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The Orphan Ts'ao P'i, His Odd Poem, and Its Historiographic Frame

When I go down and confront the former king, I shall have done enough
to fulfill my grave responsibilities. My hopes are straitened and [my]
will compressed; I can only keep to this [present stance].

Ts'ao P'i, 220 AD

Recently, two studies concerning poetry found in historiographical writings have led me back to an unusual poem by Ts'ao P'i 曹丕 (187–226) that we find embedded in a standard-history commentary. David Schaberg's study concerns the nature of pre-Han and some Ch'in-Han poems/songs (elided as one category) that were never taken into classical collections.¹ Along the way, Schaberg mentions the sorts of condensed trope that could be used to thrust forward a meaning, or a coded message. He shows that poems helped drive home the point of their surrounding historical narratives by means of a frame, which holds verse and historical incident together. The other study is by Martin Kern. Noting Schaberg's contribution, he discusses poetry found inside Han historiography. Using passages taken from the highly crafted *Shih-chi* 史記 and *Han-shu* 漢書, he shows how a historiographically framed poem “encapsulates the essence of a dramatic historical moment...”:

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¹ See David Schaberg, “Song and the Historical Imagination in Early China,” *HJAS* 59.2 (1999), pp. 305–61, esp. 309.

In the narratives of early historiography, songs often appear as markers of significant moments and are frequently related to strong claims of truth, emotion, morality, and authenticity. This applies to the elaborately orchestrated imperial sacrificial hymns, to the extemporized lyrics of a hero or lover in the moment of physical or emotional devastation, ...²

The Ts'ao P'i poem is found in an early, now mostly lost, work quoted in P'ei Sung-chih's 裴松之 (372-451) commentary to *San-kuo chih* 三國志. I translated it ten years ago as part of a study of Ts'ao's and his advisers' *stretto* communiques in the fall of 220 that argued in a variety of ways how the new Wei king would end the Han and become emperor in his own right.³ At that time, I saw Ts'ao's history-embedded poem as simply an announcement of his kingly decision and a vehicle by which he could manage the communiques and promote certain ideals for his impending reign. I had not asked: why a poem? why its shape? what about the way it is framed with the other communiques? In short, I did not interpret it as a literary piece, but I do so in the present article.

In its most psychologically jarring sense, the poem's frame in P'ei's commentary acts like a *deus ex machina* that seeks to grip and confront Ts'ao P'i. A spiritual force "from the machine" can do this because it melds inner, human expression with roiling historical events; thus we see mantic revelations of several types common to Han-era China: oracle-texts packed with numerology and word-play (one originating in the taoistically-charged Shu region), a divine-cosmic genealogy, Ts'ao P'i's enumeration of mythical eremites, and Ts'ao's appeals to postmortem beings.⁴ Firming up the frame are normative historical details: political leadership is exerted upon a listening public that included named groups at a place and moment; surrounding incidents are mentioned (some recent); and rites are designed and enacted.

² See Martin Kern, "The Poetry of Han Historiography," *Early Medieval China* 10-11.1 (2004), pp. 24-25.

³ Howard L. Goodman, *Ts'ao P'i Transcendent: The Political Culture of Dynasty-Founding in China at the End of the Han* (Seattle and Surrey, England: Scripta Serica and Curzon, 1998), pp. 32-34.

⁴ These mantic revelations are discussed in *ibid.* and in David R. Knechtges, "The Rhetoric of Imperial Abdication and Accession in a Third-Century Chinese Court: The Case of Cao Pi's Accession as Emperor of the Wei Dynasty," in David R. Knechtges and Eugene Vance, eds., *Rhetoric and the Discourses of Power in Court Culture: China, Europe, and Japan* (Seattle: U. Washington P., 2005), pp. 3-35. A classic study of the way obscurantist symbols, evolving over centuries, could purport to give hidden historical and religious truths is that of Don Cameron Allen, *Mysteriously Meant* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1970). I see Ts'ao's symbol-laden eremites who refused power as emerging from a somewhat similar process.

Having been confronted, Ts'ao P'i answered the mantic challenge by devising his own rhetorical and literary counter-frame, as it were. As I discuss in the final section, from late Eastern Han forward, there was little interest among historians in framing poems and songs in their writings. Here, Ts'ao P'i's talent and his self-consciousness as a literary leader from a literary family made up for such a lack. Stating authentic grief over his father's death and anxiety over the mantic proposals, he concluded with a poem of an unusual structure that could cleverly show his political will. He kept the process of ending the Han viable and on his own terms, and he distinguished between a foreign-seeming, pro-Ts'ao Ts'ao oracle and his own choice of ancient tropes of power. Thus our balladeer-historian is not found at the compilatory end of the process, but at the origin, framing his words for history in "real time."

TEXTUAL ASPECTS OF THE FRAME

All the communiques about Ts'ao P'i's declination and, finally, acceptance of the throne were copied into an annalistic record titled "Hsien-ti chuan" 獻帝傳, or "Annals of Emperor Hsien [of Han]" (later sometimes cited differently). It was an example of a common genre of court record, this one covering the official life of the boy, then the young man, named Liu Hsieh 劉協 (r. 189–220; posthumously titled Hsien-ti; d. 234); it was compiled by Liu Ai 劉艾, who died probably around 221–22. (I return later to the matter of how Liu's record handled its sources and over time was in turn handled.) Liu was a court recordist and adviser of the Han emperors Ling and Hsien who seems to have served in several locales as the court moved in and out of Changan and Loyang and nearby places, and was even somewhat familiar with the activities of the Five-Pecks-of-Rice Taoist 五斗米道 community in the Shu area southwest of Changan. Liu was a real official, a ritual assistant and scribe of the Eastern Han court, and was in fact referred to in other writings. He conveyed information crucial to later understanding of the last years of the Han.⁵ "Hsien-ti chuan" contains dozens of memorials, commands and edicts, yet the spoken memorials and argumentations concerning the Shu-derived, and other, oracles come at the head of all the documents. There is good reason to believe that Liu Ai placed

⁵ On Liu, see Howard L. Goodman, "Celestial-Master Taoism and the Founding of the Ts'ao-Wei Dynasty: The Li Fu Document," *AM* 3d ser. 7.1 (1994), pp. 13–18; and Rafe de Crespigny, *A Biographical Dictionary of Later Han to the Three Kingdoms (23–220 AD)* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2006), p. 470, who, concerning Liu's writing, says "survive[s] in fragments." Indeed, several *chüan* were lost quite early, but P'ei's extract from "Hsien-ti chuan" is a lengthy and integral record of this one important event.

them there because they in fact occurred, may have at one point been datable, and thus functioned as invocations for the conclave. Whether that is the case, or the case that Liu or P'ei Sung-chih later on judged them as so, at least it is clear that the role of mantic affairs was a strong force in early China's mentale.

Ts'ao P'i's small, odd poem comes inside a larger passage, that is, a formal command issued by him on about November 20-21, 220. The incidents to which Ts'ao's command was responding concerned first of all a mysterious, and in ways dubious, Shu oracle that glorified Ts'ao and was interpreted for Ts'ao by a Shu expert, then the speech of another expert on these matters, who confirmed the importance of the first oracle as one of many such texts that for years had predicted the rise of the Wei.⁶ The rhetoric of revelation and oracles, and, as we soon see, even notions of the postmortem dead, were now clearly on the table, needing proper techniques of interpretation and good rhetoric, so that the public would not become anxious about the risks imposed by turning to oracle experts. In other words, part of my argument is that Ts'ao P'i was already constructing frames when he made his response-command to the oracles.

Ts'ao's prose was, as stated, a "command 令" (some say "order"), one of perhaps a dozen that he issued to influential, some quite learned, men of action from about the second week of November to December 10, 220, the day before he mounted an altar in Fan-yang 繁陽 to accept the throne from Hsien-ti. A command was an appropriate genre for a king to use in this context, since the Han emperor was still the supreme ruler, and only the emperor could make pronouncements (decrees), that is, 詔 and 敕. The small poem that we are dealing with brings Ts'ao's command to a climactic end: there being only one short phrase of concluding prose that follows. The poem contains five hexasyllabic lines, each line with the same end-rhyme. There is an internal structure as well, which I talk about later. Apparently neither Ts'ao nor the earliest transcribers gave it a title. Over thirty years ago Lois Fusek translated the poem using the title "Poem from a Command" ("Ling shih 令詩").⁷ The name came from earlier anthologizers who merely by linking those two words may have presaged our modern sense of a frame as being several elements bound together; Lu Ch'in-li 遼欽立 follows in using the same title.⁸ However, to avoid invoking the sense of "command"

⁶ See Goodman, *Ts'ao P'i Transcendent*, chap. 4-5, esp. docs. 3, 5, 7.

⁷ Lois Fusek, "The Poetry of Ts'ao P'i (187-226)," Ph.D. diss. (Yale University, 1975), p. 287.

⁸ Lu, comp., *Hsien Ch'in Han Wei Chin Nan-pei ch'ao shih* 先秦漢魏晉南北朝詩 (Peking: Chung-hua, 1983), sect. "Wei shih 4," p. 403; the poem was collected perhaps first in Feng Wei-

as a military field headquarters, I think a broad, interpretive rendering works better, thus “A Poem That Concludes a Royal Command.”

Before we deal directly with the command and the odd poem, we ought to step back to take in the political times, especially as they relate to Ts'ao P'i, his vigorous and expressive family, and the principals' suffering and orphanhood that preceded the events of autumn, 220.

AN ORPHANED STATE AND A GRIEVING ORPHAN KING

The field of early-medieval Chinese history lacks a sufficient number of full-scale, modern biographies – ones that go beyond the standard-histories to capture circles of influence, intellectual and philosophical motives, and social structures. The few revealing works that we do have luckily cover several relevant literary greats, so that we have some help concerning Ts'ao Ts'ao 曹操 (155–220) and his sons Ts'ao Chih 曹植 (192–232) and Ts'ao P'i.⁹ For the latter, Lois Fusek sketched a short and accessible biography, relying chiefly on the Sung-era *Tzu-chih t'ung-chien* 資治通鑑. I myself, in *Ts'ao P'i Transcendent*, tried to work out in a very minor way something of Ts'ao P'i's challenges and machinations on the way to taking the Han throne, a project greatly aided by Robert Joe Cutter's work on the younger brother Ts'ao Chih.¹⁰

na's 馮惟訥 (fl. mid-1500s) *Ku shih chi* 古詩紀, thus seemingly the first to give the title as “令詩.” Feng's work was one of the chief bases on which Chang P'u 張溥 (*tzu* 天如; 1602–1641) a century later formed his compendium *Han Wei Liu-ch'ao pai-san chia chi* 漢魏六朝百三家集 (first publ. 1640–44), which carries “Ling-shih” as an item in the reconstructed *wen-chi* of Ts'ao P'i (ch. 25). The poem is not in Huang Chieh's 黃節, *Wei Wen Wu Ming ti shih-chu* 魏文武帝詩注 (Taipei: Yi-wen, n.d.); but it is mentioned in passing for its being hexasyllabic in Suzuki Shūji 鈴木修次, *Kan Gi shi no kenkyū* 漢魏詩の研究 (Tokyo, 1967), p. 466.

⁹ One of the great, full-scale biographies is Donald Holzman's, *Poetry and Politics: The Life and Works of Juan Chi* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1975); in it are episodes that explain some of the thinking of Ts'ao leaders. On Ts'ao Ts'ao, see, e.g., Wang Chung-lo 王仲榮, *Cao Cao* 曹操 (Shanghai: Shanghai jen-min ch'u-pan she, 1956); also, Paul W. Kroll, “Portraits of Ts'ao Ts'ao: Literary Studies on the Man and the Myth,” Ph.D. diss. (U. of Michigan, 1976), which analyzes the life through literature, history, and myth. The three Ts'aos are chronologized in Chang K'o-li, 張可禮, *San Ts'ao nien-p'u* 三曹年譜 (Jinan: Ch'i Lu shu-she, 1983); Wang Wei 王巍, *San Ts'ao p'ing-chuan* 三曹評傳 (Shenyang: Liao-ning ku-chi ch'u-pan-she, 1995); and Chang Tso-yao 張作耀, “San Ts'ao nien-piao” 三曹年表, in *Ts'ao Ts'ao p'ing-chuan* 曹操評傳 (Nanking: Nan-ching ta-hsüeh ch'u-pan-she, 2001), pp. 515–27.

¹⁰ Fusek, “Poetry of Ts'ao P'i,” chap. 1; and Goodman, *Ts'ao P'i Transcendent*, pp. 45–52, 56–59; the work of Cutter is: “The Incident at the Gate: Cao Zhi, the Succession, and Literary Fame,” *TP* 71 (1985), pp. 228–62. Relevant chapters of Ssu-ma Kuang's history are available in English; Rafe de Crespigny, trans., *To Establish Peace, Being the Chronicle of Later Han for the Years 189 to 220 AD as Recorded in Chapters 59 to 69 of the Zizhi tongjian of Sima Guang*, Asian Studies Monographs, NS 21 (Canberra: Faculty of Asian Studies, Australian National University, 1996). Another western-language study done around the time of Fusek's is that of Wilfred Schulte, “Ts'ao P'i (187–226), Leben und Dichtungen,” Ph.D. diss. (Uni-

Ts'ao P'i and the last Han emperor were both orphans. I take a broad view of that word, freely mixing the following characteristics: losing parents or mentors or friends by death or abandonment, living by the grace of a protector/step-parent, the concomitant straitened conditions and grief. I believe that with this sort of connective tissue we can approach Ts'ao P'i in a multifaceted way, showing different levels of relationship with both the emperor and other Ts'aos.

The stressful affairs surrounding the emperor need not be retold here, except to say that he was cast off in 189 when his half-brother was made emperor, and then led by eunuchs out of the capital and into a violent confrontation. He survived that and returned to the capital in the same year, when he was taken over by the violent warlord Tung Cho 董卓 (d. 192). Tung placed him on the throne and kept him powerless. In 190 Tung forced him to go west to Changan in 190. After several years of such confusion, the boy quasi-emperor escaped yet another handler in 195, after which he left Changan and ended up wandering with a retinue toward Loyang, which he reached in 196, only to be taken in hand by Ts'ao Ts'ao and installed finally in Hsü 許, southeast of Loyang (the formerly great capital, now destroyed).

Thus the Han emperor was an orphan of some magnitude, having experienced abandonment, grief, and life by the grace of a guardian. After being established in Hsü by Ts'ao Ts'ao, the emperor received a court of advisors, many being literary lights of the day and some staunch Han loyalists (for example, Hsün Yüeh 荀悅, 148–209, and K'ung Jung 孔融, 153–208). But as the Chien-an reign period in Hsü wore on, advisors increasingly directed their words and thoughts toward Ts'ao Ts'ao, the *de facto* sovereign and caretaker. Often, new ideas

versity of Bonn, 1973). Some recent Chinese-language studies are Hung Shun-lung 洪順隆, "Ts'ao P'i sheng-p'ing shih-chi lun k'ao" 曹丕生平事機論考, *Hua-kang wen-k'o hsüeh-pao* 華岡文學報 17 (1989), pp. 21–55; 18 (1991), pp. 229–63; 19 (1993), pp. 147–85; idem, *Wei Wen-ti Ts'ao P'i nien-p'u chi tso-p'in hsi-nien* 魏文帝曹丕年譜暨作品繫年 (Taipei: Shang-wu yin-shu kuan, 1989); I Chien-hsien 易健賢, "Ts'ao P'i nien-p'u" 曹丕年譜, *Kuei-chou chiao-yü hsüeh-yuan hsüeh-pao* 貴州教育學院學報 (She-hui k'o-hsüeh pan) 50 (1998.2), pp. 39–46; P'an Chao-hsien 潘照賢, *Wei Wen-ti Ts'ao P'i p'ing-chuan* 魏文帝曹丕評傳 (Hong Kong: Hsiang-jih kuei chubanshe, 2000); T'ung Yü 童瑜, "20 shih-chi hou erh-shih nien Ts'ao P'i yen-chiu tsung-shu" 20世紀後二十年曹丕研究綜述, *Ha-erh-pin hsüeh-yuan hsüeh-pao* 哈爾濱學院學報 26.12 (2005), pp. 66–70; Ts'ao Tao-heng 曹道衡, "Ts'ung Wei-kuo cheng-ch'üan k'an Ts'ao P'i Ts'ao Chih chih cheng" 從魏國政權看曹丕曹植之爭, *Liao-ning ta-hsüeh hsüeh-pao* 遼寧大學學報 (Che-hsüeh she-hui k'o-hsüeh pan) (1984.3), pp. 73–79; rpt. Ts'ao Tao-heng 曹道衡, *Chung-ku wen-hsüeh shih lun-wen-chi hsü-pien* 中古文學史論文集續編 (Taipei: Wen-chin ch'u-pan, 1994), pp. 49–64; Chang Hsin-chien 章新建, *Ts'ao P'i* 曹丕 (Ho-fei: Huang-shan shu-she, 1985); and Chang K'o-li 張可禮, "Ts'ao P'i" 曹丕, in Mou Shih-chin 牟世金, ed.-in-chief, *Chung-kuo ku-tai wen-lun chia p'ing-chuan* 中國古代文論家評傳 (Cheng-chou: Chung-chou ku-chi ch'u-pan she, 1988), pp. 145–59.

for diplomacy and war, as well as games, symposia, poetry, and music arose at field encampments with Ts'ao Ts'ao or in the latter's capital at Yeh 鄴. Ts'ao became something of a distant but hovering step-uncle to the emperor, even giving his own daughters as imperial consorts. One gets the sense of Liu Hsieh as step-nephew, surviving only by remaining in a temporary palace with an insular court, and having to accept tighter tethers to Ts'ao Ts'ao.

At this point we fit Ts'ao P'i into the political picture; we focus on the period 217 to early 220. It had not been easy for the Ts'ao brothers P'i and Chih to be raised by a military and strategic genius. An important reason for difficulties was that their father was harsh in applying training and discipline. This was not a brutal harshness, but a manipulation of the patrimony through tests of manhood, and by his hints about one or the other's status as successor. In the end, the brothers would have to drift apart, as Chih made poor decisions, failed tests, and met setbacks in the building of his own entourage. Rober Joe Cutter has studied the literary vehicles by which Ts'ao Chih expressed emotional tensions within the Ts'ao family.¹¹

Since 211, when P'i was given a court circle of his own (the gentlemen for all purposes), he had grown to admire leading writers (as had Chih), but in 217 a severe epidemic took a number of them as its victims, something that comes out in P'i's "Essay on Literature" and "Letter to Wu Chih 吳質," a somber piece (written around March 18, 218) that mentions the epidemic directly.¹² In 219, Ts'ao P'i was ordered by his father to make punitive dispositions concerning a core of anti-Ts'ao plotters (and many of their near relatives); this burdened P'i with equivocal feelings, since some of the plotter-families included descendants of his literary heros.¹³

¹¹ See Robert Joe Cutter, "Personal Crisis and Communication in the Life of Cao Zhi," in Knechtges and Vance, eds., *Rhetoric*, pp. 149-68.

¹² See Stephen Owen, *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought* (Cambridge, Mass.: Council on E. Asian Studies, Harvard U., 1992), p. 70-72, who mentions Ts'ao P'i's sense of anxiety about literary competition. A fine analysis of the letter to Wu, with its notice of recent deaths, is found in Fusek, "Poetry of Ts'ao P'i," pp. 72-75. On the epidemic, see Chao Chien-chün 趙建軍, "Chien-an erh-shih-erh nien te wen-i tui wen-hsüeh te ying-hsiang" 建安二十二年的瘟疫對文學的影響, *Yin-shan hsüeh-k'an* 陰山學刊 (社會科學版) 20.1 (2007), pp. 19-21. See also Ronald Miao, "Literary Criticism at the End of the Eastern Han," *Literature East and West* 16.3 (1972), pp. 1030-32; Donald Holzman, "Literary Criticism in China in the Early Third Century AD," *Asiatische Studien* 28.2 (1974), pp. 123-25; rpt. in Donald Holzman, *Chinese Literature in Transition from Antiquity to the Middle Ages* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998); Furuta Keiichi 福井佳夫, "Sō Hi no 'Yo Go Shitsu sho ni tsuite'" 曹丕與吳質書について, *Chūgoku chūsei bungaku kenkyū* 中國中世文學研究 20 (1991), pp. 1-25; Huang Shu-ling 黃淑齡, "Ts'ao P'i 'Yü Wu Chih shu' chiao cheng" 曹丕與無質書校證, *Chung-kuo wen-hsüeh yen-chiu* 中國文學研究 8 (1994), pp. 39-63.

¹³ Goodman, *Ts'ao P'i Transcendent*, p. 57, and the sources mentioned in n. 68 there.

We approach the orphan matter more closely – in the relatively narrow sense of Ts’ao-family rhetoric meant to avoid political liminality and provide a Ts’ao-family ideology. Since in summer of 216 Ts’ao Ts’ao had arranged that the Han emperor appoint him as “king” of Wei, now in 219 he stated that if the mandate actually was “lodged in his person” then he must be a sage like “Wen-wang.” That is, if some skilled astrologer or political philosopher could demonstrate the cosmic turnings of the mandate through celestial or mantic patterns, then he, Ts’ao Ts’ao, would think, as had Wen-wang, only about preparing a new polity, leaving the rest to his sons. Thus P’i and Chih would act as, variously, king Wu and the Duke of Chou. This was quite a pregnant emblem to hoist, and it ramified to the struggles between P’i and Chih. If he wished to extend such a gesture of emulation, Ts’ao P’i might demonstrate the thinking of the ancient king Wu and thus push forward the family’s struggle. But what struggle was that: to quell unrest so that the Han could continue in peace? to overthrow the Han? In fact, might P’i actually become the Duke of Chou, and thus be regent to a young Ts’ao ruler, who would then be seen as a king Ch’eng?¹⁴

The classicist emblem of a politically noble Chou orphan, as expressed by the elderly Ts’ao Ts’ao, was not a black-and-white ideology of legitimacy: it was flexible and open to manipulation. Upon Ts’ao Ts’ao’s eventual death, one or another of his sons (or someone external) would have to deal with the Ts’ao patrimony and also handle the sitting Han monarch. To Ts’ao P’i, the questions of who, how, and if were no doubt vexing. If it is possible to guess at internal thoughts, we might suggest that to P’i the father not only avoided making a difficult decision about how to handle his own Han loyalty whilst running the state, but also was simply passing the matter on to P’i. This typified the kinds of manipulation by which Ts’ao Ts’ao dominated his sons: he set up P’i as a literary man (as Chih was refining his own literary status separately), gave him a court and the title of heir-apparent, and all the while promoted images of a historic showdown for power within the family. Fusek has remarked that although Ts’ao Ts’ao “... would not move to oust the Han, his son might well be prompted to do so.”¹⁵ The key word there is “prompted.”

How would that work? How might Ts’ao P’i be prompted to take an action worthy of, or pleasing to, Ts’ao Ts’ao? The short answer involves

¹⁴ For sources of Ts’ao Ts’ao’s Wen-wang gesture, see *ibid.*, p. 56, n. 62; also Fusek, “Poetry of Ts’ao P’i,” p. 26.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 26; also Kroll, “Portraits of Ts’ao Ts’ao,” pp. 7–9, 12.

my boldest argument here: the historically least understood of all the stated ways that Ts'ao P'i perceived the old man's manipulations was the power of postmortem, numinous influence as well as the prose genre that talked about all that. These were the oracle-texts that had intruded upon and altered court political discourse since the beginning of the first century AD. When we look carefully at the Shu oracle, we see that its promoters demanded a certain kind of conversion, an acknowledgment that its truths were far-reaching and accepted. As touched upon at the end of this article, the religious (specifically revelatory) nature of all this was, in the minds of some later historiographers and critics, crude and dismissable. The well-known but disturbing medium was part of the reason that the texts of the month-long conclave, and ultimately Ts'ao P'i's poem, received little comment.

We come finally to the year 220. It started out badly for Ts'ao P'i. He had already begun to experience trouble with his lady Chen 甄, who would be hounded by lady Kuo 郭 and subsequently turn toward bitter complaining. (P'i would force her to commit suicide in 221.) Momentously, on March 15, 220, Ts'ao Ts'ao died in Loyang. The death prompted the kind of mourning that was expected of an adult orphan in early China, and P'i did mourn profusely, as noted in the sources.¹⁶ Another poem by Ts'ao P'i, much quoted and anthologized, testifies to this. It is titled "Short Song," and in Fusek's translation several lines stand out for their intimacy: "I look up at the hanging curtains, / I look down at the benches and mats. / His things are as before, / But he is gone. ... No one to rely on and no one to trust, / I weep without end. .. Only I am alone, / Holding these many sorrows. ... Why was he not protected?" Lu Ch'in-li's notes (quoting the *Chi-lu* 技錄 of Wang Seng-ch'ien 王僧虔) tell us that this lament was meant to be sung (or perhaps performed on zither), and in fact was decreed by Ts'ao Ts'ao on his deathbed to be performed on the first day of each seasonal festival.¹⁷

But Ts'ao P'i could put aside mourning late in the summer in order to tour with his military men, going southeastward to Ch'iao, the Ts'aos' homeland. There, troops were feasted and old home connections solidi-

¹⁶ Achilles Fang, trans., *The Chronicles of the Three Kingdoms (220–265): Chapters 69–78 from the Tzū Chih Tung Chien of Ssū-ma Kuang (1029–1086)* (Cambridge: Harvard U.P., 1952) 1, p. 2.

¹⁷ We know that Ts'ao P'i was musically adept, especially regarding popular zither and dance entertainment. See Fusek, "Poetry of Ts'ao P'i," pp. 172–73, also Howard L. Goodman, "Tinnabulations of Bells: Scoring-Prosody in Third-Century China and Its Relationship to Yüeh-fu Party Music," *JASOS* 126.1 (2006), p. 37. For notes on the poem, see Lu, *Hsien Ch'in Han Wei* (Wei shih 4), p. 389.

fied. In later historical criticism the new orphan was attacked for thus showing a lack of filial piety and mourning attitude. Also, at the end of 221, Sun Ch'üan 孫權, the Wei's vassal "foreign" lord in Wu, would harshly criticize Ts'ao P'i for lack of mourning propriety by his having demanded luxury items from Wu.¹⁸ Despite what seems to have been excusable political necessities (to display power at a liminal moment), the Ts'ao heir may simply have been enjoying the lifting of pressures. Sun Ch'üan had sworn fealty; Meng Ta 孟達 of Shu had gone over to Wei; and the Ti tribes of Wu-tu 武都氏 surrendered and were moved into the Han-yang area to be a buffer against Shu. The summer was thus relatively good, but it came at the price of seeming to some as too powerful and also a disrespectful orphan.

A LEADER'S EMOTIONS AND HIS RHETORIC TO CONFRONT ORACLE-TEXTS

We come to late autumn of 220, and the edicts, orders, and memorials about Ts'ao P'i's political future. For several weeks many hundreds of local leaders, military men, and officials (and all their retinues) gathered in the vicinity of a Han ritual site at Fan-yang, south of Hsü in central Honan, for the purpose of guiding the Ts'ao heir toward establishing a new dynasty. (The conclave was a hortatory event: there is no record of utterances to the effect that Ts'ao P'i should not take the throne, although there were other kinds of grumbling.) As earlier mentioned, perhaps the documents exactly reflect the original utterances and an original chronological order. My own sense is that they started as oral-written pieces meant as grand prose by the various participants, who considered that their thoughts at a historic moment were worthy of saving; many of the Han emperor's edicts were composed by a well-known scholar-antiquarian and calligraphy expert, Wei Chi 衛覲 (fl. ca. 190-230), and were no doubt later gathered by court record keepers like Liu Ai. In addition, it is possible that Ts'ao P'i and/or his close literary advisers for several months prior invited and even vetted some of the speeches, thus affecting them at their origin. As to the writings (memorials and speeches) of the gathered officials and leaders, we can assume that in the following months they were transcribed privately by the authors and their retinues and families, then sought, transcribed, and compiled by Liu Ai for his annals. He may have gone over the words – perhaps effecting some changes, but I do not believe that P'ei Sung-chih made many, if any, changes centuries later.

¹⁸ Fusek, "Poetry of Ts'ao P'i," pp. 28 and 36, respectively.

As I have mentioned, Liu Ai's documentation starts with an undated political oracle that originated in Shu perhaps around 215-19 and worked its way to Ts'ao P'i in 220. In it, we shall see that a numinous force, namely the postmortem powers of the just-deceased Ts'ao Ts'ao, influences Ts'ao P'i's "rhetoric of refusal" (to borrow Knechtges' apt phrase).¹⁹ It is my own contention that the formalistic refusal also functioned as a public disavowal of the most salient points of belief conveyed by mantic arts in the political arena: it was a refusal to be thoroughly converted to the Shu-area, specifically the Five-Peck Taoist, oracle tradition.²⁰

I summarize what I wrote elsewhere about the nature of the Shu oracle and aspects that reveal the plausible historical scenario in which it was engendered.²¹ The conclave opens with a certain Li Fu's 李伏 memorial presented to Ts'ao P'i most likely in Honan in the Hsü vicinity. Li carried title as left-general of gentlemen for all purposes, in other words he had become a member of the advisorial court under Ts'ao P'i that had been set up since 211. Li perhaps was new to the Central Plain, because he says that he heard about a Shu oracle concerning Ts'ao P'i some years prior, while he was in Han-chung 漢中, an important Shu commandery northeast of Ch'eng-tu and the administrative center of which, Nan-cheng 南鄭, was where the Taoist leader Chang Lu 張魯 established military headquarters. Li reported to Ts'ao P'i that sometime soon after 213 he heard from two oracle experts from the northwestern border area of Shu about a prophecy that predicted that the one to lead the world will be a "duke of Wei," not someone titled "king." The people of Shu thought that in 213, Ts'ao Ts'ao had arranged to be made "king" (a daring anti-Han move), but they were mistaken, since that did not occur until 216. Several evidences are given that purportedly confirmed the pro-P'i oracle including an oracle-text, or apocryphon, that spoke of numerology and a mysterious incident of magic writing. Li,

¹⁹ Knechtges, "Rhetoric of Imperial Abdication," pp. 6 ff., begins discussion of Ts'ao's "rhetoric of refusal" with the next set of documents in "Hsien-ti chuan," but that subsequent set in fact starts by acknowledging the salience of the Shu oracle.

²⁰ On the revelatory nature of oracle-texts, see Anna Seidel, "Imperial Treasures and Taoist Sacraments: Taoist Roots in the Apocrypha," in vol. 2 of Michel Strickmann, ed., *Tantric and Taoist Studies: In Honour of R. A. Stein*, Mélanges chinois et bouddhiques 21 (Brussels: Institut Belge des Hautes Études Chinoises, 1983-85), pp. 291-371. On the Shu Taoists, see Rolf Stein, "Religious Taoism and Popular Religion from the Second to Seventh Centuries," in Anna Seidel and Holmes Welch, eds., *Facets of Taoism* (New Haven: Yale U.P., 1979); Michel Strickmann, *Le taoïsme du Mao Chan: Chronique d'une révélation*, Mémoires de l'Institut des Hautes Études Chinoises 17 (Paris: P. U. de France, 1983); Barbara Hendrischke, "Early Daoist Movements," in Livia Kohn, ed., *Daoism Handbook* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), pp. 134-64.

²¹ Goodman, *Ts'ao P'i Transcendent*, chap. 4; and idem, "Li Fu Document."

still in the Han-chung area, then told this to Chang Lu, probably just before or just as Chang's Five-Peck Taoist forces surrendered to Ts'ao Ts'ao in autumn of 215. Li was probably directly advising Chang at this time. Chang was declining in health and power, his forces just then falling to the Wei generals; he admired Ts'ao Ts'ao as one general to another, having even arranged to let his stores in Nan-cheng remain in place for Ts'ao's troops to use. He wished to surrender to Ts'ao Ts'ao, but his advisors promoted other strategies, for example, staying put and manipulating tribal hostilities to the advantage of the Five-Pecks, or going temporarily over to Liu Pei 劉備. Li Fu tried energetically via his oracular sources to get Chang Lu to consider Ts'ao P'i as the true ruler. Chang was infuriated with all these suggestions and grew ill and died; but most of his family and thousands of followers went as subdued peoples to Yeh, where they were settled and given favors by the Wei court. The original teller of the pro-Ts'ao P'i oracle (the one who gave it to Li Fu) appears to have become a leader of the community by that point; it is said that he was the first to greet Ts'ao Ts'ao in Yeh.

Why did a Shu oracle lead off the speeches at Hsü? One possible answer that was not raised, above, is the intellectual allure of Shu – a foreign-seeming cultural milieu that could challenge the elite of the Central Plain. Perhaps by geography and proximity to Kunlun and the Queen Mother, or via the ancient culture that had existed around the Ch'eng-tu region, Shu seemed to be an important origin of oracles and oracular scholarship. J. Michael Farmer's recent book, *The Talent of Shu*, brings out what appears to be a pattern of learning among Shu intellectual leaders throughout the late-second and third centuries that concentrated on mantic arts in political contexts. He delineates a complex skein of mentoring and teaching, peopled by eremitic types and family traditions of secret skills. For example, the trend influenced Shu men like Ch'iao Chou 譙周 (d. 270) and his student Ch'en Shou 陳壽 (233–297), who both became known in Loyang in the 260s partly for such skills.²² We can erect an image in our minds of some sort of bold, Shu political prediction about Ts'ao P'i, colored by mantic proofs, that had been propounded among the Five Pecks in the mountains northeast of Ch'eng-tu beginning in about 213–14. Its promoter, Li Fu, used the alluring message to cement a place for himself as an immigrant Ts'ao P'i adviser in 220, just before the early-November opening documents of the conclave. Li Fu's oracle pitted the heir Ts'ao P'i against his world-

²² J. Michael Farmer, *The Talent of Shu: Qiao Zhou and the Intellectual World of Early Medieval Sichuan* (Albany: SUNY P., 2007), chaps. 1, 2; see my review, *TP* 94.1-3 (2008), pp. 163–76.

shaking father, who was idolized by a variety of Shu leaders as well as the Taoist leader Chang Lu.

Having heard Li Fu's plea to accept the oracle, the king of Wei Ts'ao P'i issued an order (coming before the order containing his poem):

Show [Li Fu's memorial] outside [the court]. How can [I], a man of meek virtue, have effected this? It is not dared to be presumed. Truly, this is the former king's (Ts'ao Ts'ao's) utmost virtue that has communicated with divine radiance; it is definitely not the work of a [mere] person 斯誠先王至德通於神明, 固非人力也.²³

The rhetoric of numinous influence has now been broached, but astoundingly the postmortem Ts'ao Ts'ao, if not the originator of the oracle in 213-14, is identified as the numinous agent who has sent his approval of the pro-P'i instruction magically to its sage-authors. The old man, now walking in the empyrean with his spiritual admirer Chang Lu, was signaling to P'i: "I always thought it was you! Go sweep away the Han for me."

The skeptical modern reader may object that Li Fu, Liu Ai, or Ts'ao P'i simply made everything up about a Shu oracle. But I do not think so, at least not entirely. Besides, what would fabricating a broad predictive statement actually mean, since in a certain way of thinking all predictions are in great part (some think wholly) an alloy of fabrication, influence, and probabilities? And even if fabricated (in whatever fashion), that would not negate the way that oracular quasi-rumors were easily recognized by several conclave participants as effective rhetoric. More than likely, Ts'ao P'i heard of the newcomer Li Fu's Shu oracles and desired to reply in an advantageous way. Thus, Ts'ao P'i has denied his own role, even as the oracles' subject; at the same time he recognized the genre's existence and importance, and built on its ghostly aspects.

This important matter of Ts'ao Ts'ao's powerful spirit was mentioned by others during the conclave. This comes inside a dated memorial placed by Liu Ai well after the above command by Ts'ao P'i, when participants were getting near to ordering built the ritual altar for the change of dynasty. Ts'ao P'i's most senior officials, the Three Excellencies, referred back to all the previous rhetorical ploys and ideas; and their memorial confirms the authority of oracle-texts *per se*, stating that Ts'ao Ts'ao's entombed numen had joined with those of

²³ Goodman, *Ts'ao P'i Transcendent*, p. 81 (doc. 4), but with emendations.

primordial sages in an overall cryptic anxiety about Ts'ao P'i's indecision to take the throne:

If the perished have numens, then Ch'ung-hua (Shun) must be angry in [his] spirit-tomb in Ts'ang-wu; Ta-Yü (Yü of Hsia) must be melancholy at Shan-yin, in K'uai-chi (where he died); and the Martial King (Ts'ao Ts'ao) must be unhappy at Kao-ling's Dark Temple. It is for this reason that we ministers dared (dare) to request (a decision to take the throne) on pain of death. 沒者有靈, 則重華必忿憤于蒼梧之神墓, 大禹必鬱悒于會稽之山陰, 武王必不悅于(商) <高> 陵之玄宮矣. 是以臣等敢以死請²⁴

The religion of ancestral rites and beliefs could form mens' thinking about occult political arts. Furthermore, Ts'ao P'i's words, above, did not deny the numinous efficacy of oracles *per se*, but only saying that he would not embrace the Shu claim, since his father was tied up in the whole matter – mythically, culturally, and numinously. To effect a fleshed-out philosophical defense for himself, Ts'ao P'i would turn to Confucian techniques and tropes. To counter Li Fu's attempt to convert him to Ts'ao Ts'ao's divine inner will, Ts'ao P'i must emphasize his own will, as we see shortly, in the little poem.

The next documents in “Hsien-ti chuan,” also undated, show that a group of senior officials, Ts'ao-family key advisers and tutors, responded favorably to Li Fu's Shu oracle and made a long peroration on previous oracles in history and the role in them of abstruse signs and naturalistic omens. Ts'ao P'i's answer to them continues the same kind of manipulation: again he denies his own role in the generation of oracles or his being their subject, yet he wants the senior officials' explanation of oracles to be broadcast.²⁵

We come to a dated document: on November 21 an otherwise unknown official in the Bureau of Astronomy-Astrology named Hsü Chih 許芝 (apparently a Central Plains, not a Shu, scholar) memorialized at enormous length, with dozens of erudite examples of political oracle-texts bearing ditties, computations, and graphologies that demonstrated that a coming Wei polity was the subject of concurring revelations.

Ts'ao P'i replied inside the “command” – potentially part of a frame. He emphasizes Confucian rhetoric, namely, the theme of Wen-wang that his father had promoted in previous years. Now Ts'ao P'i considers taking the emblematic role of the Duke of Chou, who in ancient times had

²⁴ *San-kuo chih* 三國志 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962) 2, p. 74; trans. Goodman, *Ts'ao P'i Transcendent*, p. 199.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 100 (doc. 6).

served as regent to his young nephew king Ch'eng. He praises king Wen for having honored his Shang opponents; then he states how posterity revered the Duke of Chou for helping the Chou cause by "returning government to the young son."²⁶ This last phrase, taken from the classics, becomes even more important, below, in Ts'ao P'i's poem.

Ts'ao P'i continues, humbly averring to his unworthiness to be, implicitly, a Duke of Chou, or even a Yao or Shun. He mentions that he is just extending his father's great work, and has yet to have brought peace and comfort to people in all quarters of the world. At this point, he lets us in on his physical and emotional state:

I have experienced [this] fortuitous moment, lucky enough to have followed upon the unfinished work of the former king [Ts'ao Ts'ao]; [but] my favors have not yet blanketed the four seas, and my beneficence has not reached everywhere. Although I have expended the storehouses and drained the treasuries in order to rescue the people of the Wei kingdom, still [my] freezing [subjects] have not been fully warmed, and the starving have not been fully fed. Day and night I am sorrowful and worried. I dare not to be leisureful and serene. I might hope [merely] to protect "hair and teeth."²⁷ I shall keep to this present stance until my dying day and keep whole the kingdom of Wei. [Then when] I go down and confront the former king (Ts'ao Ts'ao), I shall have done enough to fulfill my grave responsibilities. [My] hopes are straitened and [my] will compressed; I can only keep to this [present stance]. Although repeatedly graced with good omens, I face them with trembling anxiety; my senses are out of control. If it is as [Hsü] Chih spoke, then how is it even something to listen to? My heart is twittering and my hands are numb. When I write, I cannot form the graphs; in speaking, I cannot send out my feelings. Recently I composed a poem that says: ... 遭遇際會，幸承先王餘業，恩未被四海，澤未及天下，雖傾倉竭府以振魏國百姓，猶寒者未盡煖，飢者未盡飽。夙夜憂懼，弗敢違寧，庶欲保全髮齒，長守今日，以沒於地，以全魏國，下見先王，以塞負荷之責。望狹志局，守此而已；雖屢蒙祥瑞，當之戰惶，五色無主。若芝之言，豈所聞乎？心慄手悼，書不成字，辭不宣心。吾閒作詩曰：...²⁸

²⁶ Knechtges, "Rhetoric of Imperial Abdication," p. 9; he explains some of the problems in interpreting the word "fu/return."

²⁷ Possibly this refers to *Shih-ching*, Mao no. 300; I erred previously by citing it as Mao no. 96; see Goodman, *Ts'ao P'i Transcendent*, p. 106, n. 96. The ode says about the Duke of Chou: "In his time of sere locks he has cut new teeth!", meaning that the duke took on great tasks in his middle age and was renewed by his tough mission. See Arthur Waley, trans., *The Book of Songs*, Joseph R. Allen, ed. and annot. (NYC: Grove Press, 1996), p. 317.

²⁸ Goodman, *Ts'ao P'i Transcendent*, p. 106 (doc. 8), emended; see *San-kuo chih* 2, p. 65.

There follows his “Poem That Concludes a Royal Command.” Ts’ao has arrived at the poem after revealing that he is full of anxiety. We must believe him: he has come through several years of an orphaned Han state that hung onto a manipulative “uncle,” Ts’ao Ts’ao, who in turn was manipulator of his sons’ expectations and political outcomes. The old man’s death had jolted Ts’ao P’i (and others), and P’i had taken risks by marching out to gather support in Ch’iao, and to deal with family squabbles.²⁹ Now, the middle-aged new king of Wei was facing calls from oracle-texts and their interpreters. He, his brother, and his father have generally been recognized as writers who made breakthroughs in creating autobiographical space in a variety of genres.³⁰ They told what was on their minds. Rhetoric does not mean mendacity: a certain expressive truth-telling may fit one’s rhetorical goals. For Ts’ao P’i, truth about his emotions as leader would be one part of it; thus the poem could be revealing in its own way.

THE POEM

Lois Fusek’s translation of “A Poem That Concludes a Royal Command” is excellent and might be utilized step by step. But I do not focus on it, even though in several places I have based my approach directly on hers. My translation has a different purpose. I want to form five line-endings using English words that match the voice-stopped rhymes of the Chinese end-words at least in a crude way. I follow Ting Pang-hsin’s study of Wei-Chin rhyme words, where we find all five end-words in the poem under the *chih* 之 end-rhyme category, and all carry the proleptic *shang* 上 tone, their sound reconstructed as “-jəi.” The “*chih*” category is one of twelve known Wei-Chin-era “voiced-stopped” finals,

²⁹ See Cutter, “Personal Crisis and Communication in the Life of Cao Zhi.”

³⁰ Kroll, “Portraits of Ts’ao Ts’ao,” p. 14, discusses this quality of Ts’ao Ts’ao. On Ts’ao Chih’s ability to divulge his emotional state, see his “piao” concerning P’i’s punishment of him in 221–22; at one point he regrets having caused him and and their mother dowager Pien so much trouble: “My spirit and soul fly and scatter. I should let my body die and forfeit my life” 精魂飛散，忘軀殞命; trans. Cutter, “Personal Crisis,” p. 152, and n. 18 (p. 164). Among a host of studies on Ts’ao P’i’s poetry, I note these: Lu K’an-ju 陸侃如, “Chien-an (Ts’ao P’i) shih-p’u ch’u-kao” 建安 (曹丕) 詩譜初稿, *Yü-yen wen-hsüeh chuan-k’an* 語言文學專刊 2.1 (1940). Ting Hsia 丁夏, “Lun Ts’ao P’i shih, chien lun tui ‘Chien-an feng-ku’ te tsai jen-shih” 論曹丕詩，兼論建安風骨”的再認識, *Ch’ing-hua ta-hsüeh hsüeh-pao* 清華大學學報 (Che-hsüeh she-hui k’o-hsüeh-pan) 10.1 (1995), pp. 70–83; I Chien-hsien, “Ts’ao P’i ku-t’i shih pen-shih hsi-nien tsung-lun” 曹丕古體詩本事系年綜論, *Kuei-chou chiao-yü hsüeh-yuan hsüeh-pao* (She-hui k’o-hsüeh-pan) 44 (1997), pp. 19–25; Ts’ao Jung-nan 曹融南 and Fu Kang 傅剛, “Lun Ts’ao P’i Ts’ao Chih wen-hsüeh chia-chih te i-chih-hsing chi ch’i li-shih pei-ching” 論曹丕曹植文學價值的一致性及其歷史背景, *Ku-tai wen-hsüeh li-lun yen-chiu* 古代文學理論研究 11 (1986), pp. 216–28.

or “*yin-sheng* 陰聲.”³¹ Thus all my five end-words, namely “dodecad (a neologism for ‘twelve-year-period’),” “league” (I use the singular form, which sounds good in context), “trust,” “correct,” and “back,” are voice-stopped but in an unofficial way, that is, they conform to lazy aspects of U.S. speech, which greatly attenuates mid- and end-consonants to the extent that many come close to being “voice-stopped.” (The word “trust” works least well of all in this regard.)

Since the poem has only one end-rhyme (A, A, A, A, A), in my opinion the internal rhythm achieves added importance. My English seeks to show that as well: the first four lines reflect the the original’s 2:4 strophe, but the last one is 4:2. If read aloud, I suggest pausing at the double-bars, which separate the disyllabic from tetrasyllabic strophes and thus set up a meter. Thus the English rhythms will be roughly “te DUH te DUH” and “te DUH te duh te DUH te duh,” respectively.

*A Poem That Concludes a Royal Command*³²

“The loss, dis- ord’r” 喪亂 || “so long” it’s past a do- decad 悠悠
過紀 (-jəi),

The bleach- éd bones 白骨 || all jumbl’d, strewn ten-thousand
league 縱橫萬里 (-jəi).

“Alas, alas!” 哀哀 || for “folk,” there is no one to trust; 下民靡恃
(-jəi).

It’s I who will 吾將 || the times to aid,³³ and make correct.³⁴ 佐時
整理 (-jəi)

“To thus restore your shining rule”: 復子明辟 || I hand it back. 致
仕 (-jəi)

Phrases in quotation marks indicate allusions to the classics.³⁵ *Shih-ching* bears on lines 1 and 3 in an important way. Mao 164 gives us “loss, disorder” (Legge says “deaths and disorder”); Mao 287 gives

³¹ The other two rhyme categories consist of 25 known “陽聲” (nasal stopped) words, and 37 “入聲” (non-voice stopped) words. See Ting Pang-hsin, *Chinese Phonology of the Wei-Chin Period: Reconstruction of the Finals as Reflected in Poetry*, Special Publications 65 (Taipei: Inst. of History and Philology, Academia Sinica, 1975), esp. p. 55 for reference to Ts’ao P’i’s rhyme scheme in this poem. Alex Schuessler’s new work, *Minimal Old Chinese and Later Han Chinese* from U. of Hawaii P. (2009), will prompt some changes in our views on rhyming patterns. I thank Nick Williams, University of Washington, for an enlightening conversation about phonetics and help with the subject in general.

³² Cf. Goodman, *Ts’ao P’i Transcendent*, p. 106; here significantly revised.

³³ See Chang Heng’s *fu* “Returning to the Fields 歸田”; *Wen-hsüan* 文選 15, p. 20a.

³⁴ See Wang Fu’s 王符 (78–163) prose essay “Ch’ien-fu lun 潛夫論”; Anne Kinney, *The Art of the Han Essay: Wang Fu’s Ch’ien fu lun* (Tempe: Ctr. Asian Studies, Arizona State U., 1990), p. 132. There the context concerns how best to deploy systems of laws and commands for the greater political good.

³⁵ I do not remark on all of them; see Goodman, *Ts’ao P’i Transcendent*, p. 106.

us “so long (or, far)”]; no. 202 provides “alas, alas.” They are all in some way about familial struggle and suffering. Ode 164 concerns elder and younger brothers, clearly reminding Ts’ao of his brother Chih, whom he pushed coldly to the margins after Ts’ao Ts’ao’s death. Ode 202 is about loss, not just by one’s much-missed parents, but even being shut out of the norms of social justice; and no. 287 is about a young heir to a noble house who doubts his capacities to take up duties. Thus the house struggles over sorting out the polity. “The loss, disorder,” although a much-used phrase, is doubly meaningful for Ts’ao P’i, because it was uttered by his father on more than one occasion of formal prose, for example in an order dated 203 AD that promoted learning in a war-wracked region.³⁶

“Bleached bones” would have been acutely emotional, since the phrase, although common in poetry of this time, was used in particular by the famous poet and companion of Ts’ao Ts’ao Wang Ts’an 王粲, whose death in the 217 epidemic Ts’ao P’i had mourned. In Wang’s poem “Ch’i ai shih” 七哀詩 we follow the speaker around old sites and buildings that have been utterly devastated and strewn with corpses. It was the end of Loyang – something easily remembered by everyone in 220, not an incident of distant antiquity.³⁷

The fourth line shakes the mood, and the first-person voice now jumps out: “It’s I who will.” Ts’ao exclaims his plan to be a savior, making it seem somehow that it just came to him. There are no ancient classical allusions, although I have noted literary precedents in the century preceding 220. Ts’ao P’i implies, in my view, that he has mulled over the oracles and the explanations of the court astrologer Hsü Chih and wants everyone to know that he will be rejecting their innermost claims. He will not, despite the Shu prophecy, become the expected “duke” who rules China, but will stay on the more noble political path, that is, he will guard the orphaned state.

The manner of guarding is found in the last line, line five, with its allusion to a *Shu-ching* phrase already raised in one of Ts’ao P’i’s earlier orders (mentioned above), namely, “I shall restore the son, and then step aside.” David Knechtges is right to have signaled the difficulty of the phrase in the Confucian classic.³⁸ There are several semantemes at work: it can indeed mean to restore as in “restore the government to the son.” (Karlgrén’s *Shu-ching*, however, chose the meaning “to

³⁶ *San-kuo chih* 1, p. 24; see Chang, *San Ts’ao*, p. 83.

³⁷ *Wen-hsüan* 23, p. 15a; the phrase also is found in *Kuo-yü* 19, “Conversations of Wu,” no. 2.

³⁸ See n. 26, above.

report,” as had Legge’s translation.)³⁹ But I believe that the syntactic flexibility of “復” could simultaneously color the intent. With various loans and word-family relatives, *fu* can mean “to double, or pair up,” “cover,” “bring back (from iniquity or ignorance),” and “supplement, repay,” or “be excused from.” Ts’ao P’i could think of himself as paired with the emperor, or as supplementing the emperor’s very person, or restoring the glorious imperial office 復明辟, *per se*. Subtexts of *fu*, especially because the phrase is in the conclusive fifth line, with its suddenly changed rhythm, may have denoted the fact that orphan Ts’ao is actually winking at us: he knows he is not really going to give government back to the orphaned Han emperor.

Ts’ao P’i has used the image of the Duke of Chou, and in the ancient trope the duke must restore the “son” of king Wu to power and then retire. But as everyone in 220 AD knew, the Duke of Chou desired to be the “son’s” regent, making the word “retire 致仕,” or hand back one’s portfolio, rather a deception. There were other complications in 220. If we look at the Han and Ts’ao houses, we see too many struggling sons; there were of course the two sets of rulers – he of the dying Han and the men of the so-called Wei fief; there were several aspects of orphanhood; and there were dissidents and enemy states. In the metrically flipped line five, Ts’ao P’i’s asserted gesture verbally takes on the feeling of a “supplement to,” or regent of, the emperor (to whom a few days later Ts’ao would in fact grant honors as a retirement gift). Thus, I perceive a general undertone as follows: “I have been *paired* with, and *covered* by, my dead father and manipulated by his numen; he has tried to *report* to me a mysterious message just as I seek to *repay* gratitude to my public by humbly *restoring* the Han throne.” Ts’ao P’i has put a halt to the Shu revelation that was numinously guided by Ts’ao Ts’ao; he has refused to be converted and instead cuts through the political loose-ends in order to act out a gesture of restoring the Han emperor to power in a most familial, yet strangely hovering, way.

After the poem, T’sao closes off his “order” with these words:

I might hope to maintain this [my decision]: to decline [power] until I reach my end. Ultimately it will not be empty words. I ought to make public far and near [my declination], so as to proclaim my bared heart.⁴⁰

³⁹ Karlgren, “The Book of Documents,” *BMFEA* 22 (1950), p. 51: “I report to you [my son] and bright sovereign”; see Legge, *The Shoo King*, in *The Chinese Classics* (rpt. Taipei: SMC Publ., 1991) 3, p. 434.

⁴⁰ *San-kuo chih* 2, p. 65.

I see this as a hint that the poem and the decision were all about *himself*, and not so much the emperor. He is becoming ever stronger (doubling, pairing, supplementing) as he gestures benevolently toward the emperor; and he wants others to know just exactly how unwavering and honest he is. This evocation treads a thin line between what was relatively believable truth about an emotional state, earlier, and emotional disingenuousness.

Around this very time (though hard to pinpoint), Ts'ao P'i was writing other poetry about dynastic change, especially the famous classical example of Yao and Shun: "Yao was succeeded by Shun and Yü; / How can this be done again? / Wild beasts followed the dance, / And birds practiced the rites. / Acquire the right man, then there is peace! ... Only the worthy know the worthy."⁴¹ This is revealing: it makes lines four and five of the short poem, above, a bit impermanent and Ts'ao himself as able to change rhetorical direction. This is because Yao and Shun move our thoughts beyond Chou, toward dark, unrecorded myth-history. This would be Ts'ao's direction during the coming several days of the conclave; he will issue his list of symbol-laden mythical eremites (mentioned at the beginning of my essay). These primordial eremites, by refusing temporal power demonstrate that they had access to a deeper power. Ts'ao P'i was thus never really concerned with a fixed ideology of a Chou emulation, but was boring through to deep antiquity, when sages from the Yellow Emperor down to Yao and Shun fashioned the human world by listening to and watching the birds and beasts, a time when political leaders were revealed – not strategized into place.⁴²

AN ODD POEM BY A SKILLED POET;
A FRAME OF A DIFFERENT SORT

In this concluding section, I return to the original topic – the way a poem is framed in a historiographical work. I will not, however, limit myself to the methods and themes raised in the articles of David Schaberg and Martin Kern, but will comment briefly on how this one case of framing may be more fully appreciated by looking at authorial design, prosodic form, and critiques embedded in reception history. I see "A Poem That Concludes a Royal Command" as framed not by a specific "historiographer" but in an effaced way by the above-mentioned

⁴¹ This is the poem "Ch'iu hu" 秋胡; trans. Fusek, "Poetry of Ts'ao P'i," p. 276; Lu, *Hsien Ch'in Han Wei* (Wei shih 4), p. 390.

⁴² See Goodman, *Ts'ao P'i Transcendent*, chap. 7; and Knechtges, "Rhetoric of Imperial Abdication," pp. 11–15.

facets. I argue that the kind of historiographer's framing as discussed skillfully by Kern was weak, actually nonexistent, in this case because historiography after Pan Ku's time had moved on to different forms and methods. The poem, in an unusual prosodic genre, was the frame, *per se*, as made by its own author.

We return to framing as discussed by Kern. His article makes the point that frames for poems inside *Shih-chi* and *Han-shu* were made by talented writers who in a sense revived the ancient notion of the historian-balladeer. They, as well as other compilers and narrators down to about 100 AD, brought history into poetry, and read history out of poetry. Ssu-ma Ch'ien and Pan Ku

... used song and dance as rhetorical functions of historiography, representing their historical actors' emotions in the way they imagined these actors to have expressed themselves. Turning the hero into a poet, the historian, at certain moments encapsulating the essence of his narrative in song, turned himself into a poet-historian. Thus, ultimately, something of the archaic – or in Han times perhaps merely projected – figure of the historian as a singer of songs was present at the core of Han historiographic narrative.⁴³

Kern provides examples of how poems were well placed and made to reflect immediate events, so that emotions, warnings, and moral judgments came through.⁴⁴ By late-Han through Wei times, this would no longer be the case. A few examples of scholars whose literary talents might have shaped historiography importantly are Hu Kuang 胡廣 (91-172), Chang Heng 張衡 (78-139), Ma Jung 馬融 (79-166), and Ts'ai Yung 蔡邕 (133-192). In this sampling we have literary minds who also understood court rites and devoted time to compiling data on institutions; we see poets, musicologists, mechanics, and philologists. But both court-commissioned and private historiography experienced interruptions and hardships in the face of factional feuds and even warfare. For instance, Chang suffered factional setbacks and could not get support to complete history projects; Ts'ai suffered intense opposition to his studies and the trauma of banishment and imprisonment.⁴⁵

In Ts'ao P'i's own lifetime, if we attempt to find an actual framer, we must start with the earliest candidate – Liu Ai. We have hardly

⁴³ Kern, "The Poetry of Han Historiography," p. 58.

⁴⁴ See esp. *ibid.*, pp. 45-50, and the case of Liu Hsi-chün, whose *Han-shu* poem entered into later poetic canons.

⁴⁵ See Howard L. Goodman, "Chinese Polymaths, 100-300 AD: The Tung-kuan, Taoist Dissenters, and Technical Skills," *AM* 3d ser. 18.1 (2005), esp. 119-20, 130-32.

anything more than this one compendium of dynastic accession documents, but it is fair to deduce that his metier did not include bringing poetry to history and history to poetry. He was strictly an annalist who collected and winnowed documents, and set them into chronological order. He supplied something of a logistical and intentional order to the commands, edicts, and memorials of the autumn of 220. Ts'ao's odd poem, then, just happened to be inside a command in the middle of all that. Moving to historians just after 220, the author of *San-kuo chih*, Ch'en Shou 陳壽, who chose not even to include the documents, was not interested in placing lyrics into his text to enrich the narrative.⁴⁶ A few decades after Ch'en, the historical work *Hua-yang kuo-chih* 華陽國志, as J. Michael Farmer has shown, contains several poems framed in such a way as to burnish the lives of specific men of the Pa region neighboring Shu. But I see these Pa poems as relatively static set-piece eulogies, not examples of, as Schaberg has stated, the historiographer's "keeping historical memory alive" through the emotions and psychology of a historical actor and event.⁴⁷ The fifth-century expander of *San-kuo chih*, P'ei Sung-chih 裴松之, seems to have quoted poems and ditties only passively via his sources (as with "A Poem That Concludes a Royal Command"). He worked in a time of archival research, commonplace books, catalogs, but also much loss of older materials. He was very much a "cutter-paster," and the one who gathered Liu Ai's texts and placed them into his new *San-kuo chih*; but one senses no interest in the odd poem of Ts'ao P'i: he did not comment on it.

After about 280, Western Chin scholars began to debate and criticize commentarial methods and tools of historiography in significant new ways. Besides Tu Yü's 杜預 work on *Tso-chuan*, there were projects to revise *Shih-chi* and *Han-shu* and supply them with new commentaries. This movement, as it were, was vulnerable to factions motivated by purely technical disagreement as well as in order to exert influence in the two bureaus crucial to history writing and institutional compendia; yet after a promising start it was quashed with the fall, once again, of Loyang in 315.⁴⁸ One may characterize, not too unfairly, historio-

⁴⁶ Ch'en quotes from *Shih-chi* (perhaps 10–12 times) to moralize; at one point he quotes an entire four-word poem (see *j.* 53 ["Wu shu"], p. 1254), but it was not to frame the voice of history itself, but merely to prove that his subject did in fact continue to write poetry as had his father. Ch'en's history-writing did not collect, as did Shen Yüeh's and the T'ang-era *Chin-shu* compilers', all the best examples from a subject's oeuvre, nor was it a literary anthology.

⁴⁷ J. Michael Farmer, "A Person of the State Composed a Poem: Lyrics of Praise and Blame in the *Huayang guo zhi*," *Chinese Literature: Essays, Article, Reviews* 29 (2007), pp. 23–54. For Schaberg, see "Song and the Historical Imagination in Early China," p. 337.

⁴⁸ These factional pressures pitted Hsün Hsü 荀勗 against Chang Hua 張華; a politically

graphical activity from about 350 to 500 as having picked up the commentarial interests started in Western Chin and consequently produced a high level of philological readings for the Han histories. We see little interest in making new narratives of broad swathes of post-100 history, narratives that might allow for songs and poems.⁴⁹ Poetry and song in this time were of enormous interest, but involving wholly other genres associated with new social and cultural contexts. In other words, after Pan Ku the excellent historiographers who were able to have set poetry into history frames to make history sing simply were not interested in doing so. Historiography was heading toward philologic commentary, and song and poetry toward private enjoyment and imagination.

The thrust of Kern's article, that when framing a poem or song early historians were making an apposite setting for the truth of an event, is in fact nicely satisfied by "A Poem That Concludes a Royal Command." The problem is that it was done not by the historiographer but by the poem's creator. I hope that in the preceding I have shown that we should believe at least some of the poem's emotional content and its reaching out to a political public to include them in a shaped glimpse of family and state crises. We saw Ts'ao use the poem to show that he wanted to avoid the essential pleading of oracular and postmortem revelations, and to turn instead to a more orthodox demurral. His autobiographical details about an anxious heart and trembling hand are quite believable. The ostensible true details in it were not at all so fantastical, like Kern's and Schaberg's examples of songs uttered just before a speaker's heroic death or suicide, that it would need framing merely to be believed. We have instead a self-conscious writer from a whole family of self-conscious writers giving a bit of diary. Ts'ao P'i was repeatedly intimate in his musings, memos, and letters, and known to have thought that writing things down was a vehicle of personal fulfillment. His poem came within a historical event of great immediacy, it verified the immediacy, and so made Ts'ao the balladeer-historian of his own thoughts, as he stood amidst ongoing events.

A poem was a superb choice by which to break out of the surrounding prose of his formal "command," which as we recall told about Ts'ao's strenuous attempts to keep "the people" warm and fed and to

charged issue emerged over the handling by Hsün and others of the ancient bamboo-slips discovered in 280. Hsün had influenced historiography since the late-260s, but was forced out of scholarly leadership in the Imperial Library in 287. On these developments, see my forthcoming book "Xun Xu and the Politics of Precision in Third Century AD China," chap. 6.

⁴⁹ See Scott Galer, "Sounds and Meanings: Early Chinese Historical Exegesis and Xu Guang's *Shiji yinyi*," Ph.D. diss. (U. Wisconsin, 2003).

satisfy the oracle experts' and his deceased father's indications. To break out of it peacefully and dolefully, he might have chosen tetra- or pentasyllabic *shih* verse, or perhaps a *yueh-fu* piece that offered images of travail in war, or scattered memories across itineraries. He wrote many such *yueh-fu*, some of regular tetra- or pentasyllabic lines and some of irregular lines. But to break out startlingly, a hexasyllabic *shih* could grab attention.

Poems, specifically *shih*, made up of six-word lines were not new in 220 AD. There have always been critical opinions about the form itself. The first to weigh in was Chih Yü 摯虞 (b. ca. 250, d. 311), who thought it difficult and marginal to his preferred tetrasyllabic classical *shih*. The different theories concerning the pre-Han and early-Han first inklings of hexasyllabic verse will not detain us, but no one disputes that the form received very little offerings before T'ang times, and only with K'ung Jung (mentioned above, as a Han loyalist in the 190s) and the two Ts'ao brothers did artistic craft first get applied to it. (Due to its pro-Ts'ao Ts'ao nature, some have even thought that Ts'ao P'i authored K'ung's well-known hexasyllabic piece and channeled it back to K'ung.) K'ung's poem has a 2:2:2 rhythm (three disyllabic feet) in each line, using a "p'ing-sheng 平聲" end-rhyme.⁵⁰ The only other hexasyllabic verse to be written by Ts'ao P'i was "Li-yang tso" 黎陽作 ("Written at Li-yang," no. 4).⁵¹ At nine lines, it is quite a bit longer than "A Poem That Concludes a Royal Command"; and up until the last line it too employs 2:2:2. The last, the ninth, line is climactic in its singular use of the prosodic "兮," thus making a noticeable caesura – an emotional sigh over his homeland's going to ruin. In general, hexasyllabic meter provided room for a poet to experiment with syllabic foot; in fact, Ts'ao Chih's offering is mostly 2:2:2, like K'ung's, but has moments of 3:3 (two trisyllabic feet).⁵² Ultimately, P'i's choice of four lines of 2:4, then a mood-shift leading to a final line in 4:2, as I have analyzed, above, gave the little poem both oddness and greatness. It

⁵⁰ On Chih Yü and K'ung Jung, see Huang Cheng 黃征, "Liu-yen shih ch'u-t'an" 六言詩初探, *Hang-chou shih-fan hsüeh-yuan hsüeh-pao* 杭州師範學院學報 (1981.1), pp. 108–9. On the spuriousness of K'ung's hexasyllabic poetry, see Donald Holzman, *s.v.* K'ung Jung, in William Nienhauser, ed., *The Indiana Companion to Traditional Chinese Literature*, 2d rev. edn. (Taipei: Southern Materials Ctr. Inc., 1986) 1, p. 520.

⁵¹ See Fusek, "Poetry of Ts'ao P'i," p. 196; and Lu, *Hsien Ch'in Han Wei* (Wei shih 4), p. 403. There is another example, but it uses the Ch'u-tz'u-style "兮" prosodic device, and so is not strictly hexasyllabic.

⁵² On Ts'ao Chih's meter, see T'ang Ai-hsia 唐愛霞, "Ku-tai liu-yen shih yen-chiu" 古代六言詩研究, *Chung-kuo shih-yu ta-hsüeh hsüeh-pao* 中國石油大學學報 (She-hui k'o-hsüeh-pan) 24.2 (2008), p. 93.

pricked listeners' ears (if we can imagine that it was read or chanted among his retinue) and literary critics' ears as well, even though there is really not a body of exegesis on the poem. Both in foot and rhyme, it was unlike K'ung's, unlike his brother's, as well as his own, recent, "Li-yang tso, no. 4."⁵³

Another aspect of hexasyllabic verse that is discussed in modern scholarship is its reception. It is fair to say that beginning in T'ang and lasting all the way into Ch'ing times, frequent criticism of this poetic form, with its noticeably few examples and proponents, was that it was inherently unmetrical and hard to fashion poetically.⁵⁴ Reception history is interesting, but what can it say about Ts'ao P'i's framing of his poem in 220? Did *he* think that the form per se was odd and thus would make his poem odd and soon forgotten? Obviously he consciously chose a relatively unusual form, and so may have wanted to refer to its use both by K'ung Jung (once a troublesome thorn in Ts'ao Ts'ao's side but someone Ts'ao P'i admired for *belles lettres*) and to his brother (the current familial thorn), yet go them one better. I do not think Ts'ao P'i thought much about prosodic difficulties inherent in six-word lines, but he would indeed have liked the poem to make an impact on the literary world.

In fact, many of his and other Ts'ao-family members' poems were caught in the literary net of Shen Yüeh 沈約 (441-513) (in his Treatise on Music), and also that of *Wen hsüan* 文選, *Yi-wen lei-chü* 藝文類聚, *Yü-t'ai hsin-yung* 玉臺新詠, and *Yüeh-fu shih-chi* 樂府詩集, but many were not for numerous and complex reasons. "A Poem That Concludes a Royal Command" is not found in those collections – probably just for its hexasyllabic form. But there were other sorts of problems in the reception history. In the centuries after T'ang, the very legitimacy of the Ts'ao house itself was questioned by political commentators. Their thoughts about such legitimacy turned increasingly toward proofs found in military success and correct policies as opposed to the forms of ritual. In Sung times, when oracular revelations at court were promoted by the emperor but were embarrassing to his advisers, Ssu-ma Kuang

⁵³ "Ling-shih" as a novel hexasyllabic form is discussed in Huang, "Liu-yen shih," p. 110. On the date of "Li-yang tso" as somewhere around lunar mo. six, thus only several mos. prior, see Hung, *Wei Wen-ti Ts'ao P'i nien-p'u*, pp. 335-37.

⁵⁴ Wei Shao-sheng 衛紹生, "Liu-yen shih wei-ho wei-neng kuang wei liu-hsing, chien chi liu-yen shih te ping-chia wen-t'i" 六言詩為何未能廣為流行, 兼及六言詩的評價問題, *Chung-chou hsüeh-k'an* 中州學刊 152 (2006), pp. 198-203, discusses those critiques in order to argue against them: he feels that hexasyllable, which was metrically just as compressed as the vaunted tetrasyllabic *shih*, became unpopular because penta- and heptasyllabic forms outran all others and shaped the cultural taste of anthologizers (pp. 202-3).

completely left aside the rich chatter of the 200 AD communiques of Ts'ao P'i's conclave, as he narrated the fomal, ritual end of the Han. Thus by Ch'ing times, and then by habit down to our own, the general literary period from Ts'ao P'i's time through T'ang became thought of by certain critics as, in some respects, one of fantastic narratives and spells, transformations and magic – all somehow reflecting the worst elements of Taoism and Buddhism. The emergence of oracle-texts has inspired modern remarks about the era having been under the unfortunate grip of legends, with scholars (even historiographers!) unable to free themselves from oracles and active numens of the dead.⁵⁵ We are thankfully emerging from this tired sensibility. The vibrancy of China's religious culture, the richness of its forms and notions, and the enduring links to politics, local events, and to thought and customs, as well as the modern studies that have brought religion to the fore, especially the Paris school – these were things that Denis Twitchett admired and championed. Partly through him they have flourished in the last several decades of scholarship on China. It is thus that we can better frame odd poems.

⁵⁵ Some evidence of this misunderstanding of the medieval mantic mind is given in the opening section of Goodman, "Li Fu Document"; and the appendix to *Ts'ao P'i Transcendent*.