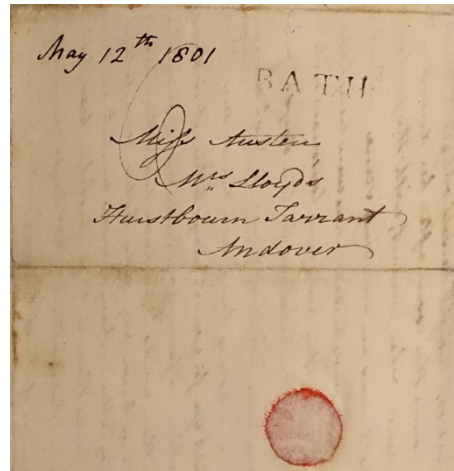


## Call for Papers: ‘Letters and Literature 1500-2025: histories, forms, communities’

5-7 November 2025 (FREE online only conference)

Deadline for submissions, 20 June 2025

Detail from letter, Jane Austen to Cassandra Austen, Bath, 12 May 1801. Morgan Library and Museum. Public domain via [Wikimedia](#).



Letters have been described in one evocative image as ‘a form in flight’ (Liz Stanley). Seeking to appreciate more fully such descriptions and their importance for literary studies, we aim to bring together in this online event scholars, writers and researchers interested in exploring letters and literature from the sixteenth century to the present day.

This FREE 3-day online international conference’s broad focus is the letter in its material and textual forms, as manifested across literary history—from the tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet* to the golden age of epistolary fiction, Kate Thomas’ ‘postal plots’ of the nineteenth century, and what Maria Löschnigg and Rebekka Schuh have identified as an Epistolary Renaissance in the work of 21<sup>st</sup> century writers. Participants are encouraged to engage with this theme in ways including but not limited to the following questions/topics:

- how, where and why do letters feature in literary texts and literary communities?
- what strategies of narrative, plot, or character do they illustrate and deploy?
- the role of materiality in literary letters
- letters as vehicles for exploring writers’ ideas about the public and the private, absence and presence, the global and the local, and/or notions of authenticity and the ‘authentic self’
- letters and literary reputations
- letter writing manuals and the development of literary history
- what counts as a letter in twenty-first century narratives?

Letters have also been described as the ‘epistolary form of gift exchange’ (Stanley). We seek contributions investigating letters as makers and markers of creative communities, including but not limited to the following topics:

- the role of letters in writers’ networks
- imagined letters/letters unsent
- writers’ letters from prison
- representation or employment of letters in diasporic/migrant epistolary narratives

Creative responses to all these issues are very much welcomed.

And with a keen eye on issues of preservation and representation, we are interested to hear too from those working on the editing of writers' letters (print and digital), and on letters in the archives.

We welcome individual paper presentations or round table discussions in any of the following formats:

- Individual paper (20 minutes speaking time/2500 words)
- Individual lightning talk (7 minutes speaking time/1000 words)
- Round table panel, up to 5 participants (40 minutes speaking time in total)
- Creative writing responses or creative/critical responses to conference themes (20 minutes speaking time/2500 words).

To propose a paper, response or panel to present at the conference, please submit a **300-word abstract and a brief biography (50 words)** to [Sara Haslam](#) by **20 June 2025**. We welcome proposals from individuals at all stages of their academic careers, including graduate students, and dedicated graduate student panels are anticipated for the event. We will aim to inform you of the outcome of your proposal submission by **30 July 2025**. The conference will be **FREE** to attend, but registration in advance will be required. A Journal Special Issue is planned outcome.

This conference is organised by colleagues in the [Department of English and Creative Writing](#) (Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences) together with colleagues in [Languages and Applied Linguistics](#) (Faculty of Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies) at The Open University. The conference is supported by [OpenARC](#), The Open University's Arts Research Centre in the School of Arts and Humanities, the Society for the History of Authorship, Reading and Publishing (SHARP), and by the History of Books and Reading (HOBAR), Contemporary Cultures of Writing, Digital Humanities, and Literature and Politics research groups in the Faculties of Arts and Social Sciences (FASS) and of Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies (WELS) at the Open University.

**Conference Lead Organiser:** Sara Haslam

**Programme Committee members:** Francesca Benatti; Daria Chernysheva; Delia da Sousa Correa; Rachele De Felice; Jonathan Gibson; Ed Hogan; Peg Katritzky; Lania Knight; Philip Seargeant; Jennifer Shepherd; Emma Sweeney; Shafquat Towheed, Nicola Watson, Anne Wetherilt.

**Conference website:** <https://digital-humanities.open.ac.uk/letters2025/>



Detail from Reginald Marsh "Unloading the Mail". Photo by Carol M. Highsmith. Full scale image available at <https://hdl.loc.gov/loc.png/highsm.24950>. No known copyright restriction.