

# Revealing to Conceal: Love-letters and Privacy in Republican China

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## Abstract

Letters, especially love-letters, reveal private thoughts and emotions to a readership that may be intentionally finite or unintentionally infinite. The borderline between genuine and imagined letters and between private and open letters has always been fuzzy, as shown throughout the history of European and Chinese letters. Imagined love-letters have appeared in Chinese fiction and drama since the Tang dynasty as devices to elaborate the plot, to reveal character and to provide variety in narration and dialogue. In the early 20th century they also served to evoke authenticity and to focus on the subjective and intimate. With few exceptions, however, the publication of apparently authentic love-letters has been relatively rare in China.

Epistolary fiction in Republican China owes some inspiration to European models such as Goethe's *Das Leiden die jungen Werthers* but has unique characteristics: written mainly by young women for a young female audience, short stories with an epistolary framework or consist-

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ing mainly of inserted letters were seen by writers and readers as a semi-autobiographical genre for the exploration of themes such as friendship with other young women, intimate reflections on life and its travails, determination to choose one's own husband, and disillusionment following marriage based on free choice. The birthplace for epistolary fiction was Peking Women's Normal College, where the student group in the early 1920s included Huang Luyin, Shi Pingmei, Feng Yuanjun and Xu Guangping, and the male staff included Lu Xun, Zhou Zuoren and Xu Zuzheng: all published epistolary fiction and/or collections of their letters in the 1920s and early 1930s.

Early examples of epistolary fiction introduced a sudden fashion around the mid 1920s for literary couples to publish their own love-letters. One of the most notable examples is the exchange between Huang Luyin and Li Weijian. The most enduring collection of published love-letters, however, is *Liang di shu*, the correspondence between Lu Xun and Xu Guangping, the only one of the Republican collections still in print. Just as suddenly as the fashion arose, it had disappeared by the mid 1930s, when the particular conjunction of sexual and literary emancipation that led to the practice had passed. Although love-letters continued to be published, they tended to appear in collections or anthologies without their dialogic partners. Letters by famous literary couples of the 1920s and 1930s not published by their authors include those between Yu Dafu and Wang Yingxia, Xu Zhimo and Lu Xiaoman, Shen Congwen and Zhang Zhaohe, and Xiao Hong and Xiao Jun.

The difference in attitudes towards privacy shown by writers who did or did not publish their love-letters shows how idiosyncratic the sense of privacy was, with no obvious pattern in regard to age, gender or social and professional ties. At the same time, the way in which their letters were published, whether as heavily edited but nevertheless genuine letters or as thinly-disguised epistolary fiction, shows an awareness that

some degree of privacy may need to be revealed in order that a deeper level can be concealed.

Letters are about as universal a phenomenon in any literate society as can be found apart from basic human needs. They cross temporal, geographical, ethnic and cultural borders; their ubiquity transcends differences in age, gender, education and social class; their versatility embraces infinite variation. As objects they are familiar, everyday things, although they have immense significance to their writers and readers; the acts of writing and reading letters may be innocent or devious, spontaneous or studied. Letters are generally considered to be private, but after their authors' death, and sometimes even within the authors' lifetimes, they attract third-party readers. This paper will begin with an examination of the relationship between letters and privacy in European and Chinese history, as an introduction to love-letters in Republican China. \*\*

## Part I: Letters and privacy

The connection between personal letters and privacy is repeatedly confirmed in the history of letters. Their writers and readers have noted their wish for privacy: in writing and in reading letters; in carrying them

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\*\* \* The origins of this research was a study of the correspondence between Lu Xun and Xu Guangping, published as "Functions and Values of Privacy in the Correspondence between Lu Xun and Xu Guangping, 1925-1929," in *Chinese Concepts of Privacy*, edited by Bonnie S. McDougall and Anders Hansson (Leiden: Brill, 2002), pp. 147-168, and *Love-letters and Privacy in Modern China: The Intimate Lives of Lu Xun and Xu Guangping* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). Much of the research for the present article was conducted at the Centre for Chinese Studies at the National Central Library in Taipei in 1999 and 2001, and the author is most grateful to the CCS staff for their generous assistance and hospitality.

as a talisman; in preserving them in a locked safe, in an underwear drawer, or concealed between the pages of a book. Lovers who are constrained in public by natural modesty or external pressures find refuge in the acts of reading and writing letters. Through letters, lovers can conduct their courtship (and married partners affirm their affection) at times and places where they are free from the gaze of others and at leisure.

Fame and especially death mean an end to privacy: a decent interval after death, such as the expiration of the writer's copyright, allows our sense of eavesdropping to be overcome by Time's "strange power of resanctifying desecration and making private property public."<sup>1</sup> The publication of authentic letters has a long history, the production of imagined letters even longer.

The right of privacy in correspondence is enshrined in the legal systems of many countries.<sup>2</sup> At least three parties have rights in their circulation: the writer, the recipient, and the family of the writer, not to mention publishers, historians and other scholars, and general readers. Letters that have been delivered become the property of the recipient or transferee, but copyright remains with the writer, usually including a short period after his/her death, or with the deceased writer's spouse. The case which established this principle in English common law in 1741 upheld Alexander Pope's right to prevent publication of private letters that he had written to Jonathan Swift and which had come into the possession of a bookseller.<sup>3</sup> The doctrine that it is morally reprehensible

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1 George Saintsbury, *A Letter Book: Selected with an Introduction on the History and Art of Letter-Writing* (London: Bell, 1922), pp. 90-91.

2 Samuel H. Hofstadter and George Horowitz, *The Right of Privacy* (New York: Central Book Company, 1964), pp. 155-60.

3 Hofstadter and Horowitz, *The Right of Privacy*, p. 155. Ruth Perry claims that Pope colluded in the publication of his letters; see Perry, *Women, Letters, and the Novel* (New York: AMS Press, 1980), p. 71.

to publish a private letter is even more ancient: Cicero famously denounced Mark Antony for having read aloud in the Senate the letter of a friend, accusing him of conduct that breaks the bonds of society.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, the pleasure that unintended readers find in intruding into others' lives is undeniable. Another advantage of reading other people's letters, according to Lord Byron, is that there is no need to answer them.<sup>5</sup> A sense of transgression may heighten the pleasure: Byron showed Lady Melbourne Augusta Leigh's love-letters to him; Augusta Leigh showed Byron's wife his letters to her.<sup>6</sup>

### European letters in print

The process by which private letters passed into public circulation is not always clear, especially in the case of older letters. A unique set of familiar letters are those by Marcus Tullius Cicero (106–43 BC), written mostly in the last twenty years of his life. His letters are primarily on public events but often touch on family matters and disclose his moods to his intimate friends. The unreliability of letter-bearers makes him reluctant to refer to politically sensitive matters in his letters, but the letters to Atticus, his brother-in-law, are private enough for Cicero to ask him not to let others read them.<sup>7</sup> He advises his friends to throw them away after reading, but his letters to Atticus nevertheless were preserved by the recipient, who allowed others to see them.<sup>8</sup> Another

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4 Hofstadter and Horowitz, *The Right of Privacy*, p. 155.

5 Antonia Fraser, comp., *Love Letters: An Anthology* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1976), p. xxi.

6 Michael and Melissa Bakewell, *Augusta Leigh: Byron's Half-sister* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2000), p. 323.

7 Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Selected Letters*, translated with an Introduction by D. R. Shackleton Bailey (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982), pp. 37, 45, 46, 69 and 95.

8 *Letters to Atticus*, edited and translated by D. R. Shackleton Bailey, 4 vols., Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

collection of letters to (and from) diverse members of his family, friends and colleagues was preserved and edited by Cicero's secretary.<sup>9</sup> Both collections were published in the middle of the first century AD, but we know nothing of the circumstances in which they were made available to a wider audience; some thought that this was Cicero's intention all along.<sup>10</sup> The letters by Pliny the Younger (61–113) addressed to his wife Calpurnia, thought to have been influenced by Cicero, were always intended for public circulation.<sup>11</sup> Cicero's posthumous readers include de Sévigné; his Letters also ranked high in Oscar Wilde's list of recommended reading.<sup>12</sup> Since Cicero's time, it must be assumed that all professional writers and most public figures will consider the possibility that the letters they write today will be read by unknown others in the future. It is unlikely that the boundaries between public and private letters were ever rigid, and it is already evident at this time that they were, by any measure, flexible.

Accidental discovery    In ancient Greek and Rome, literacy was not necessarily a marker of political power, and letter tablets were mostly in the hand of a professional scribe. Nevertheless, "The Roman, at any rate the upper-class Roman, was a letter writer,"<sup>13</sup> although few of his

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9 The companion volume is *Letters to His Friends*, edited and translated by W. Glynn Williams, 3 vols., Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1927). Each collection consists of 426 letters.

10 *Saintsbury, A Letter Book*, p. 11.

11 See extracts in Robin Hamilton and Nicolas Soames, eds., *Intimate Letters* (London: Marginalia Press, 1994), pp. 3-4; and Mary R. Lefkowitz and Maureen B. Fant, eds., *Women's Life in Greece and Rome a sourcebook in translation*, 2nd ed. (London: Duckworth, 1992), p. 184.

12 *Mme de Sévigné, Selected Letters*, translated with an introduction by Leonard Tancock (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1982), p. 254; *Oscar Wilde, Selected Letters*, edited by Rupert Hart-Davis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 65.

13 From the Introduction to *Selected Letters by Cicero*, p. 20.

personal letters remain (Cicero was an exception). Only a small number of surviving texts from the ancient world were written by women, but they include both personal and formal letters.<sup>14</sup> The earliest example of Latin handwriting by a woman is on a tablet dated 170 AD found at the archaeological site at Vindolanda in England, which bears the text of a letter from Claudia Severa, the wife of an officer living in a house near the Roman camp at Hadrian's Wall, to her friend Sulpicia Lepidina, inviting her to her birthday party. Severa adds greetings to Lepidina's husband and from her own husband and son. The main text is apparently dictated to a scribe, but the final salutation is thought to be in Severa's own hand.<sup>15</sup> The accidental discovery of Severa's tablet is a reminder that informal and personal letters and notes are routinely discarded by their writers and recipients. Failure to preserve texts of this kind does not spell an absence of the private life and feelings described in them. Ovid (43–18BC) advises lovers how to pay court in letters on waxed tablets;<sup>16</sup> we can suppose that many were written although only three or four remain from Roman times.<sup>17</sup>

One of the earliest and most famous posthumously published love-letter collections is the correspondence between Abelard (1079–1142) and Heloise (1101–1164), written in Latin prose. Peter Abelard was employed as Heloise's tutor. He seduced her and then married her after she had borne his child. Punished with castration by her guardian, Abelard then insisted to Heloise that she become a nun. After a silence of

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14 Lefkowitz and Fant, eds, *Women's Life in Greece and Rome*, p. xxiii.

15 Olga Kenyon, *800 Years of Women's Letters*, (Stroud: Allan Sutton, 1992), pp. 32-33; Lefkowitz and Fant, *Women's Life in Greece and Rome*, p. 205. I am indebted to Professor John Crook of St. John's College, Cambridge, for this information.

16 Ovid, "The Art of Love," in *The Love Poems*, translated by A. D. Melville (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 98-100.

17 Phillipe Ariès and Georges Duby, eds, *A History of Private Life*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 1987, p. 101.

some ten years, Heloise wrote a series of letters to him when she was in her mid-twenties and he was in his mid-forties, confessing that her passion for him had not abated. His replies recommend to her the nobility of spiritual love and sacrifice.<sup>18</sup> The correspondence was preserved by the lovers by transcription from wax tablets to parchment, but the letters were then neglected for almost five centuries. They were first circulated in 1616, paraphrased and translated into French by various hands throughout the 17th century, and published in definitive editions in the early 18th century. The discovery in 1974 of earlier correspondence between Abelard and Heloise, from when they first became lovers, has confirmed the authenticity of the later correspondence.<sup>19</sup>

A groundbreaking feature of this collection is that letters by both parties were included; previous collections had been one-sided for the sake of literary unity. For the general reader, each kind has its own attraction. On the one hand, "there is, first of all, the compelling reality of a single persona behind a series of letters."<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, "Another kind of unity is found in some of the extended exchanges in volumes of miscellaneous letters, in which the reader watches, and perhaps vicariously enjoys, the relationship between the two correspondents."<sup>21</sup> Although they represent most readers' experience of published letters, collections and anthologies of letters which for practical reasons are one-sided give a misleading impression of the actual exchange. (Three-sided collections are rare, and collections by four par-

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18 The Letters of Abelard and Heloise, translated and edited by Betty Radice (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974). See also Linda S. Kauffman, *Discourses of Desire: Gender, Genre, and Epistolary Fictions* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), pp. 18-19, 63-89.

19 See Constant J. Mews, *The Lost Love Letters of Heloise and Abelard: Perceptions of dialogue in twelfth-century France* (London: Macmillan, 1999).

20 Perry, *Women, Letters, and the Novel*, p. 80.

21 Perry, *Women, Letters, and the Novel*, p. 81.



ties or more appear to be non-existent.)

Publication by authors Publication of letters by the authors themselves during their own lifetimes is comparatively rare, and that of love-letters even rarer.<sup>22</sup> In general, the privacy of letters is felt most keenly by the original writer and recipient, and when one or both of the original couple are involved in publication, editorial intervention appears in the form of deletions, recensions and even additions. One of the first examples of apparently authentic love-letters published by the author herself is Veronica Franco's *Lettere familiari a diversi* (1580), written in Italian verse in Venice at a time when the familiar letter was a recognised genre in Renaissance Europe.<sup>23</sup> We have no way of knowing whether or not these letters were intended or revised for publication, but it is reasonable to assume that there might be elements of both intention and revision.

The boundaries between authentic letters written for a single recipient or limited circulation and letters written for general publication were further undermined in 17th century Europe by *Epistolae Hoelianae* or *Familiar Letters* (1657) by James Howell (1593–1666), said to be the first collection of unofficial letters written for publication.<sup>24</sup> The multiple uses of 18th century letters is well illustrated by the correspondence between Leopold and Wolfgang Mozart: the father's sermonising letters were written with full awareness of their commercial value, while the son's deceptive replies and destruction of his father's letters were

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22 Although the account below deals chiefly with love-letters, their comparatively rare appearances are supplemented with examples of letters in general, since there are no significant features of letters in general that are not also present in love-letters, and since almost all characteristics of love-letters are also true of letters in general.

23 Margaret F. Rosenthal, "A Courtesan's Voice: Epistolary Self-Portraiture in Veronica Franco's *Terza Rime*," in Elizabeth C. Goldsmith, ed., *Writing the Female Voice: Essays on Epistolary Literature* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1989), pp. 3-24.

24 Saintsbury, *A Letter Book*, p. 135.

part of his strategy for intellectual and artistic independence.<sup>25</sup> In the 19th century, George Sand edited and published letters from her lover, Alfred de Musset, to Henry James' s disapproval.<sup>26</sup>

Sometimes publication was contested. One of Oscar Wilde' s early love-letters to Alfred Douglas, read out in court to public scandal, was later described by its author as a literary conceit: "The letter is like a passage from one of Shakespeare' s sonnets, transposed to a minor key... It was, let me say frankly, the sort of letter I would, in a happy if wilful moment, have written to any graceful young man of either University who had sent me a poem of his own making, certain that he would have sufficient wit or culture to interpret rightly its fantastic phrases."<sup>27</sup> When he heard that Douglas was planning to publish his letters from prison, Wilde wrote his letter of condemnation and confession for immediate publication in part as "De Profundis."<sup>28</sup> (Wilde, of course, was aware that he had copyright over his letters and forbade their publication by Douglas.<sup>29</sup> The publication of Wilde' s correspondence was sanctioned by his grandson.)

A one-sided collection that was meant to be published, André Gide' s two thousand letters to his wife Madeleine, written over thirty years, were burnt by her during his visit to Cambridge with a young male lover:

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25 See David Schroeder, *Mozart in Revolt: Strategies of Resistance, Mischief and Deception* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), especially the Introduction, pp. 1-18, and Chapter 3, pp. 59-85.

26 Fraser, *Love Letters*, p. 9.

27 Wilde, *Selected Letters*, pp. 169-170. The love-letters read out in court are on pp. 107, 111.

28 The full version of the letter to Douglas published in part as "De Profundis" is in Wilde, *Selected Letters*, pp. 152-240; for Wilde' s comments on the early letters, see p. 169; for his protest at the publication of the prison letters, see pp. 182-84. Douglas claimed to have destroyed 150 letters from Wilde, but enough survive to trace the alternation between love and hatred in Wilde' s emotions towards Douglas.

29 Wilde, *Selected Letters*, p. 187.

“An incomplete, inexact, caricatured, grimacing image is now all that will endure of me,” he lamented. “My authentic reflection has been wiped out, for ever... all that was purest, noblest in my life, all that could best have survived, and shone, and spread warmth and beauty, all is destroyed. And no effort of mine will ever be able to replace it.”<sup>30</sup>

Family as heirs The authors’ surviving family members and descendants are usually the heirs to saved love-letters and it is their choice whether or not to publish. Especially in the case of famous men and women, families are generally less inclined to preserve the privacy of the authors or recipients. A writer who dies young may be commemorated by the early publication of his or her letters, either one or two-sided, with the consent of the bereaved. Although in some cases there may have been a tacit understanding that the letters might be published posthumously, they are not edited for publication by the authors themselves. Unless there is a clear statement to the contrary, on the other hand, it is reasonable to assume that the family has undertaken some editing.

Some descendants press ahead despite the wishes of the original author. John Donne (1572–1631) circulated his private correspondence among friends but was on guard against unauthorised readers; his son, who did not share his qualms, made somewhat garbled versions available to all.<sup>31</sup> Some families, or some members of the family, object to publication. The letters written by Madame de Sévigné (1626–96), first published a year after her death and reissued many times, were heavily edited by the author’s granddaughter, but there was disagreement within the family on what was and what was not appropriate for public circulation;

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30 Alan Sheridan, *André Gide: A Life in the Present* (London: Penguin, 2000), pp. 314-15.

31 Cecile M. Jagodzinski, *Privacy and Print: Reading and Writing in Seventeenth-Century England* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999), pp. 86-92.

in the end, first some and eventually all of the original manuscripts were destroyed.<sup>32</sup>

Lady Mary Wortley Montague's *Turkish Letters* (1763) is an example of the uncertain line between public and private. It was first composed as individual letters and journal entries for circulation among friends, and was afterwards revised by her for publication. Although her family forbade publication during her lifetime, it was published a year after her death.<sup>33</sup> Her private letters show her great interest in letter-writing as a genre. In a letter to her sister, she writes, "The last pleasure that fell in my way was Madame Sévigné's letters [published two years earlier]; very pretty they are, but I assert, without the least vanity, that mine will be full as entertaining forty years hence. I advise you, therefore, to put none of them to the use of waste paper."<sup>34</sup> To her daughter, she is more frank: "How many readers and admirers has Madame de Sévigné, who only gives us, in a lively manner and fashionable phrases, mean sentiments, vulgar prejudices, and endless repetition? Sometimes the tittle-tattle of a fine lady, sometimes that of an old nurse, always tittle-tattle; yet so well gilt over by airy expressions, and a flowing style, she will also please the same people to whom Lord Bolingbroke will shine as a first-rate author. She is so far to be excused, as her letters were not intended for the press; while he..."<sup>35</sup>

The hybrid form of letters plus travel diary was becoming common in the 18th century, but Mary Wollstonecraft's *Letters Written During a*

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32 Elizabeth C. Goldsmith, "Authority, Authenticity, and the Publication of Letters by Women," in Goldsmith, ed., *Writing the Female Voice*, pp. 51-55.

33 Isobel Grundy, *Lady Mary Wortley Montague* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 199-201, 241-42, 516, 612, 625-27; see also review by Margaret Anne Doody, *Times Literary Supplement*, 14 May 1999, p. 25.

34 Mary Wortley Montagu, *Letters* (London: David Campbell Publishers, 1992); Letter to the Countess of Mar [June 1726], p. 241.

35 Montagu, *Letters*: Letter to the Countess of Bute, July 20 [1754], pp. 443-44.

Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark (1796) had special interest: as many of her readers may have guessed, the letters were first addressed to Gilbert Imlay, the lover who had left her and the child he fathered. Wollstonecraft set out on her journey with the intention of writing a travel book, combining selected passages from her letters to him with notes on the scenery and customs. The complete letters, returned at her request, were published after her death by her husband, William Godwin.<sup>36</sup>

The correspondence between Elizabeth Barrett (1806–1861) and Robert Browning (1812–1889) consists of over five hundred letters written during the two years of their courtship. Barrett had recently published a successful book of poems; Browning was also a well-known poet, and after their elopement and marriage they formed a famous literary partnership. Their son authorised the publication of their love-letters,<sup>37</sup> but the extent to which the letters are edited is not clear.

Lydia Lopokova and John Maynard Keynes were an improbable but happy couple: he was an economist, senior government advisor and Cambridge academic; she was a young ballet dancer who came to England with Diaghilev in 1918. A selection of their playful, touching letters, written during their courtship from December 1918 to June 1925 and edited for publication by their son,<sup>38</sup> counters the malicious gossip about

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36 Mary Wollstonecraft, *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark*, edited by Carol H. Poston (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1976); Janet Todd, *Mary Wollstonecraft: A Revolutionary Life* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2000), pp. 231–369; Mary A. Favret, *Romantic Correspondence: Women, Politics and the Fiction of Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 96–132.

37 First edited by Robert Wiedemann Barrett Browning as *The Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning* in 1897 and then as *The Letters of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Browning* in 1899. See *Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett: The Courtship Correspondence 1845–1846, A Selection*, edited by Daniel Karlin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).

38 *The Letters of Lydia Lopokova and John Maynard Keynes*, edited by Polly Hill and

them that had circulated in Bloomsbury (Virginia Woolf had called their affair “a fatal, and irreparable mistake.”)<sup>39</sup>

Simone de Beauvoir’s *Beloved Chicago Man: Letters to Nelson Algren 1947-64* was published two years after her death by the author’s daughter. de Beauvoir (1908–1986) and Algren (1909–1981) began their affair in 1947 and continued it for many years despite meeting rarely; the publication of her book, *Force of Circumstance*, in the U. S. in 1965 led to a final break between them. According to her daughter’s Preface, de Beauvoir’s letters to Algren were sold after his death; she agreed to their publication but the project was not achieved during her lifetime. Her daughter retains possession of Algren’s letters to de Beauvoir but notes without explanation that the publication of both sides of the correspondence was not possible.<sup>40</sup>

Friends and admirers Publication by friends and admirers is common when one or both writers are celebrities or professional writers, but editorial interventions are also still common, whether to preserve privacy or moral reputations (which, in some cases, amount to the same thing). In 1832, Maria Edgeworth complained to Walter Scott’s biographer John Gibson Lockhart about the current “general rage” for publishing private correspondence but was persuaded eventually to allow her letters to Scott to appear in the biography; an American critic also condemned the use of private letters and journals in Lockhart’s biography. Many of the correspondents who contributed their letters sent edited transcripts to Lockhart rather than the originals, and Lockhart himself was conscious when he sent letters to Scott that these might in time be

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Richard Keynes (London: Andre Deutsch, 1989).

39 Virginia Woolf, *A Change of Perspective: The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, vol. III: 1923-1928, edited by Nigel Nicolson (London: The Hogarth Press, 1977), p. 33.

40 Simone de Beauvoir, *Beloved Chicago Man: Letters to Nelson Algren 1947-64*, compiled and with a Preface by Sylvie Le Bon de Beauvoir (London: Victor Gollancz, 1988).

published.<sup>41</sup>

The publication of the letters between John Keats and Fanny Brawne in 1878 by Harry Buxton Forman caused a great scandal, especially when it became known that Buxton Forman had sold the originals. Oscar Wilde wrote a poem on the sale, which he recommended to W. B. Yeats for inclusion in *A Book of Irish Verse*, and which he quoted to Douglas as another instance where a poet's privacy, like his, had been betrayed.<sup>42</sup> (The originals of these letters have been preserved, and it appears that the printed versions are meticulously authentic.)<sup>43</sup>

The letters from Franz Kafka (1883–1924) to Milená Jezenská (1896–1944) were first published in 1952; her letters to him have been lost. The correspondence took place between April and November, 1920, during which period they met only twice. Their first contact came after Jezenská translated one of Kafka's short stories, although Kafka was still virtually unknown. The affair was kept secret since Jezenská was then married. Kafka's letters were entrusted by her to a friend of both parties, Willy Hass, whose heavily edited version was published after her death in a concentration camp.<sup>44</sup>

Academic publication—Preservation of the author or recipient's privacy is generally a low priority to modern scholars and anthologists, especially when the lapse of time between writing and publication is a matter of centuries rather than decades: James I writing to George

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41 Francis R. Hart, *Lockhart as Romantic Biographer* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1971), pp. 167-68, 177-78, 179-80.

42 Wilde, *Selected Letters*, p. 183.

43 See *Letters of John Keats*, edited by Robert Gittings (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. xi-xii, xxi-xxii.

44 A revised edition with all but four omissions restored was published in 1986. For the English translation see *Franz Kafka, Letters to Milena*, translated with an Introduction by Philip Boehm (New York: Schocker Books, 1990).

Villiers in 1622 enjoined him to “let no creature see this letter,” but it has now become famous.<sup>45</sup> In contrast to family and friends, scholars generally disregard the writer’s express wishes. Charles Dickens, whose love-life was more complicated than he wished his readers to know, specified in his will that he wanted to be remembered by posterity only by the writings he himself had published; he condemned the “improper use made of confidential letters, in the addressing of them to a public audience that has no business with them,” and destroyed all letters sent to him “as the only safe way of keeping them out of print.” Although his correspondents did not always oblige, Dickens felt safe enough to describe a rail accident in June 1865 in which he was involved in nineteen different letters using the identical set of words, suppressing the information that it took place on a journey back from France with his mistress, Ellen Ternan, and her mother.<sup>46</sup> He went to elaborate lengths to protect his correspondence with Ternan ever being discovered, and the originals have never been found; it took infra-red photography even to reveal that they ever were written.<sup>47</sup>

### Authentic Chinese letters

The oldest piece of writing that has been classified as shu 書 [letters] dates from the Spring and Autumn period, and by Han times it was firmly established as a literary genre.<sup>48</sup> The earliest personal letters in

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45 Fraser, *Love Letters*, p. 82; Hamilton and Soames, *Intimate Letters*, pp. 35-36.

46 In some of these letters, the incident was transcribed by Georgina Hogarth, Dickens only adding the salutation, ending and signature; see Graham Storey, ed., *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, vol. 11, 1865-1867 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), pp. ix-x; see also the review of this volume by Alethea Hayter, *TLS*, 4 February 2000, p. 36.

47 Storey, *op. cit.*, p. xi.

48 See Eva Yuen-wah Chung, “A Study of the ‘Shu’ (Letters) of the Han Dynasty (206 B. C.-A. D. 200)”, Ph. D dissertation, University of Washington, 1982; available through University Microfilms International; pp. 56, 112



Chinese are those found in an archaeological site dating from 217 BC; they were written on two wooden strips, from two soldiers writing home to their families asking for clothes and money.<sup>49</sup> Private letters have also been found in Han tombs, the best preserved on silk.<sup>50</sup> The most famous early personal letter is “Bao Ren Shaoqing Shu 報任少卿書” [Reply to Ren An] by the historian Sima Qian 司馬遷 (145–90 BC), on the events leading up to his castration.<sup>51</sup> The history of its preservation is not clear, but the text first appears in the biography of Sima Qian in the Han shu 漢書 [History of the Han dynasty] by Ban Gu 班固 (32–92) and Ban Zhao 班昭.<sup>52</sup> 3rd century letter-writers include Cao Pi 曹丕 (187–226) and Cao Zhi 曹植 (192–232). Authentic letters by literary scholars and poets such as Han Yu 韓愈 (768–824) and Su Shi 蘇軾 (1036–1101), written in classical Chinese, were routinely included in their posthumous collections, although personal letters, which may have been written in a more colloquial language, were not.<sup>53</sup>

Well-known writers of the Ming and Qing dynasties, such as Feng Menglong 馮夢龍 (1574–1646), Li Yu 李漁 (1611–80?) and Yuan Mei 袁枚 (1716–1798) were among noted letter-writers and anthologists.<sup>54</sup>

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49 Endymion Wilkinson, *Chinese History: A Manual* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 1998), p. 759.

50 Wilkinson, pp. 116, 763.

51 For an analysis of early Chinese letters and privacy, see David Pattinson, “Privacy and Letter writing in Han and Six Dynasties China,” in McDougall and Hansson, eds., *Chinese Concepts of Privacy*, pp. 97–118.

52 Translated into English in *Anthology of Chinese Literature*, compiled and edited by Cyril Birch (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), pp. 120–27, and in *An Anthology of Chinese Literature*, edited and translated by Stephen Owen (New York: Norton, 1996), pp. 136–42. This letter is also contained in *Wen xuan 文選* (see below).

53 Note by Stephen Owen, *Renditions*, special issue on letters, p. 51. Examples of letters by Han Yu and Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元 are also included in Wang Li 王力, *Gudai Hanyu 古代漢語* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1963).

54 Patrick Hanan, *The Invention of Li Yu* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), pp. 24–25.

Prominent Qing letter-writers could expect posthumous publication as a matter of course, and publication during one's lifetime was also commonplace. Letters by famous men were published as models: the family letters written by Zeng Guofan 曾國藩 (1811–1872) to his son Jize 紀澤 after his 17th birthday, first published as part of Zeng's collected writings in 1879, became separately available in popular editions up until the present; short extracts from them along with other prose by Zeng Guofan were compiled by Liang Qichao 梁啟超 in 1927, and reprinted as recently as 1985.<sup>55</sup> The posthumously published collection of letters to his natural son by Lord Chesterfield (1694–1773) is a close but worldlier cousin.<sup>56</sup>

Women in Imperial China also exchanged letters with lovers, relatives and friends, although comparatively little of their correspondence was preserved.<sup>57</sup> One Song writer expressed pleasure that his wife was literate enough to write to him; a son was overjoyed at a letter from his mother.<sup>58</sup> Matchmaking was conducted through the exchange of letters of proposal and acceptance.<sup>59</sup> The “cult of qing 情” [feeling, emotion, love] in the late Ming provided a foothold in the literary world for women.<sup>60</sup>

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55 Liu, Kwang-Ching, “Education for Its Own Sake: Notes on Tseng Kuo-fan's Family Letters,” in *Education and Society in Late Imperial China, 1600-1900*, edited by Benjamin A. Elman and Alexander Woodside (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 76-108.

56 See Saintsbury, *A Letter Book*, pp. 28-31; M. Lincoln Schuster, ed., *A Treasury of the World's Great Letters* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1940), pp. 125-27.

57 See Ellen Widmer, “The Epistolary World of Female Talent in Seventeenth Century China,” *Late Imperial China*, vol. 10 no. 2 (1989), pp. 1-43; and Yu-Yin Cheng, “Letters by Women of the Ming-Qing Period,” in *Under Confucian Eyes: Writings on Gender in Chinese History*, edited by Susan Mann and Yu-Yin Cheng (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), pp. 169-77.

58 Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *The Inner Quarters: Marriage and the Lives of Chinese Women in the Sung Period* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 158, 201.

59 Ebrey, *The Inner Quarters*, pp. 5-6, 85-86.

60 Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in 17th Century China*

Personal letters were praised for attributes such as spontaneity and sincerity, and since women were thought to have a special affinity with both qualities, their education having been spared the distortions of the examination system, they were regarded as naturally skilled in letter-writing.<sup>61</sup>

Amid this enthusiasm for circulating authentic personal letters in the public realm, the absence of love-letters is notable: whether one-sided or as an exchange, written by men or by women, and circulated posthumously or during their lifetimes, the collection and publication of love-letters was a marginal activity in premodern China.<sup>62</sup> Yet love-letters undoubtedly played an important role in people's lives, as shown in two exchanges which although of dubious authenticity nevertheless have an ancient lineage as literary texts.<sup>63</sup> Another example, apparently fictional but possibly taken from life, is from the famous Tang romance, Yuan Zhen's 元慎 "Yingying zhuan 鶯鶯傳" [The story of Yingying]. In this story, which is thought to be autobiographical, the lovers start their affair by exchanging letters in the form of poems, carried by her maid; later, when they are separated, he writes to her in prose and she responds with a long letter also in prose; he shows the

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(Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), p. 52. Susan Mann and Yu-Yin Cheng also note that prose writing by women in Ming and Qing China that survives "generally takes the form of short prefaces, letters, and diaries," and that "Women are far more visible in personal, intimate, homely, or local texts than they are in texts produced by the imperial scholarly apparatus, or in formal 'official' prose"; see "Introduction," in *Under Confucian Eyes*, p. 4. Cf. Saintsbury, *A Letter Book*, p. 29.

61 Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, pp. 72-112.

62 See Kathryn Lowry, trans. and preface, "Personal Letters in Seventeenth-Century Epistolary Guides," in *Under Confucian Eyes*, pp. 156-67.

63 The first set of love-letters, attributed to the Han poet Sima Xiangru 司馬相如 and his wife Zhuo Wenjun 卓文君, is famous; the second, between an official, Qin Jia 秦嘉, and his wife Xu Shu 徐淑, is less well-known; both are fully discussed in Chung, "A Study of the 'Shu,'" pp. 131-35, 643-73.

letter to his friends, concluding that her beauty and therefore her unstable temperament makes her unsuitable to be his wife.<sup>64</sup> The term *qingshu* 情書 [love-letter] in its current sense appears in reported speech in a collection of short fiction by Feng Menglong; in Li Yu's fiction, unmarried as well as married couples exchanged letters, not necessarily by post but without difficulty.<sup>65</sup> Inserted love-letters was common both as a plot device to bring together or to separate lovers, and also as a means whereby the lovers' thoughts and emotions are revealed.

### Manuals, collections and anthologies

The appearance of letter manuals are an obvious reminder that not all letters are spontaneous, or indeed are meant to be. Manuals gave guidance not only on the complex conventions observed in traditional letter-writing, both formal and informal, but were also a guide to manners. "Like the epistolary novels which followed them, manuals often presented complex situations and then produced the tonally subtle and morally impeccable responses appropriate to them."<sup>66</sup>

In Europe, manuals for letter-writing have been popular from the 16th century to the present day.<sup>67</sup> Erasmus (c. 1467–1536) compiled *De conscribendis epistolis* in 1522 to replace outdated advice; Justus Lipsius (1547–1606) compiled his influential manual, *Epistolica Institutio*, in

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64 Translated in *Anthology of Chinese Literature*, compiled and edited by Cyril Birch, pp. 302-10, and in *An Anthology of Chinese Literature*, edited and translated by Stephen Owen, pp. 540-49.

65 See, for instance, "A Tower for the Summer Heat," in Li Yu's collection of the same name, translated with a preface by Patrick Hanan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), pp. 3-39.

66 Perry, *Women, Letters, and the Novel*, p. 87.

67 See Roger Chartier, Alain Boureau and Cecile Dauphin, *Correspondence: Models of Letter-Writing from the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997).

1591.<sup>68</sup> Alongside these, but more informally, inserted letters in literary works such as plays by Shakespeare (1564–1616) could also serve as models for letter-writing.<sup>69</sup>

From manuals it was only a short step to compilations of genuine or made-up letters. Collections and anthologies of apparently authentic but anonymous love-letters, written in vernacular prose by women but edited and published by men, became fashionable in 17th century France. *Lettres portugaises* (1669), believed by readers at the time to be the authentic love-letters of a despairing Portuguese nun to her mostly indifferent lover, was the most widely read and imitated.<sup>70</sup> The existence of manuals, collections and anthologies opened discourse on distinctions between fictional and authentic letters, encouraging but simultaneously subverting the notion that love-letters (or letters in general) were invariably (or ideally) a spontaneous outflow of emotion and a vehicle for one's most private thoughts and feelings.

The belief that women were by nature suited to be letter-writers was in common currency in 17th century Europe, but it was not entirely clear what this "women's nature" consisted of; some male readers cast doubt on the authenticity of *Lettres portugaises* on the grounds that no woman could express herself so powerfully. They were right but not necessarily for the right reasons. A counter-example is furnished by a

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68 Justi Lipsi, *Principles of Letter-writing: A Bilingual Text of Justi Lipsi, Epistolica Institutio*, edited and translated by R. V. Young and M. Thomas Hester (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996).

69 Lynne Magnusson, *Shakespeare and Social Dialogue: Dramatic Language and Elizabethan Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

70 Authorship attributed to Gabriel de Laverge; translated as *The Love Letters of a Portuguese Nun* by Guido Waldman (London: Harvill, 1996); see also Katherine A. Jensen, "Male Models of Feminine Epistolarity; or, How to Write Like a Woman in Seventeenth-Century France," in Goldsmith, *Writing the Female Voice*, pp. 25-45, and Goldsmith, "Authority, Authenticity, and the Publication of Letters by Women," in Goldsmith, pp. 46-59.

reference in Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley* (1849) to "the equally mad letters of Mrs Elizabeth Rowe from the Dead to the Living." Elizabeth Rowe (1674–1737) was a non-conformist religious poet and author, widely admired in her time and translated into French and German. In 1728 she published *Friendship in Death, in Twenty Letters from the Dead to the Living*, which was reprinted throughout the 18th century, on the immortality of the soul.

The association between women and letters was partly due to the restrictions on women's movements outside their homes. "Letters were an important line of communication with the outside world at this time when women led rather cloistered lives..... So women generally stayed at home writing letters which were at once a way of being involved with the world while keeping it at a respectable arm's length..... Letters were the perfect vehicle for women's highly developed art of pleasing, for in writing letters it is possible to tailor a self on paper to suit the expectations and desires of the audience. This is why they were used not only to transmit conventional messages, but also to maintain the proper distance in more ticklish matters..... Similarly, letters were the place to have skirmishes with lovers and suitors, for they drew the battle lines at a safe remove from the actual person of the modest woman."<sup>71</sup>

Another reason was thought to lie in the nature of letter-writing: "The unornamented prose style thought appropriate to letters was simultaneously marked as the mode suitable for writing or speaking the truth..... Furthermore, it was claimed that women had a particular propensity for such unpretentious prose."<sup>72</sup> The supposed natural proficiency of women in informal writing was in turn given support by the appearance of such works by women in the 18th century.<sup>73</sup>

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71 Perry, *Women, Letters, and the Novel*, pp. 69-70.

72 *Ibid.*, pp. 75-76.

73 Jagodzinski, *Privacy and Print*, pp. 77; George Saintsbury, *A Letter Book*, pp. 12, 28-29;

In China, letter manuals have an even more ancient history, dating back to the 3rd century.<sup>74</sup> The first comprehensive work of literary criticism, *Wen xin diao long* 文心雕龍, includes examples of epistolary prose,<sup>75</sup> and the earliest anthology of literature, *Wen xuan*, also includes a section on letters.<sup>76</sup> The standing of letters as a literary genre was enhanced by the publication of anthologies towards the end of the 16th century.<sup>77</sup> Li Yu's first effort as a literary compiler was *Chidu chuzheng* 尺牘初徵 [A first compilation of letters], which has a preface dated 1660; it concentrates on letters from the early Qing and includes letters written to Li Yu in praise of his early fiction and drama.<sup>78</sup> Guides for personal and intimate letters also appeared in the 17th century, providing models for exchanges of letters by husbands and wives and between lovers.<sup>79</sup>

The earliest surviving collection of letters by women is in the last volume in the anthology series *Chidu xin yu chu bian* 尺牘新語初編 [New examples of epistolary writing, first collection] (1663), *Chidu xin yu er*

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George Steiner, "The Distribution of Discourse," in *George Steiner: A Reader* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), pp. 345-68, esp. pp. 353-55.

74 Zhou Yiliang 周一良 and Zhao Heping 趙和平, *Tang Wudai shuyi yanjiu* 唐五代書儀研究 (Beijing: Chungguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1995), p. 1; see also Patricia Ebrey, "T' ang Guides to Verbal Etiquette," in *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, vol. 45 no. 2 (1985), pp. 581-613.

75 Liu Hsieh, *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*, translated and annotated by Vincent Yu-chung Shih (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1987), p. 279.

76 For a useful annotated selection of the letters in *Wen xuan*, see Huang Baozhen 黃保真, comp., *Gudai wenren shuxin jinghua* 古代文人書信精華 (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1992).

77 David Pattinson, "Zhou Lianggong and chidu xinzhao: Genre and Political Marginalisation in the Ming-Qing Transition," in *East Asian History*, no. 20 (December 2000), pp. 61-82, see p. 62; Widmer, "The Epistolary World of Female Talent," p. 4. See also Patrick Hanan, *The Invention of Li Yu*, pp. 185-86 and Andrew H. Plaks, *The Four Masterworks of the Ming Novel* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1987), pp. 34-35.

78 Patrick Hanan, *The Invention of Li Yu*, pp. 24-25.

79 Lowry, "Personal Letters in Seventeenth-Century Epistolary Guides,".

bian 尺牘新語二編[New examples of epistolary writing, second collection] (1667) and Chidu xin yu guang bian 尺牘新語廣編[New examples of epistolary writing, expanded collection] (1668), which between them contain over a thousand letters.<sup>80</sup> The letters in the first and second volumes are almost all by male writers, either about or to women; the third volume is largely by women to other women or to men; the editors and publishers of all three volumes were male.<sup>81</sup> Most of the letters in the first volume had already been published, but the second and third were largely comprised of letters collected by the editors or submitted by the writers. There is no evidence for the authenticity of the letters (i. e. who submitted them and under what circumstances), but there is no reason to believe that the letters by women were originally intended for publication. The women letter-writers are mostly from the gentry class, but courtesans and courtesans-turned-concubines are also represented. Many of the letters by women to women are to carry out the business of poetry clubs and publication.<sup>82</sup> These networking exchanges sometimes took place in the form of poems rather than letters,<sup>83</sup> possibly because letters in prose were not perceived as a major literary form even for women. Of twelve major anthologies of women's writings from the 17th and 18th century, only one includes letters: *Gūjin nushi* 古今女史[Lady scholars past and present], compiled by the commercial publisher Zhao Shijie 趙世杰 in 1628.<sup>84</sup>

The association of letters with privacy in premodern China was recognised without necessarily being articulated or invariably observed. In exile in Huizhou, Su Shi asked his friends not to show his letters to

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80 Widmer, "The Epistolary World of Female Talent in Seventeenth Century China", p. 3.

81 Ibid., p. 5.

82 Ibid., pp. 17-18.

83 Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, p. 15.

84 Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, p. 60.



anyone else (the implication being that letters are for private expression but some circulation might be expected unless otherwise requested), although his motive was not to preserve his personal privacy but to avoid political trouble.<sup>85</sup> The stronger evidence is negative: the absence of personal letters, especially love-letters, from the collected works of literary and other public figures. In a recent anthology of premodern letters, Huang Baozhen pays attention to their “gexing 個性” [personal or individual nature] and describes them writings which “tanji renmen xinling de shen du 探及人們心靈的深度” [reach to deep places of people’s hearts and souls].<sup>86</sup> Overall the selection is based on the letters’ literary and historical significance, but Li Shangyin’s 李商隱 letters are praised for their gexing, and some of the family letters show strong personal emotion.<sup>87</sup> The nearest to what could be called a love-letter in this anthology is the last item, a letter from Liang Qichao to his wife Li Huixian 李惠仙. Written from Hawai’i in 1900 on a voyage to the U. S., Liang talks frankly to her about falling in love with his young female interpreter, Huizhen 蕙珍.

Personal letters of all kinds from earlier times catch the public interest, including letters unearthed from family archives by people whose lives are otherwise obscure, and letters that are clearly spontaneous as well as those that read as if copied from a draft.<sup>88</sup> Their appeal is explained by Goethe: “What is general takes no finding, thrusts itself upon us, maintains and propagates itself. We make use of it, but we do not

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85 Ronald C. Egan, *Words, Image, and Deed in the Life of Su Shi* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), p. 216.

86 Preface to Huang Baozhen, comp., *Gudai wenren shuxin jinghua*. The preface is dated 1988, and the delay before publication might be related to the political repression which followed the protest movements of 1989.

87 Huang, *Gudai wenren shuxin jinghua*, pp. 67, 117-19, 158.

88 For examples of love-letters by obscure or anonymous writers, see Fraser, *Love Letters*, and Hamilton and Soames, *Intimate Letters*.

love it. We love only the individual; hence our great joy in addresses, confessions, memoirs, letters and anecdotes of the departed, even if they were people of no importance.”<sup>89</sup> Other writers who took pleasure in reading old letters and dairies include Virginia Woolf, Zhou Zuoren 周作人 and Yu Dafu 郁達夫.<sup>90</sup>

Most commentators see this as a harmless form of gratification: “In reading other people’s published letters, we seek reassurance not only about the stability of a continuous self but about the possibility of intimacy, of fruitful human exchange between members of the same sex as well as between men and women..... Despite the objectification involved in reading letters, the text, by offering vicarious participation in a harmless simulacrum of gossip, provides comfort: as gossip does.”<sup>91</sup>

Put less kindly, unintended readers are impelled by curiosity, especially when the senders and/or recipients are public figures. Some third-party readers, however, are suspicious of the sincerity of professional writers or celebrities, and prefer the naive charm of love-letters by the humble and obscure.<sup>92</sup> Invited to witness the pretence of transgressed privacy, such readers value more authentic invasions.

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89 Cited in the Introduction by W. H. Bruford to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Letters from Goethe*, translated by M. von Herzfeld and C. Melvil Sym (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1957), p. xxiii.

90 Virginia Woolf, *A Change of Perspective*, p. 69; Zhou Zuoren, “Riji yu chidu 日記與尺牘,” [Diaries and correspondence] in *Zhitang shuhua 知堂書話* (Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 1986), vol. 1, pp. 76-79; Yu Dafu, “Riji wenxue 日記文學” [Diary literature] and “Zai tan riji 再談日記,” [More on diaries] in *Yu Dafu wen ji 郁達夫文集* (Hong Kong: Sanlian shudian, 1982), vol. 5, pp. 261-67 and vol. 7, pp. 263-65.

91 Patricia Mayer Spack, *Gossip* (New York: Knopf, 1985), pp. 77-78. For the relationship between letters, esp. published letters, and gossip, see pp. 69-91.

92 Aldous Huxley found love-letters “commonplace” except for an anonymous suicide note he read in the newspaper; quoted in Fraser, *Love Letters*, p. xx.

## Imagined letters

From manuals, collections and anthologies it was only another short step to the creation of epistolary literature. Even more than anthologies, such works tease readers with revelations of what appear to be essentially private experiences, preferably those of the author or the author's friends or acquaintances. Epistolary fiction in premodern China was never a major genre, although, as noted above, the inserted love-letter was a common device whose origins can be found at least as early as 2nd-century yuefu 樂府<sup>93</sup> and the 5th-century Shi shuo xin yu 世說新語 [New stories and tales of the times], and some 17th-century letter manuals also show a close affinity with epistolary fiction.<sup>94</sup>

The first work of literature composed entirely in letter form was *Heroides*, a series of fifteen letters in verse by Ovid purporting to be written by women lamenting their seduction, betrayal or abandonment.<sup>95</sup> It had no obvious successor,<sup>96</sup> however, and the outpouring of epistolary fiction in Europe in the 18th century is an extraordinary event in the history of letters. Novel-writing was considered an unseemly occupation for a woman, but letters were the one kind of writing that women were supposed to do well, and published letters and epistolary fiction by women began to appear in England as early as the 17th century.<sup>97</sup> The earliest example in English is Aphra Benn's *Love-Letters Between a Nobleman*

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93 For an example, see Owen, *Anthology of Chinese Literature*, p. 258.

94 Lowry, "Personal Letters in Seventeenth-Century Epistolary Manuals," pp. 158-160.

95 See Ovid in *Six Volumes* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), translated by Grant Showerman, pp. 1-311. For a general discussion see Howard Jacobson, *Ovid's Heroides* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1974); for its place in epistolary literature, see Kauffman, *Discourses of Desire*, pp. 17-18, 30-61. See also the poetical letters, *Epistulae*, by Horace (65-8BC).

96 Ted Hughes's *Birthday Letters* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998) is a very remote descendant: truly autobiographical, not letters.

97 Perry, *Women, Letters, and the Novel*, p. 68.

and *His Sister*, based on a true-life elopement and published anonymously in 1684.<sup>98</sup> Inspired by *Lettres portugaises*, Benn's *Love-Letters* was erotic, scandalous, and immensely successful, and was followed by two further volumes.<sup>99</sup>

Publishers and booksellers were quick to see the possibilities of the new form. "The revelatory possibilities of private letters were certainly promoted by publishers of epistolary fiction, who were at great pains to assure their audience that the letters being printed were from real people undergoing real stresses, and that the evidence had not been prepared for public eyes. Advertisements and Prefaces for letter novels tended to stress the authenticity and morality of the works: they could be valued as true life lessons."<sup>100</sup> "Booksellers often advertised the fact that a set of letters had not been intended for publication because privacy, like virginity, invites violation. They traded on the implication that letters could give a more unguarded, natural picture of a life than memoirs which were written with a public audience in mind."<sup>101</sup> "In fact all these novels which begin with the startled discovery of a heap of papers seem too literary and too obvious for our twentieth-century minds, used to more sophisticated tricks of realism. But according to at least one literary historian, readers in those days did believe that what they read was authentic."<sup>102</sup>

Novels such as *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded* (1740–41) and *Clarissa* (1747–48) by Samuel Richardson,<sup>103</sup> *Julie, ou la Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761)

98 Aphra Behn, *Love Letters between a Nobleman and His Sister* (London: Virago Press, 1987).

99 Janet Todd, *The Secret Life of Aphra Behn* (London: André Deutsch, 1996), pp. 302-11.

100 Perry, *Women, Letters, and the Novel*, p. 72.

101 Perry, *Women, Letters, and the Novel*, p. 70.

102 Perry, *Women, Letters, and the Novel*, p. 73.

103 See Kauffman, *Discourses of Desire*, pp. 119-157, and James Carson, "Narrative Cross-Dressing and the Critique of Authorship in the Novels of Richardson," in Goldsmith,

by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* (1774; rev. ed. 1787) by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and *Les Liaisons dangereuses* (1782) by Choderlos de Laclos<sup>104</sup> crossed national borders, reaching unprecedentedly large audiences. These famous works are by male writers, and book buyers at the time were also mainly men; but women were among the readers, and their lives were often the centre of the story.<sup>105</sup> The novels dwell on the perils of courtship, and the letters are a device to focus the reader's attention on the emotions and ideas held by the letter-writers. Despite this common ground, the differences between the novels show the flexibility of the format.

*Clarissa* is an exemplar of a "new, subjective, individual and private orientation" in 18th century life and literature;<sup>106</sup> the letters are the reader's key to the characters' private worlds. Richardson, who described himself as merely the Editor of the correspondence, was fully aware of the links between letters and the family, courtship and privacy, as shown in the novel's long subtitle: *Clarissa, or, the History of a Young Lady: Comprehending the Most Important Concerns of Private Life, And particularly showing The Distress That May Attend the Misconduct Both of Parents and Children, in Relation to Marriage*. The letters present the genuine emotions of the virtuous and the deceit practised by the wicked alike; by implication, readers are warned that epistolary passion no matter how forcefully or piteously expressed is no guarantee of good faith.

Richardson was also the author of a manual for letter-writing with

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Writing the Female Voice, pp. 95-113.

104 Susan K. Jackson, "In Search of a Female Voice: *Les Liaisons dangereuses*," in Goldsmith, *Writing the Female Voice*, pp. 154-71.

105 Perry, *Women, Letters, and the Novel*, pp. ix-xiii & 16-21.

106 Ian Watts, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (London: Pimlico, 2000), p. 176; see also Christina Marsden Gillis, *The Paradox of Privacy: Epistolary Form in Clarissa* (Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1984).

examples composed by him of letters for all occasions; it offered its readers a good deal more than instructions on style.<sup>107</sup> Its subtitle runs, *Letters Written To and For Particular Friends on the Most Important Occasions. Directing not only the Requisite Style and Forms To Be Observed in Writing FAMILIAR LETTERS; But How to Think and Act Justly and Prudently in the Common Concerns of Human Life*. Epistolary fiction could also be seen as an informal education for those (like most women) whose opportunities for formal schooling were limited.

On the continent, Rousseau's *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse* was the first major success of the genre, running to 72 editions before 1800.<sup>108</sup> Opinion was nevertheless mixed: "Although reaction from some quarters was unfavourable, even bitterly hostile, *La nouvelle Héloïse* was an immediate, unmatched popular success ..... In general, the intellectual élite found the novel offensive to taste and morality..... None of these strictures, however merited, affected the vast reading public. They were as touched and enraptured by the long sermons as by the sentimentality. Both appealed to the aspect of the times that delighted in Richardson's novel and the *comédie larmoyante*..... For most readers Rousseau touched the heart and preached the morality of the heart. He was deluged with letters. A few were hostile (he was a corrupter of morals), most were favourable, many were worshipping."<sup>109</sup> Full-bodied cynicism is the main characteristic of *Les Liaisons dangereuses*; like its inspiration, *Clarissa*, it is multi-voiced, but unlike *Clarissa*, according to its author in the voice of "Editor," "almost all of the sentiments here expressed are feigned or dissimulated".<sup>110</sup>

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107 Frank Kermode and Anita Kermode, eds., *The Oxford Book of Letters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 103-8; Perry, *Women, Letters, and the Novel*, pp. 9, 88.

108 Lester G. Crocker, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: The Prophetic Voice (1758-1778)* (New York: Macmillan, 1973), pp. 52-53.

109 Crocker, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, pp. 99-101.

110 Choderlos de Laclos, *Les Liaisons dangereuses*, translated with an introduction by

A sense of exchange is absent from *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers*: the letters are mostly from Werther to his silent friend Wilhelm, there is no villain, and an Editor is obliged to step in to carry the narrative to its tragic end; in this case, the epistolary form brings out the nature of “a one-sided and lonely communication.”<sup>111</sup> Rather awkwardly, it is also the vehicle for Werther’s musings on literature, philosophy and life.

The century closed with another scandalous novel by a woman writer, Mary Hays’ *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796); another true-life story, this one was based on the author’s adulterous love-affair and incorporated her own love-letters.<sup>112</sup> The delicate balance between fiction and reality and between feigned and true emotion contributed to its huge popularity.<sup>113</sup>

Along with their decline in the rituals of daily life, personal letters have become a topos in contemporary English fiction as well as a compositional device. *Possession: A Romance* by A. S. Byatt concerns the discovery and publication of love-letters between two Victorian writers by contemporary literary scholars.<sup>114</sup> It has frequent reference to invasion of the writers’ privacy, which the writers themselves and their relatives wished to preserve against biographers; but the narrative does not give much weight to the writers’ express wishes, compared with the scholars’ career needs and their curiosity. The scholars, on the other

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Richard Aldington (London: Folio Society, 1962), p. 56. As well as providing an “Editor’s Preface,” the author also writes a “Publisher’s Note” reminding readers that the text is “only a Novel” (p. 53).

111 *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, translated with an introduction and notes by Michael Hulse (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1989), p. 5.

112 Todd, *Mary Wollstonecraft*, pp. 368-68, 410-11.

113 For a brief survey of the many functions of letters in epistolary fiction, see Spack, *Gossip*, pp. 163-64.

114 A. S. Byatt, *Possession: A Romance* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1990).

hand, cannot control the way the letters influence their own lives. Graham Swift's *Ever After* concerns the competition between two Cambridge scholars over the mid-19th century "Pearce manuscripts," a love-letter and notebooks described by the media-friendly rival of the manuscripts' owner as "an historical document of enormous value—a testimony to the effects on a private life of ideas that shook the world"; the letter and notebooks are a symbol of the victory of the intellect over love, and in a last attempt to reverse the balance, the owner yields them to his rival.<sup>115</sup>

The close affinity between love-letters and fiction is persuasively argued by the Dutch novelist Helga Ruebsamen, who describes how she became aware of the fictionality of love-letters as a young girl when she wrote them on behalf of her brother: in a switch on *Cyrano de Bergerac*, the sentiment was genuine, the expression was borrowed.<sup>116</sup> As Ruebsamen notes, letter-writers construct imaginary figures of both lover and beloved: letters are a means for creating an exclusive imaginary world where lover and beloved share pain and pleasure. In this imaginary world, privacy is absolute.

Comparing both traditions, we can see that the relationship between letters and privacy has never been clear-cut in China or Europe. There is a wide range of behaviour in regard to whether letters were intended for private, semi-public or public circulation by the author, and in the propensity of the recipient to regard them as private or public. Love-letters are no exception in these transactions. Privacy was not an absolute attribute of letters, and the values given to privacy were variable, decreasing with distance in time, relationship and acquaintance.

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115 Graham Swift, *Ever After* (London: Picador, 1992), p. 48.

116 Interview with Helga Ruebsamen, "Love-Letters as Fiction," in NIAS Newsletter, Spring 2001, pp. 27-30.



Nevertheless, it is also evident that there was also a pervasive sense of privacy about letters, especially love-letters, so that letters published by the author(s), close family members or friends were almost invariably edited before publication. An alternative destination to published letters was epistolary fiction, where literary form could provide the necessary distance between the author and the ultimate reader.

## Part II: Love-letters in Republican China

Buwei Yang Chao, writing to her fiance Yuen Ren Chao in 1921, was disconcerted to discover that her letters to him were opened by his aunt in whose home he was staying: “I had forgotten that, according to the old custom, anybody in a family could open almost anybody else’s letters.” Chao’s assumption shows that along with other changes in the relationship between individuals and the family unit, privacy was being transformed from being the property of a family to becoming the property of single individuals or individual couples. In this context, it may be helpful to recall that was not unknown in early 20th century England for the breakfast post to be inspected by the father before being passed to other members of the family, but it would be rare for other family members to read each others’ letters without permission. Letters between friends, especially literary figures, were frequently passed around and even published without the consent of the author, but letter-writers were known to object to this practice. Luo Jialun 羅家倫 rebuked his fiancée Zhang Weizhen 張薇貞 for having shown his letters to others and threatened not to write to her again; he may have been teasing, but that letter was in fact almost the end of their correspondence while he was in the U. S. <sup>117</sup>

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117 Luo Jialun, letter of 10 February 1922, reprinted in Liu Mei qing si xin shi he zagan 留美情思 信、詩和雜感, [translated as “Writings From The Heart: Lo Chia-luen in the United States (1920-1923)”], edited by Jiu-Fong Lo Chang 玖芳羅張 [Luo Jiu fang],

The modern postal service in China dates back to the establishment of the Imperial Post in 1896 as a department within the Maritime Customs Service; like the Customs, it was staffed at both senior and junior levels by foreigners. In 1911 the Imperial Post came under the Ministry of Posts and Communications, renamed the Ministry of Communications in 1912. China joined the Universal Postal Union in 1914. It took some time for the Chinese Post Office to establish a domestic monopoly: the official courier service ceased to exist in 1921, although some foreign firms continued to operate illegally up to 1923.<sup>118</sup> Mail deliveries in Peking and other major cities in the 1920s and 1930s were frequent, regular and cheap. In mid-1930s Shanghai, there were 296 pillar boxes and 80 letter boxes to put the mail in, and 880 postmen to make deliveries: six a day on weekdays and three a day on Sundays and holidays.<sup>119</sup> The uniform domestic letter rate was 5 cents, payable by the sender. Domestic airmail was introduced in 1929. Official mail surveillance was not set up until 1933. In contemporary writings there appears to be little sense of government censorship of letters in passage before the 1930s, although as Lu Xun 魯迅 noted in 1932 the possession of letters from people under government surveillance caused trouble to the recipients. On the other hand, family members or institutions such as schools were known to open personal letters or to withhold them.<sup>120</sup>

The firm Huiwentang shuju 會文堂書局 in Shanghai specialised in publishing manuals for letter-writing of all kinds in the early Republican period: the great majority, including business letters, were still in Clas-

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Tianwai jikan 天外季刊 [Outer Sky Journal], vol. 9 (January 1999), pp. 32-34.

118 Chu Chia-hua [Zhu Jiahua], *China's Postal and Communications Services* (London: Kegan Paul, 1937), pp. 45-48.

119 Chu, *China's Postal and Communications Services*, p. 34.

120 Raoul David Findeisen, "From Literature to Love: Glory and decline of the love-letter genre," in Michel Hockx, ed., *The Literary Field of Twentieth-Century China* (Richmond:

sical Chinese but one volume was for commercial letters in the vernacular. One of the titles, *Zengguang xie xin bi du* 增廣窺信必讀 [Expanded essential reader for letter writing] offered ten categories of letter models, excluding love-letters but including letters to husbands and wives under the heading “family letters.”<sup>121</sup> A manual claiming to offer advice and models for courtship by letters along European and American lines was published in 1915 under the title *Seqing chidu* 色情尺牘 [Passionate letters].<sup>122</sup> Another manual, entitled *Qingshu* 情書 [Love-letters], was advertised in *Xinwen bao* 新聞報 on August 8, 1918,<sup>123</sup> and Zhou Shoujuan 周瘦鵑 (1894–1968) wrote a series of essays entitled “*Qingshu hua* 情書話” [A few words on love-letters] which appeared in 1919.<sup>124</sup> Around the same time, the novelist Xu Zhenya 徐枕亞 (1889–1937) compiled and published a volume of model love-letters called *Hua yue chidu* 花月尺牘 [Flower and moon letters].<sup>125</sup>

Epistolary fiction in China took form in the early twentieth century. First-person narration was introduced in 1908, and inserted or framing letters and diaries soon followed. The popular novel *Yu li hun* 玉梨魂 [Jade pear spirit] by Xu Zhenya, published first in 1912 in the magazine

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Curzon Press, 1999), pp. 79-112, 99.

121 Yuan Baoshan, comp., *Zengguang xie xin bi du* (Shanghai: Huiwentang shuju, 1911). I am indebted to John Moffett to drawing this book to my attention.

122 Wu Ansun, *Seqing chidu* [Passionate letters] (Shanghai: Zhiqun shuju 知群書局, 1915), as described by Findeisen, p. 84.

123 Chen Jianhua, “Theatricality and Early Republican Subjectivity: Zhou Shoujuan’s Pillow Talk ‘In the Nine-flower Curtain’,” unpublished paper presented at the conference on “The Modern Chinese Literary Essay: Defining the Chinese Self in the 20th Century,” Achern, 2000; cited with permission.

124 Chen Jianhua, “Theatricality and Early Republican Subjectivity”.

125 The reprint does not provide the date of publication; see *Guangwen bianyi suo* 廣文編譯所, ed., *Zhongguo jindai xiaoshuo shiliao huibian* 中國近代小說史料彙編, vol. 9 (Taipei: Guangwen shuju, 1980). Cited in Chen Jianhua, “Theatricality and Early Republican Subjectivity”.

where he worked as editor and in book form in 1914, incorporated love-letters in its storyline.<sup>126</sup> An early example of a short story in diary form is “Feilai zhi riji 飛來之日記” [An unexpected diary] by Bao Tianxiao 包天笑 (1876–1973), published in *Zhonghua xiaoshuo jie* 中華小說界 [The world of Chinese fiction] in 1915.<sup>127</sup> Bao Tianxiao also wrote a short story in epistolary form, “Ming hong 冥鴻” [A letter from the underworld] in 1915. Inserted letters appear in Zhou Shoujuan’s vernacular short story, “Jiu hua zhang li 九花幃裏” [In the nine-flower curtain], published in *Xiaoshuo huabao* 小說畫報 [Fiction pictorial], a monthly fiction magazine edited by Bao Tianxiao, in 1917; it blends several kinds of first-person narratives, including dairies, love-letters, monologues and fictional autobiography.<sup>128</sup> The formal experimentation shown in these works must have stirred readers’ interest, but there appears to be comparatively little to suggest that they were being permitted access to the private thoughts and emotions of the authors as distinct from the characters.

The new literary movement of the late 1910s inspired a new kind of epistolary fiction. Lu Xun’s first vernacular short story, written in diary form, along with his other early fiction, showed how a first-person narrator could deflect interest away from the apparent subject towards the narrator’s own predicament. In contrast, the short stories in the form of letters (or short stories composed largely of inserted letters) published in the 1920s directed readers’ attention to the private thoughts and feelings of the writing subject: mostly written by young women, they contained

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126 E. Perry Link, *Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies: Popular Fiction in Early Twentieth-Century Chinese Cities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), pp. 49-51.

127 See Jana Horská, “The Literary Diary in Early Twentieth-Century China: the Expansion of Fiction to Non-Literary Writing,” unpublished paper (2000), cited with the author’s permission.

128 The story appeared in *Xiaoshuo huabao*, vol. 1 no. 6 (June 1917). Cited in Chen Jianhua, “Theatricality and Early Republican Subjectivity”.

expressions of friendship and love for other young women, intimate reflections on life and its travails, determination to choose one's own husband, and disillusionment following marriage based on free choice. The complicated plots typical of Western or late Qing epistolary fiction, involving the courtship or seduction of a woman by a man or the desertion of a woman by her lover, are relatively rare, and the interplay between virtue and wickedness in *Clarissa* is absent.<sup>129</sup> *Werther* is a more obvious model (although at least one example predates the publication of Guo Moruo's 郭沫若 translation<sup>130</sup>) in its combination of passionate, mostly sorrowful emotions and subjective musings on the course of human life. Since *Werther* in its authorship, protagonist, sentiments and Chinese translator is indisputably male, it is curious that fiction in the form of, or incorporating, letters and diaries was at first associated primarily with women writers in China. The birthplace of the new epistolary fiction was Peking Women's Normal College, where the student group in the early 1920s included Huang Luyin 黃廬隱, Shi Pingmei 石評

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129 Perry comments that epistolary fiction "always works according to a formula: two or more people, separated by an obstruction....., are forced to maintain their relationship through letters" (*Women, Letters, and the Novel*, p. 93); but this formula does not always apply in the Chinese variant of the 1920s and 1930s.

130 Terry Siu-han Yip regards Guo Moruo's translation of *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* as the starting-point for epistolary fiction in China, but this translation was not published until after Huang Luyin's "Yi feng xin 一封信" (see below); see Terry Siu-han Yip, "The Reception of *Werther* and the Rise of the Epistolary Novel in China," *Tamkam Review*, vol. XXII no. 1, 2, 3, 4 (Autumn 1991–Summer 1992), pp. 287-304, 289-91. Nevertheless Huang Luyin may have seen an earlier partial translation into Chinese or a version in English or German. For another reading of "Huo ren de beiai 或人的悲哀" see Wendy Larson, "Female Subjectivity and Gender Relations: The Early Stories of Lu Yin and Bing Xin," in *Politics, Ideology, and Literary Discourse in Modern China: Theoretical Interventions and Cultural Critique*, edited by Liu Kang and Xiaobing Tang (Durham: Duke University Press, N. C., 1993), pp. 124-143, and Larson, *Women and Writing in Modern China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), pp. 124-126.

梅, Feng Yuanjun 馮沅君, Lu Xiuzhen 陸秀珍 and Su Xuelin 蘇雪林.<sup>131</sup>

The epistolary stories by Huang Luyin (1899–1934), published in *Xiaoshuo yuebao* 小說月報 [Short Story Monthly] between 1921 and 1925, were most influential. Huang Luyin became a student at Peking Women's Normal College in 1919; she was already an avid reader of romantic fiction such as *Jade Pear Spirit*.<sup>132</sup> The title of her first effort, “Yi feng xin 一封信” [A letter] (1921), directs the reader immediately to the central plot device. The story also has a slender first-person frame consisting of two paragraphs at the beginning, one in the middle and another two at the end. The letter is addressed to the narrator's friend, Wang Yixi, from another friend, Qingyi: the narrator reads it aloud to Wang and the other young women gathered at Wang's home. The letter tells how a bright, intelligent daughter of her family servant dies after a beating when she is taken as a concubine by a rural landlord; although story-telling is awkward within the confines of a letter, the device allows the focus to be shared between the girl's tragic fate and the sorrow expressed by the letter-writer, the narrator and their friends. Although there is no letter exchange, the portrayal of the letter's impact and its circulation among friends are innovative touches.<sup>133</sup>

The novella “Haibin guren 海濱故人” [Seaside friends] (1925), Huang Luyin's best known story, also consists largely of inserted letters between young women on the impossibility of finding personal fulfilment or love

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131 Amy D. Dooling and Kristina M. Torgeson, eds, *Writing Women in Modern China: An Anthology of Women's Literature from the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), pp. 101-03, 115-17, 135-38, 157-59, 197-99.

132 Lu Jun 陸君 ed., *Jing shi hai su cai nü qing* Luyin debuliao yüan 驚世駭俗才女情：廬隱得不了緣 [The shockingly unconventional passions of a female genius: Luyin's unending fate] (Chengdu: Sichuan wenyi chubanshe, 1995), pp. 15-19.

133 “Yi feng xin” [A letter], in *Xiaoshuo yuebao*, vol. 12 no. 6 (June 1921), pp. 4-5; reprinted in [Huang] Luyin, *Rensheng xiaoshuo* 人生小說 [Life fiction] (Shanghai: Wenyi chubanshe, 1994), pp. 10-18.

(or, in the case of woman-to-woman love, sustaining it in the face of social disapproval) in their lifetimes.<sup>134</sup> In “Huo ren de beiai 或人的悲哀” [A certain person’s sorrows] a young woman reveals to her friends her disillusionment with the world and despair at being unable to write.<sup>135</sup> “Shengli yihou 胜利以后” [After victory], which has inserted letters within inserted letters, concerns the hollowness of the young women’s victory in managing to marry for love but retreating into conventional roles in their married life.<sup>136</sup>

Huang Luyin’s fiction was read by her friends as autobiographical and drew from them similar responses. Shi Pingmei (1902–1928), who was a student at Peking Women’s Normal College from 1920 to 1923 and subsequently kept on as a teacher, wrote an essay in 1924 in the form of a letter addressed to “Lusha 露莎”, one of the “seaside friends” in Huang Luyin’s story, and signed it “Bo Wei 波微”, a pen-name she used for her own fiction. It touches on the writer’s hopes for the fulfilment of her correspondent’s ambitions to transform the oppressed condition of Chinese women as well as on her fears for her own future, with occasional references to events in their lives that readers might even then have found baffling. Her fears were prophetic. Shi Pingmei’s young husband died in 1925, and Pingmei herself died three years later at the age of 26. It is known that she exchanged love-letters with her husband but they have been lost. Luyin’s response to Pingmei, “Haibin xiaoxi 海濱消息”

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134 “Haibin guren” [Seaside friends], in *Xiaoshuo yuebao*, vol. 14 no. 10 (October 1923), pp. 1-8 and no. 12 (December 1923), pp. 4-8; reprinted in [Huang] Luyin, *Rensheng xiaoshuo*, pp. 56-119. See also Larson, “Female Subjectivity and Gender Relations,” pp. 134-35, and Larson, *Women and Writing in Modern China*, pp. 156-57.

135 Yip shows convincingly that the 1922 “Huo ren de beiai” is indebted to Werther.

136 “Shengli yihou” [After victory], in *Xiaoshuo yuebao*, vol. 16 no. 6 (June 1925); reprinted in [Huang] Luyin, *Rensheng xiaoshuo*, pp. 56-119; English translation in Dooling and Torgeson, *Writing Women in Modern China*, pp. 143-56. See also Larson, *Women and Writing in Modern China*, pp. 158-59.

[News from the seashore], written in 1925, is a lament for her own passivity and despair.<sup>137</sup>

Feng Yuanjun (1900–1974) was a student at Peking Women's Normal College from 1917 to 1920. After graduation, she contributed fiction to *Chuangzao jikan* 創造季刊 [Creation quarterly], where her epistolary love story, "Gejue 隔絕" [Separation], was published in 1923.<sup>138</sup> The letter is addressed to her lover, with whom she plans to elope, and expresses the conflict between her passion for her lover and her love for her mother, who has arranged a marriage for her. The letter-writer (and author) defines her literary sensibility with references to Ibsen's *Nora*, *Hamlet* and Tolstoy, and the sensation experienced by *Werther* when his foot touched *Charlotte's*. It finishes with her injunction to her lover "to write out the history of our love, from the beginning to the end. You must organise and publish our six hundred love letters."<sup>139</sup> Three other epistolary stories are included in her 1929 collection *Jiehui* 劫灰 [Burnt to ashes].<sup>140</sup> Bing Xin 冰心, not an intimate of this circle but already becoming one of the best-known woman writers, also wrote epistolary fiction in the early 1920s.<sup>141</sup> Although there is little hard evidence, Feng Yuanjun and Bing Xin seem to have written for a wider readership and were less willing than Huang Luyin and Shi Pingmei to admit readers into their private worlds.

Guo Moruo's 1922 translation of *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* proved so popular that many other translations followed, keeping the

137 Dooling & Torgeson, *Writing Women in Modern China*, pp. 137, 139-41.

138 Dooling & Torgeson, *Writing Women in Modern China*, pp. 105-13.

139 Dooling & Torgeson, *Writing Women in Modern China*, p. 113.

140 Feng Yuanjun, "Lin xiansheng de xin 林先生的信" [Mr Lin's letters], "Wo yi zai aishen jian fazui le 我已在愛神箭犯罪了" [I have been guilty in Cupid's arrows] and "Epoch making," in *Jiehui* [Burnt to ashes] (Shanghai: Beixin shuju 北新書局, 1929).

141 See Larson, "Female Subjectivity and Gender Relations," pp. 132-33; Larson, *Women and Writing in Modern China*, pp. 126-27.



novel in the public eye.<sup>142</sup> His own 1926 epistolary novellas *Luo ye* 落葉 [Fallen leaves] and *Keermeiluo guniang* 喀爾美蘿姑娘 [Donna Carmela]<sup>143</sup> have a similarly one-sided structure. *Luo ye* consists of 41 love-letters written by a young Japanese woman, Kikuko, to a Chinese student of medicine in Japan, Hong Shiwu.<sup>144</sup> The background is explained in a preface by Hong's friend (like Guo Moruo, a medical student who has turned to literature): believing that he has syphilis, Hong spurns Kikuko's pure love, and she goes off to the South Seas to make a new life; when he finds out he was mistaken, he sets off after her. But circumstances keep them apart, and she dies in despair after burning his letters. Clutching her letters to him, Hong manages to make his way back to Shanghai to hand them to his literary friend with a final request, before he too expires, that he make a story or poem out of Kikuko's tragic fate. The narrator finds himself unable to improve on the unadorned truth and beauty of Kikuko's letters, and translates them into Chinese without changing a word (*sic*). Although some readers might have believed that Guo Moruo had based his story on a real episode, it is clearly not autobiographical.

Other male writers who adopted letters and diaries as organising structures for fiction included Xu Zuzheng 徐祖正 (a teacher at Peking Women's Normal College in the 1920s), Shi Zhecun 施蛰存 and Jiang Guangci 蔣光慈. Yu Dafu 郁達夫 was famous for the sexual frankness in his fiction, which teased readers with its apparently autobiographical references;<sup>145</sup> despite his predilection for subjective fiction, however, he

142 See Yip, "The Reception of Werther", p. 290.

143 For an account of *Keermeiluo guniang* see Yip, "The Reception of Werther", pp. 292-93, 296-99.

144 Guo Moruo, *Luo ye* [Fallen leaves], first published by Chuangzao she 創造社 (Shanghai, 1926); reprinted in Guo Moruo, *Moruo wen ji* 沫若文集 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe), vol. 5, pp. 265-360.

145 For the understanding between author and audience in Yu Dafu's fiction, see McDougall, *Fictional Authors, Imaginary Audiences* (HongKong: Chinese University Press, 2003), pp. 49-53.

did not use letters or diaries as organising structures. He was instead one of the first writers to publish his intimate correspondence with friends, confessing his loveless dealings with prostitutes and passionless marriage to Sun Quan 孫荃, and the increasing inefficacy of alcohol and women to relieve his depression, in letters to Guo Moruo and Cheng Fangwu 成仿吾 in 1923 and 1924 that were published shortly after he wrote them.<sup>146</sup> The death of his five-year-old son is the subject of a short essay written in October 1926, where again his private life is put on public display.<sup>147</sup> He was frank about the source of his own popularity among readers: “What we readers demand above all..... is to explore other people’s private affairs (this kind of CURIOSITY is one of the chief motives for reading fiction).”<sup>148</sup> Looking back in August 1927 on his literary career, Yu Dafu reiterated his conviction that “Literary works are the autobiography of the writer,” despite the personal attacks on him that implausibly identified the unfortunate protagonists of his short stories in every detail with the author.<sup>149</sup> In his own diaries, nine of which he published in September 1927 (see below), revelations such as consorting with prostitutes and taking opium attest to frankness about his habits, but there is room to doubt the authenticity of his expression; it is very difficult to determine, for instance, at what time in the day he made the often very long entries which end with his going to bed away from

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146 See “Haishang tongxun 海上通訊” [Correspondence at sea], written in October 1923 on his way from Shanghai to Peking and first published in *Chuangzao zhoubao 創造週報*, no. 24 (20 October 1923); reprinted in *Yu Dafu wen ji*, vol. 3, pp. 71-77.

147 “Yi ge ren zai tu-shang 一個人在途上” [Alone on the road; written in October 1926], in *Yu Dafu wen ji*, vol. 3, pp. 139-145. Every harrowing detail of his son's death is recounted at length, and he also admits to having beaten his small son twice.

148 Yu Dafu, “Riji wenxue,” reprinted in *Yu Dafu wen ji*, vol. 5, pp. 261-67; see also “Zai tan riji,” vol. 7, pp. 263-65.

149 Yu Dafu, “Wuliu nian lai chuanguo shenghuo de huigu 五六年來創作生活的回顧,” [Recollections of a creative life over the past five or six years] in *Yu Dafu wen ji*, vol. 7, pp. 176-81.

home, drunk, or sleepless until dawn.

The use of letters in 1920s and 1930s fiction, some in the form of love-letters and all highly sentimental, had the dual function of asserting authenticity and focussing attention on individual thoughts and emotions. In this respect, the new epistolary or semi-epistolary fiction resembled the prose essay [sanwen 散文], which was also the object of literary experimentation at that time. It also appears to be the basis for a bizarre phenomenon, the publication by writers of their own love-letters in the 1920s and 1930s. As pointed out above, self-publication of personal letters is rare, and it usually involves some kind of fictionalisation, or distancing, in the form of rewriting. The authors, nevertheless, are reluctant to admit to rewriting lest it detract from the work's impact.

The first example of the new trend was He xin 荷心 [Lotus heart] (1924), a collection of apparently authentic letters by Yang Meilei 楊沒累 and Zhu Qianzhi 朱謙之 with the subtitle "Qingshu yi shu" [A bundle of love-letters].<sup>150</sup> Two years later, Zhang Yiping 章衣苹 published his *Qingshu yi shu* 情書一束 [A bundle of love-letters], consisting of epistolary fiction and short essays as well as authentic letters to his wife, Wu Shutian 吳曙天.<sup>151</sup> Both parties were well-known in literary circles, and the collection became a great success, although Lu Xun and his friends sneered at it.

Other collections of apparently authentic correspondence between

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150 Yang Meilei (1897–1929) was a music student who had published some poetry when she met her future husband, Zhu Qianzhi (1899–1972) in Peking in 1923. For more detail see Findeisen, "From Literature to Love," pp. 88-89.

151 Zhang Yiping (1902–1946) was an active contributor to new literature in the 1920s and 1930s; his wife Wu Shutian (1903–1942) was a painter and writer. See also Findeisen, "From Literature to Love," pp. 85-86, 89. For a brief account of two of the stories in *Qingshu yi shu* see Yip, "The Reception of Werther," pp. 299-303.

literary couples followed soon after: Song Ruoyu 宋若玉 and Jiang Guangci, published in 1927 a year after Song's early death; Huang Luyin and Li Weijian 李唯建 in 1931; Luo Hong and Zhu Wen 朱雯 in 1931 and 1932; Huang Baiwei 黃白薇 and Yang Sao 楊騷 in 1933; and Lu Xun 羅洪 and Xu Guangping 許廣平 also in 1933. A three-volume anthology of love-letters appeared in 1929,<sup>152</sup> and in 1932 Zhang Yiping produced *Shuxin jianghua* 書信講話 [Lectures on letters], a compilation which includes authentic letters to and from the author as well as a brief history of letters in China and a classification of letters according to content. The first manual in the vernacular for writing love-letters was published in 1933, just as the fashion peaked.<sup>153</sup>

The correspondence between Huang Luyin and Li Weijian (1907-81) attracted particular attention. Huang Luyin was already famous both for her autobiographical, epistolary fiction and also for her unconventional way of life. Her unofficial marriage to the philosopher Guo Mengliang in 1925 was brought to a halt by Guo's death the same year at the age of 28. Three years later, Huang Luyin began an affair with Li Weijian, a student eight years her junior. Her response to the ensuing scandal was to offer their correspondence, 68 apparently unedited letters, for publication in a Tientsin newspaper in 1930 and in book form the following year under the title *Yun Ou qingshu ji* 雲鷗情書集 [Love-letters between Cloud and Seagull].<sup>154</sup> Huang Luyin died in childbirth shortly

152 Gao Yuhan and Zhang Qike, *Xiandai qingshu* 現代情書 [Contemporary love-letters], 3 vols (Shanghai: Yadong tushuguan 亞東圖書館, 1929); mentioned in Findeisen, "From Literature to Love," p. 86.

153 *Xiandai mingjia qingshu xuan* 現代名家情書選 (Shanghai: Yaxiya [Asia] shuju 亞細亞書局, 1933).

154 The claim that the letters were not edited for publication is made by Lu Jun in *Jing shi hai su cai nü qing*, p. 110; see also Findeisen, "From Literature to Love," pp. 90-91. The letters are reprinted in *Jing shi hai su cai nü qing*, pp. 274-292. The reprint omits (without explanation) the original Letter 42 and the book preface by Wang Lixi 王禮錫, and has minor variations in wording.

afterwards in 1934.

Cloud, or Strange Cloud, was Li Weijian's nickname; Seagull, or Cold Seagull, was Huang Luyin's; her name appears as first of the two authors. The book edition is framed before and after by a few paragraphs whose authorship is not clear. The letters are not dated but her reading public would have known that they were written between 1928 and 1930. Their content is purely emotional, with repeated reference to their hearts and souls, sighs and tears, love and death. Rarely do they discuss the practicalities of their daily existence, and even the customary exchange about letters received and sent is kept at a minimum. (A skeptical reader might suppose on these grounds that editing has taken place.)

The contrast between Love-letters between Cloud and Seagull and the correspondence between Lu Xun and Xu Guangping could hardly be greater, despite similarities such as the age gap between the two partners. Xu Guangping was Lu Xun's student when she first wrote to him in March 1925, and it seems unlikely that either party had sexual pursuit in mind at the beginning. By April, however, a note of sexual teasing infuses the letters with a tension that is not dispelled until Xu Guangping's expulsion from her college in May. The first stage in the correspondence ended in early July, and by the autumn the couple had become lovers. It was not easy to conduct their affair under the gaze of his mother, his wife Zhu An 朱安, and his jealous male followers, and in September the next year, they left Peking: he on his way to Amoy, she to Canton. The letters they exchanged between September 1926 and January 1927 have as their underlying theme whether or not the two can meet again, when, and under what circumstances. Reunited in Canton, they then moved to Shanghai where they lived together as a couple. The third stage of their correspondence took place in 1929 when Lu Xun made a short visit to Peking; these letters have the tenderness and warmth of any couple awaiting the birth of their first child. Their rela-

tionship still provoked gossip, however, and they decided to take control of their love story away from the rumour-mongers into their own hands by publishing an edited version of their correspondence. It appeared in 1933 under the bland title, *Liang di shu* 兩地書 [Letters between two].<sup>155</sup>

In choosing to publish their correspondence, Lu Xun and Xu Guangping were not doing anything particularly remarkable at the time. As the only example of published letters to remain in print up to and including the present, however, *Letters between Two* has been endowed with a misleading aura of uniqueness in this respect. Unique they are, but for other reasons. Until the release of the original versions of their letters in the 1980s, few readers could have guessed that *Letters between Two* is a kind of fictionalised autobiography or epistolary novel, revealing at a superficial level the two authors' love-lives, domestic habits, and views on literature, politics and life in general the better to conceal an inner level of private detail about their feelings for each other, their transsexual games, and their bodies. Lu Xun not only deleted and re-wrote substantial passages from the letters but even added new material, with as little regard for historical fidelity as if revising a work of fiction for publication.

Letters by famous literary couples of the 1920s and 1930s not published by their authors include those between Yu Dafu and Wang Yingxia, Xu Zhimo 徐志摩 and Lu Xiaoman 陸小曼, Ba Jin 巴金 and Chen Yunzhen 陳蘊珍, Shen Congwen 沈從文 and Zhang Zhaohe 張兆和, and Xiao Hong

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155 Lu Xun and Jing Song [Xu Guangping], *Liang di shu* (Shanghai: Qingguang shuju 青光書局, 1933). Lu Xun's preface, dated December 1932, disclaims any resemblance to "flower and moon" love-letters, referring presumably not only to their immediate predecessors but also to Xu Zhenya. See McDougall *Love-letters and Privacy in Modern China*, p. 99. For my translation of the correspondence see *Letters between Two* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 2000).

蕭紅 and Xiao Jun 蕭軍.<sup>156</sup> Yet thoughts of publication were not always far away. A letter to Wang Yingxia from Yu Dafu written on 4 March 1927 begins with the hope that she will keep his letter as a memento, goes on to give her permission to circulate [fabiao 發表] his letter if to do so would help her reputation, and finally hopes that in any case she will keep it and circulate it after his death.<sup>157</sup>

Yu Dafu's longing for romance found fulfilment when he met Wang Yingxia in January 1927: young, beautiful, educated and independent, she offered an alternative to his loveless marriage and resort to prostitutes. Between January and May 1927, Yu Dafu wrote fifty love-letters to Wang Yingxia, sometimes more than twice in one day.<sup>158</sup> Starting off formally addressed to "Wang nüshi 王女士" [Miss Wang], they

156 Some of the letters between Xiao Hong and Xiao Jun are included in Luo Jiongguang 羅炯光, *Xiandai zuojia shuxin 現代作家書信* [Letters by modern writers] (Zhengzhou: Wenxin chubanshe, 1993), pp. 775-97.

157 The letter is unfinished and undated; Luo Jiongguang gives the presumed date as 9 February 1927; see Luo, *Xiandai zuojia shuxin*, pp. 112-17.

158 Yu Dafu's letters to Wang Yingxia were left behind in Hanshou, Hunan when Wang Yingxia fled before the invading Japanese in November 1938. They were preserved by her friends, Yan Mengjin 燕孟晉 and Lin Aiyuan 林艾園. In 1981, Lin presented the letters to the Shanghai Library. Wang Yingxia then had copies made of them and passed on to Wang Guanquan 王觀泉 to compile for publication in 1982. Fifty of these letters are reprinted in *Yu Dafu shuxin ji*, published in Tainan in 1989 with the assistance of Wang Yingxia's eldest son, Yu Fei 郁飛. The Tainan collection consists altogether of 187 letters (including postcards) and Yu Dafu's autobiographical essays from 1934-36, but it omits essays written in the form of letters for general publication; letters written in Japanese are translated into Chinese. Five of Yu Dafu's letters to Wang Yingxia are reprinted in Luo Jiongguang, *Xiandai zuojia shuxin*, pp. 112-24; one is included with a lengthy appreciation in Liu Yanwen 劉衍文 and Ai Yi 艾以, *Xiandai zuojia shuxin jizhen 現代作家書信集珍* [A treasury of letters by modern writers] (Shanghai: Hanyu da cidian chubanshe, 1999), pp. 223-35. See also *Yu Dafu wen ji*, vol. 9, pp. 338-98. The only letters from Wang Yingxia to Yu Dafu that have been published are ten letters dating from 1938, first collected by Helmut Martin and included in *Yu Dafu and Wang Yingxia*, *Yu Dafu yu Wang Yingxia 郁達夫與王映霞*, pp. 181-98.

rapidly become intimate and then passionate, with occasional lines in English such as “Pure, pure affection, and strong enough to be everlasting” (15 February), “Kiss, kiss, a long long kiss” (19 March) and “Kiss, passionate kiss, endless kiss, long long kiss” (10 April).

In March 1927, shortly after she had been persuaded to return his vows of undying love, Wang Yingxia happened to see passages from his diary in which he wrote angrily about her failure to reply to his letters, and threatened to break off their relationship; in his letter of apology, dated March 11, he states that “I have absolutely no intention of publishing [fabiao] my diary during my lifetime”, and challenged her to make public all his letters to her; he also declared he would never make their affair public before it had come to an end. Although he never published his (or their) letters, within six months his respect for privacy had evaporated, and his diaries about their affair appeared in print in September that year.<sup>159</sup> Diaries are monologic, and Yu Dafu’s fictional persona, while ambiguous in terms of biographical reference, are also monologic. It is possible that at the time of his greatest notoriety, Yu Dafu preferred to remain in full control of his story.<sup>160</sup> A more mundane

159 Some of Yu Dafu’s letters to friends were included in the collection *Dafu wen ji* 達夫文集, published in Shanghai in 1928, but not his more personal letters. Yu Dafu’s *Riji jiu zhong* 日記九種 [Nine diaries] was published in September 1927; the first of the nine parts dates from November 1926 and was first published in *Chuangzao yuekan*, vol. 7 (July 1927). The nine essays that make up his autobiography from his childhood to his early years in Japan were published in Lin Yutang’s journals *Renjian shi* 人間世 in 1934 35 and *Yuzhou feng* 宇宙風 in 1936.

160 Yu Dafu and Wang Yingxia also went public with their relationship after a family quarrel in 1938 and again in 1939 when they were living in Singapore. They formally parted in 1940 and Wang Yingxia returned to China, where she married in 1942 and bore two more children in addition to her three sons by Yu Dafu. In Singapore, Yu Dafu then began an affair with a much younger woman, Li Xiaoying 李筱瑛. When he fled Singapore just as it was about to fall into Japanese hands, he planned to join her in Java but ended up instead in Sumatra, where he went through a form of marriage with Chen Lianyou 陳蓮有. Chen, who was 25 years his junior, bore him a son and a daughter, who both eventually took the surname Yu.



explanation is that Wang Yingxia refused to hand over his letters, and neither of them saw any reason to put hers into print alone. Yu Dafu's passion quickly cooled, and within three years of their sham wedding in 1928, he was already complaining in a letter to Zhou Zuoren 周作人 of his marital troubles.<sup>161</sup>

Yu Dafu sometimes expressed a wish to live like a hermit,<sup>162</sup> and his move to Hangchow in 1933 may have signalled a retreat from his very public life in Shanghai. Yu Dafu's three years in Hangchow were far from solitary, however, and in the 1930s and 40s he worked variously as a provincial government advisor in Foochow, editor and journalist in Singapore, and, under a different name, as interpreter for the Japanese army and businessman in Sumatra. Throughout his life he dallied on the borderline between public and private lives, and even after he stopped expressing these ambiguities in writing he assumed a public persona to conceal his private identity.

Xu Zhimo was born in 1897, a few months after Yu Dafu, and went to the same secondary school in Hangchow; as adults, the two were on friendly but not intimate terms.<sup>163</sup> Like Yu Dafu, Xu Zhimo's marriage was an arranged one, but it was never affectionate.<sup>164</sup> Xu left his wife, Zhang Youyi 張幼儀, shortly after their marriage in 1915 to attend college

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161 Yu Dafu wen ji, vol. 9, pp. 420-21.

162 In a letter to his eldest brother and sister-in-law in 1916, he wished he were a Robinson [Crusoe] living on desert island; Yu Dafu wen ji, vol. 9, pp. 312-13. Passing the port of Yantai in 1923 he compared himself to Napoleon in exile on the island of St. Helena; see "Haishang tongxun."

163 For Yu Dafu's reminiscences of Xu Zhimo, see "Zhimo zai huiyi-zhong 志摩在回憶中" [The Zhimo of my recollections] (1931) and "Huai sishi sui de Zhimo 懷四十歲的志摩" [Thinking of Zhimo for 40 years] (1936), in Yu Dafu wen ji, vol. 4, pp. 162-63, 203-05.

164 Pang-mei Natasha Chang, *Bound Feet and Western Dress* (New York: Doubleday, 1996), pp. 67, 89-90, 104.

in Shanghai, Tientsin and Peking, and after their first son was born in 1918 he was free to study abroad, first in the United States, then in England in 1920. In London he became friendly with Lin Changmin 林長民, like himself a follower of Liang Qichao 梁啟超.<sup>165</sup> Xu and Lin exchanged playful “love-letters,” in which Lin, the elder of the two, took the part of a married man and Xu took the part of a married woman.<sup>166</sup> His parents sent Zhang Youyi to join him, but by the time she arrived in spring 1921 Xu Zhimo had fallen in love with Lin’s eldest daughter, Huiyin 林徽音 (Phyllis), who was informally betrothed to Liang’s eldest son, Liang Sicheng.<sup>167</sup> Xu Zhimo and Zhang Youyi rented a house in Sawston, described by E. M. Forster in *The Longest Journey* as “an ugly little town” on the outskirts of Cambridge,<sup>168</sup> from where Xu Zhimo exchanged love-letters with Lin Huiyin in London, written in English so that Zhang Youyi would not be able to read them.<sup>169</sup> Soon after her arrival, Xu asked his wife for a divorce; with little alternative, she agreed, and what was thought to be the first modern Chinese divorce took place in 1922. Lin Huiyin was nevertheless not prepared to break her betrothal (perhaps swayed by the news that Zhang Youyi was pregnant again), and returned to China with her father in 1921. Leaving his ex-wife and their second child in Europe, Xu Zhimo returned alone to China a year later.

In 1923 Xu Zhimo fell in love with a married woman, Lu Xiaoman

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165 Wilma Fairbank, *Liang and Lin: Partners in Exploring China’s Architectural Past* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), p. 12.

166 Leo Ou-fan Lee, *The Romantic Generation of Modern Chinese Writers* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), pp. 133-34.

167 Chang, *Bound Feet*, p. 129.

168 E. M. Forster was one of Xu Zhimo’s closest Cambridge friends, and it is curious that *The Longest Journey*, first published in 1922, was set in Sawston around the time that Xu was living there.

169 Chang, *Bound Feet*, p. 119.

(aka Lu Mei 陸眉). She was a well-known socialite, famous for her beauty, and their affair soon became a public scandal. When her husband threatened to kill him, Zhimo returned to Europe in March 1925. On the eve of his departure, he asked Xiaoman to write to him, not necessarily in letters to be sent to him abroad but in a diary which he could read on his return.<sup>170</sup> Zhimo arrived in Berlin, where his ex-wife was living with friends, shortly after their second son died, and then travelled to Italy with her. Hearing from Hu Shi 胡適 in August that Xiaoman's husband had finally agreed to a divorce, he returned to China and married Xiaoman in 1926 with the consent of his ex-wife and with a disapproving Liang Qichao and Hu Shi as witnesses.

In letters to his English friends, Zhimo was indignant about the “bitter struggle” he had waged against the “deadly force of ignorance and prejudice” in regard to his relationship with Xiaoman.<sup>171</sup> Yet the marriage was difficult: Zhimo was much occupied in publishing his own and other's work, with teaching, and with publicising Rabindranath Tagore's Santiketan movement, while Lu Xiaoman's health deteriorated as she became addicted to opium. Despite the public exposure of his love-affairs, Xu Zhimo chose not to publish his love-letters or other openly autobiographical writings up to his early death in 1931; his and her diaries from 1926–27 were posthumously published by Lu Xiaoman as part of his collected works.<sup>172</sup> Writing in 1936, Yu Dafu claimed that

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170 Their letters and diaries are collected in Chen Xinyuan 陳信元, ed., *Xu Zhimo v.s. Lu Xiaoman 徐志摩 v.s. 陸小曼* (Xindian: Yejiang chubanshe, 2000).

171 Xu Zhimo's letters in English with facing translations into Chinese can be found in Liang Xihua, ed. and trans., *Xu Zhimo Yingwen shuxin ji 徐志摩英文書信集* [A collection of Xu Zhimo's English letters] (Taipei: Lianjing chuban gongsi, 1979); for quotation see p. 20, 22.

172 Many different editions of Xu Zhimo's diaries and correspondence have been published, mostly in Taipei or in Hong Kong, and from the mainland since the 1980s. Following a Taipei television series about Xu Zhimo's romances, several new books appeared about him, such as *Zui shi na yi di tou wenruo 最是那低頭的溫柔 徐志摩與四個女人* [Xu Zhimo and four women], edited by Cai Dengshan 蔡登山 (Taipei:

Zhimo's deep love for Xiaoman could be seen in his poetry, in his diaries and in his letters,<sup>173</sup> but during his own lifetime it was only in the distanced form of poetry that Xu Zhimo wrote freely about his intimate emotions.

Shen Congwen's (1902–1988) romance with Zhang Zhaohe (1910– ) followed his separation from Ding Ling 丁玲 and Hu Yepin 胡也頻. Their courtship lasted three years and nine months, during which time Shen sent her several hundred love-letters. One of these, written in June 1931, was published at the time without her name to it under the title “Fei you cundi 廢郵存底 (1)” in *Wenyi yuekan* 文藝月刊 [Literature and the arts monthly],<sup>174</sup> and reprinted with her name on it in *Fei you cundi* [Letters never mailed] in 1935.<sup>175</sup> Although otherwise their early letters were destroyed, Zhang had copied into her diary three of his letters to her between their meeting in 1930 and marriage in 1933, along with a summary of the contents of another long letter, and also her comments on the letters and other events of the courtship. None of her letters from this period survived. Their later letters plus these extracts from her diary are published with her consent many years later in *Shen Congwen jiashu* 沈從文家書 [The family letters of Shen Congwen].<sup>176</sup> In their case, the death of the famous partner, distance in time, and the survival of few out of many letters are all factors in reducing the desire for privacy as experienced earlier in the writers' lives.

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Sanpin guoji wenhua gongsi, 2000).

173 “Huai sishi sui de Zhimo”, *Yu Dafu wen ji*, vol. 4, p. 204.

174 *Wenyi yuekan* [Literature and the arts monthly], vol. 2 nos 5-6 ( 31 [sic] June 1931).

175 The author is given as Shen Congwen, but part 2 is by Xiao Qian 蕭乾.

176 *Shen Congwen jiashu* (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1998). The authors are given as Shen and Zhang jointly although the title refers to Shen only; Zhang's postscript is dated August 1995.

Some writers preferred to keep to themselves their extra-marital affairs and the exchanges of letters that accompanied them. Hu Shi, for instance, always presented a public appearance of rectitude about his personal life, and his intellectual autobiography, written in 1931, gives particular attention to his mother's marriage and her influence on his thinking.<sup>177</sup> He does not mention the marriage to Jiang Dongxiu 江冬秀 that his mother arranged for him, which took place in 1917, appeared to be agreeable to both parties, produced two sons, and lasted a lifetime,<sup>178</sup> but he makes a brief reference to the influence of "my good friend Miss Edith Clifford Williams" on his life.<sup>179</sup> Williams, the daughter of a retired professor of geology at Cornell University, was a painter who lived in New York where she exhibited as a member of the Dadaist group. Hu Shi fell in love with her in October 1914 on one of her family visits to Ithaca. He told her that he could not break the betrothal that his mother had arranged when he was thirteen, but they continued to meet and correspond as close friends. Williams' avant-garde beliefs may have encour-

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177 Written as an untitled contribution to *Living Philosophies* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1931), pp. 235-63, and reprinted as "My Credo and Its Evolution," in *The People's Tribune*, vol. 6, no. 4 (16 February 1934), pp. 219-37. Both versions are reproduced in *A Collection of Hu Shih's English Writings*, compiled by Chih-p'ing Chou [Zhou Zhiping 周質平], (Taipei: Yuanliu chubanshe, 1995), vol. 1, pp. 381-411 and vol. 2, pp. 569-89. A Chinese version, "Wo de xinyang 我的信仰" [My credo] was published in *Zhongguo si da sixiangjia de xinyang de zishu 中國四大思想家的信仰的自述* [Proclamations of faith by four great Chinese thinkers] (Taipei: Liangyou tushu yinshua gongsi 良友圖書印刷公司, 1931), and reprinted in *Hu Shi laiwang shuxin xuan 胡適來往書信選*, vol. 3, pp. 548-573. Much of the same ground is covered in *Sishi zishu 四十自述*, a series of memoirs written by Hu Shi between 1930 and 1933 and published between 1933 and 1936, but without reference to Williams. For an English translation of these memoirs and other autobiographical reminiscences, see Liang Ch' i-ch' ao and Hu Shih, *Two Self-Portraits: Liang Ch' i-ch' ao and Hu Shih*, edited by Li Yu-ning (New York: Outer Sky Press, 1992).

178 For a high-spirited letter from Hu Shi to Qian Xuantong from his honeymoon, see Luo, *Xiandai zuojia shuxin*, pp. 156-58.

179 Untitled essay in *A Collection of Hu Shih's English Writings*, vol. 1, p. 402, *Hu Shi laiwang shuxin xuan*, vol. 3, p. 565.

aged Hu Shi to adopt anti-traditionalist views: one of Hu Shi's first compositions in English, written in April 1914, defended the institution of arranged marriage, but after meeting Williams he soon discarded this allegiance.<sup>180</sup> Even more crucial to his future development was his 1915 transfer from Cornell University to Columbia University, in part, it seems, in order to be near her. The affair between Hu Shi and Williams (who never married) was kept secret during their lifetimes. Their correspondence was first made public in 1965, but little attention has been paid to it until recently.<sup>181</sup>

Hu Shi fell in love again in 1923 with Cao Peisheng 曹珮聲, the younger sister of his elder brother's wife.<sup>182</sup> Cao Peisheng was eleven

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180 Originally published as "Marriage Customs in China" by Suh Hu, *The Cornell Era*, June 1914, pp. 610-11; reprinted in *A Collection of Hu Shih's English Writings*, vol. 1, pp. 23-25. One of his first polemics in favour of free choice marriage is his 1919 play, "The Greatest Event in Life"; reprinted in *A Collection of Hu Shih's English Writings*, vol. 1, pp. 23-25.

181 The most comprehensive account of their relationship is Hu Shi yu Weiliansi 胡適與韋蓮司 [Hu Shi and Williams] by Zhou Zhiping (Taipei: Lianjing chubanshe, 1998). The correspondence was first made public after Hu Shi's death in 1962, with an exhibition in 1965 of his letters to her that she donated to the Hu Shi jinianguan 胡適紀念館 with the cooperation of Jiang Dongxiu. Other letters and papers relating to Hu Shi were bequeathed by Williams on her death in 1971 to the Hu Shi jinianguan. Some of the letters were typed by Williams from the hand-written originals. I am most grateful to Dr Zhao Runhai for permission to examine the materials at the Hu Shi jinianguan. The letters sent by Williams to Hu Shi before 1949 are held in the Academia Sinica in Peking. For further information on Williams, see Fujii Shôzô, "Ta shi Niuyue Dada pai: Hu Shi de lianren E. Kulifuduo. Weiliansi de yi sheng" [She was a New York Dadaist: a life of Hu Shi's lover, E. Clifford Williams], translated by Wang Huimin, *Lu Xun yanjiu yuekan 魯迅研究月刊* [Lu Xun studies monthly], No. 182 (June 1997), pp. 50-57. A translation into Chinese of Hu Shi's side of the correspondence only can be found in *Bu si liang zi nan wang Hu Shi gei Weiliansi de xin 不思量自難忘：胡適給韋蓮司的信* [Hu Shi's letters to Williams], translated by Zhou Zhiping (Taipei: Lianjing chuban gongsi, 1999).

182 See Zhou Zhiping, "Chui bu san de xintou renying: ji Hu Shi yu Cao Peisheng de yi duan lianqing" [A mental image that cannot be dispelled: a record of Hu Shi's romance with Cao Peisheng], in Zhou Zhiping, *Hu Shi cong lun 胡適叢論* [Collected articles on Hu Shi] (Taipei: Sanmin shuju, 1992), pp. 231-51. Cao Peisheng (1902-1973) studied agriculture

years younger and newly divorced after a childless marriage. The couple exchanged letters, and Hu Shi also wrote love poems to her some of which he published, but at the time only close friends such as Xu Zhimo knew the truth behind the poems. When the affair ended, she burnt his letters, and their relationship only came to light in 1988 on the publication of Hu Shi's diaries.

In publishing his letters from the 1920s and 1930s, Hu Shi omitted his correspondence in English with Williams, although it was still available, and with Cao Peisheng, written in Chinese but already destroyed. He also omitted his 1918 letter to Qian Xuantong 錢玄同 written on his honeymoon, although he did include a 1926 letter to Xu Zhimo confessing to frivolity and depression.<sup>183</sup> Throughout his lifetime, Hu Shi sought to conceal his private affairs; revelation came only after his death by his former lover, his wife and friends, and academic researchers.

Not all May Fourth writers were given to romantic interludes during their wedded life. Zhou Zuoren's marriage to Hata Nobuko 羽太信子 appears to have been a happy one; it was based on free choice, produced three children and lasted a lifetime. The couple were rarely separated, and there is no evidence that Zuoren was ever attracted to another woman. If there were love-letters between husband and wife they have not been published, despite Zuoren's fondness for the genre.<sup>184</sup> Of all the

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at Cornell University from 1934 to 1937 and taught in agricultural colleges on her return to China. Zhou Zhiping's essay starts with a quote on public v. private life of heroes in China; see Hu Shi cong lun, p. 231.

183 See the selection of letters by Hu Shi in Luo, *Xiandai zuojia shuxin*, pp. 148-177. Hu Shi's letters to his mother, wife and children were published for the first time in Hu Shi *jiashu* 胡適家書 [Hu Shi's family letters], edited by Lu Fachun (Hefei: Anhui renmin chubanshe, 1996).

184 For a summary of Zhou Zuoren's published letters, see the editor's "Qianyan 前言" [Preface], in *Zhitang shuxin* 知堂書信, pp. 1-3.

writers mentioned above, Zuoren was undoubtedly the most effective in maintaining his privacy despite such traumatic events as his rupture with his brother, his public disgrace as a traitor, and his enforced role as biographer to the idolised figure who bore his brother's name.

Just as suddenly as the fashion for publishing love-letters arose, it disappeared; only occasional examples of authentic love-letter exchanges were published after 1933. The brief popularity of published love-letters and autobiographical epistolary fiction can be attributed to the decline among educated urban men and women of traditional arranged marriages and their replacement by unions based on love between individuals. Apart from sexual experimentation between young unmarried men and women, this dramatic change saw the rise of a phenomenon characteristic of the period: liaisons between older men in arranged marriages with young women, including their students. Imagined and authentic love-letters offered readers new models for new relationships based on romantic and sexual compatibility. Whereas letter-writing manuals could only provide texts, imagined and authentic letters offered contexts as well, either in narrated fiction or in observable real life.

Imagined and authentic letters were also attractive to writers. Both genres were technically innovations, distinctly Western in origin when Western prestige was at its peak. Above all, they offered new perspectives in story-telling. Whether one-sided, reciprocal or multi-sided, letters focussed on intimate thoughts and feelings as experienced from within. Their writers evidently enjoyed the celebrity status that came from self-exposure. Like the film stars whose lives became marketable gossip, these writers gained fame at the expense of their private lives. Living beyond the restricting (and yet supportive) confines of traditional family life, these modern heroines and heroes took their inspiration and comfort from their fellow-writers and readers who lived or longed to



live in defiance of tradition.

Once past the initial pleasurable shock felt by writers and readers alike at daring acts of self-exposure, however, one set of letters came to appear very much like another, and even the most romantic couples were unable to maintain high productivity. Aware of competing demands on readers' attention from an increasing variety in literature and other forms of entertainment such as the cinema, writers also came to realise the limitations of epistolary techniques. The appearance of manuals and commentaries may also have discouraged other writers of what had passed for spontaneous expressions of subjectivity, and it is tempting to believe that the strictures of Lu Xun and Zhou Zuoren also had an effect. But the decisive factor in bringing to a close these linked genres was the deteriorating political situation. Subjective writing of all kinds declined as civil war and foreign invasion threatened individual as well as national survival; few men or women were bold or dedicated enough to persist with narratives that placed private lives above political and national interests.

Monologic collections of personal letters by well-known writers such as Guo Moruo continued to appear alongside anthologies throughout the 1930s.<sup>185</sup> The problems posed in editing another's letters for publication were glossed over by Luo Niansheng 羅念生 in his preface to Zhu Xiang's

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185 Moruo shuxin ji 沫若書信集 [A collection of letters by [Guo] Moruo] (Shanghai: Taidong shuju, 1933). Examples given in Luo, Xiandai zuojia shuxin are: Mofan shuxin wenxuan 模範書信文選 [A selection of model letters] (Shanghai: Guangming shuju, 1933); Xiandai shuxin xuan 現代書信選 [A selection of modern letters] (Shanghai: Beixin shuju, 1934); Dangdai chidu xuanzhu 當代尺牘選注 [An annotated selection of contemporary correspondence] (Shanghai: Guangming shuju, 1935); Xiandai zuojia shujian 現代作家書簡 [Letters by modern writers], (Shanghai: Shenghuo shudian, 1936). Cao Juren's 曹聚仁 Sanshi niandai zuojia shuxin 三十年代作家書信 [Letters by writers from the thirties] was re-published in Hong Kong in 1954 (date of first edition not clear).

朱湘 posthumously published letters.<sup>186</sup> Writing in 1934, three years after the poet's death, Lou notes that Zhu Xiang was rather bad-tempered, and that there are many passages in his letters which would give offence, so that a complete edition of his letters could not take place until after a hundred years. There is no explicit mention of privacy as an issue.

The posthumous publication of Lu Xun's letters in 1937 was a major literary event, and new editions continued to appear throughout the war years and up to the present. Publication of other letter collections was suspended after the outbreak of war in 1937,<sup>187</sup> and the fashion for epistolary fiction also declined. New postwar collections in the 1940s by writers still living include letters between Shen Congwen and Xiao Qian 蕭乾 as well as individual collections by Ba Jin and Lao She 老舍.<sup>188</sup>

After 1949, the new régime discouraged subjective writing generally, including epistolary fiction, love-letters and personal letters. Even letters by famous writers, whether still living or recently deceased, were not regarded as suitable texts for publication. People naturally continued to write personal letters, but the practice became increasingly dangerous to both writer and recipient. During the early years of the Cultural Revolution personal documents such as letters and diaries were routinely destroyed either by their owners, Red Guards or police.<sup>189</sup> Epis-

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186 Luo Niansheng, "Xu序" [Preface] in Zhu Xiang shuxin ji 朱湘書信集 [A collection of letters by Zhu Xiang] (Tianjin: Rensheng yu wenxue she, 1936), pp. 1-2.

187 Two collections of open letters to his readers by Ba Jin, Duan jian 短簡 [Missives] and Lutu tongxin 旅途通信 [Travelling correspondence] were published in 1937 and 1939 respectively, but despite some direct address to the reader they are more like occasional essays or travel diaries than letters proper. According to Ba Jin, these open letters included one to his wife (under her pen-name Xiao Shan), published 1936-37, in Missives; see "Giving of Oneself," Random Thoughts (Hong Kong: Joint Publishers, 1984), pp. 66-67. Both collections are reprinted in Ba Jin quan ji 巴金全集 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1990), vol. 13, pp. 1-72, 113-223.

188 See Luo, Xiandai zuojia shuxin, p. 4.

189 Luo, Xiandai zuojia shuxin contains only 31 letters written on the mainland in the period

tolary fiction (or fictionalised biography) first reappeared as a underground novel, *Open Love Letter*, written in 1972 and first published officially in 1980.<sup>190</sup> New collections (mostly posthumous) and anthologies of letters by famous writers became publishable again in the 1980s and 1990s. Anthologies of letters from the past include *Lidai shuxin xuan* 歷代書信選 [Selected letters from history] (1989) and *Qingsi lülüshuxin xuan* 情思縷縷書信選 [Lingering emotions; selected letters] (1998). Facsimile editions reappeared, such as the anthology *Xiandai mingren shuxin shouji* 現代名人書信手迹 [Facsimile letters by famous modern figures] (1992), and a high point was reached with the facsimile publication of the original letters between Lu Xun and Xu Guangping in 1996.

The most comprehensive letter anthology of the 1990s is Luo Jiongguang's 羅炯光 1993 *Xiandai zuojia shuxin* 現代作家書信 [Letters by modern writers], comprising over 300 letters written between 1916 and 1989, almost all from the mainland, with notes on the letter-writers and their letters, including sources. The writers are all familiar figures, mostly active between the 1910s and the early 1960s, and the editor's introduction is respectful to the point of reverence. Apart from a brief history of modern letters, the attempts at analysis (four types of content: family, love, friendship and literature; four characteristics: sincerity, literariness, modernity and subjectivity) are rudimentary. The collection features only one exchange as such, that between Huang Luyin and Li Weijian, and while Lu Xun's letters to Xu Guangping are represented, hers to him are not.

The end of the decade brought a successor, *Xiandai zuojia shuxin jizhen* 現代作家書信集珍 [A treasury of letters by modern writers] com-

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1949-1976, barely a tenth of the total.

190 As described in Edward X. Gu, "Cultural Intellectuals and the Politics of the Cultural Public Space in Communist China (1979-1989): A Case Study of Three Intellectual Groups," *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 38 no. 2 (May 1999), pp. 389-431.

piled by Liu Hengwen 劉衍文 and Ai Yi 艾以. In some ways it is more imaginative than the earlier collection: Lu Xun is represented by the original versions of letters he sent to Xu Guangping in 1929, complete with his elephant sketches, and populist writers like Zhou Shoujuan are also represented. On the other hand, there is nothing from the correspondence between Huang Luyin and Li Weijian, and nothing from either Zhou Zuoren or Hu Shi, and the short notices after each letter are impressionistic rather than informative.

In Taiwan, anthologies and collections of letters of famous men and love-letters between couples are a small but significant output. The publisher Guangwen shuju 廣文書局 produces facsimile collections of premodern letters in the series Chidu hui bian 尺牘彙編 [Compendium of correspondence] and reprints of works such as Qing wushi mingjia shuzha 清五十名家書札 [Letters by fifty famous Qing writers] compiled by Lu Xinyuan 陸心源 in 1894. A collection of letters addressed to Liu Zhen 劉真 (b. 1913), Dangdai mingren shuzha 當代名人書家 [Letters by famous contemporaries] (1999), which includes letters from Chiang Monglin 蔣夢麟, Luo Jialun and Liang Shiqiu 梁實秋 in facsimile and with extensive notes, shows that conventional salutations as well as brush writing was still common among literary men in Taiwan in the second half of the century.

Love-letters as a frame for fiction was re-introduced by Li Ang's 李昂 *Yi feng wei ji de qingshu* 一封未寄的情書 [An unsent love-letter], a collection published in 1986 containing four related epistolary short stories, including the title story.<sup>191</sup> In her preface, the author noted that

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191 Li Ang, *Yi feng wei ji de qingshu* (Taipei: Hongfan shudian, 1986); 11th reprint, 1994. See Kai-ling Liu, "The Unsent/Unanswered Letter in Epistolary Fiction by Modern Women Writers of Color," Ph. D dissertation, Pennsylvania State University, 1994 and Sheung-yuen Daisy Ng, "Li Ang's Experiments with the Epistolary Form", *Modern Chinese Literature*, vol. 3, nos. 1, 2 (1987), pp. 91-106.

whereas stories about true love written in the form of love-letters could be considered conventional for a woman writer, for her they counted as “experiments”; in other words, love-letter fiction had by the 1980s become trivialised, not what would be expected of an avant-garde literary writer like Li Ang. Love-letters whether genuine or imaginary were a popular genre in Taiwan in the 1980s and 1990s. *Lidai nūzi qingshu xuan* 歷代女子情書選 [Selected love-letters by women from history], a collection designed for a student audience, appeared in 1988. *Gongkai de qingshu* 公開的情書 [Open love-letters] (1994), edited by Lu Hanxiu 路寒袖, consists of forty letters by mostly well-known younger writers, first published to celebrate the power of love in the column of the same name in *Zhongguo shibao* 中國時報 [China times]; *Gongkai wei gongkai de qingshu* 公開未公開的情書 [Open and not-open love-letters] followed in 1997. Although most of these letters are addressed to “you”, specific forms of address are mostly dispensed with, and it is doubtful if any reader would imagine them to be authentic letters.<sup>192</sup> Next came *Feichang qingshu* 非常情書 [Extraordinary love-letters] (1998), an anthology of love-letters mainly by Taiwan teenagers and young adults. A series of five love-letter manuals for younger readers, *Qingshu xilie* 情書系列 [Love-letter series], appeared in 1999. One of the few examples of authentic love-letters by well-known writers published during the authors’ lifetimes is Lin Dongsheng 林東生 and Zhuang Biguang’s 莊璧光 *Ai. qingshu* 愛 情書 [Love and love-letters] (1994).

One of the most scandalous publications in recent years was the correspondence between Liang Shiqiu (1903–1987) and his second wife, the singer Han Jingqing 韓菁清, who was about thirty years younger. The couple met in 1974, not long after the death of Liang’s first wife; their

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192 Publication in the publisher’s series *Maitian wenxue* 麥田文學 [Maitian literature] reinforces the literary nature of the undertaking.

marriage lasted thirteen years and appears to have been happy, despite opposition from his friends and former students. After Liang's death, his editor suggested publishing their love-letters, referring to Lu Xun's [sic] *Letters between Two* as a model. Liang had previously sanctioned publication and Han gave her permission, but when they appeared in 1992, under the title *Liang Shiqiu, Han Jingqing qingshu xuan* [A selection of love-letters between Liang Shiqiu and Han Jingqing], Liang's friends were shocked and embarrassed by the passion shown by the elderly scholar. A few years later, in 1995, Yu Guangzhong 余光中 and other friends jointly compiled a collection of Liang Shiqiu's letters under the ultra-respectable title, *Yashe chidu Liang Shiqiu shuzha zhenji* 雅舍尺牘：梁實秋書札真迹 [Yashe epistles: facsimile letters by Liang Shiqiu], as if to restore his reputation.

### Part III: Conclusion

A comparison between the published and unpublished versions of the correspondence between Lu Xun and Xu Guangping suggests that this couple chose to publish their love-letters as a kind of marriagerite, to transform a private affair into a public relationship, and scandal (his adultery, their teacher-student relationship) into respectability. In other words, they sacrificed an outer sphere or layer of privacy in order to preserve an inner core; their deepest feelings for each other, and the nature of their sexual relationship. At the beginning of their relationship, they both held a conventional belief that "private" was selfish and "public" was good; but as their affair developed and they came to appreciate more and more a need for privacy, they came to value it more and more. The choice of letters as the vehicle of their revelations, I believe, was due to the fundamentally ambiguous nature of letters, where private and public are inextricably intermingled. The current fashion for publishing love-

letters served to emphasise this ambiguity (as well as the profitability of such publications). There was, and still is, a common belief that letters, especially love-letters, are a sincere outpouring of private feelings. Lu Xun warned readers in his Preface against such a naive misunderstanding, and then proceeded to make one false statement after another about how these letters were written, edited and published.

Although Lu Xun was very influential, he was not necessarily representative of his times. Lu Xun's contemporaries have not left equally rich or robust documentation of their correspondence from which their concepts or sense of privacy can be evaluated, but enough textual and biographical evidence remains to indicate a wide range of diversity even in the limited sphere of writing and publishing love-letters written during the course of extramarital affairs. To choose not to publish is an obvious index of a strong desire for privacy; the decision to publish is based on factors which differ from case to case.

Age does not seem to be a significant factor: among the men, Lu Xun was a few years older than Zhou Zuoren, Hu Shi, Yu Dafu and Xu Zhimo, but Zhou Zuoren and Hu Shi were more reticent, Xu Zhimo somewhere in the middle, and Yu Dafu least reticent. Social relationships are an even less reliable indicator. Lu Xun had broken off relations with Zhou Zuoren in 1923; he was on good but not familiar terms with Yu Dafu's intimate friends Guo Moruo and Cheng Fangwu in the 1920s but more distanced in the 1930s; he was on good terms with Lin Yutang 林語堂 in the mid-20s, quarrelled with him and was reconciled at the end of the decade, and then quarrelled with him again in 1934; and he had a strong dislike for Hu Shi and Xu Zhimo. Yu Dafu had a falling-out with Hu Shi in 1922 but is said to have patched things up the following year; he got on well with Lin Yutang, contributing to his journals throughout the 1930s (he justified writing his autobiography at the age of forty from the examples of Hu Shi and Lin Yutang); he also remained on friendly if

respectful terms with Zhou Zuoren, reporting on Lu Xun's activities and wishing his family well;<sup>193</sup> he thought well of Xu Zhimo but was not a close friend.<sup>194</sup>

Yu Dafu's long and close friendship with Lu Xun (who disapproved of the move to Hangchow) in some respects was an attraction of opposites. With the possible exception of the short story "Xiongdi" [Brothers], Lu Xun avoided obvious reference to his private life in his fiction; in Yu Dafu's case, it is hard for a contemporary reader to judge between his fictionalised autobiography and his autobiographical fiction except when the protagonists of the latter meet their death. The main bond between Yu Dafu and Lu Xun from 1927 to 1933 may have been the similarity in their situations, both married but living with a younger woman. These two triangular relationships, existing in roughly the same time and place among people in the same social circles, nevertheless exhibit quite dissimilar patterns of revelation and concealment.

Among the women mentioned above, Zhu An, Sun Quan and Jiang Dongxiu (the three wronged wives) were most reticent, followed by Cao Peisheng, Lu Xiaoman, Xu Guangping and Wang Yingxia. Much less is known about the lives, thinking and relationships of these women. Like Zhu An, Sun Quan never went public about her feelings towards her husband's desertion,<sup>195</sup> although she suffered public exposure about the failure of her marriage in stories such as "Niaoluo Xing" 蔦蘿行 [Wisteria

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193 See letters to Zhou Zuoren written in 1929, 1930, 1931 and 1935 in Yu Dafu shuxin ji, pp. 108-09, 112-13, 114-15, 150-52.

194 See the introduction to Yu Dafu's autobiographical sketches, written in October 1924 and published in Renjian shi in November.

195 Yu Ting refers to poems written by Sun Quan in "Youlan bu gong qunfang qu shuo Yu Dafu yuanpei furen Sun Quan de shi" [The serene orchid does not join together with other beautiful flowers: on the poems by Yu Dafu's first helpmeet, Sun Quan] in Yu Dafu fengyu shuo 郁達夫風雨說 [On Yu Dafu's stormy life] (Hangzhou: Zhejiang wenyi chubanshe, 1991).



and Dodder] and “Yan ying” [Smoke Shadows 煙影]. Reasons other than a desire for privacy could be behind these wives’ reticence, including literary inexperience and lack of glamour: the public were perhaps not terribly interested in their stories.

In contrast, Xu Guangping and Wang Yingxia were both highly articulate. Happy in their cohabitation, Xu Guangping went readily into print about their life as a couple after Lu Xun’s death. Although throughout her own lifetime she suppressed detail that might reflect badly on either of them, she was willing to let the original letters be published after her death. Wang Yingxia, who was much younger and inexperienced than Xu Guangping, found Yu Dafu difficult to live with. Possibly at her own insistence, she managed to avoid becoming his fictional subject and it was presumably her refusal to hand over his letters to her that prevented them from being published along with his diary about their affair. In 1939, when Yu Dafu published in the Hong Kong press a series of poems in which he complained about her, Wang Yingxia responded immediately and in equal measure to his allegations. Nevertheless, it was only many years after Yu Dafu’s death that Wang Yingxia finally wrote at length about their life together and sanctioned the publication of their letters.<sup>196</sup>

Of the women mentioned above, Huang Luyin was the least jealous of her personal privacy. Like Lu Xun, she published her love-letters in response to the gossip about her much younger partner, but unlike him, she had always drawn overtly on her feelings and experiences in her writing, as a self-declared “expert on romantic love between male and female.”<sup>197</sup> The main difference between her and Yu Dafu is that she was much less candid (or titillating) on the subject of sexual conduct. Above

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196 It is not clear what Yu Dafu did with her letters to him; only ten letters, all from 1938, have been published.

197 See Lu Jun, *Jing shi hai su cai nü qing*, pp. 141, 255.

I have drawn attention to the difference between her published love-letters and those by Lu Xun and Xu Guangping, but there is also a striking likeness: an affair that was already in the public realm and privacy that was already invaded could be re-presented by publication under the writers' control to protect their personal dignity.

Writers in Republican China sought to establish the authenticity of their emotions and their lives by revealing them in print, whether through autobiography, published letters or diaries, or epistolary fiction. But there were limits for even the most uninhibited, and the devices of literary form, editing and self-censorship concealed and defined what they valued most as private.

# 欲彰彌掩：

## 民國初年文人的情書與隱私觀念

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### 摘 要

書信（尤其是情書）能夠向特定的或廣泛的讀者，透露私人的想法或情感，但無論古今中西，書信真假與公私之間的界限，一向模糊不清，難以分辨。虛擬成分居多的情書，自唐代以來常出現在中國小說與戲劇之中，作為鋪陳故事情節、投射人物的個性，使得敘述與對話更為豐富的手段，並且在20世紀初作品中，亦時而加強故事真實性與抒情性，使其彰顯私人隱密性。相對的，真實的情書，除罕見的例子外，在中國極少有人印成書本發行。

民國初年的書信文學，雖或多或少受到歐洲作品（如歌德的《少年維特的煩惱》）的啟發，但亦有其獨到之處。此種自傳性質強烈的文學，多由年輕女子寫給年輕女子看，所探討的主題包括女人之間的情誼、對生命的反省、選自己丈夫的決心、以及自由婚姻之後的夢想破裂等問題。從1920年代至1930年代初期，北京女子師範大學成為書信文學的發源地，該所的學生如黃廬隱、石評梅、馮沅君與許廣平等，以及男教職員如魯迅、周作人、徐祖正等，都發表此類作品或情書的選本。1920年代間，在性觀念與文藝風氣解放影響之下，情侶將彼此之間寫的情書，付梓成書，蔚為風行，其佼佼者，可舉黃廬隱與李唯建通信的選本，以及由魯迅與許廣平的情書而成的《兩地書》。至1930年代中，時空背景一轉，此種潮流便逝去，情書即使繼續問世，如郁達夫與王映霞、徐志摩與陸小曼、沈從文與張兆和或蕭紅與蕭軍之間的書信，但多半被收入別人的選本或讀本，不再

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由情侶自己刊出。

在決定是否要公開其情書的選擇上，可以看出當時文人對隱私的觀念，毫無疑問的因人而異，反而與年齡層、性別、交際、職業等各種因素皆無明顯關係。同時，就選擇發表情書的文人而言，無論是以潤飾過的真人真事的情書，或改變成書信文學的方式呈現出來的，作者似乎都意識到，為了隱藏更深層的情感，有必要犧牲某種程度的隱私。