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Irony and Death in the Writings of Liu Zhen *

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The poetry of the Jian'an 建安 (196–220) era is often praised for its authentic depiction of individual character. But the danger of offending the patrons of the court, the Cao family, must have limited the ability of these writers to express their thoughts and emotions directly. Thus it seems likely that Jian'an poets might often have chosen to be reticent about their actual opinions, conveying their intentions instead through understatement or even irony. This essay is an experiment in identifying an ironic element in the works of one of the finest poets of Jian'an, Liu Zhen 劉楨 (?–217). One clue to Liu's ironical distance from the court around him is in an anecdote preserved in the *Shishuo xinyu*. Two of Liu's best poems also contain internal conflicts that seem to demand interpretation, not as lyrical self-expression, but something more complex and indeterminate. The traditional critical concept of "wind and bone," frequently applied retrospectively to Jian'an poets, contains an inherent tension that supports this approach. The sword of Damocles hanging over the writers of Jian'an means that their writings were produced in consciousness of the possible death sentence they might incur for impropriety. Another suggestive source for the interpretation of Liu Zhen is a stele inscription he wrote for a friend who had remained independent of politics. The political context of Jian'an and its reflection in literary irony is well represented by the figure of the "empty vessel," which occurs in a number of historical and literary contexts during this period.

Keywords: Jian'an literature, Liu Zhen, irony, *fenggu*, pentasyllabic verse

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Introduction

The Seven Masters of Jian'an 建安七子—Kong Rong 孔融 (153–208), Wang Can 王粲 (177–217), Liu Zhen 劉楨 (?–217) , Ruan Yu 阮瑀 (?–212), Ying Yang 應瑒 (?–217), Chen Lin 陳琳 (?–217), and Xu Gan 徐幹 (171 – 218)—are well known for their role in establishing the models of expression for pentasyllabic verse.[1] They composed poems and essays alongside Cao Cao 曹操 (155–220) and his sons at the court at Ye 鄴 (located to the southwest of modern Linzhang 臨漳 County, Hebei) during the Jian'an 建安 (196–220) era at the close of the Han Dynasty. But they were not all present simultaneously at Ye, since it was while Wang Can was still serving Liu Biao 劉表 (142–208) that Kong Rong was put to death by Cao Cao in 208.

The execution of Kong Rong is a fact of considerable importance for the interpretation of Jian'an poetry. The poems of the Jian'an masters are full of wine and song, aspirations to glory and outpourings of sorrow, all tied to their own specific characters and situations in a way that earlier verse had not always been. But these poems were written in a context when certain forms of expression were liable to incur a death sentence. Kong Rong was executed for improper behavior and lack of deference, in part because "he expressed himself in phrases that were excessive and unbalanced, often incurring offense and subversion" 發辭偏宕 , 多致乖忤 .[2] In such a context it cannot have proffered very much consolation to his literary friends that Cao Cao's heir Cao Pi 曹丕 (187–226) remained a passionate admirer of Kong's writing after the author's death.[3]

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1 An alternate enumeration substitutes Cao Zhi for Kong Rong, but for the purposes of this essay the inclusion of Kong Rong is preferable. Modern studies in Chinese include Jiang Jianjun 江建俊 , *Jian'an qizi xueshu* 建安七子學述 (Taipei: Wenshizhe chubanshe, 1982), Li Wenlu 李文祿 , *Jian'an qizi pingzhuan* 建安七子評傳 (Taipei: Wenjin chubanshe 2004), and Wang Pengting 王鵬廷 , *Jian'an qizi yanjiu* 建安七子研究 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2004). Collections of their works include Yu Shaochu 俞紹初 , ed., *Jian'an qizi ji* 建安七子集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1989); Han Geping 韓格平 , ed., *Jian'an qizi shiwen ji jiaozhu yixi* 建安七子詩文集校注譯析 (Changchun: Jilin wenshi chubanshe, 1991); and Wu Yun 吳雲 et al., *Jian'an qizi ji jiaozhu* 建安七子集校注 (Tianjin: Tianjin guji chubanshe, 2005).

2 *Hou Han shu* 後漢書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1964), 70.2272.

3 Ibid., 70.2280.

Various critics have praised Jian'an poetry as "personal and realistic," [4] distinguished by "pathos and directness."[5] Yet at the same time, the expressive means at their disposal were traditional ones: Jian'an pentasyllabic verse employs formulaic phrases, recurring topoi, and fixed structural devices.[6] These insights of previous scholarship on Jian'an poetry suggest that there is something of a mismatch between the traditional reputation of the Jian'an poets, and the literal content of their verses.[7] Readers affirm an impression of directness and pathos, on the one hand, while identifying the formulaic exchange of similar expressions, on the other. But if we think of the social setting of Jian'an poetry—courtiers vying for favor with the Cao family—we should naturally expect that Jian'an poems would contain some mixture of passionate sincerity and self-conscious flattery, with individual poems exhibiting both elements in varying degree. Jian'an poets are attempting various modes of self-expression, but not always succeeding, and adapting shared expression for their own purposes with new significance in mind.

In a political situation where the wrong word could easily be a capital crime, one has to take into account the possibility that Jian'an writers are being intentionally reticent, or even ironical. There are two primary senses of the modern word "irony": "verbal irony," in which words are used to imply a sense at variance with their literal meaning, and "situational irony," in which an

4 Burton Watson, *Chinese Lyricism: Shih Poetry from the Second to the Twelfth Century* (New York: Columbia University. Press, 1971), 44.

5 Referring specifically to Wang Can, in Ronald Miao, *Early Medieval Chinese Poetry: The Life and Verse of Wang Ts'an (A.D. 177–217)* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1982), xiii.

6 See Christopher Leigh Connery, "Jian'an Poetic Discourse" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1991); id., *The Empire of the Text: Writing and Authority in Early Imperial China* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998); and Stephen Owen, *The Making of Early Chinese Classical Poetry* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006).

7 A promising new approach different from either mentioned above, focusing on group composition, is demonstrated in Shih Hsiang-lin, "Jian'an Literature Revisited: Poetic Dialogues in the Last Three Decades of the Han Dynasty" (Ph.D. diss., University. of Washington, 2013).

entire situation or outcome is the opposite of what one might normally expect.[8] But these varieties, and the countless other varieties of irony that have been discussed in literary criticism since Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855), are not easy to distinguish in practice.[9] An example of verbal irony will often refer to an ironical situation, just as the words of people in ironical situation may be interpreted as ironical. One must write tentatively of irony in premodern texts, then, but neither is it possible to neglect the topic. In the case of the Jian'an poets, verbal irony is a natural consequence of the disequilibrium between their literary ambition and their political subservience at Cao Cao's court.[10]

To appreciate the full pathos of Jian'an poetry, then, one has to take into account some of the thoughts left unexpressed as well. In this regard, the formulaic quality of early pentasyllabic verse might be seen as a virtue rather than a defect. By limiting the scope of direct expression, it must, mathematically speaking, thereby expand the range of feelings that go unexpressed. Here the contextual information of the author's life and writings in other genres can be enormously significant. This study will place some of the poems of Liu Zhen in context of his other writings and political situation in order to tease out hitherto overlooked undertones of irony. Parallel to the critical concept of irony, the traditional Chinese dialectic of "wind and bone"(*fenggu* 風骨) also helps to illuminate the interplay of concealment and expression, formula and variation, in Liu's writings. It is only by paying attention to what is left out of the poems that one recognizes the scale of the world conveyed in their lines.

8 Though the author ultimately rejects these categories in favor of finer distinctions, there is a good presentation of the general concepts in D.C. Muecke, *The Compass of Irony* (London: Methuen, 1969), 42–52. Another classic study is Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Irony* (Chicago: University. of Chicago Press, 1974).

9 As in his 1841 doctoral dissertation, *The Concept of Irony, with Continual Reference to Socrates: Together with Notes of Schelling's Berlin Lectures* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University. Press, 1989), ed. and tr. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong.

10 It must seem improbable to the contemporary academic that Jian'an poetry would contain an ironic element, since our situation is so categorically different, in that we possess the freedom to write unconstrained by political orthodoxy, pecuniary consideration, or social conformity.

An Ironical Riposte

One of the critical turning points of Liu Zhen's life was an act of disrespect to his superiors.[11] One of the more revealing comments on this issue is a conversation recorded in the *Shishuo xinyu* 世說新語 , compiled by Liu Yiqing 劉義慶 (403–444) two centuries after the event:

Liu Gonggan [Zhen] was punished for disrespect. Emperor Wen asked him: "Why were you not more punctilious about observing the regulations?" Zhen replied: "I was truly foolish and shortsighted, but there was also the cause that your Majesty's *net is not sparsely set*."

劉公幹以失敬罹罪，文帝問曰：「卿何以不謹於文憲？」楨答曰：「臣誠庸短，亦由陛下綱目不疏。」[12]

Liu's misdeed and punishment will be discussed below. The personage identified as "Emperor Wen" should not properly be addressed so, since Cao Pi only became emperor after Liu's death. Liu Zhen's response alludes to *Laozi*: "The net of Heaven is all-encompassing, though sparse it lets nothing pass" 天

11 See *Sanguo zhi* (Beijing: Zhonghuashuju, 1959), 21.601; discussed in further detail below. Scholarly reconstructions of Liu's biography include: Itō Masafumi 伊藤正文 , "Ryū Tei den ron" 劉楨傳論 , in *Yoshikawa hakushi taikyū kinen Chūgoku bungaku ronshū* 吉川博士退休紀念中國文學論集 (Tokyo: Chikuma shobō, 1968), 145–68, rpt. in *Ken'an shijin to sono dentō* 建安詩人とその伝統 (Tokyo: Sōbunsha, 2002), 115–37; Wang Yunxi 王運熙 , "Liu Zhen pingzhuan" 劉楨評傳 , in *Zhongguo lidai zhuming wenxuejia pingzhuan xubian* 中國歷代著名文學家評傳續編 (Ji'nan: Shandong jiaoyu chubanshe, 1989), 201–12; rpt. in Wang Yunxi, *Han Wei Liuchao Tangdai wenxue luncong* (zengding ben) 漢魏六朝唐代文學論叢 (增訂本) (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2002), 308–17; Du Guichen 杜貴晨 , "Liu Liang, Liu Zhen guli ji shixi, hangbei shi shuo" 劉梁、劉楨故里及世系、行輩試說 , *Daizong xuekan* 岱宗學刊 6.3 (2002): 57; and Fusheng Wu, "'I Rambled and Roamed Together With You': Liu Zhen's (d. 217) Four Poems to Cao Pi," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 129.4 (2010): 619–33.

12 Yu Jiaxi 余嘉錫 , ed., *Shishuo xinyu jianshu* 世說新語箋疏 (Taipei: Huazheng shuju, 1991), 2/10 (70). I have supplied my own translation, while consulting Richard Mather's authoritative *Shih-shuo Hsin-yü*: *A New Account of Tales of the World,* 2nd ed. (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University. of Michigan, 2002), 34.

網恢恢 , 疏而不漏 .[13] But where the original proverb indicates that no one can escape the fate imposed ultimately by natural processes, Liu Zhen complains that his patron metes out punishment so readily that the "net" of judgment is not sparse at all. This is a rhetorical understatement that indicates a larger complaint without expressing it literally: an ironical riposte in a situation where the courtier is not free to lay out his critique openly.

This anecdote obviously is not reliable as a historical source. Apart from the anachronism, the gnomic elegance of the conversation itself seems more representative of Jin Dynasty intellectual styles, as preserved in such entertaining detail in the *Shishuo xinyu* as a whole. As a very early *interpretation* of Liu's life and career, however, the anecdote is extremely valuable. As we shall see below, it does have a strong historical basis in reality, reflecting Liu Zhen's lasting unease with his position and with patrons Cao Pi and Cao Cao. Moreover, it exemplifies his aestheticized response to that unease. Never in a position of independence from which to state his own ideals explicitly, he can only indicate his discontent indirectly. Though the specific remark may be a later invention, the understanding of Liu Zhen is convincing and directly relevant to our interpretation of his authentic writings.

The historical foundation of the anecdote is attested in two other sources quoted in Liu Xiaobiao's 劉孝標 (462–521) commentary to the *Shishuo xinyu* passage. The first is preserved in the *Dian lüe* 典略 of Yu Huan 魚豢 (3rd century):

In 211, when the heir-designate was still Master of Court Gentlemen for Miscellaneous Uses, [Cao Cao] made a brilliant selection of Gentlemen of Letters, and had Zhen accompany the heir. When everyone was pleasantly tipsy at a banquet, Cao Pi had his lady, Madame Zhen, make an appearance, and all the assembled guests kowtowed repeatedly, except Liu Zhen alone who looked on her directly. Later on his lordship heard of this, and had Zhen imprisoned, but spared him from execution, and instead sentenced him to labor in a palace workshop.

建安十六年，世子為五官中郎將，妙選文學，使楨隨侍太子。酒酣坐歡，乃使夫人甄氏出拜，坐上客多伏，而楨獨平視。他日公聞，乃收楨，減死輸作部。[14]

13 Chen Guying 陳鼓應 , ed., *Laozi zhushi ji pingjie* 老子注釋及評介 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1984), ch. 73, 334.

14 *Shishuo xinyu jianshu*, ibid.

The "heir-designate" mentioned here is Cao Pi, though in fact he would not have been yet designated as heir at this time. The anachronism here as in the *Shishuo xinyu* anecdote may simply reflect that these texts do not have the comprehensive scheme of the dynastic histories, so the authors and compilers do not make the same effort to keep titles chronologically accurate. It is striking that Liu Zhen could have been punished for "looking directly" 平視 , or not averting his gaze. That "looking directly" was a lapse of etiquette is clear indication of how much directness we should expect to find in any of the writings of the Seven Masters. This story explains both the infraction and the punishment mentioned in the *Shishuo xinyu* anecdote.

Liu Xiaobiao also quotes this passage from the *Wenshi zhuan* 文士傳 by Zhang Yin 張隱 (4th century) describing the sequel:

> By nature Zhen was quick-witted in debate, and when asked something would respond to it instantly. After being punished for looking on Madame Zhen directly, he was sentenced to serve as a craftsman polishing jade. Once Emperor Wu visited the Directorate of Manufactories to observe the craftsmen at work, and saw Zhen sitting upright and polishing stone with a solemn expression. Emperor Wu asked: "How is the stone?" Zhen used it as an analogy for his own character. He kneeled and replied: "This stone is quarried from the precipitous crags of the Jing mountains.[15] Its surface displays the five colors in neat array, while its interior is dear as the jade of Master Bian. Polishing it can add no luster, chiseling cannot better the design. Its innate quality is resolute and loyal, as it was endowed by nature. But look how its pattern has been warped and perverted, so that it can no longer straighten itself out!" The Emperor looked around at his retinue and laughed heartily. He pardoned Zhen that day.
>
> 楨性辯捷，所問應聲而答。坐平視甄夫人，配輸作部，使磨石。武帝至尚方觀作者，見楨匡坐正色磨石。武帝問曰：石何如？楨因得喻己自理，跪而對曰：石出荊山懸巖之巔，外有五色之章，內含卞氏之珍。磨之不加瑩，雕之不增文，稟氣堅貞，受之自然。顧其理枉屈紆繞而不得申。帝顧左右大笑，即日赦之。[16]

Again, the anecdote may be a later embellishment, but even in that case remains valuable as an interpretation of Liu Zhen's relationship with his Cao patrons. Liu employs clever wordplay, in this case based on the analogy of

15 This is a reference to the famous Jade of Master He 和氏之璧 .

16 Ibid.

himself to fine but still unpolished jade, to protest his own case without stating it explicitly. The elegant language praising the quality of the jade is not meant literally, but is instead a rhetorical figure that attempts to shift the relations of master and servant, punisher and prisoner, to a different aesthetic plane. These events would have happened in 211 or 212, just after Cao Pi became Master of Court Gentlemen for Miscellaneous Uses.[17] Liu would live on for five or more years after this incident, and it is to this period that we must date most of his extant writings. So these anecdotes offer a framework for reading those other writings as well.

We can also trace the roots of Liu's attitude to his position to his family, one that had been cautious about surrendering personal integrity to serve at court. The outline of Liu Zhen's biography can be reconstructed only hazily from textual sources: for instance, his possible birth date of 170 is merely conjectural.[18] His native place was Ningyang 寧陽 in Dongping 東平 (modern Ningyang county, Shandong). Ningyang was only some 25 kilometers northwest of Qufu 曲阜 , and an upbringing there would have given Liu a special affinity with Confucian scholarship,[19] like his companions Kong Rong, Wang Can, and Xu Gan. Liu's grandfather (or possibly father) Liu Liang 劉梁 (d. 178–184) was a learned but poor man who held only minor provincial offices.[20] He wrote two surviving essays: the "Disquisition Critiquing Cliquishness" 破群論 [21] and the "Disquisition Distinguishing Compromise and Conformity" 辯和同之論 .[22] The title of the latter derives from a distinction made as early as Confucius, and in the essay Liu Liang elaborates

17 Wang Yunxi, "Liu Zhen pingzhuan," 311; Itō Masafumi, "Ryū Tei den ron," in *Ken'an shijin to sono dentō,* 133.

18 See Wang Yunxi, "Liu Zhen pingzhuan," 308.

19 Itō Masafumi points out that Ningyang was only some 25 kilometers northwest of Qufu 曲阜, and that an upbringing here may have given Liu a special bond with orthodox Confucian tradition. See Itō Masafumi, "Ryū Tei den ron," in *Ken'an shijin to sono dentō,* 115.

20 According to Liu Liang's biography, Zhen was his grandson (*Hou Han shu*, 80B.2639), while according to the *Wen shi zhuan* 文士傳 , quoted in Pei Songzhi's commentary to the *Sanguo zhi*, Liu Liang was Zhen's father (*Sanguo zhi*, 21.601). There seems to be no way to decide which is preferable.

21 *Hou Han shu*, 70B.2635.

22 *Hou Han shu*, 70B.2635–39.

on the pragmatic theme that one must adapt one's behavior to circumstances, simultaneously drawing special attention to the paradoxes that can result from adhering too rigidly to conventional morality. In a more literary manifestation this perspective becomes irony, rhetoric which shows implicitly how virtues are demonstrated only partially and unsatisfactorily in the world.

Liu Zhen has no extant philosophical writings that explicitly further Liang's principles, but his friend Xu Gan, also one of the Seven Masters, wrote the *Zhong lun* 中論 (Balanced discourses), which contains some doctrines reminiscent of Liu Liang's writings.[23] The title of the work itself declares a stance of mediation between extremes, and the twelfth chapter, "Qian jiao" 譴交 (Rebuking social connections), directly recalls Liu Liang's essay in its critique of social cliques. In other places, Xu Gan argues for the limitations of various virtues, how they need to be kept in check or applied selectively according to circumstances. The chapter "Xu dao" 虛道 begins by comparing the *junzi* 君子 to an empty vessel (*xu qi* 虛器), because he does not attempt to put his own virtues on display, but only adapts to necessity.[24] There is a certain suggestion here of the necessity of deceit, as the true gentleman is one who possesses virtues but declines to show them off.

The necessity of compromise and even deceit were clear to the courtiers at Ye. Cao Cao had made this city the base of his military expeditions in 204,

23 Poems exchanged by Liu and Xu are discussed later in this paper. Texts of *Zhong lun* include *Han Wei congshu*, *Sibu congkan*, and Yu Shaochu, *Jian'an qizi ji*, 254–321. See also the translation by John Makeham, *Balanced Discourses* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press; New Haven: Yale University. Press, 2002).

24 *Zhong lun* (*Sibu congkan* edn.), 4.14b.

though it is not clear whether Liu joined him before or after that date.[25] Kong Rong was put to death by Cao Cao in the eighth month of 208. Kong was the direct descendant of Confucius in the twentieth generation and a native of Qufu, near Liu's own home. He was one of the most promising intellectual figures under Cao Cao's aegis, and his death must have served as a cautionary tale to the others of the Seven Masters.[26] So there was good reason for Liu Zhen to follow the "Way of Humility," to imitate a hollow vessel, and to express himself in ironic and deflected terms. Looking directly in another's face could after all be considered a crime.

Epistolary Rhetoric

The *Shishuo xinyu* anecdote about Liu Zhen provides a vantage point of understanding from the early interpreters of his life and work, but is not a primary source. For that, however, we are lucky, as with the other Jian'an writers, to have a number of prose writings that illuminate Liu's situation as well. These generally belong to a court setting, which is why they are preserved, so Liu is already writing from within the "empty vessel" of the courtier. With this factor taken into account, though, we can appreciate these

25 Unfortunately his arrival cannot be dated with precision. Wang Yunxi argues for a date early in the Jian'an era based on Xie Lingyun's imitation of Liu in "Ni Weitaizi Yezhong ji" 擬魏太子鄴中集 [Modeled on the Collecnon of the Crown Prince of Wei at Ye" (*Wen xuan* 文選 [Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1986], 30.1436), in "Liu Zhen pingzhuan," 309. But an imitation poem should not be used as a historical source, since Xie Lingyun's prime motivation in writing it cannot have been historical fidelity. Yu Shaochu follows the same evidence to date Liu Zhen's arrival at Ye to 204, in "Jian'an qizi nianpu," *Jian'an qizi ji*, 401. On the other hand, Itō Masafumi argues that Liu lived in his native place of Ningyang until he was summoned to serve as aide (*yuanshu* 掾屬) to the chancellor (*chengxiang* 丞相) in the sixth or seventh month of 208, after Cao Cao became chancellor in the sixth month. See *Ken'an shijin to sono dentō,* 136, n. 5. Cao Daoheng 曹道衡 and Shen Yucheng 沈玉成 collect various indirect pieces of evidence to argue that Liu Zhen arrived between 196 and 200. See Cao and Shen, *Zhonggu wenxue shiliao congkao* 中古文學史料叢考 (Beijing Zhonghua shuju, 2003), page63.

26 Itō suggests a direct inspiration for Liu Zhen's second "Poem Addressed to a Younger Cousin" in a "Miscellaneous Poem" 雜詩 attributed to Kong Rong (*Ken'an shijin to sono dentō,* 119–20), but the only source for this "Miscellaneous Poem" is the *Guwen yuan* 古文苑 , and I suspect it may not be authentic.

works for the insights they provide into Liu's character, and also for the rhetorical complexity necessitated by his situation.

Our first example is a letter to Cao Pi. Liu Zhen first joined Cao Cao's court as an aide to Cao Cao himself, but later obtained offices with both Cao Zhi and Cao Pi. In 211, Cao Pi became Leader of Court Gentlemen for Miscellaneous Uses, and Liu Zhen, along with several others, joined his staff as Gentleman of Letters. It seems that Cao Pi gave a precious foreign belt (*kuoluo dai* 廓落帶) to Liu Zhen, but later wanted to borrow it back, and wrote this letter explaining that he would only need it temporarily:

Objects become precious because of the owner. So what is in the hands of the base should not be moved to the side of the most honorable. Although I may take this now, do not fear I will not return it.

夫物因人為貴。故在賤者之手，不御至尊之側。今雖取之，勿嫌其不反也。[27]

This letter demonstrates both wit and condescension from Cao Pi at the same time. Liu Zhen's reply develops the theme with an elaborate series of rhetorical figures recalling the *Wenshi zhuan* anecdote:

I have heard of the uncut jade of the Jing Mountains, the treasure reflecting the Prime Lord;[28] and of the pearl of the Marquis of Sui,[29] which gleamed with the admiration of gentlemen; and of the copper of the southern frontier, lifted up to the necks of the elegant beauties;[30] and of the tails of the squirrel and marten, woven into bandannas for attendant ministers. These four treasures, though they be buried under rotting stones or hidden in stagnant mud, will still shine their light for millennia and

27 Quoted in Pei Songzhi's commentary to *Sanguo zhi* 21.601. On the term *kuoluo* 廓落 , also written 郭落 , see Otto Maenchen-Helfen, "Are Chinese *hsi-pi* and *kuo-lo* IE Loan Words?" *Language* 21.4 (1945): 256–60, identifying the term as a loan cognate with Greek κ κλο "circle," Tocharian A *kukäl* "wheel," etc. It was a kind of leather belt in use among the Xiongnu.

28 The emperor.

29 The Marquis of Sui, a Han nobleman, was rewarded with the pearl after helping to heal a snake of its injury. See commentary to *Huainanzi* 淮南子 (*Sibu congkan* edn.), 6.3b.

30 This metal is usually referred to as "southern metal" 南金 , as in *Mao shi* 299/8, where it is a tribute gift from the tribes of the Huai 淮 River area.

emit their colors from remote antiquity. Yet none of these could attach itself from the beginning to the most honorable. For what is worn by the honorable is produced by the base; what is used by the exalted belongs first to the lowly. Thus when mighty towers are just built, the craftsmen are first to stand below them, and when fine millet is first ripe, the farmer first tastes its seeds. I only regret that I have no other such exquisite accoutrements. If this one is truly exceptional, your highness may receive it.

楨聞荊山之璞，曜元後之寶；隨侯之珠，燭眾士之好；南垠之金，登窈窕之首；鼷貂之尾，綴侍臣之幘：此四寶者，伏朽石之下，潛汙泥之中，而揚光千載之上，發彩疇昔之外，亦皆未能初自接於至尊也。夫尊者所服，卑者所脩也；貴者所御，賤者所先也。故夏屋初成而大匠先立其下，嘉禾始熟而農夫先嘗其粒。恨楨所帶，無他妙飾，若實殊異，尚可納也。[31]

The explicit sense of the letter is the simple message that treasures are often produced or first used by the lowly, and then given to or requisitioned by the great. One almost misses, since the conclusion shows that Liu is submitting to Cao Pi's request, how Liu's simile inverts the terms of the discussion. Rather than being the lowly person in possession of a valuable object, Liu implicitly identifies himself with the valuable object, since the images he chooses, the jade from the Jing Mountains and the Pearls of the Marquis of Sui, are conventional figures for the meritorious official.

There is some ambiguity about the present location of the treasures here: does Liu Zhen feel he is still "buried under rotting mud," or is he already shining forth? There is also a sense of exploitation, as if implying that the great own nothing truly their own, but only consume the products of their subjects. This is a masterful and complimentary letter, but all the images Liu Zhen employs, the various treasures, represent the talented vassal, not the prince, and remind Cao Pi of the need to appreciate Liu Zhen. Even though the primary message is one of submission and obedience, the rhetorical devices employed all assert Liu Zhen's own worth.

In 211 or 212 Liu Zhen was on Cao Pi's staff, met with the crisis for which he was removed from office, but finally was pardoned and reinstated. He later joined Cao Zhi's staff as cadet to the Marquis of Pingyuan (Cao Zhi held this

31 Quoted in Pei Songzhi's commentary to *Sanguo zhi* 21.601. Cf. texts in Han Geping 493–94; Wu Yun 613.

title during the years 211 to 214), as we know from a letter he sent to Cao Zhi regarding his colleague Xing Yong 邢顒 (?–223).[32] Another letter to Cao Zhi affirms Liu Zhen's regard for Cao Zhi with almost desperate intensity:

> Perspicacious Governor, you first bestowed pity on me, and then your tender thoughts heightened daily. It was as if I had a severe illness, and Yan Nong prescribed a medicine, or Qi Bo gave me a treatment of acupuncture. Even if the illness were not fully cured I could die without regret. Why is this? Because that heavenly medicine is perfectly spiritual, though my earthbound flesh would already have exhausted itself.
>
> 明使君始垂哀憐，意眷日崇，譬之疾病，乃使炎農分藥，岐伯下鍼，疾雖未除，就沒無恨。何者？以其天醫至神，而榮魄自盡也。[33]

The circumstances of the letter are not clear, but one cannot help speculating if Liu Zhen was especially grateful to Cao Zhi for welcoming him after his temporary disgrace with Cao Pi. Liu also writes of illness in the second of his poems to Cao Pi, and in fact died in 217 of the same epidemic that killed Xu Gan, Chen Lin, and Ying Yang, so the illness he speaks of here may not be solely metaphorical. Yan Nong 炎農 or Shen Nong 神農 was the inventor of both agriculture and medicine, while Qi Bo 岐伯 was another great doctor from remote antiquity. The term *rongpo* 榮魄 in the last line refers to the corporeal self, with *rong* being a technical term for the circulation of the blood, and *po* the half of the soul that is bound to the body. So Liu Zhen is asserting that his spiritual fulfillment would allow him to die without regret.

There is a certain formal similarity here to a comment of Liu Zhen's that is recorded in *Wenxin diaolong*: "The form and style may be strong or weak; to succeed so that when the words are finished, the style lives on, this is difficult for any one man in the world" 文之體指【勢】實強弱，使其辭已盡而勢有

32 Text in Xing Yong's biography, *Sanguo zhi*, 12.383. For the dating, see Wan Yunxi, "Liu Zhen pingzhuan," 311–12; Cao and Shen, *Zhonggu wenxue shiliao congkao*, 62–63. Alternately, Liu might have served Cao Zhi first and then Cao Pi, as Itō suggests (*Ken'an shijin to sono dentō,* 123). This was the order of Ying Yang's appointments.

33 "Quan Hou Han wen," in Yan Kejun 嚴可均, ed., *Quan shanggu Sandai Qin Han Sanguo Liuchao wen* 全上古三代秦漢三國六朝文 (first printed 1893; rpt. Taibei: Shijie shuju, 1969), 65.4a.

餘，天下一人耳，不可得也 .[34] This statement on the nature of writing itself employs a trope favored by Liu: describing something as continuing to live on, to function after its own demise. In his letter to Cao Zhi, Liu employs this rhetoric on his own behalf, while here in regard to writing itself. There is this sense of the struggle of life against death as providing the intensity and interest of experience in his poetry as well. Liu Xie 劉勰 (ca. 465–522) praises Liu's letters in *Wenxin diaolong* as "beautiful, yet also admonitory and beneficial" 麗而規益 , and also points out that Cao Pi did not mention them in his discussion of Liu Zhen's writings in his "Discourse on Literature."[35] The judgment, though probably based also on letters that do not survive, suggests that Liu's letters had a special combination of moral seriousness and literary flair.

This letter shares with our other examples of Liu's eloquence a vivid antithesis. Whether it is the spirit surviving while the body perishes, or the force of the words continuing past the words themselves, or jade buried in the mud, these vivid antitheses are the source of much of the potency of Liu's work, and are used even more widely in his poetry. Depending on the circumstances this kind of unresolved opposition of forces can seem either a suggestion of an ironical message about power relations, or a reflection of the unceasing struggle between life and death.

Wind, Bone, Cypress, Pine

Though the term "irony" has no classical Chinese equivalent, there is a kind of counterpart for this approach in the allusions to the Six Dynasties-era discourse on *fenggu*, "wind and bone," a term frequently associated with Jian'an poetry by later critics.[36] Liu Xie describes the complementary function

34 Fan Wenlan 范文瀾 , comm. *Wenxin diaolong zhu* 文心雕龍注 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1958; rpt. Taipei: Xuehai, 1993), 30.531. I follow the emendation of 指 to 勢 in Zhou Zhenfu 周振甫 , ed., *Wenxin diaolong zhushi* 文心雕龍注釋 (Taipei: Liren shuju, 1984, rpt. 2001), 331.590.

35 Fan Wenlan, *Wenxin diaolong zhu*, 25.457.

36 There is not much scholarship on the term in English other than Donald A. Gibbs, "Notes on the Wind: The Term 'Feng' in Chinese Literary Criticism," in David C. Buxbaum and Frederick W. Mote, eds., *Transition and Permanence: Chinese History and Culture: A Festschrift in Honor of Dr. Hsiao Kung-Ch'üan* (Hong Kong: Cathay Press, 1972), 285–93. I occasionally borrow Gibbs' helpful rendering of *gu* as "bone structure."

of wind and bone as follows: "to be expert in the 'bone,' the deployment of diction must be precise; to be profound in 'wind,' the relation of feelings must be manifest" 練於骨者 , 析辭必精 , 深乎風者 , 述情必顯 .[37] For Liu Xie wind and bone are two essential features of literary composition, and excellent writing must employ both successfully at the same time. The bone may refer either to the structure of the writing or to an active, direct style, while the wind is the affective power that conveys the emotions and thoughts. But as with Liu Xie's other complementary oppositions like *tixing* 體性 and *tongbian* 通變 , both elements are desirable and cannot exist in isolation.

Though both of the constituent terms had well-established meanings, and the compound was used to refer to personal character, Liu Xie's use seems to be the first application of *fenggu* to the arts. [38] The elements *feng* and *gu* were used throughout Wei-Jin discourse to evaluate personal character and physique, with *feng* being essentially the air or manner of a person, and *gu* something more like "backbone," a moral quality of determination and resilience, as in the compound *gugeng* 骨鯁 . At the same time, the sense of *gu* was closely related to its common meaning of physical "bone," so even in regard to personality *feng / gu* was parallel to other oppositions like outside and inside, or spirit and body. The terms were reapplied to the realm of aesthetic criticism first in regard to painting and calligraphy. "Bone" could refer literally to the bone structure of a person being depicted, as when Gu Kaizhi 顧愷之 (341–402) describes how a painter first depicted the form and bone structure, then added the garments.[39] At the same time, it also took on a qualitative sense of forcefulness and vigor, as when a biography of Wang Xianzhi 王獻之 (344–

37 See *Wenxin diaolong zhu*, 28.513.

38 This discussion is based on Mou Shijin 牟世金, *Wenxin diaolong yanjiu* 文心雕龍研究 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1995), 352–60, and Wang Yunxi, "Cong *Wenxin diaolong* '*fenggu*' tandao Jian'an fenggu" 從《文心雕龍・風骨》談到建安風骨 , in *Wenxin diaolong tansuo* 文心雕龍探索 (rev. ed., Shanghai: Shanghai guji guji chubanshe, 2005), 98–124, esp. 102–8.

39 Quoted in Zhang Yanyuan 張彥遠 (Tang dyn.), *Lidai minghua ji* 歷代名畫記 ed. Yu Jianhua 俞劍華 , (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin meishu meishu chubanshe, 1964), 5.104. Gu's remarks are often attributed to *Wei Jin shengliu hua zan* 魏晉勝流畫贊 , but as Yu Jianhua makes clear in his edition, Zhang Yanyuan seems to have confused the provenance of Gu's writings. This particular quotation is introduced as Gu Kaizhi's "Lun hua" 論畫 [Discussion of painting]. See tra-nslation in William B. Acker, *Some T'ang and Pre-T'ang Texts on Chinese Painting,* Vol. II, Part One (Leiden: Brill, 1974), 59.

388) remarks that he failed to match his father's calligraphy in *guli* 骨力 .[40]

Both "wind" and "bone" were then applied to writing, particularly for praising lively, persuasive expression. Nonetheless in their separate meanings wind and bone stand in tension. Both are admirable qualities, but oriented in different directions, with the wind representing emotional affect or stylistic tendency, in contradistinction to the bone as a more fundamental quality. *Fenggu* is a synthesis of opposing tendencies, a refining of experience into art. In the case of the individual poet, pathos does not lie in "directness" but its very opposite, in the conflict of the mind making sense of spiritual constraints. In pursuit of the Jian'an style, then, we need to look at the tension inherent in its mode of expression, how the urge to communicate is thwarted by authorial personality, how self-presentation is often dramatized in the formulas of social interaction, how the momentum of the author's osseous frame meets the animating force of zephyrous art.

One of Liu Zhen's most popular poems vividly exhibits this conceptual opposition in action. This is the second of Liu's "Poems Addressed to a Younger Cousin":

亭亭山上松	Straight and tall stands the pine in the hills;
瑟瑟谷中風	Sit-sit soughs the wind in the valley.
風聲一何盛	How grand indeed is the sound of the wind!
松枝一何勁	How sturdy indeed are the branches of the pine!
冰霜正慘悽	Though wretched in the ice and frost,
終歲常端正	All the year they remain steadfast.
豈不罹凝寒	How can they not endure the freezing cold?
松柏有本性	For pine and cypress share this fundamental nature.[41]

40 *Jin shu* 晉書 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1974, 2003), 50.2106. William Acker analyzes the term *gu fa* 骨法 in painting, and finds that although it referred originally to "skeletal structure," it later took on an extended and quite different sense of "vigorous brushwork." See Acker, *Some T'ang and Pre-T'ang Texts on Chinese Painting*, Vol. I (Leiden: Brill, 1954), xxxv.

41 *Wen xuan*, 23.1115; *Liuchen zhu Wen xuan* 六臣注文選 (rpt. Taipei: Huazheng shuju, 1980), 23.44b–45a; also quoted in its entirety in the "Pine" section of *Yiwen leiju* 藝文類聚 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1982), 88.1513.

According to its title, the poem is written in praise of Liu Zhen's cousin, although the allegorical mode does not specify a referent, and the poem is evidently defining the sort of virtue to which Liu himself aspires. The poem opens with a chiasmus of pine and wind that is a structural counterpart to the fundamental opposition of the two symbols. The opposition is timeless, not bound by season, but continuing all the year, in spite of which constant pressure the pine does not weaken. The role of the wind is emphasized in the poem, recalling the statement in the *Analects* that "Only after the year turns to winter does one know that pine and cypress are late to wither" 歲寒 , 然後知松柏之後彫也 .[42] In a sense the pine requires the wind and the cold in order to thrive spiritually, even as they torment it physically. Even though their roles are in opposition, Liu Zhen places them in equal parallelism in the first couplet, even celebrating the sound of the wind.

As an allegory of the courtier-official's life, this seems a dark vision. Traditional commenters frequently interpret the poem as a statement of Liu's own virtues.[43] One can certainly read it as praise for the determination of a scholar who waits patiently, like the pine tree, to be recognized and appointed to office by a perceptive ruler. But that seems to take for granted that Liu was already satisfied by his positions with the Caos. As we have seen, Liu endured a fair share of "freezing cold" even after he came to Ye. Since Liu is writing, after all, about "fundamental nature," it seems natural to read the poem as a general description of the condition of the scholar who must compromise to serve an imperfect lord. Under such conditions success may indicate moral failure, and hardship itself be proof of virtue. Zhong Rong 鍾嶸 (?–518?) wrote in praise of Liu Zhen that: "Steadfast bones face the frost, lofty winds pass over the vulgar" 貞骨凌霜 , 高風跨俗 .[44] If we take this as a reading of Liu's second "Poem Addressed to a Younger Cousin," among other works, it seems a reminder that the gales of winter are celebrated in that poem too, along

42 *Lun yu* 論語 , 9/28.

43 Wu Qi 吳淇 (1615–1675) compares Liu himself to a pine tree in *Liuchao xuanshi dinglun* 六朝選詩定論 (Yangzhou: Guangling shushe, 2009), 6.138. Similarly He Zhuo 何焯 (1661–1722) interprets the three poems to a younger cousin as a statement of Liu's values, in *Yimen dushu ji* 義門讀書記 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), 46.905.

44 Wang Zhong 汪中 , ed., *Shipin zhu* 詩品注 (Taipei: Zhengzhong, 1969, 1990), 81.

with the sturdy pine and cypress.

Throughout his writings, and not only in pentasyllabic verse, Liu Zhen employs certain consistent rhetorical devices. First and most importantly, he sustains and develops a single rhetorical figure throughout a passage or poem. Second, he develops it dynamically, in tension with some opposing force. Third, the effect of this pattern is to create a sense of conflict or ambivalence in his writings, insofar as they center around a rhetorical figure which may take precedence over the topic of the poem. Liu Zhen's work thus ends up being open to multiple interpretations. The strong emotion implicit in the imagery leads naturally to the identification of personal expression. But the images themselves, recurring and often formulaic, cannot be linked in any simple or uncritical way with Liu's subjective interiority. A recognition of the conflict inherent in the rhetoric, the way that the pine and cypress tree are themselves dependent on the wind, forces us to a more complex appreciation of what Liu is doing.

For this kind of writing it is useful to apply critical terms like "wind and bone" that suggest the tensions involved. In a Western idiom irony is relevant as well. The irony here is not the verbal irony of a one-liner, but rather a situational or tragic irony depicted by poetic means. Lionel Trilling wrote: "What we may call Jane Austen's first or basic irony is the recognition that spirit is not free, that it is conditioned, that it is limited by circumstance. This, as everyone knows from childhood on, is indeed an anomaly. Her next and consequent irony, has reference to the fact that only by reason of this anomaly does spirit have virtue and meaning."[45] This analysis is parallel exactly, in much more compressed form than in Austen's fiction, to Liu's pine and cypress. They are constrained by circumstances, but it is precisely in that constraint that their virtue is realized. Not all of Liu's writings attain the same effect, but this ironic message is central to his best work.

In the past attention from literary scholars has tended to coalesce around Wang Can and Cao Zhi, who seem to be the most expressive and original as lyric poets.[46] But in the Six Dynasties Liu Zhen received equally high

45 Trilling, "Mansfield Park," in *The Opposing Self* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1955), 207.

46 A useful survey of his writings is Itō Masafumi, "Ryū Tei shi ron" 劉楨詩論, *Kindai* 51 (1976): 1–51, rpt. *Ken'an shijin to sono dentō*, 138–87.

appraisals for his poetry. The *Wen xuan* contains ten *shi* poems by Liu, quite a high number for a single poet. Liu continued to received the same high acclaim by later Chinese critics, as Wang Yunxi has documented.[47] It may be that some of his key works have been lost, since his extant poetry collection is meager relative to those of Wang or Cao. In the Six Dynasties, it was for the most part Liu's poetry and not his writing in other genres that won him fame. Zhong Rong awards him its highest ranking, praising especially the *qi* 氣 "vital energy" and also the *qi* 奇 "strangeness" of his poems: "He employed his vital energy (*qi*) and his fondness for the extraordinary, to stir up much and show off his unique talents" 仗氣愛奇 , 動多振絕 .[48] The characteristics of Liu's poetry identified here may loosely be translated as bold but limpid use of language, and a vigorous manner without excessive decoration. Cao Pi himself wrote that "*qi* is the principal element in writing" 文以氣為主 ,[49] so in this sense Liu Zhen is an excellent representative of Jian'an style.

Itō Masafumi identifies this characteristic in more modern terms as the *dynamic* character of Liu's poetry, in contradistinction to the more *static* character of Wang Can's poetry, which makes more use of allusion and the parallel couplet.[50] Elaborating on this insight we can try to observe how Liu Zhen depicts a set of moods or other forces in *dynamic* relation to one another, showing how the character of the pine tree is tested and proven by the force of the wind that acts upon it.

A Man Apart

Liu Xie's "wind and bone" is a concept of widespread applicability, in some interpretations even an attribute universal to all literary works. But in the particular case of Liu Zhen's poetry we can see it as the combination of intense personal emotion (bone structure of the author and work) and rhetorical

47 Wang Yunxi, "Tan qianren dui Liu Zhen shi de pingjia" 談前人對劉楨詩的評價 , rpt. in *Han Wei Liuchao Tang dai wenxue luncong* (*zengbu ben*) 漢魏六朝唐代文學論叢（增補本） (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2002), 319–31.

48 *Shipin zhu*, 81.

49 See "Lun wen" 論文 , *Wen xuan*, 52.2271.

50 Itō, *Ken'an shijin to sono dentō*, 142–43.

antithesis (expressive means communicating with other literary works and readers). On a much more limited note, it is the implicit irony in which the familiar rhetorical figures of the poem take on a life of their own, separate from and refracting back on the author. Consider Liu Zhen's poem to his friend Xu Gan, which is relatively long for Liu Zhen at twenty-two lines, and interweaves a number of the key strands in Liu's work and in Jian'an literature more broadly. I divide it into three stanzas based on the content, though there is only one rhyme throughout:

Presented to Xu Gan 贈徐幹

誰謂相去遠	Who could say that we are far apart,
隔此西掖垣	Separated only by the wall on the west side of the palace?
拘限清切禁	Kept in confines, severed cleanly from you,
中情無由宣	My inner feelings I have no way to express.
思子沈心曲	Thinking of you makes my heart plummet away,
長歎不能言	Heaving a long sigh without any way to speak.
起坐失次第	Rising and sitting, I cannot find my place,
一日三四遷	Moving three or four times in a day.
步出北寺門	Stepping out the gate of the Northern Chambers,
遙望西苑園	I gaze far off to the Western Park.
細柳夾道生	Delicate willows grow along the path,
方塘含清源	The square pond possesses fresh springs.
輕葉隨風轉	Weightless leaves revolve over and over in the wind,
飛鳥何翻翻	How the birds in flight do flit and flutter by!
乖人易感動	This man apart is easily moved to feeling,
涕下與衿連	My tears stream down along his robe's hem
仰視白日光	I gaze up towards the light of the bright sun,
皦皦高且懸	Gloriously gleaming, suspended loftily above,
兼燭八紘內	Illuminating all the Eight Extremities,
物類無頗偏	Not partial to any single species of being.
我獨抱深感	I, alone, bear this deep feeling;

不得與比焉　　That I cannot be ranked beside them.[51]

Xu Gan responded to this poem with another that matches the sentiment but is otherwise not very distinguished.[52] Given the intense feeling of Liu's poem, it may have been written while Liu was under punishment for his disrespect to Cao Pi's consort, or perhaps later while his reputation was still tarnished by his crime. The truth is that it is quite difficult to determine the exact context of the poem, particularly as Liu delights in using phrases that are scarcely attested elsewhere (such as *qingqie* 清切). His use of vocabulary that is rare in the corpus of received texts (perhaps not rare in the spoken language of his day, to be sure) is one element of his dynamic, *qi*-laden style. When a poet is artfully reworking classical allusions, in the manner of some of his contemporaries, a modern scholar can trace each phrase back to its source, but this is impossible for some of Liu's works. This spontaneity of vocabulary still creates an impression of vividness for the reader.

Regarding the interpretation of the first couplet, Wuchen commentator Lü Yanji 呂延濟 writes: "At this time Xu was in the western court [the secretariat], and Liu was in the forbidden quarters [of the palace], so he wrote this poem" 是時徐在西掖 , 劉在禁省 , 故有此詩 . Elaborating on this view, Itō speculates that Liu would have been located in a workshop belonging to the eunuchs' quarters, intensifying his sense of disgrace.[53] The next few lines elaborate on Liu's sense of isolation and longing for his friend, while the seventh and eighth lines, where Liu Zhen keeps fidgeting as he tries to work, provide naturalistic detail reminiscent of Liu's "Miscellaneous Poem" 雜詩 . But the setting established in the first couplet gives a rare specificity to the poem (rather different from the generalized emotions of much Han pentasyllabic verse).

The second part of the poem describing the parks around the palace seems somewhat ambiguous. Is Liu Zhen really pent up at work, and if so why can he go roaming outside, and why cannot Xu Gan accompany him? We could

51 *Wen xuan*, 23.1113–14; *Liuchen zhu Wen xuan*, 23.43b–44a.

52 See *Yiwen leiju*, 31.546.

53 Itō, "Ryū Tei shi ron," 160–61.

read this second part as an imaginative reverie, meant to describe what Liu would like to be doing, while the first part was more plainly descriptive of his current situation. The birds in flight in lines 13–14 are a natural conclusion to this scene, symbolizing freedom and pleasure. But how far away we are now from the mood of the opening! We are in fact forced to adopt this or a similar reading by some of the shared phrases used in this passage. For instance, both Cao Zhi's "Lord's Feast" 公讌 [54] poem and Cao Pi's "Written at Lotus Pond" 芙蓉池作 [55] also refer to the Western Park 西園 of line 10 here. Cao Zhi's poem also refers to a "green pond" 綠池 , "pure waves" 清波 , and "fine birds" 好鳥 , all phrases echoed here. These celebratory poems were probably written in the autumn of 211, at the same time as Liu Zhen's own "Lord's Feast."[56] If this hypothesis is correct, Liu Zhen's poem here is nostalgically recalling that scene, but from an entirely different psychological position. The juxtaposition can only be termed ironical.

Indeed, the third section emphasizes Liu's isolation in this scene. Liu is pinned to his place, to his sentence, just as humans are all pinned to the surface of the earth by comparison with the birds. But even further, by the end of the poem Liu Zhen feels himself not just excluded from the beneficence of the sovereign, but incommensurable with all other creatures to whom such beneficence is freely given. Overall the poem does not have the concise construction around a single image that is typical of Liu Zhen. It is instead a triptych (perhaps better compared to his set of poems to a cousin): first personal longing, second a reverie of pleasure outside, third a meditation on the isolation of a disgraced courtier.

Stylistically, the poem exemplifies some of the remarks by later critics, exhibiting both the *qi* energy of Liu's poetry, and also the *qi* strangeness, particularly in his description of himself as alienated *guairen* 乖人 "the man apart." He is "apart," not like a recluse operating altogether outside of society, but rather uncomfortable in his own position, struggling to reconcile himself with his actual circumstances, alienated. We should compare one of Liu's

54 *Wen xuan*, 20.942–43.

55 *Wen xuan*, 22.1031–32.

56 Itō, *Ken'an shijin to sono dentō,* 146.

most original poems, the "Miscellaneous Poem" devoted to the tedium of officework:

職事煩填委	Duties keep piling up on me in their tedium,[57]
文墨紛消散	Papers and ink are scattered all about.
馳翰未暇食	Racing my brush I have no time to eat,
日昃不知晏	As the sun declines still I know no rest.
沈迷簿領書	Absorbed to distraction in official records and files,
回回自昏亂	I only find myself more and more baffled.
釋此出西城	I'll drop these and go out west of the city,
登高且遊觀	Climb up high and gaze all around.
方塘含白水	The square pool contains clear waters,
中有鳧與鴈	And within it are ducks and wild geese.
安得肅肅羽	Where might I obtain some wings to flutter on,
從爾浮波瀾	And follow you away on these waves?[58]

It is not too difficult for a 21st-century academic to empathize with Liu's situation here. The poem also bears a striking resemblance to Liu's poem to Xu Gan. In both cases Liu wearies of his present situation, and thinks of going off to visit the pond nearby, and even imagines himself taking on the freedom of a bird.

The formulaic phrases at the center of the triptych take on a uniquely personal meaning in context, as the tokens of Liu's recollection, given an entirely new meaning by a new context. The very same words, even the very same lines and couplets, can mean something different in light of this situation, just as the same words might mean very different things to Cao Pi than what they meant for Liu Zhen. Verbal irony, then, is central to the making of this masterpiece. But this verbal irony also deserves to be set in context of the irony of the court at Ye itself.

57 I follow the more evocative Wuchen variant of 煩 for 相 .

58 *Wen xuan*, 29.1359–60; *Liuzhen zhu Wen xuan*, 29.18b–19a. Previous translations in Fusheng Wu, 621, n. 10; Burton Watson, *Chinese Lyricism* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1971), 45; Stephen Owen, *An Anthology of Chinese Literature: Beginnings to 1911* (New York: Norton, 1996), 265.

The Empty Vessel

In 212 Xun Yu 荀彧 (163–212), director of the secretariat, who had been one of Cao Cao's key allies throughout his rise to power, rejected a proposal that Cao receive the Nine Distinctions 九錫 , an important symbolic advance towards the imperial throne.[59] Cao Cao was disturbed at this opposition from unexpected quarters. He appointed Xun to a new position, still honorably ranked, but without the authority of the secretariat itself, effectively stripping him of influence. Soon after, when Xun was taken ill, Cao sent him a vessel of food that turned out to be empty. Xun took poison and died.[60]

In the same year Liu Zhen wrote his eulogy for a close friend, the "Stele Inscription for Guo Wenfu, Private Scholar" 處士國文甫碑 .[61] In his eloquent praise for a friend who stayed resolutely independent of Caos, Liu suggests something of the irony of his own situation, of the courtier who must adapt his own virtue in service of an imperfect lord.

The tetrasyllabic poem is preceded by a prose preface praising Guo's incorruptibility, and explaining the need to preserve his virtuous reputation in writing.

懿矣先生	How fair was that gentleman!
天授德度	Heaven bestowed a capacity for virtue.
外清內白	He was outwardly unblemished, inwardly innocent,
如玉之素	And he was as natural as jade.
逍遙九皐	Wandering at will among the nine lakes,

59 *Sanguo zhi*, 10.317. See also discussion in Rafe de Crespigny, *Imperial Warlord: A Biography of Cao Cao 155–220 AD* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 385–87.

60 *Wei shi chunqiu* 魏氏春秋 , quoted in *Sanguo zhi*, 10.317. The story may be apocryphal but is no less telling for that.

61 Yan Kejun, "Quan Hou Han wen," 65.4b–5a; *Yiwen leiju*, 37.658–59; Yu Shaochu, *Jian'an qizi ji*, 7.201–202. But note that the Shanghai guji typeset edition of *Yiwen leiju* seems to have introduced a misprint 歎 for 歡 in the final line of the poem. Yu reprints 歎 , but Yan Kejun, the *Siku quanshu* edition of *Yiwen leiju*, 37.4a, and *Liu Gonggan ji* 劉公幹集 (in *Han Wei Liuchao bai san jia ji*, *Siku quanshu* edn.), 31.6b, all have 歡 . I am grateful to Timothy W.K. Chan for clarifying this point.

方回是慕　Fang Hui was the object of his admiration.[62]
不計治萃　Unconcerned by the labor of governing,
名與殊路　He followed a path separate from fame.
知我者希　Those who knew him were few,
韞櫝未酤　He kept the jade locked up and did not sell it.
喪過乎哀　His mourning was surpassing in grief,
遘疾不悟　So he met with illness and did not wake.
早世永頹　At an early age he was ruined forever,
違此榮祚　And so lost glory and renown.
咨爾末徒　Alas, now this lowliest follower will
聿修歡故　Transmit and cultivate what he once sighed for.[63]

The elegy centers around the famous dialogue from the *Analects*: "Zigong said: 'If you had a fine jade, would you lock it up in a chest and hide it? Or would you look for a good buyer and sell it?' The Master said: 'Sell it! Sell it! I only await a buyer.'" 子貢曰：有美玉於斯，韞匱而藏諸？求善賈而沽諸？子曰：沽之哉！沽之哉！我待賈者也 . [64] The passage emphasizes the obligation to make use of one's talents rather than preserving them in isolation—given the important caveat that one must await a perceptive employer. This is the recognition of the inevitable disappointment of anyone who sells the jade of his own pure soul, becoming an "empty vessel" in the phrase of Liu's friend Xu Gan.

This poem is rarely treated among Liu Zhen's poetical works, in part since it is officially classified as *wen* 文 , a term sometimes mistranslated as "prose." As the reader may observe, the piece is in rhyming tetrasyllabic verse, entirely consistent with the form of the *Shi jing* and indeed borrowing some expressions from that classic of poetry. Moreover, it is devoted to the principal themes of Liu's writings: the role of the courtier, whether in isolation or renown; the relationship between friendship and virtue; the struggle to preserve integrity in

62 Fang Hui was a legendary recluse from the age of Yao 堯 . See *Lie xian zhuan* 列仙傳 , as quoted in *Taiping yulan* 太平御覽 (*Sibu congkan* edn.), 184.3a.

63 For "transmit and cultivate" see *Shi jing*, Ode 235/6. The Mao commentary glosses *yu* 聿 as *shu* 述 , "transmit."

64 *Lun yu*, 9/13.

the face of disregard and death. The compression of tetrasyllabic verse here is highly effective at conveying Liu's sentiment. Consider the fourth couplet:

不計治萃　Unconcerned by the labor of governing,
名與殊路　He followed a path separate from fame.

Where it occurs in the *Shi ji*, the phrase "separate paths" 殊路 precedes "return together" 同歸 .[65] So there is a subtle suggestion that even though the path of the recluse appears different from that of a courtier, they may actually attain the same goals in their different ways.

The final line of the elegy also contains an implicit contradiction: "Transmit and cultivate what he once delighted in" 聿修歡故 . The first half of the line consists of a formulaic phrase from the *Shi jing*, *yu xiu* 聿修 . It is used in its *locus classic*, the epic Ode on "King Wen" of the Zhou dynasty, as part of the line: "Transmit and cultivate his virtue" 聿修厥德 .[66] In other early usages the formula *yu xiu* similarly occurs with "virtue" or some similar expression, as in Gan Bao's 干寶 (?–336) "Overview of the *Annals of Jin*" 晉紀總論 : "[Sima Yan 司馬炎 , founder of the Western Jin] transmitted and cultivated the ambitions of our ancestors" 聿修祖宗之志 .[67] From its very first usage through Liu's own time, *yu xiu* belongs to the language of dynastic succession and imperial ambition. But here it is followed by the far more humble and intimate *huan gu* 歡故 . Like *mo tu* 末徒 in the previous line, this is quite a rare usage without obvious precedents in the classics.[68] But it is hard to read as anything but a term of endearment for a friend.

The stele inscription may lack some of Liu's famous *qi* 氣 , and feels a bit confined in four characters per line. At the same time, though at first this inscription appears a conventional pastiche of the *Analects* and *Shi jing*, some

65 *Shi ji* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1982), 23.1160.

66 *Mao shi*, 235/6.

67 "Quan Jin wen" 全晉文 , in Yan Kejun, ed., *Quan shanggu Sandai Qin Han Sanguo Liuchao wen*, 127.6b.

68 This is the only example cited in both *Hanyu da cidian* 漢語大詞典 (Shanghai: Hanyu da cidian chubanshe, 1994), 6:1476; and Morohashi Tetsuji 諸橋轍次 , *Dai Kan-Wa jiten* 大漢和辭典 (rev. edition; Tokyo: Taishōkan shoten, 1989–1990), 6:6365.

of Liu's collocations here are actually quite novel and even original. We have already seen examples of this originality of diction in his pentasyllabic verse, but it figures in his tetrasyllabic verse as well. This interplay of shared formulae and novel expressions, of personal emotion and conventional forms, seems to exhibit the principles of Liu Xie's *fenggu* again. There is also a hint of irony here in the interplay of the grandiose language of dynastic successions, and the more intimate praise of a close friend who explicitly resisted being co-opted by the contemporary regime.

Irony is not a simple phenomenon but may be indispensable to a proper understanding of the Jian'an court, and to the greatest poems of Liu Zhen. It was perhaps just this fact that the *Shishuo xinyu* compilers had in mind when they attributed to Liu an ironical *bon mot*. We should expect irony to be present, moreover, when considering the difficulty of Liu's personal situation, shared with his fellow courtiers, and the obstacles to stating his own feelings explicitly. At the same time that Liu rejoiced in the pleasures of friendship and the honor of recognition, he was also uneasy both for his personal situation and for the state of the country. His sympathy for his recluse friend in the eventful year of 212 is easy to understand, and suggestive for the reading of his other poems. The empty vessel is laden with meaning.

劉楨作品中的反諷與死亡

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建安時期（196–220）的詩歌雖以真實表現詩人個性著稱，但詩人們為了避免冒犯朝中權貴曹氏，在直接表達個人思想和感情時必須有所收斂。也許是這種心理狀態所使然，他們在作品中表達真實想法時往往來得含蓄，採取婉轉甚至反諷的手段來傳情達意。本文以建安時期的代表詩人劉楨（?–217）作為研究對象，梳理並分析其作品中的反諷元素。《世說新語》的一則軼聞透露了劉楨對於他身處的朝廷的反諷距離。劉楨兩首最著名的詩作也蘊含著不少內在矛盾，需加以詮釋。它們不像是自抒胸臆的抒情詩，而是具有更為複雜和不確定的內涵。對建安詩歌的論述，後世多以「風骨」一語描述建安詩人的整體風格，這個傳統的文學批評術語所包含的內在張力為本文的研究方向提供了堅實的理論基礎。那柄高懸在建安詩人頭上的達摩克利斯之劍，隨時給他們帶來滅頂之災，於是這些如履薄冰的詩人們清楚意識到：不恰當的文學創作很有可能招來殺身之禍。另外，劉楨為一位遺世獨立的友人所作的碑文內容，亦為本文論題提供了旁證。建安時期的政治語境及在這種語境中產生的文學反諷手法，具體體現在當時文史典籍中出現的「虛器」喻象的使用上。

關鍵詞： 建安文學　劉楨　反諷　風骨　五言詩