
Diana G. Barnes’ new book offers a survey of the printed letter from the late sixteenth century to the Restoration, highlighting a variety of the ways authors used the epistolary genre to literary, political, and personal ends. *Epistolary Community in Print, 1580-1664* focuses on the “familiar letter,” a “sociable form that speaks for the group rather than the individual” and “was ideally suited to dialogue about what binds individuals in a community” (Barnes 1). Barnes is interested in how writers took advantage of the print medium to visualize new forms of community in the early modern period, and in how the particular characteristics of the letter lent themselves to that endeavor. In this era of social and political change, she argues, the printed letter played a key part in forging a more expansive view of who could participate in public debates. As letter-writing manuals and other forms of printed letters disseminated a definition of the genre as one that almost anyone could master through diligent application, readers received a more “porous” sense of the community of the learned (2).

Even as Barnes focuses on the subgenre of the familiar letter, she untangles a skein of epistolary sources for this emerging vernacular form. In the sixteenth century, the influence of the recovery of Cicero’s letters began to shift letter writing away from adherence to the *ars dictaminis*, the medieval rhetorical structure with oratory-based rules, and toward letters of friendship that were less restrictive and more interpersonal (6-8). In the late fourteenth century, Petrarch had prepared his letters for publication using a Ciceronian model, and “[f]ollowing Petrarch, humanists classicized epistolarity via the ideal of the Ciceronian familiar letter (the letters of Seneca, Quintillian [sic] and Peter Abelard were also important)” (7). Erasmus’ influential description of the letter in his *De conscribiendis epistolis*, while rejecting some elements of Ciceronian epistolarity, “maintained the ideal of a community held together by letters in spite of physical or temporal distance” (7). And alongside the development of letter
writing as oriented toward masculine friendship bonds, Ovid's verse epistles provided a structure for love letters and letters of complaint; they served to introduce feminine epistolary voices into print (8–9). The adaptation of Ovidian poetics to the English context injected feminine epistolary discourse into questions of rationality, citizenship, and sovereignty (9).

Barnes' strongest chapter—one on Parliament’s 1645 publication of *The Kings Cabinet Opened*, a collection of Charles I’s intercepted letters—draws together these strands to look at the overlapping masculine-feminine and public-private dimensions of seventeenth-century letter writing. Chapter Four, “Epistolary Battles in the English Civil War: *The Kings Cabinet Opened* (1645),” demonstrates the ways in which Parliament used not only the content of the confiscated missives, but also the form of the letter genre, to turn the public against the king. Because readers were already accustomed to printed letters, they were trained in how to interpret such publications. When the king entered into a familiar, Ciceronian epistolary relationship with his wife, the unpopular Roman Catholic Henrietta Maria, he violated masculine norms (121–2). The letters’ parliamentarian editors also left some passages in cipher to emphasize the secrecy and duplicity of the office of the monarch. In the pamphlet, Barnes writes, “The King is identified with secret language, deception and sin, whereas Parliament is associated with plain prose, God and truth: secret letters are counterpoised with the openness of pamphlets” (113). By printing the letters, Parliament invited readers to participate in the cycle of exchange and deliberation that was essential to the letter-writing process.

But even as Barnes argues that *The Kings Cabinet Opened* was important because it revealed the king’s private relationships and contradictory public statements, she notes that the correspondents themselves never considered their epistles to be purely private. In the letters, Charles and Henrietta Maria discuss their awareness of the potential for interception (124), and the fact that they wrote in cipher is evidence of this fear. “The royal letters are self-censored texts written under the threat of exposure” (122), demonstrating a continuity between manuscript letter and printed pamphlet. As Barnes notes, “print is not an innocent conduit of data,” and the letters’ remediation did not transparently unlock the king’s secrets (117). Rather, the editors
took advantage of the established conventions of the printed letter to sway public opinion in specific ways.

The book’s first three chapters set the stage for this argument by exploring the development of the printed letter in the first English letter-writing manual, Angel Day’s *The English Secretary* (1586); in an Anglicization of Ovid’s *Heroides*, Michael Drayton’s *England’s Heroicall Epistles* (1597); and in a translation of a French volume of women’s letters, Jacques du Bosque’s *The Secretary of Ladies* (1638). These works are representative of a process by which a wider range of people gained discursive citizenship through the authority conferred by epistolary agency. Speaking of Drayton, for example, Barnes notes that he uses epistolary conventions to “present the author as a participant in a conversation rather than a singular authoritative voice,” and in doing so he “establishes terms for the new kind of relationship between author and reader necessitated by print” (57-58). Likewise, the letters in *The Secretary of Ladies* posit a “non-familial relationship of choice based on shared values,” revealing how epistolary community can upset traditional hierarchical or lineage structures (85). Throughout, Barnes is interested in documenting the new kinds of literary exchange and interaction entailed in the movement of familiar letters from manuscript to print.

While Barnes’ book presents a wealth of information about the early printed letter—establishing a genealogy starting well before the form with which scholars are most familiar, the epistolary novel—*Epistolary Community in Print* occasionally suffers from a lack of clarity about its object of inquiry. Barnes takes as her focus the familiar letter, but does not fully define this term for the reader. In fact, much of her discussion of the genre of the letter focuses on its rhetorical and humanistic forms, which could be seen as precursors to the vernacular personal letter but are not identical with it. This means that she glosses over some of the crucial differences between a work like Day’s manual, directed toward clerks needing to acquire epistolary skills, and Margaret Cavendish’s elite *Sociable Letters* and *Philosophical Letters*, the focus of her final chapter (1664). Likewise, Barnes’ understanding of “community,” ostensibly the subject of the work, is under-theorized. Does her argument work against an Andersonian understanding of national communities, or is she pushing
his argument 200 years earlier? Did the kinds of communities she identifies already exist in manuscript epistolary circles, or were they connate with print? The work would be richer if it directly addressed such questions, which have been at the forefront of literary study for decades, rather than implicitly adding to the debate.

_Epistolary Community in Print, 1580-1664_ provides a welcome extension of the history of the letter in print, and it should prove useful to scholars of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century politics, literacy, and poetry, as well as to those working on the more familiar field of eighteenth-century letter writing. The work ably establishes the importance of a number of non-canonical texts to a larger understanding of the literature and culture of the late Elizabethan period through the Restoration.


The connotations of the term “hybrid” have shifted over the past five centuries, moving from an “early incarnation in Renaissance concepts of boundary violation and the nineteenth century discourse of racial ethnography” to a current “largely celebratory” status in “contemporary theoretical parlance” (226–227). Gary A. Schmidt’s _Renaissance Hybrids_ investigates three different yet interrelated manifestations of hybridity in the English Renaissance: firstly, the “increasing presence of hybrid creatures such as satyrs, centaurs, giants and changelings” in literature and iconography; secondly, the upsurge of “generic hybridity” evident in the prevalence of satires, tragicomedies, and problem plays; and finally, the use of such hybridity to “mediate between competing forms of political organisation, … manag[e] social dissent, … [and] reconceptualis[e] the history of England itself” (1).

Schmidt begins with a discussion of various theories of hybridity, ranging across structuralism, anthropology, and contemporary cultural theory to provide a sound underpinning for his subsequent arguments. He cites Roger Ascham’s warnings in _The Scholemaster_