

## Chapter 18

### ARISTOCRATS, MONKS, AND HERMITS

The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were a watershed for the literary arts, with the growth of secular biography and poetry. The rise of the Dalai Lama's government in the middle of the seventeenth century began a cultural renaissance in the Lhasa region, as seen in chapter 17. The formation of the new government also initiated the growth of a new class of educated urban intellectuals, though this would take several generations. In the middle decades of the eighteenth century, autobiography became a popular genre among the elite of Lhasa. The leading light in this lay adaptation of an old religious genre of writing was Dokharwa Tsering Wanggyel (1697–1763), who held a cabinet position in the Central Tibetan government. Buddhism was never distant from this new literature; Dokharwa's "novel," *The Tale of the Incomparable Prince*, is a reworking of a traditional Indian literary form of life writing, the *avadāna*, in which previous lives of the Buddha are recounted. The Fifth Dalai Lama was a proponent of the most popular *avadāna* in Tibet, Kṣemendra's *Vine of Lives*, the *Avadānakalpalatā*, and had it reprinted in a bilingual edition during his reign. This no doubt did much to popularize the work among sophisticated lay readers around Lhasa in the ensuing generations. New topics were central to the new lay writing, most conspicuously romantic love, which could never find an easy place in the writings of monastics. Even the king of Tibet, Polhané Sönam Topgyé, could find time to write love poetry, which Dokharwa integrated into

his biography of the leader. Another factor in the rise of new narrative and poetry was contact with urban life outside of Tibet. Doring Paṇḍita's writings show a fascination with Beijing and an engagement with Nepal through allegorical poetry.

The rise of the aristocratic literati in Lhasa was not without detractors, both internally and externally. The Sixth Dalai Lama gave back his monastic vows and turned away from his responsibilities as leader of the country, but he also engaged in a more subtle form of protest through his writings. Unlike his predecessor, the Great Fifth Dalai Lama, the Sixth wrote no major works of philosophy, nor did he write in the preferred style of poetry for the elite, the Indian *kāvya* style. Instead he wrote love songs in a folk idiom that has more in common with harvest songs of peasants than the amorous musings of Polhané. More explicit are critiques of the cultural and social milieu in Central Tibet by writers at the margins of the Tibetan cultural world. Tenzin Repa (1646–1723) offered spirited criticism of the baroque excess within the institutions of Central Tibet, the very excess that had given rise to the literary innovation represented by Dokharwa. Finally, some writers remained rooted in their homelands outside Central Tibet, yet still found social space in which to innovate. This was the case with Orgyen Chökyi, the author of one of the earliest autobiographies by a woman in Tibetan. KRS

### AMOROUS WRITINGS

#### LOVE SONGS OF THE SIXTH DALAI LAMA

The Sixth Dalai Lama took the throne as ruler of Tibet in 1701, some eighteen years after the death of the Fifth Dalai Lama in 1682. He was by all accounts ill suited for the job, and it is tempting to wonder if he would have abdicated had he not been deposed by the Mongol leader Lhazang Khan in 1706. There are good grounds for sympathizing with Tsangyang Gyatso, who remains one of the most complex and intriguing characters in Tibetan history. Born in the southern borderlands of Tibet, he was, unlike most Dalai Lamas, not brought to Lhasa at a young age, and did not benefit from the intensive education and enculturation that monastic training in the country's capital would have offered. Rather, he was raised in secrecy, as imposed by the Fifth Dalai Lama's regent, Desi Sanggyé Gyatso, near his homeland until he was a teenager, then ushered into the political world as an inexperienced young man. Tsangyang Gyatso refused to play the role assigned to him by the regent, preferring instead to spend his time among the Lhasa public enjoying women, wine, and song. If this was not precisely what Sanggyé Gyatso had intended, history has been kind to Tsangyang Gyatso, and his poems remain among the most loved literature produced by any of the Dalai Lamas. Tibetans remember him as the Dalai Lama with a human face. He was an enlightened figure, to be sure, but he was the

Dalai Lama who chose to exhibit his pure and exalted status by conducting himself in a most sensual, amorous, and creaturely manner. Today Tsangyang Gyatso is largely known through his poetry, which is famous throughout Tibet. These brief, disconnected verses speak of yearning, arousal, and sadness. They evoke romantic images of the Tibetan landscape and nostalgic memories of drunken nights and days of youth. Perhaps more than any other work of Tibetan literature, they bring the gods to earth. KRS

(1)  
From top the eastward peak,  
arose the clear white moon:  
her immaculate face  
turned and turned in my mind.

(2)  
Last year's cast seedlings  
this year ripple as hay.  
A stripling's aging frame  
stiff as a southern bow.

(4)  
On chance's road I met  
a perfumed bodied girl.  
Like turquoise in my hand  
I threw its beauty back.

(25)  
A bee caught in a web:  
body of a Kong youth.  
Her bed-mate for three days,  
he thinks of holy lands.

(34)  
If my girl could not die  
there'd be no end to beer;  
we'd stay in youth's haven.  
In this I put my trust.

(36)  
Is not my love since youth  
descended from the wolves?  
Once she's known skin and flesh  
she bolts back to the hills.

(43)  
Central kingly Meru,  
stay faithful, do not change;  
the rounds of sun and moon  
must not be thought to stray.

(49)  
I know all her soft flesh  
but not her constancy;  
by drawing in the dirt  
I measure to the stars.

(50)  
Our tryst in the dense woods  
of the southern valley  
a parrot only knows,  
all else are ignorant.  
O parrot, please do not  
repeat our secret words.

(52)  
Hey, old dog called "Beard,"  
more clever than a man,  
don't say, "He left at dawn,"  
don't say, "He came at dusk."

(57)  
I ask you, you white crane,  
give me your wing's power.  
I am not going far,  
just 'round Litang and back.<sup>1</sup>

(65)  
Behind me a demon.  
Who cares if he's fearsome?  
I saw a sweet apple  
and was compelled to pluck.

[Tsangyang Gyatso, "Love Poems of the Sixth Dalai Lama," trans. Nathan Hill and Toby Fee, *The Harvard Advocate* (Winter 2008):80-91.]

<sup>1</sup>This verse is often considered a prophecy of the Sixth Dalai Lama's rebirth, for the Seventh Dalai Lama was born in Kham, in the region of Litang.

reflects dawning Tibetan knowledge of Communism, as the Chinese Nationalists used their northern campaign to attack the Communist revolutionaries. In this passage, the word "Communist" is not used, but a phonetic rendering of the Russian term "Bolshevik" was created out of the Tibetan words *böl-shi-bik*, meaning "soft," "to die," and "piercing." GT

#### THE STATE OF AFFAIRS IN CHINA

Beijing: the news heard was that on the sixth day of the fourth foreign month [April], after about one hundred soldiers of the warlord Zhang Xueliang's Northern Army and the armed police suddenly surrounded the four corners of the Russian consulate, those inside jumped out—twenty-two Russians and seventy-five Chinese—[and] were seized. . . . Bullets and gunpowder, a thousand red flags, and quite a few pamphlets with an evil strategy to cause trouble were brought out from those buildings. Because of that, Zhang Xueliang issued a statement: "For the communities of evil people wrongly agitating the peoples of the state—those Red Russians or the Bolsheviks—capital punishment is required."

As said above, the news heard was that on the fourteenth day of the third foreign month [March], in the Chinese city of Nanjing, the Chinese soldiers were increasingly stealing the foreign and Chinese peoples' merchandise and so forth. Blame was also placed on the Yunnanese army soldiers.

[*Yul phyogs so so'i gсар 'gyur me long* II, no. 5 (May 2, 1927), 1-4). Trans. GT]