The Taming of the King: Nyingma Ethical Revitalization and the Gesar Epic in Non-Sectarian Period Tibet

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Introduction

If there is one thing we can say that "every" Buddhist knows, it is the life story of the Buddha. It is a clearly momentous narrative, telling the story of one man who achieves incredible understanding and insight into the nature of the world, arranges teachings to leave behind, a religious institution to continue spreading his insight in the future, and encourages his followers to engage in practices that will allow themselves to attain similar insight. This narrative provides a foundation for practice and thought across the Buddhist world; in more localized settings, however, other narratives also play an important role in forming religious agents. While eastern Tibetans know the life story of the Buddha, they generally also know the life story of a different individual, one they deem to be no less religious and hardly less important—that of the epic hero King Gesar of Ling. While perhaps we do not commonly think of the Buddha as a "hero" in a traditional sense of the word, the narrative of his life represents a heroic model that Buddhists around the world follow. In a similar, albeit reversed, situation, when faced with an obviously heroic figure in the character of the sword-wielding, horse-riding, regal persona of King Gesar, we might not think of him and his epic tradition as explicitly religious, but for many eastern Tibetans, he is.

Although sometimes dismissed as unimportant or somehow secondary to religious thought, epic can have incredible impact on religious life and thought. This dissertation will argue that the divide many western scholars assume between religious narrative on one hand and epic on the other is far from the truth. It seeks to explore how epic literature works as a powerful tool of communication, and through that, to demonstrate that epic

literature has the profound—and often overlooked—ability to vastly influence religious discourse and society.

This dissertation is grounded in the belief that narrative is simultaneously a private and public experience, and that among all the vast and multivariate ways humans have told stories to each other—around campfires at night, from Sunday morning pulpits, in dark movie theaters—epic literature is unique for its explicitly social and profoundly transformative quality. Wendy Doniger writes that all narratives exist on a continuum from the hyper-personal microscope to the profoundly vast telescope:

> The end of the [narrative] continuum that deals with the entirely personal (a realistic novel, or even a diary), the solipsistic ("This never happened to anyone but me"), is the microscope…at the other end of the continuum from the personal, the abstract end—the telescope—is the entirely general and the formal: a theoretical treatise, or even a mathematical formula….Here at the telescope end is where we might locate the experiences unimaginably great ("This has happened to two million Armenians, six million Jews," or even "This is happening every day in some one of the billions of other planets in the galaxy.")[1]

Epic is able to simultaneously function as both a microscope and a telescope; it builds vast worlds and then details the heartbreak and jubilation of individuals living within them. Because epic—like myth, a genre that Doniger argues is closely related—can be re-told in an array of formats "from the most highly detailed…to the most stripped down,"[2] it is in many ways the most socially-responsive and socially-constructive of all genres of literature. Epics simultaneously create a society as a telescope, then give individuals a microscopic place to occupy as a member of that society.

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[1] Wendy Doniger, *The Implied Spider: Politics and Theology in Myth,* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 7-8.
[2] Doniger, *The Implied Spider,* 9.

Epics are also created in, responding to, and influencing specific historical moments. If Doniger's methodology represents a means to understand epic literature's social function, then Michael Armstrong Roche epitomizes a methodology to consider epic literature's historical function. In introducing his analysis of Miguel de Cervantes' epic novel *Los Trabajos de Persilea y Sigismunda,* Roche captures the complex interlacing of historical context and narrative energy—as well as the work of the scholar to attempt to tease those apart:

> [I] weave back and forth between text and context—reading [the epic] *Persiles* with and against the pressures of the moment in which it was written and then reading that moment through the lens of Cervantes' text…the approach pursued in this study also seeks to recognize the distinctive means by which fictional narratives participate in conceptual debate, tracking how characterization, action, image, motif, and intertextuality shed light on issues whose terms are usually set by propositional prose.[3]

Doniger shows us how epic constructs the social community and the social self, while Roche shows us how historical contexts create the epic. Putting these two disparate scholars together reveals how epic literature acts as a medium to translate the historical into the social—to produce societies and people within those societies that reflect their historical contexts. As a result of this system, trherefore, the social is also able to use epic literature as the medium to represent itself, its values, and its past, through which it transforms the contemporary reality. This dissertation will use one example—the early twentieth-century *Great Perfecting of Hell* episode of the Gesar epic—to demonstrate epic's bilateral role in transforming and reflecting religious discourse.

[3] Michael Armstrong-Roche, *Cervantes' Epic Novel,* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 28.

Gesar Epic Overview

While I ultimately make an argument for the role of the epic genre in religious discourse, the foundation of this dissertation is the Gesar epic of Tibet—a piece of world literature both habitually overlooked and terribly underappreciated. Like much epic literature, the Gesar epic focuses on the adventures of a warrior-king as he preserves his kingdom from malicious forces attacking it. While giving a fully-formed plot is difficult on account of the epic's malleability and the risk of overly privileging print renditions, I will make a rough attempt. Born in some sort of miraculous way to a mother who is in some way an outsider to the society of the kingdom of Ling, the child Gesar—called Joru at this point—grows up "despised and neglected."[4] After winning the throne of Ling and marriage to the kingdom's most beautiful woman, Drukmo, Gesar engages in a series of campaigns to destroy the demonic kings that surround him. These include battling flesh-eating demon Lutsen, the king of Jang, and the king of Mon. Most famous among these is his battle with the Hor King Gurkar, who stole his wife away and held her for seven years while Gesar remained in amnesia from drugs given by a heartsick woman. Gesar also engages in a variety of mini campaigns and journeys that lead to the destruction of fortresses—sometimes numbered as 18 major and 18 minor.[5] At the end of his tenure on earth, Gesar leaves the human realm in some way—either through a salvific descent to hell followed by

[4] Geoffrey Samuel, "Ge-sar of gLing: The Origins and Meanings of the East Tibetan Epic." *Tantric Revisionings: New Understandings of Tibetan Buddhism and Indian Religion,* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2005. 165-191), 165.
[5] Interspersed in the battles are often meditation journeys. These are often used to affirm the sacred nature of a given area—a notable example is King Gesar's journey to Lhasa to meditate at the Red Hill where the palace of the Dalai Lamas would eventually be built. Anne Chayet, "The Potala, Symbol of the Power of the Dalai Lamas," *Lhasa in the Seventeenth Century,* ed. Francoise Pommaret, (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 39-52. 40.

a Buddhist death (as will be the focus of this dissertation) or through holing himself up in a mountain on prolonged meditation retreat from which one day he will gloriously return.

This rough and broad plot—essentially a Donigerian telescope—is necessary because the oral nature of the Gesar epic ensures that its details are constantly open to change. The Gesar epic is traditionally recited by bards—who often enter states of possession when telling the epic—and is seldom recited in its entirety from beginning to end, but rather in episodes that tell of a single exploit of King Gesar's. Tibetan scholar Jampel Gyatso explains that bards have "no restrictions on what they sing or narrate. They can sing whatever they like or whatever they know best."[6] This flexibility does not mean that modern scholars have not tried to find some sort of standard structure for the epic. Chöpa Dondrup has worked with contemporary bards in Amdo to identify a chronological order for all the episodes,[7] while Samten Karmay has attempted to map Gesar's battles with his enemies onto a four-directional system—with enemies at each cardinal direction.[8] Both, however, note the difficulties and ultimate impossibility of the process.

The plasticity of the Gesar epic is enhanced by its impressive spread across Central and East Asia. Although it is generally identified as a culturally Tibetan epic, Jampel Gyatso has called it "the living epic of many nationalities,"[9] and versions of it can be found in Mongolia, China, Bhutan, Nepal, and larger South Asia. One of the first English editions of the epic was not from central Tibet proper, but rather from Ladakh—published by Morvian

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[6] 'Jam dpal rgya mtsho, "The Singers of the King Gesar Epic," *Religion. Myth, and Folklore in the World's Epics: The Kalavala and its Predecessors,* ed. Lauri Honko, (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1990). 471-484. 474.
[7] Gcod pa don 'grub, "Gling ge sar rgyal po'i skyes rabs lo rgyus rags tsam brjod pa," *Gling ge sar rgyal po'i shul rten gyi ngag rgyun ngo mtshar me tog phreng mdzes* (Xining: Qinghai Minorities Publishing, 1989).
[8] Samten Karmay, "The Theoretical Basis of the Tibetan Epic, with Reference to a 'Chronological Order' of the Various Episodes in the Gesar Epic," *Bulletin of the Society of Oriental and African Studies* 56.2 (1993): 234-246.
[9] Rgyal mtsho, 471.

missionary A. H. Francke.[10] Soon after, a Mongolian version was published.[11] In contemporary research, Estelle Dryland has collected two Balti versions of the Gesar epic, which make little mention of Buddhism and rather celebrate King Gesar's Muslim nature. These are told in an archaic and formulized Tibetan dialect, however, reflecting their ultimately Tibetan origin.[12] Indeed, it seems that the vast arena covered by the Gesar epic may have influenced its telling back in Tibet. As noted above, the most popular episode of the Gesar epic tells the story of King Gesar rescuing his wife stolen away by the demon-king of Hor, and its similarities to the South Asian epic tradition of the Ramayana has been noted by several observers.[13] Some Indians today even call the Tibetan epic not Gesar of Ling, but rather the "Buddhist Ramayana."[14]

The breadth of the epic's spread raises questions as to the historicity of the figure of King Gesar and the possibilities of mapping the epic onto the real, physical world. R.A. Stein has proposed that the name Gesar could potentially be linked to the Roman "Caesar," from which arises a variety of royal titles in Europe and Asia—the German "Kaiser," the Russian "Czar," or the Khotanese "Kheysara" as a few examples.[15] It is perhaps telling that Gesar is often called Gesar of Phrom or Gesar of Khrom—sounding similar to "Rome."

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[10] August Hermann Francke, *A Lower Ladakhi Version of the Kesar Saga,* (Calcutta: Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1905).
[11] Ida Zeitlin and Theodor Nadejen, *Gessar Khan,* (New York: George H. Doran, 1927). I find this version especially charming for the witty banter and insults exchanged between King Gesar and his horse in an effort to rile each other to anger when riding into battle.
[12] Estelle Dryland and Ghulam Hussain, *King Kesar of Ling,* trans. S.A. Kazmi, (New York: Amazon Kindle Publishing, 2014).
[13] Alexandra David-Neel and Albert Arthur Yongden, *The Superhuman Life of King Gesar of Ling,* trans. Violet Sydney, (New York: Claude Kendall, 1934).
[14] Times News Network, "Bhutanese Artistes Perform Buddhist Ramayana," *The Times of India,* October 13, 2016. Accessed on January 4, 2017. < http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/bhopal/Bhutanese-artistes-perform-Buddhist-Ramayana/articleshow/54826558.cms>
[15] Stein, *Recherches sur L'Épopée et le Barde au Tibet,* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1959), 107-314. This historical-linguistic claim is repeated in Pema Tsering, "Historische, Epische und Ikonogrphische Aspekte des Gling Gesar nach Tibetischen Quellen," *Die Monoglischen Epin, Ein Symposium,* ed. Walther Heissig, (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1979).

Indeed, numismatic evidence points to the fact that a Fromo Kesaro ruled the region to the southwest of Tibet in the mid-eighth century and perhaps introduced Buddhism to Khoton.[16] A relationship to a historical "demon" is possibly present here as well; Helmut Humbach says that Fromo Kesaro was a title, not a name, used to recognize a leader's ability to hold at bay Muslim conquerors.[17] Khrom or Phrom is also the name of a physical place north of Tibet that was once ruled by Turkish tribes, indicating again a possible Turkish origin for King Gesar.[18]

Leaving Turkey and Tibet's western border behind for a moment and turning to the Sino-Tibetan frontier, while called Khrom Gesar in the earliest texts, King Gesar is most commonly referred to as Gesar of Ling. From the eighth century, a region called Ling has existed in southern Amdo / northern Kham—roughly at the contemporary border of Sichuan and Qinghai provinces—and the kingdom of Lingtshang has existed from the thirteenth century in northern Kham / contemporary Sichuan.[19] Georges Dreyfus, however, argues that Gesar's kingdom of Ling might actually be an abbreviated form of the word Dzam-bu-*ling*. which means "world," indicating that King Gesar is the king of the world.[20] Moving from eastern to central Tibet, King Gesar's connections to the historical Tibetan imperial world of the seventh to ninth centuries are also highlighted throughout the epic,

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[16] Rohit Vohra, "Early History of Ladakh: Mythic Lore & Fabulation," *Recent Research on Ladakh 4&5: Proceedings of the Fourth and Fifth International Colloquia on Ladakh,*eds. Henry Osmaston and Philip Denwood, 215-234. 217-218.

[17] Helmut Humbach, "New Coins of Fromo Kêsaro," *India and the Ancient World: History, Trade, and Culture Before A.D. 650,* ed. Gilbert Pollet, (Leuven: Department Oriëntalistiek, 1987), 81-85.

[18] F.W. Thomas, *Tibetan Literary Texts and Documents Concerning Chinese Turkestan, Volume II* (London: The Royal Asiatic Society, 1951), 286-291.

[19] Jann Ronis, "An Overview of Kham (Eastern Tibet) Historical Polities," *The Tibetan & Himalayan Library,* September 8, 2011. Accessed on January 5, 2017. < http://places.thlib.org/features/24071/descriptions/1301>

[20] Georges Dreyfus. "Proto-Nationalism in Tibet," *Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the 6th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies,* ed. Per Kvaerne, (Oslo: Institute for Comparative Research in Human Culture, 1994), 205-218.

including in the terminology utilized for arms and armory,[21] the organization of the imperial court,[22] and the cosmological and mythological field providing the foundation for Gesar's work.[23]

While these potential connections to a real historical person or a physical place as the origins of the epic are thought-provoking, they will have little influence on this dissertation. I respect the scholars willing to do the detailed archeological and historical work necessary for such claims, but whether or not King Gesar was a Turkish king who held off invading armies, a generous prince introducing Buddhism to Khotan, or a tribal chieftain holding together a nomadic kingdom in post-imperial Tibet has little influence on the role of the Gesar *epic* as literature in later times and places*.* This dissertation is less concerned with historical facts of its origins and more concerned with how people interpret, mold, and use those facts to create a meaningful world in specific communities and periods*.* For the majority of Tibetans, the historical Gesar is encompassed fully by what we might call the literary Gesar. This dissertation, therefore, will consider how this *literary* Gesar advances and participates in religious debates.

Gesar as Religious Figure

Before examining in detail the particular Gesar text that will provide the foundation of my discussion of epic literature's participation in religious discourse, a moment is necessary to emphasize the religious nature of King Gesar himself. Despite significant

[21] Donald J. LaRocca, *Warriors of the Himalayas: Rediscovering the Arms and Armor of Tibet,* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).
[22] Robin Kornman, "The Influence of the Epic of King Gesar of Ling on Chögyam Trungpa," *Recalling Chögyam Trungpa,* ed. Fabrice Midal, (Boston: Shamabala Publishing, 2005), 347-380.
[23] Michael Walter, *Buddhism and Empire,* (Leiden: Brill, 2009). Gregory Forgues has an excellent review of the links between Gesar and what he calls the "nostalgia for the Tibetan empire." (2011), 291-296.

interest within Chinese academia and its high profile in traditional and contemporary Tibetan culture, the religious dimensions of the Gesar epic have remained an almost entirely ignored topic within Euro-American scholarship.[24] As a literary phenomenon, the Buddhist portrayals of King Gesar are generally relegated to secondary status by scholars of religion, who often have the unspoken assumption that real doctrinal and religious change happens only in philosophical treatises, commentaries, and visionary revelations. Tomoko Masuzawa traces this stratification of culture to the nineteenth-century divide between Orientalism, which formulated Buddhism as a "world religion," and anthropology, which framed all vernacular beliefs and folkways as examples of "primitive religion." Whereas world religions were unique and emerged in historical time, the lesser religions were primeval, interchangeable, and doomed to be replaced.[25] This dissertation works to correct the continued legacy of these nineteenth-century categories in Buddhist studies, through demonstrating how epic literature—considered part of "primitive religions"—is in fact an active agent within the scope of Buddhist traditions.

Despite the prevailing attitude of what constitutes "true Buddhism," King Gesar's participation in the Buddhist institution as a religious figure is clearly demonstrated by the number of temples and religious paraphernalia dedicated to him. There are Gesar temples spread throughout eastern Tibet—mostly in the Kagyü or Nyingma sects of Buddhism[26]—though the majority are exceptionally small and attached to a larger monastic or temple complex. A notable exception is the Gesar temple in Asu village, near the Dergé prefecture. While currently very small, it has one monk in residence as caretaker and plans are in place

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[24] Notable exceptions include the work of Geoffrey Samuel, Gregroy Forgues, and Soloman George FitzHerbert.
[25] Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 17-18.
[26] I will enter into more detail in Chapter 1 on the difference between the four major sects of Buddhism.

to build a much larger temple, possibly to capitalize on rising tourist interest in the hero Gesar. During my visit to the temple, two families came to offer scarves and butter; one explained their son was going to school in Beijing and would need strength for a period of exhaustive testing. When I joked, “The strength of Gesar?” the father laughed and mimed pulling back a bow. Similarly, while visiting the Gesar temple at Dana monastery in Kham—which features unique double statues depicting Gesar first in a wrathful form and then in a peaceful form—I saw that several knives had been offered to the peaceful statue. A local monk explained that these were from young men who were attempting to mitigate the bad karma of previous violence by offering their most cherished knives to Gesar. In addition to these buildings dedicated to the epic-hero, several temples housed artifacts of King Gesar—his sword, his saddle, etc.—and religious paintings of King Gesar were prevalent on the walls.[27]

Beyond these institutional reflections of many Tibetans’ belief in King Gesar as a Buddhist figure, Gesar’s important place in Tibetan religious life was repeatedly affirmed in contemporary field research in eastern Tibet. In interviewing Karma Lhamo—at the time of the interview, a scholar at the Yushu Office of Cultural Preservation in Qinghai—she explained that King Gesar’s wrathful appearance as a warrior with sword held high was not a detriment to his actions as a buddha:

[27] Three recent books published in China describe in detail used these images, as well as providing an invaluable resource to decode them. The future of Gesar research will likely be in the art historical direction. Jambian Gyamco and Zhou Aiming, *Thangkha Paintings: An Illustrated Manual of the Illustrated Epic Gesar,* (Beijing: China Pictorial Publishing House, 2003); ‘Jam dpal rgya mtsho et al. *From the Treasury of Tibetan Pictorial Art: Painted Scrolls of the Life of Gesar,* (Chengdu: Sichuan Museum Publishing, 2011); Sonam Gelek, *Ge sar sgrung thang / Tangkhas of Gesar,* (Lhasa: Tibetan Minorities Publishing, 2011).

> In order to conquer the four demons that were terrorizing Tibet, they [the gods] had to choose someone who has both kind peace and wrathful force together…all Tibetans believe that King Gesar is a Buddha.[28]

The two Gesar bards I interviewed echoed this sentiment, insisting that Gesar was certainly a buddha "who came to restore Buddhism that was failing."[29] They continually affirmed that Gesar was not killing people in his exploits, but rather that he only freed suffering beings. Of particular note is the fact that both bards used the word "namthar" to describe the Gesar epic—a term generally reflecting the life story of an important religious figure—rather than the more commonly used "drung," or story. Throughout my interviews, Gesar's exact spiritual role seemed to be undefined and open to interpretation—some informants explained that he was a protector deity defending Buddhism from malicious forces; others stated that he was a tantric teacher for advanced practitioners; a handful even identified him as a cosmic buddha—but there was a clear agreement that he was a Buddhist figure.

This religious nature extends beyond belief to practice, especially where it concerns the final episode of the Gesar epic—the *Great Perfecting of Hell*. Sichuan University Professor Tsering Gyurmé explained in an interview that "Reading this [Gesar] epic or other epics of the same type is equivalent to reading a book of Buddha dharma. This is why a large number of Tibetan have read the Gesar epic. A lot of them experience a sort of 'spiritual restoration' by reading it."[30] The head teacher at Yarung Gar nunnery Damchö Rinpoche echoed this, though he stated that the final episode of the Gesar epic—*The Great*

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[28] Dkar ma lha mo (Scholar at Yushu Office of Cultural Preservation). Interview with Natasha Mikles. Personal Interview. Jyekundo, China. July 18th, 2015. It should be noted that to say that *all* Tibetans believe Gesar is a buddha would be a little bit of a stretch; regionalism plays a significant role in Gesar belief.

[29] Tshe ring tshong rgyag and 'Gyur med rab rten (Gesar bards in Yul shul), Interview by author. Personal Interview. Jyekundo, China. July 18th, 2015.

[30] Tshe ring 'gyur med (Scholar at Sichuan University). Interview by Natasha Mikles. Personal Interview. Chengdu, China. October 13, 2015.

Perfecting of Hell—would be the most advantageous for a beginning student to read.[31] Similarly, the head teacher at Lhagong (Tagong) monastery explained that he directed laypeople and young monks to read the final episode of the Gesar epic to introduce them to Buddhist ideas, but in a way that was "still entertaining."[32] The two Gesar bards I spoke with explained that their act of performing the epic was itself religious: "Telling the story brings peace to the world. The demons [Gesar] conquerors are like sins or evils. [Telling the story] is like sunlight shining onto frost on a piece of grass. It melts away the bad."[33]

While these statements affirming Gesar's religious status were certainly the norm, it is important to note that not everyone I spoke with supported the idea of Gesar as a figure in the Buddhist religious pantheon. Khenpo Thubten Namgyel from Batang Samdruling monastery acknowledged that some Buddhists—particularly those of the Nyingma sect—did religious practice focused on King Gesar, but he explained that reading and thinking about King Gesar was ultimately detrimental to religious practice because he was too wild and too violent.[34] Some Geluk monastic codes state that reading the Gesar epic is frivolous and silly, on par with gambling.[35] The majority of eastern Tibetans I spoke with, however, clearly placed King Gesar within the Buddhist pantheon and considered the Gesar epic, despite its classification as a "popular" narrative or story, to be an intrinsically religious text—though as noted before, the exact outlines of this religiosity is unclear. As Ann Taves might put it, we can say that for the majority of eastern Tibetans, the Gesar epic is "special"

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[31] Dam chos Rin po che (Head Teacher at Yarung Gar Nunnery, Sichuan, China). Interview by Author. Personal Interview. Sichuan, China. August 16, 2015.
[32] Lha gong *bsha grwa,* Khenpo*.* Interview by Natasha Mikles. Personal Interview. Tagong, China. August 14, 2015.
[33] Tshe ring tshong rgyag and 'Gyur med rab rten. Personal Interview.
[34] Thub bstan rnam rgyal (Khenpo at Batang Samdruling monastery), Interview by author, Personal Interview. Jyekundo, China. July 28, 2015.
[35] Berthe Jansen, Personal Correspondence.

and occupies a position outside of the normal, everyday life, if not necessarily always clear in its exact religious significance in the institutional sense.[36]

In contrast, previous studies of Buddhist "popular" or "non-institutional" literature like the Gesar epic have disregarded its potential role in "institutional" religious discourse. Bryan Cuevas' recent *Travels in the Netherworld*[37] looks at how popular stories of those who die and come back to life reveal widespread, non-doctrinal Tibetan beliefs about the journey and experience of hell. Robert Ford Campany's *Signs from the Unseen Realm*[38] does similar work with Chinese Buddhist literature, considering how miracle tales reveals the Buddhist "repertoire," and the wide variety of purposes fulfilled by Buddhist ritual. Both of these acknowledge the importance of "popular" narratives for forming widespread religious ideas outside of the doctrinal and institutional space, while also emphasizing that those who form the Buddhist institution often participate in these belief systems. However, Cuevas and Campany continue to work with the idea that there is a fundamental disconnect between the practice and goals of religious institutions and popular literature. While monks, nuns, and other Buddhist elites certainly held what we might consider to be "popular" religious beliefs—as Cuevas and Campany demonstrate—how institutions used these "popular" religious ideas to advance their "elite" goals has been overlooked. Such literature that moves both inside and outside the traditional Buddhist institutions has significant discursive power that remains overlooked. Through demonstrating that a particular narrative of the Gesar epic is not merely reflecting and shaping popular belief,

[36] Ann Taves, *Religious Experience Reconsidered: A Building-Block Approach to the Study of Religion and Other Special Things,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).
[37] Bryan J. Cuevas, *Travels in the Netherworld: Buddhist Popular Narratives of Death and the Afterlife in Tibet.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
[38] Robert Ford Campany, *Signs from the Unseen Realm: Buddhist Miracle Tales from Early Medieval China,* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2012).

but itself actively participating in the institutional religious discourse of the period, this dissertation argues for a broader academic appreciation of the wide-variety of genres Buddhists—both institutional and otherwise—have employed to formulate and propagate their arguments. This dissertation will demonstrate that the Gesar epic is not somehow subordinate to the goals of the institutional Buddhist tradition, but rather formulates sophisticated doctrinal arguments with the goal of effecting and transforming institutional religious beliefs.

Previous Research on King Gesar and the Gesar Epic

Previous study of the Gesar epic in the Euro-American academy has centered around a few key individuals. Long hailed as the grandfather of Gesar study, French Sinologist and Tibetologist R.A. Stein was the first to produce significant academic work on the Gesar epic, specifically in the form of two monographs—the 1956 *L'épopée tibétaine de Gesar dans sa version lamaïque de Ling* and the 1959 *Recherches sur L'Épopée et le Barde au Tibet*. The former presents a French translation of two episodes of the epic, as well as their colophons, from the so-called "Lingtshang Gesar" or "Mipham Gesar," though here Stein calls it the "Lamaist Gesar." The latter presents a comprehensive introduction to the Gesar epic in Tibetan culture, including historical and anthropological data. These works remain the foundation of most contemporary scholarly exploration of King Gesar.[39] Although an excellent and broad-ranging resource, Stein privileges the particular "Lingtshang Gesar" text as a culmination of the Gesar tradition and tends to de-emphasize the importance of other literary versions of the epic. Furthermore, as much of his research is based on his

[39] Gregory Forgues recently called the 1959 *Recherches sur L'Épopée et le Barde au Tibet* the "Bible" of Gesar study.

own extensive fieldwork in the Sino-Tibetan region, it can be hard to culturally and historically contextualize his findings as they are so unique to his experience. Stein went on to publish numerous other works on Gesar, including providing an introduction to the full Bhutanese edition published in the 1980s from which the particular foundational text utilized in this dissertation arises.[40] Several of Stein's students continued his study of the epic; most notable among these is Samten Karmay, who attempted to further develop a standardized structure for the epic and to examine the role of the epic within the larger framework of Tibetan culture.

Stein and his students remained the sole authoritative voice in Euro-American Gesar studies until the end of the twentieth century, when Robin Kornman completed his dissertation examining in greater detail the Buddhist philosophical and aesthetic influence behind the first two episodes of the Lingtshang Gesar. Beyond outlining the Buddhist influence in the cosmology of the Gesar epic and Gesar's birth / emanation into the human world, Kornman also includes a comparison between the Gesar epic tradition and the Iliad. While a fascinating study in the value of comparative study of epics and the particular Buddhist influence on the Lingtshang Gesar, the influence of Kornman's religious teacher Chögyam Trungpa is evident in his textual interpretation. This influence is also evident in Kornman's privileging of the "Lingtshang Gesar" or "Mipham Gesar" as a uniquely important iteration of the Gesar epic; Chögyam Trungpa frequently cited the religious teacher of the editor of the "Lingtshang Gesar"—Mipham Gyatso, who taught editor Gyurmè Thubten Jamyang Drakpa—as an inspiration for his own work as an ecumenical Buddhist leader. Kornman's focus on this particular iteration of the epic also reflects Stein's

[40] R.A. Stein, "Introduction to the Gesar Epic," *The Epic of Gesar, Volume 3.* (Thimphu, Bhutan: Druk Sherig Press, 1979), 23-42

significant influence. Before his untimely and tragic death, Kornman also wrote several brief articles for a variety of sources introducing the epic and providing some preliminary analysis, including "Gesar of Ling" in *Religions of Tibet in Practice*[41] and "The Influence of the Epic of King Gesar of Ling on Chögyam Trungpa," in *Recalling Chögyam Trungpa.*[42]

In contrast to Kornman and Stein's focus on the particular "Lingtshang Gesar" iteration of the Gesar epic tradition, Geoffrey Samuel has explored the Gesar epic as a living epic tradition through extensive field research in contemporary Tibetan communities. While not dedicating a single monograph to the topic, Samuel has produced a significant number of articles analyzing the Gesar epic tradition through the lens of Himalayan shamanic practices.[43] In light of this interpretative strategy, Samuel has focused on Gesar as an initially non-Buddhist, shamanic figure brought under the purview of tantric Buddhism. He also has considered the genre of "epic" in Tibet—for which there is no specific word that can easily match our western category—and its relationship to other performative traditions. Samuel represents an important corrective to Stein and Kornman's focus on the "Lingtshang Gesar," while also extending some of Stein's insights on the anthropology of the epic into the contemporary Tibetan world.

This dissertation is situated as an American participant in a modern resurgence of Gesar research currently underway within the European academic community. Solomon

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41 Robin Kornman, "Gesar of Ling," *Religions of Tibet in Practice,* ed. Donald Lopez, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 39-68.

42 Robin Kornman, "The Influence of the Epic of King Gesar of Ling on Chögyam Trungpa." *Recalling Chögyam Trungpa,* ed. Fabrice Midal, (Boston: Shamabala Publishing, 2005), 347-380.

43 See further: Geoffrey Samuel, "The Epic and Nationalism in Tibet." *Religion and Biography in China and Tibet,* ed. Benjamin Penny. (London: Taylor and Francis, 2001), 178-188. ; Geoffrey Samuel, "Ge-sar of gLing: The Origins and Meanings of the East Tibetan Epic."; Geoffrey Samuel, "Music and Shamanic Power in the Gesar Epic," *Metaphor: a Musical Dimension,* ed. Jaime Croy Kassler. (Richmond: Curzan Press, 2002); Geoffrey Sameul, "The Gesar Epic of East Tibet," *Tibetan Literature: Studies in Genre,* eds. Jose Ignacio Cabezon and Roger Jackson, (Boston: Snow Lion Publishers, 1996), 358-367.

George FitzHerbert recently completed his dissertation at Oxford University examining the influence of patronage networks on two specific iterations of the Gesar epic—the "Lingtshang Gesar" and the modern oral iterations of the bard Drakpa.[44] His dissertation provides an excellent and detailed study of the Gesar epic as both historical and literary narrative, as well as emphasizing the incredible flexibility of the epic as a tradition. FitzHerbert, however, excludes the religious aspects of the Gesar epic as necessarily a "secondary layer" to the epic tradition itself. While this historical argument certainly has traction within the small community of Gesar studies and goes back to Stein himself, my own research has demonstrated that Gesar's nature as a religious figure is an important component of contemporary Tibetans' interest in and understanding of the epic. A second contemporary rising scholar of the Gesar epic tradition is Gregory Forgues, who recently completed his master's thesis "Materials for the Study of Gesar Practices."[45] Whereas almost all prior studies of the Gesar epic have taken the narrative as the primary focus of investigation, Forgues instead examines in detail the Gesar-related religious rituals created by Mipham Gyatso, Khyentse Wangpo, and other leaders of the so-called "Nyingma Renaissance" of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. His work is encyclopedic in its breadth and his translations are an incredible asset to the field. Although he focuses on the rituals intended for initiated practitioners of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, his work proves invaluable for understanding how thinkers contemporary to the *Perfecting of Hell* were actively utilizing the Gesar tradition in religious practice.

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[44] Solomon George FitzHerbert. "The Birth of Gesar: Narrative Diversity and Social Resonance in the Tibetan Epic Tradition," (PhD diss., Oxford University, 2007)

[45] Gregory Forgues. "Materials for the Study of Gesar Practices," (MA Thesis, Universität Wien, 2011)

Outside of this Euro-American tradition of academic scholarship, significant research has been done on the Gesar epic by Han Chinese and Tibetan scholars living in the People's Republic of China today. Foremost among these individuals are Yang Enhong, Jambian Gyamco, and Chöpa Dondrup. Perhaps due to government oversight and the role of the Chinese government in sponsoring such research, these scholars focus their work on the contemporary anthropological phenomena of Gesar recitation and the material artifacts produced for that. In turn, the religious, proto-nationalist, and regionalist interpretations of King Gesar are generally minimized. Although limited in scope, the work of these scholars is excellent and based on extensive field research that is off-limits to western researchers not holding a People's Republic of China passport or academic credentials. They offer an invaluable examination, therefore, of the Gesar epic tradition as contemporary phenomena in China. However, significant exploration of historical Gesar phenomena and literary religious texts surrounding the warrior-king remains outside the purview of such scholars.

The *Perfecting of Hell:* Origins and Introductions

Due to the expansive and expanding tradition of the Gesar epic, this dissertation considers only its final literary episode. While the majority of academic effort on buddhicized Gesar literature has taken the rituals and narratives associated with the Buddhist luminary Ju' Mipham Gyatso as its focus, the late nineteenth century saw another important text painting King Gesar in a distinctly Buddhist light—the *Great Perfecting of Hell* (*Nyeling Dzogpa Chenpo; Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po).* Despite being very popular in Tibetan circles, the *Perfecting of Hell* is largely unknown in western scholarship outside of

Douglas Penick's re-working, *Crossings on a Bridge of Light.*[46] This text, however, is written through the lens of Penick's teacher Chögyam Trungpa and bears little resemblance to the *Perfecting of Hell* beyond prominently featuring a descent to hell. Produced in an institutional context, but using the more "popular" medium of epic, the *Perfecting of Hell* offers an important opportunity to consider the role of epic literature in religious discourse. As a text, it uniquely encourages traditional ethical religious behavior and practice through mimicking Preliminary Meditations texts (Ngöndro), that aim to form ethical agents, reinforce traditional hierarchy, and cultivate religious community. Through promoting traditional Buddhist ethics, the text also challenges the validity of the model of a wrathful tantric practitioner and promotes in its stead the aesthetically non-violent Great Perfection practice.

Among the larger canon of Gesar literature, the *Perfecting of Hell* is unique for being an authored text. The text's colophon explains that Den Lama Chökyi Wangchuk is the author, but he is also a character in the text: he appears as the leader of a Ling funerary mission to the kingdom of Hor in the aftermath of regent Shenpa's murder. Although the text does not specifically state such, his title "Den Lama" may indicate that he is the personal lama associated with the family of Gesar's heroic companion Denma. Den, however, is also a locale north of Dergé associated with the Lingtshang kingdom, and the title "Den Lama" may reflect an association with the area. In fact, many epic traditions in the Den area claim that Denma's name reflects his home in that region, so the two interpretations may not be entirely divergent. Denma is significant not only because he is King Gesar's closest friend—known within the epic tradition for his skill in bowmanship

[46] Douglas Penick, *Crossings on a Bridge of Light, (*Minneapolis: Mill City Press, 2009)

and archery—but also because he is the only hero still living at the end of the work and the figure who requests that the tale of the *Perfecting of Hell* be written down to benefit future generations. Given the historical uncertainty over the person of King Gesar and the explicitly fantastical nature of the narrative in light of the assumptions of western academic scholarship that horses cannot talk and men cannot fly, it is unlikely we can assume Chökyi Wangchuk to be the man who put pen to paper and wrote each word of the *Perfecting of Hell.* However, inserting the author as a character in the text represents a noteworthy attempt to give an air of credibility based on historical, eyewitness testimony to the narrative. This eyewitness testimony mimics that usually provided by the Gesar bard's own visions. In this way, the *Perfecting of Hell* situates itself as an authentic Gesar text within the rest of the canon.

The *Perfecting of Hell* is also unique for being explicitly framed as a Buddhist treasure text, or terma. Particularly popular with the Tibetan Nyingma school, terma are texts hidden by great Buddhist masters—often the imperial Buddhist hero Padmasambhava or his consort Yeshé Tsogyel—only to be recovered from the ground or mind centuries later when the text is needed to stimulate or guide Buddhist practice. As the colophon continues, Den Lama Chökyi Wangchuk hid the *Perfecting of Hell* in the Red Water Lake of Golok,[47] potentially a local name for the head of the Yellow River, where it was uncovered centuries later by Lingtshang Tertön Draktsel Dorjé. Histories of Lingtshang do not mention Draktsel Dorjé,[48] and it is unclear from where this title originates, though

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[47] The 1984 Bhutanese edition is unique among the publications as it provides an additional name for the Red Water Lake in Golok, calling it only the "Solitary Pool of Water in the Upper North." (*byang stod chab kyi rdzing bu'i dben gnas*).
[48] Tashi Tsering, "History of the gling-tshang Principality of Kham: a Preliminary Study," *Proceedings of the 5th Seminar of the International Association of Tibetan Studies, Narita 1989, Volume 2,* (Narita: Naritasan Shinshoji, 1992), 793 – 821.

roughly half of the *Perfecting of Hell* editions surveyed use it. Other than this, the figure of Draktsel Dorjé is an enigma and no other information about him has been uncovered at this time. Being recovered as a treasure text evidences the *Perfecting of Hell's* attempts to situate itself as an explicitly Buddhist text. Beyond its discovery, the *Perfecting of Hell* also features a stereotypically Buddhist claim about the benefits of reading or copying the text, stating that doing so is equal to the reproduction of the Tibetan canon of the words of the Buddha, the Kanjur.[49] The colophon of the 1984 Bhutanese edition goes a step further to state, "By the benefit of reading it out loud once, [you will] be peaceful in the age of illness warfare, and famine. The Yogin who endeavors to practice [this text] will be a buddha revealed in the palm of the hand. From just seeing [this text], you will ascertain release."[50] Uncovered by a treasure revealer and with the potential karmic benefits of copying the words of the Buddha himself, the *Perfecting of Hell* clearly frames itself as an explicitly Buddhist text.

While the exact date for Draktsel Dorjé's recovery of the *Perfecting of Hell* is uncertain, we can pinpoint its first publication to the late nineteenth or early twentieth century, making it likely that it was uncovered not too long before that. According to the colophon of the 1986 edition produced by the Sichuan Nationalities Publishing House, the *Perfecting of Hell* was published as a xylograph, or wood block print, at Wara monastery under the sponsorship of Wara Retretant Damchö Denpa.[51] Like Draktsel Dorjé, there is little available information on Damchö Denpa, but E. Gene Smith describes him as a

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[49] Chos kyi dbang phyug. *Gling rje ge sar gyi rnam thar las dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po thos pa rang grol ngan song chos kyi bskul glu,* ed. Lopon Pemala (Thimphu, Bhutan: Druk Sherig Press, 1984), 356.
[50] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po.* (Thimphu), 356.
[51] Chos kyi dbang phyug. *Gling rje ge sar rgyal po'i sgrung gmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po.* (Chengdu, China: Sichuan Nationalities Publishing House, 1986), 351.

colleague of Nyingma visionary Khenpo Ngakga and provides a death date of 1946.[52] Damchö Denpa was apparently quite interested in sponsoring publications: Smith notes that the Retreatant was responsible for producing an edition of the Kangyur and a quarter of the Tengyur before he died. However, the editions remained unpopular due to the volumes being half-sized.[53]

Wara monastery belongs to the Sakya school of Tibetan Buddhism and is located in Chamdo prefecture, just inside the contemporary border of the Tibetan Autonomous Region.[54] A map of Chamdo is available in Appendix 1 (Map 2). Due to restrictions on foreigner travel in China, I was unable to visit the monastery personally, but interviews performed in nearby Palyul indicated that the monastery was destroyed during the Cultural Revolution and only recently has been rebuilt.[55] A recent published history, however, tells a more complicated tale; it notes that in 1950 the monks of Wara helped the People's Liberation Army cross the river and they later refused to participate in the 1959 uprising—actions which preserved the monastery when many others were destroyed.[56] Although put under state protection in 1961, the monastery was eventually destroyed by Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution.[57] In its pre-Cultural Revolution incarnation, the front courtyard of Wara monastery featured a great mural of King Gesar and his warriors in battle; according to recent visitors, the mural has been restored.[58] In addition

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[52] E. Gene Smith, "The Autobiography of MKhan po Ngag dga'," *Among Tibetan Texts: History and Literature of the Tibetan Plateau,* ed. Kurtis R. Schaeffer, (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2001), 29.
[53] E. Gene Smith, "The Autobiography of MKhan po Ngag dga'," fn. 64., 278.
[54] Andreas Gruschke, *The Cultural Monuments of Tibet's Outer Provinces: KHAM, vol. 1.* (Bangkok: White Lotus Press, 2004), 59.
[55] Tshe dbang 'gyur med (Woodblock carver at Baiyu Monastery), interview by the author. Personal Interview. Baiyu, China. August 14th, 2015.
[56] Gruschke, 61.
[57] Gruschke, 61.
[58] Gruschke, 61-62.

to its associations with King Gesar, Wara monastery has a long history promoting a form of Buddhist thought known as the Great Perfection, particularly during the Non-Sectarian movement of nineteenth- and twentieth-century eastern Tibet.[59] In fact, these associations with Great Perfection practices and the *Perfecting of Hell's* emphasis on participating in the Nyingma Renaissance of late nineteenth-century Tibet indicate that the monastery was likely some type of Sakya-Nyingma hybrid.

Without the benefit of accessing the historical records from Wara monastery—which were almost certainly lost during its destruction in the Cultural Revolution—it is difficult to find significant information on the first edition of the *Perfecting of Hell.* What knowledge we have of its sponsorship comes from only one source: the colophon of the 1986 edition produced by the Sichuan Minorities Publishing House. The Nationalities University in Beijing has a copy, though accessing it firsthand was impossible due to a tightening of government oversight and difficulties in acquiring the necessary paperwork. While conducting field research in China, however, I was able to view a photographic reproduction of the Wara xylograph made by a local scholar in Xining. Beyond noting that it does not share Damchö Denpa's half-size format—though it was perhaps a little shorter than traditional xylographs—the reproduction was largely unremarkable and showed no significant differences from its later editions.

Despite the relatively recent publication of the *Perfecting of Hell,* the Beijing university copy and the Xining reproduction are the only two copies of the original Wara xylograph I have been able to find. In discussing the dearth of extant copies, Professor Thubten Phuntshok—faculty at the Southwest University for Nationalities in Chengdu,

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[59] Gruschke, 61-62.

China—explained that most copies of the Wara xylograph were lost during the tumultuous environment on the 1950s and 1960s Tibetan plateau, including the blocks at Wara monastery.[60] As a result, handwritten copies frequently circulated for personal use and enjoyment. Phuntshok described his experience as a young man in the 1960s, when he was twice asked to use one handwritten copy of the text to produce another; he joked that he never would forget that text because he had "a memory of it in his hands" from copying it repeatedly.[61] When asked why the *Perfecting of Hell* was such a popular text in the Cultural Revolution period, Phuntshok elaborated that it taught Buddhist ideas in a way that was not only engaging and entertaining, but also clear and concise.

In the post-1959 Tibetan diaspora, the Wara xylograph and the handwritten copies that followed it gave rise to several published editions, which are indicated in the table below:

TABLE 1				
Title	**City of Publication**	**Publisher**	**Year**	**Call Numbers**
Kha che'i g.yu rdzong dang dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po (Published together with the *Kha-gling*)	Delhi	Jamyang Norbu	1971	TBRC: W00KG09351 LoC: pl3748 .g42 1971
Gling rje ge sar rgyal po'i mdzad sgrungs las dmyal ba'i le'u : an episode from the Gesar epic cycle recounting the King of Ling's conquest of hell	New Thobgyel	Tibetan Bonpo Monastic Center	1973	TBRC: n/a LoC: pl 3748 .g425 1973
'Dzam gling seng chen nor bu dgra 'dul gyi rnam thar las dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po	Dehra Dun, Uttar Pradesh	d. g. khochen tulku	1977	TBRC: W2CZ6778 LoC: pl3748.c47

[60] Thub bstan phun tshok (Professor at Southwest University for Nationalities), interview by the author. Personal Interview. Chengdu, China. June 5th, 2015.
[61] Thub bstan phun tshok. Personal Interview.

				d9 1977
Rgyal mchog yid bzhin nor bu gling rje ge sar gyi rnam thar dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po mthong ba rang grol ngan song chos kyi bskul glu	Thimphu	Damchoe	1984	TBRC: W26078 LoC: pl3748 .g4 1978 tib
Gling rje ge sar rgyal po'i sgrung dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po	Chengdu	Sichuan Nationalities Publishing House	1986	TBRC: W22014 LoC: pl3748.g425 d69 1987

The only edition to acknowledge its source as the Wara monastery xylograph is the 1986 Chengdu edition. This particular edition, however, is quite controversial for its heavy editing to remove sections which too closely touch on Tibetan nationalism and a coming day of cultural genocide and apocalypse for the Tibetan people. Other editions acknowledge the handwritten manuscript which served as the source of their publication: The 1971 edition published in India states that it is a print copy of a hand-written copy owned by the late Katok Mani Lama, while the 1973 edition published in New Thobgyel acknowledges the existence of the 1971 edition, but states that a better manuscript with fewer spelling errors was found by Ngawang Sonam in the library of Jedrung Trulku Ö Pemaköd. Although I utilized all editions in composing this dissertation, the 1984 Bhutanese edition has served as my primary root text. This is for two reasons. First, the text has been excellently edited under the supervision of Lopon Pemala of the National Library of Bhutan. Second, the text allows me to consider the *Perfecting of Hell* within the narrative arch of the Gesar epic as a whole due to its inclusion in a thirty-one volume edition relating the entire epic.

While this dissertation focuses specifically on the *Great Perfecting of Hell,* it is important to note that it is not the only version of the narrative of Gesar's descent to hell. Several alternate versions exist, including some which simply paraphrase the *Perfecting of Hell,* some which publish only part of the *Perfecting of Hell,* and some which tell a different story all together. Noteworthy among these alternative texts is the 1986 Xining edition: rather than Gesar descending to hell to save his mother, this text tells the story of Gesar saving from hell his sole female warrior, Atag Lhamo. However, this Xining edition shares with the *Perfecting of Hell* a repentant Buddhist attitude; the text's colophon states that by saving Atag Lhamo from hell, the "King of the World taught the impermanence of death to Atag Lhamo," and that King Gesar and the Lord of Death "resolved the object of their quarrels."[62] Another version produced as a series of religious paintings by the China Pictorial Publishing House features King Gesar descending to hell to save first the younger sister of his former enemy the Demon-King Lutsen of the North, then his wife and mother together.[63] Despite this range, however, the *Perfecting of Hell* is by far the most prominent and widely published of the narratives detailing King Gesar's descent to hell and is almost certainly the model upon which all other published versions are based.

Featuring eighteen chapters of highly variable length, the plot of the *Perfecting of Hell* is roughly divided into three sections. The first third—Chapters 1-2 (pages 1-140)[64]—tells the story of King Gesar's tenure as a teacher of Great Perfection, or Dzogchen, philosophy. Mirroring other episodes within the Gesar canon, the *Perfecting of Hell* opens

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[62] *Dmyal gling mun pa rang gsal,* ed. Qinghai Public Art and Literature Research Group, (Xining, China: Qinghai Nationalities Publishing Group, 1992), 109.
[63] Jambian Gyamco and Zhou Aiming, 108-113.
[64] Page numbers are of the 1984 Thimpu edition, which will be the edition used for the remainder of this paper, unless otherwise stated.

on King Gesar alone in his meditation retreat. After being visited by his celestial aunt Manené, he is told that he must go to visit Padmasambhava at his palace in the Glorious Copper-Colored Mountain. Despite the lamentations of his wife Drukmo and his warriors—including a humorous episode in which his evil uncle Thröthung gets the other warriors drunk so that he can be appointed de facto regent while his nephew is away—Gesar flies to Padmasambhava's abode on the Copper-Colored Mountain. After describing the island's many cities, the demons who live there, and each wrathful form of Padmasambhava that rules them, King Gesar is purified by a dakini in an aggressive ritual by which all of the impurity leaks from every orifice of his body. Gesar then comes before the great buddha in his throne room and receives empowerments in Great Perfection teachings. Padmasambhava sings a song of praise to Gesar, calling him an emanation of Mañjuśrī and a "praiseworthy king, the hero Heruka who comes to the land of human beings."[65] When Gesar asks what the future of his land Ling and Tibet will be, Padmasambhava replies with a prophetic song of coming hardships and the degeneration of the Dharma, when "the profound Dharma will be sold and [used for] deception."[66] As noted above, this song was removed from the 1984 Chengdu edition of the *Perfecting of Hell* published by the Sichuan Minorities Publishing House due to its potential political implications, but has been retained in all other editions. After his meeting with Padmasambhava, King Gesar travels to visit the buddhafields of the five directions and receive further empowerments from each buddha.

Chapter 2 features King Gesar's return to Ling, during which he writes letters calling together all the peoples in his empire and the surrounding territories. The text clearly

[65] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po*. (Thimphu), 53.
[66] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po.* (Thimphu), 63.

situates Ling and Gesar's kingdom in eastern Tibet, but is ambiguous—likely intentionally—on which people are surrounding allies and which are vassals. Once the various people have gathered—including those from the central Tibetan locales of Ü and Tsang, the Indians, Nepalis, Minyak, Chinese and those kingdoms conquered in previous episodes—Padmasambhava appears, affirming the enlightened nature of King Gesar and stating, "I have made King Gesar indivisible with all the buddhas and bodhisattvas."[67] King Gesar then emanates the appearance of a monk to perform a purification ritual and sing a song relating the basics of a Preliminary Meditations text to all assembled peoples. It highlights the rarity of a human life and the resulting importance of ethical action and devoted practice, mimicking other Buddhist literature on the topic. At the end of this, Gesar gives specific Great Perfection teachings to the assembled peoples of each land and leads them in a meditation practice for a period of time, often stretching several months in duration. The meditation periods end with brief songs of one to two pages to each national community, utilizing common Great Perfection metaphors to describe the luminosity of the human mind and the importance of Great Perfection practices. Most communities joyously return to their own lands after these songs. At the end of the teachings for the Minyak people, however, a Chinese priest accompanying them encourages King Gesar to give compassionate intent towards the Chinese court, which he calls a "land to be tamed.":

> The Emperor's court of China, is a land to be tamed, Precious Supreme Conqueror. Lord Manjughosa and you [are] without any differentiation. There is no land where [both] joy and suffering, [both] beauty and ugliness do not arise. Therefore, the 18 great regions of China, I ask you, Supreme Conqueror, to hold in your hand.

[67] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po.* (Thimphu), 89.

This is one of the only explicit references to China in the whole text and is interesting to consider in light of China's general absence from the Qing border during the *Perfecting of Hell's* composition, despite technically claiming the Tibetan region as part of its empire and promoting Geluk Buddhism as the state religion. By the end of the chapter, all the people have returned to their own land, leaving King Gesar with his work completed.

The second third—Chapters 3 - 4 (pages 140-231) focuses on King Gesar's journey to hell and confrontation with King Yama. Following the prophecies given by Manené and Padmasambhava, King Gesar travels to India to enter meditation retreat. In a tearful scene, his mother Gokmo begs him to stay, proclaiming her conviction that she will not survive his absence. Although King Gesar offers to perform a long-life ritual for her, she refuses on the grounds that she has grown weary of this world, and Gesar travels on to India. While there, his mother does, indeed, die and a messenger is dispatched to inform King Gesar. Drukmo and the women of Ling arrange for all the best funerary accouterment—the text specifies "planting funerary flags [jodar] as numerous as the hairs on her head and reciting the Dharma as many times as the hairs on her body"[68]—but the great lamas of Ling see that despite their best efforts, she has fallen to hell. They beg Gesar to return and save his mother.

Chapter 4 tells the story of King Gesar's descent to hell and resulting efforts to save his mother. The actual journey is rapid, perhaps owing to the magical nature of Gesar's horse Kyangbu, though it features several aspects which Bryan Cuevas has identified as unique to popular Tibetan conceptions of the underworld: a desolate land of familiar mountains and valleys through which one must journey, an escort that guides you through

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[68] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po.* (Thimphu), 154.

the land, and a fearsome river which must be crossed by a bridge before entering hell.[69] Once King Gesar arrives in the underworld, he immediately goes before King Yama. Terrified that he will lose his ability to speak in front of the netherworld king, Gesar does not hesitate. He puts a thousand arrows into his bow and points them directly at Yama's throat, only to realize that the king of the underworld is an emanation of a divine Budhdist figure—like Gesar himself—and cannot be harmed by arrows.

The two kings enter a battle of song in which they debate the appropriate use of violence, including the nature of hell, karma, and Yama's own role as the netherworld judge of karma. During these songs, we learn that Gesar's mother has been condemned to hell for his own karmic sins of violence, despite his claims that such practice was done in the name of protecting Buddhism. Beyond these statements defending his actions as necessary to remove threats to Buddhism, Gesar attempts a variety of other rhetorical attacks against the King of Hell, referencing his past lives as a prince among gods, nagas, and nyen—an indigenous Tibetan spirit of the ground. Yama remains unimpressed, and declares that he himself has also lived in these realms:

> You do not need to explain your liberation when you,
> Gesar, resided in the god realm,
> I the Dharma King Yama am the power of the gods
> I myself am greater than you in measure!
>
> When you resided as a Nyen spirit,
> you do not need to explain the idle chatter
> of the golden Nyen.
> I, the Dharma King Yama, am the great Nyen!
> I myself am greater than you in measure!
>
> When you resided in the lower realm of the nagas,
> there is no need to explain their joyful cruelty [because]
> I, the Dharma King Yama, am a naga demon

[69] Cuevas, *Travels in the Netherworld,* 39-43.

and am greater than you in measure![70]

Indeed, while Gesar tries to build up his persona as a fearsome opponent for the King of Hell—great in prior victory and martial power—Yama consistently returns the song battle to karma. He proclaims that his realm only appears fearsome, for if one has good karma, then hell is a palace of delights; if one has bad karma, it is a terrifying court of the damned. Yama explains that his knowledge and understanding of karma ultimately trumps Gesar's martial prowess, stating, "you do not need to speak courageous talk about your taming of the demons Dudmi and Gurkar, Yama already knows the fate of those who accompanied you."[71]

Yama defeats King Gesar in this interlude, but as he prepares to return to Ling, Yama encourages Gesar to travel through hell and save his mother. Yama even provides the ritual of powa transference that will allow Gesar to remove suffering beings from hell—though the audience is not shown the details and the whole event happens as a single line in a song. Accompanied by King Yama's Tiger-Headed servant, Gesar travels through the tortuous arenas of hell. In each level, the reader—through the eyes of Gesar—views in graphic detail the sufferings of hell and listens to explanations of the sins that land one there. While handful of hells are recognizable as traditional Indian hells, the majority are generic descriptions of horrible suffering that do not clearly match with a named hell. After crying for the anguish he witnesses, Gesar frees the suffering beings through the powa transference ritual. Indeed, the journey through hell focuses on Gesar's rich emotional experience of hell, with particular emphasis on his anger, frustration, and resentment at the torture he observes. Finally reaching the Avīci hell, Gesar finds his mother surrounded by

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[70] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po.* (Thimphu), "Song 4.4.40-51," 181.
[71] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po.* (Thimphu), "Song 4.4.64-66," 182.

all of the demon kings he killed in battle supposedly in the name of protecting Buddhism—to free her, he must free them. As will be discussed in Chapter 3, this scene is also surprising due to Gesar's role as a tantric demon slayer who had, supposedly, saved those he killed via rebirth in a Pure Land. After their tearful reunion—during which both sing once more of the importance of karma and Gesar urges his mother to worship not him, but rather the Buddhas from which he emanates—Gesar's mother is reborn into a Pure Land and Gesar returns to Ling.

The final third of the *Perfecting of Hell,* Chapters 5 – 18 (pages 231-356), features Gesar's return to Ling and the deaths of the king and his warriors. After returning, Gesar relates to everyone in Ling about the horrors he witnessed and re-affirms the importance of moral action in the face of karmic consequences. Gesar then sends messengers from his court to spread the tale of his netherworld journey across the land. In an interesting side narrative during Gesar's relation of his journey through hell to the people of Ling, Drukmo appears before King Gesar disguised as a nun from Gakyalo—Chögyal Namkhai Norbu identifies Gakyalo as a subdivision of the Ga clan,[72] but the text implies it is a place. She praises Gesar and asks him to hold Gakyalo in his heart. Recognizing Drukmo, Gesar goes along with her plan, but then sends his wife away in her nun's disguise to supervise 500 monks and lamas of Ling as missionaries and emissaries in Gakyalo. The interlude becomes stranger, when one of the head lamas on the mission is named Garab Dorje, which is the same name as the founding individual in the Great Perfection thought. The whole scene is rather mysterious and it is hard to determine if this is playful on the part of Gesar and Drukmo or a spiteful move on Gesar's part to punish Drukmo for her past indiscretions

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[72] Chogyal Namkhai Norbu, *Rainbow Body: the Life and Realization of a Tibetan Yogin, Togden Ugyen Tendzin,* fn. 3, trans. and ed. Adriano Clemente, (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2012) 85.

while prisoner with the King of Hor.[73] Regardless, Drukmo remains absent from the narrative until her death in Chapter 6.

While Durkmo is in Gyakalo, Gesar's sister Néchung has a prophetic dream detailing the death of Gesar, his warriors, and the destruction coming to the kingdom of Ling. She relates this dream to Gesar, who then divines its meaning, but warns everyone in his court to keep its significance a secret. What follows in each chapter is a description detailing the death of a member of Gesar's entourage, including his or her last will and testament on the importance of ethical action, as well as the dramatic funerary actions performed in their honor. The deaths are each unique and demonstrate a deep familiarity with the larger canon of Gesar texts in terms of friendships, fortresses, and fraternal ties, while also reflecting the norms of the deaths of realized Buddhist masters. First to die is Gesar's paternal uncle Cipon, who gives a brief summary of what awaits him in bardo and urges people to Buddhist practice. In his song, he also claims descent from Nyatri Tsenpo, the first divine king of Tibet who descended to the human realm on a cord of light, indicating that Gesar himself is descended from such an august figure. Cipon's song also declares that he will watch over all suffering beings. Leaving the entirety of his money to the Buddhist sangha, he dies and his castle is surrounded by rainbows. His daughter agrees to take on his funerary responsibilities and preserve his legacy of Buddhist practice, despite being a woman. As he dies and dissolves into the heart of Vairocana, Cipon descends to hell himself to save 200,000 people through rebirth in a Pure Land. His remains are blended with those of an unnamed Indian pandita, then gathered into a reliquary.

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[73] In the Hor Ling episode—considered one of the most famous episodes of the Gesar epic—Drukmo is stolen away while King Gesar is kept captive by the sister (or wife) of the Demon King of the North, Lutsen. While he is drugged so as to forget Ling for seven years, Drukmo lives with the King of Hor, and, in some versions, willingly has a child by him.

Chapter 6 witnesses the death of Drukmo—presumably returned from her mission to Gyakolo. Falling ill, Drukmo sends her maidservant to visit Gesar on meditation retreat, who tells the servant to do divinations and closely follow their advice. He comes to Drukmo's side only a week later, when his meditation retreat has ended. Drukmo sings a song for the benefit of those in Ling, urging them towards dedicated religious practice and expressing her wish to be reborn in a Pure Land. However, due to her time as the demon of Hor's captive-wife, Drukmo is unable to be born in a Pure Land and must first be born as a god; Gesar explains, "If it were not for the defiling by the Hor Demon, your body would be indivisible with the great light rainbow body of Precious Tara."[74] King Gesar then visits the Asura, Hungry Ghost, animal, and God realms to teach religion and free suffering beings by rebirth in a Pure Land. Through the teachings of her former husband, Drukmo dies from the God realm and is finally reborn in the Pure Land.

Gesar's evil uncle Thröthung is the next to die, during which time he reveals himself as an emanation of Hayagrīva. In fact, Thröthung becomes aware of his approaching death through hearing a celestial "neigh" from the horse-headed tantric deity. Although his children do not believe his death is imminent on account of Thröthung's health, he pinpoints the moment of his death to two-weeks time in the future. Despite the pleas of his children, Thröthung reaffirms his oncoming death. He sings a song urging appropriate religious practice and commitment to Great Perfection teachings, during which time he states that "[When] I die, I will lead countless sentient beings without fear from hell so that they may go to whatever Pure Land they like."[75] Upon his death, Thröthung becomes inseparable from the heart of Hayagrīva, then makes good on his promise and frees a

[74] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po.* (Thimphu), 290.
[75] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po.* (Thimphu), 298.

billion individuals suffering in hell. Following Thröthung's death in Chapter 7 are three short chapters describing the deaths of three warriors—Sendag, Nyibum, and Gedi. Like Thröthung, each dies of old age and illness after predicting his own death and being urged to remain behind by children. The deaths feature the traditional marks of a Buddhist master seen in the earlier deaths of Thröthung and Cipon—including relics and marvelous signs. Gedi and Nyibum free beings from hells, though the text does not relate such a feat for Sendag.

Chapter 11 relates the death of Gesar's father Senglon caused by karmic defilements that bring about a fatal illness. Gesar himself personally leads the rituals dedicated to the Buddha Amitabha for the benefit of his father. When a lama asks him how his father could get sick from karmic defilements when he was such a great man, Gesar relates a brief story of karmic morality. He explains that in a past life, his father was born in India and took the lips of a bear who had become entangled in a trap. His death in this life is the maturation of that karma of animal cruelty. Gesar then sings a brief song explaining to the surrounding people of Ling the importance of Buddhist practice and what to do when one dies and appears in the bardo realm after death. Although he already performed the death rituals for his father, this song is apparently partially directed towards Senglon, as Gesar states, "Listen to me precious father Senglon! In the powerful Dhuti channel, visualize the red letter Hri! Stir the ball of wind Ling Ling, by me speaking Hri Ka three times, [may my] father [go] to the expanse of the three bodies!"[76] In this way, the *Perfecting of Hell* summarizes the *Bardo Thödrol*—known better as *the Tibetan Book of the Dead*—which works similarly to guide those who have died through the afterlife.

[76] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po.* (Thimphu), "Song 11.1.46-51." 315.

The deaths of Chapter 12 unexpectedly move the narrative action to the kingdom of Hor, which Gesar had conquered in a previous episode of the epic. It relates how Akhro Ngonak gathers a group of dissidents unhappy with Ling's rule to challenge Ling's regent Shenpa, who has been placed in charge of the kingdom. Akhro Ngonak proclaims to his gathered rebels that "Although Gesar, son of Gokmo, is a violent-spirited man, he is truly but a mouse."[77] After being poisoning, the dying regent Shenpa sings a song encouraging Dharmic practice and regret for his previous murderous actions when serving the demon-king of Hor before Gesar's conquest. Shenpa's grandson Shenchung, however, is furious over his grandfather's death and stages a coup to kill Akhro Ngonak. What follows is an exciting battle between two men, where we see that King Gesar is still protecting the realm of Hor, despite his distance from it:

> They went to the apartment of Akhro and one or two slipped in. The suspect Akhro pulled a knife from his waisted [with] a rain [of] sparks. When no one dared to get into close contact, Shenchung, the grandson of Shenpa—possessing [the strength of] a thousand heroes and a mind without doubt—grabbed him where the neck meets the shoulder and beat him. Because of that [Akhro Ngonak] threw the knife, but because Shenchung put his hand in front of him and the voice of King Gesar [expelled] from his beard, Akhro Ngonak could not cut his armor. Then, Shenchung with his right hand pulled out the small knife [named] Blazing Wheat Hair and stabbed him in the back. As soon as that happened, Akhro Ngonak fell to the ground and they bound them like a ball of yarn together with the ministers. When this happened, Shenchung became angry in his heart and cut off the head of Akhro Ngonak and carried it before Shenpa. Although he did this, Shenpa's mind and matter had already separated.[78]

Hearing of Shenpa's murder, King Gesar sends lamas to perform the necessary funerary rituals and ensure that—despite his previous sins—Shenpa is reborn in a Pure Land.

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[77] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po.* (Thimphu), "Song 12.1.47-48." 318.
[78] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po.* (Thimphu), 321-322.

Chapters 13-16 briefly relate the deaths of two more warriors—Dralha and Lhagöd—and two female companions of Gesar—Néchung and Lhamo Yü Dronma. Each is accompanied by marvelous visions and the leaving of relics, as well as rainbow clouds and the appearance of dakinis. Most die of unspecified illness, though Lhagöd dies of possession by a demonic spirit while traveling. Each gives a deathbed song urging continued religious practice, but is otherwise unremarkable.

Chapter 17 represents a denouement of the *Perfecting of Hell's* death scenes, describing the deaths of King Gesar and his magical horse Kyangbu. Gesar begins the chapter sitting in meditation retreat; the text is sure to describe him—on the eve of his death—in its most opulent fashion yet:

> The divine prince [of the] world, [with] an untransformed body, the great lion King Gesar, the Great Garuda from the top of Mt. Meru, the jewel of the inner ocean. The child, born of 100,000 mothers, the spiritual son of 1,000 Sangyus, the column between heaven and earth, the golden continuity between India and Tibet, the precious one of all the Jambudvipa continent resided in solitary meditation, while 100,000 golden caretakers made sure he met no one.[79]

During this time, Gesar becomes aware that it is time for him to go to the Pure Land. He tells his people of his approaching death, and many beg him to remain in the human realm. First, his trusted compatriot Denma sings a song to Gesar, begging him to stay for the good of Ling. Then, three young princes whose fathers had recently passed away repeat the request, asking who will take care of Ling and lead its people if Gesar is gone. King Gesar assures them that he "will not let all of those living in this life and the next be free from the blessed iron hook of my compassion."[80] He warns that the Buddhist teachings are diminishing and tells the people of Ling to protect them and their own religious practice.

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[79] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po.* (Thimphu), 335-336.
[80] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po.* (Thimphu), "Song 12.3.33-34, 344.

His palace is then enveloped in rainbows and everywhere becomes infused with heavenly light. King Gesar is lifted into the sky on four pieces of light and dissolves into Padmasambhava in union with his consort. However, the people of Ling see twelve dissimilar methods of passing for King Gesar, likely ensuring that the text can validate a wide variety of different epic traditions relating the death of the hero. Gesar's horse Kyangbu sings a song relating all the wonderful work he and Gesar did together before he himself leaves the human realm by sprouting feathers and turning into a vulture. Finally, only Denma remains, and he instructs his lama to write the *Perfecting of Hell* while he slips away to India. This dramatic scene acts as the end of both the text and the entire Gesar epic.

A Savior and a Sojourner as Influence on the *Perfecting of Hell*

In discussing the *Perfecting of Hell,* it is important to consider two possible sources of influence on the text: the story of Buddhist-saint Maudgalyāyana's rescue of his own mother from hell and the stories of Tibetan Returners (délok) who descend to hell, meet King Yama, and then return to tell the tale. Matthew Kapstein has noted King Gesar's similarity to the Chinese figure Mu-Lian—known in Sanskrit as Maudgalyāyana—and he argues that the text likely had a direct influence on the story of King Gesar.[81] In fact, Tibetan translations of the Maudgalyāyana narrative have existed in some form from the ninth-century,[82] and other Tibetan Buddhist narratives bear remarkable similarities to the

[81] Matthew Kapstein, "Mulian in the Land of Snows and King Gesar in Hell," *The Buddhist Dead: Practices, Discourses, Representations,* eds. Bryan J. Cuevas and Jacqueline I. Stone, (Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 2007).

[82] Daniel Berounsky, *The Tibetan Version of the Scripture on the Ten Kings and the Quest for Chinese Influence on the Tibetan Perception of the Afterlife. (*Prague: Triton, 2012); Matthew Kapstein, "The Tibetan *Yulanpen Jing," Contributions to the Cultural History of Early Tibet,* eds. Matthew Kapstein and Brandon Dotson, (Leiden: Brill Publishing, 2007), 209-238; An example of one such text is 'Gos chos grub, 'phags pa yongs su skyobs pa'i

Maudgalyāyana tale.[83] In some ways, the stories of King Gesar and Maudgalyāyana look remarkably similar: son travels away from mother, son discovers his mother has died and been condemned to hell, journeys to hell to challenge the netherworld king and win her freedom, witnesses (and relates) hell's horrors, then rescues his mother. The prevalent theme in both the Maudgalyāyana story and the *Perfecting of Hell* of the anxiety that a child will be absent when the mother dies is notable, and Kapstein argues that the narratives represent a discussion of the "impossibility of perfect renunciation….[as] the very condition enabling universal salvation."[84] When talking about heroes saving mothers in the netherworld, it seems inconceivable that the authors of the *Perfecting of Hell* were ignorant of the Chinese tale.

I would argue, however, that the similarities between Maudgalyāyana and King Gesar are much more superficial than they appear at first glance. The Maudgalyāyana story in China is a component of a much larger ritual tradition that includes the Hungry Ghost Festival and the affirmation of ties between families and Buddhist institutions.[85] This ritual context is entirely absent from the *Perfecting of Hell;* there is instead only reference to traditionally ethical Buddhist and Great Perfection practices. In fact, Maudgalyāyana's narrative features nothing close to the first or third third of the *Perfecting of Hell*—where Gesar acts as religious teacher and his court dies heroic deaths respectively; taking up two-thirds of the page count, these sections are not unimportant to the text as a whole. Perhaps

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snod ces bya ba'i mdo (*The Sublime Sutra Entitled Vessel of Complete Protection),* Volume 79 of stog pho brang bka' 'gyur, (Leh: Smanrtsis shesrig dpemzod, 1975-1980), 258-260.

[83] Kapstein relates how the story of Gu ru Chos dbang saving his mother in hell closely mirrors that of Maudgalyayana. Berounsky analyzes the narrative of the Bön hero Lha bu padma 'phrul and shows that it also closely mirrors Maudgalyayana.

[84] Kapstein, "Mulian in the Land of Snows and King Gesar in Hell," 363.

[85] Beata Grant and Wilt L. Idema, "Introduction," *Escape from Blood Pond Hell: The Tales of Mulian and Woman Huang,* trans. Beata Grant and Wilt L. Idema, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011.); Alan Cole, *Mothers and Sons in Chinese Buddhism,* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

the most fundamental distinction between Maudgalyāyana and King Gesar, however, is that, by the laws of karma, Gesar's mother does not deserve to be in hell. In contrast, Maudgalyāyana's mother is extremely sinful—greedily taking for herself the money her son leaves with the intention to be offered to local Buddhist monks.[86] Except for sharing a journey to hell, the narratives are remarkably different and feature little overlap. While it is likely the author of the *Perfecting of Hell* had some knowledge of the Maudgalyāyana narrative, it seems that the Chinese tale exerted little direct influence on the Tibetan text.

A second possible influence on the *Perfecting of Hell* is represented by the Tibetan tradition of Returners (délok). These individuals reportedly die and come back to life several days later, having had dark visions of the tortures of hell. As a result, they often gain significant social power, preaching on the importance of ethical action, and sometimes experiencing multiple trips to hell after their initial journey through intentionally entering a possessed state.[87] Alyson Prude notes that the majority of contemporary Returners are uneducated women and hypothesizes that it functions as a way to gain a modicum of religious and social power—a sociological phenomenon known as "deprivation theory."[88] Looking primarily at textual accounts of Returners, Bryan Cuevas challenges this explanation and emphasizes instead the broad range of Returners' social status across a variety of boundaries, including gender, ordination status, and wealth.[89] Both Cuevas and Prude agree, however, that Returners provide an exemplary nexus to consider the

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[86] "Maudgalyayana," *Tun-huang Popular Narratives,* trans. Victor Mair, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 87-121.
[87] Alyson Prude, Conference Presentation, "The Best Way to Die: Religion, Ethnicity, and Gender among Nepali Delogs," *2016 Annual Association for Nepal and Himalayan Studies Conference,* University of Texas at Austin, 25-28 February, 2016.
[88] Alyson Prude, "Death, Gender, and Extraordinary Knowing: The Delog *('das log)* Tradition in Nepal and Eastern Tibet*,"* (PhD Diss., University of California, Santa Barbara, 2011)
[89] Cuevas, *Travels in the Netherworld.*

insufficiency of the categories of "popular" and "elite" religion. While not perhaps a significant component of institutional Tibetan Buddhist culture, Returners represent an important cultural tradition in Tibet and other areas touched by Tibetan influence. In fact, America recently gained its first Returner—a white Tibetan Buddhist named Samuel Bercholz who produced a graphic novel of the experience that mirrors in almost every way those of more traditional Returners.[90]

Like the Maudgalyāyana story, however, it is hard to draw a clear connection between Returners and the *Perfecting of Hell*. Both King Gesar and the Returners go to hell, but it is under entirely different circumstances. Returners die and are summoned to hell—sometimes by mistake—then specifically sent back with the missive to preach on hell's horrors. King Gesar enters hell of his own volition as a conquering hero, then returns to earth only after his humiliation and rescue of his mother. The all-consuming power of King Yama is the only similarity between the two. Furthermore, stories of Returners feature a certain standard plot in which narrators come to realize they have died, meet the Lord of hell, and tour the netherworld in a largely consistent manner.[91] Cuevas notes that this standard Returner narrative format is generally also customized to include highly specific local geographies and the incorporation of local recently deceased. The *Perfecting of Hell,* in contrast, features little of this local "color." The image of hell presented in the text may not quite be a traditional Buddhist version—both the *Perfecting of Hell* and Returner narratives highlight popular beliefs about the netherworld not found in other texts, including the river

[90] Samuel Bercholz, *A Guided Tour of Hell: A Graphic Memoir,* illus. Pema Namdol Thaye. (Boulder: Shambala, 2016).
[91] Cuevas, *Travels in the Netherworld;* Bryan J. Cuevas, "The Death and Return of Lady Wangzin," *The Buddhist Dead: Practices, Discourses, Representations,* eds. Bryan J. Cuevas and Jacqueline I. Stone, (Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 2007); Françoise Pommaret, "Returning from Hell," *Religions of Tibet in Practice,* ed. Donald Lopez, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997): 499-510.

that blocks the entrance to hell and the tools Yama uses to determine one's karmic debt. These inclusions, however, do not demonstrate a clear line of influence between Returner literature and the *Perfecting of Hell.* I maintain, rather, such similarities represent the prevalence of these beliefs in the Tibetan imagination. In order to understand the *Perfecting of Hell,* we will have to look to the historical and social context of the text's publication.

Chapter Outline

Like epic literature itself, this dissertation seeks to be both a microscope and a telescope. It begins by considering how the *Great Perfecting of Hell* reflects its specific historical context and advances the positions of Nyingma revivalists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but eventually broadens to present a larger theory of epic literature that argues for its unique contribution to religious discourse and the importance of including it in our historical and cultural analysis. To fully understand the historical context of the *Great Perfecting of Hell,* Chapter 1 will present a streamlined narrative of the development of the Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism and its revival in late nineteenth-century eastern Tibet. The chapter will pay special attention to the development of the Great Perfection practices, particularly as expressed in Jikmé Lingpa's *Seminal Heart of Great Expanse* (*Longchen Nyingtik)* practice cycle developed in the eighteenth century. While secondary sources provide the foundation of this chapter's narrative and little of the information will be new to those familiar with the history of Tibetan religion, it provides important context for the remaining chapters of the dissertation. Because I argue that the *Perfecting of Hell* is actively extending and supporting the religious discourse and activities

of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century eastern Tibetan Nyingma thinkers, it is imperative to understand the cultural and religious currents surrounding the composers of the text.

In Chapters 2-4, I demonstrate how the *Perfecting of Hell* is advancing religious arguments of its historical period. As the text has three sections of roughly equal length, each chapter focuses on one section. Sharpening our microscope on the *Perfecting of Hell* to its most detailed level, Chapter 2 considers the transformative effects on individual practitioners of the *Perfecting of Hell,* specifically the relationship between the text and Preliminary Meditations practices (Ngöndro). These practices rose to new heights of popularity in specific formalized versions during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries through their inclusion in Jikmé Lingpa's *Seminal Heart of Great Expanse* practice cycle*.* This cycle attempted to organize the various forms of Buddhist practice in Tibet into a singular system that culminated in Great Perfection practices—though it was not the first program to do so, only the most popular. In this chapter, I demonstrate how King Gesar's Buddhist teachings in the first third of the *Perfecting of Hell* explicitly mimic early chapters of one of the most popular *Seminal Heart of Great Expanse* Preliminary Meditations commentaries, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* by Patrul Rinpoche. Using Martha Nussbaum's work on the role of narrative in constructing individual emotional responses and forming ethical agents, I argue for the advantages of making a fully-narrativized Preliminary Meditation text to compliment and summarize the Preliminary Meditations manual. Ultimately, I suggest that presenting the focus of *The Words of My Perfect Teacher's* early chapters—karma and the truth of suffering—as narratives has the unique advantage of providing a literary "safe space" in which readers can feel and express resentment at the

brutal, but just, karmic system through the figure of King Gesar. Identifying with King Gesar's rage and frustration as presented through a narrative allows readers to express these difficult feelings, while not openly challenging their individual situation in a matrix of larger Buddhist truths.

Chapter 3 broadens our scope from the formation of individual Buddhist ethical agents to the place of the *Great Perfecting of Hell* in the historical milieu of late nineteenth-, early twentieth-century eastern Tibet. This chapter considers the *Perfecting of Hell's* representation of King Gesar in the second third of the text as a failed tantric figure, unable to fulfill his claims of ensuring rebirth in a Pure Land for those demons he has killed. In its place, the text promotes the aesthetically non-violent Great Perfection practice. Through King Gesar's humbling before the king of the underworld, King Yama, and his mother's punishment for his violent sins, this chapter fundamentally calls into question the possibility of enlightened violence found in the most popular lineages of tantra. Situating the *Perfecting of Hell* in the historical context of the Non-Sectarian movement (Rimé) this chapter examines how the epic text contributed to this amorphous religious and cultural trend in late nineteenth-century eastern Tibet. Using a discourse of ecumenicism, Non-Sectarian thinkers attempted to create a cultural counterweight to the hegemonic power of the Geluk sect supporting the Dalai Lama's government in central Tibet. Examining the implications of King Gesar's identification as an emanation of the Buddhist figure Mañjuśrī—rather than the more canonically normative Avalokiteśvara—and his humiliation by King Yama reveal the central drama of the *Perfecting of Hell* as a reversal of the foundational narrative of the Geluk Yamāntaka tantra. In light of Bruce Lincoln's theories on the political power of narrative, this chapter argues that such a reversal reveals

the *Great Perfecting of Hell's* participation in the larger, regionalist goals of the Non-Sectarian movement by undermining the authority of the Geluk sect.

Moving even more clearly towards an appreciation of narrative as telescope, Chapter 4 discusses the final third of the *Perfecting of Hell*—as King Gesar and all his heroes die paradigmatically Buddhist deaths—to argue for the socially-performative nature of epic literature. Beginning with a detailed discussion of the centrality of performance to understanding the Gesar epic in its oral manifestations, this chapter uses the work on legend of American social theorist Bill Ellis to argue for the socially-performative nature of textual epic literature like the *Great Perfecting of Hell.* Introducing the idea of a "performative text," this chapter reconceptualizes published epic literature as an active and participatory tool for building, describing, and naming the social world around it. Specifically, the *Perfecting of Hell* uses the archetype of a realized Buddhist master's death found in religious autobiographies to not merely legitimize King Gesar as a Buddhist hero, but to also give the text's performance expansive social authority. This performative authority in turn ensures that the *Perfecting of Hell's* earlier chapters' promotion of Great Perfection practices and traditional Buddhist ethics has greater potential to be read as valid. The chapter ends, however, by acknowledging the important role of social reception within the idea of a "performative text" through a discussion of the contemporary reception of this presentation of King Gesar as a Buddhist master. Noting that there is significant discomfort and taboo around the text of the *Perfecting of Hell* in contemporary eastern Tibet, I argue that the sudden presentation of King Gesar as a Buddhist master through the death scenes too greatly challenges the prevailing cultural image of King Gesar, thereby, forcing him into ambiguous, and therefore threatening, literary ground.

Finally, Chapter 5 takes as its focus the discursive potency of the genre of epic literature as a whole. Reviewing several themes arising from a selection of definitions of "epic," I offer my own definition based upon a three-pronged approach of form, content, and reception. While it is perhaps a little unorthodox to offer my definition of epic at the end of the text—rather than here in the introduction—my definition acts as a road map to consider the significant potential of epic in religious discourse and discusses both why and how this genre participated in the religious and cultural debates surrounding it. In an effort to demonstrate the potential utility of a modified form of the western concept of "epic" when considering phenomena across the globe, I consider three case studies of epic outside of the Gesar tradition—the Arthurian epic in eighteenth-century Great Britain, women's Ramayana songs in contemporary Andhra Pradesh, and the early twentieth-century production of the West Africa's Sunjata epic at the William Ponty School—I demonstrate how epic simultaneously forms a community, defines that community's values, and then attempts to impress those values onto the world around it. Rather than a singular narrative, I argue that each individual rendition of an epic is its own self-contained point of study in the social engagement of the narrative; like a painting by Claude Monet or any of the other Impressionist masters, epic traditions as a whole exist only through these individual points of epic narration. Through presenting the three traits of epic literature that make it explicitly and uniquely socially-engaged—its focus on constructing a community, its use of the historical past as a veneer for contemporary concerns, and its radically generative nature—I argue that religious discourse utilizes "epic" to make arguments precisely because of the genre's integrated work with the social. Presenting several definitions of the category of "religion" in comparison with my discussion of epic's

involvement in constructing and defining the social, I note the similarities and reveal that epic—while not always religious—is always doing the fundamentally religious work of making the social. Ultimately, this chapter argues for the utility of the category of "epic" to understand a variety of religious phenomena not previously identified as such and speaks of the perils to religion scholars if we continue to overlook it.

A Historical Narrative of Tibet

Early in a trip through the Ripley's Believe it or Not Attraction in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina guests are encouraged to face a mirror and contort their faces into strange, twisted shapes in mimicry of pictures that surround it. Later in the trip through the attraction, one learns that the mirror is, in fact, a two-way mirror and that you can now look on in peals of laughter while strangers produce funny faces under the mistaken belief that it is only an ordinary mirror. Although this may seem like nothing more than an immature joke, it represents a metaphor to consider how we are to read the historical context of texts. We, on the enlightened side of the mirror, aware of its two-way properties, view the works of people through a glass darkened by decades or centuries of time. The contorted faces we view are created in the context of the mirror and its surrounding pictures, but we on the far side are incapable of asking people on the other which picture they are imitating or how they are producing their contorted faces; we merely see the ugly, warped end product.

While the *Great Perfecting of Hell* is a far cry from the contorted faces of tourists escaping the rain at the beach, we are similarly positioned in regards to the text's historical arising. As delineated in my introduction, we have little concrete evidence on the *Perfecting of Hell's* composition and have only a shaky date in terms of first publication. Like those on the far side of the two-way mirror, we are unable to ask the text's authors their intentions or understand how they saw the *Perfecting of Hell* reacting to the social currents surrounding it. Rather, we must re-create its historical context—the pictures around the mirror which people are encouraged to imitate—to make sense of the text

before us. This chapter will explore the history behind the *Great Perfecting of Hell* in an attempt to lay groundwork for understanding the text and its unique take on the epic character of King Gesar. While such a broad historical overview will necessarily neglect much of the history of Buddhism in Tibet, it will illuminate the background behind the *Great Perfecting of Hell* and provide the foundation for future argument. Through detailing the interests contemporary to the *Perfecting of Hell's* publication, the text's efforts to position itself within the religious debates of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century will be made evident in subsequent chapters.

The Nyingma School and its Sarma Compatriots: A Primer

The story of Buddhism entering Tibet in the seventh and eighth centuries has become an important narrative of identity for the Tibetan people. Featuring noble kings unifying the country, wicked demons destroying Buddhist temples, and powerful Buddhist practitioners fighting these evil forces, it can be considered an epic in its own right—a fact that will be discussed more in the final chapter of this dissertation. As a scholar, it is difficult to determine the veracity of such narrativized histories—as Hayden White has demonstrated, all history is a form of narrative;[1] however, such narratives provide a window into understanding Tibetans' own conceptions of their past and values. According to the standard Tibetan historical narrative, King Songtsen Gampo (d. 649) unifies the Tibetan tribes into a single nation in the seventh century and—following the advice of his two Buddhist wives—begins inviting Buddhist monks from India to spread the Dharma in

[1] Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe,* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1973).

Tibet, while also making international connections with China, Turkey, and other countries with a sizeable Buddhist presence.[2] Thinking more critically about this narrative, whatever religious beliefs Buddhism was replacing have been largely obscured by the post-Buddhist context, but pre-Buddhist Tibetan religion seemed to specifically celebrate the king as a descendent of the gods, worthy of lavish funerals and commemorative devices.[3] While the Indian Buddhist monks coming to Tibet certainly must have brought the doctrines and philosophies of Buddhism with them, the early Tibetan kings seem to have taken greater interest in the ritual power of Buddhism. Matthew Kapstein has noted that—contrary to the popular myth of Buddhism "taming" and "pacifying" the wild Tibetan warriors—early Tibetan kings demonstrated particular interest in the ritual power of Buddhism to combat those things outside of human control, most notably plagues and other illnesses, but also war magic and rituals of regal empowerment.[4] This ritual focus is emphasized in the mytho-history of Buddhism's entrance itself, wherein the ritual specialist Padmasambhava is brought to Tibet by King Trisong Detsen in an effort to tame the local demons who are challenging Buddhism's spread. Upon taming the demons, Padmasambhava stays in Tibet to give teachings and embodies Tibetan Buddhism's tantric spiritual forefather.

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[2] Christopher I. Beckwith, *The Tibetan Empire: A History of the Struggle for Great Power Among Tibetans, Turks, Arabs, and Chinese during the Early Middle Ages,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 16-20.
[3] Hugh Richardson, *High Peaks, Pure Earth: Collected Writings on Tibetan History and Culture,* (Chicago: Serindia Publications, 1998), 89-99. 219-233.; Junjie Chu, "A Study of Bon-po Funeral Ritual in Ancient Tibet: Deciphering the Pelliot Tibetan Mss 1042," *Theses on Tibetology in China,* ed. Hu Tan, (Beijing: China Tibetology Publishing, 1991), 91-157.; J. Russell Kirkland, "The Spirit of the Mountain: Myth and State in Pre-Buddhist Tibet," *History of Religions* 21.3 (1982): 257-271.
[4] Matthew Kapstein, *The Tibetan Assimilation of Buddhism: Conversion, Contestation, and Memory,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 51.

In Tibetans' own narratives of their history, the period of Buddhism's initial spread in Tibet comes to an end with the murder of the king Langdarma[5] by the Buddhist monk Lhalung in 841 CE. Traditional histories state that Langdarma was decidedly anti-Buddhist and that he slashed the state support for Buddhism in order to fund non-Buddhist religious practitioners.[6] Sam van Schaik, however, notes that tensions in the Tibetan kingdom concerning the relationship between Buddhism, the state, and funding were present and persistent long before Langdarma's ascension to the throne.[7] Schaik ultimately views Langdarma's death as part of a larger destabilization of kingdoms across Asia. Indeed, the emperor's murder is traditionally said to have led to the crumbling of the Tibetan empire amongst the aristocratic families' feuding and the resulting period of intellectual deprivation became known as the "Tibetan Dark Age" or "Age of Fragmentation." While recent scholarship is challenging the idea that this period was quite as "dark" as it has traditionally been presented,[8] Buddhist institutions had little state support, and the period represented a dramatic break from Indian involvement with and support for Tibet's Buddhist development.

This abbreviated history of seventh, eighth, and ninth century Tibet is important for discussing the *Great Perfecting of Hell* not because it directly relates to the text's development, but rather because it provides a framework for the arising of and relationship between differing Buddhist sects in Tibet. During this period, Buddhist

[5] Langdarma is more correctly known as Üdumtsen. Matthew Kapstein, "The Later Diffusion of Buddhism and the Response of the 'Ancients,'" *Sources of the Tibetan Tradition,* eds. Kurtis R. Schaeffer, Matthew Kapstein, Gray Tuttle, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 167-168.
[6] *The Blue Annals, Part I,* trans. George Roerich, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1996), 60.
[7] Sam van Schaik, *Tibet: A History,* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 46-47.
[8] Manuel A. Lopez-Zafra, "Bringing Light into the Darkness: An Intellectual History of Tibet's Dark Age (842 - 879 CE)," (PhD diss, University of Virginia, 2014)

teachings were preserved far from the central regions of Ü and Tsang (see Maps 1 and 3 in Appendix I) in the western Tibetan regions of Ngari and the eastern Tibetan regions of Kham and Amdo. However, these wild, frontier Buddhists lacked the support of both the government and large-scale religious institutions, meaning that they were also free of their supervision. The result was the development of a variety of diffuse and diverse religious movements—words used by Bryan Cuevas to eloquently describe the period—spread by "the efforts of wandering yogis and self-styled religious savants, many of whom claimed lineal descent from 'authentic' Indian, Chinese, and Central Asian Buddhist masters." [9] In a period free of institutional oversight, Buddhism in Tibet fell to the hands of unaffiliated practitioners with free interpretative and innovative rein.

Unsurprisingly, concern arose among some Buddhists that the practices performed were antithetical to the true nature of Buddhism or were based on a fundamental misunderstanding of Buddhist practice. The majority of these concerns centered on the practice of Buddhist tantra, which utilizes a discourse of anti-social and transgressive practices to challenge individuals' conceptions of reality and independent existence. Kurtis R. Schaeffer explains, "Where texts of the Mahāyāna tradition might instruct the good Buddhist to avoid killing, stealing, lying, sexual misconduct, and intoxicants, tantric texts would encourage Buddhists to engage in these very practices!"[10] The role of tantra in Tibetan religious practice will be explored in greater detail in Chapter 3, but for now it is important to understand that significant debate arose in the Tibetan "Age of

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[9] Bryan J. Cuevas, *The Hidden History of the Tibetan Book of the Dead,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 57.
[10] Kurtis R. Schaeffer, "The Ordinance of Yeshé-Ö to Tantric Practitioners," *Sources of the Tibetan Tradition,* 168-173. 168.

Fragmentation" over the extent one was to actually perform these transgressive practices, or whether they were merely a discursive and aesthetic pattern supporting extensive visualization. Lama Yeshé Ö (d. 1036)—a ruler in the Southwestern Tibetan kingdom of Gugé—grew concerned about the public practice of certain tantras and believed that those individuals practicing tantra fundamentally misunderstood the Buddhist doctrine. To express his displeasure, he wrote a public ordinance that decried such tantric practitioners for being, "More avaricious for meat than a hawk or wolf. / more lusty than a mere donkey or an ox. / More greedy for beer than a beetle in a rotten house. / More indifferent to pure and impure than a dog or a pig."[11] In the decades after the fall of the Tibetan empire, practitioners debated the appropriate Buddhist practices free of institutional of Indian oversight.

In an attempt to reinvigorate the Buddhist tradition, the aforementioned Lama Yeshé Ö invited the Bengali monk Atiśa (d. 1054) to come to western Tibet and offer teachings; this new spread of teachings represents the point of division between the Nyingma school of Buddhism, or "the Ancient Ones," and the traditions that would arise from the teachings of Atiśa and those that come after him, the Sarma schools or "the New Ones." At the same time, eastern Tibetan Buddhist thinkers became interested once more in reinvigorating practice of the vinaya monastic codes—a phenomena Tibetan historians title Buddhism arising "up from the embers."[12] As Atiśa's new invigoration of Buddhism

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[11] Samten Karmay, "The Ordinance of Lha Bla-ma Ye-shes-'od," *Tibetan Studies in Honour of Hugh Richardson,* eds. Michael Aris and Aung San Suu Kyi, (Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1980), 150-162. Found in *Sources of the Tibetan Tradition.*

[12] Ronald Davidson has noted that it was the eastern Tibetan Buddhists' reinvigoration of the vinaya—not the figure Atiśa—that was considered to be the crucial source of revitalizing the Tibetan Buddhist tradition until the fourteenth century. (*Tibetan Renaissance,* 114-115. Page 115, Fn. 120 gives a detailed overview of the Tibetan historical sources giving pride of place to eastern Tibetan thinkers and presenting Atiśa as an

spread, an increasing number of Tibetans traveled to India to receive further teachings and bring advanced practices back to Tibet. Those who followed the older forms of Buddhism that were initially taught in the imperial period and developed during the Age of Fragmentation became known as Nyingma practitioners due to their reliance on "older" ("nying") teachings. In contrast, those following the newer teachings coming to Tibet during the eleventh and twelfth centuries largely rejected the older teachings as suspect and inauthentic, identifying themselves as Sarma—followers of "new" ("sar') traditions. Out of the Sarma community arose a handful of schools and lineages—Kagyü, Sakya, and eventually Geluk being the most prevalent. Jacob Dalton writes of this period that there was "intense competition among the various Buddhist communities emerging at the time. Each group sought to ensure its survival by codifying and securing exclusive control over its own set of teachings."[13] These two branches of Tibetan Buddhist teachings—the Nyingma and the Sarma—were religiously divided, therefore, and formed two separate religious canons with shared certain practices at the initial stages, but little overlap at the most advanced levels.[14] Indeed, while acknowledging an "Age of Fragmentation," Nyingma descriptions of the revival of Buddhism in Tibet ignore Atiśa entirely and instead describe how eastern Tibetan monks preserved and propagated the Buddhist teachings for central Tibetan communities.[15]

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afterthought.) He argues that it was ultimately the celebration from the Kadamapa schools, and later that of the Geluk, that led to contemporary perceptions of Atiśa's central role in the revitalization narrative.

[13] Jacob Dalton, *The Gathering of Intentions: A History of a Tibetan Tantra,* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), xx.

[14] Janet Gyatso, "Signs, Memory, and History: A Tantric Buddhist Theory of Scriptural Transmission," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies,* 9.2 (1986): 7-36.

[15] Dudjom Rinpoche and Jikdrel Yeshe Dorje, *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism: Its Fundamentals and History,* trans. And eds. Gyurmé Dorje and Matthew Kapstein, trans., (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1991), 524-525.

In an effort to continue to remain on the spiritual cutting edge in this bustling Tibetan religious marketplace, the Nyingma school developed a form of textual transmission called treasure texts (terma). Arising around the eleventh century—soon after Atiśa arrived in Tibet with new Indian teachings—treasure texts are works hidden by an individual with the intent to be discovered at a later age.[16] This revelatory tradition augmented the continuously transmitted textual lineage of Nyingma Buddhist teachings known as "kama." Initially, a wide variety of religious individuals acted as concealers of such treasure texts, though the tradition solidified around the figure of Padmasambhava from the fourteenth century onwards especially. Some of these texts claimed to be "earth treasures," (*sa gter*) physically hidden in caves, the majority represent works hidden in an individual's mind stream ("mind treasure," *dgongs gter*) or one received in a pure vision ("vision treasure," *dag snang*).

Treasure texts represent an innovative way to introduce new teachings and flexibility in the Buddhist tradition, while still maintaining the authority of an Indian origin through the figure of the treasure revealer. Bryan Cuevas writes how in introducing new practices into the emerging Nyingma system, these texts also contributed to a mythologization of the Tibetan empire:

> In addition to creating and sustaining a paradisiac mythology of Tibetan dynastic history—which incidentally could be utilized as a tool for furthering political agendas—many of the treasure texts introduced new and innovative interpretations of older religious ideas and techniques, or simply popularized in the form of prayer and liturgy what had previously existed only in the clandestine and rarefied atmosphere of elite yogis and scholarly monks.[17]

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[16] The tradition of treasure revelation continues to this day, as discussed in David Germano, "Re-membering the Dismembered Body of Tibet: Contemporary Tibetan Visionary Movements in the People's Republic of China," *Buddhism in Contemporary Tibet: Religious Revival and Cultural Identity,* eds. Melvyn Goldstein, Matthew Kapstein, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 53-94.

[17] Cuevas, *The Hidden History of the Tibetan Book of the Dead,* 82.

The Sarma schools, at least initially, were suspicious of treasure texts and many considered them an indigenous—and, therefore, apocryphal—creation of Buddhist literature.[18] Indeed, Cuevas notes that "to be sure, the clearest distinction between the Rnying-ma-pa [Nyingma] and the Gsar-ma-pa [Sarma] schools is the degree to which each accepted ongoing revelation as valid."[19] Treasure texts represented the Nyingma school's response to the distribution of and patronage for new Indian Buddhist texts in eleventh-century Tibet.

Ronald Davidson's list of the eleven "types" of historical actors in this period of Tibetan Buddhist revival—which he calls the Tibetan Renaissance—is enough to demonstrate that the narrative I have just related is exceedingly oversimplified.[20] The divisions between Nyingma and Sarma schools are nowhere near as clear as I have presented and they became variously muddied and variously reinforced over the long span of Tibetan history. However, understanding the development of the Nyingma school, its eye to a mythologized imperial past, and its use of treasure texts to introduce new Buddhist ideas with the authority of their more traditional, Indian compatriots lays the foundation for understanding the *Great Perfecting of Hell*. As discussed in the introduction, the *Perfecting of Hell* situates itself as a treasure text—though one hidden by the personal lama of Gesar's companion—and actively participates in both the support and the transformation of the Nyingma canon. While Padmasambhava appears throughout the text

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[18] Matthew Kapstein, "The Purificatory Gem and Its Cleansing: A Late Tibetan Polemical Discussion of Apocryphal Texts," *History of Religions* 28.3 (1989): 217-244. Kapstein also notes that positions taken in regards to treasure texts were exceptionally vast and, ultimately, varied between schools.
[19] Cuevas, *Hidden History,* 236, fn. 15
[20] Ronald Davidson, *Tibetan Renaissance: Tantric Buddhism in the Rebirth of Tibetan Culture,* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 11-13.

and references the glorious imperial Tibetan past, the *Perfecting of Hell's* Nyingma identity is most clearly seen through its celebration of what Nyingma practitioners considered the most advanced, most efficacious Buddhist practice—the Great Perfection, or Dzogchen. It is to understanding the development of this practice throughout Nyingma history that our attention now turns.

The Great Perfection

Like all Buddhist traditions in Tibet, Great Perfection practices claim that they have Indian origins. The primordial buddha Samantabhadra—who holds pride of place in the Great Perfection tradition—is said to have taught Great Perfection meditation and teachings to Vajrasattva who then passed it on to the Indian adept Garab Dorje, though no reliable historical record of him exists beyond this narrative. The teachings are said to have passed through the hands of several important Buddhist teachers in India; Samten Karmay notes that different Great Perfection texts identify the exact lineage differently, but that it frequently includes important Indian Buddhist philosophers as secret adepts of the Great Perfection lineage.[21] The teachings are said to have eventually reached Tibet through the actions of the Indian saints Vimalamitra and Padmasambhava—who directly or indirectly hid the texts as treasures—and their Tibetan disciples. Adherents point to the occurance of the term "Great Perfection" in Indian texts as evidence of the Indian origins of the practice. Indeed, the first use of the term is found in the Indian-arising *Guhyagarbha* tantra, where it

[21] Samten Karmay, *The Great Perfection (*rDzogs chen): *A Philosophical and Meditative Teaching of Tibetan Buddhisn,* (Leiden: Brill Publishing, 2007), 19-21.

signifies the mental state arising after the climax of the sexual yogic practices utilized in the *Guhyagarbha* and other Anuttarayoga tantras of the Mother Class.[22]

Great Perfection teachings first became popular in Tibetan regions between the ninth and tenth centuries, during the period of institutional chaos that followed the demise of the Tibetan empire. Great Perfection teachings existed in a broad variety of traditions, but eventually the most normative grouping together of those was in a set of three series—the Mind Class, the Space Class, and the Instruction Class—that roughly map onto the historical development of the Great Perfection tradition. As seen in manuscripts retrieved from the Dunhuang cave, the earliest Great Perfection texts of the Mind Class had a specific focus on the nature of the mind. Sam van Schaik notes that "the early mind series texts stayed close to one central theme: the immediate presence of the enlightened mind, and the consequent uselessness of any practice that is aimed at creating, cultivating, or uncovering the enlightened state."[23] Authors claimed these texts to be translations of Indian works in an authentic lineage spread during the Tibetan imperial period.[24] Most often emerge as treasure texts hidden by Vimalamitra, Padmasambhava, and others, the Space and Instruction Classes further developed Great Perfection ideas—which will be discussed in greater detail momentarily—to such an extent that the Instruction Class texts eventually overshadowed all other texts as the most direct route to understanding the true nature of the mind. [25]

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[22] Jacob Dalton, "The Development of Perfection: The Interiorization of Buddhist Ritual in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries," *The Journal of Indian Philosophy* 32 (2004): 1-30.
[23] Sam van Schaik, "The Early Days of the Great Perfection," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 27.1 (2004): 165-206, 165.
[24] Davidson, *Tibetan Renaissance,* 228-229.
[25] Sam Van Schaik, *Approaching the Great Perfection: Simultaneous and Gradual Methods of Dzogchen Practice in the Longchen Nyingtig,* (Somerville: Wisdom Publications, 2004), 8-9.

However, many of the Sarma traditions challenged the idea that the Great Perfection was an orthodox Buddhist teaching originating in India. Samten Karmay writes that despite numerous texts arguing for the Great Perfection's orthodoxy, it "continued to be relentlessly regarded as 'not genuine' Buddhist teaching, and so has been a controversial subject throughout the centuries."[26] Indeed, Lama Yeshe Ö's ordinance laying out his concerns with unorthodox Buddhist practices and preparing the way for Atiśa's arrival in Tibet, states that "Now as the good karma of living begins is exhausted and the law of the kings is impaired, false doctrines called Dzogchen, 'Great Perfection,' are flourishing in Tibet. Their views are false and wrong. Heretical tantras [like this], pretending to be Buddhist, are spread in Tibet."[27] Nyingma thinkers countered and affirmed the validity of treasure texts, pointing to the unique and powerful experiences of the treasure revealer that corroborated the text as authentic.[28] They reversed the argument against the Sarma schools, arguing that "the reason the older scriptures were unknown to current Indians is that this later degenerate generation of Indian Panditas was incapable of contacting the spiritual forces that had sustained and continued to sustain Tibet."[29] Despite these claims, most proponents of Sarma schools continued to look with suspicion on Great Perfection teachings as a largely indigenous Tibetan creation.

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[26] Samten Karmay, *The Great Perfection,* 13.
[27] Samten Karmay, "The Ordinance of Lha Bla-ma Ye-shes-'od," 171.
[28] For a more detailed discussion of the use of visions to validate treasure traditions, consider Janet Gyatso's *Apparitions of the Self: the Secret Autobiographies of a Tibetan Visionaries (*Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998) and David Germano and Janet Gyatso, "Longchenpa and the Possession of the Dakinis," *Tantra in Practice,* ed. David Gordon White, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 239-265.
[29] Davidson, *Tibetan Renaissance,* 231. A detailed Nyingma argument in support of the validity of treasure texts referenced by Davidson can be found in Rok-Ben Shérab-Ö's (Rog Ban Shes rab 'od d.1233) *Chos 'byung grub mtha' chen po,* specifically pp. 43.3-47.4.

Beyond their strong connections to the treasure tradition, Great Perfection teachings were also singled out by Sarma schools due to their content, which differed radically from the Indian texts entering Tibet at the time. While it is difficult to summarize the distinguishing features of a centuries-old religious tradition in such a way that does not devolve into mere gibberish, I will attempt to present here a few of the features that define Great Perfection philosophy; these will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3. Both Nyingma and Sarma traditions as practiced by laypeople and other non-advanced practitioners take as their foundation traditional Buddhist practices of offering and chanting. However, those practices aimed at more advanced practitioners diverge in methodology. Practices coming into Tibet from India in the eleventh to twelfth centuries and taken up by the Sarma schools utilized intensive ritual practices to radically undermine dualities, including the consumption of foreign substances, visualization practices, and mantras.[30] These forms of tantric practice differed significantly from Great Perfection teachings, which emphasized the natural luminosity of the mind. In fact, Great Perfection teachings highlighted that any effort to strive towards liberation—like the complex rituals of tantras embraced by the Sarma schools or even ethical practices, as will be discussed below—would cause only more delusion; they encouraged instead a practice of non-striving based on one's spontaneous and primordial enlightened nature.

It is important to note that the divisions between practice within the Nyingma and Sarma schools were not as clear-cut as this simplified narrative lays out. The Nyingma school did develop its own form of antinomian, ritually-dense tantric practices—called Mahāyoga—that utilized aesthetics similar to the tantric practices common in the Sarma

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[30] Davidson, *Tibetan Renaissance*, 74.

schools. Likewise, the Sarma schools practiced a type of aesthetically non-violent practice focused on a discourse of naturalness and spontaneity as the most direct route to enlightened realization called Great Seal meditations (Mahāmudrā).[31] Indeed, although Gesar does not teach Mahāmudrā practice explicitly to the people of Ling, he frequently cites Great Seal as a laudatory practice. However, it is important to note historically the distinctions between the Great Seal / Great Perfection and Mahāyoga / Anuttarayoga strands of Buddhist tantric practice in Tibet as they relate to the aesthetics and ideals of Tibetan religious practice. Each represents a differing way to conceptualize, represent, and visualize the path to attain realization—one which is aggressively martial and one which generally eschews martiality. The conversation about whether Great Perfection teachings qualify as a tantra has been debated extensively, but it is important to note that—despite appearing very different in their practice—Great Perfection texts themselves generally adopt the title of tantra and present themselves, like tantric texts, as the speediest, most direct route to attaining realization.

Without Indian precedent and using a radically different discourse to discuss realization, Great Perfection teachings represented a clear point of departure between the Nyingma schools of Tibetan Buddhism and those that developed later. As always with historical narratives, a caveat must be added that the distinctions between Great Perfection teachings and those of other schools are never as clear as the historical narrative lays out; as noted above, the Sarma schools—particularly the Kagyü order of Tibet Buddhism which has many similarities to the Nyingma tradition—promoted Great Seal Meditation (Mahāmudrā), which shares with Great Perfection practices a focus on the transcendent,

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[31] van Schaik, 7.

luminous human mind. The historical narrative I present here also largely overlooks the role of Great Perfection in the Bön tradition—a nominally non-Buddhist school of Tibetan religion that seems to have developed as an institution in the period of Fragmentation. Due to the Nyingma emphasis of the *Great Perfecting of Hell,* however, I elected to focus my historical narrative on that tradition. Great Perfection teachings remained a point of divergence that marked the Nyingma school as unique in relation to Sarma schools. The following section will explore how Great Perfection teachings were systematized and enhanced from their early tenth and eleventh century iterations to become a versatile and accessible practice that was eventually adopted by Non-Sectarian thinkers in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Later Developments in Great Perfection Thought

The early Great Perfection teachings transformed into the practices as we understand them today especially through the work of two great systematizers—the fourteenth-century author Longchen Rabjam and the eighteenth-century visionary Jikmé Lingpa. Nyingma histories tell of a glorious birth for Longchen Rabjam (d.1364)—more commonly known as Longchenpa—and his mastery of wide-ranging Buddhist practices from both Nyingma and Sarma schools while a student at the Sangpu Neutok monastery.[32] Becoming disillusioned with the arrogance of his Buddhist teachers, Longchenpa met with the Great Perfection master Kumārarāja (d.1343) and studied the earlier foundational early Great Perfection collections in the Seminal Heart (Nyingthik) tradition—the *Seminal Heart*

[32] Dudjom Rinpoche and Gyurmé Dorje, 575-579.

of Vimalamitra (*Vima Nyingtik*) and subsequently also studied the more recent *Seminal Heart of the Dakinis* (*Khandro Nyingtik*).

These materials became the foundation of Longchenpa's subsequent systematization of the Great Perfection teachings. Tulku Thondrup conceptualizes these two strands of early Great Perfection literature as having differing, but mutually supportive, audiences and goals:

> The instructional teachings are elucidated and condensed in two major traditions of Nyingthik. The first one is the detailed teachings for/of the scholars (rGya Ch'e Ba Pandit), brought to Tibet by Vimalamitra and known as *Vima Nyingthig* [Seminal Heart of Vimalamitra]. It is mainly based on the Seventeen Tantras and Troma Tantra. The second is the profound teachings for/of mendicants (Zab Pa Ku Sa La), brought to Tibet by Guru Padmasambhava and known as Khandro Nyingthik [Seminal Heart of the Dakinis].[33]

Longchenpa wove these two strands together to create a singular conception of the Great Perfection through composing a series of commentaries on each cycle—entitled the *Innermost Heart Drop of the Guru (Lama Yangtik)* and the *Innermost Heart Drop of the Dakini (Khandro Yangtik*)—that further developed early Great Perfection ideas and practices. These texts and commentaries were bound together with the earlier traditions to create the *Four Parts of the Seminal Heart* (*Nyingtik Yabshi*). As David Germano explains, Longchenpa's primary contribution to Great Perfection thought was exactly this systematization—taking a convoluted and complex set of texts handed down and revealed over generations and creating a systematized set of thought:

> Although at least five hundred years (800 AD – 1300 AD) of thought, contemplation and composition in this tradition (which may not have been a clearly self-conscious tradition in the beginning) preceded him such that all major themes, structures, and terminology were in place prior to his birth

[33] Tulku Thondup, *Masters of Meditation and Miracles: Lives of the Great Buddhist Masters of India and Tibet,* (Boston: Shambala Publications, 1996), 33.

> (above all in the canonical *Seventeen Tantras of the Great Perfection (rGyud bCu bDun)),* it was Longchenpa (1308-1363) who systematically refined the terminology used by the tradition with a series of subtle yet clear distinctions; brilliantly revealed its relationships with mainstream exoteric Buddhist thought; clarified its internal structure; created from it a masterpiece of poetic philosophy remarkable for their aesthetic beauty, philosophical rigor, and overall clarity; and overall pinpointed the inner quintessence of the tradition with writings that not only systematized every major topic, but also creatively explained each to render crystal clear the unprecedented revolution in the content, form, and structure of "philosophical" thought in Indo-Tibetan Buddhism that the Great Perfection teachings entail.[34]

To further aid understanding of the Great Perfection tradition, Longchenpa also composed *The Seven Treasuries*. Through his work editing, arranging, and commenting on already existent textual traditions, Longchenpa created a singular, unified conception of Great Perfection practice in the fourteenth century.

The next critical figure in the Seminal Heart tradition was the eighteenth-century visionary Jikmé Lingpa, who further systematized Longchenpa's work into a single arrangement from beginning to advanced practices leading an individual to ultimate realization. Identified as the reincarnation of Longchenpa himself, he entered meditation retreat at a hermitage in Pelri Tekchen Ling after a lengthy period of monastic study.[35] During this time, in 1757, Jikmé Lingpa received the *Seminal Heart of Great Expanse* (*Longchen Nyingtik*) practice cycle as a treasure text. Sam van Schaik writes that in the centuries between Longchenpa and Jikmé Lingpa, the Great Perfection tradition had become "a number of competing and increasingly divergent systems of practice."[36] In contrast, the *Seminal Heart of Great Expanse* attempted to consolidate the Great Perfection

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[34] David Germano, "Poetic Thought, the Intelligent Universe, and the Mystery of the Self: the Tantric Synthesis of rDzogs chen in fourteenth-century Tibet." (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1992.)
[35] Dudjom Rinpoche and Gyurmé Dorje, 835-837.
[36] van Schaik, *Approaching the Great Perfection,* 10.

teachings into not only a singular discursive system—like Longchenpa did—but into a singular path of practice from beginning to end. Dilgo Khyentsé writes that although the *Seminal Heart of Great Expanse* is most known for its advanced practices, "It includes the preliminary and main practices, the development and completion stages, and, most important, the practice of Ati Yoga, or the Great Perfection. It thus constitutes a complete path to enlightenment."[37] As part of this complete path to enlightenment, the *Seminal Heart of Great Expanse* attempted to establish the Great Perfection as the most advanced and efficacious form of Buddhist practice. This role for the Great Perfection was affirmed in Jikmé Lingpa's *Treasury of Precious Qualities* (*Yönten Dzöd*), which provided the necessary philosophical background for the *Seminal Heart of Great Expanse*.[38] As written by a contemporary Nyingma scholar today, the *Seminal Heart of Great Expanse* lays out all teachings as "either support, ornamentation, or part of the Dzogchen [Great Perfection] teaching."[39]

Presenting a single, unified system for both advanced and non-advanced practitioners means that the *Seminal Heart of Great Expanse* includes a variety of techniques as necessary preliminaries to advanced Great Perfection practices. In particular, the practices called Preliminary Meditations or Ngöndro (literally "that which goes before")

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[37] Dilgo Khyentse, *The Wish-Fulfilling Jewel: The Practice of Guru Yoga According to the Longchen Nyingthik Tradition,* trans. Könchog Tensin, (Boston: Shambala Publishing, 2013), 8.

[38] Van Schaik, *Approaching the Great Perfection,* 10.; Steven Goodman, *The Klong chen snying thig: and Eighteenth-Century Revelation.* (PhD Diss., University of Saskatchewan, 1983). 135-138; Generally circulates as a root text with commentary: For a Tibetan example see further: Yon tan rgya mtsho, *Yon tan rin po che'i mdzod kyi 'grel pa zla ba'i sgron me dang nyi ma'i 'odzer,* (Gangtok, Sikkim: Sonam T. Kazi, 1971); For an English translation of a commentary and root text, see further Kangyur Rinpoche, *Treasury of Precious Qualities,* (Boston: Shambala, 2001).

[39] Palden Sherab Rinpoche, *Commentary on Ngöndro Practice according to the New Treasure of Dudjom,* trans. Tsewang Dongyel Rinpoche, Transcriptions from Khenpos at the Turtle Hill Sangha in Tennessee, (Forthcoming) 5.

initiate the *Seminal Heart of Great Expanse* and became especially widespread with Jikmé Lingpa's work. Preliminary Meditations are divided into "Outer" or "Ordinary" Preliminaries—which do not require initiations and prepare one for basic Buddhist practice—and "Inner" or "Extraordinary" Preliminaries—which prepare one for advanced tantric practices. Although Preliminary meditations exist in some form in all Buddhist practice, the *Seminal Heart of Great Expanse* popularized and standardized them. These practices were intended to be completed before further, more advanced practice—and then often repeated—in order to "establish proper motivation, to purify the mind of afflictions, and to remove obstacles before embarking upon tantric practices."[40] As conceptualized in the *Seminal Heart of Great Expanse* practice cycle, the "ordinary" form of these Preliminary Meditations leads the individual through a series of narrative visualizations that highlight foundational Buddhist concepts like karma, the six realms of existence, suffering, and proper ethical behavior. Van Schaik writes that these practices are "causal, in that they are supposed to cause a certain state of mind to arise, and antidotal, in that they are intended to combat undesirable states of mind."[41]

Due to their importance in laying the foundation for future Great Perfection practice, Jikmé Lingpa's Preliminary Meditations inspired an extensive commentarial tradition that enhanced and developed the texts into readable and accessible programs for practice. Chief among these is perhaps the best-known piece of Tibetan literature—*The Words of My Perfect Teacher* (*kun bzang bla ma'i zhal lung*), written by Patrul Rinpoche (d. 1887) in an isolated hermitage near Dzogchen monastery in the eastern regions of Tibet. A dedicated

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[40] Robert Buswell and Donald Lopez, "sNgon 'gro,' *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 832.
[41] van Schaik, *Approaching the Great Perfection,* 95.

practitioner of the *Seminal Heart of the Great Expanse*, Patrul Rinpoche purportedly wrote the text to faithfully record the oral teachings of his own teacher Jikmé Gyalwe Nyugu (d. 1843), who was himself a direct student of Jikmé Lingpa. A clear and concise introduction to Buddhist philosophy and practice utilizing evocative imagery, narrative, and metaphor, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* became widespread in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Tibet. As will be explored in Chapter 2, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* had a profound influence on the *Great Perfecting of Hell,* which mimics the early chapters of Patrul Rinpoche's text. Through standardizing and popularizing specific practices with the goal of producing ethically-sensitive Buddhist agents prepared for future practice, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* and other Preliminary Meditations commentaries had a remarkably widespread influence on both the religion and literature of eastern Tibet.

The importance of the *Seminal Heart of Great Expanse* practice cycle cannot be overstated. In her exploration of Jikmé Lingpa's esoteric autobiographies, Janet Gyatso writes, "The collection [*The Seminal Heart of Great Expanse / Longchen Nyingtik*] has inspired most religious practice in the Nyingma school for the last two centuries."[42] The *Seminal Heart of Great Expanse* became the defining practice of the Nyingma school in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and inspired a new celebration and promotion of Great Perfection teachings. However, the spread of the *Seminal Heart of Great Expanse*, including *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* and other commentarial texts, was not limited to Nyingma circles as most discussions of Buddhist forms of Great Perfection teachings had been in the past. Rather, historical circumstances and the consolidation of power by the Geluk school of the Dalai Lamas in central Tibet ensured that the *Seminal Heart of Great Expanse* became an

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[42] Gyatso, *Apparitions of the Self,* 3.

important text for practice in eastern Tibetan, non-Geluk monasteries—regardless of whether they identified as Nyingma or Sarma. The following section will consider in greater detail how the *Seminal Heart of Great Expanse* came to be promoted by eastern Tibetan Buddhist communities with an eye to understanding the context in which the *Great Perfecting of Hell* was born.

Rimé: A Nineteenth and Early Twentieth-Century Political Movement

To this point, my discussion has reviewed—in an admittedly streamlined narrative—the relative distinction of the Nyingma school in comparison with its Sarma compatriots. This distinction arises due to its adherence to claimed imperial forms of Buddhist thought and practice, its use of treasure texts to develop its Buddhist tradition, and its advancement of Great Perfection practices as the most efficacious techniques for realization. As Tibetan political history developed and the institution of the Dalai Lama rose to prominence in the central Tibetan city of Lhasa, a second distinction moved to the forefront of social discourse—that of eastern Tibet and central Tibet. Central Tibet—the regions of Ü and Tsang[43]—has long been perceived as the cradle of Tibetan civilization due to the seventh-century establishment of the Tibetan empire's capital city of Lhasa and the iconic Jokhang temple.[44] While Anne Marie Blondeau and Yonten Gyatso challenge the claim that Lhasa was a developed city quite so early, they note that both Chinese and Tibetan histories confirm that the temple of "Rasa"—an early name for Lhasa—was

[43] Please see Map 1 in Appendix 1.
[44] Anne Marie Blondeau and Yonten Gyatso, "Lhasa, Legend and History," *Lhasa in the Seventeenth Century: the Capital of the Dalai Lamas,* ed. Françoise Pommaret, trans. Howard Solverson, (Leiden: Brill Publishing, 2003), 15-38.

identified as existing on the site from at least 710.[45] The placement of this temple—which purportedly to this day houses the first Buddha image to enter Tibet—ensured that Lhasa and the central Tibetan region remained the religious center of Tibet for centuries after.

Perhaps for this reason, when the Fifth Dalai Lama Ngawang Lobsang Gyatso (d. 1682) established his government with the help of Mongolian warlord Gushri Khan in 1642, Lhasa was selected as the capital city. Peter Schwieger explains that after battling the central / western Tibetan king of Tsang and the Karma Kagyü Buddhist school he supported, the Geluk school of Tibetan Buddhism—of which the Dalai Lama is a principal figure—became rulers of the central Tibetan region. Schwieger notes that in the period leading up to this war, "the Gelukpa had become great estate owners in [the central Tibetan region of] Ü and therefore controlled much of the regional resources" and the Geluk order had significant means to expand their sphere of power throughout Tibet.[46] This was evidenced by the Fifth Dalai Lama's support for a variety of Buddhist institutions, including those of the Nyingma school; the large Dorjé Drak monastery was founded in 1632 at the outskirts of Lhasa under the patronage of the Geluk government in an effort to support a specific strand of Nyingma intellectual development within an internal dispute of power.[47]

While the Dalai Lama's government eventually became isolated from Mongol military support and transformed at least nominally into a Qing protectorate in the early eighteenth century,[48] the Geluk school retained significant control of the region through the early twentieth century. The Qing government—and in particular the Qianlong Emperor—

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[45] Blondeau and Gyatso, 21.
[46] Peter Schwieger, *The Dalai Lama and the Emperor of China: A Political History of the Tibetan Institution of Reincarnation,* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 37.
[47] Dalton, *The Gathering of Intentions,* 88-96.
[48] Yingcong Dai, *The Sichuan Frontier and Tibet: Imperial Strategy in the Early Qing,* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009), 81-83.

also supported the Geluk School by developing a patron-priest relationship with the central Tibetan government in Lhasa and receiving Geluk emissaries in Beijing.[49] These monastic emissaries bestowed upon the Qianlong Emperor numerous initiations and, in return, he made the Yonghe Palace a full Tibetan Buddhist temple of the Geluk school in 1744 while also sponsoring a complete publication of the Tibetan Buddhist canon.[50] Through government support from both the central Tibetan and Qing government, the Geluk school solidified their extensive wealth and monastic holdings to dominate the religious scene of the central Tibetan region.

As the Geluk school rose to prominence and central Tibetan power consolidated, Eastern Tibet—the regions known as Kham and Amdo in Tibetan,[51] roughly contemporary Sichuan and Qinghai respectively—enjoyed a fair degree of independent cultural development. Nestled between the Lhasa government to the west and the Chinese government to the east, eastern Tibetan kingdoms retained some independence as a frontier region for both that "had never been convincingly annexed to any empire."[52] In the war that brought the Geluk school to power—fought against a king supporting the Karma Kagyü school and backed by its own Mongol warlord—Kham gained non-Geluk refugees fleeing retaliation in the face of their loss. These individuals established extensive and impressive monastic institutions that invigorated eastern Tibetan religious life. In particular, the eastern Tibetan kingdom of Dergé became an important patron for both

[49] Elisabeth Benard, "The Qianlong Emperor and Tibetan Buddhism," *New Qing Imperial History: The Making of Inner Asian Empire at Qing Chengde,* eds. James Millward, Ruth W. Dunnell, Mark C. Elliott, and Philippe Forêt, (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), 123-135.
[50] Van Schaik, *Tibet: A History,* 150.
[51] See Appendix 1 for a map.
[52] Van Schaik, *Tibet: A History,* 160.

religious publishing and practice.[53] Situated between two governments supporting the Geluk school as the appropriate form of Tibetan Buddhist practice, the Dergé kingdom and surrounding eastern Tibetan principalities were unique for patronizing all Buddhist sects—Sarma, Nyingma, and the nominally non-Buddhist Bön. It should be noted, however, that the Geluk order had few monasteries in the region and therefore often did not receive equivalent levels of support.[54]

In the midst of this cultural flourishing, the region suffered an invasion led by a local warlord from the southwestern kingdom of Nyarong. The Chinese army was unable to defend the Sichuan region and central Tibetan powers saw an opportunity to increase their influence in and control of the region. The central Tibetan army ostensibly entered Dergé with the intent to push out the conquering warlord, but it eventually established an office of the central Tibetan government to provide oversight for the region. In retaliation for the "uprising," this office imposed harsh punishments on the lamas and monasteries believed to have supported the marauding chieftain—especially those belonging to the Nyingma school.[55] Continuing a pattern established during the Geluk school's rise to power in central Tibet in the seventeenth century,[56] several non-Geluk monasteries in eastern Tibet were reportedly converted to the Geluk school.[57] In contrast to the prior period of relative

[53] Benjamin Nourse, "Canons in Context: A History of the Tibetan Buddhist Canon in the Eighteenth Century," (PhD diss., University of Virginia, 2014).
[54] Van Schaik, *Tibet: A History,* 164.
[55] Van Schaik, *Tibet: A History,* 168-169; Lauran Hartley. "The Kingdom of Dergé." *The Tibetan History Reader,* eds. Kurtis R. Schaeffer and Gray Tuttle, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 525-548;
[56] Samten Karmay, "Bön in Central and East Tibet," *The Tibetan History Reader,* eds. Kurtis R. Schaeffer and Gray Tuttle, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 314-332.
[57] Alexander Gardner, "Jamgon Kongtrul Lodro Taye," *Treasury of Lives,* September 2015. Accessed on January 1, 2017. <https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Jamgon-Kongtrul/TBRC_p264>. It should be noted that monastery conversion was used significantly less in this period than in the seventeenth-century and may have only been used as a nebulous threat than an actual practice.

independence where a variety of Buddhist schools were supported, late nineteenth-century eastern Tibet experienced the growing hegemonic influence of the central Tibetan Geluk order attempting to solidify control.

In this environment of rising Geluk influence, a group of eastern Tibetan thinkers began using a discourse of nonsectarian orientation to preserve texts, practices, and lineages they believed to be in danger of disappearing and through that challenge Geluk hegemony. Called the Non-Sectarian (Rimé) movement by western scholars—though there is little evidence that participants conceptualized themselves as a discrete movement[58]—non-Geluk Buddhist thinkers in eastern Tibet began encouraging students to study a wide array and variety of Buddhist texts, regardless of the religious school to which they belonged. Sam van Schaik notes that the discourse of non-sectarianism was not necessarily new for the Tibetan religious sphere:

> This ideal of nonsectarainism—of not just tolerance, but a genuine appreciation and support for all schools of Tibetan Buddhism and Bon—was not unique to [the eastern Tibetan kingdom of] Dergé. In Tibet's 'golden age' of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, nonsectarianism was the norm throughout Tibet, and figures such as Longchenpa and [founder of the Geluk school] Tsongkhapa expected to study with teachers from different schools.[59]

In his study of the ordination practices of Situ Panchen in eastern Tibet, Jann Ronis also emphasizes the historical precedents for the Non-Sectarian thinking that arose in late nineteenth-century eastern Tibet.[60]

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[58] Alexander Gardner, "The Twenty-Five Great Sites of Khams: Religious Geography, Revelation, and Nonsectarianism in Nineteenth-Century Eastern Tibet." (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2006)
[59] Van Schaik, *Tibet: A History,* 161.
[60] Jann Michael Ronis, "The Prolific Preceptor: Si tu Pan chen's Career as Ordination Master in Khams and Its Effects on Sectarian Relations in Sde dge," *Journal of the International Association of Tibetan Studies* 7 (2013): 49-85.

While helping to preserve these teachings which now lacked significant government or institutional patronage, this effort also challenged growing Geluk hegemony in eastern Tibet through largely excluding Geluk texts as an object of study. In fact, Schaik argues that it was the very wars that brought the Geluk sect and the Dalai Lamas to power—in which the Kagyü and Geluk Schools of Buddhism fought against each other with rival Mongol backers—that was responsible for the condition of mistrust and suspicion between Tibetan Buddhist sects. However, as noted before, the Fifth Dalai Lama had been a generous patron for at least certain elements of the Nyingma school in the seventeenth century. Perhaps out of a developing suspicion, the Geluk school eventually encouraged a deeply scholastic education focused on Geluk commentaries that "consisted largely of a narrow and linear understanding of Buddhism through a scholastic pursuit that is practically inept."[61] In contrast to the Geluk order's scholastic focus,[62] Non-sectarian leaders Jamgön Kongtrul (d.1899) and Jamyang Khyentsé Wangpo (d.1892)—both important figures in Dergé who had witnessed the invasions of first the Nyarong warlord and then the central Tibetan army—encouraged students to "see all the teachings as without contradiction, and consider all the scriptures as instructions."[63] They even became involved with the production of compilations of authoritative new anthologies for each non-Geluk school. Through this, both men believed that those non-Geluk Buddhist practices that they

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[61] Karma Phuntsho, *Mipham's Dialectics and the Debates on Emptiness: To Be, Not to Be, or Neither,* (New York: Routledge Publishing, 2010), 51.

[62] Georges Dreyfus has noted that this strict scholastic focus has been exaggerated. Georges Dreyfus, "Where do Commentarial Schools Come From? Reflections on the History of Tibetan Scholasticism," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 28.2 (2005): 273-297.

[63] Jamgön Kongtrul ('Jam mgon kong sprul), *Biography of Jamyang Khyentsé Wangpo,* translated and cited in Ringu Tulku, *The Ri-me Philosophy of Jamgön Kongtrul the Great: A Study of the Buddhist Lineages of Tibet,* ed. Ann Helm, (Boston: Shambala 2009), 3.

perceived as threatened by the oppressive Geluk influence entering their region from central Tibet could be preserved and eastern Tibetan religious autonomy maintained.

Due perhaps to the Nyingma affiliations of many of its major thinkers, the Non-Sectarian movement particularly promoted the *Seminal Heart of Great Expanse* as an important teaching. In fact, such Nyingma traditions were so celebrated that the Non-Sectarian period of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries has sometimes been called the "Nyingma Renaissance."[64] Emphasizing that the work of Non-Sectarian leaders was building on earlier work to standardize Nyingma education, Jacob Dalton notes that the period represented an effort to consolidate Nyingma scholastics and create a more institutionalized Nyingma school.[65] While noting that Jikmé Lingpa was not a paragon of Non-Sectarian values—having only Nyingma teachers himself—Sam van Schaik explains that "the *Longchen Nyingtig [Seminal Heart of Great Expanse]* and the *Yönten Dzö [Treasury of Precious Qualities]* became very popular in the nineteenth century."[66] Contributing to this popularity was the fact that one of the major Non-Sectarian thinkers, Jamyang Khyentsé Wangpo was identified as a re-incarnation of Jikmé Lingpa himself.[67]

Because the *Seminal Heart of Great Expanse* presented itself as a complete, graduated program for attaining realization, it included a wide variety of practices shared with other traditions as steps towards advanced practices, particularly ethical practices like the Preliminary Meditations. Non-Sectarian thinkers believed that these ethical practices demonstrated the significant shared scriptural and practical ground between all

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[64] Karma Phuntsho, 50.
[65] Dalton, *The Gathering of Intentions,* 116-117.
[66] van Schaik, *Approaching the Great Perfection,* 28.
[67] Alexander Gardner, "Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo," *Treasury of Lives,* February 2010. Accessed on January 2, 2017. < http://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Jamyang-Khyentse-Wangpo/4291>

Buddhist sects, but especially the non-Geluk sects (Nyingma, Bön, Kagyü, and Sakya). The fact that Great Perfection practices—in contradistinction to most tantras—utilized an explicitly non-martial aesthetic enhanced such feelings and found expression in their celebration of Great Perfection practitioners, most notably the wandering poet-saint Shabkar (d.1851).[68] The *Seminal Heart of Great Expanse* and the Great Perfection practices it espoused were heavily promoted by Non-Sectarian thinkers in eastern Tibet as part of their larger response to Geluk hegemony.

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw eastern Tibetan Buddhist thinkers centered in the Khampa kingdom of Dergé calling for non-sectarian Buddhist practice in an effort to create a cultural counterweight to growing Geluk and central Tibetan power based in Lhasa. The Non-Sectarian movement's exclusion of the Geluk sect's Buddhist practices from their nominally "non-Sectarian" philosophy will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3, but for now it is important to understand that this was simultaneously an attempt to transform religious thought, regional identity, and spiritual practice, while also challenging a perceived hegemonic religious ideology. As noted in the Introduction, the Gesar epic tradition out of which the *Great Perfecting of Hell* arises was centered in the eastern Tibetan areas of Kham and Amdo. Perhaps unsurprisingly, a number of Non-Sectarian thinkers actively utilized the literary image of King Gesar and presented their own versions of the epic hero. In an effort to continue providing context for discussing this final episode of the epic tradition, the next section will examine early

[68] Rachel Pang, "Dissipating Boundaries: The 'Life,' Song-Poems, and Non-Sectarian Paradigm of Shabkar Tsokdruk Rangdrol (1781-1851)," (PhD diss., University of Virginia, 2011), 248-250.

buddhicized forms of King Gesar as well as these Gesar figures contemporaneous to, but outside of, the *Great Perfecting of Hell*.

Other Gesars in the Non-Sectarian Movement

While the oral nature of the earliest forms of the Gesar epic make it difficult to determine anything with certainty, many scholars assume that Tibet's epic warrior-king has experienced a slow buddhicization from a wild folk hero to tantric figure. The earliest potential literary reference to King Gesar can be found in a fourteenth-century treasure text cycle entitled the *Five Chronicles* that give accounts of the great deeds of royal figures and tribal chieftains, though here he is little more than a name of an ancient and exemplary king.[69] A more fleshed out King Gesar can be found in the sixteenth-century legend cycle of the *Horned Volume of the Lang (Lang Poti Séru)*.[70] Glorifying the Lang dynasty and the ruling monastic principality of the Pakmodru—particularly the fourteenth-century figure Changchub Gyaltsen (d. 1364)—the text contains a brief historical description of a tenth-century King Gesar of Ling and his court of heroes in the East. Like the *Five Chronicles* before it, the King Gesar of the *Horned Volume of the Lang* is not a supernatural hero, but rather entirely a historical figure—albeit one both excellent and unexcelled.

Having been considered a historical figure validating contemporary rulers, King Gesar becomes reconceptualized in literature as a Buddhist religious figure beginning in the eighteenth-century. While a 1242 Bön ritual text mentions "the hero *g.yang* [blessing

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[69] O rgyan gling pa, *bka' thang sde lnga,* (New Delhi: Interntional Academy of Indian Culture, 1982). For further detail on this text, please see Anne Marie, Blondeu, "Le Lha 'Dre bKa' Thang," *Etudes Tibétaines dédiées à la Mémoire de Marcelle Lalou,* (Paris: A Maisonneuve, 1971), 29-126.

[70] Rlangs a myes byang chub 'dre khol, *lha rigs rlangs kyi rnam thar* or *rlangs po ti bse ru,* (New Delhi: T, Tsepal Taikhang, 1974).

deity] of the Khrom ge-sar king," John Belleza attributes it to the possible Turkish / Roman origin of the word "Gesar" discussed in the Introduction and Tibet's possible ancient links with the region.[71] Beyond this brief mention, however, the first clear textual sign of Gesar's entry into the Buddhist conceptual world is his promotion to deity found in Lelung Jedrung's (d. 1740) 1729 *The Chapter of the Tale of the Pure Vision of King Gesar,* which he received as a "pure vision" and describes King Gesar's theogony.[72] The story told in this text—which Lelung claims was related to him by a visionary figure in attendance at Gesar's marriage to the goddess Dorjé Gyu Dronma[73]—features King Gesar's birth as the youngest of fifteen children to two gods. Cameron Bailey notes that this union was proscribed by a Bön sage in the text itself, potentially linking the epic back to the Bön religious tradition discussed previously.[74]

Beyond these literary manifestations, it is difficult to determine exactly the role of King Gesar in the Buddhist rituals of the pre-Non-Sectarian period. While many scholars have noted the religious tenor of the traditional Gesar bards' recitations[75]—including ita reliance on ritualized prayers that mimic more traditional Buddhist rituals and the bards' possession by divine figures associated with the epic—without recordings of seventeenth and eighteenth-century recitations, it is impossible to make claims about the content of

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[71] John Vincent Belleza, *Spirit-Mediums, Sacred Mountains and Related Bon Textual Tradition in Upper Tibet: Calling Down the Gods,* (Leiden: Brill Publishing, 2005), 460. Full Tibetan text can be found at Bru ston rgyal-ba g.yung drung, *bon po'i gzungs 'dus,* (Dolanji: Tibetan Bonpo Monastic Centre, 1974).
[72] Sle lung rje drung bzhad pa'i rdo rje, *Dag snang ge sar gyi gtam rgyud le'u.* sle lung gsung 'bum, vol. 12. (Leh: T. sonam & d.l. Tashigang: 1983-1985). Many thanks to both Cameron Bailey and George FitzHerbert for bringing this text to my attention.
[73] In the *Great Perfecting of Hell,* (Lhamo) Gyu Dronma is not Gesar's wife, but rather his half-cousin by way of Uncle Cipon.
[74] Cameron Bailey, "A Tibetan Protector Deity Theogony: An Eighteenth Century 'Explicit' Buddhist Pantheon and Some of its Political Aspects," *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines* 37 (2016): 13-28. 16.
[75] R. A. Stein, *Recherches sur L'Épopée et le Barde au Tibet,* 318-342. ; Mirelle Helffer, *Les Chants dans l'epopee Tibetaine de Ge-sar d'apres le Livre de la Course de Cheval,* (Paris and Geneva: Librarie Droz, 1977), 543.; Geoffrey Samuel, "Ge-sar of gLing," 165-191.

their performance. Arguing that Gesar bards necessarily have a relationship to "shamans inspired by and directly connected with the deities of the epic"[76] or that "Gesar was considered to be a divine being from the beginning,"[77] as Gregory Forgues does, is simultaneously an imprecise use of second-order categories like "shaman" and "divine being" and a largely unwarranted projection into the past of our contemporary understandings of the epic today.

Outside of Tibet, however, King Gesar seems to have had a clear elevated religious position early on, potentially reflecting a previously unrecorded religious role in Tibet. Scholar of Mongolian religion Walther Heissig notes that certain seventeenth-century Mongolian manuscripts present Gesar as a deity providing protection from diseases and inspiring purifactory offering rituals.[78] The Qing dynasty had also deified King Gesar through identifying him with Guanyu / Guandi, a Chinese war deity based on a legendary general serving Liu Bei, the claimant to the Han imperial throne and ruler of Shu in the Three Kingdoms period of Chinese history (220-280 CE). Following an official policy that aimed to universalize Chinese religion and strengthen ties between the central imperial seat and the periphery colonies, Gesar was identified as the equivalent of Guanyu in the seventeenth or eighteenth century[79] and temples were built in Chinese borderlands to the

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[76] Gregory Forgues. "Materials for the Study of Gesar Practices." (MA Thesis, Universität Wien, 2011), 278-281.
[77] Forgues, 281.
[78] Walther Heissig, "Gesar Khan als Heilsgottheit," *Proceedings of the Csoma de Körös Memorial Symposium,* ed. Louis Ligeti, (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1978), 125-152.
[79] Stein puts as early as 1600, but Patrick Taveirne and Patricia Ann Berger place it significantly later, into the eighteenth or even early nineteenth-centuries. Patrick Taveirne, *Han-Mongol Encounters and Missionary Endeavors: A History of Scheut in Ordos (Hetao) 1874-1911,* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2004), 89; Patricia Ann Berger, *Empire of Emptiness: Buddhist Art and Political Authority in Qing China,* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2003), 118-119.

figure.[80] Kornman notes that the Kangxi Emperor (d. 1722)—who officially annexed Tibet into the Qing empire—worked to explicitly associate the Gesar epic with *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms (Sanguo yanyi)* in a Mongol translation he sponsored.[81] While the evidence for King Gesar's participation in Buddhist rituals inside Tibet is ultimately unclear, Mongolian and Chinese data suggests that King Gesar had some religious role in the region prior to the Non-Sectarian movement's composition of Gesar rituals, though the exact boundaries of this are uncertain.

The Non-Sectarian period of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—the context surrounding the *Great Perfecting of Hell*—witnessed a significant development of Gesar-related rituals and religious literature from important eastern Tibetan Buddhist thinkers. Gregory Forgues—whose Master's thesis on the topic remains the primary secondary resource on the Gesar rituals of the Non-Sectarian period—calls the authors of contemporary Gesar rituals a veritable "'Who's Who' of the Khams 19th century *ris med* [Non-Sectarian] movement."[82] Two of the authors—Jamyang Khyentsé Wangpo and Ju Mipham Gyatso (d.1912)—even traced their family lineage to what was purportedly the clan of King Gesar, the Mukpo. Beginning in the mid-1850s and growing exponentially through the end of the nineteenth-century, the most important Non-Sectarian thinkers composed hundreds of rituals either in praise of or propitiating King Gesar.[83] Forgues notes that the earliest texts are primarily purificatory rituals and offering rituals (*gsang*

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[80] R. A. Stein, "Introduction to the Gesar Epic," *The Epic of Gesar, Volume 1,* (Thimphu, Bhutan: Druk Sherig Press, 1979), 23-42.

[81] Robin Kornman, "The Influence of the Epic of King Gesar of Ling on Chögyam Trungpa," 350.

[82] Forgues, 282.

[83] Authors of rituals include Mdo mkhyen brtse ye shes rdo rje (d.1859); Khams sprul lnga pa (d.1847); 'Jam mgon kong sprul (d.1899); Mkhyen brtse'i dbang po (d.1892); Mchog gyur gling pa (d.1870); Mi Pham rnam rgyal (d.1912)

mchod and *gsol mchod,* respectively) common to local deities of the land and similar to the eighteenth-century rituals found in Mongolia.[84] Later texts composed by Non-Sectarian thinkers, however, featured rituals celebrating Gesar as a tutelary deity (*sgrub thabs, sādhana*) or rituals of empowerment (*don 'grub*), reframing King Gesar as a powerful Buddhist deity in his own right. Forgues explains that with these rituals "the epic hero is no longer merely a protector that one propitiates with offerings but also a yidam [personal tutelary deity] in his own right whose *sādhana* [tantric liturgy] one can practice to attain awakening."[85] Mipham Gyatso claimed to have had visionary experiences of the warrior king and as a result elevated Gesar to a particularly heralded position as not only "his private protector (*srung ma*), or *dgra lha* as he usually referred to him, but also introduced the practice of worshipping Gesar as a guru and chosen deity (yidam)."[86] Forgues suggests that ultimately the cause of the Non-Sectarian period's outpouring of Gesar rituals was a certain nostalgia for the Tibetan empire—as represented by the divine King Gesar—and the potential stabilizing role of religio-magic power in the tumultuous era surrounding the Dergé kingdom's nineteenth-century collapse.[87]

Perhaps the most well-known intersection of King Gesar and the Non-Sectarian thinkers, however, is the "Mipham Gesar," also known as the "Lingtshang Gesar." The eastern Tibetan kingdom of Lingtshang—to the north west of Dergé—has a lengthy history supporting the Gesar epic, so much so that both R.A. Stein and Gesa Uray, link the epic's

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[84] Forgues, 285.
[85] Forgues, 286.
[86] Karma Phuntsho, "'Ju Mi Pham rNam rgyal rGya mtsho: His Position in the Tibetan Religious Hierarchy and a Synoptic Survey of his Contributions," *The Pandita and the Siddha: Tibetan Studies in Honour of E. Gene Smith,* ed. Ramon N. Prats, (Dharamsala: Amye Machen Institute, 2007), 196.
[87] Forgues, 290-305.

growth and rise to popularity with the rising of the Khampa kingdom.[88] While Lingtshang was eventually overshadowed by the influence of the Dergé kingdom after its heyday in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries,[89] it remained an important locale for Gesar activity. The kings of Lingtshang themselves traced their lineage back to the half-brother of King Gesar, Gyatsha, through his son Drala.[90] Composed by the Abbot of Lingtshang monastery—Gyurmé Thubten Jamyang Drakpa, (d.1945)—the Lingtshang Gesar relates the first three episodes of the Gesar epic[91] with particular focus on the details surrounding Gesar's birth.[92] Rolf Stein called this text the "Lamaist Version of Ling" and claims the work is in reality part of a full rendition of the epic, but no further episodes have since come to light.[93] Following the convention of Robin Kornman,[94] the text has been called the "Mipham Gesar" due to the possible editorial role played by Gyurmé Thubten's teacher, Mipham Gyatso. The Lingtshang Gesar also has claims to being uniquely accurate as Gyurmé Thubten describes in the colophon of the work visionary experiences in which the figures from the epic encourage him, provide new information, and correct his work.[95]

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[88] R. A. Stein. *Recherches sur l'épopée et le barde au Tibet.;* Géza Uray, "Vom römischen Kaiser bis zum König Ge-sar," *Fragen der Mongolischen Heldendichtung, Teil III,* ed. Walther Heissig. (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz Verlag, 1985): 530-548.
[89] Geoffrey Samuel, "Ge-sar of gLing,"176.
[90] R. A. Stein, "Introduction," 23-42.; Dmu dge bsam rten, "Ge sar rgyal po dang ge sar rgyal po'i sgrung yig skor rags tsam gleng ba," *Ge sar sgrung gi dpyad rtsom kun bsdus,* (Lanzhou: Gansu Minorities Publishing House, 2004), 5.
[91] (1) Gesar's divine birth among first gods, then humans; (2) Gesar's childhood and exile; (3) Gesar's winning of the horse race, marriage to Drukmo, and coronation as King of Ling.
[92] A translation has recently been published: 'Gyur med thub bstan 'jam dbyangs grags pa, *The Epic of King Gesar of Ling: Gesar's Magical Birth, Early Years, and Coronation as King,* trans. Robin Kornman, Lama Chonam, and Sangye Khandro, (Boston: Shamabala Publishing, 2013).
[93] Stein, *L'épopée tibétaine*.
[94] Robin Kornman. "A Comparative Study of Buddhist Versions of the Epic of Gesar of Ling (volumes I and II)." (PhD diss., Princeton University, 1995)
[95] R. A. Stein, *L'épopée tibétaine de Gesar dans sa version lamaïque de Ling.* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1956).

Like the later rituals composed by the Non-Sectarian thinkers, the Lingtshang Gesar presents a thoroughly divinized, fully buddhicized King Gesar. Gesar descends to earth specifically to preserve the Buddhist teachings and through that establish an exemplary kingdom. He is accompanied by a whole host of deities who take the form of his companions so that the entire court of King Gesar is divine. Robin Kornman—privileging Mipham's role in the work's composition—writes that "Mipham made his edition of the Gesar epic [the Lingtshang Gesar] a hybrid of Buddhist and local ideas…Mipham's edition of the epic provides a systematic justification for the syncretic form of the mandala of deities that appear in the [Mipham-composed] lhasang [purifcatory ritual]."[96] Solomon George FitzHerbert argues that this divine focus of the Lingtshang Gesar is a reflection of its turbulent historical milieu; he notes that the birth section demonstrates a "marked concern for social order and socio-historical contextualization which distinguishes it from other versions of the Gesar birth-narrative."[97] Linking to the larger considerations of the Non-Sectarian movement to provide a cultural counterweight to Geluk hegemony and handle the political turmoil of nineteenth-century Kham, FitzHerbert also argues that "with its exhortations to the people of eastern Tibet to unite, it [the Lingtshang Gesar] may also be read as a charter for an eastern Tibetan political and cultural identity..."[98] The Lingtshang Gesar produced during the period of the Non-Sectarian movement built on the prevalent rituals being composed at the time to further promote the King Gesar as a fully-divinized Buddhist figure representing a celestial order in a period of disunity and confusion.

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[96] Kornman, "The Influence of the Epic of King Gesar of Ling on Chögyam Trungpa," 365-366.
[97] Solomon George FitzHerbert, "The Birth of Gesar: Narrative Diversity and Social Resonance in the Tibetan Epic Tradition," (PhD diss., Oxford University, 2007), 188.
[98] FitzHerbert, "The Birth of Gesar," 188.

Conclusions

Written at the end of the nineteenth or beginning of the twentieth century, the *Great Perfecting of Hell* enters directly into a rich environment of both ritual and narrative Gesar production. The *Perfecting of Hell's* environment also reflects an active desire to promote Great Perfection teachings and ethical Buddhist practices—particularly those found in the *Seminal Heart of Great Expanse*. While this chapter presented a streamlined—and perhaps slightly chaotic—historical narrative based largely on secondary sources, it has provided important context to understand the social, religious, and political environment surrounding the *Perfecting of Hell.* In the following chapters, we will consider how this history not only influenced the *Perfecting of Hell,* but also how the final episode of the Gesar epic actively participated in and enthusiastically contributed to these historical and religious discussions happening around it. The historical moments discussed in this chapter will be reviewed again throughout this dissertation as I examine differing elements of the *Great Perfecting of Hell* and their placement within the historical context surrounding the epic. Specifically, the next chapter takes a closer look at the *Seminal Heart of Great Expanse's* Preliminary Meditations and how the *Perfecting of Hell* imitates *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* in an effort to better form ethical Buddhist agents.

Of Ngöndro and *Nyeling:* Karmic Resentment and Compassionate Resolution through Narrative

> The story—from *Rumpelstiltskin* to *War and Peace*—is one of the basic tools invented by the human mind for the purpose of gaining understanding. There have been great societies that did not use the wheel, but there have been no societies that did not tell stories.
>
> —Ursula K. LeGuin

The *Great Perfecting of Hell* is at its essence a narrative about ethics. While King Gesar's court, the tortures of hell, and celebrated heroic deaths provide the context, it is the discussion of ethical action and its relationship to Buddhist practice that stands at the core of the text. In contrast to tantric interpretations—which will be discussed in the next chapter—the ethics of the *Perfecting of Hell* are primarily focused on traditional interpretations of Buddhist morality, defined as those moral actions associated with karmic repercussions and rewards. This chapter examines in detail the ethical instruction found in the *Perfecting of Hell* and its relationship to *Seminal Heart of Great Expanse's* Preliminary Meditations (Ngöndro). Specifically, it demonstrates how the first four chapters of the popular *Seminal Heart of Great Expanse* Preliminary Meditations commentary *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* influenced and provided inspiration for the *Perfecting of Hell*—primarily through explicit echoing in the expansive ethical songs of Gesar's tenure as Buddhist teacher, as well as prioritizing karma as an ethical principle throughout Gesar's encounter with King Yama. To consider the advantages for Buddhist practice of creating a narrativized companion to an already popular Preliminary Meditations text, this chapter uses Martha Nussbaum's work on narrative as the teacher of emotions to argue for narrative literature's unique and overlooked role in developing Buddhists as ethical agents.

Placing the karmically-focused ethical directives of the early chapters of *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* into the larger context of a narrative focuses readers' attention on the horrible effects of karma in the netherworld through witnessing the journey in King Gesar's eyes. King Gesar loudly expresses institutionally-inappropriate emotions in response to hell's horrors, and his emotional reactions of resentment and anger at the karmic system provide a model for readers themselves to feel those feelings. Such emotions that exist outside the bounds of appropriate Buddhist practice are difficult to feel in the context of *The Words of My Perfect Teacher,* though the Preliminary Meditations text utilizes significant emotional experiences to make its point. The narrative, however, also provides the means to resolve these feelings without openly challenging the Buddhist tradition through commanding an appreciation of compassion based on the equivalency of self and other.

Defining Songs and Ethics in the *Perfecting of Hell*

The vast majority of the *Perfecting of Hell's* Buddhist ethical instruction is found in the text's songs; despite being a literary text, these songs closely reflect the norms and patterns of the larger, primarily oral Gesar tradition. The pattern of narration in the *Perfecting of Hell* mimics the prosimetric form of the oral iterations of the Gesar epic, where bards quickly recite short prose sections, before singing expansive songs with character-specific melodies.[1] While the melodies are necessarily absent in the *Perfecting of Hell,*[2] the singer of each song generally identifies him or herself, the place where the song is taking

[1] Geoffrey Samuels, "Music and Shamanic Power in the Gesar Epic," *Metaphor: a Musical Dimension,* ed. Jaime Croy Kassler, (Richmond: Curzan Press, 2002).
[2] It should be noted, however, that the brief nonsense syllable bards use to establish the melody remain in the text.

place, and the title or topic of the song, as well as offering a short prayer to their personal deity. Thubten Phuntshok and Mireille Helffer emphasize the unity this opening section represents within the rest of the Gesar tradition.[3] In fact, Yang Enhong has connected this poetic pattern with a variety of other Tibetan literature, identifying a text from the Dunhuang cave detailing the biographies of Tibetan kings that shares this particular pattern.[4] However, Karma Lhamo—a scholar working for the Yushu Office of Cultural Preservation—and contemporary Gesar bards contradict these assertions, explaining that singers' styles are dramatically inconsistent.[5] After this brief introductory section, the length of the *Perfecting of Hell's* songs varies considerably—most extend for roughly three to four pages, but some are as short as one page or as long as fifteen. These songs are embedded within the larger textual narrative of the *Perfecting of Hell* and do not travel independently of the text. This marks the songs especially unlike the song and poetry collections of Tibetan religious masters. Like oral versions of the epic that privilege an on-the-spot reconstruction of the song as a product of the Gesar bard's unique, context-specific revelatory experience,[6] therefore, the *Perfecting of Hell's* songs exist only in the matrix of the larger narrative surrounding it.

The *Perfecting of Hell's* use of the oral tradition as a model for its composition is also evident in the internal classification of the *Perfecting of Hell's* songs. Despite their explicitly

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[3] Thub bstan phun tshok (Professor at Southwest University for Nationalities), private correspondence. Chengdu, China. August 5th, 2015; Mirelle Helffer, *Les Chants dans l'epopee Tibetaine de Ge-sar d'apres le Livre de la Course de Cheval,* 400.

[4] Yang Enhong, "On the Study of the Narrative structure of Tibetan Epic: A Record of King Gesar," *Oral Tradition* 16.2 (2001): 294-316, 300-301. Her Dunhuang example can be found at Wang Yinhuan and He Tianhui, *Birth at Hua Gling Canto (Hualing Dansheng Zhibu),* (Lanzhou: Gansu Nationalities Publishing House, 1985), 109. Her regal biography example can be found at Wang Yao and Chen Jian, *The Tubo Historiographies from Dunhuang Grotto (Dun Huang Ben Tu Bo Li Shi Wen Shu),* (Beijing: Nationalities Publishing House, 1980), 79.

[5] Dkar ma lha mo (Scholar at Yushu Office of Cultural Preservation), Personal Interview; Tshe ring tshong rgyag and 'Gyur med rab rten (Gesar bards in Yushu), Personal Interview.

[6] Albert Lord, *The Singer of Tales,* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960).

religious content, the text's give preference to terminology used in more secularized contexts. Songs are a common feature of Tibetan spiritual life and are often used in religious narratives to express an individual's attainment. Roger Jackson provides a typology of the three Tibetan words most commonly associated with "song" or other oral instruction:

> *Glu,* which remains in Tibetan as a general term for "song," is the earliest, most indigenous, most secular and most orally and musically oriented of the genres. *mGur,* which originally was either a synonym or subdivision of *glu,* came eventually to denote a more Buddhistic type of "song," and might be either Tibetan or Indian in its inspiration, oral or written in its style. *sNyan ngag,* "speech [agreeable] to the ear," is an ornate, written Indian-inspired type of Buddhist (and occasionally secular) poetry that did not appear until the thirteenth century, well after the two genres.[7]

Victoria Sujata builds on this typology in her study of Kalden Gyatso (d. 1677), reiterating that "gur" are songs that deal with the general topic of Buddhist teachings.[8] The *Perfecting of Hell* reflects this narrative complexity. While the majority of songs concern teaching traditionally Buddhist ethical and moral action—implicitly or explicitly—or Great Perfection philosophy, they are almost all categorized within the text as "lu." Only a small handful of songs are classified as "gur," or more commonly "gur lu," with seemingly no clear pattern as to their identification. This classification may indicate a broader use of the word "lu" than Jackson and Sujata employ, but it also reflects the *Perfecting of Hell's* roots and continued situation in the Gesar epic tradition existing outside the norms of Buddhist institutions and their accompanying literary conventions. The majority of the *Perfecting of*

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[7] Roger Jackson, "'Poetry' in Tibet: *gLu, mGur, sNyan ngag* and 'Songs of Experience'." *Tibetan Literature: Studies in Genre,* eds. Jose Ignacio Cabezon and Roger Jackson, (Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 1996), 368-392. 369-370.
[8] Victoria Sujata, *Tibetan Songs of Realization: Echoes from a seventeenth-Century Scholar and Siddha in Amdo.* (Leiden: Brill Publishing, 2004), 85-87.

Hell's ethical instruction arises within the text's songs, which classify themselves as lu, distinct from other Tibetan songs of religious instruction.

Having elaborated the context for the category of "songs" in the *Perfecting of Hell*, it is important to define "ethics." Jay Garfield and William Edelglass have noted the incredible diversity of Buddhist ethical thinking and its apparent similarity at times to western thought,[9] and significant scholarship has considered the detailed philosophies behind Buddhist ethical thinking. For the purposes of this dissertation, however, I am less interested in the doctrinal mechanics of Buddhist ethics and more interested in how ethical statements are used, who is saying them, and to whom they are directed. To determine what is an "ethical statement," I contend that the foundation of traditional, non-tantric ethics in Buddhist contexts is karma—either the karma of the past leading to a fortuitous human life, or the karma formed in the present and its effects on future rebirths. Karma itself is not an unproblematic category; Maria Heim has noted that the specific contours of the category of "karma" in early canonical sources have been largely overlooked, despite its central importance in Buddhist thought overall.[10] Suzanne Mrozik points to the relationality inherent in the idea of karma through noting the physical dimension of ethical development in Buddhism.[11] These concerns understanding "karma" as a discrete doctrinal and philosophical category, however, do not undermine karma's role as an overall effective litmus test for ethical statements within a specifically-delineated historical and textual context. While a more nuanced understanding of the concept is certainly needed,

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[9] Jay Garfield and William Edelglass, "Ethics," *Buddhist Philosophy,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 371-374.

[10] Maria Heim, *The Forerunner of All Things: Buddhaghosa on Mind, Intention, and Agency.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 2.

[11] Suzanne Mrozik, *Virtuous Bodies: The Physical Dimensions of Morality in Buddhist Ethics,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

karma ultimately remains a defining feature of traditional Buddhist morality. Within the *Perfecting of Hell* karma appears not only as statements of what one should or should not do, but also as dictation of specific ways one should orient oneself to the Dharma. I consider, therefore, exhortations to cherish the Dharma and declarations concerning the swiftness and uncertainty of death as additional ethical material because of their ultimate concern with karmic retribution and the danger of not taking full advantage of a human life.

Ethical Instruction in the *Perfecting of Hell*

Because ethical instruction pervades the entire *Perfecting of Hell*, reviewing it can easily turn into a complicated and overwhelming morass. I have organized the text's ethical instruction, therefore, into three categories of my own creation that reflect the larger themes of the text—the shortness of a human life and the resulting need for religious practice; the importance of curtailing violent action; and the centrality of karma as an effecting principle. While I leave out several examples of each category, these classifications represent the totality of the text's ethical instruction. I primarily use song selections to demonstrate the role these ethical themes play in the text; however, the *Perfecting of Hell's* prose often repeats and supports these assertions.

Shortness of a Human Life and Need for Religious Practice

The shortness of a human life is a theme emphasized continually throughout the *Perfecting of Hell.* The most important of the *Perfecting of Hell*'s songs of ethical instruction

is Song 2.1, which can be read in full in Appendix 2.[12] This song—the single longest in the text at 15 pages / 361 lines—occurs during King Gesar's public Great Perfection teachings and offers significant ethical advice for both ordained and lay practitioners. Having returned from his meeting with the great Tibetan Buddhist figure Padmasambhava newly initiated in Great Perfection teachings, Gesar commands all the peoples in his land to congregate. Padmasambhava appears in the sky and declares, "I have made King Gesar of Ling indivisible with all the buddhas and bodhisattvas,"[13] before Gesar emanates the appearance of a monk to sing Song 2.1. Surrounded by Mahayana scriptures on one side and ritual implements on the other, King Gesar offers a teaching that focuses on the importance of ethical action. King Gesar begins the song with exhortations specifically oriented around the fleeting nature of a human life and the resulting importance of religious practice, including preparing one's mind for religious teachings, the actions and inclinations which must be abandoned before engaging in practice, and the intention one must take with practice.[14] To offer an example from the song itself, he uses a variety of nature-related metaphors during this interlude to emphasize that death is sudden and without warning:

> In the ancestral burial ground of your family's home
> the generations buzz like bees [always changing and never resting].
> The causes of death are uncertain
> like the shooting star that appears without warning
> Death [is] everywhere,
> You will be the same very soon.
> Disease, evil spirits, and adverse circumstances [are] like a shooting star.

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[12] I use a system of my own devising to identify and label songs, as well as ensuring adequate translation between my English and the text's Tibetan. The first number represents the chapter number, the second represents the song's number within that chapter, and the third number represents the line within the song. The non-semantic sound repetitions at the beginning of the song used by bards to establish the melody and rhythm are not included in the line count.
[13] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po*. (Thimphu), 89.
[14] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po*. "Song 2.1," (Thimphu), 93-97.

> Wild men, poisonous snakes, carnivorous animals, etc.—
> the causes of death are many
> and the causes of life are few.
> Daily we are in the hand of the Lord of Death;
> there are no methods to overcome it.[15]

As will be discussed below, this particular arrangement of metaphors appears exactly in this order in the Preliminary Meditations commentary *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, demonstrating a link between the two corpora. The brevity of a human life as framed by the reality of ever-approaching death run throughout the *Perfecting of Hell's* ethical instruction.

Tied to the theme of the shortness and preciousness of a human life is the importance of religious practice. Within Song 2.1, King Gesar contrasts the life of a layperson with that of an ordained practitioner of Buddhism, focusing on each life's inherent suffering and freedom respectively:

> [In samsara,] the kind parents protect the children [with] compassion,
> when they grow up, they become enemies [and care not for this kindness]
> They even do not want to help the old [father and mother]
> They beat the father and reject the mother and sisters.
> Rather than making their own house, they kick the old ones out.
> This human body collects such suffering things.
> [One who has] a body of leisure and fortune, but practices like that
> will achieve only suffering.
> …
> For the yogi who wanders through the inner hermitage
> and sustains the actions of Father Emperor Buddha,
> he will get whatever food and clothes he needs.
> Having done meditations on impermanence,
> then he will attain a high level of pure vision.
> He won't have attachment to wealth.
> And goes to the Pure Land like the flight of the bird, leaving no trace.[16]

[15] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po.* "Song 2.1.107-113," (Thimphu), 97.
[16] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po.* "Song 2.1.220-260,"(Thimphu), 101-103.

In remembering the immediacy of death, King Gesar urges listeners towards taking on the vows of Buddhist practice rather than living the life a householder. This theme arises repeatedly in discussions of the brevity of a human life beyond Song 2.1. Before departing to meet Padmasambhava on the Copper-Colored Mountain at the beginning of the text, King Gesar offers his warriors a song explaining the importance of a human life and pursuing Buddhist practice:

> When you obtain the body of leisure and fortune,
> it is senseless if you attain [only your own] joy.
> Achieving that is certainly only suffering.
>
> The meaningful body does circles [of prayer wheels] with the hand.
> The meaningful speech recites the essence of the three bodies.
> The meaningful mind practices meditative stabilization.[17]

This theme is reiterated when the tantric deity Vajravārāhī (Dorje Phakmo) arrives to escort King Gesar to the Copper-Colored Mountain. Giving one the few ethical songs not sung by King Gesar himself, she repeats the importance of taking on and maintaining Buddhist vows during a human life:

> Do not become weak in sealing your dedication
> and aspiration for the ocean of suffering of the six realms.
> When you obtain leisure and fortune for one time,
> do not slip into consuming meaningless [activities].[18]

Emphasizing the shortness of a human life naturally leads to a focus on the importance of religious practice throughout the *Perfecting of Hell's* songs of ethical instruction.

An interesting component of this emphasis on religious practice is the *Perfecting of Hell's* seeming obsession with the possibility of false monks and false Buddhist teachers. One of the longest sections of Song 2.1 is a passage detailing various kinds of deceitful

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[17] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po.* "Song 1.4.102-107," (Thimphu), 23.
[18] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po.* "Song 1.8. 51-54," (Thimphu), 36-37.

religious teachers—lamas, nakpas, nuns, monks, etc.—and the hellish pitfalls that await them. Because Appendix 2 features Song 2.1 in its entirety, I will highlight only one section here in the interest of brevity—a concern for those monks who only pretend to be literate:

> For monks who read out scriptures,
> and pretend to read [but actually read falsely]
> as if you were licking filthy paper.
> The truth does not come out of your mouth and you deceive patrons.
> The patron's obstacles will become your cause of danger.
> In the end, you fall to the rock bottom of hell.[19]

The illiterate monk pretending to read is a common concern in Tibet, where the majority of individuals have historically been illiterate, and the *Perfecting of Hell* is far from the only text to mention it; however, it represents the text's larger concern over false religious teachers. This particular anxiety is repeated at the end of Chapter 4 when King Gesar finally rescues his mother. In her song describing how she fell to hell, she encourages ordained practitioners to not be deceitful by relating the potential retribution they face:

> Lamas, nakpas, and nuns,
> if you do not have a perfect Dharma [practice],
> if you desire black religious wealth,
> this life and the next will be ruined.
> If you sell religious favors,
> you have defiled your vows.
> There will be great hardship [for you] tomorrow and in the future! [20]

Part of emphasizing the importance of religious practice in light of a short human life involves delineating the need for valid and authentic practice. Such concerns over potentially deceitful practice of ordained individuals enhance the overall ethical instruction in the *Perfecting of Hell* by highlighting the danger of ignoring the need for religious practice or wasting one's life following a false teacher.

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[19] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po.* "Song 2.1. 283-288," (Thimphu), 103-104.
[20] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po.* "Song 4.9.61-64," (Thimphu), 224-225.

A Disavowal of Violent Action

Enhancing the ethical theme of the ephemerality of a human life and the importance of religious practice is the narrative's frequent repudiation of violent actions. Much of the popularity of the Gesar epic rides on King Gesar's incredible martial prowess. Not only does he always defeat the enemies he fights, but he also does so in dramatic fashion—tearing rainbows out of the sky on which his enemies and their families are attempting to escape, sleeping with the daughters and wives of his adversaries to gain access to inner chambers, and racing into battle with his sword in flames while he and his horse trade insults to rise each to anger. Geoff Barstow titles this aesthetic "heroic masculinity," and notes that it is a trait common in Tibetan descriptions—particularly those from eastern Tibet—of the ideal man. He defines it as the valorization of "the strength and skills of the warrior…the ideal figure is portrayed not as a monk or a wealthy businessman, but as a powerful warrior, willing and able to vanquish opponents through physical violence."[21] As a component of the larger Gesar epic tradition, the *Perfecting of Hell* highlights this heroic masculine ideal that valorizes bloodshed above all things. In Song 1.4, where King Gesar leaves religious advice for his warriors before departing to meet Padmasambhava, he maintains the importance of martial action:

> There are four meaningful actions:
> One, the act of exhibiting one's armor.
> Two, a multitude troops that perform the business of war.
> Three, the racing of a quick horse.
> Four, the edge of a sharp knife.[22]

[21] Geoff Barstow, *Food the Sinful Demons: Meat, Vegetarianism, and the Limits of Buddhism in Tibet.* (New York: Columbia University Press, forthcoming) 145.
[22] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po.* "Song 1.4.80-84," (Thimphu), 22.

This selection occurs mere moments after King Gesar describes the impermanence of a human life and the importance of religious action, demonstrating that the Gesar who appears early in the text sees no distinction between his violent actions and his religious ones.

In fact, the *Perfecting of Hell* initially seems to promote violence as part of its model of appropriate religious practice. King Gesar's original participation in the heroic masculine ideal is supported in many ways by the tantric models prevalent in Tibet that linked the martial prowess of a demon slayer to religious power. King Gesar himself connects his martial abilities explicitly to Buddhist practice early in his song battle with King Yama—a portion of which can be found in Appendix 4: "When I fight, I fight with the enemy of afflictive emotions; I uproot the blood line of the five toxic emotions."[23] He later reiterates, "I am the man who protected the divine Buddhist teachings….I am the man who tamed the malicious Hor demons."[24] Gesar as a tantric figure, albeit one who is a failure, will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter, but for now, it is important to understand that the early chapters of the *Perfecting of Hell* feature King Gesar situated within a discourse promoting aggressive, masculine behavior as both noble and religiously-validated.

By the end of the text, however, the *Perfecting of Hell* clearly repudiates this cultural model valorizing violence and promotes in its place a traditional, non-violent, non-tantric Buddhist morality. The central drama of the *Perfecting of Hell* concerns King Gesar rescuing his mother in hell. Despite Gesar's mother Gokmo being a good Buddhist throughout the epic and the extensive work of Ling's lamas to ensure her favorable rebirth, she falls to hell at her death. Upon arriving in hell, King Yama belittles Gesar for his violent past. Yama calls

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[23] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po,*. "Song 4.3.180-183," (Thimphu), 173.
[24] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po,* "Song 4.3.240-242," (Thimphu), 173.

King Gesar a "butcher who kills in the morning, but acts like a lama in the afternoon,"[25] and proclaims that Gesar's heroic companions "kill as meaninglessly as making water."[26] In a song that can be read in full in Appendix 4, Gesar confronts King Yama in return and challenges his mother's punishment through explaining her good karma:

> I have accurately calculated
> the white and black actions of cause and effect,
> and Mother Gokmo was virtuous at her death.
> We planted Jodar [funerary flags] as numerous as the hairs on her head.
> We recited the words of the Dharma as numerous as the hairs on her body.
> We erected 49 gold stūpas and privy seals.
> We wrote innumerable poems in her honor.
> The actions of virtuous dharma she performed transcend counting.
> The kind Mother Gokmo goes to hell
> for doing these actions of dharma?
> Dharma like that has no benefit
> [She should not] wander bardo [after] her death.
> That the law states she is to be [humiliated] in the 18 Cold and Hot hells—
> It does not add up![27]

Responding to King Gesar's challenge, Yama explains that Gesar's mother Gokmo is paying for his own sins of violence. As part of his critique, he undermines the very foundation of Gesar's violent ability in hell by ensuring he will be unable to fight:

> Although you, precious being of the world,
> are allowed to lead mother Gokmo on the path of liberation,
> for the great sins of the son Gesar, [she must] pay.
> The kind mother is not without dharma,
> it is the maturation of her son's great sins
> that will mature in the body of Gokmo.
> From now on, when you cut off the many demon heads
> with the sword you carry, you will cut your own divine head.
> Know that [in] the land of Yama and the cold realms of the living,
> You will now follow that law.
> When you sharpen [something] with great energy,
> before you would cut the heads of your enemies in twain.
> From now on, you will cut your own head into pieces.[28]

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[25] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po,* (Thimphu), 160.
[26] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po,* (Thimphu), 160.
[27] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po,* "Song 4.3.273-285," (Thimphu), 177-178.

The *Perfecting of Hell* arranges Gesar's rescue of his mother in a way that humbles the warrior king and demonstrates that—despite his claims of martial prowess and the fulfillment of a heroic masculinity—violence still ultimately causes karmic retribution. In this way, the text supports traditional Buddhist morality over the violence of fierce traditional masculinity, challenging both eastern Tibetan ideas of the ideal man and, as we shall see, tantric models.

King Yama's chastisement does not mean that the *Perfecting of Hell* abandons Buddhist reformulations of King Gesar. In response to Yama's taunts, Gesar prepares to depart in defeat and return to the human realm. The netherworld king encourages him to stay and save his mother, reminding Gesar of his incredible skill and his previous work for the Dharma, as one might parent a recalcitrant child:

> Establish all the samsaric beings in the humiliating Avīci hell
> on the path of liberation without exception!
> Are you the son Gesar?
> Then you know how!
> Do you have a divine body?
> Then you know how!
> Is your speech the excellent doctrine?
> Then you know how!
> Is your exalted mind the Dharmakāya [Ultimate Sphere of Reality]?
> Then you know how!
> Is your fundamental basis wisdom?
> Then you know how!
> Transmigration is at the heart
> of the conqueror [with] an unborn mind.
> Are you not Gesar, who will do anything for your mother?[29]

Through this speech, King Yama unlocks the power of the transference ritual called "powa" in Gesar's mind and the warrior-king finds himself able to free suffering beings in hell by

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[28] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen p,.* "Song 4.4.88-101,"(Thimphu), 183.
[29] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po,* "Song 4.5," (Thimphu), 187-188.

transferring their consciousnesses to other realms. This narrative twist demonstrates further that King Gesar is subjugated to traditional Buddhist morality—as represented by King Yama—because his ability to free his mother from hell arises only from the karmic arbiter himself. The *Perfecting of Hell's* disavowal of the violence prevalent in models of heroic masculinity is demonstrated, therefore, through both his mother's punishment for his violent actions and his reliance on King Yama—the figure enforcing traditionally Buddhist, karmically-based morality—for his Buddhist ability.

The Centrality of Karma and Ever-Present Death

The third ethical theme running through the *Perfecting of Hell* is the centrality and overarching importance of karma. In his song for the heroes of Ling, King Gesar calls upon ancient proverbs to impress on his warriors the importance of karma:

> As the ancients say, if you do not sustain good karma,
> you will be poisoned by the evil actions of before.
>
> If you do not guard your vows requesting the dharma,
> you will have no benefit [from them] and fall to a bad rebirth.[30]

This focus on karma is repeated in Song 2.1, where Gesar gives specific advice to people in different social and economic situations, while urging everyone to focus their attention on coming karmic retribution:

> Sailors, fisherman, and cheats—all three—
> if you are forgetful and negligent,
> [like] the blacksmith who forms swords
> all will fall to the hell of the plain of red-hot iron.
> Those who weave cloth, but steal [from the family]
> will have difficulty escaping from the hell of the blood lake.
> …
> Those who ride, burden, milk, and pluck the hairs of the horse

[30] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po,* "Song 1.4.68-71," (Thimphu.) 21-22.

will find it hard to separate from the pain of the poisonous fire pit.
The principal army commanders of the royal lineage
will be reborn [as food] for the hawk, wolf, and eagle.
The fisherman, bar maid, and beggar
will fall to the Most Tortuous hell for many eons.[31]

As found running throughout King Gesar's songs, karma as the foundational and determining principle affecting ethical action supports the *Perfecting of Hell's* promotion of traditional, non-tantric Buddhist morality.

The primary moment reflecting karma's centrality, however, is found again in King Gesar's journey through hell. While there, a Tiger-headed servant acts as Gesar's guide and explains the karmic cause of the many hellish torments he witnesses. There are few things more delightful than a good detailing of hellish tortures, but in the interest of brevity and rising above the gory details of flayed skin, smashed eyeballs, and cleft genitals, I will focus on the ethical exposition surrounding those condemned to hell. Unlike the other ethical instruction in the book, this is given entirely in prose and is therefore free from the baroque flourishes that one sometimes finds in other descriptions. In the Hell of Steaming Blood, the Tiger-headed servant explains that it is those who kill, those who make poisons, and brew fermented beverages that are suffering there:

It is the maturation of murdering many sentient beings.
The hunter who kills the deer;
the blacksmith who forms the knife;
the archer who uses many bows and arrows;
the butcher [who kills] many sheep;
the tavern owner who sells the five poisons;
and the man who makes fermenting agents of various sorts;
the poisoner who pours poison into water.
It is the cause and effect of these.[32]

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[31] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po,* "Song 2.1.307-335," (Thimphu), 105 – 106.
[32] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po,* (Thimphu), 202-203. Despite being prose, the text has been rendered into a poem format for ease of reading.

These causes of bad karma are echoed in the summary descriptions of one particular mountainous hell:

> As for this realm, [it is] those who killed monks, nuns, and women;
> those whose monastic vows and promises deteriorated;
> those who robbed the vows of others;
> those who eat the donations [intended] for the monastic community;
> those who, despite having heard many virtuous exhortations of life and death and hold the vows of a lama, are unable to lead and teach others and [instead] promote [their own] name, [their own] cloth, and [their own] fiber.[33]

When Gesar finds his mother at the end of his journey through hell, she acknowledges her torment and repeats the importance of traditionally Buddhist ethical action for avoiding such a rebirth:

> To the Kings, leaders, and chiefs,
> if you do not give laws [based on] right and wrong,
> it will cause embezzlement and bias.
> Except for the Most Tortuous hell, this path leads nowhere!
> …
> For those who kill sentient beings by smothering,
> you must pay 500 times over in return for killing another.
> If you kill many kinds of individuals,
> you will be unable to be freed from the Most Tortuous hell.
> You cannot deceive even a little
> the cause and effect of making black karma![34]

The descriptions of King Gesar's descent to hell reveal karma as a central organizing principle of ethical action, allowing it to highlight traditional Buddhist morality and ethical action.

Karma takes center stage during King Gesar's trip to hell not only due to the horrifying images he witnesses, but also because of the role of King Yama as an arbiter of karmic punishments. Yama focuses the reader's attention on the fact that hell is, at its

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[33] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po,* (Thimphu), 207-208. Despite being prose, the text has been rendered into a poem format for ease of reading.
[34] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po,"* Song 4.9.65-86," (Thimphu), 224-225.

foundation, a place centrally about karmic justice, and that he is ultimately the self-identified representation of that justice:

> I am the ground of ripening
> for the bad karma of non-virtue.
> I am also the one
> who demonstrates the mirror of karma.
> I am the man who lifts the scale of good and bad karma.
> If you have dharma, I am the Dharma King [and] its ministers.
> Without Dharma, I am the King of Justice [and] its ministers.
> This is the land where [you experience] great fear before the Lord of Death.
> If you have Dharma, it is the land of high joy!
> Without Dharma, [it is] the resplendently fearful court of law.
> [It is] the residence place filled with terrified crying and weeping.
> If you have Dharma, the true effect of the union of method and wisdom
> [causes] a rain of flowers to descend,
> and you can run with the zeal of a stallion.
> If you do not have Dharma, your horse will run like a he-goat. [35]

Despite celebrating himself as the arbiter of karma, Yama asserts his own disinterest in keeping hell filled with sinners; he emphasizes that those who work in hell—like the many religious supporters that surround practitioners in the human realm—merely want people to act in accordance with Buddhist morality:

> If you are skilled in the dharma,
> patrons are pleased.
> If the mind foundation of the son is good,
> friends are also pleased.
> If the horse's gait is joyful,
> small children are pleased.
> If the maiden's face and body shape is beautiful,
> everyone is pleased.
> If the chieftain's behavior is honest,
> those who support him are pleased.
> If karmic causality is detailed,
> gods and demons are pleased.
> If this life and the next are [accurately] calculated,
> Yama is pleased.
> If sins are abandoned [in favor of] Dharma,
> the executioners [of hell] are happy.[36]

[35] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po,* "Song 4.2.11-30," (Thimphu), 163.

Indeed, Yama's centrality as an embodied representation of karma's importance is highlighted by the very structure of the narrative itself: the *Perfecting of Hell* ends with Death / Yama ultimately triumphant over each hero. As the heroes die one by one, Yama and the karmic justice he represents looms ever larger and the text's ethical thrust to promote traditional Buddhist morality comes more into focus.

<u>Considerations of Audience and Conforming to Epic Norms</u>

Although just a sampling of the ethical instruction found in the *Perfecting of Hell*, it raises questions as to the text's audience. During field research in Kham and Amdo, I repeatedly heard that the *Perfecting of Hell* was a text for lay people. Tsering Chögyel, a tour guide who works primarily with foreign tourists, told me that his father would read the *Perfecting of Hell* once a year during a specific meditation period called Gatsog. This meditation was for lay people and involved a several-day fast to develop compassion for all beings through experiencing the pain and suffering of others; Tsering informed me that reading the *Perfecting of Hell* during this period assisted with developing that empathy by imagining the suffering of those in hell.[37] The Khenpo at Lhagong Monastery monastic college echoed this sentiment. He explained that lay practitioners and young monks just beginning to study Buddhism should read the *Perfecting of Hell,* but that older monks should not. In fact, he said the *Perfecting of Hell* was a component of the curriculum for the youngest level of monks studying at the Lhagong monastic college, though he

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[36] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa Chen po,* "Song 4.5.45-52," (Thimphu), 188-189.
[37] Tshe ring chos rgyal, (Tour guide in Qinghai Province, China), Personal interview. Interview by Author. Yushu, China. July 21, 2015.

acknowledged that not every teacher did utilized the text.[38] Khenpo Trülku Damchö Rinpoche at Yarung Gar Nunnery spoke about the text similarly, and noted that the *Perfecting of Hell* was especially good for lay people to read, as it clearly elucidated karmic consequences; he repeated that the text would not be suitable for higher-level students.[39] Because the majority of the text's explicit ethical advice is specifically directed to lay occupations like chieftains, butchers, bar maids, and farmers, the text itself seems to confirm these claims of a primarily lay audience.

However, the *Perfecting of Hell*'s preoccupation with the karmic punishments coming to dishonest religious practitioners would indicate a potential audience amongst ordained Tibetan practitioners. As discussed above, false religious teachers and ordained practitioners are perceived as a significant threat to both individual religious practice and the very nature of Buddhism in Tibet more generally. While it is possible that this concern with false religious teachers is meant to serve as a warning for unsuspecting lay people, the text at times speaks directly to religious practitioners and encourages them to enter more intensive meditation retreats:

> Whoever cares only for themselves falls to hell.
> The lama who does not hide from sin
> will fall to the Black Line Hell, from which there is no escape.
> Do not cling too much to your homeland,
> but wander to an isolated mountain hermitage!
> If you meditate immeasurably on your mind,
> you will look upon your own face.
> Abandon non-virtuous action and attain virtue.
> Do not hold on to the faces of pretty girls in your mind—
> you must protect your vows and pledges.[40]

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[38] Lha gong *Bsha grwa,* Khenpo. Personal interview.
[39] Dam chos Rin po che (Head Teacher at Yarung Gar Nunnery, Sichuan, China), Personal interview.
[40] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po,* "Song 4.5.65-72," (Thimphu), 189-190.

Furthermore, as will be discussed in detail in the next chapter, the *Perfecting of Hell* engages with tantric literature and mythic narrative more than is evident upon first glance, demonstrating that some knowledge of tantric texts is necessary to understand the full wealth of the text's interpretations. The *Perfecting of Hell's* ethical instruction for ordained individuals indicates that perhaps the text was not intended for a strictly lay audience, despite its contemporary use.

This examination of audience raises a further issue of the *Perfecting of Hell's* participation in the norms of the Gesar epic tradition. While the genre of epic as a whole will be discussed in Chapter 5, the *Perfecting of Hell* has an ambiguous relationship with the norms of the Gesar tradition. As the final episode of the Gesar epic, the *Perfecting of Hell* follows many conventions of other episodes of the epic. The action opens with King Gesar at Samdrup Tagtsé fortress, when his celestial aunt Manené appears and gives him a prophecy on the next action he must undertake—an opening scene which mirrors the majority of other Gesar literature. Beyond this paradigmatic interlude, the *Perfecting of Hell* is clearly enmeshed in the imaginative world of the Gesar epic—the personal inclinations, filial ties, and landed castles of the characters closely follow the trajectory of other Gesar literature. Beyond this content, the bulk of the *Perfecting of Hell's* action is made up of songs, an attribute Geoffrey Samuel identifies as one of the most characteristic features of the epic as a whole.[41] As discussed above, the songs are generally treated similarly to those produced in the setting of the oral epic, and they are clearly simulating oral compositions in

[41] Geoffrey Samuel, "The Gesar Epic of East Tibet," *Tibetan Literature: Studies in Genre,* eds. Jose Ignacio Cabezon and Roger Jackson, (Boston: Snow Lion Publishers, 1996), 358-367. 259.

structure as evidenced by the fact that the initial non-semantic vocatives used to mark the melody in oral performance are present.[42]

In other ways, however, the *Great Perfecting of Hell* is entirely unlike any other episodes in the Gesar epic. Most notably, Gesar does not emerge entirely triumphant. Rather than fighting his way to victory and further glory for the kingdom of Ling, he embodies the role of Great Perfection religious teacher and is then subsequently humiliated by Yama for his lack of karmic insight and neglect of traditional Buddhist ethics. This shift in focus is reflected in the songs' topics of choice and integration into the larger narrative role. Geoffrey Samuel makes a typology of Gesar songs that emphasizes their role in producing shamanic power of various means to affect or control the future.[43] The songs of the *Perfecting of Hell* fit nowhere in this typology and instead work to teach religious doctrine and urge specific ethical, moral, or spiritual actions. In terms of topic, they ultimately have more in common with the religious songs of realization sung by Tibetan Buddhist masters. While some may look at these distinctions and question whether the *Perfecting of Hell* truly represents a part of the Gesar epic tradition, I will argue in Chapter 5 that it is our understanding of epic that must be broadened to appreciate its unique social role and radically generative nature.

Preliminary Meditations in the *Perfecting of Hell*

Considering these issues of the *Perfecting of Hell's* intended audience and genre classification raises further questions about the text's relationship to the Preliminary Meditations texts discussed in Chapter 1, particularly those of the *Seminal Heart of Great*

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[42] Samuel, "The Gesar Epic of East Tibet," 362; Helffer, 400.
[43] Samuel, "The Gesar Epic of East Tibet," 363-365.

Expanse tradition.[44] While these ethical themes are prevalent in a variety of Buddhist literature, they are found with particular frequency in Preliminary Meditations texts that provide a foundation for future practice. In fact, the ethical themes of the *Great Perfecting of Hell* roughly delineated in the preceding sections are found throughout a variety of traditional Preliminary Meditations texts. However, as appearing in the *Perfecting of Hell,* they explicitly mimic the metaphors—and, most importantly, those metaphor's order—found in the first four chapters of *The Words of My Perfect Teacher.* This first section of four chapters of most Preliminary Meditations texts,[45] called Ordinary Preliminaries, aims to produce a foundational ethical sensitivity for future religious practice, regardless of initiated status. Through producing a truncated and summarized version of an Ordinary Preliminary Meditations text, the *Perfecting of Hell* functions as a sort of narrative accompaniment to *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*. Specifically, the *Perfecting of Hell's* lengthy Song 2.1 closely follows the pattern of metaphors and images found in *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* Chapters 1 and 2—the Difficulty of Finding the Freedoms and Advantages and the Impermanence of Life. Table 2 offers a rough summary of the similarities, comparing poetic metaphors from the *Perfecting of Hell* and *The Words of My Perfect Teacher,* as found in the 2003 Delhi Tibetan edition and the 1994 Padmakara English translation.[46]

TABLE 2		

[44] For broad examples of ethical themes on Ordinary Preliminary meditations texts, see further Patrul Rinpoche, *The Words of my Perfect Teacher,* trans. Padmakara Translation Group, (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1994) and Longchen Rabjam, *The Excellent Path to Enlightenment,* trans. Khenpo Gawang Rinpoche and Gerry Wiener, (Memphis: Jeweled Lotus Publishing, 2014) to get a larger sense

[45] (1) Difficulty of Finding the Freedoms and Advantages; (2) The Impermanence of Life; (3) The Defects of Samsara; (4) The Principles of Cause and Effect.

[46] O rgyan 'jigs med chos kyi dbang po (dpal sprul rin po che), *Kun bzang bla ma'i zhal lung (The Words of My Perfect Teacher),* (Delhi: Dharma Publishing, 2003); Patrul Rinpoche, *The Words of my Perfect Teacher,* trans. Padmakara Translation Group, (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1994).

Metaphor / Image	Great Perfecting of Hell	Words of my Perfect Teacher
Three Purities (place, teacher, assembly)	Song 2.1. Lines: 16-25; p.93	Delhi: p. 9-11; P.K.: p. 8-9
Three Defects of the Pot	Song 2.1. Lines: 42-48; p.94	Delhi: p. 13-14; P.K: p.10-11
Six Defilements	Song 2.1. Lines: 49-50; p.94	Delhi: p. 16-17; P.K: p.12-15
Five Non-Apprehensions	Song 2.1. Lines: 51-52; p.94	Delhi: p. 23; P.K: p.15
Lama as a Physician	Song 2.1. Lines: 53-55; p.94	Delhi: p. 24; P.K: p.16
Preparing to Listen	Song 2.1. Lines: 60-64; p.94	Delhi: p. 30-31; P.K: p.18-19
Eight Unfavorable Conditions	Song 2.1. Lines: 65-67; p.95	Delhi: p. 31-32; P.K: p.19-20
Possessing 18 Freedoms and Advantages	Song 2.1. Lines: 71-73; p.95	Delhi: p. 35-43; P.K: p.22-29
Human body = star during the daytime	Song 2.1. Lines: 77; p.95	Delhi: p. 63; P.K: p.34
Beings as Numerous as Dust Particles	Song 2.1. Lines: 76; p.95	Delhi: p. 64; P.K: p.34
Returning Empty from a land of Jewels	Song 2.1. Lines: 78-80; p.95	Delhi: p. 65; P.K: p.35
Impermanence of four seasons	Song 2.1. Lines: 99-101; p.96	Delhi: p. 85-86; P.K: p.45-46
Only names of those before known	Song 2.1. Lines: 106-111; p. 96-97.	Delhi: p. 86-87; P.K: p.46
Many causes of Death	Song 2.1. Lines: 118-120; p.97	Delhi: p. 102 P.K: p.53
Like Pulling hair from Butter	Song 2.1. Lines: 133-138; p.98	Delhi: p. 87; P.K: p.47

While the full table with excerpts can be found in Appendix 5, a few examples will highlight how the *Perfecting of Hell* echoes metaphors from *The Words of My Perfect Teacher.* At lines 133-138 of the *Perfecting of Hell's* Song 2.1, King Gesar uses the metaphor of a hair being pulled from yak butter to describe how one enters death alone:

> Attendants and luxuries, family and friends, the activities of this life—all are meaningless. This precious body carried a mala and a bowl, [but in death]

> you will be powerless [to do so]. Like pulling hair from butter, you will be without friends; alone you will wander bardo.[47]

In comparison, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* uses a similar metaphor, though it focuses on a slightly modified litany of things that must inevitably be left behind:

> Unbearable though it might be to part with your money, your cherished possession, your friends, loved ones, attendants, disciples, country, lands, subjects, property, food, drink and comforts, you just have to leave everything behind, like a hair behind pulled out of a slab of butter.[48]

Considering a second example, King Gesar proclaims to his peoples that "Obtaining a human body is as rare as seeing a star in the daytime."[49] *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* relies on a similar metaphor, though its use is expanded to consider all of the six realms of existence:

> By way of illustration, it is said that if the inhabitants of the hells were as numerous as stars in the night sky, the pretas [hungry ghosts] would be no more numerous than the stars visible in the daytime; that if there were as many pretas as stars at night there would only be as many animals as stars in the daytime; and that if there were as many animals as stars at night, there would only be as many gods and humans as stars in the daytime.[50]

Although not copying the metaphors exactly, the *Perfecting of Hell* utilizes many of the poetic images from *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* in its promotion of traditional ethical practice.

These similarities raise two important considerations and caveats. First, metaphors like these are well-known and popular in other Buddhist literature besides *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, so their appearance in the *Great Perfecting of Hell* is not in and of itself proof of causation or influence. Nevertheless, tracing the page and line numbers related in

[47] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po,* "Song 2.1.132-137," (Thimphu), 98.
[48] *Words of my Perfect Teacher,* 2003, 87; 1994, 47.
[49] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po,* "Song 2.1.76," (Thimphu), 95.
[50] *Words of my Perfect Teacher,* 2003, 63; 1994, 34.

Table 1, reveals that the *Perfecting of Hell* places these famous instructional metaphors in almost the exact same order as *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, an order which does not characterize any other Nyingma Preliminary Meditations commentary at which I have looked. It is evident, therefore, from the first two chapters of *The Words of My Perfect Teacher,* that it clearly exerted significant influence on the *Perfecting of Hell.* A second consideration is that the metaphors found in the *Perfecting of Hell's* songs just touch on the topic ever so briefly, then quickly move on to something else, while *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* revels in the metaphors' dramatic details and features extended and full versions. I have described the *Perfecting of Hell* as a briefly summarized version of *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*—referencing and reminding someone what happened, but not truly replacing it. For this reason, I argue that the *Perfecting of Hell* was not intended as a *substitute* for a Preliminary Meditations text, but rather as a supporting narrative that deepens, elucidates, and recollects themes. While *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* Chapters 1 and 2 are nowhere as fleshed out in the *Perfecting of Hell* as they are in the s texts, the work clearly provides summary highlights.

In addition to chapters 1 and 2 of *The Words of My Perfect Teacher,* chapters 3 and 4—the Defects of Samsara and the Principles of Cause and Effect—are underscored in the narrative of Gesar's journey to hell. While the six realms of existence are referenced briefly during Chapter 2's preliminary song of instruction,[51] King Gesar's journey through hell becomes the principal moment in which the reader explores the workings of karma and the resultant system of rebirths. Similar to the brief metaphors and poetic images highlighted in Song 2.1, the *Perfecting of Hell's* hells are not fully elaborated as Gesar journeys through

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[51] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po,* "Song 2.1.163-169," (Thimphu), 99.

them. Only the Black Line hell is mentioned by name, and most hells traditionally found in s texts are recognizable only from descriptions—the Hell of Ultimate Torment and the Hell of Iron Shalmali Trees, for example. Rather, the *Perfecting of Hell's* focus is clearly on the reality of karma as an effecting principle of rebirth, a theme brought to the forefront in Chapter 4 of *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*. This suggests some possible influence from the text, but nothing quite so clear as that seen in Song 2.1. In fact, the *Perfecting of Hell*'s focus is clearly not on the reality of hell, but rather on King Gesar's reactions to the torture he witnesses. Despite his earlier claims to omniscient Buddhahood, Gesar is deeply affected by the witnessing of hell's torments and responds with stereotypical, if not institutionally-appropriate, anger and resentment.

Excepting Gesar's rage in hell, the *Perfecting of Hell's* ethical instruction clearly draws significant inspiration from Preliminary Meditations literature in terms of tone, topic, and thematic elements—truncated and summarized thought it may be. Despite the epic trappings of the Gesar epic, it is evident that the text can be considered a narrative addendum or accompaniment to a Preliminary Meditations text, though not quite a Preliminary Meditations text in its own right. Because it does not incorporate the final four chapters of a Nyingma Preliminary Meditations commentary—those preparing advanced practitioners for tantric initiations—we can assume the *Perfecting of Hell* shares a goal with the "Ordinary" Preliminary Meditations it mimics: seeking to instill Buddhist ethical motivations in reader. At the same time, the text retains a distinctively "Gesar-ian" air and situates its ethical goals in a matrix of symbols, geographies, and narrative tropes of the larger Gesar epic tradition. In light of this unique combination of epic story and doctrinal

text, we are left with the larger question: why make a narrative supplement to an (Ordinary) Preliminary Meditations text?

Martha Nussbaum, Narrative, and the Development of Ethical Agents

When considering how the narrative trappings of the *Perfecting of Hell* enhance and support the themes found in Preliminary Meditations texts, I want to consider the social roles of narrative literature, for which Martha Nussbaum offers important insights. The foundation of her argument is an examination of the function emotions play in human thinking. Building on a definition of emotion first stated by Greek Stoic philosophers, Nussbaum argues that emotions are in essence evaluations of judgment "that ascribe to certain things and persons outside a person's own control great importance for the person's own flourishing."[52] Summarizing Nussbaum's work, she defines three parts to an emotion—object, relationship, and belief. First, she argues that emotions are inherently about an *object* that the individual experiencing the emotion deems to be particularly valuable. Second, this object is perceived by an individual as existing *in relation* to themselves, ensuring that emotions are an "active way of seeing and interpreting" an object, not merely an uncontrollable, irrational movement of energy.[53] It is the perceived nature of this relationship—Is the object threatened? Is the object in your possession? Is the object lost?—that determines the exact emotion experienced and, therefore, distinguishes love from fear, grief from hope, joy from anger, etc. Finally, in order to conceptualize one's relationship with an object, emotions necessitate a complex evaluation

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[52] Martha Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: the Intelligence of Emotions,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 22.
[53] Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought,* 28.

of *beliefs* about that object—its current state, the intentions of others acting upon it, and the significance of their actions for the health and safety of the object.

The foundation of these three components of emotions, however, is the object's perceived value to oneself. Simply put, if someone does not care about an object—a person, a ring, an animal, etc.—they will have no emotional response to any actions that they believe are befalling it. Nussbaum elaborates that this value is of a particular kind that "appears to make reference to a person's own flourishing. The object of the emotion is seen as *important for* some role it plays in the person's own life…the emotions are in this sense localized: they take their stand in my own life…"[54] While acknowledging that some people may feel emotional responses to certain public events, celebrations, or tragedies, Nussbaum argues that these people have invested their own identity and significance in those events such that they hold "a certain importance in her own scheme of ends and goals."[55] Emotions, therefore, are intrinsically concerned with an individual's own flourishing and the value of an object for impacting that flourishing.

Emotions, however, are not sui generis constructions; narrative plays a crucial role in teaching people *how* to have emotions by demonstrating for them what is worthy of value. In an early article written before her monograph on emotion and literature, Nussbaum elaborates on the constructed nature of emotional response and narrative's role within that:

> It is that emotions are not feelings that well up in some natural and untutored way from our natural selves, that they [emotions] are, in fact, not personal or natural at all, that they [emotions] are, instead, contrivances, social constructs. We learn how to feel, and we learn our emotional repertoire. We learn emotions in the same way that we learn beliefs—from

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[54] Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought,* 30-31.
[55] Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought,* 31.

> our society. But emotions, unlike many of our beliefs, are not taught to us directly through propositional claims about the world, either abstract or concrete. They are taught, above all, through stories. Stories express their structure and teach us their dynamics. These stories are constructed by others and, then, taught and learned. But once internalized, they shape the way life feels and looks.[56]

Charles Hallisey and Anne Hansen note the connections between Nussbaum's view of the transformative potential of narratives and what Dominick LaCapra calls the "worklike" aspect of texts, which "engage the reader in recreative dialogue with the text and the problems it raises."[57] Narratives not only teach readers and listeners the dynamics of emotional experience and the relationships of value between themselves and the objects around them; they also reveal a model of the emotion's development for potential imitation:

> The understanding of any single emotion is incomplete unless its narrative history is grasped and studied for the light it sheds on the present response…narrative artworks of various kinds (whether musical or visual or literary) give us information about these emotion-histories that we could not easily get otherwise.[58]

Narratives are important ultimately for their representational and constitutive qualities which mold those who interact with them, as much as or even more so than they mold it. Simply put, stories like Romeo and Juliet teach us many things, but one of them is that the object of our romantic love is important above all other potential objects and that such love is its most real only when you are willing to die for its loss. Narrative literature uniquely models emotional experience and relationships of value between an object and a person, ultimately forming our own appropriate emotional reactions in the process.

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[56] Martha Nussbaum, "Narrative Emotions: Beckett's Genealogy of Love," *Ethics* 98.2 (1988): 225-254. 226.
[57] Dominick LaCapra, *Rethinking Intellectual History: Texts, Contexts, Languages,* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 30; Charles Hallisey and Anne Hansen, "Narrative, Sub-Ethics, and the Moral Life: Some Evidence from Theravāda Buddhism," *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 24.2 (1996): 305-327. 307.
[58] Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought,* 236.

Through fashioning the emotional lives of individuals by teaching them society-specific ideas of what to value and how objects in the world relate to individuals' flourishing, narratives have a necessary role in developing moral agents. This occurs in two ways. First, narratives provide answers to certain existential and value-related questions. Nussbaum explains that "in an ethical and social/political creature, emotions themselves are ethical and social/political, parts of an answer to the questions, 'What is worth caring about?' 'How should I live?'"[59] Through the answers narrative provides, our own moral sensibilities and ideas are nudged to conform to society-specific models. Such evaluative judgements formed by narratives naturally lead to the creation of moral and ethical agents who value particular kinds of objects, relationships, and actions towards those objects as moral.

Secondly, beyond forming personal values, narratives also allow individuals to develop a "potential space" in which they can imagine the experience and inner world of another person, leading to a contemplation of how their actions might affect the value relationships of another. Focusing on the imaginative play of children, Nussbaum explains this "imagination is a crucial part of the reproduction of healthy character… narrative play has already given [the child] ways of understanding the pain that her destructive wishes would inflict on others, and therefore of taking their full measure."[60] Charles Hallisey and Anne Hansen have demonstrated the applicability of narrative's ability to imagine the inner world of the other to specifically Buddhist literature. Recognizing the central importance of imagination to Buddhist morality tales, they explain that narratives develop ethical sensitivity through revealing how we understand the agency of other figures. They

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[59] Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought,* 149.
[60] Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought,* 236-237.

elaborate that "the ethics of language do not reside in the way *it* orients *us* towards or against certain values, but rather in the fact that language use itself requires certain recognitions and kinds of choices essential to ethics."[61] Through its role as the well spring of emotion, therefore, narrative produces ethical agents who both value specific relationships with objects and are equipped to imagine the inner world of the value relationships of beings around them.

Karmic Resentment, Compassionate Resolution and the *Perfecting of Hell*

Nussbaum's theories on the emotional work of narrative demonstrate that presenting the ethical themes of a Preliminary Meditations text in a narrative format has unique advantages in developing Buddhist readers' ethical sensitivity. The goal of the early chapters of Preliminary Meditations texts is to prepare the reader for further Buddhist practice through instilling a firm understanding of karma, the cycle of rebirth, and the importance of ethical action, while also developing compassion for the suffering beings trapped within samsara. Narratives like the *Perfecting of Hell* are uniquely prepared to assist the attainment of these goals because—as illuminated by Martha Nussbaum—they identify valued objects, model appropriate reactions to those objects, and create the conceptual space to imagine another's suffering. In the *Perfecting of Hell,* Gesar's tearful reactions towards beings in hell, his commitment to reformed ethical practices, and his concern for those wasting their human rebirth are doing exactly this sort of modeling. While *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* includes brief narrative vignettes, the overall structure is of a commentarial manual, which rather undermines narrative's totalizing

[61] Hallisey and Hansen, 308.

effect. In contrast, the *Perfecting of Hell* is a narrative with ethical commentarial interludes—rather than an ethical commentary with narrative interludes—ensuring that the reader's attention is able to immerse themselves in the value relationships the narrative models. A narrative summarizing the initial chapters of *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* like the *Perfecting of Hell*, therefore, provides an ideal companion to advance the goals of a Preliminary Meditations commentary through constructing those relationships of value necessitated by the traditional Buddhist ethical agenda.

However, I argue that Nussbaum's theory reveals narrative doing more than simply modeling appropriate emotions; narratives like the *Perfecting of Hell* also model inappropriate emotions and give the reader a "safe space" distanced from their position in their individual Buddhist world in which to work through these in appropriate emotions. Putting the ethical lessons of *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* in the narrative framework of the *Perfecting of Hell* provides a more nuanced, ethically-complicated conceptual space than a Preliminary Meditations commentary. Preliminary Meditations texts may use detailed descriptions of suffering and unfavorable rebirths to nurture an understanding of karma, but they do not fully acknowledge that karmic results—though necessarily just and correct—remain difficult to observe. Every student in an introductory Buddhism course grapples with the karmic reality that, from a Buddhist perspective, those infants born without limbs, born without major organs only to immediately die, born into households unable or unwilling to support them are not innocent, but rather are suffering for prior karmic sins. Just like introductory college students, the King Gesar who descends to hell balks at the brutal, but karmically-just, torments he witnesses. At each hell on his descent, he cries tears "like resplendent leaves" and asks his guide "how are the executioners

without mercy for the suffering of this karma?"[62] Despite being informed of the specific sins committed to warrant assignment to a hell realm, Gesar feels troubled while witnessing their torture and seeks to actively circumvent the karmic system. In Song 4.6—sung during his descent to hell—King Gesar calls out to the buddhas and accuses them of lacking compassion. He asks if they are uninformed or intentionally ignoring the suffering of the hell beings:

> In the western Pure land of great bliss,
> resides the Dharmakāya Amitabha.
> You are the lama who gives guidance [to] the six classes of beings.
> Do you perceive the suffering of hell?
> I ask that you lead the sentient beings of the blood pond
> on the path of liberation![63]

Gesar's growing resentment becomes clearer the further he descends in hell. He angrily rages at the executioners for their lack of compassion and proclaims a plan to bring an army of buddhas to hell to destroy it. Found in full in Appendix 3, reflections of Gesar's participation in the model of heroic masculinity are evident here, as are traces of the tantric model of Buddhist practice that will be explored in greater detail in Chapter 3:

> You executioners without mercy!
> Why do you give useless suffering like this to samsaric beings?
> You executioners say it is because you are buddhas.
> On the path and tradition of demonic buddhas [like yourselves],
> the business is three—killing, cutting, and tormenting.
> [You have] the body of a demon without compassion,
> [You have] the body of a demon without kindness.
> I have never seen a buddha like this!
> …
> Because of you demons, I plant a supplication!
> [I ask] the wisdom deities to enter [and give you] divine minds.
> I hope to lead an army into the land of the deathly hell
> and pour out the copper [pots] of hell!
> …

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[62] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po,* (Thimphu), 202.
[63] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po,* "Song 4.6.20-25," (Thimphu), 204.

> From the Mandala of the Conqueror's own body,
> I will lead an army of the supreme one hundred families.
> The Father Primordial Buddha will act as general.
> His retinue of Supreme Hundred Families will build a military camp.
> Emanations upon emanations, so many that one cannot conceive it,
> will build military camps in the deathly land of hell.
> By the peaceful and wrathful sword of compassion,
> may all the executioners and sentient beings of hell become happy![64]

This song continues with descriptions of several different armies of emanations coming to "tame" the executioners, free those they torment, and transfer their consciousness to a Pure Land. Despite their karmic justification, Gesar reacts to the grotesque tortures of hell in direct contradiction of the laws of karma—with sorrow, anger, and resentment.

As the reader follows King Gesar's descent to hell, they accompany him within the imaginative space of the narrative, and he provides a model of and mirror for reader's own reactions to the intense suffering of hell. While Andrew Rotman has argued that "seeing" moral examples in the Buddhist narratives of the *Divyāvadāna (Divine Stories)* leads to (or at least is intended to lead to) a spontaneous development of faith, the *Perfecting of Hell* seems to portray something more sinister.[65] "Seeing" the karmic suffering causes a crisis of faith in Gesar. This hero modeling reactions to detailed descriptions of karmic suffering within the context of a narrative creates a narrative field that allows readers' potential expressions of resentment at the karmic system. Like the paradigmatic chorus of Greek literature, Gesar's expressions of horror, frustration, and resentment at the visible effects of the karmic system model the reader's own reactions. Sarah Jacoby has noted the distinctions in Tibetan literary conceptions of emotion—based on earlier Indian ideas—between the experience of an emotion (nyam; *rasa*) and the aesthetic experience of that

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[64] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po,* "Song 4.7.12-69," (Thimphu), 212-215.
[65] Andrew Rotman, *Thus Have I Seen: Visualizing Faith in Early Indian Buddhism,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

emotion (gyur; *bhāva*).[66] She cites twentieth-century Tibetan literary theorist Döndrup Gyel as stating that "basic emotions cannot be felt by anyone except yourself, [so that] they are devoid of aesthetic experience."[67] I argue that narrative, however, allows a reader to experience not simply the "aesthetic experience of an emotion," but also something approaching the "experience of the emotion" itself. As highlighted by Nussbaum, narrative necessitates an imagining of both the action as happening to another person and their internal thought as they react to that action. By imagining King Gesar's descent through hell in the text, the reader of the *Perfecting of Hell* "sees" the torments the text describes and experiences the institutionally-inappropriate feelings modelled by King Gesar.

The emotions of resentment and anger expressed so vividly in the *Perfecting of Hell* are largely absent from *Words of my Perfect Teacher*, which focuses on explaining in vivid detail and communicating effectively how the Buddhist cosmology works from a clearly institutional perspective. Narrative, on the other hand, lets one have a broader range of feeling and reactions that may even challenge and undermine the laws of karma. Gesar's rage seems to contradict his earlier portrayal in the beginning chapters of the *Perfecting of Hell* as a model Buddhist teacher and practitioner who understands the full implications of karma. The executioners are left in the position to explain karmic causality to King Gesar:

> We executioners are not demons. The karmic causality of that virtue and sin [accumulated] while living is calculated like wheat flour. If you have Dharma, you are given to the path of liberation. If you do not have Dharma, you fall to hell.[68]

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[66] Sarah Jacoby, *Love and Liberation: Autobiographical Writings of the Tibetan Buddhist Visionary Sera Khandro,* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 259.
[67] Don grub rgyal, *Bod kyi mgur glu byung 'phel gyi lo rgyus dang khyad chos bsdus par ston pa rig pa'i khye'i rnam par rtsen pa'i skyed tshal* (Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1985), 271. Translated and cited by Jacoby, 259.
[68] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po.* (Thimphu), 216.

Although discussions of the ultimate justice of the punishments narratively frame the grotesque tortures of hell that Gesar (and the reader) witness, these karmic discussions do little to ameliorate Gesar's anger. Indeed, the *Perfecting of Hell* demonstrates a certain epistemological bifurcation: it is one thing to rationally know that suffering in hell awaits those who commit certain actions (as Gesar does at the beginning of the *Perfecting of Hell*), it is another thing entirely to observe the actual sufferings first hand (as Gesar does in his hell journey). In the relatively safe space of the narrative text, the reader can acknowledge the distinctions between these two epistemologies and express a naturally arising resentment at the imaginatively-witnessed torture. The frame of the *Perfecting of Hell's* narrative allows for the intellectual distance necessary to experience that frustration in such a way that does not openly challenge or undermine the Buddhist doctrine or one's Buddhist identity itself. Witnessing King Gesar and his emotions in response to the karmic system he propounded in earlier chapters gives the opportunity for readers to do the same without explicitly threatening their larger self-perception within a Buddhist world.

While acknowledging that, within a safe and distanced space, resentment may arise in response to karma, the narrative frame of the *Perfecting of Hell* also helps readers to resolve that resentment. Traditionally, the answer to karmic suffering difficult to accept has been compassion, which narrative has an important role in developing. As explored above, narrative is deeply intertwined with imagining another's thoughts and feelings—part of the foundation of compassion. Martha Nussbaum highlights how narrative "exercises the muscles of the imagination, making people capable of inhabiting, for a time, the world of a different person, and seeing the meaning of events in that world from the outsider's

viewpoint."[69] Turning to a specifically Buddhist perspective, J. Antunes da Silva explicitly links imagination with the development of compassion within a meditative context because "imagination helps us to exchange our self for others and meditate on the practice of taking and giving. It helps the practitioner to visualize and, somehow, to recreate situations of sufferings and misery. Through this practice, one is able to attain solidarity with the suffering of others."[70] Narrative invites the reader to engage their imaginative faculties and has the potential, therefore, to powerfully contribute to the development of compassion as a traditional response to karmic suffering.

The narrative frame of the *Perfecting of Hell,* however, also provides an even more essential means to develop compassion through a radical equivalence of self and other based on true karmic misdirection. Considering the contours of the emotion of "compassion," Nussbaum builds on Aristotle to define it as the "painful emotion occasioned by the awareness of another person's undeserved misfortune."[71] She outlines the emotion as having three distinct criteria—the suffering witnessed is serious, undeserved, and prevents one's own flourishing. While a definition of compassion made by a western literary theorist may not be entirely applicable to an early twentieth-century Tibetan text, Nussbaum focuses our attention on the idea of compassion as an ultimately knowable proposition—not as simply a *sui generis,* uncontrollable force. Considering the situations observed by King Gesar in hell in light of Nussbaum's definition, compassion seems difficult to come by. The suffering observed is certainly serious—bodies are being flayed, genitals mutilated, eyeballs boiled, etc.—and fulfills Nussbaum's first criteria. However, for the

[69] Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought,* 431.
[70] J. Antunes da Silva, "Compassion in Mahayana Buddhism," *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia* 52. ¼ (1996): 813-830. 828.
[71] Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought,* 301.

majority of hell beings, the hellish torment is not strictly undeserved. King Yama and the Tiger-Headed servant make extremely clear that if you do karmically-bad actions, a bad rebirth awaits you. On the surface, the suffering of hell-beings also does not explicitly affect King Gesar's own flourishing; he is able to freely move not only between the world of humans and the netherworld, but also between the hell realms themselves with the protection of the Tiger-Headed servant.

Nussbaum's definition, however, focuses our attention on how "self" and "other" are constructed in the text and reveals how the *Perfecting of Hell* radically undermines this fundamental binary to produce compassion as the solution to King Gesar's karmic resentment. As demonstrated by his willingness to attack the servants of King Yama, King Gesar misunderstands the nature of self/other at the beginning of his hell journey. Yama identifies King Gesar's own confusion over the equivalency of "self" and "other"; in an effort to force a realization, the netherworld king changes the resulting target of his martial efforts:

> From now on, when you cut demon heads
> with the sword you carry,
> you will cut your own divine head instead.
> …
> When you [swing] a sharpened weapon with great energy,
> before you would cut the heads of your enemies in twain.
> From now on, you will cut your own head into pieces.[72]

The tantric implications of this ontological shift in warfare will be discussed in detail in the following chapter, but it serves to demonstrate Gesar's initial ignorance as to the "self" / "other" binary. Transforming the ontological metaphysics of King Gesar's warfare so that he cuts off his own head when going into battle represents a powerful metaphor for the

[72] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po,* "Song 4.4.94-101," (Thimphu), 183.

unity of self and other. When this law is tested, Gesar does indeed lop off his own head, Through ontological transformation, Yama attempts to explain to Gesar that the boundary he views between self and other is an illusion.

Yama also demonstrates the illusory nature of the "self" / "other" binary by the fact that Gesar's mother suffers for her son's sins:

> You, precious being of the world, that desires to lead
> [your] mother Gokmo on the path of liberation.
> For the great sins of her son Gesar, [she must] repay.
> The kind mother is not without dharma,
> but it is the maturation of her son's great sins
> that will mature in Gokmo's body.[73]

Returning to Nussbaum's second criteria for compassion—the suffering witnessed is undeserved—Gokmo's suffering for the sins of her son challenges Nussbaum's distinction between "deserved" and "undeserved" suffering. The very notion of "undeserved suffering" relies on a dualistic binary with firm boundaries between "self" and "other," boundaries which Yama demonstrated are an illusion through his earlier ontological trick for Gesar. Compassion, therefore, transcends "undeserved suffering" through acknowledging the equivalence of "self" with "other." Such an equivalence also fulfills Nussbaum's third criteria—the suffering witnessed effects one's own flourishing—because free from boundaries between "self" and "other," any suffering would necessarily hinder one's own flourishing. While I reiterate that Nussbaum's three-pronged definition of compassion is not necessary for a Buddhist context, it functions as a useful conceptual tool to think about and reveal the text's formation of "self" and "other," as well as considering their applicability to the development of compassion. In this way, the *Perfecting of Hell* follows traditional Buddhist ethical thinking to offer compassion that acknowledges a radical

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[73] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po.* "Song 4.4.88-93" (Thimphu), 183.

equivalence of "self" and "other" as a potential solution to Gesar's earlier karmic resentment.

The *Perfecting of Hell* uses its narrative framework to allow space for the resentment that arises from witnessing the just, but brutal, karmic system. However, it also demonstrates how self and other's equivalence ameliorates that resentment. The imaginative space delineated by Nussbaum in which narratives model emotion, therefore, by its very nature creates a more full and rich understanding of Buddhist ethics and makes more nuanced ethical beings. Narrative gives readers a type of "safe space," if you will, to fully imagine the realities and repercussions of the Buddhist ethical doctrines presented in *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*—realities that can be both difficult and tortuous. This space also reveals narrative's ability to challenge the duality of self and other through demonstrating "deserved" suffering's reliance on a self. In this way, readers have the potential to resolve their karmic resentment in an environment that remains distant from their personal, everyday identities and realities.

Conclusions

While participating in the larger literary world of the Gesar epic, the *Perfecting of Hell* uses its narrative frame to promote traditional, non-tantric ethics and present a summarized form of the first four chapters of the Nyingma Preliminary Meditations commentary *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*. This chapter has explored the benefits of the *Perfecting of Hell's* narrative frame for accomplishing the goals of a Preliminary Meditations text to create ethical agents. Using Martha Nussbaum's discussion of the social work of narrative literature and its role in developing society-specific moralities, I have

demonstrated how the *Perfecting of Hell's* narrative enhances the Preliminary Meditations' presentation of karmic realities through creating the imaginative space for readers to feel resentment through the figure of King Gesar without challenging their larger position in a Buddhist cosmology. To resolve this resentment, the *Perfecting of Hell* promotes the equivalence of "self" and "other" as a foundation of compassion through challenging the very concept of "deserved" and "undeserved" suffering upon which karma—and in Nussbaum's formulation, compassion—relies. I argue that it is the *Perfecting of Hell's* narrative frame that produces this understanding for readers through utilizing the imaginative potential of narrative as evident in its distinctive ability to structure an individual's relationships of value, create space to imagine the value relationships of another, and—as I have added—create a space to feel culturally and institutionally-inappropriate feelings. While the benefits of epic literature in participating in religious discourse will be explored further in Chapter 5, the next chapter turns our attention to the tantric subtext of the *Perfecting of Hell* and how we can interpret the moment when the great martial King Gesar is reveled to be a tantric failure.

Two Kings in Hell: Narrative as Doctrinal Argument in Tantric Contexts

> Whoever fights monsters should see to it that
> in the process he does not become a monster.
> --Friedrich Nietzsche

As a text about ethics, the *Perfecting of Hell* shows a particular preoccupation with violence. Chapter 2 explored how King Yama critiques King Gesar's martial nature and punishes his mother in his stead for his previously violent sins as part of promoting traditional Buddhist ethics. The significance of this critique is enhanced, however, by the text's location within a conversation concerning the role of violence in tantric practice. As a violent warrior-king subjugating demonic outsiders threatening religious practice, King Gesar represents an ideal representation of the aesthetically violent Mahāyoga and Anuttarayoga tantras. However, by means of Yama and Gesar's encounter in the netherworld, the *Perfecting of Hell* questions the possibility of enlightened violent action so foundational to many forms of advanced tantric practice. In its place, the text promotes Great Perfection practices—a form of indigenous Tibetan Buddhist practice based upon a recovery of "naturalness" that distances itself from the martial imagery common in other tantric systems. Its disavowal of martial and wrathful aesthetics, therefore, makes it diametrically at odds with the figure of King Gesar. Great Perfection practice and thought, however, also challenges as a form of artifice the prescriptive ethical guidelines focused on karma employed by King Yama to "tame Gesar," valorizing instead gnosis of one's own inner luminosity. While this pairing of Great Perfection practice and traditional Buddhist ethical instruction may seem at odds, it reflects the text's situation within a promoting the *Seminal Heart of Great Expanse.* Together, this combination works within the narrative to

challenge King Gesar as martial tantric figure and the practice of martial tantras more generally.

This disavowal of religious violence and the promotion of Great Perfection practices reflect the *Perfecting of Hell's* position within the broader context of what has been called the "Non-Sectarian movement" (Rimé)—a nebulously-interrelated eastern Tibetan religious discourse celebrating "ecumenicism." As part of this, Non-Sectarian thinkers of the Nyingma sect often promoted a re-discovery of traditional Buddhist ethics as a shared foundation between religious sects and represented Great Perfection as a non-violent alternative to martial tantric practices. Through supporting practice traditions they believed to be in danger of disappearing, Non-Sectarian thinkers formulated a response to the growing Geluk cultural hegemony arising in nineteenth-century eastern Tibet. This chapter examines the *Perfecting of Hell's* repudiation of tantric violence and support for aesthetically non-violent Great Perfection practice as evidence of its participation in these Non-Sectarian efforts. As illuminated by Bruce Lincoln's theories on the discursive power of narrative, the *Perfecting of Hell's* undermines Geluk religious authority by imitating and reversing tantric mythologies of Yamāntaka/Vajrabhaivara—a wrathful form of Mañjuśrī popular in the Geluk order. This chapter ultimately demonstrates how epic narratives like the *Perfecting of Hell* participate in the larger historical and religious discursive environment through constructing compelling and potentially transformative arguments.

Violence in Tantric Literature

Tantric Buddhism—one of the defining features of Tibetan religion—is a form of Buddhist practice that seeks to transform base desires of lust and wrath into meditative

tools that speedily remove obstacles and promote a discovery of one's own enlightened nature. In practice, it often involves confronting dualistic thinking concerning moral dichotomies such as pure/impure, clean/dirty, appropriate/inappropriate, and so forth to produce direct enlightened realization. First arising in India around the fifth to sixth centuries CE, tantric ideas spread quickly in both Hindu and Buddhist circles. Their exact origins are the subject of much debate, but Ronald Davidson links the development and spread of tantrism to a change in the pattern of Buddhist patronage that privileged kings and warlords.[1] Relying on martial, and later sexual, themes that recontextualize the practitioner as a buddha-king, the imagery of tantra "represents a sacralization of the sociopolitical environment."[2] For this reason, the paradigmatic image of the tantric system became kings who used their substantial martial power to subdue or "tame" demons threatening the practice of Buddhism. Throughout tantric history, these demons have been semiotically flexible, representing for some practitioners figures written atop the land and contemporary socio-politico-religious environment, while representing for others their own mental failings. Due to the transgressive nature of this imagery—celebrating bloodshed and sexuality—tantras became traditions of secrecy that required initiatory practices and intimate teacher/student relationships to pursue.

Tantric practices spread quickly throughout India and entered Tibetan religious repertoires from Tibet's first encounters with Buddhist thought and practice. Buddhist mytho-histories of Tibet's conversion to Buddhism valorize the wild tantric practitioner Padmasambhava—considered the progenitor of Buddhism in Tibet—and his tantrically-

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[1] Ronald Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism: A Social History of the Tantric Movement,* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002). See particularly Chapters 3 and 4, 75-168.
[2] Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism,* 114.

interpreted violence that converted the indigenous demons of the land into "Dharma protectors" (Dharmapāla; Chökyong). Davidson notes that these beings were likely indigenous divine figures brought into the new Buddhist cosmology, as well as important factors contributing to Buddhism's eventual popularity on the plateau.[3] The figure of a "demon slayer," therefore, became an ideal of religious practice and aesthetic symbol for a significant minority of Tibetan religious practice.

As new tantric materials continued to travel north from India into Tibet and the indigenous tradition of treasure texts introduced new religious materials, Tibetans organized the plethora of tantric texts into a four-tiered system based upon the practices' inner or outer focus.[4] As explained in Chapter 1, differing religious schools in Tibet acknowledged varying forms of ultimate practice as most advanced. Of particular importance are the Father class of Anuttarayoga tantras—called Mahāyoga within the Nyingma school—which heightened the violent and transgressive discursive ideals of prior tantric texts. In Jacob Dalton's analysis, "the [Anuttarayoga] tantras mirrored exoteric Buddhism, repeating and inverting its doctrines and rituals, and thereby confounding its normative divisions of sacred and profane."[5] The extent to which the violent, transgressive practices described in Anuttarayoga and Mahāyoga tantras were actually performed as opposed to simply visualized is ultimately unclear. Regardless, these texts utilized a vibrant discourse of violence to build the mythology of the tantric demon slayer as a central symbol of advanced tantric practice.

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[3] Davidson, *Tibetan Renaissance,* 59.

[4] Jacob Dalton has recently challenged the ubiquity of the four-fold system of organizing tantra in non-Tibetan contexts and demonstrated that it arose as a unique Tibetan innovation. Jacob Dalton, "A Crisis of Doxography: How Tibetans Organized Tantra During the 8th-12th Centuries," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 28.1 (2005): 115-181.

[5] Jacob Dalton, *The Taming of the Demons: Violence and Liberation in Tibetan Buddhism,* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 34.

The violent imagery and mythology of tantrism, however, rests on the belief of enlightened knowledge motivating any practice of violence. In his *Introduction to Tantra*, Lama Yeshe explains that through tantric practice, the practitioner "learns to think, speak, and act now as if he or she were already a fully enlightened buddha."[6] Evident in the example of Padmasambhava, acting like an enlightened buddha in a tantric context may mean that one violently confronts demons and other supernatural figures. In fact, the actions of a demon threatening religious practice and the actions of a fierce buddha like Padmasambhava surrounded in flames as he destroys those in his path may look very similar. However, the actions of a tantric buddha are consistently undergirded by compassionate intent, enlightened knowledge, and demonstrable ability to ensure positive rebirths for the victim. A crucial step of violent tantric rituals involves sending the spirit of the deceased to a Pure Land; thus, the tantric violence is, in reality, liberatory violence. Geoff Barstow notes that in practice some tantric practitioners extended their abilities of liberation even to the animals they ate, ultimately supporting the eating of meat as an entirely beneficial act that "liberated" and benefited animals.[7] Discussing what appears to be a Buddhist ritual of human sacrifice (itself euphemistically called a "liberation rite"), Dalton notes that for the tantric tradition, ritual training and enlightened knowledge represent the crucial steps to "ensure that the practitioner is not simply committing murder and thus transgressing the normative Buddhist prohibitions against killing."[8] Once the liberation is completed, the success or failure of the rite depends upon "the master's ability to link his consciousness to that of the victim and guide it into enlightenment, or at

[6] Lama Yeshe. *Introduction to Tantra: The Transformation of Desire,* Jonathan Landaw (ed.) (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2001), 3.
[7] Barstow, 108.
[8] Dalton, *Taming of the Demons,* 81.

least to a better rebirth."[9] As strikingly demonstrated in this ritual, successful tantric practice is that which transcends simple violence by means of the practitioner's enlightened knowledge, vision, and ability.[10]

The exact nature of this essential knowledge separating buddha from demon is explored in the foundational myth of tantric Buddhism, in which Buddhist figures violently confront or "tame" the demon Rudra. Dalton's *The Taming of the Demons* features an excellent translation of the full text as found in the *Great Compendium of the Intentions of All the Buddhas Sutra.*[11] A short summary will have to suffice here. In the distant past, the man Black Liberator and his servant Denpak were studying with a Buddhist teacher. Due to a misunderstanding of the teacher's words, Black Liberator believes that nothing is prohibited in Buddhist practice, while his servant understands the true equivalence of all things. They experience identical lives of hedonism, but have diametrically different understandings of the nature of reality—one (Black Liberator) allowing his base desires to run rampant in a search for pleasure, the other (Denpak) understanding the ultimate shared foundation of that which traditional, non-tantric Buddhism calls "dirty" and "clean." Through his ignorance, Black Liberator eventually becomes the demon Rudra who threatens to destroy the whole world. To confront Rudra, the buddha Vajrapāni leads an army of wrathful buddhas who ultimately destroy the rampaging demon with graphic and illustrative violence.

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[9] Dalton, *Taming of the Demons,* 88.

[10] While perhaps the paradigmatic form of ritualized practices, tantric practices are not the only form of ritualized violence. Recent work by Michael Lempert frames the contemporary spread of religious debating as a traditional form of initiatory violence. Michael Lempert, *Discipline and Debate: The Language of Violence in a Tibetan Buddhist Monastery,* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

[11] Dalton, *Taming of the Demons,* 159-206; *Dgongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo,* in the *mtshams brag* editions of the *rnying ma rgyud 'bum,* Volume 16, ed. Rdo rje thogs med, (Thimpu, Bhutan: National Library, Royal Government of Bhutan, 1982), 2-617.

While Rudra's connections with the Hindu deity Śiva allow the myth to be read as a sectarian narrative promoting Buddhist tantric practice over that of Hindu forms, it also reveals the centrality of enlightened awareness to appropriate tantric action. Although Black Liberator / Rudra and Denpak / Vajrapāni's actions look similar from the outside perspective, they are based on fundamentally different understandings:

> As close as these two forms of violence—Buddhist and Śaiva—may appear, they are understood by orthodox Buddhists to be infinitely distant. Rooted in the subtlest of distinction, they are also polar opposites. Their differences mean everything, distinguishing good from evil, *nirvana* from *samsara,* and buddhas from demons, yet the vast gulf that divides them originates, according to the myth's own narrative, in a mere instant of misrecognition, in a moment that occurred in the distant past of time immemorial.[12]

Citing the ninth-century commentator Nupchen Sangyé Yeshe (d.9th century), Dalton links Rudra's fundamental error to a misrecognition of self and other that denies their shared foundation (*ālaya*); as a result, "ignorance discriminates self from other, enlightenment from suffering, buddha from demon, and good from evil."[13] Dalton goes on to explain that within the context of the narrative, recognizing this shared foundational mind (*ālaya)* as identical with the mind of enlightenment leads one to enlightenment, while "nonrecognition bring the foundation consciousness (*ālaya-vijñāna),* afflicted thought (*klista-manas),* mind and the five sense consciousnesses, and the rest of *samsāra."*[14] Despite the apparent similarity of their violence, Rudra is a demon and Vajrapāni is a buddha because of this divergence in their understanding of the fundamental nature of reality and the equivalence of self and other.

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[12] Dalton, *Taming of the Demons,* 39.
[13] Dalton, *Taming of the Demons,* 41. Gnubs chen sangs rgyas ye shes. *Mun pa'i go cha,* In *Rnying ma bka' ma rgyas pa,* Volumes 50, ed. Bdud 'joms 'jigs bral ye shes rdo rje, (Kalimpong, India: Dubjang Lama, 1982), 258-259.
[14] Dalton, *Taming of the Demons,* 40.

Gesar as Successful and Unsuccessful Tantric Figure

Despite these prevalent claims as to the importance of correct understanding as the foundation of tantric violence, the *Perfecting of Hell* challenges traditional portrayals of King Gesar as a tantric demon-slayer and through that casts doubt on the possibility of enlightened violence at all. King Gesar has traditionally fit into the mold of a tantric demon-slayer through his subjugation of surrounding "demon-kings" threatening the practice of Buddhism. Though not explicitly portrayed in the *Perfecting of Hell,* his subjugation of these demon kings is frequently referenced in the text as part of its background story and a component of the larger epic world. In brief statements summarizing previous episodes of the epic and situating the text within the epic tradition, the author of the *Perfecting of Hell* states,

> The expansive evil forces of the four cardinal and eight intermediary directions were gaining more power. Demons had entered under the guise of all the royal lineages surrounding us….in order to establish all sentient beings in bliss, [Gesar] assumed the guise of the glorious Heruka and bound all classes of demonic beings with vows [to protect Buddhism.][15]

King Gesar refers to his own prowess as a demon-slayer in his encounter with King Yama to prove his abilities as a great Buddhist figure:

> I have effectively tamed the heretical demons and malicious spirits.
> …
> I am the man who destroyed the four enemies of the Dharma.
> I am the man who overpowered four demons.
> My impressive strength is unique in its blossoming;
> It is the divine arrow for which there are no words.
> There is no sound except the crack [when the arrow is released]
> And the gurgle of blood.
> At the end of my lasso is bone.
> ….

[15] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po*, (Thimpu), 3-4.

> If you are a demon, I will liberate you!
> Positive and negative karma, I myself will differentiate.[16]

As a demon slayer, King Gesar even proclaims his own nature as a buddha, stating at the beginning of one song, "If you do not know me, I am the third buddha, the Supreme Conqueror."[17] The *Perfecting of Hell* acknowledges this by portraying Gesar himself as a tantric demon-slayer. This portrayal is enhanced by Gesar's interactions with the figure of Padmasambhava in the first third of the text. As a character, Padmasambhava acts as an important legitimizing force for King Gesar: he provides tantric initiations necessary for Great Perfection practice and materializes to bless Gesar's spreading Great Perfection teachings in Chapter 2. Indeed, according to Solomon George FitzHerbert, the roughly contemporary "Lingtshang Gesar" promotes "the richest sense of the child-hero's [Gesar/Joru] power in the style of a tantric master."[18] As a tantric master, Gesar defeats enemy kings who are revealed to be evil demons leading people away from authentic Buddhist practice—a transformation which Charlene Makley argues represents a symbolic response to the Tibetan experience of the Qing frontier.[19] Mipham Gyatso's ritual compositions reiterate Gesar's religious status as a tantric demon-slayer through supplicating the hero as a tantric deity associated with wealth, prosperity, and martial power.[20] Imitating Padmasambhava's tantric model of a buddha subduing demons, King Gesar as portrayed in the first half of the *Perfecting of Hell* conceptualizes his own violence as inherently enlightened and for the protection of Buddhism.

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[16] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po,* "Song 4.3.30-149," (Thimphu), 167-173.
[17] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po,* "Song 2.5.7-8," *(*Thimphu), 121.
[18] FitzHerbert, "The Birth of Gesar: Narrative Diversity and Social Resonance in the Tibetan Epic Tradition," 2007.
[19] Charlene Makley, *Violence of Liberation: Gender and Tibetan Buddhist Revival in Post-Mao China,* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 238-240.
[20] For full translations of rituals, see Gregory Forgues. "Materials for the Study of Gesar Practices." (MA Thesis, Universität Wien, 2011)

The belief in King Gesar as a great tantric demon slayer is prevalent across eastern Tibet today. Researcher with the Yushu Office of Cultural Preservation Karma Lhamo explains that the Gesar epic is at its heart a text about battling demons threatening Buddhism. Importantly, she emphasizes that Gesar's confrontations are fundamentally libratory—Gesar is a buddha and his violence exists only to free suffering beings:

> There are all different types of buddhas, but in order to conquer these four demons, they [the gods] have to choose someone who has both the kindness and the force together. He needs to have wrathfulness and peacefulness together….because of this they chose the 15th son of Karpo Ngangyag [called Thöpa Gawa]. Tibetans think King Gesar is a manifestation of a buddha; he stands by Guru Rinpoche [Padmasambhava]…. Although it looks like King Gesar is fighting and killing, he is really freeing all these people who are suffering and helping them—he truly has the kind heart of a buddha, not the bloody sword of the king.[21]

Karma Lhamo's statement that King Gesar's killing was, in reality, an act of compassion was repeated throughout my field research. When interviewing Gesar bards Tsering Tsongyak and Gyurmé Rabden, both told me that Gesar's wars against demons were about protecting the Buddha's teachings and benefiting those he kills—not violence merely for its own sake:

> Although it looks like King Gesar was killing these demons and destroying them to most people, that's not really the case. These demons had many opportunities to listen to the Buddha's teachings, but they chose to not listen and their heart is like a rock placed in water [it won't absorb any of the water]. When King Gesar uses a knife to cut the heart, he kills the existing body, but puts their soul into a Pure Land. Because of that, the demons have another chance to listen to the teachings in the next life and common people won't be contaminated by their thinking.[22]

Modeling the ideal tantric practitioner, present-day interpretations of King Gesar affirm his enlightened nature and his resultant ability to save those beings he kills through rebirth in a Pure Land.

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[21] Dkar ma lha mo (Scholar at Yushu Office of Cultural Preservation). Personal interview.
[22] Tshe ring tshong rgyag and 'Gyur med rab rten (Gesar bards in Yushu), Personal interview.

Despite situating King Gesar in the role of tantric demon slayer before his encounter with King Yama, the *Perfecting of Hell* ultimately challenges this perception in its remainder. As discussed briefly in Chapter 2, Yama berates King Gesar for his violent actions and ignores his protests that those he killed were in actuality demons threatening Buddhism in Tibet. Yama explains that the violent accoutrement Gesar brings with him to the hell realm are useless; he offers in their place armor made up of traditional Buddhist understandings of ethics:

> You are allowed to wear the white armor of virtuous action;
> Hell is not the land where you wear the metal armor of demonstrative heroes.
> You may wear the white helmet of cause and effect;
> it is not the land where you wear the helmet of demonic power.
> You may carry the sword of virtuous action;
> it is not the land where you can carry the small knife of sin.
> You can show of your incomparable strength of Dharma practice;
> it is not the land where you can show off your strength of a hate-filled mind.
> You can show off your discourse on the truthful dharma;
> it is not the land where you can speak with a sweet-talking, nimble tongue[23]

Indeed, Gesar's mother's suffering in hell itself is evidence that her son's violence continued to accumulate bad karma despite his claims to enlightened ability. When describing her pitiful position, Yama emphasizes the karmic retribution that arises from violence, stating, "the fruition of karma that is like that [arising from violence] is the great suffering of the deathly hell realm."[24] These critiques of Gesar revealed both in Yama's words and in his mother's netherworld torment are unprecedented in the Gesar epic tradition and tantric literature; they challenge at least King Gesar's role as a being able to enact enlightened violence, and possibly even the idea that enlightened violence is acceptable at all.

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[23] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po,* "Song 4.2.32-41," (Thimphu), 164.
[24] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po,* "Song 4.5.105," (Thimphu), 191.

Yama's critique of King Gesar's violent actions rests on his own assertion that—despite Gesar's detailed self-descriptions of his bravado—his authority trumps that of King Gesar. He tells Gesar, "You are bragging in my realm [where] the cold live. In the land of hell [where the] dead are, you cannot go. This is not a land where you have authority. You do not have authority to rule like the Lord of Death."[25] In fact, Yama reminds Gesar that his martial talents fighting the supernatural are not necessarily unique:

> If you think I am a demon, you are deluded. The magnificent garuda is greater than the white vulture! It is your own suffering to not believe my power is great….demons, ghosts, and spirits—I can harm and destroy them all myself.[26]

As the arbiter of karma in the underworld, Yama represents a traditional, non-tantric Buddhist perspective that is both final and unmistaken. It is telling that Gesar's ability to free suffering beings at all is a skill acquired from King Yama; Yama has ultimate power over Gesar, undermining the supposed tantric demon slayer's claims to glory. The *Perfecting of Hell's* assertions of Yama's supremacy over King Gesar and his denial of the warrior-king's claims to authority as a demon-tamer undermine both King Gesar's abilities and the larger claims supporting tantric violence.

Perhaps most undermining to Gesar's claims for his own tantric capacities, however, is that Gesar discovers his abilities to "liberate" demons and transport their spirits to rebirth in Pure Lands are false. When he finally reaches his mother in hell, Gesar finds her surrounded by all the demons he had supposedly liberated in prior episodes of the epic:

> In the middle of many men and women, [was] Mother Gokmo. The three kings of Hor, the Tiger-men Demons, Great Strength, Makulha, the Persian Stanlha Dorje, Jur from Jang, the Mongolian Blood-god, Taklha of the North,

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[25] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po,* "Song 4.2.54-57," (Thimphu), 165.
[26] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po,* "Song 4.4.19-24," (Thimphu), 180.

> and all maras unable to perceive the faith who King Gesar was unable to tame and had killed mixed around her.[27]

The majority of these demons are well-known villains in the Gesar epic tradition whom Gesar had supposedly "liberated" in prior texts, though some are unknown or have modified names in the *Perfecting of Hell*.[28] King Gesar unexpectedly discovers that the demons he killed did not, in actuality, take rebirth in Pure Lands as he claimed they would. Indeed, in the early pages of the text, some of these demons are mentioned by names as those Gesar had "engaged in heavy warfare and rained swords down upon them. Through limitless manifestations, some he raised [their consciousness]…some he sent to the feet of the four [buddhas of the four directions]."[29] When a humbled King Gesar finally reaches his mother, his attitude has changed and he has modified his earlier grandiose declarations of Buddhist power. While still claiming a divine status for himself (and his horse), he states that his power in hell arises not from his own ability, but rather from the divine Buddhist figures from which he emanates:

> Do not meditate on your son, Gesar,
> [but rather] meditate on the divine Mañjuśrī who resides inside [your son]!
> Do not meditate on the white helmet [on my head],
> [but rather] meditate on the five families!
> Meditate on the actuality of the five families of divine buddhas!
> Do not meditate on your own body
> [but rather] meditation on a mandala of the one hundred sacred ones!
> Do not meditate on the three spheres [around my] waist,
> [but rather] meditate on the companions of the fierce knowledge bearers!
> Do not meditate on my horse, Kyangbu,
> [but rather] meditate on Hayagrīva, which he in reality is![30]

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[27] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po,* (Thimpu), 217.
[28] Gcod pa don 'grub and Bsod los bsgrigs, *Gling ge sar sgrung gi tshig rgyan nor bu'i bang mdzod.* (Pedrun Nationalities Publishing House, 1996).
[29] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po,* (Thimpu), 7.
[30] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po,* "Song 4.8.32-41," (Thimphu), 219-220.

The end of King Gesar's journey to hell reveals that his earlier claims to liberate demon-kings in the process of fighting are not actualized.

While the *Perfecting of Hell* undermines the possibility of enlightened tantric violence for King Gesar, the text does not deny all enlightened tantric violence; rather, it seems that Padmasambhava remains a valid expression of a tantric demon-slayer. During Gesar's travels through the Copper-Colored Mountain, the *Perfecting of Hell* highlights the wrathful and fierce nature of Padmasambhava as king and tamer of the rakshasa demons. In the northern part of the island, an emanation of Padmasambhava is said to have "tamed the rakshasas by cutting off the heads of the men and women, rooting out their eyes, and cutting, killing, and beating them."[31] Another part of the island features an area where "all must cover their noses with their right hand due to the smell of death from the bodies whose flesh the Supreme Conqueror [Padmasambhava] ate."[32] In an opening hymn of praise, however, the text reveals that the goal of Padmasambhava's actions is solely to allow for ethical discipline within the bounds of traditional Buddhist practice: "The conqueror of all the hosts of Mara, the enemies, and the hindrances. He who tames and purifies all that which seeks to harm the scripture which supports monastic discipline."[33] Padmasambhava's violent subjugation of demons exists only to ensure monastic purity, not to represent a path of realization in its own right. Ultimately, this undermines the validity and efficacy of violent religious practice for those who are not Padmasambhava. Through revealing Gesar's own inability to liberate those he kills in contrast to Padmasambhava's

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[31] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po,* (Thimpu), 47.
[32] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po,* (Thimpu), 49.
[33] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po,* (Thimpu), 2.

unique abilities as a demon-king, the *Perfecting of Hell* argues against violent tantric religious practices as suitable for most practitioners.

The *Perfecting of Hell's* concern with religious violence is also evident in its discussion of practitioners' potential self-delusion of their spiritual abilities—explored in Chapter 2 as an ethical concern, but one which also has tantric implications. To quote King Gesar's Song 2.1 once more, the *Perfecting of Hell* relates a specific lesson for tantric practitioners—called nakpas—who incorporate violence and sexual relation into their practice:

> For nakpas and those who practice tantra
> while having a wife and holding the phurba
> and killing many sentient beings in the slaughter house;
> he who has not a single compassionate thought
> and opens his eyes wide while saying "Powa!"
> Whatever he sees good or bad, he thinks it to be a ghost.
> This nakpa cannot help the people,
> but only causes harm and makes [sexual] relationships
> with a thousand sentient beings.
> When you fall to hell, you will have great regret.[34]

In Song 2.6, intended for the people of Mon and Jang, King Gesar reiterates the need to be honest about one's religious abilities and warns against performing ritualized tantric feasting when one is not enlightened:

> When the dākinīs' prophecies do not descend [upon you],
> do not enjoy women, meat, and beer.
> When your own power does not ripen in essence,
> do not teach meditation to others and measure cause and effect.[35]

These sections temper the *Perfecting of Hell's* critique of King Gesar a little, as they imply that it may be possible to do such violent tantric practices if one's meditative abilities are sufficiently realized. The reality of enlightened tantric violence overall is not necessarily

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[34] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po,* "Song 2.1.275-282," (Thimphu), 103-104.
[35] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po,* "Song 2.6.66-70." (Thimphu), 126.

denied, but the *Perfecting of Hell* makes clear that the majority of human practitioners are threatened by the risk of self-delusion. King Gesar's failure as a tantric figure—demonstrated by his inability to transport the spirits of liberated demons to Pure Lands—and resulting chastisement and maternal punishment in the netherworld demonstrate the *Perfecting of Hell's* concern with the practice of violent religious tantras as the most advanced Buddhist practice, while also potentially undermining the possibility of enlightened violence more broadly.

Great Perfection Tantras—A Unique Tibetan Innovation

Having challenged as the most advanced from of Buddhist practice the enlightened violence found in the Anuttarayoga tantras, the *Perfecting of Hell* presents instead Nyingma Great Perfection practice as an alternative. Already discussed briefly in Chapter 1, Great Perfection practice represents a largely uniquely Tibetan form of Buddhist practice—despite claims to Indian origins. Indeed, physical evidence of its texts and practices in Tibet arises only through tenth, eleventh, and twelfth century and especially through the mechanism of treasure texts, though practitioners claim it arrived in Tibet with Vimalamitra and Padmasambhava in particular.[36] As will be discussed below, Great Perfection teachings valorize the cultivation of and return to "naturalness" as a means to attain Buddhist realization. While primarily a Tibetan creation, Great Perfection practices seem to have built on preceding Indian ideas. Ronald Davidson notes that the Sanskrit term *sahaja*—defined literally as "arising together," but understood by later thinkers to mean

[36] Sam van Schaik, "The Early Days of the Great Perfection," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 27.1 (2004): 165-206. David Germano, *Mysticism and Rhetoric in the Great Perfection (rDzogs chen).* Forthcoming.

"naturalness"—was abstracted by Tibetan thinkers from its earlier ritual usage in later Indian esoteric texts to represent "the *sin qua non* of correct realization."[37]

Unlike the earliest Indian tantras and the later-developed Mahāyoga and Anuttarayoga tantras that highlighted as the foundations of practice enlightened sexuality and violence—either performed or visualized—Great Perfection utilizes explicitly non-violent themes and underscores a return to a naturally-arising, primordial enlightenment. While emphasizing the incredible variability of Great Perfection practice, David Germano has noted that Great Perfection teachings clearly break from traditional tantric norms by rejecting tantra's fierce and sexual manifestations.[38] In its place there is "a tendency toward naturalness, innateness, and simplicity/simplification and a strong suspicion of techniques and rule-governed processes of all types."[39] This celebration of "naturalness"—often combined with spontaneity, primordiality, and other indications of a lack of artifice—has at its foundation a belief in the inherently enlightened nature of all sentient beings:

> If you think that he who is called "the heart essence of all buddha, the primordial Lord, the noble Victorious One, Samanthabhadra" is contained in a mindstream separate from the ocean-like realm of sentient beings, then this is a nihilistic view in which samsara and nirvana remain connected.[40]

Sam van Schaik notes that it is a misrecognition of one's own enlightened nature and a resulting movement to make distinctions between self and other that leads to ignorance, delusion, and samsaric suffering: "The ripening of awareness into delusion is said to be brought about by awareness's nonrecognition of its own nature (*rang ngo ma shes pa*),

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[37] Ronald Davidson, "Reframing 'Sahaja': Genre, Representation, Ritual, and Lineage," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 30.1 (2002): 45-83. 52.
[38] David Germano, "Dzogchen," *Encyclopedia of Religion,* ed. Lindsay Jones, (Detroit: Macmillian Reference USA, 2005) 2545-2550.
[39] Germano, "Dzogchen," 2546.
[40] 'Jigs med gling pa. *Rdzogs pa chen po kun tu bzang po ye shes klong gi rgyud (The Great Perfection Tantra of the Expanse of Samanthabadra's Wisdom)*, n.p. or d. 79-80. As translated by Sam van Schaik in *Approaching the Great Perfection: Simultaneous and Gradual Methods of Dzogchen Practice in the Longchen Nyingtig.* 55.

which is followed by dualistic conceptualization."[41] Emphasizing the equivalence of self and other and samsaric beings own, naturally-arising enlightenment, Great Perfection teachings reject the martial and sexual themes of other advanced tantric practices.

For Nyingma practitioners of Tibetan Buddhism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Great Perfection—given the Sanskrit title *atiyoga*—occupied a role equivalent to Anuttarayoga tantras in the Sarma schools as the ultimate, most advanced stage of religious practice. Always an important tradition in the Nyingma school, the revelatory work of eighteenth-century Jikmé Lingpa organized the Great Perfection practices of Longchenpa's *Seminal Heart* series into a single system where "the Great Perfection was used as an interpretive structure for the practices of the tantras, which were placed below it in the hierarchy of Buddhist systems."[42] In creating this systematization, Jikmé Lingpa was imitating other Tibetan Buddhist schools, which had—akin to contemporary branding techniques—created their own doxographies of tantras that valorized their uniquely-held individual tantric cycles as the consummate Buddhist practice. Modeling other Buddhist schools, Jikmé Lingpa systematized Nyingma teachings to present Great Perfection as the culmination of Buddhist practice.

Great Perfection in the *Perfecting of Hell*

The *Perfecting of Hell* takes a profoundly pro-Nyingma stance through simultaneously promoting Great Perfection as the pinnacle of Buddhist practice and undermining the validity of martial tantras. As discussed above, King Gesar initially represents an ideal practitioner of the aesthetically wrathful, Mahāyoga and Anuttarayoga

[41] Van Schaik, *Approaching the Great Perfection,* 56.
[42] van Schaik, *Approaching the Great Perfection,* 5.

tantras for his regal demon slaying but is ultimately demonstrated to be a failed tantric figure. Yama reveals both his inability to truly liberate the demon kings he kills and the resulting karmic punishment for his wrathful actions (though it is applied to his mother). Gesar's most apparent success as a religious figure in the *Perfecting of Hell* comes from his tenure teaching the Great Perfection as highlighted in Chapter 2. Divine figures prophesize that this teaching will be a great benefit to the people of Ling. Explaining to his warriors Manéné's call to action and the necessity of his travel to Padmasambhava's court, Gesar proclaims that, "I must obey every command of the Master himself [Padmasambhava] and offer the essence of the Dzogchen [Great Perfection] teachings to Tibet."[43] Manéné's prophecy is echoed when Vajravārāhī arrives to bring King Gesar to the Copper-Colored Mountain:

> This Supreme Conqueror, this Being-who-Tames-the-Enemy will carry to Ling from the palace of the glorious mountain on Camara Island the profound Dharma of Dzokchen [Great Perfection]. He will act for the welfare of the ornamented southern world.[44]

The people of Ling themselves are excited to receive Great Perfection teachings and proclaim to Gesar as he leaves, "[May] Lord Padmasambhava, the fortunate deity who protects the black-haired Tibetans, [give] us blessings very quickly. May the essence of the profound Dharma of Dzogchen [Great Perfection] be carried into the land of Dark Tibet."[45] Using multiple prophetic voices, the coming of Great Perfection teachings to Ling is seen as a great boon that the figure of King Gesar must accomplish to benefit his people.

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[43] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po,* "Song 1.4.62-63," (Thimphu), 21.
[44] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po,* "Song 1.8.61-64," (Thimphu), 37.
[45] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po,* "Song 1.9.81-84," (Thimphu), 40-41.

King Gesar, therefore, becomes the source of Great Perfection teachings for the lands under his dominion. When visiting Padmasambhava, the buddha gives him teachings on and initiations for both Great Perfection and Bön texts:

> The Master explained the doctrine using mudras and made his body shimmering with rays of light. He gave teachings on the Dharma of the Nine Ways of Bon and then Tantric Teachings as if filling a vase to the brim [with water]. He particularly gave teachings on the Innermost Essential Drop of Dzogchen of the Dharma of the Great Perfection [yang gsang thig le] and the exalted mind of the Precious Supreme Conqueror completely understood it and his immeasurable wisdom increased.[46]

Because the *Perfecting of Hell* situates itself as occurring after Buddhism's initial spread—more specifically, during the eleventh-century period of imperial disorganization known as the "Tibetan Dark Age"—it seems strange that King Gesar is requested to spread Great Perfection teachings after Padmasambhava's eight-century arrival. However, the *Perfecting of Hell* accounts for this discrepancy by featuring Padmasambhava explaining that he had to limit the initial teachings of the Great Perfection:

> [Concerning] the pinnacle of the nine vehicles
> of Dzogchen and Mahāmudrā—the heart essence (*nying thig*)—
> although a buddha came before, the teachings did not spread greatly.
> Because no buddhas arose in outer form,
> I did not teach the Dharma of Dzogchen or spread it."[47]

Based on this song, the *Perfecting of Hell* is elevating Gesar into the significant role of primary teacher of Great Perfection in Tibet. The buddhas of the five directions give Gesar additional initiations and blessings, and he returns to Ling to spread the Great Perfection teachings among his people.

Tracing King Gesar's teachings for those he invites, Chapter 2 represents the fullest expression of the Great Perfection in the *Perfecting of Hell.* After Song 2.1—modeled on the

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[46] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po,* (Thimphu), 54.
[47] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po,* "Song 1.12,26-29." (Thimphu), 60.

first chapters of a *Seminal Heart of Great Expanse* Preliminary Meditations text, as discussed in Chapter 2—King Gesar offers more advanced teachings separately to each national group. He justifies the secrecy between nationality groups as "this secret mantra [of the] Dzogchen [Great Perfection] gives differing advice for each….Hearing mistaken Dharma will not lead them to their release."[48] Looking in detail at the teachings King Gesar gives as seen in Table 3, it is only a little bit of an overstatement to say that the teachings read like a veritable canon of important Nyingma and Great Perfection texts.

TABLE 3		
Peoples	**Teaching**	**Description**
India (Rgya gar)	Lama Sangdu; (*bla ma gsang 'dus)*	13th-century treasure revealed by Guru Chôwang. Main lama practice in Non-Sectarian leader's Treasury of Precious Treasures (*rin chen gter mdzod*)
Nepalis and Central Tibetans (Pal po, Dbus, Lha sa, Gtsang)	Lama Gongpa Dupa; (*bla ma dgongs pa 'dus pa)*	Important Great Perfection text revealed in 14th-century. Concerns one of major Nyingma deities.
Khampa Eastern Tibetans (Khams)	Eight Peaceful and Wrathful Deities; (*zhi khro bka' brgyad)*	Advanced Dzogchen practice centered on eight deities: four wrathful and four peaceful
Hor (Hor)	Khandro Nyingthik; (*mkha' 'gro snying thig)*	14th-century treasure revealed by Pema Ledrel Tsal. One of the main practices at Dzogchen monastery
Mon and Jang (Mon, 'Jangs)	Lama Yangthik; (*bla ma yang thig)*	14th-century commentary composed by Longchenpa on Dzogchen root text Vima Nyingthik
Minyak (Me nyag)	Lama Manjushri; (*bla ma 'jam dpal)*	Unknown practice text focused on Mañjuśrī.

Most are treasure texts arising from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, though the *Seminal Essence of the Guru* (Lama Yangtik) is written by Longchenpa himself. As to the

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[48] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po,* "Song 2.1.349-352." (Thimphu), 106-107.

order in which each national community receives their teaching, the *Perfecting of Hell* does not offer any specific spiritual significance; King Gesar states that he will begin teaching those from distant places first, though he later adds, "If I teach the Dharma first to the people of India, it will be best. Although they are from a distant land, traces of the blessings of prior Panditas remain there, [and] they will recognize it easily."[49] Although the *Perfecting of Hell* states that King Gesar teaches each group for many months, the reader does not personally witness many details about the specific contents. Rather, the narrative action jumps to the end of the teaching, where King Gesar offers the assembled community—as well as the reader—a parting song of general Great Perfection instruction.

Despite not featuring any guidance specific to the Great Perfection practice cycles he teaches, Gesar's parting songs provide significant introductory instruction in Great Perfection metaphors and thought. The theme of the luminosity of one's own mind—a central feature of Great Perfection teachings—underlies the majority of the instruction in Chapter 2's songs. In Song 2.3 for the Nepalis and central Tibetans, a discussion of the nature of the mind acts as the song's central focal point:

> The foundational nature of the mind
> is like the depths of the great ocean.
> Free from the agitated waves of thought.
> Although there are many conceptualities in the mind.
> The mind's foundational nature is devoid of limits,
> without shape and color,
> [with] luminous attention.
> Within this luminous conceptuality, there is peace.[50]

[49] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po,* (Thimphu), 110.
[50] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po,* "Song 2.3.27-30." (Thimphu), 115.

The topic arises again in Gesar's song to the delegation from Hor, which explicitly links the nature of one's own mind to the enlightened Dharma Body (Dharmakāya) from which all buddhas and bodhisattvas arise:

> Meet with the natural face of the Dharmakāya,
> [which is] the unique sphere of one's own mind!
> Without effort, special insight itself arises.
> If you see it, it is none other than a buddha.
> It is self-arising, self-released, and a great joy.
> It is beyond words.
> Its nature is birthless, unobstructed, and self-luminous.
> Birth and death, samsara and nirvana—
> there is no difference in quality.
> In truth, the natural face is spontaneously achieved by its own power.
> It has no need of flattery or reverence.[51]

Summarizing Great Perfection ideas, these songs promote a vision of the luminosity of the mind, albeit in an introductory form free of specific guidance for ritual practice.

The inherent luminosity of the mind lays the foundation for celebrating a return to naturalness, which represents the second important Great Perfection theme running throughout Chapter 2's songs. In his song for Nepalis and those from central Tibet, Gesar explains that everyone is already aware and enlightened, singing, "The foundational nature of the mind is like the depths of the great ocean—free from the agitated waves of thought."[52] The importance of expressing one's own natural state is highlighted again in King Gesar's song to the Indians, where it is explicitly linked to meditative practice:

> The female mountain lion on the white snows of India,
> because [she is in] the posture like in Mahāmudrā meditation,
> is not frightened by other lions!
> This is her nature while on the snow peaks.
>
> On the Vajra Rock mountain of India,
> the vulture's wings spontaneously spread.

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[51] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po,* "Song 2.5.27-36." (Thimphu), 122.
[52] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po,* "Song 2.3.27-30." (Thimphu), 115.

> Although the birds may fall from the cliff to the earth,
> the flight path of the vulture is in their nature.
>
> On the mountain of the woody valley [next] to India,
> the brave, agile, and courageous tiger shows off.
> The carnivorous tiger is not confined.
> The extravagant body of the tiger is his own nature.
>
> In the upper hermitage, those who practice Dharma
> meditate on complete emptiness [of all things]
> and their meditation does not slip, nor are their vows lost—
> such is the nature of those who meditate for a long time.
>
> Within the mandala of the spacious sphere of reality,
> [you] endeavor without wavering.
> Do not worry about going the wrong way,
> grasping [the meditation] is your basic nature.[53]

This song is enhanced elsewhere by Gesar's frequent calls for practitioners to take refuge as the natural action of a meditator. As part of its introductory Great Perfection teachings, the *Perfecting of Hell* thematizes the natural arising expression of practice.

Assisting these assertions that an individual's natural state is meditation, the *Perfecting of Hell's* Great Perfection teachings also include numerous calls to dedicated Buddhist practice. In Song 2.4 to the Khampas, King Gesar encourages listeners to practice without fear of future catastrophes:

> When meditating in an isolated place alone,
> purify your mind with the sword of knowledge
> so that you are fearless [in the face] of foes and thieves.
> Clothe your body spontaneously in the
> clothing of heated body practice [Tunmo]
> so that you are fearless [in the face of] the icy winter breeze.
> It is not poverty without cause;
> it completes the seven noble riches on your body.
> Do not be scared by famine.
> In reality, you will eat and be filled by meditative stabilization.
> Do not fear great thirst.
> You will drink the beer of the ambrosia of mindfulness.

[53] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po,* "Song 2.2.14-33." (Thimphu), 111-112.

> You will not desire friends.
> your friendship will be the 1000 joyful meditations.[54]

This theme is reiterated in Song 2.6 to the Mon and Jang people that emphasizes the transformative potential of meditative practice to discover one's equivalence with the buddha Samantabhadra and the Dharmakāya:

> If you envision the seven noble riches in your mind,
> you will not suffer from poverty.
> If you can burn your body with the blissful heat of heated body practice,
> you will never be confined by the suffering of a freezing body.
> If you perceive your own body as the Dharmakāya,
> you will not despair in the mud of samsara.
> If you become so that you fundamentally shine by your own luminosity,
> you will not need to hope for the upper buddha field.
> By having the mind of the glorious Samanthabhadra as your own,
> you will cherish practice.[55]

The meditation and seclusion promoted throughout King Gesar's songs of Great Perfection teaching are presented as the natural embodiment of one's already enlightened nature.

While the songs in Chapter 2 are the only moments of explicit Great Perfection instruction, the *Perfecting of Hell* features repeated references to the Great Perfection as the highest and most efficacious form of Buddhist practice. When confronted by King Gesar on the nature of hell in light of his mother's rebirth there, Yama explains that hell is a unique land of Buddhist practice—"the land where you can explain the Dzogchen [Great Perfection] teachings."[56] In the *Perfecting of Hell's* final chapters—where everyone leaves a final will and testament before dying—the heroes and heroines frequently describe their own extensive Great Perfection practice, while also encouraging others to follow their

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[54] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po,* "Song 2.4. 24-36." (Thimphu), 119.
[55] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po,* "Song 2.6.14-23." (Thimphu), 124.
[56] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po,* "Song 4.2.46." (Thimphu), 165.

example. As Gesar's wife Drukmo dies, she expresses that her Dzogchen practice has ensured her positive rebirth:

> In this transient world of the three realms,
> Death exists in the final moments of birth.
> Having meditated on impermanence in my mind,
> now it actually arises in my body.
> I do not fear or doubt my death
> [because] the Lord Supreme Conqueror's [Gesar] health is good;
> [because] I walk in the direction of the Dharma,
> [because] I have practice the dharma of Mahāmudrā [Great Seal] and Dzogchen [Great Perfection], and
> [because] the black-haired Tibetans possess joy.[57]

In addition to Great Perfection, she mentions Great Seal [Mahāmudrā] practice, an advanced practice popular in the Kagyü sect of Tibetan Buddhism that shares with the Great Perfection an aesthetics of non-violence; as will be explored in a moment, its inclusion here and at other moments throughout the text speaks to the potential Non-Sectarian aims of the *Perfecting of Hell.* King Gesar's uncle Thröthung—a complex character described as an emanation of the horse-headed tantric deity Hayagrīva, but who often works against King Gesar in the body of the narrative—reiterates Drukmo's statement that his future rebirth in the Pure Land is due to his Great Perfection (and Great Seal) practice:

> I have grown old and attained the welfare of my next life.
> I have practiced the essence of Mahāmudrā (Great Seal) and Dzogchen (Great Perfection).
> The sign of meditation accomplishment—the magical emanation—
> I have practiced in the sky.
> Hayagrīva has come to the crown ornament of my head.
> It is said I, Thröthung, must go to the Pure Land.[58]

After Gesar's tenure as Great Perfection teacher and journey to hell in the first two thirds of the *Perfecting of Hell,* the final third of the text reinforces the importance of Great

[57] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po,* "Song 6.1.64-71." (Thimphu), 288.
[58] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po,* "Song 7.2.24-28." (Thimphu), 297.

Perfection practice by displaying the heroic deaths of Gesar's companions and their subsequent rebirths in the Pure Lands. By means of both King Gesar's explicit instruction and the assertions of other characters, therefore, the *Perfecting of Hell* promotes Great Perfection practice and thought as the most advanced form of Buddhist practice.

Non-Sectarian Contexts

The *Perfecting of Hell's* promotion of Great Perfection teachings reflects the text's participation in what has been called the "Non-Sectarian movement." As described in Chapter 1, the Non-Sectarian movement (Rimé*,* lit. without bias, without division) was a trend among nineteenth- and twentieth-century Buddhist teachers in eastern Tibet—most prominently Jamgön Kongtrul and Jamyang Khyentsé Wangpo—to utilize a discourse of "non-sectarianism" in order to preserve religious texts and teachings that they believed were at risk of disappearing. First described in western literature by E. Gene Smith,[59] Non-Sectarian teachers studied and received empowerments from a range of Tibetan Buddhist practices and encouraged their students to pursue a similar variety. While Alexander Gardner has challenged its status as an organized "movement" and noted that—as will be discussed momentarily—its "non-sectarianism" still clearly favored some sects over others,[60] the "Non-Sectarian Movement" is a second-order category that continues to provide a useful categorization of changes happening in eastern Tibetan religiosity during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Non-Sectarian, perhaps, is best

[59] E. Gene Smith, "'Jam mgon kong sprul and the Nonsectarian Movement," and "Mi pham and the Philosophical Controversies of the Nineteenth Century," in *Among Tibetan Texts: History and Literature of the Himalayan Plateau,* ed. Kurtis R. Schaeffer, (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2001) Alexander Gardner notes that both of these essays were originally untitled prefaces to Indian publications, 112.
[60] Gardner, "The Twenty-Five Great Sites of Khams."

represented by what it is *not;* as characterized by Douglas Duckworth, the Non-Sectarian movement contrasts with the model most often pursued by the Geluk school—an "insular model of scholarship that frames the boundaries of discourse within one's own narrowly delineated tradition of interpretation."[61] The men who have come to be called "leaders" of the Non-Sectarian movement likely did not have had a self-referential understanding of their work as the transformation of Tibetan society it was later represented to be. However, they still reveal certain significant trends towards the (mostly) ecumenical preservation of teachings in eastern Tibetan religious thought that deeply affected the broader discussion and practice of the contemporary Buddhism around them.

As part of preserving Buddhist practice cycles in danger of dying out, eastern Tibetan Non-Sectarian thinkers enthusiastically promoted Jikmé Lingpa's *Seminal Heart of Great Expanse* and the practice of Great Perfection more generally. Operating during a time Karma Phuntsho has called the "Nyingma Renaissance,"[62] Nyingma practitioners who worked, wrote, and thought within the Non-Sectarian movement were inspired by Jikmé Lingpa's attempts to catalogue and systematize Nyingma thought. Jikmé Lingpa died in 1798 and Janet Gyatso writes that "in the century following his death, he was one of the principal inspirations for the 'nonsectarian' (*ris med)* movement led by Nyingma and other visionaries and Treasure discoverers in eastern Tibet."[63] In fact, Non-Sectarian thinker Jamyang Khyentsé Wangpo was identified as a reincarnation of Jikmé Lingpa, while Wangpo's compatriots Jamgön Kongtrul and Chögyur Lingpa actively promoted the *Seminal*

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[61] Douglas Duckworth, *Jamgön Mipam: His Life and Teachings,* (Boston: Shambala Publishing, 2011), 51.
[62] Karma Phuntsho, *Mipham's Dialectics and the Debates on Emptiness,* 50.
[63] Gyatso, *Apparitions of the Self,* 142.

Heart of Great Expanse among their own students as a means to revitalize the Nyingma tradition.

In order to further develop the Nyingma tradition's scholastic and analytic angle, Non-Sectarian thinkers made further doxographies promoting Great Perfection as the ideal of Buddhist practice. In his *Treasury of Precious Treasures* (*Rinchen Terdzöd)*, Jamgön Kongtrul compiled and republished Great Perfection teachings.[64] This work did include a variety of Mahāyoga and other aesthetically violent texts, but Great Perfection was clearly given a special pride of place. Ju Mipham Gyatso—a student of Jamyang Khyentsé Wangpo who himself became an influential Non-Sectarian writer and thinker—created new catalogs of Longchenpa's works and elaborated on the philosophical and doctrinal thinking supporting Great Perfection practice. Douglas Duckworth highlights Mipham's concern with invigorating Nyingma monastic life—itself an important component of traditional Buddhist ethics: "Mipam [Mipham] was able to carry on the tradition of Longchenpa's visionary works on the Great Perfection by putting them into conversation with the dominant analytic traditions…he rendered Longchenpa's visionary works in a way that spoke the language of the monastic institutions of his day."[65] Building on the work of Jikmé Lingpa, Non-Sectarian thinkers advanced Great Perfection teachings as the apex of Buddhist practice.

Non-Sectarian thinkers' promotion of Great Perfection teachings was complimented by their larger discourse of reviving traditionally ethical Buddhist practice. While the Great

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[64] Peter Schwieger, "Collecting and Arranging the gTer ma Tradition: Kong sprul's Great Treasury of the Hidden Teachings," *Edition, editions: l'écrit au Tibet, évolution et devenir,* eds. Anne Chayet, Cristina Scherrer-Schaub, Françoise Robin & Jean-Luc Achard, (Munich: Indus Verlag Publishing, 2010), 321-336.

[65] Duckworth, 44; For more on the invigoration of eastern Tibetan monastic life during this period, see Jann Michael Ronis, "Celibacy, Revelations, and Reincarnated Lamas: Contestation and Synthesis in the Growth of Monasticism at Katok Monastery from the Seventeenth through Nineteenth Centuries," (PhD Diss., University of Virginia, 2009)

Perfection practices themselves had a negative view of traditional Buddhist ethical practice—viewing it as a form of striving or action that threatened to obscure the essential luminosity of one's own mind—the Great Perfection tradition aesthetically rejected the violent imagery so common in Anuttarayoga and Mahāyoga tantras. Through their reassertion of traditional, non-tantric ethical values, therefore, many Non-Sectarian thinkers not only attempted to find common ground between the various sects of Tibetan Buddhism by means of emphasizing their shared commitments to compassionate practice and ethical action, but also supported their promotion of Great Perfection as an aesthetically non-violent tradition. In his expansive study of vegetarianism in Tibet, Geoff Barstow explains that during this period certain ethical behavior like vegetarianism "experienced a remarkable surge of interest, particularly in Kham among adherents of the Nyingma school."[66] Some scholars have noted that the resurgence in ethical behaviors was supported among Non-Sectarian groups by encouraging a return to both monastic lifestyles and Indian originals of translated Buddhist works.[67] As explored by Holly Gayley, this focus on ethics extends into the contemporary situation in Tibet, where ethical practice has become a point of unification—and contention—among contemporary Tibetans; however, it is ultimately unclear how directly this contemporary passion can be linked back to the initial nineteenth-century formulations of the Non-Sectarian movement and its concern with traditional Buddhist ethics.[68] Due to the Great Perfection's aesthetic that eschews

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[66] Barstow, 34.
[67] Smith, 2011; Donald Lopez and Robert Buswell, 2014. It should be noted that Alexander Gardner strongly challenges this broad generalization.
[68] Holly Gayley, "Reimagining Buddhist Ethics on the Tibetan Plateau," *The Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 20 (2013): 247-286.

violence and martial imagery, the Non-Sectarian movement's support for Great Perfection practice directly supported its promulgation of traditional Buddhist ethics.

The *Perfecting of Hell's* depiction of King Gesar as a Non-Sectarian hero who discovers the evils of unenlightened tantric violence, therefore, reflects not only the Rimé context of its creation, but also its active and participatory role in promoting Non-Sectarian discourse. As discussed in the Introduction, Wara monastery was a hub of Non-Sectarian thinking in the early twentieth century, making the *Perfecting of Hell's* reflection of the values of the "movement" unsurprising. The specifically Non-Sectarian context of the *Perfecting of Hell's* creation is evident throughout the text in its ecumenicism as well. While the *Perfecting of Hell* is clearly a Nyingma text and Great Perfection teachings are highlighted most clearly, Great Seal (Mahāmudrā) and Bön practices—Buddhist practices performed by the Kagyü sect and the "non-Buddhist" indigenous religion of Tibet respectively—are often spoken of as praiseworthy partners to Great Perfection practices. Indeed, Padmasambhava gives King Gesar initiation in the Nine Ways of Bön,[69] and both King Yama and the dying heroes of Ling praise Great Seal practices alongside Great Perfection ones.[70] This ecumenicism clearly reflects not only thinking across sectarian lines, but also a celebration of traditionally ethical imagery. The *Perfecting of Hell's* promotion of several practice traditions like Bön and Mahāmudrā as partners reflects a challenge to enlightened violent imagery.

As explored in Chapter 1, however, the Non-Sectarian movement also sought to create an eastern Tibetan counterweight through consolidating and revitalizing eastern

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[69] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po,* (Thimphu), 55.
[70] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po,* "Song 6.1," (Thimphu), 288; "Song. 7.2," (Thimphu), 297; "Song 15.1," (Thimphu), 330.

Tibetan culture in light of the Geluk influence growing in central, and now eastern, Tibet. This central Tibetan Geluk influence was responsible for suppressing non-Geluk practices and forcibly converting non-Geluk monasteries. Lauran Hartley writes that in the centuries preceding the Non-Sectarian movement's appearance, the most powerful kingdom of the region—Dergé—was tensely positioned between the Qing Dynasty and the central Tibetan government based in Lhasa. When the "Blind Warrior" of Nyarong, Gönpo Namgyel (d.1865), attacked from a small *de facto* independent kingdom to the southeast, Lhasa sent troops to quell what they considered to be a violent uprising. As Lauran Hartley relates in her brief history of the kingdom of Dergé, the Lhasa troops were brutal and "reportedly looted and inflicted much violence upon the local Dergé population," including a widespread purge of Nyingma elements who were believed to have collaborated with Gönpo Namgyel.[71] Yudru Tsomu writes that there was a pattern of Geluk encroachment into eastern Tibet in the decades before Non-Sectarian ideas began appearing, explaining that monasteries in southern and eastern Kham were converted into Geluk monasteries beginning in the seventeenth century and continuing onwards.[72] The continued presence of central Tibetan troops and growing Geluk authority in eastern Tibet throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries bred widespread resentment and frustration among non-Geluk sects.

This historical reality was reflected in a variety of Non-Sectarian religious literature. Alexander Gardner notes that in Jamgön Kongtul's elaboration of Chögyur Lingpa's

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[71] Lauran Hartley, "The Kingdom of Dergé," 529. She is largely drawing upon work in Chinese primary sources as well as the work of Luciano Petach, *Aristocracy and Government in Tibet 1728 – 1959,* (Roma: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1973), 120.
[72] Yudru Tsomu, *The Rise of Gönpo Namgyel in Kham: the Blind Warrior of Nyarong,* (New York: Lexington Books, 2015), 22.

pilgrimage map detailing the Twenty-Five Great Sites of Kham, the Geluk sect is left out entirely, despite the Geluk order's extensive presence in Kham.[73] Douglas Duckworth explains that—notwithstanding expressing extensive praise for Geluk-founder Tshongkhapa (d. 1419)—Mipham Gyatso's writings represented "attacks on the Geluk tradition."[74] Matthew Kapstein argues that *The History of the Annihilation of Yama in Ü* (*dbus 'chi bdag cham la phab pa'i lo rgyus*)[75]—a recent Gesar episode written by Khenpo Kalu (Karma Rangchung Kunhyab, d.1989) and published in 1975—represents another measure of eastern Tibetans' continued resentment towards central Tibetans for the brutalities of their intervention in the Nyarong affair. While Kapstein acknowledges this narrative complicates the overall arch of the Gesar epic—King Gesar defeats King Yama in Ü before encountering him in the *Perfecting of Hell*—he paints Gesar's bloody incursion into Ü as first and foremost a "khams-pa revenge fantasy" on the central Tibetan territory of Ü.[76] Kapstein's discussion of *the Annihilation of Yama in Ü* mirrors Georges Dreyfus' observations concerning the role of King Gesar in supporting "proto-nationalism"—a term Dreyfus borrowed from Eric Hobsbawm.[77] Across eastern Tibet and particularly surrounding the kingdom of Dergé in Kham, anti-Geluk sentiment manifested in both popular and doctrinal literature written by Non-Sectarian thinkers. Leaders of the Non-Sectarian movement, therefore, can be interpreted as responding to an increasingly prevalent and suffocating Geluk presence in eastern Tibet.

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[73] Gardner, "The Twenty-Five Great Sites of Khams," 109-165.
[74] Duckworth, 47.
[75] Karma rang byung kun khyab, *Dbus 'chi bdag cham la phab pa'i lo rgyus (The Annihilation of Yama in Ü),* (Bir: Kandro, 1975).
[76] Matthew Kapstein. Conference Presentation. "From Epic to Allegory: The Annihilation of Yama in U," *The Many Faces of Ling Gesar: A Conference held in honor of Rolf A. Stein,* Collège de France, 27-28 October 2014.
[77] Georges Dreyfus, "Proto-Nationalism in Tibet," 205-218. For Hobsbawm's use of the term, please see *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, and Reality,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), particularly 46-79.

Yamāntaka, Gesar, and the Case of the Shifting Mañjuśrī

Taking into account the fuller context of nineteenth- and twentieth-century eastern Tibet—in which thinkers used the discourse of Non-Sectarianism to specifically undermine Geluk authority—King Gesar's role as a failed tantric figure ultimately defeated and humiliated by King Yama takes on added significance. Some background on Geluk tantric practices will be necessary to fully understand my next argument. While the Geluk school is largely considered to be the most "scholastic" and "monastic" of the schools of Tibetan Buddhism, Anuttarayoga tantras played an important role within the school's Buddhist practice—albeit generally situated within meditative visualizations to preserve monastic vows. Among those tantras utilized by the Geluk school, the Yamāntaka tantra—also known as the Vajrabhaivara tantra—was considered to be one of the most effective and important forms of tantric practice. Donald Lopez and Robert Buswell explain that—along with Guhyasamāja and Cakrasamvara—Yamāntaka is one of the three principal meditation deities of the Geluk sect.[78] Robert Thurman and Marilyn Rhie go further, describing Yamāntaka as "one of the most important of all Gelukpa archetype deities."[79] In his translation of the Vajrabhaivara tantra, Bulscu Siklós notes that the popularity of the Vajrabhaivara / Yamāntaka tantra among Geluk circles likely originates from Tshongkhapa himself, who performed the full practices of the Yamāntaka deity every day and entered a lengthy Vajrabhaivara retreat later in life.[80] Like Yamāntaka, Tshongkhapa was considered an emanation of Mañjuśrī, further cementing the deity's importance for the Geluk order.

[78] Buswell and Lopez, "Yamāntaka," *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 1020.
[79] Marilyn Rhie and Robert Thurman, *Wisdom and Compassion: The Sacred Art of Tibet,* (New York: Abrams Publishing, 1996), 283.
[80] Bulscu Siklós, *The Vajrabhaivara Tantras: Tibetan and Mongolian Versions, English Translation and Annotation,* (Tring, U.K.: Institute of Buddhist Studies, 1996), 11.

Beginning with its founder's practice and religious identification, Geluk practitioners held the Yamāntaka tantra in exceptionally high esteem as a principal practice of the Geluk school.

The foundational narrative of the Yamāntaka tantra revolves around Mañjuśrī emanating as the wrathful figure Yamāntaka / Vajrabhaivara in order to destroy King Yama of hell. Yamāntaka's name—literally destroyer of Death (Shinjé Shed; *Gshin rje bshed*)—presages his mythic role in the tantra. Arising from the body, speech, and mind of Mañjuśrī, Yamāntaka destroys the iron castles of hell with his sixteen flaming feet and his "organ of wisdom."[81] After subjugating King Yama and his servants, they proclaim themselves his slaves and "address him: 'We offer our life essences as is our duty and the hero accept them.'"[82] In return, Yamāntaka liberates King Yama and his servants. Tāranātha's (d.1634) *Dharma History of the Yamāntaka Tantra* (*Rgyud rgyal gshin rje bshed gyi chos 'byung rgyas pa yid ches ngo mtshar bzhugs)* mirrors this story and elaborates on it, explaining that in defeating King Yama, Yamāntaka "asserted himself as the equivalent of the fierce ruler and lord of death."[83] He gives a further description of Yamāntaka's power and form, proclaiming that "Yamāntaka is the name of the great wrathful one. Seeing his flaming sword, all drop their weapons and the fight leaves them."[84]

In fact, Tāranaātha's text draws from a variety of sources, including the oral tradition surrounding Ra Lotsawa, who traveled to Nepal in an effort to better translate

[81] Siklós, 65.
[82] Siklós, 65.
[83] Tāranātha, *Rgyud rgyal gshin rje gshed skor gyi chos 'byung rgyas pa yid ches ngo mtshar,* Volume 6. Blockprint of gsung 'bum from 'dzam thang dgon, 37.
[84] Tāranātha, 37.

texts from the Yamāntaka lineage which Atiśa himself introduced to Tibet.[85] Through this, Tāranātha relates the story in its Hindu iteration, wherein the god Shiva destroys the great demon Dolwa Drakpo [Yama].[86] Bulscu Siklós explains that the Yamāntaka narrative itself is not a focal point of the larger tantra, as it is found only in an exceptionally short passage lacking a title and appearing only in the *Ritual Procedure Tantra of Vajrabhaivara* (*Rdo rje 'jigs byed kyi rtog pa'i rgyud).*[87] Despite this relative unimportance, the narrative provides an essential foundation for the artistic and visual imagery that runs throughout the Yamāntaka practices.

Returning our attention to the *Perfecting of Hell,* the narrative includes the major characters of the Yamāntaka story—most notably, King Yama and Mañjuśrī. Throughout the *Perfecting of Hell,* King Gesar frequently identifies himself as an emanation of Mañjuśrī. In Song, 2.1, King Gesar declares to his kingdom, "As for me, I am the Precious Guru, the Victory Banner of White Ling. First, the precious general Gesar. Then, I am the Precious Lama Supreme Conqueror. Finally, I am the primordial lord Buddha. Now, I am the emanation body of Mañjuśrī."[88] As cited previously, when he recovers his mother, he tells her to "Meditate on the divine Mañjuśrī who actually resides inside [your son]!"[89] Other characters frequently recognize Gesar as an emanation of Mañjuśrī—most notably King Yama himself. Despite his critiques of Gesar as a tantric subjugator, Yama calls the warrior

[85] *The Blue Annals, Part I,* 374; Alexander Berzin, "What is Vajrabhaivara-Yamāntaka Practice?" Dharma Talk given at Unknown Location. *StudyBuddhism.Net.* Accessed on August 14th, 2016.
[86] Tāranātha, 38.
[87] *Rdo rje 'jigs byed kyi rtog pa'i rgyud (Ritual Procedure Tantra of Vajrabhaivara)* in Volume 101 of the snar thang bka' 'gyur. Siklós, 18.
[88] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po,* "Song 2.1.9-13." (Thimphu), 93.
[89] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po,* "Song 4.8.32-33." (Thimphu), 219.

"Great lion, emanation of red Mañjuśrī."[90] King Gesar is clearly recognized as an emanation of Mañjuśrī in the text of the *Perfecting of Hell*.

King Gesar's role as an emanation of Mañjuśrī is a distinct departure from the rest of the Gesar epic tradition, in which King Gesar is always depicted as either closely associated with or as an emanation of Avalokiteśvara. R. A. Stein explains that Gesar exists in the lineage of the Padma family, where Avalokiteśvara represents the "enjoyment body" (*sambhogakāya),* Padmasambhava the "emanation body" (*nirmānakāya)* and Amitabha the "buddha body (*Dharmakāya)*.[91] While Gregory Forgues notes that two of the Gesar rituals composed by Mipham identify Gesar as the emanation of Mañjuśrī, he emphasizes that the vast majority of Gesar's representations are as Avalokiteśvara and hypothesizes that Mipham was responding to Manchu imperial policy in eastern Tibet and its celebration of Mañjuśrī.[92] In the Lingtshang Gesar associated with Mipham Gyatso, Avalokiteśvara plays a crucial role in King Gesar's descent to the human realm. After tricking his way into Padmasambhava's palace, Avalokiteśvara sings a song that draws the deity Good News (Thöpa Gawa) out of Padmasambhava's breast, proclaiming to him, "the time has come to fulfill your sacred vow and evoke the transformation body to tame the vicious!"[93] The portrayal of King Gesar as an emanation of Mañjuśrī does not seem to have much influence beyond the *Perfecting of Hell.* A modern oral version of the Gesar epic by the bard Grakpa recorded in Lhasa in the 1980s features Mañjuśrī in the text, but solely in a mischievous and antagonistic role. Mañjuśrī hides the divine child who would be King Gesar in his alms

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[90] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po,* (Thimphu), 159.
[91] Rolf A. Stein, *Recherches,* 509.
[92] Forgues, 290.
[93] Robin Kornman, "Gesar of Ling," *Religions of Tibet in Practice,* ed. Donald Lopez, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997) 39-68. 57.

bowl while Avalokiteśvara looks for him to make him descend to the human realm and protect its Buddhist practice.[94] The *Perfecting of Hell's* departure from King Gesar's portrayal as an emanation of Avalokiteśvara—far more normative in the epic tradition—directs the reader's attention to the structure of narrative itself for a possible explanation.

Looking at King Gesar's encounter with King Yama in hell in its contextual entirety, we see a remarkable reversal of the Yamāntaka narrative. Here is King Gesar, the emanation of Mañjuśrī prepared to challenge and destroy King Yama, but instead he is chastised, belittled, and bested by the netherworld king. To understand the full context of what this narrative reversal signifies, we can consider Bruce Lincoln's work theorizing the role of narrative in social discourse. Challenging the ways in which the word "myth" has been used in both historical and anthropological scholarship "to register the speaker's sense of estrangement from, and superiority to, the social group in which a given narrative normally circulates,"[95] Lincoln seeks to make a better classification system that labels narratives "not by their content but by the claims that are made by their narrators and the way in which those claims are received by audiences."[96] Initially defining myth as those narratives "that possess both credibility and authority," he later simplifies this definition to proclaim myth as "*ideology* in narrative form."[97] He argues for the constitutive feature of narrative in not merely representing the world, but composing it:

> Myths are not snapshot representations of stable taxonomies and hierarchies, as functionalists would have it. Rather, the relation between social order and the stories told about it is much looser and—as a result—considerably more dynamic, for this loose fit creates possibilities for rival

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[94] Related in Fitzherbert, "The Birth of Gesar," 319.
[95] Bruce Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society: Comparative Studies of Myth, Ritual, and Classification* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 24.
[96] Lincoln, *Discourse,* 24.
[97] Bruce Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth: Narrative, Ideology, and Scholarship.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 147.

> narrators, who modify aspects of the established order as depicted in prior variants, with consequences that can be far-reaching if and when audiences come to perceive these innovative representations as reality.[98]

While Lincoln—whose intellectual maceration as a social critic is primarily in neo-Marxist scholarship—focuses on the role of narratives in creating society's power structures, Jack Chen demonstrates that this constitutive element of literature can extend into more subtle forms of self-representation and cultural ideals.[99] Focusing on the Tang emperor Taizong (and challenging Bruce Lincoln's presentation of the theatrics of kingship), Chen explains that "the relationship between poetic and sovereign discourses should be understood as constitutive, not merely in terms of questions of dynastic legitimation, coercion, or persuasion."[100] Rather than mere entertainment, narrative and popular literature have the potential to be foundationally dynamic discursive forms that represent powerful forces in constructing and disputing religiously-grounded doctrinal arguments.

The narrative encounter between King Yama and King Gesar in hell, therefore, is not merely a literary fiction; it represents a subtle challenge to the Geluk order and contributes to the *Perfecting of Hell's* larger goal of promoting Great Perfection practices. Reversing the narrative framework in the Yama / Mañjuśrī encounter so that it is King Yama who devastates Mañjuśrī (here represented as King Gesar) fundamentally undermines the Yamāntaka tantra. Presenting the mythic foundation of one of the Geluk order's primary tantric practice cycles as invalid not only critiques the Geluk order as a whole, but also serves to heighten the Great Perfection practices promoted by the Non-Sectarian movement. The *Perfecting of Hell* valorizes a specific tantric practice (Great Perfection)

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[98] Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth,* 150.
[99] Jack W. Chen, *The Poetics of Sovereignty: On Emperor Taizong of the Tang Dynasty,* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2011).
[100] Chen, 380.

within the context of a narrative while simultaneously challenging the validity of an alternate tantric practice (Yamāntaka) and, ultimately, uses the narrative to make subtle doctrinal arguments about whose practice is truly the best, the highest, and the most effective. The *Perfecting of Hell,* therefore, participates in Non-Sectarian thinkers' efforts to challenge Geluk hegemony and promote the values of non-Geluk, in this case largely Nyingma, schools. Viewing narrative as a form of ideology—as Lincoln would have us do—and as a constitutive, non-representational feature of reality—as Chen argues for—reveals how the *Perfecting of Hell* manipulates tantric mythologies to argue against Geluk religious supremacy and encourage Great Perfection practice.

Some may challenge the claim that the *Perfecting of Hell* is a work critical of the Geluk school by pointing to King Yama's title within the text as Yama Dharmaraja—also an emanation of Mañjuśrī who acts as a protector of the Vajrabhaivara tantric system. Yama identifies himself as an emanation of Mañjuśrī just once in the *Perfecting of Hell's* Chapter 4, during which time he also calls himself Dharma King (Dharmaraja; Chögyal; *chos rgyal*). Yama explains to King Gesar, "If you do not know me, I am the Dharma King, Yama. I am the exalted peaceful body of Mañjuśrī."[101] Yama identifying himself as Dharmaraja and an emanation of Mañjuśrī in this instance identifies him as a special protector of the Vajrabhaivara tantric system.[102] King Yama's self-identification complicates the *Perfecting of Hell's* reversal of the power dynamic discussed previously. Based on this single identification, it could be argued that the Vajrabhaivara tantra's myth is not actually reversed and that the original relationship maintains.

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[101] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po,* "Song 4.4.10-12." (Thimphu), 180.
[102] Siklós, 11.

King Yama's self-identifications as Dharmaraja, however, should be read not as the text reinstantiating the Vajrabhaivara hierarchy, but rather as the persistence of the already present interpretation of King Yama as Dharmaraja. Bruce Lincoln explains that when narrative is used as argument, it cannot be a sole re-creation based on the desires and machinations of a single narrator; rather, the person creating the myth has to manage already existing cultural ideas and work within those to create something that is both authentic and novel:

> Narrators are not the sole agents in such projects of recalibration: One must also take account of reception. Audiences (and fractions of same) can resist narrative and classificatory innovations…anticipation of hostile audience responses can also work as a preemptive brake on narrators' willingness to introduce modifications. Ultimately, what come to be accepted as standard, proper, or hegemonic versions of myths are collective products that have been negotiated between narrators and audiences over time.[103]

To entirely ignore King Yama's role as Dharmaraja in a section of the text that appears geared towards tantric readers threatens to push too dramatically beyond the narratively accepted norms of Tibetan thinking on Yama. By acknowledging just once in the text that he is Yama Dharmaraja, but pushing to the narrative forefront his subjugation of Mañjuśrī emanating as Gesar, the *Perfecting of Hell* preserves its intertextuality with Tibetan tantric literature, while also maintaining its ultimate reversal of the Vajrabhaivara narrative. In fact, Yama's role as Mañjuśrī is immediately challenged by the netherworld king himself, when he proclaims—after identifying his body as that of Mañjuśrī—that "My exalted mind is the compassionate Lord Avalokiteśvara."[104] The *Perfecting of Hell* more effectively undermines the authority of the Geluk sect by situating its reversal of the Vajrabhaivara

[103] Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth,* 150.
[104] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po,* "Song 4.4.13." (Thimphu), 180.

tantric narrative in a context that briefly acknowledges the already existing views of King Yama's role as Dharmaraja.

Conclusions

In this chapter, we have explored the *Perfecting of Hell's* participation in a Non-Sectarian context through the promotion of Great Perfection practices that challenge the aesthetically and discursively martial Anuttarayoga tantras. It does this by means of portraying King Gesar both as a Great Perfection teacher and as a failed tantric deity unable to "liberate" those he has killed. Great Perfection practice—which is aesthetically more compatible with traditional Buddhist ethics—is offered not merely as the alternative, but as the most advanced, most efficacious form of Buddhist practice. King Gesar's humiliation in hell at the hands of King Yama further extends the critique of martial tantras to specifically target the Geluk order by reversing the narrative dynamic of the Yamāntaka tantra and relating a tale of Yama belittling Mañjuśrī. Situating the *Perfecting of Hell* in this larger context and revealing its active role in promoting the aims of the Non-Sectarian movement demonstrates the potential for epic narrative to participate fully and robustly in the larger religious discourse surrounding it. Epic literature appears as an important voice in doctrinal arguments. The remaining two chapters will consider the unique ways in which epic literature enhances such religious discourse and contributes to religious argumentation—both through a detailed analysis of the *how* of epic literature's participation in religious discourse in Chapter 4 and the *why* in Chapter 5.

A Performance of Death, Dying, and Discomfort: The *Nyeling* as Performative Text and Legend

> If a narrative were given a conventional closed ending, then everybody's dead or everybody's safe. That's no fun.
>
> --Bill Ellis[1]

Having saved his mother from hell successfully, if not exactly triumphantly, the last third of the *Great Perfecting of Hell* rings a somber note. After returning to Ling and proclaiming to everyone the horrors of hell, King Gesar's half-sister Néchung[2] arrives with a prophetic dream of approaching death for all the heroes of Ling and the resulting dissolution of Gesar's kingdom. What follows are brief chapters in which the main characters—including even King Gesar and his horse—die one by one, usually imparting words of advice and exhortations to devout Buddhist practice as they go. The deaths are accompanied by narrative traits commonly found in Tibetan accounts of the passing of great Buddhist saints—rainbows in the sky, flying dakinis, and the leaving behind of relics. This imitation of the literary traditions surrounding Buddhist saints represents a rhetorical move clearly meant to further legitimize King Gesar and his court of heroes as fundamentally Buddhist figures. In their deaths, King Gesar and his entourage enhance the ethical thrust of the *Perfecting of Hell* and its promotion of Great Perfection teachings as the most advanced, most efficacious Buddhist practice through giving the text the doctrinal authority of a traditional Tibetan religious biography (*rnam thar*). However, these deaths and the resulting "relics" they produce—textual, physical, and environmental—also reveal

[1] Ellis, *Aliens, Ghost, and Cults,* 168. Ellis is specifically quoting Ross Johnson, a camp counselor at Hiram House, whom he interviewed on June 22, 1979.

[2] It is worth noting that, unlike a lot of the male characters in the Gesar epic, the figure Nechung is a highly flexible character in terms of her exact relationship to King Gesar. In the *Great Perfecting of Hell,* she is the King's half-sister, but in other recorded versions she is his cousin (via Cipon) or his wife Drukmo's sister. In all versions, however, she retains her association with prophecy.

the essentially performative nature of literature like the *Perfecting of Hell*, a published, literary epic form which scholars generally isolate from a performative lens. Through considering the *Perfecting of Hell* in light of the work of Bill Ellis and other scholars of performative narrative, this chapter argues for a reassessment of how epic narratives transcend the boundaries of other Buddhist literature to create meaning through inviting both engagement and enactment. Epic literature is a uniquely performative genre and this chapter introduces the concept of a "performative text" to consider the methodologies and means by which a literary text can act like a "performance." This chapter ends by reflecting on the reception of the *Perfecting of Hell* as an epic performing the work of a religious biography through an exploration of the contemporary taboos that surround the text and how they further develop the category of "performative text."

Gesar Epic as Oral Performance Narrative

Like many epic traditions across the world, the Gesar epic is primarily an oral tradition which became textual at a point later in its history. In both oral and written versions, the text is told in a prosimetric or *chantefable* style—rapidly spoken prose broken up by sections of song / poetry wherein the narrator takes on the persona of the individual singing. In oral performances, each character has their own unique melody that marks the song,[3] though as explored in Chapter 2, a pattern identifying the singer, the place, and the occasion also marks the songs' beginnings and hints at the topic to come.[4] In its most developed form, the Gesar epic is traditionally sung by specially-chosen bards who

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[3] Mireille Helffer, "Tibetan Culture in South Asia," *The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music,* vol. 5, ed. Alison Arnold, (New York: Routledge, 1999), 734-743, 738.
[4] Mireille Helffer, *Les Chants dans l'Épopée Tibétaine de Ge-sar d'aprés le Livre de la Course de Cheval*, 430-437.

experience a form of possession during their recitation, though other forms of storytelling are also known. Indeed, both Donagh Coleman and Geoffrey Samuel have noted that the inspired Gesar bard is not the universal pattern and some bards sing recitations from memory or from texts.[5] In fact, recent typologies created by western and Chinese academic work lay out a series of four types of bards, delineated based on how they learned the epic; it is unclear, however, how indigenous these categories are to Tibetan circles.[6] The "visionary" or "inspired" bards (babdrung*;* lit. descended story), as they are called, generally undergo an initiatory experience wherein they fall ill, have visions of King Gesar and his court, and are subsequently proclaimed to be a visionary bard—often, Samuel notes, by a lama or other representative of the Buddhist institution.[7] These visions become the foundation for their singing of the epic and some bards continue to have visions in which they visit the divine court of King Gesar and receive the next episode to tell.[8] FitzHerbert has recorded the stories of several contemporary bards that follow this model, including some that bridge the oral/textual divide—most notably, the famous contemporary bard Drakpa's initiatory dream wherein his insides were stuffed full of Gesar texts in order to produce his singing ability.[9]

In my own research, both bards I interviewed had some form of initiation that required the presence of a lama or other institutional Buddhist representative. Tsering, the younger of the two bards, explained that he had dreams of King Gesar beginning when he

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[5] *A Gesar Bard's Tale,* documentary film. Directed by Donagh Coleman and Lharigtso, 2013.; Geoffrey Samuel, *Civilized Shamans: Buddhism in Tibetan Societies,* (Washington: Smithsonian Institute Press, 1993), 293.
[6] Solomon George FitzHerbert, "The Birth of Gesar," 295.
[7] Samuel, *Civilized Shamans,* 293.
[8] Yang Enhong, "The Forms of Chanting Gesar and the Bon Religion in Tibet," *Anthropology of Tibet and the Himalaya,* eds. Charles Ramble and Martin Brauen, (Zürich: Ethnologische Schriften Zürich, 1993).
[9] Solomon George FitzHerbert, "The Tibetan Gesar Epic as Oral Literature," *Contemporary Visions in Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the First International Seminar of Young Tibetologists,* eds. Brandon Dotson, Kalsang Norbu Gurung, Georgios Halkias, Tim Myatt, (Chicago: Serindia Publications, 2009), 171-196. 185.

was 13 or 14. When he was 17, he was struck by a mysterious, but very serious, illness and taken to a lama; the lama healed him and, in his words, "opened" (*phye*) the ability to sing the epic.[10] The story of the older bard, Gyurmé, lacked the dramatic illness, but mimicked Tsering's in the role of the lama as arbiter of true Gesar inspiration: one day, Gyurmé found himself able to sing a few minutes of the epic and each day the amount increased. A lama performed a divination and confirmed that Gyurmé was becoming a visionary Gesar bard, after which time Gyurmé's singing ability grew exponentially. Gyurmé explained that soon he was able to merely hear the title of a text and then be able to sing the full story immediately afterwards.[11] He maintained that bards were specially chosen by King Gesar himself to receive the story, saying that "during the time of the epic, all the animals could recite the stories of Gesar, even the earth worms, but then Gesar said that people must know of his deeds in the future, so he made humans the special bards to tell the tale."[12] As will be discussed below, the work of Gesar bards appears to have some relationship to a type of spirit possession, and, indeed, many forms of oral storytelling around the world have drawn on the discourse and rituals of possession.[13] For many Gesar bards—though not all—their oral abilities of composition develop through visionary experiences that incorporate the Buddhist institution as a source of legitimation.

The oral performances of the Gesar epic continue through the present-day, where it is supported significantly by Chinese government patronage. In successive Five Year Plans, the epic has been singled out as among the "most important scientific research items at the

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[10] Tshe ring tshong rgyag and 'Gyur med rab rten (Gesar bards in Yushu), Personal Interview.
[11] Tshe ring tshong rgyag and 'Gyur med rab rten (Gesar bards in Yushu), Personal Interview.
[12] Tshe ring tshong rgyag and 'Gyur med rab rten (Gesar bards in Yushu), Personal Interview.
[13] Natasha Mikles, "Storytelling and Possession." *Spirit Possession Around the World.* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2015), 328-331.

national level."[14] Indeed, Gesar Research Institutes exist at the majority of minority-focused universities in China today. Li Lianrong has explored the academic products from Han, minority, and other scholars in the People's Republic of China that have arisen from this support, noting that the majority focus solely on the historicity of Gesar and overlook its religious and literary implications.[15] Beyond academic research, the government financially supports contemporary bards in exchange for a certain output of recorded epic episodes. These are transcribed and widely published in Tibetan areas of China; Tibetan scholar Tsering Shakya claims that over three million Gesar texts have been printed and sold since 1980.[16] FitzHerbert argues that this patronage has acted as an umbrella for the revival of many traditions, temples, and festivals that may previously have had little to do with Gesar, but can now receive support under the auspices of the government if they manufacture a Gesar connection.[17] Such contemporary patronage of a Tibetan epic by Chinese authorities has raised some apprehension within Tibetan communities. Most recently, these concerns have been evocatively explored in Alai's *The Song King Gesar,* which intersperses the epic tale with the story of a Gesar bard's path to fame and his subsequent interactions with local authorities.[18] Indeed, these labors were so successful in some parts of Tibet that Geoffrey Samuel relates an experience wherein a Gelukpa monk in Orissa proclaimed that the entire Gesar epic was a Chinese plot to undermine Tibetan

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[14] Jam dpal rgya mtsho, "Introduction," *Gling rje'i 'khrungs rabs.* (Beijing: People's Publishing House, 2000), 7.
[15] Li Lianrong, "History and the Tibetan Epic *Gesar," Oral Tradition* 16.2 (2001): 294-316. A more detailed analysis of the is available in FitzHerbert (2007), 294-295.
[16] Tsering Shakya, "The Emergence of Modern Tibetan Literature: *gar tsom,"* (PhD diss., School of African and Oriental Studies, University of London, no date) 125. My thanks for Solomon George FitzHerbert in bringing this particular figure to my attention.
[17] FitzHerbert, "The Birth of Gesar," 295-297.
[18] Alai, *The Song of King Gesar,* trans. Howard Goldblatt and Sylvia Li-chun Lin, (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2013)

culture.[19] In the contemporary People's Republic of China, the Gesar epic thrives under the patronage of the Chinese government and remains a living oral tradition that is enhanced by published textual copies.

The Gesar epic, like all forms of oral poetic storytelling, is a fundamentally performative tradition. Richard Bauman identifies the arena of performance as one in which "a unifying thread tying together the marked, segregated [a]esthetic genres and other spaces of verbal behavior into a general unified conception of verbal art as a way of speaking."[20] While perhaps a bit esoteric, what this definition indicates is that performance is an artistic experience marked by specific forms of speech, topics, and poetic embellishments. Erving Goffman has called these specific markers "keys" and defined them as "a set of conventions by which a given activity, one already meaningful in terms of some primary framework, is transformed by the participants to be something else entirely."[21] Framing the situation with these specific markers literally constructs the individual's experience of the scene as something other to and different from "normal" time. The performer, therefore, must take on "the assumption of responsibility to an audience for a display of communicative competence" to use these "keys" to generate a time outside of normal time that results in an "enhancement of experience" and "heightened awareness."[22] Oral performances rely on culturally-understood signifiers of special time to create the individual experience of the performative context.

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[19] Geoffrey Samuel, "The Epic and Nationalism in Tibet," *Religion and Biography in China and Tibet,* ed. Benjamin Penny, (London: Taylor and Francis, 2001), 178-188. 179.
[20] Richard Bauman, *Verbal Art as Performance* (Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House Publishers, 1977), 5.
[21] Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience,* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), 43-44.
[22] Bauman, 11.

The Gesar bard, therefore, is central to the definition of the performative arena through utilizing specific keys to mark the space and time as separate. In my fieldwork, both bards to which I spoke related specific mantras they must recite and hand motions they must make for the epic to come to them and allow them to sing.[23] Donagh Coleman's work with the contemporary visionary bard Dawa shows a similar use of keys; when in a trance and telling the tale, Dawa must pinch the skin between his thumb and forefinger painfully to break out of his trance.[24] Before Tsering performed for me, he asked for a white khata—an offering scarf given to mark auspicious situations—to tie around his head. Khata are usually draped over the neck and never worn as a head band, so I asked Tsering the reason for this; he replied that "the scarf ensured his heart remained pure and that the songs would continue to strengthen within him."[25] These symbolic gestures act as "keys" to move the performative arena surrounding the Gesar epic out of the everyday and the ordinary.

Beyond this framing work, bards also use language and displays of narrative emotion to further create the performative arena. The prosimetric discourse is, by its nature, an unnatural form of speaking that denotes a specific performative setting and the songs utilize particular series of nonsense syllables to separate them. These discursive strategies are augmented by bards' use their bodies to create and transform themselves into the epic characters. While recording his performance, Tsering sang a song in the voice of Gesar's wife Drukmo about how she must go into the wilderness to tame the horse that will become Gesar's horse Kyangbu. As he sang, Tsering's eyelids fluttered and his head

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[23] This is known as the "induction method" of possession. Joseph Laycock, *Spirit Possession Around the World,* (New York: ABC-CLIO, 2015).
[24] Donagh Coleman, *A Gesar Bard's Tale.*
[25] Tshe ring tshong rgyag and 'Gyur med rab rten (Gesar bards in Yushu), Personal Interview.

lolled to the side in mimic of a womanly affect. A fellow viewer whispered to me that Gesar's wife was so delicate and aristocratic that her actions would, of course, be soft as portrayed. Local scholar Karma Lhamo even told me that she thought she could see Tsering's eyelashes lengthen when he sang a womanly song. Physical changes aside, this performance of character is enhanced by the visionary experiences of possession—either by specific characters or by the epic itself—many bards undergo: to be possessed or have visionary experiences is an inherently other-worldly event. Through specific symbolic gestures, words, and experiences, Gesar bards establish the performative arena as an other-worldly place set apart from normative discourse.

Bauman and others emphasize, however, that the performative arena is not merely under the control of the bard; the audience also contributes to the construction of the performative event, both in terms of defining the space and creating its content. Ruth Finnegan explains that "the nature of the likely audience influences all literature, but with oral literature there is the additional factor that members of the audience can take a *direct* part in the performance."[26] While Finnegan notes the audiences' effect can be as obvious as a call and response during the performance, she explains that it is more common that the "restiveness or receptiveness of the audience affects the length or brevity of the delivery of a piece, or when the presence of certain individuals or groups leads a poet to gear his presentation of, say, events or genealogies to please them."[27] As related in his dissertation, FitzHerbert describes a specific contemporary example of this effect when he notes how a present-day Kyrguz bard of the Manas epic explained that "the heroic deeds of Manas could

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[26] Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Poetry: Its Nature, Significance, and Social Context,* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 231.
[27] Finnegan, 231.

be made to suit the audience. As an example he said that if I, an Englishman, were an honoured member of the audience, a bard might describe how Manas took men and weapons from England."[28] Present-day episodes of the Gesar epic also change in response to the environmental context and audiences' assumptions about heroic endeavors: contemporary bard Dawa has revealed episodes in which King Gesar flies in airplanes and engages in lengthy aerial dog fights with the demon kings he traditionally killed merely by his on-the-ground sword play in earlier versions of the episodes.[29] Each individual oral performance of the Gesar epic is the result of complex interactions between bard and attending audience that together create the performative environment and epic content.

Ultimately, the performative aspect of the Gesar epic arises from the text's radically emergent quality. Already explored briefly in Chapter 2, the oral-formulaic theory of oral composition challenged earlier claims that bards / singers merely memorized their work. Milman Lord and Albert Parry argued instead that oral performers relied on a largely shared set of verbal formulas and cultural symbols upon which they could draw in specifically-designated performance arenas to create a shared communicative experience. Through studying primarily Greek and Slavic oral epics, Parry and Lord together developed this theory, stating that oral poetry "consists of the building of metrical lines and half lines by means of formulas and formulaic expressions and of the building of songs by the use of themes."[30] A formula is "a group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea," while a theme is "the repeated

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[28] FitzHerbert, 1.
[29] For a specific example, see Donagh Coleman and Lharitso's *A Gesar Bard's Tale.*
[30] Lord, 4; Although called Parry and Lord's theory of oral-formulaic composition, almost everything written on the topic has been authored by Albert Lord. Parry died in an unfortunate gun accident in 1935 at the age of 33, and, therefore, has published little. Albert Lord was his student at Harvard.

incidents and descriptive passages in the songs."[31] Through combining these together, oral performers create a distinctive rendition of the epic on the spot. While each performance is in essence entirely unique and actualized only in the moment of performance, the bard relies on a largely shared set of oral formulas and themes. FitzHerbert confirms that the oral-formulaic theory is largely actualized in the Tibetan context of Gesar, though he emphasizes the individualism of oral composition and notes that Lord and Parry's firm boundaries between the "oral" and "written" lineages of epic is violated by the Gesar bard Samdrup's partial recitation of memorized sections of the Lingtshang Gesar.[32] The Gesar epic's oral composition means that it is usually produced uniquely each time it is performed through relying on specific oral formulas and themes to reproduce the work.

These emergent and performative aspects of oral composition are a constitutive feature of the narrative itself for both performer and audience—not something merely added atop an already existing narrative. In his lengthy study of the performance of the *Rāmcaritmānas*—an epic poem written by Tulsidas concerning the heroic actions of King Rama—Philip Lutgendorf demonstrates the inseparability in audiences' perception "of the *Mānas* text from its realization in performance."[33] This inseparability of performance and text means that—despite circulating written copies—"the *Mānas* has for its audience an emergent quality. It is a means rather than an end, a living seed rather than a finished artifact."[34] This emergent quality is also central to the perception of the Gesar epic. In the personal analysis of contemporary bard Gyurmé Rabden, literary episodes of the epic—

[31] Lord, 4.
[32] FitzHerbert, "The Tibetan Gesar Epic as Oral Literature," 179-182.
[33] Philip Lutgendorf, *The Life of a Text: Performing the Ramcaritmanas of Tulsidas,* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1991), 340.
[34] Lutgendorf, 245-246.

even those written down from live performances—were not legitimate episodes. He emphasized that only oral versions were appropriate, though his friend tried to soften his claim by explaining that many more people were exposed to the epic now because so many episodes were being published.[35] To contextualize Gyurmé's statements, it is not which version—oral or literary—is more "real" or "legitimate" that is at stake in this discussion, but rather the centrality of performance to the Gesar epic and how that performance can only be actualized in oral contexts.

While I am a bit abashed to contradict a visionary bard of the Gesar epic, a reevaluation and reappreciation of the Gesar epic's literary texts is necessary—one which explores them as texts with the potential to be as dynamic and performative as their oral brethern. While extensively studied by R.A. Stein, Robin Kornman, Soloman George FitzHerbert, and others, literary versions of the epic have too often been dogged by a nagging sense that they are mere imitations of oral compositions and that they represent a ring of death for the oral epic itself. However, Lutgendorf urges us to reframe our assumptions concerning literary texts; he argues that texts have the potential to be read as written down performances, "not in the sense of transcriptions such as modern researchers make from their tape recordings but rather in the sense of sharing the same motives, processes, and ultimate aims."[36] What Lutgendorf hints at here is the idea that published, literary epic texts can be as radically performative as orally-composed epic performances. While literary texts represent an alternative narrative medium, they still invite engagement from their reading audience and participate in, as American folklore scholar Bill Ellis has called it, the "collective drama" of narrative storytelling. In the next

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[35] Tshe ring tshong rgyag and 'Gyur med rab rten (Gesar bards in Yushu), Personal Interview
[36] Lutgendorf, *The Life of a Text,* 245.

sections, I will argue for a fundamental re-evaluation of literary epic texts that acknowledges their activity in the performative arena and reconsiders narrative changes—like the *Perfecting of Hell's* Buddhist death scenes more germane to hagiographical literature—as emergent qualities arising from enacting a performance within a specifically designated epic arena.

Bill Ellis and Performative Legends

Bill Ellis has spent his academic career studying popular American folk legends about haunted houses, alien abductions, and horrifying monsters that kill teenagers up to no good at the town's local make-out point. These folk-tales may seem a far cry from what has been called "the world's longest epic,"[37] but his work provides an innovative lens to consider how the literary text of the *Perfecting of Hell* acts as an emergent performance within the larger epic tradition. Bill Ellis calls the stories he studies "legends," which he initially defines as a story "regarded as no less than *potential* fact."[38] Ellis' definition, strange though it may seem with its reliance on "*potential* fact," acknowledges that belief or disbelief is hard to determine and is seldom as constant as a researcher might like. It also creates space to recognize that individuals frequently act upon things they actively disbelieve. Ellis elaborates his definition, however, to include not merely this factual

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[37] Roberta Raine, "Translation and Appropriation of the World's Longest Epic, Tibet's Gesar of Ling," *Forum* 12.2 (2014): 65-85.

[38] Bill Ellis, *Aliens, Ghosts, and Cults: Legends We Live,* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2003), 6. It is worth noting that Ellis, in his definition, contradicts that of Bruce Lincoln, who claims that legends are stories that make "truth-claims" about the past, but have failed to gain widespread acceptance. (Lincoln, *Discourse and Construction of Society*, 24) Lincoln, however, is primarily concerned with separating "legend" from "history," not "legend" as a performance. For this section of the dissertation, therefore, I elect to follow Ellis' definition of legend, but keeping in mind that these academic classifications are largely second-order phenomena and, therefore, useful only in the specially defined and delineated context of this dissertation.

potential, but also the legend's performativity; he explains that the definition of legend has to go beyond mere content because it is, ultimately, a performance:

> What we should be trying to define is not the style of legend *texts* but rather the style of legend *performance.* In other word legends are not folk literature but folk *behavior.* Legends may appear in more than one legend-telling event, but the particular form they take in any one telling reflects the dynamics of that particular event.[39]

Situating itself as a potentially real, historical event—though not demanding evidence of belief—Ellis' definition of legend focuses on the performative nature of its telling which emerges out of the interactions of specific events, audiences, and storytellers.

Ellis emphasizes, however, that the performance of a legend is not an end in and of itself, but is actually a social endeavor. Tales of the uncanny—however a given society defines those—seek to both challenge and define cultural boundaries of what is and is not possible, while also exploring appropriate reactions to it:

> Legend telling is the communal exploration of social boundaries. By offering examples of the extremes of experience—unusual, bizarre, inexplicable, unexpected, or threatening incidents—members of the legend-telling circle attempt to reach some consensus on the proper response to what is arguably "real."…Legend telling in its natural context is a means of expressing anxieties about a group's cultural worldview, as well as away of redefining it in light of individual experiences. It also provides a safe way of questioning what important institutions define as "real" and "proper."[40]

Because they involve topics that are by their nature unfalsifiable—supernatural or otherworldly occurrences—legends become opportunities to discuss real and present social concerns and problems using the discourse of the otherwordly. Ellis emphasizes that "the important part of the legend-telling event is not so much the plot portrayed by the storyteller but the discussion through which all the participants relive the event in their

[39] Ellis, *Aliens, Ghost, and Cults*, 10.
[40] Ellis, *Aliens, Ghost, and Cults*, 11-12.

own ways."[41] As an example, he offers a rendition of the origin story for a local haunted house as told by two late adolescent girls. It becomes clear that the story—whose content is about a man becoming obsessed that his significantly younger wife's baby is not his and his subsequent brutal murder of them both—is truly about how to handle men and the kinds of relationships in which women are exploited. In the words of Ellis' folklore colleagues, "every legend states something…it takes a stand and calls for the expression of opinion…"[42] Legends are not simply stories, but rather have the flexibility to discuss social concerns freely through the re-telling of the narrative.

Having demonstrated the preeminently social nature of legends, Ellis argues that legends work for the narrator to establish control of a social situation. Emphasizing the performative drama at the foundation of legends, Ellis explains these narratives do not have inherent meanings, but rather that "legends *compel* their hearers to construct meanings."[43] This construction of meaning is something that specifically arises from the social setting of the legend-telling; legends, like oral compositions, are fundamentally emergent:

> Legends grow out of social contexts, which they intend to alter… they emerge as *news* freshly arisen from the teller's social setting. Their motifs and structure may be quite old, but the events or beliefs described are directly relevant to the audience's past, present, and future. Second, they are emergent in that their primary meanings *emerge out of specific social conditions and roles.* Those who tell a legend have a goal in doing so; likewise, audiences have implicit expectations they want fulfilled. Legend telling embodies a complex event, in which the performer not only narrates a story but also gains (or fails to gain) social control over a social situation."[44]

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[41] Ellis, *Aliens, Ghost, and Cults*, 11-12.
[42] Linda Dégh and Andrew Vázsonyi, "Legend and Belief," *Folklore Genres,* ed. Dan Ben-Amos, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1976), 93-123. 119.
[43] Ellis, *Aliens, Ghost, and Cults,* 75.
[44] Ellis, *Aliens, Ghost, and Cults,* xiii-xiv.

In order to "gain social control," those telling legends rely on what Ellis has called the "Rumpelstiltskin Principle"—efforts to name some uncanny or unconventional situation through the telling of a legend reduce social anxiety. Naming the event gives the legend teller significant social power to define and control the larger social situation:

> One role of legends is to redefine reality in a way that restore the narrators' control over situations….an ambiguous situation produces stress until witnesses find a "name" or a statement of it in acceptable cultural language. Once this is done, the experience can be translated into a narrative and shared with others, and the act of narrating gives observers power over the event.[45]

An important component of legends' work within social situations is to name uncanny phenomena and situate them in a culturally-accepted framework on which the community already agrees.

However, Ellis argues that legends, like most cultural products, simultaneously create that which they are created by; they are not merely stories we tell ourselves (regardless of our own personal belief in their veracity), but also stories we enact and live *through* (regardless of our own personal belief in their veracity). The last third of his book focuses on the topic of ostension, a term originating in semiotics, but defined in the use of narrative / folkloric studies as the "ways real life actions are guided by legends."[46] Ellis lays out a four-fold model of ostension that encompasses the variety of ways people may act out a legend. When people act out a legend fully, it is called *ostension.*[47] Most people, however, participate in *proto-ostension* (someone takes a story that allegedly happened to someone

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[45] Ellis, *Aliens, Ghost, and Cults,* xiv.
[46] Michael Kinsella, *Legend-Tripping Online: Supernatural Folklore and the Search for Ong's Hat,* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2011) 12. He is summarizing the term as it was originally defined in Linda Dégh and Andrew Vázonyi, "Does the Word 'Dog' Bite? Ostensive Action: A Means of Legend-Telling," *Journal of Folklore Research* 20.1 (1983): 5-34.
[47] An excellent example of this is the tradition of high school girls entering a dark bathroom during a sleepover and saying "Bloody Mary" three times over into the unlit mirror.

else and claims it happened to them), *pseudo-ostension* (someone produces a hoax that shows evidence of a legend happening) or *quasi-ostension* (someone interprets naturally-occurring events through the lens of a legend).[48] By the combination of these four forms of ostension, societies enact legend narratives, live *through* them, and use them to make sense of their world. These can be simple actions like electing not to walk past a graveyard on the way home because your friend Mario swears he saw a ghost there once (but was probably actually just high). Ostension can also be a more complex, community-wide effort, like the trend in the 80s and 90s to x-ray Halloween candy for razors and poisons (of which the only documented case was a father killing his own son for insurance money). Ostension is ultimately a form of performance that forms the world and gives individuals ways to control it. While these theories of modern day legends may seem far removed from the realm of studying a 2500-year-old religious tradition, similar ideas have been explored in work on Buddhist rituals. In particular, Erik Davis' recent work on the use of Buddhist funerary rituals to create imaginative realities reveals how ritual performance makes real for participants the imaginative cosmological worlds of Buddhism.[49] While not using the word "ostension," the death rituals studied by Davis are a way of acting out or performing a Buddhist cosmology. The lines between ritual and ostension are in reality quite thin and ostension, like ritual, provides a means for individuals to create the world around them.

Acting out legends helps communities make sense of their own fears and concerns through the process of ostension; however, this performance of the legend also opens transformative opportunities for whole communities and groups of individuals. Ostension

[48] Ellis, *Aliens, Ghost, and Cults,* 162-163.
[49] Erik Davis, *Deathpower: Buddhism's Ritual Imagination in Cambodia,* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 9.

acts as the means to subtly change the legend itself. A particularly telling example of this change is that of how we perceive ghosts. Legends before the nineteenth-century described ghosts as looking fairly similar to regular humans—a little bit worse for wear, perhaps, and often with a glow surrounding them, but no transparency or "ghastly" pallor.[50] With the advent of photography, however, people began engaging in new forms of pseudo- or quasi-ostension: making and interpreting either accidental or purposeful hoax ghost images that, due to the nature of the medium, looked pale, wispy, and transparent. The legends changed, and now our culture's archetypal image of a ghost is colorless and transparent as a result. Ostension, therefore, allows for a community's engagement with and reinterpretation of legends. Ellis explains that, "the telling is the tale; therefore, the narrator, his story, and his audience are all related to each other as components of a single continuum."[51] Legends are stories that—regardless of individual belief in them—societies simultaneously create and enact in order to gain control over social phenomena outside their understanding.

While Ellis does not limit legends to oral compositions, his work intersects with contemporary theories of oral performance—not only in the importance of the performative nature of (oral) narration, but also in explorations of how oral poetics take on meaning. John Miles Foley has emerged in the post-Lord and Parry world as the preeminent scholar of oral poetics. Criticizing his predecessors as overly mechanical, however, Foley encourages scholars to consider instead not only how oral songs are composed, but also how they make meaning through a process he calls "immanent art."[52]

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[50] R.C. Finucane. *Appearance of the Dead: A Cultural History of Ghosts*, (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1984), 83-84.
[51] Ellis, *Aliens, Ghost, and Cults,* 4.
[52] Foley, *How to Read an Oral Poem*, 109.

Foley says that "Oral traditions work like languages, only more so."[53] To demonstrate the functions of this, Foley depends on "register," which he defines as the specific language of both symbolic structures and idiomatic meanings used by the oral performer to communicate.[54] Register functions by cueing meaning within the audience's mind. Like double-clicking an icon to open an application, the poet's register makes a specific reference that ultimately opens a larger world of shared cultural meaning for the listener. Legends create social meaning and significance in similar ways. Simply mentioning a terrifying ghost opens a vault of shared cultural information in our minds that produces certain expectations about how said monster looks, what their death was like, and how they are supposed to act. Ghosts from legends are not, for example, the old man who died peacefully in his sleep surrounded by family and friends and who now roams his renovated house filled with a new family to make sure the pictures on their walls are straight and the back door is always locked; rather, ghosts from legends are people who died a horrifying, early death and who stalk the living in order to cause their own death and ensure that they are not alone in the afterlife. While changing this cultural register of ghost would not be impossible, because of the necessarily shared nature of a cultural register, it would be quite hard. Foley's concept of a register producing Immanent Art, therefore, explains both how meaning is made and why legends tend towards conservatism.

Ellis offers several examples of legends that both rely on widespread cultural beliefs to produce meaning and simultaneously create these cultural beliefs, including a mysterious hitchhiker in Pennsylvania, a ghost that haunted the refrigerator of a local Pizza Hut, and a satanic cult that planned to kidnap teenagers from a local prom. While writing

[53] John Miles Foley, *Homer's Traditional Art,* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 32.
[54] Foley, *How to Read and Oral Poem,* 116.

this dissertation, America has allegedly suffered a recent bout of clown attacks. Clowns have appeared beside roads and inside forests, waving ominously to passersby. They have made threats to kill people at schools, malls, and airports. Clips of murderous clowns from popular horror movies are being shared on social media platforms with dire warnings to be prepared for the coming onslaught of clown-related violence. A student at Texas State University was even attacked by a clown outside her dorm, though her attacker ran away when the student ran towards the door.[55] In response, local stores have removed clown costumes from Halloween aisles and individual clowns are taking to the news to dispute the scary image being projected.

Ellis would argue, however, that there are no murderous clowns, only the legend of murderous clowns, people enacting that legend, and people interpreting what is happening around them through the cultural lens of "murderous clown." Indeed, it seems that the majority—if not all—the threats of violence made to local schools are from the children themselves.[56] These threats are then firmly prosecuted by the police, further giving legitimacy to the very notion of a terrorizing clown. Ellis' theories argue that the country is engaged in a collective drama—building on our shared cultural register of the creepy clown to enchant our world and enacting the legend ourselves through ostension so that it appears real. He explains that while we may believe that "events provoke stories; it is far more likely that stories provoke events."[57] Living the legend of the creepy clowns

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[55] Andy Jechow, "Police: Clown Attacks Person at Texas State Housing," *KXAN News,* (Austin, TX) October 4th, 2016.
[56] Emily Monacelli, "Kalamazoo Student Arraigned on Felony Charges for Clown Threat Against High Schools," *Michigan Live* (Kalamazoo, MI) October 10, 2016.; Sherri Lonon, "Alleged 'Creepy Clown' Threat Results in Boy's Felony Arrest," *Patch* (New Port Richey, FL) October 4, 2016.
[57] Ellis, *Aliens, Ghost, and Cults,* 164.

demonstrates Ellis' ideas in action as the clowns draw on shared cultural memory to both test, reaffirm, and actualize our ideas of the possible.

These clowns may, on the surface, have very little to do with the warrior-king Gesar and his court of heroes, but they reveal the important intersections between narratives and the lives of those who listen to, read, and participate in the narrative. While Ellis does not explicitly deal with the category of "epic" in his work, the centrality of performance in epic's oral manifestations suggests that epics function as a particular type of legend. Indeed, evidence of individuals engaging in ostension of the Gesar epic are scattered throughout Tibet's history. These include the 1958 uprising of a Yushu lama Jara Penpa Rinpoche who "proclaimed himself to be King Gesar and titled his thirty young monks 'Gesar's thirty generals'" in an effort to push out Chinese troops[58] and the nameless nun of Nyemo who "claimed to represent Gesar's divine guide the goddess Gungmen Gyalmo…and named eight of her lieutenants as warrior heroes of Gesar."[59] Although it may seem that the *Perfecting of Hell* does not participate in this sphere of performative legend writing on account of being a literary, published version of the epic, I will demonstrate how it remains part of the performative narrative sphere through using Ellis' work and the notion of ostension. Ellis demonstrates that stories like the Gesar epic are more than simply narratives told or read in specific settings, more than simply a "living epic," as some scholars call those epics still orally composed. Rather, we should say "lived epic" to mean

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[58] Orgyan Nyima, *Living and Dying in Modern Tibet,* (Published via the *Internet Archive,* 2016), 240. <https://archive.org/details/LivingAndDyingInModernTibet>

[59] Jamyang Norbu, "Language, Identity, and Revolution in Tibet," *The Huffington Post.* Unknown Publication Date. Accessed on 25 February 2017.
< http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jamyang-norbu/language-identity-revolut_b_782498.html>

those narrative traditions through which we speak, act, and create, or as Foley's catchphrase states, epics are "like a language, only more so."

In the following sections, I will look in detail at the final third of the *Perfecting of Hell,* where King Gesar and his court of heroes die the extraordinary deaths of advanced Buddhist practitioners. This section uses the traditionally astonishing and marvelous deaths found in Buddhist hagiographical literature to reinforce King Gesar as a preeminently Buddhist hero. Examining this remarkable re-framing of the figure of King Gesar in light of Ellis' theory of performative legend-telling allows for us to move beyond merely identifying the legitimizing work of hagiographical elements in the *Perfecting of Hell* and consider the text as a force attempting to control the larger social discussion. Like the legends Ellis studies, the *Perfecting of Hell* uses the Buddhist deaths of King Gesar and his companions in an attempt to permanently establish the boundaries and characteristics of appropriate Buddhist practice and ethical action delineated in earlier chapters. Ellis' theory, however, emphasizes the fundamentally social aspect of legends and other forms of lived narratives, like epics. My final section of this chapter will consider the reaction to the *Perfecting of Hell's* attempts to re-cast King Gesar as a Buddhist hero by discussing contemporary evidence of the text as taboo or unlucky. This evaluation of the death scenes will ultimately demonstrate the performative capabilities of texts and argue for a re-evaluation of them not as inert capsules reflecting a specific moment, but rather—like their oral counterparts—as dynamic and participatory nodes in a larger system of not *living*, but *lived* epic.

Death and Dying in the Gesar Epic

The song of the oracle Néchung—described in the *Perfecting of Hell* as King Gesar's half-sister—initiates Ling's decline. Unable to decipher the dream, she approaches King Gesar, explaining that "I do not know what the meaning is, either good or bad. Because I cannot uncover its secret, I request the ear of the king."[60] The song describing her dream is filled with fantastical omens of garuda birds on fire, earthquakes, and rainbows piercing through the darkness of hell. The tone of the dream shifts between the ominous—"I dreamed the silk pennants caught fire and the three life support stones of the lamas were in the middle of the flames"[61]—and the whimsically hopeful—"I dreamed that paths of rainbows wrapped around the meditation hall of Samdrup Taksté."[62] Presaging the eventual relics that many of the heroes leave, Néchung relates a snow lion dying in her dream, and the thirteen lamas of Ling "weighed in their arms the turquoise mane. I dreamed the bones of the lion were [wrapped] in a bolt of cloth and sent inside a vase."[63] The presence of these mythical and otherworldly beasts not only enhances the strange and otherworldly nature of the dream, but also confirms the veracity of her dream's origin from divine sources.[64] Indeed, the association of dreams with prophecy is well-documented in Buddhist traditions in Tibet.[65] It frequently presages important events in the lives of religious figures; David DiValerio notes how the biographies of Sangyé Gyeltsen (d.1507), also known as Tsangnyön Heruka or the Madman of Tsang, frequently depict major life events as prophesied by dreams, including meeting his consort Küntu Zangmo and

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[60] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po,* "Song 5.4.32-33," (Thimpu), 254
[61] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po,* "Song 5.4.10-103," (Thimpu), 256
[62] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po,* "Song 5.4.138-139," (Thimpu), 257
[63] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen p,.* "Song 5.4.84-88," (Thimpu), 254
[64] Réne de Nebesky-Wojkowitz, "Tibetan Oracles," *Oracles and Demons of Tibet: the Cult and Iconography of the Tibetan Protector Deities,* (Varanasi: Book Faith India, 1993), 466.
[65] Alex Wayman, "Significance of Dreams in India and Tibet," *History of Religions* 7.1 (1967): 1-12.

identification as an emanation of Indian Buddhist saint Tilopa.[66] Néchung's dream builds upon already prevalent ideas in Tibetan Buddhist culture of the prophetic nature of dreams to portray an omen of coming destruction and disintegration of the kingdom of Ling.

The chapters following Néchung's dream see her vision actualized as each character dies the death of an extraordinary Buddhist figure. In total, fifteen characters die in the final third of the *Perfecting of Hell,* spread out over thirteen chapters and 126 pages (almost exactly a third of the *Perfecting of Hell's* total page count). The table below details the causes of their deaths, as well as the marvelous signs that may accompanying it and any post-death activities of salvation in which they engage or relics they leave behind:

TABLE 4		
Character and Relation to Gesar	**Cause of Death**	**Marvelous Signs Surrounding Death**
Cipon (spyi dpon) Paternal Uncle of King Gesar	Old Age / Illness; Dissolves into the heart of Vairocana.	Rainbow encircles Hawk Castle. White horse rides atop rainbow and takes Cipon's spirit to Pure Land. Frees beings in hell realms.
Drukmo (seng lcam 'brug mo) Wife of King Gesar	Becomes sick, but is unable to go the Pure Land at her death due to her bad karma from being kidnapped by the King of Hor. Reborn in God realm; Gesar arrives and sends her to Pure Land from there. She dissolves into Tara.	Male dakas appear in the sky and there is a spreading path of a rainbow of light. 21 excited vultures appeared and began proclaiming, Kyi kyi kyi! Gods personally escort Drukmo to the Pure Land and she is welcomed by innumerable goddesses
Thröthung (khro thung) Antagonistic Paternal Uncle of King Gesar	Old Age / Illness; Body flashes with light and takes on the appearance of a crow and flies away. Is made inseparable with Hayagriva.	Predicts omens of death. Hayagriva's court appears to welcome him. Descends to hell to save beings. Left relics of nail, hair, and clothes.
Sengtag Michang Karpo (seng stag mi spyang dkar po) Hero of Ling	Arhtritis / illness. Spirit leaves with hawks.	Hawks appeared over all the encampments of Ling

[66] David DiValerio, *The Holy Madmen of Tibet,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 43, 92.

Nyibum / Serpe Nyima (nyi 'bum / gser pa'i nyi ma) Hero of Ling	Old age / illness. Travels away with dakinis	Predicts his own death with certainty and remains in seclusion prior to it. Rainbows fills the sky, accompanied by dakinis. Left relics of nail, hair, and clothes. Travels with dakinis to hell realms to free people, then flies to Indra's Palace.
Gedi Chökyong (sgo bde chos skyong) Hero of Ling known for abilities with magic	Old age / illness. Rays of light shine from body and meet light rays from buddhas. Is purified. Dissolves into Dharma protector.	Predicts own death. Sky filled with rainbows and in center is a vision of all the assembly of benefactors / guardians of the dharma. Buddhas purify his body, Left relics of nails, clothes, and hair. Frees beings in the hot and cold hells.
Senglon (seng blon) Gesar's Father	Old age. Due to an indiscretion in a past life while living in India, Gesar must personally lead him to the Pure Land.	Consciousness is transferred by Gesar
Shenpa Horser (shan pa hor ser) Ruling Minister of Hor (after conquest)	Poisoned by evil minister Akhro trying to re-take Hor for the Hor-pas. Born in Hot hells and has to be retrieved by King Gesar.	n/a
Akhro Ngonak (a khro ngom nag) Nefarious Minister of Hor	Killed by Shenpa's grandson Shenchung in battle with magic knives. Entrails bound to him and he is flung into the dungeon.	n/a
Dralha Tsegyel (dgra lha rtse rgyal) Son of Gesar's Older Half-Brother Gyatsha	Severe flu-like illness.	Reborn in Pure Land. Few signs.
Ngolo Pumo Néchung (sngo lo'i pu mo ne chung) Half-sister to Gesar	? Rays of light flashed from her body. Takes on the form of Tara and disappears.	Blue Tara appears. Gesar predicts death. Leves relics of nails, hair, and clothes.
Lhagod Bumlu (lha rgod 'bum lu) Son of Thröthung Half-Cousin to Gesar	Possessed by demonic spirit while traveling.	Heart Fortress encircled by rainbows. Pleasant visions arose.
Lhamo Yü Dronma	? Becomes a dakini and goes	Foreordains her death. Dakinis

(lha mo g.yu sgron ma) Daughter to Cipon, Half-cousin to Gesar	to eastern Glorious Pure Land.	welcomed her personally. Rainbow clouds and light appears all around her. Leaves relics of nails, hair, and clothes.
King Gesar (ge sar rgyal po)	Produced 12 visions of death for different peoples. In reality, led by four dakinis on a path of light and dissolve into the heart of Padmasambhava and consort.	Full moon arose in the sky when it should have been the new moon. Foreordained death. Rainbows surrounded Samdrup Takste palace. Innumerable collection of buddhas arose, heaped as tall as a mustard seed. Wrathful dakinis arise. Palace, sky, and heavens suffused with light all around. Leaves relics of hair, nails, and clothes.
Kyangbu (kyang bu) Gesar's horse	Grows feathers, turns into vulture, and flies away.	Red rays of light surround him
Denma ('Dan ma) Gesar's BFF	Leaves for India.	n/a

As seen in this table, the deaths of the *Perfecting of Hell's* characters are clearly the deaths of what Bryan Cuevas and Jacqueline Stone have termed the "special dead"—those who have "escaped the samsaric cycle once and for all, putting an end to suffering…such individuals are often represented as having died exemplary deaths, in a state of calm meditative focus, and accompanied by wondrous signs."[67] Miraculous signs accompany their deaths as they dissolve into the hearts of buddhas and imitate King Gesar to free people from hell themselves. All leave the community with songs of religious instruction and exhortations to guide their further practice.

These narrated deaths imitate those of powerful Buddhist figures found in hagiographical texts called namthar. Within these texts, the death scene and the marvelous (*ngo mtshar)* signs that accompany it validate the teacher as an authentic Buddhist master.

[67] Bryan J. Cuevas and Jacqueline I. Stone, "Introduction," *The Buddhist Dead: Practices, Discourses, Representations,* eds. Bryan J. Cuevas and Jacqueline I. Stone, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007), 11.

Kurtis R. Schaeffer writes that "death accounts are occasions for hagiographers to both display and direct the immense faith that followers had for a certain holy person…."[68] A traditional hagiographical text from Dolpo reflects the purpose of marvelous signs like those seen at the deaths of Gesar and his heroes to authenticate the Buddhist master:

> There were pleasant sounds and sweet odours and fine rainbow colours, as well as showers of beautiful flowers and similar manifestations made manifest to worthy persons. Then after seven days the funeral urn was opened with acts of worship and purification, and all sorts of relic images were found his heart, tongue, and eyes…How should any creature possessed of an intellect fail to have faith in face of such wonderful signs and accomplishments?[69]

Another hagiography from the same collection describes the miraculous death signs as "wonderful examples for the guidance of men of pure heart."[70] Examining the similarities between the death of Tibetan saint Milarepa and Tsangnyön Heruka—Milarepa's most famous biographer—Schaeffer has explored how these marvelous signs of death achieved a paradigmatic status for Buddhist teachers.[71] Such signs have been used as evidence of advanced spiritual status in other traditions, most notably medieval Europe. Peter Brown—from where Cuevas and Stone borrow the term "special dead"—has noted how these miraculous and marvelous signs of death acted as clear evidence of the spiritual status of the deceased.[72] The *Perfecting of Hell* confirms the use of marvelous signs to mark spiritual validation. As the heroes die, buddhas and bodhisattvas come to attend their deathbeds, often directly leading them to a Pure Land along roads made of rainbows. Some

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[68] Kurtis R. Schaeffer, *Himalayan Hermitess: The Life of a Tibetan Buddhist Nun,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 124.
[69] "The Biography of Lama *Lord Merit*," *Four Lamas of Dolpo: Tibetan Biographies,* trans. and ed. David Snellgrove, (Kathmandu: Himalayan Book Seller, 1992), 272-273.
[70] "The Biography of Lama *Glorious Intellect," Four Lamas of Dolpo,* 228.
[71] Kurtis R. Schaeffer, "Dying Like Milarepa," *The Buddhist Dead: Practices, Discourses, Representations,* eds. Bryan Cuevas and Jacqueline Stone, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007), 208-233.
[72] Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 69-85.

of the characters surrounding the deaths proclaim this as evidence of the recently-deceased's spiritual status: when Gesar's uncle Cipon dies, his daughter proclaims that "A lengthy rainbow encircles Hawk castle; it is a sign that gracious father has attained the rainbow body!"[73] The spectacular signs surrounding the deaths of heroes portrayed in the *Perfecting of Hell* mimic those found in the hagiographies of Buddhist masters and act to validate them as advanced spiritual beings.

The use of marvelous signs to indicate the deceased heroes' spiritual status is enhanced by the frequency with which they leave relics. One of the fundamental compassionate actions of an advanced spiritual figure is to leave relics for future generations. Almost all hagiographical literature in Tibet features the creation of relics, with the purpose of developing the saints' tradition and "to persuade readers of the faith-inspired financial and material support they should provide for the institutions associated with the holy dead."[74] The association between spiritual attainment and relics is so strong that some have hypothesized later narrative renditions of the Buddha's funeral depict efforts to *increase* the number of relics by wrapping the Buddha's body in ever more shrouds before its cremation.[75] While some of the heroes in the *Perfecting of Hell* are subsumed bodily so that on their deathbed onlookers saw "nothing whatsoever…like little birds having flown from the nest,"[76] many leave relics of hair, nails, and bone that are revered and placed in stūpas or reliquaries after their death. During the passing of King Gesar himself, he manifests twelve different visions of dying—a narrative move that likely

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[73] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po,* "Song 5.7.55-56," (Thimpu), 280-281
[74] Schaeffer, *Himalayan Hermitess,* 124.
[75] John S. Strong, "The Buddha's Funeral," *The Buddhist Dead: Practices, Discourses, Representations,* Bryan Cuevas and Jacqueline Stone, eds., (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007), 32-59.
[76] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po, (*Thimpu), 281.

aims to encompass multiple, competing versions of the epic hero's death—and "in the little bedroom of the palace only the little hair and fingernails were left on the bed. They [Denma and the lamas of Ling] thought to gather the remaining hair, fingernails, and clothing and place them for sake-keeping in a well-made bronze vessel."[77] Commemorative constructions like these are accompanied in the narrative by the erection of funerary banners, chanting, and the distribution of the hero's wealth to the larger Buddhist community.

These relics work in coordination with the marvelous signs to legitimize King Gesar and his heroes as fundamentally Buddhist saints. The supposed relics of King Gesar and his heroes continue to dot the landscape of eastern Tibet. In my travels, I saw, for example, no fewer than three swords of King Gesar, two bows and arrows belonging to the warrior Denma and several horses' bridles that belonged to unnamed warrior companions of Gesar. At the seat of a small Kagyü sect near Namqing, Qinghai, that traces its origins to Gesar's half-brother's son Dralha—Dana monastery—I saw twenty stūpas representing the reliquaries for Gesar and his heroes at the top of a mountain that remained under the monastery's care. The stūpas were accessible only via horse, but my efforts to rent a horse proved fruitless, especially when it became apparent I only had the vaguest notion of how to ride. A monk later told me that the graves had been looted in recent years, resulting in a moratorium on visitors to the stupas.

However, these are not the only relics left behind in the Tibetan cultural imagination; the text of the *Perfecting of Hell* positions itself as a legitimate relic of King Gesar. It has been well-documented that Buddhist societies across the world consider

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[77] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po, (*Thimpu), 351.

Dharma texts to not be the mere words of the Buddha, but his relics—equal to or surpassing those of his body.[78] John Strong has noted that for many Buddhists, "the presence of the Buddha is to be found more in his teachings than in his physical body, more in 'books' than in 'bones'."[79] As Hildegard Diemberger demonstrates, the theological understanding of Dharma relics as equivalent to the sacred person himself found expression in the linguistic conventions used when discussing those books containing the words of the Buddha:

> Tibetan books are usually treated as honorific persons: they are invited, met and clothed in robes tied with belts. They are thought and dealt with through vocabulary and attitudes usually related to humans of high rank, transcending the distinction between animate and inanimate. Books are also addressed with a language that is the same as that used for icons and relics. In fact icons, books and relics/reliquaries are respectively symbols or receptacles (*rten*) of 'body' (*sku*), 'speech (*gsung*) and 'mind' (*thugs*) of the Buddha.[80]

While traditionally it was specifically texts of religious instruction that represented the Buddha's relics, Schaeffer makes a compelling argument for the ability of hagiographical texts to stand in for them.[81] The fact that the purported author of the *Perfecting of Hell* —Chökyi Wangchuk—is featured as a character in the text itself supports the interpretation that the *Perfecting of Hell* is a relic of King Gesar; the distance between author and audience is brief and these are, therefore, the true words of one who saw and knew the man. The potential for accounts of King Gesar's life like the *Perfecting of Hell* to occupy the role of a relic is also reflected by a large stūpa on grounds at Dana monastery. Although the physical

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[78] Yael Bentor, "Indian Origins of the Tibetan Practice of Depositing Relics," *Journal of the American Oriental Society,* 115.2, 1995: 248-261.; Gregory Schopen, "On the Buddha and his Bones," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 108.4, (1988): 527-537; John Guy, *Palm and Paper: Illustrated Manuscripts of India and Southeast Asia,* Victoria: National Gallery of Victoria, 1982.

[79] John S. Strong, *Relics of the Buddha*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 230.

[80] Hildegard Diemberger, "Holy Books as Ritual Objects and Vessels of Teaching in the Era of the 'Further Spread' of the Doctrine," *Revisiting Rituals in a Changing Tibetan World,* (Boston: Brill Publishing, 2012), 12.

[81] Schaeffer, "Dying Like Milarepa," 225.

relics of Gesar supposedly rest atop the mountain, the stūpa near the monastery contains the remains of a particularly ancient account of Gesar's life which had been partially destroyed in a fire. Stūpas are traditionally meant to hold relics, textual or otherwise, affirming the *Perfecting of Hell's* status as a paternal relic.[82] Through using paradigmatic Buddhist deaths complete with relics (both physical and textual) and marvelous signs of spiritual attainment, therefore, the *Perfecting of Hell* uses a known and recognized discourse to paint King Gesar and his heroes as realized Buddhist masters.

Perfecting of Hell as Performative Textual Narrative

Giving King Gesar and his heroes the paradigmatic death of advanced spiritual practitioners clearly elevates them to new heights of Buddhist attainment as compared with other renditions of the epic. To fully understand the significance of this narrative move, however, we need to consider the *Perfecting of Hell* as a voice in a larger performative field of "legend-telling"—not simply an isolated literary rendition of epic. Scholars of epic—including that of King Gesar—have long made a clear distinction between literary and oral renditions of the epic.[83] In contrast, I argue that representing the literary renditions of the epic as somehow "other" to the oral events divides too greatly the single rhetorical field in which both operate. Both are actors in one social discursive network, and literary texts enact performances similar to oral renditions. Like an oral performance of the epic, the *Perfecting of Hell* uses "keys" to frame the tale outside of the readers "normal time" and create a specific performance arena. These include not only the usual accoutrements

[82] Despite their original purpose, most stūpas in Tibet hold Buddhist scriptures as stand-ins for or in addition to relics of buddhas or realized masters.

[83] Lascelles Abercrombie, *The Epic,* (Middlesex, England, Echo Library, 2006, 1914); Adeline Johns-Putra, *The History of the Epic,* (New York: Palgrave Macmilian, 2006).

surrounding song sections, references to the world of the Gesar epic itself, and other normative Gesar "keys," but also specifically Buddhist signals like the marvelous signs surrounding the heroes' death and the arrival of celestial figures.

Considering the texts in this light, these death scenes exemplify more than simply a validation of King Gesar as a Buddhist figure. Rather, they represent a vibrant rhetorical move in a social discursive arena to control the image and perception of King Gesar, thereby enhancing the *Perfecting of Hell*'s social goals for early twentieth-century eastern Tibet. Ellis focuses our attention on how otherworldly literature—that which, like the *Perfecting of Hell,* exists outside of "normal time"—is not merely a self-contained event, but rather one that attempts to control social boundaries. Utilizing Ellis' Rumpelstiltskin principle, to "name" King Gesar as sinful-tantric-but-now-reformed-Great-Perfection king in a narrative utilizing Buddhist symbols of attainment effectively coordinates all other portrayals of Gesar as constitutive pieces (i.e. examples of his karmic sinfulness) in its own presentation. Like those legends studied by Ellis, this performance of the epic aims to control the larger social discourse of King Gesar. Considering the *Perfecting of Hell* in this expanded theoretical light reveals how the text simultaneously raises itself to a new, uniquely important status as the remaining relic of a Buddhist teacher, while also ensuring that it—and it alone—is the *final* word of King Gesar. The *Perfecting of Hell* and the Gesar epic as a whole also lays the groundwork for ostensive re-enactment of the legend, which allows individuals to, as Ellis says, "live through" the narrative and make the narrative's social boundaries real in the world around them. Evaluating the *Perfecting of Hell* as a "legend" attempting to enact social control while also laying the groundwork for ostensive re-enactment reveals a more nuanced and complex view of the literary Gesar epic episodes.

By situating King Gesar and his court of heroes definitively as Buddhist spiritual masters, the death scenes augment the *Perfecting of Hell's* promotion of Non-Sectarian goals to promote Great Perfection practice and encourage traditional Buddhist ethics. The earlier sections of the *Perfecting of Hell* seek to position King Gesar as an important Buddhist figure through his associations with and initiations by Padmasambhava. The death scenes' clear imitations of hagiographical literature, therefore, play an important role in reinforcing and strengthening the perception of Gesar's—and his entire court's—attainment. Through this legitimation, Gesar's promotion of Great Perfection and *Seminal Heart of Great Expanse* practice gains significantly more authority. In fact, Schaeffer argues that the death scene is uniquely central to building such legitimacy, because, "accounts of death, cremation, and relics are among the most vivid and evocative components of their *Lives* [*rnam thar* / hagiographical literature]."[84] Meshing together two sets of, as Foley calls them, cultural registers—that of the heroic masculine ideal King Gesar and that of advanced Buddhist teachers—the author of the *Perfecting of Hell* uses the narrative to mark the social boundary of appropriate Buddhist action. Telling a story in which a beloved martial hero promotes Great Perfection and *Seminal Heart of Great Expanse* practices while simultaneously being punished in hell for his violent tantric action represents a bid to paint the boundary of appropriate Buddhist practice, one which leaves the Geluk sect and its support of the Yamāntaka tantra on the "less advanced" or "wrong side."

Within the narrative field of the Gesar epic tradition, the *Perfecting of Hell's* death scenes have a second purpose: to ensure that it—and it alone—represents the final word of King Gesar of Ling. The deaths of King Gesar and his court of heroes are remarkably final;

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[84] Schaeffer, *Himalayan Hermitess,* 123.

at the end of the text, all leaders of the community are either dead or have followed Denma into India. While Gesar and his heroes could conceivably return as trülkus—and they have, according to many contemporary eastern Tibetans who consider the Fourteenth Dalai Lama an emanation of King Gesar—Gesar himself gives no hint of such a return in his final words to the people of Ling. After Denma offers a song to Gesar in efforts to convince him to stay, Gesar exclaims that his work in the human realm has finished:

> Precious Tsashang Denma, what you said is certainly true, but the karmic wind has come. It is difficult to delay going to the Buddha[field]. The teachings of White Ling are completed, so there is no cause for everyone to delay. You, Tsashang Denma Samdrup, do not let your exalted mind be even a little sad; we two brothers are free from meeting and parting in all this life and the next.[85]

The finality of Gesar and his court's death is particular evident, however, in the final song of Gesar's horse, Kyangbu. Before transforming into a vulture and flying away, Kyangbu sings a song that prepares those remaining in Ling to no longer look to Gesar and his heroes for religious guidance, but rather to turn their attention to more traditional Buddhist figures:

> To ensure the teachings of the black demons
> will not spread in the upper and lower kingdom of the southern world,
> may the glorious Heruka be your guide!
>
> To ensure that the teachings of the buddha are uncorrupted,
> may the buddhas of the five families be your guide!
>
> To ensure that interferences do not arise in your own lives,
> may the lord of the life of the five families be your guide!
>
> To ensure infectious disease does not arise in the kingdom,
> may the eight sibling medicine gods be your guide!
>
> To ensure the harvest of grain spread,
> may the great Indra be your guide!
>
> To ensure the castle does not become a ruin,

[85] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po,* "Song 5.4.35-54," *(*Thimpu), 340.

may you take as your guide the king Horse Deity!

To calm the inner and outer interferences,
may you take [protector deity] Damcen Gyatso as your guide!

In order to be surrounded by friends and companions,
may you take the protectors and guardians of the Dharma as your guide!

By the primordial lord below
and the lama possessing kindness above,
may whatever wishes you planted be obtained![86]

King Gesar's death in the *Perfecting of Hell*, therefore, closes the narrative thread of the Gesar epic—nothing else can come after it. In a discursive field where performative texts are competing for social dominance to establish the best form of Buddhist practice, these death scenes act as a rhetorical tool that attempts to silence future arguments. Any coming renditions of the Gesar epic that attempt to promote other lineages of Buddhist practice or present a differing view of King Gesar than reformed tantric king will necessarily have to enter the canon at some place before the *Perfecting of Hell,* preserving the *Perfecting of Hell's* position as the final testament of King Gesar.

Like the legends Bill Ellis describes, the *Perfecting of Hell* gains further social capital through inviting its readers to interact with the story and make it a reality in their own lives through processes of ostension. The death scenes of the *Perfecting of Hell* clearly lay the narrative groundwork to promote a religious cult of King Gesar. While perhaps not called so by most scholars of religion, such a practice represents a certain type of proto-ostension—particularly when the figure is not a clearly Buddhist one, as in the case of King Gesar. As elaborated by Schaeffer, Strong, and others, relics are a critical component within Buddhism of building future devotion to religious figures. Thinking cross-culturally, Peter

[86] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po,* "Song 5.4.35-54," (Thimphu), 350.

Brown argues that relics are important in religious traditions for their ability to connect the believer to the deceased individual through an imaginative dialectic where "the eternity of paradise and the first touch of the resurrection come into the present."[87] Stories of Gesar's relics in the *Perfecting of Hell* invite believers to engage in ostensive practices of relic devotion in order to physically connect with the warrior-king and the world of the epic.

While there are few temples that hold physical relics of King Gesar, his weapons and livery are frequently displayed as relics, as well as those of his warriors. At Khatok monastery near Pelyul (Baiyü) city, the hat and robe of Denma's son Gyatsha are held in a special room accessible only by three different keys. Devotees are encouraged to peer through a small window to look at the relics, and khata are placed on nails above the door. Beyond weapons and livery, material indications physically marked in stone of King Gesar's time in the human realm are sectioned off and offered khata and prayer flags as if they were relics. Indentations from where Gesar sat sunning himself outside can be seen at the Gesar temple in Asu village; his larger-than-life footprints are seen on a cliff in Chamdo prefecture; the Sendruk Takste school in Golok features a single footprint left by Gesar when in his youthful form as Joru. These sites are so important to local expressions of religious practice that the Chinese tried to destroy many of them during the Cultural Revolution.[88] This is a very traditionally Buddhist form of either proto- or quasi-ostensive action. Bubhuti Baruah (or Ven. Balangada Ananda Maitreya, see note below) notes that "in almost every country in Asia where Buddhism has prevailed there is at least one of the

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[87] Brown, 78.
[88] Bkra shis 'od dkar (Caretaker and lead practitioner at Gesar Temple in Asu Village). Personal Interview.

supposed impressions of the Buddha's foot."[89] While the relics of hair and nail described in the *Perfecting of Hell* are not seen in contemporary eastern Tibet, these relics reflect the text's larger efforts to make Gesar a fully divine, buddhicized figure. Through the use of relics of weapons, livery, and physical marks upon the landscape, the *Perfecting of Hell's* death scenes allow for readers to enact the "legend" and "live through" it in their own lives.

These forms of specifically religious ostension are components of a greater ostensive prevalence of the Gesar epic in the discourse, environment, and social norms of everyday Tibetans. Reflecting Foley's statement that oral poetry is "like a language, only more so," the Gesar epic is a lived, rather than living, language that surrounds eastern Tibetan culture. Like the familiar highway signs explaining that such-and-such Founding Father had slept there, the landscape is marked with cairns of white rocks, prayer flags, and golden arches to indicate that King Gesar, his heroes, or his many, many wives had once stayed there, fought there, or feasted there. Zhidu county alone features two such sites: (1) the mountain where King Gesar made his fortress is marked with the regal image of a giant conch shell in white stones and (2) a series of ponds where Drukmo is said to have washed her hair, memorialized as such by signs, prayer flags, and an uncanny disembodied giant cement head of the queen. Indeed, a significant number of small towns throughout eastern Tibet feature statues of Gesar, including Litang and Jyekundo. Besides place, living animals have also been marked by correlation with the epic's characters. A notable example is Drukmo's association with white-breasted cranes, who supposedly shielded her naked body during a storm when she was living as a hostage in Hor. At the supposed site of

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[89] Bubhuti Baruah, *Buddhist Sects and Sectarianism,* (Delhi: Sarup & Son, 2008) 138; This book seems to have plagiarized the quote from Ven. Balangoda Ananda Maitreya, "Buddhism in Theravada Countries," *The Path of the Buddha: Buddhism Interpreted by Buddhists,* Kenneth W. Morgan, ed., (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1997), 131.

Gesar's birth in Asu village, a monk pointed out a bush arising from the very place where Gesar's mother gave birth and where the afterbirth fell. An example of enacting the narrative and giving it significance in their own lives, pregnant women reportedly take a branch of the bush and make a tea from it in the hopes that they will have an easy childbirth. A certain silvery dandelion flower whose thin petals catch on the wind and fly away is commonly known as Gesar's flower. Although no one I spoke with was exactly sure why the flower carried this name, the consensus was that its seeds spread on the wind, just like his stories spread through bards.

These ostensive actions of place and action are supported more generally by the epic's use as a discursive tool. I witnessed couples flirt and boys goad each other in dares by referencing the epic's characters. During a hushed family discussion, my friend's uncle utilized the figure of King Gesar as historical proof that Tibetans had always been rulers of Tibet and that they always would be. A common aphorism related to me by Tibetan friends states that "On the wedding day, every man is Gesar and every woman is Drukmo." Discussions laying out family relationships between the characters and clarifying each hero's special abilities or animal companions would range for hours, each person frequently pulling on the knowledge they gained from some performance of the epic they had witnessed or a paperback they had read. While these quasi-ostensive actions and discourse are not directly related to the *Perfecting of Hell* and the relics characters leave behind, they are evidence of the interactions between narrative literature and cultural practice, as well as evidence for ostensive potential of the narrative. The figure of King Gesar and the world created by his epic are enacted and made real for contemporary Tibetans through their interactions with the text and discursive use of the epic tradition.

Examining the *Perfecting of Hell's* death scenes within the context of the larger narrative and discursive environment reveals that—despite its literary and published form—the *Perfecting of Hell* is as much a performance as oral renditions of the epic in two key ways. Considering first how the *Perfecting of Hell* fits into models of oral performance, Richard Bauman describes performances as relying on verbal language that is both *marked* as different and possessing a *conception of verbal art as a way of speaking.* As mentioned above, *the* language within the *Perfecting of Hell* retains the unique markers of oral performance that make it different from other forms of speech, including nonsense syllables to establish song melodies and oral tropes of singer identification. However, the Gesar epic—including the *Perfecting of Hell*—is also embodying Bauman's conception of verbal art as a *way of speaking*, a "language" in the words of Foley. In order to make narrative meaning of the presentation of Gesar's death and entourage, the *Perfecting of Hell* is reliant on the cultural registers outlined by Foley and used in oral poetry. As we shall see in the next section below, the *Perfecting of Hell* is singled out as a particularly unique Gesar episode, demonstrating that perhaps it violates too much the "grammar" of the epic's language, so to speak. Regardless, the literary episode of the *Perfecting of Hell* relies on the same tools as in the oral performance to make significance and meaning, demonstrating its similarly performative nature.

Turning to the second aspect of performance—that identified by Ellis—performance is also a form of social control. As explored in this section, the *Perfecting of Hell* is a narrative that functions as a way of talking about, formulating, and responding to the boundaries of appropriate Buddhist practice. The *Perfecting of Hell* does not merely tack on explicitly Buddhist deaths from hagiographic materials, but rather argues *through* the

celebratory imagery of the deaths of Buddhist spiritual masters. It is a vocal participant in a broader narrative sphere that performs a certain image of Gesar's death—one that is both Buddhist and final—to control the rhetorical arena and prevent alternative claims from arising. It is, therefore, responsive to both previous and anticipated voices in the arena. Beyond that, it invites readers to participate in its *way of speaking* through processes of ostension by describing the leaving of relics and enhancing the religious persona of King Gesar within the larger epic environment. This performativity allows it to enhance its overall goal of promoting Great Perfection and *Seminal Heart of Great Expanse* practice within the confines of early twentieth-century Tibet and the Non-Sectarian movement.

This dissertation argues, therefore, that a category is needed to describe those texts that run fluidly between private realms of reading and public realms of social re-enactment; I offer the analytical term of a "performative text" to describe literary texts which find social realization through the technologies of performance. As described by Paula McDowell, some scholars of orality and performance have championed a sort of "orality-literacy equation" where "orality and literacy [are posited] as elements of an equilibrium: a homeostatic balance whereby more of one necessarily means less of the other."[90] The *Perfecting of Hell* and the Gesar epic more generally demonstrate the extreme error of this statement. First, the Gesar epic as a whole challenges the "oral-literacy equation" by means of demonstrating the thriving culture of oral Gesar performance existing alongside the publication of literacy texts. Second, the *Perfecting of Hell* and other published episodes of the Gesar epic, literary though they may be, represent not solitary activities, but rather arise from, participate in, and support an expansive and generative

[90] Paula McDowell, "Ong and the Concept of Orality," *Religion & Literature* 44.2 (2012): 169-178. 71.

community. Because something is written—as opposed to oral—has only limited bearing on how it is used, enjoyed, or understood by those who possess it; this critique is evident not only in Tibetan arenas, but other historical geographies as well.[91]

This complexity within the epic tradition highlights problems in the larger study of the Gesar epic as a whole. Scholars of the Gesar epic are generally forced to focus either on one thing or the other—on the oral performance of the epic or its literary iterations; how people speak through the epic in their everyday lives is yet another thing entirely. Focusing instead on "performance" as it manifests in literary, oral, and realized versions gives scholars greater freedom to describe these phenomena as one single thing that flows from one to the other. Performance is, at its heart, an outward-focused effort to form the experiences and thoughts of another. Based upon the Bauman's and Ellis' ideas of performance discussed earlier, the *Perfecting of Hell* is utilizing performative technologies in an effort to control the social discourse surrounding Buddhist practice. While performative arenas are certainly distinct in comparison with the majority of literary and published works, a new term is needed to describe those texts like the *Perfecting of Hell* that seem to span the distance between oral performance, literary publication, and lived realization. Calling such works "performative texts" draws attention to their position participating in larger arenas of performance and their efforts to control the social discourse of others.

Focusing our attention on legends, epics, and the *Perfecting of Hell* as a performative text, therefore, the death scenes reveal how the work is attempting to actively control the larger religious environment. While mapping out the *Perfecting of Hell's* imitation of

[91] Adam Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture in England, 1500-1700,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). See particularly his introduction, 1-50.

Buddhist hagiographies perhaps does not require additional theoretical assistance, Ellis' work allows us to understand these changes in a larger social context. It also takes profoundly seriously the narrative work of the *Perfecting of Hell* within the Gesar epic. Tibetans are not merely reading or listening to the *Perfecting of Hell* (or the Gesar epic more generally), they are ostensively participating in and "living through" the epic. Ellis gives us the tools to understand the mechanics of how Tibetans move from literary text to performative religious action—especially in situations outside the norms of institutional Buddhist practice. The idea of ostension Ellis elaborates may provide a useful tool for explaining the shift from narrative to religious practice to belief in other, more traditionally Buddhist settings. A new theoretical tool is still needed, however, to describe those texts that utilize performative techniques—both those of framing and those of controlling audiences' perceptions. For this, I propose the term "performative text" as a way to describe and discuss those literary texts that maintain a presence in the larger performative arena.

Discomfort and Ambiguity with the *Perfecting of Hell*

Performances, including performative texts, are fundamentally social constructions, which means that the continued reception of the narrative remains an important component. While we have little sense of the reception of the *Perfecting of Hell* when it was first published in the early twentieth century, contemporary responses indicate that the text—while always accepted as part of the Gesar epic—has some discomfort and social taboo surrounding it. I was frequently told in interviews that if a visionary bard receives

inspiration to sing the *Perfecting of Hell,*[92] he would die within a year.[93] An interview with Aba Jamsong, an elder of Rongbu village, revealed that the singing of the *Perfecting of Hell* was both very rare and very emotional for both audience and bard as a result.[94] Many Tibetans I spoke with had a story of someone tangentially related to them either hearing of a bard's death after reciting the *Perfecting of Hell* or witnessing it personally. Collectively, these stories look rather similar to Americans speaking of their great aunt Sally's third husband who swears he knew someone that refused to forward that chain letter and died three weeks later, but their veracity was never questioned by the Tibetan audience. In fact, each story was simply used as a jumping off point to share their own story of a bard's resultant, *Perfecting of Hell*-related death.

The association between death and the *Perfecting of Hell* extends beyond the oral performances of bards, however, to affect even readers' own relationship with the text. When first conducting field interviews, I would often open the interview straight away with the question, "Have you read the *Great Perfecting of Hell?"* After a few uncomfortable interviews in which my informants became very quiet, shy, and continually attempted to change the subject, my Tibetan friend explained that I needed to stop asking about the *Perfecting of Hell* straight away. When I pushed him to explain, he said that the *Perfecting of Hell* was associated with death and that talking about it, reading it, or thinking too much about it could lead to one's own death. Laughing a little, he told me that I—a foreigner appearing in a small town in Qinghai, speaking Lhasa Tibetan, and asking questions about

[92] Defined in these situations as the final episode of the epic which features Gesar's trip to hell and subsequent death, not necessarily the specific version published as the *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po.*
[93] Dkar ma lha mo (Scholar at Yushu Office of Cultural Preservation). Personal Interview; Tshe ring tshong rgyag and 'Gyur med rab rten (Gesar bards in Yushu), Personal Interview.
[94] A ba 'jam zong. (Village Elder). Interview by the author. Personal Interview. Hua Shou Village, Yushu Prefecture. July 28, 2015.

the *Perfecting of Hell*—looked somewhat like an omen of death. When I asked for clarity on why the text was considered taboo and inquired if it was the depictions of torture in the hell realms, he said, "No, it's the death of everyone at the end, not the hells. If it was hells, then all Buddhist scriptures would be considered unlucky!" This association with taboo and unlucky tidings was confirmed by a friend's uncle, Pema Thubten. Although he acknowledged that his belief went against the Buddhist doctrine that karma decides when you die, he explained that he gets nervous reading the *Perfecting of Hell* because "reading about everyone's death [Gesar and his court] might make me die."[95] On a more intimate note, Pema told me that when he does read the *Perfecting of Hell,* "I just cry and cry and cry to hear about so many great men leaving the earth." Smiling the wry smile of those cursed to live with the sensitive and easily-verklempt, his wife poured him more tea and told me that she found the whole Gesar epic rather dull.

The widespread cultural belief of the *Perfecting of Hell* as a taboo or cursed text indicates that for many eastern Tibetans, the text exists in an ambiguous middle ground between sacred and non-sacred. Because legends do not exist in a social vacuum, Ellis argues that there is a certain "grammar" to legends. As an example, he discusses the moment when a journalist, who was recording a man's story about seeing his deceased uncle in a shopping mall, giggled reflexively and almost lost the man's trust. Ellis writes, "We instinctively smile at the notion of meeting ghosts in fast-food restaurants or shopping malls, *because* such statements are patently ungrammatical in terms of belief-language."[96] We expect the uncanny or otherworldly in some places more than others and when stories

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[95] Pad+ma Thub bstan (family friend living in Rongbu village). Interview by author. Personal Interview. Hua Shou Village, Yushu Prefecture. July 28, 2015.
[96] Ellis, *Aliens, Ghost, and Cults,* 94.

transgress certain mental symbolic frameworks we hold in our minds, we have trouble accepting it. Mary Douglas wrote about these transgressions in terms of cataloguing those things which are pure or impure,[97] but the result is the same: we become discomforted at those things that violate our symbolic frameworks. Scholars of American folktale Diana Hume George and Malcolm Nelson have noted the extreme discomfort felt by guests to their home when they stumble upon their collection of old grave stones and grave rubbings.[98] They argue that the gravestones have come to represent the eternity of death (and of the deceased), but to keep them in the house like any other decoration violates that symbolic image. In a more recent work, Ellis builds on their arguments to demonstrate that objects can become lucky (or unlucky) because they "served as a metonym for a ritual event…"[99] That which is ambiguous or between categories gets labeled unlucky or taboo.

Returning our attention to the *Perfecting of Hell,* therefore, it is an unlucky narrative associated with death because of its aggressive attempts to reframe King Gesar as a Buddhist figure, but the result is too distant from cultural beliefs about him as a violent, heroic king; the *Perfecting of Hell,* therefore*,* remains in an ambiguous position. As discussed in Chapter 3, writing King Gesar as a non-violent Buddhist figure fundamentally violates almost every other portrayal of the hero circulating in eastern Tibetan culture. While much of the work of legend is to name those things that are ambiguous or uncanny—as discussed in the "Rumpelstiltskin Principle"—if the society does not fully accept that re-naming, it risks leaving the thing in-between, two things at once and simultaneously

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[97] Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo,* (New York: Routledge, 1966, 2002).

[98] Diana Hume George and Malcolm A. Nelson, "Man's Infinite Concern: Graveyards as Fetishes," *Objects of Special Devotion: Fetishes and Fetishism in Popular Culture,* ed. Ray B. Browne, (Bowling Green: Bowling Green University Press, 1982), 136-150.

[99] Bill Ellis, "Why Is a Lucky Rabbit's Foot Lucky?" *Lucifer Ascending, The Occult in Folklore and Popular Culture,* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2004), 109.

neither. As revealed in his death, the *Perfecting of Hell* clearly states that King Gesar and his court are advanced Buddhist figures, and the text has the authority of an eyewitness author to back it up. The very things for which he is criticized in the *Perfecting of Hell's*, however, are the defining characteristics of every other iteration of King Gesar—a dominant and fierce warrior who embodies the very ideals of eastern Tibetan heroic masculinity. The *Perfecting of Hell's* attempted "naming" of King Gesar as a non-violent figure succeeded only partially, and, as a result, the text remains in an ambiguous limbo: authoritative enough to be considered authentic, but disconcerting for presenting a vastly different image of King Gesar than otherwise portrayed.

Evidence of the ambiguity surrounding the *Perfecting of Hell's* image of King Gesar is further seen in the uncertain relationship he has with the Buddhist institution. Some scholars have hypothesized that an antagonistic relationship historically existed between King Gesar and Buddhist institutions due to the tensions between the heroic masculine ideals and those of traditional Buddhist ethics.[100] Colleagues working on monastic codes (vinaya) and other rule books note that these works usually frown on reading the Gesar epic due its frivolity.[101] While the historical antecedents to this supposed tension are difficult to piece together with any certainty, my research in Yushu demonstrated that some religious leaders were suspicious of the epic hero and associated his worship with subsequent problems. In an interview with Khenpo Thubten Rongyu of Batang Samdruling monastery, the Khenpo explained that it was inappropriate for devout Buddhists to read the Gesar epic because it would make them too easily provoked and too wild, leading to

[100] Dreyfus, "Proto-nationalism in Tibet."; Robin Kornman, "A Comparative Study of Buddhist Versions of the Epic of Gesar of Ling."
[101] Berthe Jansen. Personal Conversation.

acts of violence in emulation of King Gesar.[102] An interview with Tibetan doctor Monpa Dondrup echoed this sentiment, though he limited the prohibition on reading Gesar only to monks.[103] An elder of Rongbu village told me that if the Gesar epic becomes too popular, it will lead to the end of Buddhism in Tibet.[104] These interviews suggest that the *Perfecting of Hell's* attempts to clearly place King Gesar as a religious figure left him as a hotly contested figure.

This ambiguity also extends to ritual practice and religious accoutrement. One painter of religious imagery (thangkha) explained that while he was capable of painting a King Gesar thangkha, he could think of no specific reason for doing so; he explained that because King Gesar was an emanation, one should simply paint the Buddha from who he was emanating.[105] While it is hard to argue with his logic, the fact of being an emanation has certainly never stopped painters from creating religious images of other figures throughout Tibetan history. Similarly, despite the *Perfecting of Hell's* claims to the contrary, reading the *Perfecting of Hell* as religious scripture seems to occur only seldomly. When I told a man in Namqing that I was translating the *Perfecting of Hell*, he told me about a local monk who had told everyone a few years ago that they should read the *Perfecting of Hell* to the dead and dying in place of the *Bardo Thödrol*—better known in English as the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, which is read by a monk to the dead and dying to prepare them for the afterlife. The man explained that the monk—despite his religious status—was laughed at because the Gesar epic was for entertainment only and had no ritual power.

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102 Thub bstan rong rgyu (Religious teacher at 'Ba' thang bsam grub gling), interview by the author. Personal Interview, Jyekundo, Yushu. July 27, 2015.

103 Mon pa Dun sgrup (Tibetan medical doctor in Zhiduo). Interview by the author. Personal Interview. Zhiduo, Yushu. July 26, 2015.

104 A ba 'jam zong. (Village Elder). Personal Interview.

105 Blo gros tshe ring, (thankha painter in Jyekundo, Qinghai) Interview by Author. Personal Interview. July 24, 2015.

Gesar's ambiguous status in the daily religious devotions of Tibetans is perhaps most poignantly expressed, however, in the treatment of those items considered his relics. In Sepa Monastery, roughly 40 km from Jyekundo, Qinghai, the supposed sword of King Gesar is displayed in a museum made by the deceased abbot for the purposes of ensuring local Tibetans knew about the diversity of the world outside of Tibet. It rests inside a glass box with a stained, half-hearted khata draped over it and a small plaque proclaiming that the Yushu Cultural Preservation Society declared it authentic on August 30th, 2013. One of the monastery's monks in residence told me that in the 1980s, the Rinpoche of the monastery had had a dream that he could recover the sword of King Gesar. He traveled to a small temple near Lhasa where he felt the call to dig in the ground. Mimicking the recovery of Buddhist treasure texts, the Rinpoche recovered the sword by digging through the floor of the monastery. Treasures and relics of other Buddhist figures are placed in locations of prominence within the temple and receive public offerings. In contrast, the supposedly authentic sword of King Gesar hangs in a museum next to a poorly taxidermied snow leopard and anaconda. The treatment of this sword embodies the ambiguous role for the hero in the social imagination of many eastern Tibetans: despite the *Perfecting of Hell's* portrayal of King Gesar as a spiritually advanced figure on par with any other Buddhist teacher and the verbal declaration by most eastern Tibetans that he is, in fact, a Buddha, he does not seem to occupy the same devotional or spiritual space as other, more traditional Buddhist figures.

These situations demonstrate the continued ambiguity of King Gesar as a Buddhist figure and the *Perfecting of Hell's* resulting ambiguous status as a taboo or unlucky text associated with death. Mipham Gyatso and others had written tantric texts previously that

presented King Gesar as a religious figure. The *Perfecting of Hell,* however, went above and beyond these works by challenging the figure of Gesar as a masterful and masculine hero and instead attempting to fit King Gesar into an already existent model of a non-violent, realized spiritual master. Despite the best efforts of the *Perfecting of Hell's* authors, the portrayal of King Gesar was so dissimilar from every other presentation that the text was left in an ambiguous position—both the culmination of the epic and apart from it. Subsequently, readers and listeners—uncertain how to approach it and unable to define it—considered it unlucky or taboo and believed the deaths it portrayed would cause their own. Because legends (and epics, as we shall see in Chapter 5) are by definition social constructs, they take place within a context greater than simply the pages of the text. The *Perfecting of Hell's* nature as a text utilizing the technologies of performance ensures that it exists to a large extent in a receptive relationship with the society around it. Therefore, it is both celebrated as the swan song of the great Buddhist master Gesar and feared as the death-producing taboo.

Conclusions

Legends and epics are not living, but rather lived things. While linguistic convention states that only those works of literature shared orally can "live," I have demonstrated in this chapter that the *Perfecting of Hell* occupies the space of a performative text as is as much of a "living text." To make a social argument about the best and most appropriate form of Buddhist practice, the *Perfecting of Hell* builds on its audiences' expectations and utilizes a cultural register of hagiographical Buddhist literature to name and reframe King Gesar as a Buddhist master. Like any performance, however, the *Perfecting of Hell* is

essentially a social construction and the aggressive attempts to buddhicize the figure Gesar push the text between mental categories of thought and into an ultimately ambiguous—and therefore vaguely threatening—middle ground. The fundamental ability of literary texts to be performative in oral, textual, and social environments points to a unique feature of the category of "epic" as a whole. While Ellis' definition of legend as "potential fact" is useful to define the *Perfecting of Hell,* I maintain that it is still at its heart an epic. The next chapter will consider what it means that the *Perfecting of Hell* is an epic and demonstrate why epics are a uniquely useful form of literature with which to make religious arguments.

The Religious World is the Epic World: Epic Literature, Religious Discourse, and the Things We Ignore

> "It is ever so with the things that men begin: there is a frost in Spring or a blight in Summer, and they fail of their promise."
>
> "Yet seldom do they fail of their seed," said Legolas. "And that will lie in times and places unlooked for. The deeds of Men will outlast us, Gimli."
>
> -- J. R.R. Tolkien

The study of the global category of epic seems to have the misfortune of having been silently declared a relic of an older time of scholarship. Postmodernism and academic discussions surrounding the insidious work of exoticism, romanticism, and genre imperialism have challenged the idea of "epic" as a genre of literature found across the world. Like the pivotal moment of father-murder central to so many of the world's cosmogonic myths, younger scholars rebelled against the idea of epic as a singular, global literary form, and replaced it with poetry, mytho-history, hagiography, ritual, and other classifications that were more precise and suited to the specific cultural and literary situations considered. When epic is taken as a topic of study now, it is strictly confined by geography and history and isolated to those things we can know without a doubt as epics; theorization on the larger category of epic is largely absent. Indeed, in their introduction to the edited volume arising from Brown University's Program in Ancient Studies collaborative project on the epic and history, David Konstan and Kurt Raaflaub ask, "Take the very category of 'epic': is there a single definition that can embrace the varieties of narrative poetry (and prose) produced in the several societies under consideration [in our project]

from Sumer to South Africa?"[1] Jacques Derrida has argued that the notion of "genre" itself largely constructs—and necessarily limits—the very literature it purports to describe.[2] While this rejection of an overarching theory of epic has produced much excellent scholarship and enhanced our understanding of literature's work in specific historical and cultural contexts, looking at the individual trees has lost our vision of the forest. Reviving the category of epic as a global literary genre has the potential to reveal how narrative forms society, the role of the past in creating the present, and the deep interconnection between story, place, history, and identity.

Beginning with a definition of the genre of "epic," this chapter will demonstrate how epic is a form of literature uniquely socially-engaged, and, therefore, uniquely socially-persuasive. It will review some of the major roles epic has fulfilled globally before offering three traits that reveal how epic is especially suited to participation in religious discourse and the promotion of religious transformation, as seen earlier in the *Perfecting of Hell*. As I will demonstrate, epics are a form of literature unique for their involvement in constructing the social world around them and, therefore, play an important role in religious thought and other arenas outside the direct scope of literary criticism. "Epic" has the potential to be an essential piece in the analytical toolkit of religion scholars. To address this idea, the chapter will end by considering how the social work of epic aligns with the social work of religion through a detailed comparison of my own conception of "epic" with J.Z. Smith's and Clifford Geertz' definitions of religion. What this ultimately reveals is that we as scholars of religion

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[1] David Konstan and Kurt A, Raaflaub, "Introduction," *Epic and History,* eds. David Konstan and Kurt A. Raaflaub, (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing, 2009), 1.
[2] Jacques Derrida, "The Law of Genre," *Glyph* 7 (1980), 176-201.

ignore epic at our peril because, while epic is not always religious, it is always doing the social work of religion.

Definitions of Epic—A Three-Legged Stool

Due to the problems I highlighted earlier, any discussion of epic must begin with a definition, which itself must begin with a contextual narrative of definitions prior; this dissertation will be no different. Entire books have been written on the subject of changing conceptions of the epic,[3] so I will provide only a brief synopsis here. What I will offer, however, is a critical evaluation of some highlights and trends in the definition of epic as they relate to my own definition. Various conceptions of epic have alternately focused on three features as the foundational means to identify an epic—form, content, and reception. These have been used in roughly chronological order to delineate epic from tragedy, from history, and from poetry. My own definition will be presented at the end of this section, along with some comments on the importance of delineating "epic" as adjective and "epic" as noun. Building something akin to a three-legged stool that utilizes all three of the epic traits—form, content, and reception—into a single conception of epic, this definition will provide the foundation to uniquely explore epic's social dimensions and its resulting use in religious discourse throughout the remainder of the chapter.

Unsurprisingly, some of the oldest definitions of epic arise from the culture that produced what is arguably the most paradigmatic epic products—the Greeks. Seeing a fundamental conflict between themselves as philosophers and poets, Socrates and Plato generally held suspicion for all forms of poetry, including epic. Specifically, Socrates (or

[3] A notable suggestion is Adeline Johns-Putra, *The History of the Epic,* (Basingstok: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

more accurately Plato speaking through Socrates) expressed concern that because poetry depicts untrue things, it threatened to deceive the listener or reader.[4] In describing the variety of ways poetry imitated life, Socrates delineated the contours of epic poetry in particular as that which combines "means of imitation…and the recital of the poet himself."[5] While these early philosophers denigrate epic poetry as a form of imitation that fundamentally lies to the audience, Aristotle took a softer view. In his classic *Poetics,* Aristotle explains that epic is unlike history on account of having a narrative, with a beginning, a middle, and an end. Rather, he ties epic more closely with tragedy, but notes that "epic differs from tragedy in two respects: the length of the composition and the verse form used."[6] Specifically, Aristotle explains that epics are quite lengthy and utilize heroic verse to tell the tale without relying on stage productions as tragedy does.[7]

While Aristotle allows that epics have "more scope for the illogical,"[8] his definition of what makes an epic unique is based entirely on form with little regard for specific content—epics have a discrete narrative, told in a lengthy fashion, and utilizing recited poetry. Aristotle's definition had significant impact on future study of epic such that Greek epics became the model to judge all other epic literature—regardless of cultural or historical context. In *Oral Literature in Africa,* for example, Ruth Finnegan's own use of Greek epics as the largely unconscious exemplar is evident as she declares that Africa has no epics because

[4] Plato, *Republic, Book II,* (379a5–9), eds. and trans. Chris Emlyn-Jones and William Preddy, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014).
[5] Plato, *Republic, Book III,* (393c).
[6] Aristotle, *Poetics* 23 (1549a), trans. George Whalley, (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1997).
[7] Aristotle, *Poetics 23* (1549b).
[8] Aristotle, *Poetics* 23 (1560a).

there are—as Aristotle says—no long narratives in poetic verse dealing with heroic themes.[9]

It was not until the Renaissance that literary criticism surrounding "epics" became fashionable in the West once more, particularly in the work of poetically-minded courtiers. Breaking with the Greeks, these individuals emphasized the transcendent and moral content of epic poetry rather than its form. Sir Philip Sidney, a sixteenth-century Englishman, explained that epic is "the best and most accomplished kind of Poetry…[because] the lofty image of such worthies inflameth the mind with desire to be worthy, and informs with counsel how to be worthy."[10] Sidney's Italian contemporary, Torquato Tasso defines epic as, "A heroic poem (that is, an epic) is an imitation of noble action, great and perfect, narrated in the loftiest verse, with the aim of giving profit through delight."[11] While both of these definitions give some nod to form, they emphasize the transformative content of epic that models for readers a higher moral ground. Masaki Mori notes that "Sidney changes the Aristotelian mood of 'may happen' to 'should happen' under the critical necessity of his day to moralize poetry."[12] Interestingly, this European conception of epics as the model of an ideal and moral life mirrors Arabic conceptions of epic from several centuries before; Dwight Reynolds explains that the Arabic word for biography came to be applied to epics such that these were not "simply a biography, but rather the narrative of an 'exemplary' life, the life of someone worthy of being imitated."[13] While it is possible that this similarity can

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[9] Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Literature in Africa,* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 1970), 109.
[10] Philip Sidney, *The Defense of Poesy (Poetry),* ed. Henry Morley, (London: Cassell & Company, 1891), 56.
[11] Torquato Tasso, *Discourses on the Heroic Poem* (1954), vol. 1, trans. Mariella Cavalchini and Irene Samuel, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 14.
[12] Masaki Mori, *Epic Grandeur: Toward a Comparative Poetics of the Epic,* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 9.
[13] Dwight Reynolds, "Epic and History in the Arabic Tradition," *Epic and History,* eds. David Konstan and Kurt A. Raaflaub, (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing, 2009), 395.

be traced to a specific or direct influence between the Arabic conception of epic and the analysis of western authors, no clear link has yet been found. European interest in epics peaked during the Renaissance, when literary thinkers defined them as tools to uplift the human spirit and condition by providing the model of an ideal life.

Later definitions of epic in the nineteenth century reflected the European trend towards nationalism and continued to emphasize epic's content, but with the addition of explicitly political themes centered on national identity. G.W.F. Hegel defines epic as that which provides "the vision of a national spirit in its ethical family life, in states of national war or peace, in its needs, arts, usages, interests, in short a picture of a whole way of thinking and a whole stage of civilization….in the most general terms we can cite conflict in a state of war as the situation most suited to epic."[14] In the interest of prioritizing a content centered on national identity, form has been entirely forgotten in Hegel's definition. In studying contemporaneous Romantics, Gérard Genette notes similar trends; he explains Romantics identified "an epic *world* defined by a specific type of social aggregate and human relationship," and promoted the idea of certain "natural forms" of literature defined by theme.[15]

This focus on national identity reflected the larger trends of the period, in which western nationalism arising from a Romantic conception of the "Folk" led to the widespread use of literature—both real and fake, as seen in the Ossian controversy—to create links between the people, the past, and the land. Indeed, the nineteenth century opened with the unexpected recovery of an entire *Beowulf* manuscript, birthing a palpable sense of "Anglo-

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[14] G.W.F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art, Vol. 2,* ed. T.M. Knox, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).
[15] Gérard Genette, *The Architext: An Introduction,* trans. Jane E. Lewin, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 62.

Saxon" identity.[16] Epics were promoted to the title of "national epics" that revealed the true soul of a given people and represented their ticket to the echelon of internationally prominent literary cultures. The idea of "national epic" has remained salient even today; the recent translation of the first three chapters of the "Mipham Gesar" / Lingtshang Gesar declares in its historical introduction that "The Gesar of Ling epic is the national oral epic for the country of Tibet, equivalent to the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*."[17] Nineteenth-century definitions of epic dropped form entirely as an epic criterium and instead forged the myth of the "national epic" that uniquely expressed the thoughts, feelings, and ideas of a specific culture.

The post-war period and beyond saw a return of the interest in form and content as components of epic, but highlighted audience reception to the narrative as epic's defining feature. C. M. Bowra made the audience's special pleasure and enhanced belief in human worthiness resulting from interactions with epic an important criterion:

> An epic poem is by common consent a narrative of some length and deals with events which have a certain grandeur and importance come from a life of action, especially violent action such as war. It gives a special pleasure because its events and persons enhance our belief in the worth of human achievement and in the dignity and nobility of man.[18]

Bowra's epic is not simply a lengthy narrative or one whose content relates the horrors of war, but one which specifically evokes in the reader a certain transcendence. Bowra's intellectual successor J. B. Hainsworth speaks similarly of epic. While basing his definition of

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[16] Norman Cantor, *Inventing the Middle Ages: The Lives, Works, and Ideas of the Great Medievalists of the Twentieth Century,* (New York: William Morrow, 1991) 79-117. ; R.D. Fulk, et al. *Klaeber's Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg,* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), cxxi-cxxiii. It should be noted that Beowulf is actually a member of the North Germanic tribe of the Geats, not strictly Anglo-Saxon.
[17] David Shapiro, "Historical Introduction, *The Epic of Gesar of Ling: Gesar's Magical Birth, Early Years, and Coronation as King,* trans. Robin Kornman, Sangye Khandro, Lama Chönam, (Boston: Shambala, 2012), xv.
[18] C.M. Bowra, *From Virgil to Milton,* (London: Macmillian, 1945), 1.

epic on paradigmatic examples like the *Iliad* or *Gilgamesh,* Hainsworth explains that epic is also deeply about the emotions and feelings of the audience:

> This expansiveness is at the foundation of epic, for primary epic poetry is heroic poetry writ large, its range extended, and its insights deepened. At the very least the epic puts people, and therefore feelings, hope, despair, sorrow, and triumph, into the events of the heroic lay; at its best it spreads itself over the whole mass of traditional knowledge…a deeply serious genre, the epic must be more than storytelling.[19]

These definitions do not ignore the importance of form or content, but emphasize instead epic's expansiveness, and therefore its link with transformative emotions. Similarly, Lauri Honko calls epics "superstories" and highlights the "power of expression and significance of content over other narratives…"[20] Such literary definitions focused on the emotive response of the audience are echoed in the work of French anthropologist and area studies scholar Christiane Seydou, who seeks to define the boundaries of epic in the African context. She writes, "The ability to recognize an epic is developed principally through a certain motive quality inherent to the genre."[21] Definitions of epic made in the twentieth century shifted literary and critical focus to audience reception as a means to determine epic's boundaries.

While these definitions of epic each highlight a different attribute—its form, its content, or its reception—as the crucial component among many, I want to present a definition of epic that takes into account each of the three aspects with an equal bearing and weight. I do not present my definition as necessarily novel or particularly innovative, but as will be evident in the remainder of the chapter, defining the central traits of epic literature lays the groundwork to consider its unique roles in social and religious discourse. In short,

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[19] J.B. Hainsworth. *The Idea of Epic,* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 7.
[20] Lauri Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic,* (Helinski: Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 1998), 28.
[21] Christiane Seydou, "The African Epic: A Means for Defining the Genre," Katheryn Wright, trans., *Folklore Forum* 16.1 (1983): 47-68. 47. The case of epic in Africa is a robust topic of debate.

an epic is an authorless network of oral or written texts which utilize oral / poetic elements in at least some of its storytelling to tell a narrative which forms a given community whose values are represented by an ideal central figure; this narrative is set in a largely ahistorical past, but builds an interactive and generative world in the audience's present. This definition shares much with other definitions of epic—particularly those of John William Johnson[22] and Lauri Honko[23]—but seeks to emphasize the dynamic nature of epic literature and the relationality inherent between individual, community, and narrative that lays at its foundation. An epic now may not always be an epic in the future, and no epic telling is definitive.

Breaking this definition down into its constitutive parts begins with "*An authorless network…*," which highlights that epic traditions are groups of texts spread over time and space attempting to tell the same story, but lacking a single voice that speaks with authority to the whole range of materials. Individual narratives or renditions of epic may have an author, but no one person creates every narrative or every use of the narrative in everyday life. "*…of oral and written texts…"* indicates that, unlike the conceptions of Lord and Parry and their intellectual descendants, epic is not proscribed to oral versions, either in necessity or in it most "authoritative" or "true" form. However, as seen in "*which utilize oral / poetic elements in at least some of its storytelling,"* epic has at its foundation some relationship to poetry and other forms of literature intended to be read aloud. While the entirety of an epic need not be in a poetic verse—as seen in the Gesar epic where roughly half is prose—verse or other forms of writing that reveal the epic's relationship with and intent to be read aloud

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[22] My own definition is deeply indebted to the work of John William Johnson to define epic in Africa. Traces of his four major and four secondary traits are evident in my own definition. See further: John William Johnson, "Yes, Virginia, There is an Epic in Africa," *Research in African Literatures* 11.3 (1980): 308-326.
[23] Honko, *Textualising the Siri Epic.*

are necessary. These combine to define epic's form—authorless as a whole, potentially both oral and written, and containing some poetic elements.

Turning to epic's content, epic has as its goal the desire "…*to tell a narrative which forms a given community...*" While Hegel perceived the boundaries of this community passively revealed through the epic, this definition emphasizes the creative aspects of epic's telling. Through the act of narration, epics create the boundaries of a specific group of people who it argues share culture, and/or values, and/or beliefs. Indeed, a significant proportion of the narrative may involve defining who is the "in-group" and who is the "out-group," though this may also be implied through warfare, political intrigue, or other narrative means. This constructed community's "…*values are represented by an ideal central figure…,"* meaning that epics have at their center a hero who not only ties the story together, but who also is formed in light of the principles of the community such that he or she is a paragon of the epic's values. While there will be important side characters who may even have their own episodes of separate narratives with the epic tradition, the reader or listener's interest in them arises largely from their connection to the primary figure. It is important to re-emphasize that epic's community and the representative figure are constantly open to change as either the community telling the narrative about itself or the values it holds changes. Finally, epics are fundamentally at odds with history and are *"…set in a largely ahistorical past…,"* that obscures the narrative's creation of the community through projecting its origins back into a distant and indistinct history. While the characters of epics may have exact birth and death dates known to many, the epic narrative does not seek to relate the unique historical world of the characters' arising, but rather to present a universalized—and therefore dehistoricized—past which the characters inhabit.

In addition to this delineated form and content, epic is also defined by its reception. My definition ends by stating that epic narrative "…*builds an interactive and generative world in the audience's present*,*"* meaning that once the community and its values are defined by the epic, the ahistorical past of the epic is written upon their present world. This act can take a variety of forms, including the identification of physical features in the landscape with the epic's narrative, the discovery of physical relics left by the epic's characters, or the reference to the epic in shared social speech like parables and aphorisms. Because this social and geographical discourse invites individual interaction with the epic's narrative, it is not merely static, but also generative. Despite epic's authority stemming from a seemingly distant past, it can only be expressed in present iterations. Beyond living the epic on landscape and in speech, another critical form of generative interaction with epic is the creation of new renditions or re-tellings of the epic—either through oral / theatrical performance or the publication of a new literary text. Thus, the "*authorless network*" which begins the definition is reinforced and re-created, continuing a cycle of form → content → reception → form that ensures the epic cycle remains relevant to contemporary concerns.

Beyond giving form, content, and reception equal weight in defining epic, one of the strengths of this definition of epic is that it contextualizes the definition of epic as radically generated in the present. Epic does not tell the story of a nation, a country, or any other group of people; rather, epic creates the community of people by the act of telling its tale. Each re-telling of the epic—either an unrecorded and unremarked re-telling or one known to the researcher through literary production or preservation in an oral archive—represents a moment of creation that re-defines (or attempts to re-define) the boundaries of the community and its shared values. The deeply Christian, grail-hunting British Arthur of

Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*[24] and the anti-institution, radically tolerant Roman King Arthur of the 2004 film *King Arthur*[25] form radically different kinds of communities with radically different values. Both, however, belong to the Arthurian epic tradition.

This definition also emphasizes that epic is not simply is or is not, but rather is selected and defined by the scope of the researcher's lens. Scholars of Renaissance literature frequently characterize *Paradise Lost* as an epic[26]—indeed, it seems that Milton's publication of the work in twelve volumes explicitly sought to mimic Virgil's *Aeneid*. Limiting our gaze to the text, however, reveals that it has a single authoritative voice. For this reason, as will be discussed below, J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter*, or Bernard Cromwell's *Sharpe* series taken on their own are *not* epics—in each instance, there is one single, commanding voice that speaks with authority as to what is and is not a valid part of the epic's canon. However, if the scholar considering *Paradise Lost* broadens their gaze to include the whole mythos of Christianity—the Garden of Eden, the Fall, the Creation of the Devil—then Milton's is merely one voice among many and no longer has a unique authority over the mythos. While some may argue that such a move plays a little too fast and loose with the categories of scripture and literature, I will discuss below how epic—in a way—is always a form of scripture as it is always doing religious work.

Finally, this definition neatly works around the tendency to confuse "epic" as an adjective and "epic" as a noun. Epic has become shorthand in the film and literary world for a variety of adjectives, including lengthy, expansive, astounding, or even, simply, difficult-to-

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[24] Thomas Malory, *Le Morte D'Arthur,* (New York: The Modern Library Publishing, 1999).
[25] *King Arthur,* directed by Antoine Fuqua, (2004: Burbank, CA: Touchstone Pictures). Film
[26] David Quint, *Inside Paradise Lost: Reading the Designs of Milton's Epic,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014); Mindele Anne Treip, *Allegorical Poetics and the Epic: the Renaissance Tradition to Paradise Lost,* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2015).

do. Recent examples include an "epic" book relating the 400-year history of the role of immigration in shaping New York City,[27] the *New York Times* film review recently described a 1934 romantic film as "epic,"[28] and the science-fiction blog *i09* describes the science fiction film *Children of Men*'s final single-shot scene as "epic."[29] The adjective "epic" sometimes even retains its function as a noun in marketing. Indeed the Director's Guild of America has a blog post detailing what makes a film an "epic," including the unfortunately saccharine line that "to qualify as epic, a story must have the universality of myth, the enchantment of saga."[30] These uses, however, focus only on reception—on our own sense of awe or grandeur—and ignore content and form such that it cannot be defined as an "epic" proper. Language is a fundamentally transforming thing, and I do not mean to strictly police it. However, I maintain that the genre of "epic" still has meaning beyond merely being shorthand for our own feelings and internal assessment of significance. A college student dressing up as King Arthur for Halloween in a store-bought costume may not be entirely worthy of awe, but it does not change the fact that his choice of costume is a moment of participation in an epic tradition, regardless of anyone's reception of it. Clear distinctions within academic writing must needs be drawn between the use of "epic" as an adjective and "epic" as a noun, so that "epic" remains a useful analytical category.

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[27] Tyler Anbinder, *City of Dreams: the 400-Year Epic History of Immigrant New York,"* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016).

[28] Andrew Johnston, "FILM: Rescuing a Romantic Epic from Obscurity," *The New York Times,* (New York, NY) June 11, 2000.

[29] Charlie Jane Anders, "50 Brilliant Science Fiction Movies That Everyone Should See at Least Once," *i09.* October 19, 2005. Accessed on December 1, 2016. < http://io9.gizmodo.com/5619137/25-classic-science-fiction-movies-that-everybody-must-watch>

[30] Randall Wallace, "What Makes a Film an Epic," *Director's Guild of America,* September 2003. Accessed on December 4, 2016. < http://www.dga.org/Craft/DGAQ/All-Articles/0309-Sept-2003/What-Makes-a-Film-an-Epic.aspx>

Examples of Epic's Social Work across the Globe

Because the essential product of epic is a community prepared to interact with and generate new renditions of the epic, epic is necessarily interconnected with the social. To demonstrate the veracity of my definition and lay the foundations for the next section in which I describe in greater detail how epic's form, content, and relationship with audience make it ideal for religious discourse, I will present here three case studies outside of the Gesar epic. These demonstrate the efficacy of using the admittedly western genre of "epic" as a conceptual term to describe a specific phenomenon outside of the western world through considering how epic has formed the boundaries of a community or communities, the role the epic's form plays in that process, and how it has been received by the individuals participating in the community. Because the definition of epic I presented in the previous section necessitates a certain specificity—each epic re-telling or rendition is a full re-creation of the epic's community—these case studies will focus on three moments in the lives of much longer epic traditions. Through examining these three case studies, I will demonstrate the variety of social work epics accomplish.

One may notice that the three examples I discuss here do not include the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*—considered perhaps the Platonic ideals of epic upon which all else is modeled. It is precisely because of this paradigmatic status that I do not discuss them in this chapter. Western culture has a lengthy history of recognizing themselves in the Greeks and privileging the study of Greek culture as the mark of education; it is only natural perhaps that the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad* would gain a place of honor and importance among the world's epic traditions. These narratives are not strictly unique, however, and they have held the position of epic model for far too long. I endeavor to de-center the epic from the

Greek traditions to which it has become moored in order to allow other epic voices to be heard. Doing so will ensure that our understanding of epic takes into account the full range of the epic tradition—including, of course, that of the Greeks, but not at the expense of other epics—and ultimately build a richer map of the epic world.

While Greek epic may be the favorite of epic scholars, the epic of King Arthur perhaps has more popular appeal. The significant quantity of books, films, songs, television shows, plays, and satires demonstrates the important place the Arthurian epic tradition takes in the hearts and minds of contemporary people. The Arthurian epic tradition had an even greater popularity in the nineteenth century, however, when Arthur became both a symbol for rising British nationalism and a means to discuss the ethnographic and racial history of the British Isles. The 1830s and 1840s saw a flood of Arthuriana materials published in England that attempted to formulate a sense of "Englishness" situated in a revival of "medievalism"[31] This medievalism equated the past with a variety of exemplary, fundamentally "English" virtues like heroic codes of action, a stable class structure, and an ethnic ruling homogeneity. Indeed, at a time when France was suffering through the aftereffects of the tumultuous French Revolution, English authors "used the medieval past to demonstrate the continuity and durability of Britain's political and social institutions…the established order in Britain was the product of practice experience, sound common sense, and, above all, a long historical evolution."[32] A nineteenth-century British interest in medievalism attempted to reveal what was great about the British people and through that supported a renewed interest in Arthuriana.

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[31] Alice Chandler, *The Dream of Order: the Medieval Ideal in Nineteenth-Century Literature,* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971).
[32] Stephanie Barczerski, *Myth and National Identity in Nineteenth-Century Britain: The Legends of King Arthur and Robin Hood,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 33.

A paradigmatic example of the nineteenth-century interest in King Arthur as a medieval ideal of the British people is Edward Bulwer-Lytton's 12-volume poetic rendition of the Arthurian epic. In this work, Lytton attempts to challenge the legacy of Rome as the luminary of the ancient world and reveal the power of the "Great North [British Isles] and the chivalry which sprung from it."[33] As outlined by Inga Bryden, Bulwer-Lytton presents an Arthur who is the product of a uniform British race identified as fundamentally Celtic that must defend his homeland from an uncivilized—and otherized—Saxon hoard. Arthur of the nineteenth-century represents, therefore, military victory and glory—the power of the British to defend against any enemy.[34] In this and other re-tellings of the period, Arthur is clothed in the "language of liberty, progress and civilization, indeed of moral and intellectual superiority."[35] His secret child Mordred becomes the genealogical forebear of Queen Victoria herself, as well as the forebear of her global empire. Before Arthur dies, Merlin prophesies that his descendants will beget an empire "broader than the Caesar won, shall clasp a realm where never sets the sun."[36] As demonstrated in Bulwer-Lytton's poem *King Arthur,* the nineteenth-century saw a resurgence in British Arthuriana to support a global and imperial nationalism founded on ideas of cultural superiority.

The nineteenth-century British interest in King Arthur demonstrates how epic creates a specific community defined by values speaking to modern concerns. The content of the Arthuriana material of this period created an ideal figure—Arthur, or we might say a set of figures, if we include the whole of the Camelot court—who represented the values of

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[33] Inga Bryden, *Reinventing King Arthur: the Arthurian Legends in Victorian Culture,* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2005), 38.
[34] Barczerski, 30-32.
[35] Bryden, 34.
[36] Edward Bulwer-Lytton, *King Arthur, vol. 1,* (Leipzig: Bernhard Tauchnitz, 1849), 32.

empire and continued imperial conquest, then formed him explicitly into the progenitor of the British nation. The link between epic hero and representative of the nation as a whole has been remarked on by Dean Miller, who notes that the hero "lifts or forces himself into a dominant place in his society and epoch, and then compels the society and time into new, even unique historical patterns."[37] In regards to form, *King Arthur* and other works like it were generally entirely in poetic form and lent themselves to public recitation. Furthermore, this Arthurian revival was enthusiastically received by individuals eager to interact with the epic beyond the bonds of literature and generate new products that placed the epic in the landscape and world around them. Costume catalogues of the day list several Arthur-inspired costumes for fancy-dress balls and records show handmade Arthur-inspired fireplaces, tapestries, and furniture were purchased with some regularity.[38] Locales became newly associated with the epic through renaming and the "rediscovery" of hitherto unknown links with King Arthur—a feat which undoubtedly also increased domestic tourism within Great Britain.[39] In short, the nineteenth-century revival of the Arthurian epic demonstrates epic's potential to take an active role in generating a national community—in this case one which participates in militaristic and imperial values—and allowing for interactions with this community now in an abstracted and representational form through the narrative itself.

My second case study on the social work of epic is the Ramayana, specifically in relationship to the songs sung by Brahmin women in Andhra Pradesh that provide a unique

[37] Dean Miller, *The Epic Hero,* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 20.
[38] Barczerski, 54-56.
[39] Barczerski, 58-60.

perspective on the sometimes problematic text. While the Ramayana epic tradition[40] is often associated with misogynistic attitudes due to the treatment of Ram's wife Sita—who is banished from the kingdom despite proving her innocence with a trial by fire—Velchru Narayan Rao explores the contemporary Brahmin women's songs of the Ramayana. He notes that these songs are exceptional for focusing not on Ram's, but rather Sita's experience:

> Significantly, these songs do not mention many of the familiar *Ramayana* events…on the other hand, events of interest to women are prominently portrayed and receive detailed attention: pregnancy, morning sickness, childbirth, the tender love of a husband, the affections of parents-in-law, games played by brides and grooms in wedding rituals.[41]

Indeed, Rao notes that the situations described by the songs—Rama's mother Kausalya as compassionate, loving mother-in-law to Sita; Rama's passion for Sita; the centrality of women in family power dynamics—are often *not* the lived experience of many women in India.

Beyond presenting this idealized vision of women's life in an Indian household, the songs also feature cutting lampoons of the male characters—even implying that Sita may have desired to sleep with her captor, the demon Ravana; in the words of Rao, "no one's character is untainted; no person loves another unconditionally."[42] This female-centered retelling of the Ramayana challenging the misogynistic undertones of the text is not necessarily unique, either. Philip Lutgendorf notes that certain contemporary versions of the Ramayana focusing on the character Hanuman—Ram's monkey-king companion

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[40] Although many people elect to italicize the name of the Ramayana, to indicate that I am discussing a whole epic tradition and not simply one text, I will italicize only when discussing a particular text—not the whole of the epic. If an author italicized the word "Ramayana," I maintained that italicization in the quote.
[41] Velcheru Narayana Rao, "A *Ramayana* of Their Own: Women's Oral Tradition in Telugu," *Many Ramayanas: The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia,* ed. Paula Richman, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 114-136. 118-119.
[42] Rao, 129.

considered a paradigmatic deity of men—feature in great detail his intimate friendship with Sita while dressed as her maidservant Charushila.[43]

The interaction between the production of the epic and the community it creates is highlighted in this particular case study. As an authorless network of texts, epics like the Ramayana can be re-created to speak to the specific concerns of the community it forms—here Brahmin women who wish to undermine Sita's unconditional love for Ram and the male-focused nature of the epic prevalent in other iterations. Making Sita, rather than Ram, the ideal representation of the values they idealize and want to promote in their own lives demonstrates the extreme social flexibility of epic literature. One may also note a similar assertion of women's concerns in the 2008 film *Sita Sings the Blues*—another female-focused re-telling of the Ramayana epic—and the use of songs to critique the arrogant Ram, including the memorable verse "Sing his love / Sing his praise / Rama set his wife ablaze."[44] Situating this epic rendition in the form of song contributes to its unique reception among Indian Brahmin women. These songs are generally sung in Telugu rather than the more traditional—and male-controlled—Sanskrit and can stretch for hours. While some seem to have evidence of initially being work songs, Rao notes that many are explicitly performative, being sung in the middle of the afternoon when women's traditional household labor is stalled.[45] The Andhra Pradesh Ramayana songs offer a clear example of the multiple layers that form around epics, which ultimately have the potential to form competing communities and value interpretations.

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[43] Philip Lutgendorf, *Hanuman's Tale: The Messages of a Divine Monkey King,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 116-119.
[44] *Sita Sings the Blues,* directed by Nina Paley, (2008: Nina Paley Productions) animated film.
[45] Rao, 127-128.

The final case study that examines the social work of epic is West Africa's Sunjata epic,[46] which tells the tale of the thirteenth-century hero Sunjata Keita who founds the Mali empire. This epic is traditionally narrated by inspired oral bards called *griot* or *jeli* who also provide counsel and guidance to ruling families. The titular character—Sunjata Keita—is said to be the descendent of the devoted muezzin of Muhammad himself, though some scholars consider this a later accretion to the originally secular oral tradition of the heroic king.[47] In fact, Mamadou Diawara sees the Sunjata epic primarily in competitive dialogue with Islam and argues that the work draws more from traditional African forms of ancestor veneration in which Sunjata is the ideal political ancestor for leaders.[48] Existing in this ambiguous position in regards to the larger Islamic world and retaining many traditional features of pre-Islamic West African culture, the oral renditions of the Sunjata epic became a focal point for preservation in the early decades of the twentieth century. Specifically, students and researchers at the French West African École William Ponty became involved in efforts to collect and preserve the oral renditions of the Sunjata epic.[49] While some collection of the oral epic had been accomplished prior to this period, it was done primarily by the French colonial officers; the William Ponty school represented the first time West Africans themselves collected and produced literary versions of the epic. These Africans were western-educated, but deeply interested in preserving West African culture and demonstrating its value in light of French colonial oppression. Bulman writes that French

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[46] Also called Epic of Sundiata or the Epic of Son-jara.
[47] John Iliffe, *Honour in African History,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 23.
[48] Mamadou Diawara, "Searching for the Historical Ancestor: The Paradigm of Sunjata Oral Traditions of the Shael (13th-19th centuries)," *In Search of Sunjata: The Mande Oral Epic as History, Literature, and Performance,* ed. Ralph Austen, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 111-140.
[49] Stephen Bulman, "A School for Epic? The 'Ecole William Ponty' and the Evolution of the Sunjata Epic, 1913 – c.1950," *Epic Adventures: Heroic Narrative in the Oral Performance Traditions of Four Continents,* eds. Jan Jansen and Henk M.J. Maier, (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2004), 34-45.

colonial officers generally supported these goals as a prevention against the creation of "rootless—and therefore dangerous—intellectuals."[50] Classes in transcription and translation of indigenous texts were introduced and students were expected to pursue a self-designed research project on an aspect of the epic during summer months. Beyond this, the school also began to stage plays depicting crucial scenes from the Sunjata epic and published the transcriptions of these scenes in journals distributed to local communities. These publications—which were always in French—spread a version of the epic throughout the region which highlighted the history and traditions of a pre-French West Africa, as well as explicitly noting parallels in the epic tradition with European legendary themes. Through this, the William Ponty Sunjata epic plays and re-tellings simultaneously presented the Sunjata epic as world literature equal to that created in European societies while also forming a unified, pan-West African identity out of the smaller tribal communities who attended the school.[51] The work of the William Ponty school in the early half of the twentieth century to collect and re-imagine the Sunjata epic as a source of pre-colonial traditions and beliefs formed a larger pan-West African community based around the epic that saw itself abstracted in the epic's values.

The William Ponty school's early twentieth-century Sunjata epic products—plays, transcriptions, and full re-tellings—highlighted the pre-colonial West African world to produce a community based around a shared vision of that world. Their form had a crucial role in creating the boundaries of this community, due both to the participatory nature of watching a play and reading play notes, as well as the fact that they were in French—a colonial language not every West African could read or understand—and excluded those

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[50] Bulman, 37.
[51] Bulman, 41.

uneducated West Africans. Indeed, this focus on creating an immediate—and exclusive—community is evident in forms of the Sunjata epic in contemporary West Africa. Jan Jansen relates that in contemporary re-tellings by *griot,* the Sunjata epic is told in full only at the septennial Kamabolon ceremony. During this time the Kamabolon sanctuary hut of the village is restored "and the night before the new roof is put on top of the hut, the 'canonical' version of the Sunjata epic is recited in the restored, but still roofless sanctuary."[52] Only community members are allowed at this re-telling, and Jansen notes that even trusted researchers are asked to depart when the re-telling begins. The content, form, and reception of the William Ponty Sunjata epic performances and texts formed an exclusive community of educated West Africans that perceived the work as the unique product of a pan-West African, pre-colonial world and through that demonstrated their validity as a national people and producer of world literature.

In this section, I have demonstrated how my definition of epic—which takes into account form, content, and reception with equal weight—provides a theoretical tool to evaluate epics as literature essentially doing social work. Each epic re-telling or recreation must be considered individually as a use of a particular form and content to create a particular community with particular values which responds to the epic in interactive and generative ways. I elected to use myths outside of the Gesar epic because I want to emphasize that "epic" can serve as a beneficial conceptual tool to illuminate complex and intricate networks of narrative, symbolism, and meaning across a variety of disciplines and regions. The Arthuriana revival of nineteenth-century Britain, the contemporary Ramayana songs of Brahmin women in Andhra Pradesh, and the early twentieth-century collection,

[52] Jan Jansen, "The Sunjata Epic—the Ultimate Version*," Research in African Literatures* 32.1 (2001): 14-46. 14.

performance, and dissemination of the Sunjata epic in French-occupied West Africa reveal how epic literature forms specific types of communities and values that ultimately reflect the epic rendition's unique historical context. The *Perfecting of Hell* episode of the Gesar epic does comparable work building a community, identifying the values of that community, and enacting that community's goals for the Nyingma thinkers of late nineteenth and early twentieth century eastern Tibet. In my next section, I am going to build on this theme to consider further the relationship of epic to society. Through this, I will demonstrate why epic is uniquely equipped to participate in religious debates—including the *Perfecting of Hell's* role in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century promotion of the *Seminal Heart of Great Expanse* and more traditionally ethical forms of Buddhist practice.

Epic as Socially-Engaged Literature—Community

As seen in the three case studies presented above, epics are a form of literature fundamentally concerned with building, enhancing, and representing the social. When considering the role of epic in religious discourse, it is this radical social engagement that makes epic an ideal genre to promote religious positions and transform the religious landscape. Three traits of epic—traits which each have a representative stake in one of the three "legs" of epic form, epic content, and epic reception as highlighted in my definition — give it the power to be socially-transformative and thereby make it powerful in religious discourse. The first trait centers on the fact that epic is always by its very nature about a community of people; epics tell the stories of social groups in such a way that everyone can simultaneously participate *in composing* the epic, *in identifying with* the epic, *in experiencing*

the epic, and in *embodying* the epic in practice. Like Benedict Anderson's newspapers,[53] epics make real the abstract social concept of an imagined community, but in ways that allow concrete methods for readers and listeners to actively participate in and form that community.

Considering epic composition, epics are composed by and for communities, and are uniquely "community-created" in two ways: first, anyone can produce a version with some level of freedom; second, it is the community that decides what is considered a canonical, normative version of the epic. As to the first, although an individual rendition or episode of an epic—like the *Great Perfecting of Hell*—may have an author, the epic tradition as a whole is authorless. Authority, therefore, is largely de-centered from a single voice and new forms of the epic narrative or participatory activities surrounding epic can arise from multiple arenas simultaneously. While each rendition of the epic will necessarily make some claim as to why it has a unique authority over other versions—many Gesar bards claim they have personal visions of the warrior-king visiting them and instructing their own re-tellings, for example—none can claim a true canonical status as the one, singular epic authority. The result is an active and lively form of community-created literature, where fields of possible texts claim a variety of authorities to speak on specific subjects. It is this form of community creation that allowed the *Perfecting of Hell*—am episode of the Gesar epic radically different from its compatriots—to be composed.

The second attribute of epic's community-created nature arises from this field: because there is no singular voice that speaks with authority, the community decides what is and is not "canonical." While recent iterations of Gesar epic episodes feature him flying in

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[53] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism,* (New York: Verso Publishers, 2006), 67-82.

wooden airplanes to defeat Nazi soldiers,[54] going too far afield from the bounds of what is considered normative—discovering that King Gesar is a transgender woman or that his wife Drukmo is a methamphetamine dealer—will ensure that the particular episode is deemed inaccurate and no longer has cultural permanence. Similarly, the *Perfecting of Hell* has been accepted by most Tibetan as an authentic Gesar episode—albeit one that makes them rather uncomfortable, as discussed in Chapter 4—by reflecting beliefs about the ultimately religious nature of the warrior-king and the prevalence of a savior-in-hell theme. The community both composes the literature and decides what is authentic.

Beyond its composition, epic's content extrapolates a set of values with which the community can identify or see itself represented. This could theoretically take a variety of forms, but it almost always presents itself as the epic's valorization of and focus on a singular hero. While Joseph Campbell famously saw in the hero's journey an allegorical exploration of one's own psyche,[55] Dean Miller seeks to consider the hero as a product of a particular social organization.[56] Noting that the hero always exists in the liminal state as both part of a community and apart from it—indeed, it is a frequent trope for a hero's mother to be an outsider, captive, or low-born individual within a given society and for the hero to suffer a childhood separated or apart from the community—Miller is hesitant to endorse the idea of epic heroes as representing a national or ethnic unit.[57] Rather, he emphasizes that heroes by their nature possess "solipsistic individualism, his studied self-

[54] *A Gesar Bard's Tale,* 2013.
[55] Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949, 1972).
[56] Miller, *The Epic Hero.*
[57] Miller, 371-373.

exclusion from *any* group identification, his disdain for or distrust of all of the 'legitimate' abstractions that accompany any process of social or political organization."[58]

I maintain, however, that is exactly this disaffection—this separation from the community—that allows the epic hero to represent and embody the community's values. Similar to wrapping kings, queens, and presidents in networks of symbolic rituals, heroes are heroes precisely because they are not like us, and yet represent us. In his work theorizing the mechanisms of what he calls the "theatre state," Clifford Geertz explains how the Balinese king is set apart from the normal people by means of surrounding himself with symbols of regality, yet remains a potent symbol of the country's cultural values.[59] Epic abstracts a community's values into a single hero—set apart to show his singularity, yet leading the community as its embodiment—with which the community can identify. The *Perfecting of Hell's* focus on promoting non-violent, traditional Buddhist morality through humiliating King Gesar in hell makes this particularly evident, as it represents the work of Nyingma thinkers to represent a different set of community values. Because the epic is a tool ultimately composed by a community, this process allows the community to effectively police its own values in deciding what is—and is not—the proper figure of the hero. Epic is simultaneously created by these same symbolic representations that the community canonized.

Turning our attention finally to how individuals interact with and experience the epic, epics build a living and vibrant narrative world with which the community is able to interact. Epics are at their foundation an exercise in world building; they create intricate,

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[58] Miller, 372.

[59] Clifford Geertz, *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 106-108.

inter-related networks of myth, symbol, and ideology which create a world uniquely real. Through interacting with this other-worldly, yet uniquely real world, the community's understanding of itself and its place in the world is deeply influenced. Part of this interaction arises from the form of epic literature itself, which often encourages communal storytelling due to being narrated in poetic verse or featuring songs and other performed styles of narration. But it also arises from the dense network of inter-linking information that epics necessitate for world-building. Each character of the Gesar epic, for example, has a fortress, a network of family members, specific armor, specific fighting style, specific hairstyles, and so forth. Most eastern Tibetans intuitively understand the world created by the Gesar epic and great pride is taken in demonstrating how much information one knows about the epic. During a family picnic on the grasslands, I observed three Tibetan men debate and argue over the different contemporary emanations of Gesar's warriors.[60] Each man pulled in an extensive breadth of knowledge, referencing specific story arcs, family relations, or abilities. Beyond getting the facts straight, there was also a boastful element in the discussion as each man vied to show that he knew the epic the best.

This mythological world built by the epic, however, is not merely a set of information, but also frequently exists in the physical and social world around them. The community paints the epic onto the landscape to produce locales of interaction. As discussed in Chapter 4, my informants pointed out a variety of physical sites marked by the Gesar epic while conducting field research in Kham. These include the remains of palaces of Gesar's warrior, the lake where Gesar's wife washed her hair, and the summer retreat of the warrior-king.[61]

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[60] A frequent statement I heard across Kham and Amdo was that all the characters of the Gesar epic had contemporary emanations, led by King Gesar emanating as the 14th Dalai Lama.
[61] Photos of these locations can be viewed in Appendix 1.

Similar trends are evident in other epic traditions, such as multiple hills across the United Kingdom being called “Arthur’s seat,” the belief that the thin land bridge between Sri Lanka and India was created by Ram’s monkey companions, and the naming of Kyrgyzstan’s international airport after the epic hero Manas. As evidenced by this last example, the creation of this living world is a constant and ongoing thing that extends far beyond the mere features of the landscape.

These examples demonstrate that a necessary component of epic literature is the community’s interaction with the world of the epic in their everyday lives. This world created by the epic and then written onto the landscape makes the abstract notion of the community real in ways similar to, but transcendent of, Anderson’s imagined communities. Anderson saw the formation of an “imagined community” as the result of changes in the standardization of language and the process of printing, but a community’s interaction with the epic is more than simply a transmission of a linguistic (or semiotic, as later commentators have interpreted Anderson) community—epic is the very language out of which these imagined communities themselves arise. This is the first trait of epic literature that makes it such a powerful form of social discourse—epic is at its heart always about a community. A community composes it, a community identifies with it, and a community lives through it. For this reason, surrounding the Nyingma promotion of Great Perfection practices and simultaneous celebration of traditionally Buddhist ethical action with the discourse of epic allowed it to effectively argue for a shift in the community. Importantly, the relationship is always—and immediately—reciprocal. Epic literature is simultaneously composing its community, making that community’s values, and making the foundation of the community’s experiences, then being retold or rewritten by that community in turn.

Epic composes a community and then is composed by it; it projects values and then has those projected onto it; and finally it creates a world only to have its audiences discursively use that world to retell the epic.

Epic as Socially-Engaged Literature—History

The second trait that makes epic literature uniquely socially-engaged—and therefore particularly effective in religious discourse—is that epics clothe conversations about the contemporary world in a discourse of the ahistorical past. This use of history gives them a social authority to speak to contemporary concerns. This depiction of the past gives both the world portrayed in epic and the values its heroic characters represent a specific authority grounded in beliefs of former excellence and the desire for replication of that which is tried and true. Despite often relying on a vaguely defined century or time period to frame the epic's historic past, epics as they are told are not based on actual events or historical data, and the specifics of the historical age claimed do little to influence the epic. Instead, epics ahistorical past provides the legitimacy of the long time ago in which something important happened. Many versions of the Gesar epic, for example, place the hero in the period known as Tibet's Dark Age (the tenth to eleventh century), but feature no discussion of Yeshe Öd, Atiśa, or any other specific historical details of the period. Epic, therefore, is fundamentally de-centered from the past it portrays; it is uninterested in an accurate view of history, but rather in creating a world that borrows the authority of history and is still free to explore its own concerns. Kings and leaders exist in history, epic heroes do not.

R.G. Collingwood provides a valuable foil to consider the relationships between and interconnections of history and narrative through detailing history as a study of the thought

processes and inner worlds of historical actors. In his added remarks to the *Idea of History,* Collingwood makes the distinction between external-only "events" (for example, King Gesar was a tenth-century tribal chief who became the subject of an epic) and "actions," which possess both an external and an internal component (sixteenth-century Tibetans mythologized the tenth-century tribal chief Gesar *because* it helped glorify the leader of the ruling Phagmodru dynasty).[62] For Collingwood, true history is not a mere list of events that can be judged on its accuracy or inaccuracy, but rather an interpretive project led by the person or community making the history. Sheer knowledge of past events is overshadowed by the act of elucidating causes, concerns, and intentions behind those actions. While Collingwood emphasizes that a *good* historian will actively seek to understand the mindset, temperament, and drives of historical actors, any history that gives a narrative explaining the reasoning and motivations behind events still qualifies. Considering epic's use of the historical past in light of Collingwood's definition of history elucidates how history and epic differ. While Collingwood's history emphasizes that all history is a narrative giving the "events" of the past an "inside" to become "actions," epic places the narrative of the past's "inside" at the very center, obscuring the "events" entirely and largely focusing on contemporary "inside" concerns.

Epic's narrative, therefore, uses its authority gained from the past to reflect exclusively on concerns in the present through creating an interpretative narrative that highlights "actions" removed from "events." This dissertation has demonstrated how the *Great Perfecting of Hell*—despite describing the Gesar epic in the mythic past—promotes the adoption of the *Seminal Heart of Great Expanse* in its contemporary Non-Sectarian milieu. As

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[62] R. G. Collingwood, "Human Nature and Human History," *The Idea of History,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946, 1993) 205-231. 213.

noted in the three case studies I described above, similar trends are seen in other epic traditions—King Arthur's martial prowess and racial identity were marshalled to create the veneer of a unified British country; Brahmin women in Andhra Pradesh envisioned enhanced power for themselves in the distant past of the Ramayana; the William Ponty school used the Sunjata epic's past grandeur to create a pan-West African identity and a civilization equal to that of their French colonizers. Obviously these case studies are just a handful among many; other examples include how the narrative canon of Robin Hood was mobilized in England's industrial revolution to represent a pastoral freedom workers felt slipping ever further away,[63] how the idea of the ancient city of Troy was used to buffer the military plans of certain European families,[64] and how epic literature in imperial Spain encoded a messianic superiority over that of indigenous peoples.[65] What these examples demonstrate is that although epic appears to look backwards into history, it is actually *always* looking forward and critiquing current social issues. Although borrowing the authority of history, epic is ultimately de-centered from that history; this allows it to speak to contemporary concerns with a rhetorically powerful voice that ultimately gives it significant weight in religious discourse.

Epic as Socially-Engaged Literature—Generation

The third and final trait of epic that makes it a uniquely socially-engaged form of literature is its inherently generative nature. While this was commented on briefly in my

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[63] Barczerski, *Myth and National Identity in Nineteenth-Century Britain: The Legends of King Arthur and Robin Hood.*
[64] Sylvia Federico, *New Troy: Fantasies of Empire in the Late Middle Ages,* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003)
[65] Elizabeth Davis, *Myth and Identity in the Epic of Imperial Spain,* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000)

discussion of epic's ability to form and speak to communities, it deserves greater consideration here due to the importance it holds for epic composition and experience. Epic constantly creates new primary texts, and—because epic is always about the present, despite its discourse of the past—each primary text is a moment to influence or transform the cultural discourse. Whereas other forms of literature that relate events of the past generate new interpretations of a given text, epic's authorless composition ensures that each "interpretation" becomes in essence a new "primary text" with the same possibilities for validity as older ones. I directly challenge, therefore, the metaphor used by Mikhail Bakhtin that identified epic as marble (hard and unchangeable) in distinction to novel's clay (soft and moldable).[66] As explored in Chapter 4, an effect of this generative composition is that epic texts are inherently performative works reacting to and controlling surrounding discursive contexts. While a traditional written work derives its authority largely from an author, a performative text—as defined in the previous chapter—derives its authority *from the performance.* This means, as discussed above, an audience has a role in determining a text's authority through supporting, challenging, or modifying the text's performance. As evidenced in the *Perfecting of Hell,* Tibetans have circumscribed its authority somewhat by declaring it taboo or an unlucky omen to be told and read in only certain specific occasions.

The generative and relational nature of epic literature reflects its close associations with poetry—another socially-powerful and transformative genre whose influence is often overlooked. In his work exploring the sixteenth-century Sri Lankan poet Alagiyavanna Mukaveti—a Buddhist court poet turned Catholic supporter of Portuguese colonial government—Stephen Berkwitz relates how poetry became associated in the western

[66] Mikhail Bakhtin, "Epic and Novel," *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays,* ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 3-21.

literary mind with the amorphous sense of one's own feelings and the poet's inner world of imagination.[67] He challenges this idea, however, to emphasize poetry's public role in expressing a king's power in pre-colonial Sri Lanka, as well as its work to influence how power is envisioned and religion practiced. Jack Chen takes this argument even further in his work on seventh-century Chinese Emperor Taizong, demonstrating how poetry goes beyond an ideological superstructure of legitimizing a ruler to structure the possible actions of the ruler himself.[68] Poetry allowed Emperor Taizong to "not simply justify his reign, but more importantly, to imagine it, and in the act of imagination, to shape both the reign's historical reality and himself."[69] In short, both Chen and Berkwitz encourage scholars to look beyond the simplistic lens of poetry as a tool of legitimation or poetry as the deep expression of one's inner yearning in order to take it seriously as an interpretatively procreative genre that can work at broader collective levels. Like epic, poetry as envisioned by Chen and Berkwitz is a deeply social genre arising through interactions between the poet and society. This social influence may take shape as concerns about form—indeed, Berkwitz notes that poetry is a genre "wherein form is just as important as content"[70]—or through the necessity of historical allusions that "yoke poetry to the moral significance of history and the canonical legacy of the sage-kings."[71] While Chen calls on us to take poetry "seriously as poetry,"[72] taking epic seriously as epic means that every iteration of the epic generated—no matter if the content does not fit with our ideas of the "appropriate" pattern of the Gesar

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[67] Stephen Berkwitz, *Buddhist Poetry and Colonialism: Alagiyavamnna and the Portuguese in Sri Lanka,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 7-12.; Berkwitz cites as an inspiration for his explanation Jerome McGann, "Rethinking Romanticism," *ELH* 59.3 (1992), 735-754. 735-738.
[68] Chen, 380-381.
[69] Chen, 381.
[70] Berkwitz, 210.
[71] Chen, 382.
[72] Chen, 382.

story—is a valid expression of the epic and has a potential to be accepted as normative or canonical by the society.

Another way to think about the inherently generative social nature of epic narratives is to consider them through the lens of Hobsbawm's idea of an "invented tradition." He explains the term as "a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past."[73] Through using ancient materials—and often masking their true source—invented traditions create symbolic practices that form the present group into a community. As a genre which utilizes the discourse of an ahistoric past to form a community with specific values in the present, epic clearly can be read as a unique form of invented tradition—but one which is continually, and uniquely, re-created. Echoing my earlier distinction between "lived" and "living" epic, epic is not an "invented tradition," but rather an "inventing tradition"; it is radically generative and creative, while also inspiring new expressions of itself through references on the landscape, in the community's discourse, and in the virtuous models representing the people who read it to themselves. Epic masks its creative blossoming through placing its authority in the ancient past, thereby ensuring that any statement it makes on contemporary social matters has the weight of the past behind it. The generative nature of epic traditions, therefore, gives them the flexibility necessary to address contemporary situations, while also ensuring that the community discussed by the epic can expand or contract to reflect changing social boundaries.

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[73] Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction," *The Invention of Tradition,* eds. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1.

These three traits—epic's interconnectedness with community, its eye to the historical past, and its generative nature—ensure that epic is a form of literature uniquely engaged in forming and informing the social. It is this social engagement that makes epic an important form of literature for religious discourse. This dissertation has discussed the role of the final episode of the Gesar epic as a form of social discourse aimed at transforming religious practice and promoting Nyingma practices in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Moving our gaze from epic to religion, Emile Durkheim, Robert Orsi, and others have demonstrated that one of most important aspects of religion is the social. Human societies use religious ideas to form communities, define in and out groups, control the forces attacking the community, and define larger communal values. Epics are in the center of all of this. Gregory Alles has created the term "cosmotrophe" to describe epic's social work, defining it as literature which "sustain[s] or nurture[s] life in the world of experienced, literal reality… [because] they resolve significant problematics in the world of experience through solutions that are only immediately available in the world of imagined, literary reality."[74] While the rest of his work discusses the mystification of social threats in two specific epics, his definition focuses our attention on how epic can work to provide literary answers to the complicated social questions that plague human societies—much like religion.

Epic and Religion

Having considered the definition of epic and the three traits that make it a form of literature inherently entangled with the social, two important points arise in regards to

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[74] Gregory Alles, *The Iliad, the Ramayana, and the Work of Religion: Failed Persuasion and Religious Mystification,* (University Park: Pennsylvania University Press, 1994), 104-105.

epic's relationship with our own academic conceptions of religion. First, some may note that many things traditionally defined as scriptural hagiographies of great saints and religious figures—the wildly popular singing Tibetan saint Milarepa, the Chinese pilgrim Xuanzong, or even the Buddha himself—fit into my definition of epic. That is no accident; I maintain that these are, in fact, epic traditions. For too long, our study of religious texts has held onto a very specific idea of epic literature—namely that it is entertainment, not specifically religious, or by necessity oral stories about great feats of warfare told by bards. These obscure the potential for expansive use of the analytical term "epic." I encourage, therefore, a broader appreciation and application of "epic." Adding the term to our analytical repertoire of religious literature provides a theoretical tool to describe such literature that extends beyond the confines of text to create an inter-related network of landscape, symbol, visual art, spoken poetics, and written words. Few terms in our current analytical catalogue are prepared to consider such a semiotic network in its entirety, focusing instead on each particular piece.

However, considering religious stories—for example, Milarepa or Padmasambhava—as epic traditions allows scholars to evaluate how the connections between a variety of religious expressions like narrative, practice, artistic representation, and pilgrimage work together to create a cohesive religious experience of the whole; I would argue this is closer to how practitioners of a given religion actually experience such religious categories—not sequestered into biography, ritual, and art, but rather as a unique whole like "epic." While I do not propose that we dispose of categories like hagiography, biography, or ritual scripture entirely, considering these works as "epics" gives scholars a tool to discuss the complete network of meaning that can arise around religious narratives.

A distinct advantage of utilizing epic as a broad, theoretical tool to examine religious worlds is that it emphasizes the relationality between practitioner / believer and the world religious literature creates. This dissertation has emphasized throughout—but particularly in Chapter 4—that epic is at its heart a "language." Languages do not exist in hypothetical or the realm of idea, but occur only through the voices of speakers; in short, epics and those who participate / create / react to them exist in a relationship. Indeed, Robert Orsi has sought to conceptualize religion itself as a relationship, writing that religion should be envisioned not "as a medium for explaining, understanding, and modeling reality, but… [rather] as a network of relationships between heaven and earth involving humans of all ages."[75] He explains that it is these relationships which form the very structure of the religious world individuals inhabit because, "men, women, and children *together* make religious worlds in relationship with special beings [divine beings] and with each other."[76] While Orsi emphasizes the relationships between people and special or divine beings in making religion, I want to extend his work to apply to the relationship between people and narratives. Stories form people's lives, quite literally; as Nussbaum demonstrates, they teach us what is possible, what to value, and how to obtain it. As explored in Chapter 3 and 4, people also form stories to make political and social arguments. While some may call this a cycle of "subject formation" or a "process of legitimation," it is better understood as a series of relationships people build with the narrative world they inhabit—similar to Orsi's conception of the religious world with relationships at their foundation. This narrative network of relationships is analogous to the linguistic world in which individuals exist—

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[75] Robert Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 2.
[76] Orsi, 2.

language is not merely words for items, but poetry, rhetoric, and tonality. Similarly, considering religious texts or narratives in isolation from individuals' generative reception and recreation of them—as we are encouraged to do when we identify the text as a hagiography, biography, or history—denies the relational network believers have with the story. Applying the theoretical term "epic" to such dense religious networks of meaning takes seriously the relationships individuals form with narrative and how such relationships are expressed in various concrete actions.

Secondly, while these three traits of epic—community oriented, an eye to contemporary concerns through a situation in the ahistorical past, and an inherently generative nature—reveal epic literature's unique potential in contributing to, advancing, and enhancing religious discourse, they also all have been described as attributes of the social work of religion. Indeed, while epic is not always explicitly religious, it is always doing religious work through constituting the social. This makes epic easily coopted for religious purposes and particularly effective in religious discourse

To better explain how epic does the social work of religion, I will present two definitions of religion and demonstrate how they also can be used to define the work of epic. In his article "Religion as a Cultural System"—famous for exactly this definition—Clifford Geertz connects religion to a network of symbols that creates a world uniquely real:

> Religion is a system of symbols which act to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.[77]

[77] Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System," *Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays,* (New York: Basic Books Publishing, 1977), 87-125. 90.

Because Geertz privileges a certain interiority to his definition of religion and overlooks the potential for religions to be explicitly political, Talal Asad has critiqued this definition as being based on assumptions overly Euro-centric.[78] Ultimately, he challenges the idea that a universal definition of religion is either possible or desirable. While Asad's critiques are certainly valid, I want to resuscitate Geertz by transforming his definition to speak to something less broad and less expansive—but still ultimately as radically social—than "religion." If we replace the word "religion" in Geertz' definition with the word "epic," the definition effectively describes the social work of epic:

> **Epics** are systems of symbols which act to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.

As explored throughout this chapter, epics form semiotic networks that establish and define communities with specific values that have a veneer of historicity, despite dealing with ultimately contemporary concerns. Geertz' definition points our attention to how religion works in similar ways. What is revealed in this exercise is not a statement on the validity of Geertz' definition as a whole, but rather on the religious work in which epic texts engage through their creation of the social.

Geertz's definition demonstrates epic's social—and therefore religious—work; however, it deemphasizes the generative, creative nature of epic / religion that produces so much of epic literature's content and provides the means through which individuals interact with the epic's semiotic network or "system of symbols." In contrast to Geertz, J.Z. Smith and his definition of religion consider the active role of humans in constructing religion:

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[78] Talal Asad, "The Construction of Religion as an Anthropological Category," *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam,* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982, 1993), 27-54. 28-29.

> Religion is the quest, within the bounds of the human, historical condition, for the power to manipulate and negotiate one's 'situation' so as to have 'space' in which to meaningfully dwell. It is the power to relate one's domain to the plurality of environmental and social spheres in such a way as to guarantee the conviction that one's existence 'matters.' Religion is a distinctive mode of human creativity, a creativity which both discovers limits and creates limits for human existence. What we study when we study religion is the variety of attempts to map, construct, and inhabit such positions of power through the use of myths, rituals, and experiences of transformation.[79]

In J.Z. Smith's conception of religion, scholars must appreciate "*homo religious* as being, preeminently, *homo faber."*[80] However, like Geertz, Smith's explanation of religion's significance for believers can be read as applicable to epic and demonstrates the religious work epic does. Epic creates a world "in which to meaningfully dwell" through the formation of a community of values seemingly rooted in history, one which has the potential to guarantee that "one's existence 'matters.'" Most importantly, epic (like Smith's religion) is creative and generative; it acts as the tool to "map, construct, and inhabit" one's significance in the world through "the use of myths, rituals, and experiences of transformation." While also emphasizing the procreative nature of the religious epic tradition that invites interaction and fulfillment, Smith's definition focuses our attention on the overlapping of epic's work with that of religion.

Through demonstrating how these two definitions of religion are applicable to epic, this section argues that epic performs social work similar to that commonly considered to be the prerogative of religion. Geertz's definition establishes the role of epic/religion in making a system or network of symbols that has the aura of historical continuity. Smith's definition, in contrast, reveals the role of human creativity in crafting epic / religion so that

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[79] J.Z. Smith, *Map is not Territory,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978, 1993), 291.

[80] J.Z. Smith, "The Unknown God: Myth in History," *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 66-89. 89.

it addresses contemporary concerns and constructs meaning within an individual's life. If religion is largely social and epic forms that social community while encouraging social and communal enactment with the narrative, then epic has the potential to be a powerful tool. It is not my intention to make the argument that epic is always and in every place religious, but rather to demonstrate that epic functions in many ways parallel to the social work of religion. To reiterate my statement at the beginning of this section, epic may not always be religious, but it is always doing the religious work that forms the social, represents its values, and allows the possibility of constant regenerative possibilities. As scholars of religion, therefore, we ignore the discursive power of the genre of epic at our peril.

Conclusions

As in Ursula K. Le Guin's fantasy novel *A Wizard of Earthsea,*[81] where the protagonist Ged must learn to name and define things in order to control them, definitions are a means to delineate and make understandable the world around us. This chapter presented its own definition of "epic" in an attempt to understand better the way we *could* use the word "epic" and to make an argument for how we *should* use the word "epic." In defining "epic" in terms of its form, content, and reception, I seek to turn our attention to the radically generative, radically social, and radically powerful force of epic literature. Case studies likewise reveal how epic is a form of literature uniquely involved in the social—the trait which explains why it is so powerful in religious discourse. The authors of the *Great Perfecting of Hell*—whether we consider them Lama Chökyi Wangchuk, the revelatory terton Draktsel Dorje, the sponsor Damchö Denpa, or some as of yet unknown fourth party along the way—

[81] Ursula K. Le Guin, *A Wizard of Earthsea,* (New York: Houghton Miffler Harcourt, 1968, 2012).

selected epic literature to make their argument supporting Great Perfection practice and traditional Buddhist ethics over and against wrathful tantras precisely on account of this social aspect of epic literature. As I argued in Chapter 4, epics are "performative texts" and this performative nature has the possibility to make them very much more. Epics do religious work that constructs the social, gives it meaning, and provides avenues to command it in service of contemporary concerns. By acknowledging the theoretical category of epic and applying it in larger work on religious tradition, we have the power to consider certain expansive, broad, and transforming traditions of religious practice and belief as a whole, in such a way that takes account of the multifarious ways the individuals we study experience them. Reading Milarepa, Padmasambhava, the Buddha, or other religious literature not as texts with multiple versions, but as singular epic traditions that span oral poetics, written text, visual representation, and natural landscape enriches our understandings of the processes by which religious significance is constructed and religious transformation is supported. Because in many respects a religious world is at its core *an epic world,* to ignore epic is an unreasonable, and perhaps even dangerous, decision.

Conclusion

Despite positioning itself as the final episode of the Gesar epic, the *Perfecting of Hell* forces us to ask: do epics ever really end? The *Perfecting of Hell*—as the edition composed by Den Lama Chökyi Wangchuk—has an ending, and certainly this dissertation is coming to a close, but does that mean it is *the end?*

The Chinese government certainly seems to think that epic does not end. As mentioned earlier, the only version of the *Perfecting of Hell* published in contemporary China[1] removes a substantial section of the text due to concerns about arousing Tibetan nationalist sentiment. Discussing a coming apocalypse for Tibetan peoples and the land of Ling, the excised text focuses on the destruction of Dharma:

> [There will be] wrong views and careless practice.
> The entire monastic community will be in disagreement.
> The power of nakpa's pledges will deteriorate
> Lamas will become confused [and] visit slaughter houses.
>
> The profound Dharma will be sold and [used for] deception.
> All living will disregard their vows and draw weapons marked with poison.
> Within the spiritual community, law will deteriorate
> and there will be murders.
>
> There will be robbery between father and son.
> Relatives will fight and kill illegitimate children.
> The early translations [of the Dharma] will disappear without a trace
> and people will try to make new ones.
>
> Indians and Mongolians will become in appearance [like the land of] Hor [demons].
> One will not be given his own voice and must speak with another's.
> People will shun virtue and vice and
> consume religious property.[2]

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[1] *Gling rje Ge sar rgyal po'i sgrung dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po,* (Chengdu), 1986.
[2] *Dmyal gling rdzogs pa chen po,* "Song 1.12," (Thimpu), 62-63.

For the contemporary Chinese government, this song evidently still has substantial power over 100 years after its initial publication at Wara monastery. From their perspective, neither the Gesar epic nor the *Perfecting of Hell* has actually ended, and perhaps the government's concerns are well-founded. As already written about in Chapter 4, King Gesar and the epic tradition he embodies have been an inspiration for many fighting what they perceive as "demonic" Chinese forces entering Tibet. The epic certainly has not ended for those fighting and for those governing.

Despite having a fairly canonical status, the *Perfecting of Hell* has also not remained "closed" for contemporary Tibetans reading and interpreting the text. While doing research in Tibet, I discovered a repeated tendency to interpret—incorrectly, if we accept Chökyi Wangchuk's rendition of the *Perfecting of Hell* as canonical—the reason behind Gesar's mother's condemnation to hell. While the text is fairly clear that Mother Gokmo is condemned to hell for Gesar's sins, I heard over and over that she was in hell because she herself had great karmic debt. When pressed for details, I was told that she either rejoiced in Gesar's conquering of surrounding tribes, or that she herself slaughtered a great many animals in secret rituals attempting to benefit her son's martial campaigns. My informants assured me that Gesar had done nothing wrong. Perhaps like those politicians who continue to be caught at the periphery of scandals, but somehow retain their jobs, nothing can stick on King Gesar.

So, the *Perfecting of Hell* is not the end, despite its claims otherwise. I discussed the generative nature of epic as a foundation of the genre in Chapter 5, so perhaps the question of ending is a little nonsensical. In contrast to the epic tradition it studies, however, this dissertation must come to an end. Through a detailed exploration of one story of the much

larger Gesar epic tradition, this dissertation has considered the complex relationships between narrative, ethics, regional politics, and performance. Demonstrating the influence of the *Seminal Heart of Great Expanse* Preliminary Meditations commentary *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* on the *Perfecting of Hell,* I have argued that a narrative companion to a Preliminary Meditations text develops readers' ethical agency in a way that allows for both the expression and resolution of institutionally-inappropriate responses to karmic suffering. This ethical thrust also appears in the *Perfecting of Hell's* promotion of Great Perfection practices over those of wrathful Anuttarayoga tantra, which this dissertation explored as a Non-Sectarian impulse to undermine Geluk authority. My discussion of the *Perfecting of Hell* closes with a presentation of the concept of a "performative text," which allows us to consider narratives as agents in a larger field of story-telling that aim to exert social control on both the interpretation of themselves and the world around them. Finally, this dissertation has ended by extending a new theory of epic—one which argues for its utility as a conceptual and theoretical term to identify complex, inter-related networks of narrative, image, speech, and symbol that shape the surrounding social world in ways similar to and supportive of religious discourse.

I began this dissertation discussing Wendy Doniger's distinctions between narrative "microscopes" and narrative "telescopes." I want to consider a third tool that we can add to our repertoire of narrative "scopes"—the stethoscope. As highlighted in the metaphors of the microscope and telescope, narrative can let one see things in both delicate detail and in grand panorama. However, I want to maintain that narratives can also be a stethoscope—allowing one to "hear" things hidden at first glance. Narratives like epic have the potential to reveal what a community values through fundamentally demonstrating how it

represents itself to itself. Epic also has the potential to represent a "pulse" of a given society—showing what they are concerned about in their contemporary world.

One of the things most revealed by the stethoscope of the *Perfecting of Hell* and other texts is the concerns across early twentieth-century Buddhist communities with promoting a more ethically-focused, less-ritualized Buddhism. Scholars have noted this trend in many global Buddhist communities and titled it "Buddhist Modernism," which David McMahan defines as "forms of Buddhism that have emerged out of an engagement with the dominant cultural and intellectual forces of modernity."[3] These forces of modernity are commonly thought to have found expression in Buddhist societies through relationships of colonialism and global trade that increased encounters with the West, while also causing widespread internal disruption. Erik Braun has discussed how the Burmese figure Ledi Sayadaw (d.1923) contributed to a laicization of Buddhist practice and patronage focused around meditation.[4] Anne Hansen has considered how during a similar time period in French colonized Cambodia a shift occurred in understandings of the moral, ordered universe and how one behaved within that universe.[5] Focusing on the life of Sri Lankan Buddhist reformer Hikkaduve Sumangala (d.1911), Anne Blackburn has noted a trend towards increased lay involvement with and ethical focus of Buddhist practice.[6] Each of these scholars emphasizes that—at the risk of ignoring already present efforts and indigenous impulses towards reform—the blanket term of "Buddhist Modernism" or

[3] David McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 6.
[4] Erik Braun, *The Birth of Insight: Meditation, Modern Buddhism, & the Burmese Monk Ledi Sayadaw,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).
[5] Anne Hansen, *How to Behave: Buddhism and Modernity in Colonial Cambodia 1869-1930,* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007).
[6] Anne Blackburn, *Locations of Buddhism: Colonialism and Modernity in Sri Lanka,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

"Protestant Buddhism" cannot be applied monolithically to each nation-state. However, when examined from a distance, there is revealed a distinct trend in Buddhist societies of the late nineteenth century and continuing into the twentieth towards utilizing a discourse of ethical, lay-focused practice to change or transform Buddhism.

Unlike the countries discussed by these scholars, however, Kham and Amdo of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century suffered no disruption from colonization, nor did they have contact with the Protestant West. Central Tibetan incursion into the Dergé kingdom was disruptive, but perhaps not quite the totalizing force of the global, systematic colonialism other Asian countries faced. The participation of certain eastern Tibetan thinkers in this contemporary trend towards the increasingly ethical "Buddhist Modern" as evident in the *Perfecting of Hell* and the larger Non-Sectarian movement is noteworthy, therefore. While hinted at in the work of Hansen, Braun, and others, perhaps the period saw such substantial changes in Buddhism globally not because of colonialism, per se, but rather due to changing ideas of the "self" and its relationship to social norms around it. Anthony Wallace has spoken of revitalization movements, which in times of increased individual stress arise as a "deliberate, organized, conscious effort by members of a society to construct a more satisfying culture."[7] Perhaps the focus on more laicized, ethical, and personal practice apparent in many different Buddhist countries during this period can be considered something of a "revitalization movement of the self"—when there is a crisis in older notions of the self and its role in religious practice, a new one must be made in its stead. From this light, the greater shift to ethical, laicized practice can be read as

[7] Anthony F. C. Wallace, "Revitalization Movements," *American Anthropologist* 58.2 (1956): 264-281. 265.

"technology of the self"[8] designed to produce a "self" more aligned to the historical environment.

This question of such global shifts in Buddhism existing somehow outside, but influenced by western colonialism deserves greater consideration, though here is not the place. Rather, this dissertation is confined to studying a specific time and place, and the epic literature that arose to both reflect and transform its historical context. I close by reiterating once more the centrality of epic traditions to forming human understanding of themselves, their histories, their religious beliefs, and their societies. Once we as scholars acknowledge in our own research that epic is not merely trapped in the pages of a book, but rather exists all around us—when we instinctively make a joke about Milarepa after a bowl unexpectedly shatters, when we reference the Founding Fathers in our Senate hearings, when we refer to the writing of a dissertation as a Herculean effort—we can begin to appreciate the full range of epic's role as a semiotic framework for the construction of meaning. "Epic" represents an important theoretical tool not only to understand the people we study and how they form and understand their own societies, but also to understand our own quests for significance as scholars of religious literature.

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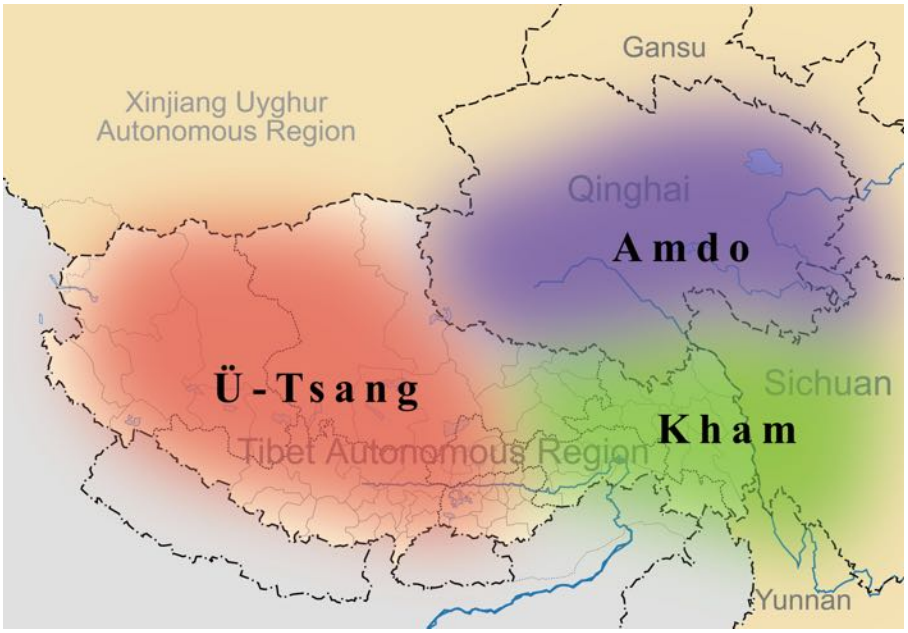
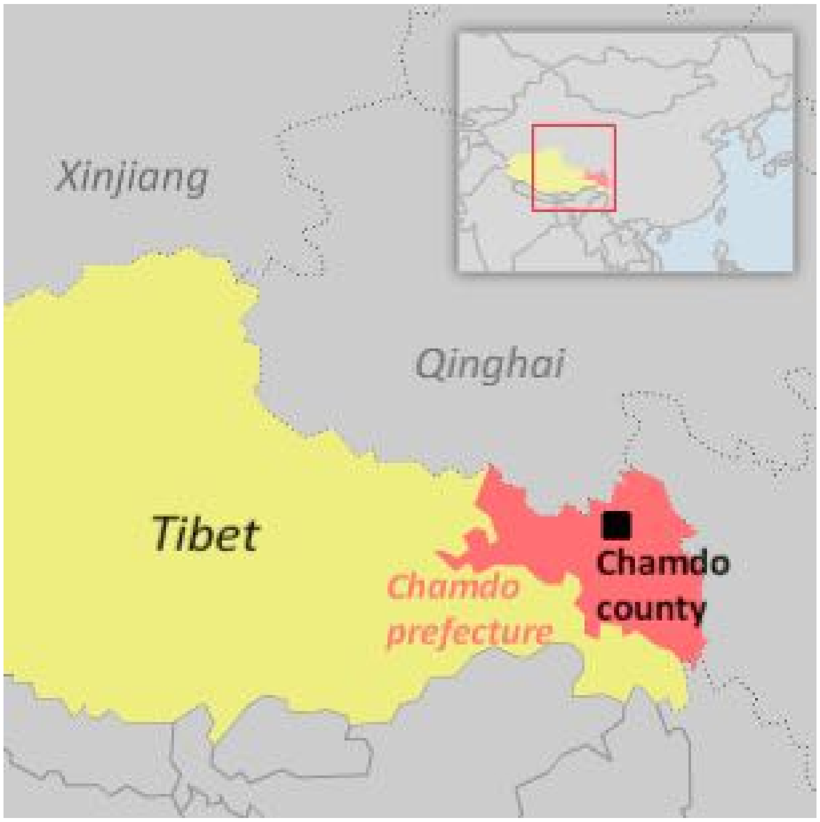
[8] Michel Foucault, "Technologies of the Self," *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault,* eds. Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, Patrick H. Hutton, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 16-49.

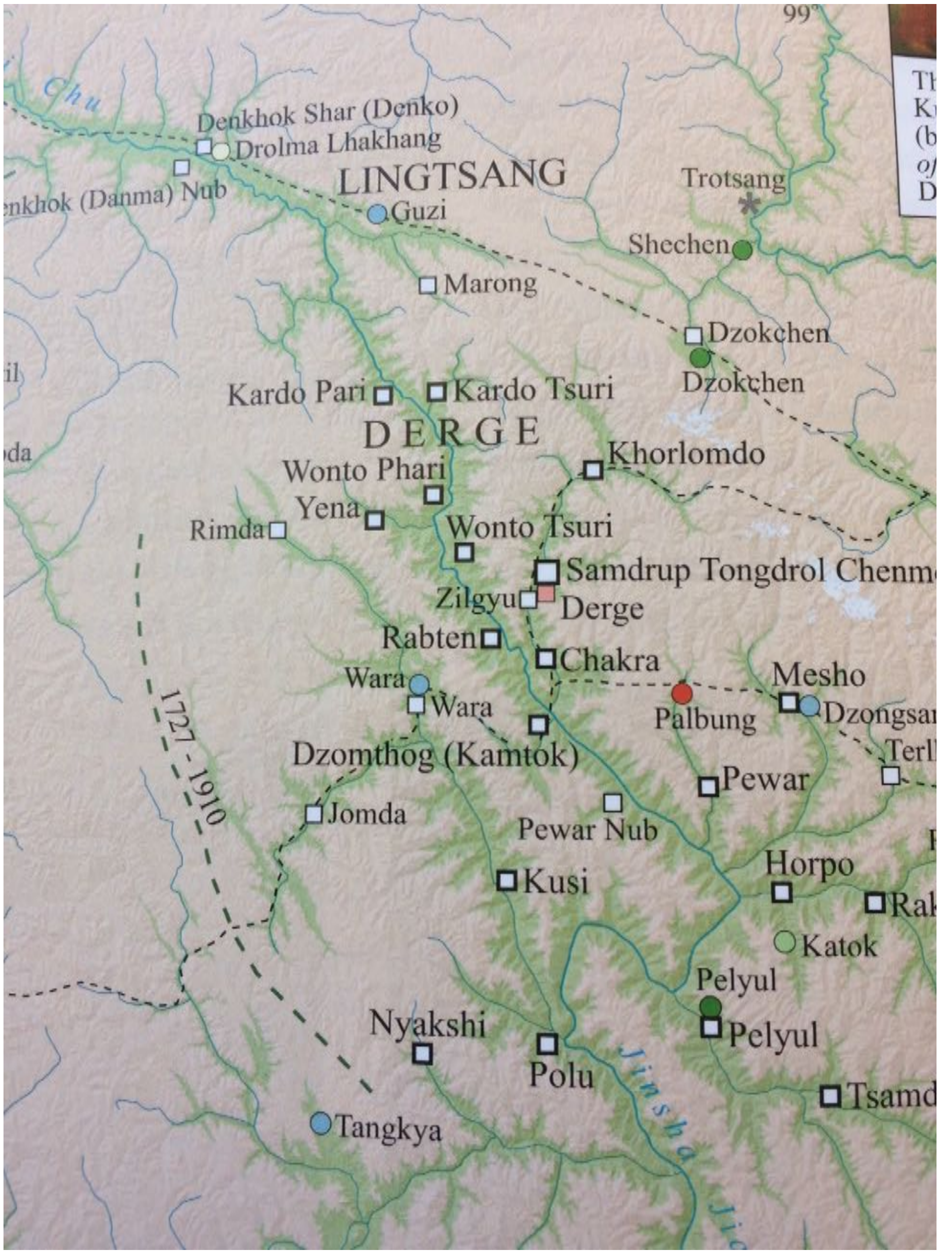
Appendix 1



Map 1. Traditional Tibetan regions mapped onto contemporary Chinese provinces. Amdo and Kham together traditionally constitute “eastern Tibet” while Ü-Tsang represents “central Tibet.”



Map 2. Chamdo county, where Wara monastery (War a) is located.



Map 3. 18th and 19th century eastern Tibet. Note proximity of Dergé, Wara, and Lingtsang, Map courtesy of Karl E. Ryavec, *A Historical Atlas of Tibet,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015) 154. Map #41.

Photo 1. Supposed ruins of the fortress of Gesar's hero's Samdag outside of Namqing, Yushu, Qinghai

Picture 2. Peaceful and Wrathful Gesar in Gesar temple at Dana Monastery, Qinghai (Yepa Kagyü; Yel pa bka' brgyud). Peaceful Gesar bears the name Vajra King of Life (Dorjé Tshegyal; Rdo rje tshe rgyal), while Wrathful Gesar is Jeweled War-God (Norbu Dralha; Nor bu dgra lha).

Picture 3. Supposed graves of King Gesar and his 30 warriors (seen in the small white stūpas evident in the crevice of the mountain). At Dana monastery in Qinghai.

Picture 4. Stūpa at Dana Monastery, Qinghai, holding the burnt remains of the destroyed Gesar text.

Picture 5. Gesar statue at Gesar temple in Asu Village, Sichuan. Around the outer walls of the temple are statues of Gesar's 30 warriors.

Picture 6. Three of the 30 warriors along the edges of the Gesar temple in Asu village, Sichuan. The middle figure is Gesar's female warrior Atag Lhamo (A stag Lha mo). Figure on the left not dressed in martial figure may represent Denma ('dan ma), who survives Gesar and goes to India on meditation retreat.

Figure 7. The hair-washing pool of Gesar's wife Drugmo ('brug mo) in Zhidu, Qinghai. Locals have marked the area with a cement rendition of Drugmo's head.

Figure 8. King Gesar of Ling statue at Dzogchen monastery (rdzogs chen) in Sichuan. The statue commemorates the commencement of Gesar operas at Dzogchen monastery in the 19th-century. It is located between the main monastery and the lay retreat center.

Appendix 2

The following is Song 2.1 of the *Perfecting of Hell,* found on pages 92-107 of Thimphu edition. Divisions are my own to make it more readable and group ideas by topic.

OM MANI PADME HUM!
This is the song, tralalala!

ཨོཾ་མ་ཎི་། གླུ་ཐ་ལ་། ཨ་ལ་ཐ་ལ་།

I bow at the feet of the kind lama, the refuge
From the suffering ocean of samsara,
please grasp [me] with the iron hook of compassion.
In the blackened, dark land of ignorance,
may the sun of dharma rise!

སྐྱབས་དྲིན་ཅན་བླ་མའི་ཞབས་ལ་འདུད་།
སྡུག་བསྔལ་འཁོར་བའི་རྒྱ་མཚོ་ལས་།
ཐུགས་རྗེའི་ལྕགས་ཀྱུས་བཟུང་དུ་གསོལ་།
མ་རིག་མུན་གླིང་ནག་པོ་ལ་།
ཆོས་ཀྱི་ཉི་མ་ [P. 93] ཤར་བར་ཤོག་།

As for this land,
it is the superior Dharma gathering place.
which turns Dharma wheel of the southern land.
As for me, I am the Precious Guru
[who is] the victory banner of White Ling.
First [I am] the precious general Gesar.
Then, I am the Precious Lama Supreme Conqueror
Finally, I am the primordial lord Buddha.
Now, I am the emanation body of Mañjuśrī.

ས་འདི་། འདུ་ར་ཆོས་གླིང་གོང་མ་རེད་།
ལྷོ་འཛམ་གླིང་ཆོས་འཁོར་བསྐོར་ས་རེད་། [l.10]
ང་འདྲ་། གླིང་དཀར་རྒྱལ་མཚན་བླ་མ་རྗེ་།
དང་པོ་དམག་དཔོན་གེ་སར་རྗེ་བར་དུ་བླ་མ་རྒྱལ་མཆོག་
རྗེ་། མཐའ་མ་སངས་རྒྱས་གདོད་མའི་མགོན་།
ད་ལྟ་སྤྲུལ་སྐུ་འཇམ་དཔལ་དབྱངས་།

As for this song, it is the song
that rouses the Dharma in the three realms.
Therefore, gathering crowd of the world,
listen well to me with undistracted ears!
You must be lead by the three purities.[1]
[First,] is this [land], [which is] unordinary.
I have cultivated an emanated pure realm,
called Ngayab.
[Second,] I am an unordinary Lama.
You should consider me a real buddha.
[Third,] the gathered retinue [of students] is unordinary.
I cultivated male and female wisdom holders
(vidyādharas).

གླུ་འདི་། ཁམས་གསུམ་ཆོས་ཀྱི་བསྐུལ་གླུ་ཡིན་། [l.15]
དེ་ནས་འཛམ་གླིང་ཁྲོམ་ཚོགས་རྣམས་།
སྙན་མ་ཡེངས་ང་ལ་ལེགས་པར་ཉོན་།
དག་པ་གསུམ་གྱི་ཐོག་དྲངས་དགོས་།
ཡུལ་ལ་ཐ་མལ་མ་ཡིན་པ་།
རྔ་ཡབ་སྤྲུལ་པའི་ཞིང་ཁམས་སྒོམ་། [l.20]
བླ་མ་ཐ་མལ་མ་ཡིན་པར་།
སངས་རྒྱས་དངོས་ཀྱི་འདུ་ཤེས་དགོས་།
འཁོར་ཚོགས་ཐ་མལ་མ་ཡིན་པར་།
སྤྲུལ་པའི་རིག་འཛིན་ཕོ་མོ་སྒོམ་།

[1] Pure place of practice, pure teacher, and pure students.

You must embrace practice with
the three excellences[2]
First, the sentient beings of the
three realms of cyclic existence,
either your friends or foes,
must become none other than your parents.
In order to repay the kindness of the parents,
you must form the resolve to become a buddha.
Second, if you cannot repay
their good kindness now,
You must practice your own mind
in order to repay the kindness afterwards.
Good or bad, whatever arises,
you must proceed along the path.
The real practice is deep training in Samadhi.
Third, ultimately by the virtue of one's
own past, present, and future
and the compassion of the conqueror,
one dedicates to obtaining Buddhahood
[for] the kindness of the father and mother.
According to the Lama Samanthabhadra,
pray [for all beings] to become a buddha.

དམ་པ་གསུམ་གྱི་རྩིས་ཟིན་དགོས་།
ཁམས་གསུམ་འཁོར་བའི་སེམས་ཅན་རྣམས་།
ཕ་མ་དགྲ་གཉེན་མ་གྱུར་མེད་།
ཕ་མའི་དྲིན་ལན་བཟློ་བའི་ཕྱིར་།
སངས་རྒྱས་ཐོབ་པའི་སེམས་བསྐྱེད་དགོས་།
དྲིན་བཟང་དྲིན་ལན་མ་སྐྱོངས་ན་།
རྗེས་སུ་དྲིན་ལན་གཟློ་བའི་ [P. 94] ཕྱིར་།
བར་དུ་རང་སེམས་ཉམས་ལེན་དགོས་།
བཟང་ངན་ཅི་བྱུང་ལམ་ཁྱེར་དགོས་།
དངོས་གཞི་ཏིང་འཛིན་སྒོམ་པ་ཟབ་།
་མཐའ་མར་རྒྱལ་བའི་ཐུགས་རྗེ་དང་།
རང་གི་དུས་གསུམ་དགེ་རྩ་དེས་།
དྲིན་ཕ་མ་སངས་རྒྱས་ཐོབ་ཕྱིར་བསྔོ་།
ཕ་ཀུན་བཟང་བླ་མའི་ཐུགས་བསྐྱེད་བཞིན་།
སངས་རྒྱས་ཐོབ་པའི་སྨོན་ལམ་ཐོབ་།

If you cannot first clear away the three defects,
you will be unable to achieve the excellent doctrine.
First, if you do not listen well
to the profound dharma spoken by the conqueror,
it will be like water sliding off a boulder.
Second, if you do not grasp
whatever is said with your mind,
you will be like a leaky pot filled with ambrosia.
Third, sentient beings mixing [thoughts]
[with] poisonous afflictive emotions
is like mixing poison with water in a vase.

དང་པོ་སྐྱོན་གསུམ་མ་སེལ་ན་།
དམ་ཆོས་སྒྲུབ་པའི་སྣོད་མི་རུང་།
རྒྱལ་བས་གསུངས་པའི་ཟབ་མོའི་ཆོས་།
རྣ་བས་ལེགས་པར་མ་ཉན་ན་།
ཕ་ལྷང་ཆུ་ཡིས་བཤལ་བ་འདྲ་།
ཅི་གསུང་ཡིད་ལ་མ་འཛིན་ན་།
སྣོད་ཞབས་ཇོལ་བདུད་རྩི་བླུག་པ་འདྲ་།
སེམས་ཅན་ཉོན་མོངས་དུག་དང་འདྲེས་།
བུམ་ཆུ་དུག་དང་འདྲེས་འདྲ་།

Now there are also the six defilements,
like grief and pride.
It is important that you endeavor to remove those obstacles.
You also must abandon the Five Wrong Ways
which lead to mistaken understanding.

དེ་དྲུག་སྐྱོ་བ་ངན་པ་དེ་།
བགེགས་མེད་རང་གིས་བརྩོན་པ་གཅེས་།
ཚིག་ལ་བརྡ་བསྒོལ་མ་འགྲོ་བར་།

[2] Mind of Enlightenment, Practice, and Dedication

The Lama is the physician and the excellent
dharma is the medicine.
As for yourself, when the lama gives you teachings,
you are the patient.
It is important to [have] faith
possessing the four qualities.

མི་འཛིན་ལྟ་སྣང་ཉམས་ལེན་ཅིག་།
བླ་མ་འཚོ་བྱེད་དམ་ཆོས་སྨན་།
མཛད་སྐྱོང་ཉིས་ནི་ནད་པའི་ཚུལ་།
འདུ་བ་བཞི་ལྡན་དད་པ་གཅེས་།

Do not think only of yourself.
It is important to have a motivation
of repaying the parents' kindness.
Make pure the three
—sights, sounds, and awareness.
You must travel the path of the three practices
—body, speech, and mind.
Do not have your outside be white
and your inside be black.
Abandon that and be like a crystal vase.

རང་ཉིད་ [P. 95] གཅིག་ཕུར་བསམ་པ་མིན་།
ཕ་མ་དྲིན་སྐྱོངས་ཀུན་སློང་གནད་།
སྣང་གྲགས་རིག་གསུམ་དག་པར་སྦྱོངས་།
ཁྱེར་སོ་གསུམ་གྱི་ལམ་བསྒྲོད་དགོས་།
ཕྱི་དཀར་ནང་ནག་མ་ཡིན་པར་།
ཤེལ་བུམ་ལྟ་བུར་སྤང་བླངས་ནས་།

Sit on the low seat and believe.
Place the palm of the hands
together at the heart in respect.
In this lifetime, it is important [to conduct]
the real practice of authentic dharma and
endeavor to strive towards a goal.
It is important to abandon violent activities
for right conduct.
Having obtained this precious opportunity
of a human life, obtaining it more than once is hard.
From the 8 unfavorable conditions,
obtaining a human body is difficult.
With the 10 freedoms, one's own power is great.
If you possess the 18 conditions
of being free and well-favored,
whatever good or evil you obtain is your own
doing.

་མོས་ཤིང་དམའ་བའི་ས་ལ་འདུག་།
གུས་པའི་ཐལ་མོ་སྙིང་ཁར་སྦྱར་།
སྤྱོད་ལམ་ཆོས་ཀྱི་ཡང་དག་གནད་།
ཚེ་འདིར་དོན་གཉེར་བརྩོན་པ་དང་། ་
མངོན་སྤྱོད་སྤང་བ་ཀུན་སྤྱོད་གནད་།
དལ་འབྱོར་རིན་ཆེན་ཐོབ་པ་འདི་། ་
ལན་གཅིག་མིན་པ་ཐོབ་པ་དཀའ་
མི་ཁོམ་བརྒྱད་ནས་རྙེད་དཀའི་ལུས་།
འབྱོར་པ་བཅུ་ཚང་རང་དབང་ཆེ་།
དལ་འབྱོར་བཅོ་བརྒྱད་ལྡན་པ་ན་།
ལེགས་ཉེས་ཅི་སྒྲུབ་རང་གིས་ཤེས

If you have land, but do not plant seeds,
obtaining bounty later is hard.
Sentient beings in Samsara [are as many]
as all the particles of the finest dust, and
obtaining a human body is as rare
as seeing a star in the daytime.
When a well-favored body is obtained even once,
if you do not accomplish the sublime dharma
[even] a short time,
it is like returning empty-handed

རྟེན་ཡོད་ས་བོན་མ་བཏབ་ན་།
ཕྱི་ནས་འབྱོར་པ་གལ་ཐོབ་།
འཁོར་བའི་སེམས་ཅན་ཕྲ་རབ་རྡུལ་།
མི་ལུས་ཐོབ་པ་ཉིན་སྐར་ཙམ་།
ལན་གཅིག་ཐོབ་པའི་དལ་འབྱོར་ལུས་།
རེ་ཞིག་ལྷ་ཆོས་མ་སྒྲུབ་ན་།
ནོར་བུའི་གླིང་ནས་སྟོང་ལོག་བཞིན་།

from the land of jewels.
To ignore the Buddhist teachings is ridiculous.
Although it is possible to obtain a human body
in other realms,
it will not have the excellent Dharma
like the southern world.
Although you obtain a human body in this world,
Practicing religion is as rare
as the Udumwara flower.
If you are born in the body of a butcher or hunter,
it is hard to become one
who obtains the fortunate life.
Mindful of the cause of arising, [therefore]
make effort diligently in the dharma.

Do not be one who become jealous
of profit and income;
it is important that you make effort
in the excellent Dharma from your heart.
Actions done now are like the farmer
sprouting good or bad seeds.
The words of the buddha [are] unerring in cause and effect.
This human body of hard won opportunity and endowment,
is impermanent like the illusory metaphor of the ten examples.
Not only the body, all is impermanent.
The external world is also impermanent.

Sentient beings are as ephemeral
as mist on the head of a blade of grass.
The four times and the four seasons
are impermanent.
A moment in itself is very changeable.
From the cakravartin to the kind lama,
except for their traces,
never have I seen them permanently abiding.
From the gray hairs of Tibet
to those who are now children,
only generations before or after
know their names,
never have I seen them permanently abiding.
In the ancestral burial ground,
the generations buzz like bees.
The causes of death

སངས་རྒྱས་མི་མཇལ་མཚར་རེ་ཆེ་།
གླིང་ [P. 96] གཞན་མི་ལུས་ཐོབ་སྲིད་ཀྱང་།
དམ་ཆོས་སྒོ་གླིང་མིན་པ་མེད་།
འཛམ་གླིང་མི་ལུས་ཐོབ་སྲིད་ཀྱང་།
ཆོས་བྱེད་ཨུ་དུམ་ཝ་ར་ལྟར་།
ཤན་པ་རྔོན་པའི་ལུས་བླངས་ནས་།
དལ་འབྱོར་ཐོབ་པ་འགྱུར་པོ་ཆེ་།
འཕྲུལ་འབྱུང་རྐྱེན་གྱི་མི་ཁོམ་པའི་།
ལེ་ལོ་མེད་པ་ཆོས་ལ་བརྩོན་།

ཁེ་དྲག་འགྲན་སེམས་མ་ཡིན་པ་།
སྙིང་ནས་དམ་ཆོས་བརྩོན་པ་གཅེས་། ་
དེ་སྔའི་ལས་བྱེད་སོ་ནམ་དེ་།
ས་བོན་བཟང་ངན་སྨྱུ་གུ་བཞིན་།
རྒྱུ་འབྲས་བསླུ་མེད་རྒྱལ་བའི་གསུང་།
དལ་འབྱོར་རྙེད་དཀའི་མི་ལུས་འདི་།
མི་རྟག་སྒྱུ་མའི་དཔེ་བཅུ་བཞིན་།
ལུས་མི་དགོས་ཐམས་ཅད་མི་རྟག་པ་།
ཕྱི་འཇིག་རྟེན་ཁམས་ཡང་རྟག་པ་མེད་།

ནང་སེམས་ཅན་རྩ་མགོའི་ཟིལ་པ་བཞིན་།
དུས་བཞིའི་ཆུ་ཚོད་མི་རྟག་པ་།
སྐད་ཅིག་ཉིད་ལ་འགྱུར་ལྡོག་མང་།
འཁོར་ལོ་སྒྱུར་རྒྱལ་མན་ཆད་ནས་།
དྲིན་ཅན་བླ་མ་ཡན་ཆོད་དེ་།
བྱུང་ཤུལ་ཙམ་ཞིག་མ་གཏོགས་པ་།
རྟག་པར་གནས་པ་གནས་མ་མཐོང་།
བོད་ཀྱི་སྐྲ་དཀར་མན་ཆད་དང་།
ད་ [P. 97] སྔའི་བྱིས་པ་ཡན་ཆོད་བར་།
མིང་རྗེས་ཙམ་ཞིག་མ་གཏོགས་པ་།
རྟག་པར་གནས་པ་ངས་མ་མཐོང་།

are like the shooting star—
no one knows when it will come.
Death [is] everywhere,
but you will be the same very soon.
Disease, evil spirits,
and adverse circumstances
[are] like a shooting star.
Wild men, poisonous snakes,
carnivorous animals,
—the causes of death are many
and the causes of life are few.
Daily we are in the hand
of the Lord of Death;
there are no methods to overcome it.

པ་ཁང་པ་མེས་དུར་ཁྲོད་ལ་།
བུ་རྒྱུད་སྣང་བའི་ལེབ་བཞིན་རྫེས་།
འཆི་ཀྱིན་ངེས་མེད་སྐར་ཟླ་ལྟར་།
ནམ་འོང་ཆ་མེད་ཤེས་པ་མེད་།
ཕྱོགས་ཀུན་འཆི་བ་ཟེར་བ་དེ་།
རང་ཡང་མི་འགལ་རིང་ཐུང་ཡིན་།
ནད་གདོན་རྐྱེན་ངན་སྐར་མདའ་ལྟར་།
མི་རྒོད་དུག་སྦྲུལ་གཅན་གཟན་སོགས་།
འཆི་རྐྱེན་མང་ཞིང་འཚོ་རྐྱེན་ཉུང་།
འཆི་བདག་ལག་ལ་ཐེབ་ཉིན་མོར་།
འཛུ་བཟུང་བཟློག་ཐབས་ཅི་ཡང་མེད་།

Now, at one time when you get bliss,
it is a very short time.
Half of your life belongs to the torpor of sleep.
A third [of the remaining time] is distraction.
One half is cut into many pieces.

ད་ལྟ་སྐབས་ཤིག་བདེ་བའི་ངོས་།
ཡུན་ཐུང་ཆེ་ཕྱེད་གཏི་མུག་གཉིད་།
ཕྱེད་ཀྱང་གསུམ་ཆ་རྣམ་གཡེང་ལས་།
ཕྱེད་ཆ་གཅིག་ཡང་བར་ཆད་མང་།

When the time has come for certain death,
the body disintegrates into the four elements
When your external breathing is interrupted,
your inner breath sound like a thousand dragons
and you will be scared.
You will faint unconscious by fright.
Then, from the door of the orifice,
you will [exit] like the wind
unable to choose where you go.

འཆི་ངེས་དུས་ལ་བབས་པའི་ཚེ་།
ལུས་འབྱུང་བ་བཞི་ཡི་གཏད་ལེན་བྱེད་།
ཕྱི་དབུགས་ཆད་བར་ནས་ནང་དབུགས་བར་།
འབྲུག་སྟོང་སྒྲ་དང་གནས་མ་གཡོས་།
འཇིགས་པའི་རྣམ་པས་དྲན་མེད་བརྒྱལ་།
དེ་ནས་བུ་གའི་སྒོ་མོ་ནས་།
རླུང་བཞིན་ཕྱོགས་མེད་བཟུང་ས་ [P. 98] མེད་།

Having known death,
you will wander in bardo.
Attendants and luxuries, family and friends,
the activities of this life—
all are meaningless.
This precious body carried a mala and a bowl,
But you will be powerless [to do so].
Like pulling hair from butter,
you will be without friends,

འཆི་བ་ཤེས་ནས་བར་དོ་འཁྱིམ་།
འཁོར་དང་ལོངས་སྤྱོད་ཉེ་འབྲེལ་གྲོགས་།
ཚེ་འདིའི་བྱ་བ་དོན་མེད་པའི་།
ཁ་ཕོར་བགྲང་ཕྲེང་གཅེས་པའི་ལུས་།
ཁྱེར་དབང་མེད་པར་ཐམས་ཅད་ལུས་།
མར་གྱི་ནང་ནས་སྐྲ་ཇག་བཞིན་།

alone you wander bardo.

རོགས་མེད་གཅིག་པོར་བར་དོ་འགྲིམ་།

Vultures and foxes will eat your corpse.
It will be buried by earth,
burned by fire, engulfed by water.
Only the trace of your name [will remain];
parents, children, spouse, and wealth
[will stay behind].
On the day of death,
you go friendless.
After three days pass,
burnt offerings and food will be dedicated.
They will write an inscription
on the side of a piece of paper.
With that, they turn over your sense enjoyments
Finally, your friends around you
call out your name in tears.
Your consciousness is like the wind wheel,
You do not have the power to remain
even an instant.

རོ་ཝ་དང་བྱ་རྒོད་ཡིས་ཟ་།
ས་ཆུ་མེ་ལ་སྲེག་པ་སོགས་།
ཡོད་པ་མིང་གི་རྗེས་ཤུལ་ཙམ་།
ཕ་མ་བུ་དང་ཆུང་མ་ནོར་།
ཤི་བའི་ཉིན་མོ་འགྲོ་རོགས་མེད་།
ཞག་གསུམ་སོང་བའི་ཉིན་མོ་ལ་།
གསུར་དང་ཟས་ཀྱི་བསྔོ་བ་བྱེད་།
ཤོག་བུ་ངོས་ལ་བྱང་བུ་བྲིས་།
དེ་ལ་དབང་དང་འདོད་ཡོན་བསྔོ་།
མཐའ་མ་ཉེ་འཁོར་གྲོགས་རྣམས་ཀྱིས་།
ངུ་ངུ་རྩེ་རྩེ་མིང་ནས་འབོད་།
རིག་པ་རླུང་གི་འཁོར་ལོ་དེ་།
སྐད་ཅིག་ཙམ་ཡང་འདུག་དབང་མེད་།

By the power of one's own
good or bad cause and effect,
if you increase your virtue,
[good things] will come.
For example, it is like good or bad seeds.
From which various fruit arises.
Although it is possible for
the four elements to reverse,
the ripening of karma is inevitable

རང་གི་ལས་འབྲས་བཟང་ངན་གྱིས་།
ཕེལ་བྱེད་དགེ་བ་སྒྲུབ་ནས་འོང་།
དཔེར་ན་ས་བོན་བཟང་ངན་བཞིན་།
འབྲས་བུ་སྣ་ཚོགས་དེ་ལྟར་འབྱུང་།
འབྱུང་བཞི་འགོ་ལྡོག་འོང་སྲིད་ཀྱང་། [P. 99]
ལས་ཀྱི་རྣམ་སྨིན་བསླུ་བ་མེད་།

The following things ripen into suffering in the six realms:
The ten unwholesome actions
which are born from the three poisons,
the five heinous crimes and the five "near-tos",
the four habits and
the eight opposites which lead to fruitions.
[In contrast,] the words spoken
by the buddha are not to be wasted.

དུག་གསུམ་བསྐྱེད་པའི་མི་དགེ་བཅུ་།
མཚམས་མེད་ལྔ་དང་ཉེ་བ་ལྔ་།
ལྟེ་བཞི་ལོག་བརྒྱད་རྣམས་སྨིན་དེ་།
རིགས་དྲུག་སྡུག་བསྔལ་རང་ལ་སྨིན་།
དགེ་བ་སྣ་གཅིག་སྒྲུབ་ནའང་།
ཆུད་ཟོས་མེད་པར་རྒྱལ་བས་གསུངས་།

In the suffering of the 18 hell realms,
the speech of the Buddha does not appear.
The hungry ghosts are afflicted
by many forms of hunger and thirst.

དམྱལ་ཁམས་བཅོ་བརྒྱད་སྡུག་བསྔལ་དེ་།
རྒྱལ་བའི་གསུང་ཀྱང་བརྗོད་མི་ལང་།
ཡི་དགས་བཀྲེས་སྐོམ་དག་གིས་མནར་།

Animals have the suffering of ignorance.
Men are afflicted by birth, aging,
sickness, and death.
The gods are afflicted by dying
and being reborn below.
The Asuras experience the suffering of strife.

དུད་འགྲོ་གླེན་ལྐུགས་སྡུག་བསྔལ་ཡོད།
མི་རྣམས་སྐྱེ་རྒ་ན་འཆིས་མནར།
ལྷ་ལ་འཆི་ཕོ་ལྟུང་བས་མནར།
ལྷ་མིན་འཐབ་རྩོད་སྡུག་བསྔལ་བྱུང་།

If you do not obtain the one authentic dharma,
wherever you are born,
suffering will be constant.
When you obtain leisure and fortune,
look at the autobiography of the Emperor Lord conqueror!
If you only concern yourself
with food and clothes every day,
very quickly you will grow old.
You think only to achieve happiness
but you achieve only suffering.
If you do not have
the previously accumulated merit,
it is only the wishes of one's mind [and] thoughts.
The king possesses power
and if you do not have the positive things,
you are like the beggar
encircling [him] on the ground.
The day of death will be like this.

ཡང་དག་ཆོས་གཅིག་མ་ཐོབ་ན།
གར་སྐྱེས་སྡུག་བསྔལ་འཁོར་ཡུག་ཡིན།
དེ་སྟེ་དལ་འབྱོར་ཐོབ་པའི་ཚེ
རྗེ་རྒྱལ་བ་གོང་མའི་རྣམ་ཐར་ལྟོས།
ལྟོ་གོས་རྒྱབ་ལ་སྒྲུག་རྒྱུག་དེ།
ཅི་ཆ་མེད་པར་མི་ཆེ་ཟད།
བདེ་སྐྱིད་སྒྲུབ་ཐབས་བརྩོན་ལེ་དེ།
སྒྲུབ་རྒྱུ་སྡུག་བསྔལ་ཁོ་ན་རེད།
སྔོན་བསགས་འབྲས་བུས་མ་གཏོགས་པ།
བསམ་པ་ཡིད་ཀྱི་སྨོན་ལམ་ཡིན།
མངའ་ཐང་ཅན་གྱི་རྒྱལ་པོ་དང་། [P. 100]
ཕན་བྱེད་དགེ་བ་མ་ཡོད་ན།
ས་མཐའ་བསྐོར་བའི་སྤྲང་ཕོང་གཉིས།
འཆི་བའི་ཉིན་མོ་འདྲ་འདྲ་ཡིན།

To the monks and nuns who wear golden cloth
and possess the kindness
of the refuge of the three jewels.
Although you are happy in this life,
later there will be suffering
[if you do not do good things].
This life is just like clouds [covering] the sun.
Therefore, endeavor for your later welfare.
The lama who gives you teachings,
even if his livelihood is [like] a butcher,
you must think he is a real, self-realized, buddha

གོས་སེར་གྱོན་པའི་བན་གཟུགས་དེ།
སྐྱབས་དཀོན་མཆོག་གསུམ་གྱི་བཀའ་དྲིན་ཅན་
ཚེ་ད་གང་སྐྱིད་ཀུན་ཕྱི་མ་སྡུག།
ཚེ་ད་ལྷ་ཉི་མའི་སྤྲིན་བར་ཙམ།
དེ་བས་ཕྱི་མའི་འགྲོ་དོན་རེམ།
རང་བཀའ་ལུང་ཐོབ་པའི་བླ་མ་དེས།
ཤན་པ་ཚང་མ་ལས་སྤྱོད་ཀྱང་།
རང་སངས་རྒྱས་དངོས་ཀྱི་འདུ་ཤེས་དགོས།

If you first ask for binding vows,
[but] in the end plant hearty blasphemy.
It is sufficient to fall to hell [by your] own [power.]
One who does not guard
one's own promise [to practice],
plants many other blasphemies.

དང་པོ་སྡོམ་པ་དམ་ཚིག་ཞུ།
མཐའ་མ་སྐུར་པ་དྲག་པོ་བཏབ།
རང་དམྱལ་དར་ལྟུང་དེའི་ཆོག།

It destroys both this life and the next.	རང་དམ་ཚིག་སྙེ་གཅིག་མ་སྲུང་བར། གཞན་ཟུར་ཙམ་ཉམས་པར་སྐུར་པ་བཏབ། ཚེ་འདི་ཕྱི་གཉིས་ཀ་རེ་ཡིས་ཕུང་།
For lamas, [you will be destroyed if] although the experience of dreams does not arise, you say you see gods and demons. If you eat the [inappropriate] food of [offerings] without having faith and having deception. If you do not cherish the religious laws of purity and virtue. If you greedily eats the food of religious charity obtained by monks.	ཉམས་རྨི་ལམ་ཙམ་ཞིག་མ་བྱུང་བས། བླ་མ་ལྷ་མཐོང་འདྲེ་མཐོང་གསུང་། མགོ་བསྐོར་དད་མེད་ཁྲམ་ཟས་ཟ། དགེ་སྦྱོངས་ཆོས་ཁྲིམས་མི་གཅེས་ནས། གྲ་པས་དཀོར་ནག་ཧབ་ཐོབ་ཟ།
For nuns, [you will be destroyed if] you do not protect your vows and disturb with poisonous language those of their own lineage.	བཙུན་མ་དམ་ཚིག་མི་སྲུང་ནས། རང་རྒྱུད་སྲིད་པའི་དུག་ཚང་དཀྲུགས།
For those who are cut from parents and married, but are the cause of argument and afflictive emotions arising in [her new] father's house. Even though the parents become old, the brothers and sisters pretend to work and prepare [for their death] [You will be destroyed.]	གར་ [P. 101] བཞག་གནས་གོ་མ་ཆོས་པར།" ཕ་ཁྲིམ་ཉོན་མོངས་རྩོད་གཞི་སློང་། ཕ་མེས་ན་སོ་རྒྱས་གྱུར་ཀྱང་། བུ་སྲིང་འདུག་ཚུས་སྒྲུབ་ཁུལ་བྱེད།
For men, you [may] die tomorrow or the day after tomorrow and be companionless. The afflictive emotions of samsara are a tiny seat [upon which to sit]. A gentleman protecting his vows out of arrogance plants the seeds of senseless violence. Finally, your own life is made a lie and both this life and the next are totally destroyed.	སང་འཆི་གནངས་འཆི་ཆ་མེད་པར། འཁོར་བའི་ཉོན་མོངས་གདན་ཆུང་སྟེང་། སྟག་ཤར་མགོ་རྣའི་སྡོམ་པ་སྲུང་། དོན་མེད་རྨི་འཕྲུག་ས་བོན་བཏབ། མཐའ་མས་རང་སྲོག་ཁྲམ་ལ་བཏབ། འདི་ཕྱི་གཉིས་ཀ་ཕུང་རབ་ཡོད།
[The sufferings of samsara are like this:] [In samsara,] when a young lady grows up, she must go wherever her father sends her. If she becomes pregnant, then she is burdened by a baby bastard and killing the children becomes a source of quarrels. The stages of becoming goes in four stages, [this is samsara's way]	ཆུང་ཨ་མའི་སྐྱེས་པའི་སྨན་ཆུང་རྣམས། ཆེ་ནས་ཨ་མའི་གན་ཁྱེར་རེད། བཏང་སར་མི་འགྲོ་ཕྲུག་ཁུར། མལ་བུ་བསོད་ཅིང་འཁྲུག་གཞི་བླངས། འཁོར་བའི་འདམ་ལ་རིམ་བཞི་འགྲོ།

[In samsara,] the kind parents protect
the children [with] compassion.
When they grow up, they become enemies
[and care not for this kindness]
They even do not want to help
the old [father and mother].
They beat the father and
kick the mother and sisters out of the house.
Rather than making their own house,
they kick the old ones out.
This kind of human body collects
such suffering things.
A body of leisure and fortune
which practices like that
will achieve only suffering by itself.

དྲིན་པ་མས་སྐྱོངས་བའི་ཨ་ཟིག་རྣམས།
ཆེ་ནས་རང་དཤག་དགྲ་རུ་ལང་།
རྒན་རབ་དྲིན་མཐའ་མི་སྐྱོང་ནས།
ཕ་བརྡུང་མ་ཙོག་སྲིང་མོར་སྣང་།
རང་ཁྲིམ་མི་བཤག་ཕྱི་ལ་ཕུད།
དེ་བཞིན་སྤྱོད་པའི་དལ་འབྱོར་ལུས།
སྡུག་བསྔལ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཇ་གིས་སྒྲུབ།

[In samsara,] the wealth of others inspires robbery.
The wealthy share the goal of an arrogant burglar.
The good qualities of others,
make one competitive.
If you yourself have enough,
you are not satisfied and try to get more.
Although wealth destroys oneself,
you keep it all for yourself.

མི་ལ་ཡོད་པའི་ནོར་རྫས་དེ།
རྐུ་འཕྲོག་རློམ་སེམས་འདུན་མ་གཏད།
གཞན་གྱི་ལེགས་ [P. 102] པའི་ཡོན་ཏན་རྣམས།
འགྲན་སེམས་རང་ལ་དགོས་སྙམ་སྡུག།
རང་ལ་ནོར་རྫས་ཕུང་ཡོད་ཀྱང་།
ཡོད་ཀྱང་ཚོག་མེད་གཞན་རྒྱུར་རློམ།

[In samsara,] you are bad to your close friends.
You throw away the scriptures of the law into the great river.
The mind’s five poisonous afflictive emotions
cause you to become angry
when just a little bad happens.
When you have to do pure activities,
your intention is bad.
The truth of karma posits five poisons.
Whatever you speak is lies born from revolving samsara.
Stop and obscure the practice
of self-vested interest.
One deceives others with lies
[like] as many colors as a rainbow.
One does not see one’s own faults,
but criticizes others meaninglessly.
Conversations of idle chatter,
which does not benefit this life or the next,
eats your whole life.

འདྲིས་བཟང་གྲོགས་ལ་ཐ་ཆད་བྱས།
ཁྲིམས་ངོ་ཚ་ཆུ་བོའི་གཞུང་ལ་བོར།
སེམས་ཉོན་མོངས་དུག་ལྔའི་ཕུང་པོ་ལ།
ཚིགས་བཟང་ངན་ཙམ་ལ་འགྱུར་ཁྲོག་བྱེད།
ལས་བདེན་པ་དུག་ལྔའི་རྩ་བར་བཞག།
ཁ་ཅི་ཟེར་རྫུན་གྱི་འཁོར་ལོ་བསྐོར།
རང་འདོད་ཉམས་ལེན་ཁོག་ལ་སྦས།
གཞན་བསླུ་བྱེད་འཇའ་ཚོན་ཁྲ་མ་ཤར།
རང་སྐྱོན་ཕྱི་མིག་མི་བལྟ་ནས།
དོན་མེད་མི་ལ་ཚིག་རྩུབ་སྨྲས།
ཚེ་འདི་ཕྱི་གཉིས་ལ་མི་ཕན་པའི།
ངག་འཁྱལ་ལབ་གླེང་མི་ཚེ་ཟད།

You do not know as your own death
draws closer and closer, but try to plan
your day, your month, and your year,
Although you do not know when you will come
before the Lord of Death, you plan for a long life.
Even though you will be affected
by illness and disease,
you still essentially wish to live.
Although your body will be separated
from your consciousness,
still you make a last will
for the sons and daughters of your family.
How pitiful to err into karma like that!

For the yogi who wanders through
the inner hermitage
and who sustains the actions
of Father Emperor Buddha.
He will get whatever food and clothes he needs.
Having done meditations on impermanence,
you will get a high level of pure realization.
Then you bee unattached to wealth.
You go to the Pure Land like the flight of the bird,
leaving no trace.

For the butcher brandishing swords and arrows,
who descend on the life vein
of living beings meaninglessly.
Then the flesh and skin you eat
is finished in a few days.
But, you are burdened by your sins
like your own shadow.
After you die, you must pay 100 times over
for [the sins] of your life.

For monks who go to villages to do rituals,
but perform black magic, you deceive yourselves.
You do not know
if you will go [to a Pure Land or hell].
If you do not know where yourself you will go,
[how can you] claim to know people go to heavens.
Having not guarded your vows and pledges,
you have a secret lover,
Whatever you see, you have to have it.
You get wealth from countless dead people.
You will die and fall into hell,

རང་འཆི་ལ་ཉེ་ལེ་མི་ཤེས་པའི་།
ལོ་ཟླ་ཞག་གི་བསྐོར་འདོག་རྩིས་།
འཆི་བདག་ནམ་ཡོང་ཆ་མེད་རེད་།
ཡུན་རིང་འདུག་པའི་གཞི་འགའ་བཞག་།
ནག་ཐོམ་མེ་ནད་ཀྱིས་ཟིན་ན་ཡང་།
ད་རུང་གསོན་ཆུས་འདུན་མ་དྲིལ་།
ལུས་བཞི་བེམ་རིག་བྲལ་ན་ཡང་།
གཏམ་ཁ་ཆེམས་བུ་དང་ཁྲིམ་ལ་བཞག་།

ལས་དེ་འདྲར་ [P. 103] འཁྲུལ་པ་སྙིང་རེ་རྗེ་།
ཕྱུག་དབེན་གནས་འགྲིམས་པའི་རྣལ་འབྱོར་པ་།
ཕ་སངས་རྒྱས་གོང་མའི་མཛད་པས་སྐྱོངས་།
ལྟོ་གོས་ཅི་བསམ་ཞོར་ལ་བྱུང་།
མི་རྟག་ཡིད་ལ་སྒོམ་བསྒོམ་ནས་།
རྟོགས་པའི་གདམ་ངག་ལྟ་བ་རྙེད་།
ཞེ་ཆགས་པའི་ཕྱུང་བྱེད་ནོར་རྫས་མེད་།
བྱ་འཕུར་རྗེས་མེད་པར་དག་ཞིང་འགྲོ་།

མདའ་གྲི་མཚོན་ཐོགས་པའི་ཤན་པ་ཚོ་།
དོན་མེད་པའི་སེམས་ཅན་སྲོག་རྩ་ཕབ་།
ཤ་ལྤགས་པ་ཉིན་བཞག་ཙམ་ལ་བཟའ་།
སྡིག་གྲིབ་མ་བཞིན་དུ་རང་གིས་ཁུར་།
རང་འཆི་ནས་སྲོག་ལེན་བརྒྱ་རེ་འཇལ་།

བར་གྲོང་ནག་འགྲིམ་བའི་སེར་གཟུགས་རྣམས་།
མངོན་སྤྱོད་ཀྱི་སོ་སོའི་མགོ་བོ་བསྐོར་།
རང་གར་འགྲོའི་ས་ལམ་མ་ཤེས་པར་།
གཞན་རིག་པ་དག་ཞིང་འཕེན་དགོས་ཁའི་།
སྡོམ་པ་དམ་ཚིག་མི་སྲུང་ནས་།
སྣན་ཆུང་བུད་མེད་ངོ་སེམས་སྲུང་།
རྒྱུ་ནོར་ཐང་ཆགས་རྩི་བཞིན་བསྡུ་།
ཚེ་འདས་གྲངས་མེད་ལག་སྡེལ་བྱེད་།

where it is difficult to get out.

For nakpas and those who practice tantra
while having a wife and holding the phurba
and killing many sentient beings
in the slaughter house,
he who has not a single compassionate thought
and opens his eyes wide while saying “Powa!”
Whatever he sees good or bad,
he thinks it to be a ghost.
This nakpa cannot help the people,
but only causes harm
and makes [sexual] relationships
with a thousand sentient beings.
When you fall to hell, you will have great regret

For monks who read out scriptures,
And pretend to read [but actually read falsely]
as if you were licking filthy paper.
The truth does not come out of your mouth
and you deceive patrons.
The patron’s obstacles will become
your cause of danger.
In the end, you fall to the rock bottom of hell
Such suffering arises by your own accomplishment.

For the doctor who claims to heal the sick,
but cannot remember any words
from the four medical tantras,
whatever you see or think is not very clear,
you’re simply watering at the mouth
for the wealth of others.
You cannot even see the difference
between acute and chronic disease.
You give the opposite of treatment
and end humans’ lives.
If your practice were serious, then you would be
kind like the Medicine Buddha.

For the Chöd practitioner traveling to the isolated
place, but not recognizing that the buddha
is your own mind and having frequent visions
[arising] from your own toxic emotions,
because you do not realize
your own body is a god’s body.

ཤི་དམྱལ་བར་ལྟུང་ཉིན་འོ་བརྒྱལ་ཆེ།

སྔགས་ཕྱུར་པ་ཐོགས་པ་ཨ་ཉེས་ [P. 104] གཟུགས།
[1.275] སེམས་ཅན་མང་པོ་བཤས་ར་འགྲིམ།
སྙིང་རྗེ་སེམས་ནས་མ་བསྐྱེད་པར།
མིག་ལྷག་རྒྱབ་ནས་ཕ་་་་་སྦྲ་བརྗོད།
བཟང་ངན་དུག་ལྷའི་འདྲེ་རུ་འཛིན།
ཕན་བྱེད་མི་ཐོག་གནོད་པ་སྒྲུབ། [1.280]
སེམས་ཅན་སྟོང་དང་ལག་སྦྲེལ་བྱེད།
དམྱལ་བ་ལྟུང་དུས་འགྱོད་པ་ཆེ།

གསུངས་རབ་ཀློག་པའི་ཨ་མཆོད་རྣམས།
ཤོག་དྲིག་ལྡག་ནས་ཀློག་རྫུན་བྱེད།
དག་པོ་མི་འདོན་ཡོན་བདག་བསླུ། [1.285]
ཡོནབདག་བར་ཆད་རྐྱེན་བགེགས་དེ།
རང་གི་རྒྱབ་ལ་ཁུར་བ་མང་།
མཐའ་མ་དམྱལྷའི་གཏིང་རྫོར་ལྟུང་།
སྡུག་བསྔལ་འབྱུང་ཡང་རང་གིས་བསྒྲུབས།

ནད་པ་གསོ་བའི་སྨན་པ་དེ། [1.290]
རྒྱུད་བཞི་དཔེ་མེད་བློ་ལས་འདས།
མཐོང་རིག་ཡིན་ལ་མི་གསལ་ནས།
རྒྱུ་ཟ་འདོད་ཁ་ནས་འཛུམ་ཆུང་ཤོར།
ནད་ཚ་གངས་སོ་སོར་མ་ཕྱེས་ནས།
དཔྱད་ཁ་ལོག་ནས་མི་སྲོག་འདོར། [1.295]
ཉམས་ལེན་གནད་ལ་སྨིན་ན་ནི།
སངས་རྒྱས་སྨན་ལྷ་བཀྲིན་ཆེ།

དབེན་རི་ཁྲོད་འགྲིམ་པའི་གཅོད་པ་དེ།
རང་སེམས་སངས་རྒྱས་མ་རྟོགས་པ།
དུག་ལྔ་འཕྲུལ་པས་ [P. 105] སྣང་ཚད་མང་། [1.300]
རང་ལུས་ལྷ་སྐུར་མ་རྟོགས་ནས།

You raise an enemy as a conceptual magical trick.
The four evils [created in your own mind]
cannot liberate themselves.
They come as interferences to lives of practice.

རྣམ་རྟོག་ཆོ་འཕྲུལ་དགྲ་རུ་ལང་།
བདུད་བཞི་རང་སར་མ་གྲོལ་ནས་།
རྣམ་འབྱོར་སྒྲོག་ལ་བར་ཆད་འོང་།

For painters, writers, and Mantra makers,
if you do something incorrect,
then you will fall to the Blue-Black hell.

ལྷ་པ་བྲིས་པ་སྔགས་པ་གསུམ་། [l.305]
མ་དག་མཐིང་ནག་རང་གིས་བསྒྲུབས་།

For sailors, fisherman, and cheats,
who are forgetful and negligent,
and for the blacksmith who beats out swords
[you all] will fall to the hell
of the plain of red-hot iron.

གྲུ་པ་ཉ་པ་ཁྲམ་པ་གསུམ་།
རྨུ་གབ་ཞྭ་ནག་རང་གིས་གྱོན་།
མཚོན་ཆ་བརྡུང་བའི་མགར་བ་དེ་།
ལྕགས་སྲེག་ཐང་ལ་བསྐལ་པར་ལྷུང་། [l.310]

For those who make cloth,
but steal [from the family],
you will have difficulty escaping
rom the hell of the blood lake.

མཁྲིན་ལེན་པའི་བཟོ་བོ་དེ་།
ཁྲག་མཚོ་ནང་ནས་ཐར་བ་དཀའ་།

For those who calculate astrology
for weddings and funerals,
but are [in reality] ignorant
will find it difficult to escape
from the hell of the land of darkness.

མི་ཤེས་རོ་བག་རྩིས་མཁན་དེ་།
མུན་པའི་གླིང་ནས་ཐར་བ་དཀའ་།

For those who cut the foundation stone
[but make it too weak] will be bound to
the copper stove in hell.

རྨུ་རྡོ་རྨང་རྡོ་མཚོན་ཕུར་གདབ་། [l.315]
དམྱལ་ཟངས་ཐབ་ཀ་གསུམ་ལ་འབྱར་།

For those who profit from sheep,
You will experience suffering in the land of Most Tortuous.

ཕྱུག་པོས་ལུས་ཚོང་ཁེ་པོ་དེ་།
མནར་མེད་གླིང་ལ་སྡུག་བསྔལ་མྱོང་།

For those who eat meat, drink chang,
and carouse with ladies,
you will not escape from the hell
of the decomposing corpse swamp.

ཤ་ཆང་བུདམེད་སྤྱོད་པ་རྣམས་། [l.320]
རོ་སྨྱུག་འདམ་ལས་ཐར་བ་མེད་།

For those who enjoy nose smoke,
mouth smoke, and garlic cloves,
you will [be reborn] in the evil smelling noxious land.

སྣ་དུད་དུ་བ་སྒོག་པ་གསུམ་།
ཞིང་ས་བཀག་པའི་རྫས་ངན་ཡིན་།

For the rich people with seven wives, seven dzo,
seven daughters, and seven dogs,

ཚུང་མ་བདུན་དང་མཛོ་མོ་བདུན་།
བུ་མོ་བདུན་གྱི་བདག་པོ་དང་། [l.325]

You will find it hard to escape
the Hell of Destroying Smoke.

ཤ་ཁྲི་བདུན་གྱི་བདག་པོ་རྣམས་།
དུད་ [P. 106] འཇོམས་གླིང་ནས་ཐར་བ་དཀའ་།

For the Lord who has lots of sheep,
wool, and weavers,
You will find it hard to escape the Reviving Hell.

བལ་ལུག་སླས་ཀྱི་བདག་པོ་རྣམས་།
ཡང་སོས་གླིང་ནས་ཐར་བ་དཀའ་།

For those who ride, burden, milk,
and pluck out the hairs of the horse,
you will find it hard to separate
from the pain of the poisonous fire pit.

རྟ་ཞོན་ཁལ་བཞོ་སྤུ་བཏོགས་པ་།
མེ་འོབ་དུག་བསྔལ་བྲལ་བ་དཀའ་།

For the principal army commanders
of the royal lineage,
you will be reborn [as food] for the hawk, wolf, and eagle ***.

རྒྱལ་རིགས་དམག་དཔོན་གཙོ་བོ་རྣམས་།
ཁྲ་གླག་སྤྱང་གསུམ་ལུས་ལོན་མང་།

For the fisherman, bar maid, and beggar,
you will fall to the Most Tortuous [hell]
for many eons.

ཉ་པ་ཆང་མ་སྤྲང་ཕབ་གསུམ་།
བསྐལ་པ་མང་པོར་མནར་མེད་ལྷུང་།

For those who have broken a vow,
made poison and fought,
you will fall beneath the stūpa
in the poisonous lake of the metal house
and escape will be very difficult.

མནའ་ཟློས་དུག་མཁན་མི་བཞག་བྱེད་།
ལྕགས་མཁར་དུག་མཚོ་མཆོད་རྟེན་འོག་།
ལྷུང་ནས་ཐར་བ་ཤིན་ཏུ་དཀའ་།

For those who grow yeast [to make alcohol]
and people who make guns,
you will certainly fall into a poison lake.

ཚོས་ཕབ་བཀའ་དང་རྫས་འདུལ་མཁན་།
དུག་མཚོའི་སྟེང་དུ་ལྷུང་བང་ངེས་།

For the characteristics of samara are like that in itself. Never have I seen those [without] sin and only [with] virtue.

དེ་བཞིན་འཁོར་བའི་མཚན་ཉིད་དེ་།
སྡིག་མེད་དགེ་བ་ངས་མ་མཐོང་།།

Then, this crowd [which has] assembled here.
My song of Dharma, the Supreme Conqueror,
may it be well-lodged in everyone's mind!
It is beneficial for the next bardo period.
I am turning the wheel of the Great Vehicle,
and it will last for three years.
This secret mantra [of the] Great Perfection,
gives differing advice for each.
The three great lamas of Ling,
following the advice of [myself]
the Supreme Conqueror

དེ་ནས་འདིར་ཚོགས་ཁྲོམ་པ་རྣམས་།
ང་རྒྱལ་མཆོག་ཆོས་ཀྱི་མགུར་གླུ་འདི་།
ཐམས་ཅད་ཡིད་ལ་ལེགས་པར་ཤོག་།
སང་བར་དོའི་སྐབས་ལ་ཕན་ངེས་ཡིན་།
ངས་ཐེག་ཆེན་ཆོས་འཁོར་བསྐོར་བ་དེ་།
ལོ་གསུམ་བར་དུ་རྫོགས་པ་མིན་།
གསང་སྔགས་རྫོགས་པ་ཆེན་པོ་འདི་།
མི་རེ་གདམས་ངག་རེ་རེ་གནང་།

will lead excellently.
Hearing mistaken Dharma will not lead to release.
Until you see the Buddha nature
in your own mind, you cannot be enlightened
by just wearing the clothes [of enlightenment].
From the primordial lord
to the lama and kind father,
everyone,
speak prayers for transmigrating beings,
like “May I be established without obstacles!”
Keep this in your mind, oh assembly!

གླིང་གི་བླ་མ་ཆེ་གསུམ་གྱིས་།
རྒྱལ་མཆོག་བཀའ་བཞིན་ཁྲིད་དཔོན་མཛོད་། [P. 107] ་
ཟབ་ཁྲིད་གནད་ལ་མ་སླེབ་བར་།
ཆོས་གོ་ལོག་ཐོས་ལོག་གྲོལ་བ་མེད་།
རང་སེམས་ཆོས་སྐུ་མ་མཐོང་བར་། [l.355]
གཟུགས་རབ་བྱུང་ཙམ་གྱིས་སངས་མི་རྒྱ་།
རྗེ་གདོད་མའི་མགོན་པོ་མན་ཆད་དང་།
ཕ་དྲིན་ཅན་བླ་མ་ཡན་ཆོད་ཀྱིས་།
འགྲོ་དོན་སྨོན་ལམ་གསུངས་པ་བཞིན་།
བདག་གིས་བགེགས་མེད་གྲུབ་པར་ཤོག་། [l.360]
ཁྲོམ་འདིར་ཚོག་ཐུགས་ལ་དེ་ལྟར་ཞོག་། གོ་ན་། མ་གོ་།

Appendix 3

The following is Song 4.7 of the *Perfecting of Hell,* found on pages 211-216 of Thimphu edition. Divisions are my own to make it more readable and group ideas by topic.

This is the method of summoning my speech.
If you are joyful, [this is] a song
marvelous [like] beer and food.
If you are suffering,
[this is] a song reflecting
your own mind's sadness.
[This is] a song of hell
to see clearly its suffering.

If you do not know this land, it is not a land of joy;
it is the Most Tortuous hot hell of Yama.

If you do not know me,
I am the Lama of Ling, Gesar.

If you do not know this song,
it is the song of grief of the gloomy Gesar.

You executioners without mercy!
Why do you give useless suffering like this
to samsaric beings.
You executioners say it is
because you are buddhas.
On the path and tradition
of demonic buddhas [like yourselves],
the business is but three—
killing, cutting, tormenting.
[You have] the body of a demon
without compassion,
[You have] the body of a demon without kindness.
I have never seen a buddha like this!

I have met countless buddhas
in the emanated pure land realm
of Chamara Island
and the Buddhafield of the Five Conquerors.
First, [they] work
for the welfare of sentient beings.
Second, [they] sustain the buddha's teachings.
Third, [they] demonstrate

ཨ་ལ་ངག་གི་འགུག་ལུགས་རེད།
སྐྱིད་ན་ཟ་ཆང་མཐསར་གླུ་ལེན།
སྡུག་ན་རང་སེམས་སྐྱོ་གླུ་ལེན།
སྡུག་ཏུ་ཐག་ཆོད་པ་དམྱལ་བའི་གླུ།
ས་འདི་ས་ངོ་མ་ཤེས་ན།

དེ་མིན་ས་སྐྱིད་ཀྱི་ཡོ་མ་རེད། [P. 213]
མནར་མེད་གཤིན་རྗེའི་ཚ་དམྱལ་རེད།

ང་འདྲ་ང་ངོ་མ་ཤེས་ན།
གླིང་གི་བླ་མ་གེ་སར་ཡིན།

གླུ་འདི་གླུ་ངོ་མ་ཤེས་ན།
གེ་སར་ཡིད་སྨུག་སྐྱོ་གླུ་ཡིན།

ཁྱོད་སྙིང་རྗེ་མེད་པའི་ལས་མཁན་ཚོ།
དོན་མེད་འཁོར་བའི་སེམས་ཅན་ལ།
སྡུག་བསྔལ་འདི་འདྲ་ཅི་ལ་བཏང་།
ཁྱེད་ལས་མཁན་སངས་རྒྱས་ཡིན་པས་ཟེར།
སངས་རྒྱས་བདུད་ཀྱི་ལམ་ལུགས་ལ།
བསད་བཅད་མནར་གསུམ་སོ་ནམ་རེད།
སྙིང་རྗེ་མེད་པ་བདུད་ཀྱི་ལུས།
བྱམས་སེམས་མེད་པ་འདྲེའི་ལུས།
ངས་འདི་འདྲ་སངས་རྒྱས་མཐོང་མ་སྐྱོང་།

ང་རྒྱལ་བ་རིགས་ལྔའི་ཞིང་ཁམས་དང་།
ཇ་ཡབ་སྤྲུལ་པའི་ཞིང་ཁམས་སོགས།
སངས་རྒྱས་བྱེ་བ་གྲངས་མེད་མཇལ།
སེམས་ཅན་འགྲོ་དོན་མཛད་དང་གཅིག།
སངས་རྒྱས་བསྟན་པ་སྐྱོངས་དང་གཉིས།

the evidence of magical emanations.
Buddhas do actions like this.
Executioners who say, "I am a Buddha,"
you are the ones
who give sentient beings bad rebirths

For you demons, I plant a supplication
for the wisdom deities to enter
[and give you] divine minds.
I hope [they?] lead an army
into the land of the deathly hell
and pour out the copper [pots] of hell.

How will it come to pass
that you know who the gods are?
From the western Pure Land of Great Bliss,
I will lead an army of unproduced Dharma bodies.
The deity Amitabha will act as the army officer
and the countless Dharma bodies
will build a military encampment
in the land of Yama.
I will ask them to liberate
the executioners from the five toxic emotions
with the wisdom sword of power and strength!
By the coming of the army of Dharma bodies,
they will lead the sentient beings
on the path of enlightenment.

From the eastern Buddhafield of Manifest Joy,
I will lead an army
of unobstructed enjoyment bodies.
The deity Vajrasattva will act as general.
Countless enjoyment bodies will make
encampment in the land of deathly hell.
By the blessing of the sword of compassion,
the executioners will be sent to the Pure Land.
By the army of enjoyment bodies
[fighting] for the welfare of beings,
may the hell realms become empty!

རྫུ་འཕྲུལ་སྒྲུབ་རྟགས་སྟོན་དང་གསུམ་།
སངས་རྒྱས་མཛད་པ་དེ་འདྲ་རེད་།
སངས་རྒྱས་ཡིན་ཟེར་ལས་མཁན་རྣམས་།
སེམས་ཅན་ངན་སོང་གཏང་མཁན་རེད་།

ཁྱོད་བདུད་ལ་ལྷ་སེམས་ཞུགས་པས་ན་།
ངས་ཡེ་ཤེས་ལྷ་ལ་གསོལ་བ་བཏབ་།
ཤི་ [P. 214] དམྱལ་བའི་ཡུལ་ལ་དམག་ཞིག་དྲངས་།
དམྱལ་ཟངས་སྟེང་།ཡོག་མི་བརྗེ་རེ་།

ལྷ་སུ་རེད་དེ་ནས་ཤེས་ལེ་འོང་།
ནུབ་བདེ་ཆེན་དག་པའི་ཞིང་ཁམས་ནས་།
སྐྱེ་མེད་ཆོས་སྐུའི་དམག་ཞིག་དྲངས་།
ལྷ་འོད་དཔག་མེད་ཀྱིས་དམག་དཔོན་མཛད་།
ཆོས་སྐུ་བྱེ་བ་གྲངས་མེད་དེ་།
གཤིན་རྗེའི་ཡུལ་ལ་དམག་སྒར་རྒྱོབ་།
མཐུ་རྩལ་ཤེས་རབ་མཚོན་ཆ་དེས་།
ལས་མཁན་དུག་ལྔ་བསྒྲལ་དུ་གསོལ་།
ཆོས་སྐུའི་དམག་ལ་ཕེབས་པ་ཡིས་།
སེམས་ཅན་ཐར་པའི་ལམ་ལ་དྲངས་།

ཤར་ཕྱོགས་མངོན་དགའི་ཞིང་ཁམས་ནས་།
འགགས་མེད་ལོངས་སྐུའི་དམག་གཅིག་དྲངས་།
ལྷ་རྡོ་རྗེ་སེམས་དཔའི་དམག་དཔོན་མཛད་།
ལོངས་སྐུ་བྱེ་བ་གྲངས་མེད་དེས་།
ཤི་དམྱལ་བའི་ཡུལ་ལ་དམག་སྒར་རྒྱབ་།
བྱིན་རླབས་ཐུགས་རྗེའི་མཚོན་ཆ་དེས་།
ལས་མཁན་རྣམ་སག་ཞིང་ལ་སྤྲར་།
ལོངས་སྐུས་དམག་གི་འགྲོ་དོན་དེས་།
དམྱལ་ཁམས་སྟོང་ལ་བསྒྱུར་བར་ཤོག་།

From the southwest realm of Emanation Bodies,
I will lead one army
of variegated emanation bodies.
The god Padmasamdeb will act as general.
The ocean of hero knowledge bearers who are his retinue will build a military camp
in the deathly hell realm.
With the sword of [the] wisdom [of] emptiness,
I, the sorcerer, will tame the executioners.
By the army of the variegated emanation bodies,
may the suffering of hell become peaceful!

ལྷོ་ནུབ་སྤྲུལ་སྐུའི་ཞིང་ཁམས་ནས།
སྣ་ཚོགས་སྤྲུལ་སྐུའིདམག་གཅིག་དྲོངས།
ལྷ་པདྨ་བསམ་ལྷས་དམག་དཔོན་མཛད། [l.55]
འཁོར་རིག་འཛིན་ [P. 215] དཔའ་བོ་རྒྱ་མཚོ་དེས།
ཤི་དམྱལ་བའི་ཡུལ་ལ་དམག་སྒར་ཐོབ།
སྟོང་ཉིད་ཤེས་རབ་མཚོན་ཆ་དེས།
ལས་མཁན་ང་བདག་འགོང་པོ་ཐུལ།
སྣ་ཚོགས་སྤྲུལ་པའི་དམག་སྒར་དེས། [l.60]
ཤི་དམྱལ་བའི་སྡུག་བསྔལ་ཞི་བར་ཤོག།

From the Mandala of the Conqueror's own body,
I [?] will lead an army
of the supreme one hundred families.
The Father Primordial Buddha will act as general.
His retinue of the Supreme Hundred Families [of buddhas]
will obtain military camp.
Emanations upon emanations,
so many that one cannot conceive it,
will build military camps in the deathly land of hell.
By the peaceful and wrathful sword of compassion,
may all the executioners
and sentient beings of hell become happy!

རང་ལུས་རྒྱལ་བའི་སྐྱིལ་འཁོར་ནས།
ལྷ་དམ་པ་རིགས་བརྒྱའི་དམག་གཅིག་དྲངས།
ཕ་གདོད་མའི་མགོན་པོས་དམག་དཔོན་མཛོད།
འཁོར་དམ་པ་རིགས་བརྒྱས་དམག་སྒར་ཐོབ། [l.65]
སྤྲུལ་པ་ཡང་སྤྲུལ་བསམ་མི་ཁྱབ།
ཤི་དམྱལ་བའི་ཡུལ་ལ་དམག་སྒར་རྒྱབ།
ཞི་དྲག་ཐུགས་རྗེའི་མཚོན་ཆ་དེས།
ལས་མཁན་དང་སྨྱལ་བའི་སེམས་ཅན་རྣམས།
ཐམས་ཅད་བདེ་བ་ཐོབ་པར་ཤོག། [l.70]

From the measureless flaming blood lake,
I will lead an army of protective deities.
Mahakala will serves as their general.
The ocean of protective deities
will build a military camp in the land of Yama.
Carefully, carefully,
they will demonstrate power and strength.
Swiftly they will lead
sentient beings to the pure land.

ཁྲག་མཚོ་མེ་འབར་གཞལ་ཡས་ནས།
བསྟན་སྲུང་དམ་ཅན་དམག་གཅིག་དྲངས།
མ་ཧཱ་ཀ་ལ་དམག་དཔོན་མཛད།
བསྟན་སྲུང་དམ་ཅན་རྒྱ་མཚོ་དེས།
གཤིན་རྗེའི་ཡུལ་ལ་དམག་སྒར་ཐོབ། [l.75]
མ་གྱེལ་མ་གྱེལ་མཐུ་རྩལ་སྟོན།
སྨྱུར་བར་སེམས་ཅན་དག་ཞིང་ཁྲིད།

May all [in] the 18 lands of Yama obtain happiness!
May it transform into a Pure Land!
May the sun of the divine buddha's compassion
make dry the mud
of the humiliating Avīci hell.
May the sword of peaceful and wrathful
method and wisdom

གཤིན་རྗེའི་ཡུལ་ཁམས་བཅོ་བརྒྱད་དེ།
ཐམས་ཅད་བདེ་བ་ཐོབ་པར་ཤོག།
དག་པའི་ཞིང་ལ་འགྱུར་བར་ [P. 216] ཤོག།
ལྷ་སངས་རྒྱས་ཐུགས་རྗེའི་ཉི་མ་དེས།

make all delusive appearances
entirely the Dharma!
May the iron hook of the three bodies' thought lead
the six classes of beings
on the path of liberation.
May the unobstructed power and strength
of the guardians of the doctrine
remove impediments to the grounds and paths.

དམའ་ན་རག་འདམ་རྫབ་སྙེམ་པར་ཤོག །
ཞི་དྲག་ཐབས་ཤེས་མཚོན་ཆ་དེས། །
འཁྲུལ་སྣང་ཐད་ཀྱིས་ཆོད་པར་ཤོག །
སྐུ་གསུམ་དགོངས་པའི་ལྕགས་ཀྱུ་དེས། །
རིགས་དྲུག་ཐར་ལམ་འདྲེན་པར་ཤོག །
བསྟན་སྲུང་མཐུ་རྩལ་ཐོགས་མེད་དེས། །
ས་ལམ་བར་ཆད་སེལ་བར་ཤོག །

Appendix 4

The following are Songs 4.3 and 4.4 of the *Perfecting of Hell,* found on pages 166-179 of Thimphu edition. Divisions are my own to make it more readable and group ideas by topic.

[KING GESAR SINGING TO YAMA]	
OM MANI PADME HUM! TRALA LALA LALA	ཨོཾ་མ་། ཏྲཱ་ཐ་ལ་། ཨ་ལ། ཐ་ལ་།
If you do not know this land, If you do not know what this land is, it is the land of the hell of death! It is the front row to the Lord Dharma King [Yama].	ས་འདི་ས་ངོ་མ་ཤེས་ན་། ས་འདི་ས་ངོ་ཅི་ལ་ཤེས་། ཤི་དམྱལ་བའི་ཡུལ་ཀྱི་ས་ཆ་རེད་། དཔོན་ཆོས་རྒྱལ་མདུན་གྲལ་གོང་མ་རེད་། མི་ང་འདྲ་ང་ངོ་མ་ཤེས་ན་།
If you do not know me, I am Siddhartha, born of the world! From my cold realm, I have come to the realm of King Yama.	ང་འདྲ་ང་ངོ་མ་ཅི་ལ་ཤེས་། འཛམ་གླིང་སྐྱེས་བུ་དོན་གྲུབ་ཡིན་། ང་འོང་བ་གྲང་ང་ཁམས་ནས་འོང་། ཐོན་ས་གཤིན་རྗེའི་ཡུལ་ལ་ཐོན་།
From the speaking of your executioners, if you are a man without Dharma, it is certainly true [that one should be afraid]. [However,] I am not the same as a common man! I was entrusted by the superior god [to] come to the transient world of Tibet! My actions are done for the welfare of all beings! My subduing the enemy is subduing heretics and rakashas! While I am not a being working alone, I am the one who established the root of the Buddha’s teachings in the land of the dark-haired Tibetans. From the speech of your executioners, they think I did not plant the religion of the Buddha. They think I did not establish the words of the master! They think I do not work for the welfare of sentient beings! They say I maintain [the difference] of self and other!	ཁྱོད་ལས་མཁན་རྣམས་ཀྱིས་གསུངས་ལུགས་དེ་། མི་ཆོས་མེད་ཡིན་ན་ཡོས་བདེན་རེད་། ང་ཕལ་པོའི་བུ་དང་འདྲ་ལེ་མིན་། ང་བསྐོས་པ་གོང་མ་ལྷ་ནས་བསྐོས་། འོང་བ་འཇིག་རྟེན་བོད་ལ་འོང་། མཛད་པ་སེམས་ཅན་འགྲོ་དོན་མཛད་། དགྲ་འདུལ་བ་མུ་སྟེགས་སྲིན་པོ་འདུལ་། ང་སྐྱེས་བུའི་རང་ཆུས་མ་ཡིན་པར་། ཆོས་སངས་རྒྱས་བསྟན་པའི་རྩ་བ་དང་། བོས་དབུ་ནག་འདུག་ཆུས་བྱེད་པ་ཡིན་། ཁྱོད་ལས་མཁན་རྣམས་ཀྱིས་གསུངས་པ་ལ་། ་ ངས་ཐུབ་པའི་བསྟན་པ་མ་བཙུགས་བསམ་། སློབ་དཔོན་གྱི་བཀའ་ཡང་མ་སྒྲུབ་བསམ་། སེམས་ཅན་འགྲོ་དོན་མ་བྱས་བསམ་། མི་རང་གི་འདུག་ཆུས་བྱེད་ [P. 167] འདུག་ཟེར་།

Your executioners talk like that!

From previously until today,
I water [the fields] for myself and for everyone.
I have effectively planted the religion of Buddhism.
I have effectively worked
entirely for sentient beings.
I have effectively tamed the heretical demons and malicious spirits.
Rather than being benefited, it is more like I am oppressed,
my kind mother has been posited in hell!
There is no sin for conquering Maras and Rakashas!

I am the Lama who gives guidance
[with] a measure of killing!
The armor about my waist is of the three types[3]
and my helmet is the three white substances.
If this is the land in which my mother is in hell,
Then what is the use of wearing this garb?
I and other men are not different.

The jewel in the crown ornament
of the white helmet on my head
was given to me from the high superior gods!
It is the helmet from
the treasure of Magyel Pomra.
The black armor [called]
the primordial suffering of demons
is the armor of the treasure of Magyel Pomra.
The bow which tames the three realms
to itself is the bow
of the treasure of Magyel Pomra.
The 80,000 golden arrows
are the arrows of the treasure of Magyel Pomra.
The arrow shaft did not arise from the land.
The arrow tip was not beaten by a blacksmith.
The arrow's fletching did not come from a bird.
These immortal arrows were made
in 18,000 years by a collection of dakinis
from the five families.

ཁྱོད་ལས་མཁན་གསུངས་ལུགས་དེ་འདྲ་རེད།

ངས་དེ་སྔ་ཉི་མའི་ཕན་ཚོད་ལ།
གས་རང་ཆུ་མ་བྱས་སྤྱི་ཆུས་བྱས།
སངས་རྒྱས་བསྟན་པ་གཙུག་ཐབས་བྱས།
སེམས་ཅན་ཡོངས་ལ་ཕན་ཐབས་བྱེད།
བདུད་མུ་སྟེགས་འདྲེ་སྲིན་འདུལ་ཐབས་བྱས།
དེ་ཕན་པ་མི་འདྲ་གནོད་པ་འདྲ།
དྲིན་ཅན་ཨ་མ་དམྱལ་བར་བཞག།
བདུད་སྲིན་པོ་འདུལ་བའི་སྡིག་ཀན་མེད།

བསད་ཚད་འདྲེན་པའི་བླ་མ་ཡིན། ་
སྐེད་འཁོར་གསུམ་ཁྲབ་དང་རྨོག་དཀར་གསུམ།
མར་དམྱལ་བའི་ཡུལ་གྱི་ས་ཆ་ན།
དེ་གྱོན་ས་མེད་དོན་ཅི་འདྲ་རེད།
ཕོ་གཞན་དང་ང་གཉིས་འདྲ་ལེ་མེད།

མགོ་རྨོག་དཀར་གཙུག་རྒྱན་ནོར་བུ་དེ།
སྟེང་གོང་མ་ལྷ་ནས་གནང་ལེ་རེད།
གཞི་རྨ་རྒྱལ་སྤོམ་རའི་གཏེར་རྨོག་ཡིན།
ཁྲབ་ནག་སྲིན་པོའི་ཐོག་སྡུག་དེ།
རྨ་རྒྱལ་སྤོམ་རའི་གཏེར་ཁྲབ་ཡིན།
གཞུ་མོ་ཁམས་གསུམ་རང་འདུལ་དེ།
རྨ་རྒྱལ་སྤོམ་རའི་གཏེར་གཞུ་རེད།
ལྷ་མདའ་གསེར་སྟོང་བརྒྱད་ཅུ་དེ།
རྨ་རྒྱལ་སྤོམ་རའི་གཏེར་བདའ་ཡིན། [P. 168]
མདའ་སྙུག་ས་ལ་མ་སྐྱེས་པ།
མདའ་རྩེ་མགར་བས་མ་བརྡུང་བའི།
མདའ་སྒྲོ་བྱ་ལས་མ་བཅད་པའི།
་དེ་ཚེ་ལོ་གསུམ་བརྒྱ་དྲུག་སྟོང་ལ།
ཨ་ཚོགས་མཁའ་འགྲོ་སྡེ་ལྔ་ཡིས།

[3] bow, arrow, sword.

They are divine arrow with magical powers,
first they have the flight of a white-tailed eagle.
Second, they have the flight of a turquoise Thangnag.
Third, they have the flight of a Thang Muglha.
Fourth, they have a flat piece of medicine crystal.

འཆི་མེད་ཚེ་མདའ་སྒྲུབ་ལེ་ཡིན་།
མདའ་ཐང་དཀར་ཤེལ་གྱི་འཕུར་ཤེས་གཅིག་།
ཐང་ངག་གཡུ་ཡི་འཕུར་ཤེས་གཉིས་།
ཐང་རྨུག་ལྷའི་འཕུར་ཤེས་གསུམ་།
མདའ་ཨ་བར་ཤེལ་ཀྱི་ལེབ་ཆེན་བཞི་།
རྫུ་འཕྲུལ་ཅན་གྱི་ལྷ་མདའ་ཡིན་།

I am the man who eliminated
the four enemies [of the Dharma].
I am the man who overpowered
the four demons.
Blossoming in my impressive strength,
I am the divine arrow for which there is no words.
There is no sound
except a crack [when the arrow is released]
and the gurgle of blood.
At the end of my lasso is only bone.

དགྲ་བཞི་ཅམ་ལ་ཕབ་མི་ཡིན་།
བདུད་བཞི་ཟིལ་གནོན་མི་ཡིན་།
རྫམ་པའི་ངར་བཞད་ལྷང་སེ་ལྷང་།
མི་སྐད་ཤེས་པའི་ལྷ་བདའ་ཡིན་།
མདའ་མི་སྐད་ཀན་སྒྲ་ཐག་སེ་ཡོད་།
ཁྲག་འཐུང་ཏུབ་སྒྲ་ཉིལ་ལེ་ཡོད་།
རུས་མུར་ངར་ཞགས་ལྷངས་སེ་ཡོད་།

I carry an incomparable sword,
which is the sword
of the treasure of Magyel Pomra.
If you thrust with it,
it always cuts something.
[Even] if you do not thrust with it,
the deity of war himself is in your retinue.
It helps annihilate difficult enemies.
It cuts the five toxic emotions at the root.
It is not like the knives of other men.

ངས་རབ་གྲི་བཏབ་པ་ལན་མེད་འདི་།
རྨ་རྒྱལ་སྤོམ་རའི་གཏེར་གྲི་ཡིན་།
གཡུགས་ན་གཡུགས་ཆོས་བར་ལ་ཡིན་།
མ་གཡུགས་དགྲ་ལྷ་རང་འཁོར་ཡིན་།
དགྲ་མ་ཐུབ་ཆམ་ལ་ཕབ་རོགས་ཡིན་།
དུག་ལྔ་རྩད་ནས་གཅོད་མི་ཡིན་།
མི་གཞན་གྱི་གྲི་དང་ [P. 169] འདྲ་ལེ་མིན་།

My mother [got me] a nimble race horse
from the plains.
When he runs,
the stallion is like flashing lightening.
If you follow it, [it is like] grasping a bird in the sky;
[you will] have [only] 13 hairs in your hand.
Outside, my beast of burden is covered with fur.
Inside, however, he represents the full of the state of enlightenment.
He is an emanation of Amitabha Buddha.
On the 11,000,000 hairs of my horse's body
reside 11,000,000 dakinis
and down their hair runs oil [which speeds his run]
He is the swiftest horse.

མ་རྒྱུག་རྟ་ཕོ་ཐང་རྩལ་ཅན་།
རྒྱུག་ན་རྟ་ཕོ་གློག་ཞགས་འདྲ་།
འདེད་ན་ནམ་མཁའི་བྱ་ཡང་ཟིན་།
འཕུར་བའི་སྤུ་རུ་བཅུ་གསུམ་ཡོད་།
ཕྱི་ལ་བྱོལ་སོང་ལྤགས་པ་གཡོགས་།
ནང་ལ་སངས་རྒྱས་དགོངས་པ་ཚང་།
སྣང་བ་མཐའ་ཡས་སྤྲུལ་པ་ཡིན་།
བ་སྤུ་བྱེ་བ་ས་ཡ་ལ་།
མཁའ་འགྲོ་བྱེ་བ་ས་ཡ་གནས་།

he tames 40 demons [simply] trotting along the foot path.
[By] the flick of his tail,
demons are smashed to dust.

མཁའ་འགྲོའི་སྲུ་ཞག་ཉིལ་ལེ་ཡོད་།
མགྱོགས་པ་རླུང་གི་གཤོག་པ་ཅན་།
རྐང་པའི་ལམ་འདྲེ་བཞི་བཅུ་བཏུལ་།
རྔ་མའི་ཕྱི་འདྲེ་ཐལ་བར་བརླགས་།

In the first half of my life,
when my sense faculties were [still] increasing,
the people of Ling wagered [the throne]
on a great horse race.
When I was small, I was Joru,
and the divine horse was a foal.
When the time of running [arrived]
the elders of Ling laid a wager
on the horse to obtain the eight royal marks.
When racing in this race,
the incredibly fast stallion had time
to encircle four continents
and eight sub continents in one moment.

ང་ཚེ་སྟོད་དབང་པོ་ཡར་དར་དུས་།
གླིང་ཚོ་ཆེན་རྟ་རྒྱུག་སྐུགས་ལ་བཞག་།
ང་ཇོ་རུ་ན་སོ་ཆུང་དུས་རེད་།
ལྷ་རྟ་ན་སོ་ཆུང་དུས་ཡིན་།
རྟ་ཐང་གཅིག་རྒྱུག་པའི་དུས་སྐབས་ལ་།
ཕ་གླིང་གི་རྟ་རྒྱན་བཞག་པ་དེ་།
ཕ་ཐོག་ལས་ཀ་ཆ་བརྒྱད་ཐོབ་།
རྒྱུག་ཆེ་བའི་རྟ་ཕོ་བང་རྩལ་ལོང་།
གླིང་བཞི་གླིང་ཕྲན་བརྒྱད་པོ་དེ་།
སྐད་ཅིག་ཡུལ་ལ་བསྐོར་ལེ་ཡིན་།

First, the wild horse Kyangbu
is a great magical emanation.
Second, I am a great magical emanation.
In the land of deathly hells, the horse now runs.
If [you] humiliate [me],
in one moment the horse will encircle
the 18 hot and cold hells.
In one moment,
the horse Kyangbu will destroy
the large furnace of hell in consequence.
My sword will destroy hell
and establish 1.8 beings [like my] mother
on the path of liberation.
The three—emanation, magical powers, and clairvoyance—are inseparable from me.
I am the unequalled lama Gesar.

རྟ་རྐྱང་པོ་རྫུ་འཕྲུལ་ཆེ་དང་གཅིག་།
ང་སྐྱེས་བུ་སྤྲུལ་པ་ཆེ་དང་གཉིས་།
ཤི་དམྱལ་བའི་ཡུལ་ [P. 170] ལ་རྟ་རྒྱུག་བཏང་།
དམའ་ན་རག་དམྱལ་ཁམ་བཅོ་བརྒྱད་དེ་།
སྐད་ཅིག་ཡུལ་ལ་བསྐོར་རྒྱུ་ཡིན་།
རྟ་རྐྱང་བུས་ཐྲ་ཁ་ལན་གིག་ལ་།
དམྱལ་བའི་ཐབ་ཆེན་ཐལ་བར་གཏོར་།
ང་སྐྱེས་བུའི་གྲིའི་དམྱལ་བ་གཏོར་།
མ་དུང་ཕྱུར་བཅོ་བརྒྱད་ཐར་ལམ་བཀོད་།
སྤྲུལ་པ་རྫུ་འཕྲུལ་མངོན་ཤེས་གསུམ་།
སྐྱེས་བུ་ང་དང་བྲལ་མེད་ཡིན་།
ང་བླ་མ་མཉམ་མེད་གེ་སར་ཡིན་།

I am Gesar, [who is] a composite of all yidams.
I am Gesar, [who is] Lord of Space!
I am Gesar,
[who is] the principal dharma protector!
I am Gesar,

ཡི་དམ་ཀུན་འདུས་གེ་སར་ཡིན་།
མཁའ་འགྲོའི་དབང་ཕྱུག་གེ་སར་ཡིན་།
ཆོས་སྐྱོང་གཙོ་བོ་གེ་སར་ཡིན་།

[whose] crown ornament is the Sangha.
My body is full of divine bodies!

དགེ་འདུན་གཙུག་རྒྱན་གེ་སར་ཡིན་།
ངའི་ལུས་ལ་ལྷ་སྐུ་ཚང་ལེ་ཡིན་།

I have the complete Supreme Hundred Families practice!
I have the complete excellent doctrine in darkness.
I have all of the 9 ways of dharma.
My mind itself is the realized Dharmakaya.
My mind is the rising sun of clear light.
There is no distinction between me
and the other [Lord] father [Buddha].

ལྷ་དམ་པ་རིགས་བརྒྱ་ཁྲིགས་སེ་ཡོད་།
ནག་ལ་དམ་ཆོས་ཚང་ལེ་ཡིན་།
ཆོས་ཐེག་པ་རིམ་དགུ་ལྷངས་སེ་ཡོད་།
ཡིད་སེམས་ཉིས་ཆོས་སྐུ་རྟོགས་པ་ཡིན་།
སེམས་འོད་གསལ་ཉི་མ་ཤར་བ་ཡིན་།
ཕོ་གཞན་དང་ང་གཉིས་འདྲ་ལེ་མིན་།

In the morning,
I emanate to the upper place of the gods;
I am like a god of the upper sky!

སྔ་དྲོ་གོང་ས་ལྷ་ལ་སྤྲུལ་།
སྟེང་ནམ་མཁའི་ལྷ་དང་འདྲ་འདྲ་ཡིན་།

I will transform the upper and lower copper cauldrons of hell [with] my foot and mouth.
I will make empty the humiliating hell realm.
I will race my stallions' magical power.
I will encircle the three spheres with method.
I will carry the renowned sword of knowledge.
I will wear the white helmet
[of] the three divine bodies.
I am the causing of wearing the fearless chain mail.
I will fearlessly scatter the castle of Yama.

དམྱལ་ཟངས་སྟེང་འོག་ཁ་ཞབས་བསྒྱུར་།
དམའ་དམྱལ་ཕམས་སྟོང་པ་བཟོ་རྒྱུ་ཡིན་།
ངས་རྫུ་འཕྲུལ་རྟ་ཕོ་རྒྱུག་རྒྱུ་ཡིན་།
ཐབས་ཤེས་རབ་འཁོར་གསུམ་བསྐོར་རྒྱུ་ཡིན་།
མཚོན་ཤེས་རབ་རལ་གྲི་གཡུགས་རྒྱུ་ཡིན་།
ལྷ་སྐུ་གསུམ་རྨོག་དཀར་གྱོན་རྒྱུ་ཡིན་།
འཇིགས་མེད་གོ་ཁྲབ་གྱོན་རྒྱུ་ཡིན་།
གཤིན་མཁར་འཇིགས་མེད་གཏོར་རྒྱུ་ཡིན་།

In the evening,
I emanate to the relations on my mother's side.
I am like a companion of the sky.
In the deep night, I emanate
to the [land of] the nagas.
It am like the nagas underground.
When I reside in the world,
I am heroic and brave like thunder.
When I arrive in the deathful land of Yama,
I am like the god Avalokiteśvara.
I am the man who brought
the six classes of beings to the Dharma.
I am the cause of leading those who die
to higher realms.

ང་ཕྱི་དྲོ་བར་མ་གཉེན་ལ་སྤྲུལ་།
བར་སྣང་གཉེན་དང་ [P. 171] འདྲ་འདྲ་རེད་།
ང་དོང་པོ་འོག་གི་ཀླུ་ལ་སྤྲུལ་།
ས་འོག་ཀླུ་དང་འདྲ་འདྲ་རེད་།
ང་འཛམ་བུ་གླིང་ལ་བཞུགས་དུས་དེར་།
དཔའ་ངར་ཐོག་དང་འདྲ་འདྲ་ཡིན་།
ཤི་གཤིན་རྗེའི་ཡུལ་སླེབས་དུས་དེར་།
ལྷ་སྤྱན་རས་གཟིགས་དང་འདྲ་འདད་རེད་།
ང་རིགས་དྲུག་ཆོས་ལ་བསྒྱུར་མི་ཡིན་།
ངས་ཤི་ཚད་མཐོ་རིས་འདྲེན་རྒྱུ་ཡིན་།

I will increase the knowledge
of your executioners.
I will completely empty the plains of death.
I will cut Yama's succession at the waist.
I will transform the ocean of red-hot iron.
I will make the fire pit unable to be used.
I will turn the metal house of torment into a pile of ash.
I will pierce the middle of the mirror [of destiny].
I will cause chaos (lit. mix up little letters and big ones)
I will cut the vast sin at the waist.

But, you, deathly King Yama!
If you are a god,
you will go to the Akhanistha buddha field;
If you are a demon, you will be liberated by me. If you are neither of these,
you will come to Ling [with me],
[where] you will attain
the aim of the southern world.
[When] I, Gesar, am in the land of Yama,
Positive and negative karma,
I myself will differentiate!
Your five servants, possessing tiger and lion heads.
If they are gods, they will go
to the pure land of the five families!
If they possess heads of the five poisonous [afflictive emotions],
the sword of knowledge will kill them.

I will cut the root of the five poisons.
I will uproot the three poisons [of] the obscurations (kleśas)
I will lead [all] on the exalted path
of liberation of the three bodies.
Sentient beings who suffer from the kleśas,
I will free like a thunder clap
I will send the sentient beings of hell
to the western blissful pure land.
I will shake the four continents greatly,
but I will not despair.
If your executioners arise, there is no concern.

ཁྱོད་ལས་མཁན་རྣམ་ཤེས་སྤར་རྒྱུ་ཡིན་།
གཤིན་ཐང་ལྟུང་ལ་བསྐྱུར་རྒྱུ་ཡིན་།
གཤིན་ཟམ་སྐེད་ནས་གཅོད་རྒྱུ་ཡིན་།
ལྕགས་སྲེག་རྒྱ་མཚོར་བསྒྱུར་རྒྱུ་ཡིན་།
མེ་འོབ་ཡུ་མེད་བཟོ་རྒྱུ་ཡིན་།
ལྕགས་མཁར་ཐལ་ཕུང་བཟོ་རྒྱུ་ཡིན་།
མེ་ལོང་དཀྱིལ་ [P. 172] ནས་ཕུག་རྒྱུ་ཡིན་།
ཡིག་ཆུང་ཁ་ཡིག་བསྐོག་རྒྱུ་ཡིན་།
སྡིག་རྒྱ་སྐེད་ནས་གཅོད་རྒྱུ་ཡིན་།

ལར་གཤིན་རྗེ་ཆོས་ཀྱི་རྒྱལ་པོ་ཁྱོད་།
ལྷ་ཡིན་ན་འོག་མིན་ཞིང་ཁམས་ཕེབས་།
འདྲེ་ཡིན་ན་དེ་རིང་ང་ཡིས་བསྒྲལ་།
ཡང་མིན་ན་ཁྱོད་རང་གླིང་ལ་སོང་།
ལྷོ་འཛམ་གླིང་བྱེད་དོན་ཁྱོད་རང་སྒྲུབས་།
ང་གེ་སར་གཤིན་རྗེའི་ཡུལ་ལ་འདུག་།
ལས་དགེ་སྡིག་དྲང་ཤན་ང་རང་ཕྱེ་།
་ཁྱོད་ལས་མཁན་སྟག་སེང་མགོ་ཅན་ལྔ་།
ལྷ་ཡིན་ན་རིགས་ངའི་ཞིང་དུ་ཕེབས་།
དུག་ལྔ་མགོ་ཅན་ལྔ་ཡིན་ན་།
ཤེས་རབ་རལ་གྲིས་མི་བསད་རེ་།

དུག་ལྔའི་རྩ་བ་གཅོད་རྒྱུ་ཡིན་།
ཉོན་མོངས་དུག་གསུམ་རྩད་ནས་གཅོད་།
སྐུ་གསུམ་ཐར་པའི་ལམ་དུ་འདྲེན་།
སྡུག་བསྔལ་ཉོན་མོངས་སེམས་ཅན་རྣམས་།
བྲེ་བརྒྱ་འུར་སེ་བཏང་རྒྱུ་ཡིན་།
དམྱལ་བའི་སེམས་ཅན་ཡ་ང་རྣམས་།
ནུབ་བདེ་བ་ཅན་དུ་གཏོང་རྒྱུ་ཡིན་།
གླིང་བཞི་འདར་ན་ཆེ་རྒྱུ་མེད་།
འཇིག་རྟེན་འགུལ་ཀྱང་ཉམས་ང་མེད་།
ལས་མཁན་འབྱུང་ན་བག་ཆ་མེད་།

You think only of joy or think of suffering,
but when I explain,
I explain the sublime dharma.
When I establish something,
I establish the teachings of the buddha.
If I endeavor [in] something,
I endeavor in the sublime, divine Dharma.
If I guard [something],
I guard my vows and promises.
If I attain [something],
I attain the 10 virtues.
If I am somewhere,
my own mind is emptiness and luminosity.
I have embraced the grounds
and paths of the great vehicle meditation.
In time, wisdom and method are unified.
The three bodies exist free from elaborations.
If I go [somewhere],
I go in the condition of emptiness and luminosity.
Having planted the religious life for the black-
haired Tibetans, I go.
When I quarrel,
I quarrel with the enemy of afflictive emotions.
I uproot the blood line of the five toxic emotions.
If I accumulate things,
I accumulate only the sublime dharma.

ཁྱོད་དགའ་དོ་བསམ་མམ་སྡུག་ [P. 173] དོ་བསམ་།
ངས་འཆད་ན་དམ་པའི་ལྷ་ཆོས་འཆད་།
འཛུགས་ན་སངས་རྒྱས་བསྟན་པ་བཙུགས་།
བརྩོན་ན་དམ་པའི་ལྷ་ཆོས་བརྩོན་།
ང་སྲུང་ན་སྡོམ་པ་དམ་ཚིག་སྲུང་།
སྒྲུབ་ན་དགེ་བ་བཅུ་པོ་སྒྲུབ་།
ང་འདུག་ན་རང་སེམས་སྟོང་གསལ་འདུག་།
སྒོམ་ཐེག་ཆེན་ས་ལམ་བཟུང་ནས་འདུག་།
ང་ཡོང་ན་ཐབས་ཤེས་ཟུང་དུ་འཇུག་།
སྐུ་གསུམ་སྤྲོས་བྲལ་ངང་ལ་ཡོངས་།
འགྲོ་ན་གསལ་སྟོང་ངང་ལ་འགྲོ་།
བོད་དབུ་ནག་ཆོས་སྒོར་བཙུགས་ནས་འགྲོ་།
ང་འཐབ་ན་ཉོན་མོངས་དགྲ་ལ་འཐབ་།
དུག་ལྔའི་སྐྱེ་རྒྱུད་རྩད་ནས་གཅོད་།
ང་བསགས་ན་དམ་པའི་ལྷ་ཆོས་བསོག་།

I lead those who possess fortune
on the path of liberation.
I run great circles around the land of Yama;
I run in order to establish suffering as joy!
I have attained mastery over the five elements.
I have attained mastery over both birth and death.
I meditate in impartiality over joy and sorrow.
I view both cyclic existence and nirvana.
I make an effort to reject both this life and the next.
I bring under my control both gods and demons
I make the enemies and demons my servants.

སྐལ་ལྡན་ཐར་པའི་ལམ་ལ་འདྲེན་།
ང་གཤིན་རྗེའི་ཡུལ་ལ་བསྐོར་ཆེན་རྒྱུག་།
སྡུག་བསྔལ་བདེ་བ་བཀོད་ཕྱིར་རྒྱུག་།
ང་འབྱུང་བ་ལྔ་ལ་རང་དབང་ཐོབ་།
སྐྱེ་འཆི་གཉིས་ལ་རང་དབང་ཐོབ་།
བདེ་སྡུག་གཉིས་ལ་བཏང་སྙོམ་སྒོམ་།
འཁོར་འདས་གཉིས་ལ་ལྟད་མོ་བལྟ་།
འདི་ཕྱི་གཉིས་ཀྱི་དོར་ལ་འབད་།
ལྷ་འདྲེ་གཉིས་ལ་དབང་དུ་བསྡུ་།
དགྲ་གདོན་ [P. 174] གཉིས་ལ་བྲན་བུ་འཁོལ་།

The servants of your land, Yama,
if their force is great,
now is the time to show it off!
If their power is great,

ཁྱོད་གཤིན་རྗེའི་ཡུལ་གྱི་ལས་མཁན་རྣམས་།
སྟོབས་དེ་ལས་ཆེ་ན་ངོམས་རན་ཡོད་།

now is the time to show it off.
If they [run] quickly,
now is the time to run!
If they are strong by the empowerments,
now is the time to show it off!
If they are wise from Dharma,
now is the time to explain [dharma].
If they have great strength and heroics,
fall out and show it!
If they have magical powers / emanations,
stake them on the sky!
If they have emanations,
let them enter the ground!
If they have heroism and bravery,
let them challenge me!

As the ancients say,
a cur does not encounter a leopard!
When you are near your own door,
you laugh at me,
but the small bird does not encounter a hawk.
Yet, when they fly in the sky,
Each has great skill in flight!
Although the donkey and the horse do not meet,
when they are in their own unique state,
the competition is intense.
Although your servants haven’t met Gesar,
there is great fear in the land of Yama.

My parents are of the six classes beings.
I, the son Gesar, will be the cause
of leading my mother [out of hell].
I am the buddha who has obtained the ten grounds.
I will lead sentient beings to Buddhahood.
What I see, I kill, [because] I am the man Gesar.
What I kill, I leads [it to a pure land]
Because I am the man, Gesar.
I am the Mahasiddha, King of Dharma.

When I, Gesar, lived in the god realms,
my father was called Tshangpa Karpo. [Brahma]
My mother was Lhasa Potshog.
I, the son, was Lhabu Dhondrup.
I am the man who protected

མཐུ་དེ་བས་ཆེ་ན་སྟོན་རན་རེད།
བང་དེ་བས་མགྱོགས་ན་རྒྱུག་རན་རེད།
དབང་དེ་ལས་བཙན་ན་ངོམས་རན་རེད། །
ཆོས་དེ་ལས་མཁས་ན་འཆད་རན་རེད།
དཔའ་རྩལ་ཆེན་ཡོད་ན་གདོན་ལ་བུད།
རྫུ་འཕྲུལ་ཡོད་ན་གནམ་ལ་ཕུར།
སྤྲུལ་པ་ཡོད་ན་ས་འོག་འཛུལ།
དཔའ་ངར་མ་ཡིན་ན་ང་ལ་འགྲན།

གནའ་མི།
ཁྱི་ངན་གཟིག་དང་མ་ཐུག་བར།
རང་སྒོ་རྩར་ཡོད་དུས་ངར་བཞད་ཆེ།
བྱིས་ཆུང་ཁྲ་དང་མ་ཕྲད་བར།
བར་སྣང་ཕུར་དུས་གཤོག་རྩལ་ཆེ།
བོང་བུ་རྟ་དང་མ་ཕྲད་བར།
རང་གཅིག་པུར་འགྲོ་དུས་བང་ཁ་ཚ།
ཁྱོད་ལས་མཁའ་གེ་སར་མ་ཐུག་བར།
ཤི་དམྱལ་བའི་ཡུལ་ལ་འཇིགས་རེ་ཆེ།

ང་གེ་སར་ཕ་མ་རིགས་དྲུག་ཡིན།
བུ་གེ་སར་གྱི་ཨ་མ་འདྲེན་རྒྱུ་ཡིན།
ང་ས་བཅུ་ཐོབ་པའི་སངས་རྒྱས་ཡིན།
སངས་རྒྱས་ཀྱི་སེམས་ཅན་འདྲེན་རྒྱུ་ཡིན།
མཐོང་ཚད་ [P. 175] བསད་མི་གེ་སར་ཡིན།
བསད་ཚད་འདྲེན་མི་གེ་སར་ཡིན།
ང་གྲུབ་ཆེན་ཆོས་ཀྱི་རྒྱལ་པོ་ཡིན།

ང་གེ་སར་ལྷ་གནས་བཞུགས་དུས་དེར།
ཕ་ཡབ་ཚངས་པ་དཀར་པོ་ཟེར།
མ་ཡུམ་ལྷ་ཟ་བོ་ཚོགས་ཡིན།
བུ་ང་རང་ལྷ་བུ་དོན་གྲུབ་ཡིན།

the teachings [of] the god realm.

ལྷ་ཁམས་བསྟན་པ་སྲུང་མི་ཡིན་

When I came to the realm of the middle Nyen,
my father was Nyenje Gerdzom
and my mother was Nyensa Odron.
I was the Nyen Kulha Gardzom.
I am the one who protected
the teachings of the golden Nyen.

བར་གཉེན་གྱི་ཡུལ་དུ་འདུག་དུས་དེར། [4]
ཕ་ཡབ་གཉེན་རྗེ་གེར་འཛོམ་ཡིན།
མ་ཡུམ་གཉན་བཟའ་འོད་སྒྲོན་ཡིན།
ང་གཉན་ཆེན་སྐུ་ལྷ་གར་འཛོམ་ཡིན།
གཉེན་སེར་པོའི་བསྟན་པ་སྲུང་མི་ཡིན།

When I was in the lower Lu realm,
my father was the naga king Jogpo.
My mother was Lumo Dedan.
I myself was called Auspicious Brahmin.

འོག་མ་ཀླུ་ལ་འདུག་དུས་འདིར།
ཕ་ཡབ་ཀླུ་རྒྱལ་འཇོག་པོ་ཡིན།
་མ་ཡུམ་ཀླུ་མོ་བདེ་ལྡན་ཡིན།
ང་རང་བྲམ་ཟེ་བཀྲིས་ཟེར།

When I am in the land of pretty Ling,
my father is King Senglon
and my mother is Goksa Lhamo.
I myself am Gesar [of] the World.
I am the man who attained
the establishment of the teachings
[for] the black-haired Tibetans.
I am the man who attained the Master's teachings!
I am the man who protected
the divine Buddhist teachings.
I am the man who protected the buddha's
teachings.
I am the man who worked
for the welfare of sentient beings.
I am the man who tamed
the malicious Hor demons.
I am the complete refuge
for 500 beings of the six realms.
I have taken up 500 of those impurely born.

ང་ཁྲ་མོ་གླིང་ལ་འདུག་དུས་སུ།
ཕ་ཡབ་སེང་བློན་རྒྱལ་པོ་ཡིན།
མ་ཡུམ་འགོགས་བཟའ་ལྷ་མོ་ཡིན།
ང་རང་འཛམ་གླིང་གེ་སར་ཡིན།
བོད་དབུ་ནག་བསྟན་ཚུས་སྒྲུབ་མི་ཡིན།
སློབ་དཔོན་བསྟན་ཆོས་སྒྲུབ་མི་ཡིན།
ལྷ་ཐུབ་པའི་བསྟན་པ་སྲུང་མི་ཡིན།
ཆོས་སངས་རྒྱས་བསྟན་པ་སྐྱོང་མི་ཡིན། ་
སེམས་ཅན་འགྲོ་དོན་བྱེད་མི་ [P. 176] ཡིན།
ཧོར་འདུད་འདྲེ་སྲིན་བདུལ་མི་ཡིན།
འགྲོ་དྲུག་ཡོངས་ཀྱི་སྐྱབས་སྔ་བརྒྱ་བླངས།
མ་དག་པའི་སྐྱེ་བ་ལྔ་བརྒྱ་བླངས།
སྐྱེ་བ་འདི་ཡི་གོང་རོལ་ལ། ལྷ་རྣམ་པར་རྒྱལ་
བའི་ཁང་བཟང་དུ། ལྷ་དབང་བརྒྱ་བྱིན་སྲས་པོ་ལ།
ལྷ་བུ་དོན་གྲུབ་གཅེས་སུ་བཏགས།

[4] This line is combined with the one before it in the text to form a single line of 15 syllables, but I have broken it in two hereto reflect the change in topic. My line count continues to consider it as one.

A long time ago from this rebirth,
in the divine mansion of the powerful prince Indra,
[called] Complete Victory,
I was called the cherished Lhabu Dondrup.
I had the clairvoyance of the gods above
and could also produce bliss.
I played with 100 divine princes,
and I was the best among them.
I cause women to burst forth [with emotion].
I cut through the swamp like an arrow
They said, "[Be] the man who plants the buddha's
teachings and makes established
all sentient beings in meditation.
Lhabu Dundrup, descend!"
Like bliss, the command to go [to earth]
arose and they said,
"You must go to Tibet
in the transient world!"
They cast divinations for me
and gave the summary of five houses for me
and a prophecy descended upon me,
the divine prince.

སྔོན་ལྷ་ཡི་མངོན་ཤེས་ང་ལ་ཡོད།
བདེ་བ་སྐྱིད་པ་གཉིས་ཀ་འཛོམ།
ལྷ་ཕྲུག་བརྒྱ་དང་རྩེད་མོ་རྩེ།
ང་ལྷ་ཕྲུག་བརྒྱ་ཡི་ནང་ཕུད་ལ།
མོ་རྩོལ་བཞིན་དུ་བརྒྱུས་ལེ་རེད།
མདའ་སྨྱུག་གཞིན་དུ་འདམ་ལེ་རེད།
སྤྱིར་སངས་རྒྱས་བསྟན་པ་བཙུགས་མི་དང་།
སྒོམ་སེམས་ཅན་ཡོངས་ཀྱི་འདུག་ཚུས་བཅས།
ལྷ་བུ་དོན་གྲུབ་བབ་དོ་གསུངས།
དབེ་བཞིན་གཤེགས་པ༑ཨི་བཀའ་བྱུང་བས།
ཁྱོད་འཛིག་རྟེན་བོད་ལ་འགྲོ་དགོས་གསུངས།
ལྷ་བུ་ང་ལ་མོ་རྩིས་བབས།
མ་མཁྲོ་སྤེ་ལྔའི་ཤག་དྲིལ་གནང་།
ལྷ་ [P. 177] འཕྲུག་ང་ལ་ལུང་བསྟན་བབས།

From immeasurable, pure, divine joy,
I did not emerge from
my hideout of refuge.
[They said] "Do not break the words
of the Divine Subduer.
Listen to the words like the Master's teachings!"
It arose that I must come to
the transient world of Tibet.
From the time I came,
I did attained the establishment of teachings,
And established them completely
for the general sentient beings.
I endeavored to plant the teachings
of the buddha's meditation.
I have tamed peaceful and wrathful
blood thirsty demons.

ལྷ་བདེ་སྐྱིད་དག་པའི་གཞལ་ཡས་ནས།
ང་བྲོས་སའི་གབ་ཁུང་མ་བྱུང་ནས།
ལྷ་ཐུབ་པའི་བཀའ་དེ་མ་བཅག་གསུངས།
སློབ་དཔོན་གསུང་བཞིན་བཀའ་ཉན་གསུངས།
ང་འཛིག་རྟེན་བོད་ལ་འོང་དགོས་བྱུང་།
འོང་ནས་དེ་སྔ་ཕན་ཆོད་ལ།
ང་སྐྱེས་བུས་བསྟན་ཚུས་མ་སྒྲུབ་མེད།
སྤྱིར་སེམས་ཅན་ཡོངས་ཀྱི་འདུག་ཚུས་བྱུས།
སྒོམ་སངས་རྒྱས་བསྟན་པ་འཛུགས་ཐབས་བྱུས།
བདུད་འདྲེ་སྲིན་ཞི་དྲག་དང་ནས་བཏུལ།

I have accurately calculated
the white and black action of cause and effect,
and Mother Gokmo was virtuous at her death!
We planted funerary flags as numerous
as the hairs on her head.
We recited the words of the Dharma

ལས་དཀར་ནག་རྒྱུ་འབྲས་ཞིབ་རྩིས་ཆེ།
མ་འགོགས་མོ་ཤི་བའི་དགེ་རྩ་ལ།
མགོ་སྐྲ་ཟག་གྲངས་ལ་ཇོ་དར་བཙུགས།

as numerous as the hairs on her body. We erected 49 gold stūpas and privy seals. We wrote innumerable poems in her honor The actions of virtuous dharma she did transcend beyond counting. And yet kind Mother Gokmo Goes to hell for doing her Dharmic actions. It should not arise that the Dharma has no benefit for her and that she has the time to wander bardo [after] death. It [should not] reach the conclusion that she is [humiliated] in the 18 cold and hot hells. It does not add up! I, Gesar, have come in chase, Yet [you] speak to me poorly.	ལུས་བ་སྤུ་གྲངས་ལ་བཀའ་ཆོས་གློག་། ཀལ་ཚོག་བཞི་བཅུ་ཞེས་དགུ་ལ་། གསེར་གདུང་བཞི་བཅུ་ཞེ་དགུ་བཞེངས་། ལུས་ལྷུག་ཚོག་གྲངས་མང་བྱས་། ཆོས་དགེ་བ་འདི་བྱས་གྲངས་ལས་འདས་། [1.280] དྲིན་ཅན་ཨ་མ་འགོགས་མོ་དེ་། ་ ཆོས་དེ་འདྲ་བྱས་པས་དམྱལ་བར་འགྲོ་། ཆོས་དེ་འདྲའི་ཕན་པ་མ་ཡོད་ནས་། ཤི་ [P. 178] བར་དོ་འཁྱིམ་ལོང་མ་བྱུང་བར་། དམའ་དམྱལ་ཁམས་བཅོ་བརྒྱད་ཁྲིམས་ལ་གཏུག་། [1.285] ད་ཙུང་དེ་བས་མི་ཚད་པ་། ་ ང་གེ་སར་ར་མདའ་འོང་བ་ལ་། ཁ་ཚིག་ངན་པ་ང་ལ་བཏང་།
My method of thinking is like this. I doubt that [you King Yama] have Dharma I think if you have dharma, you do not fall to hell. I think it is not possible that the fruit of your practice is the iron ore. I think it is not possible [for you to fall into] the ocean of blazing fire. I think good karma with a bad result is not possible. This bad fruit of virtue, I have never seen like today!	ང་གེ་སར་བསམ་ཚུལ་འདི་འདྲ་ཡོད་། ཆོས་ཡོད་མེད་འདྲ་འདྲ་ཨེ་ཡིན་བསམ་། [1.290] ཆོས་ཡོད་ན་དམྱལ་བར་མི་ལྷུང་བསམ་། ལྕགས་རྡོ་ལ་འབྲས་བུ་མི་སྲིད་བསམ་། རྒྱ་མཚོ་ལ་མེ་འབར་མི་ནུས་བསམ། ལས་བཟང་འབྲས་ངན་པ་མི་སྲིད་བསམ་། དགེ་བ་ལ་འབྲས་བུ་ངན་པ་འདི་། [1.295] ལས་དེ་རིང་མིན་པ་མཐོང་མ་མྱོང་།
I perceive your thought King Yama. I doubt my mother was without dharma. If she has dharma, I will lead her up. Where is my mother, tell her son! [Let] my own mother go on the path to enlightenment.	ཁྱོད་གཤིན་རྗེ་ཆོས་རྒྱལ་ཐུགས་བསམ་མཐོང་། ངའི་ཨ་མ་ཆོས་མེད་ཨེ་རེད་ལགས་། ཆོས་ཡོད་ཡིན་ན་ཡར་ལ་ཁྲིད་། མ་གར་ཡོད་བུ་ཡི་ཛ་བར་ཤོག་། [1.300] རང་མ་བུ་བྱང་ཆུབ་ལམ་ལ་འགྲོ་།
Her son Gesar has come on chase! Let me see my kind mother with my own eye! Let me hear the speech with my ear! If my eye does not see the body of my mother, if my ear does not hear her,	བུ་གེ་སར་ར་མདའ་འོང་ལེ་ཡིན་། དྲིན་ཨ་མ་མིག་གིས་ཨེ་མཐོང་དོ་། གཏམ་རྣ་བའི་ཨེ་ཐོས་མའི་ལུས་དེ་།

the essence of my mind will be bowed inwards.
May karmic causality take root in her son!

མིག་མི་མཐོང་ན་བས་མ་ཐོས་ན་།
སེམས་རིག་པའི་ངོ་བོ་ཚུར་ལ་ཁུག་།
ལས་རྒྱུ་འབྲས་བུ་ཡི་རྩ་བར་ཞིག་།

I am her only son, Gesar!
Do you understand my speech
about my kind mother!
If I do not see her, there will be famine!
This sadness now has no benefit!
If my mother were posited in hell, I am not Gesar.
If my mother is not established on the path to enlightenment,
it is a symbol that her son Gesar is uncompassionate.
Through the blessing of the three excellent jewels,
may we, mother and son
meet with our self-essence.

ང་བུ་ [P. 179] གཅིག་ཡོད་པ་གེ་སར་ཡིན་།
དྲིན་ཨ་མའི་གསུང་སྐད་ཨེ་གོ་དོ་།
མ་མཐོང་ཡིན་སྨུག་ཏུ་ལུ་ལུ་།
ད་ཡི་སྨུག་བྱས་པས་ཕན་པ་མེད་།
མ་དམྱལ་བར་བཞག་ན་གེ་སར་མིན་།
མ་ཐར་པའི་ལམ་ལ་མ་བཀོད་ན་།
བུ་གེ་སར་ཐུགས་རྗེ་མེད་རྟགས་ཡིན་།
ལྷ་དཀོན་མཆོག་གསུམ་གྱི་བྱིན་རླབས་ཀྱིས་།
ངེད་མ་བུ་རང་ངོ་ཕྲོད་པར་ཤོག་།
ལྷ་མ་གཡེལ་ད་ལྷ་བྱིན་གྱིས་རློབས་།

Please grant your blessings with care now, god!
Keep this in your heart, Dharma king and executioners!

ཆོས་རྒྱལ་དང་ལས་མཁན་ཐུགས་ལ་ཞོག་།
་གོ་ན་། ཅེས་གསུངས་སོ་།

[KING YAMA TO GESAR]

OM MANI PADME HUM!
LE LI LA LO!

ཨོ་མ་། ཨེ་ཡི་ལ་མོ་།

It is Yama's turn to sing!
If you do not know this land,
this land is the humiliating realm of hell!
It is the terminating space
of both positive and negative karma.
It is the Lord of the Dharma's court of law
for both sin and virtue.
It is the land of differentiating
good and bad karmic causality.
If you have dharma,
it is the land of going on the path of liberation.
If you do not have dharma,

ཨེ་ཡི་གཤིན་རྗེའི་ཁ་ལུགས་རེད་།
ཨེ་ཡི་ངག་གི་། ས་འདི་།
དམའ་ན་རག་དམྱལ་ཁམས་བཙོ་བརྒྱད་རེད་།
ལམ་དཀར་ནག་གཉིས་ཀྱི་འདུས་མདོ་རེད་།
དཔོན་ཆོས་རྒྱལ་སྡིག་དགེའི་ཁྲིམས་ར་རེད་།
ལས་རྒྱུ་འབྲས་དཀར་ནག་ཕྱེ་ས་རེད་། ་
ཆོས་ཡོད་ཐར་ལམ་འགྲོ་ས་རེད་།

it is the land of being flung to hell.

If you do not know me,
I am the King of Dharma, Yama.
I am the exalted peaceful body of Mañjuśrī.
My exalted mind is the compassionate
Lord Avalokiteśvara.
If I have a wrathful exalted mind,
it is Dharma King Yama!

King Gesar of Ling!
Above the splendid mountains is the sky,
but if you think I am only a high mountain,
you are without sense!
Above the chief leader is the Dharma King.
If you think I am a demon, you are deluded.
Greater than the white vulture is the great Garuda.
If you think I am just creative play,
it is our own suffering.
Boats and bridges reside above the great water.
If you think your force is greater,
you will become cold [in the water].
Demons, ghosts, and protector spirits,
I can harm and destroy myself.
Hell is greater than the transient world.
If you realize the nature of your own mind,
there is neither suffering nor bliss.
If you do not have the fruits of virtuous karma,
you will have difficulties.

You are called King of the World, Gesar.
You do not need to explain,
with your tiny letters, it is clear.
You, who have achieved virtue
and abandoned the sin of Ling,
you do not need to speak, within my mirror,
your identity is clear.
You do not need to speak of the
Dharma practice of Mother Gokmo,
it will be weighed on the balance.

You do not need to explain your liberation when
you, Gesar, resided in the god realm,
I the Dharma King Yama am the power of the gods

ཆོས་མེད་དམྱལ་བར་ [P. 180] འཕེན་ས་རེད་།

མི་ང་འདྲ་ང་ངོ་མ་ཤེས་ན་། [l.10]
ང་གཤིན་རྗེ་ཆོས་ཀྱི་རྒྱལ་པོ་ཡིན་།
སྐུ་ཞི་བ་འཕགས་པ་འཇམ་དཔལ་ཡིན་།
ཐུགས་སྙིང་རྗེ་སྤྱན་རས་གཟིགས་དབང་ཡིན་།
ཐུགས་ཁྲོས་ན་གཤིན་རྗེ་ཆོས་རྒྱལ་ཡིན་།

གླིང་རྗེ་གེ་སར་རྒྱལ་པོ་ལགས་། [l.15]
རི་མཐོན་པོའི་གོང་ལ་ནམ་མཁའ་ཡོད་། ་
ཕི་ང་མཐོ་བསམ་ན་དོན་མེད་ཡིན་།
དཔོན་བཙན་པོའི་གོང་ལ་ཆོས་རྒྱལ་ཡོད་།
དཔོན་ང་བཙན་བསམ་ན་འཁྲུལ་སྣང་ཡིན་། [17]
བྱ་ཐང་དཀར་གོང་ལ་ཁྱུང་ཆེན་ཡོད་། [l.20]
རྩལ་ང་ཆེ་བསམ་ན་རང་སྡུག་ཡིན་།
ཆུ་ཆེན་པོའི་སྟེང་ལ་གྲུ་ཟམ་ཡོད་། ་
ཤུགས་ང་ཆེ་བསམ་ན་འཁྱུགས་ལ་འགྱུར་།
འདྲེ་འབྱུང་པོའི་གོང་ལ་ལྷ་སྲུང་ཡོད་།
གནོད་ངས་ཐུབ་བསམ་ན་རང་བརླག་ཡིན་། [l.25]
གནས་འཇིག་རྟེན་གོང་ན་དམྱལ་བ་ཡོད་།
སེམས་རང་ངོ་འཕྲོད་ན་མི་སྡུག་བདེ་།
ལས་དགེ་འབྲས་མེད་ན་དཀའ་མོ་ཡོད་།

་ཁྱོད་འཛམ་གླིང་གེ་སར་རྒྱལ་པོ་ཟེར་།
བཤད་མ་དགོས་ཡིག་ཆུང་ནང་ལ་གསལ་། [l.30]
ཁྱོད་གླིང་གི་དགེ་སྒྲུབས་སྡིག་སྤངས་དེ་།
་བརྗོད་མི་དགོས་མེ་ལོང་ [P. 181] ནང་ལ་གསལ་།
ཨ་མ་འགོགས་མོའི་ཆོས་བསྐལ་དེ་།
་བརྗོད་མི་དགོས་རྒྱ་མ་ནང་ལ་བཀུག་།

ཁྱོད་གེ་སར་ལྷ་གནས་ཡོད་དུས་དེར་། [l.40]
ལྷ་བླ་མའི་རྣམ་ཐར་བཤད་མི་དགོས་།

I myself am greater than you in measure.	ང་གཤིན་རྗེས་ཆོས་རྒྱལ་ལྷ་དབང་ཡིན་། ཁྱོད་ལས་ཞིབ་ཆ་ང་རང་ཆེ་།
When you resided as a Nyen spirit, you do not need to explain the idle chatter of the golden Nyen. I, the Dharma King Yama, am the great Nyen! I myself am greater than you in measure.	ཁྱེད་སྐྱེས་བུ་གཉེན་ལ་བཞུགས་དུས་དེར་། གཉེན་སེར་པོའི་འཇིག་གཏམ་བཤད་མི་དགོས་། [1.45] ང་གཤིན་རྗེ་ཆོས་རྒྱལ་གཉེན་ཆེན་ཡིན་། ཁྱོད་ལས་ཞིབ་ཆ་ང་རང་ཆེ་།
When you resided in the lower realm of the nagas, there is no need to explain the joyful cruelty of the nagas, I, the Dharma King Yama, am a naga demon! I am greater than you in measure!	ཁྱོད་འོག་མ་ཀླུ་ལ་བཞུགས་དུས་དེར་། ཀླུ་དགའ་པོའི་གདུག་རྩུབ་བཤད་མི་དགོས་། ང་གཤིན་རྗེ་ཆོས་རྒྱལ་ཀླུ་བདུད་ཡིན་། [1.50] ཁྱོད་ལས་ཞིབ་ཆ་ང་རང་ཆེ་།
The great accomplishment of establishing the divine teachings of the Subduer, you do not need to explain with great, fearful speech. I, Yama, am undifferentiated from realized buddhas. I am greater than you in measure!	ལྷ་ཐུབ་པའི་བསྟན་ཆུས་སྒྲུབ་རབ་དེ་། ཁྱོད་ཆེ་སྟེ་འཇིགས་གཏམ་བཤད་མི་དགོས་། ང་གཤིན་རྗེ་སངས་རྒྱས་དབྱེར་མེད་ཡིན་། ཁྱོད་ལས་ཞུབ་ཆ་ང་རང་ཆེ་། [1.55]
You do not need to describe your great support for and achievement of establishing the divine teachings of Orgyan Padma. The Master and I, we two cannot be differentiated. I am greater than you in measure!	ལྷ་ཨོ་རྒྱན་པདྨའི་བསྟན་ཆུས་དེ་། སྒྲུབ་རབ་སྐྱོངས་རབ་བཤད་མི་དགོས་། སློབ་དཔོན་ངེད་གཉིས་དབྱེ་བ་མེད་། ཁྱོད་ལས་ཞིབ་ཆ་ང་རང་ཆེ་།
There is no need to recount the history of [your] difficult discipline [within the] precious teachings of the Buddha. I am the Dharma King, the man who calculates karmic causality. I am greater than you in measure!	ཆོས་སངས་རྒྱས་བསྟན་པ་རིན་པོ་ཆེ་། [1.60] བཙུན་དཀའ་བའི་ལོ་རྒྱུས་བགྲངས་མི་དགོས་། ལས་རྒྱུ་འབྲས་རྩིས་མི་ [P. 182] ཆོས་རྒྱལ་ཡིན་།་ ཁྱོད་ལས་ཞིབ་ཆ་ང་རང་ཆེ་།
You do not need to speak courageous talk about your taming of the demons Dudmi and Kurkar, Yama already knows the fate of for those who accompany you. I am greater than you in detail. I, King of the Doctrine, Yama,	བདུད་མི་ཟན་ཀུར་དཀར་སྲིན་པོ་རྣམས་། བཏུལ་ཐུབ་པའི་དཔའ་སྐད་བརྗོད་མི་དགོས་། [1.65] སྡོང་གྲོགས་ལུང་བསྟན་གཤིན་རྗེས་བྱུས་། ཁྱོད་ལས་ཞིབ་ཆ་ང་རྣག་ཆེ་།

am the great presence,
the mountain king of Mt. Meru.
I am renowned as the
awe-inspiring call of the great dragon.
My unborn exalted mind
is the great vastness of sky.

ང་གཞིན་རྗེ་ཆོས་ཀྱི་རྒྱལ་པོ་དེ་།
སྐུ་ཆེ་བ་རི་རྒྱལ་ལྷུན་པོ་ཡིན་།
གསུང་ཛམ་པ་འབྲུག་ཆེན་སྒྲག་གྲགས་ཡིན་།
ཐུགས་སྐྱེ་མེད་ནམ་མཁའི་ཀློང་ཡངས་ཡིན་།

I am the powerful Dharma king, Yama!
I am the powerful noose of lightning and thunder!
You, precious being born of the world,
whose white pennant flies high from your head.
[I] am so high, I join together
with the sun and moon in the sky.
By your perception, it is a cause of fear,
to me it is not.
You, precious being born of the world,
The sway in your armor called White Light
so that [its white light] appears
equal to the stars in the sky.
Some are frightened by its brilliance, but I am not.

སྟོབས་ཆེ་བ་གཤིན་རྗེ་ཆོས་རྒྱལ་རེད་།
རྩལ་ཆེ་བ་གློག་ཞགས་ཐོག་མདོད་ཡིན་།
ཁྱོད་འཛམ་གླིང་སྐྱེས་བུ་རིན་པོ་ཆེ་།
དབུ་སོག་དཀར་དར་འཕྱུ་དགུང་ལས་མཐོ་།
དགུང་ཉི་ཟླ་གཉིས་དང་མཐོ་སྡེབ་རེད་།
ཁྱོད་མཐོང་བས་སྐྲག་རྒྱུ་ང་ལ་མེད་།
ཁྱོད་འཛམ་གླིང་སྐྱེས་བུ་རིན་པོ་ཆེ་།
སྐུ་ཁྲབ་དཀར་འོད་ཟེར་ཤིགས་སེ་ཤིག་།
བར་སྣང་སྐར་ཚོགས་གྲངས་མཉམ་རེད་།
བཀྲག་ཆེ་བས་འཇིགས་རྒྱུ་ང་ལ་མེད་།

You, precious being of the world
sway and whirl with three
black weapons at your waist,
it is an amount equal to a
[great] sandalwood forest.
There is no cause of fear for me
in the binding weaponry.

ཁྱོད་འཛམ་གླིང་སྐྱེས་བུ་རིན་པོ་ཆེ་།
སྐེད་འཁོར་གསུམ་སྨྱུག་ནག་ཤིགས་སེ་ཤིག་།
ནགས་ཙན་དན་ཤིང་དང་གྲངས་མཉམ་རེད་།
གོ་བཙན་པས་ང་ལ་འཇིགས་རྒྱུ་མེད་།

You, precious being of the world,
[say] your horse Kyangbu
is quick like a violent hurricane.
Although your horse is fast,
it cannot race on this land.

ཁྱོད་འཛམ་གླིང་། [P. 183]
རྟ་རྐྱང་བུ་མགྱོགས་པ་རླུང་ལྷར་འཚུབས་།
རྟ་མགྱོགས་ཀྱང་རྒྱུག་ས་འདི་ན་མེད་།

You, precious being of the world,
[say] that you are allowed to lead mother Gokmo
on the path of liberation,
for the great sins of her son Gesar,
[she must] repay.
The kind mother is not without dharma,
it is her son's great sins that
will mature in the body of Gokmo.

ཁྱོད་འཛམ་གླིང་།
མ་འགོགས་མོ་ཐར་ལམ་འདྲེན་ཆོག་སྟེ་།
བུ་གེ་སར་སྡིག་པ་ཆེ་བས་ལན་།
དྲིན་ཨ་མ་ཆོས་མེད་མ་རེད་དེ་།
བུ་སྡིག་པ་ཆེ་བའི་རྣམ་སྨིན་རེད་།
མ་འགོགས་མོའི་ལུས་ལ་སྨིན་ལེ་རེད་

From before until now,
when you cut demon heads
with the sword you carry,
you will cut your own divine head instead.
[In] the land of Yama and my cold realm,
it will now be like that.
When you swing your weapon with great energy,
before you cut the heads of your enemies in twain.
From now on,
you will cut your own head into pieces.

ཁྱོད་དེ་སྔ་དེ་སྔོན་ཕན་ཆད་ལ།
མཚོན་གཡུགས་པས་བདུད་མགོ་མང་པོ་བཅད།
དུས་ལྷ་རང་མགོ་རང་གིས་བཅད།
གསོན གྲང་ང་ཁམས་དང་གཤིན་རྗེའི་ཡུལ། '
དེ་ཨེ་འདྲ་མི་འདྲ་ད་རེས་ཤེས།
ཁྱོད་རྩལ་ཆེན་མཚོང་ཆ་རྡོ་ལེ་དེ།
དུས་དེ་སྔ་དགྲ་མགོ་ཕར་ལ་བཅད།
དུས་དེ་རིང་རང་མགོ་རང་གིས་བཏུབ།

Although you think you are like me, you're not!
What is the energy and power of I, Yama?
My executioners do not harm my body!
It is as if there are no karmic causalities.
It is the Dharmic system of
differentiating sin and virtue of Dharma.
Then, precious Gesar, your kind mother
lives in my cold realm.
For kind parents who do not have great karma.
Now is the time repay
the kindness of Mother Gokmo!

ང་འདྲ་འདྲ་བསམ་ཀྱང་མི་འདྲ་ཨམ།
ང་གཤིན་རྗེའི་ནུས་མཐུ་ཨེ་རིག་དོ།
ཁོང་ལས་མཁན་ལུས་ལ་མི་གནོད་པར།
ལས་རྒྱུ་འབྲས་རྣམས་མིན་དེ་འདྲ་རེད།
ཆོས་དགེ་སྡིག་ཕྱེ་ལུགས་དེ་འདྲ་རེད།
དེ་ནས་གེ་སར་རིན་པོ་ཆེ།
གསོན་གྲང་ང་ཁམས་ཀྱི་དྲིན་ཅན་མ།
དྲིན་ཕ་མ་གཉིས་ལས་ [P. 184] ཆེ་བ་མེད།
མ་འགོགས་མོ་དྲིན་ལན་གཟོ་རན་རེད།

The suffering of Mother Gokmo
is happening in the 18 hot and cold hells.
The iron ore is difficult to bear—
it is unbearable for the body, flesh, and blood.
On the great blazing plain of roasting iron,
She is cut to pieces by
many swords of roasting iron.
Boiling metal is poured into her mouth.
Each hour, she dies once.
Day and Night, she dies and is restored 60 times.
A red-hot iron saw cuts her body into pieces.
Her flesh and bone are cut into a thousand pieces.
Still, like that, there are measures in the beginning.
[This is] the experience
of the 18 hot hells and cold hells.
A tiny bit of the experience of the 18
neighborhoods does

དུས་དེང་སང་འགོག་མོའི་སྡུག་བསྔལ་དེ།
དམྱལ་ཁམས་བཅོ་བརྒྱད་སྐྱོང་ཞིང་ཡོད།
ལྕགས་རྡོ་ཡིན་ཀྱང་བཟོད་པར་དཀའ།
ལུས་ཤ་ཁྲག་གི་བརྗོད་བརྣག་གང་ན་ཡོད།
ལྕགས་སྲེགས་ཀྱི་ཐང་ཆེན་འབར་བ་ལ།
ལྕགས་སྲེགས་ཀྱི་མཚོན་ཆ་མང་པོས་བཏུབ།
ཁ་ལ་ཁྲོ་ཆུ་ཁོལ་མ་བླུད།
ཆུ་ཚོད་རེ་ལ་ཤི་ཐང་རེ།
ཉིན་མཚན་ཤི་གསོས་དྲུག་ཅུ་རེད།
ལྕགས་སྲེག་སོག་ལེས་ལུས་པོ་གཏུབ།
ཤ་རུས་ཚལ་པ་སྟོང་དུ་གཏུབ།
ད་རུང་དེ་འདྲ་ག་ལ་ཚད།
ཚ་དམྱལ་གྲང་དམྱལ་བཅོ་བརྒྱ་སྐྱོང་།

not speak of the suffering of hell realms.
How pitiful for those deserving of compassion!
It is the maturation of the great sins of the son.
You [cannot] think of joy or think of pain.
Still, it goes like that in the beginning.

ཉེ་ཚེ་ཉེ་འཁོར་བཅོ་བརྒྱད་སྐྱོང་།
དམྱལ་ཁམས་སྡུག་བསྔལ་བརྗོད་མི་ལང་།
ལས་ཨ་བ་རི་ལ་སྙིང་རེ་རྗེ།
བུ་སྡིག་པ་ཆེ་བའི་རྣམ་སྨིན་རེད།
སྐྱིད་དགའ་དོ་བསམ་མམ་སྡུག་དོ་བསམ།
ད་རུང་དེ་འདྲ་ག་ལ་ཚད།

By killing the blood-drinking demons of Hor,
the flesh, bone, and blood
are made to be cut into pieces.
They are twisted by red-hot iron pinchers.
Her bones are beaten by hammers of red-hot iron.
Her large and small intestine is
transformed into a ball of yarn.
She cries out, "A tsa! A na!"
By the roars of killing and torture,
heaven and earth are filled.
The sufferings of my hell realms
are beyond explanation.

བདུད་སྲིན་པོ་ཧོར་རིགས་བསད་ཚད་ཀྱིས།
ཤ་རུས་ཁྲག་གཏུབ་བྱེད་ཅིང་ཡོད།
ལྕགས་སྲེག་སྐམ་ [P. 185] པས་བཙུན་ཞིང་ཡོད།
རུས་པ་ལྕགས་སྲེག་ཐོ་བས་བརྡུང་།
རྒྱུ་དཀར་ནག་གྲུ་གུ་ཟློག་པ་བྱས།
ལས་ཨ་མ་ན་ཙྪ་འབོད་ཀྱི།
སྐྱོབ་གསོད་ཙུར་སྒྲས་གནམ་ས་གང་།
ལས་མཁན་མཚོན་ཐོགས་མང་པོ་ཡིས།
ང་དམྱལ་བའི་སྡུག་བསྔལ་བཤད་ཚོག་མེད།

It is the maturation of the great sins of the son.
If you have love and compassion,
it is time to restore her.
If you are the divine lama,
it is time to lead her.
If you have virtuous dharma practice,
it is time to act!
If you have a quick horse, it is time to race it!
If you are a heroic son, it is the time to fight!
If you have strong armor, it is the time to wear it.
If you have a sharp weapon,
it is the time to thrust it!
If you are the hero of Ling Gesar,
demonstrate by leading [the charge]
[like when you] killed demons and rakashas.

བུ་སྡིག་པ་ཆེ་བའི་རྣམ་སྨིན་རེད།
བྱམས་སྙིང་རྗེ་ཡོད་ན་གསོ་རན་རེད།
ལྷ་བླ་མ་ཡོད་ན་འདྲེན་རན་རེད།
ཆོས་དགེ་བ་ཡོད་ན་བྱེད་རན་རེད།
རྟ་མགྱོགས་པ་ཡོད་ན་རྒྱུག་རན་རེད།
བུ་དཔའ་བོ་ཡོད་ན་འཐབ་རན་རེད།
གོ་བཙན་པོ་ཡོད་ན་གྱོན་རན་རེད།
མཚོན་རྣོན་པོ་ཡོད་ན་གཡུག་རན་རེད།
གླིང་གེ་སར་ཁྲོད་ལ་དཔའ་ཡོད་ན།
བདུད་སྲིན་པོ་བསད་ཚད་འདྲེན་སྟོན་བྱས།

Lead Mother Gokmo to the land of liberation!
If you are the hero Ling Gesar,
leisure from the copper pot of hell
[with] demons and blood-sucking demons.
Lead Mother Gokmo on the path of liberation.

མ་འགོགས་མོ་ཐར་པའི་ཞིང་ལ་ཁྲིད།
གླིང་གེ་སར་ཁྲོད་ལ་དཔའ་ཡོད་ན།
བདུད་སྲིན་པོ་དམྱལ་ཟངས་ཁ་ནས་ལོང་།

If Gesar of Ling has a heart,
free the human corpses from like when you killed the demons and blood-sucking monsters. Lead Mother Gokmo to the blissful Pure Land! Through love for a woman and her son,
go now to where Mother Gokmo is [held].
Keep this in your mind, son Gesar!

མ་འགོགས་མོ་ཐར་པའི་ཞིང་ལ་ཁྲིད་།
གླིང་གེ་སར་ཁྱོད་ལ་སྙིང་ཡོད་ན་།
བདུད་སྲིན་པོ་ [P. 186] བསད་ཚད་གཟུགས་ཕུང་སྒྲོལ་།
་མ་འགོགས་མོ་བདེ་བ་ཅན་ལ་ཁྲིད་། [l.155]
བུ་གཅིག་ཕུ་མ་ལ་བརྩེ་བས་ན་།
མ་འགོགས་མོ་གར་ཡོད་དུ་ལྷ་ཕེབས་།
བུ་གེ་སར་ཐུགས་ལ་དེ་ལྟར་ཞོག་།

Appendix 5

The Words of My Perfect Teacher citations feature first the page number of the Delhi Tibetan edition, followed by the page number of the 1994 Padmakara translation. The English in the following is based off of the 1994 Padmakara Translation of *The Word of My Perfect Teacher.*

Word of my Perfect Teacher	Nyeling
The upside-down pot. When you are listening to the teachings, listen to what is being said and do not let yourself be distracted by anything else. Otherwise you will be like an upside-down pot on which liquid is being poured. Although you are physically present, you do not hear a word of the teaching. *The pot with a hole in it.* If you just listen without remembering anything that you hear or understand, you will be **like a pot with a leak [snod zhabs rdol]**: however much liquid is **poured [blug pa]** into it, nothing can stay. No matter how many teachings you hear, you can never assimilate them or put them into practice. *The pot containing poison.* If you listen to the teachings wth the wrong attitude, such as the desre to become great or famous, or a mind full of the five poisons, the Dharma will not only fail to help your mind; it will also be changed into something that is not Dharma at all, like nectar poured into a pot containing poison. [14-15; WPT: 10-11]	If you do not listen to the profound dharma which the conqueror speaks, it will be like water sliding off a boulder. If you do not grasp whatever is said with your mind, you will be like a leaky pot [snod zhabs rdol] **filled [blug pa]** with ambrosia. Sentient beings mixing [with] poisonous afflictive emotions is like mixing poison with water from a vase [94; Song 2.1.42-48]
Avoid these six that will cause grief [skyo ba]: proudly believing yourself superior to the teacher who is explaining the Dharma, not trusting the master and his teachings, failing to apply your five senses too intently inwards, and being discouraged if, for example, a teaching is too long. [16-17 ; WPT: 12]	Now there are also the six defilements of grief [skyo ba] and pain. It is very important to remove those obstacles by your own effort. [94; Song 2.1.49-50]
Avoid remembering the words but forgetting the meaning, or remembering the meaning [brda'] but forgetting the words. Avoid remembering both but with no understanding, Remembering them out of order, or remembering them incorrectly. [23; WPT: 15 – citing root text]	You also must abandon the Five Non-Apprehensions like crossing the term with its meaning [brda] [94; Song 2.1.51-52]
Noble one, you should think of yourself as someone who is sick, of the Dharma as the	The Lama is the physician and the excellent dharma is the

remedy, of your spiritual friend as a skillful doctor and of diligent practice as the way to recovery. [24; WPT: 16]	medicine. As for yourself who sustains action (when the lama gives you teachings), you are the patient. Possessing the four humors is like faith. [94]
"Take the lowest seat. Cultivate bearing of thorough discipline. With your eyes brimming with joy, drink in the words like nectar and be completely concentrated. That is the way to listen to the teachings." [30-31; WPT: 18-19—citing jatakas]	Do not have your outside be white and your inside be black. Abandon and be like a crystal vase. Sit on the low seat and believe. Place the palm of the hands together at the heart in respect. In this lifetime, endeavor to strive towards some goal and it is important [to conduct] the real practice of authentic dharma. [95; Song 2.1.60-64]
"Lack of freedom" refers to those eight states where there is no such opportunity: Being born in the hells, in the preta realm, as an animal, a long-loved god or a barbarian, having wrong view, being born where there is no Buddha, or being born deaf and mute; these are the eight states with no freedom [31-32; WPT: 19-20—citing root text]	Having obtained this precious opportunity of a human life, obtaining it more than once is hard. It is difficult to acquire [realization] in a body which has the 8 unfavorable conditions. [95; Song 2.1.53-55]
"Nagarjuna lists them [the five individual advantages] as follows: Born a human, in a central place, with all one's faculties, without a conflicting lifestyle and with faith the Dharma….[the five circumstantial advantages are] A Buddha has appeared and has preached the Dharma, His teachings still exist and they are practiced, there are those who are kindhearted toward others." [35-43;WPT: 22-25—citing sutra and root text]	With the 10 freedoms, one's own power [to attain realization] is great. [95; Song 2.1.71]
"If you find that all these favorable conditions are present, you have what is known as "human life endowed with the eighteen freedoms and advantages."	If you possess the 18 conditions of being free and well-favored, whatever good or evil you obtain is your own doing. [95; Song 2.1.72-73]
By way of illustration, it is said that if the inhabitants of the hells were as numerous as stars in the night sky, the pretas would be no more numerous than the stars visible in the daytime; that if there were as many pretas as stars at night	Obtaining a human body is as rare as seeing a star in the daytime. [95; Song 2.1.77]

there would only be as many animals as stars in the daytime; and that if there were as many animals as stars at night, there would only be as many gods and humans as stars in the daytime.” [63; WPT: 34]	
It is also said that there are as many beings in hell as specks of dust in the whole world, as many pretas as particles of sand in the Ganges, as many animals as grains in a beer-barrel and as many asuras as snowflakes in a blizzard—but that gods and humans are as few as the particles of dust you can pile on your fingernail. [64; WPT: 34]	Sentient beings in Samsara [are as many] as all the particles of the finest dust. [95; Song 2.1.76]
You have what is called an ordinary human life, merely human life, hapless human life, or human life returning empty handed. It is like failing to use a wish-fulfilling gem despite holding it in your hands, or returning empty handed from a land full of precious gold. [65; WPT: 35]	A body which is well favored obtained once, if you do not accomplish the sublime dharma [even] a short time, it is like returning empty-handed from the land of jewels. [95; Song 2.1.78-80]
Watching the four seasons change, also, you can see how everything is impermanent. In summertime the meadows are green and lush from the nectar of summer showers, and all living beings bask in a glow of well-being and happiness. Innumerable varieties of flowers spring up and the whole landscape blossoms into a heavenly paradise of white and gold, scarlet and blue. Then, as the autumn breezes grow cooler, the green grasslands change hue. Fruit and flowers, one by one, dry up and wither. Winter soon sets in, and the whole earth becomes as hard and brittle as rock. Ponds and rivers freeze solid and glacial winds scour the landscape. You could ride for days on end looking for all those summer flowers and never see a single one. And so comes each season in turn, summer fiving way to autumn, autumn to winter and winter to spring, each different from the one before and each jut as ephemeral. [85-86; WPT: 45- 46]	Inside, sentient beings are like mist on the head of a blade of grass [quickly gone], the four times and the four seasons are impermanent. A moment in itself is very changeable. [96; Song 2.1.99-101]
In your own family, each successive generation of parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents have all died, one by one. They are only names to you now. And when the time comes, brothers, sisters, and other relatives will all die too, and no-one will know where they have gone. If the	From the gray hairs of Tibet to those who are now children, only the generation before or after known their names, never have I seen them permanently abiding. In the ancestral burial

powerful, rich, and prosperous people who only last year were the most eminent in the land, many this year are already just names. [86-78; WPT: 46]	ground of your father's place the generations are like bees [always changing and never resting]. [96-97; Song 2.1.106-111]
Unbearable though it might be to part with your money, your cherished possession, your friends, loved ones, attendants, disciples, country, lands, subjects, property, food, drink and comforts, you just have to leave everything behind, like a hair behind pulled out of a slab butter. [87; WPT: 47]	Attendants and luxuries, family and friends, the activities of this life—all are meaningless. This precious body carried a mala and a bowl, [but in death] you will be powerless [to do so]. Like pulling hair from butter, you will be without friends; alone you wander bardo. [98; Song 2.1.133-138]

Spellings of Tibetan Names and Terms

Place Names

Amdo	A mdo
Asu	A phyug
Batang Samdruling	‘Ba’ thang bsam grub gling
Chamdo	Chab mdo
Dana Monastery	Rta rna dgon pa
Dergé	Sde dge
Dorjé Drak	Rdo rje brag
Dzogchen Monastery	Rdzogs chen dgon pa
Golok	Mgo log
Gugé	Gu ge
Gakyalo	Sga skya lo
Hor	Hor
Jyekundo	Skye rgun mdo
Kham	Khams
Khatok Monastery	Ka thok dgon pa
Lhagong / Tagong	Lha gong
Lhasa	Lha sa
Ling	Gling
Lingtshang	Gling tshang
Litang	Li thang
Magyel Pomra	Rma rgyal spom ra
Menyak	Me nyag
Mon	Mon
(Namqing) Nangchen	Nang chen
Ngari	Mnga’ ris
Nyarong	Nyag rong
(Baiyü) Palyul	Dpal yul
Pelri Tekchen Ling	Dpal ri theg chen gling
Red Water Lake	Dmar chu’i dzing
Samdrup Tagtsé Fortress	*Bsam ‘grub stag rtse rdzong*
Sangpu Neutok Monastery	Gsang phu Ne’u thog gdon pa
Tshang	Gtshang

Ü	Dbus
Wara Monastery	Wa ra dgon pa
Yarung Gar	Ya rung sgar
Yushu	Yul shul
Zhidu	Khri ʻdu

Historical Persons [Broadly Conceived]

Atiśa	A ti sha
Changchub Gyaltsen	Byang chub rgyal mtshan
Chögyur Lingpa	Mchog gyur gling pa
Dawa	Zla ba
Den Lama Chökyi Wangchuk	ʻdan bla ma chos kyi dbang phyug
Dolwa Drakpo	Gdol ba drag po
Garab Dorje	Dga' rab rdo rje
Gönpo Namgyel	Dgon po rnam rgyal
Grakpa	Grags pa
Gyurmé Thubten	ʻGyur med thub bstan
Jamyang Drakpa	ʻjam dbyangs grags pa
Kalden Gyatso	Skal ldan rgya mtsho
Karma Rangchung Kunkyab	Karma rang byung kun khyab
Khenpo Nakga	Mkhan po Ngag dga'
Küntu Zangmo	Kun tu bzang mo
Jamgön Kongtrul	ʻJam mgon kong sprul
Jamyang Khyentsé Wangpo	ʻJam sbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po
Jikmé Gyalwe Nyugu	ʻJigs med rgyal ba'I my gyu,
Jikmé Lingpa	ʻJigs med gling pa
Ju Mipham Gyatso	ʻJu Mi Pham rgya mtsho
Lama Yeshé Ö	Bla ma Ye shes ʻod
Langdarma	Glang dar ma
Lelung Jedrung	Sle lung rje drung
Lhalung	Lha lung
Lingtshang Tertön Draktsel Dorjé	gling tshang gter ston drag rtsal rdo rje
Longchen Rabjam	Klong chen rab ʻbyams
Milarepa	Mi la ras pa

Ngawang Lobsang Gyatso	Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho
Nupchen Sangye Yeshe	Dnub chen sangs rgyas ye shes
Nyatri Tsenpo	Gnya' khri btsan po
Pagmodru	Phag mo gru
Patrul Rinpoche	Spal sprul rin po che
Samdrup	Bsam drup
Sangyé Gyeltsen	Sangs rgyas rgyal mtshan
Shabkar	Zhabs dkar (tshogs drug rang grol)
Situ Panchen	Si tu paN chen
Songtsen Gampo	Srong btsan sgam po
Trisong Detaen	Khri srong lde btsan
Tsangnyon	Gtsang snyon
Tshongkhapa	Tsong kha pa
Wara Retretant Damchö Denpa	Wa ra tshe mtshams dam chos bstan pa
Vairotsana	Ba ro tsa na
Yeshe Tsogyel	Ye shes mtsho rgyal

Gesar Epic Characters

Atag Lhamo	A stag lha mo
Cipon	Spyi dpon
Denma	'Dan ma
(Dorjé) Gyu Drönma	(Rdo rje) g.yu sgron ma
Dorje Phagmo	Rdo rje phag mo
Drala	Dgra lha
Drug mo	'Brug mo
Gedi Chökyong	Sgo bde chos skyong
(King) Gesar	(Rgyal po) Ge sar
Gokmo	'Gogs mo
Gungmen Gyalmo	Gung sman rgyal mo
Gurkar	Gur dkar
Gyatsha	Rgya tsha
Karpo Ngangyag	Dkar po ngang yag
Kyangbu	Kyang bu
Jur	Byur

Jang	‘Jang
Joru	Jo ru
Lutsen	Klu btsan
Manéné	Me ne ne
Makulha	Ma sku lha
Mukpo	Smug po
Néchung	Ne chung
Senglon	Seng blon
Shenchung	Shan chung
Shenpa	Shan pa
Stanlha Dorje	Stan lha rdo rje
Taklha	Stag lha
Thöpa Gawa	Thos pa dga’ ba
Throthung	Khro thung
Shinjé	Gshin rje

Buddhist Practices, Concepts, and Categories

babdrung	bab sgrung
Bardo Thödrol	Bar do thos grol
Bön	Bon
Chagchen	Phyag chen
chökyong	chos skyong
chögyal	chos rgyal
Dalai Lama	Taa La’i Bla ma
Damcen Gyatso	rgya mtsho
délok	‘das log
dzambuling	‘dzam bu gling
Drung	sgrung
Dzogchen	rdzogs chen
Gatsog	Ga tshog*** [Uncertain if this is correct spelling. Informant did not know]
Geluk	Dge lugs
gur	mgur
gur lu	mgur glu

gyur	‘gyur
Jodar	Jo dar
Kagyü	Bka’ brgyud
kama	bka’ ma
Kanjur	Bka’ ‘gyur
Karma Kagyü	Ka+rma bka’ brgyud
Khandro Nyingtik	Mkha’ ‘gro snying thig
Khandro Yangtig	Mkha’ ‘gro yang thig
Lama Yangtik	Bla ma yang thig
Lang Poti Séru	*Rlangs po ti bse ru*
Lhasang	lha gsang
Longchen Nyingtik	Klong chen snying thig
Lu	glu
namthar	rnam thar
nakpa	sngags pa
Ngöndro	sngon ‘gro
nyalwa	dmyal ba
nyam	nyams
Nyingma	Rnying ma
Nyingthik Yabshi	*Snying thig ya bzhi*
Phurba	phur ba
powa	‘pho ba
Rimé	Ris med
Rinchen Terdzöd	Rin chen gter mdzod
Sakya	Sa skya
Sarma	Gsar ma
Sepa Monastery	dgon pa
Shinjé	Gshin rje
Shinjé Shé	*Gshin rje bbshed*
Tengyur	Bstan ‘gyur
terma	gter ma
terton	gter ston
thangkha	thang ka
trulku	sprul sku

Tunmo	Gtun mo
Vima Nyingthik	Bi ma snying thig
Yönten Dzöd	Yon tan mdzod

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