

## **Life-Writing in Tibetan Buddhist Literature**

Spring, 2015

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### **Course description**

This course engages the genre of life-writing in Tibetan Buddhist culture, addressing the permeable and fluid nature of this important sphere of Tibetan literature. Through Tibetan biographies, hagiographies, and autobiographies, the class will consider questions about how life-writing overlaps with religious doctrine, philosophy, and history. For comparative purposes, we will read life writing from Western and other Asian authors, for instance accounts of the lives of Christian saints and poetry of Japanese monks, raising questions about the cultural relativity of what makes up a life's story. Literary critical and other theoretical sources are assigned weekly to support and deepen our discussions of the primary source materials. This course will ask you to attend to patterns in biographical writings, asking you to recognize, highlight and analyze patterns in life-writings, either within the Tibetan Buddhist culture or across cultures.

### **Required books (available at Book Culture and on reserve at Starr)**

Aśvaghosa. 2008. *Buddhacarita*. trans. by Patrick Olivelle.

Janet Gyatso. 1998. *Apparitions of the Self: The Secret Autobiographies of a Tibetan Visionary*.

Schaeffer, Kurtis. 2004. *Himalayan Hermitess: The Life of a Tibetan Buddhist Nun*.

Diemberger, Hildegard. 2007. *When a Woman Becomes a Religious Dynasty*

Shabkar Tsogdruk Rangdrol. 2001. *The Life of Shabkar: the autobiography of a Tibetan yogin*. trans. by Matthieu Ricard et al.

Mary McCarthy. 1957. *Memories of a Catholic Girlhood*.

Tsangnyon Heruka. 2010. *Life of Milarepa*. trans. by Andy Quintman.

Ngawang Lhundrup Dargyé. 2011. *The Hidden Life of the Sixth Dalai Lama*. trans. by Simon Wickham-Smith.

### **Additional reading assignments**

Other weekly readings, listed below, are available on Courseworks. In addition, one of the main reference sources for the course is the website The Treasury of Lives: A Biographical Encyclopedia of Himalayan Religion. This is available at [treasuryoflives.org](http://treasuryoflives.org). (Please note: if you are interested in publishing your final essay, you are encouraged to submit your work to the Treasury of Lives editors for their consideration at the end of the semester.)

### **Course requirements**

Attendance and Participation 20% – Weekly reading responses posted on Courseworks. Your weekly response should be 2-3 paragraphs in length and should address particular points in the reading that you found interesting or noteworthy. Please post your response by 8pm the night before class.

In-class presentations – you will be asked to lead at least one class session, offering the class about 5 questions to spark discussion. This presentation should engage with the Treasury of Lives site as well, if possible. You will also make a presentation about your final paper topic during the final class meeting. 20%

Midterm paper – on biography as a genre, engaging theoretical sources 30% (5-7pp: select one theoretical source and engage either with one of the primary sources or pursue a theme across several primary sources)

Final paper – a short biography (2-4 pages, possibly contributed to the Treasury of Lives collection) and reflection paper (5-7 pages) considering pattern recognition in biographical writing 30%

### **Academic Integrity**

This course is taught in the spirit of the guidelines for academic integrity of Columbia College, the School of General Studies, and the School of Engineering and Applied Sciences. All work should be the original work of the student her or himself. Papers may be discussed with other members of the class but may not be copied in any part from the work of anyone else, including from printed or Internet sources.

### **Disability Support**

Students with disabilities who will be taking this course and may need disability-related classroom accommodations are encouraged to see the instructors as soon as possible. Also, stop by the Office of Disability Services to register for support services.

### **Weekly Class Schedule**

#### **Week 1 (Jan 20) Introduction to Class, Sources, Topic**

*Encyclopedia of Religion & Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, entries on “biography” to be distributed in class.

Intro to Treasury of Lives site <http://www.treasuryoflives.org/>

In class you will be asked to compose a 300-450 word biography of one of your parents or grandparents, to discuss and turn in at end of class.

#### **Week 2 (Jan 27) Biography and Hagiography**

- 1) Aśvaghōṣa's *Buddhacarita (Life of the Buddha)* trans. by Patrick Olivelle, entire but concentrate on cantos 1-4, 13-14. (Required book.)
- 2) Janet Gyatso, "Autobiography in Tibet," *Apparitions of the Self*, pp 101-123. (Required book.)
- 3) Oates, "Biography: The Human Heart of History" in *Biography as History* 5-17.
- 4) Company, Robert Ford, "Interpreting Hagiographic Sources" in Ch. 1 of *Making Transcendents* (U. of Hawai'i Press, 2009), pp. 8-22.

Assignment (Due Jan 31): Post 300-450 word autobiography to Courseworks.

### **Week 3 (Feb 2) Exemplary Lives in Early Tibetan History**

- 1) Tsangnyon Heruka, *Life of Milarepa* (Penguin Classics, 2010), trans. Andy Quintman. (Required book.)
- 2) Selection from *Sources of Tibetan Tradition: The Stele of Takdra Lukhong*, pp 58-60; Tri Desongtsen's Edicts Rewarding the Monk Nyang Tingngedzin Zangpo, 66-70.
- 3) Kamo no Chomei, "An Account of My Hut," in Donald Keene, *Anthology of Japanese Literature*, pp. 197-212.
- 4) James Olney, *Metaphors of Self: The meaning of Autobiography*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton U.P., 1972, pp. 19-45.

### **Week 4 (Feb 10) Making Sense of Mythic Figures**

- 1) Robinson, James Burnell. "The Lives of the Indian Buddhist Saints: Biography, Hagiography, and Myth," in *Tibetan Literature: Studies in Genre*, pp. 57-69.
- 2) Janet Gyatso, "A Partial Genealogy of the Lifestory of Ye shes mtsho rgyal," *JiATS*, no. 2 (August 2006), <http://www.thlib.org/collections/texts/jiats/#!jiats=/02/gyatsoj/>
- 3) Selections from *The Lotus-born: life story of Padmasambhava* / "composed" by Yeshe Tsogyal; "revealed" by Nyang Rel Nyima Ozer pp. [55-66](#), [66-117](#), [160-162](#).
- 4) Selections from: Stag sham Nus ldan rdo rje, AKA Samten Lingpa, *Lady of the lotus-born : the life and enlightenment of Yeshe-Tsogyal*, translated by the Padmakara Translation Group. Boston : Shambhala, 1999. Part I, (with special attention to pp.5-25; 44-63; 70-92; skim 94-99. Note that these pages are very short and include many verses) and Part II (a brief 2 page verse on Yeshé Tsogyel's accomplishments and her special ties to Tibet).
- 5) Selection from *Sources of Tibetan Tradition*: Padmasambhava and Yeshé Tsogyel.

### **Week 5 (Feb 17) Gendered Readings of Biographies I (15<sup>th</sup> c)**

- 1) Diemberger, Hildegard. *When A Woman Becomes A Religious Dynasty*, NY: Columbia University Press, 2007. (Required book.) Please focus on the translator's Introduction and Part I.
- 2) Augustine. *The Confessions of St. Augustine*. trans. J.G. Pilkington (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1886). Selections, from: <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1101.htm>.
- 3) Smith, Sidonie and Watson, Julia, *Reading Autobiography* (Minneapolis: U. of Minnesota Press, 2001): Chapter 7 "A Tool Kit: Twenty Strategies for Reading Life Narratives", pp. 165-179

### **Week 6 (Feb 24) Saints in Social Context (15<sup>th</sup> c)**

- 1) Diemberger, Hildegard. *When A Woman Becomes A Religious Dynasty*, NY: Columbia University Press, 2007. Please focus on Part II.
- 2) Saint Teresa of Avila, *Collected Works: The Book of Her Life*, Institute of Carmelite Publications, Washington D.C., 1976. Chs. 1-11, 19-23, 25, 28, 31, 34, 37-40
- 3) Geary, Patrick, "Saints Scholars and Society" *Living with the Dead in the Middle Ages*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1994, pp. 9-29.

### **Week 7 (March 3) An Early Woman's Autobiography (early 18<sup>th</sup> c)**

- 1) Schaeffer, Kurtis. *Himalayan Hermitess: The Life of a Tibetan Buddhist Nun*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004. (Required book.)
- 2) From *Sources of Tibetan Tradition*: Nangsa Öbum, "A Weaving Song."

### **Midterm due March 13**

### **Week 8 (March 10) Self –doubt and Self-promotion**

- 1) Janet Gyatso, *Apparitions of the Self*, "Secret Autobiographies of Jigme Lingpa," pp. 124-145.
- 2) Jacques Derrida, *The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation* (University of Nebraska Press, 1988), pp. 3-19.
- 3) Matsuo Basho, *Narrow Road to the Deep North*, three sketches: The Records of a Weather-Exposed Skeleton; A Visit to Kashima Shrine; The Records of a Travel-Worn Satchel, pp. 51-95.

### **Week 9 (March 17) No Class Spring Break**

### **Week 10 (March 24) "Modern" Tibetan Autobiography (18<sup>th</sup> c Tibet)**

- 1) Keyes, Charles F. 1982. "Charisma: From Social Life to Sacred Biography." *Charisma and Sacred Biography*. Michael A. Williams (ed.). *Journal of the American Academy of Religion Studies*. Vol. XLVIII, No. 3 and 4, pp. 1-22
- 2) Janet Gyatso, *Apparitions of the Self*. Selections. xi-123, 265-272.

### **Week 11 (March 31) Growth and Criticism of Tibetan Biographies**

- 1) Ngawang Lhundrup Dargyé, trans. by Simon Wickham-Smith, *The Hidden Life of the Sixth Dalai Lama*. (Required book.)
- 2) Schaeffer, Kurtis. "Tibetan Biography: Growth and Criticism," *Edition, editions: l'ecrit au Tibet, evolution et devenir*. Edited by Anne Chayet, et al. München: Indus, 2010, 263-305.

### **Week 12 (April 7) Stories of the Self**

- 1) Shabkar Tsogdruk Rangdrol, *The Life of Shabkar: The Autobiography of a Tibetan Yogin*. (Required book.) Please focus on the Introduction and Chs. 1-6, 9, 12-Conclusion.
- 2) de Man, Paul. 1979. "Autobiography as De-facement," *MLN*. no. 94 vol. 5. Dec.: 919-930.

### **Week 13 (April 14) Contemporary Religious Life**

- 1) Mary McCarthy, *Memories of a Catholic Girlhood*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1957. (Required book.)
- 2) Charlene Makley, "'Speaking Bitterness': Autobiography, History, and Mnemonic Politics on the Sino-Tibetan Frontier," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*. 47: 1. January 2005, pp 40-78.  
<http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/10.1017/S0010417505000034>
- 3) Tulku Urygen Rinpoche. *Blazing Splendor: The Memoirs of Tulku Urygen Rinpoche*. Selections.
- 4) Tashi Khedrup, with Richardson, Hugh Edward, Skorupski, Tadeusz. *Adventures of a Tibetan Fighting Monk*. pp. 1-8; 15-20; 49-60; 97-104; 129-135.

### **Week 14 (April 21) Student Presentations**

### **Week 15 (April 28) Student Presentations**