

issue iv  
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# *The Falconer*

letters & literature



## *Letter from the Content Lead*

Dear reader,

The letter is a living thing. A piece of paper, plucked from a dying forest somewhere, embellished in ink, tears, and at times, even blood - a token of life itself. But what does that have to do with literature? The answer to both these questions is, and will remain, elusive to this writer. There is a connection to be made; that much is obvious, but the link between the letter and literature is not easy to find, let alone fabricate. One can only suppose that this connection lies, perhaps in the stream of possibilities that burst forth when the pen meets the page; when words become immortalized in ink - stagnant and stoic to the uncomprehending eye, yet still somehow moving with meaning. The letter enjoys multiple existences, and somehow all these existences seem to intermingle with literature - they operate within the *if*. Perhaps it was this *if-ness* that attracted us in the first place.

In this issue of *The Falconer*, we have set out to navigate tricky waters. The extent of this issue makes more sense as a spectrum than a list. We explore the great role that the letter has played in the development of the novel, an opinion that has only touched a few hearts and fallen on fewer ears. Elsewhere, we trace the scope of evolution that the letter of the lover has undergone itself, and how it dances on the perforated planes of timeless literature. We paint a portrait of a troubled poet's troubled life by juxtaposing her literary voice against her personal, all through her letter and poetry, and scattered throughout the issue are brief records of complete lives, brimming with romance, hatred, and perpetual gloom – letters by some of the most beloved names in literature.

Unlike the previous issue, we did not have to struggle to find our cover-art. Rather, the cover-art, depicting a scene from the grand epistolary novel, *Pamela*, found us. In Joseph Highmore's *Mr. B Finds Pamela Writing*, we found the perfect lament for our times – a hand that has stopped writing the letter that lies lifelessly atop the mahogany desk. The suspended hand, the side glance, and the dried ink of the dead pen are symptoms of a condition that we embody. For Pamela, it is a momentary interruption. For the twenty-first century reader, the interruption is eternal and the buzzing is constant. But not all buzzing is for naught. Not long ago, we created a certain buzz of our own. We hosted our first-ever literary contest, in which the participants were asked to bypass the restrictions of time and write a letter to Shakespeare. The brilliant poetic piece of personal prose has been added for the pleasure of our readers.

With this issue, we hope to do right by a genre that has suffered the most in the postmodern age. Letters are timeless. When you close this issue of *The Falconer* and leave it to gather dust on your study table or bookshelf, we hope that you feel the same way. It is on that note, where we must bid you goodbye, and leave you with this magazine that we have poured our hearts into. Until we meet again, take care, and *write!*

With warm wishes,

The Falconer

# **The Letter in Literature: *The Quest for Consciousness***

Moaz Ahmed Khan (3rd Year, Morning)

It is easy to dismiss letters as a symbol of the bygone years in English Literature. With modern literary techniques, epistolarity has quite lost its charm. Epistles, with the corrosion of the language of the self, no longer represent one's inner consciousness. Yet it is the same consciousness that the earliest novelist sought to channel through the epistolary form. The novel, perhaps the most cherished literary form of our times, then, owes its success to the omnipresent, ever-evolving *Letter*.

Disillusioned with the volatile politics of the eighteenth century, the earliest novelists like Richardson were interested in giving literature a "subjective and inward direction". Seminal works of the age - Pamela, Clarrisa, and The Sorrows of Young Werther - employed the epistolary form to encapsulate the essence of the personal over the social. Memoirs and biographies, argues Ian Watts, were "unconvincing" accounts of the events of the past wrapped in unoriginal freshness. The Letter, in contrast, was "present - active and alive." This found favor among the socially distracted readers of the time, who wanted, more than a humorous reimagination of their sour reality, a medium for escapism. While Watts emphasizes on the historical importance of the letter to the novel, Bakhtin suggests that it introduced the sociolinguistic need for "the self" in the realm of prosaic fiction - an idea that did not fully materialize till the latter half of the twentieth century. Through the letter, the novel invented a language that existed outside of the bounds of time and place - a language that would exist in the present regardless of when and how it is used - the language of the self. It is this language that allows Pamela to defend herself, in absentia, through the letter that she

leaves for her parents. The novel thus moved from the singular narrative of social fiction into the bilingual and multilayered narrative of the epistolary novel, spearheading a tradition of examining the psychological interior.

In the nineteenth century, however, the epistolary form declined drastically. While the commercialization of the letter made it a token of the commonplace, the Revolution gave it a political color. Novelists of the time, once again disillusioned with the sociopolitical dynamics of their times, disengaged with the form in search of a more neutral and omniscient narrative style- the third person. But with the absent narrator and open-ended action arose the issue of individuality. There was a fair amount of dramatic build-up, but no active consciousness to give life to it. And while authors like Shelley turned to the gothic, the greatest author of the time- Austen- turned to the letter. Robert Days argues that Austen, a master at the art of fabricating complicated scenarios without artificializing the story, uses the letter to introduce interpersonal communication, thereby enamoring the story with interpersonality, that is, social consciousness. In *Pride and Prejudice*, more than any of her other novels, there are 44 letters, most of which stand at the junction of heightened action- the first proposal, Lydia's running-away, and the announcement of her own marriage. The letter that Lydia Bennet writes to Mrs. Forster after she has run away with Wickham is an example of this punctuated use of the epistolary form, especially in regards to the character element of the epistolary tradition. Austen presents many of the other characters' thoughts to the reader beside Elizabeth's, but rarely does the narrator comment on what Lydia is thinking. Her thoughts and emotions are concealed throughout the majority of the text, until it is necessary to explain why Lydia has left Brighton. At other times, the letter is employed to accentuate Elizabeth's own consciousness, which,

at times, is undermined by the second-hand consciousness of the narrator. The letter Lizzy sends to her aunt to inform of her impending marriage is one such instance. Such careful use of epistles is present in most of the canonical works of the nineteenth century that are now known precisely for their complex narrative techniques and individual understanding of the characters.

But if the letter dominated the novel for the first 2 centuries through its linguistic heroism, in the twentieth century, it became the villain. Novelists of the post-war literary world no longer trusted the letter to be an authentic representative of the “psychological interior”. Their radical doubt in the efficiency of the epistolary language gave birth to perhaps the most challenging (and arguably most rewarding) narrative style: stream of consciousness. To the modernist writers, letters seemed to be divorced from subjectivity, becoming impersonal documents. They believed that letters deliberately excluded information and misrepresented certain events or experiences; and the process of letter-writing was seen as a problematic exercise. This issue with the character element of the epistolary tradition led modernist authors to view the letter as a *mise en abyme* of literary works, and this connection, far from abandoning the epistolary form, encouraged them to experiment with it.

In some of the most important works, including *Howard's End* and *Jacob's Room*, letters are used to miscommunicate and misrepresent reality, thereby making room for a more effective (and authentic) technique of exploring the true inner consciousness of the characters, emancipated completely from their faux reality. Yet letters are “venerable.” They are “infinitely brave, forlorn, and lost.” In Virginia Woolf's own words, “life would be asunder without them.” And so, they are present in even the most un-epistolary works of fiction.

The letter, then, is more than a symbol, technique, or phase - it is a force. It is that invisible string, which is not so invisible, that binds the different traditions of the novel. It collects from the past what it recollects in the present. It shifts with the norms till it shifts the norm. It changes forms till the *form* changes, and then it is renewed. It is not poetry, nor is it prose. It is a genre of its own.

## ***Sylvia Plath Through her Letters and Poems***

*Ayesha Rana (2<sup>nd</sup> Year, Evening)*

As we all lounge on borrowed eves from time, pain swirls around us in the air, decadent and heavy with her victims throughout history. Some remain silent, having lived their lives in the soil of this earth. But there are some that demand to be heard even now, as if their time had been too brief in the sun.

Sylvia Plath was one such poet, because simply reducing her to a victim of the circumstances in which death found her, would be to crudely demean her words. In death, she found peace for her troubled soul and her legacy rears her head, subtly inviting her spirit once more.

Seven days is a long time in which one can change their life in endless ways. Plath chose to end hers. Before taking her life, Plath left a note, as many do, but hers only bore four words: “Please call Dr. Horder” – and the doctor's number. It was strange for a poet who wrote so vividly of death in her poetry to leave a note of only four words. The note was not only surprising in the way it was written – urgent yet unrevealing – but also peculiarly puzzling for those who were not meant to see it. Who did Plath write the note for and why? Was it indeed a death knell or an unheard cry for help? These questions remain unanswered to this day.

Prior to her demise, Sylvia Plath also wrote to her former psychologist and controversial friend, Ruth Beuscher. He played a role not too kind, as she referred to him as coldly as any sword: ‘Dr’. The impersonal titles would lead one to believe her relationship of friendship. However, her husband Ted Hughes was reviewed with vicious candor and clarity, a face of a demon coming through the words.

Hughes, on more than one occasion, left her reeling and questioning the union that bound them. Her letters speak on her behalf:



*“Waiting for the right wonderful person is so much more important than getting the outer comforts of marriage at an early age.”*

It was evident that no one understood loneliness better than Plath. Her marriage to Hughes scarred her mind to the point where it showed in her words (*the vampire who said he was you – And drank my blood for a year*).

Her longing to be a part of something beyond this world and what it represented to her at the time: grief, frustration and chaotic existentialism, was accentuated in her letters. While her poetry could be deemed almost too horrific for the mind to comprehend, her letters are a looking glass; a glimpse into the darkening abyss that her mind was becoming:

*“My biggest trouble is that people look at me and think that no serious trouble has ever troubled my little head. They seldom realize the chaos that seethes behind my exterior. As for the Who Am I, what am I angle... that will preoccupy me till the day I die.”*

When one reads her letters, they can imagine Plath to be a delicate, dancing grain of sand trapped in an infinite hourglass. The existential crisis she battled with every waking hour of the day was evident in her words and she unknowingly let that slip in her letters:

*“But perhaps the most overlooked feature of her life was that she was human, and therefore fallible.”*

Admittance of her mistakes (*Daddy, I've had to kill you*), getting married to Hughes (*I made a model of you – a man in black with a Meinkampf look*) and then her never-ending suffering that followed, wasn't something she was afraid of. Plath wore her unbridled grief and sorrow for the world to see and resonate with.

She lived her life in an era where women were kept in the pockets of men; the rage that followed this notion is seen in her poetry, such as *Lady Lazarus*. Her empowerment pulses in every woman, encouraging them to crush the pre-established notions of propriety that often hold them back from pursuing the life of their dreams and to eat those who dare restrain them like "air".

Perhaps Plath foresaw the legacy of her life. Perhaps she took comfort in the knowledge that those who share her chaos, the kind that comes from within, would find in her words a sort of companion. In the end, she remained a memory to few, story to some and a legend to many. Her words circle the hearts of many, daring us to live freely and let the world know our own stories.

## ***Evolution of the Love Letter***

*Rumsha Rizwan (3rd Year, Morning)*

Love letters have been perhaps the most cherished form of a love confession ever since one can remember. It was the only way to communicate one's true feelings to their beloved in secrecy. The arrival of the sweetheart's scented letter would bloom the day of the one in waiting. Purest passions, thousands of dreams, promises of the moon, all enclosed in one envelope engulfing the whole world for its reader. Even in modern times, despite the existence of the internet, the very idea of getting a handwritten love note hasn't quite lost its charm yet. The writer as well as the reader feel as if they're part of a fairytale.

The love note had always been a product of the several miles between two passionate lovers. History holds a record of such figures throughout its documentation. The middle ages were never a blossoming time for love. Conformed to a theocentric society, men and women remained discreet about their affairs. It made it convenient for them to hide their true feelings to preserve chastity and holiness. A mysterious lady's letter to her lover identified as H confesses to being madly in love with him, while Mr H writes with an air of despondency about the many miles and social restraints that bar them from seeing each other without entering the folds of matrimony, which in some cases, was not an option, and his fear that he might lose her should a knight in shining armour, one that is attainable and not separated by both the physical and the metaphysical, captures her eye.

The letters, apart from the social constraints that at times made it impossible for two people in love to stay together till death do them apart, indicate the intensity, keenness and profundity of what they experienced so as to give their words such poetic flow and lucidity.

In light of the Renaissance, letter writing was perhaps the most popular genre that had cultivated itself into people's lives. The world was expanding, and letters proved to be the thread tying it together. As art and humanities began to unfold themselves and the societal drift to humanism became evident, the expressions of emotions became vivid and clear. A letter from a woman named Jane Skipwith addressed to her cousin-lover brings out the emotional correspondence and intellectual arguments between the two as she confronts him on his father's decision to marry him with a wealthy noblewoman.

From normal people to royals, these obsessive adoring writings never cease to amaze their readers. Napoleon Bonaparte when away at war wrote to his cherished wife, Josephine:

*“When I am tired of the worry of work, when I fear the outcome, when men annoy me, when I am ready to curse being alive, I put my hand on my heart; your portrait hangs there, I look at it, and love brings me perfect happiness...”*

The coming of the 18th century demanded letter writing more than ever. In such a scenario we find people who poured out their hearts on pieces of paper, staining them with the ink of affection. A certain German composer rose to fame after his demise when his treasured unsent letters addressed to an “Immortal Beloved” were found. Beethoven's letters were the highlight of the century. With his raw feelings soaking the paper, he mentions his envies, his fears, his concerns, his passions and loves, his difficulties and his ease, capturing his truest interests and most importantly the confessions to the mysterious lady.

*“Why this deep sorrow where necessity speaks — can our love endure except through sacrifices — except through not demanding everything — can you change it that you are not wholly mine, I not wholly thine?”*

The birth of the 19th century captures the famous literary romance of the Brownings, Robert and Elizabeth. Composed within sonnets these romantic notions forced them to never love anyone else. *"How do I love thee? Let me count the ways."* And it was at this time the letter turned obscene. Vivid words, layered with intimate thoughts and sexual meanings were surfacing in them. Barrett herself writes in a letter to her husband narrating her distress to tell her father about her relationship and marriage saying: *"because I understood perfectly what he meant by that. . .but now the whole sex will go down with me to the perdition of faith in any of us."* James Joyce too carried on this tradition with his wife writing, *"I see you in a hundred poses, grotesque, shameful, virginal, languorous;."* And who can forget Franz Kafka's letters to his beloved, Milena?

He writes, *"Since I love you (And I do love you, you stupid one, as the sea loves a pebble in its depths, this is just how my love engulfs you- and may I in turn be the pebble with you, if Heaven permits),"* and the reader is left enthralled and spent; in and out of the throes of this magnificent love.

The question, however, lingers at the tip of our tongues. *Is love no longer as magnificent as it once was? Or have we simply forgotten how to love?* To answer the question, one must delve into the passage of time, and how as the years progressed, the love letter took on a new form. As the passage of years went on undeterred, the love letter altered. The world took on a new, fast pace, and a letter morphed into a short text, or an image. Needless to say, a text does not really require a fourteen-line sonnet or an ode for the lover, the hastily written *'iloveyou's* have lost their true meaning by being repeated so often. Despite all the haste, the magic of the calm revives itself, and all hope is returned, in the instance when one holds a letter left by their lover in

their hands, and will forever be so; for as long as lovers live, and as long as letters are written.

## English Department's Original

### *The Truth About You*

*Aisha Idris (1st Year, Morning)*

you're not golden,  
or silver,  
or anything timeless,  
eternal,  
evergreen.  
that is not your fate,  
or your purpose.  
according to what I remember from tenth grade chemistry,  
you're more like aluminum with a protective layer of oxide over it.  
passive, but not perpetually.  
usually unreactive, until you aren't.  
shining, but not always.

time is a skilled trader, taking and giving as it wants to. and you cannot  
object. it presses down on your skin, while grief and joys and fears slip  
under and find parts of you to taint and flourish.

life does to you what acid does to metal,  
sometimes you corrode;  
bits and pieces of you chipping away:  
some fading rapidly like fireworks in the night sky,  
some gradually like dying leaves in the fall pulled away by the gentle  
breeze at last.  
on others,

it's a displacement,  
shifting and altering  
until something better emerges  
with smoother edges and greater strength.

and maybe you don't get to be neon bright,  
you don't get to keep your glow forever,  
but you're growing.  
and that is what all this room is for.



## *elephANT*

*Ayemun Imran (3rd Year, Evening)*

If I ever rise due to a thought  
And become less repellent  
I will shake hands with my rival  
And end in an instant,  
The most awaited spectacle.  
If I ever rise, I will rise against myself  
Standing on the top, I will look down  
And ask the blurred out faces  
To throw their darts at me  
And yell profanities  
And when the time comes  
Drag me on the road  
And remind me with stones:  
"What is it in you  
That we don't possess?  
A word, a voice,  
A friend's imperceptive love?

Our mute mules,  
Our illiterate goats,  
Know more about suffering  
Than your ill-fashioned thoughts  
And their bodies tremble  
With disgust and shame  
When you shape hollow,  
Unlived, fragile figures"  
Only if they could spell,  
They would unravel  
That the knives I stole  
To sharpen my tongue  
Were supposed to shear  
Their protruding woes  
If I rise, I will rise to return  
So you slash any head  
That makes your surface uneven.

## ***In the name of religion***

*Syeda Fizza Batoool Naqvi, 3rd Year, Evening*

You always tell me to not ask questions  
You ask me to never doubt religion  
For me all these ideas were just notions  
And nothing made sense, nothing had precision.

Who guides you about this religion's rule,  
Who says it's doubtless, it doesn't have queries?  
Bring that creature here from the devil's school  
And ask him, from where he got such theories.

No, I won't let these nails hurt the man again  
Nor for your peace he will die again, my child  
In those pews, I realized, when I heard amen  
This war these conflicts are only by men bribed.

# ***I fill my lips in***

*Nisha Mughees, MPhil*

I fill my lips in

Different shades, different blades

Different ways of pulling the skin

To make it perfect by breaking in

I fill and fill in,

Like plaster of Paris

Thinking the crumbling, broken skin

would get the hue of love

That shade that spreads over the city of love

That hue you get with the right amount

of lights

Just the right angle and it would

hide all the smudges

I fill my lips in

I fill my lips in

At times the layers break,  
Or puss streams out unknowingly,  
Or the well blended lips of mine  
give way to drops of agony.  
No worries! There's a powder room,  
they say, down the corridor and  
To the right  
Where all the pains are masterly concealed;

I fill my lips in  
I fill my lips in.

## ***Letter To Shakespeare***

*Syeda Dua Azim, 1st Year, Morning*

To the *Bard of Avon*,

I believe I have constructed an imaginary line somewhere along my literary years, made a neat cut the size; Shylock, would be really pleased of. It takes up my sheer love of reading and losing myself in stories and divides the many, many years worth of said practice into rather uneven parts of two: Pre- Shakespeare and Post-Shakespeare, with my always favouring the latter because, simply put, since the very moment 14-year-old me read aloud to the opening pages of ‘Merchant of Venice’, messing up the brilliancy of your Medieval English, my literary-self can be judged to have known no peace. Rightly so, I suppose, for before I became familiar with your work, I did not know that literature, as a whole, was so much more than just a subject area, having always been closest to my heart, granted, yet at the end of the day, something akin to another obstacle I had to jump my way to the next grade over; I had not the slightest bit idea that the art of literature was the way to civility, forming the very basis of culture and community – and that your mastery as the ‘Father of Literature’ extended over every such people, remaining unparalleled to this very day.

While I may not be the same impressionable teenager who proceeded to complete ‘Macbeth’, ‘The Winters Tale’ and ‘Twelfth Night’ in single sittings, not a single day goes by where I do not impart something or the other, learnt through exploring your works, to my own writing. There are elements of you in every poem, article or story I have ever composed, my appreciation for soliloquises – your classical ‘asides’- running deeper still; to the point where I am certain that yours has been the

greatest influence on not just myself, but tens of thousands of like-minded people, in finding their calling to literature - and in so artful a manner. The fact that we have such a record of the Elizabethan times so as to be constantly producing countless movies and television series based on the vivid descriptions of classes and lifestyle you have provided for us, speaks volumes about the impact you have had not only over English language, but society as a whole, be it the sixteenth century or the contemporary one.

When it is said that you remain way ahead of your time, we are not just referring to your subtle- yet remarkable! – highlights of gender-bending and the general complex nature of an individual's sexuality; but also every take you have ever had on religious clashes and celebrations, matters concerning the royals and their inheritance, the capability of women handling affairs huge and trivial, along with the more general ideas concerning the downfall of the proud and cruel- characters with a 'moral flaw' leading them to their ultimate perish- that restore our faith, time and again, in the beauty of poetic justice served like no other. Your legacy, in my eyes, is eternal and the most eloquent way I can present this thought is by taking a leaf out of your 'Sonnet 18':

"So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,  
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee."

Forever devoted,  
Syeda Duaa Azim.

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