The Oxford Book Of Letters

Frank Kermode Anita Kermode

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Reading other people’s letters, like reading private diaries, offers thrilling and unexpected glimpses into the lives of others—their pledges of love and their sharp remonstrances, their thoughts on war and peace and the gossip of the day, their intellectual travels and idle chatter. It is partly this guilty pleasure we take in such literary eavesdropping that makes The Oxford Book of Letters so compelling. More than 300 letters spanning five centuries chronicle the affairs of correspondents from Elizabeth I to Groucho Marx, from politicians to poets, from the famous to the unknown. Our book today is the delightful Oxford Book of Letters from the halcyon year 1995, a beautifully-produced and jam-packed thing edited by Frank and Anita Kermode and devoted, of course, to what is now axiomatically referred to as the lost art of letter-writing. Axiomatically, but not, I think, melodramatically; letters were tangible things, after all, capable of surviving floods, fires, and estate sales, whereas our present forms of written communication—email, Facebook, Twitter—are easily deleted (hell, Snapchat deletes itself), and also easily lost: I wrote my first emails twelve years ago.

Alan Stewart. The Oxford Handbook of English Prose 1500-1640. Edited by Andrew Hadfield. Print Publication Date. Access to the complete content on Oxford Handbooks Online requires a subscription or purchase. Public users are able to search the site and view the abstracts and keywords for each book and chapter without a subscription. Please subscribe or login to access full text content. If you have purchased a print title that contains an access token, please see the token for information about how to register your code.