EPISTOLARY ARCHAEOLOGY:
PIECING TOGETHER “THE SELF” IN VICTORIAN-AMERICAN LOVE LETTERS

by

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APPROVAL

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January 2009
DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my great-great grandparents, Grace Cornelia Lynde and Montgomery Meigs. Had their epistolary courtship of 1875-1876 not led to a fruitful marital union resulting in the birth of six daughters, I would not be here to write about them all today.

I also dedicate this work to my great-grandmother, Mary Meigs Atwater, the oldest of six; her daughter, Elizabeth Joan Rodgers Atwater Biehl; and my father, Donald Montgomery Biehl.
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Epistolary Archaeology: Piecing Together “The Self” in Victorian-American Love Letters is a thesis resulting from four years of extensive research, transcription, editing, and writing about the question of authorial identity in post-Civil War life writings, particularly love letters. Epistolary Studies first became interesting to me in July of 2005 while I was researching a family-related collection of documents being housed at Dartmouth College’s Rauner Special Collections Library. During this week of sifting through 30 boxes of my family’s military, publishing, and teaching careers going back to pre-Civil War American times, I uncovered a collection of 142 love letters written from my great-great grandfather, Montgomery Meigs, to my great-great grandmother, Grace Cornelia Lynde, during their trans-Atlantic epistolary courtship of 1875-1876. From this project, I have gained a better understanding of how men and women communicated with one another romantically through letter writing in the Victorian American time period, post-Civil War. A conclusion that I came to through my research methods and applied theories is that the question of authorial authenticity becomes even more complicated when attempting to analyze life writings such as love letters because of the public practices and constraints placed upon writers who attempt to create a private intimate space through letters to one another. However, one can gain a better understanding of life writing authorial identity and can make a more educated assumption of what a writer’s personality may have been like by piecing together contextual clues through extensive research. The process of what I call Epistolary Archaeology is shown in practice throughout the following thesis.
EPIGRAPH

Sir, more than kisses, letters mingle souls;
for, thus friends absent speak.

~John Donne
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Prefatory Letter

My Dear Readers:

Since this thesis is one dedicated to the art of epistolary practices and the “self,” I find it fitting to address you, my reading audience, in the form of a letter in hopes of conveying personal aspects of why I chose this particular vein of research.

This project’s story goes back to one day in 2004, when I was asking my parents some family history questions I had about the Meigs branch of my family tree, and when I didn’t acquire the answers I wanted, I decided to type in a name – Cornelia Meigs, my paternal great-great aunt - into the Google search engine to see what I’d get. To my astonishment, quite a bit of online information came up, including an online catalogue of Cornelia Lynde Meigs’s papers (30 boxes in total), which are currently housed at Dartmouth College’s Rauner Special Collections Library in New Hampshire.

Though I knew Cornelia was published, I had no idea that she was as prolific, well-loved, and talented of a writer, publishing several children’s adventure books, short stories, and plays from 1913 (her first book being The Kingdom of the Winding Road, a collection of fairy tales) until her death in 1973. For her prolific writing efforts, she won three Newberry Honor Medals for Windy Hill in 1922, Clearing Weather in 1928, and Swift Rivers in 1933; she was also awarded the Newberry Medal in 1934, for her

Cornelia was one of six daughters born to Montgomery and Grace Lynde Meigs, was educated at Bryn Mawr College, (obtaining her AB in 1908) and taught English at her alma mater starting as a composition instructor in 1932, soon after becoming a professor, and eventual professor emeritus. She retired from teaching in 1950 but did not stop writing. In 1956 she wrote a book about her alma mater entitled *What Makes a College?: A History of Bryn Mawr*; in 1957, she published the children’s book, *Wild Geese Flying*; and in 1972, the year before her death, she published the play, *Helga and the White Peacock*.

Upon her death in 1973, one of Cornelia’s relatives donated all of her papers to Dartmouth because she had never married and because of her influential work as an award-winning writer, teacher, and woman of independence in early 20th Century America. Among these 30 boxes of papers, including book manuscripts, lecture notes, and bank statements, I found numerous letters, and not just letters written with Cornelia as the writer or recipient.

Since she was the only one of six daughters to not marry, Cornelia was either duty-bound or chose to take care of their father, Montgomery, until his death in 1931; therefore, many of Montgomery’s letters came into Cornelia’s possession, including a collection of love letters he had written to his then fiancé, Grace Lynde, during their long-distance courtship of 1875-1876. These letters struck me as compelling, both in their pristine
preserved state and in their content, and thus began my thesis project surrounding these lovely artifacts of late 19th Century Americana.

The Meigs family history is one of American historical significance, and in order to fully understand the importance of Montgomery’s love letters to Grace during this time period, we need to look at the context of the family that surrounds their existence. Between 1875-1876, Montgomery was traveling abroad in Europe with his family because his father, Brigadier General Montgomery Cunningham Meigs, was assigned to inspect the functions of European militaries and governments, particularly that of what was then considered Prussia.

The General (1816-1892), as I have come to refer him for simplification purposes, was a key player for the North during the Civil War and was in charge of dispersing supplies to soldiers stationed at various military forts. Meigs did so in such an efficient manner that it has been said that without his supervision of this important task, the North may not have won the Civil War. During the war, “[he] became active in the outfitting of ambulance trains, the supervision of temporary barracks construction, coal purchases, and special refitting and re-supplying of exhausted veteran forces” as well as supervising the “employment of many women workers, a landmark in American history” (Hattaway and Jones 139). Meigs, though a standout at West Point in other forms of performance, was also a brilliant engineer by trade and contributed to the design of the Capital building’s dome, designed the Pension Building and aqueduct system of Washington D.C, and also was the diplomat who suggested that Arlington cemetery be created in its current location.
General Montgomery C. Meigs (Photos Courtesy of Mary A. Biehl’s Family Papers)

The General married Louisa Rodgers, a daughter of Commodore John Rodgers⁴, and together they had four children who survived infancy, Montgomery being the second oldest, John Rodgers Meigs being the oldest who was a soldier during the Civil War and was killed in action. Montgomery’s other siblings were sisters, Mary and Louisa.

Due to a childhood bout of polio, one of Montgomery’s legs was shorter than the other, which kept him from studying at West Point and serving in the military as his brother and father had. Instead, he went to college to be trained as a civil engineer, and when he was a young man of 22 years, he used his skill to contribute to the expansion of the Northern Pacific Railroad through the territories that are now known as North Dakota and Montana. Montgomery wrote several letters to his family during his stint with the railroad between 1870-1873, and unbeknownst to me until very recently, these particular letters were actually the subject matter for my Grandmother’s Master’s thesis in History, which she obtained in 1937 from the University of Montana.

⁴ Commodore John Rodgers (1772-1838) – served in the U.S. Navy from its organization through the late 1830s. His service included the War of 1812 and the naval Quasi-War with France from 1798-1800.
Montgomery met Grace Lynde in 1875 in a Rock Island reading club, most probably around the time of February 27th (Montgomery’s birthday), as he later makes reference to the night of his birthday being early on in their friendship:

“That night at Mrs. Hoffman’s which you speak of was my birthday night, as you recollect perhaps, and who knows that that little circumstance and the conversation we had on the subject may not have been the key to the whole of our future happiness” (Letter 16).

Also, his correspondence to her began in May of 1875, when his address to her was the somewhat formal, “Miss Lynde,” which would eventually transition into the more familiar, “My Dear Grace” as the epistolary relationship progressed. Grace was the daughter of Cornelius Lynde, a prosperous bank owner in Rock Island, Illinois and was socially acquainted with the Macomb family, which consisted of Montgomery’s Aunt Minerva “Nannie” Rodgers Macomb (his mother’s sister) and her children.

Grace appears to have been a devout Episcopalian young woman of the Rock Island community, and is described in their wedding announcement of January 3, 1877 as being, “supreme in youth and loveliness” and that “[h]er virtues and accomplishments are such that all who have the good fortune to know her think of her with respect and affection.” After their marriage in early 1877, they set up “housekeeping” at 1309 N. Street in Washington, D.C. nearly directly opposite the residence of General Meigs and his wife, Louisa Rodgers Meigs. Eventually, the couple would settle in Keokuk, Iowa, where Montgomery would be employed in the construction of the bridge to cross the Mississippi River in that area.

Though the cause of her death is uncertain, we may assume that having six daughters took its toll on her body and health, because on September 2, 1894, Grace
passed away at her home in Keokuk at the young age of 36, her oldest daughter Mary being fifteen years old at the time and studying abroad in Europe. The cause of her death is unknown. According to my Grandmother Betty’s thesis (1936) introduction, after Grace’s death, Montgomery was left the powerful responsibility of raising six young girls as the only parent; however, he had quite a bit of help from female governesses, servants, family, and friends. In some instances, there were no less “than twenty females under one roof” which, according to Betty, signifies that “he must have been a fairly good-natured and patient man” (Atwater).

Montgomery, though in need of female familial support (whether it was requested by or offered to him), had specific ideas about how his daughters would be educated. All but one daughter (my great-grandmother, Mary Meigs Atwater, who chose to continue her education by studying art in Paris, France) was educated at the private women’s college, Bryn Mawr of Pennsylvania. After Grace’s death, Montgomery instilled in his daughters the power of letter-writing and taught them to carry on the tradition to sit down with pen and paper every Sunday evening and write a letter home to let whomever there know someone far away was sending their love. Montgomery saved all of the letters his daughters and grand-children wrote to him until his death in 1931, going so far as to circulate letters amongst the daughters, proving that his views on the importance of epistolary communication amongst families passed down through the generations.

Based upon assumptions we can make from reading these letters, the marriage of Montgomery and Grace was one of love and adoration, but was short-lived due to her untimely death after only seventeen years of marriage. Montgomery would live until
1931, and passed away at the age of 84. The success of this particular epistolary courtship led to the birth of six dark-haired girls, taking after their mother’s looks, who grew into well-educated women – Mary, Louisa, Grace, Alice, Cornelia, and Emily Frances – each having remarkable stories all their own.

As remarkable as personal stories can be to a nostalgic reader, one should be mindful that self-writings are fraught with interpretive complications – they can be authentic, fictionalized, or a combination of both; private, meant to be perused by a public eye, or understood that the letter may be viewed by familial members other than the intended reader. My role as editor of these letters is one that complicates the writer-reader dialectic of this collection and invades a private space, especially through the acts of discovery, reading, transcription and editing processes, by transforming a private correspondence into one that is public. Where does one draw the line between being a scholar and being invasive into private lives and communication?

While researching at Dartmouth in July of 2005, the head research librarian informed me that I was the first scholar to look at the Cornelia Lynde Meigs Papers since its donation and cataloguing process of 1980, and how fitting it was for a relative to uncover such treasures. At the time, I had no comprehension of the importance of the 30 boxes of materials. Four years later, after many hours of transcription, theorizing, and reflecting upon this epistolary courtship, I can say from a critically distant perspective that this collection is significant to a contemporary reader because love letters are not the standard as they once were, and we can learn so much from those that came before us.

I Remain Sincerely Yours,        Mary Biehl
Theoretical Framework

My introductory letter was intentional in its style, subject matter, and purpose in greeting the reader, welcoming him or her into the middle of a complicated conversation concerning the blending of life, writing, and the spaces where readers and writers exist, particularly in relation to the topic of historical epistolary studies. The context of the particular collection of letters I will be analyzing throughout this thesis is dense, and the information given is made of histories interpreted through the readings of numerous primary and secondary sources located in archives, historical societies, and libraries around the country. The following thesis is informed by pieces of information, or textual clues, compiled throughout my extensive research of the Victorian-American time period, epistolary studies traditions, and the familial context surrounding the collection of letters discussed.

A term that comes to mind when practicing this style of literary analysis is Jacques Derrida’s *Bricolage*, which stems from the French term *bricoleur*, meaning a “jack-of-all trades” who puts things together out of bits and pieces. A *bricoleur* uses the means and instruments at hand, those which are already there, “which had not been especially conceived with an eye to the operation for which they are to be used and to which one tries by trial and error to adapt them, not hesitating to change them whenever it appears necessary, or to try several of them at once, even if their origin and form are heterogeneous” (Derrida 878). In this project, as a *bricoleur*, I take the interdisciplinary instruments of knowledge at hand – histories, theories, and first-hand accounts – to attempt an interpretation of epistolary authorial identity.
As suggested by the French Structuralist, Michele Foucault, in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, we critics can use our knowledge of *bricolage* to help us critique “hegemonic historiography” and euro-centered historicism by piecing together individual authorial identity through the various clues we uncover through extensive research. We can attempt to better understand a historical “self” more by studying various histories and pulling them together in what Foucault calls “archaeology of knowledge.” According to Foucault, archaeology does not seek to reconstitute the "truth" of history but how any period is made up of a series of discourses: "It is not a return to the innermost secret of the origin; it is the systematic description of a discourse-object" (140).

Also, instead of presenting a monolithic account of any given period, Foucault argues that we must reveal how any given period reveals "several pasts, several forms of connexion, several hierarchies of importance, several networks of determination, several teleologies, for one and the same science, as its present undergoes change: thus historical descriptions are necessarily ordered by the present state of knowledge, they increase with every transformation and never cease, in turn, to break with themselves" (5).

There are diverse approaches to textually studying history and culture, which often become lumped together under the category of "new historicism.” New Historicists are researchers concerned with recovering lost histories through life writings and in exploring systems of repression and subjugation suggested within these texts. The multitude of historical and cultural studies that have appeared since the early 1990s, including Cultural Studies, makes the separation of New Historicist critics complicated. The key difference between these two literary schools is that New Historicists tend to gravitate their studies
towards those at the top of social hierarchies (i.e. the monarchy, the church, the upper-classes) while Cultural Materialists focus their interest at the bottom of the social hierarchy (the lower-classes, women, and other marginalized peoples). Also, though each of these schools practices different kinds of history, New Historicists utilize sources of political science and anthropology given their interest in governments, institutions, and culture, while Cultural Materialists look to economics and sociology because of their interest in class, economics, and commodification.

Therefore, for a literary critic, it is important to discover for oneself how he or she will approach texts, and as discussed more fully in the introduction, I happily label myself as a Feminist Post-Structuralist Cultural Historian asking questions about contextual identity and sexuality from a marginal space of optimism and curiosity.

In Chapter Two, I will be introducing the characters of this epistolary courtship and stressing the importance of understanding the surrounding contextual clues that influence natural and constructed identities expressed within the letters. It is my opinion that with the added knowledge of context, we can make more fully educated assumptions regarding the question of authorial identity in life writings.

In Chapter Three, I will be taking the contextual information given in Chapter Two to practice an analysis of a few chosen letters from the collection to show how Montgomery’s authorial identity and persona as a lover blend together to create a questionable “self.” Also, within this chapter, I will show how Montgomery paints Grace the way he chooses to see her, through his words in response to her, since we readers do not have her own words to interpret. The conclusion that I come to through this means of
authorial identity analysis is that our readings of these letters, though based on contextual and factual information, can merely be assumptions; however, with the aid of extensive research, we may be able to piece together a more educated assumption as to what made these individuals’ “selves” unique within a broad descriptive umbrella of time – the Victorian American time period – based on the personal stories the world-traveling Montgomery weaves to his beloved Grace.
CHAPTER TWO

THE PLAYERS AND SETTING OF AN EPISTOLARY COURTSHIP

Comprehending Contextual Clues

Historical descriptions are ordered by the present state of knowledge through the contemporary process of *bricolage*, as described in the Introduction. Based on this ideology of piecing together a “self” through various histories, how can we apply this theory of knowledge archaeology to the identity of Montgomery Meigs?

We may never fully understand what his true personality was like, but there are a number of contextual clues that we are given from various primary and secondary perspectives that help us – as a contemporary audience – piece together an interpretation of our own. One such perspective is that of my grandmother, Elizabeth “Betty” Atwater Biehl, who had been acquainted with her grandfather, Montgomery, in her youth. In her own History Master’s thesis of 1936, she stated that she “ha[d] been told that [her grandfather] was handsome, though a little stout, and was quite the ladies’ man. He was also well grounded in engineering, and possessed of qualities of leadership, an excellent brain, and an agile comprehension. Of his vices, if any, I have heard nothing” (Atwater).

She had also noted in her thesis of 1936 that in Montgomery’s older years, when she knew him, he was a “portly old gentleman with a bald head, rosy cheeks, twinkling eyes and a walrus moustache. His sense of humor was magnificent, and his temper, except for a ‘before-breakfast grouch,’ admirable. He was the most vigorous and alive man for his age I have ever seen” (Atwater). Also from this thesis introduction, it is stated
Montgomery was educated for 2 years at Lawrence Scientific School at Harvard and 2 years at the Polytechnic School in Stuttgart, Germany, from which he returned to the U.S. in 1869. From 1870-1873, he worked as a Surveyor for the Northern Pacific Railroad on a crew personally escorted through “Indian Territory” by General Custer’s cavalry. Upon completion of his tasks for the railroad, Montgomery returned to Washington D.C., where he was born and where his family lived.

All of this first-hand knowledge, through the eyes of a potentially hero-worshiping granddaughter, add to our own interpretation of what Montgomery’s personality and identity may have been, and without the act of researching the whereabouts of this previously unheard-of thesis, we would be missing an important piece to this puzzle of interpreting Montgomery’s identity. Researching through other archival documents is one form of clue we readers interested in issues of history and identity can obtain through secondary life writings pertaining to a particular subject or person.

Another way of obtaining clues about a writer’s identity is to look to the writers of history and to do so skeptically from a space of radical openness by understanding that there are many interpretive stories that go into the collaborative processes pertaining to historical writing. What is known concerning where we have been in the past has been documented by those influenced from many spheres of knowingness and hierarchies of power-relations. Before looking to secondary sources for additional information, we researchers start with what we know. Based on what is known of Montgomery’s social standing, he was part of the middle class distinguished by his father’s military notoriety.
during the Civil War, and the Meigs family received high honors among the social and political circles of post-Civil War Washington D.C.

One question that may come to mind first concerns Washington D.C. at the time of Montgomery’s epistolary courtship and the coinciding military career of his father, Brigadier General Montgomery C. Meigs. According to one such interpretive historical reference, Lally Weymouth, in Washington D.C. of 1876, people traveled around town by carriage, horseback, horse-drawn trolley cars, or by train, and the image that comes to mind of a typical day’s milling about the nation’s capitol could easily seem romanticized to a nostalgic person; however, in a post-Civil War American context, the city was anything but idyllic. Indeed, the political center of the United States was swarming with corruption and controversy as the country attempted to rebuild its unity while at the same time growing industrially and expanding through the territories and adopted states.

Lally Weymouth further discusses the state of American customs and history in her work, *America in 1876 – The Way We Were*, and goes into some discussion concerning the problems with the government as politics recovered from the internal damage caused by the Civil War: “The corruption evident in political life in post-Civil War America has become a common theme of almost all histories of the period” (Weymouth 86). Indeed, the Grant presidential administration was renowned for the corruption amongst the time period’s Washington delegates because although Grant was personally honest, he not only tolerated financial and political corruption among top aides but also protected them once exposed.
One official of supreme importance, William W. Belknap, the 30th U.S. Secretary of War from October 1869-March 1876, was one such politician who involved himself in corruption during the Grant administration and is the only Cabinet secretary to be impeached by the U.S. House of Representatives. Political corruption at this time affected the courtship of Montgomery Meigs and Grace Lynde, whose letters I will more openly discuss in the second chapter, because of the distance it created between the two would-be lovers.

In 1875, Belknap sent Brigadier General Meigs (and his family) abroad to Europe to observe the military functions of European countries, particularly those of Prussia, with the duties associated with being the American representative among high foreign military officials. Montgomery often epistolarily describes his father’s tasks, since he was in Europe to accompany the General as a German translator, financial assistant, and, interestingly, a letter-writer for his father’s official business. One aspect of the visit to Europe that is expressed in Montgomery’s letters to Grace - and has not been noted in history books - is that the General did not want to be abroad at all and was exiled there by Mr. Belknap so that the intelligent officer would be as far away from Washington as possible. The Secretary of War was under serious investigation for corrupt behavior at the time, and the General was one of the initial military officials to take issue with Mr. Belknap’s seedy dealings.

On March 4th 1876, after a significant amount of evidence against him was secured, the House of Representatives officially accused him of having received money in return for Indian Territory post tradership appointments. Belknap hurriedly resigned his
position in the Cabinet; however, despite his resignation, the House agreed to continue with the Impeachment process because of the Secretary’s offensive actions, and shortly thereafter he was officially impeached, barely escaping a conviction ruling. News of the scandal spread rapidly throughout the U.S. and abroad. *The New York Times* issue of March 5th 1876 published a short article in response to the Belknap scandal, its main claim being “[t]his event is the more grave because it is confirmatory of the suspicion which has long prevailed among the American people” (*NY Times*).

In Montgomery’s short letter dated March 4th 1876, he writes to Grace from Rome that the Meigs family would be returning to America because a telegram notified them of Mr. Belknap’s resignation and that the General’s presence was required immediately in Washington:

> By the time this reaches you I shall probably be in the United States again […] A telegram – how strangely those little slips of paper change our plans sometimes – summoned my Father at once to Washington. This morning when the letters were brought in we little thought what was in store for us and all of the party except my Father and myself were much disappointed at the sudden change in our plans. My Father never wanted to come abroad, and as for me I shall find a sufficient recompense for my disappointment in Rock Island. This is Saturday night and on Monday morning we turn our faces homeward again […] Of course before this reaches you you will know of my Father’s recall and all about the Secretary of War scandal. At present we know nothing but what appeared in a short telegram to one of the Italian Morning Papers and the fact that Mr. 2 is act’g Sec. of War, from the cable dispatch to my Father [Letter 51].

Not only does such a letter inform a curious reader about the order of events, it also shows a different version of a story that has been conveyed in a particular way throughout

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2 Though Montgomery’s handwriting is illegible here, it is known that Alphonso Taft succeeded Belknap after his impeachment and served as Secretary of War from March 8, 1876 – May 22, 1876) and then became the U.S. Attorney General (May 22, 1876 – March 4, 1877).
In this specific letter excerpt, we observe Montgomery’s first-hand account of a publicized historical event, not as a member of political power at the top of a social hierarchy, but as an individual of observation attempting to educate his lover about a public matter in a private manner – we see a man musing with his intended during a time of unknowingness, his main concern obviously being when he will arrive home so that he may once again be reunited with his intended bride.

**The Significance of the Early U.S. Postal Service**

Historical clues can also educate us on topics that we may not have considered before, such as that of the context surrounding the conception of the United States Postal Service. The Postal Service became a permanent American fixture in 1794 when Congress officially created the nation’s Post Office (with President Washington’s blessing) and established post offices and postal roads that initially spread from Wiscasset, Maine down the East coast to Savannah, Georgia. At this time, no postal roads existed further west than Pittsburgh, Vermont, Kentucky, and Tennessee. Throughout the early years of the Postal Service, there was much inefficiency and disorganization under the supervision of Post Master Generals, who were appointed by the President of the U.S., and there were also relatively few postal clerks in employment to aid in the management aspect of efficient mail delivery.

In 1794, letter writers sent their mail without envelopes and merely sealed the missives with wax or wafers; letters were transported from post office to post office, carried in locked portmanteaus; recipients paid for the postage, at this time paying 6 cents
on a single-page letter going as far as 30 miles and 25 cents on one going more than 450 miles; and it took 40 days to send and receive a letter from Portland, Maine to Savannah, Georgia (Fuller).

In the early 19th Century, poor roads, unbridged rivers, and severe weather (as well as careless postmasters and contractors and the nation’s disorganized banking system) contributed to the unreliability of the U.S. Postal Service. Not until the War of 1812, did a truer sense of unity overcome the United States with the “warm afterglow of patriotism that suffused the nation” (81) and the desire to connect with family and friends across the states’ boundaries increased (Fuller).

Pre-payment of postage did not become authorized until the 1840s, and skeptical Americans were wary about prepaying without knowing if their letters would ever be received, and if letters did arrive at all, they were usually weeks or months late. Despite their hesitancy, writers sent letters, nationally and internationally, mainly due to the “expansionist sentiment that griped the country in the 1840s” (Fuller 196), and by 1844, as many as 1,500,000 letters passed between the U.S., England, and Europe annually. By 1865, the modern outlines of the postal system had been drawn, a flat-rate postage system had been adopted, and stamps, envelopes, and registered letters and money orders were in use. On July 1, 1865, the department had a surplus of $80,000, but this being “in the black” did not last long due to the physical and internal destruction that the Civil War (1861-1865) waged on land and government and also due to the postponement of the Postal Service (Fuller). However, “[m]ail transportation […] was excellent on the Atlantic. Virtually all of the mail here was carried by foreign ships merely for the price of
sea postage, but so many steamship lines from England and Europe to America competed for the trade that by 1874, the mails could be dispatched to Europe four days a week, on the swiftest ships afloat” (226).

After the Civil War (in which 3 million American soldiers fought and over 600,000 died) and with the South back in the Union, the suspended mail service was re-opened over thousands of miles of “unremunerative mail routes throughout the eleven states of the Old Confederacy” (Fuller 79). The U.S. Government went into a period of intense Reconstruction under the leadership of President Johnson (1865-1869) and President Grant (1869-1877), and the Postal Service thrived once again due to the need for communication being even more necessary to re-connect and relay information to colleagues, loved ones, etc. throughout the then United States and also abroad: “In 1875 a letter could be sent from America to England or any place in Europe for five cents, and a postal card or newspaper for two” (227).

What we gain from this information is an understanding that letter writers of a young nation’s budding postal service would have known that the only assumed privacy they received came in the form of a small existence of wax that sealed the folded letter closed. This epistolary practice of sealing a missive would have been acknowledged from the very moment that the writer set quill to ink, and he or she would have composed their letter knowing that whatever they wrote could be read by an unintended audience. The authenticity of the writer’s self comes into question when considering that a letter written before the envelope’s introduction in 1865 was potentially viewed by numerous sets of eyes before it ever reached its destination, if the letter ever reached said recipient: “Letters
and newspapers were often mangled beyond legibility, or even worse, lost in transit. All too often private letters were read by persons other than those for whom they were intended, a practice encourage by the absence of envelopes” (Fuller 47). Essentially, these letters were no more understood as “private” than a contemporary postcard is today, and the identity of the writer could be just as easily misinterpreted.

**Victorian-American Sexuality**

“After dinner some of us adjourned to the Library to smoke and others stayed in the parlor talking to the ladies” (Letter 27).

What is especially interesting in regards to love and sexuality during the time period in which Montgomery courted Grace is the influence Victorian England’s social practices had on America. By 1830 in America, Romantic Love was fast becoming the necessary condition for marriage in the American Middle Class (Lystra). This is in part due to the influential ways of British culture.

Queen Victoria – ruler of the United Kingdom and Ireland as of 1837 and Empress of India as of 1876 (b. 1819, d. 1901) – in a sense introduced the love match to the world when she married the German Prince Albert and throughout her marriage (and after her husband’s death) idealized love and marriage as the utmost in truth and beauty that could be achieved by mere mortals. Paradoxically, the notoriously private Victoria was also known for telling her virginal daughter on her wedding night to “Lie still and think of the Empire” (Lystra 58). Despite the popular ideology that females during the Victorian period were passionless in regards to their individual physical knowingness, it is now considered an outdated assumption to believe that all Victorian women were sexually
repressed, particularly in marriage. Sexuality was considered a powerful energy that should be harnessed for the greater good of humanity. Though women were thought to be less carnally motivated, they did have sexual feelings which were expected to revolve around loving, being loved, and using their passion towards their husband, home, and family after marriage (Seidman 48). Love, whether physically expressed regularly or not, was essentially a spiritual phenomenon.

Letter Writing Manuals

With the increased interest in the topic of “love,” Victorians could look to widely-published manuals instructing men and women in the matters of writing a perfect letter for any specific occasion. Indeed, Victorian-American letter writers had several references (called “letter writers” or letter-writing manuals) at their disposal for advice, such as Richardson’s *Familiar Letters on Important Occasions* (1741), *The Ladies’ and Gentlemen’s Model Letter-Writer, A New Letter-Writer for the Use of Ladies* (1860), *The Complete Letter Writer for Ladies and Gentlemen* (1872), and numerous others. Some manuals in particular describe the standards of letters written by youthful writers, such as Eliza W.R. Farrar’s *The Youth’s Letter-Writer* and *The Young Lady’s Friend*, and Lydia Sigourney’s *Letters to Young Ladies*.

Idleness: Teaching the manner and style how to endite, compose and write all sorts of Epistles and Letters. In the 17th century, an anonymous writer advertised merely by the initials W. P. wrote A Flying Post With a packet of Choice new Letters and Compliments: containing Variety of Examples of Witty and Delightful Letters upon all occasions both of Love and Business, which appeared in bookshops in 1678. In 1741, Samuel Richardson, a master printer, wrote and published Familiar Letters for Important Occasions, which was the condensed title. The primary title of the manual (as shown below on the original title page) was Letters Written to and for Particular Friends on the Most Important Occasions Directing not only the Requisite Style and Forms to be Observed in Writing Familiar Letters; But how to think and act Justly and Prudently in the Common Concerns of Human Life.3

Another literary source for romantic letter writers was the French (and quite erotic) 3 Samuel Richardson also wrote the epistolary novels, Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded and Clarissa—early examples of the romance novel, with the character development signified through letters written between the protagonist lovers.
Lettres Portugaise, which had been translated into English and published under the title Five Love Letters from a Nun to a Cavalier. From these early examples of steamy romantic letter-writing manuals stemmed the circulation of small pamphlets entertaining the subject, such as the eighteenth-century publication, The Amorous Gallant's Tongue Tipp'd with Golden Expressions: or, the Art of Courtship Refined. As Gardner notes in his article, this particular pamphlet was

[w]ritten anonymously, [and] it gave men and women lessons in the art of waxing eloquent while whispering sweet nothings. For any would-be gallant—eligible bachelor—suffering from lovesickness, or old-fashioned lust, who hadn't a way with words, these helpful tips must have been a godsend. The pamphlets could be relied on to suggest a few good lines worthy of any red-blooded, tongue-tied ploughman or soldier struck temporarily dumb by the unspoken love for someone of the opposite sex.

Within these “letter-writers,” writers of letters received templates for composing messages with particular important themes motivating them, such as courtship, condolence, and business, between family members, friends, lovers, or casual acquaintances. Though these manuals gave examples of already-written letters that lovers could merely copy, the main advice these writing guides gave love letter writers was to be natural to one’s self and “other” in unique self-expression; this was considered the highest act of epistolary etiquette in love letters at the time (Lystra 14, 16).

I recently came across an original copy of The Complete Letter Writer for Ladies and Gentlemen that does not have a specific publishing date listed on the title page, but does have several hand-written names and dates of those individuals who had this book in their possession – the earliest date is 1872. The Table of Contents of both the Gentlemen's Letter Writer and the Ladies Letter Writer (for they are segregated and the
subject matters vary, reflective of the difference in societal roles at the time) gives a detailed list of topics that one could look to when given the task of writing a letter.

In this guide, letter-writing templates for Gentlemen vary depending on status and include proposals on opening banking accounts, writing letters to sons and daughters, writing letters to schoolmasters regarding children, writing “matrimonial” letters to a sweetheart, job and school application letters, letters to Physicians, invitations to a pic-nic, letters to the water company, etc. The most interesting of these topics in regards to the particular question regarding courtship and identity as witnessed in letters, are those templates pertaining to “matrimonial” concerns i.e. *to one to whom one is engaged, after meeting at a party, on longer acquaintance, on a misunderstanding, in reference to confessing an attachment, various proposals, discontinuing addresses*, etc. One such template, *To a Lady to whom one is engaged* (Letter CI) on page 72 of the manual, appears to have been an actual letter that was placed in the manuscript by editors, because “Charleston, October 15th, 18—“ is listed at the beginning, and the lady’s name, “Fanny,” is included, though the gentleman’s name has been omitted:

My Dear Fanny: If there is one thing which can console me for my unavoidable absence from your side, it is the pleasure of being able to pen a few lines to express, however feebly, my continued and increasing affection for you. It is, indeed, a painful and irksome change from our rambles about the fields, our evening duets, and our stolen conversations […] Happily, however, my affairs are in a rapid state of settlement, and I shall soon hope once more to bask in the sunshine of my Fanny’s sweet countenance, and to feed my imagination with thoughts of the happiness which her placid and sincere disposition will hereafter shed around a home! […] God bless you, dearest Fanny, and believe me, with most respectful and affectionate remembrances to your parents, and all friends.

Your ever affectionate and devoted ______.
Again, the idea of these letter-writers was to show examples, not necessarily so that writers could copy them and insert names and dates, though it certainly would have been easier to do so if the subject matter of the template was appropriate to the letter-writing enterprise at hand. What is interesting to acknowledge in reading these “matrimonial templates” is the uncanny resemblance to the love letters of Montgomery to Grace during the early stages of their epistolary courtship:

My Dear Little Grace – Two letters from you made me happy yesterday, one of them dated July 10th and other June 27th [1875, one month after their official engagement] [...] The sweet spirit of disinterested affection which your letters are full of, my darling is a great solace and pleasure now that we are separated. I read and reread your dear little letters and wonder to myself at my happiness in having secured so much love. I trouble too at the responsibility: how it is sweet to be loved. The only happiness that compares with it is to love and that we both love. Our future is still uncertain but to me wears the lovely tints which clothe the distance, not azure alone but the brightest rose color.

The similarities between the template and Montgomery’s letter are overly exaggerated sentimentalities as expressed through the use of traditional lover-like language. For a 21st Century reader, it is difficult to imagine that such flowery and dramatic language is equated with authenticity. What we learn from looking to this particular letter writer for the male lover is that even if one didn’t necessarily copy the templates word for word, there was a reference for the masses in how to speak like a lover, which complicates the notion of authentic “self” in life writings such as letters.

To take this study of letter writers further, during this time of pre-telecommunications, letters were the only means of communication between people separated geographically; therefore, letter writing was crucial in nineteenth-century America communication, and the associated responsibility of rising to epistolary standards
fell particularly on the shoulders of women. Those Victorian-American women that were considered “well-bred” according to their status within society were placed on a teetering pedestal of near epistolary perfection, and it was considered inexcusable for such a well-educated woman to write anything less than an admirable letter. Indeed, women traveling in such circles were surrounded by instructional materials to which they were understood to be looking, such as the previously mentioned letter-writers (some being specifically targeted towards young women). In *The Lady's Letter Writer* of 1872, there are several examples of matrimonial letters, similarly to those in the Gentlemen’s Letter Writer, including those to a suitor, “on more intimate Acquaintance,”:

Hempstead, May 1st 18--. Dear ___, We shall be very happy to see you here for a little evening festival to the children of the village. When I say we, it of course includes some one in whose heart you now hold a place, with whose fondest thoughts and prayers your name has been associated for some months past. I believe we are not to perform charades, or something of that sort, and I have been occupied half the week in cutting old window curtains and sofa-covers into absurd costumes, supposed to be Oriental. I know you are very clever at that sort of nonsense, so I hope you will come and have a good laugh with and at Your Affectionate ______, ______.

These templates give insight into the lives of women during this time period and also how Grace may have addressed her intended, Montgomery, in her own letters, which once existed but are now silenced. The housekeeping references in the letter template above show a topic of conversation with which women of the time concerned themselves, and Grace was no exception, as Montgomery states in his response to Grace on July 26th, 1875, “I must first thank my sweet little girl for her efforts at housekeeping. That you are willing to attempt such a thing shows that you are in earnest, and everything that does that is to me like a fresh cool draught to a thirsty man, unspeakably something and refreshing”
(Letter 14). What is interesting to acknowledge in this comparison is that the letter templates for women stress writing about house duties to show themselves in a higher favor with their intended husband, while the letter templates for men stress using dramatic over-the-top sentimentality to win over the heart of the woman he is wooing. The courtship roles of pursuer and object of affection are distinctly designated to the societally-viewed dominant male and the supposedly weaker female, who had more understood power in relationships than was textually discussed, because while on the surface it seemed that the middle-class woman in a Victorian-American marriage had little influence over her own life, she did ultimately control her own sexuality with her husband once she was safe within a matrimonial bond. As the Victorian-American scholar, Karen Lystra, notes “If she didn’t want to have sex or children, on some level, she didn’t have to” by being unwelcoming to sex, using female condoms, or by the commonly used birth control technique of interruptus coitus (81).

In addition to controlling the frequency of sex and children, women also had the power to escape their lives through imagination by diving into the popular literature of the day, epistolary novels, which solidified the ways in which men and women wrote to one another when discussing themes of love. Besides popular letter-writing manuals, examples of ideal letters were targeted towards ladies in etiquette manuals, conduct books, popular women’s magazines, and the sensational literature – epistolary novels being the most vibrant of this particular time and, more so than the other sources, those directed primarily at a female reading audience.
Epistolary Novels as Love Letter-Writing Guides

Epistolary romances became popular in the 17th Century and were (and still are) novels written either through the form of letters or with letters inserted throughout the novel; either way, the story relies on letters written by one character (monologic), between the two main characters (usually between male and female lovers, and this is considered dialogic), or gives the reading audience letters between three or more characters (polylogic). Most epistolary romances revolve around themes of deception, isolation, separation, secrecy, and redemption. British author Aphra Behn’s *Love-Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister*, published in three different volumes throughout 1685-1687, is considered the first major epistolary novel in English literature. The plot of this particular romantic novel – sometimes referred to as an erotic epistolary novel – unfolds through letters – letters that fall into the wrong hands, letters that are fake, letters within letters, and letters withheld from intended recipients. Reading epistolary novels increases the complications of how romantic love, as it was expressed in 17th-19th century epistolary fiction, was defined among a prolific reading and letter-writing middle-class American both public and private social sphere.

The style of language used in these romantic epistolary novels is purposefully conversational, changing in tone from character to character, from letter to letter; yet, one commonality throughout the scantily organized dialogue of an epistolary romance is the theme of gossip – the relaying of events through the language of “he said/she said.” This style of language would be particularly tantalizing to an interested reader because the very nature of letters (even those of the fictional variety) indicates a moment of privacy.
between a writer and the intended audience. Though epistolary novels were most popular in the 17th and 18th Centuries, there were a few notable examples of the epistolary style that emerged in the mid 19th Century, which was the time during which Montgomery and Grace wrote to each other.

Jane Austen’s novels of the early 19th Century, though not epistolary in form, show the use of letters frequently to further plot and character development, and her novella _Lady Susan_ employed the epistolary novel frame; *The Moonstone* (1868) by Wilkie Collins is considered to be the first detective novel and is epistolary in form; and Fyodor Dostoevky’s _Poor Folk_ (1846) is an example of the epistolary novel, as are Mary Shelley’s _Frankenstein_ (1816-1817), Emily Bronte’s _Wuthering Heights_ (1847), Anne Bronte’s _Tenant of Wildfell Hall_ (1848), and George Sand’s _Jacques_ (1857). The tradition of the epistolary style has continued throughout time – Bram Stroker’s _Dracula_ (1897) is comprised of letters, diary entries, and newspaper accounts, C.S. Lewis’s _The Screwtape Letters_ (1942) and, contemporarily, Stephen King and Vladimir Nabokov have used the epistolary style in examples of their novels.

Though it is unknown whether Montgomery looked to any of the previously mentioned examples of epistolary style as guides in his own letter writing, it is known from his own hand that he was well-read in Charles Dickens and looked to passages from Dickens’ _The Pickwick Papers_ for advice on how to write a love letter. Therefore, his interest in literature, even epistolary literature, and his energetic desire to prove himself a worthy lover to Grace, shows us that he would have probably used such resources in

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4 Mr. Wellers is a character in Dickens’ *The Pickwick Papers* who gives advice to his son on how to write a love letter. Montgomery makes reference to this character in a few of his letters in reference to his own writing.
writing his own romantic epistles to his intended. All of this puts into question the possibility for Montgomery to ever have an “authentic self” in the role of male lover.
CHAPTER THREE

LOOKING AT THE LOVE LETTERS OF MONTGOMERY & GRACE

A Unilateral Epistolary Courtship

As mentioned in the theoretical framework section of Chapter One, the interdisciplinary theorizing trends categorized under New Historicism stress the importance of history while raising critical questions about class, race, gender spaces in all texts. Some post-modernists argue that New Historicism merely summarizes literature into a footnote of history; however, the possibilities of New Historicism as a way of symptomatically reading literature are great, particularly when attempting to deconstruct constructs of identity and thereby make sense of contemporary social practices. To refresh our knowledge of this particular theory as I discussed it in Chapter I, New Historicist and Cultural Materialist literary scholars interpret texts by believing that: 1) images and narratives do important work; 2) history is the best framework for interpreting literature; 3) interpretive problems are related to cultural-historical problems; 4) and that authors and texts are full of contradictions, the imperfections making the histories interesting.

One particular contradiction that is evident throughout the reading of this epistolary courtship is that one important voice of the communicative space has been silenced, the female voice. For whatever reason, Grace’s letters to Montgomery, her suitor and eventual husband, have not survived time despite Montgomery’s obvious treasuring of Grace’s letters. In a letter dated July 24th, 1875 written from London, Montgomery wrote:
“Your letters are my greatest satisfaction now. Do not call them stupid I think them the sweetest and prettiest outpourings of an innocent heart that were ever put on paper. I carry the whole bundle in my pocket and when I retire to a separate car as I often do in traveling to enjoy a quiet cigar I draw the little packet from my breast and read them over and over again” (Letter 13).

Similarly, in a letter dated August 12th of the same year, he expresses:

“Your letters are now my daily food. I have arranged our whole correspondence in regular order and frequently go back to the very beginning and dissect it. Those first letters of yours are quite worthy of the astute Talleyrand in their freedom from anything that could betray the sweet secret which you confess occupied your thoughts even before you went to Cambridge” (Letter 16).

After the correspondence lengthened into the Fall months, Montgomery goes to the extent of declaring in one letter dated September 11th:

“Your sweet letters are now accumulating into quite a volume. I don’t know whether I shall ever allow you to see them again but they form one of the chapters in our life now beginning, (of which I hope the succeeding ones will prove as pleasant) and will be interesting to us both when we are old and gray haired. If you keep mine we will put them together, tie them up with a ribbon and label them ‘Chapter I of a Happy Life” (Letter 23).

Montgomery seemingly cherished Grace’s letters so much, in fact, that he went to the extent of commissioning the creation of a leather portfolio to protect them safely while he traveled abroad:

“I have had a morocco portfolio made to hold your dear letters. Here is a rough sketch of it. It is not stiff but quite pliable so as to pack well and on the outside of the case is a sort of frame with an oval opening through which your sweet face peeps out upon me when I open the cover. It is my own idea and I feel quite proud of it” (Berlin, Oct. 8th 1875, Letter 27).

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5 Talleyrand was the chief French negotiator at the Congress of Vienna (November 1, 1814 – June 8, 1815), and, in that same year, he signed the Treaty of Paris. It was due in part to his skills that the terms of the treaty were remarkably lenient towards France. Today, when speaking of the art of diplomacy, the phrase "she is a Talleyrand" is used to denote a statesman of great resource and skill.

6 Montgomery makes reference to Grace mentioning to him in a letter that she had feelings for him prior to his declaration to her while he was visiting her family in Cambridge during June of 1875.

7 Cambridge, MA, where Grace’s brother, Samuel Lynde, was attending university.
So a question that one is left with is, why wouldn’t such a perceptibly valued dual correspondence be kept together?

The way that these letters have been preserved throughout time is a testament to an epistolary family that cherished news from their loved ones as their “daily food”; Montgomery instilled in his daughters a love of reading, education, and also letter-writing, as the six of them continued to write letters to their father on Sundays long after they had grown and situated themselves in history themselves. What is remarkable is that all of these epistles have been saved and housed lovingly by family until time became too much, and it was then that Dartmouth College’s Rauner Special Collection Library took over the responsibility of preservation within a top-notch research facility with temperature controlled vaults.

There’s a part of me as a historian that realizes the importance of archival institutions and the desire to preserve documents so that future generations may search for their own clues and make their own interpretations; another part of me wonders how the authors of these letters would have felt about their private correspondence being a free-for-all 135 years after they were written and catalogued within acid-free archival folders and boxes. Indeed, most letters from this time period were thrown away, destroyed, or burned because the emphasis on private moments between lovers staying private.

Similarly to the Victorian culture of Britain, the upper middle class of Victorian America (1840-1900) were intent on privacy, particularly where romantic dealings were concerned. According to William Merrill Decker, author of *Epistolary Practices*, such correspondences were often destroyed to avoid any compromising situation and that “the
flame has often figured as the ultimate defense of epistolary privacy and many invaluable correspondences have vanished by its agency” (9). Did Montgomery destroy the letters, perhaps at Grace’s request? Was the portfolio misplaced and lost, perhaps during the family’s voyage home across the sea? Did he give them as a keepsake to one of his family members or daughters after Grace’s untimely death? Or was either Montgomery or Grace buried with the mysteriously absent epistles?

If by some chance the letters have survived, they would currently be preserved (or not) in an undisclosed location – perhaps uncatologued in another library or in a distant relative’s cedar chest resting with other familial ephemera; thus, we as the curious reading audience are left with one direction of epistolary communication, which is that of the world-wandering Montgomery Meigs writing to the grounded, domestically-situated Grace Lynde in Rock Island, Illinois.

This collection is therefore considered a unilaterial one; however, one could easily argue that all epistolary communication is unilaterial because there is no interpersonal exchange in letter-writing as there is in face-to-face conversation. Indeed, there is a sense of physical detachment and distance associated with letter writing that is unmistakable and does not encourage an automatic sense of unity between epistolary correspondents, no matter what their level of familiarity may be. What takes this collection to an extreme level of unilaterality is the lack of responding female voice, the only glimmer of Grace’s identity being given to us through Montgomery’s words, veiled by societal expectations of gender roles. We curious readers are left with many questions about Grace’s identity and what truly went through her mind in response to Montgomery’s epistolary courtship - Did
she love him? Would she enjoy the inevitable consummation of their marriage in vows and in sex? What were her own worries and desires? Even if we did have Grace’s corresponding letters, could we ever sense her “true identity” amidst the patriarchal constructs of letter-writing and of society? Grace’s voice and identity are essentially up for grabs and are lost somewhere in the space where “dead letters” go.

The Post Office as a “Dead” Literary Space

Jacques Derrida introduces and practices the skeptical notion of “the dead letter” in his epistolary work, *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, which further complicates the metaphorical relationship of “space” and letters by suggesting that there is a hole of non-Being (or death) between letter writer (emission) and recipient (destination):

“The letter has a place of emission and of destination. This is not a subject, but a hole, the lack on the basis of which the subject is constituted. The contour of this hole is determinable, and it magnetizes the entire itinerary of the detour which leads from hole to hole, from the hole to itself, and which therefore has a circular form” (437).

Through such claims that the space between emission and destination is a hole, the question that Derrida asks, albeit not directly, and encourages us to ask ourselves, is, “Though we have written and sent off a letter, what guarantees that a letter is indeed *en route*, and even if the letter is *en route*, can it ever possibly arrive on time with its intended meaning in tact?” The hole of non-Being between writer and recipient, particularly between Montgomery and Grace, grows cloudier when one takes into
consideration that the reliability of mail services would also have been on the minds of letter writers in post-Civil War America when they sat down with paper and quill. The history of mail in America is important to consider when discussing authorial identity in letters because of the unpredictability of time and its effect on a newborn nation’s crisis with its own identity. Indeed, at this time, the Postal Service contributed to the insecurities of a budding nation as well as budding relationships, such as that between Montgomery and Grace.

In a letter dated Aug 29th 1875 from Lucerne, Switzerland, Montgomery writes,

“The mail facilities seem to be very inadequate. Though I write at least twice a week and you write even oftener we are both distressing ourselves over the infrequency of news from each other. Sometimes we do not get a letter it seems for a week at a time, and then several come at once only to be followed by another hiatus […] I fear we cannot avoid some irregularity in our correspondence but I shall write as often as I can. I have not written for the last five days having been busy traveling and tired out every night.”

One of the premier scholars of letter-writing practices, William Decker, comments on Derrida’s philosophy of the “dead-letter” in the introduction of his book, Epistolary Studies: Letter Writing in America before Telecommunications: “The death that is the space between correspondents – a geographic space but also a space between signifier and the mirage of consensual meanings – haunts letter writers.” (Decker 15). With this said, let us look to Grace, the recipient of more than 150 letters over the duration of a two-year-long courtship, whose own letters remain to this day, dead letters.
Introducing Grace

“Many of a letter’s story may be invisible, buried, or lost” (Decker 9).
Because Grace’s letters are absent from this collection, the mystery that surrounds her character inspired me to look for evidence of her personality in other places, such as photographs and documents from other historical archives. One such place is the Rock Island County Historical Society in Rock Island, Illinois. Since Grace was raised and died in this particular town, there were a handful of documents that referenced her and her family, including her wedding announcement and obituary which were both provided by the Rock Island Historical Society in Illinois:

An Interesting Marriage Ceremony

The marriage of Miss Grace Cornelia Lynde to Mr. Montgomery Meigs, of Washington, was celebrated last evening at the residence of the bride’s parents. The ceremony was conducted with impressive solemnity by the Rev. T. I. Holcombe, according to the services of the Episcopal Church.

The bride, supreme in youth and loveliness, stood under a marriage bell of pure white flowers, surrounded by a bevy of beautiful bride’s maids – Miss Macomb, Miss Meigs, Miss Pleasants, Miss Fay, Miss Carter, and the groom was supported by Lieut. Macomb, Mr. Lynde, Mr. Palmer, Dr. Carter and Lieut. Ayers.
The arrangements and adornments of the house were worthy of the auspicious event and of the company assembled to witness it.

Perhaps no young lady ever left the parental roof with more hearty and good wishes than those which accompany Mrs. Meigs to her new home. Her virtues and accomplishments are such that all who have the good fortune to know her think of her with respect and affection. And substantial proofs of kindly feelings were showered upon the pair. There were many beautiful gifts; each one seeming to have been selected with especial care and with an aesthetic sense of fitness to the cultivated tastes of the happy recipients.

Mr. and Mrs. Montgomery Meigs will commence housekeeping at 1309 N. street, Washington, nearly opposite the residence of Maj. Gen. Meigs, Q.M.G., the father of Mr. Meigs.

Many happy new years to them.

The character and the talents of the groom are such that we must admit him to have fairly won Rock Island’s lovely daughter. Our only regret is, that in making one man blest, Mrs. Meigs has carried away the sunshine from many hearts in the home of her childhood.

Another document in which we epistolary archaeologists may find clues of Grace’s personality is her obituary:

Mrs. Grace Cornelia, wife of Montgomery Meigs and daughter of the late Cornelius Lynde, died at her home in Keokuk, Iowa on Sunday, Aged 36 years next November 15th. She married Maj. Meigs in 1877 and they had lived at Keokuk since 1884. Besides her husband, she is survived by 6 daughters, the eldest of whom is now on her way home from Europe. The funeral will be tomorrow, here at the residence of her mother, Mrs. Mary Lynde. Burial was in Chippiannock Cemetery in Rock Island.

Also, according to the Chippiannock Cemetery Index, Grace was buried in the Lynde plot with her mother, father, and brothers, her grave epitaph being, “That They may rest from their labors / and their works do Follow them” (Doak). It is interesting to note that she wasn’t buried as part of the Meigs Family, which is at Arlington National Cemetery in
Washington, D.C., since she married into that prestigious military family. Perhaps this burial within her father’s plot was because of her young age and because her mother was still alive at the time of Grace’s death. Either way, Grace’s body would have been associated with a man, whether it be her father or husband. Her epitaph ironically refers to “labors,” which one could interpret as meaning the act of giving birth to children, as Grace had six surviving children, and because her cause of death is unknown, it is natural to assume she may have died in childbirth or from the strains put upon her body through at least six childbirth labors.

Discovering Clues of Female Identity Hidden in Census Records

Another place we critical bricoleurs may look to while interpreting the identity of female historical figures are census records. In the Victorian-American time period, women were commodified - understood in terms of their monetary or useful wealth. What census records give us is a sense of how women may have lived through the recorded financial information of the male households to which they belonged, professions of their fathers or husbands, personal estate values, and a listing of servants, if the family was wealthy enough to employ hired help. According to the 1860 census, Cornelius Lynde, Grace’s father, was a Book-keeper and had the personal estate value of $2500, which today translates into $54,150 (the dollar of 1860 is worth $21.66 by today’s standards based on historical inflation records); between 1860 and 1870, however, Lynde made his fortune by investing wisely in real estate, the railroad, and by starting the Mitchell-Lynde bank with an associate. By 1870, Lynde’s personal estate value jumped to $116,000,
which today is the equivalent of nearly $2 million. Because of the wealth and status of her father in the Rock Island community, Grace lived very comfortably and was accustomed to the presence of no less than four servants attending to the family’s needs on a live-in basis. The Lynde’s servants in 1870:

- Jesse Winston, 25 – Black. Groom from Tennessee. [he could read but could not write]
- Virginia Ldya, 30 – White. Lady’s maid - Native.

The Meigs family of Washington D.C., on the other hand, was not as wealthy as the Lynde family in 1870. The census records show that in that year, Quarter-Master General Meigs had a real estate value of $25,000 and a personal estate value of $5,000, which today would be valued at $384,750 and $76,950. Also, the house was full of family members and no servants. During 1870, the General’s eldest child, Mary Meigs Taylor, and her children, John Taylor (6), her twin daughters, Eva and Louisa (4), sons Joseph (2), and Montgomery (6 months) resided with the Meigses in addition to Montgomery (23), his sister Louisa (15), and his parents. The social atmosphere of this household would have been quite different from that of the Lynde’s because of the different financial and class situations between the two.

No doubt some of Montgomery’s insecurities as a suitor would have stemmed from Grace’s familial status; however, at the time, women of wealthy families were not necessarily wealthy themselves. Grace could have had her choice of suitors, since several gentlemen were interested in courting her (according to Montgomery’s letters), but she
instead chose to marry Montgomery, which encourages the belief that this marriage was a love-match rather than one based on financial stability and societal standing.

Glimpses of Grace’s “Self” – According to Montgomery – Emerge

In addition to the pictorial portraits Grace sat for, as shown at the beginning of the Grace section of this chapter, we have verbal portraits of what she looked like through the words of Montgomery – it is through Montgomery’s verbal creation of her that her self emerges. Upon receiving several letters from Grace, Montgomery verbally paints her portrait in the opening paragraph of a letter dated July 24th 1875 from London, England. Though this passage is quite long to quote within a paper, it shows the length to which Montgomery often went in his descriptiveness when it came to his favorite topic – his love for Grace:

“Suppose we start with your personal appearance about which you seem exercised and I shall draw your portrait as it appears to me. I see a little girl seated in her room, her face wears a pensive if not sad expression and in her hand is a locket which contains a portrait. She has a mass of golden brown hair, thick long and glossy, which she wears brushed back from her face and confined at the back of her head in rich profusion. Her brow forehead is fair and white and its noble proportions give a promise of intellect, and goodness which does not disappoint those who are happy to manage to maker her acquaintance, or better yet secure her friendship and confidence. Her eyes are blue and set somewhat deeply beneath a brow whose fullness but knows musical talent. They are sweet and kind and have a frankness and openness of expression quite charming. ‘Nez’ somewhat ‘betrousse’ just sufficiently so to give a piquancy of profile and lend character to the face. Mouth neither large nor small but rather straight cut and with firmly compressed lips expressing determination, were it not for the placid brow I should say ‘wilfulness.’ The whole face taken together is a very pleasing one. Perhaps a casual observer would not pronounce it a pretty one on ordinary occasions. Those who know her well think otherwise and a judge of character would instantly pronounce it a very unusual and striking countenance. Her eyes seem gazing far away
and have an abstracted look as if perhaps she were thinking of the original of the portrait” (Letter 13).

Montgomery’s commentary of Grace and her words, as spoken through the context of a patriarchal way of living and writing, show us how Grace had a sort of manipulative power within the uncertain beginning stages of their relationship through the distance and time separating them – she accomplishes keeping Montgomery’s interest through the tactics of teasing and jealousy: “How can you tantalize me so with that ‘something’ you could but won’t tell me? Your last letter July 10th was as unfinished as the end as one of the stories in the N.Y. Ledger ‘to be continued’ and have the same stimulating effect on my imagination” (Letter 14). Grace, according to Montgomery in a response to her, also uses a testing tactic to see if she would get the desired reaction: “Your warning as to temper does not terrify me – see how brave I am – I know you sufficiently well to be content with you just as you are” (Letter 15).

The distance between them potentially aided in their becoming acquainted with one another, since it is potentially easier to discuss particular topics in written form rather than in person: “Do you know I have learned a great deal about you from your letters, which I only suspected before I knew you so well” (Letter 15). We also get a glimpse into Grace’s extensive studies and that in addition to her housekeeping skills, she was also trained to speak and write fluently in several languages: “As you are studying Latin now you see I am beginning to cater to your taste by introducing some of it into my letters” (Letter 14). Also, women penned and copied poetry to share with their gentlemanly suitors, as Montgomery notes: “The lines you copied from Mrs. Browning are very pretty but you failed to enclose them to me and as I have no copy of her poems I cannot say
whether I ever read them” (Letter 23). As far as Grace’s personality as the daughter of a wealthy banker, we can assume that she wasn’t one for attending parties in society based on Montgomery’s question:

Is it really an effort to you to go out to a party? Does your Mother scold you for not caring more for society? If so how much we can sympathize with each other. I do not mean to say it is a good thing. People who do like going out seem to have a nice time, but one of my ___ through life has been the necessity at times of going to parties where I did not want to, and it was my Father who made me do it” (Letter 26).

Perhaps she would have rather stayed home, reading or playing the piano, as it is apparent she was quite the musician, much to Montgomery’s and his mother’s delight:

“You must teach me something of music. My Mother is quite in love with you. I think she is satisfied you are quite up to the standard she had imagined for my wife. She is delighted with what I tell her of your musical talents and will derive much pleasure from your playing. Do your singing lessons continue?” (Letter 26).

What we gather from various documents of the time – i.e. her marriage announcement and obituary – and through Montgomery’s words to Grace is that she was an accomplished, intelligent woman of Victorian beauty, a star of the community with her devout faith and reserved personality – this is how Montgomery and the Rock Island, Illinois society of the time created her identity to her and to a contemporarily unintended reading audience. Her voice is, however, lost in the space where dead letters go.
Grace Lynde with her six daughters, approximately 1889.

Montgomery Meigs & The Male Lover Persona

Montgomery Meigs, 1875 (age 28)

Whereas Grace’s words are non-existent except through the in-passing musings of male interpretation, Montgomery’s are expressed directly from his own pen to ink to
paper and have been immaculately preserved for nostalgia’s sake for more than 130 years. What history lends us is knowledge that it is an unqualified generalization to assume that men were less emotional than women merely because they were more present in the performative emotionless public sphere. What is obvious is that these letters were never directly intended for the public (meaning other than immediate family) eye to see, particularly that of the 21st century, and the curious reader may assume that Montgomery’s authorial intent and expressed “self” are genuine in emotion. However, in this unilateral epistolary courtship, we witness Montgomery typifying the male Lover Persona in a seemingly private space, which complicates the notion of Montgomery as an authentic romantic. As Bruce Redford theorizes in *The Converse of the Pen: Acts of Intimacy in the Eighteenth Century Familiar Letter*. “The letter-writer is an actor, but a magician-actor who works on his audience by sustaining the illusion of physical presence. Consequently the truest letter, we might say, is the most feigning” (7). Because of Montgomery’s absence from Grace, he is an actor performing in such a way as to appear present to her, as if he too were in the private space where she reads his letters.

According to Karen Lystra, author of *Searching the Heart: Women, Men, and Romantic Love in Nineteenth-Century America*, “Total privacy was the foundation of romantic expression, and romantic relationships were guarded by a deliberate wall of secrecy” (3), and “private words were written and read in private places, reflecting the crucial relationship between words and space” (17). These private love letters being put on public display more than 130 years after their conception violates this sacred realm of privacy that would have shrouded Montgomery’s letters to Grace and vice versa.
However, some aspects of these letters were obviously meant to be shared with familial parties outside of the epistolary relationship, such as Grace’s parents, as shown by Montgomery’s continual reference to them in his own correspondence, usually in his closing salutations: “Please give my love to your Mother and Father.” Also, in another letter, Montgomery makes reference to a “we” that can only be his family when he responds to a letter of hers that was accompanied by some of her artwork and poetry: “We all enjoyed the sketches and the poetry very much. The likeness in the sketches were unmistakable” (Letter 47). So, given this information concerning Grace’s potential reading audience being other than merely Montgomery, one is left wondering if Grace merely gave his love to her parents upon his request or if she indeed shared the entirety of his letters with her family. At the time, just how much of these letters actually remained private, just between Montgomery and Grace, and was it ever entirely possible for Montgomery’s “lover self” to be real?

To examine Montgomery’s persona as a lover, one can consult specific examples of the “lover discourse” as witnessed in literature throughout time. Victorian Americans looked to etiquette manuals and other publications to gain advice on how to write letters; however, they also looked to fictional portraits of characters to learn from their strengths and weaknesses, and as witnessed by his own hand, Montgomery idealized male and female lovers’ roles based on what he read in timeless tales of love and loss. Throughout literary history, there have been numerous evidences of the male Lover in acts of wooing the desired object – the pedestal-teetering woman. In literature, there is the Biblical King Solomon’s erotic song about his young bride; the ever-pining Astrophil pursuing the
unwilling Stella; Lancelot and Tristan from the chivalric Arthurian legends falling in love with Gwenivere and Isolde respectively; Shakespeare’s immortal Romeo; and Robert Browning’s lengthy verses of love dedicated to Elizabeth Barrett, et al.

Proper lover language usage was a concern of Montgomery’s, as he expressed in a letter to Grace from Berlin, dated Oct. 8th 1875:

“I wonder often how other lovers write; what thoughts they express and what they do not: and think their epistles must be much better than my endeavors to put my feelings upon paper, always a disappointing thing for the writer. You seem to have quite the ‘Ars Scribeude’ and your words and thoughts appear to flow from the tip of your pen with the most charming fluency” (Letter 27).

Roland Barthes discusses the language of love in his work, A Lover’s Discourse: Fragments, by giving examples of specific love elements that have been immortalized in literature throughout time. Particularly in the earlier letters, the somewhat insecure Montgomery epitomizes several of these emotionally-driven characteristics of a stereotypical male Lover, which all stem from the fear of losing Grace’s love. His references to remembrances, tokens, anxiety, love poetry, jealousy, guilt, humility due to inexpression, obsession, and secrecy all are reminiscent of a male lover’s roles.

Giving Tokens = Remaining Present

Bestowing gifts or tokens upon a person one is wooing has been a tradition existing since the romantic interaction between the genders first came to be, so it does not come as a surprise that the loverly tradition of exchanging locks of hair goes back several centuries as well. However, it wasn’t until the Victorian time period that the sentimental use of hair became an obsession in courtship practices, particularly when given to a lover during a
lengthy separation so that he or she could, in some fanciful way, remain present despite the distance and time the couple are apart (Gitter 937). According to Elizabeth G. Gitter, author of, *The Power of Women’s Hair in the Victorian Imagination*, “The preservation and exchange of hair tokens were activities of the utmost dignity and importance. Hair was powerful and the ubiquitous Victorian lock of hair, encased in a locket or ring or framed on the wall, became through a Midas touch of imagination, something treasured, a totem, a token of attachment, intrinsically valuable, as precious as gold. Because hair was so precious, however, no counterfeit would do; the hair itself was needed for the magic to work” (942-943). For Montgomery, the lock of hair that Grace bestows upon him within a letter becomes something “vital, independent, energetic,” (941) that is a pure totem, not symbol, of her “self” so that the he as the “poet-lover feels blind, exposed, frightened, and lonely without the protection it provides” (941):

How can I thank you enough for the lovely lock of hair you sent me? Were it not for the mutilation your hair could suffer, I would gladly exchange such paltry rings as the pearl one, against such golden tresses of your hair as lie before me until doomsday. How could you leave such a gash among your tresses as the sacrifice of that lock must have made. I did not hope for more than a little piece. I wear both your picture and your hair on my breast as near my heart as they can lie, and as the picture is graven on the heart itself your secret image can be no nearer a companion to me until I possess the original itself” (Letter 13).

Though Montgomery is obviously portraying himself in a certain way to appear as an authentic lover – with his use of traditional lover language and practices such as the hair token request – the authenticity of his “self” in these letters is put into question because of his over-dramatic qualities that resemble that of an actor declaring monologues from the stage. Also, these dramatic monologue-esque letters are incredibly lengthy, most
ranging between 18-20 pages, and can grow tedious to read, according to even
Montgomery’s own standards. In a letter dated August 13th 1875 from Lucerne,
Switzerland, he writes, “My paper is at an end and as usual I have said very little and that
badly. Oh for the pen of Byron or Milton or even of your sweet little self. Do you know
I think you write so remarkably well” (Letter 23). Montgomery’s intimate conversation
with Grace through this epistolary courtship is in a way a performance of different types
of roles, bordering the line between Voice and Mask, Text and Subtext. When it comes
down to determining if Montgomery’s letters are a Fictive or Natural discourse, since he
fills the role of actor nicely as “he projects an identity that stands in for something else”
(Redford 2), one obviously can not come to any one Truth – we simply have no true
knowledge of either Montgomery’s or Grace’s personality, except what is expressed
through written word, and Montgomery’s enthusiastic, dramatic, and prolific words.

Montgomery obviously viewed himself as a traditional lover, wooing his beloved to
the best of his capabilities despite their relationship being a trans-Atlantic one. In a letter
believe it is one of the characteristics of lovers to do this and that shall be my excuse”
(Letter 13). Montgomery also continuously humbles himself, and whether intentionally
or intentionally, uses incorrect grammar in the first sentence of the following letter
excerpt:

I wish I could write real nice letters for your sake. How I would like to
pen such sonnets as Moore and Burns or pour out my soul in impassioned
language of Rousseau whose writings though not really fit for anyone to
read, are beautiful. Alas I am like a miserable clay or earthenware vessel
floating in a stream among hundreds of others framed of precious
materials. I feel that my thoughts and feelings are like theirs but have not
the art of expressing them in the language of those gifted beings whose intrigues can so sway our sensibilities and delight our imaginations. My stoical philosophy however now comes to my aid and convinces me that write as they may few of them were as lucky as I and fewer yet as happy” (Letter 16).

Though it seems natural to place all romantic relationships during the Victorian American period into one generalized category, Karen Lystra, in her work Searching the Heart, notes that “Victorian Americans often succeeded in building unique, emotional bonds between lovers that emphasized their individuality, their distinctiveness, their separateness” (9). Montgomery’s letters to Grace reveal a version of the self in relationship to an “other” and do so in unique ways.

What makes the epistolary courtship between Montgomery and Grace unique to them as individuals is their shared love of literature, stories, and reading; in fact, their initial meeting took place at a reading club in Rock Island, Illinois on a February evening of 1875. Some of the books that Montgomery discusses with Grace through their epistolary conversation include Milton, Lord Byron, Dickens’ The Pickwick Papers, Diary of a Late Physician, Cherished Youth8, Sole and Haben (a German novel), and Jane Eyre:

“I see by your letters that you have been reading a great deal. ‘Jane Eyre’ is certainly an entrancing novel and one whose spirit and teachings are ennobling though I think Rochester was not good enough for Jane Eyre. It is the fate of most good women I think to get men unworthy of them. Indeed few marriages are not one-sided in some sort or other” (Letter 14).

The gift of books to one another is a theme of their entire courtship because in a letter dated November 24th 1875, from Berlin, Montgomery writes to Grace, “I have bought a beautiful copy of Schiller which I design presenting you when I come home. Perhaps

8 Cherished Youth – supposedly an epistolary novel that Grace recommended Montgomery read to aid him in his letter-writing.
some day we may read it together in the evenings” (Letter 35). The couple also sent each other used books they had already read so they could, in a sense, continue their tradition of discussing literature, as noted in a letter Montgomery wrote, dated January 23rd, 1876 from Rome: “Thank you for the presents you sent me. *The Improvisation* shall be one of my first books to read in Rome and I shall value it as having once belonged to you” (Letter 44). Through reading, Montgomery and Grace achieve a sense of intimacy that is unique to their own courtship based on their individual tastes and willingness to share with one another.

**Montgomery as a Story-Teller Traveler**

Montgomery adapts another unique lover-like persona in his letters to Grace as he relays first-hand accounts of his travels throughout Europe. In a sense, it seems that Montgomery strives to woo his intended through his stories of sightseeing and meeting European military and government officials, with his message seemingly not being so much, “Love me for how important I am,” but more, “Love me for my ability to tell a story.” Montgomery’s letter from Rostock, Germany (Midelenburg Schwernie), dated Sept. 21st 1875 is one full of historical significance as it describes how the Meigs party was invited by the Emperor of Prussia to attend the “great Manoeuvres” a 3-day long mock combat. During the duration of this festival, the battle performances commenced through the day and were followed by grand state dinners at the Emperor’s palace. By way of narrative writing, Montgomery gives a thorough account of his observations of the Prussian army’s military functions and appearances (See Appendix B) through the eyes of
an otherwise unknown American diplomat. He also gives detailed accounts of climbing mountains in the Swiss Alps, going to the Berlin Zoo, the Royal Academy Museum in London, and spending Christmas in Italy, etc., all the while musing that he wished his love were there beside him, rather than sight-seeing alone or with family members.

Another aspect of these letters that shows the uniqueness of the Montgomery-Grace epistolary courtship is Montgomery’s use of illustrations throughout his narrative letters. Because of his extensive training in the field of civil engineering, Montgomery was talented in drawing and sketching. In fact, at the closing of the first letter of the collection (See Appendix D), Montgomery enclosed a sketch of a rowboat he had designed and named The Grace. This illustration is personal to both Montgomery and Grace and shows a desire on the part of Montgomery to woo the object of his affection through a means with which he was comfortable – drawing and designing. As the courtship progressed, and the Meigs family continued to travel abroad in Europe, the letters become more prolifically illustrated, and these sketches are meant to be supplemental to the narrative Montgomery weaves for Grace (See Appendix E).

Also, Montgomery uses a style of writing that was not necessarily accepted as being epistolarily correct – cross-script writing (See Appendix C). According to letter writers of the Victorian-American time period, cross-script writing was considered bad form when intending to impress someone, which one would be doing while in the courtship process. By writing in this confusing and compact manner, Montgomery was operating under the assumption that Grace would not be offended or that she would even be able to comprehend his words. This shows a sense of familiarity between the two, particularly
because he uses this style often throughout their two-year long epistolary courtship, and he rarely apologizes for writing in this paper-saving manner.

In closing of this chapter dedicated to the analysis of Montgomery’s letters to Grace, the thesis that the reader should come away with is that though using contextual information is helpful in constructing the back-story behind the life writings discussed and that by comparing these letters to popular resources of the time, we can get a better sense of social practices of the time. However, the words themselves give hints to us as to the relationship’s uniqueness that is expressed within each individual epistolary courtship of the Victorian-American time period. What makes this particular collection unique while making this comparison is Montgomery’s and Grace’s shared love of books, reading, and story-telling; Montgomery’s use of illustrations to supplement his story-telling; and his frequent use of cross-script writing.
CONCLUSION

What I gained intellectually from this project is a better understanding of how post-Civil War Victorian-American men and women communicated with one another through letters and how they courted one another through words when the use of the telephone was not yet an option. I also learned a great deal about the U.S. Postal Service in its earliest stages as well as how Americans at the time looked to Victorian England for social, epistolary, and courtship practices.

What I knew before starting this project became even fuzzier in my mind throughout the researching and writing process, and that is that “authorial authenticity” is a complicated notion, particularly when looking at Victorian-American love letters. We may search for clues throughout archives and tomes, attempting to piece together a letter writer’s identity, but in the end, we are only making a more educated assumption about a writer’s textually evident “self.” We can never truly know what “authentic” means, because the term subjectively varies from self to self and also because social parameters influence what would presumably be private intimate spaces.

In the case of Montgomery and Grace, the puzzle of their epistolary courtship of 1875-1876 is what makes it interesting – attempting to guess at what Grace may have written to Montgomery based on his responses to her has been a surprisingly fun enterprise, as if we as contemporary readers can write their love story the way we would want it to be. This making writing more relatable to us as scholars is at the heart of literary criticism, and studying life writings, such as Victorian-American love letters, is no exception to this academic tradition.
When my Grandmother, Betty Atwater Biehl, wrote her thesis on Montgomery’s letters to his family between the years 1872-1873, she prefaced her historical analysis by saying, “I have typed the letters verbatim, except for the omission of entirely personal remarks concerning only the writer and his immediate family” (Atwater). Betty’s thesis deals primarily with the history of the Northern Pacific Railroad, which is expressed firsthand in the letters of Montgomery to his family members during his time as a surveyor for the railroad. She does not delve into the questions of his identity and purposefully edits the letters so that “entirely personal remarks” were kept private. Perhaps this is because the events were somewhat historically fresh in the minds of the family, who would have been aware of her thesis topic, or perhaps the concept of piecing together a writer’s identity did not seem as interesting as the so-called factual information of the letters’ content. For whatever reason, Betty limited her discussion of the family to her introduction, in which she muses about what she remembers of her grandfather through her own relationship with him and through her mother’s remembrances.

Throughout the lengthy process of writing this thesis, I have often questioned my own intentions and strategies of analysis in regards to such a private moment between two people involved in a romantic exchange of words. Eventually, I realized that it wouldn’t be quite as uncomfortable for me had the writer and recipient not been part of my family history. This hesitancy towards intrusion did not win over my curiosity towards the
subject of epistolary studies, and my interest in the subject of history and questions of
authorial identity was piqued as I transcribed and edited all 142 letters. We contemporary
readers are intrigued by the past, because this is our legacy and also because history
symbolizes a more romantic time to which we can imaginatively escape the complexities
of modern times, and with letters, “[t]he pleasure of reading [them] derives from the
universal hunger to penetrate other lives” (Sparks 93).


Penn State University Libraries {online}. “Meigs, Cornelia.” <http://pabook.libraries.psu.edu/Palitmap/bios/Meigs_Cornelia.html>


The Papers of Cornelia Meigs in the Dartmouth College Library, February, 1984. ML 41, Boxes 1-30. Rauner Special Collections Library, Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH.


APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

FAMILY TREE
Grace Lynde’s Side of the Family

Cornelius Lynde (b. 03/06/1825 ; d. 09/13/1888) married Mary Adams (b. 1830; d. 1904) on _______.
Samuel Adams Lynde (b. 1855 ; d. 1940) married Nannie Buel Pleasants (b. 1858 ; d. 1941) on 08/27/1879.
Cornelius Fay Lynde (b. 1864; d._______) married Elizabeth W. _______.
Gratia (Grace) Cornelia Lynde (b. 11/15/1858 ; d. 09/02/1894) married
Montgomery Meigs (b. 2/27/1847 ; d. 1931) on 01/03/1877.
  Mary Adams Meigs (b. 2/28/1878; d. 9/5/1956) married Maxwell Wanton Atwater (b. 12/10/1878; d. 6/4/1919) on 5/14/1903
  Louisa Rodgers Meigs (b. 10/30/1879; d. ______) married Melvin Green
  Grace Sophronia Meigs (b. 8/30/1881; d. 1/20/1925) married Thomas Crowder
  Emily Frances Pauline Fay Meigs (b. 11/1/1888; d. ______) married Elisha N. Fales (b 12/23/1887; d 12/1970) on 6/4/1914
  Alice McKinstry Meigs (b. 3/17/1883; d. ______) married Arthur Orr (b. 10/4/1884; d. _______ ) on 7/9/1908
  Cornelia Lynde Meigs (b.12/6/1884; d.9/10/1973)

Montgomery Meigs’s Side of the Family

Commodore John Rodgers (b. 7/11/1773; d. 8/1/1838) married Minerva Butler Dennison (1784-d. 2/17/1877) on 10/21/1806.
Robert S. Rodgers (1809-1892); m. Sarah Perry (1818-?)
John Rodgers (b. 8/8/1812; d. 5/5/1882); m. Ann E. Hodge (1823-?)
Jerusha Carolina Rodgers (1819-1883)
Henry Rodgers “Hal” (1822-1854); m. Katherine Sproat Trowbridge (b. 10/9/1829-?)
Augustus Frederick Rodgers (1829-1908); m. Serena Livingston Croghan (?-1926)
Louisa Rodgers (1817-1879) married Montgomery C. Meigs and had 4 children who survived infancy.
  John Rodgers Meigs (b. 2/9/1824; d. 10/3/1864)
  Montgomery Meigs (see below for more genealogy)
    Mary Montgomery Meigs (b. 8/22/1843; d. 1930 ) married Capt. Joseph Hancock Taylor (b. 1/26/1836; d. 3/13/1885) on 3/30/1864
    Louisa “Loulie” Rodgers Meigs (b. 8/4/1854; d. 1923) married Archibald Forbes (b. 1838; d. 3/30/1900) on 6/19/1886
  Ann Minerva “Nannie” Rodgers (1824; d. 4/1/1916) married John Navarre Macomb (b. 4/8/1811; d.3/16/1889) on 4/2/1850
    Montgomery “Mont” Meigs Macomb (b. 10/12/1852; d. 1/19/1924) married
    Caroline Luce (b.1/25/1857; d. 2/10/1933) on 10/7/1908
    Augustus “Gus” Canfield Macomb (b. 10/17/1854; d 1/2/1932) married Ella Chelle McKelden (b. 2/12/1857; d. 7/30/1946) on 3/3/1880
Minerva “Minn” Henry Rodgers Macomb (1856; d. 7/3/1898) married Thomas Willing Peters (b. 11/3/1854; d. 1917) on 3/16/1881
          Christina Livingston Macomb (b. 1861; d. 11/6/1945)
          Nannie Rodgers Macomb (b. 9/11/1864; d. 4/13/1952)

Josiah Meigs (b. 8/21/1757; d. 9/4/1822) married Clara Benjamin (b. 1762; d. 1850) on 1/21/1782

Dr. Charles Delucena Meigs (b. 2/19/1792; d. 6/22/1869) m. Mary Montgomery (b. 12/14/1796; d. 5/1865) on 03/15/1815.

Charles Delucena Meigs, Jr. (7/23/1817-1895) married Elizabeth Leaming on 4/23/1844
Dr. John Forsyth Meigs (10/3/1818-12/16/1882) married Ann Wilcocks Ingersoll (d. 12/30/1857) on 10/17/1844
Henry Vincent Meigs (b. 6/19/1821; d. 1897) married Henrietta Stewart on 6/6/1843
Emily Skinner Meigs (b. 9/29/1824; d. 11/22/1905) married Jonathan Williams Biddle (b. 8/12/1821; d. 4/21/1856) on 4/16/1846
Samuel Emlen Meigs (b. 7/16/1828; d. 9/14/1917) married Cornelia Rogers (b. 3/24/1837; d. 4/10/1896) on 5/28/1863
William Montgomery Meigs (b.4/16/1826; d. 9/6/1897) married Jerusha Eliza Turner on 8/24/1853
Franklin Bache Meigs (11/10/1829-12/25/1881)
Mary Craythorn Meigs (b. 8/19/1838; d. 2/16/1917) married Harry Carlton Hart (b. 5/21/1827; d. 2/19/1881) on 6-20-1865
Montgomery Cunningham Meigs (b. 5/3/1816; d. 1/2/1892) married Louisa Rodgers (b. 1817; d. 11/21/1879) on 5/2/1841.
          John Rodgers Meigs (b. 2/9/1842; d. 10/3/1864)
          Mary Montgomery Meigs Taylor (b. 1843; d. 1930)
          Louisa “Loulie” Rodgers Meigs (b. 8/4/1854; d. 1925?)
Montgomery Meigs (b. 2/27/1847; d. 1931) married Grace Cornelia Lynde (b. 11/15/1858; d. 9/2/1894) on 01/03/1877.
          Louisa Rodgers Meigs (b. 10/30/1879; d. ______) married Melvin Green
Dr. Grace Sophronia Meigs (b. 8/30/1881; d. 1/20/1925) married Thomas Crowder
Emily Frances Pauline Fay Meigs (b. 11/1/1888; d. ______) married
Alice McKinstry Meigs (b. 03/17/1883; d. ______) married Arthur Orr
Cornelia Lynde Meigs (b.12/6/1884; d. 9/10/ 1973)
Mary Adams Meigs (b. 2/28/1878; d. 9/5/1956) married Maxwell
Wanton Atwater (b. 12/10/1878; d. 6/4/1919) on 5/14/1903.
          Montgomery Meigs Atwater (b. 10/21/1904; d. 6/1976)
Elizabeth Joan Rodgers Atwater (b. 2/29/1916; d. 4-22-2002) married Clarence Frederick Biehl (b. 11/6/1914; d. 11/28/1987) on 10/9/1937.

Mary Alice Biehl (b. 12/15/1940)
Elizabeth Joan “B.J.” Biehl (b. 11/19/1943)
Christopher Clarence Biehl (b. 10/30/1950)

Donald Montgomery Biehl (b. 3/22/1947) married Mary Kathleen Biehl (b. 1/11/1951) on 04/04/1974.

Wade Montgomery Biehl (b. 05/30/1969)
Kathleen Dawn Biehl (b. 10/7/1973)
Mary Ann Biehl (b. 10/11/1980)
APPENDIX B

LETTER EXCERPT
Letter from Rostock, Germany (Middelburg Schwernie), dated Sept. 21st 1875

The first morning after our arrival, we drove out and were astonished to see how many of the people there were in carriages like our own. The officers in these carriages were dressed in all sorts and colors of uniform [...] Having mounted the horses brought us, we were directed to a point where we saw a number of officers collecting and the numbers increased till there were probably some 200 or more. Finally a grand clattering of hoofs was heard and the Emperor drove up in a 4 horse carriage surrounded by a guard, the Crown Prince followed amidst the huzzahs of the populace and quickly mounting their horses the two rode down through the foreigners bowing to their salutes, and led off across country at a gallow followed by the entire ‘posse cometatus.’ We soon saw the troops advancing and as the program of the battle was arranged beforehand we soon came to where the opposing infantry were firing volleys at each other (blank cartridges of course) at a perfectly deadly distance.

Montgomery also describes personal details concerning the Prussian Emperor himself:

He is a charming looking old gentleman. His manners are affable and polite and there seems to be a real desire on his part to make people feel comfortable. He is 78 now but still is erect and strong as he walks with a firm step. His hair is gray and he shaves his chin whiskers. His smile is particularly bright and kind and as he walked down the line of guests stopping every now and then to say a word to some of them and even shaking some affectionately by the hand. I could see the officers (German) looking at him with a pride and affection such as I have never seen out in public occasion before.”

The stately dinners that the Meigs family experienced throughout their stay in Prussia as guests of the Emperor were quite impressive, as Montgomery describes one such evening:

My seat at table was between two Prussians who both introduced themselves and were quite polite during the dinner. The meal (16 courses) was served in great splendor but with a rapidity which was charming compared with the tedious affairs in courses which we have. With about every other course a fine wine was served. Even the famous ‘Johannisberger’ was passed around by splendid liveried waiters. The last
course consisted of bonbons of which each person took one and put it in his pocket. I enclose one not very pretty it is true but from the Emperor’s table nonetheless. They were very attentive to Father and gave him a high seat at table next Prince Polignac of the French Army. At last the King or Emperor rose and everyone did the same, he filed out and gradually the room was emptied, the company collecting in the audience room where the events of the day were discussed and King and Crown Prince once more went round among the guests and addressed a few words to different individuals. Both the Emperor and Crown Prince stopped and spoke to the representation of America present, Gen. Meigs, enquiring if he had had a pleasant day etc. Just as a well bred man would do to a strange guest in our own country: there was no stiffness and little formality about the affair.
APPENDIX C

EXAMPLE OF CROSS-SCRIPT WRITING
This letter is dated June 27th 1875 from Washington, D.C., the home-base of the Meigs Family. It shows us an example of Cross-Script Writing and how complicated it would have been for any recipient to read. This epistolary tactic was used to save paper and postage but was generally considered to be bad form when attempting to impress.
APPENDIX D

SAMPLE OF ILLUSTRATIONS #1
This Illustration accompanies Letter 1. This particular letter is dated April 29\textsuperscript{th}, 1875, and the way that Montgomery addresses Grace in this letter is the formal, “Dear Miss Grace.” The sketch is of a boat he had designed and christened “The Grace.”

Scan Courtesy of the Rauner Special Collections Library, Dartmouth College.
APPENDIX E

SAMPLE OF ILLUSTRATIONS #2
This letter is dated September 8th 1875 from Nuremberg, Germany. The sketches are of The Bay of the Castle of Sargans (top) and Lake Constance (bottom), both popular tourist sites in Switzerland.