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# THE EPISTOLARY PACT, LETTERNESS, and the Schreiner Epistolarium

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and HELEN DAMPIER

The feminist theorist and writer Olive Schreiner was also a prolific letter-writer. Contra Lejeune and pro Altman, an exploration of Schreiner's 4,800+ extant letters throws interesting light on the idea of an "epistolary pact" that marks the reciprocity and exchange at the core of correspondence, its "I and You" character.

Keywords: Letters, Olive Schreiner, epistolarium, epistolary pact, autobiographical pact

*To a great extent, this is the epistolary pact—the call for a response from a specific reader within the correspondent’s world. Most of the other aspects of epistolary discourse . . . can be seen to derive from this most basic parameter.*

—Janet Gurkin Altman, *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form*

*How does it come I never never hear from you. The last letter I had was when you sent me that lovely little poem—the last thing you ever wrote. Do write & tell me of you all. | I never forget you | Olive.<sup>1</sup>*

—Olive Schreiner, *Letter to Ruth*, 18 Apr.

## Introduction

Olive Schreiner (1855–1920), an English-speaking South African by birth, also spent considerable periods of time in Europe.<sup>2</sup> A feminist writer and social theorist who achieved world-fame, she published a raft of novels, essays, and theoretical treatises, and also many shorter writings in magazines, journals, and newspapers.<sup>3</sup> From the early 1880s following publication of *The Story of An African Farm* until the Great War in 1914–1918, she was one of the world’s most famous women. Her publications had huge sales and were quickly translated into most major languages, receiving much public and particularly feminist and socialist attention, including from readers in China, Japan, Austro-Hungary, and Russia, as well as the Americas, and European, Scandinavian, and Nordic countries.

Around twenty thousand of Schreiner’s letters were extant at her death, many (but not all) obtained and destroyed by her estranged husband and biographer, Cronwright-Schreiner, after completion of *The Life of Olive Schreiner* and *The Letters of Olive Schreiner*.<sup>4</sup> These volumes have been extensively criticized, starting in 1924 when family members described them as his novels about his wife (Stanley and Salter 7–30). They are inaccurate regarding many basic aspects of Schreiner’s work and activities, and contention is treated as fact, while the letters are bowdlerized on a major scale, being frequently cannibalized by piecing together parts of several letters into a composite and in many more instances extracted to just banal snippets. Although

the problems have been known for a long time, these two publications have proved—because of Cronwright-Schreiner’s destruction of many sources—a difficult obstacle for Schreiner scholarship.<sup>5</sup>

The Olive Schreiner Letters Project (OSLP)<sup>6</sup> is researching, analyzing, and will publish the complete 5,500+ extant Schreiner letters in full and accurate transcriptions.<sup>7</sup> Our analysis of the letters will explore the major concerns of Schreiner’s theorizing,<sup>8</sup> and also the “letterness” of her correspondences—by which we mean the shifting boundaries of “the letter” and the porous boundaries between it and cognate forms or genres, while also recognizing that the fundamentals of the letter form are highly resilient. In addition to Schreiner’s analysis of political events and social circumstances,<sup>9</sup> we are concerned with what an examination of this large body of letters can contribute to a theoretical understanding of epistolarity and its complex character.<sup>10</sup>

In this paper, we focus on what Schreiner’s letter-writing practices can contribute to understanding how “letterness” is deployed, and in particular the light thereby thrown on the idea of an “epistolary pact”<sup>11</sup> that marks the reciprocity and exchange at the core of correspondence.<sup>12</sup> Lejeune’s ideas about an “autobiographical pact” have proved a powerful way of thinking about how to conceptualize autobiography.<sup>13</sup> However, while letters are an autobiographical genre in formalist terms, Lejeune does not specifically discuss them. We argue here that paying analytical attention to letters and letterness challenges some core aspects of the autobiographical pact. In particular, the letter with what Altman pinpoints as its ingrained assumption of reciprocity—its call for a response—directly challenges Lejeune’s conceptual frame in respect to its focus on the synonymy of “I” as the author, the narrator, and the protagonist, and its exclusion of “You” as the addressee, reader and in your turn the writer, that exists regarding letter-writing (Altman 87–115). We expand upon these ideas about the “I and You” character of epistolarity later, while discussion commences with the importance of Schreiner’s letters and their interesting complexities.

### Letterness in the Schreiner Epistolarium

There are 4,800+ extant Olive Schreiner letters, located on three continents and in around forty major and more minor archive collections. Her correspondents include the “important” and otherwise famous.<sup>14</sup> The Schreiner letters, however, have importance in a range of ways beyond the public status of many of her correspondents. They form one of the largest collections of letters by a woman of worldly

fame. The earliest surviving letter dates from April 1871 and the latest from December 1920; thus they span a period of momentous change in the world, the character and direction of which was the focus of much of Schreiner's letter-writing. They engage with many of the significant events over the period of her writing life. And they are also variously kind, engaging, prophetic, hasty, detailed, thoughtful, funny, and insightful, as well as being a good read without being mannered or studied in the way that "great letters" often are.

However, a significant proportion of them *are* great letters in a different sense, because in much of her letter-writing Schreiner has her eye not only on the views and circumstances of her correspondents but also engages with these and advances her own in a "paraenetic" or exhortatory way, with these letters being often strongly—and accurately—prophetic of the future development of society (Stanley and Dampier, "I Trust").<sup>15</sup> There are other interesting aspects of Schreiner's letters too, which are useful to outline—in relation to the idea of the "epistolarium"—before discussing specific examples.<sup>16</sup>

The epistolarium, a heuristic for thinking about letters and other epistolary activity, conceptualizes the epistolary output of a particular person (or organizational entity), such as Olive Schreiner, and the wider epistolary network of which her letter-writing was a part; in particular, it engages with its dialogical, perspectival, emergent, and sequential aspects. The components of the epistolarium can be thought about in (at least) four regards: as what now remains, someone's extant letters and other epistolary material; as all the epistolary activity he or she ever engaged in; as all his or her epistolary activity and also that of all his or her various correspondents; and also as the ur-letters that are the product of editorially publishing "the letters of A" or "the correspondence of Z and A." All four can be seen as "the letters of . . ." John F. Kennedy, David Hume, Virginia Woolf, and so on, but ontologically speaking they encompass different kinds of epistolary "things" and have a complicated interrelationship.

Schreiner's letters have important characteristics in addition to their dialogical, perspectival, emergent and sequential aspects, and interrelated components. Firstly, they have a distinctive writing "voice," characterized by great warmth and by writing to each particular correspondent in a distinctive way, something that is a significant feature of the epistolary ethics marking the Schreiner epistolarium overall.<sup>17</sup> Her letters also typically employ a very direct address to the recipient and considerable (for the time) informality, with early instances being Schreiner's habitual way of addressing her eldest sister in the 1870s as, "[m]y dearest Katie!" (Letters to Katie) and her jovial 1880s personal comments to Arthur Symons (Letter

to Arthur). There are also reverse examples, where Schreiner writes her personal letters very formally, and the non-letter-like but equally distinctive way she writes her paraenetic or exhortatory letters, which are densely-written, concerned with abstract intellectual or political matters, and more like short analytical treatises than the ordinary run of letter-writing.<sup>18</sup>

Secondly, the Schreiner epistolarium is composed mainly of large numbers of letters to relatively few correspondents, rather than fewer letters to many individuals, as are the epistolaria of other, well-known letter-writers such as Charles Darwin,<sup>19</sup> and, among the Schreiner networks, those of her politician brother, Will Schreiner, and his colleague, John Xavier Merriman. This focus and density of coverage in Schreiner's work involves a small number of overlapping networks: in her mid-life, of close friends of political and ethical like-minds, including Mary Sauer, Betty Molteno and her partner Alice Greene, Anna Purcell, Jessie Rose Innes, and her brother, Will; of family; of protégés, younger women and some men, including Alys Pearsall Smith, Ruth Alexander, Andre Murray, Schreiner's nieces (Lyndall and Ursula Schreiner), and John Hodgson; and of political opponents, including Malan, Merriman, and Smuts.<sup>20</sup> Her letters across these correspondences have qualities that add up to there being something that is recognizably an "Olive Schreiner letter." These include direct address and informality; warmth of engagement, tailoring per addressee, and having a strong "to You" character; avoidance of subjectivity and personal affect, concern largely with public matters or interpersonal arrangements; written to the moment and generally not revised, speedily written but with few mistakes, including of spelling, grammar, and punctuation, almost exclusively using the ampersand, filling the paper and all the margins; and, the greater Schreiner's familiarity with the addressee and the more a letter is about arrangements to meet, the less likely it is to include the then-formalities of address and date.<sup>21</sup> And because Schreiner does indeed tailor her longer-term correspondences to the other person, her letters also take rather different shape and have different content depending on the particular correspondent and the letter-exchanges between her and them.

Thirdly, Schreiner's letters *do* things, as well as being about things. They cement relationships and in an important sense this is the quotidian purpose of her letter-writing: extant letters are overwhelmingly concerned with the continuance of the relationship of "I-to-and-from-You" and successive returns of the epistolary gift through its dialogical reciprocity (Stanley, "Epistolary Gift" 137–54). They also foment change, the other side of the same coin as cement-

ing relationships, with interesting examples such as Schreiner's poking fun at Karl Pearson for his anti-emotional approach to social and political issues (Dampier 46–71; Schreiner, Letter to Karl);<sup>22</sup> her “I just express my views and leave them to work” approach to changing her brother Will's racial politics (Stanley and Dampier, “I Just” 677–700; Schreiner, Letter to Will, 8 May 1908);<sup>23</sup> and her tactful-but-firm response to her friend Anna Purcell's role in the Cape Town Women's Enfranchisement League officers' mishandling of the race aspect of women's franchise matters (Schreiner, Letter to Anna). Indeed, fomenting change is sometimes the entire basis of the epistolary relationship, as with Schreiner's paraenetic or exhortatory letters to politicians Malan, Merriman, and Smuts, and it also includes the more complicated strategic example of her letters to Julia Solly, with Schreiner one of the founders of the Cape Town WEL branch (Letters to Julia).<sup>24</sup> Schreiner's letters can also be direct political interventions in themselves, including her open letters to newspapers (Letter to *Daily News*) that later sometimes morphed into political essays,<sup>25</sup> and also her letters to named people designed to be read on her behalf as addresses to political meetings.<sup>26</sup>

Fourthly, Schreiner's letters are often directly performative in the Austin sense (12–24). For Austin, “performative” does not have the general meaning of “a performance” (as the term does in the work of Butler, for instance), but rather the narrower more specific meaning of words or sentences that do or perform the thing that they are about. Austin uses the example of the immediately legally binding character of “I do” in a marriage ceremony, or “I give and bequeath” in a will. In these instances, the sentence or words uttered *are* the action referred to. There are four main ways in which Schreiner's letters are performative in this specific sense.

One way in which a Schreiner letter is in itself a demonstration of the relationship it invokes is revealed when she writes lines such as, “just to hold out the hand of friendship to you” to a new WEL member, Mrs. Goosen, and signs a letter to John and Mary Brown with “This is just a word of love” (Letter to Mrs. Goosen; Letter to John and Mary). A second scenario for writing as action occurs when Schreiner writes about the closure of a correspondence, as for example in her last letter to Cape politician F. S. Malan: “I can't write to you about public matters. I personally have never wished Gladstone to be recalled, nor did I think your ministry ought to resign. . . . But I am opposed to Botha's silly Imperialism when he talks English, & narrow back-velt-ism when he talks Dutch!! Give my love to your wife, & the dear children. I hope the young generation will live to see a nobler broader, less racial spirit than we see in South Africa to-

day” (Letter to F. S. Malan).<sup>27</sup> Schreiner’s “I can’t write about . . .” is actually followed by comments on public matters and were the final things she ever wrote to him, with her “last word” on Malan situating him among the older generation with a more racial spirit. The third involves letters of introduction, in which the letter itself performs the introduction. Examples include such letters written for Fred and Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence introducing them to the Smutses and thus to Transvaal political circles (Letter to Isie, 20 Oct. 1905)<sup>28</sup> and for her nieces, Lyndall and Ursula, to introduce them in British and European feminist circles (Letter to Will, 24 Mar. 1908; Letter to Fan; Letter to Aletta). And the fourth way concerns letters which trade political favors with Schreiner arranging those connections back and forth, with examples here concerning brokering between the amateur spy, Adele Chapin, in relation to Transvaal politician Jan Smuts and Schreiner’s brother, Will, then Prime Minister of the Cape (Letter to Jan, May–June; Letter to Will, 4 June 1899) and similarly she brokered connections for her young British friend, John Hodgson, to access South African expatriate circles in London around Georgiana Solomon, so he could meet members of a visiting black delegation as part of launching himself as a journalist, as well as for many other younger friends too.

As the above discussion indicates, our work on the Schreiner epistolarium amply supports Barton and Hall’s comment that, “[a]s those who have investigated the genre of letters make clear, there is more to a genre than its formal properties” (Barton and Hall 6).<sup>29</sup> However, this is indeed “more than,” not “instead of,” for the aspects of letterness just explored demonstrate both Schreiner’s observances of the formal properties and also her complications and troublings of these. Her letters *en masse* point up the richness of what “a letter” can be, such that one of its definitional properties surely ought to be that letter-writing practices can flout, complicate, ignore, and rewrite one or more of the formal properties without destroying the fundamental letterness involved, that “call for a response” pinpointed by Altman which we noted earlier and will return to later.

William Merrill Decker usefully points out the conundrum of letters, that what can be seen as their deficiencies are in fact the source of their greatest interest and strengths:<sup>30</sup> “[a]lthough their value as primary documents is indisputable, letters do not really provide transparent access to history; nor do they generally conform to anything like self-evident story lines. . . . Letters tell stories centered in the experience of historically real individuals, but the stories they tell depend on the context in which they are read, the manifest interventions of editors and readers” (9). We readily ac-

knowledge with Decker that letters do not have direct referential properties; there is no single coherent master narrative even within those to just one correspondent; however, letters do tell something about historically real lives, including that of the letter-writer; but what they tell is importantly marked by the context of reading, which includes reading by the named addressee and also by any third parties he or she passed it to, by the researcher/editor, and then by readers of published collections. There are associated complexities, too. While there is a temporal remove between a letter being written and then being read by its addressee, absence may not necessarily be the condition for corresponding, or if it is, this may only be in a very temporary sense. Also apparently “private” letters routinely assume third party readers, as we discuss later. In addition, the borders between what is a letter and what belongs to another genre can be often ambiguous and indistinct, as previously illustrated. And, reciprocity can sometimes be absent, suspended, ignored, or even forbidden, also discussed later. We now discuss such matters regarding two of Schreiner’s long-term correspondences.

### Correspondences: The Addressee, Exchange, Context, Time, Closure

Letters *en masse* point up the complexities of letterness, which can be obscured in focusing on specific sets or small numbers of letters. The variations, complications, and violations involved can be illustrated by reference to two different long-term Schreiner correspondences. The first concerns her letters to a younger South African friend, Isie Smuts, married to the politician Jan Smuts, to whom Schreiner also wrote. She loved both the Smutses, particularly Isie, but also considerably distanced herself from the racially retrograde views both held, and which Jan put into practice as a high-level politician and government minister (and for two periods, Prime Minister of South Africa).<sup>31</sup> The second is the better-known correspondence between Schreiner and Havelock Ellis, a loved presence in her young womanhood but from whose emotional demands and game-playing she increasingly withdrew, until she arrived at a “for old time’s sake,” low-key friendship.

Most of the Smuts’s collection of letters, totaling ninety-six, are addressed to Isie Smuts,<sup>32</sup> although the subtext of many is that Jan Smuts will be told about their content or will himself read them. The inclusion of Jan is frequently very direct, as in “Please give the enclosed to your husband,” and “^ This letter is private, just for yourself & your husband. Dont show it to Miss Hobhouse or anyone. ^,” while there are many more examples where the reference is implicit

or oblique (Letter to Isie, June 1899). The addressee of such letters is clear and singular, but the complications of who is the intended reader are obvious, as is the “now it’s Isie, now it’s both” way that Schreiner positions what “private” means and her assumption that otherwise there could be unwanted third party readers, the social reformer Emily Hobhouse in the instance above.<sup>33</sup>

The letters to Isie Smuts are mainly written in the context of Schreiner living in one region of South Africa and the Smutses a considerable distance away on the high veld, which made it difficult for Schreiner to visit because of her heart condition. In this sense, her letters to Isie can be seen as conforming to “the letter” as predicated upon absence. However, there were also periods when Schreiner and the Smutses were staying in the same place, which brought *increased*, not decreased, letter-writing concerned with arranging meetings and then writing thank you letters afterwards, which also commenced arranging the next meeting. One such occasion was in 1912 when all three were in Muizenberg, on the coast near Cape Town, staying close to each other and meeting every few days, as Schreiner wrote, “I was coming down to your house to fetch my umbrella last night, but I saw you ~~were~~ pass in the motor . . . / . . . I’m going by train this afternoon to . . . Kalk Bay. On on the way back I’ll get out & come & have but don’t stop in for me because if it’s at all warm I won’t go,” and “I wanted so to come out & say good bye to you today: but I can’t. . . . I was so disappointed I couldn’t go to the house the day Neef Jan asked me. . . . I’m leaving on Thursday morning for de Aar When you pass there please let me know that I can come down & see you” (Letter to Isie, 5 Feb. 1912; 8 Apr. 1912). These are letters written in circumstances not of absence but rather of interrupted presence: they witness Schreiner and the Smutses in frequent contact with each other, and their letters are almost entirely filled by remarking on one such co-presence and facilitating the next.

In addition, the letters to Isie Smuts raise interesting aspects of reciprocity and also the permeable borders of letters with other forms. They show, for instance, that epistolary exchange is not always and entirely a matter of exchanging letters, and that responses and therefore reciprocity can take forms other than the narrowly epistolary. Thus Schreiner wrote to Isie Smuts, responding to both a letter, and an “anonymous” set of parcels (containing gifts to destitute people in the village of Hanover, where Schreiner was then living) which had arrived, with: “I was so glad, so very glad to get your letter this morning. I am writing at once I got all the parcels, the Tam-o-shanter, shawl & Babys things. I wrote at once to thank for them, though no

letter came with any of the parcels I of course knew they were from you” (Letter to Isie, 20 Mar. 1902).

Isie Smuts’s lack of signature to her “non/letter” replies was in fact characteristic and forms a kind of personal signature to many of her exchanges with Schreiner, as with “[j]ust as I was writing this letter there came a box of lovely fruit. I’m sure it must be from you though there was no name on” (Letter to Isie, Tues. 1911); and another example indicates the broader social and relational context this correspondence occurred within: “Thank you so much for the beautiful tin of biscuits you sent me. I thought as they came from Stellenbosch they were from your mother; but when I wrote to her she said they were from you” (Letter to Isie, 13 May 1905). As well as pointing up how complex notions of epistolary reciprocity and its ripple-like network effects can be, these letters also demonstrate that the responsive “I-to-and-from-You” character of a letter can be conveyed by means that are additional to letter-writing. In the examples here, these responses are “letter-like” because there is an addressee and a non/signatory and also returns of the epistolary gift, but these are clearly not letters in the specific sense (Stanley, “Epistolary Gift” 137–54). Turns in a correspondence, then, are not always taken in epistolary terms—a turn can be a meeting, parcels, or even fruit.

In a number of letters to Isie, Schreiner hints at the reasons for her relatively infrequent letters to Jan Smuts, commenting, for instance, “[r]eally, I would come up to Pretoria just to have a long talk with him; but I know a politician never talks; he fences!” (Letter to Isie, 1907). However, although there are just twenty-six letters from Schreiner to Smuts, these are among the most important in the Schreiner epistolium and they show her “fencing,” also. These are powerfully paraenetic and exhortatory letters, deeply concerned with the effects on the lives of millions of black people of the policies Smuts was masterminding. Regarding the damaged South Africa that would result, Schreiner writes: “I wish I knew you were taking as broad & sane a view on our native problem as you took on many European points when you were there. The next few years are going to determine the whole future of South Africa in 30 or 40 years time. As we sow we shall reap. / Jan dear, you are having your last throw; throw it right this time. You are such a wonderfully brilliant & gifted man, & yet there are sometimes things which a simple child might see which you don’t! You see close at hand—but you don’t see far enough” (Letter to Jan, 19 Oct. 1920).

Schreiner’s letters to Smuts have a friendly tone while at the same time firmly rejecting his politics and emphasizing that he would be personally responsible for the resulting future she so powerfully (and

accurately) invokes. These are most definitely letters to Jan and do not imply or include Isie as a third party reader. However, though these letters have a strongly “I-to-You” relational aspect, this “You” is complicated, but in a very different way from that in the letters to Isie. This “You” is the personal “you” that is the man, Jan Smuts, whom she liked; the powerful politician, who in a sense embodied the “You” of white South African retrograde politics; as well as the “You” of the racist future-society in the making. Some of Schreiner’s most politically critical letters to him finish by reference to Isie in a loving way; however, although this invokes the personal bond between them, rather than softening the main message, it underscores and points up Schreiner’s strategic deployment of such rhetorics (See letters to Jan, 30 Dec. 1908 and 19 Nov. 1918, which provide illustrations of this argument).

At the same time, an epistolary reply or response does not seem like an expected feature of Schreiner’s letters to Jan Smuts. Certainly he did write to her and, from how she responds, some of his letters were written in reply to several of her extant letters to him. However, Schreiner’s letters in effect assume non-reply in epistolary terms and focus instead on a change in his political and ethical conduct as the response for which she hoped. And as this will suggest, these letters to Smuts have a dominating referential aspect. It all *matters*, for multitudes of black people in the now of the writing, for South Africa as a society, and for the future so powerfully invoked. Temporality, then, is a strong but out-of-the-ordinary presence in Schreiner’s letters to Smuts. They combine an insistence on “now” and its immediacy and consequentiality, and powerfully engage with what she calls “the far, far future” (Letter to Jan, 19 Oct. 1920),<sup>34</sup> when the policies set in motion by Smuts will come to full fruition, with an insurgent black majority seizing their rights and exacting retribution on future generations of whites who, unlike Smuts and his colleagues, will have little direct responsibility for many years of oppression.

So far we have provided examples of letters written in circumstances of interrupted presence and recognized that letters can be written in conditions of absence. In addition, there is a more final absence that occurs with the closure of a correspondence (one that is not always, and perhaps not even usually, when a death or major illness occurs). This is absence in a reverse sense than that which some epistolary theory sees as originating and sustaining letter-writing.<sup>35</sup> That is, this absence challenges the view that letters by definition thrive on distance between people. To our minds, Schreiner’s last letters are examples that prove inadequate the Derridean theory that views letters as sustained by absence or loss. This kind of absence

finalizes and prevents reciprocity by withdrawing from an epistolary exchange, with the “absence” of Schreiner through her ending her correspondence with Jan and also Isie Smuts providing contrasting examples here. Schreiner’s letters to Isie Smuts simply stop in October 1913, in a context marked by major, racially retrograde political changes occurring around the Natives Land Act passed into law that year, and when Schreiner, at least partially as a consequence, left South Africa for Europe. Her other close relationships continued by post, but there were no more letters to Isie Smuts, making it likely that the political changes Isie supported were at the root of the cessation of Schreiner’s writing. Schreiner’s letters to Jan Smuts, however, continued intermittently until 1920. This can be explained by reference to the different kinds of letter-writing she engaged in. Her exhortatory or persuasive letters—which those to Jan Smuts most definitely are—were almost exclusively sent to politicians she disagreed with, and were an attempt to change their political positions. In this sense, they are not “private” letters but deeply public, political ones. Consequently, the “actually personal” letters to Isie probably stopped because their friendship was no longer tenable for Schreiner, while the “actually political” letters to Jan continued because she perceived that he might still change his mind on race matters. Ultimately, at the point Schreiner became convinced he would never change, she sent him a letter implicitly but certainly final, its finality demonstrated by being marked by something entirely uncharacteristic. Almost invariably, Schreiner’s exhortatory letters fill every scrap of paper. However, following the powerful passage about Smuts’s retrograde racist politics quoted above, this letter ends with three sides of folded notepaper left entirely blank: a speaking silence and absence.

We now discuss Schreiner’s correspondence with Havelock Ellis regarding its similar-but-different features.<sup>36</sup> That is, the same kinds of more-than-the-formal properties characteristic of Schreiner’s letter-writing exist here too, but the form they take is tailored to Ellis as a correspondent and the different context and circumstances of Schreiner’s friendship with him. This friendship in its early years was a very close one. Many of Schreiner’s and Ellis’s initial letters read like written chatter of an intense and familiar kind, of half-sentences and coded side-comments. They actually convey a strong sense of a “story line,” as Decker terms it, to which each successive letter contributes. Indeed, the borders between their letters and their other forms of involvement are also often multiply traversed. An example of this is where part of a letter to Ellis has been written on the back of a discarded sheet of Schreiner’s *From Man to*

*Man*, which she was editing and commented on to him (Letter to Havelock, 17 Nov. 1884).

Some interesting points also arise, in Schreiner's letters to Ellis, about duplicity in the sense of letters not always being quite what they seem on the surface, around the early-onset of emotional withholding on Schreiner's part and what we, like Yaffa Claire Draznin, perceive as an answering resentment on Ellis's (3–10). Their epistolary relationship is discernibly a troubled one, in spite of much other agreement between them, with Schreiner often raising such concerns around his heavy-handed criticisms of her as well as her work, and his resentment of other interests she had (Letter to Havelock, 30 June 1885). Schreiner's epistolary friendships with the Smutses were not trouble-free, but the consequential political disagreements forming the backcloth to these letters were acknowledged and bracketed, unlike in her letters to Ellis.

At various points Schreiner's letters to Ellis reflects that she assumes that they may have third party readers, mainly of an unsought and unwanted kind. Thus while staying with her older brother in Eastbourne, Schreiner emphasized that if Ellis wrote to her "care of" him, then "[d]on't say anything in a letter sent to Fred that everyone can't see because my sister in law may open it" (Letter to Havelock, 24 Apr. 1887). The more frequent concern, however, is with landladies and their sometimes-blatant treatment of people's post: "I am quite sure they will have torn up any letters that came for me. I am very much troubled about it ^" (Letter to Havelock, 12 May 1884). Later, during the South African War (1899–1902) and then the Great War, the unwanted third-party reader was the licensed one of military censorship, with Schreiner being a target because of her German-sounding name and her radical politics: " ^ When you write please address my letter on an inner envelope & in the an outer one enclosing this one to me address Mrs Smith 4 Gloucester Place Portman Sq London. We are under Martial Law here ^" (Letter to Ruth, 1917). Notions of what is a "private letter," and also who the addressee is, are troubled as a consequence, with Schreiner not only at times writing comments explicitly addressed to "Mr. Censor," but more generally curtailing what and how she wrote letters because of "Mr. Censor's" likely readership.<sup>37</sup> More subtle examples of this involve parts of letters marked "Private," which suggest she assumed that otherwise her letters would be shared around to friends in common, as with the Smuts/Hobhouse example above.

The earlier letters between Schreiner and Ellis were written nearly every day, sometimes several times a day. Overwhelmingly, these are letters of the interrupted-presence kind—the multiple letter

exchanges might culminate in evening meetings, for instance, while many others reprise previous meetings and plan for the next one, often having no content other than that regarding past and present co-presence. Other letters from the same time-period also convey interrupted presence by returning to past conversations and thinking into the future about the writing each was doing, which would be discussed when they next meet, as with: “[t]hank you for the sonnets I will say what I want to say about them when you come” (Schreiner, Letter to Havelock, 16 May 1884).

Schreiner’s letters to Ellis changed over time and initially became what might be termed a “punctuated absence” kind of writing, where there were far fewer face-to-face meetings even when Schreiner was living in London, as she progressively drew her emotional as well as physical distance. After her return to Africa at the end of 1888 and more decisively after her marriage, the letters to Ellis take on a rather routine writing-to-keep-in-touch character that continued even after Schreiner returned to Britain in 1914, living mainly in London until mid-1920. The later letters between Schreiner and Ellis only occasionally convey the close meaningful exchanges of the earlier ones, and then usually in the form of Schreiner’s expressing disagreement, as with, “[y]ou quite intentionally misunderstand me in every thing” (Letter to Havelock, 6 Apr. 1889). Her last letters to Ellis both before and after her August 1920 return to South Africa are in fact postcards (Letters to Havelock, 22 Mar. 1916; 7 Nov. 1920), an epistolary form she tended to use in later life with correspondents she was not particularly close to, such as Georgiana Solomon (Letter to Georgiana). The final impression is of exchanges with Ellis marked by remembrance of old times but drained of more meaningful response except when moved by specific circumstance.<sup>38</sup>

As this suggests, epistolary “absence” and “ending” can be a slow and gradual process, rather than quick and final as it was for Schreiner with Isie and Jan Smuts. It also demonstrates that closure can be a complicated matter, as a comparison with some other sets of letters will reinforce. Thus Schreiner’s letters to Ellen Sauerlander, owner of the Grand Hotel Muizenberg, are friendly beyond what might be expected of a famous writer’s letters to a hotel-keeper, but they also do the business, and Sauerlander’s emendations on them indicate their purposefulness was prime (Letter to Ellen). They are also delimited in content and focused in time, ceasing as soon as the purpose in hand was accomplished: closure came with the end of the business and was built-in, anticipated, and natural. However, a very different sense of closure exists concerning a powerful letter to the feminist writer Margaret Harkness (Schreiner, Letter to Margaret). This invokes and

emphasizes the relational and consensual character of correspondence, for Schreiner wrote in the context of an unwanted and non-reciprocal attempted imposition from Harkness that was epistolary and endeavored to be face-to-face as well. In this case, Schreiner's letter insists that Harkness and unnamed other people should not try to force her to "simply write to say we are alive & well" and that any visits to Schreiner in South Africa, including one intended it seems by Harkness and their mutual friend, the editor W. T. Stead, would be unwelcome (Letter to Margaret). This was because Schreiner had no interest in (and considerable distaste for) "other peoples affairs" being written or spoken about. She also thought her energies and time would be better spent on writing than gossiping, as she makes clear in the following: "I would rather have read that lovely little story of yours about the poor children in the P. M. G. than have five thousand letters from you; . . . You ought to feel the same about me. I am doing my best to work, & what more can any one who values me want. . . . I will promise always to write to you if I've anything impersonal to discuss; you must promise to write to me if we've any ~~the~~ line of thought we can thrash it out together. . . . There is no need for us simply to write to say we are alive & well" (Letter to Margaret). Here closure anticipated and forestalled unwanted connection, with Schreiner's sharp refusal to engage on the terms Harkness desires. Her response points up the tacit consensual and relational basis of epistolary engagement Harkness's overtures violates.

Often discussions of epistolarity are based on rather small numbers and/or specific sets of letters, while the large size of, key correspondents within, and lengthy time-span covered by the Schreiner epistolarium makes it possible to observe trends and patterns in her letters in a way that, say, the letters of Lord Chesterfield to his son cannot, however interestingly they may be analyzed in other respects.<sup>39</sup> Schreiner's letters amply show, both in the two correspondences discussed above and many others, that her letter-writing both adheres to and often departs from the formal properties of "the letter," and that both genre adherences and departures differ across her various correspondences. In addition, these correspondences take somewhat different shape depending on the time-period, context, and interpersonal circumstances of the particular relationship. Working with very large numbers of letters by one person enables the full variety and richness of letter-writing to be seen within a single epistolarium, then, including that letterness frequently troubles and sometimes infringes the formal properties of "the letter." Letters *en masse* more generally do this, not only Olive Schreiner's. But this does not mean that the formal properties of the letter are unimportant. Indeed, rather

the reverse, for such troubles occur around the largely stable, agreed properties of what makes any particular letter a more, or less, acceptable, interesting, and innovative example of the form.

The formal properties of “the letter,” and the multiple variances of letterness in practice, are codependent and co-constitutive. The definitional elements of letters as a genre are interwoven with and inextricable from the emergent properties of particular correspondences and specific letter-writing practices, so that analyzing the form has to grapple with how letterness shapes up regarding the Schreiner (or for example the Mohandas Gandhi, Emily Dickinson, Thomas Jefferson, or Mary Wortley Montagu) epistolarium and its composing correspondences. We now move on to discuss this in relation to the idea of the epistolary pact.

### The Epistolary Pact

Philippe Lejeune’s conceptualization of an autobiographical pact characterizing writing a life “in the first person” has provided a powerful way of conceptualizing the core characteristics of autobiographical writing (“The Autobiographical Pact” 3–30). Being attentive to the formal character of his conceptualization and its provisionality, Lejeune has commented that his discussion was intended more as a hypothesis and a working tool (“The Autobiographical Pact (bis)” 119–37). However, his neat pinning down of the key feature of the synonymy of the author, narrator, and protagonist around the name of the “I” on the title page clearly hit an analytical nerve. As he puts it, “[t]he autobiographical pact comes in very diverse forms; but all of them demonstrate their intention to honor his/her signature,” which is the “proper name” he insists upon as the marker of authenticity (“The Autobiographical Pact” 14). Enter the reader, on whose behalf Lejeune predicates his conceptualization of the autobiographical pact around “the name” and signature “by putting myself in the place of the reader today, who attempts to distinguish some sort of order within a mass of published texts, whose common subject is that they recount someone’s life” (“The Autobiographical Pact” 3).

The synonymy of the “proper name” is prime for Lejeune, associated with his propelling desire to differentiate autobiography from autobiographical fiction, done by positioning autobiography as composed by referential texts about an external reality and therefore subject, potentially at least, to tests of verification (“The Autobiographical Pact” 22–26), something that is indeed so important a component that it is termed a “referential pact” (22). Temporality is not an explicit feature of Lejeune’s conceptualization of the autobio-

graphical pact, but it has a place by implication around the definition of autobiography: a “*Retrospective* prose narrative written by a real person concerning his [sic] own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality.” (4; emphasis added). Time enters with retrospection, because “the moment of writing” and “the scene of what is written about” in retrospect are temporally removed (Stanley and Dampier, “*Simulacrum Diaries*” 25–42). However, this single word is the extent of acknowledging temporality in Lejeune’s conceptualization of the autobiographical pact, while for us once letters are situated among autobiographical forms of writing then temporality has to be seen to be a major property of the genre, as we go on to elaborate.<sup>40</sup>

Altman’s perceptive discussion of epistolarity gives considerable attention to what she terms “the weight of the reader” (87–116), and in particular this provides the basis for how she perceives the epistolary pact: “I insist upon the fact that the reader is ‘called upon’ to respond. . . . [This is the] fundamental impulse behind all epistolary writing; if there is no desire for exchange, the writing does not differ significantly from a journal, even if it assumes the outward form of the letter. To a great extent, this is the epistolary pact—the response from a specific reader within the correspondent’s world. Most of the other aspects of epistolary discourse . . . can be seen to derive from this most basic parameter” (89). Scholars of epistolarity have made good use of Altman’s idea of the epistolary pact to analyze particular letters or sets of letters.<sup>41</sup> However, working across the entire Schreiner epistolium and with letterness *en masse* suggests that significantly more can be said about the dimensions of the epistolary pact, proceeding from the foundation point Altman has identified.

“The letter” is an autobiographical genre in Lejeune’s terms as a first-person writing form in which the genuineness of “the name” of the signatory is an essential guarantor of authenticity; and it is predicated upon, and its authenticity is strongly grounded in, assumptions of referentiality between the words on the page and the events, people, and circumstances being written about. However, the letter’s equally ingrained assumption of reciprocity directly challenges Lejeune’s emphasis on the synonymy of the author, narrator, and protagonist as the pivotal definitional criterion, and the exclusion of “You” as a significant and agentic presence. Certainly the autobiographical pact proceeds from a Lejeunean reader who fixes on the synonymy of “the name,” but this fix effectively ignores or denies the *active* reader who responds to and *engages* with the weight of the epistolary text following the title-page inscription of “the name.”

We very much agree with Altman about the critical and foundational role of a reader responding and that this is foundational to what a letter *is* in an ontological sense, but for us characterizing what occurs in epistolary exchanges in terms of just “response” underplays the complexities involved. Regarding the Schreiner epistolarium, it is not just that one “I” writes to another “I” who responds, but that the exchange takes a strongly relational form, and for each party within a correspondence (Stanley, “Shadows Lying” 251–66). Certainly there is a signatory—Olive Schreiner—who is also the “writing I.”<sup>42</sup> But at the same time, letter-writing is usually about something or someone external to “I” and it is also a relational form, in which “I” always takes cognizance not only of “You” but also what you wrote that “I” am replying to, as well as telling “You” something about what “I” have been doing and thinking. This comes across very clearly in the different modulations of Schreiner’s letters to Jan and to Isie Smuts, and also when regarding changes over time in her letters to Ellis. From the perspective of the Schreiner letters, the autobiographical form of the letter appears to be not so much an “I writing” form, then, as it is what we term as an “I-to-and-from-You” relational one. The epistolary pact between Schreiner and her various correspondents is predicated upon and assumes this, and is modulated depending on the particular addressee and the unfolding characteristics of their correspondences with her.

Following from this, reciprocity in the sense of a tacit agreement about appropriate kinds and levels of epistolary engagement on both sides is another core component of the epistolary pact. This is not coterminous with its relationality, for after all relational letters could be written by one person but without the addressee replying, and in which case their “letter-likeness” would come under question.<sup>43</sup> Reciprocity, not just response, is essential to such exchanges, and once reciprocity becomes a dynamic, then interruptions and breaches have to be accounted for. Schreiner’s letters sometimes inquire about interruptions, and content suggests she received similar inquiries herself, regarding whether this was “about friendship” or brought about by the exigencies of material circumstance, like postal problems.<sup>44</sup> Also, many letters remark on non-observances of turn-taking (too many, as well as too few), and whether letters are “owed” and by which party to the correspondence. The expectation of turn-taking and that there should be reasonably equitable involvement regarding turns, length and frequency of writing, and reasonable rapidity in replying, are all implied or stated. These are central to what reciprocity entails, with the epistolary pact clearly entailing adherence to such expectations.

Referentiality is also a foundational aspect of the epistolary pact. Writing letters is not merely to “write the self,” or even the self and the other, but concerns other people, events, and circumstances in a world shared in common, even if not every aspect of the meaning of this is agreed between signatory and addressee.<sup>45</sup> Schreiner’s letters to Isie and Jan Smuts are a case in point. Even the most abstract of letter-writing has a material referent, involving people, places, activities, writing technologies, in a social context. Epistolarity is not just a matter of a text and its rhetorics, but concerns epistolary texts created and responded to in a material and social context that needs to be taken into account. Certainly Schreiner’s letters would be seriously depreciated if denuded of the political and ethical issues and material contexts she was so deeply engaged with elsewhere in her life, as well as in her letters. Imperialism, racism, exploitation, prostitution, war, and so on, all matter to us and are not merely words on pages, for they provided the material circumstances in which Schreiner observed, thought, wrote, and lived, and equally so for her correspondents. The crucial matter of context cannot be ignored; letters cannot be reduced to “the text” in a narrow sense without doing considerable violence to understanding.

Altman’s insistence on exchange and response also strongly implies a temporal dimension to the epistolary pact, as we go on to elaborate. Temporality within epistolarity is predicated on the letter being written in the moment and primarily concerned with this “now” aspect. There is, however, always a temporal remove between events and circumstances and a letter written about these, so that time—even if a short time—always lies between “the moment of writing” and “the scene of what is written about” (Stanley and Dampier, “Simulacrum Diaries” 25–52). Also, temporal interruption or spacing occurs around the specifically exchange aspects of correspondences, for there is also a time gap between a letter being written and the moment of reading by its addressee.<sup>46</sup> In addition, the weight of the reader, as Altman phrases it, takes shape around the temporal time-traveling of letters, because when a letter is read—and *every* time it is read—what is read is the “now” of the moment of writing inscribed on its pages. In this sense, letters are always in the present tense: they are always read as though they have just been written and in the rhetorical voice they were inscribed in, and this is so regarding unintended, present-day third-party readers of the letters of, for example, Heloise and Abelard read some hundreds of years in the future, not just regarding their original addressees.<sup>47</sup> However, this is certainly not to deny there are radically different

contexts of reading involved and this will make a major difference to the how and what of reading their “now” aspects.

The epistolary pact, then, is predicated upon exchange and response as Altman proposes. However, working on the Schreiner epistolarium indicates there are further dimensions that can be usefully teased out and their ramifications explored. Relationality, referentiality, temporality, and as reciprocity are key properties of the epistolary pact as we conceive it. Rethinking the epistolary pact in these terms also points out that “the letter” is not confined to the writer and the addressee—“I-to-and-from-You” is the foundation but not the entire edifice, for letters are routinely if not invariably multifocal, involving the writer/reader, the reader/writer, legitimate and illegitimate third parties, and, in the case of “collected” and published autobiographies and letters, this reciprocity also includes the researcher-editor, and the readers of the published versions.<sup>48</sup>

## Conclusion

Letterness in Olive Schreiner’s letter-writing is responsively modulated to the person, the context, and the particular prevailing circumstances. Her epistolary practices at times violate—but much more frequently complicate—what “a letter” is in the formal sense. Quantity is not everything, but in the case of letters, volume demonstrates how frequently and inventively letter-writing plays with the form and its typical properties; and while such properties may not be quite as typical as is often supposed, they nonetheless remain definitional. That is, as we pointed out earlier and underscore here, this does not mean that “a letter” can be anything at all, or that the formal properties ascribed to it are unimportant. Rather the reverse is true, for without a largely stable set of shared assumptions about what letters are and can be, the departures could not be identified, nor indeed could the distinctive features of “an Olive Schreiner letter” sketched out earlier be seen as such.

Epistolarity also points out that temporality, not just authorship and address, is crucial to the form of the letter, for its “I-to-and-from-You” foundation also brings with it a “here to elsewhere” dimension. Consequently, drawing on Foucault and Bakhtin, we characterize letters as forming an “epistolary chronotopia,” in which time is inscribed onto spatiality, and place/space into temporality.<sup>49</sup> The letter writes temporality into the autobiographical, which Lejeune’s notion of the autobiographical pact can usefully be extended to encompass.

Some epistolary theorists see letter-exchanges as conversational and “like talk” because of their ingrained reciprocal aspect. For us,

letter-writing is *proximate*, not approximate, to talk and to face-to-face encounters more generally; it is a part of sociality in its own right and not a proxy for anything else. What can be written in a letter, what cannot, which third parties can read and which should not, how often, at what length, in what tone, with what adherences to and departures from the formalities, as well as the presumption of response and that the relationship will continue unless one party or another enforces closure, are all involved in the configuration of the epistolary pact. Reciprocity is foundational, but its relational, referential, and temporal dimensions are built on this foundation.

Our conclusion is that the epistolary pact is both ubiquitous *and* specific across the many different correspondences in the Schreiner epistolarium. At basis, the epistolary pact signifies sociality, with the gift aspect of letter-exchanges demonstrating the existence of social and relational bonds in epistolary form around the “I-to-and-from-You” character of the letter. Olive Schreiner’s letter to her younger friend, Ruth Alexander, used as the epigraph to this paper shows the foundational character of response within the epistolary pact, and also how co-constitutive this is regarding other definitional aspects of the letter. Schreiner’s comments point up the permeable character of epistolarity regarding other genres—in this example a poem—and indicate the complications of letterness. They also emphasize sociality and the relational bond between her and Alexander and call for response—“How does it come I never never hear from you . . . Do write & tell me of you all. / I never forget you / Olive” (Letter to Ruth, 18 Apr. 1918).<sup>50</sup>

This question of “reference” at the heart of Lejeune’s pact is more radically destabilized in letters, in that the epistolary pact is primarily the agreement to establish or maintain a relationship, and reference to the world is in the service of that relationship. And so for example, if you want to make things up to amuse a person you’re writing a letter to, you then can, if the specific pact of that epistolary relationship is to amuse each other: the letter-writer breaks the pact only if he or she breaks the terms of the relationship. However, doing this in autobiography breaks what is foundational to the pact.

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## Notes

1. All transcriptions of Olive Schreiner's letters are "to the letter" and include the omissions, insertions, deletions and mistakes of the originals. ^ Indicates ^ an insertion, ~~strike through~~ is a deletion, and / shows a paragraph break. We do not use [sic] to indicate slips of the pen (aka mistakes), because these are part of the "bird in flight" character of letter-writing. Full letter references including archival information can be found in the pages of the Olive Schreiner Letters Online at <[www.oliveschreiner.org](http://www.oliveschreiner.org)>.

2. For more biographical information on Schreiner, see First and Scott; Berkman; McClintock (258–95); Burdett; and Stanley, *Imperialism*.

3. Schreiner's theoretical and analytical concerns include: colonialism under transition in the Cape from the 1850s on; feminism and socialism in 1880s London; prostitution and its analysis, understandings of 'race' and capital; the machinations of imperialism "on the ground"; "Rhodes as a system" and his Chartered Company's role in imperial expansion; the Jameson Raid; the South African War and women's relief organizations and the concentration camps of this war; changing international and South African perspectives on women's franchise campaigns; labor issues and Union rather than the federation of South Africa than Schreiner favored; pacifism and war economies in the wake of the Great War; and political and economic changes in South Africa after 1914. For full details of Schreiner's publications, see the Olive Schreiner Letters Online at <[www.oliveschreiner.org](http://www.oliveschreiner.org)>.

4. The scale can be approximated from Cronwright-Schreiner's diaries and letters to Havelock Ellis while preparing these volumes.

5. This has included subsequent and much better biographies by First and Scott, and by Schoeman (*Olive Schreiner, Only An Anguish*), and has also impinged on subsequent collections of Schreiner's letters by Rive and by Draznin.

6. Olive Schreiner Letters Online can be accessed at [www.oliveschreinerletters.org](http://www.oliveschreinerletters.org). The website has a wide range of search facilities and an extensive editorial apparatus.

7. There are two editions of Schreiner's letters in addition to Cronwright-Schreiner's. Rive's includes letters from a wider range of correspondents, but his letters are sometimes more extended notation than accurate transcription, with frequent unacknowledged omissions of often important parts of letters. Draznin's collection is exemplary for its time, but features only the atypical correspondence between

Schreiner and Ellis; its transcriptions are smoothed out by omitting deletions and ‘correcting’ errors.

8. See endnote 3 for details.

9. For more on Schreiner’s analysis of her social and political context, see Stanley and Dampier, “She Wrote Peter Halket,” “Men Selling” and “The Tone of Things”; and Stanley, Dampier, and Salter, “Olive Schreiner Globalizing.”

10. For more on the theoretical framework of epistolarity, see Stanley, “Epistolarium” and *Olive Schreiner and Company*; Jolly and Stanley; and Poustie.

11. We draw on exemplary work in epistolary scholarship including by Altman; Barton and Hall; Decker; Earle; Gilroy and Verhoven, “Letters” and *Epistolary Histories*; Jolly *Encyclopedia* and “Twenty-First Century”; Montefiore and Hallet; and Porter.

12. Where possible the Olive Schreiner Letters Online has published letters to Olive Schreiner, as well as by her, although few are now extant. In late 1913, she destroyed many letters sent to her. She foresaw letters to as well as from her being sold in the marketplace and wanted both to protect her correspondents and to prevent this commercialization.

13. For a discussion of the autobiographical pact, see Lejeune, “Autobiographical” and “(bis).”

14. Her famous correspondents included Gladstone, Herbert Spencer, Robert Browning, Rhodes, Kitchener, Milner, Smuts, George Grey, Oscar Wilde, Arthur Symons, Charles Dilke, Gandhi, Lloyd George, and Bertram Russell, Eleanor Marx, Edith Lees, Alys Pearsall Smith, Mary Drew, Constance Lytton, Frederick and Emmeline Pethick Lawrences, Catherine Marshall, Jane Addams, Aletta Jacobs, Alice Clark, and Beatrice Webb, Helen Taylor, Edward Carpenter, Alf Mattison, Robert Muirhead, Isabella Ford, Katherine and John Bruce Glasier, Havelock Ellis, and Karl Pearson.

15. Some examples of this prophetic dimension concern Schreiner’s swift realization that the 1895–96 Jameson Raid would thereafter plunge South Africa into an imperialist war (as it did in 1899); her identification in 1914, when the League of Nations was still just an idea, of the factors which would cause it to fail as a peace-keeping presence (as it did in the 1930s); and her 1914 prognostication that in thirty or forty years the war machines and war economies then evolving would plunge the world into an even more total war than the Great War (as it did in 1939).

16. See also Stanley, “Epistolarium,” “A Returned South African,” and “Epistolary Gift.”

17. Epistolary ethics concern such things as what can and cannot be written, how quickly replies should be made, more/less appropriate forms of expression, and so on. In the case of the Schreiner epistolarium, as well as emergent over time, correspondences differ in the form that such ethical matters take.

18. For letters that advance such analyses, see Schreiner, letters to F. S. Malan, John X. Merriman, and Jan Smuts.

19. For an exhaustive online database of Darwin's correspondences, see Second, et al.

20. Entries for many of these people can be found in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. In addition, Olive Schreiner Letters Online has a set of "Dramatis Personae" pages that provide biographical and, where relevant, political information for all the addressees of Schreiner's letters and also many of the people mentioned in them.

21. See Stanley, "Shadows"; Stanley and Dampier, "Men" and "I Just."

22. Karl Pearson, a British mathematician and later a eugenicist, was a key figure in the Men and Women's Club and the subject of much gossip concerning his relationships with women, including Elisabeth Cobb, Olive Schreiner and later Maria Sharpe, whom he married. See Pearson's entry in the Olive Schreiner Letters Online "Dramatis Personae" for further information.

23. Will Schreiner was a Cape lawyer, a politician, and for a period also Prime Minister of the Cape; he was very close to his sister. See his "Dramatis Personae" entry for more information and links to wider reading around his life and political concerns.

24. Julia Solly became a key figure in the Women's Christian Temperance movement in South Africa as well as in the Cape Women's Enfranchisement League, which she co-founded together with Schreiner.

25. For example, see Schreiner, *Closer Union*.

26. For example, see Schreiner, Letter to Emily.

27. Malan has been seen in the scholarly literature as one of the leading Cape Liberals and at one point a possible Prime Minister of the Cape. However, Schreiner's letters to him refer to his reneging on his principles concerning race and women's suffrage.

28. The Pethick Lawrences are extremely well-known as leading figures in the Women's Social and Political Union and later in pacifist activities in Britain.

29. See also Jolly and Stanley.

30. For the "deficiencies" stance, see Plummer (54–5) and Roberts (62–3).

31. There is a great deal of literature on Jan Smuts, but very little on Isie. Detailed entries can be found on the Olive Schreiner Letters

Online “Dramatis Personae” pages; these include references to the secondary literature where it exists.

32. Ninety-six out of one hundred and twenty-two are addressed to Isie Smuts, and the remaining twenty-six to Jan Smuts.

33. Emily Hobhouse became a key figure in campaigning against conditions in concentration camps of the South African War (1899–1902), and was widely recognized by friends as an extremely effective campaigner although often extremely difficult in her personal relationships. See also her “Dramatis Personae” entry on the Olive Schreiner Letters Online website.

34. See Stanley, Dampier, and Salter, “Cultural Entrepreneur.”

35. See Derrida; Decker; Earle; and How.

36. Havelock Ellis and Schreiner became friends when he contacted her via a fan letter that was also critical of her *The Story of an African Farm*. This set the tone for their later relationship, which became extremely close but with Schreiner ricocheting away from Ellis’s domineering attempts to control her and the highly critical way he did so. Their friendship survived but in a lower key way. For more information, see his “Dramatis Personae” entry on the Olive Schreiner Letters Online website.

37. See, for example, Schreiner, Letter to Betty.

38. A fascinating example concerns Schreiner’s husband Cronwright-Schreiner who was estranged from her by 1913. After seven years apart, he briefly visited her in London in late July 1920 en route for the US. Very ill with heart problems, she had already arranged to return to South Africa. Her “goodbye” postcard contains the final message: “You must have my big stone warmwater bottle. It will keep you warm in the winter if you don’t come [back to South Africa] / ^yours ever ^,” both immensely prosaic for someone expecting soon to die and also in its ‘yours ever’ rather distant and cool (Letter to Cronwright).

39. For more, see Chesterfield.

40. This is not to suggest that Lejeune fails to discuss or theorize time (see, for instance, “The Order of Narrative” on time in Sartre’s and other autobiographies), but that time and temporality are not seen as a core element of the autobiographical pact, apart from that unremarked upon “retrospective” word in the definition of the genre noted earlier. It is the latter we insist upon.

41. See McElaney-Johnson; Lyons, “Love Letters” and *Reading Culture*; and Foley.

42. In some epistolary circumstances, a scribe or amanuensis may be the literal writer of a letter; but the signatory in such cases is in the

deeper sense the “author,” as the person who authorizes the writing of the text and puts their name to it.

43. We do not agree with Altman’s suggestion that letters without response by definition are just “a journal.” Whether this was so would very much depend on circumstance.

44. See Schreiner, Letter to Katie.

45. How points out that letters “seek to accomplish a variety of ends” including in relation to public and political matters and that the letter-writers he studied were mainly actively determined “to achieve material, political, spiritual and intellectual ends,” a point we echo from the perspective of the Schreiner epistolarium (2–3).

46. Or the recipient; and as in the cases of landladies and censorship noted earlier, the addressee and the recipient are not always coterminous.

47. See Mews.

48. See Decker (9). For autobiography as well as letters, the weight of the reader is borne upon more than ‘the name’ and signature; and autobiography too has unwanted third party presences, researchers and editors, and third party readers of published versions. We are aware that Altman, working from fictional letters, accepts Lejeune’s formalist notion of the autobiographical pact, but we are clear that “actual letters” en masse and their complex letterness cannot be contained in this way.

49. See Foucault; Bakhtin; and Stanley, Dampier and Salter, “The Epistolary Chronotopia.”

50. Do these ideas about “letterness” and relationality extend to email, instant messaging, and texting? It seems to us they do, but in a complicated way. While letters are certainly proximate to conversation, digital correspondence seems distinct from print-culture-based correspondence as well as oral exchanges, but in it nonetheless the form of epistolarity remains largely preserved.

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