

THE HALBERD AT RED CLIFF

Jian'an and the Three Kingdoms



XIAOFEI TIAN

The Halberd at Red Cliff

HARVARD-YENCHING MONOGRAPH SERIES 108

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Jian'an and the Three Kingdoms

Xiaofei Tian

Published by the Harvard University Asia Center
Distributed by Harvard University Press
Cambridge (Massachusetts) and London 2018



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Printed in the United States of America

The Harvard University Asia Center publishes a monograph series and, in coordination with the Fairbank Center for Chinese Studies, the Korea Institute, the Reischauer Institute of Japanese Studies, and other faculties and institutes, administers research projects designed to further scholarly understanding of China, Japan, Vietnam, Korea, and other Asian countries. The Center also sponsors projects addressing multidisciplinary and regional issues in Asia.

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Tian, Xiaofei, 1971– author.

Title: The halberd at Red Cliff : Jian'an and the Three Kingdoms / Xiaofei Tian.

Other titles: Harvard-Yenching Institute monograph series ; 108.

Description: Cambridge, Massachusetts : Published by the Harvard University Asia Center, 2017. | Series: Harvard-Yenching Institute monograph series ; 108 | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2016056558 | ISBN 9780674977037 (hardcover : alk. paper)

Subjects: LCSH: Chinese poetry—Qin and Han dynasties, 221 B.C.–220 A.D.—History and criticism. | Chinese poetry—Three kingdoms, 220–265—History and criticism. | Chinese literature—History and criticism.

Classification: LCC PL2314 .T53 2017 | DDC 895.11/209—dc23 LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2016056558>

Index by June Sawyers

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Last figure below indicates year of this printing

24 23 22 21 20 19 18

For George,
my fellow fan

1982
01 201

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Acknowledgments

I have been fortunate in having many wonderful colleagues and students whose probing questions and comments over the past decade have greatly enriched my research on this book. A very early version of part of chapter 1 was presented at the workshop organized by Wendy Swartz at Columbia University in 2010, and received extensive feedback from my discussant Meow Hui Goh. Parts of the chapter were also presented in lectures at Beijing University and Nanjing University in 2010, respectively hosted by Chen Pingyuan and Cheng Zhangcan. A Chinese version of the lectures appears in *Zhongguo wenxue xuebao* (1.2010). A portion of the material in chapter 2 was presented at the University of Colorado in 2012, and subsequently appears in an article, “Material and Symbolic Economies: Letters and Gifts in Early Medieval China,” in *A History of Chinese Letters and Epistolary Culture* edited by Antje Richter (Brill, 2015). An early version of chapter 3 was presented at Princeton University in 2012, and also at a lecture hosted by Paula Varsano at Berkeley in 2013; it was later incorporated into an article, “Fan Writing: The Cultural Transactions between North and South from the Third through Sixth Century,” included in *Southern Identity and Southern Estrangement in Medieval Chinese Poetry* edited by Ping Wang and Nicholas Morrow Williams (Hong Kong University Press, 2015). I have presented on Three Kingdoms fan fiction at an AAS panel on “Three Kingdoms in East Asia” that I organized in 2014, and at workshops at Harvard University respectively organized by Lan T. Nguyễn and Cuncun Wu in 2014 and 2015. The presentations were developed into an article, “Slashing Three Kingdoms: A Case Study in Fan Production on the Chinese Web,” which received many comments from Kirk Denton and was printed in *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 27, no. 1 (2015). I am grateful to my fellow paper presenters, audiences, hosts, editors, and anonymous readers for their critical insights.

In addition to my regular sabbatical, an extra semester of leave from Harvard University in the fall of 2015 enabled me to finish the final draft of the book manuscript. For the precious gift of time, and for the Harvard Publications Fund for Tenured Faculty for coverage of the indexing cost, I thank William C. Kirby, Diana Sorensen, Robin E. Kelsey, and the late Jeremy R. Knowles, the former and current deans who generously supported scholarship in the arts and humanities at Harvard. I also wish to affectionately acknowledge the talented graduate students in the seminars on Jian'an and Three Kingdoms in 2010, 2012, and 2014, and the enthusiastic undergraduate students in the course "The Worlds of the Three Kingdoms" in the spring of 2013.

A special note of thanks to Paul W. Kroll and Antje Richter for generously reading the entire manuscript and giving perceptive comments and corrections; to James Cheng and Ma Xiaohe at the Harvard-Yenching Library for offering invaluable research assistance; to Bob Graham at Harvard Asia Center Publications Program for warmly encouraging me to submit my manuscript; and, last but not least, to Kristen Wanner, for putting so much thought and care into making this book better. All imperfections that remain are mine.

It is difficult to be a scholar, teacher, administrator, parent to a young child, and to write a book at the same time. I could never have done it without my family's love and support. Thank you, Steve and George, for being sources of strength and joy in my life. I dedicate the book to George, who is a most vivacious reciter of Cao Cao's "Short Song" and shares my passion for the Three Kingdoms.

—X.F.T.

Note on Sources

For early medieval Chinese poetry and prose citations, I use primarily Lu Qinli's 逯欽立 (1910–73) *Pre-Qin, Han, Wei, Jin, and Southern and Northern Dynasties Poetry* (*Xian Qin Han Wei Jin nanbeichao shi* 先秦漢魏晉南北朝詩) and Yan Kejun's 嚴可均 (1762–1843) *Complete Prose of Antiquity, the Three Dynasties, Qin, Han, the Three Kingdoms, and the Six Dynasties* (*Quan shanggu sandai Qin Han sanguo liuchao wen* 全上古三代秦漢三國六朝文), followed by modern annotated editions wherever necessary. These anthologies are divided into different volumes by dynasties, such as *Wei Poetry* (*Wei shi* 魏詩) and *Complete Jin Prose* (*Quan Jin wen* 全晉文). In identifying the source of a text from Lu Qinli or Yan Kejun's anthologies, I shall not refer to the complete title but cite only the relevant volume title, followed by *juan* and page numbers (e.g., Lu Qinli, comp., *Wei shi*, 1.12). For Tang and Song poetry and prose citations, I use primarily *Quan Tang shi* 全唐詩, *Quan Tang wen* 全唐文, *Quan Song shi* 全宋詩, and *Quan Song ci* 全宋詞, supplemented whenever necessary with modern annotated editions.

Timeline of Chinese Dynasties

- Shang Dynasty 商 (ca. 1600–1046 BCE)
- Zhou Dynasty 周 (ca. 1046–256 BCE)
 - Western Zhou 西周 (ca. 1046–771 BCE)
 - Eastern Zhou 東周 (770–256 BCE)
 - Spring and Autumn Period 春秋 (770–481 BCE)
 - Warring States Period 戰國 (481–221 BCE)
- Qin Dynasty 秦 (221–207 BCE)
- Han Dynasty 漢 (206 BCE–220 CE)
 - Former/Western Han 前漢 / 西漢 (206 BCE–8 CE), capital Chang'an
 - Later/Eastern Han 後漢 / 東漢 (25–220 CE), capital Luoyang
- Three Kingdoms 三國
 - Wei 魏 (220–265)
 - Shu 蜀 (221–265)
 - Wu 吳 (222–280)
- Jin 晉 Dynasty (265–420)
 - Western Jin 西晉 (265–316), capital Luoyang
 - Eastern Jin 東晉 (317–420), capital Jiankang
- Northern and Southern Dynasties 南北朝 (420–589)
 - Northern Dynasties 北朝
 - Northern Wei 北魏 (396–534)
 - Eastern Wei 東魏 (534–550)
 - Northern Qi 北齊 (550–577)
 - Western Wei 西魏 (535–557)
 - Northern Zhou 北周 (557–581)

Southern Dynasties 南朝

Song 宋 (420–479)

Qi 齊 (479–502)

Liang 梁 (502–557)

Chen 陳 (557–589)

Sui Dynasty 隋 (581–618)

Tang Dynasty 唐 (618–907)

Five Dynasties 五代 (907–960)

Song Dynasty 宋 (960–1279)

Northern Song 北宋 (960–1127)

Southern Song 南宋 (1127–1279)

Yuan Dynasty 元 (1271–1368)

Ming Dynasty 明 (1368–1644)

Qing Dynasty 清 (1644–1911)



Three Kingdoms Period.

Introduction

In Hong Kong director John Woo's 2008 epic film about the historic Battle of Red Cliff, the title sequence presents a rusty sword emerging out of the mist. As the opening credits are shown on the screen, the sword is gradually cleaned of its encrustations, until it becomes a shiny, sharp blade again. As the mist dissipates, we are taken back to that moment in history.

For any viewer familiar with European and American filmic conventions, the aura of "medievalness" is unmistakably inscribed in the iconography of the sword and the mist, recalling such Arthurian romances as *Excalibur* (1981). The nostalgic act of remembrance embodied in the de-encrustation of a weapon is, however, decidedly "Chinese." It evokes the canonical poem by the Tang poet Du Mu 杜牧 (803–52), "Red Cliff" ("Chibi" 赤壁), a poem that is no doubt in the background of this visual shorthand in John Woo's movie of the same name.

折戟沉沙鐵未銷	Broken halberd, sunken in sands: its iron not yet rusted away;
自將磨洗認前朝	I pick it up and polish it myself, recognizing the former dynasty.
東風不與周郎便	Suppose the east wind had not given the young Master Zhou a chance,
銅雀春深鎖二喬	On Bronze Bird Terrace the Qiao sisters would have been locked away in spring's depths. ¹

1. *Quan Tang shi*, 523, 5980.

2 Introduction

In the battle of Red Cliff that took place in 208 CE, Zhou Yu 周瑜 (175–210), the general of the southern state of Wu, defeated the powerful warlord Cao Cao's 曹操 (155–220) large naval fleet. Zhou Yu won his victory through the use of fire ships, with the help of an east wind fanning the blaze in the right direction. The Qiao sisters were legendary beauties, respectively married to Zhou Yu and Zhou Yu's lord, Sun Ce 孫策 (175–200). Discovering a broken halberd at the site of the battle, the ninth-century poet imagines an alternative history—what if Zhou Yu had lost? Cao Cao would then have captured the Qiao sisters and taken them to the city of Ye 鄴, his seat of power in the north, and had them placed on Bronze Bird Terrace. There, by Cao Cao's will and testament, his concubines and female entertainers were to be lodged after his death.

The poet polishes a weapon just as a warrior would before a battle; he does so not to fight, but to recognize the traces of the past. War and violence turn into an imagined loss and wasting away, desire frustrated, that might have taken place in the future if the battle had had a different outcome. The east wind is usually associated with spring; its unseasonal blowing in the winter of 208 marks the contingent nature of history. It returns, albeit implicitly, in the last line of the poem, as the poet fantasizes about the beautiful women confined to the terrace, which after Cao Cao's death would become overgrown with spring's vegetation.

With its provocative contemplation of history, the poem for the first time connects two aspects of the last era of the Eastern Han that are respectively embodied by two sites: Red Cliff and Bronze Bird Terrace. Each represents a distinct tradition. Like the poem, this book brings the two traditions together, showing how they are intertwined and cannot be adequately appreciated if separated.

Jian'an 建安 is the name of the last Han emperor's reign period, lasting from 196 to 220.² Cao Cao's son and heir Cao Pi 曹丕 (187–226) overthrew the Han and took the throne himself in 220. The Shu 蜀 ruler Liu Bei 劉備 (161–223) proclaimed himself emperor in 221, and was soon followed by the Wu 吳 ruler Sun Quan 孫權 (182–252). Thus Cao Pi's founding of the Wei 魏 dynasty would be in the strictest sense the beginning of the "Three Kingdoms" period proper. The tripartite division would

2. Technically the name of the last Han reign period was Yankang 延康, which immediately followed Jian'an, but the Yankang reign lasted less than seven brief months in 220.

fall apart with Wei's subjugation of Shu in 263, the overthrow of the Wei itself and the establishment of the Jin 晉 dynasty by the house of Sima 司馬 in 265, and finally, the Jin's conquest of Wu in 280. Nevertheless, in the Chinese cultural imagination the Three Kingdoms period is usually considered as having begun with the Han empire's descent into chaos and the ensuing civil wars among various warlords. It is identified in particular with the gradual formation of three major powers—Wei, Shu, and Wu—in the first two decades of the third century.

Thus the two terms in the title of this book, Jian'an and the Three Kingdoms, refer to essentially the same period, and yet they produce radically different associations. "Jian'an" brings to mind an age of cultural flowering: not only were poetry and *fu* (alternatively translated as "poetic expositions," "rhapsodies," or "rhymed prose") produced in great numbers, but a variety of discursive genres also flourished. In literary history this era is recognized as the true origin of classical Chinese poetry after ancient poetry; it also saw what is commonly regarded as the first theorizing of literature. Cao Cao and his sons Cao Pi and Cao Zhi 曹植 (192–232), and the coterie formed around the Caos, are the names writ large in any Chinese literary historical account. In contrast, the term "Three Kingdoms" primarily recalls the infighting of the warlords, with their shifting alliances, stratagems and maneuvers, and martial prowess. It is especially associated with the popular tradition in late imperial times, revolving around the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (*Sanguozhi yanyi* 三國志演義), traditionally attributed to the shadowy figure Luo Guanzhong 羅貫中 (fl. ca. 14th century). This novel has since generated numerous fictional, dramatic, and visual representations, from opera plays and storytelling performances, to films, television shows, manga, video games, and card games. It was also widely disseminated and reworked in Japan, Korea, and Vietnam, making the fascination with the Three Kingdoms an East Asian phenomenon. Indeed, it has now achieved global exposure, with the spread of Japanese video games on the Three Kingdoms, with John Woo's film, and with fan creations on the Internet.

The turn of the third century thus holds a double significance for the Chinese literary and cultural tradition: its writings lay the foundation of classical poetry and literary criticism; and its personages and events have become the stuff of legend. There is, however, a neat split between the

two, a split symptomatic of the segregation of high and low literary traditions, and of a self-imposed segregation within Chinese literary studies in modern times. There is a vast body of secondary literature on each subject separately, but very little on their interface.

This book attempts to break down such artificial segregation. It traces how these different sets of associations and concerns gradually evolved over many centuries in changing cultural contexts; but first of all it is an investigation into how these associations and concerns were closely related in their complex origins and came to be defined and delineated in their subsequent metamorphoses. As we will see, not only is the Three Kingdoms imaginary a powerful construct, but “Jian’an” itself is a later formation. As early as the last decades of the third century, the Jian’an writings were already read with nostalgic longing. The image of Jian’an, with its feasting, drinking, heroic spirit, and literary panache, as well as intense male bonding, was to return over and over again, either as a subtext or as an explicit theme, in the romanticized narrative of the Three Kingdoms. It came to represent an imaginary fullness lost, a bygone age of flamboyant, larger-than-life characters whose truth could no longer be distinguished from fiction.

How exactly did “Jian’an” bifurcate into two distinct nostalgias, one of which was the paradigmatic embodiment of *wen* (literary graces, cultural patterning), and the other, the paradigmatic embodiment of *wu* (heroic martial virtue)? How did these largely segregated nostalgias negotiate with one another? This book is an attempt to tell that story in Chinese cultural history, a story that is as important to its literary tradition as it is dear to the heart of all those who know it. It is concerned with both the writings *of* the period and the writings *about* the period. It shows that the imagination about the period influenced the preservation of its writings, which were edited and anthologized in such a way as to instantiate the cultural image.

The book is divided into three parts. Part 1, “The Plague,” contains two chapters centering on the Jian’an period. The opening chapter, “Plague and Poetry: Rethinking Jian’an,” traces the creation of the literary era of Jian’an as itself a literary construction by identifying three moments in this retrospective process. The first moment took place shortly after 217, the year of the great plague, with Cao Pi the crown prince mourning his

stricken friends; this is the moment that marked the birth of the idea of “Seven Masters of Jian’an,” all of whom were dead by this point. This was followed by the “ventriloquization” of Cao Pi and his literary coterie performed by Xie Lingyun 謝靈運 (385–433), one of the greatest early medieval poets, in a series of poems written in their voices. Finally, the image of “Jian’an” was solidified in the Liang 梁 dynasty (502–57), when the Liang princes saw in the Cao Wei court what they themselves wanted to be. The Crown Prince Xiao Tong’s 蕭統 (501–31) canonical anthology *Selections of Refined Literature* (*Wen xuan* 文選) was a crucial milestone in the formation of “Jian’an literature”; yet, his selective representation of writings from and about Jian’an, highlighting conviviality and fraternity, subdued the aspects of Jian’an that did not conform to its sanctioned image. The chapter ends by considering a darkened, and darker, Jian’an.

Chapter 2, “Circling the Tree Thrice: Lord, Vassal, Community,” continues the discussion of Jian’an literature by turning to the discourse of community and examining some important themes and aspects of community building: food and feast, letter writing, and gift giving. In modern scholarship, one oft-repeated characterization of the Jian’an period is the development of a “literary group” (*wenxue jituan* 文學集團); another familiar formulation is the “emergence of individual self-consciousness,” which refers to a perceived mode of subjective, even individualistic, expression in belletristic writings. The former owes much to the legacy of Cao Pi’s notion of the “Seven Masters,” whereas the latter clearly shows the influence of European intellectual movements of Enlightenment and Romanticism on Chinese literary studies in the early twentieth century. These two beliefs are generally accepted by scholars as self-evident truths, and there has been little critical reflection on their historical formation and historical nature. Nor has there been much awareness of the inherent tension between the two commonplace characterizations of the era, let alone any attempt to resolve it.

In this chapter, rather than adopting the problematic concept of the “literary group,” I employ the much broader model of “community” and demonstrate that the construction and representation of self-identity in early medieval China were relational, born through and reflective of the interaction among social peers and, more importantly, between retainers and their lord patrons. Despite the modern illusion of an insular “individual self,” the notion of self was, and still is, constituted of

one's social relations. The perceived subjective, individualistic mode of expression in the belletristic writings of this period must be considered in this context. This chapter thus examines the reconstitution of community after the collapse of the Han empire and studies the role played by writing, especially poetry writing, in the process of community building. In the Western Han, Sima Qian's 司馬遷 (ca. 145–86 BCE) *Records of the Historian* (*Shi ji* 史記), Liu An's 劉安 (d. 122 BCE) *Huainanzi* 淮南子, and Sima Xiangru's 司馬相如 (ca. 179–117 BCE) grand *fu* rhapsodies were all encyclopedic, all-encompassing narratives produced in a unified empire. In the Jian'an period, lyric poetry—especially poetry in the five-syllable line, a low register at the time, often accompanied by music and orally performed—emerged from the ruins of that empire as a *useful* form. Letters, too, served a special purpose in establishing and maintaining networks. This chapter argues that the fragmentation of the Han empire and the subsequent efforts to rebuild community were a driving force behind the literature and culture of this period.

Writing in the Jian'an period was very much a political act—not in the narrow sense of governing and managing affairs of the state, but in the broad sense of complex social relations involving authority or power. In this chapter I also consider how individual interest negotiated with the interests of the community by examining the linguistic transactions between an individual member and the social group to which he belonged. Material and verbal forms of exchange functioned in the economy of social ties and the construction of a system of circulation and networking. The chapter ends with a discussion of the language of desire and male bonding.

Parts 2 and 3 of the book respectively focus on the two physical and textual sites—Bronze Bird Terrace and Red Cliff. Bronze Bird Terrace was a towering structure constructed in Ye under Cao Cao's orders. Cao Cao and his sons Pi and Zhi had all composed poetic expositions celebrating its completion. To understand Bronze Bird Terrace as a textual site exerting far-reaching influence in the Three Kingdoms imaginary, however, we must step outside the "Jian'an" tradition, largely identified with the Cao Wei power in north China, and instead look to an external perspective on the Wei. Chapter 3, "The Southern Perspective: 'Fan Writing,'" argues that Wu, the southern state best able to contend with Wei for cultural authority, provides an alternative perspective on Wei and

on the Three Kingdoms dynamics in general. Such a perspective eventually culminates in the writings of Lu Ji 陸機 (261–303) and Lu Yun 陸雲 (262–303), scions of old Wu aristocracy and dominant figures in the early medieval poetic tradition. Lu Ji and Lu Yun were both fans of the Cao Wei literary legacy who nevertheless transformed that legacy. Their nostalgia was crucial in creating a romanticized image of the Three Kingdoms, with Bronze Bird Terrace as a key motif.

The preface to Lu Ji's elegy on Cao Cao contains a passage from Cao Cao's will that commands his concubines and entertainers housed on Bronze Bird Terrace to give musical performance for his spirit twice a month. The image of these confined women performing for their dead lord encapsulates the melancholy impermanence of greatness; it became a standard poetic topic in the Southern Dynasties and Tang. Chapter 4, "Terrace and Tile: Imagining a Lost City," traces the transformation of this poetic tradition from the fifth century onward. In the eleventh century, the cultural imagination shifted from the terrace to its synecdochical fragmentation, namely, the tiles allegedly from the original terrace that were made into inkstones and fetched a handsome price on the antique market. The transition signifies a changing relation to history: in the tile-inkstone poems, we see no sympathy linking the poet to any person from the past as is done in the terrace poems; rather, history becomes a curio, a commodity that can be counterfeited, authenticated, sold, bought, and owned, even as the Song poets condemn the Cao Wei rulers as evil usurpers. We witness a miniature cultural history in this long process of the disintegration of the Bronze Bird from a terrace to a tile to an inkstone: in his building of Ye and the terrace, Cao Cao tried to create an empire that replicated and replaced the Han; the pathos of Bronze Bird in the Southern Dynasties is a willful rejection of the splendors of the living city of Ye under northern "barbarian" rule in favor of the Jian'an legacy; the Tang at first continued the Southern Dynasties tradition, but later there appeared greater diversity; finally, in the eleventh century, the Bronze Bird inkstone became the best embodiment of the literati culture that has come to be identified with the Song and, as "Song," in implicit contrast with its predecessor "Tang."

Part 3 of this book, "Red Cliff," comprises a single chapter, "Restoring the Broken Halberd." No other place name conjures the aura of the Three Kingdoms as powerfully as Red Cliff does, evoking heroism and panache,

combat and intrigue. The making of Red Cliff is informed by changing historical contexts, from the “southern turn” in the ninth century, to Su Shi’s 蘇軾 (1037–1101) canonical writings and the subsequent responses to Su Shi through the Southern Song, to the Ming novel’s famous representation of the battle episodes, and, finally, back to John Woo’s film as well as the popular 2010 mainland Chinese television series *Three Kingdoms*. This book opens with a chapter on the nostalgic construction of Jian’an in the wake of a great epidemic, as an always already past golden age of poetry and feast; its last chapter shows that at the center of the historic battle is, once again, the composition of poetry; a banquet; fire and plague.

Women do not feature prominently as dynamic agents in historical and literary representations of the largely masculine world of the Three Kingdoms. The epilogue of this book discusses the return of the repressed in the Three Kingdoms imaginary. A fourteenth-century play, *A Duel of Wits across the River* (*Gejiang douzhi* 隔江鬥智), is one of the rare plays set in the Three Kingdoms period whose arias are sung by a female lead and present a woman’s perspective on the unfolding events. I discuss the play in the epilogue and include a full translation in appendix C of this book. The most remarkable new element of the Three Kingdoms imaginary in contemporary times is how women have become foregrounded not just as characters but also as authors. Particularly notable is a body of homoerotic works about the Three Kingdoms produced by young female Chinese fans in cyberspace. Male homosocial bonding at the turn of the third century has been superseded by a female writing community in the digital age, but the question remains the same, namely, how to construct a community through writing and reading. Today, the question continues to be renegotiated in a changed world of technology, capitalism, and new social relations.

Part One

THE PLAGUE

CHAPTER ONE

Plague and Poetry: Rethinking Jian'an

Introduction: Looking Back

In the chapter “Discourse on Literature” (“Lun wen” 論文) from his monograph *Normative Discourses* (*Dian lun* 典論), Cao Pi famously identified seven masters as the finest men of letters of his age.¹ These seven men were Kong Rong 孔融 (153–208), Chen Lin 陳琳 (d. 217), Wang Can 王粲 (177–217), Xu Gan 徐幹 (171–218), Ruan Yu 阮瑀 (d. 212), Ying Yang 應瑒 (d. 217), and Liu Zhen 劉楨 (d. 217). Forever bound together by Cao Pi’s comments, these men would become known as the “Seven Masters of Jian’an” (*Jian’an qizi* 建安七子), the Pleiades to dominate the literary historical narrative of the age until today. And yet, there is something obvious about the grouping that seems to have been overlooked, namely, at the time when Cao Pi was writing the chapter, every one of these seven men was dead. We do not know if any other living writer was included in Cao Pi’s original chapter;² but judging from

1. Yan Kejun, comp., *Quan sanguo wen* 全三國文, 8.1097–98. Xiao Tong, comp., *Wen xuan*, 52.2270–72.

2. Cao Pi’s chapter was included, in a much abridged form, as a single coherent essay in the sixth-century *Wen xuan*. In fragments of the chapter that do not appear in the *Wen xuan* version but are scattered in encyclopedias, Cao Pi comments on earlier writers such as Qu Yuan 屈原 (fl. ca. 4th–3rd century BCE), Jia Yi 賈誼 (d. 168 BCE), Sima Xiangru, Li You 李尤 (ca. 40s–120s CE), and Ma Rong 馬融 (79–166 CE). Yan Kejun collects the fragments, arranges them in chronological order of the birth dates of the writers, and appends a note saying that he suspects these fragments belong to the first half of Cao Pi’s chapter on literature and that much more has been excluded from the *Wen xuan* version (此三條疑當在前半, 文選刪落者尚多也). Yan Kejun, comp., *Quan sanguo wen*, 8.1098. In some of the fragments, the structure of comparison and relative judgment based on individual strengths is quite similar to Cao Pi’s comments on the Seven

what we have, the musings on the contemporary writers—the “literary men today”—are informed by an acute sense of mortality. Our familiarity with the practice of reserving one’s evaluations for deceased writers obscures its novelty in the early third century. From the very beginning “Jian’an” as a cultural period was formed in nostalgic retrospect and mourning for loss.

There are two Jian’an eras in Chinese history: the historical reign of the last Han emperor from 196 to 220 of the Common Era, and the legendary literary age that constitutes the true origin of classical Chinese poetry. All origins are created in hindsight, but the literary Jian’an is, in more ways than one, a retrospective construction. In this sense the second part of this chapter’s title—“Rethinking Jian’an”—is intended to convey a double message: it is an invitation to reconsider the era of Jian’an, and to conceive of Jian’an as always already an afterthought. As a literary term, “Jian’an” had first taken shape in one man’s recollection of dead friends and past events. At the center of this dark recollection, there is a merry gathering, a feast, complete with music, poetry, drink, and food.

This chapter traces the creation of the literary era of Jian’an as itself a literary construction. It was marked by three important moments. The first moment occurred shortly after 217, the year of the great plague. The then crown prince of the Wei, Cao Pi, memorialized his deceased friends by editing their writings. In conjunction with his appraisal of short belletristic genres, Cao Pi’s compilation of their literary collections marked the emergence of *literary* authors. The second moment came nearly two centuries later, as the great poet Xie Lingyun recreated that first moment of nostalgia in a series of poems, each composed in the voice of a different Jian’an poet, with a preface by “Cao Pi.” The early fifth century was an age of retrospection as well as of court-centered

Masters of his times. For instance, the comment on Qu Yuan and Sima Xiangru reads: “Someone asks, ‘Which are better, Qu Yuan’s poetic expositions or Sima Xiangru’s?’ I say, ‘To leisurely draw out [his words] is Qu Yuan’s forte; as for being extremely extravagant and exhaustively marvelous, that is Xiangru’s strength. But Yuan bases [his writing] on metaphors, and his intent roams and has a great scope. Zhangqing’s [Sima Xiangru] and Ziyun’s [Yang Xiong] intent cannot catch up with his’” 或問屈原相如之賦孰愈，曰：優游案衍，屈原之尚也；窮侈極妙，相如之長也。然原據託譬喻，其意周旋，綽有餘度矣。長卿子雲，意未能及已。 *Beitang shuchao*, 100.3a. All translations in this book are my own unless otherwise noted.

cultural activities in which the emperor/prince himself participated in literary composition; it was also the age that saw the ascendance of poetry in the five-syllable line—the Cao family's favorite form, albeit still a low form in the early third century—to the center of literary activities. Xie Lingyun's poetic re-creation of a literary gathering is a product and a symptom of this new age.

The third and definitive moment of the literary creation of the Jian'an era took place in the sixth century, when a series of factors, including the desire for making oneself into one's own cultural ideal, was responsible for the solidification of the literary and cultural image of Jian'an. The Xiao princes of the Liang dynasty found in the Cao Wei court what they themselves aspired to be, and turned that into the "Jian'an" as we now know it. The anthology *Wen xuan* is important in this regard, because it is where we find a careful selection of Jian'an writings, and writings about the Jian'an period, including Cao Pi's reworked chapter on literature and Xie Lingyun's poem series. Can we still discover a different Jian'an underneath the image constructed by *Wen xuan*, and if yes, what might that be?

"Dead Poets Society"

As in Giovanni Boccaccio's (1313–75) *Decameron*, in which the Black Death frames the colorful stories told by the aristocratic youths seeking refuge in the countryside from the stricken city of Florence, a plague is the dark, macabre context that frames the poetry and the story of Jian'an. In the *History of the Latter Han* (*Hou Han shu* 後漢書), the historian Fan Ye 范曄 (398–445) gives a terse statement about the deadly outbreak of 217:

In the twenty-second year of the Jian'an era of Emperor Xian, there was a great epidemic.³

獻帝建安二十二年，大疫。

3. *Hou Han shu*, zhi 17.3351.

In a fragment preserved in the tenth-century encyclopedia *Imperial Reader for a Time of Supreme Peace* (*Taiping yulan* 太平御覽), Cao Zhi, Cao Pi's younger brother, describes and rationalizes the catastrophe:

In the twenty-second year of the Jian'an era, a pestilential humor prevailed. Every household suffered from the pain of death; from every chamber there came the sound of wailing. In some cases entire families passed away; in other cases whole clans were wiped out. Some people believed that the plague was caused by ghosts and deities. All of those who were stricken by the epidemic were, however, people wearing coarse clothes, eating bean leaves, and living in humble dwellings of brambles and reeds. As for families residing in great mansions and dining from arrayed tripods, dressed in sable coats and sitting on layered mats, they were rarely affected. The plague occurred because the *yin* and *yang* were displaced, and the cold and hot seasons were out of joint. And yet ignorant folk hung talismans in an effort to expel it—that was quite ridiculous.⁴

建安二十二年，厲氣流行。家家有僵尸之痛，室室有號泣之哀。或闔門而殪，或覆族而喪。或以為疫者，鬼神所作。夫罹此者，悉被褐茹蕘之子，荆室蓬戶之人耳。若夫殿處鼎食之家，重貂累蓐之門，若是者鮮焉。此乃陰陽失位，寒暑錯時，是故生疫；而愚民懸符厭之，亦可笑。

As Marta Hanson notes, Cao Zhi stresses “social and economic factors—differences in wealth, housing, food, clothing, and bedding—that made the destitute and poor suffer most” in the epidemic.⁵ Cao Zhi's observations are no doubt true to a certain extent, as overcrowding, inadequate shelter, and poor sanitation, things that characterize the living conditions of the poor, are major culprits for transmitting diseases; and yet, in his eagerness to refute superstitious practices and preach his notion of science, Cao Zhi elides the fact that the plague of 217 affected the social elite more severely than his depiction suggests.

We see a drastically different picture from the words of Cao Pi in a letter to Wu Zhi 吳質 (177–230) dated March 17, 218:

4. *Taiping yulan*, 742.3425–26. Yan Kejun, comp., *Quan sango wen*, 18.1152–53. For another English translation of this passage, see Hanson, *Speaking of Epidemics*, 5.

5. Hanson, *Speaking of Epidemics*, 5.

Many relatives and old friends were stricken by last year's epidemic. Xu, Chen, Ying, and Liu passed away all at once. How could I speak of the pain!⁶

昔年疾疫，親故多離其災，徐、陳、應、劉，一時俱逝，痛何可言邪。

The interval between early 217 and early 218 was a year of great significance for Cao Pi: in that year he was at long last officially designated as his father's heir—a position for which he had competed fiercely with his younger brother Cao Zhi. It was also in that year that he lost five of his close companions, beginning with Wang Can, who had died of illness earlier when returning from a military campaign against Wu in early 217, and ending with Xu Gan, who succumbed to the epidemic in early 218. The plague had a profound effect on Cao Pi. According to Wang Chen 王沈 (d. 266), the compiler of *History of the Wei* (*Wei shu* 魏書):

When the emperor [i.e., Cao Pi] first became the crown prince, there was a great plague, and many contemporaries passed away. The emperor was deeply moved. He wrote a letter to Wang Lang, Chamberlain for Law Enforcement, whom he had always respected: "Alive, a man has a body of seven *chi*; dead, he becomes a coffinful of dirt. Only by establishing virtue and spreading fame does he not decay; the next best thing is to write books. Epidemics frequently strike; members of the gentry wither and fall. Who am I that I alone could hope to live out my natural lifespan?" Thereupon he composed his *Normative Discourses* as well as his poems and rhapsodies, which amounted to over one hundred pieces. He gathered various scholars within the Sucheng Gate and tirelessly discussed with them the general import [of his writings].⁷

6. *Sanguo zhi*, 21.608. This letter is cited twice in *Sanguo zhi*: the first citation, in a much abbreviated form, occurs in the historical text proper (*Sanguo zhi* 21.602); the second in Pei Songzhi's 裴松之 (372–451) *Sanguo zhi* commentary, which in turn cites from *An Overview of the Wei* 魏略, a history of the Wei privately compiled by Yu Huan 魚豢 (fl. second half of the 3rd century). Pei dates the letter to the 23rd year of the Jian'an era (218). The *Wen xuan* version of the letter represents a third version of the letter and contains further variants when compared with the *Wei lüe* / Pei Songzhi version. According to the date in the *Wen xuan* version, the letter was written on the third day of the second month, which would be March 17, 218. See Xiao Tong, comp., *Wen xuan*, 42.1896. From the *Sanguo zhi* text to Pei Songzhi's commentary and to the *Wen xuan* version, there is, interestingly, an increasing level of historical specificity in dating the letter.

7. Cited in Pei Songzhi's commentary. *Sanguo zhi*, 2.88. *Taiping yulan* citations read *wei* 為 for *wei* 唯 (93.575, 615.2895, 742.3425).

帝初在東宮，疫癘大起，時人彫傷，帝深感歎，與素所敬者大理王朗書曰：“生有七尺之形，死唯一棺之土，唯立德揚名，可以不朽，其次莫如著篇籍。疫癘數起，士人雕落，余獨何人，能全其壽？”故論撰所著典論詩賦，蓋百餘篇，集諸儒於肅城門內，講論大義，侃侃無倦。

Cao Pi's letter to Wang Lang first quotes from the Western Han work *Huainanzi*: “Alive, I have a body of seven *chi*; dead, I have a coffinful of dirt” 吾生也有七尺之形，吾死也有一棺之土。⁸ He then alludes to the famous dictum in the *Zuo Tradition* (*Zuo zhuan* 左傳), which states that one establishes oneself by three things: virtue, deeds, and words, “the three things that do not decay” (*san bu xiu* 三不朽).⁹ The words' ability to confer immortality is embodied in the very act of citing from earlier writings, which live on after their mortal authors.

Motivated by his friends' untimely deaths and his desire for immortality, Cao Pi circulated his writings far and wide: he had his *Normative Discourses* and other literary writings copied on expensive silk and sent to Sun Quan; another copy was made on paper, a less expensive writing medium, and sent to Zhang Zhao 張昭 (156–236), Sun Quan's senior advisor and a cultured Wu courtier.¹⁰ The plague's greatest impact on Chinese literary history was, however, Cao Pi's creation of the Seven Masters in the chapter on literature in *Normative Discourses*. If this chapter represents a public, and much publicized, document that identifies the Seven Masters and cements their fame, then Cao Pi's nostalgic letters addressed to Wu Zhi, most notably the letter written in early 218, further link the discussion of the Seven Masters with elegiac reflections on aging and death.

The part of the *Normative Discourses* chapter that concerns the Seven Masters is cited in Pei Songzhi's commentary to the biographies of Wang Can and the others in *Records of the Three Kingdoms* (*Sanguo zhi* 三國志). This citation from Pei Songzhi is the earliest version of this passage, predating the *Wen xuan* version by over a century.¹¹ It reads:

8. Liu An, comp., *Huainan honglie*, 224. The image of the dead decaying and turning into dirt also appears in Cao Pi's letter to Wu Zhi, discussed below, which refers to the deceased Jian'an writers' “transformation into dung and dirt” 化為糞壤。

9. *Zuo zhuan zhushu*, Xiang 24, 35.609.

10. The Wu author Hu Chong 胡沖 (fl. 243–80) records this in his historical work, *The Chronological Account of Wu* 吳曆. Cited in Pei Songzhi's commentary. *Sanguo zhi*, 2.88.

11. *Sanguo zhi*, 21.602.

Of today's men of letters, there were Kong Rong of Lu, Chen Lin of Guangling, Wang Can of Shanyang, Xu Gan of Beihai, Ruan Yu of Chenliu, Ying Yang of Ru'nan, and Liu Zhen of Dongping. These seven masters left out nothing in their learning and never borrowed others' words in their writings. They all considered themselves as steeds capable of dashing a thousand *li*, and yearned to gallop abreast.¹² Wang Can was good at rhapsodies. Xu Gan sometimes had a noble [or untrammelled] air, but he was not Wang Can's peer.¹³ As for works like Wang Can's "First Journey," "Ascending the Tower," "Locust Tree" and "Thoughts on Journey," and Xu Gan's "Dark Gibbon," "Syphon," "Round Fan" and "The Sour-peel Tangerine Tree,"¹⁴ even Zhang Heng [78–139] and Cai Yong [133–92] could not surpass them; and yet, their other writings do not match these. Chen Lin and Ruan Yu's memorials to the throne and memorandums are today's finest. Ying Yang is agreeable but not vigorous while Liu Zhen is vigorous but not meticulous. Kong Rong's form and energy are noble and marvelous, and there is something about him that outshines the others; but he cannot sustain an argument. His reasoning falls short of his rhetoric and sometimes even sinks to farce and mockery. But when it comes to what he is good at, he is the equal of Yang Xiong [53 BCE–18 CE] and Ban Gu [32–92].

今之文人，魯國孔融、廣陵陳琳、山陽王粲、北海徐幹、陳留阮瑀、汝南應瑒、東平劉楨，斯七子者，於學無所遺，於辭無所假，咸自以騁騏驎於千里，仰齊足而並馳。粲長於辭賦，幹時有逸氣，然非粲匹也。如粲之初征、登樓、槐賦、征思，幹之玄猿、漏卮、圓扇、橘賦，雖張、蔡不過也，然於他文未能稱是。琳、瑀之章表書

12. *Li* was a traditional Chinese unit of distance whose length varied over time. Rather than translating it as the misleading "mile" or "league," I choose to keep it as it is in *pinyin*.

13. This line (幹時有逸氣，然非粲匹也) has an intriguing variant in the *Wen xuan* version: "Xu Gan sometimes had a *slack* air, but he *was* Can's peer" 徐幹時有齊氣，然粲之匹也 (my italics). Xiao Tong, comp., *Wen xuan*, 52.2270. The early eleventh-century compilation *The Great Tortoise of the Repository of Records* 冊府元龜 agrees with Pei Songzhi's version (837.9933). The seventh-century encyclopedia *Classified Extracts from Literature* 藝文類聚 and the tenth-century encyclopedia *Taiping yulan* present yet another variant version: "Xu Gan sometimes had a noble air, but he was Can's peer" 徐幹時有逸氣，然粲匹也. *Yiwen leiju*, 56.1017; *Taiping yulan*, 599.2826. It might be helpful to point out that in Cao Pi's letter to Wu Zhi he states: "Gonggan [Liu Zhen's courtesy name] had a noble air, just not quite forceful" 公幹有逸氣，但未遒耳. This line appears as a citation in the *Sanguo zhi* text to which Pei Songzhi's *Dian lun* citation here forms a commentary.

記，今之僞也。應瑒和而不壯，劉楨壯而不密。孔融體氣高妙，有過人者，然不能持論，理不勝辭，至于雜以嘲戲；及其所善，揚、班之儔也。

The *Records of the Three Kingdoms* text, to which this passage is a commentary, does not mention Kong Rong, and here the commentator's inclusion of the comment on Kong Rong in the last part of the above passage seems to be a decision based on showing respect for the integrity of Cao Pi's original text that mentions Seven Masters. In the *Analecets* Confucius says cryptically (in the apparent context of speaking of recluses), "Those who did it amount to seven people" (*zuozhe qiren* 作者七人).¹⁴ Although here by *zuozhe* Confucius almost certainly did not mean "authors,"¹⁵ the authority of his statement lends a certain cultural aura to the number seven, and the other meaning of *zuozhe*—one who creates—cannot fail to strike a chord with early medieval readers when they read Cao Pi's discussion of "these Seven Masters" (*si qizi zhe* 斯七子者).

Indeed, Cao Pi might very well have been aware of his younger brother Cao Zhi's letter to Yang Xiu 楊修 (175–219).¹⁶ The letter was later anthologized in *Wen xuan*, so it was unlikely a private epistle intended for Yang Xiu's eyes only, and in any case, the sentiments expressed in the letter might have been familiar to Cao Pi. The letter opens with a statement about the present-day *zuozhe*, here used unequivocally in the sense of authors:

The authors of our present day may be summed up as follows. In the past, Zhongxuan was matchless to the south of the Han River; Kongzhang soared like an eagle to the north of the Yellow River; Weichang enjoyed a fine reputation in the land of Qingzhou; Gonggan demonstrated his literary grace by the sea; Delian rose to prominence near the Wei; you, dear sir, looked down proudly from the imperial capital. At the time, everyone thought that he clasped the pearl of the divine serpent in his hand, and each claimed to own the jade from Jing's hills.¹⁷ Thereupon our lord and

14. *Lunyu*, 14.37.

15. Medieval Chinese commentators often attempted to identify them with various recluses. See *Lunyu zhushu*, 14.130.

16. The letter is usually dated to 216 CE.

17. The serpent's pearl was the bright pearl given to the Marquis of Sui 隋侯 by a

king cast a great net to take them in, and shook the eight guide-ropes to contain them. Now they are all gathered in our domain!¹⁸

然今世作者，可略而言也：昔仲宣獨步於漢南，孔璋鷹揚於河朔，偉長擅名於青土，公幹振藻於海隅，德璉發跡於此魏，足下高視於上京。當此之時，人人自謂握靈蛇之珠，家家自謂抱荆山之玉，吾王於是設天網以該之，頓八紘以掩之，今悉集茲國矣。

Cao Zhi's list includes five of Cao Pi's Seven Masters, and Yang Xiu is the sixth. Since the letter was to accompany some samples of Cao Zhi's own poetry and rhapsodies that he sent Yang Xiu, it would seem that Cao Zhi was the last *zuozhe* of an implicit group of seven. Throughout the letter Cao Zhi sports a tone of casual arrogance: immediately after the above-cited passage he states that "these several masters are nevertheless unable to travel trackless in a light carriage and fly off for a thousand *li*" 然此數子猶復不能飛軒絕跡，一舉千里，even as this statement would seem to include the letter's recipient Yang Xiu, and proceeds to deride Chen Lin's weakness in composing rhapsodies.

Cao Pi's discussion of the Seven Masters picks up many of the key motifs in Cao Zhi's letter, such as the limitation and partiality of any given writer's literary ability, and the qualifications of a literary critic; he even echoes the horse/carriage/thousand *li* metaphor. Yet, he develops Cao Zhi's every point into a more full-blown and well-thought-out argument. Cao Zhi claims that "no one's writings could be devoid of faults" 世人之著述不能無病 save for Confucius's *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chunqiu* 春秋), without explaining why this should be the case; Cao Pi, in contrast, relates a given writer's limitation to the diversity of literary forms, saying that "few can be good at everything because literature has more than one form" 文非一體，鮮能備善. Cao Zhi believes only a superior writer is qualified to be a critic, saying, "Without the face of a Nan Wei [legendary beauty], one cannot discuss beautiful ladies" 蓋有南威之容，乃可以論其淑媛; Cao Pi for his part states that only a "gentleman" (*junzi* 君子) who is capable of examining himself can evaluate others: "A gentleman examines himself to measure others, and so he can

serpent after he healed its wound; the jade of Jing Mountain was a famous jade from Chu discovered by Bian He 卞和. The two references are often used together in early writings to refer to precious objects.

18. Xiao Tong, comp., *Wen xuan*, 42.1901-2.

avoid such a burden and compose a discourse on literature” 蓋君子審己以度人，故能免於斯累而作論文。¹⁹ The most obvious point of difference between the two brothers is that Cao Pi implicitly places himself in the position of a Confucius who evaluates and rises above the seven *zuozhe*, unlike Cao Zhi, who himself implicitly constitutes the seventh.²⁰

There were certainly a great many writers active at the end of the Eastern Han. According to the group biography of Wang Can and other men of letters in *Records of the Three Kingdoms*:

When Emperor Wen [Cao Pi] was still the Leader of Court Gentlemen, he and Zhi, the Marquis of Pingyuan, both loved literary learning, and befriended [Wang] Can as well as Xu Gan, Chen Lin, Ruan Yu, Ying Yang, and Liu Zhen. . . . At the time, there were also Handan Chun and Po Qin of Yingchuan, Lu Cui of Chenliu, Ding Yi and Ding Yih of Peiguo, Yang Xiu of Hongnong, and Xun Wei of He'nei. They all possessed literary grace, but none of them was part of the group of these seven men.²¹

始文帝為五官將，及平原侯植皆好文學，蔡與北海徐幹字偉長、廣陵陳琳字孔璋、陳留阮瑀字元瑜、汝南應瑒字德建、東平劉楨字公幹并見友善……自潁川邯鄲淳、繁欽、陳留路粹、沛國丁儀、丁廙、弘農楊修、河內荀緯等，亦有文采，而不在此七人之例。

19. By “such a burden” he refers to the Seven Masters’ mutual competitiveness and lack of respect for one another.

20. In his March 17, 218, letter to Wu Zhi, Cao Pi’s self-identification with Confucius is more pronounced, both in echoing Confucius’s remark that “the future generations are worthy of awe” (後生可畏) and in comparing his grief over the death of his friends to Confucius’s pain at losing his disciple Zilu (傷門人之莫逮). Xiao Tong, comp., *Wen xuan*, 42.1897–98.

21. *Sanguo zhi*, 21.599, 602. The Song bibliographer Chen Zhensun 陳振孫 (1179–1262) notices the numerical discrepancy in the historian’s narration. As he points out, “[These seven men] are the so-called Seven Masters of the Jian’an. However, from Wang Can down I only count six men here; I suppose Cao Zhi is considered one of the seven [by the historian Chen Shou]. And yet, Emperor Wen’s *Dian lun* places Kong Rong at the top [of the Seven], who alongside Wang Can, Chen Lin, and the others make up the Seven Masters, and Cao Zhi is not one of the Seven therein” 世所謂建安七子者也，但自王蔡而下纔六人，意子建亦在其間耶？而文帝典論則又以孔融居其首，并蔡琳等謂之七子，植不與焉。Chen Zhensun, *Zhizhai shulu jieti*, 16.462. Chen Shou could have been under the influence of the epithet “Seven Masters of the Jian’an” and made a slip in recording six but saying “seven,” even though Xie Lingyun’s poetic series, as we shall see, precisely includes Cao Zhi as the seventh man and leaves Kong Rong out.

One could certainly argue that Cao Pi's judgment in terms of whom to include in his group of Seven Masters was not only swayed by his literary taste but also by the writers' political allegiances, since at least the two brothers Ding Yi and Ding Yih (d. 220) were confirmed vocal supporters of Cao Zhi in the longstanding sibling rivalry between Cao Pi and Cao Zhi. However, Po Qin (d. 218), Lu Cui (d. 219), and Xun Wei (182–223) were all close to Cao Pi in one way or another, not to mention Wu Zhi, the last man recorded in the group biography, who was “well-liked by Emperor Wen [Cao Pi] for his literary talent” 以文才為文帝所善.²² Thus, it seems that beyond political allegiance, personal friendship, and literary talent, the one thing that unites the magic circle of the Seven Masters is their untimely death, and herein lies the other important difference between the brothers Cao Pi and Cao Zhi: while Cao Zhi is only talking about the living,²³ Cao Pi is meting out judgment on contemporary writers who are deceased, and whose deaths afford a closure to their writings and enable them to be entered into the canon of earlier writers—such as Qu Yuan 屈原 (fl. ca. 4th–3rd century BCE), Jia Yi 賈誼 (d. 168 BCE), Sima Xiangru, and Ma Rong 馬融 (79–166)—mentioned in the fragments of the “Discourse on Literature” chapter before it was edited into its current form. Cao Pi was creating a canon—and he succeeded.²⁴

One might want to pause here to consider the profound originality of the “Discourse on Literature” chapter. *Normative Discourses* is a work written in the tradition of long treatises given to discussions of metaphysical, social, political, and broadly cultural issues; but in the extant earlier

22. *Sanguo zhi*, 21.607. Po Qin was on good terms with Cao Pi, and his letter to Cao Pi about a young boy singer is singled out for praise by Cao Pi and anthologized in *Wen xuan*; Lu Cui, executed by Cao Cao for some offense during a campaign, was particularly close to Cao Pi, who is said to have deeply lamented his death; Xun Wei had served as Cadet on Cao Pi's staff and so must have been well known to Cao Pi.

23. It turns out that the two Seven Masters not mentioned in Cao Zhi's letter are Kong Rong and Ruan Yu, who were both dead at the time when he was writing the letter (if we follow the usual dating of the letter to 216 CE).

24. It is ironic that Liu Xie 劉勰 (ca. 460s–520s), in the postface to his work of literary criticism, *Literary Mind and the Carving of the Dragon* 文心雕龍, criticizes Cao Pi for being “meticulous but not comprehensive” 密而不周 in his citation of Jian'an writers. “Comprehensiveness” was not Cao Pi's goal; canonization was, and canonization by its very nature means exclusion. Liu Xie, *Wenxin diaolong yizheng*, 50.1918.

works of this genre, there is nothing of the sort of full-blown discussions about shorter literary writings that would later constitute “literature” in its narrower sense. Wang Chong’s 王充 (27–100) *Impartial Discourses* (*Lun heng* 論衡) stands out as a remarkable precedent to *Normative Discourses*, for its “Examining Books” (*An shu* 案書) chapter contains a brief discussion of Wang Chong’s contemporaries; yet, a comparison of the two texts both shows their rhetorical similarity and even more clearly demonstrates the novelty, or we may say progressiveness from our vantage point, of Cao Pi’s text.

The crowd loves to treasure antiquity and does not prize the modern, believing present-day writings are inferior to ancient works. But past and present are the same in that there are superior and inferior talents and that there are right or wrong words. If one disregards good and bad and only seeks to prize antiquity, it is basically regarding the ancients as more worthy than moderns. Yet, when we consider the likes of Zou Boqi of Dongfan, Yuan Taibo and Yuan Wenshu of Linhuai, Wu Jungao and Zhou Changsheng of Kuaiji, even though they have not reached high official positions, they are truly stores of ability and knowledge and heroes in terms of cultural grace. If we view Boqi’s *Yuan si*, Taibo’s *Yi zhangju*, Wenshu’s *Xian ming*, Jungao’s *Yue niu lu*, and Changsheng’s *Dong li*, even Liu Zizheng [Liu Xiang 劉向, 77–6 BCE] and Yang Ziyun [Yang Xiong] could not surpass them.

Talent can be profound or shallow, but cannot be measured by its being ancient or modern; writings can speak untruth or truth, but cannot be divided into old and new. Speaking of people like Chen Zihui and Yan Fang of Guangling, or today’s Secretariat Court Gentleman, Ban Gu, and Imperial Librarians Yang Zhong and Fu Yi [d. ca. 90], though they have authored no monographs, their poetic expositions, odes, memorandums, and memorials are splendid in literary elegance. Their rhapsodies resemble those of Qu Yuan and Jia Yi, and their memorials take after those of Tang Lin and Gu Yong. When we place their writings side by side [with the earlier writings] for comparison, the beauty is one and the same. They are not yet preeminent in the present day, but after a hundred generations they will be grouped with Zizheng and Ziyun.²⁵

夫俗好珍古不貴今，謂今之文不如古書。夫古今一也，才有高下，言有是非，不論善惡而徒貴古，是謂古人賢今人也。案東番鄒伯奇、臨淮袁太伯、袁文術、會稽吳君高、周長生之輩，位雖不至公卿，誠

25. Wang Chong, *Lun heng jiaoshi*, 73.1173–74.

能知之囊橐，文雅之英雄也。觀伯奇之元思，太伯之易章句，文術之咸銘，君高之越紐錄，長生之洞歷，劉子政、揚子雲不能過也。善[蓋]才有淺深，無有古今；文有偽真，無有故新。廣陵陳子迴、顏方，今尚書郎班固，蘭臺令楊終、傅毅之徒，雖無篇章，賦頌記奏，文辭斐炳。賦象屈原、賈生，奏象唐林、谷永，並比以觀好，其美一也。當今未顯，使在百世之後，則子政、子雲之黨也。

In an effort to counter the public's blind adulation of the ancients at the expense of modern writers, Wang Chong argues that the writings of his age are not inferior to ancient writings. Although he also mentions contemporary writers good at composing shorter pieces such as "poetic expositions, odes, memorandums, and memorials" 賦頌記奏, Wang Chong's comments are primarily directed at the authors of long treatises. We see his formulation of comparative judgment ("even Y and Z could not surpass X") in Cao Pi's description of the Seven Masters; but in contrast with Wang Chong's emphasis on long treatises, Cao Pi focuses on the shorter pieces, such as Wang Can's poetic expositions or Chen Lin's and Ruan Yu's memorials and memorandums. In a passage hailed as the earliest example of genre theory in Chinese literary criticism, Cao lists memorials and disquisitions (*zou yi* 奏議), letters and discourses (*shu lun* 書論), inscriptions and elegies (*ming lei* 銘誄), and poetry and poetic expositions (*shi fu* 詩賦).²⁶ These are all shorter forms that constitute the stuff of "literature" as conceived in the premodern Chinese tradition, in comparison with long works of intellectual writing (*zi* 子), historiography (*shi* 史), or classics (*jing* 經).

Up until the third century, a multi-chapter treatise on social, ethical, and political issues, with each chapter under a subject heading and with an autobiographical postface, had been considered the most important form of self-representation for an early medieval elite Chinese male.²⁷ Cao Pi's *Normative Discourses* is exactly such a treatise, just like Wang Chong's *Impartial Discourses*. But changes were afoot in the early third century. Xu Gan was the only one of the Seven Masters who was truly a *zi* because he had written a "master's book" (*zishu* 子書), namely *Balanced Discourses* (*Zhong lun* 中論), and in the preface by an anonymous admirer

26. Xiao Tong, comp., *Wen xuan*, 52.2271. Owen, *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought*, 64.

27. See detailed discussion in Tian, "Twilight of the Masters," 465–86.

his work is exactly defined in opposition to shorter pieces of literary writings such as poetry and poetic expositions:

Mr. Xu's nature was such that he always desired to take from what the world had in surplus in order to augment what the public lacked. He observed that the beautiful writings of Rhetoricians were being composed one after another, but that there was nothing that elucidated the great principles, disseminated the teachings of the Way, sought the sages' point of balance above, and dispelled the confusion of popular contemporary mores below. Therefore he abandoned such writings as poetry, poetic exposition, eulogy, inscription, and encomium, and wrote the book *Balanced Discourses* in twenty-two chapters.²⁸

君之性常欲損世之有餘，益俗之不足。見辭人美麗之文並時而作，曾無闡弘大義，敷散道教，上求聖人之中，下救流俗之昏者。故廢詩賦頌銘贊之文，著中論之書二十二篇。

By saying “the beautiful writings of Rhetoricians” the author is echoing Yang Xiong's famous critique of poetic expositions (*fu*): “The poetic expositions of the Poets are beautiful and thereby offer a norm; the poetic expositions of the Rhetoricians are beautiful and thereby are unrestrained” 詩人之賦麗以則，辭人之賦麗以淫。²⁹ In an attempt to praise Xu Gan's uniqueness and gravity, the anonymous author had to pitch his work against the literary compositions of his contemporaries, which are exactly what Cao Pi appreciates in his “Discourse on Literature.”³⁰

The anonymous author's definition of a multi-chapter philosophical work against the beautiful writings of Rhetoricians was not a random move. Notably, beginning in the early third century, such works were more often opposed diametrically to what in Ge Hong's 葛洪 (283–343) words were “small, fragmentary writings” (*xisui xiaowen* 細碎小文) such

28. Based on John Makeham's translation with modifications. Xu Gan, *Balanced Discourses*, xxxv.

29. Yang Xiong, *Fayan yishu*, 2.49.

30. Although Cao Pi does state at the end of “Discourse on Literature” in its *Wen xuan* form that Xu Gan was the only one who had “accomplished a discourse of his own” 唯幹著論成一家言, his words of appraisal about the other masters are all directed at their shorter writings, including the “beautiful writings of Rhetoricians” denounced by the anonymous author of the *Zhong lun* preface.

as poetry and poetic expositions.³¹ Eventually the literary collection (*ji* 集, *wen ji* 文集, or *bie ji* 別集) would replace “masters’ works” as the central form of self-representation. Cao Pi was the crucial figure in the change, as he named the Seven Masters and compiled their collections, and his was the first explicit reference, made by the compiler himself, to the making of a literary collection.

In his March 17, 218, letter to Wu Zhi, after the initial pleasantries, Cao Pi wrote:

Many relatives and old friends were stricken by last year’s epidemic. Xu, Chen, Ying, and Liu passed away all at once. How could I speak of the pain! In the past we had roamed and rested together, our carriages following one another on an outing, and our seating mats touching one another’s when we stayed in: we never spent a single moment apart. When goblets and ladles were passed around, strings and panpipes played in harmony, we got tipsy with ale and our faces were flushed, and we looked up and composed poems. At such a time we abandoned ourselves to pleasure without knowing that we were happy. We took a lifespan of a hundred years for granted, and we thought we could always enjoy one another’s company just like that. Who would have expected that in a matter of a few years they had all passed away—it wounds my heart to even speak of this. Lately I have edited the writings they left behind into a collection, and as I looked at their names, I realized they were all in the register of ghosts. When I think back to our roaming in bygone days, it is so vivid in my mind’s eye; and yet these gentlemen have already turned into dung and dirt—how can I bear to say anything further!³²

昔年疾疫，親故多離其災，徐、陳、應、劉，一時俱逝，痛可言邪。昔日遊處，行則連輿，止則接席，何曾須臾相失。每至觴酌流行，絲竹並奏，酒酣耳熱，仰而賦詩，當此之時，忽然不自知樂也。謂百年已分，可長共相保，何圖數年之間，零落略盡，言之傷心。頃撰其遺文，都為一集，觀其姓名，已為鬼錄。追思昔遊，猶在心目，而此諸子化為糞壤，可復道哉！

In this poignant passage, at the center of Cao Pi’s recollection are the feasts they had once shared, feasts replete with drinking, music, and

31. Ge, *Baopuzi waipian*, 50.697.

32. Xiao Tong, comp., *Wen xuan*, 42.1896–97.

poetry. The merry gathering defines the literary era of Jian'an, and yet it has *always* existed as memory and absence. Indeed, Cao Pi claims that he did not know his merriment as such until it had vanished.

It is not entirely clear whether Cao Pi had compiled a joint collection of the writings left behind by his friends or individual collections, but in either case it was an act of commemoration. In a discussion of the rise of literature "as a distinct field of discourse" in the classical Chinese tradition, Owen points out the essentially posthumous nature of a literary collection (*ji*), which became "'complete' only with the author's death."³³ Cao Pi's creation of the Seven Masters is inseparable from his creation of their collections, and by necessity both must be posthumous constructions, as the collection signals the full presence of a person, no longer growing and changing, but arrested and wholly embodied in the writings he left behind.

Cao Pi wrote in "Discourse on Literature":

Literary writings are the grand achievement in the management of state, a splendor that never decays. A person's life will inevitably come to an end; glory and pleasure are limited to one's person: neither can compare with the infinite eternity of literary writings. For this reason the ancient authors would lodge their persons in the brush and ink, and manifest their intentions in their writings. Without depending on the words of a good historian or relying on the power of those soaring and galloping, their reputations were thus passed on to posterity on their own strength.

蓋文章經國之大業，不朽之盛事。年壽有時而盡，榮樂止乎其身，二者必至之常期，未若文章之無窮。是以古之作者，寄身於翰墨，見意於篇籍，不假良史之辭，不託飛馳之勢，而聲名自傳於後。

The mortal "body" (*shen* 身) can only last when it is "lodged" in one's writings, animated by the permanent presence of the author's intentions or thoughts (*yi* 意) and by his vital energy (*qi* 氣), which is literally "breath." Immediately preceding the above passage Cao Pi famously declares: "In literature *qi* is the most important factor" 文以氣為主. According to Cao Pi, *qi* is an inherent quality unique to each individual: "It cannot be brought about by force. . . . A father and elder brother cannot transfer it

33. Owen, "Key Concepts of Literature," 6.

to a son or a younger brother” 不可力強而致……雖在父兄，不能以移子弟。 An optimistic reading of “Discourse on Literature” is that the textual body of a literary collection can be, and is, the perfect equivalent of its author’s physical body, ensuring his eternal presence in the living world after the body’s return to the earth.

The plague was a catalyst and a precondition for the immortalization of the Seven Masters. It is not accidental that Cao Pi’s many cultural undertakings also took place after the plague. If *Normative Discourses* might have had an earlier point of origin, then certainly the “Discourse on Literature” chapter in its *Wen xuan* form, closing with the statement that “Kong Rong and the others have already passed away,” was finished after the plague. Another notable project undertaken in the aftermath of the plague—though not until Cao Pi commanded more power and authority after his father passed away—was the *Imperial View* (*Huang lan* 皇覽), commonly acknowledged as the first encyclopedia (*lei shu* 類書) proper. Cao Pi commissioned a group of scholars to compile it in the year 220 after he succeeded Cao Cao as the King of Wei, and the work was completed after he ascended the throne as emperor. The completed work “had altogether over forty categories [*bu* 部],” “totaling over eight million characters” and “over a thousand chapters [*pian* 篇].”³⁴

In the sense that it is a compilation of material from existing sources, *Imperial View* evokes Lü Buwei’s 呂不韋 (d. 235 BCE) *Lü’s View* (*Lü lan* 呂覽) or *Mr. Lü’s Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Lüshi chungiu* 呂氏春秋), Liu An’s *Huainanzi*, or Liu Xiang’s *Garden of Persuasions* (*Shuo yuan* 說苑). However, *Lü’s View* and *Huainanzi* are both syncretic works; even *Garden of Persuasions* contains Liu Xiang’s own creations and comments. In contrast, an encyclopedia merely *presents* existing material. The relation to earlier texts had undergone a radical change from *Lü’s View* to *Imperial View*: whereas the former seeks to integrate knowledge, the latter preserves extracts verbatim for the sake of contributing to one’s own literary writings. It is not a coincidence that the emergence of encyclopedias (*lei shu*) in the early third century concurred with the conscious compilation of individual literary collections and with the creation of the Seven Masters as authors—not in the sense of a Confucius, a Sima Qian, or a Wang Chong or Ge Hong, but in a sense that is much closer to the later notion of “literary writers.”

34. *Sanguo zhi*, 23.664, 2.88.

In his March 17, 218, letter to Wu Zhi, Cao Pi affirms the Seven Masters' value in negative terms: they cannot be matched in his lifetime, they cannot be repeated and replaced, and they are gone forever.

These gentlemen were inferior only to the ancients, but they were all outstanding talents of our age. Those living today are not their equals. "The future generations are worthy of awe," and they cannot be judged harshly; but you and I, my dear sir, shan't live to see them.³⁵

諸子但為未及古人，自一時之雋也，今之存者已不逮矣。後生可畏，來者難誣，然吾與足下不及見也。

Past, present, and future are fused in these lines anxiously punctured by phrases like "not as good as" (*weiji* 未及), "not in time to" (*bu ji* 不及), and "not equal to" (*bu dai* 不逮), with Cao Pi's own position wobbly and ambiguous between those departed and the generations to come. The letter continues on an intensely personal note:

As I am getting on in years, I have ten thousand concerns. Sometimes I am so worried about something that I stay up all night. How can I be like I was in the old days? I am already an old man save for my hair, which has not yet turned white. Emperor Guangwu [of the Eastern Han] once said, "I am thirty years old now and have been in the army for a decade; I have experienced quite a few things." Though my virtue cannot match his, my age is the same. With the substance of dog and sheep, I am clothed in the patterns of tiger and leopard; without the brightness of the stars, I am merely borrowing the light of sun and moon. In every move I make, I am being watched and observed. When can this ever change? I am afraid that I shall never have the kind of excursions I enjoyed in bygone days.

年行已長大，所懷萬端，時有所慮，至乃通夕不暝，何時復類昔日？已成老翁，但未白頭耳。光武言年已三十，在軍十年，所更非一。吾德雖不及，年與之齊。以犬羊之質，服虎豹之文；無眾星之明，假日月之光。動見觀瞻，何時易邪？恐永不復得為昔日遊也。

35. For the last sentence, the *Wen xuan* version reads: "but I *fear* that you and I, my dear sir, shan't live to see them" 然恐吾與足下不及見也 (my italics). *Kong* (fear) slightly softens the tone. Xiao Tong, comp., *Wen xuan*, 42.1898.

The plague of 217, as noted above, coincided with Cao Pi's becoming the crown prince of Wei. It is said that when he first heard the news of his elevation, Cao Pi was so overjoyed that he leapt up and hugged a courtier.³⁶ If the anecdote is true, his joy proved short-lived. With the gravity of power came the weight and restraints of responsibility.³⁷ Comparing himself to Emperor Guangwu, the founder of the Eastern Han dynasty, is a rhetorical move impregnated with political meaning, even as Cao Pi states that his virtue is inferior to Emperor Guangwu's.³⁸ In addition, it is at the age of thirty that Confucius says he "became established" (*sanshi er li* 三十而立), having reached mature manhood. Speaking with a keen awareness of his age and the weight of his position, Cao Pi mourns in equal measure the death of the Jian'an Masters and the passing of his own carefree youth.

And so an era is born with the very declaration that it is over. Cao Pi's letter marks the moment that defines Jian'an: from the very beginning, "Jian'an" was a romanticized era created from elegiac remembrance. Although the letter passes judgment on the writings of the Masters, as in the "Discourse on Literature" chapter, it proves a much more intensely personal document than the chapter. As Antje Richter argues, Cao Pi "masterfully exploited the genre-typical potential of the inherent dialogicity of the letter, which allows the loose succession or even juxtaposition of different subjects and a relaxed train of thought resembling the back and forth of a conversation. It also allows for a certain dramatization of arguments and charges them with personal concern."³⁹

Interestingly, the earliest version we have of this letter—the excerpt included in the text of *Records of the Three Kingdoms*—deletes all the rambling personal remarks surrounding the appraisal of the Seven Masters and, in its more austere cataloguing of their strengths and weaknesses, resembles more closely the "Discourse on Literature" chapter. However, the deleted remarks are supplied by Pei Songzhi with a note: "In Your

36. *Sanguo zhi*, 25.699.

37. For instance, he had to curtail his passion for hunting after some concerned courtier remonstrated with him about the danger and frivolity of such an activity. *Sanguo zhi*, 25.718.

38. As we shall see in the next chapter, Cao Pi is used to establishing connection by employing such "negative comparisons." That is, by saying "I am not [like] so-and-so," he associates himself with so-and-so.

39. Richter, "Letter or Essay?"

subject Songzhi's opinion, although the biography contains an excerpt of this letter by the crown prince, the lovely words [of the letter] are mostly excised; therefore I have included here the text cited in *Wei lüe* in its entirety" 臣松之以本傳雖略載太子此書，美辭多被刪落，今故悉取魏略所述以備其文。⁴⁰ From the complete version we also find a comment on Liu Zhen's poetry that had apparently been removed from *Records of the Three Kingdoms*: "As for his poetry in the five-syllable line, it is the most marvelous of the day" 至其五言詩，妙絕當時。⁴¹ This is an intriguing excision; a possible explanation is that Chen Shou 陳壽 (233–97), the compiler of *Records of the Three Kingdoms*, did not think very highly of poetry in the five-syllable line: it was a "low" form favored by the Cao family and popular in Luoyang, but Chen Shou, who hailed from the provincial Shu region, did not necessarily share the same literary taste. By the fifth century, however, poetry in the five-syllable line had become firmly established as a prestigious genre, and Cao Pi's letter was regarded as much for his "lovely words" as for its value as a historical document.

Gathering at Ye

Pei Songzhi was writing in the early fifth century, when there was a rekindled interest in third-century poetry. Yan Yanzhi 顏延之 (384–456), the preeminent court poet, wrote a commentary on Ruan Ji 阮籍 (210–63), the famous son of one of the Seven Masters Ruan Yu; Xie Lingyun, the other leading poet of the day, looked to the Cao Pi / Cao Zhi brothers and the poet Lu Ji, an admirer of the Caos to whom we will return in chapter 3, as his personal heroes. Xie Lingyun's poetic representation of

40. Pei Songzhi is addressing the intended reader of his commentary, Emperor Wen of the Song 宋文帝 (r. 424–53), who had commissioned the commentary. *Sanguo zhi*, 21.609.

41. The *Wen xuan* version reads: "The outstanding pieces of his poetry in the five-syllable line are the best among his contemporaries" 其五言詩之善者，妙絕時人. Xiao Tong, comp., *Wen xuan*, 42.1897. This is a much more qualified judgment than we see in Pei's version: in this version Cao Pi is not saying that all of Liu Zhen's poetry in the five-syllable line is first-rate, but only that the best of his five-syllable-line poems are outstanding.

Cao Pi and the Masters, in a remarkable group of what I call fictional poems, is the second important phase in the construction of the literary Jian'an. With keen perception, Xie chose to base his representation exactly on the moment of remembrance and commemoration that we see in Cao Pi's March 17, 218, letter to Wu Zhi. The series, known as *In Imitation of the Wei Crown Prince's Gathering at Ye* (*Ni Wei taizi Ye zhong ji* 擬魏太子鄴中集), begins with a preface by a fictive Cao Pi, followed by eight poems respectively in the voices of Cao Pi and the Seven Masters, albeit with Cao Zhi standing in for Kong Rong.⁴²

The preface is the narrative frame for the poems:

In the last years of the Jian'an reign, I was at the Ye palace; I went on outings at dawn and feasted in the evenings, and reached the zenith of enjoyment. In this world, fine moments and lovely scenes, hearts capable of appreciation and events of delight—these four things are hard to come by conjoined; but with a small group of talented men like my brother and my friends, we have experienced them to the utmost.

Since the ancient times joy like ours has never been seen in any record. Why do I say this? At the time of King Xiang of Chu, there were Song Yu, Tang [Le], and Jing [Cuo].⁴³ At the time of Prince Xiao of Liang, there were Zou Yang, Mei Sheng, Yan Ji, and Sima Xiangru.⁴⁴ Those who went on excursions were indeed wonderful, yet their lords were not themselves literary. Xu Yue and the other talented men at the time of Emperor Wu of the Han were quite competent in responding [to the emperor], and yet their ruler was suspicious and took offense easily, and how could they have felt at ease in face-to-face conversations?⁴⁵ As for the future generations, I do not wish to judge them harshly, and I suppose there will be people proving more worthy than those living today.

As the years and months flow on like water, the members of our group have withered and fallen and are almost entirely gone. Compiling their

42. Xiao Tong, comp., *Wen xuan*, 30.1432. Lu Qinli, comp., *Song shi* 宋詩, 3.1181–85.

43. Song Yu, Tang Le 唐勒, and Jing Cuo 景差 were supposedly *fu* writers of Chu from the third century BCE. They often appear as figures in early medieval poetic expositions. *Shi ji*, 84.2491.

44. Zou Yang 鄒陽 (d. 120 BCE), Mei Sheng 枚乘 (d. 140 BCE), Yan Ji 嚴忌 (Zhuang Ji 莊忌, fl. ca. 154 BCE), and Sima Xiangru were *fu* writers of the Western Han who had been on the staff of the Prince of Liang (184–144 BCE).

45. Xu Yue, a man of Zhao, sent a memorial to the throne discussing contemporary affairs. *Shi ji*, 112.2956.

writings and thinking of them with longing, I am moved by what has gone by, and my grief is intensified. The words are as follows. . . .

建安末，余時在鄴宮，朝游夕宴，究歡愉之極。天下良辰美景，賞心樂事，四者難并。今昆弟友朋，二三諸彥，共盡之矣。古來此娛，書籍未見。何者？楚襄王時有宋玉、唐、景，梁孝王時有鄒、枚、嚴、馬，游者美矣，而其主不文。漢武帝徐樂諸才備應對之能，而雄猜多忌，豈獲晤言之適？不誣方將，庶必賢於今日爾。歲月如流，零落將盡，撰文懷人，感往增愴。其辭曰……

The fact that Xie Lingyun wrote in the voice of a historical person shows considerable originality. Such historical imagination is fundamentally different from that demonstrated in *yuefu* poetry, in which a persona usually represents a general type rather than a particular individual, let alone a historical person.⁴⁶ In framing the poems with a preface describing the circumstances under which the poems are grouped together, Xie Lingyun took his inspiration from the genre of *fu*, poetic exposition, as many early and early medieval *fu* used historical, quasi-historical, or downright fictional characters in their framing narratives, and the *fu* text proper was usually delivered by one or more of these characters. But the difference is illuminating. In those *fu*, even a supposedly historical figure like “Song Yu” becomes a stock character no more and no less real than the fictional Lord No-such in Sima Xiangru’s famous poetic expositions. In this regard, the “Cao Pi” preface’s fictionalizing and dramatizing are both similar to the narrative framing in *fu* writing and remarkably dissimilar, for Xie Lingyun is not only “impersonating” a historical person but also

46. We do have a *yuefu* poem “Lyrics on Wang Mingjun” 王明君辭 by Shi Chong 石崇 (249–300) that is in the voice of a historical person, the Han palace lady Wang Mingjun, better known as Wang Zhaojun 王昭君 (Lu Qinli, comp., *Jin shi* 晉詩, 4.642–43); but Wang Mingjun has not left behind any writing of her own, nor we do know much about her as a person. Before Xie Lingyun’s poetic series there had been a distinctive practice of *daizuo* 代作 (“writing on behalf of/in the voice of”), but those poems tend to be written on behalf of/in the voice of a living person; for example, Lu Ji’s “Presented to the Wife on Behalf of Gu Yanxian” 為顧彥先贈婦詩 (Lu Qinli, comp., *Jin shi*, 5.682). Another “precedent” is the poems attributed to historical persons such as Su Wu 蘇武 (d. 60 BCE), Li Ling 李陵 (d. 74 BCE), Cai Yan 蔡琰 (fl. ca. 195–207), and so forth, likely in the “unofficial biographies” (*bie zhuan* 別傳) or historical romances of those personages circulating in early medieval times. Those poems, however, tended to be taken as authentic in early medieval times and in any case would circulate under those personages’ names.

impersonating that person *in a specific historical situation*, namely when Cao Pi was editing the writings left behind by the Masters into a collection and thinking of them with nostalgia.⁴⁷ Yet another innovative aspect of this poetic series is that despite the word *ni* (“imitate”) in its title, it is almost certain that Xie Lingyun is not “imitating” particular texts here;⁴⁸ rather, he is performing a literary ventriloquism that represents the important moment when Cao Pi compiled a literary collection or collections (*ji*) of a group of men of letters who had once gathered (also *ji*) around the ideal and idealized prince. In other words, Xie Lingyun’s title should be understood as “emulating the assembly in Ye,” with “assembly” retaining its double meanings of a poetic collection and a social gathering.

Both acts of *ji* had a significance that goes beyond the immediate fact in and of itself. Earlier in this chapter I discussed the significance of the emergence of the “literary collection” and the rise of the literary author. The sense of a community consisting of a literary prince and his literary courtiers composing *together*, as opposed to the earlier courts where an emperor or prince commissioned literary writings but did not himself participate in the practice of composition alongside his courtiers, reflects the new historical situation of the fifth century. On the one hand, we must note that the precedents mentioned by “Cao Pi” here only cite rulers/courtiers who primarily had a penchant for poetic expositions (and, in the case of Xu Yue, memorials to the throne), and that the famous Western Han Prince of Huainan who oversaw the compilation of

47. It is instructive to compare Xie Lingyun’s poetic series with his clansman Xie Zhuang’s 謝莊 (421–66) “*Fu* on the Moon” 月賦, a famous piece also included in *Wenxuan* (13.598–603). It is set in the Jian’an era with Cao Zhi and Wang Can as the main characters. In the poetic exposition, it is Cao Zhi, rather than Cao Pi, who is lamenting the deaths of Ying Yang and Liu Zhen, and to assuage his sorrow, Cao Zhi commands Wang Can to compose an exposition on the moon; Wang Can’s exposition thus forms the *fu* text proper. The ahistorical nature of this work is glaring: first, the historical Wang Can had died before Ying Yang and Liu Zhen; second, while Cao Zhi composed an elegy for Wang Can, we have no extant record of his mourning the Jian’an Masters who passed away in the plague; third, Xie Zhuang has no intention to “sound like” the historical Cao Zhi or Wang Can.

48. Doran discusses this in “Perspective and Appreciation,” 54–56. One may add that the “*Xji*” in the title “Ye zhong ji” is a common phrase referring to a gathering at X place in early medieval poem titles, such as “Poem Written at Jingu Gathering” 金谷集作詩, “Poem Written at Hualin Park Gathering” 華林園集詩, or “Poem Written at Liu Puyé’s Dongshan Gathering” 劉僕射東山集詩.

Huainanzi, a long, book-length treatise, was not considered: this accords perfectly with the transition from the popularity of long philosophical treatises to that of individual literary collections (*bieji*) in the early fifth century.⁴⁹ On the other hand, the fifth century was also the time when the emperor or prince ceased being merely a spectator but rather often joined his courtiers in composing poetry and poetic expositions on social occasions. The court—both the imperial court and the princely court—became the central site of literary and cultural production, with the active participation of the lord and ruler himself. This marks a new phase in the development of court literature since Han times.⁵⁰

That Xie Lingyun is projecting the reality of the fifth century onto Cao Pi and the Jian'an writers is accentuated by the fact that Cao Pi, though a "lord's son" (*gongzi* 公子), was not a prince, let alone a crown prince, when he was feasting and composing poetry with the Masters. In fact, Ruan Yu had died long before Cao Cao was enfeoffed as the King of Wei, and Wang Can never lived to see Cao Pi officially become the crown prince. In other words, it was Xie Lingyun's own age that truly saw an emperor or prince engaging in literary activities alongside his courtiers; it was also Xie Lingyun's own age that witnessed a new fascination with literary history, in terms of the revival of interest in the poetry in the five-syllable line of the early third century and of the writing of literary historical accounts.⁵¹ Xie's biographical circumstances may or may not have played a role in composing this series of poems, but his larger historical circumstances almost certainly did.⁵²

It is noteworthy that the very first sentence of the "Cao Pi" preface reads: "In the *last years* of the Jian'an reign" (my italics). The wording implies that at the time when "Cao Pi" composed the preface, the Jian'an reign was already over. By emphasizing the end of a political era, the

49. See Tian, "Twilight of the Masters," 473–78.

50. For a detailed discussion of this striking phenomenon, see Tian, "Representing Kingship."

51. Owen, *The Cambridge History*, 227–29.

52. Some scholars believe that Xie's poetic series was inspired by his grief and nostalgia for the young prince Liu Yizhen 劉義真 (407–24). See, for instance, *Xie Lingyun ji jiaozhu*, 200–201. Efforts to identify biographical elements in the poetic series are, however, thwarted by the fact that we simply do not know at what point in his life Xie Lingyun composed the series, and that could change an autobiographical interpretation significantly.

preface signals the birth of the *literary* era of Jian'an. Each of the eight poems, save for "Cao Pi's," is headed by a "little preface" summarizing the life and defining characteristics of the author. The effect is as of a painting scroll in which all persons are reduced to what is perceived as their most essential qualities, with the "little preface" functioning as a caption. What we have is a tableau vivant of the quintessential Jian'an.

The Poems

Marked by authors only, none of the poems have a title, which perhaps represents exactly the way in which many manuscript texts, especially group compositions, might have appeared in early medieval times. The first poem is by "Wei's Crown Prince" 魏太子, the title indicating the status change between the time of the composition of the poem and the "present" time of the composition of the preface.⁵³

"Wei's Crown Prince" 魏太子

百川赴巨海	A hundred streams all flow to the great ocean;
眾星環北辰	A multitude of stars surround the North Pole. ⁵⁴
照灼爛霄漢	Shining forth, they illuminate the Heavenly Waterway;
4 遙裔起長津	From afar the long rivers originate.
天地中橫潰	When heaven and earth were caught in a deluge,
家王拯生民	My king and father rescued the people from drowning.
區宇既滌蕩	When the entire world has been washed clean,

53. Cao Cao passed away in the first month of the 25th year of the Jian'an era (March 220), and Cao Pi succeeded as King of Wei immediately; the Han emperor changed his reign title from Jian'an to Yankang shortly afterwards. *Sanguo zhi*, 22.644.

54. This clearly echoes the *Analects*: "Confucius said, 'To govern with virtue is like the North Pole Star, which simply stays in its place with the multitude of stars surrounding it [in submission]' 為政以德，譬如北辰居其所而眾星共之。 *Lunyu*, 2.1.

not satiated with depth” 山不厭高，海不厭深。⁵⁷ The idea of men gathering, *ji*, around their lord is already implicit in the image. The second line moves to a balancing image, echoing the *Analec*s quotation about stars surrounding the North Pole that again suggests kingship. The third and fourth lines each represent an exposition of the second and first line respectively, but the earthly rivers in the fourth line are reflected in the light of *xiaohan* 霄漢, the Heavenly Waterway (i.e., the Milky Way, a synecdoche for the sky), in the third line. There is a lot of water in these couplets, and water, when not controlled well, leads to a bursting of the dike in the fifth line, with Cao Cao being figured as the one who saves the people from drowning. The water imagery is carried through to the fourth couplet, in which the world is finally “washed clean” (*didang* 滌蕩) by the flood, and the various talented men all come hither and gather under Cao Cao’s leadership. Finally, liquid makes its last appearance in the ninth couplet, as “pure brew” that fills the golden flagon at the happy communal feast shared by lord and vassals.

While actual banquet poems by the Jian’an poet always contain a reference to “precious victuals” (*zhenshan* 珍膳) or “excellent viands” (*jiayao* 嘉餚) such as “stewed lamb” (*peng yang* 烹羊) and “roasted fatty ox” (*zhi feiniu* 炙肥牛), the food imagery is conspicuously missing from this “Cao Pi” poem.⁵⁸ Instead, Xie Lingyun uses two couplets (lines 13–16) highlighting the one aspect that rarely constitutes the main element in extant Jian’an banquet poems, and that is “discussing things” and “analyzing principles” about the “interaction of heaven and men”—the substance of their conversations is the very stuff of the philosophical “masters’ works.”⁵⁹ This important divergence from the norm of Jian’an

57. Lu Qinli, comp., *Wei shi* 魏詩, 1.349. Also in Xiao Tong, comp., *Wen xuan*, 27.1281–82. For the full text of the poem and its translation, see appendix A.

58. For a discussion of the “food and ale” template couplet in Jian’an poetry, see Owen, *The Making*, 208.

59. The only reference to discoursing at a feast is found in a fragment of Ying Yang’s “Public Banquet” poem: “Debating and discussing release what is pent up within; / Holding a brush we engage in literary compositions” 辯論釋鬱結，援筆興文章。Lu Qinli, comp., *Wei shi*, 3.383. In poetic representations of banquets, guests are typically too busy eating, drinking, and enjoying songs and music to talk much, and when they do speak, it is to “only complain that wine cups pass too slowly” 但慙杯行遲 (Wang Can) or to “wish the host a long life of ten thousand years” 賓奉萬年酬 (Cao Zhi). Lu Qinli, comp., *Wei shi*, 2.360, 6.425. While discoursing and conversing might very well have been part of the banquet routine, poetic representation follows its own rules.

banquet poetry reflects the predilection for philosophical discoursing at gatherings in Xie Lingyun's own time.

The next poem is by "Wang Can" and is preceded by a "little preface":

"Wang Can"

Coming from the Qin plain, he was a descendant of a noble family. Encountering disorder, he went into exile, and was full of sadness about his life.⁶⁰

家本秦川，貴公子孫，遭亂流寓，自傷情多。

幽厲昔崩亂 In the past, the times of King You and King Li
were in upheaval;

桓靈今板蕩 Today, the reign of Emperors Huan and Ling
went astray.⁶¹

伊洛既燎煙 Yi and Luo had already gone up in smoke;

4 函嶠沒無像 Han and Xiao fell into unparalleled chaos.⁶²

整裝辭秦川 Packing my luggage, I took leave
of the Qin plain,

秣馬赴楚壤 Feeding my horse, I went off
to the land of Chu.

沮漳自可美 Though Ju and Zhang were beautiful,⁶³

8 客心非外獎 A traveler's heart was not to be seduced
by external things.⁶⁴

60. Wang Can's great-grandfather and grandfather were high officials in the Han court. Caught in the chaos at the end of the Eastern Han, Wang Can left Chang'an ("the Qin plain") in 192 and went south to Jingzhou 荊州 (modern Hubei), attaching himself to the Jingzhou governor Liu Biao 劉表 (142–208). When Cao Cao's army descended on Jingzhou in 208, Wang Can urged Liu Biao's son and successor Liu Cong 劉琮 to surrender to Cao Cao. Since Jingzhou was in the territory of the old kingdom of Chu, the sixth line of the poem refers to it as "the land of Chu."

61. King Li and King You were Zhou rulers whose tyrannical rule led to disorder; King You was the last Western Zhou king (r. 781–771 BCE). Emperors Huan (r. 147–67) and Ling (r. 168–89) were the last Eastern Han emperors. "Ban" 板 and "Dang" 蕩 are both poems from *Shi jing* that are interpreted as criticizing King Li's bad rule.

62. Yi and Luo are names of rivers near the Eastern Han capital Luoyang (in modern He'nan). Han and Xiao refer to the Hangu Pass and Mount Xiao (or the Xiao Pass), both in He'nan.

63. Ju and Zhang are names of rivers in Jingzhou.

64. In Wang Can's "*Fu* on Ascending the Tower" 登樓賦, believed to have been

- 常歎詩人言 I would often sigh about the words of the *Shi*
poet:
式微何由往 "O decline!" Yet how could I return home?⁶⁵
上宰奉皇靈 The Great Minister serves the Imperial
Numen,⁶⁶
12 侯伯咸宗長 All noble lords consider him as the leader.
雲騎亂漢南 His cloud-like cavalry crossed to the south of
the Han River,
紀郢皆掃盪 The city of Ji Ying was swept clean.⁶⁷
排霧屬盛明 Pushing aside the fog,
I behold the great splendor;
16 披雲對清明 Clearing away the cloud,
I face clarity and brightness.⁶⁸
慶泰欲重疊 Blessings and auspices tend to accumulate,
公子特先賞 As I receive special appreciation
from my lord's son.
不謂息肩願 I did not expect that my wish to be relieved of
burden and to rest
20 一旦值明兩 Would be more than satisfied by my encounter
with the bright prince.
並載遊鄴京 Riding in the same carriage,
we roam in the capital of Ye,
方舟汎河廣 Our boats, side by side,
float in the broad river.⁶⁹

composed when he was in Jingzhou, he describes the land: "It hugs the intersecting channel of the clear Zhang, / Rests upon the long sandbars of the twisting Ju. . . . Though truly beautiful, it is not my home! / How can I remain here even briefly?" 挾清漳之通浦兮，倚曲沮之長洲。 . . . 雖信美而非吾土兮，曾何足以少留? David R. Knechtges's translation, in *Wen xuan*, 237-39.

65. This is from the *Shi jing* poem "O Decline" 式微: "O decline! O decline! Why not return home?" 式微式微胡不歸. *Mao shi zhushu*, 2.92.

66. The Great Minister refers to Cao Cao, and the Imperial Numen refers to the Han emperor.

67. Ji Ying refers to the city of Ying, the capital of the old kingdom of Chu.

68. The *Wen xuan* commentator Li Shan 李善 (630-89) cites Ruan Yu's letter to Cao Cao: "Once I get to push open the dark clouds and gaze on the white sun, I will strive to do my best; how could I dare to be disloyal!" 一得披玄雲，望白日，唯力是視，敢有二心! Xiao Tong, comp., *Wen xuan*, 30.1434.

69. Li Shan cites a letter from Cao Pi to Wu Zhi, dated to 215: "Sharing the same

- 網繆清讌娛 Intimately we enjoy the pure pleasures
of the banquet;
- 24 寂寥梁棟響 In the spacious hall music resounds against
beams and rafters.
- 既作長夜飲 Now that I engage in drinking and carousing
through the long night,
- 豈顧乘日養 How can I be concerned with nurturing life
in the sun chariot?⁷⁰

The “Wang Can” poem is one of the most distinguished in the series because of its deft appropriation of Wang Can’s writings and biography with a Xie Lingyun twist. In this poem, the Yi and Luo Rivers are literally being set ablaze and the mountain has become “imageless” (*wu xiang* 無像). “Unparalleled/imageless chaos” is clearly inspired by the opening line of Wang Can’s “Poems of Seven Sorrows” (“Qi ai shi” 七哀詩) No. 1, “The western capital fell into unparalleled/imageless chaos” 西京亂無象, but the “river/mountain” parallel is typical of Xie’s own landscape poetry with its customary “mountain/water” couplets.⁷¹ The parallel is carried into the next stanza, which sees the poet taking leave of the Qin plain (“Qin chuan” 秦川) and going off to the “land of Chu” with its Ju and Zhang Rivers; incidentally, *chuan* also means “river,” and the poet seems to be playing with the linguistic ambiguity in creating an illusory “water/mountain” balance in pairing off “Qin chuan” and “Chu rang” (literally “Chu soil”).

More than any other poem in the series, the “Wang Can” poem contains explicit references to the *Classic of Poetry* (*Shi jing* 詩經). A number of Wang Can’s poems are called to mind: “Seven Sorrows” No. 1, which ends with the poet evoking the *Shi jing* poem “Falling Spring”

carriage and riding together, we roamed in the rear park” 同乘並載以遊後園. Xiao Tong, comp., *Wen xuan*, 30.1434. The letter is included in *Wen xuan*, 42.1895.

70. Li Shan (*Wen xuan*, 30.1434) identifies the allusion to a *Zhuangzi* story: the Yellow Emperor was on an outing and got lost. He asked a horse-herding boy for directions and then, perceiving the boy as unusual, proceeded to ask him about governing the world. Instead of answering him directly, the boy merely said that when he was little, he suffered from a “dizzy” illness, and that an elder told him, “Why don’t you ride in the sun’s chariot and roam in the wilderness of Xiangcheng?” And doing so seems to have cured him. *Zhuangzi jishi*, 8.832.

71. Lu Qinli, comp., *Wei shi*, 2.365.

("Xia quan" 下泉) ("I understood the man of 'Falling Spring,' / Heaving sighs, I felt a wound in my heart" 悟彼下泉人, 喟然傷心肝); "Public Banquet Poem" ("Gongyan shi" 公宴詩): "I have heard the words of the *Shi* poet: / Do not go home unless drunk" 常聞詩人語, 不醉且無歸; "Poems on Joining the Army" ("Congjun shi" 從軍詩) No. 2: "I lament the men of Eastern Hills; / Heaving sighs, I feel touched by the cries of the stork" 哀彼東山人, 喟然感鶴鳴; No. 4: "Bearing the blame of dining for nothing, / Truly I am put to shame by the man who hews the sandal trees" 我有素餐責, 誠愧伐檀人; and No. 5: "The *Shi* poet praises the land of joy, / Though a guest, I wish to stay here" 詩人美樂土, 雖客猶願留.⁷² The kind of overt mentions of "the *Shi* poet" and of the "title" of a *Shi jing* poem like "Falling Spring," "Eastern Hills" ("Dong shan" 東山), or "Hewing the Sandal Trees" ("Fa tan" 伐檀) are clearly copied in the first and fifth couplets of the "Wang Can" poem. Interestingly, those Wang Can poems cited above are the very ones included in *Wen xuan*, and their inclusion in this canonical anthology reinforces the impression that Wang Can has a penchant for making *Shi jing* allusions in a distinctive manner. Xie Lingyun's "Wang Can" poem and *Wen xuan* selections thus form a perfect loop of mutual substantiation.

From the opening imagery of smoke, dimness, and indeed "imagelessness," the "Wang Can" poem moves gradually toward clarity and brightness. Cao Cao's cavalry, numerous like "clouds" ("cloud formation" *yunzhen* 雲陣 is also the name of an army configuration), crossed the Han River; the verb *luan* 亂 (to cross [a river]) echoes the phrase *bengluan* in the first line but is used in a different sense, and it results in Chu being "swept clean" (*saodang* 掃盪), which echoes the phrase *didang* 滌蕩 ("washed clean") in the "Cao Pi" poem. The imagery of luminosity culminates in lines 15–16, where "cloud" and "fog" are dispelled and the poet faces the sun, and further down in line 20 he encounters the "double brightness"—the crown prince. The description of the banquet not only is reduced to just one couplet but also turns out to be even more ethereal than in the "Cao Pi" poem—that is, it is limited to the echoes of music in the great hall; and in light of the discussion of the poem's particular structure of moving from dim imagelessness to bright forms, the adjective chosen to depict the banquet is "pure/clear" (*qing* 清) in line 23.

72. Ibid., 2.365, 2.360–63.

Finally, the ingenious ending takes the “dimness/clarity” contrast to a new level:

既作長夜飲	Now that I engage in drinking and carousing through the long night,
豈願乘日養	How can I be concerned with nurturing life in the sun chariot?

Li Shan correctly identifies the allusion in the last line as one to the *Zhuangzi* story, but he glosses *yang* 養 as “joy” and thus seems to have missed the message. The fictive Wang Can is referring to “riding in the sun’s chariot” in its original sense as the means of nurturing life and curing disease. The historical Wang Can was apparently a sickly person. His biography in *Records of the Three Kingdoms* states as much.⁷³ Cao Pi’s March 17, 218, letter to Wu Zhi says, “It is a pity that his body was frail, not enough to sustain his writings” 惜其體弱，不足起其文。⁷⁴ Wang Can eventually succumbed to an illness during a military campaign. Xie Lingyun is clearly alluding to the historical Wang Can’s poor health in the last line, which serves as a sort of “poetic omen” (*shichen* 詩讖) for Wang Can’s untimely death. The line is also clever in the way that it subverts the transition from dimness to brightness that has been built up through the poem, as “Wang Can” claims to surrender himself to drink through the “long night,” giving up the sun’s chariot.

The most striking point about the following “Chen Lin” poem is that its first part is devoted to an eager explanation of the poet’s former service to Cao Cao’s nemesis Yuan Shao 袁紹 (d. 202). While in Yuan Shao’s employment, Chen Lin had drafted a proclamation denouncing Cao Cao. After Cao defeated Yuan and captured Chen, he rebuked Chen Lin for insulting not just himself but also his forefathers; Chen reportedly apologized, saying, “I was like the arrow on the bowstring that could not help being shot” 矢在絃上，不可不發。⁷⁵ Cao Cao admired his talent so much that he overlooked the offense. This proclamation is included in

73. *Sanguo zhi*, 21.598.

74. Yan Kejun, comp., *Quan sanguo wen*, 7.1089.

75. This remark is cited by Li Shan in his commentary on the proclamation. See Xiao Tong, comp., *Wen xuan*, 44.1967.

Wen xuan and known as “Military Proclamation to [the Governor of] Yuzhou on Behalf of Yuan Shao” (“Wei Yuan Shao xi Yuzhou” 為袁紹檄豫州). Perhaps having this incident in mind, the fictive Chen Lin in Xie’s poem makes a much more earnest display than do the other fictive poets of his helplessness in the end-of-the-Han chaos and of his loyalty to Cao Cao.

“Chen Lin”

He was a gentleman on Yuan Benchu’s [Yuan Shao’s courtesy name] secretarial staff, and so he wrote much about turmoil and disorder.

袁本初書記之士，故述喪亂事多。

- | | |
|----------|---|
| 皇漢逢屯遭 | As the august Han encountered hardship, |
| 天下遭氛慝 | The world was caught in an evil aura. |
| 董氏淪關西 | To Dong Zhuo fell the west of the Pass; |
| 4 袁家擁河北 | The house of Yuan occupied
the north of the Yellow River. |
| 單民易周章 | A solitary man easily loses his nerve, |
| 窘身就羈勒 | And in a predicament I submitted myself
to bridle and reins. |
| 豈意事乖己 | Who would expect things to go
so against my wishes? |
| 8 永懷戀故國 | Yet I had always longed for my homeland. |
| 相公實勤王 | The Lord Minister truly worked diligently
for the royal house, |
| 信能定螫賊 | And indeed he was able to overcome
the enemies of the empire. |
| 復睹東都輝 | Once again I get to witness
the splendor of the Eastern Capital; |
| 12 重見漢朝則 | Once again I get to see
the statutes of the Han court. |
| 餘生幸已多 | I am fortunate to have
the remaining years of my life, |
| 矧適值明德 | Not to mention encountering
the one of splendid virtue. |
| 愛客不告疲 | He loves his guests and
never complains of any fatigue; |

- 4 淹留憩高密 Linger a while and resting at Gaomi.
 此歡謂可終 I had thought that this joy would last forever,
 外物始難必 But external things were difficult
 to hold on to.⁸⁰
- 搖蕩箕濮情 My feelings of reclusion welled up within me;
 8 窮年迫憂慄 Throughout the year I was oppressed by
 worry and fear.⁸¹
- 末塗幸休明 In my late years I fortunately encounter
 the good bright prince,
 棲集建薄質 Roosting and resting, I establish
 my meagre substance.
- 已免負薪苦 Freed from the hardship of carrying firewood,
 12 仍游椒蘭室 I roam in noble chambers
 perfumed with peppercorn and orchid.
- 清論事究萬 In pure discourse we explore
 the depths of myriad things,
 美話信非一 Exquisite discussions are truly not confined
 to just one topic.
- 行觴奏悲歌 We toast one another
 as impassioned songs are sung;
- 16 永夜繫白日 A long night of feasting follows the day.
 華屋非蓬居 The splendid hall is no thatched hut;
 時髦豈余匹 How can I be any match
 for the outstanding talents of our age?
- 中飲顧昔心 In the midst of drinking,
 I reflect on my past aims;
- 20 悵焉若有失 Melancholy, I feel as if I have lost something.

The poem is noteworthy in juxtaposing the vision of private feasting in the opening couplets against the reality of public banquet in

80. I follow Hu Kejia's 胡克家 (1756–1816) emendation of *bi* 畢 to *bi* 必, as Li Shan's commentary cites *Zhuangzi*: "External things cannot be held on to" 外物不可必. Xiao Tong, comp., *Wen xuan*, 30.1435. Both words had the same sound in Middle Chinese pronunciation.

81. Xie Lingyun's "The Gentleman Longs for Someone" 君子有所思行 reads: "All through the long night, drinking to heart's content; / Throughout the year, playing with musical tunes" 長夜恣酣飲, 窮年弄音徽. Lu Qinli, comp., *Song shi*, 2.1150.

the last couplets. The places appearing in the first four lines—Linzi, Jiaodong, and Gaomi—are all local, and there is a sense of ease, relaxation, and enjoyment in the description of the gatherings in his youth. The phrase “this joy” (*ci huan*) in the fifth line also forms a direct contrast with the same phrase in the last line of the “Cao Pi” poem (“This joy truly deserves to be treasured”). “The splendid hall” with its perfumed chambers of “peppercorn and orchid” echoes a couplet by Cao Zhi: “Alive we reside in the splendid hall; / Fallen, we return to hills and mounds” 生存華屋處，零落歸山丘，⁸² and carries with it a hint of melancholy. Time’s passage—night coming upon day—suddenly feels ominous, and in the last couplet the betrayal of youthful aims and the sense of loss feel particularly poignant in the midst of merry drinking.

“Liu Zhen”

He was a remarkable man whose talent stood out among others, and his works were the most energetic. What he has achieved constitutes the norm and yet is extraordinary.⁸³

卓犖偏人，而文最有氣，所得頗經奇。

貧居晏里閭	Living in poverty, I was at ease in my hometown;
少小長東平	When I was young, I grew up in Dongping.
河充當衝要	The Ji River and Yan Prefecture occupied important strategic positions;
4 淪飄薄許京	Drifting on, I arrived at the capital Xuchang.
廣川無逆流	A broad river does not turn away currents,
招納廁群英	I was accepted and found myself among many talented men.

82. From Cao Zhi's *yuefu* poem “Song of the Harp” 琴瑟引, also known as “Brown Sparrow in the Wild Fields” 野田黃雀行. Lu Qinli, comp., *Wei shi*, 6.425.

83. Yang Xiong gives an interesting explanation of the term *jing* 經: “When content exceeds diction, the writing is dry; when rhetoric exceeds content, it is expository [*fu*]; when content and rhetoric match each other, it constitutes the norm [*jing*]” 事勝辭則冗，辭勝事則賦，事辭稱則經. Yang Xiong, *Fayan yishu*, 2.60. *Jing* indicates norm (hence “classic”), whereas *qi* 奇 indicates something unusual: to harness the two words together is, to say the least, uncommon. I have not been able to find any other instance of its usage in earlier or contemporary sources.

- 北渡黎陽津 To the north, I crossed the Liyang Ford;
 8 南登紀郢城 In the south I climbed the city wall at Jiying.⁸⁴
 既覽古今事 Having examined the affairs
 of past and present,
 頗識治亂情 I acquire much understanding
 of order and chaos.
 歡友相解達 Close friends converse with me
 and encourage me to seek advancement;
 12 敷奏究平生 Making reports to my lord,
 I use my abilities to the fullest.
 矧荷明哲顧 How much more so when I am kindly
 regarded by the wise one,⁸⁵
 知深覺命輕 His appreciation of me is so deep
 that my life becomes light.
 朝遊牛羊下 We roam from morning until the herd returns;
 16 暮坐括搗鳴 In the evening we sit together
 till the rooster crows.
 終歲非一日 Throughout the year, not just
 on one single day,
 傳卮弄新聲 We pass around cups and enjoy new music.
 辰事既難諧 A fine moment and a lovely scene
 are hard to come by together;
 20 歡願如今并 Yet, joy and desire coincide today.
 唯羨肅肅翰 I only envy those fluttering wings
 繽紛戾高冥 As they soar in a flurry to the high heavens.

The last couplet is the poem's punch line. Following the Five Ministers' commentary, modern annotators take this couplet to mean that the poet desires to further advance his position in public life.⁸⁶ This interpretation rather misses the real point of the poem. The reference here is to Liu Zhen's "Unclassified Poem" ("Za shi" 雜詩), which complains of

84. The Tang "Five Ministers" commentary on *Wen xuan* identifies the first line of the couplet as the campaign against Yuan Shao and the second line as the campaign against Liu Biao. Xiao Tong, comp., *Song ben liuchenzhu Wen xuan*, 30.582.

85. That is, Cao Pi.

86. *Xie Lingyun ji jiaozhu*, 150; *Xie Lingyun ji*, 131.

too much office work.⁸⁷ In the poem the poet seeks relief from paperwork by going outside, and spots some wild ducks and geese floating in a pond. In a typical rhetorical move in Jian'an poetry, he expresses his envy of the birds and wants to join them:

安得肅肅羽 Where can I get those fluttering wings
從爾浮波瀾 To go with you and float on the waves?

The repetition of the phrase *susu* is a dead giveaway that Xie Lingyun had this particular poem in mind when he wrote the "Liu Zhen" poem. As it is, the last couplet overturns everything that precedes it and becomes a much more shocking and powerful ending than in the historical Liu Zhen's poem featuring the "fluttering wings."

Unsurprisingly, Liu Zhen's poem that inspires the last couplet is included in *Wen xuan*. So is the inspiration for the "Ying Yang" poem that follows:

"Ying Yang"

A gentleman from Ru and Ying, he was tossed around in the chaotic world and lamented much about his rootless wanderings.

汝穎之士，流離世故，頗有飄薄之歎。

嗷嗷雲中鴈	"Ao ao," cries the wild goose in the clouds;
舉翮自委羽	Raising its wings from Mount Weiyu.
求涼弱水湄	It seeks cool by the shores of the Ruo River,
4 違寒長沙渚	And flees from cold on the isle of Changsha.
顧我梁川時	Looking back on the time
	when I was at Liangchuan,
緩步集穎許	With leisurely steps I had roosted
	at Ying and Xu.
一旦逢世難	One morning I encountered
	the great trouble of the age,
8 淪薄恆羈旅	I wandered around, a constant traveler.
天下昔未定	Long before the world was settled,

87. Xiao Tong, comp., *Wen xuan*, 29.1359.

- 託身早得所 I had found a place to entrust myself.
 官度廁一卒 At Guandu I served as a soldier in battle;
 12 烏林預艱阻 At Wulin I experienced hardship and peril.⁸⁸
 晚節值眾賢 In my late years I met a group of worthy men,
 會同庇天宇 Together we take shelter
 under the roof of heaven.
 列坐廡華榭 We sit in order, shaded by splendid beams;
 16 金樽盈清醕 Clear ale fills golden flagons to the rim.
 始奏延露曲 At the beginning,
 the tune of Yanlu is performed,⁸⁹
 繼以闌夕語 Followed by conversation
 throughout the night.
 調笑輒酬答 Laughing and bantering,
 we give quick responses;
 20 嘲謔無慚沮 We tease and mock, with no embarrassment
 or hurt feelings.
 傾軀無遺慮 We give ourselves with no second thoughts,
 在心良已敘 Fully expressing our innermost feelings.

Clearly the poem is inspired by Ying Yang's "Attending a Gathering Held by the Leader of Court Gentlemen for Miscellaneous Uses at the Jianzhang Terrace" ("Shi Wuguan zhonglangjiang Jianzhang tai ji" 侍五官中郎將建章臺集), which can now be found in *Wen xuan*.⁹⁰ The first half of the poem, unlike other banquet poems, focuses on the image of a lost wild goose as a figure of the poet:

- 朝雁鳴雲中 A wild goose cries in the clouds at dawn,
 音響一何哀 How mournful is that sound!
 問子遊何鄉 I ask the wild goose,
 "Where do you come from?"
 4 戢翼正徘徊 It folds its wings and lingers.

88. Guandu refers to Cao Cao's battle with Yuan Shao; Wulin refers to the Battle of Red Cliff, in which Cao Cao's army was defeated by the Wu-Shu alliance.

89. Yanlu (alternatively appearing as 延路) was the name of a popular tune in early writings. The choice of the term is interesting, perhaps a hint at the Caos' love of popular music.

90. Xiao Tong, comp., *Wen xuan*, 20.946-47.

言我寒門來 將就衡陽樓 往春翔北土 8 今冬客南淮	It says, "I come from the Gates of Cold And am on my way to Hengyang to roost. Last spring I soared in the northern land, This winter I will sojourn to the south of the Huai."
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Lines 17–18 of the poem mark a turning point, after which the poet turns to the human world and elaborates on his good fortune in encountering a hospitable young lord who loves his guests, and ends by exhorting all guests to perform their jobs well and repay the lord's favor.

The "Ying Yang" poem only spends four lines, rather than sixteen, on the bird metaphor, although the locations—Mount Weiyu is in the far north and Changsha is in the south—are carefully chosen to parallel the north-south migration in the original text.⁹¹ The sixth line makes explicit the bird/man connection by using the verb *ji* 集, to roost (bird) and to gather (human). Structurally, it is a subversion of the preceding poem by "Liu Zhen"—instead of flying away, here the bird eagerly seeks shelter (*bi* 庇) and shade (*yin* 蔭) and finds it.

The "Ruan Yu" poem is an anomaly in the set because it bears little resemblance to the surviving poetic corpus of Ruan Yu; rather, it heavily borrows from a letter by Cao Pi to Wu Zhi.

"Ruan Yu"

He was in charge of secretarial work, and so spoke with gracious generosity.

管書記之任，有優渥之言。

河洲多沙塵 風悲黃雲起	On the river's isle there is much sand and dust; A gust of wind blows, yellow clouds rise.
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91. Xie Lingyun also makes a clever word play, as Weiyu 委羽 in the second line is literally "putting down/hanging feathers," which forms a verbal parallel with "raising wings" (*ju he* 舉翮). Another noteworthy detail is that Mount Weiyu, the Ruo River, and Changsha respectively represent the north, west, and south. It fits with Xie Lingyun's fascination with locales and directions in the other poems of this set (for example, the "Chen Lin," "Liu Zhen," and "Xu Gan" poems), and spatializes the wanderings of the courtiers before they are all centralized and "roost"/"gather" (*ji*) at Ye.

- 金羈相馳逐 Horses with gold bridles gallop
and chase one another,
- 4 聯翩何窮已 On and on—when does it end?
慶雲惠優渥 The auspicious colorful clouds graciously
bestow generous moisture,
微薄攀多士 And I get to attach my humble self
to the many gentlemen.
- 念昔渤海時 I think back to the time at Bohai
8 南皮戲清沚 When we amused ourselves
on the islet at Nanpi.
今復河曲游 Today we again go on outings
at the river's bend;
鳴葭泛蘭汜 Sounding reed pipes, we go boating
by the orchid banks.⁹²
- 躡步陵丹梯 Leisurely strolling and climbing the red stairs,
12 並坐侍君子 We sit together in attendance of my lord's son.
妍談既愉心 Lovely conversations delight the mind;
哀弄信睦耳 The impassioned melody is truly agreeable
to the ear.
傾醑係芳醕 Fragrant ale is poured out,
one goblet after another;
- 16 酌言豈終始 In drinking there is no beginning or end.
自從食萍來 From the time of "eating the fern shoots,"⁹³
唯見今日美 No one has seen such loveliness till today.

The extant poems by Ruan Yu cannot be more dissimilar to this piece in that they are particularly gloomy in comparison to other writings by

92. These two couplets echo the 215 letter to Wu Zhi by Cao Pi, who wrote: "I always think of the outings at Nanpi in the old days—they are truly unforgettable" 每念昔日南皮之遊, 誠不可忘。The first half of the letter reminisces about Nanpi, and in the second half of the letter, Cao Pi speaks of the present time: "Sometimes I order my carriage to go out and drive along the river's bend. Escorts sound the reed pipes to clear the way, and men of letters ride in attendant coaches" 時駕而遊, 北遵河曲, 從者鳴笛以啟路, 文學託乘於後車。Lines 13–14 of Ruan Yu's poem are taken almost verbatim from this letter: "Lofty conversations delighted the mind, and the impassioned zither music was agreeable to the ear" 高談娛心, 哀箏順耳。This letter is anthologized in *Wen xuan* (42.1895–96).

93. This refers to the *Shi jing* poem "Deer Cry" 鹿鳴, which begins, "Yoo, yoo cry the deer, / Eating the fern shoots in the meadow" 呦呦鹿鳴, 食野之苹。The poem is about feasting and welcoming fine guests. *Mao shi zhushu*, 9.315.

Jian'an poets, a point to which I will return at the end of this chapter. He wrote on reclusion, old age, his reluctance to go on military campaigns, homesickness, and, in a *yuefu* poem attributed to him, an orphan who is tortured by his stepmother. The only exception is a fragment from his "Public Banquet Poem" ("Gongyan shi" 公宴詩):⁹⁴

陽春和氣動	In sunny spring, a clement energy stirs;
賢主以崇仁	With it the worthy lord honors benevolence.
布惠綏人物	Spreading his grace, he soothes talented men,
降愛常所親	Bestowing favor on those he holds dear.
上堂相娛樂	In the high hall he entertains us,
中外奉時珍	Seasonal delicacies are brought in from home and abroad.
五味風雨集	Foods of five flavors gather like wind and rain;
杯酌若浮雲	Cups are filled with ale, like floating clouds.

If one looks very hard, there is the faintest echo of this in the "Ruan Yu" poem, centering on the fifth line with the imagery of clouds and the word "grace" (*hui* 惠).

The "Ruan Yu" poem is striking in its internal transformations: the river's isle covered in dust storms (line 1) turns into "pure isle" and "orchid banks" in lines 8 and 10; the yellow clouds in line 2 turn into "auspicious clouds," usually in five colors, in the fifth line; the sad wind in line 2 turns into the sound of reed pipe and then the impassioned melody (*ai nong* 哀弄) in lines 10 and 14. All is changed to something better, more cheerful, and more pleasant. Yet, the hint of death and separation is ever strong. I have mentioned how this "Ruan Yu" poem curiously borrows more from one of Cao Pi's letters than any other text. In that letter, between reminiscing about the happy outings at Nanpi (in Hebei) and relating the present outings along the river, Cao Pi laments the ephemerality of pleasure and the death of none other than Ruan Yu.

[On outings at Nanpi] I turned around to say: "This pleasure will not last." You [i.e., Wu Zhi] and the others all thought that it was true. Now we are indeed separated, each at one corner of the empire. Yuanyu [Ruan Yu's

94. Lu Qinli, comp., *Wei shi*, 3.380.

courtesy name] has left us forever, transformed into an alien thing. Every time I think of this, how can I bear to speak of it!

余顧而言，斯樂難常，足下之徒咸以為然。今果分別，各在一方。元瑜長逝，化為異物，每一念至，何時可言！

The transformations (*hua* 化) in the “Ruan Yu” poem conceal, and yet foreshadow, the ultimate transformation of Ruan Yu himself into “an alien thing,” a common phrase indicating death. If in Cao Pi’s letter Ruan Yu is an apparition haunting his memory, then in the “Ruan Yu” poem Cao Pi’s letter becomes the textual apparition that uncannily presages his own demise. The two textual voices are skillfully woven together in a dazzling time loop—Xie writing as “Cao Pi” editing an old poem that evokes a letter written by Cao Pi lamenting the passing of the poem’s author.

The overtone of mortality and dispersal of the “gathering at Ye” leads thematically to the last poem of the set.

“The Marquis of Pingyuan, [Cao] Zhi”

The young lord does not concern himself with worldly affairs;
he only takes delight in roaming. Yet he frequently laments the
brevity of human life.

公子不及世事，但美遨遊，然頗有憂生之嗟。

朝游登鳳閣	In the morning we ascend the phoenix pavilion,
日暮集華沼	At dusk we roost by the splendid pool.
傾柯引弱枝	I bend boughs to pluck tender shoots;
攀條摘蕙草	Pulling at branches, I pick orchid plants.
4 徙倚窮騁望	Pacing back and forth, gazing into the distance,
目極盡所討	I look as far as I can, and see everything I was looking for.
西顧太行山	To the west I regard the Taihang Mountains,
8 北眺邯鄲道	To the north I look at the road to Handan.
平衢脩且直	The level thoroughfare is long and straight,
白楊信裊裊	The poplars are truly swaying in the breeze.

- 副君命飲宴
12 歡娛寫懷抱
良游匪晝夜
豈云晚與早
眾賓悉精妙
16 清辭灑蘭藻
哀音下迴鶴
餘哇徹清昊
中山不知醉
20 飲德方覺飽
願以黃髮期
養生念將老
- The heir apparent has ordered a feast,
We enjoy ourselves and express
what is in our hearts.
In our happy sojourn we do not care
whether it is day or night,
How can we speak of “late” or “early”?
The guests are all marvelous,
Their pure words spread flowery splendor.
An impassioned melody brings down
the circling swan;
Its lingering sound reaches the clear sky.
We are not aware of drunkenness
with the Zhongshan ale;
Only when imbibing virtue
do we attain satiety.⁹⁵
I wish to live to the age of yellowed hair;
Concerned about growing old,
I will nurture my life.

The opening couplet presents a remarkable deviation from the other poems in the set: while the Masters' poems all begin with a linear narrative of their life, Cao Zhi opens with a couplet of circularity. “Doing X in the morning” and “doing Y in the evening” is a formula seen often in the tradition of poetic expositions (*ci fu*), including *Verses of Chu* (*Chu ci* 楚辭), whose echoes strengthen in the next two couplets. The cycle of morning and evening is repeatable from day to day and has an apparently changeless, eternal quality to it. But it is disrupted by the act of picking plants and gazing afar in the second and third couplets: in *Verses of Chu*, this is a classic gesture of longing and desire.

The objects of the poet's gaze are noteworthy because commentators generally do not explain the significance of the two locales, as if to look at the Taihang Mountains and the road to Handan were simply the most “natural” thing for the poet to do. This is far from being true. Li Shan

95. The ale of Zhongshan was famous. The second line combines a couplet from the *Shi jing* poem “Having Become Drunk” 既醉: “Having become drunk on the ale, / Having becoming satiated with virtue” 既醉以酒, 既飽以德. *Mao shi zhushu*, 17.604.

identifies the allusion to “road to Handan” by citing from the *History of the Han* (*Han shu* 漢書): “Emperor Wen [of the Han] pointed out the Xinfeng road to Lady Shen, saying, ‘This is the road to Handan.’”⁹⁶ But as usual, Li Shan does not provide the full context of the remark made by Emperor Wen: first of all, the occasion was a visit to Ba Mound, which was Emperor Wen’s future mausoleum; second, after the emperor pointed out the Handan road to Lady Shen, a native of Handan, he asked her to play the harp and he himself sang a song; then the emperor became melancholy and made a morbid comment about the means of securing his coffin against grave robbers. While the courtiers in attendance all agreed with the emperor’s solution (using the hardest stone from the Northern Hills as the outer coffin, and so forth), Zhang Shizhi 張釋之 stepped forward, replying that the only way to safeguard against grave robbing was to hold a plain, thrifty burial. Zhang Shizhi’s candor earned praise from the emperor. The entire incident is recorded in Zhang Shizhi’s biography to highlight the outspokenness of the minister.⁹⁷

When we have the context of the “road to Handan” remark in mind, this couplet takes on a powerful connection with thoughts of mortality. If death is figured as the “Great Return” in the Zhuangzi sense, then Lady Shen’s longing for home becomes an overture to the emperor’s reflections on another sort of homecoming and on the security of his “home” after death. Seen in this light, the reference to the Taihang Mountains makes one wonder. In early classical poetry, Taihang with its famous winding path and overwhelming steepness often represents “hard traveling.”⁹⁸ Nevertheless, Taihang appears as a fantastic mountain range in early texts such as *Classic of Mountains and Seas* (*Shanhai jing* 山海經) and *Tradition of King Mu* (*Mu tianzi zhuan* 穆天子傳), and the “west” has a strong association with immortality as well, as that is the direction where Mount Kunlun, the home of immortals, lies. In early medieval lore, Taihang is connected with the seeking of immortality: Wang Lie 王烈, a Daoist adept who was notably also a native of Handan like Lady Shen, reportedly found a bluish syrupy substance in the rocks there; he

96. Xiao Tong, comp., *Wen xuan*, 30.1438. The citation is from *Han shu*, 50.2309.

97. See *Shi ji*, 102.2753–54, and *Han shu*, 50.2309.

98. For instance, Cao Cao’s “Bitter Cold” 苦寒行 begins with the line, “To the north we climb the Taihang Mountains, / So hard, how towering the mountains are” 北上太行山, 艱哉何巍巍. Lu Qinli, comp., *Wei shi*, 1.351.

ingested some and gave the rest to Ji Kang 嵇康 (ca. 223–ca. 262, aka Xi Kang), a famous poet who was married into the Cao family, but in Ji Kang's hands it congealed and turned into hard rock.⁹⁹ Ji Kang was the author of the famous “Treatise on Nurturing Life” (“Yangsheng lun” 養生論), yet in the end he not only proved inadequate “immortal material” but did not even live out his natural lifespan, as he was executed by Sima Zhao 司馬昭 (211–65), whose son Sima Yan 司馬炎 (236–90) eventually forced the abdication of the Wei emperor and established the Jin dynasty in 265. The Taihang Mountains “collapsed” in the spring of 265—that is, a rockslide took place—and that event was regarded as an omen for the end of the Cao Wei dynasty later that year.¹⁰⁰

Thus, a complex web of textual echoes and associations is woven into the couplet about Taihang and Handan, with an uncanny evocation of Taihang as both a symbol of immortality and that of impermanence of the Wei rule itself. The poet's train of thought about death and immortality is reinforced in the next couplet, “The level thoroughfare is long and straight; / The poplars are truly swaying in the breeze,” which brings to mind these lines of “Nineteen Old Poems” (“Gushi shijiushou” 古詩十九首) XIII, from the second or third century:¹⁰¹

驅車上東門	I drive my cart to Upper East Gate,
遙望郭北墓	From there I gaze at the tombs north of the city.
白楊何蕭蕭	The poplars—how they rustle in the wind!
松柏夾廣路	The broad boulevard is lined with pines and cypresses.

99. *Jin shu*, 49.1370.

100. Ibid., 29.898: “In the second month of the second year of Wei Emperor Yuan's [Cao Huan] Xianxi era, the Taihang Mountains collapsed. This was the omen of the fall of the Wei. That winter, Jin took the realm” 魏元帝咸熙二年二月，太行山崩，此魏亡之徵也。其冬，晉有天下。 This is also recorded in the *History of the Song* 宋書 compiled in the fifth century. *Song shu*, 34.997. Keep in mind that when Xie Lingyun was appointed as Imperial Librarian in the early 420s, he was commissioned by Emperor Wen of the Song to compile a *Jin History*. According to his biography, he had roughly set up the basic parameters, but he ultimately failed to bring it to completion. *Song shu*, 67.1772. The *Sui shu* monograph on “Bibliography” nevertheless records a *Jin shu* in thirty-six scrolls under Xie Lingyun's name. *Sui shu*, 33.955.

101. Lu Qinli, comp., *Han shi* 漢詩, 12.332.

下有陳死人	Down below are people who are long dead,
杳杳即長暮	Distantly they have gone on to the eternal dark.
潛寐黃泉下	Lying asleep under the Yellow Springs,
千載永不寤	For a thousand years they will never awaken. . .

The “Old Poem” moves from death to a denouncement of the seeking of immortality through taking drugs, and finally to an exhortation to drink ale and enjoy life. The rustling poplars, like pines and cypresses, are trees usually planted by tombs; in the “Cao Zhi” poem they are an unmistakable sign of mortality that marks the transition to a description of feasting in the following lines, mirroring the shift from death to drinking in the “Old Poem.” Thus the “Cao Zhi” poem is neatly divided into two balanced halves, death and immortality in the first half and feasting in the second, complete with the three elements established by the “Cao Pi” poem: discoursing, music, and drinking.¹⁰² The last couplet overturns the defiant ending couplet on seizing the day and forgetting about nurturing life in the “Wang Can” poem, and is instead a resolution to nurture one’s life and live out a full lifespan. Hence, structurally, the set of the Seven Masters’ poems, beginning with “Wang Can” and ending with “Cao Zhi,” comes full circle. As the “Cao Zhi” poem also ends on a note of wistful yearning for transcending the mortal life despite the allure of its sensual pleasures, it corresponds to the preface by “Cao Pi” that laments the deaths of the Masters. The series is haunted by thoughts of impermanence and immortality.

In summary, the poems are a carefully structured, complex set, strategically evoking writings by the historical poets to realize Xie Lingyun’s vision of the literary Jian’an. It was probably when he was working in the

102. The idea of becoming drunk on virtue rather than ale is a nod to Cao Zhi’s “*Fu* on Entertaining Guests” 娛賓賦. Only a fragment of this *fu* is extant. Part of the fragment reads: “We take delight in the nobility of the young lord, / Whose virtue is as fragrant as the orchid. / He spreads his benevolence to those living in humble homes, / Surpassing the Duke of Zhou, who disregarded his meals. / Listening to his words of benevolence, we forget our cares; / The fine ale has cooled off, and the meat has dried” 欣公子之高義兮，德芬芳其若蘭。揚仁恩于白屋兮，踰周公之弃餐。聽仁風而忘憂兮，美酒清而有乾。 Yan Kejun, comp., *Quan sango wen*, 13.1126. The last line alludes to *The Book of Rites* 禮記: “酒清，人渴而不敢飲也；肉乾，人飢而不敢食也。” *Li ji zhushu*, 63.1030.

Imperial Library that Xie Lingyun compiled an anthology called *Poetry Collection* (*Shi ji* 詩集) in fifty scrolls, along with *The Finest Blossoms of Poetry* (*Shi ying* 詩英) in ten scrolls.¹⁰³ For anthologies like these, one suspects that he would naturally select those poems by the Jian'an poets that he thought would somehow best represent them—poems evoked in “Ye’s Gathering.” The *Wen xuan* compilers would have had easy access to these earlier anthologies, and they seem to have taken their cue from the preferences of Xie Lingyun, the poet who in many ways turned a new page in literary history.

Reperforming Nostalgia

The modern scholar Deng Shiliang says of Xie Lingyun’s Ye poems that they are “more like Jian’an than Jian’an.”¹⁰⁴ It is an interesting comment. There is an image of Jian’an that does not necessarily fit the historical reality. The image takes hold and becomes dominant. The *Wen xuan* selections and Xie Lingyun’s poetic series, which is also included in *Wen xuan*, reinforce each other and cement the image of the literary era of “Jian’an.” The image is not only one of conviviality, but also of nostalgia and mourning. More precisely, it is the memory of merriment and feast framed by loss and death.

The Liu-Song 劉宋 dynasty (420–79) saw the rise of prince- and emperor-sponsored salons where princes and emperors not only commissioned literary writings but also themselves participated in group composition. By the sixth century, such court-centered literary production, now a familiar convention, flourished during the peaceful and long reign of Emperor Wu of the Liang dynasty (r. 502–49), who was a prolific writer and an avid patron of literary and cultural endeavors. His cultural enterprise was extended by his sons, Xiao Tong, the chief compiler of *Wen xuan*, and Xiao Gang 蕭綱 (503–51), who was designated the crown prince after Xiao Tong’s death. If Xie Lingyun projected the new situation of emperors and princes writing alongside their courtiers back onto

103. *Sui shu*, 35.1084.

104. Deng Shiliang, “Lun Xie Lingyun,” 7.

the Ye gatherings, Xiao Tong and Xiao Gang certainly were enamored of that image later. Each in his capacity as heir apparent to the throne wanted to play the role of a “Cao Pi” as crystalized and essentialized in Xie Lingyun’s imagination.

Such cultural role-playing entirely focused on mourning and nostalgia. A letter from Xiao Tong to Xiao Gang, dated to 527, mourns the loss of several eminent contemporary cultural figures.¹⁰⁵

Governor Ming of North Yanzhou and Administrator Dao died one after another.¹⁰⁶ I cannot stop grieving over them. Last year Chamberlain Lu passed away,¹⁰⁷ and now these two worthies [i.e., Ming and Dao] departed this life. Mr. Lu was loyal and faithful, his virtue as clear as ice and as pure as jade. His literary writings incorporated the principles of the “four beginnings,”¹⁰⁸ and his scholarship encompassed the nine schools. His lofty sentiments and extraordinary personality soared to the clouds. His Grace Ming was erudite in scholarship on the Classics and immersed in the study of antiquity. He was honest and sincere, consistent in dealing with people and carrying out his principles. If he were to encounter Confucius, he surely would have been the one who “ascended the hall.”¹⁰⁹ Master Dao had a most candid and open demeanor, and his writings were remarkable. In serving his office and managing public affairs, he was upright and harbored no personal interest. They were all outstanding men within the four seas and the secret treasures of the Imperial Library. I lament their loss so much—what more can I say? It is just that we had associated with one another for years, and that they had given me endless loyal advice in our intimate conversations. That I was fortunately exempted from major occasions for regret was entirely due to the efforts of these gentlemen. Our discussions seem to have just taken place yesterday, and the sound of their voices is still ringing in my ears; yet they have withered and fallen one after another, transformed into alien things. Every time I think of this, how can

105. *Liang shu*, 27.405.

106. Governor Ming of North Yanzhou was Ming Shanbin 明山賓 (443–527). Administrator Dao was Dao Qia 到洽 (490–527).

107. Chamberlain Lu was Lu Chui 陸倕 (470–526), Chamberlain for Ceremonials.

108. *Shi jing* is supposed to have “four beginnings”—there are different theories about what they refer to. Some believe it refers to the four *Shi jing* sections, *Airs* 風, *Lesser Odes* 小雅, *Greater Odes* 大雅, and *Hymns* 頌.

109. *Lunyu*, 11.15: “Confucius said, ‘You [his disciple] has ascended the hall, but has not quite yet entered the inner chamber’” 由也升堂矣，未入於室也。

I bear to speak of it! They are the treasures of the entire world, and their deaths should be mourned.

Lately Magistrate Zhang of Xin'an has also passed on.¹¹⁰ His rhymed and unrhymed writings were both elegant, and his death is lamentable. He had been a member of your staff and followed you east and west for a long time, and you must be particularly saddened by his death.

Recently many personages have withered and fallen, and I find it extremely depressing. The messenger from you happens to be here, and so I take this opportunity to bring this up.

明北克、到長史遂相係凋落，傷怛悲惋，不能已已。去歲陸太常殂歿，今茲二賢長謝。陸生資忠履貞，冰清玉潔，文該四始，學遍九流，高情勝氣，貞然直上。明公儒學稽古，淳厚篤誠，立身行道，始終如一，儻值夫子，必升孔堂。到子風神開爽，文義可觀，當官莅事，介然無私。皆海內之俊乂，東序之祕寶。此之嗟惜，更復何論。但遊處周旋，並淹歲序，造膝忠規，豈可勝說，幸免祇悔，實二三子之力也。談對如昨，音言在耳，零落相仍，皆成異物，每一念至，何時可言。天下之寶，理當惻愴。近張新安又致故，其人文筆弘雅，亦足嗟惜，隨弟府朝，東西日久，尤當傷懷也。比人物零落，特可傷惋，屬有今信，乃復及之。

This epistle, with *lingluo*—withering and falling—as the main refrain, strongly evokes Cao Pi's letters to Wu Zhi. Phrases such as “alien things” and “every time I think of this, how can I bear to speak of it!” are taken verbatim from Cao Pi's letter lamenting Ruan Yu.

Xiao Tong's portrayal of the deceased men emphasizes their learning, scholarship, and literary writings as well as their moral character and administrative talent, and his personal memory of the men accentuates their “loyal advice” to him rather than feasting. Nevertheless, the association of feasting with lamentation is not lost on him. If Cao Pi frames death in the memory of feasting, then Xiao Tong's poem, entitled “Thinking of Old Friends near the End of a Banquet” (“Yanlan siju shi” 宴闌思舊詩), embeds mourning in the context of the banquet.¹¹¹

孝若信儒雅	Xiaoruo [Ming Shanbin] was truly an erudite scholar,
稽古文敦淳	Studying antiquity, he lent grace to integrity and simplicity.

110. This was Zhang Shuai 張率 (475–527).

111. Lu Qinli, comp., *Liang shi* 梁詩, 14.1795.

- 茂沿實俊朗 Maoyan [Dao Qia] was indeed outstanding
and bright,
4 文義縱橫陳 His fine writings are free and unrestrained.¹¹²
佐公持方介 Zuogong [Lu Chui] held fast
to the principle of uprightness,
才學罕為鄰 Few could match him in talent and learning.
灌蔬實溫雅 Guanshu [Yin Yun] was indeed gentle
and graceful,¹¹³
8 摘藻每清新 Whenever he composed any writing,
it was always pure and fresh.
余非狎異者 I am not someone who would act familiarly
with others—¹¹⁴
惟舊且懷仁 I think on old friends
and cherish their benevolence.
綢繆似河曲 Our intimacy evoked “the river’s bend,”¹¹⁵
12 契闊等漳濱 Our friendship was equal to that bond
formed on the Zhang shores.
如何離災盡 O, that they should have been stricken
and passed away!
眇漠同埃塵 Distant and hazy, they are now part of dust
and dirt.
一起應劉念 Whenever the thought of Ying and Liu arises
in my mind,
16 泫泫欲沾巾 My tears flow and are about to soak
my kerchief.

112. This is transformed from the line about Cao Pi, whose “literary elegance soars unrestrained and free” 文雅縱橫飛, in Liu Zhen’s “To the Leader of Court Gentlemen for Miscellaneous Uses” 贈五官中郎將 No. 4, anthologized in *Wen xuan* 23.1112. Lu Qinli, comp., *Wei shi*, 3.370.

113. Guanshu was Yin Yun 殷芸 (471–529), who had served as an academician (*xueshi*) in the Eastern Palace (the crown prince’s residence) from 525.

114. This echoes a couplet from Cao Zhi’s “Poem to Ding Yi” 贈丁翼詩: “Surely I am not one who acts familiarly with other people— / It is my friends who are together with me” 我豈狎異人, 朋友與我俱. Lu Qinli, comp., *Wei shi*, 7.452. This poem is, unsurprisingly, anthologized in *Wen xuan* 24.1126. As Li Shan points out, this couplet in turn echoes two lines from a *Shi jing* poem: “How could it be other people? / It is none other than my own brothers” 豈伊異人? 兄弟匪他. By echoing the *Shi jing* lines, Cao Zhi implicitly compares his “friends” (*pengyou*) to “brothers” (*xiongdì*).

115. This is a reference to Cao Pi’s 215 letter to Wu Zhi. See note 92.

Besides the allusions to Jian'an poems and locations, in its last two couplets the poem versifies lines from Cao Pi's letter: "Many relatives and old friends were stricken by last year's epidemic. Xu, Chen, Ying, and Liu passed away all at once. How could I speak of the pain!" And Cao Pi's reference to the men's transformation into *fenrang* 糞壤, "dung and dirt," is rewritten as the more decorous image of "dust and dirt."

The entire poem is structured by memory: not just personal remembrances, but also cultural and textual memory. Indeed, if one does not know who the four men being mourned were, it does not really matter; what matters is to recognize the act of double remembering. In reperforming past nostalgia, the modern prince creates and confirms his own place in tradition, ensuring the continuity of multiple memories—that of his personal and cultural past, and that of himself.

Xiao Gang, a superb stylist, manages to convey emotional authenticity while channeling past voices in his letter of condolence to Liu Xiaoyi 劉孝儀 (484–550) on the passing of Liu's cousin, Liu Zun 劉遵 (488–535).

Your worthy cousin, the Palace Cadet, unexpectedly passed away. How could I speak of the pain! He was sincere and passionate in his filial piety and brotherly love, upright and honorable in establishing himself. His inner being was as warm and mellow as jade, and his manners as pure as a clear spring. His excellent reputation was widespread among his friends, as his words and action were in perfect accord, and he remained constant from beginning to end. He was erudite in literature and history, as if his mind were of fine jasper and carnelian; his writings were rich and knowledgeable, producing beautifully patterned silk with black and yellow colors. Modest by nature and manifesting it in his behavior, he was ever cautious in making career advancement. In fact, he had never paid any visits to high ministers or chased fame and profit. Therefore, the Earl of Xinta did not recommend him, nor did the "Martial Storehouse" Du know of his merit.¹¹⁶ Ever since Ruan Fang took office and Yewang was appointed,¹¹⁷ he

116. The Earl of Xinta was Shan Tao 山濤 (205–83). His *Jin shu* biography states that after he became Minister of Personnel, he was good at recommending and selecting the right people for various positions. *Jin shu*, 43.1225. "Du the Martial Storehouse" 杜武庫 refers to Du Yu 杜預 (222–85), who had also served as Minister of Personnel. He was known by this nickname because of his broad knowledge and multifarious abilities, which were like a "martial storehouse" complete with all sorts of weapons. *Jin shu*, 34.1028.

117. Ruan Fang (d. ca. 330) was one of the "Eight Free Spirits" ("Ba da" 八達) of

lingered on my staff for over five years, during which time his peers had all advanced, and even his juniors had mostly been promoted. And yet, he remained contented and at ease, never concerned with gains and losses. It is verily not easy to find such firmness of purpose anywhere. Viewing treasure at Xihe, or being matchless east of the Yangzi River—nothing from past records could possibly surpass this.¹¹⁸

In the old days, when I was serving my post to the south of the Han River, he produced a flurry of wonderful writings while serving on my staff;¹¹⁹ by the time I was transferred out of my turn to Zhufang,¹²⁰ with an easy and gentle manner he was the guest of honor at my table. Facing a lovely scene at a fine moment,¹²¹ with a clear breeze blowing and in the bright moonlight, the boat with the fish-hawk prow would set sail, and “The Vermilion Heron” would be slowly sounded.¹²² there was never a day going by that he did not attend on me, and never a time passing that we did not spend together.¹²³ When we were finishing our drinks and our faces were

the Eastern Jin, who indulged in binge drinking and wild parties. *Jin shu*, 49.1385. Feng Yewang 馮野王 (fl. 1st century BCE) was bypassed for promotion because he was the brother of the Han Emperor Yuan's consort and Emperor Yuan desired to avoid the suspicion of employing an imperial in-law. *Han shu*, 79.3302–3. Xiao Gang is saying that even people who might be considered unsuitable for office for one reason or another had been appointed or promoted, while Liu Zun, who was worthy of promotion, never was.

118. “Viewing treasure at Xihe” refers to the general Wu Qi's 吳起 (d. 381 BCE) famous reply to the Marquis of Wei, when they were boating on Xihe, that the treasure of a state was virtue, not geographical advantage. *Shi ji*, 65.2166. “Being matchless east of the Yangzi River” refers to a saying in the fourth century: “Matchless to the east of the river is Wang Wendu” 江東獨步王文度. Wendu was the courtesy name of Wang Tanzhi 王坦之 (330–75). *Jin shu*, 75.1964.

119. This refers to the time when Xiao Gang served as governor of Yongzhou from 523 to 530. “Lianpian shuji” 連翩書記 evokes Cao Pi's March 17, 218, letter: “Yuanyu's letters and memorandums were marvelous, a source of great delight” 元瑜書記翩翩，致足樂也。

120. Zhufang was another name for Dantu 丹徒 in the capital region. Xiao Gang was summoned back to the metropolitan area in 530 and served as governor of Yangzhou; in the following year, after Xiao Tong's unexpected death, he was made the crown prince, and Liu Zun was appointed palace cadet on his staff.

121. This is taken verbatim from Xie Lingyun's “Cao Pi” preface.

122. “The Vermilion Heron” is one of the Han “Nao Bell Songs” 鏡歌 for drum and fife.

123. Again, there are many echoes of Cao Pi's letters to Wu Zhi in these lines. In the March 17, 218, letter Cao Pi wrote: “We never spent a single moment apart” 何曾須臾相失. Xiao Tong, comp., *Wen xuan*, 42.1897. The 215 letter recalls the outings at Nanpi: “The carriage wheels moved slowly; guests and attendants fell silent. A pure breeze arose

flushed, we would speak what was on our minds and compose poetry;¹²⁴ we would also evaluate loyal and worthy men and discuss literature and history. Speaking of “three kinds of beneficial friends,” he was exactly the man.¹²⁵ Later on, when he went to spread the Way in a commandery, even before he could fully implement his good policies, he had already inspired so much affection among the common folk and produced the phenomenon of “many tame pheasants in the wilderness.”¹²⁶ Truly, a single feather from a majestic phoenix was nevertheless adequate to testify to its Five Virtues.¹²⁷

After I moved into the Spring Residence [i.e., the crown prince’s residence], we were able to see each other again. The Broadview Palace has no obligation to receive guests,¹²⁸ and in his cultivation of virtue, the heir apparent must observe numerous etiquettes and protocols. I could rely only on my old friends for companionship from time to time. Then this man abruptly departed this life. Alas, how sad! That heaven only favors good men—this is such empty talk, for how could heaven repay good men like this?¹²⁹ I can well imagine how endless your own sorrow must be. What can be done about those who are gone? I put down my brush with a pang in my heart.

Yesterday I set about writing a tomb inscription for him, and editing his writings into a collection. Inferior and mediocre as I am, I was unable to commend and honor him so that he might have made use of his talent while he was alive; now, although I may write his tomb inscription and edit his writings, what good would that do for the deceased? It is for this reason that my grief and regrets have no end.¹³⁰

at night, and a sad reed pipe intoned softly” 輿輪徐動，賓從無聲，清風夜起，悲笳微吟。Xiao Tong, comp., *Wen xuan*, 42.1895.

124. Cao Pi’s March 17, 218, letter reads: “We got tipsy with ale and our faces were flushed, and we looked up and composed poems” 酒酣耳熱，仰而賦詩。

125. This is a reference to Confucius’s remark that there are three kinds of beneficial friends: the upright, the trustworthy, and the learned. *Lunyu*, 16.4.

126. This refers to the story about the Eastern Han official Lu Gong 魯恭 (32–112), whose benevolent governance of his prefecture had such a great impact on the people that a pheasant tamely stopped next to a boy and the boy did not even try to capture it. *Hou Han shu*, 25.874.

127. A cock is supposed to possess five virtues: patterning, martial prowess, courage, benevolence, and trustworthiness. *Han shi waizhuan*, 2.70.

128. The Broadview (Bowang) Palace was constructed by Emperor Wu of the Han for the crown prince.

129. “Heaven does not have any sense of partiality but always rewards good men” 天道無親，常與善人。This is an ancient saying appearing in a number of early texts such as *Laozi* or *Shi ji*.

130. The letter appears in Liu Zun’s biography in *Liang shu* (41.593).

賢從中庶，奄至殞逝，痛可言乎。其孝友淳深，立身貞固，內含玉潤，外表瀾清，美譽嘉聲，流於士友，言行相符，始終如一。文史該富，琬琰為心；辭章博瞻，玄黃成采。既以鳴謙表性，又以難進自居。未嘗造請公卿，締交榮利。是以新沓莫之舉，杜武弗之知。自阮放之官，野王之職，栖遲門下，已踰五載，同僚已陟，後進多升；而怡然清靜，不以少多為念。確爾之志，亦何易得。西河觀寶，東江獨步；書籍所載，必不是過。

吾昔在漢南，連翩書記，及忝朱方，從容坐首。良辰美景，清風月夜，鷁舟乍動，朱鷺徐鳴，未嘗一日而不追隨，一時而不會遇。酒闌耳熱，言志賦詩，校覆忠賢，權揚文史，益者三友，此實其人。及弘道下邑，未申善政，而能使民結去思，野多馴雉，此亦威鳳一羽，足以驗其五德。

比在春坊，載獲申晤。博望無通寶之務，司成多節文之科。所賴故人時相媿偶。而此子溘然，實可嗟痛。惟與善人，此為虛說。天之報施，豈若此乎。想鄉痛悼之誠，亦當何已。往矣奈何，投筆惻愴。

吾昨欲為誌銘，並為撰集。吾之劣薄，其生也不能揄揚吹獻，使得騁其才用，今者為銘為集，何益既往？故為痛惜之情，不能已已耳。

In the opening passage, Xiao Gang commends Liu Zun's moral character, especially his sense of modesty and indifference to career advancement; his learning; and his literary elegance. He moves on to reminisce about old times in a passage that heavily echoes Cao Pi's two letters to Wu Zhi as well as Xie Lingyun's "Cao Pi" preface. Less obvious is the sub-textual presence of yet another letter of Cao Pi to Wu Zhi that is dated to 220, after Cao Pi succeeded Cao Cao to become King of Wei. In this letter, cited by Pei Songzhi in his *Records of the Three Kingdoms* commentary, Cao Pi comforts his friend for not having been promoted to a prominent position, and the last sentence of the letter seems to hint at the possibility of promotion in the near future.

From the outings at Nanpi, there are only three who have survived. After the founding king soared like a dragon, one [of the three] has become a general, and the other, a marquis.¹³¹ Only you, sire, are still lingering in

131. According to Pei Songzhi, this refers to Cao Xiu 曹休 (d. 228) and Cao Zhen 曹真 (d. 231), respectively; as Cao clansmen they had been enfeoffed after Cao Cao became King of Wei ("soared like a dragon"). The modern scholar Wei Hongcan 魏宏燦 understands *liezu* 烈祖 as referring to Cao Cao. See Cao Pi, *Cao Pi ji jiaozhu*, 263. Yi Jianxian 易健賢 suggests emending *liezu* 烈祖 to Lie Dan 烈丹—Wenlie 文烈 and Zidan 子丹,

a low position. You have been following me, and yet you alone have not “reached the gate.”¹³² When the jug is empty, the ewer feels ashamed:¹³³ how can I not feel embarrassed by this situation? The distance separating us is not great, and you will hear from me again.¹³⁴

南皮之游，存者三人，烈祖龍飛，或將或侯。今惟吾子，棲遲下仕，從我游處，獨不及門。瓶罄罍恥，能無懷愧。路不云遠，今復相聞。

Xiao Gang clearly had this epistle in mind when he wrote that Liu Zun had been “lingering on my staff” 栖遲門下 (literally “lingering under [my] gate”), echoing Cao Pi’s “lingering in a low position.” Yet, while Cao Pi did fulfill his unspoken promise to Wu Zhi after he ascended the throne, Xiao Gang would never have a chance to do so for Liu Zun. The implicit contrast increases the pathos of his letter.

If Cao Pi laments the passing of his carefree youth in his March 17, 218, letter, Xiao Gang likewise betrays a gentle wistfulness at his constraint of action in the position of heir apparent.¹³⁵ But what both connects and separates the two is Xiao Gang’s recognition that the compilation of the deceased man’s literary collection would have no meaning to the dead. Cao Pi’s investment in posthumous immortality is implicitly refuted and even made to sound a bit hollow, as Xiao Gang focuses his thoughts on the living person.

Liu Xiaoyi’s reply to Xiao Gang, in the epistolary subgenre known as *qi* 啟 (a sort of a thank-you note to one’s superior in this period), shows that Liu Xiaoyi fully participates in the “Jian’an discourse.”¹³⁶

the respective courtesy names of Cao Xiu and Cao Zhen. See Cao Pi, *Wei Wendi ji quanyi*, 188. Wei Hongcan’s interpretation works very well without requiring an emendation.

132. Confucius said: “None of those disciples who followed me in Chen and Cai has reached the gate [of an official career]” 從我於陳蔡者皆不及門。 This was understood by Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127–200) as referring to the fact that none of those disciples had managed to obtain an official position. *Lunyu*, 11.2.

133. From the *Shi jing* poem “Flourishing Southernwood” 蓼莪: “When the jug is empty, / It is the shame of the ewer” 瓶之罄矣，維罍之恥。 *Mao shi zhushu*, 13.436.

134. *Sanguo zhi*, 21.609.

135. He expresses this sentiment more explicitly in a letter to his younger brother Xiao Yi 蕭繹 (508–54), translated partially and discussed in Tian, *Beacon Fire*, 280.

136. For a discussion of this epistolary subgenre, see Tian, “Material and Symbolic Economies,” 171–82.

My deceased younger cousin Zun was spotless in a hundred kinds of moral conduct and had always set his aims on a thousand *li*. The brotherly love for those who shared the same roots, and the kindness of ten risings while sleeping fully clothed,¹³⁷ were embodied in him spontaneously and naturally, practiced as easily as bending over to pick something up from the ground. Since he participated in the banquets at the Jieshi Residence, and followed Your Grace to visit the Fishing Terrace,¹³⁸ holding on to the dragon's scales and the phoenix's wings, it has been more than thirty years. Heaven's reward for good men is shrouded in darkness, and within one day's time he departed forever. The sword has concealed its splendid light; the jade disk with shining pattern is shattered into pieces. Your Grace wielded your divine brush and deigned to deploy marvelous thoughts. Even the frequent longing for the outings of Nanpi and the remembering of Ruan Yu in a letter, or the composing of a song to mourn Zihou while passing by the Northern Lodge, cannot match such profound benevolence or equal such long-standing affection.¹³⁹

亡從弟遵，百行無點，千里立志。同氣三荆之友，假寢十起之慈，皆體之於自然，行之如俛拾。自礪宮陪宴，釣臺從幸，攀附鱗翼，三十餘載。茫昧與善，一旦長辭，劍匿光芒，璧碎符采。躬搖神筆，親動妙思。雖每想南皮，書憶阮瑀；行經北館，歌悼子侯，不足輩此深仁，齊茲舊愛。

The discursive formation of the “Jian'an” was widely spread in the Liang. Liu Xiaochuo 劉孝綽 (481–539), an eminent court poet much admired by the emperor and princes, wrote a poem, “‘Attending a Banquet,’ after Liu Gonggan, Written to the Command of the Crown Prince” (“Shiyan tong Liu Gonggan yingling” 侍宴同劉公幹應令).¹⁴⁰

137. This is a reference to Diwu Lun's 第五倫 (fl. 1st century) remark: “My elder brother's son once was sick, and I got up to see him ten times a night” 吾兄子常[嘗]病，一夜十往[起]。 *Hou Han shu*, 41.1402.

138. King Zhao of Yan 燕昭王 (d. 279 BCE) built a mansion for the polymath Zou Yan 鄒衍 near Jieshi and treated him with great respect. Fishing Terrace is likely a reference to Yan Guang 嚴光 (fl. 1st century), an old friend of Emperor Guangwu of the Han when he was still a commoner. After Emperor Guangwu took the throne, he tried to persuade Yan Guang to serve the state, but Yan remained a recluse all his life.

139. This refers to Han Emperor Wu's mourning of the untimely death of Huo Shan 霍嬭 (d. 110), courtesy name Zihou, who had died of a sudden illness. *Han shu*, 55.2489. The emperor himself composed a song to lament him. *Yiwen leiju*, 56.1002. “At the time [of his death] Zihou was in the Northern Lodge and bade farewell to his family” 時子侯於北館與家別。 *Chuxue ji*, 18.448.

140. Lu Qinli, comp., *Liang shi*, 16.1839.

副君西園宴	The heir apparent holds a feast at the Western Garden;
陳王謁帝歸	The Prince of Chen has returned from an imperial audience. ¹⁴¹
列位華池側	They take seats one after another by the splendid pool,
文雅縱橫飛	Their literary elegance soars unrestrained and free.
小臣輕蟬翼	This humble subject, lighter than a cicada's wing,
龜勉謬相追	Strives in vain to keep up.
置酒陪朝日	Drinks are set out to accompany the rising sun;
淹留望夕霏	Now lingering still, we gaze at the twilight mist.

The poem is written after the manner of Liu Zhen's "To the Leader of Court Gentlemen for Miscellaneous Uses" ("Zeng Wuguan zhonglang Jiang" 贈五官中郎將) No. 4, which is, unsurprisingly, a *Wen xuan* piece.¹⁴²

涼風吹沙礫	A chilly wind blows over the sand and gravel,
霜氣何皚皚	The frosty air is so glimmeringly white.
明月照緋幕	The bright moon shines on scarlet curtains
華燈散炎輝	Where sparkling lamps scatter their fiery glow.
賦詩連篇章	Poems are composed one after another,
極夜不知歸	Through the whole night we don't think of return.
君侯多壯思	Your Grace has many bold thoughts,
文雅縱橫飛	Your literary elegance soars unrestrained and free.

141. "The Prince of Chen" was Cao Zhi, usually referring to the younger brother of the crown prince. The date of this poem is unknown: Liu Xiaochuo could be speaking of Crown Prince Xiao Tong and his younger brother Xiao Gang, or, after 531, Crown Prince Xiao Gang and his younger brother Xiao Yi.

142. Xiao Tong, comp., *Wen xuan*, 23.1112.

小臣信頑鹵 This humble subject is truly slow-witted,
 僂俛安能追 Though he strives hard, how can he keep up!

Notably, not only does Liu Xiaochuo's poem use the same rhyme scheme, but the first three couplets also entirely adopt the rhyme words of Liu Zhen's poem. The result is not a *ni* imitation, which usually rewrites the original poem couplet by couplet but in different linguistic register, but a closely matching duet, which is something new.

In a letter to his brother-in-law Zhang Zuan 張纘 (499–549), Xiao Gang both echoes Cao Zhi's letter to Yang Xiu, cited earlier in this chapter, and criticizes Cao Zhi for belittling literary writings in that letter:

I have loved literature from childhood, and it has been twenty-five years since.¹⁴³ As I once said, even the sun, moon, and stars shine forth in heavenly configurations, and the patterns of flames and dragons prominently mark human affairs; how, then, can literary writings ever be stopped, and singing and chanting be discontinued? "A grown man does not practice it"—Yang Xiong had truly marred the Way with his petty discourse.¹⁴⁴ "Writing rhapsodies is not fitting employment for a gentleman"—Cao Zhi had also damaged Discourse with his trivial rhetoric. If we must punish them for their offenses, their crime is unpardonable.¹⁴⁵

網少好文章，於今二十五載矣。竊嘗論之：日月參辰，火龍麟黼，尚且著於玄象，章乎人事，而況文辭可止，詠歌可輟乎！不為壯夫，楊雄實小言破道；非謂君子，曹植亦小辯破言。論之科刑，罪在不赦。

Upon the death of Liu Xian 劉顯 (481–543), the writer and scholar Liu Zhilin 劉之遴 (478–549) wrote to Crown Prince Xiao Gang, asking the prince to write a tomb inscription for his deceased friend: "Alive, a man has a body of seven *chi*; dead, he becomes a coffinful of dirt.' The matter of 'not decaying' must depend on [your] evaluation" 生有七尺

143. Cao Zhi's letter states: "I, your servant, have loved writing from childhood, and it has been twenty-five years since" 僕少小好為文章，迄至于今，二十有五年矣。Xiao Tong, comp., *Wen xuan*, 42.1901.

144. Yang Xiong, *Fayan yishu*, 2.45.

145. Yan Kejun, comp., *Quan Liang wen* 全梁文, 11.3010. The second half of the letter is translated in Tian, *Beacon Fire*, 136.

之形，終為一棺之土，不朽之事，寄之題目。¹⁴⁶ Cao Pi asserts that one's literary writings enable an author to pass his name on to posterity without having to "depend on either a good historian's words or the momentum of a powerful patron" 不假良史之辭，不託飛馳之勢，而聲名自傳於後；but Liu Zhilin states that Xiao Gang's positive appraisal in the form of a tomb inscription would confer on Liu Xian immortality.

A letter written by Xiao Gang in 536 laments the passing of another courtier, Wang Gui 王規 (448–536).¹⁴⁷

Weiming suddenly passed away last night. This is very sad. His demeanor was vigorous and elegant; his deportment shone forth in splendor. For a thousand *li* one does not see the likes of him, who was like the *wutong* tree of the Dragon Gate standing a hundred feet tall with no feeble twigs and branches. He was skilled in writing and eloquent in speech, rich in talent and broad in learning. His free, unrestrained sentiments were abundant, and he had a particularly large share of the air of the Hao Bridge.¹⁴⁸ He was truly a remarkable man! But in an instant his life was over, as swift as a horse's galloping past an opening in a wall; now he has forever returned to eternal night. A precious sword has concealed its luster, and the extended course of the Huai River is severed and dries up. In mid-winter last year I lamented the death of Master Liu; in the first month of this cold season, I again mourn Master Wang's demise. The grief about "passing away all at once" is truly not empty talk.

威明昨宵奄復殂化，甚可痛傷。其風韻道正，神峰標映，千里絕迹，百尺無枝。文辯縱橫，才學優贍，跌宕之情彌遠，濠梁之氣特多。斯實俊民也。一爾過隙，永歸長夜。金刀掩芒，長淮絕涸。去歲冬中，已傷劉子；今茲寒孟，復悼王生。俱往之傷，信非虛說。

The last sentence of the letter, with its emphatic "truly" (*xin* 信), pays tribute to Cao Pi's lament for the "passing away all at once" of the Masters in his March 17, 218, letter.

Established in the Liang dynasty, the mode of mourning from the position of the crown prince became entrenched in the second half of the

146. *Liang shu*, 40.571. This recalls Cao Pi's letter to Wang Lang discussed earlier in this chapter.

147. *Ibid.*, 41.582–83.

148. That is, the carefree nature of Zhuangzi.

sixth century. The last emperor of the Chen dynasty and the last ruler of the Southern Dynasties, Chen Shubao 陳叔寶 (553–604), wrote to his courtier Jiang Zong 江總 (519–94) lamenting the passing of Lu Yu 陸瑜 (ca. 530s–570s),¹⁴⁹ and his letter is structured and phrased much along the same axis.

The discursive formation of “Jian’an” has a central manifestation in the *Wen xuan* selections of Jian’an writings, which are spread across a variety of genres but focus heavily on the themes of feasting, excursions, and fraternizing. Jian’an writings in *Wen xuan* concentrate in two genres—poetry (*shi*) and letters (both *shu* 書 and *jian* 牋). Under “Poetry” we find them mainly in two sub-categories: the “Public Banquet” (*gongyan* 公讌) sub-category, in which four out of fourteen poems, in other words nearly one-third of the section, are by Jian’an authors (i.e., Cao Zhi, Wang Can, Liu Zhen, and Ying Yang); and the “Presentation and Response” (*zengda* 贈答) sub-category, in which seventeen poems, constituting almost one-fourth of the section, are by Jian’an authors (i.e., Wang Can, Liu Zhen, and Cao Zhi). In “Letters” (*shu*), six out of twenty-four, that is, one-fourth of the section, are respectively written by Cao Pi (the 218 and 215 letters to Wu Zhi), Cao Zhi (one to Yang Xiu and one to Wu Zhi), and Wu Zhi (reply to Cao Zhi). In the category of “Informal Letters” (*jian*), more than half—five out of nine—are by Jian’an writers: Yang Xiu to Cao Zhi; Po Qin to Cao Pi; Chen Lin to Cao Zhi; and Wu Zhi to Cao Pi (his reply to Cao Pi’s March 17, 218, letter). The selections collectively evoke the image of a close-knit male literary community in which the young lords and their vassals shared an intimate relationship.

Wen xuan also contains later writings that romanticize “Jian’an.” Besides Xie Lingyun’s poetic series, there are also Jiang Yan’s 江淹 (444–505) poetic series *Various Forms* (*Za ti* 雜體), which includes four “Jian’an” poems in the voices of “Cao Pi,” “Cao Zhi,” “Wang Can,” and “Liu Zhen,” as well as Lu Ji’s “Elegy on Emperor Wu of the Wei” (“Diao Wei Wudi wen” 弔魏武帝文) and Xie Tiao’s 謝朓 (464–99) poem on the Bronze Bird Terrace in Ye, both about the legacy of Cao Cao (to be discussed later in this book, in chapters 3 and 4, respectively). By anthologizing and recycling Jian’an writings, the Xiao Liang princes created

149. *Chen shu*, 34.464.

their own predecessors and held them up as a mirror image of themselves; this image is, however, carefully constructed, motivated by the princes' own agenda.

The Jian'an That Is Unlike "Jian'an"

If we had only *Wen xuan* and *New Songs of the Jade Terrace* (*Yutai xinyong* 玉臺新詠) compiled by Xu Ling 徐陵 (507–83), the latter being the sole pre-Tang anthology of poetry that has survived, our image of early medieval Chinese literature would be much diminished and impoverished. We would, for instance, only have two poems from Cao Cao, now considered a major poet and writer, because those two poems are the only ones by Cao Cao that made it into *Wen xuan*. Cao Cao's poems, all being *yuefu* songs, have survived through "The Monograph on Music" ("Yue zhi" 樂志) in the *Song History* (*Song shu* 宋書) compiled by Shen Yue 沈約 (441–513). The mission of the "Monograph on Music" was to preserve the court music repertoire—not what the fifth- and sixth-century court writers considered as "fine literary works."

The early Tang encyclopedia *Classified Extracts from Literature* (*Yiwen leiju* 藝文類聚), compiled by a group of courtiers and presented to the throne in 622, is an altogether different sort of textual container compared with the above compilations. It is a *lei shu* that, in its simplest definition, consists of extracts from earlier writings that are classified under different categories, ranging from social-political institutions to natural phenomena. Unlike *Wen xuan*, it is not meant to present a literary canon and carry a strong editorial agenda; unlike *New Songs of the Jade Terrace*, a poetic anthology purportedly produced for female readers, it is not restricted to poems on women and romantic love; unlike the "Monograph on Music" in a dynastic history, it is not confined to *yuefu* songs. As such, the Jian'an writings represented in *Classified Extracts from Literature* are broader and much more diverse, and complicate the image of "Jian'an" constructed by the fifth- and sixth-century writers.

Perhaps the most striking case is Ruan Yu, none of whose poems is included in either *Wen xuan* or *New Songs of the Jade Terrace*. If we look

at his poems surviving in *Classified Extracts from Literature*, we note that their subject matter and expressions are characterized by a strong sense of dejection. He particularly laments the hardship of traveling—perhaps related to the frequent military campaigns that the Jian'an writers went on under Cao Cao's leadership. Two poems by Ruan Yu appear in the "Travel" (*xinglü* 行旅) category.¹⁵⁰ The second one reads:

我行自凜秋	I embarked on my journey in the cold autumn,
季冬乃來歸	And only returned in the last month of winter.
置酒高堂上	I set out ale in the high hall,
友朋集光輝	My friends all gather in the bright light.
念當復離別	But I think of how we will soon part again,
涉路險且夷	And I will go on a road,
	now rough, now smooth.
思慮益惆悵	Such thoughts increase my melancholy,
淚下沾裳衣	Tears stream down and soak my clothes.

This poem describes a private gathering (*ji* 集, appearing in line 4) enjoyed by the poet and his friends, its tone much different from that of the celebratory public banquet poems, its emotions more complex. The happiness of reunion and the merriment of the gathering are undercut by thoughts of more travel and separation. Compared with this poem, the campaign poems by Wang Can included in *Wen xuan* are all much more upbeat and optimistic.¹⁵¹

Ruan Yu seems to always strike a discordant note. *Wen xuan* anthologizes two poems on "Three Good Men" ("San liang" 三良) by Cao Zhi and Wang Can, on the topic of the three brothers from an earlier age who were buried alive to accompany their deceased lord, Duke Mu of Qin 秦穆公, as human sacrifices. Compared with these two poems, Ruan Yu's poem on this topic, which might have been composed on the

150. *Yiwen leiju*, 27.484–85.

151. Ying Yang also has a campaign poem written in a dejected tone, "On Parting" 別詩, that appears in *Yiwen leiju* but not in *Wen xuan*: "Morning cloud afloat within the four seas, / At sunset it returns to the former hills. / Going on a campaign, I long for my native land; / Full of sad yearnings, I cannot speak. / Far off I travel a thousand li, / Nobody knows when I can ever go home again" 朝雲浮四海, 日暮歸故山. 行役懷舊土, 悲思不能言. 悠悠涉千里, 未知何時旋. *Yiwen leiju*, 29.515.

same occasion, is much more explicitly and unambiguously critical of Duke Mu's folly, opening with the line: "How wrong was Duke Mu of Qin!" This poem is excluded from *Wen xuan*.

A poem fragment of Ruan Yu's appears in the *Classified Extracts from Literature* category of "Old Age" (*lao* 老):

白髮隨櫛墮	My white hair falls out with the comb,
未寒思厚衣	Though it's not cold yet, I long for thick clothes.
四支易懈倦	My four limbs get easily weary and worn out,
行步益疏遲	My footsteps become increasingly slow.
常恐時歲盡	I always fear that my time will come
魂魄忽高飛	And the soul will suddenly take flight.
自知百年後	I know that after my life is over,
堂上生旅葵	Wild mallows will grow in my hall.

What we have in the first two couplets is not the more "poetic" but abstract or formulaic lament over mortality, but a startlingly realistic depiction of the process of aging—the fall of white hair, a fear of cold, a stiffness and fatigue of limbs, and a slowness in footsteps.

While Wang Can's "Seven Sorrows" No. 1 is the most famous piece under its title, Ruan Yu also has one, written from the perspective of the dead:¹⁵²

丁年難再遇	We will never encounter life's prime again,
富貴不重來	Wealth and honor won't come round a second time.
良時忽一過	As soon as the fine moments are suddenly past,
身體為土灰	The body becomes dirt and ash.
冥冥九泉室	Dark are the chambers of the Nine Springs,
漫漫長夜臺	Stretching on, the Terrace of Endless Night.
身盡氣力索	When the body is gone, breath and energy spent,
精魂靡所迴	The soul has nowhere to come back to.
嘉肴設不御	Fine delicacies are set out but cannot be had,
旨酒盈觴杯	Excellent ale fills the goblets to the rim.

152. *Yiwen leiju*, 34.596, under the category of "Sadness" 哀傷.

出壙望故鄉 I go out of the tomb-vault and gaze at home:
但見蒿與菜 All I see are the mugwort and weeds.

This is the precursor to the adoption of the dead man's point of view in "bearers' songs" ("wan'ge shi" 挽歌詩) by the great early medieval poets Lu Ji and Tao Yuanming 陶淵明 (365–427).¹⁵³ Remarkably, the banquet scene is displaced to the sacrificial offerings to the dead.

Another *Classified Extracts from Literature* category under which one finds a Ruan Yu poem, in six lines, is in "Resentment" (*yuan* 怨).¹⁵⁴ Yet another category is "Reclusion" (*yinyi* 隱逸), in which Ruan Yu's poem is the first one listed in the "Poetry" section within this category.¹⁵⁵ In this poem, Ruan Yu extols a number of famous ancient recluses, stating: "Boyi starved on Mount Shouyang, / All under heaven admire his benevolence" 伯夷餓首陽，天下歸其仁。Boyi and his brother Shuqi 叔齊 opposed Zhou's overthrowing of the Shang dynasty by escaping to Mount Shouyang, where they vowed "not to eat Zhou's grain" and eventually starved to death. The second line evokes Cao Cao's well-known couplet: "The Duke of Zhou spat out his food, / All under heaven gave him their hearts" 周公吐哺，天下歸心。The Duke of Zhou was so eager to gather worthy men around him that he would reportedly spit out the food in his mouth in the middle of a meal and rush out to greet a visitor. While Cao Cao praises the Duke of Zhou, the regent ruler of Zhou, as his political ideal, Boyi was exactly the antithesis of the Duke of Zhou and had refused food for a very different reason. *Wen xuan* only has a very small representation of reclusion poetry, but this is understandable for a court anthology supervised by the crown prince—the heir to the throne

153. *Wen xuan* includes three "Bearers' Songs" by Lu Ji (28.1333–36), but he has written more. See Lu Qinli, comp., *Jin shi*, 5.653–55. For Tao Yuanming's poem "In Imitation of 'Bearers' Songs'" 擬挽歌辭 No. 2, see Lu Qinli, comp., *Jin shi*, 17.1013.

154. *Yiwen leiju*, 30.538. The fragment reads: "Heaven's mandate for human life / Is to swirl like dust specks in the river. / Though a man claims a life of one hundred years, / Whose body can achieve that? / He may also get caught up in disaster, / Drifting here and there in constant misery" 民生受天命，漂若河中塵。雖稱百齡壽，孰能應此身。猶獲嬰凶禍，流離恒苦辛。

155. *Yiwen leiju*, 36.641. Each *Yiwen leiju* topical category includes extracts on the topic under different genres, usually beginning with poetry, followed by "poetic expositions" (*fu*) and others.

who would not want to over-emphasize the role of recluses in the actual or discursive empire.

Other Jian'an poets' poems that only survive in *Classified Extracts from Literature* likewise reflect a rather dark side of "Jian'an." Chen Lin's gloomy banquet poem, which begins with "At a grand gathering I sometimes become unhappy" 高會時不娛, ends with his quitting the table and weeping in a mountain valley.¹⁵⁶ A Wang Can poem uses the familiar figure of the bird in Jian'an poetry but in a way completely contrary to what we have been led to think of Wang Can by the fifth- and sixth-century poets:¹⁵⁷

驚鳥化為鳩	A bird of prey turned into a dove,
遠竄江漢邊	Fleeing far off to the Rivers Yangzi and Han.
遭遇風雲會	It encountered the meeting of wind and clouds,
託身鸞鳳間	And lodged itself in the midst of simurghs and phoenixes.
天姿既否戾	Its natural appearance was disagreeable;
受性又不閑	Its endowed nature was also not serene.
邂逅見逼迫	Unexpectedly it met with oppression,
俛仰不得言	Looking up and down, it could not express itself.

The metamorphosing bird in the poem is a figure of the poet, as its flight to Yangzi and Han marks the poet's own trajectory from Chang'an to Jingzhou. In fact, Cao Zhi's elegy for Wang Can ("Wang Zhongxuan lei" 王仲宣誄) uses the very figure of a bird and the same phrase "fleeing far off" (*yuancuan* 遠竄) to describe Wang Can's escape from the devastated capital to Jingzhou: "Suddenly he took flight like a phoenix, and fled far off to the barbarian land of Jing" 翕然鳳舉, 遠竄荆蠻.¹⁵⁸ The "meeting of wind and clouds" in the third line usually refers to the productive encounter of a lord and a minister, and here the line seems

156. *Yiwen leiju*, 28.501. This poem is under the category "Outing" 遊覽. Translated and discussed in Owen, *The Making*, 194-95.

157. *Yiwen leiju*, 92.1600.

158. Xiao Tong, comp., *Wen xuan*, 56.2435.

to say that Cao Cao, unlike the Jingzhou governor Liu Biao, recognized Wang Can's abilities, and that Wang Can now found himself among outstanding peers like "simurghs and phoenixes." If this narrative fits the Masters' autobiographical accounts in Xie Lingyun's "Gathering at Ye" poems remarkably well, then the second half of Wang Can's poem abruptly deviates from the standard "sad-to-happy" storyline and presents a troubling picture of the poet's feeling of being oppressed (one wonders by whom?) and unable to speak. Neither his original nature as a fierce bird of prey nor his forced transformation as a meek dove makes him a good fit among the "simurghs and phoenixes." Certainly in this poem we do not detect the sort of harmony and congeniality in the nostalgic picture of the "Jian'an" painted by Cao Pi, Xie Lingyun, Jiang Yan, and the Liang princes.¹⁵⁹

Outside the standard "Jian'an Masters," Po Qin's poem in *Classified Extracts from Literature* on basil ("Yong hui" 咏蕙) laments how the fragrant plant finds itself growing in the wrong location, getting no sunlight and constantly fearing the collapse of the cliff.¹⁶⁰ Informed by the terminology and imagery of "Encountering Sorrow" (*Li sao* 離騷), its allegorical nature is transparent.¹⁶¹

At the time when the compilation of *Classified Extracts from Literature* was undertaken, the Jian'an writers' collections were still extant: the largest was Wang Can's collection in eleven scrolls, next Po Qin's in ten, Ruan Yu's in five, Xu Gan's in five, Liu Zhen's in four, Chen Lin's in three, and Ying Yang's in one.¹⁶² This shows that Po Qin and Ruan Yu both left a large number of writings, and yet neither Po Qin nor Ruan Yu is

159. The poem in the voice of Wang Can in Jiang Yan's series is entitled "Palace Attendant Wang: Grateful for Grace" 王侍中懷德. See Xiao Tong, comp., *Wen xuan*, 31.1456–57.

160. *Yiwen leiju*, 81.1393.

161. Basil is very much a *Chu ci* plant, regarded as a symbol of the sweet virtue of the poet. The last couplet of Po Qin's poem, "By the time my beautiful blossoms bloom, / The shrike is already singing sadly" 比我英芳發，鷓鴣鳴已哀, echoes the couplet in *Li sao*, "I fear that the shrike will cry early, / Causing all plants to lose their sweet scent" 恐鷓鴣之先鳴兮，使夫百草為之不芳. The shrike's cry marks the season's end. *Chuci buzhu*, 1.39. Perhaps it is worthwhile to mention another poem attributed to Po Qin, "Cockspur Growing" 生茨, which also employs plant imagery and describes a vile weed overgrowing an orchid garden. Lu Qinli, comp., *Wei shi*, 3.385.

162. *Sui shu*, 35.1058.

well represented in *Wen xuan*: Po Qin only has one letter included there, which is precisely the one praised by Cao Pi;¹⁶³ Ruan Yu is represented by his “secretarial work”—a letter to Sun Quan on behalf of Cao Cao—and that is also what Cao Pi believes he is best at.¹⁶⁴ In other words, *Wen xuan*’s choices were heavily influenced by Cao Pi’s evaluations; and the Jian’an poems in *Classified Extracts from Literature* that did not make their way into *Wen xuan* present a dark, and darkened, side of Jian’an.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have reviewed three important moments in the construction of the literary era of Jian’an. The image of the literary era of “Jian’an” was first constructed by Cao Pi himself, in his role of the cultured prince (known posthumously as the Cultured Emperor), when he was looking back to a lost past. The era was born in the awareness of its ending, in nostalgia and mourning. Perhaps feast poetry is always related to death—either thoughts of mortality impel one to drinking and enjoying oneself, or at the height of pleasure thoughts of the brevity of pleasure and of human life arise—and in many ancient cultures symposiums had associations with death and burial;¹⁶⁵ but in Cao Pi’s reminiscences, the feast is not just the site of feelings of impermanence but itself becomes the figure of loss, because the feast has been displaced to the lost past, framed by the plague-stricken present.

163. Cao Pi’s comment on this letter is cited in Li Shan’s commentary. Xiao Tong, comp., *Wen xuan*, 40.1821.

164. *Ibid.*, 42.1887–93.

165. In ancient Greek symposiums that began in the first century BCE people would recline on couches, which were used primarily as deathbeds, and the deceased were often depicted in a symposium setting lying on the couch-deathbed. Boardman, “Symposium Furniture,” 122–31. In Mesopotamia, burial chambers contained images of revelry and the ivory inlaid couch. Reade, “The *Symposium* in Ancient Mesopotamia,” 35–56, esp. 40.

CHAPTER TWO

Circling the Tree Thrice: Lord, Vassal, Community

Introduction: Wang Can's Jade Pendant

Cao Pi's nostalgic founding of the "dead poets society" of the Seven Jian'an Masters, reinforced by the editorial intervention of *Wen xuan* and the Xiao Liang court's cultural imagination, has had an enormous impact on the subsequent representation of the period. One of the most common ways of configuring Jian'an literature is to speak of a "literati/literary group" (*wenren/wenxue jituan* 文人/文學集團) that was primarily made up of the "Jian'an Masters" as "literary attendants" of their lord. Such a picture—in itself forming a glaring contrast with the other favorite cliché of modern literary and intellectual historians about the "emergence of the individual self" at this time—has created some notable obstacles to a clear understanding of the period. The lumping together of the Seven Masters, despite Cao Pi's efforts to distinguish them, tends to obfuscate the individual differences among them, reduces attention to those outside the group, and obscures the complex relationship between those outside the group and the Cao lords. More importantly, the modern conception of *wenxue* as belletristic writing eclipses the extent to which the term *wenxue* in this period, besides being the name of an office, was not construed merely as compositional talent, but as a kind of "cultural learning." Wang Can's case is instructive.

In *Records of the Three Kingdoms*, Wang Can heads a group biography consisting of himself, Wei Ji 衛覲 (155–229), Liu Yi 劉廙 (180–221), Liu Shao 劉劭 (d. ca. 240s), and Fu Gu 傅嘏 (209–55).¹ The very first sentence

1. *Sanguo zhi*, 21.597–629.

of the biography states Wang Can's illustrious lineage: his great-grandfather and grandfather had both held rank as one of the "three dukes" of the Han. The following passage, depicting Wang Can's life and career before he served Cao Cao, contains two contrasting journey narratives. First, after the warlord Dong Zhuo's coup, Wang Can's family moved from Luoyang to Chang'an with the Han court in 190. At Chang'an, a young and scrawny Wang Can was received most favorably by the towering literary giant of the last decades of the Eastern Han, Cai Yong 蔡邕 (133–92). Cai reportedly said to his guests, who all were luminaries of the Han court: "This is the grandson of Lord Wang. He has extraordinary talent that dwarfs mine. I will pass to him all of the books and writings in my family's collection." In 192, when Chang'an was devastated by civil war, Wang Can went south to seek refuge with Liu Biao, the then influential governor of Jingzhou. We are told that "because Can was plain and frail in appearance and had a casual manner, Biao did not appreciate him."² In 208, after Liu Biao died, Wang Can persuaded Liu Biao's heir Liu Cong to capitulate to Cao Cao. The verb used for Liu Cong's surrender is *gui* 歸, literally "return," though it was Wang Can who "returned" to north China and to the Han court with Cao's army.

Wang Can's career took off under Cao Cao, who enfeoffed him as the Marquis of Guannei. When Cao Cao himself established his own court as Duke of Wei in 213, Wang Can was made palace attendant. A salient statement is inserted here in his biography:

He was learned about all sorts of things and had a broad knowledge, and was able to answer every question put to him. At the time, former rules and rituals had fallen into dereliction. With regards to the establishment of rites and procedures, Can was always in charge.³

博物多識，問無不對。時舊儀廢弛，興造制度，絜恆典之。

This statement is followed by two anecdotes demonstrating Wang Can's great powers of memory. The historian goes on to describe Wang Can's skills in the mathematical arts and only at the end asserts that he was also good at compositions.

2. *Ibid.*, 21.598.

3. *Ibid.*

Everything in Wang Can's biography—his illustrious family lineage, his approval by the great Eastern Han polymath Cai Yong, his familiarity with “former rules and rituals,” and his astonishing prowess of memory—contributes to the image of a man who served as a link between the Han empire and the new dynastic order. This was crucial in the wake of the destruction of the old social order, as the legitimacy of the new regime was predicated on its ability to uphold traditional rules and rituals that would impose order on society and behavior.

Pei Songzhi's commentary on the passage quoted above cites a detail that on the surface might seem frivolous to the modern reader:

After the devastation and chaos of the end of the Han, there was absolutely no jade pendant. Wei's Palace Attendant Wang Can knew [the shape of] the old hanging jade, and only then was it produced once again. The jade pendant of today is modeled on the design passed on by Wang Can.⁴

漢末喪亂，絕無玉珮。魏侍中王粲識舊珮，始復作之。今之玉珮，受法於粲也。

To appreciate this detail we must know the important function of what a modern person might consider “mere externals” in court culture, in which everything on the outside, such as clothing and ornaments, serves to make visible people's ranks and positions and mark their social identities. *The Book of Rites* (*Li ji* 禮記) prescribes: “Gentlemen in ancient times were certain to wear jade” 古之君子必佩玉, and sets forth to outline the different kinds of jade worn by different people, from the Son of Heaven down to a member of the gentry.⁵ Notably, Pei Songzhi does not credit Wang Can with the creation of a new design but with the re-creation of the “old” design. He was a transmitter of tradition, a man who remembered how it was and enabled the past to go on. Wang Can was also the designated inheritor of the “books and writings” in Cai Yong's collection—another statement that we should take on a symbolic, as well as a literal, level.

Upon close examination, every other “title character” of the group biography earns his place in history through broadly defined cultural

4. Ibid.

5. *Li ji zhushu*, 30.563.

learning, as Wang Can does. Wei Ji, “well known for his talent and learning,” was “put in charge of rules and rituals together with Wang Can”; he was the author of the *Wei Code of Deportment for Officials* (*Wei guanyi* 魏官儀). Liu Yi, who had served as instructor (*wenxue* 文學) on the staff of Cao Pi, had “authored a book of dozens of chapters,” which was presumably a work in the genre of “masters’ texts” (*zishu*). This work, now lost, and his “discussion on legal codes with Ding Yi” both “went into circulation [as written texts] at the time.”⁶ Liu Shao, now primarily known as the author of the *Treatise on Human Character* (*Renwu zhi* 人物志), was an expert in ritual, music, and law, and was charged with drafting the *Criteria for the Inspection of Officers in the Section for Justice* (*Duguan kaoke* 都官考課). In his recommendation of Liu Shao to the throne, Xiahou Hui 夏侯惠 (fl. ca. early 3rd century) describes how Liu Shao was admired by different specialists and makes a noteworthy distinction between *wenxue* and *wenzhang*: “The men of cultural learning (*wenxue*) appreciate the meticulousness of his astronomical calculations. . . . the men of letters (*wenzhang*) love the way in which he writes treatises and puts together phrases” 文學之士嘉其推步詳密，文章之士愛其著論屬詞。⁷

Wang Can is usually thought of as the leading writer of the “literary group” at Ye, but his function far exceeded the limited perception of a “literary man” (*wenren*) in its conventional narrow sense. He was a man of cultural memory and cultural learning, and what he did, including but not limited to his literary compositions, was important cultural work.

During the waning years of the Han dynasty, in a world torn apart by war, famine, and plague, the foremost task facing a political leader was to rebuild the community and gather talented men around himself. These people fall into a broad category of “talents” (*cai*), and the Jian’an Masters, singled out by Cao Pi only after their deaths, must be considered as one part of this community. This chapter discusses the function of writing in the formation of community and the complex dynamics of the community performed through writing. Instead of the emergence of the individual, I want to emphasize the importance of community, especially the mutually dependent relationship between lord and vassal. Writing

6. *Sanguo zhi*, 21.616.

7. *Ibid.*, 21.619.

was one important way to realize that community and to configure that complex relationship.

This chapter focuses on some of the major aspects of a community coming together: food and feast, letters and gifts; it ends with a discussion of the language of longing and of male friendship. The forms of writing that are most productive to our consideration are poetry (*shi*), poetic exposition (*fu*), and letter. The surge of elite interest in the five-syllable-line verse was a new phenomenon, and that in itself deserves note as a historical, not just *literary* historical, occurrence. Poetry in this period was public performance in two senses: as song lyrics sung in a public setting, and as verses composed publicly on elite social occasions. Poetic expositions were also public performances in the second sense, though that was much in the tradition of the great Han *fu* and so lacked the novelty of the voluminous use of *shi* poetry on elite social occasions, especially poetry in the five-syllable line, at the time a low genre. Finally, letter occupies an intriguing social space because it straddles the boundary between public and private: it is addressed to one person, and yet it may be preserved, transmitted, and circulated, turning into a public document.⁸

Regarding the prevalence of the elite practice of poetic composition at the turn of the third century, Paul Rouzer has made a convincing case about an elite member's self-fashioning and "constructing class identity" through poetry writing.⁹ This nevertheless does not quite explain why Wang Can and his peers chose to write in a low genre, i.e., verse in the five-syllable line, to construct an elite identity. One way to think about this issue, and to take Rouzer's argument in a slightly different direction, is to regard the formation of a *community*, rather than that of one's own elite status as a *shi* 士, as the crux of the matter, for without that community one's elite status is of little meaning and value. Thus, a man like Wang Can perfectly shared the interests of the warlord Cao Cao. Unlike Liu Biao, Cao Cao offered people like Wang Can protection, recognition, and, more importantly, a political vision of recreating the golden

8. One should note that no letter would have been passed down to us from early medieval times if it had been truly "private" in the modern sense, unless it had been preserved for calligraphic value or was accidentally preserved and uncovered from excavation.

9. Rouzer, *Articulated Ladies*, 75–85, 374.

age of the Zhou dynasty; in return, Wang Can gave his allegiance to Cao Cao because he saw himself not only surviving the chaotic times but also having a chance to partake in the glory of the enterprise.

Food and Feast

Wang Can's biography in *Records of the Three Kingdoms* contains a lengthy speech made by Wang Can, which constitutes a significant "action" in an otherwise static portrait of a life. In this speech Wang Can contrasts Cao Cao with the warlords Yuan Shao and Liu Biao, stating that Yuan and Liu could not effectively utilize the extraordinary men under their charge, as Cao Cao had.

Your Bright Lordship . . . has won the hearts of people within the four seas, who look up to you and wish for great peace and order. Both civil and military talents are deployed; cultural worthies and martial heroes equally exert themselves to their utmost [in your service]. Yours is the way of the Three Kings.¹⁰

明公……使海內回心，望風而願治，文武並用，英雄畢力，此三王之舉也。

The speech could have been embellished by the historian in hindsight, but regardless of its accuracy, the rhetorical purpose of inserting it in Wang Can's biography is to highlight both Wang Can's political foresight and the legitimacy of the Cao Wei rule, stamped with the endorsement of the prominent descendant of an illustrious Han aristocratic family.

The speech was purportedly made when Wang Can offered a toast to Cao Cao at a banquet, after Cao Cao had claimed Jingzhou. The historian's choice of this moment has an interesting resonance with some of Wang Can's most famous compositions. His poem "Public Banquet" ("Gongyan" 公宴) praises the feast held by Cao Cao and is immortalized as one of the first pieces under the "Public Banquet Poetry" section in

10. *Sanguo zhi*, 21.598. The Three Kings refer to the founding kings of Xia, Shang, and Zhou.

Wen xuan.¹¹ Implicitly, in negative contrast, the Jingzhou banquet evokes Wang Can's most famous poem, "Seven Sorrows" No. 1, one of the best-known poems in the early medieval period. It narrates Wang Can's flight in 192 from the devastated Chang'an to seek refuge in Jingzhou:

- | | |
|----------|---|
| 西京亂無象 | The Western Capital fell into unparalleled/
imageless chaos, |
| 豺虎方構患 | Jackals and tigers were wreaking havoc. |
| 復棄中國去 | So I abandoned the heartland and went away, |
| 4 遠身適荆蠻 | Going far off to the barbarian land of Jing. |
| 親戚對我悲 | My kin faced me in sadness, |
| 朋友相追攀 | My friends went after me, clinging. |
| 出門無所見 | Going out the gate I saw nothing: |
| 8 白骨蔽平原 | Just white bones covering the plain. |
| 路有飢婦人 | On the road was a starving woman, |
| 抱子棄草間 | Holding a baby in her arms
and abandoning it in the bushes. |
| 願聞號泣聲 | She turned her head
when she heard the baby's crying; |
| 12 揮涕獨不還 | She wiped away tears, but did not return. |
| 未知身死處 | "I don't know where I myself will die; |
| 何能兩相完 | How can I preserve both of us?" |
| 驅馬棄之去 | I hurried my horse on, abandoning her, |
| 16 不忍聽此言 | For I could not bear to listen to such words. |
| 南登霸陵岸 | To the south I climbed the slope of Baling, |
| 迴首望長安 | I turned my head and gazed on Chang'an. |
| 悟彼下泉人 | I understood the man of
"Falling Spring," |
| 20 喟然傷心肝 | Heaving sighs, I felt a wound in my heart. |

In this poem, community falls apart; relationships disintegrate. Instead of being given proper burial and commemorated in death, human beings are reduced to anonymous, animalistic "white bones." Yet, in the verbal structuring of the poem, we see connections and hear reverberation everywhere: the poet's abandonment (*qi* 棄) of the heartland and of

11. Xiao Tong, comp., *Wen xuan*, 23.1087.

his family and friends is mirrored in the woman's abandonment (*qi*) of her child, which forms a parallel with the poet's abandonment (*qi*) of her; the baby's wailing is echoed in the mother's weeping, which is resonated in the poet's sighing, and the poet's sighing is in turn reverberated in an ancient poet's moaning called up in the allusion to "Falling Spring," a *Shi jing* poem that contains the refrain: "Moaning and sighing I lie awake, / Thinking on the Zhou capital."¹² What has been learned as mere book knowledge suddenly becomes real and human to the poet Wang Can, as his experience illuminates an old text for him and literally brings to life the *sound* of the *Shi* poet, which finds a new audible expression in his sighing double.

Like all great poems, this poem possesses a rich store of internal resources and touches on many issues, not the least of which is that of sustenance and community. The woman, who is herself starving, fails to provide sustenance to her baby—a mirroring image of a failed government unable to provide for its people, all being the emperor's children. The baby will die alone, and the mother will most likely also die alone. Just as the mother looks back to her baby, the poet does the same to Chang'an, but unlike her, he does "return" (*huan* 還), if not physically, then symbolically. He does so by engaging in a verbal act of poetic imagination: rewriting the *Shi jing* poem by writing his own poem. Thus, although leaving behind his family and friends, he manages to rejoin the human community in words and by means of words. The reader is given a choice: to "abandon" the poem because the reader "could not bear to listen to these words," or to finish reading the poem and think on the *Shi jing* poem *and* on Wang Can's poem, and to empathize with the author, just as Wang Can declares he has done at the end of his poem. With this compassionate understanding of an earlier text, the reader would again become a member of the human community.¹³ In some ways, a "dead poets society" is already being formed by this poem.

12. *Mao shi zhushu*, 7.272.

13. Rouzer makes a relatable point about Wang Can's reinforcement of his "connections with history" by quoting the *Shi jing* poem, which also "holds open the possibility of future recognition and alliance with literati of the future" (*Articulated Ladies*, 82). My focus, however, is not on the poet's construction of class identity and social status through writing this poem, but on the formation, or more precisely the reconstitution, of community.

We do not know when the poem was composed—shortly after the experience or years later—but its composition is driven by a sense of horror about being deprived of sustenance and community: to die alone, and to be reduced to a pile of “white bones” that lack all distinction, human or social. “Public Banquet” provides its antithesis.¹⁴

- | | |
|----------|---|
| 昊天降豐澤 | The summery heavens send down
enriching moisture, |
| 百卉挺葳蕤 | All the plants rise upright, burgeoning. |
| 涼風撤蒸暑 | A cool breeze dispels the muggy heat, |
| 4 清雲卻炎暉 | Clear clouds make the fiery glow retreat. |
| 高會君子堂 | A grand assembly is held
in the gentleman's hall, |
| 並坐蔭華棟 | We sit side by side,
shaded by decorated beams. |
| 嘉肴充圓方 | Excellent viands fill the round and square vessels, |
| 8 旨酒盈金罍 | Choice ales brim the golden beakers. |
| 管絃發徽音 | Pipes and strings give forth splendid notes, |
| 曲度清且悲 | The melody's measure is clear and moving. |
| 合坐同所樂 | Sitting together we share in joy, |
| 12 但慙杯行遲 | Complaining only that the cups
pass too slowly. |
| 常聞詩人語 | I have heard a phrase of the <i>Shi</i> poet, |
| 不醉且無歸 | Of not going home unless drunk. ¹⁵ |
| 今日不極歡 | If we don't enjoy our pleasure today
to the fullest, |
| 16 含情欲待誰 | For whom would we wait,
holding back our feelings? |
| 見眷良不翅 | Truly there is no limit
to the fond regard I am shown, |
| 守分豈能違 | So how can I err in keeping to my place? |
| 古人有遺言 | A phrase comes down from the ancients: |

14. The translation is Stephen Owen's with slight modifications. *The Making*, 205–6.

15. “Heavy Dew” 湛露 in the *Lesser Odes*. *Mao shi zhushu*, 10.350.

- 20 君子福所綏 The gentleman is soothed by his blessings.¹⁶
 願我賢主人 I wish that my worthy host
 與天享巍巍 Will enjoy towering along with the heavens.
 克符周公業 He can match the legacy of the Duke of Zhou,
 24 奕世不可追 Not again to be equaled
 by generations on end.

Instead of the bleak scene of white bones on the plain, the poem opens with verdant growth and flourishing plant life nourished by heavenly moisture. The retainer-guests are likewise nurtured by the grace of their lord-host: no one stays hungry or thirsty because food and drink are delicious and abundant (*chong/ying* 充/盈). In place of wailing and weeping, we have the “clear and moving” music; in place of separation and abandonment, we have repeated assertions of togetherness: “grand assembly” (*gao hui* 高會), “sitting side by side” (*bing zuo* 並坐), “sitting together” (*he zuo* 合坐), and sharing in joy (*tong suole* 同所樂). The bitter rhetorical question in “Seven Sorrows”—“how can I preserve both of us?”—is here expanded to two rhetorical questions in lines 15–18. Similarly, the *Shi jing* reference in line 19 of “Seven Sorrows” No. 1 is amplified into two quotations, not from the *Airs* (*Feng* 風) but from the more stately *Lesser Odes* (*Xiaoya* 小雅), lending an aura of dignity to the present occasion. The verbal abundance reflects the bounty of the lord’s feast and of the lord’s grace. In “Seven Sorrows” No. 1, the poet ends the poem with a nostalgic backward gaze at the glorious past of the Han empire, evoked by the mention of Baling (Ba Mound), the burial mound of Emperor Wen of the Han, famous for his peaceful and prosperous reign. In the feast poem, that backward gaze is transformed into looking ahead into the future: the present moment is thus turned into the very golden age that the future generations will always look back to with nostalgia and longing. According to the Mao commentary on *Shi jing*, which was surely known to Wang Can, “‘Falling Spring’ expresses the poet’s longing for order and peace. The people of Cao . . . yearned for a wise king and a worthy lord.”¹⁷ That yearning is fulfilled in “Public Banquet.”

16. “Mandarin Ducks” 鴛鴦 in the *Lesser Odes*. *Ibid.*, 14.481.

17. *Mao shi zhushu*, 7.272: “下泉, 思治也。曹人……憂而思明王賢伯也。”

It is not an accident that a feast is the setting for Wang Can's speech included in his dynastic history biography. Feast is, first of all, a powerful social institution that brings people together, forms a community, and reinforces the values of fellowship and civility. As Michel Jeanneret puts it, "The table is a microcosm of society, the ideal place for communication, the nexus where ideas are exchanged, where social relationships are formed and where people learn how to respect each other."¹⁸ When a patron gives a feast to his clients, feeds them, and entertains them with musical performance, he proffers nourishment for both body and mind, displays wealth and rank, and, by doing so, reaffirms the social standing of host and guests and strengthens the clients' allegiance. Wang Can understands this perfectly; his emphasis on "keeping to my place" is a clear affirmation of the distinction and hierarchy made visible at a public banquet held by the lord-patron. In "Seven Sorrows" No. 1, he has lost his place at the center and has to flee to the "barbarian" land in the southern periphery; in "Public Banquet" he has regained his place at the communal table, a place of distinction.

In return for the "enriching moisture" of the patron/host, the client/guest must offer his gratitude and loyalty. He is bound to his patron/host in a system of exchange: words, both oral and written, for the victuals he consumes. The mouth takes in food and drink and pours out words: it is a process of transformation of the physical into the spiritual, the material into the cultural. It was not just eloquent speech that was expected from the guests at the table of the Cao lords, but also, as we can see in Wang Can's example, elegant written words. A couplet from Cao Zhi's "Song of the Harp" ("Konghou yin" 箜篌引) embodies the reciprocal relationship between the host and his guests:

主稱千金壽	The host makes a toast
	of one thousand in gold,
賓奉萬年酬	Guests respond, wishing him
	ten thousand years. ¹⁹

18. Jeanneret, *A Feast of Words*, 21.

19. The poem is also known as "Brown Sparrow in the Wild Fields" 野田黃雀行. Lu Qinli, comp., *Wei shi*, 6.425.

In this exchange the host's gift is admittedly more substantial than the guests' repayment, just as the food and drink provided to the guests are substantial physical sustenance. The return, however, carries a symbolic weight, not to mention that in terms of sheer numbers it is ten times more than the investment.

The Ideal Feast

Cao Cao's "Song of Breathing Out" ("Qi chu chang" 氣出倡) No. 2 depicts a banquet of gods. At the feast "jade maidens" rise to dance to the music of pan-pipes and singing, and immortals who arrive riding mist and clouds "drink and eat joyfully together until dusk" 樂共飲食到黃昏.²⁰ Cao Zhi celebrates the glory of the Wei court in "The August Wei" ("Da Wei pian" 大魏篇), one of a series of drum dance songs in which the feast of the imperial court mirrors the divine banquet.²¹ Representing an ideal feast rather than a specific feast, the poem is not descriptive but prescriptive. It illuminates the significance of feasting in court culture and demonstrates the importance of verbal representation of such feasting as in itself essential political business. Indeed Cao Pi's authoritative declaration in his "Discourse on Literature" was phrased with care and precision: "Literary writings are the grand achievement in the management of state, a splendor that never decays."²²

"The August Wei" by Cao Zhi can be divided into six stanzas marked by rhyme change:

大魏應靈符	The august Wei corresponds to numinous signs,
天祿方甫始	The blessing bestowed by heaven is just beginning.
聖德致泰和	The emperor's sagely virtue leads to great peace,
4 神明為驅使	Gods and spirits respond to the imperial beckoning.
左右宜供養	Left and right are fit for attendants;

20. Lu Qinli, comp., *Wei shi*, 1.346.

21. *Ibid.*, 428–29.

22. Yan Kejun, comp., *Quan sanguo wen*, 8.1098.

- 中殿宜皇子 The central palace hall is suitable
for imperial sons.
- 陛下長壽考 May His Majesty live a long life,
8 群臣拜賀咸悅喜 The various subjects all bow
and offer congratulations happily.
- 積善有餘慶 Accumulation of good deeds produces
abundant blessings,
寵祿固天常 Honor and grace are indeed
the constant way of heaven.
- 眾喜填門至 A multitude of joys comes upon the door,
12 臣子蒙福祥 The ministers all receive good fortune.
無惠及陽遂 The Tree of No Harm
and the bronze Yangsui mirror²³
- 輔翼我聖皇 Give assistance to our sagely emperor.
眾吉咸集會 Various forms of auspiciousness
gather together,
16 凶邪姦惡並滅亡 The evil and the wicked are all destroyed.
- 黃鵠遊殿前 Yellow swans roam in front of the hall,
神鼎周四阿 Divine tripods are all around.
玉馬充乘輿 Jade steeds fill up the imperial stable,
20 芝蓋樹九華 The *zhi* canopy erects the nine blossoms.
白虎戲西除 The white tiger frolics
by the western stairs,
舍利從辟邪 Holder-of-metal follows
the averter-of-ill.²⁴
- 騏驎躡足舞 A unicorn taps its feet and dances,
24 鳳皇拊翼歌 A phoenix claps its wings and sings.

23. The Tree of No Harm refers to the *shilu* 拾樵 tree believed to be able to kill evil spirits. See Cui Bao 崔豹 (fl. ca. early 4th century), *Notes on Things Past and Present* 古今注, 248. The Yangsui Mirror was a concave bronze mirror used to catch sunlight and start a fire.

24. Hanli, “holder-of-metal,” is a mythical beast that disgorges metal. See Xue Zong’s 薛綜 (d. 243) annotation of Zhang Heng’s “*Fu* on the Western Metropolis” 西京賦 in *Wen xuan* 2.76. Bixie, translated as “avertter-of-ill,” is a mythical beast that wards off evil.

- 豐年大置酒
 玉樽列廣庭
 樂飲過三爵
 28 朱顏暴已形
 式宴不違禮
 君臣歌鹿鳴
 樂人舞鞀鼓
 32 百官雷拊讚若驚
 儲禮如江海
 積善若陵山
 皇嗣繁且熾
 36 孫子列曾玄
 群臣咸稱萬歲
 陛下長樂壽年
 御酒停未飲
 40 貴戚跪東廂
 侍人承顏色
 奉進金玉觴
 此酒亦真酒
 44 福祿當聖皇
 陛下臨軒笑
 左右咸歡康
 杯來一何遲
 48 群僚以次行
- On a year of great harvest
 a splendid feast is set up,
 Jade flagons are arrayed
 in the spacious courtyard.
 Merry drinking exceeds three cups,
 Our faces are already flushed.
 Feasting but not going against etiquette,
 The ruler and ministers together sing
 "Deer Cry."
 The musicians dance to the drum beat,
 A hundred officials clap like thunder,
 acclaiming in awe.
 Propriety is stored like rivers and seas;
 Goodness is accumulated
 like mounds and hills.
 Imperial descendants are many
 and flourishing,
 With great-grandsons and great-great-
 grandsons lining up.
 The ministers shout in unison,
 "Long Live the Emperor!"
 May His Majesty enjoy a long life.
 There is a pause in drinking
 the imperial wine,
 As noble kinsmen kneel in the east loggia.
 Attendants look to the countenance
 of the emperor,
 Presenting the golden and jade goblets.
 This wine is truly the Genuine Wine,
 Blessings fit for our sagely emperor.
 His Majesty smiles by the railing
 of the front hall,
 The ministers are all happy and content.
 How slow is the coming of the wine cups!
 The various ministers receive their drinks
 in order.

賞賜累千億	The emperor bestows gifts worth billions of cash,
百官並富昌	A hundred officials are all wealthy and prosperous.

The opening stanzas of this poem affirm the belief that the human social order is sanctioned by heaven. In the third stanza, the human world morphs into the divine world. White tiger, phoenix, unicorn, and *zhi* plant are all traditionally auspicious omens appearing in times of peace and prosperity; to Cao Zhi's contemporaries, the description would certainly evoke the immortal realm as depicted in the following song:

黃金為闕班璘	Golden were the turrets, streaked and gleaming,
但見芝草葉落紛紛	And I saw only the leaves falling in a flurry from the magic fungus.
百鳥集來如煙	All the birds come to roost like mist,
山獸紛綸	Mountain beasts teeming,
麟辟邪	The unicorn, the averter-of-ill,
其端鶡雞聲鳴	At the edge the sound of the kun-fowl singing,
但見山獸援戲相拘攀	I saw only the mountain beasts sport- ing and helping each other along. ²⁵

There are also echoes of Cao Zhi's own poems on immortals. For instance, the line "noble kinsmen kneel in the east loggia" 貴戚跪東廂 recalls a couplet from "The Five Wanderings" ("Wu you yong" 五遊詠): "The High God rested by the western casement, / All the cosmic lords assembled in the eastern loggia" 上帝休西櫺, 群后集東廂.²⁶

What sets the mortal banquet apart is the emphasis on the observing of decorum, which is rarely mentioned in the depiction of divine feasting, and on spiritual wealth in the opening couplet of the fifth stanza: "Propriety is stored like rivers and seas; / Goodness is accumulated like

25. From "Dongtao Ballad" 董逃行. Lu Qinli, comp., *Han shi*, 9.264. Trans. Owen, *The Making*, 154.

26. Lu Qinli, comp., *Wei shi*, 6.433. Trans. Owen, *The Making*, 169.

mounds and hills.” The subtext here is the story about the evil last ruler of the Shang dynasty, who had supposedly made “a pool of wine” and “a forest of meat.” The pool of wine was so big that it could float boats, and by the wine pool there was a Hill of Dregs. King Zhou’s indulgence of his physical appetites ultimately led to the end of the dynastic rule.²⁷ In contrast, the surplus of propriety and goodness in Cao Zhi’s poem—the overabundant accumulation of spiritual capital—led to the emperor-host’s own great lifespan and spilled over into a long lineage of imperial descendants including “great-grandsons and great-great-grandsons.”

As opposed to King Zhou’s excesses, the ideal feast must combine enjoyment with restraint and merry-making with civility and good manners. It is a public occasion where the host makes visible, and hence reaffirms, social hierarchy. Thus Wang Can must explicitly avow “keeping to [his] place” at the table, and Cao Zhi must stress “feasting but not going against etiquette.” Towards the end of the poem, the complaint “How slow is the coming of the wine cups,” echoing Wang Can’s line “complaining only that the cups pass too slowly,” is immediately balanced by the ensuing statement of the *orderly* passing of drinks to the ministers.

Because both Cao Cao and Cao Pi frequently went on military campaigns, much feasting in this period took place in a military context. As Oswyn Murray argues, there is “a close relationship between feasting and the organization of war.”²⁸ Feasting the army not only feeds the bodies of the warriors and makes them better prepared for fighting, but more importantly, creates bonding among fellow soldiers and loyalty to the commander, which is key to the success of an army.

Cao Cao led a campaign against the Daoist kingdom of Zhang Lu 張魯 in the spring of 215. In the autumn of 216, his army vanquished Zhang Lu’s forces, entered the city of Nanzheng, and looted Zhang Lu’s treasury: “The army had traveled a thousand *li* through the mountains from Wudu, and the soldiers were all exhausted from trekking through the steep and perilous mountain range. After their victory His Lordship held a grand banquet, and everybody forgot their fatigue.”²⁹ A stanza from Wang Can’s “Poems on Joining the Army” (“Congjun shi” 從軍詩) No. 1 describes the feast and the redistribution of resources from the center of power:

27. *Shi ji*, 3.105.

28. Murray, “War and the Symposium,” 83.

29. Pei Songzhi’s commentary to *Sanguo zhi*, 1.45.

陳賞越丘山	He set out rewards that surpassed mountains;
酒肉踰川坻	The wine exceeded rivers, the meat, hills.
軍中多飫饒	The army was surfeited with feasting,
人馬皆溢肥	Men and horses were both well fed.

In the early autumn of 220, Cao Pi gave a great feast to both the army and the people of Qiao 譙 (in modern Anhui), his birthplace and the Cao family's place of origin.³⁰ This later incurred the disapproval of the historian Sun Sheng 孫盛 (ca. 302–74), who criticized Cao Pi for having failed to observe the mourning rites by allowing a festive carnival to happen not long after Cao Cao's death.³¹ Sun Sheng did not consider the fact that Cao Pi, an experienced warrior and huntsman himself, was as pragmatic a military commander as his deceased father: he recognized the consolidating function of feasting, especially in a time of potential political instability after his father's death. This was a feast that Cao Cao himself would have approved.

The importance of this feast is testified by the subsequent erection of a stele in commemoration of the occasion. Wei Ji, a noted calligrapher of the time, is said to have authored the text and written it out.³² Once again, we have a verbal representation of feasting, which appears not only as a highly public piece of writing but also in a durable medium. It makes evident the symbolic meaning of the feast as well as proclaims the importance of such verbal representation itself as important political business.

大饗碑	The Stele Inscription on the Grand Feast ³³
惟延康元年八月	The time is the eighth month of the first year of the Yankang era,

30. *Ibid.*, 2.61.

31. *Ibid.*

32. Yan Kejun, comp., *Quan sanguo wen*, 28.1212. The text is alternatively attributed to Cao Zhi, and the calligraphy to Zhong Yao 鍾繇 (151–230).

33. Although this work is largely a piece of unrhymed prose (save for the inscription at the end), I have chosen to use the layout usually reserved for poetry for the sake of an easy comparison of the Chinese text and the English translation.

旬有八日辛未	On the <i>xinwei</i> day, which is the eighteenth. ³⁴
魏王龍興踐祚	The King of Wei, having soared like a dragon and taken the throne,
規恢鴻業	Plans and aggrandizes the royal enterprise,
構亮皇基	In order to construct and support the foundation of the empire,
萬邦統世	And unite the myriad domains.
忿吳夷之凶暴	Enraged by the violence and cruelty of the Wu barbarians,
滅蜀虜之僭逆	[Feeling contempt for] the rebellious presumption of the Shu bandits,
王赫斯怒	The king, awe-inspiring in his great wrath,
順天致罰	Follows the charge of heaven to mete out punishment.
奮虓虎之校	He rouses lieutenants like roaring tigers,
簡猛銳之卒	And selects soldiers who are brave and fierce.
爰整六軍	He puts the six army regiments in order,
率匈奴暨單于	Commanding the Xiongnu riders and their Khan
烏桓鮮卑引弓之類	As well as the bow-carriers of Wuhuan and Xianbei.
持戟百萬	A million troops, all holding halberds;
控弦千隊	A thousand divisions, all drawing bow strings.
玄甲曜野	Their black armor shines forth on the plain;
華旗蔽日	Numerous splendid banners cover the sun.

34. That is, October 2, 220. The army had apparently arrived at Qiao on the *jiawu* day of the seventh month (September 5, 220). See Cao Pi's biography in *Sanguo zhi*, 2.61.

天動雷震	They act like thunderclaps that shake the sky;
星流電發	They move as swiftly as shooting stars and erupting lightning.
戎備素辦	As military preparations have long been made,
役不更藉	There is no need to renew conscription.
農夫安疇	Farmers remain at ease in the fields;
商不變肆	Merchants effect no change to their shops.
是以	Therefore
士有拊髀之驩	Members of the gentry clap their hands with joy;
民懷惠康之德	The common folk are grateful for His kindness.
皇恩所漸	As imperial grace penetrates gradually,
無遠不至	Even people from the farthest place come over;
武師所加	When martial power is applied,
無強不服	No powerful enemy fails to submit.
故寬令西飛	Henceforth, when a charitable order is conveyed to the west,
則蜀將東馳	Shu generals gallop to the east to surrender;
六旆南徂	As the six standards fly south,
則吳黨委質	The Wu gang offers capitulation.
二虜震驚	The two foes are in shock and fear,
魚爛階潰	[Crumbling] like rotting fish and broken dikes.
將汎舟三江之流	Our battleships shall float on the currents of the Three Rivers;
方軌邛來之阪	Our chariots shall proceed on the path through Mt. Qionglai.
斬吳夷以染鉞	We will execute the Wu barbarians and dye our axes red;
血蜀虜以釁鼓	We will use the Shu bandits' blood to smear our drums.

曜天威于遐裔
 復九圻之疆寓
 除生民之災孽
 去聖皇之宿憤

We will demonstrate imperial power
 on distant frontiers,
 And recover the boundaries
 of the nine regions,
 Thus ridding the common folk
 of harmful ills
 And removing the old grievance
 of the sagely ruler.

次于舊邑
 觀釁而動
 築壇墼之宮
 置表著之位
 大饗六軍
 爰及譙縣父老男女

Our army stops over
 at the king's former domain,
 Waiting to take action
 when our enemy shows weakness.
 A temporary palace surrounded
 by short walls is built;
 Various proper positions
 for the officials are marked and set.
 A grand feast is held
 for the six regiments,
 As well as for the elders, the men
 and women of Qiao County.

臨饗之日
 陳兵清塗
 慶雲垂覆
 乃備蹕御
 整法駕
 設天宮之列衛
 乘金華之鸞路
 達升龍于太常
 張天狼之威弧

On the day of the feast,
 The troops are arrayed to open the way,
 Auspicious colored clouds
 give protection.
 The boulevard is cleared
 for the royal procession,
 The regal carriage is getting ready.
 When the imperial guardsmen
 are in place,
 The king rides in the simurgh coach
 decorated with gold flowers.
 One envisions mounting a dragon
 on seeing the *taichang* flag,
 And draws the mighty bow
 at the Celestial Wolf.

千乘風舉	A thousand chariots speed by like a gale;
萬騎龍驤	Ten thousand riders march on like prancing dragons.
威靈之飾 震曜康衢	Their awesome, numinous decorations Shake and dazzle the thoroughfare.
既登高壇 蔭九增之華蓋	After the king goes up the high altar, He is shaded by the magnificent nine-layered canopy,
處流蘇之幄坐	And is seated on the throne surrounded by tasseled curtains.
陳旅酬之高會	A sumptuous banquet is laid out, where toasts are exchanged,
行無算之酣飲	And there is unlimited drinking.
旨酒波流	Fine ale flows like waves,
肴烝陵積	Meat with bones piles up like hills.
瞽師設縣	Blind musicians set up bells and chimes,
金奏讚樂	The small and large carillons are sounded in concert.
六變既畢	After all the six movements are completed,
乃陳祕戲	A wonderful acrobatics show is put on.
巴俞丸劍	With the Ba-Yu Dance, the play of balls and swords,
奇舞麗倒	There are solo dancers or paired jugglers.
衝夾踰鋒	Performers present marvelous skills such as dashing through the dagger ring, their chests brushing past blade tips;
上索踏高	Walking a tightrope across the air;
扛鼎緣橦	Lifting cauldrons, climbing a pole;
舞輪擲鏡	Juggling wheels, throwing and catching mirrors;

騁狗逐兔	Unleashing running dogs to chase a rabbit;
戲馬立騎之妙技	Standing on a galloping horse.
白虎青鹿	There are the white tiger and azure deer,
辟非辟邪	<i>Bifei</i> and <i>bixie</i> beasts,
魚龍靈龜	Fish, dragon, magical tortoises,
國鎮之怪獸	Extraordinary creatures that are stabilizing treasures of the state.
瑰變屈出	Marvelous transformations take place in turn,
異巧神化	With the remarkable skills of spirits and gods.
自卿校將守以下	From ministers and generals, lieutenants and guards,
下及陪臺隸圉	Down to servants and slaves, conscripts and herders,
莫不歆淫宴喜	Everyone experiences the utmost joy and uninhibited pleasure,
咸懷醉飽	And all are satiated with food and drink.
雖夏啟均臺之饗	Even King Qi of Xia's banquet at Jun Terrace,
周成岐陽之狩	King Cheng of Zhou's hunt to the south of Mount Qi, ³⁵
高祖邑中之會	Han Emperor Gaozu's gathering at his hometown,
光武舊里之宴	Han Emperor Guangwu's party in his native place—
何以尚茲	How could they match this great feast?
是以刊石立銘	Therefore we carve an inscription in stone and establish the stele
光示來葉	To clearly demonstrate to the future generations.

35. *Zuo zhuan zhushu*, Zhao 4, 42.730.

其辭曰	The inscription is as follows:
赫王師	Magnificent is the imperial army,
征南裔	Going on a campaign to the southern frontier.
奮靈威	It exerts its numinous power,
震天外	Shaking the land beyond the sky.
吳夷慄	The Wu barbarians tremble in fear,
蜀虜竄	The Shu bandits take flight.
區夏清	The Central Plains are clear,
八荒艾	The Eight Wastes are pacified.
幸舊邦	The king visits his native land,
設高會	And sets out a sumptuous banquet.
皇德洽	His imperial grace is widespread,
洪恩邁	His great generosity reaches everyone.
刊金石	Let it be carved in metal and stone
光萬世	To be announced to ten thousand generations.

The stele inscription begins with an account of Cao Pi's enthronement as the King of Wei and his resolve to destroy the "Shu bandits" and "Wu barbarians"; it goes on to give a lengthy description of the current military campaign and the mighty forces of the Wei, predicting the utter defeat of the Shu and Wu. It then narrates the Wei army's stopover at Qiao, where the king gives a great banquet to soldiers and the people of Qiao. A ceremonial procession ensues; a special altar is erected to seat the king; a lavish banquet is held, sumptuous food and drink offered, and many forms of entertainment provided. Distinction in social status is mentioned only to be counterbalanced by the guests' *shared* indulgence and satiation: "From ministers and generals, lieutenants and guards, down to servants and slaves, conscripts and herders, everyone experiences the utmost joy and uninhibited pleasure, and all are satiated with food and drink."

Immediately after this statement the author lists four ancient kings who have held great banquets and declares that theirs cannot rival *this* banquet. All of the kings, except for King Cheng of Zhou, are dynastic founders, although we must remember that King Cheng's father was King Wu, which was Cao Cao's posthumous title. The distinction that

the author of this text wants to highlight is that between guests and host; it is to set apart the prince who, seated on a high altar, is elevated above the rest under the “nine-layered canopy” and “surrounded by tasseled curtains,” occupying a space clearly demarcated from his guests. While the guests are being entertained with the splendid spectacle of musicians and acrobats, the true spectacle is the one of the political theater and the demonstration of political power.

Two Perspectives on Food

Robert Joe Cutter observes, “The last of the Han was a dangerous time, with war, politics, and disease all taking their toll, and one of the ways poets dealt with these stern realities was by joining together to feast and drink.”³⁶ Although this is doubtless true, in the preceding section I have tried to call attention to some of the other ways in which food and alcohol were used socially to deal with the “stern realities” of the Jian’an. In this context, feast is a powerful institution establishing a community and strengthening the bonds between guests-clients and their host-patron; it also provides the space for a symbolic exchange between the host-patron and guests-clients. Cao Zhi’s poem, “The August Wei,” ends with the emperor’s bestowal of gifts “worth billions of cash.” The feast is an occasion that can embody perfect reciprocity, as attested by the provision of victuals and the presentation of poetry at the banquet. The feast could, as Owen says, “serve a political function, and its poetry could support that purpose.”³⁷ In this poetry, as we can well imagine, “food” is an important figure.

Throughout most of his career, Cao Cao’s favorite political role model was the Duke of Zhou, who had ruled as regent on behalf of the young King Cheng. The Duke was so eager to gather talented men into the Zhou court that he would repeatedly stop whatever he was doing, even if he was in the middle of a meal, in order to rush out to receive a guest.³⁸ In the last stanza of his famous “Short Song,” a piece that sings of a banquet, Cao Cao evokes the Duke of Zhou.³⁹

36. Cutter, “Cao Zhi’s Symposium Poems,” 6.

37. Owen, *The Making*, 197.

38. *Shi ji*, 33.1518: “I grab my wet hair [without drying it] three times in one washing and spit out the food in my mouth three times during one meal, so as to rush out to receive gentlemen. Even so, I fear losing any worthy man of the world” 我一沐三捉髮，一飯三吐哺，起以待士，猶恐失天下之賢人。

39. Xiao Tong, comp., *Wen xuan*, 27.1282.

山不厭高	The mountain is not satiated with height,
海不厭深	The sea is not satiated with depth.
周公吐哺	The Duke of Zhou spat out his food,
天下歸心	All under heaven gave him their hearts.

The word *yan* 厭 has the sense of having had too much to eat or drink. While mountain and sea yield their products to serve as delicacies on the food table, they themselves have an insatiable desire for the abstract values of height and depth. The parallel in the human world is the Duke of Zhou, who disgorges food from his mouth and thereby gains the “hearts” of people of the world. It is striking to talk about spitting out food in a banquet poem that in all likelihood was performed at a banquet. The host is marked as different from his guests, who would be urged to eat and drink their fill on such an occasion.

The difference between lord-host and his retainer-guests, as well as the motif of fullness, is the focal point of Cao Pi’s poem “Grand!” (“Shanzai xing” 善哉行).⁴⁰

朝日樂相樂	In the morning, joy upon joy,
酣飲不知醉	We drink heartily, without getting drunk.
悲絃激新聲	The sad strings stir new sounds,
4 長笛吐清氣	The long flutes emit clear breath.
絃歌感人腸	Songs sung to strings touch a man’s heart,
四坐皆歡悅	All the guests present are delighted.
寥寥高堂上	In the vastness of the great hall,
8 涼風入我室	A cool breeze enters my chamber.
持滿如不盈	If one maintain things at fullness, without spilling over,
有德者能卒	Someone with virtue can bring things to a good end.
君子多苦心	The superior man usually has a much troubled heart,
12 所愁不但一	The things that worry him are more than one.
慊慊下白屋	Full of yearning, he goes to visit the plain cottage,

40. Lu Qinli, comp., *Wei shi*, 4.393.

yan, sated and gratified. In contrast to his guests, the host is beset with worries and cannot enjoy the sensual pleasure of the feast.

Cao Pi's "*Fu* on Being Vigilant about Fullness" ("Jieying fu" 戒盈賦), of which only a fragment has survived, may be read as an elucidation of this poem. Its preface describes the occasion and the purpose of composition: "When I seek relief from the summer heat in the Eastern Pavilion, I invite guests over to a grand party. As we are tipsy from drinking and music is being played, I fondly think of the warning about 'maintaining fullness,' and compose the following poetic exposition."⁴⁴ The fragment reads as follows:

惟應龍之將舉	As the winged dragon is about to soar,
飛雲降而下征	Flying clouds descend to the lower realm.
資物類之相感	Relying on the correspondence of things of the same kind,
信貫徹之通靈	Truly we are able to communicate with the divine.
何今日之延賓	On this day I have extended an invitation to my guests,
君子紛其集庭	Many superior men gather together in the hall.
信臨高而增懼	Truly being on high increases one's apprehension;
獨處滿而懷愁	Alone in a position of fullness, I am beset with worries.
願群士之箴規	I hope that the various gentlemen will offer their advice,
博納我以良謀	Enabling me to broadly incorporate good counsel.

The fragment opens with a diametric pull of two opposing forces: the soaring dragon and the descending clouds. As clouds attend the dragon and assist its rise, the imagery serves as a figure of the gathering of the numerous *shi* guests in the hall of their lord. The extant text does not contain any depiction of food and drink, but we can well imagine how

44. Yan Kejun, comp., *Quan sanguo wen*, 4.1073.

in the original *fu* such a depiction might precede the statement about the lord-host's worries, followed by the not-so-subtle demand for the guests' good counsel in exchange for the good time they have.

A good host must make sure that his guests have plenty to eat and drink, and yet, like the Duke of Zhou, he himself may not get to eat his fill in his eagerness to receive guests. Such eagerness is often described in terms of hunger and thirst in contemporary writings. Cao Pi himself uses "hunger and thirst" to depict the Han Emperor Wen's desire for talented men: "Emperor Wen desired worthy men more intensely than a hungry and thirsty man desires food and drink" 文帝思賢甚于飢渴.⁴⁵ In such a metaphoric formulation, the worthy men function as the food and drink to gratify the lord's appetite. A poem by Ying Yang, "Attending a Gathering Held by the Leader of Court Gentlemen for Miscellaneous Uses at the Jianzhang Terrace," presents an intriguing twist on the food theme from the perspective of a guest.⁴⁶

朝雁鳴雲中	A wild goose cries in the clouds at dawn,
音響一何哀	How mournful is that sound!
問子遊何鄉	I ask the wild goose, "Where do you come from?"
4 戢翼正徘徊	It folds its wings and lingers.
言我寒門來	It says, "I come from the Gates of Cold
將就衡陽樓	And am on my way to Hengyang to roost.
往春翔北土	Last spring I soared in the northern land,
8 今冬客南淮	This winter I will sojourn to the south of the Huai.
遠行蒙霜雪	In far travels I have endured frost and snow,
毛羽日摧墮	My feathers, increasingly ruined, fall out every day.
常恐傷肌骨	Always I fear harm to my flesh and bones,
12 身隕沈沙泥	That my body will plummet and sink in sand and mire.

45. Zhang Hong 張紘 (153–212), who was on intimate terms with Kong Rong and Chen Lin, states in his letter to his son: "A wise ruler . . . desires worthy men as if hungry and thirsty [for food and drink] and is never satiated with receiving remonstrance" 求賢如飢渴, 受諫而不厭. Yan Kejun, comp., *Quan hou Han wen* 全後漢文, 86.941.

46. Xiao Tong, comp., *Wen xuan*, 20.946–47.

- 簡珠墮沙石 If this great pearl should fall
 to sand and pebbles,
 何能中自諧 How can I keep harmony within?
 欲因雲雨會 I want to avail myself
 of a conjunction of clouds and rain,
 16 濯翼陵高梯 Bathing my wings and mounting up the high
 ladder.
 良遇不可值 Should it be impossible for me
 to have such a lucky encounter,
 伸眉路何階 Then what steps lead to the road
 where I will relax my brows?"
- 公子敬愛客 The young lord respects and loves his guests,
 20 樂飲不知疲 We drink merrily, without knowing fatigue.
 和顏既以暢 With a gentle and cheerful countenance,
 乃肯顧細微 You are willing to consider
 someone as minor as myself.
 贈詩見存慰 You presented me with a poem
 to inquire after me,
 24 小子非所宜 This is not the due of an insignificant person.
 為且極歡情 So let us now experience
 the heights of pleasure,
 不醉其無歸 Let no one go home until drunk.
 凡百敬爾位 May all the hundred officers
 respect their positions
 28 以副飢渴懷 To answer your concerns of hunger and thirst.

This twenty-eight line poem by Ying Yang is unique among extant feast poems from this period in that the first half of the poem features an extended dialogue between an interlocutor and a wild goose suffering from the hardship of travel; the second half of the poem depicts the human counterpart of the bird.

The image of the traveling bird looking for a resting place echoes a stanza from Cao Cao's "Short Song," one of the two "extra" stanzas that are found in the *Wen xuan* version:⁴⁷

47. This stanza does not appear in the version recorded in the "Monograph on Music" from *Song shu* (21.610).

月明星稀	The moon is bright, the stars sparse,
烏鵲南飛	Crows and magpies are flying south.
繞樹三匝	They circle the tree thrice—
何枝可依	On what branch could they roost?

That birds choose a good tree branch on which to roost is an old metaphor for a minister's choice of a good lord to serve. Its source text is Confucius's remark upon departing from the court of Wei: "A bird can choose its tree; how could a tree choose its birds" 鳥則擇木，木豈能擇鳥？⁴⁸ Cao Cao's implication that he himself is the best tree around is none too subtle, and his poem is as much a work of Wei propaganda as an unabashed piece of advertisement. The bird image appears in the last stanza of the *Shi jing* poem "In the South Are Fine Fishes" ("Nan you jiyu" 南有嘉魚), another banquet piece in the *Lesser Odes*, from which Cao Cao also cites "Deer Cry" in his "Short Song." The stanza reads: "Fluttering their wings are the *zhui* birds, / In great numbers they come. / The lord has wine, / The fine guests feast with him repeatedly" 翩翩者騅，烝然來思，君子有酒，嘉賓式燕又思。⁴⁹ The Mao commentary and Zheng Xuan's 鄭玄 (127–200) commentary both take the *zhui* birds as a figure of the retainer-guests of the lord-host.⁵⁰

In his feast poem Ying Yang follows the metaphoric convention by figuring himself as a wild goose. The question put forth by the uncertain wild goose in line 18, "What steps lead to the road where I will relax my brows?" is answered by the reassuring statement in line 19, "The young lord respects and loves his guests." The poet finds himself a roosting place at his lord's table. He responds by affirming his gratitude and, like Wang Can and Cao Zhi, emphasizing the importance of social status and hierarchy. As soon as he exhorts his fellow guests to enjoy the party to the full, he also urges them all, including himself, to remember their proper

48. *Zuo zhuan zhushu*, Ai 11, 58.1019. A slightly later formulation by Pan Yue 潘岳 (247–300) makes the parallel perfectly clear in "Elegy on the Jingzhou Governor Yang [Zhao]" 楊荊州誄: "A bird chooses its tree; a minister likewise selects his lord" 鳥則擇木，臣亦簡君. Xiao Tong, comp., *Wen xuan*, 56.2440.

49. *Mao shi zhushu*, 10.347.

50. In another poem from the *Lesser Odes*, "The Four Stallions" 四牡, which comes right after "Deer Cry," the *zhui* bird's constant flying is used as an affective image for a man's being kept constantly occupied by the king's business. *Mao shi zhushu*, 9.317–18.

place: “May all the hundred officers respect their positions, / To answer [the lord’s] concerns of hunger and thirst” 凡百敬爾位，以副飢渴懷。

When read in the context of an elaborate bird metaphor, the customary avowal of repayment for the lord-host’s grace in a banquet poem takes on an unexpected dark undertone. The wild goose is, after all, one of the favorite game birds for hunters and the first of the “six fowls” (*liu qin* 六禽) for eating.⁵¹ Cui Yin 崔駟 (d. 92) speaks of “stewed swallow and simmered mutton, roast wild goose and boiled wild duck” 鶩臠羊殘，炙雁煮鳧.⁵² Zhang Heng, lovingly enumerating all the local delicacies produced by his hometown region, lists “the returning wild goose and the crying grouse” 歸雁鳴鷄.⁵³ Zhang Xie 張協 (d. 307?) in his “Seven Charges” (“Qi ming” 七命) includes the goose among fine foods: “Dawn-flying wild duck and dew-soaked goose; grouse at the time of frost, and brown sparrow” 晨鳧露鷄，霜鷄黃雀.⁵⁴ “Dew-soaked goose” refers to a wild goose in autumn—the season of “frost and dew”—when the goose is at its fattest. All these descriptions hark back to the “Great Summons” (“Da zhao” 大招) from the *Verses of Chu*, which tries to lure the soul of the dead back to the land of the living by listing the sensual pleasures of the mortal world. Among the delicacies mentioned therein are “roast herons [swans] and steamed ducks” 炙鷓[鷓]蒸鳧.⁵⁵ The word *zheng* 蒸, to steam (later written as 蒸), evokes the “Nan you jiaju” line *zhengran laisi* 烝然來思, translated as “In great numbers they come” above. In the context of the line, *zhengran* must mean “in multitude” or, as Zheng Xuan glosses it, “for a long time,” but one of the meanings of *zheng* is to place meat in the ritual vessel in sacrifice or at banquet, which is related to the derived meaning of offering and presenting. Just as the “fine fishes” (*jiayu* 嘉魚) in the poem verbally echo the “fine guests” (*jiabin* 嘉賓)—and fishes are both the food for the guests and a figure of the guests—a wild goose may be a figure of the worthy guest but is very much at the risk of itself becoming food.

Cao Zhi once wrote a *fu* on a trapped wild goose, whose preface states: “I was on an excursion to Xuanwu Lake. A wild goose was caught

51. *Zhou li zhushu*, 4.59.

52. Yan Kejun, comp., *Quan hou Han wen*, 44-713.

53. “Fu on the Southern Capital” 南都賦. *Ibid.*, 53.768.

54. Yan Kejun, comp., *Quan jin wen* 全晉文, 85.1954.

55. *Chuci buzhu*, 10.220.

by a stringed arrow and could not get away. I told the boatman to pursue it, and he captured it. I took pity on the bird and wrote the following poetic exposition.⁵⁶ The extant fragment describes the fate awaiting a captured wild goose—being turned into a delectable course on the lord's banquet table:

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| 憐孤雁之偏特兮
情惆焉而內傷 | I pity the loneliness of the solitary goose,
My feelings are melancholy,
and I feel wounded within. |
| 尋淑類之殊異兮 | I examine the special quality
of its fine species, |
| 4 稟上天之休祥
含中和之純氣兮 | It receives the auspice of the heavens.
Harboring the pure aura of the primal
energy, |
| 赴四節而征行 | In response to the four seasons,
it goes on a journey. |
| 遠玄冬于南裔兮 | In the far south staying away
from black winter, |
| 8 避炎夏乎朔方
白露淒以飛揚兮 | In the north it avoids the hot summer.
When the white dew is chilly
and tosses in the air, |
| 秋風發乎西商
感節運之復至今 | The autumn wind rises in the west.
Moved by the return of the season, |
| 12 假魏道而翱翔 | It takes its route
through the realm of the Wei. |
| 接羽翮以南北兮 | Wing to wing the geese fly
from north to south, |
| 情逸豫而永康 | They are at ease and enjoy
lasting contentment. |
| 望范氏之發機兮 | They resent Mr. Fan's pulling the trigger
of the cross-bow, ⁵⁷ |

56. The title is "Fu on the Wild Goose Trapped by a Stringed Arrow" 離繳雁賦. Two fragments are respectively preserved in *Yiwen leiju* (91.1580) and *Chuxue ji* (30.736). The text used here is a composite version in Yan Kejun, comp., *Quan sanguo wen* 14.1129–30.

57. Mr. Fan may be an error for "Mr. Wei" (Weishi 魏氏), a fine archer from antiquity referred to by Cao Zhi in his other writings such as "Seven Inspirations" 七啟. Yan Kejun, comp., *Quan sanguo wen*, 16.1142.

- 16 播纖繳以凌雲 Which spreads the slender string
 over the clouds.
 挂微軀之輕翼兮 The light wings of its slender body
 become entangled,
 忽積落而離羣 Suddenly it plummets from the sky,
 separated from its flock.
 旅朋驚而鳴逝兮 Its traveling companions, startled,
 cry out and fly away,
- 20 徒矯首而莫聞 It raises its head in vain
 but cannot hear them.
 甘充君之下廚 Its sweet meat would provide
 for the lord's lowly kitchen,
 膏函牛之鼎鑊 Its fat would moisten the tripod
 large enough to cook an ox.
 蒙生全之顧復 But it receives mercy and preserves its life;
- 24 何恩施之隆博 How great and profound
 is the generosity and grace.
 于是縱軀歸命 Thereupon, it goes free
 and surrenders itself to fate,
 無慮無求 Having neither worries nor desires;
 飢食梁稻 When hungry, it eats millet and rice;
- 28 渴飲清流 When thirsty, it drinks
 from the clear current.

In this text the wild goose's lucky escape from the lord's dinner table is mirrored reversely in its own carefree enjoyment of food and drink. In contemporary writings the image of a bird often functions as a symbol of freedom as well as a figure of entrapment: we see this from Zhao Yi's 趙壹 (ca. 130–185) "Fu on a Desperate Bird" ("Qiongniao fu" 窮鳥賦) to the famous poem about a trapped/freed "brown sparrow" attributed to Cao Zhi.⁵⁸ Thus, when Ying Yang compares himself to a lone wild goose

58. The poem attributed to Cao Zhi is "Brown Sparrow in the Wild Fields." Lu Qinli, comp., *Wei shi*, 6.425. These texts attest to the enduring appeal of animal fable and the fascination with the motif of a trapped bird. For instance, a fu on "Hawk and Sparrow" 鷓鴣賦 attributed to Cao Zhi is a delightful fable about a sparrow escaping the clutches of a hawk, with personified hawk and sparrow talking to each other. Yan, comp., *Quan sanguo wen*, 14.1130.

in a feast poem and then alludes to the host's "hunger and thirst" for worthy men, he comes dangerously close to a murky discursive territory, where guests, well fed by the host, are themselves turned into food to satisfy the host's appetite, their "sweet meat" and "fat" greasing the lord's pots and pans.

In the last stanza of Cao Pi's "Grand!" discussed earlier in this chapter, the poet speaks of the desire to fly away: "If, wing to wing, they soar in the Milky Way, / How can the fowler entrap them?" The desire to fly away as a pair of birds is a habitual ending in contemporary feast poems,⁵⁹ but read in the context of the bird/guest/food dynamics, the ending takes on an intriguing complexity. Is the poet speaking for himself here, as his song certainly "sounds almost as though he wants to escape the oppressive model of the Duke of Zhou's attentiveness (received from Cao Cao) and the constant strains of being a patron"?⁶⁰ Or is he, in a moment of compassion, speaking of the guests he as the patron-host does not want to "let escape"?

Whichever is the case, we have a rare accord between host and guests, for in this stanza we hear the wistful longing elsewhere expressed by one of Cao Pi's favorite retainer-guests, Liu Zhen, in his "Unclassified Poem":⁶¹

職事相填委	My office duties are piling up,
文墨紛消散	Paperwork is dispatched in droves.
馳翰未暇食	I let my brush gallop, having no time to eat,
4 日昃不知晏	The sun is slanting; I hardly notice it is getting late.
沈迷簿領間	Absorbed and lost in registers and documents,
回回自昏亂	My head is spinning around in chaos.
釋此出西城	Setting it aside, I go out the western city gate,
8 登高且游觀	Climb a high place and let my eyes roam.
方塘含白水	The square pond contains clear water,
中有鳧與雁	In the midst there are wild ducks and geese.
安得肅肅羽	How can I get those fluttering wings,
12 從爾浮波瀾	To go with you and float on the waves!

59. See Owen, *The Making*, 100–124.

60. *Ibid.*, 202.

61. Xiao Tong, comp., *Wen xuan*, 29.1359–60.

Ironically, the retainer-guest, once trapped by his lord's favor, works so hard for him that he does not have time to eat at all.

A Man of Taste

Food was important in third-century politics. The symbolic significance of food, though acquiring a central manifestation in feasting, extends far beyond the feast. In another banquet poem entitled "Grand!" Cao Pi speaks of bountiful food and beautiful music being brought forth for his enjoyment:⁶²

朝遊高臺觀	At dawn I roamed to the towering terrace;
夕宴華池陰	In the evening I feasted beside the splendid pool.
大酋奉甘醪	The Grand Steward offered sweet ale;
4 狩人獻嘉禽	The Royal Huntsman presented excellent fowl.
齊倡發東舞	Qi entertainers performed eastern dances,
秦箏奏西音	A Qin harp gave forth the tunes of the west.
有客從南來	A guest came from the south,
8 為我彈清琴	And played the clear zither for me.
五音紛繁會	The five notes were conjoined in abundance,
拊者激微吟	The one who strummed it stirred a faint chant.
淫魚乘波聽	Sturgeons were riding the waves to listen,
12 踴躍自浮沈	They leapt up, diving and rising to the surface.
飛鳥翻翔舞	Birds in flight danced, soaring around,
悲鳴集北林	They sang touchingly, roosting in the northern grove.
樂極哀情來	When joy reached its height, sorrowful feelings arose:
16 慄悵摧肝心	Melancholy crushed my heart.
清角豈不妙	Isn't the Clear Jiao marvelous? ⁶³

62. Lu Qinli, comp., *Wei shi*, 4.393.

63. Duke Ping of Jin wanted to hear the tune of the Clear Jiao, and Music Master Kuang (Ziye) warned him that his meagre virtue was inadequate for him to appreciate it. At the Duke's insistence Ziye played the tune, and there was immediately a great thunderstorm that tore apart the curtains and caused the roof tiles to fall from the eaves; subsequently Jin suffered a drought and the Duke himself fell ill. *Han Feizi*, 3.172.

德薄所不任	But my meagre virtue does not deserve it.
大哉子野言	Great indeed are the words of Ziyè;
20 弭絃且自禁	Let me stop the strings, forbidding it to myself.

Music, man-made and natural, is proffered from all four directions: the eastern dances, the tunes of the west, the zither-player from the south, and the singing birds in the northern grove. This effectively situates the poet himself at the center—the fifth direction—to which bounties flow. The concept of the five directions, with the corresponding Five Phases, was part of the Han cosmology inseparable from political philosophy and state ideology, and represented the mapping of the Han Empire. Taking advantage of the geographical location of the Wei on the traditional “Central Plains” of north China, Cao Pi establishes himself at the center where political authority lies. His modest self-denial at the end of the poem paradoxically places him in the very position that he claims he does not deserve. It also shows that he not only knows music but, more importantly, knows himself, unlike such a benighted ruler as Duke Ping of Jin.

In contrast with his father, Cao Pi made conscious efforts to represent himself as a man of refined taste in matters of food, drink, and clothes. It was not just a matter of personal difference but also a result of the political situation under which he ruled. In a time of political instability and civil war, the service of talented men, regardless of their social status, was more salient to Cao Cao than the endorsement of old aristocratic families. If those old families did not support him, he would not hesitate to use brutal force. His decision to execute Kong Rong, an eminent member of the elite and the twentieth-generation descendant of Confucius, was a good example.⁶⁴ Cao Cao also issued several famous directives about the need to seek talented men regardless of their moral standing.⁶⁵ In contrast, Cao Pi, as a dynasty founder ruling over a unified north China, needed prestige and the backing of old aristocratic families more than his father did. Contending with the kingdom of Wu in the southeast and the kingdom of Shu in the southwest, he also had to

64. *Sanguo zhi*, 12.370–73.

65. *Ibid.*, 1.32, 44.49.

establish political legitimacy and cultural superiority—the two being one and the same—over his rivals. Cao Pi sought a cultural aura, the aura of a “superior man” (*junzi* 君子).

Cao Pi’s self-representation as a judge of literary merits is best manifested in the “Discourse on Literature” chapter of his *Normative Discourses*, which has been well translated and discussed. His statement on sartorial and culinary tastes is less known and deserves to be quoted here:

Only someone from a noble family of three generations knows about clothes; only someone from a noble family of five generations knows about food and drink. This goes to show how difficult it is to know anything about clothes, food, and drink.⁶⁶

三世長者知被服，五世長者知飲食，此言被服飲食難曉也。

Cao Pi himself was not from an old elite family;⁶⁷ nevertheless, by constantly offering appraisals of sartorial and culinary matters, he established himself as a man of superior taste. In a propaganda war against Wu and Shu, Cao Pi repeatedly issued directives to his courtiers criticizing the rival kingdoms’ foods and textiles. Gift exchange between the states became an occasion for flaunting wealth and power as well as disparaging the enemies’ inferior products and poor taste. In these cases, gift-giving was indeed “a form of surrogate warfare.”⁶⁸

Through a number of letter fragments, we learn that Cao Pi sent the Wu ruler Sun Quan 孫權 (182–252), among other things, five cakes of “rock honey” and a thousand abalones.⁶⁹ “Rock honey” is cane sugar,

66. Yan Kejun, comp., *Quan sanguo wen*, 6.1082.

67. Cao Cao’s father was an adopted son of a eunuch. *Sanguo zhi*, 1.1.

68. Curta, “Merovingian and Carolingian Gift Giving,” 698. For a full discussion of Cao Pi’s gift-giving and his opinions regarding clothes and textiles, see Tian, “Material and Symbolic Economies,” 148–71.

69. The letter fragments are preserved in different places in *Imperial Reader for a Time of Supreme Peace*. See *Taiping yulan* 857.3941 (“rock honey”), and 938.4301 (abalone). Probably because these fragments all mention a Zhao Zi 趙咨 as the messenger, Yan Kejun pieced them together into one missive. Yan Kejun, comp., *Quan sanguo wen*, 7.1090. However, we do not know how many trips were undertaken by Zhao Zi or whether the gifts were given to Sun Quan all at once. The *Chronological Account of Wu* compiled by Hu Chong, cited in Pei Songzhi’s commentary, states that in the spring of

which originated from India but came to China through the Silk Road. The Chinese term “rock honey” might have been a translation of the Sanskrit word *śarkarā*, which has the meaning of gravel, grit, and pebbles, and is referred to as the “rock honey of the Western Kingdoms” (*xiguo shimi* 西國石蜜).⁷⁰ In the third year of the Huangchu 黃初 era (222), several kingdoms of the Western Regions—Shanshan 鄯善, Qiuci 龜茲, and Yutian 于闐—sent emissaries to the Wei court with gifts, and “thereafter the Western Regions were opened up [to the Wei].”⁷¹ It is likely that Cao Pi sent Sun Quan some of the cane sugar shortly afterward to show off the Wei court’s far-reaching influence.

The case of abalone is more intriguing. A later story about the fifth-century nobleman Chu Yuan 褚淵 (435–82) records how he, instead of taking a retainer’s suggestion and selling thirty pieces of abalone given to him as a gift, “ate them up in no time.” According to the account, “At the time the land to the north of the Huai River belonged to [the Wei], and there was no abalone in the south. Occasionally it made its way to the south, and a single piece was worth several thousand cash” 時淮北屬 [魏], 江南無復鰓魚, 或有間關得至者, 一枚直數千錢.⁷² This fascinating story about gift and commodity in the Southern Dynasties exemplifies A. J. Gurevich’s description of the noble lords’ attitude toward wealth in medieval Europe: “Wealth as seen by the lords was not an end in itself, nor was it something that should be accumulated for economic improvement or development”; rather, it was a way of widening his circle of friends and of reaffirming his power, and so it would be best to squander it “in the full glare of publicity.”⁷³ Chu Yuan’s act of conspicuous consumption affirmed his noble birth and distinguished him from a profit-seeking merchant. The story also conveys the scarcity and desirability of abalone in south China in the early fifth century. We do not

222, Sun Quan reported to Cao Pi that he had won a great military victory over the Shu forces and that, as a reward, Cao sent to Sun Quan “a marten fur coat, a set of Bright Light Armor and horses,” and “he also had his *Normative Discourses* as well as his poetry and *fu* copied out on silk and sent to Quan.” *Sanguo zhi*, 47.1125.

70. Cao Pi uses the phrase “grapes and rock honey of the Western Kingdoms” 西國葡萄石蜜 in one of his letters to his courtiers. See p. 117 below.

71. *Sanguo zhi*, 2.79.

72. *Nan shi*, 28.751. The character “Wei” is present in the citation in *Taiping yulan* (938.4301). The Wei refers to the Northern Wei dynasty (386–534).

73. Gurevich, *Categories of Medieval Culture*, 247–48.

know if this was also the case in the early third century, but regardless of whether abalone was easily obtainable in the kingdom of Wu, Cao Pi's gift of abalone to the Wu ruler was meant to demonstrate the economic power and the bountiful natural resources of the Wei.

Meanwhile, it was said that Cao Pi theatrically turned up his nose at gifts—especially food gifts—from Wu. Sun Quan once gave some large oranges to Cao Pi. Cao Pi addressed a communication to his courtiers: “The south produces sourpeel tangerines. They are so sour that they ruin one's teeth. Sweet ones are few and far between” 南方有橘，酢正裂人牙，時有甜耳。⁷⁴ Ironically, Cao Cao had once tried to have some sourpeel tangerine trees transplanted to the Bronze Bird Park in the city of Ye, but his botanical venture turned out to be disastrous. According to Cao Zhi's “*Fu* on Sourpeel Tangerines” (“*Ju fu*” 橘賦), the orange trees all died in the cold climate of north China. Calling the orange a “precious tree,” Cao Zhi laments: “I stroke its slim branches and heave a sigh, / Saddened by how difficult it is to transform plants and trees” 拊微條以歎息，哀草木之難化。⁷⁵ The lament sounds faintly comic because of its cosmic proportions, with *hua* implying the moral transformation of the common folk exercised by the Confucian monarch.

In another missive Cao Pi derides two other southern fruits:

The south produces longans and lychees; how can they compare with grapes and rock honey of the Western Kingdoms? They are quite sour, and their taste is inferior even to that of the ordinary date of the Central Kingdom, not to mention Anyi's dates presented to the throne.⁷⁶

南方有龍眼荔枝，寧比西國蒲萄石蜜乎？酢且不如中國凡棗味，莫言安邑御棗也。

An entry cited in *Taiping yulan* partially overlaps with the quotation above and includes an additional remark: “Now We shall bestow the lychees on civil and martial officers; once they eat them, they will know what an insipid flavor this fruit has” 今以荔枝賜將吏，啖之則知

74. *Taiping yulan*, 966.4417. *Yiwen leiju*, 86.1477.

75. Yan Kejun, comp., *Quan sanguo wen*, 14.1129.

76. *Yiwen leiju*, 87.1486.

其味薄矣。⁷⁷ The confidence with which Cao Pi speaks is interesting: on the surface, he is appealing to empirical experience as the ultimate criterion—as soon as one tastes it for oneself, one will find out the truth; yet, the objectivity is undercut by the predetermined result and by the imperious tone that practically demands the predicted result. One imagines that anyone who does not find the lychee fruit tasteless would himself be derided as tasteless and, worse, in the ruler's disgrace.

In one communication Cao Pi extols the pear of Zhending (in modern Hebei): “Zhending's pears presented to the throne are as large as a fist, sweet like honey, and crisp like icicles. They can relieve irritation and slake thirst” 真定御梨大若拳，甘若蜜，脆若凌，可以解煩釋渴。⁷⁸ While he freely praises northern foodstuff, he does not hesitate to pass on to his courtiers the unflattering assessment of Shu food products made by a former Shu general who capitulated to Wei: “According to Magistrate Meng of Xincheng, Shu's piglets, lamb, chickens, and ducks are all bland and flavorless, and that is why the Shu people love to use sugar and honey when they cook” 新城孟太守道蜀豚羊鷄鶩味皆淡，故蜀人作食，喜著飴蜜。⁷⁹ Another communication contrasts the best southern rice unfavorably with the best rice of the north: “To the south of the Yangzi River only Changsha claims to have good rice, but how could it even hold a candle to the non-glutinous rice of Xincheng [in modern He'nan]? When you cook it in the direction of the wind blowing, you can smell its fine aroma from five *li* away” 江表唯長沙名好米，何時比新城粳稻也？上風吹之，五里聞香。⁸⁰

Yet another communication famously sings the praises of the grape:

There are many kinds of precious fruit from the Central Kingdom. Let us now speak of the grape for you. When the vermilion summer is transition-

77. *Taiping yulan*, 971.4438.

78. *Ibid.*, 969.4429.

79. *Ibid.*, 857.3942. The Magistrate of Xincheng was Meng Da 孟達 (d. 228), who capitulated to Wei in early 220. Thanks to this remark, we learn that early medieval Sichuan cuisine was probably rather sweet. It was apparently not only devoid of the hot taste of the chili pepper of the New World, but perhaps not even “numbing” (*ma* 麻), a sensation evoking the effect of oral anesthesia achieved by the native Chinese *huajiao* 花椒 pepper or fagara.

80. *Taiping yulan*, 839.3882. Also in *Yiwen leiju*, 85.1449.

ing into autumn but the remaining heat still lingers on, one gets drunk and wakes up with a hangover, and eats grapes covered with dew. They are sweet but not cloying, crisp but not acerbic, cool but not cold; with an enduring flavor and abundant juice they get rid of irritation and relieve nausea. One can also use grapes to make wine, which is sweeter than ale. One becomes drunk from it easily but recovers just as easily. Just talking about it makes one's mouth water, not to mention actually eating it. How could fruits from other places match it?⁸¹

中國珍果甚多，且復為說蒲萄：當其朱夏涉秋，尚有餘暑，醉酒宿醒，掩露而食，甘而不飴，脆而不酸，冷而不寒，味長汁多，除煩解飴。又釀以為酒，甘于鞠藁，善醉而易醒。道之固以流羨咽唾，況親食之耶？他方之果，寧有匹者？

The most notable thing about the grape text is the distinction made between the “Central Kingdom” and “other places” (*tafang* 他方), although the grape is no more of a native product of the “Central Kingdom” than cane sugar. Cao Pi once gives a summary statement affirming the unquestionable prestige of the “Central Kingdom,” the geographical location of the Wei regime: “For precious objects, one must look to the Central Kingdom” 夫珍玩必中國。⁸²

Tirelessly writing epistles to his courtiers as well as to his opponents, Cao Pi sent them strategically chosen gifts for display and persuasion. Both the gift of food and that of his own writings copied out on expensive silk—a cultural sustenance—were meant to demonstrate the power and legitimacy of the Wei regime, which was repeatedly promoted as the center and the gathering place of resources. Cao Pi himself turns out to be the figure at the center, a man of fine taste.

81. *Taiping yulan*, 972.4440. For another translation, see Knechtges, “Gradually Entering the Realm of Delight,” 238.

82. *Yiwen leiju*, 67.1187.

Gifts, Letters, Exchange

Gift giving stands at the center of social relationships across many cultures. It displays power, strengthens alliances, and creates debt and obligations. Especially at a time of social disintegration, gift-giving practices, along with feasting, constitute material and symbolic exchanges that foster bonds, rebuild hierarchical structures, and reconstitute the community. The exchange of letters in many ways resembles the exchange of gifts. To address a letter to someone implicitly carries with it a request for timely response and reciprocation, and the epistolary conventions create a complex system of rules and constraints that both define and maintain social relations. A letter itself is also a material object. As Antje Richter states in her ground-breaking study of epistolary culture in early medieval China, “The materiality of letters is more pronounced than that of many other genres.”⁸³ Exchanging letters that are about the giving and receiving of a gift constitutes yet another layer of object transference, one that delimits and accentuates the symbolic significance of gift exchange.

In the following pages I will examine a series of texts, mostly letters, that form a commentary on the relationship of reciprocation. Many of the letters were written to accompany gifts or to express thanks for a gift. They demonstrate the complex power dynamics of interaction within the Wei elite community, especially the interaction between lord and vassal.

Give and Take

Cao Zhi’s poem “The August Wei” describes the emperor’s generous bestowal of gifts on his courtiers. A monarch must distribute his wealth to retain social influence. While precious objects, land, and titles are doubtless necessary, a princely gift does not have to always possess a high economic value. Among Cao Pi’s many extant missives to Zhong Yao 鍾繇 (151–230), a prominent Wei minister, two are letters accompanying gifts: in one case, he gave Zhong Yao a bouquet of chrysanthemum flowers; in another case, a “Five-Taste Cauldron.” In each case the letter is crucial for foregrounding the symbolic value of the gift.

83. Richter, *Letters and Epistolary Culture*, 17.

The chrysanthemum letter reads as follows:⁸⁴

Years and months come and go, and suddenly it is the ninth day of the ninth month again. "Nine" is a *yang* number; now that both month and day happen to correspond to it, people cherish the name [of the "Double Ninth"] and believe it contributes to permanence.⁸⁵ For this reason imperial banquets and sumptuous parties are held on this day. This month matches the musical pitch of "No Emergence," which means that none of the various trees and plants comes out and grows.⁸⁶ And yet, the sweet-smelling chrysanthemum alone blooms profusely. If not for holding within the pure harmony of heaven and earth, and embodying the gentle energy of fragrant virtue, how could it be like this? Hence, when Qu Ping lamented his gradual aging, he longed to ingest the fallen blossoms of autumn chrysanthemum.⁸⁷ For sustaining one's body and prolonging one's life, nothing is more precious than this flower. I respectfully present you with a bouquet to help with the method of Pengzu.⁸⁸

歲往月來，忽復九月九日。九為陽數，而日月並應。俗嘉其名，以為宜於長久，故以享宴高會。是月律中無射，言羣木庶草無有射而生。至於芳菊，紛然獨榮。非夫含乾坤之純和，體芬芳之淑氣，孰能如此？故屈平悲冉冉之將老，思食秋菊之落英。輔體延年，莫斯之貴。謹奉一束，以助彭祖之術。

The ingestion of chrysanthemum flowers is supposed to contribute to health and longevity. The gift of chrysanthemum flowers on the "Double Ninth" conveys Cao Pi's good wishes for Zhong Yao. Cao Pi also invests the flowers with symbolic meaning, calling attention to the metaphorical value of the flower as a figure of virtue in "Encountering Sorrow." While Qu Yuan was supposedly lamenting his alienation from an unwise king in "Encountering Sorrow," Cao Pi inserts himself in the position of a wise ruler who knows how to treat his worthy ministers.

84. *Yiwen leiju*, 4.84.

85. That is, nine (*jiu* 九) puns with "permanence" (*jiu* 久).

86. "The pipe of the ninth month is called *wu she*. *She* means emergence. *Wu she* means that at the time the *yang* energy rises up and myriad things are withdrawn and no longer come out" 九月之管名為無射，射者出也，言時陽氣上升，萬物收藏無復出也。 *Jin shu*, 22.679.

87. This refers to a passage from the poem *Li sao* attributed to Qu Yuan (i.e., Qu Ping).

88. Pengzu was famous for his legendary longevity.

The Five-Taste Cauldron is a ritual vessel divided into five segregated sections, with each section reserved for cooking one flavor. After Cao Pi was named heir by Cao Cao, Zhong Yao presented the mold of a Five-Taste Cauldron to Cao Pi, itself a highly symbolic gesture as cooking is a well-known figure of governing in early Chinese political discourse. Cao Pi understood the message perfectly: he subsequently had a cauldron made from the mold, composed an inscription in the four-syllable line and had it carved on the cauldron, and gave it to Zhong Yao with the following letter.⁸⁹

In the past, the Yellow Emperor had three tripods, and the Zhou had nine precious cauldrons; but they each had only one body that was used to produce one flavor. How could they compare to this *fu* vessel that allows five flavors to emit aromas simultaneously? Cooking in a tripod is to feast the heavenly god above and to nourish the sage and worthy. In illuminating virtue and soliciting blessings, nothing could be more marvelous. Therefore, only a Grand Man can produce such a vessel, and only such a vessel is a match for great virtue. Now this marvelous *fu* vessel exceeds even the beauty of a tripod. The Zhou minister in charge of ancestral sacrifices, Kaofu of the state of Song, Kong Kui of Wei, and Wei Ke of Jin: these four courtiers had had their names carved on bells and tripods on account of their eminent achievements and virtue. Your Excellency respectfully serves the Great Wei to augment the sagely transformation of the common folk. Speaking of magnificent virtue, none could compare with you. This is truly what the Chamberlain for Ceremonials should write an inscription for and have it carved on the sacrificial vessels in the ancestral temple. Therefore I have composed this inscription and had it carved on the mouth of the *fu* vessel. I hope it will be able to give adequate praise of your great merit and immortalize it.

昔有黃三鼎，周之九寶，咸以一體使調一味，豈若斯釜，五味時芳？蓋鼎之烹飪，以饗上帝，以養聖賢，昭德祈福，莫斯之美。故非大人，莫之能造；故非斯器，莫宜盛德。今之嘉釜，有逾茲美。夫周之尸臣，宋之考父，衛之孔悝，晉之魏顆，彼四臣者，並以功德勒名鐘鼎。今執事寅亮大魏，以隆聖化，堂堂之德，於斯為盛。誠太常之所宜銘，彝器之所宜勒。故作斯銘，勒之釜口，庶可贊揚洪美，垂之不朽。

89. The inscription is preserved in Zhong Yao's biography in *Sanguo zhi*, whereas the letter is supplied in Pei Songzhi's commentary as a citation from *Wei lüe*. *Sanguo zhi*, 13:394-95.

This letter evokes the classical and literary tradition, enumerating illustrious examples from the past to accentuate the superiority of the present cauldron and of the present minister, both being “vessels” of the state. Much more than rhetorical flourish, the evocation of the cultural past is a discursive strategy to endow the gift with a venerable historical tradition and a dignity not inherent in the material object itself. Without their accompanying letters, the chrysanthemum bouquet and the Five-Taste Cauldron are little more than a spray of flowers and a cooking utensil.

The bestowal of gifts may demonstrate a noble lord’s generosity, but for a retainer it is of paramount importance to keep in mind that his lord is the center to which all human and material resources flow. Once, Cao Pi learned that Zhong Yao had a valuable jade in his possession and desired it. When Zhong heard about this, he immediately gave the jade to Cao Pi, who subsequently wrote a letter to thank Zhong.⁹⁰ The letter, usually dated to 215, is a fascinating demonstration of the contestation of power.

Pi lets you know: A fine jade is compared to the virtue of a superior man; precious jade ritual vessels are eulogized by the *Shi* poet.⁹¹ The jade from Chuiji of Jin, the *yufan* jade of Lu, the Congealed Green of Song, and He’s Jade of Chu:⁹² their prices exceed ten thousand gold pieces; they are more valuable than great cities. They were commended in the past, and their reputation extends into the future. Therefore when the Chuiji jade left

90. This incident and the letter are cited from Yu Huan’s *An Overview of the Wei* 魏略 in Pei Songzhi’s commentary. *Sanguo zhi*, 13.396. The letter is also included in *Wen xuan* with some variants. Xiao Tong, comp., *Wen xuan*, 42.1899–1900. Also see Yan Kejun, comp., *Quan sanguo wen*, 7.1088.

91. Li Shan identifies this line as a reference to *Li ji*: “Confucius said, ‘A noble man’s virtue is compared to jade’” (*Li ji zhushu*, 48.1031); and the second as a reference to a *Shi jing* couplet: “Gentle and dignified, / Like jade ritual vessels” (*Mao shi zhushu*, 17.628). Xiao Tong, comp., *Wen xuan*, 42.1899.

92. “He’s Jade” refers to the jade named after its discoverer, Bian He from Chu. Bian He found an uncut jade and presented it to the King of Chu, who had his jade craftsman look at it; the craftsman declared it to be a worthless piece of rock, and the king subsequently had Bian He’s foot cut off as a punishment for lying to the king. When the king died, Bian He presented the jade to his successor; the same happened, and Bian He lost his other foot. When the third Chu king was enthroned, Bian He held the jade and wept for days and nights until the king sent someone to cut open the stone and find a priceless jade inside. This jade later was owned by the King of Zhao. *Han Feizi*, 4.238.

Jin, the domains of Yu and Guo both fell;⁹³ when He's Jade entered Qin, Xiangru remained steadfast to principle.⁹⁴

丕白：良玉比德君子，珪璋見美詩人。晉之垂棘、魯之璵璠、宋之結綠、楚之和璞，價越萬金，貴重都城，有稱疇昔，流聲將來。是以垂棘出晉，虞虢雙禽；和璧入秦，相如抗節。

Opening with allusions to the Classics, the letter immediately brings out the symbolic meaning of the material object being transferred. The physical properties of a precious jade resemble the virtue of a “superior man” (*junzi*), who, as we have learned, in ancient times was “certain to wear jade.” A “superior man” presumably also exerts rightful ownership over a fine jade because of the affinity between man and object.

Next, Cao Pi enumerates four famous jades of the past, using a verbal structure that echoes a passage from a letter written by Fan Sui 范曄 to King Zhao of Qin 秦昭王 (r. 306–251 BCE). Fan Sui, a humble commoner at the time, is trying to persuade the king to give him an audience. He compares worthy men such as himself to precious jades that have once been overlooked by good craftsmen before being recognized for what they truly are:

I have heard that Zhou has Di'e, Song has Jielü, Liang has Xuanli, and Chu has He's Jade. As for these four treasures, they came from the earth and were all misrecognized by fine craftsmen; but in the end they turned out to be famed objects of the world. This being the case, might not those that were abandoned by sage kings be of profit to the state?⁹⁵

且臣聞周有砥礪，宋有結綠，梁有縣蔡，楚有和朴，此四寶者，土之所生，良工之所失也，而為天下名器。然則聖王之所弃者，獨不足以厚國家乎？

93. The domain of Jin was undertaking a military campaign against the domain of Guo, and offered its Chuiji jade to the domain of Yu as an exchange for giving the Jin army access to Guo. The ruler of Yu agreed against his minister's advice; after conquering Guo, the Jin army on its way back took Yu as well. *Zuo zhuan zhushu*, Xi 2, 12.199.

94. The King of Qin coveted the famous “He's Jade” of Zhao and offered to exchange fifteen cities for it. The Zhao minister Lin Xiangru took the jade to Qin, but knowing the King of Qin was being insincere in his offer of exchange, he secretly sent someone to smuggle the jade out of Qin and back to Zhao. *Shi ji*, 81.2439–41.

95. *Shi ji*, 79.2405.

Anyone familiar with the source text knows that immediately after these remarks Fan Sui continues to elaborate on the motif of “profiting the state” by making a jab at the noble lords who only think of profiting their own households at the expense of the state. He states that those who know how to profit the state do so by taking from the noble lords.

I have heard that those who are good at profiting one's household takes from the state, and that those who are good at profiting the state take from the noble lords. When a wise ruler presides over the world, then the noble lords are unable to monopolize profit. Why is this? It is because they would have taken from the ruler's glory.

臣聞善厚家者取之於國，善厚國者取之於諸侯。天下有明主則諸侯不得擅厚者，何也？為其割榮也。

Ultimately both worthy man and precious jade, which is a figure of worthy man, must be possessed by the ruler; only an unwise monarch would allow his courtiers to appropriate what is rightfully his. This much is made clear by Fan Sui's letter, and it is also the implicit “argument” in Cao Pi's letter to Zhong Yao.

After the enumeration of the four famous jades, Cao Pi singles out two of them to show the disastrous consequence if jade, a highly symbolic ritual object, gets in the wrong hands: the domain of Yu was destroyed because it became greedy for the Chuiji jade, the state treasure of the domain of Jin; in the case of “He's Jade,” the ambitious King of Qin tried to snatch it from the state of Zhao but only wound up being swindled. Indeed, the story associated with the *yufan* jade of Lu conveys a similar lesson. The *yufan* jade was customarily carried by the rulers of Lu, but the powerful minister Ji Pingzi 季平子 (d. 505 BCE) wore the jade when he was acting as regent; after Ji Pingzi died, his retainer Yang Hu 陽虎 wanted to bury the jade with him, but was opposed by Zhongliang Huai 仲梁懷. Zhongliang Huai's rationale was simple: the *yufan* jade belonged to the ruler; now that a new ruler was established, the jade should go to the new ruler instead of following Ji Pingzi, a minister, underground.⁹⁶

Next Cao Pi turns to speak of his own lack, and the desire borne from it, in implicit contrast with Zhong Yao's possession of the jade:

96. *Zuo zhuan zhushu*, Ding 5, 55.958.

I have seen beautiful jade described in a book on jade:⁹⁷ “The white ones are like sliced fat; the black ones are like pure lacquer; the red ones may be compared to the crest of a rooster; the yellow ones equal the color of steamed chestnut.” Though I have heard of such, I have never actually witnessed it.

竊見玉書稱美玉：白如截肪，黑譬純漆，赤擬雞冠，黃侔蒸栗。側聞斯語，未睹厥狀。

It is interesting to observe how desire is fanned by reading, with the textual “seeing” (*jian* 見) and the real-life “witnessing” (*du* 睹) paired off in contrast in this passage. Textual knowledge laid out in sensuous detail precedes actual knowledge, and acts as a powerful inducement to seek out the latter.

Although my merit is not that of a noble man, and I lack the qualities of a *Shi* poet, a high mountain and a great thoroughfare are what I have always admired and looked up to. However, those four treasures are already distant, and I have never heard of a good match for them in Qin and Han. I had been seeking it for many years, but never encountered its true form. My private desire remained unfulfilled, my hunger and thirst were never satisfied.

雖德非君子，義無詩人，高山景行，私所仰慕。然四寶邈焉已遠，秦漢未聞有良比也。求之曠年，不過厥真，私願不果，飢渴未副。

“A high mountain and a great thoroughfare” is another allusion to a *Shi jing* poem, in this case the poem “Carriage Lynchpin” (“Ju xia” 車牽), a poem that is traditionally interpreted as an officer’s expression of joy at the prospect of obtaining a beautiful and virtuous bride for

97. I suspect “a book on jade” (*yu shu* 玉書) should read “Wang’s book” 王書 (*Wang shu*), the characters for *yu* and *wang* resembling each other closely. “Wang’s book” would be a reference to the first-century scholar Wang Yi’s 王逸 work entitled *Zhengbu lun* 正部論, which was lost in the sixth century. *Sui shu*, 34.998. A fragment from Wang’s work quoted in the early Tang encyclopedia *Classified Extracts from Literature* reads: “Someone asks me about the standard for jade. I reply, ‘The red ones are like the crest of a rooster; the yellow ones are like steamed chestnut; the white ones are like pork fat; the black ones are like pure lacquer. This is the standard for jade.’” 或問玉符，曰：赤如雞冠，黃如蒸栗，白如豬肪，黑如純漆，玉之符也。 *Yiwen leiju*, 83.1428.

his king.⁹⁸ In the poem “a high mountain and a great thoroughfare” are figures of virtue. Through such a phrase, Cao Pi once again creates a direct relation between jade and virtue, and reiterates the symbolic meaning of a precious jade through deliberate echoes of the classical tradition. More importantly, he places himself in the position of political authority such as that of a king, and the apparently modest claim, “Although my virtue is not that of a noble man,” produces, by way of negation, the very parallel between Cao Pi himself and a noble man figured as a precious jade.

The *Shi jing* poem speaks of the desire for a beautiful bride; Cao Pi’s passage cited above speaks of his desire for a beautiful jade. Both desires are articulated in the framework of “virtue.” Cao Pi’s phrasing throughout this passage echoes not only the *Shi jing* poem seeking a worthy mate but also the political discourse of seeking worthy advisors. The keyword linking the material, erotic, and political spheres is the phrase “hunger and thirst” (*jike* 飢渴). Noticeably, the “Ju xia” poem contains a couplet: “It was not hunger or thirst I felt; / I longed for an encounter with [her] virtuous words” 匪饑匪渴，德音來括。⁹⁹ As we have already seen, the use of “hunger and thirst” to describe the ruler’s desire for worthy men is common in contemporary political discourse. When Cao Pi’s desire for a beautiful jade is described in the same terms, the jade takes on a symbolic value much higher than its material value. While Fan Sui compares a worthy man to a figurative jade, Cao Pi is comparing a real jade to a worthy man.

There are some further twists and turns in the story. According to historical record, when Cao Pi heard of the jade in Zhong Yao’s possession, “he wanted to have it, but found it awkward to speak of it publicly, so he asked the Marquis of Linzi [i.e., Cao Zhi] to convey his wish to Zhong Yao through someone else.”¹⁰⁰ Here is Cao Pi’s version of the event:

98. *Mao shi zhushu*, 14.484.

99. Ibid. The couplet is ambiguous as to the exact rhetorical function of the phrase “hunger and thirst”: Zheng Xuan explains that even though the officer was hungry and thirsty while fetching the beautiful bride for his king, he did not *feel* hungry or thirsty because he was so keen to bring her back. Alternatively, “hunger and thirst” could also be regarded as a metaphor for the desire for the virtuous and beautiful bride.

100. *Sanguo zhi*, 13.396, cited in Pei Songzhi’s commentary.

Lately, Zong Huishu of Nanyang mentioned that Your Lordship had once come into possession of a fine jade ring.¹⁰¹ I was both surprised and overjoyed upon hearing of this, and I clapped my hands in laughter. I should have written you in person, but I was worried that hearsay might not be accurate, so I asked my younger brother Zijian to convey my sentiments through Xun Zhongmao at leisure. You did not neglect my wish, but satisfied it most generously. When the rider came from Ye and the precious jade ring first arrived, I held the case with both hands, straightened up my back and knelt down on my knees to open it—my five inner organs were shocked and stunned, for as the rope was unwound to its end and the case opened, a brilliance filled my eyes. I, with my ignorant and base demeanors, was able to see a treasure rare to find in the world, without troubling a single emissary, without paying the price of many cities. While I possess the view enjoyed by King Zhao of Qin on Zhang Terrace, I never needed to perform Master Lin's deceptive snatching.

近日南陽宗惠叔稱君侯昔有美玦，聞之驚喜，笑與拊會。當自白書，恐傳言未審，是以令舍弟子建因荀仲茂時從容喻鄙旨，乃不忽遺，厚見周稱。鄴騎既到，寶玦初至，捧匣跪發，五內震駭。繩窮匣開，爛然滿目。猥以蒙鄙之姿，得睹希世之寶，不煩一介之使，不損連城之價，既有秦昭章臺之觀，而無蘭生詭奪之誑。

Cao Pi describes his reception of the jade with much theatricality; yet, in contrast with the sensuous language depicting beautiful jades earlier in the letter, he says nothing about the physical appearance of *this* jade. Instead, the only term he uses is *lanran* 爛然, "brilliant," a phrase depicting light. The rhetorical effect achieved is striking, for it is as if Cao Pi is so dazed by its otherworldly beauty that he cannot find words to describe it.

Cao Pi's modest claim about his "ignorant and base demeanors" is undercut by his self-alignment with King Zhao of Qin, the recipient of Fan Sui's letter. What deserves note is Cao Pi's changing reference to the role played by Lin Xiangru in the recovery of He's Jade from the Qin king: earlier Cao Pi has praised Lin Xiangru for remaining "steadfast to principle" under pressure, but now he portrays him in a negative light ("deceptive snatching"). He is eager to state that he is not like Lin Xiangru in getting the jade from Zhong Yao, but the protest is a little too loud, and indeed the negation of connection creates the very

101. Zong has a variant, Song 宋, in *Yiwen leiju*.

connection he denies. It seems that in describing his own coming into possession of Zhong Yao's jade, Cao Pi is wavering between identifying himself with King Zhao of Qin and with Lin Xiangru. The desire to represent himself as a ruler prompts him to choose the former identification, and yet his reference to Lin Xiangru bespeaks an anxiety about the manner in which he appropriated the jade. Indeed, the claim that he did not have to deploy a single emissary contradicts the fact that he had indeed deployed not one but two emissaries—Cao Zhi and Xun Zhongmao.

With this unsolved rhetorical conflict Cao Pi brings his letter to an end:

Your bountiful gift is rich and magnificent; how dare I not receive it with deference? Now I respectfully present you with a poetic exposition in order to praise its beautiful substance. Pi lets you know.

嘉貺益腴，敢不欽承？謹奉賦一篇，以讚揚麗質。丕白。

As if to forestall any accusation that he has “deceptively snatched” the jade, he stresses that it is a “bountiful gift”—in other words, something freely given—and presents Zhong Yao with a return gift. Only a fragment of Cao Pi's poetic exposition is still extant and deserves to be included here.¹⁰²

有昆山之妙璞	There is a marvelous uncut jade
	from the Kunlun Mountain,
產曾城之峻崖	Produced under the steep cliffs
	of the Tiered Wall. ¹⁰³
漱丹水之炎波	It is washed in the fiery waves
	of the Cinnabar River,
蔭瑤樹之玄枝	And shaded by the black boughs
	of the Jasper Tree. ¹⁰⁴

102. *Yiwen leiju*, 67.1186.

103. Kunlun Mountain is the legendary dwelling place of immortal beings, and the Tiered Wall is its highest peak.

104. Many rivers are known as the Cinnabar River. See *Shanhai jing*, 16, 25, 27, 41, 90. Jasper Tree grows on the Kunlun Mountain. Liu An, comp., *Huainan honglie jijie*, 4.133.

包黃中之純氣	Holding within the pure aura of the Yellow Center, ¹⁰⁵
抱虛靜而無為	It embraces empty quietude and non-action.
應九德之淑懿	Corresponding to the beauty of the Nine Virtues,
體五材之表儀	It embodies the manifestations of the Five Elements. ¹⁰⁶

Praised for its celestial origin, the jade encompasses all four colors of the precious jades of the mortal world: it is washed in the “Cinnabar River” and shaded by the “black boughs” of the Jasper Tree; it holds the aura of the “Yellow Center”; finally, the color white is implied in the Daoist statement about “empty quietude and non-action,” evoking a phrase from *Zhuangzi*: “An empty chamber gives rise to whiteness [i.e., a bright light]” 虛室生白.¹⁰⁷ Each of the four colors characterizes an individual jade in the book Cao Pi has read, and all find expression in one single jade that embodies ultimate perfection.

Zhong Yao loses his jade but acquires a literary representation of his jade as a return gift. He knows, however, that the real gift from Cao Pi is something else. His reply makes his gratitude quite clear.

I once had the honor, of which I was completely unworthy, to serve near the throne, and was given this penannular jade ring. The elders from the Directorate for Imperial Manufactories, who were familiar with objects from old times, commended its pattern and texture, and predicted that it would eventually find its rightful place. However, I thought Your Highness must have far more precious jades in your possession, so I held it in contempt and did not present it to you. It is my fortune that Your Highness should lower yourself to express approval of it, which truly delighted me. In the past, Mr. He was solicitous and thoughtful, loyal and honest; I, however, had to wait for your instruction first [before presenting the jade to you], and for this reason I feel deeply ashamed.

105. The “Yellow Center” is a term referring to the human heart; according to the theory of Five Elements and Five Colors, the heart as the center of the five inner organs corresponds to the element of Earth and possesses the color of yellow.

106. There are various theories of what the Nine Virtues are. The Five Elements are metal, wood, water, fire, and earth.

107. *Zhuangzi jishi*, 2.150.

昔忝近任，并得賜珎。尚方耆老頗識舊物，名其符采，必得處所。以為執事有珍此者，是以鄙之，用未奉貢。幸而紆意，實以悅懌。在昔和氏殷勤忠篤，而繇待命，是懷愧駭。

In the Bian He story the ability to appreciate a beautiful jade and the ability to appreciate a worthy man are connected explicitly, the latter being a defining quality of a wise ruler. Zhong Yao is implicitly acknowledging Cao Pi as a good ruler for his acuity of perception, and he further apologizes deeply for his own failure as a subject, for he should have presented the jade to Cao Pi without prompting.

Zhong Yao remarkably thanks Cao Pi for taking his jade, and perhaps we should not regard this as a mere rhetorical flourish. The jade had been completely obscure in Zhong Yao's possession, and after it was transferred to Cao Pi, it fell into oblivion again. For a brief moment, during its transition from one owner to another, it shone forth with a "brilliance" created by Cao Pi's letter. Zhong Yao's ownership of the jade is paradoxically manifested only through the loss of his possession.

Cao Pi's writings also produce a surplus value for the object, augmenting the jade's worth many times its original price, because it is essentially appraised as priceless. The German sociologist Georg Simmel (1858–1918) highlights the psychological aspect of economic exchange by saying, "Exchange takes place not for the sake of an object previously possessed by another person, but rather for the sake of one's own feeling about an object, a feeling that the other previously did not possess. The meaning of exchange, moreover, is that the sum of values is greater afterward than it was before, and this implies that each party gives the other more than he had himself possessed."¹⁰⁸ This statement aptly describes the exchange between Cao Pi and Zhong Yao.

Ownership and Competition

A wise monarch both collects and knows when to distribute; but hoarding is, as Fan Sui suggests, always dangerous when practiced by subjects at the expense of the ruler. Ownership, which underlies Cao Pi's letter to Zhong Yao, is also at the heart of a pair of letters between Cao Pi and Liu Zhen.

108. Simmel, *On Individuality and Social Forms*, 44.

Emperor Wen [Cao Pi] had once given a *kuoluo* belt to Zhen. Later, the craftsman died, and Cao Pi wanted to borrow the belt from Liu Zhen as a model. He sent a teasing letter to Zhen, saying, "Things become precious because of their owners. Therefore an object in the hands of the lowly is not used by the most revered. Although I take it from you today, don't worry that it will not be returned."¹⁰⁹

文帝嘗賜楨廓落帶，其後師死，欲借取以為像，因書嘲楨云：“夫物因人為貴。故在賤者之手，不御至尊之側。今雖取之，勿嫌其不反也。”

Like any good borrower, Cao Pi assures the lender that the object in question will be returned to the owner, but his reassurance appears in the form of an “insult”: a man of high status will not deign to use the object owned by a lowly person, and so you need not worry that I will appropriate your belt for myself. In other words, even though the belt had once been precious because it had been owned by Cao Pi, as soon as it left Cao Pi's possession, it was no longer precious. It is teasing, but like all teasing it has an edge.

Liu Zhen's response is as follows:

I, Zhen, have heard that the uncut jade of the Jing mountains shines upon the precious seal of the Prime Lord; that the pearl of the Marquis of Sui illuminates the elegance of various gentlemen; that the gold of the southern terrain is lifted to the head of a seductive beauty; and that the tail of a marten or a squirrel is attached to the cap of the courtier. As for these four treasures, they were once hidden under decayed rocks and concealed by filthy mud. Ultimately, their brilliance shines for a thousand years and their splendor is brought forth from their former state, but at the beginning they were not able to find their way to the most revered on their own. What is used by the superiors has been set up by the inferiors; what is employed by the exalted has been tried out by the lowly. Therefore when a grand mansion is just completed, the master craftsman first stands in it; when the fine grain has just ripened, the farmer first tastes it. I only regret that among my accoutrements there is no other marvelous accessory. If there is anything else that is truly remarkable, it would be presented to Your Highness as well.¹¹⁰

109. Cited from Yu Huan's *An Overview of the Canon* 典略 in Pei Songzhi's commentary, *Sanguo zhi*, 21.601.

110. *Ibid.*

楨聞荊山之璞，曜元后之寶；隨侯之珠，燭眾士之好；南垠之金，登窈窕之首；鯀貂之尾，綴侍臣之幘：此四寶者，伏朽石之下，潛汗泥之中，而揚光千載之上，發彩疇昔之外，亦皆未能初自接於至尊也。夫尊者所服，卑者所脩也；貴者所御，賤者所先也。故夏屋初成而大匠先立其下，嘉禾始熟而農夫先嘗其粒。恨楨所帶，無他妙飾，若實殊異，尚可納也。

Liu Zhen begins by enumerating four objects from nature that are prized in the world of men. Coming from lowly places, they cannot find their way to the “most revered” on their own, so they need an intermediary, who by implication must be a lowly person. It is interesting to note that he repeats Fan Sui’s phrasing verbatim by saying, “As for these four treasures” 此四寶者. Calling them “treasures,” he puts a twist on Cao Pi’s statement, “Things *become* precious because of their owners,” for he implies that these objects may come from dirt, but they are inherently precious.

Liu Zhen’s letter does not deny his lowliness but manages to grant dignity to the lowly. The end of the letter directly addresses Cao Pi’s reassurance by saying, in effect: I would not begrudge the belt at all and my only regret is having no other treasure to offer you. The implication is that the only precious accessory in my possession is this belt—a gift from you—and it is all yours. With this Liu Zhen yields to Cao Pi’s ownership over the most valuable of his possessions and, by a symbolic extension, over himself.

With his teasing note, Cao Pi initiates a game of verbal jousting, just as he occasionally engages in a sword fight with an underling.¹¹¹ The prince would never feel satisfaction if the vassal does not appear to be trying his best, as that would take the fun out of the game and fail to prove the prince’s superiority; but he would not be happy either if the vassal does not cede to the prince in the end—it would have been unbecoming if the general who engaged in a sword fight with Cao Pi should beat Cao Pi. Liu Zhen plays his part in the gift-giving game with a self-conscious dexterity that is recognized by the historian as what wins him the fond regard of the young lords of the Cao family. After quoting the letter, Yu Huan states approvingly: “The marvelous artfulness of

111. “Self Account” 自敘 in *Dian lun*. Yan Kejun, comp., *Quan sanguo wen*, 8.1096.

Zhen's discoursing was always like this. For this reason, he was particularly loved by the young lords [i.e., Cao Pi and his brothers]" 楨辭旨巧妙皆如是，由是特為諸公子所親愛。

Another round of verbal jousting takes place between Cao Pi and the hapless Po Qin. In the year 217, Po Qin followed Cao Cao on his military campaign while Cao Pi stayed in Qiao.¹¹² Po Qin wrote Cao Pi a letter about the discovery of a young boy with a fantastic talent for singing.¹¹³

On the eighth day of the first month, the *renyin* day,¹¹⁴ Po Qin, currently filling the position of administrator, deserves the punishment of death for his audacity in writing you. Of late I have sent you quite a few letters, and yet I find it impossible to express my feelings adequately. Recently, the musicians have been widely searching for extraordinary performers. It so happened that Lieutenant Xue Fang's carriage attendant, who is just turning fourteen this year, could draw out his voice in imitation of musical instruments, sharing the same sound as a Tartar flute. Xue Fang reported it and presented him to His Lordship, and indeed it turned out to be true.

We have just given him an interview, and only now do I know that between heaven and earth there are indeed marvelous creatures born of nature. The hidden breath revolved inside his body, and a sad sound was brought forth. It could be loud and clear without becoming shrill; it could be soft and low without dying out. His lilt is more melancholy than an old Tartar flute; his tune is more beautiful than any ordinary music. When he and Wen Hu, the Palace Bandsman, sang in turn or in duet, the voice coming from his throat was always in perfect harmony. Twisting and turning, rising and sinking, it followed the changes in the melody and answered

112. Li Shan dates the letter to the 16th year of the Jian'an era (211) when Cao Cao undertook a western campaign against Han Sui 韓遂 and Ma Chao 馬超, leaving Cao Pi behind in his headquarters at Ye. Since Cao Cao started the campaign in the seventh month, Po Qin's letter could only be written in the first month of the 17th year, but the *renyin* day of the first month of the 17th year is the 9th, not 8th, day. Also, Cao Pi's account states that he was staying behind in Qiao, not in Ye, which also conflicts with the western campaign of 211. Liu Zhijian 劉知漸 dates this letter to Cao Cao's campaign against Sun Quan in the 22nd year (217) of the Jian'an era. Liu Zhijian, *Jian'an wenxue biannianshi*, 54–55. I follow Liu's dating, although dating in this case does not matter too much.

113. Xiao Tong, comp., *Wen xuan*, 40.1821–22.

114. If we follow the 22nd year of the Jian'an era dating, this was February 1, 217.

the beats. From the time when he was first being tested, twenty days had elapsed. During this time Wen Hu wanted to show off his repertoire and best the boy with one song. He exhausted his skill and depleted his ideas, and finally could no longer come up with anything. Yet this boy's lingering voice rose and fell in a measured cadence, whose beauty was inexhaustible; with ease his voice modulated, long drawn out and infinite. His sad song was pure and clear, mixed with grief and longing. He chanted of the far-off campaign against the northern Di; he conveyed the deep homesickness of the Tartar horse. The sorrow penetrated one's inner organs, touching both the obtuse and the astute.

At this time the sun was sinking in the west, and a cool breeze brushed our lapels. The mountain was in the background, and a stream was in front, its water flowing ceaselessly eastward. The seated audience all looked up and sighed; the viewers bent their heads over and listened intently. Eyes welled up, tears fell; everyone present was deeply moved. We all claimed that this boy, after such celebrated performers as Zuo Zhen, Shi Na and Jian Jie, was the most extraordinary creature among those we had witnessed with our own ears and eyes ever since we had any ability for appreciation. Truly we had never heard such singing before.

With deference I think on Your Sagely Self, who has a catholic taste and loves remarkable things. Therefore I would like to, by means of this letter, first report to you the longs and shorts of the matter. In prostration I envision how, upon learning about it, Your Highness will be thoroughly delighted. I hope that I will finish my business soon and return to wait upon your shining visage; and that I will set my eyes upon your courtyard and listen to the boy together. The joy of feasting and reveling will also be boundless.

From Qin, who deserves punishment by death on account of the insolence of this letter.

正月八日壬寅，領主簿繁欽死罪死罪。近屢奉牋，不足自宣。

頃諸鼓吹廣求異妓，時都尉薛訪車子，年始十四，能喉嚨引聲，與笳同音。白上呈見，果如其言。即日故共觀試，乃知天壤之所生，誠有自然之妙物也。潛氣內轉，哀音外激，大不抗越，細不幽散。及與黃門鼓吹溫胡迭唱迭和，喉所發音，無不響應。曲折沈浮，尋變入節。自初呈試中閒二旬，胡欲傲其所不知，尚之以一曲，巧竭意匱。既已不能，而此孺子遺聲抑揚，不可勝窮，優遊轉化，餘弄未盡。暨其清激悲吟，雜以怨慕，詠北狄之遐征，奏胡馬之長思，悽入肝脾，哀感頑豔。

是時日在西隅，涼風拂衽，背山臨蹊，流泉東逝。同坐仰歎，觀者俯

聽，莫不泣淚殞涕，悲懷慷慨。自左驥史納塞姐名倡，能識以來，耳目所見，僉曰詭異，未之聞也。

竊惟聖體兼愛好奇，是以因賤先白委曲，伏想御聞必含餘懽。冀事速訖，旋侍光塵，寓目階庭，與聽斯調。宴喜之樂，蓋亦無量。

欽死罪死罪。

Cao Pi's reply to Po Qin opens with his expression of delight at the discovery of a musical talent, but it soon takes a strange turn by talking about another, better, singer. Competitiveness happens between their judges and critics rather than between the two singers under discussion, and aesthetic appreciation becomes a thin disguise for the power dynamics underlying the exchange of words.¹¹⁵

Upon opening your letter I laugh happily, unable to contain myself: remarkable talent and marvelous performance—how wonderful it is! It just so happens that Sun Shi, a guardsman, has a daughter named Suo. When she was merely nine years old, she dreamed of communing with gods. Upon waking, she started singing in a passionate, moving voice. [Her body is like a soaring immortal's.] Since then it has been six years, and she turns fifteen this year. Recently his lieutenant reported to me in detail what happened.

On the *wuwu* day,¹¹⁶ we were holding a farewell banquet in the North Park. Worthy guests were widely invited, and celebrated entertainers put on a musical performance. After several melodies were played through, our joyful feelings were not yet spent. [The white sun had galloped west; a clear breeze entered the chamber. The gossamer curtain was thereupon opened, and the moonlight was just beginning to shine forth.] Then I ordered my attendants to summon Shi's daughter.

In a short while, she arrived. Her appearance was quite beautiful, with her pale skin and dark hair, gleaming teeth, and scarlet lips. I questioned her in some detail, and she said that she was good at singing and dancing. Thereupon she lifted her sleeves, slowly advanced, raised her eyebrows and cast a glance at the audience. Her fragrant voice was pure and clear, and her

115. The text, which appears in *Quan sanguo wen* 7.1088, is pieced together from fragments preserved in *Yiwen leiju* 43; *Chuxue ji* 19, 25, 30; and *Taiping yulan* 381, 573, 926. I will note textual variants in footnotes.

116. The *wuwu* day, if in the first month of the 22nd year of the Jian'an era, would be February 17, 217.

nimble feet tapped ever so swiftly. All entertainers leapt up and fled [out of embarrassment for their own inferiority]; all guests moved away from their seating mats [to get closer to her].

Then she examined her appearance and refreshed her make-up, switched to a new tune and changed tempo. [The “Clear Jiao” was sounded forth, and the “White Snow” played, to accompany her extraordinary voice as she danced to the fast beat. Thereupon the western wind shook the branches, the spring hawks gave autumn whistling, and floating mist turned into frost.] This might very well be called the sound that harmonizes with bells and chimes, the breath that corresponds to the pitches. It is the sort of music that encompasses both the elegant *Shaohu* and the popular ditties of Zheng and Wei.

In today's world no dancer is more skillful than Jiangshu, and no singer is better than Song La. And yet, how could they lead gods and spirits astray [above], transform the myriad things below, stir up wind and cloud, permeate and overwhelm with no limit like this girl? This is surely not what that carriage attendant boy's imitation of musical instruments and prolonged chanting can keep pace with.

I am experienced with beauty and knowledgeable about music, and she quite fits my standard of selection. I have divined an auspicious day, on which I shall take her into my spacious chamber.

披書歡笑，不能自勝。奇才妙伎，何其善也！

頃守土孫世有女曰瑣，¹¹⁷ 年始九歲，夢與神通，寤而悲吟，哀聲激切。¹¹⁸ [體若飛仙，]¹¹⁹ 涉歷六載，于今十五。近者督將具以狀聞。

是日戊午，祖于北園，¹²⁰ 博延眾賢，遂奏名倡。曲極數彈，歡情未逞。[白日西逝，清風赴闌，羅幃徒祛，玄燭方微。]¹²¹ 乃令從官引內世女，須臾而至。厥狀甚美，素顏玄髮，皓齒丹脣。詳而問之，云善歌舞。于是振袂徐進，¹²² 揚蛾微眺，芳聲清激，逸足橫集。[眾倡騰逝，群賓失席。]¹²³ 然后修容飾妝，¹²⁴ 改曲變度，[激清角，揚白雪，接孤聲，赴危節。

117. The phrase *Shoutu Sun Shi* 守土孫世 reads *shougong Wangsun Shi* 守宮王孫世 (the Palace Guard Wangsun Shi) in *Taiping yulan* 573.2717.

118. *Yiwen leiju* 43.778 and *Taiping yulan* read *jiqie* 激切.

119. This line (體若飛仙) only appears in *Taiping yulan*.

120. *Yiwen leiju* has no 戊午祖于北園. This appears in *Taiping yulan*.

121. These four lines appear in *Chuxue ji* 25.598, under “Curtain” 帷幕.

122. *Zhen mei* 振袂 (*Taiping yulan*) reads *ti mei* 提袂 in *Yiwen leiju*.

123. These two lines appear only in *Taiping yulan*.

124. *Xiu rong* 修容 reads *xun rong* 循容 in *Yiwen leiju*: “examine her appearance.”

于是商風振條，春鷹秋吟，飛霧成霜。]¹²⁵ 斯可謂聲協鐘石，氣應風律，
[網羅韶護，囊括鄭衛者也。]¹²⁶

今之妙舞莫巧于絳樹，清歌莫善于宋臆，¹²⁷ 豈能[上]亂靈祇，¹²⁸ 下
變庶物，漂悠風雲，橫厲無方，若斯也哉？固非車子喉轉長吟所能逮
也。

吾練色知聲，雅應此選，謹卜良日，納之閑房。

Cao Pi's letter corresponds to Po Qin's letter point by point, attempting to outperform it in content and rhetoric. Po Qin's young boy is a great singer, whereas Cao Pi's girl is good at singing *and* dancing, and, on top of that, is a great beauty. Po Qin praises the boy as one of the "marvelous creatures born of nature," whereas Cao Pi claims that the girl's gift, acquired in a dream, is divine and transcends nature. While Po Qin anticipates a feast where he would enjoy a performance by the boy singer together with Cao Pi, Cao Pi depicts a banquet that has already happened, and stages the appearance of the girl singer at the banquet in a theatrical fashion. The most striking difference lies in the characterizations of their musical performance. The boy's forte was to imitate the sound of the "Tartar reed flute," and his music had an exoticism associated with the "barbarian" Di people and "the Tartar horse" of the

125. The lines beginning with 激清角, except for the line "Qin hawks" 春鷹秋吟, appear in *Taiping yulan*. *Taiping yulan* 926.4727 (under "Hawks") includes the following excerpt, notably with a variant, "Qin hawks" 秦鷹, for "spring hawks": 商風振條，秦鷹秋吟，斯可謂聲協鐘石，氣應風律. *Chuxue ji* 30.731 (under "Hawks") cites the same lines as *Taiping yulan* 926, though with "spring hawks" 春鷹 rather than "Qin hawks." The excerpt in *Chuxue ji* is given under the pair of allusions regarding hawks: "Spring Transformation/Autumn Whistling" 春化/秋吟. "Spring transformation" refers to a *Li ji* passage that states hawks turn into cuckoos in springtime (*Li ji zhushu*, 15.298), even though *Chuxue ji* cites under the paired allusions another *Li ji* passage about young hawks learning to strike their prey and apparently mixing it up with the "transformation" passage (*Li ji zhushu*, 16.318). *Qiu yin* 秋吟 is given as *du yin* 度吟 in Yan Kejun's version; it may be either a "typo" or an emendation made by Yan Kejun.

126. These last two lines only appear in *Taiping yulan*.

127. This sentence is cited in *Chuxue ji* 19.455 with *shan* 善 reading *ji* 激 (under "Beautiful Women" 美婦人). The passage from this sentence to the end of the letter appears in *Yiwen leiju*.

128. *Yiwen leiju* has no "above" 上, which seems to have been added by Yan Kejun to make the clause a better parallel with the following clause.

northern frontier region. In contrast, the girl's singing was to the "Clear Jiao" and the "White Snow," which represent the most elegant and noble of tunes played by the legendary zither master Kuang, and which only virtuous rulers were worthy of enjoying. In fact, in his poem "Grand!" discussed earlier in this chapter, Cao Pi claims that his virtue is too meager to listen to the "Clear Jiao."

Ultimately, the girl's music is described as possessing a perfection that encompasses both "Shaohu" (the music of the sage king Tang) and "Zheng and Wei," which traditionally stands for contemporary popular music. Cao Pi was eager to show her as a "comprehensive talent" (*tongcai* 通才), which makes her worthy of a superior man (*junzi*) like Cao Pi himself—in his "Discourse on Literature" chapter he implicitly identifies himself as such, compared to the "Jian'an Masters" who are all only "partial talents" (*piancai* 偏才).

Sun Suo's singing apparently brings about an unseasonal change in weather: an autumn wind begins to blow, mist turns into frost, and even "the spring hawks" give an "autumn whistling," a line that must have seemed so strange to a scribe that a textual variant of graphic similarity, "Qin hawks," appears in lieu of "spring hawks." Since there is no particular reason, as far as we know, for hawks to be from the Qin region, "spring hawks" is more likely. According to the "Monthly Ordinances" chapter of *The Book of Rites*, hawks are transformed into cuckoos in spring but turn back into fierce predators that kill their prey in autumn, all in correspondence to the way the cosmos works. In Cao Pi's description, Sun Suo's singing possesses a cosmological power of transformation that trumps the natural order. Just as Sun Suo's musical gift has a divine origin, her music has a supernatural impact, as opposed to the boy singer whose influence is confined to his human audience.

As if all these highly rhetorical exaggerations were not adequate, Cao Pi adds a final touch. While Po Qin lists several famous performers such as Zuo Dian, Shi Na, and Jian Jie, Cao Pi states in an authoritative tone that the best dancer and singer "in today's world" respectively are Jiangshu and Song La, but they are far inferior to Sun Suo in terms of transformative power, which is of course the proper function of music based on the traditional theory of music and poetry. Cao Pi concludes explicitly that the carriage attendant could never measure up to her. The identification of Sun Suo by her name suddenly takes on a special meaning: in contrast

with the anonymous boy referred to by his occupation, Cao Pi is adding “Sun Suo” to the musical canon.

The last passage of Cao Pi’s letter squarely focuses on the issue of ownership. The boy singer praised by Po Qin is presented to Cao Cao, himself a music connoisseur, and Po Qin anticipates sharing the enjoyment of his singing with Cao Pi. Cao Pi, in contrast, claims his sole possession of Sun Suo by taking her into his harem. There can be no sharing in this case, either aesthetically or sexually.

Li Shan’s commentary cites a passage from Cao Pi’s collection commenting on Po Qin’s letter:

When His Lordship went on the western military campaign, I stayed behind at Qiao while Po Qin followed His Lordship. At the time Xue Fang’s carriage attendant could draw out his voice in imitation of musical instruments, sharing the same sound as a Tartar flute. Qin wrote me a letter and praised him extravagantly. Although [the praise] exceeded reality, his writing was quite beautiful.

上西征，余守譙，繫欽從。時薛訪車子能喉嚨，與笳同音。欽賤還與余，盛歎之。雖過其實，而其文甚麗。¹²⁹

It seems that Cao Pi tries to outdo Po Qin both in the object of writing and in the writing itself. Competition is as much between son and father as between lord and vassal. Cao Pi’s ambition to be a “superior man” is always conveyed not in absolute terms but in relative terms—not to be superior, but to be superior *to*.

A Dark Exchange

The foregoing discussions demonstrate the complicated power dynamics between lord and vassal as manifested in contested ownership of precious objects and objectified people. The fraught relationship of reciprocity between lord and vassal is not something contingent upon the touchiness of any particular ruler; rather, it is a way of life in the context of court culture, and it is also a topic that was of great contemporary interest and had surfaced in various forms at the turn of the third century.

129. Xiao Tong, comp., *Wen xuan*, 40.1821.

At some point between 208, the year when Wang Can joined Cao Cao's staff, and 212, the year when Ruan Yu, one of the Jian'an Masters, died, Cao Zhi, Wang Can, and Ruan Yu each wrote a poem on the same topic, presumably on the same occasion. Wang Can and Cao Zhi's poems are anthologized in *Wen xuan* under the category of "[Poetry] On History" (*yongshi* 詠史), with Wang Can's poem entitled "A Poem on History" ("Yong shi shi" 詠史詩) and Cao Zhi's entitled "A Poem on Three Good Men" ("San liang shi" 三良詩).¹³⁰ Ruan Yu's poem, likely a fragment, is preserved under the "Historical Biography" (*shizhuan* 史傳) category of *Classified Extracts from Literature*.¹³¹ It has no title, although the titles of Wang Can's and Cao Zhi's poems in *Wen xuan* very possibly represent an editorial choice.

The poems are based on a *Shi jing* poem, "Yellow Bird" ("Huang niao" 黃鳥). According to a *Zuo Tradition* account,¹³²

When the Earl of Qin, Renhao, passed away, he used the three sons of the Ziju clan, Yanxi, Zhonghang, and Qianhu, as human sacrifices. They were all good men of Qin. The people of the state mourned them, and chanted "Yellow Bird" on their behalf.

秦伯任好卒，以子車氏之三子奄息仲行鍼虎為殉，皆秦之良也。國人哀之，為之賦黃鳥。

The Earl of Qin was Duke Mu of Qin, who died in 621 BCE. The "little preface" in the Mao commentary makes a similar statement: "The Yellow Bird' is a lament over the three good men. The people of the state criticized Duke Mu's use of human sacrifices for his burial and composed this poem" 黃鳥，哀三良也，國人刺穆公以人從死，而作是詩也。¹³³

The poem begins with a bird roosting upon a jujube tree:

交交黃鳥	<i>Jiaojiao</i> cries the yellow bird; ¹³⁴
止于棘	It stops on the jujube tree.

130. *Ibid.*, 21.985–87.

131. *Yiwen leiju*, 55.992.

132. *Zuo zhuan zhushu*, *Wen* 6, 19.313–14.

133. *Mao shi zhushu*, 6.243.

134. Or, if we adopt Zheng Xuan's reading: "Fluttering its wings is the yellow bird."

Zheng Xuan, from a generation or two before the Jian'an authors, interprets this opening image as a figure of a vassal serving his lord, saying, "The yellow bird stops on a jujube tree to seek rest for itself. If the tree is not restful, then the bird moves away. 'Stirring' means that it is the same way with a vassal serving his lord."¹³⁵ The "correctness" of Zheng Xuan's interpretation is beside the point here; rather, it is worth noting that his interpretation is fully resonant with the metaphorical potential of the bird and the tree such as are featured in Cao Cao's "Short Song." There is, however, another side—the dark side—of the statement: if a lord does treat a retainer with great favor, then the retainer is expected to repay his lord with devotion, in life and in death. The poem continues:

誰從穆公	Who would follow Duke Mu?
子車奄息	It was Ziju Yanxi.
維此奄息	This man Yanxi
百夫之特	Was the finest of a hundred men.
臨其穴	Standing by the pit,
惴惴其慄	Shuddering, he was afraid.
彼蒼者天	That gray one, heaven,
殲我良人	Has destroyed our good man.
如可贖兮	If he could be ransomed,
人百其身	A hundred would go in his place.

In the line *baifu zhi te* 百夫之特, *te* 特 has been glossed as "match" (匹也) in the Mao commentary on another *Shi jing* poem, but here it is also glossed by Zheng Xuan as "the most outstanding among a hundred men" 百夫之中最雄俊.¹³⁶ And yet, in the word *te*, which originally refers to a bull, especially a bull used for sacrifice, the relation between the best of men being identified as a sacrificial victim and the most perfect of bulls being chosen as a sacrificial animal is uncannily borne out.

The "Yellow Bird" has two more stanzas, each of which, like the first stanza, calls out one brother by name and declares that a hundred men are willing to die in his place. "Substitution, the use of a 'stand-in' in place

135. The Mao commentary annotates the opening as a "stirring" or "affective" image (*xing* 興) and Zheng Xuan explains what the commentary means by that.

136. See "Cypress Boat" 柏舟, *Mao shi zhushu*, 3.110.

of an original which then ‘represents’ it,” as Brian K. Smith and Wendy Doniger state, “is at the very heart of sacrifice.”¹³⁷ If a sacrificial victim is the surrogate of the sacrificer, then further substitution for the victim is theoretically possible: a bull for a man, a goat for a bull, and a goat figurine for a goat, and so forth, because it is all a matter of symbolism.

Substitution is, however, not accepted in this case because the brothers are named: each has an individual identity and is given the dignity of an individual human being. The three brothers had to die because there was literally nobody who could stand in for them, and, with their deaths, they saved the three hundred men from death. By expressing the men’s willingness to die for the brothers, however, the poem itself becomes a verbal substitute for the men’s actual sacrifice. In other words, the impossibility for the Qin people to take the place of the three brothers was redeemed by their making of the poem, in which they offered themselves as willing surrogate victims. Ultimately the poem must be understood as an anti-ritual poem, because ritual is and must be repeatable. By identifying the three brothers one by one by their personal names, all unique individuals, the “Yellow Bird” becomes an antithesis of ritual.

The archaic practice of killing and burying retainers with their lord is disturbing to people of a later world. In his glossary of the “Yellow Bird” poem, Zheng Xuan makes a great effort to consistently delete the fact that Duke Mu was responsible for having his best retainers killed and buried with him. While the Mao commentary states in no ambiguous terms, *yi ren cong si* 以人從死 (literally, “used human beings to follow [him] onto death”), Zheng Xuan offers the following gloss: “Follow [him] onto death’ means *killing oneself* to follow [him] into death” 自殺以從死 (my italics).¹³⁸ Sima Qian’s account of the event likewise unmistakably assigns the blame to Duke Mu by expanding on the comment made by a “superior man” (*junzi*) in the *Zuo Tradition*: “When he died, he forsook his folk, taking in his good retainers to follow him unto death” 死而弃民, 收其良臣而從死.¹³⁹ Nevertheless, the “suicide” theory seems to have existed since the Western Han. Kuang Heng 匡衡 says in his memorial to Emperor Yuan 元帝 (r. 48–33 BCE): “Duke Mu of Qin prized being true to one’s word, and so many retainers followed him unto death” 秦穆貴

137. Smith and Doniger, “Sacrifice and Substitution,” 189, 194.

138. *Mao shi zhushu*, 6.243.

139. *Shi ji*, 5.195.

信，而士多從死。¹⁴⁰ While Kuang seems to imply that the many retainers who committed suicide for Duke Mu were honoring a general oath of loyalty to their lord, the great scholar Ying Shao 應劭, the uncle of Ying Yang, in his commentary on this remark tells of an oath sworn by three specific retainers on a specific occasion—that of a feast:

Duke Mu of Qin was drinking with his various ministers. When they were tipsy, the Duke said, “Let us share this joy together in life, and share the sorrow together in death.” Thereupon Yanxi, Zhonghang, and Qianhu made a promise. When the Duke died, they all followed him into death. The “Yellow Bird” poem was composed for them.¹⁴¹

秦穆公與羣臣飲酒酣，公曰：“生共此樂，死共此哀。”於是奄息仲行鍼虎許諾。及公薨，皆從死，黃鳥詩所為作也。

The point here is that a seemingly casual promise made at a moment of tipsiness is kept at all costs, though the occasion of a feast once again demonstrates the adhesive function of feast in forming ties, however deadly they are.

It is interesting that in the early third century the “Yellow Bird” poem took on a special significance for a community intensely concerned with the relationship between lord and vassal. The two readings—human sacrifices or voluntary suicides—are the focus of the poems by Wang Can, Cao Zhi, and Ruan Yu. Ruan Yu’s poem is the most forthright and unambiguous in its narration and judgment.¹⁴²

誤哉秦穆公	How wrong was Duke Mu of Qin—
身沒從三良	When he died, he had the three good men follow him.
忠臣不違命	The loyal ministers did not disobey command; ¹⁴³

140. *Han shu*, 81.3335.

141. *Ibid.*, 81.3335. Yang Xiong also alludes to the story: “Somebody asked about trustworthiness. I replied: ‘it means not eating one’s word.’ ‘Examples?’ I said, ‘Jin’s Xun Xi; Zhao’s Cheng Ying and Gongsun Chujiu; Qin’s ministers who made their way into the mausoleum of Duke Mu’ 或問信。曰：“不食其言。”“請人。”曰：“晉荀息，趙程嬰、公孫杵臼，秦大夫鑿穆公之側。” Yang Xiong, *Fayan yishu*, 10.395.

142. Lu Qinli, comp., *Wei shi*, 3.379; *Yiwen leiju*, 55.992.

143. *Yiwen leiju* reads 達 for 違, and the line would mean: “The loyal ministers did not understand fate.”

- 4 隨驅就死亡 They were driven to go to their deaths.¹⁴⁴
 低頭闚壙戶 They bent their heads
 and pecked into the grave vault,
 仰視日月光 Then they looked up
 at the light of sun and moon.
 誰謂此可處 Who said that one could dwell
 in such a place?¹⁴⁵
- 8 恩義不可忘 But the lord's favor must not be forgotten.
 路人為流涕 People on the roadside wept for them,
 黃鳥鳴高桑 Yellow birds sang on the tall mulberry tree.

The opening line unequivocally criticizes Duke Mu's sacrificing of the brothers, who are, however, too loyal to their lord to disobey his command. Lines 5–6 elaborate on the fourth couplet in “Yellow Bird,” which describes the brothers' fear upon seeing the grave vault. Zheng Xuan tries to reduce the pathos of that couplet by reading the couplet as describing the Qin people's reaction, not the poor sacrificial victims' fear. Ruan Yu, however, restores the full tragic effect of “pity and fear” by contrasting the darkness of the grave vault and the light of the sun and moon, which the brothers would never see again once the vault was closed.

Wang Can's poem presents a much greater degree of emotional ambiguity.¹⁴⁶

- 自古無殉死 From ancient times
 there should be no human sacrifices:
 達人共所知 This is something
 that enlightened people all know.
 秦穆殺三良 Duke Mu of Qin slew the three good men,
 4 惜哉空爾為 How regrettable that he did this for nothing.
 結髮事明君 “Since we bound our hair,
 we served our wise lord;¹⁴⁷
 受恩良不訾 The favor we had received from him
 was truly immeasurable.

144. Lu Qinli has *qu* 軀 (body) for *qu* 驅 (to drive; to force).

145. That is, the grave vault.

146. Xiao Tong, comp., *Wen xuan*, 21.985–86.

147. Binding one's hair indicates becoming an adult.

Ambiguity is carried through to the end: the poet's praise of the three men is undermined by the "sadness" of the "Yellow Bird" poem.

Cao Zhi's poem forms a sharp contrast with Ruan Yu's and Wang Can's. It starts out with a general declaration of the importance of "loyalty and righteousness," and goes on to make an unequivocal statement about the men's voluntary self-sacrifice.¹⁴⁸

- | | |
|----------|--|
| 功名不可為 | "Accomplishments and reputation
were not up to us to establish, |
| 忠義我所安 | We sought peace of mind
in loyalty and righteousness." |
| 秦穆先下世 | Duke Mu of Qin first departed
from this world; |
| 4 三臣皆自殘 | The three subjects all slew themselves. |
| 生時等榮樂 | "In life we had enjoyed
glory and happiness together; |
| 既沒同憂患 | In death we would share sorrow and hardship." |
| 誰言捐軀易 | But who said it was easy to give up one's life? |
| 8 殺身誠獨難 | It was truly difficult to destroy one's body. |
| 攬涕登君墓 | Shedding tears, we climbed
on our lord's grave mound, |
| 臨穴仰天歎 | Facing the vault, we looked up
at heaven and sighed. |
| 長夜何冥冥 | How dark is the endless night! |
| 12 一往不復還 | Once taking our leave, we would never return. |
| 黃鳥為悲鳴 | The yellow birds cried out sadly for us, |
| 哀哉傷肺肝 | Alas! The cries wounded one's innards. |

Written from the viewpoint of a young lord, Cao Zhi's poem, perhaps unsurprisingly, is the one most perfectly in line with the "suicide" theory, with the third couplet echoing Duke Mu's words in Ying Shao's version of the story. The retainers' self-sacrifice restores agency to the retainers, and removes all responsibility from their lord.

If the key to sacrifice is substitution, then a suicidal human sacrifice changes the game: there is no substitution involved because sacrifice and

148. Xiao Tong, comp., *Wen xuan*, 21.986–87.

victim are one and the same. As Smith and Doniger state, “Anything that one sacrifices is a surrogate for the ultimate paradigm underlying all sacrifices, the sacrifice of oneself. The least symbolic of all sacrifices is the suicidal human sacrifice, in which the symbol stands for itself.” And if sacrifice may be defined as “the act of giving up something in order to receive something of greater worth,”¹⁴⁹ then what is that something of greater worth that could possibly be gained by the suicidal human victim? It is honor—the reputation for “keeping one’s word.” More importantly, it is to fulfill one’s obligation in a relationship of exchange. In the “suicide” reading of the three good men story, one sacrifices one’s own life to fulfill the demand.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the formation of community in the early third century as performed through and manifested in writing. This community is not a “literary group,” but a sociopolitical community coming together as much for political goals as for cultural purposes.

While the conventional account of literary history adheres to Cao Pi’s nostalgic construction of the “dead poets society” consisting of the Jian’an Masters, we must look beyond this neatly delineated “literary society” (*wenxue jituan*) and see that the actual community building went far beyond a handful of “writers,” as notable counselors and generals were drawn by a wide range of attractions—office, fief, protection—offered by the Cao household, the de facto royalty of the early third century even before Cao Cao formally assumed the title of King of Wei in 216 or before Cao Pi took the imperial throne in 220. Even the most literarily inclined members of the community were far more than mere “writers/poets/literary attendants” amusing their young lords as well as themselves within a “private” or “leisurely” timeframe. Instead, they were doing important cultural and political work for the Cao Wei powers that were. To be seen as a worthy successor to the Han, the first unified Chinese empire that

149. Smith and Doniger, “Sacrifice and Substitution,” 190–91, 189.

lasted four centuries and dominated all subsequent political and cultural imagination of empire, the Cao Wei court indeed had quite a bit of work to do.

The central relationship in this community is that between vassal and lord. In this chapter we have seen a complicated and nuanced power dynamics instead of the monolithic model of the absolute supremacy of the lord over his vassals. Although in the end the vassals must show deference to their lord, the lord depends on his vassals as much as they on him, and there are always different sources of power that compete and negotiate with one another.¹⁵⁰ As John Adamson notes, it is best to treat court politics not “as a series of responses to monarchical fiats, but as a process in which the carapace of autocracy concealed a diversity of partly complementary, partly competing, ‘foyers of power.’”¹⁵¹ The well-known sibling rivalry between Cao Pi and Cao Zhi, who had for years competed for the right to be heir and for political influence, is just another illustration of the complicated power relations at the center.

The complex relationship between lord and vassal is often figured in a language of desire, particularly in poetry. This language of desire and intimacy is generalized and shared across the board by any two individuals in a close bond, such as husband/wife, brothers, good friends, and vassal/lord. When we read the following two poems side by side, we cannot help noticing their similarity.

秋日多悲懷，感慨以長歎 慘慘時節盡，蘭葉凋復零
終夜不遑寐，斂意於濡翰 喟然長歎息，君期慰我情

150. Cao Cao had sent lavish gifts and a mollifying letter to the eminent Eastern Han nobleman Yang Biao 楊彪 (142–225) after he executed Yang Biao's son Yang Xiu, revealing his sense of the delicate balance between his own political authority and the prestige of an old eminent aristocratic family. For a translation and discussion of the letter, see Tian, “Material and Symbolic Economics,” 137–41. Cao Pi's letter to Po Qin manifests a sense of competition not only with the courtier but also with his own father. Cao Cao's consort, Lady Bian 卞 (159–230), was another subsidiary source of power at the time: her letter and gifts to Yang Biao's wife after Yang Xiu's death show her as an active player at Cao Cao's court; in fact, evidence suggests that she continued to exert an influence in court politics after Cao Cao's death. Cao Pi's edict in 222 reveals the degree to which he had had to contend with his own mother for control: “From now on, the various ministers must stop reporting to the empress dowager” 羣臣不得奏事太后. *Sanguo zhi*, 2.80.

151. Adamson, *The Princely Courts of Europe*, 17.

明鏡曜閨中，清風淒已寒
白露塗前庭，應門重其關
四節相推斥，歲月忽欲殫
壯士遠出征，戎事將獨難
涕泣灑衣裳，能不懷所歡

On autumn days there are
many sad cares,
I am deeply moved
and give a long sigh.
All night long I have
no chance to sleep,
I give vent to my thoughts
with moist brush.
The bright candle glows
in the chamber,
The clear wind is dreary
and cold.
Silvery dew muddies
the front courtyard,
And the palace gate
doubles the bar.¹⁵²
The four seasons press on
in succession,
The year is suddenly
almost over.
The stalwart knight goes
on a far campaign,
I suppose warfare is
uniquely hard.

展轉不能寐，長夜何綿綿
躡履起出戶，仰觀三星連
自恨志不遂，泣涕如涌泉

Gloomily the seasons
draw to an end,
The orchid leaves/blooms
wither and fall.
With a moan, I heave
a long sigh,
I hope that you will
comfort my feelings.
I toss and turn
and cannot sleep,
How the long night
stretches on.
I put on my slippers, rise
and go out the door,
And looking up I see
the Three Stars joined.
I feel distressed that
my aims are not fulfilled,
My tears are like
a gushing spring.

152. These four lines, instead of being a straightforward depiction of the poet's own situation, might point to the poet's imagination of where Cao Pi is. "Guizhong" 閨中 resonates with the *Li sao*: "The inner chamber is remote and far, / and the wise king is not yet aware" 閨中既以遠遠兮，哲王又不寤。Wang Yi's commentary must have been familiar to the third-century elite: "This says that the king dwells in his palace and that his chamber is far and deep" 言君處宮殿之中，其閨深遠。Chuci *buzhu* 1.34. *Yingmen* 應門 refers to palace gate. See Mao commentary: "The King's front gate is called *yingmen*" 王之正門曰應門。Mao *shi zhushu*, 16.549.

Tears sprinkle my
 clothing:
 How can I not yearn
 for the one bringing me joy?

In both poems the year is coming to an end, corresponding and perhaps contributing to human melancholy, and the speaker is unable to sleep (a common theme in this period).¹⁵³ There is plentiful sighing and copious weeping, as well as intense longing for the person who could bring joy or comfort to the speaker. If entrusting one's feelings to a moist brush—i.e., writing—seems like a masculine gesture, then to lament that one's aims (*zhi* 志) go unfulfilled could equally sound more like a manly than a feminine complaint.

The poem on the left is one of Liu Zhen's poems to Cao Pi, known as "To the Leader of Court Gentlemen for Miscellaneous Uses."¹⁵⁴ The poem on the right is by Xu Gan, entitled "Unclassified Poem" ("Za shi" 雜詩) in the 1540 edition of *New Songs of the Jade Terrace*.¹⁵⁵ Being included in *New Songs of the Jade Terrace*, a poetic anthology compiled for female readers, the poem takes on a feminine aura, and many commentators regard Xu Gan's poem as being in a woman's voice.¹⁵⁶ This, however, is not necessarily the case. Like many of the "Nineteen Old Poems," the poem uses a shared language of longing in which there is no gender specificity attached to certain images or metaphors, even though these images or metaphors took on gender specificity in later times. In other words, although some expressions and gestures may *sound* feminine to a modern

153. See Owen's discussion of the "Sleepless at Night" topic in *The Making*, 77–92.

154. Lu Qinli, comp., *Wei shi*, 3.370. For a translation and discussion of the entire series, see Fusheng Wu, "I Rambled and Roamed Together with You," 619–33.

155. Lu Qinli, comp., *Wei shi*, 3.377; Xu Ling, comp., *Yutai xinyong huijiao*, III. It also appears as "Unclassified Poem" in *Expanded Wen xuan* 廣文選 compiled by Liu Jie 劉節 (1476–1555). See Lu Qinli, comp., *Wei shi*, 3.376.

156. Han Geping, annot., *Jian'an qizi*, 352–53; Xu Gan, *Xu Gan ji jiaozhu*, 400–401. The 1633 edition of *Yutai xinyong*, printed by Zhao Jun 趙均 (1591–1640), has this poem along with several others under the title "Chamber Thoughts" 室思. See Xu Ling, comp., *Ming Xiaowan tang fu Song ben Yutai xinyong*, 13. Although *shi* 室—chamber—is a neutral term, it takes a stronger feminine tone when the poems are anthologized in an anthology of poems primarily about romantic love and female life.

reader, those expressions are *not* gender marked, and the perception of femininity is a later, anachronistic one.¹⁵⁷

A generalized language of desire, which sometimes leads modern commentators astray in their choice of a gendered reading, lends itself to the inscription of emotional nuances. I conclude this chapter with a remarkable pair of poems that bring the complexity of the relation between vassal and lord to the fore. It is important to bear in mind that although the poems are without doubt closely associated with each other, we cannot determine their sequence of composition. The intricate verbal correspondence between the pair is a highly original phenomenon, indeed unique, in the early history of classical poetry. Both poems are anthologized in *Wen xuan*, and yet they appear in different parts of the anthology, and there is no indication of editorial awareness of the poems' relation.¹⁵⁸

First we look at Cao Zhi's poem entitled "To Wang Can" ("Zeng Wan Can" 贈王粲), which appears in *Wen xuan* under the section "Presentation and Reply [Poems]" (*zengda* 贈答).¹⁵⁹

端坐苦愁思	Sitting up, suffering from sorrowful thoughts,
攬衣起西遊	I gather up my robe and rise, roaming west.
樹木發春華	Trees send forth spring flowers;
4 清池激長流	The clear pool raises long currents.
中有孤鴛鴦	In the midst there is a lone mandarin duck,
哀鳴求匹儔	Singing sadly, seeking its mate.
我願執此鳥	I hope to get hold of this bird,
8 惜哉無輕舟	What a pity that there is no light boat.
欲歸忘故道	I wish to go home,
	but forget the road by which I came,
願望但懷愁	Looking on in hesitation, I only feel sorrow.

157. This is similar to the case of Southern Dynasties *yuefu* songs: many of the songs could have been sung by a female or male singer, but modern scholars often consider them as "female songs" because they find certain expressions of emotions, especially passionate longing, sadness, and despair, "feminine." See the section "Performing Women: Songs of the South" in Tian, *Beacon Fire*, 358–65.

158. This seems to furnish an effective piece of evidence that the anthology was compiled by a team of editors rather than by a single hand.

159. Xiao Tong, comp., *Wen xuan*, 24.1120.

悲風鳴我側	A sad wind sings beside me,
12 羲和逝不留	Xihe speeds away without lingering. ¹⁶⁰
重陰潤萬物	Layered clouds moisten myriad things,
何懼澤不周	Why fear their moistening grace does not encompass all?
誰令君多念	What makes you so full of concerns?
16 自使懷百憂	You have brought a hundred worries upon yourself. ¹⁶¹

Li Shan identifies the “lone mandarin duck” as a figure for Wang Can. Paired mandarin ducks, rather than a figure of heterosexual romance as in later times, often serve as a common metaphor for brothers or best friends in early classical poetry,¹⁶² so a lone mandarin duck seeking its mate is not a surprising image in a poem about friendship. However, the speaker’s desire to “get hold of this bird” is a little troubling and out of place. In other words, instead of figuring himself as another mandarin duck (and thus a suitable match for the lone bird), this speaker remains stubbornly human, a particularly striking fact if we consider how many poems of this period utter the speaker’s wish to become a bird to fly away with an avian companion or companions.

The speaker has gone on an outing to dispel his worried thoughts, but in the end only feels sorrow. His sorrow seems to be caused by the fact that he can neither advance to hold the bird nor return home, and is caught in a limbo of inaction. Yet, in the last four lines of the poem, he first affirms that the lord’s grace is all-encompassing, with a couplet that reminds us of the opening lines of “Public Banquet” by Wang Can: “The summery heavens send down enriching moisture, / All the plants rise upright, burgeoning” 昊天降豐澤，百卉挺葳蕤； then he turns to address Wang Can directly, urging his friend not to harbor so many concerns and worries. The ending might seem a little abrupt, unless we take a look at Wang Can’s poem, which appears under the title

160. Xihe is the driver of the chariot of the sun. This line means that time is speeding by and it is getting dark.

161. This line also reads 遂使懷百憂: “[What makes you so full of concerns,] hence harboring a hundred worries?” Lu Qinli, comp., *Wei shi*, p. 7.451.

162. For example, see Ji Kang’s poem to his elder brother. Lu Qinli, comp., *Wei shi*, 9.482.

“Unclassified Poem” (“Za shi” 雜詩) in *Wen xuan* under the category of “Unclassified Poems.”¹⁶³

- | | |
|----------|---|
| 日暮遊西園 | At sunset I roam in the western park, |
| 冀寫憂思情 | Hoping to relieve my sorrowful thoughts. ¹⁶⁴ |
| 曲池揚素波 | The winding pool raises white waves, |
| 4 列樹敷丹榮 | Rows of trees unfold cinnabar blossoms. |
| 上有特栖鳥 | Up in the trees there is a bird roosting alone, |
| 懷春向我鳴 | Stirred by springtime, it cries out to me. |
| 褰袞欲從之 | Holding up my robe, I wish to follow it, |
| 8 路險不得征 | But the road is perilous, and I cannot go. |
| 徘徊不能去 | Lingering back and forth, |
| | I cannot bring myself to leave, |
| 佇立望爾形 | Standing for a long time, I gaze at your form. |
| 風飄揚塵起 | A gust of wind rises, blowing dust, |
| 12 白日忽已冥 | The white sun is suddenly darkened. |
| 迴身入空房 | Turning back, I enter my empty chamber, |
| 託夢通精誠 | Communicating my sincerity |
| | by way of a dream. |
| 人欲天不違 | Heaven does not go against human desire, |
| 16 何懼不合並 | Why fear not being united? |

Ironically, Wang Can's poem and Cao Zhi's are “not united” (*bu hebing* 不合並) in *Wen xuan*, and the Tang dynasty commentators—Li Shan or the Five Ministers—did not seem to realize that the two poems belong together. The “union” (*hebing* 合並) of the poems did not occur until much later and remains problematic. Whereas Liu Lü 劉履 (1317–79) and Wu Qi 吳淇 (1658 *jinshi*) both take Wang Can's poem as a reply to Cao Zhi,¹⁶⁵ modern scholars Huang Jie 黃節 (1873–1935) and Han

163. Xiao Tong, comp., *Wen xuan*, 29.1359.

164. This line also reads 寫我憂思情: “to find relief for my worried thoughts.”

165. Cited in Wang Can, *Wang Can jizhu*, 187–88. This is likely because Cao Zhi's poem is entitled “Zeng Wang Can” in *Wen xuan*. However, titles are among the most textually fluid items in the age of manuscript culture; and, even if we assume the poem title is stable, one could nevertheless construct other scenarios about the composition circumstances. For instance, Wang Can could have composed his poem first, a poem that might or might not have been “presented to” Cao Zhi or written with Cao Zhi in mind; upon seeing it, Cao Zhi composed his poem to comfort Wang Can.

Geping 韓格平 take Cao Zhi's poem as a response to Wang Can.¹⁶⁶ In this case, which poem precedes the other is a question unlikely ever to be resolved with certainty, although the sequence does matter to our interpretation—in other words, taking either one as the earlier poem would turn the other into a “response” and thus change how we understand it. One thing is clear: the two poems correspond to each other closely, couplet by couplet. The technique, as Huang Jie points out, recalls *ni*, “imitation.”¹⁶⁷ However, such a line-by-line, couplet-by-couplet imitation/rewriting is rare in the extant early classical poetry; in fact the only early case is Lu Ji's imitations of “Nineteen Old Poems,” which were nevertheless composed at least half a century later.¹⁶⁸ Here we must pose another perhaps unanswerable question: does the repetition of the other poem in the first twelve lines mean that the poet is empathetically speaking in the other poet's voice, or does it mean that the poet feels the same way as his friend and thus writes as he does?

However we take the poems, the bird image is crucial: it is a figurative bird, and the figurative nature of the bird is particularly highlighted when we read the two poems together. In Wang Can's poem, the bird is “roosting alone” and cries out to him, and he reciprocates its feelings by desiring to “follow it”—implying transforming himself into a feathered creature and flying away with it. This is a common desire in Jian'an poetry. Does the bird roosting alone on a flowering tree represent Cao Zhi or some other person? We cannot know. We only know that in Cao Zhi's poem the bird is not on a tree but swims in the pond; it cries out for a mate (not to the speaker); and instead of expressing the common poetic desire to fly away with the bird, the speaker wishes to “get hold of” the bird, with the verb *zhi* 執 having the troubling meanings of “hold in hand,” “arrest,” and “control.”¹⁶⁹ Cao Zhi's poem adds a much complicated dimension

166. Cao Zhi, *Cao Zijian shizhu*, 33–34; Han Geping, annot., *Jian'an qizi*, 256.

167. Cao Zhi, *Cao Zijian shizhu*, 34.

168. Huang Jie claims, “When the Jian'an Masters wrote poems, they often copied/imitated one another, not only in this poem” 建安諸子為詩往往互相摹擬不獨此篇矣. However, there is no other pair of extant poems by the Jian'an poets that shows such a close line-by-line imitation.

169. Huang Jie is so troubled by this verb *zhi* that he gives a convoluted reading of *zhi ci niao* 執此鳥 as somehow connected to the phrase *zhi you* 執友 from *The Book of Rites*, glossed by Zheng Xuan as “a like-minded friend,” and interprets the phrase as “wishing to be a like-minded comrade [with the bird]” 願與為同志也. Cao Zhi, *Cao Zijian shizhu*, 33.

to Wang Can's poem and tantalizingly points to many possible interpretations involving the contemporary political situation, with himself contending with his brother for dominance and for the acquisition of retainers and allies.¹⁷⁰

Wang Can died in 217 when he followed Cao Cao on an expedition against Wu. Later, both of his sons became embroiled in a rebellion plot against the Caos and were executed under Cao Pi's order in the fall of 219. At the time, Cao Cao was away on another campaign. When he heard that Wang Can's sons were among the executed, he reportedly sighed, saying, "If I had been there, I would not have cut off Zhongxuan's family line" 孤若在, 不使仲宣無後.¹⁷¹ It so happens that Liu Yi's brother was also involved in the rebellion plot; Liu Yi, who appears in the same group biography as Wang Can, was supposed to be executed along with his brother according to the law of implication, but Cao Cao gave him a special pardon. This makes one wonder whether Cao Cao had really been unable to wield any influence from afar as he claimed, or whether his sigh of regret was a mere performance.

Certainly the whole story might have been apocryphal, serving to highlight Cao Cao's generosity and Cao Pi's ruthlessness. In any case, the fact remains that the biography of Wang Can in *Records of the Three Kingdoms* concludes with the statement that his family line was cut off (*houjue* 後絕), a sharp contrast with the opening statement about his prestigious ancestry. The old Han elites, when not serving the Cao family's purpose well, were easily disposable, like Kong Rong, Yang Xiu, or Wang Can's sons. Cao Pi's sentimentality about his dead friends never got in the way of politics—and his sentimentality itself, seen in this light, is also politics.

170. Wu Qi, for instance, believes that Cao Zhi's poem expresses his intention to "ensnare the various talents to be his own feathers and wings." Wu Qi, *Liuchao Xuan shi*, 122.

171. Cited in Pei Songzhi's commentary, *Sanguo zhi*, 21.599.

Part Two

THE BRONZE BIRD

CHAPTER THREE

The Southern Perspective: “Fan Writing”

Introduction: The Southern Perspective

Of the three powers—Wei, Shu, and Wu—that divided China for the better part of the third century, Wei has received the most attention in the standard literary historical accounts.

In a typical book of Chinese literary history, little, if anything, is said about the cultural production of Wu and Shu. These accounts are dominated by a linear narrative that is organized by the literary output of the three political eras of the Eastern Han, Wei, and Western Jin—namely Jian’an, Zhengshi 正始 (240–49), and Taikang 太康 (280–89); the narrative is further punctuated by a few stellar clusters, namely the Cao family, the “Seven Masters,” and the “Seven Worthies of the Bamboo Grove,” in particular its two literary luminaries, Ruan Ji and Ji Kang. Yet Shu, though the smallest of the three states and the weakest, was not devoid of cultural, and to a less significant extent, literary activities. And as for Wu, it was a different story altogether: judging from the list of literary collections in the *Sui shu* “Bibliography,” and from records in earlier historical sources, the Wu court boasted an impressive array of scholars and writers.¹

The prevailing literary judgment made by men of letters in the fifth and sixth centuries, however, largely bypassed Wu and Shu and looked to

1. For a detailed examination of the literary productions of Shu and especially Wu and their importance in painting a fuller picture of the cultural dynamics of the Three Kingdoms period, see Tian, “Remaking History.”

the northern state of the Central Plains—the Wei—as representing the orthodox lineage in literature. Since the Southern Dynasties were heirs of the Western Jin, the dynasty that replaced Wei and unified China, their literary judgments were colored by their political views regarding legitimacy and orthodoxy. No poem or poetic exposition from Wu or Shu writers is anthologized in the influential sixth-century anthology *Wen xuan*, despite the fact that quite a large number of literary collections by Wu writers were still extant when *Wen xuan* was being compiled. Such a bias, favoring the Cao Wei at the expense of Shu and Wu, represents the culmination of a long process of canonizing the Jian'an / Cao Wei writers, which, as discussed in chapter 1, began in the early fifth century. The canonization of the Jian'an / Cao Wei community was responsible, to a large degree, for the loss of most of the textual remains from Shu and, in particular, Wu. The textual dearth subsequently obscures modern scholars' view of the state of cultural production in the third century. The extant writings from Wu form only a tiny portion of what once had been a considerable corpus of writing by Wu writers, in commentaries on the Classics, "masters' texts" or book-length works on philosophical, political, and social issues, Wu history, and, last but not least, poetry and poetic exposition, the proper stuff of belletristic literature.

The emphasis on Wei culture and thought in modern scholarship, as J. Michael Farmer has observed, "mirrors and perpetuates traditional biases against southern culture and results in a distorted and incomplete picture of intellectual life in early medieval China."² In many ways we cannot properly assess the cultural and literary production of the Wei without considering Shu and Wu. Cao Pi's urge to represent himself as a man of taste, discussed in the previous chapter, was in no small measure due to the political need to best his rivals. The rulers of these three kingdoms competed with one another for the claim to political legitimacy and cultural supremacy, and constantly stimulated and motivated one another in establishing superiority and distinction in cultural matters. On the most obvious level, the battle of wits was always present during diplomatic missions. Many anecdotes tell of emissaries' eloquence in defending the honor of their home state. For instance, Zhao Zi 趙咨 (fl. early 3rd century), well known for his oratorical skills, gave apt replies

2. Farmer, *The Talent of Shu*, 2–3.

to Cao Pi's pointed questions such as, "What sort of ruler is the King of Wu? Is His Grace well versed in learning? Is Wu attackable?"³ Shu and Wu ministers, including Fei Yi 費禕 (d. 253), Zhuge Ke 諸葛恪 (203–53), and Xue Zong 薛綜 (d. 243), engaged in clever repartee in the form of verse in the four-syllable line.⁴ The Shu scholar Qin Mi 秦宓 (d. 226) famously came up with witty answers to a series of playful but challenging questions, such as, "Pray, does Heaven have a surname?" posed by a Wu diplomat.⁵ Although the representation of such verbal sparring depends on the viewpoint of the author recording it and thus ought to be taken with a grain of salt, it nevertheless illustrates the discursive importance of such representation in the construction of the state's image.

On a more subtle level, Wei, Shu, and Wu all desired to be seen as the heir to the Han legacy. In Shu and Wu, connection with prominent old families of the Han constituted considerable cultural capital and was mentioned as a sort of special distinction in a man's biography.⁶ Wu in particular was in a position to contend with Wei in its cultural undertakings, notably in the areas of history writing and ritual music. Wu was also the state that saw the compilation of many records of exotica from the far south, demonstrating many Wu writers' interest in the regional geography and customs of southern locales, as well as Wu's colonial explorations.

3. *Sanguo zhi*, 47.1123.

4. *Ibid.*, 64.1430, 53.1250.

5. *Ibid.*, 38.976.

6. Xu Jing 許靖 (150s?–222), the cousin of the Eastern Han celebrity Xu Shao 許劭 (150–95) known as an insightful arbiter of talents, received such high honor in Shu that it is said Zhuge Liang, the powerful regent, would bow down to him in greeting. His biography is given pride of place in the *Book of Shu* 蜀書 in *Sanguo zhi*, even though he did not seem to have done much at all in Shu except for "taking delight in talented gentlemen, encouraging and accepting members of the younger generation, and being ever untired of 'pure discussions'" (*Sanguo zhi*, 38.967). Cheng Bing 程秉 (fl. 2nd–3rd century), a Wu scholar of the Classics, had studied with the famous classicist Zheng Xuan and was treated with great respect by the Wu ruler Sun Quan, who made him grand tutor to the crown prince (*Sanguo zhi*, 53.1248). Approval by members of prominent old families of the north is often cited as the demonstration of a man's cultural excellence and worth. For instance, Yu Fan 虞翻 (164–233), a southern native and a classicist, sent a copy of his commentary on the *Classic of Changes* to Kong Rong and received a letter from Kong praising the work. The letter is duly excerpted and recorded in Yu Fan's biography. *Sanguo zhi*, 57.1320.

There is yet another, perhaps more important, way for us to rethink the cultural dynamics of the three kingdoms, namely, the way in which the textually prolific Wu provides an alternative, external perspective on the Wei and Shu. Many Wu writers were engaged in the writing of book-length sociopolitical treatises, in which they made keen observations of contemporary political events and personages. Zhang Yan 張儼 (d. 266), Wu's Chamberlain for Dependences (*dahonglu* 大鴻臚) whose responsibilities included taking charge of diplomatic relations, offers a comparative analysis of the Shu and Wei ministers in his aptly titled *Noted in Silence* (*Mo ji* 默記); it even preserves a memorial to the throne by Zhuge Liang 諸葛亮 (181–234) that is missing from Zhuge Liang's own collection. Most remarkable is an account of the warlord Cao Cao's life and career, known as "The Biography of Cao the Trickster" ("Cao Man zhuan" 曹瞞傳, Trickster supposedly being Cao Cao's childhood moniker), and attributed to an anonymous Wu author.⁷ The account, written with flair, presents a vivid, complex picture of Cao Cao as a man of cunning, ruthlessness, and charisma. Copiously cited in the historian Pei Songzhi's commentary on *Sanguo zhi*, it contains numerous colorful anecdotes that have since become character-defining and widely known in the late imperial literary representation of Cao Cao. Many of the anecdotes are not found in any other source, and the Cao Cao they depict—smart, cool, rakish, theatrical, an informal and unpretentious man who laughed with his guests so heartily that he would bury his face in food, and yet wily, cruel, and terrifying—cannot possibly exist in the much more somber and deferential Wei narratives about their dynasty's founding father.

The external perspective on Wei found its culmination in the brothers Lu Ji and Lu Yun, descendants of a most prestigious southern clan and great-grandsons of Sun Ce, one of Wu's founders and the elder brother of the first Wu emperor, Sun Quan. After Jin conquered Wu in 280, Lu Ji and Lu Yun lived in seclusion at their southern home. It was a full ten years later that they left for the capital Luoyang to enter service in the Jin court. Treated as outsiders there, they were keenly aware of their status as such, even as their literary talent won wide recognition and admira-

7. See a discussion of this work, and a translation of its extant fragments, in Kroll, *Portraits of T'ao T'ao*, 122–26, 271–79.

tion. Both brothers had an intense sense of their southern roots, and yet both were deeply fascinated by the northern culture, especially by the Wei legacy. Of the two brothers, Lu Ji, doubtless the more innovative, exerted a profound influence on Southern Dynasties poetry. Throughout the early medieval period he was rightly regarded as the most important poet after the Jian'an group. Compared to the northern poets Fu Xuan 傅玄 (217–78) or Zhang Hua 張華 (232–300), both also crucial figures in the late third-century literary scene, Lu Ji was unique in bringing his southern identity to bear on northern poetry, because he effected changes to the northern literary tradition in ways that only an outsider could.

This chapter focuses on Lu Ji's perpetuation and transformation of Wei's literary legacy. Such a southern perspective provides a crucial link in Chinese literary history, both in the sense of Lu Ji's elevation of five-syllable-line poetry, a low genre in the early third century (despite being the Caos' favorite form), to a new level of literary sophistication, and in the sense of the brothers' creation of some of the most enduring poetic tropes and narrative motifs. These tropes and motifs constituted an essential frame through which later generations imagined the Jian'an era and the Three Kingdoms story cycle. Lu Ji was a fan of Wei's cultural legacy, whose poetry, as we will see, demonstrates many characteristics of modern fan writings; he also used a feather fan, a southern product, as the figure of a talented southerner going north.

The Fan

Fans commonly used in the north were either square or round, made of bamboo and silk; in contrast, Wu fans had a different shape and texture, as they were often made of bird feathers, such as those of a crane. Wu's regional product—the feather fan—became a fashionable accessory in the northern capital Luoyang after Jin's conquest of Wu, and many northern writers wrote poetic expositions about it as an exotic object from a newly subjugated state. As Fu Xian's 傅咸 (239–94) preface to his "*Fu* on the Feather Fan" ("Yushan fu" 羽扇賦) states,

The Wu folk take the plumes from a bird's wings to stir the air. It is superior to the square and round fans, but no one in the Central Kingdom was interested in it [before]. After the conquest of Wu, however, it suddenly became a prized thing.⁸

吳人截鳥翼而搖風，既勝于方圓二扇，而中國莫有生意。滅吳之後，翕然貴之。

In several poetic expositions on this topic composed by the northern noblemen, we often detect a sense of condescension toward the object from the conquered state of Wu, for instance in Ji Han's 嵇含 (262–306) preface to his piece:

The gentlemen of Wu and Chu often use a fan made of feathers from a crane's wings. Although such a fan comes from the outlying southern borders, it can nevertheless shade one from the sun and dispel heat. In the past, when Qin conquered the domain of Zhao, it brought back Zhao's official attire to [. . .] its courtiers. After the great Jin subjugated Wu, it likewise took Wu's feather fan and put it to use in the upper domain [i.e., the capital].⁹

吳楚之士多執鶴翼以為扇。雖曰出自南鄙，而可以遏陽隔暑。昔秦之兼趙，寫其冕服，以□侍臣。大晉附吳，亦遷其羽扇，御于上國。

Pan Ni's 潘尼 (ca. 250–311) piece contains the following lines: "At first, it demonstrated its usefulness in the barbarian wasteland; / But eventually it manifested its wonder in the upper domain" 始顯用于荒蠻，終表奇于上國.¹⁰ The feather fan, created from a bird, travels like a bird; its ascension through the social hierarchy mimics the bird's soaring flight into the air.

The trajectory of the feather fan outlined by Pan Ni can be easily associated with that of the southern elite who came to serve in the Jin

8. Yan Kejun, comp., *Quan Jin wen*, 51.1752.

9. *Ibid.*, 65.1830. The ellipsis in the bracket indicates a corrupted character in the original text.

10. *Ibid.*, 94.2000. It is simply entitled "*Fu* on the Fan," though it is clearly focused on the feather fan. A contemporary, Zhang Zai 張載 (ca. 250–ca. 310), also wrote a *fu* on the feather fan, and the fragment stops at a place where the author seems to be about to go on and talk about the feather fan's origin. *Ibid.*, 85.1949.

court. In the mid-280s, Hua Tan 華譚 (ca. 250s–324), the descendant of a Wu official family, was nominated as a "Flourishing Talent" (*xiucai* 秀才) and arrived at Luoyang to take the civil service examination. Emperor Wu of the Jin (236–90) designed the examination questions himself. One question stated that after the Jin conquest of Shu and Wu, the Shu people were submissive but the Wu people frequently made trouble. The emperor wondered if this was because the Wu people were frivolous and impetuous; he also asked how Hua Tan proposed to pacify them. Hua Tan acknowledged that the Wu folk were an "agile, brave, and tough" bunch, and one of his suggestions was to "make plans for its gentry so that they may soar into the clouds and get to the heavenly gate," referring to their admission into the court.¹¹

The brothers Lu Ji and Lu Yun were among those who soared to the heavenly gate. Like the feather fan, when they went north to Luoyang in 289 to accept Jin's employment, they received a mixed welcome: there was genuine admiration for their talent, and there were also barely disguised hostility and contempt for "the remnants of a fallen country."¹² Much has been written about the Lu brothers' confrontation with the northern elite, the north/south conflict, and the regional consciousness exemplified in Lu Ji's writings.¹³ These writings shed light on the issue of regional identity in a newly unified empire where many divergent social forces competed and contended with one another. Yet, the emphasis on the cultural tension between the north and south in the third century tends to obscure the fact that the brothers were also intensely fascinated with the northern culture: its history, architecture, and music. While they were regarded as "foreigners" by the northern elite, the north was also a foreign

11. *Jin shu*, 52.1450.

12. Examples of both attitudes can be found in Lu Ji's biography in the *Jin History*. While Zhang Hua 張華 (232–300), an eminent writer and senior statesman, regarded the Lu brothers highly, Wang Ji 王濟 (d. before 297), the imperial son-in-law, treated Lu Ji with arrogance (*Jin shu* 54.1472–73). The same Wang Ji called Hua Tan "the remnant of a fallen country" (*wangguo zhi yu* 亡國之餘) to his face. *Jin shu*, 52.1452. Wang Ji's father Wang Hun 王渾 (223–97), a Jin general who participated in the military campaign against Wu, also addressed the Wu people thus at a drinking party held at the Wu royal palace after the conquest. *Jin shu*, 58.1570.

13. To cite a few important examples: Lin Wenyue, "Pan Yue Lu Ji shi," 19–36; Satō, *Seishin bungaku kenkyū*; Tang Zhangru, "Du Baopuzi," 337–67; Knechtges, "Sweet-peel Orange," 27–79.

country in *their* eyes, and like all foreign countries, both alienating and exotic, it provided endless inspiration and excitement.

Among Lu Ji's many works produced in the north, we find a "*Fu* on the Feather Fan," in which he retaliates against the northern lords' disdain for the southern object and defends its value. It is not difficult to see the feather fan as a figure for the poet himself.¹⁴ As a great admirer of the northern culture, Lu Ji was also a "fan" in another sense, as he soared into the "upper domain" and was captivated by what he saw and heard there. While Lu Ji certainly did have a "southern consciousness," this chapter hopes to call attention to the brothers' enthrallment with the north, with a special focus on Lu Ji's poetic writing of his nuanced fascination with the northern culture and his nostalgia for the Cao Wei dynasty. Although Wei had long been Wu's nemesis, Wu was conquered by Jin, which had also overthrown Wei, and Lu Ji's nostalgia for the past glory of the Wei seems to bespeak a sadness for his own fallen home state. Lu Ji is the first poet who created a romanticized image of the Three Kingdoms and immortalized Bronze Bird Terrace, a key image in the Three Kingdoms imaginary. Indeed, his own literary fame to a large extent was indebted to his serious commitment to Wei's musical and literary legacy.

14. For a translation and discussion of Lu Ji's *fu*, see Knechtges, "Southern Metal," 36–41. A Wu writer, Min Hong 閔鴻 (fl. 240s–280s), also wrote a "*Fu* on the Feather Fan." Yan Kejun, comp., *Quan sanguo wen*, 74.1452. Min Hong had been a Wu official, and after the fall of Wu he refused to go to Luoyang and serve the Jin regime. His *fu* closely relates the feather fan to its origin, the crane, exalted as a noble bird. It is not clear whether Min Hong's piece had been written before Jin's conquest of Wu, or after the conquest in response to the northern writers. In the former case he would have written with prescience, though in a long tradition of *fu* on fans. In the latter case we see an intense local pride and a continuous cultural contestation between north and south, even after the war was over on the battlefield. Min Hong knew the brothers Lu Ji and Lu Yun; Yun as a young boy had met Min Hong and was praised by Min as "either a dragon pony or a phoenix chick." *Jin shu*, 54.1481. For a translation and discussion of Min Hong's poetic exposition, see Tian, "Remaking History," 717–18.

An Account of Luoyang

The southern elite, including the Lu brothers, claimed to have descended from venerable northern ancestors.¹⁵ Far more important than this fantastic lineage, however, was the common cultural heritage they shared with the north, with its locus in the Eastern Zhou and Eastern Han capital, Luoyang.

Few other Chinese cities at the time, perhaps with the only exception of Chang'an, would incite as much wonder, admiration, and melancholy nostalgia as the great metropolis Luoyang, about which the Lu brothers must have read and heard so much long before they saw the physical place. Edward Gibbon (1737–94) reminisced about his first visit to Rome: "At the distance of twenty-five years I can neither forget nor express the strong emotions which agitated my mind as I first approached and entered the eternal City. After a sleepless night I trod with lofty step the ruins of the Forum; each memorable spot where Romulus stood, or Tully spoke, or Caesar fell, was at once present to my eye."¹⁶ Gibbon's remarks nicely summarize a reader's response to the subject of his readings that has finally materialized in front of him.

Regrettably, we do not have any record of the brothers' first impressions upon entering Luoyang. Lu Ji's couplet—"The capital Luoyang has much wind and dust, / My white clothes have turned into black" 京洛多風塵，素衣化為緇—is often quoted to demonstrate his distaste for the world of vanity and power at the center of the Jin empire.¹⁷ However, in a *yuefu* poem entitled "The Gentleman Longs for Someone" ("Junzi yousuosi xing" 君子有所思行), he has the speaker looking out to the hustle and bustle of the great city from the hilltop and feeling a mixture of fascination and unease.¹⁸

命駕登北山 I ordered my carriage
and climbed the northern hills,

15. See, for instance, Lu Yun's "Eulogy for My Forefathers" 祖考頌, in Lu Yun, *Lu Shilong wenji jiaozhu*, 881–85. For a discussion of this claim, see Knechtges, "Sweet-peel Orange," 42–45.

16. Gibbon, *The Autobiographies*, 267.

17. The poem is "Presented to the Wife on Behalf of Gu Yanxian." Lu Qinli, comp., *Jin shi*, 5.682. Gu Yanxian was also a southerner like Lu Ji.

18. Xiao Tong, comp., *Wen xuan*, 28.1302.

- 延佇望城郭 There I stood long, gazing at the metropolis.
 塵里一何盛 How abundant were the dwellings,
 4 街巷紛漠漠 With numerous streets and lanes
 all densely arrayed.
 甲第崇高閭 The great mansions raised their tall gates;
 洞房結阿閣 Recessed chambers intertwined
 in towers with eave-drains all around.
 曲池何湛湛 Deep and limpid were the winding pools,
 8 清川帶華薄 Clear rivers were lined with flowering bushes.
 邃宇列綺窗 Spacious halls had rows
 of latticework windows,
 蘭室接羅幕 Perfumed rooms were strung
 with gauze curtains.
 淑貌色斯升 Fair faces withdrew
 upon the master's changed countenance;
 12 哀音承顏作 Sad music was played,
 following the lord's whims.
 人生誠行邁 Human life is truly like a distant journey,
 容華隨年落 The bloom of a visage falls away
 with passing years.
 善哉膏粱士 How grand are the gentlemen
 dining on fine food:
 16 營生奧且博 Their way of nurturing their lives
 is subtle and profound.
 宴安消靈根 Indulgence in pleasure melts one's soul,
 酖毒不可恪 Such poison must not be held in regard.
 無以肉食資 Do not, with the endowment of a meat-eater,
 20 取笑葵與藿 Become the laughingstock for those
 who live on mallows and bean leaves.

The hill to the north of Luoyang was the famous Bei Mang 北邙, or North Mang, where the noble lords of the Eastern Han, Wei, and Jin dynasties were buried. This viewing point casts an ironic shadow over the scene of opulence and luxury of the city life in the first half of the ballad, and paves the way for the dark warning offered in the second half.

The opening of the above *yuefu* poem echoes two earlier poetic texts.

One text is Liang Hong's 梁鴻 (fl. 1st century) "Song of Five Alases" ("Wuyi zhige" 五噫之歌).¹⁹

陟彼北芒兮，噫！	I climb the North Mang, alas!
顧覽帝京兮，噫！	I turn back to look at the imperial capital, alas!
宮室崔嵬兮，噫！	Tall and majestic are the royal palaces, alas!
人之劬勞兮，噫！	The common folk are suffering, alas!
遼遼未央兮，噫！	On and on, with no end in sight, alas!

The other text is Cao Zhi's "Sending Off Mr. Ying" ("Song Yingshi" 送應氏) No. 1, which also begins by climbing up and looking down, albeit at a devastated Luoyang.²⁰

步登北芒阪	I walked up the slopes of North Mang,
遙望洛陽山	And gazed at the hill of Luoyang afar.
洛陽何寂寞	How desolate Luoyang is!—
宮室盡燒焚	Its palaces have all been burned down.

Lu Ji's echoes of the earlier poems demonstrate his familiarity with the northern literary tradition as well as his innovative approach to the motif of "Luoyang as seen from North Mang."

As much as a city of the living, Lu Ji's Luoyang was a city of words and images drawn from literary works, a resonant physical place where traces of cultural memories shared by southerners and northerners alike were seen everywhere. It was this Luoyang that Lu Ji attempted to immortalize in *An Account of Luoyang* (*Luoyang ji* 洛陽記), a work he authored after he was appointed editorial director of the Imperial Library in the year 298.²¹ It has survived only in fragments, preserved in sources such as

19. Lu Qinli, comp., *Han shi*, 5.166.

20. Lu Qinli, comp., *Wei shi*, 7.454.

21. The dating is based on a statement in *Cefu yuangui* 560.6730: "After Lu Ji became editorial director of the Imperial Library, he compiled *Luoyang ji* in one scroll" 陸機為著作郎，撰洛陽記一卷。Also see Lu Ji's chronology in Lu Ji, *Lu Shibeng wenji*, 1416.

commentaries and encyclopedias.²² Even in such a fragmented form, we can still catch a glimpse of the scope of the original work.

It might have begun with a statement about the origin of the city and its current scale: “The city of Luoyang was designed and created by the Duke of Zhou. It spans ten *li* long from east to west, and thirteen *li* from south to north” 洛陽城，周公所制，東西十里，南北十三里。²³ Subsequently Lu Ji gives an account of the city gates, noting points of interest.²⁴ He describes the two large imperial palace complexes in the city with their many soaring towers and terraces, which used mica in window construction.²⁵ He writes about important cultural landmarks such as the Numinous Terrace (Ling tai 靈臺), which was the astronomical observatory, or the National University (Taixue 太學). He records with loving precision the Stone Classics erected in 175 at the National University: “There are altogether forty-six original steles. In the western row, of the steles on which were carved *Shangshu*, *Zhou yi*, and *Gongyang zhuan*, sixteen are still standing, but twelve have been damaged.”²⁶ Impressed with the broad avenues of Luoyang lined with elms and locust trees, he observes how the avenues were all divided into three lanes; the center lane was used by the imperial procession while all others entered the city on the left lane and departed from the city on the right.²⁷ The width of the avenues almost certainly would have surpassed that of the Wu capital Jianye 建邺 (modern Nanjing), a city of a much smaller scale at this time.²⁸ Lu Ji also makes note of public spaces such as the flourishing markets or the famous Bronze Camel Boulevard, where

22. For a collection of the fragments, see Lu Ji, *Lu Shiheng wenji*, 1287–94; Lu Ji, *Lu Ji ji*, 183–85. Neither collection, however, is complete. For citations in this paper I give early rather than modern sources.

23. *Yiwen leiju*, 63.1133. The modern scholar Shi Weile 史為樂 argues that the size of the city as recorded here shows that Lu Ji has included the surrounding areas of Luoyang rather than just the walled city itself. See Shi Weile, “Lu Ji *Luoyang ji*,” 28–32.

24. See, for instance, the description of the Xuanyang Gate and an ice chamber located there, in *Taiping yulan* (68.452).

25. *Yiwen leiju*, 63.1134.

26. Cited in Li Xian's 李賢 (654–84) commentary to *Hou Han shu*, 60.1990.

27. *Taiping yulan*, 195.1070.

28. Jianye served as the Eastern Jin capital, and its name was changed to Jiankang 建康. Even after it was rebuilt under the Eastern Jin minister Wang Dao 王導 (276–339), it was accused of manifesting poor urban design because its streets were too winding. See Liu Yiqing, *Shishuo xinyu jianshu*, 2.156.

Luoyang's fashionable young men gathered.²⁹ He writes about the city's residential quarters known as "wards" (*li* 里), such as Buguang Ward 步廣里 where the prefectural liaison offices were located.³⁰ His account seems to have extended beyond the city proper to include sites in the vicinity, such as the Songgao 嵩高 Mountain fifty *li* to the southeast of Luoyang.³¹

It is fascinating to see Lu Ji measure the material city against the written city, again testifying to his familiarity with the northern literature:

I always wondered about "We greeted the emperor at the Chengming Lodge," and asked Lord Zhang about it. His Lordship said that courtiers would always go to court meetings through the Chengming Gate when Emperor Ming of the Wei presided at the Jianshi Hall. So the lodge where the officials on night duty stayed over was beside the Chengming Gate.³²

吾常怪謁帝承明廬，問張公，張公云魏明帝在建始殿朝會皆由承明門。然直廬在承明門側。

"We greeted the emperor" is the opening line of Cao Zhi's poem "Presented to Biao, Prince of Baima" ("Zeng Baima wang Biao" 贈白馬王彪).³³ Lord Zhang refers to none other than Zhang Hua, the eminent writer and statesman who acted as the Lu brothers' patron.

An Account of Luoyang might not have been a massive tome,³⁴ but it is the first extant account of Luoyang, written at a time when people were primarily writing geographical accounts of one's native region or of faraway places with a focus on their exotic produce.³⁵ Lu Ji certainly

29. *Taiping yulan*, 191.1054, 158.899.

30. *Ibid.*, 181.1009.

31. Cited in Li Shan's commentary to Xiao Tong, comp., *Wen xuan*, 16.731.

32. *Ibid.*, 21.1016 and 24.1123. The latter citation reads: "Emperor Ming of the Wei constructed the Jianshi Hall" 魏明帝作建始殿. This may be a transcription error, since the Jianshi Hall was already in use during Cao Pi's reign. See Pei Songzhi's commentary to *Sanguo zhi*, 2.76. The Jianshi Hall was in the northern palace complex at Luoyang.

33. Lu Qinli, comp. *Wei shi*, 7.453.

34. It is recorded as consisting of "one scroll" in the *Sui shu* "Bibliography." *Sui shu*, 33.982.

35. *Sui shu*, 33.982–87. One anonymous *Luoyang ji* in four scrolls is recorded in the *Sui shu* "Bibliography" right before Lu Ji's *Luoyang ji*. Although *Sui shu* usually arranges the book titles in chronological order, anonymous works tend to be placed at the beginning

could not claim a native's knowledge of Luoyang. His interest in Luoyang was that of an outsider and a visitor attracted to a city that was at once strange and strangely familiar through his reading. We know Lu Ji had planned to write a poetic exposition on each of the capitals of the former three kingdoms, but he reportedly gave up the idea after Zuo Si 左思 (ca. 250–ca. 305), a “[northern] lout” (*cang fu* 儻父) whom he held in contempt, had completed a set of poetic expositions on the three capitals first, which Lu Ji found remarkable.³⁶ Could *An Account of Luoyang* have been a by-product of the aborted writing plan? Or was it just a loving record of a city that had fascinated Lu Ji, who repeatedly talked about its wonders in an admiring tone in his letters to his brother Lu Yun? In any case, he might not have declared, like the Augustan writer Propertius, “in loyal verse would I seek to set forth these walls,” but he had certainly, as Horace would say, “built a monument more lasting than bronze.” While the bronze camels on the Luoyang thoroughfare are long gone, fragments of the textual city created by Lu Ji have survived, illuminating a southerner's fascination with the northern metropolis. In it, we hear Cicero's words to Varro: “We were sojourners, as it were, in our own city, and wandering about like strangers, your books have conducted us, as it were, home again, so as to enable us to at last recognize who and where we were.”³⁷

of a list of works on the same subject. In this case, however, it is quite possible that the anonymous *Luoyang ji* was the very one authored by an otherwise obscure man named Hua Yanjun 華延儁. His *Luoyang ji* is cited a number of times in commentary and encyclopedia sources, and was probably lost in the Southern Song. Since a fragment mentions Emperor Yuan of the Jin 晉元帝 (r. 317–23) crossing the Yangzi River to the south, Hua Yanjun must have lived during or after the Eastern Jin. This fragment is cited in an anonymous Yuan local gazetteer, *The Record of Hé'nan* 河南志, which scholars speculate is largely based on Song Minqiu's 宋敏求 (1019–79) work of the same title. See Zhang Baojian, “Song Minqiu *Hé'nan zhi*,” 79–82.

36. *Jin shu*, 92.2377. “Cang fu” was used by southerners to refer to northerners in this period.

37. Cicero, *Academica*, 1.7.

Bronze Bird

Another northern city with which the Lu brothers were deeply engaged was the city of Ye. For them, Ye embodied a more recent past, as it had served as Cao Cao's headquarters. Cao Cao, already a legendary figure while alive, was feared and admired by friends and foes alike.³⁸ Both Lu Ji and Lu Yun were Cao Cao's avid admirers.

At about the same time that he wrote *An Account of Luoyang*, Lu Ji, working in the Imperial Library, had an opportunity to go through the archives and chanced upon Cao Cao's last will and testament. Moved by its pathos, Lu Ji composed an elegy on Cao Cao, which, as we know, was anthologized in *Wen xuan*.³⁹ Lu Ji's prose preface to the elegy, especially the part that quotes directly from Cao Cao's will, has become much better known than the elegy itself. The will, which otherwise would have become lost, is indeed one of the most famous pieces in all of Chinese literature.

Framing the preface in a dialogue between himself and a fictional interlocutor, Lu Ji expresses sympathy and regret about the way in which Cao Cao succumbed to sentimentality at the end of a heroic life.

As I observe how he gave his last orders to his heir and offered parental advice to his four sons, I find his plan for managing the country far-reaching, and his instructions for glorifying the family extensive. He said, "My upholding of the law in the army was justified. As for those minor instances of anger and the grave errors I have committed, you should not emulate them." These are the wise remarks of an enlightened man. Holding his young daughter in his arms and pointing to his little son Bao, he said to his four grown-up sons: "I will have to burden you with them now." At this point his tears fell. Ah, how sad!

.....

He also said, "My concubines and entertainers should all be accommodated on Bronze Bird Terrace. A couch of eight feet long enclosed with fine hemp curtains should be set up in the hall on the terrace. Every day, once

38. It was said that during one of Cao Cao's military campaigns, even the enemy generals bowed to him when they saw him on the battlefield, and Han and non-Han soldiers all vied to get a good look at him. See Pei Songzhi's commentary, *Sanguo zhi*, 1.35.

39. Xiao Tong, comp., *Wen xuan*, 60.2594-601.

in the morning and once in the afternoon, dried meat and other kinds of food should be offered to my spirit. On the first day and fifteenth day every month, the entertainers should give a musical performance in front of the curtains. You should all go up Bronze Bird Terrace from time to time and gaze at my tomb on the western mound.”

Then again he said, “The remaining incense should be divided up among my consorts. Since they have nothing else to do, they may learn how to make decorated shoes and sell them. The silk bands that I have obtained in my various offices should all be put away in storage. As for my remaining clothes, you should put them away in a separate storage. If you cannot, then you brothers should divide them among yourselves.”

觀其所以顧命冢嗣，貽謀四子，經國之略既遠，隆家之訓亦弘。又云：“吾在軍中持法是也。至小忿怒，大過失，不當効也。”善乎達人之諫言矣！持姬女而指季豹以示四子曰：“以累汝。”因泣下，傷哉！

.....

又曰：“吾婕妤妓人，皆著銅爵臺。於臺堂上施八尺牀，總帳，朝晡上脯糒之屬。月朝十五，輒向帳作妓。汝等時時登銅爵臺，望吾西陵墓田。”又云：“餘香可分與諸夫人。諸舍中無所為，學作履組賣也。吾歷官所得綬，皆著藏中。吾餘衣裘，可別為一藏。不能者兄弟可共分之。”

Lu Ji comments on every part of Cao Cao's will that touches him, and ends the preface with a statement that “virtuous and talented people” should “discard attachment to external things and dismiss concerns with the inner quarters.” Throughout the preface and the elegy, Lu Ji constantly employs spatial metaphors to convey a poignant contrast between the largeness of a grand life (“How lofty and expansive was his broad mind, / His great enterprise was truly prosperous” 咨宏度之峻邈，壯大業之允昌) and the “narrowness” of death in terms of both the dying man's concern with an intimate interior space (*mi*, “fastidiousness,” also means closed, private, or secretive) and the small physical space of the body's resting place, indicated by “a small wooden coffin” (*ququ zhi mu* 區區之木) and “a tiny piece of earth” (*zui'er zhi tu* 叢爾之土).

In the elegy Lu Ji responds to the past through reading the text of Cao Cao's will, but his reading is animated by a vivid visualization of historical events, not just the dying scene of Cao Cao, but also an imagined scene of the women of Cao Cao's household gazing out to his grave. When Cao Cao states in his will, “You should all go up Bronze Bird Terrace from time to time and gaze at my tomb on the western

mound," he is speaking to his sons, the executors of his will; however, Lu Ji deliberately takes the addressees as Cao Cao's concubines and conjures up a poignant scene of longing and emptiness by imagining the women gazing at Cao Cao's tomb. This imaginary scene would become one of the most famous in classical Chinese literature and engender an entire poetic tradition of its own, which will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

In envisioning the women on the Bronze Bird Terrace, Lu Ji's historical imagination turns spatial, with the terrace as the locus of the foolishness of human desires and the pathos of mortality. He also extends the largeness of Cao Cao's grand life, stressed throughout the preface and the elegy, into the "emptiness" of the soul-curtains and the "hazy distance" of the western mound. Through the mouth of the imaginary interlocutor, Lu Ji uses the figure of space to describe human life: "To live and then die define the territories of a life" 死生者性命之區域. Here death acquires a concrete embodiment in the Bronze Bird Terrace.

The imaginary interlocutor questions the intensity of Lu Ji's emotional response: "We feel grieved when setting eyes on the coffin at a funeral, but when we see plants growing for over a year on the grave, we cease wailing" 臨喪殯而後悲，覩陳根而絕哭. For the interlocutor, the sight of a coffin is an essential stimulus of emotion. Lu Ji, however, demonstrates that for an imaginative reader, a text is more powerful than any actual object:

覽遺籍以慷慨	Reviewing the writing he left behind,
	I feel stirred,
獻茲文而悽傷	And I offer this piece to his soul
	with sorrow.

While Lu Ji responded to the past through reading a text, Lu Yun did so through reading a place. In 302, Lu Yun was appointed to the staff of Sima Ying 司馬穎 (279–306), the Prince of Chengdu 成都. His office took him to Ye, where Sima Ying had been stationed since 299.⁴⁰

40. According to Lu Yun's biography, he became Sima Ying's right commander 右司馬 after the Prince of Qi 齊 was killed in early 303 (*Jin shu*, 54.1484). However, according to Lu Yun's preface to his "Fu on the Year's End" 歲暮賦, the appointment was made in the summer of the second year of the Yongning era, which would have been 302 (Yan Kejun, comp., *Quan Jin wen*, 100.2031).

In contrast with Lu Ji, who examines Cao Cao's will and testament (*yi ling* 遺令), Lu Yun examines Cao Cao's "past deeds" (*yi shi* 遺事) in an architectural structure:

As I review the past deeds of Lord Cao, I feel that only the most thoughtful and talented in the world could be his match. He had had a rather ordinary residence constructed, which, nevertheless, is still standing even after almost a hundred years. The small hall attached to it was indestructible,⁴¹ and had to be taken down with axes. From this, one knows that his officials must have been competent and his people content with their professions.

省曹公遺事，天下多意長才乃當爾。作榑屋向百年，于今正平。夷塘乃不可得壞，便以斧斫之耳。爾定以知吏稱其職、民安其業也。

At Ye, Lu Yun visited the Wei palace complex, especially the three terraces built by Cao Cao: Bronze Bird, Metal Tiger, and Ice Well. Several letters he wrote to Lu Ji attest to his fascination with these sites.

One day, as I was on the inspection tour, I took the opportunity to examine Lord Cao's personal effects. There were cushions, mats, seven sets of quilting for winter and summer, and a headband with "long ears" that looked like the kind of headband we had in Wu. His royal crown and Far Roaming Hat were both there. There was a cosmetics box, which was about seven to eight inches long and over four inches tall, with no shelves or layers inside, just like the kind used by Wu commoners. One could still make out the grease on the hair brush. His comb and toothpick were all there. There were two pieces of yellow cotton he used to wipe clean his eyes; they had some dark smudges, which were tear stains. His hand warmer, bamboo recliner, straw mat, chess board, and book case were also there. There were five large and small reading desks; in a book cart there was a reclining pillow, which he used for reading when lying down. He had a fan like Wu fans; his folding fans were also there. There were five book cases. I assume you know Yan'gao's book case—they look very much like that. His writing brushes

41. *Yi tang* 夷塘 has a variant: 謬 (also written as 謬) 塘 or 謬堂. A variant version of the letter is cited in Xu Kai's 徐鍇 (920–74) notes to the entry on "謬" in *Explanation of Simple Graphs and Analysis of Composite Characters* 說文解字: "People tried to demolish the small hall attached to the building constructed by Lord Cao but could not, so they had to take it down with axes" 曹公所為屋，圻其謬塘不可壞，直以斧斫之而已。Xu Kai, *Shuowen*, 5.47.

were also just like Wu brushes; so was his inkstone. There were five paring knives.⁴² There was a writing brush made of lapis lazuli, which is very rare.⁴³ On the seventh day of the seventh month in the third year of the Jingchu era [July 24, 239], Lady Liu broke it in half. Upon seeing it I was filled with melancholy. All these objects were quite plain.

Now I am sending you several large writing tablets from the Ye palace.⁴⁴ Previously I have told you about the hemp soul-curtains and the place of gazing at Lord Cao's tomb. That was when I was still administrator at Qinghe.⁴⁵

On the terrace the remarkable transformations in architectural design are endless. But I have always wanted to ask Lord Cao: "Suppose the rebels were to manage to go up the terrace, and Your Lordship only used your clever schemes moving back and forth to avoid them; what would Your Lordship do if they set fire to the terrace?" In that case, I am afraid even His Lordship would not be able to stop them.

To the north of Wenchang Palace there is a sky passageway, which is about ten feet away from the palace. The inner chambers are in the eastern section of the Palace. The residence to the east of Wenchang Palace belongs to Prince Chenliu, so I was unable to go in and take a look.⁴⁶

一日案行，并視曹公器物。牀薦席具。有寒夏被七枚，介幘如吳幘。平天冠遠遊冠具在。嚴器方七八寸，高四寸餘，中無鬲，如吳小人嚴具狀，刷膩處尚可識。梳枕剔齒織綆皆在。拭目黃絮二在，有垢黑，目淚所沾污。手衣臥籠挽籠挽蒲棋局書箱亦在。奏案大小五枚。書車又作欹枕，以臥視書。扇如吳扇要扇亦在。書箱五枚。想兄識彥高書箱，甚似之。筆亦如吳筆。硯亦備。書刀五枚。琉璃筆一枝，所希聞。景初三年七月七日，劉婕妤折之。見此期復使人悵然有感處。器物皆素。

今送鄴宮大尺閒數。前已白其總帳及望墓田處。是清河時。臺上諸奇變無方。常欲問曹公：使賊得上臺，而公但以變譎因旋避之，若焚臺當云何？此公似亦不能止。

文昌殿北有關道。去殿丈。內中在東。殿東便屬陳留王，內不可得見也。

42. *Shudao*, literally "book knife," was probably a small knife used to scrape away mistakes when one was writing on bamboo slips.

43. Or it could be made of glass.

44. This sentence (今送鄴宮大尺閒數) is ambiguous. I take 尺閒 to be 尺簡.

45. Lu Yun was at Qinghe (in modern Hebei). This sentence (是清河時) may be textually corrupted.

46. The last Wei emperor, Cao Huan 曹奂 (246–303), was enfeoffed as Prince of Chenliu and resided in the Ye palace complex. *Sanguo zhi*, 4.154.

The first part of the letter, which reads like an inventory, conveys a palpable sense of the aura of Cao Cao's personal effects. All these objects were intimate items of daily life that had been well used by their owner. Lu Yun was clearly struck by the stains on the hair brush and on the cotton pads: they were "traces" (*ji* 跡), not the kind of grand, intangible deeds (*shi ji* 事跡) of a ruler, but physical marks left behind by a historical person made real by his corporeality. Lu Yun examined the objects closely, and by doing so, implicitly obtained direct access to the person of the past without the mediation of text.

Throughout his description of Cao Cao's personal effects, Lu Yun constantly evokes similar objects from Wu as points of comparison, apparently trying to make Lu Ji "see" the objects as well. The appeal to familiarity and modesty (e.g., the cosmetic box looked like those "used by Wu commoners") brings attention to the one object that he claims to be "rare," a writing brush made of lapis lazuli, which was preserved, in its damaged state, in the palace collection. The exact date on which the brush was broken—the seventh day of the seventh month—is a traditional festival celebrating the reunion of the separated heavenly lovers, the Cowherd and the Weaver stars. We do not know how Lu Yun learned of the date and of the identity of the palace lady who broke the brush, but such intimate details point to a story that is tantalizingly withheld and to a past visibly concealed, embodied in a broken writing brush whose function, ironically, is to record and transmit. The fragmented lapis lazuli becomes a physical symbol of a past at once exceedingly close and irreparably fractured, a fact also manifested in the contemporary spatial arrangement of the palace complex: Lu Yun was unable to access the eastern quarters of the Wenchang Palace because they were being used as the residence of the abdicated Wei emperor.

At the time when Lu Yun was writing, Wei had ended merely a few decades earlier, and many members of the Wei royal family provided him with living connections to the past. He befriended an aspiring writer named Cui Junmiao 崔君苗, the son-in-law of Cao Cao's grandson, Cao Zhì 曹志 (d. 288). Cui Junmiao admired Lu Ji's writings so much that, according to Lu Yun, every time he saw a new composition by Lu Ji, he would declare that he wanted to destroy his own inkstone and brush and never write again.⁴⁷ He also engaged in a sort of friendly compe-

47. Yan Kejun, comp., *Quan Jin wen*, 102.2045.

tition with Lu Yun. In the summer of 302, Lu Yun composed a "Fu on Ascending the Terrace" ("Dengtai fu" 登臺賦),⁴⁸ the very topic that Cao Cao himself had taken up and commissioned his sons, Cao Pi and Cao Zhi, to write on when they went up the newly constructed Bronze Bird Terrace in 212.⁴⁹ Lu Yun writes in his letter to Lu Ji:

I went up the city gate the other day and was moved to compose a "Fu on Ascending the Terrace." I racked my brain but still could not finish it. Then Cui Junmiao wrote a piece on the same topic. Now I have more or less brought it to a finish. I could not make it better, even though I was exhausted for days [from writing it]. Nevertheless, I say it is better than the two poetic expositions I sent you earlier. I wonder what you think of it. I hope you can edit it somewhat. Just change a word or two here and there—I do not dare wish for more. I am afraid it contains some southern pronunciations, and hope you can fix it as you see fit.⁵⁰

前登城門，意有懷，作登臺賦，極未能成。而崔君苗作之，聊復成前意，不能令佳，而羸瘁累日。猶云逾前二賦。不審兄平之云何？願小有損益。一字兩字，不敢望多。音楚，願兄便定之。

Later he forwarded Cui Junmiao's piece to Lu Ji:

I am enclosing Junmiao's "Fu on Ascending the Terrace." It is a fine piece. He said he would revise it further and make it even better. I wonder if his revised version could actually surpass this.

今送君苗登臺賦。為佳手筆。云復更定，復勝此。不知能逾之不。

It is interesting to note how the idea of laboring over and revising one's writing is foregrounded in both letters. The fatigue mentioned with regard to Lu Yun's attempt to complete his poetic exposition is evocative of the physical efforts required by the ascension of the terrace or by the construction of the terrace itself. Writing a terrace into being turns out to be no less exhausting than climbing or building a terrace.

48. Ibid., 100.2032–33.

49. *Sanguo zhi*, 19.557. Only two short lines have survived from Cao Cao's "Fu on Ascending the Terrace," but longer fragments from Cao Pi and Cao Zhi's compositions are still extant. See chapter 4 for a detailed discussion.

50. Yan Kejun, comp., *Quan Jin wen*, 102.2043.

Cui Junmiao's *fu* is no longer extant, but Lu Yun's has survived, to which we will return in the next chapter. Here suffice to say that it forms an interesting contrast with Cao Zhi's piece written ninety years earlier, which praises Cao Cao's accomplishments and expresses the wish for his glory and life to last forever. Lu Yun writes in his *fu*: "I am moved by the existence of the old objects, / And feel saddened by the absence of the former inhabitants" 感舊物之咸存兮, 悲昔人之云亡. He ends the *fu* by commending the last Wei emperor for understanding heaven's mandate and abdicating to the house of Jin:

清文昌之離宮兮	Having purified the provisional Palace of Cultural Glory,
虛紫微而為獻	He vacated the Purple Tenuity as an offering, ⁵¹
委普天之光宅兮	Relinquished the grand residence under heaven,
質率土之黎彥	And pledged all the worthy men within the realm.
欽哉皇之承天	With respect and care, our emperor carries out the way of heaven,
集北顧于乃眷	As heaven concentrates its favor of the north in Him alone. ⁵²
誕洪祚之遠期兮	We expect the great dynastic fortunes to endure for ever
則斯年于有萬	And enjoy the longevity of ten thousand years.

The Western Jin collapsed fourteen years later, but Lu Yun would not live to see it, for he and his brother were both executed by the Prince of Chengdu in 303, the year after he wrote the "*Fu* on Ascending the Terrace."

Lu Yun's enthrallment with the north and the northern personages, especially Cao Cao, is palpable in his writings at Ye. The various literary

51. The Purple Tenuity is a constellation of fifteen stars around the Northern Dipper and the Polestar; it represents the imperial palace.

52. This rewrites a line from the *Shijing* poem "August!" 皇矣: "[Heaven] looks to the west with favor" 乃眷西顧. *Mao shi zhushu*, 16.567.

connections with the Cao family, formed in reading and in reality, seem to only have intensified his desire to bridge the gap between the present and the past. Several times Lu Yun took some of the objects left behind by Cao Cao and sent them to Lu Ji as gifts, so that Lu Ji might use them and partake in their aura. On one occasion he sent Lu Ji two cases of "ink coal" from Cao Cao's storage, which was to be used as ink.⁵³ On another occasion he gave Lu Ji a much more intimate item from Cao Cao's belongings: "Lately I again inspected Lord Cao's personal effects, and took one of his tooth-picks. Now I am sending it to you."⁵⁴ These letters reflect on both brothers as avid devotees to Cao Cao. Lu Yun's report about the "hemp soul-curtains" and the "place of gazing at Lord Cao's tomb" might very well have been in response to Lu Ji's elegy.

It seems a universal human foible to, as Cao Pi puts it in his "Lun wen," "cherish what is far away and scorn what is close at hand" (*gui yuan jian jin* 貴遠賤近).⁵⁵ Visiting Rome in 1337, Petrarch lamented: "Who are more ignorant about Roman affairs than the Roman citizens? Sadly do I say that nowhere is Rome less known than in Rome."⁵⁶ Similarly, it takes a southerner to lovingly scrutinize the great northern cities and their famous former inhabitants, and to read and write about them. The native residents of a place, ironically, are turned into foreigners by a foreigner who has, through his reading and writing, come to inhabit the place like home.

"Fan Writing"

One thing that connected Lu Ji and the Cao Wei rulers was Lu Ji's intense interest in the northern court music. Cao Cao was a music connoisseur: he was said to have musicians playing in the background for him constantly, and composed many song lyrics (*yuefu*) and set them to music himself.⁵⁷

53. Yan Kejun, comp., *Quan Jin wen*, 102.2041.

54. *Ibid.*, 102.2045.

55. Yan, comp., *Quan sanguo wen*, 8.1097.

56. Petrarch, *Rerum familiarum libri*, 293.

57. *Sanguo zhi*, 1.54.

All of Cao Cao's extant poems are song lyrics, preserved in *Song shu's* "Monograph on Music" that aims to conserve the court music repertoire. Cao Pi, the founder of the Wei dynasty, and Cao Pi's successor Cao Rui 曹叡 (206–39), or Emperor Ming 明帝 (r. 226–39), were both avid music lovers who actively concerned themselves with the making and performing of the Wei court music, which after necessary adjustments and revisions continued to be performed in the Jin court.⁵⁸ The sort of music with which the Caos were enamored, in contrast with "serious" ritual music, was the more informal kind, known as "harmony tunes" (*xianghe qu* 相和曲) or "clear *shang* music" (*qingshang yue* 清商樂), with songs accompanied by a string orchestra.⁵⁹ Lu Ji's poetry collection contains a large number of poems under *yuefu* titles; he also wrote a series of poems that are imitations (*ni* 擬) of "old poems" (*gushi* 古詩), that is, anonymous poems of uncertain date from the second or early third century. In its early phase, the *yuefu* song had not yet developed its later generic specificities, and the distinction between "old poems" and "*yuefu*" is largely the function of sources—that is, if a poem happens to be preserved in a musical source, then it is known as a *yuefu*, often under the *yuefu* title "The Song [*xing* 行] of X," but the same text may appear elsewhere under the appellation of an "old poem." Together, Lu Ji's "imitations of 'old poems'" and his poems under *yuefu* titles constitute a corpus of texts largely inspired by the northern court music tradition.

It should be mentioned at the outset that there is no internal or external evidence for the dating of these pieces. While some scholars assign the "imitations of 'old poems'" to Lu Ji's Wu period, others prefer

58. Cao Pi and Cao Rui both composed many *yuefu* for court performance. For various court music reforms during Cao Pi and Cao Rui's reigns, see *Song shu*, 19.534–39. For the Western Jin's continuation and reform of Wei court music, see *Jin shu*, 12.676, 679, 684–85, 702–3. Although the songs or at least the song lyrics for state rituals must be revised to fit the needs of a new dynasty, it is not necessarily required for the "lighter" entertainment music.

59. Wang Sengqian 王僧虔 (426–85) wrote: "Today's 'clear *shang* music' has originated from the Bronze Bird Terrace. One cannot but long for the romantic panache of the three Wei emperors" 今之清商實由銅雀，魏氏三祖風流可懷。Cited in Guo Maoqian 郭茂倩 (fl. ca. 10th–11th century), comp., *Yuefu shiji*, 44.638. According to the historian Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019–86), "Wei Taizu [i.e., Cao Cao] constructed the Bronze Bird Terrace at Ye. He composed song lyrics himself and set them to pipes and strings. Later, a 'directorate of the clear *shang* music' was established in charge of it" 魏太祖起銅雀臺於鄴，自作樂府被之管弦，後遂置清商令以掌之。 *Zizhi tongjian*, 134.898.

a post-Wu date; I agree, however, with C. M. Lai that these poems should be simply treated as "undatable."⁶⁰ Because of the special nature of Lu Ji's imitation, which will be discussed below, I do not side with the theory that these "imitations" are to hone his writing skills; nor do I subscribe to the view that the earlier songs are "folk" literature, since there is no credible evidence for such a claim, and none of them would have been passed down to us had they not been transmitted as part of the court music repertoire to begin with. In other words, whatever their "original origin," the earlier songs became part of the "harmony tunes" or "clear *shang* music" performed in a court setting from the Eastern Han through the Western Jin, and for this reason I suspect that Lu Ji most likely had access to those songs *en masse* only after he came to Luoyang.

Lu Ji's "imitations of 'old poems'" are characterized by a restricted sense of *ni*, i.e., the "practice of rewriting of the precedent text line by line in a more elevated register."⁶¹ His *yuefu* poems also have precedents and respond to their precedents in complex ways. Like his "imitations of 'old poems,'" these *yuefu* poems are notable for their rich, ornate diction, which, being more elaborate and rhetorically elevated than that of their precedents, indicates a great degree of self-conscious literary crafting. Although such a desire might have been present in Lu Ji's mind, his poetic practice seems to primarily exemplify a southerner's fascination, appropriation, and, ultimately, "correction" of the northern musical tradition.

In many ways, the theory of fan literature in contemporary cultural and literary studies is surprisingly productive for our thinking about what Lu Ji does. Fan literature, especially fan fiction or fanfic, has been described as works that "generate variations that explicitly announce themselves as variations." The fact that "works enter the archive of other works by quoting them consciously" distinguishes the condition of fan fiction from intertextuality, which is considered by some critics as the condition of all literary works.⁶² Fan fiction represents the interest of the socially subordinate, as "most fanfic authors are women responding to media products that, for the most part, are characterized by an underrepresentation

60. See Lai, "The Craft of Original Imitation," 122–24.

61. Owen, *The Making*, 261.

62. Derecho, "Archontic Literature," 65.

of women.”⁶³ Fan fiction scholars find Gilles Deleuze’s argument about repetition and difference particularly useful in discussing fan literature; according to Deleuze, “repetition” is not mechanical and secondary to the original, but contains within itself “a ‘differential’” that is “disguised and displaced.” Fanfic scholars use Deleuze’s theory to get away from the notion of a hierarchical relation between the original work and its new version that is conventionally denigrated as “derivative work.”⁶⁴

There are, of course, important differences between Lu Ji’s imitation poems and contemporary fan fiction. A major difference is that poetry in the five-syllable line was a low form at the time, and Lu Ji’s efforts to elevate it rhetorically and make it more respectable seem to take the urtexts into an exactly opposite direction of fan literature today, since the purpose of fan writing is *not* to raise the urtexts (or “canon” in fan lingo) to a higher linguistic plane.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, despite the fact that they were produced under very different conditions, Lu Ji’s “imitations of ‘old poems’” and *yuefu* songs inspired by the northern court music exemplify quite a few characteristics of modern fan literature, of which the crucial one is *repeating with a difference*. That is, rather than writing fresh, original material, he chose to rework existing songs and change them; his rewritings elevated the linguistic register of the urtexts and, at a deeper level, offered more politically correct versions to override the urtexts that he feels are no longer appropriate for a unified empire. Though not a woman like the typical fan fiction author, Lu Ji certainly occupied the feminized position of a social subordinate, both as a subject in the Jin court, and as a southerner from a conquered state; yet, by rewriting the northern musical tradition and consciously striving to make it “better,” he attempted to intervene in the dominant culture. Yet one more point of resemblance is a delay in public recognition of the literary and cultural importance of such writings. Fan literature has stayed under the radar of serious literary scholars in English-speaking academia until recently; in Lu Ji’s case, although he himself was commonly considered an eminent writer, his imitation poems and *yuefu* poems inspired by the northern

63. *Ibid.*, 71.

64. *Ibid.*, 73–74.

65. I choose to use “urtext” here fully aware of the connotation of the term as a single, non-fluid “original” text, because Lu Ji by writing an “imitation poem” has in fact produced an urtext, that is, made the earlier poem or song a fixed prior text.

musical repertoire were singled out for special attention only in the early fifth century by high-brow poets such as Xie Lingyun, Xie Huilian 謝惠連 (407–33), and Yan Yanzhi, at a time when poetry in the five-syllable line itself was becoming an increasingly prestigious form. Lu Ji's imitations generated more imitations by these poets; as Derrida says, "the archive is never closed."⁶⁶

Lu Ji's "imitations of 'old poems'" have been discussed by many scholars; in contrast, his *yuefu* poems have received less attention, yet they show greater ingenuity in transforming existing lyrics. I will discuss two examples. The first example is "The Song of Perambulating the East and West Gates" ("Shun dong xi men xing" 順東西門行).⁶⁷ There is no extant earlier *yuefu* poem under exactly the same title. Instead, there are two anonymous earlier *yuefu* poems, respectively called "The Song of West Gate" and "The Song of East Gate." Both anonymous poems are preserved in the *Song shu*.⁶⁸ "The Song of West Gate" reads:

出西門	I went out West Gate, ⁶⁹
步念之	I paced, brooding:
今日不作樂	If I don't make merry today,
當待何時	What moment am I waiting for?
夫為樂	As for making merry—
為樂當及時	To make merry one must seize the moment.

66. Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 68.

67. Lu Qinli, comp., *Han shi*, 9.269. *Shun* here is interchangeable with *xun* 巡, to walk about, to patrol.

68. *Song shu*, 11.617–18, 11.616. There is a "Que dong xi men xing" 卻東西門行 beginning with the words "Wild geese" that is attributed to Cao Cao, but it is preserved only in the much later *Yuefu shiji*, 37.552, comp. Guo Maoqian. A citation from the sixth-century work *Record of Music Past and Present* 古今樂錄 compiled by the monk Zhijiang 智匠, which in turn cites from Wang Sengqian's *Record of Music* 伎錄, states that the "Que dong xi men xing" by Cao Cao beginning with the words "Wild geese" "is not transmitted today" (*jin bu chuan* 今不傳), a claim very different from the phrase "not sung today" (*jin bu ge* 今不歌). The latter, often used in *Record of Music*, indicates that the lyrics were still extant but the music had been lost. *Yuefu shiji* might have a reliable source for this *yuefu*, though it is dubious.

69. Owen's translation with slight modification, *The Making*, 182.

何能坐愁怫鬱
當復待來茲

Why sit in troubled sadness?
Should we wait for some year to come?

飲醇酒
炙肥牛
請呼心所歡
可用解愁憂

Drink pure ale,
Roast the fatty ox,
Call to those your heart enjoys,
Who can release worries and sadness.

人生不滿百
常懷千歲憂
晝短而夜長
何不秉燭遊

Man's life does not last
a full hundred years,
He always has enough cares
for a thousand.
If the daylight is short
and the nights are long,
Best to go roaming with a candle in hand.

自非仙人王子喬
計會壽命難與期
自非仙人王子喬
計會壽命難與期

Since I'm not the immortal
Qiao the Prince,
It's hard to expect such a long lifespan.
Since I'm not the immortal
Qiao the Prince,
It's hard to expect such a long lifespan.

人壽非金石
年命安可期
貪財愛惜費
但為後世嗤

Man's lifespan is not of metal and stone,
How can you expect long-fated years?
If you're greedy for goods
and begrudge spending,
You'll be only mocked by later ages.

A variant *Song shu* version is identical with the above in the first four stanzas but ends with the following fifth stanza:

行去之
如雲除
弊車羸馬為自推

Off you go,
Passing like clouds,
Battered wagon and run-down nag—
push 'em yourself.⁷⁰

Yuefu shiji records the first *Song shu* version, which is supposed to be the performance text used by Jin court musicians; it also records an alternative version, which is believed to represent the "original lyrics" (*benci* 本辭):⁷¹

出西門 步念之 今日不作樂 當待何時	I went out West Gate, I paced, brooding: If I don't make merry today, What moment am I waiting for?
逮為樂 逮為樂 當及時 何能愁怫鬱 當復待來茲	When it comes to making merry, When it comes to making merry, We must seize the moment. Why be in troubled sadness? Should we wait for some year to come?
釀美酒 炙肥牛 請呼心所歡 可用解愁憂	Brew the fine ale, Roast the fatty ox, Call to those your heart enjoys, Who can release worries and sadness.
人生不滿百 常懷千歲憂 晝短苦夜長 何不秉燭遊	Man's life does not last a full hundred years, He always has enough cares for a thousand. If the daylight is short and the nights are long, Best to go roaming with a candle in hand.
遊行去去如雲除 弊車羸馬為自儲	Go roaming, off you go, passing like clouds, Battered wagon and run-down nag, your store.

71. Guo Maoqian, comp., *Yuefu shiji*, 37.549. Owen's translation with modification, *The Making*, 183.

After summarizing the content of “West Gate,” Wu Jing 吳競 (670–749) in his *Summary Explanations of Old Yuefu Topics* (*Yuefu guti yaojie* 樂府古題要解) observes, “There is also a ‘Song of Perambulating the East and West Gates’ in three- and seven-syllable line, which also laments [the passage of] time and treasures the day, very much resembling this [i.e., ‘West Gate’]” 又有順東西門行，為三七言，亦傷時顧陰，有類於此。⁷²

Below is Lu Ji’s version:

出西門	I go out West Gate,
望天庭	I gaze at heaven;
陽谷既虛崦嵫盈	The Sun Valley is empty, the Yanzi Mountain full.
感朝露	I am moved by the morning dew,
悲人生	I am saddened by human life:
逝者若斯安得停	It flows past like this, how can it be stopped?
桑樞戒	I take my lesson from the mulberry door-spindle,
蟋蟀鳴	And the crickets are singing,
我今不樂歲聿征	If I do not enjoy today, the year is marching on.
迨未暮	Before it gets dark,
及時平	While we are still at a time of peace,
置酒高堂宴友生	I set out a banquet in the grand hall to entertain my friends.
激昂笛	Playing the flute, loud and clear;
彈哀箏	Strumming the melancholy harp—
取樂今日盡歡情	We take pleasure today and enjoy it to the full.

72. Cited in Guo Maoqian, comp., *Yuefu shiji*, 37.549. The citation is slightly different in the Mao Jin 毛晉 (1599–1659) edition: “In the *yuefu* of the various poets, there is also a ‘Song of . . .’” 諸家樂府詩又有順東西門行。This variant suggests that there is no anonymous original for this *yuefu* title. See *Lidai shihua xubian*, 30.

A quick comparison of Lu Ji's poem with the anonymous "West Gate" shows the extent to which he deploys literary learning, as it is full of echoes of earlier texts from the *Analects* to Han *fu* and the *Verses of Chu*.⁷³ The third stanza contains two allusions. The first, "mulberry door-spindle," is a reference to *Zhuangzi*: the virtuous Yuan Xian lived in dire poverty, and "used mulberry as his door spindle," but he was happy nevertheless, playing music to amuse himself.⁷⁴ The second allusion is to the *Shi jing* poem "Cricket" ("Xishuai" 蟋蟀), which contains the lines: "The crickets in the hall: / The year is drawing to a close. / If I do not make merry now, / Days and months will keep passing by" 蟋蟀在堂，歲聿其莫，今我不樂，日月其除。⁷⁵ Interestingly, the verb used in the last line, "Days and months will keep passing by," is *chu* 除, which is exactly the same as the one used in the enigmatic phrase *ru yun chu* 如雲除 ("passing like clouds") in the last stanza of the variant version of "West Gate." The faint verbal echo of the ancient *carpe diem* poem is brought out explicitly in Lu Ji's poem.

The fourth stanza does not contain any specific textual reference, but "I set out a banquet in the grand hall to entertain my friends" is a more elegant rewriting of the stanza about drinking pure ale and roasting fatty ox in "West Gate." In contrast with "those your heart enjoys," Lu Ji uses *yousheng*, a phrase that appears in a *Shi jing* poem;⁷⁶ instead of the more corporeal description of food—"fatty ox"—Lu Ji chooses to describe the spatial setting of the party, which is literally a "high" hall.

The literary reference in the last stanza steers this apparently straightforward *carpe diem* poem into an uncertain direction. Zhang Heng's "Fu on the Western Metropolis" ("Xijing fu" 西京賦) satirizes the lavish and sensual indulgences of the Western Han rulers and the nobility: "They take pleasure today: / There is no time to worry about what will happen after us" 取樂今日，遑恤我後。⁷⁷ Does Lu Ji's song imply, by repeating

73. The Sun Valley where the sun rises and the Yanzi Mountain where the sun sets are mythological places that have appeared in various literary sources such as the Han *fu* and the *Chu ci*. Lu Ji also notably alludes to Confucius's remark, "What is gone by flows past just like this [river]." *Lunyu zhushu*, 9.17.

74. From the chapter "Giving Away a Throne" 讓王, in *Zhuangzi jishi*, 9.975.

75. *Mao shi zhushu*, 6.216.

76. "Although I have brothers, they are not as good as my friends" 雖有兄弟，不如友生. *Mao shi zhushu*, 9.322.

77. Yan Kejun, comp., *Quan hou Han wen*, 52.763.

Zhang Heng's phrase verbatim, this "Après moi le déluge" mentality? If so, then the song is no longer a clear and simple call to seize the day, but contains in itself a self-critique that deconstructs its surface message, and casts an ominous shadow over the earlier statement, "while we are still at a time of peace." Such ambiguity is not found in "West Gate," which induces no guilt about the pleasures it promises. The great Eastern Han scholar Cai Yong had dismissed the lyrics of the "clear *shang* music," saying that "their words are not worth collecting and recording" 其詞不足採著.⁷⁸ One of the songs he criticizes is "Going Out West Gate" ("Chu guo ximen" 出郭西門), which, given the fluidity of poem titles in early medieval times, may very well be our "West Gate." Lu Ji, however, transforms "West Gate" into a more literary and high-brow song. One thing that deserves mention is that Lu Ji seems to have followed the variant *Song shu* version, as his poem has five stanzas rather than six, and the more literary image of "mulberry door-spindle" seems to be a transformation of the reference to the speaker's poverty—"battered cart, run-down nag," which only appears in the variant *Song shu* version (or the alternative version in *Yuefu shiji*). The variant *Song shu* version also includes a distinctive three-three-seven syllable line stanza, which is adopted throughout Lu Ji's poem.

Lu Ji seems to be fond of this particular metrical pattern. In the preface to another *yuefu*, "The Soccer Song" ("Juge xing" 鞠歌行), he writes:

According to my investigation, the Han palace complex had a Hanzhang Soccer Field and a Numinous Mushroom Soccer Field. Ma Fang of the Latter Han built his residence right beside a public street,⁷⁹ so connected towers, linked pools, and walled soccer field crowded the roadside. The "Soccer Song" presumably refers to this. In addition, the Prince of Dong'e writes in his poem: "With many riders one after another, they struck the *rang* sticks."⁸⁰ Perhaps this line refers to the soccer game? The form that

78. Cited in Guo Maoqian, comp., *Yuefu shiji*, 44.638.

79. Ma Fang (d. 101) and his brother were known for their lavish lifestyle. They "constructed grand mansions, with towers and pavilions overlooking the avenues going on and on" 大起第觀, 連閣臨道, 彌互街路. *Hou Han shu*, 24.857.

80. The Prince of Dong'e is Cao Zhi. He writes in "Song of the Famous Metropolis" 名都篇: "Continuously we struck the fur-ball and *rang* sticks" 連翮擊鞠壤. Xiao Tong, comp., *Wen xuan*, 27.1290. Lu Ji's quotation may be abbreviated from the five-syllable line, and there may also be some textual corruption, as Lu Ji's quotation makes the game sound more like polo than soccer.

- 上葉摩青雲 Above, its leaves brushed the blue clouds,
 4 下根通黃泉 Below, its roots reached to the Yellow Springs.
 涼秋八九月 In cool autumn, in the eighth or ninth month,
 山客持斧斤 A man of the mountains brought an ax.
 我口何皎皎 My . . . how gleaming bright,
 8 梯落口口口 Hacked away
 根株已斷絕 Root and trunk had been broken apart,
 顛倒巖石間 It fell over among the rocks of the cliff.
 大匠持斧繩 The great craftsman brought ax and saw,
 12 鋸墨齊兩端 With rope and ink he made the two ends even.
 一驅四五里 Once it was carried four or five *li*,
 枝葉自相捐 The branches and leaves were destroyed.
 口口口口口
 16 會為舟船燔 Happened to be [burned] for a boat.⁸³
 身在洛陽宮 My person is in the palace of Luoyang,
 根在豫章山 My roots are on the Camphorwood Mountain.
 多謝枝與葉 Send my regards to my leaves and branches—
 20 何時復相連 When shall we be rejoined again?
 吾生百年口 My life, a hundred years . . .
 自口口口俱 . . . together.
 何意萬人巧 Who would have thought
 that the craft of ten thousand
 24 使我離根株 Would cause me to be separated,
 trunk from root?

The “yuzhang” in the title is a camphor tree, but it is also the name of a Han commandery in the south (in modern Jiangxi). This *yuefu* song has been pointed out as making use of the same thematic material as an exposition in Lu Jia’s 陸賈 (ca. 240–170 BCE) chapter “On Material” (“Zi zhi” 資質), with a tree cut and fashioned as timber (*cai* 材) appearing as “a figure of human ‘talent’ [*cai* 才/材].”⁸⁴ Lu Jia’s exposition stresses that “circulation” (*tong* 通) is essential to both trees and talented people: the common poplar is being used in state ceremonies because it

83. *Fan* 燔 (burn) has a textual variant *pan* 蟠 (coil, twist), which makes better sense: “happened to be bent/twisted for a boat.” Guo Maoqian, comp., *Yuefu shiji*, 34.501.

84. See Owen, *The Making*, 130–33.

grows close to the capital, while the fine camphor wood wastes away in the wilderness. The *yuefu* song, however, describes a poplar growing in the Camphorwood Mountain that laments being cut and destroyed as timber, separated from its native place and from its "branches and leaves."

That a tree growing in the southern mountains is cut down and sent to the capital to be timber (*cai*) would be a resonant theme for Lu Ji, a southern talent (*cai*) relocated to "the palace of Luoyang." In a unified empire, goods and people must both be circulated to gain value and currency, just like the feather fan or the camphor wood. His "Song of Yuzhang" is a remarkable, and subtle, reworking of the theme.⁸⁵

沉舟清川渚	Sailing in a boat by isles on the clear river,
遙望高山陰	I gaze at the shadowy north slopes of the high mountain afar.
川陸殊途軌	River and land present different routes;
4 懿親將遠尋	A loved one is going on a distant quest.
三荊歡同株	The three briar trees once rejoiced in sharing the same trunk; ⁸⁶
四鳥悲異林	The four birds are saddened by flying off into different woods. ⁸⁷
樂會良自古	Since ancient times people have enjoyed gathering together;
8 悼別豈獨今	To lament parting does not begin with this day and age.

85. Lu Qinli, comp. *Jin shi*, 5.657; Guo Maoqian, comp., *Yuefu shiji*, 34.502-3.

86. Three briar trees sharing the same trunk as a figure for three brothers is a common trope. See "Ballad of Shangliutian" 上留田行 in Lu Qinli, comp., *Han shi*, 10.288. Zhou Jingshi's 周景式 (ca. 4th century?) *Biographies of Filial Sons* 孝子傳 (a lost text) records a story about three brothers who wanted to split family property; upon seeing three briar trees sharing the same trunk, they were moved to change their mind. *Yiwen leiju*, 89.1548. Wu Jun's 吳均 (469-520) *Sequel to Qixie's Account* 續齊諧記 records a similar story, but the *jing* tree becomes a *zijing* 紫荊 tree (bauhinia or orchid tree). Wu Jun, *Xu Qixie ji*, in *Han Wei liuchao biji*, 1004.

87. One morning Confucius heard a woman weeping nearby. His disciple Yan Hui remarked that this was the sound of those having to part with one another. He explained that the mother bird of Wan Mountain had made a wailing sound just like that when her four young birds, having fledged, set off in different directions. Confucius sent someone to investigate, and it turned out that Yan Hui was right. Liu Xiang, *Shuo yuan*, 18.647-48.

tree is diffused in the next line into the image of woods (*lin*), and the timber metamorphoses into a bird, a freer, more active agent than a tree. The bird is also able to make sounds (*yin*) that can be heard by those at home, and this is precisely what the speaker promises to his loved ones at the end of the poem: "When the shadow is gone, I will follow up with sound." That is, when he is away, he will send letters.

Jing 景, here translated as [the poet's] shadow, also means "sunlight." The poet plays with light and shadow throughout the poem: in the opening couplet he gazes at the shadowy slopes of a high mountain (*gaoshan yin* 高山陰); at the middle point of the poem, the sun speeds by "with no still shadows" (*wu tingyin* 無停陰); two lines later, it is approaching twilight (*mujing* 暮景); in the last couplet the sunlight and the poet's shadow cast by the sun are gone, and in the darkness where sight fails, the poet turns to the sound of words, which in a self-referential twist points to this poem itself. The shift from light to dark mimics the course of the sun, of time, and of human life; it also mirrors the poet's relocation from the south to the north, for the south, symbolized by "vermilion brightness" (*zhuming* 朱明), is the land of the sun and summer, and the north is considered a country of cold winter governed by the God of Dark Mystery (*xuanming* 玄冥).⁹⁰

As the poet himself is "approaching twilight" both in temporal and spatial terms, his heart is heavy with ambivalence:

蜀為復以茲	Why is it then that with time passing so fast,
曾是懷苦心	I should cling to misery and sadness?
遠節嬰物淺	With far-reaching aspiration,
	my entanglement with external
	things is shallow;
近情能不深	Yet I cannot help it
	if my immediate sentiments run deep.

In the first couplet, we hear the echo of the familiar rhetorical question in the *carpe diem* songs of the north: "Human life is short, why be sad

90. See, for instance, *Huainanzi*: "The south is of the fire element, its god is the Fiery God, whose assistant is Vermilion Brightness" 南方火也, 其帝炎帝, 其佐朱明. Liu An, comp., *Huainan honglie jijie*, 3.88. "Dark Mystery" is the name of the god of winter as well as the god of the north. *Li ji zhushu*, 17.8a.

and not make merry?”⁹¹ The second couplet provides an answer to the question: the poet has “far-reaching aspiration,” which takes him on the journey; in the meantime, however, he cannot help but feel “immediate sentiments”—attachment to his loved ones.

In this poem Lu Ji adheres to the old *yuefu* theme of leaving one’s family behind and seeking fortune in the capital city, but he also transforms it into something more complicated in terms of the feelings he seeks to express. The poem is not a straightforward celebration of the timber/talent’s good fortune, nor is it a simple lamentation of the timber/talent’s separation from his native soil. Feeling the pressure of time’s passage and desiring to achieve his aspiration, the poet voluntarily undertakes the journey, even though he is pained by homesickness; yet, as he advances on the journey that is compared, in a reversal of a commonplace metaphor, to human life, the poet is driven by the force of his rhetoric to a dead end in darkness. The poem turns out to be an uncanny prophecy for Lu Ji.

The Poetics of Unified Empire

The previous section has discussed Lu Ji’s transformation of the northern *yuefu* tradition by his rewriting of it, much in the same way as a fan writes fan fiction: take the established theme, plot, and character, elaborate them, and give them a personal twist. The end results in Lu Ji’s case are much more complicated and nuanced than the urtexts. Of the poems analyzed, “The Song of Yuzhang” in particular is informed by Lu Ji’s trajectory from south to north and his obsessive concern with both. Ultimately, Lu Ji aspires to write a new poetry, no longer merely of the north or the south but of a unified empire, and to forge a new identity for himself and his literary output. This can be best illustrated

91. For instance, “Enjoy to the fullest, amuse your heart, / Why be pressed by gloomy thoughts?” 極宴娛心意，戚戚何所迫 (“Nineteen Old Poems” III); “The ‘Dawnwind Hawk’ harbors misery; / The ‘Cricket’ laments a hard-pressed life. / Clear your mind of worries, set your feelings free, / What’s the point of constraining yourself?” 晨風懷苦心，蟋蟀傷局促，蕩滌放情志，何為自結束 (“Nineteen Old Poems” XII). Lu Ji has written “imitations” of both of these “old poems.”

in his bold transformation of two northern *yuefu* titles, "Song of Joining the Army" ("Congjun xing" 從軍行) and "Song of the Oars" ("Zhaoge xing" 棹歌行).

There are two groups of precedents to the title "Song of Joining the Army": the first are two song fragments credited to the famous Wei court musician Zuo Yannian 左延年 (fl. early to mid-3rd century), known for his skill at low or popular music (as opposed to elegant ritual music);⁹² the second is a set of five poems as well as two fragments by the prominent poet Wang Can.⁹³ The first song fragment by Zuo Yannian is preserved in Tang and Song encyclopedias:⁹⁴

從軍何等樂	How joyful to be in the army!
一驅乘雙駁	We dash forward on a pair of piebald horses.
鞍馬照人目	Saddles and steeds dazzle one's eyes,
龍驤自動作	The dragon mounts gallop without urging.

The second song fragment by Zuo is cited in Shen Jian's 沈建 *Expanding on Yuefu Topics* (*Yuefu guangti* 樂府廣題):

苦哉邊地人	How they suffer—those serving on the frontier!
一歲三從軍	In one year they are drafted three times.
三子到敦煌	Three sons go to Dunhuang,
二子詣隴西	Two sons arrive at Longxi.
五子遠門去	All five sons fight afar,
五婦皆懷身	Their wives are pregnant at home. ⁹⁵

Wang Can's poems were not all composed at the same time. Of the set of five poems anthologized in *Wen xuan*, the first poem was written in

92. *Sanguo zhi*, 29.807: "Although musicians such as Zuo Yannian were all wonderful with notes, they were all good at the [popular] music of Zheng" 自左延年等雖妙於音, 咸善鄭聲.

93. The five poems are entitled "Poems on Joining the Army" 從軍詩 in *Wen xuan* (27.1269–73), but *Yuefu shiji* includes them as *yuefu*. This is a good example of the lack of boundary between a *shi* poem and a *yuefu* song at this stage.

94. *Chuxue ji*, 22.537. In this version *mu* 目 (eyes) reads *bai* 白 (white). *Taiping yulan*, 358.1775.

95. Cited in Guo Maoqian, comp., *Yuefu shiji*, 32.475. Lu Qinli, comp., *Wei shi*, 5.411.

- 南陟五嶺巔
4 北戍長城阿
深谷邈無底
崇山鬱嵯峨
奮臂攀喬木
8 振跡涉流沙
隆暑固已慘
涼風嚴且苛
夏條焦鮮藻
12 寒冰結衝波
胡馬如雲屯
越旗亦星羅
飛鋒無絕影
16 鳴鏑自相和
朝食不免胄
夕息常負戈
苦哉遠征人
20 撫心悲如何
- To the south they ascend the Five Peaks;
To the north they defend the Great Wall.
Valleys are deep, bottomless pits;
Lofty mountains are many and steep.
When climbing, they strive
to hold on to the towering trees;
Leaving behind tracks,
they cross sandy deserts.
The heat of summer is miserable enough;
Chilly autumn wind, stern and cruel.
Fresh blooms are scorched in hot summer;
Cold ice freezes rushing currents.
Tatar horses gather like clouds;
Yue banners are everywhere like profuse stars.
Flying blades cast endless shadows,
Sounding arrowheads sing in harmony.
Even when eating breakfast,
they don't take off their armor;
When resting at evening,
they still carry their halberds.
How they suffer—
those on a faraway campaign,
Striking their chests, they grieve,
yet can do nothing about it.

Lu Ji repeats the structure of the opening line of one of Zuo Yannian's songs ("How they suffer . . ."), but it is not difficult to see the dramatic difference between the two poems in terms of linguistic register. Lu Ji's poem is also stylistically more ornate than Wang Can's poems because of its heavy parallelism and minimal narration. The most important difference is that, if each of Zuo Yannian's and Wang Can's poems focuses on one region—either north or south—Lu Ji deliberately creates the totality of experience of "the soldier" fighting for the empire, not the unique experience of any particular historical person, by incorporating both north and south in his poem. Although he mentions "the four directions" at the start, it soon becomes clear that the east and west are not part of the picture. Skillfully employing parallel structure, he pairs the south

and north in the second couplet; subsequently, geographical and climate characteristics respectively associated with the north and south crop up: forest vs. desert, heat vs. cold. The parallel structure of the couplets conditions the reader to split geographical features that may be found in the same location, to divide seasonal changes that are universal—valleys and mountains, summer heat and autumn cool, spring blossoms and winter ice—and to identify each set with the south or the north. As a consequence, the south and the north are not only fixated with the heat/cold associations but take on certain geological traits as well, and these geological traits are in turn related to gender traits, e.g., valley = yin/female; mountain = yang/male. In this aspect, Lu Ji was one of the first to begin a long process of the making of the cultural south and north.¹⁰⁰

Lu Ji is writing the poetry of a unified empire. This is no longer the north against the “southeastern barbarians” (*dongnan yi* 東南夷), a term used to refer to the Wu people in Wang Can’s “Poems on Joining the Army” No. 3, or the south against the northern “bandits” (*kouzei* 寇賊), a term used to refer to the Wei army in one of Wu’s state ritual songs.¹⁰¹ In fact, toward the end of his poem, Lu Ji explicitly brings up the ethnic identities of the northern and southern foes: they are now displaced to “Tatar” (*hu*), the traditional reference to northern non-Han peoples, and to “Yue,” the name for the non-Han peoples living south of the Yangzi River. Through such a displacement Lu Ji suggests that it is ethnic and cultural identity, not regional identity, that is and should be the issue in a unified empire.

Similarly, in “Song of the Oars,” literary and cultural changes are closely connected to geopolitical shifts. It is not hard to see why Lu Ji chose this northern *yuefu* title for reworking. Its precedent, attributed to Emperor Ming of the Wei (or alternatively to Zuo Yannian), sings of a military campaign against Wu:¹⁰²

100. For a detailed discussion of the making of the north and south in the Six Dynasties, see Tian, *Beacon Fire*, 310–66.

101. Wu’s courtier Wei Zhao 韋昭 (204–73) composed a series of state ritual songs, “Wu Songs for Drum and Fife” 吳鼓吹曲, giving praise to Wu and denouncing Wei and Shu; the sixth of the series, “Capturing Wan City” 克皖城, celebrates Sun Quan’s victory over the Wei army represented as “bandits.” Lu Qinli, comp., *Wei shi*, 12.545. For a study of these songs, See Tian, “Remaking History,” 725–30.

102. Lu Qinli, comp., *Wei shi*, 5.416.

- 20 旗幟紛設張 Numerous standards and pennons
 are displayed.
- 將抗旄與鉞 Bearing standards and axes,
耀威於彼方 The army will demonstrate its power
 in their land.
- 伐罪以弔民 Punishing the criminals,
 bringing comfort to the people,
- 24 清我東南疆 We shall clear up our southeastern territories.

The extant version of Lu Ji's "Song of the Oars" is apparently a fragment of the original poem.¹⁰⁵

- 遲遲暮春日 Sunny and warm is the day in late spring,
天氣柔且嘉 The weather is gentle and pleasant.
元吉隆初巳 Great auspice is augmented
 on the Festival of the Primal Si,¹⁰⁶
- 4 濯穢游黃河 We go on an outing on the Yellow River
 to cleanse ourselves.
- 龍舟浮鷗首 The dragon boat floats with its heron prow;
羽旗垂藻葩 Plumed streamers are hanging
 with their flowery decorations.
- 乘風宣飛景 Riding the wind, illuminated
 by the flying light,
- 8 逍遙戲中波 Leisurely we roam and play in mid-current.
名謳激清唱 Famous performers sing solo,
 unaccompanied by music,
- 榜人縱棹歌 Boatmen intone the song of the oars
 to their heart's content.
- 投綸沈洪川 Fishing lines, thrown out,
 sink into the great river;
- 12 飛繳入紫霞 Stringed arrows fly into purple clouds.

105. Lu Qinli, comp., *Jin shi*, 5.660; *Yiwen leiju*, 42.757; Guo Maoqian, comp., *Yuefu shiji*, 40.593.

106. I follow the *Yiwen leiju* and *Yuefu shiji* versions of this line by adopting *long* (augment) rather than *jiang* 降 (bestow).

What Lu Ji describes here is a joyful celebration of the Festival of the Primal Si (*Chu si* or *Shang si*). Beginning in the Wei, this springtime festival was observed on the third day of the third month (roughly in April). On this day, the people of Luoyang would go to the Yellow River to purify themselves. It was an important festival for royalty, nobility, and commoners alike, judged by the large number of poems composed on the occasion (many of which were written by imperial command), and by the depiction of the festival in poetic expositions and prose pieces.¹⁰⁷ The biography of the recluse Xia Tong 夏統 (courtesy name Zhongyu 仲御), a native southerner from Kuaiji and Lu Ji's contemporary, records how Xia went to Luoyang to buy medicine for his ailing mother and chanced on the festival celebration:

The people in Luoyang, from princes and dukes on downward, all went out riding their carriages, which advanced side by side and flowed on continuously, to perform the lustration rite by the South Pontoon Bridge. The men's crimson official robes dazzled the road; the women were dressed in splendid bright-colored brocade and silks.¹⁰⁸

洛中公王以下，莫不方軌連軫，並至南浮橋邊襖。男則朱服耀路，女則錦綺粲爛。

Lu Ji's poem has a strikingly different focus from the Wei court *yuefu*: instead of a military song sung by the navy on the eve of war, his is a celebration of a festival in a time of peace and prosperity. The Wei army's militant banners, including the Taichang banner usually indicating an imperial procession, are turned into the more ornate and less somber streamers decorated with feathers. The imperial presence in the Wei *yuefu* is displaced on a verbal level to the mention of the "dragon boat." While

107. Lu Ji's older contemporaries Chenggong Sui 成公綏 (231–73) and Zhang Xie 張協 (d. 307) each wrote a "Fu on Lustration at Luoyang" 洛襖賦. Yan Kejun, comp., *Quan Jin wen*, 59.1795, 85.1951.

108. "Xia Zhongyu's Unofficial Biography" 夏仲御別傳, cited in *Yiwen leiju*, 4.63. Also see Xia Tong's biography in *Jin shu*, 94.2429–30. Interestingly, Xia Zhongyu had astounded his northern aristocratic audience with not only his superb boating skills, but also his singing of southern airs on the Yellow River. His *Jin shu* biography, no doubt based on his "unofficial biography" likely circulating in the south, offers us yet another glimpse into the encounter, contestation, and confluence of north and south in the newly unified empire of the Jin.

the dragon may be a symbol of the emperor, a dragon boat could simply refer to a large boat decorated with the figure of a dragon. Both texts contain a self-referential mention of the “song of the oars.” In the Wei *yuefu*, “The song of the oars is sad and poignant,” evocative of battle and death; Lu Ji’s version, on the other hand, depicts a picture of singing at ease, and the song of the oars takes on a casual and carefree air. With the couplet, “Bearing standards and axes, / The army will demonstrate its power in their land,” the Wei *yuefu* hints at the violence of war; Lu Ji’s version displaces violence to birds and fish.

The ultimate point of departure lies in the opening lines. The Wei *yuefu* shows that a ruler, who is a match for heaven and earth, contains within himself both *yang* and *yin* forces, the former for the protection and cultivation of life, the latter for punishment and destruction. While the Wei *yuefu* emphasizes the martial (*wu*) power of a ruler, Lu Ji’s extant version begins with *chichi*, a compound descriptive of the warmth of the spring sun, and develops along the line of “the *yang* energy” that “produces and nurtures.” Noticeably, in the second line of the poem, Lu Ji uses *rou jia* (gentle and pleasant), a compound from *Shi jing* which usually depicts a person.¹⁰⁹ By using the phrase to describe the weather of that day, Lu Ji gives it a moral quality that agrees with the human agency acting in accordance with the spring season. Once again, Lu Ji’s poem exemplifies the poetics of a unified empire, in which the only violence should ideally be directed at the non-human world of the birds and fish as well as the often dehumanized “barbarians.”

Lu Ji’s life was tragically cut short in 303; not long after that, the Western Jin fell, leading to a long period of disunion known as the Northern and Southern Dynasties. As the Jin imperial house fled war-torn Luoyang and crossed the Yangzi River to the south, the southern dynasties regarded themselves as the upholders of the Han cultural legacy and the legitimate inheritors of the orthodox rule passed on by Han, Wei, and Jin. The former Wu capital, now known as Jiankang, became the capital of the southern regimes and the new center of politics and culture from the fourth through the sixth century.

Lu Ji’s refashioning of the north ultimately influenced the creation of the cultural south in fifth- and sixth-century south China, as the “Song

109. See, for instance, “All People” 烝民. *Mao shi zhushu*, 18.674.

of the Oars" became a favorite music title for the Southern Dynasties poets, who saw the possibility of conflating it with other southern motifs: picking lotus or water chestnuts, washing silk, or just pleasure boating in general.¹¹⁰ Xiao Gang's poem to the same title is representative of the transformation: moving the site of the song to the Xiang River, he evokes the *Verses of Chu*, the classic poetic anthology of the south, and infuses the poem with a powerful southern aura by bringing together all the southern motifs mentioned above. By making the woman in his poem a secularized Xiang River goddess and a skilled court singer on a par with the legendary performers of the Han, and by claiming the superiority of "The Song of the Oars," now repackaged as a southern song, Xiao Gang asserts the cultural supremacy of the southern court.¹¹¹

Conclusion

Reminiscent of Min Hong's poetic exposition on the same subject, the feather fan becomes a synecdoche for the crane in Lu Ji's "*Fu* on the Feather Fan":

累懷璧于美羽	Burdened by its beautiful plumes,
	it is the one carrying a precious jade, ¹¹²
挫千歲乎一箭	Its lifespan of a thousand years
	compromised by one single arrow.

110. Silk washing has a southern association because of the legend of the silk-washing southern belle, Xi Shi 西施, from Yue. For other versions of "Song of the Oars" by southern poets, see Guo Maoqian, comp., *Yuefu shiji*, 40.594–95. The title itself also frequently appears in Southern Dynasties poems, such as Shen Yue's "Song of the South" 江南曲 (Lu Qinli, comp., *Liang shi*, 6.1621) and Xu Mian's 徐勉 (466–535) "Song of Picking Water Chestnuts" 采菱曲 (Ibid., 15.1811). Lotus and water chestnuts were not exclusively southern plants, but they were made "southern" in literature as part of the cultural campaign in the Southern Dynasties. See Tian, *Beacon Fire*, 346–58.

111. For a translation and discussion of Xiao Gang's "Song of the Oars," see Tian, "Fan Writing," 75–76.

112. This refers to a proverb, "A man may be guiltless, but he has committed a crime by carrying with him a precious jade" 匹夫無罪，懷璧其罪. *Zuo zhuan zhushu*, Huan 10, 7.7b. The proverb refers to a person's unwitting courtship of disaster by possessing a treasure and inviting jealousy.

Unlike Min Hong, who chose to stay in Wu, Lu Ji went north to serve in the Jin court and remained there at a perilous time when many of his fellow southerners resigned and went home.¹¹³ The figure of the crane, an immortal bird killed for its plumes, becomes an omen of the Lu brothers' tragic end, casting a dark shadow on the image of the white fan.

Lu Ji's writings as a "fan" in the other sense of the word—as an avid admirer of the Cao Wei literary legacy—were nevertheless immortalized and became part of the Chinese literary canon. Lu Ji is one of those poets who marked a turning point in literary history by effecting extraordinary transformations of previous works; but, once the turn was made, his transformations were gradually neglected. Looking at his poems re-situated in their context, we might understand why his poetry was so revered in the Southern Dynasties: with his close attention to the crafting of words and phrases more prevalently than any poet before him, his writings turned five-syllable-line poetry, still a relatively low genre at his time, into a sophisticated poetry with nuances and finesse. The Southern Dynasties poets still had access to that cultural world of the earlier period and were much better able to appreciate Lu Ji's transformation of it, and the appreciation of Lu Ji's works depends much on the reader's familiarity with the literary and cultural world with which Lu Ji was so fascinated. Only a small fragment of that world has survived after the Tang, and even that small fragment largely owes to Lu Ji's writings, which made it seem noteworthy in the first place.

In the fifth century, Lu Ji's writings exerted an immense influence on Xie Lingyun and his cousin Xie Huilian, who both wrote many *yuefu* poems inspired by, and reworking, Lu Ji's songs. It is hard to assess whether Xie Lingyun's fascination with the Ye and the Cao Wei poets to some extent resulted from his admiration for Lu Ji or whether his admiration for Lu Ji was part of his engagement with early classical poetry, which in turn was part of the fifth century "literary renaissance" in Jiankang. In any case, it is safe to say that the Wu perspective had found its culmination in Lu Ji's writings intervening in the dominant northern culture. On the one hand, he tries to counteract and overwrite the old conflicts of the era of division by composing a new poetry of the unified empire; on the

113. For instance, Zhang Han 張翰, son of Zhang Yan, returned to Wu before the situation in Luoyang deteriorated (*Jin shu*, 92.2384). Another literary pair of brothers Zhang Xie and Zhang Zai 張載 also resigned from their posts (*Jin shu*, 55.1518–24).

other hand, his nostalgia for the vanished glory of the former age is manifested in his writings romanticizing the memory of the Cao Wei, which is the beginning of the romanticization of the Three Kingdoms. One of the most powerful poetic images created by Lu Ji is that of the Bronze Bird Terrace. Cao Cao, the Martial Emperor of the Wei, may have built it and enjoyed it; but it was Lu Ji, a descendant of Wu, who made it last.

CHAPTER FOUR

Terrace and Tile: Imagining a Lost City

Introduction: Views of Ye

In the early autumn of 545, Yu Xin 庾信 (513–81), later to be known as one of the greatest early medieval poets, was sent on a diplomatic mission to the Eastern Wei, whose capital was the city of Ye. The Wei court, quite aware of the fine reputation of the young poet, chose their own most accomplished courtiers to receive the Liang delegation. Among them was Zu Xiaoyin 祖孝隱 (518–49), who was “quick-witted and eloquent.”¹ Zu presented a poem to Yu, but only Yu’s reply has survived. The poem has the title “Bearing Imperial Command to Visit Ye: In Reply to Regular Officer Zu” (“Jiangming zhi Ye chou Zu zhengyuan” 將命至鄴酬祖正員).²

我皇臨九有	Our emperor rules over the Nine Regions;
聲教洎無隄	His civilizing influence has no boundary.
興文盛禮樂	He promotes culture: rites and music flourish;
4 偃武息氓黎	He ceases martial endeavors, allowing the folk to rest.
承乏驅騏驎	Filling the vacancy, I charge my steed,
旌旗事琬圭	Holding the jade vessel under standards and pennons. ³

1. This was Zu Bizhi 祖賁之, who was known by his courtesy name Xiaoyin. *Bei Qi shu*, 39.521.

2. Lu Qinli, comp., *Bei Zhou shi*, 2.2358.

3. Ni Fan 倪璠, seventeenth-century commentator on Yu Xin’s collection, cites Zheng Xuan’s commentary on the *Rites of Zhou* 周禮 that the jade vessel *wan gui* 琬圭, with a round top, is a sort of jade talisman held by the emissary sent by the Zhou king to reward

culminates in the last line, which makes clever use of a Han proverb: “Peach and plum do not speak, but a path will naturally form beneath them” 桃李不言，下自成蹊。⁵ That is, there are so many people going to the trees to pick their fruits that the traffic naturally creates a footpath, even if the peaches and plums do not promote themselves. Stating that there is “no way” (*wu xi*) for him to repay Zu Xiaoyin’s gem of a poem with a plum, Yu Xin makes yet another jibe at the city of Ye, as he seems to hint that the city is so overgrown that there is no “way” (“path”) for him to reach the plum tree.

Yu Xin’s poem, however arrogant and insulting it may sound, is an incomplete story in the absence of Zu Xiaoyin’s original. For all we know, Yu Xin might be simply repaying Zu Xiaoyin for his verbal affront in a contemporary game of poetic repartee between northern and southern diplomats. Nevertheless, Yu Xin’s biased description of Ye represents the southern view of the north at the time: a culturally ruined place under non-Han rule. The steles may be ancient, but the words on them have become illegible; the north may have had a past, but it does not have a “history.” What history it has does not belong to its current inhabitants, but instead to the custodians of culture living in the south.

Unlike the Southern Dynasties’ capital Jiankang (also known as Jinling 金陵), Ye has never become a major site of “meditation on the past” (*huaigu* 懷古), but it has its own textual history connected to, yet also distinct from, its social history. Its first heyday was when Cao Cao made it his headquarters and spent considerable resources rebuilding the city. In 335, Shi Hu 石虎 (295–349), the Xiongnu ruler of the kingdom of Zhao (known as the Later Zhao), moved his capital to Ye and gave it a major makeover. He rebuilt the three terraces that had fallen into ruin during the chaotic years at the turn of the fourth century, and renamed Metal Tiger as Metal Phoenix to avoid the taboo of his own first name. The renovated city was even more magnificent than in Wei times. According to Li Daoyuan 驪道元 (d. 527), “When Ye was at its pinnacle of splendor [under Shi Hu], one could see its lofty watchtowers from sixty or seventy *li* away, like the dwelling place of immortals” 當其全盛之時，去鄴六七十里，遠望茗亭，巍若仙居。⁶ Shi Hu’s extrav-

5. Cited in *Shi ji*, 109.2878.

6. Li Daoyuan, *Shuijing zhu*, 10.179.

agant architectural projects, his love of luxurious display and ingenious devices, and his large retinue of splendidly dressed horse-riding female officials soon became the stuff of legend. It is well documented, perhaps with a great deal of exaggerating and romanticizing, in Lu Hui's 陸翹 (fl. mid- to late 4th century) *Account of Ye* (*Ye zhong ji* 鄴中記).⁷ In this now fragmentary account, the "barbarian" ruler's excesses seem to be viewed with shock and contempt mixed with envy and admiration.

Subsequently the physical city was destroyed and rebuilt many times. In 357, the Sarbi ruler of the kingdom of Yan, Murong Jun 慕容儁 (319–60), chose Ye as his capital and ordered the restoration of Bronze Bird Terrace, but Ye soon fell to the army of the Former Qin in 370.⁸ The next revival of Ye took place in the sixth century, as it became the capital of the Eastern Wei (534–50) and then the Northern Qi (550–77). In 558, the renovation project of the old Three Terraces, which had mobilized three hundred thousand workmen to make them "higher and grander" than ever before, was completed. Bronze Bird was renamed as Golden Phoenix 金鳳, Metal Tiger as Sagely Response 聖應, and Ice Well as Magnificent Light 崇光.⁹

Ye was restored to full splendor under the Northern Qi rule, but this was to be its last reincarnation as the imperial capital. In 577, the Northern Zhou (557–81) conquered the Northern Qi, and the Zhou Emperor Wu (r. 560–78) had the Three Terraces as well as other Qi royal parks all demolished.¹⁰ Finally, in 580, after crushing the rebellion of a Zhou loyalist general, the powerful and ambitious Zhou minister Yang Jian 楊堅 (541–604) ordered the burning of Ye and moved all its residents forty-five *li* south.¹¹ Yang Jian was to be known as his posthumous title Emperor Wen of the Sui 隋文帝, who unified the Chinese empire in 589.

There is no doubt that the architectural appearance of Ye was much more resplendent under the Zhao and Qi rule than it had been as Cao Cao's headquarters. Lu Hui's *Account of Ye* contains many colorful details. Yet, none of this did much to inspire contemporary poetic imagination. There appears an interesting disjunction between the actual city

7. Translated by Schafer, "The 'Yeh chung chi,'" 147–207. See also Müller, *Yezhongji*.

8. *Jin shu*, 110.2838.

9. *Bei Qi shu*, 4.65.

10. *Zizhi tongjian*, 173.5372.

11. *Ibid.*, 174.5426.

flourishing under non-Han rule and the textual city in the literary tradition. This disjunction demonstrates how certain views of the city are formed to serve certain interests and ends. To the Southern Dynasties poets, Ye had little to do with the physical city occupied by rulers like Shi Hu. Instead, to them Ye was bound up with cultural memory and frozen in time; it was a city of poetic words and pathos, associated with the legacy of the Caos, the Jian'an Masters, and the brothers Lu Ji and Lu Yun. Their idea of Ye was based on a deeply entrenched faith in their own position in history as the upholders of Han legacy; they defended the city by trying to delineate its fundamental image within social and cultural imaginaries.

In the fifth century in south China, consistent with what I call a retrospective gaze—i.e., a prevalent interest in literary history and an intense engagement with early classical poetry in the five-syllable line—we begin to see a unique historical imagination at work in the contemporary belletristic writings. First we have Xie Lingyun, the influential poet, seeking to revive and refashion Jian'an, Ye, and the Cao Wei court. In the ensuing decades, another member of the eminent Xie clan, Xie Zhuang 謝莊 (421–66), composed the famous “*Fu* on the Moon” (“*Yue fu*” 月賦), which offers a dramatized fictional account of Cao Zhi and Wang Can lamenting the passing of Ying Yang and Liu Zhen.

The most powerful vision of the city of Ye is condensed in the image of Bronze Bird Terrace represented in a text within a text, namely, Cao Cao's will and testament preserved in Lu Ji's elegy. This particular image of Bronze Bird Terrace both stands for the grandeur of Cao Cao's energetic accomplishments and evokes the melancholy of impermanence. It inspired a number of poems by the best of the southern court poets, and the topic—Bronze Bird Terrace or Bronze Bird Performers—subsequently became a standard poetic topic for the next five hundred years, with some variations, but constituting a basically stable tradition.

The Southern Dynasties poets' literary production successfully shaped the knowledge of Ye. This only changed in the eleventh century, when cultural imagination shifted from the terrace to its synecdochical fragmentation: the tiles that were allegedly culled from the original Bronze Bird Terrace, made into inkstones, and sold for a handsome price on the antique market. History is compressed and consolidated into an object of value, appreciated, exchanged, bought, and sold by art connois-

seurs and lovers of antiquity. Meanwhile, pathos and lament of Bronze Bird Terrace were replaced by moral censure and satire, as the evaluation of the Three Kingdoms history experienced a sharp moralistic turn against the Wei, and the poetry of Jian'an, Wei, Jin, and the Southern Dynasties fell out of favor. In this chapter, I will trace the Ye/Bronze Bird tradition in Middle Period poetry, from its genesis to its gradual loss of energy, and discuss the cultural changes revealed by these developments.

Ascending the Terrace: Early Writings

This section will discuss the early writings about Bronze Bird Terrace that form a vivid contrast with later poems on the topic. In the early writings, the gaze from the terrace encompasses a much broader view, including the architectural wonders of the city and the natural landscape in its environs. The aggrandized view celebrates the newly renovated city as a symbol of regal accomplishments and rhetorically transforms an essentially provincial city—much smaller than Chang'an and Luoyang in actual scale, though with an innovative layout—into one with imperial dimensions.

In the spring of 212, Cao Cao ascended the recently finished Bronze Bird Terrace with his sons and commanded them to each compose a poetic exposition on the occasion. Cao Cao himself also wrote one, only two lines of which are extant:

引長明 Drawing Eternal Brightness Canal
灌街里 To flow alongside the streets.¹²

This refers to the diversion of the Zhang River into the city, which created a street canal system ensuring the city's water supply as well as improving the urban landscape. It was an important part of Cao Cao's renovation project of which he felt particularly proud.

Cao Pi's poetic exposition is likewise only extant in fragments.¹³

12. Yan Kejun, comp., *Quan sango wen*, 1.1055.

13. *Ibid.*, 4.1074.

登高臺以騁望	Going up the high terrace, I look into the distance;
好靈雀之麗嫺	I admire the graceful beauty of the divine bird.
飛閣崛其特起	The soaring pavilion is elevated far above the ground,
層樓儼以承天	Its multi-storied tower stands tall to hold up the sky.
步逍遙以容與	I walk around slowly and leisurely,
聊遊目于西山	Letting my sight roam awhile to the western hills.
溪谷紆以交錯	There streams and valleys are winding and intersecting with one another,
草木鬱其相連	Plants and trees grow lushly in clusters.
風飄飄而吹衣	Wind is fluttering and blows on my robe;
鳥飛鳴而過前	Birds cry out, flying past in front of me.
申躊躇以周覽	Taking time to gain a comprehensive view,
臨城隅之通川	I look upon the river flowing through the city.

The second line of the fragment mentions a “divine bird” (*ling que*), which clearly is the “bird” in the name of the terrace.¹⁴ In “Account of Ye,” Lu Hui states that Shi Hu built a five-storied tower on Bronze Bird Terrace and then installed a gigantic statue of a Bronze Bird on top of the tower, which “spread its wings as if in flight” 舒翼若飛.¹⁵ This may very well have been a re-creation of what had once been there before. Zuo Si’s “*Fu* on the Wei Capital” (“Wei du fu” 魏都賦) mentions a “bird in clouds” with regard to the Three Terraces: “The cloud bird mounts the eaves and holds its head high, / Its powerful wings spread their carved patterns against the blue sky” 雲雀踞甍而矯首，壯翼摛鏤於青霄。¹⁶ The “cloud bird,” glossed as “phoenix” by the *Wen xuan* commentator Lü Xiang 呂向 (fl. early 8th century), seems to refer to the very bird that gave the terrace its name.¹⁷

14. Although in the eleventh-century anthology *Yuefu shiji* Guo Maoqian claims that the terrace was named after a large Bronze Bird on top of it, no extant contemporaneous source mentions the existence of such a Bronze Bird on the Wei terrace. *Yuefu shiji*, 31.454.

15. Lu Hui, *Ye zhong ji*, in *Siku quanshu*, 463.308.

16. Yan Kejun, comp., *Quan jin wen*, 74.1888.

17. Xiao Tong, comp., *Song ben liuchenzhu Wen xuan*, 6.125.

In any case, the name of Bronze Bird is likely based on the urban lore of the Western Han capital Chang'an. According to an "old song," a pair of "bronze birds" on the watchtowers to the west of Chang'an would augur a great harvest with their cries.¹⁸ An early work, *Sanfu huangtu* 三輔黃圖, states that those birds are "bronze phoenixes."¹⁹ The song is attributed to Cao Pi in several early sources, indicating the confusion of the legendary "bronze birds" of Chang'an with the Bronze Bird of Ye.²⁰ There is, however, little doubt that the name of Ye's terrace was meant to evoke the former Han capital.

In the extant fragment of Cao Pi's composition, much attention is paid to the view of landscape to the west of the city afforded by the high vantage point. There is an interesting contrast between the architectural bird's "graceful beauty" and the real birds' animated movements, although, by stressing that the birds are flying past "in front of" him, he implicitly praises the extraordinary height of the terrace. We do not know if this feature accurately represents the focus in the original text or if it is a function of textual fragmentation, but in Cao Zhi's poetic exposition written on the same occasion, much better preserved, we note a greater elaboration on human artifice and labor. Cao Zhi's *fu* is mentioned in his *Sanguo zhi* biography as a "handsome" piece (*keguan* 可觀, literally "viewable") that he had dashed off in no time and that deeply impressed Cao Cao.²¹ Its fame is even more enhanced in later times because it is ingeniously woven into a plot in *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, with a forged passage added to it by the novelist, a point I will return to in chapter 5. Cao Zhi's *fu* reads thus:

18. The song goes: "To the west of Chang'an, a pair of circular watchtowers, / On top of them perches a pair of Bronze Birds. / They sing once, and five grains grow; / They sing again, and five grains ripen" 長安城西雙員闕，上有一雙銅雀宿，一鳴五穀生，再鳴五穀熟。 There are several variant versions. Lu Qinli, comp., *Wei shi*, 4.406.

19. *Sanfu huangtu jiaoshi*, 2.130.

20. *Beitang shuchao*, 156.8. See Li Shan's commentary in Xiao, comp., *Wen xuan*, 56.2420.

21. *Sanguo zhi*, 19.557. We do not know if the text is complete even if it is in a far better shape than his father's and brother's pieces. The version used here is from *Yiwen leiju*, 62.1120. Also see *Chuxue ji*, 24.575-76. Pei Songzhi cites the text in his commentary from *Record of Wei* 魏紀 by Yin Dan 陰澹 (ca. late 3rd century).

從明后而嬉遊	Following our wise lord, we roam in pleasure,
聊登臺以娛情	And go up the terrace to amuse ourselves awhile.
見太府之廣開	I see the vastness of the Grand Storehouse opening up,
觀聖德之所營	And take in view what has been fashioned by his sagely virtue.
建高殿之嵯峨	He constructed a lofty structure,
浮雙闕乎太清	Making the twin watchtowers float in the Grand Clarity.
立沖天之華觀	He erected splendid edifices rising up against the sky, ²²
連飛閣乎西城	Connecting the soaring pavilions to the west of the city.
臨漳川之長流	Looking upon the extended course of the Zhang River,
望眾果之滋榮	I gaze afar at the luxuriance of the many fruit trees.
仰春風之和穆	I raise my face to the temperate harmony of spring breeze,
聽百鳥之悲鳴	I listen to the moving cries of a hundred birds.
天工坦其既立	Heaven's task has been smoothly performed; ²³
家願得而獲呈	The wishes of our house are also fulfilled.
揚仁化於宇內	Our lord spreads his benevolent influence within the world,
盡肅恭於上京	And pays solemn respect to the imperial capital.
唯桓文之為盛	Dukes Huan and Wen were considered magnificent, ²⁴

22. Yin Dan's version has *zhongtian* 中天 (piercing the sky). Ban Gu's "Fu on Western Metropolis" 西都賦: "They erected ornate watchtowers piercing the sky" 樹中天之華闕. Yan Kejun, comp., *Quan hou Han wen*, 24.603. Knechtges's translation, in *Wen xuan*, p. 119.

23. *Tiangong* 天工 also reads *tiangong* 天功 in *Chuxue ji*.

24. That is, Duke Huan of Qi 齊桓公 (d. 643 BCE) and Duke Wen of Jin 晉文公

豈足方乎聖明	But how could they compare
	to our lord's sagely wisdom?
休矣美矣	Oh how marvelous and wonderful!
惠澤遠揚	His grace reaches far and wide.
翼佐皇家	Assisting the royal house,
寧彼四方	He pacifies the four directions.
同天地之矩量	He shares the grandeur of heaven and
	earth,
齊日月之輝光	And equals the light of the sun and
	moon.
永貴尊而無極兮	May he be exalted and glorified
	for ever and ever,
等年壽於東王	And live as long as the King of the East. ²⁵

Cao Zhi notably uses a series of active verbs to describe the human planning and labor that brought about the architectural and engineering wonders: *ying* 營 (fashion), *jian* 建 (construct), *fu* 浮 (here “cause to float”), *li* 立 (erect, establish), *lian* 連 (connect). The rhetorical strategy highlights the urban architecture and human achievements rather than the natural landscape. Such a focus would surely have pleased Cao Cao, the man supervising the city’s renovations. Yet, Cao Zhi’s compositions typically lack the nuances and attention to detail characterizing much of Cao Pi’s writings. For instance, Cao Zhi also has a couplet pairing wind and bird, and he used explicitly descriptive terminology like “temperate harmony” to describe the spring breeze; Cao Pi, in contrast, chose to show rather than tell by depicting the fluttering breeze blowing his robe, a typical phenomenon on a high place.

Nearly a century later, Lu Yun composed his “*Fu* on Ascending the Terrace,” whose ending I briefly discussed in the previous chapter. In the

(697–628 BCE), who were known for assuming leadership among the feudal lords to serve the royal house of the Zhou. Cao Cao himself says of the dukes in his “Decree That Reveals My Aims” 自明本志令 issued in 211: “The reason why Duke Huan of Qi and Duke Wen of Jin are still being remembered and praised even today is that, even though they possessed considerable military might, they nevertheless continued to serve the royal house of Zhou.” Yan Kejun, comp., *Quan sanguo wen*, 2.1063.

25. The King of the East refers to the immortal Dong wang gong 東王公. These last two lines are only preserved in Yin Dan’s version.

main body of this *fu*, Lu Yun describes both what he sees *of* the terrace and what he sees *from* the terrace. Strikingly, he has reused the “wind/bird” couplet in the Cao brothers’ compositions and turned it into a far more elaborate picture that conveys a drastically different sentiment.

爾乃	Thereupon
佇眄瑤軒	I pause and look at the jasper gallery,
滿目綺寮	Intricate latticed windows fill my sight.
中原方華	The plain is just flowering,
綠葉振翹	Green leaves raise luxuriant splendor.
嘉生民之壘壘兮	I admire the diligence of the folk;
望天畷之苕苕	I gaze at the sunlit sky far above.
歷玉階而容與兮	Walking up the jade steps, I linger at leisure;
步蘭堂以逍遙	I amble freely in the orchid halls.
蒙紫庭之芳塵兮	Covered by the fragrant dust of the purple courtyard,
駭洞房之迴飈	I am startled by the whirling wind in the secluded chambers.
頽響逝而忤物兮	Fading echoes, bouncing off against things, gradually die out,
傾冠舉而凌霄	My cap is blown off my head and flies into the clouds.
曲房縈而窈眇兮	The secluded chambers are winding and deep,
長廊邈而蕭條	The long veranda extends into distance, quiet and desolate.
于是	Thus
迴路委夷	The long path twists and turns,
邃宇玄芒	The recessed residence is dim and hazy,
深堂百室	Within the cavernous hall there are a hundred rooms;
層臺千房	On the storied terrace, a thousand compartments.
關南窗而蒙暑兮	When I unlock the southern windows, I am immersed in heat;
啟朔牖而履霜	Opening the northern casement, I seem to be stepping on frost.

遊陽堂而冬溫兮 步陰房而夏涼	The sunny hall is warm in winter, While the rooms in the shade are cool in summer.
萬禽委蛇于潛室兮 驚鳳矯翼而來翔	Myriad birds fly about in concealed quarters, As a startled phoenix bird flaps its wings and flies hither.
紛譎譎于有象兮 逸攸忽而無方	In a great multitude they manifest their images, Then suddenly scatter and vanish in all directions.

If in the Cao brothers' pieces the wind is temperate and the birds fly around singing, in Lu Yun's piece a whirling draft in the large, empty halls blows his cap away, and the birds nesting in the deserted chambers are startled by the visitor and take off in a flutter. Lu Yun's depiction captures the eeriness of the hollow rooms of an uninhabited terrace. It also pays homage to his contemporary Zuo Si's "*Fu* on the Wei Capital," which contains an imaginary depiction of the terraces in their glory days:

周軒中天 丹墀臨焱	The winding verandas cleave the sky, The red patio looks down on the soaring whirlwind.
增構峨峨	These storied structures are so tall and steep,
清塵影影 雲雀踉蹌而矯首	Pure dust floats and drifts among them. The cloud bird mounts the eaves and holds its head high,
壯翼摘鏤於青霄	Its powerful wings spread their carved patterns against the blue sky.
雷雨窈冥而未半	Thunderstorms, dark and gloomy, reach not even halfway up the tower,
皦日籠光於綺寮	The blazing sun engages its light in intricate latticed windows.
習步頓以升降	Practicing his gait, the ruler ascends and descends the staircase;
御春服而逍遙	Garbed in spring clothes, he ambles freely about.

八極可圍於寸眸 From here the eight limits
 can be encompassed by an eye,
 萬物可齊於一朝 And the myriad things are seen as equal
 in a single morning.²⁶

This passage depicts the extraordinary height of the terrace, which is so tall that it rises above thunderstorm clouds, and from which one's view encompasses the eight limits of the earth. The images of whirlwind, dust, "cloud bird," and lattice windows all recur in Lu Yun's piece.

The second part of Lu Yun's piece may be regarded as an amplification of the last two lines of Zuo Si's passage above.

翫瓊宇而情愜兮 As I admire the magnificent edifice,
 my feelings are delighted;
 覽八方而思銳 As I view the eight directions,
 my thoughts become sharpened.
 陋雨館之常規兮 I disdain the ordinary structure
 of the Rain Lodge,
 鄙鳴鶴之蔽第 And feel contempt for the shabby
 residence in the Singing Swan Park.²⁷
 仰凌眇于天庭兮 I look up, and my gaze encompasses
 the heavenly court;
 俛旁觀乎萬類 I look down, and my view includes
 myriad species.
 北溟浩以揚波兮 The Northern Deep is vast,
 and its waves swell;
 青林煥其興蔚 The Green Grove shines forth
 in full splendor.²⁸
 扶桑細于毫末兮 The Fusang Tree appears smaller
 than the tip of a hair,

26. Knechtges's translation with slight modifications, in *Wen xuan*, p. 445.

27. According to a pre-Tang work, *Names of Jin Palaces and Towers* 晉宮闕名, Ye had a Singing Swan Park. *Yiwen leiju*, 65.1160. I suspect the Rain Lodge was also the name of a building in Ye.

28. The Northern Deep is the legendary sea in the far north. Green Grove is another name for the Heavenly Park Constellation (Tianyuan 天苑), a cluster of stars to the south of the Bi constellation (the Hyades).

崑崙卑乎覆簣

And Mt. Kunlun seems lowlier
than an overturned basket of dirt.

In contrast with the focus on the earthly landscape and structures in the Cao brothers' compositions, Lu Yun's sight is set on a much wider expanse, from the Northern Deep to the Green Grove constellation in the southern sky, from the legendary Fusang Tree where the sun rises in the east and the immortal Mount Kunlun in the west. The view that encompasses the universe entails a philosophical vision that changes normal human perceptions of large and small, grandiose and insignificant. Lu Yun's musings may have been influenced by the "pure discourse" on Laozi and Zhuangzi prevailing in Luoyang, just as his senior contemporary Zhang Hua's "Fu on the Wren" (*Jiaoliao fu* 鷦鷯賦) praising the humble little bird over gargantuan creatures is an offshoot of this interest.

Lu Yun goes on to contemplate the rise and fall of empires but stops short of applying his enlightened understanding of the continuous rotation of "failure and success" to the current regime. Instead, he ends the piece, like Cao Zhi once did, with a wish for his dynasty's eternal prosperity, leaving unresolved the tension between the lament over the "lack of constancy in rise and fall" (崇替之靡常) and the expressed wish for the Jin's everlasting good fortunes.

In the early fourth century, Lu Chen 盧諶 (285–351), whose father had served as prefect of Ye at the same time when Lu Yun was there, wrote "On Ascending the Ye Terraces" ("Deng Ye tai fu" 登鄴臺賦).²⁹ Lu Chen's service was obtained by Shi Hu in 338, and his *fu* was likely written shortly after he arrived at Ye, before Shi Hu rebuilt the terraces. A fragment of his piece is extant, which testifies to the former existence of a Bronze Bird on the original terrace, now crumbling on the ground.³⁰

顯陽隗其顛隕

The Gate of Resplendent Yang
has crumbled and collapsed,

文昌鞠而為墟

And the Palace of Cultural Glory
is prostrate in shambles.

銅爵隕于臺側

The Bronze Bird has fallen
beside the terrace,

29. *Jin shu*, 44.1256.

30. Yan Kejun, comp., *Quan Jin wen*, 34.1656.

洪鐘寢于兩除	And the grand bells lie on the two sides of the steps.
奚帝王之靈宇	How has this divine abode of emperors and kings
為狐兔之攸居	Come to be the dwelling place of foxes and rabbits?

The wreckages seen from the terrace form a sharp contrast with the scene of splendor in Cao Zhi's composition. The textual fragmentation of the piece becomes an embodiment of the city's ruins.

A Changed View from the Terrace

In the earlier writings the view from Bronze Bird Terrace always encompasses a vast expanse, be it the layout and environs of the city or a visionary view of the cosmos. This grand view experiences a remarkable shift in the fifth-century poems on Bronze Bird Terrace, whose inspiration comes from Lu Ji's elegy for Cao Cao.

In some ways Cao Pi's description of his fascinated gaze at the western hills proves to be strangely premonitory: in Cao Cao's will and testament, he commands his sons, "You should all go up Bronze Bird Terrace from time to time and gaze at my tomb on the western mound." In an interesting twist in Lu Ji's elegy, those gazing at Cao Cao's tomb were not his sons but were instead the female entertainers, who were to be housed, per Cao Cao's instruction, on the terrace after his death and perform to his soul tablet. Lu Ji conjures up a poignant scene of loss and longing that engenders a poetic tradition of its own:

矯感容以赴節	Restraining their grief-stricken expression, they moved to the beat;
掩零淚而薦觴	Wiping away fallen tears, they offered goblets of ale.
物無微而不存	There is no object that is too small to survive,

體無患而不亡	And there is no form that is too beautiful to perish.
庶聖靈之響像	Yet, they hoped that his numinous spirit might have sound and shadow,
想幽神之復光	And imagined that the dark soul might shine forth again.
徽清絃而獨奏	Tuning clear strings, they played music in solitude;
進脯糒而誰嘗	They presented victuals, but who would taste them?
悼總帳之冥漠	They lamented the quiet emptiness of the hemp soul-curtains,
怨西陵之茫茫	And resented the haziness of the western mound.
登爵臺而群悲	Ascending Bronze Bird Terrace, they mourned together;
貯美目其何望	Their beautiful eyes were fixed in a distant gaze, but what could they see?

While the lords of Cao once surveyed the city from the terrace, the women now look at their lord's tomb. In the midst of the flux of human life, they become fixed on the terrace just as their eyes are fixed on an unobtainable object of desire. As the literary imagination of the fifth century centered on the Jian'an era, the pathos of the Bronze Bird Terrace women was captured by some of the finest southern court poets.³¹

In keeping with his intense interest in the literary past and in a literary portrayal of the past, Jiang Yan's "Bronze Bird Performers" ("Tongque ji" 銅雀妓) is one of the earliest poems on the topic.³²

武王去金闕	The Martial King has left the golden pavilion,
英威長寂寞	His heroic majesty is ever lonely and forlorn.

31. The most convenient place to look for these poems is Guo Maoqian's *Yuefu shiji*, where he collects about thirty Southern Dynasties and Tang poems on the topic (31.454–61). The collection, however, is not complete, representing some interesting omissions that may or may not have been deliberate on Guo Maoqian's part.

32. Lu Qinli, comp., *Liang shi*, 3.1555. For another English translation, see Eccles, "The Grief," 180.

雄劍頓無光	The male sword suddenly loses its luster, ³³
雜佩亦銷燂	And the sheen of various jade pendants also fades away.
秋至明月圓	Autumn comes: round is the bright moon;
風傷白露落	Wind wounds, as white dew falls.
清夜何湛湛	How deep is the clear night—
孤燭映蘭幕	As a lone candle illuminates the scented curtain.
撫影愴無從	Looking to their shadows, they are saddened about not following him; ³⁴
惟懷憂不薄	In their hearts there is nothing but a heavy sorrow.
瑤色行應罷	The alabaster face is about to be no more;
紅芳幾為樂	How long does the joy of sweet rouge last?
徒登歌舞臺	In vain they ascend the terrace for singing and dancing:
終成螻蟻郭	All will turn into a city of mole crickets and ants.

The hard substance of metal (sword) and mineral (jade pendant) yields to temporal changes, but the wind “wounds” just as swords do. The women appear as the shimmering shadows cast on the soul-curtains by a solitary candle, whose light replaces the vanished light of the king’s “male sword.” The poem ends with an image that is striking in the contemporary context of fifth-century writings: in earlier literature, mole crickets and ants either appear as a figure of lowliness and insignificance, or, in the graphic language of one of Lu Ji’s “Bearers’ Songs,” refer to the eaters of

33. According to ancient sword lore, the famous swordsmith couple, Gan Jiang 干將 and Mo Ye 莫邪, forged a pair of swords, one male and one female, and named them after themselves.

34. *Cong* (follow) is a loaded word in the context of the death of one’s lord, as it has the sense of following one’s lord into death as human sacrifice. It is also understood as the custom of joint burial. “Shun was buried in the wilderness of Cangwu, and his three consorts did not follow him” 舜葬於蒼梧之野，蓋三妃未之從也。 *Li ji zhushu* 7.125. Jiang Yan’s line could also mean “feeling saddened that there is no one for them to follow” as in the prescription for women to adhere to the “principle of three followings” 三從之義 (i.e., follow her father while unmarried, follow her husband after marriage, and follow her son after the husband’s death). *Yi li zhushu*, 11.359.

dead bodies buried underground;³⁵ Jiang Yan's "city of mole crickets and ants" is a novel expression that turns the much romanticized banquets of the Jian'an era and the much celebrated city of Ye into a metropolis of macabre feasts.

Jiang Yan's fascination with candlelight and shadows was very modern,³⁶ even though the poem as a whole deals with the topic in a heavy-handed way that is somehow reminiscent of the "old poems." It starts off with a narrative opening couplet identifying Cao Cao by his posthumous title and baldly announcing his passing; after that, pretty much everything in the poem is explicitly stated: autumn "comes," moon is "round," dew "falls," night is "deep," the women are sad about "not following" their lord, and the final unequivocal declaration is that all will turn into the mound of cadaver-eating insects. The change in contemporary aesthetics is demonstrated most clearly in the acclaimed court poet Xie Tiao's poem "On Bronze Bird Terrace: Composed with Consultant Xie" ("Tong Xie ziyi yong Tongque tai" 同謝諮議詠銅雀臺).³⁷ Twenty years younger than Jiang Yan, Xie Tiao was one of the key crafters of a new courtly style of restraint and elegance. This court poetics would exert a major influence on later poetry.

總帷飄井幹	Hemp soul-curtains flutter on the towering edifice,
樽酒若平生	A goblet of ale, just like how it used to be.
鬱鬱西陵樹	Dense are the trees on the western mound;
詎聞歌吹聲	How could the sounds of song and piping be heard?
芳襟染淚跡	The fragrant lapels are stained by tracks of tears,
嬋媛空復情	Tenderly attached, their feelings are all in vain. ³⁸

35. Lu Ji, "Bearers' Songs" No. 3: "Plump flesh is feasted upon by mole crickets and ants" 豐肌饜螻蟻. Lu Qinli, comp., *Jin shi*, 5.654.

36. The interest in light and shadow in belletristic writings was a new phenomenon in the late fifth through the first half of the sixth century, as there was a surge in the use of the imagery of candlelight and shadow. For a more detailed discussion, see Tian, *Beacon Fire*, 211–59.

37. Lu Qinli, comp., *Qi shi* 齊詩, 3.1418. For other English translations, see Eccles, "The Grief," 180–81; Owen, *An Anthology*, 326; Mather, *The Age of Eternal Brilliance*, 2.17.

38. *Chanyuan* 嬋媛 (or in variant form *chanjuan* 嬋娟) is a compound used in

玉座猶寂寞 Even the jade throne is lonely and desolate;
 況乃妾身輕 How much more so are our bodies
 of little weight.

Reading this poem against Jiang Yan's, we notice many interesting features. First, there is no explicit reference to Cao Cao, but the second line strikes any reader in the know with its power of rich irony, as it rings with the dead man's own words from "Short Song": "The wine before me as I sing. / How long can human life last?" The masterful word choice made in the first couplet is *ruo* 若, "just like," which later Chinese critics would characterize as one of those "empty words" (*xuzi* 虛字). The use of *ruo* implies a subjective perception and a sense of comparison between "before" and "after," turning a normally "solid" (*shi*) object, i.e., a goblet of ale, into an "empty" thing, i.e., the past or "how it used to be."

The density of the trees growing on Cao Cao's grave mound indicates time's passage. Like a screen, the trees block the sound of music from Bronze Bird Terrace; but the second couplet can also be read as run-on lines: trees are unfeeling things that cannot hear. Here one can almost make the association with one of the English poet William Wordsworth's famous "Lucy" poems, "A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal," in which the dead girl "seemed a thing that could not feel / The touch of earthly years. / No motion has she now, no force; / She neither hears nor sees; / Rolled round in earth's diurnal course, / With rocks, and stones, and trees."

Jiang Yan's poem reduces the women to shadows reflected on the soul-curtains, illusory and fleeting. Xie Tiao returns physicality to them by mentioning their "fragrant lapels"—with just a hint at Cao Cao's deathbed instruction about "dividing the remaining incense among my consorts." Yet, their dresses are tainted (*ran* 染) with tears of longing, a line of strong Buddhist connotations, as the term *ran*, contamination or pollution, refers to the defilement of the mind by desire or sexual passion. The Buddhist connotation of this line is emphasized by the word *kong* 空, emptiness, in the corresponding position of *ran* in the next line of the

"Lament for Ying" 哀郢: "My heart is fondly attached, and my breast is wounded" 心蟬媛而傷懷兮. *Chuci buzhu*, 4.134. Also see Jiang Yan's "Fu on Leaving My Hometown" 去故鄉賦: "My feelings are tenderly attached, not quite subsiding" 情嬋娟而未罷. Yan Kejun, comp., *Quan Liang wen*, 33.3143.

couplet. Xie Tiao lived at a time when Buddhist influence was prevalent and intense in elite life, not to mention that his patron, the Prince of Jingling 竟陵王 (Xiao Ziliang 蕭子良, 460–94), was a devout Buddhist who constantly hosted dharma assemblies at his residence, which Xie Tiao frequented.³⁹ Soothill's Buddhist dictionary glosses the term *rangou* 染垢 as such: "Soiled, contaminated, impure, especially by holding on to the illusory ideas and things of life; deluded. The *klesas* or contaminations of attachment to the pleasures of the senses."⁴⁰ Nothing exemplifies the teaching about "mind defilement" better than the women of Bronze Bird Terrace and their lord who had them perform for his dead self.

The poem ends with the women's direct speech, addressing themselves in self-consolation. The lightness—but also the warmth—of the female bodies is contrasted with the heavy and cold "jade throne" (i.e., the "couch of eight feet long" enclosed in the hemp curtains in Cao Cao's will), a metonymic reference to Cao Cao that depersonalizes him. The contrast brings the poem to a full circle: the opening line—"Hemp soul-curtains flutter on the towering edifice"—contains just such a contrast of something weightless and animated and something heavy and lifeless, an oppressive weight that immobilizes the women. That "Even the jade throne is lonely and desolate" brings nothing but cold comfort.

This poem in many ways exemplifies Xie Tiao's poetic style admired and emulated by his contemporaries: it is graceful even in articulating resentment, implicit rather than explicit, and how much "information" a reader can get from it depends on the reader's degree of complicity in the same cultural and literary discourse and rhetorical training.

"Bronze Bird Performers" by He Xun 何遜 (d. ca. 518), who enjoyed fame as one of the best poets in the early sixth century, is written with the same kind of delicate restraint but manages to be unique.⁴¹

秋風木葉落	In the autumn wind, tree leaves fall,
蕭瑟管絃清	Rustling, pipes and strings sound clear.
望陵歌對酒	Gazing at his tomb, they sing
	"The wine before me,"

39. Xie Tiao was one of the famous "Eight Friends" of the prince. *Liang shu*, 1.2.

40. Soothill and Hodous, *A Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms*, 309.

41. Lu Qinli, comp., *Liang shi*, 8.1679. For other English translations, see Eccles, "The Grief," 181; Owen, *An Anthology*, 326.

向帳舞空城	Toward the curtains they dance the “empty city.”
寂寂簷宇曠	All still, the roof and eaves are broad;
飄飄帷幔輕	Fluttering and flapping, the curtains light.
曲終相顧起	Music is done, they look at one another and rise;
日暮松柏聲	At sundown, sound in the cypresses and pines.

The first two couplets rework the same elements—wind, trees, music, and Cao Cao’s own song—of Xie’s first two couplets, with two more allusions to earlier literature seamlessly inserted. The first line evokes “The Lady of the Xiang” (“Xiang furen” 湘夫人): “Gently blows the autumn wind, / The Dongting Lake ripples, and tree leaves fall” 嫋嫋兮秋風，洞庭波兮木葉下.⁴² The goddesses of the Xiang were believed to be Yao’s two daughters who married Emperor Shun, after whose death they were filled with longing for him. The “empty city” in the fourth line alludes to the story of the ill-fated Han prince Liu Dan 劉旦 (d. 80 BCE), who committed suicide after a failed rebellion. Before he died, he gave a last banquet for his retainers and consorts; at the banquet he sang a song imagining his city deserted after his death, and his consort rose from her seat to dance.⁴³

In this poem the women do not look to the grave but look at each other instead. Vision is curbed even further and turned inward. There is also a remarkable emphasis on sound. As Owen points out, the poem “opens with the sound of wind in the trees, in which begins the music of instruments, then song, and it ends with the sound of the wind in the cypresses and pine trees planted on the tomb.”⁴⁴ The supplanting of music with the desolate sound of nature is an implicit comment on the impermanence and fragility of human accomplishments. In many ways, He Xun’s poem also pays tribute to Lu Yun’s “*Fu* on Ascending the Terrace,” in which there is a passage that vividly describes the hollow

42. *Chuci buzhu*, 2.65.

43. The consort also sang a song. Both songs are recorded in the prince’s biography. *Han shu*, 63.2757.

44. Owen, *An Anthology*, 325.

chambers by depicting the draft and the echoes. Here, however, we can best observe the generic difference between a poetic exposition and a *shi* poem, especially a *shi* poem informed by the new aesthetics that was to become prominent in the later tradition: the former elaborates and exposes, seeking to overwhelm the reader in a linguistic display; the latter evokes and elicits with deliberate restraint and control.

From the sixth century on, the pathos of Bronze Bird seems to have become one of the standard topics at which any self-respecting poet must try his hand, most typically in the form of eight five-syllable lines. Many of the pieces are competent, but neither inspired nor inspiring. Among these the early Tang poet Wang Bo's 王勃 (650–76) pair of poems is more interesting because of the dual perspectives adopted therein.⁴⁵

I.

金鳳鄰銅雀	Metal Phoenix is adjacent to Bronze Bird,
漳河望鄴城	From the Zhang River one looks toward the city of Ye.
君王無處所	The lord and king is nowhere to be found, ⁴⁶
臺榭若平生	Though the terraces and pavilions are just how they used to be. ⁴⁷
舞席紛可就	Dancing mats are many and still usable,
歌梁儼未傾	Lofty rafters of singing have not yet crumbled. ⁴⁸
西陵松檟冷	On the western mound, pines and catalpas are chilly:
誰見綺羅情	Who sees the feelings of gauze and silk?

45. *Quan Tang shi*, 56.678. For another English translation, see Eccles, "The Grief," 182–83.

46. *Wu chusuo* 無處所 (nowhere to be found) is an ironic recycling of the phrase from the famous "Fu on Gaotang" 高唐賦, in which the Chu king has an erotic dream of the Goddess of the Wu Mountain, but then she supposedly transforms herself into the morning cloud that is "nowhere to be found" when the rainstorm stops. Yan Kejun, comp., *Quan shanggu sandai wen* 全上古三代文, 10.73.

47. *Ruo pingsheng* 若平生 (just how they used to be), which is parallel to the recycled phrase *wu chusuo*, is taken verbatim from Xie Tiao's poem.

48. "Rafters of singing" refers to the conventional description of a singer's soaring voice that echoes in a hall and "circles the rafters."

2.

妾本深宮妓	I am originally a performer
	from the deep palace,
層城閉九重	In the Tiered City, barred in nine layers.
君王歡愛盡	Now that my lord and king's sweet love
	is gone,
歌舞爲誰容	Singing and dancing: for whom
	do I adorn my face?
錦衾不復襞	Brocade coverlet is left unfolded,
羅衣誰再縫	Who cares about sewing another silk dress?
高臺西北望	On the high terrace I gaze
	toward the northwest:
流涕向青松	Tears flow as I face the green pines.

The two poems are meant to be read as a sort of duet, an interlocking of two perspectives, one being the view of the terrace from afar and the other an imagined view from the terrace. They strongly evoke “Nineteen Old Poems” (“Gushi shijiushou” 古詩十九首) II:

青青河畔草	Green, green is the grass by the river,
鬱鬱園中柳	In the garden the willows are all dense and full.
盈盈樓上女	High in the tower a woman so lovely,
皎皎當窗牖	She glows in the window, white and pure.
娥娥紅粉粧	Rouge on her cheeks, bright in her beauty,
纖纖出素手	She puts out a pale and delicate hand.
昔爲倡家女	“Once long ago
	I was from a family of performers,
今爲蕩子婦	Now I'm the wife of a traveling man.
蕩子行不歸	He travels and never comes home,
空牀難獨守	A lonely bed can't be kept empty for long.” ⁴⁹

What concerns us here is the dual perspectives in this canonical poem: first the vision—that of a male passer-by?—zooms in, penetrates the vegetation that encloses the garden to reveal the tower in the garden,

49. Owen's translation with slight modifications, *An Anthology*, 259.

moves up to the woman who stands by the window in the tower, and finally, focuses on a delicate pale hand she puts out from the window, completing a mutual traversing of boundaries; then we hear a soliloquy from the woman, who offers her life story and her viewpoint on the current unbearable situation she finds her in. This structure of an outsider's peeking inside the interior—first that of a garden and a house, then that of a woman's personal and emotional world—is replicated exactly by Wang Bo's Bronze Bird poems.

In Wang's first poem, the speaker looks at Ye from the bank of the Zhang River, and his eyes move from Metal Phoenix to Bronze Bird. He sees the terraces and towers from afar, but the lord and king, Cao Cao, is, ironically, like the dissipated "morning cloud"—the goddess of Wu Mountain—that is "nowhere to be found." Then he comes closer and sees the interior, noticing the mats and rafters still there. At this point he turns back to look at the western hills: a viewpoint that brings him so close to the women on the terrace that he literally becomes one of them—and the second poem gives us the view *from* Bronze Bird Terrace, with the poet assuming her own voice.

The last couplet of the first poem is notable for the comment that the pines and catalpas planted on Cao Cao's tomb are "chilly" (*leng* 冷), which is not an adjective normally associated with trees. The trees are chilly because the sun is setting, and they are deprived of the sun's warmth. Of course it can also be because the trees grow so dense and full (*yuyu* 鬱鬱) that it is hard for the sun's rays to penetrate them, and their green color is a visually cool hue.⁵⁰ In the descending dark, with the view-blocking trees, the poet wonders to himself: who can *see* the feelings of the women on the terrace? Feelings are not a thing to be "seen," but this question reminds us that the poem is very much about vision, about what one can and cannot see. The question is implicitly answered by the poet, who positions himself, not the dead lord, as the person who truly "sees" the women's feelings, because he has "entered" them and become them.

The second poem begins with a couplet that both mimics the last part of the Old Poem and turns it around: the woman in the Old Poem

50. Later on, the great poet Wang Wei 王维 (699–761) was to write "Hues of sunlight were chilled by green pines" 日色冷青松 in his acclaimed poem entitled "Stopping by the Temple of Incense Massed" 過香積寺. *Quan Tang shi*, 126.1274.

says she “once was” (*xi wei* 昔為), and the woman on Bronze Bird Terrace speaks of “originally” (*ben* 本); but if the former hints at her public accessibility, the latter insists on her sheltered and insulated past in the deep palace. Her lord, like the traveling man in the Old Poem, will not come home; but unlike the woman in the Old Poem, there is no make-up on her face.⁵¹ The third couplet is entirely based on Southern Dynasties poetic tropes. The “brocade coverlet left unfolded” is a surprise to a reader who is familiar with the sixth-century poetry, for the image of a spread brocade coverlet is usually associated with lovers sleeping together. Thus, in the noted writer Wang Sengru’s 王僧孺 (465–522) poem, a lonely woman speaks of “Leaving the brocade coverlet folded and not lying down, / Sitting upright from night to morning” 錦衾襞不臥，端坐夜及朝。⁵² But here we see the opposite—the coverlet is left unfolded, perhaps to show how she disregards daily routine in her melancholy, or perhaps to hint that she wants to keep everything as it was on the last night she had spent together with her lord. The “sewing” line in the third couplet evokes similar lines in Bao Zhao’s 鮑照 (d. 466) and particularly Xie Tiao’s poetic collections.⁵³ The last couplet of the poem has her standing on the terrace—not looking back at any passer-by, but gazing at her lord’s tomb; her flowing tears echo the image of the Zhang River, and the green pines echo the chilly pines and catalpas in the first poem, bringing things full circle.

Wang Bo’s poems are absorbed in the question of vision. The unidentified speaker looks at the woman on the terrace and claims, implicitly, to be the one who can see her feelings, but the woman is looking at someone

51. Applying make-up during her husband’s absence is disavowed in the *Shi jing* poem to which the line “for whom do I adorn my face” alludes, though that is exactly what the woman in the Old Poem does. The *Shi jing* poem in question is “My Man” 伯兮: “Ever since my man goes east, / My hair has been like tumbleweed. / It is not that I do not have ointment, / But for whom should I adorn my looks?” *Mao shi zhushu*, 3.140.

52. “A Poem on Behalf of Someone’s Favorite Consort Who Feels Resentment” 為人寵姬有怨詩。寤臥, to lie down, has a textual variant, *kai* 開, “to open” or “unfold.” Lu Qinli, comp., *Liang shi*, 12.1768.

53. Bao Zhao: “Dress for dancing is no longer being mended” 舞衣不復縫. Lu Qinli, comp., *Song shi*, 7.1259. Xie Tiao: “Dress for dancing is folded, unmended” 舞衣襞未縫. Lu Qinli, comp., *Qi shi*, 4.1447. Sometimes a woman preoccupies herself with sewing or mending her clothes in a sleepless night, as in Xie Tiao’s “Resentment of the Jade Steps” 玉階怨: “Through the long night she sews her silk dress; / This longing for you—when will it cease” 長夜縫羅衣，思君此何極. Lu Qinli, comp., *Qi shi*, 3.1420.

else who can never return her gaze. The beauty of the poems lies in the fact that there is an utter lack of reciprocation, between the poet speaker and the woman, between the woman and her lord, in this pair of poems that form a perfect parallel to each other.

While the pathos of Bronze Bird women dominates the poetic imagination about Ye from the Southern Dynasties on, in the late sixth through the early eighth century we still see a more general interest in the city associated with the aura of the Jian'an and Cao Wei. Li Baiyao 李百藥 (565–648), son of the Northern Qi courtier and historian Li Delin 李德林 (532–91), has a remarkable poem, “On the Assigned Topic: Wei’s Capital” (“Fude Wei du” 賦得魏都).⁵⁴ Li Baiyao had spent his early childhood in Ye, but after the Qi fell to Zhou in 577, he was relocated to Chang’an along with his father. He served the Sui dynasty as a young man, and then he served in the court of Tang Emperor Taizong (r. 626–49). To write on an assigned topic at a social gathering was a popular practice at court; we do not know when he composed this poem, but we can be certain that it was written after the physical city of Ye was razed in 580.

炎運精華歇	The fine essence of the fiery enterprise had ceased to be, ⁵⁵
清都寶命開	In the celestial capital heaven’s mandate was revealed.
帝里三方盛	The imperial city was the most prosperous of the three regions, ⁵⁶
4 王庭萬國來	To the royal court myriad kingdoms paid tribute.
玄武疏遙磴	By the Dark Warrior Lake drainage ditches were widely spaced, ⁵⁷

54. *Quan Tang shi*, 43.536.

55. According to the Five Elements theory, the element of Han was fire, and so Han was often referred to as the “fiery Han” or “blazing Han” (*yan Han* 炎漢).

56. *San fang*, three regions, is a term used in Lu Ji’s “An Analysis of the Dynastic Downfall” 辨亡論 to refer to the Three Kingdoms of Wei, Shu, and Wu. Yan Kejun, comp., *Quan Jin wen*, 98.2023.

57. According to Li Daoyuan’s commentary on the *Water Classic*, Cao Cao “dammed the Zhang River and made it flow east, calling it Sky Well Dam; and within the distance of twenty *li* created twelve drainage ditches, spaced at three hundred paces apart.” Li Daoyuan, *Shuijing zhu jiaoshi*, 10.179.

referring to the placing of the Bronze Bird on top of the terrace.⁶¹ The upward motion, as the vision follows the phoenix to “ascend” (*shang*) the high terrace, is maintained in the seeking of immortality in the seventh line, but the eighth line moves down and back to the human world again, where one suffers from heat and cold and, unlike the “immortal lads” in Cao Pi’s poem who “neither drink nor eat,” must both eat and drink. This leads to the familiar vision of the Jian’an feasts in the fifth couplet, in which we continue to see the motion of drawing in and pulling toward the political and cultural center.

The last couplet of the poem, however, abruptly moves from inside to outside the city: echoing Liu Zhen’s poem thanking Cao Pi for visiting him while he was convalescing “on the riverbank of the Clear Zhang,” the couplet shifts focus from the center to the periphery. The image of the sick poet recuperating at home and receiving solicitous attention from his lord is essential to the construction of the empire in the poem: nobody is, or can be, outside the purview of the empire; the poet, temporarily in reclusion, is nevertheless visited upon by his lord and must show appreciation for his lord’s *xi* 惜 (to cherish; also to begrudge a thing of value). Indeed, the figure of the sick poet probably had a special resonance for Li Baiyao, whose name, given to him by his grandmother, means “a hundred medicines” because he was very sickly as a young boy.⁶²

Several generations later, Zhang Yue 張說 (663–731), the grand statesman of the Tang court, wrote “Tune of the Capital Ye” (“Ye du yin” 鄴都引):⁶³

君不見	Don't you see
魏武草創爭天祿	Wei's Martial King initiated the enterprise and vied for heaven's blessing
群雄睚眦相馳逐	As many heroes glared at one another, galloping and competing;

61. Note that the “metal phoenix” here is *not* the name given to Metal Tiger Terrace by Shi Hu, although the Northern Qi’s change of Bronze Bird’s name to “metal phoenix” might have played a role in Li Baiyao’s phrasing.

62. Li Baiyao’s biography in *Jiu Tang shu*, 72.2571. Li was supposed to be cured of his many ailments after a failed assassination attempt by poisoning, and of course he went on to live to the ripe old age of eighty-three.

63. *Quan Tang shi*, 86.939–40.

- 畫攜壯士破堅陣 During the day he led stalwart warriors
to break hard formations,
夜接詞人賦華屋 At night he received men of letters,
composing poems about the splendid
hall;⁶⁴
都邑繚繞西山陽 His capital wound around
on the sunny side of the western hills,
桑榆漫漫漳河曲 At the bend of the Zhang River,
endless mulberries and elms;⁶⁵
城郭為墟人改代 Now the city is in ruins,
generations have changed;
但有西園明月在 Only the bright moon of the Western Park
still remains;⁶⁶
鄴傍高塚多貴臣 In the towering grave mounds beside Ye
lay many a noble lord;
蛾眉曼睞共灰塵 Moth-like eyebrows, lustrous glances,
all in dust—⁶⁷
試上銅台歌舞處 If you go up Bronze Bird Terrace,
on the spot for singing and dancing,
唯有秋風愁殺人 There is but the autumn wind,
killing a man with melancholy.

64. Cao Zhi's "Song of the Harp" / "Brown Sparrow in the Wild Fields" has the couplet: "Alive we reside in the splendid hall; / Fallen, we return to hills and mounds" See chapter 1, note 82.

65. The term *sangyu*, according to a now lost entry from *Huainanzi*, can refer to the rays of the setting sun on the treetops. Cited in Liu Xiaobiao's 劉孝標 (462–521) commentary in Liu Yiqing, *Shishuo xinyu jianshu*, 2.62. Cao Zhi's poem "Presented to Biao, Prince of Baima" has the couplet: "My years sink in the west among mulberries and elms, / Like shadow and echo they cannot be pursued" 年在桑榆間, 影響不能追. Lu Qinli, comp., *Wei shi*, 7.454.

66. This is again a reference to Cao Zhi's "Public Banquet": "On a clear night we roam in the Western Park, / Flying canopies chase one another. / The clear light of the bright moon is so pure, / Constellations are scattered in the sky" 清夜遊西園, 飛蓋相追隨, 明月澄清景, 列宿正參差. Lu Qinli, comp., *Wei shi*, 7.449.

67. This brings to mind the lines from "Summoning the Soul" 招魂: "Moth-like eyebrows, lustrous glances, / Eyes that beam with brightness" 蛾眉曼睞, 目騰光些. *Chuci buzhu*, 9.205.

We recognize the familiar elements from Bronze Bird poems—trees, autumn, wind, moon; but they have all been transformed into something different. The poem, like Wang Bo's set, focuses on vision: what one can, and cannot, see, of the city of Ye and the history embodied by the city. The poem begins with a rhetorical question that also reads like a denial—"Don't/Can't you see" (*Jun bu jian* 君不見, literally, "you do not/cannot see"), and the rest of the poem could be read as the object of this "(not) seeing." Throughout the poem the imagery of the eye is foregrounded—the angry glares (*yazi* 睚眦) of the heroes fighting for control of the empire; the gleaming eyes (*manlu* 曼睞) of the women singing and dancing at the banquets. But the poem ends with an aural image not visible to the eye—the sound of the autumn wind. Indeed the only thing from Cao Cao's times that remains visible is textual: "the bright moon of the Western Park"—the moon Cao Zhi celebrated in his poem. In his commentary on Cao Zhi's line "My years sink in the west among mulberries and elms," Li Shan says: "The sun on mulberries and elms is a metaphor for a person's aging" 日在桑榆以喻人之將老.⁶⁸ Here with the overgrowth of mulberries and elms indicating nature's triumph over man-made structures, Zhang Yue describes the aging and death of a city: Ye is in ruins; its people are no more. Yet, the "splendid hall" constructed with poetic words has alone survived. The second couplet of the poem presents a beautiful balancing of the destructive/creative forces of *wu* (martial) and *wen* (cultural): "hard formations" can be smashed (*po* 破) with military power, but writing builds the splendid hall that lives on even as the physical city crumbles. It is a poem that ultimately points to itself and validates itself through its celebration of poetry.

A discussion of medieval Bronze Bird poems cannot be complete without mentioning Li He's 李賀 (791–817) "Written in Retrospective Response to He and Xie's Poems 'Bronze Bird Performers'" ("Zhui he He Xie Tongque ji" 追和何謝銅雀妓).⁶⁹ Li He was known in later times as the "ghostly talent" (*gui cai* 鬼才) for his baroque, morbid imagery, and for his obsession with otherworldly, including historical, subject matter. Among other things, he was intensely interested in the history of the

68. Xiao Tong, comp., *Wen xuan*, 24.1124.

69. *Quan Tang shi*, 392.4412. For another English translation, see Frodsham, *Goddesses, Ghosts, and Demons*, 90. Also Eccles, "The Grief," 186.

late Eastern Han and Three Kingdoms, as attested by a number of his poems on this period.⁷⁰ The topic of Bronze Bird performers would have presented to him an opportunity and a challenge he could not afford to miss. Li He also lived at a time that witnessed a powerful cultural nostalgia for the Southern Dynasties; this nostalgia endowed the Southern Dynasties with an aura of melancholy decadence that was nowhere to be found in the period itself.⁷¹

佳人一壺酒	The fair one—a jug of ale—
秋容滿千里	Autumn looks fill a thousand <i>li</i> .
石馬臥新煙	Stone horses crouch in the new mist. ⁷²
憂來何所似	Worries come—what are they like?
歌聲且潛弄	For the moment, just sing softly;
陵樹風自起	From the grave trees, a wind rises of itself.
長裾壓高臺	Long trains of dresses press on the high terrace;
淚眼看花機	Tearful eyes gaze at the flower loom.

Commentators tend to take *jiaren* 佳人 in the first line as indicating the women on the terrace,⁷³ but *jiaren* in classical Chinese is not gender specific. The association here is certainly with the opening lines of Cao Cao's "Short Song," alluded to in both Xie Tiao and He Xun's pieces, and with its gender and number ambiguity *jiaren* evokes both Cao Cao and the women on the terrace offering ale to his spirit.

70. For instance, he wrote a poem on Lady Tang, the consort of the ill-fated young Han prince Liu Bian 劉辯 (176–190), who was emperor for a few months before being deposed and poisoned by Dong Zhuo ("The Drinking Song of Lady Tang of the Han" 漢唐姬飲酒歌); a poem on the Wei Emperor Ming's relocation of the bronze statue of an immortal from Chang'an ("Bronze Immortal Bade the Han Farewell" 金銅仙人辭漢歌); a poem on the general Lü Bu 呂布 (d. 199) ("Song of General Lü" 呂將軍歌); and a particularly intriguing poem, "Children's Rhyme from the Ancient City of Ye: An Imitation of Wang Can's Satire on Cao Cao" 古鄴城童子謠效王粲刺曹操, which will be discussed later in this chapter. *Quan Tang shi*, 394.4441, 391.4403, 393.4433, 392.4420.

71. See Fusheng Wu, *The Poetics of Decadence*, 77; Owen, *The Late Tang*, 209; Tian, *Beacon Fire*, 420.

72. Stone horses refer to the stone statues lining up the "spirit way" leading to a royal tomb.

73. See Li He, *Changgu ji*, 3.93, and Li He, *Li Changji geshi*, 3.98 (both printed in *Li He shi zhu*); also Li He, *Li He shiji*, 162, and *Li He ji*, 183.

The lack of determinacy in the reference of “the fair one(s)” and in the relationship between “the fair one(s)” and “a jug of ale” prefigures the rest of the poem, which draws its affective force from the interpretative vibrancy and fluidity of the phrasing and the images.

The phrase *qiu rong* in the second line is usually thought to describe autumnal appearance of the landscape. Juxtaposed with “the fair one(s)” in the corresponding position, it also evokes the aging faces of the women. As it is joined with the phrase “a thousand *li*,” one also thinks of Xie Zhuang’s elegiac, Jian’an-themed “*Fu* on the Moon,” which contains the famous line, “Across a thousand *li*, we share the same bright moon” 隔千里兮共明月.⁷⁴ The pathos is as effective in Xie’s *fu* as it is here, since for those separated not by physical distance but by death, there is no sharing of the moon. The oblique presence of the moon is reinforced by the fourth line in Li He’s poem with its more explicit allusion to Cao Cao’s “Short Song” (though few commentators have pointed it out): “How bright is the moon, / When will its passage cease? / Worries come from within, / Nor can they be halted” 明明如月，何時可輟？憂從中來，不可斷絕。 The question, “Worries come—what are they like?” implicitly invites the reader to compare cares to the bright moonlight (as in Cao Cao’s poem). The imperviousness of the dead to the concerns and sorrows of the living is reinforced in the third couplet: the wind rises “of itself” (*zi* 自), which is immune to human sentiments and does not respond to the women’s song (also *feng* 風, “air”).

The most fascinating interface with He Xun’s and Xie Tiao’s poems is the way in which Li He plays with the motif of weight and lightness in this poem. First we have the line, “Stone horse crouches in the new mist” 石馬臥新煙。 A horse, characterized by its speed of movement, is now reduced to a heavy, cold, immobile object (and evokes, by metonymic extension, the horse-riding martial lord who lies dead and cold in the tomb); the weight, solidity, and clearly defined contour of the stone horse are brought out most strikingly by its crouching, a verb of physicality and immobility, in mist, something ethereal, shifting and shapeless. The mist is also intriguingly *new*:⁷⁵ the newness indicates

74. Yan Kejun, comp., *Quan Song wen* 全宋文, 34.2625.

75. Late imperial commentators tried to explain the phrase as “new vegetation recently planted on a new tomb” but the explanation fails to satisfy, because the “mist” formed by newly sprouted leaves simply does not work with the autumnal atmosphere. Li He, *Changgu ji*, 3.93, and *Li Changji geshi*, 3.98.

changes happening in the world of nature, and reinforces the perpetuity and changelessness of the stone statue, which, as a sign of the noble status of the deceased, gives evidence of the memorialized life of the dead horse-rider in the tomb.

The interplay of weight and lightness is echoed, and reversed, in the penultimate line: “Long trains of dresses press on the high terrace” 長裙壓高臺. *Ya* is unusual here, because it implies weight, and yet a woman’s dress, especially the silk dress of a Bronze Bird performer, is anything but heavy. The striking strangeness of the verb inspires some absurdly literal-minded ingenuity, such as the suggestion that there are simply too many women on the terrace. But the line is in fact inspired by the contrast between the airiness of the fabric and the weight of the terrace in the opening line of Xie Tiao’s poem: “Hemp soul-curtains flutter on the towering edifice,” and by the women’s feeble self-consolation in the last couplet, “Even the jade throne is lonely and desolate, / How much more so are our bodies of little weight.” Li He makes two changes: first, the fabric here becomes that of the dresses that clothe the female bodies; second, the relation of fabric to the terrace is changed to one of pressing and oppressing: one may say that the women here are made into a counterweight, both to the lightness of body and worth in Xie Tiao’s couplet and to the stone horse statue symbolizing the dead lord; their lives, weighed down to the terrace by a will more powerful than theirs, are also weighing on the terrace.

One final note on the final line of the poem: all commentators try to emend the last word, *ji* 機, to *ji* 几, “table,” which is usually interpreted as the table for making offerings to the dead. This reading is not impossible, although a sacrificial table is rarely, if ever, referred to as a “flowery table/flower-decorated table.” I suspect, instead, that Li He’s strange and bold poetic imagination might have taken him to a part of Cao Cao’s will that no Bronze Bird terrace poet ever touches on—that Cao wished his women to while away the time, after he was gone, by making fancy shoes and selling them. *Ji* 機 is a loom; although it is not entirely consistent with shoe-making, where embroidery rather than fabric is central, it signifies the fact that when the women are not performing for the departed, they have to do women’s work. Whatever *huaji* refers to, the poem ends with a visual focus on something close at hand. This recalls He Xun’s ending couplet, in which the women look at each other after

they finish the song. In either case, the women are not looking into the distance at the tomb.

Irony and Criticism: Later Variations

If in earlier Bronze Bird poems the women express longing for their lord, there is no such sentiment discernible in Li He's poem. A sense of irony about Cao Cao's dying wish is certainly never far away from the Bronze Bird theme: even in Lu Ji's elegy we already see a tension between Lu Ji's disapproval of Cao Cao's sentimental attachment and his sympathy for the warlord's human weakness. As time went on, the balance was tipped toward compassion for the performers' tragic fate, and beginning in the eighth century, there was growing criticism of their lord.

Cui Guofu's 崔國輔 (726 *jìnshì*) "Wei Palace Lyric" ("Wei gongci" 魏宮詞) is a pungent satire that sheds a different sort of light on the Bronze Bird women.⁷⁶

朝日照紅妝	The morning sun shone forth on the rouge make-up,
擬上銅雀台	As she was planning to go up Bronze Bird Terrace.
畫眉猶未了	Even before she was done painting her eyebrows,
魏帝使人催	Wei's emperor had already sent someone to hurry her up.

The quatrain seems innocuous, but something is not right: by this time female presence on Bronze Bird Terrace had become almost exclusively associated with the women who performed for Cao Cao's spirit, not for any living ruler. Cui Guofu might be alluding to a story from the fifth-century anecdotal collection *A New Account of Tales of the World* (*Shishuo xinyu* 世說新語), in which Cao Pi is said to have taken his

76. *Quan Tang shi*, 119.1202.

father's favorite concubines as soon as his father passed away.⁷⁷ The poet thus transforms Bronze Bird Terrace from a site of melancholy and unfulfilled longing into one of living desire and sexuality. The implicit criticism does not even have to be directed at incest, because for a ruler to be so eager for a musical performance in the early morning is downright scandalous.

The son of the *Wen xuan* commentator Li Shan, noted writer and calligrapher Li Yong 李邕 (678–747), composed a most unusual “Bronze Bird Performers,” condemning all previous poems on this topic.⁷⁸

- | | |
|---------------------------|--|
| 西陵望何及 | One gazes toward the western mound,
but what can one see? |
| 絃管徒在茲
誰言死者樂 | Strings and pipes are here in vain.
Who says that the dead can take pleasure
in them? |
| 4 但令生者悲
丈夫有餘志
兒女焉足私 | They only bring sadness to the living.
A real man has far-reaching aspirations;
How could he harbor the feelings
of boys and girls? |
| 擾擾多俗情 | Tangled and confused
are the vulgar sentiments, |
| 8 投跡互相師 | Following the previous tracks
and emulating one another. |
| 直節豈感激
荒淫乃淒其
潁水有許由 | Who is stirred by upright integrity?
One only feels moved by uninhibited passions.
By the River Ying there was Xu You; |
| 12 西山有伯夷
頌聲何寥寥 | On the Western Mountain there was Boyi.
How few are the odes singing their praises! |

77. “After Emperor Wu of the Wei [Cao Cao] died, Emperor Wen [Cao Pi] took all of Emperor Wu’s palace ladies for himself. When Emperor Wen was seriously ill, Empress Dowager Bian came to visit him. When she arrived, she saw that the ladies waiting on him were all Cao Cao’s favorites from the old days. Empress Dowager asked them: ‘When did you come here?’ They replied, ‘We came here during the Soul Summoning ceremony [performed for Cao Cao].’” Liu Yiqing, *Shishuo xinyu jianshu*, 19.669. Also translated in Mather, *Shih-shuo hsin-yü*, 365. The Soul Summoning ceremony was usually performed after a person had just expired.

78. *Quan Tang shi*, 115.1168.

- 舉頭君不在 They raised their heads:
 their lord was no more:
 12 惟見西陵木 They only saw the trees
 on the western mound.
 玉輦豈再來 Jade carriage would never come again;⁸⁰
 嬌鬟為誰綠 For whom were those lovely tresses still dark?
 那堪秋風裏 Even more unbearable: in the autumn wind
 16 更舞陽春曲 They must dance to the "Tune of Sunny Spring."
 曲罷情不勝 Song done, they were overcome by feelings,
 憑闌向西哭 Leaning over the railings, they wept
 facing the west.
 臺邊生野草 Wild plants grew by the terrace,
 20 來去罨羅縠 Silk and gauze were snared
 in their coming and going.
 沉復陵寢間 Not to mention over there by the mausoleum,
 雙雙見麋鹿 They saw deer roaming in pairs.

Whereas previous Bronze Bird poems depict the overgrowth on the tomb, Liu Shang imagines wild plants growing by the terrace: moss or grass covering the path leading to a dwelling that nobody has visited for a long time is an established poetic image indicating isolation, whether of a palace lady who has lost her lord's favor or of a recluse; nevertheless, wild plants snaring the performers' silk skirts is an ingenious transformation of the traditional image, vividly portraying their entrapment in the situation (reminiscent of Li He's line about dresses weighing down on the terrace). The overgrown Bronze Bird evokes the ancient Gusu Terrace: the minister Wu Zixu 伍子胥 (559–484 BCE) had famously said to the king of Wu that if the king did not heed his warning, he could foresee deer roaming on the Gusu Terrace and brambles growing in the palace.⁸¹ The roaming deer appear in the last line of the poem, but deer roaming in pairs is Liu Shang's new twist: the coupling of the animals serves as a painful reminder of the women's loneliness.

One could of course read moral censure of Cao Cao into all Bronze Bird poems, but this poem is distinctive in its explicit opening denunciation of Cao's selfish indulgence in sensual pleasure. Indeed, to refer

80. Jade carriage refers to the royal carriage (of Cao Cao).

81. *Wu Yue chungiu*, 149.

to him as the “Wei lord” (*Wei zhu*) rather than as king or emperor is a noteworthy choice of address indicating moral judgment: it is a conventional device for implying the illegitimacy of a monarch’s rule in dynastic histories.⁸² The poet’s deliberate avoidance of any delicacy and restraint in portraying the performers’ predicament and sorrow also intensifies the tone of condemnation, and it is not at all clear whether the performers are sad because they long for their lord or because they are lamenting their own fate.

In the ninth century, while we continue to see the decorous grief of the earlier Bronze Bird poems in compositions on this topic, changes are clearly discernible. Poets seem to be consciously striving to avoid clichés: Li He’s version, cited above, repeats certain motifs with a conscious difference from his most famous predecessors; Wen Tingyun 溫庭筠 (ca. 812–ca. 870) attempts innovation by writing about another Ye terrace, Metal Tiger, as well as by trying to inscribe the Northern Qi history back into the poetic discourse on Ye.⁸³ Meanwhile, poems on the Three Kingdoms history in general increase, with certain new favorite figures and events, most prominently Zhuge Liang and the Battle of Red Cliff, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

In ninth-century poems on Ye and Bronze Bird Terrace, irony is increasingly apparent. Li He’s poem, “Children’s Rhyme from the Ancient City of Ye: An Imitation of Wang Can’s Satire on Cao Cao” (“Gu Yecheng tongzi yao xiao Wang Can ci Cao Cao” 古鄴城童子謠效王粲刺曹操), is a striking early example:⁸⁴

鄴城中	In the city of Ye,
暮塵起	Dust rises at dusk.
探黑丸	The one drawing a black ball
斫文吏	Must slay a civil officer. ⁸⁵

82. For instance, Shen Yue’s *Song shu* consistently refers to the Northern Wei emperor as “the Wei lord” (*Wei zhu* 魏主) in, e.g., *Song shu*, 4.65, 46.1397–400. The northern historian Wei Shou’s 魏收 (506–72) *Wei shu* 魏書, on the other hand, refers to the Liang emperor as “the Liang lord” (*Liang zhu* 梁主). *Wei shu*, 105.2449.

83. “Metal Tiger Terrace” 金虎臺 (*Quan Tang shi*, 577.6711). Wen’s poems on the Northern Qi include “Song of Mr. Guo of Handan” 邯鄲郭公詞 and “Damozhi Tune” 達摩支曲. *Quan Tang shi*, 577.6712, 577.6703.

84. Frodsham’s translation with modifications, *Goddesses, Ghosts, and Demons*, 131.

85. According to *Han shu*: “During the eras of Yongshi [16–13] and Yuanyan [12–9],

棘爲鞭	Brambles for whips,
虎爲馬	And tigers for horses,
團團走	They gallop in packs
鄴城下	Under Ye's walls.
切玉劍	Sword to cut jade;
射日弓	Bow to shoot the sun:
獻何人	Presented to whom?
奉相公	Why, to the prime minister.
扶穀來	Propping his wheel-hubs
關右兒	Are lads from west of the Pass.
香掃塗	Sweep the boulevards with perfume—
相公歸	The prime minister comes home!

The poem paints a picture of a chaotic age, with gangs of young toughs galloping through the city and assassinating government officials. The “satire” of the piece lies in the gangs’ disregard for the law and their single-minded reverence for the prime minister, i.e., Cao Cao. The gift offerings are problematic, especially the bow to “shoot the sun,” implying mutinous intentions.

While the brisk trisyllabic rhythm of the song evokes some of the Eastern Han popular rhymes or “children’s rhymes” recorded in *Hou Han shu*,⁸⁶ there is no satire directed at Cao Cao in Wang Can’s extant writings. Instead, there is a proclamation denouncing Cao Cao written by Chen Lin on behalf of the warlord Yuan Shao and included in the *Wen*

the Emperor [Emperor Cheng of the Western Han] was negligent in his rule . . . There was gradual increase of the wicked and dishonest people in Chang’an. Young men formed packs in the neighborhood to kill government officials; sometimes they were paid off to exact vengeance on them. They would get together and draw lots with pellets: those who drew red pellets killed military officials; those who drew black pellets, civil officials; those who drew white pellets would take care of funerary arrangements [for one of their own who was slain]. Dust arose at dusk in the city. Travelers were raided and robbed. Dead and wounded people lay on the streets” 永始元延間，上怠於政...長安中姦滑浸多，閭里少年羣羣殺吏，受賕報仇，相與探丸為彈，得赤丸者斫武吏，得黑丸者斫文吏，白者主治喪，城中薄暮塵起，剽劫行者，死傷橫道。 *Han shu*, 90.3673.

86. For instance, see *Hou Han shu*, 78.2521.

xuan.⁸⁷ Either Wang Can, like Chen Lin, had written something satirical about Cao Cao when he was still serving under Liu Biao and the writing is lost by now, or (more likely) Li He imagines that Wang Can “must have” written something like that, in the same way that he writes a poem in the voice of Yu Jianwu 庾肩吾 (ca. 487–551), a prominent Liang court poet, because he imagines that Yu “must have” composed something on Liang’s fall.⁸⁸

In this poem Cao Cao is obliquely cast as the overlord of a gang of lawless toughs, an unsettlingly powerful prime minister with imperial ambitions. It is not a flattering image, but one that would gain increasing influence in the ninth century and beyond. Li Xianyong’s 李咸用 (ca. fl. 860–74) “Bronze Bird Performers” is explicitly satirical.⁸⁹ Li’s poetic collection was still well preserved in the Southern Song; the eminent poet Yang Wanli 楊萬里 (1127–1206), an admirer, wrote a preface to his *Collection of Sifting through Sand* (*Pisha ji* 披沙集) in 1193.⁹⁰

但見西陵慘明月	One only sees the bright moon mourning the western mound;
女妓無因更相悅	There is no means for the performers to bring pleasure.
有虞曾不有遺言	You Yu had never left any last word behind him,
滴盡湘妃眼中血	Yet blood drained from the weeping eyes of the Xiang ladies.

The “bright moon of the Western Park” in Zhang Yue’s poem now becomes the melancholy bright moon over the western mound, and that

87. This is the famous “Military Proclamation to [the Governor of] Yuzhou on Behalf of Yuan Shao” mentioned in chapter 1.

88. The poem is entitled “Song on Returning from Kuaiji” 還自會稽歌. In the preface to the poem, Li He states: “It has been my opinion that he [Yu Jianwu] must have written something at the time; only now it cannot be found. Therefore I composed ‘Song on Returning from Kuaiji’ to supplement what is missing regarding his sorrow.” *Quan Tang shi*, 390.4392–93.

89. *Quan Tang shi*, 644.7383.

90. See Yang Wanli, *Yang Wanli ji jianjiao*, 3289–90.

is all there is to be seen. The second couplet refers to the popular legend of You Yu, i.e., Emperor Shun, whose consorts wept so much over his death that their tears turned into blood. The comparison is clearly at the expense of Cao Cao, whose final word about the performers on Bronze Bird is implicitly represented as a foolish obsession.

The well-known late Tang poet Lu Guimeng 陸龜蒙 (d. 881) has two quatrains entitled “Ye Palace Lyrics” (“Ye gong ci” 鄴宮詞), respectively on Cao Cao and Shi Hu.⁹¹ The one on Cao Cao is not subtle in its denigration of what the poet perceives as Cao’s hypocrisy:

魏武平生不好香	Wei’s Emperor Wu disliked perfume all his life;
楓膠蕙炷潔宮房	He only allowed maple resin and basil wick for purifying the air of palace chambers.
可知遺令非前事	Thus one knows that the will he left did not match reality,
卻有餘薰在繡囊	For there was remaining incense stored in embroidered bags.

Lu Guimeng’s quatrain is based on two of Cao Cao’s instructions (or two different parts of the same instruction). The first states:

In the past, when the country was first pacified, I had forbidden my family members from using incense. Later, my daughters were married to the emperor, and so for their sake incense was burned.⁹² I do not like incense, and regret that my wish was not fulfilled. Now I again forbid the burning of incense. Even putting perfume underneath clothes and applying it to the body are not permitted.⁹³

昔天下初定，吾便禁家內不得香薰。後諸女配國家，為其香，因此得燒香。吾不好燒香，恨不遂所禁，今復禁不得燒香。其以香藏衣着身亦不得。

91. *Quan Tang shi*, 629.7221.

92. This took place in 213. The instruction must have been issued after this date.

93. *Taiping yulan*, 981.4476.

And the second states: “If the chambers have a foul smell, then it is permissible to burn maple resin and basil incense” 房室不潔，聽得燒楓膠及蕙草。⁹⁴ Lu’s poem focuses on the perceived discrepancy between Cao’s earlier instruction declaring a dislike of incense and the will in which he ordered the dividing of remaining incense among his consorts.

Luo Yin 羅隱 (833–910), a poet well known for his satiric mode of writing, asks in his “City of Ye” (“Ye cheng” 鄴城, alternatively titled “Bronze Bird Terrace” No. 2): “Even a hero is reduced to ‘dividing up incense,’ / How does that compare with an ordinary man?” 英雄亦到分香處，能共常人較幾多。⁹⁵ He also seems to exhibit a rare sense of irony about the Bronze Bird performers in “Bronze Bird Terrace.”⁹⁶

強歌強舞竟難勝	They forced themselves to sing and dance: it is ultimately hard to bear;
花落花開淚滿膺	Flowers fall, flowers bloom: tears on breasts.
只合當年伴君死	Back then, they should have just died along with their lord,
免教憔悴望西陵	To avoid wasting away thus gazing at the western mound!

The energy of the poetic tradition of the Bronze Bird performers seems truly depleted by this point. What most effectively demonstrates its demise is Xue Neng’s 薛能 (817?–880?) “Bronze Bird Terrace,” a quatrain that reduces the poetic pathos to prosaic moralizing worthy of village doggerels.⁹⁷

魏帝當時銅雀臺	On the Wei emperor’s Bronze Bird Terrace from the old days:
黃花深映棘叢開	Now yellow flowers bloom, shining forth deep in the brambles.

94. *Ibid.*, 982.4480.

95. *Quan Tang shi*, 655.7538. Xin Wenfang’s 辛文房 (fl. 1304–24) *Biographies of the Tang Talents* 唐才子傳 describes Luo Yin’s poetry as “primarily satirical” 詩文凡以譏刺為主. Xin Wenfang, *Tang caizi zhuan jiaojian*, 9.123.

96. *Quan Tang shi*, 656.7545.

97. *Ibid.*, 561.6514.

人生富貴須回首 In this life, when rich and powerful,
 a man must look back:
 此地豈無歌舞來 Even a place like this has once seen
 song and dance.

The romantic aura of Bronze Bird and the romanticized vision of Cao Cao and of Ye seen in the poems by Li Baiyao and Zhang Yue gradually vanished. This process of attenuation culminates in Mei Yaochen's 梅堯臣 (1002–60) "Ballad of Ye" ("Ye zhong xing" 鄴中行), a downright caricature of Bronze Bird Terrace, the Caos, and the Jian'an Masters.⁹⁸ Pre-Tang poetry, except for Tao Yuanming, was generally a literature of lesser interest in the Song, and the Jian'an Masters had reached a new nadir after their elevation in the fifth century.

武帝初起銅雀臺 Emperor Wu first constructed
 Bronze Bird Terrace;
 丕又建閣延七子 Pi then had a pavilion built and invited
 the Seven Masters.
 日日臺上群鳥饑 Day after day on the terrace, the crows
 were hungry;
 4 峨峨七子宴且喜 Solemn were the Seven Masters, feasting
 and enjoying themselves.⁹⁹
 是時閣嚴人不通 At that time, the pavilion was well
 guarded, nobody could get in;
 雖有層梯誰可履 Though there was a ladder, who could
 step on it?¹⁰⁰
 公幹才俊或欺事 With outstanding talent, Gonggan
 sometimes acted insolently,

98. *Quan Song shi*, 245.2842. Mei Yaochen, *Mei Yaochen biannian jiaozhu*, 255.

99. *E'e* 峨峨 is used in the sense of the lines from the *Shi jing* poem "The Yu and the Pu" 棧樸: "They bore their jade vessels solemnly, / As befitting such eminent gentlemen" 奉璋峨峨, 髦士攸宜. According to traditional interpretation, the poem praises King Wen of the Zhou for employing many talented men. *Mao shi zhushu*, 16.556.

100. In Ying Yang's poem, "Attending a Gathering Held by the Leader of Court Gentlemen for Miscellaneous Uses at the Jianzhang Terrace" (discussed in chapter 2), there is the couplet: "I want to avail myself of a conjunction of clouds and rain, / Bathing my wings and mounting up the high ladder" 欲因雲雨會, 濯翼陵高梯.

of Bronze Bird in earlier poetry. In the last couplet of Mei's poem, Ye is reduced to an aged trace in a writing scroll, and the mention of the Zhang River evokes Confucius's famous remark made upon a river: "That which goes by is just like this."

Fragmentation: The Bronze Bird Inkstone

The denigration of the Jian'an Masters goes hand in hand with the largely indifferent attitude toward pre-Tang poetry prevailing in the Song. Hu Hong 胡宏 (1105–61) wrote a poem entitled "Looking at the Poems by the Seven Masters of Jian'an" ("Guan Jian'an qizi shi" 觀建安七子詩).¹⁰⁵ Significantly, the term *guan* (look at) rather than *du* 讀 (read) is used—the poems of the Seven Masters become objects to be "surveyed" and "observed" from afar but not texts to be perused closely:

作文發妙理	Marvelous principles may be displayed in literary compositions;
經國厲遠圖	Yet in managing the state one must cultivate far-sightedness.
游目建安中	I let my eyes roam in the Jian'an era:
4 才子足歡娛	Talented men brought plenty of pleasure.
王劉與應阮	Wang and Liu, Ying and Ruan:
精神可交輸	Their spirits communed well with one another.
西南落漢日	In the southwest the sun of the Han empire was setting;
8 揚益奮兩隅	Yang and Yi rose in power in the two distant regions. ¹⁰⁶
山河裂地軸	Mountains and rivers broke up along the earth's axle;
星象分天衢	Stars and constellations were divided by heaven's road.

105. *Quan Song shi*, 35.22097.

106. Yang and Yi refer to Yangzhou and Yizhou, respectively the territory of Wu and Shu.

- 八師遇有姚 When the Eight Worthy Teachers encountered
You Yao,¹⁰⁷
- 12 萬世垂楷模 For ten thousand generations they set a model.
一元均大化 The august beginning evenly distributed
the great civilization,
- 五服擁皇都 As the Five Outlying Areas embraced
the imperial capital.
- 悠悠彼七子 The Seven Masters, part of the common
crowd—
- 16 流光失其孚 Their legacy has lost conviction
as time flows by.
- 飛觴宴婉孌 With flying goblets they had enjoyed
intimate feasts:
- 鼓瑟吹笙竽 A harp was struck, and pan pipes were played.
主人敬愛客 The host respected and loved his guests,
- 20 徒爾相揚揄 They praised each other—all for nothing.
魏祚竟不長 For the lineage of the Wei did not last,
詒謀止斯須 Planning and strategizing
was but for one brief moment.
- 逡巡數十年 In no more than just dozens of years
- 24 犬羊毳八區 Dogs and sheep set up yurts
all over the Eight Directions.¹⁰⁸
- 所以漢高帝 This was why Han's Exalted Emperor
慢罵輕文儒 Swore with contempt at literary scholars.

The Song lost northern China to the Jurchen people when Hu Hong was a young man, and the last two Northern Song emperors

107. You Yao is another epithet of the sage emperor Shun. The Eight Teachers refer to the eight worthy ministers in antiquity serving as teachers to their rulers. See “Seven Remonstrations” 七諫 attributed to Dongfang Shuo 東方朔 (ca. 160–93): “It would not work out even with the Eight Teachers’ assistance” 雖有八師而不可為. Yan Kejun, comp., *Quan Han wen*, 25.262.

108. This is from the manuscript copy owned by the nineteenth-century book collector Lu Xiangpu 陸香圃, whereas the *Siku quanshu* print edition has “Liu and Shi dominated the Eight Directions” 劉石擅八區. *Quan Song shi*, 35.22097. Liu and Shi refer to the non-Han rulers dominating north China in the fourth century. This is most likely an emendation made by the eighteenth-century *Siku quanshu* editors to avoid offending the Manchu Qing rulers with ethnically sensitive terms such as “yurt” and “dogs and goats.”

were captured and taken north by the Jurchens, much like the last two Western Jin emperors. Living most of his life in south China in the early Southern Song, Hu Hong may very well have felt intensely the pertinence of the Wei/Jin history to his own time. The opening couplet of the poem presents a striking split between literary compositions and political achievements, with the former being implicitly reduced to secondary; the “marvelous principles” of literature (*wen*) are bereft of all relevance to anything beyond literature itself. In subsequent lines he makes clear his view of the Jian’an Masters as “literary scholars” (*wenru* 文儒) who were useless in “managing the state” (*jingguo* 經國). This is in direct contradistinction to Cao Pi’s remark, “Literary writings are the grand achievement in the management of state,” representing a falling away from the integrated notion of culture and politics in early medieval times.

The vision of Ye changes along with the changing evaluations in literary and political history. Much more Song poetry has survived than ever before because of the advent and flourishing of printing, and yet not much is written about Ye. The long poem “Former Ye” (“Gu Ye” 故鄴) by He Zhu 賀鑄 (1052–1135) is a remarkable, if singular, example.¹⁰⁹ The poem has a preface sketching a brief history of the city and giving the composition date as 1078. He Zhu was appointed near Ye at the time, and he apparently rode out to the site of the ancient city on a late autumn day and composed the poem “on horseback” during the journey home.

魏武昔恢圖	Wei Emperor Wu had great plans in days of yore,
北平譚尚孽	Up in the north he destroyed the wicked Tan and Shang. ¹¹⁰
卜鄴築新都	He chose the site of Ye by divination, and had a new capital built,
4 非徒三狡穴	Enjoying more than three lairs of the clever hare. ¹¹¹

109. *Quan Song shi*, 1103.12510. He Zhu, *Qinghu yilao shiji jiaozhu*, 62. The poem is partially translated by Stuart Sargent in Sargent, *The Poetry of He Zhu*, 14–15.

110. Yuan Tan and Yuan Shang were sons of the warlord Yuan Shao who had occupied Ye before Cao Cao took it.

111. A hare is believed to have three lairs to escape to when in danger.

- 將行遷鼎志 Just as he was about to fulfill his aim
of moving the tripods,¹¹²
- 遽有分香訣 He suddenly departed the world,
having divided the incense.
- 落日總帷空 At sunset, emptiness within the hemp
soul-curtains;
- 8 莫終歌舞闕 After the sacrifices, singing and dancing
stopped.
- 旋聞瀘洛上 Soon it was heard that by the Chan and Luo
Rivers,
載起蒼龍闕 The towers of Dark Dragon were built.¹¹³
四葉不歸東 For four generations the rulers did not return
east,¹¹⁴
- 12 苔花馳道絕 Moss grew on the abandoned Imperial
Boulevard.
- 食槽識終驗 “Three horses eating from the same trough”
eventually came to pass;¹¹⁵
- 挂飯期先決 “Hanging up a meal” foretold
the future events.¹¹⁶
- 擾攘百年間 Hustle and bustle in a hundred years,
16 覆車尋此轍 Overturned carriages all sought out the same
track.¹¹⁷

112. Tripod was the symbol of state power; moving the tripods means the founding of a new dynasty.

113. This refers to the construction undertaken at Luoyang, especially under Cao Rui, Emperor Ming of the Wei.

114. That is, the Wei emperors for four generations stayed in the capital Luoyang and did not return to Ye.

115. Cao Cao once dreamed of three horses (*ma* 馬) sharing the same trough (*cao* 槽) and thought it was a bad omen. The Sima family indeed replaced Wei to establish Jin. *Jin shu*, 1.20.

116. According to He Zhu's preface to his poem, Emperor Xiaowen 孝文 of the Northern Wei (r. 471–99), upon passing by Ye on his way to Luoyang, reportedly hung a ladle of food over the city gate. His minister Cui Guang 崔光 said that a “hung meal 掛飯 is *xuan sun* 懸殮; this means the emperor must have a great-great-grandson [*xuansun* 玄孫] who will rise to power here.” Ye later on indeed became the capital of the Eastern Wei.

117. Neither the Eastern Wei nor the Northern Qi lasted very long.

- 山川氣象變 Mountains and rivers have altered
their appearances;
朝市繁華歇 In court and marketplace,
luxury and prosperity have vanished.
白露復青蕪 White dew, then again green overgrowth,
20 茫茫換時節 Vast and hazy, the seasons changed.
陰風吹葛屨 The chill wind now blows
on the straw sandals,¹¹⁸
燐火走兵血 And with will-o'-the-wisp runs soldiers' blood,
木葉下西陵 Leaves fall from the trees on the western
mound,
24 寒蟲助騷屑 Cold insects contribute to the rustling sound.
當時陪葬骨 Those buried beside their lord
have all turned into bones,
馬鬣猶環列 The "horses' manes" encirclement formation
still remains.¹¹⁹
隧碣仆縱橫 The steles alongside the Spirit Way lie
here and there,
28 鐫文久殘缺 Their inscriptions long fragmented
and missing.
帛砧與柱礎 Used as fulling blocks, or as column bases,
螭首隨分裂 The dragon-heads decorating the steles
have fallen off, broken.
指此一抔間 Pointing to this small handful of dirt:
32 賢愚兩何別 I wonder what is the difference
between wise and foolish?¹²⁰
悠悠風漳水 Long flowing, the phoenix water
of the Zhang;¹²¹

118. This is a reference to a *Shi jing* poem, "Straw Sandals" 葛屨: "All wound up are the straw sandals / That can be worn to tread on frost" 糾糾葛屨, 可以履霜. *Mao shi zhushu*, 5.206. It is from the "Airs of Wei" 魏風, and although it is not the same Wei, the poet may be playing with the name here.

119. This refers to a certain shape of the grave mound. *Li ji zhushu*, 8.149.

120. "A small handful of dirt" refers to a tomb. The origin of the phrase is *Shi ji*: "If the ignorant folks take a handful of dirt from the Zhangling Mausoleum, how would Your Majesty punish them?" 假令愚民取長陵一抔土, 陛下何以加其法乎. *Shi ji*, 102.2755. This couplet means that death is the end for both the wise and the foolish.

121. According to a widely known urban legend, two metal phoenixes on Ye's Fengyang Gate flew into the Zhang River during the last years of Shi Hu's reign. *Jin shu*, 27.811.

- 寂寂雀臺月 Quiet and desolate, the moon
 over the Bronze Bird Terrace:
 千古配英魂 For a thousand years they accompany
 the heroic spirit,
 36 未隨埃燼滅 And have not vanished with dust and ashes.
 田畠訪遺老 In farming fields I wanted to question
 the remaining elders,
 謂有興亡說 I thought they must have something to say
 about rise and fall.
 但聽黍離篇 But all I heard was the “Miller Lush”:
 40 叱牛耕不輟 They hollered at the bullocks,
 plowing without pause.

In many ways this forty-line poem can be read as an elaboration of the four lines from Yu Xin’s poem discussed at the beginning of the chapter: “On the ancient steles, inscriptions are worn down to nothing; / In the desolate city, one loses the sense of epochs. / Covering field ridges, patterned melons are ripening; / Crossing over the footpaths in the paddies, fragrant ears of wheat hang low.” Yet, the two poems’ divergences are much more telling of the “cultural differences” that separate the poets and their ages. Like Yu Xin, He Zhu comments on the missing stele inscriptions; but even more poignant is the fall from grace indicated by the mundane use to which the steles themselves are now applied—as fulling blocks for pounding clothes, or as recycled building material. Unlike the Liang court poet serving as a state diplomat, He Zhu at the time of his outing was working as a low-level official at a Chief Manufactory;¹²² his attempt to interview the local peasantry for an “authentic” account of the local history is indicative of the enormous cultural change taking place in the last six hundred years (no early medieval poet would solicit the opinion of a local farmer, however “elderly” he might be, on the “rise and fall” of dynasties). Such an attempt is represented humorously, in a humanizing touch that characterizes Song poetry at its best, as the “Miller Lush” implied in the Liang poem comes out here as the farmers’ shouting to the oxen to plow “without pause”—they have clearly ignored the poet who is eager to obtain insight from the folk. If the archaic *Shi jing* poem

122. Sargent, *The Poetry of He Zhu*, 13.

“Millet Lush” is always read simply as a melancholy lament over dynastic decline, it takes on a much more complicated meaning when realized in the quotidian image of farmers working hard to produce food.¹²³ The last line of He Zhu’s poem, with the hollering at the bullocks, is surprisingly aural, creating an effect of lively reality and presence contrasting with the silent ancient steles—the realm of history and culture—and with the chirping of autumn insects—the unfeeling world of nature. Without the last four lines, the long poem would still have been a competent exercise in versification, but the final couplets frame the dead and gone history attracting too many pompous poetic clichés within the living world of men, and by doing so return to it a new sense of dignity.

Overall, however, the ruins of Ye did not inspire great poetry in the Northern Song—and in the Southern Song the site was in the territory of the Jurchens and thus proved inaccessible to Song poets—except negatively. In a poem entitled “Reading the ‘*Fu* on the Three Capitals’” (“Du ‘San du fu’” 讀三都賦), Xie Ke 謝邁 (1074–1116), the cousin of the now better-known poet Xie Yi 謝逸 (d. 1113), criticizes Zuo Si for writing poetic expositions on the capitals of the Three Kingdoms. After lamenting the end of the Han and the chaos of the times, the poem ends with these lines:

作都雖云美	Though they built magnificent capitals,
其如九鼎輕	They could not help the lightness of their Nine Tripods. ¹²⁴
十年翰墨手	The master of brush and ink for ten years
摸寫費丹青	Engaged in mimetic description, wasting red and green pigments.
人與骨俱朽	Now the man and his bones have both rotted away,
山川空炳靈	Hills and rivers emit numinous light in vain. ¹²⁵

123. Plowing or tilling in the fall is to loosen the soil and prepare it for easier, better spring planting.

124. Once the ambitious Earl of Chu asked, inappropriately, about the size and weight of the tripods in the Zhou capital, and the Zhou king’s emissary retorted that the dynastic rule depended on virtue, not on tripods. *Zuo zhuan zhushu*, Xuan 3, 21.367.

125. The phrase *bingling* is from Zuo Si’s “*Fu* on the Shu Capital” 蜀都賦. Yan Kejun, comp., *Quan Jin wen*, 74.1883.

吾懷鮑明遠 My own thoughts turn to Bao Mingyuan—
 寂莫賦蕪城 Desolate, lonely, writing about a ruined city.¹²⁶

The Nine Tripods are symbols of imperial power. The first couplet cited above is saying that although the capitals were beautiful, none of the three kingdoms could hold on to its rule. In Xie Ke's poem *zuo du* 作都 (build the capital) is regarded as more important than *zuo fu* 作賦 (create the poetic exposition), and ultimately the Nine Tripods are more important than the city itself. Zuo Si's ten years of labor, which had earned him such fame that the price of paper soared in Luoyang (because everyone was copying out his writings), are regarded as a mere waste of words.

Throughout the Song, poems on the melancholy of the Bronze Bird performers are few and far between; instead, we witness a new poetic topic evolving in keeping with a distinctive cultural and aesthetic development, namely, the merging of arts connoisseurship, collecting, and antiquarianism in the sphere of the private life of the literati. This new poetic topic is the Tongque yan 銅雀硯 ("Bronze Bird inkstone"), allegedly made of the tiles from Bronze Bird Terrace. The terrace had crumbled and fragmented; its alleged pieces floated around and were sought after as antiquarian artifacts to be acquired, exchanged, appreciated and evaluated, and used as instruments of writing. As such, the Bronze Bird Inkstone becomes in many ways the best embodiment of the literati culture that has come to be identified with the Song and, as "Song," in implicit contrast with its predecessor "Tang."

A surge of poems on the topic appeared in the eleventh century, including poems by Mei Yaochen, Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007–72), Han Qi 韓琦 (1008–75), and their younger contemporaries such as Tao Bi 陶弼 (1015–78), Wen Tong 文同 (1018–79), Liu Chang 劉敞 (1019–68), Wang Anshi 王安石 (1021–86), and Qiang Zhi 強至 (1022–76).¹²⁷ But

126. Bao Zhao, Mingyuan being his courtesy name, wrote the famous "Fu on a Ruined City" 蕪城賦. Yan Kejun, comp., *Quan Song wen*, 46.2687.

127. For Ouyang Xiu's and Han Qi's poems, see below. Tao Bi, "Bronze Bird Inkstone" 銅雀硯, *Quan Song shi*, 406.4993; Wen Tong, "Asking Chen Yansheng for an Ancient Tile Inkstone" 問陳彥昇覓古瓦硯, *ibid.*, 448.5438; Liu Chang, "An Tile Inkstone from Bronze Bird Terrace" 銅雀台瓦硯, *ibid.*, 474.5744; Wang Anshi, "An Ancient Tile

apparently the object had long been a profitable commodity. In the late tenth century, the writer Su Yijian 蘇易簡 (958–97) mentions it in his *The Four Lineages of the Study* (*Wenfang sipu* 文房四譜):

At the site of Wei's Bronze Bird Terrace, people often excavated its old tiles and crafted them into inkstones, which were quite well-made. In the past, when the terrace was being built, the tiles were made by pottery workers who would filter the clay with fine linen and then add walnut oil to it before firing; therefore they were different from ordinary pottery tiles. Some locals would fake such inkstones in the shape of ancient tiles, and have sold a great many of them.

魏銅雀臺遺址人多發其古瓦，琢之為硯，甚工。昔人製此臺，其瓦俾陶人澄泥以綿濾過，加胡桃油，方埏埴之。故與衆瓦有異焉。土人有假作古瓦之狀硯，以市于人者甚衆。

Controversy about the tiles' functionality as inkstones emerged early on. In contrast to Su Yijian's testimony about the special nature of the authentic Bronze Bird tiles, Yang Yi 楊億 (974–1020) relates a derisive anecdote about Xu Xuan 徐鉉 (916–91), the Southern Tang minister and scholar who served Song after the Southern Tang was conquered in 975.

Inkstone of Xiangzhou" 相州古瓦硯, *ibid.*, 569.6723; Qiang Zhi, "Shi Kangzhi Showed Me His Bronze Bird Inkstone and I Dashed off This Poetic Inscription" 石亢之出銅雀台硯相示信筆題其後, *ibid.*, 588.6913. Of the next generation, Su Shi 蘇軾 (courtesy name Zizhan 子瞻, 1037–1101) mentions the fame of the inkstone in the opening couplet of his poem, "Matching Rhymes with Ziyou's Poem about His Desire for Mt. Li's Dengni Inkstone" 次韻和子由欲得驪山澄泥硯, *ibid.*, 788.9131. This poem is about his brother Su Zhe's 蘇轍 (courtesy name Ziyou 子由, 1039–1112) desire to get a Dengni inkstone from him. Su Zhe's original poem is entitled "Zizhan Promised to Give Me Mt. Li's Dengni Inkstone" 子瞻見許驪山澄泥硯, *ibid.*, 850.9828. Both poems use Bronze Bird inkstones as a point of reference for the coveted Dengni inkstone. There are also a number of "inscriptions" (*ming* 銘), usually celebrating a friend's or one's own acquisition of a fine specimen. Su Shi wrote one for his friend Huang Tingjian 黃庭堅 (courtesy name Luzhi 魯直, 1045–1105): "Inscription on Huang Luzhi's Bronze Bird Inkstone" 黃魯直銅雀硯銘, Su Shi, *Su Dongpo quanji*, 553; and Huang Tingjian wrote one himself: "Inscription on a Bronze Bird Inkstone" 銅雀臺硯銘, Huang, *Huang Tingjian quanji*, 550. Su Zhe also composed "Inscription on a Bronze Bird Inkstone, with Foreword" 銅雀硯銘并引, in Su Zhe, *Luancheng ji*, 1524.

Xu Xuan was skilled in seal script and clerical script, and fond of [fine] brushes and inkstones. After he submitted to our dynasty, he heard that farmers at Ye had sometimes found ancient tiles from the site of Bronze Bird Terrace and crafted them into excellent inkstones. It so happened that he had a close friend who was appointed as magistrate of Ye, so he entrusted this matter to the friend. After several years the friend finally acquired two ancient tiles that were extremely large and thick. He ordered the craftsmen to make them into two inkstones, and took them back to give to Xuan in person. Xuan was overjoyed and immediately poured water into the inkstones to try making ink. The tiles had been buried underground and were very dry. As soon as water was poured in, it infiltrated the inkstones; however much water was poured into them, they were dried out right away, and the wet surface made a sort of sucking sound. Xuan said with a chuckle: "Ain't the Bronze Bird thirsty!" In the end the inkstones could not be used; they were no different from any ordinary broken tile and brick.

徐鉉工篆隸，好筆硯。歸朝，聞鄴中耕人時有得銅雀台古瓦，琢為硯，甚佳。會所親調補鄴令，囑之，凡經年，尋得古瓦二，絕厚大，命工為二硯持歸，面以授鉉。鉉得之喜，即注水，將試墨，瓦墜土中，枯燥甚，得水即滲盡，又注之，隨竭，涔涔有聲噴噴焉。鉉笑曰：“豈銅雀之渴乎？”終不可用，與常瓦礫無異。¹²⁸

The story takes obvious delight in a good laugh at the expense of the former minister of a fallen state. Whatever the actual quality of the “Bronze Bird Inkstone” was we can no longer tell, since its first entering of the cultural discourse was already mixed with the report of numerous fakes. What really mattered for the Song literati was the “name” (*ming* 名) of the inkstone, not its reality (*shi* 實). As He Wei 何遠 (1077–1145) comments on the quality of the inkstone in his *Record of Hearsay from a Spring Isle* (*Chunzhu jiwen* 春渚紀聞): “Although it is easy to make ink with, in the final analysis it lacks the smooth and moist quality [of a good inkstone]. Those making a fuss about it only value it for its aura of noble antiquity” 雖易得墨，終乏溫潤，好事者但取其高古也。¹²⁹

128. From Yang Yi, *Yang Wengong tanyuan*, in *Song Yuan biji*, vol. 1, 553. *Yang Wengong tanyuan* is a collection of anecdotes and sayings recorded by a Huang Jian 黃鑒, one of Yang Yi's retainers, and edited by Song Xiang 宋庠 (996–1066). The work is lost and has been reconstituted from later sources.

129. *Chunzhu jiwen* 9, in *Song Yuan biji*, vol. 3, 2450. Ironically, in the next entry He Wei records his father's preface to his inscription on another “ancient tile inkstone” made

The poets were fascinated with the fantasy of owning a solid piece of history. Ouyang Xiu understood this perfectly, as he states in his *Lineage of Inkstones* (*Yan pu* 硯譜):

The authentic ancient tiles from Xiangzhou are decayed and useless. The world merely values their name. People nowadays purify the clay and then mold it in the shape of the ancient tile and bury it underground. After a long time they [dig it out again and] make it into an inkstone.¹³⁰

相州真古瓦朽腐不可用，世俗尚其名爾。今人乃以澄泥如古瓦狀埋土中，久而研之。

The process of first burying a tile underground for a long time and then making it into an inkstone is presumably to give the object an ancient patina. However, when he received a gift of an “ancient tile inkstone” from his friend Xie Bojing 謝伯景 (998–1054), Ouyang Xiu’s knowledge of how such inkstones were produced did not stop him from writing a long poem praising it: “A Song in Response to Xie Jingshan’s Gift of an Ancient Tile Inkstone” (“Da Xie Jingshan wei gu wayan ge” 答謝景山遺古瓦硯歌).¹³¹

火數四百炎靈銷	After the reign of fire lasted four hundred years, the Fiery Essence melted away;
誰其代者當塗高	Who would replace it? “The towering structure in the midst of the road.” ¹³²
窮姦極酷不易取	Wicked and ruthless schemes were exhausted, yet it was hard to snatch the throne,

from a broken tile found at the site of Nanpi, the very place near Ye where Cao Pi had partied with his friends; in the preface his father claims that the inkstone is “especially fine and glossy, easy to produce ink, and quite usable” 特潤緻發墨可用, and praises the ancients for taking care in crafting even such an insignificant thing as a tile, “unlike the shabby things made by later generations.” *Ibid.*, 2451.

130. Ouyang, *Ouyang Xiu quanji*, 1095.

131. *Quan Song shi*, 297.3741–42.

132. The Fiery Essence refers to the Han. The remark that “that which replaces the Han will be the towering structure in the midst of the road” 代漢者當塗高 was widely circulated as a prophecy from a Han divination work in the last years of the Eastern Han. “The towering structure” was believed to indicate the Wei, as the character *wei* means “palace tower.” *Sanguo zhi*, 42.1020.

- 4 始知文章基扁牢 Only then did one know how strong and
solid the empire's foundation in culture
and rites had been.
坐揮長喙啄天下 All because it pecked at the world
with its long beak,¹³³
豪傑競起如蝟毛 Stalwart men strove to rise to arms,
as many as a porcupine's quills.
董呂催汜相繼死 Dong, Lü, Jue, and Si: they died
one after another;
- 8 紹術權備爭咆哮 Shao, Shu, Quan, and Bei competed,
snarling and growling.
力彊者勝怯者敗 The one who pushed harder won,
the faint-hearted lost:
豈較才德為功勞 They certainly did not contend
through talent and virtue.
然猶到手不敢取 Yet even when the throne was within
reach, he did not dare take it,
- 12 而使螟蝗生蠹蝻 Instead, he let the locusts breed
nymphs.¹³⁴
子丕當初不自恥 His son Pi had no sense of shame,
敢謂舜禹傳之堯 He dared claim that he was like Shun and
Yu, and received the throne from Yao.
得之以此失亦此 He got it, then he lost it,
all in the same way;
- 16 誰知三馬食一槽 Who would foresee the three horses
eating from one trough?
當其盛時爭意氣 When his power was at its apex, he fought
for his ambition,
叱吒雷電生風颯 He cursed and swore like thunderbolts
and hailstones, giving rise to a
windstorm.
干戈戰罷數功闕 After the battle was over, it was time to
evaluate merits:

133. That is, the Han was doing a great deal of damage to its people in the last years of its rule.

134. That is, Cao Cao remained the Han subject and did not usurp the throne during his lifetime.

- 20 周蔑方召堯無皋 With regard to Zhou, they despised its
Fang Shu and Shao Hu, and lamented
that Yao did not have Gao Yao.¹³⁵
英雄致酒奉高會 The heroes were offered ale
as they participated in the great feast
巍然銅雀高峇峇 On the grand Bronze Bird Terrace,
lofty and towering.
圓歌宛轉激清徵 Lovely voices, sweet and melodious,
stirred the tune of the Clear Zhi;
- 24 妙舞左右回纖腰 Marvelous dancers, left and right,
turned their slender waists.
一朝西陵看拱木 Then one morning they would gaze
at the trees on the western mound,
寂寞總帳空蕭蕭 Quiet and still were the hemp
soul-curtains, rustling in emptiness.
當時淒涼已可歎 The desolation then and there
was already lamentable,
- 28 而況後世悲前朝 Not to mention the later generations'
mourning for the former dynasty.
高臺已傾漸平地 The high terrace collapsed, the ground
gradually leveled,
此瓦一墜埋蓬蒿 This tile fell off and was buried
under the overgrowth.
苔文半滅荒土蝕 Its inscription is half covered by
the patterning of moss, eroded by dirt,
- 32 戰血曾經野火燒 Battle blood was once burning
in the will-o'-the-wisp.¹³⁶
敗皮弊網各有用 Ruined leather, broken net,
each has its use;
誰使鑄鏡成凸凹 Who has carved and polished it,
and turned it into an inkstone?
景山筆力若牛弩 The power of Jingshan's pen
is like an ox-horn bow,

135. Fang Shu 方叔 and Shao Hu 邵虎 were worthy ministers of the Western Zhou. Gao Yao was the minister of the legendary sage emperor Shun. This couplet describes the arrogance of Cao Cao's generals and counselors.

136. *Liezi*: "Human blood can turn into wild fires" 人血之為野火也. *Liezi jishi*, 1.15.

- 36 句道語老能揮毫 His lines are forceful, his phrasing
mature: this man knows how to wield
his brush.
嗟予奪得何所用 Alas, I snatched the inkstone from him—
what use have I for it?
簿領朱墨徒紛淆 The red and black ink for government
paperwork, all mixed up in vain.
走官南北未嘗捨 Yet when I serve in posts south and north,
I never leave it behind,
40 緄襲三四勤緘包 With three or four layers of scarlet silk
I dutifully wrap it up.¹³⁷
有時屬思欲飛灑 Sometimes I try to conceive an idea
and let my brush fly free,
意緒軋軋難抽綵 But my thoughts are slow in forming,
as difficult as reeling silk from a cocoon.
舟行屢備水神奪 When traveling by boat, I am always
prepared in case the river god might
snatch it,
44 往往冥晦遭風濤 As the sky frequently turns dark,
with strong wind and crashing waves.
質頑物久有精怪 Despite its unfeeling substance,
an old thing could become demonic,
常恐變化成靈妖 I always fear that it might transform
into some spirit.
名都所至必傳玩 Whatever famed city I go to,
people pass it around in appreciation,
48 愛之不換魯寶刀 I treasure it and would not exchange it
even for the precious Lu sword.¹³⁸
長歌送我怪且偉 You gave it to me with a long song
so extraordinary and grand,

137. In Li Xian's commentary on *Hou Han shu*, he cites a story from a lost work, *Quezi 闕子*, about a man of Song mistakenly treating a common rock as a great piece of treasure. When a visitor asked to see it, he laid it out with great pomp and ceremony, having wrapped it up in ten layers of scarlet silk. He was informed by the knowing visitor of his mistake, who called it "no different from a tile or a brick," but he refused to believe and held on to the rock more stubbornly than ever. *Hou Han shu*, 48.1613.

138. There was a precious sword from Lu that was known as Menglao 孟勞. *Guliang zhuan zhushu*, Xi 1, 7.70.

欲報慚愧無瓊瑤 I would like to repay it,
but am embarrassed I have no jade.

In this long poem Ouyang Xiu uses the first thirty lines to trace the history of the Wei and depict the pathos and decline of Bronze Bird Terrace. By doing so the poet offers an illustrious lineage (*pu*) of this particular inkstone, as opposed to his general work on the "lineage of inkstones." The lineage endows this inkstone with a cultural cachet that, in being demonstrated in an elaborate poem by the gift recipient, adequately repays the gift giver. Poetry, as many scholars have observed, played an important role in the gift politics of the Song.

Ouyang's poem is elegant and well written, though like numerous such social poems from the period, one cannot say that there is great poetry in it. What does stand out as interesting is his effort to undercut the fame of the inkstone within the confines of social politeness (it was after all a gift from a friend expecting to receive a complimentary poem from an eminent literary figure of the age). First, he uses the allusion to the foolish Song man's obsession with a common rock in line 40, evoking the distinct possibility that this inkstone, like the treasured rock, is perhaps no different from any ordinary tile or brick. Second, and more explicitly, he talks about his inability to compose any great literary writing with the inkstone and his use of it mostly for official business and administrative paperwork. Third, he implies that it is a burden because he treasures it too much. In any case, Ouyang's mode of writing, i.e., beginning with a brief narrative of Wei history and Bronze Bird Terrace, as we shall see, becomes standard in many later poems about Bronze Bird inkstones. In this mode of writing, we still find the traditional theme of the pathos of Bronze Bird, but it is usually condensed (for instance, into six lines in Ouyang's poem, from line 21 to line 26) and changed by its new contextualization.

Among the earliest datable poems on this topic were several pieces by Han Qi, whose appointment as prefect of Xiangzhou 相州 in 1056 placed him in convenient proximity to Ye. He sent one inkstone to Pang Ji 龐籍 (988–1063), an influential statesman who was at the time serving as the prefect of Bingzhou 並州, along with a poem. Pang Ji thanked him with a poem, to which Han Qi wrote a reply matching Pang Ji's rhymes.

Pang's poem is lost, but both of Han Qi's poems are extant.¹³⁹ The second quatrain contains the line, "Nowadays Ye inkstones are considered first-class" 歎硯今推第一流, testifying to the popularity of Ye inkstones at the time.

Perhaps to his horror, Han Qi's access to Ye tiles turned him into a convenient supplying source of the artifact for his friends, who would send him poems brazenly asking for a specimen. We know of at least two such friends: Chen Shunyu 陳舜俞 (d. 1075), a well-known writer who had had close connections with Ouyang Xiu and the historian Sima Guang, and Zhang Wangzhi 章望之 (fl. 11th century), whose uncle was the eminent minister Zhang Dexiang 章得象 (978–1048).¹⁴⁰ In "Replying to Collator Zhang Wangzhi's Poem Asking for an Ancient Tile Inkstone" ("Da Zhang Wangzhi bijiao huishi qiu gu wayan" 答章望之秘校惠詩求古瓦硯), Han Qi gives a detailed account of his acquisition of the inkstone:

求之日盛得日少	Every day there is more demand for them, and every day those who acquire them are fewer,
片材無異圭璧珍	One single piece has become as precious as a vessel of jade.
巧工近歲知衆寶	In recent years, clever craftsmen know how treasured they are,
雜以假偽規錢緡	So they mix in fakes and forgeries in order to make a profit.
頭方面凸槩難別	With square tops and bulging surfaces, it is hard to tell the difference;
千百未有三二真	Out of a hundred and a thousand not three or two are real.
我來本邦責鄴令	Upon coming to this prefecture, I sent a request to the Ye magistrate,
朝搜暮索勞精神	Who has since spent much energy searching from dawn to dusk.

139. "Sending an Ancient Tile Inkstone to His Grace Pang, Bing Governor" 寄並帥龐公古瓦硯, and "Reply in Matching Rhymes to His Highness Pang, Bing Governor" 次韻答並帥龐公謝寄古硯. *Quan Song shi*, 325.4037–38.

140. For the two poems, see *Quan Song shi*, 319.3977–78.

遺基壞地徧阮窟	After digging holes all over the grounds throughout the ruins,
始獲一瓦全元淳	He finally found one single tile, intact in its original state.

Han Qi emphasizes the difficulty of acquiring an authentic Ye tile inkstone: he had to use his administrative power over the magistrate of Ye. Whereas Xu Xuan had reportedly asked a close friend serving as Ye magistrate to look for an ancient tile, Han Qi as prefect of Xiangzhou was the direct supervisor of the Ye magistrate: in other words, the Ye magistrate would not dare refuse his request but had to do all he could to fulfill it. In the gracious verse about something culturally elegant, there is a faint smell of corruption. Han Qi also strenuously stresses the rarity of finding a complete, rather than a fragmented, tile. The poem serves as an eloquent piece of advertisement and a certificate of authentication affirming and increasing the worth of his gift. Political power and cultural cachet, commercial value and social capital are all intertwined in a literary composition.

Mei Yaochen's piece, "Bronze Bird Inkstone" ("Tongque yan" 銅雀硯), is dated to 1056, the year when Han Qi was in Xiangzhou and when the inkstones were probably going around in the close-knit circle of top literati members.¹⁴¹

歌舞人已死	Those who performed song and dance are now dead,
臺殿棟已傾	The beams holding the terraces and palaces have crumbled.
舊基生黑棘	From the old base grow black thorns,
4 古瓦埋深耕	Ancient tiles are buried under the deeply furrowed fields.
玉質先骨朽	White alabaster flesh had rotted before the bones,
松棟為埃輕	And the pine rafters are turned into light dust.
築緊風雨剝	Beaten earth was dense, but torn by wind and rain;

141. Ibid., 257.3205. Mei Yaochen, *Mei yaochen biannian jiaozhu*, 906.

- 8 埏和鉛膏精 The clay became mixed
 with powder and ointment.
不作鴛鴦飛 Rather than flying away as mandarin ducks,¹⁴²
乃有科斗情 The tiles develop feelings for the tadpole script.
磨失沙礫粗 After polishing, they have lost
 the coarseness of sands,
- 12 扣知金石聲 Tapping on them, one hears the sound
 of metal and stone.
初求畝畝下 They are first sought after in farming land,
遂廁几席清 Then they participate in the purity
 of armrest and seating mat.
- 入用固為貴 They are certainly precious when put to use,
16 論古莫與并 And they are matchless
 in terms of antiquarian value.
端溪割紫雲 A piece of purple cloud is cut out
 at the Duan Stream:
空負世上名 Its reputation in the world is undeserved
 in comparison.¹⁴³
韓著毛穎傳 When Master Han composed “The Biography
 of Hairy Tip,”
- 20 何獨稱陶泓 Why did he only praise Tao Hong
 the Pottery Pool?¹⁴⁴
儻以較歲年 For if the two of them measure their age,
泓當視如兄 Hong should regard this one his elder brother.

This rather flat piece can be read as a good summary account of the terrace's fragmentation into tiles, the tiles' transformation into inkstones, and the worth attached to them.

Poems on Bronze Bird inkstones continued to be dashed off through the early Southern Song. There are the pieces composed by the late eleventh-century generation, such as Wei Tai 魏泰 (ca. fl. 1105), Wu Zeli

142. Paired tiles are referred to as “mandarin-duck tiles” (*yuanyang wa* 鴛鴦瓦).

143. Inkstones made from rocks of the Duan Stream are famous, but Mei Yaochen suggests that, in comparison with Bronze Bird inkstones, they are not nearly as precious.

144. This refers to the personified brush and pottery inkstone in the Tang writer Han Yu's 韓愈 (768–824) famous piece, “Biography of Hairy Tip” 毛穎傳. *Quan Tang wen*, 567-5738.

吳則禮 (d. 1121), Li Bing 李邴 (1085–1146), and Chen Yuyi 陳與義 (1090–1138).¹⁴⁵ In the twelfth century, poems on this topic tended to be written in the meter of a rambling heptasyllabic ballad, running at least twelve to fourteen lines and usually much longer, forming a distinctive contrast with the much more restrained form of the earlier Bronze Bird Performers poems of eight pentasyllabic lines. Two examples are the “Song of Bronze Bird Inkstones” (“Tongque yan ge” 銅雀硯歌) by Gao Sisun 高似孫 (1158–1231), the author of a work on inkstones, *Yan jian* 硯箋, and “Bronze Bird Inkstone” (“Tongque yan” 銅雀硯) by Zhao Wen 趙文 (1239–1315), who has a particular penchant for Bronze Bird Terrace themes.¹⁴⁶ The poems usually open with a versified historical account like Ouyang Xiu’s, such as in Zhou Zizhi’s 周紫芝 (1082–1162?) “Bronze Bird Inkstone” (“Tongque yan” 銅爵研).¹⁴⁷

棗街夜腹空燃脂	At Hay Street, belly fat was burned at night—all for nothing. ¹⁴⁸
可憐漢祚終陵夷	Pity that the Han could not help going into decline.
老瞞自在作家主	The old Trickster did what he pleased, acting as head of family,
4 欺他寡婦與孤兒	Bullying the widow and orphan. ¹⁴⁹
洛陽宮殿皆頽圮	Luoyang palaces all crumbled and lay in ruins;

145. Wei Tai’s poem is no longer extant. Wu Zeli’s poem is entitled “Written in Response to Wei Daofu’s Poem on Bronze Bird Inkstone” 和魏道輔銅雀硯, in *Quan Song shi*, 1268.14313. See also Li Bing, “Bronze Bird Inkstone” 銅雀硯, in *Quan Song shi*, 1646.18436; Chen Yuyi, “An Exposition on Elder Kang Ping’s Bronze Bird Inkstone” 賦康平老銅雀硯, in *Quan Song shi*, 1758.19579.

146. *Quan Song shi*, 2719.31984, 3611.43248. Zhao also has a poem entitled “Bronze Bird Tile” 銅雀瓦, which talks about the tile inkstone in his possession, and another poem, “Bronze Bird Terrace” 銅雀臺. *Quan Song shi*, 3611.43241, 3611.43243.

147. *Quan Song shi*, 1506.17175.

148. Hay Street (Gao Jie) was a street in Chang’an where the quarters for foreign emissaries were located. In 36 BCE, the head of a Xiongnu khan, who was defeated by the Han army, was hanged at Hay Street to demonstrate Han power. *Han shu*, 70.2015. In 192, after Dong Zhuo was killed, his body was left exposed in the Chang’an marketplace, and the guard burned his belly fat as lighting fuel. *Hou Han shu*, 72.2332.

149. Here the poet is referring in general terms to Cao Cao’s despotism toward the last Han emperor and the house of Liu.

- 更作高臺半天起 He constructed a new lofty terrace rising
 halfway to heaven.
- 臺上吹香十里聞 Incense from the terrace wafting
 on a breeze: one could smell it
 from ten *li* away,
- 8 臺下洗妝漳水渾 Beneath the terrace the Zhang River
 was turbid from washed-off make-up.
- 當時歌管一消歇 Once the singing and piping of the time
 stopped,
- 回望西陵空斷魂 Gazing at the western mound, the women
 were heartbroken in vain.
- 百年歲月空中鳥 Hundreds of years fly by
 like a bird in the sky;
- 12 花不長妍人易老 Flowers do not bloom forever,
 a person easily grows old.
- 臺傾人去不復存 The terrace has collapsed, those
 on the terrace gone: nothing remains;
- 碧瓦澄泥為誰好 The filtered clay turned emerald tiles—
 now for whom so fine?¹⁵⁰
- 那知流落向寒窗 And who knows that it would fall
 in disgrace facing a cold window,
- 16 乞與詩人賦花草 Given to a poet for him to versify
 on flowers and plants.

Cao Cao, here referred to by his nickname “Trickster,” is presented as a bully. His Bronze Bird Terrace is completely deprived of its military and strategic functions and is portrayed as a pleasure terrace instead. There is little pathos about the performers: they are the metaphoric flowers that “do not bloom forever” and are disposed of along with the crumbling terrace.

The last line of the poem is intriguing because “versifying on flowers and plants” has a distinctive pejorative flavor: Zhou Zizhi lived at a time when Daoxue (the “Learning of the Way,” also known as “neo-Confucianism”) with its mistrust of belles-lettres and its antagonism to poetry was becoming increasingly influential, and “versifying on flowers and

150. *Dengni*, filtering clay, refers to the method of firing pottery inkstones.

plants” is exactly the sort of “playing with things” (*wanwu* 玩物) that the Daoxue master Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033–1107) denounces.¹⁵¹ Later on, the famous Southern Song poet Liu Kezhuang 劉克莊 (1187–1269) would try to defend the appreciation of “wind, moon, flowers, and willows” by saying, “But Kangjie [i.e., Shao Yong 邵雍, 1011–77] and Mingdao [i.e., Cheng Hao 程顥 (1032–85), Cheng Yi’s brother] never failed to appreciate ‘wind, moon, flowers, and willows,’ and this did not detract from their being great Confucians.”¹⁵² Yet, the statement is notably couched in terms that do not endorse the appreciation of “flowers and willows” per se; instead, it defends the practice negatively, saying only that it does not do any harm.

Zhou Zizhi attempted to offer a version of a poem that does not “versify on flowers and plants,” or, more precisely, versifies on flowers and plants in a different, negative manner. Hence, the flowers in his poem are negated as soon as they are mentioned in line 12, and birds (often paired with flowers in nature poetry) appear in line 11 only as a metaphor for the passage of time. The poem begins with the image of *gao*, hay or, literally, dried plants, and with burning. The clay (*ni*, lit. mud) is not for growing anything, but for being fired into a hardened object facing a “cold window.”

Liu Kezhuang is unsparing in his moral judgment of the Caos in his own versified history of the Wei, entitled “A Song of Bronze Bird Tile Inkstone to Thank Administrator Lin of the Law Section” (“Tongque wayan ge xie Lin facao” 銅雀瓦硯歌謝林法曹):¹⁵³

涼州賊燒洛陽宮	Liangzhou rebels set fire to the palaces of Luoyang;
黃屋遷播僑鄴中	The yellow canopy moved, temporarily lodged in Ye. ¹⁵⁴
兵驅椒房出複壁	Soldiers drove the empress out from the layered wall of Peppercorn Hall,

151. See Fuller, *Drifting among Rivers and Lakes*, 476–80. In Cheng Yi’s view, to spend time composing literary writings is one kind of “playing with things” that distracts a man from pursuing the Way.

152. Fuller’s translation, 495.

153. *Quan Song shi*, 3055.36440.

154. “Liangzhou rebels” refers to Dong Zhuo’s forces. The yellow canopy was that of the imperial carriage.

- 4 帝不能抹憂及躬 Powerless to save her, the emperor feared
for his own life.¹⁵⁵
- 臺下役夫皆菜色 The conscripted laborers under the terrace
had emaciated faces;
- 臺上美人如花紅 On the terrace fair ladies were like
crimson flowers.
- 九州戰血丹野草 In Nine States battle blood dyed
the wild plants red,
- 8 不聞鬼哭聞歌鐘 He did not hear ghosts cry, only heard
songs and bells instead.
- 時人肆罵作漢賊 His contemporaries cursed him as “Han’s
traitor,”
- 相國自許賢周公 But the prime minister regarded himself
as more worthy than the Duke of
Zhou.
- 一朝西陵瘞弓劍 One morning, the bow and sword were
buried on the western mound,¹⁵⁶
- 12 帳殿寂寞來悲風 The curtained hall was quiet and still,
a sad wind hovered.
- 美人去事黃初帝 The fair ladies went on to serve
the Huangchu emperor,¹⁵⁷
- 家法乃與穹廬同 Their family customs turned out to match
those of the yurts.¹⁵⁸
- 繁華銷歇世代遠 The luxury and prosperity are long gone,
the age is distant,

155. In 214, Empress Fu 伏 was killed for plotting against Cao Cao. *Hou Han shu* 10b.454. According to the anonymous “Biography of Cao the Trickster” (discussed in chapter 3), when the soldiers went into the palace to arrest her, the empress tried to hide in the double wall of her chamber but was dragged out. When she pleaded with the emperor to save her, the emperor reportedly answered, “I don’t know when my own life will end.” Cited in Pei Songzhi’s commentary, *Sanguo zhi*, 1.44. “Peppercorn Hall” (Jiaofang) was the name of a Han palace in Chang’an built for empresses.

156. “After the Yellow Emperor died, only his bow and sword remained [in his tomb], so people all said that the Yellow Emperor had ascended to heaven as an immortal” 帝崩，惟弓劍存焉，故世稱黃帝仙矣。Li Daoyuan, *Shuijing zhu jiaoshi*, 3.19. “Bow and sword” became a euphemism for a ruler’s death.

157. Huangchu was Cao Pi’s reign title.

158. The Han palace lady Wang Zhaojun 王昭君 (fl. 1st century BCE) was married to a Xiongnu’s khan, after whose death his son (by a Xiongnu queen) took her as one of his own queens. *Han shu*, 94b.3807.

- 16 惟有漳水流無窮 Only the Zhang River flows on and on.
 時時耕者鑿遺瓦 From time to time a farmer would dig out
 a tile with his hoe,
 蘇侵土蝕疑古銅 Overgrown with plants, rotting in dirt,
 like ancient bronze.
 後來好事斲成研 Then some enthusiasts chiseled it
 into an inkstone,
- 20 平視端歛相長雄 Equal with Duan and She, it competes
 with them for superiority.¹⁵⁹
 參軍得之喜不寐 The administrator acquired one—
 so happy he could not sleep.
 攜歸光怪夜吐虹 He took it home, and it emitted a light
 at night like a rainbow.
 謂宜載寶餉洛貴 I thought he would present it
 to some noble lord of Luoyang,
- 24 顧肯割愛遺山翁 Who knew he would give up his treasure
 to this mountain elder?
 翁生建安七子後 This old man was born long after
 the Seven Masters of Jian'an,
 幼覽方冊夢寐通 In youth he had read their works
 and communed with them in dreams.
 白頭始獲交石友 Only when his hair is white does he
 obtain this dear “stone friend,”
- 28 非不磨礪無新功 It is not that he does not try to polish
 his writings, but he has no new
 accomplishments.
 復愁偷兒瞰吾屋 Furthermore, he worries that a thief
 might eye his house
 竊去奚異玉與弓 And steal it like the precious jade
 and the great bow.¹⁶⁰
 書生一硯何足計 Should that happen, what does a scholar's
 inkstone matter?
- 32 老瞞萬瓦掃地空 But the old Trickster's ten thousand tiles
 would all be lost.

159. Duan inkstones are produced from the rocks of the Duan Stream (see above). She County (in modern Anhui) is also famous for its inkstones.

160. A thief stole Lu's state treasures, i.e., a precious jade and the great bow (盜竊寶玉大弓). *Zuo zhuan zhushu*, Ding 8, 55.963.

In the poem, Cao Cao is portrayed as ruthless (turning a deaf ear to the destruction caused by civil war and driving the common folk to construct a pleasure terrace) and hypocritical (priding himself on being better than the Duke of Zhou); his Bronze Bird Terrace was unoccupied after Cao Cao's demise because his women had been taken by Cao Pi, which made the Caos no different from barbarians (again we hear the echo of Liu's contemporary concerns about the Jurchens occupying northern China). In the ending couplet, the poet speculates with glee about how, if the inkstone is stolen, Cao Cao's tiles would all be lost, and seems to imply that it would serve the "old Trickster" right. Another noteworthy feature of the poem is the poet's playing with plants and flowers in lines 5–7: the laborers' emaciated faces are literally "of the color of greens" (i.e., pale and sallow from malnutrition), which is contrasted with the female performers like "crimson flowers"—an image that is, however, immediately undercut by the war dead's blood dyeing the green plants red. Contrasted with these interposed images of nature—vegetables, flowers, plants—the inkstone is rigid and cold, like "ancient bronze," literally a "stone friend." The past is solidified into a tangible object, a hard thing, to be played with, exchanged, gifted, or stolen.

Perhaps ultimately what is so fascinating about the transition from Bronze Bird Terrace poems to Bronze Bird inkstone poems is the way in which it signifies a changing relation to history: unlike Wang Bo, who imagines himself both as the passer-by looking at the woman on the terrace and as the woman on the terrace herself, here in Liu's poem we see the poet express no sympathy for any person from the past; the Jian'an Masters he communed with in youthful dreams are now in his old age replaced by a "stone friend" who will only repeat what he says/writes back to him. History becomes a curio on the antiques market, a commodity that can be faked, authenticated, sold, bought, and owned.

The last poem to be discussed in this chapter represents a poet's attempt to end all Bronze Bird inkstone poems. Ai Xingfu 艾性夫 (fl. late 13th century–early 14th century), apparently a Daoxue zealot who may have eventually served the Mongol Yuan in his last years,¹⁶¹ gives his poem a long rambling title:

161. See editorial notes on Ai Xingfu in *Quan Song shi*, 3699.44383.

Various Venerable Sirs Composed Poems on Brother Dongyuan's Bronze Bird Inkstone and Praised It Extravagantly; I Alone Differ.

The Long Poems by Su Zhanggong [Su Shi] and Minister Mei [Mei Yaochen] Are the Same Way, with Statements like "The Whole World Claims the Hardness of Ye Tiles, / A Hundred Gold Pieces Cannot Buy A Single One," and "Rather Than Flying Away as Mandarin Ducks, / The Tiles Develop Feelings for the Tadpole Script. / They Are Certainly Precious When Put to Use, / And They Are Matchless in Terms of Antiquarian Value," and So On and So Forth. I Thereupon Venture to Compose A Piece in the Manner of "Refuting 'Encountering Sorrow.'"¹⁶²

諸公賦東園兄銅雀硯，甚夸，余獨不然，蘇長公梅都官長句皆爾，如謂“舉世爭稱鄴瓦堅，一枚不換百金頒，”“不及鴛鴦飛，乃有科斗情，入用因為貴，論古難與並”之類是已，敢併為之“反騷”。¹⁶³

The poem itself is a cantankerous rant:

- | | |
|-----------|--|
| 臨洮健兒裹甲衣 | Lintao's stalwart lads wore their armor inside their clothes; ¹⁶⁴ |
| 曹家養兒乘禍機 | The Cao family's adopted son took advantage of the calamity. ¹⁶⁵ |
| 匹夫妄作九錫夢 | A commoner had a wild dream about the Nine Honors, ¹⁶⁶ |
| 4 鬼蜮敢學神龍飛 | A devil dared to imitate the soaring divine dragon! |
| 負鼎而趨不遑死 | Carrying the tripod and running away with it—now why didn't he die early? |

162. "Fan Sao" refers to Yang Xiong's "Refuting 'Encountering Sorrow'" 反離騷, in which he criticizes Qu Yuan for committing suicide. Yan Kejun, comp., *Quan Han wen*, 52.409.

163. *Quan Song shi*, 3699.44386.

164. Dong Zhuo was a native of Lintao.

165. This refers to the fact that Cao Cao's father was the adopted son of a Han court eunuch.

166. The Nine Honors were the nine highest honors bestowed by an emperor on a minister; historically the ministers who received the Nine Honors tended to take the throne as the next step.

- 筑臺尚欲備歌舞 He even had a terrace built in order to
house singers and dancers.
- 但知銅雀望西陵 He only knew they would gaze at
the western mound from Bronze Bird;
- 8 不覺妖狐叫墟墓 But could not help fox demons wailing
among the graves.
- 分香賣履吁可憐 Dividing incense, selling shoes—
alas, how pitiful!
- 所志止在兒女前 All he thought about were his sentimental
attachments.
- 竟令山陽奉稚子 He even made the Duke of Shanyang
serve his puny son:¹⁶⁷
- 12 出爾反爾寧無天 What you do to others returns to yourself:
there is a heaven above.¹⁶⁸
- 陳留作賓向司馬 When the Prince of Chenliu submitted
his throne to the house of Sima,¹⁶⁹
- 包羞更出山陽下 He suffered worse humiliation
than the Duke of Shanyang once had.
- 國亡臺廢天厭之 The dynasty fell, the terrace was ruined,
heaven abandoned them;
- 16 何事人前拾殘瓦 Now why should people try to pick up
those broken tiles?
- 古來觀物當觀人 From antiquity, in observing an object
one must observe its owner;
- 虞琴周鼎絕世珍 Yu's zither and Zhou's tripods
are rare treasures of this world.
- 區區陶甃出漢賊 But this mere piece of pottery tile
came from Han's traitor,
- 20 矧可使與斯文親 How could one let it become intimate
with cultured men?
- 歛溪龍尾誇子石 The Dragon Tail of She Stream boasts
a fine inkstone;

167. The last Han emperor was made the Duke of Shanyang after he abdicated to Cao Pi.

168. Here *chu'er fan'er* 出爾反爾 is used in the sense of the *Mencius* passage: "Zengzi said, 'Be careful, be careful: what comes from you will return to you'" 曾子曰: 戒之戒之, 出乎爾者, 反乎爾者也. *Mengzi zhushu*, 2b.45.

169. The last Wei emperor was made Prince of Chenliu.

- 端州鷓眼真蒼璧 The Myna Bird's Eye of Duanzhou is truly
a piece of blue-gray jade.¹⁷⁰
- 好奇不惜買千金 Those who love the strange would lavish
a thousand gold pieces on this tile,
24 首惡寧容汙寸墨 Yet how can one bear having the prime
evildoer stain one's ink?
書生落筆驅風雷 A scholar applies his writing brush
to order wind and thunder,
要學魯史誅姦回 He must emulate the Lu historian
and punish the wicked with writing.¹⁷¹
- 請君唾去勿復用 I beg you, dear sir, to discard this thing
and never use it again:
28 銅雀猶在吾當摧 If the Bronze Bird were still erect,
I would demolish it myself.

Denouncing and swearing at Cao Cao more energetically than any previous poem on this topic, the poem is filled with self-righteous anger and moral didacticism. In comparison, Li Yong's piece sharply criticizing Bronze Bird Performer poems, cited and discussed earlier, seems mild. Although the historical terrace had long crumbled, Ai Xingfu destroys it once more, discursively, at the end of the poem.

Conclusion

"Brother Dongyuan," whose acquisition incited Ai Xingfu's wrath, most likely did not throw away his Bronze Bird inkstone, nor did Ai Xingfu's poem end the Bronze Bird inkstone fad or the tradition of writing about the inkstone.

Throughout late imperial China we continue to see poetic compositions on Bronze Bird Terrace or inkstones, and the desire to further

170. This couplet refers to the famous inkstones produced in She County and Duan Prefecture.

171. This refers to Confucius's alleged authorship of the *Spring and Autumn Annals* and his subtle way of applying moral judgment in his writing.

fragment Bronze Bird by shattering the tile inkstone also persisted. In the fifteenth century, a poetically inclined doctor named Liu Bo 劉博 (studio name Caochuang 草窗) composed a “Song on Bronze Bird Inkstone” (“Tongque yan ge” 銅雀硯歌), claiming that he is going to take out his sword and smash the inkstone into pieces because of its connection with the evildoer Cao Cao. His poem provoked the famous painter Shen Zhou 沈周 (1427–1509) to compose a poem, “Don’t Smash Bronze Bird Inkstone” (“Mo zhuo Tongque yan ge” 莫斫銅爵硯歌), advising against such hot-headedness. Shen Zhou then painted a scroll on the subject matter in 1500, and this scroll subsequently became an occasion for later poets to compose more poems.¹⁷²

In the eleventh century, the poet-official Shao Bi 邵必 (courtesy name Buyi 不疑, 1038 *jinshi*), who was a close friend of Mei Yaochen, had a “Ye city-wall brick inkstone” in his collection. This inkstone had reportedly come from the collection of Yuan Jie 元結 (723–72), the Tang poet who was the twelfth-generation descendant of the cousin of the Northern Wei’s founding emperor. The back of the inkstone had an inscription that gave its date of making as the second year of the Xinghe 興和 era (539–42), and Xinghe was the reign title of the last Eastern Wei emperor. Wang Shizhen 王士禎 (1634–1711) takes this to mean that Bronze Bird tiles were so rare even in Tang times that Yuan Jie would just use an inkstone made of an Eastern Wei brick.¹⁷³ The truth, however, is that there was no inkstone fetish in the eighth century like there was three hundred years later, and Yuan Jie might very well have used an Eastern Wei brick as his inkstone out of family affection and personal nostalgia.

Even though the possibility of any of those inkstones celebrated in the Song having anything to do with the Cao Wei terrace was, at best, extremely remote, “old Ye inkstone” poems from the Song always invoke the Cao Wei, never Eastern Wei or Northern Qi, regime. This is the consequence of an established poetic tradition on Bronze Bird performers; it is also the consequence of a political, ethnic, and cultural prejudice. The fragmentation of Bronze Bird, from a terrace to a tile and an inkstone that itself is constantly threatened to be smashed, serves as an apt reminder of the cultural changes that have taken place in history.

172. See Fan Zhibin, “Guanyu Cao Yin,” 18–36.

173. Wang Shizhen, *Chibei outan*, 398–99.

Part Three

THE RED CLIFF

CHAPTER FIVE

Restoring the Broken Halberd

Introduction: The Broken Halberd

折戟沉沙鐵未銷	Broken halberd, sunken in sands: its iron not yet rusted away;
自將磨洗認前朝	I pick it up and polish it myself, recognizing the former dynasty.
東風不與周郎便	Suppose the east wind had not given the young Master Zhou a chance,
銅雀春深鎖二喬	On Bronze Bird Terrace the Qiao sisters would have been locked away in spring's depths.

In the mid-ninth century, Du Mu's quatrain "Red Cliff" brought together Bronze Bird Terrace with the historic Battle of Red Cliff, which took place in 208 and decided the fate of the three kingdoms of Wei, Shu, and Wu. This poem serves as a dividing line: if prior to its composition Bronze Bird had been a main theme in the literary representation of the Three Kingdoms, then the Red Cliff has ever since dominated the Three Kingdoms imaginary, down to the present day.

It is safe to say that there are very few Chinese who do not know about Red Cliff as the most famous Three Kingdoms site. Although the actual location of the historical battle is still debated, the physical place hardly matters.¹ No other place name conjures the aura of the Three

1. The debate was dubbed by Chinese media as the "new Battle of Red Cliff." For a detailed account of the history of locating the site, see Wang Linxiang, *Chibi zhi zhan*. Covering the period from 1977 to 2007, the book includes descriptions and excerpts from

Kingdoms quite as powerfully as Red Cliff does: it has long been the keyword around which images and emotions cluster.

From Du Mu's poem to John Woo's film, there have been many variations of the story in terms of plot and characterization. Historical judgment, as we will see, has changed dramatically; but the basic framework remains, much like a chess game being played out in numerous different ways but always within the confines of a single chessboard and certain rules, and in this case with the final outcome predetermined. Yet, even with its certain outcome, it has never ceased to fascinate and to continue to attract new players to the field, whether in literary and visual representations, or in computer games. The question is: how did it happen? That is, how did Red Cliff become inscribed on the Chinese literary map and in the Chinese cultural imagination? How did the story of the Battle of Red Cliff gradually come into being, its picture initially a simple sketch outlined in terse historical narratives but eventually replenished, reorganized, and retouched in a full epic portrayal marked with some intensely lyrical moments? What might one learn from unpacking the legend that is "Red Cliff"?

Going Local, Getting Personal: The Governor of Huangzhou

We must return to Du Mu, who served as the Governor of Huangzhou 黃州 (to the north of the Yangzi River in modern Hubei) from 842 to 844. During his tenure at Huangzhou, Du Mu wrote two poems featuring the local Red Cliff as the site of the famous battle, one of which is the quatrain cited above. A few earlier poems, no less by such luminaries as Li Bai 李白 (701–62) and Du Fu 杜甫 (712–70), also mention Red Cliff, but they are little known and their impact on the Three Kingdoms imaginary is negligible.² Li Bai's "Song of Red Cliff: Farewell" ("Chibi

over ninety articles by scholars and local fans published in newspapers and academic journals. For a more succinct account, see Zhang Jinglong, *Chibi zhi zhan yanjiu*, 179–241.

2. Du Fu, in "Entering Lake Dongting to Stop by the Southern Marchmount" 過南嶽入洞庭湖, writes: "On and on, it turns at Red Cliff, / Vast flooding, we go past

ge songbie” 赤壁歌送別) is nevertheless worth citing, because it offers a certain perspective on the success of Du Mu’s Red Cliff quatrain.³

二龍爭戰決雌雄	Two dragons had once fought here for domination:
赤壁樓船掃地空	The warships at Red Cliff were swept bare.
烈火張天照雲海	A blazing fire concealed the sky and illuminated a sea of clouds:
周瑜于此破曹公	This is the place where Zhou Yu defeated Lord Cao Cao.
君去滄江望澄碧	When you go to the emerald river and gaze at its clear azure,
鯨鯢唐突留餘跡	The battling leviathans surely have left traces.
一一書來報故人	You must report back to your old friend in detail,
我欲因之壯心魄	For with those stories I shall fortify my heart and soul.

The imagined battle scene in the first half of the poem is displaced first onto a tranquil river of “clear azure,” and then further onto a future letter report that the poet requests from his departing friend. The plain narration of the battle, with the remarkably prosaic line “This is the place where Zhou Yu defeated Lord Cao Cao,” does not leave much to the reader’s imagination.

In writing his poem, Du Mu offers exactly the report Li Bai asks for, with the evidence of a physical object—a broken halberd from the battle (what “remaining trace” [*yuji* 餘跡] could be better?)—and with the claim that he has *personally* picked it up, washed and polished it. The stress on his doing it himself can be easily ignored but is significant in this poem: it emphasizes a personal encounter with the past, and the intimate nature

Cangwu, / Where the royal daughters’ resentment remains, / Where Cao Cao’s bold plans were humbled” 悠悠回赤壁，浩浩略蒼梧。帝子留遺恨，曹公屈壯圖。 *Quan Tang shi*, 233.2567. Owen’s translation, *The Poetry of Du Fu*, 6.48–49.

3. *Quan Tang shi*, 167.1727.

of the encounter is accentuated by his physical contact with a material object from a bygone world. The poem shows the influence of “Song of an Arrowhead from the Battlefield of Changping” (“Changping jiantou ge” 長平箭頭歌) by Li He, for whose poetic collection Du Mu so reluctantly wrote a preface back in 831.⁴ That earlier poem, about another famous historical battle, is crucial for us to appreciate Du Mu. It opens with a series of metaphors—“Char of lacquer, powder of bone, pebble of cinnabar” 漆灰骨末丹水砂—the abruptness and the illegibility of these images mimicking the poet’s shock and incomprehension upon seeing “an encrusted lump” having been buried in the earth for hundreds of years. The next three lines present a metaphorical de-encrustation of the lump and a gradual process of recognition; then the poet goes on to describe how he has come upon the arrowhead: he offers roast lamb and ale to the hungry ghosts on the ancient battlefield, and “it is only after this act of ceremony and remembrance that he finds the arrowhead.”⁵

The poem abruptly ends with a proposal of commercial exchange:

南陌東城馬上兒	On a southern lane in the capital's eastern ward a boy on horseback
勸我將金換簪竹	Tried to get me to trade the metal for an offering basket.

This is decidedly an anti-climax: that the ancient arrowhead, imbued with the aura of history and of the undying spirit of the dead, is reduced to commodity, and in this proposed exchange it is called unsentimentally by its right name, “metal” (*jin* 金). In a stranger’s eyes it is seen as its basic thing-nature, bereft of the human craftsmanship that forged it into an arrowhead, and bereft of the human relationships that the poet takes pains to construct in the earlier part of the poem. One could call it crass commerciality and feel discomfort about the reduction of a thing with historical weight and poetic beauty, or one could consider it a refreshing matter-of-factness about antiques, especially antique weapons. However one wants to interpret *liaozhu* 簪竹—a sort of bamboo, or the bamboo ritual vessel used for containing meat offerings to the dead—it is emphatically *not* an instrument of violence and killing.

4. See Owen, *The Late Tang*, 292. *Quan Tang shi*, 393.4432.

5. Owen, *Remembrances*, 71.

Returning to Du Mu's "Red Cliff," which likewise begins with de-encrustation and recognition, we can now understand its uniqueness through seeing its debt to its predecessor. The plainness of the first couplet conceals a complexity condensed into the most economical lines. Again, the poet stresses his personal encounter with history, which is done through holding a halberd that itself had experienced real action on the battlefield. That this is no ceremonial weapon is implied by the fact that it had been used with so much force that it was "broken," a single word that conveys the violence of the battle. Now the halberd is being polished again, as indeed a weapon should be—not, however, to maim and kill, but to "recognize the former dynasty" and to read the violent history that is now becoming illegible. If the weapon had been nothing but a blunt instrument of warfare, *wu*, then in the hands of the poet, it becomes an apparatus of *wen*, as it enables the identification of a political regime and constitutes the basis on which Du Mu constructs his poem.

The lesson of history drawn by the poet is that no lesson of history can be taught or learned: chance and accident are the crucial reasons for Zhou Yu's victory over Cao Cao. The east wind, on which Zhou Yu's fire-attack plan depended, is another name for spring wind; at Red Cliff, its unseasonal blowing in deep winter saved Wu. Neither wisdom nor morality can contend with weather—nature that cannot be inscribed by culture.

The blowing of the east wind leads to a hypothetical springtime scene: if Zhou Yu had not had the help of the east wind and lost the war to Cao Cao, the two Qiao sisters would have been captured and transported to Ye to live on Bronze Bird Terrace with Cao Cao's other women. Here, however, we must be able to imagine the response of Du Mu's contemporary elite reader, who was just as familiar with the Bronze Bird Terrace poetic tradition as Du Mu himself was: for such a reader, the echo of the Bronze Bird poems would have unmistakably pointed to the time when Cao Cao would be dead and gone and when his women were locked away on the terrace gazing at his grave mound. For such a reader, Du Mu's poem not only offers an imagined past ("suppose Cao Cao had won") but also points to an imagined future of this imagined past ("he would be dead in another ten years and then the sisters would have to spend their remaining years on Bronze Bird Terrace like his other concubines"). The metal of the opening line returns as the lock that shuts the

southern belles away. One does not need to know anything about Freud to note how the image of a broken halberd might embody thwarted sexuality, although this time desire, both the warlord's and his women's, is not frustrated by military defeat, but by death.

Before we leave this quatrain, we need to point out one textual echo, though perhaps it is hardly an "allusion." Du Fu, the poet deeply admired by Du Mu, had famously written in the capital Chang'an behind enemy lines during the An Lushan Rebellion:

國破山河在 A kingdom smashed, its hills and rivers still
 here,
城春草木深 Spring in the city, plants and trees grow deep.

In the senior Du's poem, a city, when deprived of human care in wartime, can become easily lost in the depths of plants and trees. In the junior Du's poem, *chun shen* 春深, spring's depths, the phrase that condenses Du Fu's second line, indicates the lush vegetation of springtime that grows around Bronze Bird Terrace and encloses the Qiao sisters. It subverts the terrace's usual association with autumn, indicates overgrowth and desolation, and is contrasted with frustrated human sexuality. It gives a particular force to the image of the east wind, which was life-saving for Wu but served as the harbinger of destruction for Cao Cao's army, for we realize that the east wind represents the force of nature that brings spring and life back but causes the ruin of the overgrown terrace. It is beyond human history and human control.

The simplicity of the unexpected lesson conveyed by the poem (that no lesson is possible) and its verbal intricacy make the poem a haunting text. It derives much of its weight and power from the claim to firsthand experience. The experience originated in Huangzhou, a place apparently believed by Du Mu to have been the actual site of the battle. During his tenure as the Huangzhou governor, Du Mu wrote another poem that prominently features Red Cliff:⁶

柳岸風來影漸疏 Wind comes to willow-lined shores,
 the reflections grow gradually sparser;

6. The poem is entitled "Late Autumn in the District Offices at Qi'an" 齊安郡晚秋. *Quan Tang shi*, 522.5966. Owen's translation, *The Late Tang*, 1.

使君家似野人居	The governor's home is like where someone lives in the wilds.
雲容水態還堪賞	I can still enjoy the look of clouds and charm of the waters,
嘯志歌懷亦自如	I whistle my aims, sing my cares, and do as I please.
雨暗殘燈棋散後	Rain darkens the dying lamp, soon the chess pieces will be removed,
酒醒孤枕雁來初	I sober up on my pillow alone, the geese begin to come.
可憐赤壁爭雄渡	I am moved how at Red Cliff, the crossing where heroes contended,
唯有蓑翁坐釣魚	There is only an old man in his raincoat, sitting and fishing.

Like a rustic recluse, the governor lives a simple life, playing chess with a friend, drinking, dozing off, and waking up only at the cries of the wild geese passing at dawn. In these laidback lines there is nevertheless a strange, melancholic restlessness that is hard to put one's finger on. Perhaps it is the rather abrupt mention of "Red Cliff, the crossing where heroes contended" in a landscape that nowhere evokes the fierce battle from a bygone era. In many ways this poem forms a fitting opening, as it does, to a book on the poetry of the "Late Tang," in which Owen argues that the Late Tang poets shared "a sense of cultural belatedness, standing in the shadow of past masters of poetry and past glory."⁷ Yet, in another way, the ninth century saw the *beginnings* of many things: as poets went away from the capital to the provinces, they wrote poems about local sites they visited that put those sites on a national literary map. No doubt the educated people had all known about "Red Cliff" before, but it had had no aura or panache, no images or emotions associated with it; it had remained a mere name in history books until Du Mu claimed to have seen it with his own eyes and to have polished its encrusted ancient weapon with his own hands. Cao Cao and Zhou Yu might have given Red Cliff an event, but Du Mu gave it an image. The image lasted, and was enriched by the writings of many more generations.

7. Owen, *The Late Tang*, 5.

It is important that Red Cliff is invoked only when Du Mu is actually there in Huangzhou (no matter whether Huangzhou's Red Cliff is the real site of the battle). The penultimate line echoes something that Li Bai wrote:

赤壁爭雄如夢裏	Heroes contending at Red Cliff: it is now like a dream;
且須歌舞寬離憂	We need song and dance to relieve the sorrow of parting.

This couplet comes from Li Bai's poem "Presented to Magistrate Wei Bing of Nanling at Jiangxia" ("Jiangxia zeng Wei Nanling Bing" 江夏贈韋南陵冰);⁸ Jiangxia (Wuchang in modern Hubei) is of course another place that lays claim to being the site of the Battle of Red Cliff. Only by leaving the capital and wandering around in the empire—something that happened with increasing frequency after the An Lushan Rebellion in the mid-eighth century—could poets see places they used to read about and write them into being.

The Southern Turn in the Ninth Century

In close connection with poets' direct experience of local sites, the Three Kingdoms imaginary experienced a crucial turn in the ninth century with two noteworthy phenomena. One was the increasing prominence of Zhuge Liang. Du Fu's poems singing extravagant praises of Zhuge Liang during his sojourn in Shu were largely responsible for Zhuge's rise to fame, as Du Fu himself became a revered master after his death. Hoyt C. Tillman reminds us that Zhuge Liang was far from a universally acclaimed hero in eighth-century China, before Du Fu made him out to be in his poems.⁹ Indeed, in the seventh century, Wang Bo echoed Chen Shou's judgment

8. *Quan Tang shi*, 170.1754–55.

9. For instance, Tillman observes the wonderful irony between Du Fu's hyperbolic proclamation of Zhuge Liang's fame and his depiction of Zhuge's shrines as "desolate, neglected, and in disrepair." Tillman, "Reassessing Du Fu's Line," 312.

that Zhuge Liang's strength was not in his talent as a military commander dealing with changing situations (固知應變將略非武侯所長).¹⁰ The writer Li Han 李翰 (fl. ca. mid-8th century) ranked him beneath the famous general Yue Yi 樂毅 (fl. 3rd century BCE), to whom Zhuge Liang had compared himself.¹¹ Lü Wen 呂溫 (772–811), writing in 798, even criticized Zhuge Liang for his foolhardy loyalty to the Han, arguing that he should have surrendered if Cao Cao was treating the common folk well. Lü Wen's assessment of Zhuge Liang concludes: "He had abundant talent, but did not possess profound insight" 才有餘而見未至.¹² Such a view would be unthinkable in later imperial China when Zhuge Liang's supreme status was predominantly attributed to his unwavering loyalty to the Han.

Less well-known than Du Fu's veneration of Zhuge Liang, but perhaps of equal importance to Zhuge Liang's gradual rise in status, is the famous prime minister Pei Du's 裴度 (765–837) high esteem for him, as Pei apparently treated Zhuge Liang as his personal hero and role model. In the preface to the "Stele Inscription for the Shrine to the Shu Prime Minister, the Martial Marquis Zhuge" ("Shu chengxiang Zhuge Wuhou sitang beiming" 蜀丞相諸葛武侯祠堂碑銘), Pei Du writes:

Some held on to integrity in serving the ruler but lacked abilities in founding a state; some acquired the way of establishing oneself but lacked skills in governing the people. As for possessing all these four aspects and putting them into action, the Shu prime minister, Lord Zhuge, was such a person.

或秉事君之節，無開國之才；得立身之道，無治人之術。四者備矣，兼而行之，則蜀丞相諸葛公其人也。¹³

In a memorial to the throne, Pei Du declares: "Although my talent is inferior to Zhuge Liang's, I aspire to emulate the ancient man" 臣才雖不逮諸葛亮，心有慕於古人。¹⁴

10. Wang Bo, "On the Three Kingdoms" 三國論. *Quan Tang wen*, 182.1857.

11. Li Han, "On Three Famous Ministers" 三名臣論. *Quan Tang wen*, 431.4382.

12. Lü Wen, "An Account of the Shrine of the Martial Marquis Zhuge" 諸葛武侯廟記. *Quan Tang wen*, 628.6341.

13. *Quan Tang wen*, 538.5463.

14. *Ibid.*, 537.5458.

Several poets after Du Fu likewise celebrated Zhuge Liang. While in Sichuan in the last years of his life, the famous poet Li Shangyin 李商隱 (813–58?), one of Du Fu's admirers, contributed a poem on the old cypress on the grounds of Zhuge's shrine that had first been noticed and commemorated by Du Fu; a poem on the same topic by the Sichuan native Yong Tao 雍陶 (fl. ca. 834–54) could not have been a mere coincidence.¹⁵ Li Shangyin was also one of the first Tang poets who wrote on the Choubi Stockade 籌筆驛, where Zhuge Liang's army was encamped.¹⁶ Other popular topics related to Zhuge Liang were Nanyang 南陽, where Zhuge had lived in reclusion, and Wuzhangyuan 五丈原, where he died during a military campaign against the Wei. Of the poet Hu Zeng's 胡曾 (ca. late 9th century) famous set of quatrains on history ("Yong shi" 詠史), twelve are about the Three Kingdoms history, and three of those—one quarter—are about Zhuge Liang, respectively on Nanyang, Lushui 瀘水, and Wuzhangyuan, each punctuating a phase or a key moment in Zhuge's life and career.¹⁷

In the Song, a combination of factors, including Du Fu's own canonization after the eleventh century and the political situation of the Southern Song, turned Zhuge Liang into one of the most illustrious of the Three Kingdoms heroes in poetry. He is easily one of the three most popular Three Kingdoms topics from the eleventh through the thirteenth century, the other two being the Bronze Bird inkstone and Red Cliff. What deserves note about the early Zhuge Liang poems is that he seemed very much a local hero of Shu, and the authors who wrote about him—Du Fu, Li Shangyin, and Yong Tao—had all had some connections with Shu; the other well-known Tang poet who composed a long poem on

15. Yong Tao's poem is entitled "The Old Cypress at the Shrine to the Martial Marquis" 武侯廟古柏. *Quan Tang shi*, 518.5924. Duan Wenchang 段文昌 (772–835), who spent many years in Shu, composed a piece on "The Old Cypress in Front of the Shrine to the Martial Marquis Zhuge" 諸葛武侯廟古柏文. *Quan Tang wen*, 617.6234. Duan Wenchang was the one entrusted to write the stele inscription memorializing Pei Du's pacification of Sichuan after Han Yu's stele inscription was destroyed by a disgruntled general.

16. Du Mu wrote a long five-syllable-line poem in response to a Yin Qianzhi 殷潛之 on the stockade. *Quan Tang shi* 523.5983–84. Luo Yin also wrote on the topic. *Quan Tang shi*, 539.6161.

17. *Ibid.*, 647.7421, 7423, 7427.

Zhugue Liang was Li Bai, who was, of course, from Shu.¹⁸ However, as Zhugue Liang's fame spread, he truly became a national hero. One poem on "The Shrine to the Martial Marquis" ("Wuhou miao" 武侯廟) by a Buddhist monk-poet Shi Jujian 釋居簡 (1164–1246) stands out among dozens of similar Song poems because of its amusing preface:

Being on Lake Tai, the shrine cannot possibly be that of the Martial Marquis; it should be for [Zhugue] Jin and [Zhugue] Ke [i.e., Zhugue Liang's brother and nephew who had served Wu]; but the local elders insist that it must be the Martial Marquis.

太湖上必非武侯，當是瑾與恪，父老必為武侯。¹⁹

Clearly Jujian had had a debate with the local elders about a Zhugue shrine by Lake Tai: based on its location, Jujian thought that the shrine was to honor Zhugue Liang's brother and nephew, but the local elders disagreed. Despite the preface, the poem that follows is entirely about Zhugue Liang.

The other, perhaps much more noteworthy, phenomenon in the ninth-century Three Kingdoms imaginary is the emergence of a general interest in the history of this period. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Li He wrote about the fierce warrior Lü Bu 呂布 (d. 199) in "Song of General Lü" ("Lü jiangjun ge" 呂將軍歌) and about the consort of the ill-fated young Han emperor in "The Drinking Song of Lady Tang of the Han" ("Han Tangji yinjiu ge" 漢唐姬飲酒歌). Li Shangyin's couplet from "Poem on My Darling Son" ("Jiao'er shi" 驕兒詩), which describes the young boy's familiarity with the lore of Zhang Fei and Deng Ai 鄧艾 (195–264), is frequently cited by modern scholars as evidence of the contemporary popularity of the Three Kingdoms lore.²⁰ Lü Wen's quatrain, "Orally Composed at Master Liu's Shore" ("Liu lang pu kouhao" 劉郎浦口號), focuses on Liu Bei's marriage alliance with Wu because Master Liu's Shore (in modern Hubei) was supposedly the place where Liu Bei wedded Sun Quan's younger sister; and yet, just a few

18. "Reading the Biography of the Martial Marquis Zhugue and Writing Down My Thoughts to Send to Magistrate Cui Shufeng and His Brother at Chang'an" 讀諸葛武侯傳書懷贈長安崔少府叔封昆季. *Ibid.*, 168.1735.

19. *Quan Song shi*, 2793.33125.

20. *Quan Tang shi*, 541.6244.

decades earlier, when Du Fu set out from the same ford, his poem written on the occasion did not mention anything regarding this lore.²¹

Lü Wen's poem title clearly indicates that he was physically present at the site, just as Du Fu had been. While direct travel experience brings a poet's attention to a local site that he might have ignored otherwise, the opposite is also at work in the dynamic process of putting places on the literary map; that is, a more prominent interest in the Three Kingdoms history in contemporary popular culture might have contributed to the poet's noticing an otherwise obscure site known only to the locals. While Du Fu is certainly the greater poet, in this case Lü Wen's poem is much better known, as it is one of the very first poems about Liu Bei's marriage with Sun Quan's sister, a story that was to be made much of in the later tradition:

吳蜀成婚此水湄	Wu and Shu had wedded on this very shore:
明珠步障幄黃金	The windbreak screen for walking was decorated with bright pearls, their tent with yellow gold.
誰將一女輕天下	What sort of man would disdain the realm for the sake of one girl?
欲換劉郎鼎峙心	That they should want to, with her, change Master Liu's ambition of dividing the empire!

Since Lü's quatrain, Master Liu's Shore has become a famous Three Kingdoms site, even though we do not have any evidence that this was indeed the site of Liu Bei and Miss Sun's wedding or that it had anything to do with Liu Bei in the first place.²²

Many episodes, now well known in the Three Kingdoms story cycle, are celebrated in individual poems. Toward the end of the ninth century,

21. *Ibid.*, 371.4167. Du Fu's poem is entitled "Setting out from Master Liu's Shore" 發劉郎浦. It was composed in 768. *Quan Tang shi*, 223.2373.

22. A Southern Song source, *Account of Shouchang* 壽昌乘, states: "Master Liu's Whirlpool is to the east of the commandery and on the Yangzi River. Its old name is 'Flowing Waves' [liulang]. 'Master Liu' [Liu lang] is an error" 劉郎湫在郡東江上, 故名流浪, 劉郎語之訛也. In *Song Yuan fangzhi congan*, 8411.

Hu Zeng composed quatrains respectively on the Battle of Guandu, where Cao Cao's much smaller army crushed Yuan Shao's forces in 200; the Battle of Red Cliff; Liu Bei's escape from his assassins at the Tan Creek; and Zhuge Liang's campaigns against the southwestern non-Han tribes.²³ A poem by Luo Yin, "On the Stone Ram in Front of Miaoshan Temple at Runzhou [in modern Jiangsu]" ("Ti Runzhou Miaoshan qian shiyang" 題潤州妙善前石羊), depicts the temple as the site of a meeting between Liu Bei and Sun Quan.²⁴ The local lore apparently held that Liu Bei and Sun Quan had once sat on the rock shaped like a ram in front of the temple.

紫髯桑蓋兩沈吟	The man with the purple beard, and the man of the mulberry canopy: ²⁵ each lost in thought;
很石空存事莫尋	The obstinate rock is here in vain: nothing can be traced. ²⁶
漢鼎未安聊把手	Possession of Han's tripods had not yet settled: they held hands for the moment;
楚醪雖美肯同心	The Chu brew might well be delicious, but how could they be of the same mind?
英雄已往時難問	The heroes are gone now—it is difficult to inquire after their age.
苔蘚何知日漸深	What do the mosses know? They have gradually deepened, day after day.

23. *Quan Tang shi*, 647.7437, 7430, 7423, 7427.

24. *Ibid.* 662.7592. Here I adopt the version recorded in Cai Juhou's 蔡居厚 (fl. 1109) "remarks on poetry." See *Cai Kuanfu shihua* 蔡寬夫詩話, in *Song shihua quanbian*, 1.625. Cai Juhou states, "As the legend goes, Sun Quan once sat on the rock and discussed Lord Cao with Liu Bei." In a note to his poem "Temple of Sweet Dews" 甘露寺, Su Shi mentions that it was Zhuge Liang who had sat on the rock and discussed Lord Cao with Sun Quan. Su Shi, *Su Shi shiji*, 310. *Quan Song shi*, 790.9149.

25. Sun Quan reputedly had a "purple" or reddish beard. See Pei Songzhi's commentary, *Sanguo zhi*, 47.1120. When Liu Bei was a boy, he would pretend that the shade of a large mulberry tree growing next to his house was the canopy of a royal carriage he rode in. *Sanguo zhi*, 32.871.

26. The "obstinate rock" refers to the rock in the shape of a ram. The ram is characterized as obstinate. The phrase comes from *Shi ji* 7.305: "as obstinate as a ram" 很如羊.

還有市廛沽酒客 There are still many travelers
 buying ale at the marketplace,
 雀喧鳩聚話蹄涔 Noisy like sparrows, gathering like
 pigeons, they chat up a storm from
 the tiny puddle in an ox's hoofprint.

Later in the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* the episode is elaborated into a full-blown chapter (chapter 54) with a delightful mix of intrigue and comedy. A banquet takes place in the temple on the eve of Liu Bei's wedding to Sun Quan's sister, and at the banquet Sun Quan's mother, irate about her daughter's marriage to a man thirty years her senior, inspects her future son-in-law to see if he measures up to her standards; meanwhile, there is a plot on the part of Sun Quan to take Liu Bei's life as soon as his mother decides she does not like Liu Bei. Moreover, the rock is by this point known as "hate rock" (*henshi* 恨石) rather than "obstinate rock" (*henshi* 狠石): in the novel, Liu Bei makes a secret wish that if he gets to escape from Wu alive and to ultimately accomplish his imperial enterprise, he would be able to cut the rock in half, which he does; but when Sun Quan asks him why he should hate the rock so much, he replies that he wants to see if he could "destroy Cao Cao and revive the Han" again.²⁷

We cannot tell what story about the stone ram was being told in the late ninth century, but the last couplet does point to a lively scene of telling tall tales about the Three Kingdoms history. The travelers buying ale and noisily chatting are implicitly contrasted with the two rulers drinking the Chu brew together, each lost in his own thoughts. The age of the heroes is gone; what is left is a little puddle of rainwater after a storm, around which birds gather together and chirp away. One might also observe that the first couplet in another version of the Luo Yin poem reads:

紫髯桑蓋此沈吟 The man with the purple beard
 and the man of the mulberry canopy
 were lost in thought *at this spot*;

27. In the novel Sun Quan subsequently also makes a secret wish about taking Jingzhou from Liu Bei and bringing about the prosperity of Wu, though he tells Liu Bei that he, too, wants to divine whether he could destroy Cao Cao by trying to cut the rock in half, which he does. Liu Bei and Sun Quan thus carves a cross pattern (like the Chinese character for ten, *shi* 十) into the rock.

很石猶存事可尋 The obstinate rock is *still* here:
the event *can* be traced.²⁸

The textual variants, marked with italics in the translation, clearly show a much more “positive” and positivist vision of history: as long as the rock remains, the event *can* indeed be traced.²⁹

Perhaps indicative of a larger pattern of shifting power from the capital to the provinces, particularly the south and the southwest, in the contemporary world, the ninth-century surge of interest in the Three Kingdoms history had a distinct southern turn, as Wu and the Battle of Red Cliff come to the fore in the historical imagination about the Three Kingdoms. Du Mu’s poem on Red Cliff is the most famous of all, but the late ninth century was the time when “poems on history”—often in the form of the seven-syllable-line quatrain—flourished, with Hu Zeng, Wang Zun 汪遵, Zhou Tan 周曇, and Sun Yuanyan 孫元晏 being the major names in this subgenre. Hu Zeng’s and Sun Yuanyan’s quatrain series both give a prominent place to the Red Cliff and the heroes of Wu. Hu Zeng’s “Red Cliff” reads:

烈火西焚魏帝旗	Blazing flames in the west burned the Wei emperor’s standards:
周郎開國虎爭時	The young master Zhou founded the kingdom at this fierce battle.
交兵不假揮長劍	During the clash, even without bothering to wield his long sword,
已挫英雄百萬師	He had already crushed an army of a million soldiers.

Zhou Yu is credited with the victory of the historic battle that decided the fate of the three kingdoms and led to the founding of Wu as an imperial dynasty. Hu Zeng has also left a seven-syllable-line regulated poem “On General Zhou Yu’s Shrine” (“Ti Zhou Yu jiangjun miao” 題

28. Another textual variant occurs in the fourth line: “Although the Chu brew was filled to the rim” 楚醪雖滿. See *Quan Tang shi*, 662.7592.

29. According to Cai Juhou, the temple was burned down around 1100; the tablet on which Luo Yin’s poem was inscribed was destroyed, and the rock was also ruined.

周瑜將軍廟), which praises Zhou Yu for having protected Wu in the crisis.³⁰

The prominence of Wu's role in the Three Kingdoms is most visible in the set of quatrains on history by Sun Yuanyan. We know virtually nothing about Sun, but he was clearly fascinated with the history of the south. The series of seventy-five poems focuses on the history of the Six Dynasties (i.e., Wu, the Eastern Jin, Song, Qi, Liang, and Chen), of which a disproportionate seventeen poems are about Wu. The structure of the poetic set deserves attention: it begins with "The Carriage of Yellow Gold" ("Huangjin che" 黃金車) and ends with "Blue Canopy" ("Qinggai" 青蓋).³¹ The former is from a children's rhyme from the years 194–95 that supposedly foretold the rise of Wu as an imperial power;³² the latter is from a divinatory remark about the Wu ruler's "blue canopy entering Luoyang," though in this case it was a prophecy about the last Wu ruler Sun Hao's going to Luoyang as a prisoner.³³ The framing of the Wu quatrains between the two quatrains both involving a prophecy and the imperial chariot creates a poetic cycle of Wu's rise and fall.

The remaining poems of the set display the poet's intimate knowledge of Wu's history. Sun strikingly dedicates two poems to Lu Su 魯肅 (courtesy name Zijing 子敬, 172–217), Sun Quan's councilor, but nothing to Zhou Yu, even though he mentions Zhou Yu and Lu Su together in the quatrain entitled "Red Cliff" as the only two Wu ministers who urged Sun Quan to fight Cao Cao.³⁴ The first of the two Lu Su poems focuses on the crucial role played by Lu Su in the Battle of Red Cliff:

斫案興言斷衆疑 Cutting off the desk corner: a speech
was given that put a stop to people's
doubts;

30. *Quan Tang shi*, 647.7419.

31. *Ibid.*, 767.8702, 8704.

32. *Sanguo zhi*, 47.1134.

33. The last Wu ruler, Sun Hao 孫皓 (r. 264–80), was once told by a diviner that the "blue canopy [of the imperial carriage] will enter Luoyang in the *gengzi* year." Pei Songzhi's commentary, *Sanguo zhi*, 48.1177. In 271, he took his entire harem on a winter trip, calling it "the blue canopy entering Luoyang, to follow heaven's mandate" 云青蓋入洛陽以順天命. Pei Songzhi's commentary, *Sanguo zhi*, 48.1168. In 280, which was a *gengzi* year, Wu was conquered and Sun Hao indeed went to Luoyang, as a prisoner.

34. *Quan Tang shi*, 767.8702.

- 鼎分從此定雄雌 From this point on, the world was divided
like the three legs of the tripod,
victory and defeat became clear.
- 若無子敬心相似 Had there been no Zijing
who thought the same way,
- 爭得烏林破魏師 How, at the Black Forest, could they have
smashed the Wei troops!

Confronted with Cao Cao's large army, many Wu ministers and generals, including senior officials like Zhang Zhao, suggested surrender, but Lu Su alone advised Sun Quan to resist; later, when Zhou Yu came to see Sun Quan, he held the same view. The historical work *The Account of the South* (*Jiangbiao zhuan* 江表傳) by Yu Pu 虞溥 (fl. late 3rd century), cited in Pei Songzhi's commentary, relates that after an impassioned pro-war speech by Zhou Yu, Sun Quan drew out his sword to cut off a corner of his desk to warn his ministers not to say another word about surrender.³⁵ Pei Songzhi appends a note here stating that Lu Su was really the first to have advised Sun Quan to fight and that Zhou Yu's *Sanguo zhi* biography does not accurately reflect Lu Su's role in the crisis. It seems that Sun Yuanyan had taken Pei Songzhi's view seriously by giving a more important place to Lu Su. Sun's second Lu Su poem relates how Lu, in his youth, had contributed his family resources to Wu's cause.

- 破產移家事亦難 Spending family fortune, moving house:
these things were not easy;
- 佐吳從此霸江山 From this point on he assisted Wu
to dominate rivers and hills.
- 爭教不立功勳得 How could he have failed
to establish great deeds?
- 指出千囷如等閒 See how he pointed to thousands of bushels
as if they were nothing!

Lu Su was from an affluent family and was always generous with his fortune to win the hearts of the local gentry. He had two granaries, each

35. *Sanguo zhi*, 54.1262.

containing three thousand bushels of grain. Once, Zhou Yu showed up with several hundred retainers and asked him for financial assistance. Lu Su pointed to one of the granaries and gave it all to Zhou Yu. Later, he moved his entire clan to Juchao, where Zhou Yu was magistrate, and allied with Zhou Yu.³⁶

Another late ninth-century poet, Zhou Tan, who left behind about two hundred quatrains on history, has six Three Kingdoms poems, half of which are about Wu: one on the decadent last Wu ruler, one on Wang Biao 王表, and one on Lu Su.³⁷ Wang Biao was a self-proclaimed god—an invisible presence—revered by Sun Quan in the last year of his life, cited in Sun Quan's biography as an omen of the great emperor's decline and demise.³⁸ The poet's choices are fascinating: clearly Wu occupies a large part of his imagination about the Three Kingdoms, and yet, the Wu represented in his poems is divided between the image of incompetent rulers and that of an outstanding minister. The quatrain on Lu Su again evokes the story of Lu Su's liberal donation to Zhou Yu:

輕財重義見英奇	Disdaining wealth, prizing friendship: his extraordinary abilities are revealed therein;
聖主賢臣是所依	For a sagely ruler and a worthy minister, this was the man to rely on.
公瑾窘饑求子敬	Zhou Yu sought Lu Su's help when he was in hard straits:
一言才起數船歸	As soon as Lu uttered one word, he returned home with many full boats.

In this poem Zhou Yu is seen as seeking Lu Su's help, but surely both men were considered "extraordinary" (*yingqi* 英奇) in the tenth century. Li Jiuling's 李九齡 (964 *jinshi*) "Reading the *Record of the Three Kingdoms*" ("Du *Sanguo zhi*" 讀三國志) shows Zhou Yu to be regarded as a pillar of his state just like Zhuge Liang.³⁹

36. *Ibid.*, 54.1267.

37. *Quan Tang shi*, 729.8357–58.

38. *Sanguo zhi*, 47.1148–49.

39. *Quan Tang shi*, 730.8363. *Quan Song shi*, 18.265.

有國由來在得賢	The fate of a state has always depended on obtaining worthy men:
莫言興廢是循環	Don't tell me that a dynasty's rise and fall are just cyclical.
武侯星落周瑜死	After the Martial Marquis's star fell, and Zhou Yu passed away,
平蜀降吳似等閒	The conquest of Wu and Shu turned out to be a breeze.

Strikingly, in the novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, Zhuge Liang is depicted as the real hero of the Battle of Red Cliff whose intelligence is superior to that of everyone else, and Lu Su and Zhou Yu are turned into veritable laughingstocks. Zhou Yu is portrayed as jealous and small-minded while Lu Su is a kind-hearted fool, and the negative characterization is stuck in the Chinese cultural imagination to this day.⁴⁰ John Woo's film is one of the few artistic representations of Red Cliff that take an unambiguous Wu perspective, choosing Tony Leung, an East Asian movie icon, to play Zhou Yu, even though Lu Su remains a negligible sidekick who provides comic relief.

In the eleventh century, the stern moralism that would dominate much of the Three Kingdoms poetry throughout the Song dynasty can already be detected in the blind faith in moral agency in Wang Zhou's 王周 (1012 *jinsshi*) poem "Red Cliff."⁴¹

帳前斫案決大議	The desk's corner was cut off, a great decision was made:
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40. In contrast with the novel, the Lu Su portrayed in the *Records of the Three Kingdoms* strongly resembles Zhuge Liang in his candid, shrewd assessment of the political situation and his encouragement of Sun Quan's imperial ambition. In an early conversation with Sun Quan, he had reportedly said: "The house of Han cannot be revived, and Cao Cao cannot be eliminated quickly." And then he proceeded to urge Sun Quan to unify and occupy the south, using it as his base to strengthen himself, wait for opportunities, and eventually take the empire. *Sanguo zhi*, 54.1268. Lu Su's counsel sounds remarkably like the famous advice given by Zhuge Liang to Liu Bei when Liu first met with him. Unlike many other Wu counselors, Lu Su had never paid any pious lip service to the Han rule, but had always been a staunch Wu supporter. To caricature Lu Su in the novel can be seen as both an ideological and a narrative choice on the part of the novelist.

41. *Quan Song shi*, 154.1762.

赤壁火船燒戰旗	The fire ships at Red Cliff burned away army banners.
若使曹瞞忠漢室	If Cao the Trickster had been loyal to the house of Han,
周郎焉敢破王師	How could Master Zhou have dared to defeat the emperor's troops?

Nevertheless, the most influential representation of Red Cliff in the eleventh century takes place in works other than this lackluster versifying exercise and, more importantly, in genres other than *shi* poetry. That in itself is an interesting new development in the history of “Red Cliff,” to which the next section will turn.

Owning Red Cliff

The eleventh century marks the second crucial moment in the making of Red Cliff because the great Su Shi was exiled to, of all places, Huangzhou. This happened in 1080. The story is well known: Su Shi's political views clashed with the reformist views of Prime Minister Wang Anshi; he was accused of slandering the emperor and the court in his writings and incarcerated in the prison of the Censorate; there he faced possible execution in the famous “Crow Terrace Poetry Case” (*Wutai shi'an* 烏臺詩案), which marked the first time in Chinese history that a prominent man of letters was legally tried for his writings—specifically and significantly, for his poetry;⁴² he narrowly escaped death and was sent to Huangzhou instead. There, in the year 1082, he wrote three pieces on Red Cliff that were to be ranked among the best-known works of Chinese literature: two poetic expositions (*fu*) respectively known as the “Former and Latter Rhapsody on Red Cliff” (“Qian hou Chibi fu” 前後赤壁賦), and one *ci* lyric to the tune of “The Charms of Niannu” (“Niannu jiao” 念奴嬌), entitled “Meditation on the Past at Red Cliff” (“Chibi huaigu” 赤壁懷古). So famous are these pieces that, as we will see, they

42. “Crow Terrace” refers to the Censorate. See Hartman, “Poetry and Politics,” 15–44.

have formed an independent tradition of their own.⁴³ Today, because of Su Shi, Huangzhou's Red Cliff is known as the "literary Red Cliff" (*wen Chibi* 文赤壁) while the Red Cliff of Hubei's Puqi 蒲圻 County, which has a stronger claim to being the real site of the battle, "the martial Red Cliff" (*wu Chibi* 武赤壁).

The first Red Cliff rhapsody begins innocuously enough:⁴⁴

It was the autumn of the *renxu* year, the night after the full moon in the seventh month, when Master Su, together with some companions, let our boat drift, and we were carried beneath Red Cliff.

壬戌之秋，七月既望，蘇子與客泛舟遊於赤壁之下。

This opening relates, in the dry, straightforward, and precise manner of a historical narrative, how on the night of August 12, 1082, "Master Su" and his companions went boating and drinking beneath Red Cliff. It immediately strikes the reader that instead of saying "my friends and I" (in Chinese 吾與吾友/予與數友/予與友 or any number of combinations), the poet chose "Suzi yu ke," literally "Master Su and his guests." Although I have kept "our" and "we" in the English translation, they could easily be rendered as third person. It is, to be sure, a way of distancing oneself from the experience represented in the rhapsody; but first and foremost it places the character Master Su in the position of a *zhu* 主 (host/master) as opposed to his *ke* (guest/sidekick), who any premodern educated reader would know is a figure, a type, with a long history behind him from the Western Han on: in the tradition of *fu* and its various offshoots featuring a dialogical discussion staged between a protagonist (*zhu*) and his interlocutor (*ke*), the guest is invariably the unenlightened questioner/accuser against whom the host successfully defends himself.

A cool breeze came gently along, but it raised no waves in the water. I lifted my wine and toasted my companions, reciting the piece from the *Classic of*

43. The Red Cliff pieces, especially the *fu*, have been translated into English and discussed by many scholars. My own reading is particularly indebted to the close readings performed by Egan in *Word, Image, and Deed*, 221–28; and by Hegel in "The Sights and Sounds," 11–30.

44. Su Shi, *Su Dongpo quanji*, 268. Owen's translation with modifications, *An Anthology*, 292–94.

Poetry on the bright moon and singing the stanza on the woman's grace.⁴⁵ After a while the moon did indeed come forth over the mountains to the east and hung there in between the Dipper and constellation of the Ox. A silver dew stretched across the river until the light on the water reached off to the very sky. We let this tiny boat, like a single reed, go where it would; and it made its way across thousands of acres of bewildering radiance. We were swept along in a powerful surge, as if riding winds through empty air. And not knowing where we would come to rest, we were whirled on as if we stood utterly apart and left the world far behind, growing wings and rising up to join the immortal beings.

By then I had been drinking to the point of sheer delight. I tapped out a rhythm on the side of the boat and sang about it. The song went:

Oars made of cassia, magnolia weeps,
 Beat empty brightness, glide through flowing light.
 So distant and far off are my thoughts,
 As I gaze toward the fair one at the edge of the sky.

清風徐來，水波不興，舉酒屬客，誦明月之詩，歌窈窕之章。少焉，月出於東山之上，徘徊於斗牛之間，白露橫江，水光接天；縱一葦之所如，凌萬頃之茫然。浩浩乎如馮虛御風而不知其所止，飄飄乎如遺世獨立羽化而登仙。於是飲酒樂甚，扣舷而歌之。歌曰：“桂棹兮蘭槳，擊空明兮泝流光。渺渺兮予懷，望美人兮天一方。”

Two things deserve notice: first, as the Chinese text slyly indicates and the English translation underlines, the moon comes forth after the chanting of the *Shi jing* poem entitled “Moonrise,” as if conjured up by Master Su’s word magic; second, Master Su’s song is in the *Verses of Chu* meter, and, as Hegel notes, “cassia oars” and “magnolia sweeps” are both terms from “The Lady of the Xiang” of the “Nine Songs,” which sings of longing for an elusive goddess.⁴⁶ Whatever other textual allusions and echoes one might recognize from the opening of this rhapsody, it is significant that the two canonical anthologies regarded as the dual fountainheads of Chinese literary tradition are “quoted,” and it is equally

45. This is the *Shi jing* poem “Moonrise” 月出: “The moon rises, glowing bright; / The fair one, full of light. / Slow and of gentle grace, / Heart’s torment, heart’s pain” 月出佼兮，佼人僚兮，舒窈糾兮，勞心悄兮。 *Mao shi zhushu*, 7.255.

46. Hegel, “The Sights and Sounds,” 19.

significant that both “quotations” are poignant expressions of unfulfilled desire. The tone of pain and pining in the songs undercuts the narrator’s claim to feel elated and joyful.

Just as the chanting of the “Moonrise” poem leads to the rise of the moon, the lyric of Master Su’s song leads to the transition from joy to melancholy, even though “Master Su” does not seem to know it, and instead attributes the changed mood to the sad flute melody of one of his companions. He asks the companion, “Why did you play it like that?” and receives a long reply:

My companion answered, “‘The moon is bright, the stars sparse, / Crows and magpies are flying south.’ Isn’t that Cao Cao’s poem? Here facing Xiakou to the west and Wuchang to the east, where the mountains and river wind around each other with the dense green of the forests—isn’t this the place where Cao Cao was set upon by young Zhou Yu? Once Cao Cao had smashed Jingzhou, he came down to Jiangling, going east with the current. The prows and sterns of his galleys stretched a thousand *li*, his flags and banners blotted the very sky; he poured wine and stood over the river, hefted his spear and composed a poem—he was indeed the boldest spirit that whole age! And yet where is he now?”

客曰：“‘月明星稀，烏鵲南飛。’此非曹孟德之詩乎？西望夏口，東望武昌，山川相繆，鬱乎蒼蒼，此非孟德之困於周郎者乎？方其破荊州，下江陵，順流而東也，舳艫千里，旌旗蔽空，醜酒臨江，橫槊賦詩，固一世之雄也，而今安在哉？”

The couplet by Cao Cao is of course from his “Short Song.” The above passage does not explicitly state that the poem composed by Cao Cao while he “poured wine and stood over the river” was the “Short Song,” but an implicit connection is established for the first time between this specific poem and the Battle of Red Cliff, and stays on in the Three Kingdoms imaginary. What the author Su Shi does here via the “guest” is no less than what the Mao commentary did for the *Shi jing* poems: namely, he identifies an occasion for the poem, the circumstances of its composition, which would govern the interpretation of the poem for a long time in the popular imagination.

What follows is the predictable statement that if a great hero like Cao Cao with his massive fleet could vanish without a trace, how much more so for people like themselves on a little boat?

We go riding a boat as small as a leaf and raise gourd flasks of wine to toast one another. We are but mayflies lodging between heaven and earth, single grains adrift, far out on the dark blue sea. We grieve that our lives last only a moment, and we covet the endlessness of the great river. We would throw an arm around those immortal beings in their flight and go off to roam with them; we would embrace the bright moonlight and have it done with forever. And since I knew that we could not suddenly have these things out of the blue, I gave the lingering echoes of that desire a place in my sad melody.

駕一葉之扁舟，舉匏樽以相屬。寄蜉蝣於天地，渺滄海之一粟。哀吾生之須臾，羨長江之無窮。挾飛仙以遨遊，抱明月而長終。知不可乎驟得，託遺響於悲風。

The companion's description of their outing effectively forms a rebuttal of all the earlier romantic descriptions of their outing in this rhapsody; this is the second perspective—that of a sober man—on the outing, in marked contrast with that of Master Su. If Master Su toasts his friends left and right, this companion observes that the flask is a humble one made of gourd;⁴⁷ if in Master Su's eyes their little boat carries them over (literally, "transcends" *ling* 凌) the vast river, here it is reduced to a mayfly and a single grain in the vast universe; if Master Su feels like an immortal being with feathers and wings, then the guest retorts that immortality is not something they could ever hope to attain. It is a wonderful deflation and a challenge to which Master Su must answer, and answer he does.

His reply can be divided into two parts. In response to the companion's expression of covetousness about the endlessness of the river, the first part makes the familiar Zhuangzi-esque argument that all depends on one's point of view:

And do you, my friend, indeed understand the water and the moonlight? As Confucius said as he stood by the river, "It passes on just like this," and yet it has never gone away. There is in all things a fullness and a waning to nothing, just as with that other thing, the moon; and yet it has never increased and never vanished altogether. If you think of it from the point of view of changing, then heaven and earth have never been able to stay as they are, even for the blink of an eye. But if you think of it from the point

47. One thinks of Huan Kuan's 桓寬 (fl. 1st century BCE) remark, "The vessels used by commoners are made of nothing but bamboo, willow, pottery, and gourd" 庶人器用即竹柳陶匏而已. Huan Kuan, *Yan tie lun*, 6.351.

of view of not changing, then neither the self nor other things ever come to an end. So then what is there to covet?

客亦知夫水與月乎？逝者如斯，而未嘗往也；盈虛者如彼，而卒莫消長也。蓋將自其變者而觀之，則天地曾不能以一瞬；自其不變者而觀之，則物與我皆無盡也，而又何羨乎？

The second part is provoked by the guest's retort that one cannot "attain" (*de*) the transcendental state of immortal beings and speaks of the issue of acquisition (*de* 得) and ownership (*you* 有), an issue at the heart of contemporary culture and with which the author Su Shi was obsessed:

Between heaven and earth each thing has its own master. If something is not mine, then I cannot take it as mine, even if it is only a hair. There is only the cool breeze along with the bright moon among the mountains. The ears catch one of these, and it is sound; the eyes encounter the other, and it forms colors. Nothing prevents us from taking these as our own. We can do whatever we want with them, and they can never be used up. This is the inexhaustible treasure trove of the Fashioner-of-Things, and it serves the needs of both you and I alike.

且夫天地之間，物各有主，苟非吾之所有，雖一毫而莫取。惟江上之清風，與山間之明月，耳得之而為聲，目遇之而成色，取之無禁，用之不竭，是造物者之無盡藏也，而吾與子之所共適。

The word *zhu* 主 (master, owner, and host), obliquely present through the presence of *ke* (guest) in the text, is finally called out explicitly in the first line of this passage. Master Su claims that all things can be owned except for the breeze and the moonlight, and that he and his companions can "take" them, "use" them, enjoy them, and that is all. Nevertheless, they need a perceiving subject, also *zhu*, to exist (耳得之而為聲，目遇之而成色), and they are colored by the perceiver's subjectivity. This recalls the early medieval discussions influenced by Buddhist teachings: one must face the landscape with the right attitude, and the beauty of the physical landscape is but a reflection of one's own mind.⁴⁸ By deduction, the realm

48. Indeed, Su Shi's statement about the formation of sound and color recalls a passage discussing "causes and conditions" in the "Sutra of Perfect Wisdom" 道行般若經: "[The echo in the mountains] is not realized with one factor, or with two factors. There has to be

of light and transcendence perceived by Master Su in the opening statement of this rhapsody is but an extension of himself. In those lines—“We were swept along in a powerful surge, *as if* riding winds through empty air; and not knowing where we would come to rest, we were whirled on *as if* we stood utterly apart and left the world far behind, growing wings and rising up to join the immortal beings” (my italics)—the use of the word *ru* 如 (as if, like) is critical, as it implies subjective experience. For Su Shi, an avid admirer of the early medieval poet who had written, “When the mind is distant, the locale naturally becomes remote” 心遠地自偏, subjective experience is everything.⁴⁹ Just as the writer Su Shi was an exiled official to Huangzhou, “Master Su” *is* already an immortal, one exiled to the mortal world—a sentiment he expresses by using the verb *gui* 歸 (“go home”) to speak of his desire to fly away to heaven in his other writings.⁵⁰

This implicit claim to immortality is to be seriously undermined in Su Shi’s second rhapsody on Red Cliff. In it, the poet decides to leave a delightful little drinking party beneath the cliffs and climb to the hilltop alone without his “two guests,” but he ultimately abandons the transcendental height and returns to the boat: “We pushed off to midstream, to come to rest wherever the boat might take us” 放乎中流，聽其所止而休焉。⁵¹ This is not the place to go into that text, which is every bit as complicated as the first piece; suffice to say that the return to his boat on the river is a symbolic choice of the flow of historical time over the

a mountain; there has to be a person; there has to be a shout; there has to be an ear listening to it: only when all these factors are brought together is an echo realized.” *Daoxing boruo jing* 10.476, in *Taishō shinshū Daizōkyō* 8. For a detailed discussion of the emphasis on the power of the mind and subjective perception, a stress that became immensely influential in Chinese cultural tradition, see Tian, *Visionary Journeys*, 21–67.

49. The line is written by Tao Yuanming in “Drinking” 飲酒 No. 5. Lu Qinli, comp., *Jin shi*, 17.998.

50. In a *ci* lyric to the tune of “The Charms of Niannu” on the Mid-Autumn Festival (September 10, 1082), about one month after his boating trip to Red Cliff, Su Shi talks about wanting to ride the wind and “go home” to the immortal moon palace (便欲乘風翻然歸去). The phrasing recalls the *ci* lyric to the tune of “Song for the River Tune” (*Shuidiao getou* 水調歌頭) he wrote on the Mid-Autumn Festival in 1076, in which he expresses the same desire (“I want to ride the wind to go home” 我欲乘風歸去) but finally decides that “nothing could beat staying in the human world.” *Quan Song ci*, 1.330, 1.280.

51. Su Shi, *Su Dongpo quanji*, 269. Owen’s translation, *An Anthology*, 676.

stillness of immortality and transcendence.⁵² Hence the lone crane he sees from his boat in the second rhapsody *must* fly west—the direction of the immortal land like Mount Kunlun—while the river flows east.⁵³

Master Su's philosophizing produces an unsurprising response:

My companion was so pleased that he laughed heartily, and washing out his cup he poured himself another. The snacks and fruits had been finished, with plates and cups scattered all around. We all leaned against one another in that boat, unaware that the east was brightening with day.

客喜而笑，洗盞更酌，肴核既盡，杯盤狼藉，相與枕藉乎舟中，不知東方之既白。

Of course we already know this: namely, the guest would challenge Master Su only to be persuaded in the end, for that is how a “guest” always behaves toward the “host” in the tradition of writings on “answering ridicule” (*jiechao* 解嘲). Yet, there is something faintly comic about *this* guest's changing mood—first ranting and raving, and now chuckling with delight, which shows that he is easily manipulated by “external things,” be it the physical environment or words.⁵⁴ In contrast, Master Su's recital of the “Moonrise” poem not only has little to do with the

52. In the second Red Cliff rhapsody, there is no rhetorically lofty and distant “Master Su” but only the more humble and personal “I” (*yu* 予). Even though he still has “two guests” who “follow” him (二客从予), an intertextual echo from the “mid-autumn” song lyric written in the same autumn might put this party of three into an interesting perspective: in the song lyric he writes, appropriating the Tang poet Li Bai's famous couplet, “I hold up my cup to toast the moon, / Along with my shadow, we make a party of *three guests*” 舉杯邀月，對影成三客 (my italics). Li Bai's original line reads “three persons” (三人) instead of “three guests.” Li Bai's poem is entitled “Drinking Alone under the Moon” 對月獨酌 No. 1. *Quan Tang shi*, 182.1853.

53. I give a full discussion of the second rhapsody elsewhere. See Tian, “Yingzi yu shuiwen,” 296–311.

54. The translation of the phrase *xi er xiao* 喜而笑 is instructive. Egan translates it as “smiled with delight”—a straight, and straightforward, statement (*Word, Image, and Deed*, 223); Owen translates it as “laughed in amusement”: the guest apparently takes Master Su with a grain of salt (*An Anthology*, 294); Hegel renders it as “smiled at his [Master Su's] enjoyment”—an ambiguous response which could denote approval or irony or both (“The Sights and Sounds,” 17). My understanding is closer to Egan's, although my reading yields less dignity to the “guest” because he is, after all, a plot function who is supposed to be totally won over by Master Su's rhetoric.

external world but also is the power that calls out the moon. They may have all fallen into a drunken stupor, but this guest is the one who is “unaware” (*buzhi*) at a deeper level: he does not “know” or perceive the wind and moon in the same way as Master Su does, and thus he cannot really participate in their ownership, however transient it is; more importantly, he is not aware that Master Su is really the double of Cao Cao, the commander of the vast fleet, even though what Master Su / Su Shi admires in Cao Cao is not the military might of the “Martial Emperor” but the power of words of a great poet.

Everywhere in Su Shi’s first Red Cliff rhapsody we hear echoes of Cao Cao’s “Short Song,” with its motifs of drinking, lamenting over human life’s brevity and its numerous worries, longing for talented men, and desiring to achieve lasting accomplishments. The “Short Song” opens with these lines:⁵⁵

對酒當歌	The wine before me as I sing:
人生幾何	How long can human life last?
譬如朝露	It is like the morning dew,
去日苦多	And the departed days are sadly too many.

慨當以慷	The feeling is strong in me,
憂思難忘	I cannot forget these worries of mine.
何以解憂	How can I banish my worries?
唯有杜康	Only by Du Kang’s gift of wine.

Su Shi’s Red Cliff rhapsody opens with Master Su’s toasting his companions with wine and singing the stanza from a *Shi jing* poem; later, as “silver dew” stretches across the river and the poet drinks himself tipsy, he again bursts into song, this time one composed by himself.

Cao Cao, too, sings stanzas from *Shi jing*:

青青子衿	“Blue, blue are your gown’s folds;
悠悠我心	So full of yearning is my heart,”
但為君故	And only because of you,
沉吟至今	I have been brooding till now.

55. Xiao Tong, comp., *Wen xuan*, 27.1281. See appendix A.

呦呦鹿鳴	“ <i>Yoo, yoo</i> cry the deer,
食野之苹	Eating the fern shoots in the meadow.
我有嘉賓	I have fine guests with me,
鼓瑟吹笙	So play the harp and blow the pipes.”

It is striking that the line “so full of yearning is my heart” (*you you wo xin* 悠悠我心) forms an exact parallel with the line “so distant and far off are my thoughts” (*miao miao yu huai* 渺渺予懷) in Master Su’s song, which, just like Cao Cao’s song, expresses an intense longing for “the fair one.” In Cao Cao’s piece, the harp is played and the pipes blown in the *Shi jing* quotation; in Su Shi’s rhapsody, Master Su’s guest plays a flute. The melody fills Master Su with melancholy just as the cheerful scene of music-making precedes a transition in mood and a relapse into worries and cares in Cao Cao’s song—

明明如月	How bright is the moon,
何時可輟	When will its passage cease?
憂從中來	Worries come from within,
不可斷絕	Nor can they be halted.

When read against this stanza, Master Su’s philosophizing about the changelessness of things such as the moon as well as about the self takes on a new meaning. Unlike the Yangzi River and the moon, both seeming permanent to humankind, an individual’s self does come to an end, and the only way for it to go on, even though in fragmentation and permutation, is through the poetic word. The poetic word shapes the cares of the great warlord, relevant as they are only to a fleeting political situation, into a work of art that continues to exist and move long after he and his armada are gone. In the image of Cao Cao, who “poured wine and stood over the river” and “composed poetry,” we see Master Su who composes his song and the poet Su Shi who composed the Red Cliff rhapsody. Cao Cao’s humiliating defeat at Red Cliff, like Su Shi’s humiliating exile to Red Cliff, distracts little from the greatness of his literary creation.

The sentimental, unenlightened “guest” is Su Shi’s creation as much as “Master Su” is, and both personas represent different facets of Su Shi the author. We know this because Su Shi has left an equally famous song lyric,

a *ci*, on Red Cliff, in which we again see the working of doubles and opposites.⁵⁶ This song ostensibly celebrates the victorious young general Zhou Yu, but the image of Cao Cao appears as a haunting presence that finds its shadow-reflection (*ying* 影) in the aging poet. The first stanza of the song opens with the image of a mighty river, the symbol of historical time.

大江東去	Eastward goes the great river,
浪淘盡	its waves have swept away
千古風流人物	a thousand years of gallant men.
故壘西邊	And they say
人道是	that west of the ancient castle here
三國周郎赤壁	is that Red Cliff
	of Zhou Yu and the Three Kingdoms.
亂石崩雲	A rocky tangle shatters clouds,
驚濤裂岸	leaping waves smash the shore, ⁵⁷
捲起千堆雪	surging snow in a thousand drifts.
江山如畫	Like a painting, these rivers and hills
一時多少豪傑	where once so many bold men were.
遙想公瑾當年	I envision Zhou Yu back then,
小喬初嫁了	just wedded to the younger Qiao,
雄姿英發	his manly manner striking,
羽扇綸巾	with his black turban and feather fan,
談笑間	laughing in conversation
檣櫓灰飛煙滅	as embers flew from mast and prow
	and the smoke was sinking away. ⁵⁸

56. *Quan Song ci*, 1.282. This song lyric has many variants. The text here is based on the version in Su Shi, *Dongpo yuefu jian*, 2.9b. Owen's translation, *An Anthology*, pp. 579-80.

57. The variant lines (adopted in Owen's translation) in *Quan song ci* read: "A rocky tangle pierces the sky / leaping waves slap the shore" 亂石穿空，驚濤拍岸。

58. The stele inscription in Su Shi's handwriting at Huangzhou has *qianglu* 檣櫓 (prow and mast), but a variant version reads *qiang lu* 強虜 (powerful foe). This variant is recorded in a quotation by the Southern Song official Li Bi 李壁 (1159-1222) in his conversation with, significantly, a Jurchen Jin emissary from the north. Since *lu* 虜 was a pejorative term used to refer to northern non-Han peoples, this might have been a deliberate distortion in the Southern Song, which now defended itself against its northern enemy with its river fleet just like Wu had. Su Shi, *Dongpo yuefu biannian*, 210.

故國神遊
 多情應笑我
 早生華髮
 人生如夢
 一尊還酹江月

The spirit roams that long-ago land—
 you will laugh at this sentimental me,
 hair streaked white before my time.
 Yet this human world is like a dream
 and I pour out my wine as offering
 into the river's moonbeams.⁵⁹

As opposed to the flowing river, the man-made structure—an old fortress in ruins—remains motionless. East and west are deliberately juxtaposed to bring home the contrast between stillness and movement, a contrast stressed and played with throughout the first stanza. The landscape is so dynamic that it evokes the battle scene, but then it is suddenly brought to a standstill in the penultimate line of this stanza: “These rivers and hills are like a painting.” The builders of fortresses, warriors fighting over the lands, the “gallant men,” on the other hand, move quickly through the landscape—swept away by the waves, transient, and “bold” only for a while (*yishi* 一時). Yet, it is these men who give an identity, a name, to the anonymous landscape: as “they say,” this is the “Red Cliff of Zhou Yu and the Three Kingdoms.”

In the second stanza, like in a flashback in a movie, the poet zooms in to create a close-up of Zhou Yu: his youthful virility and confidence, accentuated by the mention of the younger Qiao, form an implicit contrast with his foe Cao Cao, powerful but aging. Although this song lyric doubtless expresses admiration for Zhou Yu, there is a great distance between Zhou Yu and the “sentimental me” with white hair who drinks and laments the brevity of life by the moonlit river—a figure that, in fact, evokes the image of Cao Cao as presented in the first Red Cliff rhapsody.

Su Shi is paying tribute to previous poets: not only Cao Cao but also Du Mu, who first brought the Qiao sisters into the picture and who superimposed an old fisherman on the background of an ancient battle. In the second Red Cliff rhapsody this fisherman is displaced into a “guest” who provides the fish for the boat party; in this song lyric he is displaced into the image of the aging poet in exile and disgrace who nevertheless never loses his gallant spirit (*fengliu* 風流): he remains *duoqing* 多情,

59. *Lei* 酹 (to pour wine onto the ground as an offering), has a variant, *zui* 醉 (to be drunk).

literally “full of feelings,” a striking phrase to use here because it usually describes a lover’s romantic sentiments. Interestingly, the phrase’s transposition here to depict a general temperament of emotional intensity is a perfect allegory of Su Shi’s transformation of the *ci* lyric, a genre that at this time was still reserved by and large for expressions of romantic love.

In Chinese literary history it has become a cliché that Su Shi “wrote *ci* in the way one would write *shi*” (*yi shi wei ci* 以詩為詞).⁶⁰ It is nevertheless intriguing that he chose to write a *ci* lyric, not a *shi* poem, on Red Cliff.⁶¹ Perhaps, as Fuller speculates, the potential of *shi* poetry for allegorical interpretation and Su Shi’s incarceration and trial turned him toward *ci* and *fu* as safer venues of self-expression.⁶² By Su Shi’s time, poetry was certainly read as much more intimately and transparently autobiographical than either the *ci* lyric at this stage of its development, with its performance context and voice of a persona, or the *fu*, which traditionally often employs a fictional framework to frame its main body. Generic factors are decidedly at work in the predetermined direction of a “master/host vs. guest” debate in the *fu*, and in the sentimental indulgence of the *ci* lyric; in each case the author distances himself with the personae he creates while allowing them to all reflect some part of himself.

The development of the *ci* lyric is always influenced by *shi*—both directly and, as *shi* poetry’s negation, indirectly; it also forces *shi* poetry to change in response to the pressure of *ci*. We may take a look at a *shi* poem, “Meditation on the Past at Red Cliff” (“Chibi huaigu” 赤壁懷古) by Su Zhe 蘇轍 (1039–1112), Su Shi’s little brother.⁶³

60. Chen Shidao 陳師道 (1053–1101) in his *Houshan’s Remarks on Poetry* 後山詩話 famously states: “Tuizhi [Han Yu’s courtesy name] wrote *shi* poetry in the way one would write prose, and Zizhan wrote *ci* lyrics in the way one would write *shi* poetry” 退之以文為詩，子瞻以詩為詞。See *Lidai shihua*, 185.

61. Michael Fuller gives a fascinating statistical analysis of the types and volume of Su Shi’s writing that survived from his Huangzhou exile. According to Fuller’s statistics, Su Shi “wrote fewer poems” at Huangzhou; for instance, he wrote only 39 poems in 1082, the year he took the Red Cliff trips, as opposed to 111 poems in the year he left Huangzhou; but he additionally wrote 23 song lyrics, including the one on Red Cliff, in 1082. Fuller, *The Road to East Slope*, 262–63.

62. Fuller, *The Road to East Slope*, 287.

63. *Quan Song shi*, 858.9949.

新破荊州得水軍	He had recently conquered Jingzhou and acquired a fleet,
鼓行夏口氣如雲	Marching to the beating drums at Xiakou, with a momentum like clouds.
千艘已共長江嶮	Already a thousand warships had together braved the perils of the Yangzi River,
百勝安知赤壁焚	Having won a hundred victories, how could he foresee Red Cliff's burning?
鶻距方強要一門	With a strong beak and claws, the bird of prey sought a good fight;
君臣已定勢三分	But ruler and minister had already decided on the tripod situation. ⁶⁴
古來伐國須觀霧	From ancient times one must wait for the right moment to attack a state;
意突成功所未聞	To act impulsively and succeed— I have never heard of that before.

Compared with Su Shi's *ci* lyric, which contains many twists and turns, Su Zhe's poem is noted for its linear exposition and discursive argumentation, both being generic traits that would increasingly characterize the *shi* form. Generic difference and, more importantly, the poet's clumsiness in versification result in a poem that, like Cao Cao's fleet, begins with a great deal of *qi* (momentum and energy) but falls flat.

Dongpo's Red Cliff

With his two rhapsodies and one song lyric, Su Shi left his lasting imprint on the Red Cliff legacy, attested by a long literary and artistic tradition on the theme of Su Shi's boating at Red Cliff.⁶⁵ Poets wrote about reading

64. This line could also be understood as "The relation of ruler and subject had been fated, and the land was to split into three."

65. The tradition is too massive to be done justice to in a footnote. For a start, one may look at *Dongpo Chibi yiwenzhi* (1922); *Huangzhou Chibi ji* (published in 1932), which

Su Shi's rhapsodies or on paintings based on the rhapsodies, and even in writing about the battle itself, poets often felt compelled to mention Su Shi.⁶⁶ "Zhou Yu's Red Cliff" 周郎赤壁 has long since become "Dongpo's Red Cliff" 東坡赤壁, with Su Shi's ownership of the place firmly established. Indeed, it seems that Su Shi's Red Cliff *ci* was directly responsible for the popularity of the tune title "Charms of Niannu," which is alternatively called "Wine Offering to the River Moon" ("Lei jiang yue" 酹江月), "The Great River Lyric" ("Dajiang ci" 大江詞), "Eastward Goes the Great River" ("Dajiang dongqu" 大江東去), or simply "Red Cliff Song" ("Chibi ci" 赤壁詞)—all after Su Shi's lyric. In addition, there was a notable surge of song lyrics written to this tune title after the eleventh century: in the modern scholar Tang Guizhang's 唐圭章 monumental multi-volume *Complete Song Ci Lyrics* (*Quan Song ci* 全宋詞) arranged in chronological order, there are by a very rough count well over 500 songs written to "The Charms of Niannu," but only about a dozen are from volume 1, which begins and ends with figures active in the late eleventh century and early twelfth century such as Zhang Lei 張耒 (1054–1114) and Hou Meng 侯蒙 (1054–1121), and that is under 1 percent of all the extant Song dynasty *ci* lyrics to this tune title. Even when we consider the vicissitudes of transmission and potential textual losses, such a drastic increase in the number of "Niannu" songs is quite striking.

collects several hundred poems and rhapsodies on Red Cliff from Song through Qing, has its title inscribed by Chiang Kai-shek (1887–1975). A more recent, and more manageable, volume is *Dongpo Chibi shicixuan* (1984). For works of visual art, see *Chibi fu shuhua tezhan*, which showcases a special exhibit of "Red Cliff rhapsody" calligraphy pieces and paintings held at Taipei's National Palace Museum. Qiao Zhongchang's 喬仲常 (fl. late 11th–early 12th century) narrative painting scroll on the second Red Cliff rhapsody, currently in the collection of Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, is perhaps among the best-known early paintings on this theme and has been explored well in Chinese and English scholarship; see a short bibliography in Tian, "Yingzi yu shuiwen." For the dramatic tradition on Su Shi and Red Cliff, see Yi Ruofen, "Juzuo jia bixia," 385–98.

66. For instance, the poet-monk Shi Baotan's 釋寶曇 (1129–97) "Inscribed on Li Fangzhou's Painting 'Dongpo's Red Cliff'" 為李方舟題東坡赤壁圖, Xin Qiji's 辛棄疾 (1140–1207) *ci* lyric "Red Cliff" to the tune title "Frosty Sky, Morning Horn" 霜天曉角, Bai Yuchan's 白玉蟾 (b. 1194) "Ten Poems on Meditation on the Past at Wuchang: Red Cliff" 武昌懷古十詠赤壁, Fang Yikui's 方一夔 (fl. 13th century) "Reading 'Rhapsodies on Red Cliff'" 讀赤壁賦, and Zheng Sixiao's 鄭思肖 (1241–1318) "Painting on Su Dongpo's 'Former Rhapsody on Red Cliff'" 蘇東坡前赤壁賦圖 are all interesting specimens in this subgenre. For translations of these poems, see appendix B.

Out of the small handful of “Niannu” songs in the first volume of *Quan Song ci*, eight are dubiously attributed to Qin Guan 秦觀 (1049–1100), one of Su Shi’s closest friends and followers.⁶⁷ In many ways, one of these songs, entitled “On Snow: In a Boat at Red Cliff” (“Chibi zhouzhong yongxue” 赤壁舟中詠雪), is representative of this poetic sub-genre and one of the most fascinating. It is almost certainly from a much later time, but its true authorship hardly seems to matter here.

中流鼓楫	We beat the oars in mid-stream,
浪花舞	waves splash and dance,
正見江天飛雪	and right in front of our eyes
	snow is flying between the river
	and sky.
遠水長空連一色	Distant waters and endless heaven
	are all of one color,
使我吟懷逸發	inspiring in me a lofty mood
	for chanting poetry.
寒峭千峰	Cold sharpens a thousand peaks,
光搖萬象	light shakes up myriad things,
四野人蹤滅	no human tracks anywhere in the wilds.
孤舟垂釣	Fishing in a solitary boat:
漁蓑真個清絕	the fisherman’s raincoat is truly elegant.
遙想溪上風流	I envision the gallant man
	on the stream—
悠然乘興	who followed his whim afar,
獨棹山陰月	alone boating in Shanyin’s moonbeams. ⁶⁸

67. *Quan Song ci*, 1.474.

68. This refers to the famous calligrapher Wang Huizhi 王徽之 (d. ca. 386) who lived in Shanyin 山陰 (in modern Zhejiang). On a snowy night, as he was drinking alone and intoning Zuo Si’s poem “Summoning the Recluse” 招隱士, he suddenly had the urge to call on his friend Dai Kui 戴逵 (d. 396) who lived in Shan County. He ordered a small boat and journeyed all night only to turn back at Dai Kui’s door without going in. When asked why, he answered: “I went on a whim; when my mood was used up, I just went home. Why was it necessary to see Dai?” Liu Yiqing, *Shishuo xinyu*, 23.47.

爭似楚江帆影淨	But how could that compare with the clarity of sail's shadow on the Chu river,
一曲浩歌空闊	and with singing aloud in the vast emptiness?
禁體詞成	As a forbidden-style <i>ci</i> lyric is done, ⁶⁹
過眉酒熱	Wine flush passes through the brow,
把唾壺敲缺	I tap rhythm on the spittoon until it is broken. ⁷⁰
馮夷驚道	The river god marvels with amazement:
坡翁無此赤壁	"Even the Old Man Po did not have such a Red Cliff!"

The metaphoric snow in Su Shi's song becomes literal snow in this song lyric, which is all about the composition of song lyrics, about Su Shi, and about earlier textual tradition. Zhou Yu's "manly manner striking" (*xiongzi yingfa* 雄姿英發) becomes, in a line with the same rhyme word, "a lofty mood for chanting poetry" (*yinhuai yifa* 吟懷逸發). The last five lines of the first stanza rewrite the Tang poet Liu Zongyuan's 柳宗元 (773–819) "River Snow" ("Jiangxue" 江雪).⁷¹

千山鳥飛絕	A thousand mountains, birds stop flying;
萬徑人蹤滅	Ten thousand paths with no human tracks.
孤舟蓑笠翁	In a solitary boat, an old man in rain hat and coat
獨釣寒江雪	Fishes alone in the cold river's snow.

69. A forbidden-style poem refers to one that forbids the use of certain conventional words and phrases associated with the topic.

70. This is an allusion to another early medieval anecdote: the Eastern Jin rebel general Wang Dun 王敦 (266–324) would, after drinking, invariably intone Cao Cao's couplets and tap rhythm on a spittoon with his *ruyi* baton so hard that the mouth of his spittoon was all chipped and broken. The couplets he intoned are from Cao Cao's "Going out of the Xia Gate" 步出夏門行: "An aging steed lying in the stall / Still wants to gallop a thousand li; / A bold man in his twilight years / Never abandons his stout heart" 老驥伏櫪, 志在千里, 烈士暮年, 壯心未已. Liu Yiqing, *Shishuo xinyu*, 13.4.

71. *Quan Tang shi*, 352.3948.

The only difference is the addition of the colloquial *zhen'ge* 真個 (truly, indeed) in the song, which turns Liu's poem into a self-conscious "literary quotation," confirming the "truth" of high classical poetry with an aggressively vernacular utterance designed to evoke a sense of "what really is in real life."

This old fisherman is the same old fisherman in Du Mu's poem who sits at "the crossing where heroes contended." Du Mu displaces the battle into the image of fishing, but he does so by explicitly recalling the battle. By contrast, in this song lyric we hear only the echo of an echo, with the battle receding into an invisible background. If Su Shi's rhapsody explicitly evokes Cao Cao and cites his poetry, then this song evokes Wang Dun, who intones Cao Cao's poem; if Su Shi in his lyric sees Zhou Yu with his mind's eye, then this *ci* poet sees Su Shi. The second stanza begins with "I envision" (*yaoxiang*), unmistakably mimicking Su Shi; but the poet replaces one kind of "gallant" (*fengliu*) with another, namely, that of the man who claimed that he did not need to see Dai Kui and who never did see Dai Kui. This "not seeing" is as important to the story as to the song lyric, in which the past is displaced further and further behind multiple layers of text.

Some try to access the past by going to the source text, as in the song lyric "Reading the Biography of Zhou Gongjin [i.e., Zhou Yu]" ("Du Zhong Gongjin zhuan" 讀周公瑾傳) written to the tune "Ganzhou in Eight Rhymes" ("Basheng Ganzhou" 八聲甘州) by the Southern Song scholar and poet Wang Zhi 王質 (1135–89). But even here Su Shi intervenes, unexpectedly.

事茫茫	The events are distant and hazy now:
赤壁半帆風	as the wind blew on the half-raised sail
	at Red Cliff,
四海忽三分	the world within the Four Seas suddenly
	split into three.
想	I envision
蒼煙金虎	the blue mist concealing Metal Tiger,
碧雲銅爵	emerald clouds enshrouding Bronze Bird, ⁷²
恨滿乾坤	regret filling heaven and earth.

72. This is an allusion to Jiang Yan's poem, "Imitating Huixiu's Resentment at Separation" 效惠休別怨: "At dusk emerald clouds gather, / And the fair one has not yet arrived" 日暮碧雲合, 佳人殊未來. Lu Qinli, comp., *Liang shi*, 4.1580.

鬱鬱秣陵王氣	Meanwhile, the copious royal aura at Moling
傳到第三孫	was passed on to the third Sun. ⁷³
風虎雲龍會	The encounter of wind and tiger, cloud and dragon— ⁷⁴
自有其人	there was naturally someone up to it.
朱顏二十有四	The youthful face at four-and-twenty: ⁷⁵
正錦幃秋夢	this was exactly the time of having autumn dreams behind brocade curtains,
玉帳春聲	enjoying spring's sounds from the general's jade tent.
望吳江楚漢	I now gaze toward the Wu River that divided Chu and Han:
明月伴英魂	only the bright moon is keeping his heroic soul company.
浥泥小橋紅浪濕	The little bridge was awash in the red waves; ⁷⁶
撫虛弦	she stroked the empty strings,
何處得郎聞	but where could she get her lover to listen? ⁷⁷

73. That is, Sun Quan (after his father Sun Jian and his elder brother Sun Ce). Moling is another name for the Six Dynasties capital Jianye/Jiakang.

74. This refers to the encounter of ruler and minister.

75. Zhou Yu was twenty-four *sui* (twenty-three years old by modern reckoning) when he began to serve Sun Ce and was referred to as the “young Master Zhou” (Zhou lang) by his contemporaries. *Sanguo zhi*, 54.1260.

76. The younger Qiao's surname appears as 橋 in Zhou Yu's *Sanguo zhi* biography, which means “bridge.” Qiao as her surname is now more often written as Qiao 喬. The red waves refer to tears. Wang Jia 王嘉 (fl. 4th century) records an apocryphal story about Cao Pi's consort Xue Lingyun 薛靈芸 weeping tears of blood when she left her parents to enter the harem, and “red tears” become a standard reference to a beautiful woman's tears. Wang Jia, *Shiyi ji*, 159.

77. Zhou Yu was a connoisseur of music. If a music performer ever made any mistake, even after much drinking “he would invariably notice and turn around to look at the person. Therefore his contemporaries had a saying, ‘An error in music / Turns the head of the young Master Zhou’” 曲有誤，周郎顧。 *Sanguo zhi*, 54.1265.

雪堂老
 千年一瞬
 再擊空明

The elder of the Snow Hall,⁷⁸
 for one moment in a thousand years,
 would beat the empty brightness
 once again.

The first stanza is filled with air: the east wind at the Battle of Red Cliff; the mist and clouds enshrouding Ye's terraces, where the fair Qiao sisters never did show up as in Jiang Yan's "emerald clouds" couplet; and in contrast the copious "royal aura" arising from Moling, Wu's capital. Even Zhou Yu himself appears in the figure of wind and cloud that, according to the *Classic of Changes*, follow upon tiger and dragon. The failed romantic encounter, euphemistically referred to as "cloud and rain," of the warlord and the Qiao sisters is replaced by that of a wise king and his able minister. All, however, is subsumed in the opening line, in which the past is figured as "distant and hazy" (*mangmang* 茫茫).

The haziness of the past is resolved in the second stanza, which begins with a clear close-up of the "youthful face" [lit. rosy countenance] of the twenty-four-year-old Zhou Yu. There are some distinctly sexual overtones, with the description of autumn dreams behind the brocade curtains, spring's sounds in the general's tent, or the little bridge drenched by red waves. Even the music line—stroking the "empty strings"—is ambiguous enough: one understands the line as saying the widowed Lady Qiao is now playing her zither in vain because Zhou Yu cannot hear anymore; yet, the phrase "empty strings" is habitually used to refer to empty bowstrings without an arrow. The aborted "cloud and rain" due to Zhou Yu's untimely death is displaced into other forms of liquid: tears, and the "empty brightness" of the Yangzi River in moonlight, evoking "Master Su's" song: "Oars made of cassia, magnolia weeps, / Beat empty brightness, glide through flowing light. / So distant and far off are my thoughts, / As I gaze toward the fair one at the edge of the sky." The second stanza forms a perfect parallel with the first in that the aborted "cloud and rain" meeting of a man and a woman is superseded by a homosocial bond between men. One wonders exactly which "fair one" or fair ones Wang Zhi is really "gazing toward" here in his textual/sexual fantasy. The music of the younger Qiao and the song of the Snow

78. Su Shi built the Snow Hall in Huangzhou.

Hall elder are strangely intertwined, and equally lost to posterity, in their yearning to reach the absent center that is the dashing young Master Zhou.

Another Southern Song poet, Dai Fugu 戴復古 (1167–ca. 1247), decided that the best way to access the past is not to read biographies in dynastic history books but to read the physical place. This is his take on “Meditation on the Past at Red Cliff,” written to the tune “Red Filling the River” (“Manjianghong” 滿江紅).

赤壁磯頭	The rocky beach of Red Cliff—
一番過	each time I pass through,
一番懷古	I meditate on the past.
想當時	I envision the time
周郎年少	when young Master Zhou
	was in his prime,
氣吞區宇	his energy overwhelmed the world.
萬騎臨江貔虎噪	Ten thousand cavalry coming
	upon the river, warriors roared
	like tigers and jaguars;
千艘列炬魚龍怒	a thousand galleys lining up the torches:
	fish and dragon were wrathful;
卷長波	roiling up the long waves,
一鼓困曹瞞	with one drum beat he trapped
	Cao the Trickster—
今如許	today, all of that is but like this.
江上渡	The crossing on the river;
江邊路	beside the river, a road.
形勝地	The land of beauty and peril;
興亡處	the place of rise and fall.
覽遺蹤	Viewing the remaining tracks
	of bygone times
勝讀史書言語	is better than reading history books.
幾度東風吹世換	Many a time east wind has blown
	on the changed generations,
千年往事隨潮去	The past events of a thousand years
	recede with the ebbing tide.

問道傍	I ask those roadside willows:
楊柳為誰春	“For whom are you turning green again?”
搖金縷	They only shake their golden threads. ⁷⁹

East wind still blows; spring still comes around: nature is wonderfully repetitive. The human “meditation on the past” is just as tiresome and redundant, for the poet is compelled to do it “each time” he passes through Red Cliff—there is almost a tone of exasperation in the phrasing “*yifan* 一番 . . . *yifan* 一番 . . .”—and to replicate Su Shi in his gesture of “envisioning” of a young Zhou Yu, whose battle with Cao Cao was the only original and unrepeatable act. In fact, Su Shi himself had once done just that: when he visited Mount Lu, he vowed he would not write any poem about it; but then he couldn’t help writing a quatrain after he was repeatedly recognized by monks or laymen as the famous poet, and before he knew it, he had written another, yet another, yet another, and so forth.⁸⁰ But Su Shi turned that experience itself into a self-consciously ironic and hilarious piece of writing; Dai Fugu is all earnestness in his compulsion to, as his personal name dictates, *fu gu* 復古, return to/repeat the ancient.

In the second stanza, the poet declares that viewing the landscape itself is better than reading the words of history books, but the declaration pales against the generic appearance of the landscape described in three words, *jin ru xu* 今如許 (“today, all of that is but like this”). These words are oddly both effective and impotent because the poet literally does not have language to depict the landscape he sees, bland and non-descript as it is.⁸¹ “The land of beauty and peril” and “the place of rise and fall” can be applied to numerous other sites. The image of golden threads of the willows is the only concrete image in this *ci* lyric that belongs to

79. Golden thread is a common term for willow branches in early spring; it also evokes the *carpe-diem* song “Robe of Golden Threads” 金縷衣 cited in Du Mu’s note to his “Poem on Du Qiujiang” 杜秋娘詩: “I ask you not to begrudge your robe of golden threads; / I ask you to cherish your youth. / When flowers bloom, go ahead and pick them; / Don’t wait till flowers fall and nothing is left but an empty branch” 勸君莫惜金縷衣, 勸君須惜少年時。花開堪折直須折, 莫待無花空折枝。 *Quan Tang shi*, 520.5938.

80. “An Account of My Visit to Mount Lu” 記遊廬山, in Su Shi, *Dongpo zhilin*, 8.

81. It could also be a subtle lament over the river fleet of the Southern Song in the face of its powerful northern foe.

“today’s” scene, but it is as generic as can be, not to mention that it recalls an earlier text, the song “Robe of Golden Threads” from Du Mu’s poetry. Ultimately this song lyric bespeaks the failure of words (*yanyu* 言語), not only of history books but also of its own.

Dai Fugu also wrote a poem simply entitled “Red Cliff” (“Chibi” 赤壁).⁸² Unlike the song, it has little saving grace:

千載周公瑾	In a thousand years, it is as if Zhou Gongjin
如其在目前	Were right there in front of my eyes:
英風揮羽扇	In a heroic manner he waved his feather fan,
烈火破樓船	As blazing flames burned down the battleships.
白鳥滄波上	A white bird over gray-green waves, ⁸³
黃州赤壁邊	Huangzhou is right next to the Red Cliff. ⁸⁴
長江酌明月	On the Yangzi River, offering a cup of wine
	to the bright moon—
更憶老坡仙	Even more do I think on
	that old immortal Slope. ⁸⁵

The prosaic opening is neither compensated by the word play in the third line (“heroic manner” 英風 is also a “heroic wind”), nor by the attempted cleverness of taking Huangzhou literally as a “yellow prefecture” to form a parallel with “white bird” in the third couplet. If anything, the color scheme in the third couplet is so busy and jarring that it destroys every chance for the poem to redeem itself. Noticeably, the poet is compelled to think on Su Shi in the last couplet and to replicate what Su Shi does in his song lyric (i.e., offering wine to the moon), something that almost everyone does at this site. By asserting his own dominance over the place, Su Shi has come very close to ruining Red Cliff for Zhou Yu.

82. *Quan Song shi*, 2817.33552.

83. This is a commonplace poetic image that usually indicates freedom and ease. Here it serves to depict the real present scene in front of the poet’s eyes as opposed to the violent scene of battle seen with his mind’s eye.

84. This remarkably insipid line seems to indicate that the administrative unit Huangzhou is now known through Red Cliff instead of the other way around (i.e., not “Red Cliff is in Huangzhou,” but “Huangzhou is where Red Cliff is”).

85. That is, “East Slope,” the famous moniker taken on by Su Shi while he was at Huangzhou.

Of the numerous Red cliff poems from Song through Qing and modern times, there might be a few hidden gems here and there, but they need to be discovered painstakingly by scholars. Nothing else after Du Mu and Su Shi is as well known in the cultural tradition, and for popular, influential, writing on Red Cliff we have to look elsewhere.

A Storyteller's Vision

The Red Cliff episodes in *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* are among its best-known chapters, and justifiably so.⁸⁶ Like the rest of the novel, they represent a conscious manipulation of dynastic histories, with deletions, additions, and, perhaps more importantly, grafts. For instance, the story about Sun Quan turning his boat around to take arrows from Cao Cao's archers so that the weight of the arrows on two sides of the boat was balanced out is transplanted to Zhuge Liang in chapter 46.⁸⁷ The commentators Mao Lun 毛綸 (fl. 17th century) and his son Mao Zonggang 毛宗崗 (1632–1709) further effected numerous alterations to the earlier version of the novel, some of which were aesthetic, but many of which were ideological.⁸⁸ The most noticeable ideological change resulting from the multiple layers of rewriting of historical records is in

86. I use the seventeenth-century "Mao commentary edition" (*Mao pingben* 毛評本), which has remained the most popular of *Sanguozhi yanyi* editions, as the basis of my discussion. There are many seventeenth- and eighteenth-century print editions of *Mao pingben*. One of the early editions I have referenced is *Guanban dazi xiuxiang piping Sanguozhi* 官板大字繡像批評三國志, printed by Zhiyuan tang 致遠堂 / Qisheng tang 啟盛堂, with a 1734 preface; and one of the easily accessible modern editions is *Mao pi Sanguo yanyi*. Since there are so many easily available modern editions of the novel, unless I cite a specific passage from the novel or from Mao Lun and Mao Zonggang's commentary, I will only note chapter number for the reader's convenience but not give any page number. For an edited volume about this novel and its influence in the Chinese tradition, see Besio and Tung, *Three Kingdoms and Chinese Culture*.

87. This story is cited from *Wei lue* in Pei Songzhi's commentary. *Sanguo zhi*, 47.1118. The protagonist of this occurrence is Zhou Yu in *Sanguo zhi pinghua* 三國志平話, a rough incarnation of the Three Kingdoms story cycle printed in the Zhizhi 至治 era (1321–23). *Zhizhi xinkan*, 79.

88. See, for instance, He Manzi, "Lun Mao Zonggang dui," 59–63.

characterization that reflects changing historical judgment. The Battle of Red Cliff is largely narrated from the perspective of Shu, perceived as the only legitimate power. Predictably, Zhuge Liang is made into the true hero of the battle who proves crucial for the final victory, and Zhou Yu is portrayed as capable but prejudiced and small-minded, so jealous of Zhuge Liang's talent that he makes repeated attempts on his life, all to no avail. Lu Su is largely reduced to a plot function, constantly going between Zhuge Liang and Zhou Yu and passing on news and gossip, acting as the comic straight man as well as an unsuspecting tool in the Machiavellian plotting of Zhuge Liang and Zhou Yu. In chapter 43, in a famous scene known as "'Tongue Battle' with a Group of Scholars" ("Shezhan qunru" 舌戰群儒), Zhuge Liang eloquently defeats Wu ministers who advocated surrender to Cao Cao's army in a court debate; the courtiers, such as Zhang Zhao and Xue Zong, who were considered Wu's greatest resources in early medieval times, are all caricatured in late imperial times, referred to by Zhuge Liang as "rotten pedants" (*furu* 腐儒) or "small-minded Confucians" (*xiaoren zhi Ru* 小人之儒).

Ideological leaning and moralism are nevertheless the least important elements in the success of these episodes. Out of the countless colorful characters and details scattered and dispersed in historical sources, the narrator manages to create a complex and yet tightly coherent story that captures the reader's attention until its climactic finish. One way of doing this is to structure the narrative through multiple layers of contestation among the three powers involved. These clashes, beginning with Zhuge Liang's "tongue battle" with the Wu courtiers upon arriving at Wu, are diminutive fights, in the form of real or mock battles of force and wit, functioning like a deliciously intricate prelude that foreshadows and gradually leads up to the climax.

The recurring motif is deception. There are numerous instances of scheming and trickery, whereas in historical sources only one such instance is recorded, and it is something conspicuously missing in the poetic tradition. Each camp, for instance, sends spies and false capitulators to the enemy. In chapter 45, Jiang Gan 蔣幹, who was sent by Cao Cao to persuade Zhou Yu to surrender, took back a piece of information, forged by Zhou Yu, about the capitulation of Cai Mao 蔡瑁 and Zhang Yun 張允, the two most capable navy commanders in Cao Cao's camp. Cai and Zhang were executed by an enraged Cao Cao, who realized his

mistake too late. Cao Cao subsequently sent Cai Mao's brothers, Cai He 蔡和 and Cai Zhong 蔡中, as false capitulators to the Wu camp. Although Zhou Yu immediately saw through their falsity, he nevertheless pretended to accept their surrender as sincere and kept them in his camp, so that they could be used as unwitting mediums to pass on misleading military information back to Cao Cao. Meanwhile, the Wu general Huang Gai 黄盖 successfully tricked Cao Cao into believing his own promise of capitulation—this is the only known instance of fake capitulation in this battle that is testified in historical sources.⁸⁹

One of the recurring keywords in these chapters is *man* 瞞 (to trick or dupe), which was supposedly Cao Cao's childhood name. Chapter 47 begins with Kan Ze 闕澤 taking Huang Gai's capitulation letter across the river to Cao Cao, who was initially skeptical: "This can only trick other people; how could it trick *me*?" 只好瞞別人, 如何瞞得我.⁹⁰ But Cao Cao was eventually swayed by Kan Ze. The second half of the chapter relates how Pang Tong 龐統 convinced Cao Cao to connect all the battleships with iron chains to stabilize them for the benefit of Cao Cao's northern soldiers, who were not used to fighting on water; the strategy was seen through by Xu Shu 徐庶, however, and the chapter ends with his words: "You can only trick Cao Cao, but you cannot trick me!" 只好瞞曹操, 也須瞞我不得.⁹¹ Cao Cao's and Xu Shu's remarks form a perfect symmetry worthy of a poetic parallel couplet.

The opposition between the north and south side of the Yangzi River is complicated and enlivened by the competitions within the Wu/Shu alliance: Zhuge Liang and Zhou Yu are portrayed as such intense rivals that they are bound to each other like a pair of lovers, with Lu Su as the innocent go-between in a triangle relationship that mimics the Wei/Shu/Wu dynamic.⁹² Chapter 46 furnishes a wonderful example. The chapter begins with Lu Su paying a visit to Zhuge Liang: Zhou Yu had ordered Lu Su to go and find out if Zhuge Liang was aware that Cao Cao had wrongly executed his naval commanders due to Zhou Yu's plotting. Zhuge Liang showed Lu Su he knew exactly what was going on, but he

89. *Sanguo zhi*, 54.1263.

90. Luo Guanzhong, *Guanban dazi*, 9.5a, *Mao pi Sanguo*, 350.

91. *Ibid.*, 9.11a, *Mao pi Sanguo*, 353.

92. The intense male bonding is picked up by the modern film *Red Cliff*, albeit with friendly competition but not the real enmity in the novel.

urged Lu Su not to reveal his knowledge to Zhou Yu because “I fear that Gongjin [Zhou Yu’s courtesy name] might be filled with jealousy and try to find another pretext to kill me off.” Lu Su agreed, only to tell Zhou Yu everything. Then, in the middle of the chapter, Lu Su advised Zhou Yu to be skeptical about the Cai brothers’ fake capitulation, but Zhou Yu dismissed him. Lu Su told Zhuge Liang of his concern, and Zhuge Liang explained to him that Zhou Yu was not really taken in but was merely using the Cai brothers. The last part of the chapter relates Huang Gai’s plot to receive a heavy beating from Zhou Yu, which was to be used as a pretext for Huang Gai’s fake capitulation to Cao Cao. The innocent Lu Su was aghast at the beating and complained to Zhuge Liang, who again explained everything to him with a warning: “When you see Gongjin, by no means tell him that I know what is going on; just say that I, too, find him unfair.” This time, Lu Su obeyed Zhuge Liang by lying to Zhou Yu, who chuckled with pleasure how he had finally “duped” (*man*) Zhuge but did not know he was the one being tricked instead. The entire chapter is structured around the circulation, transmission, and suppression of knowledge and information.

Deception, which finds no place in the poetic tradition of Red Cliff, is thus the organizing principle of the eight Red Cliff chapters in the novel. Skillful or clumsy deception is shown to be much more important than military might in winning or losing a war; it is also a prominent motif in late imperial vernacular fiction and drama in general. Yet, in the final analysis, the novelist’s vision of Red Cliff is successful because it embodies the interpenetration of the fictional and the poetic tradition and the perfect coming together of the popular and the high literary imaginations. In Chapter 47, when Kan Ze secretly goes over to Cao Cao’s camp, he disguises himself as a fisherman rowing a little boat across the Yangzi River under a night sky “bright with cold stars.”⁹³ The brave courtier carrying out a dangerous mission underneath the raincoat of the poetic fisherman is a symbolic image that sums up the conflation of the narrative and the lyrical.

In chapter 49, which depicts the night of the fateful battle, the moon “shone forth on the river like ten thousand golden snakes playfully roiling the waves,” but the scene soon turned into “a vast red blazing through

93. Luo Guanzhong, *Guanban dazi*, 9.3b, *Mao pi Sanguo*, 349.

heaven and earth” as the fire raged through Cao Cao’s galleys.⁹⁴ The next chapter, which relates Cao Cao’s escape on the Huarong Trail 華容道 and the aftermath of the fierce river battle, is punctuated with many smaller fires set on land by the Wu and Shu allies, with a distinctly hellish image of Cao Cao fleeing through “the flaming woods” (*huo lin* 火林). The fictional fire is allowed to die out gradually, mimicking the flames of a real fire, as the narrative advances: it ends with a great downpour that soaks the armor of Cao Cao’s remaining troops acting under Cao Cao’s orders to gather kindling (*huozhong* 火種) and make a cooking fire. Finally, there is no more fire, just several columns of smoke rising from the hills.⁹⁵

The quintessential scene in the novel that connects the high literary tradition with the popular, the Jian’an poetry with the Three Kingdoms story cycle, takes place in chapter 48, entitled “Banqueting on the Yangzi River, Cao Cao Composed a Poem; / Locking the Battleships Together, the Northern Army Applied Martial Force” 宴長江曹操賦詩，鎖戰船北軍用武。 The narrative is inspired by Su Shi’s rhapsody, with unmistakable verbal echoes.⁹⁶

That day was the fifteenth of the eleventh month in the winter of the thirteenth year of the Jian’an era. It was a beautiful day, with little wind and no waves in the water. Cao Cao commanded: “Set up wine and music on the great ship. I want to hold a banquet for my generals tonight.” Toward evening, the moon came forth over the mountains to the east, so bright that it was like broad daylight. The Yangzi River was like a stretching bolt of white silk. Cao sat on the great ship with several hundred attendants, who were all dressed in embroidered jackets and brocade robes, carrying lances and clutching halberds. Civil and military officers took their seats in proper order. The colors of the Southern Screen Mountain were like a painting. Cao looked at the territory of Chaisang to the east and the river at Xiakou to the west; he again gazed toward the Fan Hill to the south and

94. Luo Guanzhong, *Guanban dazi*, 9.33b–34a, *Mao pi Sanguo*, 367.

95. *Ibid.*, 9.40a, *Mao pi Sanguo*, 370–71.

96. The first half of the chapter title appears in the earlier print editions as “Cao Mengde Hefted His Spear and Composed a Poem” 曹孟德橫槊賦詩, more explicitly recalling Su Shi’s first Red Cliff rhapsody. See the “Jiajing edition” 嘉靖本 printed in 1522, photo-reprinted in *Xuxiu siku quanshu*, 1790.341.

Black Forest to the north: the scene was vast and spacious, and his heart was filled with delight.⁹⁷

時建安十二年冬十一月十五日，天氣清明，平風靜浪。操令：“置酒設樂於大船之上，吾今夕欲會諸將。”天色向晚，東山月上，皎皎如同白日。長江一帶，如橫素練。操坐大船之上，左右侍御者數百人，皆錦衣繡襖，荷戈執戟。文武眾官，各依次而坐。操見南屏山色如畫，東視柴桑之境，西觀夏口之江，南望樊山，北觀烏林，四顧空闊，心中歡喜。

The formal announcement of the date that begins this passage—with the bright moon rising over the mountains to the east and a tranquil river with no waves—parallels the opening of Su Shi's Red Cliff rhapsody almost exactly. The description of Cao Cao looking around with pleasure at the landscape comes directly from the nostalgic vision of Master Su's companion: "Here facing Xiakou to the west and Wuchang to the east, where the mountains and river wind around each other. . . ." That Cao Cao "poured wine and stood over the river, hefted his spear and composed a poem" 釀酒臨江，橫槊賦詩 is also fully realized in the fictional construction, albeit with a gothic twist.

The storyteller's obsession with the high literary tradition continues to manifest itself in two more connections with the most famous of the Red Cliff poems. As Cao Cao became tipsy toward midnight, he confessed his desire for the legendary Qiao sisters to his generals:

"I have recently constructed a Bronze Bird Terrace by the Zhang River. If I acquire the south, I will take the two Qiao sisters and have them live on the terrace, to entertain me in my old age. With that, my wishes will have all been fulfilled." He ended his speech with a hearty laughter. The Tang poet Du Muzhi wrote a poem: "Broken halberd, sunken in sands: its iron not yet rusted away; / I pick it up and polish it myself, recognizing the former dynasty. / Suppose the east wind had not given the young Master Zhou a chance, / On Bronze Bird Terrace the two Qiao sisters would have been locked away in spring's depths." Just as Cao Cao was laughing in conversation, suddenly he heard a crow crying as it flew south.

“吾今新構銅雀臺於漳水之上，如得江南，當娶二喬，置之臺上，以娛暮年，吾願足矣。”言罷大笑。唐人杜牧之有詩曰：折戟沈沙鐵未消，自

97. For the quotations from this chapter, see Luo Guanzhong, *Guanban dazi*, 15a–17b, *Mao pi Sanguo*, 356–57. Also see Moss Roberts's translation in *Three Kingdoms*, 838–42.

將磨洗認前朝。東風不與周郎便，銅雀春深鎖二喬。曹操正笑談間，
忽聞鴉聲望南飛鳴而去。

Earlier in the novel, in chapter 44, Zhuge Liang had told Zhou Yu that all Cao Cao ever wanted from Wu were the Qiao sisters, and recited Cao Zhi's "*Fu* on Ascending the Terrace" to "prove" it. Into the *fu*, however, he/the narrator slyly inserted a couplet about "two bridges" punning with the two Qiaos.⁹⁸ This was the first time in the novel that Zhuge Liang incited Zhou Yu to a fit of rage. If the reader has any doubt that Zhuge Liang had made it all up, then Cao Cao's own confession here seems to have "proved" Du Mu's poetic vision. Chinese classical vernacular fiction loves to use the saying, "Here is a poem as evidence [of the story]" (*you shi wei zheng* 有詩為證), but in this case, the novelist is in fact inventing a story to realize the poet's imagination.

Cao Cao's "laughing in conversation" is an ironic echo of Su Shi's Red Cliff *ci* lyric, in which it was Zhou Yu who was "laughing in conversation" as "embers flew from mast and prow/and the smoke was sinking away." The ingeniously crafted scene goes on:

Cao asked: "Why do these crows cry at night?" An attendant replied, "When the crows see the bright moonlight, they think it may be dawn breaking, so they fly off from the tree, crying." At that Cao laughed again. Now he was entirely drunk. He took his spear, stood on the boat, poured his wine into the river as an offering. Then he drank three full cups, hefting his spear, and addressed his generals: "With this spear I have defeated the Yellow Turbans, captured Lü Bu, destroyed Yuan Shu, overcome Yuan Shao, and penetrated deep into the northern frontiers, going all the way to Liaodong. With it, I have done whatever I pleased in the entire realm and have not quite failed in realizing the ambitions of a real man. Now, facing this scene, I feel deeply moved. I will compose a song, and I want you all to sing with me." Thereupon he started singing [the "Short Song," omitted here]. After he finished, everyone joined in a chorus, and there was a general merriment.

98. Cao Zhi's *fu* is translated and discussed in chapter 4. After line 10, "I gaze afar at the luxuriance of the many fruit trees" 望眾果之滋榮, the fictional Zhuge Liang adds four lines: "Two terraces were built, one on the left and one on the right, / There is the Jade Dragon, and there is the Golden Phoenix. / We will embrace the two bridges in the southeast, / Enjoying their company day and night" 立雙臺於左右兮, 有玉龍與金鳳, 攬二橋於東南兮, 樂朝夕之與共. Wu was situated in the southeast.

操問曰：“此鴉緣何夜鳴？”左右答曰：“鴉見月明，疑是天曉，故離樹而鳴也。”操又大笑。時操已醉，乃取槊立於船上，以酒奠於江中，滿飲三爵，橫槊謂諸將曰：“我持此槊破黃巾，擒呂布，滅袁術，收袁紹，深入塞北，直抵遼東，縱橫天下，頗不負大丈夫之志也。今對此景，甚有慷慨。吾當作歌，汝等和之。”歌曰……歌罷，眾和之，共皆歡笑。

At this point, however, an official objected that the song was inauspicious. That official was, the narrator informs us, Liu Fu 劉馥, a good, capable minister who had followed Cao Cao for a long time.

Hoisting his spear, Cao asked: “What is inauspicious about it?” Fu replied, “The moon is bright, the stars sparse, / Crows and magpies are flying south. / They circle the tree thrice— / They have no branch to roost on.”⁹⁹ These are inauspicious words.” Cao was enraged. “How dare you ruin my mood!” he cried. With a single thrust of the spear he killed Liu Fu on the spot. Everyone was stunned, and the banquet was over.

當下操橫槊問曰：“吾言有何不吉？”馥曰：“‘月明星稀，烏鵲南飛，逸樹三匝，無枝可依。’此不吉之言。”操大怒曰：“汝安敢敗吾興！”手起一槊，刺死劉馥。眾皆驚駭，遂罷宴。

According to his *Sanguo zhi* biography, Liu Fu was a commendable minister who died in 208.¹⁰⁰ That he was killed by Cao Cao on the eve of the Battle of Red Cliff is entirely fictional. His fortuitous time of death in the year of the historical battle and his acclaimed career, however, make him the perfect prop here, for nothing demonstrates Cao Cao's hypocrisy better than his murder of a worthy man right after he composed a song comparing himself to the talent-loving Duke of Zhou. The public banquet of the Jian'an period that was, as we have seen in chapter 2, a powerful social institution binding the lord and his retainers together and creating a close-knit community is represented in this late imperial novel as a sham, nothing but an occasion for Cao Cao to put on full public display his lascivious and cruel nature. His bald statement of his desire

99. For the last line, all earlier versions read, “On what branch could they roost?” It is a question to be answered in the last stanza of the song that implies the poet-speaker, Cao Cao, offers the true shelter for the birds/ministers. Note that the novel adopts a variant line that is considerably darker in tone by giving a downright negative statement.

100. *Sanguo zhi*, 15.463.

for the Qiao sisters forms a glaring contrast with his senseless slaying of one of his most talented and virtuous officials.

The narrator is making a familiar move in classical Chinese literary tradition, indeed one of the oldest interpretative strategies applied to a poem: the Mao commentary on the *Classic of Poetry* appends a “little preface” offering an account of the putative circumstance of each poem’s composition, and the historical circumstances that occasioned the poem are often considered crucial to correctly understanding the poem. While Su Shi’s rhapsody only vaguely gestures toward linking a specific Cao Cao poem with the specific occasion, the novel makes the connection explicit and pinpoints the exact time and date of the composition of Cao Cao’s arguably most famous poem, the “Short Song.” The poem is enclosed by a full compositional scenario from the imminent battle to the crying crows, as the narrator does not neglect to create an empirical occurrence and to fashion a dialogue between Cao Cao and an attendant to rationalize the lines about the crows crying at midnight—even though birds flying and crying at nighttime is one of the most commonplace tropes in early classical poetry. The narrator also extends the scenario until after the composition of the poem and purports to show us the aftermath: the cold-blooded killing of a “fine guest” (*jiabin*) praised and courted in the poem. By doing so, he exposes the poem as insincere and farcical, and the lesson is that we cannot trust poetry unless we know the “full story” about the historical poet, even if the story is, in this case, entirely made up.

In many ways the narrator is writing in the tradition, from the Southern Song on, of reading Cao Cao’s “Short Song” as revealing the discrepancy between the man and his poetry. Underlying such a reading is the neo-Confucian insistence on an all-encompassing “sincerity” (*cheng* 誠), a comprehensive consistency that does not allow deviation at any time. For instance, the Daoxue master Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) once commented: “One can see the poet from his poems. For instance, someone like Cao Cao would talk about the Duke of Zhou even when he was composing a song about drinking—just from that one can see he was a crook. Someone like Cao Pi would only talk about drinking.”¹⁰¹ Liu Kezhuang makes a similar statement: “Lord Cao’s ‘Short Song’ states

101. Zhu Xi, *Zhuzi yulei*, 140.3324.

at the end, 'The mountain is not satiated with height; / The sea is not satiated with depth. / The Duke of Zhou spat out his food, / All under heaven gave him their hearts.' And yet Kong Rong and Yang Xiu were both executed by him. Where were his height and his depth then? He was Han's prime minister but his contemporaries called him Han's traitor—and yet he compares himself to the Duke of Zhou. How wrong-headed was he!"¹⁰² This is a motif that continues in later critics' comments. Yang Shen 楊慎 (1488–1559) writes admiringly of some stanzas by Cao Cao and then calls him "literature's scoundrel" 文姦, and Xie Zhen 謝榛 (1495–1575) states that "Old Trickster tried to put people on" 老瞞如此欺人 with his couplet on the Duke of Zhou.¹⁰³ Even Wu Qi and Chen Zuoming 陳祚明 (1623–74), two of the most sophisticated Qing commentators on early medieval poetry, cannot help being drawn into the "genuineness/hypocrisy" dialectic in their comments on the poem.¹⁰⁴

From one perspective, the quotation of the poem in the novel performs a service to the fictional characterization of Cao Cao; from another perspective, one may regard the Red Cliff chapters as a long commentary on the "Short Song" that offers its "original story" (*benshi* 本事) and its most authoritative interpretation. The framing of the "Short Song" is, in some ways, symptomatic of the eternal tug-of-war of narrative and poetry: narrative wants to subsume poetry by enclosing it with a compositional scenario and tying it down to history, to individual historical authors and their stories; and yet, poems—or at least some poems—always manage to get away from its clutches and stay tantalizingly free, henceforth attracting more attempts to place them and pin them down.

Cao Cao's banquet on the Yangzi River marks a climax in the Red Cliff episodes in the *Romance*, with the well-known ancient saying looming large in the background: "When joy is at its utmost, sadness follows" (*leji shengbi* 樂極生悲). Liu Fu's death becomes a foreshadowing event for the deaths of Cao Cao's 830,000 troops, out of which only twenty-seven riders were allowed to survive. In chapter 50, after Cao Cao finally escaped to safety, the Mao Zonggang edition adds a detail: "Cao Ren set

102. *Houcun shihua* 後村詩話, in *Song shihua quanbian*, 8.8354.

103. See Yang Shen, *Sheng'an shihua* 升庵詩話 3, in *Ming shihua quanbian*, 3.2581; Xie Zhen, , *Siming shihua* 四溟詩話 1, in *Ming shihua quanbian*, 3.3133.

104. Wu Qi, *Liuchao Xuan shi*, 101; Chen Zuoming, *Caishu tang gushi xuan*, 128.

up wine to bring Cao Cao some consolation, and all his councilors were present."¹⁰⁵ The banquet is a deliberate echo of the earlier river banquet, the last touch of irony to complete the epic canvass. With it, we come full circle to the Jian'an poetry, with Cao Cao's "Short Song"—the quintessential banquet poem—as the centerpiece. It is needless to say by this point how much had changed in between.

The Mao Zonggang commentarial edition of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* embodies a much more sophisticated representation of the popular literature than many of the earlier versions of the *Three Kingdoms* story cycle such as *Sanguo zhi pinghua*, and in it, one sees the merging of the poetic and narrative traditions. Ever since its appearance, this edition has asserted predominance in the market and continues to be the favorite *Three Kingdoms* narrative among Chinese readers. Perhaps one of the reasons for that is its skillful manipulating, framing, and reinterpreting of the poetic canon. It is most likely not a coincidence that there was a revival of interest in Cao Cao's poetry, and an increasingly positive evaluation of his poetry, from the sixteenth century on. Whereas the attention to Cao Cao may well have been part of the general interest in early medieval poetry after the mid-Ming, it was probably also fed by the construction of the fascinating figure of Cao Cao in popular culture, which in turn absorbs influences from contemporary literary trends. There is, after all, no such clear-cut division between the elite and popular traditions; what we have is the complex dynamics of interactions and interpenetrations.

The Reel Red Cliff

One of the latest reincarnations of the Battle of Red Cliff is the movie *Red Cliff* directed by John Woo. It was released in two parts, totaling 288 minutes, in China and much of Asia from 2008 to 2009; outside of Asia,

105. Luo Guanzhong, *Guanban dazi*, 9.44a, *Mao pi Sanguo*, 373. This sentence is absent in the 1522 edition, which merely states in its place: "[Cao Cao and his councilors] sat till midnight" 坐至半夜.

a cut-down single version in 148 minutes was released in 2009.¹⁰⁶ The film has been largely successful in terms of box office sales as well as critical reception in and out of Asia.

A period film speaks two languages: cinematic language—the filmic system of signification through which a story is told, and historical language—the events and characters from history of which the audiences possess knowledge to different extents. John Woo negotiates skillfully between the two, which converge beautifully in the film’s opening credits. First he uses the familiar “iconography of mist” shared by European and American medieval films to evoke the distance of time we must travel to get back to the past; moving through the mist-enshrouded landscape we come to see a close-up of the two characters Chibi 赤壁 (*Red Cliff*) self-referentially inscribed on a reddish-colored cliff, reminiscent of the inscription at the real (?) site of the battle at Puqi (in modern Hubei); then we are taken to penetrate the cliff-face, moving with accelerated speed, mimicking a further journeying back into history (“time travel” in Chinese is literally *chuanyue* 穿越); finally, a sword looms in the mist, a rusty, eroded sword, and as the credits appear on the screen, the sword is gradually de-encrusted, exactly as if it were being polished by the poet’s hand in Du Mu’s quatrain, until it becomes a shiny, sharp blade again. For any viewer who knows European and American medieval films, *Excalibur*—both the legendary sword in the Arthurian romance and the 1981 movie bearing the name—is writ all over the images of the sword and the mist; and yet, the de-encrustation of the weapon is completely Chinese, calling up Du Mu’s iconic poem. *Red Cliff* thus opens with a set of time-honored visual shorthands that simultaneously appeal to diverse audiences.

Although the movie does not entirely live up to its great opening, *Red Cliff* nevertheless makes its mark for the new perspectives it brings to the Three Kingdoms imaginary. Perhaps for the first time in the history of the Three Kingdom story cycle, it gives visibility to a common soldier, a completely fictitious character named Sun Shucai 孫叔財, nicknamed Pit (“Fantong” 飯桶, literally “rice bucket”). A Wei foot soldier promoted to the position of a minor officer for his soccer skills, he forms

106. A full 288-minute version, referred to as the “International Version,” was released on DVD and Blue-ray in the United States and Canada in 2010. My analysis is based on this version.

an unexpected friendship with Sun Shangxiang 孫尚香, Sun Quan's younger sister cross-dressed as a man to infiltrate the Wei army camp.¹⁰⁷ Admittedly, he is largely a stereotype of the idealized "common folk" in the Chinese elite's vision: simple and kind-hearted, he has no ambition, and all he ever wants is for the war to be done so that he can go home to be a peasant again; nevertheless, he is given a name, a personality, and a dignifying death scene on the battleground. The individuality and dignity accorded to a common soldier represent a modern value and a point of view on the Red Cliff that is never explored in premodern writings, which primarily focus on the leaders and heroes of the battle.

The film also gives prominent roles to women: Sun Shangxiang and the younger Qiao are both major characters granted a significant amount of screen time; they are portrayed as brave and smart, even though one is a tomboy skilled in martial arts while the other is ultra-feminine and, in an outlandish plot twist, acts as a *femme fatale* who distracts Cao Cao with her seductive charms. The screenplay writer for the popular 2010 mainland China TV series *Three Kingdoms* mentioned in an interview the need to add female characters to the TV drama under the pressure of the producer and director, who in turn were under pressure to accommodate viewers' preferences and tastes.¹⁰⁸ Yet, in representing Red Cliff, the different approaches of the movie and TV drama producers toward female characters could not be greater. In the TV drama, both the younger Qiao and Sun Quan's sister vanish suddenly. In just as outlandish a plot twist as in the film, the younger Qiao saves Zhuge Liang, Zhou Yu's arch-rival, after the Battle of Red Cliff; Zhou Yu is so infuriated that he sends her away in a towering rage, and she leaves his camp abruptly and in disgrace. She does not even make an appearance in the lengthy scenes of Zhou Yu's sickness, death, and funeral, thus fulfilling a male fantasy about disposing of the inconvenient meddling wife, who, in the emotional drama of intense love/hate between Zhou Yu and Zhuge Liang, becomes the

107. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Sun Quan did have a younger sister whom he married off to Liu Bei, and she was said to be a fierce and tough young lady. But her story in the film is, needless to say, entirely fictitious. More will be said about this character in the epilogue of this book.

108. See Zhu Sujin 朱蘇進, "Wo yao rang Sanguo zhifan yemao," an interview by Wang Xiaofeng in *Sanlian shenghuo zhoukan*. June 2, 2008, <http://www.lifeweek.com.cn/2008/0602/21534.shtml>.

unwanted and bothersome third party. As for Sun Quan's sister known as "Xiaomei" 小妹, it is significant that she does not have a personal name in this TV series (Xiaomei means "little sister"); and although she has been established as an individual character for whom the audience cares, she is never granted the dignity of a death scene; instead, her premature demise—ostensibly out of depression after she leaves Liu Bei and returns to Wu—is briefly related by her brother.

Apart from the new viewpoints of class and gender, for a Chinese audience the most noticeable thing about the movie *Red Cliff* is its southern perspective. The late imperial novel's emphasis on Shu and Zhuge Liang is shifted to a Wu outlook in the film. Zhou Yu portrayed by the mega-star Tony Leung is unquestionably the leading man in every sense of the word, and this, as we have seen, had not quite been the case since the ninth or tenth century. Cao Cao is still the villain, and his vision of unifying China—a vision that is, for instance, considered adequate to redeem a notorious tyrant in the 2002 mainland Chinese film *Hero*—is likewise derided as being doomed to failure.¹⁰⁹ Since the focal point has been shifted from Zhuge Liang and the Shu-Han dynasty to Zhou Yu and Wu, the real issue of the film is no longer the ruling house's political legitimacy or Han vs. Cao Wei but empire vs. regionalism. For a viewer who is sensitive to the mainland Chinese government's tireless promotion of Chinese unification and a nationalistic agenda and to the Hong Kong identity of the director John Woo, this becomes a sly commentary on a localist perspective as opposed to the grand discourse of the empire.

The different visual treatment of a crucial moment of the Battle of Red Cliff—Cao Cao's intonation of his "Short Song" at a night banquet on the river—offers one of the best illustrations of the film and the TV drama's different ideological focus. Cao Cao in the TV series is a wonderfully complex and nuanced character, clearly admired for his powerful and charismatic personality, ambition, and vision. The intonation of the poem appears in Episode 41.¹¹⁰ It is prefaced, as in the novel, with Cao

109. *Hero* (2002), a period drama directed by the famous director Zhang Yimou, is about the swordsman Jing Ke's 荆軻 failed assassination attempt on the life of the King of Qin, later the First Emperor of Qin, who destroyed all six feudal states and unified China. Jing Ke's failure is given a new interpretation in the movie: he chooses not to kill the king because he wants a unified empire.

110. It can be viewed at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cPokRPW1mBI&feature=player_detailpage#t=120s.

Cao's soliloquy that enumerates his past achievements ("defeating the Yellow Turbans" and so forth) and ends with the statement, "With a life spent like this, what else do I seek!" 此生如此, 夫復何求。 Throughout the soliloquy, the camera alternates between the point of view shot that shows, across Cao Cao's shoulders, the seated officials on the two sides in his eyes and the shot, gradually moving closer and closer to his face, of the full frontal view of Cao Cao as he is speaking. Interestingly, he delivers his entire speech with his eyes shut, refusing to look at his officials and the viewers, absorbed in his internal world. The juxtaposition of the POV shot and the "shot reverse shot" forcefully brings the audience into Cao Cao's subjective world and creates empathy for him. Then, as if waking to the slow drum beat and the sound of a horn blowing, he opens his eyes, gets up from his seat, walks toward his soldiers, and finally, holding up his cup as if toasting the entire army, begins intoning the poem.

After the first line, "The wine before me as I sing," the camera shifts back to the position of his seat at the table, so that with the second line, "How long can human life last?" we see, as his advisors and generals do, the back of Cao Cao, a large, impenetrable figure clothed in a crimson-colored robe; and the dishes laid out on his table appear in the foreground, just like the food offerings to the ancestral spirit—or a god. Thus, this POV shot, with the camera's position in the empty seat behind the food table, not only gives us Cao Cao's officials' point of view, but also that of Cao Cao himself in the form of his spirit tablet, with the poetic line resounding in the background as a paean to his immortal fame after a brief human life. The food left untouched on the table also evokes the Duke of Zhou, who stops eating to greet his guests.¹¹¹

After the first two stanzas, we hear a wordless chorus rising in the background as if the soldiers had all joined in; the camera follows Cao Cao closely as he walks forward and continues chanting the poem, with lines of burning torches and fully armored warriors on his two sides, gradually picking up the pace and tempo. The stanza beginning with "How bright is the moon" is introduced to a long shot of the camp, hinting at the largeness and inclusiveness of the poet's "worries." With the famous penultimate "crows" stanza, Cao Cao is shown again in full frontal view as he gradually walks into close range of the camera, looming larger and

111. I thank Stephen Owen for this point.

larger, until he occupies the central position of the frame. With the last stanza, we are given a view of Cao Cao standing still in this central position, filmed from a low angle so that we have to look up to him while he in turn is looking into the distance, an imposing visionary figure, idealized by the lovingly lingering camera. When he intones the concluding line, "All under heaven gave him their hearts," the actor gives a long pause after saying *tianxia* ("all under heaven"), and then, instead of ending with a vocal crescendo, noticeably lowers his voice and utters the last two words, *guixin* ("gave him their hearts"), in a reflective, almost tender, tone, completing the portrayal of a charismatic ruler.

The treatment of Cao Cao's iconic poem seems to deliberately form a sharp contrast with its representation in John Woo's film, which places the banquet in the grim context of death. When Cao Cao's navy was struck by plague, he ordered that the corpses of the dead soldiers be shipped off across the river to the allies' camp to be used as biological weapons against his enemy. Zhuge Liang stipulated that the bodies must be burned to avoid the spread of the plague; pyres were subsequently erected, and a proper funeral rite was carried out with the Wu and Shu commanders and generals, as well as the younger Qiao, all present. Giving proper burial to the dead, especially the war dead, has always been a measure of the righteousness and benevolence of a ruler in the Chinese tradition, and here Cao Cao's total lack of humanity, as demonstrated by the demeaning way in which he wanted to dispose of his soldiers' bodies, becomes an ironic frame for his poem that begins by lamenting the brevity of human life.

The opening line of the poem, "The wine before me as I sing," is intoned, without giving the audience a glimpse of Cao Cao's face, against a shot of the burning funerary pyres.¹¹² Then, with the second line we see only Cao Cao's back, just as this line is done in the TV drama, but visually nothing could be more different: here Cao Cao is clothed in a black robe, with a vast space and a large red carpet spread in front of him, and with his people situated far away from him, so that his figure seems rather lonely and small. The words, "How long can human life last?" are incongruously juxtaposed with the laughing faces of his generals and

112. Instead of using the movie's English subtitles, I follow the English translation adopted in this book for this poem. It should be noted, however, that the English subtitles are substantially different, and the politics of translation is quite interesting to observe.

female attendants, showing a complete absence of sympathy for the truth contained in the poetic line, for the dead soldiers, and for the somber reality of the war. The point of view shot in the TV drama that allows the audience to get close to Cao's inner world is used, with the voicing of the line "The feeling is strong in me," on Zhou Yu, who stands there gazing at the blazing funerary pyres, and the remaining lines of this stanza are intoned against close-up shots of the faces of the Wu and Shu commanders—solemn, indignant, or grieved.

In the same way, the camera cuts back and forth between the two camps: whereas the Cao Wei camp is marked by festive merriment, callous and cruel in the context, the allies' camp honors and commemorates the enemy's dead with dignifying mourning and respect. Cao Cao's poem is ingeniously made to serve a double purpose: it underlines Cao Cao's cruelty and hypocrisy, but the words reverberate as unusually powerful and moving when superimposed over the images of the somber faces of the Wu and Shu allies, and of the corpses on the burning pyres, which foreshadow the blazes that would engulf Cao Cao's fleet. Thus, in a strange twist, Cao Cao's celebratory song is turned, in the Chinese audience's foreknowledge of the battle, into an elegy delivered by an unsuspecting Cao Cao.

The film has interestingly omitted one stanza from the poem that begins, "Crossing paths, traversing lanes / You have gone out of your way to call on me." The second line of the penultimate stanza, "crows and magpies are flying south," is intoned with a shot of Cao Cao walking rapidly toward the camera, but since it is a wide shot, Cao Cao's figure is small and blurry, the fluttering of his black robe making him look like a crow. Next the camera cuts to a fleeting close-up shot of Cao Cao moving from right to left, then left to right, of the screen. It is, however, not a full frontal view: his face is in fact a little out of the frame, and his eyes look downward to the right corner of the frame—the overall impression, as he intones the line "They circle the tree thrice," is one of instability and shiftiness, so that the image of restless birds again seems to depict him.¹¹³ This offers a sharp contrast with the close-up shot of Cao Cao in the TV drama whose body occupies the center of the frame, as still and stable

113. The movie subtitles for the two lines read: "Flying with no rest, / Where shall they nest?" The image of the tree is gone.

as the tree on which the birds are to roost, and whose eyes steadily gaze straight ahead.

The first two lines of the final stanza—"The mountain is not satiated with height; / The sea is not satiated with depth"—are each intoned with a close-up shot of Cao Cao's and Zhou Yu's faces, establishing the two of them as the two protagonists of the movie, one good and one bad, arch-enemies contending and mirroring each other. Cao Cao squints his eyes and glances sideways to the right, with a darkish background behind him; Zhou Yu with a resolute, serious expression looks up to the left, his face lit up by a leaping flame right in front of him: the two shots work just like the two parallel lines in the couplet, their visual language as clear-cut as night and day. With "the Duke of Zhou spat out his food," Cao Cao dramatically whirls around to face the camera, his black robe again fluttering like a crow; then he intones the first half of the last line, *tianxia*, and violently dashes his wine-cup on the ground. This is followed by a long pause just like in the TV drama, with the camera cutting back to the burning pyres and then to Zhou Yu's face; then Cao Cao intones the second half of the line, *guixin*, this time with a close-up shot that finally gives us a full frontal view of Cao Cao, though only for a brief moment. Almost immediately afterwards, the camera cuts to the wildly cheering crowd of Cao Cao's generals, their faces distorted in a drunken ecstasy.¹¹⁴ The rapid movement of the camera strikingly stands out against the TV drama's representation of the scene, in which Cao Cao remains as still as a large monument, projecting an aura of solemnness and reliability.

The portrayal of Cao Cao serves to advance the ideological agenda driving the cinematic production: whereas the TV drama admires an ambitious hero who wants to unite a divided empire at any cost, the film promotes anti-war sentiments and respect for individual human life and exemplifies a strong sense of regional identity and pride, a refusal to be coopted into the vision of an empire. To achieve its purpose, however, the film must find a way to deal with Cao Cao's poem, whose intonation has become an iconic moment in the Three Kingdoms imaginary and the legend of Red Cliff. As in the premodern novel, it creates a compositional scenario for the poem that manages to cast it in a negative light, but there

114. Again one may observe that the subtitles of the last two lines read: "Sages rush when guests call, / So at their feet, the empire does fall!"

is something about the words of the poem that exceeds its context. The words are, simply put, stirring; they have a life of their own that refuses to be coopted into the narrative vision. To tame it, the film places the poem in a context of plague, death, and funeral to show the poet's heartlessness, hypocrisy, and greed for personal glory; but the camera is compelled to cut back to the mournful, the humane, and the heroic whenever impassioned lines from the poem are being articulated, and one stanza has to be completely edited out. In a way, the filmic Cao Cao who is unable to control or even comprehend the strangely moving power of the words he utters becomes an allegory of any director, novelist, or commentator who tries to find a place for the poem and pin it down in history. Before the Battle of Red Cliff, there is a battle between narrative and poetry, and poetry wins.

Conclusion

This book opened with a chapter on plague, death, and the nostalgic construction of the Jian'an era as the Age of Poetry. Fortuitously, this chapter, the last of this book, ends with poetry and plague. Cao Cao's navy did suffer from a plague in the winter months of 208,¹¹⁵ and later on, in a letter he wrote to Sun Quan, Cao Cao gives his own reconstruction of what happened at Red Cliff:

During the campaign at Red Cliff, there happened to be a plague, and we had to burn our ships and withdraw our army on our own, and *that* has led Zhou Yu to this undeserved fame of his.

赤壁之役，值有疾病，孤燒船自退，橫使周瑜虛獲此名。¹¹⁶

Two centuries later, Pei Songzhi tried to offer a level-headed analysis of the situation:

115. *Sanguo zhi*, 1.31.

116. *Ibid.*, 54.1264. Cited in Pei Songzhi's commentary.

As for [Cao Cao's] defeat at Red Cliff, it was the hand of Fate. In point of fact, it was because first of all the prevalence of a great plague had caused the army to lose its edge; and then, a warm wind blowing from the south fanned the flames of the fire. Heaven truly had done it to him; how could it have anything to do with human efforts?

至於赤壁之敗，蓋有運數，實由疾疫大興，以損凌厲之鋒，凱風自南，用成焚如之勢，天實為之，豈人事哉？¹¹⁷

Nevertheless, Cao Cao's version of the event, like most accounts given by the vanquished, carries little weight, and "human efforts" make much better stories and movies.

It is common to hear movie-goers, even sophisticated critics, comment on a historical film's fidelity or infidelity to history and regard its "truthfulness" as a criterion of judgment of its value or success. But examining the artifice in the different cinematic representations of Red Cliff, as I did in the last section of this chapter, enables us to see the fallacy of seeking a transparent authenticity in historical films. If by their very nature as an art form all historical films are, as Pierre Sorlin reminds us, fictional,¹¹⁸ then so are all poetic representations of history and, indeed, all historical representations of history, in terms of their belatedness, their manipulation of source materials, and their shifting points of view. These representations are historical only insofar as they are productions of their own historical circumstances and the individual circumstances of their producers. In exploring how Red Cliff became a fixture on the cultural and literary map of China and the changing ways in which it has been envisioned (*yaoxiang*), I have attempted to outline the trajectory of some of the underlying historical changes in this chapter.

Perhaps because of the existence of the fourteenth-century *Sanguozhi yanyi*, the earlier work *Sanguo zhi*, closer in time to the events of the Three Kingdoms and sanctioned as official dynastic history, is often privileged as "real history" and is regarded as the yardstick to measure the authenticity of all subsequent representations of the Three Kingdoms, even though Pei Songzhi's commentary alone, whose cited sources and viewpoints often conflict with one another, ought to disabuse us of any

117. *Ibid.*, 10.330.

118. Sorlin, *The Film in History*, 21.

notion that *Sanguo zhi* should be trusted more than other official histories or historical romances. Now, however, with the existence of cinematic representations of the Three Kingdoms, even *Sanguozhi yanyi*, a premodern historical novel, somehow acquires the aura of "historical truth." Like the *ci* lyric on boating in snow at Red Cliff, we are displaced further and further from the past, which remains ever out of reach. We can only get to know the past in remnants, like the speaker in Du Mu's Red Cliff quatrain does; and even when we hold an authentic physical object in our hands, tangible as it is, we recognize that it, too, needs a human voice to give it an identity and a story, to articulate what it is, and from whence and where it came.

EPILOGUE

The Return of the Repressed

The Three Kingdoms imaginary has continued throughout Chinese history with ever-changing manifestations. Apart from adaptations of the story cycle in visual media, a noteworthy modern chapter of the ongoing saga is the development of Three Kingdom video games. The two games designed by the Japanese company KOEI, the strategic game *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (*Sangokushi* 三國志) and the action game *Dynasty Warriors* (*Sangokumusō* 三國無雙), enjoyed great popularity in East Asia and beyond, leading to many installments of the series and inspiring numerous spin-offs. They not only created a new Three Kingdoms fandom but also spread the knowledge of Three Kingdoms to North America when they were released there in 1988 and 1997, respectively. The video games allow Three Kingdoms fans to reenact historical events through gaming while also introducing the period and its huge cast of historical characters to new fans. *Dynasty Warriors* in particular exploits the potential of female characters in the Three Kingdoms: it makes the most of an otherwise largely macho world by turning the female characters into powerful players with strength, skill, and cunning. The way in which women become foregrounded in the world of the Three Kingdoms, first as characters and then as authors, is the most remarkable new element of the Three Kingdoms imaginary in modern times.

Historically, elite women played a large role in politics during this period, certainly much larger than has been represented in later historiographical or literary works. As mentioned in chapter 2, an edict issued by Cao Pi in 222 forbidding his officials to report business to Empress Dowager Bian clearly shows her strong political influence.¹ Cao Pi's second

1. Chapter 2, note 150. Cao Pi once dreamed of trying to scrub off the patterning on a coin; the more he scrubbed it, the brighter and clearer the patterning became. He

wife, Empress Guo 郭, is said to be “shrewd and canny,” and played a role in securing Cao Pi the place of heir.² Sun Quan’s mother, Lady Wu 吳, (d. 202) was actively involved in state affairs, especially when Sun Quan first succeeded to his elder brother as a very young man.³ Sun Quan’s eldest daughter Luban 魯班, better known as Princess Quan 全公主 since she was married to a Quan Cong 全琮, was a central figure, and a colorful one, in the dangerous court politics both in Sun Quan’s later years and after his death.⁴ Sun Quan’s younger sister, who was married to Liu Bei, was another formidable woman of the Sun family. According to the historian, she was “smart, tough, and fierce, and had the manners of her elder brothers [Sun Ce and Sun Quan]. She had over a hundred maid-servants wearing swords attending on her. Every time the Former Ruler [i.e., Liu Bei] entered the inner quarters, he always felt a chill in his heart” 妹才捷剛猛，有諸兄之風，侍婢百餘人皆親執刀侍立，先主每入，衷心常凜凜。⁵ A mention of Lady Sun in a contemporary source characterizes her as “proud and unruly” (*jiaohao* 驕豪), in command of a large retinue of officers and soldiers when she resided in Jingzhou as Liu Bei’s wife.⁶

There is, however, little detailed portrayal of these strong-willed women in historiography.⁷ Their influence in political and social life is often revealed indirectly. If anything, a historian might think that he

asked the diviner Zhou Xuan 周宣 (d. ca. 239) for an interpretation, and Zhou replied: “This is about Your Majesty’s family affairs. Though Your Majesty wants to do something, the Empress Dowager will not listen” 此自陛下家事，雖欲爾而太后不聽。 *Sanguo zhi*, 29.810–11. The anecdote shows that all was not well between mother and son.

2. *Sanguo zhi*, 5.164.

3. *Ibid.*, 50.1196.

4. *Ibid.*, 50.1198. Princess Quan was instrumental in Sun Quan’s decision to depose the crown prince Sun He 孫和 (224–53) and to establish his youngest son, Sun Liang 孫亮 (243–60), as heir. *Ibid.*, 48.1151; 59.1369. She had an affair with the powerful minister Sun Jun 孫峻 (219–56) during Sun Liang’s brief rule, and was actively involved in Sun Liang’s botched plot against Sun Shen 孫綝, which resulted in Sun Liang’s deposition and her exile in 258. *Ibid.*, 64.1444–49.

5. *Ibid.*, 37.960.

6. “The Unofficial Biography of Zhao Yun” 趙雲別傳, cited in Pei Songzhi’s commentary. *Ibid.*, 36.948.

7. For a discussion and translation of the biographies of the empresses and consorts from the period in *Sanguo zhi*, along with Pei Songzhi’s commentary that complicates their images in the dynastic history, see Cutter and Crowell, *Empresses and Consorts*.

was doing these “proud and unruly” women a good turn, and certainly serving the interest of the dynasty he worked for, by representing them in the “best light possible”—in other words, as modest and self-deprecating ladies subservient to their husbands and sons. Women are likewise marginalized in literary representations of the period. In *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, there is hardly any well-developed female character, and she is usually subjected to heavy gender stereotyping, serving as a foil or a medium to male characters in the novel. The screenplay writer of the popular 2010 mainland China TV series *Three Kingdoms* even remarked that there were only “two and a half women” altogether in the novel, with the “half woman” referring to Sun Quan’s mother, whose age and seniority trump her gender.⁸ The “two women” are Lady Sun and Diaochan 貂蟬. The latter is a fictional character based on a passing mention in *Records of the Three Kingdoms* of a maid in Dong Zhuo’s household who had an affair with the general Lü Bu.⁹ Both women are involved in the so-called “beauty strategy” (*meiren ji* 美人計), used as pawns for men’s political purposes.¹⁰ As Hu Ying points out, “Their beauty is the bait of the novel; but as any bait, they have no consequence of their own. They are therefore sacrificed at any moment once the narrative and moral fish is caught.”¹¹

Compared with her characterization in historiography, Lady Sun’s image in the novel is considerably softened. Instead of being a constant threat to her husband, she is portrayed as a loyal spouse helping him out against the interests of her natal family. A symbolic scene is the wedding night in chapter 55. Liu Bei, seeing the many weapons in the bridal chamber and maids wearing swords, feels nervous; Lady Sun subsequently orders the removal of the weapons and dismisses the maids with a chuckle: “A man who’s spent half his life on the battleground is afraid

8. Zhu Sujin, “Wo yao rang Sanguo zhifan yemao.” Interview by Wang Xiaofeng in *Sanlian shenghuo zhouban*, <http://www.lifeweek.com.cn/2008/0602/21534.shtml>. The writer himself did little to rectify the situation, arguing that he could not afford to push the limits of the audience’s tolerance too much, even though he was certainly not timorous in testing the boundaries in other aspects of the hit show.

9. “Bu had an affair with Zhuo’s maid” 布與卓侍婢私通. *Sanguo zhi*, 7.219.

10. Diaochan is presented to both Lü Bu and his adoptive father Dong Zhuo in a plot to create conflict between the two powerful men in chapter 8 of the novel.

11. Hu Ying, “Angling with Beauty,” 112.

of these?" The disarmament is both literal and metaphorical. The two subsequently consummate their marriage "in mutual bliss."

A somewhat different image of Lady Sun appears in an anonymous Yuan *zaju* 雜劇 play known as *A Duel of Wits across the River* (*Gejiang douzhi* 隔江鬥智), preserved in late Ming drama anthologies.¹² In a *zaju* play, all arias are assigned to a single actor, either the leading male (*zhengmo* 正末) or the leading female (*zhengdan* 正旦). Although there are a large number of extant Three Kingdoms plays from the late imperial period, *A Duel of Wits* is "one of the rare Three Kingdoms plays in which the arias are assigned to a female lead," in this case to Lady Sun.¹³ This unconventional choice, perhaps initially motivated by the presence of a leading actress in the opera troupe, means that the audience has an opportunity to see the events from the point of view of Lady Sun herself. More than just an observer and a commentator, she also takes on an active role in the events unfolding around her.¹⁴ If Lady Sun in the novel is constantly manipulated by Sun Quan, Zhou Yu, and Zhuge Liang, then the Lady Sun of the play, whose name is given as Sun An 孫安, is much more autonomous. Certainly, she is still the woman caught between Zhuge Liang and Zhou Yu in a "duel of wits" across the Yangzi River, and she still has to obey Sun Quan to marry Liu Bei; nevertheless, she *chooses* not to assassinate Liu Bei as she has been instructed to do, and

12. This play's full title is *A Duel of Wits across the River between Two Army Counselors* 兩軍師隔江鬥智. It is preserved in Zang Maoxun's 臧茂循 (1550–1620) prestigious *Anthology of Yuan Plays* 元曲選, printed in the early seventeenth century, and in Meng Chengshun's 孟稱舜 (fl. 1600–1655) *A Collection of Libations to the River* 酌江集 in his *Joined Anthology of Famous Plays Past and Present* 古今名劇合選, printed in 1633. The base edition used here is Zang Maoxun, *Yuan qu xuan jiaozhu*, vol. 4 (i), 3269–324. For a full English translation of the play, see appendix C. For a general survey of Three Kingdoms *zaju* plays, see the introduction to Idema and West, *Battles, Betrayals, and Brotherhood*.

13. Idema and West, *Battles, Betrayals, and Brotherhood*, xx.

14. Lady Sun's proactive personality differentiates her from the character of Lady Gan 甘 in the play *Guan Yunchang Travels Alone a Thousand Li* 關雲長千里獨行, who as Liu Bei's wife is being rescued and escorted by Guan Yu 關羽 (d. 220), Liu Bei's sworn brother, on a long journey to find Liu Bei. In the play, Lady Gan mainly plays the role of bearing witness to Guan Yu's upright character and there is very little else she can "do." For a translation of this play, see Ross, *Kuan Yü in Drama*. The plot of *A Duel of Wits* bears resemblance to the story about Lady Sun and Liu Bei in *Sanguo zhi pinghua*; however, the *Pinghua* material is so crude that it is difficult to outline the characterization of Lady Sun or even to make sense of the narrative at times.

although Zhuge Liang in the play has predicted every move Zhou Yu makes, this “plan B” of having Lady Sun act as the assassin is decidedly a blind spot for Zhuge, a hole in his all-knowing, all-encompassing plan. Sun An turns out to be a wild card, so to speak, the workings of whose mind are revealed to the audience but not to the characters in the play, thus endowing the familiar story with an element of suspense.

In the play, Lady Sun is the only character, besides the matchmaker Lu Su, to cross the Yangzi River more than once. The freedom to go on a journey and traverse boundaries is symbolic. At the beginning of the play, when we first see her, she is a proper young lady sequestered in her boudoir, reading regulations on female conduct, engaged in “women’s work” like embroidery, and composing poems. Yet, an intriguing dialogue between her and her maid reveals that she has been inexplicably losing weight lately. This is an unmistakable sign of awakened, but suppressed, sexual desire in late imperial drama, more evocative of a delicate Miss Du in *The Peony Pavilion* than the sword-loving Lady Sun in historiography.¹⁵ This soon changes. In act 2, she leaves home for the first time, to get married to Liu Bei in Jingzhou. On the way there, she observes a vista from her boat that is different from anything observed from her boudoir:

So vast and gloomy are the waves,
it is hard to distinguish between sky and earth,
and the road ahead is locked in fog, lost in mist.

蕩洪波不分一個天地，
望前程尚隔著霧鎖煙迷。

Likewise, her future is also unclear and she does not know what awaits her. Then she sees Jingzhou, and her reaction is akin to a heroine in Jane Austen’s novel setting eyes on a fine estate of an eligible bachelor:

15. Tang Xianzu’s 湯顯祖 (1550–1616) *Peony Pavilion* 牡丹亭 was perhaps the most popular play of the late Ming. Du Liniang, an upper-class young lady with newly awakened sexual desire, dreams of making love to a handsome young scholar in the spring garden and subsequently dies of longing. Buried in the garden, she is later revived and marries her dream lover.

What a mighty fine city! [*Sings*]:

Look! Mulberries and hemp are densely planted,
bathing in sunlight;

Wheat and millet stretch toward the horizon, touching the sky.

是好一座城池也呵!(唱):

你看那桑麻映日稠, 禾黍接天齊。

To the remark by the Wu general escorting her, "It is because the land is vast and the people are wealthy in Jingzhou that my lord cannot let go of it," she replies in an aria:

Now I have set foot on Jingzhou myself,

And seen it with my own eyes.

Look at how great is the land,

And how prosperous are its people—

truly it is a splendid city, as if embroidered in brocade,

whoever is its lord and governor is surely a lucky man.

這荊州我親身、親身可便到這裡,

你看那地方寬, 民富實,

端的是錦繡城池, 無福的難存濟。

Ironically, just like the men in this play, she too covets Jingzhou now. From this point on, her future becomes clearer and clearer to her. After she meets Liu Bei and his men, she closely examines them one by one: first Zhuge Liang, then the generals, and finally Liu Bei himself. "All my life I never stepped outside my boudoir," she sings, "I feel too embarrassed to take a good look at any man." But now Jingzhou, and the men in Jingzhou, become the objects of *her* gaze and *her* desire. Her interaction with Zhuge Liang is particularly flirtatious, and Liu Bei's discomfort is just barely beneath the surface. Thus the water journey, suspended between two places and between two prescribed roles (daughter and wife), offers her an opportunity for transition and transformation. From a stereotypical "maiden with spring longing," she turns into a young woman of insight who can make a decision for herself, a decision beyond Zhuge Liang's oppressive manipulation or Sun Quan's rigid control. "You see," she declares, "a girl has to take care of herself."

The play is also notable in that three out of four acts contain a banquet scene. Act 2 features the wedding banquet: Sun An's crossing the river and entering the city have a symbolic significance as a rite of passage that initiates her into a new stage of life, and that indicates a new stage in the relationship of the Sun and Liu forces. In act 3, a banquet is hosted by Sun Quan to entertain Liu Bei and Sun An, the newlyweds visiting Sun An's natal family as part of the "homecoming" customs, with a great deal of hostility and intrigue concealed under the glossy surface of the merry feasting. A banquet is held in act 4 to celebrate Sun An and Liu Bei's safe return to Jingzhou and the victory over Zhou Yu, with tension and conflict finding release and resolution in the feast setting. At this banquet Sun An interacts with Zhuge Liang and the generals, gracefully acknowledging their gratitude. After she passes through trials and tests, this is the ritual ceremony affirming her true integration into a new family and her completion of transformation from a maiden into a woman. Seen from this perspective, the play is less about the "duel" of Zhou Yu and Zhuge Liang than about a girl's coming of age. The performance of the ritual on stage within the play is reinforced by the theatrical performance of the play itself.

At the turn of the twenty-first century, a new chapter in the Three Kingdoms tradition has been opened by a body of works, including, among other forms, fan fiction (fanfic) and fan music videos (MVs), produced by young female Chinese fans in cyberspace. Fan MVs are song videos edited together by fans from footage from film or television shows and set to pop songs. Fanfiction, broadly defined, is fiction based on established characters, plots, and settings in existing works known as "canon" (fan slang for source material), including books, films, or television. In Western fan fiction studies, the origin of narrowly defined fan fiction is placed in the late 1960s and early 1970s with the rise of the *Star Trek* media fandom and its vibrant fanzine (fan magazine) culture.¹⁶ It was a primarily female fan community that had emerged from a male tradition of science fiction literature fandom, and its most notable and noted feature is the writing of "slash," homoerotic fiction.¹⁷ The more

16. Hellekson and Busse, *The Fan Fiction Studies Reader*, 6.

17. The term slash originated within *Star Trek* fandom when Kirk and Spock were first matched with each other as lovers, with a stroke or "slash" inserted between their names—i.e., Kirk/Spock or K/S—to indicate their romantic pairing.

direct influence on Chinese Internet fan fiction came from Japanese fan fiction subculture, with slash being especially inspired by the genre of Japanese fictional media known as *yaoi* or BL (boys' love).¹⁸ The Chinese term for slash fan fiction is *danmei tongren* 耽美同人; *tongren* (*dōjin* in Japanese) refers to fan creations based on a literary or media source text; it includes all forms of fan art, but fiction remains the most popular form; *danmei* (*tanbi* in Japanese), literally obsessed with or addicted to beauty. *Danmei tongren* refers to a fan fiction subgenre in which two male characters from the source text are portrayed as sharing an erotic love relationship, and the world of Three Kingdoms provides a rich playing field for its female fans. While certainly not all Three Kingdoms fan production is slash, slash constitutes a substantial, and important, part of the vibrant Three Kingdoms literary and media fandom.¹⁹

There are many slash pairings known as CP ("couple") in Three Kingdoms fandom, such as Yun/Liang 雲亮 (Zhao Yun / Zhuge Liang 趙雲/諸葛亮), Ce/Yu 策瑜 (Sun Ce / Zhou Yu 孫策/周瑜), and Cao/Guan 曹關 (Cao Cao / Guan Yu 曹操/關羽). The original Chinese term is a compound comprising two Chinese characters respectively taken from the two lovers' names and uses no slash, but the sequence of the characters is important because the character appearing first is *gong* 攻 ("top," *seme* in Japanese), literally "attack," the dominant figure in a relationship (also conveniently punning with *gong* 公 of the form of address *zhugong* 主公, "my lord"), and the second is *shou* 受 ("bottom," *uke* in Japanese), literally "receiving" or "enduring," the passive figure. Perhaps predictably, one of the most popular pairings is Liu Bei and Zhuge Liang, commonly known as Xuan/Liang 玄亮. Xuan, "dark," is taken from Liu Bei's courtesy name Xuande 玄德, and forms a nice contrast with Liang, literally "bright." The slash production is based on a variety of literary and media forms, from *Records of the Three Kingdoms* and *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* to cinematic representations, video games, and card games such as the popular *Legends of the Three Kingdoms* (*Sanguo sha* 三國殺). The venues of publications include fan fiction websites, BBS forums (*luntan* 論壇), and "post bars" (*tieba* 貼吧). Fans also publicize

18. See Wang Zheng, *Tongren de shijie*, 7–12, 53–54. Also see Jin Feng, *Romancing the Internet*, 55–56.

19. For a detailed discussion of this phenomenon, see Tian, "Slashing Three Kingdoms," 224–77.

their writings and exchange with one another on their blogs (*boke* 博客) and microblogs (*weibo* 微博).

The motives for writing slash have been amply explored by scholars of Western and Chinese fan production, and one reason that applies particularly well to the Three Kingdoms slash is the marginalization of women in the world of the Three Kingdoms and, in lieu of male-female romantic relationships, the intense male bonding witnessed in the novel and in contemporary onscreen representations. Fan fiction, especially slash fan fiction, is born in the cracks found in “canon” that open up to possibilities existing in a parallel universe, operating on visible, but suppressed, subtexts that fans cite as the basis of their homoerotic works.

While slashing is universal in global fan productions, Three Kingdoms slash has a unique Chinese twist. One of the longest-standing interpretive paradigms in the Chinese literary tradition, beginning with Wang Yi's *Chu ci* commentary, is the reading of political allegory into depictions of sexual relationships. In the *Li sao*, the speaker, taken to be the voice of Qu Yuan, constantly shifts gender, speaking either as a male searching for an ideal mate or as a female slandered by jealous women in the harem. In either case, we see the possibility of configuring a political and public relationship in sexual and private terms. Later in the tradition, as gender roles stabilized, it was more common to identify the minister with a woman or wife and the ruler with a man or husband. In other words, the hierarchy in the man/woman relationship in a patriarchal culture is seen as overlapping with the hierarchy in the lord/vassal relationship.

In premodern writings political and sexual readings of a text often exist side by side: one does not supplant the other. The language of desire, either for one's lover or for one's lord, is shared; and the lover's discourse possesses a profound ambiguity that can be political and sexual at the same time. Although such discursive ambiguity provides them with a wonderful verbal repertoire, fan authors notably strip the discourse of its ambiguity by treating desire as literal, not metaphorical. Another significant departure from tradition is that in premodern writings the political reading is almost always generated by the language of unfulfilled desire: in other words, a sexual text capable of political interpretation could only be born in the space of separation—there cannot be actual intimacy and consummation in the text. Such a rule does not apply to modern slash

production. In Xuan/Liang slash, as in slash in general, “first time” is a favorite theme: slash authors relish the depiction of the moment when the two lovers come together for the first time after overcoming obstacles, mostly psychological; and the depiction ranges widely from soft-core erotica to explicit representations of sex. In sum, if the traditional reading paradigm privileges the elite male subjectivity by seeing a longing woman as the male poet’s textual projection, slash authors subvert the paradigm by treating the traditional male poet’s allegorized sexual desire as literal and granting it its eternally denied physical gratification.

Fanfic scholar Sara Gwenllian Jones argues that we cannot regard slash fanfic as subversive because the source texts, with their homo-social emphasis, are already inviting a sort of homoerotic reading.²⁰ This is certainly true of the Three Kingdoms literary and media texts. Yet there is an undeniably subversive element in the transformation of an allegorical relationship built around social bonding in the premodern Chinese cultural discourse into a literal, *physically* fulfilling one. To push this point further, I argue that the subversiveness does not lie so much in the transformation per se as in the female pleasure derived from the act of transforming and, more important, in the female fans’ communal production and consumption of sexual fantasies. Although the majority of Three Kingdoms slash texts are at most mildly titillating, quite a few stories are explicitly erotic, and these stories’ titles are often marked with “carnal” (*rou* 肉) for readers’ easy identification. The wide publicizing of erotic writings about men by women and for women on the Internet is itself a strikingly new phenomenon in the Chinese cultural tradition, and the Internet has been a key factor in the formation of such a largely female community consuming female-authored, male-homoerotic works that are explicitly created for female pleasure.²¹

20. Jones, “The Sex Lives,” 79–90.

21. It is always a risky business to declare anything “new” when working on Chinese literature: its tradition is long and continuous, and many scholars have a near-obsessive penchant for seeking origins and precedents. And yet, although there was a proliferation of erotic writings in late imperial China, it is unlikely that any of those writings—including the male homoerotic narratives—was written *by female authors for female readers*. Indeed, we cannot know or even begin to speculate on something of this sort in pre-Internet China. The existence of a long *tanci* novel, *Phoenixes Flying in Pairs* 鳳雙飛, about male homoerotic love and written by the female author Cheng Huiying 程蕙英 (fl. 1868), proves the rule by exception. I thank Paola Zamperini for pointing me to this particular work.

In this regard, the bafflement of the provincial police in Zhengzhou, He'nan, during an investigation into a high-profile pornography case perhaps best demonstrates the shock to convention. In the spring of 2011, there were multiple arrests made by the Zhengzhou police of fan fiction authors on charges of pornography, and the officers were stunned because they had expected to find "male homosexuals" but found a group of twenty-year-old women instead.²² In addition, it must be stressed that just as important as the erotic fantasy within fan fiction are the fans' communal discussions of male beauty outside the texts, especially in connection with media fandom. The online discussions range from close analysis of male actors' looks to rankings of different screen versions of a male character in terms of physical attractiveness. In some ways it resembles late imperial Chinese men's "ranking of flowers" (i.e., evaluation of courtesans).²³ The public and communal expressions and celebration of female sexual pleasure forcefully subvert the gender stereotype that women care more—or only—about the heart and soul than about the body, and creates a unique space for unconventional female participation in the largely male and macho world of the Three Kingdoms.

Slash is a complicated, multifarious phenomenon that requires a nuanced approach. Although the female Three Kingdoms fans' pleasure is empowering, subversion often only serves to reaffirm what is subverted, not to mention that the erotic hot spot of Three Kingdoms fan fiction largely centers on male homoerotic relations that are in a strange way heteronormative. Although fan authors greatly complicate the male-centered patriarchal tradition of the Three Kingdoms story cycle, the moral values explicitly espoused in their works remain, in the final analysis, largely

22. "Zhengzhou wangjian pohuo huangse xiaoshuo wangzhan," QQ.com, March 21, 2011, <http://news.qq.com/a/20110321/000741.htm>. Slash and the male homoerotic fantasies in the slash genre should not be confused with "gay literature" (*tongzhi wenxue* 同志文學). First, slash pairs are not gay: the partners in a slash pair are only devoted to each other but do not have a general homosexual orientation, and the female slash authors have no interest in exploring homosexuality, nor do they necessarily endorse homosexuality in the "real" world offline; second, slash is focused on *female sexual fantasy* about men and has little to do with gay sexuality in reality.

23. Even though this practice did spread to boy actors in the nineteenth century, the consumers of male beauty remained largely male. See Wu Cuncun, *Homoerotic Sensibilities*, 116–58.

conservative. Loyalty to the Han, devotion to one's lord, and faithfulness to brotherhood are unquestioned moral principles and even sexual turns. In female Three Kingdoms fandom, as in its male counterpart, there is a tremendous nostalgia for the cultural past, manifested sometimes in sentimental pilgrimages to the cultural tourist sites endorsed by the Chinese state and carefully cultivated by the local government for both ideological and commercial benefit, as these sites are expected to foster pride in Chinese national history and cultural tradition while turning a handsome financial profit.²⁴

Yet, despite such politically correct sentiments, the return of the repressed female presence as seen in Three Kingdoms slash could be easily construed as a form of irreverence, existing in a tension-filled symbiotic relation to the sort of institutionalized nostalgia sanctioned by the Chinese state. The serious, grandiose nature of the foci of the Three Kingdoms tradition—politics, power, dynastic rise and fall—invites parody and incites the promotion of a different set of values: private life and private pleasures as opposed to the “great enterprise” of unifying China, heterosexual romance and heteronormal family structure as opposed to homosocial male bonding, ordinary humanity as opposed to superheroes. The Hong Kong film *Just Another Pandora's Box* (*Yueguang baohe* 越光寶盒, 2010), directed by Jeffery Lau 劉鎮偉, offers just such an anti-authoritarian spoof. The movie tells the story of a goddess falling in love with a mortal man and relentlessly pursuing the reluctant object of her desire until both of them are accidentally transported into the world of the Three Kingdoms—which is turned upside down in the fashion of *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* (1975), the famous British parody of Arthurian mythology.²⁵ In the opening scene, the goddess identifies a small-time bandit as her true love because she mistakenly thinks that he has pulled a fabled sword out of its sheath, a clear parody of the Excalibur legend. If pulling out Excalibur from the rock is a mystical symbol of the legitimacy of King Arthur's power and authority, in *Just Another Pandora's Box* the political discourse is displaced by the discourse of romantic love,

24. See Tian, “Slashing Three Kingdoms,” 257–59.

25. The film's title puns on a 1995 two-part film written and directed by Jeffrey Lau, which was based on the novel *Journey to the West* 西遊記 and has since become a cult classic; part 1 of the film is known as “A Chinese Odyssey Part 1: Pandora's Box” 大話西遊之月光寶盒.

i.e., whoever pulls out the sword from its sheath is the goddess's divinely destined lover. It does not matter that the goddess identifies the wrong man—as long as she believes he is right for her. She resorts to numerous ruses to get him to fall in love with her, and he does in the end. The scheming and strategizing that mark the world of the Three Kingdoms, especially in the novel, are transferred to a completely different playing field. Throughout the movie there are many satirical jabs at everything larger-than-life in the Three Kingdoms tradition—the iconic image of Zhao Yun as a superhero fighting off a massive army; Guan Yu as the ultimate emblem of moral uprightness and desexualized masculinity; the desire to unify the Chinese empire that is seen as mirroring mainland China's taking of Hong Kong. The laughter both acquiesces to the order of things and resists it, generating tolerance by dissolving tension, yet poking fun at everything authoritarian and oppressive.

Thus, the Three Kingdoms imaginary continues.

APPENDIX A

Cao Cao's "Short Song"

- 短歌行
曹操
- Short Song
Cao Cao (155–220)
- 對酒當歌
人生幾何
譬如朝露
4 去日苦多
- The wine before me as I sing:
How long can human life last?
It is like the morning dew,
And the departed days are sadly too many.
- 慨當以慷
憂思難忘
何以解憂
8 唯有杜康
- The feeling is strong in me,
I cannot forget these worries of mine.
How can I banish my worries?
Only by Du Kang's gift of wine.
- 青青子衿
悠悠我心
但為君故
12 沉吟至今
- "Blue, blue are your gown's folds;
So full of yearning is my heart,"
And only because of you,
I have been brooding till now.
- 呦呦鹿鳴
食野之苹
我有嘉賓
16 鼓瑟吹笙
- "*Yoo, yoo* cry the deer,
Eating the fern shoots in the meadow.
I have fine guests with me,
So play the harp and blow the pipes."
- 明明如月
何時可輟
憂從中來
20 不可斷絕
- How bright is the moon,
When will its passage cease?
Worries come from within,
Nor can they be halted.

越陌度阡 Crossing paths, traversing lanes,
枉用相存 You have gone out of your way to call on me.
契闊談讌 As we chat and feast after long separation,
24 心念舊恩 The mind thinks on former kindnesses.

月明星稀 The moon is bright, the stars sparse,
烏鵲南飛 Crows and magpies are flying south.
繞樹三匝 They circle the tree thrice—
28 何枝可依 On what branch could they roost?

山不厭高 The mountain is not satiated with height,
海不厭深 The sea is not satiated with depth.
周公吐哺 The Duke of Zhou spat out his food,
32 天下歸心 All under heaven gave him their hearts.

Sources: Lu Qinli, comp., *Wei shi* 1.349; *Song shu*, 21.610; Xiao Tong, comp., *Wen xuan*, 27.1281–82; Guo Maoqian, comp., *Yuefu shiji*, 30.446–47. Translation based on Owen's, *An Anthology*, pp. 280–81.

Notes

Line 1: This line is alternatively understood as “Facing the wine and listening to song” or “Facing the wine one should sing.”

Line 8: Du Kang was the legendary inventor of wine.

Lines 9–10: These two lines are taken verbatim from the *Shi jing* poem, “Your Gown’s Folds” (“Zi jin” 子衿). *Mao shi zhushu*, 4.179.

Lines 11–12: These two lines do not appear in the Li Shan version of the *Wen xuan*.

Lines 13–16: These four lines are taken verbatim from the *Shi jing* poem, “Deer Cry” (“Lu ming” 鹿鳴). *Mao shi zhushu*, 9.315. In the *Song shu* version, they appear after the fifth stanza (beginning with “How bright is the moon”).

Line 18: I adopt the *Yuefu shiji* variant *chuo* 輟, “to stop.” The *Wen xuan* version reads *duo* 掇, “to grasp.”

Lines 21–28: These eight lines do not appear in *Song shu*. The *Song shu* version only contains six stanzas rather than eight. *Yuefu shiji* takes the *Song shu* version as the Jin musicians’ performance version (*Jin yue*

suozou 晉樂所奏) and the *Wen xuan* version as "the original lyrics" (*benci* 本辭). Line 28 has a variant: "They have no branch to roost on" 無枝可依. This variant appears in *Du gongbu caotang shijian* 杜工部草堂詩箋 and *Gujin shiwen leiju* 古今事文類聚, both late twelfth-century works (see Lu Qinli, comp., *Wei shi* 1.349). It is also the line used in the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*.

APPENDIX B

Red Cliff Poems

赤壁懷古 崔塗	Meditation on the Past at Red Cliff Cui Tu (888 <i>jinshi</i>)
漢室河山鼎勢分	Han's rivers and hills: divided like the legs of a tripod;
勤王誰肯顧元勳	In serving his lord and king, who cared about establishing great merits?
不知征伐由天子	Not aware that punitive campaigns were up to the Son of Heaven,
唯許英雄共使君	He only allowed himself and the governor to be true heroes.
江上戰餘陵是谷	In the aftermath of the river battle, hills have turned into valleys;
渡頭春在草連雲	Spring is here at the ford, plants stretching to clouds.
分明勝敗無尋處	Victory and defeat are so clear, yet nowhere to be found:
空聽漁歌到夕曛	In vain I listen to the fisherman's song till the twilight hour.

Source: *Quan Tang shi*, 679.7782.

Notes

Not much is known about Cui Tu except that he was a southerner who passed the Civil Service Examination at the highest level in the last years of a dysfunctional Tang government (the Tang collapsed in 907).

He left behind about a hundred poems, many of which are about his wanderings. In this poem, one can clearly discern the influence of two of Du Mu's poems, "Red Cliff" and "Late Autumn in the District Offices at Qi'an."

Lines 3-4 refer to the well-known story in which Cao Cao casually told Liu Bei over a meal that the only true heroes in this world were Liu and himself and that people like Yuan Shao were nothing in comparison; according to the story, Liu Bei was so taken aback by Cao Cao's remark that he dropped his chopsticks. The story is recorded in *Sanguo zhi*, 32.875, and appears in much elaboration in chapter 21 of the novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*.

Line 5: "Hills turning into valleys" is a common way to refer to time's passage and the vast changes taking place in history.

- 為李方舟題
東坡赤壁圖
釋寶曇
Inscribed on Li Fangzhou's Painting
"Dongpo's Red Cliff"
Shi Baotan (1129-97)
- 大江赤壁黃州村
魚龍吹血波濤渾
腥風不洗賊臣淚
4 暗濕官樹旌旗昏
城南啞啞一笑入
愁日動地回春溫
夜闌魑魅不敢舞
8 璧月如水舟如盆
客親饋魚婦致酒
北斗可挹天可捫
當時跨鶴去不返
12 水仙王家真畫存
百年畫史有眼力
東坡曉挂扶桑暎
- The Great River, Red Cliff,
the village that was Huangzhou:
Fish and dragon blew blood,
the waves were turbid.
The foul wind did not wash away
the traitorous minister's tears;
It soaked the trees along the highway,
and the army banners blurred.
There was cawing south of the city,
as he entered with a laugh;
The sorrowful sun shook the earth
till the warm spring's return.
It was late at night, demons and goblins
did not dare to dance,
The light of the disk-moon was like water,
the boat, a basin.
The guests presented a fish,
and the wife brought out ale,
The North Dipper was used as a ladle,
heaven was within reach.
Riding away on a crane,
he left and would not come back;
The true painting exists in the household
of the King of Daffodils.
The painter-historian of a hundred years
has great insight;
Hanging on the East Slope at dawn:
the light of the rising sun.

Source: *Quan Song shi* 2361.27102.

Notes

Shi Baotan was a Southern Song poet-monk from Sichuan. Li Fangzhou was Li Shi 李石 (1108–81), a scholar-official who was also known for his paintings. Li's painting on which Shi Baotan inscribed his poem was apparently about Su Shi's second Red Cliff rhapsody, and Shi Baotan's poem presents a pastiche of images taken from Su Shi's rhapsody and Li Shi's poem about the site of Huangzhou (see below).

Lines 1 and 7 refer to Li Shi's poem "Visiting the East Slope at Huangzhou" 游黃州東坡, in which Li refers to Huangzhou as "a three-household village" 三家村 (i.e., a small village). In the poem Li also says of Su Shi: "In the past he was detested like a demon or a goblin; / Today he is worshipped as a god" 昔為魑魅憎, 今作神明禱 (*Quan Song shi*, 1985.22262). Shi Baotan might also have in mind the eerie atmosphere in Su Shi's rhapsody where the author talks about his late-night ascent of Red Cliff:

I crouched on a tiger-like boulder and climbed a dragon-twisting tree. I pulled my way up to the precariously perched nest of the roosting hawk and looked down into the hidden palaces of Ping-yi, the river god. My two companions were not able to follow me there. I gave a long whistling. The trees shuddered, the mountains resounded, and the valleys echoed; the wind came up and the waters were seething.¹

踞虎豹，登虯龍，攀棲鶴之危巢，俯馮夷之幽宮。蓋二客不能從焉。劃然長嘯，草木震動，山鳴谷應，風起水湧。

Lines 5–6: This is an ambiguous couplet. The phrase *yaya* 啞啞 can describe the cries of a bird or the sound of laughter, and its position in the middle of the line makes it function in both senses. An early ballad, "Fighting South of the City" 戰城南, describes the exposure of the war dead on the battleground: "Fighting south of the city, / Dead north of the town; / Left unburied in the wilderness, food for crows" 戰城南，死郭北，野死不葬烏可食 (Lu Qinli, *Han shi*, 4.157). The crying crow in Cao Cao's "Short Song" also comes to mind. However, the sixth line about spring's return seems to indicate Su Shi's release from the prison of the Censorate, which preceded his exile to Huangzhou;

1. Owen's translation with slight modifications, *An Anthology*, 676.

and since the Censorate was also known as the “Crow Terrace,” the cawing of the crows takes on yet another layer of meaning here. In any case, Shi Baotan may be juxtaposing a set of free associations about the Battle of Red Cliff, dead soldiers, Cao Cao’s poem and his defeat, Su Shi’s own political fate, and the shrill cry given by the lone crane in Su Shi’s rhapsody.

Line 12: “The King of Daffodils” refers to the Dragon King of Qiantang, whose temple was by the West Lake in Hangzhou during the Song. It may be used to stand for any dragon king or river god; it could also be a specific reference whose meaning is now lost to us.

Line 13: What I translate as “painter-historian” is *hua shi*, which is often used to simply refer to a painter.

Line 14: Although the painting depicting “Dongpo’s Red Cliff” must present a night scene, this last line is clearly about dawn—a sly reference to the ending of Su Shi’s first Red Cliff rhapsody.

- 霜天曉角·赤壁 “Red Cliff” to the tune title “Frosty Sky and
Morning Horn”
辛棄疾 Xin Qiji (1140–1207)
- 雪堂遷客 The exile of Snow Hall
不得文章力 Did not gain anything from literary writings.
賦寫曹劉興廢 He described the rise and fall of Cao and Liu:
千古事 those affairs of a thousand years ago—
泯陳跡 their old tracks have vanished.
- 望中磯岸赤 As I gaze toward the rocky beach
with its scarlet embankment,
直下江濤白 The tidal waves of the River flow down,
all white.
- 半夜一聲長嘯 In the middle of the night, a long whistle—
悲天地 sad that heaven and earth
為予窄 have become narrow for me.

Source: *Quan Song ci*, 3, 1975.

Notes

Xin Qiji was one of the most famous *ci* poets of the Southern Song. He left behind about six hundred lyrics. He is also remembered today for his “patriotic” sentiments and impassioned calls for war with the Jurchen Jin dynasty. The “long whistle” alludes to the “long whistle” in Su Shi’s second Red Cliff rhapsody.

武昌懷古十詠赤壁	“Ten Poems on Meditation on the Past at Wuchang; Red Cliff”
白玉蟾	Bai Yuchan (b. 1194)
不說江山笑老權	No one says rivers and hills had a good laugh at Old Quan;
盡稱造化戲曹瞞	Everyone claims the Creator had played a joke on Cao the Trickster.
飛鳥逸樹孤回首	A flying bird circles the tree, turning head in loneliness;
斷戟沉沙怒激湍	Broken halberd sinking in the sand: swift currents flow furiously.
豪杰已隨霜葉盡	Heroes are all gone along with the frosty leaves;
興亡儘付浪花翻	Rise and fall are entirely entrusted to the roiling waves.
畫堂莫唱坡仙賦	In the painted hall let us not sing the Slope Immortal’s rhapsody—
戰骨草中吟夜寒	Bones of war amidst the overgrowth are chanting in the night chill.

Source: *Quan Song shi*, 3137.37526.

Notes

Bai Yuchan was a very influential Daoist figure in the Southern Song who also had remarkable talents in literature and the arts. He left behind a number of well-known Daoist writings and is known as one of the Five Patriarchs of the Southern Lineage of the Inner Alchemy.

讀赤壁賦 方一變	Reading “Rhapsodies on Red Cliff” Fang Yikui (1253–1314)
萬舸浮江互蕩磨 一番蛟鱷戰盤渦 中天日月悲分影	Ten thousand warships sailed down the River, roiling and tossing; Krakens and crocodiles fought a battle in the vortex. Mid-heaven, sun and moon were saddened their light would be divided;
對局英雄付逝波	Heroes playing opposite on the chess board are now all entrusted to vanished waves.
形勝空傳二赤壁	Scenic landscape is transmitted in vain in the two Red Cliff rhapsodies;
文章誰肯百東坡	In literary writings who could prove superior to that man of the East Slope?
荊州風景今何似	The scenery of Jingzhou— what does it look like today?
秋夜時聞窈窕歌	On an autumn evening one hears, from time to time, the song about the woman’s grace.

Source: *Quan Song shi*, 3537.42299.

Notes

Fang Yikui was a native of Chun’an (in modern Zhejiang), a junior clansman of Fang Fengchen 方逢辰 (1221–91), a late Southern Song scholar-official. After the Southern Song fell, he lived in reclusion in his hometown and was known as “Master Fushan” 富山先生.

Line 3: That is, the sun and moon were grieved that in the aftermath of the Battle of Red Cliff, the empire was to be divided into three states, Wei, Shu, and Wu, and unification was not possible.

Line 8: This refers to Su Shi’s first Red Cliff rhapsody, in which he writes: “I lifted my wine and toasted my companions, reciting the piece from the *Classic of Poetry* on the bright moon and singing the stanza on the woman’s grace.” Fang’s poem, however, seems to hint at a different sort of singing than the singing by “Master Su” and his friends.

蘇東坡前赤壁賦圖	“Painting on Su Dongpo’s ‘Former Rhapsody on Red Cliff’”
鄭思肖	Zheng Sixiao (1241–1318)
泛舟赤壁痛銜杯	Boating at Red Cliff, he drank to his heart’s desire.
孟德英豪安在哉	The heroic spirit of Mengde— where is it now?
何似江山風月妙	How could that compare to the wonders of river, hill, wind, and moon?
不從自己外邊來	For they don’t come from outside of one’s self.

Source: *Quan Song shi*, 3624.43400.

Notes

A native of Fujian, Zheng Sixiao was a zealous Song loyalist well known for his paintings of orchids. He is also known for being the author of a work of intense loyalist sentiments, known as *The History of My Heart* (*Xin shi* 心史), which was reportedly sealed in an iron box and buried in a dry well at a Buddhist temple, only to be discovered by the temple’s monks in 1633. The authenticity of the book has been a topic of heated debate ever since it surfaced.

Line 2: “Mengde” was Cao Cao’s courtesy name.

APPENDIX C

*A Duel of Wits across the River
between Two Army Counselors*¹

Anonymous

ACT ONE

[*Zhou Yu enters with soldiers.*]

Zhou Yu [*recites*]:

Since a young age I have applied myself
to the study of military strategies;
During the Battle of Red Cliff, I demonstrated
my martial powers.
Surely Cao Cao and Liu Bei each have their fair share
of capable generals,
But only I—Zhou Yu—enjoy a prominent reputation
to the east of the Yangzi River.

My name is Zhou Yu, courtesy name Gongjin. I am a native of Shucheng
in Lujiang and a general serving under Sun Zhongmou to the east of

1. A *zaju* play typically has a “topic” (*timu* 題目) and a “proper name” (*zhengming* 正名), which appear at the end of the play. The heading of the play—or what we refer to as a “title”—is usually its “proper name.” In the case of this play, in Zang Maoxun’s edition the “topic” is “A Duel of Wits across the River between Two Army Counselors” 兩軍師隔江鬥智, and the “proper name” is “Liu Xuande by a Lucky Turn of Events Contracted a Good Marriage” 劉玄德巧合良緣; yet, the heading of the play is given as *A Duel of Wits across the River between Two Army Counselors*.

the Yangzi River.² During these declining years of the Han, Cao Cao monopolized power in court, forcing the three brothers, Liu [Bei], Guan [Yu] and Zhang [Fei], to forsake Fancheng and flee to Jiangxia. Later on, Zhuge Liang crossed the Yangzi River to enlist our help. My lord lent him a navy of thirty thousand men, with me as their commander-in-chief, and Huang Gai as the vanguard. At Xiakou, we attacked with fire and slaughtered Cao Cao's entire army. Of Cao Cao's eight hundred and thirty thousand soldiers, not a single one survived, and Cao Cao himself fled through the Huarong Trail, leaving Cao Ren behind in charge of the Southern Commandery. That bastard Liu Bei took advantage of the situation and snatched Jingzhou from us. The victory at Red Cliff was utterly due to the efforts of our Wu army, but Liu Bei seized the nine commanderies of Jingzhou without lifting his little finger—how could I let this go! I have tried several times to get Jingzhou back, but each time my strategy was seen through by that scabby scoundrel Zhuge Liang. Now I have come up with another idea, and I shall discuss it with my generals. Soldier! Keep watch. When the generals arrive, let me know.

Soldier: Yes, sir.

[*Gan Ning and Ling Tong enter.*]

Gan Ning: My name is Gan Ning, courtesy name Xingba. I was born a southerner. This general here is Ling Tong.³ We both serve under Sun Zhongmou, the King of Wu. The commander-in-chief has just summoned us, and we must go and find out what he wants. Soldier! Go in and report that Gan Ning and Ling Tong are here.

Soldier: Gan Ning and Ling Tong are here.

Zhou Yu: Ask them to come in.

Gan Ning and Ling Tong: May we know why you, sir, summoned us?

Zhou Yu: Please wait for a while. Soldier, ask Lu Zijing to come in.

Soldier: Grand Master Lu, the commander-in-chief invites you to come in.

2. Zhongmou 仲謀 was Sun Quan's courtesy name.

3. Gan Ning 甘寧 and Ling Tong 凌統 were both Wu generals whose biographies can be found in *Sanguo zhi*, 55.1292–95, 55.1295–97.

[*Lu Su enters.*]

Lu Su [*recites*]:

At the Red Cliff we have set fire
on a million troops of Cao Cao;
Broken halberds, sunken in sand,
their iron not yet rusted away.
If I, your humble servant, had not persuaded
Young Master Zhou to fight,
On Bronze Bird Terrace the two Qiao sisters
would have been locked away in spring's depths.⁴

I am Lu Su, courtesy name Zijing, a native of Linhuai. I serve as Middle Grand Master under my lord, Sun Zhongmou. When Liu Biao, the lord governor of Jingzhou, passed away, I crossed the Yangzi River and met with Kongming, who asked for our military assistance.⁵ My lord appointed Zhou Yu commander-in-chief, and he defeated Cao Cao at Red Cliff. Who would know that Liu Bei took advantage of the situation and snatched the nine commanderies of Jingzhou from us! Under the pretext of "borrowing" Jingzhou for a temporary base, he occupies the land and refuses to return it to us. The commander-in-chief has tried to get it back several times. I have advised him to wait till later, but he is adamant. Today he has invited me to a meeting, and I suppose it must be about Jingzhou again. I have to go to the meeting, and now I am already right outside his camp. Soldier, report that Lu Su is here.

Soldier: Grand Master Lu is here, sir.

Zhou Yu: Invite him in.

Soldier: Master Lu, please go in.

Lu Su: May I know why the commander-in-chief has invited me?

Zhou Yu: Grand Master, as you know well, I have tried several times to get Jingzhou back, but that scabby scoundrel Zhuge Liang thwarted me every time. Now I have just come up with another plan.

4. The poem cited by Lu Su recycles two lines verbatim from Du Mu's "Red Cliff" quatrain.

5. Kongming 孔明 was Zhuge Liang's courtesy name.

Lu Su: Pray, sir, what is your plan?

Zhou Yu: My plan, sir, is this: recently, Liu Bei has lost his two wives, Madame Gan and Madame Mi, in battle, and is living alone as a widower. Now, our lord has a younger sister, Miss Sun An, who is an excellent match for Liu Bei. [*Whispering*] Of course, I have no intention for a true marriage alliance between Sun and Liu—this is just my strategy of getting Jingzhou. I will mobilize the troops in secret, and claim to escort the bride; then we catch them unawares and take the city. This is the first part of the plan. If it does not work, then after the wedding we will have Miss Sun assassinate Liu Bei, and subsequently my army will take Jingzhou. Sir, what do you think of this plan?

Lu Su: It is certainly a good plan, but I fear that it would not get past Zhuge Kongming.

Zhou Yu: Sir, please rest assured: that scabby scoundrel would by no means see through it. Why don't you go and report the plan to our lord, and I will wait for his response right here at the ford of Chaisang. Please make haste.

Lu Su: I will leave the camp immediately, and go see our lord today.
[*Exits.*]

Zhou Yu: Now that Lu Zijing has left, Gan Ning and Ling Tong, get your troops ready, and wait for my orders when Zijing returns.

Gan Ning: Yes, sir.

Zhou Yu [*recites*]:

We pretend to lay down our arms
and form a marriage alliance;
This is all because Liu Bei decided
to be an enemy of ours.

Gan Ning [*recites*]:

Even though Zhuge Liang is full of strategies,
With a single battle we shall capture Jingzhou. [*Exits.*]

[*Sun Quan enters with soldiers.*]

Sun Quan: I am Sun Quan, courtesy name Zhongmou, a native of the

south. My family were subjects of the Han for generations. My late father, Sun Jian, was the magistrate of Changsha and occupied this land after his campaign against Lü Bu. My elder brother, Sun Ce, was unfortunately assassinated by Xu Gong's men, and so the position was passed on to me. Now I am the lord and master of the eighty-one commanderies to the east of the Yangzi River. When Liu Bei was chased by Cao Cao and fled to Jiangxia, he sent Zhuge Liang to seek my help. I lent him a navy of thirty thousand men, with Zhou Yu as commander-in-chief and Huang Gai as the vanguard. In the Battle of Red Cliff, they destroyed Cao Cao's eight hundred and thirty thousand troops, with hardly one piece of armor and helmet left intact. The land of Jingzhou originally was not ours, but then Liu Bei managed to occupy it under the pretext of using it as a temporary base. Zhou Yu tried several times to snatch it, all to no avail. This is truly frustrating.

[Lu Su enters.]

Lu Su: Having left the river camp, I am now in court. Go and report that Lu Su is here to see my lord.

Soldier: Yes, sir. Lu Su is here to see you, my lord.

Sun Quan: Lu Zijing must be here on important business. Let him come in.

Soldier: You may go in.

[Lu Su greets Sun Quan.]

Sun Quan: Zijing, what brings you here?

Lu Su: My lord, as you know, Zhou Yu has tried several times to take Jingzhou, but every time was thwarted by Zhuge Liang. Now he has come up with another plan. Since Liu Bei has lost his two wives, Madame Gan and Madame Mi, in battles with Cao Cao, Zhou Yu suggests that my lord give the hand of your sister, Miss Sun An, to Liu Bei, and Zhou Yu's troops will then sneak into the city at the time of the wedding. As clever as Zhuge Liang is, he surely would never see through this plan. If, however, this plan does not work, then Zhou Yu has another idea.

Sun Quan: And what idea is that?

[*Lu Su whispers into Sun Quan's ear.*]

Lu Su: What do you say to this, my lord?

Sun Quan: I cannot decide on this matter by myself. I have to discuss it with my elderly mother. Why don't you step aside for a while?

Lu Su: Yes, sir. [*Exits.*]

Sun Quan: Go and invite Her Ladyship to come out.

Soldier: Your Ladyship, my lord invites you to come out.

[*Madame Sun enters with ladies-in-waiting.*]

Madame Sun [*recites*]:

Ever since I left Changsha and came to the Stone Fortress,
I have been mourning the death of my eldest son.
If not for Zhongmou, who has defeated our enemy,
Who could protect the many prefectures
to the east of the river?

I am Sun Quan's mother. My late husband and I have two sons: Sun Ce and Sun Quan; the youngest is a daughter, Sun An. After Sun Ce passed away, I made the decision that Sun Quan should succeed him. Now he wants to see me, and I wonder what for. I will find out soon enough.

Soldier: Her Ladyship is here.

Sun Quan: Why didn't you let me know sooner? Let me go out and greet Mother.

[*Sun Quan greets Madame Sun.*]

Sun Quan: Mother, please forgive me for being slow in coming out to greet you.

Madame Sun: Zhongmou, you asked to see me. What is on your mind?

Sun Quan: Mother, here is the situation. Zhou Yu has tried several times to take Jingzhou, all in vain, so he has come up with this plan. My younger sister, who is at a marriageable age now, has not yet been engaged. It just so happens that Liu Bei has recently lost his wives.

What about pretending to form a marriage alliance with him and promising him my sister? That way we would catch Zhuge Liang unawares and take Jingzhou. This is the plan. Your son does not dare decide by himself and would like to ask for your permission.

Madame Sun: We have to talk this over with your sister. Have the maid invite the young lady.

Lady-in-waiting: Meixiang, ask the young lady to come over.

[*Sun An enters with her maid Meixiang.*]

Sun An: I am Sun An. I am sitting in my bedchamber, and my mother has just sent for me. Meixiang, follow me to see my mother.

Meixiang: M'lady, these past few days you have not had any appetite, and methinks you have lost some weight. I wonder why?

Sun An: Meixiang, how could you understand! [*Sings*]:

Day after day I spend my time fantasizing;
How could I tell what is in my heart?
All you see are the folds of my skirt
concealing my reduced waistline.

Meixiang: M'lady, you have lost so much weight—I truly cannot guess why.

Sun An [*sings*]:

I could say "not even for a moment
have I been idle with needlework."

Meixiang: M'lady, could it be that you are unhappy with my service?

Sun An [*sings*]:

Speaking of your service, Meixiang,
Of course everything is just right—
whether you are attending to my clothes,
or to my meals.

Meixiang: M'lady, look at this lotus-like face and willowy waist of yours—you are so pretty. Who could come near you?

Sun An [*sings*]:

You say my face is more beautiful than the lotus blossom;
 This waist is more delicate than the supple willow branch.
 Sometimes I devise new embroidery patterns
 with colored threads;
 Sometimes I compose poems to match the rhymes
 of ancient verse under the green windowcase.
 In everything I do, I model myself
 on the conduct of virtuous ladies,
 and observe the *Admonitions for Women*.⁶
 Too languid to apply powder and kohl,
 I have washed off the rouge from my face.
 When have I ever ventured to peek
 outside those embroidered curtains?

Meixiang: M'lady, Her Ladyship is waiting. Please hurry.

Sun An [*sings*]:

Surely, if not because my mother has sent for me,
 I would not even come out to the front hall much.

I am in the front hall already. Meixiang, come with me. [*Salutes
 Madame Sun and Sun Quan.*] Mother, brother, greetings.

Meixiang: The young lady was watching me make embroidery patterns
 in her room when Your Ladyship sent for her. She has come as soon
 she could.

Madame Sun: My child, I have sent for you because there is something
 we need to talk to you about.

Sun An: What is it, Mother?

Sun Quan: Mother, you summoned her here; why don't you tell her
 already?

Madame Sun [*sorrowfully*]: My child, this is something that upsets me
 beyond all measure, and that is why I find it so difficult to break the
 news to you.

6. The *Admonitions for Women* 女誡 written by the Eastern Han woman author and scholar Ban Zhao 班昭 (ca. 45–ca. 117) was a work prescribing virtuous female behavior.

Sun An: Oh, Mother, this is really strange and confusing. [*Sings*]:

Mother, you would not say anything,
And would not even look at me—
What is the meaning of all this?
Why have you sent for me in the first place?

Why do you think my mother is so upset, Meixiang?

Meixiang: M'lady, if even you don't know, how would *I* know?

Sun An [*sings*]:

Could it be that some ignorant churl
has offended my dear mother?

Madame Sun: My child, your brother has promised your hand in marriage.

Meixiang: Oh, do find me a husband too!

Sun An [*sings*]:

To whom did he promise my hand in marriage?
I surely hope that it is a good match?

Mother, who did my brother promise my hand to?

Sun Quan: Sister, as long as you are getting married to somebody, why do you care to whom?

Sun An [*sings*]:

Pray do tell—who is the matchmaker?
When will the wedding take place?

Sun Quan: The wedding will take place within a couple of days.

Sun An [*sings*]:

Why on earth in such great haste?

Sun Quan: Well, it is for the sake of the nine commanderies of Jingzhou.

Sun An [*sings*]:

So it is all because you want to take Jingzhou,
and yet you do not want a war—

Madame Sun: My child, your brother is hoping to accomplish a great deed through you.

Sun An [*sings*]:

And you are counting on forming a marriage alliance,
 joining the boughs of two trees in spring breeze.
 Pondering over this, I find the situation
 truly awkward for myself.

Sun Quan: Sister, don't you try to refuse. I have already given them your birth date.⁷

Sun An [*sings*]:

What is to be done, now that my dear old mother
 has given my birth date to her future son-in-law?
 How can I refuse now?
 Alas! I suppose I can only hope you have picked
 an auspicious wedding date!

But brother, do tell me: what is this all about?

Sun Quan: Well, sister, let me explain. We are going to marry you to Liu Bei. But we don't really want to form a marriage alliance with him; we just want to take Jingzhou. On your wedding day, I will send a couple of good generals to escort you, and they will use the opportunity to capture the city. I myself will follow up with an army, and we will take Jingzhou in one stroke. Indeed we are relying on you to help accomplish this great deed, so don't you try to refuse anymore.

Sun An [*sings*]:

So pleased with yourself, you plot and conspire,
 without letting me in on the plan.
 You match me with a man, all for the sake of using
 the bridal procession to get them to open up the
 city gate.
 But I urge you, my brother, to give this some thought:

7. As a part of the marriage ritual, the birth dates of a potential couple would be submitted to a diviner to see if they would make a good match.

I fear you won't be able to swindle Zhuge Liang.
If he sees through this ruse, if something goes wrong,
Wouldn't your "beauty strategy" be all for naught!

Sun Quan [*whispering into her ear*]: Sister, if this does not work, there is another plan. Once the wedding is over, you and Liu Bei will retire to the bedroom; your maids all wear swords, and you can surely find an opportunity to assassinate him. Then Jingzhou will be ours again. You will achieve a great deed, and I will certainly find you a husband from a prominent family and have you remarried to a handsome hero—and you'll be nicely settled for the rest of your life.

Sun An [*sings*]:

Ah! I thought you had some other wonderful plan;
It turns out that you want me to use my wits
and try to stab him in the back!

Brother, I am afraid that your plan is no good. [*Sings*]:

I was going to recite the lines about the gentle maiden
from the "Fishhawk" when you asked me to play
an assassin wielding Dragon Spring.⁸
You only worry you might let down
that Commander Zhou stationed at Sanjiangkou,
But to *my* lifetime happiness when have you ever
given any thought?

Sun Quan [*acting enraged*]: Sister, you must obey me in this matter. If I cannot capture Jingzhou, then I am no longer a real man!

Madame Sun: My child, your brother is getting upset. Why don't you just give in?

Sun An: Mother, your child understands. I will let my brother do whatever he pleases. [*Sings*]:

Oh brother, no need to fly into a rage, and puff up your
purple beard.⁹

8. "Fishhawk" 關雎 is the first poem in *The Classic of Poetry*, which is about seeking a good love match and conjugal happiness. Dragon Spring 龍泉 was the name of a famous sword.

9. Sun Quan allegedly sported a purple, perhaps reddish, beard. *Sanguo zhi*, 47.1120.

I will no longer dodge and evade;
 I will let you do what you please.
 I will bid my mother farewell right away,
 getting ready for the auspicious day.
 I will prepare myself
 for a joyful honeymoon.

Sun Quan: Good. Now that my sister has agreed, I will send Zijing to make the marriage proposal, and see what Liu Bei says.

Sun An [*sings*]:

Oh brother, so you are all set
 to send over a messenger,
 and ask for a response.
 We surely are not looking for any betrothal gift
 from the groom—
 no need for lamb and ale, or flowers and gauze,
 indeed we shall not ask
 for a single thread of silk from him.
 On one side is the beautiful maiden of Wu;
 On the other, the scion of the imperial house of the Han.
 We are willing to give away our girl with a rich dowry
 and escort her all the way to his door.
 The perfumed smoke will swirl from the gold lion incense
 burner, and the ale shall fill the jade goblets to the brim.
 All will be well
 when the groom and bride are being led
 to the painted wedding hall,
 with piping and song.
 And I suppose then, and only then,
 will you finally have your wish.

Madame Sun: My child, now that you have agreed, you must discuss the details with your brother carefully, and do not do anything regrettable. I shall retire now. [*Recites*]:

My son decided to make a match for his sister,
 And now she has given her consent.
 Even if we do capture Jingzhou in the end,
 What about my daughter's future happiness?! [*Exits.*]

Sun Quan: Sister, why don't you go back to your room too? I will find an auspicious date and send Lu Su across the river to make the marriage proposal.

Meixiang: I would like to follow my lady when she gets married.

Sun An: Brother, I understand. [*Sings*]:

Oh brother, I only fear that even before you solve this
problem, you will get yourself in more trouble,
For from now on, war will follow peace.
And how can you always rely on me being there—
a real man without cap and sash?¹⁰

Meixiang: M'lady, as the saying goes, "Marriage is fate; no chance nor accident." This marriage of yours may very well be a karmic affair destined by heaven.

Sun An [*sings*]:

What part of this marriage is destined by heaven?
I am just going along with my family,
so that they won't complain
that I am being partial to my husband,
an outsider.

Sun Quan: Sister, you have to be careful: don't leak a word.

Sun An: Brother, I understand. [*Sings*]:

Although you are a reckless fellow yourself,
I am matchless in my wits!
How could I leak any important military secrets! [*Exits.*]

Sun Quan: My sister is gone. Now that all is set, I will send for Lu Zijing.

Soldier: Grand Master Lu, please come in.

[*Lu Su enters.*]

Lu Su: My lord, have you made your decision? I need to get back to Commander Zhou, who is waiting for a response.

10. "Cap and sash" were part of a male outfit, hence a synecdoche for man.

Sun Quan: Zijing, I have told my mother everything, and my sister has given her consent. I will now trouble you to act to cross the river as matchmaker and take the marriage proposal to Liu Bei. In the meantime, I will ask Zhou Yu to get his troops ready. Isn't this a wonderful plan!

Lu Su: In that case, I will go and report back to Commander Zhou.
[*Prepares to exit.*]

Sun Quan: Zijing, come back here. Let me give you a few more words of instruction. When you see Liu Bei, just tell him that my sister has an extraordinary spirit and a handsome face; she is a good match for the imperial uncle and will make a fine wife.¹¹ From now on, the Sun and Liu clans will form a marriage alliance and stop fighting. Isn't this a blessing for both sides? Once Liu Bei agrees, I will choose an auspicious day and escort my sister to Jingzhou in person. Be careful and don't procrastinate. [*Recites*]:

For Jingzhou I rack my brain day and night,
I swear never to withdraw my troops until I capture it.

Lu Su [*recites*]:

Zhou Gongjin has come up with a clever strategy:
Forming a fake marriage alliance between Liu and Sun.

ACT TWO

[*Zhou Yu enters with Gan Ning, Ling Tong, and soldiers.*]

Zhou Yu: In order to capture Jingzhou, I have come up with a plan to marry my lord's younger sister to Liu Bei. On the surface we are forming a marriage alliance; but the bride's escorts are in fact our soldiers, who will catch them unawares. I am sure Zhuge Liang, that scabby scoundrel, cannot see through this ruse. Now I must send Lu Zijing

11. Liu Bei claimed to have descended from the Han imperial house, hence "the imperial uncle."

to Jingzhou to notify them of the approaching wedding day, and then I will deploy my generals.

Gan Ning: I have heard that when Lu Zijing went to Jingzhou to make the marriage proposal, Liu Bei was rather reluctant, but Zhuge Liang urged him to give consent. Zhuge Liang was obviously taken in by our commander's great plan. This time we will capture Jingzhou for sure.

[*Lu Su enters.*]

Lu Su: Zhou Gongjin had asked me to convey his plan to my lord, and we fortunately got an agreement from Her Ladyship and the young lady, which I reported back to the commander-in-chief. Then I was sent to Jingzhou as matchmaker. When it was all set, I reported back to my lord. Going back and forth like this, I was on the road for more than a month, and my head is still dizzy from all the travels. Today the commander has sent for me again. Life is truly hard for a matchmaker! Soldier, go in and let the commander know that Lu Su is here.

Soldier: Yes, sir. Sir, Grand Master Lu is here to see you.

Zhou Yu: Invite him in.

Soldier: Please go in.

[*Lu Su greets Zhou Yu.*]

Lu Su: Commander, what do you want to see me for?

Zhou Yu: Now that everything is set, our lord has chosen an auspicious wedding date; but Liu Bei does not know it yet. I would like to trouble you to announce it to him, so that they can make due preparations to receive our young lady. I will also make due preparations. Why don't you cross the river right away? And be careful.

Lu Su: I dare not disobey your order. I will depart right away. [*Exits.*]

Zhou Yu: Grand Master Lu has left. Now, Gan Ning, Ling Tong, listen to me! The two of you will each take five hundred of your best men and escort the young lady's carriage to Jingzhou. If anyone tries to stop you, just say Madame Sun has sent you to escort the young lady. Once you are in the city, take over the South Gate; I will be right behind you with the troops. Be sure to follow my orders!

Gan Ning: Yes, sir. We will immediately go pick one thousand of our best men and escort our lady's carriage to Jingzhou. [*Recites*]:

We two generals escort the new bride,
How dare we disobey the commander's orders!

Ling Tong [*recites*]:

Following the phoenix carriage to Jingzhou,
We will take the iron-clad city gate in secret. [*Exits.*]

Zhou Yu: The two generals have left. As long as Lady Sun An executes my two plans, we will surely be able to take Jingzhou. Listen to me, the three regiments! You stay here and guard the camp; don't let anything go amiss. I will lead thirty thousand crack troops and follow the two generals. [*Exits.*]

[*Zhuge Liang enters.*]

Zhuge Liang [*recites*]:

The imperial aura of the Han is coming to an end;
The three powers, like the legs of a tripod,
each rule over a region.

Zhou Yu may deploy a thousand strategies,
but all in vain—

In the end he will lose the fight
to the Recumbent Dragon of Nanyang.¹²

I am Zhuge Liang, courtesy name Kongming. I go by my Daoist appellation Master Recumbent Dragon. I lived in reclusion in Nanyang until the Liu brothers paid three visits to my cottage, invited me to come out of the mountains, and appointed me as the army counselor. I suggested to my lord that we should first take Jingzhou, then Xichuan, so as to become one of three powers along with Cao Cao and Sun Quan. When Liu Biao was alive, he asked my lord several times to become the governor of Jingzhou; my lord, being a benevolent man, would not listen to my advice, and refused adamantly. After Liu Biao passed away, his second son Liu Cong surrendered to Cao

12. Nanyang was Zhuge Liang's hometown, and "Recumbent Dragon" was his appellation when he lived in reclusion there.

Cao, and so Jingzhou fell into Cao Cao's hands. I went to Wu and borrowed their troops to resist Cao Cao. On the altar built for the Wind Ritual, I managed to produce an east wind that blew three days and nights; it fanned the fire that burned Cao Cao's eight hundred and thirty thousand troops to death at Red Cliff. That sent Cao Cao fleeing by way of the Huarong Trail, and my lord took charge of the nine commanderies of Jingzhou. However, Zhou Yu believes that they are entitled to Jingzhou because they have helped us resist Cao Cao; he camps his army at the ford of Chaisang and has made several attempts on Jingzhou. But in my humble view, how could he ever succeed in one-upping me? Now he has come up with yet another plan, claiming that they want to form a marriage alliance with us. I have already agreed to his proposal. Now I must invite my lord and the generals over to discuss this matter. Soldier, let me know when my lord and the generals arrive.

Soldier: Yes, sir.

[*Liu Feng enters.*]

Liu Feng [*recites*]:

As a general I am used to facing off with the enemy;
I am good at acrobatics, and I am good at trickery.
Your humble servant's official name is Liu Feng;¹³
As for his courtesy name, it is the Original Fast Talker.

I am Liu Feng. My adoptive father, Liu Bei, governs Jingzhou. Our councilor Kongming is truly a god of strategies—he set a fire that sent Cao Cao a-running back to Xu Du like a wisp of smoke, although I would have run even faster if I were Cao Cao. Today our councilor has called a meeting to discuss some idea of his. Now, if I don't go, whatever idea he got would surely fall through. Hey, you, go in and report that your uncle Liu Feng is here.

Soldier: Liu Feng is here.

13. In history Liu Feng 劉封 (ca. 190?–220) was Liu Bei's adopted son and a fierce general, who was later executed for failing to lend aid to Guan Yu. His biography is in *Sanguo zhi*, 40.99I–94.

Liu Feng [*acts arrogantly*]: Fine, fine, if he does not come out to receive me, I will just go in myself. [*Greets Zhuge Liang.*] Sir, I am here.

Zhugue Liang: Liu Feng, stand down for a while. I will make an announcement when the generals arrive.

[*Zhao Yun enters.*]

Zhao Yun [*recites*]:

I have achieved great deeds,
 and my valor awes the Han and Hu alike:
 At Danyang they are still talking about my heroic act.
 Protecting the young master
 amidst a million enemy troops—
 I am the one from Changshan of Zhending,
 named Zhao Zilong.¹⁴

I am Zhao Yun, courtesy name Zilong, a native of Changshan in Zhending. I was originally a general in Gongsun Zan's army, but I gave my allegiance to Liu Bei when I met him at Qingzhou. At Changban of Danyang, I fought with Cao Cao for three days and three nights, and saved the young master from a million troops. Even Cao Cao admired my valor. Zhou Yu has tried several times to take Jingzhou from us, but each time was defeated by our councilor. Now Zhou Yu camps his army at the ford of Chaisang, and he is still making advances on our territory. I suppose that our councilor is calling a meeting on this account. Soldier, go in and let the councilor know that I am here to see him.

Soldier: Zhao Yun is here.

Zhao Yun [*greets Zhuge Liang*]: Sir, I am at your service.

Zhugue Liang: Zilong, stand down for a while.

[*Liu Bei, Guan Yu, and Zhang Fei enter.*]

14. Zhao Yun 趙雲 (170–229) was one of Liu Bei's generals. The event alluded to in the poem is recorded in his biography in *Sanguo zhi*, 36.948. "When the Former Ruler was chased by Lord Cao Cao at Changban of Danyang, he forsook his family and fled south. Zhao Yun carried [Liu Bei's] young son, i.e., the Later Ruler, and protected Lady Gan, i.e., the Later Ruler's mother, and escorted both of them to safety." This incident receives much elaboration in chapter 41 of the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*.

Liu Bei: I am Liu Bei, courtesy name Xuande, a native of Lousang. I am a descendant of Prince Jing of Zhongshan, the great-great-grandson of Emperor Jing of the Han. Here are my two brothers: this one here is Guan Yu, courtesy name Yunchang, a native of Xieliang in Puzhou; this one here is Zhang Fei, courtesy name Yide, a native of Fanyang in Zhuozhou. We swore an oath of brotherhood in the peach orchard. After that, we defeated Lü Bu and served in the imperial court at Xu Du. Because I could not get along with Cao Cao, we left Xu Du and stayed at Fancheng temporarily. After I invited Kongming to join us as army counselor, we crushed Cao Cao's army at Bowang and won the Battle of Red Cliff, until almost nothing was left of Cao Cao's troops. Only then did we take the nine commanderies of Jingzhou as our territory. Brothers, the army counselor has invited me to a meeting. I must go and find out what is going on.

Guan Yu: Please lead the way, brother.

Zhang Fei: Brother, that rash fool Zhou Yu has got into several battles with us for the sake of Jingzhou. Now that he is camping at the ford of Chaisang, I am sure he is up to something. Brother, you've got to talk it over with the counselor at the meeting today. Don't let us fall behind others.

Liu Bei: Brother, I am sure that the counselor has a good plan regarding Zhou Yu. Soldier, go in and let the counselor know the three of us are here.

Soldier: Yes, sir. Sir, our lord and the two generals are here.

Zhugé Liang [*greets Liu Bei*]: Please forgive me, my lord, for being slow in coming out to receive you.

Liu Bei: Not at all, counselor, you have been working hard.

Zhugé Liang: My lord, now that all the generals are here, I have something important to discuss with you.

Liu Bei: What is on your mind, counselor?

Zhugé Liang: My lord, you lost Madame Gan and Madame Mi during recent battles with Cao Cao, and nobody is taking care of the young master Liu Shan. Now Sun Quan has sent a messenger across the river

to let us know that his younger sister, Lady Sun An, is a good match for my lord in terms of age and would like to form a marriage alliance with us. In my humble opinion, this is indeed a good match, and I wonder what my lord thinks of it.

Liu Bei: Councilor, I do not dare presume that I can make a decision myself. I must consult with my generals, for I suspect that this is Zhou Yu's scheme.

Zhuge Liang: My lord, please rest assured: I have thought about this very carefully. I expect that someone from Wu will be here to see us today.

[*Lu Su enters.*]

Lu Su: I, Lu Zijing, have come to Jingzhou to announce the wedding date. Lieutenant, go in and report that Lu Su is here.

Soldier: Yes, sir. Sir, Grand Master Lu Su from the State of Wu is here.

Zhuge Liang: Ask him to come in.

Soldier: Please go in.

Lu Su [*greets Zhuge Liang*]: Councilor, I see that Lord Liu Xuande and the various generals are all here. My lord has asked me to inform you that today is an auspicious day, and that Her Ladyship is being escorted across the river at this very moment. Councilor, you must make preparations to receive my lady.

Zhuge Liang: Sir, no need to worry: I have been making preparations for quite a while by now. General Zhang, step forward.

Zhang Fei: Councilor, I am at your service.

Zhuge Liang [*whispering into Zhang Fei's ear*]: Go and do it.

Zhang Fei: Yes, sir.

[*Enter soldiers, Sun An in carriage, and Gan Ning, Ling Tong, and Meixiang all wearing swords.*]

Sun An: I am Lady Sun An. My brother has sent his generals to escort me to Jingzhou to get married. Gan Ning, Ling Tong, where are we now?

Gan Ning: M'lady, we are not far away from Jingzhou now.

Sun An [*sings*]:

I have seen quite a bit of the river landscape—
so vast and gloomy are the waves,
it is hard to distinguish between sky and earth,
and the road ahead is locked in fog,
lost in mist.

All I can make out are some leisurely gulls,
plants densely covering the dikes;
I cannot but become lost in thought.
My brother separates me from my family
for the sake of Jingzhou;
He has devised so many devious schemes.

Gan Ning: M'lady, you must be very careful when you get there.

Meixiang: Her Ladyship does not need your counsel—she is quite smart.

Sun An [*sings*]:

You don't have to waste your advice on me,
I have always been wise in my ways.
When I see them, I have my own shrewd strategy,
And I am sure they will be delighted.
The one who made the match—how could he know that
a fake wedding might just turn real;
The one who is the go-between—he did well
in concealing the truth;
But the one who enters the match—she is quite capable
of stirring up trouble on her own.

Ling Tong: In the distance one can see a great many troops outside the city of Jingzhou. They must be there to receive us.

Meixiang: General Ling, I have never been on a trip before. Are you trying to scare me?

Sun An: What a mighty fine city! [*Sings*]:

Look! Mulberries and hemp are densely planted,
bathing in sunlight;
Wheat and millet stretch toward the horizon,
touching the sky.

Gan Ning: It is because the land is vast and the people are wealthy in Jingzhou that my lord cannot let go of it.

Sun An [*sings*]:

Now I have set foot on Jingzhou myself,
 And seen it with my own eyes.
 Look at how great is the land,
 And how prosperous are its people—
 truly it is a splendid city,
 as if embroidered in brocade,
 whoever is its lord and governor
 is surely a lucky man.

Gan Ning: We are already outside the South Gate. Guard, go and report that the Wu generals are here as Lady Sun's escorts. Open the city gate quickly.

Soldier: Yes, sir. General Zhang, the Wu generals escorting the bride are here.

Zhang Fei: Lieutenant, only let in the lady's phoenix carriage and her maid. As for the rest, keep them out of the city and don't allow a single one to come inside. Tell them that I am here in person.

Soldier: Yes, sir. Generals from Wu, listen carefully! Our General Zhang has issued an order: only let in the lady's phoenix carriage and her maid; the rest of you stay outside.

Gan Ning: In this case, I want to see General Zhang myself. [*Greets Zhang Fei.*] General Zhang, we are here as our lady's escorts. We all want to have a few drinks at the wedding banquet. Why won't you let us in?

Zhang Fei: You are surely not here for drinks at the wedding banquet. I know Zhou Yu's scheme all too well: you are here to dupe us into opening the city gate. With my spear, I will finish off anyone who dares come in.

Meixiang: M'lady, this man with huge round eyes is really tough. Let's turn back and go home.

Sun An: Gan Ning, Ling Tong, why don't you leave us now? I will go into the city with Meixiang alone.

Gan Ning: In this case, we'd better not hang around. Not only do we not get any drinks at the wedding banquet, but we might get ourselves in trouble—we might as well leave.

Ling Tong: General Gan, you are right. Let's go back and report to our commander. [*Recites*]:

Zhou Gongjin racked his brain to come up with the plot;
But Zhuge Liang already knew even before we made a move.
We did not get even half a bottle of wedding ale,
Instead got ourselves in an unpleasant brawl. [*Exits*.]

Zhang Fei: You sedan carriers, follow me. Let me report to my lord.
[*Exits*.]

Zhang Fei: Brother, my sister-in-law's carriage is now outside. I have blocked the Wu generals who escorted her here.

Liu Bei: Brother, I already learned.

Lu Su: Since my lady is here, let me greet her.

Zhuge Liang: Let's all go and greet her.

Lu Su and others [*greet Lady Sun An*]: M'lady, please step out of the carriage. We are all here to welcome you.

Meixiang: Grand Master Lu, don't frighten my lady. Let me give her a hand here.

[*Meixiang helps Lady Sun An; others follow.*]

Lu Su: M'lady, you are the mistress here now. After you and Lord Liu Bei are wedded, the generals will pay their respects to you.

Zhuge Liang: General Zhao, please take care of setting up the banquet.

Zhao Yun: Soldiers, set up the banquet.

Soldiers: Yes, sir.

[*Sun An and Liu Bei bow to heaven and earth in the wedding ritual.*]

Zhuge Liang: Bring in the drinks. Let me make a toast. [*Toasting Liu Bei.*] My lord, please drink up.

Liu Bei: Thank you, councilor. [*Drinks; the generals all bow.*]

Zhuge Liang [*toasts Sun An*]: Madam, please drink up.

Sun An: Grand Master, who is this?

Lu Su: This here is Councilor Zhuge Kongming, who goes by his Daoist appellation, Master Recumbent Dragon. M'lady, please greet him properly.

Sun An [*accepts the toast*]: Councilor, please drink first.

Zhuge Liang: I would not dare. Madam, please, you drink first.

Meixiang: If the two of you don't drink up, I'll drink first.

Sun An [*sings*]:

In front of this sumptuous feast
 I see many heroes arrayed.
 Everyone is vigorous and in high spirits,
 courteous and gracious.
 The army councilor, with his supreme talent,
 truly has the power of a dragon.
 I catch glimpses of a remarkable face
 and of the manners of a god,
 for he looks marvelous
 in his attire of stars and clouds.
 I want to say that he is just like Guan Zhong of Qi,
 but he knows more about military strategies;
 I want to say that he is just like Lü Wang of Zhou,
 but he is so much more youthful;
 I want to say that he is like Zhang Liang of Han,
 but he is wiser in his ways.¹⁵

15. Guan Zhong 管仲 (ca. 720–645) was Duke Huan of Qi's advisor and chief minister, who helped Duke Huan achieve hegemon status. Lü Wang 呂望, also known as Jiang Shang 姜尚, Jiang Ziya 姜子牙, Lü Shang 呂尚, Grand Duke Jiang 姜太公, or Grand Duke Wang 太公望, was a military strategist who helped King Wen and King Wu of the Zhou to overthrow the Shang dynasty; he was already an old man when he was "discovered" by King Wen. Zhang Liang 張良 (d. 189 BCE?) was the Han founding emperor Gaozu's counselor, who was instrumental in the establishment of the Han.

Zhuge Liang: Let me make another toast.

Liu Bei: No need to trouble the councilor. Second brother, why don't you make a toast on behalf of the councilor?

Guan Yu: Councilor, you just enjoy yourself. Let my third brother pour the brew, and I will make a toast.

Zhang Fei: Will do. [*Pours.*]

Guan Yu [*toasts Liu Bei*]: Brother, please drink first.

[Liu Bei drinks.]

Guan Yu: Sister-in-law, please drink up.

Sun An: Grand Master Lu, who are these two men?

Lu Su: These two here—one is none other than Guan Yunchang, the other is none other than Zhang Yide.

Sun An: Ah, what great generals they are! [*Sings*]:

I observe their looks and their manners:
Truly they possess the magnificent courage of a tiger.
Now I think back to our Gan Ning and Ling Tong,
Who compared with these two are like rat and fox.
It is no wonder that Liu Xuande could revive
the imperial house of the Han—
He has the support of such a fine group of men
in both civil and martial affairs.

Guan Yu: Madam, please finish this goblet of wedding ale.

Sun An [*sings*]:

Ah, seeing how reverentially he holds up
the golden goblet with both hands,
And how the spirit of harmony and good will
permeates the great hall,
I cannot but with equal deference
accept his toast,
And won't refuse or evade
even if I may get drunk.

Only today do I realize
 what a fool that Zhou Yu is—
 Otherwise how could he have failed so miserably
 in his assessment of the situation?

Sun An [*drinks*]: I have finished it.

Liu Feng: All you guys do is to offer toasts—I haven't got a chance to greet my mother yet. [*Bows to Sun An.*] Mother, your son here is a little bit of a good-for-nothing; from now on I will count on you to take care of me.

Liu Bei: Meixiang, why don't you take Her Ladyship back to the rear hall now?

Meixiang: M'lady, let's retire to the rear hall now.

Sun An: Grand Master Lu, please tell my brother that I will pay them a visit in a month, and that I would like to talk to my mother when I do.

Lu Su: Yes, m'lady.

Sun An [*aside*]: Liu Xuande can see his own ears with his eyes, and has arms that can touch his knees.¹⁶ In my view he has the true visage and manners of an emperor. It certainly is no dishonor to have him as my husband. [*Sings*]:

All my life I never stepped outside my boudoir;
 I feel too embarrassed to take a good look at any man.
 I have been taught "Three Forms of Obedience"
 and "Four Assets."¹⁷

"Even if you marry a cock, still you have to
 follow the cock."

But I find him with eyes that can see his ears,
 And I find him with arms that reach his knees—
 He is the true scion of the Red Emperor.¹⁸

16. Liu Bei was said to have long arms and big ears. *Sanguo zhi*, 32.871–72. Remarkable physical appearance was considered a sign of future greatness.

17. That is, a woman must obey her father while unmarried, obey her husband after getting married, and obey her son if her husband dies. The four assets refer to female virtue, female speech, female work, and female appearance.

18. The Han founding emperor Gaozu was considered the son of the mythical "Red Emperor." *Shi ji*, 8.347.

The dragon coils in hiding for the time being;
Sooner or later it will soar to heaven in thunder and rain.

Zhou Yu, you make me laugh: what a fool you are! You do not have the wits to take Jingzhou, and instead send me here. You want to accomplish your great deed, but why should *I* spend the rest of my life as a widow for your sake? [*Sings*]:

Now that he has shot the eyes of the peacocks
painted on the gate, like the Tang emperor,
The two of us will ride the phoenixes and fly away
together, like Princess Nongyu and her love.¹⁹
You see, a girl has to take care of herself.
All you could think of is your great deed of the moment;
And completely ignore my conjugal happiness
of a lifetime.
Who in my position would not have regrets?
You may use all of your strategies,
but I am afraid that in the end
it would be all for naught.

How cruel is my brother! Is this Jingzhou really worth it? First you marry me off, and then you want me to murder my husband. Do you really think that your sister is capable of destroying one man and then just going off to marry another? Oh brother, you are so heartless! [*Sings*]:

After all, how many brothers and sisters
do we have in all?
My elder brother died young, and my heart is still pained
at the mention of his name.
Alas, our mother is getting old, and you,
my brother, do not have other siblings but myself.

19. Dou Yi 竇毅 (519–82) had had two peacocks painted on the screen and told his daughter's suitors to shoot arrows at them, saying that only the one who could shoot the eye of a peacock would marry his daughter. Li Yuan 李淵 (566–635) was the last one who shot at the peacocks and got one eye of each peacock, and subsequently married Lady Dou. Li Yuan was the Tang founding emperor. *Xin Tang shu*, 76.3469. According to legend, Nongyu 弄玉 was the daughter of Duke Mu of Qin 秦穆公 (d. 621); she loved flute music and married a flute player, Xiao Shi 蕭史, and they could imitate phoenixes' cries with their flute playing. One day they flew away with phoenixes as immortals.

How could you not have some pity for your little sister—
that you should pretend to marry her off,
only to use her to get your way!

Mother had also tried to persuade me, asking me to listen to my brother.
I suppose it was not because Mother was cruel to me, but because once
my brother had made his mind, nobody could turn him back. But
now I have a plan of my own. [*Sings*]:

I don't want to hurt the feelings
of my mother and brother,
Nor do I want to ruin the relationship
between husband and wife.
From now on I will emulate Yiliao,
the man who created peace by juggling:²⁰
I will play fair in the middle
so that there will be no more wars. [*Exits with Meixiang.*]

Zhuge Liang: Madam has retired. Grand Master Lu, have another drink;
then please go back and tell the King of Wu that our lord sends his
best regards.

Lu Su: Councilor, I have had enough. Now that Sun and Liu have formed
a marriage alliance, we will forever lay down our arms and be friendly
neighbors to each other. This is truly a happy event. I will go back
today. I have caused you much inconvenience; I give you my sincere
thanks.

Zhuge Liang: Grand Master Lu, we have been negligent in our recep-
tion of you. Please accept my sincere apologies, sir. When you see
Commander Zhou, please tell him that even though the ford of
Chaisang is not far, I am unable to wait upon him myself, and for that
I humbly beg his forgiveness.

Lu Su: I will convey your message. Farewell. [*Recites*]:

20. Yiliao 宜僚 (fl. 5th century BCE) was a brave warrior of Chu. Two Chu noblemen were fighting, and one of them wanted Yiliao to kill the other. Yiliao, who was good at juggling, kept juggling balls and paid no attention to the request, and the crisis resolved itself. *Zhuangzi jishi*, 8.850. Yiliao became a common figure standing for someone who could resolve a problem between two parties by not taking sides.

Zhou Gongjin has devised one scheme after another;
But Zhuge Liang has seen through them all.
Now that the two clans have formed a marriage alliance,
I wonder when he could ever capture Jingzhou. [*Exits.*]

Zhuge Liang: My lord, this marriage alliance was Zhou Yu's scheme. Now that I have seen through his ruse, he may very well become annoyed and come up with some other plan. Lady Sun is a new bride. My lord, please feel free to retire to the rear hall and celebrate with her. I will make the necessary deployments.

Liu Bei: In that case, I will count on you to work it out, councilor. Second brother, third brother, you stay here at the councilor's command. I will retire. [*Exits.*]

Zhuge Liang: General Guan!

Guan Yu: Councilor, what can I do for you?

Zhuge Liang: Go to Hanyang and get your troops ready; wait for my orders.

Guan Yu: Yes, sir. [*Recites*]:

The lord with a handsome beard is well-known
to the east of the Yangzi River;²¹
He is getting his crack troops ready for battle.
Let Zhou Yu rack his brain and wear out his mind,
Our councilor will succeed
even while laughing in conversation.²²

Zhuge Liang: Zilong!

Zhao Yun: Councilor, what can I do for you?

Zhuge Liang: Go to Xinye and get your troops ready; wait for my orders.

Zhao Yun: Yes, sir. [*Recites*]:

Our councilor is like a god in his marvelous strategizing;

21. Guan Yu had a handsome beard, and he was very vain about it. *Sanguo zhi*, 36.940.

22. This line is reminiscent of Su Shi's description of Zhou Yu in his song lyric on Red Cliff.

Zhou Yu is laughable for having formed
 a marriage alliance in vain.
 If he ever approaches the city wall of Jingzhou,
 I will take his head and present it at the gate of our camp.

Zhuge Liang: Liu Feng!

Liu Feng: I've been waiting for this call all day—so it turns out you do
 need your Uncle Liu after all.

Zhuge Liang: Take five hundred soldiers and guard the South Gate. Be
 careful!

Liu Feng: Yes, sir. [*Recites*]:

I, Liu Feng, am a man of skills;
 On battleground my balls are bigger than my frame.
 If I ever run into Commander Zhou,
 I'll break all the tendons in his body. [*Exits.*]

Zhuge Liang: General Zhang Fei, wait here with me; soon enough I will
 have a task for you. Zhou Yu's scheme is clearly not working. He'll
 come up with another strategy for sure, but it is nothing to worry
 about. [*Recites*]:

I, Kongming, with black turban and feather fan,
 Sing a ballad to "Liangfu" without much thought.²³

Zhang Fei: Zhou Yu! Zhou Yu! [*Recites*]:

Don't ever brag that your clever strategy
 can deceive the world—
 You will lose your troops as well as your lady!

23. "With black turban and feather fan" (*yushan guanjin* 羽扇纶巾) is the same phrase used in Su Shi's song lyric on Red Cliff. When Zhuge Liang was living in reclusion, he loved to sing a ballad of "Liangfu" 梁父. *Sanguo zhi*, 5.911.

ACT THREE

Zhou Yu [*enters with soldiers*]: I am Zhou Gongjin. In the Battle of Red Cliff, my general Huang Gai suffered a setback,²⁴ and Liu Bei took the nine commanderies of Jingzhou. I came up with the plan of capturing Jingzhou under the pretext of forming a marriage alliance, and I told Gan Ning and Ling Tong to report to me as soon as they got into the city gate. Why is there no message yet? How frustrating!

[*Gan Ning and Ling Tong enter.*]

Gan Ning and Ling Tong: Commander-in-chief, we are here to see you.

Zhou Yu: Did you seize Jingzhou's city gate?

Gan Ning: Commander, we were blocked by Zhang Fei at the gate. He said that they had already seen through our strategy, and he only allowed our lady's carriage to pass. He said that if any of the Wu generals dared to enter, he would kill him off with his own spear. My lord, that Zhang Fei's spear was quite sharp! If the two of us had not hastened, we would have been pierced through.

Zhou Yu: Alas! That scabby scoundrel is indeed good! How infuriating!

Ling Tong: Commander, don't be angry with him. We have eighty-one wealthy commanderies in our territory. Even without Jingzhou, there is surely plenty to enjoy.

Zhou Yu: But how could I bear to give up Jingzhou! I have another idea. I will wait for Lu Zijing. He should be here any moment now.

Lu Su [*enters*]: I, Lu Zijing, have crossed the river, and am in front of Commander Zhou's camp at the ford of Chaisang. Soldier, go in and report that Lu Su is here.

Soldier: Yes, sir. Commander, Master Lu is here to see you.

Zhou Yu: Ask him to come in.

Soldier: Please go in.

24. Huang Gai was wounded in battle. *Sanguo zhi*, 55.1285.

[*Lu Su greets Zhou Yu.*]

Zhou Yu: Master Lu, what did that scabby scoundrel, Zhuge Liang, have to say?

Lu Su: Commander, Zhuge Liang had Zhang Fei block the Wu generals at the city gate. I followed our lady into the city, and they performed the wedding ceremony. Our lady was very happy, and I suppose it is because she was pleased with Liu Xuande. It is quite obvious that neither of your strategies is working. Commander, why don't we just forget about the whole thing?

Zhou Yu: Master Lu, how could I bear to give up Jingzhou? You go back and report to our lord: a bride is supposed to visit her natal home after one month; make Liu Bei come together with her. Then I will order my generals to guard the ford and stop Liu Bei from going back. If he returns Jingzhou to us, everything is fine; if not, then we will kill him and attack Jingzhou. What do you think?

Lu Su: Commander, this is a great idea, but I fear that Zhuge Liang is not going to let Liu Bei cross the river.

Zhou Yu: Master Lu, just listen to me and report this to our lord. How can that scabby scoundrel see through this strategy?

Lu Su: Well then, I will obey your command. [*Recites*]:

Zhou Gongjin rules supreme in the South;
 Zhuge Liang has endless ingenious ideas.
 While the two of you have a duel of wits across the river,
 I alone have to travel back and forth. [*Exits.*]

Zhou Yu: Lu Zijing is gone. I am sure this strategy will work. Gan Ning, Ling Tong!

Gan Ning: Commander, what do you want us to do?

Zhou Yu: Each of you will take five thousand soldiers and guard the ford. When Liu Bei tries to cross the river, stop him.

Gan Ning: Yes, sir.

Zhou Yu: This strategy of mine is known as "acquiring their general by deception." We will see how that scabby scoundrel deals with it this time. [*Recites*]:

The world is divided into three kingdoms—
dragons and snakes mix together;
How insufferable is that Zhuge Liang,
who widely deploys his schemes.
If Liu Bei ever crosses the river and comes to us,
We will surely take the nine commanderies of Jingzhou.

[*Exits with Gan Ning and Ling Tong.*]

Zhugé Liang [*enters with soldiers*]: I, Kongming, have seen through Zhou Yu's strategy every time. Just the other day he again sent Lu Su over, requesting my lord and lady to visit her mother together. Instead of declining their request, I asked my lord to do exactly as they said. I suppose Zhou Yu wants to hold my lord hostage in exchange for Jingzhou. Ah, Zhou Yu! How could you outwit me in this game? Soldier, call Liu Feng in.

Soldier: Where is Liu Feng?

[*Liu Feng enters.*]

Liu Feng [*recites*]:

Liu Feng's fighting skills are a bit rusty;
As soon as there is a battle, he hides away.
He does not have much to do every day
But to follow around a fast talker to make iron nails.

I am Liu Feng. My father, Liu Xuande, has accompanied his new wife to visit her family. I wonder why the councilor sends for me today. Soldier, go in and let the councilor know that Uncle Liu is here to see him.

Soldier: Liu Feng is here.

[*Liu Feng greets Zhuge Liang*]: What do you want to see me for, councilor?

Zhugé Liang: Liu Feng, our lord has been gone for several days now. Why don't you bring him some clothes? Take this brocade bag with you—in it there is a letter, and you must not let anyone see it. Come close. [*Whispers to Liu Feng.*] Now, when you present the clothes to our lord, give him this brocade bag. Then you whisper to him and ask him to feign drunkenness and drop it by accident—and let Sun Quan pick it up. My strategy will work wonders. Be careful.

Liu Feng: I understand. I look forward to having a good time there.
[*Exits.*]

Zhuge Liang: Soldier, call in General Zhang Fei.

Soldier: Where is General Zhang?

[*Zhang Fei enters.*]

Zhang Fei: I am Zhang Fei. Zhou Yu's previous strategy has been seen through by our councilor. Now he has invited my brother and sister-in-law to go and visit her family. The councilor asks to see me, and I must obey. Soldier, go in and let the councilor know I have dismounted.

Soldier [*reports*]: General Zhang is here.

Zhang Fei [*greets Zhuge Liang*]: Councilor, you summoned me?

Zhuge Liang: General Zhang, I want you to go to the river and pick up my lord and lady. Come closer. [*Whispers into Zhang Fei's ear.*] Now do as I said.

Zhang Fei: Yes, sir, will do. [*Recites*]:

We are neighbors depending on each other
like lips and teeth,
For no reason at all they have declared war on us.
Now I will deploy a clever strategy in my lady's carriage,
And make that Zhou Yu die with rage.

Zhuge Liang [*laughs*]: Zhou Gongjin, how could you ever outwit me in this game? You want to hold my lord hostage, but I will make Sun Quan send my lord back of his own accord, and infuriate you to no end. [*Recites*]:

Zhou Gongjin deploys three strategies in succession;
All he ever gets in return is frustration.
He will kill himself with anger—
Too bad the younger Qiao will be a widow
for her remaining days. [*Exits*]

[*Madame Sun and Sun Quan enter with soldiers.*]

Madame Sun: I am Sun Quan's mother. My daughter, Sun An, has been married to Liu Xuande. Today is their one-month wedding anniversary.

sary, and my son-in-law has come to pay respects to me. I told my son that he should ask Xuande to stay a little longer to show him how we cherish him. Zhongmou, is the banquet ready?

Sun Quan: Yes, mother, the banquet is ready. I have requested Xuande to cross the river and pay respects to my mother, but my real intention is to use him as an exchange for Jingzhou. He has been here for quite a few days now, and we have not yet entertained him much. Soldier, invite Lord Xuande.

Soldier: Yes, my lord.

[*Liu Bei enters.*]

Liu Bei [*recites*]:

I am not sure what the secret scheme is;
But Kongming has made me cross the river.
When can this phoenix ever break the jade cage
and fly away,
And when will this dragon smash open the golden lock
and be free again?

After I, Liu Xuande, married Lady Sun An, Lu Su asked me to cross the river and pay respects to Madame Sun. I did not want to come, but my councilor said that I should put my mind at ease and just go, for he had a strategy to deal with the situation. I have been here for days now, and they will not let me leave. Today I received an invitation from the King of Wu, and I must accept. Soldier, go in and report that I am here.

Soldier: Your Grace, Lord Liu the Imperial Uncle is here.

Sun Quan: Invite him in immediately.

Soldier: Please go in.

Liu Bei [*greet*s Madame Sun and Sun Quan]: Madam, how could I be worthy of your generous treatment?

Sun Quan: Lord Xuande, forgive us, but we must await my sister for the drinks to begin.

[*Sun An enters with Meixiang.*]

Sun An: I, Sun An, have been married for over a month now. Today my mother and brother have invited my husband to a banquet. I must join them.

Meixiang: M'lady, I have already stolen a peek—it is really a splendid banquet!

Sun An: Meixiang, might this not be the same as the banquet of Hongmen prepared by the King of Chu?²⁵ [*Sings*]:

In this painted hall of ours, everything is in perfect order:
The shining tables are set up,
The delicacies are laid out;
Against the silver screen, embroidered sitting mats
are neatly arranged;
The sweet tune of the phoenix flutes is mixed
with the sound of the simurgh pan pipes.

Meixiang: M'lady, my lord is the only guest. Why is the banquet so sumptuous?

Sun An: How could you understand! [*Sings*]:

This is no “adding flowers to the brocade,”
But rather “hiding knives in one’s smiles.”
They had already put a heartless plot in place.

Meixiang: M'lady, please ask my lord to drink less today. Otherwise he will get drunk again, and I will have to wait on him!

Sun An [*sings*]:

Meixiang, how could you understand?
He is so full of worries,
And it is really easy for him
to fall under the influence of alcohol.

Meixiang: M'lady, what is my lord worried about?

Sun An [*sings*]:

25. The King of Chu was Xiang Yu 項羽 (232–202 BCE); he prepared a banquet for Liu Bang 劉邦 (later Han Emperor Gaozu) at Hongmen 鴻門, planning to assassinate him at the banquet. *Shi ji*, 7.312–13.

He is worried about news from Jingzhou—
About being separated from his sworn brothers
for all this time.

Meixiang: If so, then my lord should go back.

Sun An [*sings*]:

Girl, what a blockhead you are!
That brother of mine has a thousand clever ideas.
He is counting on keeping my lord here
to achieve his ambitious purpose.

Meixiang: If His Highness does not let my lord go, why, my lord could just sneak away, couldn't he?

Sun An [*sings*]:

Don't we need to arrange a boat?
And if an army is unleashed after us,
how do we get away on the Yangzi River?

Meixiang: In that case, m'lady, you surely need to make a plan for yourself. Let us first go and see Madam.

Sun An [*greet*s Madame Sun and Sun Quan]: Mother, brother, greetings.

Madame Sun: My daughter, we are all waiting for you to begin.

Sun Quan: Bring in the drinks.

Soldier: The drinks are here.

Sun Quan: Mother, please drink up.

Madame Sun: Alright, I will drink up. [*Drinks.*]

Sun Quan: And here's to you, Xuande.

Liu Bei: It is better to obey the host than to be overly polite. I will drink up.

Sun Quan: And here's to you, my sister.

Sun An: Brother, you first.

Sun Quan: No, sister, after you.

Sun An [*sings*]:

My esteemed brother, you must not trouble yourself
offering me this golden cup
brimming with fragrant brew.

Sun Quan [*speaks in a low voice*]: Sister, I want you to do something for me after drinking this.

Sun An [*sings*]:

When drinking, we should only speak of drinking;
Why do you try to hurt me again,
annoying me to no end?

Sun Quan: Sister, why should you be annoyed? Just drink up.

Sun An [*turns away from him, sings*]:

I will secretly offer this goblet of ale to heaven and earth,
To make a wish for us to be together as man and wife
till old age.

[*Sun An drinks.*]

Sun Quan: Let someone take the empty cup and fill it up again. Let us drink leisurely.

[*Liu Feng enters.*]

Liu Feng: I, Liu Feng, at the councilor's command bring some clothes to my father. I have brought a bag with me to take home all the leftovers after the banquet. Ah, I am already here! Someone, go in and report that Liu Feng is here.

Soldier: Yes, sir. My lord, someone by the name of Liu Feng is here.

Sun Quan [*aside*]: I wonder what Liu Feng is doing here. [*To Liu Bei*]: Lord Xuande, Liu Feng is here to see you.

Liu Bei [*pretends to be drunk*]: Madam, I have had enough to drink.

Sun Quan: Lord Xuande is drunk. Sister, why do you think Liu Feng is here?

Sun An: Brother, I have no idea.

Sun Quan: Sister, you misspoke—how could you not know? Now tell me the truth: why is Liu Feng here?

Sun An [*sings*]:

Brother, ever since I got married,
you have been suspecting me of acting in strange ways;
but the truth is that your schemes
simply have not worked out so well.

Sun Quan: Ah sister, when did you ever listen to me in anything I asked you to do!

Sun An [*sings*]:

If I ever harbor any evil intention,
Heaven above is watching me.
I only wish you would let him go home,
So that we may avoid the use of swords and spears,
and the spilling of blood.

Sun Quan: Fine, call Liu Feng in.

Soldier: Liu Feng, my lord calls for you.

Liu Feng [*greets Sun Quan*]: I, Liu Feng, am bringing some warm clothes to my father, since he has been staying here quite a while and the weather is getting chilly. You might give me some of the leftovers from the banquet.

Sun Quan: I see! You are here to bring your father some warm clothes. Liu Feng, your father is drunk now.

Liu Feng: I see! I have not paid proper respects to everyone. Greetings, grandmother. Greetings, mother. Greetings, father—father is drunk. Father, Liu Feng is here, bringing you some warm clothes.

Liu Bei [*acts drunk*]: Madam, I have had enough to drink.

Liu Feng: Mother, how did my father get this drunk? Why don't you try to wake him?

Sun An: Liu Feng, let me ask you some questions first.

Liu Feng: Mother, what do you want to know?

Sun An [*sings*]:

Back home, are people happy or worried?

Liu Feng: The councilor and others are all fine; they have no worries.

Sun An [*sings*]:

And what is the situation—are things good or bad?

Liu Feng: One could buy a huge steamed bun with one badly minted coin at Jingzhou—this is all the situation there is.

Sun An [*sings*]:

Perhaps the generals—Yunchang and Yide—
are feeling restless and anxious?

Liu Feng: My two uncles drink all day long and are having a great time—they are not anxious at all.

Sun An [*sings*]:

I am afraid that they are eagerly waiting for news
that is not coming their way,
wondering why we are tarrying here.
I am afraid that they might gossip about me
behind my back.

Liu Feng: Father is drunk and has dozed off. Mother, please rouse him.

Sun An: Let me rouse him. My Lord Xuande, Liu Feng is here. He has brought you some warm clothes.

Liu Bei [*casts furtive glances at Liu Feng*]: My lady, I cannot drink any more.

Sun An [*sings*]:

He is about to open his bleary eyes,
But he does not want anyone to see that he is looking.
All his clever ideas—
he keeps to himself.

Sun Quan: Sister, why don't you rouse him, help him change into the clothes brought by Liu Feng, and make him drink some more?

Sun An [*sings*]:

You ask me to rouse him from sleep,
And help him change into the warm clothes,
But it is hard to wake a drunken man—

Liu Feng: When will father wake up then?

Sun An [*sings*]:

He will sleep till the bright moon
shines over the flowers.

Sun An: My Lord Xuande, why don't you change into the warm clothes?

Liu Bei [*awakes*]: Ah, wife, ask Liu Feng to come here.

Sun An: Liu Feng, go to your father.

Liu Feng [*greets Liu Bei*]: Father, I have brought you some warm clothes.

Liu Bei: Hand them to me. [*Puts on clothes.*]

Liu Feng [*hands him the brocade bag*]: Father, please put this bag away.

Sun Quan [*aside*]: Ah, a brocade bag!

[*Liu Bei puts the bag in his sleeve.*]

Liu Feng [*whispers to Liu Bei*]: Father, be careful.

Liu Bei: I understand.

Sun An: This is truly strange. [*Sings*]:

Whispered words go into his ear,
And he understands in his heart—
He hides it all from me,
Not knowing I am on his side.

Liu Feng: Mother, look after father.

Sun An [*sings*]:

How can I ever go against him?

Though a pretty woman,
I am also a loyal subject.

Liu Bei: Liu Feng, why don't you go home now?

Liu Feng: But I have not even had one drink yet! Oh fine. Grandma, mother, I will take my leave now. [*Recites*]:

The councilor asked me to bring
some warm clothes for my father;
I sped on the river in a favorable wind,
following the currents.
Having traveled several thousands of miles,
I got an eyeful of the feast, but left on an empty belly.

Sun Quan [*aside*]: Liu Feng is gone. I saw him hand a brocade bag to Liu Xuande—I bet it is a letter. Liu Xuande is already drunk. Sister, you never listened to me in anything; why cannot you obey me this one time? Won't you get that brocade bag for me, please? Ask Meixiang to help Liu Xuande to bed, and sneak that letter out to me. I will return it to you after I take a look at it. What, you won't even do this one little thing for me? Mother, Liu Xuande is drunk. Why don't you tell Meixiang to help him to bed?

Madame Sun: Meixiang, help your lord to bed.

Meixiang: My lord, you are drunk. Let me help you to bed.

Sun Quan: Lord Xuande, we will get together again tomorrow.

Liu Xuande [*bows*]: Thank you. I am much obliged. [*Drops the brocade bag and exits.*]

Sun Quan [*picks up the bag*]: Thank heaven, he dropped the bag and I picked it up. Liu Bei, you are doomed. Let me open it and see what is inside. Ah, I knew it is a letter. [*Reads the letter.*] "Zhuge Liang respectfully reports to Lord Xuande: Even since my lord left, the generals have all been dutiful, so there is no need for my lord to be concerned. However, Cao Cao, harboring resentment because of his defeat at Red Cliff, is on his way to Jingzhou with an army of a million soldiers. When you receive this letter, please do not be so eager to come back. I will order the generals to guard the various passes. I also plan to

borrow additional troops from the King of Wu. For one thing, the generals of Wu are all old acquaintances of ours; for another thing, we have formed a marriage alliance with Wu. For these reasons, the King of Wu will surely not reject our request for help. Please take care not to leak the content of this letter. Yours, Zhuge Liang.” Aha, so this is what happens! Why, then, should I hold him here? I might as well let him go. I will of course not lend him any troops; I will just wait for Cao Cao to finish him off. Sister, pack your bags. Go back to Jingzhou with Lord Xuande immediately.

Sun An: Thank you, brother.

Madame Sun: Zhongmou, why do you make them leave?

Sun Quan: Mother, you don't understand. [*Whispers into Madame Sun's ear.*]

Madame Sun: In that case, I will leave the matter to you.

Sun An [*sings*]:

While they are all worried,
I have a smile on my face.
I will happily be the gigantic turtle of the Eastern Sea
That escapes from the golden hook and goes free.

Sun Quan: Sister, why don't you leave right away?

Sun An [*sings*]:

You fear I might linger out of affection,
but all I want is to make haste
and get back to our Jingzhou as soon as I can.
Even if you host a thousand feasts,
don't you ever invite *me*
to be your guest again. [*Exits with Madame Sun.*]

Sun Quan: Who would know that Zhou Yu deployed another strategy for nothing? Now, if Zhuge Liang comes here to borrow our troops, I am sure I would be persuaded by him again. However, as the saying goes: “The tracks of the overturned cart should serve as a warning for the cart that comes later.” I already made a mistake once by lending

them my troops, so why should I do it again? I might as well release Liu Xuande and let him go back with my sister immediately. [*Recites*]:

I wanted to trade Liu Bei for Jingzhou;
 Who would expect that Cao Cao's army is here again?
 I might as well send Liu Bei across the river,
 To be spared from the nuisance
 of lending him my troops. [*Exits*.]

Wedge²⁶

[*Liu Bei enters with entourage.*]

Liu Bei [*recites*]:

As we hastily depart from Wu and take the road home,
 Jingzhou is still far away at the edge of the clouds.
 Once the whale is free of the golden hook,
 It shall never come back again.

I, Liu Bei, have stayed in Wu for more than ten days. Sun Quan planned to detain me as a hostage, trading me for Jingzhou. Yesterday Kongming dispatched Liu Feng to bring me some clothes as well as a brocade bag with a letter in it, which I deliberately dropped for Sun Quan to pick up. Unaware that it was Kongming's trick, Sun Quan immediately sent my wife and me on our way. Gan Ning and Ling Tong tried to stop us at Jiangkou, but thanks to my wife, they were forced to withdraw. Now we are not far from Jingzhou. I only worry that Zhou Yu might come after us himself. I wish that someone would come to our rescue!

[*Sun An enters in her carriage.*]

Sun An: Lord Xuande, we must tell the entourage to hurry.

Liu Bei: Back at Jiangkou, if you, my lady, did not order the Wu generals to withdraw, how could we have made it through? This is the ford at

26. See Translator's Note at the end of the play.

Hanyang, and we are already in the territory of Jingzhou. Even so, I worry that Zhou Yu may come after us himself.

Sun An: My lord, please do not worry. I am sure that Councilor Zhuge has thought of something. Look, there are some troops in the midst of the reeds. That must be our men from Jingzhou.

[*Zhang Fei enters with soldiers.*]

Zhang Fei: I, Zhang Fei, have come to Hanyang to greet my brother at the councilor's command. Ah, there they are! [*Greets Liu Bei and Sun An.*]

Liu Bei: Third brother, I am so glad you are here. What is our councilor's plan?

Zhang Fei: Brother, please ask my sister-in-law to step out of her carriage and ride to Jingzhou on horseback. [*Whispers into Liu Bei's ear.*] This is what the councilor said.

Liu Bei: I see. My lady, will you please step out of your carriage and ride with me? We will leave first, and General Zhang will follow.

Sun An [*alights from carriage and gets on horse*]: Brother-in-law, please be careful.

Zhang Fei [*sings*]:

Switch carriage for horse and be on your way.
Zhou Yu will be confounded to no end,
And he will learn never to play games with *me* again.
If he does, then with my spear I will send him running
in fine shape.

[*Liu Bei exits with Sun An and Meixiang.*]

Zhang Fei: Soldier, take my horse. Let me get into the carriage and settle in comfortably. Move along!

[*Zhou Yu enters with Gan Ning and Ling Tong.*]

Zhou Yu: I, Zhou Gongjin, had a hard time getting Liu Bei to cross to our side of the river. Why did my lord let him go so easily? How can I bear this? Gan Ning, Ling Tong!

Gan Ning and Ling Tong: At your command, sir.

Zhou Yu: I ordered the two of you to guard the ford at Jiangkou. Why did you disobey me and let Liu Bei go?

Gan Ning: Of course we would not have let him go—we guarded the ford as tightly as a purse. But Lady Sun An said that they had been sent on their way by Madame Sun and our king himself. Her Ladyship always has quite a temper, not to mention she is Madame Sun's favorite child. Even if you, sir, had been there in person, you might not have been able to stop her, let alone the two of us.

Zhou Yu [*angrily*]: Shut up! Haven't you heard the saying that "a general on battlefield does not have to obey the king's command"? I gave you an order—who gives a damn about Lady Sun An! I will forgive you this time, but you must make amends for what you did. Get your men ready—we will chase them down.

Gan Ning: Look, isn't that our lady's carriage? Commander, wouldn't it be good if you could catch up with her and ask her in person?

Zhou Yu [*alights from horse and kneels*]: My lady, I, Zhou Yu, devised three strategies and formed this marriage alliance with Liu Bei in order to get back Jingzhou. We finally got Liu Bei on this side of the river, and I was planning to trade him for Jingzhou. Why did my lady dismiss the generals at Jiangkou so that he could pass through? When can we ever get Jingzhou back now? It is not right for my lady to defend your husband like that.

Zhang Fei [*opens the carriage curtain*]: Hey, Zhou Yu, do you recognize me? What a strategy you've got! Don't you feel ashamed of yourself? If you had not knelt down before the carriage, I would have made a hole in your chest with my spear!

Zhou Yu [*enraged*]: It is Zhang Fei in the carriage! Oh that I should have knelt down before *him*! How infuriating! [*Faints.*]

Gan Ning: General Zhang, our commander's old arrow wound has just opened.

Zhang Fei: Fine, I won't kill him then. Just take him back to your camp.

[*Gan Ning and Ling Tong carry Zhou Yu away.*]

Zhang Fei: Ha, Zhou Yu, I bet you are not going to survive this! My brother and sister-in-law are far ahead now. Soldiers, bring my horse and follow up with the carriage. I will catch up with my brother and sister-in-law, and report back to the councilor. [*Exits.*]

ACT FOUR

[*Zhuge Liang enters with soldiers.*]

Zhuge Liang: Zhou Yu planned to trade my lord for Jingzhou. I, Zhuge Kongming, sent Liu Feng to bring my lord some warm clothes and a brocade bag. I knew that Sun Quan would let my lord go as soon as he saw my letter, and I ordered General Zhang to meet my lord by the river. I have also prepared a banquet to welcome my lord and lady back. They should be here any time now.

[*Liu Feng enters.*]

Liu Feng: I, Liu Feng, took some warm clothes to my father on the other side of the river. My father was so drunk that I starved all day. I am going to see the councilor now.

Soldier: Councilor, Liu Feng is here.

Liu Feng [*greets Zhuge Liang*]: Councilor, I handed the clothes and brocade bag to my father, who asked me to come back first. Councilor, Sun Quan prepared quite a banquet. Poor me—my eyes had their fill, but my belly did not get any.

Zhuge Liang: Liu Feng, you did well.

Liu Feng: Thank you, councilor.

[*Liu Bei enters.*]

Liu Bei: I was detained for more than ten days; thanks to the councilor, Sun Zhongmou sent my lady and me on our way, and my brother Zhang Fei escorted us home. My lady has retired to the rear hall. I am going to see the councilor now.

Soldier: Councilor, our lord has arrived.

Zhuge Liang: My lord is here! I will go and greet him. [*Greets Liu Bei.*]

Liu Bei: Councilor, what a wonderful strategy you devised! As soon as Sun Quan saw your letter, he let me go.

Zhuge Liang: My lord, please be seated. When the generals are all here, we will celebrate.

[*Guan Yu and Zhao Yun enter.*]

Guan Yu: I am Guan Yunchang; this is Zhao Zilong. At the councilor's command, we went to Fancheng and Xinye to get the troops ready. We have learned that my brother is back today. Zilong, let us go and greet my brother.

Zhao Yun: After you, General Guan. Soldier, go in and report that that Generals Guan and Zhao are here.

Soldier: General Guan and General Zhao are here.

Guan Yu: Councilor, we are back from Fancheng and Xinye.

Zhuge Liang: Please wait for General Zhang. Then we will begin the banquet to welcome our lord and lady.

[*Zhang Fei enters.*]

Zhang Fei: Soldier, go in and report that Zhang Fei is here.

Soldier: General Zhang is here.

Zhang Fei [*greets everyone*]: Councilor, after I met with my brother and sister-in-law, I sat in my sister-in-law's carriage and waited for Zhou Yu. Zhou Yu caught up with me, and then he knelt down in front of the carriage and made a full report of his scheme. I opened the carriage curtain and embarrassed him real good. He was so mad that he passed out on the spot, and his generals had to carry him away. He is probably dead by now.

Zhuge Liang: General Zhang, congratulations on a deed well done! Our lord is back today; the marriage alliance is in place; and Jingzhou is intact. I have prepared a banquet to celebrate, and would like to invite Lady Sun to join us.

Guan Yu: Councilor, you are right. Soldier, go and invite my sister-in-law to the party.

Soldier: My lady, please join the party.

[*Sun An enters.*]

Sun An: I, Sun An, have come back to Jingzhou with my Lord Xuande safe and sound. The councilor has prepared a banquet to reward the generals and celebrate the happy occasion. It has not been easy! [*Sings*]:

The gracious host is holding a sumptuous banquet,
Which bodes well for a happy conjugal life thereafter,
A match that is matchless in this world.
I think back to the time
 when an emissary was dispatched to Jingzhou,
And my brother sent his own blood and flesh
 across the river as bait.
If not for the ingenious arrangements of the councilor,
How could a pair of mandarin ducks ever live in peace?²⁷

Zhuge Liang: My lady is here. My lord, everyone, please be seated.

Liu Bei: Generals, if not for the councilor's ingenuity, how could I get back to Jingzhou!

Zhuge Liang: It is certainly not due to my ingenuity or to the generals' efforts. First of all, it is because of our lord's good fortune; second, we must thank our lady for her wisdom and virtue. Soldiers, bring in the drinks.

Soldiers: Yes, sir.

Zhuge Liang: Let me first offer a toast to our lord and lady, and then to the generals. [*Offers toasts.*]

Sun An [*sings*]:

On the faces of the ministers and generals
There are merriment and delight;
On the tables delicacies and drinks
Are neatly laid out;

27. A pair of mandarin ducks refers to a romantic couple, here Liu Bei and Sun An.

In the painted hall sweet music is played;
 And from the jeweled incense burners
 The perfumed smoke rises.
 We bow to our lord, wishing him a thousand years.
 I wonder: even after the great Battle of Red Cliff,
 Was there ever such joyful festivity as this?

Zhuge Liang [*offers another toast*]: My lady, please drink this cup.

Sun An: After you, councilor.

Zhuge Liang: My lady, I would not presume. Please drink first.

Sun An [*sings*]:

The councilor offers me a toast,
 Yet how could I, a woman wearing hairpins and skirt,
 deserve such an honor?
 We owe our victory to your decisiveness and your insight
 well worthy of a commander-in-chief
 and a prime minister;
 I have done nothing to justify
 this generous compliment.

Zhuge Liang: My lady, please do drink up.

Sun An: All right, I will. [*Drinks.*]

Liu Bei: Bring in the drinks. I will offer a toast to the councilor.

Sun An [*sings*]:

Indeed we should thank your councilor,
 Who used one letter to guarantee your freedom.
 He predicted a thousand successes and failures,
 and warded off a hundred harms.
 Everyone says "Bravo!" about this game well played.
 To whom else should we give credit
 for preserving Jingzhou's peace and prosperity?

Liu Bei: Generals, fill up your goblets. You must not leave unless you all get drunk.

Guan Yu: Sister-in-law, in the beginning, how did Zhou Yu scheme to get Jingzhou? Why don't you tell us the whole story?

Sun An [*sings*]:

Wu wanted to take Jingzhou,
But nobody had a good plan,
And Zhou Yu wanted to show off
His talent for wild schemes.
He designed a marriage alliance
And had the bride escorted here—
But what they asked me to do
I did not pay it any heed.

Zhang Fei: If not for my wise and virtuous sister-in-law, my brother would have fallen into their trap.

Sun An [*sings*]:

It has little to do with wisdom or virtue—
One just has to be sensible in what one does.
Before I entered your door,
I had already surrendered my heart.
Once we become kin,
We must establish trust.
If we live with each other in peace,
Zhou Yu's schemes will be all for naught.

Zhuge Liang: Few people are as honorable as my lady.

Sun An [*sings*]:

It is also because
 this is a match made in heaven,
 between a man and woman
 drawn to each other by destiny.
Husband and wife who care for each other
 will live in love and harmony forever.
May the dynasty last tens of thousands of years,
 the frontiers be shielded from wars,
 and all disasters averted.

We will pour the royal ale,
 decorate ourselves with palace flowers,
 revel in the joy of the feast
 for all eternity.

Zhuge Liang: Generals, please kneel and listen to our lord, who will administer rewards according to your accomplishments. [*Recites*]:

Once I was a recluse, living a quiet life on the farm;
 I met a wise ruler, who paid me three visits.
 Now I serve as army councilor,
 with my black turban and feather fan,
 Devising tactics and maneuvers.
 We borrowed Jingzhou to camp our troops,
 But the Kingdom of Wu kept trying to take it from us.
 They came up with many strategies,
 each time seen through;
 Finally they sent an envoy to discuss a marriage alliance.
 They invited my lord to cross the river, intending harm;
 But when my brocade bag arrived,
 they immediately let him go.
 Although Zhang Yide is uncouth,
 He played a fine lady in the carriage.
 Zhou Yu was humiliated on the spot,
 His arrow wound broke, his life was in peril.
 Guan Yunchang's bold plans are peerless in the world;
 Zhao Zilong is well known for his courage.
 Even though Liu Feng has never fought a battle,
 He did well by trekking back and forth.
 Lord Xuande descends from the imperial lineage;
 Lady Sun is from a renowned clan.
 Together they are a match made in heaven,
 And with this banquet we celebrate the eternal spring.
 All generals shall be rewarded and promoted,
 And should thank our lord for his infinite grace.

Sun An: Oh, my lord— [*Sings*]:

He descends from the imperial house of the Han,

He will eventually conquer Wu and Wei,
uniting the world.
This demonstrates the talent of Zhuge,
the Recumbent Dragon,
And we must laugh at Zhou Yu,
who is mean and tough
but lives a short span.

THE END

Translator's Note: The "Wedge" (xiezi 楔子)

A *zaju* play is very much like a musical, which combines spoken dialogue, song, and acting. As the theater stage was typically quite bare, the reader may have noticed that the spoken dialogue serves to orient the audience regarding where a character is ("I am outside the camp now") and what s/he is doing or about to do ("I will go in and report to the commander"). The arias are written to preexisting melodies; thus the form is closely related to *ci*, whose lyrics are composed to preexisting tune titles. A *zaju* play typically consists of four acts and one or more "wedges." Each act has a set of eight to twelve songs in a different musical mode. As Idema and West explain in the introduction to their translations of *Three Kingdoms* plays, "A 'wedge' (*xiezi*) consisting of one or two songs may also precede any of the sets of songs, although most often this demi-suite comes before Act 1, 2, or 3" (*Battles, Betrayals, and Brotherhood*, xxiii).

In this play, the wedge comes before Act 4. It is remarkable for featuring a second singing voice in the play, which is strikingly assigned to Zhang Fei, a fierce general characterized by a thunderous voice and a dark complexion in the popular tradition. In the "Wedge," Zhang Fei switches places with Sun An and sits in her carriage waiting for Zhou Yu. Suspecting nothing, Zhou Yu kneels before the carriage and delivers a speech to the "young lady." In a comic case of mistaken identity, the contrast of a beautiful young lady with one of the most macho men in the world of the *Three Kingdoms* casts Zhang Fei as a foil to Sun An,

both reflecting her quasi-male heroic qualities and foregrounding her femininity. The playwright is clearly aware of the gender politics in this rare Three Kingdoms story that showcases a strong heroine: in the play, in a pointed comment on Sun Quan's claim that he is no longer a "real man" if he cannot get Jingzhou, Sun An calls herself "a real man without cap and sash"; yet, at the end of the play, she refers to herself as "a woman wearing hairpins and skirt," thus restoring a sense of gender "properness" and balance, but also demonstrating that even as a woman, she can play a powerful role.

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