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DEAD LETTERS

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1996-2005

When writing a letter took
more than a moment
...

And loving someone took
a lifetime
...

In our world of rampant 'individualization' relationships are mixed blessings. They vacillate between sweet dream and a nightmare, and there is no telling when one turns into the other ... In a liquid modern setting of life, relationships are perhaps the most common, acute, deeply felt and troublesome incarnations of ambivalence.

(Zygmunt Bauman,
Liquid Love,
2003/2006, p. viii)





DEADLETTERS AND BEYOND

1996

Letter never sent

Dear B—¹

My forgotten Angel, how are you? It seems so long since I've spoken to you—not that I could when I saw you at Craig's. I was simply too stunned. Your face, your presence, *your everything* just took me too far back, and I couldn't move, not outwardly anyway. God damn it, I wanted to, believe me.

I am (thankfully) only a matter of days away from completing my degree (all things going well, that is), and I now have to make some decisions concerning my future. 'A pragmatist at last,' I hear you say; well, yes, there it is. I became career-minded somewhere along the line, although I'm not sure when. My options seem to be between Honours English or a Diploma of Education, and my head tells me to get a Dip-Ed and get the fuck out of here—to England or Korea or even Tokyo. You wouldn't believe the teacher shortages in these

¹ All letters have been revised and edited. See note at end.

There is something off-putting about a nonfiction story in which the 'I' character is right and all others are wrong, the 'I' infinitely more sinned against than sinning. By showing our complicity in the world's stock of sorrow, we convince the reader of our reality and even gain his sympathy.

(Phillip Lopate, 'Writing Personal Essays: On the Necessity of Turning Oneself Into a Character', *Writing Creative Nonfiction*, 2001, p. 43)

places, especially for teachers of English as a Second Language (a course I'd major in at Sturt if I go there). I think it's nigh on time to get out of Adelaide—it's simply too close to me, too constrictive, and too small. How do you know who or what you are or could be when everyone around you has already decided for you? You can't—hence my yearning to dive into the world and quite possibly drown in it.

I still think of you, dear B. I know I shouldn't, but you're like an addiction that I can't quite shake. I won't be an imposition on you, believe me, and I hope you don't see this letter as just that, but I do regard you as fervidly as ever and can't help but maintain some sort of connection, even if it's with a 'you' that no longer exists. After all, I remember walking to school with a young B, and I hope to walk beside her again someday, just as avidly and happily as I did then ('Good God!' I hear you say). This will only happen in a dream, I'm sure.

I really hope you are happy, dear B, for if there is one thing you have taught me it is how to dream and how to live simply and independently.

Little Rastas, I'm sorry to say, is getting vis-

In the media market,
the self functions
as a commodity.

(Paul John Eakin,
'Introduction:
Mapping the Ethics
of Life Writing,'
*The Ethics of Life
Writing*,
2004, p. 14)



ibly older. It's not that he's less handsome or less playful—quite the contrary—he's as beautiful and proud and open-eyed as ever; it's just that the grey bristles on his chin grow longer, his belly grows rounder, and some of the mischievous kick has gone out of his legs. But I love him all the same and I hope he lives forever. He's all I've got.

Oh, by the way, I've enclosed the *Wordstorm* anthology with my story in it ['A Scratch in the Dark']. At long last, Bill and Jessy (and Oscar) have found a temporary home. It's not like the original—in fact, it's sadder—but it is something I dabbled in last year. After all, the real Bill and Jessy will never die: they will live with me forever.

To paraphrase Keats: *If I could kiss a sweet poison from your lips and be done with it, I would!*

Take care, dear B—

[1996]



1996/1997

Letter never sent

L■■,

I hardly know where to begin as I fear this epistle has already fallen on deaf ears. If not, I implore you to listen—I beg you! Suffice to say, *you win*. I am completely wretched and in a state of shock and despair. I guess I always hoped that after the fireworks had settled you and I would finally get it together and be completely honest with each other. I didn't think I'd lose you so quickly. I thought—so stupid of me—that we merely had to work out the limits of each other, and that we would then go on to bigger and better things. Obviously, I'm a fool.

It's funny, I now have these dreams where you and I are almost at blows. During these exchanges I usually grab you and kiss you until the fight and anger lifts from your limbs and a tranquil resolution follows. During these brief moments I am at complete peace, completely in love, and completely happy. Then I wake. And then I realise it's been a



fantastic lie—my own brain completely deceiving me—and I return to a state of utter dejection.

My dear L■■■, maybe the deception has been all my own (don't laugh), but if not—and I pray it's not—don't let go so soon. Like I tried to say on Friday night, rather hopelessly I fear, if you feel anything for me, anything at all, then fight your pride and anger, fight your need to punish me, and give me—give us!—another chance—*because I love you.*

If this is all too hilarious or repugnant to you, please spare me the embarrassment and let this final exchange die with my hopes for us. I just couldn't take another blow. Exposure would kill me. Like I said, you win—I surrender.

Take care,
A.

PS. I'll take 'no response' as meaning 'no-hope-for-us' and promise to stay well clear of you and your life. Now destroy this letter—it's for your eyes only!

[1996/1997]

The need thus exists to make oneself into a character, whether the essay uses a first- or third-person narrative voice. I would further maintain that this process of turning oneself into a character is not self-absorbed navel gazing, but rather a potential release from narcissism. It means you have achieved sufficient distance to begin to see yourself in the round: a necessary precondition to transcending the ego – or at least writing personal essays that can touch other people.

(Phillip Lopate,
*Writing Creative
Nonfiction*,
2001, p. 44)

1996/1997

Letter never sent

L■■■,

I don't know where to begin, but here goes. I'm sorry about my comments on Friday night, they were drunk and thoughtless and certainly not fair. I am, however, very disappointed with you, not so much for brushing me aside, but for simply not trying. I really don't think you gave *us* a chance—*ever*. You were upset that I told people I was seeing you, when for me, I couldn't wait to tell my friends—I was so hopeful and happy. Your preference for secrecy is understandable given the volatility of your home life, but again, I don't think you ever really let me in. I don't blame you for *my* feelings, since you maintained all along a 'no-promises' approach, but I am disappointed with you for not helping yourself. You've always said you wanted a decent man in your life, and I really wanted to be that man; but you have to return that passion and trust—at least a bit.



So, I upset you at the party. I'm sorry. I really didn't think it was as malicious as all that. I didn't set out to hurt you. I wanted to love you—so very much, in fact. At some stage you will need to let someone into your life; you can't stay a lone warrior forever. You are a very beautiful girl, L■■■, but what a waste if you don't fight for what you want and need—and I believe that's someone like *me*.

So, there, now you know why I'm distant at present. When I look at you I see what you and I have lost: *we lost each other!*

Take care,
A.

[1996/1997]



1996/1997

Letter never sent

Dear L■■■,

This is in response to the charge that men can't communicate! Here goes...

I'm terribly sorry to have grieved you with my immature despondency. I'm sorry, it was pathetic of me. You have to act in a manner that is right for you, and by no means succumb to the reckless desires of others (including mine). Whatever *is* right for you will surely become plainer as time goes by. I think it shows great courage that you've made changes in your life, even if some things are still to be resolved, and I support you in this quest. Good luck to you. I won't challenge you again, except when asked, I promise (although you may have to make some allowances for me breaking this pledge should pangs of madness overcome me, yet I'll try to remain true to my word).

Once again, I'm sorry; and remember, it's your life and only you know what's best for *you*.

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Affectionately,
A.

[1996/1997]





26 February 1997
Letter never sent

Dear L■■■,

This is probably my sixth attempt to write to you in as many months, so I hope this time I have courage enough to let one at least get through.

I've been trying for so long, dear L■■■, to support and comfort you through your struggle to find freedom and happiness. And it seems like I've loved you for just as long, hoping that one day, by some means, a miracle even, that you'd love me too; that you'd realise I was a very real and loving proposition for you. I really have struggled through this period in my life, L■■■, clinging to wisps of hope that I'd make you see me for what I could be to you—yours!

All yours!

But lately my hopes and dreams have been exposed for exactly what they are: hopes and dreams, nothing less and nothing more. So forgive me if I run, at least initially. I now know that no



matter what I do or how hard I try you will never love me as I love you. I don't blame you for this. It's just the way things are. I guess we've all been there at some stage. Nevertheless, forgive me if I run. Being so close to you simply hurts too much. It's funny, some of my happiest moments come when I'm thinking about you, whilst some of my worst moments come when I'm actually with you (realising that your heart is beyond me, and that I can't hold you or kiss you as I once did).

What is it they say: 'Life's a bitch and then you marry one'?

Well, *I wish!*

I have to find a home for this heart of mine (don't laugh), just like you do. Believe me, I wish you all the best in your search, and I hope you wish me all the best in mine.

And, of course, I'll be thinking of you,

A.

PS. I don't expect you to comment on this letter, as I know only too well that the whole Godforsaken situation is of my own making.

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PPS. Please destroy this letter after reading it!

[26 February 1997]

As strange as it may sound, all memoir is a process of researching one's own life. By that I mean rethinking, of course. I also mean reimagining and perhaps revising – because to see the past anew is often to view it, even at great distances, more clearly.

(Michael Pearson, 'Researching Your Own Life', *Writing Creative Nonfiction*, 2001, p. 45)

9 May 1999

Letter never sent

Dear C—

I know things have been a bit strained between us lately (or at least not entirely comfortable), and that you have good reason to put some distance between us. For starters, my behaviour in recent times has been nothing short of appalling. There may have been extenuating reasons behind my clinging to you so desperately, but these reasons do not excuse the way I have invaded your personal space and basically forced you to spurn me. Believe me, there are times when I wonder *whose* life I have stepped into and *whose* character I have slung over my shoulders. Like you (I guess), I want the real Andy to return so that you and I can both feel more at ease.

Dear C■■■■, I really am trying to regain a grip on myself and not torture you so much with pathetic speeches about love and romance and all that. I was so damn preoccupied with 'love' that I forgot what



it was that made you and I so special: the fun! You and I used to get on so well, physically and mentally. I guess that in the wake of Scotty's death [my brother] I tried desperately to create something more permanent between us. That was wrong! Rather than draw you in, I pushed you away. It's amazing how hindsight can bring clarity to our most absurd actions. And whilst I don't feel shame for how I feel about you, I do feel shame for the relentless manner I went about trying to smother you with such feelings. I was selfish and coercive, to say the least.

I guess I just want you to know that our friendship is bloody important to me and I never consciously meant to threaten it.

Anyway, I've enclosed a prose poem loosely based on some of the incidents that passed between us. By offering you this, I hope you understand how precious I feel about the times we shared. You will always inspire me, C■■■■, and to your memory I shall always confide even if not to your person. In fact, in my own silly way, I talk to you every day and imagine your responses—your words, your gestures, how you laugh and smile, and so on.

The other is in
 a condition of
 perpetual departure,
 of journeying;
 the other is, by
 vocation, migrant,
 fugitive; I—I
 who love, by
 converse vocation,
 am sedentary,
 motionless, at hand,
 in expectation,
 nailed to the sport,
in suspense—like
 a package in some
 forgotten corner of
 a railway station.
 Amorous absence
 functions in a
 single direction,
 expressed by the one
 who stays, never by
 the one who leaves:
 an always present *I*
 is constituted only
 by confrontation
 with an always
 absent *you*. ...

(Roland Barthes,
A Lover's Discourse,
 1977/1979, p. 13)

But enough of that. I'll leave you with this poem. It speaks of my adoration and how I wish to remember you: *as a gift*, not a burden. In short, I doubt whether anyone will ever dazzle me as much as you have.

Ever Yours, etcetera,

[9 May 1999]



Awake for ever in a
sweet unrest.

John Keats, 1819

2001

Dearest R■■■■■,

Hope you got my e-mail forewarning you of this letter. It's Thursday night and I'm penniless and staying indoors—a rarity for me as you probably know. Rained incessantly today, the first real sodden day we've had in months, but I liked it despite getting soaked while leaving work and running to the bus stop. But now it's nice and warm, it's about 7 pm, in my rundown squat with ceilings higher than most houses, with Bubby—my dog; you know her—staring up at me from the floor. She looks gorgeous, with spots of rain on her face and nose from our run to the shops to buy cigarettes just a few moments ago. That means I'm stocked up and about to bore you half to death with my ramblings. Think of it as a serial novel, an episodic madness, something you may want to read on a bleak day and return to on a bleak night—if it doesn't send you to sleep or despair in the meantime.

By the way, I liked your letter. It was curiously folded and impossible to unravel: very exciting! And I liked the pictures. And before I say another 'like', let me just say I 'enjoyed' your (to use your own words) "thinking thing"—it's what distinguishes you from other people, who remain faceless smudges on a crowded canvas. Like impressionist people.

Before I say something about what I've been doing and thinking, you'll have to let me know how long you intend to stay in London. I take it that since you have your own place you mean to be there for a while. I thought—don't kill me if I'm wrong—you were planning to work again on another cruise ship. Anyway ... What's this about wrinkled hands? *Soaking them too long? Predisposition to wrinkles? Age? A Lady Macbeth thing?*

As for my film script ... *The Ridiculous Madman* ... Nothing much going on there. Seem to have lost my creative edge lately. It's like ... it's like a character I read about in a book once ... being caught in a riptide, not a real one, but a metaphorical rip, a mental rip ... where moments from the past, my past, have snagged me, caught me, and are drag-



A commitment to a relationship that is 'meaningless in the long term' (of which *both* sides are aware!) is a two-edged sword. It makes the holding or the forfeiting of the investment a matter of your calculation and decision - but there is no reason to suppose that your partner won't wish, if need be, to exercise a similar discretion and won't be free to do so if and when she or he wishes.

(Zygmunt Bauman,
Liquid Love,
2006, p. 15)

ging me away from any kind of tangible future. Whatever it was I imagined as a child seems foggy and abstract now, like the ever-receding shoreline as I battle against the sea. Straining my eyes so hard I can no longer see anything. Not even a mirage. I just have some vague recollection, somewhere in the back of my mind, about what it was I was supposed to be or do right now. Perhaps, in fact, I'm being swept to a place I'm supposed to go, not away from it, but toward it. Who's to say? It just seems that I can no longer feel the sand between my toes, that coarse grainy sense of certainty and substance at my feet. (Hope this isn't boring you, but suddenly I feel like writing. And sometimes the easiest people to talk to are those on the other side of the globe, thousands and thousands of miles away. Up-close and personal can seem too threatening and absurd, because language and human contact don't seem quite real or satisfying, as if they lack something. I warned you this could be a tirade, or at least I implied it.) Where was I? Sand between my toes and a riptide. Nothing but water and a vanishing beach, nothing but fluidity and a sense of formlessness, drifting—hopelessly—or perhaps



hopefully—away from—or towards—something—or someone. Oscillating between extremes. Uncertain about my destination—*if I have one*. People are falling off the world all the time, you know. I like those people. They seem real to me. They have faces. You can see into their eyes, such blazing eyes, peering back at you with that sense that they know something too—something about all that stuff that goes on beneath the surface of things, camouflaged to most, but perceptible to some. Yes, I like those people. They exist in *Blade Runner* [motion picture, 1982]. I think they exist in you. But enough of that.

Perhaps, it's the eviction, this uncertainty thing. This absent sand. This floorless world. Two months and then I lose another home. When they demolish this relic and build a seaside skyscraper. It's as if I'm forever relocating—drifting, drifting—on *A Permanent Vacation* [motion picture, 1980]. There appears to be no safety left in the world, at least for me. It's just Bubby and me and my floating self—and she keeps getting out, which terrifies me. I always think she's going to get squashed under a car and leave me behind. That's what happens

Though each love
 is experienced
 as unique and
 though the subject
 rejects the notion
 of repeating it
 elsewhere later
 on, he sometimes
 discovers in himself
 a kind of diffusion
 of amorous desire;
 he then realizes he
 is doomed to wander
 until he dies, from
 love to love.

(Roland Barthes,
A Lover's Discourse,
 1977/1979, p. 101)

when you've feasted on death: you begin to think it stalks and mocks you. It's awful.

I'm being a bit morbid, I know. Sorry. Must be the bleak weather and boredom. Too much time to think. To be.

I should be drunk. That's probably why I hide there all the time, comfortably numb in mindlessness, kind of dead in life, momentarily devoid of consciousness and the flood of images and feelings. *God help me*, sings Redgum, *I was only nineteen* ['A Walk in the Light Green', 1983]. But I'm *not* 19.

I'm 31—and homeless.

Hey, what did you think of that line from the poem I put in your last e-mail? *Somewhere someone is travelling furiously toward you* ... I discovered that when I was doing Honours and needed something about 'hope' and people finding each other. How 'love' and 'connection' just appear, out of nowhere, and people who were up until a moment ago wretched and despairing suddenly find themselves so far removed from the pain and suffering of the past that they no longer recognise themselves. It's beautiful. Perhaps I'll e-mail the whole poem to you. It's called 'At North Farm' [by



John Ashbery].

The dog's licking my foot under the table. It's reassuring. Anyway, I might go and watch *The X-Files* now. Haven't seen it in a while, but the ad looked interesting. Scully was passionately searching for Mulder. It looked romantic in a very sad kind of way. I hope she finds him. *But will she recognise him when she finds him? Recognise the gift he has for her?*

Take care, sweetie-pie. Don't let any of those encroaching cranes pick you up and carry you away. Until next time,

With kisses and dreams,
Andy
xxoo

[2001]



The Unsent Letter

The preservation of the unsent letter is its arresting feature. Neither the writing nor the sending is remarkable (we often make drafts of letters and discard them), but the gesture of keeping the message when we have no intention of sending it. By saving the letter, we are in some sense 'sending' it after all. We are not relinquishing our idea or dismissing it as foolish or unworthy (as we do when we tear up a letter); on the contrary, we are giving it an extra vote of confidence. We are, in effect, saying that our idea is too precious to be entrusted to the gaze of the actual addressee, who may not grasp its worth, so we 'send' it to his equivalent in fantasy, on whom we can absolutely count for an understanding and appreciative reading.

(Janet Malcolm, as cited in Slavoj Žižek,
How to Read Lacan,
2006, pp. 10-11)



22 July 2003
Letter sent

Dear M■■■■,

Just writing to clear my head of everything we discussed the other day. Somewhat stunned and disappointed at the time, I didn't really get a chance to consider the implications of what was being said and my attitudes towards it. Even still, I know this letter is probably quite beside the point and you needn't reply. After all, I know where you stand on these matters and absolutely respect you and your position. That respect won't change, so don't think I write out of spite or resentment. Far from it. I think of you as highly now as ever.

I guess I need to give my reply as a final acceptance of a situation I still find unbearable, illogical, and particularly painful. I'm sure this will continue for some time yet, but I pray otherwise.

Perhaps I'm suffering from chronic delusion, for Lord knows my life has been one long and agonising delusion, but I feel compelled to respect-

How to begin again?
How to recover the
knack of swimming
smoothly from one
minute to the next,
to keep on fitting
each new day into
the puzzle the way
everyone else does
without thinking?

(Janette Turner
Hospital,
Charades,
1989,
p. 37)

fully *disagree* with the tenet that two alcoholics cannot build a loving and sustainable long-term (life-long) relationship. By and large I'm sure that most alcoholic couples run into grief in no time at all, and often with catastrophic results. I do accept this. However, such is the case with 'normal' (non-alcoholic) people too, particularly when such relationships are based, as you rightfully point out, on lust and other such short-term indulgences. I wonder, however, what the odds are for two alcoholics who base their relationship on love, friendship, respect, mutual affection, and a day-at-a-time program committed to long-term mental, physical, and spiritual health? I wonder. I'm sure such a relationship could and would succeed if both parties worked equally hard to ensure it did—as much chance in fact as two 'normal' people committed to such a relationship. *All* relationships are vulnerable if not built on a reciprocal commitment between two like-minded individuals, whether formed between 'normal' people, alcoholics, drug addicts, or some other subset of people. At the end of the day I think it has more to do with the people involved and their capacity to work together than



the nature of their diseases. I therefore think such a bond, whilst unlikely to succeed when viewed statistically, is achievable if both parties believe in themselves and each other.

Love, in the end, conquers all.

The greatest miracle I have witnessed in recovery is that of a ‘higher power’ arresting my alcoholism, and that of similar miracles helping others, including yourself. If the grace and love of God (to use the AA jargon) can achieve this, then the love of God can easily ensure two alcoholics love and nurture each other—*if that's God's will*.

It's a big *if* (but not *that* big).

Hopefully, you're not grinding your teeth by now with contempt, but I do believe this. I can only imagine that in reality you do not share my optimism because you do not feel the same about me as I do you, which is understandable. It is very rare for two people to feel as strongly about each other as all that. And that, I'm sad to say, is something no amount of work can fix. I suspect this is the ultimate reality here and will retreat knowing full well the futility of a *one-sided* attraction. Such an attraction cannot, I guess, be God's will—unless

God is a sadist!

One rather sombre thing occurred to me after you rode into the sunset the other day. I had said I couldn't understand how the majority of people could settle for second best in matters of the heart. I now have some insight into this terrible plight. Having met you after all these years of looking—and believe me I've looked—I'm loath to admit that the proverbial bar has been raised by your appearance in my life, and now fear that a more astounding miracle will need to occur for me to avoid this plight myself. But alas, I have witnessed many miracles in recent days, so I shouldn't despair just yet, if ever.

I really do hope a man comes along a thousand times more worthy than me and sweeps you off your feet and into a loving and fulfilling future. I wish it was me, God knows!

A.

[22 July 2003]





14 February 2005
Letter sent

My dear, sweet, beautiful N[REDACTED],

It goes without saying that I love you. I know this scares you and makes you feel uncomfortable, and that saddens me. My love wasn't meant to entomb you, but I guess that's what it's done. This reflects on me—not you.

I am still learning to walk, it seems. To embrace someone isn't to strangle them, is it? And a gift given isn't a vow.

My heart has always told me that love is the only emotion that *really* matters, and that when you feel it you show it. In the past I was incapable of showing my true feelings, but today I can. But just because I feel this way doesn't mean you do too. Whatever the case, the love I'm offering you has scared you, and I'm sorry about that. Perhaps, among other things, you fear rejection: that if you accept my love you expose yourself to future abandonment and heartache. If this is true then I



understand your fear. For I have felt it too. It seems to me that this type of fear isn't a fear of failure and loss, but a fear of success and gain. It's the fear of actually living the dream. Of winning!

I know this terrifies me. I've spent my whole life dreaming about the perfect future while behaving in such a way as to sabotage that future.

Life, I believe, is for *loving*. What else is there? Only love can bring the peace and stability I long for. All the other stuff is just ego-stuff, and anything to do with the ego is ultimately pain-producing. Its hunger is the hunger of generations.

Recently you suggested that my love for you was a sign of insanity and sickness. It is understandable that you would think this in a world addicted to hatred and betrayal. You have only ever experienced *the absence of love* by people you so desperately sought love from. Love isn't insanity, ~~Ni~~, it is sanity!

And I am *sane* because I choose to love you, whether others have or not. Nor should I be punished because others have failed to live up to your expectations of love. Where others have failed I mean to succeed. For I do not fear success and I



do not fear gain. For I am a 'warrior of light' [Paulo Coelho, *Manual of the Warrior of Light*, 2002] and warriors of light feel no shame in loving. And I will not feel shame for loving you.

I thank you with all my heart for the gifts you have given me. It has been a tug-of-war at times, but I have learned a lot about myself in this struggle. My ego has wanted to attack you on many occasions, particularly when I have felt attacked by you. But thankfully I have never abused you or floundered off the handle. I have always loved you despite the things you have said to me, because I know I am complicit in the pain I feel, and that many of the things you say you don't mean. I love you for this. You have shown me that it is possible to love in the face of crippling pain and verbal chaos. This has amazed me. The 'old' me would have gone mad with rage. I don't want to feel rage for you, N■■■■. I want to love you.

Some of the things you said recently hurt me. You said I was too serious and emotional to have a relationship with. Believe it or not, that's a compliment! Other girls have begged me to be emotional and serious. The usual accusation is that I have no



emotions and that I think life is a giant party and a colossal joke. So, I'm glad that I'm emotionally available and emotionally sensitive today. I like me for being able to love and empathise with others, particularly you. It fills me with joy that I can love you at all. I feel this *is* sanity. This *is* growth. As for being too serious, I respond to the situation at hand. You are often sullen and unhappy when I'm with you, so I act appropriately. I do my best to go with your moods. And I have always supported you no matter what; and I have always gone to you when you have called.

Would you remain in this situation if you were me?

Then there's the thing about you wanting to fuck other people. I appreciate your honesty, if nothing else. That's your choice. But it's a big choice. Let's face it—it throws mud in the face of my love for you, however gently you articulate it. How would you feel if you were me? I guess I have to accept what *is*, and let it go. But I do have to ask myself some painful questions: namely, do I want to expose myself to this kind of pain? Can I be around someone who treats me so recklessly? Can I stand idly



Is there anybody out
there?

Pink Floyd

by while the woman I love pursues other people? Answer: of course not. You couldn't either, let's face it. This would hurt anyone worth anything. And I am worth everything!

I love you enough to let you go and explore your new freedoms, and good luck to you! I hope you find what you're looking for. I hope you have fun. But I also have to respect my own feelings. So, here's the thing: I'm choosing to honour both our choices. I respect you and your decision, and love you for being you. You are free and you are beautiful in your freedom, and I think you radiate beauty from the inside out. I am also going to love and protect 'me' and remove myself from this mad situation. *This is the only sane choice for me, N[REDACTED].* Either you love me or you don't. There is no right or wrong feeling here. It is what it is. And clearly after all these months you haven't found 'that' kind of love for me, or else you wouldn't feel the need to look elsewhere—you certainly wouldn't be planning an interstate rendezvous with another man, *not while I was here!*

I just couldn't do that to you, N[REDACTED], and it surprises me that you can do this to me. It's an obvious



display of our relative feelings for each other, and that's okay. I accept the fact that you are not in a position to return my feelings, *and nor should you while you are still finding your feet in a sober world.* Life is for living and you have only just discovered life.

Regardless of everything, N█████, and no matter where you are in the world or what you are doing, I am putting my love out into the universe for you.

I think this is my way of letting you go. I release you with love.

Now fly...

[14 February 2005]



A NIGHT AT . . .

2005

Poem sent to N—

...

a nigh t at N■■■■'s

a nigh t at N■■■■'s

...

...

the bird just ate the bug

the cat just ate the b ird

and N■■■■ and i are drinking coke

in Her backyard

birds and bugs everywhere

at twilight t

beaks clap-ping and snap-ping

insects

tw2o cats on the wreck of a car

tossing tails

watching

preying

and N■■■■ and i smoke cigarettes

chatting

laughing

and playing

on Her wooden seats



bought only days ago
 in the warm night
 in spring
 birds swoop-ing
 circling
 snap-ping
 and flap-ping
 tw2o cats on the roof of a car wreck
 watching and waiting and preying
 and N■■■■ and i speak of things
 within the frenzy
 quieter things
 until She is startled by a bir d
 near Her-face—
 a shadow
 wings swish-ing
 flap-ping
 and retreating
 and N■■■■ screams and flees inside
 and the feeding goes on
 without Her
 ...
 puss has a bird—
 it squeal s
 dying



AHOOOOOOO---

Sapphire

and N■■■■ is alarmed by the murder r
 She would prefer it to live
 but the bird is dragged awa y
 s-creaming and s-quawking
 under the wreck
 through the longgrasses
 beneath the rusted gate
 as i follow it
 and give up
 and N■■■■ and i shut the door
 on the frenzy
 on the wildflowers
 on death
 and go to dinner
 to eat pizza
 to live
 ...
 but something tells me
 She would still prefer
 to die
 that She hasn't seen the beauty
 all around-Her-
 the eternity of the momen t
 is lost onHer
 perhaps She will tomorrow see



the miracle
and yesterday
will stop destroying 2day
and tomorrow will be welcomed *if it comes*
for kisses at midnight
are as sweet as those
at dawn
for every moment
holds eternity
and eternity holds us all
in thrall
but I miss that
moment
most
N[REDACTED]
...
...

by Andrew Miller

The Politics of Revising Old Love Letters: Negotiations

Censoring One Self to Satisfy Another Self

Storytelling must be done with sensitivity and concern both for the stories themselves and even more for the persons, for the human beings, whose stories these are.

(Claudia Mills, 'Friendship, Fiction, and Memoir,' in P.J. Eakin (Ed.), *The Ethics of Life Writing*, 2004, p. 114)

For me, there is a high *cringe*-factor when reading these old love letters. To make it possible to share them with you I had to negotiate between the needs and interests of the past and present. *I had to edit the letters to include them here.* If this 'pollutes' the original artefacts and makes them less memoir and more 'true-fiction' or 'hyper-creative-nonfiction,' so be it. Ultimately, I had to honour my current needs and interests and limit my self-sabotaging and masochistic tendencies in order to bare my soul. On a scale from 1 to 10 the cringe-factor for the letters *as they stand* remains at about 8. The cringe-factor for the letters in their *raw* state was

more like 11. And that was cringe enough without increasing the cringe-factor by sharing them with you. This seems more in keeping with a healthy type of *disclosure* than a reckless and self-defeating *humiliation*. I have hurt myself enough.

The letters do retain much of their original content and style even if editing and revision has condensed and refined them. So, whilst the letters have been 'fictionalised' to improve readability and to minimise the cringe-factor, they remain 'true' in spirit to the originals. I have done this to protect my needs and those of would-be recipients. I have endeavoured to be fearless without being sadistic.

What is curious to me is why I kept the letters in the first place. I must have wanted a future 'self' (me today) to read and acknowledge them. And today I have. For the first time ever I have seen the letters side-by-side. For me, this provides a disturbing—and touching—time-lapse picture of an earlier incarnation of self. I have caught a glimpse of myself evolving in a textual mirror—an *un*-posed glimpse—peering back from behind a jilted register and pompous conceit. The letters do retain the integrity of that *self-seeing* but in such a way as to

make it possible to share today. In fact, the time may have come to burn the originals and be done with it.

This puts me in a duplicitous position. I am trying to be true and fair to multiple 'selves' and multiple agendas simultaneously: to 'earlier selves' and *their* words and feelings, and a 'later self' and *his* words and feelings. Several authors have therefore contributed to these letters. Both earlier and later selves have compromised in this transaction—a *transculturation* of sorts across time and space. Earlier selves sent the letters and an older self received them. The earlier selves have suffered the editorial brutality of an older self editing the prose to a level acceptable to him; but they sent them knowing this would—and *could*—occur. The older self has left much of the original pain and prose intact to honour the emotional and intellectual experiences of earlier selves, but not to the point of *dishonouring* his current needs and interests (such as risking stigmatisation through publication).

Publication of the letters side-by-side does collapse the time and distance between each piece and make the various writers look like lovelorn Rome-

os while the collective self looks more like a serial playboy. The simple act of collating the letters *side-by-side* changes them. It fictionalises the letters by permitting readers to read one *against* the other (something the various authors weren't privy to at the time). Two different types of self emerge. Individually, the letters say one thing; together, they say another. Even a 'true' memoir contains this lie. The cringe-factor for the older self is still considerable—but not *unbearable*. A workable compromise has been met; one that all sides of the cubist self can abide.

What remains unclear is whether the letters have wronged the people they address. Every effort has been made to protect individual identities. The addressees themselves may speculate as to whether they were the intended recipients (should they ever read the text), but few people outside the text could make such a distinction. Those who have received letters from me—and kept them—may find the letters presented here sufficiently altered to distance them from the text. For them, it may well be like reading *someone else's* letter.

What remains, then, is a series of letters which

reflect a type of stylised or sanitised ‘truth’—a truth mediated through multiple authors and multiple needs and interests. In fact, I don’t think the unsent letters were meant for the ‘named’ (now censored) addressees. I think they were intended for the ‘me’ who wrote them. It was a therapeutic conversation *with* the self—and *by* the self—as a means of naming and articulating *his* feelings and experiences rather than actually communicating with the women in question. In this sense many of the letters acted as ‘proxies’ in the absence of the women themselves. *He’s talking to himself*. And now I’m talking to him (and you).

Each letter is a ‘technology of self’—a means of making sense of the world (textualising) and making sense of the self (identity formation). He was (and is) writing the ‘self’ into being—one fashioned from a university education and a semi-pompous literary conceit. The letters were a means of surviving and negotiating the world through the only technology he had: pen and paper (aka, *narrative inquiry*).

Today, the love letters (if that’s what they are) continue this work, but for *contemporary* mean-

ing-making purposes. I am still trying to make sense of my ‘self’ and my world through narrative inquiry (semiosis). The *re*-writing and *re*-imagining and *re*-stylising of old documents is an extension of this exercise—but not to the point of completely mutilating or erasing the original artefacts. The texts that emerge are the products of multiple authors, multiple audiences, multiple contexts, and multiple purposes. They are ‘hyper-real’ letters: more-real-than-real because of their *re*-vision and *re*-presentation. What’s more, by taking them out of their original contexts (single A4 pages, handwritten or typed) and placing them in this highly stylised format, they are made to speak *to* and *against* a range of other signifying practices (including themselves): colours, images, quotations, backgrounds, formats, fonts, etc. They have transcended their original frames and become something else: *picto-ideo-phonographic* texts that combine visual and verbal elements to create multilayered screens. They have joined the carnival of texts that inhabit my pages (or e-pages). This process has fictionalised and stylised the letters and turned them into something other than what they

I am caught in this
 contradiction:
 on the one hand,
 I believe I know
 the other better
 than anyone and
 triumphantly assert
 my knowledge to
 the other ('I know
 you—I'm you!'); and
 on the other hand,
 I am often struck
 by the obvious fact
 that the other
 is impenetrable,
 intractable, not to
 be found; I cannot
 open up the other,
 trace back the
 other's origins,
 solve the riddle.
 Where does the other
 come from? Who is
 the other? I wear
 myself out, I shall
 never know.

(Roland Barthes,
A Lover's Discourse,
 1977/1979, p. 134)

were. So, even if they hadn't been edited they were destined to become fictional artefacts (or art[e]facts) through recontextualisation. They have been resurrected from the abyss of history—and *beautified!*

If anything, rather than lose narrative-truth, they have gained narrative-truth through the palimpsestic process. *They are more meaningful now than when they begun.*

So, fiction is a choice for story sharing that provides more protection for those whose stories are told. That said, the strength of memoir is precisely its claim of literal truth. ... Moreover, memoir is arguably more direct and honest as a choice here than fiction, which can involve deliberate distortions of someone's life presented as thinly disguised fictionalization, and which lacks memoir's accountability, its public declaration that it offers at least an attempt at the truth.

(Claudia Mills, 'Friendship, Fiction, and Memoir,' in P.J. Eakin (Ed.), *The Ethics of Life Writing*, 2004, p. 116)



All love is tinged with the anthropophagic urge. All lovers want to smother, extirpate and cleanse the vexing, irritating alterity that separates them from the beloved ...

(Zygmunt Bauman,
Liquid Love,
2003/2006, p. 17)

