God's Friends and Buddha's Children

A Comparative Study of Exemplary Lives and Exceptional Narrations

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to him who is able

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Abstract/Abstrait

This object of this thesis is to formulate and test a revised methodology of comparison in the study of religion. It presents a history of attempts to compare religious traditions, their features and people, and critiques significant methodological moves by appeal to contemporary work on comparison, ethical subjectivity, narrative historiography, and postcolonial methods. It proposes in light of these critiques a new method that takes as its operative metaphor the sacralising of space using mandala forms in the conversion of Tibet to Buddhism. From this theoretical mode, this thesis moves to consider two corpora of life narrations: those of realised masters of South and Central Asian Islam, and those of realised masters of Indian and Tibetan Buddhism. It analyses repeated tropes in each corpus to unearth patterns of moral exemplarity, expressing these patterns as generalised traits whose intersections form the pool of family resemblances that define each paradigmatic master. Finally, it uses the newly-proposed method to compare these two sets of traits, uncovering similarities and differences that speak to the characteristic properties of each paradigmatic master. This thesis closes with the argument that the results of an application of this particular method reveal more about the comparanda than a study of each individually could produce, while simultaneously avoiding many of the undesirable outcomes of earlier comparative methods and methodologies.

Le but de cette thèse est de formuler et de mettre à l'épreuve une méthodologie de comparaison modifiée dans les études religieuses. Elle présente une histoire des tentatives à faire la comparaison entre quelques traditions religieuses, ses traits et ses adhérentes/ adhérents, et critique certaines instances importantes de l'utilisation des méthodologies comparatives en appelant oeuvres contemporaines sur la comparaison, la subjectivité éthique, l'historiographie narrative, et les méthodes postcoloniales. Elle propose, grâce à ces critiques, une nouvelle méthode qui prend comme métaphore opérationelle la sacralisation d'espace avec formes de mandala durant la conversion du Tibet au bouddhisme. Après cette section théorique, la thèse considère deux corpus des narrations des vies : ceux de maîtres réalisés qui viennent de l'Islam sud-asiatique et Asiatique central, et ceux de maîtres réalisés quie viennent du bouddhisme tibétain et indien. Elle analyse des motifs répétés dans chaque corpus pour découvrir les modèles de l'exemplarité moraux, et elle exprimes ces modèles comme traits généralisés qui se croisent dans la formation d'un groupement des ressemblances familiales qui précisent chaque maître paradigmatique. Finalment, elle utilise la méthode nouvellement proposée pour faire une comparaison entre les deux ensembles de traits et par conséquent découvre similitudes et différances qui dévoilent les propriétés caractéristiques de chaque maître paradigmatique. Cette thèse se termine avec l'argument que les résultats d'une application de cette méthode démontrent plus sur les comparanda qu'une étude de chacun isolément pourrait produire. Simultanément, elle fait valoir que cette méthode évite plusiers résultats indésirables des méthodes et méthodologies de comparaison antérieures.

Introduction

> Reading the great unread entails attentiveness to the materials of the archive. It also entails humility before the vastness of the task and a retreat from totalizing ambitions.
> Margaret Cohen, "Narratology in the Archive of Literature," 61

In her study of pilgrims' perspectives, Barbara Aziz identifies the most common form of pilgrimage as that of following the path of a saint, re-enacting the trials and tribulations by which the saint moved from "humble seeker" to revered exemplar (Aziz 257). In a sense, the writers of hagiographies are themselves pilgrims, tracing paths and walking in footsteps in order to re-enact and revision the life of the saint; in another sense, readers are pilgrims, too. I take seriously the notion that the scholar, as a type of reader, is necessarily performing a kind of pilgrimage in approaching hagiographies, especially when we seek as I do to uncover the specific contours of the exemplarity embedded within these texts. In tracing the footsteps of the saints whose lives I read, I also perform a pilgrimage of another sort: through the sacred topography of my discipline, following Margaret Cohen's suggestion that the literary scholar ought to "foreground […] the similarity between her practice and its object" (Cohen 54).

The aim of my travel is twofold. I intend, firstly, to chart a course through the murky waters of the comparative study of religion that will, upon its completion, equip me to enter the territory of the saints as a cartographer. This second journey will lead me, and you, reader, to at once a greater familiarity with this territory and an awareness of the uncertainty implicit in map-making. In what follows, I will outline the tools I take with me, my scholarly definitions, and address the boundaries that circumscribe the corpora through which I will travel. From there, I will move into the journeys themselves, beginning by orienting myself disciplinarily and then puzzling through the two territories that compose my corpora, finally using the landmarks in each to understand the geography of the other. I will conclude this study with some reflections on both its progress and how, as a map of my voyages, it might be further refined to be of use to would-be pilgrims.

Portable Tools

I am concerned in this thesis with parsing patterns of exemplarity in life narrations of realised masters, focusing specifically on moral exemplarity; that is, on ideal moral behaviour expressed narratively. In the context of Islam, the ultimate moral exemplar is the Prophet; in Buddhism, the Buddha. I argue, hopefully uncontroversially, that the subjects of the texts I consider functioned in their bodily lives as derivative moral exemplars and continue to perform this function so long as their lives are perpetuated in narrative. These lives are at least in part patterned after those of their respective ultimate exemplars, and in turn serve as patterns for both other narrative expressions of exemplarity and the lives of practitioners. In the first part of my Methods and Methodology chapter, I will expand upon exemplarity, particularly as it relates to its foil and partner, exceptionality.

We can imagine for these narrative expressions of moral behaviour a broad audience composed of religious practitioners who seek inspiration and guidance in the examples of these men and women, although despite many studies of these narrative genres there has been little attention paid to audiences intended or actual. There is also little scholarly attention paid to

the interaction of textual and oral narratives of these exemplars and the potential for extended audiences through textual recording of oral narratives and oral recitations of textual narratives, at least in scholarship on the genres considered here. More specifically, though, these lives are likely exemplary for the classes of religious specialists that lay claim, legitimate or otherwise, to their subjects. In some cases, lives are presented polemically, to appropriate an exemplar into the writer's tradition, or, in the case of what are often called heresiographies and are not considered here, to distance the exemplar from that tradition. Lives may also be presented for the purpose of using a particular exemplary behaviour to justify a current practice within the writer's tradition. In other cases, they are presented devotionally, and in still others, they are presented with the expectation that they will win the author fame and glory. In all of these cases, the readers differ, but my understanding of the contexts in which these texts were written lead me to identify the ideal reader with a literate, primarily male practitioner who is concerned at least in some way with the particular strand of tradition in which the exemplar participates. Marcia Hermansen and Bruce Lawrence go as far as to say that at least one of the genres with which I concern myself are always elite narratives written for elites (Hermansen and Lawrence 149).

Instead of the term "hagiography," which is heavily imbued with Latinate Christian meaning, I call these textual narratives "life narrations." I have foregone emic genre titles in large part because while Muslim exemplars have their lives represented in a variety of ill-defined and understudied genres, Buddhist exemplars are represented in a single genre so large and unwieldy that the lack of scholarly attention paid to it as a genre is perhaps understandable. Creating a hybrid term in light of these conditions was too daunting a task for me. "Life narration" is instead a hopefully neutral descriptive term rather than a prescriptive genre title. It is rooted in "life writing," a term that is used often in studies of biographies outside of religious traditions. Although in this study I only consider texts, I have chosen the broader "narration" over "writing" to avoid foreclosing the possibility that the conclusions of this project might reflect the state of oral, performative, artistic, and monumental tellings of these exemplary lives. Indeed, it is one of the weaknesses of this project that it does not engage with the inter-genre and inter-medium interaction that was almost certainly occurring as the texts I consider were being composed, and by their exclusion I fear my provisional multi-generic label reveals more about me and my methods than about the texts it purports to classify.

Before turning to questioning why life-narrations are important, I want to briefly make an excursion into the topic of the dictionary, as both Islamic and Buddhist traditions of life narration include biographical compendia sometimes referred to as dictionaries. J.Z. Smith, in his discussion of taxonomies, argues that discussions of dictionaries are inseparable from discussions about definitions (*Relating Religion* 7:164). General language dictionaries, he notes, "are descriptive, not prescriptive" (*Relating Religion* 7:164), but "technical or subject-field dictionaries" are prescriptive insofar as they provide theoretical definitions, imposed on the reader by the expert writing the entry on the basis of "authoritative definitions composed by other experts," that "often counter common usage and are persuasive rather than descriptive" (*Relating Religion* 7:165). Although in large part a biographical dictionary is often called so because of its alphabetical organization, it is helpful

perhaps in the context of this project to interrogate a biographical dictionary in light of these opposing definitions. Is a biographical dictionary intended to be descriptive, like a lexical dictionary, or prescriptive, like a technical dictionary?

This question has serious implications for the light in which we take these particular sorts of life-narrations. While I would argue that the simplest reading of these texts is as descriptive, I suspect that the reality is far more complex. I want to suggest that the accounts in a biographical dictionary each offer both a description of a life and a prescription for how to live a morally exemplary life; it is on the basis of both facets of each entry that I am able to compile patterns and to ask, "exemplary for whom?" If these dictionaries were only descriptive, the question, and indeed his thesis, would have no meaning. But to treat the texts as exclusively prescriptive is to ignore the potent potential of the accounts within them as devotional tools, memorials, and, indeed, as archival sources. When I use the term "life-narration," I am including all of these valences, although I will be principally concerned with the tension between descriptive and prescriptive that lies within the concept of exemplarity, even in life narrations that address themselves to only one subject.

It is at this coincidence of prescription and description that we are uniquely able to discern answers to the question of what it means to be a moral exemplar. A purely prescriptive text, a manual of behaviour or a list of "thou shalt nots," is neither inspiring nor, in most cases, easily applicable. The description of the life of an (arguably) real person personifies and humanises the prescriptions for a moral life, renders them uniquely accessible and vivifies them to make them also uniquely compelling. But a description alone would not serve to answer the question, either, for a description by itself is simply offering chronological and thematic details, some recognisable, some not. Unless it is paired with the prescriptive mood, a description can serve at best to inspire states of mind. In reading an exemplary life-narration, with its indelible prescription, readers are compelled to consider how they might model their behaviour after the subject being described, in large part due to the power of exceptionality to signal where a moral exemplar is to be found, a consideration upon which I will expand in the second chapter. Life-narrations are thus a uniquely fertile ground for questioning the nature of moral exemplarity for the traditions who produce it.

These subjects whose described lives function as moral prescription are most commonly called "saints" in academic work. The term comes with a great deal of baggage: it is once again a Latinate Christian term that not only reflects scholarship's deep roots in the Euro-Christian imperialist project but also implies that the standard paradigm of the, almost always Roman Catholic, saint is to be deviated from rather than acknowledging a diversity of paradigms for exemplary lives. Barbara Holdrege decries this tendency for "European conceptual categories [to] provide the standard of comparison" (Holdrege 150), and here I attempt to break from that prevailing paradigm by positing a cross-cultural category whose title gestures to the surface-level similarities that prompted me to begin this study in the first place.

Although I will not use it, it is important to briefly explore some of the emic terminology before explaining my final act of terminological innovation. In the Buddhist tradition, the *chang chub sem pe* or *sangye kyi se* are Tibetan conceptual transliterations for the Sanskrit bodhisattva; the

former can be literally translated to "the hero with a mind of awakening" and the latter to "son of the awakened one." *Bodhisattva* itself is usually untranslated, but if represented in English it means something like "one having perfect wisdom." Within the Mahayana Buddhist context, the practitioners described by these terms are those who have taken a vow to seek awakening for the sake of all beings and who are therefore referred to as being on the bodhisattva path. Here I must note one of the crucial differences between the saint and the bodhisattva that plays a role in my rejection of the former term: the affective dimension of identity. While a saint's sanctity is a gift from the divine and/or a by-product of the saint's behaviour, the *sangye kyi se*'s linguistically predominant feature is their kinship with the Buddha. In the Islamic tradition, titles given range linguistically from the *shaykh*, *walī*, and *'āshiq* of Arabic and Persian to the *pīr* of Persian and Urdu. *Shaykh* and *pīr* both connote age, often conflated with spiritual authority, and are commonly used as titles of address in the context of life narrations, chronicles, records, and everyday life. The *walī* is the friend of God, and the term is often used in life narrations of and other literature pertaining to realised masters, as in 'Attar's famous compendium *Tazkirah al-awliyā*. The *'āshiq* is the lover to God's beloved, and is a term most commonly associated with poetry and ecstatic utterances. The title of this thesis intentionally reflects the relational ties the *sangye kyi se* has to their tradition and the *walī* has to his God, but to talk about both I use an artificially constructed term.

I use "realised master" or simply "master" to denote the subjects of exemplary life narrations. These masters are adepts in their respective traditions, and are acknowledged in their life narrations to have achieved a certain level of understanding about the nature of the world and their religious tradition's place in it. This title is one of the end results of my comparative project; I began examining lives of figures I called "poet-saints," and moved from there through several different and ultimately inadequate terms until I decided on "realised master." This rectification of academic terminology is, as I will discuss more fully in "Methods and Methodology," one of the primary outcomes of ethical comparison. Here as with the process that resulted in "life narration," emic terms are insufficiently similar to allow any to be taken as the name of the category into which both sets of figures fall, or to create a hybrid name. In any case, as I will detail in "Methods and Methodology," emic terms lose much of their usefulness when they are divorced from their contexts. Instead, I offer "realised master" as a term because it describes and circumscribes the exemplars whose lives are narrated in my corpora, not because I think it is a term that can or should be applied outside of this particular study. Even now, I am uncertain if perhaps "master" alone is not more reflective of these exemplars, and "realised" perhaps springs instead from my own disciplinary training.

"Realised master," then, for the moment, but master of what? I use this term to mean more than simply that these exemplars have mastered philosophical, doctrinal, ritual, or behavioural aspects of their respective religious traditions. I draw here from Paul Martin's types of journeys meant by the cognitive metaphor "the religious life is a journey." Martin identifies four: aspiring, mystical, ritual, and moral (Martin 949-54). The aspiring journey is "the endeavor to reach beyond the apparent limitations of the isolated self (ego) to be involved in that which is supposed to be

grander and greater (Martin 949-50). The mystical journey involves "a cross-over of ontological domains and of liminality," that, cataphatically, can involve an experience or consciousness of the divine presence or of the ultimate nature of reality) whose description is only ever metaphorically possible, if at all; apophatically, language is rendered entirely useless (Martin 950-2). The ritual journey is "a metaphoric projection that is experientially motivated," using both transactional ad relational logic to establish a connection between human and other agents (Martin 952-3). Finally, the moral journey is "the effort by people to reflect the moral qualities exemplified by some individual or individuals" (Martin 953).

Even just terminologically, it is evident that realised masters are master journeyers in all four of these senses. The Buddhist master follows the bodhisattva path; the Sufi the way (*tarīqa*) of his master. All the exemplars discussed here are simultaneously travelling along aspiring, mystical, ritual, and ethical journeys. What I mean by using the adjective "realised" is to suggest that they are advanced along these paths, that they have reached beyond their selves to gain experience or awareness of ultimate truth (*al-haqq*; *satya*), and indeed have transacted a relationship with that truth, and that they are emulating the behaviour of the ultimate exemplars in their traditions. Here I also want to question what it means for memorials of realised masters if their lives are journeys. Physical and textual life-narrations might in this frame be considered something like tour guides to help the traveller. The journey that is the spiritual life is made accessible in its physical dimension to the seeker who focuses on retracing the master's footsteps, often through pilgrimage but also through adoption of exemplary behaviours, and thereby access is granted to the spiritual journey in its metaphysical sense. All practitioners are at some stage on the path; it is their further progression along it that allows the figures I call realised masters to be road maps.

Boundaries

Here, I intend to offer a justification of the vast stretch of time that my project covers. I follow Gayatri Spivak in being troubled by periodization. Spivak suggests that a potential avenue away from the obsession with grand narratives of development involves taking into consideration what a text constructs as its ideal reader, enabling an identification of discrete linkages (Spivak *Postcolonial* 1.2:52, note 64). The discrete links I identify are between works within the genres that make up life narrations in these religious traditions, links of history and influence that span "periods" and political eras. Similarly, Talal Asad argues for conceptualising time and narrative differently by, instead of considering developmental narratives of periodization, putting the focus on transitions between time slices along a trajectory. He calls for a disruption of strict linear temporality (Asad *Secular* 5:179 and suggest that in light of the unacceptableness of a "straightforward narrative of progress" (Asad *Secular* 1:1), we ought to trace multiple trajectories almost simultaneously.

If periodization and the "straightforward narrative of progress" that successive periods implies are to be considered with suspicion, what is the alternative? Siegfried Kracauer, in his generalist appropriation of George Kubler's art historical arguments, offers a potential way forward. Kracauer identifies three negative consequences of the emplacement of events within

a linear relationship in the flow of chronological time, including a tacit assumption that appeal to a "historical moment" explains the appearance of events or phenomena, a focus on artificially constructed "continuous sequences" that ignore historical breaks, and the consideration of "the historical process" as a formal whole with attributable qualities (Kracauer 66). He follows Kubler to suggest that rather than following this fraught path of chronology, we ought instead to consider sequences, of events, for Kracauer; of artworks, for Kubler, "each composed of phenomena which hang together inasmuch as they represent successive 'solutions' of problems originating with some need and touching off the whole series" (Kracauer 67). In this sequential focus, the position of the event or artwork within the sequence to which it belongs is more important than its place in chronological history, especially as "related consecutive solutions are often widely separated in terms of chronological time" (Kracauer 67). Chronology, for Kracauer as for Kubler, is useless for helping us to understand historical phenomena in relationship to each other (Kracauer 68).

If, as I think can be fairly easily argued, texts like the ones I am considering can be arranged in a kind of sequence relative to each other, the relative position of any member of that sequence in chronological time has very little meaning for my understanding of the sequence as a whole. Here I am indebted to theorists of genre like Fredric Jameson, Ralph Cohen, and Mikhail Bakhtin who posit genres as eternally reconstructed through historically contingent evolutions rather than as fixed entities. Certainly here I am working with texts in multiple genres, but if each genre contains its own sequence, or if we take all of these to be but sub-genres of a genre umbrella that I am surely not alone in calling life narration, then the sequential nature of art objects allows these texts to fall together beyond the periodization that might otherwise be imposed upon them.

As a result of considering these genres as sequences over and above their constituents' locations in chronological time, I am able to examine members of the sequence not chronologically proximal to each other. I am not interested in understanding the historical contingencies that, as Kracauer notes in his corrective to Kubler, might influence one or another aspect of a member of the sequence.

It may seem dubious to propose to treat a sequence of works and, at the same time, uncover for whom their subjects are exemplary, but that is precisely what I intend to do. I contend that these sequences of texts, by virtue of their nature as extensions of and reflections on the primary exemplary narratives of each of their religious traditions, offer insight into what Talal Asad calls "tradition," in all of its groundedness and all of its potential for change. "Having a tradition," he suggests, "is an expression of a desire for the completion of a present that is simply unfinished time," (Asad "Tradition" 166-7). Traditions, for him, are composed of discourses and acts that proliferate in interpretation and development of non-exhaustive foundational discourses and acts; they are ongoing conversations into and out of which subjects pass and that can "accommodate rupture, recuperation, reorientation, and splitting" (Asad "Tradition" 168). The tradition of the moral exemplar is thus perpetuated and mutated as this sequence of narratives makes its way through chronological time, but while certain aspects of the patterns I have worked to identify may be associated with particular chronological contingencies, they ultimately all interpret or develop

the root narrative pattern in such a way that the sequence's construction of its ideal reader remains, broadly, unchanged despite changes to specific identities of readers. Whoever is interested in emulating the Prophet or the Buddha is, as I have mentioned above, uncontroversially the basic category of reader for whom these texts offer moral exemplars. Whoever is interested in emulating biographers before them; this is the basic category of reader for whom these texts themselves are exemplars, a category that includes modern scholars.

While, as Allan Pasco has argued and as is reasonably well-accepted in historical studies of literature today, literary texts are rich sources of archival knowledge about the chronological moments in which they came to be (Pasco 2004), I am less interested in the specific reader and their archival identity than I am in the general reader. However, as Pasco suggests, literary texts are rich sources not only for the kind of demographic information found in the archive; they are also sources for "reading the hearts and minds of individuals of long ago" (Pasco 378). Thus it is that these literary texts – unavoidably so, for they are not scripture, not scholarship, not legal texts or chronicles or philosophical tracts – can offer insight into what exemplarity means in their chronological contexts. In this project, I want to use this insight provided by the individual text-as-archive and broaden it to gain an understanding of the nature of exemplarity for the tradition embodied in the sequence of texts. Following this logic, I am choosing to use the plural when I discuss patterns of exemplarity because I am not intending to argue for a singular ethos stretched unbroken along the sequence; that, to return to Asad, is not the definition of tradition. Rather, what unifies the tradition, as the genre unifies the sequence, are crucial moments that arrange themselves into repeated and repeatable, interpretable, developable patterns. Further, I contend with Lynee Lewis Gaillet that the archive functions as a "primary sourc[e] for creating knowledge" rather than simply as a repository to be curated (Gaillet 39). While the patterns I seek to uncover in the sequential literary archives I am exploring are not explicit in them, by identifying and articulating these patterns I am creating both knowledge and uncertainty, I am asking the archive a question it is fully capable of answering about the composition, in the sense both of makeup and being made-up, of an exemplary life.

Having packed my bag and determined the boundaries of the territory I will cross, I now embark on my pilgrimage through first my discipline, in the chapter I have entitled "Methods and Methodology," and the objects of my study, in on "God's Friends" and "Buddha's Children" After I reflect on my journeys in "Reading Negative Space," I will conclude by arguing three central points. Firstly, I will contend that the method I develop, which uses the operative metaphor of a mandala overlay to seek non-hierarchising similarity and difference between comparanda, is successful in its aim of renewing comparative methodology in the study of religion. It is so because of its power to redescribe the categories that I have compared as well as its power to reflect upon the terminology that I have just presented and refine and redefine it.

My second argument is about the nature of the Muslim master's exemplarity. I argue that these masters live transformed and transformative lives permeated by an ethics of care and a dedication to practice, oriented toward the journey of the Path and thus heavily focused on temporal

concerns, including modelling behaviour. In contrast, and this is my third argument, the transformed and transformative lives of the Buddhist masters are rooted in an ethics of utility and a dedication to truth, oriented toward the end of the Path and thus heavily focused on concerns of posterity and legacy, including a heavy emphasis on exceptionality. My argumentation in all three cases is highly interdependent, reflecting my commitment to treating my method as pilgrimage as much as my analysis is. The boundaries between my comparison and its objects are fluid and imprecise; I aim in what follows to suggest that such interaction is to be desired because of its rendering contingent all conclusions.

Methods and Methodology

Scholarly labor is a disciplined exaggeration in the direction of knowledge.
J.Z. Smith, *Relating Religions,* 7:175

The title of this chapter may seem, at the outset, something by way of begging the question. Why is it necessary to differentiate between these two terms, and why have I included both? In multidisciplinary disciplines like the study of (a) religion(s), we are accustomed to seeing one or the other – usually "methods" from the social sciences and "methodology" from the humanities – but rarely, if ever, both. In this chapter, I will argue, among other things, that both an uncovering of our methods and a parsing of our methodologies are necessary for honest, accessible scholarship.

I begin with considering why this thesis, surely situated firmly in the humanities, is including a section on method. In so doing, I follow Barbara L'Eplattenier, who asks of literary studies generally and of literary archive historians specifically, "Why do we as a discipline rarely talk about the methods we use to access our information?" (L'Eplattenier 68). I would extend her question to ask, wherefore this curious absence in the humanities more generally? In part it must be laid on the shoulders of the tortured relationship the humanities have with the sciences more broadly – at once a rootedness and a repudiation, a contest in which the winner earns the title "more valuable." Another force at play is certainly the war within each of our constituent disciplines as to whether our work can – or should – be duplicatable; we are often caught between the desire to present our conclusions as objective facts and the simultaneous epistemic anxiety over the very possibility and accessibility of things we might term "objective facts." Neither of these reasons are terribly good justifications to avoid methods sections.

Beyond our hesitance to include discussions of our methods at all, we must confront the issue that when we do include them, we almost always retain a certain distance, preferring to theorise rather than to describe method. L'Eplattenier follows Kirsch and Sullivan to note that "methods" and "methodology" are fundamentally different entities, the latter "allow[ing] us to theorize the goals of our research" and the former to "contextualize the research process" (L'Eplattenier 69). She argues for an inclusion of explicit accounts (L'Eplattenier 68) of method, calling for more of what she calls "'here's what I did in the archive' stories," or disciplinary "lore," in the service of developing general methods for our fields (L'Eplattenier 70). While I do not necessarily agree, as will become apparent, that generalised or generaliseable methods are achievable or even desirable, I am very much swayed by L'Eplattenier's secondary argument for method inclusion. She maintains that when we neglect these narratives, we render the researcher transparent in the Spivakian sense of dishonestly invisible and in so doing prevent the honest growth of our disciplines. Such growth can only occur, for her, when methods – the "practical components" rather than simply the theoretical commitments – are open to critique and thereby to improvement (L'Eplattenier 71).

While L'Eplattenier does not extend her argument to discussing the merits of methodology, I will briefly explore here what such arguments might be within the framework of honesty and accountability she advocates. In the first place, one's logical process for method selection and/or development is a crucial factor for any evaluation of that method. Similarly, methodological

elaboration allows the reader to take a position with respect to one's theoretical commitments, which in turn facilitates productive and potentially transformative scholarly dialogue. Finally, methodological openness renders visible the scholar in a way that compliments the visibility provided by method-unveiling, Such an unveiling of the subject position of the scholar can only aid in the critical evaluation of honest scholarship and in the development of accessible, meaningful work.

I follow L'Eplattenier and her theoretical debt to such forceful opponents of scholarly transparency as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in desiring to lay bare the narrative of my progress through the archive both conceptually and pragmatically. As the former begets the latter, it is with my methodology that I will begin. I do not know that my conclusions are falsifiable in the way that a hard scientist expects when they present themselves in articulating their methods, and indeed I rather hope that they are not. What I do know is that the problems about which L'Eplattenier gripes in literary studies are as prevalent and as troubling in the study of religion, and in a gesture toward a solution I will end this section with a discussion of the concrete details of my working method. I begin my methodological considerations with a discussion of comparative analysis, then move through questions of scholarly praxis before finally arriving at the practical minutiae.

What is comparison?

In the introduction to this thesis, I have already gestured toward my motivation for choosing a comparative methodology, and here I offer a fuller explanation, grounded in a discussion of the nature of comparison itself. From there, I will move to address the comparative method as it has been used in the study of religion, including a brief digression into the all-important question of what the object of this comparison has been and might legitimately be taken to be. Finally, I will address my own position within and at the edges of these overlapping conversations. I must emphasise at the outset that where I differ from many of the approaches to comparison that I survey here is in my orientation toward the uncovering of difference rather than the positing of similarity that seems both starting and ending point for many comparativists.

Theorists of comparison are often reluctant to discuss its nature, often instead assuming their reader understands what logic underlies the choice to compare. One of the exceptions to this rule is Robert Segal, who argues that comparison is "indispensable" for understanding, as "[t] o understand any phenomenon, however specific, is to identify it and to account for it. To identify something is to place it in a category, and to account for it is to account for the category of which it is a member. Both procedures are thus inescapably comparativist" (Segal 352). Despite broadly agreeing with Segal's claim, I hesitate to equate this kind of unavoidable comparison with the choice of a comparative project, if only insofar as the conscious comparativist must be compelled to justify what Segal considers a perfectly natural seeking for similarity and acknowledgement that difference may also appear (Segal 358).

Jonathan Z. Smith, one of the more influential voices in comparative religions, similarly sees comparison as rooted in the nature of human knowledge-production (J.Z. Smith, *Map is Not Territory*

11:240). Conceptual metaphor theory, an outgrowth of cognitive linguistics and neuropsychology, offers theoretical support for this assertion of the natural, or intrinsic to human knowledge structures, character of comparison. One of the central predicates of the theory is the metaphoric nature of conceptualisation, where metaphor is "experiencing and understanding one kind of thing in terms of another" (Martin 940). The "one kind of thing" is the "target" domain, the "another" the "source" domain, and the act of metaphorising is to map correspondences between target and source, where the source is most often a physical entity or process (Martin 941). One of the most commonly cited conceptual metaphors is "love is a journey" (ibid); another is "knowing is seeing" (Martin 942).

When basic conceptual metaphors come together to form complex metaphors like "a purposeful life is a journey," they are attended by a vast array of metaphorical possibilities based on the culturally and temporally specific physical realities of the source concept (Slingerland 13). For Edward Slingerland, it is not the metaphors themselves that form the basis for comparison, but the fact of shared human embodied experience that makes conceptual metaphor a possibility (Slingerland 16); although the cultural context changes which metaphors are used, their mutual grounding in physical sources is universal. As J.C. Hanges argues, even if one does not find cognitive arguments convincing, one need only look at universal linguistic structures to appreciate how "regardless of their specific schematization, the semantic relationship, 'X is a kind of Y,' is always present" (Hanges 333), and thus the act of comparison can be considered intrinsic to human language if not to human thought. The search for similarity, which I would extend to a search for difference as well, differs contextually only in the criteria for establishing these relations, not in the attempt to establish as such (Hanges 333-4).

I maintain that to argue, as some of the comparative method's harshest critics have, that comparison of any kind is impossible is to succumb to a logical fallacy. If all our knowledge is based in comparison, whether cognitive or linguistic, anything incomparable is therefore inaccessible to our cognitive and/or linguistic faculties and is thus unknowable. This train of argument is most fully developed by philosophers of religion who use claims of ineffability of mystic experience to ground their assertions that mystic experience is ultimately unknowable. Philosophers like Timothy Knepper, William Barnard, and Wayne Proudfoot argue conversely on the basis of the well-known Wittgensteinian denial of private language that mystic experience is knowable if it is expressed using a grammar that allows for the free use of comparative language. In an important sense, it is therefore comparison alone that can help the so-called incomparable to be known.

Returning to J.Z. Smith, he differentiates these natural or unconscious comparisons from academic comparison, which for him is inseparable from classification (J.Z. Smith, *Relating Religion* 7:174). His well-known argument that "map is not territory," to which I will return, is founded in the assertion that academic comparisons are necessarily artificial constructions that require a human agent, as similarity and difference are imposed upon comparanda by the comparativist. In the academic sphere of which he speaks, comparison is most often described by appeal to its uses. I will detail some of the most prominent schemes here, and then suggest where this thesis might fit

within and between them. I.A. Owen Aldridge suggests that comparison is defined by its use to trace "affinity, tradition or influence." The first deals with resemblances, both formal and content-based, between works otherwise unconnected; the second with resemblances of any kind between works linked by history, chronology, genre, author, or other similar bonds; and the third with resemblances between works wherein an earlier work has had "a direct effect" upon a later (Aldridge 143) or upon the later work's author (Aldridge 145).

W.J.T. Mitchell similarly breaks comparison down into three modes of theorising, which is itself, for him, a synonym for the act of comparison, insofar as both terms describe the work of equation and differentiation (Mitchell 321). He labels these modes the Perceptual, defining it as "noticing" commonalities and differences; the Discursive, which consists of "verbalizing comparative propositions" through "rhetorical figures"; and the Disciplinary, wherein there is an attempt to systematise the perceptual and the discursive by means of some "unifying principle" (Mitchell 322-3). For J.Z. Smith, comparison can be broken down into four types: cultural, historical, cultural-historical, and hermeneutic (11:241-4). Cultural comparison he defines as "the attempt to 'place' one another" with reference to a self/other dynamic (11:241-2); historical as composed of attempts, both scholarly and popular, to situate the present and the past relative to each other (11:242-3); cultural-historical as efforts to account for perceived similarity by appeal to cultural processes like "*assimilation, diffusion, or borrowing*" (11:243, emphasis original); and hermeneutic as the use of an entity from one context in the attempt to understand an entity from another context (11:244).

It is in the tension between Segal's natural and J.Z. Smith's artificial, between Aldridge's, Mitchell's, and J.Z. Smith's schemata of its uses, that my own understanding of comparison can be found. I argue that the artificializing of comparison in the academic sphere is the product of a conscious attention paid by the scholar to the *how* of any project. It requires, however, a renewed commitment to unmasking the *who* of the project, the agent of this artificial classificatory framework. Comparison thus is that which is both natural and artificial in a search to find similarity and, crucially, difference. In the move to critically evaluate and intentionally use that which comes naturally to us whether cognitively or linguistically, we move from mere perceptual comparison into the dynamic discursive attempts articulated by Aldridge and J.Z. Smith.

The nature of comparison cannot be understood solely with reference to its uses and the intentionality thereof; rather, again following J.Z. Smith, I argue that we must also understand its ends. Especially in the artificial act of academic comparison, to understand what it is, we must clarify what we hope to gain by its intentional uses. J.Z. Smith articulates four distinct moments that occur within any iteration of the comparative enterprise: "description, comparison, redescription, and rectification" (J.Z. Smith *Relating Religion* 9:197). The last two are central to my own understanding of the legitimate, defensible ends of comparison. Description places the comparandum within both its home context and the context of the particular comparative enterprise (9:197-8). Once both/all comparanda have been so localised, they may be fruitfully compared, and then redescribed "at the

very least, each in terms of the other" so as to provide "a rectification of the academic categories in relation to which they have been imagined" (9:198).

While I am indebted to J.Z Smith for this cogent articulation of the ends of comparison, with which I generally agree, I depart from his formulation in suggesting that one of the ends of comparison is destabilisation. I argue that rectifying academic categories must be paired with their undermining, so that comparison inevitably results in a heightened awareness of the artificiality of these categories and their concomitant inadequacy to encapsulate what they purport to represent in anything more than a provisional way. Comparison thus produces uncertainty as much as it produces knowledge, and the tension between the two is where any comparative enterprise must aim itself. My location on the nature of comparison, in the context and for the purposes of this thesis, is that it is a hermeneutic tracing of affinity and, to a lesser extent, of tradition with the Disciplinary aim, in Mitchell's sense, of systematic redescription of my comparanda in terms of each other and the simultaneous rectification and destabilisation of the category of moral exemplar in the particular context of these life-narrative corpora.

What is "comparative religion"?

Perhaps even before embarking upon the task of answering this question, it behoves me to justify my asking it in the first place, as a student in the department of Islamic Studies, not Religious Studies. The study of Islam at McGill and at other institutions has found itself curiously divorced from the study of other religions, often being treated most comprehensively in area studies departments like SOAS in London, MESAAS at Columbia, and NMES at the University of Toronto. The prevalence of Marshall Hodgson's term "Islamicate," which even in its later uses purports to be able to isolate religion and culture one from the other, is symptom of a larger trend deeply influenced by a refusal of philosophy departments to take Muslim philosophers seriously, of literature departments to step outside the mould of Europe and its others, and so on. A consequence of this exclusion is the haphazard piling of scholars who do not primarily – or even at all – study Islam into unwieldy departments where they become marginalised in a different way, by their isolation from the disciplines that gave them their specific methodologies and methods, and their inclusion within a multidisciplinary context that is still not quite sure what to do with multidisciplinarity. "Islamicate" becomes one of the only unifying factors, but unlike "religion" in my home context, an equally artificial and flawed umbrella under which crowd a motley crew of multidisciplinary exiles, it is rarely critically evaluated or contextually defined in scholarly publications, classes, or conferences.

Although crucial insofar as they are, in some way, inclusive of these works and workers that have nowhere else to go, the conglomerate departments have abandoned tools and ties to the study of religion, at least in part due to the influence of McGill's own Wilfred Cantwell Smith, whose theoretical isolation of Islam from other religious traditions serves as one of the largest barriers preventing the reclaiming of this fruitful ground. These abandoned tools include especially questions of definition, which area studies departments, Islamic Studies departments, and "Islamicate" and

its cognate terms seem to take for granted as always already answered. The relationship between the study of Islam and the study of religion more generally deserves reconciliation, for the good of both. I do not pretend to be able to effect such a reconciliation here, especially since it is in part dependent on a breaking down of many of the structures of a still profoundly racist and Western-centric academy. Nevertheless, I feel it incumbent upon me to make explicit that, as a student in the department of Islamic Studies whose disciplinary training is primarily in the study of religion, I see these texts of the Islamicate as inescapably religious objects expressing religious concepts for primarily religious, and to a lesser extent scholarly, audiences.

What is "religion"?

But what is "religious" about these texts, their concepts, and their audiences, and what is this "religion" that is studied by the study of religion? The current prevailing argument is that it does not exist, "at least not as an original configuration or structure present in every culture" (Dubuisson 27, citing a great wealth of scholarly opinion), that it is an artificial term constructed and perennially reconstructed by scholars (J.Z. Smith *Representing Religions* 8:193-4) that functions more to describe that scholarship than anything about its objects (Dubuisson 27).

Here I will briefly sketch an outline of the discourse surrounding the term, concluding with the operational definition used in and resulting from this study. Over the long history of the discipline, "religion" has been defined in a staggering and unsatisfying variety of ways, from "the sacred" of the early phenomenologists of religion (Mircea Eliade, Rudolf Otto) to "a series of traits that are *defined as religious*" (Eaghll 36, emphasis original).[1] Chris Hermans and Carl Sterkens argue that the still-standard definitions are founded so exclusively on Euro-American Christianity as to make them incapable of stretching to also apply to the many traditions outside of this locale (Hermans 130-1).

Tenzan Eaghll suggests that a further problem plagues all these definitional attempts: the fundamental impossibility of a term to ever perfectly map onto that which it purports to describe, and the refusal of definition-makers to interact with this linguistic conundrum (Eaghll 38). A related problem, which for me is more troubling and which Eaghll leaves unsolved, is a lack of engagement with the question of whether a given iteration of "religion" appears first in the data or in the scholar's preconceived theoretical frame (Eaghll 37). Scholars of religion are thus left with a simultaneous need for a definition of the object of their study and confusion as to whether such definitions are in fact desirable, or even possible.

I follow Thomas Tweed in arguing that scholars nevertheless have a "role-specific obligation" to define, even and especially if multiple contradictory definitions are possible (Tweed 253). Tweed argues that students of religions especially are "called to the task of defining – and to contesting definition" (Tweed 256), and J.Z. Smith would agree (*Map is Not Territory* 10:208). For him, definitions are always fluid and contextual, maps shifting with different perspectives on the territory they represent, and the scholar of religion is uniquely both cartographer and evaluator of

1 See Tweed 271-4 and J.Z. Smith *Representing Religions* 8 for more comprehensive surveys.

pre-existing maps emic to the very territory we are trying ourselves to map (J.Z. Smith *Map is Not Territory* 10:291-2).

Following the work of Robert Baird, Tweed lays out three cartographical rubrics, separating the obligatory definitions into the lexical, the empirical, and the stipulative. Where lexical definitions are descriptive of past and present usage (Tweed 256), empirical definitions are "proposals" about the nature of a term and stipulative definitions "somewhat arbitrarily" provide meanings suitable to the definer's context (Tweed 257). An empirical definition can be true or false; a stipulative definition is evaluated instead on its utility. As the truth value of empirical definitions, especially in the case of definitions of "religion(s)," can never be satisfactorily established, these definitions must be reconsidered and evaluated, I maintain, as stipulative.

But why squabble over stipulative and empirical, when we can rest on the lexical definitions provided by the contexts of our objects? J.Z. Smith contends that we cannot "rest content with reproducing native lexicography" because these simply record how terms are emically used and are thus "useless for scholarly work" (*Representing Religions* 5:134). I would not go so far here, as I do see a value in lexical definitions insofar as they can contribute to more useful stipulative definitions, but otherwise I agree with J.Z. Smith that the second-order usage of terms in an academic context is needed in scholarly work (*Representing Religions* 10:221-2). These second-order terms are what enable us to critically evaluate the usage of emic terms within their contexts, to map the mappings occurring in these contexts. Further, they offer yet another opportunity to deny certainty and render the scholar visible, both, for me, critical commitments.

The emic lexical definitions can help us to avoid the temptation to, like the Medieval European cartographers whose small world was bordered simply with dragons and other fantasies of the unknown, centre our own homes in our stipulative definitional mapping of religious territory (J.Z. Smith *Map is not Territory* 10:295). Nathan Rein suggests that "religion" in particular "identifies something about the dynamic and contingent relationship between observer and observed" (Rein 14), arguing convincingly that stipulative definitions are necessary because they preserve the *interested* nature of definitional articulation by the scholar (Rein 17) and thus that scholars of religion cannot shy away from making them (Rein 18). Our personal and disciplinary domesticated spaces play into the "incongruity" of map and territory that necessarily exists in order for a map to be useful at all, for a map that perfectly reproduces its territory is rather difficult to carry about and use. Our definitions of "religion(s)" must, I follow these theorists to argue, be stipulative ones, and we cannot escape making and remaking them.

Because it is incumbent upon me to define my terms, to sketch a map, I here provide my stipulative definition of "religion." This definition is, I believe, the most useful one in the context of this thesis: it identifies the relationship between myself as observer and these texts that I am observing, while also self-consciously excluding characteristics that would make it a more universal claim subject to empirical scrutiny. It is highly contextual, a map idiosyncratic and inescapably centred on my areas of interest, useful here because it allows me to compare my corpora on equal

footing. Religion, I contend, is that collection of human attempts to answer the question of how one should live in the world in light of a super-worldly truth.

The comparative study of religion: a brief history

Having established the utility of comparison, justified my disciplinary location, and defined my broader object, I now turn to an exploration of the methodology I seek to reframe, or perhaps even to rehabilitate. In so doing, I hope to make clear what I see as the necessity of such a rehabilitation. Slavica Jakelic' and Jessica Starling argue that comparison of belief systems was where the study of religion as a distinctive field was born (Jakelic and Starling 195). If we take their argument seriously, we must look for the roots of this methodology and its attendant, if ill-defined methods in the beginning of the larger discipline. But, as with the definition of the object itself, there is very little scholarly consensus on when the study, comparative or otherwise, truly began.

Rather than attempting to posit an origin for the methodology in early textual sources, as J.Z. Smith does with Herodotus, we might consider instead situating the beginnings of the comparative study of religion as an academic discipline, with all of the Eurocentricity that academic disciplinarity entails in the current paradigm, in the, especially Jesuit, travelogues of the European Age of Exploration (roughly 15th-17th centuries CE), following Guy Strousma who centres his history on the first recorded usage of the word "religions" as a plural term in English in 1508 (Strousma 27). The academic study of anything, but especially of religion, is inextricably bound up with Empire; I follow Pui-Lan Kwok in maintaining that this binding moves from imperialist roots into the present day (Kwok 287), making an identification of origins with imperialistic expansion in these centuries.

Speculation about the "first" instances aside, a trajectory of development is fairly simple to plot by considering scholarly works emerging over the years between the 1600s and today. The initial centuries of the discipline were largely characterised by an attempt to uncover the underlying nature or structure of "religion" as such, and thereby to define it. For this enterprise, comparison proved indispensable. Possibly the first Western scholar to approach the study of religion comparatively was Nicholas of Cusa (1401-64), but the explicit use of a comparative method to study religions was not inaugurated until the mid-17th century in England, with the work of John Spencer[2] and Alexander Ross.[3] This comparative tradition was taken up in the late 18th and early 19th centuries with Christoph Meiners[4] and Karl Ottfried Muller[5] in Germany, where the nascent discipline of the study of religion would remain headquartered for much of its history.

Drawing from this tradition to become the first really influential theorist of comparison, the giant on whose shoulders we all must dutifully stand, came Friedrich Max Muller,[6] who not only laid the foundations for Religious Studies as a modern discipline, but was the first to systematise comparative methodology and method, building on the foundation of comparative philology,

2 *De legibus Hebroerum ritualibus*, 1686
3 *Pansebeia; or, A View of all Religions in the World*, 1650
4 *Grundriss der Geshichet aller Religionen*, 1785; *Allgemeine kritische Geschichte der Religionen*, 1805
5 *Prolegomena zu einer wissenschaftlichen Mythologie*
6 *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, 1870; *The Origin and Growth of Religion, as illustrated by the Religions of India*, 1878; the 1889-92 Gifford Lectures on Natural Religion, Physical Religion, Anthropological Religion, and Psychological Religion

especially in the study of Sanskrit. Muller, who wrote primarily from England, was not the only philologist who took on the comparative study of religion; Cornelius Petrus Tiele[7] and Pierre Daniel Chantepie de la Saussaye[8] were his philologist contemporaries in Leyden, as Albert Réville was in France. In this same era, an Englishman named James Frazer published the first major cross-cultural case study,[9] which brought together a breathtaking number of primarily textual traditions by isolating a particular myth as a common thread between them, a project that would unfortunately inspire many similarly decontextualized studies featuring wild leaps of logic in an effort to prove connections between all religious traditions.

By the early 20th century, the discipline was sufficiently well-established that Louis H Jordan could write nearly 500 pages of a survey history,[10] complete with colour charts and an extensive bibliography. In his introduction, Jordan wrote, rather optimistically, that comparative religion

> "consists in placing the numerous Religions of the world side by side, in order that, deliberately comparing and contrasting them, it may frame a reliable estimate of their respective claims and values […] It has no end to gain by securing the elevation of one Faith at the expense of another; accordingly, it is never tempted to contrive invalid and ex parte arguments, with the view either of buttressing or undermining the supports of any special School of theology" (Jordan xi).

On the very next page, he clarified that while comparison itself ought to be unbiased, if comparative activity resulted in proofs for the superiority of Christianity, so much the better (Jordan xii). The literature he surveyed and the trends he recorded reflect this underlying assumption: the goal of comparison does not need to be a vindication of Christianity, because such a vindication is a natural and expected by-product of any comparison wherein Christianity is one of the comparanda. And, at least in the works Jordan surveys, all comparative projects are between Christianity and. The thematic collection began to be popular in this era, although Jordan did not describe it as an independent genre. It is exemplified by Frank Byron Jevons' 1908 *An Introduction to the Study of Comparative Religion*, which deals in turn with such categories as Magic, "Fetichism," Prayer, and Morality in the so-called "primitive" religions before turning to an explanation of how each of these is brought to fulfillment or perfect understanding in Christianity.[11]

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7 *Vergelijkende Geschiedenis der Egyptische en Mesopotamische Godsdiensten*, 1869-72; *De plaats van de Godsdiensten der Vaturvolken in de Godsdienstgeschiedenis*, 1873

8 *Lehrbuch der Religionsgeschichte*, 1887-9; *Die vergleichende Religionsforschung und die religiose Glaube*, 1898

9 *The Golden Bough*, 1890

10 *Comparative Religion: Its Genesis and Growth*, 1905

11 Other thematic compendia include A.C. Bouquet's *Comparative Religion: A Short Outline* (1941; 7th ed., 1967) and Geoffrey Parrinder's *Comparative Religion* (1962). Bouquet, an army chaplain, Cambridge professor, and president of Cambridge's Judo/Ju-jitsu club, continually updated his collection to reflect emerging research trends, which makes him somewhat unique in the field of publishing this kind of work. He used a vaguely historical model to track the development of religions from "The Beginnings" through to Islam and divided religious traditions within this historical trajectory between those concerned with "Process" (Buddhism, for instance, as well as Confucianism, early Christianity, and Communism) and those concerned with "a Person" (Western Christianity being the primary example) (Bouquet 16). Parrinder offers the first glimpse of the idea of comparative religions as a study of confrontation, tolerance, dialogue, and other forms of interaction between religions, organising his survey around the "flaws" in all the "major religions" (Parrinder 1:9-20). Like those scholars before him, Parrinder assumed a Christian readership and wrote from a Christian

Emile Durkheim[12] also focused on "primitive" traditions on a thematic basis, while Rudolf Otto[13] had a more focused approach, considering different forms, principles, and ideas that corresponded to his definition of religion, an approach that would later be taken up by the (in) famous Mircea Eliade. The philological basis for comparison, still going strong, was represented by scholars like Arthur Anthony MacDonell, whose Stephanos Nirmalendu Ghosh Lectures[14] relied to make their arguments on similarities between Sanskrit and Greek.

The decades between 1950 and 1980 were the most significant for the field of religious studies more generally, of which comparison continued to be a dominant methodology. It was now sufficiently venerable as to have departments, journals, conferences, and chairs dedicated to it, as well as a growing usefulness to national defense strategies in Europe and especially in North America. This was the era of Claude Levi-Strauss[15] and Huston Smith.[16] In 1962, Wilfred Cantwell Smith wrote, but would not publish until 1964, a theoretical work on religion that centred Islam as a special case, unique from other traditions.[17] In it, he addressed what he considered the two main – and, ultimately, incorrect – criticisms of the study of religion: that it is "inherently inadequate" and that it is "inherently unscholarly" (*The Meaning and End* 12-3). In defence of the discipline he argued that it is ultimately a practical field concerned with how homo religio is to get along with his neighbours (*The Meaning and End* 15). Unlike others working in these fruitful decades, W.C. Smith advocated setting aside the question of defining "religion" in favour of focusing on traditions in themselves, for their own merits and flaws (*The Meaning and End* 16), ignoring the important questions of in what a "tradition in itself" might be understood to consist and of how the student of such a tradition should go about defining their object.

W.C. Smith focused first on "'Religion' in the West" and then "Other Cultures: 'The Religions'," defining neither "religion" nor "religions," using his special case of Islam to suggest that this binary, on which the majority of his work rests, is inadequate, and to urge instead an investigation into "faith." His aims were apparently noble, but rather than solving the problem of the binary, which has since been usefully reframed as Religion the undefinable and religions the specific iterations that contribute by way of family resemblances to a composite definition, he created a problem of access. "Faith" is, of course, accessible only through self-narration, and in any case a focus on the internal life of faith discounts the richness of religious culture in all of its manifestations, many of which have nothing at all to do with faith. He would later publish a project comparing "academic" and "theological" histories of "religion" (still undefined), offering different theologies of comparison with the ultimate goal of proving the coherent unity of all of humanity's religious history.[18] I disagree with his theological stance, his universalising tendencies, his refusal to

perspective, although nominally aiming for "a completely unbiased study," which he considered "essential if the heart of the religion is to be unveiled" (Parrinder 1:12).

12 *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, 1912

13 *The Idea of the Holy/Das Heilige,* 1917

14 Delivered in 1922; published as *Lectures on Comparative Religion* in 1978

15 Especially in *The Savage Mind*, 1966

16 *The World's Religions: Our Great Wisdom Traditions*, 1958

17 *The Meaning and End of Religion: A New Approach to the Religious Traditions of Mankind*

18 *Towards a World Theology: Faith and the Comparative History of Religion*, 1981

consider problems of definitions, and his paradoxical commitment to positioning Islam as a curative to a binary. He is not the only scholar to make any of these moves; particularly his singling out of Islam was shared by many scholars, whose works would set the stage for the current debates about the "other"ness of Islam and the framing of a de-Islamicised Sufism as a curative for the extremism of Other Cultures and their religions by its participation in and compatibility with Religion (and "faith") in the Christian West.

Almost at the same moment, and in a different direction entirely, Mircea Eliade was writing *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (1958; translated into English by Rosemary Sheed in 1963), an expansive thematic survey focusing on iterations of "the sacred" in different kinds of traditions. The overarching ethos of this work is to study religion qua religion (Eliade *Patterns* xiii), that is to say, as manifestations of "the sacred," although despite giving this definition he suggests leaving off definitions of religion until after one has examined some exemplars (Eliade *Patterns* xiv). Comparison is, for Eliade, a tool not for redescribing each tradition being compared, but for seeking the essence of "religion" (*Patterns* xvi).[19] His works all focus on a developmental process of conceptions of and interactions with the sacred within religion as such, a trajectory whose points are represented by actual traditions.

The mid-20th century was also the era of Robert Charles Zaehner, whose *The Comparison of Religions*[20] is primarily framed as a developmental debate between East and West with the stated purpose of rectifying what he considers a neglect of Christianity by comparative religion scholars, an assessment retrospectively somewhat puzzling given the now-obvious dominance of Christianity in every aspect of the comparative study of religion. He begins by discussing the "great religions of the world other than Christianity" that have "despite the missionary zeal of the Christian church, still maintain[ed] their vigour and have resolutely refused to disappear" (Zaehner 1:11), culminating in a discussion of how Christianity is the fulfillment of both "the mystical tradition of India as finally expressed in the Bhagavad-Gita and the Bodhisattva doctrine, and the hopes of Zoroaster" (Zaehner 5:194). The 1967 edition contains an appendix on "The Qur'an and Christ," which unsurprisingly if unchronologically argues that Christianity is the fulfillment of Islam as well. Following Eliade's and Zaehner's lead in plotting a chronological hierarchy of religions, many comparativists have sought to place traditions on an imagined trajectory of "progress," placing monotheism above polytheism, institutional hierarchy above "folk" religion, and textually-centred traditions above orally-centred ones. One of the ways in which I seek to avoid hierarchies is by limiting the scale of my study to two geographically-specific traditions, removing the temptation, to which many of these scholars submitted, for ranking or classifying by accord with my own values.

Eric J. Sharpe's 1975 *Comparative Religion: A History* marks one of the first real turns to reflexivity within the methodology, offering an account of the different approaches to comparison then in vogue, as well as his own suggestion of "dialogue" as a potential route forward. The work

19 Eliade went on to publish *From Primitives to Zen: A Thematic Sourcebook of the History of Religions* in 1967, a thematic collection of textual sources organised by geography. It is the first instance of a textbook allowing students to practice their comparative technique; up to this point, publications had focused on theorising or exemplifying comparison.
20 First edition, 1958

reveals a continued Western-, Judeo-Christian-centrism, which belies the argument made in a similar retrospective volume by William Lessa and Evon Vogt[21] that "comparative religion" as a discipline is separating itself out from an older model wherein Christianity served as the baseline for comparison (Lessa and Vogt 4) and now "looks for universals, worldwide typologies" (Lessa and Vogt 5). Despite these reflexive considerations, it is not until 1984 that we get more than a paragraph or at most a page dedicated to the ethics of comparison, when Henry McDonald[22] offered an evaluation of comparative religion in light of "modern morality and nihilism." In his primarily philosophical text, McDonald's concern is mainly, if unconsciously, to evaluate the moral qualities of the kind of society – which for him is Euro-American and post-Christian – that can produce comparative scholarship on religion rather than on the qualities of an ethical inquiry, but it represents an important step in the field. Debates about whether the discipline was overmuch or insufficiently Christian-centric as well as justifications for an ascending chronology from so-called primitive religions were forced to give way to the kind of work McDonald was doing with the watershed event that was the 1978 publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism*. As its ripples were felt throughout first the humanities and then the social sciences, the comparative study of religion was suddenly on the defensive in a much more desperate way than it had been ever before, even in the face of such rigorous critics as Clifford Geertz[23] and the many voices decrying the (mis)appropriation of the evolutionary model by scholars like William Robertson Smith and James Frazer.

Accused, in my reading accurately, of reification and of fetishisation, of a prioritisation of Western-centric categorisation unreflective of the reality of any tradition beyond, especially Protestant, Christianity, the discipline began to produce, for the first time in a century, works purporting to critically evaluate and to abrogate the comparative method itself. Representative of this move is Ronald M. Green[24] who, despite promising a new method, provided more of the same masked in anti-essentialist rhetoric; he worked through token examples from Africa and China in comparison with Jewish and Christian readings of Genesis 22 in order to illustrate what he identified as the "deep structure" of moral reasoning. Many similar works paid lip service to new modes of working without changing much of the method's own "deep structure." Despite its initial problems, this trend of self-reflection is one of the few threads still alive today, with work by Tomoko Masuzawa,[25] Wayne Proudfoot,[26] Daniel Dubuisson,[27] and Kimberley Patton and Benjamin Ray.[28]

In 1978, while the academy was reeling from the first shockwave of *Orientalism*, the comparative study of religion had its own small cataclysm when J.Z. Smith published *Map is Not Territory: Studies in the History of Religion*, a collection of previously-published essays whose concluding piece, the eponymous and previously unpublished "Map is Not Territory," has served

21 *Reader in Comparative Religion: An Anthropological Approach*, 1979
22 *The Ethics of Comparative Religion*, 1984
23 *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 1973
24 *Religion and Moral Reason: A New Method for Comparative Study,* 1988
25 Especially *In Search of Dreamtime: The Quest for the Origin of Religion*, 1993
26 *William James and a Science of Religion: Reexperiencing the Varieties of Religious Experience*, 2004
27 *The Western Construction of Religion*, 2003
28 *A Magic Still Dwells: Comparative Religion in the Postmodern Age*, 2000

as the groundwork for every attempt to revive the method since. The 1971 essay "Adde Parvum Parvo Magnus Acervus Erit," which appears as the eleventh chapter in the same volume, concludes that, with comparison indelibly linked to the ultimately misguided evolutionary method, the era of "comparative religions" has effectively ended and a new era must rise from its ashes (J.Z. Smith *Map is Not Territory* 11:264). "Map is Not Territory" argues that an important aspect of this new era will be an orientation to the unexpected in order to improve upon our inevitably representative maps of religious territory. I, as perhaps is apparent by now, am seeking to progress a little along the path that J.Z. Smith envisioned, departing from surface-level changes in method to do more than critique in one breath what I reproduce with the next. I want to be, and have been, surprised by the texts in my corpora, and it is the desire to preserve this surprise that motivates me to articulate concretely a new method that rises from the ashes of the old.

Comparativists of the later 20th and early 21st centuries have focused less on methodological concerns, among them Wendy Doniger,[29] the many scholars associated with the field of comparative ethics who look at religious material,[30] John Stratton Hawley,[31] and Mark Jurgensmeyer.[32] Some of these users of comparison frame their work as a "dialogue," an approach used most notably by Sachiko Murata.[33] Murata draws on the work of her mentor, Toshiko Izutsu, to suggest that one of the initial steps in a new method must be to cease considering Christianity as either comparandum or basis for comparison. The second step, for her, is the denial of "comparison" as a name for the work and concomitant adoption of something akin to interfaith dialogue. Popular works[34] seek to simulate this dialogue by appeal to similarity in either form or underlying structure. While I have certainly used dialogical metaphors myself, I am increasingly uncertain if such dialogue is truly possible to stage or to simulate with anything approaching a clear conscience.

This uncertainty colours my evaluation of the last scholar in my too-brief and highly selective disciplinary narrative, as do my personal experiences of him as an instructor and my disagreement with the way in which he approaches religions outside of the one of his deepest training. But I perhaps over-caveat. McGill's Arvind Sharma is one of the few scholars to attempt to lay out a dialogue-based comparative method in concrete form, and one of the few scholars remaining in an explicit Comparative Religions posting in a North American university. In 2005's *Religious Studies and Comparative Methodology: The Case for Reciprocal Illumination*. Sharma articulates three kinds of "reciprocal illumination": between two traditions, between two methods, and between a tradition and a method. His own method, as I understand it, can be summarized in five steps:

Identify a concept in one tradition → Identify a similar concept in a second tradition →
Use concrete examples to identify commonalities → Demand of each how they can answer

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29 *The Implied Spider: Politics and Theology in Myth*, 1998

30 See Bruce Grelle's and Sumner Twiss' 1998 edited volume *Explorations in Global Ethics: Comparative Religious Ethics and Interreligious Dialogue*, for example.

31 *Saints and Virtues*, 1987

32 *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*, 2000

33 *The Tao of Islam*, 1992

34 Karen Armstrong's *The History of God*, 1993, and *The Battle for God*, 2000; *Stephen Prothero's God is Not One*, 2010

questions posed by the other until a single unified concept emerges → Consider how this unified concept might help practitioners understand their own traditions.

I have several problems with this method, not least that it is predicated on the comparativist being a practitioner of one of the comparanda. I wonder if both terms can be treated equally in such a case. His case studies, almost all textually based, are presented devoid of their context so that two different paradigms (in the Kuhnian sense) or epistemes (in the Foucauldian) are equated without consideration of how that equation is possible. Sharma calls for comparison between "phenomena that appear different but possess similar significance in each tradition," ignoring that these significances are based in different epistemes or paradigms, and crucially, that determining similarity is already inherently comparative. His cardinal fault, though, is in the attempt to reduce similarity to unity, an aim that erases the significance of difference to understanding and leads to the paternalistic suggestion that academics use comparison to preach "right" understandings to practitioners.

Flaws in Sharma's specific iteration of dialogical comparison notwithstanding, there is a deeper problem in using "dialogue" as an operative metaphor. Who, exactly, is in dialogue – a tradition as a whole, a specific example, or something else? How can I, as a scholar, presume to ventriloquise my subjects, if I am able to determine who they should be? And when I present them, surely they and I speak more to the reader than to the other tradition? How might I, especially if I were to be a practitioner of one tradition, give each equal weight in such an artificial dialogue? Morny Joy has said that true dialogue is possible "only among believers and practitioners" (Joy 226), and I tend to agree. Above all, "dialogue" assumes the existence of a common language and is fraught with potential for value judgement. I thus abandon the dialogical model and instead suggest, following the work of Elizabeth Bucar (2008), that a constructivist project drawn from self-presentation of the object(s) of study can avoid the problems of agency and power inherent in the dialogical model. I will adress shortly the difference between a "dialogue," in Sharma's sense of a scholarly mediation of textual or traditional intersection, and a "conversation," which I will argue, following N. Ross Reat, includes the scholar as an interlocutor whose self-presentation interacts with that of the object(s) of study.

A New Method: The Background

I offer in this section firstly a justification of my attempt to write a new method, then a declaration of the ethics of this method, and finally an outline of the methodology behind the method.

Methodological invention

Elizabeth Bucar, a comparative ethicist who works primarily with women's ethical practices in Christianity and Islam, highlights the need for a method suitable for the subject matter in question (Bucar 2008, 256). In her narrative of her own gradual centring of method, she argues that to be ethical to one's sources is necessarily to abrogate methods that, if applied, will not result in ethical comparison (Bucar 2008, 261). Indeed, she suggests that more global methodologies inevitably "produce a sort of academic ventriloquism" that is ultimately incapable of producing either

knowledge or understanding (Bucar 2008, 362-3). Eric Ziolkowski, writing on the non-discipline that is religion and literature, agrees that especially in interdisciplinary fields that have rich legacies from multiple methodological strands it is essential for scholars to "devise their own strategies" that are inherently combinatory and comparative (Ziolkowski 131-2). As the foregoing matter has suggested and what follows will show, I have taken these prescriptions to heart and worked to whip together the cream from the surface of the various milk pots of the comparative study of religion in a way that is uniquely suitable to the context of this project, while also being adaptable to other contexts and is thus fluid rather than static.

The ethics of comparison

It is perhaps safe to say that the pretenses to "scientific" objectivity that characterised much of the history of the study of religion no longer dominate. We consider ourselves no longer bound by "the reigning paradigm of religious studies," with its basis in Enlightenment philosophy and Eurocentric ideology (King 368-9), and take on instead a scholarship of contingency and contextual dependency (King 371) expressed in methodological innovations that have their roots in our rejection of "traditional" methods (King 373). I take seriously Susan Olsson's suggestion that what is needed in this changing time is an active engagement with one's object, what Ursula King similarly calls "empathetic involvements" (Olsson 203; King 374). Olsson argues that engagement is holistic, urging the scholar to eschew the urge to only present palatable parts of religious traditions, to declaw traditions in order to counter current socio-political stereotypes, and to examine only those (parts of) traditions that appeal to our personal sensibilities. Rather, for her the scholar must approach the object of study with an eye to see what is simply present (Olsson 214-18).

To engage in a critical way requires, Olsson suggests, bolstering an argument I have been making in this chapter, a dedication to reflexivity, both in terms of one's own subject position (Olsson 207) and one's disciplinarity (Olsson 208). This disciplinary reflection involves an awareness of the ways in which the history of our studies colours our readings of the past, our constructions of methods in the present, our projections of both into the future (Olsson 212), and what subjects catch our interest (Olsson 219). This question of reflexivity is, for me, central to ethical comparison. I have thus far presented something approximating disciplinary reflexivity, and, at the end of this chapter, will attempt to answer especially the question of interest when I detail my own subject position.

Beyond reflexivity, there is an important question of objectivity N. Ross Reat isolates four types of knowledge transmission in the study of religion in an effort to understand how academic subjectivity can contribute to a well-rounded study: insider-insider, insider-outsider, outsider-outsider, and outsider-insider (Reat 459). He suggests that all of these must function together for any full understanding of a tradition, and, in what feels like an obvious move, but is in truth a profoundly radical one, argues that the academic "is merely a peculiar brand of insider who, in order to understand religion […] must be prepared to utilize each of the channels of information" (Reat 466). He mobilizes the similarity of master-disciple transmission favoured in many religious

traditions to the methods of academic training to further maintain that the position of academic as insider to their own disciplinary tradition is a crucial component of their taking seriously the religions and religious persons with whom they interact (Reat 466). These overlapping subjectivities, in my reading, are what allow a reliable analysis that avoids the problem of an impossible objectivity. I consider myself an insider to my scholarly tradition and an outsider to the traditions represented by my corpora, and by interacting with text-as-insider and other scholars who are similarly outside these texts, I hope to produce a subjective but ethical analysis. In Reat's sense, dialogue can be possible where the disciplinary insider enters into respectful conversation with her sources and allows herself and her practice to be shaped by them.

But these conversations are always already fraught, despite being less impositional and artificial than the dialogical model advocated by Sharma and Murata, among others; Olsson reminds us, from her perspective as a scholar of Islam within the context of religious studies, that "it is essential to consider power and agency in scholarly work" (Olsson 205), even within a model that seeks to avoid imbalances of power. I take this warning to heart and ask myself here, what power do I have over these texts, what power over their subjects? As an academic, a non-Muslim, and a white woman, my relationship to the texts is one that requires interrogation and, beyond criticism, an effort toward ethical engagement.

An important intervention into this question of power, over and above both reflexivity and multiple subjectivity in framing the ethics of comparison, is made by R. Radhakrishnan. She argues against the neutrality of comparisons, stating instead that all comparative projects are coloured and shaped by what she calls "the aggression of a thesis" and the Nietzschean "will to power/knowledge" that creates it. For her, historically and disciplinarily influenced "[c]omparisons work only when the 'radical others' have been persuaded or downright coerced into abandoning their 'difference,' and consent to being parsed within the regime of the sovereign One" (Radhakrishnan 454). "All learning," she continues, "is transformative and interventionary, and if that is the case, then all learning is valuecentric" (Radhakrisnan 455).

Not only is it valuecentric, learning and especially comparison reproduce the dominance of the epistemic agent over the object of knowledge, no matter how careful that agent tries to be (Radhakrishnan 459). Reflexivity, what Radhakrishnan calls "rigorous autocritique and autodefamiliarization," can mitigate for this value-laden dominance (Radhakrishnan 463), but ultimately these techniques serve only to highlight the impossibility of that objectivity so prized by scholars. I am in full agreement with her despite being troubled by a great deal of epistemic uncertainty, and I believe that uncertainty, that contingency, is a crucial component of the development of an ethical comparative method. But I have some difficulty with her final point, which is that the only "educative" comparisons "happen in a site that belongs to no one" (Radhakrishnan 471). Where might such a site be found? Certainly the academy is not a neutral space, and perhaps this "site that belongs to no one" is the fabled objectivity that we can never attain, and perhaps without it comparison is doomed to failure. I am uncertain how to solve this crucial problem, but I think it important to include nonetheless, and to suggest that although this

comparison occurs in a space that belongs almost entirely to me, I have tried to welcome my corpora as guests, with all the efforts at self-abnegation that hosting implies. In staging myself as a member of the conversation, rather than a facilitator of dialogue, I seek to undermine my own power position.

The utility of the case study

My understanding of the case study is grounded in philosopher Giorgio Agamben's expression of paradigm, which I will summarise shortly. Here, I take the individual texts of my corpora as paradigms of their genres, both in the broad sense of life-narrations of Muslims or Buddhists and in the narrower senses of such emic genres as tazkirah and rnam thar. Agamben focuses on paradigm not as the Foucauldian "disciplinary matrix" but as a "single case that by its repeatability acquires the capacity to model" (1.2:11). A paradigm is necessarily both particular, as it is a "single case," and universal, as it stands in for the whole category of which it is the exemplar (1.7:20). As such, it relates to other objects in the category, to the "general rule" that it expresses, and to its own "intelligibility" (1.10:23). Further, the paradigm can only function as an exemplar if it is "suspended from its normal function"; by virtue of exemplifying the rule of a category, it is exempt from the constraints of the rule (1.11:24). For Agamben, the paradigm cannot be examined purely synchronically or diachronically, but requires a focus on the intersection of these two axes of investigation (1.15:31). As such, it also requires a focus on the position of the scholar to "mak[e] the inquirer's presence intelligible" as much as the object of inquiry (1.15:32).

Agamben describes signatures as those things that allow a paradigm to manifest its internal qualities (2.1:33), what I will call, in later chapters, characteristic features. He argues that a signature is not merely that which expresses a relationship between sign and signified, but something that moves beyond this relation, identifying something essential about the behaviour of the signified as well as how the observer is to behave (2.5:40-1). Agamben, like Foucault, is concerned with the question of resemblance: when we see similarities between two things, he says, we need a signature in order to understand each and the relationship between them (2.15:57). He differentiates between semiology – that by which we understand that something is a sign – and hermeneutics – that by which we understand what the sign means (2.15:58), its semantic implication(s) (2.16:60). It is the signature, he argues, that allows us to make the transition between semiology and hermeneutics, that gives the meaning of the sign (2.15:59). There is no meaning for the sign but that given by the signature (2.16:61). This position of the signature between the recognition of the sign and the understanding of its meaning can also be occupied by statements, such as those made in academic discourse (2.17:64).

In this study, the sign is provided by the texts in my corpora, my paradigms, and their characteristic features are what the signatures of my positive statements cause them to signify. Agamben's theorising thus opens the door for a radical situated uncertainty in knowledge production, as different signatures allow different significations to emerge from the signs about which we make statements. The signatures I employ here identify not only how my paradigms

connect to my reading of their characteristic qualities, but also how they might require readers to engage with them. My signatures are at the core of my hermeneutic process.

It is crucial to bear in mind that the case study is only a paradigm insofar as it has the capacity to stand in for other all cases with the same sign-signature-signified relationship. This requirement is one that I doubt can ever be satisfactorily met within the constraints of a human lifetime and the vastness of the archive. I choose here to humbly submit to that vastness, following a prescription of Margaret Cohen's that has sustained me throughout this writing process, and to cast my paradigms as provisional at best, and my signatures as much a product of and themselves producing uncertainty as knowledge. Here it may be useful to appeal to the work of Spivak once again, who in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" and *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* cautions against using case studies as representative of anything outside of themselves, noting that "historical knowledge cannot be established on single cases" (Spivak *Postcolonial* 3:198). The point Spivak is attempting to make here, in my reading, is that the power of case study is severely constrained when we cease to construct a monolithic Other for the Self of Europe and, indeed, when we cease to consider Europe as a monolithic Self.

She is of course speaking specifically of histories of subalterns in the Indian subcontinent, but her cautions are crucial for literature as well. It may be tempting to take, say, 'Attar's *Tazkirah al-awliyā* or Tsangnyon Heruka's *Rnal 'byor gyi dbang phyug chen po rje btsun mi la ras pa'i rnam thar pa* as representative of all life-narrations in their respective traditions. In selecting such large corpora, I sought to mitigate this potential, responding to what Spivak is calling for, in my reading: a varying of "assumptions" based on the specific case with which we are engaging (Spivak *Postcolonial* 1.1:9) in an attempt to work against the disciplinary tendency to reify both Self and Other (Spivak *Postcolonial* 3:202). This approach refuses to write grand narratives in the interest of accurately unravelling small ones, and here I attempt the same by simply developing signatures that convey what I see as patterns of signification in my paradigms without generalising to the paradigm-as-category.

Elizabeth Bucar and Julia Kristeva caution that a sign does not merely correspond symbolically to that which it signifies, but semiotically enhances "the alterity of its object in relation with the representable and representing object" (Bucar 360), and I take their suggestion to heart in highlighting the power of the language I use to create and complicate meaning in the crafting of my signatures. Importantly, these paradigms in my corpora are representative of lives, and in reading them and in writing about them I am myself reproducing and representing those lives. My use of case studies is thus intended both to allow my signature-creation to reflect more accurately what the texts in relationship to each other signify and to produce a sense of uncertainty that lends shades of meaning to my knowledge-production.

Similarity and difference

The comparative study of religion has all too often operated with the assumption that two phenomena that to the outside gaze of the scholar look the same must in some intrinsic way be the same. Here, I seek to step back from "the same" to "the similar," and I will argue that the search

for similarity is crucial to the uncovering of what I term "critical difference." In order to compare two or more phenomena, we must both establish a basis for comparison and what it is that we hope to achieve by the act. J.C. Hanges argues that the basic ground for comparison is the semantic formula "X is a sort of Y" (Hanges 333), and thus that similarity is the most fundamental ground for any comparative activity. Robert Segal frames comparison's semantic requirement as "only that Y be like X" (Segal 346), and urges that similarity not be confused with identity (Segal 349). J.Z. Smith cautions in a similar vein against reading too much into surface similarities, and against what he follows F. Steiner in calling "the rhetoric of association" (*Map is Not Territory* 11:253). Instead, he suggests, the comparativist must be a taxonomist and posit first a category of similarity (*Relating Religion* 7:160-1).

How might we compose such as category? Hanges requires that the comparatist acknowledge that comparative criteria are always already artificial and etic, even if the comparatist seeks to uncover emic bases for comparison. Similarly, David Decosimo requires that the comparativist take seriously the relativity and variability of similarity (Decosimo 226) and differentiate between the trivial similarity seen initially and a deeper, more significant similarity (Decosimo 231-2). To identify the significant similarity requires, for him, a context and an acknowledgement of the scholar both seeking significance and choosing its context (Decosimo 232-3).

Following his prescription (Decosimo 237-8), I will in the following paragraphs explicitly lay out how I determine similarity in this study. As no prominent methodologist of the comparative study of religion has laid out their criteria for determining significant similarity, I turn to several different disciplinary approaches. In doing so, I am guided by Jeppe Sindig Jensen's suggestion[35] that similarity must be sought both in socio-cultural forms and in the interpretive terms attached to them by scholars. The two avenues I took in developing this methodology are the *tropological analysis* of literary theory and the *paradigm* of Foucauldian archaeology.

The primary mode of determining similarity that I employed in this thesis is tropological analysis, purloined from literary theory to the arsenal of a historian most notably by Hayden White in *The Content of the Form* and *Figural Realism*. This mode is undergirded with the acknowledgement of the interdependence between content and form; content necessarily requires form, and form itself has analysable content. Writing specifically of historical narrative, White argues that the content of the form consists largely of the linguistic and tropological characteristics of the narrative. He argues that an analysis of these features allows the historian firstly to categorize and understand the profound structural similarities between historical and fiction writing, and secondly to identify those features that are distinct to each register of narrativization. The two sets of narratives I compare here can similarly be compared based on the content of their forms, and indeed my breaking down of each corpus into thematic categories, as I will expand upon below, owes a great deal to White's formulation. Considerations of time and length prevent me from fully investigating the formal qualities of the various genres represented in my corpora; nevertheless, my analysis is grounded in a tropological articulation of similarity.

35 In "Universals, General Terms, and the Comparative Study of Religion"

I make use of paradigm, especially as articulated by Giorgio Agamben in *The Signature of all Things*, and to a lesser extent in *Profanations*, to buttress my use of case studies, as I have shown, as well as to identify significant similarity. Agamben's articulation of paradigm as both representative instance and overarching category allows for a comparison without a requirement for essential sameness. Paradigm functions much like Wittgensteinian family resemblances, making it particularly applicable to a religious studies context where family resemblances mark the closest the discipline comes to defining its object. I thus establish similarity on the basis of shared elements that do not compose the entirety of each comparandum. Each text I have chosen is a paradigmatic example of the category of "life-narration of realised master." What composes each tradition-specific iteration of the category is of course different, and it is this critical difference I seek to uncover. But I am getting ahead of myself. I use Agamben's paradigm to marshal my tropes into family-resemblance groups and determine similarity on the basis of a sharing in these tropological groups.

I must also briefly acknowledge that my thinking on narrativization of memory and history as potential ground for determining significant similarity is indebted to Jan Assman, Edward Case, Paul Ricoeur, and James Wertsch. Although I have chosen not to explicitly use any of their classificatory or pattern-finding approaches, I have nevertheless only arrived at the approach detailed above through consideration of these other possible avenues, and it is likely that I have implicitly included them by virtue of having absorbed their arguments.

Once I establish similarity in chapter four, I will go on to an identification and articulation of difference, which for me presents a way out of many of the problems with comparison as a method. Here I follow W.J.T. Mitchell to suggest that difference alone is not enough, but the import of it, the difference it makes, is the only academically viable fruit of comparison (Mitchell 323). J.Z. Smith calls this discovery of difference "the unexpected," suggesting through analogy to the crime-solving methods of the great Sherlock Holmes that it manifests both by "the surprising occurrence" and "the lack of occurrence of an expected event" (*Map is Not Territory* 13:301). The unexpected is that which does not fit into the map that, rooted in an assumption of significant similarity, we impose upon our data; rather than ignoring or explaining away (or, worse, making fit!) that which does not conform, we must "reflect on and play with the necessary incongruity" (*Map is Not Territory* 13:309). It is only this academic living-into of the unexpected, the difference, that can allow for what J.Z. Smith sees as the end of comparison: a reformulation of our scholarly categories and a revaluation of our subjects (*Relating Religion* 9:208). He argues that

> "Meaning is made possible by difference. Yet thought seeks to bring together what thought necessarily takes apart by means of a dynamic process of disassemblage and reassemblage, which results in an object no longer natural but rather social, no longer factual but rather intellectual" (*Relating Religion* 11:246).

The goal of comparison is thus the elucidation of difference for someone whose position relative to – or even relationship with – the comparanda allows for synthetic judgements. In this study, I use significant similarity as a base from whence to launch an investigation of difference from my position as a reader of these texts first personal and then academically. I maintain that the

differences I uncover reveal important details about the unique characteristics of each of my corpora. I seek similarity within each corpus, and aim to discover the differences between them to develop situated, artificial, academic reconstructions of terms that are already all of these things.

Identifying comparanda

Theorists of comparison have any number of suggestions for selecting comparanda, from the deceptively simple to the stringently ethical, but all of them are deeply troubling in that they foreground the person of the comparativist who in most cases would likely rather remain in the background. I will here sketch out some of the more relevant standards, and then move to articulating my own process. Hermans and Sterkens suggest that comparanda be selected on the basis of the social scientific idea of the research population, arguing that this population is composed of individuals "with at least one characteristic in common" (Hermans and Sterkens 140-1). The selection of which individuals to study requires that one have a "clear and unambiguous" definition of the population's broad definition so that one can select those individuals who best represent the population as a whole (Hermans and Sterkens 144). I have attempted to follow this dictum in the selection of my comparanda, although I will freely admit that I consider becoming sufficiently familiar with their categories so as to have a "clear and unambiguous" definition is the task of at least one lifetime. In an attempt to compensate I have included in my corpora texts in subcategories other than the main ones of my interest, as I will discuss below.

Hanges suggests that comparisons ultimately and inevitably "reflec[t] the interest of the scholar," rendering comparison "a blatantly scholarly exercise" that is focused on studying the relation of two or more phenomena to an artificial scholarly category like "myth" (Hanges 340-1), or, perhaps, like "saint." Spivak similarly acknowledges that all historical tracings are inherently *interested* histories (Spivak *Postcolonial* 208). Ultimately, I have chosen the corpora that I have because their categories interest me, the transformative potential of morally exemplary narratives as much as the truly and delightfully bizarre stories of things that exemplars do and say and are. My comparison rests therefore on identifications both my disciplinary training and my personality have led me to make of and between and perhaps even with these comparanda.

I must confess that aside from the grand motivation for this study, to which I will turn below, I am at heart J.Z. Smith's historian, whose "task is to complicate not to clarify" (*Map is Not Territory* 13:290), circumambulating the stupa – in the sense of reliquary, in the sense of memorial, in the sense of its own representativeness of its object, the world – of my object to pay homage to past masters of my scholarly lineage and in order to see what it is I am trying to study from all the angles it will allow, superimposing them upon each other in my creation of a pattern – a map – that is hopelessly inadequate to represent the affective effect of my circumambulation. I with other devotees of history "share an uncommon faith in the revelatory power of a telling detail" and, I think, more than anything else, I am among those who "play the role of 'anthropologists' in Aristotle's sense of the term: people who delight in telling tales (*logoi*) about other folk (*anthropoi*),

in a word, gossips" (*Relating Religion* 5:117). I delight, indeed, in telling these intertwined tales of exemplary memories.

While my selection of these two sets of texts is deeply *interested*, it is also informed by a desire to move away from the long legacy of comparing both exemplars and life-narration genres from these traditions to Christian iterations. Barbara Holdrege argues for a removal of Europe from consideration entirely in an cross-culturally comparative project, in order that it might contribute to the "multiplicity of different imaginaries that do not privilege 'Western' idioms associated with the modernist project but are rather grounded in the indigenous idioms of the cultures" being considered (Holdrege 148). While her focus is on narratives of modernisation and secularisation, the possible benefits of excluding Europe entirely as a term in a comparative effort are alluring. The most prominent of these for her is a deconstruction of "hierarchical dichotomies in which categories that accord with the Protestant ethos are given priority" (Holdrege 163), including sacred and profane, religion and culture, faith/belief/doctrine and practice/ritual/law, individual and community, universalism and particularism (Holdrege 163-4). To this benefit I would add that removing Europe altogether allows for a richer understanding of the potential interplay between terms usually only approached through their relations to Europe. But I wonder if, as an insider to a Euro-American scholarly tradition, I do not myself bring Europe to the table, much as I would like to leave it out in the cold.

Another important consideration, in a similar vein, is that offered by Revathi Krishnawamy, who wonders how we can recapture the rich sources of literary and comparative theory outside of the Western philosophical tradition (Krishnawamy 400). She situates disciplinary comparison as fundamentally Eurocentric in its inception, and notes that almost all comparative literature projects are between "Europe and" (Krishnawamy 402). While it is outside both the scope of this thesis and my own resources to discern and apply non-Euro-American theories of comparison, I believe that removing the "Europe and" formulation is an important first step, although I cannot claim to have completely or successfully done so.

Finally, I turn to one of the overarching goals of this thesis, one of several possible answers to the question of why it matters. Pui-lan Kwok, in his discussion of how the field of religious studies has been "shaped by imperialism in the past and Empire in the present" (Kwok 286) suggests that "Decolonizing the cultural imaginary" is necessary if the field is ever to rebel against those forces (Kwok 287). He argues that such decolonization, apart from a focus on regional and cultural specificity and a move away from Eurocentric theory and practice, can occur in the reorientation of the scholar from curator to communicator, from one who collects-studies-classifies-displays for the fellow scholar to one who finds the ways in which their knowledge can be mobilised in the public sphere to educate everyday people "about why religion matters" (Kwok 296-7).

Although I am a proponent of knowledge for knowledge's sake, I do believe that Kwok's prescription here is entirely correct. It is one of the reasons I have chosen to focus on the subjects that I have, but it is also one of the reasons why I believe my choice of comparanda outside of a European Christian frame is necessary. In a globalising world, how can the everyday person in

Canada understand how religion is indelibly involved in shaping personhood, in shaping morality, in shaping the contours of community life? At the risk of sounding self-aggrandising, I believe that studies like this one are part of the answer. I want to present these texts in an accessible way, I want to show another form of conversation between traditions than the often trite and unconvincing efforts at "interreligious dialogue," and I want to offer a reading that hints at how a religious past shapes any present, especially in light of Olsson's and Stenberg's assertion that texts such as these are "*part of* contemporary lived religion" (Olsson and Stenberg 213, emphasis original).

Overlays

In this subsection, I would like to turn to my own contribution to this methodological muddle that is the contemporary discourse on comparative religion. Here, I use as operative metaphor the role of shrine construction in religifying the landscape of Tibet. Part of the reason that I have chosen it is in an effort to step simultaneously away from Eurocentric theoretical approaches to comparison and toward a type of comparative project that resonates more with the traditions with which I am engaging than with my own preconceptions. Buddhism's advent in Tibet was characterized, in part, by domestication and Buddhification of kingship (Bjerken 814-15) and landscape (Bjerken 836) with mandalas as hierarchical centralising maps (Bjerken 818) imposed to reorder, in Zeff Bjerken's words, "conceptions of power and place" (Bjerken 814). Since the mandala fixes every aspect of the cosmos in its proper place, it is the ideal location of clarification for the hierarchical rules of status and power and is thus inherently political even as it also performs many other functions (Bjerken 820).

When the form of the mandala is superimposed on any social space, Bjerken argues, it functions prescriptively for new constructions, but also as a mold that re-shapes what is already present (Bjerken 835). Mandala-forms domesticate space and delimit who is inside and who outside, both ideologically and literally, with the construction of shrines and reliquaries built with mandala floorplans (Bjerken 836). Ceremonies in monasteries like the mask dances at Samye in Ladakh re-enact the demon-subjugation of one of Tibetan Buddhism's most prominent hierarchs, Padmasambhava, while simultaneously re-making the contours and boundaries of the monastery's mandala floorplan. I suggest that the life-narration functions similarly, re-articulating identity boundaries, as its exemplarity is imposed on or adopted by a community. So does academic discourse, both in shaping the disciplines and in shaping their objects.

Rather than using the mandala to domesticate, I seek simply to use it to identify the contours of an alternate cosmic order. In laying one tradition as a mandala over the other as a social space, I can easily see that which does not fit. In identifying elements of the overlay not represented in the space, and vice versa, I can identify the critical differences between the two, and thereby can understand better the unique way in which each functions. In short, I use comparison through this technique in order to better understand not only my overarching category of family resemblances, but also each overall corpus. That uniqueness might be considered a characteristic property of each considered phenomenon, but without my mandala overlay I might never uncover the depth of its

significance. This method empowers me to ask of a tradition not only why it includes what it does but also why certain elements that might have been included are not. The mandala overlay is also an operative metaphor that I have consciously chosen from outside of my own training and disciplinary understanding. It is my hope that in using it I am stepping onto a path whose aim is to decentralise and defamiliarize.

A New Method: The Details

Before I begin, here I feel it important to make clear once again the distinction I am drawing between methodology and method. Where methodology describes the theoretical underpinnings of method, the displinary approach, and so on, the method itself is a concrete, duplicable set of steps for reading and analysis. I intentionally refer to this section and the previous as "A New Method" because while my methodology is, at its heart, very much in line with a certain trend in comparative studies, my method itself is an innovation. Below I will describe the operative metaphor that lies at the heart of this new method, one that I have not seen used in any of my reading, and one that hopefully comes a little closer to a utilisation of emic frameworks. I do not claim theoretical originality, but I do believe that my practical contribution is one that can be considered new.

Because my still-fledgling knowledge of the original languages of many examples of life-narrations in both traditions would have greatly constrained the number of sources I was able to consult, and because I wanted a statistically significant pool of sources, I chose to read works in English. Some of these are translations of texts in Persian, Urdu, Tibetan, or Sanskrit, but many of them were initially written in English. Of these, there are a number that are scholarly accounts of lives taken from a variety of primary sources. There are also a number that are written by devotees of the master in question, or by authors who are members of the tradition that follows from the master's lineage. This combination of English-language sources and sources translated into English seemed to me the best possible set given the constraints of my skills; further, it allows me to question the differences between how masters are depicted in scholarly and in devotional works, which adds another layer of comparison that illuminates the exemplarity of each master.

Some of the more classical sources I chose because I was previously aware of them. The remaining sources were the result of searches using McGill's WorldCat catalogue. I used multiple sets of search terms, which are listed as follows:

- [Sufi/Buddhist/Tibetan Buddhist/South Asian/Central Asian/Muslim] saints
- [Sufi/Buddhist/Tibetan Buddhist/South Asian/Central Asian/Muslim] masters
- [Sufi/Buddhist/Tibetan Buddhist/South Asian/Central Asian/Muslim] biographies
- [Sufi/Buddhist/Tibetan Buddhist/South Asian/Central Asian/Muslim] hagiographies
- Hagiography in [Islam/Buddhism/South Asia]
- [Sacred/religious] biography in [Islam/Buddhism/South Asia]
- Tazkirah/tezkire/Tazkirah, rnam thar/rnam par thar pa, tarjama, and malfuzat

I also made sweeps of the shelves surrounding each text my search terms returned, sometimes resulting in interesting finds. Of the texts uncovered by these terms, I discarded all those whose

subjects' lifetimes did not fit within my date range, with several notable exceptions, which I retained as controls to aid in my understanding of generic construction and genre tropes. I attempted to achieve a balance between biographical compendia and stand-alone biographies in each corpus, although the genre difference is such that in my Tibetan Buddhist corpus the works are primarily the latter and in my Sufi corpus primarily the former. I eventually constrained myself geographically more out of necessity than desire; McGill has a reasonable South Asian Islam collection and several rather good Tibetan Buddhism collections, but lacks substantial resources on Islam in Central Asia more generally.

In reading these works, I used a form of tracking spreadsheet developed by Ben Wood, to whose class on *rnam thar* classification at the University of Toronto in the autumn of 2011 I owe this particular part of my method. Wood developed spreadsheets organised by trope; his included three pages devoted to events, objects, and teachings. The "events" page was separated into text overview categories, including date, author, translator, and genre information, and thematic analysis categories. These latter included many that I have also used, but where his were primarily imposed before reading the text, mine emerge from the texts themselves.

In constructing the spreadsheets for this project, I used Wood's basic outline for the "events" page, leaving objects and teachings out of my consideration. I began my thematic analysis categories with a few that I anticipated would be part of the life-narrations. For the Sufi corpus, I began with "childhood," "patrilineal inheritance," "teacher and lineage," "ecstatic utterances," and "relationship with God." For the Buddhist corpus, I began with "previous births," "paternal heritage," "pre-birth miracles," "teacher and lineage," and "incarnations." As I read, I input into these categories all instances from the lives of the masters that fit them. Any time I encountered an instance that did not fit a previously defined category, I created a new one. Some of the categories that I had pre-selected were not well represented in the corpora, and these did not end up in the chapters. Some events that I had categorised under one heading are represented in the appropriate chapter under a different heading, often because the new heading was created after I had already finished reading the work in question.

In writing the chapters, I worked one category at a time, working through all the examples in each to divide them into further sub-categories and begin intra-corpus comparison. As I wrote, I questioned how each of these patterns of events might be interpreted as either exemplary or exceptional. I also took into consideration the provenance of each work, attempting to use the distinction between scholarly and devotional works to further understand exemplarity and exceptionality. Once I teased out from each category an overarching theme, what I call a "marker of exemplarity," I was able to create a paradigmatic image of a master in each tradition by composing a pool of family resemblances. It must be noted here that this image is highly artificial, composed as it is from cumulated pattern data rather than being a pattern that is exhibited in full by any one master. Nevertheless, it is these artificial images that I was able to overlay on each other, questioning each marker of exemplarity's position in the pool of family resemblances for each paradigm. Differences

revealed by this overlay process I isolate as "characteristic features" of each broad category of exemplarity.

Other considerations

Here I would like to make note of two additional points that do not quite seem to fit anywhere, but whose inclusion would, I believe, radically alter my project. The first is the question of books as art objects, as memorialising monuments as physical as a shrine building or a reliquary. If I were to consider the physical dimensions of these texts, I would necessarily be forced to move beyond life-writing to the furthest extent of life-narration, discussing inevitably physical modes of both remembering the master and, in important ways, of prolonging the master's life. I discussed the possibility of the latter in a conference paper in the spring of 2016, but in this thesis considerations of length, time, and argumentative concision have caused me to leave it mostly unexplored. What other implications might there be for a consideration of the texts as physical objects? Questions of aesthetics, ritual function(s), patronage, class-based and economic accessibility of exemplary narratives, library and archive politics; these and many others would inevitably need to be explored. By considering the textual content rather than the plain fact of text, I am foreclosing all of these avenues, abandoning these options for a deeper, richer analysis. I cannot say that I am glad to do it.

The second consideration is a reflexive one. This project is an outgrowth of my personal fascination with exemplary narratives, born perhaps of early exposure to the lives of the saints in my own tradition (and of Amelia Earhart, Marie Curie, Harriet Tubman, Nellie Bly, Hatshepsut, and many others). This comparative project is important to me, is something I believe needs to be done, as a rehabilitation of a method that I once reviled but have come to revere. But, beyond this motivation, this comparison is important to me because I believe both cognitively and affectively it is important to scholarship for the tyranny of the purely rational to be torn down, step by step, important for the academy to come to understand other ways of knowing. I am moved, deeply, emotionally, by these narratives, and that is a way of knowing them. By comparing them to each other I am using a discarded method because if I can rehabilitate it, maybe there will be room for my being moved to matter.

It is important, I believe, for scholarship to strip down and present itself as inherently subjective, inherently situated, inherently epistemologically flawed, and to accept or even embrace these descriptors. Honest comparison has the potential to create a space for such self-presentation. But this comparison in particular is important because it allows me to say, here, this is an idiosyncratic reading of idiosyncratic texts in very fluid genres about men and sometimes women who themselves do not fit neat categories, and neither texts nor subjects are accessible to me in any unmediated way. And I want to say, that is beautiful. That uncertainty, that contingency, that is a joy and a gift. I have to choose to believe (cognitively) and have faith (affectively) in any conclusions I might encounter, and is not that involvement of my whole person, the way these cognitive and affective states when they coincide affect my posture and the set of my jaw, speed up my heart rate, brighten my eyes, is all of that not a profound and magnificent thing?

I am choosing, in this work, to not engage with how these narratives move me; being disciplinarily transgressive in one dimension is enough, for me, for this thesis. But if I did, what would this work look like? How would it be different if I considered these masters as exemplars from the point of view of a person trying to learn how to be as a religious woman, as a student of history, as a disciple of an institutional tradition, as an activist, as a person in the world? I do not know the answers to these questions, but I think they are an important note on which to end this methodological chapter. I think it is important for me to acknowledge that, although I am choosing not to engage with most of the ways in which I have come to know these texts and their subjects, my being moved indelibly colours this whole project, makes it flawed, makes it real.

God's Friends: Exemplary Narratives of Muslim Masters

"Tazkiras are not mere mnemonic repetitions. They are conscious remembrances, and therefore they are both cultural artifacts and cultural reconstructions"
Hermansen and Lawrence, "Indo-Persian Tazkiras" 150

Preliminary Concerns

This chapter works through the thematic categories that emerged from my reading of the works in my Muslim corpus, although as the below concerns apply equally to my Buddhist corpus this section of the chapter can be considered something of an introduction to both chapters two and three. Some of the categories do not appear in these chapters; others have changed names or have been absorbed into larger categories. These changes arise from an attempt to provide a statistically significant analysis. I have stretched the limits of my comfort in the articulation of this pattern by considering significant those subcategories within the larger themes that are drawn from the lives of a few masters only. These attempts at being significant are complicated by a desire to incorporate the whole of each corpus, themselves not truly representative of the diversity of Muslim and Buddhist life-narration, into this family resemblance nexus. One of the complicating factors, on which I will expand in chapter four, is length. Even in the overarching categories, none of which are represented in all the life narrations of these corpora, there is an absence of a strong, consistent frame, perhaps the result of my choice of works. I will argue that it is instead due to the situational nature of exemplarity itself.

Here I must clarify what I mean by calling exemplarity situational. What I aim to achieve in this chapter and the next are nexuses of markers of exemplarity that are universally, or at least diversely, applicable, but the situations from which I draw them are idiosyncratic to the text or to a small group of similar texts. For the purposes of this study, I argue that the exemplarity of the particular act is less significant, but I do not wish to foreclose the possibility that a reader might find in such particular acts a situationally appropriate response to the question with which they approached the text. But because these markers are artificially imposed based on patterns of particular acts that I have chosen to highlight, they are themselves situational, situated in the overlapping worlds of my corpus and this previously blank page. While I maintain that my markers are more universally applicable than the situations from which they are drawn, I cannot truly escape exemplarity's situational nature.

As we will see, in several categories there is a direct conflict between two strong pattern strands, and this conflict along with the lack of a continuous thread indicates to me that this pattern of exemplarity I am proposing has more in common with the definition of religion than it does with scientific categorisation. Situational terms like "religion" and "moral exemplar" are best defined, as I have uncontroversially maintained in chapter one, with appeal to nexuses of family resemblances. Obviously, as with the definition of religion, such an approach presents difficulties, especially to the scholar who wishes to classify. As a part of my revision of comparativist methodology, I am forced to acknowledge the inherently situated and situational nature of all classificatory frameworks, and I, at least, welcome the uncertainty that comes along with a pattern based on family resemblances.

I am concerned less with the providing for a scholar a mechanism for identifying a given figure as a master than with questioning what the life-narrations of masters can give to communities of adherents as paradigms for exemplary behaviour, although I acknowledge that any attempt to untangle the latter rests to an extent on the former.

I initially considered the themes collected in this chapter and the next as patterns based on which a moral exemplar might be identified or even constructed. I have come, however, to think of these artificial patterns as inappropriate for such tasks, as no one exemplar exhibits all the traits and some exhibit at most two, and yet the are still included in life narration genres that focus on exemplars. The frame of family resemblances is better than "pattern," but even still it is difficult to determine to what extent this nexus may be used to analyse texts and their subjects. I propose, finally, that the act of comparison that I will perform in chapter four is analogical to the way my pool of family resemblances can be used to classify: a life narration potentially of a master may be subject to a mandala-overlay of this pattern, redefining and nuancing it even as it allows for an academic classification of the potential master.

Another important consideration is the utility of investigating works along a continuum. In discussing my methodology, I touched on the theories of Kubler and Kracauer, who have indelibly impacted my understanding of sequences of artworks. Life-narrations are undeniably didactic art, as are, I would argue, all scholarly works. As such, their emplotment on a timeline allows us to demonstrate and investigate influence, inheritance, and other atemporal relationalities between texts. Each text in the network of genres that contribute to life-narrations of realised Muslim masters is in conversation with every other text, whether intentionally or otherwise; thus, a scholarly work from the Subcontinent addresses itself to scholarly works from North American authors, to devotional works past and present, and to the overarching Islamic scholarly genre of the *tazkira*. Similarly, a devotional work by a white European Buddhist speaks to and is spoken to by scholarly works past and present, devotional works by ethnically Tibetan Buddhists, the traditional life narration of the Buddha, and the umbrella genre that is the *rnam thar*. It is in these conversations between texts, dynamic and unbound by time or geography, that patterns of exemplarity emerge and are refined. Devotional readers of any of these texts are trained by exposure to these texts, and to the Prophetic Sunna, *jataka* tales, and other bodies of text, to extrapolate exemplary moral behaviours that can be applied to their own lives. Scholars ought also, therefore, to consider all works within this conversation when we consider how moral exemplarity is constructed and understood by them. To consider all accounts side by side, as I have done, is in a certain way to elide the situated temporality of each account. In doing so, however, it is possible for features that transcend the specific temporal and geographical iterations of this conversation to make themselves known most forcefully, to beckon both me and you into the loudest, most affirmed dialogical spaces.

What might be gained from considering by whom – and by "by whom" I mean "in which temporal-spatial moment" – a given idea was added to the conversation? Perhaps much, although I suspect that a search for such information would ultimately be fruitless, or at the very least frustrating in the extreme. Beyond the difficulty, questions of provenance have very little impact

on the answer that I am seeking. I am uninterested, here, in a kind of tracing of generic history, although such an investigation could only enhance my project. Rather, I take genre into account by differentiating between devotional and (nominally) scholarly works, acknowledging that especially earlier works tend to be both. My aim in so doing is to interrogate why a certain marker might be more prevalent in one or the other, and how that difference in emphasis might help clarify the contours of each marker.

Finally, I must address one of my core interpretive moves: the differentiation of exemplarity and exceptionality, and my fitting of extremity into both. In each of the chapters that follow, I will gradually unveil the specific dynamics of and between these forces, so here I will simply explain what I take each term to mean. I argue that a given person can *be* exceptional and *do* exemplary actions. An exemplary character is a result of such performance, while actions that can be read as exceptional are not exceptional in themselves; rather, they spring from and are signifiers of an exceptional character. Exceptionality inheres; exemplarity is performed. In the life narrations of both of my corpora, these concepts play into, enhance, and nuance each other. Extremity is an outgrowth of both: it is what renders exemplary acts markers of exceptionality, so that the Buddha's past births detailed in the jataka narratives are exemplary in underlying principle – primarily the display of compassion – but exceptional in their profound extremity. This extreme exceptionality is in both cases, I argue, as aspirational as exemplarity.

For the Buddhist corpus, this argument rests on Nagarjuna's *Mūlamadhyamikakārikā*, wherein he advocates for the abolition of mental categories down to the self-other distinction in order to open the door to such extreme compassionate activity. This rhetoric colours my overall use of exemplarity and exceptionality as mutually reinforcing concepts, but I am also indebted to the idea of the *barzakh*, especially as developed by Ibn 'Arabi and Muhammad Iqbal. In what I read as an Iqbalian spin on an Akbarian concept, the *barzakh* is the bridge that connects the divine and the human and allows for their interaction by being in relationship with both. In a sense, the master, or for Iqbal the *insān al-kāmil*, must be exceptional, partaking of the supra-human, in order for his actions to be exemplary. His extremity is a marker of that otherness that stems from divine relationship and functions as a path by which the practitioner, drawn along by mimicry of exemplary performance, can also achieve divine relationship. Exceptionality and exemplarity thus function in tandem in these corpora to provide aspirational goals and guidance to the reader-practitioner.

Introduction

In this portion of the current study, I examined 154 life narrations of 124 masters, using a combination of translated devotional texts, scholarly works written originally in English, devotional works written originally in English, and works that seem to straddle the line between scholarship and devotionalism. I broke each work down by theme and inserted the details into the most massive spreadsheet I hope to ever see. The themes that I chose initially were based on my reading of two classic life-narration compendia: Fariduddin 'Attar's *Tazkirah al-awliyā* as translated by Paul Losensky, and Ibn al-'Arabi's *Rūh al-Quds* and *Al-Durrat al-Fākhirah*, translated together as *Sufis of Andalusia*

by R.W.J. Austin. As I read the life-narrations included here, I abrogated these categories, adding new ones where necessary and changing the titles of pre-existing ones to best reflect the source material. In compiling this chapter, I have further shifted these categories, collapsing some into each other and eliminating some entirely. Included in my corpus but not in my analysis are life narrations within ʻAttar, a life narration of ʻAli, and a small number of others. These functioned somewhat as controls, allowing me a broader sense, as I was reading, of what some of the standard, widespread tropes and styles might be. This last component was particularly crucial for me, as I am much more familiar with the genre conventions of my Buddhist corpus and wanted to treat the two as equally as possible.

My nexus of family resemblances does not include any number of interesting elements, like artistic talent, extreme lack of bias, proclivity for joking at the dinner table, chronic depression, the employment of porters to carry clay tubs with flowering shrubs after one so that one might constantly be surrounded by a garden, otherworldly loveliness, impressive memory, the proclivity for falling into a trance state, and the inevitable wearing down of open-hearted enthusiasm into bone-deep exhaustion. Individually, any of these elements might provide fruitful ground for a practitioner seeking a model of behaviour, so their lack of inclusion is not a statement on their exemplary possibilities. Rather, they are not included because they occur too few times to be counted as part of the pattern.

Those categories that are included will be addressed in the following order: titles and honours, genealogy and parentage, unusual childhood, teachers and lineage, material contributions, scholarly accomplishments, relationships with peers, relationships with students, relationships with temporal powers, relationships with non-Muslims, family and love relationships, ecstatic utterances, violence, pilgrimage, poverty and charity, and death. In each category, I will begin by identifying possible differences of emphasis based on genre of source. I will then move on to discussing the content of each category, offering a few representative examples, and identifying what is exemplary for the practitioner. In each instance, I will also provide the number of life-narrations that include each element.

Titles and Honours

In this category, source genre assumes a central importance. Translated devotional compendia tend to preface their life-narrations with lists of titles, some of which were accrued by their subjects in life, but many of which the author is giving to them posthumously. Outside of compendia, titles are often descriptive and appear either at the appropriate narrative point, or at the end as a way of summarising the important elements of the life in question. English-language devotional works are largely silent on the topic of titles, official or otherwise, perhaps in part because these works tend to follow scholarly patterns and include an introduction wherein the master(s) to be discussed are introduced. Scholarly works tend only to record those titles granted officially, often drawing from court records and other similar documents.

In the cases of the thirty-nine masters who are given titles, these can be understood as belonging to one of two categories. The first, more common in devotional works, are titles that express elements of the master's personal realisation or achievement, so that, for example, Baba Musafir is called the "Emperor of the realms of spiritual dominion" (Digby 49). These titles, occurring at the outset of a life-narration, serve as an advance summary, preparing the reader to encounter the realised master, forewarning that this life is not an ordinary one. The second, present in both devotional and scholarly works, function as remembrances of important deeds in the master's life. Nizamuddin Awliya, we are told, is called "Mahfil Shikan" or "Breaker of Assemblies" for his skill in debating during his school days in Delhi (Nizami 36), while Pir Sadr ad-Din is called "Harischandra" and "Sohdev" because of his familiarity with Hindu scriptures (Renard *Tales* 268). What is exemplary about these titles is not their possession, but indeed the personality traits and activities that provoked their being given. Titles function, in part, to highlight the remarkable elements of a given master's life from the perspective of the author. We can perhaps say that, for the purposes of the pattern, an exemplary life includes *remarkable activities or personality traits*. English-language devotional works signal these remarkable details in their introductions, obviating the necessity for highlighting them within the text; these generic conventions shape the way that exemplarity is expressed, but not what exemplarity is.

Genealogy and Parentage

I must acknowledge that my analysis of this category glosses over larger questions of inheritance and inheritability. This inheritance is both spiritual and physical, in the dual sense of biology and material property like *khanqah*s, *waqf*s, and such embodiments of power as cloaks, rosaries, and libraries. There is an underlying suggestion in these life-narrations, supported by other kinds of writings, that spiritual prowess is inheritable. There is a preponderance of evidence in this corpus to suggest that genealogical purity, and possibly even the inheritability of power and innate capacity, is a central feature of an exemplary life. It is only the first of many instances wherein what I term exceptionality is present as an enhancement to the exemplary core of the life-narration.

Exceptionality, I will argue throughout this chapter and in the next as well, is as important a hallmark of life-narrations of realised masters as exemplarity is. The positioning of a master as exceptional serves two interrelated purposes. Firstly, it precludes the necessity that the practitioner reading or hearing or otherwise experiencing the life-narration fulfill perfectly every element of moral exemplarity. The masters are called, albeit inconsistently, the friends of God precisely because their relationship to the divine, and thus to moral perfection, is closer than that of the average practitioner. By emphasising the exceptional nature of the master's life, the author can impress on a readership that these lives offer guidelines, possible solutions to problems that the reader may face, but are not and cannot be prescriptive in their entirety.

The second purpose is related to the spiritual hierarchy within traditions of Islam that focus on realised masters. By positing the master's exceptionality, the author firmly positions the master a step or multiple steps above the practitioner in the hierarchy of their shared tradition. A

maintenance of hierarchy serves any number of functions. For our purposes, the most significant of these is the institutionalisation of exemplarity, by which I mean that it allows a practitioner to know to whom to look when encountering a situation wherein there is doubt as to how to proceed. The supreme hierarch is, of course, the Prophet himself, most exemplary and most exceptional of humankind. Other exemplars, specified and organised differently by each of many branching traditions, serve to offer either confirming examples or situational alternatives to Prophetic behaviour. The presence of a hierarchy allows the uncertain practitioner to look perhaps first to the living master of the tradition, then to its founder, and so on up the ranks until an acceptable and situationally appropriate answer to the question of what action to take or behaviour to inculcate is encountered. A spiritual hierarchy resting on exceptionalism thus underpins any claim to exemplarity that life-narrations have, while simultaneously assuring the reader that to attempt to mimic a life in its entirety is impossible and thus unnecessary.

Genealogical purity is one of the valences of this exceptionality. Thirty-five of the masters considered here have exceptional genealogies. Twelve are Sayyids and one an ʿAlid, two trace their lineage to Companions of the Prophet, seven are descended from royalty, and thirteen from other well-respected practitioners, many of whom are also realised masters.

Another valence of exceptionality is related to the phenomenon of a lack of male parenting from a young age; twenty-four masters lose their fathers while they are still children or before they are even born. Of these, two are old enough to take on responsibilities toward their mothers and siblings, two have sufficient inheritances to not have their lives significantly impacted, two are raised by their father's senior disciples, one is orphaned outright as an infant and leaves no record of who raised him, and the remaining fifteen are raised exclusively by their mothers. The importance of motherhood in these fifteen lives allows an examination of the otherwise veiled, textually inaccessible valences of gendered female exemplarity.

Only three individual women's life-narrations appear in this corpus, in part because very few lives of realised women are recorded at all, and in part because even fewer of these are available in English translation or English original. The profound absence of female exemplars in their own works is a difficult problem with which to grapple, especially given the importance of women as mothers and, as we will see later, as wives. Are women only ever exemplary when they function to support the lives of exemplary men? This question is one that continues to trouble me, but that is impossible to answer with the current data set. Instead, I believe it is more fruitful to ask in what ways women are allowed to be exemplary in the lives of exemplary men through taking on exceptional roles that might appear in a different light in an individual life-narration.

Here I must pause for a moment to reveal my own subject position with respect to the mothers in these narratives. I specifically sought life narrations of women when compiling my corpus, only to find them sadly lacking in any language. The few I uncovered in English were so short as to not contribute statistically to this analysis in any category. Provoking my arguments in the following section is a somewhat selfish desire to capture exemplary femaleness in some form, born of a knowledge that it is always already constructed differently than the nominally genderless

but functionally masculine universal ideal. I therefore approach these mothers, for whose scraps of narrative I have scrounged, avoiding the impulse to historicise, to contextualise with anthropological or other data. I approach them with the timeless question, similar to that which I will ask of the corpus as a whole, of what it might mean to live an exemplary life, particularly here as a woman, and as a mother.

I want to argue that women like the mothers whose narratives I will address shortly could not take on the roles that they do if their life-narrations stood on their own. They are veiled, in the sense of protection invoked by theorists like Fatima Mernissi and Saba Mahmood, by the life narrations of their sons, and are thus able to transgress social norms and perform care, teaching, commitment to truth, and others of the markers of exemplarity that I will develop in this chapter in ways that are potentially accessible as exemplary to female, and perhaps even to male, readers. In their own life narrations, their narratives would be rendered exceptional in the extreme, with the implication that the average female practitioner could not hope to follow their examples. Instead, by virtue of their inclusion as mediating influences in the lives of these fifteen masters, the emphasis is placed on the difference that these roles make. It becomes, in my reading, something close to a prescription for the religious woman to fulfill these unconventional roles in order to provoke the development of realised masters within their communities. Is this instrumentalisation of motherhood, common in philosophical discussions of human perfection as well, as empowering and potentially transformative as the examples provided by the lives of sons? Almost certainly not, especially as all life-narrations outside of the autobiographical are inherently externally constructed reproductions. The distance between constructor and construction in the case of these subaltern mothers is necessarily even greater as all the works in this corpus are written by men.

I want to emphasis that in no way do I believe that this loophole for female exemplarity is representative of some pro-woman strand in life-narration literature. It is always unwise to seek atemporality in historically situated works. There are too many attempts, in modern media and even scholarship, to see Sufism as feminist, and I want to explicitly avoid aligning myself with such a reductive narrative. I want to suggest, instead, that there is liberatory *potential* in existing in the background, in being veiled and this enabled to act more fully. Might my argument here be different if I had other life narrations where women figured more prominently? Almost certainly. Here, I interpret the absence of women along with their presence and conclude that being agential in the lives and paths of their sons is the most exemplary place for women to be.

These mothers who raise their sons to be realised masters offer a radical perspective on motherhood. Perhaps the best example of the transformative power of motherhood is in Nizamuddin Awliya's mother. Her love's work begins before the master's birth: nearing the end of her pregnancy, she receives a Prophetic dream asking her to choose between the life of her husband and the life of her unborn child. She chooses the child (Suvorova 114) and enters a life of extreme poverty that lasts until her death. Despite the dire financial straits that leave her often without food, she relocates with Nizamuddin and his older sister to Delhi when it becomes clear that he has reached the limits of his education in their hometown of Badaon, and supports him by begging,

and perhaps other means, while he seeks knowledge (Nizami 36-7). Her emotional support seems to have been more important to the master even than her financial support, for his teachings on both women and loss reflect a deep devotion to her, and he mourns her death in both ritual and feeling for over fifty years, until well into has late seventies (Suvorova 117).

Other mothers take on full responsibility for education of their sons, both as Sufis, as in the case of Miyadi Miyan Mir (Hanif *South* 205), and in classical learning, as in ten cases. Some, like the mother of Saiyid Ashraf Jahangir Simnani, intervene in their sons' lives to ensue that they find teachers (Hanif *South* 30); some, like Nuru'd-Din's mother, remove them from the influences of criminals (Hanif *South* 301); others, among them Sultan Bahu's mother, nurture their spiritual interests (Rehman 153). This same Sultan Bahu loves his mother with such fervour that he requests her to be his master (Puri and Khak 27-30, Buxi 69, Hanif *South* 368). She refuses, reminding her son that women cannot be masters to men, and as performance of the kind of stylised, almost ritualised humility that can be seen in theoretical works as well as in historical texts other than life narrations where it is emphases that masters ought to refuse disciples on the grounds of their own inadequacy. But the force of their spiritual power and the clearly close relationships between mothers and sons opens the door for potentially radical behaviour.

This refusal to serve as master, paired with an ethics of care[36] manifested in its most extreme and self-abnegating sense, is exemplary to a female readership, delimiting the boundaries of permissible female accomplishment. The exceptionality of these masters is in part determined by the exceptional behaviour of their mothers, but these women are framed in a way that allows the reader to consider how they might, in following the example set by these women, also be instrumental in the development of an exceptional master. The power that this narrative places in the hands of women is not to be taken lightly; as mediators and formative influences in lives of spiritual accomplishment, they demonstrate the transformative nature of motherhood. Along with encouraging a female readership to nurture and ground their sons, this narrative articulates their equivalency to male parental figures. There are no narratives, in the works considered, of masters being raised by single fathers, and there are certainly no narratives that reveal as strong an emotional connection as some of these masters have with their mothers. Is this because a male parent alone is unremarkable, or is it because the possibility for a male parent to find a female surrogate is strong enough that masters simply do not grow up without mothers? Moreover, these mothers manifest the markers of exemplarity that characterise the lives of their sons, thus acting as teachers while also, in their veiled ways, possibly being recognisable as masters themselves through the logic of the family resemblances nexus. The exemplary lesson for the female reader, and one that is possible to transfer

36 The term "ethics of care" comes from modern feminist theory as it intersects with ethical philosophy; specifically here I am indebted to Carol Gilligan, Nel Noddings, and especially Joan Tronto. For Tronto, there are four elements of care: attentiveness, responsibility (assumed, not enforced and thus distinct from duty), competence, and the responsiveness of the recipient, which is closer to feedback than reciprocation in nature. Care, as I use it here, thus differs from the plain fact of responsibility, service, generosity, and what al-Hujwīrī calls "preference," although it includes all of them. Crucial to the character of care are the moves of attentiveness and competence. And a response is required as well, some or all of which are ignored in these other terms, but all of which are present in the exemplary narratives I isolate as demonstrating the ethics of care.

to a male reader as well, is to *facilitate realisation*. Certainly, masters take up this call when they take up the mantle of teaching, as I will argue below.

Masters whose fathers are mentioned are primarily those who are sons of men already on the Path (twenty-five), although in a significant minority of cases the mentioned father is not a practitioner (eleven). Of the latter, the diversity ranges from wealthy landowners (five masters) to merchants (two masters) and even an embroiderer. Of the former, it is interesting to note that in two cases both mother and father are on the Path. Most of the narratives with fathers mentioned come from non-scholarly sources, indicating a crucial concern in devotional works about the accessibility of spiritual life. Those masters born to another practitioner exhibit exemplarity within the frame of their privileged birth status by humbling themselves to follow the family calling, and the lives of the remaining masters emphasise to a similarly disadvantaged readership the importance of striving, as well as the ultimately small value of birth. That these narratives are primarily devotional speaks to the nature of these works as primarily concerned with the practical aspects of exemplarity, while scholars, who often produce exemplars unconsciously when pursuing some other aim, have no concern for the feasibility of these lives even when obsessing over whether they really took place as recorded.

Here it is possible to isolate two valences of exemplarity, both ultimately reducible to the same principle. It is exemplary to *choose the Path*, regardless of outside circumstances. This exemplary behaviour expresses itself both in the kind of filial duty that has sons following in their fathers' footsteps and in the disjunction from family life that characterises masters who step away from their fathers' professions. It is important to note here that the exemplary behaviour of choosing the Path outweighs the potentially transgressive behaviour of family abandonment, a feature that will re-emerge when family dynamics outside the parental are discussed below.

Childhood

This category is also one that seems to have earned little scholarly interest, likely in part because it is also one that displays primarily exceptionality. The authors of the scholarly works in this corpus focus primarily on accurately reflecting their source material, although some are keen to throw in snide remarks about the believability or truth value of the narratives they recount, and thus both exemplary and exceptional elements of realised lives matter to them only insofar as they are emphasised in the primary sources from which they work. Devotionally, however, this exceptionalism matters a great deal; these childhood narratives reflect natural dispositions that set the stage for later behaviour, once again hinting at the innateness of what I term "realisation potential" but might, using more emic terminology, be called something like "preparedness," and providing a platform for hierarchisation. It is outside the scope of the present study, but it is important to consider how the presence of exceptionality in narratives may also be related to developments in especially the South Asian elevation of masters to objects of devotion.

There are two types of unusual childhood occurrences present in the considered narratives. The emphases here are on the one hand on a supernatural devoutness and piety, and on the other a

preternatural aptitude for meditation and study. In this corpus, seventeen masters display childhood piety that ranges in expression from refusing to nurse during the fasting hours of the month of Ramadan (Talib 2) to weeping whenever the master had to witness merchants haggling and thus demonstrating the trickery inherent in commerce (Hanif *Central* 409). Six masters memorise the Qur'an at a young age, and all of these also reveal scholarly aptitudes at an early age. Perhaps the most notable of these is Abdu'l-Haqq, who several times caught his small turban on fire while sneakily reading after he had been sent to bed. A conscientious student by day who would arrive early to school and study all evening, he would be so absorbed in his illicit late-night study that he would not notice the fire until his scalp began to burn (Hanif *South* 41).

While exceptionality hovers in the background, exemplary behaviour is still fairly easy to pick out, and might be articulated by the simple formulation that one ought to *internalise the principles of religion* and *be constant in study.*

Teachers and Lineage

There are twelve masters whose teachers are not mentioned by name in their life-narrations; Four of these are women, and another six have life-narrations that are only one to three paragraphs long. Aside from these examples, all the other masters have a teacher at least acknowledged, and most have extensive narrative space dedicated to interactions between teacher and student, making this category the closest to a universal marker of exemplarity present in this corpus. Whether a teacher is mentioned or not seems purely to be a function of length rather than of source genre, and what is remembered about each of these masters is a presence of some authority in their lives; that is to say, their knowledge and spiritual achievement are neither spontaneous nor self-produced. This textual reproduction of instructional hierarchy is itself exemplary, so that it is easy to say that the marker for this category might simply be *have a spiritual preceptor.*

There are two prominent tropes present in the life narrations that go beyond mere mention of authority: the search and devotion. There are nineteen masters who spend a great deal of time searching for a teacher, although in a few cases it is the teacher who does the searching. An excellent example of this latter category is Shah Hussain, whose teacher, Hazrat Sheikh Bahlol Daryai, learns through spiritual illumination that there is a young man destined to be his pupil and seeks out the youth instead of Shah Hussain having to seek for him (Naqshbandy 3-4). The relationship of devotion to one's teacher is arguably a genre trope that relates to the development of the tazkira and other genres in the South Asian subcontinent. Eighteen life-narrations include mention of the master's profound emotional and/or spiritual attachment to his teacher. This emotionality includes, but is not limited to, such experiences as Baba Musafir's, whose innate attraction to his teacher "stole away [his] heart," resulting in spontaneous poetic utterances, the feeling of being drawn as by a chain around his neck back into the teacher's presence whenever they were apart, and when in that presence the loss of all sense of time or the body's needs (Digby 49-51, 63, 69, 99). This attraction and attachment to the teacher, who is arguably a stand-in for the divine and whose presence provokes experiences of realisation, is clearly exemplary. These two tropes, the urgent desire to find

a teacher and the loving devotion to that teacher once found, lend weight to the prescription of the exemplarity marker. The having of a teacher is perhaps the closest to a constant among the family resemblances of a master's life-narration, and as a result carries the heaviest weight of exemplarity. A would-be practitioner, then, must first *seek out* and then *love a teacher* in order to progress in following the example of nearly any master considered here. Moral and spiritual progression appear at least partially contingent on this relationship.

Founding Buildings

This category seems primarily populated by narratives in the scholarly genres, an interesting phenomenon that seems to speak to the fact that tangibles such as building construction are the meat of scholarship; these facts are among those most easily verifiable by appeal to sources external to the devotional life-narrations from which many scholars are drawing their narratives. What do these tangibles represent for the practitioner seeking a moral exemplar in these texts? Certainly the remembrance of reaching out into the life of the community, extending beyond the self in the development of spiritual acuity, is a crucial element in understanding the exemplary function of building foundation. But only four of the nineteen building-founders build places exclusively to serve the community, while the remaining fifteen building projects are multifunctional *khanqah*s.

The exclusive care for one's immediate community implied in the building of what some scholars have called "Sufi convents" is of course only once facet of *khanqah* construction, for many of these projects also included extensive kitchen facilities for providing food to any who came by, but ultimately I argue that it is at least in part an ethics of care that is at stake here. More than simply care, exemplary in itself, is an economic exemplarity: the usage of donated resources for community works, an immediate returning to the community that which has been given by them. The ethical usage of money and goods is raised implicitly in these narratives by the juxtaposition of the master's self-imposed poverty, which I will discuss more fully below, and the often lavish gifts that result from public acknowledgement of the master's spiritual power. In an important way, much of that power comes from ascetic practice, but the function of masters and their households in exemplifying the ethical usage of resources cannot be elided in a conversation involving, as *khanqah* construction does, both power and care.

The undercurrent running through these building narratives is similar rhetorically to that in narratives about motherhood: to serve the exemplarity of the master is itself an exemplary behaviour. To donate to a master is an exemplary behaviour, these narratives inform their readership, because of what it enables the master to accomplish as both an act of care and an act of ethical resource management. The narratives of building foundation also demonstrate the necessity of understanding exemplarity through the lens of interconnected community life. It is impossible for a master, isolated from the community, to fully express an exemplarily moral life, and so the reader who cannot achieve the status of master as a result of the master's concomitant exceptionality is encouraged to perform the kind of reaching out that enfolds the master into the very community that can serve as ground and source for the master's exemplarity, a participatory exemplarity that

can function only in relationship. The markers of exemplarity are thus twofold here: *generosity* and *ethical resource management*. Of course, the parameters of ethical resource management are elided somewhat by the exceptional nature of the master, which is what allows some masters, among them Shah Khalilullah I (Nurbakhsh *Masters* 70), to live rich lives surrounded by the glamour of court patronage. Building foundation serves, in its articulation of two levels of exemplarity, to present the master once again as an exceptional, aspirational model whose decisions cannot be judged or perhaps even understood by lay practitioners.

Scholarly Accomplishments

This category is another externally verifiable, even equally tangible,[37] one onto which the authors of the scholarly works in this corpus attach themselves, perhaps seeking a kind of exemplarity of their own. Certainly narratives about scholarly masters, especially ones like Shaikh ʻAli Muttaqi, who transcribed and sold copies of the Qur'an in order to fund his obsessive book-buying habit (Hanif *South* 249-50), or Baba Musafir, who refused a donation of books on the grounds that they had been plundered from a library and sent an army of ants to decimate the entire library of the colleague who did accept the stolen volumes (Digby 129-30), or even Shah Muhammad b. ʻAbd Ahmad, who always intended to write a Qur'anic commentary but never got around to it (Hanif *Central* 1) and Shaikh Muhammad Hasan, who almost wrote a book but then destroyed what he considered its unworthy draft (Hanif *South* 123) are sympathetic to the scholar. Who among us does not place a higher value on books than on many things non-scholars might deem more important? Who among us has not procrastinated on a writing project, or been consumed by feelings of inadequacy about one already started? Who among us can look at the example of Nizamuddin Awliya, the "ardent bookworm" whose library continued to grow his entire life despite his commitment to fairly extreme personal asceticism and whose love of learning is remarked upon by all his biographers (Nizami 155, Suvorova 113), and not experience a sense of inspired kinship? It is perhaps this "inspired kinship" that best expresses what I mean by "exemplarity" – not merely a prescriptive model for behaviour but a vital relationality that builds on self-identification with the master to encourage the realisation of a high standard of behaviour.

It is similarly fairly intuitive to grasp the exemplarity of the scholar for the devotional author and reader. Representative as they are of a tradition that has valued learning throughout its long history, these masters are validated as exemplary Muslims in many ways, but perhaps most explicitly when their scholarship is addressed. This point is a crucial one to emphasise, since it goes against the narrative, standard even now despite a great deal of scholarship suggesting precisely what my analysis has uncovered, that Sufi masters were the furthest possible thing from scholars. Too often, studies of Sufisms have relied upon poetry, reading it as descriptive of practiced realities rather than relying on life narrations and other documents to provide a less idealised image. Relationships with

37 I use the word "tangible" here and elsewhere in referring not to the essence of scholarly production, which is certainly ephemeral in nature, but to the physical evidence thereof. What is accessible to the historian of scholarly accomplishments is that which is recorded in primarily texts, which throughout the history of my corpus are physical objects. I here draw on Hayden White's suggestion that form itself has content in order to argue that the physical manifestations of these accomplishments can be analysed for the mere fact of their physical presences.

traditional Islamic learning are exemplified by thirty-eight masters in this corpus, and they take many different forms, from teachers to memorisers, from prolific authors to copyists, from debaters to grammarians and translators. Poetic composition, while not necessarily to be considered a traditional Islamic science, is nevertheless an important hallmark of both the well-educated Muslim practitioner and the exemplary Muslim master. Scholarship and composition more generally thus play into an overlapping category that identifies these masters as exemplary Muslims even outside of their status of spiritual realisation. Five of the masters here wrote specifically to gain the attention of patrons as well, marking them as participators in a courtly patronage culture and thus lending a legitimacy to that culture. It becomes exemplary to write for a patron because a realised master does it, but more than it, these narratives open the door for less ecstatically-inclined practitioners to consider where Sufi practice might have a place for them. Scholarly accomplishment, almost paradoxically considering the elite nature of academia in any time and any place, makes the Path more broadly accessible.

The marker of exemplarity here is fairly simply *educated in the traditional sciences* but might also be phrased as *love of learning*. It is more difficult to determine the latter, as it is a phrase that is not explicitly used in this corpus and, I suspect, if it is used at all in the wider corpus of the whole genre it must be very sparingly. I cannot help but see it stare up at me from the pages of these life narrations, though, with the emotional fervour that the term implies heavy in the air. Perhaps my own scholarly search for exemplarity clouds my judgement, but I stand by this marker.

Finally, even though only twelve masters engage in religious debate in one way or another, and in at least nine of these cases the purpose the narratives serve seem to be to situate the master in a milieu wherein either *samā'* or *waḥdat al-wujūd* were being debated, it is important to consider explicit accounts of engagement in religious debate. All four narratives of masters debating *samā'* are from scholarly sources, and all five narratives of *waḥdat al-wujūd* debates are from devotional sources. What does this difference reveal about the role of each debate in determining a matter of exemplarity? I argue that the master's position on *samā'* plays into questions about his role in sociopolitical life of the period and is a question that interests primarily the historian, while the master's position on *waḥdat al-wujūd* is a matter of core theology. It is this debate on the matter of core theology that further reinforces what has become the central marker of exemplarity, the *commitment to truth*. Regardless of the master's actual position on *waḥdat al-wujūd* or *samā'*, it is the commitment to that position that matters in terms of providing a model for the practitioner to follow. Here it is also crucial to note that the fact of engaging in these debates indicates, as all instances in this category do, a *relationship with scholarly communities* that is a central part of a master's life and teaching. Again, too, it firmly situates these masters within deeply Islamic milieu, emphasising their Muslimness over and above their sometimes unorthodox theologies and practices.

Relationships with Peers

This category is rather a broad one, involving both positive and negative relationships with fellow Sufi practitioners and fellow Muslims more generally. It is interesting to note that, while

positive and negative relationships with fellow Sufis are reported fairly equally, positive relationships with the *'ulema* are reported with far less frequency than negative ones. In fact, in the scholarly sources surveyed, no positive relationships with the *'ulema* are recorded at all. Does this aporia reveal an agenda at play, an implicit and at times even explicit desire to set up an opposition between Sufi Islam and the Islam mediated by the *'ulema*? Perhaps not, especially given that scholarly works do note the involvement of masters in the traditional Islamic sciences that are the purview of the *'ulema*, but these narratives by and large do not include details of interpersonal relationships. What is at stake in calling someone a scholar but tacitly presenting their life as one either in isolation from or directly at odds with the scholarly establishment? As a scholar at odds with the establishment myself, I see the appeal in such presentations, the attractiveness of an exemplar who does not Play Nice, but I must wonder: do they make for honest scholarship? There is also an ideology at play in devotional iterations of a master's antagonism toward the *'ulema*, but at least the devotional corpus surveyed here has a few mentions of positive relationships, and is clearer about their agendas.

Presenting a troubled relationship between a master and his scholarly colleagues involves, necessarily, the attempt to assert a higher knowledge, or a more correct correctness to the master's practice and example. In devotional works, this elevation serves the obvious purpose of indicating that the exemplarity of the master is superior and much better to follow than any example a mere scholar might provide, as well as the similar purpose of elevating the Path as the best way of progressing through life as a Muslim. It also serves to provide a guide to the practitioner in how to mediate their own relationships with the *'ulema*, although this latter purpose is tempered by the master's exceptionality, which allows him to stand on equal or superior ground. In scholarly works, this elevation of the master is more troubled. There is a history in the study of Islam more generally of isolating and elevating Sufism as "better" than other iterations of Islam, using whatever terminology and rhetoric is in vogue at the time, despite the fairly clear evidence that to speak of Islam without Sufism before as late as the mid-19th century is virtually impossible. It is also possible, if one is inclined to be generous, that there are fewer references to positive relations with the *'ulema* in scholarly works because the primary sources on which they base their work assume that the default relationship is a positive one, unworthy of specific mention. It is difficult to judge based on absence, but important, at least, to note the contours of this absence.

Of the masters surveyed here, twelve have positive relationships with other Sufis, and twelve have negative. Only two have what might be construed as positive relations with the *'ulema*, although both narratives have shades to them, and sixteen have negative relationships with the scholarly establishment. The positive relationships with other Sufis are primarily about cordiality and mutual respect, although four of the masters in this corpus explicitly defend and protect *qalandar*s regardless of the harm these latter cause. The exemplarity marker here is fairly straightforward: *respect for other Sufis*. Negative relationships with other Sufis are much more scandalous and interesting, as is usually the case, and as I have already self-identified as Aristotle's gossipy historian I will share some of the juiciest here.

When Shaykh Usman Marandavi Lal Shahbaz Qalandar comes to Sehwan, it is a hotbed of rival groups. The masters in the city are, perhaps correctly, worried about the arrival of yet another master, so before he reaches the city limits they send him a bowl full to the brim with milk to indicate that there is no room for him. In response, he floats a rose in the milk and sends it back (Sind Department 16). This story is made particularly fascinating by the fact that, aside from in this publication by the Sind Department of Public Relations, the superiorly floral main character is otherwise remembered as Baha'uddin Zakariya (Suvorova 114, Hanif *South* 144). This same Baha'uddin Zakariya figures in several other antagonistic narratives as well, for instance becoming enraged at an Ismaili missionary who sits during prayer on the pretext that the prayer leader is insufficiently focused on God. They engage in a battle of will and supernatural gifts, with Zakariya ordering a blockade to prevent this Shams al-Din from entering his city and restricting all boats from carrying him, and Shams al-Din responding by building full-sized paper boats. They curse each other, Zakariya aloud and ineffectually, and Shams al-Din with a glance that causes horns to spring from his opponent's head, only removing them after a full apology and still ensuring that the marks of the horns will be visible on the foreheads of all Zakariya's descendants (Hanif *Central* 436).

Data Ganjbaksh endures several bad meetings with other Sufis, including an instance in Khurasan when the local Sufis feed him mouldy breadcrumbs while forcing him to watch them eat a rich meal as they sit on the roof above him and throw their melon skins on him (Suvorova 43). Other masters undergo trials of a more academic nature, with profound disagreements resulting in blanket boycotting of masters by each other in five cases. Shaikh Ahmad Qadiri, deliciously, is not above poaching the disciples of other masters (Hanif *South* 313-4). Data Ganjbaksh's narrative introduces an exemplarity marker that is reinforced by the examples of masters whose relations with the *'ulema* are antagonistic: *forbearance and forgiveness*. The remaining narratives reveal that moral exemplarity is at last in part predicated on something like the defeat of false teachers or the bringing of good teaching into broader circulation. The exemplarity marker might be articulated as *ensuring sound teaching*.

The two narratives relating possibly positive relationships with the *'ulema* involve Baba Musafir's love of the law (Digby 103, 128-9) and Mu'inuddin Chishti's conversion of anti-Sufi legislators into pro-Sufi legislators, which while on the surface have markers of antagonism and violence, ultimately indicate that it is not 'ulemic status that is the problem, but anti-Sufi sentiment. There are not enough exemplars of this category to result in an exemplarity marker, but it is important to acknowledge these possible positive representations of Sufi-*'ulema* relations. Negative relations with the *'ulema* are both more frequent and much more exciting.

Abdullah Ansari is prohibited from teaching, temporarily banished, imprisoned, and finally permanently exiled from his hometown when his students burn down the house of one of the *'ulema* who has been most viciously opposing him (Farhadi 10). Both Nizamuddin Awliya (Suvorova 109) and Baha'uddin Zakariya (Suvorova 144-6) are brought to trial by the *'ulema*, and Shaikh Muhbiu'llah Mubariz Ilahabadi is indicted by a fatwa as a materialist and an atheist who deserves execution (Hanif South 235). Baba Sa'id (Digby 46-7, 60, 80-1) and Shams al-Din (Hanif

Central 437) trounce members of the *'ulema* in such supernatural feats as subduing floodwaters and resurrection, while Shaikh Saifu'd-Din thanks God loudly and often that he is "neither a scholar nor a theologian" (Hanif *South* 337). The marker of exemplarity here relates to those developed in considering the cases of negative relationships with fellow Sufis: the *commitment to sound teaching* about higher truths. In no instance does a master himself retaliate against the *'ulema* who persecute him, reinforcing the marker of *forgiveness and forbearance* as well.

Relationships with Students

In fourteen narratives, students are mentioned as a list of names at the end of a life-narration, and in most of the others where they are named at all it is simply in passing where their lives intersect with that of the master. In the remaining twenty-four, however, the details of this relationship are articulated, and it is these detailed descriptions that are the most valuable for seeking exemplarity. There does not seem to be a difference in terms of how or how often these details are recounting based on source type, likely because neither scholarly nor devotional sources have ideological stakes in whether or how masters acquire students. The average practitioner is unlikely to be acquiring students, so it is difficult to determine how to present exemplarity in this section. I have opted for dual markers: one that indicates how to treat students if one has them, and another more general principle that can be applied even if one does not have students.

The memorialised aspects of these relationships can be categorised, for the most part, under charisma. The master's spiritual prowess in five cases is sufficient to overwhelm his students, resulting in such experiences as six months of unending dhikr (Digby 47) and spontaneous world renunciation (Nurbakhsh *Women* 128). Remembered aspects can be categorised under care (five masters), refusal to teach (five masters), teaching of the common people (four masters), and discipline (four masters). Of these, care, refusal, and discipline require some elaboration.

Care is exemplified in several different ways, from Shaikh Jalalu'd-Din Kasi's adoption of one of his students so that the boy's family would stop persecuting him for choosing the path (Hanif *South* 175-6) to Baba Musafir's tendency to send a vision of himself to protect his students when they were far from him (Digby 104, 113-4, 128, 139-40, 141, 155-6). Perhaps the two best examples of care come from Mu'inuddin Chishti and Nizamuddin Awliya. Mu'inuddin cared for his students in the hereafter by extracting a promise from God that all his lineage for all time would be accepted into paradise (Currie 69), but he also cared for them in the world. In one such instance, he made the arduous journey from Ajodhan to Delhi to rescue a student from a false charge of sexual immorality (Begg 101), and on another occasion threatening the people of Delhi, who were mistreating his chief student, Qutubu'd-Din Bakhtiyar Kaki, with bringing this student back to Ajodhan with him and leaving Delhi without a master unless they reformed (Suvorova 66).

Nizamuddin Awliya has several touching interactions with his students, although the singular depth and emotionality of these portrayals may simply be a result of the richness of his life-narrations in my corpus rather than an indicator that his is an extreme case. He is the only master who is portrayed as the recipient of care, as in the time a student's wife insists on washing his filthy

clothes, draping him in one of her veils and allowing him to curl up in the corner and read until she has finished (Nizami 47). He fosters community spirit by having his students teach each other (Nizami 65), and develops a counselling practice that Anna Suvorova notes resembles modern psychological techniques used to help victims of violence. He would cry alongside the victim, then tell something from his own experience to bring them onto the same level of vulnerability, then softly joke and recite comforting Qur'anic verses, talking around the issue in a way that offered comfort and potential solutions without requiring the sufferer to directly relate their trauma. He made himself accessible to all petitioners for this or any other service twenty-four hours a day (Suvorova 120-2, 124).

Masters who refused students did so for a few reasons, whether because they did not want a significant following, as in Hazrat Mian Mir's case (Brahma 9), because they would not participate in transgressive practices, as in Hazrat Shah Hussain's case (Naqshbandy 17), or because of a fear of large crowds. Shaikh 'Ali Muttaqi, whose excuse is the last, would instead send out a servant to impersonate him and give fake blessings until the crowd dispersed (Hanif *South* 249. Disciplinarian masters chastise their students for falling away from perfect conduct in dreams, like Baba Musafir (Digby 113-4, 138, 139-40), or with object lessons, as do Mu'inuddin Chishti and Nizamuddin Awliya (Currie 81, Nizami 58-9), and, like Baha'uddin Zakariya, restrict their access to other masters (Suvorova 147).

The markers of exemplarity here for the master can be articulated as *choose and train students*, somewhat obviously. But how might these narratives offer exemplars of behaviour to those practitioners who do not and are not likely to ever have students? One that is perhaps also obvious is to again consider the communal tinge that these narratives lend to exemplarity; the reader might see himself in the student who is in awe of the master or who is cared for and disciplined by the master, whose presence provides a ground for the master to display his exemplarity to its furthest extent. These narratives can also serve to emphasise the exemplarity articulated by narratives of explicitly seeking a teacher. But I want to argue that, as masters are always exemplars even in the midst of their exceptionality, here the ethics of care, the necessity of discipline, and humility are clearly on display as behaviours that transcend the master's specific context. The markers of exemplarity for the reader, then, might be phrased as *care for subordinates*, which I argue comprises both acts of compassion and those of discipline, and *lack of pretention*, which encompasses both the underlying logic of refusing to teach in some cases and the underlying virtue of teaching the common people.

Relationships with Temporal Powers

Here once again there appears to be little difference between scholarly and devotional sources in terms of percentage of masters who have each of the following different kinds of relationships with temporal powers. Here I am referring primarily to governments and nobility, even though in all of these cases these structures are inherently and explicitly religious, with pretentions to super-temporal influence or responsibility. I am here using "temporal" to mean precisely these governmental relationships that are centred not on orthodoxy or orthopraxy, as relationships with

the *'ulema* are, but on questions of authority, accountability, economics, and influence. I divide these relationships into six categories: state violence, explicit distancing, critique of government, violence on behalf of the state, noble students, and intercession.

I must note here that my articulation of a distinct and temporal "state" or "government" is highly artificial, and conflates Muslim rulers with non-Muslim where perhaps it may have been more fruitful and more accurate to consider Muslim rulers with "other practitioners" and non-Muslim rulers with "non-Muslims." I have not done so because of the pattern that I see emerging from my temporally vast corpus that distinguishes between how one acts with the powerful (temporal relationships), with the knowledgeable (relationships with other practitioners), and with the ignorant (relationships with non-Muslims).

Seven masters experience state violence, from being arrested (Hanif *South* 355) to having friends martyred (Nurbakhsh *Masters* 88), direct physical attack (Begg 63-4), banishment (Hanif *South* 26) – including of Nizamuddin Awliya when he is eighty (Suvorova 110) –, and social boycott (Hanif *South* 39). Of the seven masters who explicitly distance themselves from secular power, mostly by refusing court appointments or land grants, Nizamuddin Awliya's case for staying removed from the state is the most well fleshed out. He holds that court and khanqah are fundamentally incompatible (Nizami 59) and even goes so far as to defy austerity measures put into place by a local sultan by ordering his khanqah kitchens to serve extra dishes and multiple desserts (Nizami 111-5). On another occasion, he refuses to attend Friday prayers in the company of the sultan as ordered, because he worries that his mosque for the poor will have no one to lead prayers. When the sultan, enraged, demands his participation, Nizamuddin responds darkly that a dismal fate awaits those who deprive people of their prayer leaders. The sultan dies before the month is out (Suvorova 110-1).

Four masters critique the government explicitly, from Zinda Shah Madar who eventually resorts to afflicting the local ruler with whom he disagrees with boils (Suvorova 171) to Sultan Qutbu'd-Din in Kashmir who gets pretty huffy because he feels his local ruler is insufficiently harsh in his application of Islamic law to Hindus (Hanif *South* 341) and Nuru'd-Din who preaches against his local ruler's persecution of non-Muslims (Hanif *South* 306). Three masters engage in violence on behalf of the state, most notably Baba Sa'id, who keeps an army of fighting faqīrs and loans it out to rulers at various points on the condition that they note that faqīrs are higher than princes (Digby 56-7, 90). An astonishing thirty-eight masters explicitly accept noble or royal students, allow them to make lavish donations, and even accept titles or government posts as part of their teaching fee. A few of those masters with reasonable or good relationships with the state use them to their advantage; three use their state ties to intercede on behalf of their disciples or poor petitioners in their regions.

With such divergent relationships, it is difficult to articulate one overall marker of exemplarity. While cooperation with and even approval by the state appears to be overwhelmingly the largest category, such extensive examples as Nizamuddin Awliya's prevent me from dismissing disapproval and resistance of the state as mere outliers. What appears here is a possible contestation: are these two ways of interacting with the state contradictory, or complementary? How might the average

practitioner, presuming he was encountering multiple life-narrations, determine what the morally exemplary path is? The answer may lie in an appeal to exceptionality, but it may also lie in a deeper analysis of the narrative aims of both strands.

The aim of those narratives about cooperation with and support of kings and princes is primarily to establish the master's place in a stratified society. Imbricated in governance and politics, the master's relationship to and especially influence over temporal power serves to highlight his spiritual power. These narratives are reminders to the reader of the elevated place of the master, certainly, helping lead toward appropriate reverence for and deference to other masters, but they also function to argue the compatibility and mutual reinforcement of different kinds of power. It is necessary, for some readers who may not apprehend the nuances of spiritual power, to have the much starker, more common image of the temporally powerful man to contextualise their understanding of what it is to be a master. The marker of exemplarity here is the *responsible use of power*, for each narrative makes clear that, regardless of any preconceptions the reader brings to the text about what the responsible use of power might actually be, the master's usage is ultimately correct. The situatedness of responsibility's contours is an aid rather than a detractor from the exemplary nature of these narratives, insofar as it reveals to the reader that absolute guidelines are impossible. A master knows what is the responsible use of power in a given situation, and while this knowledge is certainly aspirational it is also exceptional. The average practitioner might be encouraged by seeking narratives that relate to his position relative to power and follow the situated master's example.

The aim of narratives about more troubled relations with secular power is rather different. In these narratives, what is emphasised is not power but two elements of exemplarity that have already been touched upon: *dedication to true teaching*, and a radical *forgiveness and forbearance*. The former is rather obvious; holding the government accountable for their actions or choosing to completely remove oneself from the activities of secular power are both modes of resistance to bad doctrine. The master's exemplarity in this regard serves to highlight for the reader the importance of a certain strength of character. While this strength may be exceptional in its extent, these examples are ones that any practitioner can follow, albeit on a smaller scale. Masters interact with the state at the highest levels, and the average reader at perhaps a lower level. These narratives do not instruct the reader to confront princes, but perhaps to confront or to resist lower functionaries on a level more appropriate to their own. The grace under pressure has already been hinted at in a discussion of how masters interact with hostile peers, and its exemplarity is also fairly straightforward.

In this analysis, instead of being contesting narratives, different ways of interacting with secular power are presented as simply two facets of moral exemplarity. The master's contextualised behaviour is always already exemplary, and its memory, while it may have something to do with extra-textual concerns like establishing the master's legitimacy or establishing a ruler's legitimacy by appeal to his relationship with a given master, functions as a blueprint for how a practitioner can morally engage with secular powers, by speaking to larger motivational concerns – the truth – and behavioural preferences – responsibility and forbearance.

Relationships with non-Muslims

This category is one of the few where devotional works have less to say than scholarly works. At stake here from the perspective of the scholarly work is the situating of Islam and important Muslims inside and outside of narratives about tolerance and interreligious cooperation, as well as within larger regional histories including multiple traditions. The scholarly obligation to be faithful to the source material is only part of the equation here, as scholarship on Sufism is inescapably coloured either by complicity with or refusal of cultural narratives about Sufism and Sufis as old as the Western academic study of religion. Particularly in the cases of masters whose poetic corpora are extant, there is a hesitancy to recall that they are Muslims at all, and reactionary scholars seem to find that narratives of conversion and violence are what is needed to realign the Sufi and the Muslim within each master. Both moves are troubling, and both are at play in the academic works in this corpus, although I have not, in the analysis that follows, tried to parse scholarly motivation.

What is at stake in devotional works that leave narratives of interreligious interaction out is a framing of relational ethics. Time and again, the interconnected, communal nature of ethics in these texts makes itself clear through the ways in which the exemplarity of the master and the exemplarity of the people around him intersect. What leaving interreligious interaction out of a life-narration, especially one with evidence of a relational ethics, does is to emplace exemplarity within a Muslim-only community. It suggests of the work as a whole that ethical behaviour is incumbent upon the Muslim to and in relation to other Muslims, in unconscious, or perhaps intentional, exclusion of non-Muslims. This exclusion is fair, in a sense, for it also prevents non-Muslims from being obliged to adhere to the same moral standard as Muslims, creating yet another layer in the spiritual hierarchy moderated by exceptionality.

What is remembered in the primarily scholarly narratives about interreligious interaction is a combination of two again perhaps conflicting images: the missionary, and the cohabitant. Twelve masters have conversion narratives, most of which are fairly straightforward. Three include violence, but two of these have caveats – both Shah Jalal (Suvorova 162) and Sipah Salar Mas'ud Ghazi (Suvorova 157-9) are beloved of the Hindus they use violence to convert. Mas'ud Ghazi's case is particularly interesting; his posthumous devotees invoke the same affectionate nicknames as are used in the area for Krishna as a young man and as a child (ibid). Both Pir Sadr al-Din (Renard *Tales* 264-5) and Pir Shams al-Din (Hanif *Central* 434-7) use local languages, scriptures, and poetic forms in their missionary work, and four masters use miracles. Seven masters live with some degree of peaceful cohabitation with their non-Muslim neighbours, from Hazrat Mian Mir's "cordial relations" with the fifth Sikh Guru (Brahma 5) to Amin al-Din A'la, whose service was open to Hindus as well as Muslims, and one of whose principal disciples was permitted by local Saivites to wear a linga on his left foot (Hanif South 38). Four masters are explicitly said to incorporate Hindu elements into their teaching.

Exemplarity here is once again difficult to determine given these seemingly conflicting types of narratives. I argue that they represent two sides of the same ideological commitment: *true religion*. The difference lies simply in where the master, or the author of the original life-narration,

an important possibility, sees the boundaries of that true religion. It is important to note here that those masters who incorporate Hindu ideas do not incorporate Hindus; aside from the controversial and transgressive Amin al-Din A'la, no master here opens their doors to Hindus who are allowed to remain Hindus. Nizamuddin Awliya argues for treating non-Muslims with grace as a way of mirroring the vast spread of divine grace, but, importantly, he does not express an approbation for their remaining non-Muslim (135, 136-7, 137-8, 140). Shah Hussain's love for a Hindu boy (Rehman 67) does not stop him from making a Sufi of his young lover over the course of time. The impulse to convert is implicit even in narratives where cohabitation and harmony are valorised, such that the exemplarity marker for this category might be phrased: *commitment to true religion (Islam).*

Especially for scholars committed to framing Sufism as a more tolerant branch of Islam, cohabitation narratives or caveats to conversion narratives are all the more attractive and convincing, but as I have noted the identification of Muslimness and conversion attempts is deeply problematic. For scholars committed to a historicist understanding of the difficulty in delineating boundaries between Sufism and Islam more generally, missionary narratives are often ultimately more convincing. It is not my intention here to accuse all scholars in this field of having an agenda; rather, I find it difficult to believe that scholarly objectivity is possible. Allergic as I am to narratives of Islam as violent and coercive in conversion, it is I who have positioned Mas'ud Ghazi's posthumous nicknaming as a way of lessening the impact of the fact that his life-narration claims it was he who convinced his uncle Mahmud of Ghazni to wreak destruction on Somnath. As I am not immune to bias and an implicit desire to frame these masters in a way that accords with what I consider exemplary, I cannot imagine that the scholars who scour not just life-narrations but other records as well in constructing their narratives do so without such unconscious biases.

Love, Marriage, and Family

This category is a complex combination of different modes of relationality. Rather than attempting to parse any overall trends, I turn immediately to these sub-categories: love, explicit celibacy, marriage, and children.

Five masters have experiences of ecstatic love, and these are recorded fairly equally by scholarly and devotional sources. The only one of these to have his love requited is Shah Hussain, whose lover is an initially Hindu boy from whom he becomes inseparable, to the point where they are frequently referred to using one name that is a combination of both of theirs (Hanif *South* 147, Rehman 67, Naqshbandy 11-2, 14). Two masters are explicitly celibate, again an equally recorded phenomenon. Neither of these subcategories have enough examples to make a definitive statement about the exemplarity of ecstatic love or of celibacy. The fact of their relatively scant presence speaks to something that will become apparent in chapter four: these life narrations focus much more on the exemplary than on the exceptional, at least in terms of details surrounding how masters live their lives. The emphasis on exemplarity helps to position the exceptional narratives in the corpus as instances of the edge of the generic pattern of life narrations.

Twenty-five masters, in contrast to these exceptional ones, are married, although what those marriages look like differs widely. Marital relations are primarily recorded by devotional sources, likely because of a drive to have a master mirror the exemplarity of the Prophet and, in some cases, of ʻAli both in narrative logic terms and, often, in the master's own articulation of the logic of marriage. Four of these include explicit instances of divorce or abandonment to follow the Path. Seven masters marry for practical reasons, whether to solidify relations with local convert communities, as in the cases of Shaikh Badruddin and Mir Muhammad (Suvorova 165, Hanif *South* 201), because marriage is prescribed to cure an illness, as in the case of Sharafuddin Maneri (Jackson 53-6), or because a vision from a deceased master comes to the father of the master's future wife and it becomes awkward for the master to refuse, as in the case of Mu'inuddin Chishti (Suvorova 65, Begg 70). The Ni'matullahi order's masters seem to marry sisters or daughters of their masters or fellow disciples, keeping it in the family, as it were (Nurbakhsh *Masters* 92, 104). Sultan Bahu, an impressive outlier, marries three Muslim women and a Hindu woman and entertains seventeen mistresses before abandoning them all (Hanif *South* 368).

I have already appealed to Prophetic exemplarity in an attempt to understand why one-sixth of this corpus displays this particular exemplary behaviour, but I suggest that there is a further argument to be made. The emphases on exceptional marital circumstances again highlights the masters' location in the spiritual hierarchy, but also at once detracts from the permissibility for the reader of these kinds of arrangements and highlights that even exceptional practitioners practice this deep form of Islamic piety. No matter the reader's circumstances or character, these life narrations suggest, marriage is a legitimate and perhaps even an encouraged path. The fact of *being married* is thus a crucial marker of exemplarity.

Twenty of the married masters have children explicitly mentioned in their life-narrations, although it is certainly possible that others have children to whom the life narrations do not refer. Fifteen of these masters choose their sons as their successors, one his grandson, and two their sons-in-law. Mu'inuddin Chishti, married twice in quick succession at a very advanced age, has three sons and a daughter whose biological connection to him is contested on account of that age, although his daughter becomes one of his perfect students (Suvorova 65, Currie 83) and, as we shall see, the biological transfer of spiritual prowess is taken for granted by many of these narratives.

This transfer is attested beyond the contexts of life narrations; it is a concept present in Sufi writings more broadly. Just as ʻAlī was deputized to bear that holiness within him as heir to Muhammad, according to authors of Sufi manuals like Abu Hamid al-Ghazālī, masters should transmit their charisma and sanctity to carefully selected lineal descendants (al-Ghazālī xxxiii). By the 14th century of the common era, many masters were affiliated patrilineally with ʻAlī, which implied both the transmission of sanctity biologically as well as membership in the most privileged of initiatic chains (Mayeur-Jaouen and Papas 8; Peskes 151). The sense of continuity was critical, but almost as important was the elimination of a risk sacred knowledge might be transmitted to someone ill-equipped to handle it; if knowledge itself is transmitted orally and experientially, the capacity for reception and understanding is transmitted genealogically (Mayeur-Jaouen and Papas 13-

17). The genealogy, *nasab*, is thus inextricably bound to the acquired merit, *hasab*, of any practitioner, although genealogy is not necessarily directly patrilineal: a daughter can inherit her father's *baraka* and their husbands can thus become bonded into the *nasab,* as is the case with ʻAlī, who married the Prophet's daughter Fātima (Mayeur-Jaouen and Papas 18). That is not to say that all descendants of the Prophet, achieve the status of friends of God, but nearly all of God's friends for much of Sufism's long history could trace their *nasab* back to Muhammad (Mayeur-Jaouen 163), and all of them ultimately trace their *silsila* back to him (Mayeur-Jaouen 174). The authority that attends the status of master is thus inextricably tied to a biological link to the best of God's friends, and family is thus potent beyond the imaginal as a biological and affective marker of sanctity and power. Sonship and inheritance have a legitimizing function that transcends and complements individual spiritual accomplishment.

Pir Sadr al-Din's five sons all gain enough renown to have their own tomb shrines (Renard *Tales* 267), but in most of the narratives where children are mentioned more than in passing, almost all from devotional sources, it is because something bad is going to happen to them. Hakim Ata's son Hubbi Khwaja reveals his spiritual prowess one day at a feast and gets banished on the grounds that there is only space for one master in any khanqah (Renard Tales 123-4), while Shaikh Nur Qutb-i Alam's son is tortured to death by a local ruler with whom the Shaikh has been arguing (Hanif *South* 300). Jalal al-Din Bukhari's toddler grandson waddles merrily through his grandfather's prayer room one afternoon, and dies of a spontaneous fatal illness within just hours (Steinfels and Denny 175). Baba Farid marries three women, who are continuously producing children, but because he forces all of them to share the extreme poverty of his spiritually disciplined lifestyle, most of these children are either stillborn or die in infancy from malnutrition. When his wives come to beg him for food for their starving children, he dismisses their petitions and refuses even to concern himself with the education or spiritual training of those who do survive (Suvorova 96-7).

Instead, Nizamuddin Awliya, his chief disciple, takes on responsibility for these abandoned children (Suvorova 96, Nizami 168). These are not the only children Nizamuddin adopts; when his beloved older sister flees from her abusive husband, the master takes her in and brings up her children as his own, even taking one of his nephews as a chief student (Nizami 166-7). Baba Musafir is one of only two other masters with explicit adoption narratives; he adopts all the orphans as well as all the widows and helpless women in his area, giving the latter daily allowances and having his students act as sons to them (Digby 67-8, 105-6, 160-1). All but one narrative about biological succession appear in devotional sources, which begs a series of questions: what is at stake for the practitioner in these narratives? Do these narratives function to restrict exemplarity to only the families of masters? Is the biological transfer of spiritual power functioning to elevate the master, or to justify his having had children at all in the face of a commitment to poverty?

As before, I suggest that it is the fact of having children that is exemplary here, as a part of that commitment to true religion that requires but does not legislate its propagation. For the practitioner, seeing that even these exceptional masters who presumably have more significant matters to which they might be attending and may be assumed to have generally risen above self-

driven concerns take the time to have families may serve as a powerful and perhaps inescapable message that there is no such thing as a more significant matter than reproduction. But in another sense, these narratives, by virtue of centring the familial aspects of spiritual prowess, again isolate their subjects and their families as exceptional. Here the spiritual hierarchy most explicitly becomes multi-generational, making achieving the status of a master appear ever more distant perhaps, but at the same time reassuring the reader that looking for a living master can begin with examining family trees. Not only do these narratives offer examples for the average practitioner to follow in every facet of life, they also offer examples of the type of living master one should seek. These narratives force a turning away from an exclusively text-based moral exemplarity. More pragmatically, they also serve to indicate that a commitment to poverty is compatible with traditional family-building.

The majority of narratives, both scholarly and devotional, are reticent to delve into details, however, of the master as father. The reasons for this reticence, I believe, are different based on the genre of the work. The scholarly work is of course focused on the master himself, and simply the fact of his having had children and a wife or wives is sufficient often; these narratives are generally more interested in either the master's teaching or his political involvement, often seeking genealogy only when it serves their desire to historically situate the master. In the devotional work, however, one might expect to find a bit more of a focus on the exemplary nature of the master's fatherhood. The answer to its absence perhaps lies in the devotional work's emphasis on motherhood; there seems to be a rather straightforward assumption at play that child-rearing is a job for women. As we have seen and will continue to see, the master's engagement with the cultural status quo is not entirely, or even primarily, antagonistic.

More than that, though, I suggest that devotional works necessarily portray the master as a purveyor of multiple overlapping authorities and relational ethics, only one strand of which is biological fatherhood. Masters act as fathers to their students, as sons to their own teachers, as siblings to other practitioners, and we must seek answers to questions of these kinds of indelibly masculine familiality in these overlapping biological and affective relations. Marrying and having children are primarily ways of fulfilling markers of exemplarity that predate these narratives and source themselves in the Prophetic Sunna, and here I argue again that rather than how fatherhood is enacted it is that a master marries and has children, *has a family,* that is exemplary. How the master cares for this family and interacts with its members goes almost entirely unmentioned; where it becomes important, as in Baba Farid's case, the message is clearly that the master treats all members of his entourage equally. Once again, the *commitment to truth* above all else is at play in the exemplary life of the master. Biological fatherhood can enjoy less detail because master-student relationships offer equally valid and broadly applicable articulations of exemplary fatherhood.

Violence

This category raises several interesting questions about exemplarity and exceptionality, the more so because it is represented fairly equally in devotional and scholarly works. The first real question pertains to those fourteen masters who enact violence: what is exemplary about such

a path? Eight of the masters in this corpus engage in warfare, three use violence to discipline recalcitrant disciples, and three bless military expedition without participating in them directly. Setting aside for the moment the teaching ideal present in the act of discipline – some instances of which result in death – it is curious to note the prevalence of military engagement in this enacting of violence. Here again the master's involvement with temporal powers serves to emphasise the inextricable binding of power to power, the way each uses the other to further idiosyncratic aims: the growing of a kingdom, the spreading and flourishing of true religion.

Again, and here my analysis also includes violent discipline, the *responsible use of power* underlies these actions, but more crucially there is a *commitment to true religion* once again making itself known. It is not violence itself that is exemplary, but the use of violence to serve this greater commitment is as exemplary as other expressions thereof. In these narratives lies permission for didactic as well as purifying violence, and the more easily justifiable defensive violence. The extremity of these situations enhances the exceptionality of their particulars, but also serves as something of a warning for the practitioner: when dealing with a master, when seeking him as a teacher, one ought to be prepared for the unconventional in his approach to teaching and leadership.

Turning now to the seven masters who experience violence, we see immediately that the majority of violence done upon the body of the master is from antagonistic forces outside of his community. Among them is the missionary Shams al-Din who is sentenced to die by having his skin peeled off but, in a bizarre twist, peels it off himself (Hanif *Central* 437). Mu'inuddin Chishti suffers many attacks from unbelievers on his arrival in Ajodhan, to the extent that the majority of space in each of his life-narrations is occupied by accounts of his ferocious battles (Currie 74-81, Begg 57-67, Dhaul 13). This meeting of violence with a reconceived violence, a reframed violence, is indicative of an unconventionality as much as more passive reactions, like that of Baba Musafir, whose response to being forced by his master's sons to sit on an archery mound and allow them to beat him until he falls off (Digby 107-8) is simply to allow it to happen.

In both sets of reactions there are dual forces at play. In the first place, all of them partake of a particular extremity of reaction that is exceptional by its very nature. But the second aspect is that even this extremity is deeply exemplary. In the cases where violence is met with reframed violence as well as in those cases of non-resistance, what is at stake is a *commitment to truth* so profound that it overtakes concern for life and limb and renders all sacrifice, in the sense of sacred payment, worthwhile. Especially in the latter response to violence we see again a *forgiveness and forbearance*, and a *refusal of primacy to the body* that will appear again below. It is also worth noting that these masters bring violence upon themselves by this very *commitment to truth*, so that here the marker of exemplarity is both cause and effect of the circumstances of its enactment.

Pilgrimage

Pilgrimage practices do not seem to be expressed or explored differently in scholarly and devotional sources, at least in this corpus. Aside from the standard Hajj, a pillar of Islam upon which twenty-eight masters embark, although only twenty-five actually make it all the way to Mecca,

the phenomenon of tomb shrine pilgrimage (*ziyārat*) makes an appearance. Thirteen masters visit the tomb shrines of other masters, while three have experiences at the Prophet's tomb. The performance of the Hajj is self-explanatory in terms of exemplarity; the pillars of Islam are themselves sufficiently widespread across divisions of order and theology and region that to enact them is universally acceptable as an exemplary act. But *ziyārat*'s exemplarity requires a little more unpacking.

The logic of pilgrimage is similar to what Shihab al-din Suhrawardi (in the *Kitab hikmat al-ishraq*) uses to explain visionary encounters with deceased masters: both activate a liminal space, which Suhrawardi calls alternately the world of likeness (*'alam al-mithal*) and the *barzakh*. Events that occur within this space are actual events in the same way that events within our own more recognisable world are. *Ziyārat*, which Carl Ernst appeals to 18th-century Chishti *ziyārat* guidebook author Muhammad Najib Qadiri Nagawri Ajmeri to call "not merely a journey to a place of burial, but is literally a visit to a living saint" (Ernst 52), is one way of entering the space, wherein the encounter with the master is a real event. The "visit" as a term is crucial. Ernst uses it because of the common Persian word for tomb – *mazār* – that can be translated with appeal to its Arabic roots as "a place visited." The visiting of the saint is terminologically prioritized over the reliquary function of the shrine; a tomb, according to Muhammad Ajmeri, is something like a living room.

In an important sense, then, *ziyārat* fulfills the same function as a visit to a master with whom one is on the same side of death, and participates in the same markers of exemplarity: *seeking out a teacher*, and then *loving him* so much that death itself is no obstacle to the continual search for him. More than that, though, *ziyārat* speaks to a particular frame of mind that *refuses to accept physical limitations*. This marker is important, as for the average practitioner, barriers to practice can seem insurmountable. There is nothing more insurmountable than death, however, and the implicit message in these *ziyārat* narratives is that to allow such obstacles to limit practice is to fail in living a fully moral life. It speaks to a profound faith in the humanly impossible that is itself an integral component of Muslim life both ideal and actual.

In part, these impossible events that occur during *ziyārat*, especially in visits to the Prophet's tomb – the voice of Muhammad speaking to Jalal al-Din Bukhari from inside his tomb (Steinfels and Denny 175, 177), Nur 'Ali Shah's experience of ecstatic rapture at the tomb of Shah Ni'matullahi (Nurbakhsh *Masters* 87), Mu'inuddin Chishti's Meccan vision of the pomegranate that sends him to Ajmer (Currie 72-3) – represent for the practitioner-reader an element of both recognisability and exceptionality. These masters are exceptional insofar as they experience more significant impossible events than is average, but, in a twist that is lost on the modern, secular reader, the masters are rendered more real and accessible by their participation in the metaphysical world that hovers at the fringes of the physical. The difference between Baba Sa'id having a picnic with Muhammad Gesudaraz's spirit every Friday night (Digby 85-6) and the average practitioner encountering small household crises that are clearly evidence of havoc being wrought by non-human beings is in terms of scale rather than type. Both experiences rest on the acceptance of the metaphysical world as an important part of life.

Impossible Experiences and Activities

It is the same logic of limit-refusal that underlies this next category. Briefly, before delving into analysis, a word on the title I have chosen. I have, after tossing out "supernatural," "unconventional," "amazing," and "unexpected" as insufficiently accurate, settled on "impossible" to describe the events I will analyse shortly. It is my hope that this word encapsulates the sense in which I have discovered these acts to transgress the laws of our physical world, partaking as they do in liminal spaces and other levels of reality through the mediation of the master's relationship with the divine Lord of the two worlds. I must be clear, here, that "impossible" is not a statement on the truth value of these narratives, as I am profoundly disinterested by the question of whether these or any other events are historically verifiable.

All instances of the impossible by their nature participate in the exceptionality of the master, who is able not only to experience but also to perform and to enact the impossible. These interactions are signs of spiritual achievement that should not be sought out for themselves by the practitioner; rather, they are side effects of attaining a certain status in the spiritual hierarchy, and as such provide a way to identify a master should one be in doubt, and they also work to establish the master's liminal nature. This liminality is present throughout all exceptional categories, as the master manages to be both human and somehow other. It is perhaps best articulated by the Akbarian conception of the *barzakh* that Muhammad Iqbal takes as an element of his *insān al-kāmil*: the master, in having agency in both the metaphysical and the physical worlds rather than simply existing, as the average person does, in both, serves as a bridge between these worlds. By following the example of the master, the average physical practitioner can cross over into agential interaction with the metaphysical world. By following the instruction of the master, the average practitioner can spiral ever closer to an unmediated experience of the impossible, of the unveiled divine. This ineffable "mystic" experience is routinely left unexpressed in life-narrations, leaving scholars who seek to parse and quantify it stymied. The practitioner experiences no such obstacle to understanding; his is an experiential knowledge, mediated at first by the master's deft hand, and then gradually becoming an intimate, unmediated knowledge often inexpressible by conventional language.

There are any number of possible categorisations for these supernatural occurrences; I have chosen to separate them into travel, dreams and visions, prescience and omniscience, and healing. There are also several individual instances that defy categorisation, but as all are adequately described by the exemplarity markers articulated above, their defiance of categorisation does not present a particular problem.

Ten masters engage in supernatural modes of travel, from Ma'sum 'Ali Shah Deccani's power of flight (Nurbakhsh *Masters* 79) to Shaikh Badru'ddin's penchant for sea travel on the back of a large fish (Suvorova 166). Five of these masters use their unusual travel methods to either regularly or sporadically go on pilgrimage. Five masters use visions to instruct or to chastise their disciples, while eleven masters experience visions, didactic or otherwise, of their own. Nizamuddin Awliya is alone in experiencing dreams of temptation (Nizami 25). Five masters can predict the future

accurately. Eight have the capacity to read minds or to otherwise know information that people around them keep secret, as when Data Ganjbaksh goes to visit another master to test his ability to read minds, resulting in a gripping and even somewhat amusing mind-reading contest (Suvorova 44-5). Eleven masters are able to accomplish acts of healing ranging from broken-heartedness (Nashbandy 61) and djinn-possession (Brahma 88) to the plague (Hanif *South* 22) and male impotence (Suvorova 174). Six masters can both heal and resurrect the dead.

The miscellaneous acts of spiritual prowess are as exciting as Baba Sa'id's ability to make seven rupees worth of ingredients into enough halwa to feed "countless people" (Digby 46), a skill I at least covet, and Shah Hussain's miraculous urine, which turns everything it touches into gold (Naqshbandy 65). There are at least two masters who can speak to snakes, and Sufi Badhni's body appears to separate into pieces whenever he meditates (Lawrence "Morals" 140-1). Shams al-Din convinces the sun to come down to Multan to help him grill some meat (Hanif *Central* 437), and 'Ali Hamadani wins levitation contests before rotating an entire mosque so that the *qibla* faces him (Hanif *South* 339). These and other equally interesting uncategorised impossible deeds are accomplished by a total of twenty-two masters. The exemplarity marker here is, of course, the *refusal to accept limitations*, and it is accompanied by the prescriptive marker that encourages following a master into liminal space. At play are also a *commitment to truth* and a *care for subordinates*.

Poverty, Asceticism, and Extravagant Charity

It is interesting that for these sets of behaviours, there are very few entries in scholarly sources. Instead, most of these fascinating narratives are drawn from devotional life-narrations. I argue that this difference lends to the markers of exemplarity I will draw out from these narratives additional force, highlighting that they exist in the narrative for almost purely didactic purposes. It is also crucial to note that these experiences are not often externally verifiable in a way that modern scholarship, in its historicist mode trending to scepticism, accepts as trustworthy. Nine masters live in poverty, while a stunning thirty masters engage in austerities. Nine masters go on extended retreats, and nine engage in an extreme interpretation of the pillar of charity.

It is also crucial to recall that the case of charity especially is directly related to Muslim practice in the broadest application. What these masters display in their charity, to which I have intentionally prefixed the adjective "extravagant," which is usually applied to divine largesse, is potentially a reflection of the divine attribute of generosity, and perhaps even than of mercy. What is on display here is thus a mirroring, in the Akbarian sense, of the divine Names, and thus an instance of the master's character as the *barzakh* who bridges the human and the divine. In an important sense, these masters exemplify in their charitable work beyond the strictures of obligation a way to express one's relationship with the divine in one's every day. But are these narratives perhaps more accurately understood as markers of exceptionality? Is it reasonable to suggest that these narratives are encouraging practitioners to follow the examples of men who practice self-mortification and sleep in graveyards?

A palatable answer might be found in seeking an underlying logic that allows the reader to avoid feeling obliged to partake of extremity, and indeed such an answer would fit well with my aim to emphasise the situational nature of exemplarity. Something along the lines of *total devotion to practice* might certainly accomplish much in that line, and I indeed count that as a marker of exemplarity. But beyond the comfortable answer, there is the uncomfortable reality that this marker is nowhere nearly as helpful in answering how one ought to live in the world as the specific, situational extremes of asceticism. I will suggest that a way out of this difficulty might be found with an integration of the purpose and goal of asceticism, and here in part my argument is necessarily coloured by my own experience of ascetic practice. The mortification of the body, which is ultimately at the root of all ascetic practice, is almost always intended to be used for its effect on the spirit: to liberate it, to allow the practitioner to focus on it, to cleanse it. Here I believe the suggestion is being made to the reader-practitioner that the body is not, cannot be, the primary focus of someone following the path of exemplarity. Even in the direst straits – profound poverty, the forty-day upside-down suspended fast called the *chillah*, denial of sleep – the exemplary master is not distracted by his body. Baba Musafir's instruction to his students to only beg if their hunger impeded their prayer (Digby 100-1) is a clear articulation of this idea that the body and its needs must be made secondary.

This *refusal of primacy to the body* is not the same as a complete rejection of or hatred for it. Rather, it is an acknowledgement of the body as a vital part of a person's life in the world, and represents a prioritization of the other – both the other world and the bodies of others, as evidenced by the lives of those masters who live on near starvation diets while their khanqahs feed thousands of hungry people to sufficiency – over the self. The Sufi thinker al-Hujwīrī, the real name of the master known as Data Ganjbakhsh, theorised what he called "preference" in the *Kashf al-mahjūb*, which I argue can easily be seen in this abnegation of the body, and represents an instance of overlap in prescriptive theory and descriptions of practice of which there are surely others.

Not only the body's needs, but the needs of the ego must be subordinated as well, the example of the ascetic masters tells us. Nizamuddin Awliya instructed his disciple, Shaikh Nasiru'd-Din, that living in the heart of the inner city and bearing the suffering of the urban poor was just as valid an ascetic practice as fasting in the wilderness (Hanif *South* 285), and a later Nasru'd-Din emerges from a forty-day retreat with four uncrackable walnuts uneaten because breaking the *nafs* is more important than breaking open a walnut to stave off hunger (Hanif *South* 265). Nur al-Din Shah Nimatullah Wali spent his time farming because he believed service to society was the only austerity that purified the heart (Nurbakhsh *Masters* 48-9). Masters who do secret austerities and masters who perform these kinds of unconventional self-mortifications reveal that it is not simply the body's needs that must be denied on the Path, but the needs of the ego as well. How can you focus on the divine when you are focused on your stomach? How can you focus on the divine when you are focused on making yourself look good? The marker of *lack of pretention* is here as well, as ascetic activity in a theistic context always asks whether we are not already naked before the divine.

These are some of the richest narratives in the life-narrations, described in almost loving terms by scholars and devotional authors alike. They range from extreme to mundane, from the sublime to the ridiculous – like Sufi Badhni, who refused to wear any clothing at all and seems to have spent every waking hour prostrated in front of the mihrab of his local mosque, surely an unfortunate sight for his fellow worshippers (Lawrence "Morals" 140). They are exemplary not simply because of their emphasis on total devotion, but because they are narratives of ultimately ordinary men who are trying to understand how to escape some of the very elements of what it means to be human, how to be transformed by their refusal of primacy to themselves, body and ego, into someone who partakes of both worlds. There is an awareness here that seeking the divine is not a part-time job, and while the masters in these narratives – necessarily, as they are exemplars – live into this marker of exemplarity in extreme ways, they are eminently followable. The rhetoric of exceptionality enables the practitioner to peel back the layers of starvation and sleeplessness to see that at its core ascetic practice is about allowing one's entire being to yearn for, to prefer, to care for what is other to it. The body cares for other bodies, the ego prefers other egos, the spirit years for the divine Spirit. There is an exemplarity here that the practitioner can follow beyond the specifics, one that says this *desire for transformation* must be recognised and cannot be ignored.

To return to extravagant charity in this frame is to find yet another expression of this yearning, this preferential care. These narratives tell the practitioner that duty finds its fulfillment when it passes from duty to joyful impulse. In their excesses, exemplary masters *do good not by requirement* but by transformed and transformative desire. This marker of exemplarity is simultaneously yet another means for and product of silencing that self who lives to check off items on the to-do list of religion. In its extremity, it is profoundly transgressive of social norms, and it invites the practitioner to consider how transgression can itself be an act of religion.

I must here digress briefly on the subject of transgressivity, a particular fixation of mine. Too often, in scholarship as in social discourse, there seems to be an expectation that socio-cultural transgressivity is explicitly bound up with challenges to political power. Masters who ally with temporal rulers or who get along well with the *'ulema* seem, in this view, almost disappointingly normal, their support for the status quo the opposite of our antinomian expectations. But I believe these temporally situated rejections of convention that we desire to help validate an image of the transgressive mystic and the un-Muslim Sufi are much, much less powerful than the transgressions performed by masters who commit to remaking their bodies and minds in the service of a truth that demands they care for those in their peripheries. Ascetic, charitable masters exemplify modes of being in the world that transcend temporal and spatial contexts and limitations, rendering their life narrations accessible and relevant even today. Periodization falls short in the face of such profoundly transgressive acts and attitudes.

Death

As death is, the tongue-in check truism reminds us, a part of life, so the life narrations of exemplary masters include articulations of exemplary approaches to death. As evidenced earlier

in this chapter, death is not necessarily the end of life, but merely another part that plays a role in answering the question of how the reader ought to live. The following patterns emerge from the corpus on this point, with no differentiation between scholarly and devotional narrations in terms of thematic elements. Ten masters spend their final days or hours in prayer, whether dying like Sa'id al-Din Kashgari (Hanif *Central* 410) or Husayn 'Ali Shah (Hanif *South* 106) in the midst of prayer, or like Baba Farid (Talib 56) or Nizamuddin Awliya (Nizami 94-7) after a prolonged period of reciting the same prayer. Seven masters achieve the station of martyrdom. In my reading, the writing is, as it were, on the wall: continuing in practice, again in abnegation of the needs and desires of one's body, is the way to die as it is to live. Exceptionality shades these narratives, as many of these masters are led to prayer by impulse rather than by design, and that inherent desire for nearness with the divine is as exceptional as a willingness to kill and die for the sake of the truth. As always, exemplarity and exceptionality support and reinforce each other.

The lives of Ten masters are explicitly extended after their deaths, which rather than dictating the contours of a good death as an exemplary act situates the master as someone exceptional whose activity cannot be disrupted by something as simply as bodily demise, reinforcing the marker of *refusal to accept limits*. At play here is also the tangibility of such extensions of life as monuments and even life narrations themselves, wherein the narrative lives of realised masters are prolonged not simply in practice, but in representation as well. Many of the masters in this corpus, as evidenced in part by their *ziyārat* activities, solicit and experience the presence of a master on the other side of death. There are even masters, particularly prominent in Central Asia, whose initiation into Sufism is at the hands of a master who has experienced bodily death and who appears in dreams and visions to teach. They do not make significant appearance in this corpus, but their life-narrations are potent reminders that death is merely another event in the life of a master. The exceptionality inherent in this ability to linger and continue to influence the world after one's body is no longer living does not, however, offset the obvious exemplarity of *holding fast to practice into death*. In fact, the former affirms and supports the latter, as these masters clearly continue to teach and guide, to care and prefer, to be generous and to use their power responsibly, to perform exemplary fatherhood and act as bridges, even on the other side of death.

Conclusions

The family resemblances that shape an exemplary life include any combination of these markers of exemplarity. The examples of masters give to those who read or otherwise experience their life-narrations the impetus to engage in remarkable activities as they choose the Path. They are encouraged to internalise the principles of religion through being constant in study, especially of the traditional sciences, first seeking and then loving a spiritual preceptor, and loving learning itself. They marry and have families. They are shown that they must display generosity and ethical resource management, respect for other Sufis and forbearance and forgiveness. They must ensure sound teaching and care for subordinates while also displaying a lack of pretention and a responsible use of power. Their dedication must be to true religion. Their refusal to accept limitations is part

of their total devotion to practice, displaying their refusal of primacy to the body and a desire for transformation. They move beyond simply abiding by the pillars of Islam, forgetting requirement and acting from transformed and transformative desire. When they die, they hold fast to practice, keeping themselves as close to God in death as they were in life.

This nexus of resemblances is relevant, although potentially overwhelming in its full expression, for practitioners of the Path and for Muslims more generally. It may even be that these representations can be or have been used rhetorically in defining community identity boundaries or for other communalistic purposes. I have not commented on these socio-political possibilities, nor on how these texts might be received by communities rather than simply individual practitioners, nor really delved into the identity of the reader, constrained as I am by space and time. But all of these concerns of reception and identity are still latent within the texts, the possibilities for mobilisation almost physically present.

One of the aims of English-language devotional works seems to be to extend the reading audience beyond the confines of the community to which each master belongs, making it possible that these exemplary lives are meant to be exemplary beyond the borders of the religion each of these masters professed. That line of speculation is not one that I have the space to follow here, but it is one that has permeated my attempt to articulate exemplarity in the broadest possible terms. As the strongest and most repeated marker of exemplarity is a commitment to true religion, which in all cases means Islam despite the fact that each master seems to have a different position on what Islam is, I think it imprudent to suggest that these narratives can belong to anyone for whom that does not hold true. Rather, I phrase exemplarity in broad terms in order to understand how it might be possible for readers from other traditions to see these exemplary behaviours in the life-narrations of their own traditions, an activity which I turn to now as a scholar with reference to the Tibetan Buddhist life narration tradition.

Buddha's Children Exceptional Narratives of Buddhist Masters

> While the various Buddhist traditions offer numerous definitions of a Buddha [...] the fact remains that what a Buddha *does*, through his or her efforts in meditation and teaching, most directly defines the term's central meaning.
> Willis, *Enlightened Beings* xiv

Introduction

In this chapter, I turn to the second of my comparanda, my compiled corpus of Buddhist masters. My approach to exemplarity, exceptionality and extremity are the same as that articulated at the beginning of my second chapter. Once again in what follows I will perform intra-tradition comparison, with the aim here of developing a composite image of a realised Buddhist master expressed as a group of family resemblances. It is on the basis of these similar attributes, these markers of exemplarity derived from the patterns I see within the life narrations of this corpus, that I hope to establish critical difference between the product of this chapter and that of the previous.

Already, before engaging with the content of these texts, there is a significant generic difference. I have selected only 78 life narrations, contained in 23 volumes, and thus 73 masters because the vast majority of Tibetan life narrations are much longer and more detailed works than the compendia that dominate my other corpus, and the sub-genre of the biographical dictionary has no parallel. I have worked with as many compendia as I felt I reasonably could, but rather than overstuff this corpus with the much more common book-length works I have opted for roughly the same volume of material. Further, those compendia it does contain have multi-page narrations while in my Muslim corpus the narrations in compendia are frequently as short as a paragraph. I do not know that I have made the correct choice.

Another important difference between the textual compositions of my corpora is the presence of dedicated translation and publishing houses who monopolise the production and availability of English translations of Tibetan texts in all genres. Such centralisation reduces the number of different translations available, and as in my experience these houses seem to draw almost always from the most canonically valued source, there is less variety in originals available as well. This corpus is thus less varied than the other in a number of ways, and any conclusions I draw from it should be assessed accordingly. I must further note that because of my prior familiarity with the genre and many of the major exemplars within it, I have not included any "control" narratives as I did with my Muslim corpus, further reducing the number of life narrations.

Despite these limitations, I can categorise my sources in a similar way as I have done for those of my other corpus, into academic works and devotional, the latter including both English-language originals and English translations of Tibetan originals. With respect to this corpus, however, the division is almost unnecessary: in no category was there a marked preponderance of one type of source over another, which curious fact leads me to a discussion of the genre that dominates any corpus of Tibetan Buddhist life narrations.

All the works my corpus contains, apart from the English-language academic works, are identified by the genre name *rnam par thar pa* (*namtar*),[38] itself usually taken to be a translation of the Sanskrit vimōksha, which is most commonly translated as "complete liberation." The majority of the works in this corpus thus explicitly self-identify as narratives of masters attaining realisation, marking their subjects as exceptional from the very first page. Beyond their self-identification as narratives of liberation, *namtar* texts function as roadmaps and potentially even catalysts for the liberation of their readers; the complete liberation does not necessarily belong exclusively to the subject. These texts by their naming conventions offer instructions for how they are to be read, and I have attempted to follow those instructions by searching for the exemplarity and exceptionality that their titles tell me mingle throughout. I have also imposed this lens of genre on the English-language academic works included in this corpus, as even if their intent is not necessarily to provide either narrative of or roadmap to liberation, by narrating the lives of masters they are implicitly doing so. In fact, because of the dominance of *namtar* as a genre, I suggest that even those academic authors who seek to break from its mould by virtue of their familiarity with it tend to follow the patterns of the genre. In this sense, my reading of academic works through the same lens as devotional is perhaps less of an imposition than it might otherwise be.

Prophecy

Eighteen masters in this corpus have their lives prophesied before their births, and six have their awakening prophesied during their lifetimes. Of the former category, six are prophesied by the famous teacher and demon-subduer Padmasambhava, four by the female wisdom-beings called *dākinīs* and/or the saviouress Tara, and three by their own previous incarnations. There is a great variety of types and carriers of these prophecies. Some contain a wealth of detail including minute specifics of physical attributes, as in the case of Migyur Dorje, the *terma*[39] prophesying whose birth contains a description of a very distinctive mole by which he is to be recognised (Zangpo 46). A prophecy concerning Yeshe Tsogyel specifies her even further forward birth as Machig Labdron, also considered in this corpus (Stag-sham 86); several other prophecies focus on several rebirths as well. The majority are vague, however, offering promises of mastery over tradition, meetings with important teachers, and manifestations for the sake of beings.

Prophecies are by nature exceptional, signalling a kind of certainty about the future that for the average practitioner is difficult or even impossible to come by. Prophecy highlights the master as significant enough to garner the reader's attention by placing them on a similar level to those beings whose supremacy is widely acknowledged in the tradition, including the Buddha. The function of exceptionality here is not simply a signal, but also offers a way for the reader to allow

38 For a fuller study of this genre and its potential subcategories, see Janice D. Willis' introduction to her 1995 work, *Enlightened Beings*. Unfortunately, the state of study has not changed much since she lamented the dearth of academic focus on defining and understanding this genre. The second chapter of Stefan Larsson's 2012 *Crazy for Wisdom* is one of the more recent contributions; he briefly discusses how namtar takes themes from the Buddha's biography and the proliferating *jataka* tales.

39 One of Padmasambhava's greatest tasks was the secreting of texts throughout the landscape of Tibet, to the discovery of which a large part of the Nyingma school is devoted. These texts are called *terma*s and their finders are *tertons*; these terms are frequently translated as "treasure" and "treasure-revealer" respectively.

themselves room for imperfectly following the master's example. As I have argued, this function of exceptionality is crucial to the proper impact of exemplarity in texts like these. Exceptional circumstances allow the reader to understand why their personal practice may not be as successful as that of the exemplar, while still highlighting the aspirational possibilities in the master's display of exemplarity.

Here especially exceptionality is complicated by the concept of rebirth, a complication I will take up in greater detail in the following section. If all of these masters are acknowledged to be the product, as all beings are, of countless rebirths, it stands to reason that their current precious birth can be anticipated because of the marks their past births have left in the world. This possibility is especially clear in the cases where those past births predict their own rebirths. Neither exemplar nor reader are inhabitants of this life alone; they are informed by the past and working for the future, and as a result exemplary behaviour cannot be circumscribed by the limitations of the current birth. The call implicit in prophecy, then, is to *live a life that makes marks*. What will emerge as a pattern across these categories is that this multi-life logic is what makes exemplarity so powerful in these exceptional lives. By indicating that this present life can contribute to exceptional circumstances for future births, these life narrations challenge the reader to aspire beyond the confines of the present.

Previous Births

Seventeen masters have these previous births specified, specifications that again rely on the concept of rebirth that underlies the lives of these masters. Where previous births are mentioned by name, they reveal something important about what it takes to attain to heights of exceptionality that these masters attain. There is a wide range of previous experiences to be considered both here and by the practitioner who might see in them modes of preparation for their own exceptional future birth(s). All the specified previous births are practitioners, including several ranking lineage masters (Allione 150-3, Chitkara 78, 88), all the buddhas (Snellgrove 83), authors of crucial texts (Stearns 28-9), and emanations of various *dākinīs* (Diemberger 151; Allione 184, 209). Pemalingpa's previous births are particularly colourful: a daughter of the great king Trisong Detsen, no less than five different women or female animals, two nun-consorts of treasure revealers, three increasingly scandalous tantric practitioners, and two otherwise quite boring people (Aris 26-31).

There are several possible interpretations for the specification of rebirths. Primarily, it is essential to note that the fact of rebirth itself is not exceptional, but in fact helps to render the masters themselves less exceptional, in that much of their merit is outside of the control of their current births, having been carried over from previous lives. Indeed, merit and demerit from previous births are often invoked in these life-narrations, often to justify the great difficulties through which a master must go to achieve realisation by appeal to the need to purify residual effects of past actions. It is how masters react to the effects of their demerit and how they make use of their merit that is exemplary.

The call implicit in these narratives of previous births is to *practice with a view to the long-term*, to practice in this life in such a way that you might be reborn as an exceptional practitioner yourself.

I consider this marker of exemplarity to be distinct from the previous in that these birth narratives are explicitly centred on how one lives a life that makes marks, rather than simply the fact of doing so. Furthermore, the model of the exemplar in taking a rebirth after having been an advanced practitioner is explicitly compassionate; when previous births are specified in this corpus it is along with an assertion that the birth that is the main focus of the life narration was taken on so that the master could help suffering beings. While the average practitioner does not have control over his own rebirths, he can take inspiration from an act that benefits all beings to ensure that his own more mundane acts have the same aim. Once again, the exceptionality of the master is transmuted by the frame of rebirth into something exemplary for the less-than-exceptional reader.

Genealogy and Parentage

This category and the next are more properly focused on the master's family than on the master, although I will argue that they are still able to provide markers of exemplarity. There is a great variety of birth situations in this corpus. Fourteen masters are born to noble parents, including Yeshe Tsogyel (Stag-sham 10), Naropa (Guenther 7-8), Sakara (Abhayadatta 227) and Chos-skyabs dpal-bzang (Snellgrove 129-30), whose parentage is royal, and Yonten Gyatso, the fourth Dalai Lama, whose father was a Chokhur tribal chieftain (Chitkara 95). Five are born to wealthy parents, among them Marpa, whose parents each had an extensive dairy cattle herd and were not particularly pleased when he liquidated his share of their farms and went off to study instead of staying home to help, rejecting their offer to fund his studies with the perfectly serviceable local teachers (Heruka *Marpa* 5-9). Eight are born to parents on the opposite end of the socio-economic scale; four to Brahmin parents, raising an interesting point about innate tendencies; and six to *dākinī* mothers. Twenty-three in total have parents who are themselves advanced practitioners. These range from Chokyi Dorje's parents, who met each other with on the same ascetic pilgrimage route (Willis *Enlightened* 49), to Pedma Lhundrub Gyatso's heritage, which is described as an "unbroken line of pure-awareness mahāsiddhas" (Zangpo 72). Similarly, Machig Ongio comes from a paternal line of 100 bodhisattva generations (Allione 216), while Drenchen Rema's father had a Geshe degree (Allione 224).

Although the eight masters born in poverty are at what might be considered a disadvantage, rendering their exemplarity particularly meaningful and simultaneously difficult to access in a mimetic way, the vast majority of masters here come into life with conditions already ideal for the attainment of realisation. Being born to a practitioner is especially advantageous, as those masters whose parents also practice have far fewer trials on the route to dedicating their own lives to the path. The exemplarity on display here is threefold. In the first place, those disadvantaged masters exemplify a *commitment to seeking the truth* that will be echoed throughout most of the categories in this chapter. Here it is paired with a dismissive attitude toward bodily and social needs, one that I will eventually argue is rooted in a *utilitarian view of a body* that is otherwise reviled. The second type of exemplarity is similar to what I have already discussed, a usage of exceptional circumstances to implicitly offer a vision of an exceptional future contingent on present modes of practice. Finally,

this category offers a second nuance to the marker of *practicing with a view to the long term*; in this case, the future one's fervent practice can impact is not one's own future births, but the future and even present birth(s) of one's children.

A curious final note on the way that genealogy and parentage are treated in this corpus: seven masters lose a parent, but there is no pattern evident in terms of which parent they lose or how they react to this loss. In all cases, the parental death is itself a footnote, and the only narrated effect comes from the life of Milarepa, whose father's death is the catalyst for a sequence of events that culminate in his destroying family property with black magic (Heruka *Milarepa* 21-2, 33-4, 39-40). Because of this lack of specificity, it is difficult to say if there is a marker of exemplarity lurking here, but it is useful to juxtapose these detail-light accounts with those extremely thorough ones of parental over-involvement. Noble, wealthy, and impoverished parents alike seem to want to keep their children close, and ultimately the death of a parent seems to have less of an impact on a life than coming into conflict with the desires of a living parent. Even some practitioner parents, although these are a minority, have difficulty allowing their children to spread their proverbial wings.

Notable examples are the aforementioned Milarepa, whose mother's craving for vengeance is what sets him on a path that eventually requires him to undergo tremendous suffering to purge the residues of the destructive acts he performs in obedience to her (Heruka *Milarepa* 27-9). Naropa's Brahmin parents expend so much energy trying to keep him at home that he is only able to go seek the truth by means of guile (Guenther 7-8, 14-18), while all the female practitioners save Machig Labdron are made to carry out their filial duties by marrying as it most politically advantageous for their families, sometimes with disastrous results. The struggle against well-meaning parental expectations in dedication to the truth is exemplary in that it calls the reader to *seek truth above all else*. Regardless of wealth or poverty, practitioner-parents or anti-Buddhist parents, all of these masters refuse to succumb to the expectations or troubles their family situations have gifted to them.

Conception, Gestation, and Birth

The pattern of many of these life-narrations closely follows the pattern set in that of the Buddha. I have broken this category into five subcategories, in the interest of analysing each type of remarkable event in the roughly nine-month span covered by this category. The first is the experience of dreams at the time of or just preceding conception, in which one or both parents of fourteen masters participate. One of the typical examples of this trope is the dream Gyalwa Lorepa's mother has of a jeweled arrow entering her head (Thargyay 31). Chokyi Dronma's mother dreams less typical dreams: two months before conception, she dreams a girl wearing only a bone ornament, and at the very moment of conception she dreams the sun and moon dissolving into her heart (Diemberger 152). Six mothers are lucky enough to experience blissful pregnancies and five painless births, surely exceptional circumstances. Particularly remarkable, and perhaps the most impossible occurrence in this corpus, is that Machig Labdron's mother, forty-eight at the time of conception, has as easy and blissful a pregnancy and delivery as the much younger, healthier mothers

of other masters (Allione 153-5). All of these blissful pregnancies are accompanied by rather spectacular dreams.

Fourteen masters are born to what most life narrations simply call "wondrous" or "auspicious" signs. When signs are specified, they are often in the form if thunder and earthquakes, as in the case of Naropa (Guenther 9); gatherings of celestial bodies, as for Pemalingpa (Aris 31); rainbows, as in the case of Machig Labdron (Allione 156-7), or, curiously, the birth of the master from the centre of a lotus (Abhayadatta 172; 228). A further eight masters act, immediately upon birth, in was rather unusual for newborns, whether uttering mantras like Gyelwa Ensapa (Willis *Enlightened* 57) or taking on tantric postures like Machig Labdron (Allione 73). Particularly interesting as a first act is one of those performed by Yeshe Tsogyel, whose full set of teeth and hair to her waist upon birth are seemingly insufficient to set her apart. Moments after being born, she declares that she needs no food but will eat to satisfy her mother, a remarkably relatable action (Stag-sham 12).

These conception, gestation, and birth narratives are perhaps the most explicit exceptional markers of this whole corpus, along with those I will discuss in the next section. What is exemplary for an adult practitioner about the actions of a child? How can exemplarity be found in circumstances rather than in actions? For the second question, I believe something like a contextual explanation may be helpful. I have not surveyed life narrations produced for children, although my experiences with children's biographies in other traditions suggests to me that if I have I might have seen greater emphasis on and detailed descriptions of childhood attitudes and behaviours. Circumstances here are thus not necessarily exemplary, but the first question remains, as does one of how to find exemplarity in narratives of conception and gestation. I suggest that we ought to read all of these narratives as exclusively exceptional: they mark the master as an important exemplar while reaffirming a spiritual hierarchy in a way that allows the tradition to retain its structures and that further acts in a cross-genre way to highlight the importance of the texts these masters produce and the transmission lineages to which they belong. Further, as always, exceptionality at once offers a kind of grace or leniency to the practitioner who may be struggling to practically follow the master's example and offers hope of an exceptional future birth if one makes wise use of one's current birth.

Childhood

A number of masters experience extraordinary childhoods. Seven masters engage from earliest childhood in a rejection of the world. Eleven are naturally gifted as teachers, among them Gyelwa Ensapa (Willis *Enlightened* 58) and Gyalwa Yang Gonpa, whose first words where a teaching discourse (Thargyay 38). Eight recall their former lives, including Migyur Dorje, whose first words are about his previous births and their interactions with Padmasambhava (Zangpo 47). Three commit themselves at an early age to non-harm. Thirteen pepper their childhoods with dharmic gestures and spontaneous meditation states, from Gyalwa Gotsangpa Gonpo Dorje, who would pretend to give sermons and to perform tantric songs and dances (Thargyay 36) to Pemalingpa, who would pretend to build stupas, temples, and thrones, give initiations, set up prayer flags, and write

scriptures (Aris 32-4). Palden Lodron's games similarly involve rituals and text-recitation (Snellgrove 188), while Gedun Truppa spent his early years carving sacred inscriptions into things (Chitkara 68). In comparison to these acts of mimicry, Chokyi Dronma spontaneously learns to perform bell and drum rituals perfectly at six months old, and even as a toddler she speaks exclusively in Sanskrit and spends most of her time in deep meditation, entering deep, liberating meditation at the tender age of six (Diemberger 152-6). Three eschew the company of other children, or perhaps are too busy studying to play, and four grow with extraordinary rapidity. Among these are Yeshe Tsogyel, who appeared eight at one month and reached her full growth by ten years old (Stag-sham 14), and Nangsa Obum, who grows each month of her first few years of life as much as a normal child grows in a year (Allione 68).

It is once again difficult to determine what might be exemplary about these actions, many of which occur while the average child is incapable of rational thought. Perhaps they are intended to aid parents in inculcating desire for the truth in even their very young children, or even to provide guidance for parents with weird children who behave in ways that a religious expert would recognise as less weird and more indicative of an advanced state. In other senses, though, these behaviours and experiences are truly exceptional. Why are these life-narrations top-loaded with these exceptional markers? Are they aspirational, as I have suggested, for one's current practice to inform one's potential future births? Do they serve to stratify ethical behaviour, suggesting to the reader rather than that this figure is an example worth following, as I have suggested, that due to the master's exceptionality the reader is exempt from following the examples? Do they overwhelm the exemplary potential of these life-narrations, reinforcing a hierarchy of practice so strict that the average practitioner cannot even aspire to follow these examples?

The aspiration for future births is certainly a possible explanation that I find reasonably convincing, and as I have already repeatedly expressed I think the leniency offered to the practitioner by exceptionality is central to understanding the exemplary functioning of life narrations and their genres. But I also believe it is crucial to highlight how in an institutional tradition of textual production, especially in a society as monastically dominated as was the Tibet of the centuries in which the Tibetan originals of this corpus were composed and as still is the Tibet of the scholarly imaginary, so pervasive as to be impossible to avoid completely, life narrations use exceptionality to support the institutional traditions that produce them. They serve as character witnesses for textual and transmission lineages and implicitly call the practitioner to support their local iteration(s) of this establishment so as to be supporting the spread of truth, however indirectly.

Marriage and Family

This category is a difficult one to parse, the first instance in this corpus to present truly divergent patterning. As a result of these many different attitudes to marriage and family, including some that imply by omitting these relationships altogether that they have no importance to the life of the master, the markers of exemplarity I derive from this category are especially provisional. Some of the blame for the apparent divergence of approaches can be placed on my reading of

family as primarily biological, framing the affective and lineal ties of the *vajra* family separately. I make this biological-affective distinction because in my reading the unique valences of *vajra* family relations are important to juxtapose to relations of biology.

In coming to discuss the *vajra* family (Tib. *chos spun*), I am bringing in a theoretical conception of an idea latent in the texts although not fully explored in them. The *vajra* family as a structure is composed of practitioners initiated into the same lineage, and the ties it forms are stronger even than biological ties, superseding the latter and providing an exemplary rationale for masters who abandon their biological parents, children, and spouses. The *vajra* family represented most clearly by the teacher is the relational partner who has priority in this scheme. Although I have elsewhere argued that *vajra* families are more than simply terminologically familial, here I focus on the dimension of choice that truly differentiates the two types of kinship structures. I translate *chos spun* as "*vajra* family," following Martin Mills, but it would be accurate, if less concise, to say "religion/dharma kin group"; the marker of participation here is a sharing in the group's orientation toward the truth, and thus the choice of *vajra* family is always a choice to seek and dedicate oneself inescapably to truth, to align oneself with institutional guardians – in the shape of transmission lineages – of that truth. Biological family, except in a very few cases, is not a choice. In those instances where masters choose a family in which to be born, this choice functions in the same way as the choice of *vajra* family. Beyond the choice, ties from previous births manifest more strongly in each subsequent birth; one makes a choice of a master or of a mother because of these ties. In a way, then, these choices are almost as inevitable as rebirth itself.

I intentionally use "almost," because it is crucial to differentiate circumstances that are results of previous births and tendencies of behaviour and attitude that carry over from birth to birth. Tendencies can be acted upon or not, while circumstances are truly inevitable. Exemplary acts are choices that a person makes within circumstances that are outside of their control; by definition, control over circumstances, including the circumstances of rebirth, is exceptional. To align oneself away from biology and discourses of inherency and inheritance is to align oneself explicitly with a life that is profoundly exceptional. The pursuit of truth at all costs suborns what we incorrectly think of as inherent human nature as the master seeks a release from the constraints of preconception and, indeed, of conception.

Returning to the biological family, eight masters have siblings, although only in Milarepa's case is a relationship given any level of detail (Heruka 19, 142-3). Siblings nevertheless can have major impacts, mostly for the good, as did Machig Labdron's in educating her after the death of their mother (Allione 159, 162). Ten masters have families who love them perhaps too much, begging for them to visit or to remain home. In all cases, the masters eventually reject these pleas. Here there seems to be a significant gender difference: masters like Je Tsongkhapa can get away with sending enchanted pictures of themselves home while they remain in study (Tulku 10), but female practitioners like Nangsa Obum and Chokyi Dronma struggle for decades against the desires of their parents and eventually their husbands as well. Four masters agree to marry.

The most detailed of these narratives is that of Naropa, who realises he is causing pain to his parents by continually refusing to marry but still believes marriage will hinder his practice. He hits on a genius plan: he tells them he will marry an impossible girl, a sixteen-year-old girl, birth-clean, unprejudiced, a Hindu who practices the Mahayana, and, most importantly, is named Drigmedma. Miraculously, the minister his parents send out to search actually finds a girl who meets this overly detailed description, and although he must threaten to kill himself on the steps of the house in order to get her father to agree to the marriage, the minister returns to the capital with Naropa's bride in tow. Naropa, blindsided but true to his word, marries her, and she serves him so well that when she discovers how much he wants to renounce the world she concocts a scheme to convince his parents that she is a bad wife so that they will let him put her aside (Guenther 14-18). Chokyi Dronma also agrees to marriage for the sake of her parents, deciding on the most prominent suitor in order to allay her mother's fears about her position, having given birth to only daughters while several lesser wives have produced sons (Diemberger 154). When her desire to renounce eventually overcomes her, she asks her father to replace her in her husband's household with one of her sisters, but before he can agree she learns that her daughter has died and decides to renounce immediately, although she stays with her husband, hiding her shaved head under a wig, until his new bride arrives (Diemberger 166-172).

In marriage to satisfy one's family we see the conflict between a rhetoric of temporal duty and a rhetoric of self-chosen responsibility, where practitioners are encouraged to balance living in the world and fulfilling the requirements of that life with a dedication to easing the suffering of all beings. Unsurprising to me is that the easing of suffering, itself an act of emotional labour, is performed in most extremity by female practitioners. The temporal duty to marry and bear children weighs on female practitioners as on the women to whom male practitioners are married and with whom male practitioners procreate. To avoid causing suffering to one's parents or to the men who desire one – Yeshe Tsogyel's extreme example of allowing herself to be gang-raped out of compassion (Stag-sham 44-7) is an especially poignant example of the latter – one must sacrifice oneself in a way that male practitioners do not have to. Naropa's wife is not alone in serving her husband with complete self-abnegation; Marpa's Dagmema suffers beatings when she tries to intercede on behalf of the much-abused Milarepa (Heruka *Milarepa* 62-3, 65), and almost all the female masters in this corpus support their husbands even as they desire so strongly to have no temporal ties.

Tilopa's lineage all suffer to attain realisation and thus to benefit beings by their teaching, but it is a different kind of suffering and a different kind of benefit. To be exemplary, the female practitioner must *prioritise the immediate temporal desires of her others*. Doing so is truth-inspired dedication to relieving suffering. This relationality is highly coercive, but it simultaneously elevates the female master to great heights of institutional and spiritual prominence. These female masters are framed by their life narrations as exemplary in a complete, ultimate sense.

Another four masters explicitly express a lack of desire for marriage. Milarepa takes this impulse the furthest, deeding his entire inheritance to his betrothed so that he can justify never

seeing her again (Heruka *Milarepa* 128), although Gyalwa Lorepa actually runs away from home to avoid a familial scheme to lock him up with a woman and force him to invalidate his monastic vows (Thargyay 32-3). Six are married off by force, all women. Yeshe Tsogyel's forced marriage is the most violent. When she tries to refuse, she is lashed with a whip studded with iron thorns, she is traded by her husband to another prince in return for some political advantage, and for the same reason by this prince to the Emperor, and by the Emperor to Padmasambhava as one part of a five-part payment for a tantric initiation. All of these forced marriages take place before she reaches the age of twelve (Stag-sham 16-24). Nangsa Obsum, beset with suitors from all over Tibet by the time she is fifteen, is permitted by her parents to reject all of them, but is finally kidnapped by a local ruler and forcibly betrothed to his son. Her family is threatened into agreement (Allione 69-75). Nine masters take consorts. Thirteen have children, whether by spouses or consorts, the most detailed depiction of which relationship is of Marpa and his son; in fact, much of Marpa's biography is consumed with the circumstances surrounding this son's unfortunate death and Marpa's own grief (Heruka *Marpa* 160-8). Kapalapa also suffers the loss of children, but it is when he is burying his five sons that he meets his teacher (Abhyadatta 222-3). Three of these parent-masters eventually renounce their children, most notably Nangsa Obsum, who uses her abandonment of her son to teach him about the dangers of attachment (Allione 96-11).

Male masters marry or have children in the periphery of their lives, and children themselves seem to be morally neutral. Having them seems to be exemplary only insofar as it furthers the propagation of truth, if one is a male practitioner, as in the case of Drogon Tsanga Gyare whose son attains full Buddhahood (Thargyay 18) or Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal whose son turns out to be a tulku (Thargyay 56). The three masters who explicitly abandon their children are all female, and I suspect that this abandonment must be made explicit in their cases because it runs counter to the dominant exemplary marker of women's self-sacrifice to ease the suffering of others. It also functions to render these women exceptional, as by explicitly presenting children and childcare as an obstacle to practice these narratives effectively cut women who have borne or will bear children from the path so long as they retain their motherhood. The women who are able to surmount this obstacle make difficult examples to follow, especially in the context of familial networks, where the work of mothering is never really finished. Male masters are able to progress with more ease along the path, as they do not take roles in the raising of their children, and, after taking wives or consorts, abandon them and any children that are produced, Marpa and Indrabhuti being the only exceptions to that trend in this corpus.

In both cases, *seek truth above all else* is the marker that manifests itself, but it is expressed differently in these gendered examples. Male masters prioritise truth by making it the centre of their lives; female masters do so by refusing to allow it to be pushed to the periphery. There is a subtle but significant difference here, and in it lies one of the central questions of exemplarity. Is the exemplary practice of the path inherently gendered? Philosophical treatises and practice manuals would suggest not, and yet these lived experiences demonstrate two very different standards and acceptable conditions.

Women's lives are ultimately exemplary to men as well, in the extremity of their desire to serve all beings and their explicit echoing of Gautama's abandonment of his son that is taken for granted as exemplary in male life narrations. The conflict between the duty of temporal service and the desire for ultimate service in disrupting the chains of suffering and rebirth is primarily exemplary for those readers who are constrained by temporal duties, but ultimately it is an almost universal battle. These women are exceptional in their ability to maintain a focus on the truth in the face of beatings by their sisters-in-law, whippings by their husbands, kidnappings, rapes, forced marriages, forced pregnancies, evil mothers-in-law, mothers who will not take them back home when they stumble, broken and bleeding, to their doorsteps seeking sanctuary from any of the above, and being actively prevented from studying or practicing the truth.

It is this dedication to truth that allows them to be exemplars in other areas of their lives, this exceptionality that marks them as members of the elite company of realised masters, this endurance of gendered violence that inspires the reader to single-mindedly focus on the truth regardless of external circumstances. I argue that while for the male reader there may not be a significant difference between these experiences and those of male masters who are subject to violence, the violence of social pressure combined with physical violence that centres on reproduction and sex is inescapably gendered. While the general principle for the male reader may be extreme exemplarity, for the female reader it sounds a lot like a warning.

Returning to the overall theme of this category, for male practitioners in my reading, the acts of marriage, consort-taking, and procreation are exemplary only insofar as the provoke realisation. Antinomian practitioners like Drukpa Kunley, who leaves a thick trail of fifteen thousand sexually satisfied and philosophically curious girls in his wake (Dowman *Madman* 51, Thargyay 48), are provoking realisation in the women with whom they engage in intercourse, but they are using these interactions primarily to reinforce their own practice. Kunley's life narration in particular, of the nine that contain narratives of consorts, exemplifies this instrumentalisation; many of its pages detail the scrapes he gets into while trying to have sex, the narrow escapes he effects, the very plentiful sex he does manage to have, and his habit of leaving his sexual partners, all of whom plead to be allowed to travel with him, walled up in caves, ostensibly to work on their own spiritual practices. He impregnates a nun, the wife of a disabled man, and the wife of a man he beats into submission, all because of visions of future sons to carry on his lineage (Dowman *Madman* 18-20, 32, 50-1, 56, 65-6, 72-3, 82, 98-9; Thargyay 48). Naropa is required by his teacher to take consorts on two separate occasions, on one resulting in his crushing his own genitalia with stones and on the other resulting in him having to watch as his teacher beats the consort, all to teach him the evils of attachment (Guenther 76-8, 80). Yeshe Tsogyel takes both male and female consorts, but on more than one occasion she gives her female consorts to her teacher for his own use in creating treasure texts (Stagsham 44, 50, 57-8, 85, 55, 122).

Transgression of boundaries is exemplary when it serves to enhance one's awareness of ultimate reality, as is the general rule for all tantric practice, and we must maintain an awareness in reading these texts that the primary audience is male and monastic. Explicit rejection of the vow

of celibacy for at least two of the four schools of Tibetan Buddhism is notable for its participation in this tantric rhetoric of transgression. These narratives are not practice manuals, nor are they philosophical works seeking to justify tantric activity, although by virtue of being embedded in life narrations that otherwise show every indication of perfect exemplarity, these narratives might be seen as practical justifications. Particularly here I am thinking of Machig Labdron's experience of taking a consort. As a result of a vision, she learns that she is destined to have a relationship with a man named Topabhadra, who is the equivalent of the quarterback of the tantric football team. When she finds him, they talk doctrine in between self-empowerments over seventeen sleepless days before finally engaging with each other ritually, which produces a great variety of visual phenomena confirming the rightness of their relationship. Rather than one being the consort of the other, they are both called consorts, and spend most of their relationship apart while Topabhadra raises their children and comes to visit to compare practice notes with her (Allione 168-173). Narratives of consorts, even when not this explicitly positive, demonstrate a more general marker of exemplarity, one that will become more readily apparent in other categories: the practical inculcation and eventual demonstration of *non-divisive/non-discriminatory thinking*.

These life narrations use procreation and non-procreative intercourse in very careful ways to teach the reader foundational truths about the nature of the world and how one ought to approach it, as non-discriminatory thinking ultimately is a part of the pursuit of truth, paradoxical as it seems to have a binary opposition as a product of efforts to dismantle binaries.

Relationships with Teachers

Thirteen masters have relationships with their teachers that are coloured by affection and warmth. One of the most explicit of these is that of Yeshe Tsogyel with her teacher Padmasambhava; she frames her narration of her own life as an opportunity to discuss his, and every interaction she recalls with him is coloured with joy and devotion. When he dies, her distress is expressed with some of the most eloquent, desolate language in the entire corpus (Stag-sham 126-145). Marpa's eventual reunion with his teacher Naropa has the student weeping and fainting from "inconceivable joy" when Naropa declares that "the father has arrived in front of the son" (Heruka *Marpa* 85). Some interactions are less extreme, but no less affectionate, as in the case of Chokye Palzang, whose teacher threw him a huge party to celebrate the completion of his first independent meditation retreat (Snellgrove 136-7). Ten seek out their masters, and twenty have physical reactions to meeting their teachers – or even hearing their names – for the first time that require some recovery time. Among these is Chokyi Dorje, whose first meeting with his teacher wipes all other thoughts from his mind, and although he eventually goes on to seek a wide array of teachers, even the thought of his first and most central is enough to cause him to spontaneously burst into song (Willis *Enlightened* 49-53). Four encounter their teachers when at their lowest points. Most notable of these is Ajokipa's teacher, who finds him in deep misery in a cemetery in the wake of an epidemic (Abhayadatta 109). Five perform the funerary rites for their teachers, including Gyalwa Lorepa,

whose teacher was responsible for tricking Lorepa's parents into letting their son become a monk (Thargyay 32).

These narratives indicate a certain attitude toward teaching as necessary to proper following of the path, especially in its affective dimensions. Buddhist masters come to knowledge of the truth for which they seek not simply by the exercise of their intellects, but through emotional and embodied experience. In all of these modes of knowledge acquisition, the teacher plays the central role of catalyst, whether they are visionary or non-human (fifteen masters), family members (four), or more conventional teachers in a monastic frame. Significant for this catalysing function are the five narratives of masters whose teachers are also their students. The case of Gyalwa Yang Gonpa is particularly illuminating, and also deeply moving: neither he nor his teacher Gyalwa Gotsangpa Gonpo Dorje thinks they are entirely worthy of the other, and yet their interactions greatly help both of them (Thargyay 39-40). Here, we see that the *affective ties to a teacher* are not the only force at play; there is also *an acknowledgement of the need for a teacher* even in the midst of an externally-validated level of mastery. This acknowledged need in turn opens the door to methods outside of the standard curriculum, like the use of didactic violence in three cases, to be addressed in another category.

Scholarly Accomplishments

Forty-four masters receive teachings in the form of transmissions of texts or practice traditions from a variety of teachers, primarily earthly, although in four cases from wisdom beings. This institutionalised interconnectedness is an important characteristic of an exemplary life. To *seek out truth* in all its forms involves discerning which transmission lineages will best satisfy one's aims, or in many cases to participate in multiple lineages, but it also involves the humility to recognise one's incapacity to independently produce truth. This deep imbrication in the religious institutions of the tradition, both monastic and extra-monastic, suggests to the practitioner that it is particularly an *alignment with institutional truth* that is effective in attaining the exceptional status of a realised master. It also serves as something of a guide for the practitioner seeking their own involvement in such an institution by valorising lineage itself as a marker of truth.

Many of these masters display exemplarity not only in that they seek truth as students, but also in their performance of exemplary studenthood. Four masters are champions of memorisation, including Je Tsongkhapa, whose powers of memory are extensive enough to earn him the title of Great Scholar by the time he is nineteen (Tulku 7). Three are masters of the institutional debate tradition of the Gelugpa school, including mostly notably Sanggye Yeshe, known as the Scholar-Siddha, who won his first large-scale debate when he, too, was nineteen (Willis *Enlightened* 76). Two sit their Geshe exams; ten innately or suddenly understand scripture and oral tradition, a feat that allows them to excel in their scholarly pursuits. It is notable that these ten, as well as three masters who learn effortlessly because they retain practice knowledge from their previous lifetimes, all explicitly assume the role of a gifted beginner. Their conscious adoption of the performance of studenthood demonstrates the exemplarity of humility in the face of the vastness of the truth, and

emphasises once again the institutional, non-self-arisen nature of truth. Here it is apparent that dedication to formal study is what marks exemplarity. Further, these narratives of skill in learning highlight the exceptional nature of these masters, particularly here functioning cross-generically as a stamp of legitimacy on written works. It is crucial to recall that the intended audience of Tibetan-original texts is composed primarily of literate monastics whose social role in part rested on receiving and transmitting the right kind of practical and doctrinal knowledge.

The minimal emphasis on debate and formal monastic-scholarly degrees is in large part due to my attempt in assembling this corpus to include masters from a variety of schools rather than focusing on the richer, more numerous compendia exclusive to the scholastic Gelugpa school. But even acknowledging the constraints here, I suggest that the greater detail in terms of transmissions – requiring two volume-length appendices in the case of Kunzang Sherab (Zangpo 55-7, 62-3) – and studenthood is due to two competing factors. On the one hand, the emphasis on exceptionality results in what I am calling an orientation toward posterity, de-emphasising the "how" of an exemplary life. The second is related but ultimately distinct: in my reading, studenthood is exemplary over and above more specific aspects because the "right" way to be a student is determined largely by the idiosyncratic attachment one has to one's teacher, as well as by the teacher's use of skill in means to convey knowledge at an individually suited pace.

On the other side of scholarly achievement, eighteen masters produce written works, and two uncover *terma*s. Here, the marker of exemplarity involves being committed to helping others understand truth. The seeking of truth is necessarily transactional, requiring a recompense of truth-teaching. It is also heavily institutional, from teachers to works that become part of the accepted especially commentarial canon. There are many other types of works, though, and masters always seem to write in more than one. Kunzang Sherab, for instance, wrote on monastic discipline in addition to his scholarly work (Zangpo 70), Sanggye Yeshe dabbled in both *namtar* and meditation cycles (Willis *Enlightened* 81), Kunkhyen Pema Karpo wrote in enough different genres to have his twenty-four-volume collected writings be broadly named the *Hundred Thousand Works* (Abhayadatta 52-3). Tsangnyon Heruka, the compiler of the canonical life narrations of Marpa and Milarepa, also composed Hevajra and Cakrasamvara treatises (Thargyay 43-4), Marpa spent much of his career translating works into Tibetan (Heruka *Marpa* 63), and Dolpopa wrote treatises, letters, and impassioned oral defenses of his commentary on the Kālacakratantra commentary known as *Stainless Light* (Stearns 24-5, 27-9). This multifarious engagement with genre conventions in monastic-scholastic dominated traditions is one of the ways that hierarchical structures and the institutional tradition are maintained not only by masters but also by their life narrations. Institutional participation is as important a marker of exemplarity in this context as the *dedication to spreading truth* evident in the practice of writing.

Monastic Involvement

This category includes several very different sub-categories. It is interesting to note, however, that what unites them is not simply their centring on the institution of the monastery, but their function as public displays of and external proofs for posited interior states. These narratives thus serve the dual purpose of aligning their subjects with the monastic establishment and establishing their spiritual credentials. Eighteen masters are enthroned as monastic heads, although three of these reluctantly so. Enthronements can take place at any life stage, as evidenced by the cases of Sanggye Yeshe, who came out of retirement retreat to take the unexpectedly vacated seat at Riwo Gopel (Willis *Enlightened* 79-80), Kunkhyen Pema Karpa, whose status in a reincarnation lineage saw him enthroned at age nine (Thargyay 50), and Dolpopa, who took his first seat at Sakya when he was twenty-eight, and his second, at Jonang, when he was thirty-four (Stearns 15, 18). Some enthronements, like Sanggye Yeshe's, are only temporary; Chokyi Dronma (Diemberger 181) and Palden Lodron (Snellgrove 197) both take over for voyaging teachers as regents of a sort. Even reluctant throne holders do so from a desire to *meet community needs*.

Another form of monastic involvement is ordination. Eight masters stop at novice ordination, while thirty progress to full ordination, some so committed to the idea that, like Pedma Lhundrub Gyatso, they fudge some math to be allowed full ordination before they are technically old enough (Zangpo 72-3). Six explicitly proceed to bodhisattva vows, although it is likely that many of the masters in this corpus did take a bodhisattva vow that is not mentioned, given that their lives are narrated in the *namtar* genre. Seven are noted for their superb *vinaya* adherence, two with extreme vows taken upon the death of a father figure. It is significant that so many masters have their vows specified, many with the names of their *vinaya* committee and particular administrators included. These details function in a classificatory fashion, identifying each master's place within the relevant institutional galaxy.

More than that, these narratives offer evidence of a process internal to the master: the *seeking of truth* and concomitant *acknowledgement of the need for structure and direction* in that search similar to that expressed by narratives involving teachers. Vows indicate an allegiance with institutional approaches to both the truth and to the search itself, a statement strongly opposed to the possibility that there might be a subjective element to truth. Vows also prefigure a marker I will address more fully when I discuss asceticism: an attitude toward embodied existence that sees it both as a field of opportunity and a dangerous distraction in need of being constrained in some way. Vows further, especially in the case of the bodhisattva bow, make the master open to the petitions of the beings that they have vowed to aid, emphasising a broader community concern that sends monastic involvement into the core of the worlds' suffering and positions the monastery as central in answering to and assuaging that suffering. These narratives thus also function to validate the monastic establishment itself, rendering the master's ties to that establishment a source of mutual reinforcement.

Finally, it is important to recall that monastic involvement is also involvement with the physical presence of monasteries. Three masters take tours of all the monasteries in Central

Tibet, while on the other side of the spectrum four leave or are expelled from their monasteries, including Virupa who chooses to leave rather than be expelled when caught eating meat he has slaughtered himself and drinking wine (Abhayadatta 28). Twenty take on building projects, among them Kunkhyen Pema Karpo, who founds thirteen monasteries and four hermitages (Thargyay 52), Dolpopa who builds stupas and shrines across Tibet using his own hands (Stearns 20, 29), and Chokyi Dronma, who when she establishes her nunnery sews all the ordination robes herself so that her nuns can maintain their vows of renouncing worldly care (Diemberger 189). Five take on extra responsibilities within their monastic communities.

These final examples suggest most strongly that *acting to benefit the community* is central to the life of an exemplary master. The community's needs are not simply for sound teaching, or for realised masters providing supervised paths to liberation, but are often physical as well. Repairing existing or building new monasteries especially indicates that the physical needs of the specifically monastic community of other practitioners are central concerns for the master. Monuments and monastic art can also be considered embodied teachings, and as a result by engaging in their commissioning and repair masters display a *commitment to spread the truth* that both reflects their vows and is reflected by their acts of teaching, as I will analyse below. In the strictly practical sense, masters by using the donations they receive to benefit their communities both physically and didactically exhibit the exemplarity of ethical resource use.

Beyond these many markers, there is another at play in the involvement of masters with their respective monastic establishments. Participation in the establishment prevents practitioners from imperfectly discerning ultimate truth, emphasising that truth itself is and can only be one. It also serves to highlight a desire for truth that prompts masters to seek out both a knowledge/practice community and community of service, which in narrative terms allows the master the space to reveal the internal state that epitomises their mastery. When masters participate in monastic hierarchies and take on ordination, they are *aligning themselves with institutionalised truth*, and their example calls the average practitioner to do the same.

Even the antinomian tradition, represented in this corpus by Drukpa Kunley, Pemalingpa, Tsangnyon Heruka, and Tilopa's lineage, is associated with establishment practices, including the establishment of lineage and acts of devotion to and for shrines and stupas. What is crucial to note in their rejection of institutionalised practice is that it is phrased primarily as a rejection of monasticism as an end in itself. Antinomian masters verbally and behaviourally critique monks for slavish adherence to form, ritual, and the strictness of vows over and above the search for truth these institutions purport to aid. When monasticism hinders this all-important search, like a ripple effect it prevents all other exemplary behaviours, including most especially action to benefit the community. Masters thus, in keeping with the situational nature of exemplarity, *reject paths whose features distract from their aim*.

Tantric Practice

While tantra in the popular imagination of Tibetan Buddhism is most frequently associated with the antinomian tradition, its practice is one in which masters of all levels of monastic involvement widely participate, to the extent that thirteen masters can practice the tantras without their specific practices being identified, with the practice itself mentioned in passing. In terms of specified practice, six perform ritual self-harm, among them Naropa, who eats razor blades rather than reject offerings (Guenther 86), although in one of these cases the biographer assures the reader that these were all right-handed, and thus not truly transgressive, practices (Willis *Enlightened* 65). Je Tsongkhapa is perhaps the most secretive of these, practicing in a special temple he has built at Ganden, his monastic seat, to keep the uninitiated from seeing his tantric paraphernalia (Tulku 29). Ten masters practice in charnel grounds, including Kanhapa, who transforms himself into a wolf to eat corpses at his cemetery (Abhayadatta 83), and three masters are explicitly associated with the antinomian tradition, among them Tsangnyon Heruka who first studies tantra and then throws off study in favour of manifesting "divine madness." He carries a trident topped with three skulls throughout Ü and Tsang, wearing bones and blowing a horn made of human thighbone, causing rumours of cannibalism (Thargyay 42-3).

Seven masters engage in transgressive sexual practices. The most thorough of these accounts is of Drukpa Kunley, although both Yeshe Tsogyel's and her later rebirth Machig Labdron's life narrations offer fairly extensive accounts of sexual activity. Kunley's life narration, however, is unmatched in this corpus for both the level of detail and the sheer number of partners recorded. Some of the specifics I have already addressed; what is important to highlight here is that Kunley's breaking of his monastic vows is, according to the author of his life narration, accepted by his peers and by high-ranking contemporaries as evidence of his realisation (Dowman *Madman* 73-5). Edible substances are also a part of tantric practice; Kunkhyen Pema Karpo synthesises enlightenment pills (Thargyay 53) and Yeshe Tsogyel consumes a variety of different psychotropic substances (Stag-sham 73), while Lupiya lives for twelve years eating only fish entrails in order to purify himself of his elitist ideas about food purity (Abhayadatta 24).

Beyond the usual readings of tantric practice as itself a commentary on or reading of the core doctrines of non-attachment and merit, there are markers of exemplarity evident that centre not on how tantric practice differs from non-tantric, but on their similarity. Tantra is just a more obvious, especially or perhaps exclusively to the Western reader, way of *devoting the whole self to truth-seeking*. Through these practices, masters demonstrate in highly visible ways that even such central parts of their lives as eating an sex are oriented toward the all-consuming search for truth. They are exemplary not necessarily for the specifics of their practice, although I want to be careful not to preclude that possibility, but for what those practices call the reader to examine: how even the most mundane parts of their lives might be distractions from truth-seeking, and might in turn be transformed, transmuted, into aids along the path. In a certain sense, these practices are also exceptional; they serve to set the masters apart from their less-transgressive coreligionists and even to dissuade others from following their examples.

This self-imposed isolation is in part a highly stylised, even ritualised humility, an attempt to disinvite the regard and devotion of the practitioner, which can be distracting for both parties. More than this performative consideration, though, tantric isolationism is the result of a prioritisation of the ultimate needs of suffering beings – to attain liberation, which requires in most cases the competent guides tantric masters are training or already consider themselves to be – over the potential physical benefits of remaining in monastic practice alone. All tantric practitioners to a certain degree seek to promote the truth above and to the exclusion of themselves, and to teach it by their actions as well as verbally and conceptually. This humility and self-abnegation, with its accompanying behaviours that often seem paradoxically self-serving to the outside observer, is exemplary for even the average practitioner who may not be prepared to enter the path of the tantras. All practitioners can seek the truth and elevate its pursuit above their other concerns.

At the same time, the fact that these masters are able to convey such important exemplary and otherwise didactic messages with their transgressive behaviour is an exercise of their exceptional skill-in-means, a trait of realisation that sets them apart from the reader even as it brings the two closer together. Tantric practice is thus the site of an exceptionality that is complemented by and complements a kind of exemplarity that relies on an abstraction from exceptional behaviours. Masters are set apart by their ability to enter these extreme states, freeing the practitioner from a mandate to eat corpses or engage in secretive ritual forms, and simultaneously encouraging an overall approach to life wherein priorities are reordered holistically and incontrovertibly, transforming lives.

Asceticism

Asceticism is similar to tantric practice in its simultaneous exemplarity and exceptionality, with much more narrative focus placed on the latter. There are several modes of asceticism, with repeated isolated retreat, often for very long periods of time, being with most common with thirty-seven masters in this corpus engaging. The most extreme of these is Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, who seals himself up in a meditation cave with orders not to disturb him for at least twelve years, and for all we know, he may be there still (Thargyay 57). All the other practices can and do occur independent of retreat contexts, but often masters in retreat also engage in secondary forms of asceticism.

Eleven masters take on restrictive fasting vows, among them Milarepa, who, after a few years in retreat, runs out of food. He begins to eat the nettles that grow around his cave, eventually turning green and growing fuzz to match them. When he does get gifts of food, they spur him to achieve new levels of practice, but for the most part hunger and nakedness are the soul of his practice (Heruka 136-7, 138-40, 147). Sonam Lodron begins his retreats eating barley mixed with sand and eventually moves to just eating sand, which causes him to become seriously ill (Snellgrove 94-8). Three take on twenty-four/seven meditation practices, while five engage in self-imposed violence. Karma Chagmed is perhaps the most extreme of these, offering his finger as a butter lamp at the funeral of a colleague, and, after surviving the infection that follows, offers another butter-

lamp-finger to the Jowo at Lhasa (Zangpo 39). Yeshe Tsogyel recites continuously until her throat is literally destroyed, and circumambulates and prostrates her meditation ground until bones protrude from her body and she streams blood and pus (Stag-sham 73-77). Fourteen dedicate themselves to extreme poverty, like Kunkhyen Longchen Rabjam, who lives in "circumstances of extreme deprivation," moving camp every month with only one ragged bag as a cover even in the extremely harsh winter (Thondup 111), and four go about naked.

The marker of *devoting the whole self to practice* is at play here, as is that of *rejection of distraction*. These markers are simply on display in asceticism with more extremity than with other forms of practice, paradoxically reinforcing the exemplarity of the marker while enhancing the exceptionality of the behaviour itself. These masters are themselves exceptional in the depth of their devotion, the violence of their rejection, rendering their specific examples guidelines only for the similarly exceptional and allowing the reader both the freedom to avoid enduring such extremity and the opportunity to explore the behavioural patterns that mark the lives of realised masters. These in turn may help them identify teachers or practitioners to whom devotion and donation will result in the kind of merit the accruing of which can contribute to an exceptional rebirth. On another level of exemplarity, these narratives offer examples for the practitioner of how to *approach hardship: with equanimity*, and as a potential agent of removal of distraction. Practitioners like Yeshe Tsogyel can endure primarily by appeal to their masters, another mode of approach to hardship exemplified by life narrations. In a very real sense, the examples of these masters reinforce an institutionalised spiritual hierarchy by calling their readers to integrate themselves into a mode of being that is predicated on reliance on a realised master.

Further, these ascetic exercises emphasise the centrality of truth-seeking as a guiding force for one's everyday actions. Kunzang Sherab ties himself up by the hair each night to avoid falling asleep during meditation (Zangpo 55). Milarepa leaves his leftovers uneaten out of compassion for the maggots in his meditation cave (Heruka 138-9). Drenchen Rema keeps away from areas that are noisy and might distract her from meditation (Allione 226-8), while Chokye Palzang refuses to allow his students to compare him favourably to the buddhas (Snellgrove 175). These masters and the others in the corpus demonstrate by their ascetic acts what *commitment to the truth* looks like, and how the *body might be instrumentalised*. Their life narrations reveal that inculcating a rigorous selflessness, putting the needs of the body and the social self violently aside in order to *evade the distractions* that body and self bring is the "how" if truth-seeking, as crucial to the enterprise as any other of the subsidiary markers. Exceptional here is the ability to sustain such extremes of practice, but these narratives also offer to the reader a model for how to achieve the dedication to truth that is such a prized attribute of a realised master. Asceticism is, in a certain sense, the great equaliser. It renders the exceptional achievable, thus enhancing the exemplarity of the whole of the master's life.

But it is still profoundly exceptional. These masters perform acts, like eating only thirty juniper berries a day for three years (Willis *Enlightened* 36) or remaining in total darkness for four (Stearns 17), that the average practitioner would find unsustainable or even completely impossible. Here, exceptionality functions aspirationally: one's small acts of self-abnegation in this life might

pave the way for future lives where the distraction and clinging point that is the combined body and social self can be attacked with greater skill and more perseverance. Exceptionality, paradoxically, wonderfully, also functions here to reassure the reader that their clinging to and distraction by the facets of their selves is a central part of embodied existence against which even the most advanced truth-seekers must strive Here, then, exceptionality highlights exemplarity, by suggesting a closer link between the reader and the master than might otherwise be perceived, the master's overall example is rendered even more worthy of emulation.

Violence

Connected to tantric practice and to asceticism both is the question of violence. I will turn to self-inflicted violence at the end of this section, but first I will consider the enacting of violence by and onto external agents within these life narrations.

Five masters receive violence at the hands of their families, four from their teachers in order to pay for teachings, and four from their teachers just because. These last two categories are perhaps the most interesting in this section, and before attempting to understand them I offer one of the most striking examples of violence to the master from his teacher. After leaving his monastic home of Nalanda to search for a teacher, Naropa desperately searches for the Tilopa about whom he has heard so much, finding him only after threatening to kill himself. Tilopa begins by using object lessons to teach, but soon falls silent for an entire year, breaking it only when, sitting with Naropa on the roof of a temple, he says, in an offhand matter, that if he had a really, truly dedicated disciple, said disciple would throw himself off the roof of this temple, and isn't it a pity that such a disciple is not to be found. Naropa, of course, immediately jumps, breaking every bone in his body. Tilopa seems puzzled as to why his student is lying on the ground, but begrudgingly heals him and gives him a teaching. This pattern continues through a number of increasingly painful and torturous scenarios in which Tilopa makes casual remarks and Naropa jumps, often literally, at the chance to be hurt (Guenther 43-85). Naropa's student, Marpa, inflicts similar violence on his own would-be pupil, Milarepa (Heruka *Milarepa* 51-68, 75-83).

Four masters are almost killed by practitioners who accuse them of incorrect practice, including poor put-upon Naropa (Guenther 86-7), while six are attacked frequently by non-Buddhists, including Unyon Kunga Sangpo, who is burned alive not once, but twice after an idol-burning goes awry, but still manages to return dancing both times (Thargyay 45-6). What is exemplary here is the reception of violence with compassion for attackers, or even with devotion to them, in the case of teacher-inflicted violence. Common across both violence from enemies and violence from allies – who may perhaps be understood as enemies of the master's delusions or of the residues of their past actions – is that the master uniformly *accepts violence* and sometimes even welcomes it. This acceptance is in line with the rejection of the body that colours ascetic and tantric practice. Violence is instrumentalised, and of course is often also explicitly considered unavoidable as resulting from residues of past actions, in the grand, multi-life narrative of realisation in the same way that every aspect of phenomena existence is or can be. Masters demonstrate non-discriminatory

thought by their reception of violence as both commonplace and potentially transformative. It is this *orientation toward transformation* that unites the acceptance of violence with other aspects of an exemplary life.

What is especially curious to note here is that in those cases where violence is received from one's teacher, the teacher's life-narration includes no mention of the incidents recorded in the students'. What is crucial about the exemplarity of didactic violence, then, is in its receipt. It becomes part of the way in which masters actively repudiate their own bodies, instrumentalising all the phenomena with which they come in contact to serve the greater goal of achieving ultimate realisation without associating itself with any exemplary mode of teaching. It is clear from this category and others that the act of having students may be exemplary, but insufficiently important as to warrant much in the way of explanatory detail. Is it perhaps the case that part of the emphasis on living as a student is because realisation brings its own clues as to how to teach? Is it connected to the abject self-abnegation so strongly emphasised by these narratives? Is one to learn from one's teacher how to teach? I suggest that the answer is most likely a combination of these possibilities: studenthood is given such a profound emphasis because it is the period of a master's life wherein ignorance is the central reality, the force that must be overcome. These narratives, in their radical exceptionality, still offer a significant, exemplary mode of being, suggesting strongly the preeminent desirability of studenthood. It is a deeply reassuring thing to read, and here I must flag again the possibility that my own studenthood colours my reading indelibly.

Receiving violence for the sake of the truth, whether in order to gain it or in order to demonstrate it, is ultimately also a reflection of the extreme *dedication to truth* that seems to pervade every action these masters take. In being so, however, it is also a marker of exceptionality. In one sense, a dedication to truth so strong that it does not shy away from violence or the threat thereof is not necessarily one that the average practitioner feels competent to cultivate. As a result, it marks either many lifetimes on the path of exceptional facility in this particular birth. In another sense, the receipt of violence is specifically tied to purifying residues of past actions in as quick a way as possible, a hallmark of the in-this-very-lifetime promise of the Vajrayana. Being not only able to withstand the fury of such purification, such an outpouring of the negative effects of all of one's deeds, but also desirous of the depth of awareness that comes with immediate awakening, these masters go against the grain of human behaviour and human desire. They are profoundly alien to the lives of the average practitioner, whose unwillingness to tread the diamond path is cast into sharp relief by the wild abandon with which these masters accept the violence that is its natural result.

For the reader already on the fast, aggressive path, already dedicated to awakening in this very lifetime, it is possible to acknowledge another level of exemplarity, especially with respect to such categories as violence. It is a significant limitation of this study that I do not systematically address these potentially multiple layers, nor consider for each text the intended and even actual audiences. In the case of violence, I address the question in small part, by appeal to a master whose life narration is as much a part of this corpus as the life narration he composed about the head of

his lineage. Milarepa's life-narration displays exemplarity in these broad terms I have been using to the monk who reads or householder who hears it, but to a reader like Tsangnyon Heruka, who made a dedicated study of all of the versions in compiling his canonically accepted masterpiece, it tells a more explicit story. The doctrine of the trifold meaning is here inversed, so that while an adept might read the hidden or even the secret meaning of a sutra or a tantra, the adept-reader of a life-narration can uniquely read it for explicit exemplarity. Tsangnyon Heruka seems to have taken as exemplary not simply Milarepa's acceptance of violence, but his active solicitation of it. Other adepts might do the same.

It is perhaps difficult to link self-inflicted violence to violent acts carried out on the bodies of others, but I argue that both return to a singular root commitment. To support my argument, I offer a few narratives of these violent actions. Milarepa, in begging Marpa for teachings, is subject to mental, emotional, and physical violence repeatedly and consistently over the course of many years, including savage beatings and denial of medical care for bleeding and infection. At three separate points, he makes a genuine attempt to kill himself, but each time is forestalled by a member of Marpa's household (Heruka 60-1, 67, 78). Similarly, Nanga Obum suffers repeated intense beatings and is subject to verbal abuse and the theft of her only child. It is only when she hears that a monastery in which she has decided to seek refuge likely will turn her away, due to lack of practice permission from her husband, that she tries to take her own life (Allione 81-4, 89, 120). Others inflict bodily harm on themselves without having been driven to such extremity. Representative of these is Mekhala, who cuts off her own head to pay an initiation fee (Abhyadatta 212). Underlying all of these self-harm narratives, five in total, is a desperation that leads to a *prioritisation of the truth* over even the most basic needs of the body.

This prioritisation of truth is also present in narratives of violence inflicted by masters outside of themselves. Almost all of these nine instances centre on a non-Buddhist king, a demon, or other anti-Buddhist forces that must be subdued by the master, whether as in the case of Shabdrang Ngawang Namgyal's "wrathful compassionate activity" (Thargyay 55), Chokyi Dronma's stoning of Bonpo priests (Diemberger 158-9), or Drukpa Kunley's various uses of his erection in demon slaying, banishment, and subjugation (Dowman *Madman* 35, 66-7, 90, 90-1, 95-8, 100, 101, 101-4). These two types of enacted violence are related by their foundation in a deep concern for the discovery and preservation of truth. More than that, though, these acts have in common the *refusal to adhere to convention* that underlies so much of the practice of these masters. Drukpa Kunley beating demons with his erection is as convention-shattering as Chokyi Dronma's wrathful aspect ravaging a non-Buddhist kingdom and Caurangi refusing to allow a servant to suffer in his place (Abhayadatta 51-2). The dedication to truth must be paired with a rejection of social, and potentially even monastic norms.

Finally, we come to the difficult question of how to interpret the exemplarity of self-harm and suicidal ideation, beyond the simple assertion that it is linked to a dedication to truth-seeking. Certainly, much of the same logic that underlies acts of asceticism is at play, but at play here I believe is a more extreme *distaste or even hatred for embodied existence and the body*. Abhorrence of the

body is often invoked in attempts to understand ascetic practice more generally, but in these cases of masters willingly harming or attempting to harm themselves I believe it holds a particular power. More than simply hindrances, as is usually assumed to be the case in discussions of self-imposed violence in a religious context, for these masters their bodies are tools with which, by judicious application of force, realisation can be provoked. In the absence of external violence, masters can choose to themselves apply force in order to make use of their bodies for the truth. Especially in the case of suicidal ideation, these masters demonstrate an *instrumentalisation of the body*.

Relationships with Peers

With this category and those that follow, my aim is to demonstrate some of the multiple ways in which the popular image of the world-renouncing hermit simply is not reflected in my corpus, wherein even Milarepa, one of Tibet's most famous meditators, regularly engaged with other beings. In this first subcategory, I have identified a number of behavioural trends that lead to two distinct markers of exemplarity. The first trend is that of discussion, formal or otherwise, with fellow walkers of the path, present in eleven life narrations.

Eight masters receive reverence from other practitioners of high levels, eight by their actions inspire or even fully liberate practitioners, three encourage their disciples to seek other teachers, and four go on group pilgrimages. Seven engage in mutual teaching relationships, including most notably Machig Labdron, who aside from her mutual teaching with her consort eventually becomes a co-teacher with some monks who come all the way from Bodhgaya expressly to text her. When they have been thoroughly impressed, and have given her their teachings, they take hers back to Bodhgaya with them, the first time, the narrator tells us, that the dharma has been brought from Tibet to India instead of the other way around (Allione 182-6). Four masters solve conflicts between their peers, while three use their positions to benefit their friends, and four give aid of some kind to commoners. Among this latter group are Pemalingpa, who routinely gives away his wealth to help locals in debt or to ransom goods taken in war (Aris 68, 68-69), and Drukpa Kunley, who offers teaching, death rituals, and anti-demonic aid to anyone in need (Dowman *Madman* 24-7, 30-1, 38-41, 51-5, 64, 68, 68-71, 78-9, 104-6).

What all of these trends indicate is the existence of networks of practice, many of which seem to centre on masters, as is the case with Naropa's disciples, who are all very close to each other (Heruka *Marpa* 8-10, 17, 22-4, 64-5, 93-4, 102-6, 107-121). These networks can also, in this corpus, be rooted in certain texts, geographical areas, monastic schools, and teaching lineages. They span social classes and relative hierarchical positions, resulting in an opportunity to explore the situated nature of exemplarity. One's position within a network of practice seems still to be informed by socially constructed realities external to the network in question, so that it is exemplary to offer devotion and reverence to those at higher levels, teach and provide for those at lower levels, and engage in mutually beneficial practices with those at similar levels. I articulate two general markers from this tangle: the *instrumentalisation of relationships* and *acting to benefit the community*, in this case the community that composes the network.

Moving on to the other facet of engagement with other practitioners, it is crucial to note that these negative interactions are represented in the corpus with much less frequency, and less detail when they do appear, than positive ones. Almost all the narratives I include in this subcategory – five practitioners being accused by their coreligionists of being false, five working to undermine establishment monks and teachers, and nine engaging in feuds with heretics or superiority contests with other masters – are related to malfunctioning or clashing networks of practice. The focus here seems to be similar to that of the violence from subcategory, in that masters break or break from networks of practice as part of their larger aim in seeking truth. Many of these principled stands include both doctrinal and "magical" superiority, as in the case of Tilopa, narratives of whose fantastic one-on-one battles over points of doctrine are extensive (Mar-pa 46, 47, 48, 58-9), and of Bhusuku, whose is the subject of ridicule for his inability to recite until an encounter with Mañjūsrī, the bodhisattva of wisdom, gives him the power to defeat his former tormentors (Abhayadatta 147).

Others are more strictly doctrinal disputes. When Dolpopa first publishes his radical *shentong* philosophy, it is so other to the usual practices of his adopted Sakya school that almost all the major Sakyapa masters angrily call him a traitor, but he gradually gets them to come around with lots of careful conversation and correspondence. He also has something of a rivalry with his strict Gelugpa contemporary, Buton, over their wildly divergent approaches to writing annotated commentaries of the *Kalacakratantra* and its canonical commentary, *Stainless Light* (Stearns 28, 35). Pemalingpa, on the other hand, when challenged to a debate for which he had no formal training, demands instead a trial by fire and coincidentally unearths a terma revealing the more decrepitude of his would-be opponent (Aris 64-6). Milarepa and Drukpa Kunley both explicitly criticise particular monks as examples of the opulence and corruption of the monastic establishment (Heruka *Milarepa* 129, 155-9, 177-82; Dowman *Madman* 33, 33-8, 44, 45-9, 59-62, 62-3,). Sectarian violence haunts the childhood of the Great Fifth Dalai Lama, who goes on to crush all opposition to the political supremacy of his Gelug school brutally and effectively in the aftermath of a massacre of his entire monastery by the Drukpa Kagyu, from which he narrowly escapes (Chitkara 99-101).

These narratives all betray sectarianism of a more or less violent nature, and many exhibit even implicitly a deep distrust of the monastic establishment. An anxiety about charlatans and false teachings or incorrect views is perhaps the natural counterpart of a dedication to ultimate truth, but it also works to complicate the image of networks of practice. Detachment from form and tradition is easy to assign to the same impulse underlying ascetic practice and tantric activity, but it is also an implicit call for a detachment from the very networks of practitioners that support practice, in line with the *rejection of distraction*. It seems that the value of all things and people, which doctrinally is non-intrinsic, is based solely on their possible contribution to the search for truth.

And yet the call for compassionate activity remains, implicit in narratives of negative relationships where an assumed audience grows closer to correct views through the master's intervention into and disruption of networks of practice based on incorrect views. These narratives suggest that one cannot truly search for truth unless one is dedicated also to *spreading it*. The Mahayana bodhisattva ideal, while not explicitly referenced in this corpus, thus simmers below its

surface, rendering suspect any suggestion that these masters might be self-absorbed, appearances notwithstanding. Undergirding this exemplary behaviour is a sense that these masters are exceptionally able to seek truth in these ways, uniquely equipped to discern both networks that will benefit them and incorrect views that can damage that utility.

Relationships with Temporal Authority

Continuing to address extra-meditational activities of masters, I turn not to address the ways in which they interact with the powers that are external in some way to their networks and patterns of practice. It is crucial to note here that in many cases the holders of temporal power are themselves students of or co-students with the masters in their narratives, or are aligned with one or another Buddhist teaching lineage. The ways in which these interactions are addressed here is largely outside of these larger contexts, except in instances where the life narration offers such contextualising details, which is a rare occurrence in this corpus.

Nineteen masters are on friendly terms with kings and nobles, from those like Pedma Norbu who are invited by kings to bless their palaces (Zangpo 79) to those who are objects of devotion for local rulers, sometimes, as in Tilopa's case, expressing their devotion as lavish donation (Abhayadatta 98). Perhaps the master most connected to temporal power is Sonam Gyatso, who is the first to be given the title Dalai Lama by the Mongol khan to whom he is a primary teacher (Chitkara 87-91). Six take on kingly duties themselves, whether unwillingly like Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal (Thargyay 55-7) or without question like Dombipa, under whose reign "fear and poverty were brought to an end" (Abhayadatta 34). Five act as mediators between social classes.

There is a certain logic to suggesting that holding one's leaders accountable for practicing and holding to the truth is exemplary, as well as to the idea that rulers might be yet another tool used for the realisation and maintenance of truth. However, I argue that these many alliances with and even assumptions of temporal power are radically exceptional eve in their exemplarity. Masters are clearly able to discern where these relationships will neither distract nor corrupt, but more than that, these power alignments speak to a social hierarchy in which men and women of power interact at a level inaccessible to the average practitioner. We cannot hope to aspire, in this lifetime, to such a level; exceptionality here functions at once to elevate the master and signal their worthiness and thereby that of their lineage-bearers to be followed, and to inspire the practitioner to follow the master's example in other areas to possibly be reborn at such a level. These narratives may also serve a similar legitimising function for the temporal authorities mentioned in them, and to the heirs of these authorities, as the rulers themselves are also exemplary. Support of and allegiance with masters is very clearly a mode of behaviour intended to be followed regardless of level.

In contrast to this wealth of positivity, a scant three masters are openly antagonistic to secular rulers, while only seven are treated or perceived negatively by the ruling establishment. Three passively refuse to take part in power relations of this kind. Here what seems to be at play is again an instrumentalisation that, when it ceases to be of utility, must be dismantled, as well as a sense that didactic action can sometimes require violence. I further suggest that as the most notable cases of

rejection of and by secular authority are on behalf of incredibly transgressive figures like Drukpa Kunley and Yeshe Tsogyel, there may also be some of the counter-cultural tendencies that form almost the whole of the antinomian master of the Western imaginary. Overwhelmingly, the image presented by all of these relationships is of an exemplar who uses what means are at hand in the service of truth and who is *dedicated to truth* above all temporal concerns, including those of power, prestige, and politics.

Teaching

This category is by far the most prevalent in this corpus, appearing as a theme within the main text of the life-narrations of fifty-seven masters, and as a list of disciples in the paratext of nearly all the life-narrations. While there is enough detail to tease out some of the different ways in which masters acquired students – Sonam Lodron's ad campaign is particularly notable (Snellgrove 112-3) – there are no rich narratives of teacher-student relationships as there are when life narrations discuss the master as a student. I have isolated several specific subcategories within this larger category, but I argue that in all of them the lack of detail renders more the act of having students exemplary than any specific mode of teaching. The *dedication to spreading the truth* that colours so much of these exemplary lives is obviously at play in this argument, and I further suggest that *acting to benefit the community* makes its presence very strongly felt in this category.

The lack of detail, and the lack of consistency when detail is present, speaks once again to the inherently situated nature of exemplarity. Only three masters explicitly undergo pedagogical training, but thirteen explicitly mould their teachings to the needs of their audiences, and twelve give teachings that result in miraculous occurrences including full realisation. The second is usually mentioned rather than being illustrated, but in Je Tsongkhapa's case we glimpse his practice of creating an environment comfortable enough for people to ask questions, and of scheduling teachings in such a way that people have time to journey to them (Tulku 11-13). The miraculous occurrences that occur following teachings tend to be recorded in a rote manner – we have the usual flowers falling from the sky, sweet smells, and spontaneous realisation on the part of listeners in various combinations, but not much that deviates from this pattern.

The obvious markers of exemplarity here support my previous assertion that the focus on these life narrations is more on exemplary studenthood, on the actions and behaviours of a seeker after truth, with the assumption that the realisation of truth is a one-time event that, among other things, opens up one's teaching faculty to an extent that exemplary life narrations do not really need to centre their focus on teaching particulars. The question of miraculous teachings offers a layer of complication to this otherwise fairly straightforward category. If teaching itself is read as exceptional, a result of a fulfillment of the exemplary search for truth, wherefore these even more exceptional narratives? Certainly they serve to highlight the exceptional nature of even un-realised teaching ability, but I argue that the emphasis here serves to demonstrate the ways in which a teacher worth following can be identified. In their exemplarity, then, these life narrations present modes of being for practitioners to emulate; in their exceptionality, they offer guidelines for seeking aid and

recognising expert walkers on the path. Exceptionality may also allow exemplarity to be aspirational, as I have suggested.

Before turning to my next category, I want to consider lineage lists, albeit briefly. There is a spectre of permanence that hovers over life-narrations in general, expressed most fully, to my eyes, in the very act of narrating and thus indefinitely prolonging lives, but is especially problematic in these sometimes-lengthy lists of names, titles, and levels of realisation. I contend firstly that there is an important element of exceptionality in these lists, which renders the master both suitably magnificent as to inspire the awe and devotion that allows the life to be a trustably exemplary one and suitably influential as to validate the exemplarity and teaching-value of the disciples on the list. In a certain sense, the master's exemplarity is extended like an umbrella out over the lives of his disciples, so that by being listed alongside him and under his aegis they are able to participate in his power and his impact on the lives of readers. My second contention is that these lists function as tangible evidence, more so than any formal element I might isolate in my categories, of a life lived in dedication to the spread of truth. It is all well and good to cite the traditional hundreds of thousands of disciples from demons to dākinīs and everything in between, but these lists of disciples function to highlight a reality that even a skeptic, or a reader familiar with the genre conventions of exaggeration and metaphor, cannot deny without calling into question the historicity of all the named figures and their frequently well-documented ties to each other.

The permanence of these lists, then, with their tying of the master indelibly and even eternally – or at least until the lineage is no longer held by a living person – to the temporal, physical world, is a statement about the paradoxically enduring nature of the truth itself. The truth exists to be propagated in all times, and the identity of the propagator matters only insofar as it serves to identify him as a legitimate source. These narratives are exemplary beyond the lifespan or cultural context or temporal location of the master, transcending specificity and situatedness by their reliance on general principles so ubiquitous as to render my analysis almost unnecessary; as such, they contain both grounding features like student lists and assertions of seeming permanence – those very lists – that identify them to endlessly varied readerships who seek some enduring sense of how to live in the world. Are they thus counter-productive, or even anti-doctrinal? This thesis is not the place to confront the potentially troubled interaction between doctrines of impermanence and the permanence-making that narrating the lives of masters entails. For the moment, then, I offer simply the suggestion that reading life narrations without consideration for the many other genres with which they interact is to miss one of the points of studying them as literary products.

Impossible Experiences and Activities

The experiences and activities in this category are numerous across the corpus, indicating their centrality to narratives of realised masters. As with other seemingly impossible phenomena, the exceptionality displayed by these masters is a crucial genre convention signalling the master's high level of aptitude rather than requiring the reader to take blanket statements of such on faith. Identifying the master in this way heightens the rhetorical force of suggestions of exemplarity

elsewhere in the life narration. I argue that beyond this by now familiar line of reasoning these impossible narratives offer crucial exemplary behaviours and mindsets for the practitioner. Be for I indicate my reading of these exemplary markers, I offer some of the narratives on which my reasoning rests. These are often some of the richest areas of a given life narration in detail and length. I have broken them up, as usual, into a variety of numerically significant subcategories.

Five masters have dream excursions, like Sonam Lodron, whose dream journey to his teacher during a great sickness results in healing by way of the dream-teacher hitting him on the head with a ritual implement (Snellgrove 98). Twenty-three meet regularly with buddhas, bodhisattvas, and/or *dākinī*s, whether, like Migyur Dorje, all in a clump with a generic vow to protect his transmission lineage (Zangpo 49-50), or as a targeted visit with the aim of teaching a crucial lesson. Naropa's is of this second type; he meets a *dākinī* with thirty-seven ugly features who tells him to seek Tilopa; when she leaves him, he realises that her features represented the thirty-seven marks of the world of suffering (Guenther 24-7). Twenty-two masters receive visions. Chokyi Dorje receives the full Oral Transmission from Je Tsongkhapa in a vision (Willis *Enlightened* 53), while Tsangnyon Heruka's vision is of fifteen young girls who tell him where to go to get his next teaching (Thargyay 41) and Je Tsongkhapa himself has a vision of Mañjūsrī begging him to stop asking for advice on understanding emphasis, as he has already fully grasped it and the bodhisattva has no more to teach him (Tulku 20-1). Seven masters visit other realms, including Tilopa, who tours a man through the heavens and hells to teach him the law of cause and effect (Mar-pa 53-4). These interactions with the world beyond the five waking senses indicates primarily a deep comfort with the realms beyond the physical human one. That masters are as effective in these interactions, as agential, reveals a non-discrimination, and absence of the distinction I, and other scholars, tend to draw. For these masters, *compassionate activity knows no constraints*.

Seven masters spontaneously manifest physical objects as they require them, including the enviable Pemalingpa, who never runs out of either ink or paper (Aris 39). Twenty cure health problems, including death. The narratives here are some of the richest of this category, ranging from Drukpa Kunley's healing of a woman who had suffered multiple miscarriages (Dowman *Madman* 35-6) to Tilopa's resurrecting of all the people killed by a sorcerer with whom he is having a contest (Mar-pa 55-6). Gyalwa Lorepa heals his own mother from an illness when he is just seven (Thargyay 31), and Kucipa heals himself of a tumour by meditating on it containing all inherently existent things, of which, of course, there are none (Abhayadatta 132-3). Sixteen can transform their shapes, whether, like Yeshe Tsogyel, into a fairly generic Pure Being (Stag-sham 42-3), or, like Kunkhyen Longchen Rabjam, into the wrathful form of a deceased master – in his case, Padmasambhava – or guardian spirit in order to pacify demons (Thondup 113). Some in recitation or language ability, most prominently Gyelwa Ensapa, who one day is able to speak classical and colloquial Indian languages like a native (Willis *Enlightened* 65-6), and some in ritual forms like Pema Norbu in complex Sakya dances (Zangpo 80), six masters in total attain spontaneous knowledge or skills. Fifteen possess powers of clairvoyance and prediction, most of which are simply mentioned rather than demonstrated.

Here, in these narratives of meeting immediate needs, masters demonstrate once again their *refusal to accept limitations* on their compassionate activity. They also display a recognition of those needs that is lacking elsewhere in this corpus. I suggest that the fact that attention paid to immediate needs appears only in the context of impossible occurrences is connected inextricably with the overall focus in these narratives on exemplary action that is aspirational, that encourages practitioners to *practice with a view to the long term*, to future births wherein they will be better equipped not only to meet needs, but will be able to do so in a way that simultaneously reveals the truth of the emptiness of all phenomena, represented here most strikingly by transformations.

My final broad subcategory involves masters performing the kind of actions that unavoidably express how much power they have over their external circumstances. Three cause the earth to tremble, five leave their foot impressions on rocks, and Gyalwa Gotsangpa Gonpo Dorje leaves hand and forehead impressions as well (Thargyay 38), and fifteen possess powers of clairvoyance and prediction. Four are able to travel instantaneously, fourteen travel by levitation or flying, and twenty-three are said, using fairly stock phrasing, to be able to control all external phenomena. By far the most interesting external expression of power is the subjugation of demons, performed by twenty masters in this corpus. I have already mentioned Drukpa Kunley's unique techniques elsewhere, but it is worth mentioning here that his life narration has the largest number of demon-subjugation narratives of this corpus. Virupa conquers demons who are drinking human blood by the power of his "twelve fearful laughs," binding them to protect Buddhism and ordering them to only ever drink the blood of non-Buddhists in the future (Abhayadatta 30-1). Nagarjuna, in contrast, defeats his demonic enemies by ignoring them until they are bored enough that, for a change of pace, they devote themselves to his service (Abhayadatta 76). Of all the narratives in this corpus, though, it is Palden Lodron's that is the strangest. His adventures in demon-subduing begin when he takes on the form of a wrathful guardian spirit to pacify a local demon who is causing some illness. Being rather keen, he ends up quite ruthless in his subjugation technique, refusing the bound demon even the smallest piece of special sacrificial cake despite his prisoner's tearful pleas. Despite these displays of ruthlessness, Palden is on quite good terms with the local spirits of his area, who inform the whole network of his goodness so that he is welcomed by the spirits of every place he goes, drinking milk tea with them and attending banquets that they host, enlisting them to help him battle illness-causing demons, and having joyful reunions with them whenever he returns home from retreat. He is careful, however, to keep them continually aware of his supremacy, aggressively subduing those who will not bow to him (Snellgrove 194-5, 196, 198, 199, 205-6, 219-21, 222-5).

These opportunities that masters have to display their realm-spanning power, their lack of boundaries, and their deep interconnection with the state of the world present an exemplarity of agency. Masters demonstrate that *active involvement in the world*, which I have elsewhere expressed as *acting to benefit the community*, is crucial, belying once again the stereotyped image of the hermit-renouncer. The ways in which these masters display agency, act compassionately, and go beyond limits, across realms, and across lives are situated in their particular contexts and determined by their particular characters and characteristics. But that they do all of these things is exemplary in itself, for

practitioners who interact only with the physical human realm and for those, a much greater number than scholarship that ignores the ubiquity of the non-human in these human lives would have us believe, for whom non-human interaction is a regular occurrence, and for everyone in between.

Compassion to Non-Humans

While compassion for humans and non-humans of other realms is always presented obliquely, by framing it as a proof of impossible abilities or teaching perfection, compassion for non-human animals figures in these life narrations very explicitly, often with the word "compassion" actually used. Whether as simple as Kunzang Sherab ransoming dzo and yak from herders (Zangpo 66), Sonam Lodron sponsoring the creation of two animal preserves (Snellgrove 119), or the Great Fifth issuing environmental and animal protection edicts (Chitkara 101), or as extreme as Chokyi Dronma's childhood habit of hosting on her own body lice that had been discarded by others and her use of her own clothing to shelter insect nests from inclement weather (Diemberger 153), these masters demonstrate forcefully a nuance of *compassionate activity knowing no limits*: that it must be for all beings.

But there are only nine of these sorts of narratives in the corpus. Some of this absence might be explained by appeal to the relative length of some life narrations, although many of the longest notably do not participate in this category. I suggest that there is another reason for the scarcity of what seems to be a crucial nuance to a central marker. These life narrations are much less interested in presenting the everyday habits of their subjects, in my reading, unconcerned with small deeds and humble moments, than in emphasising great events and major characteristics. All nine of these narratives are extreme in some way, whether in their specificity or in their wide-reaching effects, because the emphasis on exceptionality precludes all but the grandest acts of compassion to non-human animals, as it does the mundane details of friendships, food, and other elements of life that may very well be exemplary, but do not also serve the set the master apart. For all their interconnection with multiple realms and networks of practice, these masters are portrayed in their life narrations as islands. Their relationships are bridges rather than isthmuses, temporary, conditional, in need of maintenance until they no longer serve. Even devotion to a teacher is framed in this way, participating in the paradoxical approach this corpus takes to the question of permanence. The absence of more than a few narratives, and those extreme, of compassion to non-human animals indicates forcefully the ultimate exceptionality of these masters, even as those narratives that are present offer a crucial elaboration on compassion's extents.

Death

This final category serves once again to highlight exceptionality while delimiting the contours of another crucial exemplary behaviour: the good death. I separate this category into explicitly exemplary and explicitly exceptional sub-categories, although I hope to demonstrate how each can also be found in the other.

Twenty-two masters have deaths where unspecified "wondrous"/"miraculous"/"auspicious" signs are exhibited, while three masters unite with celestial buddhas or bodhisattvas, eight dissolve

their bodies into clear light and the *dharmakāya*, seven manifest to beings after their bodily demise, fifteen leave relics on their funeral pyres, and twenty-one enter the realm of the *dakas*, sixteen of those "in this very body." These events are obviously exceptional, marking the master as someone whose other actions can be reliably interpreted as exemplary. They fundamentally alter the master's identification with any human reality, emphasising both connectedness to multiple realms and isolation from other beings by representing the master as peerless. Certainly there is something aspirational about these narratives, but I suggest the exemplary is present as well. Compassionate activity, which these masters perform by these acts that reassure present and future disciples, cannot know limits, even those of sickness and death. Again, here the specificities partially mask an underlying general principle that is of central importance to the identification of the master as an exemplar.

Thirteen masters make succession plans on their deathbeds, mostly involving handing over ritual implements or clothing to their chosen successors. Twelve pass while in deep meditation. Before Pedma Lhundrub Gyatso does so, he announces dramatically that "the time has come to train in the practice of the Dharmakāya of death," entering meditative equipoise one last time (Zangpo 76). Dolpopa's last conscious act after a stroke paralyses him and steals his capacity of speech is to pass into deep meditation, his body dying shortly thereafter (Stearns 37-9). Seven will their own deaths, most as a teaching act, but Pemalingpa as a result of the death of his brother and an attack by a demoness that leaves him shaken (Aris 91-6). Eighteen die when they feel their activities are complete, all of them choosing to give final teachings, some very large, before they allow themselves to leave this life.

These more practical, and thus seemingly more exemplary, actions can be expressed by the marker of *continuing to practice until the end*. The pursuit of truth does not end with embodied existence, these narratives tell us, and the concreteness of practice allows masters, and those who follow their examples, to continue unafraid and fully prepared into whatever comes next. The dedication to truth thus marks both exemplary life and exemplary death. This exemplarity of practice is also exceptional, however. These masters are fully prepared for their lives to come to an end, some even planning the event, in a way that the people in their life narrations who die in other ways do not. The equanimity toward and even embracing of death ties back to a *revulsion for all but instrumentalised embodied existence* and to the non-discriminating consciousness that propels compassionate activity, but it also marks the master, in the final scene of life, as the fulfillment of exemplary striving, mirroring incredible birth and childhood to depict a life fundamentally other to that of its readers.

It is also worth noting that many masters in this corpus appear in other life-narrations after their embodied lives have ended, despite the very few instances of these appearances in the texts narrating their own lives. Certainly someone like Tsangnyon Heruka, compiling a life narration after many centuries and from many versions, might have included a few anecdotes. The fact that neither he nor any other author in this corpus does so speaks to one of the central problems of life narration genres in a Buddhist context, that of permanence. While the bodies of these masters

have come to various ends, their lives, problematically, continue, raising the question of how an author might recall something that is still ongoing. These masters teach against permanence, against fallacious assertions of anything unchanging, and I argue that a general lack of narratives – even those seven included are mere mentions – of post-death activity is a way for authors to present lives that adhere, at least in part, to the teachings of their subjects. Lives can only be remembered, exemplarity and exceptionality commemorated, once they have ended. Masters appear in life narrations other than their own for reasons running from legitimation to plot-pertinent guidance, but in the narratives of their own lives death is a requirement. In enacting it, these masters solidify the possibility that a reader might take lessons from their lives, putting a seal on the exemplary potential of their narratives through offering a final act affirming both truth-seeking and boundless compassion.

Conclusions

The realised master in this corpus is a moral exemplar whose life-narration emphasises any number of the following traits. Once again, I suggest that this list of markers must be treated as a collection of traits form participating in which inferences based on family resemblances can be made. It is this artificial, composite image that I will take up in the chapter that follows as I seek myself to exemplify the comparative method for which I advocate.

The Tibetan Buddhist master lives a life that makes marks, ensuring that all their practice is with a view to the long-term. They are committed to seeking the truth above all else, with a devotion of the whole self. Part of this devotion involves a utilitarian view of the body that is otherwise reviled and the acceptance of violence and other hardships with equanimity. In seeking truth, masters acknowledge the need for structure and direction by aligning with institutional truth and developing affective ties to a teacher. Their instrumentalisation of their bodies is paired with an instrumentalisation of relationships that is constrained by their rejection of any path whose features distract from its aim.

In pursuing the paths they choose, they exemplify ethical resource use and a dedication to spreading truth that often reveals itself as acting to benefit the community with compassionate activity that knows no constraints, including those of community membership, as masters practice non-discriminatory thinking. Female masters take this mode of acting to the furthest extreme, prioritising the immediate temporal desires of their others. In all their lives, their orientation toward transformation expresses itself in their refusal to adhere to convention, often from the very first day of their lives until the moment their practice ceases, which is to say, until they die, as they continue to practice until the end.

Reading Negative Space: The Mandala Overlay

The foregoing chapters have demonstrated the first type of similarity-seeking in which my comparative method grounds itself: intra-comparandum comparison. I compiled from the patterns I teased out in each corpus a list of markers of exemplarity, formulated as two nexuses of family resemblances. Here, I set them one atop the other to see firstly where they coincide, and to use that second form of similarity-seeking as a basis for my analysis of the areas in which they differ. Before delving into this task, I offer here a brief reminder of my method in doing so.

The technique I use is inspired by cosmic (de)stabilisation in the construction of Buddhist monuments in Tibet through appropriating and reordering pre-existing sacred space. I use this mandala overlay as an operative metaphor in my comparative turn firstly to redescribe both exemplary categories and then to redefine the academic terms with which I have all along been understanding them, exemplarity itself, and the concept of comparison. I have no interest in hierarchising or in value judgements. Instead, I seek simply greater comprehension of two distinct phenomena, in all their profound differences, by means of an appeal to a surface-level similarity determined by paradigmatic tropes present in both. As the markers that I identify are signatures, they are indelibly artificial and situated in my own academic context, rendering my object the production of destabilising uncertainty as much as of understanding.

I will begin this chapter with a consideration of tropes in common, and then turn to tropes present in only one case. In both of these latter sections, I will examine not only what it means for each category to include these tropes, but what it means for the other to exclude them. I will argue as I do so that both presences and absences represent characteristic properties of these categories of exemplars, although I will question the utility of these categories for predicting patterns in their respective genres.

Common Markers

I begin this section with a plea that the reader recall that I am dealing here with family resemblances rather than with lists of mandatory criteria, and that these appear within artificially defined categories imposed by myself as the scholar standing outside of the works. In articulating these nexuses of resemblance based on tropes as they appear in the texts of my corpora, I have attempted to be ethical in my treatment, but my own hypotext repository is alien to both traditions and does not include many texts that might have shaped a more emic understanding of resemblances in these categories. Nevertheless, I persist. The common markers of exemplarity can be found in the table below.

Muslim Masters	**Buddhist Masters**
Dedication to true religion	Seek truth above all else
Constant in study (of the traditional sciences)	Aligned with institutional truth
Display generosity; ethical resource management	Ethical resource use
Act by transformed and transformative impulse	Perform unconstrained compassionate activity
Seek out and love a spiritual preceptor	Acknowledge a need for structure and direction by forming affective ties with a teacher
Engage in remarkable activities	Refuse adherance to convention; Live a life that makes marks
Total devotion to practice	Devotion of the whole self to the truth
Ensure sound teaching and care for subordinates	Spread the truth; act to benefit the community
Hold fast to practice into death	Continue to practice until the end

This table demonstrates that even within what I have identified as similarities there are profound differences. It is as if the mandala and the site match each other in terms of cosmic order, but in each case the shape of the crucial elements is just enough different to prevent a perfect mapping. Why might this lack of perfection be significant? Here, I argue against the implicit articulation of universal categories by adopting terminology like "saint" and "hagiography" exhibited by some of the most prominent scholars of realised masters, their lives, and their narratives.[1] Beyond the terminological difficulty of applying a Latinate Christian concept beyond the borders of its tradition, there is the problem that even when two markers of exemplarity that seem central to universal categories, like the approach to truth or true religion, seem identical, it is evident with a deeper examination that they are not. Any universal category would require such a large pool of family resemblances from which to draw as to make it impractically large. Similarity cannot be assumed; it must always be argued for in the context of the specific cases being compared, and it must never, in my opinion, be treated as sameness. My objection to "saint" as a generic term is this uncritical implication of sameness. Instead, the project of comparison offers the possibilityof determining the small and large variations in type that make each distinct articulation of moral and spiritual exemplarity unique. Rather than a unified category based on markers like care or devotion, lineage or learning, I suggest that what unites these figures and allows for comparison is that their traditions frame them as exceptional, and often extreme, exemplars. Within this impossibly broad characterisation, I turn now to the difference-tinged similarities in how that exemplarity is portrayed.

I. Dedication to true religion and seeking truth above all else are similar insofar as they speak to an aim that is articulated as a path toward an ultimate knowledge – and I read in these works an orientation not simply to cognitive knowledge, but also to embodied and affective knowledges – of the nature of reality. They can be differentiated, however, by their shading of meaning. Muslim masters frame true religion performatively as well as intellectually and affectively, and there is a greater consciousness of "true religion" being identified with a (specifically Muslim) community

1 Here in particular I have in mind Hawley (*Saints and Virtues*), Mayeur-Jaouen and Papas (*Family Portraits with Saints*), Smith and Ernst (*Manifestations of Sainthood in Islam*), Suvorova (*Muslim Saints of South Asia*), Ardussi and Epstein (*The Saintly Madman in Tibet*), Roberts (*Biographies of Rechungpa: The Evolution of a Tibetan Hagiography*), Bellamy (*Person in Place: Possession and Power in an Indian Islamic Saint Shrine*), and Green (*Stories of Saints and Sultans*), although there are many, many other scholars in both traditions who similarly take an uncritical attitude toward "saint" and its related terminology.

of practice. In the Buddhist case, "truth" often appears at a remove from the performative aspects of the tradition, in part as a result of this corpus' orientation toward the exceptional. The sense of religion as shared practice is much less evident. I freely admit that my identification of this nuance raises the spectre of the binary oppositions of Abrahamic vs. Eastern and practical vs. philosophical that have plagued the study of both traditions. Even as I struggle with my disciplinary heritage, I am nonetheless a product of it. With this acknowledgement in mind, I want to emphasise here that I do see "truth" and "true religion" as significantly, although not overwhelmingly, different orientations of this similar drive to prioritise knowledge of reality.

II. A similarity that may require something more in the way of explanation is that between being constant in study, especially of the traditional sciences), and an alignment with institutionalised truth. The similarity I see here is on the grounds of a participation, on the part of both masters, in the workings of their respective religious establishments. In both corpora these establishments are also fundamentally political, so that even in cases where masters go as missionaries to such strongholds of untruth as Hindu-dominated Kashmir they are supported materially and immaterially by their home contexts. When we consider antinomian masters, who might be called *qalandar* or *smyon pa*, *malamati* or *ngak pa*, they are not only in the minority, but are also implicitly and inextricably located within their respective institutionalised traditions. This location is expressed in the Buddhist case primarily by way of oral and written transmission lineages in which the antinomian masters take part. In the Muslim case, these masters are located in the establishment by being situated within Sufi lineages or traditional educational contexts, or sometimes both.

By virtue of being so imbricated in the religious establishment, both masters display an exemplarity of hierarchy and exemplify the centrality of a self-identification – or an identification imposed by their biographers, if we are to be skeptics – as practitioners of their respective traditions. Despite poetic corpora in both Buddhism and Islam that question whether realised masters are truly or uniquely Buddhist or Muslim, and here we ought to note that while "Muslim" is an emic term, "Buddhist" is not, these life narrations very clearly situate masters as exemplary Muslims and Buddhists who participate in the knowledge structures of their traditions. That they do so in slightly different ways is more of a matter of context than of any deep-rooted difference in their approaches to and understandings of relationship with the dominant religious establishment.

It is crucial to understand both of these portrayals, despite their differences, as validation of a social model that rests on the prominence of religious institutions. These masters and their life narrations participate in and uphold social order even as some of the narratives within these texts show masters subverting the institutional status quo. This paradoxical affirmation-rejection is uniquely possible in life narration genres, which can speak in oblique enough terms that they offer exemplary flexibility and an awareness of the contextual dependence of all relations with authority.

III. Generosity and ethical resource management of course almost entirely overlap with ethical resource use. Where the difference arises is, in my reading, the way in which the Buddhist exemplars work within a highly developed institutional system, while in many cases the Muslim masters are presented as needing to be creative and innovative outside of the kind of institutional

structures that other literature tells us where actually present in many of their contexts. This juxtaposition raises the interesting question of what might be at stake in framing exemplary resource usage as embedded in institutions in the Buddhist case and as distinctly outside of them in the Muslim. Especially given that by now it is well-established that in both contexts masters were heavily implicated in the religious and political institution, it is difficult in both cases to parse the reasoning behind these different articulations of this similar marker.

IV. The markers of acting from impulse and performing unrestrained compassionate activity share not only a similarity in deed but a similarity in underlying conditions as well. In both cases it is an increased knowledge of reality and a transformed understanding of the self that provokes the performance of care work. But while the Muslim master exemplifies all four components of Joan Tronto's ethics of care, Buddhist masters manifest only three. Both are attentive to the needs of those around them, in the Muslim case primarily physical and emotional and in the Buddhist case primarily intellectual and spiritual. Both freely assume responsibility, without having to be coerced or pressed into service. Both develop and exercise competence, and in the Buddhist case the emphasis is strongly on this aspect, as competence, especially in teaching, is a reliable signifier of realisation. But only the Muslim master leaves himself open to the response of the people for whom he seeks to care; for the Buddhist master, there is no room for either criticism or recompense, no space for exchange. There is certainly a sense for both masters that meeting the needs of others is not a duty or a responsibility, but instead that emerges organically from their transformed characters. It is simply carried out differently, with a distinctly interactive bent in the Muslim case and a unidirectional one in the Buddhist.

V. In both cases, the orientation toward the teacher crucially makes evident both the transmitted nature of knowledge and spiritual power and the relational nature of practice training. The differences here are ones of individual nuance primarily, although there is more consistent emphasis in the Buddhist case on spontaneous embodied states that result from encounters with the teacher. The bidirectional affection that marks these relationships in both corpora is perhaps the strongest similarity between them, and I suggest that it is a commonality they share with student-teacher relationships in many different contexts both religious and otherwise. What I find crucial here is that while it is possible in, for instance, modern works discussing such relationships in an academic context, to find at least an awareness of the potential for toxicity and abuse, in neither corpus is there a single narrative of a bad teacher. Certainly, there are teachers who are less effective, often encountered while the master is on their way to finding their principal, perfect teacher. But the lack of narratives of bad teachers is to me a more impossible indication of extreme exemplarity than what I have explicitly categorised as impossible behaviours. That masters who teach, and their own teachers, are elevated and valorised indicates the extent to which truth and true religion are central to these narratives; if neither can be attained independently, the role of the teacher is the most crucial in maintaining religious life and vibrancy in the community as a whole.

VI. Engaging in remarkable activities, eschewing convention, and living a life that makes marks are all expressions of what other scholars have variously termed magic and miracle; these

are formulaic and genre-conventional actions that defy the scientific laws of the physical world, but are by and large accepted as possible by those who witness them and, at least in devotional works, by their authors as well. If I had limitless space, it would be intriguing to consider here the extent to which these impossible activities are in their details similar and different between the two corpora, but as I am here concerned with overall markers, I leave only this sentence as a suggestion of the rich possibilities of this kind of comparison. It is crucial to recall that in both cases these abilities and experiences are results of transformed mental and/or spiritual states. I see a significant difference in the Buddhist orientation toward posterity, whether it is for the sake of future practitioners or for one's potential future births. Muslim masters in my reading are more grounded in the present and use their transformed power more frequently than Buddhist masters to solve immediate problems or meet immediate needs. This difference in temporality is seemingly at odds with the orthodox Buddhist attitude toward impermanence, and it lends nuance to the familiar portrait of the Muslim master eschewing the temporal moment of his situatedness.

VII. I move here from considering these similarities within which difference is minimal to examining a relationship between markers in which difference is absolutely central. As with the first category of similarity, I have juxtaposed the total devotion to practice with the devotion of the whole self to truth in order to highlight something that might have otherwise been elided. I want to highlight what I see as a critical difference between the Muslim and Buddhist masters. While both are on what their traditions call the path or way, in keeping with the Buddhist master's focus on posterity to which I have alluded, they orient themselves toward the destination to which the path leads; the Muslim master, instead, orients himself toward the journey itself. Truth and practice are of course intimately related and ultimately difficult and perhaps even impossible to disentangle, but the different ways in which they are treated by these masters are central to an understanding of each unique paradigm.

I would also suggest that this end vs. journey binarism resonates with the overarching difference in emphasis on exceptionality and exemplarity in the corpora. Achieving the end of the path is inherently exceptional and aspirational, and in describing the behaviours and attitudes of practitioners at or near that end, Buddhist life narrations emphasise the ultimate meaninglessness of all disparate methods of traversing the path that leads to this end; it is the focus on the end that colours all exemplary behaviour and that must infuse the life of the practitioner above and beyond specific modes of or orientations to practice. In the Muslim case, by way of contrast, the focus on the journey requires a greater depth of articulation and a more immediately accessible approach to exemplarity. Practitioner-readers aspire to live as their exemplars do rather than to necessarily achieve some shared final station.

VIII. The emphasis on studenthood over teacherhood in the Buddhist case reflects this orientation, as the exceptional state at the end of the path is predicated on the master's experiences as a student and their selection of the most skilled teacher of the most expedient method. The emphasis on teacherhood for the Muslim reflects the transformative nature of being on the path, and the importance of community interconnectedness for proper travel. Students thus become sites

for enacting exemplarity in a rather different way than being a student, which is exemplary itself. In both cases, of course, the other orientation is also at play; here I am concerned with which is emphasised.

IX. Sound teaching and care find obvious parallels in dedication to truth-spreading and actions that benefit the community. As before, the differences are nuanced: they lie in the fine distinction between benefit and care, as I have briefly discussed above, and the possibility that "teaching" opens to pedagogies of performance that "truth-spreading," with its focus on knowledge over practice, forecloses. What is interesting to note here, especially when this similarity is taken in conjunction with the master's identity as a student, is a difference in emphasis. Buddhist life-narrations seem to privilege the master as student, devoting a great deal of space to naming teachers and guides and describing interactions with them, while narratives situating the master as teacher are few and less detailed. In the Muslim case, the emphasis is reversed, and masters are presented much more frequently and in richer narratives by appeal to their relationships with their students. This difference relates to a point I will develop further below on exceptionality and exemplarity.

X. Finally, the similarity of perpetual practice must be nuanced by an appreciation of the two different orientations toward death on display. The Buddhist master is almost always looking forward to a rebirth for the sake of suffering beings, while the Muslim master does not in these texts betray and awareness that even after death his teaching and help will continue to be requested. The sense of finality, of consummation connoted by the feast-day of the master's death is present in the life narrations that include death narratives. In both cases, practice up until the moment of bodily death is at once an inborn requirement, an expression of the master's dedication to the path, and the core that remains when in the last days of life the master's rational faculties begin to be compromised.

Unique Markers

I begin my discussion of tropes that stand out in my overlay with the affective, and will move from there through relationality, responsibility, and finally transformative desire. In each case, I will question both presence and absence, referring to the broad differentiation I have made between an orientation toward exemplarity and one toward exceptionality.

I. When considering the exemplarity of such affective states as *forgiveness and forbearance*, it is crucial to bear in mind that the masters who display them are ultimately manifesting divine qualities, both in the understanding of the philosophical traditions that surround and ground them and in that of schools of practice that emerge from their teachings and examples. Where I have used "forgiveness" I may have instead used *rahma*; for "forbearance" *sabr*. The manifestation of these divine qualities is central to the understanding of the master as *barzakh*, a uniquely Muslim principle, but they are only able to do so as a result of also connecting the master intimately to the life of his community.

These affective states underlie what it means to be a Muslim in the grammatical sense. Submission to the will of the divine is a ribbon that winds through the lives of these masters, and these states that I have isolated are merely the most explicit examples of how one ought to react to

that will. This simultaneous and almost paradoxical submission and divine manifestation is ultimately what allows the master to be exemplary; his life functions, the emphasis on these affective states tells the reader, to provide a way for the human and the divine to meet, at once a site and a conduit.

These qualities are notably absent from the life-narrations of Buddhist masters, despite my isolation of *acceptance of hardship with equanimity* as a marker. I argue that where equanimity differs from forbearance is in the location of each attitude. I must acknowledge that this argument rests in large part on my understanding of the linguistic connotations of these two English words, neither of which is a direct translation from my sources. While "equanimity" is frequently used in translations of Buddhist texts from a variety of languages, it does not actually appear in any of the life narrations in my corpus. I make this analysis, though, because these terms are ones that I have imposed in order to identify patterns that I see, and as a result their connotations reflect my reading of these texts. I see forbearance as indicative of an affective state, a profoundly emotional reaction that takes into account the person whose actions one is forbearing. In contrast, equanimity is a mental state, a conscious decision to consider actions and people without discriminating between bad and good, harmful and helpful, foe and friend. While the two have similar outcomes, allowing both masters to avoid reacting with anger and vengeance, they are fundamentally different processes that speak to some of the central qualities of both masters.

It is also possible that the unfettered compassion Buddhist masters show could be seen as similar to forgiveness and forbearance; I suggest instead that compassion is a different state altogether, proactive rather than responsive. Compassion exists before any action that must be forborne, while forbearance only ever comes to exist in the aftermath of such actions. The difference likely is related to a difference in each tradition's ethical orientation, but these texts themselves are largely silent on matters of prescriptive ethics, so here I focus simply on what this absence means for the nature of moral exemplarity.

Buddhist masters, in contrast to their Muslim counterparts, are constantly working to overcome external events. They are recorded as these events as impediments to practice or as avenues for purification, but their affective reactions do not seem to be considered sufficiently important to mention. Rather than emulation of divine mercy and grace, Buddhist masters exemplify a strong belief in and a resignation to the law of cause and effect. Rather than a submission to a divine will, Buddhist masters inculcate a mentality of change and a non-differentiating equanimity. These ideas come from fundamentally different places, and in any case these affective states are not highlighted or, in many cases, even mentioned in life narrations. Perhaps this absence speaks to the Buddhist focus on exceptionality, but I suggest instead that it has more to do with the overall emphasis in the Buddhist corpus on instrumentalisation of external phenomena. What is useful for attaining realisation, in the end, does not need to be forgiven or forborne.

II. The master's *lack of pretention* is part of the overall orientation toward submissiveness to which I have gestured, but it also stands on its own as a marker of a desire for unmediated relationship. Muslim masters display deep love for their teachers and their disciples, for their peers and for their God, and none of these relationships are possible unless the master allows himself to

be sufficiently vulnerable as to present his frailties rather than cloaking them in his strengths. What is often glossed as humility – or even blame-seeking in an effort for selflessness – I read instead in the context of this corpus as a profound understanding of the nature and necessity of human relationship. Masters eschew all the trappings that might stand in the way of open and honest conversation, actively dismantling traditional class-, caste-, and religion-based structures in an effort to open the way for the real and vital working of relating to take place. I argue that the earthiness of masters, their groundedness in both sides of the wide river they span between the divine and the human, is what allows them to truly be the *barzakh*. They are morally exemplary because, through this vulnerability that best manifests itself in a true absence of pretention, in the dual senses of pretence and self-aggrandisement, they are able to connect the two worlds in which they live.

Certainly many Buddhist masters eschew trappings and treasures, but theirs is not an explicit commitment to this kind of relationality. In fact, relationality within this corpus serves primarily as one of a variety of tools to reach the ultimate aim of realisation, in keeping with the overall orientation of these masters to the end of the path. There is a sense that the relationships between masters and disciples – almost always narrated exclusively from the perspective of the disciple – are intended for transmission of truth, but not for the same kind of bridging that occurs with Muslim masters. The openness of the desire to be on the Path is in itself a kind of vulnerability, but again it is not the vulnerability that is prized, but the desire.

Here I am departing from analyses that see the blame-seeking and crazy wisdom traditions as the root of the similarity between the *qalandar* and the *smyon pa*. In my reading, the *smyon pa* tradition as revealed in these life narrations is not at all about vulnerability, but is instead a radical reframing of the self with the ultimate goal of self-abnegation. The Muslim path of blame on display in my corpus is instead highly relational, with an articulated end of preventing the kind of awe and reverence for the master that serves neither him nor those who would devote themselves to him. I see in the Buddhist case a unique quality of radical self-abandonment, stemming from a belief in the need to inculcate non-discriminating consciousness. Abandoning the self first is what allows these masters to engage in selfless relationality, and relationality before this state serves its realisation. In contrast, for the Muslim master the vulnerability that allows radical relationality comes before the realisation of that union with the divine to which the life narrations in my corpus gesture.

III. The *responsible use of power* as a marker begs two questions: what is "responsible," and what kinds of "power"? It is clear from the narratives in this corpus that the power is both spiritual and temporal, both the power that fuels impossible and remarkable deeds and the power that lends social and political influence. To use these different types of powers responsibly, in this context, is to use them in a way consonant with the master's relational position and as a way of filling the competency component of the ethics of care. Thus, economic power is exemplarily used for feeding the poor, for instance, and the power of mind-reading to temper the behaviour of unruly disciples.

The significance of this difference is twofold. In the first place, especially with respect to social and political power, it connects the life narration genres to other genres of writing; particularly in this case I have in mind the didactic Mirror for Princes. That the use of power is the focus of

both prescriptive and descriptive writing emphasises an overarching ethical system in which these exemplary lives take part, serving to make clear that their behaviour is not simply for those far along the path, but for unskilled practitioners and unrealized people from courtyard to courtroom. By highlighting such a universal mode of moral behaviour, these life-narrations work to counterweight the potentially overwhelming force of the types of power these masters hold. Certainly the average practitioner cannot fly to Mecca and back or heal with a glance, but the works in this corpus, in emphasising an underlying theme, are able to remain accessible and applicable to that less-empowered reader. In the second place, this emphasis serves to underscore the ultimate relationality of all exemplary behaviours that colours the Muslim master's progress along the path by how he interacts with both fellow travellers and those others he meets travelling.

Why might it be that the Buddhist life-narrations, which surely also speak to an overarching ethical system and relate to other genres of ethical writing, do not highlight this theme? In my reading, the answer lies both in the orientation toward exceptionality and the utilitarian attitude toward relationality that I have argued are unique aspects of the Buddhist master. I argue that the purpose of the use of power in these narratives, for the most part, is intentionally overawing, intentionally setting up a much more rigid hierarchy of realisation than in the Muslim case. The aim here is to emphasise both the radical change that attaining realisation makes and the intensive process of transformation as some kind of gulf. These masters live lives the average practitioner might hope to live in a future birth, and, if anything, one of the major roles of these life narrations is to give the reader hope: hope that all the sometimes tedious or seemingly ineffective practices of this life can and will have effects.

This orientation toward posterity and emphasis on the end of the path encourage the practitioner to persevere, and the master's use of overawing power serves as a kind of advertisement for the effects of such perseverance. Moreover, for the more advanced practitioner it represents the use of skill in means, and is thus exemplary in a much more practical way. I draw a distinction here between relational power use and skill in means, which while focused on the needs of the practitioner does not allow for the responsive component of care ethics and is thus always unidirectional, where relational power use is at least bidirectional.

IV. An explicit *refusal to accept limitations* is the penultimate unique characteristic marker of the Muslim master. Here I must acknowledge that perhaps one of the reasons why this marker is not common across the corpora is that my Muslim corpus does not contain any major life-narrations of female masters, and those small ones it does contain are very few in number. In seeking a gender-neutral set of patterns, I have struggled to account for the ways in which gender makes itself indelibly known, and in this particular case I feel as though I have failed to do so in a satisfying way. In an case, the Buddhist masters do not exhibit this mode of exemplarity because many of them – disproportionately female – accept the limitations of temporal responsibilities to their families and their husbands, even though for all of them these limitations prove to be merely temporary. As a result of these issues, I feel I cannot conclusively argue that this marker is indeed not a shared one,

and cannot suggest why it might be present in one corpus but not the other except as a factor of the gender makeup of both.

V. The Muslim master also exhibits a profound *desire for transformation*. This transformation is one that might be better explained by appeal to the poetry many of these masters wrote, or that written by analogous figures, but here I seek to understand these narratives in their own terms, without appeal to hypotexts that I cannot say for certain were active in the minds of these authors. Instead, I suggest that the transformation being sought here is that which is evident in the life-narrations: the masters seek to become more fervent embracers of the Truth. How these masters approach this goal differs widely, as do their various understandings of the nature of the Truth that they seek to transform their lives into greater awareness of and reliance on, yet the drive remains the same.

I have gestured already in chapter two to where this desire leads and of what it is composed. Here, I seek to understand what is significant about it beyond its uniqueness. I read this marker as indicative of all four themes I have so far seen most strongly articulated by these life narrations. Masters desire to be transformed relationally, both by and into an ethics of care and as a result of manifesting divine attributes. They in being so transformed become the barzakh, the bridge, exhibiting an exemplarity of process and journey that in turn has the power to transform and to provoke a desire for transformation, closing the relational circle.

The Buddhist masters desire transformation as well, but rather than being framed in their life narrations as a transformation into radical relationality it is expressed as a transformation that breaks down relationality, replacing it with an unwavering sense of ultimacy that renders all relationships void of meaning in their own terms. In adopting a path of utilitarian non-distraction, reviling their bodies and detaching themselves from their networks, they work toward an end that has the potential to be final. They find their transformations not in a greater embodying of divine attributes but in a steady cessation of discriminatory consciousness. The Buddhist masters are transformed when all distortions fall away and they come to comprehend the nature of reality, and it is only then that their compassionate activities can flower and bear fruit. These distinct attitudes toward transformation, the processual and the final, play into this line I am drawing between the two traditions with respect to their articulation of the path as site for exemplarity.

As I hope is becoming apparent, these unique markers and their absences are what we can consider characteristic properties, at least in a preliminary sense. A comparison of these masters with those of another tradition, Christianity or especially *bhakti* Hinduism being the most common comparanda in both cases, may very well reveal different characteristic qualities. As with most things, definition by the *via negativa* is tempting; to say Buddhist or Muslim masters are not and are not, *neti*, *neti*, might be less of a risk than attempting to make positive statements. It is my aim here to exhibit a method that allows for both positive and negative definition and exploits the power of both. In defining what the Buddhist master is, I sharpen the image of the Muslim master by defining the negative space around him, and vice versa.

VI. The Buddhist master's *practice with a view to the long-term* is the next marker to consider. It is almost impossible to address it without acknowledging its root and origin in a cosmological system that includes multiple births. The Buddhist master is necessarily not only a practitioner of their religion, but, like the Muslim master, is a product of it. This most crucial difference between the two exemplars is one often elided in comparisons, but here I attempt to give it place. The exemplar embodies their tradition, a similarity that underlies all the many differences.

As the tables and lists of disciples and lineage transmissions in the Buddhist corpus emphasise, and the presence of relics after death indicates, the view to the long-term is also about perpetuating the tradition. Buddhist masters are mindful of the specificities of the teachings they acquire and the importance of their perpetuation for all beings in the world, and their practice reflects this consideration of what will happen to their schools and transmissions, their monasteries and their monuments, after their deaths. It is somewhat ironic that men and women given to the study and cultivation of emptiness should be so fixated on permanence, and yet their life-narrations very clearly indicate that they are. It is this sensibility that informs almost every aspect of their lives, from teaching to participation in practice networks.

The Muslim master, obviously given the lack of reincarnation narratives in the corpus, does not practice with a view to multiple lives. He does take on students, but in this corpus laundry lists of disciples and lineages are so uncommon as to not even feature in my analysis, and certainly it is not his inheritance of a particular set of transmissions that he is concerned with passing on. He participates in the broader Muslim transmission of knowledge, as is evidenced by the number of masters who are scholars or who pursue scholarly practice, but the uniqueness of the Tibetan transmission system does not resonate in these works. The unconcern that even masters who build khanqahs or mosques display for the longevity of these erections is striking in its contrast to the ways in which Buddhist masters treat the physical edifices they erect and maintain.

Why is it that this detachment, in a tradition where detachment is not necessarily as prized, is so present in this corpus; why is the view to the long term so conspicuously absent? This absence may be connection to the lack of pretention that is the characteristic marker of the Muslim master, where he truly imagines his individual actions and experiences to be inconsequential, or perhaps to be manifestations of something larger than he is. It is difficult to avoid thinking about the Akbarian conception of the Names of God manifesting in creation, and especially in the *insān al-kāmil*, when contemplating how the masters in these life-narrations are so very unconcerned with their individuality in so many cases.

But this comparison leaves lingering questions about the adequacy of religious texts, from practice manuals to scripture and its commentaries, to describe the behaviour of practitioners. That the tradition (in)famous for detachment and teaching on impermanence should have as its exemplars men and women who consider the long term of themselves and their traditions while a tradition with a historically lesser emphasis on detachment should have such detached exemplars opens uncomfortable questions about the arbitration of valid practice. Does one follow the practice manual, or the much more accessible exemplary life? I cannot believe that exceptionality is enough

to shield the reader-practitioner from this line of questioning, and from the uncomfortable truth that despite legal and legalistic traditions, and efforts like mine to systematise, there is no coherent answer to how one best lives.

VII. The mode of pursuing the Path, for the Buddhist masters in this corpus, is also distinct from that of their Muslim analogues. They explicitly *reject any path whose features distract from its aim* and in their dedication to truth all things are instrumentalised; here especially I have in mind networks of practice. The rejection of distraction is a distinctly utilitarian view of the world that enhances the emphasis in this corpus on exceptionality. There is at work here an orientation toward the end of the path rather than to the path itself, as I have argued, one that permeates these life narrations even as the purport to exemplify life on the path. The very genre name, *namtar*, complete liberation, speaks to the ultimacy of practice. Truth rather than true religion, a fact to be realised rather than a way of life in which to participate, is the emphasis for the Buddhist master.

The Muslim masters, for their parts, are oriented toward the walking of the path, toward religious practice as a way of life that is inherently communal rather than instrumentalist. There is certainly a sense that distractions are present, and to be avoided, but these masters are, in my reading, dedicated to the "and" rather than choosing one or another "or" when confronted with distractions on the path.

VIII. As a last category, we come to the *utilitarian view of the body*, which I see in the same line as the instrumentalisation of relationships. The master is paradoxically embedded in social networks that belie the stereotyped image of the isolated hermit-renunciant, and yet their every action speaks to an inward-facing work that decontextualizes the body and the social self. The body, more than simply a vehicle for the social self, is a foundationally communal, corporate entity, profoundly relational in its structure and inextricably bound up with the needs and desires and proximities of other bodies, be they human or non-human. To fully engage with the truth is to prioritise it over this body; other practitioners are merely parts of the social body, the body of practitioners, that must likewise fall away. The master's position relative to these other bodies is at once a way of remarking on the foundational interdependence of all existence and an indication of how this metaphor of the body can be used to instrumentalise its physical referent. Both bodies, the physical and the social, have value only insofar as they can be used to further the search for truth, and by virtue of their impermanence and the change masters impose upon them, often violently, they teach both the master and the reader fundamental truths.

The Muslim master, in contrast, is profoundly communal and corporate in his orientation to the world. He is marked, in this opposition, by an engagement with other bodies and with his own body as the very same tools that the Buddhist master uses, but with the aim of realising radical relationality with the divine rather than radical dissolution of the self that relates. While in Sufi literature, especially poetic production, there is certainly a sizeable strand that speaks to this very relationality as itself a self-dissolution, that strand is simply not represented in these life narrations. Masters instead express an abnegation of their bodily needs by *refusing primacy to their bodies* in favour of community needs, and in their attachment to and entrenchment in their various communities they

indicate that following the path is a behavioural exercise, a connective one, that is as much about the walking, and one's fellow-travellers, and the stops along the way, and the food and drink and guide and guidebook, as it is about the destination.

For both sets of masters, however, relationality leads to a more radical understanding of that very relationality, but the explicit instrumentalisation of body and social networks in the Buddhist case provides a strong contrast to the emphasis on an ethics of care present in the Muslim case.

Conclusions

What is evident from this comparative enterprise is, unsurprisingly, that these two exemplars are very different. Each is a product of the religious tradition in which they play prominent roles, even as their lives in turn shape behaviours and expressions of faith in practitioners of these religions. Through this process of mapping each nexus of family resemblances onto the other, I am equipped to suggest more than just the fact of difference, but its contours as well. Based on the above analysis, I have isolated what I consider the characteristic properties of each master, expressed in a sufficiently broad way that they apply throughout my corpora.

The Buddhist master's life is narrated with exceptionality as the focus; it is utilitarian and goal-oriented. The Muslim master's life, in contrast, is narrated with a community-based relational exemplarity as the focus, and is process-oriented. Despite many similarities, including deep imbrication in teacher-student relationships, ethical resource use, consistency in practice up to and including death, and a propensity to perform impossible actions, these masters express fundamentally different answers to the question of what it means to live a moral life.

These answers speak to different cosmological and ethical systems, as well as to the difference in genre at play in my corpora. Buddhist masters are remembered and even memorialised in larger works with a more explicitly didactic focus, existing as they do within a genre and a political system that centres on the authority of the liberation story and the master who lives it. Muslim masters are recalled and given devotion instead in a wide range of genres, many composed of shorter works organised thematically or alphabetically – a relational organisation – that are written in several different political climates; they as a result do not have the same cohesion or consistency as the works in my Buddhist corpus.

Can these characteristic properties predict patterns in their genres, or, as they are fairly broad, are they of utility in doing so? I maintain that an articulation of characteristic properties is primarily valuable in and of itself; it is a production of an uncertain and inherently situated knowledge that nevertheless provides insight into the ways in which these different religious traditions express moral exemplarity. In a world where talk show hosts and Twitter pundits are fond of making reductive, absolutist statements about what Islam is and what Muslims are, and where everything from Instagram to The Washington Post is flooded with implicit, usually commodified and trivialising, assumptions about what Buddhism is and what Buddhists are, understanding the lives of moral exemplars cannot be more important. Regardless of the historical accuracy of these texts, they portray Muslims and Buddhists for their own sakes, emphasising values and attitudes that

are crucial to opening up the self-understandings of religious people. The hypervisible Muslim and the Buddhist so ubiquitous as to be invisible are both victims of the work of early comparativists of religion, and my production of these contingent, tentative characteristic properties is part of an attempt to stand in the way of that epistemic and verbal violence.

Beyond its intrinsic value as knowledge production, this articulation has many possible uses. I envision, for instance, a project evaluating modern superheroes for how they measure up to moral exemplars from a variety of traditions, especially given the fact that superhero media seems to only get more popular with each passing year. I wonder how everyday political realities in places like Ladakh, with its simmering Muslim-Buddhist tension, might be better understood and perhaps even mitigated by examining how these different ideals of moral exemplarity play into both identity articulation and the assessment of the moral value of the behaviour of the Other. I imagine a possible resurgence of appreciation for life narration genres not as sources for the historian of an era or an empire, but as literary forms in themselves that reveal important things about literary production and the maintenance of readerships. These characteristic properties can reveal much if they are brought to bear on questions of authorship as well, and they may be helpful in discerning how to understand works that deviate from their patterns. I am under no illusions that the properties I have articulated are anything but products of both my particular corpora and my particular self, and I can see possible avenues for refining them and thereby refining academic and popular understandings of the power of the exemplary life, the centrality of life narration genres, and identity politics.

Conclusion

In describing this project to people outside of my academic sphere over the past two years, I have found myself often faced with a mild, confused shock. "I didn't know Muslims had saints," is the most common response, but people from American customs officials to blue-haired church ladies have also expressed surprise that Islam exists outside of the Middle East, that there are books by and for Muslims outside of the Qur'an, and that I am not reading them to fight terrorism (customs officials) or convert anyone (church ladies). The Buddhist part of my 30-second elevator speech usually lies, forgotten, where I have laid it in front of them. Which of these is the more enviable position, the invisible or the hypervisible? While this question is one with which the foregoing thesis has not had to grapple, and indeed it is one that cannot truly be answered, I believe that it is crucial to consider. The lives narrated in this study and the texts that fuelled it are repositories for examples of how one should live in a world where one is invisible, where one is seen too much. They are parts of living, vital traditions and are inspirational and reviled in turn by members of those same traditions. To consider life-narrations without considering the lives of real people in the communities that produce and read them is to do the texts a disservice.

What does it mean to consider Muslim moral exemplarity in a world where my friends and colleagues are afraid to cross the border to the South, or to cross a classroom in order to voice a different perspective than the ones their classmates and, often, teachers assume they will have, or sometimes even to cross the street? What does it mean to consider Buddhist moral exemplarity in a world where statues of Maitreya are ubiquitous in trendy cafes and suburban bathrooms but Buddhism itself is understood primarily through the means of decontextualized meditation videos on YouTube or the adjectival use of "Zen"? As I am situated in this world where Muslim and Buddhist exemplars continue to live and have their lives narrated for them by perpetually racist, exoticising, ignorant media forms and the people who consume and produce them, it is impossible for me to not consider these questions. I do not know that I can answer them.

What I can say is that it is incumbent upon me as a lover of knowledge and an incurable gossip to provide and to provoke alternative modes of seeing that decentre while also rendering visible the agent of sight. It is incumbent upon me, too, to destabilise categories both academic and popular, to say in my elevator speech that I want scholarship on exemplars to move away from "saint" and "hagiography" so that my colleagues and the non-academics with whom I interact can begin to think about what words we can use to better express our contingent, situated understandings of the world, to tell the American customs official and church lady both that Islam and Buddhism are much more than they or I could ever possibly hope to grasp in their entireties. This project is one part of my attempt both to consider a different way of seeing and to work toward an understanding of what it is that I have seen.

In "Methods and Methodology," I set out to challenge both a method and the long history of challenging it. I articulated a set of problems with the comparative study of religion and sought to demonstrate that in spite of these problems comparison is still a crucial tool that, when utilised in responsible ways, can provide a richness and depth that unifocused analysis cannot. I specified

the contours of responsibility in which I understood this goal to be possible, and laid out the concrete details of my method to be critiqued, duplicated, and improved upon. I have argued that the comparative turn must be framed as a search for difference, that in every case the ethics of comparison require a making visible of the agent of comparison and thus contingent the results, and that one of those most crucial elements of this visibility is a detailed articulation of method. As I hope "Reading Negative Space" has demonstrated, my use of the mandala overlay metaphor has resulted in a deeper understanding both of both corpora of texts and my own bewilderment in approaching them. In using it, I have been able to redescribe my comparanda and refine my terminology.

In "God's Friends" and "Buddha's Children" I examined patterns within the life-narrations that compose my corpora, distilling them into articulations of, in each case, a nexus of family resemblances that serve to define an exemplary realised master. In this performance of J.Z. Smith's first comparative moment, description, I worked from very large spreadsheets down to text, distilling for each category of exemplarity firstly a numerical breakdown, selecting representative cases, and ultimately arguing for one or more markers of exemplarity that emerged from the often-conflicting accounts I had included under the category's arch. These markers I collected at the end of each chapter to make a composite image of a realised master.

I must reiterate here that these masters are highly artificial; no master in my corpora, even those whose lives are the most extensively recounted, embodies every attribute. My appeal to family resemblances echoes moves in the study of religion to encompass diverse traditions under a rubric that allows for their similarity to matter. In this intra-tradition comparison, I focused on that similarity, but by appeal to the constructed nature of the idealised master who appears at the end of each chapter I intend to highlight that nestled within this construction of similarity that serves as a base for my larger comparative project difference still lurks. In real cases, no two exemplars will exhibit the same markers in the same way, and there are likely other markers still that a broader corpus may have revealed to me. In any case, these markers of exemplarity are the signatures that I have identified as giving significance to the behaviours and attitudes that are their signs. As signatures, the meaning they allow is inextricably situated in the context of this study.

These chapters represent a concrete example of my own method, the territory, if you will, that my description in "Methods and Methodology" sought to map. But beyond this project's borders, I must confess that researching for and writing them was independently valuable to me. In reading the lives of these masters, I came to know them in strangely intimate ways, and found myself thinking often when faced with a new or difficult situation about what they would do. This is the power of exemplary lives: you do not need to seek them for answers in order to learn from them. I approached these life-narrations with curiosity and have left them with it burning afresh within me; even now I feel as though I have just scratched the surface of understanding the Muslim and Buddhist masters, individually and collectively, who compose the case studies for this project.

I must emphasise that these redescriptions I have made in "Reading Negative Space" do not directly spring from the texts of my corpora, nor are they possible to find in the prescriptive works

of their various traditions. Instead, what I have accomplished in my redescription is an articulation of what exemplarity means in each tradition. This move allowed me the opportunity to redefine my overarching category and to refine what I meant by "realised master," such that the definition in my introduction reflects my reading of these lives. I have as a result rectified my academic categories into closer accord with the lived realities for which they purport to account. There are certainly many areas in which my analysis might have been extended, my categories further rectified, my comparanda better redescribed.

"Reading Negative Space" merely scratched the surface of an overwhelming wealth of possible meaning and nuance that comparison can provide. Nevertheless, I am confident that this study has produced a few positive statements. I have argued that even amid seeming similarities on such points as studenthood and truth-seeking, there are profound differences between the Muslim and the Buddhist master. These differences are illuminated by the process of comparison, allowing for a much more nuanced etic redescription of the unique characteristics of each type of realised master. The Muslim master, I have argued, lives into a profoundly relational ethics of care through being transformed continually as they traverse the Path, oriented toward the journey itself and providing an exemplary path for the practitioner to follow. The Buddhist master's utilitarian ethics are instead aimed at radical non-discrimination, experiencing transformation as an event, the end of the Path to which they orient themselves as they provide exceptional encouragement to the practitioner. In both cases, the overall ethical orientations of the tradition are echoed and subverted, adopted and transformed by the lives of their exemplars.

These conclusions about the nature of exemplarity demonstrate the value of life narration genres, and comparative study thereof, for coming to understand real people – real Muslims and real Buddhists, made visible in their own terms. Life narration sits at the nexus of literature-as-archive and the power of the prescriptive-descriptive text. It is so much less glamorous than philosophical texts or poetry, but somehow earthier, more real, more relevant. Even when these texts speak in elevated language or use metaphors that would make them inaccessible to the everyday person, they are still so much more human, so much more accessible, than any of the more elevated genres of textual production with which they intersect, which they influence and are influenced by. These are narratives that have the power to shape so much more than mindsets, and I hope that this thesis has been a site for them to shape method and methodology in this discipline. It is certain that they have shaped me.

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