ন্ত্ শ্বিষ্টা স্থান (Silent Dusk) के শ্বিদ্ধান্ত Tsedrön Kyi

(Translated from Tibetan by Erin Burke and Eben Yonnetti)9

Keywords: Tibetan literature, women writers, Tsedrön Kyi, translation, polyandry

Translator's Introduction

Contemporary Tibetan writer Tsedrön Kyi (ক্টাৰ্ক্স্ক্রির) is from Ba County (বননাইনা), in Amdo, close to Tso Ngonpo (মার্ক্টার্ক্স্ক্রাম্) in

⁹We are especially grateful to Tashi Dekyid Monet for first introducing us to this short story and patiently answering numerous questions we had while reading it the first time. Additional thanks go to Tsedrön Kyi for sharing her reflections on this story and permitting us to translate it into English. Finally, we would like to thank all of the participants in the Tibetan Women Writing Symposium for their comments and suggestions on an earlier draft of this translation.

the northeastern region of Tibet. For several decades, she has worked as a Tibetan language and literature teacher at Yushu Nationalities High School in Yushu Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture (খ্ৰাপ্ৰাইন্ট্ৰাম) and written many short stories and essays that have been published in literary journals. Like many other contemporary Tibetan women writers, Tsedrön Kyi writes in her spare time, balancing writing with her career as an educator. Still, she has published two books of her own short stories, A Melancholy Drama (ক্ৰাপ্ৰাইন্ট্ৰামণ্ডৰামণ্ডৰ

Tsedrön Kyi frequently elevates the perspectives of Tibetan women and often centers her fiction around their experiences. She is particularly skillful at conveying the intense unspoken emotions and innermost struggles of women, voices that have been historically underrepresented in much of Tibetan literature. As she noted in a recent interview, she finds inspiration for her short stories in the everyday world around her, often crafting her stories based upon "the general fate of Tibetan women (\(\Tilde{\Tild

¹⁰Tshe sgron skyid 2005.

¹¹ Tshe sgron skyid 2016.

¹² Her essay, মান্তবি অনু ব্যামান্ত্র ক্লিন্ত্র কলেন্ত্র কলেন্ত কলেন্ত্র কলেন্ত্র কলেন্ত্র কলেন্ত কলেন্ত্র কলেন্ত্র কলেন্ত কলেন্ত্র কলেন্ত্র কলেন্ত্র কলেন্ত্র কলেন্ত্র ক

intimately familiar with from her career as a secondary school teacher.¹³

"Silent Dusk" (মৃ.শ্রমান্ত্যমান্ত্রমান্ত্রমান্ত্রমান্ত্রমান্ত্রমান্ত্রমান্ত্রমান্ত্রমান্ত্রম (মার্নিস্থ্রাম্ব্রা) and her painful struggles within her polyandrous marriage in rural Tibet. The story is set in an undisclosed village in contemporary Tibet, punctuated with both bucolic images of the Tibetan landscape as well as mobile phones and highways. As the story opens, Metok Lhadzé is gazing off into the sunset on a hilltop near her home, unsettled and restless over the absence of her beloved husband, Wangdül. Confused and anxious, she trudges back to her home where she is confronted with her despised and drunken second husband, Drakpa. Like many other Tibetan and Himalayan women, Metok Lhadzé is in a polyandrous marriage with two brothers whose contrast in terms of education and worldly success, life choices, and temperament toward her are a clear source of tension throughout the story. As darkness engulfs the valley, Metok Lhadzé's hopes dissolve like the red clouds at sunset and Drakpa's drunken rage overwhelms everything. The story ends in blackness.

Although "Silent Dusk" offers only a brief glimpse into one evening of a woman's life, Tsedrön Kyi manages to contrast the tense atmosphere of Metok Lhadzé's claustrophobic helplessness with the spacious emptiness of her environment and what feels like an eternity of loneliness that stretches out before her. She is focused tightly on her white cellphone, her most precious gift from her beloved husband Wangdül, compulsively returning again and again to check for his call.

¹³ Tsedrön Kyi quoted in Bhum and Gayley 2022, 86.

At the same time, the vast sky is slowly darkening, and Metok Lhadzé can see the road stretching far away from her village. She imagines Wangdül in another city with another woman, which seems a world away, but she cowers in her kitchen, avoiding the other husband who has come home.

During the Tibetan Women Writing Symposium held at the University of Virginia in April 2022, Tsedrön Kyi noted that while she wrote the first draft of "Silent Dusk" over the course of one evening in 1997, she continued to return and revise it for over twenty years. The short story is a deeply moving depiction of contemporary Tibetan women's struggles with love, rural life, marriage, and education in a world that seems to offer hope for a better life in the towns and cities just over the horizon. Although the end of the story is heart wrenching, one of the saddest moments in the story is Metok Lhadzé's wish to sit quietly reading next to Wangdül. As an uneducated woman, her wish for literacy is one that Wangdül cannot fulfill. Tsedrön Kyi emphasized in conversation that Metok Lhadzé not only longs for the company of the kinder of her two husbands, but for the educational opportunities that take and keep him so far away from her as well.

Although there are elements of broader social commentary and realism in this story—drunken and absent husbands, inequities in educational opportunities—the story lives in Metok Lhadzé's inner world. Readers do not get a stark depiction of social realities, but a personally inflected lived experience of them from one woman's perspective. Tsedrön Kyi does not portray Metok Lhadzé flatly as a type—a woman oppressed by a traditional marriage custom.

Similarly, we see glimpses of her deadbeat husband Drakpa's personal struggle with his own experience of rural life and a complicated marriage. As despicable as his behavior in the story is, Drakpa seems to face similar frustrations over his limited education and career opportunities, and lack of status as the younger brother in a polyandrous marriage. In our discussions at the Symposium, Tsedrön Kyi emphasized that contrary to what first impressions might impart to readers, her intention in this short story is to take the sides of neither Tibetan women nor men. If she did, she continued, it would not make for a very interesting story.

We chose to translate the title of this story as "Silent Dusk." The Tibetan word khu sim po (() means both "silent" and "without agitation or conflict." Tsedrön Kyi describes the setting sun and darkening valley beautifully, but the dusk that settles around Metok Lhadzé does not ease her mind and bring her peace—just the opposite. Her angst only increases the lower the sun dips below the horizon. We understood "silent," therefore, as having multiple references throughout the story. First, it alludes to Metok Lhadzé's phone, which never brings the sound of Wangdül's call, no matter how desperately Metok Lhadzé wishes it would. Second, Metok Lhadzé is also silent in the story, never once responding to Drakpa's tirade of drunken questions and demands. Finally, the darkening valley is also silent, devoid of the sounds of other life and the motor of Wangdül's car. Given the foreboding quality of the atmosphere and disturbing ending, we hope "Silent Dusk" conveys some of the cruel irony of the original Tibetan title.

Tsedrön Kyi's short stories describe in intimate detail the tremendous struggles and complex emotional tensions experienced by

Tibetan women as they navigate their lives in contemporary Tibetan society. Women's obstacles as they pursue an education, attempts to balance familial expectations with their own aspirations, as well as experiences with sexual violence and the pulls and pitfalls of urban life are all important themes across much of Tsedrön Kyi's writings, and are especially central to "Silent Dusk." The first time we read this story, we were both absolutely devastated by it and simultaneously drawn in by the vivid characters and beauty of the prose. Tsedrön Kyi's powerful writing invites readers to envision Metok Lhadzé's dreams and to share in her heartbreak. We hope our English translation conveys the tensions present within Metok Lhadzé's inner life to readers and allows them to enter the world of this beautiful tragedy.

मि.श्रुश्रासद्गुःशःश्रूरी

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Silent Dusk

Over many months and years, reddish clouds had beautifully adorned the horizon at dusk countless times. Nevertheless, because these clouds created little more than passing beauty, Metok Lhadzé hardly ever noticed this ever-present scene anymore. Today once again, after the sun had set, the red clouds on the western horizon were like an indecipherable¹⁴ oil painting. Even though Metok Lhadzé tried to carefully study and appreciate this wonderous natural image, she wasn't very successful. For a little while, she tapped the white mobile phone in her hand repeatedly against her earring. Her beautiful face, like a full conch-moon, was marked by a longing¹⁵ melancholy as she finally walked down the hill.

Today was Saturday, so Metok Lhadzé had been expecting her elder husband, Wangdül, would come. But, Wangdül hadn't called yet. Could he have been in an accident with a truck on the road? Could he have fallen in love with another woman? What could have happened? In any event, after lunch today Metok Lhadzé had paced up and down the hill behind her home quite a few times. She found the hours difficult to pass in anticipation and worry. Now that twilight had faded, the sky in the valley was almost completely dark and Metok Lhadzé had no choice but to return to the kitchen, her head hanging low.

As soon as she opened the front door, her phone rang. Overjoyed, Metok Lhadzé picked up and placed the phone to her ear.

¹⁴ বৰ্দ্ধিন ব্ৰামান্ত translates literally as "an unclear subject." Tsedrön Kyi explained that here the term is describing a blurry or indecipherable painting, the lack of clarity mirroring the mood of Metok Lhadzé.

¹⁵ दे भूज a term we have translated the term alternately as "longing," "expecting," and "anticipation." It appears three times in the opening lines to this story and is an important descriptor of Metok Lhadzé's emotional state.

"Hey woman! I'm about to head home. Cook up some juicy meat and make some good tea. And don't forget to come and greet me at the door. Got it?" It was Drakpa's unpleasant voice.

Drakpa was Metok Lhadzé's younger husband. He only knew how to trade in odds and ends. He was careless and scatter-brained, 16 and Metok Lhadzé found him impossible to put up with. From inside the bedroom, he would always call to ask her pointless questions, like "Who do you really love?" "Why do you always flash smiles at Wangdül, but barely glance at me?" and so on.

And then there was Wangdül...Wangdül had gone to college and was now a language arts teacher at the county middle school. For his part, he fundamentally disagreed with this polyandrous marriage. However, in addition to his elderly father's commands, his elderly mother had used all manner of ways to force him into it, swearing oath after oath and carrying on. In the end, he had no choice but to renounce his affections and autonomy and marry Metok Lhadzé together with his younger brother, Drakpa.

In reality, it was Wangdül and Metok Lhadzé who were legally husband and wife and had the marriage certificate. Moreover, the white mobile phone Metok Lhadzé used was the best gift Wangdül had ever bought for her. Wangdül didn't express his affection very much, but he loved

¹⁶ ភូតុ ត្រូវត្សភុទ literally translates to "having a manifold stream of thoughts." Here the term negatively implies Drakpa having an unproductive overabundance of thoughts and ideas.

cleanliness and never said more than was strictly necessary. Usually, he just liked to sit beside his reading lamp and peacefully read his books. In Metok Lhadzé's mind, she would imagine and say to herself over and over again: "If only I had gone to school, then I could sit and read with him. If only our lives could be like that, how wonderful it would be!" Moreover, Wangdül never once told Metok Lhadzé his desires, saying "I need this and that," and so on. Ever since they were married, unless there was some special event, as soon as it was the weekend Wangdül would leave the school and return home. When he came home, he would busy himself right away doing whatever chores he could inside or outside the house. Even when Wangdül wasn't home, he would call Metok Lhadzé on her phone. And so, Metok Lhadzé truly and sincerely loved him.

For the last two weeks, however, Wangdül inexplicably hadn't returned home. He hadn't even so much as called. Metok Lhadzé fell into an abyss of longing and worry. She often cried alone in her kitchen. And, today when she heard Drakpa's unpleasant voice, she felt as if she'd been crushed by a boulder. Her normally relaxed breathing had become labored and difficult.

Just then, Drakpa entered the house accompanied by the overpowering¹⁷ smell of alcohol. His eyes were bloodshot, and strings of spittle spewed everywhere from his mouth when he spoke.

¹⁷ স্বর্সে might also be translated here as "harmful" or "oppressive." We have chosen "overpowering" to connote the strength of this smell and how revolting Metok Lhadzé finds it.

"Hey woman! Why didn't you come out to welcome me home? Ah, Wangdül...you were hoping for Wangdül, huh? But now you're disappointed? 'A white-collar worker' 18... Phuh!" Drakpa trailed off, and muttering to himself he went straight to Metok Lhadzé's bedroom.

After the others in the house had gone to bed, Metok Lhadzé cooked the meat for Drakpa in the kitchen. All the while, she still really believed that Wangdül's phone call would come.

"Hey woman! Why won't you come near me? Hey woman!" Drakpa called out to Metok Lhadzé, slurring his words.

"That jerk!¹⁹ When he called a little while ago, he didn't seem drunk. Who was he with, and where did he get so drunk in just a half an hour?" Metok Lhadzé cried to no one but herself in the kitchen. A look of panic and helplessness appeared on her face. She touched the phone again and again. She ran her hand across the phone again and again. As she touched the phone, she kept thinking of the soft touch and gentle character of her dear husband, Wangdul.

Suddenly, Metok Lhadzé got up, climbed to the top of the hill again, and looked into the distance. She couldn't see a car—or even a headlight—coming or going on the winding highway leading to the far-off town. All of the peaceful and relaxed twilit surroundings started to

¹⁸ ক্রুলামর ক্রুলাম ব্রুল্ফা literally translated means "one who works for the state" which might be translated as "a civil servant." Here Tsedrön Kyi noted that she meant to imply someone with stable office work in contrast to Drakpa's intermittent employment.

^{19 ₹} १६ translates literally as "corpse-demon." It is a derogatory insult that could also be translated in much harsher terms but is not necessarily an expletive.

blur.

Though Metok Lhadzé ran her hand over the white phone a few times, in the end, she didn't find the courage to call Wangdül. Most likely, Wangdül had a soulmate he could confide in. In all these years, he hadn't sincerely told Metok Lhadzé anything that was truly from the heart, but there is no such thing as a normal marriage without problems. Metok Lhadzé certainly knew all of these things. Nevertheless, Wangdül's easy-going temperament, kind speech, gentle touch, and understanding nature had made her so happy. Every one of Wangdül's calls had given her tremendous hope, and that gentle disposition and clear voice of his had pulled her out of hell and into heaven.

Darkness is a cruel predator and seemed in the span of a single instant to begin to devour this small, insignificant valley whole. Now no one could see very far at all.

The white phone made no sound at all. Yesterday's words repeated again in her mind, "Really, no one should rely on worldly hopes and happiness. Those are just like the red clouds on the horizon." Dragging her feet heavily, Metok Lhadzé went back down the hill.

Like a child lost in dreams and fantasies, as Metok Lhadzé was about to come through the door to the bedroom she closed the white phone with trembling hands. She let out a long sigh, and, as usual, got into Drakpa's bed.

"Hey woman! Where did you disappear to? Were you waiting for that accomplished man? Tell me! Speak!" Drakpa grabbed Metok Lhadzé by the hair and shook her a few times. Suddenly, intoxicated with desire, he began to have his way with Metok Lhadzé without restraint.

In the sky, the moon had no brightness, and even the constellations did not shine. Everything was just like the terrifying Lord of Death's²⁰ difficult path.

Revised in Kyegu, October 30, 2019.

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²⁰ Shin jé (স্বাইন) in Tibetan or Yamarāja in Sanskrit, is a wide-ranging deity in Tibetan Buddhism. In paintings of the wheel of life (মুদ্দেই ব্রহিন্দ্রেই) he is depicted as the personification of death, holding all of cyclic existence in his grasp. In images of the hell realms, Shin jé is depicted as the king of the hungry ghosts, judging beings who have been born in the hell realms.

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