

Final Paper



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I have a drawer in my desk of every single piece of writing I have received in the last five years. It has letters sent to me from the mail and emails that were printed, even scraps of paper with written “i love you’s” from summers ago. It is something that I don’t ever talk about. It sits in my room and sometimes when I remember it’s there, I go and I touch every single piece of paper and try to remember. I want to be able to remember it all, each moment, each feeling I had when I read things for the first time. It is all so fleeting and I am always plagued with the fear of forgetting, but knowing that each word is there puts me at ease.

I could say it started with the five page letter. The letter I wrote the day of his birthday, the day after I kissed him and the day after the ten page letter that I received, that I have tucked at the bottom of my memory box. I could say it started on Valentine’s Day in 2019, with the two letters written to my old best friends, both of which I don’t talk to anymore. I could even say it started with the birthday letter I wrote to the person I thought was my first love that sits in my laptop still. But I think it has always been with me. Writing letters has always been an outlet, a secret way to tell people things without the fear of speaking the words. I have enclosed more secrets in letters than I have ever said out loud. I think it is easier that way. Maybe it means more this way.

My letters were never not intimate. I didn’t know how to write without pushing memories between the words and writing about features of people only someone who deeply loved them would know.

Most of the time it was intimate and romantic, teetering on the lines of what could seem like

friendship and what could seem like more. I never meant it to be, but I was alone and the words were there and I felt safe in the idea that it was just for someone. It is something I seemed to do out of desperation then, now more for the release of the love that builds up, now as a way to express my queer-ness in a deeper way.

Letter writing has always been used to share secrets and express love. It has always been taught in history, even when I did a play in the fourth grade with a man on a horse delivering letters to the people of the fake town. But while it has always been there, there is a special tie between letter writing and queerness. It's an outlet for queer people to express love and even sexual desire in a more private, intimate manner, especially in times when it is all there is to give. It is weaved into epistolary books and shows up in movies now. It lives on my bookshelves and in the PDFs on my phone, in my emails and the seventeen letters I have in the box I have hidden.

Although epistolary writing and letters have been an important part of history in many places, it has specifically made a mark on Spain, focusing more on lesbian authors and their stories. In recent years the genre of writing has been used by lesbians to explore conventional values in romantic relationships and look more into the social structures these types of relationships contain. In Megan Sheldon's essay

“My Tongue's Not Straight” (which put a deeper emphasis on the essay “Grandeza y miseria de la epístola” by Carmen Riera), she goes into detail about a specific letter in which two lesbians are able to express their “intense combination of affection and sexual desire” through language and their epistolary writing. It is mentioned in “Confessions of the Letter Closet” that epistolary fiction gives a “fertile yet unexplored terrain for the investigation of queer subjectivities in modern Spain” and gives a

specific example of an AIDS prevention campaign in Spain in which a video of a man typing “I love you” in an email is shown in English. Alongside this, pieces like *La Novela de Don Sandalio, Jugador de Ajedrez* (Miguel de Unamuno) and *La Tribada Falsaria* (Miguel Espinosa) showcase the versatile use of epistolary fiction for queerness throughout time in Spain. In the case that a queer relationship needs privacy or has to be more secretive, whether that be because of homophobia or safety concerns, letter writing has been something people are able to fall back on to use in a secure, secretive but still intimate way. With homophobia and transphobia increasing recently with all the new laws, it's important to have a forum like this and it has always been a part of history. Pamela VanHaitma's essay “LGBTQ+ Epistolary Rhetoric/Letter Writing” touches on how how writers, even with the emphasis that letters could either be rhetorical or just drawn upon as records for information, that they are a “indispensable sources for the development of LGBTQ+ histories of rhetoric, studies of public memory, and research on communication.” Letter writing has always been touched upon in the context of privacy and keeping history alive in books like *This is How You Lose the Time War* (by Amal El-Mohtar and Max Gladstone) in which two fem-aligned people write letters to and from in secret, under the pressure that if they were found out they could be killed, which ties into queerness now and conversing through mediums such as emailing. Epistolary fiction and letter writing is also an outlet for queer people to express sexual and erotic desire alongside feelings of just love and romance. It is stated in *Confessions of the Letter Closet* that “The association of letter writing with intimate secrets and sexuality has motivated contemporary critics to investigate authentic letter correspondence for evidence of homoerotic and homosexual relationships.” Being able to express these

feelings through letter writing gives the whole situation a more intimate and personal feel, it gives perspective of either the person or characters wants and needs sexually which draws a reader in and it gives more detail than able to give in a normal context. The book *We Contain Multitudes* by Sarah Henstra uses the epistolary format throughout the whole book but also in context to the book's sex scenes, in which we get the perspectives from both characters. Not only does this make the scenes more erotic but with the way that every act is described, it feels more important. Parts of the book *Red White and Royal Blue* (Casey McQuiston) also fall under this category, with their email exchanges to one another, specifically having to do with their sex. The relationship between desire and power in this format can also be seen in letter writing books outside of English like *Sexutopía* by Sophia Ruiz and *Cenicienta en Chueca* by María Feliticas Jaime. It is mentioned in *My Tongue isn't Straight* that Ruiz's other book *Carta a mi Amante* that Ruiz creates an 'explicit expression of erotic desire with particular attention to language and its impact on the representation of her and her lover.' It is described in all of these that the letter writing creates sexual games through the linguistics and enhances carnal needs of queer people all around.

As someone who is a big reader, I feel like epistolary fiction has significantly impacted my own views of queer literature and it is something I have found a lot of personal connection to. I use the things I have picked up in these books in my own letter writing, whether that be to friends or people more intimate and I have found it houses room for a different expression of love otherwise unable to be expressed. It feels deeper and more personal, while it allows someone to showcase all they know about someone. In the summer of 2021, I ended up writing over 20 letters back and forth, maybe even more,

to my then best friend. Not only did this exchange jumpstart my desire to write letters, but it created a way for me to express all of the love I always felt. Letter writing is impactful to queer people, especially me and it an important part of history and desire throughout history.

To incorporate my research into different words, I decided to write letters to important people in my life. I chose to use nicknames for all of them, as I don't want the identity to be fully revealed. I wrote to people that have significant importance in my life and who I am infinitely grateful for. I decided to add songs at the end of each letter, mostly to explain my relationship to the person but also songs that the person and I share in different ways.

Dear Z,

I would never say I love you. Maybe to my friends in passing and to my mom when I describe you, but never to your face. I know on some level you know. I know you've seen it in the photos and in between my attempts to not outright say I miss you in the emails I write late at night. I know on some level you love me back though. When my friends say I'm your favorite even if you don't, I think I feel it. I want to feel it.

I think you are the best friend I've ever had. And I know there were the months when it was different and you were there and happened to end up on the receiving end. I also know you still don't know about that, I don't think I ever want you to know. But you are my best friend. I think it was you the first time we ever hung out outside the group, when he and I were still together and I couldn't mask how excited I was to see you. Couldn't mask how badly I wanted things to be different then, how much I needed them to be. You sat in the backseat of my mom's car with your hair so short and fidgeted with your fingers and I didn't know what to do except stare at you like you were a wild animal. You were so different from my other friends. I think then I realized things were going to be different. I knew it was going to be better, and all I wanted was better.

There was so much bliss in all of it. In the late night movies, just us in the theater laughing at how stupid everything was. In the drives to the beach and the hours in the library, even in the grocery shopping and the piles of ASL work you swore you could help me with. There were nights when you slept next to me with my cat and I couldn't help but think about how lucky I was, and how lucky I

continue to be. You are so easy. I need easy and you are easy and I don't know what I would do without it. It grounds me and you always tell me what I need to hear. You are always what I need.

I know we don't talk about feelings. I know you told me we could, if I wanted that, when I came to you that day. But I think I'm okay leaving things how they are now. I think about you always. You are my best friend, and I don't say that lightly. I do love you. I hope you can feel it.

Pity Party - Mickey Darling

Don't You Want Me - The Human League

So Alright, Cool, Whatever - The Happy Fits

Dial Drunk - Noah Kahan

Dear Dawn,

Thank you for the time in the car. After he yelled at me and you stood in line with my mom and picked out the smoothie you then didn't know was my favorite, but maybe you know me better than you think you do. You held me the whole time the way back. I cried into your chest. I don't know how to not be someone without you, you know. I don't know how to not engrave you into everything I do.

I'm sorry I wrote that letter back in October. I swear I didn't want things to change, I just wanted it to count for something. I wanted to matter, I wanted all of this to matter. The necklaces and the garden, the shells I brought and the time we sat on your bedroom floor and you played songs for me. Every time we sat and I watched your fingers move across the strings, every call and everytime we laid in your bed back facing each other.

I couldn't have done the years without you. I tried to explain to him how you were the most solid force in my life during it all, how you are my connection back to New York and how I can't think about it all without it being soaked in you. I'm going to be there and for once we are going to be on the same coast for a long time. The same time zone. A year ago, that's all I would have wanted.

You asked me if you were still my favorite when I saw you in January. When you started doing things and I didnt know if I knew you anymore, I don't think I do anymore even if I want to. But you always will be. You are too meshed with me to not be. I'll write you an email. Not like the letter, different, but maybe I'll tell you everything. A part of me wants to. I hope you're well. I hope I run into

you when I'm back in the city. You are my ocean. Home misses you.

Almost (Sweet Music) - Hozier + Anything - Adrienne Lenker + Manta Rays - Chloe Moriondo

Dear Lloid,

I am homesick. I always am. It sits in my chest like tar and I can feel it in the bones of my fingers when I flex them. I can feel it in the divots in my skin and the times when I step outside and I feel the cold on my nose. I feel it always. I feel it when I sleep and when I get off the plane knowing you are so close. I think I will die feeling homesick.

I have these dreams sometimes where I am back under the pines with you. It starts off so bad with him right there and the feeling in my chest starts but then I look over and you're there. You are always there in them. I have these dreams where I am next to you and I can physically feel the weight release. I can smell the trees in the dreams. I can feel the water on my knees and the dirt caked onto my legs. I can feel your fingers interlocked with mine. I feel like I'm going to get out sometime when I'm there. I think you taught me how to be normal. Or I guess how to be okay without being normal. How you held my hands while I tried to get out how I could never feel normal when I feel this much. When you told me you think it's wonderful and I don't know why it was so bad then. A part of me is mad that I subjected you to it all, another part of me is on my hands and knees kissing the ground because the earth brought you to me then.

I know you will get out. I know you're scared. I know it sits in your throat sometimes. But I know you will get out. You won't be there forever. You have so much ahead of you. You're going to go so far. I love you I love you I love you, times three. There is hope in it all and you are my hope that things will work out. I am holding my bracelet and listening to our songs. I am so proud of you.

Homesick - Noah Kahan

She Calls Me Back - Noah Kahan

Dear Kal,

I don't know how to not write about things being different. Sometimes I think I can only write about the change and how things will be different, how they are different even if I don't want it. I think you will always stay the same to me. You will stay the same but grow alongside me and I am not scared of this. I would have been. But I am not scared, I promise. My hands are gentle. You know this.

You also know I love you. This is short because I will drive with you with the windows down and lay in bed with you while the sun sets through my window and comes back up in the morning. It is short because there is the beach to see and the sand to feel and the music to play. I have saved up my happiness for this. I have been hoarding all the sun I have felt over the months so I can sit in the yard and press flowers for you and let it soak into the ground around me. I love you. In the sun and in the car and on the boardwalk and in my new and your missing tattoos. I love you, your head is tipping back and I am not afraid. I am not scared of trying.

Were All Doomed - Shallow Alcove

Don't Get The Deal - Beabadoobee

Maine - Noah Kahan

Is That So Wrong? - Mickey Darling

Matchbox - Rainbow Kitten Surprise