Intimacy and the Aesthetic of "Litter" Writing: Epistolary Renarrativisation in Georgina Kleege's *Blind Rage: Letters to Helen Keller*

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First-person genres of life writing such as autobiography and diary at the point of their completion evoke anxiety about the 'death of the author.' While diarists are concerned about the impossibility of writing the "final entry," autobiographers are worried about the "incompletion, error, and fragmentariness" of their work (Sullivan 298). Of the diary, Philippe Lejeune observes that it is "virtually unfinishable from the beginning, because there is always a time lived beyond the writing... and one day, this time beyond will take the shape of death" (191). With regard to the problem of autobiographical finish, Jacques Derrida reminds us that every autobiographer must utter the paradoxical—and performatively impossible—statement "I am dead!" once the writing ends ("The Deaths of Roland Barthes" 65). These remarks encapsulate the dilemma that haunts the life writer: the end of writing implies death, but in order to defy it, one cannot write forever either. Since "self-life writing" is meant to inscribe one's life in writing by oneself, it also means that the writing ends because one is dead, and not writing indicates the termination of the self.[1] This follows that the sense of morbidity implicated at the ending of these 'life-writing' genres turns them into genres of self-declared death, or in other words, ones that are oriented towards a closure that signifies death—both literal and metaphorical.[2]

On the contrary, the letter writer does not dread closure as it signals an abeyance in writing—an invitation for the other to write back and, in response, an opportunity for the former to resume writing in turn. Hence, epistolary writing is intermittent but not terminal. This implies that the letter does not claim to epitomise a totalising representation of the writing self as autobiography and diary do; it rather articulates the self in relation to the other at a given moment marked by interpersonal urgency. As Rachel Bower notes, epistolary meaning is always intersubjective*: "*...the letter always demands connection in order to create meaning, and calls for a response from a specifically defined addressee" (9). However, the relational nature of the form indicates that the epistolary closure might also spell authorial death upon lack of readerly response. The reason for such non-response varies from the most accidental to the most intentional: the letter might miscarry, might reach belatedly, or the correspondent might be too "hostile" or too "indifferent" to respond (Decker 155).[3] Deprived of intersubjective impetus, self-writing—hence one's self in writing—cannot move further. Much of the discussion thus far concerns the factors determining the upkeep of real-life correspondence between two people. This paper inquires into the problem of non-response as confronted by a subject who addresses her letters to a dead person—with reference to Georgina Kleege's *Blind Rage: Letters to Helen Keller* (2006).[4]

The readerly silence in *Blind Rage* thwarts the subject's desire for interpersonal intimacy that the reciprocation of letters is supposed to facilitate. It renders Kleege's writing a futile activity, reduces it to a mere self-echo, and invalidates the desire for communion that the epistolary writing otherwise embodies. The paper argues that in *Blind Rage*, the act of writing the letter—rather than its intersubjective reciprocation—enables the subject to forge epistolary intimacy with her dead addressee. "A principle of deferral" undercuts Kleege's epistolary practice: despite knowing the failure of her correspondence, she postpones the revelation to a later point in the narrative (Decker 144).[5] This affirms that the fulfilment of intimacy in fictional letter writing is processual and not closural. Such an emphasis on the process of

writing makes the fictional epistle a metonymic rather than a metaphoric genre (MacArthur 8). Given her pre-knowledge about the predestined failure of her work, Kleege employs a number of narrative techniques to drive the epistolary sequence forward: generalising the addresseeship even when keeping its particularity intact, bringing both epistolary self and the other on the same narratological level, deferring the climactic moment of the undeliverability of the letters to the very last moment, and imagining the addressee's response in modes other than epistolary. These narrative manoeuvres help the subject to pursue an "ideal of dialogue or connection" with Keller, thereby fulfilling her desire for intimacy in spite of the unbridgeable existential void separating the living and the dead (Bower 9). The fictional correspondence addressed by one blind subject to another works not as much in terms of the letter's referential validity as in terms of its capacity for a re-imaginative vision; this challenges the simplistic understanding of Keller as an icon of human will overcoming the 'adversity' of disability for a more nuanced representation at the quotidian level. Further, it foregrounds the transformative quality of writing: what starts out as a "blind rage" towards Keller gradually turns into a female friendship wrought exclusively in letter writing.

The letter holds a titillating possibility for a readership beyond the 'pristine' interpersonal realm; though it is addressed to a specific, "reified addressee" as in Altman's terms, it can also be read by a reader to whom it was not originally intended, or who is spatiotemporally far removed from its composition and immediate circulation (*Epistolarity* 117). This openness, according to Hodkinson and Rosenmeyer, "sets up a triangulation" in the fictional epistle between the "author, the internal correspondents, and the external reader" (14). *Blind Rage* exploits such porousness inherent to the epistolary form for its genesis and sustenance in view of its fictionality and the concomitant readerly silence.[6] For instance, in a note addressed to the external reader, Kleege solicits the latter *to* "inhabit Keller's consciousness and respond in her stead to what I depict as some of the key moments of her life" (v-vi). She deliberately dilutes the "specificity" of the addresseeship and opens it up for "anyone" to receive and to co-respond to her writing (Altman 90). The paratext—in explicitly inviting the external reader to substitute the actual reader—lays a base for conceiving this improbable, supposedly anachronistic correspondence.

The letter's openness explains Kleege's choice of the genre for her renarrative project—which could well have taken a less informal, and more detached, form. She writes:

> Although based on facts, this is not a conventional biography or historical novel because those genres would keep her at too great a distance. Instead, I have written letters to her that allow for some intimacy between us, some exploration of our shared experiences and sensibilities (vi).

Though the text contains both biographical and novelistic traces, Kleege does not resort to either of them in their full-fledged forms due to their tendency to distance the writing subject from the subject written to. Instead, by employing the epistolary form, she opens up the facts of Keller's life for a critical interrogation both at interpersonal and cultural levels—the latter by engaging the reader on the received understanding of the icon in question. The paratext foreshadows what will become one of the predominant motifs in the work: the writerly desire for epistolary intimacy. The work is factual but critically so; intimate but interrogatively so. A much more significant reason for Kleege's generic choice is the letter's facility to translate her "interior dialogues" with Keller into an open correspondence (v). This translational exercise releases the writer's obsessive dialogue with a dead historical figure from the interior. The epistolary form makes the work more literary than academic, less authoritative than subjective.

The blurring of the distinction between the homodiegetic and the heterodiegetic reader raises certain narratological and ethical issues for the epistolary text under consideration. At the level of narratology, notwithstanding the voyeurism of a third party's "eavesdropping on a private conversation" between two correspondents, the letter's intersubjective nature holds that much of its meaning shared by the latter is destined to elude the heterodiegetic reader (Hodkinson and Rosenmeyer 3). Despite inhabiting "Keller's consciousness," the external reader will still remain as a third subject in the conversation (Kleege v-vi). For the benefit of the latter, Kleege narrates incidents even if the act is redundant to the internal correspondents. *Blind Rage* is replete with instances of redundant narration that implicitly address whom Decker calls "nonaddressees" of the message (Decker 26). Instead of making these redundant passages obvious, Kleege inserts them as reminders to her primary addressee, thereby keeping the internal verisimilitude of the letters intact. In a letter dated February 11 in the first part of the book—entitled "Consciousness on Trial"—Kleege recounts Keller's story "The Frost King" that brought its child author the controversy of plagiarism at the age of eleven (35). Saying, "In order to explain, let me remind you of the story itself," she summarises it in a paragraph (35). In what can be considered as a refracted address, Kleege gets the story across to the external reader even as she speaks to the primary reader. She satisfies the letter's mandate of addressing a specific individual while at the same time keeping the external reader informed of the development in the narrative.

The constant copresence of a third subject challenges the otherwise "unusual freedom" of privacy that the letter offers to the writer to say whatever she wants to her addressee (Showalter 114). She must factor in the ethical dimension of her re-narrativisation in the absence of the empirical addressee who is represented by the external reader. In a letter dated "February 8 or 9"—where she interrogates Keller's forceful assimilation into the sighted culture—Kleege asks: "Were you a hoax, Helen? A fake? There, I've typed the words. Forgive me, Helen. It's a betrayal, I know" (30-31). In line with the radical nature of her inquiry, she wonders if Keller was merely a stage-managed object of disability heroism, a supercrip who deceived herself into believing that she could successfully "hoax" others with her presumed superhuman abilities (31).[7] At the point that the enormity of her question sinks in, she writes: "I wince to think what my friends who are Deaf would say. It's more than a betrayal. It's brutal, obscene" (33). She justifies the obscenity of her question by stating that this is "what the Normals think" of her, thereby exposing the hypocrisy implicit in the appreciative words of the able-bodied for the 'supercrip' (33). She adds:

> Behind every "How ever do you manage?" there's the thought," Someone is doing this for her. Yes, she goes through the motions. She can do as she's told. But inside that head, behind those blind eyes, those deaf ears, there's nobody home" (33).

Kleege unravels the sense of incredulity implicit in the non-disabled people's words of praise for Keller.[8] She critiques the tendency of the so-called "Normals" to assume that the disabled are incompetent and need 'training' to act on and satisfy even the most mundane of impulses and needs (31). The passage affirms that the copresence of the external reader does not deter the writer from holding difficult conversations with her primary addressee. It only reinforces her choice of the epistolary form in that she is able to manipulate its informality to engage with Keller at an 'intimate' level without any constraint related to etiquette that more formal genres might pose.

Blind Rage attempts to negate the readerly non-response by exploiting the letter's inherent conversational nature to get "in touch" with the primary addressee (Decker 160).[9] Its apostrophic intent—characterised by the tendency to address the absent other—embodies

Keller's copresence despite the latter remaining a "receiving presence without substance" (*Blind Rage* 203). In a letter dated November 4—in which she discusses Keller's vaudeville career in a series of postcards of reminiscence—Kleege articulates her addressee's proximity as follows:

> I'd like to leaf through your scrapbook with you, skim the reviews, the programs, and have you comment, "Yes, that's Detroit, or is it Indianapolis? And this one must be Denver. We always brought down the house out West" (131).

The excerpt expresses the writer's anticipation of cerebral synchrony between the addresser and the addressee. What remained as an interior dialogue till then manifests as a conversation, a "telepathic contact" between two minds (Decker 37). Since the addressee is privy to the letter from its very conception, *Blind Rage* subverts the most basic tenet of epistolarity in the form of spatiotemporal separation of the correspondents. The reader's cerebral presence in the writer's consciousness ensures that the distance between the writing self and the other stays marginal.

The epistolary telepathy enables Kleege to tease Keller about the subject matter of the letter in advance. The beginning of an undated letter in the fourth part titled "The Hand's Memory" demonstrates it: "Next, Helen? You know what's next" (Kleege 157). This conversational manoeuvre conjures an illusion that the writer and the reader are cognitively and emotionally bound together with little, if any, spatiotemporal gap dividing one another. It brings both the self and the other on the same cerebral terrain, thereby blurring the narratological line that separates them. This togetherness also alerts Keller to subjects that are likely to be unsettling and, as a result, induces her to protest against the discussion. Intuiting that Kleege is about to deliberate on the most unsettling topic—that of Anne Sullivan's death and its after-effects in her life—Keller is made to voice her discomfort as follows: "You say, "Not that. Anything but that. Not again" (157). The incorporation of Keller's voice inflects the flow of the otherwise one-sided narrative and fulfils the dialogic mandate of the fictional epistle. Whilst the copresence of the external reader is implicitly acknowledged, the presence of the primary reader is brought into relief by way of direct address. Direct speech becomes much more defined in a later instance where Keller is presented as challenging Kleege's idea of "progress" (182). In a letter dated March 22 in the fourth part, Kleege tells Keller of a rare public instance—a "quiz show" called "Jeopardy"—marked by a more nuanced understanding of Keller as in, "...you were remembered for things you did and not simply for the fact that you were deaf and blind. It's progress of a sort" (182-183).[10] Unmoved, Keller asks: "'Progress?' you say. 'You call that progress?'" (183). Unlike the previous response—which was marked by defensive tone—the present one demonstrates Keller as being more critical of contemporary discourses on disability than Kleege herself. Put differently, it emerges as an imaginative possibility for Keller to assess her legacy through the sensibilities of a conscious disability position. The incorporation of Keller's voice in the epistolary narrative carries tonal shifts reflecting the latter's changing attitude towards how she is perceived in the cultural imaginary.

In spite of constructing an artifice of readerly response using various narrative techniques, Kleege must nevertheless confront the problem of undeliverability of her letters in the course of the narrative; without reciprocation, her writing cannot form part of a correspondence and hence cannot attain its epistolary maturity. In a letter dated May 30 in the fourth part, she writes that she "took the plunge and sent you an e-mail message" to the following imagined mail id: "HKeller@afterlife.com" (203). She receives the following reply: "Auto-Submitted: auto-generated (failure)" (204). The reply—which, ironically, is itself an automated one—points to the self-directed nature of Kleege's writing, one that is ineluctably

locked within self, sendable but not deliverable.[11] Of the apparent failure of her message, she remarks:

> For thirty-six hours, my words to you were out there, wherever there is, waiting online with a hundred billion other messages. But mine was misaddressed, my very desire misguided. My words, those few pulse beats of human imagination, will now be deleted from the queue, shoved out of the patient line, rubbed out, gone without a trace (204).

The virtual suspension of her message in a realm of nowhere—involving one and a half days of suspense—dramatises the letter's perpetual failure to overcome absence and accomplish contact. The impossibility of reciprocity means that it ends up being a mere echo within Kleege's private space. The immateriality of her correspondence risks her epistolary attempt and, along with it, her desire for interpersonal union disappears without any trace in cyberspace. The dispatch is not only a venture stuck in the indefinable, nonspatial region of "out there," but also an attempt that is untimely and seemingly bereft of any immediate significance, recalling William Viney's description of "waste objects" as referring to "pasts and futures, yet are anchored by neither" (12). The participles such as "deleted," "shoved," "rubbed out," and "gone" reinforce the letter's aborted futurity. The latter becomes literally a "matter out of time" in the sense that it cannot inflect any temporality other than the present (Viney 2). The passage of suspension reiterates the precarity of the letter as it wanders in search of an anchor in the anonymous world; when it returns, it does so undelivered and devalued, bearing the mark of illegitimacy. The wandering is reminiscent of Jacques Lacan's epistolary "tale" that "consists in the vanishing act of the message, whose letter goes wending off without it" ("Lituraterre" 31). The message remains enveloped while the letter traverses from the sender to the receiver; the materiality of the letter operates independently of the written material that it encases. The epistolary failure reflects that technology can only generate a simulacrum of connection but cannot simulate readerly response; it cannot mitigate the existential void between the living addresser and the dead addressee.

Kleege's desire for intimacy meets with what J. Hillis Miller calls "destinerrance," the letter's tendency to go astray and be lost forever with the message not delivered (Qtd. in Addlitt 9). The letter risks being dumped as Joycean "litter" in the absence of a receiving subject (Addlittt 13). The moment that Kleege chooses to write a letter—a medium that in its very genesis is bound to move from one place to another—she enters into the uncertain terrain of Millerian destinerrance; she wills herself to the dangerous possibility of the epistolary "non-arrival" (9).[12] Realising that her epistolary venture might go traceless in the cyber abyss, she grows desperate in her attempts to induce response from Keller and, pleads with the latter:

> I keep holding out for some sort of dazzling revelation, or oracular utterance, or code to live by, and all you have to say to me is, "Can you give me a stamp for this letter?"
>
> Who are you writing to? Why won't you write to me? (Kleege 205).

And a little later:

> I press my hand flat against the computer screen. It is at first cool, then warm. Is that your hand on the other side of the glass, pressing back? The skin of my flattened palm grows warmer and warmer. There, right there, Helen. That's the spot. Put your words there. Speak to me (Kleege 205).

These passages unveil quite viscerally the writer's "all-consuming desire" for intimacy, her need to negate the truth of its impossibility (Addlitt 12). It also reveals the emotional toll of not being acknowledged, and to be left unattended to forever. The writing becomes "frantic," expressive of a longing for physical proximity (Campbell 337). Kleege's plea also brings into relief the ultimate irony that, in spite of its appeal for connecting two subjects in an intimate dialogue, the letter fails, and represents the impasse that it was deployed to overcome in the first place. All that remains of this communicative mishap is the writer's freedom to continue writing to the non-responding recipient—facilitated by the letter's inherent readerly gap. As Addlitt writes: "The love remains unrequited, unreturned because unreturnable, and this frustration is the only sign of love" ("Love, Infidelity..." 12). Unconsummated, the epistolary desire stagnates between the writer and the letter, and the writing turns into "litter."

Before parsing the reason why this revelatory moment occurs late in the narrative, the paper turns to an instance in the third part titled "Working the Pump" that marks a self-parodic gesture of the fictional epistle's genesis. In a letter dated November 11in the part in question, Kleege is momentarily fooled into thinking that the letter she receives from an organisation called "Helen Keller International" is indeed from the addressee herself:

> ... there I was, reading return addresses with my closed-circuit TV reading device ... and I read "Helen," then "Keller," then "International." Actually it took me a second to get to "International." I got to "Keller" and lost it. My brain temporarily shut down from sheer disbelief. All this time writing all these letters to you and now, finally. . . I thought, "Can it be? Has she... ?" (Kleege 146).

The "second" that it takes Kleege to get to the word "international" from "Keller" makes her think that Keller has indeed responded to what she otherwise felt was a one-sided correspondence. When she realises that it is addressed by a charity organisation bearing Keller's name does the joke and, with it, the disappointment, dawn on her: "But of course you hadn't. It is just an organization with your name" (146).[13] In its bureaucratic formality and appropriation of the icon's name for fundraising, the letter greatly contrasts with Kleege's highly personal, sensitive letter writing that aims to depict a more complex image of Keller. The episode demonstrates the precarity of Kleege's epistolary re-imagination that is situated in a culture that perpetuates such misappropriations of Keller and her story.

The climactic moment of revelation occurs only belatedly—two-hundred pages into the text—although the writer has frequently hinted at the self-deceptive nature of the endeavour. The reason for Kleege initiating the correspondence despite its "destined errancy" lies in her impulse to re-narrativise Keller's life in order to posit a more complex version of the icon's story (Addlitt 9). This is evidenced from the very first letter (dated February 3) itself, where she admits her desire to dwell on certain episodes of Keller's life even if that meant traversing into the unknown:

> Now that I've scanned your writing, visited your childhood home, and more importantly released some of my hostility toward you, I begin to sense that there's more to your story than the official version. So if you don't mind, I'd like to ponder one or two incidents from your life and find out where it takes me (Kleege 10-11).

The passage shows that Kleege defers her foreknowledge of the failure of her correspondence in order to articulate her desire for intimacy in the form of writing itself rather than its readerly consummation at the end. Though she knows the speculative nature of her correspondence, she

remains bound to the internal momentum of the fictional epistle (33). This recalls Elizabeth MacArthur's argument about the metonymic (sequential), as opposed to the metaphoric (closural), nature of the epistolary form (*Extravagant Narratives* 8). For MacArthur, the epistolary form valorises "mobility and desire" over "stability and meaning," which makes it an "open" genre (26). The significance of the epistolary form lies in the act of writing rather than its closure as it is the case with other genres of representation.[14] This explains Kleege's willful suspension of her knowledge of the epistolary breakdown.

The paradox of writing despite its evident futility gives rise to an aesthetic of litter writing in *Blind Rage*, which can be understood with reference to Lacan's neologism "lituraterre" that "deals with writing erasure on earth and with the littoral of the letter that writes it" (Biswas 174). Lituraterre is inscribing what is not present and skirting what is invisible;it is an attempt at imagining the impossible. Viewed in this light, the letter is an affirmation of absence but an attempt at negating the latter by evoking a semblance of presence. In spite of knowing that her letter will litter at the end, Kleege composes it in order to establish contact with Keller. The work's consciousness of its residual status makes it a text of litter writing. In continuing to write, she is able to manipulate the "littoral" condition of her letter to constantly re-evaluate the nature of the distance between herself and her addressee (Lacan 32). Of the Lacanian littoral, Klotz writes: "... the littoral, the shore, separates the earth or ground from the water and it can move according to the season (203). The littoral morphs into different postures according to the context of signification. Its flexibility facilitates Kleege to reset her vantage of Keller as her writing progresses. In writing the letter that slips into litter, she discovers that it occupies the crepuscular region of finite possibility crisscrossed with infinite imagination.

Deferring the revelatory moment of the epistolary failure also works as a reconstitution of the littoral that separates the self from the other; it enables Kleege to re-assess her relationship with Keller. As the text progresses, we witness a definite shift in her attitude and in the tone of her writing: while early letters exuded a sense of confrontation and cynicism, the ones that are drafted later reflect a sense of empathy. This transition is apparent when we compare the early and the later sections of the text. For instance, she introduces herself to Keller in the first letter dated February 3 as follows: "...the most important thing you need to know about me, and the reason for my letter, is that I grew up hating you" (Kleege 1). Coming as it does at the outset of the narrative, this feeling of hatred towards the addressee functions as a catalyst to propel the epistolary sequence forward. By contrast, a later letter dated November 4 in the third part is a far cry from the first letter in its expression of mutual empathy; Kleege informs Keller that, confronted with the resistance against her proposal to add the latter in the curriculum on "Disability Studies," she argued for the inclusion of the latter's works (128). She reports her argument thus:

> I mean, where would any of us be without Helen Keller? At home, the lucky ones. In institutions, the rest of us, maybe put out of our misery at some early age." Yes, I was preaching, browbeating, carrying on. I concluded," I mean, we don't have to agree with her. We don't have to like her. But she needs to be part of this conversation (129).

The passage not only indicates Kleege's greater understanding of the version of Keller shorn of her celebrity status—due mainly to her extensive reading into her oeuvre—but also demonstrates the extent of that understanding in her justification of Keller to others. It calls for sensitivity in situating Keller and her work in proper historical context instead of dismissing the latter as being regressive and not 'contemporary' enough. In Kleege's epistolary revision, Keller is transformed from a popular disability icon who "set such an impossibly high standard

of cheerfulness in the face of adversity" for disabled people to emulate to one whose story requires a more nuanced reconstruction (1). The text records the transformation in the form of interpersonal reconciliation between the addresser and the addressee on one hand and image de-familiarisation in the public domain on the other.

Kleege's litter writing pivots on a littoral aesthetic of time that occupies contradictory temporal locations. The littoral is characterised by a constant overlap between the inside and the outside and subsequent blurring of temporal and spatial zones. Klotz elucidates this spatiotemporal imbrication of polarities in the following way: "...the letter is the effect, or in terms of the discourse of Lacan, it is produced by the signifier and the language as something that is outside but not without" ("The Littoral Condition of the Letter" 200). According to this line of reasoning, the letter assimilates its own littering even when the latter occurs outside its textual existence. The possibility of littering becomes an essential tenet of epistolarity. In *Blind Rage*, littering does not occur in a reflective space outside the letter's diegetic frame. It happens as part of the letter's composition and, instead of terminating it, induces further writing. Viney captures the litter's potential to incite "more writing" as follows: "The writing of waste, the writing that has become waste, is described, distorted and made visible via the reflexive manipulation of yet more writing, yet more narrative" (*Waste* 105). Kleege writes further in order to make sense of the littering of her letter and discover alternative rationales for constructing the imaginary dialogue with Keller. The extravagance in writing transforms the supposed "non-functionality" of the litter into a worthwhile pursuit for dialogue (Viney 104). It also prevents a possible invalidation of littering and attributing to it negative value as the death of the epistolary.

Blind Rage posits the epistolary re-narrativisation as being based on an aesthetic of re-reading Keller's life and works differently. A particularly self-reflexive opening of a letter dated October 15 in the third part, for instance, indicates this: "It's bad enough that I've read every word you ever published, and every biography ever written about you, and that I bore all my friends with tidbits of Helen Keller trivia" (Kleege 93). The immersion in Keller's writing enables Kleege to construct a semblance of intersubjective connection. She imagines readerly response in modes other than epistolary; this within the fictional epistle itself. In one of the last few letters of the book dated May 28, for instance, she demonstrates a cross-modal dialogue based on the aforesaid aesthetic of alternative reading. She writes:

> I put the tape recorder playing your words next to my plate. We ate grilled asparagus and zucchini, red lentils with tarragon, and couscous. Not a menu I imagine you ever ate in life. But you were always willing to try new things. And together, we had a conversation of sorts. You were talking about your dog's litter of puppies and the clothes you were buying for your trip to Japan. And I was speculating over the flaws in my personality. It was not a coherent conversation; there were a lot of nonsequiturs and tangents leading away in different directions. But it was not unlike dinner conversations I've had with other people I know well. And as I say, it left me feeling more myself (203).

Kleege forges a conversation—replete with "nonsequiturs and tangents leading away in different directions"—despite an exchange not only of contradictory messages but also that of contrastive modes—namely epistolary and journalistic (203).[15] She confesses that she feels more comfortable with the passive presence of Keller than interacting with people in social situations. Interestingly, despite the fact that the conversation that she initiates with Keller being similar to the ones with her acquaintances, it makes her feel more herself since she is not judged by her interlocutor. The passage suggests that regardless of coherence or accuracy, a

sense of intimacy can always be built on a symbolic exchange of companionship broached through the familiar encounter with the auditory words of Keller. Kleege's interpretation of tape-listening to Keller's journal is in some sense epistolary in that, she replaces Keller's writing for the writing self and, in so doing, conjures the presence of the addressee—who is also an addressing subject. The instance also marks a possibility for a dialogue between two genres of writing—not only between epistolary and journalistic but also between epistolary and non-epistolary in general (as Kleege brings other forms of life writing that Keller engaged in also into the conversation)—leading eventually to a "sisterly" communion between subjects who are bound by shared writerly and disabled identities (Kleege 207).

It is safe to assume that *Blind Rage* pivots on an aesthetic of litter writing, a self-consciously paradoxical gesture that extracts interpersonal intimacy not in the consummation of the epistolary exchange but in the very act of writing. A principle of becoming—rather than one of being—characterises the fictional letter's identity and, more importantly, its validity. Given that the letter conjures a simulacrum of self-other communion—even before the latter's consummation through an actual correspondence between two interlocutors—Kleege succeeds in communicating her message to Keller and thereby radically re-narrativising her official story. Through demonstrating the dialogic potential of the letter slipping into litter, the work calls for a rephrasing of our valuation of literary detritus. By highlighting the work's informality, provocativeness, gossipiness, urgency, and a seemingly polaristic aesthetic of immediacy and mediatedness, the paper has demonstrated that the formal and semantic features of the epistolary form hold key to understanding Kleege's reimaginative inquiry into Keller's life. In an open conclusion—keeping with the spirit of epistolarity—I imagine that the writing subject of *Blind Rage* could perhaps say: "I write to you despite the fact that you are dead, or precisely because you are dead," proclaiming an epistolary reversal of Derrida's conception of the paradox of self-declaring one's death at the end of writing.

Notes

[1] Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson in their book titled *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (2010) refer to these first-person modes of life writing as "self life writing," but choose not to use the phrase for its "clumsiness" except for "occasional emphasis" (4). But it offers an opportunity to contemplate the complexities involved in considering the letter as a "self life writing" genre in that, due to its dependence on a specific addressee for meaning making, the epistolary self always stands in relation to the other—unlike autobiographical or diaristic modes of life writing that present/represent only an individual self (Smith and Watson 4).

[2]Hannah Sullivan remarks, "If posthumous editing is the supplementary act required to finish a diary whose author could never write "this is the final entry," the textual process that shadows and supplements autobiography is authorial revision" ("Autobiography and the Problem of Finish" 301). While The impossibility of ending a diary oneself urges another person to do it posthumously, the anxiety about imperfection of one's autobiography compels a writer to revise it again and again to give it a final shape which keeps eluding.

[3]For William Merrill Decker, the readerly silence depends on a number of contingencies: "There is always the risk of epistolary silence: the letter, or its reply, has been lost in the mail, or one's partner has grown hostile or indifferent. There is the silence of the response that does not reciprocate one's own urgency" (155). This means that to write a letter is to enter into the vulnerable territory of epistolarity that might or might not facilitate one's continued textual self-representation.

[4]My intention here is not to explore the differences regarding readerly silence in real-life and fictional letters. Nevertheless, the discussion is informed by theoretical inputs that apply to both to some extent.

[5]The phrase is culled from William Decker's discussion of Emily Dickinson's epistolary writing which according to him was characterised by "A principle of deferral" where "reunion, presence, closure become objects of perpetual postponement" (144). Though the context in which the phrase is used is different, it is useful in capturing an aesthetic of deliberate postponement that is at work in Kleege's fictional letter writing as well.

[6]Talking about the prevalence of the epistolary form in Greek literature of antiquity, Hodkinson and Rosenmeyer observe that "The frisson of external readers 'eavesdropping' on a private conversation is the crucial ingredient of most epistolary literature and helps to explain its popularity as a literary form" (3). In the same vein, it can be argued that Kleege chooses to engage with Keller in a form as much for its looseness as for its capacity to afford greater intimacy.

[7]In his book titled *Signifying Bodies: Disability in Contemporary Life Writing (2009),* G. Thomas Couser distinguishes between four different rhetorical patterns found in disability memoirs. The first pattern that he identifies is a narrative in which disability is presented as an "adversity" to be overcome, and he calls such an overcomer a "supercrip," who is often "atypical" and holds out to be "the model disabled person" (34). This description suits Helen Keller since she "set" a "high standard" for the disabled to emulate and became an inspirational icon for the non-disabled by 'overcoming' the tragedy of twin impairments of deafness and blindness (Kleege 1).

[8]Kleege imagines that Anne Sullivan, Keller's teacher and a lifelong companion, could have taught her "a repertoire of a couple dozen useful phrases" to use on cue (31). She writes, "Number three," she'd tap on your shoulder. And you'd sign, "So lovely to meet you," and she adds, "Or 'Number twenty-two,' she'd signal. And you'd say, "I hope your mother is in good health'" (31). This playful critique inverts the sighted culture's mindless preconceptions about and its denial of agency to the disabled. Through caricaturing Sullivan's training of Keller by reducing it to a mere bagful of tricks and cues, Kleege also questions the widely-held belief that Keller is but a prodigy of Sullivan's pedagogic genius.

[9]It is important to note that epistolary writing is not synonymous with a face-to-face conversation, but assumes conversationality since the letter writer's attitude—and the tone that she employs—is one of addressing another person as in a conversation. Rachel Bower, for instance, claims that the reason why the letter is deemed to be conversational is because it is "structured to elicit a reply and has dialogue at its core" (10). It is this illusion of conversationality that Kleege exploits to construct intimacy with Keller cerebrally if not corporeally.

[10]In a "quiz show" called "Jeopardy" where "contestants are given an answer and then must supply the question," the following statement is posed: "The 1904 graduate of Radcliffe College who went on to be a suffragist, a lecturer, a vaudeville performer, and a writer," for which, the "winning question" is "Who was Helen Keller?" (182). Kleege deems this to be progressive since the answer emphasises on the kind of work that Keller did rather than solely on her deaf-blindness, which popular discourse on the latter usually does.

[11]This contrasts with the "other-directed" quality of the letter (Altman 38).

[12]Of the letter's errant tendency, David Wills observes: *"*Not only are there any number of examples of letters, signs, senses, going astray, but that possibility must exist as soon as and as long as the sign, the message, the sense, is defined as involving even the smallest displacement, distance, difference. Hence, if the letter cannot arrive, it cannot arrive" (Quoted in Addlitt 9). Since the letter is subject to all three motive elements—"displacement, distance, difference"—as Wills suggests, it eludes the writer's control once it is sent out to be delivered in a world that is replete with innumerable contingencies that might intervene its passage and abort its consummation.

[13]The instance also marks the fact that the writer's disabled embodiment has the potential to inflect the course of the narrative. Kleege is deceived into thinking that the letter is Keller's response because of the way she gradually reads each word of the address by using her assistive reading device.

[14]Echoing MacArthur, Elizabeth Campbell in her article titled "Re-Visions, Re-Flections, Re-Creations: Epistolarity in Novels by Contemporary Women" writes that "In open epistolary fiction, writing, the attempt to

be heard, is more important toward an ending, than imposing closure" (333). In fact, this is the reason why Samuel Richardson famously suggested that when one writes a letter, one writes "to the Moment" (Quoted. in Curran 9). Although Kleege is not so naive as to believe that her writing is purely unmediated and spontaneous, she postpones the revelatory moment to revel in writing that attempts to communicate with the dead addressee.

[15]In an earlier page, Kleege writes that she began to read Keller's "journal" once she came back from a tiring social gathering: "...I felt better just to be reading your journal, just to have you on my mind. Getting back to my work made me feel myself again" (201). This affirms the identity of Keller's work in question being a journal and hence reiterates the argument of the paper that the text forges a cross-generic dialogue between the correspondents.

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