

CHAPTER 7

The Space of Separation: The Early Medieval Tradition of Four-Syllable “Presentation and Response” Poetry*

Zeb Raft

Chinese poetry as a whole could be considered under the rubric of letters, insofar as so many poems are “addressed” to another person, and as this inter-subjective quality is such a prominent feature of Chinese poetry even in the absence of a named addressee. Of course, it is rather easy to expand the concept of letters to accommodate any kind of literature, or even anything put in writing, and while Chinese poems were frequently objects of exchange over distance, letters can be distinguished for *always* being part of such an exchange.¹

The pair of poems studied in this essay can indeed be considered letters, as can many specimens of the general type to which they belong, “poetry of presentation and response” (*zengda shi* 贈答詩). Presentation and response poetry covers a wide swath of early medieval (and later) Chinese poetry—at seventy two poems, it is the second largest *shi*-category in the *Wen xuan* 文選, early medieval China’s most representative anthology.² The poems studied here belong to a sub-type, presentation and response poetry in the four-syllable meter, that possesses a more natural coherence than the category as a whole. Presentation poems of this sort are generally long, stanzaic compositions, beginning with a eulogistic treatment of the recipient, continuing with a narrative account of the shared friendship, and concluding with a message for the recipient, with the response poem requiting in close parallel. This well-defined structure evinces a kinship with medieval prose letters.³

* Research for this paper was conducted using Academia Sinica’s *Scripta Sinica* text database (<http://hanchi.ihp.sinica.edu.tw>). All references, however, are to the print editions cited.

1 For an extended definition of the letter and discussion of its manifestations in early medieval China, see Richter, *Letters and Epistolary Culture*, 37–42.

2 For an overview, see Jiang, *Wen xuan zengda shi*. For this statistic, p. 25; on the overlap between this category and other poetic categories, preface p. 1 and pp. 166–78.

3 On the structure of early medieval prose letters, see Richter, *Letters and Epistolary Culture*, Chapter Three and 140–45.

This essay focuses on what I call the “space of separation” opened up by this kind of poem, with specific discussion of three topics that enter into that space in one particular pair of poems—the intimate bond of the poets, the presence of the state, and the representation of a public space. I begin with a brief account of the history of four-syllable presentation and response poetry and the formation of its special “space.” I then present the poems in translation, followed by an inquiry into the lives of the poets that lays the ground for the thematic discussion. In conclusion, I reconsider the relationship of letter and poem in the Chinese “letter poem.”

1 Four-Syllable Presentation and Response Poetry and the “Space of Separation”

By all appearances, the four-syllable presentation and response poem is a phenomenon distinctly associated with early medieval China, existing only from the mid-second through mid-seventh centuries. It arose late in the Eastern Han dynasty (25–220), although the extant examples do not allow us to determine how prevalent a practice it was at that time. It achieved maturity and even grandiosity with the Western Jin (265–316), when strong classicist currents tended to favor the stately, archaic cadence of the four-syllable line.⁴ It continued to be used by literati in the Yangtze river region after the establishment of the “Eastern” Jin (317–420), but though we now—thanks to a Tang compendium partially preserved in Japanese monasteries⁵—have quite a few such poems it is still difficult to know how extensively or consistently it was practiced. The poems studied here date from this period, and come from this source.

Judging from extant materials, in the mid-fifth century this kind of poetry seems to fade away before a brief revival in the court-dominated literary culture of the turn of the sixth century. By the Tang (618–907), four-syllable presentation and response poetry appears to have disappeared completely. The reasons for this disappearance, to the extent that we believe in reasons for historical facts, are probably two. First, literary culture from the mid-fifth century onwards showed a decided preference for the more modern five-syllable line, and the poetic formulated in that culture had five-syllable verse at its center. Second, with the rise to ubiquity of the epitaph (*muzhiming* 墓誌銘) in the late fifth century, the four-syllable line became almost exclusively associated

4 For a paradigmatic example of the grand imperial style under the Western Jin, see Knechtges, “Sweet-peel Orange.”

5 This is the *Wenguan cilin* 文館詞林, originally in 1,000 scrolls, compiled in 658.

with the eulogistic mode, as it remains to this day. Thus it slipped forever from the domain of "poetry" to that of "functional verse"—though we should not forget to acknowledge the underappreciated pleasures of functional eulogistic verse.

Three things should be said from the outset if we are to treat presentation and response poems from the perspective of letter writing: that in their roots they were not letters but rather poems from parting banquets; that this kind of poetry came to be used for letter writing, that is, the poems came to be exchanged over a distance; and that there was an important conceptual overlap between these two functions, the banquet poem and the letter poem. In this overlap we find the "space of separation" central both to our interpretation of this poem exchange and to consideration of the genre's broader cultural significance.⁶

The parting banquet is the site of our earliest examples, the fragments from Cai Yong 蔡邕 (133–192) and the (presumably) complete poems by Wang Can 王粲 (177–217), and it continues to be a regular site for later works. The scene is well epitomized in the closing verse of a poem presented by Sun Chuo 孫綽 (314–371) to the potentate Yu Bing 庾冰 (296–344):

For the ancients, parting was a weighty affair,
Without fail would they make a present to the traveler.
A gift of a thousand pieces of gold—
How could that compare to a few pithy words?
Watch yourself, Master Yu!
Strive to keep up with the former worthies.
With what, then, do I send you on your journey?
Draw [your lessons] from this poem.

古人重離，必有贈遷。千金之遺，孰與片言。
勵矣庾生，勉蹤前賢。何以將行，取諸斯篇。⁷

The banquet is not itself a point of focus in such banquet poems. Rather, the parting scene is present as a fulcrum for the elevation of a few carefully chosen words (the irony being that these poems are anything but "pithy") that may shape memories of the past and influence relationships of the future.

⁶ Separation is also a topic of special significance in prose letters of this period; see Richter, *Letters and Epistolary Culture*, 119–27.

⁷ Lu Qinli, *Xian Qin Han Wei*, 899.

The poem, presumably presented in its author's calligraphy, becomes a talisman consecrated at the parting ceremony.⁸

This detachment from the direct circumstances of composition facilitated the development of an epistolary function, by the Western Jin at the latest. Several of Lu Yun's 陸雲 (262–303) poems note explicitly that the participants in the exchange are separated, and one of them refers to itself as a letter (*chidu* 尺牘).⁹ Cao Shu 曹攄 (d. 308), another Western Jin poet, mentions having been apart for "two weeks" (*er xun* 二旬, twenty days).¹⁰ By the Eastern Jin separation seems almost to be the norm. Both of Wang Huzhi's 王胡之 (fl. mid-4th c.) extant poems are "mailed" (*ji* 寄, here used in the literal sense).¹¹ Sun Chuo has banquet poems to Wen Qiao 溫嶠 (288–329) and Yu Bing (quoted above), but writes over a distance to Xu Xun 許詢 (fl. mid-4th c.) and to Xie An 謝安 (320–385) after a separation of three years.¹² The poems studied in this essay were sent over a distance, and of Xie Lingyun's 謝靈運 (385–433) five extant poems in the genre four appear to have the poet separated from his correspondent.¹³ There are examples from the late fifth century, like Shen Yue 沈約 (441–513), who "sends it by flying goose" 寄之飛鴻, though one senses that by then it had again become more court- and banquet-centered.¹⁴

Rather than call these poems "letters," it might be better to regard them as part of an epistolary process. Lu Chen's 盧湛 (284–350) poem to Liu Kun 劉琨 (271–318), for instance, comes with a letter, as Liu Kun makes clear in his letter in reply.¹⁵ Zhi Yu's 摯虞 (d. 311) poem to an official on his way to the Sichuan basin ends "There are messengers, / To transmit your voice [via letter], / [But] southern tortoise and elephant tusk, / Truly will be my heart's delight" 既有

⁸ The final line alludes to the "Appended Phrases" commentary of the *Classic of Changes*, describing how the sage made the eight trigrams: "Close at hand, he drew from his own experience" 近取諸身; see *Zhou yi zhengyi* 周易正義 (*Shisanjing zhushu* ed.) 8.4b. Here, the poet has drawn the poem from his own experience, and the recipient should in turn draw from the poem as he physically carries it with him.

⁹ See Lu Qinli, *Xian Qin Han Wei*, 712 (stanza 5); also 706 (stanza 5), 714 (stanza 10), 716. In addition, see p. 723 (stanza 4), where Lu's interlocutor specifies that they have been apart for three autumns.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 755 (stanza 8).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 886–87.

¹² *Ibid.*, 898–901.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 1154–57. Tao Yuanming's 陶淵明 (365?–427) three extant examples (*ibid.*, 971–72), also from this period, were exchanged in person, possibly suggesting that the epistolary side of the genre was exploited by people connected to the court.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 1629 (stanza 5).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 850. For a detailed study of this distinctive pair of poems, see Knechtges, "Liu Kun."

行李，以通其音。南龜象齒，實將云心， which when we recall that letters, in medieval China and elsewhere, are often notes accompanying gifts, suggests that a poem might be accompanied by something even more substantive than a letter.¹⁶ Furthermore, even poems “presented” in person often contain the expectation of a reply from a distance, be it a prose letter or one in verse, blurring the line between banquet poem and letter poem. Thus one of our earliest samples, Wang Can’s poem to Shisun Meng 士孫萌 (fl. late 2nd c.), closes with the admonishment “Do not hide away the sound of your voice” 無密爾音, which is to say, keep in touch,¹⁷ and Xie Lingyun closes the banquet poem mentioned above with “We part and you follow the river’s isles, / As I cup my ears [awaiting] your gentle voice” 分手遵渚，傾耳淑音。¹⁸ Just as letters are defined by being part of a set, so the presentation poem anticipates reciprocity. To put it another way, a banquet poem should elicit a letter poem, making the former an equal constituent of the letter set.

These connections in practice between presentation and response poetry and letter writing are supported by a conceptual commonality. The banquet is a pivotal moment because it is the moment of parting, but this moment itself possesses its own significance. Parting is not merely the “efficient cause” for the composition of the poems. Rather, it is a kind of “formal cause,” essentially “informing” the whole of the poem, because the space that separates (or is about to separate) the two poets gives shape to the poems they produce. The significance of this aspect of parting stands out in the letter that prefaces Lu Chen’s poem to Liu Kun. Leaving “against his will,” Lu Chen reflects on the moment:

That the beginning could be the same but the end so different made Yang Zhu sad [when he reached a fork in the road], and that [silk is] white but can then become dark made Mo Di sob. [But] everyone can sigh sadly at the moment of parting [like Yang Zhu], and of those ways of bringing on sad feelings there would seem to be some more severe than this

16 Lu Qinli, *Xian Qin Han Wei*, 759 (stanza 4); Zhi Yu may intend this figuratively: a letter from you would be like a precious gift. On the relationship of gifts and letters, see Richter, *Letters and Epistolary Culture*, 133–34, and Xiaofei Tian’s contribution to this volume.

17 Lu Qinli, *Xian Qin Han Wei*, 358.

18 Ibid., 1155; also 1154 (stanza 4). See also Tao Yuanming’s poem to the Duke of Changsha on p. 972. The examples of Lu Yun and Cao Shu, mentioned above, are with one exception all “response” poems, suggesting that, in this early period at least, the first poem of a pair was likely to be a “banquet poem” and the second a “letter.”

[i.e., Mo Di’s darkened silk]. Indeed, why should one cry out only when standing before a road [about to start his journey], and why sob only upon seeing silk?

蓋本同末異，楊朱興哀；始素終玄，墨翟垂涕。分乖之際，咸可歎慨；致感之途，或迫于茲。亦奚必臨路而後長號，覩絲而後歔歔哉？¹⁹

Parting is in fact the motivating moment for Lu’s letter and poem, the hook on which he hangs his reflections on his personal history, but he here makes a point of recognizing that as an efficient cause parting is trivial. Though moments of parting and change may make us sad, the deeper significance is to be found in the vicissitudes of human experience and relationships that take their shape from parting and change.

Thus, the moment of parting is the point of inception of the “space of separation” that is the central domain of the letter, and this space possesses its own conceptual valence. In the passage above, parting is paired with change for the worse: silk begins white and Mo Di (the philosopher Mozi 墨子) sobs when it is colored, that is, changed forever. This ominous sensibility, of irreparable change in the unknown future, is the fear that accompanies separation: one of the parties might die, or do something that sullies his reputation, or dilute the relationship by allying with or harming some third party, etc. But when separation becomes a literary space in a letter poem, the forces of fate are weakened. Within the literary space of separation, where separation leaves “life” and enters “discourse,” all squalls can be calmed, or at least serve in a symbolic capacity.

This space serves to produce what one recent author has called “a primary fantasy of epistolary discourse,” namely, that “communication by letter may be experienced as more authentic and intimate than communicating face-to-face.”²⁰ In short, letters simplify things. Simple rhetorical figures used by Lu Chen notwithstanding, parting and change are not simple. They are discomfiting human events embedded in complex contexts. But when the events of parting and change are winnowed and hewed by a literary discourse, a space of fantasy emerges. This is the intersubjective realm exemplified by presentation and response poetry.

19 *Wen xuan* 25.1179; see also Knechtges, “Liu Kun,” 47.

20 Milne, *Letters, Postcards, Email*, 72, also citing in this context work by William Decker.

2 The Poems

Qiu Yuanzhi 丘淵之 (after 370–after 433), “Presented to Secretarial [Adjutant] Yang Hui 羊徽 [after 370–before 420], Who Is Ill and Abroad (One Poem)” (Zeng jishi Yang Hui, qi shu ji zai wai, yi shou 贈記室羊徽其屬疾在外一首)²¹

In natural inclination we respond to each other ethereally,
[And] our interlocked fate has taken its course in human experience.
[We are] like gold and orchid:
Strength and fragrance explicate one another.²²
[But you are gone, so] the craftsman of Ying rests his axe,
And there is no one to query on Hao ford.²³
Who, then, shall be my sublime confidant?
Without you, indeed [my heart] is bound up.²⁴

趣以冥感，契以情運。譬彼金蘭，堅芳互訓。
郢夫寢斤，濠津闕問。孰是超賞，非爾殆蒞。²⁵ (Stanza 1)

[We took] lithesome pleasure in leisurely office,²⁶
And toiled together [on campaigns] in two regions.

- 21 The base text is the manuscript reproduced in Abe, *Bunkan shirin*, 61–62; also Lu Qinli, *Xian Qin Han Wei*, 1217. By “abroad” is meant “out of the capital,” or at least outside the imperial city. “One poem” (*yi shou*) is likely the anthologist’s note, not an integral part of the title.
- 22 The associations of gold and orchid with deep friendship derive from the “Appended Phrases” commentary to the *Classic of Changes*; see *Zhou yi zhengyi* 7.18ab.
- 23 The craftsman of Ying was able to use his axe to scrape chalk from his friend’s nose without doing any bodily harm, but claimed to have lost the ability to do so after his friend’s death; Zhuangzi invokes this story on a visit to the grave of his confidant, Huizi. See *Zhuangzi jishi*, 843 (徐无鬼). Also the use in two poems by Wang Huzhi in Lu Qinli, *Xian Qin Han Wei*, 886 and 887, which both close with this allusion. “Hao ford” refers to Zhuangzi’s famed conversation with Huizi by the river Hao; see *Zhuangzi jishi*, 606 (秋水).
- 24 The line borrows from *Mao shi* 毛詩 147 素冠: “My heart is bound up, oh! / Let me for a moment be as one with you, oh!” 我心慍結兮，聊與子如一兮。
- 25 In line 4, the manuscript has the graphically and phonetically similar 乎 for 互。
- 26 “Lithesome” (*wanwan*; 元部) is part of a family of words (e.g. 婉婉, 婉孌, 燕婉, 嫵婉, 宴婉) describing gentle, generally feminine, beauty; for related words in the *Classic of Poetry*, see *Mao shi* 43, 94, 102, 106, 151. As *wanluan* 婉孌 (also 元 rhyme) it is paired with “toiled together” (*qikuo*; line 2 here) in a memorial by Cai Yong (*Quan Hou Han wen* 79.3b,

[Our horses ran] bridle by bridle on the northern plains,
Our oars lined up on the Yangtze and Xiang.²⁷
In winters we exchanged our warmth,
In summers we shared the cool.
Was there not [hardship, travelling through] much dew?
[Yet] our feelings grew deep as we tread the frost.²⁸

婉晚閑暑，契闊二方。連鑣朔野，齊棹江湘。
冬均其溫，夏共其涼。豈伊多露，情深踐霜。²⁹ (Stanza 2)

[But now] divine martiality has cleansed the distant lands,
The great way is now being spread.³⁰
[Hoers] and plowmen take joy in their work,³¹
Not one little thing going amiss.
[And you] in your leisurely garden, in your back lane,³²
[Your] wine cup and zither string limpid and excellent.³³
How I rejoice for [your friends] those Two Zhong,
To have gone with you into retreat.³⁴

with 變 written as 戀); it appears as *yanwan* 嫵婉 in medieval poetry, describing fond friendship as it does here (e.g., Cao Zhi’s poem at *Wen xuan* 20.974).

- 27 The poets are on campaign with Liu Yu, preeminent power of the day. From the reference to Mt. Tai, the first line of this couplet should refer to the northern expedition of 409–10. The second line likely refers to the Yangtze river campaign of late 410, although 412 and 415 are also possibilities. See also stanzas 2 and 3 of Yang’s poem.
- 28 Travel through dew is a kenning for hardship from the *Classic of Poetry* (*Mao shi* 17 行露). Treading through frost may allude to Hexagram 2 in the *Classic of Changes*, where a similar term (*li shuang* 履霜) symbolizes the beginnings of a great enterprise; the figure also appears in *Mao shi* 107, 129, 203. “Feelings” (*qing*) is the same word as “human experience” in stanza 1, line 2 above.
- 29 In line 1, the manuscript has 暑 for 署。
- 30 This couplet refers to the accomplishments of Liu Yu. See the discussion of the poems.
- 31 The text reads *tu* (“butcher”; 刀, 魚部). I tentatively emend to *chu* 鋤 (“hoe”; ㄉㄜ, also 魚 rhyme), for the attested medieval compound *chulei*.
- 32 Taking 苑 as 苑. Alternatively, *xianwan* 閑苑 might be a relative form of the attested *xianyan* 閑宴, thus: “[And you] leisurely lithe, in your back lane”; see n. 26 above.
- 33 Wine cup and zither string (*shang xian*) are metonymy for wine and zither: the wine is limpid and the zither excellent. Compare the fourth of Tao Yuanming’s “Miscellaneous Poems” (Lu Qinli, *Xian Qin Han Wei*, 1006), where the same cup and string symbolize a man aloof from worldly cares.
- 34 The Han era recluse Jiang Xu 蔣詡 had only three paths to his cottage, reserved for himself and his confidants Yang Zhong 羊仲 and Qiu Zhong 求仲. Thus the “Two Zhong”

神武遐滌，大衢方揮。屠耒晏業，介焉靡違。
閑苑敞徑，觴弦湛微。欣彼二仲，與子俱歸。(Stanza 3)

A friendship will not always be fulfilled,
[We] rejoice [together] but despair [from separation] always follows.³⁵
You have fallen ill,
And I, through worry, grow old.
It is not that scratching my head [awaiting you] is toilsome,
But in sooth my bosom is entwined [with yearning].³⁶
I long for my beautiful one,
And verily does the churning in my heart increase.

願言無必，欣慨屢造。爾疾既纓，余憂用老。
搔首匪勤，寔纏中抱。言念佳人，祇增心攪。(Stanza 4)

The Way of Heaven may be far, far in the distance,
Yet one can expect goodness to be rewarded.³⁷
Today, my dear sir,
You should have been here from long ago.
Riding with Truth, you shall be unimpeded [in your recovery],
With limpid [thoughts in your] breast, you shall naturally be at ease.
[And] once you have walked through this Thrice Broken [illness],³⁸

became a poetic metaphor for partners in reclusion. For a contemporary example, see Xie Lingyun's poem at *Wen xuan* 30.1397.

- 35 "A friendship" (*yuanyan*) is literally "desiring" for one's friend, from the *Classic of Poetry*: "Desiring, I long for you, / And my heart inside goes aflurry" 願言思子，中心養養 (*Mao shi* 44 二子乘舟); see also *Mao shi* 30, 62. The phrase appears again in stanza 1 of Yang's poem. The second line here is literally "happiness and despair arrive many times."
- 36 To scratch one's head is a figure for fretting, from *Mao shi* 42 靜女, where a man awaits his lover: "Enamored of her and yet I see her not / I scratch my head and pace about" 愛而不見，搔首踟躕。
- 37 That heaven will reward good conduct with good fortune is a maxim voiced in the *Classic of Documents* (*Shang shu* 尚書; *Shang shu zhengyi* 8.10b 湯誥), but in medieval literature the ideal is regularly questioned (e.g., in stanza 2 of Liu Kun's "Poem in Reply to Lu Chen," Lu Qinli, *Xian Qin Han Wei*, 851).
- 38 "Thrice Broken" (*sanzhe*) invokes an ancient maxim, cited in the *Zuozhuan* (Ding 13) and elsewhere: break your arm three times and you will have enough experience to become a good doctor.

You ought to brood [again] upon the Five Virtues.³⁹

天道雖緬，福善可期。今唯吾子，久應在茲。
乘理載遂，沖衿自怡。三折既履，五德宜思。(Stanza 5)

In self-cultivation [I can boast] nothing lofty,
Frequently harnessed in the dusty [world of] service.⁴⁰
You strive hard in your toil for simplicity,
[While] I undeservedly [serve amongst these] tomes and documents.⁴¹
Knowing you as [a hermit worthy of] Rong Qiqi,⁴²
My [shamed] face has accumulated a thick [skin to write to you].⁴³
[Yet] I hope I might rely on your acceptance of this stained [gift],
And I stand here awaiting the Three Beneficences [of your friendly tutelage].⁴⁴

- 39 "Five Virtues" (*wu de*, or five "powers") can refer both to a set of personal moral virtues and to the cycle of "five elements" (*wu xing* 五行) associated with the rise and fall of imperial dynasties; see the discussion of the poem below. Compare the "Five Difficulties" in Yang's closing stanza.
- 40 *Ye* ("self-cultivation"; also "heritage") is the Chinese word Buddhism adopted for karma and it may carry some of that sense here. Qiu may also be alluding to his less prestigious family background. For an analogous but positive use in a contemporary poem exchange, see Xie Lingyun's praise for his cousin Hongyuan in Lu Qinli, *Xian Qin Han Wei*, 1154 stanza 1. "Dusty" (*chen*) in the following line is also a word with religious connotations.
- 41 The manuscript writes *xian* 險 but this should be emended to *jian* 儉, as it apparently has been in the text Lu Qinli worked from. "Toil for simplicity" (*jianqin*, lit. "parsimony and toil") is a term connected to the medieval culture of reclusion. See, e.g., Yan Yanzhi's "Dirge for Tao [Yuanming] the Summoned Scholar": "In his daily life he knew all toil and restraint (*qinjian*), / In his body he experienced both poverty and illness" 居備勤儉，躬兼貧病 (*Wen xuan* 57.2473); and the similar term *jianku* in one of the *Song shu* hermit biographies: "[his wife] willingly dwelt with him through parsimony and hardship" 共安儉苦 (*Song shu* 93.2284). The source of the expression is the appearance of "parsimony" as a "virtue" of the gentlemen who secludes himself in times of disorder in *Classic of Changes* Hexagram 12: "Through the virtue of parsimony (*jiande*), the gentleman can escape difficult times" 君子以儉德辟難 (*Zhou yi zhengyi* 2.24a).
- 42 Rong Qiqi is a hermit with a witty response to Confucius in *Liezi* (*Liezi jishi* 1.22–23), regarded as a Daoist sage in early medieval times.
- 43 "Thick-skinned face" is a figure for the shameless from *Mao shi* 198 巧言; for a contemporary example in association with the indignities of government service, see stanza 6 of Xie Lingyun's four-syllable response poem to Xie Zhan in Lu Qinli, *Xian Qin Han Wei*, 1155.
- 44 The poem itself is the gift in question. The "Three Beneficences" are the qualities Confucius, in *Analecs* (*Lunyu* 論語) 16.4, attributes to a good friend: rectitude, trustworthiness and broad learning. To "stand awaiting" (here *zhu*) is a common motif in prose

予業弗高，屢羈塵役。勉彼儉勤，忝此墳籍。
識以榮期，顏以厚積。庶憑納汙，佇規三益。 (Stanza 6)

Yang Hui, "In Response to Qiu [Yuan]zhi (One Poem)" (Da Qiu Quanzhi, yi shou 答丘泉之一首)⁴⁵

In [the realm of] Truth, one may rely on things,
But once a [mundane] matter goes by, there is nothing more to expect.⁴⁶
From yesteryear we have enjoyed friendship—
Asleep and awake I have longed [for you].⁴⁷
When shall I meet my bosom friend?
Oh that the one I esteem should be here.
[Then] my judgments shall be grasped, my meaning followed:
At that time shall my lacking be fulfilled.⁴⁸

理屬有待，事過無期。自昔願言，寢興伊思。
爰遭懷人，載欽在茲。賞得意從，無關惟時。 (Stanza 1)

The path of kings is long and winding,
Our marches to war toilsome indeed.
In yesteryear we followed along on campaign,
Just as the troubles were at their height.
Dark and deep, the shadows of Mt. Tai,

letters (see Richter, *Letters and Epistolary Culture*, 106) and in four-syllable exchange poetry as well.

45 Abe, *Bunkan shirin*, 56; Lu Qinli, *Xian Qin Han Wei*, 940–41. I have consulted, but not always followed, the annotations and Japanese translation in Hasegawa, *Tōshin shi yakuchū*, 448–53. Qiu's name is written Qiu Quanzhi 泉之 in our manuscript, but a variety of evidence shows that this is a Tang avoidance character.

46 The term *youdai* ("rely on things") is a common conceit in fourth-century philosophical poetry, derived from the *Zhuangzi* and often developed in contrast with *wudai*, "not relying" (here corresponding to *wuqi*, "nothing to expect"). For a full series of examples, see Kroll, "A Poetry Debate." Yang's usage seems rather prosaic, reversing the "expectations" (*qi*) assumed in the first couplet of Qiu's stanza 5. See also below, stanza 3 lines 5–6.

47 Here and in stanzas two and five, the hyperbole of "yesteryear" (*xi*) elevates their friendship by placing it in an idealized past. For *qinxing* ("asleep and awake"), see in particular *Mao shi* 128 小戎, where the speaker longs for the "virtuous voice" (*deyin* 德音) of the "good friend" (*liangren* 良人).

48 *Que* ("lacking," here as *wuque*, a lack resolved) echoes line six of Qiu's first stanza, treating Qiu as his *Zhuangzi*.

Roiling and rushing, the banks of the Yangtze.⁴⁹
Bound together, we became dear [friends]—⁵⁰
Together with you, pacifying the difficulties.

王路威夷，戎役孔勤。昔從經略，方難之殷。
悠悠岱陰，滔滔江濱。綢繆成說，與子夷屯。 (Stanza 2)

The waters of the Yangtze were [long and] rolling indeed,⁵¹
Then there were waves, then it was still.
And so we removed our armor in times of leisure,⁵²
Smiles loosened our faces as we released [feelings of] sincerity.
In [pursuit of] Truth, [we] devoted ourselves to the roots,
In [mundane] matters, we paid solemn attention to [our] human experience of things.⁵³
Oh how it was when we were toiling together,
Truly we were close, [like] lifelong friends.⁵⁴

江之泳矣，載瀾載清。俛青時暇，解顏舒誠。
理既睦本，事亦敦情。永言契闊，實深平生。 (Stanza 3)

[But] from that point we separated from each other,
The time came to part.⁵⁵

49 "Roiling and rushing" appears three times in the *Classic of Poetry*, with a close parallel to this line in *Mao shi* 204 四月.

50 *Choumou* derives from the title of *Mao shi* 118 綢繆, an ode about the union of friends or lovers. *Chengyue* is from *Mao shi* 31 擊鼓, a battle poem.

51 This line is a near quote from *Mao shi* 9 漢廣 (where 泳, "rolling," is written 永, "long," but appears in the poem one line prior). Xie Lingyun uses a variation of the line twice in his four-syllable poetry and it is best regarded as a convenient classical allusion for poets living on the Yangtze, but there may also be a light allusion to the import of the original poem, which the Mao commentary associates with the spread of King Wen's virtue. In that sense, the good auspices of Liu Yu have fostered their friendship.

52 Taking 俛 as 免, for the attested compound *mianzhou*.

53 This "human experience of things" (*qing*) is that mentioned in Qiu's stanza 1 (line 2) and stanza 2 (line 8, rendered as "feeling").

54 "Lifelong friends" (*pingsheng*) is a trope derived from *Analects* 14.12, commonly used in this sense in presentation and response poetry (e.g., in three poems by Xie Lingyun, see Lu Qinli, *Xian Qin Han Wei*, 1154–56).

55 The language echoes Wang Can's four-syllable presentation poem to Cai Mu 蔡睦 (*Wen xuan* 23.1103), which may already have been canonical at this time.

And I truly was unworthy,
 Deeply sick for a full year.⁵⁶
 But who should remember me in his bosom?
 It was only you, my dear sir.
 And did you not indeed have the king's business to do?
 Racing about ceaselessly on your mount.⁵⁷

自茲乖互，屬有逝止。余實無良，沈痾彌祀。
 孰是懷之，則惟吾子。豈微王事，驟駕無已。⁵⁸ (Stanza 4)

I begged off on account of my laggard state,
 But then I received such a succoring bounty:⁵⁹
 We came together in the ranks of the prominent,
 Sharing in the same official duties.⁶⁰
 Our pleasures of yesteryear,
 Thus were taken up again:
 I entrusted myself to the glow of your spring foliage,
 That brought comfort to this tumbleweed of autumn.

疲殆既謝，惠澤是逢。顯列斯偕，厥司攸同。
 疇昔之歡，於焉克從。託曜春藻，慰此秋蓬。⁶⁰ (Stanza 5)

Yet though old pleasures were taken up,
 In the course of things dispersal did come,

56 Yang may be expressing deference by implying *Mao shi* 49 鶉之奔奔: "An unworthy [wu liang] man, / Yet I (here understood as Qiu) take him as my elder brother" 人之無良，我以為兄。"A full year" (mi si) might be "many a year."

57 "The king's business" (wang shi) appears in a number of poems in the *Classic of Poetry*, in the context of the hardships a loyal servant must suffer; see *Mao shi* 40, 121, 162, 167, 168, 169, 205. Driving one's chariot is also a campaign figure in the *Poetry*, and *Mao shi* 162 has the toiling servant "racing" (zhou) to do the king's bidding.

58 In line 7, the manuscript writes 微 for 微。

59 I render this stanza and the one that follows as a narrative, but they might be read as the imagination of what a reunion might be like: "Were I to join you in the ranks of the prominent... Yet dispersal would come."

60 The word xie ("come together"; also below at stanza 6, line 4) is generally associated with friendship in the *Classic of Poetry* (e.g., *Mao shi* 133 無衣, a paean to friendship) and used in this sense in medieval poetry (e.g. Cao Zhi's poem to Cao Biao, see *Wen xuan* 24.1123; Xie Lingyun, Lu Qinli, *Xian Qin Han Wei*, 1155 stanza 8).

And the joys of [reclusion in] hut-and-brook,⁶¹
 Are not such that we might come together on regular days of rest.⁶²
 The winter days are harsh and hard,
 The gusting wind cold and sharp.⁶³
 [And I imagine you] facing your shadow [alone] in your flowery office—⁶⁴
 How could I but harbor longing in my bosom?⁶⁵

雖則克從，遞來有乖。衡泌之娛，休沐未偕。
 冬日烈烈，飄風淒淒。對影華署，如何勿懷。⁶⁶ (Stanza 6)

In those bosom thoughts I indeed have toiled,
 And I have [duly] gathered up [your] orchid remnants.⁶⁷
 You succor me with your fine words,
 Deep sincerity in your brush[strokes].⁶⁸
 I dare forget about the Thrice Broken—

61 "Hut-and-brook" (hengbi) is drawn from *Mao shi* 134 橫門, which describes reclusion in a hut with a single-plank (heng) door, by a babbling (bi) spring.

62 "Regular days of rest" is literally days for "rest and washing" (xiumu). One day of five in the Han dynasty, it is uncertain how such vacation days were apportioned in this period.

63 These two lines are very close to a couplet in *Mao shi* 204 四月: "The winter days are harsh and hard, / The gusting wind whooshing" 冬日烈烈，飄風發發; qiqi ("cold and sharp") appears in the parallel couplet of the poem's preceding stanza. Thus Yang may be comparing himself to the forlorn speaker of that poem, and alluding to the contrasting figures with which *Mao shi* 204 closes, a bird flying high and a fish lingering in a pond—common medieval figures for official service (here, Qiu) and reclusion (Yang). These contrasting figures are made explicit in the use of this allusion in Wang Can's poem to Cai Mu (*Wen xuan* 23.1103).

64 "Flowery office" (huashu) is apparently unattested, but there are a number of similar terms dating to the Tang, including "jade office" yushu 玉署, "cloud office" yunshu 雲署, and "fragrant office" xiangshu 香署. See the related "leisurely office" (xianshu) in Qiu stanza 2.

65 Here and in line one of the following stanza, the subject may be Qiu: you long for me.

66 The final character of line 6 (qi) has dropped out of the manuscript.

67 "Orchid" is a figure for a poem received in a Pan Ni 潘尼 (247?-311?) poem to Lu Ji (*Wen xuan* 24.1158; Lu Qinli, *Xian Qin Han Wei*, 764 stanza 6), and ji is used in the sense of "collect your righteous advice" in a reply from Sun Chuo to Xu Xun (Lu Qinli, *Xian Qin Han Wei*, 900 stanza 9). That is, your poem, which of course is no replacement for the person, who is the full "orchid."

68 Lu Qinli follows an emendation of "sincerity" (cheng 誠) to the graphically similar "admonition" (jie 誡).

I shall reverently brood upon the Five Difficulties [instead].⁶⁹
 I will take your gift, my gentleman,
 And read it over and again, into the year's cold end.⁷⁰

懷亦勤止，戢此餘蘭。惠以好言，深誠在翰。
 敢忘三折，敬思五難。君子攸贈，復之歲寒。
 (Stanza 7)

3 The Poets

Given the length of these poems a brief summary may be helpful. Qiu Yuanzhi's presentation poem begins with an affirmation of the friends' intimate bond (stanza 1), and stanza two relates their shared experience in the political realm. The third stanza finds the recipient in reclusion, and in the fourth he is described as ill. In stanza five he is encouraged to return—to good health and, as I will explain below, to government service. The sixth and final stanza relays the writer's hope for a letter poem in response. The response poem follows a parallel progression, starting from their ethereal friendship (stanza 1) and continuing to recount their shared experience (stanzas 2 and 3). The fourth stanza has Yang taking leave on account of illness. The narrative of the ensuing two stanzas is not entirely clear, but by the interpretation I have adopted here Yang has returned to office (stanza 5) before again leaving for a life of determined

69 *Gan* can mean "dare" or "dare [not]," but the point of this couplet is the shift from Qiu's "Five Virtues" (stanza 6) to the "Five Difficulties" here. The "Five Difficulties" of self-cultivation are described by the third-century philosopher-poet Xi Kang 嵇康 (223–262) as extinguishing one's interest in worldly fame and profit, eradicating the emotions, doing away with pleasures of music and sensuality, eschewing rich foods, and finally dispersing all worry; see *Quan Sanguo wen* 48.8b. These "five difficulties" appear elsewhere in period literature (e.g. Fu Liang's essay at *Song shu* 43.1339, and Jiang Yan's poem at *Wen xuan* 31.1470), but Hasegawa (*Tōshin*, 453) connects this line to a political "five difficulties" (of lacking the advisors, leaders, plans, followers, and virtue that an aspiring ruler needs to successfully take the throne) from *Zuozhuan* Zhao 13, see *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu*, 1350–53. This seems unlikely.

70 "The year's cold end" alludes to *Analects* 9.27, where the "true colors" of the gentleman only show when the times are most difficult: "Only when the year reaches its cold end do you see how the pines and cypresses are the last to wither away" 歲寒，然後知松柏之後彫也。The implication is that both poets are gentlemen. For reading it "over and again" (here *fu*) as a characteristic part of the "epistolary experience," see Richter, *Letters and Epistolary Culture*, 130–32. It is also a common motif in "presentation and response" poetry.

reclution (stanza 6). In the final stanza Yang thanks Qiu for his letter, while courteously resisting his entreaties.

The basic historical background can be summed up in briefest fashion. In the late fourth century the Eastern Jin court reached its nadir. Factionalism opened a path to power for Huan Xuan 桓玄 (369–404), who established his own ephemeral new dynasty in 403–4. Huan was immediately deposed by one Liu Yu 劉裕 (363–422), a middle (or lower-middle) elite figure who restored the Jin in name and spent the following fifteen years gradually building his own dynastic credentials. Liu's Song dynasty was established in 420 and would last sixty years. Both our poets were involved in his rise to power.

Qiu Yuanzhi 丘淵之 (after 370–after 433) was a native of Wucheng 烏程 district in Wuxing 吳興 prefecture.⁷¹ On the south bank of Lake Tai, Wuxing was a key region in the increasingly rich lower Yangtze delta, the hub of a wheel that included Wu 吳, a wealthy old southern prefecture, to the east; Guiji 會稽, also wealthy and featuring a mix of prominent northern émigré families, to the southeast; Jinling 晉陵 prefecture, where northern émigré families constituted a majority, to the north; and the capital area to the west. Directly south offered access to the seclusion of the scenic mountains of the Zhe 浙 river valley.

The Qiu family of Wuxing does not enter the historical record until the late fourth century, but the earliest record is informative: a member of the clan, one Qiu Wang 丘甌, joined the messianic rebellion of Sun En 孫恩 (d. 402) and was made "prefect of Wuxing" by Sun. Qiu Wang's head was sent to the capital the following year, but the fact that he was given charge of his home area likely reflects the Qiu clan's local clout.⁷² Around the turn of the century there is mention of "Director of the Palace Library Qiu Jizu" 秘書監丘繼祖, the context making clear that he was a notable in the Wuxing area.⁷³ Of perhaps more significance is a record of one Qiu Huan 丘洵 helping Liu Yu's faction attack the character of Liu Yi 劉毅 (d. 412), the rival general, in 411—not

71 Cao Daocheng and Shen Yucheng's biographical dictionary (Cao and Shen, *Zhongguo wenxuejia*, 81) suggests a date of death past 433, based on a reference to the death of Xie Lingyun in a catalog attributed to Qiu. His birth date is unknown, but from Yang's response poem (stanza 5) we learn that he was younger than Yang, who was born sometime after 370.

72 *Jin shu* 100.2632; *Song shu* 100.2445. That they continued as a local power is suggested by the court's recruitment of a certain Qiu Xian 丘顯 to put down a rebellion in the area in 424; see *Song shu* 52.1504.

73 *Song shu* 91.2248. This is the grandfather of the late fifth-century literatus Qiu Lingju 丘靈鞠.

long before our exchange of poems took place.⁷⁴ These data, however slight, suggest that the Qiu clan, or at least some of its members, had one foot in the enclave of Wuxing and one in the middle rungs of officialdom, and the case of Qiu Huan suggests that by 411 some members of the family at least were aligning themselves with Liu Yu. Qiu Yuanzhi was among them.

The *History of Song's* (Song shu 宋書) very brief biographical note simply groups Qiu Yuanzhi with several other southerners who achieved prominence in the Liu-Song, his eminence attributed solely to the "patronage obligations" (*jiu'en* 舊恩, lit. "former kindnesses") he acquired in the service of Liu Yilong 劉義隆, the future Emperor Wen 文帝 (407–452; r. 424–52).⁷⁵ It is certainly true that Qiu's high offices after 424—including a small fief and posthumous honors as "Grand Master for Splendid Happiness" (*guanglu dafu* 光祿大夫)⁷⁶—were due to the relationship he established with Yilong in 417, when the prince was stationed in Pengcheng and Qiu served as his Senior Aide (*zhangshi* 長史). But Liu Yilong was eleven years old (*sui*) in 417, and Senior Aide is not an entry level appointment. The biographical note's omission of any official career for Qiu's father and grandfather *may* mean that they never held significant office, but Qiu certainly had experience in officialdom before 417, and he had distinguished himself enough to be handpicked by Liu Yu for a responsible position in the northern campaign's base camp, with a precious ward in his care. Our poem can serve as evidence from Qiu's earlier service under Liu Yu, where his literary talents were evidently put to use drafting documents (see Qiu's stanza 6).⁷⁷

The addressee of Qiu's poem, and author of the response, is one Yang Hui 羊徽 (after 370–before 420).⁷⁸ Yang was a native of Taishan 泰山, originally a

74 *Song shu* 64.1695.

75 *Song shu* 81.2078–79.

76 The posthumous honors are mentioned his *Song shu* biography, the fief in an alternative *Song shu* quoted in the *Jiatat Wuxing zhi* (Gazetteer of Wuxing from the Jiatat reign [1201–4], 16.34b).

77 It is strange that the historian, Shen Yue, who had a distinct interest in literature, does not here note that Qiu was the author of a bibliography of Eastern Jin literary collections, the "Record of New Collections" *Xinji lu* 新集錄 (cited in *Shishuo xinyu* commentary; see *Shishuo xinyu jianshu* 2.108). It is possible, however, that Qiu's literary endeavors are the reason for his being given any mention at all here. The alternate *Song shu* mentioned above claims a collection in 100 scrolls, perhaps indicating a version of the *Xinji lu* as an anthology; the *Sui shu* catalog (35.1072) lists his collection as 15 scrolls in the Liang, a respectably sized individual corpus. On Qiu's works, see Cao and Shen, *Zhonggu wenxue shiliao*, 352–54 and 370–71.

78 *Song shu* 62.1662.

prefecture near its namesake mountain on the Shandong peninsula but relocated to the south as a "lodged" unit in the Jingkou 京口 (modern Zhenjiang) area, a key garrison on the south bank of the Yangtze, downriver from the capital. In contrast to the Wuxing Qiu, the Taishan Yang was a prominent clan with old connections to the Jin court. Yang Hu 羊祜 (221–278) was a grandson of Cai Yong and brother-in-law to Sima Shi 司馬師 (the court power in the 250s, posthumously recognized as the Jin Emperor Jing), and the family established an empress for Emperor Hui (r. 291–306). A number of Yang family members appear at the side of Emperor Yuan (r. 317–23), the first Jin emperor in the south, and the family was related to Wang Dun 王敦 (266–324), a powerful figure early in the transition.⁷⁹ But perhaps because of the relation to Wang Dun, a loser in those initial power struggles, or perhaps because they never sufficiently fortified themselves in the émigré world, by the middle of the fourth century the Yang are no longer a family of any particular prominence. Yang Hui's grandfather was a palace official and his father rose to prefect (*taishou* 太守), "upper middle-class" jobs that were likely integrated into much richer lives that our sources are unable to relay to us.

We know little of Yang Hui's first thirty years. Passing over his entry into officialdom in silence, Yang's biographical note says only that he was "recognized" (*beiyu* 被遇, another patronage term) by Liu Yu sometime after 405 and served as his "secretarial adjutant" (*jishi canjun* 記室參軍, an upper staff position for men with literary skill) early in Liu Yu's rise.⁸⁰ In 415, or perhaps as early as 412, Yang was assigned an important posting in the secretariat, in charge of drafting documents for the imperial court.⁸¹ Sometime around 418 he was placed on the staff of Liu Yilong, Qiu Yuanzhi's patron, then twelve years old and regional commander of Jingzhou 荊州 (modern Hubei area). He might well have been there together with Qiu. By 420 he was dead.⁸²

What, then, was the relationship of these two poets? Two rather different views can be admitted. A contrastive view will see Qiu as a southerner from a family with no national reputation, while Yang hailed from a northern émigré

79 Wang's mother was a Yang.

80 On the prestige of the position of Secretarial Adjutant, see *Tongdian* 20.524.

81 Yang's biography says that this appointment occurred in 412, but the biography of Fu Liang 傅亮 (375–426) puts it at 415; see *Song shu* 43.1336, and Cao and Shen, *Zhonggu wenxue shiliao*, 253, for a discussion of relevant materials. As the more detailed account, Fu's biography is more likely correct, and there is an easy explanation for the error: there were Yangtze river campaigns in both years. It is also likely that the historical record does not fully reflect the complexity of Yang's political career.

82 We know Yang died before the foundation of the Liu-Song because he is listed as a Jin figure both in our manuscript and in the *Sui shu* bibliography (35.1070).

family of high pedigree. No member of the Qiu family was praised for their talents by illustrious members of the Wang and Xie clans, but several Yang received this cultural imprimatur, including Yang Hui's older brother Yang Xin 羊欣 (370–442), a celebrated eremite of whom more will be said below.⁸³ Perhaps most tellingly, our sources state clearly that from the beginnings of his ascent Liu Yu sought to cultivate the two Yang brothers, while Qiu's associations with Liu Yu go entirely unmentioned. On this view, Yang Hui's family background gave him a certain "cultural capital," and Qiu's poem to Yang looks very much like an appeal, on Liu Yu's behalf, to a figure of higher status. The poems' profession of an intimate friendship may even appear contrived.

From another point of view, however, many factors mitigate against taking Yang's family prestige as a decisive indicator of his standing in society and vis-à-vis Qiu. Fame is never as weighty as it presents itself to be. All the famed clans were filled with quite ordinary families and family members; the famed members of those clans participated in many ordinary activities; and as a token passed around in period discourse the famous person was not necessarily better off than the ordinary one. More specifically, we have seen that Qiu's family was probably well established, perhaps even eminent, in its home region, and that the eminence of Yang's family was rooted in an ever more distant past. Whatever deference we find in Qiu's poem may be better explained by the fact that Qiu was the younger of the two than by any salient difference in social station. Nor should we assume that "northerners" and "southerners" necessarily experienced decisively different social realities in this time, roughly a century after the former's flight from their old homeland.⁸⁴ One piece of evidence even suggests a direct social connection between the two men: Yang's father, Yang Buyi 羊不疑, served as magistrate of Wucheng, Qiu Yuanzhi's hometown, for a period beginning in 381. From an anecdote in Yang Xin's biography we may infer that the family settled there, and Yang Xin's long association with the prefecture of Xin'an 新安, a scenic spot in the Zhe river valley, south of Wuxing,

83 See *Song shu* 62.1661–62. Additionally, a sister of Xie An, the preeminent cultural figure of the mid-fourth century, married a Yang and Xie was said to have shown special attachment to his nephew Yang Tan 羊曇 (*Jin shu* 79.2077).

84 The gulf between the "southerners" (themselves immigrants from the north a few centuries prior) and the "northerners" (those who fled south in the early 4th c.) is a commonplace in southern dynasties sources. While modern scholarship has generally emphasized the realities of this distinction, I view it as a discourse based on a much more complicated set of facts.

suggests that they may well have remained in the area.⁸⁵ This local connection may have provided a basis for the friendship narrated in our poems.

To recapitulate, from a sociological perspective Yang Hui may have had a certain prestige that Qiu lacked, but from a cultural perspective the two men very possibly belonged to the same world. It may be best to combine these two views. In this way, our poem exchange reflects both the contrast, with Qiu Yuanzhi helping Liu Yu lure a valued gentry family to his cause, and the commonality, with Qiu and Yang affirming friendship and shared ideals. Indeed, it would be very difficult to separate these two strands: gentry prestige was a birthright only because it was assumed that a good member of a good family upheld good cultural ideals shared by all good men. The poem exchange is a testament to these shared ideals.

4 In the Space of Separation: Intimacy and the State

By identifying separation as a "formative cause," we stress the fact that the "space of separation" is not just a space created by separation but a space in which separation itself has a presence. What develops in this space does so not in a vacuum, but in interaction with separation, the essential quality of the space. Here I identify two key themes in the poem, intimacy and the state, and show how they are developed in this way.

Affirmation of the poets' intimate bond is central to the purpose of this poem exchange. That intimacy can be and is stated outright, as when Yang Hui repeatedly (stanzas 1, 4, 6, and 7) speaks of their mutual "longing" (*huai*), but the power of the letter poem resides rather in the structuring of this longing within the epistolary space of separation. We can identify two key "separations" of intimacy in the exchange. The first occurs in the opening stanzas, where Qiu speaks of the "ethereal" nature of their bond, and Yang requites in kind. This is a permanent connection, but also one that is infinitely distant from the human world in which they live, and in both opening stanzas this spiritual unity is explicitly paired with physical separation in the human realm. In Qiu's poem, ideal unity and physical separation are neatly balanced, two couplets given to each. In Yang's response the transition comes immediately—cosmic truth acknowledged in the first line, the limitations of human experience announced in the second—but balance is preserved in the end of that stanza,

85 The family of Wang Shaozhi 王韶之 (380–435), a contemporary of similar background and career trajectory, settled in Wucheng when his father served there; see *Song shu* 60.1625.

where he imagines their reunion. Qiu establishes the separation. Yang sees it through to the fantasy of reunion, "sublime" (Qiu) and "complete" (Yang).

The great fault of an ethereal bond is a narrative one, that there is no room for development. For this, human experience is necessary, and this is the site of the second separation of intimacy: between the leisure in which friendship is enjoyed and the hardship in which it takes shape. This separated space is outlined clearly in Qiu's second stanza, where "leisure" (*xian* 閑) is raised in line one and paired with "toil" (*qikuo* 契闊) in line two. In the remainder of the stanza they dwell in this space, the hardships of cold and heat providing circumstance for shared enjoyment, the frosts they tread forging the "depth" of their bond. This is the world not of leisure but of *qikuo*, a poetic word that can convey both time apart and time together. Yang likewise anchors his depiction of their time together (stanza 3) in the balance of leisure and hardship—the "leisure" (here *xia* 暇) found in the pauses of battle. Echoing Qiu, Yang observes the "depth" derived from their time "toiling together" (*qikuo* again), and throughout both poems the balance of leisure and hardship swings hard toward the latter—in addition to *qikuo*, both poets refer twice to a "toiling" of the heart (*qin* 勤, Qiu stanzas 4, 6, Yang stanzas 2, 7). This is because while leisure is an ideal space in human experience, the space where friendship is enjoyed, in the mundane world it is hardship that provides the "deep" common experience that catalyzes the development of friendship, and in the fantastic space of letters it, stripped of the realities of hardship, becomes its own leisurely space.

Whence this hardship and toil? Surely, from their activities and their thoughts, but what is the more general cause? It is the state, the second major theme in these poems. Although it is certainly true that the prominence of dynastic politics in medieval Chinese historiography can blind us to the social diversities of the period,⁸⁶ that prominence is not a distortion but an index of the immense ideological and practical importance of the state in elite life. In these poems, the state is the most important ground of intimacy, and like intimacy it is animated by the space of separation of the letter poem. Two specific mechanisms of separation, illness and eremitism, serve to inflate this notion of the state.

Illness is the mundane mechanism. A common topic in early medieval letters and early medieval poetry generally,⁸⁷ illness was a key facet of medieval

86 For a strong critique of modern scholarship's tendency to over-emphasize the role of the state in this period, see Lewis, *China Between Empires*, 45.

87 On its pervasive presence in early medieval letters, see Richter, *Letters and Epistolary Culture*, 90–92.

elite culture because it practically facilitated the individual's disengagement from the state. Illness is a personal kind of separation, the separation of the body from the state of good health, that produces social separation. Its consequences can be dire, but functionally it is a positive, positioning the individual between the complications of an engaged life and the null simplicity of death. This function is on plain display in our poems, where illness is given as a reason for Yang's absence from state service. Looking more closely, we find across the pair of poems an elegant structural development of the topic. "You have fallen ill," states Qiu in his fourth stanza, continuing, "And I, through worry, grow old." As before, the two men share hardship, albeit in separation. Illness has taken Yang away from state service. Worry and rapid aging, Qiu's sympathetic reaction, mimic illness, and such sympathy brings Qiu closer to Yang in spirit. Thus drawn toward Yang's life in reclusion, Qiu is granted an abstract degree of removal from the state.

Here we find a central tension of letter writing—that the special space of the letter exchange is predicated on the desire to close the state of separation that in fact informs that space. Proceeding from this ideal "bond of separation" of illness and worry, Qiu arrives at a logical but unsatisfactory resolution in his fifth stanza: Yang will recover from illness and, by implication direct or indirect, rejoin Qiu in public life. Rather than unsatisfactory, we might call this resolution provisional, a foil for Yang's perfect response. When Yang broaches the topic of illness, in his stanza four, he pairs it not with Qiu's worry but with the latter's continued toil in the service of the state, "racing about on his mount." This creates a bond of hardship, but differently valorized, with Qiu firmly identified with the state. This disparity is maintained through the end of the poem, as Yang replaces focus on illness with his dedication to the eremite's life (stanza 7, lines 5–6). The space is maintained. The recluse is immune to cures.

And this is the second mechanism at work here. Illness can be described as a distance from physical health, or the ordered state of the body, that facilitates distance from the state. Eremitism is distance from the state, or the realization of an ordered society.⁸⁸ Like illness, reclusion can have serious consequences (death for the ill, the penury of one's family for the recluse), but symbolically it is also a positive. Like illness, the life of reclusion puts one just on the margins of the world, apart from it but within it. This is the perfect balance between the tendency to close the space of separation and the need to sustain, on display in these poems.

88 For an introduction to the Chinese eremitic tradition, see Vervoorn, *Men of the Cliffs and Caves*. Briefly put, the lofty moral ideals to which the Chinese eremite dedicates himself are presumed to preclude normal participation in the dusty world of politics.

The dynamics of reclusion here are best understood by going “outside” the poem, to an aspect of the poems’ biographical background omitted from the discussion above—the life of Yang Hui’s brother Yang Xin. The *History of Song*’s brief biographical note on Yang Hui is in fact a short appendix to the biography of Yang Xin. In that biographical note, Yang Hui receives the backhanded compliment that “his renown amongst his contemporaries (*shi yu*) was greater than Yang Xin’s” 世譽多欣, and Yang Xin’s biography has Liu Yu remark that while Yang Hui is “a fine ‘vessel’ suitable to current times” 一時美器, “contemporary opinion” 世論 reserves greater esteem for Yang Xin.⁸⁹ According to the historiography, whatever fame Yang Hui enjoyed was an alloyed sort, in the shadow of his brother’s purity. In our poem exchange, by contrast, the image of Yang Hui is precisely that of Yang Xin in the history, the lofty eremite too ill to be burdened with the duties of governance.

The actual story of Yang Xin is hardly so pure, and this side of the eremite also sheds light on our poem exchange. His biography pointedly emphasizes his ability to keep a distance from the factional disorders of the late 390s, but it is apparent that he was active in the political world. During Huan Xuan’s momentary rise, Yang Xin joined in his cause, serving as his chief of staff (*zhubu* 主簿), and in this capacity it is said that “he was involved in [Huan’s] major decisions” 參預機要. Elsewhere we learn that a number of other Yang were associated with Huan Xuan, including their cousins Yang Fu 羊孚 and Yang Xuanbao 羊玄保.⁹⁰ Whether or not Yang Hui was himself drawn into Huan Xuan’s enterprise (the sources are silent), the memory of his family’s unfortunate experience may have fed the reticence he expresses in our poem exchange. The account of this episode in Yang Xin’s biography provides important context for our poems:

[However,] wishing to distance himself from Huan, Yang would at times let secret information leak out. [But] Huan Xuan understood what Yang’s intentions were and valued him even more highly. [Thus] Huan appointed him Director of Palace Affairs on the Secretariat of his Chu [shadow] cabinet, saying to him: “The Secretariat is the root of all matters of governance, and Music and Rites[, the most fundamental basis of governance,] issue forth from the Director of Palace Affairs. You have been

89 *Song shu* 62.1662. The reference to a “fine vessel” is an allusion to *Analects* 2.12, by which Liu Yu, and/or our historiography, suggests that Yang Hui is not a true gentleman.

90 On Yang Fu’s relations with the powers of the day, see *Shishuo xinyu jianshu* 2.104, 2.105, 4.62, 17.18, 22.6. The heir of the Western Jin statesman Yang Hu also had his family fief revoked for his associations with Huan; see *Jin shu* 34.1024.

acting as my right-hand man, but this indeed is a more weighty posting.” Yang took the office and resigned it after a few days, on grounds of illness. He then secluded himself in the wards and alleys [of private life], not emerging for more than ten years.

欣欲自疏，時漏密事，玄覺其此意，愈重之，以為楚臺殿中郎。謂曰：「尚書政事之本，殿中禮樂所出。卿昔處股肱，方此為輕也。」欣拜職少日，稱病自免，屏居里巷，十餘年不出。⁹¹

The courteous historiography makes no mention of Huan Xuan’s fall, and Huan Xuan, according to this telling, is not angered by Yang Xin’s betrayal. The historiography’s claim that Huan “valued him even more highly” (*yu zhong zhi*) may specifically refer to Huan’s estimation of Yang as an individual, but its greater referent is something quite different: Huan saw even more symbolic value in Yang than he had before and he undertook to better utilize that value within the political culture of the time. In the immaculate choreography of that culture, Huan moves Yang from a position of real consequence, chief of staff, to an ideal one that satisfies both parties. Huan gains a prominent name on his shadow cabinet and asserts his acknowledgment of the legitimizing powers of “ritual and music,” while Yang is able to move to a position in which he is in charge of nothing and from which he can easily extricate himself in an affirmation of his personal integrity. His means of extrication, illness, are exactly those deployed in our poem exchange. Furthermore, the relationship of Yang Xin and Huan Xuan functions as a model for that of Yang Hui and Liu Yu a decade later: the courtier distinguishes himself by distancing himself from the political power of the day, who in turn seeks creative means to reattach the courtier to his cause. Qiu Yuanzhi’s poem may and indeed should represent his own personal testament, but it is also a means of granting Yang Hui the ideal existence that historiography would bestow upon his elder brother, and bringing that idealized personage into Liu Yu’s fold.

The passage quoted above quietly adumbrates Yang’s return to state service, and “ten years later” corresponds to the same period from which our poems date. Emerging from seclusion to accept a variety of positions given him by Liu Yu, but only with due reticence, the *History of Song* places Yang Xin’s biography in a chapter with two other high-minded—perhaps even haughty—men whose presence both challenged and lent luster to the young Liu-Song

91 *Song shu* 62.1662. The association of the Director of Palace Affairs with ritual knowledge is also evident in *Jin shu* 51.1435–36.

dynasty. The culmination of his career was an irregular appointment to the scenic prefecture of Xin'an, which he held for thirteen years, and when he was finally transferred to a more mundane post he petitioned for release, claiming "severe illness." Continuing his life apart from society, he was renowned—his biography tells us—for appreciation of landscape, studies in the Dao, calligraphy, and pharmaceutical knowledge.⁹² When he travelled, he never entered the town walls. Though they appointed him to numerous offices, he refused to appear at court and neither Liu Yu nor Liu Yilong ever met him in person.

Returning now to our poems, in Qiu's third stanza we find this eremitic ideal represented in perfect balance with the state. While the two couplets of the stanza's first half extol the sovereignty of the state, newly reinvigorated under Liu Yu's stewardship, the second half of the stanza turns to a different kind of sovereignty: the "limpidity and excellence" (*zhan hui* 湛徽, to allow Yang Hui's wine and zither to stand for his character) of the hermit. What then is the quality of the space between these two halves of the stanza? Does it separate, or stitch together? In one sense, it is a chasm between two opposing forces, the state and the non-serving subject. The "king's path" that Yang himself invokes in his second stanza bridges all distances except this one. Yet in another sense, the gap is the generic essence that unites the two sides of the stanza as a matching pair. The establishment of imperial order is not merely a matter of putting the peasants back to work, the figure Qiu deploys here. That is a mere "property" of good governance. Lasting order, or true sovereignty, comes only when governance is established on some ideal, and the "space of eremitism" in the middle of the stanza is a formal cause for both the hermit in the second half and the ideology of sovereignty in the first half. The legitimate state is defined as a government grounded in the moral order, the hermit as the man who best preserves (and symbolizes) that order, and in the letter poem these two ideals are brought into suspended separation.

5 A Public Space

This essay has attempted to advance the following view. With parting as a "formative" moment, the presentation-response poem (or its four-syllable variety) opens up a "space of separation." Separation has its own ideal value, conditioning the themes that are developed in that space. Intimacy is the point of departure in our poems, and their ostensible end. Developed in that space,

92 For a translation and discussion of one of Yang Xin's prose letters, transmitted as a calligraphic specimen, see Richter, *Letters and Epistolary Culture*, 146–48.

intimacy gains its power from distances ethereal and mundane. The locus of the mundane is the state, which has in turn its own presence in the space of separation. Practically through illness and ideally through eremitism, the individual distances himself from the state, and the latter distance affirms the moral standard in which the state grounds its legitimacy. This view will now be pursued two steps further. Intimacy and the state both take shape in spaces of separation, but they do so as a connected pair. As such, they are projected on a new space of separation, and this space has its own atmospheric quality. I account for it in this section as a *public* space. The conclusion will treat this public space as an essential quality of the *poetic* aspect of the Chinese letter poem.

Early medieval letters were, in the words of one recent study, "commonly seen as public documents, and it was expected that these letters would circulate more widely."⁹³ In our exchange we can identify three specific points at which such a public space is opened up within the poems. The first is the title of the presentation poem, "Presented to Secretarial [Adjutant] Yang Hui, Who Is Ill and Abroad." While we cannot say with absolute certainty that the title is original to the poem, there are strong indications from contemporary poets (Tao Yuanming, Xie Lingyun) that titles and prefaces (our "title" might be a short title with a prefatory note) providing contextual information were becoming a part of the poetic tradition. As the use of the third person pronoun (*qi* 其, here translated as "who") suggests, the "addressee" of this heading is not the poem's recipient, or not just him, but some broader community to whom this letter would constitute testimony. This frames the poem as a public document, a "superposition of private communication and public exhibition," the poets positioning themselves not only toward each other but toward society at large.⁹⁴

This public frame prompts us to read the poem's subject matter from a different perspective. The basic posture adopted here, deference, has the poets deferring to one another's good characters, and Yang deferring in the face of a call to service, but from the perspective of a readership at large this deference has more significance, placing the two men in a hoary cultural tradition of political deference—the practice of *rang* 讓—that stretched back to the legendary sage kings Yao and Shun. In Qiu and Yang's own age, their demonstration of *rang* would have connected them to their community, where

93 Pattinson, "Privacy and Letter Writing in Han and Six Dynasties China," 16; also on this point Richter, *Letters and Epistolary Culture*, 42–43. See also the essay by Pablo Blitstein in this volume.

94 Quotation from Guillén, "On the Edge of Literariness," 7.

declining office was a regular practice even when the office (as here) was going to be accepted, and more particularly to the rise of Liu Yu, who was practicing *rang* at every step of the way in his ascent, and whose demonstration of *rang* would require exchanges of decorous edicts and memorials composed by “ghostwriter” documentarians—a cohort that included Yang and probably Qiu as well. Here they are composing a more personal, yet equally public, set of documents. Yang gets to play emperor, as the reticently ascending dynastic founder plays the eremite.

A second emergence of public space occurs with the delivery of and response to the didactic message in the poems’ closing stanzas. The key term here is “five virtues” (*wu de*; Qiu stanza 5). On a personal level, the five virtues refer to some set of moral qualities an individual ought to cultivate.⁹⁵ Such moral self cultivation, however, is not exactly a private affair, as these are moral qualities with which a good servant of state will better the world. The “five difficulties” (*wu nan*) Yang substitutes in his reply (stanza 7) are, by contrast, aspects of self-cultivation that take the individual deeper into the eremite’s domain, away from state service. Extinguishing one’s interest in worldly fame does not coincide with a political career. On a philosophical level, the contrast between the two is clearer still. The most common medieval usage of “five virtues” occurs in the context of dynastic legitimacy, where they are associated with the cosmic trends (the “five elements,” *wu xing*) that lead to the rise and fall of imperial lines.⁹⁶ Working on behalf of Liu Yu, Qiu Yuanzhi is calling on Yang Hui to rejoin the “revival” of the Jin—or to participate, as both men indeed would, in the imperial mandate’s transfer to a new caretaker. Citing the recluse’s “five difficulties,” Yang insistently preserves his personal integrity in the face of the vicissitudes of an age of disorder. For the time being—for here we may recall the political circumstances of the age. From the very beginnings of his rise to power, with the overthrow of Huan Xuan in 404, Liu Yu sought to establish authority over the official ranks. In 407 he took full control of the capital region, exterminating the old order of court powers. In 411 he asserted suzerainty over unheeding gentry in the empire’s rich and powerful southeast, and in the same year awarded himself the right to examine the qualifications

95 The *Hanyu da cidian*, the most comprehensive modern dictionary, offers at least three possibilities, the most likely reference being *Analects* 1.10—though the qualities are not there labeled “five virtues.”

96 For a representative example, see Zuo Si’s 左思 (252?–306?) “Rhapsody on the Wei Capital,” *Wen xuan* 6.286–87, and Knechtges, tr. *Wen xuan*, 463. For examples in four-syllable verse, see *Wen xuan* 20.953, Lu Qinli, *Xian Qin Han Wei*, 838, and *Quan Jin wen* 94.7a and 146.5b.

of all appointees to the imperial bureaucracy. In 412 he vanquished his only legitimate rival, Liu Yi, and the court faction that had supported him, and in 413 he ordered the re-registration of the empire’s population, a sign of total dominance. When, in 415, he successfully challenged the remnant powers of the Jin imperial family, the writing was on the wall for all forward-looking gentry to read.⁹⁷ This is the fabric of public events on which our poem exchange was written.

As suggested in the excerpt of Sun Chuo’s banquet poem given earlier in this essay, four-syllable exchange poetry was supposed to contain a didactic message, to delight *and* instruct. That, perhaps, was what was to distinguish it as poetry, as opposed to pure eulogy. This message is a fundamentally public one in two senses. First, ethical admonition marks the poem as public property by providing a respectable horizon toward which the two participants, and their audience, can share a dignified gaze. The good toward which the recipient is directed is a common good, and when Yang responds with an eremite’s recalcitrance he is affirming himself as public exemplar of a recognized moral tradition. Second, the handling of the didactic portion is an opportunity for the public display of the wit and craftsmanship that constitute the literary courtier’s stock in trade. Qiu admonishes with a velvet glove, and Yang shows himself capable of deftly shifting the grounds of debate to his own space.⁹⁸ Working in concert, Yang and Qiu put on a refined literary performance of the eremitic space of separation described above.

Finally, there is a moment in which the public enters into the poetic narrative itself. Allusion to historical or legendary figures in Chinese poetry can generally be said to be a way of binding poet and reader together in a trans-temporal cultural community, but in Qiu’s poem the figure of the “Two Zhong” (stanza 3) has a more specific effect. The Han dynasty recluses who are depicted as following Yang into “retreat” (*gui*, “return,” a related ideal space of separation) may stand for actual people known to the two poets, or even for the men delivering Qiu’s letter. More generally, however, they also stand as figures for any reader of the poem who has the good fortune to associate with a lofty man like Yang. The narrative presence of a public again takes the poem out of the hands of Qiu and Yang and delivers it into the broader community,

97 See *Song shu* 1.9 (straightening the post-Huan Xuan court), 1.14 (execution of remaining Huan faction), 2.27–28 (suppression of Guiji gentry), 2.28 (defeat of Liu Yi and associates), 2.29–30 (re-registration order), 2.31–35 (defeat of Sima Xiuzhi).

98 The final stanza of Lu Ji’s response to Pan Yue 潘岳 (247–300) and Jia Mi 賈謐 (d. 300) features a similar if perhaps more antagonistic riposte; see Knechtges, “Sweet-Peel Orange,” 36–42.

where it stands as a manifold testament: to Yang's lofty character, to Qiu's ability to appreciate and care for his friend, to the ideal relationship they profess, to their literary prowess, and finally as a eulogy for anyone in their readership who is able to share in their appreciation of the ideals expressed therein.

In sum, these poems are not "private" letters but public pronouncements, just as calligraphy (the "brushwork" in Yang's final stanza) of the time was a public representation of something taken to be the very essence of the personal. Suspended in the space of separation, the relation of the correspondents is not simply their relation, but a relation on display. The value of a pair of letters lies in the inherently public space between that makes them a pair.

...

The approach of this essay to the pair of letter poems in question has been epistolary, rather than poetic, because the "space of separation" held to have informed the poems is an essentially epistolary quality. In conclusion, I turn briefly to the other side of the question. In what sense has *poetry* informed these poems, or the medieval Chinese letter poem generally? The most salient point of overlap between letter and poem is the basically public nature of the early medieval letter, discussed above. This is an epistolary phenomenon insofar as a public relationship is established between two correspondents, but it is also a poetic one. In a narrow sense, the specific contribution of "poetry" to the four-syllable Chinese letter poem includes two technical aspects: the use of stanzas, which shape the narrative in a predictable fashion that enables readers to accommodate "poetic" elisions; and the use of isometric lines, which give the letter a declamatory rhythm with deep roots in classical learning, canonical poetry, and formal court speech. Poetry's more significant contribution to this space of fantasy, however, derives from the most influential conception in Chinese poetics—that poetry is the use of figured language in the public presentation of the normative self.⁹⁹ Thus, the poetic element in presentation and response poetry serves as a "warrant" on the truth of the letters' testimony, and adds cultural value to the letters by formulating them in the most honored voice of emotional expression. Where the epistolary process lends the poetry rhetorical focus and offers an effective means for "publication" to contemporary society, the poem as a poem is a public act that guarantees and enhances the display of normative values, lending gravity to the "fantastic" possibilities of the space of separation. This is Poetry, *Shi* with a capital "S"—in the great

99 My gloss of *shi yan zhi* 詩言志, "poetry voices intention," the canonical "definition" of poetry from the *Classic of Documents* (*Shang shu zhengyi* 3.26a 舜典).

tradition of *The Classic of Poetry* (Shijing 詩經). As much ideal as it is art, in this sense Poetry is indeed a kind of letter, constituting its own separate space.

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CHAPTER 8

Letters and Memorials in the Early Third Century: The Case of Cao Zhi

Robert Joe Cutter

The more we learn about early medieval Chinese literature, the more conscious we are of how much is missing and how bereft we are of a store of materials adequate to lend real clarity to our assertions. Fluctuations in taste and the ravages of time have depleted what was once a more varied and robust corpus, and what remains, of course, presents with all of the philological symptoms and infirmities of authenticity that come with great age. Xiaofei Tian has invoked the image of an iceberg to refer to "the vast textual world of early medieval China which is largely lost to us but whose traces nevertheless remain in the form of fragments, prefaces, postscripts, bibliographies in dynastic histories, random mentions in letters, discussions, or the like."¹ Robert Alter's analogy of "walking through a great museum on a very gloomy day with all the lights turned out" is also apt.² Yet while we may not have as rich a trove of sources as we might desire, especially in comparison to later periods, we do have a substantial amount in a variety of literary forms. The difficulty is always in determining the extent to which these represent the values and practices of the literary culture of the time.

The compilation of anthologies and the gradual appearance of letters, essays, poetry (in the broad sense) and, finally, books dealing with writing clearly indicate that the need to get a handle on literary genres became acute during the Wei Jin Nanbeichao period (3rd to 6th c.). Classifications of genres were made earlier, but largely in an embryonic way. The institutional requirements of a bureaucratic government and the social, ritual, and aesthetic needs of a sophisticated élite, coupled with the convenience and availability of paper, led to a burgeoning of writings and literary forms during the Han and post-Han periods.³ This explosion in literary production and preservation meant that there was a vast amount of writing that had to be organized in some way. The

1 Xiaofei Tian, "The Twilight of the Masters," 471–72.

2 Alter, *Genesis*, x.

3 See Zhao Ming, *Liang Han da wenxue shi*, 865–67; Cutter, "Personal Crisis and Communication," 149; Knechtges, "Culling the Weeds," 202.

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