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‘Alles Andere ist jetzt eben nichts mehr. Bist du ja jetzt meine ganze Welt.’¹ An unedited love correspondence from the nineteenth century: an analysis.

Abstract

This paper relies on an unedited and unpublished nineteenth century love correspondence of a heterosexual couple from the German speaking area. The aim of this study is to contribute to the knowledge regarding the nineteenth century love experience of ordinary and unknown lovers. In fact, while there are plenty of books on love correspondences of famous personalities, little research has been dedicated to love letters and romantic experiences of ‘ordinary and unknown’ people. For this reason the main aim of this article is to shed light on love stories and love experiences that otherwise will fall into the abyss of oblivion.

A new theory regarding the love experience in the nineteenth will be proposed: in this century love was perceived more in its material than in its abstract nature; I argue that in the nineteenth love was more about what people did, than to what they said. Lovers are in constant need of material and ‘seeable’ proof in order to perceive the love of their partners as real and authentic. The examples extrapolated from the following correspondence will corroborate this statement. Furthermore, this article has the purpose to underline the great value of love letters not only from an historical perspective (being evidence of past lives and dynamics), but also and more importantly from a cultural and societal one: analyzing love letters means to acquire knowledge not only about cultural and societal dynamics, but also and more importantly to add knowledge to the love discourse. In fact, they say a lot about the way people talked, expressed and materialized love in their daily lives. Correspondences without any publication in view are the most precious ones because they represent an unregulated and more spontaneous expression ‘of the language of the heart’.

Key words: love letters, materiality of love, material culture, practice theory, epistolary culture, intimacy, nineteenth-century letter writing, romantic love, nineteenth-century courtship, sensory history.

Introduction

The subject of love letters in general, and nineteenth-century love letters in particular, is both fascinating and challenging.

It is fascinating because love letters can be considered as the caretakers of love

¹ LB_00149_001 till LB_00149_0083, Liebesbriefarchiv, Koblenz, Germany.

Letter 0017; translation: Everything else is just nothing now. You are my whole world now. The original German letters have been translated by the author of this article, Piera Mazzaglia.

stories that otherwise would be lost. They are testimonies and constant reminders, not only to the people directly involved in the exchange, but also to us, of the fact that love exists. It is also a challenge because, although there are archives all over the world full of precious letters of all kinds and periods, it is extremely difficult to find an archive devoted entirely to love letters. The Liebesbriefarchiv in Koblenz is the exception to the rule since it constitutes the first and maybe only one love letter archive of the German Area.

In my view, the unpublished and unknown letters are the most fascinating and interesting category to throw light on, because they give the chance to narrate stories that none had heard before. For this reason, the present study will examine a nineteenth century love correspondence from the German speaking area which had not been published yet and that, more importantly, had been written by unknown and 'common' lovers, 'ordinary' people. In fact, while there seem to be many interesting books about love letters of famous people, such as Goethe's, Napoleon's, Churchill's, Hemingway's, Carroll's, to name only a few, there is little attention paid to love letters of 'ordinary people'. Indeed, the world is also full of 'common' and unknown people who have their own love stories to tell and who experience love in their special way.

Love is about what people do and the experiences they have in order to love and be loved. For this reason, the opportunity to tell a love story is not to be missed, as it offers the chance to shed light on different experiences of love.

The present study is based on an unedited love correspondence, kindly provided by the Liebesbriefarchiv in Koblenz. Being the first to read these letters gives me the opportunity to tell this love story.

Before delving into the analysis of the original materials, it is necessary to give a brief definition of love letters and to explain their meaning and value in the nineteenth century.

I like to define love letters as the speaking of the heart and of the inner and deepest self and therefore as one of the most precious and honest proofs of our feelings towards someone, a proof which is tangible and evident. Love letters are authentic documents of a person and evidence of a relationship. The materiality and tangibility of love letters is given not only from their material form (the paper that we can touch and hold in our hands and eventually preserve as a constant reminder), but also from their implicit material nature: love letters are themselves the materialization of abstract feelings. Indeed, the fact that they exist already makes a feeling, in this specific case love, tangible and more evident, especially in the eyes of a nineteenth century lover. People know that they are loved not

only by words spoken aloud, but also by actions taken and things seen and felt. Love needs constant tangible and evident proof to be considered real, to be perceived as real. Therefore, it needs to be materialized (the question whether there is love without actions and material/evident proofs should be the topic of another article and/or if love is a practice rather than a feeling).

This need of constant proof is clearly traceable in a sentence that the lover of this correspondence writes, after having received a letter with flowers from his beloved one: letter 003:

Du hast mir Dein letztes Briefchen mit Rosenblättern bestreut, damit es mir recht lieblich zünde? Ich habe sie aber auch recht fleißig gesammelt, damit ja keines verloren geht, sondern alle als treu *Zeugen Deiner aufrichtigen Liebe* bis ans Ende der Welt erhalten bleiben.²

The fact of having received a letter and flowers with it is for him a tangible and material proof (Zeugen/testimony) of his beloved's love, a concrete proof that will be cherished and preserved until the end of the world. So will their love: preserved and cherished with tangible evidence for eternity. In this way, feelings become 'visible' and material, and therefore more real, in the eyes of the lover. He sees her love in the actions she does for him and vice versa (see more example below). The fact that we are still able to read these letters more than two centuries later, because they have been well preserved, is further proof that the promise to keep and look after the beloved proofs of love has not been broken.

The essential VVA scheme in the love experience of the nineteenth century.

Thanks to the wide-spread alphabetization and the improved postal system around the turn of the nineteenth century, the letter and especially the love letter became a medium of communication for everyone, even for those who had little letter-writing know-how.³

Historical data proves that a great amount of love letters had been written and received in the nineteenth century, especially after the introduction of the postal reforms (not only in the United Kingdom but also in many other European countries). An estimated 337,500,000 letters passed through the United Kingdom in 1849.⁴ In Germany (at the time

² You sprinkled your last letter with rose petals, so that it would burn sweetly for me? But I also collected them diligently, so that none would be lost, but all would remain as faithful witnesses of your sincere love until the end of the world.

³ Eva L. Wyss: "From the Bridal Letter to Online Flirting: Changes in Text Type from the 19th Century to the Internet Era": *Journal of Historical Pragmatics*; 2008, p. 2.

⁴ Catherine Golden: *Posting it: The Victorian Revolution in Letter Writing*, Gainesville, University Press of Florida, 2010; p. 193.

German States) the increase of the number of letters exchanged went from 334 Millions in the year 1870 to 2,038 Millions in the year 1895.⁵ From this point of view, love letters are not only testimonies of love experiences, but also, on a larger scale, historical documents of past existences, which can reveal a great deal of information about a specific historical period and the people who inhabited it. Briefe werden zu Dokumenten einer distanzierten, kollektiven Erinnerung. Sie rücken ein in das Korpus kultureller Zeugnisse und werden in dieser Funktion durch Veröffentlichung in Auswahl zugänglich gemacht.⁶⁶ According to the historian Karen Lystra, love letters better than any other sources, capture the experience of Victorian romantic love; the common acts of love letter writing and reading in the nineteenth century were processes of defining experience that fostered the development of a romantic consciousness.⁷ Love letter writing was, for many couples of this period, an essential way to materialize and experience love. This experience was formed and nourished through specific phases which can be summarized, in what I defined as the three *essential VVA scheme* of the love experience in the nineteenth century: *Verbindlichkeit, Vertrauen/Vertrautheit und Austausch* (Commitment, Trust and Exchange).

Especially in the nineteenth century, which is considered the Golden Age of letters due mainly to the reforms in the field, writing letters was considered *a serious business*. The decision to correspond with someone, especially in matters of courtship, was seen as a 'formal declaration of intent'. It showed a clear and serious interest in someone. When an individual decided to send an initial letter of introduction, it meant that they were trying to establish that bond (commitment) with someone. The volatile emotional standard of romantic love was joined to the long standing idea of the spousal continuous duties and obligations,⁸ which meant that the person was *verbunden/bound* to oblige to some well established 'Erwartungen/expectations.' A letter was an official way (and also an official document) to introduce oneself and it was crucial in giving a first impression (much more detailed and efficient than a visit card). For this reason, it took time and attention to write a very good letter, and people were aware of this. It had to follow certain

⁵ Rainer Baasner: Briefkultur im 19 Jahrhundert, Niemeyer 1999, p. 11. See also, Statistik der Reichs-Post-und Telegraphenverwaltung. In: Karl Sautter: Geschichte der deutschen Post. 3. Bd.: Geschichte der deutschen Reichspost. Frankfurt a.M. 1951. Anhang A, s. 593.

⁶ Rainer Baasner, p.29. "Letters become documents of a distanced, collective memory. They become part of the corpus of cultural testimonies and are made accessible in this function through publication in selected form."

⁷ Karen Lystra: Searching the Heart: Women, Men, and Romantic Love in Nineteenth-Century America; Oxford University Press, 1993, p. 26.

⁸ Ibid., p.10.

rules, use certain sentences and have very good grammar and spelling. A letter with grammar or orthographic mistakes was already considered to be impolite and also unmasked unpleasant details about the sender. For this reason, letter writing was considered to be 'a serious business' that many used, but only a few really mastered.

Once this *Verbindlichkeit* had been recognized and accepted by both parties, it was then necessary to prove its *truthfulness* by establishing a *Vertrauen Verhältnis* (a relationship based on trust) between the two people involved, which, for the lovers in particular, was considered to be a crucial and undeniable 'part'. Lovers, who decided to engage in a correspondence, had to be able to trust each other in order to become intimate and be able to manifest their deepest feelings and emotions. In fact, the Victorian belief in romantic love demanded that men and women cross gender boundaries by disclosing and sharing, what was according to their romantic view, their essence.⁹ Once this *Verhältnis* was established, it was then time for the real exchange (*Austausch*) which of course had to be gegenseitig/reciprocal and follow some other specific rules in order to be efficient. This *Verhältnis* had of course to include sincerity and honesty; a study on nineteenth-century conduct manuals indicates that "mutual sincerity was regarded as the substance of romantic contract."¹⁰

Furthermore, within the circle of romantic love, men and women shared their interior lives with such intensity that many felt that they had merged part of their inner being...men and women from middle-class both shared romantic values that encouraged them to seek reciprocal understanding.¹¹

The unpublished and unknown correspondence, analyzed in this study, represents a perfect example of a nineteenth century love correspondence where the VVA scheme, explained above, can be easily traced. It is also an interesting case to study for a number of reasons. Firstly, not only does it represent a very long and continuous courtship, but it also evolves later into a marriage correspondence. Secondly, it is an example where the act of writing letters is the first and official method that helped to establish the love relationship between the protagonists of this love story: Peter and Adele. In fact, we know that feelings developed first during the exchange of some letters (and not thanks to a previous personal acquaintance) because in letter 008 Peter writes: "Weißt du noch

⁹ Ibid., p. 9.

¹⁰ Ibid., p.14, note 15.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 9.

recht wie ich aussehe, um eine genaue Beschreibung machen zu können? Sonst kann ich Dir eher mein Porträt anfertigen lassen.”¹² This aspect could confirm the theory of ‘Brief als Medium der Beziehung und Beweis der Liebe’, even before personal contact.

The importance of implicit details in love letters

It is amazing how much detail and information can be gleaned from a single love letter. The power of a love letter lies in the implicit rather than the explicit. The way a letter is written, the type of paper used, the words used, the length, the order and many other small details are important aspects for researchers. A letter, in this sense, can say a lot about a person’s beliefs, ideas, moral and ethical convictions, social status, grade of education and even religious orientation.

Giving attention to the protagonists of these letters, we have only the information that we can deduce from the letters, which is already considerable. We do not know how the correspondence came to be in the archive or who kept it for more than two centuries. It was certainly donated by an unknown person. If the person in question was related to the couple or just happened to be in possession of these letters is something that remains a mystery. We know Peter's surname, Dietschi, because he never fails to end his letters with his name and surname, but we cannot deduce Adele's surname because she simply signs herself Adele. I was able to find this information by consulting another archive where I discovered that her surname was Schmid. The couple must have been born and raised in Switzerland. Adele's hometown is most likely Olten, as one of the letters mentions her struggle to leave her father's house in Olten to follow Peter after their marriage. We don't know exactly where Peter was born. However, as far as we can tell, Peter is writing from another town in Switzerland called Solothurn, where he is working as a teacher. The distance between the two cities is very small by our modern standards (according to Google maps the journey is less than two hours by car). For that time by train (Peter refers very often to the train station and to his journeys on the train) it must have seemed like an eternity.

The first letter of this correspondence, dates 13th September 1858 and it is a letter from Peter to Adele; whereas the last one dates 3rd October 1864. The dates on the right side above tells a lot about the ‘time regularity’ of this letter exchange. In fact, we know that Peter and Adele wrote to each other regularly, sometimes more than once a week

¹² “Do you still know what I look like so that I can give you an exact description? Otherwise I can have my portrait made for you.”

even. In some cases, however, there are significant time gaps. It is very unlikely that during these time frames the couple did not write to each other. It is, instead, more probable that the letters were lost. This theory is supported by the absence of references to quarrels and the like in the letters that follow.

We are in front of a very regular love correspondence, consisting of a total of 82 letters, which covers an astonishingly long period of time, more than four years. The fact that all these letters have been preserved is not something to be underestimated. Indeed, it shows and confirms the value and importance given by people to love letters from the beloved one. This couple is no exception. The majority of the letters are from Peter to Adele and not vice versa (Adele's letters are very few and form the missing part). This other detail might lead us to believe that it was Adele who kept the letters, probably recognizing their emotional, symbolic and material value. Peter may or may not have done the same, but this is something that unfortunately we will never know, unless the missing letters are to be found. Nonetheless, this fact might confirm the common thought that considered women the major exponent of this genre, and also as the 'caretakers and preservers' of love and gifts received from the beloved. Im Sinne eines Mediums der Empfindsamkeit und Identitätskonstruktion (vgl. Reinlein 2003) wird die Konnotation des Briefs, und insbesondere Liebesbriefs, als typisch weibliches Schreiben in Verbindung mit Idealen der Natürlichkeit und Tugendhaftigkeit ausformuliert.¹³

In addition to the length of this correspondence, another interesting aspect, worth mentioning, is the fact that all the letters of this correspondence were written on a typewriter. Typewriters were a typical new invention of the nineteenth century, which means that they also must have been very expensive at that time and not everyone could afford them. The fact that all these letters are written on a typewriter can only indicate that Peter and Adele must have belonged to a wealthy class (perhaps a wealthy bourgeoisie), rich enough to afford such an expensive tool and to exchange letters in the first place (they not only had the money to write and send letters but, more importantly, the leisure time to devote to this activity, which was a prerogative of the wealthy social classes).

¹³ Elisabeth Fritz: "Der Brief in der darstellenden Kunst seit dem 18. Jahrhundert; Der Brief als weibliches Medium im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert". In: Handbuch Brief, von der Frühen Neuzeit bis zum Gegenwart, Band 1: Interdisziplinarität-Systematische Perspektiven-Briefgenres. Hg. Marie Isabel Matthews-Schlinzig, Jörg Schuster, Gesa Steinbrink und Jochen Strobel. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020, p. 362. "In the sense of a medium of sensibility and identity construction (cf. Reinlein 2003), the connotation of the letter, and especially the love letter, is formulated as typical female writing in connection with ideals of naturalness and virtue."

From the first lines, and also from the articulate way in which Peter describes his feelings, the environment around him, the metaphors he uses and the references to poems he mentions, the use of French words clearly confirms the theory that he is a highly educated man (which was soon confirmed by further reading of the following letters).

Peter is in fact a teacher, probably trying to acquire a good position in order to guarantee better standards for his future family. It is no wonder that he takes this duty quite seriously since it is perceived in connection to their future happiness. In letter 016 he writes “...darfst Du recht in meinem Herzen leben, weil nur dann unser Glück fest gegründet ist, wenn ich nicht nur ein treuer Liebender, sondern auch ein rechter Professor bin.”¹⁴

Very often he writes about his ‘Vorlesungen’ like in letter 011 “Meine Vorlesung ist Gottlob vorbei. Wie sie aus gefallen, darüber weiß ich noch nicht viel....Das Publikum war sehr zahlreich; ich habe Leute bemerkt, die noch gar nicht da waren”;¹⁵ he continues in the same letter “Vor allem habe ich viel für die Schule nach zuholen, für die ich in den letzten 14 Tagen manches müßte liegen lassen, sodaß ich zunächst noch Arbeit genug habe.”¹⁶ The act of sharing daily based activities is also an important part in love correspondences because it makes lovers get to know each other better in relation to their daily habits.

In the nineteenth century, the fact of writing in a 'well-cured' and articulate way was already a sign of 'care' towards someone, and especially towards the lover. It indicated that the writer was seriously committed to that particular moment of writing the letter and expressing his deepest feelings. This special moment belonged only to the two of them, letter 019:

So opfere ich den herzlich gerne ein Studchen, um Dir einige Tage “ Hangens und Bangens in schwebenden Pein” im Tage jener “ Himmelhochjauchzenden Freude zuverwandeln die allein die liebende Seele so innig fühlt. Und diese Stüdchen selbst ist ja auch mir selbst geopfert. Ist es mir auch dabei, als säßest Du traulich auf meinem Schoße, die zarten Arme zärtlich um meinen Nacken schlingend und blickest recht seelenvergnügt zu mir hernieder, oder lehntest Dein niedliches Köpchen an meinen glühenden Wangen!¹⁷

¹⁴ ...may you live right in my heart, because only then is our happiness firmly founded, if I am not only a faithful lover but also a right professor.

¹⁵ My lecture is thankfully over. I don't know much yet about how it turned out The audience was very large; I noticed people who hadn't ever been there.

¹⁶ Above all, I have a lot of catching up to do for school, for which I had to leave a lot behind in the last 14 days, so that I still have enough work to do for the time being.

¹⁷ So I will gladly sacrifice a little piece to you in order to transform a few days of "trembling and trembling in suspended torment" into the day of that "joy rejoicing in the heavens that only the loving soul feels so intimately. And this little piece itself is also sacrificed to myself. Is it also as if you were sitting comfortably on my lap, tenderly wrapping your arms around my neck and gazing down at me, quite pleased with your soul, or leaning your cute little head against my glowing cheeks!

Female and male members of the bourgeoisie wrote often such eloquent, correct or playful letters, employing an old-fashioned stereotypical literacy usually observed only in very formal literacy-letters with a sense of esprit modeled by the Great German writers, whose letters were already being published in edited collections in the second third of the 19th century¹⁸. In fact, already in the first letter that we registered, Peter writes: "Schon der Abend ist herangekommen; die Sonne ist hinter dem Jura verschwunden und bläulich grauer Duft, der sich auf Berge und Täler niedersenkt, verkündet die Neige des Tages, und noch habe ich heute nicht Zeit gefunden Dir zu schreiben."¹⁹

ANALYSIS

In the majority of cases, love letters of this period present a definite structure and recurring forms and contents that follow the well established parameters of the letter writing art. This correspondence is no exception. It should not wonder if some passages, especially in long correspondences, result redundant or full of too detailed descriptions, since it was part of the established parameters; as Rainer Baasner notes: Bei der Lektüre eines großen Briefkorpus aus dem Untersuchungszeitraum mit annähernd repräsentativen Charakter prägen sich gewisse wiederkehrende Form- und Inhaltselemente als feste Strukturen ein.²⁰

The importance of nicknames

The date written at the top right is followed by a greeting, which is usually made up of nicknames. Nicknames are usually an essential part of love letters and are considered special because they are created and used exclusively by the lovers and are part of their "secret way of communicating", their secret language of love. In my opinion, they are an essential part because they set the tone of the conversation, make it more confidential, help to break down the wall of officialdom and establish a new level of intimacy between the two.

¹⁸ Eva L. Wyss, *Communication of love: mediatized intimacy from love letters to SMS: interdisciplinary and historical studies*; Cultural and Media Studies, Bielefeld, 2014, p. 189.

¹⁹ Evening has already come; the sun has disappeared behind the Jura and the bluish grey scent that descends on mountains and valleys announces the end of the day, and I have not yet found time to write to you today.

²⁰ cit. Rainer Baasner, p. 16. "When reading a large corpus of letters from the period under investigation, which are approximately representative in character, certain recurring elements of form and content become imprinted as fixed structures."

Die Kosenamen sind als Teil des Privatcodes für den Partner oder die Partnerin reserviert und werden – auch wenn es sich um verfestigte sprachliche Formen handelt – in der Regel ausschließlich von diesen und für diese verwendet. Durch diese kommunikative Praktik baut sich daher nicht nur eine Selbstdarstellung des einen als Teil eines Paares auf, sondern es entsteht dabei gleichzeitig eine sozialsemiotische Positionierung, die anzeigt, dass und wem man sich zugehörig fühlt und welche Namen-Kultur man betreibt, d.h. wie man sich sozial verortet.²¹

In the case of the correspondence analysed, we are not dealing with a very creative couple. Nevertheless, the nicknames are always present in every single letter. Peter very often calls Adele “Mein theures Liebchen” or “mein theures Bräutchen” or “mein liebes, herziges Bräutchen” and then later “liebes Mütterchen”, “mein liebs Weibchen”, “mein herziges Hausmütterchen” whereas Adele addresses to him as “mein theurer Brautigam” or “mein innigstgeliebter Bräutigam” or “liebes Mannli” (see letter 0075) or “mein liebes Vaterli” (letter 077). It is very interesting to note how, in this case, these small words can reveal a lot of important information about the development of their relationship and the changing roles within the couple, so that it is possible to understand, without further reading, the level of intimacy between the two (from simple “Weibchen” to “Bräutchen”, ending with “Mütterchen”, for example). Indeed, the couple eventually marry and give birth to children throughout the length of the letter exchange. The greetings are usually followed by the acknowledgements of the letters received. This part in particular helps us to understand the importance and role that writing and exchanging love letters played for lovers at that time. Peter is quite clear, in more than one occasion, in describing the importance he attaches to letters from Adele. In letter 008 Peter compares the letter he received from Adele to a sunshine in the evening:

Auch mir folgte am Montag auf die Stunden beklommen Herzens ein lichter Strahl der Sonne, der den sinkenden Abend verklärte. Ich erhielt Dein liebes Briefchen und noch nie war eines so schön, noch nie war ich ob einem so glücklich gewesen. O hätte ich Dich gehabt um Dich an mein Herz zu drücken um Dir tausend und tausend Küsse auf Deine glühenden Lippen pressen zu können.²²

²¹ Antje Dammel, Yvonne Niekrenz, Andrea Rapp und Eva L. Wyss, “Muckelchen oder Süßer? Onymische Gender-Konstruktionen bei Kosenamen im Liebesbrief”, *Namen und Geschlechter: Studien zum onymischen Un/doing Gender*, edited by Damaris Nübling and Stefan Hirschauer, Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2018, pp. 157-190. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110589122>. p. 159: “The nicknames are reserved as part of the private code for the partner and - even if they are solidified linguistic forms - are usually used exclusively by them and for them. Through this communicative practice, therefore, not only is a self-representation of one as part of a couple built up, but at the same time a social-semiotic positioning is created that indicates that and to whom one feels one belongs and which name culture one practices, i.e. how one situates oneself socially”.

²² On Monday, after the hours of my heart's trepidation, a bright ray of sunshine followed me, transfiguring the sinking evening. I received your dear little letter and never before had one been

As mentioned before, the theory that letters are perceived as tangible proofs of love is here confirmed by Peter, letter 0010:

Dein letztes Briefchen hat mich recht innig grefreut, wenn es mich schon schmerzte Dich so betrübt zusehen. Ist es doch *ein inniges Zeugnis Deiner Liebe* und aufrichtigen Theilname für mich.²³

Love letter as a special commitment

As previously stated, writing love letters is a commitment that cannot be missed and that provides great joy. Letter 011 “Indess wird sich doch auch wieder mehr freie Zeit finden im Dir etwa ein artiges Briefchen schreiben zukönnen und das freut mich am meisten.”²⁴ It is a commitment that cannot be missed, otherwise it would cause great pain and worries in the other half. Peter and Adele are surely aware of this. So it is not surprising that Peter, in particular, is constantly giving information about when he will write the next letter or when the letter will reach Adele's hands. In this way, Peter implicitly reassures Adele that his commitment will be maintained, and vice versa. On the other hand, he is in constant need of reassurance, and in every single letter he asks Adele to write him back, using phrases such as letter 004 “Schreib bald, recht bald. Du kennst meine Stimmungen und Erwartungen”;²⁵ letter 008 “Schreibe mir recht, recht bald!”; letter 003 “Erhalte ich vielleicht noch ein Briefchen vorher?” letter 002 “Wenn du morgen oder übermorgen noch einmal schreiben willst, wird es mich sehr freuen; letter 005 “ Darf ich auf ein baldiges Briefchen hoffen?”; letter 006 “Schreibe recht bald”.

There is more to this request: it is not only a request to write back, but also a request not to be forgotten or betrayed, a request, as mentioned, to keep the commitment made, not to stop loving him. The request to continue to give material and tangible proof of her love.

In letter 011 Peter reassures Adele once again about his commitment: “Nächste Woche haben wie zum Glück einen Feiertag und dazu noch an einem Mittwoch. Dann sollst Du ein recht herziges Briefchen erhalten und auch wieder einmal ein längeres.”²⁶

so beautiful, never before had I been so happy about one. Oh, if I had had you to press you to my heart, to press a thousand and a thousand kisses on your glowing lips!

²³ Your last letter made me very happy, even though it pained me to see you so sad. It is, after all, a heartfelt testimony of your love and sincere sympathy for me.

²⁴ However, there will be more free time again to write you a nice little letter and that makes me most happy.

²⁵ Write soon, very soon. You know my moods and expectations.

²⁶ Luckily, we have a holiday next week and it's on a Wednesday. Then you shall receive a very hearty letter and also a longer one once again.

Continuing in the same letter “Ich wollte Dir nur wenige Zeilen schreiben und nun siehst Du sind die drei Seiten wieder gänzlich voll geworden. Dafür wirst Du aber auch an mich denken und mich mit einem artigen Briefchen recht bald belohnen”²⁷ as he does in Letter 020 “Diesen Brief solltest Du eigentlich morgen erhalten. Da es aber so fürchterlich stürmt draußen, wirst Du mir wohl verzeihen, wenn ich vielleicht heute nicht mehr in die Stadt zugehen wage.”²⁸

Sometimes, the desire to write a letter is so much pressing that he is unable to wait: Letter 014 “Ich habe Dir zwar erst auf Mittwoch ein Briefchen versprochen, aber ich kann mich nicht enthalten schon heute zu beginnen damit es Morgen fertig werde und am Dienstag schon recht früh in Deine Hände gelange.”²⁹ In the same letter Peter, after having described the pain he feels for being unable to have Adele in his arms, asks again for reassurance: “Doch Du wirst mich rech bald mit einem lieben Briefchen beglücken und dann werde ich wieder heiter und froh sein. Nicht wahr liebes Herzchen.”³⁰

Peter seems to be in constant need of reassurance of Adele's feelings. In fact, in the same letter he once again writes “O theures Herzchen schreibe mir recht bald, bald! (he underlines this part himself). Ich bitte Dich rechherzlich darum. Recht schmerzlich sehne ich mich nach Deinen lieben Zeilen, die hoffentlich meinem gepreßten Herzen wieder Ruhe und Freude bringen.”³¹

In this other letter 016 Peter mentions the turmoil that Adele might suffer in the case that she will not receive the expected letter: “Morgen, also am Mittwoch, ist durch Schule und Bibliothek meine ganze Zeit belegt und da will ich lieber heute beginnen, damit Du am Donnerstag nicht durch das Ausbleiben der *ersehten Briefchens beunruhigt* werdest.”³² Peter is more than aware of the fact that not receiving a letter might cause disappointment (so where lovers of this period):

²⁷ I only wanted to write you a few lines and now you see that the three pages are completely full again. But you will also think of me and reward me with a good letter very soon.

²⁸ You were supposed to receive this letter tomorrow. However, since it is storming so terribly outside, you will forgive me if I do not dare to go into town today.

²⁹ I promised you a letter for Wednesday, but I can't stop myself from starting today so that it will be ready tomorrow and reach your hands early on Tuesday.

³⁰ But you will soon make me happy with a dear little letter and then I will be cheerful and happy again. Not true, dear heart.

³¹ O dearest heart, write to me soon, very soon I sincerely ask you for it. I am longing quite painfully for your dear lines, which I hope will bring peace and joy to my pressed heart again.

³² Tomorrow, that is, Wednesday, all my time will be taken up by school and the library, and so I would rather begin today, so that you will not be disturbed on Thursday by the absence of the longed-for letters.

letter 019: Da Du aber noch einige Zeilen von mir zuerhalten wünschst, so könnte ich es unmöglich übers Herz bringen, Deine Hoffnungen zutäuschen. Giebt es ja doch kein ein größeres Vergnügen für mich, als Dir eine Freude zu bereiten und was sollte mein Herz mehr beseligen können, als die Überzeugung, Du seiest glücklich im Gedanken an mich?³³

The struggle caused by the lover's absence

The next part consists of a description of the struggle and agony caused by the absence and distance of the loved one. Very often a description of the environment is included as a metaphor for the tormented inner state. This part can be seen as a kind of self-dramatisation/self-reflection in which individuality predominates. In this section, the writer expresses his or her personal feelings and current state in a very detailed and elaborate way, which clearly has nothing to do with the pain of the body, but with the pain of the heart. Letter 014 "Den ganzen langen Tag kamen gestern und heute meine Gedanken nicht von Dir weg und doch war ich dabei recht sehr melancholisch ..." ³⁴ continuing with the metaphor:

Auch in meinem Herzen war Sturm gestern und heute. Finstere Wolken umhingen meinen Sinn und umschleierten Dein freundliches liebes Bild....Kurz alle quälenden Gedanken, die nur möglich waren, stiegen in meiner Seele auf und es war wie wenn alle bösen Geister plötzlich frei geworden wären, mich zu plagen. Ich konnte gar nicht froh werden! Du wirst sagen, ich sei ein rechtes Narr, Du liebst mich ja so sehr, wozu ich mich denn mit solchen melancholischen Gedanken martern wolle? Aber siehst Du so ist die Liebe. Was sie schon hundert mal wieder von Neuem hören und mit neuem Zauber bannt dann das süßes Wort "Liebe" allen bösen Mächte.³⁵

In this case, the pain was not only caused from the absence of the loved one but also from the doubts of not being loved back that shook Peter's soul like a storm might shake the trees or sweep away the white clouds of a clear blue sky.

In fact, doubt is another big part of love letters, because doubt itself is an essential part of the love experience. As mentioned at the beginning of this article, love constantly needs proof and reassurance for one main reason: fear and doubt are part of being in love. Doubting that we are not being reciprocated in the same way that we love is and always will be one of the greatest fears that lovers have. Peter clearly has this fear. He becomes

³³ But since you still wish to receive a few lines from me, I could not possibly bring myself to deceive your hopes. After all, there is no greater pleasure for me than to give you joy, and what could make my heart more happy than the conviction that you are happy in the thought of me?

³⁴ All day yesterday and today my thoughts did not leave you and yet I was very melancholic.

³⁵ There was a storm in my heart yesterday and today as well. Dark clouds surrounded my mind and shrouded your kind, dear image. Shortly all the tormenting thoughts that were possible rose in my soul and it was as if

all the evil spirits had suddenly become free to plague me. I could not become happy at all! You will say I am a real fool, you love me so much, why should I torture myself with such melancholy thoughts? But you see, that's love. What they hear a hundred times again and again, and then with new magic the sweet word "love" banishes all evil powers.

melancholy when doubt arises. The only thing that gives him a break from these sufferings is a reassurance from Adele, which consists of *the material things and acts she does*: sending the letters in the first place, thinking about him all day, talking to people and friends about him, struggling in the same way as he does. Peter, like lovers in general, does not need words when the doubts come, but tangible proof that he is indeed loved. Letter 011:

...Es wußte mir viel Liebes und Gutes aus Deinem Briefe zuerzählen. Ich sah daraus, daß Du mich recht innig liebest, an nichts denkst als an mich und das freute mich natürlich im Grunde des Herzens. Diese Deine Liebe ist ja jetzt mein ganzer Himmel, die ich nicht gäbe um alles Gold der Erde. Komme auch was da wolle, bleibt sie immer so rein und treu, dann wird auch das Glück nie fehlen und in allen Nöthen des Lebens wird sie als ein freundlicher Stern auf sicherem Pfade hindurchleuchten.³⁶

Letter 009: Da Du doch so fleißig bist auf dem Klavier, so muß ich doch auch hören was Du für Fortschritte gemacht und was für ein schönes neues Lied Du gelernt. Dieser Beweis Deiner Liebe freute mich recht sehr und soll uns auch ein angenehmes Stündchen verschaffen"; letter 0010 "Aber Du liebst mich ja, deren darf ich gar nicht mehr zweifeln, liebst mich innig, mächtig: All Dein Kummer ist ja nur Deine Liebe und so muß er mir doppelt nahe gehen. Und die Thränen, die Du weinst, nachts wenn Dich der selige Schlummer verläßt, das sind Thränen der Freude für mich, denn sie erzählen mir von des theuren Bräutchens reiner Liebe...³⁷

On the other hand, Peter also considers a way of showing his love to Adele in this way, letter 0010:

Elise...hat mir viel Liebes und Gutes von Dir erzählt, was mich innigst freute. Mehr als zwei Stunden haben wir geplaudert und gewiß kein Wort als von Dir, Neues und Altes wie es kam.. Es erzählte mir auch eine traurig-schöne Scene, die mich innig gerührt hat, wie mein liebes Herzchen krank und matt mit dem Brief des fernen Liebenden in der Hand beim brennende Lichte eingeschlafen sei. Gewiß gieng das mir recht zu Herzen. Kein Schöneres Pendant zu den Thränen beim Fenster hätte ich mir denken können, keinen rührendern Beweis Deiner treuen Liebe.³⁸

In letter 015 Peter mentions another event that caused him joy and that at the same time reveals an important detail of their relationship. Peter must have officially asked for

³⁶ You told me a lot of good and loving things in your letter. I saw from it that you love me very dearly, that you think of nothing but me, and that naturally made me happy at the bottom of my heart. This love of yours is now my whole heaven, which I would not give for all the gold in the world. Come what may, it will always remain so pure and faithful, then happiness will never be lacking and in all the hardships of life it will shine through as a friendly star on a safe path.

³⁷ But you love me, of that I must no longer doubt, you love me deeply, mightily: all your sorrow is only your

love and so it must be doubly close to me. And the tears you cry at night when blissful slumber leaves you are tears of joy for me, for they tell me of my dear bride's pure love.

³⁸ Elise...told me many dear and good things about you, which made me very happy. We chatted for more than two hours and certainly not a word but about you, new and old as it happened. He also told me a sad and beautiful scene, which touched me deeply, of how my dear little heart fell asleep, sick and weak, with the letter from the distant lover in my hand, by the burning light. It certainly went straight to my heart. I could not have imagined a more beautiful counterpart to the tears at the window, no more touching proof of your faithful love.

Adele's hand for marriage. Apparently, he learns of her reaction: "Aber was ich wieder für eine schöne Nachricht erhalten habe! Du könntest beinahe gar nicht erwarten, bis Du mein liebes Weibchen seiest! Ist das wirklich wahr? Das freut mich recht herzlich."³⁹

Solutions to the struggle

This pain and struggle has customarily two temporary solutions: the recollection of past memories and the sight of future expectations. For this reason, a very important part that usually cannot be overlooked is the memory or recollection of the last time the couple spent time together, in each other's arms. This part of the 'shared memory' is usually very consistent and meaningful for the couple, because it is crucial for strengthening their emotional bond and for making their intimacy grow. In fact, sharing memories that only they know is another aspect of their secret language of love. In Peter's letters this part is always very conspicuous, especially when he recalls the body contact given by touching and staying together with his Adele.

Letter 015: Und haben wir je das Glück der Liebe so mit vollen Zügen getrunken, wie letztes Mal? Hast du je so gefühlt, was das heißt: Seele rann in Seele.⁴⁰

Letter 007: Doch wenn ich da Stunden lang auf Stühle und Bänke hingestreckt lag, so fühlte ich doch den Schmerz nur halb, weil ich dabei die Bilder des vergangenen Tages im Geiste von mir aufsteigen ließ, wie mir da so herzlich war, umschlungen von Deinen weichen Armen, wie die Stunden des Nachmittags dahin rannen bei unserem traulichen Gekose gleich Minuten.⁴¹

The other temporary relief from the pain of love is represented, as already mentioned, by future expectations. In this section, the writer generally describes the great and overwhelming joy of the impending reconciliation. The prospect of an imminent reunion with the beloved represents a break from the constant longing to be together. Practical information about the future meeting are included in this part as well. "Du wünschst, ich möge Dich bald wieder besuchen. Wie ich dir versprochen habe, mein liebes Herzchens!... Am Freitag also, Abends, hoffe ich Dich wieder zu sehen und Dich an mein Herz zu drücken"⁴²(letter 002).

³⁹ But what beautiful news I have received again! You almost couldn't wait until you were my dear little wife! Is that really true? That makes me very happy.

⁴⁰ And have we ever drunk the happiness of love to the full as we did last time? Have you ever felt what it means: soul running into soul?

⁴¹ But when I lay there for hours, stretched out on chairs and benches, I only half felt the pain, because I let the images of the past day rise up in my mind, how I felt so warm, embraced by your soft arms, how the hours of the afternoon ran by in minutes with our happy cuddling.

⁴² You wish me to visit you again soon, as I promised you, my dear heart... So on Friday evening, I hope to see you again and to hold you close to my heart.

“Dabei entschwinden umso leichter die Stunden und ist einmal eine Woche hin, so sind bald noch drei oder vier andere nachgefolgt. Und dann führt mich raschen Fluges des Dampfro wieder ins liebe Olten, wo meine liebe Adele mich sehnlichst erwartet”⁴³ (letter 004). The joy is usually expressed in sentences like: “Wie freue ich mich, Dich in drei Wochen wieder zu sehen”⁴⁴ (letter 005). Needless to say, how the count of missing days is kept: “Wann nun dieses geschehen wird, kann ich Dir nicht ganz genau sagen....Doch kann der Unterschied höchstens 8 Tage betragen und jedenfalls komme ich so bald als möglich”⁴⁵ (letter 006).

The imminent reconciliation is also perceived as liberation from the sufferings, especially involving fear:

Letter 0010: Doch warte nur, wenn ich Dich einst wieder in meinen Armen hege und an mein pochendes Herz drücke, dann will ich diese Thränen der Angst von Deinen rosigen Wangen küssen und Du sollst in Seligkeit Freud-Thränen weinen.⁴⁶

Letter 011: Aber wir werden uns doch wohl eine Weile noch gedulden müssen. Und dann wird auch wieder die frohe Stunde des Wiedersehens schlagen. Unterdessen getröste Dich eben, mein liebes Herzchen und denke Deinem Liebenden in der Ferne gehe es eben auch nicht besser.⁴⁷

The fact that the other lover cannot wait to be reconciled is already a cause for joy, because it makes the lovers feel united again through the shared experience of the same feelings.

Letter 013 “Du hattest also gehofft, ich würde Dich vor Neujahr noch einmal ersuchen? Liebes Närrchen, warum hast Du nichts davon geschrieben?”⁴⁸

In letter 015 we learn that the couple is officially getting married (26 December 1858), Peter describes the future scenario of their being finally together:

Das werden doch göttliche Tage werden, wenn ich Dich schon so bald heimführen kann und mich nicht mehr von Dir zu trennen brauche, außer um in die Schule zu gehen. Dann wollen wir aber recht schöne Abende mit einander verleben. Du setzest Dich an meine Seite und so arbeiten wir zusammen. Ich studiere und du leuchtest mir als ein guter Genius die dunklen verworrenen Pfade der Wissenschaft. Dann werde ich viel besser dozieren und die Studenten darob recht zufrieden sein. Siehst Du, was das für ein freundliches Bildchen gibt zum Schlusse des Jahres?⁴⁹

⁴³ The hours slip away all the more easily, and once a week has passed, three or four others soon follow. And then the swift flight of the steamboat takes me back to dear Olten, where my dear Adele is eagerly awaiting me.

⁴⁴ I look forward to seeing you again in three weeks.

⁴⁵ Now when this will happen, I can't tell you exactly But the difference can be no more than 8 days and in any case I'll be there as soon as possible.

⁴⁶ But just wait, when I once again hold you in my arms and press you to my throbbing heart, then I will kiss these tears of fear from your rosy cheeks and you shall weep tears of joy in bliss.

⁴⁷ But we will have to be patient for a while. And then the happy hour of reunion will come again. In the meantime, comfort yourself, my dear heart, and think that your lover far away is no better off.

⁴⁸ So you had hoped that I would ask you again before the New Year? Dear fool, why didn't you write anything about it?

⁴⁹ Those will be divine days when I can take you home so soon and no longer need to separate from

In letter 017 Peter tries to comfort Adele in this way:

Aber siehst Du nun, wie so plötzlich die blassen Schatten der Melancholie auch ein heiteres Gemüth umdürstern können? Doch tröste Dich nur: im raschem Fluge eilt ein Tag um den andern dahin; Schon sind 10 Tage, lange Tage der Trennung dahin; schnell werden noch 2 mal 10 Tagen folgen und dann schlägt schon wieder die fröhliche Stunde des Wiedersehens und Tagen und Wochen werden wir in reinster Freude nahe einander zubringen können, wo kein Tag vergehen soll, ohne dass ich Dich sehe, Dich in meine Arme schließe und ein Stündchen der Wonne und des Glückes in Deinem Besitze genieße.....Und so geht es fort bis ich Dich, hoffentlich recht bald völlig mein nenne und nichts in der Welt uns mehr voneinander trennen kann."⁵⁰

It is then evident how the promise of a future and definitive reconciliation through the bond of marriage is the ultimate consolation for the couple.

Letter as comfort/consolation

The fact that lovers share the same pain is another essential factor in creating the emotional bond that unites them on a deeper level. Indeed, it is another essential part of the romantic experience in the nineteenth century. In this sense, letters become comfort and consolation to the lover. "Doch nur um so öfter wirst Du mir deinen Gedanken bei mir weilen um so lieber wirst Du Dich hinsetzen mir Freude und Leid zuklagen und in meinen Briefen dafür Trost zu finden."⁵¹ (letter 007) or the other example: letter 016 "Es ist zwar heute erst Dienstag und noch nicht völlig 2 Tage sind verflossen, seit ich den letzten Kuß auf Deine Lippen drückte und schon setze mich wieder hin, dir einige tröstende Zeilen zukommen zu lassen."⁵²

Letter 002: Ich dachte eben es müßte Dir auch ergehen, wie mich und ich wenigstens bin immer recht glücklich, wenn ich recht von Sehnsucht nach Dir geplagt bin....die stille Sehnsucht eines liebenden Herzens.⁵³

Letter 002: So mein Herzchen! Sollst du meinen Wunsch und Du wirst mit mir die

you, except to go to school. But then we will spend some nice evenings together. You sit by my side and so we work together. I will study and you, as a good genius, will light up for me the dark labyrinthine paths of science. Then I will lecture much better and the students will be quite satisfied. Do you see what a friendly little picture this gives at the end of the year?

⁵⁰ Das werden göttliche Tage sein, wenn ich dich so bald nach Hause bringen kann und mich nicht mehr von dir trennen muss, außer um zur Schule zu gehen. Aber dann werden wir ein paar schöne Abende zusammen verbringen. Du sitzt an meiner Seite und so arbeiten wir gemeinsam. Ich werde lernen und du, als gutes Genie, wirst mir die dunklen, verschlungenen Pfade der Wissenschaft erhellen. Dann werde ich viel besser dozieren und die Studenten werden zufrieden sein. Siehst du, was für ein freundliches kleines Bild das am Ende des Jahres ergibt?Deinem Besitze genieße. Und so geht es fort, bis ich Dich, hoffentlich recht bald völlig mein nenne und nichts in der Welt uns mehr voneinander trennen kann.

⁵¹ But the more often you will stay with me in your thoughts, the more you will like to sit down and lament my joy and sorrow and find comfort in my letters.

⁵² It is only Tuesday today and not quite 2 days have passed since I pressed the last kiss on your lips and I am already sitting down again to send you some consoling lines.

⁵³ I just thought it should happen to you as it does to me, and I at least am always quite happy when I am quite plagued by longing for you the quiet longing of a loving heart.

Wahrheit erkennen, die in demselben liegt.⁵⁴

Letter 007: Hab ich doch mit herzlichem Vergnügen bemerkt, *wie Du ebenfalls besorgt bist*, mir immer rechtzeitig zuantworten und dadurch die Melancholie, die sich bis weilen düster um meine Stirn lagert, soviel in deinen Kräften steht, zu verscheuchen. Und dafür könnte es sicher kein besseres Mittel geben, als einige liebevolle Worte von Dir.⁵⁵

In this part, it is always very interesting to see how the lover describes or imagines the other half who is suffering for the exact same reason:

Letter 003: Und die Gedanken? Ach Gott, die wollen sich vollend gar nicht mehr halten lassen besonders ist es ein niedliches, liebe Bildchen das mir beständig von der Seele schwebt und mir schon manche trübe Stunde in wehmütiger Freude verküßt hat... Denke Dir, es ist das Bildchen von meinem theuren *weinenden* Liebchen...das reuige Liebchen das am Fenster sitzt oder oben im einsame Kämmerlein mit dem Briefchen des geliebten Liebenden in der Hand und dem die Thränen ob seinen Worten die rosigen Wangen hinunterrollen."⁵⁶

Continuing in the same letter the concept of the shared pain becomes clearer.⁵⁶

Letter 007 " Es ist wahr, während vielen Wochen der Trennung giebt es manche düstere Stunde, manche Stunde des Unmuths, manche Stunde der Sehnsucht, manche Stunde banger Erwartung. Aber auch da giebt einen erhebenden und tröstlichen Gedanken, der Gedanke, daß man nicht allein sich selbst überlassen sei auf dem Erdenrund, daß ein liebes Herzchen an all diesen Wechseln der Stimmung, der Wonne und des Glückes, des Kammers und des Schmerzens innigen Antheil nehme, daß ein geheimes Band der Schlag der Herzen verbinde und dem fernen Bräutchen von der Sehnsucht des Geliebten erzähle.⁵⁷

Displacement of religious beliefs

The displacement of religious beliefs is another recurrent theme in love letters of this period. Especially during courtship, it can be shown that romantic love contributed to the displacement of God by the lover as the central symbol of ultimate significance.⁵⁸ Being in love was seen as being reborn. In this sense the future marriage was associated with the

⁵⁴ So my little heart! Shall you know my wish and you shall know with me the truth that lies in the same.

⁵⁵ I have noticed with heartfelt pleasure how you are also concerned to always answer me in good time and thus to dispel the melancholy that has been lingering darkly around my forehead as much as you can. And for this there could surely be no better means than a few loving words from you.

⁵⁶ And the thoughts? Oh God, they don't want to be held any longer, especially there is a cute, dear little picture that is constantly floating from my soul and has already protected many a gloomy hour in wistful joy Think of it as the picture of my dear weeping sweetheart. the repentant sweetheart sitting at the window or upstairs in a lonely room with the letter from the beloved lover in her hand and tears rolling down her rosy cheeks at his words". continuing in the same letter the concept of the shared pain becomes clearer.

⁵⁷ It is true that during many weeks of separation there are many a gloomy hour, many an hour of displeasure, many an hour of longing, many an hour of anxious expectation. But even then there is an uplifting and comforting thought, the thought that one is not left to oneself on the face of the earth, that a dear little heart takes an intimate part in all these changes of mood, of delight and happiness, of sorrow and pain, that a secret bond connects the beating of hearts and tells the distant bride about the longing of the beloved.

⁵⁸ Karen Lystra, p. 8.

blessing in the eyes of God.

In letter 012 Peter thinking about the worries he has for the 'ungewisse Zukunft/unkown future' writes: "Doch ich tröste mich dann und denke, der liebe Gott, der unsere Herzen zusammengefügt, werde uns auch beschützen, wenn wir uns nur treu lieben und brav bleiben."⁵⁹

In this extract Peter is praying God for Adele's mother who apparently is not feeling well: letter 020 "Ich will zum lieben Vater im Himmel beten, dass er es ja möge geschehen lassen."⁶⁰

Love letters might as well reveal dimensions of power, sex and love in courtship and marriage,⁶¹ as well as the expectations that the two genders had in the relationship. In the case of this correspondence, it is not so much about power as it is about the established roles in the couple that are expected to be respected (which is clearly no surprise for the nineteenth century). Peter often mentions, in a quite casual way, about what he is expecting from Adele and what he considers as a proof of her love, such as the fact, for instance, that she keeps practicing the piano so that her future husband can find solace.

Very often, in the last part of the letter, the well being of relatives and friends is mentioned. The interest in the lives of relatives and the fact of constantly checking on their health can also be seen as a desire to be involved in the new family dynamics, but it is also a question of politeness. Although the idea of 'marriage for love' was gaining ground during this period, in some cases limiting the power of the family in the choice of a spouse, it seems unlikely that everyone married for love alone (without taking into account family's wishes). The family could have played a less pressing role, still it must have been present somehow. It is evident that for Peter and Adele, for instance, the family support has an important role. In fact, in almost every letter, one or more than one member of the family is mentioned.

There are some sentences Peter wrote that underline how important it is for him to receive the blessing of the rest of the family: in letter 007 Peter writes "Den Brief an Tante Adolphine habe ich eigenhändig abgegeben und zugleich Grüße an Frau Pfluger ausgerichtet"⁶² or in letter 006 "Apropos! Soll ich etwa Frau Pfluger in der Apotheke bald

⁵⁹ But I console myself and think that the dear God who knitted our hearts together will also protect us if we only love each other faithfully and remain well-behaved.

⁶⁰ I will pray to the dear Father in heaven that he may let it happen.

⁶¹ cit. Karen Lystra, p. 10.

⁶² I hand-delivered the letter to Aunt Adolphine and at the same time sent my greetings to Mrs Pfluger.

einen Besuch machen? Du wirst vielleicht etwas gut tun wenn du mich etwas gelegentlich an so etwas erinnerst, da ich in solchen Dingen etwas ungeschickt oder vergesslich bin.”⁶³

Letter 013: Nun möchte ich Dich noch bitten, auch Deiner lieben Mutter meine herzlichsten Grüße und innigsten Wünsche auszurichten und Dir dringend ans Herz legen, ihr immer eine gute, folgsame und fleißige Tochter zu sein ...⁶⁴

Letter 016: Die Kommissionen und Grüße habe ich alle getreulich ausgerichtet und wurde von Tante Pfluger und Tante Adolphine sehr freundlich empfangen.⁶⁵

We do not know if Peter and Adele chose freely each other as life partners. The role of the family in this pairing is not entirely clear. What we do know is that other family members (such as Aunt Adolphine, Aunt Pfluger and Adele's parents) play an important role in their relationship, as they are mentioned in almost every letter. Elise is another figure who is consistently mentioned. He must have been a very important person to the couple and also considered as a conduit between the two parties. He is in fact, usually, the one with whom Peter or Adele talk with about the lover; thus, he must have been like a sort of dear and trustworthy confidant to both of them. In this case, reported by Peter, he must have felt ill, because Peter is reassuring Adele about his health condition: letter 017 “Elise ist also wieder gesund und ohne das treffliche Mittel, dass ich ihm anrahten wollte.”⁶⁶

Conclusion

In the nineteenth century, love letters are the speech of the heart and the reassurance of lovers, the material proof of one of the deepest feelings we have in life: love. They are the materialization of love not only because of their material nature, but also because of their more implicit 'material' nature: they are the materialization of abstract feelings. Indeed, the very fact that they exist makes a feeling, in this particular case love, material and more evident, especially in the eyes of a nineteenth-century lover. This paper has argued that love in the nineteenth century was more about what people did than what they said. In this century, the romantic experience was strictly linked to a series of specific actions and behaviors that had to be performed on a regular basis. In fact, the actions and concrete gestures that lovers performed can be seen as the 'tools' that made love real and more 'visible', even authentic, in their eyes. They knew, or at least perceived, that they were

⁶³ Apropos! Shall I pay a visit to Mrs. Pfluger in the pharmacy soon? You will perhaps do me some good if you remind me of such things occasionally, as I am a little clumsy or forgetful in such matters.

⁶⁴ Now I would like to ask you to also send my warmest greetings and heartfelt wishes to your dear mother and urge you to always be a good, obedient and diligent daughter to her.

⁶⁵ I faithfully delivered all the commissions and greetings and was very kindly received by Aunt Pfluger and Aunt Adolphine.

⁶⁶ So Elise is healthy again and without the excellent remedy that I wanted to give him.

loved by the actions that their lover performed for them, expressing his or her love. The act of writing letters can be considered as one of these actions, and one of the most effective. It has been shown how much this practice was appreciated and taken into account by contemporaries, especially during the courtship period. The reforms and improvements in the postal system in the first half of the century (which took place in England, but were soon followed by other European countries such as the German states) played a crucial role in the spread of this practice. The reduction in the cost of postage gave lovers in particular the perfect opportunity to write more often and almost regularly. In the second part of the article, an essential scheme VVA *Verbindlichkeit, Vertrauen/Vertrautheit und Austausch* (commitment, trust and exchange) was proposed as an attempt to give more clarity to the romantic experience in the nineteenth century. Within this wide range, love letters in the nineteenth century were considered more than just pieces of paper. Rather, they were a proof of commitment, a source of comfort and a solution to a 'struggle of the heart', an expression of self and 'reinforcement' of the relationship, and a representation of religious beliefs. As historical documents, love letters are also extremely valuable as evidence and testimony of past lives and past love experiences. The large amount of implicit information they contain is an invaluable source of knowledge about this particular historical period. The unpublished and unedited correspondences, as in this case, are valuable for many fields of research, such as: history, cultural history, material culture studies, literature, linguistics, love studies, emotion studies, cultures of knowledge, to name but a few. Moreover, focusing on unpublished love letters written by 'ordinary people' provides the perfect opportunity to bring to light love stories that would otherwise fall into the abyss of oblivion. Finally, this article is an attempt to fill the gap left by the lack of research into the love letters and experiences of ordinary and unknown lovers.