'My adored girl' Prescribed politeness strategies on courting for the Victorian working class in nineteenth-century letter-writing manuals

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Luce Wieman

Leiden University

Dr. M.S. Gordon

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1. Introduction

In the nineteenth century, people belonging to the middle class made use of letter-writing manuals to ensure that their language use adhered to the expected social norms and to portray themselves as respectable. These manuals provide an insight into expected and prescribed language at the time. Some of these letter-writing manuals provide model letters for people of the working class as well, which is interesting as these manuals were typically marketed and advertised for the middle class. Wieman (2021) found that there was a clear gap in social status and social roles between middle-class women and men and that this gap could be traced back in the prescribed language found within the manuals. However, the working-class women and working-class men did not experience this same gap. Though there still was a divide in expected social roles, there are many aspects in which the man was expected to rely on the woman to survive. This thesis will research whether a similar gap in terms of prescribed language can be detected in the prescribed language for members of the Victorian working class.

The Victorians could find model letters on many different types of topics in letter-writing manuals. This thesis will focus on the topic of courting and love. As the aim of this thesis is to determine whether a difference can be found in the prescribed language use found in such letter-writing manuals for both genders, it is of importance to research a context in which the genders interact and on somewhat equal terms. As courting requires members of each gender to interact with one another, the topic of courting and love will be suitable for detecting differences in the prescribed language in the letter-writing manuals. In addition, the topic of courting is also one in which the genders will develop a relationship and in which letter-writing manuals will display the stages of a relationship.

Some research has been done on model letters for the working class, but not with the intent of investigating a difference between prescribed language for working-class men and

for working-class women. For instance, Dossena (2019) has looked at model letters related to business found in nineteenth-century letter-writing manuals and usage guides. She focuses on comparing the model letters with actual business letters and utilises politeness theory to analyse the language by analysing the difference in status between the correspondents. Her study shows that Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness framework is an effective framework to analyse and explain language use. Fens-de-Zeeuw (2008) has done research in eighteenth and nineteenth century letter-writing manuals, but has mainly focused on what content can be found within the manuals, e.g. how many of each type of letter could be found within each of the letter-writing manuals she analysed. Unlike these studies, this thesis will focus on the difference in language prescribed for the working class specifically.

In order to determine whether a similar gap of status can be found between both genders in the working class, this thesis will make use of Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory. In their theory, they argue for a division between negative politeness and positive politeness. Brown and Levinson (1987) explain that positive politeness strategies are "representative of the linguistic behaviour between intimates, where interest and approval of each other's personality, presuppositions indicating shared wants and shared knowledge, implicit claims to reciprocity of obligations or to reflexivity of wants, etc. are routinely exchanged" (p. 101). Essentially, positive politeness is language use that conveys familiarity and informality. Negative politeness strategies on the other hand entail language use to convey respect and which is considered formal language use. Brown and Levinson (1987) describe negative politeness as "specific and focused; it performs the function of minimising the particular imposition that the FTA (face-threatening act) unavoidably affects" (p. 129). For example, Victorians would make use of honorific terms of address such as 'Lord', 'Sir' for the men and 'Lady', or 'Madam' to express their respect. Victorian middle-class women were expected to make use of negative politeness strategies until a courtship was established

(Wieman, 2021). Middle-class men on the other hand were prescribed to use positive politeness strategies to flatter their female correspondent. This was one of the manners in which the status divide and expected social roles of middle-class men and middle-class women was mirrored and enforced in the letter-writing manuals.

The aim of this thesis is to research whether one can detect differences in politeness strategies prescribed for women from the lower class in endearment terms, opening and closing formulae prescribed and politeness strategies prescribed in the same aspects for men from the lower class in letter-writing manuals in model letters on courting in the nineteenth century. To analyse this data, this thesis will make use of findings made on the middle class to compare the data with.

2. Background

2.1 Gender roles and domestic theory Victorian working class

The Victorian era is known among other aspects for a clear social distinction between men and women. Victorians saw the world of the public sphere as a world full of temptations and hardships. In contrast to this, the private sphere was seen as refuge from all of the troubles and temptations of the public sphere (Griffin, 2012). The core of the Victorian domestic theory was that "men were seen as better capable to cope with the trials of the public sphere, while women were supposed to maintain their purity by remaining in the private sphere, where they could create a domestic environment in which family religion could prosper" (Griffin, 2012, p. 40). The role of women was thus to be the 'angel' of the household and the role of the man was to earn a living and to affront the public sphere's temptations. As Morris (1990) summarises, Victorian women were exalted as morally superior but treated as legally, intellectually, psychologically, and biologically inferior to men (p. 26). For instance, married

women could not own property and her identity essentially merged with her husband's. The people belonging to the middle class and the upper class could afford to and strived to uphold this ideal. However, the same cannot be said for the lower working classes of society.

In fact, the majority of the working class would not be able to uphold this upper and middle class ideal, simply for the fact that they would not be able to afford it in terms of money. The gender roles in the working classes were overall vastly different from those in the upper and middle class. Instead of being an 'angel of the house', the average working-class woman would be working to generate income like her husband. The middle-class ideal was that a working man should support his wife and children in full, but in reality only a few of the highly skilled, namely 15 percent or so belonging to the upper layer of the Victorian working class, were able to do so (Perkin, 1989. p. 119). Instead of looking for an 'angel of the house', the working-class men would likely be more in search of a wife to fulfil the role of a 'manager'. If a woman was temperamentally or physically incapable of managing the household and rearing the children, the husband had no hopes of overcoming the financial difficulties that would be caused as a result. On the other hand, a woman faced the risk of marrying a man who was totally incapable of supporting a family (Perkin, 1989. p. 119). Thus, working-class men and working-class women were in multiple aspects more dependable upon each other than their higher class counterparts, leading to more equality or, in the least, less societal distance between the two genders in a marriage. This does not mean that the traditional gender roles did not apply at all to the working class, as, for example, the woman was still expected to be the one to take care of the children. However, the working woman did often have more input and power in a marriage than a middle- or upper-class woman. As Perkin (1989) explains, "[t]he main reason why in this stratum of society men's power over women was constantly challenged was the precarious economic position of the man and his dependence on his wife's earnings and ability to manage the budget" (p. 158).

As the social distance between working-class men and working-class women is less substantial, it is possible that this translated to their language use as well. As the middle class had clear expectations of each gender, they adhered to language use that conformed with these ideals. Ingham (1996) notes that the ideals of upper- and middle-class women having to be naturally maternal, and sexually pure were reflected, shaped and passed on within conduct books and in turn the ideal of men having to be "'naturally' fit for the marketplace and its struggles" as well (p. 22). People belonging to the middle class would ensure and aim to conform their behaviour and thus language use to this ideal. As the working classes did not experience this distinct and strict role division between the two genders, it will be interesting to analyse whether a difference in gender roles can be traced in the love and courting letters prescribed for the working class in the letter-writing manuals that will be analysed for this thesis.

2.2 Societal anxiety within the Victorian working class

The lower Victorian working class cannot be summarised as one homogenous group. This class consisted of "different groups and subclasses with different lifestyles and outlooks which changed not only between levels of income, but between town and country, between different regions of the country" (Perkin, 1989, p. 117). For instance, skilled artisans, such as shoemakers, dressmakers, etc., in the city were considered to be ranking higher than the farmers, domestic servants, factory workers, etc. yet both were considered working class. Joan Perkin (1989) describes the working class as "very different from the middle and upper classes, in that they were generally poorer, lived differently, dressed differently, ate differently, even smelled different" (p. 117). The Victorian middle class felt a societal pressure to separate themselves from the lower working class by striving to uphold the norms of the upper class. After all, the class division in the Victorian era was considered to be

mainly determined by one's manners, speech, education, clothing, and values rather than one's income and partly by one's income, family connections, and birth (Mitchell, 1996. p. 17).

Scholars are not in agreement as to what the working class' disposition is in this situation. Some, like Perkin (1989), argue that the lower working class considered themselves a separate class and did not strive to imitate the middle class' respectability. Instead, they thought of their culture as "separate and indigenous, grounded in their own version of Evangelical religion, mutual support and the collective help of extended families or neighbours" (Perkin, 1989. p. 132). Yet other scholars explain that the lower class also tried to make use of the blurred lines between the class divisions and tried to work their way up the social ladder. According to the social network theory, there are two types of social networks, namely open networks and closed networks. Milroy & Milroy (1987) explain that closed networks are characterised by what they refer to as 'norm enforcement mechanisms'. Essentially, "such networks have their own norms by which they distinguish themselves from other social networks, linguistically or otherwise" (Tieken-Boon van Ostade, 2009. p. 104), are conservative, and resist changes. Open networks on the other hand are open for change and thus also open for linguistic change. With the lines between the social classes blurred and social mobility possible, the upper layer of the working classes could be categorised as open network, as they were aiming to fit in with the class above them and actively willing to change their behaviour in both linguistic and non-linguistic manners to fit in with another social network. Gibson-Brydon (2016), for instance, explains that in 1850 the wages increased by eighty percent, allowing for the people belonging to the working class to enjoy more luxuries. He explains that due to this increase in wages, "working people still experienced shortages of food and material necessities, [but that] they were less anxious about such basic things" and that they "began to suffer more from a kind of stress caused by

status consciousness" (p. 107) instead. An example of how this societal pressure and stress, which Gibson-Brydon (2016) notes, manifested itself was how working-class people tried to migrate to more 'respectable' neighbourhoods. An important factor for measuring being 'respectable' was to be able to have the leisure and comfort of privacy. Another example is how people from the working class invested in more luxurious clothes in an attempt to "dress above their class" (p. 120). As the people belonging to the working class were trying to emulate middle and upper classes' standards by material means, it is very well possible that they emulated their language use as well.

The middle class tried to separate themselves from the lower working classes by emulating the behaviour of the upper classes, as they saw this behaviour as exemplary. They tried to achieve this by displaying 'cultured', 'proper', 'gentle' behaviour and mannerisms one would avoid being perceived as 'vulgar', 'uncultured', and 'barbarous' which in turn was associated with lower classes. One of the manners in which they would discern themselves from the lower classes was through their language usage. The Victorian middle class mainly depended on prescriptive literature in the form of letter-writing manuals, pronunciation dictionaries, etiquette books, etc. to achieve the 'correct' and 'acceptable' language use. Essentially, language turned into a marker and factor from which society would judge a person's "social background and even personality traits like toughness or intelligence" (Mugglestone, 2007. p. 51). As Görlach (1999) emphasises, "[l]arge numbers of 19th-century conduct books show how important etiquette was considered to be, especially by social climbers (p. 26). In contrast, the working class would discern whether one was 'respectable' mainly by material matters and whether one could experience leisure, comfort, and to do so in a non-indulgent manner. As Perkin (1989) explains, according to the people belonging to the working class, 'to be respectable' meant "not living a riotous life, not drinking or gambling heavily or using bad language, not going in for rough sports and pastimes,

believing in chastity before marriage and fidelity afterwards, and not getting into debt" (p. 131). Yet, assuming that the Victorian upper working class tried to emulate and reach the 'respectability' that the middle class possessed by material means, it will be interesting to analyse whether they tried to emulate the middle class with their language use as well. Especially so if they considered 'bad language' to be a sign of disreputable behaviour and if prescriptive literature was an important tool for social aspirants.

2.3 Marriage in the Victorian working class

Courting amongst the working class is overall considered to be a much freer affair than that in the courting process of the middle class. Unlike the middle class, the working class did not make use of a social season to socialise with people of the opposite sex. Phegley (2012) explains that members of the working class met at work, Sunday school, church, theatres, music halls, museums, weekly markets, and annual fairs and that they socialised in taverns, coffee houses, gardens, and other public places (p. 59). Working-class members would also organise their own dances and gatherings free from the gaze and supervision of parents or other elders. Moreover, those elders were "less restrictive about their children's interactions with the opposite sex" (Phegley, 2012. p. 59). The one group of the working class that was attempting to uphold the traditional values of the higher classes, such as no intercourse before marriage or marrying after one is financially established, was the upper layer of the working class. Instead of loosening these patriarchal and etiquette patterns, they became more strict and stringent among this group of society. The reason for this being to separate them from the 'impoverished' and to emulate the upper- and middle- class' values (Gilles, 1985. p. 64). As Mugglestone (1995) explains, in Victorian society, the judgement of correctness and acceptability increasingly aligned with the perception and judgement of social and intellectual acceptability, which in turn created an anxiety for correctness. This resulted in a

large increase for prescriptive literature in the nineteenth century. However, for most people belonging to the working classes, marriage and everything revolving around marriage mainly revolved around gaining economic independence and being able to survive.

Though working-class women also desired to marry to avoid the life of a spinster, it often also was still a matter of status within her social circle. As Perkin (1989) explains, a working-class woman "wanted the higher status marriage conferred in the eyes of her neighbours, a home of her own, a spouse to love and share her life, legitimate sex, children" (p.125-126). So in relation to marital status, there was a sense of distinction measured by wealth but by societal measures within the Victorian working class as well, just as was the case in the middle classes. Aside from the social status it would have provided, marriage would also have provided a sense of economic security. In order to achieve the desired economic independence, working class women would have been in need of a husband. Even though they earned their own wage and had their own savings, these would not amount to enough money to survive and live independently.

Interestingly, there was also an economic and social interest for the artisan working-class man to marry. As discussed prior, the middle class ideal of a respectable marriage entailed that the man was established and could support himself and his family financially. However, as John Gilles (1985) points out, the man's ability to be able to live a respectable life often was made possible by his wife. On his own, he would not be able to realise his dream of becoming his own master. Apprentices, servants, journeymen, etc. would not be able to save enough money to establish themselves in even the lowest levels of what were considered to be respective trades on their own (Gilles, 1985. p. 174). To accomplish this, they would often need the savings that a woman would have saved, for instance during her years as a domestic servant. In addition, a man's work in the city was often seasonal in terms of income, meaning that his salary would not be enough to support him for the full year. So it

was not at all “unusual for families to be entirely dependent on women's work when the man's trade was slack” (Gilles, 1985. p. 174). Thus, it was in the best interest for men as well not to remain a ‘spinster’.

Many etiquette books were written with advice on love, marriage, courting, etc. for the middle class. The advice within these books mainly revolved around how one should behave in a courtship and what to look for in the partner. For instance, as prescribed in *The Ladies’ Book of Etiquette, and Manual of Politeness* written by Florence Hartley, one should pick a partner who displays “good temper, pleasing manners, and respectable connections” (p. 246). However, the lower working class was not as concerned with proper courting etiquette as the middle class was. Most of the working-class couples would not be able to afford the marriage ceremony straight away, often resulting in a short period of cohabitation preceding the legal marriage (Holmes, 2017. p. 2). This would have been a great faux-pas amongst the middle class. To the middle class, the working class’ marital relationships were considered to be “incomprehensible” and a source for debate. As Perkin (1989) explains, “they were sometimes naive and hypocritical in suggesting that wife-beating, intemperance, prostitution, infant mortality and deviant sexual patterns were restricted to the lower orders” (p.157). Whereas societal status and propriety was the main priority in securing a marriage for the middle and upper classes, the working classes were first and foremost interested in ensuring survival.

2.4 Victorian etiquette books and letter-writing manuals

As discussed, the Victorian middle class experienced a societal pressure and anxiety to separate themselves from the working lower class. One of the manners in which they accomplished this was by emulating their language usage to that of the upper class. To ensure that they were displaying well-mannered middle-class behaviour, one focused on using

correct lexis, grammar, pronunciation, etc., as this would ensure that they would not be perceived as ‘vulgar’ or ‘uncultured'. As language increasingly became a status marker and on which other members of society would determine your “social background and even personality traits like toughness or intelligence” (Mugglestone, 2007. p. 51), there came a need for prescriptivist literature. For instance, pronunciation dictionaries and books on linguistic etiquette became increasingly popular in the nineteenth century (Mugglestone, 1990). During the development of the prescriptive ethos, the judgement of linguistic correctness and acceptability increasingly aligned with the perception and judgement of social and intellectual acceptability (Mugglestone, 1995). This resulted in a person’s use of language becoming a factor to be evaluated by other members of society and displayed your class and propriety.

As *The Ladies’ Book of Etiquette, and Manual Politeness* (1860) explains to its audience at the start of its chapter on letter-writing: there is “no station, high or low, where the necessity for correspondence is not felt; no person, young or old, who does not, at some time, write, cause to be written, and receive letters” (p. 116). This high regard for letter-writing led to another form of prescriptivist literature; letter-writing manuals. There were two main types of letter-writing manuals to be found in the Victorian era. One focused on discussing correct grammar usage, terms of address, language use, etc.; essentially focused on the technical side of writing. The other kind of letter-writing manuals contained model letters which one could essentially copy and be ensured that they had a grammatically correct and socially acceptable written letter. All that one would have to do, is to adjust the name to whom one would send the letter. Some of these letter-writing manuals also made use of letters from well-known people. The topics of the letters within these manuals had a great range, displaying many possible scenarios for which one would need to write a letter. The letter-writing manuals featuring these model letters will be the focus of this thesis.

Though these letter-writing manuals were mainly advertised for and used by the middle class, these manuals also included model letters that were intended for the working class. For instance, there are letters for servants who want to apply for a job in a household or letters on how to ask an employer to write them a reference. The people from the middle class would have no need for these letters, so it is very possible that the people belonging to the working class also consulted these letter-writing manuals. Among the many topics to be found within said letter-writing manuals, one could find letters on courting and love letters. For the middle class this would be an important topic as there were many stages that needed to be considered in the courting period and one was expected to behave accordingly. For instance, there are model letters for letters of introduction and model letters for when the couple have agreed to be engaged. However, as Phillips (1984) discusses, working-class people were not as concerned with formal marriage etiquette as the people from the middle class were. To illustrate, it would be quite a scandal if there would have been an unchaperoned affair in the middle class, yet this was not at all the case for the freer, less chaperoned working class (p.116). Yet, one can find model letters for love letters for people considered to belong to the working class as well. It is interesting that for a practice that for the working class is considered free and separate from the middle class' etiquette, there are model letters prescribing how to write a socially acceptable letter on the topic of love. In the preface of *The Letter Writer for Lovers*, the author also notes that "it is manifestly impossible for any one individual to write a series of 'love letters' (...) which meet all cases and requirements: what would suit in one grade of society would be out of place in another". Furthermore, this quote might suggest that in terms of content and language use that there definitely is a difference between the model letters for the middle class and the model letters for the working class. No studies up to date have considered whether this difference is to be found in the letter-writing manuals. Therefore, this thesis will aim to address this gap by

analysing whether the language use prescribed for the working-class people differs from that of the language use described for the people belonging to the middle class and if so in what manner.

2.5 Letter writing and letter-writing manuals; previous research

In the nineteenth century, literacy levels among the middle class significantly rose as education became more accessible. However, there were many varieties of education in the Victorian era, all of which did not teach towards a national standard. Due to the many varieties in types of schools, i.e. public schools, church schools, dame schools, etc., the picture of literacy was multifarious and complex (Mair, 2019). In the education that was available for all the layers of society, penmanship, reading, and writing was seen as the priority of what has to be taught. Mair (2019) also notes that the role class anxieties played in extending education to the poor as it 'is no accident that factory reform and educational provision were so often linked'. Historians have demonstrated that working-class families and individuals sought out education showing that they knew the value of writing as well. .

As concerns previous studies on this topic, Lyda Fens-de Zeeuw (2008) compares the content of three nineteenth century writing manuals. In her study, she compared the content of these manuals. To be precise, she analyses how many model letters each letter-writing manual offers on each topic, the rules for terms of address, how these manuals provide explanation on grammar and how many pages each respective writing manual uses for the aforementioned topics. Based on her analyses, Fens-de Zeeuw (2008) finds that the Victorian marriage proposal procedures have changed in comparison with those of the eighteenth century procedures. As these marriage proposal procedures had changed in the period that she studied, it is quite possible that as a result love letters became an integrated part of the 'love, courtship, and marriage' and 'matrimonial' sections of multiple letter-writing manuals

(p.189). Fens-de Zeeuw's focus whilst comparing the manuals was mainly on the content and the functionality of the letter-writing manual. However, this thesis' focus will mainly be on the language use prescribed for the members of the working class in the model letters within the nineteenth century letter-writing manuals.

In her study, Marina Dossena analysed prescribed language found in usage guides and letter-writing manuals with the focus on business correspondence. In addition, she looked at actual business related letters written by Victorians to compare the prescribed language with. Moreover, she had analysed her data by utilising Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory. Based on her results, Dossena (2019) finds that the language used within both the model letters and letters from actual people on the topic business would be considered over-exaggerated in modern times. This is particularly the case when speech acts are considered intrinsically face-threatening for the sender, such as requests for payment or job applications. Expressions of gratitude were also written in such a manner which modern people would consider too emphatic and exaggerated as to ensure that the generosity expressed would be thanked for appropriately. She also found that "politeness moves have to be consistent with one another throughout the text, so that positive and negative politeness, face-enhancing and face-saving moves coexist and indeed support the construction of a message" (p. 214-215) for a letter to be considered 'acceptable'. This showcases that both the Victorian middle class and working class valued correct usage of politeness strategies and would judge the sender's character based on the strategies used. When comparing the openings and closings of the model letters with actual material on the topic of business, Dossena (2019) found that there were more options found within the letters from actual people than in the model texts. She explains this is due to the fact that"letter-writing manuals [needed] to present relatively few but effective examples, so as to save on printing space while ensuring that the book would be marketable" (Dossena, 2019. p. 214). Though language prescribed in the letter-writing

manuals can be traced back in actual material written by the Victorians, it is wise to keep in mind that the letter-writing manuals are not fully representative of the actual language usage of the Victorians.

In a previous thesis, Wieman (2021) examined politeness strategies in love letters and letters concerning courtship in five nineteenth-century letter-writing manuals published in Britain prescribed for the middle class and in 211 letters of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Browning's correspondence. She analysed whether one could detect a difference in the language use prescribed and used between the two genders of people belonging to the middle class by analysing the opening, closing, and endearment terms of both the model letters and the Browning letters. Her conclusion was that men were supposed to be the flatterer and often utilised more positive politeness and the women were supposed to be the neutral and sober judges of character, resulting in them being encouraged to use negative politeness. Middle-class men were provided with more variants of endearment terms and were encouraged to make use of positive politeness strategies in all of the analysed aspects, whereas the middle-class women were prescribed to make use of positive politeness strategies either in the closings of the letter or once a formal courtship had been established. When comparing these results of the letter-writing manuals with the letters of the Brownings, she found that they did not make use of the model letters in their correspondence, but that Robert still assumed the role of a charmer and that Elizabeth the sober judge in their early correspondence, which was in line with the Victorian middle class ideal. As she discovered a clear distinction between language prescribed for women and men in the middle class, one might be able to detect such a distinction in model letters for the working class. Wieman's (2021) findings also allow for comparison with the findings to be made in this thesis. As this thesis aims to discover whether a similar difference in prescribed language can be detected for the working class, this

thesis will use Wieman's (2021) methodology and results as a base for this thesis' research and to compare results with.

2.6 Socio-historical linguistics & historical pragmatics

The language people utilise on a daily basis is socially embedded, which means that "various extralinguistic, social, and situational factors play a role in speakers' decisions about how to use language" (Grund, 2017. p. 219). Socio-historical linguistics focuses on researching the connection between society and language in past periods (Grund, 2017). As this thesis will be researching language use from the nineteenth century and will be focussing on the social connotations of this language use, this thesis will analyse the data from a socio-historical linguistic perspective. Specifically, this thesis will make use of a synchronic socio-historical approach as opposed to a diachronic socio-historical approach. As Grund (2017) explains, synchronic studies focus on the social embedding of language usage at a particular point in the history of the English language. In summary, synchronic studies research "how very specific, situational concerns govern users' linguistic choices or how users deploy features very consciously to project certain social roles, signal authority, or indicate various attitudes" (Grund, 2017. p. 222). In the case of this thesis, the research will focus on how the working-class role is portrayed in the nineteenth century letter-writing manuals, how their social class influences the prescribed language use, and what this showcases about the attitude towards the working class.

In addition to socio-historical linguistics, this thesis will also make use of the historical pragmatic perspective. As the term implies, "historical pragmatics combines "pragmatics" – the study of language use in context – with "historical linguistics" – the study of language in historical periods and as it changes over time" (Brinton, 2017. p. 246). The aim of historical pragmatics is to research and describe patterns of past language use, how

these patterns developed and how meaning was made, and what factors underlie both synchronic variation and changes in a diachronic perspective. Pragmatics takes people and contexts into account, and it is the researcher's task to relate texts to people, to their authors and audiences, and provide the context (Jucker, A. H., & Taavitsainen, I., 2013. p. 32). As this thesis focuses on the topic of love and courtship in particular, it is important to take the context into account in analysing the language found in the model letters that will be analysed. In addition, it will be important to note the relations and occupations of the author and receiver of the model letters, as this will likely influence the language prescribed.

2.7 Politeness theory

In addition to socio-historical linguistics, this thesis intends to examine the letter-writing manuals by making use of the politeness theory. In their book *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage,* Brown and Levinson (1987) argue a distinction between positive politeness and negative politeness. They explain that people can express negative politeness through ten different strategies which can be categorised into five main mechanisms of negative politeness; be direct, don't presume/assume, don't coerce the addressee, communicate the speaker's wants in such a way as to not impinge on the addressee, and redressing some particular other wants of the addressee. Examples of negative politeness strategies include being apologetic, being pessimistic, being direct, being conventionally indirect, giving deference, hedging, and impersonalising the speaker and addressee (Brown and Levinson, 1987. p. 131). Essentially, negative politeness is invoked and utilised by people to showcase respect through formal rules of language use as well as terms of address that convey respect.

Positive politeness on the other hand is used to express familiarity and informality between speaker and addressee. Positive politeness can be achieved through fifteen different strategies which can be categorised into three main mechanisms: claiming common ground,

conveying that speaker and addressee are cooperators, and fulfilling the addressee's wants. Examples of positive politeness strategies include expressing and exaggerating interest, using in-group identity markers such as jokes, endearment terms, and nicknames, seeking agreement, assuming or asserting reciprocity, being optimistic, and giving gifts (Brown and Levinson, 1987. p. 102).

Ingrid Tieken-Boon van Ostade (2015) found that "whether someone will choose a negative or a positive politeness strategy will mainly depend on the relation with the other". Brown and Levinson (1987) also clarify that 'social distance' between the speaker and the addressee play a role in the assessment of the seriousness of a face threatening act (p. 74), meaning that one takes the social status and relationship to one's self of the addressee into account when deciding what type of politeness to use. Tieken-Boon van Ostade (2015) found that the more familiar and the better the relationship between the people who are communicating, the more probable it is that they will make use of positive politeness strategies.

In a previous thesis, Wieman (2021) has found that the letters on courting in the letter-writing manuals prescribed a gradual transition from negative politeness to positive politeness for the members belonging to the Victorian middle class. As the middle class valued stages in courting, there was a corresponding type of politeness that would be expected to be made use of. As established, the members of the Victorian working class did not value nor were they expected to conform to the middle class' courting etiquette. Therefore, it will be interesting to analyse what type of politeness is prescribed in the letters on courting and love for the working class and whether a similar transition can be found.

3. Method

3.1 Analysing letter-writing manuals

To determine whether one can detect differences in politeness strategies for people belonging to the Victorian lower class prescribed in letter-writing manuals, this thesis will analyse a total of ten of such manuals. Within these manuals, this thesis will specifically research model letters on the topic of love and courtship. This topic is one in which authors of both genders interact with each other which will allow for comparison. The model letters of the following ten letter-writing manuals will be analysed in this thesis:

British letter-writing manuals:

- *A New Letter Writer for the Use of Ladies and Gentlemen*. (1854). George Routledge and Co. London. (ANLW)
- Cooke, T. (1812). *The Universal Letter-Writer; Or, New Art of Polite Correspondence*. London. (TULW)
- *Cupid's Letter Writer for the Use of Ladies and Gentlemen*. (1859). Cameron, Clark & Coo. Glasgow. (CLW)
- *The Companion Letter Writer*. (1866). Frederik Warne and Co. London. (TCLW)
- *The Whole Art of Polite Courtship; Or the Ladies & Gentlemen's Love Letter Writer*. (1849). Webb, Millington & Co. Leeds. (TWAOPC)
- *Ward and Lock's Letter-Writer's Handbook and Correspondent's Guide*. (1882) Ward, Lock and Co. London. (WLLWHCG)

American letter-writing manuals:

- Anners, H. F. (1847). *The American Lady's and Gentleman's Modern Letter Writer, Relative to Business, Duty, Love, and Marriage.* Philadelphia. (TALAGMLW)

- Elderkin, J. (1886). *The New York Fashion Bazar Model Letter-writer and Lovers' Oracle*. George Munro's Sons Publishers. New York. (TNYFB)
- North, I. (1867). *North's Book of Love Letters*. Dick & Fitzgerald Publishers. New York. (NBLL)
- *The New Parlor Letter Writer*. (1849). George H. Derby & Co. Buffalo. (TNPLW)
- Turner, R. (1845). *The Parlour Letter-writer, and Secretary's Assistant*. Thomas, Cowperthwait, & Co. Philadelphia. (TPLWSA)

For this research, letter-writing manuals published both in Britain and America have been analysed. The reason for this being that although these letter-writing manuals contained letters for the working class, most letter-writing manuals still contain only letters to be used by people from the middle and upper class. In order to collect as much data as possible, this thesis has opted to not focus on a certain continent. A common practice of American letter-writing manuals was to copy the model letters found in British ones. However, if these manuals would have been incorporated into the data, it would result in double data and as it is copied word for word it would not provide new insights. For this reason, the letter-writing manuals that contained the same data as already analysed have been omitted from the data.

3.2 Analysing model letters

This thesis will analyse the model letters that can be found within the chapters on courting and love. As this thesis aims to analyse the difference between the language prescribed for the middle class and the language prescribed for the working class, only the letters written by or to people belonging to the Victorian working class will be analysed. The manuals do not always specify the occupation of the author or receiver, so in case of doubt the letter was omitted from the analysis. For instance, a letter titled along the lines of 'A Lady to her

Sweetheart' will be omitted from the analysis whilst letters as 'From a Young Lady to a Young Tradesman' will be included. Essentially, if it was unclear from the title or from the model letter whether the author and receiver could be considered working class, the letter would not be taken into account. Of these letters, the opening of the letter, the closing of the letter, and the endearment terms will be analysed as these can be used to determine whether positive or negative politeness was utilised by the author.

Per model letter, I have noted down the letter-writing manual in which the model letter can be found, the gender of both the sender and receiver of the model letter, the occupation of both the sender and receiver if this was mentioned, the type of letter, the opening, the closing, the endearment terms of address, general terms of address, the politeness strategy used, the title of the model letter and the page number on which the model letter can be found within the manual.

Of each model letter it was also determined what type of letter it was. For instance, was it a letter containing a proposal, an acceptance of a proposal, a love letter between two people who are in an already established relationship, etc. This is of importance as this information will be needed to determine what type of politeness strategy is prescribed for every stage of relationship. To determine what type of letter the model letter was, this thesis determined the main focus of the model letter. For instance, there were some model letters in which the sender expressed their love for their sweetheart, but in the end the aim of the letters was to propose to said sweetheart. In this case, the letter would be categorised as a 'proposal'. Remarkably, there were also quite some model letters relating to officers leaving for the war. Hence, this has become a separate category from the love letters.

In some instances, the final sentence of the letter blends with the closing of the letter. In these cases, I have only noted down the final formal closing as the sentence preceding the final closing and signature may not showcase any politeness strategies and thus irrelevant for

this thesis' analysis. In contrast, the final and formal fragment exhibits the politeness and the measure of intimacy. In some closings one can also find endearment terms. These instances have not been noted as separate endearment terms in the data. Endearment terms will only be taken note of if they occur in the body of the letter to address the receiver of the letter, as it in that case will not be a part of a predetermined and prescribed structure.

3.3 Determining positive and negative politeness in model letters

A major part of the analysis will make use of the strategies of both positive and negative politeness pointed out by Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory. The politeness strategy used was mainly determined through the manner in which the sender addressed the recipient of the model letter in all of the analysed aspects. For instance, when analysing the opening and closings of the letters, it was analysed whether the sender would use an honorific term of address (e.g. Miss or Mr.) or whether more familiarity was shown (e.g. by addressing the recipient by their first name or an endearment term).

4. Results

4.1. Overview model letters

As mentioned in the method section, eleven letter-writing manuals published throughout the nineteenth century with a focus on the topic of love and courting among the working class were analysed. An overview of the types of letters, in terms of content, and how many of a certain type of letter can be found in each analysed letter-writing manual can be found in Table 1 and Table 2. Table 1 showcases the number and types of letters analysed in the British letter-writing manuals and Table 2 provides the same information but for the American letter-writing manuals. The British manuals provided thirteen different types of

letters for the working class and the American letter-writing manuals provided ten different types of letters on the topic of courting. Across all the manuals, the total of different types of letters to be found is sixteen.

	TULW (1812)	TWAOPC (1849)	ANLW (1854)	CLW (1859)	TCLW (1866)	WLLWHCG (1882)
Proposal	3	4	2	1	2	2
Acceptance of proposal	2	x	1	1	x	3
Rejection of proposal	x	3	x	1	x	3
Undecided answer to proposal	1	x	3	x	x	x
Rejection and desire to break off communication	x	1	x	x	x	1
Love letter	x	1	4	1	x	3
Love letters related to leaving for war	1	x	4	x	1	x
Response to love letter	1	x	x	1	x	x
Desire for introduction and acquaintance	x	1	1	x	x	x
Refusing addresses	x	x	3	x	x	x
Arranging a meeting with parents	x	x	x	2	x	x
Neglected by lover	x	x	x	x	x	1
Response to rejection	x	1	x	x	x	x

Total:	8	11	18	7	3	13

Table 1. Amount of type of letters analysed per British letter-writing manual

	TPLWSA (1845)	TALAGMLW (1847)	TNPLW (1849)	NBLL (1867)	TNYFB (1886)
Proposal	3	x	2	5	2
Acceptance of proposal	2	x	1	4	x
Undecided answer to proposal	x	x	1	x	x
Love letter	2	1	x	2	1
Love letters related to leaving for war	x	x	1	x	1
Response to love letter	3	x	1	3	1
Desire for a visit	x	1	x	x	x
Declaration of feelings	1	x	1	1	x
Response to declaration of feelings	1	x	x	1	x
Married couple	x	x	1	x	x
Total:	12	2	8	16	5

Table 2. Amount of type of letters analysed per American letter-writing manual

One of the aims of this thesis is to determine whether the language prescribed for women belonging to the working class differs from the language prescribed to men belonging to the same class. To get an insight into this aspect, it is necessary to have an overview of how many model letters can be found for women and how many can be found for men within all of the letter-writing manuals that were analysed. Table 3 provides such an overview in which it is specified how many letters for both genders can be found in each of the letter-writing manuals. It is noteworthy that the distribution of the model letters is fairly balanced

between the two genders. In only two of all the analysed letter-writing manuals, the women are provided with a significantly higher number of model letters. In five of the letter-writing manuals, the amount of model letters for men outweighs the amount of model letters for women. Two of the letter-writing manuals do not even provide model letters for women at all.

	TULW (1812)	TWAOPC (1849)	ANLW (1854)	CLW (1859)	TCLW (1866)	WLLWHCG (1882)	**Total**
Letters for men	4	7	6	3	3	3	25
Letters for women	4	4	12	4	x	10	34
Total:	8	11	18	7	3	13	59

	TPLWSA (1845)	TALAGMLW (1847)	TNPLW (1849)	NBLL (1867)	TNYFB (1886)	**Total**
Letters for men	6	2	5	8	3	24
Letters for women	6	x	3	8	2	19
Total:	12	2	8	16	5	43

Table 3. Amount of letters analysed per gender in each letter-writing manual

4.2 Writing above one's class

Of the 102 letters that were analysed across all the letter-writing manuals, sixteen model letters are from people belonging to the working class writing to someone labelled explicitly as belonging to the middle or upper class. These letters have still been analysed because they were included into the letter-writing manuals and expected to be used by people from the working class. Although these letters will not be used to answer the research questions of this thesis, since the focus is on letters among social equals, they will be considered here because

they will give insight into the differences between corresponding with a social equal and socially superior addressee. For this reason, the results from these letters will still be shown, but separate from the results of the other model letters. Noteworthy is that all the model letters belonging to this category are prescribed for men and none of these types of letters could be found for women.

4.3 Occupations of intended correspondents of the model letters

As established, the main focus of this thesis is analysing the prescribed language of the working class within nineteenth-century letter-writing manuals. An overview of all the occupations of the correspondents of the model letters and how often they reoccurred can be found in Table 4, organised in alphabetical order. Interestingly, many model letters for the women either do not specify the occupation or are prescribed for women who are domestic servants. In the manuals, the women were often referred to as ‘a young woman’, or someone’s ‘sweetheart’. The men showcase a larger range of occupations with the most model letters for tradesmen or officers. Only two model letters did not specify the occupation of the male correspondent. As mentioned, the focus of the working class was establishing financial security and it appears that the letter-writing manuals thus take the occupation into account in the model letters. Essentially, these model letters exemplify how to convince the receiver that they can establish financial independence in accordance with their occupation’s prospects.

Occupations men	Amount of letters found	Occupations women	Amount of letters found
Apothecary	1	Domestic servant	20
Attorney	1	Farmer’s daughter	2
Business owner	1	Mantua maker	1

Carpenter	1	Unknown/Not specified	22
Domestic servant	3		
Farmer	2		
Finished apprentice	2		
Gold digger	1		
Grocer	1		
Labouring man	1		
Man-milliner	1		
Merchant	2		
Merchant's clerk	2		
Officer	8		
Soldier	3		
Sailor	4		
Student	3		
Tradesman	7		
Unknown/Not specified	2		

Table 4. Occupations of senders of the model letters in the letter-writing manuals

4.4 Openings found in model letters

In order to determine whether a difference in prescribed language can be detected between the two genders, the openings or salutations found within the model letters of the letter-writing manuals were analysed. This section discusses the findings on the prescribed openings for both working-class women and working-class men.

4.4.1 Openings prescribed for women

Across all of the letter-writing manuals analysed for this thesis, a total of fifteen variants of prescribed openings for women could be found. An overview of all the found variants can be

found in Figure 4. The openings within Figure 4 have been ordered from the ones which display the most formality and respect (negative politeness strategies) towards the receiver to the ones displaying the most informal and most affection (positive politeness strategies) towards the receiver of the model letter.

Most Negative Politeness  Most Positive Politeness	❑ x ❑ Sir ❑ Dear Sir ❑ Mr. (name receiver) ❑ (full name receiver) ❑ (first name receiver) ❑ Dear Mr. (name receiver) ❑ Dear (name receiver) ❑ Dear (first name receiver) ❑ My dear Mr. (last name receiver) ❑ My dear Mr. (first name receiver) ❑ My dear (name receiver) ❑ My dear friend ❑ My dear (first name receiver) ❑ My dearest (first name receiver)

Figure 4. Scale of politeness in women's openings

The variants are quite balanced with an almost equal amount that falls in the negative politeness strategies as the ones belonging to the positive politeness strategies. However, this does not mean that this same balance occurs within the letter-writing manuals in terms of the frequency. When analysing the occurrence rate, of which the results can be found in Figure 5, it seems that working-class women are not necessarily prescribed to display negative politeness in their openings, unlike their middle and upper-class counterparts. However, they are not prescribed to show very positive politeness strategies either. Essentially, they are prescribed to be quite neutral in regards to the usage of politeness strategies. The openings which are most prescribed for the women are 'Dear (name receiver)', 'Dear (first name receiver)', and 'My dear (first name receiver)'.

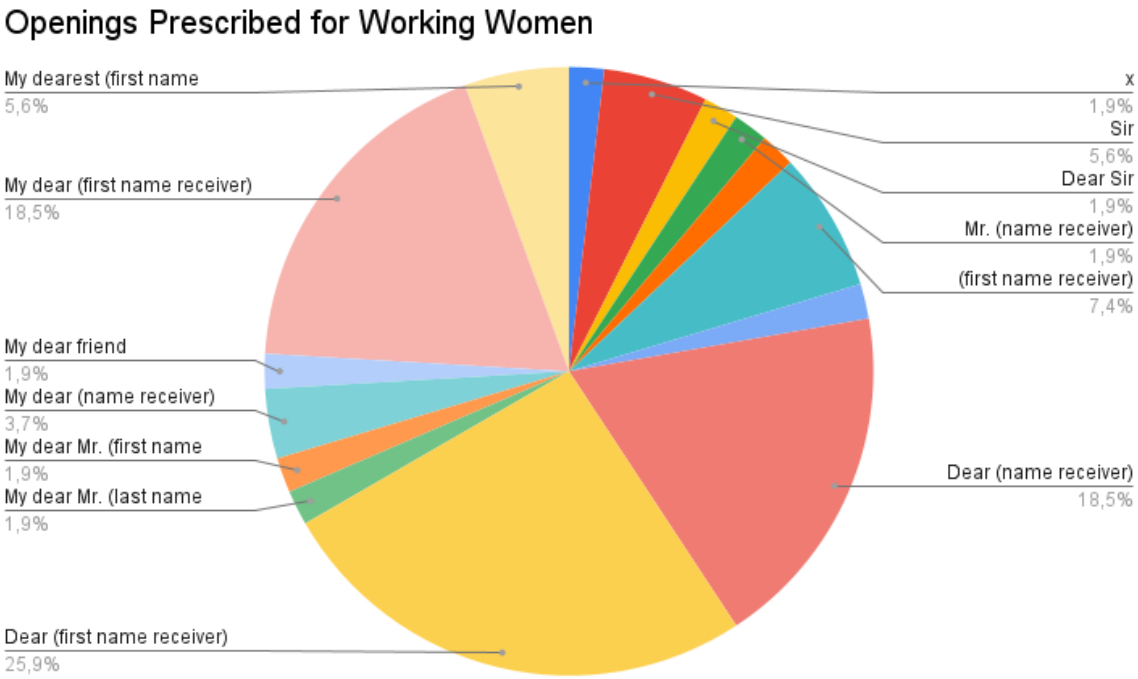

Figure 5. Usage rate of prescribed openings for women in all of the letter-writing manuals

4.4.2 Openings prescribed for men

For working-class men who are writing to women belonging to the working class, a total of thirteen variants of salutations can be found within the letter-writing manuals. An overview of said variants can be found in Figure 6 and have been scaled from the most negative politeness to the most positive politeness. When comparing this figure with Figure 5, which displays the prescribed openings for the working-class women; a notable difference that can be detected is that the men are not offered a similar balance in variants for positive and negative politeness. The main difference being that working-class men are prescribed more variants that best describe positive politeness strategies. When analysing the rate of occurrence for each of the men's variants (Figure 7) and comparing this analysis with one of the women, it seems that the results are fairly similar. Like the occurrence rate for the openings for the women, 'Dear (name receiver)', 'Dear (first name receiver)', and 'My dear (first name receiver)' are the openings most often prescribed by the letter-writing manuals. It

seems that the main difference then between working-class women and the working-class men remains the difference in the amount of openings prescribed which showcase positive politeness strategies.

Most Negative Politeness ↓ Most Positive Politeness	❑ Dear Miss (last name receiver) ❑ Dear Miss (name receiver) ❑ Dear Miss (first name receiver) ❑ Dear (name receiver) ❑ Dear (first name receiver) ❑ My dear Miss (last name receiver) ❑ My dear Miss (first name receiver) ❑ My dear (first name receiver) ❑ My adored girl ❑ Dearest (first name receiver) ❑ My dearest (name receiver) ❑ My dearest (first name receiver) ❑ My Dearest Angel

Figure 6. Scale of politeness in men's openings writing to working-class women

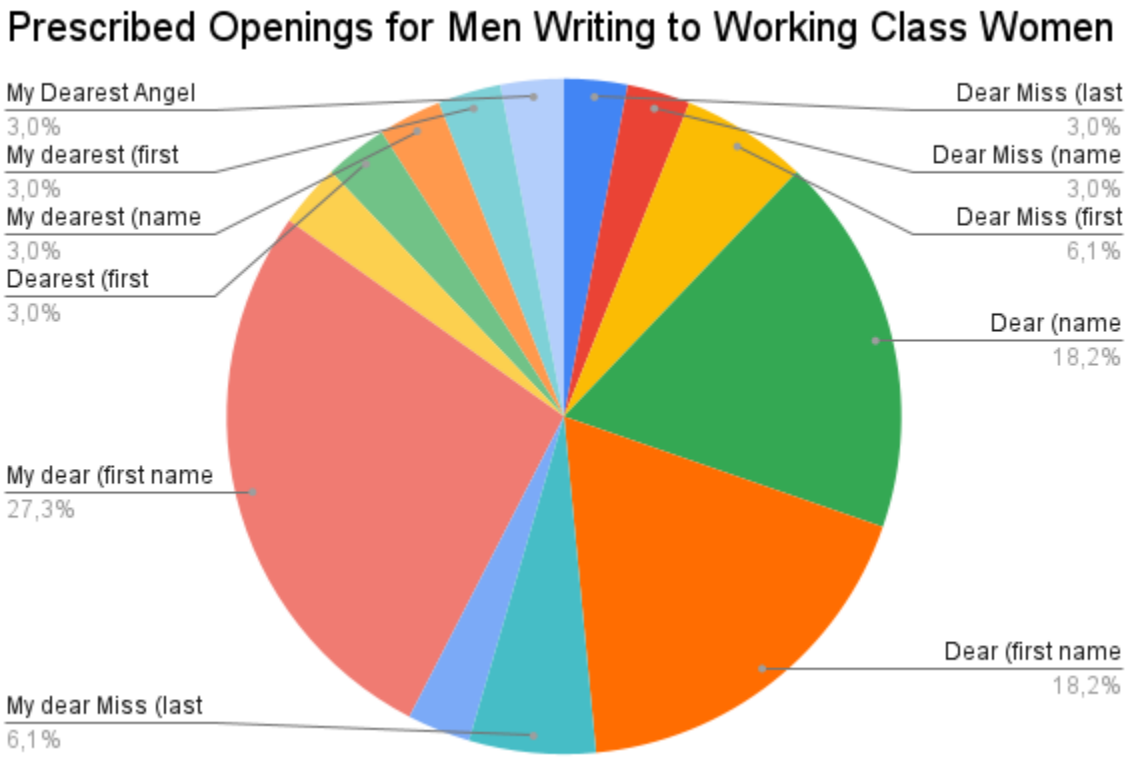

Figure 7. Usage rate of prescribed openings for men writing to working-class women in all of the letter-writing manuals

For the working-class men writing to a ‘Lady’, a total of seven variants of openings are prescribed across all of the letter-writing manuals analysed. In the nineteenth century, ‘Lady’ was not yet a generalised term to refer to anyone of female gender. Instead, it was a term that was used to specify that a woman belonged to a higher class. Whereas the men are prescribed to lean towards positive politeness when writing to women belonging to the same class, negative politeness is expected when writing to a ‘Lady’. Figure 8 showcases all the possible openings prescribed for men writing to a ‘Lady’, scaled from most negative politeness to most positive politeness. Four out of the seven variants display clear negative politeness due to them addressing the woman with her title. The remaining three, display quite the opposite and showcase clear positive politeness strategies due to addressing the ‘Lady’ in question by her first name only or with an endearment term. Figure 9 provides an overview of the occurrence rate of each of these found openings prescribed to use when writing to a middle or upper-class ‘Lady’. About 80 percent of the letters of this nature are prescribed an opening which is considered to display negative politeness. Essentially, these letters either prescribe an opening displaying extreme negative politeness or an opening displaying extreme positive politeness. The positive politeness in this case also occurs in model letters that resemble love letters or letters in which the sender and recipient are already in a relationship with one another. Thus, in proposals and first occurrences of contact, negative politeness is prescribed and expected towards a ‘Lady’.

Most Negative Politeness  Most Positive Politeness	❑ Madam ❑ Dear Madam ❑ Dear Miss (last name receiver) ❑ Dear Miss (name receiver) ❑ Dear (first name receiver) ❑ My dear ❑ My dear charmer

Figure 8. Scale of politeness in men’s openings writing to middle- or upper-class women

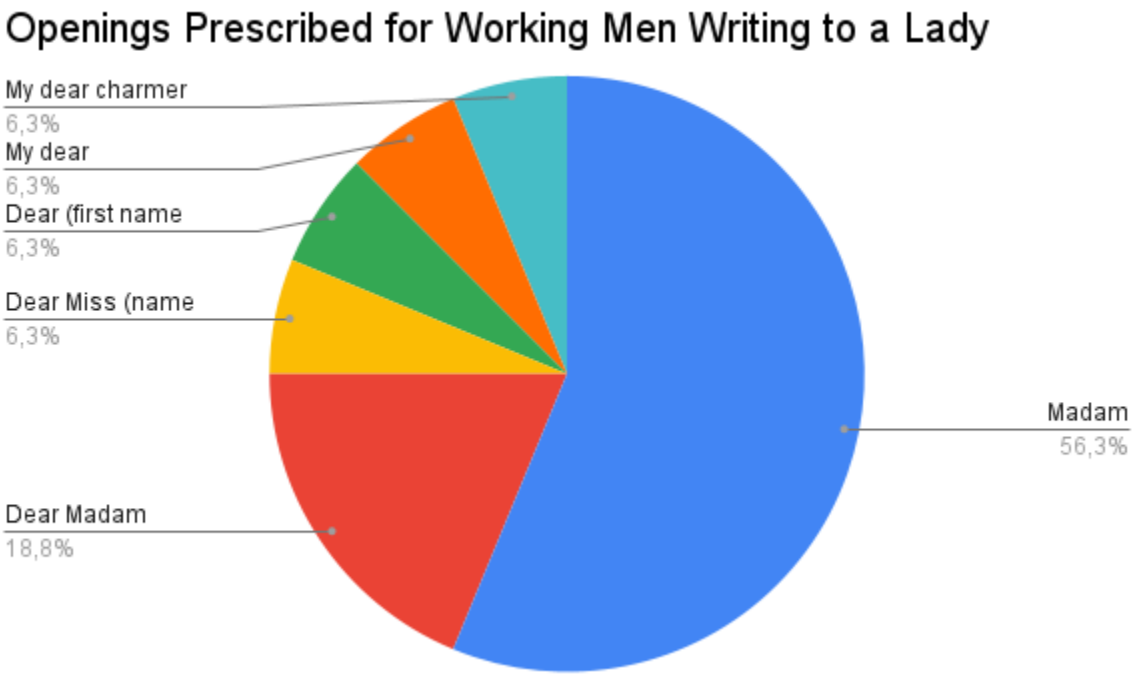

Figure 9. Usage rate of prescribed openings for men writing to middle- or upper-class women in all of the letter-writing manuals

4.5 Closings found in model letters

Additionally, this thesis has also analysed the closings of the model letters. However, analysing these closings is more complicated than analysing the openings of the model letters. This is due to the fact there is more room for small variations and differences which results in no closing being identical. In order to still analyse the closings found within the letter-writing manuals, this thesis will categorise them into five main categories, scaled from negative to positive politeness strategies. The following five categories are the ones utilised to organise the closings:

1. Closings with 'Sir/Madam', 'your humble/obedient servant', or abrupt closings
2. Closings with 'yours sincerely', 'yours faithfully', 'yours truly', etc., or 'dear Sir/Madam'.
3. Closings with 'your admirer', or dear/my dear 'Miss/Mr. (name receiver), yours very faithfully/sincerely/truly.
4. Closings with 'ever yours', 'yours ever', 'your affectionate', etc.

5. Closings with first name receiver or sender, endearment terms, words such as ‘devotedly’, ‘lovingly’, ‘affectionately’ or other creative closings (e.g. ‘your devoted lover’ and ‘your own true love’).

If a closing had elements that overlapped two categories, the closing would be characterised under the category with the most positive politeness. For example, if a closing read: ‘I am, my dear (first name receiver), Yours ever affectionately, (full name sender)’, the closing would be categorised under the fifth category.

4.5.1 Closings prescribed for men & women

Figure 10 displays the results of the organisation of all the closings and how often each gender made use of a certain category in line with politeness strategies. Notably, men who are writing to the upper class are expected to make use of negative politeness which is in line with the prescription of the openings for the model letters for these men. Yet, men who will be writing to a woman of the working class are not expected to make use of negative politeness strategies at all.

In comparison with the men, the range of the closings prescribed for women is more balanced. However, this is likely the case because women are also prescribed model letters that reject the advances of the correspondent, which is a type of letter not prescribed for men. Often within these letters, negative politeness strategies are used to ensure a respectful rejection. Still, most of the model letters do prescribe that women make use of positive politeness strategies in the closings of their letters. It seems, for the majority, that working-class women were expected to be neutral in their opening and convey their true feelings in the closing of their letters.

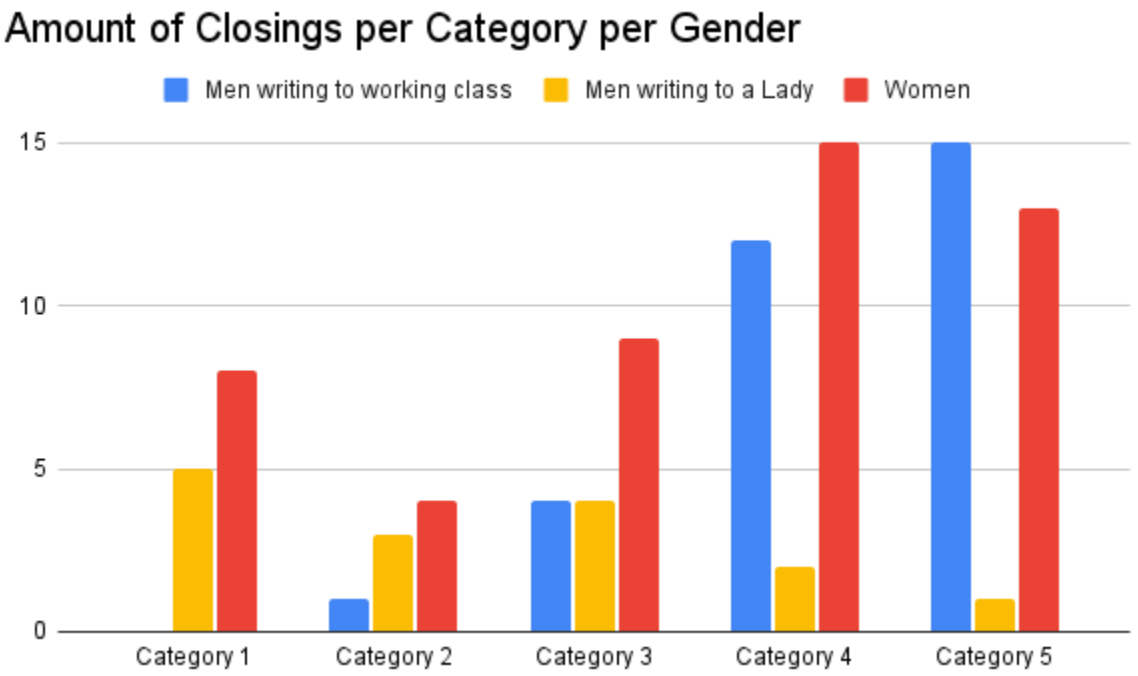

Figure 10. Categorised closings usage per gender

4.6 Endearment terms in letter-writing manuals

Endearment terms are typically used to express affection and they provide an insight in the people's relationship. Hence, they are a great tool to analyse whether a model letter can be considered to be making use of positive politeness or negative politeness. Endearment terms also allow for an insight into how both genders were expected to interact with the opposite gender. This in turn might provide an insight into how letter-writing manuals prescribed the boundaries and gender roles for the upper layer of the working classes.

4.6.1 Types of letters in which endearment terms are prescribed

A middle-class woman was expected to be level-headed when it came to judging whether a man would be suitable for her and was thus encouraged to mainly showcase negative politeness until an official courtship or relationship was arranged and established (Wieman, 2021). However, once a formal courtship was established, women were encouraged to make

use of endearment terms. It seems that the letter-writing manuals prescribe the same attitude towards the endearment terms for the working-class women as for the middle- and upper-class women. Figure 11 provides an overview of in what type of model letters endearment terms are found and prescribed for women. As becomes clear from Figure 11, the only model letters in which endearment terms can be found across all of the letter-writing manuals are model letters in which the correspondents are accepting a courtship or already in an existing romantic relationship with one another. However, there are also model letters to be found in which a proposal is accepted or in which the correspondents are in an established relationship in which the woman still does not make use of endearment terms. So it was not considered a requirement for a woman to make use of endearment terms once the proposal was accepted according to the prescribed language found within the letter-writing manuals.

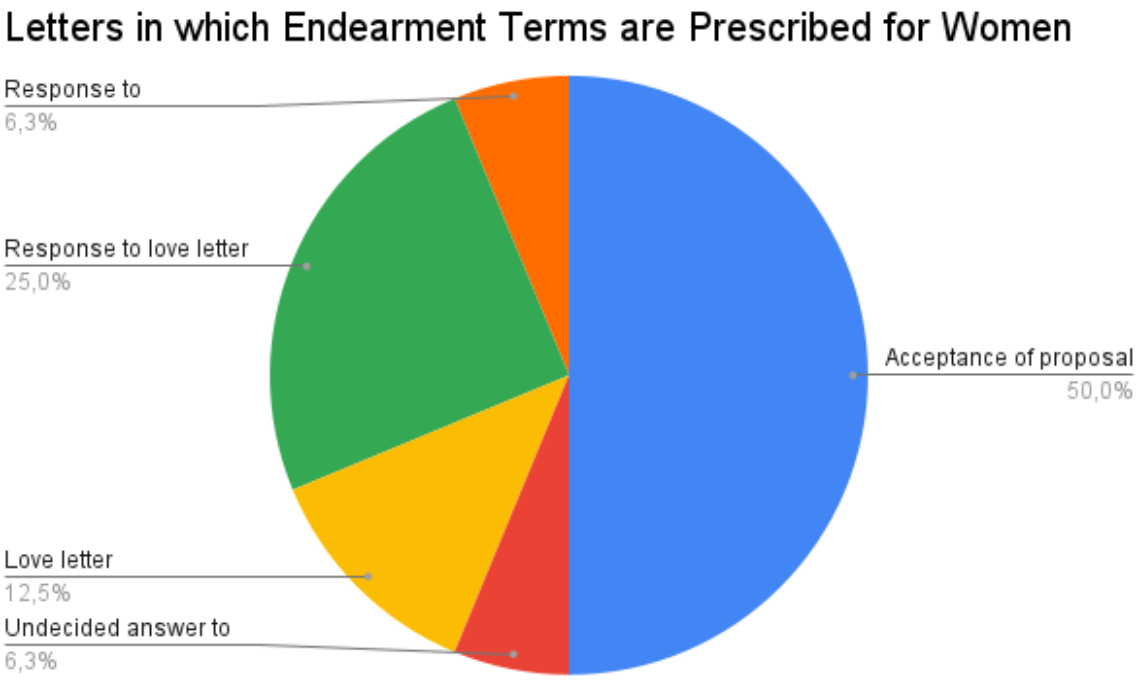

Figure 11. Types of model letters in which endearment terms can be found for women

The results of a similar analysis for the letters of the men also mirror that of the expected attitude for middle- and upper-class men. When analysing the types of letters in which endearment terms are prescribed for men (Figure 12 and Figure 13), they are most

often found in proposals. This accounts for letters to women belonging to the working class as well as the letters written to women belonging to the middle or upper class. In line with the ideal Victorian domesticity theory, men were expected to be the ones actively pursuing the courtship, whilst the women were expected to be passive with their only right being to reject or accept a gentleman's advances. Utilising the endearment terms to charm the lady is apparently part of actively pursuing this courtship. Essentially, the ideal of the man being the one who should woo the woman shines through the prescribed language for men within the letter-writing manuals.

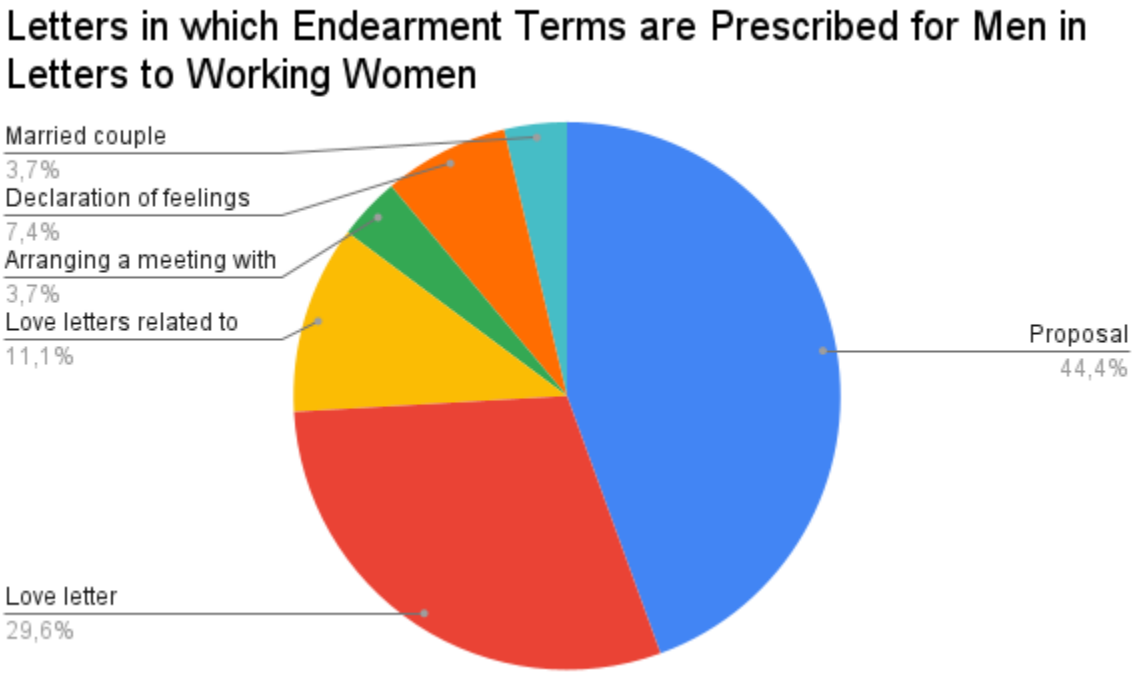

Figure 12. Types of model letters in which endearment terms can be found for men writing to working-class women

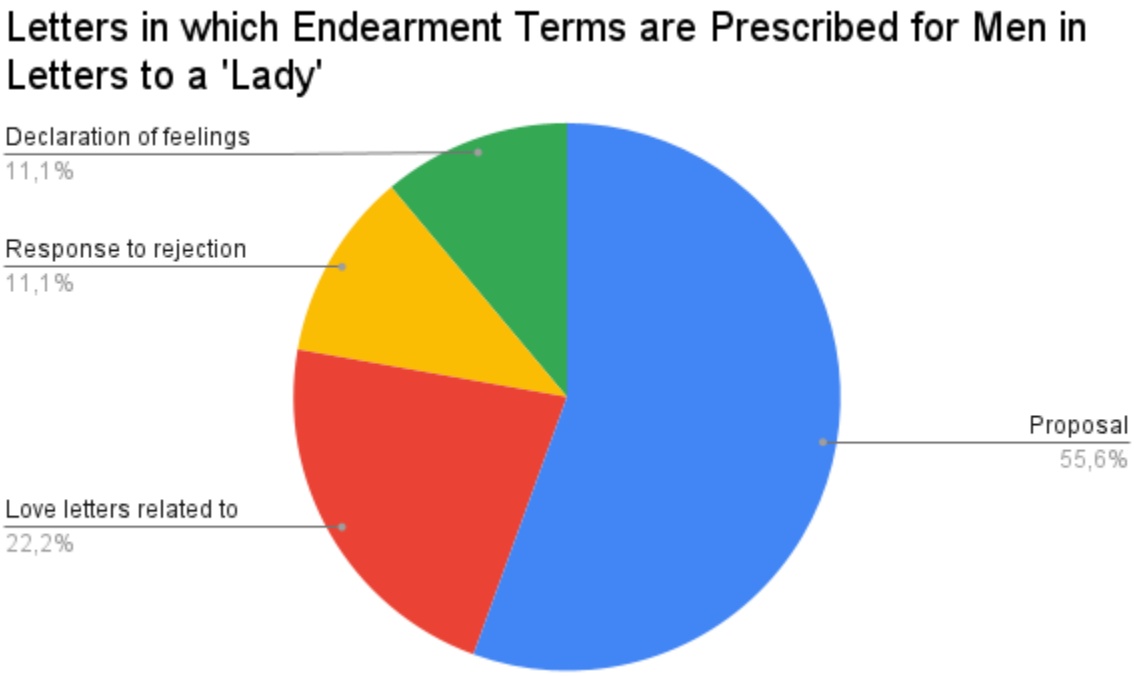

Figure 13. Types of model letters in which endearment terms can be found for men writing to a 'Lady'

4.6.2 Variants of endearment terms prescribed for each gender

Figure 14 displays the endearment terms that are prescribed for both genders belonging to the working class. In the figure, the endearment terms are noted from the most negative to the most positive in regards to the politeness strategies. As becomes clear from figure 13, men are provided with a larger range of endearment terms than for the women. In total, men have a range of 32 different prescribed endearment terms, whereas women have a range of twelve prescribed endearment terms across all the letter-writing manuals.

Women	Men
❏ dear Sir ❏ dear ❏ dear (first name receiver) ❏ (first name receiver), dear ❏ dear (nickname) ❏ my dear	❏ dear Miss (name receiver) ❏ dear Miss (first name receiver) ❏ dear ❏ dear girl ❏ dear (name receiver) ❏ dear (first name receiver)

❏ my dear (name receiver) ❏ my dear (first name receiver) ❏ my dearest (first name receiver) ❏ my dearest soul ❏ my (first name receiver) ❏ my lover	❏ (first name receiver), dear ❏ my dear Miss (last name receiver) ❏ my dear Miss (first name receiver) ❏ my dear ❏ my dear girl ❏ my dear (first name receiver) ❏ (first name receiver), my dear ❏ my adored girl ❏ my angel ❏ my charming friend ❏ my (first name receiver) ❏ dearest ❏ dearest (first name receiver) ❏ my dearest (name receiver) ❏ my dearest (first name receiver) ❏ my dearly beloved (first name receiver) ❏ my charmer ❏ my dear charmer ❏ my dearest teacher ❏ love ❏ darling ❏ my darling ❏ my darling (first name receiver) ❏ my love ❏ my lover ❏ my beloved

Figure 14. All variants of endearment terms prescribed for each gender of the working class in the letter-writing manuals

As mentioned prior, there were no model letters to be found of women writing above their station. This is the reason Figure 15 only displays the endearment terms that men are prescribed to use when writing to a woman belonging to the middle class. It is clear that within these letters, a smaller range of endearment terms can be found than displayed in Figure 13. In total, nine different endearment terms are prescribed for men when writing to someone who would have been considered above their station. Interestingly, most of these are quite intimate and do not necessarily adhere to the expected negative politeness found

within the openings and closings of these letters. However, they are in line with the ideal of the man being the charmer and thus using endearment terms to charm the ‘Lady’ in question.

Men
❏ dear Madam/Madame ❏ dear Miss (name receiver) ❏ my dear ❏ my dear (first name receiver) ❏ my angel ❏ my charmer ❏ my dearest angel ❏ love ❏ my love

Figure 15. All variants of endearment terms prescribed for each men writing to a woman belonging to middle or upper class

5. Discussion

5.1 Middle class view & etiquette in content of working-class model letters

Alongside the language used in the model letters, allows the content of the analysed model letters for some insights into the Victorian ideal portrayed and prescribed. Although this thesis’ main aim is to detect differences in gender in terms of language, this thesis does deem some observations based on the content of the model letters valuable to comprehending the context. In this heading this thesis will provide observations made based on the content and etiquette found within the letter-writing manuals.

Not only does the middle class’ ideal in terms of language usage shine through the model letters for the working class, but in terms of general etiquette as well. For instance, *The Whole Art of Polite Courtship; Or the Ladies & Gentlemen's Love Letter Writer* contains multiple letters of working-class men writing to a middle- or upper-class lady. The language found within these model letters are truly quite absurd due to the puns related to the

occupation of the author and the overly dramatic use of language. An example can be found in a model letter from an apothecary to a 'Young Lady' in which he tells her "I am now in the *fever* of love, and no *medicine* but your hand can raise me up again" (p. 15). The letters that are prescribed for the lady to return are always a rejection and include a threat to never write to them or in such a manner again. By portraying them in a ridiculous manner and encouraging the women to reject this ridiculousness, the writing manual enforces the etiquette of women having to judge the character and having to reject such 'foolish' advances. In fact, one could argue that then no man of the working class would make use of these letters, seeing as what types of responses are prescribed.

The Victorian view on working-class life can also be traced within the contents of the model letters. As mentioned, it was important for a man to be able to support his family and to establish financial stability before considering marriage. Many of the proposal model letters for the working-class men prescribe that they should mention their wages and that they should convince their letter's receiver that they will be able to manage. Though middle- or upper-class men do not specifically state their wages and their occupation, they do often assure the lady that they are able to provide them with a comfortable life. The women responding to these gentlemen are often merely judging whether they believe the said gentleman can actually make his promise true. The reality for working-class women is that working-class men needed their income as well to accomplish said financial independence. It is then very interesting that the occupation of the women to whom one was writing or who was composing the model letter is either omitted or the woman is categorised as a domestic servant. Some letter-writing manuals' model letters then prescribe working-class women to assure the male correspondent that their savings will be able to contribute to financial independence as well. One could argue that perhaps the reason for omitting the women's

occupation could be because of the middle class ideal that women should focus on their motherly role and not have an occupation in the first place.

5.2 Middle class ideal on endearment terms in working-class model letters

For the middle class, the main difference in the prescribed language found in letter-writing manuals on the topic of love and courting between the genders is that men were encouraged to utilise positive politeness to charm the women to be the flatterer and women were in turn expected to be more reserved and only make use of positive politeness once a formal courtship had started. When analysing the prescribed language in the model letters in the letter-writing manuals for the working class, it becomes clear that in most aspects the ideal for the middle class on the aspect of the usage of endearment terms shines through.

For instance, Wieman (2021) had found that middle-class men were prescribed significantly more variants of endearment terms than middle-class women. Like the middle-class men, working-class men are prescribed more variants of endearment terms than the women. When analysing the endearment term each gender gets prescribed, it also becomes clear that working-class men are also prescribed endearment terms which express extreme positive politeness and ones with more ‘creativity’. Working-class women on the other hand are provided with fewer options and the variants of endearments that are prescribed are more of the standard endearment terms. Essentially most of the women’s endearment terms consist of ‘my dear/dearest’ in combination with the name of the addressee. Men in that sense are prescribed with more ‘creative’ variants such as ‘my angel’, ‘my charmer’, ‘my adored girl’, and many more of such endearment terms. In this aspect, the Victorian middle- and upper-class ideal of the man being the one to woo and impress the woman and the woman is the one who has no need for such terms is found.

In terms of prescribing the correct context in which the endearment terms should be used, the middle- and upper-class ideal can once again be traced. When analysing what types of model letters prescribe the use of endearment terms for women, it is notable that the women are prescribed to make use of them only once the proposal has been accepted. The men on the other hand are mainly prescribed to make use of them in the letters which contain their proposal for marriage. So not only in the amount of variants each gender is prescribed in the letter-writing manuals is the ideal of the man as a 'charmer' present, but in the type of letters in which endearment terms are prescribed for each gender respectfully as well.

5.3 Social status and distance enforced

The social distance between working-class men and working-class women is considered to be less than the social distance between middle-class men and middle-class women. In some aspects, model letters found in the letter-writing manuals reflect this sentiment. For instance, Wieman (2021) found that there were a lot more model letters present for middle-class women than for middle-class men in her study. To be exact, across five letter-writing manuals she analysed, she found 46 model letters prescribed for middle-class men and 73 model letters prescribed for middle-class women (19). The difference in the amount of model letters prescribed for the working-class men and working-class women is almost non-existent. Across the ten letter-writing manuals analysed for this thesis, there were 49 model letters prescribed for the working-class men and 53 model letters present for working-class women. Although there are still more model letters prescribed for women, the gap is considerably less in comparison with Wieman's (2021) findings on the middle class. In fact, there were no letters to be found for working-class women in two of the analysed letter-writing manuals for this thesis. It shows that letter-writing manuals do not expect the same pressure on working-

class women in terms of adhering to prescribed language as was expected of middle- and upper-class women.

Whereas there is a clear distinction in the norms of politeness strategies for the two genders among the higher classes in Victorian society, the language prescribed in the letter-writing manuals for the working class can be considered more equal in some ways. For instance, women are expected to use positive politeness much sooner into the relationship, in a more clear manner, and are prescribed to use it much more often than the middle- or upper-class ladies. They are essentially prescribed to be neither extremely respectable nor extremely intimate with their correspondent. This neutrality and non-pressure for correctness, which would be considered very important amongst the middle and upper class, could be detected in multiple aspects in the model letters of the analysed letter-writing manuals.

The working-class women are prescribed more different types of variants in terms of closings of letters than the working-class men. When rejecting proposals, of which it is clear that they were not wanted in the first place, women often closed their letters in an abrupt manner, which is a clear form of negative politeness as it conforms with the negative politeness strategy of being very direct. By being very direct and abrupt, the focus of the sender is on the function of the letter and not on the relation with the receiver, which in turn " performs the function of minimising the particular imposition" (Brown and Levinson, 1987. p. 129). Another example of closings that made use of negative politeness strategies were closings in which they declared themselves 'your humble/obedient servant'. Working-class women were thus provided with closings that exude negative politeness. When analysing the closings prescribed for the working-class men who write to an equal social correspondent, no closings exuding extreme negative politeness could be found. One can argue that men are not necessarily prescribed letters which need negative politeness as they are not provided with model letters which reject their addressee which has to be done without it resulting in

threatening the sender's 'face'. Yet Wieman (2021) shows that middle class men did make use of negative politeness in proposals when writing to middle-class women, who were women belonging to the same class. However, as the working-class men are not prescribed to make use of negative politeness in their closings or to show a level of respect when proposing to their female correspondent, there seems to be less of a gap in status between the working-class men and working-class women. Especially since in closings in model letters which are addressed to a 'Lady', negative politeness can be found. This shows that working-class men were supposed to feel a clear barrier of status which called for respect for middle- and upper-class women, but they were not expected to do the same with women belonging to the working class.

Another aspect found in the model letters which showcase the enforcement of social status and distance are working-class men's openings when writing to working-class women. When analysing the proposals written by them, they never address the female receiver as 'madam', which is a form of address used by middle-class men. Instead, the most formal manner prescribed for addressing a working-class woman would be 'Miss (last name receiver)'. This term then is only found within proposals, which is in line with the ideal of gradually using positive politeness strategies as the relationship with the other progresses. A possibility is that the working-class people mentioned in the model letters of the letter-writing manuals had already established at least acquaintance and that the first hurdle which would have required negative politeness has already been crossed. Though it is clear that working-class men do possess knowledge of the value and importance of status markers, as shown by model letters of working-class men writing to someone belonging to a higher-ranking class. They do utilise negative politeness and the proper address to showcase their respect to a lady.

Working-class women on the other hand are prescribed to express more positive politeness in the openings than middle-class women. Like the openings prescribed for

working-class men, women are not prescribed to address the receiver with a status marker. Women are most often prescribed to address their correspondent by either their full name or only their first name. Middle-class women were more often than not prescribed to make use of negative politeness in their openings. This was mainly achieved through the use of addressing their correspondent with the correct title even once courtship was established. It seems then that the letter-writing manuals do not prescribe the pressure of being correct with titles which would showcase one's status.

6. Conclusion

The aim of this thesis is to determine whether a difference between the language prescribed for nineteenth-century working-class women and working-class man in letter-writing manuals can be found. In addition, this thesis wanted to research whether the upper working class experienced the same linguistic anxiety to portray themselves in a certain manner to convey and enforce their status. To establish whether such a difference and such an anxiety can be detected, this thesis analysed ten letter-writing manuals published throughout the nineteenth century in both Britain and America. Specifically, endearment terms, opening and closings found in model letters prescribed for working-class women and working-class men were analysed with the use of Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory and Wieman's (2021) findings on the politeness strategies prescribed for the Victorian middle class.

In comparison with the middle class, the letter-writing manuals prescribe similar differences in politeness strategies for the working-class men and the working-class women. Men are prescribed and expected to be the 'charmer' and therefore have more creativity in terms prescribed variants of endearment terms. Working-class women on the other hand are more restricted in regards to positive politeness options in comparison with the working class men, but are prescribed more positive politeness than the women belonging to the upper or

middle class. In contrast with the middle class, the model letters analysed for this thesis do seem to attach less importance to addressing the receiver with the correct title, which showcases the lesser social distance between working-class men and working-class women. Especially so since working-class men writing to a woman belonging to a superior class are prescribed to address her appropriately with forms of address that indicate negative politeness. The content of the model letters also portray Victorian upper-class etiquette by, for instance, having the men establish that he could be financially independent or by making letters from working-class men to upper- and middle-class women seem ridiculous.

Essentially, the nineteenth-century letter-writing manuals insert their own views and ideals into the model letters prescribed for the working class. This makes the model letters not a reliable source to determine what type of language would have been used by the working class. In theory, the working-class men and women are much more equal to one another which in some aspects are portrayed in the model letters, but for the most part there is a clear underlying upper and middle class influence on the language portrayed. In conclusion, there is a prescribed social gap between the two genders of the Victorian working class, which most likely would not have occurred in correspondence between members of the working class.

7. Further research

Initially, this thesis would focus on correspondence between two people belonging to the upper working class. However, this was not possible at the moment as there was no suitable data. As the letter-writing manuals are a middle- and upper-class ideal which does not reflect the actual language use of the working class. Nor does it mean that the lower class adhered to these ideals and that they might have completely ignored this, since they might have viewed themselves as a separate community. It would therefore be interesting to research actual love

letters written by people belonging to the working class to discover to what extent the prescribed language is in line with the language actually used.

In the final pages of some of the manuals, more letter-writing manuals were advertised to have letters for all walks of life or for people belonging to the working class as well, for instance *The Letter Writer for Lovers A Complete Guide to Lovers' Correspondence Suited to All Classes of Society* and *The Lover's Letter Writer, And, Etiquette of Courtship & Marriage*. However, this thesis did not manage to get access to these letter-writing manuals. It is very possible that more of such manuals contain model letters that would be interesting to analyse in relation to the working class.

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