance of a network of correspondents which, throughout Europe, brought into existence and reinforced the trust between intervenients as well as in the network itself as a whole. “Reciprocal trust and good faith in their dealings were the ethical elements which distinguished the tone of relations between merchants and which were the most important factors in their solidarity”, wrote Ugo Tucci about the Venetian merchant of the Renaissance.⁶¹ The generalisation of the use of such a sophisticated instrument as the letter of change brings this reality to the fore. In a contract, the validity of the transaction was not depending on who, if anybody, had actually trusted. While as in a missive, as we suggested, trust was a result or by-product of the communication process itself. Both these two typologies of letters (the letter of friendship and the letter of change), in conclusion, point to an important historical reality. Epistolarity as a textual form as well as a mechanism of communication was a widely spread device for the generation and maintenance of trust in late medieval and early modern European societies.

⁶⁰ Raymond de Roover, *L'Évolution de la lettre de change, XIVe-XVIIIe siècles*, Paris 1953, p. 41. See also his “Scholastic Economics”, in: Julius Kirshner (ed.), *Business, Banking, and Economic Thought in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, Chicago 1974, pp. 306-335.

⁶¹ Ugo Tucci, “The psychology of the Venetian merchant”, in: J. R. Hale (ed.), *Renaissance Venice*, London 1973, p. 367. Important remarks on this subject are also made in the classic works of Armando Sapori, *Le marchand italien au Moyen Âge*, Paris 1953 and S. D. Goitein, *Letters of Medieval Jewish traders*, Princeton 1973. See more recently Gunnar Dahl, *Trade, Trust and Networks: Commercial Culture in Late Medieval Europe*, Lund 1998.

Sixteenth Century Letters: typologies and examples

from the monastic circuits

by

Gabriella Zarri

The attention that has been centred on letters as a source of literary and historical study over the last twenty years has been heightened recently thanks to today's methods of electronic communication. "Finger culture" has, in the view of some scholars, sounded the death knell of the letter as a means of "communicating *in absentia*" while, for others, it has given it new life. In the study of medieval and contemporary history, the letter has also become one of the main sources of interest for the new disciplines that study the history of writing, literacy, gender and female socialization. Socio-anthropological factors, as well as others of a more scientific and cultural nature, are the reasons why today it is worthwhile reflecting on this vast inheritance of books and manuscripts from the past when seeking answers to issues of both a theoretical and practical nature.

As has already been pointed out in the introduction to this Workshop, ours is an appropriate time to look into the changes that the traditional epistolary means of communication has undergone and introduced during periods of history that witnessed a profound cultural transformation brought about by technological and ideological factors, changes which also make us curious to investigate the social and literary meaning of letter writing.

Before moving on to the specifics of the issue I will deal with, I would like to draw your attention to two recent Italian books which, together with those mentioned in the prospectus to the Seminar and the Introduction, may be considered a good starting point for further study. The first is the miscellaneous volume *Alla Lettera*, edited by Adriana Chemello which examines letters from

the perspective of the history of literature;¹ then *Per Lettera*, another miscellaneous volume edited by myself which examines female correspondence, manuscript and printed, written during the *ancien regime*.² The first volume, whose somewhat ambiguous title is a reference to the Latin expression *Ad litteram*, looks at the theories and practices of letter writing from ancient times to the present day. The broad diachrony that marks the book lends itself particularly to highlighting the development of the literary genre, from the Greek and Latin theories of letter writing to those of the humanists, with special emphasis on the novelty of the Sixteenth Century constituted by Aretino's invention of the book of letters and by the rhetorical *institutio* of the books of the Secretary.³

Cicero's definition of the letter still holds true for some of its typical aspects. The great Roman orator called it "*Amicorum colloquia absentium*", or a (written) conversation between absent friends. These few words describe the letter as a conversation, viz. *in the oral dimension* but which unfolds in terms of a *later communication*, the written word taking the place of the impossible verbal colloquy, and, furthermore, taking *the form of writing* which allows it to *move through space*.

Colloquiality more than rhetoric is, therefore, the letter's prime characteristic that qualifies it in relation to its contents; then comes the writing and material support used for the deferred conversation, viz., the paper upon which it is written which qualifies the letter in relationship to the culture and social class of the writer as well as to the technological development of the time. Finally, there is the *space* which separates the friends who are conversing and the means used

¹ Adriana Chemello (ed.), *Alla Lettera. Teorie e pratiche epistolari dai Greci al Novecento*, Milan 1998.

² Gabriella Zarri (ed.), *Per Lettera. La scrittura epistolare femminile tra archivio e tipografia*, Rome 1999.

³ In addition to Amedeo Quondam (ed.), *Le "carte messaggere". Retorica e modelli di comunicazione epistolare*, Roma, Bulzoni, 1981, see the essays by Claudio Greggio, Adriana Chemello and Elisabetta Selmi, in *Alla Lettera* above, and Nicola Longo, *Letteratura e lettere. Indagine nell'epistolografia cinquecentesca*, Rome 1999.

to eliminate it which evokes the system of written paper and especially of the letter.

Cicero's foundation of the epistolary genre found reconfirmation in the humanistic period in which this form of literature was rediscovered and raised to literary dignity in the common tongue too. While Manuzio's edition (1500) of Caterina da Siena's letters is mainly justified by the spiritual character of the content and correspond to the expectations of Manuzio himself in terms of reformation of the church,⁴ Aretino's idea of editing collections of letters of illustrious personages echoes an emerging new literary taste and commercial requisites. The art of writing letters was brought to perfection in the course of the 16th Century with the emergence of the profession of "Secretary", and the practice of correspondence broadens out until the 18th Century with an plethora of different types – from the erudite, to the amorous and familial.⁵

The volume *Alla lettera* reviews writing theories and practices as they evolved over the centuries. *Per lettera*, on the other hand, looks into uses and functions of letter writing with special attention focused on the specificity of the genre of female writing.⁶ Although the literary value of the collection in print of women's letters is not outwith the scope of this volume, it does appear of secondary importance. 16th Century female letter collections in print are, by and large, literary models, like the fortunate collection *Lettere di molte valorose donne [Letters of several courageous women]*, written by a man; or they were printed with the aim of becoming models of comportment, like the one written by the almost-unknown nun of Genoa, Battistina Vernazza, published in the *corpus*

⁴ *Epistole devotissime de sancta Catharina da Siena*, Venice, Aldo Manuzio, 15 September 1500. Preface by Aldo Manuzio addressed to Monsignor Francesco Piccolomini.

⁵ Cf. Roger Chartier (ed.), *La Correspondance. Les usages de la lettre au XIXe siècle*, Paris 1994.

⁶ On the female epistolary genre see also: Maria Luisa Doglio, *Lettera e Donna. Scrittura epistolare femminile tra Quattro e Cinquecento*, Roma 1993 and Christine Planté (ed.), *L'Épistolaire est-il un genre féminin?*, Paris 1998.

of her *Opera omnia* (1602), or that of the well-known Teresa d'Avila, published in the 17th Century.

The book *Per Lettera* focuses its attention on the social practice of correspondence and the transformation it underwent during the 16th and 17th Centuries. Events of undoubted economical and cultural importance, such as the discovery of America, and of an institutional nature, as was the centralization of State power and the move towards permanent diplomacy, favoured the organization of the Post, an extremely efficient system for the delivery of correspondence which was strengthened in the first half of the 16th Century in Europe under the German Empire. Even though the Post never fully took the place of the *brevi manu* delivery system of letters, in particular those that had to be more carefully looked after for political or doctrinal reasons, the new distribution system for correspondence brought about an increase in letter writing, not to mention a perfection in compiling them, as witness the several *Formulari* and the increase in those whose job it was to write letters, such as the Secretaries, making editing and conservation of epistolary writings easier. In 16th Century letter writing, during which the use of the common tongue opened letter writing to women too, mostly still spiritual or office letters were written, while the 17th Century saw an increase in women's letter writing and the social practice of correspondence which, for women, gradually became a requirement of their status.

Among the first women to take up letter writing in Medieval times were nuns.⁷ "Literate" *par excellence* by virtue of the requirements of their office, the professed nuns were sometimes more cultured than their mothers and sisters living at Court or outside the convent walls. They were literate first and foremost as readers, able, that is, to recognise the letters written in their breviary and other prayer books. Often they were writers too, able to inscribe on parchment and

⁷ Cf. Karen Cherewatuk and Ulrike Wiethaus (eds.), *Dear Sister. Medieval Women and the Epistolary Genre*, Philadelphia 1993.

paper the characters conveying thoughts in writing. Generally speaking, they possessed a two-fold knowledge which, in the past had been described as knowledge of the alphabet, used above all to indicate the ability to read and write. Many of the nuns studied and understood Latin too. As is well known, the terms “literate” and “illiterate” in Medieval and Early Modern Ages were not a cultural qualification, a mark of high culture, but rather of low culture. The term itself comes from the primary meaning of the Latin “*littera*” i.e. letter of the alphabet.

It is worthwhile noting that in Salvatore Battaglia’s *Grande dizionario della Lingua italiana* the entry for “lettera” in the sense of “epistle” appears in 15th place after a long series of meanings given to the same term in the acceptance of a graphic mark.⁸

With their ability to read and write the nuns would sometimes exercise the profession of copiers, transcribing, in particular, liturgical and devotional texts for their own use, or for use by their family or the citizenship. In Florence, for example, the convent of the Murate was renowned for its *scriptorium*. Writing was however a strictly regulated activity and all orders had rules prohibiting the nuns from writing letters.

No monastic rule, however was eluded more than that which forbade the writing and receiving of letters. Letters both spiritual and official, letters begging for alms and patronage, letters to the ecclesiastical authorities and family members, forbidden notes to family and friends came and went incessantly through convent doors even convents with a reputation for strict discipline. There is even a pious convent of Poor Clares founded in Bologna in 1456 famed for the culture and holiness of its founder, that still keeps a handwritten formulary of letters in its archives which dates back to the 15th Century.⁹ In addition, many convents who agreed to reformation in accordance with the dictates of the Observance Movement after a sermon, or meeting with a observant religious

⁸ “Grande dizionario della lingua italiana”, ed. Salvatore Battaglia, vol. VIII, Turin 1973, 979.

⁹ Archivio Generale Arcivescovile di Bologna, *Archivio della Beata Caterina*, 34. *Copia di lettere spirituali da scrivere in diversi casi*, codex in paper, 27 folios (Book 12, N° 6).

person continued to receive instruction in writing in the ways of the spirit and of religious reform. Suffice it for all to cite the example of the Dominican Corpus Domini order of Venice, reformed towards the end of the 14th Century by Giovanni Dominici, whose spiritual teaching conveyed by letter was studied recently by Daniel Bornstein.¹⁰

In the broad scenario of monastic writings, letters have a privileged place as an indicator of the practical consequences and concrete repercussions of large-scale cultural and institutional change, such as the 15th Century introduction of the Observance already mentioned, the implementation of the Trent decrees in the 16th Century and the monitoring of mysticism and visions in the 17th Century.

It must be pointed out that convent archives contain letters sent to nuns rather than those sent by them; they often hold collections or copies of letters written by nuns only concerning events significant to the convent or linked to nuns of an especially holy reputation. Letters of a spiritual content were often copied and circulated within the religious order. On the basis of well-documented examples and research conducted personally, I shall draw a broad outline for one type of monastic letter.

Spiritual letters: Spiritual Fathers and Mothers; and writing “in obedience”

Spiritual Fathers

Before the invention of movable type, and up until the mid-16th Century, the spread of the word of God and spiritual teaching took place by word of mouth through preaching and catechism to small groups of devotees. Preaching within monasteries was a task for the father confessor, members of the religious order or for preachers from outside who were invited to prepare cycles of sermons or

¹⁰ Giovanni Dominici, *Lettere spirituali*, ed. Maria Teresa Casella and Giovanni Pozzi, Turin 1981; Daniel Bornstein, “Spiritual Kinship and Domestic Devotions”, in: Judith C. Brown and Robert C. Davis (eds.), *Gender and Society in Renaissance Italy*, London and New York 1998, pp. 173-192.

spiritual exercises. Some set the nuns down a path to greater spirituality and, after leaving the convent, continued their teaching by letter. Like Giovanni Dominici, the Dominican we mentioned previously, Domenico Benivieni, a lay priest of the early 16th Century too, very close to Savonarola, continued to give instructions by letter to the Florentine nuns of the Murate as well as to the Benedictines of San Michele di Pescia. The letters he wrote, copied along with those other religious personages sent to those same nuns, are conserved in a codex of the Riccardiana Library.¹¹ The letters written by spiritual fathers to convents were considered as, and indeed often took the place of books of devotion, especially during the long period which stretched from oral to written culture and during the spread of the protestant reformation. This is shown, as in the case already mentioned, by the letters being copied into a codex which then circulated among many convents, or the originals being conserved, bound in book form.¹² Teaching by letter continued on even after the invention of printing and book production, indeed it represented that “conversation between absent friends” defined by Cicero and which greatly favours persuasion, as well as perseverance in carrying out intentions emerging from a sermon or confession. The oral and familiar aspects of teaching are much easier to convey in a letter than in a book; the absence of the friend and master is lightened by the material presence of what he himself wrote. The book of the confessor or preacher’s letters was then copied and distributed among the nuns for successive decades, becoming one of the means of identification of the convent.

¹¹ Biblioteca Riccardiana di Firenze, Ms Riccardiano 2405. Cited by Lorenzo Polizotto, *The Elect Nation. The Savonarolan Movement in Florence. 1494-1545*, Oxford 1994, the manuscript was the subject of the dissertation of Valentina Baroncelli, Florence University 2001-2002.

¹² This is the case of the papers of don Leone Bartolini held in the Archive of the suppressed monastery of Santa Maria degli Angeli in Bologna, now housed in the State Archive. Cf. Gabriella Zarri, *Il carteggio tra don Leone Bartolini e un gruppo di gentildonne bolognesi negli anni del Concilio di Trento (1445-1563)*, in *Archivio italiano per la storia della piet , VII*, 1986, and *Il monastero degli angeli. Dipinti del secondo Cinquecento per un monastero femminile a Bologna. Catalogo della mostra*, Bologna 2003.

Spiritual Mothers

Catherine of Siena whose letters were circulated before being published in printed form,¹³ can be taken as a model of the “Spiritual Mother”, the prototype, for example, of many later women deemed to be charismatic who, during the 15th and 16th Centuries became the focus for a group of devotees who turned to them for spiritual help and prayer. In many cases, the letters were written by the “mothers” to lay people, linked to her by family or friendship, in others they were written to religious people who had turned to the charismatic woman for education. Not infrequently, letters were sent to sisters of other convents in order to promote or launch reformation processes. Typical in this sense were the letters written by the Dominican from Genoa, Tommasina Fieschi, who wrote to her sister nuns in the awareness that she was starting or continuing a “santa conversazione” (holy conversation).¹⁴ The network of these charismatic nuns was widespread and highly diversified: as were many of the spiritual letters Caterina de’ Ricci, a Dominican nun from Prato who lived in the 16th Century, sent to family and friends, the affectionate, everyday tenor of a family letter prevails over the deference with which she addresses sister nuns of her own or other Orders.¹⁵ In letters to a confessor/disciple the intention of submitting the spiritual itinerary God inspired in her to some external authority, induced the nun to compose her letters in a generally autobiographical way. This is the case, for example, of the Poor Clare Camilla Battista Varano da Camerino (1475-1528)

¹³ The National Library of Turin houses an ancient collection of thirty letters commissioned by Margherita di Savoia in the early 15th Century.

¹⁴ Silvia Mostaccio, *Osservanza vissuta osservanza insegnata. La domenicana genovese Tommasina Fieschi e i suoi scritti (1448 ca.- 1534)*, Florence 1999 as appendix to the edition of 35 letters.

¹⁵ Cf. Anna Scattigno, “‘Carissimo figliolo in Cristo’. Direzione spirituale e mediazione sociale nell’epistolario di Caterina de’ Ricci (1542-1590)”, in Lucia Ferrante, Maura Palazzi and Gianna Pomata (eds.), *Ragnatele di rapporti. Patronage e reti di relazione nella storia delle donne*, Turin 1988, pp. 219-239; and, moreover, “Lettere dal convento”, in Zarri (ed.), *Per lettera*, pp. 312-357.

who wrote the book of her spiritual life in the form of letters to her confessor.¹⁶ Faced with a personality of extreme devoutness and uncommon culture, as was the nun of Camerino, the confessor had no hesitation in exchanging roles with his disciple and asking her for instruction in the ways of the spirit. This same nun Camilla Battista was the author of an *Istruzione al discepolo* [*Instruction for the disciple*] in letter form, a clear reversal of role between master and disciple.¹⁷ The relationship of spiritual guide, still not rigidly formalised as it was in the Counter-reformation, easily became in the late middle-ages a relationship of reciprocity in which female charisma was acknowledged and exalted.

Writing “in obedience”

“Imbecillitas sexus” was the judicial formula used by Roman law to exclude women from testifying in courts of law and “fragilitas sexus” the metaphorical formula used by canonical law to stop women teaching and speaking with Church authorities. Humility was, however, the virtue that enabled nuns too to express themselves despite submission to a number of regulations: no teaching or writing anything on one’s own initiative, but only on the orders of the superior, in other words “in obedience”. No teaching or writing for one’s own pleasure or personal glory but for the honour and good of the community. These are the reasons why the writings mentioned by Varano, the spiritual autobiography and the *Istruzioni al discepolo* were written in letter form and this is also the reason why the oldest sister, Caterina de’ Vigri, author of a spiritual work known as *Le sette armi spirituali* [*The seven spiritual weapons*] declared she had been ordered to write

¹⁶ Edition of the text in Giacomo Boccanera, *Le opere spirituali*, Jesi 1958. Cf. moreover Gabriella Zarri, “Camilla Battista da Varano e le scrittrici religiose del Quattrocento”, in Andrea De Marchi and Pier Luigi Falaschi (eds.), *I da Varano e le Arti*, Acts of the international congress at Camerino, Palazzo Ducale, 4-6 October 2001, Ripatransone (AP) 2003, vol. I, pp. 137-145.

¹⁷ Cf. this author, *L’autobiografia religiosa negli scritti di Camilla Battista da Varano: “La vita spirituale” (1491) e le “Istruzioni al discepolo” (1501)*, in Francesco Bruni (ed.), *Verità e finzioni dell’“io” autobiografico*, Venice 2003, pp. 133-158.

them by her confessor and entrusted her work to the convent, signing it anonymously in humility “Minima cagnola latrante” [Smallest barking she-dog].

In the Renaissance period and the early 16th Century, spiritual correspondence reflected a condition of relative openness on the part of convents to preaching by religious people from outside, as well as to spiritual instruction of lay people. During the Counter-reformation, however, a more stringent control of seclusion and writing was enforced. There were, however, instances in which writing was not forbidden but, on the contrary, made obligatory. This happened with the visionary nuns, or those considered saintly who were asked not to speak of their charismas or inspirations but to write down what they deemed to have been divinely inspired and submit it to the examination of their confessor. This spawned a wealth of female writing, conserved in the convents or the tribunals of the Holy Office.¹⁸ These writings are of a genre not easy to identify, halfway between letters and diaries. They have the colloquial form and external referee of the letter and the daily periodicity of the diary. In special, extreme cases, like the Capucin Veronica Giuliani who lived towards the end of the 17th Century, “obligatory” writing took the shape of an obsessive repetitiveness of visions and penance that drags on for three thousand pages.¹⁹

Networks of relationships

The letter is the most appropriate historical form to reflect the system of relationships within a convent. The letter can, however, only convey information on licit relationships. For information on the illicit, one must turn to trial

¹⁸ Many examples are to be seen in Adriano Prospero, *Tribunali della coscienza. Confessori, inquisitori, missionari*, Turin 1997; by the same author see also “Lettere spirituali”, in Lucetta Scaraffia and Gabriella Zarri (eds.), *Donne e fede. Santità e vita religiosa in Italia*, Rome-Bari 1994, pp. 227-251 (English translation *Women and Faith. Catholic religious Life in Italy from Late Antiquity to the Present*, Cambridge-London 1999, pp. 113-128).

¹⁹ Cf. Maria Duranti (ed.), *Il sentimento tragico dell'esperienza religiosa: Veronica Giuliani (1660-1727)*, Naples 2000.

documents or pastoral visits. To better illustrate the multifarious networks of relationships that nuns kept with lay and ecclesiastical people, I shall take the example of the Murate convent of Florence, and on whose correspondence a pupil of mine is writing a thesis. The convent was set up in the 14th Century by a small group of women who had themselves walled up in a cell on a bridge over the river Arno. They subsequently founded a convent and took the Benedictine Order and seclusion. The nuns continued to be called “Le Murate” [walled-up] even when strict seclusion was extended to all convents. Renowned for its observance, the Institute came under the *jus patronatus* of the Medici family in the 15th Century who renovated and extended it. Its fame and the patronage it enjoyed by the dominating family enabled the number of professed nuns to exceed two hundred, all from aristocratic families. Recent studies by Francis Kent, Kate Lowe and Judith Brown show how some facets of convent community life²⁰ can be shed light on by examining letters conserved in their archives. These are many in number, some hundreds collected and classified from the last decade of the 15th Century to the 18th. It is interesting to note that the spiritual letters to the sisters sent by Domenico Benivieni already mentioned are not conserved. These reached us by the codex of the Riccardiana Library we already discussed. The letters that have been kept, therefore, are “business” and, in one case at least, “affectionate” considering the confidential tone Alessandro de’ Medici, Archbishop of Florence, uses to address the abbesses in the course of a long correspondence which spanned some forty years. The confidentiality, however, is justified by the condition of patronage extended by the family.

²⁰ Cf. Francis Kent, “Lorenzo de’ Medici, Madonna Scolastica Rondinelli e la politica di mecenatismo architettonico nel convento delle Murate a Firenze (1471-1472)”, in Arnold Esch and Christoff Liutpold Frommel (eds.), *Arte committenza ed economia a Roma e nelle corti del Rinascimento (1420-1530). Atti del Convegno internazionale*, Torino 1995, pp. 353-382; Kate Lowe, *Nun’s Chronicles and Convent Culture in Renaissance and Counter-Reformation Italy*, Cambridge and New York 2003; Judith Brown, “Monache a Firenze all’inizio dell’età moderna, Un’analisi demografica”, in *Quaderni storici*, XXIX, 85, 1994, pp. 117-152.

The letters, which are classified in binders, reflect the relationships between the convent and the civilian and ecclesiastical authorities, in particular princes, archbishops and cardinals. Letters touching on the nuns' families are scarce. Some were kept as relating to issues of dowries. By selecting and classifying the letters, the Murate wished to exalt the "honour" of the convent and the high social standing of the nuns, over and above their observance. The relationship with princes was indicative of a type of reciprocity which, within the Catholic Church, is the basis which justifies giving alms. The nuns pray incessantly for the requirements of their single interlocutors and their souls and, in exchange, receive money, exemption from duties, or gifts in kind, like the casks of salted eels Ercole I d'Este sent in 1500. These relationships are not at all affected by distance: indeed a lively correspondence was kept up between 1497 and 1515 between the Murate and the Kings of Portugal, the latter also emerging later as among the most generous benefactors of the convent with a yearly inheritance from Queen Eleonora. The letters of the Medici appear from Granduca Cosimo I onwards, a sign that there was a very close relationship between the nuns and the dominating family with no need for it to be documented in writing. Suffice it to recall that Catherine, the future Queen of France, was sent to the Murate to be educated and, as Guicciardini testified, Pope Leo X, fearing incarceration by the French, in 1515 sent his triple crown to the Murate for safekeeping.²¹

Letters to Archbishops and Cardinals are equally significant in testifying to the nuns' network of relationships which they seemed to get from their families rather than from the monastic order. The convent was under the authority of the Bishop of Florence and received no orders or pastoral visits on the part of Benedictine abbots. Cardinals received supplications generally for the convent's needs, such as the letters sent to Antonio Pucci, the Penitentiary Cardinal to receive letters of indulgence to benefit the convent. The relationships with other

²¹ Letters to the Murate, with those from Caterina de' Medici, are in Archivio di Stato di Firenze, *Corporazioni religiose soppresse dal governo francese*, 81, Filza 100.

Cardinals testify generally to a patron within the Curia and so to being able to ask for favours or benefits directly. Renée Baerstein's idea, that the Angelic nuns of the Sfondrati family from Milan and their relationships in the Curia were a contributing factor to their brother being promoted Cardinal is worth considering.²²

Different is the correspondence written by the Florentine Archbishop Alessandro de' Medici who wrote to his favoured "daughters" from Rome where he was entrusted with tasks for the Curia. His attention was turned in particular to the implementation of the terms of the Council of Trent in the convent, and his wish that the community conserve the strictness and fame of sanctity for which the nuns had been hitherto renowned.

Relations between the convent and princes and cardinals and the nobility of Florence or elsewhere was also fed by small gifts for which the nuns worked assiduously. The "ornate and polished artefacts" sent to Eleonor of Aragon, Duchess of Ferrara in July 1490 were the product of hours of embroidery, while the "fruit" was the product of the orchard and kitchen-garden in which the nuns worked for part of each day.²³

The agents who brought and took the letters always enjoyed the sender's trust. Often, religious people took it upon themselves to deliver letters and unwritten messages too, as the letters we have mentioned of Eleonor of Aragon state openly. The well-known preacher, Mariano da Firenze, who was often called to the Estense court was one of the most assiduous messengers of the Dukes of Ferrara. The role of go-between to the Kings of Portugal was again played by religious pilgrims or agents of the convent itself.

²² Cf. Renée Baerstein, *A Convent Tale. A Century of Sisterhood in Spanish Milan*, New York-London, 2002.

²³ The gifts of fruit and food prepared within the convent are also what Celeste Galilei presented affectionately to her father: cf., Celeste Galilei, *Lettere al padre*, ed. Giovanni Ansaldo (1927), Genoa 1992.

What is not included in this brief classification is the correspondence by individual nuns allowed to write “in obedience” or forbidden to do so. As so often happens, however, the archive of an institution is conceived with the idea of conveying collective recollections and reflecting the honour of the institution.

Translated by Donald A. Bathgate

Provenance and Embeddedness

The Letters from Elisabeth, Countess Palatine (1552-1590)

to Anna, Electress of Saxony (1532-1585)

by

Pernille Arenfeldt

In 1570, Elisabeth, daughter of the Electoral couple of Saxony, was married to Johann Casimir, son of the Elector Palatine. From the time of the wedding until the death of her parents in the mid-1580s, communication between Elisabeth and her parents was largely limited to that which could be expressed in letters and in oral messages conveyed by messengers. They only met three times in person during the fifteen years between 1570 and 1585.

In this paper, I will argue that the provenance of the letters which Elisabeth sent to her mother, Anna of Saxony, deserves to be considered as a source in its own right. The letters' provenance not only helps to re-situate Elisabeth within the social contexts of her everyday life, it also provides guidance for an "excavation" of the correspondence. The paper is divided into four parts: 1) a description of the provenance of Elisabeth's letters in which I seek to demonstrate that they have been transmitted in their original context and order; 2) a description of some of the patterns of communication which emerge from a limited examination of the provenance; 3) an introduction to the content of selected letters to demonstrate how the patterns described in part two can help to identify the letters that may reveal the causes of change; and 4) a discussion of provenance as a source. In the last part of the paper, the findings of this brief investigation are related to more general discussions regarding the strength of social structures in an early modern reality. This is done to assess the possibilities and limitations of employing provenance as a source in a study of dynastic figurations.

Intact provenance?

Before the letters from Elisabeth to Anna are introduced, a working definition of *provenance* should be established. According to *The new shorter Oxford English Dictionary* provenance refers to, “1. The place of origin, derivation, or earliest known history, esp. of a work of art, manuscript, etc.”.¹ In this case further clarification is required because of the necessary distinction between individual letters and a letter collection. The material discussed here are letters, and the place of origin is generally stated in the dateline of the individual letters. However, the letter collection to which the historian has access was created in Saxony where the letters were received, organised and bound, and where copies of Anna’s replies were prepared and carefully preserved. Hence, provenance here refers to the original order of this letter collection, i.e. the way in which this particular correspondence was collected and ordered by Anna and/or her secretaries.

The letters exchanged between Elisabeth and Anna are preserved in the vast correspondence that survives from Anna of Saxony. Between six and eight thousand letters sent by her and c. 20,000 letters sent to her are collected in the Sächsische Hauptstaatsarchiv, Dresden. The letters cover the period between 1554 and 1585, but the large majority of letters were written between the mid-1560s and 1585. The letters sent by Anna are bound in 19 volumes of so-called *Copialbücher* (copy-books/letter-books). These contain an average of c. 220 pages, all drafts for letters, penned by secretaries but written and sent “... in the name of the Electress of Saxony ...”² Each letter-book is chronologically

¹ *The new shorter Oxford English Dictionary on historical Principles*, ed. by Lesley Brown, Oxford 1993, Vol. 2, p. 2392. See also *The Oxford English Dictionary*, Oxford 1991, Vol. XII, p. 710 for similar explanations and examples of usage.

² “... inn der Churfürstin zu Sachßen Namen ...”, Sächsische Hauptstaatsarchiv Dresden (SächsHstA), Kopial (Kop.) 509-527. See also Kop. 307, 348 b, 356 a, 356 b, 356 c, 356 d and

ordered, but from the mid-1570s to Anna's death in 1585 two letter-books run parallel at any given time. The parallel letter-books have identical titles and no systematic differences in their content can be detected.³ While the first part of the correspondence appears fragmented and less orderly, it is clear that Anna – or her secretaries – maintained a meticulous order of the outgoing letters as they were prepared from the mid-1560s onwards. Most of the later volumes are equipped with accurate alphabetical indexes penned by the same writers who drafted the letters for Anna.

The letters received by Anna are collected in 70 volumes of c. 250-300 pages each, catalogued as *Handschriften*. The majority of these are organised according to senders or to territories of senders. A smaller part is collected in volumes of “princely letters”, “noble letters” or a combination of letters by commoners and nobles. In each volume the letters are bound in a rough chronological order. While the letter-books have indexes compiled by Anna's secretaries, tables of contents were added to these volumes in the nineteenth century.⁴

The letters from Elisabeth to her mother are collected in two volumes entitled “Count Palatine Johann Casimir's Letters to the Electress of Saxony, my Gracious Lady, from Anno 1569-1575” and “Letters from Count Palatine Johann Casimir's and his Princely Gracious Wife's Letters to the Electress of Saxony 1574-1585”.⁵ The first volume contains 181 letters, but less than half were sent

356 e, which all contain a number of letters sent by Anna and letters sent jointly by her and her husband.

³ For example SächsHstA, Kop. 518 & 519, Kop. 520 & 521, and 522 & 523, which overlap in pairs as listed – probably because the drafts were written on unbound sheets of paper in different locations and only afterwards brought together and bound.

⁴ The handwriting of the later indexes resembles Karl von Weber's hand, the author of the first biography of Anna, *Anna, Churfürstin zu Sachsen geboren aus Königlichem Stamm zu Dänemark. Ein Lebens- und Sittenbild aus dem sechzehnten Jahrhundert*, Leipzig, 1865. Von Weber's hand is identified on “Extracte auf Quartblätter, Abtheil: XVI. No. 1133b, Personalia der Regenten etc. von Churf. August an,” III a in SächsHstA.

⁵ SächsHstA, Loc. 8532/4, “Pfaltzgraffen Johann Casimirn Schreiben an die Churfürstin zu Sachssen meine gnädigste Frau, von Anno 1569-75” and Loc. 8535/2, “Pfalzgraf Johann Casimirs und S. Fl. Gndl. Gemahls Schreiben an die Churfürstin zu Sachsen 1574-1585”.

from Elisabeth to Anna.⁶ In addition to Elisabeth and Anna, nine other correspondents can be identified as senders and/or recipients of the letters, the most frequent contributors being Johann Casimir and Elisabeth; Elisabeth's parents, Anna and August; Johann Casimir's father, Friedrich III and his second wife, Amalie.⁷ If the title reveals little about the actual content of the volume, it nevertheless indicates that the letters were bound in this particular order while Anna was still alive. The person who wrote the title referred to Anna as "... my gracious Lady ...", a phrase which recurs in the content of her letter-books.⁸ The writer was clearly a secretary working in direct contact with Anna.

The second volume is comprised of 229 letters, and in addition to Elisabeth and Johann Casimir, Anna and August, thirteen other correspondents are represented. This second volume does not appear to have been bound while Anna was alive: the last letter was received in Dresden on 14 September 1585, only c. two weeks before she died,⁹ and the title does not present her as "my gracious Lady". Even so, the original order of the letters appears to have survived. The occasional presence of drafts for letters from Anna to Elisabeth or Johann Casimir in both volumes suggests that the order of the two volumes resulted from the daily practices which developed around the routines of receiving and writing/dictating letters. On 7 January 1572 Anna thus dictated a reply to the letter she had received from Johann Casimir a few days earlier, and on 25

⁶ It must be added that because two letters from the same sender to the same addressee at times were sent together, or a smaller note "Zeddel" was included with a more formal and extensive letter, any quantification of the collection entails a degree of interpretation.

⁷ The most frequently present correspondents are: Anna, August, Johann Casimir, Elisabeth, Friedrich III of the Palatinate; Amalie, Electress Palatine (1539-16023, born Countess of Neuenahr); Anna, Countess Palatine (1529-1591, born Landgravine of Hesse) and widow of Johann Casimir's cousin Wolfgang; Johann Casimir's older brother, Ludwig; Ludwig's wife, Elisabeth (1539-1582, born Landgravine of Hesse); Bartholomæus Hofmann, the Lutheran chaplain in Elisabeth's household, and the four noble widows who served as court mistresses for Elisabeth at varying times.

⁸ "... meine gnädigste Frau ...". For other examples of the same phrase see SächsHstA, Kop. 356 a, fol. 450 (original pagination, fol. 32), "An meiner gst Fraw Tochter Frawen Elisabeth".

⁹ Elisabeth to Anna, 29 Aug. 1585, received Dresden 14 Sep. 1585, SächsHstA, Loc. 8535/2, p. 269.

October 1577 she prepared a reply to the letter Elisabeth had sent her at the beginning of the month. The drafts for these letters are bound together with the received letters.¹⁰ Had a professional secretary or archivist been at work, the replies are likely to have been transferred and bound as part of the letter-books – as is the case for the overwhelmingly large part of the collection of letters.

The titles of the two volumes of received letters also point to the common practice of binding the letters from a married couple together. Generally, the titles refer only or mainly to the husband – sometimes with the added phrase “... and his Gracious Wife”.¹¹ Although a fairly successful effort was made to keep Anna’s correspondence separate from her husbands, this practice at times spilled into the cataloguing of the incoming letters. As mentioned above, several letters to or from Elisabeth’s father are included in the two volumes labelled as letters to Anna.¹²

But it is not only the titles and the presence of drafts which point to the transmission of an original provenance. The concordance between the sequence in which Anna prepared the outgoing letters and the transmitted order of her received correspondence provide further evidence in support of it. The correspondence between Elisabeth and Anna – and between members of Elisabeth’s family-in-law and Anna – during the first five months of 1572 provides one example: on 8 January 1572 Anna sent letters to Johann Casimir, Elisabeth, Elisabeth’s father-in-law, and her mother-in-law. All four letters were

¹⁰ Johann Casimir to Anna, 26 Dec. 1571, and Anna to Johann Casimir, 7 Jan. 1572, SächsHstA, Loc. 8532/4, pp. 141 c-141 d. Elisabeth to Anna, without date (early October 1577), and Anna to Elisabeth, 25 October 1577, Loc. 8535/2, pp. 125-126.

¹¹ “... und seiner gnädigste[n] Frau”. The practice is reflected throughout the “Handschriften”, see for example, SächsHstA, Loc. 8510/5, “Schreiben so an Churfürst Augusten zu Sachsen und Sr. Fürstl. Gnd. Gemahl Herr Wilhelm, Prinz zu Uranien und Sr. Fürstl. Gndl. Gemahl Frau Anna, gebohr. Herzogin zu Sachsen ... 1562-1570”, and Loc. 8536/4 “Braunschweig, Herzog Julien und S. Fürstl. Gndl. Gemahlin Schreiben an die Churfürstin zu Sachsen ao: 1576-1585”.

¹² SächsHstA, Loc. 8535/2, letters from Elisabeth to August can be found on pp. 51, 95, 122, 251, 254. One letter from Elisabeth to Anna is bound with the letters to August, SächsHstA, Loc. 8514/4, “Schreiben So Pfaltzgraff Johann Casimir, vnnd S.F.G. Gemahl, Frau Elizabetha geboren Hertzogin zu Sachssen an Churfürst Augusten zu Sachßen ... gethann, ... Vom dem 1568 biß vff das 1585 Jahr”.

prepared together and appear in her letter-book in the sequence listed here.¹³ On 4 February, two days after receiving these letters, Johann Casimir, Elisabeth and the Elector Palatine all replied to Anna. These three letters are bound together among the received letters.¹⁴ In mid-March, Anna again prepared an extensive package of letters to be sent to the Palatinate: one for the Elector, one for the Electress, one for Johann Casimir and one for Elisabeth, in addition she dictated a letter to Johann Casimir's older brother, Ludwig. The five letters are all dated 18 or 19 March and penned on consecutive pages (folio 29-31) in her letter-book.¹⁵ Ludwig replied to his letter already on 31 March, the Electress Palatine replied on 7 April, her husband dictated a long reply on 10 April and penned a smaller autograph note to be enclosed with it four days later. Johann Casimir and Elisabeth, though, did not reply to Anna's letters until 5 May,¹⁶ and at this point Elisabeth had already received a second letter from her mother, dated 11 April.¹⁷ In this letter, Anna did not express discontent about not having received a reply from Elisabeth, because in the meantime she had received a letter which Elisabeth had written on 6 March.¹⁸ On 26 April Anna replied to Elisabeth's letter from early March,¹⁹ and less than three weeks later (16/17 May), Elisabeth and Johann Casimir again wrote to her.²⁰

The examples demonstrate how the preserved order of outgoing and received letters reflects the sequence in which they were received and responded to. The reconstruction is based exclusively on the order in which the letters appear in the bound volumes, but can be confirmed by the content of several of the letters. Having begun a letter with a formal address and good wishes, the correspondents

¹³ SächsHstA, Kop. 516, fol. 1-6.

¹⁴ SächsHstA, Loc. 8534/2, pp. 142-146.

¹⁵ SächsHstA, Kop. 516, fol. 29-31.

¹⁶ SächsHstA, Loc. 8534/2, pp. 150-158.

¹⁷ SächsHstA, Kop. 516, fol. 42-43.

¹⁸ SächsHstA, Loc. 8534/2, p. 148. Anna refers to this letter in her reply in Kop. 516, fol. 42-43.

¹⁹ SächsHstA, Kop. 516, fol. 48.

²⁰ SächsHstA, Loc. 8534/2, pp. 162-164.

typically proceeded with a reference to the latest letter received from the person they now were addressing: on 5 May, Johann Casimir continued, "... Your Grace's gracious and motherly letter, which she prepared for me Dresden 18 March, I received the 10th of the subsequent [month] April ...". And Elisabeth wrote, "... Your Grace's two motherly letters have been brought to me shortly after each other ...".²¹

But there are instances in which one seeks in vain for a reply to a specific letter, and it should be kept in mind that many letters have been lost. However, because of the intact provenance of the letters sent from Elisabeth, Johann Casimir and his parents to Anna, it is frequently possible to reconstruct at least the approximate date of a lost letter.²²

Patterns of communication

The two volumes of "Handschriften" which are of interest here comprise of a total of c. 410 letters. Roughly half of these were sent from Elisabeth to Anna. In comparison, drafts for c. 150 letters from Anna to Elisabeth survive. It may seem unsound to employ the numbers of letters as an indication of social relations. Not only is it clear that an unknown number of letters have been lost, but the quantities also do not reveal anything about the content of letters. However, as illustrated in the table below, the number of surviving letters which were exchanged between two correspondents show a remarkable concordance: when the number of letters Anna sent to Elisabeth increased, so did the number of

²¹ "... Eg gnedige vnd Mutterliches schreiben so sie habe zu Dresden den 18 Martÿ an mich gethan hab ich ... volgendens den 10 Aprilis ... empfangen ...", Johann Casimir to Anna and Elisabeth to Anna, "...EG mütterlich zwei schreiben sind mir kurtzlich nach einander vberantworten ...", both 5 May 1572, SächsHstA, Loc. 8532/4, pp. 156-158.

²² An example from early February illustrates this point. At the beginning of February 1571 Anna received letters from the Elector Palatine, his wife Amalie, Johann Casimir and Elisabeth on the same day, (SächsHstA, Loc. 8532/4, pp. 52 & 54-60). Only the reply to Elisabeth can be found in Anna's letter-books, (SächsHstA, Kop. 514, fol. 212). It is unlikely that Anna replied to her daughter and not to the other correspondents. 17/18 March, Friedrich, Amalie and Johann Casimir again sent letters to Anna, and in these they thanked her for the replies (Loc. 8534/2, pp. 72-80). Hence, Anna had sent letters to them between late-February and mid-March, but these are not preserved.

letters from Elisabeth to Anna. The same is true for Anna’s exchange with Johann Casimir. This gives reason to believe that development outlined below reflects more than the result of coincidental transmission of the material.

Year	Number of letters from Anna to Elisabeth	Number of letters from Elisabeth to Anna	Number of letters from Anna to Johann Casimir	Number of letters from Johann Casimir to Anna
1570 ²³	7	6	4	5
1571	9	17	5	14
1572	7	5	4	6
1573	10	12	7	9
1574	7	10	2	2
1575	8	19	2	7
1576	16	20	1	1
1577	14	16	0	1
1578	12	11	3	9
1579	10	16	0	1
1580	10	13	0	0
1581	9	12	0	1
1582	8	5	0	0
1583	7	10	0	0
1584	12	10	2	2
1585	6	8	0	0
Total	152	190	30	58

From the fifteen years investigated in this paper, 342 letters exchanged between Anna and Elisabeth survive, but only 88 exchanged between Johann Casimir and Anna can be located. Generally, more letters sent to Anna than sent by her have survived, possibly because not all of her letters were entered in the letter-books. During the first years of the marriage, Elisabeth and Johann Casimir sent almost the same number of letters to Anna, and this suggests that the later

²³ For 1570 only the letters written after 1 June (i.e. after the wedding) are included.

discrepancy only in part can be explained by the gender of the correspondents and the gendered relationships. The communication between Anna and Elisabeth reached a quantitative peak between 1575 and 1580 (between 23 and 36 letters survive from each of these years), and the lowest number is found in 1572 (12 letters). Johann Casimir and Anna exchanged the highest number of letters in 1571 (19 letters), and with the exception of 1578, they almost ceased to communicate from 1574.²⁴ The most conspicuous change in the pattern in the communication is that the two sets of exchanges show opposite trends, and the figures in the overview indicate that the turning point may be located around 1574-1575.

During the first four years of the marriage one can locate large sets of letters, which is to say several letters from different addressees to Anna and/or August dated the same day or only one or two days apart. Most frequently these sets consist of letters from Johann Casimir and Elisabeth to August and Anna, hence, four letters sent together.²⁵ Between July 1570 and December 1575, 43 letters from Johann Casimir to Anna survive. Only five of these bear a date on which Elisabeth did not write to her mother.²⁶ But also letters from other correspondents were collected and sent together. A package sent during January 1571 contained at least six letters, the “usual” four (from Elisabeth and Johann Casimir to Anna

²⁴ The sudden increase of letters exchanged between Anna and Johann Casimir in 1578 was caused by at least two related questions. In July 1578, Johann Casimir left for the Netherlands to lead his army in support of the Dutch Calvinists. Anna wanted Elisabeth to be in Saxony during her husband's absence, and this was addressed in several letters. From October until Christmas, Elisabeth was in Saxony, and when Johann Casimir sent a letter to her it seems that he also included one for Anna. In these he repeatedly addressed when he wanted Elisabeth to be back in the Palatinate, see for examples Loc. 8535/2, pp. 151-153, 155-158 & 163.

²⁵ 25/26 Jan. 1571, Johann Casimir and Elisabeth penned letters to both Anna and August: Johann Casimir to August 26. Jan. 1571, SächsHstA, Loc. 8514/4, p. 46; Elisabeth to August, 25 Jan. 1571, Loc. 8514/4, p. 44; Johann Casimir to Anna, and Elisabeth to Anna, both 26 Jan. 1571, Loc. 8532/4, pp. 54 & 59-60.

²⁶ These five were dated 14 Aug. 1570, 26 Dec. 1571, 9 Aug. 1573, 29 Sep. 1573 and 4 May 1575, SächsHstA, Loc. 8532/4, pp. 30, 141 c, 227 & 240 and Loc. 8535/2, p. 10.

and August) and letters to Anna from both the Elector Palatine and his wife.²⁷ This pattern changed from the mid-1570s. When the contact between Johann Casimir and Anna diminished, so did the correspondence between Anna and Elisabeth's parents-in-law. However, around the same time another kind of "letter-set" becomes visible: two letters from Elisabeth to Anna written on the same day.²⁸

When assessing the quantitative extent of the correspondence between Elisabeth and Anna, the composite content of the two volumes of received letters must be kept in mind. Frequently, correspondences are conceptualised or even published as isolated exchanges between two people. The provenance of the letters Elisabeth sent to Anna suggests that this imagination of easily definable exchanges between two individuals, which lie behind this practice, should be dismissed. Even if each letter has only one sender and one addressee, several participants have to be granted access into the exchanges. In the description above, it has been demonstrated how the letters from a married couple were bound together, and the overview points to a direct interrelation between the contact which took place between Elisabeth and Johann Casimir, respectively, and Anna. But the inclusion of participants into an exchange should be taken further than to spouse: among the c. 400 letters catalogued as correspondence from Johann Casimir and Elisabeth to Anna one can identify more than twenty correspondents.²⁹ As the title of the volumes show, Elisabeth and Johann Casimir constituted a unit. From the perspective of the Saxon Electress, the other

²⁷ Friedrich to Anna, 25 Jan. 1571, SächsHstA, Loc. 8532/4, p. 52, Johann Casimir to Anna, Amalie to Anna and Elisabeth to Anna, all 26 Jan. 1571, Loc. 8532/4, pp. 54-60. Johann Casimir and Elisabeth to August, both 26 Jan. 1571, Loc. 8514/4, pp. 44 & 46.

²⁸ For example Elisabeth to Anna, 4 May 1577 (Loc. 8535/2, pp. 117 & 119), 2 Sep. 1577 (pp. 123-124), 11 March 1578 (pp. 137-138), 3 May 1578 (pp. 142-143, the second of these is not dated, but was received in Dresden together with the dated letter, and the content elaborates on information provided in the first letter), 7 Feb. 1583 (pp. 232-233), and 16 March 1585 (pp. 264-265).

²⁹ At times Elisabeth and Johann Casimir enclosed a copy of a letter they had received from or sent to another correspondents. The individuals who only are represented in the copies of these letters are not included in this count.

members of her daughter's family-in-law, and Elisabeth's closest servants in the household (two temporary court masters sent from Saxony to be with Elisabeth while Johann Casimir participated in the French Wars of Religion in 1576, her court mistresses and her chaplain,) belonged to the same unit.³⁰

The composite compilation of the two volumes might be a reflection of what Natalie Zemon Davis described as "apertures in the boundary of the person" in her discussion of the "self" in sixteenth-century France.³¹ In a related manner, Horst Wenzel has argued that Helene Kottannerin, a chambermaid to the Hungarian queen, Elisabeth (1409-1442), portrays herself as an extension of the Queen in her memoirs.³² However, as both Wenzel's careful text analysis and Davis' varied documentation remind the reader, it is much too hazardous to draw any such conclusions only on the basis of the letters' provenance. Rather, provenance should be considered as an aid which can facilitate a greater awareness of an early modern letter-writers' social embeddedness and help locate times of change in social relations among the individuals who contemporaries considered to be part of the exchange.

³⁰ The letters exchanged between Anna, on the one hand, and Elisabeth's parents-in-law, her court mistresses and the two court masters, on the other, are almost exclusively devoted to matters related to Elisabeth. See for example the letters from Amalie, Electress Palatine, Loc. 8532/4, pp. 44-45, 56, 68, 74, 131, 152, 218 & 305, and Loc. 8535/2, p. 9. The letters from Anna von Wolfersdorf, Elisabeth's first court mistress, Loc. 8532/4, pp. 96-97, 111, 120, 129-130, 135, 140-141, 149, 160 & 182, The letters from the two temporary court masters, David Hirschfelt and Heinrich von Petschwitz can be found in Loc. 8535/2, pp. 38, 40, 43, 45, 52-54, 71, 76, 82, 84, & 93. The letters sent by Anna von Hohenlohe and Margaretha von Schleinitz, the two noble widows who recurrently spent longer periods by Elisabeth can be found in Loc. 8535/2, pp. 47, 72, 74, 89, 91, 97, 98, 99 c, 102, 107, 139, 144-147, 162, 167, 169-171, 176, 179-181, 183, 185, 187 & 189.

³¹ Natalie Zemon Davis, "Boundaries and the Sense of Self in Sixteenth-Century France", in: T.C. Heller et al. (eds.), *Reconstructing Individualism. Autonomy, Individuality, and the Self in Western Thought*, Stanford, 1986, pp. 53-63.

³² Horst Wenzel, "Zwei Frauen rauben eine Krone. Die denkwürdigen Erfahrungen der Helene Kottannerin (1439-1440) am Hof der Königin Elisabeth von Ungarn (1409-1442)", in: Regina Schulte (ed.), *Der Körper der Königin. Geschlecht und Herrschaft in der höfischen Welt seit 1500*, Frankfurt a. M., 2002, pp. 27-48.

A double correspondence

The development of communication between Anna and Elisabeth, and between Anna and Johann Casimir, suggests that a change took place in the relationships between the three around 1574-1575. Until 1574 Elisabeth and Johann Casimir had sent most of their letters to Anna together, but at this point Johann Casimir and Anna almost stopped corresponding. In contrast, the number of letters exchanged between Elisabeth and Anna increased, as did the number of letters Elisabeth wrote “in haste” and/or left undated.³³ It is equally remarkable that Elisabeth, from the mid-1570s, in some cases wrote two letters to her mother on the same day. These are the changing patterns of the correspondence, from which I will depart in order to examine what the content of the letters reveal about the nature and possible causes of the changes.

One of the last instances in which Johann Casimir and Elisabeth sent letters to her parents together was at the beginning of February 1575. On 6 February, Johann Casimir penned a letter to Anna and, on the subsequent day, one to August.³⁴ On 7 February Elisabeth also wrote two letters, but both were addressed to her mother.³⁵ In his letters Johann Casimir assured his parents-in-law that he was following their wish that he spend more time by Elisabeth. He expressed gratitude for the offer of their portraits, and he thanked August for his financial help to secure Elisabeth through the acquisition of the estate Friedelheim. Finally, he wished them a happy new year.

The first of Elisabeth’s letters to Anna is relatively short, but the second is almost three times that length.³⁶ In the first letter, she thanked Anna for a recent letter, expressed happiness about her parents’ and siblings’ well-being, and

³³ “... in eil ...”, see for example, Elisabeth to Anna 12 April 1574, SächsHstA, Loc. 8532/4, p. 263, Elisabeth to Anna, without date (autumn 1574), Loc. 8532/4, p. 283 and Elisabeth to Anna, without date (Jan.-Feb. 1575), Loc. 8532/4, p. 289.

³⁴ Johann Casimir to Anna, 7 Feb. 1575, SächsHstA, Loc. 8532/4, p. 272, and Johann Casimir to August, 6 Feb. 1575, Loc. 8532/4, p. 273.

³⁵ Elisabeth to Anna, 7 Feb. 1575, SächsHstA, Loc. 8532/4, pp. 290-294.

³⁶ The first letter contains 320 words and the second 880 words.

assured her mother that both she and Johann Casimir were in good health. She then proceeded with an account of the answer Johann Casimir had given to her numerous requests for permission to visit her parents. He had told her that a Diet soon would be proclaimed to take place in the vicinity of Saxony, and that she there would have a chance to see her parents. Only if this did not happen or her parents could not attend the Diet, would she be allowed to visit them in Saxony. His reluctance to grant her permission for the trip was explained by financial concerns. Finally, she sent wishes for a happy new year and commended her mother in the protection of God and herself in her mother's heart.

The content of the second letter stands in stark contrast to the first. Here Elisabeth thanked her mother for an autograph letter and for the consolation Anna sought to provide her daughter because God had given her such a difficult cross to bear. She told Anna not to worry about Elisabeth's trip to Heidelberg, because – with God's help – she would find a way to avoid her father-in-law and Heidelberg altogether. The next passage regards the money Johann Casimir had received from August. Elisabeth explained that she did not know about it nor about the conditions on which August had given the gift until the most recent letters from her parents had arrived. Only then had she realized that August (on Johann Casimir's request) had sent her and her husband 6,000 Thalers. The large sum was given on the condition that Johann Casimir deed the estate Friedelheim to Elisabeth. Johann Casimir had not told her anything about this until the letters arrived, but then "... he instantly told me about it and said that he will deed it to me...".³⁷ He now had asked his father whether the deed should be hereditary or only for Elisabeth's lifetime. No answer had arrived yet, but she promised to disclose to her mother whatever else she found out about it. Having expressed gratitude for her parents' help in this matter, she returned to the question of a possible visit to Saxony, and wrote, "... with a solemn heart I must bewail ... that

³⁷ "... hatt ers mirs flucks gesagt ... [und] ... das er mirs wil verschreiben ...", Elisabeth to Anna, 7 Feb. 1575, SächsHstA, Loc. 8532/4, pp. 292-294.

my lord will not permit me to [visit] Your Grace ...”.³⁸ She explained that Johann Casimir had asked his father for advice. The Elector had replied that, “... he could not advise my lord to permit me to go there ...”.³⁹ Elisabeth begged her parents to do all they could to help her obtain a permission to visit them. Before closing, she assured Anna that she never would be led astray from the true teaching of God’s word. Finally, she called upon God to stand by her and she commended her in her mother’s prayers and in her mother’s heart.

In the first letter, Elisabeth maintained the appearance of a loyal and obedient wife, but in the second she revised the smooth reality pictured in both her husband’s and in her first letter. She made it clear that Johann Casimir intentionally had withheld information from her – against the wishes of her parents. She depicted his deep subjugation to his father, which transferred some of the blame to Friedrich III, but it also weakened Johann Casimir in relation to his parents-in-law. The contrast between Elisabeth’s two letters leaves no doubt that the second letter was written without Johann Casimir’s knowledge. And in keeping with the secrecy, Anna made no references to any of the information it contained in her replies.⁴⁰ Elisabeth knew exactly what her husband wanted his parents-in-law to know and which subjects she was expected to leave untouched when writing to them. Having completed a later letter in which she begged her parents to stop Johann Casimir from intervening in the French Wars of Religion, she added, “... my lord knows no word of the messenger ...”.⁴¹

³⁸ “ich mus ... mit bedrubten hertzen klagen das ... mich mein herr nit erlauben wil zu EG ...”, Elisabeth to Anna, 7 Feb. 1575, SächsHstA, Loc. 8532/4, pp. 292-294.

³⁹ “... er konet meinen herren nicht raten das er mich hinein liss ...”, Elisabeth to Anna, 7 Feb. 1575, SächsHstA, Loc. 8532/4, pp. 292-294.

⁴⁰ Anna to Johann Casimir, and Anna to Elisabeth, both 3 March 1575, SächsHstA, Kop. 518, fol. 20-22. The continuation of the discussion can be followed in Johann Casimir’s and Elisabeth’s letters to Anna, 5 April 1575, Loc. 8535/2, pp. 5-6, and Johann Casimir to Anna, 4 May 1575, Loc. 8535/2, p. 10

⁴¹ “... mein herr weis kein word von den boten ...”, Elisabeth to Anna, 16 Oct. 1575, SächsHstA, Loc. 8535/2, p. 22.

The first secret exchange between Elisabeth and Anna which can be documented took place in the late-summer of 1573. In August 1573 Elisabeth included an undated note with one of her letters to Anna,

“... I beg Your Grace, for the will of God, not to reveal that I have written this to the [my] mother and lady, my lord does not know that I have written it ... I beg Your Grace once again that You will not reveal me, if so I will be in difficulties, they find that I write too much to Your Grace ... I would have written it to Your Grace sooner but no possibility has transpired, my lord is not here [now] ... or else I could not have written it because my lord seals all my letters...”⁴²

The information she so urgently needed to send to her mother regarded the christening of the child she was expecting. Her husband and parents-in-law wanted the child to be christened by a Reformed/Zwinglian priest, a desire which went against Elisabeth’s – and her parents’ – Lutheran beliefs. Moreover, it went against their understanding of the agreement regarding Elisabeth’s confession, which had been reached between them and Johann Casimir prior to the wedding.⁴³ Until this point, no doubts had existed about Elisabeth’s confessional freedom in her new dynasty and Anna had placed greater weight on the accounts of her daughter’s behaviour which she received from Johann Casimir and Elisabeth’s court mistress than the assurances given by Elisabeth.⁴⁴ As Elisabeth proved her willingness to defend her (and her parents’) confession, Anna’s trust in her grew and the confidentiality, which had existed between Anna and Johann

⁴² “... ich bitte EG vmb gottes willen sie wollen mich nicht melten das ichs der frawmutter geschriben haben den mein herr nicht weis das ichs ... geschriben habe ... ich bitte EG nochmals sie wolten mich nicht melten den mirs sunsten vbel gehen wird[,] sie meinen sunsten ich schreibe EG zu viel ... ich hettes lengst EG gerne geschriben so hats die gelegenheit nicht zutragen wollen[,] ... mein herr [ist] nicht hir ... sunsten hette ichs auch nicht kunen thun den mein herr mir alle meine schreiben selber zu mach ...”, Elisabeth to Anna, without date (Aug. 1573), SächsHstA, Loc. 8532/4, p. 236.

⁴³ The marriage agreement and the diverging interpretations of it will be discussed at greater length in the Ph.D.-dissertation, which I am preparing. An older analysis can be found in August Kluckhohn, “Die Ehe des Pfalzgrafen Joh. Casimir mit Elisabeth von Sachsen”, *Abhandlungen der Historischen Classe der Königlich Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, Vol. 12 (1874), pp. 81-165. However, Kluckhohn took few of Anna’s letters into account and her exchanges with Johann Casimir and Elisabeth during the autumn 1573 contain information, which conflict with his conclusions.

⁴⁴ Anna’s distrust in Elisabeth appears most clearly in her letter to Elisabeth, 8 Jan. 1572, SächsHstA, Kop. 514, fol. 3-4.

Casimir during the first years of the marriage, disappeared. This initiated a series of changes. Not only did both Elisabeth's and Johann Casimir's relationship to Anna change, so did their relationships to August, and the interactions between the two electoral couples. After 1574 no contact between Elisabeth's father-in-law and Anna can be documented, and only one letter from Anna to the Electress Palatine survives from 1575.⁴⁵ Instead the contact between Anna and Johann Casimir's older (and Lutheran) brother, Ludwig, and his wife became more frequent.⁴⁶

During the next years, it became increasingly difficult for Elisabeth to keep the secret letters away from Johann Casimir's attention. On 2 September 1577, she again penned two letters to Anna; a short letter, which Johann Casimir is likely to have read and approved, and a much longer and bleaker account of the obstacles she faced with regard to communications with her mother. She explained that she usually had no problems securing messengers, but when Johann Casimir knew that she was preparing letters for her parents, no messenger would be made available. In addition, Johann Casimir had warned her that

“... he would have great attention paid to my letters and he would have some messengers slated ... in order to know what I write ... I excused myself the best I could [by saying] that I do not write either of Your Graces anything that he does not read, most heartedly beloved mother I fear from my heart to write more to Your Grace ...”⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Anna to Friedrich III, 1 March 1574, SächsHstA, Kop. 517, fol. 154, and Anna to Amalie, 4 June 1575, Kop. 518, fol. 65.

⁴⁶ Although the change is subtle, a tendency is clear. The last letter from Anna to Amalie is dated 4 June 1575. The earliest letter from Anna to Elisabeth (Ludwig's wife), which is included in Anna's letter-books, is from 1573. But the contact between the two increased and reached a peak in 1576 when Anna sent five letters to her daughter's sister-in-law. See SächsHstA, Kop. 518, fol. 188 (4 Sep. 1576) and Kop. 519, fol. 168, 191, 266 & 281 (2 March, 19 April, 19 Oct. & 13 Nov. 1576).

⁴⁷ “... er wolte mir ... wol achtung auff meine briffe geben lassen er wolte auch ein deil botten nider werffen lassen das ... [er] ... erfure was ich schreibe[,] ich habe mich entschultiget auff mein bestes ich schreibe beiden EGG nichts als was mein herr selber lesse[,] hertzallerlibeste frawmutter ich furchte mich von hertzen EG mehr zu schreiben ...”, Elisabeth to Anna, 2 Sep. 1577, SächsHstA, Loc. 8535/2, pp. 123-124.

Prompted by this account, Anna formalised the secret correspondence between herself and her daughter. "... We therefore intend to send one of our own messengers to You Beloved every month and to always have him bring [you] a secret letter ...".⁴⁸ Johann Casimir could read the "common letter",⁴⁹ but Elisabeth was to take great care of the other letter and burn it after reading it. The secret correspondence, which thus far had been sporadic, could now be carried out at regular intervals. As Johann Casimir's correspondence with Anna waned, the contact between Elisabeth and Anna not only became more frequent, their correspondence also doubled.

Provenance as a source to dynastic embeddedness

I have made an effort to demonstrate how the provenance of Elisabeth's letters can be used as a vehicle for an investigation into the degree of embeddedness, which characterised Elisabeth's position in the dynastic configuration she was part of. It has been shown that the development of Elisabeth's correspondence was closely related to the development of her relationship to her husband and to the relationship between him and his parents-in-law. The provenance of her letters thus help to emphasise the interdependence between the various relationships between both groups and individuals within a dynastic figuration.

I consciously employ the terms figuration and interdependence and this requires a mention of the work of Norbert Elias. Elias argued that individuals can only be understood in their interdependence and as part of what he termed

⁴⁸ "... So seint wir bedacht ... alle Monat zum wenigsten einen eigenen bothen bey DL zu haben vnd Ime alwege ein vortraulich neben schreiben mittzugeben ...", Anna to Elisabeth, 25 Oct. 1577, SächsHstA, Loc. 8535/2, pp. 126-127.

⁴⁹ "... gemeine schreiben ...", Anna to Elisabeth, 25 Oct. 1577, SächsHstA, Loc. 8535/2, pp. 126-127. Given the disputed meaning of the word "gemein", an adequate translation is difficult to find. According to Lucian Hölscher, the meaning approximated "open" or "public", see L. Hölscher, *Öffentlichkeit und Geheimnis: eine begriffsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zur Entstehung der Öffentlichkeit in der frühen Neuzeit*, Stuttgart, 1979. However, the usages, which can be documented in the letter-collection of Anna of Saxony, indicate that "common" may be a more appropriate translation.

figurations.⁵⁰ Elias' conceptual framework implies that when the relation between two individuals changes, this has consequences for all relationships within the figuration. While this approach help to develop an understanding of the social processes and patterns of human behaviour, it also entails the risk of what Jeroen Duindam, called "the vicious circle" within which every element is both "... a prerequisite for and the consequence of a development".⁵¹ In other words, it risks compromising questions of causality.

The same danger is present if provenance is overestimated as a source. Neither the provenance of Elisabeth's letters nor Elias' concept of figuration can point to the causes which initiated the processes of changing relationships. A consequent application of the approach advocated by Elias can even result in a disregard for notions of beginnings and ends, in part because his work regards long-term developments but also because of his insistence on change as a process. When discussing provenance of letters however, the "scale" of time is smaller and defined in relation to changes within the lives of individuals. The changes revealed through an examination of the letters' provenance thus permit change to be located more precisely in time than the figurational approach.

The second point I wish to make regards the dichotomy of autonomy and dependency. The patterns of social interaction and the changes in these, as revealed by the letters' provenance, risk over-emphasising embeddedness – a critique which also has been raised against Elias' figurational approach.⁵² The cost could be insensitivity to the subtle traits of autonomy and subjectivity, which can be found in the letter-texts. The example of Elisabeth's double

⁵⁰ Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process. Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*, Oxford, 1994 (first German edition, 1939), especially pp. 314-316; Norbert Elias, *Homo Clausus: The Thinking Statues* in Norbert Elias, *Norbert Elias: On Civilization, Power, and Knowledge: Selected Writings*, ed. and with an introduction by Stephen Menell & Johan Goudsblom, Chicago, 1998, pp. 269-290; and Robert van Krieken, *Norbert Elias*, London, 1998, pp. 55-65.

⁵¹ Jeroen Duindam, *Myths of Power. Norbert Elias and the Early Modern European Court* Amsterdam, 1995, p. 27.

⁵² Chris Rojek, "Problems of Involvement and Detachment in the Writings of Norbert Elias", *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 37, (1986), pp. 584-596.

correspondence and the risks she took in relation to her husband and parents-in-law in order to maintain an uncensored communication with her mother can be interpreted as an expression of her ability to act autonomously. But embeddedness will only be exaggerated, if – as argued by Natalie Zemon Davis – its ability to prompt self-awareness is forgotten.⁵³

The double correspondence between Elisabeth and Anna reflects the double reality which Elisabeth accepted – and co-created – in order to negotiate the conflicting interests within the dynastic figuration she was part of. This echoes what John Martin has described as “a divided self”. According to Martin, “...[t]he experience of personhood in the Renaissance world was ... often the experience of a divided self, ... a person ... was frequently forced to erect a ... façade that disguised his or her convictions, beliefs, or feelings”.⁵⁴ Although Elisabeth was not required to hide her religious beliefs, she was aware of the need to disguise her reliance upon her parents and the steps she took to defend her continued confessional freedom. However, the tension, which Martin resolves through a distinction between conviction and appearance, bears resemblance to the questionable dichotomy of autonomy and dependency. This is especially the case when he points to the development of a new subjectivity during the sixteenth century, a subjectivity characterised by a new sense of “... ownership of and agency behind one’s speech, thoughts, and actions...”.⁵⁵ Although Johann Casimir accused Elisabeth of possessing too strong a will of her own,⁵⁶ she did not accept “ownership” of her actions. The course of her life reflected God’s will and any decision she made depended upon God’s will to be made manifest. When she decided to end the secret correspondence between her and Anna, she

⁵³ Davis, “Boundaries ... of Self ...”, pp. 53-63.

⁵⁴ John Martin, “Inventing Sincerity, Refashioning Prudence: The Discovery of the Individual in Renaissance Europe”, *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 102 (1997), s. 1309-1342.

⁵⁵ Martin, “Inventing Sincerity ...”, pp. 1309-1342.

⁵⁶ The words which are used in Anna’s summary of Johann Casimir’s complaints is “... eigensinningkeit und halstarrigkeit ...”, Anna to Elisabeth, 8 Jan., 18 March & 18 June 1572, SächsHstA, Kop. 514, fol. 3-4, 30, 75-76.

explained, "... I have commended everything to the dear, faithful God and given it in his power that he will prevent me from writing to Your Grace about it [the difficulties between her and Johann Casimir] ... God grant that all with me will be according to the will of the dear God ...".⁵⁷ Regardless of what God offered her, she would live according to his command, "...because I also have to keep my soul in consideration...".⁵⁸ She assumed responsibility for the salvation of her soul, but the ways in which she sought to secure this was influenced by her position as a bond between two dynasties which were in open competition about her confession and allegiance.

⁵⁷ "... ich habe es den liben drewen gott alles befehlen vnd im heim geben er wirts wol machen das ich EG nichts dar von schreibe ... gott gebe es gehe mir wie es der liben gottes wil ist ...", Elisabeth to Anna, 7 Feb. 1583, SächsHstA, Loc. 8535/2, p. 233.

⁵⁸ "... den ich habe auch meine sehle zu bedencken ...", Elisabeth to Anna, 20 Dec. 1579, SächsHstA, Loc. 8535/2, p. 197.

Reading Italian Love Letters around 1600

by

Xenia von Tippelskirch

« *Quels sont les faits qui sont dignes de susciter l'intérêt de l'historien? Tout dépend de l'intrigue choisie; en lui même, un fait n'est ni intéressant ni le contraire [...] en histoire comme au théâtre tout montrer est impossible, non parce qu'il faudrait trop de pages, mais parce qu'il n'existe pas de fait historique élémentaire, d'atome événementiel.* »
Paul Veyne, *Comme on écrit l'histoire*, 1971.

Letters have always been used by historians as sources, but in the last few decades – particularly after the linguistic turn – they have sparked new methodological reflections.¹ Differences in interpretation result from the fact that letters, which maintain in their written form features of oral communication, might be considered as historical sources, as fictional texts (part of a literary genre) or as evidence of an everyday practice. By the 16th century, people were reflecting on communication via letters, as the following example shows. After claiming that writing and receiving letters distinguishes mankind from animals, Bernardino Pino tells the following story in his treatise on the *Galantuomo*, published in 1604:

“Avenne ad un Gentilhuomo mio amico, che havendo date lettere ad un contadino suo lavoratore che le portasse ad un Gentilhuomo, che stava in Villa, tardò due mesi a darle, & tornando alla Città, mentre il Padrone lo richiede, se le lettere furono date, in un momento, come destato dal sonno, disse, messersi eccovi la risposta, & cavando una carta dallo scarsellino li ridette le medesime lettere, che'l gentil'huomo suo padrone gli havea date. Di che sdegnato acerbamente riprendendolo li minacciò di severo castigo, si che impaurito il balordo Villano, disse; Messere io non ho rubato niente del vostro, & vi ho riportato quel che già ho havuto da voi però vedete bene dentro la lettera, se alcuna cosa vi manca, che tutto

¹ A useful tool is the bibliographical repertory on secondary literature about letter-writing at http://www.textkritik.de/briefkasten/forschungsbibl_a_f.htm. For the present article, see in particular: Roger Chartier (dir.), *La correspondance. Les usages de la lettre au XIXe siècle*, Paris (Fayard) 1991; Adriana Chemello (a cura di), *Alla lettera. Teorie e pratiche epistolari dai greci al Novecento*, Milano (Guerini) 1998; Gabriella Zarri (a cura di), “Il carteggio tra Don Leone Bartolini e un gruppo di gentildonne bolognesi negli anni del Concilio di Trento (1545-1563). Alla ricerca di una vita spirituale”, *Archivio italiano per la storia della pietà*, VII, 1986; Ead. (a cura di), *Per Lettera. La scrittura epistolare femminile tra archivio e tipografia*, Roma, Viella, 1999. I am grateful to Jeff Shapiro and Pernille Arenfeldt for careful proofreading.

voglio restituirvi. Di questo sorrise il gentilhuomo, & da Galant'huomo lo rimandò a casa; tale sciocchezza, ò più tosto malignità del villano, ho io a questo luogo voluto aggiungere Illustrissimo Sig. mio, accioche il lettore veggia come si debba essere bene avvertito nel dare le lettere a qualsiasi persona.”²

Ostensibly he recounts this episode (reminiscent of biblical parables) in order to alert his readers that they should be careful in choosing the person to whom they entrust their letters. But the episode reveals much more. Letters are here situated in the context of a noble culture, the importance of literacy is pointed out, as is the importance of the delivering and receiving of a letter which can fulfill its purpose only once it has been read by the person to whom it is addressed. Indeed, Bernardino Pino himself suggests in his treatise a clear distinction between the letter that is being written and the one being received. The first he labels “epistole” the second “lettere”:

“quanto all’effetto di chi scrive e manda le lettere, si possano e si devono chiamare Epistole, perché sono mandate, ----- & quanto all’atto di chi le riceve si chiamano ragionevolmente lettere, perché sono lette, ----- si che lettere si chiamano in mano del lettore e epistole o scritture in mano di chi le scrive.”³

The following reflections will centre on a series of letters (now kept in the Roman State archives⁴) written by Anna Maria Cesi to her groom and later husband Michele Peretti between 1613 and 1615. I will then proceed to interpret this, in my opinion, emblematic case, focusing mainly on one side of the communication that took place via letters: the reception, that is the act of receiving letters and the significance that was attached to this act.⁵ Therefore, I will read the letters against the backdrop of contemporary treatises, letter guides

² Pino da Cagli, DEL GALANT’HVOMO/ OVERO/ DELL’HVOMO/ PRVDENTE, ET/ DISCRETO./ Di M. Bernardino Pino da Cagli./ LIBRI TRE./ Nei quali con bellissimo modo, & ordine, copiosamente/ si contiene quanto si aspetti a chi fa professio-/ne di perfetto Galant’huomo, Venezia (Sessa)1604, p. 106^r.

³ Ibid., p. 103. “Epistole” derives from greek *επιστελλειν* (to send).

⁴ Archivio di Stato Roma, Famiglia Sforza-Cesarini, 1 parte, 72: *Lettere diverse di donna Anna Maria Cesi al Principe D. Michele Peretti suo sposo e consorte* [hereafter: *Lettere diverse*].

⁵ In focusing on a concrete case, I am trying to follow up my specific interest in reception and reception theory in Early modern Italy. I developed this interest in a much broader context in my PhD thesis *Sotto controllo. Letture femminili all’inizio dell’Epoca moderna in Italia*, IUE 2003.

and literary sources, and other letters kept in court records. Though well aware of the different typology of the examples I will report on (I will deal with published and unpublished letters, written by writers from different social backgrounds), I intend to show their corresponding and contradictory elements in the following paper. The main purpose of this paper is thus to demonstrate some of the difficulties associated with the interpretation of early modern letters and to challenge their clear-cut categorization as fictional or non-fictional texts.

On 11 October 1613, Anna Maria Cesi wrote to Michele Peretti, to whom she was already engaged, addressing him as “consorte et padrone mio,” even though her father did not allow them to see each other.

“Se pensasse, che V. E. credesse di essermi inportuno con scrivermi spesso pensaria anco, che non havesse più memoria di me, et non si ricordasse quanto io le sia Devotissima Serva, ho [sic] che non desse fede alle mie vere parole; ma non voglio credere tanto male, che morirei di dolore, voglio ben sperare, che per la solita cortesia scriva in questa maniera; ma io la suplico non lo fare più. Io sì che dovia dirlo, et non lo pur penso ancor, che mi accorga, che le mie littere siano così sciocche, che non si possono legger’ con gusto anzi le scrivo volentieri spero le siano care, et vorrei potere scriverli tante volte il di quante leggo le littere di V. E. che non ci è numero.”⁶

How shall we historicize her letters? How shall we contextualize this specific case in which we read texts written by a Roman noblewoman, describing her grief over the absence of the beloved, underlining with remarkable self-confidence that she is suffering more than he is? How might we move beyond regarding the letters as constituent part of marriage negotiations – as others have brilliantly done for other similar cases, in order to illustrate the intrigues and power politics of Roman marriage affairs in which women often played an

⁶ “If I would believe that your lordship thinks he is importunate by writing so often, I should also believe that you have forgotten me, not remembering what a devoted servant I am, or that you have no faith in my true words; but I don’t want to believe such painful things, I would sooner die with sorrow; rather I hope that you’re writing in this way only because of your usual politeness; but I urge you, don’t do this again. I should say so, but I don’t believe – if I am right – that my letters are so stupid that they can’t be read with pleasure, I enjoy writing often to you, hoping that you appreciate, and I would like to write as many times a day as I read your letters, uncountable times.” 11.10.1613, *Lettere diverse*.

important role? Scholars such as Ago, Casanova, Fosi, Visceglia and Borello have pointed out that the simple existence of a letter may be evidence of effective networking.⁷

If we want to believe Litta, who gives in his famous 19th century opus *Famiglie celebri di Italia* a brief account of the encounter between Michele Peretti and Anna Maria Cesi (without mentioning the letters), they seem to have been characters straight out of a novel if not a soap opera. Michele Peretti, grandnephew of Sixtus V, had urged Francesco, his only son from his first marriage, to get married to ensure the perpetuation of the family. When, shortly after the death of his first wife, he first went to meet his future daughter-in-law whom Francesco had chosen, Michele himself fell in love with Anna Maria. His son retreated, concentrating instead on an ecclesiastical career – “così non solo giunse ad estinguere l’ardore di una passione, ma anche a perdonare ad un nemico nel genitore stesso”⁸ – and later on becoming cardinal. When Francesco died, the Peretti-family line ended: Michele and Anna Maria never had children.

Was there indeed an intense love affair behind the letters, almost untouched by strategic consideration of an alliance between two Roman noble families, or are we overly eager to accept the 19th century idea of romantic love (re-)presented by Litta? The relationship that we read about in the letters is mainly confined to the writing and especially the reading of letters. One of the main themes is reflections on reading (and writing). And of course, a precondition for the production of love-letters is literacy, that is access to reading skills also for

⁷ Cf. Renata Ago, “Maria Spada Veralli, la buona moglie”, in: Giulia Calvi (a cura di), *Barocco al femminile*, Roma/Bari (Laterza) 1992, pp. 51-70; Cesarina Casanova, “Le donne come ‘risorsa’. Le politiche matrimoniali della famiglia Spada (secc. XVI-XVIII)”, in: *Memoria. Rivista di storia delle donne*, 21 (3), 1987, pp. 56-78; Irene Fosi/ Maria Antonietta Visceglia, “Marriage and Politics at the Papal Court in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries”, in: Trevor Dean/ K. J. P. Lowe (eds.), *Marriage in Italy, 1300-1650*, Cambridge (Cambridge University Press) 1998, pp. 197-224. Benedetta Borello, *Trame sovrapposte : la socialità aristocratica e le reti di relazioni femminili a Roma, 17.-18. secolo*, Napoli (Edizioni scientifiche italiane) 2003.

⁸ Litta, *Famiglie celebri italiane*, fasc. 5, 1821 (Peretti), fasc. 7, 1822 (Cesi).

women.⁹ As Marina D'Amelia has shown for the Italian context, material conditions of delivery, too, necessitated reports about the letters themselves (confirmation of how and when they reached their destination). Our protagonist, Anna Maria, wrote “[...] leggo nelle littere sue, che desidera accertarmi della sua gratia, et che le sono così care le mie littere, che le son causa di farli pigliar incomodi per haver le mie.”¹⁰ But it was not material reasons alone that led to reflections about the reception of a letter.¹¹ Anna Maria let Michele also know that she had slight reservations about what she was reading: “voglio ben sperare, che per la *solita cortesia* scriva in questa maniera; ma io la suplico non lo fare più.” Where could Anna Maria and Michele have learned this courtesy?

At the beginning of the 17th century, published letter-writing guides (so-called *libri di lettere*) were widely distributed in Italy. In his remarkable study of *Le carte messaggiere* (16th century letter-writing guides), Amedeo Quondam drew a distinction between other types of letter and the genre of the love letter, the *lettera amorosa*.¹² In the German-speaking context (at least as far as Nickisch asserts) love letters appear rather late in the published collections of exemplary letters,¹³ but in Italy these books were widespread already from the middle of the

⁹ Elizabeth S. Cohen, “Between Oral and Written Culture: The Social Meaning of an Illustrated Love Letter”, in: Barbara B. Diefendorf/ Carla Hesse (a cura di), *Culture and Identity in Early Modern Europe (1500-1800). Essays in Honor of Natalie Zemon Davis*, Ann Arbor (University of Michigan Press) 1993, pp. 181-201.

¹⁰ Letter from the 16.10.1613. “I read in your letters that you wish to assure me of your grace, and that you appreciate my letters so much, that you go through a lot of trouble in order to get them; certainly I am so impressed by this that I wish I could write to your lordship what I feel, but as I can’t succeed in this, I will be quiet, and I will tell you only that I don’t want other certainty, and I desire as only grace the trust you give my in your words.” *Lettere diverse*.

¹¹ Marina D'Amelia, “Lo scambio epistolare tra Cinque e Seicento: scene di vita quotidiana e aspirazioni segrete,” in: Zarri, *Per lettera*, pp. 79-110.

¹² Amedeo Quondam (a cura di), *Le “carte messaggiere.” Retorica e modelli di comunicazione epistolare: per un indice dei libri di lettere del Cinquecento*, Roma (Bulzoni) 1981, pp. 96-119.

¹³ Only in 1597 was published a collection of letters taken from the famous Amadis: Schatzkammer/ Schöner/ zierlicher Orationen/ Sendbriefen/ Gesprächen/ Vorträgen/ Vermahnungen/ und dergleichen: Auß den vier und zwenthig Büchern des Amadis von Franckreich zusammengezogen. (...) Getruckt zu Straßburg/ in verlegung Lazari Zetzners, 1597. Cf. Reinhard M. G. Nickisch, *Die Stilprinzipien in den deutschen Briefstellern des 17. und 18.*

sixteenth century: *I quattro libri delle lettere amoroze* by Girolamo Parabosco (1545-1617 – 31 reprints), *Delle lettere amoroze* by Luigi Pasqualigo (1563-1607 – 10 reprints) and the *Lettere Amoroze Di Madonna Celia Gentildonna Romana* (1562-1628 – 11 reprints) to name only a few. They were all reprinted several times despite censorship, as I will discuss later. These letter collections draw upon the literary tradition¹⁴ (the first model is the *Heroides* of Ovid)¹⁵ and – as some of them claim explicitly – are conceived as books that are to be quoted. Guasco had advised his daughter (a future courtier at the court of Turin) to learn from letter-writing guides, “perché ne potrebbe un giorno far tua padrona a suo servizio capitale”, without forgetting to tell her to correct the language of her Ladyship if necessary, and to keep quiet about what she would be asked to write (“*secret-ari*” were supposed to keep secrets).¹⁶

The published collections had a significant influence on the epistolary communication of the period and they touched as much on the reading of letters as on their writing. In one popular collection of published letters, the Roman noblewoman Celia withdraws to her room in order to read her letters in private. It was however rather unusual that letters were read in solitude. Anna Maria Cesi thus clarifies

“La Signora Madre sola vede le lettere, che V. E. mi scrive, la quale non ha maggiore desiderio, che di servirla, et tacerà tutto.”¹⁷

Jahrhunderts. Mit einer Bibliographie zur Briefschreiblehre (1474-1800), Göttingen (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht) 1969, pp. 43, 44, 258.

¹⁴ Quondam talks about Parabosco as the “repertorio del dicibile amoroso.” Quondam, *Carte messaggere*, p. 100.

¹⁵ Successful collections by Francesco della Valle e Antonio Bruni were modeled on the *Heroides*: Francesco Della Valle, *LE LETTERE/ DELLE DAME,/ E DEGLI EROI*[...]/ Venezia (Ciotti) 1622; A. Bruni, *EPISTOLE EROICHE/ POESIE/ DEL BRUNI; LIBRI DUE*. In questa seconda Impressione rivedute, et accresciute. Dal medesimo Autore/ Venezia, 1636.

¹⁶ Annibale Guasco, *RAGIONAMENTO/ DEL SIG. ANNIBAL/ GUASCO/ A D. LAVINIA SUA FIGLIUOLA,/ Della maniera del governarsi ella in corte, andando per Dama/ ALLA SERENISSIMA INFANTE/ D. CATERINA, DUCHESSA/ DI SAVOIA*, Torino (erede Bevilacqua) 1586, p. 20^v.

¹⁷“Only my mother sees the letters your lordship writes to me, she has no other desire than to serve you, she will keep everything secret.” 6.10.1613, *Lettere diverse*.

Erasmus suggested that letters should transport feelings,¹⁸ and indeed, the fictional figure Celia provides a detailed account of the emotions she feels when reading the letters from her lover. The letters substitute the presence of the beloved.¹⁹ Celia is relieved when she reads, feels consolation, at times also shame,²⁰ for she weeps for joy and cries with pain.²¹ She kisses the paper, reads it over and over.²²

“Le lettere vostre gratiosissime sempre da me sono disiderate: & quanto più lunghe sono: tanto maggior diletto mi apportano. ma mi avviene: ogni volta che io le ricevo (o sia la contentezza per l’affettione grande: o sia il timore, per la noia: che mi si appresenta per non poter loro dare quella grata risposta: la quale sarebbe di desiderio mio per vostro sodisfacimento) che subito tremo tutta, con una insolita passione di animo: nella quale mi è forza stare infino a tanto: che io mi ritraggo per leggerle: le quali solo in aprirle mi porgono cotanto di forza: & è tanto l’animo: che mi danno, con un contento, & un piacere così grande: che incontanente mi sento racconsolare: et cessandomi ogni affanno, tutta giubilo, & godo, più, & più volte leggendole.”²³

¹⁸ See for this aspect Lisa Jardine, “Reading and the Technology of Textual Affect: Erasmus's Familiar Letters and Shakespeare's King Lear” in: James Raven/ Helen Small/ Naomi Tadmor (a cura di), *The Practice and Representation of Reading in England*, Cambridge (Cambridge University Press) 1996, pp. 77-101, here: p. 79.

¹⁹ Quondam uses the term “feticcio” in order to characterize the specific function of the letter: “Un amore compiutamente inscritto in questo spazio epistolare: tra una lettera scritta e una letta, trascritta e riletta. Uno spazio di ripetizione: all’infinito. Ma in quanto reliquie le lettere assumono anche un’altra funzione nel rapporto amoroso: di oggetto-feticcio, sostitutivo di un’assenza, di una lontananza.” Quondam, *Carte messaggiere*, p. 106.

²⁰ “Non so che dire: se non che a me è occorso, come dice il poeta, solo ov’io era, vergogna hebbi di me. Vi giuro su la fe mia: che in leggendo quella partita, arroschi.” LE LETTERE/ DI MADONNA CELIA/ GENTILDONNA/ ROMANA, Milano (Giovann’Antonio de gli Antonij/ fratelli da Meda) 1562, p. 30^v. She is quoting here “Del mar tirreno a la sinistra riva” di Petrarca. Cf. F. Petrarca, *Canzoniere*, a cura di P. Cudini, Milano (Garzanti) 1983, p. 93 (LXVII).

²¹ Le lettere di Madonna Celia, p. 28^r, 75^r; In other anthologies, too, letters may provoke tears. cf. OPERETTA/ AMOROSA CHE/ INSEGNA A COMPONER/ lettere, & a risponder a persone d’amor ferite, over in amor/ viventi in Toscha lin-/ gua composto, / con piacer non poco, & diletto di tutti gli giova/ni Inamorati, la qual si chiama il /Refugio di Amanti [ALLI LETTORI GIOVAN ANTONIO TAGLIENTE], Venezia (A. de Vian) s.t., p. 10^v n.n., p. 11^r n.n.

²² *Le lettere di Madonna Celia*, p. 13^r, 17^r.

²³ “I always await your letters with great desire, and the longer they are, the more pleasure they transport: but every time I get them (for the happiness or because I fear not to be able to answer them, as I would like to do) I start trembling, deeply moved, and I remain in this state, until I can go to my room to read them: already when opening the letters they give me so much strength, so much courage with enormous pleasure, I feel comfort, the pain ceases, I rejoice,

The letters may give her comfort but also plunge her into the depths of despair, not allowing her to laugh, sleep or eat,²⁴ because they awake memories.

“Questo io dico: che quando io lessi la lettera vostra, [...] mi parve di precipitare: & natomi subito un grandissimo dolor ne’l cuore, tutte le mie disgratie in quello instante mi sovenero di modo, che non potei contenermi di non piangere almeno per una mezza hora.”²⁵

Anna Maria, too, reads Michele’s letters over and over, countless times. She expresses the relief a letter conveys to her:

“Io stavo dolendomi di no[n] haver nova di V. E. quando mi è arrivata, la sua lettera, di quanta consolatione mi sia stata non ho parole da poterl’esplicare, solo le dico, che per l’afflictione che ho della sua assenza ne havevo grandissimo bisogno. [...] Non creda V. E. de sentire la millesima parte di quello io sento la sua partita di qua; perché l’assicuro ci è gran differenza; a che termine la senta io non posso dirlo, perché è infinitamente; questo so bene non potere essere maggiore di quella che è. I giorni son longhissimi, et i tempi assai cattivi, et V. E. mi ha promesso venire presto, questo mi lo allegerisce il mio dispiacere, dimani è Giovedì”²⁶

As Celia trembles for fear of not being able to give an adequate answer to the letters, Anna Maria is troubled by not being able to explain her feelings. She stresses “[...] vorrei saper scrivere a V. E. quello ch’io sento; ma poiché a questo non so arrivare tacerò [...]”²⁷

In 1612, the author Tassoni wondered whether it was better just to see the beloved without talking to her, or to talk without seeing. He concluded that to

while I am reading them over and over.” *Le lettere di Madonna Celia*, p. 29^v. One could also read “tutta tremante”: cf. *Opereta amorosa*, p. 4^r.

²⁴ *Le lettere di Madonna Celia*, p. 33^r.

²⁵ “I tell you, when I was reading your letter [...] I had the impression of falling headlong: I was overwhelmed with grief, remembering all my misery, weeping bitter tears for half an hour.” *Le lettere di Madonna Celia*, p. 41^r.

²⁶ “I was in pain not having any news of your lordship, when I got your letter, I don’t have the words to express how much comfort I felt, I just want to tell you that for the sorrow I feel because of your absence, I needed it desperately. [...] Don’t believe, your lordship, to feel only a thousandth of what I feel because of your departure; I assure you there is a big difference, how much I feel it, I can’t tell you, because it is infinite; I just know that I couldn’t feel more. The days are terribly long, times are quite hard, and your lordship promised me to come soon, that helps me a bit, tomorrow is Thursday.” Letter written in Rome 12.9.1614, *Lettere diverse*.

²⁷ “I read in your letters, that you wish to assure me of your grace, and that you appreciate my letters so much, that you go through a lot of trouble, in order to get them; certainly I remain so impressed by this that I wish I could write to your lordship what I feel, but as I can’t succeed in this, I will be quiet, and I will tell you only that I don’t want other certainty, and I desire as the only grace, the trust you give me in your words.” 16.10.1613, *Lettere diverse*.

speak only was preferable, because speaking (or writing) implied an action; only with words could emotions be expressed and secret messages transmitted. Above all he underlined that words needed the consent of the beloved, because she could be looked at without permission, but if she listened to his words or read them, she had to be in agreement.²⁸ In *Commodità dello scrivere* (1558) Bernardino Pino, who's later work was quoted at the beginning of this paper, pointed out that letters could play an important role in bringing two people together.²⁹ But Pino himself had some doubts about the effectiveness of transmission presuming that the reader could assume a quite active role in receiving the letter.³⁰ This conception of an active reader was not taken for granted in 16th century, and particularly not with regard to female readers. The instrumental use of letters was well explained by Erasmus, who suggested the usage of persuasion (praise and compassion) in the conquest of a young girl :

²⁸ Alessandro Tassoni, *VARIETA' DI PENSIERI/ D'ALESSANDRO TASSONI/ DIVISA IN IX PARTI./ Nelle quali per via di Quisiti con nuovi fondamenti, e ragioni si trattano le più cuiriose materie Naturali,/ Morali, Civili, Poetiche, Istoriche, e d'altre/ facultà, che soglina venire in discorso/ fra cavaglieri, e professori/ di lettere, Modena (eredi Gio. M. Verdi) 1612, p. 302.*

²⁹ “Ma qual più pretioso pegno, e qual ritratto più vero, che il mandare l’animo ne le lettere scolpito? il quale non si cambia per tempo, né si muta per luogo: come la faccia del corpo, che nel ritorno è spesse volte si trasformata, & dissimile dal suo ritratto, che, o quello non si stima preso da lei, o quella si vergogna di porsi in comparatione con lui. Non avviene questo a le lettere, che di tempo in tempo rappresentano l’animo, come se d’hora in hora a guisa di buon corteggiano dal suo signore si lasciasse vedere. [...] non vi par ch’egli alloggi in casa vostra leggendo le sue lettere in risposta.” Bernardino Pino, *DELLA COMMODITA/ DELLO SCRIVERE/ DISCORSO/ DI M. BERNARDINO/ PINO/ AL SIGNOR ANTONIO/ PVTEO*, Roma (Valerio Dorico) 1558, p. 2.

³⁰ “Ma non si vede egli ancora, ch’elle paiono belle, e brutte, sciocche, e prudenti, secondo che chi le legge si trova disposto [...] Avviene nel leggere le lettere il medesimo, che nel mirare, o nel udire uno, che ragioni: o quante volte si tien l’occhio fisso in uno, che parla, quante volte par che l’orecchie raccolgano quanto egli dice, e non dimeno si sta con l’animo tanto lontano, che la mente, la quale è l’occhio della nostra anima, anzi l’anima del nostro spirito; nulla ne comprende: non prova tal effetto in se stesso chi studia, che molte volte legge, e rilegge, e per essere con l’animo altrove non comprende alcun sentimento dello scrittore, ne raccoglie alcun frutto della lettione? [...] quanto di quelli, che con si gagliardi argomenti si persuadono di conchiudere il loro sentimento, che chiedendo a chi scrivono qualche cosa, credono, che mentre la lettera si legge, la cosa si venga da se stessa impetrando. Alcuni tanto s’invaghiscono de loro sottoscritti, che pensano d’impatronirsi de l’animo del lettore con le catene de l’obligatissimo del perpetuo, del’humilissimo, et altre belle parole.” Pino, *Della commodità*, p. 18^v.

“For all human beings, but girls in particular, delight in praise, especially of their beauty, on which they set the greatest store, and also of their age, character, family, refinement, and similar matters. Then, since that sex is tender hearted and easily moved to pity, we shall strive to be as supplicating as possible. We shall extol her merits and belittle our own, or at any rate mention them with great modesty. We shall demonstrate intense love joined to deep despair. We shall try by turns moaning, flattery, and despair; at other times we shall make skilful use of self-praise and promises; we shall employ precedents of famous and honourable women who showed favour to a pure, unfeigned love and to the devotion of youths far beneath them in social condition. We shall attempt to show of humility we shall beg that if she can in no way deign to give her love in return, she will at least resign herself to being loved without prejudice to herself; we shall add that if this request is not granted, we are resolved to cut short a cruel life by whatever means possible.”³¹

We should not fail to mention that a similar advice had already been given in 1215 by Boncompagno da Signa in his *Rota Veneris*. Flattery and gifts were also useful, great promises could be used as well, because every woman is ultimately seducible, as Boncompagno shows by reference to the successful seductions of nuns.³²

The firm belief that the female “sex is tenderhearted and easily moved to pity” prompted a series of authors of didactic treatises to comment on the question of letter-reading. Lodovico Domenichi joked in 1551 about “*uomini da poco*” (worthless fellows), stating that some “cold and jealous” men prevented their wives from reading for fear that they might read or write love letters. In most pedagogical treatises and advice books on behaviour of the second half of the 16th century, we find allusions to the danger attributed to letters.

³¹ Desiderius Erasmus, *Collected Works of Erasmus. Literary and Educational Writings* 3. de Conscribendis Epistolis. edited by J. Kelly Sowards, translated by Charles Fantazzi, Toronto 1985, p. 204 sgg.: “But if we are seeking to arouse feelings of mutual love in a girl, we shall make use of two main instruments of persuasion, praise and compassion. [...] Examples of these precepts may be found in Ovid and the other poets who concern themselves with this subject. There is also a class of love letters which is free from immorality; as when an honourable youth is desirous to take an honourable and well brought up girl as his wife; although this too involves coaxing, tears, complaints, sighs, dreams, and all the rest – things that are not so much disgraceful as rather foolish, giving the appearance of immorality, and therefore of doubtful propriety for setting before young men. [...] In this it will be intellectually challenging to devise methods of recommending oneself without giving an appearance of arrogance or stupidity, unless it is our aim to portray exactly this kind of person.”

³² Étienne Wolff, *La lettre d’amour au Moyen Age*, Paris (NIL) 1996, p. 14.

Sabba Castiglione warned in 1569 that women's hands should be paralysed in order not to accept letters and lyrics, because such written messages are nothing less than poison:

“che in accettare & pigliare [...] lettere, epistole, rime tutte piene di adulationi, assentationi, bugie, & vanità, vogliate haver le vostre mani paralitiche, anzi aride & secche, [...] perché alla fine altro non sono che un veleno, un precipitio, una rovina, un pericoloso scoglio, un naufragio certo dell'honore, della fama, & delle povere anime vostre.”³³

In 1585 Lombardello gave a laconic warning: “lettere non legga, né scritte a se, né ad altre donne senza licentia del marito.”³⁴ Beneath the cautionary words lies the conviction of the seductive art, of the power of persuasion, of the success of transmission of feelings claimed by the theorists of letter-writing, as this was expressed in a novel of the same period: “non terminò la lettura, che si diede per vinta. Erano troppo potenti quei caratteri contro la debolezza del cuore d'una donna, ch'è facile ad ogni impressione.”³⁵ To conserve their honour, female readers were supposed to enact a “ristringimento dei sensi,” a confinement of the senses, because it was through eyes, ears and the other senses that they could be infected with the plague of lasciviousness.³⁶ This conviction was applied also in

³³ Sabba Castiglione, RICORDI OVERO/ AMMAESTRAMENTI DI/ MONSIGNOR SABBA CASTI-/glione, Cavalier Gerosolimitano:/ Ne i quali con prudenti, & christiani discorsi si ragione di/ tutte le materie honorate, che si ricercano/ ad un vero gentiluomo, Venezia (Giovanni/ Bariletto) 1569, pp. 109^v, 110^r. Dionisio Certosino avvertì: “similmente devono fuggir le occasioni del peccare, il dare & ricevere presnti, le nocive familiarità, il scrivere e ricevere lettere secretamente.” Dionisio Certosino, DIVOTO ET VTILE/ TRATTATO DEL DIVINO/ DIONISIO CERTOSINO/ Della Lodeuole Vita/ delle Vergini, Milano (fratelli da Meda) 1563, pp. 12^v/13^r.

³⁴ “A wife should not read letters, neither if they are written to her, nor to other women – without the permission of her husband.” Orazio Lombardelli, DELL'VFFICIO/ DELLA DONNA MARITATA/ Conclusioni CLXXX./ D'ORATIO LOMBAR/DELLI SENESE/ Academico Humoroso, Ferrara (Vittorio Baldini) 1585, p. 35. Nevertheless in Venice (in 1561) Mambre had no reservations about having his wife read his correspondence. Cf. for this example: Archivio della Curia Patriarcale Venezia, Criminalia S. Inquisitionis, b. 2, n.n.

³⁵ “She hadn't finished reading yet – when she was forced to give up. The letters were too powerful against the weekness of a female heart, that is easily impressed.” Novella di Gio. Francesco Loredano in NOVELLE AMOROSE/ De'Signori/ ACADEMICI INCOGNITI/ PUBLISHATE/ DA FRANCESCO CARMENI/ Segretario dell'Accademia./ ALL'ILLUSTRISSIMA SIGNORA MARCHESE/ LAURA PEPOLI RIARI, Venezia (eredi Sarzina) 1641, p. 3.

³⁶ Guazzo, *Dialoghi piacevoli*, 1590 (edizione ricoretta), p. 438. “peste della lasciva”

rules for censorship: In 1574 (when thousands of copies of *lettere amoroze* were already in circulation) the Maestro del Sacro Palazzo, Paolo Costabile,³⁷ signed and published an *Aviso alli librari, che non faccino venire l'infrascritti libri, & ritrovandosene havere, che non li vendino senza licenza* in which for the first time the whole genre of published “*lettere amoroze*” was prohibited.³⁸ This ban was repeated in several local indexes, and in the index of 1590 (the so-called “*indice sistino*” after Sixtus V., the great uncle of Michele Peretti), and in the index of 1593.³⁹ Full realism appears lacking in what Guazzo writes in in 1590 in his *dialoghi piacevoli (Dalla cui familiare lettione potranno senza stanchezza & satietà non solo gli huomini, ma ancora le donne raccogliere diversi frutti morali, & spirituali)* when he states that

“hoggi di non si scrivono più lettere d’amore, non hanno più recapito quelle pietose tabacchine, che sotto colore di divotione, & di santità & sotto maschera di vender tele, recavano le lettere, & l’ambasciate [...] il mondo oggi mai è fatto più piano, più domestico, più pacifico, & più libero.”⁴⁰

³⁷ Cfr. per la questione della interferenza del maestro del sacro palazzo nelle questioni di competenza della Congregazione dell’Indice: G. Fragnito, “The central and the peripheral organization of censorship”, in: G. Fragnito (a cura di), *Church, Censorship and Culture in Early Modern Italy*, Cambridge 2001, pp. 13-49, p. 19.

³⁸ *Index des livres interdits* (edited by J. M. De Bujanda), Quebec 1984 seg. (ILI), vol. IX, p. 746seg. “Lettere amoroze di nessuna sorte, non si permettono”. The prohibition was repeated in the *Lista di libri prohibiti mandata da Roma XV Augusti 1577*, as well as in the *Annotatio librorum prohibitorum* printed in Alessandria by Ercole Quinctiano (1580) and in the *Index of Parma* (printed by Erasmo Viotto in 1580) that specified: “lettere amoroze lib. dua per il Sansovino e qualunque altre lettere amoroze”. In the Index of Naples (1583) we find “lettere amoroze di qualonque auttore, & di qualonque sorte”, in the Roman Index 1590 “literae amatoriae sine nomine auctoris”, ILI, IX, pp. 750, 753, 765, 832. This generic form is not present in the Roman Index of 1593 where single works are mentioned: *Lettere amoroze* by Luigi Pasqualigo, by Parabosco and the *Lettere* by Veronica Franco (with the annotation “se prima non saranno emendate”). ILI, IX, p. 908. At the end of the 17th century another letter-collection was prohibited (probably due to the contribution of Ferrante Pallavicino it contained): *Scielta di lettere amoroze di Ferrante Pallavicino, Luca Assarino, Margarita Costa Romana, Gerolamo Parabosco, et d’altri più eruditi scrittori italiani, con una raccolta di rime amoroze, et aliquante lettere di Cupido, con sua risposta*, Venezia (Bortoli) 1656, was prohibited by decree on 09.02.1683.

³⁹ That this prohibition was not fully shared by all the cardinals of the congregations shows in the fact that it was not included in the index of 1596.

⁴⁰ Guazzo, *Dialoghi piacevoli*, 1590 (edizione ricoretta), p. 438. “nowadays no love letters are written any longer. There are no longer these poor tobacco selling women who simulated

In the very same year, Cassandra, a roughly 19-year-old Venetian prostitute wrote the following letter, which her aunt later tried to use as a proof in a trial against Cassandra. The letter opens with the words:

“ala mia cara speranza e al mio dolce cuor Io o receuto una vostra letera laqual quando io la o buda innele mane dala grandisima alegreca mi o meso apiangere quando poi che io lao aperta esconmencata [cominciata] alegere imi ogi [i miei occhi] pareva due fontane a sentir quele dolce e delicate parole che vien daquela dolce e suave boca del mio dolce ben e dela mia cara speranza.”⁴¹

In order to express her feelings, a woman did not need to have learned from the letter-writing books. The prohibitions, therefore, functioned only partially. We know that Cassandra had read the *Canzoniere* di Petrarca and *Orlando furioso* di Ariosto. Her familiarity with literary texts certainly influenced her writing, but she appropriated the words for her own use. Celia warned against the possible misuse of letters with the following words.

“Perché tutti gli huomini con ogni astutia cercano sempre di ingannare le misere donne: & con dolci, & lusinghevoli parole, & con littere non scritte di cuore, ma ricavate hora da questo, hora da quel libro danno loro a credere quello: che eſi vogliono. Tale confesso essere di me avenuto.”⁴²

Wasn't this just a very acute way of repeating – in the framework of a highly suspect collection of love letters – the moralistic advice to keep away from any love letter? In any case, the copying from letter books was widespread.

In 1629 the highly educated Margherita dei Medici, married to Odoardo Farnese, wrote from Parma to her brother Mattia in Florence that she had replaced her secretary because the old one was unable to come up with new concepts, and he could not even find new interesting subjects of conversation in

devotion and pretending to sell linen delivered letters, [...] the world today is plain, more domestic, peaceful and free.

⁴¹ Archivio di Stato Venezia, S. Uffizio, b. 66, fasc. Lizzari, Cassandra (1590). Ruggiero mentions her case, without talking about the love letter. Cf. Guido Ruggiero, *Binding Passions. Tales of Magic, Marriage, and Power at the End of the Renaissance*, New York/ Oxford (Oxford University Press) 1993. In another inquisitorial case we find letters addressed to “Vita del anima mia”, “cocha mia dolgisima” and to “cocho mio dolcisemo”. ASV, S. Uffizio, b. 80, Cristina Collarina.

⁴² *Le lettere di Madonna Celia*, p. 8^r.

his letter book.⁴³ The letter book she refers to is the collection of “*concetti*” by Garimberti,⁴⁴ published at least 24 times between 1550 and 1610. The collection presented a series of ready-made sentences for all occasions arranged in alphabetical order. Among the aphorisms, we are told how to express joy upon receiving a letter. One of the suggested sentences is:

“S’io vi paresse esser importuno col ricordarvi ogn’hora, che mi scrivete spesso, datene la colpa all’amor ch’io vi porto, che condito dalla bellezza del vostro ingegno, fa ch’io sento un’estremo piacer leggendo le vostre lettere.”⁴⁵

This phrase calls to mind the sentence used by Anna Maria Cesi quoted at the beginning of this paper. It should be mentioned that Garimberto provided also set phrases for simulating love (“*concetti per fingere di amare*”).

By the beginning of 17th century, women and men move between standard expressions in their letters, a highly codified genre. The writing of letters must always be seen in connection with the various ways in which the same letters might be read. Epistolary communication cannot be thought of without considering the moral framework in which the letters were written. What must be reconstructed are the circumstances of receiving letters, the role of the in-betweens, the specific *tactique* (De Certeau) of appropriating texts, and the meaning the exchange of love letters could have. The correspondents were quite conscious of their use of readymade phrases. It seems worthwhile to investigate in detail how the letter writers tried to overcome the dilemma of expressing themselves forced to use inevitable standard expressions. Barthes recognizes behind this dilemma a semantic standard feature. He describes the love letter with the following words in his *Fragments d’un discours amoureux*:

⁴³ Archivio di Stato Firenze, Mediceo del Principato, b. 5306, c. 61. “non gli sovengono più concetti nuovi, [...] dal suo Garimberti non sa cavare più concetti.”

⁴⁴ Girolamo Garimberti, *Concetti di Hieronimo Garimberto et de più autori. Raccolti da lui per scrivere familiarmente*, Roma (Vincenzo Valgrisi) 1551.

⁴⁵ “allegrarsi [...] di lettere ricevute” Ibid., p. 19.

“La figure vise la dialectique particulière de la lettre d’amour, à la fois vide (codée) et expressive (chargée de l’envie de signifier le désir).”⁴⁶

When considering love letters written around 1600 we might agree with this aphorism, nevertheless it should be taken into account that the specific codes and the way of attributing significance change over time.

⁴⁶ R. Barthes, *Fragments d’un discours amoureux*, Paris 1977, p. 187. Dolfi gives a convincing interpretation of this fragment in the introduction to A. Dolfi (a cura di), “*Frammenti di un discorso amoroso*” nella scrittura epistolare moderna. *Atti di seminario. Trento, maggio 1991*, Roma 1992, pp. 9-22, here p. 19: “Dire l’affetto, l’amore – e dirli per lettera in scrittura – è allora per tutti tentare un’impresa impossibile, che la vita resta fatalmente al di là delle parole, della loro necessaria, perenne tautologia. Ne la delusione è solo per l’inadeguatezza del medium, ma della situazione: che il discorso doppio dei due corrispondenti, è sempre o quasi squilibrato, sempre, o quasi condannato all’ansia, [...] all’insoddisfazione, [...] all’infelicità. Nate dall’assenza, le lettere ne divengono il simbolo, la ipostasi, attraverso quella stessa scrittura che avrebbe potuto e dovuto esserne la negazione; fatte inquietante testimonianza di una perenne linea di discriminazione che si spinge poi al punto di tangenza tra la vita e la scrittura, il letterario e ciò che non lo è.”

“Wer wird schon Gellert sein? Hier schreibe ich!” -

Geschriebene Äußerungen als mündliche Herausforderungen

VON

Beatrix Bastl

1. Die Aufgabe oder eher der Ausgangspunkt

Die Gattung Briefe wird innerhalb der Quellenkunde beschrieben, aber die Mentalitätengeschichte ist imstande Fragen zu formulieren, welche über den Quellenwert derselben für die politische Geschichte hinausführen.¹ Genau an diesem Punkt setzte unser Projekt *Briefe Adelliger Frauen: Beziehungen und Bezugssysteme* an, welches vom Fonds zur Förderung der wissenschaftlichen Forschung in Österreich gesponsert wurde.²

Ausgangspunkt dafür waren Briefe aus 19 Archiven adeliger Provenienz, die im Rahmen eines vorhergegangenen Projektes zum Thema *Quellenstudien zur Geschichte der adeligen Frau in Österreich vom 15. bis zum 18. Jahrhundert* erhoben worden waren.³ Dabei stellte sich rasch heraus, dass innerhalb der Briefe subjektive Elemente vorherrschend sind, die das Eingehen auf jeden einzelnen

¹ Beatrix Bastl, “Formen und Gattungen frühneuzeitlicher Briefe”, in: Josef Pauser/Martin Scheutz/Thomas Winkelbauer (ed.), *Quellenkunde der Habsburgermonarchie (16.-18.Jahrhundert). Ein exemplarisches Handbuch*, Wien/München 2004, p. 801-812. Eine ‘Langfassung’ zu Auswertungsmöglichkeiten von Briefen soll anlässlich des Internationalen Kolloquiums *Éloignement géographique et cohésion familiale* (30.09.-02.10.2004) der Marc Bloch Universität/Strasbourg vorgestellt werden. Vortragsthema: *Sprache als Medium von Nähe und Distanz: Briefe und Porträts der Familie Harrach im 18. Jahrhundert. Mentale Kategorien und die Wege ihrer Erfahrbarkeit*; Klaus Beyrer/Hans-Christian Täubrich (ed.), *Der Brief. Eine Kulturgeschichte der schriftlichen Kommunikation*, Frankfurt am Main 1996; Heinz-Dieter Heimann in Verbindung mit Ivan Hlaváček (ed.), *Kommunikationspraxis und Korrespondenzwesen im Mittelalter und in der Renaissance*, Paderborn 1998.

² <http://www.univie.ac.at/Geschichte/Frauenbriefe>.

³ Doris Aichholzer, “Frauenbriefe aus drei Jahrhunderten – eine unerschöpfliche Quelle für die Mentalitäts- und Alltagsgeschichte”, in: *Frühneuzeit-Info* 8/1 (1997), p. 148-152; dies., “Briefe adeliger Frauen: Beziehungen und Bezugssysteme – ein Projektbericht”, in: *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung* 105/4 (1997), p. 477-483.

Brief erfordern und eine spezielle weibliche Identität zeigen.⁴ Daneben stehen rhetorische, stilistische und formale Gemeinsamkeiten und eine Fülle von Hinweisen auf gruppenspezifische Werthaltungen und Vorstellungen, die diese Briefe zu einer idealen Quelle für mentalitätengeschichtliche Fragestellungen machen.⁵

2. Der geschriebene Brief als mündliche Äußerung?

“So viel ist gewiß, dass wir in einem Brief mit einem andern reden, und dass dasjenige, was ich einem auf ein Blatt schreibe, nichts anders ist, als was ich ihm mündlich sagen würde, wenn ich könnte oder wollte”.⁶ Dieses Diktum Christian Fürchtegott Gellerts aus seinen *Gedanken von einem guten deutschen Briefe* aus dem Jahre 1742 provoziert die Frage nach dem ‘Wie’ und die Analogie zwischen Gespräch und Textualisierung verweist auf die antike Definition des Briefes als Gespräch zwischen räumlich Getrennten. In den französischsprachigen Briefen intimen Inhalts existierte im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert eine eigenen ‘Kultur’ des nicht-öffentlichen Briefschreibens. Während des 17. Jahrhunderts empfahl man einen höflichen Briefstil, welcher dem fünfgliedrigen, schematisch-gezwungenen Dispositionsschema der klassischen Rhetorik – *salutatio, exordium, narratio, petitio* und *conclusio* – folgte. Erst in den achtziger Jahren des 17. Jahrhunderts ersetzte Christian Weise das fünfteilige, die Gedankenführung stark reglementierende Schema des Briefaufbaus durch die dreigliedrige *Chria* (*salutatio, narratio, conclusio*), die sich mehr an den argumentativen Bedürfnissen orientierte.

Gellert wandte sich dann radikal gegen die überkommenen Briefsteller rhetorischer und schematischer Natur. Er griff zwar auf reformatorische Ansätze

⁴ Lutz Niethammer, *Kollektive Identität*, Reinbek bei Hamburg 2002.

⁵ Beatrix Bastl, *Tugend, Liebe, Ehre. Die Adelige Frau in der frühen Neuzeit*, Wien 2000.

⁶ Christian Fürchtegott Gellert, *Die epistolographischen Schriften. Faksimiledruck nach den Ausgaben von 1742 und 1751*. Mit einem Nachwort von Reinhard M. G. Nickisch, Stuttgart 1971.

zurück, fasste aber als erster alle vorangegangenen Veränderungen mit eigenen Neuerungen in ein durchdachtes System, in den bereits erwähnten *Gedanken von einem guten deutschen Briefe* zusammen. Diese selbst in Briefform gehaltenen ‘Gedanken’, die sich nicht durch ‘Gelehrsamkeit’, sondern durch ein ‘klares Nachsinnen’ legitimieren, richtete Gellert an den vermutlich fiktiven ‘Herrn F. H. v. W.’ und erhob die Forderung, einen Brief nicht nach starren Regeln, sondern nach der ‘natürlichen’ Ordnung der Gedanken aufzubauen. Antike Vorbilder sollten dem Briefschreiber lediglich zur Übersetzung und Übung dienen. Gellert richtet den Stil des Briefes am mündlichen Gespräch aus, das keine festen Formeln kennt, aus der Situation heraus neue, ungekonnte Wendungen findet und erfindet. Der Brief soll eine ‘Nachahmung’ des Gesprächs sein, womit sich die Zufälligkeit der Rede und der persönliche Ausdruck der Einmaligkeit der individuellen Erfahrung einschleicht. Gerade die geforderte Mündlichkeit macht das Briefschreiben zur Kunst. Die Schreiberin/der Schreiber kommt in die Schwierigkeit, ‘spontan’ sein zu müssen, jedoch Hohlheit und Geschwätz zu vermeiden. Der Brief ist somit eine schriftliche Form der Rede – was in der epistolographischen Reflexion zunächst eine rein äußerliche Bestimmung darstellt. Als stummer Ersatz des Gesprächspartners hebt der Brief die Abwesenheit des anderen durch die zeichenhafte Textualität seiner Rede auf. Dies ist seine spezifische Funktion, die in der alteuropäischen Brieftheorie de facto auch nicht wahrgenommen wurde: “...denn was ist ein Brief überhaupt anderes, als eine geschriebene Anrede an einen Abwesenden?” heißt es lakonisch bei Gottsched, der antike Brieftheorien rezipierte.⁷

Das Gespräch war ein bevorzugtes Mittel, den eigenen Platz in der Gesellschaft und die Position des anderen im Verhältnis zu sich selbst zu bestimmen. Die feinen Nuancen in der sozialen Hierarchie erforderten, dass man sich stets um die Achtung des anderen sorgte, die ausschlaggebend für die eigene

⁷ Robert Vellusig, *Schriftliche Gespräche. Briefkultur im 18. Jahrhundert*, Wien/Köln/Weimar 2000, S. 30 Anm. 18.

Position war. Wo das Wort eine so beherrschende Rolle spielte, bestand große Gefahr, eines Tages sein Opfer zu werden, etwa wenn Gerede in Umlauf kam. Jede Anspielung, jedes provozierende oder auch nur ausweichende Wort über den Ruf und die Tugend eines Menschen, Zweifel an einer Person veränderten die Beziehung zwischen Menschen, die sich zuvor in ihrem Ansehen oder doch in ihrer Billigung mehr oder weniger als gleich betrachtet hatten. Ein Mitglied der Gesellschaft wurde plötzlich ins Abseits gedrängt, ohne dass ein solcher Bruch oder eine solche Modifizierung der Beziehung zu einer Person die allgemeinen sozialen Mechanismen oder Strukturen zerstörte, die auf rivalisierenden Bündnissen beruhten. So schreibt Johanna Theresia Harrach, geborene von Lamberg, am 22. Juli 1677 an ihren Mann Ferdinand Bonaventura I. Graf von Harrach, der sich als Botschafter in Spanien befindet, über den Tratsch bei Hof und die dafür zuständige Person:

“Daz best aber ist, daz er vordt ist, dan es ist ein solcheß bizbáz, dass einß lachen mueß, dan es sein doch als lauder lügen, dan die von Heisenstein, die duet nichtß allß alleweil lügen erdenckhen und die leidt ihneinander bringen und hadt so vilerlei finden, daz man nie mergt, daz von ihr herkomt, dan wan man sagt, sie hatß gesagt, so klaubt manß kleich nicht und sagt, die narin hadtß gesagt, sie ist lächerlich, aber eß eichenß alle wegen ihrß verloggen maull.”⁸

Die geschriebene Rede des Briefes imitierte zwar nicht mehr die geschmückte Sprache der Höflichkeit, aber ebenso wenig bildete sie die mündliche Rede des Alltags ab: Denn der Hofadel begann, mit der Zunahme von Zentralfunktionen neue Standards der Selbstdarstellung auszubilden und ein höfisches Symbolsystem zu etablieren, mit dem er sich nach innen verständigte und zugleich nach außen hin abgrenzte. Die Erziehung im Adelshaus wurde ergänzt und überlagert durch die Sozialisation am Hof, durch die Ausformung von höfischen Verhaltensstandards, Lebensformen und Sprachregelungen. Diese galten aber nicht unbegrenzt und wurden manchmal gnadenlos dechiffriert.

⁸ Susanne C. Pils, “Hof/Tratsch. Alltag bei Hof im ausgehenden 17. Jahrhundert”, in: *Wiener Geschichtsblätter* 53 (1998), S. 77-99, hier: S. 91.

So bemerkt Judith Sabina Gräfin von Starhemberg gegenüber ihrer Schwiegermutter über das Wiener Hofleben, den Wiener Humor und die Folgen für diejenigen, die sich mit dieser Art der Kommunikation nicht anfreunden können:

“Und hab witer lautter gnedige frau und freillen in der Wienstad ihrer erzeigung und sagen nach, ins herz khan man kein sehen, sunst wolt ich eimb die Wienerischen humor zimblich peschreiben, ich glaub nit, das ein soliche falscheit in der kristenheit ist als hie, und wer das nit khan, der mus doch hie lernen oder er khumbt zu kurz.”⁹

Offenkundig kann man mit Worten zwar lügen, aber die Sprache des Körpers und der Gesten besitzt eine eigene Realität und kann Worte Lügen strafen. Dies funktioniert nur, wenn die Betrachterin/der Betrachter darauf vertraut, dass Denken und Sprechen eine Identität bilden, der Körper und seine Gesten hingegen eine völlig andere Identität darstellen.

3. Der Brief im Kontext von ‘Privat/Öffentlich’

Heide Wunder geht aufgrund ihrer langjährigen Forschungen davon aus, dass eine Unterscheidung zwischen ‘privat’ und ‘öffentlich’, die im 19. Jahrhundert möglich ist, in der Frühen Neuzeit zu Fehlinterpretationen führt.¹⁰ Einerseits repräsentieren ‘privat’ und ‘öffentlich’ im Kontext von Briefen gemeinsame Bestandteile einer sozialen Formation, andererseits gibt jede Kultur innerhalb der Pole von Öffentlichem und Privatem eigene Positionen normativer Verbindlichkeit vor und setzt andere Grenzen hinsichtlich des Umfangs, der Durchlässigkeit und Dichotomie beider Bereiche.

Ein Beispiel für überlappende Aktionsradien aus dem hier zugrunde gelegten Quellensample bieten im Folgenden zwei Briefwechsel, der erste ist jener

⁹ Oberösterreichisches Landesarchiv, Familienarchiv Starhemberg, Bestand Riedegg, Karton 47: eigenhändiger Brief der Judith von Starhemberg an ihre Schwiegermutter Juliana in Nieder-Wallsee (Wien, 16. März 1630).

¹⁰ Heide Wunder, “Einleitung”, in: Heide Wunder/Christina Vanja (ed.), *Wandel der Geschlechterbeziehungen zu Beginn der Neuzeit*, Frankfurt am Main 1991, p. 7-11.

zwischen Rosina von Tschernembl (1575-1630), geborene Jörger, und ihrem zukünftigen Schwiegersohn Karl Christoph von Schallenberg (1596-1629).¹¹

Sie entschuldigt sich bei ihm, dass sie nicht zum Herrschaftssitz ihres Bruders Helmhard Jörger in Steyregg kommen könne, da ihr Augenleiden sie daran hindere. Dies wäre umso notwendiger gewesen, da Helmhard Jörger wegen seiner maßgeblichen Teilnahme am Aufstand der Stände am 21. Juni 1621 in der Linzer Burg inhaftiert wurde. Eine persönliche Vorsprache ihrer Person wäre dringend vonnöten, da sie bislang nur die Erlaubnis des Statthalters bekommen habe, einen Boten dorthin zu schicken.¹² Kurz darauf schreibt sie ihrem zukünftigen Schwiegersohn in verschlüsselter Form, dass sie ihm viel Glück für seine Reise nach Linz wünsche, wo er wohl eine Weile bleiben müsse. Dies bedeutet, dass auch er bereits inhaftiert wurde, und in ihrem nächsten Schreiben vom Anfang Dezember teilt sie ihm mit, dass zu ihrer Unterstützung der Sohn ihres Bruders im Land sei; sie hoffe, dass ihr Bruder Helmhard Jörger zu den Weihnachtsfeiertagen entlassen werde. Rosina von Tschernembl handelt zunächst in familiären, ‘privaten’ Angelegenheiten, die durch ihre politischen Folgen zu ‘öffentlichen’ werden.

Anna Maria Thurn Valsassina (1560-1606), seit 1581 mit Ferdinand Graf von Hardegg (1549-1595) verheiratet, unterhält im Jahr 1595 einen regen Briefwechsel mit ihrem Neffen Georg Friedrich von Hardegg (1568-1628), dem Sohn Heinrichs von Hardegg (gest. 1577) und der Anna Maria Thurn vom Kreuz (1540-1597). Anna Maria geht daraus als die in ihrem ‘Amt waltende Hausherrin’ hervor, denn ihr Mann Ferdinand, Kommandant der wichtigen Grenzfestung Raab, hatte diese Festung nach dem Scheitern aller Entsatzversuche

¹¹ Beatrix Bastl, “Caritas Conjugalis. Der Begriff des Friedens in der Ehe”, in: *Wiener Geschichtsblätter* 52 (1997), S. 221-233, hier: S. 227.

¹² Brief aus Enns, 3. Oktober 1621. Alle Briefe der Rosina von Tschernembl stammen aus einem Konvolut (Karton 96) des Herrschaftsarchives Rosenau, das sich als Depot im Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv befindet.

an die Türken übergeben, um unnötiges Blutvergießen zu vermeiden.¹³ Dies büßte er mit dem Leben: Er wurde am 16. Juni 1595 auf dem Platz am Hof in Wien enthauptet. Um ihrem Mann zu helfen und dieses Todesurteil abzuwenden, hatte Anna Maria den genannten Neffen Georg Friedrich von Hardegg im Interesse des gesamten Geschlechtes um seine persönliche Intervention gebeten.¹⁴ Es stand die Familienehre auf dem Spiel, wenn eines ihrer Mitglieder auf diese unehrenhafte Weise beseitigt wurde:

“Wolgeborener herr graff, freundlicher herr vetter, dem heren sein meine gebuerlich willig dienst zuvohren.¹⁵ Was mier leider, gott erbarmts, mein liebster herr und gemahll vonn seinem leydigen zustandt zugeschriben, das wird mein herr vetter aus beyliegender seiner handtschrift vernehmen, darauf ich umb godt und es jungsten gericht willen mein flehendlichs und hochfreundlichs bidten, mein her vedter wolle sich alsbalt, und in angesicht dieses schreibens aufmachen unnd durchaus in erwegung der hechsten noth nicht ausbleiben...wo in einem oder den andern was unterlasen oder vergesen, das ime meinem hern oder dem ganzen geschlecht zu verkleiner- und verschimpffung gereichen wurde, das ich desen kein schadt noch nachrede nicht haben will.”¹⁶

Da Frauen aus adeligen, sogar hochadeligen Häusern in der Regel nur als Ehefrauen oder Mütter erwähnt wurden, sind ihre politischen Handlungsspielräume nur ausschnitthaft erkennbar. Briefe als Quellen stellen in

¹³ Ferdinand war der jüngste Sohn des Reichsgrafen (1485) Julius Prüschenk von Hardegg und der Gräfin Gertraud von Eberstein, wirklicher Hofkriegsrat, kaiserlicher Feldoberster, General und Kommandant der ungarischen Festung Raab. Zum Militärgerichtsverfahren gegen Ferdinand von Hardegg und dessen Vorgeschichte ausführlich Friedrich Hausmann, “Ferdinand Graf zu Hardegg und der Verlust der Festung Raab”, in: Walter Höflechner (ed.), *Domus Austriae. Eine Festgabe Hermann Wiesflecker zum 70. Geburtstag*, Graz 1983, S. 184-209.

¹⁴ Georg Friedrich war der Sohn des Heinrich von Hardegg (gest. 1577), eines Bruders des Ferdinand von Hardegg, und der Anna Maria Thurn vom Kreuz (1540-1597), der 1592 Sidonia von Herberstein geheiratet hatte. Brief der Anna Maria von Hardegg an Georg Friedrich von Hardegg aus Wien vom 12. Juli 1595 (Niederösterreichisches Landesarchiv, Herrschaftsarchiv Stetteldorf, Karton 78).

¹⁵ Hier liegt eine unklare Handhabung der Verwandtschaftsverhältnisse vor, denn Anna Maria Thurn vom Kreuz spricht ihren Neffen in diesem Brief als ‘freundlicher herr vetter’ an. Mit Vetter wird eigentlich der Vatersbruder bezeichnet, doch die Bedeutung erweitert sich zunächst auf dessen Söhne, und schließlich konnte mit dem Wort ‘Vetter’ jeder männliche Verwandte angesprochen werden (Jacob und Wilhelm Grimm, *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, Bd. 26, ND Leipzig 1951, Sp. 26-33).

¹⁶ Niederösterreichisches Landesarchiv, Herrschaftsarchiv Stetteldorf, Karton 78, 12. Juni 1595.

diesem Zusammenhang ein wichtiges Korrektiv dar. Ledige Adelige konnten beispielsweise einem Stift oder Kloster vorstehen und Witwen ihr Wittum selbständig verwalten und kommen dadurch eher in den Blick. Wenn sie die Vormundschaft über unmündige Söhne besaßen, übten sie oft auch jahrelang die Regentschaft aus, die allerdings häufig unter die Regierungszeit des Sohnes subsumiert wird. Da Frauen die Berechtigung zum politischen Handeln offensichtlich aufgrund ihrer Position in der Ehe und der Zugehörigkeit zu einem Geschlecht (im Sinne eines Generationenverbandes) oder einer Dynastie besaßen, sind diese als dafür relevante Institutionen zu bewerten.¹⁷

4. Handlungsspielräume von Frauen

Bei der Analyse der politischen Entscheidungsprozesse in der Frühen Neuzeit muss ein Verständnis von Politik zugrunde gelegt werden, das um die Berechtigung zu öffentlichem, verbindlichem Handeln von Frauen als Ehe- und Hausfrauen, die für die ‘gute Ordnung’ zuständig waren, erweitert ist. Diese Zuständigkeit war rechtlich in den Kompetenzen des Hauselternpaares festgeschrieben und beruhte auf der Rolle von Ehemann und Ehefrau in den selbständigen bäuerlichen, handwerklichen, kaufmännischen, aber auch adeligen Haushalten. Nicht nur Heinz Reif stellte fest, dass “die organisatorische Solidarität der Eheleute [...] sich daraus ergab, dass sie innerhalb der Grundherrschaft des Hauses und der Familie vor Aufgaben standen, die sie nur gemeinsam lösen konnten.”¹⁸ Eine signifikante Briefstelle dafür bietet das Schreiben des verwitweten Moritz Heinrich von Thürheim an seinen Bruder Philipp Jakob aus dem Jahr 1582, als er sich ein zweites Mal mit Margaretha von Eyb zu verehelichen beabsichtigte:

¹⁷ Regina Schulte (ed.), *Der Körper der Königin. Geschlecht und Herrschaft in der höfischen Welt seit 1500*, Frankfurt am Main 2002.

¹⁸ Heinz Reif, *Westfälischer Adel 1770-1860. Vom Herrschaftsstand zur regionalen Elite*, Göttingen 1979, S. 105.

“Du solltest mich mit deiner selbst persönlichen zuekhunnfft, oder doch zum wenigsten mit deinem schriftlichen bericht in disem meinem notwendigen anligen, nicht so lanng auffgehalten haben, damit ich vor nechst khönnfftigem aduent (welches nu mehr versaumbt) noch hette hochtzeit, oder den beyschlaff hallten, vnnd mein schwere verderbliche haußhaltung in ain anndern vnnd bessern weg richten mögen, dann weil die sachen so lanng auffgezogen, eruolgt mir nichtz anders darauß, dan das mir nicht allein in meinem haußhallten teglicher grosser schaden zusteet, sonnder auch im lanndt vmb reiten, das gelt vnnützlich vertzehren, das meinig anhaimbs versaumen, auch mit botten lohn vnnd anderem vncosten teglich vil außgeben vnnd verschwenden mueß.”¹⁹

Die Briefe der Rosina von Tschernembl, geborene von Jörger (1575-ca. 1630), an ihren Schwiegersohn Karl Christoph von Schallenberg beschreiben immer wieder den gesellschaftlichen Ort von Frauen.²⁰ Dieser ist innerhalb ihres “Herrschaftsbereiches” zu suchen, das heißt im Rahmen der umfassenden Bewirtschaftung des Gutes und der Organisation des Haushaltes sowie aller damit in Zusammenhang stehenden Aktivitäten, die keinesfalls eng begrenzte Handlungsräume darstellen.²¹ Denn die für das Leben adeliger Frauen relevanten familiären, sozialen und rechtlichen Ordnungen bildeten im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert keine konzentrischen Kreise, sondern Kreise, die sich vielfach überschneiden. Erst im 19. Jahrhundert wurden Ehe und Familie für Frauen ausschließlich ehemannbezogen erfahren. Denn der Ehemann benötigte die Ehefrau nicht nur für die Führung seines bürgerlichen Hausstandes und die Erziehung der Kinder, sondern auch zur Herstellung seiner eigenen persönlichen Humanität, die durch das tätige Leben innerhalb einer als feindlich gedachten Welt eingeschränkt war. Diese Vereinnahmung der Ehefrau durch den Ehemann und damit ihr Verschwinden in immer kleinere Räume des Hauses und der Wohnung hat ein amerikanischer Arzt 1864 als “Interiorisierung” der Frau beschrieben.²²

¹⁹ Oberösterreichisches Landesarchiv, Herrschaftsarchiv Weinberg, Nr. 1329.

²⁰ Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Herrschaftsarchiv Rosenau, Karton 96: 20 Briefe der Rosina von Tschernembl, deren Tochter Eva Maria 1622 Karl Christoph von Schallenberg geheiratet hat, an ihren Schwiegersohn.

²¹ Bast, *Tugend, Liebe, Ehre*. S. 24-32.

²² Heide Wunder, “Der gesellschaftliche Ort von Frauen der gehobenen Stände im 17. Jahrhundert”, in: *Journal für Geschichte* 2 (1985), S. 30-35, hier: S. 33.

5. Die soziale Hierarchie im Schriftspiegel

Formeln sind sowohl zur synchronen als auch diachronen Analyse von Briefen sehr geeignet, da sie einerseits in fast jedem Brief vorkommen, sich andererseits aber im Laufe der Zeit stark verändern. Anrede und Gruß machen die soziale Stellung von Briefschreiber/in und Briefempfänger/in deutlich, und auch die Unterschiede zwischen den Geschlechtern sowie feine soziale Differenzen werden dadurch spürbar. Personenbeziehungen werden so besonders gut fassbar, wie der Briefwechsel der Schwestern Emilie von Hessen (verheiratet seit 1648 mit Prinz Henri Charles von Talmont) und Charlotte von Hessen (verheiratet seit 1650 mit Kurfürst Karl Ludwig von der Pfalz) mit ihrem Bruder Landgraf Wilhelm VI. zeigt.²³ Der Bruder ist als Mann und Thronerbe selbstverständlich der Ranghöhere; darüber hinaus bedienen sich beide Briefschreiberinnen übertrieben der Etikette, um dahinter ihre Gefühle als vernachlässigte Schwestern und später als unglückliche Ehefrauen zu transportieren.

Ähnlich emotionell, doch graduell deutlich abgestuft, fallen Anrede und Grußformeln innerhalb der Briefe Helena von Schallenberg an ihren Bruder Christoph (1561-1597) aus dem Jahre 1593 aus. So schreibt Helena, die 1595 in das Franziskanerinnenkloster Hl. Kreuz in Landshut eintreten und dort 1617 Äbtissin werden wird, an ihren ein Jahr älteren Bruder Christoph von Schallenberg:

“Edler gestrenger mein fraindtlicher hertz aller liebster brueder, von dem allmechtig gott wünsch ich dier sambt den deinen aus schwösterlichen hertzen vill glüksellige gesunde zeit, unnd alle wolfardt zu seel und leib, mein herz lüebster brueder, ich hab noch laudt deines negsten schräbn, so du mier bey eines mallers diener gedan, verhofft, du werst mier entwöder bey dem Starhemberger oder wie du mier verheissen bey einem aignen potten schräben, dessen ich bisher mit verlangen gewardt hab, weil ich aber nichts erwarten khan, trängt mich die nott, das ich dier einen aignen poodt schikhen mues...der allmechtig gott erparmb sich gnedig über uns, demb ich dich mein allerliebster brueder sambt den dein hertzlich in seinen vätterlichen schutz bevelhen thue, unnd sey von mier zu tausentmal

²³ Erwin Bettenhäuser (ed.), *Familienbriefe der Landgräfin Amalie Elisabeth von Hessen-Kassel und ihrer Kinder*, Marburg 1994, S.79-81.

schwösterlich gegriest...Deine treue schwester bis in tod, Helena von Schallnberg.”²⁴

Es gibt also Unterschiede in der Art und Weise, wer wen wie anspricht; allerdings folgen diese keinem auch nur grob näher zu bestimmenden Raster. Es handelt sich nicht um “große Unterschiede” innerhalb der Anrede und Grußformeln zwischen adeligen Frauen und Männern, Eltern und Kindern, Geschwistern und Verwandten; vielmehr sind es jene “kleinen, feinen geschmacklichen Unterschiede” (Pierre Bourdieu), die alles, aber auch wirklich alles ausmachen.

Ein weiterer Indikator für die soziale Stellung der Briefpartner/innen ist der Schriftspiegel. Je “rangniedriger” die Absenderin oder der Absender ist, umso tiefer wird der Schriftspiegel angesetzt. Innerhalb des Briefwechsels der Maria Anna von Harrach mit ihrem Vater Friedrich August Gervasius Protasius aus den Jahren 1733 bis 1748 wird dies besonders deutlich.²⁵ Der Schriftspiegel rutscht immer weiter nach unten, je inferiorer sich die Tochter gegenüber dem Vater fühlt; gleichzeitig kommt es zu einer Intimisierung innerhalb der Anrede. So schreibt die Achtjährige auf Französisch am 30. April 1733 aus Wien an ihren Vater: “Mon tres cher papa [...] Votre tres humble et tres obeissante fille et Servante Marie Anne Com : d’Harrach.” Der gesamte Brief nimmt sich als ‘Pflichtübung’ eines Kindes aus, welches Kontakt mit seinem Vater aufnimmt und ihm neben Belanglosigkeiten auch schreibt, dass sie jeden Tag um die Gesundheit des Vaters bete – was sie in einem Satzsatz erwähnt, der sich haarscharf zwischen Formelhaftigkeit und Anteilnahme bewegt, wohl auch unwissend dazwischen balanciert: “mon cher papa continu. À Se bien porter, pour quel Sujet, je ne discontinuë, à faire journellement des priers au Seigneur.” In

²⁴ Oberösterreichisches Landesarchiv, Herrschaftsarchiv Schlüsselberg Nr. 60: Eigenhändiger Brief der Helena, die Hoffräulein damals am herzoglichen Hof in München war, an ihren Bruder Christoph von Schallenberg, Regimentsrat des Erzherzogs Matthias in Wien (München, 26. Oktober 1593).

²⁵ Zum folgenden Allgemeines Verwaltungsarchiv, Familienarchiv Harrach, Karton 532: Maria Anna von Harrach (1715-1780), Karton 43: Briefe an ihren Vater Friedrich August von Harrach (1696 – 1749) aus den Jahren 1733 – 1748.

den folgenden Jahren schreibt Maria Anna aus Brüssel an den Vater, wobei der Schriftspiegel immer tiefer – bis auf neun Zeilen – sinkt. Zwischen der Anrede und dem Text befinden sich in den Briefen der nunmehr Zwölfjährigen bereits fünf Zeilen, was ein Maß darstellt, auf das sie sich später “einpendeln” wird. Sie entschuldigt sich andauernd für ihre schlechte Schrift und ihren kargen Stil, die schlechte Briefkomposition und ihre Übersetzungen in das Französische, die der Vater korrigieren soll: “Pour vous montrer que je suis obeissante a vos ordres et je ne passe point mon tems a ne rien faire je y fait aujourdhuy une petite Traduction que je prend la liberté de vous envoir esperand que vous me ferez la grace démüloier [?] un petit instant a la corriger.” (Chaufontaines, 14. August 1738) Es scheint ein unmittelbarer Zusammenhang zwischen der Qualität der Briefe der kleinen Maria Anna und dem Wohlwollen, der Geneigtheit und Güte des Vaters zu bestehen: “je tacherai de faire toujours de mieux, en mieux, en lettres, aussi bien qu’en tous mes autres devoirs, pour pouvoir meriter vos graces.” (Brüssel, 4. Mai 1737) Als Maria Anna 13 Jahre alt wird, beginnt sie auf Deutsch zu schreiben; interessanterweise werden nun die Anrede und der Schluss ihrer Briefe noch förmlicher als in der vertrauten französischen “Kindersprache”: “Hochgebohrner Reich Graff, Gnädigster Herr Vatter...Euer Gnaden Gnädigster herr Vatter unterthänigste: und gehorsamste dienerin und tochter Maria Anna Gräfin von Harrach”. (Chaufontaines, 20. August 1738)

6. Natürlichkeit

Die ‘Nachahmung des guten Gesprächs’ wird von Gellert nicht nur durch die Ablehnung umgangssprachlicher Ausdrücke reduziert. Es geht nicht um eine Opposition zwischen Umgangston und Kanzleistil, sondern um den Versuch die Darstellung des Selbst innerhalb des Briefschreibens zu kultivieren. Sprechinhalte sollten verbal rekonstruiert werden. Ein gutes Beispiel dafür bietet der eigenhändige Brief der Elisabeth (1544-1580), der Tochter des Erasmus von Starhemberg (1503-1560) und der Anna von Schaunberg (1513-1551) an

Magdalena von Starhemberg, geborene Lamberg, nach Wildberg (10. September 1564 aus Steyr):

“Wolgeborne frau freundliche mein herzen liebste frau schwester, ich wunsch dier gottes gnad und vill gesunder gottgefölliger zeit samt allem was ich liebs und guetts vermag wiss mich dein zum pesten, mein hertz liebste frau schwester ich bin im herzen erfreydt das mein liebe schwester frau von Tschernembl mit einer tochter wieder erfreydt ist worden hat meine liebste frau maimb befohlhen dier zu schreiben das sie es auch herzlich gern vernumben hat das so glichlich und palt von statt sey gangen, gott sey lob, ich woltt gar gern ein mall bey dier sein mein lieb den ich het vill mit dier zu reden...Ellisabeth von Starhemberg”.²⁶

Wer sich im gesellschaftlichen Umgang ungezwungen verhält, wer schreibt, wie er/sie spricht, der verbirgt die Last mühseligen Formulierens. Dies sollte der Brief ebenso vermeiden, nämlich sich die Anstrengung des “Verbalisierens” anmerken zu lassen, womit wir dorthin kommen, wo Baldassare Castiglione mit seinem *Cortegiano* ansetzte: bei der *sprezzatura*. Dies war die Kunst, jene Mühe zu verbergen, die es kostete, das ganze Unternehmen als mühelos erscheinen zu lassen.

In der wissenschaftlichen Literatur wird immer wieder angenommen, dass der Briefaustausch schwieriger ist als ein mündliches Gespräch zu führen. Elisabeth von Starhemberg schreibt den gerade zitierten Brief an ihre Schwägerin Magdalena auf Geheiß ihrer Tante und würde lieber ein mündliches Gespräch mit ihr führen. Doch genau das ist hier das Problem: Ein mündliches Gespräch zu führen ist hier viel weniger möglich als mit der Schwägerin schriftlich zu kommunizieren. Dieses lebendige Kommunikationsbedürfnis ist gemeint, wenn Gellert davon spricht, dass diejenigen Briefe am natürlichsten sind, zu denen uns “unser Herz” nötigt. Denn “wer die Betrübniß, die Freude, die Liebe, das Mitleid, das er zu erkennen geben, oder erwecken will, in der That empfindet, dem wird es nicht schwer sein, davon zu reden”.²⁷

²⁶ Oberösterreichisches Landesarchiv, Familienarchiv Starhemberg, Bestand Riedegg, Karton 40.

²⁷ Zitiert nach Vellusig, *Schriftliche Gespräche*, S. 95.

Aber nicht nur Gellert machte sich über die “Natürlichkeit” innerhalb von Briefen seine Gedanken, sondern auch die hier vorgestellten Briefschreiberinnen. Sie sahen deutlich die Grenzen, welche die Forderung nach gestalterischer Qualität ihnen setzte. Nicht jede unwillkürliche und spontane Äußerung wurde als “natürliche Ausdrucksweise” angesehen, sondern deutlich deren Stilisierung bemerkt.

7. Zum Stilbegriff der Mündlichkeit und der Historizität von Emotionen

Die Leichtigkeit der Mündlichkeit fanden Gellert und seine Zeitgenossen in den “Briefen von empfindsamen Frauen”, der Epistolographie der Madame de Sévigné, vorgezeichnet. Sie glaubten, dass “weibliche Briefe” keinen rhetorischen Zwängen unterworfen gewesen wären, und vergaßen, dass Frauen generell aus dem gelehrten Diskurs ausgeschlossen waren. Mit einem Wort: Die Männer entdeckten ihr anderes, ihr weibliches Selbst in der Konversationskultur der französischen Salons.

Was auch immer hier als “Leichtigkeit” neu aufgefunden erscheint, ist jedoch innerhalb der privaten Korrespondenz des 16. Jahrhunderts bereits zu beobachten. Ob es sich nun um den Briefwechsel zwischen dem Kurfürstenpaar Albrecht und Anna von Brandenburg-Ansbach (1474/75),²⁸ jenen zwischen Elisabeth von Braunschweig-Lüneburg und Albrecht von Preußen aus dem 16. Jahrhundert²⁹ oder die Korrespondenz zwischen Judith von Ungnad (gest. 1572) und ihrem Ehemann Juan de Hoyos (1506-1561) aus der Zeit von 1548 bis 1555 handelt.³⁰ Juan de Hoyos wurde in Burgos/Spanien geboren, folgte Erzherzog Ferdinand in

²⁸ Cordula Nolte, “Verbalerotische Kommunikation, ‘gut schwenck’ oder: Worüber lachte man bei Hofe? Einige Thesen zum Briefwechsel des Kurfürstenpaares Albrecht und Anna von Brandenburg-Ansbach 1474/75”, in: Jan Hirschbiegel/Werner Paravicini (ed.), *Das Frauenzimmer. Die Frau bei Hofe in Spätmittelalter und früher Neuzeit*, Stuttgart 2000, S. 449-461.

²⁹ Ingeborg Mengel, *Elisabeth von Braunschweig-Lüneburg und Albrecht von Preußen. Ein Fürstenbriefwechsel der Reformationszeit*, Göttingen 1954; Ingeborg Klettke-Mengel, *Die Sprache in Fürstenbriefen der Reformationszeit untersucht am Briefwechsel Albrechts von Preußen und Elisabeths von Braunschweig-Lüneburg*, Köln/Berlin 1973.

³⁰ Schloß Horn, Familienarchiv Hoyos, Karton 382/18.

die Österreichischen Erblanden, absolvierte eine hervorragende Ämterlaufbahn und lernte vor 1547 Judith Elisabeth kennen, die Tochter des steirischen Landeshauptmannes Hans von Ungnad auf Sonegg und der Anna von Thurn. Judith Elisabeth schreibt in der Verlobungszeit an Juan de Hoyos (Graz, 22. April 1548):

“Wolgeporner freuntlicher mein herzen lieber herr von hoyos, eine gesuntt vnd glyckliche belfortt waer mir alzeit ain herzliche freytt zu horen so wye mein liebe frau muetter mich sambt allen meinen geschbister in guete gesunttheit gott dem herrn sey lob vmb alles mein lieber herr von hoyos ych hab eine khettn von eurn diener augustin heintt enttpfangen und sag euch darumb den hechsten Danckh ych hab auch von eurn diener verstanden, er mein gemel pegert euch zu schycken belches ich gern gethan hett aber es hatt so plat nit geschehen mugen so ist auch nyt ain gueter maler hie der ain wenkh khundt abmalen...das main ansuchen dapay er den auch sein muess das auch die ursach is das ich euch von beger der khurzen zeytt nitt erschreckhen welle mit meiner gepallt vnd van die lieb nitt grosser bär, so bär ich auch bald dahinden pyben...aber pey meiner frau muetter merckh ich balt das sy nitt gern von khindern geht...meiner farb vnd khlayder halber sag ich euch an das ich auch noch nitt baiss, was man mir gebn beert, piss das mein lieber herr vatter haym khumbt vnd es darunder byl ich euchs wissen lassn mein lieber herr von hoyos...bejl ichs mündlich nitt ansuechen khan so hab ich euchs schreyben wellen”.

Die ganze Unmittelbarkeit spontaner Äußerungen wird hier textualisiert, indem alle Abweichungen vom Thema, alle Gedanken, unmittelbar schriftlich ausgedrückt werden. Man kann direkt das Gesprochene hören! Wenn man Schreiben hingegen als Formulieren versteht, dann erhält dieses sozusagen einen “künstlichen Charakter”, der einen eigenen Mitteilungswert besitzt. Ich halte es jedoch für vermessen zu behaupten, dass im Gespräch Abschweifungen als solche denunziert werden, innerhalb des schriftlichen Textes jedoch plötzlich “Reflexionscharakter” zugewiesen bekommen. Es ist zu argumentieren, warum nicht grundsätzlich der mündliche Text mit einem geschriebenen Text direkt vergleichbar sein kann. Würde man nur dem geschriebenen Text Reflexionscharakter zubilligen, dann hätten wir den Antipol im mündlichen Text als sozusagen unreflektiertem Reden; und das wäre ja wohl Geschwätz!

Einen zweiten Zugang zu Mündlichkeit – und damit zu Emotionen – verspricht ein historisch-anthropologischer Ansatz, den Hans Medick und David

Sabean im Rückgriff auf Esther Goody zeigen.³¹ Eine Kulturgeschichte, welche so verschiedene Dinge wie Erfahrungen, Wahrnehmungs- und Verständigungsformen ins Visier nimmt, muss anders agieren.³² Diese Analyse von Gefühlen als kulturelle Praxis steckt noch immer in den Kinderschuhen, wird aber als historisch bedingt bereits akzeptiert. Die Erforschung von Emotionen ist auch deshalb außerordentlich schwierig, da das “Emotionskonzept” einerseits als etwas Reales, als erlebtes Gefühl, zu betrachten ist, andererseits aber auch als Code zu sehen ist. Es fällt schwer – wenn wir uns den nachfolgenden Brief vor Augen halten – von einem Konstrukt von Mütterlichkeit zu sprechen oder gar Mutterliebe zu verneinen – jene in der neueren Geschichtswissenschaft heftig diskutierte Emotionsform, die sich unterschiedlich äußert und unterschiedlich erfahrbar wird. Eigentlich ist es unmöglich die Frage zu beantworten, ob, inwieweit und inwiefern imaginierte Emotionskonzepte Einfluss auf gelebte haben.

Maria Eleonora Catharina von Harrach besucht eine ihrer Töchter – nämlich Maria Anna, welche sich in Paris bei einer Tante befindet – und schreibt am 11. September 1739 aus Paris an ihren Schwiegervater Aloys Thomas Raymund Grafen von Harrach:

“Hohgebohrner reichs graff gnädiger herr vatter Ewer gd. Kann ich nicht bergen wie hertz beschwerdt es mir ankomet meine tochter rosa von mir weckzulassen, also zwar das es mir nicht möglich gewesen wäre, jemandt andern als Euer gdt. Allein das sacrificie davon zw machen, ich erkenne dan noch das glück gar wohl so sie dabey hat, die ubrige zeit ihrer erziehung unter euer gdt. Gnädign augen zubringen zw können, getröste mich auch sie werde durch ihren gehorsam und gutn willn, sich die jenige sorgfalth bestens zw nutz zu machen suchen, die euer gnd. für ihre künftige erzihung zw tragen gnädig beliebn werden, da sie aber dennoch dermahlen in solhen jahren ist, wo mann nicht wohl vollkommen von aller handt jugendt fählern befrewet seyn kann, als hoffe euer gdt. werden ihr, besonders anfangs, bis sie sich ein wenig in die grosse welth wird haben schiken können die selben gnädig verzeihen, und ihr gleich wie mir mit vorhofft vätterlichen gnadtn

³¹ Hans Medick/ David Sabean (eds.), *Emotionen und materielle Interessen. Sozialanthropologische und historische Beiträge zur Familienforschung*, Göttingen 1984, S. 27-54.

³² Vgl. als Beispiele auch: Silke Lesemann, “Liebe und Strategie. Adlige Ehen im 18. Jahrhundert”, in: *Historische Anthropologie* 8/2 (2000), S. 189-207, hier: S. 191 Anm. 12; Bastl, *Tugend, Liebe, Ehre*, S. 333-561.

jederzeith gewogen verbleiben, die ich mich allerdenclichster lieb und respect abzw dienen zeith lebens beflissen seyn wird, wie ich dann auch mit einem wahren kündlichen vertrauen und vollkommener verehrung bis in todt zw verharren gedenke Euer gdt. unterthänig gehorsame Dienerin und tochter Eleonora g. v. harrach”.³³

8. *Vorläufiger Endpunkt*

Privatbriefe, also Briefe der hier vorgestellten Art sind kaum literarisch gestaltet und ähneln einem Telefongespräch; in der Vielfalt der Themen, die sie ansprechen sind sie bestens geeignet die Komplexität sozialer Beziehungen und Bezugssysteme innerhalb vormoderner Gruppen offenzulegen, wodurch der Brief methodisch schwer zu handhaben ist.³⁴ Der Brief stellt eine der Grundformen von Kommunikation zwischen einem/r Absender/in und einem/r Empfänger/in einer schriftlichen Mitteilung dar. Eine Definition des Briefes ist nur dann zu gewinnen, wenn man ihn als historisches Dokument betrachtet, welches er zunächst und in erster Linie ist. Zu einer literarischen Gattung kann der Brief erst werden, wenn er eine entsprechende inhaltliche und sprachliche Qualität erreicht hat. Stellt man den Brief jedoch in den größeren Zusammenhang aller schriftlichen Zeugnisse der Vergangenheit, dann wird deutlich, dass er eine historische Quelle unter vielen anderen ist, die seit langem durch entsprechende historische Hilfswissenschaften definiert und beschrieben worden ist.

³³ Allgemeines Verwaltungsarchiv, Familienarchiv Harrach, Karton 79; zu Maria Rosa von Harrach (20.08.1721-28.08.1785), ihrer Biographie und ihrem Briefwechsel vgl. die Ausstellungsbroschüre “Briefe Adelliger Frauen aus Wiener Neustadt” (Ausstellung im Stadtarchiv Wiener Neustadt, 16.03. – 29.10.2000).

³⁴ Dazu wäre zu lesen: Paul Karl Feyerabend, *Wider den Methodenzwang*, Frankfurt am Main 1999.

**Family networking. Purpose and form of epistolary conversation
between aristocratic siblings (Siena 17th century)**

by

Benedetta Borello

In recent years, careful analysis carried out on correspondence by historians, anthropologists and linguists has emphasized one of its fundamental functions: the letter creates social relationships. In particular, family letters have offered very fertile ground for investigation. More than other kinds of correspondence, letters exchanged by family members show well the “paradoxical order” referred to by Roger Chartier and Jean Hebrard in the conclusion of *La Correspondance*: the letter “builds a social link starting from a subjective and singular gesture”.¹

In aristocratic families, as much research appearing in Gabriella Zarri’s book has shown, writing letters and bonding or consolidating relationships inside as well as outside the family was considered an activity of great importance for both men and women.² As was also suggested, “regular epistolary exchange between the various family members” could change “the meaning and sense that the family had for its individuals”, and it could also have a positive effect “on identity and the feeling of belonging”, above all on women, who not infrequently played a marginal role in the households.³

Not all family correspondence was the same kind; within the family there were more frequented channels of news transmission and, in parallel, more solid bonds were created, destined to have greater effects. The letters show us that within the aristocratic families there existed areas of more intense relationships or relations of a different type.

¹ Roger Chartier (ed.), *La Correspondance. Les usages de la lettre au XIX^e siècle*, Paris 1994.

² Gabriella Zarri (ed.), *Per lettera. La scrittura epistolare femminile tra archivio e tipografia secoli XV – XVII*, Rome 1999.

³ Marina D’Amelia, “Lo scambio epistolare tra Cinque e Seicento: scene di vita quotidiana e aspirazioni segrete”, in: Zarri, *Per lettera*, pp. 79-110, p. 110.

Some interesting ideas for thought on this subject have come to me from some of the Chigi family letters, well preserved in their family archive at the Vatican's Apostolic Library.⁴ In 1659 when, after Alessandro VII overcame his resistance to it, his Sienese relatives started flowing to Rome,⁵ even Sigismondo Chigi, son of Augusto, the pope's brother, and of Francesca Piccolomini, left for the papal court. Sigismondo was ten when he moved to Rome, and his moving away from home was indispensable and fairly urgent. Second child (but only and very beloved son of Francesca Piccolomini, since the other children were born from Olimpia Della Ciaia), with an uncle who was Pope, Sigismondo was to take up an ecclesiastic career and become a cardinal at only eighteen.

Departure from Siena gave way to a consistent flow of letters directed to the young prelate. The family archive preserves the correspondence written by Olimpia Chigi, third child of Augusto and Olimpia Della Ciaia, as well as wife of Giulio Gori as of 1653. There are about ninety letters written between 1659 and 1676, nearly all addressed to her brother.⁶ Side by side with this epistolary flow, two other correspondences unwind: that of another of Sigismondo's sisters, Laura Chigi,⁷ who had taken the vows in the Sienese monastery of San Girolamo di Campansi, under the name of Sister Maria Pulcheria, and that of his mother Francesca Piccolomini Chigi of whom 650 letters are preserved written between 1660 and 1678.⁸ Sister Maria Pulcheria is the authoress of about fifty letters, nearly all addressed to her brother. The letters written by Francesca Piccolomini, numerous and well preserved, bear witness to a very intense relationship. There wasn't one letter where the mother didn't repeat to her son how much she missed him and where she expressed her affection for him. Aside from this, Francesca's

⁴ The study of this source falls within a vaster research project, which I am carrying out at the University of Siena, on the relationships formed between Siena and Rome by the aristocratic families.

⁵ Antonio Menniti Ippolito, *Il tramonto della Curia nepotista. Papi, nipoti e burocrazia curiale tra XVI e XVII secolo*, Rome 1999.

⁶ Vatican's Apostolic Library, Chigi Archive, b. 3871.

⁷ Vatican's Apostolic Library, Chigi Archive, b. 3847.

⁸ Vatican's Apostolic Library, Chigi Archive, bb. 3831 and 3832.

correspondence was useful in providing information about the whole family, contrary to that of the two sisters, who in their letters seemed to prefer cultivating a preferential relationship with their brother. Their mother, who had stayed in Siena, seemed invested with the duty of managing the family relationships *in toto*.

Over the following pages I will reconstruct the family networks that the Chigi siblings wove during the second half of the 17th century between Siena and Rome, comparing the two relationship systems with that bound between mother and son. I would like to show how the scope of the single letters sent by the two women blends with their manners of expression. Epistolary conversations between siblings served to create a dense area, that integrated well with the overall family equilibrium, with the strategies pursued, and with the primogeniture logic.

Brother and sisters

The relationship between siblings, their conflicts and their complicity are a topic that still merits an in-depth study. Angiolina Arru and Sofia Boesch Gajano, as far back as ten years ago, in the “Introduzione” to issue 83 of *Quaderni Storici*, dedicated to *Fratello e sorella*, noted how the brother/sister pair found difficulty in becoming the subject of studies and how recent research underestimated the role of the fraternal relationship.⁹ Naturally there were exceptions to this general trend. Lawrence Stone, for example, suggested various times in his *Family, Sex and Marriage in England*, the intensity of the sibling relationship in the sixteenth and seventeenth century family.¹⁰ The children grew up together, adults rarely experienced those primogeniture conflicts that took place between brothers or, I would add, the controversies for hoarding the dowry that could take place between sisters.

⁹ Angiolina Arru, Sofia Boesch Gajano, “Introduzione”, in: *Quaderni Storici* 1993, 83, pp. 307-310.

¹⁰ Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800*, London 1977.

The issue of *Quaderni storici*, in particular, had the aim of removing the couple from the exclusive dimension of son/daughter. Following the path marked by Hans Medick and David Sabean and above all by Martine Segalen in their volume,¹¹ the editors of the issue of *Quaderni Storici* dwelled on the reconstruction and redefinition of the male and female roles at the time of transmission or division of patrimony. In the inheritance game or in the creation of a circuit of dowries, strongly complementary matters between siblings seem to emerge within families.

In the essay by Marina D'Amelia, an examination was made of a lengthy correspondence that two siblings, Geronima Veralli Malatesta and Giovanni Battista Veralli, exchanged between 1575 and 1622. The non-payment of Geronima's dowry held the whole family group in check, and above all the eldest, indebted and subjected to control by his sister and by the second-born cardinal. In this essay the relationship between the siblings was read in the light of family dynamics – the Veralli crisis – of the economic difficulties experienced and the strategies suggested by Geronima to Giovanni Battista for “running the house”. Yet the letters also witnessed an on-going play of readjustment to reabsorb asymmetries of power and conflicts, playing with different wording as well. The need to continuously recreate an affectionate family atmosphere between siblings pervades the entire epistolary, with the intent, according to D'Amelia, to direct the conduct of the eldest towards adult responsibilities.¹²

There are no dowries at stake, nor economic difficulties, nor adult responsibilities in the Chigi correspondence that I studied. Yet the frequency of the letters, the presentation of topics and the rhetoric artifices used within them, contribute in

¹¹ Martine Segalen, “Sein Teil Haben”: Geschwisterbeziehungen in einem egalitären Vererbungssystem”, in: Hans Medick/ David Sabean (eds.), *Emotionen und materielle Interessen. Sozialanthropologische und historische Beiträge zur Familienforschung*, Göttingen 1983.

¹² Marina D'Amelia, “Una lettera a settimana. Geronima Veralli Malatesta al signor fratello 1575-1622”, in: *Quaderni Storici*, 1993, 83, pp. 381-413.

creating the same familiarity (whether affectionate or turbulent) found in the Veralli instance.

Secret and confidence

In the two epistolaries written by the sisters Chigi to their brother I seem to find a solid bond between siblings who, between Siena and Rome, worked together, each one within their own sphere in the interest in the lineage. The domestic roles covered by Sigismondo Chigi, Olimpia Chigi Gori and Sister Maria Pulcheria Chigi, cut out precise scopes of action for the siblings and defined their duties. Nevertheless, the letters show how the functions could work well together, creating alternative spaces yet nonetheless essential to the most traditional family dynamics, characterising the logic of the primogeniture.¹³ The Chigi letters, furthermore, seem to collect the “indirect memory” of the family, the non official memory: that which refers to the mechanisms of those spaces alternative to the primogeniture.

The two correspondences of the Sigismondo sisters, as well as that written by their mother, Francesca Piccolomini, witness to the existence of dense social relationships, a support network for those who became part of it (nephews, as well as friends, protégés); furthermore the letters had their own special way of expressing and witnessing the existence of this network.

The topics of the letters were varied and, naturally, the reasons the two sisters decided to take pen in hand were different. The various purposes, such as taking care of Agostino’s young daughters in a monastery, sending things to Rome or information about Sieneese or Roman ecclesiastics corresponded to different forms of epistolary conversations. Amongst the rhetoric artifices used in the

¹³ Renata Ago, “Giochi di squadra: uomini e donne nelle famiglie nobili del XVII secolo”, in: Maria Antonietta Visceglia (ed.), *Signori, patrizi e cavalieri nell’età moderna*, Roma-Bari 1992, pp. 256-264.

letters, was the transmission of secrets that – as Simmel has taught us¹⁴ – encourage the formation and consolidation of communities.

At times though, the restricted circulation of news could even not take the form of transmitting a secret or a confidence. Within the family there could actually be a kind of specialisation by topic. Some could be delegated to deal with certain matters in their letters, while others intentionally ignored them. This is seen for example in the letters written by Pamphilio Pamphilj and by Olimpia Maidalchini Pamphilj, his wife, to Vittoria Gualtieri, Olimpia's mother. It was Pamphilio who spoke about the children and how they were growing, maybe because he was better informed or maybe because it wasn't a matter that Olimpia need dwell upon: it would have been a repetition.¹⁵ Nevertheless, it seems to me that the restricted circulation of news, even when it took on the form of specialisation by subject matter, served to strengthen a relationship.

After the volume edited by Hans Medick and David Sabeau, it is superfluous to say that, within these family networks, woven transversally and that could take on various shapes, material interests and affection were indissolubly bound. This can be seen quite well in a letter written by Sister Maria Pulcheria at the end of 1672.¹⁶

On 16 November 1672, Sister Maria Pulcheria Chigi, just like every Wednesday, took pen in hand to write to her cardinal brother, Sigismondo, from the Sieneese monastery of San Girolamo di Campansi. This time the letter was the fruit of family collaboration. Sister Pucheria wrote with her young niece Angela Chigi,¹⁷ brought up in the cloisters. The epistolary conversation between the two siblings concerned another Chigi, whom sender and addressee claimed to know well. Maria Virginia Borghese, mother of little Angela, a guest in the Campansi

¹⁴ Georg Simmel, *Sociologia*, Milan 1989, pp. 291-346.

¹⁵ Benedetta Borello, *Trame sovrapposte. La socialità aristocratica e le reti di relazioni femminili a Roma (XVII-XVIII secolo)*, Naples 2003, pp. 54-55.

¹⁶ Vatican's Apostolic Library, Chigi Archives, b. 3847.

¹⁷ Angela was born in Rome in 1665 from Maria Virginia Borghese and Agostino Chigi, the first-born brother of Sigismondo and Suor Maria Pulcheria.

monastery, to be taught there and then take the vows, had delivered her eighth child, a daughter, slightly disappointing the family expectations. Wife of the only Roman Chigi, Agostino, Maria Virginia had had only one boy and, so far, seven girls. She was to have four more girls. Seven of her daughters were taken into the San Girolamo di Campansi cloisters in Siena, where, after being properly educated by their aunt – Sister Maria Pulcheria Chigi – they took their vows.

On 16 November 1672, only Angela was left at Campansi, seven years old. According to what Sister Pulcheria wrote to her brother Sigismondo, aunt and niece had no misgivings. Angela's mother gave birth to another girl and, what they were most interested in, was in good health. On this note, the first part of the letter was closed, where the nun asked after her brother's health, renewed bonds with the rest of the "Chigi community" she belonged to and, with rhetoric artifice, placing herself and her epistolary gesture in the monastery alongside the little girl who had been entrusted to her, brought back an intimate and familiar atmosphere, as suggested to us by the research of Cécile Dauphin and Danièle Pouban.¹⁸ A kind of gift of familiarity to her brother. Sister Maria Pulcheria's letter had a social role no less important than that played by intimacy and familiarity. Regular and necessary correspondence showed each family member the existence of a kinship front where advice, goods and services circulated.

The second part of the letter was dedicated to confidentiality, sending secrets and intimate, personal impressions, which, along with the social aspect, were the other key element of the correspondence. We don't know if little Angela was sent away or stayed beside her aunt, but, as in a voice conversation between adults, she kept her distance. Her aunt tells about how, after a series of fevers, the little girl recovered and seemed to be enjoying good health. According to Sister Anna Maria, another guest at the monastery of San Girolamo di Campansi, she even grew in height. Yet most important was that Angela's presence at Campansi

¹⁸ Cécile Dauphin, Pierrette Lebrun Pezerat, Danièle Pouban, "Une correspondance familiale au XIX^e", in: Mirelle Bossis (ed.), *La lettre à la croisée de l'individuel et du sociale*, Paris 1994, pp.125-145.

made her aunt happy. Angela was good, fond of everyone and loved by everyone, so much so that Angela was a “Little Angel”, as her aunt wrote. There is no doubt about the sincerity of these words. Since the girl’s entry in the monastery, Sister Maria Pulcheria’s correspondence – always quite regular, a letter was sent nearly every Wednesday – had undergone a change. The routine letters that the siblings exchanged became enriched with details of the girl’s presence. Angela’s illnesses, her aunt’s worries, about which she didn’t want the girl’s parents to be informed (Agostino Chigi and Maria Virginia Borghese), yet about which she spoke freely with her brother Sigismondo, the happiness that Angela spread to the nuns, small gifts sent from Rome for the aunt to spoil her niece with – Angela had a little vegetable patch, and the seeds of the colourful flowers she sowed had come from Rome – consolidated a horizontal bond between siblings, an indispensable counterweight to the vertical logic of the male lineage.

This letter, as nearly all the others, talks about the monastery, about Roman relatives who would be guests there, and other matters are touched on that had never been discussed in the correspondence of the other sister, Olimpia Chigi. The two epistolaries run parallel, almost never intersecting. Reading the nearly twenty years of correspondence of the two women with their brother, there are no more than two mentions of one of them (a name or sarcastic comment) in the correspondence of the other one. This is not the case, for example, for Francesca Piccolomini. Sigismondo’s mother’s numerous letters give the feeling of her key role in the Chigi domestic relationships, relationships destined to be risked increasingly in the public sphere, since it was the family of the reigning pope. Nearly all her letters to her son had news about the health of family members, information about the management of the family assets and about the economic situation of the married sisters; it was always Francesca who took care of telling Sigismondo how to behave with the other sister or with the aunts in the monastery, which were places Francesca frequented no less assiduously than the drawing rooms of noble palaces or country villas. In short, it was the mother’s

letters that put in communication the two relationship systems that the correspondence between Olimpia and Sister Maria Pulcheria depicted as quite closed, with few channels of communication.

Even though bonded by affection and material interests to their cardinal brother, the two women had woven, within the family atmosphere, networks that were nearly independent and fairly tight knit between them. The style of their epistolary conversation, the circuits for transmitting news and secrets depicted these two webs of relationships quite differently. Yet both sisters had an intense and articulate relationship with Sigismondo. Correspondence served to build dense areas of social relations, that could be used to contrast the destructive logic of the primogeniture and maintain a bridge between the new and the old city, between the Roman Curia and Siena. The epistolary networks, with so much distance between sender and addressee, were the means for “keeping cohesion with relatives”.

The two sisters used the pen differently. Aside from the topics, the recounting of events, the confidential information they sent their brother, the form of their letters was different too.

Maria Pulcheria didn't write poorly. The language she used reveals a fairly good education, which she had at the Campansi monastery at the knee of her aunt, Sister Maria Agnese Chigi.¹⁹ The nuns of the Chigi house transmitted a wealth of knowledge to each other, as well as, maybe (it is still to be studied), the concrete tools of knowledge (books, writings or libraries). Yet her handwriting was terrible, at least if compared to that of her sister. Maybe she had little bent for holding a pen, since the handwriting of her aunt was much better.

Aside from her handwriting, even the style of Olimpia's letters was better. In writing to her brother, she concealed no detail of her life. She went through her

¹⁹ Cf. Ambrosius Eszer, “Prinzipessinnen Chigi als Nonnen in den Klöstern S. Girolamo in Campansi zu Siena und SS. Domenico e Sisto zu Rom”, in: *Römische Kurie, kirchliche Finanzen Vaticanische Archiv. Studien zu Ehren von Hermann Hoberg*, 1. Teil, Rome 1979, pp. 171-196.

Siena friends with a fine-tooth comb, she was well informed and gave meticulous information about internal family dynamics. She also told things that, if expressed publicly or referred to the person concerned, would have offended them. On 19 December 1667, for example, she told about an evening at the Della Ciaia's and wrote to her brother:

“Ieri arrivò la Signora Giulia in casa Ciai e iersera ci andammo a veglia, e veramente canta molto bene e con una gran maniera, e disinvoltura, ma levato questo è una gran brutta figliola vestita a quella maniera mezza da huomo, così da donna mi presuppongo che sia molto peggio”.

Her pen was biting even with her family. What Olimpia told in confidence to her brother on 9 December 1669 not only put Sister Maria Pulcheria in a bad light, but if it had been made public it could have upset the plans for the destiny of the young Roman Chigi girls. Laura, called Lala, Olimpia's daughter, thirteen-years-old, after falling ill twice was taken from the Campansi monastery, an unhealthy place according to her mother.

“V.E. sa che cavai Lala che aveva la febre e dopo a un mese che è stata fuori gli è passata e sta bene, ma non so se io ce la rimetto perché l'aria non mi pare che li si affacci niente e, per dirla con confidenza, che Suor M. Pulcheria non lo sappi, la citta ne meno ci sta volentieri e così mi credo che come dirò a Suor M. Pulcheria di non ce la rimettere ...

ma mentre lei a da far la monaca voglio che lei si contenti, e credo che ogn'uno mi darà la ragione con chi lei si lamenterà mentre che ho provato a rimetterla due volte.”

If a judgement of this kind had reached the ears of the Romans and if they had shared it, the seven Chigi's might have deposited their rich dowries in a Roman monastery. Suor Maria Pulcheria and maybe part of the Sienese branch would have been kept more at the margins of family life. That did not happen: Sigismondo opportunely kept his silence, not believing his sister and, implicitly, protecting the other sister.

Aside from keeping secrecy, this correspondence reveals clear reciprocity. Olimpia and Sigismondo spoke the same language, knew the same people well and could share secrets. Brother and sister handled letters in the same manner. As

Valérie Feschet rightly observed, reciprocity is among the first rules of epistolary communication.²⁰ In order for senders and addressees to communicate, they need to share the same definition of public and private, intimate and flaunted, written and oral. Distance could impoverish the baggage of mutual experiences. And even a different way of handling what was written could damage the solidity of an epistolary bond. Showing a confidential writing, like betraying a secret, was considered a grave offence. On 1st January 1663, for example, Francesca Piccolomini asked Sigismondo not to show the letter that she had sent him; a week later she insisted with the same request, giving as a reason the low literary level of her compositions, but a more likely reason was to be able to dialogue more freely with her son. Beside “open letters” where greetings were sent to this person and that person and where it was said to say this and that, there were the more confidential letters, where, for example, she asked her son to tell her what other people said about her. Naturally, Sigismondo told his mother what she asked for and probably didn’t tell what he was asked to keep secret.²¹

There was other correspondence that created bonds between more “distant” relatives (both physically and with those separated by several degrees of kinship). Regular correspondence was, in this case too, conceived as an obligation. It is clear, although, that the exchange of correspondence was less intense in its content, just as the density of the relationships that intertwined in that area of kinship was less intense.

For example, Olimpia Aldobrandini, barely fifteen, was taken in 1638 from the Roman monastery of San Sisto e Domenico to marry Paolo Borghese. In a few months the matrimony transformed her from a convent girl to the centre of a vast epistolary network that embraced Naples, Milan and the Farnese court of Parma, where her aunts lived. Steadfast writing was an obligation from which the young woman, like every other aristocrat, could not evade. In spite of the

²⁰ Valérie Feschet, “Le nipoti di Hortense. Parole e silenzi”, in: Daniel Fabre (ed.) *Per iscritto. Antropologia delle scritture quotidiane*, Lecce 1998, pp. 227-249.

²¹ Vatican’s Apostolic Library, Chigi Archive, b.3831.

frequency of her letters, composed with elegance and skill, her epistolary conversation betrayed her detachment. The tone was ceremonious, not unbecoming to an Aldobrandini woman, but quite different to what was used in the Chigi household, at least between Sigismondo and his sisters. The content basically concerned the sender's and addressee's health, movements or rare journeys or, exceptionally, an occasional request for objects or help for individuals who appeared once in the entire correspondence, made without too much hope for success. In such cases the letter became precious as a handwritten gift, to exhibit in witness of a bond that could be traced back only by the name and coat of arms.²²

In the same style were the letters that Pulcheria and Olimpia wrote to the other family cardinal, their cousin Flavio. When compared to those written to Sigismondo, the intimacy and density of relationships between siblings can immediately be seen.

Pulcheria had no qualms about asking her brother for money, even insistently. Money seems to me to be a revealing detail in understanding the confidence and intimacy that there could be between sender and addressee, as can be seen in the two examples that follow, where Olimpia Maidalchini and Olimpia Aldobrandini broached the subject in their letters.

In mid December 1622, Olimpia Maidalchini made a comment to her mother about some expenses made by her brother, Andrea, on the occasion of his marriage. Between Olimpia and her mother, during the twenties of the seventeenth century, a heavy, confidential epistolary dialogue developed. The topic of the letter could make this area of kinship more dense. When the wedding had already taken place, Olimpia bitterly scolded her mother for the money wasted on the celebration. In fact, gold palls had been bought, by then out of fashion. It would have been much better to spend the money for a carriage "which does much more justice".

²² Borello, Trame, pp. 67-68.

Money, on the contrary, was a subject she preferred speaking little about in the correspondence between Olimpia Aldobrandini and her aunts. Only once, answering her Aunt Maria who asked her to pay a debt of one of her protégées, Olimpia wrote curtly that in Rome a lot of charity was needed and one couldn't heed all requests for money. Neither aunts nor niece would have ever dared criticise expenses for clothes or carriages, as Olimpia Moidalchini did. It is difficult to establish whether this lack could be attributed to scarce intimacy between aunts and niece, or to a total lack of information about the true value of things. Both possibilities seem likely. Olimpia saw little of the other Aldobrandini women. Then again her family belonged to a more ancient and prestigious nobility than the Moidalchini's, who, still in full social ascent, had to evaluate costs and benefits of each single object very attentively.²³

Pulcheria Chigi's insistent requests for money from her brother, instructions on how to get it quickly and safely to the monastery, Olimpia Chigi Gori's harsh observations about the value of some of the things she bought, as well as the information that Francesca Piccolomini Chigi asked Sigismondo to get from Agostino Chigi about her income (a cheque to cover household expenses), seem to me to be another key in evaluating the intimacy and complicity within the family. The sums mentioned in the various letters were different: Sister Maria Pulcheria wanted a small amount for her personal needs, on the other hand Francesca asked about the lifestyle she would lead after the departure of her sons for Rome. In both cases we are dealing with delicate and important information concerning quite "peripheral" portions of family assets, yet which contributed in guaranteeing the unity of the kin group.

Some conclusions

Study of the correspondence, the careful analysis of the expressive forms and the placing of the epistolary gesture in the time of the family and its internal

²³ Ibid., pp. 75-76.

dynamics seems to me very useful in understanding the internal articulation of a kin group, the roles that each member was called to perform and the way this was done.

From this point of view, I believe I can identify the more popular channels of transmission of news, affective bonds, exchange of goods and services. One is certainly that between sister and brother, and I think I can add between sisters- and brothers-in-law and at times between sons- and daughters-in-law. That is what I can sum up, at the end of a long analysis (carried out on more than 500 letters) of the epistolary of the Roman family, the Pamphilj's. The members of this family used to create intimacy with some of their parents and these dense areas influenced decisions and strategies of the whole family group.²⁴ For example Olimpia Maidalchini, at the beginning of the 17th century, co-operated in different moments and in different ways with her brother-in-law, Giovanni Battista. The letters that both wrote are evidence of this work together. Olimpia, on the other hand, had a quite strong bond with her sisters in the monastery of San Domenico in Viterbo, but not with her two sisters-in-law in the Roman monastery of Tor de' Specchi e Santa Marta. Sometimes letters between mother and daughter testify an important tie, which can be built on a dialogue about pregnancy and motherhood, as Marina D'Amelia showed.²⁵

The density of the relationships, within these family areas, and the pattern and importance they took on in relationship to the entire kin group, were influenced by the manners of transmission of wealth and by the roles that the single members had to play, as well as the dynamics of ascending or descending mobility of the family.

Correspondence and therefore dialogue (and not only the manner of address

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Marina D'Amelia "La presenza delle madri nell'Italia medievale e moderna", in: Ead. *Storia della maternità*, Rome-Bari 1997, pp. 3-52.

denoting social intimacy or distance²⁶) between family members seem to me – at least with respect to the rather restricted framework of the research I have presented here – a good tool for investigation. Alongside this, I feel that interesting ideas can be obtained from the study of houses and of division of space inside them, from the circulation of knowledge, the consumption of family goods and from devotion.

²⁶ Marzio Barbagli, *Sotto lo stesso tetto. Mutamenti della famiglia in Italia dal XV al XX secolo*, Bologna 1984.

Briefe an den Kaiser. Anträge auf Nobilitierung als Quelle für die mitteleuropäische Sozialgeschichte des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts

von

Klaus Margreiter

Der übliche, wenn nicht der einzig mögliche Weg, als Untertan des Römischen Kaisers oder eines seiner souveränen Vasallen am Reich adelig zu werden, war, sich schriftlich um die Nobilitierung zu bewerben. Das Recht zu nobilitieren wurde seit alters her als sogenanntes kaiserliches Reservatrecht behandelt und als solches, nämlich eines der letzten Privilegien, das die hervorgehobene Stellung der Majestät gegenüber den anderen Reichsfürsten bezeugte, bis zum Ende des Heiligen Römischen Reichs eifersüchtig gehütet. Außer dem Kaiser besaßen nur solche Personen das Nobilitierungsrecht, an die er es durch Verleihung des großen Palatinats ausdrücklich delegiert hatte. In den meisten Fällen waren dies hochrangige österreichische oder dem Haus Österreich nahestehende Adelsfamilien.¹ Die kaiserlichen Prinzen aus dem Erzhaus besaßen, als sogenannte erbliche Hofpfalzgrafen ebenfalls das Nobilitierungsrecht, verzichteten aber auf dessen Ausübung. Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts verlieh auch der Kurfürst von Bayern den Reichsadelstand, doch war die Legitimität dieser – Kraft seiner Eigenschaft als Reichsvikar verliehenen – Dekrete umstritten. Auch der König von Preußen nobilitierte seit dem 18. Jahrhundert als Souverän eines Territoriums, das außerhalb der Reichsgrenzen lag. Der Kaiser selbst schließlich verlieh den Adelsstand in vierfacher Gestalt: den Reichsadel, den Adelsstand der Königreiche Ungarn und Böhmen und den erbländischen Adelsstand.

Der formale Prozeß einer Nobilitierung war vergleichsweise einfach: Die Supplikanten hatten ein Antragsschreiben an die zuständigen kaiserlichen

¹ Tatsächlich war die Gültigkeit von Nobilitierungen, die von Inhabern des großen Palatinats erteilt worden waren, beschränkt: In Preußen und Sachsen wurden sie seit dem 17. Jahrhundert nicht mehr anerkannt.

Behörden (die Reichskanzlei bzw. die österreichische/vereinigte Hofkanzlei) zu senden, die Tax² und nach der Genehmigung des Antrags eine weitere geringe Gebühr für die Ausfertigung des Diploms zu entrichten.³ Es wurde erwartet, daß der Antragsteller in seinem Schreiben eine Begründung für seinen Wunsch nach Erhebung in den Adelsstand gab, die ausreichte, um seinen Anspruch auf Standeserhöhung zu rechtfertigen. In einem Zeitraum von über drei Jahrhunderten ist auf diese Weise ein Korpus von Dokumenten entstanden, das aus mindestens 25.000 Akten besteht,⁴ die im Adelsarchiv zu Wien lagern.⁵ Zumeist bestehen sie aus dem Antragsbrief und dem Konzept des Verleihungsdekrets. Nach der thesesianischen Verwaltungsreform wurde der Verwaltungsprozeß weiter verschriftlicht, so daß sich in den Adelsakten seit den 1760er Jahren auch die Gutachten der Kanzleien und die schriftliche Fassung der Vorträge für das kaiserliche Kabinett (häufig mit dem eigenhändigen kaiserlichen “placet” versehen) finden. Es läßt sich heute weder feststellen, ob auch schon vor der Verwaltungsreform Untersuchungen über die Glaubwürdigkeit der von den Supplikanten angeführten Argumente durchgeführt wurden, noch ob die Anträge ebenfalls direkt vor den Kaiser gebracht wurden. Ebenso wenig ist bekannt, ob es Richtlinien für die Kanzleien gab, nach denen beurteilt wurde, ob Supplikanten adelswürdig waren. Welche Vorstellungen die kaiserlichen Behörden von der Adelswürdigkeit hatten, welches Konzept bezüglich der Bedeutung des Adelsstandes den Antragsbeurteilungen zugrunde lagen und welche sozialpolitische Strategie die Regierung mit den zahlreichen Nobilitierungen

² Für eine einfache Nobilitierung betrug die Gebühr im 18. Jahrhundert etwa 300 fl.

³ In der Praxis mögen mitunter noch Ausgaben für einen Rechtsberater, der Vorschläge für die Abfassung des Antrags gab und das Honorar für den Wappenmaler hinzugekommen sein.

⁴ Dieser Wert ergibt sich aus einer Hochrechnung, die ich im Zusammenhang mit meinem Dissertationsprojekt *Absolutistic Ennoblement Policy* unternommen habe: Aus der zufälligen Auswahl von 20% der Grundgesamtheit ergaben sich 5.072 Fälle. Allerdings wurden Erhebungen in einen höheren Adelsrang nicht berücksichtigt. Außerdem muß berücksichtigt werden, daß in vielen Fällen mehrere Personen durch dasselbe Dekret nobilitiert wurden.

⁵ Das Adelsarchiv ist Teil des Allgemeinen Verwaltungsarchivs (AVA) im Österreichischen Staatsarchiv. Ein publiziertes Verzeichnis liegt vor: *Standeserhebungen und Gnadenakte für das Reich und die Erblände bis 1806*. Hg. v. Karl F. v. Frank. - Senftenegg: 1967 ff.

möglicherweise verfolgte, läßt sich nur indirekt und daher recht grob aus dem Profil der genehmigten Anträge erschließen. Umso genauer und vor allem konkreter geht die Auffassung vom Adelsstand aus den Briefen der Antragsteller hervor, denn ihre Absicht war ja, das eigene Leben, das vergangene wie das aktuelle so darzustellen, daß aus dessen Beschreibung die Adelswürdigkeit hervorging. Mit anderen Worten: Die Anträge sollten ausreichende Antworten auf die Fragen enthalten, warum der Supplikant adelig werden wollte und warum er sich für adelswürdig hielt.

Ob es sich bei Nobilitierungsanträgen wirklich um Briefe im weiteren Sinn des Wortes handelt, hängt von der Behandlung zweier Faktoren ab:

1. Wenn man die Bedeutung des Begriffs "Brief" ausschließlich als Mittel zur privaten Kommunikation definiert, dann sind Nobilitierungsanträge klarerweise keine Briefe. Obwohl sie in der Regel eine Reihe privater Angelegenheiten behandeln – sie enthalten z. B. Lebensläufe, Informationen über das Einkommen, den Status und familiäre Verhältnisse – ist man eher geneigt, diese Angaben als *vertraulich* zu bezeichnen. Sie sind von der Art, wie sie heute etwa für Steuererklärungen typisch sind. Zwar könnte man einwenden, es bestehe kein wesentlicher Unterschied zwischen privat und vertraulich und daß auch Daten in Steuererklärungen auf alle Fälle den Bereich der Privatsphäre berührten, aber nicht immer ist vertrauliche Information notwendig auch privater Natur. Überdies muß man, entsprechend der von der heutigen Bedeutung des Begriffs "privat" abweichenden Auffassung der Frühen Neuzeit, berücksichtigen, daß nicht jede private Information unbedingt als vertraulich behandelt werden mußte. Unter Bedingungen, in denen der sogenannte demonstrative Konsum wenigstens im Adel eine allgemein gebräuchliche Gepflogenheit war, kann die Höhe des Einkommens keinesfalls als eine vertrauliche Information gewertet werden.
2. Üblicherweise versteht man unter Briefwechsel eine Form der Kommunikation. Wenn man darunter außerdem einen längerfristigen Prozeß interpersonellen Austauschs versteht, dann kann man den Begriff

“Kommunikation” auf Nobilitierungsanträge nicht anwenden. Andererseits ist offensichtlich, daß Adels-supplikanten etwas mitteilen (kommunizieren) wollten: Sie wollten über ihre Leistungen und Errungenschaften berichten, um dafür Anerkennung zu erhalten und belohnt zu werden. Allerdings war keineswegs sicher, ob derjenige, an den diese Berichte gerichtet waren, der Kaiser, sie jemals zu Gesicht bekam. Als das, was sie im Grunde waren, nämlich Geschäftsbriefe, wurden sie zunächst von einem zuständigen Beamten oder Sekretär gelesen und bearbeitet. Die einzige Antwort, die die Antragsteller zu erwarten hatten und gleichzeitig die einzige, an der sie interessiert waren, war ein positiver Bescheid und letztlich die kaiserliche Verleihung. Wenn man also hier überhaupt von echter Kommunikation sprechen kann, dann bestenfalls von Einwegkommunikation.

Auch wenn hier also kein Briefwechsel vorliegt, hätte es keinen Sinn, Adelsanträge vorschnell aus der Quellengattung Brief auszuklammern. Denn vom formalen Gesichtspunkt aus betrachtet handelt es sich eindeutig um Briefe und nicht etwa um Antragsformulare. Die Vielfalt der Formulierungen und der inhaltlichen Gliederung erlaubt kaum die Annahme einer formalen Norm zur Abfassung von Nobilitierungsanträgen. Aus naheliegenden Gründen sind die Anträge von Beamten am stärksten formalisiert und reproduzieren den Standard des administrativen Schriftverkehrs. Gelegentlich orientierten sich Supplikanten an den Formulierungen der Verleihungsurkunden, die sie womöglich irgendwo gesehen hatten (was manchmal zu leicht bizarren Ergebnissen führte). Doch Supplikanten ohne bürokratischen Hintergrund formulierten, wie es ihnen am adäquatesten erschien und häufig mit großer Freimütigkeit oder im Stil von Bittgesuchen. Außerdem wurden die Anträge – wiederum formal betrachtet – an den Kaiser persönlich gerichtet. Sie sind daher in der Art einer persönlichen Mitteilung abgefaßt, in der der Adressat unmittelbar angesprochen, das heißt an sein der Persönlichkeit des Kaisers eigentümliches Verständnis, Gerechtigkeitsgefühl oder Mitleid appelliert wird. Es ist also festzuhalten, daß

Nobilitierungsanträge nicht an die zuständigen Behörden gerichtet waren, sondern, wie es bei Bittschriften allgemein üblich war, an die Majestät persönlich. Das entsprach dem formalen Verfahren, in dem ein Supplikant keine behördliche Dienstleistung oder einen Bescheid verlangt, der im Kompetenzbereich des administrativen Personals lag, sondern eine Gunst, die nur der Kaiser selbst erweisen und nur ausnahmsweise delegiert werden konnte.

Eher berechtigt wäre Zweifel daran, ob derartige Briefe tatsächlich an den Kaiser persönlich gerichtet wurden, das heißt ob wirklich die Person des Kaisers gemeint war. Denn selbstverständlich wurde hier der Monarch nicht in seiner Eigenschaft als Privatperson, sondern als Souverän angesprochen. In der Anrede “Allerdurchlauchtigster, Großmächtigster und Unüberwindlichster Römischer Kaiser ...” spiegelt sich in der Tat das komplexe (aber nichtsdestoweniger inzwischen ausreichend beschriebene) dualistische Konzept des Monarchen als Person und gleichzeitig Personifikation des Staates. Allerdings ist in diesem Kontext von besonderer Bedeutung, daß vor- und frühmoderne Souveräne den Staat nicht nur repräsentierten, sondern vielmehr mit ihm identisch waren. Sie waren – persönlich – der Ursprung jeglicher staatlicher Autorität und die letzte Instanz in allen weltlichen Angelegenheiten. Berücksichtigt man diese Duplizität des Monarchen als Souverän und Person, dann erweisen sich Unklarheiten bezüglich der in den Briefen angesprochenen Instanz als gegenstandslos. Der Kaiser als Individuum war vom Souverän nicht zu trennen und daher mußten sich Petitionen gleichermaßen an beide Instanzen richten. Wer an die höchste obrigkeitliche Autorität appellierte, sprach mit dem Kaiser. Der Staat war der Souverän und dieser war ein denkendes und fühlendes Individuum.

Aber außer der persönlichen Kontaktaufnahme mit dem Kaiser enthalten Nobilitierungsanträge noch einen zweiten, wesentlich wichtigeren persönlichen Aspekt: Antragsteller mußten über sich selbst schreiben. Die sozialen Verhältnisse, unter denen man selbst und die Familie lebte, zu beschreiben bedeutete, eine Selbsteinschätzung und Bewertung dieser Verhältnisse

vorzunehmen. Natürlich geschah diese Beurteilung unter besonderer Betonung von Verdiensten und Leistungen und insgesamt unter Hervorhebung jener Eigenschaften, die man entweder für edel oder adelswürdig oder wenigstens für belohnenswert hielt. Doch die beträchtliche Zahl von Adelswerbern, die keine überdurchschnittlichen Fähigkeiten bzw. außerordentlichen Verdienste vorzuweisen hatten und den Adelsstand eingeständenermaßen lediglich des besseren oder leichteren gesellschaftlichen Fortkommens wegen beantragten, ermöglicht Einblicke in unterschiedliche Varianten der Autoreflexion auch von eher durchschnittlichen Existenzen. Hatte man eine ansehnliche Beamten- oder Militärkarriere aufzuweisen oder womöglich Entbehrungen in kaiserlichen Diensten erlitten, konnte man mit einigem Selbstbewußtsein und Stolz von der erwiesenen Treue berichten, mit der man dem Kaiser gedient hatte. In diesem Fall zögerte man nicht, persönliche Vorzüge und lobenswertes Verhalten ins rechte Licht zu rücken. Die vor allem im 18. Jahrhundert häufig gebrauchte Formel "ohne eitlen Ruhm zu melden"⁶ und ähnliche Neutralisierungsfloskeln halfen, den Bereich der Schicklichkeit trotzdem nicht zu verlassen. Wenn man aber von dergleichen verdienstvollem Wandel nicht berichten konnte, war man gezwungen, die entwaffnende Wirkung der Aufrichtigkeit für seine Zwecke einzusetzen:

"Zwar kann ich keine glänzenden Verdienste anführen, allein, die allerhöchste Milde, mit der Eure Kayserl: Majestät die Verdienste jedes Rechtschaffenen Mannes nach dem Maaße derselben belohnen, läßt mich hoffen, daß ich einer allerdreichsten Gewährung nicht ganz unwürdig werde erfunden werden."⁷

So berichteten relativ normale Mittelstandsexistenzen (Kaufleute, Ausübende freier Berufe, Privatiers usw.) nicht weniger freimütig, daß sie zeitlebens tugendhaft gelebt und ihre Pflicht erfüllt hätten, versehen mit der formelhaften Versicherung, dem Kaiser zu allen Zeiten mit größter Devotion zugetan gewesen

⁶ Vgl. AVA Adelsakten Franz Joseph Ignaz STEINER 1742, Maria Magdalena BEROLT 1747, Cyriak GÜNTHER 1661, Johann Thomas TRATTNER 1764, Johann Jakob SICHART 1750.

⁷ AVA Adelsakt August Wilhelm CRAYEN 1788, fol. 8.

zu sein und sich auch weiterhin in dieser Weise verhalten und dankbar erweisen würden. Ob das Glück der Kinder, das häufig als Motivation für die Entscheidung zur Beantragung einer Standeserhöhung angeführt wurde, ebenso aufrichtig gemeint oder nur vorgeschoben war, läßt sich aus heutiger Perspektive kaum mehr ermitteln, ebensowenig wie die Authentizität der Gefühle, die man dem Kaiser angeblich entgegenbrachte.

In den bisher eingesehenen Akten lassen sich grob zwei Grundtypen unterscheiden, die sich beide von auch heute noch angewandten rhetorischen Strategien nicht wesentlich zu unterscheiden scheinen. Der erste besteht darin, ein vermeintliches Recht auf die beantragte Gunst geltend zu machen, gewissermaßen nur das einzufordern, was einem ohnehin zustehe. Die zweite Strategie gab sich bescheiden; man bat um eine Gunsterweisung und appellierte an die kaiserliche Mildtätigkeit. Bemerkenswert ist, daß diese beiden Strategien nicht gleichmäßig über den Beobachtungszeitraum (17. und 18. Jahrhundert) verteilt sind, sondern daß, wiederum grob betrachtet,⁸ eine Häufung des ersten Typs im 17. Jahrhundert auftritt, während man im folgenden Jahrhundert anscheinend eher zum zweiten Typ tendierte.

Die für das 17. Jahrhundert typische fordernde Haltung (der erste Typ) hängt wahrscheinlich mit der in dieser Zeit noch lebendigen mittelalterlichen Vorstellung vom Kaiser als dem obersten Lehnsherrn zusammen. In einer feudal gegliederten Gesellschaft war die Beziehung zwischen Fürsten und Untertanen durch eine festgelegte Reihe von Pflichten definiert, auf die sich beide Seiten berufen konnten. Ein solches Verhältnis war, wenigstens theoretisch, weniger durch veritable Untertänigkeit, als eher eine Art gegenseitiger Treuevereinbarung charakterisiert. So lange Fürsten noch keine absoluten Monarchen (das heißt die absolute Macht der Fürsten noch nicht in den Bereich der Mentalität vorgedrungen oder die Untertanen diese Form der Macht noch nicht internalisiert hatten), waren Untertanen auch keine absoluten Untertanen. Dieser Kontext ist

⁸ Eine statistische Auswertung muß noch vorgenommen werden.

bei der Erklärung von Nobilitierungsanträgen des 17. Jahrhunderts zu berücksichtigen. Man beschrieb seine Vorzüge und Leistungen, betonte seine unverbrüchliche Treue und tat das auf eine Weise, aus der die Frage “Wer, wenn nicht ich, wäre für den Adelsstand geeignet? ” hervorzugehen scheint. Aus der rapportartigen Auflistung von Ämtern, die man bekleidet, Aufträgen, die man ausgeführt und alle jederzeit zu größten Zufriedenheit der Obrigkeit erledigt hatte, entsteht der Eindruck einer Rechnung, die man dem Monarchen vorlegte in der Hoffnung, sie möge beglichen werden. Natürlich appellierten auch die Antragsteller dieser Periode an die Milde des Kaisers aber tendenziell in Form einer in aller Bescheidenheit vorgetragenen Erinnerung an die Regeln, daß es nämlich zu den kaiserlichen Pflichten gehöre, Mildtätigkeit gegenüber denen zu zeigen, die es verdient hätten:⁹

“Allernägster Herr Herr; Es ist Weltdkündig, daß E: Kay: May: nit allein nach dem Exempel dero höchstgeehrter Vorfahren am Reich Römischer Kayser vnd Könige, sondern auch aus angeborner milde, dieiehnige, so sich ie vnd allerwegen in Adelichen vnd gueten Tugenden aufzunehmen vnd zuwachsen, auch in dero vnd gemeinen weesens diensten meritirt zumachen beflissen, mit sonderbarer Kayl: gnaden vnd ergezlichkeiten anzusehen vnd vor andern zu würdigen pflegen. ”¹⁰

Diese Art der Argumentation, in der man den Kaiser quasi mit einer Forderung konfrontierte, verschwand im Lauf des 18. Jahrhunderts. Mehr und mehr scheint bescheidene Zurückhaltung zur Norm für Nobilitierungsanträge geworden zu sein. Allerdings handelte es sich dabei um eine eher geschwätzig Art der Zurückhaltung, denn gleichzeitig kann beobachtet werden, daß die Antragsbriefe immer länger und die Lebensbeschreibungen immer detaillierter wurden. Das war die Konsequenz der immer umfangreicheren Bemühungen der Supplikanten, ihren Anspruch auf Standeserhebung möglichst profund und umfassend moralisch zu legitimieren und argumentativ zu untermauern. Dieser gesteigerte Fokus auf die argumentative Absicherung dürfte ihrerseits das Resultat einer veränderten Auffassung von der rechtlichen Qualität kaiserlicher

⁹ Vgl. AVA Adelsakten Dominik HÄRING 1623, Abraham PÜCHLER 1666, Paul Heinrich TILEMAN 1700, Jakob Ernst PLÖCKNER 1690, Johann Joachim GREDELY 1657.

¹⁰ AVA Adelsakt Mathias DOLLINGER 1668, fol. 14.

Gunsterweisungen gewesen sein.¹¹ Sie wurden nicht mehr als ein Recht aufgefaßt, das man unter bestimmten Voraussetzungen in Anspruch nehmen konnten, sondern als weitgehend vom Willen und Gutdünken des Monarchen abhängig betrachtet. Daher erschien es notwendig zu sein, nicht nur von den Leistungen, die eine Nobilitierung rechtfertigten, zu berichten, sondern den Kaiser (bzw. die Behörde) vom Wert und der Würdigkeit der eigenen Person zu überzeugen. Zu diesem Zweck wurden die Berichte mit immer mehr persönlichen Details angereichert und erstmals beschrieben Antragsteller auch das, was man ihre persönliche Situation nennen könnte, etwa wie unwürdig und erniedrigend sie sei und wie sie und ihre Vorfahren unter ihrem beklagenswerten gegenwärtigen Status gelitten hätten. Aus den umfangreichen Elogen auf die Tugend der Majestät, die die Berichte umrahmen und die wahrhaft barocke Dimensionen erreichen konnten, drängt sich dem Leser der Eindruck auf, die Autoren dieser Texte wären mehrheitlich dazu übergegangen, den Erfolg ihrer Unternehmung auf das Erlehen des kaiserlichen Mitleids zu gründen.

“Ewr Kayserl: Majestät Weltbekannte Allerdreichste und Menschenfreundlichste Herablassung, welche einem jeden das Ehrfurchtvollste Vertrauen einflößet, läßt auch mich hoffen, daß Allerhöchst Dieselben es in Ungnaden nicht bemerken werden wenn ich in allertiefster Unterwürfigkeit mich unterwinde, für meinen einzigen Hoffnungsvollen Sohn, der gegenwärtig seine Akademischen Jahre geendiget hat, und eine neue Laufbahn antreten will, um die Erhebung in den Adelstand fustfälligst zu bitten weil dieser junge Mensch verschiedene glückliche Aussichten hat, die eine Standeserhöhung erfordern.”¹²

Kaum noch wagte man, den Kaiser auf seine Pflichten anzusprechen. Stattdessen führte man an, von der unendlichen “Clemenz” der Majestät gehört zu haben und “daß keiner, der dem geheiligten Thron sich genähert, und um eine allerhöste Gnade in allertiefster Ehrfurch gebethen hat, sagen könne, Er seye ohne trost, und ohne gnade entlassen worden.”¹³

¹¹ Zur Vermutung, die Anträge würden strenger geprüft bestand kein Anlaß, denn die Zahl der Nobilitierungen ging nicht zurück.

¹² AVA Adelsakt Franz Bernard BRUNS 1786, fol. 6.

¹³ AVA Adelsakt Johann Paul Strickler 1776, fol. 14.

Dieses Ausmaß an Schmeichelei und Untertanengebaren war dem 17. Jahrhundert weitgehend fremd. Das ist bemerkenswert, wenn man bedenkt, daß Antragstellern in dieser Zeit deutlich mehr Stoff für mitleiderregende Berichte zur Verfügung gestanden hätte und diese wohl auch mehr Ursache gehabt hätten, ihre Bericht auf diese Weise zu formulieren. So finden sich in Anträgen aus dem 17. Jahrhundert manchmal wahrhaft erschütternde Beschreibungen von Not und Willkür zu Kriegszeiten: Fälle von Plünderung, Entführung, Vertreibung, Gefangenschaft oder auch nur jahrelanger (!) Besoldungsrückstand während des Dreißigjährigen Krieges, des Pfälzischen Krieges und des Spanischen Erbfolgekrieges sind darunter.¹⁴ Im 17. Jahrhundert erbat man daher nicht selten Kompensation für die aus Treue zum Kaiser erlittenen Entbehrungen durch eine formelle Standeserhöhung.

Supplikanten des 18. Jahrhunderts beschäftigten dagegen Probleme anderer Art. Damit ist vor allem das ständig steigende Gewicht höfischer Statussymbole gemeint, die diesen im Alltag einer Gesellschaft zukam, die immer mehr unter den Einfluß der Regeln des höfischen Lebens geriet. Aus vielen Nobilitierungsanträgen wird klar, daß diese Verhältnisse unter Umständen beträchtliche praktische Probleme mit sich bringen konnten. Welcher Art diese Schwierigkeiten sein konnten, illustrieren folgende Beispiele: 1788 beantragte ein Kaufmann aus Leipzig die Nobilitierung, um seinen Söhnen eine Offizierslaufbahn zu ermöglichen.¹⁵ 1776 beantragte ein pfälzischer Graf für seine bürgerliche Gattin, um seine Kinder erbberechtigt zu machen.¹⁶ Schon aus dem Jahr 1670 stammt ein Fall, der beredt den Druck veranschaulicht, den die höfische Gesellschaft auf ihre Mitglieder ausübte. Johann Abundius Somigliano aus Nürnberg sah sich, nachdem er eine Baroness geheiratet hatte, genötigt, den Freiherrnstand zu beantragen:

¹⁴ Vgl. AVA Adelsakten Adam SÄTZL 1673, Johann Abundius SOMOGLIANO 1670, Johann Schweickhart EMMERICH 1641, Johann Georg MEZGER 1690, Adolf Friedrich PFREUNDT 1708.

¹⁵ Vgl. AVA Adelsakt August Wilhelm CRAYEN 1788.

¹⁶ Vgl. AVA Adelsakt Agatha SCHWEIZER 1776.

“Außer Welchem Standt Sye mit mir, u neben ihren aigenen geschwistrighen. so mit Freyherrn auch vermählet seint, ohne Schamrothe Bey keinem einizen Hoffe erscheinen könnte.”¹⁷

Zahlreiche Unternehmer und Selfmademen erstrebten eine Art sichtbarer Bestätigung ihres beruflichen Erfolgs und sozialen Aufstiegs.¹⁸ So spiegelt sich im sozialen Profil der Supplikanten auch die verstärkte soziale Mobilität und insgesamt die komplexere Sozialstruktur des 18. Jahrhunderts.

Beamte stellten zu allen Zeiten eindeutig den Großteil der Adelswerber. Als hochrangige Fürstendiener waren sie nach der hergebrachten Auffassung ideale Adelskandidaten. Obwohl erst zu Beginn des 19. Jahrhunderts (für österreichische Beamte) vorgeschrieben wurde, daß sich Beamte, sobald sie eine gewisse Anzahl von Dienstjahren in einer leitenden Position hinter sich gebracht hatten, um die Nobilitierung zu bewerben hatten, scheint man auch schon früher ähnliches von ihnen erwartet zu haben. Da in den kaiserlichen Behörden und dem Kaiser selbst gewiß genau bekannt war, worin ihre Arbeit und ihre Bedeutung für die Staaten bestand, konnten sie häufig auf eine ausführliche Beschreibung ihrer Meriten und Rechtfertigung ihres Ansuchens verzichten. Zudem bestand ein traditioneller Zusammenhang zwischen dem Adelsstand und der Ausübung obrigkeitlicher Herrschaft. Seit bürgerlichen Beamten im Fürstenstaat Macht über Untertanen übertragen worden war, durften sie Anspruch auf Zugehörigkeit zum *Herrschaftsstand* erheben. Der Schwerpunkt in ihren Berichten lag auf dem Nachweis ihrer Treue zum Fürsten, ihrer politischen und bisweilen auch noch ihrer konfessionellen Verlässlichkeit, sowie auf Gelegenheiten, bei denen sie mit dem Kaiser persönlich in Kontakt getreten waren. Auch die Versicherung, sich der Nobilitierung würdig zu erweisen, gehörte zum Standard von Antragstexten. Aus diesem Grund bestand für Beamte nicht die Notwendigkeit, sich ausdrücklich auf Verdienste um das gemeine Wesen zu berufen, wie es seit dem

¹⁷ AVA Adelsakt Johann Abundius SOMOGLIANO 1670, fol. 20.

¹⁸ Vgl. u. a. AVA Adelsakten Andreas Josias KILIAN 1778, Johann Jakob SICHART 1750, Johann Thomas TRATTNER 1764, Johann Paul STRICKLER 1776, Jakob SCHAKHY (SACCO) 1677.

Ende des 17. Jahrhunderts und verstärkt seit der zweiten Hälfte des 18. Jahrhunderts, insbesondere von Unternehmern, gemacht wurde.

Es bedarf noch einer wesentlich genaueren Analyse, aus welchen Gründen Personen die Nobilitierung beantragten und welchen Wert eine Nobilitierung in der Gesellschaft hatte. Anders, als in Frankreich, wo Trägern junger Adelstitel die Assimilierung in die höfische Gesellschaft gelingen konnte, war ein derartiger sozialer Aufstieg in Deutschland/Österreich nur selten möglich. Die Frage nach der Motivation für die Erwerbung des Adelsstandes ist deshalb umso virulenter, denn ein Nobilitierter konnte kaum damit rechnen, vom alten Adel als ebenbürtig akzeptiert zu werden oder überhaupt als echter Adeliger angesehen zu werden. Dazu waren auch ihre sozialen Verhältnisse viel zu heterogen und selten mit denen der alten adeligen Familien vergleichbar. Auch der alte Begriff des "Beamtenadels" kann das vielschichtige Phänomen der kaiserlichen Nobilitierung nicht abdecken.

“Je connois votre facilitée à manier la plume” – Epistolary skills and Princely children at the court of Baden-Durlach in the 18th century

by

Claudia Kollbach

I. Letter writing at court

In 1602, seven-year old Prince Gustav Adolf of Sweden wrote a letter to the Electoral Prince of Palatine, also aged seven. The letter, which represents a letter of friendship, aimed explicitly at strengthening the ties existing between the two courts. Referring to the lengthy correspondence and confidence already holding between their fathers, Prince Gustav asked the Prince of Palatine to follow their father’s example and to continue this relationship:

“[...] damit auch zwischen E. L. [Euer Liebden, C.K.] undt uns inn unsern kindlichen und jungen Jahren, weil wir gleichs alters sein, ein solch gutes vertrauen undt Oheimliche, undt vätterliche freundschaft möge continuiert undt erhalten werden, alß wollen wir unß gegen E.L. deßen hiemit freuntlichen anerbotten haben. ”¹

This letter, which of course was not composed by the prince himself but by the chancellery of the court, underlines the importance of letters written in and exchanged between courts: the diplomatic significance of letters, especially of so-called letters of notification and letters of compliment in general.² In the second

¹See the following rough translation: “[...] *between Your Beloved and us in our childlike and young years, since we are of the same age, such a good confidence and [...] fatherly friendship may be continued and preserved, that for we want to offer ourselves to Your Beloved in a friendly way.*” Cited in Georg Steinhausen, *Die Geschichte des deutschen Briefes*, 2 volumes, Berlin 1889-1891, vol. 2, p. 123 ss.

² For the term “letter of compliment” cf. Janet Gurkin Altman, “Teaching the ‘People’ to write: The Formation of a Popular Civic Identity in the French Letter Manual”, in: *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 1992, 22, pp. 147-180, p. 151, 157 and Manfred Beetz, *Frühmoderne Höflichkeit. Komplimentierkunst und Gesellschaftsrituale im altdeutschen Sprachraum*, Stuttgart 1990. Synonymously, I am using the terms “occasional letter” and “ceremonial letter”, thus referring to Gellert, who, in his well-known theory of epistolography, dating from the 18th century, describes letters which are “introduced by the spirit of ceremony”, cited in Steinhausen, *Brief*, vol. 2, p. 380. Steinhausen gives further examples of this genre of letters, including “letters of notification”, “letters of recommendation” (“Anerbietungs-

half of the 18th century, such ceremonial letters were also exchanged between courts according to diplomatic protocol, often between members of the same family. The paying of compliments was appropriate on many specific and special occasions, for instance, on the birth of a prince or a princess, marriages, the new year or for giving condolences. Over several centuries, they served as indicators of the quality of the diplomatic relationship between courts. “*Mit Courpfalz stehen wir auch wol*”, – Sophie of Hanover claimed in one of her letters – “*haben Neuwjahrsbrif gewechselt*”; equally, offences committed against this etiquette were noted carefully.³

Although the above mentioned letter was not written by the prince himself, but only in his name, the writing of letters was considered a crucial skill to be mastered by princes and princesses. This skill – which in many respects implied a “distinctive character”⁴ – was not only necessary to write letters of compliment,

schreiben” resp. “Anwerbungsschreiben”), “letters of greeting”, “letters of congratulation”, “letters of dedication” etc., *ibid.*, pp. 123-148.

³ “*We also have a good relationship with Electoral Palatine, we have exchanged New Year’s greetings.*” Cited in Steinhausen, *Brief*, vol. 2, p. 136. Most probably Steinhausen is here quoting Sophie of Hanover (1630-1714), daughter of the Elector Friedrich V. of Palatine and wife of Ernst August, Duke of Braunschweig-Lüneburg. New Year’s messages therefore formed part of the code of manners which one had to respect when writing a letter, cf. Gerhard Fouquet, “Fürsten unter sich. Privatheit und Öffentlichkeit, Emotionalität und Zeremoniell im Medium des Briefes”, in: Cordula Nolte [et al.] (ed.), *Principes. Dynastien und Höfe im späten Mittelalter. Interdisziplinäre Tagung des Lehrstuhls für Allgemeine Geschichte des Mittelalters und Historische Hilfswissenschaften in Greifswald in Verbindung mit der Residenzen-Kommission der Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen vom 15.-18. Juni 2000*, Stuttgart 2002, pp. 171-198, p. 176 ss. For the “demystification” of letter writing under the French Revolution, thus including the abolition of New Year’s greetings and the courtly ceremonial style in general cf. Altman, *Letter Manual*, p. 159 ss.

⁴ By this term I am referring to the wish of the aristocracy to distinguish itself from others by its behaviour, education etc. Apart from the use of French in the court sphere, further elements of distinction are, for example, the self-discipline which was required for maintaining correspondences over a long period of time and which even becomes obvious in the specific posture that was needed for the writing of letters. Of course, material conditions also had to be fulfilled: one had to have appropriate, high quality paper at one’s disposal, a good pen, a seal and the money for postage. Cf. Steinhausen, *Brief*, vol. 2, p. 404; Reinhard Nickisch, *Brief*, Stuttgart 1991, p. 52. Correspondingly, also contemporaries regarded letter writing as the prerogative of a leisured class. Cf. Altman, *Letter Manual*, p. 155. Furthermore, the maintenance of intensive correspondences, especially when held with famous personalities, contributed to the social prestige of a person. This allowed at the same time information to be

but was also a precondition for writing the usual familiar letters, not to mention letters of request, by which concrete financial or political matters were pursued by aristocrats. Similarly, even dynastic plans were very dependent on epistolary knowledge, or, to put it in other words, given the arranging of marriages through letters, even the social reproduction of aristocracy was closely tied to such skills. Furthermore, the letters which were exchanged between members of the princely family – the familiar letters⁵ – were used as instruments of integration for children into court society, as well as to build up a strong awareness concerning their own family. In the following section, I will show these functions by mainly focusing on letters written by the Princes of Baden-Durlach to their parents in the course of the second half of the 18th century, a century which is also described as the “classic century of letters”.⁶

First of all, I will briefly show how the young Princes of Baden-Durlach were introduced to the epistolary skills; then a ceremonial letter written by the hereditary Prince Karl Ludwig (1755-1801) to his mother will be focused on and, finally, the significance of common letters exchanged between parents and children, will be investigated.

II. The teaching of princely children in epistolary

When Prince Friedrich of Baden-Durlach (1756-1817) wrote his first letter he was six years old; the first still existing letter which his brother, Karl Ludwig, sent to his father, was written when he aged seven. This points to a genuine characteristic of noble education in general: the so-called “*précocité*”, a term which emphasises the distinctive function of time in considering social

received in a period in which correspondence still performed the function which was later on overtaken by newspapers. Cf. Steinhausen, *Brief*, vol. 2, pp. 198, 174 ss.

⁵ In agreement with Fouquet and Rogge I call these letters “familiar letters” or “letters of friendship” (“*Familien- und Freundschaftsbrief*”), thus rejecting the term of the “*Privatbrief*”, used by Steinhausen. Cf. Fouquet, *Fürsten*, p. 173 and Altman, *Letter Manual*, p. 162. But whereas Fouquet does not distinguish these letters from pure ceremonial letters, in my opinion a clear differentiation is possible, as the ceremonial letter cited below will demonstrate.

⁶ Cf. Steinhausen, *Brief*, p. 302 ss.

relationships.⁷ That is to say, given the fact that the nobles' education (in this case the instruction in epistolary skills) began when they were very young, they gained an advantage in time, which made it difficult for other social classes to keep up. The ability to write a letter, especially a ceremonial letter, therefore served to mark social boundaries.

To guarantee such an advantage in time, formal instruction necessarily had to begin at an early age. Unfortunately, there exists no time table for the instruction of the Princes of Baden-Durlach for the time before 1764: the oldest prince then was 9 years old, and his younger brother Friedrich was eight. Nevertheless the time-table points to the great importance which was attributed to the ability of writing letters at court. Three hours per week were dedicated to the subjects "*Briefschule*" (letter writing instruction) and "*Schreibübungen*" (writing practice); the time-table which illustrates their mother's own instruction lists four weekly lessons in "*Epistolographie*" and "*Calligraphie*".⁸ Indeed, the composition of letters was perceived as a subject in its own right and was, towards the end of the 17th century, even being taught at university, for example, by August Bohse (1661-1742).⁹

In order to exercise an appropriate style of letter writing, princely children were encouraged to copy letters found in the family archives. The copies of such letters by the young Princess Karoline Luise of Hessen-Darmstadt, later Markgräfin of Baden-Durlach, still exist. As part of her instruction, she had

⁷ For this term cf. Pierre Bourdieu, *La distinction. Critique sociale du jugement*, Paris 1979, pp. 70-81, 77. Beetz also refers to the social advantage in the "process of culture" ("Enkulturationsprozeß"), which leads to a natural boundary between the different classes and can not be made up for. Cf. Beetz, *Höflichkeit*, p. 306. This distinctive advantage in time was ensured by certain rules of decorum, cf. *ibid.*, pp. 249, 273.

⁸ For the princes' time-table see Generallandesarchiv Karlsruhe, Familienarchiv, 5A, Corresp., 148; for the time-table of the Markgräfin Karoline Luise of Baden-Durlach (1723-1783) see 5A, Corresp., 74. The letters cited in the following all refer to the family archive of the Markgrafen resp. Großherzöge of Baden (-Durlach) kept in the Generallandesarchiv Karlsruhe.

⁹ Bohse, who published under the pseudonym of "Talandier", had also written an important letter manual of the baroque gallant style. After 1700, he even worked as a professor at the "Ritterakademie" in Liegnitz, cf. Steinhausen, *Brief*, vol. 2, p. 153; Beetz, *Höflichkeit*, pp. 57-59; Nickisch, *Brief*, 80.

obviously been asked to copy letters of condolence, as well as letters dealing with the education of her brothers in Alsace. These letters, written by French native speakers, were probably regarded as exemplary.¹⁰ Moreover, copying letters regarding one's own family can also be considered as a means of transmitting and strengthening the dynastic memoria.¹¹ That such exercises had a long tradition within noble education is illustrated by the book of letter writing exercises ("Briefübungsbüchlein") belonging to the later Duke Christian Louis I of Mecklenburg, which dates from the first half of the 17th century; similar examples of princes practising their style of letter writing can still be found for the 19th century.¹²

In their lessons princely children also learned the correct way of using titles and greetings, basic knowledge which needed to be mastered for diplomatic correspondence, and they were trained in this through the letters that they wrote to their parents, as the drafts of New Year's letters by the fourteen-year old Princess Karoline Luise of Hessen-Darmstadt show: according to the rank of the addressee, Karoline Luise had to put the formal greeting at the end of the letter in a slightly differing pattern of lines. Whereas for her father, the hereditary Prince of Hessen-Darmstadt, Karoline Luise explicitly noted that she should not use more than six lines, the greeting for her grandfather, the ruling Landgraf, was supposed to stretch over seven lines.¹³

¹⁰ See 5A, Corresp., 20, sheet nos. 3-5 and 46-48.

¹¹ For the role of memoria within noble culture cf. Otto Gerhard Oexle, "Aspekte der Geschichte des Adels im Mittelalter und in der Frühen Neuzeit", in: Hans-Ulrich Wehler (ed.), *Europäischer Adel 1750-1950*, Göttingen 1990 (= Geschichte und Gesellschaft, Sonderheft 13), pp. 19-56 and Beatrix Bastl, *Tugend, Liebe, Ehre. Die adelige Frau in der Frühen Neuzeit*, Wien [et al.] 2000, pp. 16, 20, 430, 482, 524, 526 u. 566 ss.

¹² Regarding the Duke of Mecklenburg cf. Antje Stannek, *Telemachs Brüder. Die höfische Bildungsreise des 17. Jahrhunderts*, Frankfurt a. M. 2001 (= Geschichte und Geschlechter, 33), pp. 138, 256; for the 19th century cf. Kristin Wiedau, "Eine adlige Kindheit in Coburg. Fürstenerziehung und Kunstunterweisung der Prinzen Ernst und Albert von Sachsen-Coburg und Gotha", in: *Jahrbuch Der Coburger Landesstiftung* 2000, 45, pp. 1-112, p. 27.

¹³ See the draft for the New Year's greetings from Karoline Luise to the hereditary prince of Hessen-Darmstadt dating from 31 December 1737, sheet no. 43, in 5A, Corresp., 20.

A very popular device for teaching letter writing were letter manuals and books of headings (“Titularbücher”), by which one could ensure the correct heading and appropriate style.¹⁴ In France, this genre was originally developed for the aristocracy in order to reinforce the social hierarchy, the first French letter manual appearing already around 1534.¹⁵ Whereas the earliest German printed equivalents can be traced back to the end of the 15th century, the epistolographic writings of Christian Weise (1642-1708), who often is considered to be the founder of the German style of compliments, were published in the 1680s.¹⁶ If such traditional letter manuals were also used for the instruction of the Princes of Baden-Durlach is difficult to say. Nevertheless there is one letter manual listed in the library catalogue of the princes’ teacher: it is the most popular German letter manual of the 18th century, *Gellerts Briefe u. Abhandlung vom guten Geschmacke in Briefen*, published in 1751. This treatise – with its demand for naturalness and its disdain for the pedantic ceremonial style – thus redefined the genre of letter manuals.¹⁷ Although it is known that copies of letters by Christian Fürchtegott Gellert (1715-1769) were much appreciated at German courts,¹⁸ it here has to remain an open question to what extent his letter manual actually influenced correspondence at court. In any case the abolition of ceremonial letters demanded by Gellert apparently did not have a great effect on court etiquette, at least not earlier than the very last decades of the century.

¹⁴ See for example the “Stylistisches Elementarbuch” (containing instructions for a sophisticated style, exercises, sample letters and headings), which was still consulted by the princes of Sachsen-Coburg Gotha in the 19th century. Cf. Wiedau, *Kindheit*, p. 37.

¹⁵ Cf. Altman, *Letter Manual*, pp. 149-151, 153. These manuals originally followed courtly style. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 157 and Nickisch, *Brief*, 79.

¹⁶ Regarding German letter manuals cf. Fouquet, *Fürsten*, p. 172 and Nickisch, *Brief*, pp. 77-83. As to Weise cf. Beetz, *Höflichkeit*, p. 60 and Nickisch, *Brief*, p. 79 ss.

¹⁷ Concerning Gellert cf. Werner Jung, “Zur Reform des Deutschen Briefstils im 18. Jahrhundert. Ein Beitrag zu C. F. Gellerts Epistolographie”, in: *Zeitschrift Für Deutsche Philologie* 1995, 114, pp. 481-98; Nickisch, *Brief*, pp. 81-83; Steinhausen, *Brief*, vol. 2, pp. 250-265. Some extracts of his letter manuals next to commentaries are published in: Angelika Ebrecht [et al.] (ed.), *Brieftheorie des 18. Jahrhunderts. Texte, Kommentare, Essays*, Stuttgart 1990, pp. 21-27, 56-98.

¹⁸ Cf. Steinhausen, *Brief*, vol. 2, pp. 255, 322.

At the same time letter writing was practised in the letters children had to write to their parents, who observed attentively the studies and the progress of their offspring. The Markgräfin Karoline Luise, who attempted to express herself in a “*stile le plus fleuri et le plus eloquent*”,¹⁹ encouraged her children, even when adults, not only to write regularly but also to use a gallant style: “*je connois votre facilitée à manier la plûme*” – so she writes to her son, or: “*vôs deux lêttes mon cher Fritz au Marg. et à moi, sont bien dignênt de vous*”,²⁰ judgements of which the importance should not be underestimated, as people and their education were increasingly assessed by their “eloquence” over the 18th century.²¹

III. Letters of compliment by princely children

As letters of compliment did not so much aim at communicating concrete information as at expressing oneself in a most artificial, stilted way, such letters demanded special epistolary skills.²²

The sons of Markgraf Karl Friedrich of Baden-Durlach (1728-1811) and his spouse Karoline Luise wrote such letters regularly to their parents for their birthday and name day as well as for New Year.²³ Two of the earliest “occasional writings”²⁴ of the brothers Karl Ludwig and Friedrich are those addressed to their mother for New Year 1763. The letter of the then seven-year old Prince Karl

¹⁹ See the letter from Karoline Luise to Karl Ludwig dating from 27 April 1777, no. 96, in 6, Corresp., Nachtr. I.

²⁰ See her letter to Karl Ludwig dating from 19 July 1775, no. 88, in 6, Corresp., Nachtr. I and her letter to Friedrich dating from 6 June 1778, no. 6, in 8, Corresp., Nachtr. I.

²¹ Cf. Steinhausen, *Brief*, vol. 2, p. 316 ss.

²² Ceremonial letters possessed a character of direct action, exactly like e.g. “Sprechhandlungen”, cf. Beetz, *Höflichkeit*, p. 18 ss., 109-112; see also Nickisch, *Brief*, p. 10.

²³ For all three sons 60 letters of this kind have been preserved, which were addressed to their father, of which the earliest letter is dating from 1762 (thus not taking into consideration the three German poems which were composed for the Markgraf and his spouse in the name of their sons from 1755 to 1758). See 5, Corresp., 2, 5, 8; 5, Corresp., Nachtr. 2, 3, 5 and above all HfK-HS, no. 192. Of the letters written by the sons to their mother, hardly any have been handed down with the exception of some letters written by Karl Ludwig among which three letters of compliment can be found, in 5A, Corresp., 2.

²⁴ For this term see footnote no. 2.

Ludwig will here be looked at in detail.²⁵ The New Year's greeting of the young princes, which could be taken as an exercise in calligraphy, bears the following heading: "*Complimens/ pour le nouvel an 1763/ adressés/ à Son Altesse Sérénissime Madame la/ Margrave regnante de/ Bade Dourlach/ par Ses très Soumis Serviteurs et fils/ Charles Louis de Bade/ et Frédéric de Bade.*"

The text itself reads as follows:

"A la bonne année, que nous commençons aujourd'hui, on entend de tous parts des complimens, des vœux, des souhaits; daignez entendre aussi les miens, chere Mama, ils proviennent d'un cœur que vous ne saurez refuser, étant celui de Votre fils. N'ayant rien de plus cher au monde qu'une telle mere, je rends grace au ciel aujourd'hui, que selon mes vœux et ceux de tous vos sujets il vous a conservé jusqu'à ce jour non seulement tout autre bien, mais encore celui qui surpasse les autres, la santé et en même tems je prie à Dieu si bon envers nous, de vouloir Vous combler de ses bénédictions pendant tout le cours de cette nouvelle année et d'une infinité d'autres pour que rien ne vous reste à désirer ni du coté de la santé ni du coté d'un contentement parfait à tous égards je m'efforcerais d'y contribuer par mon envie et mon empressement de faire tout ce qui pourra vous être agréable.

Charles Louis de Bade."

Like most of the letters penned during their childhood, this letter is also written in French. Mastery of the French language was therefore very important and nobles were already trained in using French at a very early age – thus corresponding to the general court costumes during the 18th century, by which nobles aimed at distinguishing themselves from other classes.²⁶

²⁵ See 5A, Corresp., 2. The ceremonial letters written by the young princess Karoline Luise to her father and grandfather use even a more sophisticated and eloquent language, in 5A, Corresp., 20, sheet nos. 16 ss.

²⁶ Concerning the use of the French language as a means of social distinction cf. Beetz, *Höflichkeit*, p. 185.

In his letter, Karl Ludwig uses the formal title of his mother (he addresses her as “*Margrave regnante de Bade Dourlach*”) and in the text he mentions the subjects of his mother. Both point to her outstanding social position and her role as ruling princess. Thus the perspective of the outside world regarding his own mother is inculcated and internalised by the young prince. By comparing his own wishes for his mother with the wishes of her subjects, a difference of power emerges: here a subordinate or a “*trés Soumis Serviteur[.] et fils*” – so the traditional formula at the end of court letters – sends his wishes to a ruler. In fact, occasional letters of princely children can be compared to letters of homage, by which the familiarly dependencies were renewed yearly, exactly as was the case with the dependencies on a political, juridical level.²⁷ Nevertheless, the Markgräfin is also addressed in her role as mother of the prince: “*N’ayant rien de plus cher au monde qu’une telle mere*”. In other letters, the children explicitly thank their parents for their fatherly or motherly care.²⁸ Even though these are regularly used topoi, such codes helped to develop an attitude of respect towards their parents as well as a devoted attitude in general. This is, for instance, also illustrated by the equally used formulae such as “*Pardonnez cher Papa que je Vous importune par cette Lettre*” or “*je prends la liberté de Vous écrire chere Mama*”.²⁹ This type of submission becomes even more obvious in the poems of homage which were dedicated by the young princes to their parents for special

²⁷ Cf. Beetz, *Höflichkeit*, p. 314; see also Fouquet, *Fürsten*, p. 180, Steinhausen, *Brief*, vol. 2, p. 183 and Altman, *Letter Manual*, p. 162. Whereas Beetz thinks that these expressions of submission in letters between children and parents were only used until the first third of the 18th century, those here presented provide a different picture. Another example for addressing the parents as ruling prince and princess can be found in the ceremonial letter written by Karl Ludwig to his father on his name-day, dated the 28 January 1767. Here Karl Ludwig refers to his father’s subjects, who are celebrating this day for the first time. See also his letter addressed to Markgraf Karl Friedrich for New Year 1768 resp. his letter for the name day of his parents dating from 28 January 1768, in 5, Corresp., 2.

²⁸ See the letter from Karl Ludwig to his father of 22 November 1764 as well as by Prince Friedrich to his father on the same occasion, in 5, Corresp., 2.

²⁹ See the letter from Karl Ludwig to his father of 16 April 1768, in 5, Corresp., Nachtr. 2 and the letter from Karl Ludwig addressed to his mother on 13 July 1775, in 5A, Corresp., 2.

occasions, since, at court, this genre was only to be addressed by people of lower rank to those of higher rank.³⁰

Whereas, on the one hand, one could state that ideas form language, it can, on the other hand, also be claimed that language – the rhetorical construction of emotions – leads to forming ideas and creating feelings, and to directing them towards an idealistic goal. Therefore, by instructing princely children in writing letters to their parents, a certain kind of behaviour is aimed at, which goes beyond the written sphere, penetrating all levels of human relationships. Correspondingly, letters can be regarded not only as the written expression of relationships but, at the same time, as the means of constructing them.³¹ Even though the letters of the children were initially composed with the help of an “informer” (teacher), the mere fact of repeatedly copying them not only made the princes sensitive to the use of the ceremonial style but probably also formed a specific awareness of their own position in their family and in society in general, illustrating the fluid transitions between the microcosmos of the princely dynasty and the macrocosmos of the feudal society.

At the ages of eleven and twelve years, the princes Karl Ludwig and Friedrich wrote their first letters of compliment to their father, which they composed themselves.³² The ability to express a devoted attitude combined with the simulation of love was not only demanded by ceremonial letters but also by courtly-gallant correspondence in general. As Eustache du Refuge (1564-1617) points out in his “*Traité de la Cour*”, written already in 1616, and later translated

³⁰ See, for instance, the Latin poem by Karl Ludwig and Friedrich, written for the occasion of the birthday of their father, 22 November 1764, in 5, *Corresp.*, 2. Cf. Jörg Jochen Berns and Miriam Fischer, “Casualgedichte für einige Landgrafen von Hessen-Kassel. ‘Vergönne Grosser Fürst! daß sich mein Staub darff wagen’”, in: Jörg Jochen Berns [et al.] (ed.): *Erdengötter. Fürst und Hofstaat in der Frühen Neuzeit im Spiegel von Marburger Bibliotheks- und Archivbeständen. Ein Katalog*, Marburg 1997, pp. 501-541, p. 504.

³¹ For the significance of letters and their oral as well as rhetorical elements in order to gain insight into the quality of relationships in general cf. Fouquet, *Fürsten*, p. 191.

³² See the letters for New Year 1768 from Karl Ludwig and Friedrich to their father Karl Friedrich, which contained the following additional remarks: “*composé par Lui-même*” resp. “*de la composition du [...] Prince*”, in 5, *Corresp.*, 2.

into German, one of the basic rules of politeness is to make the others think that you love them, not because of convention but because of personal attachment.³³

At the same time, self-degradation which formed part of the style of compliments, required a certain distance from one's own person, for example, when writing of oneself in the third person: "*Vivez la bien aimée du ciel, de Vos sujets & de Votre fils. Puisse-t-il se rendre digne d'être à son tour le bien aimé de sa mère*",³⁴ so the words of the second-born son Friedrich in a letter to his mother. Here, the prince perceives himself objectively in the role of the son who must deserve the love of his mother and be worthy of it. The expression "*se rendre digne*" represents another topos which was common in the letters of noble children to their parents.³⁵ This self-degradation is not only expressed by words.³⁶ As we have already seen, the formal style, the outward arrangement of the letter, is also to be considered as a reflection of devotion. Apart from the quality of paper, the hand-writing, the format, the seal, the margins, the so-called "Spatium", and the way of folding together a letter can also be considered as virtual reverences.³⁷ The "Spatium" – that is to say, the distance between heading and text – in the letters written by the Princes of Baden-Durlach to their parents is relatively wide, the distance which existed between parents and children therefore even entered into the very material of the letter itself. By learning to subordinate oneself rhetorically, instruction in letter writing also satisfied one of the

³³ Cf. Beetz, *Höflichkeit*, p. 149.

³⁴ See the New Year's message for 1763 from Friedrich to his mother, in 5A, Corresp., 2.

³⁵ For the use of this topos see e.g. the compliments for New Year written by his mother as a young princess to her father in 1734 and 1737, sheet nos. 36 and 43, in 5A, Corresp., 20.

³⁶ As to the address, greeting-formula and signature as metacommunicative elements cf. Nickisch, *Brief*, p. 10. Beetz provides detailed information about the linguistic arrangement of letters, cf. Beetz, *Höflichkeit*, 207-243. The high importance attributed to the appropriate greetings and closings is, for instance, underlined in the compendium by Friedrich Carl Moser "Abhandlung und Ahnung fehlerhafter und unanständiger Schreiben, nach dem Gebrauch der Höfe und Canzleyen" of 1750, cf. Hans Sperber, "Zur Sprachgeschichte des 18. Jahrhunderts", in: *ZfdPh* 1929, 54, pp. 80-97, p. 86.

³⁷ Cf. Beetz, *Höflichkeit*, pp. 200-207, 58; Steinhausen, *Brief*, vol. 2, pp. 238-240. For the Spatium in particular see also Sperber: *Sprachgeschichte*, p. 84 ss.; Steinhausen, *Brief*, vol. 2, p. 222.

traditional aristocratic ideals of education: according to the Italian humanist Guazzo (1530-1593), only those who first had learned to serve would later on possess the ability to rule in a fair way.³⁸

IV. Familiar letters at court

Although in the children's letters of compliment the aspect of devotion towards their parents can be demonstrated very clearly, the correspondence between parents and children refers at the same time to an education which endowed the princes with a feeling of their own special and elevated position within the feudal system. Thus, the children are addressed as "*Vous*" by their parents and their formal greeting at the end of a letter reads, for example "*Votre toute devouée Mère et Servante Caroline*" or "*Vôtre très fidele pere Le Marggrave de Baaden*".³⁹ Thus the status of the princes is highlighted in a certain way. The greetings sent to the children by relatives or members of the own court in the letters of their parents and the replies of the children to these greetings helped to successively integrate the princes within court society, even at a very early age. When Karl Friedrich wrote to his eight-year old son "*Mon frere Vous fait ses compliments, ambrassés [sic!] les Vôtre [sic!] de ma part*",⁴⁰ he addressed his son almost as an equal, thereby emphasising that they both represented the first-born of the dynasty.

³⁸ Cf. Beetz, *Höflichkeit*, p. 269 ss.

³⁹ See the letter from Karoline Luise of 19 July 1775, no. 88, and the letter from Karl Friedrich dated the 14 November 1763, no. 1, both addressed to Karl Ludwig, in 6, Corresp., Nachtr. I.

⁴⁰ See the letter from Karl Friedrich to his son Karl Ludwig mentioned in the previous footnote. Cf. also Steinhausen, *Brief*, vol. 2, p. 347, who points out that a communal spirit is indicated in the greetings of the children addressed to the servants. See, for instance, the invitation from Karoline Luise to greet the "*Mes Klos, Eichenrodt & Ring. à Me. Memme et Braun*" in her letter to Karl Ludwig of 8 September 1765, in 6, Corresp., Nachtr. I. On another occasion the hereditary prince himself mediates the greetings from the administrative personnel to his father, see his letter of 24 October 1771, in 5, Corresp., 2. For the significance of greetings within a social network, see the letter of Karoline Luise addressed to Friedrich of 4 June 1779: "*apropos cette Duchesse me chargea de mille Compl. pour vous, et combien elle regrettois que vous n'etiés jamais du voyage. je lui fis alors valoir tous les vôtres, et n'oubliois certainement pas vós interrêts.*", in 8, Corresp., Nachtr. I.

The letters written by princely children do not imitate only the style of adults, but also the contents. The hereditary prince had apparently been asked by his father to report him regularly about the foreign visitors at court,⁴¹ and it can be assumed that this request also sharpened his attention for court matters. At the same time, the correspondence between father and son shows that the latter and his daily routine was somehow “controlled” by his father.⁴² Further characteristics of the correspondence underline the special role that was attributed to the oldest son of the family in comparison with the role of his younger brothers. So it is for instance striking that the Markgraf, his father, writes to him far more often than to his other sons.⁴³ The hereditary prince himself often functions as the “mouthpiece” of his family, sometimes even as a kind of proxy of his father as head of the dynasty. Such is the case whenever he informs his father about the health of his brothers and mother and when he points out that his younger brother will also not neglect to write to him.⁴⁴

⁴¹ See e. g. his letters addressed to his father of 13 September 1765, 20 October 1771 and 12 October 1772, in 5, Corresp., 2 and the letter of 08 November 1765, no. 8, in 5, Corresp., Nachtr. 2: “*Hier Monsieur le contte de Fetoriki un cosaque est venu à la cour il sait 13 langues [...] voila les treize langues qu’il sait. Sans cela je ne sais point d’etranger qui soit arrivé ici.*”

⁴² Letters were also used as a means of control, as the letters of the hereditary prince to his father show, in which he often has to account him for his activities during the day, see e. g. the letters nos. 10-13 of the year 1767, in 5 Corresp., Nachtr. 2. In this context it is interesting to see that also in contemporary pedagogic literature it was recommended that children should write letters to their parents as this would allow for greater control over the children. Cf. Peter Gstettner, *Die Eroberung des Kindes durch die Wissenschaft. Aus der Geschichte der Disziplinierung*, Reinbek bei Hamburg 1981, p. 47 ss. Furthermore, the letters which Karl Ludwig’s wife, the princess Amalie, addressed to him at the beginning of their marriage apparently had to pass through the hands of his mother, see e.g. Karl Ludwig’s letter of 20 July 1775, no. 7, in 5A, Corresp., 2. and the letters of Karoline Luise addressed to his son of 8 and 23 July 1775, in 6, Corresp., Nachtr. I.

⁴³ This is indicated by the greetings which Karl Friedrich sends regularly to his younger sons in his letters to the hereditary prince. See e. g. Karl Friedrich’s letters dating from 14 November 1763, no. 1, without date, no. 3, and from 26 April 1775, no. 14, in 6, Corresp., Nachtr. I.

⁴⁴ See, for instance, the letter from Karl Ludwig to his father of 10 October 1767, no. 33, or of 16 April 1768, no. 36, in 5, Corresp., Nachtr. 2; in his letter of 27 April 1769, Karl Ludwig asks his father in the name of his younger brothers for permission to write to him, in 5, Corresp., 2. Fouquet states that in respect of his function the firstborn represented the second “I” of the father and master. Cf. Fouquet, *Fürsten*, p. 175.

However, it were not only these familiar letters that served to firm the ties within the own family or dynasty: also the above mentioned letters of compliment can be viewed in this way, as the occasions such as the birth- or name day of the parents themselves represented dynastic ceremonies. The remembrance of these days, connected with the adoration of the own parents, were used as instruments to develop an awareness of the grandeur of the own dynasty.⁴⁵

The intense correspondence within the family functioned to create dense relationships between its members.⁴⁶ The very act of writing letters can therefore be understood as concrete “work” for the dynasty and the family’s discipline which was imposed on its members. The mere fact that such a huge number of familiar letters has been preserved until today should be considered as proof for the effectiveness of this “work” on forming a family-awareness. Indeed, these letters also formed part of the “memoria” of the family, and this becomes obvious whenever later generations bound them together or kept them e.g. in velvet boxes. This kind of letter collection sometimes even received a title like the one Prince Friedrich gave to the letters from his mother after she had died in 1783: *Voici les lettres de ma tendre Mère; monument précieux pour son fidèle fils Frédéric Prince de Bâde. ceci a été écrit le 10. Decembre 1783.*⁴⁷

⁴⁵ See also the topos of the blood relationship, which was still used regularly by Karoline Luise herself but which apparently went out of fashion during the second half of the 18th century as it cannot be found anymore in the letters of her sons: “*Unies de sang et de sentimens*”, “*a nous rendre dignes de plus en plus du sang, dont nous sommes nées*”, “*Agrées, que deux Sœurs, qui ont le précieux avantage d’être du sang de V. A. S.me*”, etc., in 5A, Corresp., 20, sheet nos. 26, 36, 38, 43.

⁴⁶ Although the correspondence between parents and children at the court of Baden-Durlach seems not to have been preserved completely, there are nevertheless still more than 400 letters handed down. The size to which a noble correspondence could grow, however, is amply demonstrated by the correspondence of the brother of the Markgräfin Karoline Luise, the Landgraf Ludwig IX. of Hessen-Darmstadt: in the course of almost 33 years of marriage he received all together 2,555 letters from his spouse, the Landgräfin Caroline. Cf. A. F. Walther, “Einleitung”, in: Id. (ed.), *Briefwechsel der “Grossen Landgräfin” Caroline von Hessen. Dreissig Jahre eines fürstlichen Frauenlebens*, Vol. I. u. II, Wien 1877, Vol. II, p. 2.

⁴⁷ See 8, Corresp., Nachtr. I.

“Vostro devotissimo servo”. Segretari e società italiana nell’Ottocento

di

Luisa Tasca

Il *Grande Dizionario della lingua italiana* definisce il segretario come un “manuale di compilazione o repertorio di lettere, che serve come modello per la corrispondenza (in particolare amorosa: *Segretario galante*)”¹. Significativamente, la parola segretario, nell’accezione che qui ci interessa di “manuale epistolare”, è assente nei vocabolari di inizio Ottocento e continua ad esserlo a metà secolo, tanto nel *Vocabolario universale della lingua italiana* curato da Antonio Mortara quanto nel *Dizionario della Lingua Italiana* di Francesco Cardinali. Il dizionario che per primo presenta la parola “segretario” nell’accezione di manuale epistolare è il *Dizionario della lingua italiana* di Tommaseo e Bellini, che esce tra il 1865 e il 1879. Il Tommaseo-Bellini situa il termine in tre contesti: quello dell’amministrazione e della politica (“Colui che mette in carta le deliberazioni di qualche adunanza o accademia”– “Segretario di Stato. Primo ministro di un governo politico”), quello del mondo aristocratico (“Segretario privato di principe, di signore, di letterato”); infine, solo come ultima voce e sottogruppo del “segretario intimo”, prende in considerazione il segretario nell’accezione di “manuale epistolare”. Non lo contempla però come voce a sé ma lo ricava per estensione dal nome dalla persona che fa ambasciate amorose, il segretario galante: “(c’è anche tit. di un libro prescrivente la formola delle lettere amorose, come dire *L’amore bell’e preparato in pillole*) può recarsi a questo senso, così come il tit. d’Ambasciatore”²: prima di essere un manuale

¹ Salvatore Battaglia, *Grande Dizionario della lingua italiana*, Torino 1962, vol. XVIII, ad vocem.

² *Vocabolario universale della lingua italiana. Edizione eseguita su quella del Tramater di Napoli con giunte e correzioni per cura di Antonio Enrico Mortara, prof. Bernardo Bellini, prof. Don Gaetano Codogni, Antonio Mainardi ecc. ecc.*, Mantova, Fratelli Negretti, 1845-1856; F. Cardinali, *Dizionario della lingua italiana*, Napoli, Domenico Capasso, 1853; *Dizionario della lingua italiana nuovamente compilato dai signori Nicolò Tommaseo e cav.*

epistolare in senso generico, il segretario è quindi “segretario galante”. La lentezza con cui i vocabolari riconobbero questa voce è la spia sintomatica della difficoltà a legittimare un genere letterario disprezzato da letterati ed educatori (Carducci lamentava la loro influenza negativa sulle pratiche di scrittura, Luisa Amalia Paladini ne sconsigliava la lettura alle giovanette³), ma che ottenne invece l’ampio favore dei lettori⁴. Senza affrontare il problema di quanto i segretari abbiano contribuito al processo di formazione e diffusione di una lingua nazionale unitaria, o di come abbiano influito sulle pratiche di scrittura, in queste pagine tratterò qualche pista di lettura a proposito delle immagini che offrivano dei rapporti tra gruppi dirigenti e ceti popolari.

professore Bernardo Bellini con oltre 100,000 giunte ai precedenti dizionari raccolti da Nicolò Tommaseo, Gius. Campi, Gius. Meini, Pietro Fanfani e da molti altri distinti Filologi e Scienziati corredato di un discorso preliminare dello stesso Nicolò Tommaseo, Torino, Società Unione Tipografica Editrice, 1865-1879, vol. IV, ad vocem.

³ Giosué Carducci, *Lettere*, vol. XIX, Bologna, Zanichelli, pp. 186-187; Luisa Amalia Paladini, *Manuale per le giovinette italiane*, VI ed., Successori Le Monnier, Firenze, 1875, p. 135.

⁴ Sul successo dei segretari italiani cfr. Luisa Tasca, “La corrispondenza per tutti”. I manuali epistolari italiani fra Otto e Novecento”, in: *Passato e Presente*, XX (2002), n.55, pp. 139-158). Ancora poco studiati in Italia, i segretari hanno ricevuto maggior attenzione in Francia; cfr. C. Dauphin, “*Prête-moi ta plume...*” *Les manuels épistolaires au XIXe siècle*, Paris, Éditions Kimé, 2000; C. Dauphin, *Les manuels épistolaires au XIXe siècle*, e a quello di R. Chartier, “Des ‘secrétaires’ pour le peuple? Les modèles épistolaires de l’Ancien Régime entre littérature de cour et livre de colportage”, in: R. Chartier (ed.), *La Correspondance. Les usages de la lettre au XIXe siècle*, Paris, 1994; qualche accenno sull’argomento anche in Marina Roggero, *L’alfabeto conquistato. Apprendere e insegnare nell’Italia tra Sette e Ottocento*, Bologna, 1999; Jeanine Basso, *Le genre épistolaire en langue italienne*, Nancy, 1990, che si ferma però al XVII secolo; cfr. anche Janet Gurkin Altman, “Teaching the ‘People’ to Write: The Formation of a Popular Civic Identity in the French Letter Manual”, in: *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, edited by P. Craddock and Charla Hay, Colleague Press, pp. 147-180; Ead., “Political Ideology in the Letter Manual (France, England, New England)”, in: *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, 1988, pp. 105-122; Ead., “The Letter Book as a Literary Institution 1539-1789: Toward a Cultural History of Published Correspondances in France”, in: *Yale French Studies*, 1986, pp. 17-62; per la Spagna cfr. Verónica Sierra Blas, “La carta en escuela. Los manuales epistolares para niños en la España contemporánea”, in: *Etnohistoria de la escuela*, XII coloquio nacional de historia de la educación, Universidad de Burgos, 2003, pp. 723-739; Ead., “La guerra en el tintero. Manuales epistolares para soldados”, in: *Pliegos de Bibliofilia*, n. 21, 2003, pp. 15-38.

2.

I manuali epistolari italiani potevano contare su di una lunga tradizione che, iniziata con Cicerone e passata attraverso le *artes dictamini* medievali, raggiunse il suo apice in Antico Regime, con un'esplosione editoriale a partire dagli anni '90 del '500 e la pubblicazione, tra gli altri, del *Formulario de epistole vulgare e missive e responsive* di Cristoforo Landino, del *Segretario* di Francesco Sansovino e del *Modus epistolandi* di Francesco Negri. Tuttavia, se prestiamo fede a quanto si legge ne *Il Segretario perfetto ovvero modelli di lettere di vario argomento*, tradotto dal francese da Ludovico Antonio Loschi e pubblicato a Venezia nel 1737, l'Italia degli anni Trenta del Settecento soffriva di una carenza di manuali epistolari autoctoni (“si è grande in Francia il numero degli scrittori epistolari, che la loro collezione formerebbe una biblioteca; ed in Italia all'incontro è sì picciolo, che ancora dopo dugento e più anni non si fa che ristampare le lettere del Commendatore Annibal Caro”⁵) e, per contro, era invasa dai manuali francesi tradotti in italiano. Ad esempio, le *Lettere moderne colle loro risposte* di Dionigi di Villecomte presentavano un mondo tutto francese di gentiluomini, dame, cavalieri, signori di corte, contesse e marchese. Le lettere, di tono leggero e mondano, mettevano in scena episodi improbabili, come “la lettera d'una dama che si duole coll'autore, ch'egli abbia mutato stile da qualche tempo” o la “lettera in forma di biglietto faceto d'un cavaliere a una dama sua amica, a cui promise delle albicocche”, o ancora la “lettera di un marchese ad un medico, a cui dona un diamante per avergli guarito la consorte mentr'egli trovavasi assente”. Ancora più famosi erano il *Segretario della corte*, pubblicato per la prima volta in Francia nel 1625, e *Il segretario alla moda*⁶, uscito nel 1640 e tradotto dal francese nel 1702: il loro autore, Puget de la Serre, scrittore alla corte

⁵ *Il Segretario perfetto ovvero modelli di lettere di vario argomento. Coll'aggiunta di un Supplemento tratto dal Nuovo Manuale Epistolare, traduzione dal francese di Ludovico Antonio Loschi*, Venezia, 1737, presso Antonio Canziani, p. 3.

⁶ Puget de la Serre, *Il segretario alla moda, portato dal francese da Livio Alessandro, con un'aggiunta di lettere morali e complimenti, impressione quarta*, Venezia, 1702, per Domenico Lovisia.

della regina madre, storiografo e autore di romanzi a chiave, celebrava i protagonisti, gli scambi e le amicizie della nobiltà di Francia.

Nel genere dei segretari si era cimentato anche Gasparo Gozzi, che aveva dato alle stampe *Il segretario moderno o sia ammaestramenti ed esempi per ogni sorta di lettere*⁷ con lettere di congratulazione “con un Luogotenente Generale dell’esercito per la dignità da lui acquistata con una grande azione”; “Lettera di raccomandazione dell’Abate della Trappa ad un Magistrato per uno de’ suoi amici”; “Lettera del Principe di...al Re di...”; “Lettera di raccomandazione a favore di un gentiluomo”. Il ritratto dei protagonisti del manuale di Gozzi riflette virtù e valori propri di una società prerivoluzionaria: raccomandando un gentiluomo ad un amico il mittente ne parlerà come di “uomo di coraggio, e d’ingegno, onestissimo, e di presenza, come V.S. Illustrissima vedrà, graziosissima, e di soavissima conversazione. In tutti gli esercizi riesce perfetto, è un bel cavaliere, sa adoperare le armi, e posso aggiungervi, che non s’è dimenticato il latino”⁸. Ma nemmeno il *Segretario moderno* di Gozzi esce dall’ambiente dell’aristocrazia francese, pur osservata e descritta con grande attenzione per la realtà quotidiana nei suoi aspetti più pratici e realistici⁹.

In un Settecento italiano dominato quindi dal modello dell’epistolografia francese, è significativo che i segretari tedeschi non abbiano avuto alcuna influenza, pur potendo vantare, con *Briefe*, del poeta Christian Fürchtegott

⁷ Gasparo Gozzi, *Il segretario moderno o sia ammaestramenti ed esempi per ogni sorta di lettere. Trattati da più illustri scrittori moderni, e proposti a chiunque vogli esercitarsi in questo nobile uffizio*, Venezia, Gianbattista Novelli, 1757.

⁸ Gozzi, *Il segretario*, p. 100.

⁹ Oltre ai segretari di ambiente cortigiano ed ecclesiastico esisteva nel Settecento un’altra tipologia di segretari: i libri di lettere commerciali. Molti fra questi forniscono modelli bilingui per il commercio in francese, tedesco o inglese: *Il Segretario di banco o lettere mercantili francesi ed italiane*. Con diverse osservazioni da praticarsi per ben comporle, uscito a Livorno nel 1767⁹; *Il segretario de negozianti francese ed italiano secondo lo stile moderno*, uscito a Nizza per Floterons nel 1766; *Il segretario di banco per tutti i negozianti, o lettere mercantili in francese ed in italiano*, uscito ad Amsterdam per i Reycends nel 1752. Famoso *Il segretario di banco ovvero lettere di corrispondenza mercantile, spiegato con molte e bellissime Lettere di Negozio in ogni genere di Traffico*, di Matthias Kramer, autore di manuali di grammatica e di un vocabolario tedesco-italiano, ripubblicato con numerose edizioni lungo tutto il secolo.

Gellert, di un testo fondamentale per l'epistolografia, contrario allo stile ampolloso e barocco, e con aperture rispetto alle donne¹⁰. Il legame con la cultura francese non interessava infatti solo i nobili (la maggior parte degli italiani colti leggeva direttamente in lingua francese), ma anche i mercanti, e la conoscenza del francese era un "indicatore sociolinguistico di prammatica nel *commerce du monde*"¹¹. Anche se non mancavano i manuali commerciali bilingui, quello in voga era un modello cortigiano e nobiliare: vi appare un mondo sociale omogeneo, in cui i membri sono legati da rapporti d'uguaglianza e di amicizia, da una comune sensibilità culturale, dagli stessi gusti e dalle stesse abitudini. Da questo punto di vista non si può dire che i segretari fossero strumenti di educazione che fondavano le identità sociali a partire dalla conoscenza della distanza verso l'altro.

Non penetra invece in Italia il modello dell'epistolografia repubblicana e democratica che aveva portato in Francia a *Le Secrétaire des Républicains*, pubblicato probabilmente nel 1793: *Le Secrétaire des Républicains* spingeva il lettore, come facevano i catechismi rivoluzionari e i manuali di comportamento all'indomani della Rivoluzione, ad abbandonare il complesso sistema di saluti e formule in uso sotto la monarchia per adottare uno stile democratico ed egualitario. Nell'Enciclopedia, Louis de Jaucourt aveva scritto che l'arte epistolare di una nazione soffre della mancanza di partecipazione alla vita politica: l'articolo «Lettre» celebrava un ideale letterario di "style simple, libre, familier, vif et naturel", dove l'uomo appaia "sans déguisement et sans affectation", e criticava le lettere coeve, le quali "ont une espèce de monotonie", perché "ne contiennent que de petits faits", e sono sacrificate alla "fausse politesse". Come è noto, l'Italia ebbe il suo "galateo repubblicano": il *Nuovo galateo* di Melchiorre Gioia, pubblicato a Milano nel 1802 e finito all'Indice dei

¹⁰ Christian Fürchtegott Gellert, *Briefe, nebs einer praktischen Abhandlung von dem guten Geschmacke in Briefen*, 1751.

¹¹ A. Dardi, "Uso e diffusione del francese", in: *Teorie e pratiche linguistiche nell'Italia del Settecento*, a cura di L. Formigari, Bologna, 1984, pp. 347-372.

Libri proibiti, era il manifesto della cultura laico-borghese della seconda Cisalpina e definiva un nuovo ordine sociale, basato sui meriti individuali e non sulla nascita, tra l'altro anche disprezzando le "cerimonie" dell'etichetta aristocratica a favore di uno stile epistolare più semplice e diretto¹². Inutile, invece, cercare segretari che fondassero una nuova epistolografia alternativa a quella di tradizione nobiliare: l'ondata rivoluzionaria non pare aver prodotto un segretario rivoluzionario. Sembra cioè che in Italia si passi direttamente – e in modo piuttosto repentino – dal modello cortigiano e nobiliare, di importazione francese, al modello borghese-paternalistico di metà Ottocento, con la sua insistita connotazione di italianità e i suoi nuovi protagonisti sociali. Vista con gli occhi di Jaucourt, la nazione italiana *in nuce* trovò in un'arte epistolare apparentemente aperta a tutti, ma in realtà gerarchica, la propria modalità di integrazione.

3.

Il primo segretario che si definisce "italiano" compare a Milano per i tipi di Silvestri nel 1818: è il *Segretario italiano, o Modelli di lettere d'ogni argomento*, che conobbe un buon successo di pubblico e numerose riedizioni negli anni seguenti. Segno evidente che esisteva una domanda nuova di "segretari italiani". Ma solo negli anni Trenta dell'Ottocento il fenomeno dei "segretari italiani" divenne incontrovertibile: titoli come *Il nuovo segretario italiano*, *Il segretario italiano*, *Il grande segretario italiano*, *Il moderno segretario italiano* e il *Segretario universale italiano* cominciarono ad affollare prepotentemente i cataloghi dei librai. Già altrove ho cercato di interrogarmi sulle ragioni di tale caratterizzazione dei titoli¹³: dovuta forse al dibattito sulla lingua svoltosi nei primi decenni del secolo, forse agli accresciuti rapporti tra le diverse regioni della penisola, o forse al clima di maggior distensione introdotto da Francesco

¹² M. Gioia, *Nuovo galateo*, Milano, Pirotta e Maspero, 1802.

¹³ Cfr. Luisa Tasca, *La corrispondenza per "tutti"*.

Giuseppe a Milano, dove vennero stampati quasi tutti i segretari degli anni Trenta. Più tardi, saranno l'opera di alfabetizzazione ed educazione intrapresa dallo Stato unitario e le necessità imposte da un accresciuto contatto con la burocrazia a decretare il successo dei "segretari italiani", che conosceranno un secondo momento di popolarità negli anni Settanta e Ottanta.

Nei segretari di primo Ottocento prendono la penna le classi medio-basse: cameriere e padrone, negozianti e commercianti, contadini, affittuari e i rispettivi padroni, sartine, maestre, tutori e pupilli; ma anche funzionari, avvocati e professionisti. Scriveva chi era lontano da casa, e cioè serve, militari, operai emigrati, giovani in collegio, che davano notizie e ne chiedevano sui familiari¹⁴. Le situazioni epistolari e sociali erano le più svariate: scrive la padrona all'amica chiedendole informazioni su una serva che vuole assumere, e scrive la ragazza per "dare notizie ad un'amica su un rosaio", scrive "un giovinetto ad un suo amico per regalare un canarino", scrive la "signora che desidera un maestro di cembalo per suo figlio", e scrive il commerciante "per chiedere alcuni articoli".

È una società in cui si muovono ed entrano in relazione tra loro una grande varietà di attori diversi: a dominare è un popolo che si potrebbe definire terziario, fatto di artigiani, insegnanti, commercianti, impiegati, mentre sono poco visibili proprio le due classi che nel corso del secolo incarna il conflitto nella società industriale in *statu nascendi*, e cioè padroni e operai. Bisognerà attendere il 1902 perché compaia un segretario rivolto ai figli degli operai, *Vita moderna: epistolario del piccolo operaio ad uso della 4^a e 5^a elementare*¹⁵. In scena è "una civile e ben ordinata società" nella quale "sono dovute alle persone di vero merito, o a quelle che occupano un posto ragguardevole per impiego o per nascita alcune espressioni di deferenza e rispetto"¹⁶. In nessun modo la lettera è associata

¹⁴ Giovanni Battista Colombo, *Il segretario di lettere. Ad uso dei soldati del R. Esercito*, Milano, Colombo, 1863.

¹⁵ Andrea De Ritis, *Vita moderna: epistolario del piccolo operaio ad uso della 4^a e 5^a elementare maschile e femminile e delle scuole serali e festive, con una raccolta di temi per esercizio di scuola a casa*, Lanciano, Carabbo, 1902.

¹⁶ *Il segretario italiano*, Milano, Guigoni, 1889, p. 21.

all'ozio o all'aristocrazia: persa la sua aura aristocratica essa è divenuta uno strumento borghese, se non ancora popolare, con cui gestire gli affari, trattare con commercianti e professionisti, sollecitare pagamenti, riscuotere crediti, redarguire dipendenti, mantenere i legami con i familiari, congratularsi per promozioni di amici e conoscenti.

Nella prima metà dell'Ottocento la comunicazione può avere talvolta una direzione orizzontale: ad esempio, *Il segretario principiante*, pubblicato a Bergamo nel 1841, presenta un mondo di commercianti e professionisti alle prese con cambiali, procure e quietanze. Solo leggendo il contenuto delle lettere si capisce la collocazione sociale dei mittenti, che non sono qualificati socialmente in modo esplicito, e si firmano “vostro vero amico N. N.” o “vostro affezionatissimo amico N. N.”. Il tono amichevole e non ossequioso richiama il modello dell'amicizia e dell'epistolografia della Roma repubblicana: “felici gli antichi i quali entravano tosto nella materia che assumevansi a trattare per lettera, e con un, *vale, state sano*, e altra consimili espressione, chiudevano lo scritto, quando più nulla avevano a dire d'interessante”¹⁷. Ma si registra, nello stesso tempo, una sorta di ritorno alle buone maniere prerivoluzionarie: *Il nuovo segretario italiano o sia modelli di lettere*, pubblicato da Silvestri nel 1829, dichiara che “un'abitudine interrotta nel corso della rivoluzione, e che al dì d'oggi ritorna in campo, porta chiunque a farsi reciproci complimenti al rinnovarsi dell'anno: sono allora vicendevoli gli abbracciamenti, gli auguri, i presenti”, ma anche “la falsità e l'interesse”¹⁸.

A partire dalla metà dell'Ottocento colpisce invece la centralità acquisita dalla figura del protettore, del benefattore e del mediatore, che scalzano quella del nobile, del prelado e della dama di corte: nel *Nuovo segretario italiano* del 1864 incontriamo di seguito una “Lettera per la festa di un Protettore”; “Lettera ad una persona che beneficia una famiglia”; “Lettera ad un Protettore che si è lungamente

¹⁷ *Il segretario principiante*, Bergamo, Mazzoleni, 1841.

¹⁸ *Il nuovo segretario italiano o sia modelli di lettere sopra ogni sorta di argomenti colle loro risposte*, Milano, Silvestri, 1829, p. 22.

trascurato”; “Lettera ad un Protettore che ha ottenuto un impiego”; “Lettera per ringraziare una Persona per averci accordato la sua protezione da noi non richiesta”. E come se non bastasse: “Lettera a Persona autorevole per supplicarla a interporre il suo favore, a fine di ottenere un impiego”; “Lettera ad un Amico per ottenere, colla sua interposizione, qualche favore presso di un Ministro”; “Lettera per domandare la Protezione di una Persona a favore di un’altra”; “Altra per domandar protezione per se medesimo”.

Anche il *Segretario per tutti* di Niccolò Maria Introna, edito da Pagnoni nel 1894, presenta una ricca casistica da manuale di *patronage* ad uso e consumo del popolo: “Lettera di ringraziamento ad una signora per un soccorso ricevuto”; “Altra per ringraziare un signore distinto di un favore reso a persona raccomandatagli”; “Lettera di ringraziamento ad una persona la quale ci ha prestato del denaro”; “Lettera di ringraziamento ad una persona col mezzo della quale si riuscì ad ottenere un impiego”. Il tono è ossequioso e servile, mentre il mittente assume il profilo del “questuante”, adottandone modi ed espressioni, come nella seguente lettera, scritta “Per la festa di un Protettore”: “profitto con piacere di tutte le occasioni che mi si presentano per testificarle il mio rispetto e la mia riconoscenza, e non potrei lasciar passare la di lei festa, senza rinnovare l’espressione del mio omaggio sincero. La prego ad accoglierlo colla bontà che la caratterizza. Ai voti che mando al cielo perché la colmi di giorni e di prosperità, ne aggiungo un altro, ed è che mi conservi la di lei benevolenza, e l’onore di quella protezione che mi è di già riuscita tanto vantaggiosa”¹⁹.

È vero che i segretari ottocenteschi rappresentano un universo meno uniforme di quello che si può supporre ad una prima lettura: il *Segretario privato* della Sonzogno, forse perché “privato”, forse perché edito da una casa editrice “progressista”, offre esempi di un’epistolografia orizzontale interna all’ambiente

¹⁹ *Nuovo segretario italiano o modelli di lettere sopra ogni sorta di argomenti con le loro risposte. Modelli di suppliche, biglietti d'ordine e lettere di cambio e un vocabolario di voci dubbie ed avvertimenti grammaticali preceduti da una breve Istruzione sul cerimoniale epistolare e da alcune regole di ortografia appositamente compilate per questa V ed. interamente ricorretta, ed aumentata*, Firenze, Giacomo Moro, 1864, p. 23

popolare e non presenta rapporti di *patronage*; il *Come devo scrivere le mie lettere?* di Jacopo Gelli, anch'esso edito da una casa editrice laica come la Hoepli, non fa alcuna menzione di benefattori e beneficiati, anche se riporta lettere di domanda per essere presentati a corte²⁰. Tuttavia, nella più parte dei casi, le lettere esprimono una richiesta di protezione da parte di chi occupa una posizione sociale inferiore. De Martino ha spiegato il comportamento delle classi popolari come difesa dagli stimoli distruttivi, ricerca di protezione dalla “negatività del quotidiano”²¹: nei segretari “per tutti” si tratta di necessità legate al lavoro, ai soldi, alla malattia, talvolta alla richiesta di grazia per familiari condannati, bisogni impellenti dettati da situazioni di precarietà e contingenza. Mentre nei segretari settecenteschi si ha l'impressione che la lettera sia strumento di comunicazione interna allo stesso ambiente sociale (la nobiltà, il clero o il ceto mercantile), nel secolo successivo la lettera è il mezzo con cui gli strati sociali inferiori si mettono in contatto con quelli superiori alla ricerca di protezione e favori.

Le lettere offrono al lettore una rappresentazione non conflittuale dei rapporti sociali (o meglio: il conflitto è messo in scena ma viene subito riassorbito ed esorcizzato) e la fisiologia di funzionamento di una società paternalistica, equitativa e non egualitaria, in cui ciascuno è consapevole del posto occupato e rispetta superiori, inferiori ed eguali²². Lo scambio epistolare tra servo e padrone,

²⁰ *Segretario privato*, Milano, Sonzogno, 1876; Jacopo Gelli, *Come devo scrivere le mie lettere? Esempi di lettere e di scritture private per tutte le circostanze della vita. Con prefazione di Giuseppe Fumagalli*, Milano, Hoepli, 1898.

²¹ Ernesto De Martino, *Sud e magia*. Introduzione di Umberto Galimberti, Milano, 2002.

²² Valga come esempio per tutti il *Moderno segretario italiano* del 1873, che presenta la lettera di un servo lontano dal proprio padrone, grondante sottomissione, gratitudine e abnegazione da ogni riga: “Amato signor Padrone, Le circostanze mi tengono da molti mesi lontano dalla sua casa; l'adempire che fo ai miei doveri di buon figliuolo, non diminuiscono però il rincrescimento ch'io provo nello star separato dalla di lei persona, e dall'esemplare sua famiglia. Sono troppo abituato a vivere sotto il suo tetto, ove con l'ordine che ella vi fa regnare, solo con la bontà dei suoi comandi, par di vivere in un paradiso. Signor Padrone, io sono un povero ragazzo, di cui ella si prese cura, sono rozzo di maniere, il cuore fu da lei corretto, sento che ho bisogno di sfogarlo, e profitto di quest'occasione dell'incominciare del nuovo anno. Che Dio le conceda lunga vita, tranquilla e con salute! Eccole pochi auguri che col cuore le fa il suo affezionatissimo servo”, *Moderno segretario italiano, o modelli di lettere sopra ogni sorta di*

tra fattore e mezzadro, tra tutore e pupillo, tra zio e nipote, esalta la reciprocità che doveva regolare le relazioni sociali. Catena illimitata di reciprocità, in cui la lettera è spesso l'omaggio con cui il povero ringrazia il benefattore. Ma anche il mezzo con cui si ristabiliscono ordine e giustizia se sono stati disattesi: quando qualcuno non ha estinto un debito, ha eseguito male il proprio lavoro, ha trascurato l'amicizia, ha ritardato nel rispondere, ha mancato di pagare, la lettera di rimprovero – tipologia a se stante – non interrompe il legame sociale, ma lo ristabilisce: niente è definitivo, tutto può essere reintegrato e riparato per mezzo dello scritto. Infine, i segretari offrono schemi comportamentali per ristabilire l'ordine emotivo, nelle circostanze più diverse e più importanti della vita, quando qualcuno muore, nasce, si sposa, si ammala o guarisce, perde il lavoro o l'acquisto, la lettera è il mezzo con cui ristabilire l'ordine minacciato.

Già nel Cinquecento i manuali inglesi e americani rappresentavano mercanti, apprendisti, contadini e marinai come “self-reliant, persuasive, and upwardly mobile”²³, mentre in Francia solo nell'Ottocento il manuale epistolare, rimasto a lungo espressione di un ambiente cortigiano, iniziò a definire i lettori-epistolografi come individui dotati di diritti, fornendo loro documenti utili per rivedicarli. In Italia, la diffusione dell'epistolarità, che i segretari probabilmente favorivano, sembra controbilanciata dalla rappresentazione dei rapporti sociali fornita dagli stessi epistolari. Nei manuali italiani c'è infatti una comunicazione interclassista intensa, nella quale domina la direzione basso-alto, secondo il modello di un'epistolografia che si sviluppa perlopiù in verticale, quasi ad evitare la formazione di legami orizzontali. Tuttavia, gli autori delle lettere non reclamano diritti, ma chiedono protezione, mediazione e aiuto, mentre la mobilità sociale è riservata al solo ceto impiegatizio di fine secolo. Il porsi in modo contrattuale rispetto al padrone, la certificazione burocratica dei bisogni piuttosto

argomenti con aggiunta di nozioni sull'ortografia, istruzioni sul cerimoniale epistolare, e sulle diverse specie di componimenti; modelli di biglietti, lettere di commercio, lettere di cambio, obbligazioni, certificati, ricevute, contratti, suppliche, istanze ec., VII ed. adattata per le scuole, Enrico Moro, Firenze, 1873, pp. 32-33.

²³ Janet Gurkin Altman, *Political Ideology in the Letter Manual*.

che la supplica, la rivendicazione di diritti, tutte forme di comunicazione presenti nelle lettere di operai già nel primo quarto Novecento, sono assenti nei segretari²⁴.

4.

In questo quadro la famiglia è importante: sono in particolare i rapporti tra padre e figli ad avere un ruolo di primo piano, e quelli, analoghi, tra zii e nipoti maschi, tra cugini: i figli esprimono ai padri il loro “rispetto”, mentre chiedono la “benedizione” e mandano a salutare madri che restano sullo sfondo. Roger Chartier ha sottolineato le relazioni tra le pratiche dello scritto, la coscienza di sé e l’espressione dell’esperienza intima, mettendo in evidenza l’importanza della conquista della scrittura soprattutto da parte delle donne: la lettera, insieme al diario, è infatti una delle forme di scrittura femminile più frequente²⁵. Tuttavia, nei manuali epistolari a scrivere sono gli uomini, mentre le donne sono destinatarie passive di messaggi concepiti da altri. Fino alla Restaurazione, l’educazione delle donne doveva limitarsi ad un’alfabetizzazione religiosa, alla possibilità di leggere il salterio e le vite dei santi: scrivere lettere era collegato al peccato, al divertimento, all’allontanamento dagli obblighi familiari. Se dopo l’Unità lo stato intraprese una politica di alfabetizzazione che riguardava anche le donne, il segretario rimaneva un genere rischioso perché la lettera, fuori controllo, metteva in comunicazione con l’ambiente esterno alla famiglia. Tanto più che i segretari presentano nella stragrande maggioranza un mondo laico, nel quale sono rarissime le lettere per il parroco o per autorità religiose: vi sono, è vero, alcuni segretari cattolici e moraleggianti, in cui la lettera acquista la funzione di predica morale, come spesso accade nei segretari per convittori, o nelle lettere di condoglianza per la morte di familiari. Ciononostante, la maggior

²⁴ Augusta Molinari, *Le lettere al padrone. Lavoro e culture operaie all’Ansaldo nel primo Novecento*, Milano, 2000.

²⁵ Roger Chartier, “Culture écrite et littérature à l’âge moderne”, in: *Annales*, 56 (2001), n. 4-5, pp. 503-802.

parte dei segretari si muove in una società secolarizzata, attenta all'interesse economico o a quello amoroso, ai bisogni materiali, con un intento al massimo civico-patriottico.

Ciò vale in particolare per i segretari galanti, piccoli romanzi epistolari sentimentali e libertini, mal visti dalla Chiesa, che si preoccupò di metterli all'Indice dei Libri Proibiti²⁶: essi presentavano storie d'amore che si protraevano tra corteggiamenti, dinieghi, giochi di seduzione, impedimenti, genitori contrari e intrighi, con le relative "lettere di discordia e accomodamento", lungo le tappe convenzionali di un'unica vicenda, come quella del "Carteggio fra i due amanti Adolfo e Giulia. Origine, progressi e vicende a cui soggiacquero i loro amori per qualche tratto di tempo fino alla loro unione in matrimonio" del *Piccolo segretario galante* del 1882. Contenevano segreti infallibili per gli innamorati, "arti per farsi amare" ed erano pubblicati anonimi o sotto pseudonimi (Scipione Trasbàu, Dottor Nullo Amato, Provaglio Epaminonda, De Gentili Gentile) da case editrici laiche, Salani, Guigoni, Nerbini. L'impressione è che queste raccolte esercitassero una funzione compensatoria, mostrando amori impudichi e dai tratti parossistici, contrastati da genitori che impedivano ai figli di vedersi: gli amanti non potevano che essere "sventurati" e "infelici", le donne usavano l'intrigo e la seduzione con grande sicurezza e i firmatari si sottoscrivevano come "tuo sviscerato amante", "tua ad ogni costo", "tuo per la vita e per la morte". Il problema per i segretari galanti non sembra essere stato quello di "imparare a scrivere lettere" quanto di "parlare d'amore": il segretario assunse così la

²⁶ *Il segretario galante, o collezione di lettere amorose*, uscito a Torino e Milano nel 1810, venne condannato dalla Congregazione dell'Indice con decreto del 17 marzo 1817: nei duplicati delle Posizioni, si legge che nei "due libercoli" "le lettere ascendono al numero di 163. Sono tutte dello stesso conio, l'autore è sempre intento ad elitrizzare fra li due sessi la concupiscenza della carne, e perciò si oppongono direttamente al buon costume, alla sana morale, alla dottrina della Sagra Scrittura, de' SS. Padri, ed allo spirito dell'Evangelio. Sicché sembrami, che li sopraddetti due libercoli di lettere di stile amoroso debbano sottarsi dalle mani de' Fedeli, specialmente giovani, con pubblica proibizione", ACDF, Index, Acta et Documenta; sui segretari galanti cfr. Bruno Wanrooij, "I segretari galanti: un genere letterario tra Otto e Novecento", in: *Padania*, 6 (1999), n.11, pp. 20-33.

funzione di romanzo epistolare destinato a lettori dai gusti semplici, lettura clandestina di iniziazione e svago, che appagava un certo *voyeurismo*.

Da questo punto di vista, i segretari galanti presentano molte caratteristiche in comune con i libri sul linguaggio dei fiori che divennero popolari nell'Ottocento²⁷: contengono tabelle “sull'oracolo dei fiori e delle piante”, crittografie, brevi psicologie dell'amore e dei “simbolici linguaggi amorosi”, cifrari convenzionali per la scrittura segreta, destinati a lettori delle città di provincia per comunicare tramite i giornali. Talvolta i due generi si fondono in un unico manuale, dal carattere convenzionale e “immaginario”: lettere d'amore e fiori sono un sistema di conoscenze che ha pochi collegamenti esterni; il richiamo alla pratiche reali è limitato, e si mette in scena un mondo con regole proprie. Come il linguaggio dei fiori, anche le lettere, specie quelle amorose, sono presentate come modo per gestire i rapporti sociali a proprio vantaggio, in chiave strumentale e utilitaristica. E sono aperte a tutti: come recita il suo titolo, *Il nuovo segretario galante per ambo i sessi e adatto ad ogni ceto* non fa distinzioni tra uomini e donne, ricchi o poveri quanto a giochi amorosi.²⁸ Possibilità di evasione da regole di comportamento e legami di dipendenza gerarchici, dai numerosi obblighi reciproci, anche se ammantati di buone maniere epistolari, spazio apparentemente democratico, cui avevano accesso tanto il gentiluomo quanto il contadino, tanto la serva quanto la signora borghese. Il tentativo classificatorio e ordinario perseguito dall'insieme dei segretari, il sogno che ciascuno fosse irrigidito in una rete di relazioni fisse, fallisce di fronte alla varietà del mondo sociale che essi cercano di imbrigliare: anche nel quadro apparentemente ripetitivo e monolitico dei segretari ottocenteschi i lettori potevano trovare norme, ruoli e modelli diversi e non coincidenti.

²⁷ Jack Goody, *La cultura dei fiori*, Einaudi, Torino, 1993.

²⁸ Ambrogio Cogliati, *Il nuovo segretario galante per ambo i sessi e adatto ad ogni ceto*, Milano, Lovati, 1879.

„Die Luis ist ein Närrin“

Suppositions about the Betrothal Letters of Queen Luise of Prussia (1793)

by

Regina Schulte

Thus far I have treated the myth of Queen Luise, the “Prussian Madonna”, as it developed in nineteenth-century biography and historiography,¹ in a cult performed in monuments, at schools, in endless ceremonies and speeches following her death in 1810.² It seemed to me that I needed to confront this bourgeois and national construct at some point with the real, authentic Luise, and for that reason I began searching for her subjectivity, for her own voice, for texts in which she expressed herself. It made sense to examine her 410 published, carefully edited letters.³ During my search for the ‘authentic’ Luise I appear, however, to have fallen for a second myth, one clearly associated with the history of the letter such as it has been defined since the eighteenth century and Rousseau and Gellert. In the end I found both Luise and the production of a myth.

The edition of Luise’s correspondence begins with a letter that the ten-year-old Princess Luise Auguste Wilhelmine Amalie of Mecklenburg-Strelitz wrote to her brother Georg, who was three years her junior. Along with their sisters Therese and Friederike, he was one of the most important recipients of the letters Luise wrote between 1786 and 1810, the year of her death. Other major correspondents included her father, Prince Carl Ludwig, her children, her grandmother and various relatives

¹ Regina Schulte, “The Queen – A Middle-Class Tragedy: The Writing of History and the Creation of Myths in Nineteenth-Century France and Germany”, in *Gender & History*, Vol 14/2, 2002, pp. 266- 293, p. 278 ss.

² See also: Philipp Demandt, *Luisenkult. Die Unsterblichkeit der Königin von Preußen*, Köln-Weimar-Wien (Böhlau) 2003.

³ Königin Luise von Preussen, *Briefe und Aufzeichnungen 1786-1810*, Introd. by Hartmut Boockmann, ed. by Malve Gräfin Rothkirch, München/Berlin (Deutscher Kunstverlag) 1985.

of her own and her husband's. The next circle of correspondents encompassed servants, ladies of the court, advisers, tutors and the occasional female friend. A few central letters went to important rulers, among them Tsar Alexander and Napoleon Bonaparte.

My remarks will focus on Luise's 79 betrothal letters to the Prussian crown prince and later king Friedrich Wilhelm III, which were written during the period of their engagement from March to December 1793. In March 1793 King Friedrich Wilhelm II went in search of brides for his two eldest sons Friedrich Wilhelm and Ludwig. The princesses Luise and Friederike of Mecklenburg-Strelitz, who were passing through Frankfurt with their grandmother, were presented to him on 13 March. On 14 March the sisters met the two princes and after four days of seeing each other at parties hosted by Frankfurt families Friedrich Wilhelm settled upon Luise. On 18 March the king officially asked the grandmother, Luise of Hessen-Darmstadt, for her granddaughters' hands in marriage. On 19 March the crown prince proposed to Luise, five days after setting eyes upon her for the first time, and she agreed to marry him.⁴ On 22 March grandmother and granddaughters traveled on to Darmstadt. From there Luise wrote her first letter to the prince, who was staying at the headquarters of the Prussian troops near Oppenheim, in reply to the letter with which Friedrich Wilhelm had initiated the correspondence.⁵ The letters that followed were, from the outset, love letters. I would like to show that – although Luise had got to know the prince only a couple of days before writing these letters – Luise from the beginning constructs a romantic couple and anticipates the ideal of a royal marriage as a love match. The prince's absence provides the space and time for the creation of a narrative, a love-story, which in future would become the founding myth of the marriage.

I would like to begin with the first letter, since it anticipates key elements of the future correspondence. In the first part of the letter, Luise addresses her betrothed as

⁴ Ibid., p. 11.

⁵ Ibid., p. 12 s.

“my dear prince” and informs him that “nothing can stand in the way of our happiness”. She writes that she would seek his friendship “all her life long” and that she would send him her portrait:

“I have already sat for him [the painter] three times and he first sketched the size of my eyes (which as you know are rather small), the outline of my nose and my mouth [...] I told him that he should paint me quite simply, my head bare, dressed in white; I know you love simplicity [...]”⁶

The first part, in which she introduced her face and her simple white-clad figure as a miniature, that is, presented herself as a picture, closes “Your faithful friend, Luise”.⁷

A second section of the letter follows, using quite a different diction:

“You will notice, dear friend, that I pass over many points of your letter in silence. Do not be surprised at this; Papa and Grandmama wanted me to show them my letter to you, and the latter particularly advised me not to write too affectionately. What luck that thoughts and sentiments need not pass through customs, so that no etiquette need be applied. Do you know, dear prince, that I was very pleased to be called friend, and dear Luise; call me what you will, always; never in my wildest dreams would it occur to me to disapprove; quite the contrary, it pleases me. It seems to me that, since from the first moment of our acquaintance we were natural and easy in each other’s company, I must give you some reason for the presence of a certain strait-laced style in my letters, which is not at all natural to me; otherwise you might think I had changed in my sentiments towards you, which is not the case. On the contrary, I am not indifferent to you, and you know my feelings for you, so that I need not repeat that I am well-disposed towards you. Please always be the same towards me. I promise you, my heart cannot change. If you were still in Trebur I would look forward to many days like the 24th, which was one of the loveliest in my life. I implore you, dear prince, not to show this note to a living soul, and when you reply, don’t do so in your letter, but on a separate note, so that Grandmama won’t notice it, otherwise I will have no end of trouble. For my part I declare that I owed it to you to tell you the truth. [...] Grandmama wanted me to make a rough draught of the letter to you because I cannot write or spell correctly. I admit that I don’t write prettily, but you must also know my faults. Had I been more industrious as a child I would now be in a position to express the feelings in my heart to you perfectly, as it is I can do so only imperfectly [...]. Never cease to love your Luise. Should you receive this letter in company, I implore you not to open it there, otherwise people could think me foolish.”⁸

⁶ Ibid., p. 13.

⁷ Ibid., p. 17. For the meaning and the cult of friendship in 18th century letters see: Robert Vellusig, *Schriftliche Gespräche. Briefkultur im 18. Jahrhundert*, Wien/Köln/Weimar (Böhlau) 2000, p. 60 s.

⁸ Luise, *Briefe*, p. 15.

Thus in her first letter Luise already breaks through strict courtly form; in the second, secret part her grandmother could not “apply etiquette”. Her grandmother and father represented and guaranteed courtly rules, according to which the letters of royal brides were checked and censored, and writing affectionately was not considered seemly. By making Friedrich Wilhelm her accomplice in secretly exchanged notes, Luise turns writing into a tender gesture, an exclusive and intimate private matter for two lovers. She creates the frame, in which her future lover and husband shall appear and she juxtaposes the stiff, “strait-laced” quality of the official letter with the “naturalness” that mark the encounters of the two from the first moment, in which they felt no constraints and understood their feelings for each other. As she wrote later, their relationship was such that “we can tell each other everything we think”. The simple portrait, without finery or head-dress, which she intended to send him was part of this ‘naturalness’, and in a later letter she distanced herself vehemently from the coquetry of women at the Berlin court and contrasted this “despicable vice” with her own virtue: “You know, dear prince [...] my heart is too virtuous ever to be able to change [...] and to stoop so low as to love such persons”.⁹

Luise uses this ‘other’ mirror to tie the *topoi* of naturalness and modesty together – thus covering and at the same time displaying her own coquetry. For her, naturalness also meant refusing to practice correct and perfectly spelled writing in a notebook: she portrays herself as not having been industrious as a child, as still under the thumb of her grandmother being able to express the feelings in her heart only imperfectly, and spontaneously, as she wrote.¹⁰ Finally – from the beginning, the

⁹ Ibid., p. 49.

¹⁰ For the *topoi* of naturalness, simplicity and liveliness in French and by the Enlightenment influenced letter-writing see on 18th century manuals of correspondence John W. Howland, “The Letter: an Expression of Enlightenment Ideology”, in: *Germanistik. Publications du Centre Universitaire de Luxembourg*, 1, 1989, pp. 79 - 88, p. 81. For the role of grandparents in this context in 18th/19th century aristocratic female writing and memories of childhood see Petra Wulbusch, “Die ‘Jugendgeschichte’ Charlotte von Einems. Ein Selbstbild, Brüche, Folgen und Funktionen”, in: Magdalene Heuser (ed.), *Autobiographien von Frauen*, Tübingen (Niemeyer) 1996, pp. 175-193. See also Barbara Becker-Cantarino, “Leben als Text – Briefe als Ausdrucks-

prince should also know and doubtless also accept his future princess's failings, along with her "scribblings, scrawled as they are".¹¹ Luise clearly did not intend to improve her spelling. In a later letter she explained to the prince how she had spun a mendacious plan.

"Wouldn't one say a child of the devil had engineered this? Yet I am an angel, as people sometimes assure me, do me a favour and find some order or sense in that. If people [...] say too many good things about me, don't believe them, for I am, alas, an imperfect creature [...] I have my own faults and someday when you know all of them, say to yourself: her heart is not bad. In all my life I have never yet been false. [...] I may truly assure you of this truth: all my life I shall try to make you happy."¹²

There was a further point in which Luise violated the etiquette of proper letter-writing in her future epistles as well. The language of courtly correspondence was French. Luise punctuated her rather stiff French with bits of German and even of Low German dialect – sometimes not only adding English and Italian in the same letter, but switching from one language to the other in mid-sentence: "Ich habe a great friendship for you. Don't be taken aback by my knowledge of English, don't imagine I have the Kribbelsucht, a disease which causes one to use all manner of languages. No, no, I just richly enjoy telling you over and over that you are the person I love most in the world,"¹³ or "Adieu mon cher, mon unique, mon bon ami. Soyez bien persuadé de l'amitié sans égal de votre amie de votre bien tendrement altesse >nebst guten Kirschen< [along with good cherries]."¹⁴

In her first letter and all those that followed Luise projects two figures in which she appears as in a picture puzzle. The loyal, loving friend and the fool: she is foolish. She is forever singing the praises of sentimental, open and true friendship

und Verständigungsmittel in der Briefkultur und Literatur des 18. Jahrhunderts“, in: Hitrud Gnüg/Renate Möhrmann (eds.), *Frauen, Literatur, Geschichte. Schreibende Frauen vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart*, Stuttgart/Weimar (Metzler Verlag) 1999, pp. 129-146, p. 136.

¹¹ Luise, *Briefe*, p. 16

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 16 ss.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

and dancing like an imp through the letters.¹⁵ Maria Theresa's lessons to her daughter Marie Antoinette¹⁶ or perhaps her grandmother's shine through when she writes:

“All my life I will try to make you happy; my greatest care will be spent trying with all my might to discover how I might please you; I will study your tastes in order to suit myself to your will; in short, I swear to you that I will always be truly yours, your loyal friend.”¹⁷

The future consort of the king of Prussia had stepped onto the stage here, already clothed in the Protestant bourgeois ideals of fidelity and submission, but for Luise ‘friendship’ also demanded reciprocity and acceptance. For only under these conditions could the other Luise, the foolish one, exist in high spirits and laughter. The lofty image of the white-clad, simple and natural angel contrasted with the prankster's face of a cat:

“‘Green parsley, green parsley, and coleslaw.’ I simply had to write down these few words for you, despite the fact that Miss Marico is twisting my hair and preventing me from writing a letter properly; for you must know, I am writing on my knees, against which I rest my book; it is large, to be sure, but does not provide enough space for my big fat ‘paws’ which, as you know, are the ‘daintiest of their kind’ [...] When you (Your Royal Highness) come to Frankfurt, you will naturally come to the lodgings where we are staying and then, to welcome you, I shall sing: ‘our cat has seven kittens, and the old one is dead’ [...] What a horrid letter. Thousand pardons. But judge for yourself whether (Brother) George is right in saying ‘Luise is a fool’.”¹⁸

What was Luise preparing her future husband for, to whom she was so devoted as a loyal friend? For little acts of cheekiness? She shows him her paws, sings him an almost naughty soldier's song, and in her most boisterous declarations of love falls back into dialect: “*Dies Luisch ische wäri Närrin*”.¹⁹

“I must go to church, otherwise my old granny will beat me [...] For God's sake, forgive me this scribble-scrabble. Yesterday evening I danced about in all the rooms shouting ‘I'm going to see my darling again, I'm going to see my darling again!!!’”²⁰

¹⁵ See Becker-Cantarino, *Leben als Text*, p. 141 s.

¹⁶ Regina Schulte, “‘Madame, ma Chère Fille’ – ‘Dearest Child’. Briefe imperialer Mütter an königliche Töchter“, in: Regina Schulte (ed.), *Der Körper der Königin. Geschlecht und Herrschaft in der höfischen Welt seit 1500*, Frankfurt/New York (Campus Verlag) 2002, pp. 162-193, pp. 162-174.

¹⁷ Luise, *Briefe*, p. 19.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 19 s.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

“‘Here my prince,’ I say to you, a grape as a token of my love. [...] Forgive me, my prince, this letter is rather stupid, without rhyme or reason, but that is not my fault, I had to give my nose a good blow and am so afraid that something of my brain has departed along with it.”²¹

Dialect formed part of Luise’s foolishness, lending an oral dimension to her letters, in which she makes herself audible, physically present, allowing the prince to imagine her voice and even inviting him to sing and yowl along. In fact, the prince sent the complete version of the cat song in his reply letter.²² In her letters, through her words Luise makes herself visible. The prince can see her as the miniature painter begins to sketch his model, she evokes moments of desire when she approaches the sleeping prince around midnight – according to the date on the letter – “sleep well, dear prince, perhaps you are already asleep [...] since I have the pleasure of writing to you [...] to be near you for a few moments”²³, in written fantasies she receives him in bed with tooth-ache, while having her hair done, at table – “while I write I am eating the most delicious dumplings, with bread and butter”²⁴ –, in her little room, “so neat, so comfortable and nice”.²⁵ Was she familiar with Gretchen, had she read Goethe? She invites him to enter a voyeuristic scene when she tells the story of her naked lady in waiting being caught “im Hemde ... blink und blank und ...”²⁶. Luise’s arts of seduction also led her to invent little scenes of jealousy: “and sometimes, but rarely, I think of you, my friend”.²⁷

Outside the window of her cosy room the war raged, however. “From my room one can see every fire-bomb, every cannon blast, and supposedly even the drums were audible, which I humbly dare to doubt”.²⁸ Luise hoped that her prince would return to her “crowned with glory and laurels”²⁹, thus creating a fantasy about a hero,

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 20.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 32

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

cherishing his princely masculinity. But then she presents herself as the ‘other’, the compassionate female in the royal couple, a figure like the future “lady of the lamp”. She had visited the army camp and laments his existence in a chilly dugout, “but not so much as the poor soldiers in their tents. How they must freeze at night [...]”.³⁰ In her repeated concern for the well-being of the soldiers and her distress over the many dead Luise already presents herself as the future people’s queen. This becomes clear in the first sentence of the last letter she wrote before setting out for Berlin to be married. “Surrounded by the poor and by people saying their farewells, I write these lines to you, my dearest [...]. Adieu, I love you.”³¹

After her marriage Luise’s letters take a further, remarkable step away from the old court etiquette. She addresses her husband with the familiar Du: “This [the letter] is now the only thing left to me to converse with you, my dear, beloved friend: my quill shall tell you what my mouth has assured you of a million times [...]”.³² She now signs her letters, “Dein treues Weib Luise” [Your faithful wife, Luise]. The letter is now a substitute for conversations, it permits the resumption of intimacy in another form.

It might appear as if Luise had put into practice all of the typical elements that had characterised eighteenth-century epistolary culture since Rousseau *and* Gellert. She had adopted the cult of friendship, which also marked her letters to her siblings at this period, the ideals of naturalness, authenticity and openness, of spontaneity that came not from the head but from the heart. Her love letters provide all elements, which at 1800 constitute a romantic couple – faithfulness, jealousy and intimacy.³³ Did Luise know the art of authentic writing or had she internalised it to such a degree that she simply wrote whatever came into her head? Perhaps she had already mastered some of the scenes that the bourgeois stage prepared for her? While she

³⁰ Ibid., p. 45.

³¹ Ibid., p. 49 s.

³² Ibid., p. 57 ss.

³³ See Annette C. Anton, *Authentizität als Fiktion. Briefkultur im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert*, Stuttgart/Weimar (Metzler) 1995, S. 97.

was writing her betrothal letters establishing thus the narrative about the loving royal couple of post revolutionary times she acknowledged that Marie Antoinette was executed³⁴ – her last appearance was as the citizen and widow Capet. Luise had a French governess, and perhaps Rousseau had also been included in her education. A comparison with the letters to her beloved father and her grandmother, however, also shows that Luise was perfectly capable of deploying the strict set-phrases of submission and extreme courtesy that were apparently still expected of her, and could express her strong feelings towards them in different, older forms. In these letters, too, though, the little fool occasionally dances across the page and perhaps this was the shape in which Luise sought to escape the one and the other system of rules, or even to turn it on its head?

Translated by Pamela Selwyn

³⁴ Ibid., p. 43.

Alcune lettere a Paolo Mantegazza: Questione ebraica, discorsi ebraici, e politiche dell'identità ebraica nell'Italia liberale, 1880-1899*

di

Emanuele D'Antonio

Le scienze sociali sugli ebrei e gli usi socio-politici dei loro discorsi fra otto e novecento, oggetto della ricerca che sto correntemente conducendo, hanno ricevuto di recente un crescente interesse storiografico. Uno degli aspetti più sorprendenti messi in luce da questi studi riguarda la dialettica che i produttori ed i fruitori di origine ebraica aprirono per negoziare saperi, concetti e idee che non solo nascevano al di fuori dei circuiti del mondo ebraico europeo, ma spesso si fondavano su assunti pregiudiziali, se non propriamente antisemiti, per giungere alla produzione di scienze sociali ebraiche. Si tratta di un fenomeno inerente alle più generali relazioni fra gli ebraismi e le culture dominanti nella modernità: la storiografia recente ha evidenziato come per “culture ebraiche” si devono intendere delle “sottoculture”, complessi culturali in cui elementi secolari e “non ebraici” svilupparono nuovi linguaggi ed ideologie, le cui origini risiedevano in bisogni specifici di certi settori dei diversi mondi ebraici.¹ In questi termini,

* Desidero ringraziare la direzione del Museo Nazionale di Antropologia di Firenze per avermi consentito l'accesso alle carte di Paolo Mantegazza, e la dottoressa Gloria Roselli, preziosa e paziente guida nella consultazione. Analoghi ringraziamenti vanno alla dottoressa Enrica Schettini, responsabile del Fondo Graziadio Ascoli, conservato presso l'Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei di Roma.

¹ Sui discorsi scientifici ebraici cf. J. M. Efron, *Defenders of the Race. Jewish Doctors and Racial Science in Fin de Siècle Europe*, Yale University Press, New Haven-London 1993, M. B. Hart, *Social Science and the Politics of Jewish Identities*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2001, e D. J. Penslar, *Shylock's Children. Economics and Jewish Identities in Modern Europe*, University of California Press, Berkely-Los Angeles 2001. Per un magistrale case-study del processo di trasformazione di un discorso sugli ebrei in discorso politico ebraico cf. S. Beller, “Herzl, Wagner, and the Ironies of ‘True Emancipation’”, in N. A. Harrowitz, *Tainted Greatness: Anti-Semitism and Cultural Heroes*, Temple, Boston 1994, pp. 109-126. Sui processi socio-culturali che investirono gli ebrei d'Europa nella modernità cf. D. Sorkin, *The Transformation of German Jewry 1780-1840*, Oxford University Press, Oxford-New York 1987, S. Beller, *Vienna and the Jews. A Cultural History 1867-1938*, Cambridge University

anche gli integrazionismi, i loro linguaggi e le parallele forme di auto-coscienze non possono essere considerati una rimozione delle distinzioni socio-culturali (forse invisibili nei periodi immediatamente successivi alle emancipazioni), ma forme di soggettività ebraica, non necessariamente subalterna alle identità nazionali, e attive politiche delle moderne identità ebraiche.

Verificata soprattutto nel caso austro-tedesco, questa tesi può essere fonte di illuminanti analogie nello studio della cultura ebraica nell'Italia liberale, un contesto in cui dopo il mutuo incontro nel Risorgimento, il processo di integrazione sociale appariva coronato da larghi successi. Nel caso italiano, allora, il linguaggio degli intellettuali ebrei fu particolarmente influenzato dai motivi della nazione risorgimentale, ma, come ha notato Francesca Sofia, ciò non implica che il discorso assimilazionista non potesse funzionare da “ebraismo con pensiero preso a prestito”.²

Alla luce di queste considerazioni, basandosi su alcune lettere di corrispondenti ebrei a Paolo Mantegazza, si vorrebbe mostrare in quale modo il prestigioso spazio scientifico, positivista ed evoluzionista, delle discipline biomediche e sociali, potesse portare verso la produzione di un discorso ebraico. Il caso di Mantegazza è particolarmente rilevante perché, pur trovandosi nella pubblica posizione di “amico degli ebrei”, nel 1885 fu uno dei primi intellettuali liberali a sollevare una questione ebraica in Italia. Due sono gli episodi che si vogliono analizzare con l'ausilio di una corrispondenza epistolare inedita. Come interpretare le reazioni degli intellettuali liberali ebraico-italiani di fronte alla richiesta di una “vera” forma di emancipazione che cercava legittimazione in un discorso scientifico? Come interpretare il ruolo e l'immagine di Mantegazza in un originale sistema scientifico di igiene sociale ebraica negli anni novanta dell'ottocento? Più in generale, è possibile tentare una prima storicizzazione di

Press 1989, e J. Frankel and S. J. Zipperstein (eds.), *Assimilation and Community. The Jews in Nineteenth Century Europe*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1992.

² F. Sofia, “Su assimilazione e autocoscienza ebraica nell'Italia liberale”, in *Italia Judaica IV. Gli ebrei nell'Italia liberale 1870-1945*, Ministero per i beni culturali e ambientali, Roma 1993, p. 43.

queste vicende entro la cornice della cultura delle *élites* ebraiche post-risorgimentali nei termini della ricerca di una rigenerazione (già) all'interno di una cittadinanza liberale e risorgimentale?

Paolo Mantegazza e gli ebrei italiani: una relazione dialettica

Nato a Monza nel 1831, negli anni ottanta, Paolo Mantegazza era intellettuale fra i più noti dell'Italia liberale. Di formazione medica, dal 1870, con la nomina alla nuova cattedra fiorentina di antropologia, si dedicò alla formazione e all'organizzazione di un gruppo di antropologi professionali, accademici e non, cercando di dotare la disciplina di un moderno approccio che legasse la ricerca sperimentale alla formulazione di “leggi” unificatrici della storia della natura e della storia dell'uomo. Fornendo le “concrete variabilità”, biologiche e storiche, delle monogenetiche “razze” umane, l'antropologia di Mantegazza avrebbe voluto fungere da base normativa per l'utopia liberale ed evolucionista del miglioramento dell'uomo nei suoi diversi gruppi sociali³ attraverso una quasi “apostolare” opera di divulgazione igienica e morale che, nel corso degli anni, assunse sempre più tinte fortemente moralistiche.

Più che per l'antropologia o la politica, Mantegazza, pronto a scendere nel sociale, guadagnò la sua fama con la divulgazione scientifica e *self-helpista*, che, nel contesto post-risorgimentale, appariva un importante strumento per superare le strutture di potere di antico regime e l'influenza clericale, per giungere all'auspicato auto-governo del popolo, cioè della borghesia.⁴ Fra i tardi anni settanta e gli anni ottanta, lo sguardo mantegazziano smorzò il suo ottimismo, e, di fronte alle permanenti arretratezze e ai nuovi mali sociali (italiani e *latu sensu* europei), il pensiero sociale dell'antropologo fu sempre più rivolto a modalità di

³ G. Landucci, *Darwinismo a Firenze. Tra scienza e ideologia (1860-1900)*, Olschki, Firenze 1979, pp. 120, 123, G. Panseri, “Il medico: un intellettuale scientifico nell'Ottocento”, in C. Vivanti (ed.), *Storia d'Italia. Annali 4. Intellettuali e potere*, Einaudi, Torino 1981, p. 1155.

⁴ P. Govoni, *Un pubblico per la scienza. La divulgazione scientifica nell'Italia in formazione*, Carocci, Roma 2001, p. 17.

rigenerazione del principio che “il libro e la penna hanno a governare tutti” e “devono essere strumento di tutti”.⁵ Quali ne fossero gli esiti pratici è arduo a dirsi, né convincenti appaiono immagini estreme di un Mantegazza progressista o reazionario e razzista. In mancanza di una periodizzazione biografica, pare che, di fronte ai primi sintomi della crisi della soggettività borghese e razionalista, l’evoluzionismo mantegazziano abbia innestato sugli antichi motivi pedagogico-liberali una confusione di elementi socialmente neo-gerarchizzanti e altri più vicini alla cultura democratico-radicalista, uniti nella volontà di formazione di un uomo sociale “europeo”, “civile” perché (ecletticamente) “omogeneo” e viceversa.

Negli anni settanta e parte degli ottanta, Mantegazza fu, con tutte le ambiguità che la definizione porta con sé, un “amico degli ebrei”. Questa posizione derivava più che dagli ancorché notevoli legami amicali, intellettuali e professionali con personalità di origine ebraica, dall’attenzione peculiare che l’opinione pubblica ebraica, o quanto meno le sue *élites* borghesi, dedicarono all’apostolato igienico-morale. Il fatto che, in un cordiale incontro del 1881, il rabbino Flaminio Servi, il direttore della più importante rivista ebraica italiana dell’epoca, avesse strappato a Mantegazza, un’“anima fatta per intender[lo]”, la promessa di studiare scientificamente gli ebrei⁶ era segno di chiara attrattiva e di una possibile utilità delle scienze mantegazziane per una sottocultura che ne aveva condiviso gli entusiasmi risorgimentali e, forse, al suo interno, iniziava ad essere accomunata da alcune delle nuove inquietudini.

Nel 1885, purtroppo, Mantegazza mantenne involontariamente l’impegno e, per condannare la barbarie della pratica antisemita, lo sguardo dell’antropologo cadde anche sugli ebrei. Nel rifiutare i “romanzi storici” dell’arianesimo, gli strumenti antropologici gli permisero un’incerta caratterizzazione scientifica

⁵ P. Mantegazza, *Il secolo nevrosico* (1887), Studio Tesi, Pordenone 1995, p. 52.

⁶ F. Servi, “Una visita a Mantegazza”, *Il Vessillo Israelitico*, 1881, 29, pp. 275-276. In alcuni lavori storico-educativi sull’igiene ebraica, Servi sosteneva di avere preso ispirazione dai coevi *Almanacchi Igienici mantegazziani*, cf. “Dei bagni presso gli Ebrei”, *ibid.*, 1876, 24, pp. 259-262, e “Il vino e gli Ebrei”, *ibid.*, 31 1883, 31, p. 20.

degli ebrei, a suo dire, una popolazione europea che aveva guadagnato tratti di “razza” nel corso della sua evoluzione storica, con la reclusione nel sordido ambiente del ghetto e con le persecuzioni secolari. Movendo dall’antropologia storica al moderno sociale, il discorso si faceva assai ambivalente: i tratti di distinzione stereotipa degli ebrei, le ricchezze, la scienza, l’intelligenza, la cura della vita, la forte solidarietà inter-comunitaria ed internazionale, apparivano fonti di rottura della solidarietà umana, se usati seguendo una presunta vecchia logica del ghetto.

Una prova antropologica sembrava confermare la “paura” di una popolazione non completamente moderna ed integrata: seguendo il paradigma evoluzionista, Mantegazza dipinse la circoncisione quale orribile residuo di un “patto” primitivo, una “mutilazione” che separava artificialmente un certo gruppo dal resto dell’umanità. Facilissimo, tuttavia, sarebbe stato passare dalla separazione alla distinzione. Il continuo progresso della cultura ebraica avrebbe, infatti, favorito una piccola “riforma religiosa”, così Mantegazza aveva già scritto nel 1877, e, con essa, la rigenerazione e la soluzione della questione ebraica. Con la rinuncia alla circoncisione, pratica effettivamente dismessa da alcune comunità riformate del mondo austro-tedesco, gli ebrei avrebbero raggiunto definitivamente la modernità.⁷

Pur dichiaratamente incerti e ipotetici, i corollari politico-sociali, soprattutto la “grave” accusa di costituire una “tenace framassoneria” estranea alle società nazionali, rimettevano in circolo visioni antisemite, e apparivano una sfida che l’assimilazionismo italiano, laico e religioso, rigettò con giusta acedine polemica.⁸ Nello spazio dialettico, centrato sul discorso politico, il tema rigenerazionista, senza sparire del tutto – per esempio, l’ebreo ferrarese Elio

⁷ P. Mantegazza, “La questione antisemitica”, e “La razza ebraica di fronte alla scienza”, in *Fanfulla della Domenica*, 20 e 27 settembre 1885. Il riferimento alla “riforma” era apparso in *Almanacco Igienico Popolare del dottor Paolo Mantegazza*, 1877, 11, pp. 46-47.

⁸ M. Toscano, “L’uguaglianza senza diversità. Stato, società e questione ebraica nell’Italia liberale, 1870-1914”, in M. Toscano (ed.), *Integrazione e identità. L’esperienza ebraica in Germania e Italia dall’Illuminismo al fascismo*, Angeli, Milano 1998, pp. 218-219

Melli propose di risolvere la questione ebraica nei “nodi d’amore” di una vasta politica di matrimoni misti⁹ – rimase certamente in secondo piano. Restava però possibile un processo di accurata selezione critica e modificazione, una negoziazione, del discorso mantegazziano, che si vuole qui illustrare attraverso due lettere di uno dei più grandi intellettuali ebraico-italiani del tempo.

***“Su tutto il resto si può disputare e in molte cose, io credo, ci troveremmo d’accordo”*: una lettera di Graziadio Ascoli sulla questione ebraica**

Contestualmente alla pubblicazione del discorso politico e rigenerazionista del primo articolo, “a precipizio”, Graziadio Isaia Ascoli decise di scrivere due lettere¹⁰ per invitare, in maniera informale e aperta, il “[c]ollega onorandissimo”, alla discussione. Nato nel 1829 nell’asburgica Gorizia, Ascoli era il più importante glottologo e linguista d’Italia, collaboratore ministeriale e alta figura di intellettuale del Risorgimento. Ma era anche uomo che aveva vissuto una lunga e importante esperienza ebraica – come scrisse a Mantegazza “mai disgiunto dai [suoi] compagni di razza” e da cinquant’anni vicino a “tutto quanto si attiene al Giudaismo” – che ne faceva una “gloria” dell’ebraismo liberale italiano. Per dirla con Alberto Cavaglion, “ebreo vivente” e “italiano vivente” ad un tempo.¹¹

Non si sa quando fossero iniziate le relazioni fra Ascoli e Mantegazza; certamente, dopo la comune partecipazione ad una ricerca etnologica sugli antichi popoli d’Italia e la conseguente entrata del glottologo nella Società di Antropologia (1873), fra i due, accomunati da una visione evolucionista e monogenista dell’uomo, i rapporti, sebbene non frequenti, dovevano essere

⁹ E. Melli, “La questione antisemitica. Comunicato”, in *La Domenica del Fracassa*, 11 ottobre 1885.

¹⁰ Lettere di G. I. Ascoli a P. Mantegazza, Milano 20 settembre 1885, Fondo Museo Psicologico 2875 e 2876 (non catalogate), Museo Nazionale di Antropologia, Firenze.

¹¹ Su Ascoli si vedano S. Timpanaro, “Carlo Cattaneo e Graziadio Ascoli”, in *Rivista Storica Italiana*, 1961, 73, pp. 739-771, i saggi in *Graziadio Isaia Ascoli. Attualità del suo pensiero a 150 anni dalla nascita*, Licosa, Firenze 1979, A. Cavaglion, Felice Momigliano (1866-1924). Una biografia, Il Mulino, Bologna 1988, p. 85, e il recente A. Casella e G. Lucchini (eds.), *Graziadio e Moisé Ascoli. Scienza, cultura e politica nell’Italia liberale*, Università degli Studi, Pavia 2002.

improntati ad un cordiale e vicendevole rispetto. In virtù di questo legame personale, Ascoli si peritò di correggere una “calunnia [...] involontariamente diffus[a]”, che, incrociandosi con la montante campagna dell’antisemitismo cattolico,¹² rischiava di generare conseguenze assai gravi. La solidarietà ebraica non costituiva un pericolo potenziale per gli individui e i gruppi sociali, altrimenti si sarebbe dovuto

“riconoscere e sostenere, che negli Ebrei [...] è come una incapacità naturale ad ogni funzione civile e politica tra le varie nazioni a cui si presumono partitamente spettare per sentimento, per nascita, per lingua e per cultura; poiché sempre potrebbe avvenire per loro (a differenza, per esempio, che per i Francoprovenzali d’Italia o per gli Albanesi d’Italia), che i lor doveri verso lo Stato si trovassero in collisione con quelli importati dal giuro, dal patto, dalle sacre vendette.”

Non vi potevano, insomma, esser dubbi sulla coincidenza dei valori ebraici e della modernità, fosse essa nazionale, europea o universale. Reale era un certo sradicamento di ebrei “ignoranti o superstiziosi”, ma ciò, diversamente da “come pare[va] immaginare” l’antropologo, era da attribuirsi ad una “società moderna” ancora “refrattari[a]” alla “fusione” con l’ebreo, “elemento sociale, che isolato sgomenta per la potenza soverchia e come parte di lievito è ancora male accetto”.

Allora, un uomo e scienziato “pari” a Mantegazza avrebbe potuto “appurare meglio la cosa” – e il suggerimento dall’amico Carlo Usigli, editore ed educatore ebreo,¹³ di recarsi presso la comunità di Firenze per fare “un po’ di statistica” era ancora più esplicito – per tornare sull’argomento con più solide basi. La sfida non era ironica come potrebbe sembrare poiché, legittimando gli auspici mantegazziani di ulteriori studi scientifici sulla popolazione ebraica, pareva tentare di gettare un rinnovato ponte fra l’antropologo e il mondo ebraico italiano. Infatti, continuava Ascoli, “[s]u tutto il resto si può disputare e in molte cose, io credo, ci troveremmo d’accordo”. In altri termini, una debita trasformazione delle

¹² R. Taradel e B. Raggi, *La segregazione amichevole. La Civiltà Cattolica e la questione ebraica 1850-1945*, Editori Riuniti, Roma 2000, p. 25.

¹³ Lettera di C. Usigli a P. Mantegazza, Trieste 17 novembre 1885, Fondo Paolo Mantegazza 1313, Museo Nazionale di Antropologia, Firenze.

idee espresse avrebbe potuto rendere il discorso stesso in un certo qual modo utile ai fini di una ridefinizione interna al mondo ebraico italiano.

Sino dagli anni settanta, le *élites* ebraiche italiane, soprattutto gli attori istituzionali borghesi, dipingevano l'ebraismo italiano in una condizione in cui, alla nuova posizione sociale, faceva riscontro una crisi di identità, quantunque non grave, manifesta nelle persistenze di aree di povertà nei diversi gruppi locali e nella crescente disaffezione della borghesia dalla pratica religiosa e, peggio, comunitaria. Lo stesso Ascoli, in un numero unico dedicato a Moses Montefiore, nel 1884, aveva sostenuto che la questione ebraica consistesse nella perdita del “sentimento della moderazione e della modestia” di molti dei fuoriusciti dei ghetti, e invitato gli ebrei italiani a dedicare “quel [loro] civile eroismo” alla riacquisizione delle virtù borghesi.¹⁴ Né le comunità, percorse da frammentazioni geografico-culturali, sembravano disporre di potere sufficiente per co-ordinare politiche socio-culturali di rigenerazione, né lo Stato appariva interessato a favorevoli regolamentazioni legislative, capaci di promuovere nuove forme di centralizzazione inter-comunitaria.¹⁵ A fronte di “soggetti deboli”, assai frequenti furono i tentativi, fallimentari, di attori, comunitari e singoli, di promuovere pratiche di educazione e istruzione popolare ebraica,¹⁶ sovente ispirati da una volontà di fondare una “conoscenza scientifica” delle reali condizioni del gruppo sociale ebraico su cui dirigere l'intervento. Né fu casuale che, sull'esempio dei successi integrazionisti dell'ebraismo francese, importanti rappresentanti

¹⁴ Album Montefiore, Pane, Casale Monferrato 1884, pp. 9-10; la miscellanea, cui partecipavano molte “glorie” dell'ebraismo italiano, era stata promossa dal “Vessillo Israelitico”.

¹⁵ T. Catalan, “L'organizzazione delle comunità ebraiche italiane dall'Unità alla prima guerra mondiale”, in C. Vivanti (ed.), Storia d'Italia. Annale 11/2. Gli ebrei in Italia, Einaudi, Torino 1997, pp. 1246-1267.

¹⁶ Cf. S. Guetta Sadun e A. Mannucci, “A scuola non solo crocifissi. Il contributo all'educazione nella stampa periodica ebraica e protestante tra Ottocento e Novecento”, in G. Di Bello, S. Guetta Sadun, A. Mannucci, Modelli e progetti educativi nell'Italia liberale, CTE, Firenze 1998, pp. 151-153 e 175.

dell'assimilazionismo avessero tentato la via della ricerca statistica quale elemento conoscitivo e unificante della popolazione da rigenerare.¹⁷

Alla negoziazione del proprio discorso, inizialmente, Mantegazza sembrò interessato: in un'immediata risposta epistolare,¹⁸ oltre a salutare “di cuore” il glottologo, si disse grato “dell'importanza [data] al [suo] articolo” e “onoratissimo” di aprire una dialettica “in campo aperto”. Il proseguo del dibattito, però, vide la frettolosa ritirata dell'antropologo, che, a seguito di interventi assai critici¹⁹ o sferzanti, sentendosi “incompreso” (in buona fede, purtroppo) da coloro che riteneva aver “difeso”, decise di non mettere in gioco la propria fama,²⁰ a rischio anche per il contemporaneo *Gli amori degli uomini. Saggio di etnografia dell'amore*. In breve, non certo per causa degli ebrei italiani, in questa scansione dell'emergere della questione ebraica, né il rappresentante della cultura maggioritaria accettò un dialogo, né fu possibile l'apertura di un discorso ebraico. Diversamente da quanto sarebbe accaduto alcuni anni più tardi ad opera di Ugo Passigli.

¹⁷ Sul rilievo della statistica nell'educazione popolare ebraica si veda F. Servi, *Gli Israeliti d'Europa nella civiltà. Memorie storiche, biografiche, statistiche dal 1789 al 1870*, Foa, Torino 1871, pp. 276-277. In quanto dono dell'autore nell'incontro del 1881, il libro è presente anche nella biblioteca dell'antropologo, Fondo Paolo Mantegazza 105, Biblioteca dell'Istituto di Antropologia, Università di Firenze. Sul legame fra statistiche ebraiche e politica sociale comunitaria e inter-comunitaria nella Francia degli anni settanta cf. D. J. Penslar, *Shylock's Children*, pp. 184, 194 e 218.

¹⁸ Lettera di P. Mantegazza a G. I. Ascoli, Firenze 21 settembre 1885, Fondo Graziadio Isaia Ascoli 5/56, Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, Roma. Forse preoccupato da possibili rotture, Mantegazza aggiungeva di aver fatto “marcire” ogni debito di Ascoli con la Società di Antropologia. Rottura che non ci fu, se è vero che, alcuni anni più tardi, l'antropologo poté pubblicamente vantare la sua amicizia con il glottologo, cf. P. Mantegazza, “Der Antisemitismus”, in *Neue freie Presse*, 5. September 1893. Da rilevare, infine, che Ascoli, almeno nominalmente, non intervenne nel dibattito pubblico.

¹⁹ Brevi considerazioni sulla questione antisemita in risposta a due articoli del Professor Paolo Mantegazza apparsi sul *Fanfulla della Domenica*, Citi, Pisa 1885.

²⁰ P. Mantegazza, “La discussione è chiusa”, in *Fanfulla della Domenica*, 17 ottobre 1885.

Mantegazza il moderno Talmudista? Ugo Passigli, la medicina moderna e l'igiene sociale ebraica

In un *pamphlet* del 1899, un giovane medico fiorentino descrisse Mantegazza come lo scienziato che aveva dato moderno compimento alle prescrizioni igieniche del *Talmud*, una sorta di vero talmudista moderno.²¹ Per quanto bizzarra o blasfema possa sembrare, questa affermazione proveniva da Ugo Passigli, un ebreo, collaboratore del *Vessillo Israelitico*, figlio di un *chazan* nella sinagoga fiorentina e vicino alle pratiche religiose. Nato nel 1864 e morto nel 1905, Passigli esercitò la sua attività professionale dapprima come patologo, poi nel settore dell'igiene pubblica, da direttore del Servizio disinfezioni del Comune di Firenze.²² Quali elementi socio-culturali ed intellettuali implicava l'immagine (invero impegnativa per un nemico della circoncisione) di talmudista moderno?

Fra il 1894 ed il 1899, Passigli esercitò una feconda attività pubblicistica in cui, padroneggiando i propri saperi scientifico-professionali, fu in grado di sviluppare un particolare discorso ebraico. Tale approdo, come per altri medici ebrei dell'epoca, per esempio il russo Isaak Alexandrovich Dembo o il tedesco Felix Theilhaber,²³ sebbene non originato nella lunga tradizione dell'igiene ebraica, doveva produrre l'immagine del carattere "sano" della "razza ebraica", acquisito nel rispetto dei propri costumi religiosi e delle proprie norme socio-culturali. Più precisamente, si trattava di dimostrare il moderno valore igienico del complesso insieme di pratiche tradizionali, quali la circoncisione, la *Schechità*, le leggi alimentari, le norme di vita sessuale, familiare eccetera.

Bisogna definire le contestualità di questa prospettiva, prendendo ad esempio una ricerca del 1896 sulla macellazione rituale.²⁴ In primo luogo, Passigli difendeva il gruppo ebraico dall'antisemitismo. Negli anni novanta, visioni del

²¹ U. Passigli, *La donna ebrea*, Morterra, Trieste 1899, 17-18.

²² Cf. i cenni necrologici di G. Calò, "Notizie diverse. Firenze", in *Il Vessillo Israelitico*, 1906, 54, p. 54.

²³ J. M. Efron, *Medicine and German Jews: A History*, Yale University Press, New Haven-London 2001.

²⁴ U. Passigli, *Un'antica pagina d'Igiene alimentare*, Annunzio, Firenze 1896.

corpo e della cultura materiale dell'ebreo quali elementi sporchi, inquinanti ed immorali, estranei ai corpi nazionali, guadagnarono non solo un diffuso successo nelle culture dominanti, ma anche un certo grado di istituzionalizzazione politica e sanzione statale. Fu il caso del bando svizzero della *Schechità* nel 1893, una legislazione referendaria che mirava alla maggiore esclusione possibile dei profughi russi dal territorio nazionale.²⁵ Dimostrando che, lungi dall'essere crudele, il metodo ebraico consentiva alla carne una migliore e più lunga conservazione dei valori nutrizionali, con un linguaggio igienico, Passigli sosteneva che in nessun modo vi fosse opposizione fra una moderna cultura nazionale ed europea e la tradizione ebraica.²⁶

Ma vi era dell'altro: Passigli parlava anche al suo gruppo ebraico di riferimento, ed il linguaggio medico diventava strumento per promuovere una politica dell'identità. Sotto la forma storica della religione, diceva il fiorentino, gli ebrei avevano ricevuto dal "grande igienista" Mosè e dai talmudisti una legislazione di igiene morale e sociale, le cui pratiche avevano permesso agli antichi di diventare "popolo", e, nel corso della storia, a dispetto delle minacce esterne, di mantenere la solidarietà etnico-culturale e sviluppare idee, comportamenti e stili di vita moderni perché socialmente "igienici".²⁷ L'esaltazione medica del rituale conduceva verso l'auspicio di un'universale adozione della *Schechità*,²⁸ avvicinandosi così ad una versione scientificamente aggiornata dell'ideologia della "missione ebraica" fra i popoli, concretizzando nell'igiene rigeneratrice il contributo, usualmente individuato nell'etica monoteista,²⁹ degli ebrei alla civiltà. Agli ebrei suoi contemporanei, Passigli

²⁵ B. Mesmer, Das Schächtverbot von 1893, in A. Mattioli (ed.), Antisemitismus in der Schweiz, 1848-1960, Orell Füssli, Zürich 1998, 215-239. Sulle immagini del corpo dell'ebreo nella fine secolo cf. S. Gilman, The Jew's Body, Routledge, London-New York 1991.

²⁶ Antica pagina, pp. 11 e 16-17.

²⁷ Antica pagina, p. 59.

²⁸ Antica pagina, pp. 78-82.

²⁹ Il tema era stato sviluppato ancora dieci anni prima dal patriota e sansimoniano piemontese David Levi ne Il Semitismo nella civiltà dei popoli, Unione Tipografico-Editoriale, Torino 1884.

proponeva il rispetto delle pratiche religiose, non per cieca obbedienza ai dettami divini, ma per la razionale ed etica comprensione dell'alto valore sociale dei precetti biblici e talmudici. Un ebraismo religioso e comunitario, ma “moderno” e pronto a ulteriori riforme igienizzanti,³⁰ era il frutto delle ansie di un medico ebreo, membro di un'élite borghese alla ricerca di un rinnovamento della propria identità, integrata e distinta, in una struttura nazionale e liberale.

Mantegazza fornì a Passigli preziosi strumenti scientifici per costruire un discorso sull'evoluzionismo religioso e sulle complessità socio-culturali, extra-biologiche per così dire, delle definizioni di “razza”.³¹ Così, quando, in una lettera del 1889,³² il giovane studente presentò l'intenzione di “portare anch'[egli] la [sua] piccola pietruzza al grande edificio che [Mantegazza] con tanto amore e tanta scienza sta[va] costruendo”, erano i contributi delle civiltà del passato all'evoluzione dell'uomo l'oggetto del dono, autografi di artisti dei secoli XIV-XVI, al costituendo Museo Psicologico. Né, visti i presupposti della passigliana igiene sociale ebraica, avrebbe potuto essere diversamente.

Dalla lettera si comprende anche la mutuazione di elementi direttamente ideologici, l'utopia igienista e la fede nell'educazione degli uomini, e una profonda, quasi religiosa, affezione personale del giovane:

“è mio dovere di esserle [...] grato per il bene che mi hanno fatto i suoi libri di Morale e d'Igiene, pel gran diletto e l'immensa utilità che ho sempre ricavato da tutte le sue opere che [...] tengo fra miei volumi prediletti, e pei sentimenti del bello e del buono che ogni giorno mi ispira l'immagine sua che [...] mi tengo qua sul tavolino, fra le fotografie che mi ricordano i Genitori e gli amici più cari.”

³⁰ Per esempio, Passigli propose una professionalizzazione medica del mohel e una riforma chirurgica della rito della circoncisione, la cui universalizzazione appariva auspicabile per una generalizzata opera di prevenzione sociale della fimosi e di altre malattie sessuali, Dottor Tomès [U. Passigli], Della circoncisione sotto il punto di vista profilattico e terapeutico, Annunzio, Firenze 1895, pp. 46 e 58-61. Nonostante l'apprezzamento per la ricerca, le élites religiose rifiutarono il corollario riformista, Aristarco, “Noterelle bibliografiche”, in Il Pensiero Israelitico, 1 agosto 1895, pp. 12-14.

³¹ P. Mantegazza, “L'uomo e gli uomini”, in Archivio per l'Antropologia e l'Etnologia, 1876, 6, pp. 30-46. Della definizione normativa di razza contenuta nel testo, gli antropologi professionali, anche quelli formati con Mantegazza, soprattutto dopo gli anni ottanta, colsero e svilupparono il dato biologico, più che quello storico-sociale.

³² Lettera di Ugo Passigli a Paolo Mantegazza, Firenze 17 settembre 1889, Fondo Paolo Mantegazza 1776 (ex 1771), Museo Nazionale di Antropologia, Università di Firenze.

Attraverso la retorica epistolare, Passigli introduceva l'eroe culturale entro la cerchia familiare. L'esito simbolico è quanto mai sorprendente perché la sovrapposizione della figura di Mantegazza, della sua immagine fotografica, a quella del padre "adorato"³³ indica l'avvenuta sintesi fra il moderno apostolato igienico-morale e l'educazione religiosa ricevuta dal *chazan* Abramo Passigli. L'estrema fascinazione ideale e personale permise a Passigli, quantunque addolorato dalle polemiche del 1885, di costruire nel proprio discorso culturale il Mantegazza moderno talmudista, colui che, alla luce dei principi scientifici, aveva stabilito la validità igienica ed etica delle antiche norme e pratiche religiose.

Resta da dire delle risposte mantegazziane al discorso del discepolo. Effettivamente, spesso negli anni novanta, nella divulgazione igienica, l'antropologo donò immagini assai positive della normativa biblica e talmudica, ed elogiò le evoluzioni in senso etico del giudaismo.³⁴ Non deve allora apparire ironico che, al plauso a Passigli, l'antropologo aggiungesse un caldo invito, immediatamente ripreso dalla stampa ebraica, ai macellai cristiani che, "invece di deridere", avrebbero dovuto "adotta[re]" le tecniche della *Schechità*.³⁵ Ma la rinnovata simpatia delle *élites* assimilazioniste per il prestigioso difensore della macellazione ebraica non poté che essere breve ed effimera, e non solo per la permanenza dei pregiudizi mantegazziani del 1885; cambiando il contesto, l'emergere di altre forme di politica identitaria stava ormai spostando i nuclei della discussione sulla modernità ebraico-italiana.

³³ Così, alcuni mesi dopo la morte di Abramo Passigli, avrebbe scritto Ugo in una Lettera di condoglianze per la morte del padre all'amico Guglielmo Ferrero, Firenze 1 settembre 1904, Ferrero Archive, Uncatalogued Papers, Butler Library, New York.

³⁴ Almanacco Igienico, 1890, 25, pp. 94-95, 1895, 30, p. 21, e 1896, 31, p. 11, e P. Mantegazza, "La cabala del lotto", in *La Nuova Antologia*, 15 gennaio 1896, pp. 340-345.

³⁵ Almanacco Igienico, 1898, 33, pp. 118-121 e P. Mantegazza, "La macellazione ebraica", in *Il Vessillo Israelitico*, 1898, 46, pp. 13-14.. Successivi elogi incontrò anche la passigliana *Igiene del corpo e delle vestimenta presso gli antichi ebrei* in *Almanacco Igienico*, 1899, 34, pp. 116-124.

Una prima conclusione

Giunti a questo punto, si vuole concludere che l'epistolario mantegazziano ci dona un'immagine più mosca di quanto solitamente si pensi delle relazioni vicendevoli fra l'antropologo e la cultura ebraica italiana. Certo, Mantegazza produsse stereotipi, in negativo e, accettando il discorso igienico, in positivo; tuttavia tali contestate visioni avrebbero potuto generare, o generarono, una qualche utilità per una parte delle *élites* ebraiche. Ferme le differenze di origine, professione e importanza intellettuale, Ascoli, Passigli, Servi, Usigli, ma anche altri importanti "amici ebrei" quali Tullo Massarani e Luigi Luzzatti, condividevano con Mantegazza una prospettiva in cui, sull'evoluzionismo religioso, si innestavano politiche integrazioniste dell'identità ebraica. Che, di fronte agli squilibri sociali interni al gruppo ebraico e, successivamente, all'emergere dell'antisemitismo, potevano richiedere non l'obliterazione identitaria, ma nuovi modi per essere, come recitava un libro assai conosciuto dagli ebrei italiani, *Israël chez les nations*.

Per evidenziare questo processo, le lettere hanno avuto un'importanza metodologica decisiva. Infatti, dietro alla generazione di testi, densi di giusti rimbrotti nel 1885 o di entusiastiche citazioni, vi erano procedure spesso ignote al pubblico dei lettori, che rappresentavano un fondamentale aspetto dinamico interno alle reti intellettuali di socializzazione, non necessariamente ebraiche, in cui erano inseriti gli ebrei che intervenivano nei dibattiti scientifico-culturali sulla questione ebraica nell'Italia liberale. Vale a dire, in questo *case-study*, le lettere sono state strumento indispensabile per accedere al livello della negoziazione da cui avrebbe potuto prendere vita un discorso ebraico.

Esilio: empatie e passioni politiche

di

Marina Calloni

1. Lettere dall'esilio: anti-fascismo e tradizione ebraica

Molto spesso le lettere sono state considerate mere forme di scambio interpersonale, prive di qualsiasi valore cognitivo. Sarebbero mezzi impiegati per ricreare i paesaggi dell'interiorità attraverso una comunicazione privata tra soggetti, interessati a mantenere vivi sentimenti e affetti anche a distanza. Le lettere permettono dunque di affermare interattivamente la propria identità, ricorrendo al processo riflessivo della scrittura, indirizzata ad altri. Tuttavia, oltre che ad un valore privato, alle lettere è stato attribuito uno specifico significato politico, nel momento in cui le sorti di intere popolazioni o decisioni pubbliche sono state prese da uomini di stato, mediante il ricorso a scambi epistolari. La sfera privata e l'ambito pubblico sono dunque i due versanti, opposti e insieme speculari, che hanno caratterizzato l'interpretazione delle lettere secondo studi di carattere letterario, psicologico, socio-politico, storico, storiografico e filosofico. Ma le epistole hanno acquisito uno specifico valore cognitivo ed epistemologico, allorché sono state analizzate secondo una prospettiva di genere, ovvero secondo un'angolazione che non solo mette in luce le diverse sensibilità di e fra uomini e donne, ma soprattutto pone in rilievo una più complessa relazione fra la sfera privata dell'esistenza individuale e l'ambito pubblico del discorso politico. E la connessione fra vita personale e identità collettive appare tanto più evidente, quanto più le lettere vengono inviate da un luogo d'esilio, ovvero da una terra lontana dalla propria patria, abbandonata per motivi politici e/o razziali. Questioni personali si intrecciano qui indissolubilmente con domande politiche e con speranze sul futuro della propria nazione.

Tale problematica può essere esemplarmente rinvenuta in alcuni scambi epistolari intercorsi tra donne intellettuali e antifasciste di origine ebraica durante il loro esilio, avvenuto fra gli anni Trenta e Quaranta. Qui il ricordo simbolico e culturale della perdita della “terra promessa”, così come viene ricordato dalla Bibbia e come è stato trasmesso per secoli dal popolo d’Israele, diventa un potente vettore per sopportare l’esilio e per promuovere azioni rivolte al ritorno in patria. La memoria dell’esilio di matrice ebraica viene narrata in voce di donna e dunque rielaborata dalle nostre interlocutrici in chiave politica e secolare. L’esilio – dovuto alla presa di posizione contro la dittatura fascista – viene pertanto esperito secondo una specifica sensibilità di genere, come dimostra la stessa modalità di scrittura impiegata nelle lettere: l’empatia dei sentimenti morali si viene a identificare con la forza delle passioni politiche. In tale contesto, Amelia Rosselli può essere presa ad esempio, come colei che sa connettere in maniera costruttiva l’esperienza dell’esilio con la memoria del passato e le aspettative del futuro: riesce infatti sempre a far interagire nelle sue lettere la complessità dell’esistenza individuale con le biografie familiari e la storia collettiva.

Amelia Rosselli era stata la prima scrittrice di teatro in Italia alla fine dell’Ottocento e fino alla fine degli anni Venti fu una nota scrittrice al centro di numerosi dibattiti politici e iniziative culturali. Ma fino ad alcuni anni or sono, la Rosselli era soprattutto conosciuta come la madre di Carlo (fondatore del movimento di “Giustizia e Libertà”) e di Nello (storico), uccisi in Francia nel 1937 da sicari assoldati da Mussolini. Negli ultimi anni, Amelia Rosselli ha invece cominciato ad essere rivalorizzata come “scrittrice autonoma”, grazie alla pubblicazione di alcuni epistolari coi figli (Rosselli, 1979) e con amici (Rosselli, 1997), ma soprattutto per l’edizione delle sue memorie (Rosselli, 2001) e alla riedizione di alcune sue commedie teatrali. Come scrittrice epistolare e come narratrice autobiografica, Amelia Rosselli rappresenta in effetti un caso particolare all’interno del panorama letterario, intellettuale e politico italiano.

Attraverso un' incisiva modalità di scrittura, Amelia riesce infatti a trattare in modo innovativo, a rendere compatibili e a far coagire problematiche assai complesse che vanno dall'analisi introspettiva, alle comunicazioni con amici e personalità intellettuali e politiche del tempo, fino a riflessioni pubbliche sulla situazione politica del tempo. Sentimenti personali e passioni politiche sono pertanto congiunte in modo indissolubile, soprattutto quando le lettere dall'esilio non riescono a dissimulare l'attesa per il giorno dell' "immane vittoria" contro il nazi-fascismo.

L'esilio ebbe inizio per Amelia il 13 giugno 1937, quando raggiunse Parigi per la morte dei figli (Calloni 2002 a), e giunse a termine il 30 giugno 1946, quando Amelia rientrerà in un'Italia democratica e repubblicana, assieme alle mogli di Carlo e Nello (Marion e Maria) e ai suoi nipoti. Durante i nove anni di esilio, Amelia cercherà riparo in diverse nazioni: dopo aver abitato in Svizzera, a Villars-sur-Ollon dal 1937 al 1939, andrà a vivere nel Regno Unito, a Quainton-Bucks dal 1939 al 1940, per poi spostarsi negli Stati Uniti, a Larchmont, dove visse dal 1940 al 1946. Amelia, che era fuggita dall'Italia per via del suo antifascismo e per il rifiuto di continuare a vivere in una terra dominata da una dittatura totalitaria che aveva ordinato la morte dei suoi due figli, si troverà ad essere perseguitata anche per via del suo essere ebrea. La sua diventa una doppia fuga dal dominio brutale del nazi-fascismo. Il sentimento patriottico di Amelia, il suo sentirsi "italiana" (Calloni 2003), viene così a scontrarsi con i dettami delle leggi razziali, che escludono gli ebrei non solo dal diritto di cittadinanza, ma cercano di annientarli come intero popolo. Riflessioni sulle sorti politiche dell'Italia e riflessioni sulla questione ebraica diventano dunque due elementi fondamentali che caratterizzano gli scritti e le lettere di Amelia durante l'esilio, tanto da motivare la scelta tanto dell'esilio volontario, quanto del rientro.

Come scrive Amelia nelle sue memorie,

"Anch'io perciò, nata e cresciuta in quell'ambiente profondamente italiano e liberale, non serbavo, della mia religione, che la pura essenza di essa dentro il cuore. Elementi religiosi unicamente di carattere morale: e fu questo l'unico

insegnamento religioso – se così si può chiamare, e che piuttosto che insegnamento era ispirazione – da me dato ai miei figlioli. Ricordo che il primo anno in cui mi trasferii a Firenze coi bimbi ebbi subito occasione di fare affermazione di questa italianità che non ammetteva due patrie. In quel principio di secolo s’iniziava anche in Italia il movimento sionista. Io ero ferocemente avversa ad esso, credendo di vederci un pericolo estremo per l’italianità degli ebrei. Anzi, addirittura lo negavo, con una veemenza piena di rancore e di odio. Mi rifiutavo di ponderarne con calma le cause. Sostenevo che l’ebraismo è una religione, non una razza: non ammettevo l’esistenza possibile di due patrie. In una parola: negavo in pieno il problema. [...] Oggi, alla distanza di trent’anni e più da quel giorno, condanno quella mia furiosa intransigenza. Sono stata costretta, attraverso un lungo e doloroso processo mentale, ad ammettere l’esistenza del problema ebraico. Confesso però che lo vedo ancora oggi sotto la luce di una necessità: non di un diritto nazionale. E che il mio ideale sarebbe che la Palestina funzionasse quale centro culturale dell’ebraismo, quale seminario di rabbini e non come la patria terrena degli ebrei. Mi sembra che, travalicando nei secoli l’idea ‘nazione’ e rimanendo come filtrata l’essenza soltanto religiosa dell’ebraicità, quest’ultima, anzi che perdere del suo intrinseco valore, lo aumenti inestimabilmente, lo aiuti a salire verso l’eternità.” (Rosselli 2001, p. 128-129)

L’esilio diventa infatti un mezzo per poter continuare a rimanere fedeli a se stessi e ai propri ideali, pur in contesti che impongono cambiamenti radicali e una notevole flessibilità di adattamento, tanto da mettere a dura prova lo stesso principio dell’identità personale. Le lettere, inviate a chi per costrizione non può esserci vicino, diventano dunque il viatico per esprimere l’autenticità del proprio sé, ricollocato in contesti diversi. La propria storia passata viene misurata sui cambiamenti in corso e sulle aspettative per il futuro. L’esilio diventa dunque sia per Amelia, sia per altre sue amiche l’occasione per rielaborare la propria storia personale e la comune tradizione ebraico-italiana, nei nuovi spazi in cui si trovavano ad abitare. Il “riadattamento” non è infatti un mero adeguarsi alla nuova realtà o una semplice assimilazione alla comunità ospitante. È qualcosa di più. L’esilio può infatti diventare l’occasione per aprirsi al nuovo, per imparare dal contesto geo-politico in cui si trova a vivere, per affrontare in modo più articolato le questioni pubbliche che si vanno via via ponendo nel dibattito politico internazionale. La narrazione dell’esilio è dunque una commistione fra la necessità di affrontare costruttivamente la nuova situazione esistenziale e la fatica del vivere quotidiano col peso del passato e le difficoltà di riadattarsi, segnate anche da malattie e disagi. Ma ciò che spinge le donne in esilio a reagire non è

solo l'amore per sé: è soprattutto dovuto alla cura e al rispetto che devono a familiari più vulnerabili. In particolare, bisogna garantire ai bambini quella sorta di "normalità" che era stata loro preclusa dalla morte dei padri e dalla fuga dell'Italia. Bisognava creare loro condizioni di vita ottimali e trovare scuole di qualità dove potessero avere una buona educazione. Amelia era infatti andata in esilio con le vedove dei figli (Marion e Maria) e con sette nipoti (John, Amelia e Andrea, figli di Carlo; Silvia, Paola, Aldo e Alberto, figli di Nello), che al tempo della fuga dall'Europa verso gli Stati Uniti avevano un'età compresa fra i 13 e i 3 anni. I pensieri maggiori andavano dunque al loro futuro.

2. Orrore della guerra e sofferenze personali

Aspetti esistenziali e insieme politici sono rinvenibili con forza nelle missive inviate da Amelia, soprattutto a due amiche: Gina Lombroso e Laura Orvieto (Calloni 2002 b). Con costoro aveva condiviso a Firenze l'interesse per la questione femminile, l'attivismo politico (patriottico e anti-fascista), l'analoga origine ebraica, molti progetti e intensi sentimenti amicali. Ma mentre il carteggio di Amelia con Gina (in esilio a Ginevra dal 1930, assieme al marito, lo storico Guglielmo Ferrero) è già stato pubblicato (Calloni e Cedroni 1997), le missive di Amelia con Laura (conservate presso Archivio Contemporaneo Bonsanti del Gabinetto Vieusseaux di Firenze) sono rimaste finora inedite.

Le lettere scritte in esilio possono essere dunque lette come una sorta di prisma sfaccettato che riflette domande sull'identità personale, sulle relazioni interpersonali e sulle prospettive politiche, in un tempo in cui la guerra, le persecuzioni di massa e il genocidio non sembravano rimandare ad un futuro di pace, se non in termini di attesa per l'"immane vittoria" e di speranza perché trionfasse la giustizia in terra.

Come Amelia scrive all'amica Gina da Larchmont il 4 febbraio 1941:

"In quanto alle sorti del nostro povero Paese, passiamo – come passerete voi – dalle speranze più vive agli abbattimenti più profondi. Due o tre settimane fa si credette veramente che ci si avviasse verso la fine di tanti guai. Ma la fortuna di

quell'individuo è qualcosa di sfacciato. Più le cose gli vanno male, più sembra sull'orlo dell'abisso, e più rimbalza come un vero burattino. E purtroppo l'aiuto l'ha trovato, e non ha esitato a chiederlo: e l'altro non chiedeva di meglio che darglielo, e così mettere le catene al nostro povero travagliato Paese. Ma dovrà, dovrà pur venire il giorno della giustizia! Tornando alle cose private, per quanto oggi meno che mai possano essere disgiunte dalle pubbliche: ho sentito con molto piacere dalla Nina che Nora ha avuto una bella bimba, e che Ugo ha subito felicemente l'operazione a uno degli occhi. Marion sta benino assai, per quanto ancora non del tutto libera dalle conseguenze della crisi passata l'inverno scorso. I ragazzi sono felici nelle relative scuole, e le frequenti vacanze ce li portano spesso qui Marion però continua a star sola in albergo e non se la sente ancora di metter su casa. Addio cara Gina. Perdonami se ho lasciato passare tanto tempo senza scriverti (12). Ma queste enormi lentezze postali mi scoraggiano tanto! Ditemi cosa pensate voi costà di tutto quello che sta succedendo. Ti abbraccio..” (Calloni e Cedroni, 1997, p. 222-223).

Ma l'insicurezza del futuro lascia spazio alla malinconia, come fa trapelare Maria in una lettera (inedita) del 1939. I suoi pensieri vanno infatti spesso a “quella povera Apparita [la casa di campagna sulle colline di Bagno a Ripoli, M.C.] per la quale la nostalgia si fa sempre più pungente, forse perché vedo sempre più lontano il giorno del ritorno...” Ma, nonostante gli scoraggiamenti, uno dei motivi che fa sopportare il dolore dell'esilio e dà luogo alla speranza è la sicurezza di poter assaporare un giorno la gioia per la liberazione dal totalitarismo. Significava rendere anche giustizia a coloro che erano morti (come Carlo e Nello) per gli ideali di libertà e giustizia, prima che iniziasse l'orrore della guerra e dell'Olocausto. E su questo punto, in una lettera a Gina e Guglielmo Ferrero da Villars del 25 agosto 1938, Amelia si domanda: “– e forse ve lo domanderete anche voi – di fronte alla sconcia bufera che sconvolge il mondo, se i nostri cari non avrebbero, con le loro sensibilità portate in ciascuno all'estremo – per quanto in diverso modo – sofferto *troppo* di tutto quello che avviene!...” (Calloni e Cedroni, 1997, p. 2001).

Ma non tutti gli esiliati potranno far ritorno nell'Italia liberata. Guglielmo Ferrero morirà a Ginevra nel 1942, mentre Gina nel 1944. Le lettere dall'esilio sono dunque continue testimonianze di valori comuni e duraturi, ma anche mezzi empatici per poter condividere il dolore alla distanza, nel saper ricreare una vicinanza emotiva, separata spazialmente dall'Oceano e resa faticosa

dall'indisponibilità o dalla lentezza dei mezzi di comunicazione. Amelia è dunque presente nel cordoglio per la scomparsa degli amici. È tuttavia consapevole che la scrittura è uno strumento di per sé limitato nell'esprimere la partecipazione al dolore e nel comunicare i sentimenti. Non è sufficiente per arrecare un vero conforto, ma perlomeno ricrea la solidarietà e la comunanza. Le ultime lettere dell'epistolario dei Rosselli ai Ferrero sono infatti dedicate al dramma della morte di Guglielmo.

Il 6 settembre 1942 Amelia scrive un'accurata lettera all'amica Gina:

“Non la mancanza di pensiero, che è costantemente rivolta a te dal giorno in cui lessi la tremenda notizia, bensì la mancanza di coraggio m'impedì di scriverti, dopo averti mandato quelle poche parole del telegramma. Che dire, che scrivere, quali parole avrebbero potuto o potrebbero interpretare il mio sentimento, che è ancora di doloroso stupore, potrebbero avvicinarsi al tuo dolore incommensurabile, mia povera Gina cara! Nessuna parola, nessuna... Purtroppo so come, sotto il colpo inatteso di un grande dolore, ci si senta isolati nonostante l'affetto più tenero e devoto di cui ci circondano gli amici che soffrono con noi, e per noi... [...] È così crudele, terribilmente crudele pensare che Guglielmo non potrà godere la gioia meritata col lungo esilio e il lungo patire, di vedere un giorno la liberazione del nostro povero Paese e di cooperare alla sua ricostruzione! Chi più di lui lo meritava? Mia cara Gina, addio. Ma il mio cuore è sempre con te.” (Calloni e Cedroni, 1997, p. 229-230).

Gina risponde poco dopo alle amiche con una lettera (inedita) da Ginevra:

“Care Amelia e Maria! Ricevo il vostro telegramma che mi è di grande conforto. Voi sentite come e quanto ho pensato a voi in questi giorni. E quanto si era parlato di voi con Guglielmo nella speranza, nella fiducia che Guglielmo aveva grandissima di un prossimo ritorno. Lascio a Paola di scrivervi: io sono a letto tramortita dal dolore e da tutte le responsabilità che mi restano.”

La sorella di Gina, Paola Lombroso in Carrara (famosa scrittrice di libri per l'infanzia, col nome di zia Mariù), cercherà di sorreggere la sorella in questo momento drammatico, recandosi dall'Italia alla Svizzera. A pochi giorni dalla morte di Guglielmo, Paola si rivolge così ad Amelia e Maria con una missiva (inedita) da Ginevra:

“Immagino quanto tu, Maria e tutti gli amici di New York siate ansiosi di aver notizie della Gina. Come sempre al momento ha avuto una forza d'animo, un coraggio, una lucidità straordinaria perché si è trovata sola a Mont Pelerin e ha dovuto pensare a tutto [...], ma adesso ha la reazione di questo sforzo inimmaginabile e il medico le ha ordinato un assoluto riposo che è ben difficile di

farle seguire in mezzo a questa valanga di lettere, telegrammi, a cui vuol rispondere, articoli, etc. Quest'attestazione mondiale di ammirazione, di rimpianto, di riconoscimento di Guglielmo è un gran conforto per lei e anche il pensiero che il colpo tremendo per lei sia stato benefico per lui che non ha sofferto – come vi dirà Nina – neppur un attimo – ed era in questi ultimi mesi ma soprattutto lì a Mont Pelerin in uno stato di euforia, di speranza fidente. [...] Aveva potuto vedere la prima copia di *Pouvoir* (2) di cui era doppiamente fiero perché era la Nina che ne aveva ottenuta e curata la pubblicazione – e perché lo considerava come il suo testamento spirituale, una chiave per la pace futura.”

E Amelia risponde a Paola con una lettera da Larchmont dell'8 settembre 1942:

“Amarissimo pensiero, che il grande caro amico nostro non possa un giorno avere l'immensa gioia dell'immane vittoria! Uguale a quello che tortura anche me pensando a Carlo e Nello... Ma probabilmente quel giorno non lo vedrò neppure io. Addio cara, volevo soltanto dirti quanto penso anche a te, e come ti voglio bene.” (Calloni e Cedroni, 1997, p. 231)

3. Le attese dopo l'esilio

Amelia riuscirà invece a far ritorno in Italia, nel 1946. Intanto, a partire dalla fine della guerra, Amelia era riuscita a ristabilire dall'America con molti suoi amici quei contatti che erano andati persi durante il periodo bellico non solo a causa della difficoltà dei mezzi di comunicazione, ma soprattutto per via della diaspora di molti di loro. Infatti molti avevano trovato rifugio all'estero, mentre altri si erano nascosti in Italia. Con la liberazione di Firenze il 4 agosto 1944 e la fine della guerra in Italia il 25 aprile 1945, vengono dunque ristabilite le comunicazioni fra i fuoriusciti e coloro che erano rimasti in Italia o che avevano preso parte alla Resistenza. Questo è il caso di Laura Cantoni in Orvieto che col marito Angiolo era stata ospite – durante gli ultimi tempi della guerra – di Padre Massimo, nel suo ospizio di Barberino del Mugello. Per tal motivo, l'epistolario fra Amelia e Laura si era infatti quasi del tutto interrotto durante gli anni dell'esilio, vale a dire fra la fine degli anni Trenta e la metà degli anni Quaranta. Ciò spiega la differenza fra l'epistolario Rosselli-Ferrero e le lettere Rosselli-Orvieto. Infatti la comunicazione fra il regno Unito, gli Stati Uniti e la Svizzera – e quindi fra Amelia e Gina – era resa possibile dalla neutralità della Confederazione Elvetica (nonostante che molte lettere fossero state controllate

dalla censura statunitense). Viceversa, erano praticamente impossibili gli scambi postali fra gli Stati Uniti e l'Italia, dal momento che dal 1940 le due nazioni erano entrati fra di loro in guerra. Amelia riceverà così per alcuni anni informazioni assolutamente sporadiche su familiari e amici rimasti in Italia, mediante gli uffici della Croce Rossa. Terminato il conflitto, riprendono i contatti anche postali. Pertanto, anche la corrispondenza fra Amelia e Laura ricomincerà con vigore dopo il 1945, quando Amelia è ormai in attesa del rientro in Italia.

Laura non è più giovane (era nata a Milano nel 1876, mentre Amelia a Venezia nel 1870). Pur tuttavia ritrova la voglia e l'energia di dar vita a Firenze ad un nuovo progetto: fondare e dirigere un giornale, *La Settimana dei Ragazzi*, rivolta alle giovani generazioni. Amelia ne viene subito informata: condivide appieno l'iniziativa, tanto da diventare corrispondente dall'America e da scrivere alcuni interventi sulla vita negli Stati Uniti e su altre questioni di rilevanza pubblica. Le due amiche condividono pertanto la gioia per la vittoria, l'interesse per nuovi progetti, ma anche il tentativo di rielaborare il proprio esilio e di rinforzare le ragioni di una solida amicizia, durata nel tempo e nel dolore. Amelia riconosce che gli anni dell'esilio hanno rappresentato per lei un'importante esperienza formativa e una fonte di apprendimento, tanto da farle assumere un diverso atteggiamento verso la vita.

Al proposito, Amelia scrive a Laura una lettera (inedita), datata 30 luglio 1945, dall'Ashmere Lake Hotel di Hinsdale nel Massachusetts:

“Mia carissima Laura, La tua lettera del giugno scorso, meravigliosa di gioventù, mi ha entusiasmata per quello che fai, per te, che sai trasformare le vicissitudini più tristi in un ‘paradiso’: come hai definito il tuo lungo soggiorno, o meglio la vostra reclusione in quell'Istituto per i vecchi poveri. Quando ne parlai con Silvia, essa esclamò: ‘come, come si può essere *cheerful* in un ambiente simile?’ Allora le raccontai a lungo di te, di quello che è stata, che è, e che cosa ha significato nella mia vita la nostra amicizia. Voglio che impari a *conoscerti* prima di conoscerti. (Nota la differenza dei due piani della conoscenza.) [...] Ma tornando a te e al tuo temperamento felice, mi è sempre sembrato di ritrovare nell'atmosfera americana un po' di quella che aveva da te. ‘*Take it easy*’ è lo slogan nel bene e nel male. La prima lezione l'ebbi da un orologiaio, da quale ero dovuta tornare più volte per la medesima riparazione. L'ultima volta mi mostrai un tantino seccata. ‘*take it easy*’, mi disse: ‘nella vita ci sono cose molto più importanti’. Rimasi colpita: però, obiettai alla fine (pensando alla *Yoghi Philosophy* e ai diversi *piani*), mi conoscerà che nel *piano* di un orologio che deve marcare

l'ora esatta, la cosa ha la sua importanza. Ma lui non mi parve molto persuaso: e io lasciai il negozio dubitando assai dell'importanza di avere un orologio che vada bene. E ho imparato a 'take it easy', da allora. Pare impossibile, non si smette mai d'imparare. Direi anzi che da vecchi s'impara di più perché le lezioni sono illuminanti e quasi commentate dalla luce dell'esperienza, dal collegamento sintetico dei vari avvenimenti. E... Altra interruzione! Ma questa volta non è la cameriera, ma l'arrivo della posta, con un frotto di lettere dall'Italia. Arrivano sempre così, a ondate. E ce n'è una tua! Non hai un'idea della gioia che si prova, noi lontani, nel ricevere lettere dall'Italia. Mi pare di capire che tu non abbia ancora ricevuto la mia nella quella ti dicevo di aver avuto, appunto, i primi tre numeri e che tenerezza mi aveva fatto vedere, nel primo, la "collaborazione" mia e dei miei ragazzi...da te trovata in quel caro, unico modo! Se io collaborerò davvero, in altro modo, non so. [...]"

Amelia sta intanto preparando il ritorno, sta pensando alla casa che l'aspetta, emozionata di vedere cosa è ancora rimasto, immutato nel tempo (simboli che la ricollegano con la sua storia passata), preoccupata di appurare i cambiamenti, ma di nuovo motivata a partecipare alla vita politica del paese. Come ricorda a Laura in una missiva da Larchmont del 10 maggio 1946, a poche settimane dal referendum su monarchia o repubblica, quando per la prima volta venne riconosciuto il diritto di voto alle donne:

“sei stata tanto, tanto cara per essere andata in Via Giusti e essere entrata nella nostra casa. Essere *tornata* tu, intanto, prima di me, e aver fatto una visita a quelle stanze, al giardino (che credo non sarà più giardino!) e salutato il grande albero in fondo c'è dunque ancora... all'ombra del quale abbiamo passato tante ore a discutere e spesso non sole...Mi pare quasi che, precedendomi, sul varcare quella soglia sulla quale metterò presto il piede con tanto interno tremore, tu mi abbia steso una mano per aiutarmi a oltrepassarla. [...] ma lasciamo andare, perché il troppo ricordare, i due, fa male. Dunque, bella notizia quella che il re (con l'r più piccolo possibile) se ne è finalmente andato! Speriamo che il 2 Giugno lo seguirà il resto della degna famiglia, e non se ne parli più. Ma purtroppo non basteranno quattro generazioni a riparare a quanto male fatto da lui, più ancora che da Mussolini. Perché questi era un *ganster*, fin dal principio si sapeva: e l'altro si credeva fosse un galantuomo, e aveva giurato di non violare la costituzione. Invece!...Vorrei essere in Italia, e poter almeno dare il mio piccolo voto.”

La sconfitta del nazi-fascismo e la scelta della repubblica in luogo della monarchia avverano le aspettative di Amelia. L'esilio era finito: poteva tornare in patria, in un'Italia democratica, circondata dall'affetto e dalla cura di familiari e amici. Il ricordo andava però sempre a coloro che non potevano più tornare, a condividere con lei il nuovo corso storico.

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**Letters as historical sources –
some concluding reflections**

by

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Letter writing as a specific mode of communication, as a peculiar communicative practice, is of course closely related to a peculiar media system and to particular social and communicative cultures. Communication via letters is and has been a delayed mode of communication based on specific forms of transmission between a sender of a letter and one or more addressees. Communication via letter bridges not only spaces but also time.

Letter writing as a cultural practice must be historized and contextualized. Thus, questions immediately arise: Why did people write letters? What were their motives and reasons? What did people make of this mode of communication under the given technological and cultural circumstances? Another question that only rarely has been examined concerns the impact of writing letters on the fabrication of the self of both the sender and the addressee.

In a perspective of "longue durée" (F. Braudel) the sender of a letter is not necessarily the writer. In the late Middle Ages and still in the early modern period, nuns, for instance, dictated their letters but did not write them. The publication of these spiritual letters was managed by men, whose aim was a "pedagogy of holiness". On the other hand, the spiritual letters of the nuns' confessors could easily turn into genuine books of devotion. However, eventually even the nuns wrote their letters themselves. Thus, by mailing and receiving letters they could overcome the voluntary seclusion in the convents. Moreover,

writing letters by themselves and about themselves, the nuns could experience themselves.

The private or personal letters, which in the European context emerged and spread from the 16th century at the latest, reveal to what extent the letter became a mode of fabricating modern individuality and subjectivity. Thus, the interrelation between writing letters and the construction of the self needs to be examined further. However, the epistolers' impact on standardizing identity could easily be disregarded. At the same time, scholars have continuously ascribed private letter writing to women. Private letters – only personal letters? – are assumed to have been written primarily by women because of their gender. A closer look at the published and not yet published female letters, however, unmask a variety of motives to write letters and the content frequently transcends the narrowly defined private or personal matters. It is misleading to reduce the female letter to personal or family issues.

Since the late Middle Ages the peculiar historical cultures of letter writing developed a diversity of forms of letters from the scholarly letter to the family letter and the most personal love letter. The often used differentiation between the personal letter on the one hand and the business letter on the other is misleading: The personal letters not only regarded the personal interrelations and the business letters were not only written for professional purposes.

Quite obviously, the prevailing scholarly tendency to reduce personal letters to private ones is questionable. The traditional definition of the genre as “private” is strictly speaking the paradox of research on letter writing. A letter written and mailed immediately becomes “public”. For instance, the particular letter in the communicative system of early modern Europe could be partially or totally read to others and it could even be given to others for reading copying . This habit was

still used in the 19th century and even during the First World War. Thus, the concept of intimacy or subjectivity should be reconsidered. And at least since the 18th century female letters played a decisive role in the "disputed space" between "private" and "public". Recent research has highlighted the peculiar interrelation between both social spaces and the social construction of the bourgeois ordering of the sexes, which can be observed from the late eighteenth century.

In order to reconstruct the meaning of a particular letter within a correspondence a detailed examination is needed. As a first step scholars have to contextualize the act of letter writing. The precise knowledge of the material circumstances of letter writing is crucial for an interpretation of letters. At the same time letter writing is only one among different other cultural practices. Letter writing thus has to be related to these practices. Besides the efforts to interpret the individual letter a precise examination of the place of this letter within a network of letters is needed. Of course the analysis of the contents of the individual letter and of the network of communication belongs to research on letters. A variety of factors obviously contributes to the textual structure of the particular letter. To state that only personal strategies make up the letter's textual structure is a misleading simplification. Strategy, style and textual structures influence each other reciprocally. In order to precisely explore the content as well as the literary quality of a particular letter as the mode of communication, the prevailing social and literary norms have to be taken into account. Only then can the particular accomplishment of the sender be examined, both in terms of its literary quality and its cognitive dimensions.

Letter writing creates interrelations, bridges spatial distances, and can even become a goal in itself. Then however, the letter becomes a requested object and it no longer serves as a vehicle that brings about a presence of the sender. Letters document the manifold modes and stages of the interrelations between the sender

and the addressee, the very beginnings, the diversity of the exchange, the ruptures, the silences, and even the closing. This perspective explores the networks in order to analyse the overlapping of communicative networks of particular senders as well as addressees.

Naturally, the form, production and purpose of a letter are dependent on a letter's mode of transmission. A teleological reconstruction of its transmission via the messengers in the Middle Ages, via scholarly travellers, which continued far into the 18th century, or via the state organized post especially since the 18th century, and the growing efficiency and speed of transmission of letters plays down the impediments and the contingency of the transmission of letters. The interrelation between the changes of transmission of letters and the changes in the practice(s) of writing letters including its impact on the idea of the "self" have not yet been taken into account.