INTRODUCTION

Tossed by wind, flying like tumbleweed,
I encounter cold and heat in the meantime.

—Cao Zhi, "*Shi* on the North Wind"

Poetry of Loss

Siding with the Han imperial house and condemning the warlord Cao Cao's 曹操 (155–220) control of it, traditional commentators of early medieval Chinese poetry share a strong sentiment with the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (Sanguo yanyi 三國演義). They are mainly concerned with how Cao Cao disclosed his traitorous thoughts in his song verses (*geshi* 歌詩, more commonly known today as *yuefu* 樂府 or "music bureau" poems), how his second son Cao Pi 曹丕 (187–226) did the same and eventually dethroned Emperor Xian of Han 漢獻帝 (r. 189–220), and how his fourth son Cao Zhi 曹植 (192–232), a distinguished poet of the time, was envied and oppressed by Cao Pi. Upon seeing notions of frustration and sorrow in Cao Zhi's song verses and *shi* 詩 poems (a genre that resembles song verses in prosody but is divorced from music), the commentators tend to take the melancholy expressions as evidence of sibling rivalry and political upheaval.

In his 1964 article on Cao Zhi's poetry, Hans H. Frankel proposes another approach: instead of viewing a melancholy tone as a reflection of the poet's "sad sack in real life," let us consider it "the noblest mode of Chinese lyric poetry." What Frankel attempts to refute is the biographical approach that reduces everything to the sibling rivalry between Cao Pi and Cao Zhi. As he points out, a melancholy tone is also prevalent in Cao Cao's song verses that have little to do with sibling rivalry. To avoid such a fallacy, Frankel proposes to turn our attention to the poetic art *per se* as New Critics do. When reading Cao Zhi's melancholy descriptions of tumbleweed, for example, we should resist the temptation to associate those with Cao Zhi's being sent from one fief to another by his brother Cao Pi. Since Cao Cao also writes about tumbleweed in his song verse, we should explore how Cao Zhi adapts the tumbling image and creates a poetic world in "the noblest mode of Chinese lyric poetry."[1]

1 Frankel, "Fifteen Poems by Ts'ao Chih," 11, 14.

While acknowledging the fallacy of reducing everything to sibling rivalry, I am not persuaded to cast biographical information aside, especially when our understanding of the poetic world can be nuanced by the social situations of the poets, and when such information is available to us. Among all the biographical materials, the prefaces that the Cao court poets provided for their own poems, especially for their rhapsodies (*fu* 賦, another poetic genre that was recited rather than sung), make the most significant difference. The prefaces, whose fragments are mainly found in later literary compendia and were pieced together by the Qing-dynasty scholar Yan Kejun 嚴可均 (1762–1843), inform us that a melancholy tone can result from various losses that the Cao court experienced due to the unfortunate occurrences of epidemic, frustration, and war, as well as the natural course of aging and declining. The social situations of the poets at Cao Cao's court include, but certainly are not limited to, sibling rivalry and political upheaval.

Yan Kejun's reconstruction of the rhapsodies and their prefaces should have been available to Frankel. Why did those materials not contribute to Frankel's study of Cao Zhi's poetry? Besides his reservations concerning the biographical approach, it was also because by "poetry," Frankel referred to "song verses" and "*shi* poems" but not "rhapsodies." To Frankel as well as Yan Kejun, rhapsodies were closer to prose (*wen* 文) than to poetry (*shi* 詩). Yan Kejun thus included his reconstruction of the rhapsodies and their prefaces in his *Complete Prose of High Antiquity, Qin, Han, Three States, and Six Dynasties* (Quan shanggu Sandai Qin Han Sanguo Liuchao wen 全上古三代秦漢三國六朝文), Frankel thus conceptually separated rhapsodies from song verses and *shi* poems, and Yan Kejun's reconstruction of the rhapsodies and their prefaces thus contributed little to Frankel's study of Cao Zhi's poetry. But to Cao Zhi and his fellow poets, rhapsodies were not only a poetic genre, but a more established poetic genre than song verses and *shi* poems. Naturally, it was a more common practice for them to provide prefaces to their rhapsodies than to their song verses or *shi* poems. To gain a more complete picture of early medieval Chinese poetry, therefore, one cannot ignore the rhapsodies. In recent decades, rhapsodies have gradually regained their reputation as an established poetic genre. In light of this scholarship,[2] I actively include the Cao court's rhapsodies and their prefaces—along with other biographical materials such as letters and histories—in my research of the Cao court poetry.

2 Recent scholarship on rhapsodies is embodied in Williams et al., *The Fu Genre of Imperial China*; and Williams et al., *Reading Fu Poetry*.

In her 2018 book on the literary memories of the Cao court, Xiaofei Tian points out another approach that has dominated our imagination: viewing the dynamics of the Cao court nostalgically after the outbreak of an epidemic in 217–218. Tian traces how this perspective is adopted by Cao Pi in his letter to Wu Zhi 吳質 (178–230), reinforced by Xie Lingyun 謝靈運 (385–433) in his poem suite titled "Impersonating the *Shi* [Poets] at the Ye Gathering [Hosted] by the Heir Designate of Wei [Cao Pi]" (Ni Wei taizi Ye zhong ji shi 擬魏太子鄴中集詩), and canonized by the sixth-century anthology *Wen xuan* 文選, which includes both Cao Pi's letter and Xie Lingyun's poem suite. But as Tian observes, Cao Pi's nostalgic, post-epidemic view is only one of the many ways of remembering the Cao court and approaching its poetry.[3]

Here my study diverges from Tian's. When cross-referencing canonical and noncanonical poems, Tian uncovers the Cao court's darker scenes of political manipulation, but my focus is rather on the Cao court's diverse ways of addressing losses. When exploring alternative memories of the Cao court, Tian goes into subsequent dynasties, but I stay in the time period of the Cao court to examine the court poets' memories of themselves. As memory studies inform us, our memories change in response to every present moment we live in.[4] While Tian studies the multiple present moments throughout the dynasties, I research the multiple present moments of loss through the course of Cao Cao's life and court.

The Cao Court

In political history, the Cao court can be described as a group of people who worked under his command. On close examination, we notice that they did not all necessarily serve on Cao Cao's staff. Some were in the imperial palace, others were in regional governments, and still others were assigned to serve his sons. In addition, we notice that the ardent supporters of either Cao Pi or Cao Zhi did not necessarily serve on their young lord's staff. For example, Cao Zhi was supported by the brothers Ding Yí 丁儀 (d. 220) and Ding Yì 丁廙 (d. 220),[5] but they served respectively on Cao Cao's staff and in the imperial palace.[6] As to the brothers' staff, they did not always get what they wanted. Cao Cao appointed Bing Yuan 邴原 (ca. 158–ca. 208) as Chief

3 Tian, *The Halberd at Red Cliff*, chap. 1, "Plague and Poetry."

4 Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, 3–4.

5 Ding Yí 丁儀 was the elder brother and Ding Yì 丁廙 was the younger. Their names are differentiated in romanization by tone markers.

6 *Sanguo zhi jijie*, 19.1564.

Clerk (*Zhangshi* 長史) on Cao Pi's staff, and Xing Yong 邢顒 (d. 223) first as Household Aide (*Jiacheng* 家丞) on Cao Zhi's staff, later as Grand Mentor (*Taifu* 太傅) on Cao Pi's staff. Neither Bing Yuan nor Xing Yong was close to Cao Pi or Cao Zhi. The former confronted Cao Pi at a social gathering, and the latter was reportedly at odds with Cao Zhi.[7] The Cao brothers could ask their father for a particular person to be their Scholar (*Wenxue* 文學) or Cadet (*Shuzi* 庶子), but again, it was up to Cao Cao to decide.[8]

In contrast to a political approach, the Cao court can be described in literary history as a community of accomplished writers known for the "three Caos" (*san Cao* 三曹): Cao Cao, Cao Pi, Cao Zhi; and the "seven masters" (*qizi* 七子): 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).[9] Drawing on kinetic imagery, the sixth-century literary critic Liu Xie 劉勰 (d. ca. 537) vividly captures the energy in their composition of pentasyllabic *shi* poems as follows:[10]

> When it came to the Jian'an reign [196–220], pentasyllabic *shi* burgeoned and flourished. Emperor Wen [Cao Pi] and Prince Si of Chen [Cao Zhi] freed the reins to gallop; Wang [Can], Xu [Gan], Ying [Yang], and Liu [Zhen] followed in their footsteps to race. Side by side they delighted in the wind and the moon, took excursions to ponds and preserves, gave account of the glories of enjoying favour, and told of festively tipsy feasts. Impassioned, they gave free rein to their vitality; openhearted, they employed their talent. When they expressed their feelings and related things, they never resorted to petty cleverness; when they drove the vehicle of words to catch the appearances of things, they only valued the capability of being lucid: These are what they shared in common.
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> 暨建安之初，五言騰踊。文帝陳思，縱轡以騁節；王徐應劉，望路而爭驅。並憐風月，狎池苑，述恩榮，敘酣宴。慷慨以任氣，磊落以使才。造懷指事，不求纖密之巧；驅辭逐貌，唯取昭晰之能：此其所同也。

The expression "side by side" (*bing* 並) in my translation above highlights a feature of their group composition: Instead of excusing themselves, the Cao lords actively took part in it. Take Cao Pi's preface to his "Rhapsody on

7 *Sanguo zhi jijie*, 11.1108, 1182.

8 For the Cao brothers' fight for Handan Chun 邯鄲淳 (fl. 190–220), see *Sanguo zhi jijie*, 21.1667.

9 For the first reference of the seven masters, see Cao Pi's essay "On Literature" (Lun wen 論文), a chapter from his *Normative Discourses* (Dian lun 典論), in *Wen xuan*, 52.2270.

10 Liu, *Wenxin diaolong yizheng*, 6.196.

Climbing the Terrace" (Deng tai fu 登臺賦) for example. For a long time I had understood Cao Cao's command stated in the preface as asking his sons to compose among themselves, side by side with their brothers. It is not until recently that I realized Cao Cao was also a participant, asking his sons to compose on the spectacular complex of the Bronze Bird Terrace (Tongque tai 銅爵臺) and West Garden (Xiyuan 西園) side by side with him:[11]

> In the spring of the seventeenth year of the Jian'an reign [212 CE], [His Highness, which refers to Cao Cao] roamed in the West Garden, climbed the Bronze Bird Terrace, and commanded us brothers to compose side by side [with him].
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> 建安十七年春，[上]遊西園，登銅雀臺，命余兄弟並作。

Take Cao Pi's preface to his "Rhapsody on the Widow" (Guafu fu 寡婦賦) for another example. For a long time I had understood Cao Pi's command stated in the preface as asking others to compose among themselves, side by side with one another. Again, it is not until recently that I realized Cao Pi was asking them to compose side by side with him:[12]

> 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, 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.
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> 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。

My understanding of the expression "side by side" changed when I read the concept of "emulation" introduced by the art historian Thomas Crow. In his 2006 book *Emulation: David, Drouais, and Girodet in the Art of Revolutionary France*, Crow distinguishes emulation from mere imitation. In French lan-

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11 Two lines of Cao Cao's "Rhapsody on Climbing the Terrace" are extant in *Shui jing zhu*, 10.9a (213); Cao, *Cao Cao ji*, 29. For a discussion of Cao Cao's extant lines, along with Cao Pi's and Cao Zhi's rhapsodies, see Tian, *The Halberd at Red Cliff*, 213–17; also see Tsao, *The City of Ye*, chap. 2, "Ye in Jian'an Literature." For Cao Pi's preface, see *Yiwen leiju*, 62.1120. A missing character following the character *chun* 春 is indicated by Yan Kejun in *Quan Sanguo wen*, 4.5a (1074) and by Lu Bi 盧弼 (1876–1967) in *Sanguo zhi jijie*, 19.1553n10. Wei Hongcan 魏宏灿 supplies the word *Shang* 上 (His Highness) in Cao, *Cao Pi ji jiaozhu*, 102.

12 Yan Kejun reconstructs this preface in his *Quan Sanguo wen*, 4.4a (1073) from Li Shan's 李善 (ca. 630–689) commentary on Pan Yue's 潘岳 (247–300) "Rhapsody on the Widow" (Guafu fu 寡婦賦) (*Wen xuan*, 16.735) and from the *Yiwen leiju*'s quote of Cao Pi's "Rhapsody on the Widow" (*Yiwen leiju*, 34.600).

guage and the studio of the artist Jacques-Louis David (1748–1825), the word suggests a relationship more of empowerment than a rigid hierarchy, more of side-by-side competition than top-down control:[13]

> [Jean-Germain Drouais's] paintings extended and confronted the hardest lessons that David had to teach. At his death, his teacher declared in a famous and resonant lament, "I have lost my emulation." The English cognate does not adequately convey the sense of the pupil being recognized as peer, and even master.

The group compositions in which both the lords and the scholar-officials at the Cao court engaged have long drawn scholarly attention, but scholars have debated their value. To some, those represent a golden era of mutual appreciation and literary splendour; to others, the panegyric tone of the poems sounds all too suspicious. In recent decades, scholars tend to refrain from judging the poems by how genuine the lords and court poets could have been. In Robert Joe Cutter's 1984 article, for example, their gatherings are compared to ancient Greek symposiums and the conviviality of the scenes is vividly reconstructed. In Cheng Yu-Yu's 鄭毓瑜 1996 book chapter, for another example, their light-hearted composition is read as a crucial vehicle that helped not only perfect poetic art, but also forge a bond among the participants.[14] Following in their footsteps, in my 2013 dissertation I reconstructed their poetic dialogues and explored the social implications of those.

What I found too challenging to address in my dissertation is their "Rhapsodies on the Widow." As the above-quoted preface reads, the Cao court poets composed the rhapsodies in response to the death of their friend Ruan Yu. Their motivation is not hard to understand, but the way they composed their rhapsodies is: They lamented for their friend's death not in their own voices but in the voice of his widow, thus titled "Rhapsodies on the Widow." Venturing to cross the boundaries drawn by the mortuary rituals, how could such a group composition have helped forge a bond among the participants? And why did they write in such a distinct way from Cao Pi's lament for his many friends' deaths in the 217–218 epidemic?

The former question will be addressed in Chapter 2. Here I would like to address the latter by introducing the "multidirectional approach" developed by Michael Rothberg in his 2009 book *Multidirectional Memory: Remem-*

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13 Crow, *Emulation*, 1. For a review of Crow's concept of "emulation," see Liu, "Guankan, guannian, guan wu," 378–82.

14 Cutter, "Cao Zhi's (192–232) Symposium Poems," 1–32. Cheng, "Shilun gongyan shi," 171–218.

bering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization. Collective remembering, Rothberg stresses, is not a zero-sum endeavour. The remembrance of X does not necessarily displace the remembrance of Y. When we live in the age of Y (e.g., decolonization), our remembrance of X (e.g., the Holocaust) typically involves negotiation with the remembrance of Y, even to the point of cross-referencing and borrowing it, much more than simply displacing it. In Rothberg words, "the contest of memories cannot be reduced to a battle over real estate."[15]

This approach is multidirectional in that it recognizes the dynamics within and without a community. The community that is supposed to keep certain memories is not static. Not only do their collective memory and ways of remembering change in response to every present moment they live in, but so, too, does the community itself change over time. In his studies of the 1949 émigrés from mainland China to Taiwan, Dominic Meng-Hsuan Yang adopts Rothberg's approach and reveals how the émigré community keeps reinventing itself, its collective memory, and its ways of remembering through various traumatic moments. In light of Rothberg's and Yang's memory studies, I propose that we also view the Cao court and its poetry of loss multidirectionally. Rather than sticking to Cao Pi's post-epidemic standpoint, let us observe how the Cao court drew on experiences of loss to reinvent itself, its collective memory, and its ways of remembering.

Chapter Outline

Each chapter of this book addresses a key experience of loss. In Chapter 1 we look at Cao Cao's experience of the death of Guo Jia 郭嘉 (170–207), the youngest among his military consultants. By associating Guo Jia's premature death with Cao Cao's poetic reflection on aging, I explore how the warlord mentally and emotionally sustained a military-political community by presenting his melancholy yet heroic song verses. Chapter 2 addresses the loss of Ruan Yu. To commemorate their friend, the first among them to pass away, Cao Pi commanded his fellow poets to write with him in a peculiar way: in the voice of Ruan Yu's widow. It turns out this was not the only group composition in which the Cao court poets assumed the voice of a bereaved woman. I compare and contrast these compositions to examine why they responded to Ruan Yu's death so. While Chapter 1 tells how Cao Cao sustained a military-political community outside of the Han imperial court,

15 Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, 3, 310.

Chapter 2 tells another story: how Cao Pi developed his own community besides his father's.

The 217–218 epidemic, which killed Chen Lin, Xu Gan, Ying Yang, and Liu Zhen, is addressed in Chapter 3. In addition to Cao Pi's nostalgic view of their good old days, I trace Cao Zhi's remembrance of a brilliant summer and ask these questions: What role does summer play in the collective memory of the Cao court? In what sense can we read their remembrance as an early medieval variation of the ancient soul-summoning poetry? In Chapter 4 I revisit the moments when Xu Gan quit and several other colleagues felt frustrated at the Cao court. Cao Zhi was the one who presented them with poems of consolation, only to find that they were like the skull in the philosophical treatise of the *Zhuangzi* 莊子, content in their world of withdrawal and unwilling to return. While in Chapters 1 and 2 the Cao court survived multiple moments of loss, in Chapters 3 and 4 we find it broken into shards of memories.

Cao Cao passed away in 220. As a matter of course, his death is addressed in the last chapter. I track how his bereaved sons Cao Pi and Cao Zhi as well as his bereaved grandson Cao Rui 曹叡 (204–239, r. 226–239), despite the brokenness of the Cao court, tried their best to sustain themselves and their community through poetic composition. In the Epilogue, I revisit the research question raised by Hans H. Frankel and reflect on the multidirectional approach I adopt in this book. While it is neither my intention to displace Cao Pi's nostalgic memories of the Cao court, nor my goal to exhaust every possible way of remembering the community, I hope this book offers a rich array of approaches to the early medieval Chinese court poetry of loss.

Translation of Chinese Texts and Terms

Integral to my approach is translating the Chinese texts and terms into English. Here I would like to introduce the conventions of translation I follow in this book. A historical personal name that appears for the first time in each chapter consists of three parts: the pinyin romanization, the Chinese characters, and the dates in parentheses. For example, Cao Cao 曹操 (155–220). A personal title follows a similar fashion, but the dates are usually the person's reign. For example, Emperor Wu of Han 漢武帝 (r. 141–87 BCE). A poem or book title that appears for the first time in each chapter consists of an English translation in quotation marks (if it is a poem) or in italics (if it is a book), followed by parentheses in which the pinyin romanization and the Chinese characters are provided. For example, "Short Song" (Duan ge xing 短歌行); *Balanced Discourses* (Zhong lun 中論). But if the

book is named after a person, or it is one of the Thirteen Classics (*Shisan jing* 十三經) or Twenty-Four Standard Histories (*Ershisi shi* 二十四史), or its title is not directly relevant to the discussion, there is no English translation but the pinyin romanization in italics and the Chinese characters. The nature of such a text, nevertheless, is clear from context. For example, the philosophical treatise *Zhuangzi* 莊子; the historical records *Sanguo zhi* 三國志; the classic of poetry *Shi jing* 詩經 (or *Mao shi* 毛詩); and the literary compendium *Yiwen leiju* 藝文類聚. Chinese terms are in English translation, followed by parentheses in which the pinyin romanization of the term is in italics (except for proper nouns, whose romanization is not in italics) and the Chinese characters are provided. For example, song verses (*geshi* 歌詩); Bronze Bird Terrace (Tongque tai 銅爵臺).

When translating a poem, I pay special attention to the rhyme scheme. Generally speaking, a stanza rhymes every other (even-numbered) line. Rhyming characters are underlined. If there is a rhyme change, it is signified by a space between the stanzas. Take the following two stanzas of Cao Pi's "Rhapsody on the Widow" for example:

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,
我獨怨兮無依　I alone resent that I have no one to rely on.
撫遺孤兮太息　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,
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;
鷰雀飛兮我前　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;
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 contrast to the block quote of a poem, which has Chinese text on the left and English translation on the right, the block quote of a non-rhyming text is presented with English translation on the top and Chinese text at the bottom. Compare Cao Pi's "Rhapsody on the Widow" with his preface to it:

> 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, 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.
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> 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。

Although arranged differently, neither the block quote of a poem nor that of a non-rhyming text provides pinyin romanization. And since the Chinese text looks distinct enough from the English translation, it is not put in parentheses. Now, how did the Cao court poets process their loss—a friend in this case—through poetry in each present moment of their intertwined lives? Let us turn to the chapters to explore.