MANCHESTER
1824

English letter-writing: Teaching history of English by research

David Denison
Kansai Gaidai University
26 November 2016

Manchester history of English language courses

2

Options in history of English

- Introduction to Old English (10 credits, 2nd year)
- Introduction to Middle English (10 credits, 2nd year)
- Modern English Language (1500-present) (20 credits, final year)
- Editing of two letters + linguistic commentary is significant component in the ModE course:
  - 1/11 lectures
  - 2/10 tutorials, including library visit
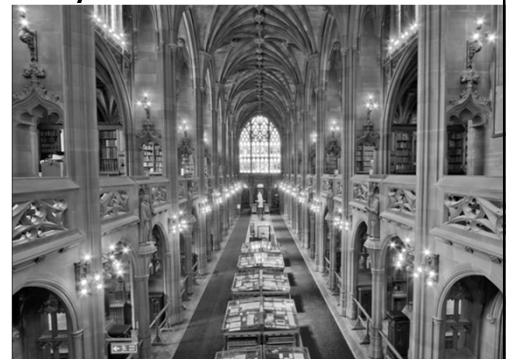 - 30% of marks

3

Mary Hamilton papers

John Rylands Library

4

The Library

The Library

Mary Hamilton papers

- Family and friends
  - Mary Hamilton (1756-1816), courtier and diarist
  - old aristocratic family of military/political background
  - 1777-1782, governess to George III's daughters
  - 1783-1785, London, friends with the Bluestocking circle
  - 1785, married John Dickenson; daughter Louisa b.1787

(Anson & Anson 1925: frontispiece)

Title	Mary Hamilton Papers
Dates	1743-1826
Extent	3 series; 2496 items
	Correspondence (1743-1826): 22 sub-series (+53), 2474 items
	Diaries (1776-1797): 16 autograph diaries
	Manuscript volumes (c.1779-c.1791): 6 volumes
Ref	GB 133 HAM
Held at	The University of Manchester, The John Rylands University Library

7

Project 'Image to Text'

- David Denison and Nuria Yáñez-Bouza
- Concerned (mainly) with Mary Hamilton Papers as digitised in high-quality photos
- All existing images now freely available from JRL

- But many letters hard to decipher
- One aim: make material easily accessible

www.projects.alc.manchester.ac.uk/image-to-text/

8

Project 'Image to Text'

- Research-based teaching project from the start
  - students at Manchester (undergraduate, then MA too)
  - students at Vigo (undergraduate and MA)
  - students at Uppsala (MA)
  - + ...?
- Our students have session at Library with archivist, Fran Baker, who shows sample letters 17C-21C
  - history of postal systems, letter-writing constraints and conventions, problems of archiving email etc.
- Small groups have informal go at transcription

10

Library visit

11

Project 'Image to Text'

- Over several weeks, each student edits two letters in original spelling and layout, with tags from
  - XML = eXtensible Markup Language
  - TEI = Text Encoding Initiative
- Machine-independent international standards

  - We minimise purely technical demands.
  - use modest subset of TEI guidelines (4 sides A4) for mark-up – list updated if new problems encountered
  - leave complex XML codes (e.g. for hyphenation) and TEI header to be added by research assistant

12

Project 'Image to Text'

- Research assistant processes files, then all(!) three project members check them
  - sometimes obsessively!
- So far 230 letters = 122k text words

13

Purpose of transliterations

- For students
  - Engage with genuine texts some 200 years old
  - Solve puzzles in letters from knowledge of history of English language, plus reference works, etc.
  - *Learn* language history from examples found in letters
- For others (historians, literary scholars, public, …)
  - Convenient rendition of historical documents which are often hard to read, sometimes hard to understand
  - Reliable text in standard format
 - Indexing of people, places, etc.

14

Example letter

- Note treatment of
  - page layout, lineation and underline, superscript, etc.
  - words broken at end of line
  - abbreviations
  - corrections, additions, deletions, gaps
  - long-s
  - notes
- Website sets transliteration side by side with original.
- Letter from Queen Charlotte to Mary Hamilton, HAM/1/1/2/2 – visit project website to view.
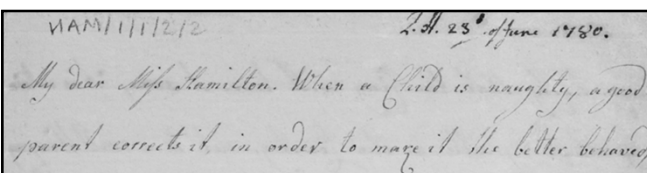
15

Representation of text

- Show long-s? If so, how?
- Yes, using Unicode long-s character <ſ>:
  - paſsion, Miſs, etc.
- Good for TEI compliance ✓
- Screen character lacks descender (except when italicised *paſsion, Miſs*!) and sometimes has crossbar.
- 'Latin small letter esh' <ʃ> looks much better:
  - paʃsion, Miʃs
- but non-compliant! ×
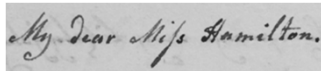
16

TEI and XML

17


```
<pb n="1"/>
<lb/><opener><dateline rend="align-right"><address><abbr
expan="Queen's House">Q.H.</abbr></address> <date
when="1780-06-23"><hi rend="underlined">23<hi
rend="superscript">d</hi></hi> of June 1780</date>.</dateline>
<lb/><salute type="opening">My dear <name type="person"
role="addressee">Miſs Hamilton</name></salute></opener>.
When a Child is naughty, a good
<lb/>parent corrects it in order to make it the better behaved,
```
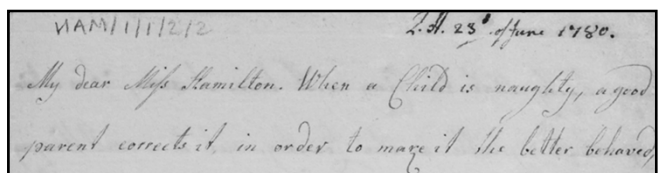
18


```
<pb n="1"/>
<lb/><opener><dateline rend="align-right"><address><abbr
expan="Queen's House">Q.H.</abbr></address> <date
when="1780-06-23"><hi rend="underlined">23<hi
rend="superscript">d</hi></hi> of June 1780</date>.</dateline>
<lb/><salute type="opening">My dear <name type="person"
role="addressee">Miſs Hamilton</name></salute></opener>.
When a Child is naughty, a good
<lb/>parent corrects it in order to make it the better behaved,
```

comma?

29

Physical vs. logical layout

- Desire for side-by-side display suggests
  - Preserve page- and column-breaks
  - Preserve line-breaks
- Keep all blocks of text together that appear on same page of original
- But then, what to do with
  - address panel written in middle of page?
  - insertions squeezed into any available space?
  - blocks of text written at 90° or upside-down or 'crossed'?

30

Layout problems

- Address is on page of letter (no envelopes then); when unfolded, address appears in centre of page.
- Should address panel interrupt XML text or not?
  - Eventual pragmatic decision: only if clean break in letter content with no text on both sides of address
- Always a compromise between
  - rearranging all blocks of text **on a single page** in logical order – letter content, postscripts, address, insertions at side, etc. – and
  - guiding reader to relevant parts in handwritten original

31
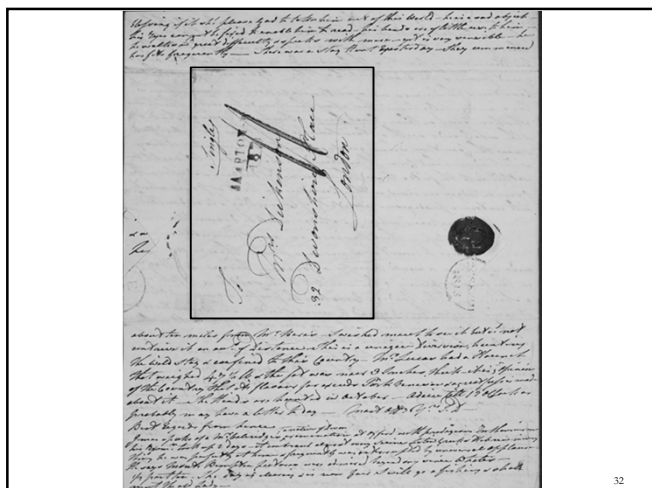
32

Representation of text

- Correct or modernise spelling?
- Our choice: keep original spelling throughout.
  - If spelling differs from present-day standard, leave unmarked if current at the time (as shown in *OED*).
  - Otherwise mark obvious slips or idiosyncrasies for correction – with on-screen pop-up.

- But eventual linguistic tagging and parsing may require a different normalisation.

34

Plain text version

- For users such as linguists who want content only without reference to handwritten original
  - Text rearranged to maximise continuity
  - Corrections, unclear text, recombined broken words silently included
  - No long-s or macrons, but otherwise original spelling
  - Barely any mark-up: only filename, change of hand, discontinuity, gap (these tags within carets, not XML)
- Users advised to check examples against XML text

35

Verb morphology

36

Past tenses

but <u>you was</u> so long in answering (HAM/1/5/2/17)

poor Dutches of Athol <u>writ</u> me a very melancholy letter (HAM/1/7/12/7)

We got home safe -- <u>eat</u> a good Supper & went to bed (HAM/1/2/49)

I was at two Concerts, [...] at which latter, Mʳ: Braham and Madame Catalani <u>sung</u> (HAM/1/4/3/28)

the little boy [...] <u>run</u> to Mʳˢ. Delany and told her that he had seen a great many Kings (HAM/1/2/7)

37

Past participles

or have you <u>chose</u> to imagine that you no longer interest me (HAM/1/15/1/14)

I was <u>drove</u> to Town by a Pain in face (HAM/1/15/1/17)

somebody had <u>wrote</u> to Mʳ. Hamilton (HAM/1/4/2/25)

• *shook, forgot,* etc.

38

Miscellaneous inflections

Lady Elizabeth Archer <u>dont</u> intend leaving this Place till the middle of Novʳ (HAM/1/7/12/4)

it was the best thing and the <u>properest</u> he could do (HAM/1/5/2/20)

39

Word class

they were <u>much pleased</u> (HAM/1/10/1/20)

however there are such <u>various</u> attractions beside (HAM/1/4/3/27)

he is rather better but <u>looks deplorably</u> (HAM/1/15/1/11)

I shou'd think myself <u>unworthy the constant attachment</u> & friendship I have experienced from you & Mʳ. Dickenson were I silent upon the character of your Cousin (HAM/1/4/1/34)

40

Syntax

41

NP

to show you how much I am desirous to repair <u>this my</u> former omission (HAM/1/3/2/4)

all the little Murray's have had <u>the Measles</u>, except William -- Lord and Lady Stormont wish'd much that he shou'd have <u>them</u>, because he is going to Westminster School -- but he did not catch <u>them</u> tho' he try'd for it (HAM/1/4/3/7)

I will send her a long letter <u>the first opportunity</u> (HAM/1/3/2/9)

42

Neg. imperative, interrogative

but then I conjure you <u>keep me not</u> in ignorance in any thing relative to you (HAM/1/15/2/10)

let me hear next post -- <u>fail not</u> (HAM/1/15/2/12)

Pray <u>don't let</u> my long Silence prevent your writing to me soon. (HAM/1/4/3/15)

you do not mention London, my dear, <u>do not you mean</u> to come, or only in the Spring? (HAM/1/15/1/9)

"<u>Did not I ask</u> you before where you got this Note" (HAM/1/2/45)

<u>is not that</u> rather too late a period (HAM/1/4/1/17)

but <u>dont you think</u> it a punishment [...] ? (HAM/1/5/2/13)

43

No progressive passive

• Not yet found in collection: *NP is being Ved*

There is a trial <u>preparing</u> for me -- a separation from my beloved Sister (HAM/1/15/1/8)

A Road <u>is now making</u> along this Valley which will be nearly flat all the way from here to Exeter (HAM/1/2/45)

a high sort of parapet [...] which <u>is now constructing</u> (HAM/1/2/57)

The Theatre <u>is rebuilding</u> (HAM/1/4/3/27)

44

Perfect

Lady Warwick <u>is come</u> (HAM/1/1/2/2)

My Brother <u>is gone</u> abroad for a year (HAM/1/15/1/36)

I have had the comfort of seeing my Husband return in good health at a time when by the wind I concluded he <u>was sail'd</u> to Torbay (HAM/1/5/2/19)

change of air & place always agrees with me & I <u>was grown</u> quite fat & rosy (HAM/1/15/1/40)

45

Perfect

It rains so hard that I fear the Weather <u>is broke</u> & then we cannot go to Exeter (HAM/1/2/45)

I <u>have</u> now <u>passed</u> 3 times thro this beautiful Country & <u>am become</u> pretty well aquainted with it (HAM/1/2/53)

I am sorry, it has not been in my power before now, <u>to have answer'd</u> Your last (HAM/1/5/2/12)

46

Grammaticalisation

but I cannot help now my Dear Madam gieving you the trouble of this <u>seing</u> in the news papers, Prince Alfrede has been dangerously ill, tho I hope in god by this time his Royal Highnefs is better and I hope will soon get well (HAM/1/7/12/10)

• Structure unclear, but probably

   [...] gieving you the trouble of this,
   <u>seing</u> in the news papers [...]

• Bridge context for *seeing* between literal 'I having seen' and grammaticalised 'since, because'?

47

Lexis and semantics

48

You must my dear sister be <u>sensible</u> that in this affair I wish to be guided by the best motives (HAM/1/3/2/9)

Mrs Port's ^{visit} is rather a bad & <u>hurrying</u> thing for poor Mrs D. (HAM/1/15/1/12)

Brooks Ball was at the Opera -- magnificent they said, but not pleasant as the crowd was <u>amazing</u> (HAM/1/15/1/36)
- postdates *OED* sense 1 'Causing distraction, consternation, confusion, dismay; stupefying, terrifying, dreadful'

We then went to see M^r. Grangers Garden wch. adjoins the Castle as is truly one of the <u>Lions</u> at Exeter (HAM/1/2/49)

49

---

the reflexion of my having acquitted myself to this dear & invaluable <u>friend</u> [= *his daughter*] in the <u>crisis</u> of her affliction will be my principal consolation, shoud it be the will of Providence to take her from us (HAM/1/4/2/21)

I returned to London for a <u>Drawingroom</u> & staid almost a fortnight (HAM/1/15/1/22)

I am invited by the Duke, so is all the family, but we do not attend the Queen, & go <u>undressed</u> (HAM/1/15/1/21)

What gives me great satisfaction is that you express yourself <u>stout</u> & well & equal to the ball at Woburn. (HAM/1/5/1/6)

50

---

and to take charge of his daughters [...] and I trust she will continue to shine in that with the adition of being as good a <u>Mother in law</u> ['stepmother'] (HAM/1/5/2/19)

the World seems so involved in trouble and perplexity all over the face of the globe that it is <u>wonderfull</u> and nothing can acount for it but that the Decrees of Providence are fullfilling in a way to high for us to understand (HAM/1/5/2/20)

she wished very much to write to you but I thought it more prudent to <u>check</u> her in that & insisted upon being her Secretary (HAM/1/5/2/3)

51

Editing problems

53

Foreign or not?

I was appointed ⟨Lectrice⟩ to the society and every morning read a French Drama or story of some kind, loud to a very attentive audience, <u>from</u> which I generally drew tears, for the choice of the ⟨lecture⟩ being left to me, you may imagine it was of a serious or affecting nature (HAM/1/15/1/17)

<hi rend="underlined"><foreign xml:lang="fr">lectrice </foreign></hi>
<hi rend="underlined"><foreign xml:lang="fr">lecture </foreign></hi>

54

How foreign? How incorrect?

inshort it has broke into all my plans of occupation & has unhinged me quite -- I feel ⟨desœuvreed⟩ dissipated, without an object or a pursuit which is worse than death to me (HAM/1/15/1/20)

<hi rend="underlined"><foreign xml:lang="fr"><sic corr="désœuvrée">desœuvre</sic></foreign>ed</hi>

55

Correct the text?

There are a set(a)Savages that are employed in making the new Road who are Strangers & earn prodigious Wages & live in on extraordinary eating raw bacon & undressed meat & drinking such Quantities of liquor as is scarce credible (HAM/1/2/47)

- *a set a savages*: should we correct to *a set of savages*?
- No: *OED* doesn't treat it as form of *of* but as form in its own right, exactly as here on page

56

Correct reading?

Since my arrival here I have been in a bit of a passion but as I am quiet now I will endeavour w^h- Composure to tell you that there is not a Soul in this town who ever heard of Oakford -- I have been to the post Office -- Never heard of the place -- **I have spoken to ??? in the street** -- knew no such place -- The Landlord says he has a post Boy who must know it but he will not return till later so here have I been fuming & admiring all my Relations as the most discreet sensible people in the World -- to invite me to come 200 miles to pay them a visit to direct me to go to Town & from there to take a Post Chaise & not know where to direct the Driver to direct his horse (HAM/1/2/43)

57

Correct reading?
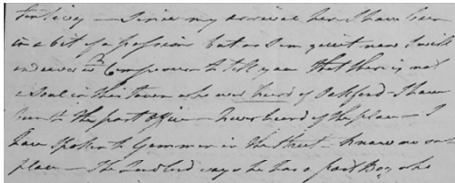
- *Gunmen*? *Gentlemen*? *Yeomen*?
- Gave up and just put <gap>
- *Gemmen* = vulgar pronunciation of *gentlemen* [*OED*]

58

Other letter collections

59

Of for *have*

- Unstressed *have* (*'ve*) and unstressed *of* are homophones: [əv]
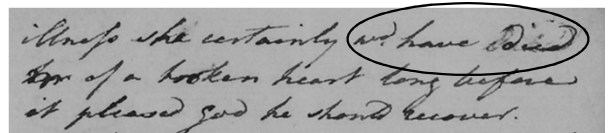- *of/have* confusion in some spoken English, especially where have would be infinitive in irrealis clause:

Dorothy   We had a hedgehog last year, I haven't seen them this winter er you know since

Unknown speaker   Yeah, something might of happened to them (BNC)

60

Of for *have*

- Mary Hamilton to Fanny Burney (1789) (HAM/1/6/5/2)

- Online catalogue entry quotes letter as containing the words "she 'certainly w[oul]d of died of a broken heart ...'". (p.c. Marianne Hundt)

61

Of for *have*

Had I known of your illness I <u>should not of written</u> in such fiery phrase in my first Letter. (1819 Keats)

I <u>never could of thought</u> that force Could turn affection in its course. (1814 [*OED*])

I <u>would of gone</u> Long before this but I still expected Letters from you as I wrote often to you. (1796 CORIECOR)

I should be very happey <u>to of seen</u> m^{rs}. Orford at Leek (?1774 Corpus of l18C Prose)

the servant to the old Lady <u>I sho~ld not of thought</u> of after what had past, but I wonder at no_thing (1773 *ibid.*)

62

please

- Ingrid Tieken-Boon van Ostade and Fátima María Faya Cerqueiro offered new hypothesis on origin of *please*
  - from *please to V* rather than if *you please*

<u>Please to let</u> us know what time will sute you to meet at Fairfield (1772 Corpus of Late 18th-century Prose)

(<u>Please</u> see over) (1788 *ibid.*)

- Corpus of late 18c Prose antedated by a century *OED*'s then earliest example.
  - *OED* can now date it from 1771.

63

Some course evaluations

- I think one of the things I most valued about this unit was the fact that we got to work with real 18th century letters and it was so exciting as we never had had this opportunity. (2013)
- The Mary Hamilton letter editing was really interesting, as was the opportunity to visit the Deansgate library and see original letters. It helped to contextualise the whole course unit; studying the history of the language is much more engaging when you can see original examples of it instead of just examples from textbooks or online resources. (2013)
- As strange as it may sound, even the assessment is something new and exciting – the chance to work with modern English manuscripts is incredible [...]! Easily my favourite module from my entire degree! (2016)

64

Acknowledgements

- Nuria Yáñez-Bouza (joint project director)
- George Bailey, Donald Morrison, Isabella Formisano (research assistants)
- Fran Baker (archivist at JRL)
- Lisa Crawley (archivist for Hamilton Papers)
- Carol Burrows and the Digitisation Steering Group
- enthusiastic students at Manchester and Vigo
- various expert advisers on XML, TEI, XSL and CSS, eighteenth-century London, sea silk, ...

65

JSPS Fellowship

- I gratefully acknowledge funding from the

  JSPS Invitation Fellowship Programme for Research in Japan (short term)

  which has made this lecture possible

- and I warmly thank Professor Fujio Nakamura for organising the JSPS application and resultant visit.

66

Last slide!

- **Image to Text** project website:
  www.projects.alc.manchester.ac.uk/image-to-text/

- This presentation can be downloaded from
  http://tinyurl.com/DD-download
- Comments welcome!

  Domo arigato – Thank you

67