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Letters, Organization, and the Archive in Elizabeth Montagu's Correspondence

Markman Ellis

ABSTRACT The archive of Elizabeth Montagu's extant letters is very large, comprising over seven thousand items, of which the great majority are in the Huntington Library in San Marino, California. This essay considers the afterlife of letters in that collection, examining internal evidence of how received letters, copies of letters sent, and sent letters returned were organized within Montagu's household and by a series of subsequent editors. The essay assesses contemporary accounts of systems for organizing sent and received letters in merchant's manuals, and in other descriptions of filing practices of the period. Finally, the essay considers the large number of multiples of the same letter in the Montagu Papers, both drafts and copies made by amanuenses and copyists, and the sociable practice of extra-circulation. The essay uses Derrida's essay "Archive Fever" (1995), especially his concepts of consignation and the disintegrative death drive, to examine particular moments when these systems of letter organization reveal themselves and when those systems break down. In "The Commerce of Life": Elizabeth Montagu (1718–1800)," ed. Nicole Pohl, special issue, <http://muse.jhu.edu/issue/39838/print> **KEYWORDS:** extra-circulation of letters; eighteenth-century correspondence practices; letter storage systems; letter books; Gilbert West

🌀 **ELIZABETH MONTAGU (1718–1800)** was a prodigious letter writer, whose archive of sent and received letters at the Huntington Library in San Marino, California, comprises 6,923 items written between 1740 and 1800.¹ That group is augmented by an as-yet-unquantified number of manuscript letters, at least several hundred more, in collections all over the world, including the British Library, the Houghton Library at Harvard University, Nottingham University Library, and the University of Aberdeen Library, as well as by letters now extant only in print editions. As this essay

1. Janice Blathwayt, "A Bluestocking Bibliography," "Reconsidering the Bluestockings," ed. Nicole Pohl and Betty A. Schellenberg, special issue, *Huntington Library Quarterly* 65, no. 1/2 (2002): 39–57 at 39. Elizabeth Robinson Montagu Papers, 1688–1800, Huntington Library. The Montagu Papers at the Huntington are cited henceforward with the abbreviation MO.

explores, what fate awaited the letter after it was received, read, and consumed was a question of considerable interest to eighteenth-century letter writers. In this period, letter writers recognized the practical difficulties of maintaining a correspondence: from accidents of the post, such as misdirection, misdelivery, and loss, to the perils of reception, such as interception, misreading, and destruction. Furthermore, the sheer volume of letters that were sent, received, and returned posed a set of practical problems, of storage, organization, and editing.

Although without doubt very large, the Montagu correspondence is by no means the largest collection of personal correspondence from the eighteenth century. Large correspondence collections have formed the basis of some equally extensive publication projects. The letters of Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826), estimated to number 18,000 sent and a further 25,000 received, are being published by a scholarly project that began in 1943, produced its first volume in 1950, and as of 2018 had reached volume 43.² The Yale edition of the correspondence of Horace Walpole (1717–1797) extends to 48 volumes, together containing around 9,000 letters, usually providing both sides of a correspondence.³ In the case of Frances Burney (1752–1840), the project to publish her letters and private journals has been underway since 1972 (in its most recent iteration) and will extend to at least 25 volumes in total.⁴ The correspondence of Samuel Richardson (1689–1761), comprising around 600 extant letters from Richardson and 1,100 by his correspondents, will be published in 12 volumes, now in preparation.⁵ As the teams of scholars involved in these editions have described, the process of archiving, editing, and publishing correspondences of this magnitude requires specialized systems of organization and management.⁶ But maintaining a correspondence as extensive as these examples also posed problems of organization and management to correspondents in the eighteenth century, problems akin to the

2. *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, accessed November 12, 2018, <https://jeffersonpapers.princeton.edu>. See Mark F. Bernstein, “History, Letter by Letter,” *Princeton Alumni Weekly*, May 14, 2003, 20–23; Barbara Oberg, “A New Republican Order, Letter by Letter,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 25, no. 1 (2005): 1–20.

3. *The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole’s Correspondence*, ed. W. S. Lewis, 48 vols. (New Haven, Conn., 1937–83).

4. *The Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney (Madame d’Arblay) 1791–1840*, ed. Joyce Hemlow, 12 vols. (Oxford, 1972–84); *The Court Journals and Letters of Frances Burney*, ed. Peter Sabor, 6 vols. (Oxford, 2011–); *The Early Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney*, 5 vols. (Oxford, 1988–2012); *Additional Journals and Letters of Frances Burney*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 2015–18).

5. *The Cambridge Edition of the Correspondence of Samuel Richardson*, ed. Peter Sabor, 12 vols. (Cambridge, 2013–). See also Peter Sabor, “‘The Job I Have Perhaps Rashly Undertaken’: Publishing the Complete Correspondence of Samuel Richardson,” *Eighteenth-Century Life* 35, no. 1 (2011): 9–28.

6. See Robert Halsband, “Editing the Letters of Letter Writers,” *Studies in Bibliography* 11 (1958): 25–37; and *Yale French Studies: Men/Women of Letters* 71 (1986): 1–212.

“information overload” perceived by many in the so-called flood of printed books in the period.⁷

In the past two decades, scholars have paid increased attention to the material aspects of the early modern letter, notably that of the seventeenth century, but also, to a lesser extent, of the eighteenth century.⁸ This research has analyzed the materiality of letter writing through the whole correspondence process. Thus there has been research on the “things” of letter writing: paper, ink, pen, penknives, rulers, and sealing wax. There has also been analysis of the wider cultures of letter writing, not only further material objects like closets and desks but also cultural formations such as handwriting practices, forms of address, and instructional manuals, and beyond that, the processes of sending and receiving letters: the institution of the post office, private carriers, franks, and penny posts.⁹ These aspects of the material culture of letter writing are celebrated in John Bowles’s mezzotint *Correspondence, Sending Intelligence* (undated, ca. 1733–52; fig. 1), depicting a genteel young woman at her writing table, seemingly caught in the act of sealing a letter. The scene is lit from within by a candle placed in a holder on the table, illuminating her writing box, open to show the viewer writing materials, including a quill pen, ink stand, sand box, and several folded letters.

Letter Archives

All of the extant Montagu letters in libraries and manuscript collections are there because they have been, at some stage, actively and intentionally preserved by their recipient or sender. There is much evidence that eighteenth-century letter writers, Montagu included, were aware, concerned, and curious about the fate of their letters after they had been sent and, as a result, developed practices to preserve them. James Daybell describes this archival urge as part of the “afterlife of letters”; in particular, he delineates a set of methods for storing and ordering letters adopted by secretaries working for noble statesmen and the great offices of state in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, methods that allowed both their preservation and retrieval for rereading.¹⁰ In the eighteenth century, writers of domestic letters were motivated to preserve letters by a similar archival urge; the letters were valuable to the correspondents both because of the emotional and cultural capital they carried in the present and because, in some cases, their recipients saw in them the potential for other forms of value in posterity. As this essay discusses, the term *archive* can refer to a collection

7. On the flood of books, see Ann Blair, *Too Much to Know: Managing Scholarly Information before the Modern Age* (New Haven, Conn., 2010).

8. James Daybell, *The Material Letter in Early Modern England: Manuscript Letters and the Culture and Practices of Letter-Writing, 1512–1635* (Basingstoke, U.K., 2012); Leonie Hannan, “Making Space: English Women, Letter-Writing, and the Life of the Mind, c.1650–1750,” *Women’s History Review* 21, no. 4 (2012): 589–604.

9. Susan Whyman, *The Pen and the People: English Letter Writers 1660–1800* (Oxford, 2009).

10. Daybell, *Material Letter*, 217–28.

of letters, to the repository in which they are held and organized, and transitively, to the action of placing or organizing them. The archival urge of eighteenth-century letter writers met its opposite in a fear of piracy or illicit publication of private letters, either within the writer's lifetime or posthumously. Walpole argued that, "when it is scandalous to open a private letter, they who publish private letters, stand in a very foul predicament, while the authors are living and may be hurt by them."¹¹ Nonetheless, Walpole, especially later in his life, was concerned to preserve his letters after his death. Walpole believed that his correspondence had value to future readers, and he not only preserved letters in his care but also retrieved many of those he had sent, then systematized and annotated them.¹²

An example of this kind of awareness of posterity is afforded by Walpole's correspondence with his school friend George Montagu, which began when Walpole was at King's College, Cambridge, in 1736. George Montagu and Elizabeth Montagu were, by marriage, distantly related members of the wider Montagu clan, known as the "Cus" or "Cues." George Montagu's correspondence with Walpole fell away quite abruptly in 1770, ten years before George died, but even so it amounted to 449 letters. George Montagu's heir, Frederick Montagu, came into possession of Walpole's letters to Montagu and returned them, probably expecting this act to be reciprocated. In returning letters after the death of the correspondent in this way, Frederick followed the established cultural practice that letters remain the writer's property, even when preserved by the recipient. Once they were back in his possession, Walpole "half-heartedly" edited them, crossing out some passages, obliterating some names, and dating or annotating others, as if he expected them to be printed at some stage in the future. He then returned them to Frederick Montagu, together with Montagu's letters to Walpole, thus keeping both sides of the correspondence together. They thereafter remained in the Montagu family at Kimbolton Castle, home of the Dukes of Manchester, and Wilmarth Lewis made photostat copies of them in the 1930s for his edition.¹³ In fact, the preservation and publication of the letters had long been imagined in their correspondence. In his earliest extant letter to George Montagu, written in 1736, Walpole observes, "you desire I would burn your letters; I desire you would keep mine."¹⁴ Decades later, in 1760, Montagu praises Walpole's most recent letter as "the best and most charming" and proleptically imagines the value of his letters to

11. Walpole to Lady Ossory, July 7, 1775, in *Horace Walpole's Correspondence with the Countess of Upper Ossory*, ed. W. S. Lewis and A. Dayle Wallace, with the assistance of Edwine M. Martz, 3 vols., vols. 32–34, *Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence* (New Haven, Conn., 1965), 32:240.

12. Wilmarth Lewis, preface to *Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, 1:xxiii.

13. Warren Hunting Smith, "Bibliography and Method," in *Horace Walpole's Correspondence with George Montagu*, ed. W. S. Lewis and Ralph S. Brown, 2 vols., vols. 9–10, *Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence* (New Haven, Conn., 1941), 9:xxvii–xxix.

14. Walpole to George Montagu, May 2, 1736, in *Walpole's Correspondence with George Montagu*, 9:2.



FIGURE 1. John Bowles, publisher, *Correspondence, Sending Intelligence*, ca. 1733–52, mezzotint, 349 × 248 mm, British Museum, 2010,7081.913. © Trustees of the British Museum.

future generations of scholars: “Think that I have a box full of them of above twenty years old; think what a treasure they will be a hundred years hence to a Madame Sévigné of the House of Montagu.” The example Montagu invokes of a letter writer as historian is Marie de Rabutin-Chantal, marquise de Sévigné (1626–1696), an aristocratic woman whose letters to her daughter describing affairs of state and of the heart at the court of Louis XIV had become celebrated as one of the most important primary sources for the history of the period when they were published after 1726.¹⁵ Walpole returned to the historical potential of his own correspondence:

Look you, Sir, they are my property; you may burn your own works but you shall as soon burn me as make me burn them. No; they are in a box which I will cover with yellow velvet turned up grey and enclosed in a tin case for fear of fire, and bequeathed with the most solemn trust and precautions to the last Cu of ye Cudoms. None of them will relish them more than me.¹⁶

By preserving and storing received letters (archive as collection) in a fireproof box (archive as repository), Montagu gave testimony to his regard for the value of correspondence beyond the immediate moment of production and consumption.

Richardson, too, was aware that his letters could be used to construct a version of his self, either through publication or as evidence in a biography. As scholars have noted, Richardson was a prolific correspondent, both as a man of letters and a commercial printer, yet comparatively few of his quotidian letters survive. The great majority of Richardson’s extant letters were preserved by him in specially prepared letter books, which he began to maintain after the successful publication of *Pamela* in 1740, so that by 1753, he referred to his “Volumes of Epistolary Correspondencies.”¹⁷ As Louise Curran and Annie Watkins have observed, Richardson’s careful ordering and reordering of his manuscript correspondence was integral to his attempt to “fashion himself as an author” and celebrity.¹⁸ The method to effect this purpose was publication of the letters, which Richardson at first undertook with the aid of

15. *Lettres de Marie Rabutin-Chantal, marquise de Sévigné, à Mme la comtesse de Grignan, sa fille* (1726); *Madame de Sévigné: Correspondance*, ed. Roger Duchêne, 3 vols. (Paris, 1973–78); *Letters of Madame de Rabutin Chantal, Marchioness de Sévigné, to the Comtess [sic] de Grignan, her daughter. Translated from the French* (London, 1727).

16. George Montagu to Walpole, February 3, 1760, in *Walpole’s Correspondence with George Montagu*, 9:275.

17. Richardson to Johannes Stinstra, June 2, 1753, in *The Richardson–Stinstra Correspondence, and Stinstra’s Prefaces to “Clarissa,”* ed. William C. Slattery (Carbondale, Ill, 1969), 30.

18. Louise Curran, “‘Into Whosoever Hands Our Letters Might Fall’: Samuel Richardson’s Correspondence and ‘the Public Eye,’” *Eighteenth-Century Life* 35, no. 1 (2011): 51–64 at 51; Annie Watkins, “Richardson, Barbauld, and the Construction of an Early Modern Fan Club” (PhD diss., Queen Mary University of London, 2011).

his friend Dorothy Bradshaigh, with whom he carefully edited the letters, correcting errors and disguising identities. Using evidence in the letters themselves, Curran shows that both Richardson and Bradshaigh considered the publication of his private letters as a continuation of the moral project of his writing, even though they also feared that “some disagreeable use might hereafter be made” of the letters that might damage his reputation.¹⁹ The project of publishing the correspondence, as ordered and edited by Richardson, was later completed by Anna Barbauld in 1818.²⁰ In Fanny Burney’s case, late in her life she edited her own letters and journals in the expectation that they would meet some form of posthumous publicity, indicating that although freighted with added complications, the practice of correspondence curation was not irrelevant to the status of the woman writer.²¹ In these examples from Walpole, Richardson, and Burney, all in their own way self-professed authors, the afterlife of letters is inextricably linked to publicity and posterity, the afterlife of writers.

☞ The Montagu Papers

This essay addresses the Elizabeth Montagu letter archive and its systems of organization. The quotidian practices of Montagu and her correspondents provided an elementary level of systematic preservation to the collection. Keeping received letters was an established social practice in wealthy households. Montagu’s husband, Edward, told her in 1742 how he had “just now been reading & sorting your letters, which always give me new pleasure, & which I shall preserve as the most valuable writings belonging to me” (December 21, 1742, MO 1717). The first indication of a massed collection of Montagu papers is that provided by Montagu’s executor, Matthew Montagu. After her death in 1800, he inherited his aunt’s collection of letters received, and solicited the return of Montagu’s letters from her correspondents or their heirs, which he drew upon for his selected edition, *The Letters of Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu*, published in 1809 and 1813.²² Further letters, from Elizabeth Carter to Montagu, were published by Carter’s nephew, the Reverend Montagu Pennington (1762–1849).²³ The papers were edited again in the 1870s, around the same time as the sale of Montagu’s library at Sotheby’s,²⁴ by John Doran (1807–1878), an editor and

19. Richardson to Bradshaigh, January 2, 1758, quoted in Curran, “Samuel Richardson’s Correspondence,” 55.

20. William McCarthy, “What Did Anna Barbauld Do to Samuel Richardson’s Correspondence? A Study of Her Editing,” *Studies in Bibliography* 54 (2001): 191–223.

21. On Burney’s self-editing practices, see Joyce Hemlow, “The Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney,” in *The Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney*, 1:xxxvi–xlv.

22. Elizabeth Montagu, *The Letters of Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu, with Some of the Letters of Her Correspondents, Published by Matthew Montagu*, 4 vols. (London, 1809–13).

23. Elizabeth Carter, *Letters from Mrs. Elizabeth Carter to Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu between the Years 1755 and 1800*, ed. Montagu Pennington, 3 vols. (London, 1817).

24. *Catalogue of the Extensive & Valuable Library Formed . . . by the Montagu Family . . . Which Will Be Sold by Auction by Messrs Sotheby, Wilkinson & Hodge . . . on Monday 15 of April 1872* (London, 1872).

miscellaneous writer who had also worked on the Walpole papers. In 1899 the Montagu Papers passed into the hands of a granddaughter of Matthew Montagu, Emily J. Climensson, and on her death in 1921 to Reginald Blunt; each edited and published a selection of letters.²⁵ The collection was sold by the book dealer A. S. W. Rosenbach to Henry E. Huntington in 1925. At each of these transitions, distinct acts of editing and organization left some mark on the letters: layers of editorial and cataloguing decisions, each with its own marginalia, erasures, and inventory marks, have been made on the material letters and the folders and boxes of the collection itself.

The present organization of the Montagu Papers follows the Huntington's ordering system, undertaken sometime after accession in 1925. It reveals the Huntington's understanding that the primary importance of the Montagu collection was historical, not literary, and reflects standard cataloguing practice of the time.²⁶ When the collection was processed, the letters were arranged alphabetically by author; they were assigned call numbers based on, first, the alphabetical and, second, the chronological order of letters written by that author. This allowed all of the letters by each author to be numbered in series. The collection was then rearranged to be shelved in chronological order. In this way, the call numbers do not appear in sequential order, but the folders are in chronological order. Because the materials created by a single author were placed in sequential call number order, each author's letters were accessible through the relevant card catalogue, allowing scholars to find all the letters by a single author. As the material was housed chronologically in folders and boxes, archivists could also meet the needs of those researchers who wanted to browse across time. More recently, since 2015, encoded online finding aids have allowed more complex searches of material in the collection.²⁷

In this system, a blue archival folder preserves each letter, which may be represented by two, three, or, occasionally, four copies. On the cover of each blue folder is a catalog description, stating the date, author, addressee, and extent of each copy of the letter, together with a call number stamp. These numbered stamps, beginning

25. Elizabeth Montagu, *Elizabeth Montagu, the Queen of the Blue-Stockings, Her Correspondence from 1720 to 1761 by . . . Emily J. Climensson*, 2 vols. (New York, 1906); Elizabeth Montagu, *Mrs. Montagu, "Queen of the Blues": Her Letters and Friendships from 1762 to 1800*, ed. Reginald Blunt, 2 vols. (London, 1923).

26. Richard Berner, *Archival Theory and Practice in the United States: A Historical Analysis* (Seattle, Wash., 1983). Although it is not possible to discern precise influences, the Huntington Library collection includes several important early works on archival cataloguing, including Margaret Cross Norton, *Catalog Rules: Series for Archives Material* (Springfield, Ill., 1938).

27. I have benefitted here from discussions with curators at the Huntington Library: first Sue Hodson, curator of literary manuscripts (now retired), and later Vanessa Wilkie, William A. Moffett Curator of Medieval Manuscripts and British History, as well as other library staff. The individual items are discoverable in the Huntington's Subject Manuscript Card Catalogue, alphabetical by author, and in chronological order in the Collection Manuscript Card Catalogue. Researchers can now also use the encoded online finding aid, which lists items chronologically by box but can be searched electronically by keyword.

MO for Montagu, provide an access point for the folder, as each item is listed with its MO number in the online finding aid.²⁸ The stamped call number establishes a permanent location for each item in the Huntington collection, allowing library staff to retrieve and replace items for readers in the chronological series of folders and boxes. In addition, the stamped call number also records the letters' ordering, first alphabetically by author and within that, chronologically. Although as an access point for librarians, a call number can be essentially arbitrary, in the case of the Montagu Papers, it both an access point and a mark of organization.

An additional complexity of the Huntington's collection of Montagu correspondence, as noted above, is that single letters are frequently represented in multiple copies, which are identified by a letter (A, B, C, etc.) in addition to the inventory stamp and contained within the same blue folder. As the folders may contain more than one copy of a letter and may also contain further material such as enclosures and covers, the folder is in that sense a dossier (a word borrowed from French in the late nineteenth century for a bundle of papers).²⁹ The Huntington classification system in this way catalogs all copies of a letter under the same MO number, even if one of the versions is incomplete, a draft, in another hand, or made on a different date: in short, even if they are not identical. The principle, it might be inferred, is that one copy of the manuscript letter is the "copy-text" understood to be closest to the author's intention, usually assumed to be the letter as sent, preserved in the author's handwriting.³⁰ This is the so-called "ALS," a term derived from the nineteenth-century autograph trade meaning "Autograph Letter Signed," a letter written in the hand of the sender and signed by the same individual.³¹ In the case of the Montagu Papers, the present arrangement of the archive overwrites, but does not conceal, prior reorganizations by earlier owners and editors, such as Matthew Montagu, Emily Climenson, and Reginald Blunt.³² In recovering some idea of the eighteenth-century letter systems, the

28. "Elizabeth Robinson Montagu papers," Online Archive of California, <http://www.oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/tf767nb23s/>.

29. Margaret Cross Norton, *Norton on Archives: The Writings of Margaret Cross Norton on Archival & Records Management*, ed. Thornton W. Mitchell (Carbondale, Ill., 1975), 118.

30. Walter W. Greg, "The Rationale of Copy-Text," *Studies in Bibliography* 3 (1950): 19–36.

31. "Autograph," the adjective meaning "written in the author's or composer's own handwriting," is recorded from 1735 in the *Oxford English Dictionary* but comes into more general usage in criticism in the 1790s. The phrase "autograph letter signed" produces no results in a search of Eighteenth Century Collections Online. The phrase seems to come into usage in the secondhand book-auction trade in the 1840s and 1850s, for example, in John Gray Bell, *American Revolutionary War: Catalogue of an Extraordinary Collection of Original Documents Connected with the British Army, Also a Few Autograph Letters, Etc., of the Leaders of the American Army* (Manchester, 1857), where Bell refers to "my usual Catalogue abbreviations, A. L. S. for Autograph Letters Signed" (1).

32. Elizabeth Eger, "Montagu's Editors from 1806 to the Present" (paper, "Editing Enlightenment Letters: Elizabeth Montagu's Correspondence" colloquium, Huntington Library, April 13, 2012).

research in this essay necessarily excavates and reveals the later and very thorough reorganizations of the collection.

In his essay “Archive Fever” (1995), Jacques Derrida offers an analysis of the concept of the archive, noticing especially how an archive acquires and orders its material. This principle Derrida calls *consignation*. This term enters English in the fifteenth century from the French, though it derives from the Latin *consignāre*, to furnish, mark, or attest with a seal. Although the verb *to consign* later came to mean to hand over for storage, sale, or transport, among the earliest meanings was to mark with a sign, such as the sign of the cross in baptism. These notions of deposit and marking are embedded within Derrida’s discussion of archival consignation:

By consignation, we do not only mean, in the ordinary sense of the word, the act of assigning residence or of entrusting so as to put into reserve (to consign, to deposit), in a place and on a substrate, but here the act of consigning through *gathering together signs*.

The archive, he argues, has a “principle of consignation, that is, of gathering together”—the force or principle that drives the accumulation and organization of material on a topic—which is also manifested in and through the marks made on that material.³³ The principle of consignation describes how an archive acquires as much information as it can: it wants and desires as much information as possible. Derrida makes this point, though, to establish a pointed contrast between the capacity of archives and that of human memory, compared to which even an enormous archive contains comparatively small amounts of information. Nonetheless, under the principle of consignation, archives want to accumulate as much data and information about their subject as they can, so as to generate new information as they are consulted, analyzed, and discussed in scholarship. When scholars confront a large archive of correspondence like that of Montagu, they are struck by how much information there is in it, more than can possibly be dealt with. Not only does each item in the collection present an almost inexhaustible potential for analysis, the collectivity of the archive promises even more. The dominant scholarly experience of the Montagu Papers is of being overwhelmed by information overload: in Ann Blair’s phrase, there is “too much to know.”³⁴ Wilmarth Lewis planned the Yale edition of Walpole’s letters “as an encyclopaedia of eighteenth-century life and thought,” suggesting that he thought that the plenitude of letters in the collection could, through the organizing structures of the edition, serve as a complete summary of the whole period.³⁵ The principle of consignation expresses this desire for more, and more complete, informa-

33. Jacques Derrida, “Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression,” trans. Eric Prenowitz, *Diacritics* 25, no. 2 (Summer 1995): 9–63.

34. Blair, *Too Much to Know*, 3–5.

35. Wilmarth Sheldon Lewis, *Collector’s Progress* (London, 1952), 162.

tion, all of which is preserved, ordered, and retrievable. But, says Derrida, the almost limitless potential of each item is matched or opposed by another force, which he calls the death drive, by which the scholar comes to understand that the archive contains but a tiny fraction of the information about its subject, not only in practice (as letters and papers have been censored, lost, or destroyed) but also in theory (no archive could contain as much as a single memory, no set of letters could describe everything that happened to their protagonists). The conflict between the desire of the accretive consignatory principle and the disintegrative death drive Derrida names *archive fever* (*mal d'archive*). Archive fever is that bad feeling experienced by a researcher when confronted in the archive by the problems inherent in its archiveness, such as its inevitably incomplete coverage of the subject, the recalcitrance of the contents in addressing the research question at hand, and problems caused by the consignatory organizing principles of the archive itself (*meta-archivality*).

In the case of the Montagu Papers, the collection was assembled (consigned) by numerous hands: first by Elizabeth Montagu herself and her household, and then after her death, for the purposes of publication and biography, by her editors Matthew Montagu, Pennington, Doran, Climenson, and Blunt, before systematic reorganization by the Huntington's archivists. As this inquiry shows, the letters themselves occasionally testify to how they were read, used, and organized by contemporaries, in the period before and after consignment. Ghostly vestiges of all these organizations are visible in and through the Montagu letters. The Huntington Library has been described as "a library of libraries or a collection of collections": in the case of the Montagu Papers, it is also an archive of archives.³⁶

Extra-Circulation

One of the pressing problems of meta-archivality in the Montagu Papers is the presence of multiple copies of single letters. Like many letter writers in the eighteenth century, Montagu and her correspondents understood a letter as a sociable object, not only in the sense that letters between distant people confirmed their friendship but also meaning that material letters themselves would be circulated and read beyond the addressee. In the neighborhood of her country house at Sandleford, Montagu's letters were passed around a wider circle of acquaintances, both by hand and by post. An elderly neighbor, Elizabeth Pococke, eulogizes the circulation of Montagu's letters in 1755 as "an enhancement of your favours," praising them for containing "the most remarkable of what has happened in Town, & what new books worth notice & your opinion of them" (Pococke to Montagu, March 22, 1755, MO 4148). Montagu found benefit in this, too, gaining intellectual admirers beyond her immediate circle. Gilbert West reports that he showed Montagu's letter to him concerning Bolingbroke (November 14, [1754], MO 6721) to the archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Herring, in

36. George Sherburn, "Huntington Library Collections," *Huntington Library Bulletin* 1 (May 1931): 33–106 at 33.

November 1754; he says that Herring was “so pleased, that he desired me to give him a Copy of the whole Paragraph, promising that if he shewed it to any body, he would however carefully conceal the name of the Author” (West to Montagu, November 18, 1754, MO 6667). Close friends and collaborators also enjoyed reading letters addressed to other correspondents. In 1760, for example, both Lyttelton and Montagu regularly swapped letters with others; Lyttelton also notes that he had already read letters (in the plural) that Montagu had written to others (Lyttelton to Montagu, October 18, 1760, MO 1291),³⁷ and Montagu reports on an admonitory letter that Lyttelton had written to Monsey and that Monsey had sent to her (Montagu to Lyttelton, October 21, 1760, MO 1403). Montagu sent a copy of the bishop of London’s congratulatory epistle to the newly crowned George III to William Pulteney, the Earl of Bath, in December 1760, with strict instructions not to copy or disseminate it further, which was clearly a common activity (December 2, [1760], MO 4501).³⁸ In 1761, Bath reports his pleasure at reading letters between Montagu and Elizabeth Carter, commenting that, “I own I wish you very often separated, & apart from each other, that mankind hereafter may be benefited by such a Correspondence, and I am sure neither of you can be two days without writing the prettyest, & the easiest letters, in the world, to one another” (Bath to Montagu, September 21, 1761, MO 4238). The practice of sharing files of letters, or letter books, was widespread, and at least within the Montagu-Lyttelton circle of 1759–60, was closely tied to the composition of the *Dialogues of the Dead*, as I have argued elsewhere.³⁹ Bath writes to Montagu in March 1760, requesting, “Pray send me some more of your letters, I sitt in my Library surrounded with Books, but have no pleasure in reading any thing, but your letters[,] which have more witt and spirit in them, than is on all the shelves I so ostentatiously boast of” (March 16, [1760], MO 4221). These comments by Lyttelton and Pulteney show them participating in a sociable culture of letter reading and give some hints about how it was organized and managed.

Montagu actively encouraged sociable extra-circulation, contributing to the necessary arrangements, such as the preparation of copies or the assembly of bundles of letters. In 1774, she writes to her friend Elizabeth Vesey of her intention to prepare copies of her letters for this purpose:

As you are so indulgent to the pictures of my mind I propose to order some copies of my old letters to various correspondents to be delivered to you as soon as they can be written out. When you have read them you

37. “None of your Letters are obscure to me, and those which I thought had rather too great a crowd of Images in them were not written to me.”

38. Possibly this refers to “Letter to George II, King of Great Britain,” November 1, 1760, MO 6822, copy.

39. See Markman Ellis, “‘An Author in Form’: Women Writers, Print Publication, and Elizabeth Montagu’s *Dialogues of the Dead*,” *ELH* 79, no. 2 (Summer 2012): 417–45.

shall deliver them to my sister. You must not let anyone see them but Mr Vesey & Mrs Handcock. (October 14, 1776, MO 6457)

As this makes clear, the copies were prepared at her order and not in her own hand, presumably by a secretary or amanuensis. Montagu's household often included young women of high social status who were nonetheless expected to perform secretarial duties for her: for example, Dorothy Gregory (1754–1830), the daughter of the physician and writer Dr. John Gregory (1724–1773), acted as an amanuensis and secretary in the 1770s.⁴⁰ The letter to Vesey also shows that Montagu operated a system that preserved copies of her own sent correspondence alongside letters she received from others. These may have been drafts, secretarial copies, or, perhaps, returned letters. She was able to access these letters, make a selection, and cause them to be “written out,” all within a short period of time. She further established who was permitted to read the copies and what was to happen to them next: they were to be forwarded to her sister, Sarah Scott, in Bath Easton. Montagu demonstrates here that she operated a sophisticated letter archive.

Receiving Letters

In understanding eighteenth-century correspondence practices, recent scholarship has found an important resource in letter-writing manuals. Throughout the eighteenth century, numerous manuals were published offering practical guidance in letter writing, especially in how to adopt the appropriate conversational tone and use correct forms of polite address. Works like the anonymous *Complete Letter-Writer: or, New and Polite English Secretary* (1755) ran to more than forty editions by the end of the century. In the critical discourse on letter writing (Howard Anderson, Bruce Redford, Cynthia Lowenthal),⁴¹ epistolary instruction manuals have been understood in primarily formal terms: they are seen to offer practical advice to writers about appropriate style and address by providing exemplary letters upon which to model correspondence on everyday topics, such as “Business, Duty, Amusement, Affection, Courtship, Love, Marriage, Friendship, &c.”⁴²

Eighteenth-century letter manuals have little to say about what to do with a letter after it has been received. They seem to assume that a letter's journey is complete

40. Betty Rizzo, *Companions without Vows: Relationships among Eighteenth-Century British Women* (Athens, Ga., 2008), 112–41.

41. Howard Anderson, Philip B. Daghljan, and Irvin Ehrenpreis, *The Familiar Letter in the Eighteenth Century* (Lawrence, Kans., 1966); Bruce Redford, *The Converse of the Pen: Acts of Intimacy in the Eighteenth-Century Familiar Letter* (Chicago, 1986); Cynthia Lowenthal, *Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and the Eighteenth-Century Familiar Letter* (Athens, Ga., 1994).

42. *The Complete Letter-Writer: or, New and Polite English Secretary. Containing Directions for writing Letters on all Occasions, in a polite, easy, and proper Manner; with a great Variety of Examples, from the best Authors, on Business, Duty, Amusement, Affection, Courtship, Love, Marriage, Friendship, &c.*, 2nd ed. (London, 1756). The first edition appeared in 1755, and thirty-nine further editions were printed before 1800.



FIGURE 2. Carington Bowles, publisher, *Correspondence, Receiving Intelligence*, [ca. 1766–99], mezzotint with some etching, 151 × 114 mm, British Museum, 2010,7081.1706. © Trustees of the British Museum.

once it has been opened and read. Epistolary reception is dramatized in a mezzotint published by Carington Bowles (1724–1793), entitled *Correspondence, Receiving Intelligence* (fig. 2), a response to the John Bowles print noted earlier. A young woman wearing a cap and a low gown with a laced bodice leans on a table, intently reading a letter addressed “To Miss Charlotte.” She seems pleased by the letter, an interpretation reinforced by the inscription below, a quotation from the Bible celebrating the effect of good news: “As cold waters to a thirsty Soul, so is good News from a far Country” (Proverbs 25:25). She has unfolded the letter (it has been folded to make its own envelope, per convention) and holds it in both hands for reading. The letter achieves its purpose, so it seems, when it has brought its intelligence from afar, assuaging the desire or thirst for fresh information. But in doing so, this print reminds us, the sender gives away the letter, literally sending it as a thing through the post. After it has been received, the letter remains in the addressee’s possession, a material object to be stored or disposed of after its purpose is complete.

Although there was no consensus that a letter that had been read was itself something valuable, there were of course some contexts in which received letters were considered important. Historians of science such as Elizabeth Yale and Noah Moxham have described how, in the late seventeenth century, the Royal Society evolved or invented a practice of retaining and organizing manuscripts so that they could be both stored and retrieved.⁴³ The Royal Society’s letter storage system began with a “letter book”: valuable correspondence was pasted into prepared blank books, where it could be read and re-read by any interested Fellows. Subsequently, selected items of the preserved correspondence were printed in the *Philosophical Transactions*, which even as a scientific journal kept the epistolary format of its communications, even retaining the seemingly irrelevant polite forms of address.⁴⁴ The key aspect of the Royal Society’s system was the analysis of what material was worth preserving: important letters were pasted into the letter book and less important ones were (mostly) discarded.

Dena Goodman’s recent work on furniture and writing in the eighteenth century points to ways in which keeping and organizing letters was a practical as well as intellectual problem. Furniture makers in the mid-eighteenth century competed

43. Elizabeth Yale, “With Slips and Scraps,” *Book History* 12 (2009): 1–36; Noah Moxham, “Fit for Print: Developing an Institutional Model of Scientific Periodical Publishing in England, 1665–ca. 1714,” *Notes & Records* 69 (2015): 241–60. Jacob Soll’s research on Jean-Baptiste Colbert (1619–1683) provides an account of the role of information management systems in managing the French state intelligence in this period: *The Information Master: Jean-Baptiste Colbert’s Secret State Intelligence System* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 2009).

44. Thomas Birch, *The History of the Royal Society of London for Improving of Natural Knowledge From Its First Rise*, 4 vols. (London, 1756–57), 3:366. “That all letters received be pasted into a book, as they are received, and that such of them as shall be thought fit, shall be fairly copied out into the Letter book for that year.”

with each other to produce new solutions to managing correspondence.⁴⁵ In Carington Bowles's "The Contemplative Charmer" (1780), a fashionably dressed young woman organizes her letters in a rack labeled with the days of the week: most of them seem to be assignments, invitations, and tickets (fig. 3). Furniture could provide further creative solutions. The poet William Shenstone, writing to his friend Thomas Percy in 1762, stated that "I am making a sett of *boxes* yt are to appear on ye outside like books," to be kept on the shelves of his library, in which to archive his correspondence. "As these books are *really* boxes to contain ye letters of some chosen Correspondents, I shall letter ye Backs wth my Friends' names."⁴⁶ Here Shenstone proposes a system of filing boxes for letters, dissimulating their appearance as books, so that they might disappear into his library. The catalog of the fashionable cabinet maker Thomas Chippendale included numerous ingenious library solutions: tables with concealed inclined writing surfaces, writing desks with numerous drawers and hidden shelves for storing letters, and elaborate bookcases. In the 1762 edition (the third since 1754), Chippendale introduced a new model of writing desk that featured an innovative letter-management concept, that of the alphabetized pigeon-hole: "the Inside is divided into Pigeon-Holes, with Labels of the Alphabet over them, and Drawers on each End."⁴⁷ Furniture such as these secretaries and bureaus was designed not only to produce letters but also to archive them.

There were avenues of professional life in which more advanced systems of letter organization were conventional, especially among lawyers and merchants. In commercial contexts, almost every letter was valuable because it recorded the details of commercial transactions. The key to early modern accounting practices, such as that called the Italian or double-entry method, was the keeping of accurate records. This of course is part of an enduring history of document storage and retrieval.⁴⁸ Ostensibly, the double-entry method allowed the merchant to keep track of goods, money, and instructions through the maintenance of manuscript books in which transactions were recorded. Bookkeeping was part of the more general problem of recording and managing information. By the eighteenth century, accounting manuals, such as William Gordon's *The General Counting-House, and Man of Business* (1766), specified eight books in which the various transactions of a merchant, fiscal

45. Dena Goodman and Kathryn Norberg, *Furnishing the 18th Century: What Furniture Can Tell Us About the European and American Past* (London, 2007); and Dena Goodman, *Becoming a Woman in the Age of Letters* (Ithaca, N.Y., 2009).

46. William Shenstone, *The Letters of William Shenstone*, ed. Marjorie Williams (Oxford, 1939), 618–19. He initially thought to have whimsical titles on the books, such as an ironically Puritanical title "A spiritual shove" or the quaint and antiquated "a tragedie of pleasaunte thinges."

47. Thomas Chippendale, *The Gentleman and Cabinet-Maker's Director* (London, 1762), 10. The reference is to plate 75.

48. Heather Wolfe and Peter Stallybrass, "Writing, Printing, and Filing, 1500–2010, Part 2" (plenary lecture, Rare Books and Manuscripts Section Preconference, American Library Association, June 25, 2010).



FIGURE 3. John Raphael Smith, published by Carington Bowles, *The Contemplative Charmer*, 1780, hand-colored mezzotint, 352 × 250 mm. British Museum, 1876,0708.2760. © Trustees of the British Museum.

and textual, were to be recorded: invoice book, sales book, letter book, bill book, book of commissions, books of expenses, cash book, and book of debts.⁴⁹ A daily journal or waste book recorded quotidian events as they happened; from this journal or daily record, commercial events were then reinscribed in their correct book. The mutually supporting quality of these books attested to their accuracy, or, as Mary Poovey has noted, created a reassuring feeling that seemed like accuracy: an “epistemological effect” produced by the internally coherent “formal precision” of the books, based on a “rule bound system of arithmetic,” that “*seem[ed]* to guarantee the accuracy of the details it recorded.”⁵⁰

A letter book was “a manuscript book, in which normally copies, or transcripts, of outgoing or incoming letters are entered.”⁵¹ In James Daybell’s account, letter books that preserved copies of sent letters for reference were in widespread use in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and were still common in the eighteenth.⁵² George Bickham’s *Universal Library of Trade and Commerce* (1747) described the letter book system as comprising a copy of outgoing letters, transcribed into a book by a clerk or amanuensis, and a file of incoming letters:

As it is very improper to send away any Letter of Consequence, without taking a Copy of it, to prevent any bad Consequence from Neglect therein, every Merchant is provided with his Folio of Blank-Paper for the copying verbatim every Letter of Business before he send it away. So that this Book, together with the Letters he receives from Correspondents (which ought to be carefully kept on Files, or in Boxes provided for that particular Purpose) make up a compleat History of the Transactions of Trade from the Time of his first having any Dealings or Correspondence, which on many Occasions may be of great Use.⁵³

The purpose was to provide a “compleat History of the Transactions” of the office, which could later be traced back through time, forensically. It is worth noting here that Montagu’s correspondence included, alongside her familiar letters to friends, a great number of business letters, such as those to her agent in Newcastle,

49. William Gordon, *The General Counting-House, and Man of Business* (Edinburgh, 1766), 14–20. See also Soll, *The Information Master*, 52–58.

50. Mary Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact: Problems of Knowledge in the Sciences of Wealth and Society* (Chicago, 1998), 30. Poovey concludes, “Instead of gaining prestige from numbers, double-entry bookkeeping helped confer cultural authority on numbers” (54).

51. Peter Beal, *A Dictionary of English Manuscript Terminology 1450–2000* (Oxford, 2008), 226.

52. Daybell, *Material Letter*, 175–216.

53. George Bickham, *The Universal Library of Trade and Commerce; or, a general magazine for gentlemen, ladies, Merchants, Tradesmen, School-Masters, and all who are any Ways concerned in Business, or the Education of Youth of either Sex, as well as for young Clerks, Apprentices, &c. &c.* (London, 1747), chap. 5 (“A Compendious System of Merchants Accounts; or, the Italian Method of Book-Keeping”), 9 [separately paginated].



FIGURE 4. Thomas Rowlandson, *A Merchant's Office*, 1789, 27.8 × 33.3 cm, watercolor with pen and ink over graphite on paper, Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, B1977.14.150. Note the shelf with day and cash book and papers filed on strings.

William Archdeacon, regarding the management of her collieries and coal business. Preserving letters like these was an important part of her office management. Rowlandson's watercolor-and-ink drawing *A Merchant's Office* (1789) depicts clerks entering material in the various letter books; behind the merchant is a shelf containing bound volumes named "Ledger," "Cash Book," and "Day Book," while on the floor is a "Bill Book," and hanging on a string, a file of received letters (fig. 4).

Multiple Copies

As noted above, the Montagu Papers at the Huntington Library preserve multiple copies of the same letter, often in different hands, in single folders. What can these duplicates tell readers about the letter-writing systems of Montagu and her circle? What do they say about the afterlife of Montagu's letters, after they had been read by their recipients? Although there is no data about how many of the 6,923 folders in the Huntington Library preserve multiple copies, in this writer's experience, they are

numerous and must run into the hundreds. In the section of the essay that follows, an example of a letter that exists in multiple copies will be examined closely.

The chosen example is a letter from Montagu, sent from her house at Sandleford in Berkshire on October 4, 1753, to Gilbert West, who was visiting Dr. Thomas Sherlock, the bishop of London, at his palace at Fulham.⁵⁴ This letter exists in three states in the Huntington collection (housed in folder MO 6702 and identified as A, B, and C; fig. 5). West was an established religious thinker and published author, part of an influential elite Whig social circle. Montagu's correspondence with West in the early 1750s, before he died in 1756, developed into one of her first extended intellectual epistolary discussions, and as such, it was an important precursor to her later literary and critical correspondence with Lyttelton and Carter. In this letter she responds to various sociable points made in a letter she had recently received from West and develops two extended discussions. In the first, referring to an afternoon's outing in her carriage, she reacts to some lines from Edward Young, quoted inaccurately from memory: "wisdom grows on all plants, and in every rill a pure instruction flows, but there wants a certain chymical art and skill to extract this sapient virtue."⁵⁵ She describes how she has observed the "rustic stupidity" of those who dwell in a "humble Cottage" on the nearby common (perhaps Greenham Common): she at first imagines that the "poor cottagers" live in "sweet content," musing that "we are apt to think their wishes have as narrow limits as their possessions, & their tempers are as uniform as their way of life." This "cottage-door scene," depicting a somewhat sentimentalized and pastoral description of rural poverty, gives way in her mind eventually to a less flattering, counter-pastoral vision of the cottagers' life, in which she "envy'd neither shepherd nor shepherdess." "The poor cottagers who perhaps as erroneously ascribe happiness to wealth, as we may peace to poverty, had probably envy'd me the ease & indolence I enjoyed in the coach." She also explains to West a social obligation: inadvertently, their mutual friend Sir George Lyttelton had neglected to make the courtesy of a visit to the historian Nathaniel Hooke when in his neighborhood; she instructs her cousin to remedy the mistake before Hooke can imagine it to be a deliberate slight: "One may decline making an acquaintance but it is never safe to drop one. I would not have my friends have any enemies." It is in many ways a typical Montagu letter, friendly, sententious, and conversational. It was these qualities that drew Matthew Montagu to include it in his collection in 1813, albeit in a truncated form.

54. The letter is partially printed in *Letters of Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu*, ed. M. Montagu, 3:250–53.

55. Probably a reference to Edward Young, *The Universal Passion. Satire I. To His Grace the Duke of Dorset* (London, 1725): "On every thorn delightful wisdom grows; / In every rill a sweet instruction flows."

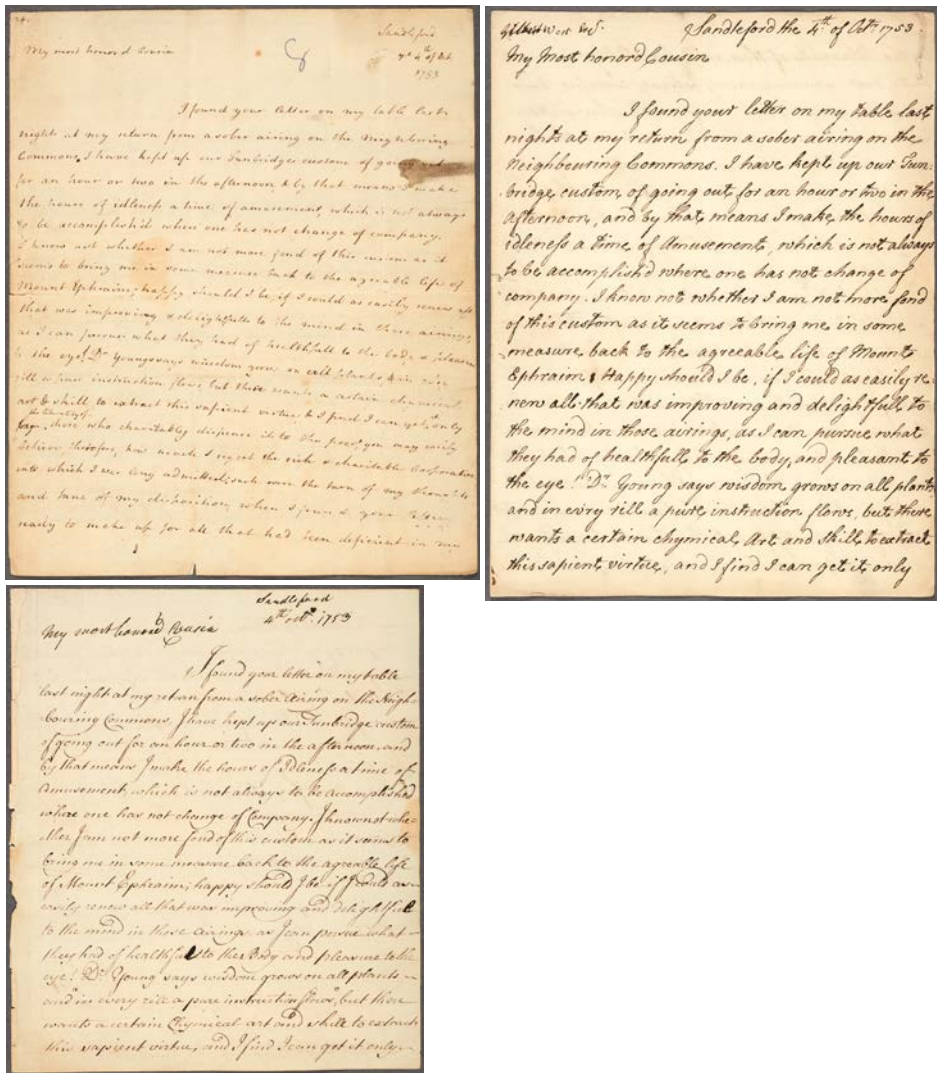


FIGURE 5. Elizabeth Montagu to Gilbert West, Sandleford, October 4, 1753, MO 6702 A & B & C, Elizabeth Robinson Montagu Papers, Huntington Library.

MO 6702 A

MO 6702 A is designated correctly by the Huntington catalogue as the “ALS,” the letter as sent by Montagu. In a material sense, too, MO 6702 A is a typical Montagu letter, albeit a little longer than her usual. It is written in a brownish ink over five pages of the eight available in its two bifolia: the fifth and final page is thus followed by two blank pages and the cover. The compression of the lines on the final fifth page suggests that the writer sees the page as a unit of letter length, even though there were two further pages of blank paper available for writing. The cover has been formed by folding the letter four times, and has been sealed with red sealing wax, with the address written on the front (fig. 6).⁵⁶ The letter is written in Montagu’s good flowing hand and uses an appropriately conversational style and grammar, with numerous subordinate clauses linked by commas and colons; words and phrases are sometimes inserted between the lines; ampersands and contractions are used; and there are relatively frequent exclamation marks. On the top of the fourth page, a sizeable inkblot in the margin obscures one word. All these elements suggest a letter composed in a thoughtful yet extempore manner.

Once it entered the postal system, the letter acquired various stamps and marks to show the postage was paid for and to record the route it traveled. On the reverse are two inked postal marks. The first, the Bishop mark, is a stamped postmark that indicates when the letter was received by the postal system: a bisected circle showing that the letter entered the system on 5 Oc[tober]: unusually, this letter has received the Bishop mark stamp twice. Another stamp indicates the route taken by the letter, this case a “READ / ING” mark to indicate the letter has been through the Reading sorting office. On the front of the folded letter, the address is given as “To / Gilbert West Esqr / at The Bishop of London / at Fulham / Middlesex,” and is endorsed “Free / Edw: / Montagu.” As her husband, Edward, was a member of Parliament with a franking privilege, Montagu’s postage was free, as long as it pretended to have come from or to him. The address has an ink mark scribbled over it, perhaps a cancel to indicate it has been dealt with at some stage in the postal service. Only this copy of the letter, as the “ALS sent,” carries this kind of postal information, or “control information,” to draw an analogy with the anachronistic language of computer networking. In comparison, the copies contain only the content of the letter, the user data or “payload.” There is one further layer of metadata: on an inside fold, a later hand has added the endorsement “Letters to the West Family”—a note that suggests the letter was at some stage retrieved and organized within the household of Montagu or her heirs—perhaps after the letter was returned to her upon West’s death in 1756.

56. The Montagu seal, as also used by Edward Montagu, in this instance not a good example, has a heraldic shield in an ornamental cartouche, right blazon three crosses in a chevron, with three stags.

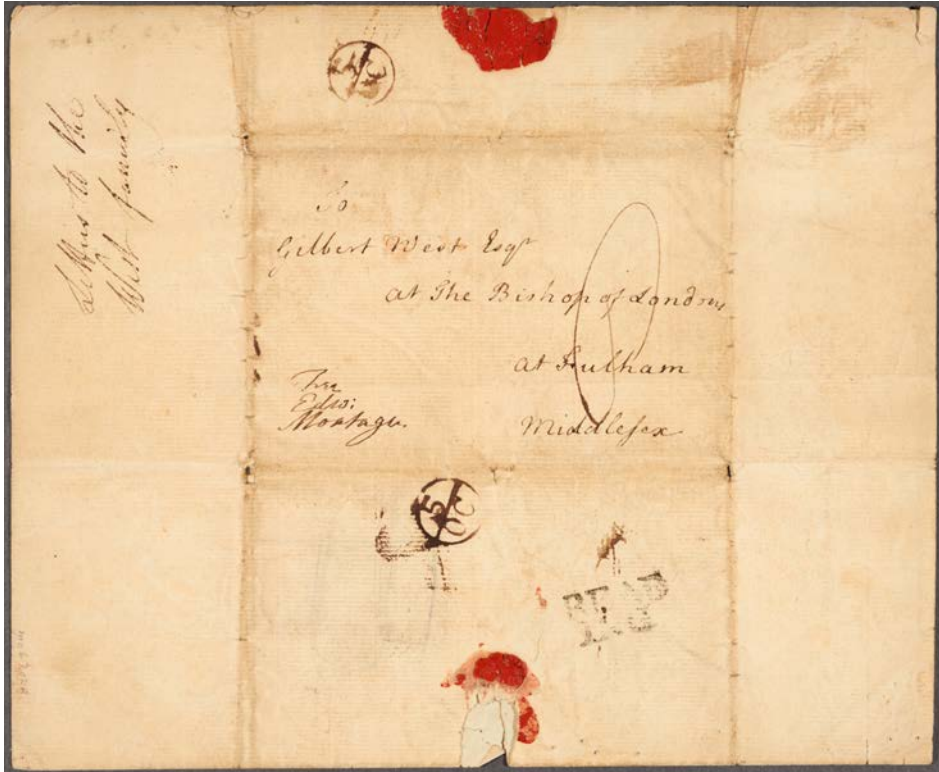


FIGURE 6. Cover, Elizabeth Montagu to Gilbert West, Sandford, October 4, 1753, MO 6702 A, Elizabeth Robinson Montagu Papers, Huntington Library.

MO 6702 B

MO 6702 B, like MO 6702 C, is a copy in eight pages on two bifolia. The copyist has a larger, neater, and more regular hand than Montagu, with larger and more consistent flourishes; the ink is blacker. The paper is a larger folio with strongly marked vertical chain lines. When the folio sheet was folded to make four pages, these chain lines appear to have been used as line guides for the copyist. The copyist's letters do not show evidence of having been folded up for posting or delivery. The copyist has improved the punctuation and made the presentation more formal: colons are preferred over semicolons, there are fewer comma-spliced run-on sentences, there is more noun capitalization, and ampersands have been spelled out. It is not clear who prepared the copy. The handwriting and paper are similar to other copies of Montagu's letters to Gilbert West and George Lyttelton. This copy was the one used as copy-text by Matthew Montagu in his 1813 edition of Montagu's letters, and it appears he marked it up in his editing process. A large section at the end of the letter, including the entire discussion of Lyttelton's inadvertent discourtesy to Hooke, has been diagonally crossed out in ink. These omissions correspond with the sections excised

from Matthew Montagu's edition. However, this is not evidence that the copy was made in that period as part of Matthew Montagu's procedures for his edition, for elsewhere in the correspondence he similarly marks his editorial excisions directly on an ALS. It seems more likely that this copy was made within Montagu's household by one of her amanuenses, perhaps for her letter book of sent letters, and was later used by Matthew Montagu.

The copyist's letter has also been endorsed "Mr West" in ink on the back end paper. This endorsement, and the absence of information about the sender, only really make sense if the letter was not in his household but rather in Montagu's own letter archive. Most curiously, the copyist's letter seems to have been prepared for filing by being loosely sewn into a series. The history of filing is not a large field of research; the best recent work is by Peter Stallybrass and Heather Wolfe.⁵⁷ Peter Beal defines a file, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as "a series of papers strung together on a string, wire, or twisted leather cord terminating in a metal point. . . . Alternatively, the term denoted the string itself that kept the papers in order."⁵⁸ A file of letters can be seen in the drawing by Rowlandson titled *The Merchant's Office*: it shows letters that have been strung on a string "file" for preservation and reference (see fig. 4). Beal states that numerous seventeenth-century Dutch and Flemish paintings depict the offices of merchants and lawyers with documents filed on strings. The copyist's version of the West letter was apparently preserved with others of its kind by being sewn to them: a hole near the fold suggests that a needle and string were pushed through the paper there, so that the letter could still be read but could be loosely attached to the next. All the letters by this copyist show evidence of filing holes. If contemporary filing practice in the period had been followed, these letters would be assembled into loosely threaded gatherings—not quires, but simply sewn piles of letters.

The Montagu Papers ephemera file (MO 6922) preserves a single filing string tag: a card printed with the name "Mr Montagu Manchester Square," probably made from a visiting card, perforated by a short piece of string (fig. 7).⁵⁹ The strings would have been passed through holes in the letters, and knotted together loosely to hold bundles of letters together. Such name tags might have been used to identify correspondences, to preserve them as collections, and so to allow letters to be retrieved and accessed by an archivist, whether Montagu herself or her amanuensis, executor, or editor. Although not a book, and not in a binding as such, these collected sewn bundles of letters were booklike in important ways: they kept the pages of the letters in a constant and unchanging order, and they related one letter to the others

57. Wolfe and Stallybrass, "Writing, Printing, and Filing"; see also Cornelia Vismann, *Files: Law and Media Technology*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young (Stanford, Calif., 2008).

58. Beal, *Dictionary of English Manuscript Terminology*, 153.

59. Montagu Papers Ephemera, MO 6922 (13). The Ephemera file also contains several small scraps of contemporary paper with names of correspondents ("Carter," "Letters from my Lord Bath to Doctor Mounsey") neatly added in manuscript, in ink and pencil, in various hands. These labels were presumably used to identify bundles of letters.



FIGURE 7. “Filing tag made from printed visiting card of Mr Montagu Manchester Square” Ephemera, MO 6922 (13), Elizabeth Robinson Montagu Papers, Huntington Library. Author photograph.

in its bundle. The booklike-ness of the collected sewn bundles may have been reinforced by another piece of ephemera of which there is an example in the collection: a blue-paper-covered cardboard cover, made up from waste paper, titled in blue pencil “Elizabeth Robinson’s Letters to the Duchess of Portland, 1731–1740” (MO 6922 [12]). The cover emulates the blue paper wrappers used for pamphlets and magazines in the period but also the stiff boards used in binding. A folder or cover such as this was evidently used to keep letters together in good condition and to preserve an order. In this case, the cover may have accompanied the Montagu letters (Elizabeth Robinson is Montagu’s maiden name) when the letters were returned after the death of the recipient, Margaret Cavendish Bentinck, Duchess of Portland (1715–1785).

MO 6702 C

In the case of the third copy, MO 6702 C, the copyist has transcribed the letter onto both sides of four small quarto leaves with a ruled pencil margin, which have been cut or torn from a notebook. This copyist, who has a small neat hand with a consistent flourish, would seem to have been working within the West household, although the handwriting is not that of West himself, nor his wife Catherine, nor Montagu. In its format and appearance, this copy is one of a larger number from the Montagu–West correspondence and represents a different practice from MO 6702 B. The letters, all from Montagu to West, have been transcribed into a bound notebook, from which they have later been removed, so that they are all single sheets, written on both sides. The letters from the notebook are, with some notable exceptions, filed in the Montagu Papers in their appropriate date location: for example, a letter from Montagu to Gilbert West of June 26, 1755, is extant in the collection as an ALS and as the copyist’s transcription removed from the notebook (MO 6723). However, there is also one folder (MO 6693 A & B & C & D & E & F), entitled “Fragments of a letterbook containing copies of Mrs Montagu’s letters,” which contains six smaller folders, each with pages from the letter book relating to two letters. This is because the letter book copyist started each letter on a new page, not caring whether it was recto or verso.⁶⁰ This means that when the notebook was broken up, some leaves had text from two different letters—for example, the end of one letter on the recto and the beginning of another on the verso. As the leaves are containers for two separate letters, each of which should have its own location in the collection, with a separate MO call number, it has not been possible to file them in the Huntington author-chronological series. Furthermore, the letters were not transcribed in precise chronological order, which suggests perhaps that the copyist was working at some time after their receipt. Both these factors mean that it is not possible to file such leaves individually in the Huntington chronological series, as each leaf needs to be in two places at once. As the Huntington catalogue suggests at MO 6693, the copyist’s notebook resembles a letter book as described in the merchant’s manuals, although here it has been used to record letters received by West, perhaps in order to allow for extra-circulation. As noted above, West is known to have circulated Montagu’s letters within his circle (MO 6667).

The three copies of the letter to West on October 4, 1753 (MO 6702 A & B & C) are all copies of the same letter, and all show signs of post-postal archival organization. A is the ALS, and records the postal control information as well as later

60. The folder comprises six small folders, each with pages from the letter book: MO 6693 A: Montagu to West, June 2, 1752, and November 26, 1752, 18 pages in 4°; MO 6693 B: Montagu to West, November 16, 1752, and December 27, 1753, 8 pages in 4°; MO 6693 C: Montagu to West, January 2, 1753, 10 pages in 4°; MO 6693 D: Montagu to West, June 26, 1755, and October 1755, 8 pages in 4°; MO 6693 E: Montagu to West, July 3, 1755, and July 27, 1755, 10 pages in 4°; MO 6693 F: Montagu to West, August 26, 1755, November 5, 1754, September 3, 1754, 22 pages in 4°.

metadata. B and C are both copies, but seem to represent slightly different practices, although firm conclusions are difficult to draw. Copy B would seem to originate within, or to have ended up in, Montagu's own letter archive, perhaps as part of a sent-letter book system. Copy C seems more likely to have been made within its recipient's household, perhaps for extra-circulation. The ordering principles encoded on and within these copies are also important. Sewing into a bundle or copying into a bound notebook establishes an order to the letters. To a large extent, it does not matter whether the order is chronological, alphabetical, or by subject; the main point is the fact of ordering itself, as it suggests that the letters are primarily retained for communal re-reading, not communication. The letters preserved in this way can be retrieved and read again, ordered up, or recalled for consultation. The correspondence has become an archive, with its own information order. Letters in this condition have been accorded a value or status in excess of their function in news communication, as correspondence.

Surveying the Montagu correspondence in the 1750s, it is clear that multiple copies of letters are common within some of Montagu's correspondences but not within others. Multiple copies exist most commonly in the 1750s and early 1760s in her correspondences with Gilbert West, George Lyttelton, and William Pulteney, Lord Bath. These three correspondents are all established gentlemen of literary note, so the existence of multiple copies may represent a practice peculiar to men of their status; Sarah Scott, for example, does not seem to have undertaken such a practice.⁶¹ In the sociable culture of letters, extra-circulation of Montagu's letters flattered her letter-writing skills and gave testimony to her advancing reputation as an intellectual woman. Her letters could and did circulate beyond their original recipients, where they were valued not for their news and gossip but for their philosophical weight and literary achievement. Preserved in ordered bundles, her correspondence became an archive that could be consulted and explored. Archiving and copying was a way in which Montagu's reflections on topics of intellectual debate could be shared and circulated more widely, at first within her family circle, and later in more ambitious intellectual coteries. The preservation of copies of her letters is an important measure of her rising status in the public world of letters and give testimony to the role of correspondence in that emergence.



Derrida suggests an archive responds to consignation (the acquisition of material) by the relentless and consistent application of its archival principles. In the case of the Huntington's archivist in the mid-twentieth century, the problem of consignation is addressed by the entirely logical application of a set of rules for arranging the documents. As proposed by archival science of the mid-twentieth century, this

61. I am grateful to Nicole Pohl for this information.

arrangement is systematic: catalogued by author and organized by chronology, dating and ordering the letters in discrete chronological files, with a strict and clear application of principles. Letters are stamped with their place in the alphabetically organized author series, and are stored in date order by day: in cases where a date cannot be established at the level of the day, they accumulate at the end of each month, dated only by month and year; where they can be dated only by year, they accumulate at the end of the year; where they can be dated only by decade, they accumulate at the end of the decade. Online finding aids, and the Subject Manuscript Card Catalogue, allow different kinds of search and retrieval, but do not disturb the arrangement of the chronological series. Of course there are some letters that scholars now consider to have been misdated, and therefore out of place, but where a letter has a date, even approximate, it is consigned to its appropriate place in the stored series. (The rigor of this arrangement is clearly the cause of frustration among some readers, whose comments and suggestions on dating, written on paper slips, are found in some files.) The cataloguer's systematic desire to fulfill this date order is pursued even when some items have to be excluded because of it. An example of this is the case of the West letter book peculiars, accumulated outside the sequence at MO 6693, because they represent two distinct letters. This exceptional example is, in this way, also the most typical, showing how the principle of consignment, to return to Derrida's language, meets its destruction, the death drive, producing in a small way something like Derrida's curious feeling of "archive fever."

The quantity of letters in the Montagu archive, including the various copies, poses questions both practical and ontological, not only for Montagu and her executors but also for the modern scholar, especially those contemplating an editorial project to publish the collection. Derrida confronts the ontological problem through the concept of consignment. He establishes that the archive's acquisition of letters, and the methodization of them into a robustly applied and systematic order, including metadata that allow access and retrieval, serves to confirm, in the end, not only the extent of the collection, but also how much the archive does not know about its subject. Scholarly research on the material letter, such as that of Daybell and Whyman, addresses the problematic of consignment through an historical investigation into the material practices of early modern letter archives, those aspects that Daybell calls the "afterlife of letters." Both approaches have echoes of the death drive, signaling that the archive is conceived as a place that puts an end to the open-ended, growing, and lively nature of a correspondence. Entering the archive consigns correspondence to its afterlife. As Montagu's correspondence shows, both in the copies and the contemporary metadata, her letters were subject to numerous archival practices almost as soon as they were composed: copies were made both within her household and by her recipients, so as to allow her letters and thereby their payload—her thoughts and reflections—to be more extensively organized, retrieved, and circulated.

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