

He had the permission of visiting me in the Stragtio.

Corresponding and Creating: female power through the pen

In the Romantic period, men and women had different and unequal social roles. Yet although their participation in public life was circumscribed, Romantic-period women could – and did - become prolific writers.

Letters were an essential means of communication and the Romantic period saw great advances in the national postal service. While letter writing was a central component of the daily routine, paper and postage were costly. Letter-writers devised ingenious methods to reduce these expenses. Techniques such as cross-hatching (overlaying horizontal and vertical writing) and folding letters into their own envelopes minimised costs.

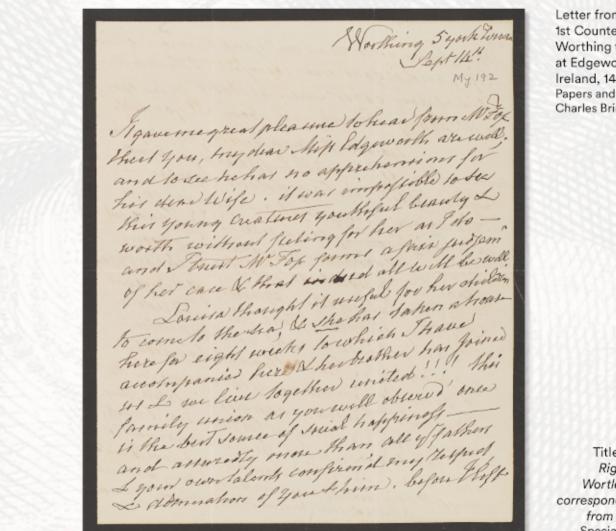
The evolving literary marketplace enabled women to write for public consumption on a hitherto unprecedented scale. Female authors used their writings to invite reconsideration of traditional conceptions of women's roles in society. Often their texts dealt with domestic issues, education, and motherhood, but women such as Felicia Hemans and Joanna Baillie also engaged with wider public issues such as nationhood, religion, and class.

Women published their views in many forms, including non-fiction, poetry, plays, and prose. There was a perceived hierarchy of literary genres: in the early Romantic period, novels were generally considered inferior, trivial and therefore suitable for female writers and readers. As the period continued, prose fiction attained higher status and became associated with male as well as female writers, producing celebrated works such as Sir Walter Scott's Waverley novels.

Frontispiece from The works of the Right
Honourable Lady Mary Wortley Montagu:
including her correspondence, poems, and
essays from her genuine papers (1825)
Special Collection, PR3604.A1.E25



Autograph signature of Felicia Hemans (1793-1835) Papers and Correspondence of Charles Brinsley Marlay, My 4344



Letter from Catherine M. Bury
1st Countess Charleville at
Worthing to Maria Edgeworth
at Edgeworthstown, Longford,
Ireland, 14 September 1836
Papers and Correspondence of
Charles Brinsley Marlay, My 192

Title page of The works of the Right Honourable Lady Mary Wortley Montagu: including her correspondence, poems, and essays from her genuine papers (1825) Special Collection, PR3604,A1,E25

