

**Publishing and Reading Friendly Female
Correspondence in Works of Fiction
—Women Writers' Sharing of Sensitivity with
Reader-Friends in 18th-Century France**

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Abstract

Friendship correspondence was one of the major forms of writing practiced in everyday life in 18th-Century France. Writers used it in the composition of their literary works, for example in the genre of the epistolary novel. This essay focuses on female friendship correspondence in works of fiction composed by women writers, and aims to analyze, from the point of view of the history of publishing and of reading, their participation in the construction of epistolary culture and contributions shaping a form of communication which helped bring women's writing to the public by way of print. Initially, we will study the ideal of the friendship letter employed in epistolary art discourse, as well as the normative representation of women's letters and its evolution as presented in letter manuals. Then, to determine how the epistolary novels concerned could have been classified or received by their readers, we will employ catalogues from the auctions of private libraries and from bookshop reading rooms and book reviews. Based on these analyses, this essay will study how women writers, using the form and ideal of the friendship letter, conveyed in their writings the practice of a mode of communication emphasizing the sharing of sensitivity with their reader-friend.

Key Words: female friendship correspondence, epistolary novel, ideal of the friendship letter, epistolary culture, history of publishing and of reading