

Producing Hate in “Private” Letters: Horace Walpole, Mary Hays

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In 1810, Mary Berry published the correspondence of Madame du Deffand, including in her footnotes excerpts from notoriously aggressive letters written by Walpole to Deffand; in 1798, Mary Hays published versions of some of her own letters to William Godwin and his responses to them in her novel Memoirs of Emma Courtney. Hays’s private letters to Godwin and Walpole’s semi-private letters to Mme. du Deffand reveal them engaged in transference, but not exactly transference-love—rather, hate. I argue that letter writing becomes a psychoanalytic practice with the publication of this private activity. Publishing an epistolary relationship restructures it, positioning its authors and readers in narcissistic but also sibling relationships as described by Juliet Mitchell, thereby enabling these authors to deploy hate to encounter reality. They produce hatred in a way productive for historical understanding, both theirs and ours.

I am concerned here broadly with what might be called the psychic life of print production. This essay is about how letter writing becomes a psychoanalytic practice with the publication of this private activity. That is, I want to revise the idea, “no Fliess, no Freud,” into “no published letters to Fliess, no Freud,” partly because it enables confronting the historical limits of psychoanalysis by which I mean both its blind spots and its historicizing capacity. Though I would like to be able to say it was Horace Walpole and Mary Hays who taught me that psychoanalytic thinking is historically limited and also provides a means for constructing a disinterested history, truly I have learned to see what they are doing through Juliet Mitchell’s recent work on the psychic impact of sibling relations. *Siblings* is a brilliant book that exposes the limits of classical

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and even much postclassical psychoanalysis, not to debunk it but to liberate its methods from the service of promulgating normative developmental theories into the service of uncovering historical specificity.

The productive matrix surrounding Walpole's correspondence with his French friend Mme du Deffand effects a merger in which one speaks through another's voice. Walpole copied by hand a letter written to him by Deffand, then edited, copyset, and printed it as part of his own "Description of Strawberry Hill" published by the Strawberry Hill Press in 1774. This letter was written in the voice of the ghost of Mme de Sévigné and encased in a snuffbox with Mme de Sévigné's portrait on it, an imitation of an original—hence its description in the Strawberry-Hill catalogue. The box had been planted in Walpole's house as if by Sévigné's ghost by the French ambassador who had been given the task by a friend of and decoy for Deffand (Lewis, *Horace Walpole's Letter*). This publication history as it were confounds many hands, including Walpole as writer and printer, with the voice of another, Deffand, hidden formally by a narrating persona and physically by a fake portrait. Who are the people handing over the text, and where? Individuals are indistinguishable in this scene.

There are such productive confusions throughout publication of Walpole's correspondence with Mme du Deffand.¹ Walpole gave Mary Berry his letters to Deffand. Berry was allowed to use them in editing a volume of the letters of Deffand which appeared in 1810, but was then required by Walpole's will to destroy them, which she did. Nonetheless, we still have some of them, and this is how: they are quoted by Berry in footnotes to her edition of Deffand; some were copied by the French post office, ever on the watch for revolutionary plots; and finally they are quoted by Deffand herself, extensively, in her replies to Walpole (Lewis, "Introduction" xli–xlii). Walpole's voice is amorcelated and spread out over these textual locales. Even within them, it is attenuated as well. In Deffand's quoting, she exchanges all of Walpole's "I's" with "you's" because she is quoting him back to himself while still talking about herself in the first person. "Where did you get the idea, I beg you" she says, "that *I am given to romantic indiscretions and transports?*" She italicizes "*I am given to romantic indiscretions and transports*" to indicate that she is quoting his letter directly; that original letter, from Walpole, must have said, says the *Yale Correspondence of Walpole's Letters*, "[You are] given to romantic indiscretions and transports."² Via interpolations and footnotes, *Yale* changes all the "I's" back to "you's" and vice versa, disentangling Deffand from Walpole via scholarly code—and yet, as we will see, at moments unsuccessfully.

An early letter that lays the groundwork for their fifteen-year correspondence articulates something very close to Freud's "fundamental rule" of psychoanalysis, viz. no self-censorship (12: 107). "Well," she writes in June of 1766 toward the outset of their epistolary relationship:

I hear your voice saying to me, "dare everything, write as much as you wish, nothing will anger me, I will never respond with biting or humiliating comments, I will leave it to you to state them to yourself I want only that *ma petite* be happy, that she love me, that she tell me so since that gives her pleasure . . . ; she is not vain, she is not manipulative, she has no feeling that is not honorable, the sun is not more pure than her heart, I want no longer to afflict her; when she suffers melancholy, I consent that

she may write to me her sorrows, because I would rather that she irritate me for one moment than risk making her crazy by forcing her to swallow all that she would say to me. (Walpole 3: 66)

Usually it is the case that, in epistolarity as a mode, one person reads the letter sent to them, another writes, expresses, and both at a distance, unless two people sit in a room together reading each others' letters to each other and commenting on them aloud. Thus Deffand here describes a single-person analysis, letter-writer on the couch, letter-reader behind it silently listening. But it does more: insofar as this letter describes a psychoanalytic scene, it shows us that the scene is indeed promotes a narcissistic merger, as has been revealed in the late twentieth century by the postclassical critique of psychoanalysis (Treurniet 879–880).

Formally, Deffand's narcissistic desire to merge is expressed by impersonating Walpole, quoting something he did *not* write in his letters but which she wanted him to write, crucially mixing some real quotations in with the discourse she imagines for him—"ma Petite" is his pet name for her, something he really writes (3: 260). Moreover, because she so often quotes what he really wrote back to him, this campy ventriloquizing serves further to render indistinguishable her fantasy from the real Walpole. Here again, the printed production of their texts re-enacts this narcissistic merger. One of Walpole's letters as produced by *Yale* (Friday July 3, 1772) reprints text quoted by Deffand in a responding letter: "I want only to make others my slaves, I love only myself, and since you also love only yourself, we can never get along" (5: 262). It seems as if Walpole is informing Deffand of his own desire for slavish friends and that his selfishness conflicts with hers. And yet the original, Deffand's letter of July 8, 1772, quoting his preceding epistle, also uses "I":

Your enumeration of my crimes will make the postmen laugh. *I want*, you continue [in your letter], *only to make others my slaves, I love only me, and since you love only yourself, we can never get along.* (5: 263)

Why didn't Lewis and Smith interpolate "you" for "I" as they typically do—as they did, for instance, in reprinting as if "from Walpole" Deffand's "you say that I am given to romantic transports": "[You are] given to romantic transports"? Is the "I" here in "I want only slaves" Walpole or Deffand, or does the thematic reflexivity of the sentence, "and since you also only love yourself," render that question sheerly academic, a moot point?

Given Deffand's bequest of her letters to Walpole while he was still alive (Lewis, Intro. xxiv), and Walpole's bequest of his to Mary Berry, for use in footnotes only, Walpole fully envisioned Deffand's letters as published without his own: Deffand's desire to merge with Walpole is thus in a sense co-authored by him. Personalities, technology, form, theme, codes of academic editions, and the epistolary mode all here conspire to produce the postclassical critique of traditional psychoanalytic discourse.

But there is more to this merger: narcissism's dark side; murderous aggressivity. Critics have noticed Walpole's failure to live up to Deffand's request to be treated kindly. Walpole is notorious for his epistolary attacks on her: "I have scolded Madame du Deffand black and blue," he says in a letter to a friend (qtd in Lewis, *Walpole's*

Letter 15). In fact, he so browbeats her, threatening in March 1773 not to answer nor even to read her self-disburdening letters (5: 343), that Deffand ultimately recants her articulation of the fundamental rule of unbounded self-expression:

Here are the conditions under which I will conduct myself in the future: to never disturb your peace by requiring that you subject yourself to any rule in writing me, let that be whenever it is agreeable; to never tell you about my anxieties, nor my disgust with life; to never complain about any person in particular, nor in general; to no longer expatiate, as you put it, that is to no longer communicate neither my thoughts nor my reflections. I consent, if I violate any of the four conditions, to feel the greatest possible unhappiness that could ever happen to me over having caused you pain. (5: 344)

Focusing on Walpole's virulent misogyny and Deffand's masochistic reception of it, her willingness to accept his epistolary reciprocity on any terms, critics have not so much remarked that her responses are at least equally as aggressive: when you accuse me of "romantic transports," she writes in 1766, "that puts me in a fury, and I would willingly tear out those eyes that people tell me are so beautiful, but that assuredly you cannot suspect of having turned my head" (Walpole 3: 7). She is excessively and physically infuriated when he accuses her of having an odd, quasi-incestuous sexual desire for him since the by-now blind Deffand was old enough to be his mother.

In this epistolary relationship, hate seems to function in ways fairly well defined by classical and postclassical psychoanalysis: Deffand's castrating anger when Walpole hints at her sexual interest in him, exposing the transference too early to her beleaguered defenses; Walpole's use of hate to define the analyst's boundaries and thus his reality independent of the analysand, a hatred more typically expressed in our time in the form of a very large bill. This correspondence seems to replicate the psychoanalytic scene except for one thing: it also seems completely facetious.³ Is the excess of Deffand's recanting of the psychoanalytic rule really a severely masochistic acceptance of Walpole on any terms, or is it a joke? Is this a parody of psychoanalytic process or its instantiation? Like the Swiftian satire that reveals—indistinguishably—Swift's failure or refusal (Pollak 178; Said 49, 66) to represent what has been defined by modernity as a "normal," whole psyche, one cannot tell here whether Deffand and Walpole, in their "carefully calculated version of private experience" (Haggerty 152), deviate from normality or mock it. These letters give us a version of the psychoanalytic process that is failing disastrously for both analyst and analysand, or they give us a parody of that process. Their critique of psychoanalysis as narcissistic emerges precisely from their hate-filled failure or refusal to enact it "properly" at the very moment that psychoanalytic relationships are becoming a historical possibility.⁴

Hate works a little differently, but to the same effect of giving us a glimpse of real history, in the epistolary exchange between Mary Hays and William Godwin. Godwin was Hays's mentor roughly from 1794 to 1796, until publication of the novel, Hays's *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*, in which he stars primarily as Mr. Francis. Though Augustus Harley in this novel is clearly a stand-in for William Frenn who rejected Hays's amorous advances, in Augustus's refusal to answer any of Emma's letters, he also resembles Godwin. In *Emma Courtney*, Harley's mother offers as her dying wish

that Augustus treat Emma like a sister (183), a wish that Hays probably entertained more for Godwin than for her estranged lover Frennd.

In *Siblings*, Mitchell discusses lateral sibling relationships as the blind spot in psychoanalysis (xv, 18). More exactly, she argues that psychoanalysis does not theorize the trauma of these relations because the analyst is in fact both a mother of siblings and a sibling to the analysand. The analyst acts out rather than thinks about sibling relations in practicing psychoanalysis. For Mitchell, hatred among siblings—expressed as two inextricably simultaneous desires, to merge with and murder the other child—is generated by the trauma of their mutual displacement, a trauma that can be healed only by accepting what Mitchell calls the “law of the mother,” a prohibition against murder, obviously, and a requirement to be different in time, to be historically situated (43–53). I have come to understand how this prohibition is internalized best not through Mitchell herself but through eighteenth-century moral philosophers, particularly, Helvétius, the philosopher most often quoted by Hays in her novels.

Helvétius sees hate as coming from competition for esteem, and even discusses types of people, fanatics, whose investment in those they hate oscillates between identification and murder, concomitantly inflating and deflating their own narcissism; they act just like the undifferentiated, displaced, angry other child (2.23.112). For Helvétius, some awareness of other people as independent subjects is only established—not by avoiding this narcissistic dilemma but by coming through it. In a section of *De L'esprit* on moral perfectability, Helvétius writes, “it is in the nature of man to praise love or gratitude, and to despise hatred or revenge.”⁵ It is natural and necessary, that is, to hate hatred, and it is precisely this hatred of hatred that allows persons “of discernment,” he says, “desirous of knowing the human heart, and of obtaining a knowledge of the mind, [to] reciprocally examine each other as two subjects of instruction . . .” (2.10.57). Helvétius describes not objectivity but an intersubjective achievement that, I would like to suggest, both Mitchell and Hays are able to consciously achieve for different reasons and from different structural and historical positions. Moreover, Hays and Mitchell are able to put this hatred of hatred to use as a springboard for standing temporarily outside of ideology, for becoming “scientific” in a sense formulated by Louis Althusser.⁶ I turn now to Hays and Godwin’s correspondence.

Hays writes to Godwin, she says, because her overburdened psyche needs to be (as Hays puts it later) “sluiced off.”⁷ In the analytic pact they worked out, Hays would write to Godwin, and he, too busy to write in reply, would answer her letters in person (Hays, *Love-Letters* 232). This is a painfully unequal relationship, Hays giving Godwin so much time both in writing and in passively awaiting his visits. In one crucial letter written over the last few days of April and first few days of May in 1796, Hays articulates her despair over this inequality:

I wonder, if I were to say—I would write to you no more, which I should punish most, you or myself!—For the b—st—y solitude in which I live, requires that I, who am so fond of talking, especially about myself, should sometimes unburthen my mind: and it flatters my vanity—still myself!—to believe a great philosopher interests himself in my prattle. (MH 20, April 29 to May 3, 1796)

Here Godwin is a mother figure, like an analyst as postclassical psychoanalysis imagines him or her to be, but also, in Mitchell's rewriting of that scene, someone who endows the attention on siblings, someone who "interests himself in my prattle."

And yet at moments Hays is able to imagine and to insist upon their equality through rearranging the epistolary scene. At one point, Hays asks him to bring her letters with him when they talk (MH 27, November 5, 1795). Here it seems as if the situation is much less classically psychoanalytic: Godwin will, as unresponsive correspondent, be Hays's screen for transference, as is any good analyst, but then, she will get up off the couch and examine the analysand's text—her own letters—with him. In the same letter, Hays articulates the psychoanalytic rule that enjoins self-censorship in a way similar to Deffand's:

I like your sincerity, & to afford you a still greater proof of my own, I will give you a little farther insight into my character, though it will make yet more against me: but we cannot expect to have our disorders heal'd by the Phycisian [sic.], however skilful he may be, while we conceal any of their symptoms. (MH 27, November 5, 1795)

Here, Hays does not quite describe the physician-healer as a recipient of her disorders. The person who functions as analyst is not simply Godwin but "we," an entity made up of them both: they will pore together, side by side, over her letters; their collective minds will cure "disorders" that perhaps plague them both—"their symptoms." Leveling the ground involves converting the analyst Godwin into a brother. If Godwin is a sibling who outranks her in the first part of their letter-writing arrangement, he is an equal in the second, and not merely an object to be loathed or loved but rather another subject to her as a subject, their interaction intersubjective rather than objectifying to either one. The "proof of sincerity" that she will give him is the novel *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*, "a sketch of the incidents which have formed my character," she elsewhere calls it (MH 24, January 1796). Here, she actually writes his letters for him, reformatting Godwin's conversations with her as letters written by Mr. Francis. Godwin's response to this bid for lateral equality and mutual subjectivity is not exactly positive: as one can see in her quotation of a comment he made about the novel, whether written oral, he accuses her of trying to "crush" him and advises her to "omit" her "philosophical letters" (MH 21, May 11, 1796, Brooks "Appendix", 256).

Hays's response to Godwin's insuperable sexism is hatred, *at first* of him. In the letter she writes to him after giving him her manuscript, she attacks him for failures of attention: "besides abusing my letters," she says,

you were not—indeed you were not!—pretty behaved! In the first place, while I had determined to banish selfish sensation, had dressed myself with more than usual care, & exerted all my powers to amuse you, you must needs chuse to be 'stupid'—a pretty compliment! I am destined for mortification—Do you think I can always be so meek & so forgiving a creature? (MH 20, April 29 to May 3, 1796)

That this access of hatred is about her own annihilation in the face of Godwin's interest in another sibling becomes most evident later in the letter: "The pretty Miss—perhaps never finds you stupid!" Though of course there is seduction in this letter, there is

hatred over the withdrawal of attention onto someone who displaces and replaces. The aggressive grandiosity alternates with fear of retaliation: about her manuscript, she says, “I feel all over author, & shrink from criticism, like the sensitive plant” (MH 20, April 29 to May 3, 1796). Though part of an oscillation between narcissistic merging with a rival and profound emptiness over being supplanted, this hatred of the sibling is according to Mitchell not envy but a sign of life; it provides the first step in overcoming the trauma of annihilation (41–42). A subsequent letter in which Hays responds to Godwin’s criticisms of her novel is even more strident: it opens, “Ah! you savage-hearted & barbarous critic! ... Thank heaven, all the world are not as delicate & fastidious as you are, or woe to the poor authors!” (MH 21, 11 May 1796, Brooks 253). But here, rather than speaking to Godwin dispenser of attention, Hays’s tone suddenly shifts, recognizing him as just a person, himself threatened: “I should be unworthy of the benevolent pains you have taken, both with me and my papers—a thousand times I thank you!—Be not unjust to me & to yourself.” In this letter, Hays stands back as literary critic of her own work, able like Godwin to evaluate it and able also to evaluate the justice of his criticism:

One of your observations I confess gave me considerable pain, respecting the ‘radical defect of my novel’—my heroine interested only about herself.—I understand your application but too well, & I plead not guilty. . . . Nor do I think, your own Caleb Wms, or Falkland, . . . less absorbed in their peculiar sufferings. (MH 21, May 11, 1796; Brooks “Appendix”, 255)

Here Hays very clearly articulates what is a traumatic historical reality for both her and Godwin, recognizing it as such by hating it rather than him, another victim. The traumatic historical reality she uncovers is this: women who suffer aloud are complaining shrews; men who do so represent the human condition. When she tells Godwin in giving him her novel, “I have laid before you a faithful representation of my mind,” and then refuses to make all the changes to *Emma Courtney* that would make it a better (i.e., more conventional) novel but less “real,” to use her own word (MH 21, 11 May 1796; Brooks “Appendix”, 254), she insists upon her capacity to represent human conditions—more, to be representative of them, to be a historical subject.

To conclude: for Juliet Mitchell, it is precisely hatred that can lead to aliveness, to the creative, sublimated, active engagement with history that trumps the egoistic reality testing which always returns to us, in the mirror, an ideologically-laden image. Mitchell’s book *Siblings* demonstrates that well-meaning analysts, like Godwin, offer interpretations that deny sibling hate. These interpretations simultaneously enact it by inflecting the patient’s story as a narrative of development rather than allowing it to be a valid formulation of historical reality. If working through the Oedipus complex constitutes sexual difference and with it the symbolizing ego, overcoming sibling rivalry in contrast constitutes a real, scientific sense of how gender relations are mapped onto sexual difference at any historical moment. Hays’s novel represents for us not personal pathology but articulated historical trauma, and she knows it. She owes this achievement, her contact with historical reality, to successive imaginings of and finally her own active organizing of the letter-writing and reading scene: she

publishes her novel, against Godwin's advice. Examining the techné or handling of letters in the effort to publicize them—by Walpole and Deffand, by Godwin and Hays—reveals one aspect of the interface between private psyche and public history. These figures are able to productively connect with reality by producing letters and, with them, the hatred of hate.

Notes

- [1] I am indebted in my thinking about what constitutes the context of the correspondence to Fitzmaurice who, in turn, relies upon Anderson and Ehrenpreis, and Altman; on Romantic-era epistolarity, see Favret.
- [2] To Madame du Deffand, Friday April 18, 1766, and From Madame du Deffand, Monday April 21, 1766 (*Yale Correspondence* 3: 2, 3: 7). In this citation, as throughout the essay, the volume numbers for the complete *Yale Correspondence* will be used rather than the volume numbers for the correspondence with Deffand, a subset of that complete edition, edited by Lewis and Smith. Lewis and Smith reprint a copy of Deffand's letter with the quotation in it (3: 7–10), then insert a letter fragment which they derive from her letter alone. Their letter fragment reads, “[Vous êtes] livrée à des indiscretions et des emportements romanesques,” and the interpolation is theirs. All translations of these letters are mine.
- [3] George Haggerty pointed this out to me in listening to a version of this paper given at ASECS 2005.
- [4] Those relationships are only possible with the emergence of the modern psychic structure capable of sustaining it (Wahrman, Marshall), not firmly in place during Swift's moment, emerging during Walpole and Deffand's. On the emergence of what is identifiably Freud's psyche during the Romantic Era, see Belsey and Faflak.
- [5] 2.24.126; cited hereafter in the text, as here, by essay, chapter, and page number.
- [6] “As for science, it may well arise from an ideology, [but it then] detach[es] itself from its field in order to constitute itself as a science... [It is] relatively autonomous...” (133).
- [7] MH 12, February 6, 1796; Brooks “Appendix”, 245. I am grateful to the Pforzheimer Collection of the New York Public Library for allowing me to view and quote from this resource. Hereafter I will cite Hays's letters in the essay as here, providing as well a page number from Brooks's Appendix to *Emma Courtney* which prints most of them.

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