

Dearest Friend,

When you speak of our letters as one-way streets, I think of Walter Benjamin,¹ who found in Proust's letters the 19th century reduced to its essence – words entirely circumscribed by a love of ceremony:

*"My dear Madam,
I just noticed that I forgot my cane at
your house yesterday; please be so
good as to entrust it to the bearer of
this letter.*

Marcel Proust

*P.S. Kindly pardon me for disturbing
you; I just found my cane."*

That Proust sent his letter anyway is, of course, absurd, but the action also speaks of a sensibility we have lost in the transition to modernity, the knowledge that letter-writing is the act of dialogue condensed into physical form. More absurd than sending the note would be to crumple it up and drop it into the waste basket, as that act would be akin to admitting one had spent the past half-hour making conversation with the figure in a mirror.

A true master of the form, like Proust, is only too aware that the letter can be an end-in-itself, and that it can only be so insofar as the ceremony surrounding it transcends any message it contains. Every epistolary address calls a series into being – the ideal exchange that each mailed sheet of A4 aspires to. A letter is a single shard in an ever-growing mosaic of relationship, the art of which embarrasses silence, commands continuation. Despite finding itself somewhat neglected by our modern culture, the epistolary form remains the original literature of fragmentation.²

I remain your humble and trusting etc. etc. etc.

Luke Neima³



¹ If you don't already know of Walter Benjamin then perhaps it's best you start with *The Arcades Project*, which remained unfinished at the time of his death in 1940.

² This letter was originally submitted for the first issue of *The Letters Page*, and recently discovered crammed behind the desk with a stack of other important papers. We feel it has stood the test of time.

³ Luke Neima's writing and translation has appeared online in the *White Review*, *Prospect* and *Granta*. He is an editorial assistant at *Granta*.