

**Les Lettres**

**A. Multiple choice-** Choose the response below that best completes each phrase.

**1. The author of the text points out that J.K. Rowling .... (choose one)**

- a. often writes letters to fellow authors and friends
- b. never reads autobiographies
- c. rarely reads non-fiction
- d. does not often read non-fiction
- e. seldom gives her opinion about others' books

**2. The author of Harry Potter praises the following in *Decca*... (choose all that apply)**

- a. the humor
- b. the respectful nature of Jessica Mitford's letters
- c. the rebellious spirit present in the letters
- d. seeing Jessica Mitford grapple with the opinions of her sisters
- e. the more complete picture of Jessica Mitford the book provides
- f. the more detailed political opinions expressed in the letters

**3. According to many, the decline in the art of letter writing dates back to the following invention(s) ... (choose all that apply)**

- a. the telegraph (I'm assuming telegraphs and faxes are two different things, and so not marking this. If indeed telegraph means the same as fax, then consider this marked. But as far as I can work out this is a slightly different thing than explicitly stated in the third paragraph)
- b. the telephone
- c. email

d. the adhesive stamp (technically the first date mentioned is 1840 with the invention of the stamp, though the way it is worded and how things progress you could say it includes all other others...but I stick with this answer as the actual origin whereas the others aided the decline).

e. worldwide postal service

**4. In 1919, the disappearance of the epistolary art was attributed to... (choose one)**

a. the telegraph

b. the telephone

c. changing past times

d. the quill pen

e. motorcars

**5. The author of the text states that “en ce début de XXIe siècle, nous sommes trop occupés par le travail, les voyages et les exigences de la modernité pour nous poser une minute; à plus forte raison pour méditer une lettre et l’écrire.” The phrase in bold could be translated as...(choose one)**

a. what reason do we have in the 21st century to write letters?

b. all the more reason to relax and meditate on writing a letter.

c. mulling over letters, with reason, doesn’t hold the same value it once did.

d. a stronger reason for letter writing is required.

**B. Questions** In your own words, respond to the following questions in complete sentences based on what you learned in the text. You may cite the text when appropriate to justify your responses.

6. In your own words, summarize the footnote in which J.K. Rowling shares her thoughts on the author Jessica Mitford and Mitford’s writing.

In 2002 Rowling said that Mitford is the writer who “sans aucun doute” (without a doubt) influenced Rowling the most. Her great aunt gave her Hons and Rebels which instantly became her favorite heroine, “j’avais quatorze ans, elle est instantanément devenue mon héroïne”. She (Mitford) left home to fight in the Spanish Civil War and took with her a camera “appareil

photo” she bought with her father’s money “avait achete avec l’argent de son pere”. Rowling was captivated with the tale for Mitford’s courage and how she never lost sight of the vision she had as an adolescence “ne se soit jamais departee de la vision des choses qu’elle avait a l’adolescence” and how she remained true to her political convictions. Rowling even named her daughter Jessica in her honor “J’ai meme appele ma fille Jessica Rowling Arantes en son honneur”.

7. What is the author’s concern in relation to letters? How will it affect the future?

They wondered and worried how people would be able to accurately record and tell their stories, the stories of history, without letters “je me suis aussi demande comment nous allions pouvoir consigner et raconter correctement notre histoire sans lettres”

8. Explain in your own words what has occurred in recent years with regard to letters. Cite some of the details provided in the text.

Letter writing has experienced something of a golden age, perhaps. “une eclosion de correspondences, un age d’or meme, peut-etre”. Kurt Vonnegut, P.G. Wodehouse, Paul Cezanne, Ernest Hemingway and others have used the internet to upload their letters, their correspondence, as a way of bridging the gap between letter writing and the Internet (which as mentioned above was part of the reason letter writing had continued its decline) offering addicting nuggets of correspondence. “Et internet soi-meme verse dans le dernier chic postal: certaines des pepites de ce site tres addictif...”

9. In your own words, describe some of the correspondence that the author has discovered in his research. Discuss at least three examples provided in the text (excluding the Elvis anecdote in the next question).

I think I began covering this in the previous question, but Paul Auster and J.M Coetzee posted their discussions about sports “Paul Auster et J.M. Coetzee ont publie leurs echanges su l’amitie et le sport”. Novelist Jon McGregor launched a website called The Letters Page where writers can post their contributions “et le romancier Jon McGregor vient de lancer The Letters Page en ligne, ou des ecrivains postent leurs contributions...” She also spent two years collecting letters from the last valliant letter-writers and wrote a book on the art of correspondence, “J’ai passe ces deux dernieres annees a amasser des recueils de ceux qui pourraient bien etre les derniers vaillants epistoliers. J’ai ecrit un livre sur l’art de la correspondance...”.

10. Describe the correspondence between Elvis Presley and President Nixon. What transpired afterward?

She was captivated by the letters from Elvis to Nixon in 1970 asking for the badge of the anti-drug brigade “pour demander a recevoir le badge de la brigade anti-drogue”. Elvis has other police badges and hoped this one would allow him to walk around with as many drugs and

weapons as he wanted “permettrait de se balader avec autant d’armes et de narcotiques qu’il voulait”. Thanks to the badge Elvis began consuming *more* drugs “après quoi il se mit à consommer beaucoup plus de drogue”.

The letter, written on a flight from LA to Washington, convinced Nixon to give Elvis the badge after promising to help American youth fight against the scourge “et jurant vouloir tout faire pour combattre le fleau”.

**C. Translation** - Translate the following passage into grammatical, natural sounding English, respecting the tone, register and intentions of the original.

Mais le grand maître contemporain, c’est Ted Hughes. Jamais il n’a utilisé d’ordinateur; son éditeur lui en a bien offert un, pour lui permettre d’envoyer des e-mails, mais le poète s’est toujours accroché à son stylo et à sa machine à écrire.

Christopher Reid, son éditeur, publia un recueil éclairant en 2007, d’où il ressort que, comme Keats, Hughes mûrissait bon nombre de ses poèmes dans ses lettres. Sa correspondance dépeint une vie de création, d’orages, de quêtes et de bienveillance. Dans une lettre de 1975 à sa fille Frieda, scolarisée en pension, il l’interroge sur ses examens, puis décrit l’activité du jour dans le Devon...

*La pluie s’est mise à tomber juste au moment où nous finissions de charger les bottes de foin – nous nous sommes précipités pour les mettre à l’abri, bottes dans la Land Rover, bottes dans le van de Jean et Ian, bottes dans le box des chevaux, bottes dans les oreilles, bottes dans le cou, bottes dans nos bottes, bottes dans nos chemises. Nous avons donc bringuebalé jusqu’à la maison, en ployant & en flageolant & en penchant & en renversant & en chancelant. Et là, devant nous, un autre tracteur se traînait avec une remorque au chargement deux fois plus haut que le nôtre, un vrai gratte-ciel. Partout dans la campagne, on croisait des tracteurs rampant péniblement vers le bercail sous d’ultimes chargements impossibles dans le vert de la pluie.*

Aurait-il pu écrire cela dans un e-mail ? Je ne pense pas: c’est trop savamment composé, trop finement ciselé. C’est une œuvre authentique, intime et familière, et naturellement lyrique. Qui serait apparue trop littéraire dans un e-mail, trop en décalage avec la technologie qui l’avait créée.

Écrire des lettres libère une gamme d’émotions humaines plus étendue que toute autre forme de communication, hormis l’art et le roman. Internet est dans une large mesure son ennemi.

Quelqu’un a reçu de beaux e-mails d’amour récemment? Ou le moindre message qui soit à la hauteur du sentiment exprimé par Goethe qu’une lettre manuscrite est «*le souffle de la vie de la personne qui l’a écrite*»? Je ne pense décidément pas.

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But the great contemporary master, is Ted Hughes. He never used a computer; his editor offered him one so that he could send emails, but the poet always stuck with using a pen and typewriter.

Christopher Reid, his editor, published an illuminating collection in 2007, from where it appeared that, like Keats, Hughes developed many of his poems in his letters. His correspondence depicts a life of creation, of storms, of quests, and goodwill. In a 1975 letter to his daughter Frieda, who was in boarding school, he asks her about his exams, then describes a typical day's activities in Devon...

The rain started to fall just as we finished loading the hay bales—we rushed to shelter them, bales in the Land rover, bales in Jean and Ian's horse trailer, in the horse box, hay in our ears, hay in our neck, hay in our boots, hay in our shirts. So we lurched back to the house, bending, wobbling, leaning, tipping and staggering. And there, in front of us, was another tractor crawling along with a loaded twice as high as ours, a real skyscraper. All throughout the countryside we passed tractors creeping slowly along towards their home with their final load made impossible because of the sudden rain. *(NOTE: I see that the end is translated 'in the green of the rain', but I have no idea if that's supposed to be a literal saying I don't get, or idiomatic-which I also don't get. Contextually it seems like referencing the sudden and heavy rain, so I went with that).*

Could he have written that in an email? I don't think so: it's too skillfully made, too finely penned. It's an authentic work, intimate and familiar, naturally lyrical. It would have seemed too literary in an email, too at odds with the technology that created it. Writing letters allows for a wider range of human emotions than any other form of communication, apart from art and novels. The internet is to a large extent his enemy. Has anyone received any beautiful emails of love recently? Or any letter that matches Goethe's feelings that a handwritten letter is, "the breath of life of the person who writes it"? I definitely think not.