

***“Epistolary-Style Indirect Libre-Epistolary
Novel Hybrid”***

**How James Patterson was successful in
creating a new type of epistolary novel**

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“The explanation usually given for the decline of the epistolary novel is that new novel types for which the epistolary form was not suited arose and became popular... With the beginnings and spread of realism and the increasing dominance of third-person narration, an epistolary novel become more and more of a rarity.” (Martens, 1985, pp100-101).

In this mini-thesis, I will be analysing James Patterson’s use of both the epistolary form and style indirect libre in two of his novels; *Suzanne’s Diary for Nicholas* and *Sam’s Letters to Jennifer*.

I will be analysing his use of these two narrative forms as style indirect libre has been blamed for the decline of the epistolary novel. I will be analysing how he uses both narrative forms to tell two separate but connected stories—which are connected through an epistolary object which both novels revolve around.

This mini-thesis contains two brief summaries of the origins, development and decline of the epistolary and diary novel under the subheadings: **The Epistolary Novel** and **The Diary Novel**. Following these two subheadings, this thesis contains a brief summary of the definition, origin and emergence of style indirect libre under the subheading: **Style Indirect Libre**.

The two novels are analysed under their own subheadings with the same title: **Suzanne’s Diary for Nicholas** and **Sam’s Letters to Jennifer**. I have chosen to analyse three key areas of the novels that help understand Patterson’s reasons for choosing to write his novels in these two narrative forms. These three key areas are: why he chose to tell one protagonist’s story in the epistolary form and the other protagonist’s story in style indirect libre, Patterson’s use of the epistolary form and style indirect libre and the “ultimate mystery” and narrative desire—all of which are analysed under their own subheadings of the same title.

I will be concluding with asserting that Patterson was successful in using both narrative forms to create a new type of epistolary novel; an epistolary-style indirect libre-epistolary novel hybrid and what this could mean for writers and the future of epistolary novels.

THE EPISTOLARY NOVEL

The epistolary novel originated in the seventeenth century and rose to prominence and popularity in the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, particularly from the 1740s onwards with the publication of Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*.

The epistolary novel appealed to middle class readers because they could identify themselves and their lives with the characters in these novels and also because epistles were the main method of communication, "*Communication by the written word was the only contact between people living at a distance from one another and letters were greatly prized in those times of bad roads and slow vehicles.*" (Perry, 1980, p63) so it would be natural for this communication to seep into literature.

From the decade of 1740-49, along with Richardson's *Pamela*, there were six epistolary novels published. From the decade of 1750-59, the number of epistolary novels doubled to twelve. From the decade of 1760-69, thirty-two epistolary novels were published. From the decade of 1770-79, sixty-eight epistolary novels were published. The decade of 1780-89 was the decade that the epistolary novel peaked, one year in particular, 1785 was when it soared. In this decade, seventy-five epistolary novels were published. After this decade, the epistolary novel did begin to decline due to the development of style indirect libre and the stream-of-consciousness novel and also because the "*intimate letter itself became passé.*" (Martens, 1985, p100)

THE DIARY NOVEL

"The diary novel was not only strongly influenced by the changing fashions of the real journal; it was particularly at its origins, indebted to the influence of another novel form, the epistolary novel." (Martens, 1985, p25)

The diary novel, like the epistolary novel originated, developed and rose to prominence and popularity in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Also like the epistolary novel, the diary novel was based on real diaries. Therefore the diary novel is a mimetic novel that developed and rose to prominence and popularity after the epistolary novel was established, without the epistolary novel, the diary novel would not have come to be.

STYLE INDIRECT LIBRE

Style indirect libre otherwise known as free indirect speech or free indirect discourse, as defined by reference.com *“is a style of third person narration which combines some of the characteristics of third-person narration with first-person direct speech.”*

(Unknown author, 2009) For the purposes of this mini-thesis, I will use the French translation of the term; Style indirect libre.

In researching for this mini-thesis, I found little on style indirect libre. What I did find was contradictory, however based on what I did find during this research; style indirect libre emerged during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—the eighteenth century being the time in which the epistolary novel emerged. Style indirect libre, like the epistolary novel also peaked during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Jane Austin and Gustave Flaubert are well-known authors that wrote their novels in style indirect libre.

SUZANNE’S DIARY FOR NICHOLAS

Why Patterson tells Suzanne’s story in the epistolary (diary) form and tells Katie’s story in style indirect libre

Patterson chose to tell Suzanne’s story in the epistolary (diary) form—the diary that she wrote herself for her son, Nicholas, because Suzanne’s story is set in the past. Her story, her events have already happened and her story is being told retrospectively. Her story is told retrospectively, not only because her story and her events have already happened, but also because she can’t tell her story in the present because, as the novel later reveals, she is dead.

Katie’s story is being told in style indirect libre as her story is set in the present and she is also bringing Suzanne’s story to life as she progresses through the diary. As she progresses through the diary, Katie’s story is also being told and revealed to the reader.

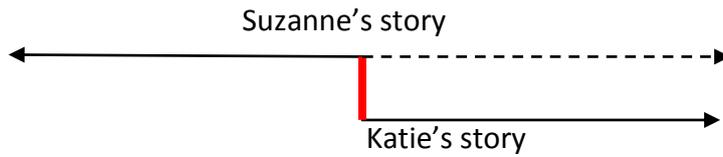


Fig 1: The parallel storylines: Suzanne's and Katie's stories.

The red line, connecting Suzanne's and Katie's stories is the diary. Matt; Suzanne's husband gives the diary to Katie, his girlfriend who he broke up with at the start of the novel, to read, to understand why he broke up with her.

The dotted line represents Suzanne's story in the past being told in the present as a parallel story as Katie progresses through the diary.

Patterson's use of the epistolary form and style indirect libre

Patterson goes to the effort to separate the epistolary form and style indirect libre in the majority of the novel using cover pages to indicate to the reader which character and storyline to follow.

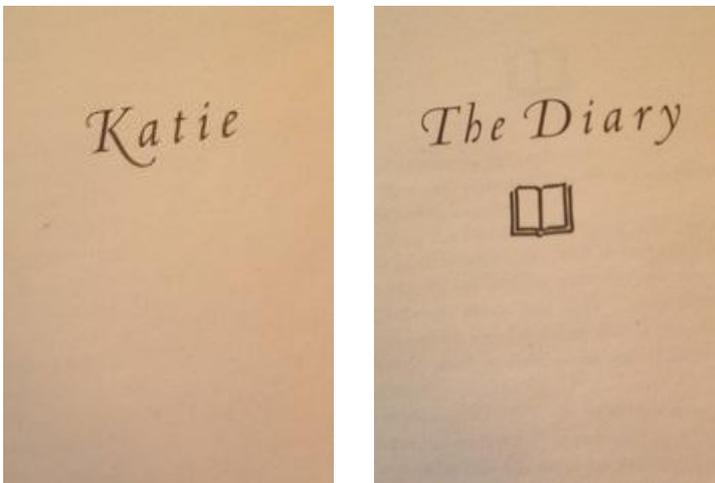


Fig 2. The "Katie" and "The Diary" cover pages.

However when Patterson introduces the reader to the connections of the characters in both stories—which is established by Matt giving his late wife's diary written for their late son to Katie, his girlfriend whom he recently broke up with, Patterson has both

narrative forms appear together on the same page. The first appearance of this is on pages 13 and 14 when Katie finds the diary that Matt left for her at her apartment, shortly after their break up.

“Her fingers were trembling as she opened the diary to its first page. A note from Matt was affixed. Her eyes began to well up, and she angrily wiped the tears away. She read what he’d written.

Dear Katie,

No words or actions could begin to tell you what I’m feeling now. I’m so sorry about what I allowed to happen between us. It was all my fault, of course. I take all the blame. You are perfect, wonderful, beautiful. It’s not you. It’s me.

Maybe this diary will explain things better than I ever could. If you have the heart, read it.

It’s about my wife and my son, and me.

I will warn you, though, there will be parts that may be hard for you to read.

I never expected to fall in love with you, but I did.

Matt.

Katie turned the page.”

On page 15, the first “The Diary” cover page appears.

Patterson also has both narrative forms appear on the same page before and after he reveals major plot points. The aforementioned example when Katie reads the letter from Matt encouraging her to read the diary is the first example of this. The second example of this is after it is revealed that Suzanne and Nicholas died in a car accident on page 286.

“The letter inside was in Matt’s handwriting. Her fingers trembled as she unfolded it. The tears started again as she began to read.

Katie, dear Katie,

Now you know what I haven't been able to tell you all these months. You know my secrets. I wanted to tell you, almost since the day that we met. I have been grieving for such a long time, and I couldn't be comforted. So I kept my past from you. You, of all people. There are words from a poem about the local fishing boats and their crews that have been carved into the bar of Docks Tavern on the Vineyard. The longed-for ships/come empty home or founder on the deep/and eyes first lose their tears and then their sleep. I saw the words one night at Docks, when I couldn't cry any more, and couldn't sleep, and I was almost crushed by the awful truth in them.

Matt

That was all he wrote, but Katie needed more. She had to find Matt.”

This is also the last appearance of the epistolary form in the novel.

The Ultimate Mystery and Narrative Desire

“Desire is always there at the start of a narrative, often in a state of initial arousal, often having reached a state of intensity such that movement must be created, action undertaken, change begun.” (Brooks, 1984, p38)

Patterson establishes narrative desire by writing two parallel stories in two different narrative forms. This is highlighted with both stories revolving around Suzanne's Diary and how he uses the diary and letters to reveal, introduce and conclude the story and especially to reveal major plot points. Even though the diary and the letters establish narrative desire, more than anything they maintain narrative desire simply by being, as the reader would be asking why Suzanne's diary needs to be read. Therefore, Patterson creates what I call, an “ultimate mystery”—the biggest question and mystery of the novel which draws the reader in and motivates them to read the novel. This “ultimate mystery” is:

Why did Matt give Katie his wife's diary to read?

There are supplementary questions that arise from this ultimate mystery and are also connected to, which are: Why did he leave Suzanne and Nicholas? Is he still married to Suzanne? Why did he start a relationship with Katie whilst still married to Suzanne? Why did he leave Katie?

Even though Suzanne is the protagonist of the epistolary story and Katie is the protagonist of the style indirect libre story, Matt cannot be taken for granted as an integral character. Even though Matt isn't a protagonist in either story, he is the character that sets the story in motion and he is the character through which the major plot points are revealed. He gives Katie, Suzanne's diary and foreshadows its content by placing a letter in the front of the diary, and the ultimate mystery is resolved when Matthew writes in Suzanne's diary and reveals Suzanne's and Nicholas' deaths. He also leaves a letter at the end of the diary for Katie to understand his motivations and actions.

"If the motor of the narrative is desire, totalizing, building ever-larger units of meaning, the ultimate determinants of meaning lie at the end and narrative desire is ultimately, inexorably, desire for the end." (Brooks, 1984, p52)

The narrative desire that is established and maintained throughout the novel is the ultimate mystery and Suzanne's diary. For the reader to obtain the narrative desire, which is to reach the end of the story, where the ultimate mystery is resolved, like Katie, they would have to progress through Suzanne's diary. So when the "Matthew" cover page is shown to the reader, this alerts them to a major plot point and the ultimate mystery being resolved as Matthew has never written in the diary and the reader would be questioning why he would.

Once the ultimate mystery is resolved, the epistolary story ends as the narrative desire has been met. The style indirect libre story continues and shortly ends after this as by resolving the ultimate mystery, Matt's motivations and actions are

understood and all that is left is to discover whether Katie and Matt will get back together and have a happy ending, which they do.

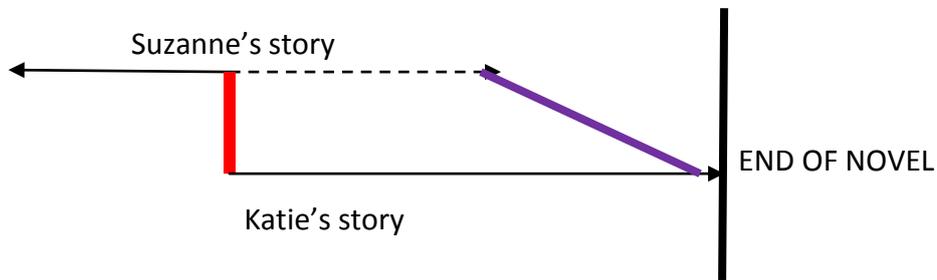


Fig 3. How the parallel storylines end once the ultimate mystery is resolved.

The red line, connecting Suzanne's and Katie's stories is the diary. Matt; Suzanne's husband gives the diary to Katie, his girlfriend who he broke up with at the start of the novel, to read, to understand why he broke up with her.

The purple line represents Suzanne's story ending, which happens when the ultimate mystery is resolved. Because it is resolved, Suzanne's story comes to end and the diary entries/epistolary form no longer appear in the novel.

Katie's story ends shortly after Suzanne's story does and after the ultimate mystery is resolved.

SAM'S LETTERS TO JENNIFER

Why Patterson tells Sam's story in the epistolary form and tells Jennifer's story in style indirect libre

Following *Suzanne's Diary for Nicholas'* lead, Patterson chooses to tell Sam's story in the epistolary form—the letters that she wrote to Jennifer, because Sam's story is set in the past. Her story, her events have already happened and her story is being told retrospectively. Her story is told retrospectively, not only because her story and her events have already happened, but also because she can't tell her story in the present

because, until the end of the novel, she is in a coma, she briefly wakes up and recovers from the coma, only to die at the end of the novel.

Jennifer's story is being told in style indirect libre as her story is set in the present and she is also bringing Sam's story to life as she progresses through the letters. As she progresses through the letters, Jennifer's story also progresses.

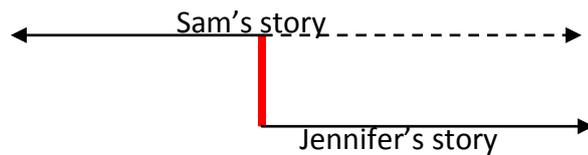


Fig 4: The parallel storylines: Sam's and Jennifer's stories.

The red line, connecting Sam's and Jennifer's stories is the letters that Sam writes to Jennifer. The moment when Sam and Jennifer and the letters are connected is when Jennifer discovers the letters at Sam's house and when she begins to read them.

The dotted line represents Sam's story in the past being told in the present as a parallel story as Jennifer reads and progresses through the letters that Sam has written to her.

Patterson's use of the epistolary form and style indirect libre

Similarly to *Suzanne's Diary for Nicholas*, Patterson goes to the effort to separate the epistolary form and style indirect libre in the majority of the novel. However the style indirect libre in the novel is Jennifer's first-person perspective, unlike *Suzanne's Diary for Nicholas*, which is third-person perspective, focalised through Katie. Also *Sam's Letters to Jennifer* is not structured as rigidly as *Suzanne's Diary for Nicholas*. Yes both narrative forms are separated in the majority of the novel, however a cover page does not separate them. Instead the novel is divided into five parts: "Prologue: Just Like Always"—Sam and Jennifer are on a beach on Lake Michigan, a year after the death of Jennifer's husband, Danny, where Jennifer reads a letter that Danny wrote to her—the

first instance of both narrative forms appearing on the same page occurs in this part on page 5.

“Dear, wonderful, gorgeous Jennifer...

You’re the writer, not me, but I had to try to put down some of my feelings about your incredible news. I always thought that you couldn’t possibly make me any happier, but I was wrong.

Jen, I’m flying so high right now I can’t believe what I’m feeling. I am, without a doubt, the luckiest man in the world. I married the best woman, and now I’m going to have the best baby with her. How could I not be a pretty good dad, with all that going for me? I will be. I promise.

I love you even more today than I did yesterday, and you wouldn’t believe how much I loved you yesterday.

I love you, and our little ‘peanut’...Danny.

Tears started to roll down my cheeks. ‘I’m such a big baby,’ I said. ‘I’m pathetic, the queen of the losers.’....”

The second part is *“Part One: The Letters”*—Jennifer returns to Lake Geneva, to Sam’s house and where she spent most of her summers during her childhood, after she is informed that Sam has had an accident and falls into a coma. When she arrives at the house, she discovers the letters that Sam has written to her on page 27, the first letter appears on page 29. In this first letter, the first major plot point is revealed and the narrative desire created and established when Sam reveals in this letter that she never loved her husband and Sam’s grandfather, Charles. She also reveals how she met Charles, how he hit her on their wedding night and revealed that their marriage—one that Jennifer always admired, was, in fact, loveless. At the end of this part, the ultimate mystery is established when Sam reveals that she had an affair and refuses to tell Jennifer his real name, instead, naming him ‘Doc.’ Meanwhile, as Jennifer is reading these letters, she sees her childhood friend, Brendan Keller for the first time in years.

The third part is “*Part Two: Young Love*”—this is the biggest part of the novel at 125 pages and is the core of the novel. Jennifer and Brendan’s friendship eventually blossoms into love, which leads to Brendan admitting to Jennifer that he has a brain tumour and later undergoes life-threatening surgery.

Sam’s letters not only reveal her affair, but also have Sam providing Jennifer with important life lessons which include: not to shut out love, putting herself first and laughing more. Sam also talks about the night that Charles died.

As Jennifer progresses through Sam’s letters and learns and takes these lessons on board, she slowly changes her life for the better: she incorporates Sam telling her story into the column that she writes for her job and also gives in to her feelings for Brendan and lets their relationship progress. Just as it is peaking, Sam awakes from her coma.

Other than Sam’s letters, there is the presence of notes, in the form of letters written by Brendan for Jennifer. These letters are on the same page as the style indirect libre. The first one is on page 148 when their romance is blossoming and after he has revealed that he is dying.

“...Maybe Brendan was used to the idea of his dying, but I wasn’t.

He was waterproofing Shep’s deck and the job was only half done, so after lunch Brendan went back to his work. I was clearing the table when I found a note folded under my plate. It read:

Jennifer,

You are formally invited to dinner at the Guesthouse.

7.00 p.m. more or less.

Come as sweet as you are.

Brendan.”

The second note is on page 153, just before Sam awakes from her coma and Brendan is in Chicago.

“...From the height of the sun, I estimated that a portion of the morning was gone as well. I gathered up my clothes and, to my relief, found a note lying on top of my sandals.

Dear Jen,

I was right, you are the best. I have a little business in Chicago. Nothing too important. See you tonight? I hope so. I can't wait to have you back in my arms. I miss you already. Hope you feel the same about moi.

xoxo,

Brendan.”

Part Two ends with Brendan leaving Lake Geneva to have brain surgery and leaving a letter for Jennifer revealing his love for her. Unlike the notes he leaves for her and like with Sam's letters, it is on a separate page. Interestingly, when Brendan appears and is interacting with Jennifer, Sam is not mentioned as prominently and her letters don't appear. When Brendan is not interacting with Jennifer, Sam appears via her letters, which Jennifer progresses through when she is not interacting with Brendan—Brendan and Sam do not appear at the same time or on the same page.

The fourth part is “*Part Three: Leaving Lake Geneva*”—focuses on Brendan's surgery and Jennifer reading Sam's final letters whilst waiting for him to come out of the surgery. The final letter reveals that Sam accepted Doc's marriage proposal, however she doesn't reveal his real name. This final letter, however is not the final letter of the novel. The final letter of the novel is revealed to the reader after Sam dies, in which she leaves her house to Jennifer. This is the final appearance of the epistolary form of the novel and concludes this part. The final part of the novel, “*Epilogue: Pictures for Sam*”—Brendan and Jennifer's baby, Samantha is born and they are starting a video journal to tell their love story to her.

The Ultimate Mystery and Narrative Desire

“Finish the letters and we’ll talk more. Just remember, they’re not only about me—they’re about you too, sweetheart.” (Sam directly speaking to Jennifer, pg 194)

Patterson again establishes narrative desire by writing two parallel stories in two different narrative forms. This is highlighted with both stories revolving around Sam’s letters and how he uses the letters to reveal, introduce and conclude the story and especially to reveal major plot points. Even though the letters establishes narrative desire, more than anything they maintain narrative desire simply by being, as the reader would be asking why Sam wrote these letters to Jennifer and why they need to be read. Therefore, Patterson creates what I call, an “ultimate mystery”—the biggest question and mystery of the novel which draws the reader in and motivates them to read the novel. The “ultimate mystery” is:

Who is ‘Doc’?

There are supplementary questions that arise from this ultimate mystery and are also connected to, which are: Why is Sam telling Jennifer about Doc and their affair? Why didn’t Sam just leave Charles? Why didn’t Sam marry Doc? (At least at first, that is what Sam and the reader are led to believe)

There are more characters in *Sam’s Letters to Jennifer*, than *Suzanne’s Diary for Nicholas* and there isn’t an integral character, like Matt is in *Suzanne’s Diary for Nicholas*. However, as previously mentioned, Brendan and Sam do not appear at the same time or on the same page. When Brendan appears and is interacting with Jennifer, Sam is not mentioned as prominently and her letters don’t appear. When Brendan is not interacting with Jennifer, Sam appears via her letters, which Jennifer progresses through when she is not interacting with Brendan. This is because there are two narrative desires at play. The identity of “Doc” and why Brendan is at Lake Geneva—which is revealed later. Jennifer and Brendan’s love story and Brendan’s reasons for being at Lake Geneva is just as important a story as Sam and Doc’s love story. The style indirect libre story in this novel is more significant than the style

indirect libre story in *Suzanne's Diary for Nicholas*, which is also why there are two narrative desires at play. It is also the reason why this novel is not as structurally rigid as *Suzanne's Diary for Nicholas*.

"If the motor of the narrative is desire, totalizing, building ever-larger units of meaning, the ultimate determinants of meaning lie at the end and narrative desire is ultimately, inexorably, desire for the end." (Brooks, 1984, p52)

The narrative desire that is established and maintained throughout the novel is the ultimate mystery and Sam's letters, as well as the presence of Brendan. For the reader to obtain the narrative desire, which is to reach the end of the story, where the ultimate mystery is resolved, like Jennifer, they would have to progress through Sam's letters.

Unlike *Suzanne's Diary for Nicholas*, the ultimate mystery is revealed after Sam awakes from her coma and Brendan recovers from his life threatening surgery. The epistolary story ends when Sam reveals that Doc proposed to her and she accepted. To maintain narrative desire, Patterson ends the epistolary story on a cliff hanger to keep the reader engaged and resolves the ultimate mystery in the style indirect libre story. The style indirect libre story ends after the ultimate mystery is resolved, after Sam dies and after Samantha, Brendan and Jennifer's baby is born. Sam is killed off as her story has been finally told and is known, like she wanted and her time is over.

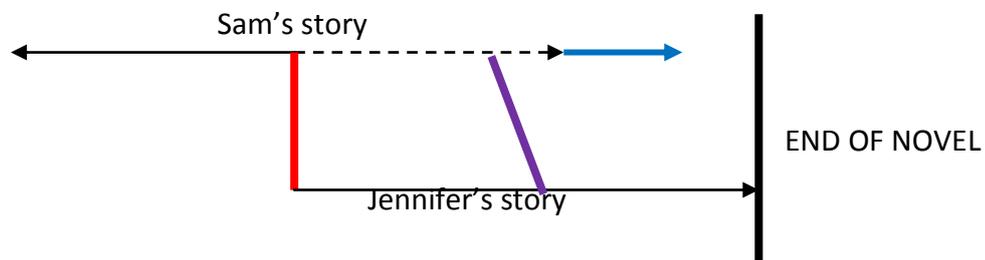


Fig 5. How the parallel storylines end once the ultimate mystery is resolved.

The red line, connecting Sam's and Jennifer's stories is the letters that Sam writes to Jennifer. The moment when Sam and Jennifer and the letters are connected is when Jennifer discovers the letters at Sam's house and when she begins to read them.

The purple line represents the epistolary form ending; however the epistolary story doesn't end there.

The blue line represents Sam's story continuing in real time, after her past story has been told in the present through her letters. However her story ends before Jennifer's story and the novel ends.

By choosing to write two novels which had two parallel stories told in the epistolary form and in style indirect libre, especially when style indirect libre was blamed for the decline of the epistolary novel, Patterson has found a new way to tell a story or two as well as a new way to write a novel. Both *Suzanne's Diary for Nicholas* and *Sam's Letters to Jennifer* were critically acclaimed and made bestseller's lists. *Suzanne's Diary for Nicholas* was also made into a telemovie in 2005. Therefore the critical and financial success of both novels proves that Patterson was successful in creating a new type of epistolary novel; an epistolary-style indirect libre-epistolary novel hybrid.

For writers that desire to write an epistolary novel, this hybrid provides a new way to write an epistolary novel as well as keep it alive, Patterson's success with this hybrid proves that the epistolary novel is, in fact not dead.

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