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0521842557 - Correspondence and American Literature, 1770-1865

Elizabeth Hewitt

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CORRESPONDENCE AND
AMERICAN LITERATURE,
1770–1865

Elizabeth Hewitt uncovers the centrality of letter-writing to antebellum American literature. She argues that many canonical American authors turned to the epistolary form as an idealized mode through which to consider the challenges of American democracy before the Civil War. The letter was the vital technology of social intercourse in the nineteenth century and was adopted as an exemplary genre in which authors from de Crèvecoeur and Brockden Brown to Emerson, Fuller, Melville, Jacobs, Dickinson, and Whitman, could theorize the social and political themes that were so crucial to their respective literary projects. They interrogated the political possibilities of social intercourse through the practice and analysis of correspondence. Hewitt argues that although correspondence is generally only conceived as a biographical archive, it must instead be understood as a significant literary practice through which these authors made sense of social and political relations in the new nation.

ELIZABETH HEWITT is Assistant Professor of English at the Ohio State University.

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For Jared, Eli, and Gideon

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- C* Herman Melville, *Correspondence*, ed. Lynn Horth (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1993).
- HM* Herman Melville, *Pierre, Israel Potter, The Piazza Tales, The Confidence-Man, Uncollected Prose, Billy Budd, Sailor*, ed. Harrison Hayford (New York: Library of America, 1984).
- JMN* Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks*, ed. William H. Gilman, 16 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960–82).
- L* *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, ed. Thomas Johnson, 3 vols. (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1986).
- LRWE* *The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Ralph L. Rusk, 10 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939–).
- MF* *The Letters of Margaret Fuller*, ed. Robert N. Hudspeth, 6 vols. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983).
- P* *The Poems of Emily Dickinson, Variorum Edition*, ed. R. W. Franklin, 3 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).
- PT* Herman Melville, *The Piazza Tales and Other Prose Pieces, 1839–1860*, ed. Harrison Hayford *et al.* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1987).
- RWE* *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Essays and Lectures*, ed. Joel Porte (New York: Library of America, 1983).