

The Space of Reading: Describing Melancholy and the Innermost Thoughts in 17th-Century *Qingshu*

Kathryn Anne Lowry *

Abstract

This chapter examines *qingshu* (love letters) and commentary that decodes reading and writing about sentimental ties as the measure of changing social roles in early-seventeenth century China. Rare seventeenth-century miscellanies compiled by Deng Zhimo (fl. ca. 1596), *The Gracious Love Letter and A Casual Reader*, and *The Plum Sprig Letters* attributed to Feng Menglong (1574-1646) furnished glosses on vocabulary, marginal notes on style, and didactic lessons to be drawn from *qingshu*. These publications humorously circumscribe a space for reading where what is coded as hidden and selfish bears on public action, social roles, and moral values. *Qingshu* are characterized by a mixture of bookish and sentimental prose, ‘high’ and ‘low’ diction, quotation from the classical and vernacular works, and awkward descriptive prose that reveals

Keywords: *qingshu* (love letter), *youqing* (melancholy), *sixin* (self-interest), representational space, Deng Zhimo, *The Gracious Love Letter* (Fengyun *qingshu*), *A Casual Reader* (Sasa bian)

* Kathryn Anne Lowry is an assistant professor in the Department of East Asian Languages and Cultural Studies, University of California at Santa Barbara.

the writer's innermost thoughts. The preponderance of description of places, objects, gifts, and recollected scenes performs the emotions of the writer in order to reveal hidden sentiments and remind the recipient of the letter (and later readers) of his or her obligations and social role. These publications humorously circumscribe a space for reading where what is coded as hidden and selfish bears on public action, social roles, and moral values. This chapter borrows Henri Lefebvre's notion of "representational space" to highlight ways in which descriptive practices in qingshu bridge the realms of private and public, dream and reality, troublesome melancholy or desire and regulative/normative. Analysis of letters for exchange between courtesans and clients and suitors and gentlewomen demonstrates ways in which descriptions of objects and fragments of personal history attest to the sentimental tie between writer and recipient. In turn, it explores how this rich and repetitive description outlines a space for reading that makes self-interest and passion the basis for social conduct.

This chapter examines fictionalized qingshu 情書 (love letters), which are marked by a preponderance of description of places, objects, and events grounded in personal history, and suggests ways printer-editors made these sentimental objects the measure of changing social roles in China of the late Ming, ca. 1570 to 1640. Although several hundred letter-writing manuals and letter anthologies circulated in the early-seventeenth century, most epistolary literature left qingshu off the books.¹ There are, however, several rare collections of qingshu that playfully scrutinize the style and sources for writing on melancholy and other powerful feelings seldom explored in literature. Three early seventeenth-

1 Zhao Shugong 趙樹功 comments that the genre of qingshu is distinguished by its absence. See *Zhongguo chidu wenxue shi* 中國尺牘文學史 (Shijia zhuang: Hebei renmin chubanshe, 1999), pp. 41-53.

century miscellanies that survive in libraries in Japan give a broad sampling of qingshu with commentary that scrutinizes the link between writing and reading and social conduct, allowing us to trace ways in which editors, writers, and readers described and interpreted the sentiments.²

The term qingshu is best translated “love letter,” but the letters explore sentiments that inhere in various types of social relationship, not restricted to romantic or conjugal love as the English suggests. Qingshu are characterized by a mixture of bookish and mawkish prose and ‘high’ and ‘low’ diction, intermingling allusions to the classics, quotation of vernacular drama, shi poetry, song-lyric, vulgar speech, and doggerel to reveal the writer’s innermost thoughts. The depiction of the emotions achieves a peculiar effect, since the descriptions of spaces and places, objects, and gifts that are held in secret not only materialize the writer’s feelings but also call the emotions into being in the mind of the reader. The descriptive and sentimental language of qingshu performs the thoughts of both the sender and recipient of the writing, not in the sense of a speech act that enunciates the condition with words that set it in motion.³ Instead, the qingshu use description and sympathetic evocation of sights and sounds that may reveal the connection between the sentiments and social conduct. The core concern is not action, per se, but rather the values and emotions that determine conduct. By describing things that are grounded in personal experience, memory, or the problematic realm of selfish concerns (sixin 私心), qingshu allow the reader to decipher the pattern inhering in the sentiments that make social rela-

2 The three works each survive in a single copy in the Naikaku Bunko 内閣文庫 (Cabinet Library). See notes on primary sources in the Appendix.

3 J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things With Words*, ed. J. O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), on statements as performatives, pp. 133-47.

tionships endure.

Seventeenth-century printers and editors furnished paratexts for qingshu that signal the ambiguous status of printed letters as commodities. They are not only verbal etiquette manufactured for a growing literate public but also reading material that delights in showing the discrepancy between the literary imagination of desire and the social reality.⁴ The commentary highlights the ways in which sentiments are manifest in language, things, or natural indices; ultimately words are the umbrella category, describing the ways in which material manifestations of feeling appear and how to decipher them. The reading apparatus for the qingshu conflates their function as models for writing, didactic literature, and entertainment, as I discuss elsewhere.⁵ The editors provide framing narratives to introduce the circumstances that separated the writer and recipient and note the external and internal forces that moved them to write. In addition, marginal comments point out the role letter writing plays in steering the course of events, and the commentator applauds particularly vivid words or phrases and attitudes that “one might draw on,” kequ 可取, or “might emulate,” keyi feng 可以風. Such comments indicate tacit acceptance of the use of printed books as guides to etiquette and copybooks one might selectively draw on to shape social conduct or the writing of it.

Chidu 尺牘, “notes” or “personal letters” as a genre (if it can be said to have a coherent generic identity) are marked by the concern with expressing personal thoughts and emotions in exchanges between individuals. Considerable nuance of feeling is inscribed in writing about social engagements, the status of one’s health, or philosophical or social

4 See the author’s “Duplicating the Strength of Feeling: The Circulation of Qingshu in the Late Ming,” In *Writing and Materiality in China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003): 239-72.

5 Lowry, “Three Ways to Read a Love Letter,” *Ming Studies* 44 (Fall 2000): 48-77.

issues. Chidu are sometimes classified as siwen 私心, “personal writing.”⁶ However, such letters were apparently not regarded as private or restricted knowledge, and were valued for their calligraphy and circulated in the public realm as early as the Han.⁷

The ways in which Chinese epistolary literature intermingles the conventions of woodblock printing and manuscript suggest a parallel phenomenon in the blurring of the boundaries between conventionalized and individuated modes of expression and concerns typically regarded as public concerns and self-interest. Letter-writing guides and epistolary anthologies presented systematic guidelines to enable readers to copy or adapt models for writing their own personal letters. Timothy Brook has suggested the popularity of letter-writing manuals in late Ming signals a growing reliance on texts for the conduct of daily life and an increasing number of would-be writers who required models for communication.⁸ However, even while the printed literature instituted standards for self-expression, the print formats tend to emulate the look of manuscript. Commentary printed in the margins, beside, and within the text often imitates the appearance and tone of handwritten notes scribbled on a manuscript circulated among a coterie of readers.

The first part of this chapter examines the sources of qingshu and

6 Zhao Shugong locates a shift from letters expressing concerns of state, or gongwen 公文, to expression of emotions and personal thoughts, siwen, in the Warring States period. *op. cit.*, pp. 3-11.

7 See Qianshen Bai, “Chinese Letters: Private Words Made Public,” In *The Embodied Image: Chinese Calligraphy from the John B. Elliott Collection*, eds. Robert E. Harris and Wen C. Fong (Princeton: The Art Museum, Princeton University, 1999). Ronald Egan notes that Su Shih’s writings were primarily valued for their calligraphy; See “Su Shih’s ‘Notes’ as a Historical and Literary Source,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* vol. 50, no. 2 (December 1990): 561-88.

8 Timothy Brook, “Transportation and Communication,” In *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 8, ed. Denis Twitchett and Frederick W. Mote (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 636, 639-40.

descriptive practices that shed light on ways of conceptualizing “private” space, in opposition to orthodox behavior and social roles. Above all, qingshu are characterized by the predominant use of metaphor and spatial terms to paint a range of powerful emotions. I borrow the term “representational space” from Henri Lefebvre for the spaces conjured up in qingshu to suggest ways in which the descriptive practices in letters map perception against social space and practice and, in turn, create a counter-discourse about sentimental objects as opposed to public, regulative, or bureaucratic concerns. The notion of representational space is useful for considering the status of the space that letter writing defines, bridging the gulf between personal observation and perception, on one hand, and regulative or normative concerns on the other. Examples of qingshu exchanged between courtesans and their clients illustrate the manner in which writers describe scenes recollected from the past and gifts exchanged to attest to their sentimental attachment. The literature is repetitive and duplicates images and narrative tactics, yet this flaw is its strength, a means to codify the realm of sentiment and to articulate the basis for their liaison. The second part of the chapter examines objects that capture sentiments, differentiating the playful discourse on gifts in letters to courtesans from the more controversial letters exchanged by suitors and gentlewomen. Where letters to courtesans echo the imagery and concerns of letters between wife and husband, gifts and letters exchanged in courtship delve into melancholy and troublesome or unseemly passions. The commentary on qingshu exchanged in such illicit affairs decodes the ways in which objects and the intent they reveal should mold the orthodox relationships of future husband and wife. It shows how their writing bears witness to fate or other designs that join husband and wife, linking the secret exchanges of gifts and letters to social roles.

The fictionalized qingshu revel in showing the variety of ways in

which writing about desire can forge sentimental ties between writer and recipient. The epistolary correspondence allows one to sidestep meeting face to face, the matchmakers, or other social rituals, yet can forge ties more enduring than those cast through such sanctioned means. However, we must question whether the experience of reading such letters is “private” and solitary. One can imagine qingshu as public performances, starting with the writer who encodes emotion, then the commentator who scrutinizes the choice of physical and literary evidence for the sentiments, then the recipient (and broader circle of readers) who decodes the emotion upon reading the letter.⁹ At each stage of writing, annotating, and receiving a letter, it could be read aloud to friends, relatives, servants, and later readers, delighting them in the way that writing serves as a nexus between intangible feeling and physical form, private and public dimensions of social life.

The Sources of qingshu

This essay draws primarily on two miscellanies compiled by the journeyman editor and well-known author of Taoist fiction Deng Zhimo (鄧志謨, fl.ca. 1596), and an epistolary manual that is spuriously attributed to Feng Menglong (馮夢龍, 1574-1646).¹⁰ The first miscellany is the *Sasa bian* 洒洒編 (A Casual Reader, n.d.), a volume devoted to courtesans, romance and “freeflowing” or “casual” expression and behavior, with a second chapter titled *qingzha* 情札. A second miscellany, *Fengyun qingshu* 丰韻情書 (The Gracious Love Letter, preface dated 1618), categorizes letters into four chapters according to different types of sentimental ties:

9 I thank John Ziemer for his insight in commenting on an earlier essay.

10 The *Zhemei jian* is attributed to Feng Menglong, but the chapter titles and running headings for this work label it as a third edition of a book compiled by Mei Fengting 梅鳳亭, entitled *Danshan feng* 丹山鳳 (Phoenix from Cinnabar Mountain). See the annotated bibliography in the appendix to this paper.

conjugal love, brotherhood, courtesan-client assignments, and courtship. The two final chapters are love poetry and love songs, qingshi 情詩 and qingci 情詞, each of which could constitute a love letter in itself or furnish phrases to be incorporated in a letter. The epistolary guide *Zhemei jian* 折梅箋 (Plum Sprig Letters) is a third sampling of qingshu, a total of twenty-one epistolary exchanges arranged according to the same four categories used in Deng's work. The contents and chapter title in the *Zhemei jian* also duplicate the *Fengyun qingshu*. While it is not clear which work was printed first, the duplication shows the popularity of this kind of reading material (despite the fact that the only extant copies are in Japan, since few works concerned with romance and fewer about erotic life survive in Chinese libraries).¹¹

The primary concern of the genre of qingshu is representation of the innermost feelings, youqing 幽情, most centrally melancholy, longing and desire; such knowledge is the sole province of two people. The secrecy of such feelings and, indeed, the difficulty of articulating them in writing bears a close resemblance to Western notions of privacy, as something belonging to oneself or concerning a particular person, and not matters of state. Further, the melancholy and desire that qingshu convey is often problematic, a troubled state of mind or restlessness that disrupts normal activities. The space of reading that appears in the title of this essay refers, in part, to the generic concern of letters with conjuring up sentiments for one particular reader. Qingshu use visionary and ingenious language, creating a unique account of experience, meant for one reader. Yet later readers are invited to enter the space that writing and reading create for the sentiments.

Is the language for depicting of sentiment or the space for reading

11 It seems likely that the *Zhemei jian* is based on Deng Zhimo's miscellany, since a number of corrupted characters appear in the epistolary guide. See Lowry, "Duplication," pp. 243-244.

private? It is commonly held that silent reading is a private activity that gives rise to a capacity for self-reflection and interiority and that readers with sufficient skill may draw on print matter in their own fashion to construct meaning. Roger Chartier and Philippe Aries link the expansion of literacy and the circulation of texts in print and manuscript form to the privatization of life in early modern France in the period from 1500 to 1800. Chartier singles out the growing common practice of silent reading that shaped the encounter between the reader and his book and “redrew the boundary between the inner life of the individual and the community.”¹² He posits that the activity of silent, solitary reading was an occasion to construct an autonomous mental space and create a sense of the bounded self. “Silent reading opened new horizons for those who mastered it,” and transformed the intellectual endeavor in such a way that it became “an intimate activity, a personal confrontation between an ever-growing number of texts, a question of memorization and cross-referencing.”¹³ Further, he argues that silent reading paved the way for “critical audacities” such as the heretical texts of religious reformers and erotic books printed with suitable illustrations. However, the conceptualization of privacy in early modern Europe bears reexamination as we turn to Chinese culture in roughly the same period.

It may not be possible to generalize about the experience of reading a wide range of varied literary texts, even in a narrowly defined period and region.¹⁴ The critical part that Chartier holds silent reading played

12 Roger Chartier, “The Practical Impact of Writing,” in *History of Private Life*, vol.3, *Passions of the Renaissance*, ed. R. Chartier (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 111.

13 *Ibid.*, p.126.

14 Elizabeth Cohen, “Between Oral and Written Culture: The Social Meaning of an Illustrated Love Letter,” in *Culture and Identity in Early Modern Europe (1500-1800): Essays in honor of Natalie Zemon Davis*, eds. Barbara B. Diefendort and Carla Hesse (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), pp.181-197.

in the formation of a private realm and an emerging consciousness of the self as a bounded entity does not seem to have a direct counterpart in China of the same period. However, several dimensions of the reading practices that Chartier posits as a means to create a sense of autonomy and a space for the self can be seen in conventional letter-writing guides that survive in some numbers from the late-sixteenth century and early seventeenth century (and ostensibly had wide circulation). First, epistolary guides required or allowed readers to pick and choose and to cross-reference lists of phrases and vocabulary that were indexed to each topic for writing. These books were increasingly geared to composition at the level of the individual phrase.¹⁵ That kind of format offered a guide to readers who were confronted with a choice of texts, helping them to represent themselves or, in a sense, to invent themselves on paper. The present paper can only indicate trends in the practices of anthologizing letters and circulating model letters that aid in understanding how print might shape personal expression and how rigid or flexible were the parameters for expression.

A second feature of letter-writing guides which may have opened up a new space for reading and private reflection is annotation of the epistolary texts, which make it possible to use them as a primer (one reason many of these works are preserved in libraries in Japan). Such reading apparatus offers props to less proficient readers to read without formal instruction. However, that does not tell us that such books were read in solitude or in silence. In fact, the terms for reading that appear in letters, *du* 讀, *nian* 念, *yong* 詠 all imply recitation or reading aloud. The fact that reading might be vocalized and even involve public performance and reading aloud to family members or friends does not necessar-

15 See the author's "Personal Letters in Seventeenth-century Epistolary Guides," In *Under Confucian Eyes*, Susan Mann and Yu-yin Cheng eds. (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), pp. 155-160.

ily mitigate the formation of a private space; it was simply not a space restricted to one person. I contend that the qingshu printed in the literary miscellanies provide a space for reading about the sentiments and for other forces that shape sentimental relationships. The space of reading is an imaginary realm, and it is for this reason that the analysis in this paper centers on the descriptive means for rendering objects, places and thoughts in the qingshu. However, I reiterate that the extensive reading practices that are suggested by the books' format and the imaginative journey of reading the letters about melancholy need not have been enjoyed in silence to bear significance for understanding discourse about privacy and the sentiments. Social historical questions about changes in reading practices and the extent of literacy in the early seventeenth century are beyond the scope of this essay, but are important for understanding the audiences and uses for published qingshu (and popular reading materials in general) and I pursue these issues elsewhere.¹⁶

Seventeenth-century readers of epistolary guides were told that they must use letters for conducting social affairs; to invite guests to one's home or to travel, one had to find the words to convey the appropriate feelings. Letter writing became a necessity in the context of the economic and social change of the Ming.¹⁷ Transportation networks and trade led

16 I discuss the notional readerships for Ming drama miscellanies in the first chapter of my book *A Tapestry of Songs* and show the close tie between the context of staging drama and formats for printing popular songs and arias that emerge after the 1580s. Anne McLaren has suggested that advances in literacy, printing technology and the use of illustrations in mid- and late Ming books made it possible to have a private reading experience in a paper "Popularization of Print Culture in Late Imperial China" presented at the Association of Asian Studies meeting in March 2001.

17 Andrew Plaks gives an overview of social and economic change from the mid-sixteenth century and suggests their impact on creating a mobility of consciousness or "psychic mobility" in *Four Masterworks of the Chinese Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), pp.13-17.

to growing numbers of deracinated merchants who might spend years away from their families. Changes in the administration of the examinations also swelled the number of students, leading to sojourns away from home and new circles of acquaintance. Letter writing enabled people to regulate domestic affairs, to secure help and patronage, and to nurture personal friendships. Model letters are an important source for the social historian to understand emerging social networks as well as changing economic behavior (contracts for sale and rental of land, livestock, and laborers are standard elements of epistolary guides).

Qingshu describe the melancholy and doubts about fidelity that arose during protracted periods of separation. They are centrally concerned with the conflict between personal and public obligations and suggest a range of strategies to cope with such dilemmas through writing and reading. In turn, they witness the changing patterns of travel and trade, military service, and pursuit of success through study for the examinations, from an individual perspective. They seem to bear an indirect relationship to social reality, and may best be regarded as a literary amusement, or *wenzi youxi* 文字遊戲. Nevertheless, the qingshu bear witness to the way expanding literacy led to a new consciousness of the role of the individual man or woman vis-a-vis the community and state. The publications adopted a novel approach to the sentiments, a topic that had broad appeal in late Ming. Addressing a sophisticated (*fengliu* 風流) reader who is interested in how sentiment is manifest in the natural and human worlds, the books added humorous and often whimsical commentary on the aesthetic value of the letters as expressions of *qing* (emotion or passion). That people should stipulate how to write letters about melancholy and desire, even in play, shows the role literacy might play in describing and creating an imaginative realm focused on morality and personal conduct.

The number and scope of epistolary guides and anthologies of per-

sonal letters approached a zenith in the Ming Wanli and Chongzhen reign periods (1573-1619, 1621-44). Almost eighty extant guides from late Ming attest to the range of books concerned with personal letter writing, as well as to larger numbers of each title printed and the regard in which such practical works were held, which may have played a role in the books' survival. Their topics extend from the social rituals of marriage, birth and birthday congratulations, career advancement, death and mourning writing essentially as a speech act to mark a change in status to models for writing on daily affairs. The topics include sending or receiving gifts, invitations to wander or roam in the mountains or attend the staging of a drama, requests for loans, procuring goods, and so on. Conventional writing guides fused the pragmatic concern with social etiquette, with rhetorical concerns with "making the heart apparent through the pen," *yingshou dixin* 應手得心.

The late-Ming fascination with the workings of emotion surfaced in a number of letter-writing guides and is generally evident in the ways standard guides describe the relation between rhetoric and feeling. A small number of letter anthologies advanced the interest in rhetoric and the relation between writing and the sentiments by treating personal letters as *belles lettres*. Some anthologies compiled letters by renowned authors of the Ming and earlier eras, and treat them as minor essays (*xiaopin wen* 小品文) whose brevity of form and malleable style suited them to personal reflection.¹⁸ An example is the *Hebi wenhan* 合璧文翰 (Perfectly Suited Pair of Letters), attributed to Tu Long 屠隆. This anthology breached the boundaries between manuscript and print and

18 I discuss the trend to regard *chidu* as a branch of *belles lettres* in "Editing Annotation, and Evaluating Letters at the Turn of the Seventeenth Century: Instituting Literary Forms for the Self," In *Zhongguo gudian wenxue pingdian yanjiu lunji* 中國古典文學評點研究論集, eds. Zhang Peiheng 章培恒 and John Wang 王靖宇 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chuban she, 2002), pp. 100-20.

between private and public life by rendering short notes by renowned writers in a woodblock edition and adding comments on style. The preface claims the notes are “an invaluable aid to townspeople and their children for the conduct of daily social intercourse” *qie wei liren zi pingri jiaoji suo bu ke que zhe* 且為里人子平日交際所不可缺者. Circulating personal letters in print was not by any means a new phenomenon. Yet Tu Long’s work illuminates the seventeenth-century trend to address a broad readership, where some might use the material as practical models for writing or as a primer, while others might appreciate them as literary prose. Readers could also glean information about popular writers such as Wang Baigu and his affairs with courtesans. In another work, the *Han hai* 翰海 (Sea of Letters) compiled by Shen Jiayin 沈佳胤 (n.d.), the first chapter is concerned with sentiment, entitled *Qing bu* 情部, and is divided into the sub-topics of “longing” *si* 思, “parting” *xibie* 惜別, “travel” *lü* 旅, and “asking after someone” *xunhou* 訊候.¹⁹ The expression of personal thought and emotion was integral to communication on a given topic. Seen in the context of epistolary guides compiled by figures like Tu Long, Xu Wei 徐渭, Shen Jiayin, Xu Yizhong and others, the publications of *qingshu* simply elaborated the concern with sentiment that was inherent in the act of writing any personal letter.

The publication of *qingshu* suggests ways in which literacy had consequences for social life in the Ming, in particular the way women’s knowledge of fiction and drama provided them with a point of reference for evaluating social conduct. The letters poured out powerful sentiments of longing, melancholy and, in some cases, jealousy caused by separation from the beloved. Such feelings were not ordinarily put into words; this fact may explain the many literary genres of *shi* poetry, song-lyric, rhapsody, and dense descriptive prose that are incorporated in the

19 This work has a preface by Chen Jiru 陳繼儒 dated 1630 (Chongzhen 庚午). There are copies in the Harvard-Yenching Library and the Peking University Rare Books Collection.

letters. Literature provides a model for expressing the sentiments. In turn, the publication of qingshu served as an avenue to learn about literature. The intensive commentary and interlinear notes identify allusions and quotations, and explain the lessons to be drawn from each epistolary exchange (letters are printed in pairs, with some exceptions where a series of four letters were exchanged).

In a sense, these books offered a new form of knowledge to less literate readers, presenting them with letters about contemporary life and the forces that separated lovers and friends, which drew on the classics, wenyan 文言 fiction, and poetry to set forth moral guidelines. The comments instruct readers in how to read qingshu and emphasize the lessons to be drawn, but also provocatively suggest ways in which desire can help people to realize the true meaning of orthodox virtues of loyalty, filial piety, oaths of conjugal love and brotherhood. The published qingshu merge concern with the technique of writing about the sentiments with instruction in how to read, appreciate, and apply material drawn from a broad range of literary genres. They show, on the one hand, how interest in epistolary rhetoric spilled over into the personal realm and, on the other hand, how the publication of fiction and drama provided a frame of reference for writing about personal affairs.

The act of committing one's feelings to paper does not necessarily restrict the audience to one reader. In fact, letters often serve to reveal circumstances that would otherwise be concealed. In an example printed in the Gracious Love Letter, the melancholy of a woman whose husband has been away for three years comes to the attention of the commanding general when her letter falls on the ground in his sight. After reading the letter, he commands the man to return home to alleviate his wife's suffering.²⁰ Another example, a letter from a husband to his wife, Xie

20 The exchange "Sun Du qinghao 孫杜情好", in Fengyun qingshu, 1:26-28, concerns Sun Zhilong 孫之龍 and Du Xiuheng 杜秀珩.

Lanniang 謝藍娘 (Blue Mistress), who was lost to him in one of the battles in the first years of the Ming and is being kept by a military officer, leads to their reunion. The housekeeper intercepts the letter and shows it to the officer, who is so moved by what he reads that he reunites the couple.²¹ When letter writing is part of a fictional or dramatic narrative, its dual nature as physical object and a message that is decipherable is often central to the plot.²² The published qingshu also reveal what is generally concealed by bringing the subject matter of illicit love affairs and melancholy to a popular readership. In turn, it renders the hidden emotion in a form where it can be read both by the single reader for whom it is intended and by later readers, so that the emotion is performed for successive circles of readers. We can only speculate about the nature of that performance of emotion, whether the books were consulted as guides to writing, or for entertainment, or rehearsed and read aloud as examples of how to decipher writings about the sentiments.

Qingshu as a genre is marked by the intent to convey the innermost feelings of the writer, but the tension between literary conventions for expressing the sentiments and the concern to represent the unique circumstances of the individual writer is acute. The writer must devise, invent, or borrow the descriptive means to portray emotional experience. This practice of seeking or borrowing forms to convey sentiment has two important implications for understanding the fundamental mode of

21 “Jiang Xie qinghao” 蔣謝情好, in *Fengyun qingshu*, 1:23-25b. The letters and poems they exchange are published in *Yu chuang tanqing lu*. The exchange is reprinted in *Mingdai mingren qingshu* 明代名人情書 (Qingshu by famous figures of the Ming), He Keren 何可人 comp. Guo Bingquan 郭炳權, annot. and vernacular translation (Shanghai: Yilin shushe, 1936).

22 The *chuanqi* 傳奇 drama *Jingchai ji* 荊釵記 (The Wooden Hairpin) is an excellent example, where Wang Shipeng’s 王十朋 letter bearing good news is intercepted and rewritten by his rival, to tell Qian Yulian 錢玉蓮 that he wishes to remarry. The wife’s disregard for the letter is unusual in not giving credence to his authorship.

expression in letters anthologies and writing manuals more generally. First is the attitude toward duplication of materials found in the realm of print, and second the asymmetrical relationship of the core imagery of qingshu both to the observed world and to human experience. Popular letter-writing guides and the seventeenth-century anthologies of qingshu that were inspired by growing numbers of epistolary guides invite readers to borrow or duplicate phrases, structuring devices, or entire letters, and allow them to fill in the blanks or adapt the models as needed. Letter-writing guides offer models that give appropriate form to the reader's feelings and might enable him or her to compose a letter of their own. The anthologies of qingshu differ from conventional epistolary guides, since they incorporate song, shi poetry, and drama with the conventional language that is found in letter-writing guides.

These publications are premised on an attitude toward reading and writing that not only sanctions duplication but also assumes some degree of ability to fragment and recompose such models on the part of the reader. In this respect, published qingshu (and the commentary Deng Zhimo provides on technical or aesthetic accomplishment in letter writing) presume that readers are seeking to represent their internal states by selecting from texts and combining features drawn from materials in the realm of print. This, it seems to me, gets at the essence of the construction of a notion of the self and privacy that is founded on the spread of literacy and a culture that privileges writing as a means to express one's innermost thoughts. Epistolary guides offer rhetorical guides for voicing personal concerns, and presume that readers can select and adapt the models and phrases that were published to suit their individual needs. Letters could convey the heart's thoughts and thus affirm the sentimental ties between writer and recipient. As noted above, late-Ming epistolary publications showed increasing concern with refining rhetoric to capture sentiments that are appropriate to a given

relationship and social role.

Consideration of the imagery of qingshu, the second point noted above, takes us in quite a different direction from concerns with duplicating or selectively drawing on the conventional forms supplied in model letters. Moreover, the publications of qingshu include a narrative frame to explain the circumstances under which the letter was written, so that the reader is asked to view the letter as a particular expression of melancholy rather than the typical one. The commentary on each example of qingshu stresses the ingenuity and stylistic flair of the writer. Thus writing was viewed as an extension of the person and an act of memory.

Representational space, memory, and the space of reading

In this section I will examine the descriptive of practices in qingshu and trace the way letters to courtesans utilize familiar places and scenes, uncovering sites of memory to reveal their innermost emotions. Sites, scenes, and objects situate the sentiments and link the writer and recipient. The nature of the places which letter writers describe is essential to this inquiry into the space of reading, in order to show how letter writing traverses private and public realms.

I adopt the notion of representational space that is proposed by Henri Lefebvre, in order to explore the space that is envisioned by letter writers. The spaces in which letter writers locate their emotions are most often drawn from memory, recollected as the locus of past events and experiences that the writer and recipient shared. The spaces that are defined and described in seventeenth-century Chinese love letters are imaginary or visionary. Since they may be situated or linked to the past, present, and future at once, this space bears a peculiar relation to the observed world. The description of feeling resides in space of a peculiar nature, since it may exist simultaneously at several moments in time, and have different spatial or objective counterparts. As Lefebvre

defines it, representational space is intimately associated both with perceptions of space and actual construction of the spaces which define and delimit social practice. Representational space is neither abstract nor is it a physical space that might be “subject to the measurements and estimates of the survey.”²³ It is a conceived space (rather than abstract), of a kind that is experienced or ‘lived’ through its associated images and symbols. This is space that the imagination seeks to transform or appropriate. Lefebvre emphasizes that this type of space is passively experienced and is worked upon by the imagination; it “overlays physical space” rather than establishing the boundaries for spatial practice. Representational space is dominated by the imagination, and is not in itself constitutive of social forms as are representations of space. It is the space of artists, writers and philosophers “who describe and aspire to do nothing more than describe.”²⁴ Lefebvre shows representational space to be a complex symbolism that serves to create a counter-discourse about social life.

To put it differently, representational space is a visionary realm and the imagination mines that realm for forms that may express feeling or experience; while this approach to space is merely descriptive, it relies on fundamental conceptions of inner, intimate, shared spaces (but these spaces are so common, or commonplace that they are public knowledge). Bachelard links representational space which he travels through in his dreams to the intimate and absolute space of the dwelling.²⁵ Such a space (or one should say it is an approach to describing space) is

23 Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, Maria Jolas translator (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), p.xxxii.

24 Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, translated by Donald Nicholson Smith (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1991 [Editions Anthropos, 1974]), pp. 33, 39.

25 Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, Maria Jolas translator (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), p.xxxii-iv; Cited in Lefebvre, *op.cit.*, p.121.

the site of memory that enables one to summon up past events and emotions.

I use the term representational space somewhat more broadly than Lafeyvre to refer to the scenes, places, and objects that letter writers describe in order to recollect past experience and the emotions to which those events gave rise. Extending his definition of representational space to refer also to objects, I hold that they are equally the space of the writer and reader who make their feelings known through description and “aspire to do nothing more than describe.”

The love tokens, scenes of parting, and sites may trigger memories of a loved one (or melancholy in his or her absence) and all share a spatial element; this spatial dimension is essential to the expression of sentiment that is the letter writer’s primary aim. The practice of description, whatever its object, introduces a spatial dimension. Representational space and the objects envisioned by the writer function as a site where sentiments are lodged. This concept may help us to investigate notions of autonomy or privacy in writings that are concerned primarily with the sentiments, for the practice of expressing the sentiments in spatial terms shows how they are bounded and inevitably reflects the shifting boundary between public and private life.

The notion of representational space defined above mitigates the idea that the letter writer expresses feelings that are strictly private, even when writing of intimate ties. By definition, imaginary or visionary space overlays social space and is dependent on it. Furthermore, the purpose of describing places is to recognize the sentimental attachment between writer and recipient. The intimate emotions that they share are lodged in gifts, including jade hairpins, fans, sashes, gold pendants, and so on, whose symbolism is highly conventionalized. The discourse on objects in qingshu is sentimental and uses the limited set of objects as metaphors for powerful feelings of melancholy and longing. In

this respect, one letter strongly resembles another; and there is an overwhelming sameness to the writing about melancholy. However, as the writer elaborates his sentiments through describing the appearance of an object and explicating its symbolism, he or she also tries to add an individual twist to the conventional rhetoric of love and to create a sense of intimacy. The often startling images work to promote interest in the sensibility of the writer, his or her powers of observation, literary skill, and inventiveness. Since the letters were published as exchanges, with an initiating letter and response that focus on the gifts or places known to both, the writing creates a shared realm; this is what I term the space of reading. However, the publications subordinate the particular expressions of the sentiments to broad types of social relationship through chapter divisions. They articulate the hidden dimension of social relationships and show how the passions have a bearing on the mutual obligations and rights of the writer and recipient.

An exchange of letters between one Zou Fengbao 鄒鳳苞, who is a Suzhou native, and the actress Dong Qiongqiong 董瓊瓊 which whom he had a liaison for several months during her stay in that city illustrates the way that epistolary language relies on representational space to capture an emotional bond. The correspondence between the actress and her lover is placed in the chapter of letters confirming ties with courtesans, entitled “Gracious words (sent to) the blue towers,” Qinglou fengyun 青樓丰韻. Their letters describe love tokens and scenes familiar to both writer and recipient to convey the idea that their feelings are lasting, rather than transitory (though in truth of fact the latter is more likely the case). Qingshu are distinct from conventional letters in that they use places and objects as ciphers of feeling.

The actress initiates the correspondence, opening her letter by confessing that their time together helped her to realize a private dream: “These last months of harmonious union (liangyuan) have fulfilled my

most profound wish 數月良緣，平生深願。” She recalls him seeing her off on her journey and transforms her memory to name the light spring rain as tears: “A few drops (of spring rain fell) to welcome the plums half of it was the tears that filled the eyes of the person about to depart 時疏疏幾點迎梅雨，半是離人眼中淚也。” She injects that scene with melancholy, recalling how the drops of rain mingled with her tears. The letter reinforces their shared knowledge and history by describing the scene of their parting. Further, the writer reveals that what appeared to be raindrops were in fact her tears, a physical trace of her feeling for him. The way she formulates that memory of their parting conveys the sense that her melancholy is ongoing; like the rain, it is a natural force which cannot be repressed. The love letter enshrines the place of parting, the rain, and her tears, painting a scene that embodies her emotion. She envisions their parting as an instance of nature showing human feeling; such an imaginative reordering of scene and gesture makes her sorrow eternal.

Dong Qiongqiong closes her letter with another reference to tears, which once more links her sadness to a site they knew in the past. She observes that her letter is stained with “two tracks of heartfelt tears (literally, “tears of blood,” xuelei 血淚) and asks him in a formal, somewhat stilted manner to “Kindly look at the tearstains and tell me if they don’ t somehow resemble the (mottled) bamboo that grows before the temple to the consorts of the Xiang?”²⁶ The question is melodramatic, an attempt to dignify her tears by remembering the markings on the bamboo that is commonly known as Xiangfei zhu 湘妃竹. Ostensibly, they are both familiar with the temple, and often went there together. However, with this move the love letter steps outside a frame of private experience,

26 “Zou Dong qinghao” 鄒董情好, in Zhemei jian, 8:22b; Fengyun qingshu, 3:18b-19b. Xiang Fei 湘妃, the consorts of the Xiang, are E-huang 娥皇 and Nu-ying 女英, wives to the sage emperor Shun who drowned themselves in the River Xiang upon his death.

and invokes the bamboo whose texture is said to commemorate the despair of the imperial consorts. Both the scene of their parting and the bamboo before the temple are the narrative ground on which she draws tears and, from this, conjures up an image of deep melancholy. The first uses a private frame of reference, one that is shared only by the two people who parted in that place. The second allusion to the markings on the bamboo evokes orthodox notions of fidelity and loyalty; this space gives a more profound meaning to the actress' s somewhat petty description of her melancholy.

She tells him since leaving she has been consigned to the realm of longing and cannot find rest. Heaven is filled by her regret and is damaged to an extent that the mythical Nüwa 女媧 could never repair it. She reminds him that she has pledged her body and her heart to him. The actress bewails her status as a performer, by quoting Bai Juyi 白居易: “How could I willingly take my lute in my arms and board the boat that will part us two? 豈肯抱卻琵琶而過別船乎.”²⁷ She then dangles a tantalizing figure of their eventual reunion in the lover' s knot they might create by joining the two halves of the handkerchief that each possesses. As I have discussed elsewhere, the description of the handkerchief materializes the writer' s emotions by offering a palpable image of their future reunion and their longing to be fused as one body.²⁸ The handkerchief and the rain are representational spaces that describe the writer' s melancholy. In the context of the epistolary exchange, this

27 The Fengyun qingshu adds an interlinear note identifying this as “a phrase from Bai Letian 白樂天語.” 3:18b. However, the phrase does not appear in his corpus. It is found in a heptasyllabic quatrain by Long Renfu 龍仁夫, 陳平章席上題琵琶亭 (An inscription for the Pipa pavilion at a dinner hosted by Chen Pingzhang); see Li Gun 李葦 (1553 jinshi), comp. Yuan yi puji, 3:296. 元藝圃集, juan 3. SKCS vol. 1382.

28 “Wan Ming qingshu: Yuedu, xiezuo yu xingbie 晚明情書：閱讀、寫作與性別,” In Ming Qing Wenxue yu xingbie yanjiu 明清文學與性別研究, ed. Zhang Hongsheng 張宏生 (Nanjing: Jiangsugji chuban she, 2001), pp.390-410, particularly p.404.

imagery defines a shared space that not only recollects her emotions but provides a framework for the letter written in response.

A marginal comment on the opening passage by the Master of Frankness, Tanran sheng, praises her exposition as “a letter of feeling from the hand of a person of feeling” and notes her talent for transforming passionate feeling into natural imagery. “Each phrase is the cry of a solitary wild goose in flight; each sound she utters is (lonely) as the gibbon calling in the hills.” He concludes, “I dabble with these letters dispassionately, yet am disturbed by their passion *yu wan zhi wuqing que wei duoqing nao* 余玩之無情卻為多情惱.” The commentator inverts the final phrase of Su Shih’s song-lyric to the tune ‘Die lianhua’ 蝶戀花 (Butterfly Loves Flowers), in which “the man of sentiment was disturbed by the dispassionate” sounds of laughter in a space hidden from view.²⁹

The witty marginal note furnishes insight into a narrative mode that characterizes the love letter as a genre, that is, the use of inanimate objects or scenes as ciphers of feeling. *Qingshu* describe everyday objects, small gifts, and scenes familiar to both writer and recipient in such a way that feeling or passion is invested in an inanimate object, *wuqing wu* 無情物. This is an important insight, pinpointing the way that letter writing conveys feeling. *Qingshu* is expressly concerned with the sentiments, which the man or woman of feeling seeks to artfully voice. The inversion of the phrase found in Su Shih’s song-lyric sets up a contrast between the sentimental mode of the late-Ming *qingshu*, and the manner in which the Song dynasty writer constructed a realm of intimate or private pleasure, where the reader is touched by what he overhears and imagines taking place on the other side of a garden wall. The song-lyric evokes subtle emotions that are stirred by objective

29 See Su Shih’s song-lyric to the tune ‘Die Lianhua’ 蝶戀花(花褪殘紅青杏小), *Quan Songci*, p.300. The last line reads, “多情卻被無情惱.”

phenomena; it is emotion that gives shape to the world. In contrast, qingshu use representational space, objects, and scenes to give shape to memory that stirs strong emotions of passion and longing.

The letter employs imagery that can explain or remind the reader of the nature of the emotional bond. It affords a space for reading and writing about experience that is overtly sentimental. The letter begins and ends with the sentiments, and seeks to strike a chord in the recipient of the letter (and in later readers of the anthologies). The reader of the anthology is allowed to play voyeur and survey a range of intimate relationships. In a sense, these miscellanies take the wrapping off of private experience and scrutinize the expressive technique of writers who are experiencing exquisite sorts of sorrow that one would never expect to see in print.

Zou Fengbao answers the actress's letter point for point, first describing the season when they met and setting the scene in his own terms: "When I chanced to meet you, my dear, it was just the time of year when green arches above and red enfolds (one), but before I noticed the red (blossoms) were locked away and the green was disappearing 與卿邂逅, 正期倚翠偎紅, 不覺紅銷翠減." He uses the standard term to refer to an intimate relationship with a courtesan, yicui weihong 倚翠偎紅, to contrast with the conventional time of parting, in the fall. (The actual time when they met or parted is of little consequence in this formulation.) He remembers:

"When I saw you off at the pavilion, luxuriant foliage and ripples on the water stirred all sorts of sorrow in the two about to part. Since we parted, new cicadas (have hatched to) perform songs like (those played on) zither or reed pipes. Supple as the tone of the Jade One's singing, they ruminate on the penultimate pitch (zhi 徵) and imply the tonic (gong 宮), (sounds) strange and rare to my ears. I cherish and adore

them, but have you in my heart. I don't know if you have me in yours. What you said in your letter must be meant to bother me. From the other side of the wall, he bid the shadow of the (girl on the) swing farewell. Though it's not certain, it is likely that (the singing girl) did not really have to take her lute and sail away. It need not be so.

送至亭，草色萋萋，波光漾漾，動離人許多愁恨。別來新蟬奏響，如琴如竽，宛似玉人音調，嚼徵含宮，依稀在儂耳中也。儂愛之慕之，但儂之心有卿，不知卿之心有儂否，所語云云將給我矣。隔牆送過鞦韆影，莫須有，不抱琵琶過別船，未必然。

His letter sketches sounds he hears in nature and finds them a pale facsimile of her songs. This description of the autumn cicada does not pretend to be objective. It represents his experience of the song, claiming that however fond he is of it, the music can never replace her. He complains that her letter ignores him and accuses her of trying to trick him. Her allusion to the poem about a singing girl also elicits his response, to chide that she need not be an itinerant performer.

The letter to the courtesan closes with a witty inscription about the presents he is sending with the letter:

I am giving you a gold button, which you must place next to your heart.
I give you a jade hairpin. Don't wear it on the back of your head.
Regards.

今贈卿金扣，須放之心頭。贈卿玉簪，勿置之腦背後也。一祝。

This short closing rhyme playfully instructs her in how to use his gifts. She is to place the button (kou 扣) next to her heart (xintou 心頭); the wording of his letter suggests she should be touched, playing on the expression “kouren xinxian 扣人心絃.” He then instructs her not to fasten the hairpin on the back of her head (nao beihou 腦背後) where she cannot see it. In telling her to place the gifts by her heart and in view, these lines

humorously reformulate the wish stated in the body of the letter that she keep him in her thoughts.

Where the actress' s letter strikes a note of pure melancholy, with its imagery of tears and description of the torn handkerchief that may never be joined together, Zou Fengbao' s response is teasing and accuses her of being absorbed in her own thoughts. But he is scrupulously careful to address the fears her letter spelled out. The crowning detail of the letter is his assurance to her that things are not as bad as all that. The summary comment notes that "the short phrase (six characters) that Dong writes (to her): ' Though it is not certain, it might be...' and ' It need not be so' reveal his heart."

Objects that capture the sentiments: "Passion in its ripest form"

When a letter writer captures his or her feelings in an object it is said to show "passion in its ripest form," *zhenqing zhi renhou zhe* 真情之稔厚者.³⁰ These words preface an exchange of letters between a Hangzhou courtesan and her client, which illustrates the function of gifts (or more precisely, the description of a gift) as an imaginative ground. Objects provide a focal point for a lover' s discourse on the qualities that drew the writer and recipient to one another and on the enduring quality of their affection. The first two exchanges examined below are with courtesans, and show how verbal play confers meaning on objects as a token of a lasting regard. The next two examples are letters of courtship, which show ways in which description of objects is a means to impress the recipient with the sense of absence, not desire. Descriptions of love tokens and gifts in the amorous epistolary texts evoke melancholy that arises from desire for the beloved' s presence and the fact of his or her absence. Letters concerning gifts exchanged between a wife and her

30 "Sun Jiang qinghao 孫蔣情好," In *Zhemei jian*, juan 8:18b; *Fengyun qingshu*, 3:6a-7b.

husband spell out the significance of the object in a different mode. I have discussed several examples of letters of conjugal love elsewhere, to illustrate how qingshu may be read as didactic fiction. Little is concealed in such letters, which remind the recipient of his or her obligations to the family unit. A husband decodes the symbolism of three gifts he sends his wife, tailoring the epistolary message to impress the ideals of feminine virtue upon the recipient (and the reader of the anthology). A wife writes to encourage her husband in his studies and sends a pair of shoes and socks which he may wear to ascend the clouds, not to walk the brocade carpets of the pleasure quarters.³¹ These exchanges were all published in Deng Zhimo's miscellany *The Gracious Love Letter*, and several were reprinted in the *Plum Sprig Letters*.

The practice of choosing a material object to convey one's thoughts, *yowu yuyi* 有物寓意, is most evident in letters exchanged with courtesans, who were notorious for petitioning their clients for precious gifts and coveted goods from various parts of the country.³² The qingshu that Deng Zhimo selected for publication are remarkable for their wit, rather than the choice of a remarkable or valuable gift. The same love tokens are the subject of countless letters: jade hairpins are the most common, with mirrors, silk fans, cosmetics, incense, fruit, tea, and so on following close behind. Individuals exchange customary gifts to speak their mind, but the letters that accompanied those gifts ingeniously capture and encode the sentiments of longing and desire. This kind of writing is intensely private and hermetic; the form, structure, and themes of the

31 See the author's "Three Ways to Read a Love Letter," *Ming Studies* 44.

32 Guides to frequenting the pleasure quarters that were included in household almanacs, such as the *Fengyue jiguan* 風月機關 (Houses of Romance), caution men against giving in to a courtesan's requests for precious stones such as pearls, coral and other precious stones. This exhortation is cited in the summary to "Xie Tao qinghao 謝陶情好," *Fengyun qingshu* 3:9b-11a, discussed below.

initiating letter and the response are modeled closely on one another.

Gifts are often the focal point of short notes (*chidu*) that were published in letter anthologies and individual collections. Model letters, no less than examples of personal correspondence to friends and family, shed important light on the way the exchange of material goods cemented ties of affection and played a role in creating broad social networks based on private friendships.³³ But where does the boundary fall between private and public, between a customary gift that seals the affections in order to maintain a social relationship and an object that reveals one's innermost longing?

The conventional letters from a husband to his wife that are published in epistolary guides among "letters to one's household" (*jiashu* 家書) make it clear that such a note was often occasioned by the opportunity to send a sum of money or goods through an acquaintance traveling to the vicinity. Such letters are generally termed *ping'an xin* 平安信, "a letter to say that all is well." Models for correspondence between a husband and wife are a standard feature of letter-writing guides, and state the writer's longing, the length of time he has been gone, and the intention to return as soon as he completes his business. This message varies only in minor details of vocabulary and degree of annotation.³⁴ In contrast to model letters for exchange between husband and wife, where the message is highly conventionalized and the central concern is to deliver goods as part of the effort to regulate household affairs, *qingshu* generally devote more scrutiny to the gift's appearance and its symbolism. The epistolary description of the gift may be best likened to poetry on sending gifts, but the interplay between writing on the object and a narrative of parting and

33 For examples of Su Shih's notes, see Ronald Egan, *op. cit.*, pp. 571-74.

34 Model letters for exchange by husband and wife from two works are translated by the author in "Personal Letters", pp. 560-73.

loss surpasses what can be found in such poems.³⁵

In one example, Sun Fengxiang 孫鳳翔 became involved with the courtesan Jiang Honghong 蔣紅紅 during his stay in the city of Hangzhou. After continuing on his travels, he sent a gift of a jade hair clasp and mirror traced with water caltrop, along with a note declaring his enduring feelings for her. He uses clichés about romance to describe a landscape of pleasure. The printer added annotation in small script, which is italicized in the following translations of letters:

Heaven availed us of a fate, such that I could be (on intimate terms with you) embraced by red and reclining on azure. The clouds and rain of the Wu River Gorges appeared in my dreams. The wind and moon over the Tower of Qin pleased my senses.³⁶ It was truly delightful. Who could have expected that the mynah bird and soaring swallow (would scatter east and west). The two of us are at opposite ends of the heavens. I gaze at jet-black clouds, Oh, dense and obscure! Pronounced “a”, like wisps of cloud³⁷ and long for the delicate wisps (of hair) at your temples. I sight the new moon, Oh! charming, it makes me recall the sweeping line of your lovely eyebrows. I catch a glimpse of strange flowers, Oh! riotous and bright colored, they make me think of your seductive, flower-like countenance. Every single day, twelve hours (of the day), there is not a moment when I am not restless. Often I’ m driven to seek a way to renew our ties and to find solace from a traveler’ s

35 See, for example, “Zeng hanjin” 贈汗巾 (A gift of a handkerchief), “Zeng xiangnang” 贈香囊 (A gift of a perfume satchel), Fengyun qingshu, 4:27ab; “Lie bo zeng qingren” 裂帛贈情人, “Jiefa zeng lang” 截髮贈郎 (Cutting a lock of hair as a present for you), Sasa bian, 6:5, 7.

36 The Tower of Qin, Qinlou 秦樓, is a conventional reference to brothels. Originally it refers to a Phoenix Tower that Duke Mu of Qin had built for his daughter Nongyu 弄玉 and her husband Xiao Shi 蕭史, a flute player. The two played and sang there, attracting a pair of phoenixes who then allowed the couple to mount and ride away.

37 Lüyun 綠雲, translated literally here as “jet-black clouds,” commonly refers to the hair of a beautiful woman.

loneliness, but the road is difficult and long. You asked when I go on from here. It will have to be when the geese migrate southward and the handle of the Big Dipper points west in the fall.³⁸

天假以緣，得從卿儂紅倚翠。巫峽入雨雲之夢，秦樓之風月怡情，誠可樂只。詎意伯勞飛燕，天各一方，望綠雲兮靄靄音講雲縹緲貌。想雲鬢之綽約，見新月兮娟娟。憶蛾眉之秀嫵，觀奇花兮灼灼。思花容之妖冶，一日十二時，何時而不耿耿也。幾欲重尋舊約，為慰遠懷。奈道阻且長，卿問我行期乎？尚在鴈陣南來，斗柄西指秋時之日。

The opening lines give a strangely literal reading of the standard terms for “sexual union,” yuyun 雨雲, and “romance,” fengyue 風月, to create a spatial dimension for his affectionate memories. The stereotyped terms for taking sexual pleasure sound trite (as does the entire letter), yet the metaphor outlines vast spaces of the river gorge and tower to situate his experience of the pleasure quarters, as does the subsequent passage of the letter. He modulates the tone of his letter, using a bowdlerized form of archaic Chu-style song, to set a “classical” mood for his memory. (The shift to elegiac style is an example of the tendency in qingshu to incorporate different literary genres, styles, and quotations in order to voice the emotions.) He finds reminders of her everywhere he looks. Forms in nature summon up images of the courtesan or rather parts of her: soft wisps of hair at her temples, her brow, and her face. The forms of the clouds, moon and flowers function metonymically, to make her seem present or even omnipresent. The style of the letter is heavy-handed, but it earns the praise of the Master of Frankness, who comments in the upper margin: “Solicitous, (this is a letter) that shows great feeling and the forms of his imagination suit (the sentiments)體貼有情想

38 “Sun Jiang qinghao”. Fengyun qingshu, 3:6a-7b; Zhemei jian, 8: 18b-19b. The manual Zhemei jian omits this gloss on the Big Dipper and provides different annotation for the descriptive term aiai 靄靄, translated “drak and obscure.” The extensive annotation in the miscellany on romance suggests its audience were less proficient readers.

象更切。” Sun restates his desire to be reunited and affirms his lasting affection by explaining the choice of gifts that accompany his note, as follows:

“I am sending a jade hairpin and a mirror traced with water caltrop. My wish is that the hairpin might adorn (literally “accompany,” ban 伴) your silken black hair always, staying with you until your hair is white. I wish for the mirror to reflect a moon that is eternally full (to signify our union), the better to gaze at Chang’ e’ s visage. I trust you won’ t take umbrage at their poor quality, and will smile and keep them.

茲附碧玉簪一枝，菱花鏡一面，其簪也，欲其常伴青絲髮，相隨到白頭。其鏡也，欲其明月永團圓，好觀姮娥面。卿將不嫌其微褻，一笑存焉。

He asks that she keep the gifts, however small, so that the hairpin will adorn and be adorned by her for years to come, a symbol of their lasting affection. The description in the letter selects facets of the objects: their placement and proximity to the beloved, their ability to enhance and to reflect her image to state the writer’ s hope for an enduring relation.

Before thanking him for his gift, Honghong anticipates the autumn, when he promises to return, and looks forward to taking a boat to see the water lilies on West Lake. She then offers a reading of the gifts he has sent her, but does not follow his interpretation. Instead she sees the objects as emblematic of his character, writing in reply, “I look upon the jade hairpin and think of your abundant warmth. When I see the jeweled mirror, I’ m reminded of your upright nature. Thank you.”

The courtesan Jiang Honghong, in turn, sends gifts to her lover and expands on their meaning in an interesting vein. She has an ingenious reason for choosing his gifts. She sends a cake of incense from Lingnan, paicao xiang 排草香, and a decoction of powder, with this explanation:

“I trust that you know the stories behind each (of these presents) and know what I mean by them. Your concubine’ s wish is something like this:

to soon be able to cuddle up to the fragrance of Commander Xun, and not give the cold shoulder to a powdered Master He.”

Her closing words are, “I need not elaborate *bu xi* 不悉.” The Master of Frankness praises the effective juxtaposition of the two objects and the stories associated with them, *dui de qiahao* 對得恰好.³⁹ The allusions to the Han commander and the Wei courtier are explained in interlinear notes, a clue that the intended readership might not be versed in history. Her gifts are a humorous prescription that would allow him to dress up as a man she will not reject, where other women undoubtedly would.

Many love letters are solely concerned with gifts that signify the affection for the letter’s recipient or which will secure affection from the reader. One Tao Rugui 陶如圭 writes a letter attempting to set forth a rationale for how small gifts his courtesan has requested bear witness to his affection: rouge and powder, a brocade purse, a fine silk fan, a gauze sash, and jade hairpin. The note sent by the Hangzhou courtesan Xie Yunxian 謝雲仙 requesting these five presents presents him with a doggerel rhyme (*feng yi kouci* 奉以口詞) enumerating the qualities the objects will enhance in her, and asks him not to take offense at the pettiness of her thoughts:

The first goes like this: In the quiet courtyard, stricken with longing flowers (beauty) fade. If you wish my face to look nice, I implore my love to buy some rouge and powder. The second goes like this: Southern girls have wonderfully fragrant skin, and the courtesans of Qin have bodies with a lovely aroma. If my love desires me to smell good, I ask you to procure a bag of scent. The third one goes: The weather’s suddenly turned unbearably meaning extremely hot,⁴⁰ and my blouse is soaked in fragrant sweat. If my love wants my heart to stay cool [and

39 Marginal comment above the final line of “Honghong fu Sun sheng shu 紅紅復孫生書,” Fengyun qingshu, 3: 7b.

aloof from other men], I asked you for a good silk fan. The fourth one goes: Since I think so often of my talented man, my gown now enfolds me in its breadth. If my love wants me to show off my fine waist, I ask you for a white gauze sash. The fifth one goes: I try to fasten my glossy hair knot, but these flowing tresses are totally pronounced like kerchief uncontrollable (luan, like her thoughts). If my love wants me to be well adorned, I ask you for a jade hairpin.⁴¹

其一曰，深院為傷春，不覺花枝損。郎君欲我好姿容，從郎索脂粉。其二曰，楚女肌偏馥。秦姬體自香。郎君欲我好氣味，從郎索香囊。其三曰，天氣忽炎歊，羅衫透香汗。郎君欲我心地涼，從君索紈扇。其四曰，幾為憶才郎羅衣摺寬褪，郎君欲我好腰肢，從郎索羅帶。其五曰，欲挽堆鴉髻，雲鬢亂莫禁。郎君欲我好粧飾，從郎索玉簪。

The marginal comment above this middle section of her letter praises the way “each item is vested with meaning, each word spelling out her feeling. This lament is so prolonged, it is truly marvelous! 事事寓意，字字寫情，悠長妙甚”⁴² The courtesan concludes her litany by saying, “These few things I ask of you, my love. You can offer me the shade of one leaf from a thousand trees. Such deep shade as it created could quell every drop of the waves in the four seas 一一求于郎，郎能分千樹一葉之影，即是濃陰，減四海涓滴之波，” and then closes the letter.

Tao writes a teasing letter to the courtesan in reply, beginning, “I dare not boast that I have such things, nor dare I to demur by saying I don’t have them.” He grudgingly allows that he has money to spare (qingfu 青蚨 “green water beetle”) for the gifts. He explains his action in his own sequence of five short verses, which he terms “a shallow song-

40 The interlinear note stating that yang 歊, unbearably, “is pronounced like precious yin gui 音貴,” seems to be incorrect.

41 “Xie Tao qinghao” 謝陶情好. Fengyun qingshu, 3:9b-11a.

42 “Yunxian yu Xie sheng shu 雲仙與謝生書.” Fengyun qingshu, 3:10. Like all the marginal comments in the miscellany, this is ascribed to the Master of Frankness.

lyric,” bici 鄙詞, sent “as a reflection of his feelings” dai wei qingzhao 代惟情照. The verse envisions the way the courtesan will use the gifts:

First, I send you rouge and powder, which will make your countenance perfectly charming. I insist that you take care of yourself and not let the dressing table sit empty. Second, I send you a purple sack of perfume, the scent of xunlong nao, and hope that you will be a fragrant Lady Willow and not get mixed up in stinkweed. Third, I send you a fan of fine Qi silk that unfolds to show the joy of reunion. Even when the autumn wind begins to blow, I hope you will not discard it. Fourth, I send you a fragrant gauze sash, twice as long as I imagine you will need. I ask you not to take away from the length and save it to tie a lover’s knot. Fifth, I send you an azure jade hairpin to keep in your silken black hair for many years. I wish that you will treasure it and don’t let it go askew.

其一曰，贈卿脂與粉，恰好為儀容，願卿須愛惜，勿使鏡奩空。其二曰，贈卿紫香囊，氣味薰龍腦，願卿香柳娘，勿混魚腥草。其三曰，贈卿齊紈素（扇），展動喜團圓，縱使秋風起，願卿莫棄捐。其四曰，贈卿香羅帶，其長剛一尋，願卿莫浪棄，留得結同心。其五曰，贈卿碧玉簪，常伴青絲髮，願卿好珍重，莫使中央折。

The double entendre in his poem expresses a wish that they may maintain a lasting love. He hopes that she won’t throw away the fan when the cool weather comes (abandon her affection for him as time goes by), or trim the sash to the proper size and discard it (loosen it for another man) before they can use it to tie a lover’s knot. Similarly, he hopes she will wear the hairpin neatly in her hair (keep their liaison central in her thoughts). He concludes by saying that though the objects he’s sending on her request are “trifling,” jianjian 淺淺, his feelings for her are “tender and pitying,” lianlian 戀戀.

Finally, Tao spells out the paradox the situation presents him: “I am

singularly able to secure the affection of a beauty with inanimate objects of this kind, *wu qing wu*. He proclaims this good fortune for the trinkets, “and my good fortune as well,” and closes, “And fortunately, you may look on these with a smile and keep them.” The humorous exchange on the part of both the writer and recipient clearly delineates the link between objects, the qualities such objects are meant to enhance or evoke in a person, and the sentiments these qualities inspire.

Commerce with women in the pleasure quarters involved gifts of far greater value. The summary comment on this exchange in the Gracious Love Letter observes that requests for pearls, precious coral, and agate would of course be commonplace for men who frequented the pleasure quarters, but would not always be granted. The letters exchanged by Tao Rugui and the courtesan show a mutual indulgence: she commandeers gifts from her lover in order to fashion herself to his liking and pretends not to be interested in the gifts in themselves. He, in turn, says the material goods have little significance, but explains how she should use them to show that she values his affection. As in the previous letters exchanged with the Hangzhou courtesan, humor is a means to encode their sentiments. The letters employ wit of a sort that is trite and non-committal, but the writer asks the recipient to participate in verbal play and to uncover the double entendre to reveal their lasting affection.

The Innermost Emotions and Self-Interest

The love letter affords a space for expression of personal or selfish concerns, *sixin*, and conveys the writer’s innermost feelings or musings, *youqing*. However, this dialogue is not strictly private in nature, for it is integrally related to the construction and perception of social role and creation of a mutual understanding of the rights and obligations intrinsic to that relationship. The term *sixin* that appears in the published love letters, and its component *si* 私, is inherently ambiguous, for it denotes

personal thoughts and desires that are associated with intimate emotional ties and domestic relations, but also may refer to an individual's selfish or self-interested thoughts.

An exchange between a suitor and a young gentlewoman he spied when watching the Dragonboat races provides a particularly vivid example of the ways in which letters disclose the workings of the heart and, in doing so, redefine their social relationship as future husband and wife. The need to make the desire of the two young lovers conform to reason or to invent a reason or underlying pattern that can explain and rationalize their desire becomes the central concern in this qingshu. This concern to show how covert or even illicit desire underlies a public social relationship is most pronounced in the letters of courtship.⁴³ The preface gives an account of how a young man by the name of Liu Chun 劉純 secretly wooed a girl he happened to see on the day of the race, whispering to her on that first occasion, "The boats are fine, but not nearly so fine as the flower." He then tossed her a trinket, a fan pendant in the shape of a lion; she made a gift to him of a jade hairpin in return. The preface closes, "His letter conveys his innermost feelings, as follows" 以書傳幽情云。⁴⁴

The attention to objects in this pair of letters is distinct from the preceding exchange between the courtesan Jiang Honghong and her client, where objects are emblematic of the character of the recipient and of the giver. This is discourse that seeks to show ways in which objects represent the beloved and substitute for the desired person. In turn, by substituting for the object of desire, such love tokens underscore the

43 The chapter is titled "The secluded chambers" (of a young gentlewoman), yougui 幽閨, in the miscellany Fengyun qingshu and the epistolary guide Zhemei jian.

44 "Xiao Wei qinghao" 蕭魏情好. In Fengyun qingshu, 4: 22b-24b. Although the title gives the surname Xiao, the preface and each of the four letters refer to the young man by the surname Liu. The emphasis on innermost feelings is my addition, not in the original text.

innaccessibility of the person and evoke a sense of longing and loss. Fastening the jade hairpin on his head, Liu Chun writes, “I wish above all to wear the Jade One. Taking (the hairpin) in my hands, I long to fondle the Jade One.” He further spells out the relation between the object given him, the hairpin, and the giver as the object of desire, telling her, “I ll try to state my thoughts like this: I long for the Jade One, but cannot see her. I look at this jade hairpin, which resembles the Jade One. Who could foresee that a jade hairpin could so pierce my heart and puncture my lungs?” The jade hairpin is the most common of love tokens, since it evokes the Jade One, the beloved. The hairpin is a stand-in for the beloved and so it triggers his longing and a physical, even visceral sense of despair and defeat when he thinks about how far beyond his reach she lies. The marginal comment at the close of the suitor’s letter underscores the nature of his intense longing, as something that is unreasonable or unaccountable. The last lines of his letter inquire into the “cause” of their meeting, duan 端, in a play of words, splitting the name of the festival when they first met, Duanyang jie 端陽節, on the fifth day of the fifth lunar month. The Master of Frankness draws attention to the need to make their illicit desire conform to social mores in his marginal comment: “A person of feeling crosses paths with another person of feeling. An inexplicable occurrence leads to inexplicable regret 有情人過有情人，無端事惹無端恨。” The conflicting reasons for their meeting, their subsequent tryst, and eventual union become the central concern of the exchange.

The woman Wei Qianyun 魏倩雲 explores her feelings for him by writing about his gift of a pendant. She underscores the connection between the object and “longing”. “Fondling the lion,” she writes, “I cannot control this longing.” The object is present, while the beloved is not, and its presence evokes a sense of loss. The Master of Frankness praises the way her writing on the pendant reveals her thoughts: “Giving

form to her longing through the lion, and making the lion real in her thoughts. Such ingenuity of thought is marvelous and penetrates the marrow of one's bones" 以獅形思，以思實獅，思之巧者也，殆妙入骨髓之處。 If this were the end of their correspondence, it might be sufficient, but they have not achieved a resolution. Qianyun closes her letter by suggesting a date for a rendezvous on the Seventh Night. The Master of Frankness muses on the plan to rendezvous, saying that the two should find a joy in this meeting that does justice to the convergence of the stars in heaven.⁴⁵ She attests to the reason for this plan by proclaiming the day of their meeting on the Dragonboat Festival an "auspicious time," jiachen 佳辰; the night of the seventh day of the seventh lunar month is an "auspicious evening," jiaxi 佳夕; and their chance meeting is an "auspicious event," jiashi 佳事. However, the literature on the Seventh Night stresses the brevity of the lovers' meeting, as much or more than the opportunity to be together. The commentator raises this issue at the close of her letter, asking "What will the next night be like mingye dang heru 明夜當何如?"⁴⁶

The suitor Liu Chun presses the lady to meet him again in his next letter, but the girl declines his request. She explains her refusal is "not because (she) does not desire to continue their union fei bu yu zai xu siluo 非不欲再續絲蘿," but because there is no pretense for a meeting. Her words are carefully calibrated, and make a clear distinction between what she considers an act of fate and a secret liaison. She does not want to be discovered. "And moreover," she writes, "This night is clearly not the Seventh Night, and we cannot extend the new relationship that was fated between us in familiar assignation" 況此夕月明非七夕，舊緣未可續

45 He writes, "They set a meeting on the Seventh Night. In heaven there are auspicious times, which are times for joyous events in the mortal world. Delightful!" Fengyun qingshu, 4:24b.

46 Fengyun qingshu, 4: 25.

新緣。She urges him to seek out her aunt as a go-between without delay. The Master of Frankness comments that “This letter shows that human desire is part of the pattern of heaven, and the pattern of heaven is intrinsic to human desire 此一書天理中有人，欲人欲中有天理。” His summary comment then spells out the lesson to be drawn from their courtship in letters:

This couple was intially united by desire and finally was constrained by pattern (or “reason”). Those who are drawn together by desire, even if it is the meeting of a talent and beauty, must be faulted them for acting thus. Bus those who are constrained by reason, though hearsay and depravity might sway them, think to arrange a proper match. It could not be otherwise. Although there is that which deserves censure, their case is not entirely without that which can be enhanced.

此輩始以欲合，終以理制。合于欲者，才子遇佳人，每怪其然；制於理者，謠奢思正配，不得不爾，是可刺之中，不無可美者在。

In explanation, Liu appended a song-lyric so that the reader “may survey his feelings,” yangwei qingzhao 仰惟情照 and know how their meeting stirred him. His letter thus echoes the form of the letter with appended song-lyric by Tao Rugui 陶如圭 to a courtesan. The young woman also appends a song to her suitor, so that he may reflect on her feelings, gengxi qingzhao 更希情照. The interplay between the presentation of sentiment in poetic form and the intricate negotiations that lead to their union is startling, for the two types of language bear equal weight. The song-lyric manifests their feeling, but the discussion of why they met and should meet again is crucial to legitimize and allow them to act on those feelings.

Another exchange of letters in the same chapter of the Gracious Love Letter also explores the conflict which both the man and woman experience during courtship, between personal feelings of desire and

public decorum. Two young people who live in neighboring houses have known each other since childhood. She is a beauty and he a talent. This is an account of how the affection between the two young people matures and turns into longing and melancholy when they are reluctant to act on their desires. In turn, it is a fascinating example of the way publication of qingshu in the seventeenth century created a discursive space, explicitly addressing the way personal sentiments might be accommodated by evolving social roles.

The preface elucidates the regard both the man and woman have for one another: Liu Chunbiao admires He Yunying 劉之慕賀, while she is inseparable from Liu, qianquan yu Liu 繾綣於劉. Their affection for each other expresses itself as a mature love, with the different, gendered stances a man and woman take in romantic relationship. The preface also identifies the problem: “their private thoughts and desires are unanswered 幽思尋春不偶”. By giving voice to the writer’s melancholy, the qingshu work to reconcile their “troubling thoughts” or “pensive moods,” yousi 幽思 and youhen 幽恨, and give outward expression to what has been kept hidden or suppressed.

Liu Chunbiao despairs that “It is the laughter and conversation (they) shared in the past that was the embryo of this present odious longing” 是往日之笑語，今日惡相思之胚胎也。⁴⁷ He gives a moving account of his feeling for his neighbor, which seems to pervade everything he sees: When I see water lilies rising from a pond, no sooner does my eye alight on them than it takes on color and I can’t help thinking of your grace. When I walk in the garden and hear the song of the oriole emerging from the valley, my ear apprehends it and it forms a sound A phrase from Master Su and I cannot help but recall the cadence of your

47 “A letter presented to Mistress He by Master Liu 劉生奉賀娘書.” Fengyun qingshu, juan 4:5. This is the first of two letters entitled “Liu and He had a close relationship 劉賀情好” Fengyun qingshu, 4:4b-6b.

voice. The young man then copies out a song-lyric that he found as he flipped through a book, which made his heart leap and his thoughts race away, and finally left him desolate as if he had lost something. He then appends his own composition of a short song-lyric “to reveal the workings of his heart, *yi shu xinqu* 用抒心曲.” The term he uses for the “workings of his heart,” *xinqu*, denotes a sense of hidden movement or meandering; the song captures feelings that can’t be revealed in other forms of speech or prose.

Although the young man’s song borders on doggerel verse, he is lauded for the way he conceals his melancholy. More precisely, he masks his sorrow in playful words. Because the two concerns have arisen earlier in this essay, first, with masking one’s sentiments and, second, with verbal play as a means to communicate or create sentimental attachment, I translate the marginal comment in full:

“This is a new cadence, which is both elegant and moving. Yet he (chooses to write) playfully about these things, so as not to sound desolate. One must steel one’s heart and harden one’s bowels. This is a capable (piece of writing).

調新而雅而又悲，恰玩之而不悵然，必鐵心而石腸乃能爾

The commentary clearly sets forth the qualities that would interest readers. First is the refined, *ya*, or ‘literary’ nature of this genre of writing. Second is its evocative quality; this letter is not simply polished, it is affective. Third, the humor of this writing is an important aspect, as we have seen throughout. The writer pours out his heart without going too far, sending a poem that is a variation on the poem he’s just read:

秋光好，秋風老 The autumn scene is fine; the autumn wind’s grown old.
 偏有離人憂草草 But there is haste and worry in the traveler’s mind.
 木落還成宋玉悲 The leaves fall and give fruit to Song Yu’s sorrow.

月明更起蘇公惱	The moonlight, in turn, makes Master Su feel vexed.
雨意悠悠	The rain seemed set on falling without cease.
雲情渺渺	The clouds' sentiments are vast and mysterious.
寸心不定常如搗	My heart is uncertain, pounding constantly.
夢魂有意入巫山	My dreaming spirit is intent on entering Mount Wu.
巫山道路知多少	Who knows how long the road there is?

Yunying replies in the same vein, and appends her own composition to the tune 'Qinlou yuan 秦樓怨,' (Lament on the pleasure houses) in order "to tell him of her innermost sorrow, wei ji youhen 為寄幽恨."

金風乍起	The autumn breeze suddenly rises,
吹動離人情緒	stirring up the traveler's mood
燕子于今辭舊壘	By now the swallows have departed their fortresses.
是他帶得愁來	It was he who ushered my sorrows in,
更不解帶將愁去	but then didn't think to take that sorrow away with him.
織女多情牛郎有意	The weaving maid is infatuated and the cowherd has intent.
銀河莫恨無橋渡	Don't regret that there is no bridge to cross the Milky Way
天台洞口桃花媚	The cave entrance on Tiantai is adorned in peach blossoms
待情人為劉郎指引尋春路	Whom may I ask to guide Master Liu in his search for the road to (Peach Blossom) Spring.

The manner in which the young man and woman use poems to restate their emotions illustrates a central characteristic of the language of qingshu that is seen in all the examples discussed above. The epistolary text is a pastiche of different literary genres, where the writer seeks to give form to feeling, and often repeats himself or herself, revisiting her

melancholy and factors that have caused (or may assuage) it. The qingshu are exceptional sorts of writings, in this respect, whose language does not sound like the letters that appear in individual collections (bieji 別集), nor rehearse similar concerns and ideas; the qingshu rehearse the sentiments. Here, both the man and woman incorporate their own compositions in the message, providing an important means to make concealed feelings manifest. The poem by the suitor Liu Chunbiao is an excellent instance of epistolary writing that is inspired by something discovered in a book; he essentially imitates that other poem in order to discover a form to profess his melancholy to the woman he admires.

This exchange illustrates a second feature of the literary miscellanies that published qingshu, which furnish abundant (even excessive) reading apparatus. The commentator plays an interesting role in setting forth a new kind of moral guideline to explain how desire may be accommodated, or perhaps one should say contained, within the conventional relationship of husband and wife. The prefatory introduction to this exchange makes it clear that the publication sanctions their feelings of desire: it states the initial regard the man and woman hold for each other, and finally applauds them at the end when they act with reason and restraint. The summary comment praises their restraint in “not stealing over the wall to make an assignation, instead going through the slow, crippling process of arranging a union (through a matchmaker), acting with reason and restraint” 不踰牆相從，只求蹇修，撮合以理制。⁴⁸ Descriptive prose is the third means to make desire palpable. The language evokes the lover’s voice or appearance in a material sense, rather than “telling” how feelings arose. The peculiar language of qingshu makes the writer’s feelings more troubling, rather than less. The rendering of natural forms to evoke melancholy or sorrow makes the feelings

48 The summary comment is set off from the main text graphically, by indenting the passage, and by the use of a simple cursive script. Fengyun qingshu. 4: 6b.

palpable and real; this is representational space, where the writer “describe(s) and aspires to do nothing more than describe,” and not “mere” description.

In conclusion, the qingshu open up an imaginative space where the innermost feelings are given form, and are accommodated to social relationships of conjugal love, friendship, courtship, and the long-term liaisons with courtesans that played an increasingly prominent role in seventeenth-century life. The examples of qingshu discussed in this essay show how troubling emotions are brought to light to attest to the desire that should bind the writer and recipient. That bond may be premised on the need to assuage melancholy or, in the case of courtesans, on the writer’s bold demands to procure or wear a gift. The unusual publications of qingshu with commentary made the discourse on qing accessible to less literate readers and suggest how new reading materials was circulated and read (aloud or in silence), to achieve a marriage between desire to reason, on the one hand, and description and the sentiments, on the other.

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閱讀的空間： 晚明情書中對幽情的寫照

羅 開 雲*

摘 要

本文試圖以「有物寓意」及寫信人附上的詩詞「以書傳幽情」，「代為情照」為中心，並以鄧志謨（活動於1596年前後）編選的《丰韻情書》及《洒洒編》與所謂馮夢龍（1574-1646）編輯的《折梅箋》在情書上增加以批點作為參照座標，探討雲箋的編輯、書寫、閱讀如何把私密空間與社會角色串通問題。在商業交通迅速發展，識字日益普及的明朝末年（約1580-1640年）尺牘規範流通極廣；日用類書的翰墨門書契門，各種捷用尺牘及歷代翰墨選集至今保存將近80種，其引用書目列出200多種書名，而其中情書是一個空缺。本文分上中下三編：上編為引子，主要考析《丰韻情書》與另外兩種的成書經過與其前後複制抄造現象。鄧志謨編纂《丰韻情書》根據社會關係分類：夫妻間的室家丰韻，友人的金蘭丰韻，情侶的青樓丰韻，及幽閨丰韻四種，作品著重描寫景物來傳達情思，引用各種詩詞、歌曲、傳奇、典故等，而編輯通過對書中著者身世的總結把書信來往情節化和教導化，形成一種獨特的文體。中編為外論，把情書所描述的景色，包括離別的亭臺花木與遊人眼前的山川，視為寫照空間（representational space），對其打破夢幻與現實，情欲的私密空間與公認的義務的界限加以討論。下編為內論，主要把情書「物為情之稔厚」這個概念加以討論，並以情書中用以表示思戀愛慕閨女的禮品的描繪作為具體例

關鍵詞：情書、晚明、寫照空間、幽情、私心、丰韻情書、洒洒編、鄧志謨

* 加州大學聖塔芭芭拉分校東亞系副教授。

證，探討情書、幽情、私心的重新認識與肯定，這種通俗出版物如何反映和影響晚明時期變遷中的社會角色，以及鄧、馮二人對編選工作與閱讀模式的理論思考。