

## THE EPISTOLARY TRADITION AND ITS CONNECTION BETWEEN LETTER WRITING AND THE ARTISTIC PROCESS

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**Abstract:** *The article gives an overview of the epistolary genre and its role in literature. Its most important characteristic of having a dialogue nature is being emphasized. This paper also presents the modernist authors whose fiction is often inspired by autobiography.*

**Keywords:** *Letter Tradition, Epistle, modernist literature, epistolary form, epistolary tradition, letter writing.*

**Annotatsiya:** *Maqolada epistolyar janr va uning adabiyotdagi o'rni haqida umumiy ma'lumot berilgan. Uning dialog xarakteriga ega bo'lgan eng muhim xususiyati ta'kidlangan. Ushbu maqola, shuningdek, badiiy adabiyoti ko'pincha avtobiografiyadan ilhomlangan modernist mualliflarni taqdim etadi.*

**Kalit so'zlar:** *Xat an'anasi, Maktub, modernistik adabiyot, epistolyar shakl, epistolyar an'ana, xat yozish.*

**Аннотация:** *В статье дается обзор эпистолярного жанра и его роли в литературе. Подчеркивается ее важнейшая характеристика - диалогический характер. В этой статье также представлены авторы-модернисты, чьи произведения часто вдохновлены автобиографиями.*

**Ключевые слова:** *Письменная традиция, Послание, модернистская литература, эпистолярная форма, эпистолярная традиция, письмо.*

### INTRODUCTION

The epistolary form in modernist literature, which challenge the character element of the epistolary tradition, create a connection between letter writing and the artistic process. Making connections is an important concept to Virginia Woolf's aesthetic philosophies. In her memoir *A Sketch of the Past*, Woolf attempts to describe herself by describing some of her earliest memories, especially those epiphanies that have inspired her art. One particularly poignant memory is when she sees a flower and thinks, "That is the whole". Woolf believes that this wholeness is present everywhere, but is hidden by our mundane everyday experiences of living: "From this I reach what I call a philosophy; at any rate it is a constant idea of mine; that behind the cotton wool is hidden a pattern". Art, she says, is one of the things that

allows us to see the patterns and connections in life and thus she thinks that “by writing I am doing what is more necessary than anything else”.

Letter writing in Jacob’s Room also tries to create connections, which is why the narrator calls letters at one point “the unpublished works of women”. Female letter writers are like authors, because like Virginia Woolf, they try to look past the cotton wool and reach the patterns that bind us together.

The narrator begins to imagine that the letter is more than an inanimate object, that it has the thoughts and feelings of a loving mother, and speculates what the letter would think and what it would do if it knew that Jacob, its son, was having sex with a girl in the next room.

But if the pale blue envelope lying by the biscuit-box had the feelings of a mother, the heart was torn by the little creak, the sudden stir. Behind the door was the obscene thing, the alarming presence, and terror would come over her as at death, or the birth of a child. Better, perhaps, burst in and face it than sit in the antechamber listening to the little creak, the sudden stir, for her heart was swollen, and pain threaded it. My son, my son—such would be her cry, uttered to hide her vision of him stretched with Florinda, inexcusable, irrational, in a woman with three children living at Scarborough. And the fault lay with Florinda. (Woolf, *Jacob’s Room* 79)

Then the narrator completely stops talking about the letter and speaks directly about what Mrs. Flanders, the writer of the letter, would do if she were in the situation that the letter witnesses: “Indeed, when the door opened and the couple came out, Mrs. Flanders would have flounced upon her—” (Woolf, *Jacob’s Room* 79). In this episode, the letter completely takes on the writer’s (Mrs. Flanders’) identity, parodying the character element of the epistolary tradition. Letters were originally used in literature because their form allowed an author to record a character’s thoughts. Here, the object of the letter momentarily gains its own subjectivity.

Like Mrs. Flanders, Clifford Chatterley in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* is also an artist figure because of his early foray into creative writing, although he eventually

abandons his ambitions as a writer and devotes himself to industry. However, the way his letters to Connie are described are a reminder of his earlier literary ambitions: “Clifford wrote regularly. He wrote very good letters: they might all have been printed in a book. And for this reason Connie found them not very interesting” (Lawrence 283).

Previous descriptions of Clifford’s writing are extremely similar to what he includes in his letter to Connie: “He had taken to writing stories; curious, very personal stories about people he had known. Clever, rather spiteful, and

yet, in some mysterious way, meaningless. The observation was extraordinary and peculiar. But there was no touch, no actual contact" (Lawrence 14). The metaphor in Clifford's letter is inspired by his experience of listening to Mrs. Bolton and is used to relate a personal story. But it is disdainful, malicious, and prejudiced. Clifford fails to connect with his reader, Connie, who already violently hates his class biases and is more concerned about the fate of Mellors than she is about her husband's clever wording. The similarity between the descriptions of Clifford's short stories and the content of his letter, draws suggests a parallel between the letter and his artistic endeavors. The style of Mellors' letter, which is similar to Clifford's, also creates connections between letter writing and art, but his writing echoes the style of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, making his letter a *mise en abyme* of the novel itself. In her article, Joan Peters argues that *Lady Chatterley's Lover* has two distinct narrative threads that represent Clifford and Mellors specifically. The prose in the Clifford section, at first appears to be metaphorical, but lapses into cliché: "Convenient cliché replaces vital metaphor within the fabric of the narrative itself, so that the text of the novel reflects, at the same time it fictionally creates, the tired spirit of Clifford's world".

In the character element of the epistolary tradition, letters were used to develop the character of the letter writer, because they presented that character's thoughts to external readers. However in *Miss Lonelyhearts*, the letters in the text develop the character of the letter reader instead of the letter writers, because the letters written by minor characters are the source of *Miss Lonelyhearts'* identity. His whole existence revolves around them. His real name is never revealed to the external readers of the book, because he is only addressed as *Miss Lonelyhearts*.<sup>16</sup> The only conversations he has with other characters are about the letters. For example, Shrike constantly ridicules *Miss Lonelyhearts'* job, his attempts to cope with the suffering he sees everyday, and his desire to speak to his readers about Christ. In the very first scene of the book, the clever but sadistic Shrike tortures the conscience of his columnist by satirizing a Catholic prayer, the *Anima Christi*, and leaving it on his desk. The other workers at the paper follow Shrike's lead and berate him as well.

Conclusion. The article provides a more general overview of the letters' use in modernist fiction. It uses the works of James Joyce as a case study, examining how one author's use of the letter develops over his artistic career. According to the previously stated, it can be concluded that the epistolary genre has its ancient historic background. Based on the author's integration regarding communication either with real or with imaginary

reader, the dialogic nature is dominant, as well as the subjective form of perception, i.e. the intimate provenience. It was established in this paper that the number of definitions for this literary genre, its theoretic considerations, its characteristics as well as its classifications are numerous. However, besides all of these, the fact that epistolary genre is specific narrative form which offers a lot of perspectives and opportunities for further researches remains.

The letter writers write about events that have their origins in the reality of the storyworld, but deliberately misconstrue what actually happens. Like fiction, their letters create a new reality. In addition, the emphasis on and depiction of composition, draws parallels between letter writing and novel writing.

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