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# Autobiography in Tibetan Religious Literature: Reflections on its Modes of Self-Presentation

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Mind itself,  
lacking beginning or end,  
is inexpressible.  
To appear everywhere,  
in both Saṃsāra and Nirvāṇa,  
is its primordial nature.

If one were to teach  
about this endless miracle,  
who could ever tell it all?

However much a fool might try,  
it doesn't seem to benefit anyone.  
It would be best to adopt, for the while,  
a discipline of no speaking.

And if there is speaking,  
one would hope it would be to tell  
the biographies of the venerable ones.  
To tell of one's own qualities  
is the lowest way to go.<sup>1)</sup>

In so introducing his own autobiography, the famed Tibetan scholar Jo-nang rJe-btsun Tāranātha (b.1575) exhibits a humility and a skepticism that are appropriate for a practitioner of a religion in which “self” is the principal villain. For what is autobiography if not a celebration of just the self – oneself – along with that self's own history, actions, development, virtues, failings? Maintaining that a) the particular qualities and details of the life of the individual are inconsequential to the ultimate truth, or worse, unjustified conceits; and that b) the ultimate and full story always exceeds language in any case, the eminent representatives of many traditional societies, such as Plotinus,<sup>2)</sup> or even a modern traditionalist such as Ananda Coomaraswamy,<sup>3)</sup>

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1) Tāranātha Kun-dga' sNying-po, *rGyal khams pa Tāranāthas bdag nyid kyi rnam thar nges par brjod pa'i deb gter/ shin tu zhib mo ma bcas lhug pa'i rtogs brjod*, reproduced from a manuscript preserved at mTshams-brag Monastery, Paro: Ngodrup and Sherab Drimay, 1978–9, p. 3.

2) “...he could never be induced to tell of his ancestry, his parentage or his birthplace....” From Porphyry's “Life of Plotinus,” in Plotinus, *The Enneads*, S. Mackenna, trans., cited in K. S. Oldmeadow, “Traditional and Modern Attitudes to Religious Biography,” in *Religious Traditions* 7–9 (1984–1986), p. 106. (See Oldmeadow's comment, p. 110, on a conversation with a Tibetan lama that betrayed a sentiment at some odds with the thesis of the present paper.)

3) Who when pressed to write his autobiography replied “I must explain that I am not at all interested in biographical matter relating to myself, and what I consider the modern practice of publishing details about the lives and personalities of well-known men is nothing but a vulgar catering to illegitimate curiosity.” – Letter from A. K. Coomaraswamy to S. Durai Raja Singam, May 1946, reproduced in S. Durai Raha Singam, ed., *Ananda Coomaraswamy – Remembering and Remembering Again and Again*, privately published Kuala Lumpur, 1974, p. 276, cited in Oldmeadow, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

refused ever to tell their autobiographies at all. Yet Tāranātha, while expressing much the same sentiment in the opening lines just cited, remains uncowed by the logic of diffidence. Indeed, he goes on to tell of his own qualities and life events, and in no less than 703 pages. Perhaps Tāranātha was moved by a particularly Tibetan conviction, such as that expressed by another prolific Tibetan autobiographer, bDud-'joms Gling-pa (b.1835), to wit: "If you do not tell a bit of the history of your family and do not know your ancestors, then you have the fault of being like a monkey in the forest."<sup>4)</sup>

Tāranātha's willingness to tell his own story appears in fact to be a not uncommon presumption in Tibet. Buddhist and Bon doctrines of no-self notwithstanding, Tibetans, both powerful and humble, mostly clerical but also lay, write autobiography. Early important Tibetan autobiographers include such outstanding religious figures as gTsangs-pa rGya-ras (1161–1211);<sup>5)</sup> the second Karmapa Karma Pakśi (1206–1282);<sup>6)</sup> the sixth and seventh Shangs-pa patriarchs (12th–13th centuries);<sup>7)</sup> and the gTer-ston Guru Chos-dbang (1212–1273).<sup>8)</sup> In an attempt to gauge the extent of the genre in Tibetan literature, I have made a count of Tibetan autobiographies: I identified 103 book-length autobiographies, many of which exceed 200 pages. It must be noted, however, that this count represents a rough estimate. My list continues to expand, and we would not be uncautious if we were to approximate that there may be half again that amount, if not more, Tibetan autobiographies currently extant.<sup>9)</sup>

The abundance of Tibetan autobiography will come as no surprise to Tibetologists, who have long used specimens of the genre for their valuable historical and cultural information. However, when placed in cross-cultural perspective, the statistics just cited begin to take on considerable significance. Most striking is the fact that traditional Indian Buddhists produced little, if any, autobiography at all.<sup>10)</sup> So the Tibetans did not import their autobiographical tradition from India, however much else Indic they may have adopted. Chinese literature, on the other hand, does include various sorts of autobiographical writings, such as self-composed tombstone inscriptions, self-eulogies on portraits, confessionals, portions of recorded conversations and lectures of Ch'an Buddhist masters, and in the seventeenth century, fictionalized autobiographical adventures and autonecrolgies. But book length autobiography was relatively rare in traditional China, and most examples which are available tend to be formulaic and objective, with a few

4) Padma-Lung Rtogs Rgya-mtsho, ed., *Gter chen chos kyi rgyal po khrag 'thung bdud 'joms gling pa'i rnam par thar pa zhal gsungs ma*, Dehradun: G. T. K. Lodoy and N. Gyaltzan, 1970, p. 3.

5) Gtsaṅ-pa Rgya-ras Ye-ses-rdo-rje, *Chos rje rin po che gtsaṅ pa rgya ras pa'i rnam par thar mgur 'bum dan bcas sin tu rgyas pa*, Thimphu: Kunsang Tobgay, 1975.

6) Karma-paksi, *The Autobiographical Writings of the Second Karma-pa Karma-pakṣi, and Spyī lan rin mo: a Defence of the Bka'-brgyud-pa Teachings Addressed to G'yag-sde Pan-chen*, Gangtok: Gonpo Tseten, 1978.

7) *Bla ma ri gong pa'i rnam par thar pa*, pp. 297–333; and *Bla ma chos rje'i rnam par thar pa* (the autobiography of Sangs-rgyas sTon-pa), pp. 335–391, both in *Shangs Pa Gser 'Phreng: A Golden Rosary of Lives of Masters of the Shangs-pa Dhar-brgyud-pa Schools*, Reproduced from the Dpal-spungs Tsa-'dra Blocks, Śmanrtsis Shesrig Spendzod, vol. 15, Leh: Sonam W. Tashigang, 1970.

8) See n. 47 below.

9) My survey canvassed the Tibetan literature in the collection of the Institute for Advanced Studies of World Religions (formerly at Stony Brook, N.Y.); listings in the OCLC On-line Catalog; Tibetological publications; and it is also informed by Tashi Tsering of the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives in Dharamsala. The total figure does not include as separate items the several individual autobiographical texts that are included in one volume, such as in the case of *The Autobiography of 'Ja'-lshon sNying-po* (Bir: Kandro, 1974). Further, I have not included in this survey recent autobiographies written by Tibetans in exile since 1959. Nor have I counted the many Tibetan texts that contain primarily autobiographical songs (*mgur-'bum*). Of the 103, 5 are by Bon-pos, 8 by Sa-skyas, 23 by dGe-lugs-pas, 27 by bKa'-brgyud-pas, and 36 by rNying-ma-pas, and the rest had either multiple or undetermined sectarian affiliation. Three are by women. Again, my count is far from comprehensive; among other things I have not canvassed all *gsung-'ums* nor *gser-'phreng* biographical collections, both of which tend to contain autobiographies. Based on recent conversations with the Ven. Tenzin Namdak and H. H. Sakya Trizin, I believe that my Bon-po and Sa-skyapa counts are especially low, as both of these lamas stated that they had a number of lengthy unpublished autobiographies in their possession in India.

10) The Buddhist *Thera-* and *Therigāthā* would appear to be autobiographical, but these contain accounts of the personal circumstances of renunciation that are at most several verses long, and the authors of many of the accounts are in any case not their protagonists. See K. R. Norman, trans., *The Elders' Verses I: Theragāthā*, London: Pali Text Society/Luzac and Co., Ltd., 1969, p. xix seq.

exceptions in the Sung dynasty, and the late Ming. Chinese accounts of the lives of Buddhist monks, the most immediate candidates for comparison with Tibetan autobiography, were usually not autobiographical. Thus there is little evidence of influence of Chinese literature on the development of Tibetan autobiography, although a forthcoming extensive study of Chinese autobiography will facilitate closer consideration of this question.<sup>11)</sup> We might also mention Japan's secular autobiographical tradition here, especially the self-reflective and often poetic autobiographical writings that date from the tenth century onwards, some of which constitute Japan's most brilliant classics.<sup>12)</sup> But Tibetans were unaware of these works as far as we know, and in any case the Tibetan variety of autobiography is very different from the Japanese one, which is usually written in diary form or as a travel journal. There remains a possible influence from Persian Islamic literature, in which didactic religious autobiographies are also known from the tenth century onwards, but such a connection remains to be demonstrated. In the main, and at our current state of knowledge, we are left with the hypothesis that the impetus to write autobiography in Tibet was indeed an indigenous one, with the modes and styles in which the genre developed being characteristically, and originally, Tibetan.

The genre of autobiographical writing in Tibet is thus unique among Asian literatures on several counts. In its sheer quantity and relative frequency of occurrence, Tibetan autobiography, and especially autobiography of religious figures, significantly outnumbers its neighbors. Further, the nature of the genre in Tibet, the type of persons that write autobiography, and the formats and styles and contexts in which it is written differ widely from other Asian autobiographical traditions. These observations lead one to ask some very wide-reaching and complex questions. Why do Tibetan religious figures, unlike other Mahāyāna Buddhists, produce autobiography in such prolific quantity? Can a special feature of Tibetan religious practice or thought be identified which would account for this phenomenon? Do social factors that are peculiarly Tibetan create the environment and motivation for writing autobiography? The present essay is an attempt on my part to identify but one of the many lines of thought that could be considered in answering these questions, and to discuss some of my findings in pursuing that line of thought. This effort represents my early thoughts and speculations, and I will explore these matters further in a project to translate and introduce the visionary autobiography of 'Jigs-med Gling-pa (1730–1798) that will be carried out in the coming year. The line of thought that I pursue in this initial essay is suggested to me by Western literary theory, but the particular variables that I will focus upon emerge from my reading of Tibetan autobiographies themselves.

## I

The genre of autobiography has in recent years received a good deal of attention from literary theorists, and is considered to be a barometer of certain fundamental cultural characteristics.<sup>13)</sup> However, there are a number of problems in applying Western critical standards to Tibetan

11) Pei-yi Wu's *The Confucian's Progress: Autobiographical Writing in Traditional China* will be published soon by Princeton University Press. Wu has studied the expression of self in Chinese literature masterfully and at length: see his "Varieties of the Chinese Self," in *Designs of Selfhood*, Vytautas Kavolis ed., Rutherford, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, pp. 107–131; and "Self-Examination and Confessions of Sins in Traditional China," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 39:1 (June 1979) pp. 5–38.

12) *The Princeton Handbook of Classical Japanese Literature*, by Earl Miner, Hiroko Odagiri and Robert Morrell, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985, lists 52 examples of the *nikki* or *kikō* genre, and nine of the *zuihitsu* genre. Compare our estimate of the number of Tibetan autobiographies.

13) Noteworthy works in Western autobiography theory that this writer has found suggestive for the study of Tibetan autobiography include Janet Varner Gunn, *Autobiography: Towards a Poetics of Experience*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982; Karl Weintraub, *The Value of the Individual: Self and Circumstance in Autobiography*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978; Elizabeth Bruss, *Autobiographical Acts: The Changing Situation of a Literary Genre*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976; Jacques Derrida, *The Ear of the Other. Otobiography, Transference, Translation*, translated by Avital Ronell, Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1988; Philippe Lejeune,

literature. Autobiography is widely regarded by literary theorists to be a product of the distinctive individualism of modern civilization. Accordingly, only few examples of genuine autobiography are recognized before the 18th century. Furthermore, autobiography is held to be a specifically Western phenomenon, and has been declared to be absent in traditional Asia except insofar as it has been influenced by Western culture.<sup>14)</sup> Most non-Western and premodern autobiographical writings that do exist are distinguished by literary theorists from autobiography proper. As the relevance of this last distinction for non-Western literature remains to be determined, I will not employ it in any consistent way here; it might be noted, however, that one of the crucial features which characterizes a text as autobiography proper is the degree of the sense of individual selfhood that the author displays.<sup>15)</sup>

Despite their generalizations about Western civilization, and its distinctness from other civilizations, literary theorists have not in fact seriously studied the traditional autobiographical writings of Asia, even though several outstanding examples, notably Japanese ones, have been available in Western language translation for some years. It is only very recently that Asianists themselves have begun to consider the validity of Western literary theory for Asian autobiography.<sup>16)</sup> That it is Asianists who consider this question is in any case most appropriate, since many factors other than literary ones need to be taken into account when considering the nature and implications of the conventions of literary genre. Nonetheless, some of the basic observations of Western literary theory, despite the glaring gaps concerning non-Western material, are useful in understanding the nature of Tibetan autobiography. Questions prompted by comparative considerations can direct one's attention to features of the particular tradition one is studying that were not hitherto noticed. And in particular, the questions on the nature of selfhood and individuality that Western autobiography theory raises involve hermeneutical issues that are as pertinent and central to Tibetan religious thought and practice as they are to any discipline in the contemporary West.

What is the nature of selfhood in Tibetan autobiography? Does it betray a certain well developed sense of individuality in Tibetan religious practitioners? These questions are only slightly more limited in scope than those articulated above. In what follows, I will consider an even more limited set of issues, based upon a number of introductory statements in which Tibetan writers reflect upon the project of autobiography as a whole, as well as other passages of autobiographical narrative. In this I will look not so much at selfhood itself, as at the way in which the self is presented in the text. I will also look at the religious contexts in which these autobiographies are produced, and at the readership for which they are written, since these matters bear considerably upon the mode of self-presentation.

## II

The latter matter of readership is a good place to begin a study of Tibetan religious autobiography. The readers of Tibetan religious autobiography are largely the autobiographer's disciples, present and future. These disciples have a strong role in determining the nature of the self presented in the autobiography, to the point that it is not uncommon for the border between

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*On Autobiography*, translated by Katherine Leary, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1989; Paul de Man, *The Rhetoric of Romanticism*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1984; James Olney, ed., *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980; James Olney, *Metaphors of Self*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972; John Paul Eakin, *Fictions in Autobiography: Studies in the Art of Self-Invention*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985.

- 14) See the influential Georges Gusdorf's "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography," pp. 28-47 in James Olney, ed., *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*.
- 15) See Karl Weintraub, *The Value of the Individual*, especially p. xvi, for a lucid introduction to this issue.
- 16) A recent book addressing many of these questions is Marilyn Jeanne Miller, *The Poetics of 'Nikki Bungaku': A Comparison of the Traditions, Conventions, and Structure of Heian Japan's Literary Diaries with Western Autobiographical Writings*, New York and London: Garland, 1985.

author and reader to begin, in various ways, to break down. This occurs for both practical and theoretical reasons.

On the practical level, the merging of author and reader occurs when teachers orally dictate their autobiographies to the disciples. Thus the written text is a joint product.<sup>17)</sup> Disciple-scribes regularly add elements of their own. At the minimum, they will often add concluding chapters concerning their master's death. They also sometimes see fit to edit the text by inserting honorific verbs, which they consider to be appropriate for the exalted self whose story is being told. In contrast, autobiographers will employ impolite or even self-deprecatory phrasing when talking about themselves, reflecting as a matter of course the basic conventions of Tibetan speech and writing. It is sometimes on this count alone that the separate hands of the autobiographer and the disciple-scribes/editors can be recognized, as in the obvious change in tone from the reverent section headings and summaries inserted by the editor of the autobiography of 'Khrul-zhig Rinpoche Ngag-dbang Tshe-ring (1717–1794), to the diffident tone of the autobiographical account proper.<sup>18)</sup> However, as we will see, the use of honorifics in Tibetan autobiography cannot definitively establish that the author is someone other than the autobiographer.

It must also be noted that sometimes what is ostensibly a biography, with authorship clearly attributed to a disciple, can contain much that is actually autobiographical, such as an intimate account of a dream, again because of the practice of Tibetan teachers to recount their lives orally. Even a biography written centuries after the subject's demise may be based upon oral traditions originating in that subject's own self-narratives. In any case let us note here that this blurring of the border between author and reader in the construction of autobiographical selfhood leads to a blurring of the genres of biography and autobiography. Both genres are labeled with the euphemistic "liberation [story]" (*rnam-thar*). Variants that are only sometimes used to specify that the text is in fact an autobiography are "own liberation [story]" (*rang-rnam=rang-gi rnam-thar* or *nyid-kyi rnam-thar*) or "liberation [story] told by [his/her own] mouth" (*rnam-thar zhal-gsungs-ma*). *Rtogs-brjod*, which translates the Sanskrit *avadāna*, refers almost exclusively in Tibetan to an autobiography which emphasizes religious experience, but that term can also on occasion label a hagio/biography, as it does in Sanskrit.

But even if the disciple-editors/readers have no hand in the writing of their master's autobiography, they still have a theoretically determined role in the creation of the self presented in the text, and one that is even more far-reaching than mere overt editorial tampering. Within the context of the teacher-disciple relationship, the desire to provide a self that can be an exemplary role model is, at least theoretically, the only reason why autobiography is written at all. The disciple's presence is to be felt throughout the text. As the intended reader, the disciple stands as the completer of the autobiographical act, the fulfiller of the "contract" of selfhood (or "signature", as Jacques Derrida would have it).<sup>19)</sup>

But this is not a simple matter. The desire to create an exemplary self in Tibetan religious autobiography stands in profound contradiction with the powerful socially and linguistically constructed diffidence already mentioned. Thus the self-effacement evinced when Tibetan autobiographers claim that they only wrote their account because of the insistence of an entreater (*bskul-ba-bo*) in fact reflects two opposing sentiments: 1) The author of autobiography does not write it for him or herself but rather for other sentient beings, the author's disciples, who will benefit by reading the story of how someone progressed on the path to enlightenment; 2) the author of autobiography does not write it for him or herself because to do so would imply that the

17) It would constitute a very interesting study to investigate systematically the multiple ways in which Tibetan autobiography, not to mention Tibetan literature as whole, is committed to writing, edited, and published.

18) Nag-dbañ-tshe-riñ (1717–1794), *Dpal-ldan Bla-ma Dam-pa 'Khrul-sig rin-po-che ñag-dbañ-tshe-riñ gi rnam thar kun tu bzañ po'i zlos gar yid kyi bcud len*, edited and arranged by Tshul-khrims-'byuñ-gnas alias Bžad-pa-rdo-rje, Kawring, H.P.: Tobdan Tsering, 1978. See, e.g., the difference between the honorific phrasing of the section on p. 20.2–21.5, as compared to the more straightforward account that follows, the latter being most likely the autobiographer's own composition.

19) See *The Ear of the Other*, pp. 9, 49 seq., and throughout.

life and self being recounted have some value, which would be a conceit and a lie. The first of these sentiments accords the autobiographical self some value for the reader, but both concur that it has no value for the author.<sup>20)</sup>

This leads us to the primary findings of this paper. First, in the face of the tension just mentioned, Tibetan autobiographers, from the earliest down to the most contemporary, have found modes of self-presentation that span a very wide gamut. At one end of the scale we find extremely self-deprecatory autobiographical presentations, at the other end extremely self-aggrandizing ones, and in the middle a number that achieve a reasonable degree of straightforwardness. Second, there are a number of indications that some of the selves presented in Tibetan religious autobiography *are* valued by their authors, and may not be as determined by reader needs and expectations as religious doctrine and social convention might require. In order to see how this second, somewhat unorthodox finding becomes evident, we might begin with the more predictable self-effacing characterizations to which virtually all Tibetan autobiographers pay abundant lip service.

### III

At the self-deprecatory end of the Tibetan self-presentational spectrum fall many autobiographies of gTer-stons (the “Treasure discoverers”) and other visionaries. Typical is the 12th century Bon-po visionary rMa-ston Shes-rab Seng-ge’s labelling of his entire narrative as “beggar’s lying words” (*sprang-po’i rdzun-tshig*).<sup>21)</sup> Even the exalted Fifth Dalai Lama (1617–1682) emphatically denigrates his project to relate his visionary autobiography, the spectacularly illustrated manuscript that has recently been published by Samten Karmay.<sup>22)</sup> Moreover, gTer-ston autobiographers widely employ such terms as “deluded appearance” (*’khrul-snang*) to describe their visionary experiences (while their disciples apply such terms as “pure appearance” (*dag-snang*) or the honorific “seen appearance” (*gzigs-snang*).)<sup>23)</sup>

But the self-deprecation of the gTer-stons is signified not only through such wordplay. It is evident in the entire tenor of their autobiographies, the overarching theme of which concerns their grave doubts about their personal legitimacy, as well as that of the revelations they are receiving. As I have discussed elsewhere, the diffidence of the gTer-ston is a special strategy to demonstrate caution and scrupulousness, which ultimately functions to engender confidence in the authority of their revealed gTer-ma scriptures.<sup>24)</sup> Less complex autobiographers than the gTer-stons also struggle with a conviction that they have little religious insight that would merit repeating, and thus suffer extreme embarrassment and skepticism in the face of a student’s request for an autobiography. Rig-’dzin Kun-bzang rDo-rje (1738–1805), for example, must be

20) In the preceding paragraph I have referred to the autobiographer with both feminine and masculine pronouns. However, I will use only the masculine pronoun in what follows for the sake of simplicity (although this is not my usual policy), because the large majority of the authors of the extant Tibetan autobiographies were males. My survey described in n. 9 identified only three autobiographies by Tibetan women, but I trust that more will surface, especially since Mr. Tashi Tsering is making this a special topic for his research.

21) *rMa ston sher seng gi gzigs snang* in Tenzin Namdak, ed., *Sources for a History of Bon*, A collection of rare manuscripts from Bsam-gling Monastery in Dolpo, Dolanji: Tibetan Bonpo Monastic Center, 1972, pp. 310–324.

22) Samten Gyaltzen Karmay, *Secret Visions of the Fifth Dalai Lama*, The Gold Manuscript in the Fournier Collection, London: Serindia Publications, 1988. See the introductory verses, translated on p. 27.

23) Although we might note here in passing that bDud-'joms Gling-pa can introduce his own autobiography as an account of his experiences of pure visions: *Op. cit.*, p. 3: “dag pa’i snang nyams zur tsam ‘dir brjod bya.”

24) Discussed in my article “The Internal Logic of Legitimation as Presented in the Tibetan Treasure Cycles”, soon to be published. See also my “Signs, Memory and History: A Tantric Buddhist Theory of Scriptural Transmission,” in *The Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* (1986) 9:2 pp. 7–35; “The Relic Text as Prophecy: The Semantic Drift of Byang-bu,” to be published in a commemorative issue of *Tibet Journal* for Densapa Burmiok Athing, edited by Tashi Tsering, 2 vols., in 1990; and “Genre, Authorship, and Transmission in Visionary Buddhism: The Literary Traditions of Thang-stong rGyal-po,” in Ronald Davidson and Steven Goodman, eds., *Tibetan Buddhism: Reason and Revelation*, Albany: State University of New York Press, forthcoming.

entreated several times, and it is only after several students add their pleas, and argue that future generations of students will benefit from reading his story, that he humbly consents: "I have no confidence that I am one to be emulated. So as not to be ashamed in front of the denizens of the pure realms, I shall not enter into a vainglorious discourse of false goodness [like] an enchanting demon. But I shall offer here a clear and honest story of my ways."<sup>25)</sup>

As we move into the middle range of the self-presentational axis, we find a willingness among some autobiographers to discuss political intrigue, journeys, and other external events quite matter-of-factly, often adding their own observations and opinions. When autobiographers enter this mode, their accounts become particularly useful for historical reconstruction of periods and movements. But even with regard to inner religious experience, many realize, as Kun-bzang rDo-rje ultimately did, that one might offer a clear and honest story of one's ways. gTer-bdag Gling-pa (1646–1714) is especially eloquent in coming to this realization. He writes, "It is proper to tell the story of one's past straightforwardly, without the extremes of either exaggeration or diminution.... If one is not [truly] good oneself, then even if credulous fools call one a Buddha out of mere sectarian loyalty, what's the use? But if one has achieved a firm confidence in one's own mind, then even though they call you a demon, that's just a word. Therefore, with the eight worldly worries self-liberated into the great pervasively diffused expanse of equality, an unfabricated account of one's realizations, just as they are, will cause delight in those who are interested and have pure vision."<sup>26)</sup>

Another reason for writing autobiography independent of egoistical concerns occurs in the case of collections of biographies of a lineage. Here the editor, himself a member of the lineage, will add his own autobiography simply to complete the collection. An example of such an autobiographical act appears in the several texts appended to the *dKar brgyud gser 'phreng* by its editor Mon-rtse-pa Kun-dga' dPal-ldan (1408–1475), in which are presented graphic accounts of wars and descriptions of his homeland, as well as reflections on his personal mystical experiences.<sup>27)</sup>

An instance of unabashed self-assessment of religious virtues, which begins to enter the other pole of the self-presentational axis, is evident in the autobiography of gNyan-ston Ri-gong-pa (1175–1255), the sixth Shangs-pa dKar-brgyud patriarch. Ri-gong-pa can state, for example, that he possessed wisdom as a youth, and was without stinginess and greed.<sup>28)</sup> After recounting the struggles of his spiritual quest in some detail, he concludes his autobiography with a listing of the various ways in which he should be regarded as being no different than a Buddha, this being the proper manner in which disciples view their teacher.<sup>29)</sup>

Ri-gong-pa's self-assertion is in fact far from uncommon in Tibetan autobiography, and, as his own conclusion suggests, can be explained by the awareness that the autobiographer will be the object of disciples' devotion. A very extreme case of fully hagiographical self-presentation for just this reason, in which the author performs a special switch in perspective not illustrated in the previous examples, is to be seen in a striking pair of autobiographies. These were written by the late Kalu Rinpoche (d.1988), a master of impeccable repute in the Tibetan world, and, I might add (in light of my own close acquaintance with him on a daily basis some years ago) an utterly

25) *Rig 'dzin Kun bzang rdo rje'i rnam thar skal ldan sñin gi mun sel rig pa'i sgron me*, edited by Padma-chos-'phel, Gangtok: Gonpo Tseten, 1978, p. 8.

26) *Rig pa 'dzin pa 'gyur med rdo rje'i shin tu gsang ba nyams snang rtogs brjod sgyu 'phrul rdo rje'i rol mo*, in *Gter-bdag-glin-pa 'Gyur-med-rdo-rje, The Life of Gter-bdag-glin-pa 'Gyur-med-rdo-rje: a collection of the relevant texts*, Paro: Lama Ngodrub and Sherab Drimey, 1982, vol. 2, pp. 381–382.

27) See his outer (*phyi*), inner (*nang*) and secret (*gsang*) autobiographies in his *dKar brgyud gser 'phreng: A Golden Rosary of Lives of Eminent Gurus*, Leh, n.p., 1970. Another editor who has added his autobiography to a collection of biographies is Bla-ma gShongs-chen, first in a series of editors of the gSang-spyod sNyan-brgyud cycle: *Grub mchog rgyal po thang stong pa'i zab gter chos mdzod rin po che*, Thimphu: Kunsang Topgey, 1976, vol. 1.

28) *Bla ma ri gong pa'i rnam par thar pa*, p. 301.

29) *Ibid*, p. 331 et seq.

humble, unassuming man.<sup>30)</sup> But in both texts, Kalu Rinpoche characterizes himself as a highly realized master, with countless meditative accomplishments and compassionate acts that benefitted many. The first of his “autobiographies” is actually a biographical prayer (*rnam-thar gsol-'debs*), addressed to himself:

In your dreams, the great Lama Jamgon  
conferred on you in full the four empowerments,  
and you changed yourself into the form of Padmasambhava  
and brought gods and demons under control.  
To you, to whom the mountain goddesses offered songs, I humbly pray....

When you were seventy-eight,  
you travelled over the ocean in the appropriate directions  
to visit different continents and lands all over the world.  
You went to more than thirty five countries.  
To you, who travel in the open sky, I humbly pray....

In summary, your mind has merged with the minds  
of all the excellent and incomparable lamas.  
Your actions fulfill their vision.  
You never waver from *bodhicitta*,  
nor from development and completion.  
To you, holy son of the Victorious One, I humbly pray.<sup>31)</sup>

Here is an autobiographical text, covering the major events of his life, in which the autobiographer refers to himself in the second person, and even sometimes employs honorific verbs! The use of the second person is key here, for Rinpoche intends that the text be used by his disciples to pray to him.<sup>32)</sup> The first person in this text is implicitly the disciple, who has thus become the narrator of Rinpoche's autobiography. In other words, Kalu Rinpoche has compassionately placed himself in the shoes of his students, and is looking at his own life through their eyes. The hagiographical rendition of his own career can be explained by the fact that he has adopted the conventions of the liturgical genre in which he is writing, which would have been adopted in the same manner had a student written such a biographical prayer to him.

However, there is another explanation of the exalted manner in which Kalu Rinpoche has seen himself, beyond his compassionate self-projection on behalf and from the viewpoint of his students. Kalu Rinpoche elaborates this second reason in his other autobiography, which is a prose commentary on the versified prayer. Here, after making the claim that “Any relationship I have with someone, whether it be a good, bad, or neutral one, becomes significant since it will be the seed of his or her attainment of higher births and freedom,” he states in conclusion, “In summary, my wish is for my mind to merge with the minds of all excellent lamas whose kindness is beyond comparison. In my actions I work to fulfill their vision. In my mind, I never waver from the

30) Karma Rang byung kun khyab, Kalu Rinpoche, *Bla ma'i rnam thar dad pa'i gsol 'debs thar lam bsgrod pa'i shing rta*, offset ms. in my possession. This and the versified version of the autobiography upon which the prose version is based are given in English translation in *The Chariot for Travelling the Path to Freedom: The Life Story of Kalu Rinpoche*, translated by Kenneth I. McLeod, San Francisco: Kagyu Dharma, 1985. In translation, the versified autobiographical prayer is entitled *The Song of the Spontaneous Activity of Enlightenment*, and the prose account is *The Chariot for Travelling the Path to Freedom*.

31) Extracted from *The Chariot*, pp. 21–26. I have slightly altered McLeod's translation.

32) Another example of such a use of the second person, albeit not in an autobiographical context, is a *guruyoga* of bDud-'joms Rinpoche 'Jigs-bral Ye-shes rDo-rje that he wrote himself. Selections of the Tibetan text, along with translations, in *The Lamp of Liberation*, edited by Terry Clifford, New York: Yeshe Melong, 1988. See for example the prayer addressed to himself on pp. 18–9. The first person here refers to the reader, the second person to the author. But this is not uncommon in Tibetan *guruyoga* liturgies.

practice of precious *bodhicitta* and development and completion. Hence, [my autobiographical] prayer describes me as a holy son of the Victorious One".<sup>33)</sup> In other words, in addition to being intended for his students, the exalted self image that Kalu Rinpoche sets down in writing is an optimistic projection, for himself, of his own ideal self-image. By presenting it as *fait accompli* in his autobiography, indeed, by placing it in the mouth of someone else, he fulfills and makes concrete his own highest goals for himself.

Having surveyed the range of autobiographical selves, from the self-deprecating, to the diffident, to the straightforward, and to the self-glorifying, we have seen at the latter end of the spectrum a suggestion of self-interest in autobiographical intention. I will return below to other indications that some Tibetan autobiographers write for their own edification. First, I would like to explore a bit further the sort of projective identity and resulting glorified self-transformation that can occur within the context of certain Tibetan autobiographical traditions.

#### IV

That an autobiographer such as Kalu Rinpoche can write his life from the perspective of his readers is itself an interesting aberration in the autobiographical act offered by Tibetan literature. But there is another aberration in Tibetan autobiographical writing, one that takes the flexibility of author's perspective to a new level of complexity. This is to be recognized in the prophecy (*lung-bstan*) texts found in the literature of the gTer-ma tradition. There are many such texts, and I have discussed their significance elsewhere.<sup>34)</sup> I do want to state here, however, that my current study of Tibetan autobiography has led me to realize that these prophecies constitute a bizarre subgenre of autobiographical writing.

The gTer-ma prophecies, published both as separate texts and in fragments quoted in other texts, are considered to be revealed scripture. One such prophecy may be found in the *Klong chen snying thig* gTer-ma of 'Jigs-med Gling-pa.<sup>35)</sup> The following is an abridged passage of that document:

"At that time, through the compassionate prayers of my disciples who are here now, there will be a manifested son, who will have as his secret name Gar-dbang 'Jigs-med Gling. He will have a lotus eye on his right hand. He will have great wisdom and little attachment. All of the vehicles (*yānas*) will shine forth in his mind. Dākinīs will come three times to him to encourage him. He should visualize me, Padma [sambhava], on his head. On the tenth day of the Monkey month of the Monkey year, he will meet with my, Padmasambhava's, face...."

The text goes on to "predict" the circumstances of 'Jigs-med Gling-pa's visions and revelations. It may be called autobiographical on several counts. It is, after all, written by its subject, i.e. the prophesied gTer-ston, despite the fact that its narrator/author, in accordance with the conventions of the gTer-ma tradition, is cast as the eighth century Padmasambhava, here speaking in the first person. Further, the text relates the events of its author's own life, even if those events are described in the future tense. As in other sorts of autobiographical writing, the text gives details of its author's personal appearance, periods in meditative retreat, visionary experiences, psychological states, etc. Many gTer-ma prophecies also describe the visionary's parents, birthplace, and other details.

33) *The Chariot*, p. 49. (My bracketed insertion.) The English version of the entire prose text has been adjusted to the first person although the Tibetan original is complicated by the inclusion of the versified prayer in the second person. See the translator's remarks, p. 15.

34) See e.g. "Signs, Memory and History," p. 22 seq.

35) Abridged from *gNad byang thugs kyi sgrom bu*, pp. 73–4 in *The Collected Works of Kun-mkhyen 'Jigs-med-gling-pa*, Gangtok: Sonam T. Kazi, 1971, vol. 7, pp. 69–78.

What is happening in such prophetic autobiography? The gTer-ston, the autobiographer, produces a text that is couched in the words of another: his “father”, the founder of his lineage, his “own-face guru” (*rang-zhal bla-ma*) of rDzogs-chen meditation practice. As the gTer-ston reads the prophecy back to himself, he hears an account of his life, telling both events that have gone before, and events that are about to happen, i.e., the gTer-ma revelation about to be discovered. Since the narrator of this odd projective autobiography is the authoritative Padmasambhava, the coming destined events of the gTer-ston’s life have been legitimized and encouraged. Once again, the autobiographer has used honorifics self-reflexively, this being appropriate since the prophesied subject is the manifestation of Padmasambhava. Thus, the gTer-ston sees himself in this prophetic mirror in a very glorified way. In short, the autobiographer engages in what we might call a hierarchical specularity, as also did Kalu Rinpoche. The latter saw himself in a mirror constructed from a position below his own on the hierarchical scale, namely that of his disciples, while the gTer-ston sees himself in his autobiographical mirror from the point of view of someone above himself, namely Padmasambhava. In both cases, a narrator other than the autobiographer creates an image of the autobiographer, an image which becomes a mirror that allows the autobiographer to behold himself as an accomplished master. For Kalu Rinpoche, the accomplished master that is his autobiographical self-image is portrayed as a compassionate Bodhisattva; for Jigs-med Gling-pa, it is portrayed as a predestined gTer-ma discoverer. And both images directly reflect the religious ideals of the tradition of which the autobiographer is a part.

## V

In addition to the specular self-reflection just discussed, another strategy also allows Tibetan autobiographers an expanded and glorified self-image. This is the practice of beginning an autobiography with an account of one’s past lives. A variant of another widespread practice, that of introducing autobiography with stories of one’s ancestors, the “remembering” of past lives has for its eminent model in Buddhism the *Jātaka* tales of the past lives of Śākyamuni. Sometimes these previous existences seem to constitute a very large part of the autobiographer’s sense of identity indeed. For example, the gTer-ston ’Gro-’dul Las-’phro Gling-pa (16th cent.) sees fit to devote the first 258 pages of his 630 page autobiography to narrating his own former incarnations.<sup>36)</sup>

But does the autobiographer actually remember these past identities? In the case of the Jo-nang-pa scholar Kun-dga’ Grol-mchog (1507–1566?), who presents eleven *avadānas* of his past incarnations in his autobiography, we see that these are well-known personages about whom biographical information would have been known to Kun-dga’ Grol-mchog from sources other than his own memory.<sup>37)</sup> gTer-bdag Gling-pa claims explicitly in his autobiography that his knowledge of his past lives is based on what he has read of his incarnational lineage in the gTer-ma cycle of rDo-rje Gling-pa, the biography of mChog-ldan mGon-po, and prophecies in his own gTer-mas. He goes on to say that while he cannot really say that he remembers his previous lives as such, under certain circumstances he does seem to have unconnected flashes of memories of being Vairocana, Zur-chen, rDo-rje Gling-pa, and the others. He also states that when he reads certain texts written by historical figures, he feels he wrote them himself; he has but to read the first words of such a text and he has an unsought-for, vague sense of the rest of it. In what he

36) *Rig ’dzin chen po Gter ston Las ’phro gliñ pa’i dus gsum gyi skye brgyud dan rnam par thar pa che loñ tsam śig bkod pa me tog ’phreñ mdes*, completed by his disciple ’Od-gsal rgya-mtsho, Gangtok: Gonpo Tsetan, 1979.

37) The accounts of his past lives, including those as the well-known Indian *siddha* Kṛṣṇācārya, and the Tibetan scholar Rong-zom Chos-kyi bZang-po, comprise the entire first volume of *The autobiographies of Jo-nañ Kun-dga’-grol-mchog and his previous embodiments*, Reproduced from prints of the rGyal-rtse blocks, New Delhi: Tibet House, 1982, 2 vols.

thinks is a karmic replay of past events, certain disciples and situations still appear vividly in his present mind, like a very clear dream that one has had in the past.<sup>38)</sup>

gTer-bdag Gling-pa's clear vision now of experiences and people then reminds us of a similar statement by Tāranātha, recalling a rainbow he saw as a youth. "Even now," the mature autobiographer writes, "it appears clearly as an object of my mind."<sup>39)</sup> When the autobiographer has a present self-awareness that is seen as distinct from the past self being recalled in the text, he or she is writing what literary theorist James Olney has called a "duplex" autobiography.<sup>40)</sup> Olney differentiates duplex autobiography from one that is "simplex", in which the autobiographer looks back on the self with objective and unreflective distance, almost as if it were someone else. But the duplex autobiographer is aware, in a very personal and individualized way, of the very ambiguity of the autobiographer's task: when the self writes about the self, which, the writing or the written-about, is the real self? This question directs the autobiographical task to the issue of the nature of autobiographer's own self, itself.

The issue of the nature of the self is far from foreign to Tibetan philosophical treatises. But in that context, the self is discussed in a general, abstract manner, bearing upon the nature of all selves. Also, many Tibetan autobiographies, especially those that present the self in a glorified, idealized light, do not portray the self itself as a unique and individualized subject. However, there are certain Tibetan autobiographies that I believe can be said to exhibit a marked personal self-consciousness. These are of particular pertinence to the present essay, because it is in just those passages which betray such self-consciousness that we see the issue of reader-determined self-presentation begin to fall away. Unlike the cases seen above, here the reader is not the sole reason for, and receiver of, the autobiographical self that is presented in the text. Rather, in these passages autobiographers seem to be writing for themselves.

## VI

A superb example of reflective self-consciousness in Tibetan literature is to be found in the magnificent visionary autobiography of 'Jigs-med Gling-pa, which I am currently translating.<sup>41)</sup> For 'Jigs-med Gling-pa, the burning question seems to be less about the content of what has happened to him and what he has seen, than about the nature of his self-identity with respect to those occurrences. Thus does he enter into a complex analysis of the relationship between what happens in his visions and the role of his own stance in those visions. He writes, with great exasperation, "I beheld a sight which is ungraspable, as are reflections in a mirror, or the moon and stars scattered upon the ocean. But then [I had] the subtle discrimination that this was an external appearance...[which made] that Clear Light vision stop in its tracks!"<sup>42)</sup> The autobiographer here takes full responsibility for everything that appears in his field of vision, and considers the nature of those events to be a direct reflection of his own internal state. Such responsibility is no small burden, and it leads the autobiographer to despair, as well as to a self-deprecation akin to what we have discussed above. However, this time the self-deprecation does not appear to be a socially-required show of modesty. It indicates instead an authentic frustration on the autobiographer's part, which in this case is with his difficulty in maintaining

38) gTer-bdag gling-pa, *op. cit.*, p. 384 (summarized).

39) Tāranātha, *op. cit.*, p. 19. "da lta'ang blo yul na gsal bar snang."

40) James Olney, *Metaphors of Self*, pp. 38–45. See also Georges Gusdorf, "Conditions and Limits," p. 44.

41) (Not to be confused with his gTer-ma prophecy that was discussed above.) The account of his visionary life is actually broken up into two texts, *rTogs pa brjod pa dakki'i gsang gtam chen mo* and *gSang ba chen po nyams snang gi rtogs brjod chu zla'i gar mkhan*, pp. 4–68 in *Klong-chen snying-thig: Treasured rNying ma pa precepts and rituals received in a vision of Klong-chen-pa Dri-med 'od-zer* by 'Jigs-med gling-pa Rang-byung rdo-rje mkhyen-brtse'i 'od-zer, New Delhi: Ngawang Sopa, 1973. Also published in *The Collected Works of Kun-mkhyen 'Jigs-med-gling-pa*, Gangtok: Sonam T. Kazi, 1971, vol. 7, pp. 1–67.

42) *gSang ba chen po nyams snang gi rtogs brjod chu zla'i gar mkhan*, Ngawang Sopa edition, pp. 28–29.

Clear Light, the meditative state that facilitates the type of revelatory experience that 'Jigs-med Gling-pa is seeking.

In the same autobiography 'Jigs-med Gling-pa also has moments of profound self-confidence. He proclaims, "In this life it has not been necessary to become weary through detailed analysis and refined terminology, nor to depend upon a teacher... Having broken out of the syndrome of wishful thinking, I don't listen to what anyone says. Rather, I course in the great expanse of spontaneity, where all appearance shines forth as text, and all action is understood as a special instruction."<sup>43)</sup> Part of the reason for this proclamation of self-confidence, as the autobiographer himself states explicitly elsewhere, is to encourage his readers/students in their own visionary quests. To this extent, his triumphant self-presentation in this passage is affected by the wish to provide an exemplary role model. But it is also evident that the passage just cited betrays a quite candid celebration of hard-won freedom and power, a celebration in which the autobiographer seems truly to be enjoying, for himself, the fruits of his own rigorous visionary journey.

In Tibetan literary terminology, 'Jigs-med Gling-pa's intimate exploration of the inner workings of his psycho-physical experience qualifies his visionary autobiography as being "secret" (*gsang*). This, along with another emic category, the "inner" (*nang*) autobiography, stands in contrast to the "outer" (*phyi*) autobiography, which recounts mostly the publicly observable aspects of a life. ('Jigs-med Gling-pa wrote a 518 page "outer" autobiography as well).<sup>44)</sup> Both the inner and secret subgenres of Tibetan autobiography, and of biography, typically present meditative experiences, dreams, and visions as central elements in the religious master's life. These interests may be seen as early as the twelfth century, in the autobiography of Ri-gong-pa, as well as in that of his successor Sangs-rgyas sTon-pa.<sup>45)</sup>

The focus upon dreams and visions that occurs in certain Tibetan autobiographies merits close examination along the lines of the questions raised in this study. As with autobiographical self-presentation, which can be idealized so as to serve as an exemplar for a readership of disciples, the content of dreams and visions can be informed by mythologies and idealized religious goals that have significance for the community of disciples and practitioners. The prophecies and meditative techniques revealed in the gTer-ma tradition are cases in point. However, there are also dreams and visions recorded in Tibetan autobiography that have little significance for the community, and are rather of personal importance to the autobiographer. When dreams and visions are understood as individually meaningful in particular, they would seem to encourage a sort of self-reflection akin to what literary theorists have recognized as crucial to the genuine autobiographical urge.<sup>46)</sup> Interestingly, the very gTer-stons whose visionary revelations are community-oriented tend also to be the most deeply self-conscious autobiographers, reporting many personally significant dreams and visionary experiences, as we have just seen in the case of 'Jigs-med Gling-pa. Personal dreams and visions are in fact critical in the career of the gTer-stons; and gTer-stons are among the most prolific writers of autobiography in Tibet.

The earliest example of a gTer-ston's autobiographical writings that I have identified so far is the two volume collection by Guru Chos-dbang (1212–1273).<sup>47)</sup> Most of the autobiographical material here focusses upon the description of dreams, many of which have their own title and comprise a separate text, as if it were the dreams that form the chapters of Guru Chos-dbang's life.

43) *Ibid*, p. 41.

44) *Yul tho rgyud du byung ba'i rdzogs chen pa rang byung rdo rje mkhyen brtse'i 'od zer gyi rnam par thar pa legs byas yongs 'du'i snye ma*, vol. 9 in *The Collected Works of 'Jigs-med-glin-pa Rañ-byun-rdo-rje Mkhyen-brtse'i-od-zer*, Gangtok: Pema Thinley for Ven. Dodrup Chen Rinpoche, 1985.

45) Their autobiographies cited in note 7 above.

46) Gusdorf, "Conditions and Limits," is particularly eloquent on some of the relevant issues here. Note the theme of the mirror in Gusdorf's essay, a theme that has also been stressed in the present study. The mirror is a common image in Tibetan autobiographical narratives of dreams and visions.

47) *The Autobiography and Instructions of Gu-ru Chos-kyi-dban-phyug*, reproduced from a rare manuscript from the library of the late Lopon Choedak, Paro: Ugyen Tempai Gyaltzen, 1979, 2 vols. The manuscript retains various old orthographical conventions. It should be noted that this collection is distinct from Guru Chos-dbang's so-called *Mani bKa'-bum* texts, which also appear to be quasi-autobiographical.

These dreams invariably demonstrate the author's contact with divine beings – *Ḍākinīs*, *Vidyādharas*, and of course *Padmasambhava*. What is so interesting about them, and what makes one think that they are being told less to prove something to the reader than to provide an opportunity for the author to muse upon the specificity, indeed the eccentricity, of his own individuality, is the manner in which mythological elements are intertwined with the concrete details of *Guru Chos-dbang's* own self. The dreams inevitably take place against the backdrop of his personal life. One dream centers upon a house that someone tauntingly points out was built by his now-dead parents, leading him to cry out their names futilely.<sup>48)</sup> Even when the dreamer has a direct confrontation with a divinity, the focus remains on the self, the specific and personal self of *Guru Chos-dbang*. In a long and intimate dream conversation with *Padmasambhava*, *Guru Chos-dbang* is shown a mirror which causes him to remember thirteen of his lives. With regard to the last, his present life, he asks such questions as, If I am a *nirmāṇakāya* (*sprul-sku*), why don't I have the signs on my body that *Śākyamuni* had? Why do I have an unattractive, small body? In another passage, he asks *Padmasambhava*, Why do I have so much difficulty remembering dreams just when I begin to try to write them down? Why was I born in previous lives so often in India and so rarely in Tibet?<sup>49)</sup> Once again we have an example of profound specularity in an autobiographical account. But unlike the complex *gTer-ma* prophecy, in which the autobiographer projects a *Padmasambhava* who in turn predicts the future individual, i.e. the present autobiographer who now beholds that prophesied image of himself, *Guru Chos-dbang's* dream creates *Padmasambhava* and his mirror in the present, ready to reflect back to the dreamer the answers to all of his questions. And unlike the glorified image that the *gTer-ston* creates for himself in the prophecy, here *Guru Chos-dbang* sees himself with all of his real-life faults.

Dream sequences such as *Guru Chos-dbang's* provide the opportunity for highly idiosyncratic self-presentations in Tibetan autobiography. Dreams are, after all, private, individual experiences, even if they do absorb elements of a mythology shared in the culture at large. Moreover, given its obviously self-produced character, the dream or vision is the natural object for self-conscious reflection and analysis. Thus it is not surprising that visionaries and *gTer-stons* are perhaps the most prolific writers of Tibetan autobiography. We may even speculate that it is precisely the very pronounced emphasis throughout Tibetan Tantrism upon practices that explore vision, dream, and the psycho-physical nature of experience (much more emphasis, we might add, than can be found in many other Asian religious traditions of praxis) that is in fact a principal reason why autobiography developed so extensively in Tibet altogether.

## VII

Thus we can identify a considerable range of modes of self-presentation in Tibetan religious autobiography. Most of these modes, from the self-deprecating to the self-aggrandizing, are influenced by the readers of autobiography, who exert upon the author the conflicting pressures of expecting diffidence and desiring religious exemplars. However, we can also recognize ways in which Tibetan autobiographical self-presentation is determined by the interests of the autobiographer himself. Sometimes author and reader are simultaneously edified, as in the case of *Kalu Rinpoche's* *Bodhisattvic* persona. Sometimes author and reader edification occurs in separate autobiographical texts, as with the *gTer-stons*, who present a glorified prophesied persona that demonstrates legitimized destiny, as well as a blundering would-be visionary image that

48) *Ghu ru chos kyi dbang phyug gi rmi lami dpal phug ring gi dag snang brda don chen mo*, in *The Autobiography and Instructions of Gu-ru Chos-kyi-dbañ-phyug*, vol. 1, p. 364 seq.

49) *Ghu ru chos dbang gis rnam mthar bka' rgya brgyad ma*, in *The Autobiography and Instructions of Gu-ru Chos-kyi-dbañ-phyug*, vol. 1, pp. 68; 109; 115; 133; etc.

encourages perseverance in students, but also betray a genuine personal self-interest in yet other autobiographical contexts.<sup>50)</sup>

Finally, some Tibetan autobiographies, especially those that focus upon visionary and dream experience, testify to a simple curiosity and delight in the quirks and eccentric twists of the internal landscape, suggesting a primarily self-driven motivation for autobiography. One recognizes such a motivation in other Tibetan autobiographies as well, for example in the extraordinary autobiography of Sa-skya Khri-chen Drag-shul Phrin-las Rin-chen (1871–1936).<sup>51)</sup> This text was pieced together by his students from his extensive diary entries, which were written on odd pieces of paper in pencil. The author reflects at length on various sorts of personal details and aesthetic experiences, often with no apparent didactic intent but rather for the pleasure of his own musings. As in the case of the visionary autobiographers, part of Drag-shul Phrin-las Rin-chen's autobiographical intention seems to be the joy of observing and reflecting upon experience itself.

Undoubtedly, there is a special pleasure in remembering the idiosyncratic and the lucid, both on the autobiographer's part and on that of the reader. I experienced this pleasure myself when recently attending a lecture of Namkhai Norbu, a modern Tibetan meditation master and gTer-ston in his own right. Norbu saw fit to recount in great detail some of his own dreams in the context of giving instructions on rDzogs-chen practice and lifestyle. The dream account afforded a special intimacy between the speaker and his audience, as we mused together on the amusing twists and jokes of a particular dream sequence. I found myself ineluctably lured into the private world of my own imaginative field, filling out the account as I heard it with, perhaps, dreams or memories of my own. I barely have the words to describe what happens when we enjoy the account of a dream, but I can say at least that the vividness and also the individuality of that enjoyment must lie somewhere at the base of the autobiographical project that became so popular in Tibet.

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50) This analysis was confirmed in an interview in July 1989 in Charlemont, Massachusetts with the Fourth rDo Grub-chen Rinpoche concerning the visionary autobiography of 'Jigs-med Gling-pa, which Rinpoche claimed was written as much to keep track of personally significant experiences as for the edification of students.

51) Drag-śul-phrin-las-rin-chen, *Rdo rje 'chan Drag Śul phrin las rin chen gyi rtogs brjod*, Dehra Dun: Sakya Centre, 1974, 2 vols. We are reminded here of Kenkō's *Tsurezuregusa*, also compiled from bits of paper (in this case stuck on the walls of his hut) after his death.