

The author explores and describes the nature of what he terms epistolary spaces, phenomena that came into being as a result of the foundation during the 1650s of a Post Office available to the general public. He focuses on the history of letter-writing by English men and women, and in so doing he shows how the imaginations of letter writers were affected by the increasingly cheaper, faster and more efficient postal services that were developed throughout the time period covered. The book makes a detailed study of five real correspondences, reading the letters in terms of their social and political interest and addressing such concerns as class, gender, collections of model letters and the importance of London to English epistolary spaces. How portrays epistolary spaces variously as arenas in which to explore the new urban culture of London, in the love letters of Dorothy Osborne (1652-4); courtly enclaves, in the diplomatic letters of the dramatist Sir George Etherege (1685-9); and aristocratic redoubts, in the correspondence between the Countesses of Hertford and Pomfret (1739-41). Finally, How examines the letters that constitute Richardsons novel Clarissa, showing how the artistic achievement of Richardsons greatest novel was aided by almost a century of just such imaginations of epistolary spaces as are to be found in the letters of Clarissa Harlowe, Anna Howe and Robert Lovelace.

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