

Dear J,

Sorry I didn't reply sooner. Thanks for asking and I'm really very flattered, but I don't think I'll be able to supply a hand-written letter for the collection. This is because I'm working on a book at the moment and I am unable to multi-task. I'm aware that some writers can drop in and out of their current projects while they do extracurricular work (usually to ensure a steady income), but once I get involved with a book I can think of nothing else. Luckily I have a day job¹ to cover the expenses, but when I'm walking to and from work I'm usually going over sentences and pieces of dialogue from the night before. Actually, I've discovered that I do my best writing away from my desk – also, I can conjure up a mental picture of a page and sometimes I realise I've made a mistake e.g. it occurred to me the other day that one of my characters had contradicted herself – I made the amendment when I got home. It's the same when I go swimming or up to the pub – I'm only thinking about my books.

Therefore, I'm sorry² but there'll be no letter.³

Kind regards,
Magnus⁴

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Sorry I didn't reply sooner. Thanks for asking and I'm really very flattered, but I don't think I'll be able to supply a hand-written letter for the collection. This is because I'm working on a book at the moment and I am unable to multi-task. I'm aware that some writers can drop in and out of their current projects while they do extracurricular work (usually to ensure

¹ Magnus Mills works as a bus-driver in London, a fact which all literary critics and interviewers are required by law to mention within the first three paragraphs of any published article, along with an acknowledgment of the fact that such a mention has worn thin by now and is almost certainly redundant.

² It's worth noting here that a significant proportion of the letters we received for this issue featured prominent apologies; for poor handwriting, for not coming to a conclusion, for not having fully understood the submission guidelines. (Hint: a guideline is not a rule.) And this editor has noticed, in a recent revival of personal correspondence-by-post, how easily people feel the burden of letter writing. 'I'm sorry I haven't replied

sooner,' our letters all seem to begin, in the tone of a muttering student handing in a late assignment. Dear readers and fellow letter-writers, don't be so burdened! Write, or don't write, but enjoy it when you do. It's nice to reply to a letter, but there's no need to turn it into a chore; after all, if there's a message that can't wait, you can always send an email. (Remember email?) One of our editorial board members, the poet and publisher Éireann Lørsung, puts it very well: 'A letter,' she tweeted recently, 'is not a system of debt.'

³ We are unclear whether the use of a handwritten letter to apologise for there being no handwritten letter is a deliberate or fortuitous irony. Either way, it's an irony we appreciate; hence the inclusion of this letter here. We hope Mr Mills won't object to the international circulation of what he may have considered to be private correspondence. We suspect he won't.

⁴ Magnus Mills' most recent novel is *A Cruel Bird Came To The Nest And Looked In*, which we would be tempted to describe as 'a return to form' had his form in any way dipped since his startling debut, *The Restraint of Beasts*.