

Chapter 2

SURVIVING IN HER VOICE

DEATH WAS “SOCIAL” primarily at the lineage level. It was to the bereaved lineage, with a focus on the male heir, that mourning and sacrificial rituals were ascribed. According to the *Zuo zhuan* 左傳, “people do not offer sacrifice to those not of their house.” Confucius (551–479 BCE) also said that “to offer sacrifice to spirits who are not your ancestors is ingratiating.”¹ Mourning anyone of a lateral or an unrelated lineage (e.g., a cousin or a friend) was considered proper only to some extent. As Lu Ji 陸機 (261–303 CE) put it, a gentleman was expected “not to lament until arriving at a funeral, and to cease wailing upon seeing plants rooted for over a year.”² Therefore, Lu Ji had to defend himself when grieving for Cao Cao 曹操 (155–220), who had been gone for decades. Despite the boundaries drawn by the mortuary rituals, Cao Pi 曹丕 (187–226) composed poems in the voices of these bereaved women: Cai Yong’s 蔡邕 (133–192) bereaved daughter Cai Yan 蔡琰 (ca. 178–post 206),³ Ruan Yu’s 阮瑀 (d. 212) widow, and Cao Pi’s mother Lady Bian 卞夫人 (159 or 161–230) in mourning for a Cao clan child.⁴ Moreover, Cao Pi commanded other poets to compose theirs side by side with him.

“Writing in the voices of others” is called *ni* 擬, *dai* 代, or *nidai* 擬代 in Chinese. For the economy of language, I also translate it as “to impersonate” or “impersonation” (without any negative connotations attached to this

1 Falkenhausen, *Chinese Society*, 23–24 and Part I; Campamy, “Ghosts Matter,” 17–18. For Durrant, Li, and Schaberg’s translation of 民不祀非族, see *Zuo Tradition*, Lord Xi 10/3 (1:300–1). For Chin’s translation of 非其鬼而祭之，諂也, see *The Analects*, 2/24 (24).

2 These lines (臨喪殯而後悲，覩陳根而絕哭) are from Lu Ji’s “Mourning Emperor Wu of Wei” (Diao Wei Wu wen 弔魏武帝文). See *Wen xuan*, 60.2594–601. The expression of “plants rooted for over a year” (*chen gen* 陳根, literally “old roots”) is from the expression of “grass growing for over a year” (*su cao* 宿草) in the *Li ji* 禮記: “On the tomb of a friend, if there is grass growing for over a year, one stops wailing thereafter” (朋友之墓，有宿草而不哭焉). See *Li ji jinzhu jinyi*, 3.66; Tian, *The Halberd at Red Cliff*, 175.

3 For a discussion of Cai Yan’s dates, see Frankel, “Cai Yan and the Poems,” 133–34.

4 For Lady Bian’s dates, see *Sanguo zhi jijie*, 5.580; *Taiping yulan*, 872.10a. Also see Cutter and Crowell’s note in the historical records *Empresses and Consorts*, 195n15.

English word). Impersonation is common in *yongwu* 詠物 poems such as a rhapsody on a caged oriole. It is also essential to the trope of a “longing wife” (*sifu* 思婦) or “abandoned wife” (*qifu* 棄婦), whose laments and complaints are conventionally read as a frustrated scholar’s yearning for his lord’s recognition.

But while impersonating a caged oriole or a longing wife was typical of a court composition, impersonating a bereaved woman was not. The mortuary rituals would discourage such composition in a court setting and for the purpose of expressing one’s yearnings for his lord’s recognition. Why did Cao Pi venture to cross the ritual boundaries? And why did he command other poets to do the same? Did death become bonding because the poems assumed the role of the bereaved at court? Or was it marginalizing, since those were written not in a male voice but a female one, not under Cao Cao’s command but Cao Pi’s? To look for answers, this chapter will reconsider the interrelationship among mortuary rituals, mourning genres, the trope of a longing wife, and court composition.

Away from Chang’an

A couplet from Wang Can’s 王粲 (177–217) pentasyllabic *shi* 詩 poem “Sevenfold Sadness” (Qi ai 七哀) captures the moment when he fled the old capital and gazed back at it:⁵

南登霸陵岸	Southward I climbed Baling’s slope,
迴首望長安	Turning my head I gazed at Chang’an.

Baling is the burial mound of Emperor Wen of Han 漢文帝 (r. 180–157 BCE), whose posthumous title represents cultural elegance. Chang’an 長安 (present-day Xi’an 西安, Shaanxi), literally “long-lasting peace,” had been the capital city during his reign, but in 192 it became an arena of revolts, assassins, and massacres. What Wang Can gazed back at was a falling empire and what he mourned was the death of cultural elegance.

In addition to the grand images of an imperial mound and an old capital, Wang Can includes a mother’s voice in the same poem. The sixteen-*sui* poet did not know who she was,⁶ not to mention to which lineage she belonged. But by impersonating her, he makes us hear the pain and think of all the mothers who have to leave their children behind:

⁵ *Wen xuan*, 23.1087.

⁶ *Sui* is a classifier of age. In traditional calculation, people turn one *sui* as soon as they are born.

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| 路有飢婦人 | On the road there was a starving woman, |
| 抱子棄草間 | Hugging her child and leaving it in the grass. |
| 顧聞號泣聲 | Looking back she heard it wailing and weeping, |
| 12 揮涕獨不還 | Wiping her tears, she still did not return. |
| 未知身死處 | "I do not know where I shall die, |
| 何能兩相完 | How can I keep the two of us alive?" |
| 驅馬棄之去 | Spurring my horse, I left her behind— |
| 16 不忍聽此言 | I could not bear to listen to these words. |

Wang Can kept heading south while Cai Yan was abducted to the north. They were the two book inheritors of the leading scholar Cai Yong: Wang Can as a young talent who had won Cai Yong's acclaim, and Cai Yan as the only child of Cai Yong's principal wife.⁷ During the political upheavals of Chang'an, Cai Yong was put to death and the two young people went in opposite directions. Wang Can fled south and served the warlord Liu Biao 劉表 (142–208) in present-day Hubei; Cai Yan was seized by non-Han cavalry and became a Xiongnu chieftain's wife in present-day Shanxi. It took them more than a decade to return to the central land, and Cao Cao was the key to their returns: He ransomed Cai Yan from the Xiongnu and remarried her to a commandant called Dong Si 董祀; when he launched a military expedition against Liu Biao, Wang Can joined his court.

In contrast to the anonymous female voice in Wang Can's poem, Cai Yan was known because of her father, the celebrated scholar Cai Yong. By arranging her ransom and remarriage, Cao Cao assumed the role of a guardian, not only of Cai Yong's heir but also of the cultural heritage that Cai Yong represented. According to the *Hou Han shu* 後漢書, when Dong Si committed a capital offence and Cai Yan pleaded on her husband's behalf, Cao Cao did not meet her separately to take care of the matter in private. Instead, he announced her to his guests—including high officials, famous scholars, and envoys from afar—as Cai Yong's daughter. Cai Yan managed to impress and move everyone with her plea, but Cao Cao again turned the focus to her role as Cai Yong's heir, asking if she remembered the books her father had owned. She did not disappoint Cao Cao, writing from memory the books she

⁷ Cai Yong had another daughter, who was likely born to a concubine. See Cao and Shen, *Zhonggu wenxue shiliao congkao*, 44. The books Wang Can received from Cai Yong were inherited by his cousin, whose son was the famous scholar Wang Bi 王弼 (226–249). For a discussion of the circulation of Cai Yong's books, see Yu, "Jian'an qizi nianpu," 418–19.

still remembered.⁸ Ransoming Cai Yong's bereaved daughter thus presented double meanings: the lineage of Cai Yong as well as the cultural heritage of a court.

In response to this meaningful ransom, Cao Pi composed a poem titled "Rhapsody on Cai Bojie's [style name of Cai Yong] Daughter" (Cai Bojie nü fu 蔡伯喈女賦). For its reference to a black jade disk, the preface is extant in the entry of "jade disk" (*bi* 璧) in the Song-dynasty literary compendium *Taiping yulan* 太平御覽. The main text of the rhapsody, on the other hand, is not included in the compendium or found elsewhere:⁹

My father was as fond of Cai Bojie just as Guan [Zhong] was of Bao [Shuya], and therefore commanded an envoy, Zhou Jin, to take a black jade disk to the Xiongnu to ransom Cai's daughter. When she was back, he married her to Dong Si, Commandant of the Commanderies with Agricultural Garrisons.

家公與蔡伯喈有管鮑之好，乃命使者周近持玄玉璧於匈奴贖其女，還以妻屯田郡都尉董祀。

In the Tang-dynasty literary compendium *Yiwen leiju* 藝文類聚, in the entry of "resentment" (*yuán* 怨), we find another rhapsody on Cai Yan. It is attributed to Ding Yi 丁廙 (d. 220), who joined Cao Cao's court during its founding years. It is possible that this piece was written for the same occasion as Cao Pi's, but the extant text in the literary compendium, which hardly quotes anything in full length, stops before referring to the ransom.

The first rhyme group in the extant text begins with a third-person pronoun *yi* 伊. She is described as sixteen *sui* and as splendid as the flowers in the legendary Deng Grove.¹⁰ She modelled herself after those in the first six chapters of the *Traditions of Exemplary Women* (*Lie nü zhuan* 列女傳) (line 5).¹¹ Moreover, she was "under the clear instructions given by her father" (line 7, which alludes to the relationship between Confucius and his son).¹²

8 *Hou Han shu*, 84.2800–801.

9 *Taiping yulan*, 806.9b (3584). Also see Frankel, "Cai Yan and the Poems," 134, 149; de Crespigny, *Fire over Luoyang*, 137–38n44.

10 For the legend in which the sun-chasing giant Kuafu's 夸父 staff transformed into the Deng Grove, see *Shanhai jing jiaozhu*, 8.238–39.

11 The *Traditions of Exemplary Women* is attributed to Liu Xiang 劉向 (79–78 BCE). Among its seven chapters, the first six present moral models (called *Liu Lie* 六列 in line 5), whereas the seventh presents "bad" examples.

12 The expression of "across the courtyard" (*guo ting* 過庭) in line 7 is from *The Analects* (16/13), in which Confucius gave his son instructions while the latter hurried across the courtyard. See *Lun yu zhushu*, 16.9b (150).

Then the metaphorical “cold frost” set in (line 14), marking a transitional point in her life. According to the *Hou Han shu*, her first husband, Wei Zhongdao 衛仲道, died early, and since they did not have children, Cai Yan returned to her maiden home. In Ding Yi’s observation, she “only wished to fully enjoy her remaining years” (line 16). But by marrying a Xiongnu chieftain, in Ding Yi’s unfair judgment, she was “ashamed to face the ‘Cypress Boat’ poet of old” (line 21).¹³ While the widow in the classic poem “Cypress Boat” (Bo zhou 柏舟, *Mao shi* 毛詩 45) refused to remarry, she “betrayed” the soul of her husband and was remarried. The entire rhyme group reads:¹⁴

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| 伊太宗之令女 | She is the esteemed daughter of the great clansman, |
| 稟神惠之自然 | Born with a disposition of unearthly grace. |
| 在華年之二八 | When it came to her sixteenth in blossom, |
| 4 披鄧林之曜鮮 | She displayed the splendour of Deng Grove. |
| 明六列之尚致 | Enlightened by the nobility in the six <i>Exemplary Women</i> chapters, |
| 服女史之話言 | She engraved on her mind the words of the lady scribes. |
| 參過庭之明訓 | Under the clear instructions given by her father, |
| 8 才朗悟而通玄 | She was bright and perceived the abstruse. |
| 當三春之嘉月 | During the three favourable months of spring, |
| 時將歸於所天 | It was time to marry to her “heaven,” the husband. |
| 曳丹羅之輕裳 | Trailing a light skirt of cinnabar-red gossamer, |
| 12 戴金翠之華鈿 | She wore hair-ornaments of gold and kingfisher feathers. |
| 美榮曜之所茂 | While praising how the luxuriant splendour thrived, |
| 哀寒霜之已繁 | One laments that the cold frost has grown profuse. |
| 豈偕老之可期 | Could anyone expect to grow old with their partner? |
| 16 庶盡歡於餘年 | She only wished to fully enjoy her remaining years. |
| 何大願之不遂 | How come her major wish was not fulfilled— |
| 飄微軀於逆邊 | Her humble body drifted to the borders among the rebels. |
| 行悠悠於日遠 | Travelling away and afar, further distant daily, |
| 20 入穹谷之寒山 | She entered the cold mountains among the deep valleys. |
| 慚柏舟於千祀 | Ashamed to face the “Cypress Boat” poet of old, |
| 負冤魂於黃泉 | She betrayed his soul under the Yellow Springs. |

13 For the “moral contempt in which Cai Yan was held by many,” see Frankel, “Cai Yan and the Poems,” 155.

14 *Yiwen leiju*, 30.542.

In the next two rhyme groups Ding Yi switches to the first-personal pronoun *wo* 我 to assume Cai Yan's inner voice. In her voice, more classical allusions are made, all of which are from the *Shi jing* 詩經 airs of Bei 邶, Yong 鄘, and Wei 衛, known for female laments: "I fear I will be worn out by the 'wild and windy'" (line 26, alluding to *Mao shi* 30), "I grieve that 'there is no regard for my person'" (line 38, alluding to *Mao shi* 35), and "Facing the 'south wind,' I weep tears of blood" (line 42, alluding to *Mao shi* 32). In addition to the *Shi jing*, the melancholy *Chu ci* 楚辭 is alluded to. "Intoning 'fragrant grass ten thousand *li* away'" (line 27), she attempts to summon her late husband's soul (see Chapter 3). But as the protagonist in the *Chu ci* usually does, she fails and finds herself approaching the "mulberry and elm" (line 34), where the rays of the setting sun linger. Neither accepted by her late husband (in the second rhyme group), nor recognized by her current one (in the third rhyme group), she becomes an abandoned wife in the conventional trope. The two rhyme groups read:

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| | 我羈虜其如昨 | Since I was abducted, which feels like yesterday, |
| 24 | 經春秋之十二
忍胡顏之重恥 | I have passed twelve springs and autumns.
Enduring the deep shame, the criticism
of "how unabashed she is," |
| | 恐終風之我萃
詠芳草於萬里 | I fear I will be worn out by the "wild and windy."
Intoning "fragrant grass ten thousand <i>li</i> away," |
| 28 | 想音塵之髣髴
祈精爽於交夢
終寂寞而不至
哀我生之何辜 | I recall his voice and traces in any semblance.
I prayed to meet his spirit in my dream,
In the end, all that arrived was silence and stillness.
I lament what wrongs I have done, |
| 32 | 為神靈之所棄
仰薜華其已落
臨桑榆之歔歔 | That I am abandoned by his spirit?
Looking up at the hibiscus flower—they have fallen;
Approaching the mulberry and elm—I sob and sigh. |
| | 入穹廬之祕館 | Since I entered the chieftain's residence in a yurt, |
| 36 | 亟踰時而經節
歎殊類之非匹
傷我躬之無悅
脩膚體以深[...] | I have been anxious to pass the hours and seasons.
Sighing that he, of a different kind, is not a good match,
I grieve that "there is no regard for my person."
Cultivating my form with deep [a character is missing here], |
| 40 | 念蘭澤之空設
佇美目於胡忌
向凱風而泣血 | I worry the thoroughwort oil is applied in vain.
Fixing my beautiful eyes afar, what am I afraid of?
Facing the "south wind," I weep tears of blood. |

The two poems attributed to Cai Yan and incorporated in the *Hou Han shu* are emotional in a distinct sense. What hurt her most was not being rejected by her late husband and unrecognized by her current one, but leaving behind the two children whom she bore the Xiongnu chieftain. She recalls:¹⁵

兒前抱我頸 My children came forward and hugged my neck,
問母欲何之 Asking, “Mother, where are you going?
[...]
兒呼母兮號失聲 My children, calling “Mother,” cried themselves hoarse;
我掩耳兮不忍聽 I, covering my ears, could not bear to listen.

Such a painful expression echoes the voice of a mother in Wang Can’s “Sevenfold Sadness,” but this time the tragedy takes place ironically upon Can Yan’s return to the central land. The *Hou Han shu* makes us realize that she was not only an abducted daughter or an abandoned wife. She was also a mother of two children whom she had to leave behind upon her ransomed return. And as mentioned before, her life was no easier afterwards. Dong Si, the husband Cao Cao arranged for her, committed a capital offence, and it was she who pleaded on his behalf. To survive all the hardships, how resilient Cai Yan must have been! While her contemporary Ding Yi makes a biased judgment of her and uses the conventional trope of an abandoned wife in his rhapsodic impersonation, the post-Cao scholar Fan Ye 范曄 (398–445) remarkably includes a resilient image of her in his historiography.

Beyond Ritual Time

Cao Pi, Wang Can, and a member of the Ding family impersonated another female of their time:¹⁶ Ruan Yu’s widow. Cao Pi’s preface to his “Rhapsody on the Widow” (Guafu fu 寡婦賦) reads:¹⁷

Ruan Yuanyu [style name of Ruan Yu] of Chenliu was a friend of mine. Ill-fated, he died early. Whenever I think of his bereaved children,¹⁸ I am invari-

15 *Hou Han shu*, 84.2802–3.

16 The Ding family member who impersonated the widow could be Ding Yi 丁儀 (the elder brother), Ding Yi 丁廙 (the younger brother), or the wife of either one of them. See my discussion later.

17 Yan Kejun reconstructs this preface in his *Quan Sanguo wen*, 4.4a (1073) from Li Shan’s commentary on Pan Yue’s “Rhapsody on the Widow” (*Wen xuan*, 16.735) and from the *Yiwen leiju*’s quote of Cao Pi’s “Rhapsody on the Widow” (*Yiwen leiju*, 34.600).

18 One of the children whom Ruan Yu left behind was the poet Ruan Ji 阮籍 (210–263). When Ruan Yu died, Ruan Ji was only three *sui*.

ably grief-stricken and wounded in heart. I therefore have composed this rhapsody to relate the sorrow and pain of his wife and children, and commanded Wang Can and others to compose theirs side by side with me.

陳留阮元瑜與余有舊，薄命早亡。每感存其遺孤，未嘗不愴然傷心。故作斯賦，以敘其妻子悲苦之情。命王粲等並作之。

Before Cao Pi's poetic impersonation, there were few poems that address a widow's sorrow and pain except for rhapsodies on music (*yinyue fu* 音樂賦). Instead of elaborating on the grand and splendid aspects of the empire, these rhapsodies charm by going into the desolate and sorrowful realm of life.¹⁹ In the music section of Mei Sheng's 枚乘 (d. 141 BCE) "Seven Stimuli" (Qi fa 七發), for example, a zither is decorated with the earrings of the "nine-son widow" (九寡 or 九子之寡母) and produces the saddest music that one can ever hear. In Wang Bao's 王褒 (ca. 84–ca. 53 BCE) "Rhapsody on the Panpipes" (Dongxiao fu 洞簫賦), for another example, Qi Liang's widow (杞梁之妻) is remembered for the moving music she played prior to her suicide.²⁰ Both widows are included in the *Traditions of Exemplary Women*. The "nine-son widow" is portrayed as a role model who abided by traditional expectations for women. Before visiting her maiden home, she asked her adult sons' permission; when returning, she was also careful not to interrupt her adult sons. Qi Liang's widow, childless and without kin, provides another traditional role model. When her husband was killed in battle, she asked the lord for proper mourning. Her laments were so earnest that the city wall where her husband lay crumbled. Moreover, she stated her resolution not to remarry and took her own life.²¹

Impersonating a friend's widow is different from impersonating historical characters: It risks crossing the boundaries drawn by the mortuary rituals. Pan Yue 潘岳 (247–300) must have sensed the risk, so he justified his "Rhapsody on the Widow" on the grounds that the widow was not only the wife of his boyhood friend Ren Hu 任護 (d. 276 or 277), but also a sister of his wife. His predecessor Cao Pi, on the other hand, did not have any familial relationship with Ruan Yu's widow. What was the circumstance, then, in which Cao Pi composed a rhapsody in the widow's voice, and commanded other poets to compose theirs side by side with him?

In a letter to Wu Zhi 吳質 (178–230), Cao Pi recalls a night excursion with Ruan Yu and other poets in Nanpi 南皮, a prefecture of Bohai 渤海 (present-

¹⁹ Chu, *Han fu shilue xinzheng*, 453.

²⁰ *Wen xuan*, 34.1562, 17.787.

²¹ Liu, *Gu Lienü zhuan*, 1.24a–25b, 4.12b–13b.

day Cangzhou 滄州, Hebei) that Cao Cao captured in 205 when he defeated Yuan Shao's 袁紹 (d. 202) first son Yuan Tan 袁譚 (d. 205). There Cao Pi had a great time with his poet friends. They enjoyed all kinds of pleasures from scholarly studies to board games, indoor to outdoor, north to south, day to night, fast to slow. Most important of all, they gathered as a group of like-minded men, sharing not only joyful thoughts but also sorrowful ones.²²

When the blazing sun hid away, it was succeeded by the bright moon. We rode together in the same carriage to roam in the rear park. The carriage wheels slowly moved; the entourage did not utter a sound. A cool breeze rose in the night; sorrowful reed pipes softly moaned. As joy departed, sadness arrived. We were grief-stricken and wounded in mind. I looked back and said, "This joy will not last." You and the others all thought it was true. Now we are indeed separated, each located in a quarter. Yuanyu [style name of Ruan Yu] has eternally gone, turning into an alien thing. Whenever thinking of this, [I would like to tell you all, but] when can I tell [you all ever again]? Just now the *ruibin* pitch marks the time [i.e., the second month of summer], with the Effulgent Wind fanning everything. The air is pleasantly warm, and a multitude of fruits all grow profuse. Sometimes I drive a carriage to roam, to the north along the bend of the Yellow River. Attendants sound reed pipes to clear the way, and my scholars ride in carriages behind. Seasons return but not time. Everything remains the same except for the people. How heavy-hearted I am!

白日既匿，繼以朗月，同乘竝載，以遊後園，輿輪徐動，參從無聲，清風夜起，悲筳微吟，樂往哀來，愴然傷懷。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？方今蕤賓紀時，景風扇物，天氣和暖，衆果具繁。時駕而遊，北遵河曲，從者鳴筳以啓路，文學託乘於後車。節同時異，物是人非，我勞如何！

The letter is dated to 215, three years after Ruan Yu's death.²³ The expression "whenever" (*mei* 每) suggests that the letter is a culmination of years' of remembrance. The same expression is found in Cao Pi's preface to his "Rhapsody on the Widow": "Whenever [*mei* 每] I think of his bereaved children, I am invariably grief-stricken and wounded in heart." We realize that the rhapsody is not necessarily an immediate response to Ruan Yu's death. It can be like the letter, written beyond ritual time: With a dirge (*lei* 誄) presented at the funeral, the living has spoken to the departed in public for the

22 The letter is titled "Letter to Wu Zhi, Magistrate of Zhaoge" (Yu Zhaoge ling Wu Zhi shu 與朝歌令吳質書). See *Wen xuan*, 42.1895.

23 For the date of the letter, see Shih, "Jian'an Literature Revisited," 227-30.

last time;²⁴ with grass growing for over a year on the tomb, the expected extent for a collegial condolence has also passed. But for the widow and Cao Pi, the pain of loss persists.

Their “Rhapsodies on the Widow” are extant in the literary compendium *Yiwen leiju*. A few additional lines are found in Li Shan’s 李善 (ca. 630–689) *Wen xuan* 文選 commentary, especially that on Pan Yue’s “Rhapsody on the Widow.” As mentioned earlier, it is questionable that the *Yiwen leiju* ever quotes anything in full length. Take Pan Yue’s “Rhapsody on the Widow” for example. In the sixth-century anthology *Wen xuan*, the rhapsody provides personal details (such as Ren Hu’s widow being orphaned) and funeral details (such as changing the furnishing colours to white and carrying the coffin to the graveyard). The *Yiwen leiju* skips not only most of those details, but also classical allusions if any of those are quoted elsewhere in the literary compendium.

Cao Pi’s “Rhapsody on the Widow” in the *Yiwen leiju* most likely has undergone similar abridgement. With few personal and funeral details, everything becomes indefinite and infinite. There is no spring, and the summer days and autumn nights feel too long. Soon it is winter, which only freezes the lonely one further into loneliness:²⁵

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| | 惟生民兮艱危 | Verily, all people experience hardship and danger; |
| | 在孤寡兮常悲 | But to orphans and widows, it is perpetual sorrow. |
| | 人皆處兮歡樂 | Everyone else lives in joy and happiness, |
| 4 | 我獨怨兮無依 | I alone resent that I have no one to rely on. |
| | 撫遭孤兮太息 | Patting the bereaved children, I heave a great sigh; |
| | 俛哀傷兮告誰 | Lowering my head in lament—whom shall I tell? |
| | 三辰周兮遞照 | Sun, moon, and stars revolve, shining in succession, |
| 8 | 寒暑運兮代臻 | Cold and heat rotate, arriving in turn. |
| | 歷夏日兮苦長 | I have passed summer days, which were way too long; |
| | 涉秋夜兮漫漫 | I have crossed autumn nights, which went on and on. |
| | 微霜隕兮集庭 | Light frost fell and gathered in the courtyard; |

24 Most of the dirges use second-person pronouns to speak to the departed, whereas most of the rhapsodies in memory of the departed are written from a third-person perspective (except for the finales, if any). Compare how Pan Yue refers to his father-in-law in his “Dirge for Yang, Inspector of Jing Province” (Yang Jingzhou lei 楊荊州誄) and his “Rhapsody on Yearning for Former Friends and Kin” (Huai jiu fu 懷舊賦) in *Wen xuan*, 56.2439–44 and 16.730–32. Also see Chapter 5 for Cao Pi’s lament (equivalent to a dirge) and Cao Zhi’s dirge, both referring to their deceased father by second-person pronouns.

25 *Yiwen leiju*, 34.600.

- 12 鶯雀飛兮我前 Swallows and sparrows flew away from me.
 去秋兮就冬 Autumn left and winter approaches;
 改節兮時寒 The season has changed and it gets cold.
 水凝兮成冰 Water has frozen and become ice;
- 16 雪落兮翻翻 Snow is falling lightly and airily.
 傷薄命兮寡獨 Grieving for my ill fate, I live lonely in widowhood;
 內惆悵兮自憐 Feeling low and down, I feel for myself.

In addition to the “Rhapsody on the Widow,” a “*Shi* on the Widow” (Guafu shi 寡婦詩) is also attributed to Cao Pi in the *Yiwen leiju*.²⁶ In his study of Pan Yue’s rhapsody and its precedents, Nicholas Morrow Williams suspects that the *shi* poem, resembling the rhapsody in contents and metre, may have been a section of the rhapsody.²⁷ In my observation, the *shi* poem may have been no other section but the finale, at least part of it.

A finale is usually marked with “as the summary goes” (*luan yue* 亂曰), sometimes with “as the appended reiteration goes” (*xi yue* 系曰), and other times with “as the reprise goes” (*chong yue* 重曰). The finale of Pan Yue’s “Rhapsody on the Widow,” for example, is marked with *chong yue*. From these markers we know the main function of a finale is to summarize and reiterate. Cao Pi’s rhapsody may lose its finale marker in the process of quotation and transmission, but his *shi* poem is indeed a reiteration of his rhapsody, including the falling frost, migrating birds, and the loneliness of the widow:

- 霜露紛兮交下 Frost and dew, in a flurry, swirl down;
 木葉落兮萋萋 Tree leaves fall in profusion and abundance.
 候鴈叫兮雲中 Migrant geese call in the clouds,
- 4 歸鶯翻兮徘徊 Returning swallows, lightly, flutter to and fro.
 妾心感兮惆悵 I, your handmaid, feel low and down;
 白日急兮西頽 The blazing sun, in haste, is dropping west.
 守長夜兮思君 I stay awake through the long night, longing for you, Milord;
- 8 魂一夕兮九乖 In one evening, my soul departs from me nine times.
 悵延佇兮仰視 At a loss, I remain standing and look up—
 星月隨兮天迴 Stars and moon revolve with the sky.

26 *Yiwen leiju*, 34.595–96. Another “*Shi* on the Widow” is attributed to Cao Zhi in Li Shan’s commentary. The extant lines (高墳鬱兮巍巍，松柏森兮成行) follow the same metre as Cao Pi’s. See *Wen xuan*, 23.1094, under 松柏森已行.

27 Williams, “Pan Yue’s ‘Study of a Widow,’” 354.

- 徒引領兮入房 Craning forward in vain, I enter the room;
 12 竊自憐兮孤栖 Feeling for myself in secret, I rest alone.
 願從君兮終沒 I wish to follow you, Milord, to sink away for good;
 愁何可兮久懷 This sorrow—how can I bear it long?

When reading this “reiteration,” we immediately find something different: the use of personal pronouns. Line 5 uses the humble first-person pronoun “I, your handmaid” (*qie* 妾); lines 7 and 13 use the honorific second-person pronoun “Milord” (*jun* 君). By using these pronouns, the *shi* poem/finale impersonates a widow who is speaking to her husband. The rhapsody/body, on the other hand, uses *wo* 我, a first-person pronoun without any relational connotations, to impersonate a widow who is speaking to a general audience. Same distinction exists between the body and finale of Pan Yue’s rhapsody. In the body of Pan Yue’s rhapsody, the widow uses *yu* 予, another first-person pronoun without any relational connotations, to refer to herself. When it comes to the finale, she addresses her husband by using the honorific second-person pronoun “Milord” (*wujun* 吾君). These traces suggest that the poetic impersonation of a widow consists of a body with her self-statement to a general audience, and a finale with her words for her husband.

In Wang Can’s “Rhapsody on the Widow,” she closes the door to sweep the floor (line 1), obviously not to greet guests.²⁸ She sees, or remembers, the world in blossom (line 7), but now lives in a secluded world of falling leaves (line 8). The days are not bright enough to pull oneself together, nor are the nights dark enough to rest. Li Shan cites Wang Can twice: lines 3–4 and lines 17–18. In both cases Wang Can turns our attention to the young children, echoing what Cao Pi writes in the preface: “Whenever I think of his bereaved children, I am invariably grief-stricken and wounded in heart. I therefore have composed this rhapsody to relate the sorrow and pain of his wife and children, and commanded Wang Can and others to compose theirs side by side with me.” The extant text reads:²⁹

- 闔門兮却掃 Closing the door to sweep the floor,
 幽處兮高堂 I live secluded in the lofty hall.
 提孤孩兮出戶 Carrying the fatherless children out the door,

28 I read *quesao* 却掃 as “to take a step back to sweep the floor,” or simply “to sweep the floor” with the implied retreating motion in mind. Similarly, *queli* 却立 means “to take a step back to stand” or simply “to stand back” in the context of Lin Xiangru’s 藺相如 (fl. 298–266 BCE) threat to smash a precious jade disk. See *Shi ji*, 81.2440.

29 *Yiwen leiju*, 34.601. The last two lines are supplied from Li Shan’s commentary. See *Wen xuan*, 16.739, under 鞠稚子於懷抱兮，羌低徊而不忍。

- 4 與之步兮東廂 I walk together with them in the east wing.
 顧左右兮相怜 Looking to my left and right, I feel for them;
 意悽愴兮摧傷 Sad and grief-stricken, I am broken and wounded.
- 觀草木兮敷榮 Seeing grasses and trees display their luxuriance,
 8 感傾葉兮落時 I feel for the tilting leaves, for their falling time.
 人皆懷兮歡豫 Everyone else experiences joy and happiness,
 我獨感兮不怡 I alone feel discontented.
- 日掩曖兮不昏 The sun, obscure and overcast, is not dusking;
 12 朗月皎兮揚暉 The bright moon is pure, sending forth its radiance.
 坐幽室兮無為 Sitting in my secluded chamber, I do nothing;
 登空床兮下幃 Climbing into the empty bed, I let down the curtains.
 涕流連兮交頰 My tears flow in streams, crossing at my neck;
 16 心慳結兮增悲 My heart aches and knots, loaded with more sorrow.
- [欲引刃以自裁 Planning to draw a blade to end myself,
 顧弱子而復停 I looked back at my delicate children and stopped.

Finally, there is a rhapsody attributed to a member of the Ding family. Some scholars believe it is an autobiography of Ding Yi's widow (or that of his elder brother Ding Yi's 丁儀 widow) when the Ding brothers were executed.³⁰ I doubt this interpretation. The extant text refers to *ruo zi* 弱子, literally "sons in delicate ages," as the last line of Wang Can's rhapsody does. But while Ruan Yu was survived by sons, the Ding family was not. According to the *Sanguo zhi* 三國志, all the male members of the Ding family were killed along with the Ding brothers.³¹ Therefore, the rhapsody is more likely a court composition in the voice of Ruan Yu's widow than a Ding widow's autobiography, and the "peril" mentioned in the rhapsody (line 10) is more likely Ruan Yu's death than Ding Yi/Yi's. The first rhyme group reads:³²

惟女子之有行 Verily, that women go forth to marry
 固歷代之彝倫 Certainly is the rule through the ages.

30 *Quan Han fu jiaozhu*, 1174n5.

31 *Sanguo zhi jijie*, 19.1564.

32 *Yiwen lejju*, 34.601. I replace 情 with 清 in line 4 according to *Chuxue ji* (14.354, under 辭父母遠兄弟); *Beitang shuchao* (84.7b, under 辭父母); and Cao Zhi's line 君若清路塵 in his "Sevenfold Sadness" (*Wen xuan*, 23.1086). Lines 7–8 are supplied from Li Shan's commentary. See *Wen xuan*, 16.735–36, under 懼身輕而施重兮，若履冰而臨谷。

- 辭父母而言歸 Leaving my parents and going to wed,
 4 奉君子之(情)[清]塵 I served in his lord's immaculate traces.
 如懸蘿之附松 Just as hanging moss clings to the pine,
 似浮萍之託津 I was like floating duckweed on the riverbank.
 [恐施厚而德薄 Fearing his favour was too much for my scarce virtue,
 8 若履冰而臨淵] I felt like treading on ice and approaching an abyss.
 何性命之不造 How come I was so ill-fated,
 遭世路之險迤 That I met such a peril on my life journey?
 榮華曄其始茂 When my luxuriant florescence shines and began to thrive,
 12 所恃奄其徂泯 He whom I relied on, all of a sudden, departed and vanished.

The second rhyme group begins in a way similar to Wang Can's poetic impersonation, with her quietly shutting the door. The third rhyme group also resembles Wang Can's poetic impersonation by referring to the young children. What distinguishes this rhapsody from Wang Can's is its inclusion of funeral details. Here we see the widow changing everything to white and plain, which tells us that it was during the first few days:

- 靜閉門以却掃 Quietly I shut the door to sweep the floor;
 魂孤瓮以窮居 My soul was all alone, living depleted.
 刷朱扉以白堊 Daubing the vermilion door in white plaster,
 16 易玄帳以素幃 I replaced the black bed curtains with plainsilk.
 含慘悴以何訴 Heart-wrenched and worn—whom shall I tell?
 抱弱子以自慰 I hugged my delicate children to console myself.
 時翳翳以東陰 The hour, gloom of gloom, darkened the east;
 20 日晷晷以西墜 The sun, onward and onward, dropped west.
 雞斂翼以登棲 Roosters folded their wings and climbed up to nest,
 雀分散以赴肆 Sparrows scattered and vanished into the marketplace.
 還空床以下帷 Returning to my empty bed, letting down the curtain,
 24 拂衾褥以安寐 I dusted the quilt and mat to have a sound sleep.
 想逝者之有憑 Thinking that the departed had mediums,³³
 因宵夜之髣髴 I clung to the nights for his semblance.
 痛存沒之異路 It pains me that the living and the deceased go different ways,

33 Wilt L. Idema translates *shenping* 神憑 as “a spirit's manifestation” in Cao Zhi's “Discourse on the Skull” (Dulou shuo 髑髒說). See Idema, *The Resurrected Skeleton*, 277. But since the core meaning of *ping* 憑 is “to lean on,” I translate it as “mediums,” which are for a spirit to lean on (i.e., to possess).

28 終窈漠而不至 In the end all that arrived was sombreness and stillness.

As the hope to see the departed ended in the third rhyme group, the funeral procession began in the fourth rhyme group. A “dragon hearse” was hitched,³⁴ and the “setting-out sacrifice” was offered:³⁵

時荏苒而不留	Time slipped and elapsed, never staying;
將遷靈以大行	We were transporting him for the great procession.
駕龍輜於門側	The dragon hearse was hitched by the gate,
32 設祖祭於前廳	The setting-out sacrifice was offered in the front hall.
彼生離其猶難	A parting in life is already hard,
矧永絕而不傷	How could I bid him a final farewell without feeling wounded?

Alternative to lines 27–32 in the *Yiwen leiju* extract above are lines 27–30 below, which are reconstructed from Li Shan’s commentary and the *Yiwen leiju*.³⁶

痛存亡之異路	It pains me that the living and the deceased go different ways,
28 將遷靈以大行	Now that we were transporting him for the great procession.
駕龍輜於門側	The dragon hearse was hitched by the gate,
旒繽紛以飛揚	The banners, in a rich array, soared and fluttered.
彼生離其猶難	A parting in life is already hard,
32 矧永絕而不傷	How could I bid him a final farewell without feeling wounded?

In the latter version, the hope to see the departed at night did not fade into darkness; it was the funeral procession that wrecked hope and made one realize “the living and the deceased go different ways” (line 27). And instead of the solemn setting-out sacrifice, it was a rich array of fluttering banners that accompanied the dragon hearse. As a result, the final farewell sounded even more rushed and difficult. Shorter than the *Yiwen leiju* extract by two lines, this version reconstructed mainly from Li Shan’s commentary is more

34 The “dragon hearse” (*long'er* 龍輜) was reserved for the funeral procession of a ruler. To use it otherwise was considered ritual violence. However, we find it not only in this rhapsody, but also in Pan Yue’s “Lamenting the Eternally Departed” (*Ai yongshi wen* 哀永逝文) and his “Rhapsody on the Widow.” See Lai, “The Art of Lamentation,” 419, line 3.

35 For the “setting-out sacrifice” (*zuji* 祖祭), see Lai, “The Art of Lamentation,” 420, line 15.

36 Lines 27–28 and lines 29–30 are from Li Shan’s commentary in *Wen xuan*, 16.738, respectively under 痛存亡之殊制兮，將遷神而安厝 and 龍輜儼其星駕兮，飛旒翻以啟路. Lines 31–32 are identical to lines 33–34 above, also from the *Yiwen leiju*.

dramatic in transitioning to the funeral procession, and to the fourth rhyme group.

The fifth rhyme group relates the widow's pain that goes beyond the funeral. As winter is approaching, she has come to the icy season of her life. The screens and awnings make an architectural, pictorial, and poetic space for seating or resting.³⁷ But from her perspective those are set out in vain:

- | | | |
|----|--------|--|
| | 自銜恤而在疚 | Since I harboured this woe in the ritual mourning, |
| | 履冰冬之四節 | I have trodden the icy winter, the fourth season. |
| | 風蕭蕭而增勁 | The wind, souging and whistling, is increasingly fierce; |
| 36 | 寒凜凜而彌切 | The cold, freezing and forbidding, is progressively severe. |
| | 霜淒淒而夜降 | Frost, chilling and numbing, falls at night; |
| | 水濼濼而晨結 | Water, hardening and solidifying, freezes by dawn. |
| | 瞻靈宇之空虛 | Looking up at the eaves he dwelled under, now an empty void, |
| 40 | 悲屏幌之徒設 | I lament that the screens and awnings are set out in vain. |
| | 仰皇天而歎息 | Looking up at August Heaven I heave sighs, |
| | 腸一日而九結 | My intestines knot ninefold in a single day. |

The sixth rhyme group is again a combination of Li Shan's commentary (lines 43–44) and a *Yiwen leiju* extract (lines 45–48), reconstructed by the Qing-dynasty scholar Yan Kejun 嚴可均 (1762–1843) according to the rhyme scheme and the context. In other cases I am hesitant to follow Yan Kejun's reconstruction.³⁸ But in this rhyme group he reconstructs, the widow reaches a closure as the deceased's spirit (*shenshuang* 神爽, literally "the spiritual and refreshing," a synonym of *jingshuang* 精爽 "the essential and refreshing") fades away and the work of a year is done (lines 43–44). She

37 For the architectural, pictorial, and poetic space of screens, see Wu, *The Double Screen*, 9–28. For awnings (*huang* 幌, also written as 幌), see *Wen xuan or Selections*, 1:396 (line 339).

38 For Yan Kejun's reconstruction, see his *Quan Hou Han wen*, 96.10b–11a (991–92). I am hesitant to follow his reconstruction of these lines: 涕流迸以淋浪 (Yan Kejun makes this a rhyming line and places it at the end of the fourth rhyme group about the funeral procession, but it can be also placed with lines 17–18 about embracing the children as long as it is not a rhyming line), 氣憤薄而交縈; 撫素枕而歔歔 (Yan Kejun combines these with other lines to make 氣憤薄而交縈 rhyme with line 25 想逝者之有憑, but the third rhyme group would be broken), 顧(顏)[頤]貌之艷艷, 對左右而掩涕 (Yan Kejun places these with lines 17–18 about embracing the children, but again, the third rhyme group would be broken), and 鳥凌虛以徘徊 (Yan Kejun places this with lines 21–22 about nesting roosters and returning sparrows, but it can be also placed in a finale as Pan Yue does).

who is forever frozen in the extant texts of Cao Pi's and Wang Can's poetic impersonations finally finds peace:³⁹

- | | |
|-----------|--|
| 神爽緬其日永 | His spirit is far away, further distant daily; |
| 44 歲功忽其已成 | The work of a year, all of a sudden, is already done. |
| 惟人生於世上 | Verily, human life upon this earth |
| 若馳驥之過櫺 | Is like catching a sight of a racing steed from a lattice. |
| 計先後其何幾 | While calculating how early or late others died, |
| 48 亦同歸乎幽冥 | We, too, together return to darkness and gloom. |

The following two lines are separated from previous lines by Yan Kejun for their distinct source, rhyme, and context:⁴⁰

- | | |
|------|--|
| 賤妾兢兢 | I, your humble handmaid, am all alone, |
| 顧影為儔 | Gazing at my shadow for a companion. |

It is likely that these tetrasyllabic lines (XXXX · XXXX) are from the finale, whereas the previous text in the “Li sao” metre (XXXyXX · XXXyXX) is from the body of the rhapsody. The metre in a finale often differs from that of the body. The finale of Pan Yue's rhapsody, for example, adopts the Chu song metre (XXX兮XX · XXX兮XX) while the body adopts the “Li sao” metre (XXXyXX兮 · XXXyXX). Moreover, as we have seen in Cao Pi's “*Shi* on the Widow,” a particular personal pronoun is used to impersonate the widow speaking to her husband: the first-person pronoun “I, your humble handmaid” (*jianqie* 賤妾) turns the lines into words for her husband. It is just that her words are doomed to be a soliloquy, as related in the following lines of Pan Yue's rhapsody:⁴¹

- | | |
|--------|--|
| 廓孤立兮顧影 | Standing all alone, I gaze at my shadow; |
| 塊獨言兮聽響 | Speaking in total isolation, I hear only my voice. |

Coincidentally, in the same year that Cao Pi wrote the letter about the Nanpi excursion with Ruan Yu—and perhaps also commanded Wang Can and a Ding family member to impersonate Ruan Yu's widow—Cao Zhi 曹植

39 *Quan Hou Han wen*, 96.11a (992). For lines 43–44, see *Wen xuan*, 16.739, under 亡魂逝而永遠兮，時歲忽其遒盡。

40 *Quan Hou Han wen*, 96.11a (992). For these two lines, see *Wen xuan*, 16.740, under 廓孤立兮顧影，塊獨言兮聽響。

41 *Wen xuan*, 16.740. For a discussion of this soliloquy, see Williams, “Pan Yue's ‘Study of a Widow,’” 361.

(192–232) wrote a poem that addresses Wang Can and Ding Yi/Yi:⁴² “Mr. Ding is resentful at court, / Master Wang enjoys making his own plans” (丁生怨在朝，王子歡自營).⁴³ This coincidence reminds us of the special statuses of Wang Can and Ding Yi. Unlike other poets, who were either Scholars (*Wenxue* 文學) or Cadets (*Shuzi* 庶子) on the staff of the Cao brothers, they respectively served as Palace Attendant (*Shizhong* 侍中) for Cao Cao the Duke of Wei, and Gentleman Attendant at the Palace Gate (*Huangmen shilang* 黃門侍郎) for the emperor.⁴⁴ Were the Cao brothers respectively seeking support from outside of their offices through poetic composition, to develop their own community besides their father’s? Both Cao Pi’s letter and Cao Zhi’s poem are dated to 215, and Cao Cao did not name his Heir Designate until 217. Did the competition between the Cao brothers become heated during this time?⁴⁵

In the Private Space

In his dirge for Ruan Yu, Wang Can numerates his colleague’s feats in the public domain; that is, the military and political services that Ruan Yu did for the state.⁴⁶ Since most of the dirges use second-person pronouns to speak to the departed, as mentioned earlier, I follow the practice in my translation of the extant lines of Wang Can’s dirge:⁴⁷

42 Huang Jie dates Cao Zhi’s “Presented Again to Ding Yi and Wang Can” (You zeng Ding Yi Wang Can 又贈丁儀王粲) to 215, whereas Cao Daoheng and Shen Yucheng date it to 211. See Cao et al., *Cao Zijian shi zhu (wai san zhong)*, 56; Cao and Shen, *Zhonggu wenxue shiliao congkao*, 43. I follow Huang Jie in dating it to 215. See Chapter 4 for my discussion. Although the title says this is presented to the elder brother Ding Yi, which Huang Jie accepts, Li Shan believes this is to the younger brother Ding Yi. See Cao et al., *Cao Zijian shi zhu (wai san zhong)*, 56; *Wen xuan*, 24.1121. Either way, Cao Zhi could connect himself to the Ding family.

43 *Wen xuan*, 24.1122.

44 *Sanguo zhi jijie*, 19.1648, 1564.

45 As mentioned earlier, another “*Shi* on the Widow” is attributed to Cao Zhi in Li Shan’s commentary. If Cao Zhi wrote it also under the command of Cao Pi, my speculation here would need revision.

46 Examples are the letters Ruan Yu drafted for Cao Cao to Sun Quan 孫權 (182–252) and Liu Bei 劉備 (161–223). For the former letter, see *Wen xuan*, 42.1887–93; for the latter (only two lines of which are extant), see Li Shan’s commentary on Pan Yue’s “*Shi* Composed at the Jingu Gathering” (Jingu ji zuo shi 金谷集作詩) in *Wen xuan*, 20.978.

47 *Beitang shuchao*, 103.3b–4a.

既登宰朝	Having risen to the chancellor's court,
充我秘府	You were appointed to our repository for rare books.
允司文章	Verily you ministered writing,
爰及軍旅	Which involved military matters.
庶績惟殷	Your feats of all kinds were abundant;
簡書如雨	Your letters on bamboo slips were like rain.
強力(成敏)[敏成]	The great force was sharp-wittedly formed,
事至則舉	Upon assignment, every task was carried out.

In his poetic impersonation of Ruan Yu's widow, Wang Can presents the same person in a different space: the private quarter around which the bereaved family still lives. Instead of a battlefield or the court, it is the east wing where Ruan Yu once dwelled but is now left empty, constantly reminding the bereaved of his perpetual absence:

提孤孩兮出戶 Carrying the fatherless children out the door,
 4 與之步兮東廂 I walk together with them in the east wing.

Line 4 alludes to the “Rhapsody on the Tall Gate Palace” (Changmen fu 長門賦) attributed to Sima Xiangru 司馬相如 (179–117 BCE) in which an abandoned palace lady also wanders to the east wing.⁴⁸ Ruan Yu's former room may not be as ornate as a palace one, but with the perpetual absence of its former dweller, it is as lonesome. Likewise, in the “Rhapsody on the Widow” attributed to a Ding family member, a hall is nothing but an empty void because its former dweller is no longer there:

瞻靈宇之空虛 Looking up at the eaves he dwelled under, now an empty void,
 40 悲屏幌之徒設 I lament that the screens and awnings are set out in vain.

Which matters upon one's departure: their traces in the public domain, or those in their private quarter? And to whom do those matter? Cao Pi addresses these questions by impersonating his mother Lady Bian, who grieves for the premature death of a Cao clan's child named Cao Wenzhong 曹文仲 (dates unknown). Titled “Rhapsody on Mourning the Young Departed” (Dao yao fu 悼夭賦), the poem is found in the entry of “laments” (*aishang* 哀傷) in the *Yiwen leiju*, the same entry where quotes of the “Rhapsodies on the Widow” are found. The preface highlights kinship, suggesting Lady Bian and Cao Pi

48 *Wen xuan*, 16.714, especially the lines 間徙倚於東廂兮，觀夫靡靡而無窮。

are not merely an aunt and an elder cousin, but the Cao clan's first lady and eldest living son (Cao Cao lost his eldest son Cao Ang 曹昂 in 197):⁴⁹

A younger cousin of mine, Wenzhong, died at the age of eleven. My mother grieves for his premature death, recalling and mourning him incessantly. Out of affection for my kin, I therefore have composed this rhapsody.

族弟文仲亡，時年十一。母氏傷其夭逝，追悼無已。予以宗族之愛，乃作斯賦。

Before reading the extant text, let us see what the critic Liu Xie 劉勰 (d. ca. 537) says about the mourning genre for children. In his erudite project titled *Wenxin diaolong* 文心雕龍 (The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons), Liu Xie compares the mourning genres as follows: For adults, the mourning poems are called “dirge” (*lei* 誄), which “consists of a selection of the sayings and an account of the life of the deceased” (選言錄行). For children, the mourning poems are called lament (*ai* 哀), which speaks of the young departed as bright since they were “young and had not established their merits” (幼未成德).⁵⁰

Rather than following the conventions, Cao Pi's “Rhapsody Mourning the Young Departed” focuses on the grieving mother and places her in a private quarter: the boy's bedroom, with the clothes he wore still on the bed. And as if speaking to the boy, she directly addresses him by using the second-person pronoun “you” (*er* 爾 in line 3, corresponding to *jun* 君 in Cao Pi's “*Shi on the Widow*”):⁵¹

氣紆結以填胸	Disordered breaths, twisted and knotted, fill my breast;
不知涕之縱橫	I was unaware of my tears crisscrossing my face.
時徘徊於舊處	Sometimes I linger to and fro in your former living quarters,
4 睹靈衣之在床	Seeing the clothes you wore on the bed.
感遺物之如故	It moves me that the objects you left behind remain as those were,
痛爾身之獨亡	It pains me that your body is the only thing that has perished.

The room, clothes, and other items all remind her of the child. Having no rest, she entrusts the daylily (*xuancao* 萱草 in line 10, or 謾草 in *Mao shi* 62), known as sorrow-forgetting herb, in the hope that she can take a break from flooding memories. Conventionally used in the trope of a longing wife, the

49 *Yiwen leiju*, 34.599.

50 Liu, *Wenxin diaolong yizheng*, 12.442, 13.472.

51 *Yiwen leiju*, 34.599–600.

sorrow-forgetting herb finds a new context of mourning poetry. This rhapsody, moreover, is not just another mourning poem of traditional values; it reaches the private quarters where the bereaved still lives:

- | | | |
|----|--------|---|
| | 愁端坐而無聊 | In sorrow I sit upright, getting no relief; |
| 8 | 心感感而不寧 | My heart is sad, so sad, finding no peace. |
| | 步廣廈而踟躕 | Walking to and fro in the spacious mansion, |
| | 覽萱草於中庭 | I view the daylily in the courtyard. |
| | 悲風蕭其夜起 | The sorrowful wind soughs, rising at night; |
| 12 | 秋氣慳以厲情 | The autumn air is heart-wrenching, arousing thoughts. |
| | 仰瞻天而太息 | Looking up I gaze at heaven and heave a great sigh, |
| | 聞別鳥之哀鳴 | Hearing the parting birds sadly calling. |

Wang Can is attributed in the same *Yiwen leiju* entry with a poem with a similar title, “Rhapsody Grieving for the Young Departed” (Shang yao fu 傷夭賦). Although Wang Can is not mentioned in Cao Pi’s preface, he can be also impersonating Cao Pi’s grieving mother. The unnamed “disordered breaths” (*qi* 氣) in the first line of Cao Pi’s mourning poem becomes clear in the first four lines of Wang Can’s. We realize those must arise when the bereaved accuses August Heaven of failing to be just in allotting lifespans:⁵²

- | | | |
|---|--------|--|
| | 惟皇天之賦命 | Verily, the way August Heaven allots lifespans |
| | 實浩蕩而不均 | Is indeed powerful but not just. |
| | 或老終以長世 | Some meet their end when they are old, living a long life; |
| 4 | 或昏夭而夙泯 | Others die prematurely, vanishing early. |
| | 物雖存而人亡 | Although everything remains, the person has perished; |
| | 心惆悵而長慕 | Feeling low and down, I forever yearn for him. |
| | 哀皇天之不惠 | Lamenting that August Heaven is not kind, |
| 8 | 抱此哀而何愬 | I harbour this sadness—whom shall I tell? |
| | 求魂神之形影 | I seek his soul and spirit, in any form or shadow, |
| | 羌幽冥而弗迕 | But alas, darkness and gloom is all I encounter. |

52 *Yiwen leiju*, 34.600–1. Yang Xiu 楊修 (175–219) is another poet who might write in the same context. His rhapsody is also titled “Rhapsody Grieving for the Young Departed” (Shang yao fu 傷夭賦), two lines of which are found in Li Shan’s commentary: “I lament that his body and mien are submerged and obscured, / In my eyes there is constantly his former form” (悲體貌之潛翳兮，目常存乎遺形). See *Wen xuan*, 23.1092, under 寢興目存形，遺音猶在耳 of Pan Yue’s “*Shi* Mourning Her Death” (Dao wang shi 悼亡詩).

- 淹低徊以想像 Immersed in thoughts, I try to conjure up his image;
 12 心彌結而紆縈 My heart knots further, so twined and twisted.
 晝忽忽其若昏 In the morning, I am dazed and drowsy as if it were evening;
 夜炯炯而至明 At night, I am restive and restless until it dawns.

As intimacy finds its place in a private quarter, poets of later times continue their reflection on mortality in such a space, including the Bronze Bird Terrace (Tongque tai 銅爵臺) on which female entertainers danced for their departed lord.⁵³ In the face of death, which matters, and to whom do those matter? In the voices of the bereaved daughter, wife, and mother Cao Pi and his community give a unique answer: Death is alienating, but it can also be bonding when we continue speaking to the departed in a private space that matters to us.

53 Tian, *The Halberd at Red Cliff*, 222–53.