Introduction

Francisco Bethencourt and Florike Egmond

PEIRESC

When Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc (1580–1637) died, Pope Urban VIII pronounced a eulogy, the Roman academy of the humorists organised public mourning, while a *Monumentum* in his honour was published in Rome with epitaphs in forty languages. Sixty years later, Pierre Bayle (1647–1706) declared about Peiresc:

> no man rendered more services to the republic of letters than this one. He was a kind of General Attorney of this republic: he encouraged authors, he provided lighting and materials, he used his revenues to buy or copy the most rare and useful monuments. His trade of letters embraced all parts of the world. Philosophical experiences, rarities of nature, productions of art, antiquities, history and languages were the object of his care and curiosity.[1]

Bayle also complained, however, that many French men of erudition of his own time had not even heard of Peiresc. He could not have foreseen that the name of Peiresc would be almost forgotten throughout the eighteenth century, to be only slowly rediscovered in the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The reason is obvious: Peiresc published almost nothing. How, then, could this man have come to be considered the 'General Attorney' of the republic of letters in his own time? The answer lies in the wide range and depth of his expertise, but equally so in his vast network and correspondence.

[1] Pierre Bayle, *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, 3rd edition, corrected by the author (Rotterdam: M. Böhm, 1720), vol. 3, pp. 2216–17 (our translation).

Peiresc left more than 10,000 letters.[2] He corresponded with more than 500 persons – from princes, popes, cardinals and bishops, to ambassadors, magistrates, scholars, librarians, secretaries, artists, writers, scientists, pharmacists, jewellers, merchants and clergymen. Although most of his correspondents lived in France (mainly Paris and Provence), the geographical range of his network was wide, comprising north and central Italy, the Low Countries, the Holy Roman Empire, England, Spain, the eastern Mediterranean, Middle East and even Asia (Goa). He could, moreover, use mediators to reach other parts of the world: the Portuguese jeweller Álvares, for instance, who was based in Paris, provided Peiresc with information about plants, precious stones and medals which he obtained from his own network of correspondents in Vijaiapur, Manila and Macao.[3] Peiresc crossed religious boundaries as well, corresponding regularly with Protestants and Jews.

Peiresc was interested in many scientific and cultural areas, such as physics, astronomy, optics, geology, mineralogy, botany, perfumery, zoology, medicine, anatomy, dissection, archaeology, weights and measures, numismatics, art, iconography, literature and music. Correspondents all over the world were crucial to some of the scientific experiments which he performed, such as the ones on longitude. He also calculated the width of the Mediterranean (correcting former data), advanced astronomic observations of the moon, started a project to create a cartography of the moon, and recalculated the distance between the earth and the moon, correcting information received from his correspondent Galileo. Despite his residence in a city of secondary importance – he lived in Aix en Provence as a counsellor of its parliament – he belonged to the most important academies in France and Italy and received several notables, such as Pope Urban VIII's

[2] Linda Van Norden, 'Peiresc and the English scholars', *The Huntington Library Quarterly* 12.4 (1949), 369–89; Paul Dibon, 'Les échanges épistolaires dans l'Europe savante du XVIIe siècle', *Revue de synthèse*, 3rd series, 81–2 (1976), 31–50; Robert Mandrou, *Histoire de la pensée européenne*, vol. 3: *Des humanistes aux hommes de science (XVIe et XVIIe siècle)* (Paris: Seuil, 1973), pp. 369–89; Agnès Bresson *Les correspondants de Peiresc*, electronic paper, website www.peiresc.org (1992).

[3] *Lettres inédites de M. de Peiresc*, ed. Faurius de Saint Vincent (Aix-en-Provence: Imprimerie d'Augustin Pontier, 1816).

nephew Cardinal Francesco Barberini.[4] Peiresc kept up a longstanding correspondence with the latter's secretary, Cassiano dal Pozzo, and exchanged gifts with him.[5]

Peiresc generally corresponded in French and Italian, even if he was considered a prince of the Latin republic of letters.[6] His refusal to become (and behave like) an author was related to the model of a man of letters he chose for himself. As a disciple of Gian Vincenzo Pinelli (1535–1601), he developed an ethos of detached and generously shared learning for the sake of learning. Part of this ethos was the promotion of knowledge as a process of cooperation in the literary and scientific community, which should be based on free exchange and far removed from the mean considerations of proprietorship that being an author entailed. This is the image Pierre Gassendi (1592–1655) presented in his biography of Peiresc.[7] Yet, the type of 'intellectual' (if we may use this anachronistic term) embodied by Peiresc was quite exceptional. First of all, he did not have to publish in order to find patrons and protectors. Second, his ethos presupposed a huge network of correspondents, who benefited from his generosity and recognised his merits. Finally, his detachment was less radical than it seemed. While using the available means of communication (correspondence) on a large scale to both increase his knowledge and disseminate it, he reinforced his own intellectual prestige. He knew that his letters were simultaneously private and public, confidential and open: they could be exchanged and read aloud in small groups, a common practice

[4] *Lettre de M. de Peiresc écrite d'Aix à son frère alors à Paris, dans laquelle il lui donne des détails sur une visite qu'il lui avait fait le cardinal Barberini, neveu du Pape Urbain VIII, légat en France, le 27 octobre 1625* (Aix-en-Provence: Imprimerie d'Augustin Pontier, 1816).

[5] Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc, *Lettres à Cassiano dal Pozzo (1627–1637)*, ed. and annotated by Jean-François Lhote and Danielle Joyal, preface by Jacques Guillerme (Clermont-Ferrand: Adosa, 1989).

[6] Marc Fumaroli, *Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc: Prince de la République des Lettres*, electronic paper, website www.peiresc.org (1992). See the global view proposed by Peter N. Miller, *Peiresc's Europe: Learning and Virtue in the Seventeenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

[7] Pierre Gassendi, *Vie de l'illustre Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc, conseiller au parlement d'Aix*, translation from the Latin by Roger Lassalle and preface by Jean Emelina (Paris: Belin, 1992).

in the republic of letters. 'Familiar' or 'friendly' correspondence had acquired the reputation of giving insight into the real thoughts of the author, which is why that type of correspondence circulated widely. But, as far as we know, Peiresc did not intend to publish his letters.

AIMS AND PERSPECTIVE

Although none of the essays in this volume discusses Peiresc as its main subject, he was in touch with some of the persons who figure in it. We have chosen him as icon of this volume, however, because of the geography of his correspondence, the European reach of his network, the wide social range of his correspondents, the issues raised by his systematic use of vernacular languages, the semi-public aspect of his letters, the way in which exchanges (of more than just information) played an important role in his correspondence, and his role in the republic of letters. In short, Peiresc's correspondence raises a number of issues that are discussed in this volume with respect to other early modern correspondents and correspondences.

Peiresc belonged to the social and political elite of early modern Europe. Correspondence was, however, by no means only relevant to members of his status group. In this volume we will explore a much wider range of correspondences and their relevance to cultural exchanges in early modern Europe. In social terms we will look at the correspondence of both scholars and scientists, spies, merchants, politicians, artists, collectors, noblemen, artisans, and even, perhaps unexpectedly, illiterate peasants. In terms of language we will pay far more attention to correspondence in the vernacular than to that in Latin. Above all, we are looking at different networks of exchange by means of correspondence in Europe and at various functions and meanings that handwritten correspondence had for members of different strata in European society during the early age of printing. Correspondence helped to create an ethos of social groups, to define new fields of research, satisfy administrative enquiries and articulate feelings. It was also an important means to collect and diffuse information, to express and create opinion, especially in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. What was the role of handwritten

newsletters with respect to the spreading of information in Europe? How did information travel in manuscript newsletters across cultural barriers in Europe and between Europe and other parts of the world? Who were the agents of such exchanges? How did it relate to printed information?

Through the analysis of correspondence in its different manifestations we intend to reconsider the status of information and thus tackle a central issue in the field of information and communication. In doing so we focus on *cultural* issues rather than on economic or political ones, although the latter are clearly interwoven with the former. We do not discuss the enormously important infrastructure of exchanges by letter (such as postal services, and the various conditions on which safe and regular travel is predicated). And we do not regard the exchange of correspondence – or correspondence and exchange – as identical with the exchange of information. That would not only reduce letters (which are objects in their own right as well as carriers of information) purely to their contents, but moreover simplify the function of those contents to an unwarranted extent. As the example of Peiresc demonstrated and all contributions to this volume will make abundantly clear, there is much more to correspondence than just information exchange. In Peiresc's case, it served for instance, to create a scientific network and to spread a specific ethos. In most essays discussed in this volume, correspondence was an instrument of cultural exchange and transmission which could cross many boundaries and have unexpected and unintended effects. Besides the polite and learned letters that could be read aloud in almost any company, we will look therefore at the range of less polite, the more intimate, businesslike, emotional, or even secret correspondence. Although we will by no means neglect the correspondence of erudite and generally upper-class men – such as humanists, scholars, princes, patron-collectors and scientists – a large part of this volume is purposely devoted to correspondence by members of other social categories, since we believe that the relevant criterion for selecting correspondence to be studied should not necessarily be a similarity of social background, literary style, or scholarly influence, but first and foremost the phenomenon of letter writing and reading itself.

Evidently, 'exchange' is a complex concept, which has triggered a great deal of discussion by historians and social scientists, besides playing a central role in the ESF project of which this volume is one of the results. This is hardly the place to repeat that discussion, but it should be stressed that, following Georg Simmel, we are looking for the two-sided, reciprocal effects of exchange in human interaction. For Simmel, exchange represented a new and creative process of transformation and not merely the addition of two processes of giving and receiving.[8] Exchange is never pure and symmetrical; moreover, it is usually fashioned by relations of power and expresses different presuppositions (and positions) of the persons or groups involved. Considering cultural exchange at a European level, we should take into account both Braudel's assumption of cultural resistance to innovation and Shils's notion of centres and peripheries of cultural production.[9] The latter seems more flexible and efficient, because it can help us identify geographical and social asymmetries, inclusions and exclusions, in the process of cultural exchange.

EARLY MODERN CORRESPONDENCE AS A LITERARY GENRE

For a long time the historiography of early modern correspondence has focused on the letters written by important humanists or scientists, and on the status and form of correspondence as a literary genre. Those aspects are relevant to the discussion in the present volume as well, because the literary conventions that were newly developed or adapted during this age continued to leave their mark on letters written not only by those who were aware of these models, but even by men and women who were less familiar with them. Cultural models travel across geographical borders as well as social boundaries, and letters are a special example, since they embodied certain cultural models on the one hand, and formed a means of travel across such boundaries on

[8] Georg Simmel, 'Exchange', in *On Individuality and Social Forms*, ed. with an introduction by Donald N. Levine (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), pp. 43–69.

[9] Fernand Braudel, *Civilisation matérielle, économie et capitalisme*, vol. 2: *Les jeux de l'échange* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1979); Edward Shils, *Center and Periphery: Essays in Macrosociology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975).

the other hand. Even the illiterate should therefore not be regarded as beyond the reach of literary or epistolary models.

Literary traditions concerning correspondence went back a long way. Roman antiquity had already set the model for writing in the epistolary mode – the famous examples of the *Epistulæ* of Cicero, followed by Seneca, Pliny the Younger and others – but it was the second generation of Italian humanists who were to (re)define correspondence as a new, formalised literary genre. Poggio Bracciolini (1380–1459) – notary, secretary of seven popes, and chancellor of Florence – compiled three different series of correspondence in 1436, 1438 (enlarged in 1444) and 1455 that were shown to interested men of letters.[10] He created the style of the 'familiar' letter addressed to public figures, scholars and friends. In these he reflected on philological, theological, artistic, literary and political issues, addressed matters of daily life (friendship, marriage, education of children, everyday conflicts), and reinforced the ethos of the humanist community, which for the first time had been defined as a republic of letters by his correspondent Francesco Barbaro in a letter written in 1417.

By editing and printing his own letters, Erasmus (1469–1536) set a decisive step in the process of turning correspondence into a literary genre. His first 'official' compilation of 617 Latin letters in 1521, *Epistolæ ad diversos*, was followed by a second edition in 1529, *Opus epistolarum*, which added another 400 letters.[11] It is interesting to see how the geographical network of Erasmus's correspondents was much wider than that of Poggio, with many more letters going to England,

[10] After his death, his friends added another set of his letters from 1455 to 1459. Poggio Bracciolini, *Lettere*, ed. Helène Harth, 3 vols. (Florence: Leo Olschki, 1984–7). See also *Two Renaissance Book Hunters: The Letters of Poggius Bracciolini to Nicolaus de Niccolis*, translated from the Latin and annotated by Phyllis Walter Goodhart Gordan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974).

[11] The definitive modern edition of Erasmus's letters by Percy Stafford Allen comprises 3,162 Latin letters, including over 1,600 written by Erasmus to hundreds of correspondents in Europe, princes, popes, dignitaries of the church, reformers, politicians, humanists, scholars, bankers or merchants. Erasmus, *Opus epistolarum*, ed. P. S. Allen et al., 12 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1906–58, reprint 1992); *The Correspondence of Erasmus*, Allen's edition translated into English by R. A. B. Mynors and D. F. S. Thomson, annotated by Wallace K. Ferguson, 12 vols. to date (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974–2003).

France, Italy, Flanders, the Holy Roman Empire and Iberia. The themes discussed by Erasmus were also extremely varied, from high-level interventions in theological, philological and political debates, to minor details concerning his personal and financial problems.

The first correspondence printed in the vernacular appeared in 1538: a selection of 320 of Pietro Aretino's (1492–1556) Italian letters; he wrote many more.[12] Precisely through the process of selection, organisation and editing for publication, this printed edition testifies to the changing status of those letters. Aretino united the roles of courtier, journalist, poet and writer of satires in one person, and enjoyed an enormously high reputation among popes, the emperor, kings (in particular François I), princes, scholars and humanists. All of them desired the 'privilege' of having access to Aretino's letters, which contained information, analyses and prognoses concerning the European political situation. The geographic range of Aretino's correspondence was wide, on account of his political connections, even if most of his correspondents were Italians. Aretino generally preferred the 'familiar' type of letter, but his publication project caused a dramatic change in his style. His letters became much more thematic (on friendship, fortune, truth and lies, time and memory), and were designed to be read by a larger public. From 1535 he devoted himself almost exclusively to the writing of letters, which confirmed the status of correspondence as a literary genre. Aretino's project to publish his correspondence was almost contemporary with the project carried out by Pietro Bembo, and it preceded other similar compilations of letters by Guidiccione, Caro, Ruscelli, Domenichi, Tasso or Tolomei.[13]

Within the domain of the art of rhetoric there was no classical tradition concerning the writing of letters.[14] Throughout the Middle Ages, however, the art of the sermon and the art of letter writing were regarded as the two major prose genres.[15] Innovation came especially

[12] The critical edition reveals a total of 3,290 letters written by Aretino. See Pietro Aretino, *Lettere*, ed. Paolo Procaccioli, 6 vols. (Rome: Salerno Editrice, 1997–2002).

[13] Jeanine Basso, *Le genre épistolaire en langue italienne (1538–1662): répertoire chronologique et analytique*, 2 vols. (Nancy: Presses Universitaires de Nancy, 1990).

[14] Marc Fumaroli, 'A l'origine d'un art français: la correspondance familière', in *La diplomacie de l'esprit: de Montaigne à La Fontaine* (Paris: Hermann, 1998), pp. 163–81.

[15] James J. Murphy, *Rhetorics in the Middle Ages: A History of Rhetoric Theory from St Augustine to the Renaissance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974).

with Erasmus and Justus Lipsius, who both wrote decisive books on the subject, the former stressing the idea of exchange between absent friends, the latter the concept of a cooperative community.[16] Both of these innovations were therefore invented and developed as a format during the period on which this volume focuses, and reflected contemporary practices and mentalities. But they had long-term effects as well. Their expansion of the art of rhetoric influenced a series of correspondence manuals which were published throughout the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries and integrated in the French *Bibliothèque Bleue* and similar popular series in other European countries. Such manuals disseminated general formats for letter writing, types of 'familiar' letters, indications for merchants' letters, and the use of courtly or popular language.[17] Not everyone approved of such formats at the time. As Roger Chartier has pointed out, Montaigne reacted against them. He was in favour of the expression of spontaneous feelings in correspondence and contrasted the etiquette of ceremonial letters with the freedom and sincerity of less formal writing.[18] This perspective would much later be developed in a literary form. While the publication of letters as a literary genre was established in the sixteenth century, novels and essays in an epistolary form emerged only in the seventeenth and especially the eighteenth century.[19]

[16] Erasmus, *De conscribendarum epistolarum ratio* (Lyon: S. Gryphium, 1531). Justus Lipsius, *Principles of Letter-Writing: A Bilingual Text of Justi Lipsii Epistolica institutio*, ed. and trans. R. V. Young and M. Thomas Hester (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996). See also Marc Fumaroli, 'La conversation savante', in Hans Bots and Françoise Waquet (eds.), *Commercium litterarium, 1600–1750* (Amsterdam and Manrosen: Ape/Holland University Press, 1994), pp. 67–80.

[17] For instance Francesco Sansovino, *Del secretario* (Venice, 1564); Battista Guarini, *Il segretario* (Venice, 1594); Gabriel Chappuys, *Le secrétaire* (Lyon, 1588); Angel Day, *The English Secretary* (1st edn 1586), ed. with an introduction by Robert O. Evans (Gainsville, FL: Scholar's Facsimiles & Reprints, 1967); Henry Care, *The Female Secretary* (London, 1671).

[18] Roger Chartier, 'Des "secrétaires" pour le peuple?', in Chartier (ed.), *La correspondance: les usages de la lettre au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Fayard, 1991), pp. 159–87. The references concerning Montaigne were quoted from essay XL on Cicero. For the previous period see Alain Boureau, 'La norme épistolaire, une invention médiévale', in Chartier (ed.), *La correspondance*, pp. 127–57.

[19] That topic lies beyond both the temporal and thematic boundaries of this volume. See, however, Dena Goodman, *The Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994).

SHIFTING GEOGRAPHY AND NETWORKS OF ERUDITE CORRESPONDENCE

As several of the contributions to the present volume demonstrate, wide-ranging networks (in terms of either geography or number of correspondents) and vast amounts of correspondence were by no means limited to the small circle of famous humanists. They were unusual, however, even among the erudite elite of Europe. So much is clear if we compare the geographical distribution of Erasmus's correspondents with the much smaller network of Pedro Mártir de Anglería (*c.*1456–1526), an Italian humanist based in Spain. He was a chaplain, historian, ambassador and counsellor of the Spanish monarchs, from Isabel of Castile to Charles V and wrote the early history of the European discovery of the Americas. Pedro Mártir de Anglería left a compilation of 813 Latin letters, which was published in 1530.[20] The great majority of his correspondents were Spaniards, though there were a few Italians and Portuguese. Through his prolific production of chronicles he played an extremely important role in the dissemination in Europe of the discovery and exploration of America, but he had only a limited network of correspondents.

His contemporary Erasmus occupied a central position in the early sixteenth-century European republic of letters and none of the other humanists ever equalled his influence, which comprised both northern and southern Europe. Yet, the large-scale production of the Italian humanists undeniably turned Italy into the intellectual centre of Europe and made the Italian language a point of reference for the men of letters in the course of the sixteenth century. This situation changed in the seventeenth century. The centre of the republic of letters shifted to France. This change was marked (and stimulated) by the emergence of Parisian academies, such as the one established in 1635 by Marin Mersenne (1588–1648) and the new organisational culture proposed by the brothers Pierre (1582–1651) and Jacques Dupuy (1591–1656).

[20] Pedro Mártir de Anglería, *Opus epistolarum* (Alcalá de Henares: Compluti, 1530; 2nd edn Amsterdam: Danielum Elzevirium, 1670). There is a Spanish translation, *Epistolario*, ed. José López de Toro, 4 vols. (Madrid: Imprenta Gongora, 1953–7).