



Posting It: The Victorian Revolution in Letter Writing

Catherine J. Golden

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"A beautifully researched study of how the Victorian Penny Post altered human relations. As Golden eloquently documents, family and friends could, at last, easily keep in touch with distant relatives, but cheap postage also provided new opportunities for blackmailers and con artists. In her richly textured study, we learn not only about the pervasive use of letters as a literary device in fiction, but also the immense increase in paraphernalia related to the writing and sending of a letter or that new invention, the postcard. Anyone interested in the complex relationship between material and cultural change will find this book illuminating."--Martha Vicinus, University of Michigan

"Just as the Penny Post revolutionized communications, Catherine Golden's meticulous and imaginative analysis of its cultural effects transforms our reading experience of Victorian fiction. From the blackmail plot to the writing desk, the paraphernalia of the Victorian novel takes on new meaning and contemporary parallels."--Elaine Showalter, Princeton University

"Provides an engaging and comprehensive account of the context and spirit of Victorian postal reform and the resulting rise in affective correspondence that continues to this day."--Eileen Cleere, Southwestern University

"Combines historical perspective, social context, and literary criticism. It goes beyond the standard historical or literary work in that it provides insights into the daily lives and values of Victorians of all classes. As such it makes a significant contribution to Victorian cultural studies. Golden explains the impact of the Penny Post on the nineteenth century and draws parallels to the communications revolution of today."--Richard Fantina, Vermont State Colleges

Although "snail mail" may seem old fashioned and outdated in the twenty-first century, Catherine Golden argues that the creation of the Penny Post in Victorian England was just as revolutionary in its time as e-mail and text messages are today.

Until Queen Victoria instituted the Postal Reform Act of 1839, mail was a luxury affordable only by the rich. Allowing anyone, from any social class, to send a letter anywhere in the country for only a penny had multiple and profound cultural impacts.

Golden demonstrates how cheap postage--which was quickly adopted in other countries--led to a postal "network" that can be viewed as a forerunner of computer-mediated communications. Indeed, the revolution in letter writing of the nineteenth century led to blackmail, frauds, unsolicited mass mailings, and junk mail--problems that remain with us today.

Catherine J. Golden is professor of English at Skidmore College.

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