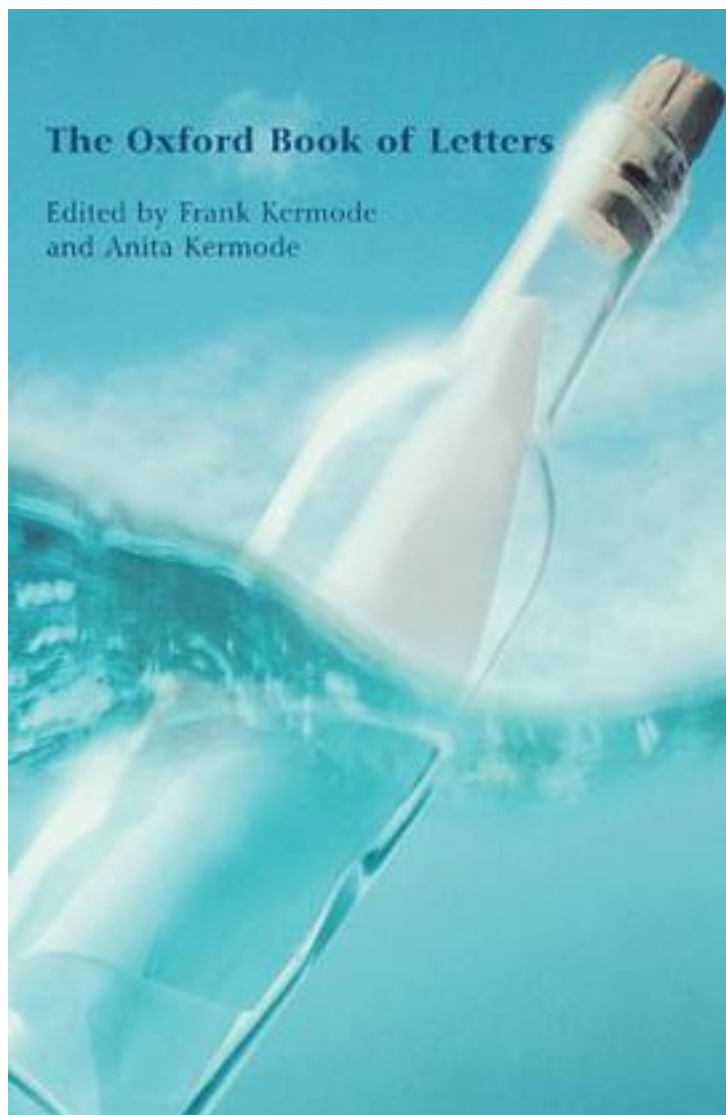


The Oxford Book of Letters



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Reading other people's letters, like reading private diaries, offers thrilling and unexpected glimpses into their lives, and it is partly the guilty pleasure we take in such literary eavesdropping that makes this volume so compelling. More than 300 letters spanning five centuries chronicle the affairs of correspondents from Elizabeth I to Groucho Marx, from politicians to poets, and from the famous to the unknown. But whether the writers are educated or barely literate, whether the prose is polished and witty or stumbling and artless, these letters share an immediacy and intimacy unlike any other form of writing. Their subjects range from the mundane to the extraordinary, from gossip about the latest fashion to the horrors of a public execution, and from the tragic to the hilarious. Exchanges of letters between regular correspondents are included, where familiarity and an ongoing saga add to the fascination. Among the most moving letters are those from emigrants to America, Australia, and South Africa, describing the hardships they endured and the resolution with which they faced their new worlds. In every case the editors provide a context for the letters, and unobtrusive notes. In an age where communication is instant and ephemeral this volume celebrates the glories of the written word, and what may well be a dying art form. .

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