

Writing Upwards: Letters to Robert Menzies, Australian Prime Minister, 1949–1966

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Abstract: Robert Gordon Menzies received approximately 22,000 letters during his record-breaking second term of office as Australia's Prime Minister (1949–66). This article examines the corpus as an example of “writing upwards,” a distinctive epistolary genre in which the weak wrote to the powerful, to praise them, berate them, abuse them, or perhaps wish them a happy birthday. From this perspective, the Menzies correspondence takes its place alongside the correspondence of other twentieth-century leaders that has already attracted scholarly and popular interest (the Belgian monarchy, Hitler, Mussolini, Mitterrand, Obama). After surveying this literature and establishing the Australian context, I give a brief presentation of the corpus as a whole. I then focus on one fundamental assumption of letter writers engaged in “writing upwards”: they believed their leader or superior was directly accessible and that they could establish a personal connection with him. By cutting through bureaucratic red tape and by using the epistolary hotline to the top, they could solve a problem or at least make their grievance heard. I indicate the difficulties and illusions they experienced, and outline the tactics deployed by Menzies's secretariat in responding to their letters.

Writing Upwards

“Writing Upwards” is the term I use to categorize letters from humble citizens to their ruler, employer, or social superior, to petition, abuse, or congratulate them. Many Australians “wrote upwards” to Robert Menzies, their longest-serving prime minister, during his second term of office from 1949 to 1966. I will briefly outline the corpus of private correspondence he received during this record term of office, and then focus on one important assumption shared by all “writing upwards”: the accessibility of the leader, and the possibility of establishing a personal connection with him.¹

Historians of popular writing have found a fruitful source in letters to eminent political leaders. Maarten van Ginderachter, for instance, analyzed thousands of letters sent between 1865 and 1934 to the Belgian royal family. Most asked for some assistance, and normally the monarch obliged by sending a small gift, which showed that the strategy could be productive.² Adolph Hitler's Reich Chancellery received thousands of letters addressed to the Führer, and Hitler designated officials to reply to some of them. In Henrik Eberle's published selection, letters of protest to the Führer were initially present but gradually dwindled leaving an unremitting stream of veneration and birthday congratulations.³ Poems of homage, birthday gifts, and requests to act as godfather to the writer's child poured in during the mid-1930s when Hitler was at the height of his epistolary popularity. In 1934 alone he received 10,000 birthday letters. Benito Mussolini also created a

special office to deal with such correspondence. Anne Wingenter studied letters sent to Mussolini by surviving families of Italian soldiers killed in Ethiopia, in which desperate pleas for help were mingled with crude imitations of the heroic language of fascist sacrifice, designed to demonstrate the writer's loyalty.⁴ The regime manipulated the letters in order to nourish the personal cult of Il Duce and published a carefully edited selection of them to confirm Italians' alleged devotion to their leader.

Scholars have also scrutinized writing to French presidents. Sudhir Hazareesingh interpreted Charles de Gaulle's incoming correspondence from the 1950s onwards as an important component in the cultivation of a personal myth of the national savior and the providential father of the French people.⁵ François Mitterrand received about 1,000 letters daily during his presidency of France, and staff replied to almost every one of them in rapid time, although the requests they submitted were not granted. According to Béatrice Fraenkel, 110 standard responses were available to the presidential secretariat.⁶ In 1983, the service was computerized and removed from the presidential Élysée Palace to new premises across the river Seine, thus breaking its connection with Mitterrand's private circle. Nevertheless, such cases illustrate the persistence of popular belief in the personal benevolence of the ruler and in the writer's ability to reach him personally, in spite of the inevitable bureaucratization of official correspondence in the cases mentioned. This created paradoxical situations: French subjects wanted a direct, unmediated epistolary connection with their president, but their correspondence was diverted to an impersonal public service department employing a staff of 100, who sorted the letters and selected the appropriate response. In such a situation, the question arises: who actually replied to letters to the president? The same question can be asked of the Menzies correspondence. Replies were a collaborative effort, drafted by staff in the name of the president or prime minister, who remained virtually present on the page. These examples also show the willingness of political authorities to manipulate such correspondence for their own ends. Hence Mitterrand invited people to write to him, while Mussolini published extracts from the most edifying letters.

The selection of letters to US President Barack Obama presented by Jeanne Marie Laskas is the most recent analysis of the genre.⁷ Obama received about 10,000 letters daily, and every day he read ten of them, carefully selected by his staff. The Office of Presidential Correspondence employed fifty staff members, thirty-six interns and 300 rotating volunteers. The writers who replied to them, channeling the president's voice, included literature graduates sensitive to his tone and language—which was not the case with replies to the Menzies letters, penned by private secretaries who were not trying to imitate the prime minister's style.⁸ Nor were Menzies's secretaries offered counselling, as Obama's staff were, when they had to deal with particularly traumatic letters.⁹ Laskas's moving book is sympathetic to Obama, as a man of compassion who cared deeply about ordinary people's problems. I do not seek to emulate Laskas here: my study is not intended as a homage to Menzies.

Unlike Menzies, both Obama and Mitterrand were elected by direct popular vote, which may have strengthened the letter writers' perception that a close personal connection with them was possible. The Menzies letters, however, share important features with the corpuses mentioned above. They are evidence of a persistent belief in the power of the written word; and they are based on common assumptions about the accessibility of the ruler. These assumptions are a defining element of the genre.

Letters to a political leader are only one manifestation of the genre of writing upwards. Pauper letters seeking charitable relief from poverty and hardship are another, and they have been analyzed for the ways in which ordinary people interacted with authorities, sharing and

manipulating common “anchoring rhetorics” and developing a dialogue with them based on similar “linguistic platforms.”¹⁰ Petitions to a monarch constitute a further variation on the theme of writing upwards, although they differ in important ways from letters to a prime minister. Petitions are usually collectively organized, and they are often public documents. In some cases, the task of drafting them is entrusted to a delegated writer possessing suitable legal competence. Letters, on the other hand, are private and they have individual authors.¹¹

Writing upwards describes all the ways above in which poor, desperate, or indignant people addressed their superiors. “Deference, Demands, Supplication”—this was how Camillo Zadra and Gianluigi Fait summarized their collection of studies on writing to the powerful.¹² Letters to authorities usually adopted a deferential tone that recognized their own inferior status; they often sought some personal advantage and sometimes they did so in begging or groveling language. But this was not always the case, and Zadra and Fait’s title was too short to encompass the wide range of possible attitudes expressed in writing upwards. Writings to the powerful might be abusive or obsequious, or they could denounce neighbors, conspirators, and corrupt officials. Occasionally they demanded nothing but seemed simply to have been a cry for attention or a plea for reassurance. Sometimes the writer assumed a network of reciprocal obligations and reminded a superior authority of the duty to fulfil earlier promises. Writers, I suggest, expected direct access to their leader, even if this expectation was rarely achievable. The underlying condition of all writing upwards was social or political inequality between the correspondents. For poor people addressing powerful forces, it was wise to be deferential and cautious. As James C. Scott has argued, however, expressions of loyalty and obedience should not be taken at face value, because deferential language could disguise a deeper insubordination.¹³

An Alternative History

Potentially, letters of ordinary citizens to any political leader reveal an alternative history that contrasts with political narratives conventionally told from the top down, from the viewpoint of politicians and official institutions. Thus, in spite of the variety of correspondents represented here, the letters from ordinary and even semiliterate writers provide a unique window on the mentality of grass-roots Liberal Party supporters in this period. They can tell us what ordinary people were thinking, in a way that a politician’s best guesses or anonymous election results cannot. I cannot claim that the Menzies letters constitute a representative sample of Australian “public opinion” as a whole. Most of them were penned by Liberal supporters and as a result a large section of the political spectrum is not represented. On the other hand, they were not blandly conformist and, although a majority of their authors were Liberal voters, they were Liberals with a grievance or a warning. Those grievances are themselves indicative of their unspoken beliefs.

James C. Scott distinguished between the public transcript, usually representing a visible and perhaps ritualized expression of conformity to official ideology, and the hidden transcript, referring to the private “offstage” conversations of citizens in which a more subversive discourse may be concealed.¹⁴ When Menzies’s correspondents (or at least most of them) went to the polls to vote Liberal, they were performing a public transcript of support for Menzies and their political cause; in their personal letters, however, they expressed the hidden transcript of their misgivings and demands for change.

History told from the letter writer’s perspective may not coincide with orthodox narratives. Textbook histories of the period may, if their scope embraces international affairs, underline the

historical importance of events like the Korean War, the death of Stalin, or the Suez crisis. Authoritative surveys with a more specifically Australian focus would emphasize a different set of landmarks—the Petrov Affair, the disastrous split in the Australian Labor Party, the problem of Indonesian designs on New Guinea.¹⁵ Ordinary writers absorbed and reflected the significance of some of these events but remained completely indifferent to others. They had their own historical perspective and followed an autonomous historical calendar. They were most strongly moved, for example, by the royal visit of 1954, or a parliamentary decision to increase the remuneration of its own members, or the provisions of a forthcoming annual budget. The concerns of their letters did not necessarily mirror conventional or official views of the period. Instead, they offer an alternative history of the Menzies years. For instance, the most persistent issue running through the Menzies correspondence was neither the future of the British Empire nor anti-communism, powerful as these concerns were. The topic that exercised writers most regularly was rather the amount of the old age pension and the difficulty of trying to live on it. Constant cries of distress on this point echo throughout the correspondence.¹⁶

There were significant lacunae in the letters to Menzies. World events that in hindsight seem of major significance were passed over in almost complete silence by correspondents at the time. When a new prime minister took office in Britain, writers were well aware of it, but similar events elsewhere did not surface in their letters. The death of Joseph Stalin in 1953 went virtually unmentioned, which is a surprise considering the general interest in communism at this stage of the Cold War. Dwight Eisenhower's accession to the US presidency in the same year went similarly unnoticed in the letters. We cannot attribute this to the insular outlook of Australians and their general indifference to foreign affairs because there were clearly occasions when correspondents took a great interest in events abroad. If Australian troops were committed overseas, for instance in Malaya, public interest certainly followed them. The Suez crisis of 1956, together with the debate over apartheid after 1960, generated plenty of discussion in the correspondence, completely defying Menzies's own pronouncements that apartheid was a South African domestic issue that did not concern Australia. African affairs have probably never figured so prominently in the Australian consciousness as they did in this period. Writers' interest in foreign issues, however, remained selective.

The Menzies Correspondence

Menzies was the longest-serving prime minister in Australian history. He served two terms, the first from 1939 to 1941, and the second, with which my study is concerned, between 1949 and 1966. His longevity in office is exceptional and indeed legendary. He presided over significant social, economic, and political change. Some of it, like the mass immigration program, was engineered by the government. Other changes, like the switch to decimal currency, happened in spite of it. The Menzies years were a time of postwar reconstruction and rising prosperity against the background of the Cold War.

Australian politicians have battled for control of the historical memory of the 1950s. John Howard (Liberal prime minister, 1996–2007) recognized Menzies not merely as the founder the Liberal Party but also as the ideological fountain that constantly replenished the deep wells of Australian conservatism. In his eyes, these years were a golden age of calm and prosperity during which the unbroken supremacy of the Liberal Party laid the foundation of modern Australia.¹⁷ Howard selected what he needed in order to construct a Liberal role model and an influential

political tradition. For Paul Keating, on the other hand (Labor prime minister, 1991–96), these were years of complacency and cultural stagnation, soon to be shaken by mass immigration and the declining relevance of the White Australia policy. Keating berated Liberal nostalgia for the 1950s as “fogeyism” and condemned in particular its “cultural cringe” towards Britain and its monarchy.¹⁸ Keating was committing the sin of historical anachronism, judging the 1950s against the values of the present. The popular royalism that he ridiculed was a potent force in 1950s Australia and demanded to be taken more seriously.

The letters that ordinary voters sent to Menzies in their thousands suggest a different profile from those advanced by self-interested politicians. For many ordinary people, the Menzies years appear as a time of anxiety and conflict, punctuated by fears of war, a repeat of the Great Depression, or an imminent nuclear Armageddon. Those deep-rooted fears were often exacerbated by Menzies himself for electoral gain. To persuade voters that they need greater security, you must first make them feel unsafe. Politicians’ versions of the past, however, do not always correspond to the grass-roots memories of their electorates.

Under Menzies, Australia eventually experienced a growing prosperity introduced by the first mining boom, and Liberals were justifiably confident about holding on to power against an opposition paralyzed by its own divisions. Beyond these comforting developments, however, a deeper malaise surfaced in the correspondence to Menzies. There were concerns, fueled by Menzies himself, that some of the certainties of Australian life were under threat from communist subversion and Asian hostility. The global importance of the British Empire, on which Australia had for so long relied, was shrinking. There were fears that the whiteness of White Australia could not be maintained in all its purity forever. Meanwhile, the persistent level of poverty undermined official complacency about Australia’s growing economy. The undeniable achievements of the age were accomplished in a polarized world in which there seemed to be a high risk of confrontation between superpowers. Meanwhile, over and above all those achievements loomed a mushroom-cloud-shaped vision of unparalleled destruction.

The corpus of the Menzies correspondence analyzed here consists of 19,363 letters. I have set aside dozens of boxes of invitations to functions and speaking invitations that Menzies usually declined (if I had included them, they would have brought the total number of letters in his mailbag to about 22,000 items). The correspondence includes letters of all sizes, telegrams, air letters, “with compliments” slips, and cards for different occasions—birthdays, Christmas, Easter, bon voyage cards, welcome home cards, and small calling cards bearing a scribbled message. Ordinary writers did not always obey the standard rules of epistolary etiquette, and they exploited any material that came to hand. In Queensland, Lawrence Johnston received a letter from Menzies about his pension, and used the blank spaces on the page for his reply, writing his own message in purple ink all around the typed text of the ministerial letter.¹⁹ Some correspondents simply tore a page from a ruled exercise book. Bill Newling, a former bus conductor, wrote to Menzies on a piece of brown wrapping paper.²⁰ The archive is a great leveler: missives like Bill Newling’s piece of brown paper sit side by side with the occasional telegram from Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

My qualitative commentary on the correspondence is based on the entire corpus of over 19,000 letters. There has been no triage or selection: I have counted and reviewed every item. A few questions, however, demand a statistical answer and for the quantitative part of my analysis some sampling has been necessary. To this end I have conducted a simple statistical survey of three sample years, one at the beginning of the period (1949–50 numbering 863 letters), one in the middle (from 1958 totaling 1,623 letters) and one near the end (from 1964 numbering 1,195 letters). Altogether, these provide a total of 3,681 letters, which is a solid sample of about 19 percent

of the main series of correspondence. The figures cited below are based on an analysis of these years, and the chronological span they cover allows a glimpse of one or two significant developments in the correspondence over the sixteen years of Menzies's term.

Who then wrote to Menzies? About 30 percent of the correspondence was sent by collective bodies or institutions—ministries, embassies, government departments, businesses, churches, and other nongovernment organizations. I am more interested in the remaining 70 percent (2,579 letters in the three-year sample). These individual letters are from ordinary writers who expressed their grievances and aspirations, and who embarked on the unfamiliar challenge of writing personally to the prime minister.

Men wrote most of the letters reflecting the historical male domination of politics, public administration, and capitalist enterprise. Even if we only consider letters from private individuals, 71.7 percent were written by men, compared to 28.8 percent by women, with a small residue of cases where the author's gender cannot be determined.²¹ This disproportion remained fairly consistent across the years.

There was a strong overseas presence in the Menzies correspondence. The number of overseas correspondents fluctuated, but overall they were responsible for one in five of all letters (21.3 percent). "Londoners love Mr Menzies," reported Norma Norris when she returned home to Warburton (Victoria) after her holiday in England in 1964, and British correspondents regularly addressed Menzies on a range of topics, including the possibility of an assisted passage to Australia.²² British correspondents dominated the cohort of overseas writers, accounting for 45.4 percent of all letters of foreign origin and rising to over 50 percent of them in two out of the three sampled years. The US produced just 22 percent, and British Commonwealth countries like New Zealand and Canada dominated the rest. In fact, almost two-thirds (64 percent) of overseas letters originated from Britain or the Commonwealth, which is a good indication of Menzies's personal network as well as of his general worldview.

Letters with an Australian postmark outnumbered overseas letters by about three to one, accounting for 76.9 percent of the sample. They originated overwhelmingly from Victoria (35.2 percent of Australian letters) or New South Wales (30.5 percent), although Victoria's share was in slow decline. A rising proportion of letters (14 percent of Australian letters) came from Canberra, Australia's capital and center of government, for example from government departments and parliamentarians. This change illustrates the slow bureaucratization of the correspondence, in the sense that the direct and personal contact with Menzies to which correspondents eagerly aspired in 1949–50 was gradually interrupted and partially superseded in the corpus by epistolary conversations between public servants. Since almost 80 percent of the Australian letters came from Victoria, New South Wales, or the Australian Capital Territory, voices from other states were much more rarely heard. As a result, Menzies was far more likely to receive a letter from England than one from either Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia, Tasmania, or the Northern Territory, which between them accounted for 19 percent of Australian letters.

Menzies had a few very persistent correspondents, but the vast majority of ordinary writers (81.9 percent) sent only a single letter each. Their letters were usually short: 59 percent of them were confined to a single page, not counting numerous telegrams and cards carrying very brief messages. Correspondents chose a wide variety of paper sizes, and there were many available, since Australia did not adopt A4 as the standard paper size until 1971. Nevertheless, 64 percent of letters were on medium-sized paper, encompassing A4, US letter and variations on both. A substantial minority of 29.2 percent of letters had a more intimate and smaller size, close to today's

A5. A large paper size, foolscap or US legal, was favored by government departments and accounted for 6.7 percent of letters.

The majority of letters had a formal letterhead, perhaps an individual's address (printed or cheaply embossed), a business address, or occasionally the letterhead of a ship or a hotel. On the whole, however, the correspondence is distinguished by a high degree of informality, especially from untutored hands. Individual and inexperienced writers often used lined paper, which accounted for over 20 percent of all letters in 1949–50, although the proportion fell to 11.5 percent by 1964. Over 6 percent preferred colored paper, almost always blue, although a lighter shade of grey was fashionable in 1964. Neither lined nor colored paper can be considered conventional materials for formal letters. Sometimes they came from cheaply available, small format notepads—the kind of paper one might use to write to anybody.

Although the correspondence certainly illustrates the inexorable rise of the typewriter, handwriting retained an enduring popularity. Some considered a handwritten letter more personal and informal than a letter typed on a machine. G. D. McKinnon of the Victorian Presbyterian Church wanted to send a letter with a personal touch and explained, “Having posted a typewritten letter to you this morning—somewhat hurriedly—second thoughts suggest that it smacked of being too ‘official’.” He rectified the situation by sending a handwritten letter.²³ Archbishop Eris O’Brien (of Canberra and Goulburn) was under the mistaken impression that a handwritten letter was more likely to receive Menzies’s exclusive attention, and he wrote “I have written, rather than typed, this letter, because I want it to be personal and not subject to the observation of others.”²⁴ In the 1949–50 sample, letters composed by hand were even in the majority, but this did not last long and handwriting was generally the preferred method for 43.4 percent of all letters. Within this number, the domination of the biro (a ballpoint pen) over the fountain pen was secure. Biro was used for 62 percent of manuscript letters in 1964.²⁵

Many writers showed that they were not entirely familiar with the letter-writing process and its protocols. In other words, their level of epistolary literacy was weak. By far the most common signs of inexperience were the failure to use any margins and a complete lack of paragraph indentation. More than a quarter of all manuscript letters (28.2 percent) showed signs of one or another of these deficiencies, and they usually went hand in hand. A few more writers failed to keep a straight horizontal line, and others wrote either in a very cramped script or a very large one—both signs of unfamiliarity with the medium and poor control of the *mise-en-page*. Several writers had a shaky or scrawled hand, in some cases due to old age and natural frailty. A couple were written entirely in block capitals. Fifteen letters exhibited symptoms of poor epistolary competence to the point of being virtually unintelligible. These included letters penned by inmates of mental institutions; their incomprehensible letters were dutifully forwarded to the prime minister in recognition of every citizen’s right to petition parliament. Overall, the combination of a biro and lined paper in small or medium format was a popular choice and this suggested an informal approach to Menzies.

Many letters demonstrated an imperfect grasp of English, and spelling errors were abundant. Capital letters might be distributed throughout the text quite indiscriminately. As with examples of “writing from below” encountered in other contexts, the letter writers were also uncertain about punctuation and sometimes liberated themselves completely from the rules of grammar.²⁶ G. H. Parry, to take one example, wrote,

I saw Mr Ryan head of police Parramatta he told me to see my solicitor but he said case was to big for him Police and soluitons wont help so I thought case for bigger man
This case is long over due it time some one dine about it...

your faifully, GH Parry.²⁷

Writers with a grievance wanted to be “compassated,” or they complained that the attitudes of “offissialdom” were far from “addiquett.” They wrote “leased” for least, “sincear” for sincere, “ledgeslation” for legislation or “hole” for whole. They were frustrated if a request was “refewsed.” Staunch Liberal supporters detested Labor “polatishons” and especially denounced the “hipocery” of Menzies’s political opponent, Labor leader H. V. “Doc” Evatt. They often had difficulty with names of foreign places and individuals. The correct English spelling of Khrushchev often defeated them, but in fairness it would have challenged any scholar. One writer, however, wrote that Khrushchev’s base was in “Mossgow”—which conjured up an imaginary New South Wales town somewhere between Moss Vale and Lithgow. “Mr K” was not all Menzies had to watch out for: there could be trouble from “Chiner” and the “Japanease” as well.

Throughout the correspondence a gradual trend towards greater bureaucratization can be detected. Canberra and the sources of government provided a growing element in the correspondence, thereby reducing the share of letters received from private individuals and from other parts of the country. At the same time, correspondents began to recognize the presence of secretaries and their power to filter communication between the citizen and Menzies. The fiction of personal and direct access to the prime minister was effectively abandoned by an increasing number of writers. In spite of this, the myth of the personal hotline to the top continued to inspire ordinary writers to pick up their biros.

The Personal Hotline

Leaving aside the statistical sample, I now turn to the corpus of over 19,000 letters as a whole to stress one fundamental assumption of writing upwards: that ordinary people had a right to direct personal access to their superiors. Their previous efforts to solve a problem might have run into difficulty with the authorities, or they may have been frustrated by bureaucratic delays and obfuscation. Menzies’s local constituents from Kooyong, for example, reported their failures to persuade the Postmaster-General’s office to extend a new telephone line to their premises; would-be emigrants had hit a brick wall in their approaches to the Australian High Commission in London to secure approval for an assisted passage; applicants for a war or a disability pension had initially been refused by the relevant ministry. George Reeves, a Lancashire (UK) man trying to get an assisted passage to Australia, described a common situation very succinctly: “After many weary years of waiting,” he wrote, “I now attempt to side step red tape and present my case.”²⁸ Writers implicitly believed that if they could reach a higher authority in person, they would receive humane treatment and a sympathetic hearing. Writers writing upwards, then, strove for a personal connection with the leader and assumed it was possible. Correspondents desired an unmediated connection with their leader, without filters or interpreters. One member of Mitterrand’s staff labeled this a “monarchist” vision of the world.²⁹ In such a vision, citizens imagined that if sovereigns could only be made aware of the heartlessness of their subordinate officials, they would right all wrongs, ensure that their subjects were no longer mistreated, and in this way justice would prevail. In the bureaucratized world of the twentieth century, this might have seemed a throwback to a premodern age if political leaders had not themselves seen some advantage in encouraging citizens to write to them.

This assumption that a personal epistolary hotline was available ran counter to the practical realities of government. Writers became exasperated when their requests got lost in red tape at the hands of government officials who stood between themselves and Menzies, but these intermediaries could not always be avoided. In practice, of course, Menzies himself diverted private requests to the appropriate public organization responsible for dealing with them. Even if correspondents knew full well that this would happen, they continued to believe that a word of support from Menzies himself would fix their problems. Menzies had his own private secretariat to deal with the correspondence he received, and the role of the secretary will be considered below.

Menzies, it was assumed, was accessible to all and sundry. "I have been told", wrote Arthur Smellie from London, "that you are great enough as a statesman and a man, for the humblest to seek and obtain your ear."³⁰ Mrs. E. Radcliffe, writing from South Africa, began with a standard apology before insisting on addressing the highest authority: "Please forgive me writing to you: my father used to say to me as a child 'If you want anything done go to the top' and I don't feel it would be nice if this were picked over by endless people and perhaps never reaching you at all."³¹ The personal hotline was activated to secure an understanding and effective response.

The assumption that Menzies was accessible to all was evident in the material signs of intimacy in the letters. The use of decorated or colored paper, together with colored inks, usually purple, green, or red, indicated a close rather than a formal relationship. We even find examples of cross-writing, when a correspondent filled a page portrait-style, then turned it ninety degrees and continued writing the message at right angles over the previous text. In prior centuries, cross-writing was a way of saving paper, but it was something only acceptable between friends. Familiar forms of address like "Dear Bob" also assumed a close relationship between Menzies and the writer. There was a widespread feeling amongst correspondents that Menzies "belonged" to his public, as a letter from Alice Hann indicated: "Please forgive me if I presume too much but I feel my Prime Minister belongs to me as to all his other loyal constituents and I would be so happy to meet you and Mrs Menzies."³² Writers imagined that they could nullify the status gap between themselves and the prime minister, making even a personal meeting possible.

Correspondents needed to ensure that their letters found their way into Menzies's own hands. They feared that a secretary would intervene and interrupt their personal communication route to him, like John Mason, who wanted to attack compulsory trade unionism and told Menzies, "I am writing this to you hoping that you shall read it yourself and not office staff or screw it up and throw it away in the dust bin, until you have read it yourself."³³ Professor Warren Carey had something to say about the nationality of the next Governor-General, and did not see why the office should be the exclusive preserve of Australians and Britishers. Unable to see Menzies in person, he put his arguments in writing to Menzies's secretary William Heseltine, commenting for his benefit, "It will not suffer by being left unopened for a while, but it is not a matter which should be bandied about in the department before it has gone to the prime minister."³⁴ Many just did not anticipate the role of a secretary to filter the mail and respond to it, and reacted angrily when they received a message from the secretary telling them he or she would bring the matter to the prime minister's attention. Some naively believed that by marking their letter "Private" they would guarantee its swift passage to the prime minister. Sydney Moss peppered the prime minister's office with letters about pension increases and wrote to Heseltine:

Whilst I thank you for yours under date the 26th inst., in answer to my 'PRIVATE' letter to Mr Menzies of the 20th ... I am at a loss to understand why my letter was not received by Mr Menzies himself, being addressed 'Private' and why you, Sir, should state 'you will bring it under his notice etc'

It is far too important a matter to be shelved, as thousands of poor unfed Pensioners are suffering though [*sic*] lack of the Governments interest or action, on their behalf, and I shall look for some explanation, as to why so urgent a mater [*sic*] was not dealt with by the Prime Minister himself, and opened by him.³⁵

A few writers imagined that the secret of direct access was to address the letter appropriately, like John McConville, who sent his letter to Menzies's private residence, because in his words, "I feel if I sent it to parliament house it would just be dealt with by your Secretary and you might never see it."³⁶ His letter protested against salary increases for members of parliament, and Heseltine sent him a reply. Mr. H. Roberts from Menzies's own Kooyong constituency also hoped to bypass bureaucratic obstruction to make a similar protest, writing, "in the hope that this communication survives the sometimes impenetrable barrier of secretaries our politicians have erected at our expense, I wish to voice an emphatic protest at the shameless salary grab in which you are about to participate."³⁷ But it was more productive to curry favor with the secretaries rather than to insult them.

This discussion is primarily devoted to writers who made a direct and personal approach to Menzies. For those more aware of the paths their letters actually followed, however, it was politic to address the secretaries themselves, perhaps to ask them to intervene on the writer's behalf. From Wales, Joan Lewis only realized the true mediated nature of the epistolary exchange when she received an unexpected reply from Menzies's office and immediately understood that she owed this as much to the secretary as to Menzies himself. She wrote again, this time to secretary Hazel Craig herself, to express her surprise and gratitude for the reply, referring to "Your letter from the Prime Minister Mr Menzies," which seems an excellent formulation of the collective work of the secretariat. Lewis was amazed that Menzies had taken the time to attend to her questions and wrote, "I don't really know how to start to thank you," referring to Craig.³⁸

One Englishman invited Craig to visit him in Devon, promising her a room with a view of the sea,³⁹ but a better example of epistolary dialogue between a correspondent and a secretary is Mrs. E. M. Thisseu, an elderly woman with restricted mobility. Thisseu explained to Craig that she had not been out of her house in Swansea (New South Wales) for years. She related her life story, and asked for a food parcel and an autograph. She, too, addressed herself to Craig, pleading, "Do you think you could write me a letter sometimes Miss Craig, and help to make my life a little brighter by reading something of what you do, its [*sic*] very lonely sometimes!" Mrs. Thisseu was exceptional in that she clearly would have liked to have struck up a relationship with Craig and establish a hotline with her rather than with Menzies. Her plea illustrates one of the rarely articulated motives for writing to a public figure: the sheer loneliness of the elderly.⁴⁰

For almost everybody, however, access to Menzies himself was the prime objective. One ruse adopted to activate the hotline was to address the letter to Pattie Menzies, Robert's wife. This was predominantly a female strategy: out of eleven correspondents in the corpus who addressed their letters to Dame Pattie in the sampled years of 1949–50, 1958, and 1964, eight were from women, two were from men, and one was from a company selling encyclopedias. Joyce Atkinson wrote inviting Menzies's wife Pattie to have a "back-stage chat" but fully expected her to "pass the information on to hubby for me ... please."⁴¹ Adele Vandenberg tried to reach Menzies by this roundabout route with this apologetic and flattering request:

Dear Dame Pattie,

Please forgive me for passing this on to you, but I feel that by doing so, I will genuinely get in touch with (our dear Prime Minister)—your husband.⁴²

Another female correspondent also sent a New Year greetings and congratulations to the prime minister via his wife, adding in a postscript,

I am addressing this to Mrs Menzies as I feel there is more likelihood of your reading it, than if a secretary had to decide an important enough epistle for you to spend your time on.
But naturally I think it is very important!!⁴³

Gladys Kennedy wrote about the Moral Re-Armament World Summit and addressed her letter to Mrs. Menzies because “I want to reach the heart of Australia and I thought of no better way than to write to you—the Prime Minister’s wife.”⁴⁴ She received a reply but from Hazel Craig. None of these tactics stood any chance of avoiding the usual secretarial screening.

The Secretariat and the Art of the Evasive Reply

Menzies’s private secretaries had to demonstrate a high level of technical competence, and they enjoyed the advantage of being close to the prime minister. In spite of this, they had little power to resolve problems; usually they simply had to know the best person to whom they should *refer* problems. A referral from the prime minister’s office was a strong incentive to a minister or official to examine an individual dossier very carefully. The prime minister’s secretaries, then, were not administrators with the capacity to make decisions. Referrals to a ministry or a department never pressed for any particular outcome—they just asked for a report. Once the report was received, the secretariat had to relay an administrative decision back to the correspondent, and it was often unfavorable. This required a skillful reply that intermingled bureaucratic explanations with a dose of compassion.

Leaving aside the prime minister’s press secretary, who was not directly concerned with his personal correspondence, there were always at least two staff members responsible for receiving and responding to personal letters, and at very busy times more were hired on a casual basis. These public servants formed a small group of hard-working, experienced, and politically neutral secretaries who mediated the epistolary hotline between Menzies and his correspondents.

They gave incoming correspondence three red stamps, as appropriate. Firstly, letters were stamped “Received” with the date of reception added. A selection of letters was stamped “Personal” when the letter was from a personal friend of Menzies and a personal reply was required. A further selection was stamped “Seen by the Prime Minister” when it was considered important enough to be brought to his attention. Menzies, in other words, did not see every letter, although he was virtually present in all replies they received. To this extent, the personal hotline to which correspondents aspired was an illusion.

In most cases, the secretaries would send noncommittal replies thanking the senders, and they would draft these on their own initiative. Some letters bear a typed or handwritten note: “ack.” with the date, indicating when a simple acknowledgement of receipt had been sent. A proportion of letters would be referred to an appropriate ministry or government department. In some of these cases where the original letter has been forwarded, only the reply remains on file. We have to deduce the contents of the original from the prime minister’s response.

There were inevitably occasions when the secretary needed to confer with Menzies before drafting a suitable reply, and the correspondence bears the traces of their dialogue. In straightforward cases, the secretary would forward the letter to Menzies and write in pencil in the margin

“anything wanted?” and Menzies would write back in pencil: “No, RG [*his initials*].” Sometimes the letter was illegible and incomprehensible, and the secretary would type a transcription for Menzies to read. If a letter arrived in a foreign language, she would find an expert to translate it. She would ask Menzies if he knew the writer personally, because this would influence the nature of the reply. If writers just gave a name and initial without indicating their gender, the secretary would look them up in the telephone directory, so that she would have the correct form of address on hand for her response. On occasions, she would draft a reply in shorthand in pencil on the verso of the letter received. The details of the mechanics of reception and response reveal that the letters were heavily mediated, and that even if responses bore Menzies’s name and were issued with his authority, they were a collective and a collaborative enterprise.

A few correspondents caused amusement in the office. Mrs. E. E. Beniams of New Zealand, for example, raised eyebrows when she blamed princess Elizabeth for marrying a descendant of the Battenbergs, the enemies of Great Britain, and for good measure she asserted she was Captain Cook’s great-granddaughter. She was not the only person in the British Commonwealth to express misgivings about the royal marriage, but her extravagant genealogical claim did not convince anyone. Craig noted to Menzies: “Although this is from an admirer of yours, I am afraid she is a bit barmy.”⁴⁵ She warned him against another correspondent as she forwarded her letter: “Be careful here—she is as ga-ga as they are made—completely nuts.”⁴⁶ Ernest Cooper of Western Australia wrote a twenty-three-page double-spaced letter on the merits of peace and cooperation in preference to interparty feuding, as well as on the telepathic messages that he had been receiving about this. He went on, “I could write much more than all this, on that and allied subjects and may do soon.” Secretary William Heseltine, hitherto a patient reader, penciled a marginal note: “Not to me I hope.”⁴⁷

There were serial offenders, whose repeated and lengthy correspondence seems to have been a symptom of either dire loneliness or a deep-rooted fixation. Joyce Atkinson wrote often and profusely from her home in Queensland. Her letters arrived every few days in the winter of 1958. Before the secretariat had time to acknowledge one of them, another would arrive, so that the secretaries resorted to responding to them in batches. She had been identified as a problem as early as 1955, as Craig explained at some length to Menzies in a typed comment:

This woman has a complex, but you are her “hero.” As you can see she runs to pages and pages every week.

We have sent her some of your speeches and now she asks whether she can incorporate (in full) your speech to the Institute of Management in a book she intends to write. Personally I don’t think it will ever see the light of day. I think perhaps I should tell her that this is now the property of the Institute of Management. Would this be correct? [*Menzies wrote “Yes” in the margin*].

I am quite positive she is on your side, and would not do anything to harm you, but is “over eager” or a bit “queer.”⁴⁸

As the cases of George Hodge and Oswald Ziegler, mentioned below, will show, Craig’s frustration with problem correspondents was not directed exclusively at women. But, however trying the circumstances, the secretariat maintained its tolerance and composure.

At the same time, showing her public face, the secretary assured writers that they had every right to address the prime minister and that they would receive a fair hearing. Victoria Brown wrote a bitter and pessimistic letter that concluded, “I am told you will pass this to the waste paper basket as ‘Gutter Topic’.” But Craig assured her that this would not be its fate, since “any citizen

is always at liberty to write to the Prime Minister and, unless the letter is not signed, or has no address, attention is given to it.”⁴⁹ When Mrs. R. Powell of Bendigo wrote, “I suppose you will think I have an awful cheek writing to you,” Craig told her it was her right as a citizen to do so, in these terms: “It is the right of every citizen to write to the Prime Minister should they desire information, and he is only too happy to do his best for them.”⁵⁰ Mr. B. Cowling certainly appreciated this. “Frankly, sir,” he wrote, “I even like having the knowledge of being able to write to my Prime Minister and state what I believe. Many countries cannot do this.”⁵¹ Writing upwards was an essential democratic right.

Not everybody expected a reply from Menzies. Timothy Western of Camberwell (Victoria) wrote to attack the government’s general incompetence and especially its failure to allow more Asian immigration, concluding, “What will become of this letter, I am not sure. Will you, as Prime Minister see it? Will it be answered, or will it be treated with contempt? Be this a democracy, I will receive an answer. But is it?”⁵² Western did receive a reply from secretary Les Moore, explaining that his previous letters had been ignored because they were abusive.

Expectations notwithstanding, Menzies was very assiduous in replying. Consider the sample of 3,681 letters presented at the beginning of this article. If we exclude from the tally all messages that clearly did not seek a reply, such as thanks-for-your-condolences and other goodwill cards, the net total remaining from the sample is 3,408. Of these, the very high figure of 74.1 percent received a reply from Menzies’s secretariat. The secretariat’s efficiency in this domain, however, was in decline. In 1949–50, the first year sampled, the reply rate was almost 80 percent. In 1958, it fell to under 73 percent and in 1964 the reply rate had declined further to 71.8 percent. Even this figure represented an extraordinarily high rate of response. It is possible that there were fewer replies because more requests were being dealt with either in person or by telephone.

Delays were inevitable: secretaries constantly apologized to correspondents on Menzies’s behalf because he was too busy, overseas or preparing to go overseas, so that he had neglected his personal correspondence. Papers were mislaid as Menzies traveled, and the secretary had to apologize for the oversight later. Most writers got a reply eventually, even if it sometimes took months to arrive, waiting for a parliamentary session to end, or for Menzies to return from an overseas visit. Even when a writer specifically told Menzies not to reply, he or his secretariat still wrote a response. Sometimes where there is no written reply on file, instead there is a note to say that he had phoned the writer, or spoken to him or her in person, in the case of members of parliament. Replies often enclosed a copy of a recent Menzies speech or an extract from Hansard, and sometimes an autographed photograph, although the office was slow to prepare for this kind of fan-mail exchange and for several months in 1950 did not comply with requests for a photo.

Menzies’s election win in December 1949 stimulated a deluge of congratulatory messages, which overwhelmed the newly installed secretariat. Profuse apologies were issued for the delay in replying to them all:

As you will realise, many thousands of messages were received by Mr Menzies, not only from within Australia, but from all over the world. It would have been a physical impossibility for him to reply personally to all of them, and it was for that reason “acknowledgement” cards were sent out, with small typed notes from him which did not necessitate his signature.

Necessarily, however, it will be a matter of courtesy for him to send personal letters to a number of prominent people.⁵³

In other words, and quite counterintuitively, the sender was reliably informed that if he or she had not received any response yet, it could well be a sign of his or her important rank.

There were a few favorite ways of replying, even if the responses were never completely uniform. Walter Henderson had written a supportive letter that included a personal element and an invitation for Mr. and Mrs. Menzies to visit him, and he received this courteous reply that was typical of many:

Dear Mr Henderson,

Although with the pressure of parliamentary duties the Prime Minister has not had an opportunity to reply personally to your letter of the 28th October he has asked that I will send a message to thank you for the encouraging way in which you have written.

He was interested, too, to know that your daughter is still absorbed in her work.

Mr Menzies sends his best wishes to her and to you and his thanks for your open invitation to him to bring Mrs Menzies to visit you.

Yours sincerely,

E.M. Wilkinson, Private Secretary.⁵⁴

Although this was a typical response, it was not completely standardized, and there was plenty of scope for a tailored, personal reply. Prime ministerial apologies might be phrased typically as follows: “As you will doubtless realise, in the last couple of months he has been hard-pressed with parliamentary matters and, more recently, in preparation for this very hurried visit abroad, and more or less personal matters were neglected.”⁵⁵ Letters of support and congratulation were acknowledged in this courteous style:

I am writing to thank you and your wife for the sentiments expressed in your letter of 17th August.

It is very warming to receive such letters of congratulations from my friends and I am deeply appreciative of your thoughtfulness.⁵⁶

When correspondents put forward plans for reform or laid bare grievances, the usual response was to thank them for their “practical interest” in writing. This phrase was used repeatedly to acknowledge but at the same time to deflect the inquiry, but there were very few standard, pre-prepared response formulae. If correspondents raised a thorny problem, the reply would ignore it and just convey good wishes.

Correspondents therefore only rarely succeeded in establishing the direct personal connection with Menzies that they expected would provide the answer to their troubles, but they could usually count on a personalized response that was not merely the equivalent of today’s impersonal, pre-recorded message. Of course, there were always a few correspondents who would not be fobbed off by apologies for delays, and who resented the interference of officials whose obstruction they were trying to circumvent. These individuals had higher expectations of the correspondence, and they appeared as troublemakers. Arthur Richardson was one of those who wanted Menzies to dismiss William McKell as Governor-General as soon as he became prime minister, arguing that McKell’s appointment had been a party-political measure engineered by the Labor Party. When he failed to get a commitment from Menzies on this score, he exploded. Although Menzies had been ill as well as busy, Richardson wrote: “I must protest strongly against your clear attempt—which in itself arouses suspicion—to avoid the issue until after the election ... I do not expect Mr Menzies to have time for letter writing, but I do expect him to find time to dictate a

plain and simple answer to this vitally important question. I expect my letter—incidentally a friendly one from a supporter—to be treated seriously.” Richardson was not apologetic, and he was particularly impatient with the evasions he received from the secretariat. He added in a post-script, “I and my friends are not interested in the ‘very many queries’ Mr Menzies is dealing with ‘all over Australia’—at any rate not to the point of having this particular query side-stepped.” Menzies was shown this letter and made a penciled note: “No—ignore.”⁵⁷

Similarly, Edward Wright from the Blue Mountains (New South Wales) was provoked to anger when his attempt to secure a personal appointment did not receive the desired response from the government. He attacked both Menzies and the relevant minister thus: “As the prime inspiration for Australia’s most rapidly rising national enterprise—passing the buck—and chief Dalia Lama [*sic*] of Canberra, may I direct your attention to the fact that the word of your Repatriation Minister, Cooper, is worthless; or his health is no longer equal to his present position.”⁵⁸ Secretary Heseltine penciled in his understandable reaction to this outburst: “I felt that this letter was couched in terms of much rudeness as to require no acknowledgment—WH”.

In time the secretariat lost patience and became a little more privately cynical about individual correspondents. In 1964, George Hodge asked Menzies to donate a Bible to his local Presbyterian Church, but Hazel Craig rejected his pleadings with a note dismissing them as “another try-on ... Poor struggling little Presbos, I guess.” This time Craig had underestimated Menzies, who agreed to make the donation.⁵⁹ She similarly lost patience with Oswald Ziegler of Ziegler publications, who sent several letters asking Menzies to write a foreword to a coffee-table book on Australia, to authorize a reproduction of his portrait, and then to let him call it “The House that Bob Built.” He got permission for the portrait but not for his other requests. Craig “mistrusted him” and warned Menzies, “The Lord forbid that you should fall for this” because “he is an awful humbug really.”⁶⁰

Perhaps the most telling sign of a new and less generous attitude was the creation in 1965 of a “no-reply” file, which mainly includes letters from eccentrics and religious fanatics. Most of the contents of the “no-reply” file were received during Menzies’s retirement, but it nevertheless contains several items from 1965 and January 1966 (when he was still in office), including a few complaints about pensions and the means test, which determined who qualified to receive one. Unlike the treatment of the vast majority of correspondents in previous years, these correspondents received no answer. The discourse of the archive is eloquent here: grumbling pensioners were now classified in the same category as cranks.⁶¹

Correspondents certainly were rude and were often deferential, but they had a common goal. They hoped for a personal epistolary conversation with Menzies, whom they assumed could assist them with a range of problems, some political or administrative and others more personal. When they encountered a wall of secretaries, they had several different reactions. Some were outraged that their message had not reached the prime minister in person and had failed to obtain the desired outcome. Some resorted to ruse to slip their letters through the protective net, sending them to Mrs. Menzies or conspicuously labelling it “Private and Confidential.” None of this worked. Some just accepted secretarial intervention and even embraced it as an opportunity to open a conversation with a new correspondent. As already noted, a growing number of letters was addressed directly to one of the secretaries. The initiatives shown by Menzies’s secretarial staff even encouraged this. When a woman wrote from Texas offering advice on how to deal with the rabbit problem, which she had been reading about, secretary Everil Wilkinson wrote her a long explanation of the particular problems faced in rural Australia, especially the difficulty of constructing boundary fences in sparsely populated areas.⁶² Her generous reply was far longer than the original letter,

showing the willingness of secretaries to engage with individual correspondents, at least in these early years.

If we compare Menzies's secretariat with that of François Mitterrand in the 1980s, we find an enormous difference of scale. Mitterrand might have received as many letters in a single day as Menzies received over a whole year, and the French president had a secretariat fifty times larger to deal with them.⁶³ In both cases, the same notion of a direct, personal exchange with the national leader inspired the correspondence. In the French case, however, the mere size of the corpus inevitably tended to make the exchange more distant and impersonal. Perhaps the continuing illusion of the personal hotline to the top only made sense in a smaller country with a slimmer apparatus of government.

The importance of the letters to Menzies has hitherto been ignored. We should situate them within a specific genre of letter writing—namely, writing upwards. The analysis of writings upwards provides an alternative to conventional political history. It changes the perspective, focusing on the assumptions and concerns of the so-called silent masses and finding them to have been not so silent after all. Today, the New History from Below is making great efforts in various parts of the world to unearth more direct evidence of their existence and their culture in the writings of the poor and the marginal themselves—the writings, in fact, of those who often in the past have not been credited with the ability to write competently at all.⁶⁴ This kind of history reevaluates individual experience and searches for the personal voices of common people. Those voices may be mediated, as in this case, through written correspondence; and they may struggle to express themselves because of their unfamiliarity with writing technology or with epistolary literacy in general. But ordinary readers and writers can only be fully understood if we listen to their own voices, however inarticulate they may seem, and regard them as active agents in their own history rather than passive receptacles for official ideologies. The writings of humble people are there if we care to look for them. The letters to Menzies are one small part of a submerged continent of ordinary writings now becoming increasingly accessible to the New History from Below.

NOTES

¹ A book length study of the Menzies letters, provisionally entitled *Writing to Menzies: Letters to an Australian Prime Minister, 1949–1966*, will be published in Sydney by University of New South Wales Press in 2022.

² Maarten van Ginderachter, “If your Majesty would only send me a little money to help buy an elephant’: Letters to the Belgian Royal Family (1880–1940),” in *Ordinary Writings, Personal Narratives: Writing Practices 19th and Early 20th-Century Europe*, ed. Martyn Lyons (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007), 69–83.

³ *Letters to Hitler*, ed. Henrik Eberle. English version edited by Victoria Harris, translated by Steven Randall (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2012), 174 and 94.

⁴ Anne Wingenter, “Voices of Sacrifice: Letters to Mussolini and Ordinary Writing under Fascism,” in Lyons, *Ordinary Writings*, 155–72.

⁵ Sudhir Hazareesingh, *In the Shadow of the General: Modern France and the Myth of De Gaulle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁶ Béatrice Fraenkel, “Répondre à tous’? Une enquête sur le service du courrier présidentiel,” in *Par écrit: Ethnologie des écritures quotidiennes*, ed. Daniel Fabre (Paris: Maison des Sciences de l’Homme, 1997), 243–71.

⁷ Jeanne Marie Laskas, *To Obama, with Love, Joy, Hate and Despair* (London: Bloomsbury Circus, 2018).

⁸ Laskas, 65–66 and chap. 14.

⁹ Laskas, 71.

¹⁰ Steven King, *Writing the Lives of the English Poor, 1750s–1830s* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2019); *Essex Pauper Letters, 1731–1837*, ed. Thomas Sokoll (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Lindsey Earner-Byrne, *Letters of the Catholic Poor: Poverty in Independent Ireland, 1920–1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge

University Press, 2017). The rhetorical structures of the Menzies letters are fully treated in Lyons, *Writing to Menzies*, forthcoming.

¹¹ Martyn Lyons, "Writing Upwards: How the Weak Wrote to the Powerful," *Journal of Social History* 49.2 (2015): 317–30. This article takes up examples of workers' letters to an Italian factory owner, letters to the king of Italy during the First World War, petitions to the Russian Tsar, and Australian Aboriginal petitions to the British crown.

¹² Camillo Zadra and Gianluigi Fait, *Deferenza, Revendicazione, Supplica: le lettere ai potenti* (Treviso: Pagus, 1992).

¹³ James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

¹⁴ James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 3–16.

¹⁵ In April 1954, Vladimir Petrov, a colonel in the Soviet intelligence service, defected to Australia. A few days later his wife Evdokia was sensationally "rescued" at Darwin airport from the hands of Russian operatives who intended to escort her back to the USSR.

¹⁶ A full discussion of these topics in the letters is beyond the scope of this article but may be consulted in Lyons's forthcoming *Writing to Menzies*.

¹⁷ John Howard, *The Menzies Era: The Years That Shaped Modern Australia* (Sydney: Harper Collins, 2014), 3, 385, 631–65.

¹⁸ Paul Keating, Speech to House of Representatives at question time, February 27, 1992, <https://australianpolitics.com/1992/02/27/keating-blasts-liberal-party-fogies.html>. Read July 18, 2019.

¹⁹ National Library of Australia MS 4936, Box 47, Folder 98; Lawrence Johnston, September 11, 1953. All citations from the letters are from this collection at the same call number. I normally use correspondents' real names, in the interests of transparency and to enable researchers to locate my sources. If a letter is extremely offensive or racially prejudiced, I withhold the author's name in order not to embarrass his or her descendants. This precaution does not apply to any letter cited in this article.

²⁰ Box 61, Folder 214, Harbord (NSW), February 15, 1954.

²¹ Percentages include letters sent by married couples and jointly by families so they add up to more than 100.

²² Box 122, Folder 702.

²³ Box 95, Folder 496, November 30, 1960.

²⁴ Box 69, Folder 281, September 24, 1955.

²⁵ Given the difficulty of distinguishing writing by superior ballpoint pens from that of fine-nibbed fountain pens, there is some margin of error in this figure.

²⁶ Martyn Lyons, *The Writing Culture of Ordinary People in Europe, c.1860–1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013) gives many examples from soldiers' letters in the First World War and from the correspondence of Spanish emigrants to the Americas.

²⁷ Box 43, Folder 59, Merrylands (NSW), March 1, 1950.

²⁸ Box 126, Folder 737, Bolton (UK), June 20, 1965.

²⁹ Fraenkel, "Répondre à tous," para. 30.

³⁰ Box 51, Folder 130, June 12, 1953.

³¹ Box 66, Folder 257, August 22, 1955.

³² Box 46A, Folder 92, London, June 6, 1953.

³³ Box 48, Folder 107, Pagewood (NSW), October 22, 1953.

³⁴ Box 79, Folder 355, Warren Carey, University of Tasmania, February 13, 1958.

³⁵ Box 69, Folder 278, Beverly Hills (NSW), May 28, 1955.

³⁶ Box 88, Folder 436, Longueville (NSW), April 22, 1959.

³⁷ Box 89, Folder 448, H Roberts, Kew (Vic), March 30, 1959.

³⁸ Box 76, Folder 334, Joan Lewis, Cardiff (Wales), July 17, 1957.

³⁹ Box 87, Folder 427, John Harris, Paignton (Devon, UK), October 10, 1959.

⁴⁰ Box 52, Folder 135, June 2, 1953.

⁴¹ Box 98, Folder 514, Nambour (Qld), October 7, 1961.

⁴² Box 90, Folder 457, Potts Point (NSW), September 13, 1958.

⁴³ Box 47, Folder 102, Dagmar Levy, Armadale (Vic), January 1, 1953.

⁴⁴ Box 81, Folder 372, Glen Iris (Vic), July 19, 1958.

⁴⁵ Box 55, Folder 160, December 1954.

⁴⁶ Box 119, Folder 678, Mrs M Clout, London, March 29 and May 4, 1964.

⁴⁷ Box 65, Folder 246, Bunbury (WA), September 1, 1955.

⁴⁸ Box 63, Folder 231, Note from Craig, July 27, 1955, on Joyce Atkinson of Nambour (Qld).

⁴⁹ Box 64, Folder 239, Ascot Vale (Vic), August 10, 1955.

⁵⁰ Box 62, Folder 221, June 30, 1954 and reply of July 5.

⁵¹ Box 92, Folder 473, Tasmania, March 9, 1960.

⁵² Box 105, Folder 570, September 20 and reply of September 28, 1961.

⁵³ Box 44, Folder 67, E. G. Linehan to Mrs. D. M. Rae of the Australian Women's Movement Against Socialisation, January 7, 1950.

⁵⁴ Box 42, Folder 48, Walter Henderson, Robertson (NSW), October 28, 1950.

⁵⁵ Box 42, Folder 48, Edward Hirst, Sydney, reply of July 20, 1950.

⁵⁶ Box 89, Folder 441, reply to Spencer Nall, August 25, 1959.

⁵⁷ Box 43, Folder 62, Adelaide, November 29, 1949.

⁵⁸ Box 90, Folder 459, Glenbrook (NSW), September 14, 1959.

⁵⁹ Box 123, Folder 711, Georgetown (Tas), May 9, 1964.

⁶⁰ Box 123, Folder 717, several letters from February 10 to September 3, 1964.

⁶¹ Boxes 164-165.

⁶² Box 42, Folder 52, Kathleen McCary, Freeport (TX), May 1950. In the early 1950s, myxomatosis ("myxo") effectively reduced the rabbit population.

⁶³ Fraenkel, "'Répondre à tous'," para. 1.

⁶⁴ Tim Hitchcock, "A New History from Below," *History Workshop Journal* 57 (2004): 294-99; Sokoll, *Essex Pauper Letters*; Antonio Gibelli, "C'era una volta la storia del basso..." in *Vite de Carta*, eds. Quinto Antonelli and Anna Iuso (Naples: L'Ancora, 2000), 160-61; Lyons, *Writing Culture of Ordinary People*; Lyons, "A New History from Below? The Writing Culture of Ordinary People in Europe," *History Australia* 7.3 (2010): 60.1-60.9; King, *Writing the Lives*.