

How to Read Like a Dead Horse Listens: Audience and Affect in “The Tale of the Separation of Horse and Kiang”

Brandon Dotson

Abstract “The Tale of the Separation of Horse and Kiang,” a 9th- or 10th-century Tibetan ritual text recovered from Dunhuang, is a work of both simplicity and of extraordinary richness. This article offers a guided reading through this performative text, and describes its use of various poetic devices common to the genre of ritual antecedent tales. It also teases out some intriguing structural parallels and reversals in the plot of the narrative, and in the relationship it imagines between horses and humans. An application of Peter Rabinowitz’s typology of four audiences reveals how the tale operates on different levels, simultaneously appealing to an ideal narrative audience of equine listeners, an ideal human audience that takes the world of this tale as real, a literary/performative audience that is familiar with the genre of ritual antecedent tales, and an actual audience of readers and listeners ranging from those who are ignorant of these tales and their genre to those who know them well. Considering also the plot’s arc and the role of affect in the bodies of the tale’s listeners, the article offers suggestions for how such tales impacted their various audiences.

How does one read a text that was meant to be heard?¹ Or a performer’s notes that mix snatches of a tale with shorthand performance notes? One can cite many perceptive answers to such questions from the field of oral literature studies, which equip one to read textualized oral performances and other related genres of “oral literature” with sensitivity to their putative settings and to their poetics. But what if the text that one reads, besides being an “oral text,” is addressed to a deceased listener? How can one speak of reception or emotional arc when the explicit target audience is the dead? And how does one account both for the intended deceased audience and the incidental living listeners and readers? To complicate matters one step further, beyond the divides of oral/written and living/dead, what if the intended audience - or at least part of the intended audience - is a dead horse, such that one also crosses the boundaries of species and of language? These are the questions explored here through a guided reading of “The Tale of the Separation of Horse and Kiang,” a 9th- or

1. I am grateful to the article’s anonymous reviewer for their perceptive comments to an earlier draft of this article. I am also grateful to Gergely Orosz for multiple insightful discussions of this text during his time in Munich.

10th-century Tibetan ritual text recovered from Dunhuang. The tale is addressed in part to one or more horses that are about to be, or already have been, slaughtered in order to guide a dead human to the “Land of Happiness and Bliss” (Dga’ dang skyid pa’i yul) that is, to the “Land of the Dead” (Gshin yul), as it was known within certain early Tibetan cosmologies. The guided reading introduces many of the features of early Tibetan ritual literature so that the reader may better appreciate this and other ritual narratives. It then borrows Peter Rabinowitz’s articulation of a fourfold audience and applies this to the tale in order to lay bare, among other things, its rhetorical operations.

Ritual Antecedent Tales

“The Tale of the Separation of Horse and Kiang” is part of a body of textualized ritual narratives that complemented, coincided with, and constituted non-Buddhist ritual practices in early Tibet. These interrelated tales, called *rab* (rabs), are found in over a dozen manuscripts dating to approximately the ninth century, recovered from Cave 17 in Dunhuang, and now kept in the British Library and in the Bibliothèque nationale de France. It is also a genre of ritual literature that can be found in later texts and in living Himalayan ritual traditions, as documented in Toni Huber’s recent work in Eastern Bhutan.² The most detailed study of ritual antecedent tales from Dunhuang remains Stein’s masterful “Du récit au rituel dans les manuscrits tibétains de Touenhouang,” and they have been studied more recently by Samten Karmay, Chabgak Tamdrin (Chab ‘gag rta mgrin), John Vincent Bellezza, Daniel Berounsky, myself, and others.³ Here I offer a brief overview of the genre and its assumptions in order to inform a guided reading of “The Tale of the Separation of Horse and Kiang.”

The majority of the Dunhuang ritual narratives concern death and the proper performance of funerals, though some also pertain to healing, exorcism, and other ritual aims. The tales are set in remote antiquity, and their *dramatis personae* are mythical kings, gods, demons, and priests. After a formulaic opening that introduces time and place, and the main protagonists, a ritual antecedent tale inevitably turns towards death. A character’s death typically comes about in a stereotyped fashion, usually through one of five standard tropes: marriage, hunting, possession by a demon, competition in a race or other physical challenge, or breaking an interdiction, such as by turning a cooking pot upside down.⁴ As a result of this death, priests must be summoned, and a funeral must be performed, at which animals, including horses and sheep, must be killed. The ritual success of

2. Huber 2020.

3. Stein 1971; Karmay 2010; Chab ‘gag rta mgrin 2009, 34–73; Bellezza 2008, 496–542; Berounsky 2017; Dotson 2008, 2016; Cantwell and Mayer 2008.

4. Stein 1971, 492–93; Dotson 2016, 81–82.

the funeral for its mythico-literary protagonist is then applied to the present, and to a possibly mimetic ritual for the deceased.

In addition to their evocation of a ritual-spatial universe set in a heroic past, early Tibetan ritual narratives are also notable for their use of a specific, formalized register of language. It can be distinguished from prose such as we find in Tibet's chronicle-epic, the *Old Tibetan Chronicle*, by its specialized lexicon and by its use of noun pairs, and also by the extension of the principles of repetition and parallelism, by which synonymous terms or phrases occur in apposition. Thus at the beginning of a ritual antecedent tale, characters are typically introduced in a "family scene" as, e.g., "the children and offspring of the father and patriarch So-and-So, conceived and begat with the mother and matriarch Such-and-Such..." This form of parallelism, or at least the use of noun pairs, is a defining characteristic of ritual registers used by Tibeto-Burman groups in the Himalayas, and is a common form of both ritual and poetic speech cross-culturally.⁵ As for the question of the larger significance of paired speech, one might venture that in this context form and content align to signal a larger thematic parallel between antecedent ritual success and present, consequent ritual success.

In a single Dunhuang manuscript, one often finds one tale after another, typically with the first one given in full, and the others contracted. In such cases, there are often meta-textual performance notes after the first tale, which give instructions on how to fill in the abbreviated tales that follow. The latter often appear to be little more than lists of people and places. This is relevant to Marcelle Lalou's initial treatment of such texts as "catalogues of principalities."⁶ In a more detailed study of early Tibetan ritual literature, I have clarified that these are closer to what John Charlot refers to as "redactional outlines," which include the bare minimum of information necessary—usually names of characters and names of places—that a performer needs by way of notes in order to fill in the tale.⁷ The meta-textual instructions, which may be as simple as "proceed as in the above tale," bear witness to an oral tradition, or at least to oral, ritual performances for which these manuscripts likely served as props or notes.⁸ The interrelationship between the tales is therefore such that one

5. See, for example, Gaenzle 2002, 47; Oppitz 2010, 111–21; Blackburn 2008, 159–60; and Fox 1988.

6. Lalou 1965.

7. Charlot 1977, 491; Dotson 2016, 84–89.

8. Dotson 2013; 2016, 83. See Huber's perceptive remarks on "text-reading shamans" in an Eastern Bhutanese context, which offers some examples of how such oral traditions become textualized; Huber 2020 vol. 1, 229–38. There is an interesting hint about the textualization of Old Tibetan ritual antecedent tales in a note at the end of a tale, also concerning funerary horses, that immediately precedes "The Tale of the Separation of Horse and Kiang." It reads, "this is the (ritual) section concerning the types [of sacrificial animals(?)]. It should be taught to others; I've just written down a little bit of it" (*chosmos pha'i le'u lagste gzhan ni lobs lagso 'dir ni gzbug chung zbig briso /*; IOL Tib J 731, 137–38). On the meaning of *cho* as type or species, often indicating parentage, see Stein 1971, 539–43. Note that *le'u*—understood in a written context as "chapter"—may here refer to a section, or be a genre designation similar to *rabs*, but that in other contexts it can refer to a "unit of ritual activity," and there are ritual specialists in Northwest Gansu known as *le'u pa*, who perform apotropaic rites drawn from the *Gnyan 'bum*; Huber 2020 vol. 2, 9; Gyatso 2016; Berounsky 2020, 28–40.

tale illuminates another. This is also true across a body of manuscripts that all include ritual antecedent tales that participate in a shared set of narrative and ritual assumptions, cosmologies, *dramatis personae*, topographies, topoi, storylines, scenes, and formulae. This relationship between the tales is not textual, as in one writer's awareness of another text, but performative, such that one must view each textual artefact in light of the entire performative tradition of which it is a uniquely fossilized instantiation. It is apt, therefore, to speak of shared formulae, topoi, story types, and so forth not as instances of intertextuality but of what Richard Martin calls "metaperformativity."⁹

One tale might expand a topos, e.g., of dying after challenging one's maternal relatives, or a formula, e.g., describing the funerary structures, that is contracted or garbled in another tale. Or one formula, e.g., the description of a corpse turning as white as silk, might be present in one tale and absent in another. Reading through this entire body of interrelated tales, one therefore gets an idea of the rhythms of oral performance, or at least of the options that were open to the performers in the course of their tellings. One learns to notice where a tale could expand, where it could contract, and where it might allude to another tale. An experienced listener (or reader), for example, need only hear the place name Jangka Namgyé (Byang ka snam brgyad) to know that a character in the tale is soon to die. Similarly, one hears or reads a princess's lament and knows that this portends her suicide.¹⁰ More generally, one also learns to recognize that stepmothers in these tales are usually wicked, and that maternal relatives are often dangerous. Absent their intended audience, or absent an approximation of that audience in the form of modern readers who have acquired "traditional literacy" in the form of familiarity with such topoi, the tales lose their richness and their resonance, and—though this remains an open, and possibly unproductive question—perhaps also the ritual efficacy that was their *raison d'être*. The question of intended and actual audience(s) is complex, however, and will be explored below after a guided reading of "The Tale of the Separation of Horse and Kiang."

The Tale of the Separation of Horse and Kiang

The tale has been translated and studied before, first by F.W. Thomas (1957), then by Rolf Stein (1971), John Vincent Bellezza (2008), Chab 'gag rta mgrin (2009), and myself (Dotson 2018). While it is beyond the scope of the present contribution, one should point out that some of the basic outlines of the tale can be found in folktales about horses, and that some basic plot elements, such as one of the three horse brothers being killed by a yak, are found in later Buddhist ritual texts performed on behalf of horses (*rta glud*). One conclusion to draw from this would be that, not unlike the genesis of some *Jātaka* tales in India, various Tibetan ritual traditions have drawn on

9. Martin 1997.

10. See Dotson 2013, which compares the lament of Sad mar kar in the *Old Tibetan Chronicle* and other laments in Old Tibetan ritual literature with the lament of Andromache in the *Iliad* as analyzed in Foley 1999.

popular narratives—including “international folktales”—in constructing their ritual antecedent tales.

In what follows, I have smoothed over some of the rough edges, as when a character’s name is given in variant orthographies. I have also taken the liberty of correcting small mistakes, as when the tale mixes up the names of two formulaic pastureland settings. Such interventions are familiar to students of oral performance and popular ritual texts, and one may in any case check my “corrections” against the original text. I have tried to capture some of the poetics of the original, particularly with regard to its use of noun pairs and appositional synonymous phrases. In order to make the tale more accessible, I have elided the few short phrases that escape my comprehension by using ellipses, rather than giving the offending words or sentences in transliteration, which distract the specialist with enticing philological conundrums but simply puzzle the non-specialist. In order to better point out the tales’ various poetic and rhetorical devices, I have also chosen to interrupt the narrative here and there with a running commentary, such that the following is a guided reading.

First, a list of the principal *dramatis personae* and settings may be helpful for following the tale. One might also think of this as a tale in three acts: a first act in the heavens involving the horse mother; a second act on the plains with the three horse brothers; and a third act involving the youngest horse Khukrön Mangdar and his partnership with the human Mabu Damshé. There is also a coda, which relates the tale to a present ritual act.

Principal characters:

Taza Lungdrangi Chamarön: mother of the three horse brothers

Lhaza Gungtsün: Goddess who detains then drives away Taza Lungdrangi Chamarön

Yiki Dangcham: the eldest horse brother

Kyangrön Ngoktra: the middle horse brother

Khukrön Mangdar: the youngest horse brother

Drongyak Karwa: the yak in Jangka Namgyé who kills eldest horse brother Yiki Dangcham

Mabu Damshé: the human with whom youngest horse brother Khukrön Mangdar makes a pact

Shenrab Miwo and Durshen Mada: priests who perform Mabu Damshé’s funeral

Settings:

Nam/Gung: the sky/the heavens, birthplace of Taza Lungdrangi Chamarön

Lhayül Gungtang: the land of gods to which Taza Lungdrangi Chamarön first descends

Jilung Dangwa: the land of wind to which Taza Lungdrangi Chamarön next descends
 Jangka Namgyé: the land to which the eldest horse brother Yiki Dangcham goes
 Chidroky Gyéngong: the land to which the middle horse brother Kyangrön Ngoktra goes
 Drokchi Tangsum: the land to which the youngest horse brother Khukrön Mangdar goes
 Miyül Kyiting and Mayül Tagyé: the land of humans and of the man Mabu Damshé

The tale of the separation of horse and kiang.

It was before the ancient times, the days of old... but after the deluge of the Tempest, and after the shifting of the Quake. The name of the horse's father and patriarch was Father Kharté Yelwa. With the mother Sangté Chöma, the child that the two conceived and begat was born as Taza Lungdrangi Chamarön. The horse resided, she resided in the sky. The steed resided, she resided in the heavens. There was no grass for her wide mouth. There was no water for her wide throat.¹¹

Not every tale begins or ends with a title, and many are fragmentary such that we are missing the beginning and/or end of the text due to damage to the manuscript. Here we have the stated title, which conveys to us not only that it is a ritual antecedent tale (*rabs*), but that it belongs to a specific subgenre of “tales of separation” (*dbye ba'i rabs*). Such tales often include etiological myths involving the splitting of an originary ur-species or chimera into two separate species, and can be found in later compilations of Tibetan ritual literature, including the *Nyen bum* (*Gnyan 'bum*).¹² Here the original species that branches out into horse and kiang (*equus kiang*) is referred to as a horse, but should probably be regarded as an “ur-horse.”

Following the title is the standard opening for ritual antecedent tales. They are all set in a remote antiquity characterized by phrases that, like the rough equivalent “once upon a time,” invite the listener into narrative (and ritual) time and space. The antiquity of these tales is not monolithic. Its dividing line, not unlike that in the Old Testament, is a cataclysm referred to as the *kyintang*, which literally means something like “hailstorm,” but might be captured more figuratively, given its cataclysmic nature, as “tempest or deluge.” This is the same word that is used for the cataclysm that, in Tibetan apocalyptic prayers, will bring an end to the Evil Age and inaugurate the return of the Good Age in a cyclical model of world ages relevant to early Tibetan “rebirth eschatologies.”¹³

11. *rta rgyang dbye ba'i rabs la // gan khar rga gzhe dgu ga dgu ga dgu gsang ga gsang pyo ga // na skyin dang bab kyī 'og rman dang gyos kyī 'og / na' // rta'i pha dang yab kyī mtshani pha khar rta 'i yal ba dang // ma gsang rta'i pyod ma gnyis bshos dang nams kyī sras / rta za lung brang gyī bya ma ron du ldam te / rta bzbug ni gnam la bzbug rmang bzbug ni dgung la [bzbugs?] na' kha yangs kyī ran ma mchis // mgrIn yangs kyī chab ma mchIste* (IOL Tib J 731138–42).

12. I am indebted to Gergely Orosz for this observation.

13. For analyses of these apocalyptic texts, see Stein 2010, 171–76; and Ishikawa 2007. On rebirth eschatologies and their

The use of noun pairs and appositional synonymous phrases, already introduced above, also brings the listener into the sensibilities of the tales and into their ritual-spatial universe. The mare *Taza Lungdrangi Chamarön* is thus both a “horse” (*rta*) and a “steed” (*rmang*), and she resides in the “sky” (*gnam*) and in “heaven” (*dgung*). Pairs of synonyms, one common and the other rare or archaic, characterize the language of these tales and set them apart as a distinct, heightened register. This is also true of actions, like “conceived and begat” (*bshos dang nam*), as if each action must be ratified. It reminds one again of oral performance and the use of an “echo singer,” or of various conventions for prolonging and embellishing each verse.¹⁴

After the introduction of the temporal setting, the tale begins with a “family scene”: a mother and a father have child. In narrating this act, the tale makes ample use of noun pairs and parallel phrases. This very fundamental aspect of opening a tale with the introduction of a family through the birth of a child or children to a mother and father may also be read on a rhetorical, or even psychological level. It may be, as Martha Nussbaum contends, that this invokes childhood, and a setting in which one was told the first tales that helped to shaped one’s experience of the world.¹⁵ One also notes that stories with talking animals are often among the first that children hear. In the passage above, the mother and father play no role in the story; their role is simply to bring this protagonist of the tale’s first act into existence.

In a manner characteristic of so many fairytales analyzed by Vladimir Propp, the tale is finally set into motion by the search for something that is lacking, in this case food and water.¹⁶

The horse descended, she descended from the sky. The steed descended, she descended from the heavens. As for where she descended, she descended in the land of Lhayül Gungtang. As for whose property she became, she descended as the property and possession of Lhaza Gungtsün. [Lhaza Gungtsün] put her inside of an earthen house. She gave her shoots of grain, fed her sweet barley flour, and poured her molasses-sweetened water. Being made property and possession, the horse was very rebellious, the steed was very angry. When the goddess tried to feed Taza Lungdrangi Chamarön in the morning, she could not feed her. When she tried to catch her in the evening, she could not catch her. Lhaza Gungtsün punished her, and removed her from the earthen dwelling. When she drove her

generally amoral perspective versus karmic eschatologies in Indic, comparative, and theoretical contexts, see Obeyesekere 2002.

14. For instructive examples of how what is orally performed differs from the text that the performer is using, as well as the presence of echo singers, see Huber 2020 vol. 1, 238, 401-402; vol. 2, 269-74.

15. Nussbaum 1998, 233-35.

16. Propp 1968, 34-36.

away, she descended.¹⁷

This continues the mare's descent through various celestial realms before we move to the tale's second act and the birth of her three sons. This first act is in a sense a prologue that prefigures some of the themes of the rest of the tale. Here we have a goddess trying to tame a female horse and failing to do so; in the third act a male horse willingly comes to be tamed by a human man. These entail reversals both of volition and of gender. The motif of domestication involved in corralling and feeding the horse appears in other ritual antecedent tales in which horses are pursued, captured, and persuaded to serve as psychopomp guides to the Land of the Dead, and it is intimately connected to the notionally inverse rite of passage by a human to the Land of the Dead.¹⁸

As to where she descended, she descended in the land of Jilung Dangwa (“Land of Wind”). She met Ji Charchur (“Rushing Wind”), and the offspring that they conceived and begat were born as three horse brothers, three steed brethren. The elder brother, the eldest, was Elder Brother Yiki Dangcham; the younger brother, the middle, was called Kyangrön Ngoktra; the younger brother, the last, was called Khukrön Mangdar. In the land of Jilung Dangwa there was no grass for their wide mouths, there was no water for their wide throats. The elder brother, the eldest, Yiki Dangcham, went to the land of Jangka Namgyé and searched for water for his wide mouth, searched for grass for his wide throat. Kyangrön Ngoktra went to the land of Chidrook Gyégong and searched for grass for his wide mouth, searched for water for his wide throat. Khukrön Mangdar went to the land of Drokchi Tangsum and searched for clumps of waving grass and...¹⁹

The tale has now shifted from its first act, involving the horse mother, to the second act involving

17. *rta bab ni gnam nas bab rma rmang ba+b / dgung nas bab // te bab gang du bab na yul / rji lung dang ba 'I nang ba ru bab te rji ba phyar pyur dang 'tshos lha yul gung dang gyi nang du bab te dkor su 'i dkor na lha za gung tshun gyI dkor dang dad du / bab ste / sa khyIm khang mo'i nang du nI stsald / 'bras kyI lchang pa ni / stsald / sngo mo ngar phye ni / bsgams / bu ram rnyung chu ni blud / dkor dang dad du bgyis na / rta la log pa che rmang la / mkhrIs pa che / rta za lung brang gI bye ma ron / nang glan ran na glan du ma btub nub gzung ran na / gzung du ma btub / lha [---] gung mo tsun bkyon / nas / sa khyim pug mo'i nang nas ni pyung ste / bskrad na / bab; 142–48.*

18. Dotson 2018, 277–78.

19. *gang du ba[b] na yul rjI lung dang ba 'i nang du bab nas rjI pyar pyur dang mjald te bshos dang nams kyi bu / rta ni spun gsuM rmang mched gsuM / du ~~btu~~ btam / phu bo gchen lo ni phu yid kyI gdang pyam nu bo 'bring po ni / rkyang ron rmang rmgog bkra zhe 'o / nu bo tha chungs ni / khug ron gyi rmang dar zhe 'o / yul rjI lung dang ba'i nang / kha yangs kyI ~~rtse~~ ma ran ma mchis / ~~mying~~ yangs mgrin ya[ngs] kyi ni chab ma mchis / ~~pu~~ pu bo gchen po gyi kyI gdang pyam ni / yul byang ka snam rgyad du gshel[gs] te kha yangs kyi ni chab 'tshal mgrin yangs kyi rtsi 'tshal / rkyang ron rmgog bkra ni / yul pyi 'brog brgyad gong du kha yangs kyi ni rtsi 'tshal / mgrin yangs kyi ni chab 'tshalo / khug ron rmang dar ni / yul pyi 'brog pyi gtang sum na / 'brog rtsi phyor ba pang pung ni 'tshal / bre mo ne'u kol ni 'phung / zhing mchiso / ~~da~~; 148–57.*

her three sons. In a poetic evocation of horses' speed, their father is the Rushing Wind. Among the brothers' names, that of the middle brother, Kyangrön Ngoktra, advertises that he will be the one who becomes the ancestor of the kiang. Immediately these three brothers' parents disappear from the action in the second act of the tale, just as Taza Lungdrangi Chamarön's parents were incidental to her adventures in the first act. Also in parallel to their mother, the three brothers descend from the land of their birth to search for food and water. Each goes to a separate, formulaically named pastureland. The first of these, Jangka Namgyé is a frequent setting for hunting trips in these ritual antecedent tales, which, as noted above, nearly always end in death. The knowledgeable audience therefore has a hint of what is coming for the elder brother who descends to Jangka Namgyé.

Then, after some time, in the land Jangka Namgyé, the elder brother Yiki Dangcham met the wild yak, Father Drongyak Karwa. Drongyak Karwa said, "Last year and in the years before, high above the sky, up on the top of the heavens, Lord Yabla Dakdruk the ancestral god commanded it: the land of the horse should be the pasture; the land of the yak should be the north [Jang, as in Jangka Namgyé]. This being so, elder brother Yiki Dangcham, go elsewhere."

Elder brother Yiki Dangcham said, "Lord Yabla Dakdrug the ancestral god commanded it, and indeed it is true that the land of the horse is the pasture; indeed it is true that the land of the yak is the north. So, today, looking to tomorrow, the horse and the yak have nothing to fight about. The horse will eat the grass first, and the yak drink water while he waits. Or, yak, eat the grass first, and [I] the horse will drink water while I wait!"

Drongyak Karwa did not...and he took him with his right horn, and gored him with his left horn, and thus he killed elder brother Yiki Dangcham. His flesh was eaten by birds, tearing, tearing. His blood was drunk by the earth, sucking, sucking. His bones were chewed by beasts, cracking, cracking. The hair of his head was carried off by the wind, wailing, wailing. Thus he killed the elder brother Yiki Dangcham.²⁰

20. *da re shig re shig / na / yul byang ka snam brgyad na / pu yid kyi gdang pyam da+ng / pha 'brong gyag skar ba gnyis mjald nas / 'brong ལྔ་ gyag / skar ba'i mchid nas / na ni gzhe ning snga / gnam gyi ya bla dgung gi ya stengs ba nas rje byab bla bdag bdrug / mgon tshun pyvas / 'is bskoste / rta yul ni 'brog yin ba'i rigs gyag yul ni / byang ལྔ་ yin ba'i rigs na / phu yid kyi gdang pyam ga la gar bzhud ches mchi na / ལྔ་ phu yid kyi gdang pyam gyi zhal nas / rje ya bla bdag drug mgon tshun phyvas bskoste / rta yul 'brog yin gyang bden gyag yul pyang yi[n] gyang bden / na / da de ring sang lta na / rta dang / gyag ལྔ་ gnyis shang myi 'thab 'o / rta snga ba ni rtsva la za 'o / gyag 'pyi ba ni chu 'thung shig / gyag snga ni rtsva zo shig rta 'pyi na ni / chu 'thung shig / ches gsung nas / 'brong gyag skar ba ma bgrings te / 'brong gi phyi phyogs kyis / rba gyas kyis ni blangs / rba gyon kyis ni bzar te phu yid kyi gdang pyam ni de ru bkrongso / / sha bya za nI rhal rhal khrag sa 'thung ni cib cig / rus pa gle 'cha ni khrum krum mgo spu rjis khyer ni / ban ban / / phu ལྔ་ yid ལྔ་ kyi gdang pyam ni de ru bkrongso; 148–69.*

The rhetoric of argumentation between the horse and the yak alludes knowingly to that of ritual narratives themselves, and their duality of ancient antecedent and contemporary ritual performance. Ritual antecedent tales begin, as seen here, with their temporal setting, and they end by relating what happened in that setting long ago to the present day. One of the most common formulae relevant to the beginning is “last year, and in the years before” (*na ning ni gzhe ning snga*) which is spoken here by the yak. In doing so, the yak collapses the logic of antecedent into a succinct statement: “in the past, the god said this, so... now get lost.” Except in this case, the yak does not formally complete the rhetorical syllogism with the statement of present relevance, “today, looking to tomorrow...” This phrase is instead left hanging, as it were, and is seized by the horse, who accepts the yak’s premise and the god’s command, but proposes that an entirely different set of consequences should follow from it. These same rhetorical devices are employed in a flyting exchange between two councilors in the *Old Tibetan Chronicle*, both of whom, like the horse and the yak, use the pairs “last year, and in the years before” and “today, looking to tomorrow,” in order to make competing arguments over the division of spoils following Yarlung’s conquest of Ngépo.²¹ Rather than flyting councilors, here we have a horse and a yak, and their argument leads to violence and death.

The corpse of the elder brother horse Yiki Dangcham is described using a formula for the pitiful state of a corpse, found in other ritual antecedent tales. It makes use of duplication and onomatopoeia (“sucking” is *cib cig*), both easily recognizable and highly prized elements of traditional Tibetan poetics.

After a while, the younger brothers Kyangrön Ngoktra and Khukrön Mangdar both whinnied in horse language, “tser tser,” in steed language “tser tser.” The elder brother Yiki Dangcham’s response did not come. Khukrön Mangdar and Kyangrön Ngoktra both went to the land of Jangka Namgyé as younger brothers searching for their lost elder brother. They did not meet with the bright, living face of elder brother Yiki Dangcham. They met with his dead corpse.²²

This is a very touching scene, with a mixture of equine features, e.g., the whinnying of the horses, with formulae that would be more commonly associated with the sadness of humans encountering their dead. This passage trades on one’s family obligations— typically imagined as either fraternal or filial—to find a family member who is lost, and to see to their funeral when they die. This is

21. Bacot et al. 1940-1946, 140-43.

22. *da re shig na / nu rkyang ron rngog bkra dang / khug ron rmang dar gnyis kyi / rta skad ni tsher tsher rmang skad ni tsher tsher zbe 'o / phu yid kyi gdang pyam gyi gsung ma mchiste / khug ron rmang dar rkyang ron rngog bkra gnyis yul byang ka snaM brgyad du phu rlag nu yis tshol du mchi mchi na / phu yid kyi gdang pyam gyi bshos kyi zhal dang dang ni ma mjal / nongs kyi spur dang mjald / nas; 169-72.*

one of the most deeply felt obligations in early Tibetan culture, and animates not only ritual literature, but the famous myth of Drigum Tsenpo in the *Old Tibetan Chronicle*. It is also voiced by the exemplary priest Shenrab Miwo in another ritual antecedent tale from Dunhuang: “I perform the funeral rite for the deceased. I search for the lost.”²³ In the absence of family, these obligations can be created through a pact of “blood brotherhood” (*shag rag*), as in another Old Tibetan ritual antecedent tale.²⁴ What follows concerns a related, archetypically though not exclusively fraternal obligation, namely revenge. The application of these obligations to horses is central to the tale, and, besides the obvious circumstances of their talking and emoting, this also pertains to how humans are here imagining horses in their own likeness.

The younger brother Khukrön Mangdar said, “If the flesh of the elder brother is not avenged by his younger brothers, if the nape of the neck is not looked after by the throat, if the despised heart is not cut out and if love is not repaid, if it is given up, if we do not drink the blood of his dead chest, then the throat does not look after the flesh of the nape, and thirst dries out our mouths—such would be a shame! The younger brothers shall avenge the elder brother’s flesh. Khukrön Mangdar and Kyangrön Ngoktra shall see to the flesh of Yiki Dangcham! We shall cut out the despised heart! We shall cut out the heart of Drongyak Karwa! We shall repay [our brother’s] love. We shall repay our elder brother Yiki Dangcham!”

To this Kyangrön Ngoktra replied, “Our elder brother Yiki Dangcham was fast among horses and skilled among steeds. If he could not defeat Drongyak Karwa, then you and I, though we chase him, shall not catch him, though we try to escape, shall not get away, and though we fight him, shall not win. Therefore the younger brothers shall not avenge the flesh of the elder brother, and shall not drink the blood from [the yak’s] dead chest.” He said, “I am going to the land of Chidrok Gyégong²⁵ to eat grass for my wide mouth and drink water for my wide throat.”

When he said this, the younger brother Khukrön Mangdar said, “You are a coward among horses! You are a coward among steeds! As for you, younger brother Kyangrön Ngoktra, from now on we will have separate lands when liv-

23. *shI ni bdur rlag ni tshol*; Pelliot tibétain 1289, l. 613; Stein 1971, 501, n. 63.

24. This is what I’ve called the “Tale of Blood Brotherhood,” and it is the first of two tales contained in the scroll Pelliot tibétain 1136. It has been studied by Stein (1971) and more recently by Ishikawa (2021).

25. The text here reads Drokchi Tangsum, which was the land to which Khukrön Mangdar, not Kyangrön Ngoktra, initially went. Presumably this is an error, born of the fact that the names of pasturelands in these tales are, like most of the place names, made up of highly generic and often interchangeable terms. When the two meet face to face once more when Kyangrön Ngoktra passes through Khukrön Mangdar’s land on the way to defeat the yak, it is again Chidrok Gyégong.

ing, and separate graves when dead.” He said, “I am going to the land of Miyül Kyiting (‘Land of Men’).”²⁶

Here begins a second dialogue that ends in a rupture. The first, between the yak and the eldest horse brother, led to the latter’s death. This dialogue leads to a permanent break between the remaining two brothers. In appealing to his elder brother to avenge their eldest brother’s death, Khukrön Mangdar adopts the familiar idiom of proverbial speech, one of the most ubiquitous Tibetan codes of persuasion. Proverbs are used to make points in philosophical texts, in oratory, and in legal settings, and their skillful use is among the principal arts of Tibetan rhetoric. These tend to appeal to immutable customs, applying “the way things always have been” to “the way things should be.”²⁷ In this, their logic is similar to that of the ritual antecedent tale. The appeal to repaying kindness and love is a particularly strongly felt sentiment in Tibetan culture. It is the inverse—and in this case the justification—of paying back hatred in the form of revenge.

The image of cutting or stabbing the heart of one’s reviled enemy recurs in Old Tibetan dice divination texts: one auspicious oracular response declares, “you killed your hated enemy without even having to worship the gods...Gather your beloved relatives and strike your enemy’s heart with a dagger.”²⁸ Here, the motif of revenge is adapted to horses, so no daggers come into play, but we instead find the arresting image of a horse drinking the yak’s blood.

The manner in which Khukrön Mangdar insults his elder brother Kyangrön Ngoktra as a coward also warrants comment, since its language alludes to the role that horses play in funerals. In carrying the deceased over mountain passes on the path to the Beyond, a horse must show “great courage” (*chu gang che*). Khukrön Mangdar calls his brother a coward by saying that he has “little courage” (*chu gang chung*), a point that in a way prefigures the difference between them, since Khukrön Mangdar, when he becomes the domesticated horse, will be characterized by his pos-

26. *nu khug ron rmang dar gyi mchid nas / phu sha ni nu yis ma blans / ltag sha ~~mcha~~ mjing gis ma gnyer bas / sdang gi ni snying myi chod byams kyi ni lan ~~myi~~ ma lo glon na gtang du snying re na // ro khrag khung du ma 'thungs na / ltag sha mjing du ma gnyer / bas skom kha ru skams na 'di ji nongs / phu sha nu yis glano / yid kyi gdang pyam gyi sha khug ron rmang dar dang rkyang ron rngog bkra's gnyero / sdang gi snying gchado 'prong ga gyag skar / ba'i snying gchado byams kyi lan glan no / phu yid kyi gdang pyam gyi lan glan no // zhes gsung na / rkyang ron rngog bkra'i zhal nas / phu yid kyi gdang pyam ni rta la ni gang mgyogs rmang la ni rtsal che bas 'brong gyag skar ba / ma thub na / khyod dang nga gnyis kyis kyang snyag na ni myi slebs 'bros na ni myi thar rgal na ni myi thub mgyis phu sha nu 'is myi lon ro khrag khong du myi 'thungs shes mchi na te // yul 'brog / phyi ldang gsum du kha yangs kyi ni rtsi za mgrin yangs kyi ni chu 'thung du 'donggo zhes gsung na' nu khug ron rmang dar 'i mchid nas // rta la chab gang chung rmang la chab gang chung na nu rgyang rkhyang ron / rngog bkra khyodo / da pyi slan chadu / so na ni yul 'bye 'o / shi na ni dur 'bye'o / zhes mchi na+s / yul myi yul skyi mthing du mchi 'o zhes mchi na' /; 173–87.*

27. Sørensen 2010.

28. *sku bla ni ma gsol bar / stang gyi ni dgra zhig guM...byaMs gyi ni gnyen bsogs shing/ dgra snying ni phur gyis btab /; IOL Tib J 739, ll. 16v1–7; Dotson 2019, 15.*

session of “great courage” in his capacity to carry deceased humans across mountain passes to the Land of the Dead.

Khukrön Mangdar’s proverbial image of codependence and consanguinity likens the relationship between brothers to that between the throat and the nape of the neck. It is all the more alarming, therefore, that the two brothers’ disagreement leads to a vow to graze in separate lands when living and rest in separate tombs when dead. This is functionally the opposite of the pact of blood brotherhood that binds a friend to look for you when you’re lost and to see to your funeral when you die: it is the severance of kin ties and obligations.

The elder brother Kyangrön Ngoktra replied, “Younger brother Khukrön Mangdar, when you go to the land of Miyül Kyiting, and befriend man, then tomorrow and forever on may you, horse, be harnessed by a bit in your mouth and develop sores around your mouth! May your back be loaded with a pack and saddle and may you have load [sores] on your back. May your lungs be constricted by a saddle girth, and may the heart in your chest grow weak.”

To this the younger brother Khukrön Mangdar replied, “As for you, elder brother Kyangrön Ngoktra, when you roam the land of Chidrok Gyégong,²⁹ though there be no one to ride you, may you be ridden by the stars in the heavens and may your back be stricken by insects and pustules. Though there be no man to harness you with a bit, may your mouth be surrounded by sores as if from a bit, caused by eating the rough grass of the pasturelands. Though there be no men to chase you, may you be pursued by swift hunting dogs. Though there be no men to catch you, may you be shot at by swift archers.”³⁰

Their dispute now beyond repair, the two brothers rain down curses on one another, in turns calling into existence the plight of the domesticated horse and that of the wild kiang, and authoring the conditions for each other’s misfortune. Both sets of maladies are specific and come from acute observations of both horses and kiangs. The poetic image of being ridden by the stars appears to allude to astrological lore about the malefic influences of certain stars and constellations.

29. The text here reads Drokchi Tangsum; see fn. 25.

30. *pu rkhyang ron rngog bkhra 'i mchid nas / nu khug ron rngog bkhra khyod ni yul myi yul skyi mthing du mchiste myi dang bsen bgyis pas sang nam nam zha chig na // rta khyod ni khar srab gyis srabste kha drung shu bab 'khor chig rgyab du sgas stade rgyab du sgal byung shig glo glos mnan te khong na snying nyams par shog shig ches gsung na' // nu khug ron rmang dar 'i zhal nas / khu rkhyang ron rngog bkra khyod ni yul pyI 'brog ltang gsum du song na bzbon gyi myi myed kyang skar ma gyen gyis bzbon te rgyab bya 'bras dang tshag ma / tshig par shog shig / srab gyI myi myed na 'brog rtsI pyor bas rang du sras te kha drung shu bab 'khor bar shog shig snyag gyi myi myed na mgyogs sha khyis snyogs shig 'dzin gyi myi myen na mgyogs / gzhi khyen gyis / 'pong shig ches mchi nas; r87–95.*

This essentially ends the second act of the tale, and marks the transition to the third act, concerning the younger brother Khukrön Mangdar's partnership with man.

The elder brother Kyangrön Ngoktra went to Chidrok Gyégong.³¹ He went to seek grass for his wide mouth and to seek water for his wide throat.

The younger brother Khukrön Mangdar went to the land of Miyül Kyiting and Mayül Tagyé. He went to the man Mabu Damshé in his stronghold Sakar Kyawo. The horse Mangdar said, "Today, looking to tomorrow, the horse is weak, the steed is impaired. You man, Mabu Damshé, can you act bravely at the mountain pass or not? Can you bear expansively over the ford or not? Acting bravely at the pass and bearing expansively at the ford, today, looking to tomorrow, when you are alive I will carry your body for 100 years, and when you die and depart as leader of the 700,000, I will establish you as lord." The man Mabu Damshé and the horse Mangdar both drew their agreement in the dirt. They separated horses from mules, and entrusted [roles for] each. They swore an oath..., made an agreement... When living, he will carry his body, and when dead, he will establish him as lord.³²

Unlike his mother, who was captured by a goddess who would domesticate her, Khukrön Mangdar comes willingly to be domesticated by the man Mabu Damshé. He states that he is weak, alluding to his inability to kill the yak. He then reveals how he can compensate for some of man's own weaknesses by carrying him across the passes and fords to the Land of the Dead. Crucially, this mutually beneficial pact in which each compensates for the other's weakness, is proposed not by the man but by the horse. It is, as it were, the "horse's idea" to serve as mount to the Land of the Dead. The pact that they make parallels the rupture of the horse brothers in that it concerns their relationship to one another in both life and in death. Here horse and human communicate plainly, but their agreement is not only oral and verbal. The pact must be solemnized with writing, however pictographic and rudimentary, and also by oaths. The agreement also includes practical matters: the horse will not be doing work that is proper to a mule.

31. The text here reads "Drokchi Tangsum"; see fn. 25.

32. *pu rgyang ron rmgog bkhra ni 'brog phyi ldang sum du mchiso // kha yangs gyi ni rtsi 'tshal br mgrin yangs gyi ni chab 'tshal du ma / mchiso // nu khu gron rmang dar ni yul myi yul skyi mthing smra yul thag rgyad du mchi / te / mkhar sa mkhar skya bo'i nang na myi rma bu ldam shar gyi gan du mchiste // rta rmang dar 'i / mchid nas // de ring sang lda na rta la ni nyam nyes rmang la ni yang thag gyis myed na // myi rma bu ldam shad / khyod chab gang la ru bgyi 'am myi bgyi yang ba rab du sbog gam myi sbog // chab gang la ru bgyis / la yang ba rab du sbogs na // de ring sang lda na ni bshos tshe lo brgya la ni ring bkhuro // nongs tshe bdun bum gyi bdag du gsbegsna ni rje gdabo / zhes mchi nas // myi rma bu ldam shad dang rta rmang dar gnyis tha / tshIgs ni skam la bchas dre'u rta ni dbye la stad te mna bchad mtho bchade bchad gyi mtheb li gong / tha bgyIs tshIgs bgyIs te gnyI dro thab mo gor te / bshos na ni ring bkur nongsna ni rdze gdab phar bgyiste /; 197-104.*

Like everyone else in this story, the man has a very formulaic name, as does his geographical setting. Most of these names have lexical meanings, and Mabu Damshé is no exception: he is “Son of Man, Storyteller.”³³ He may as well be named “archetypal man.” There are two places given as his land, Miyül Kyiting and Mayül Tagyé. Within the ritual-spatial universe of these tales, these are the names of the land of humans, as opposed to, say, the land of gods, demons, etc. The existence of various places on the Tibetan plateau with these names is probably a secondary development, in which this important site in the ritual spatial universe was mapped onto the physical landscape.³⁴ Elsewhere, the ritual and the physical landscapes are coterminous insofar as many of the geographical settings for ritual antecedent tales are sites along the course of the Tsangpo (Brahmaputra) River, imagined or re-membered within these tales as ancient kingdoms, some with claims to prehistoric existence.³⁵

The language describing the oaths makes use of the poetic device of hyperbaton, where words, or parts of a word, that naturally go together are separated in such a way that their meaning can still be comprehended, as in the expression “un-bloody-likely.”³⁶ Thus the term *mna’ mtho bcad*, “to make an oath,” is divided into *mna’ bcad mtho bcad*, where the repetition of the verb *bcad* hints at the fact that the two nouns preceding are separated halves of a compound. The same is done for the phrase “made an agreement,” *tha tshigs bgyis*, which is similarly arrived at by hyperbaton in the phrase *tha bgyis tshigs bgyis*. This is one of the more obscure and lesser known poetic devices in Tibetan ritual literature, and one that has confounded those translators who have proceeded literally, word-by-word. It is conceivable that this type of hyperbaton derives from conventions of oral performance that draw out and repeat and vary a given line.³⁷

The man Mabu Damshé mounted the horse Khukrön Mangdar, and lashed his tiger skin quiver and his leopard skin quiver... The rider squeezed his sides, and when they arrived at the land ChidroK Gyégong, the younger brother Khukrön Mangdar said, “I will be ashamed before my elder brother, I will be ashamed be-

33. Though the orthographies differ, the preferred reading is probably *Ltam shad* rather than *Ldam shad*. *Ltam* means words or stories, whereas *ldam* means mud or dirty water. *Shad* is a straight punctuation mark, but in the name *Ltam shad*, one can easily surmise that the labial prefix *b*, following the labial suffix *m*, has been elided, such that the “correct” spelling of his name is **Ltam bshad*, which means “speaks words or stories,” a most fitting name for the only human in a tale full of horses.

34. Blezer 2011.

35. Dotson 2012, 170–71; Hazod 2019.

36. Smyth 1920, 679.

37. Take this example from the *spos rabs* from Lawa, recorded by Huber, where the syllables *ay* and *way* are added to a line to break it up in a pattern repeated for the other lines:

stag shar gnyis kyis spos ‘tshal phyin /
way stag shar gnyis kyis spos ‘tshal phyin /
ay spos ‘tshal ay phyin /
ay stag shar gnyis; Huber 2020 vol. 1, 238.

fore Kyangrön Ngoktra. Cover this horse's face, cover this steed's face." The man Mabu Damshé covered the horse's face, covered the steed's visage.

When they arrived at the land of Jangka Namgyé, they met the wild yak, Father Drongyak Karwa there. [A description of the battle with the yak, with some details of the melee]... and thus he killed Drongyak Karwa.

The younger brother Khukrön Mangdar said, "The elder brother's love is repaid. Yiki Dangcham's love is repaid. The despised heart is cut out. Drongyak Karwa's despised heart is cut out. The younger brother has avenged the flesh of the elder brother horse. I have drunk the blood from the chest. The throat takes care of the flesh of the nape. Now, cut the yak's flesh into pieces. Cut the yak's hide for clothing. Attach its tail to this horse's mane. Now, I'll show off to the elder brother, show off to Kyangrön Ngoktra." The man Mabu Damshé cut the yak's flesh into pieces, and cut its hide for clothing. He attached the tail to the mane of the horse Khukrön Mangdar.³⁸

In this part of the tale, man holds up his end of the bargain by killing the yak that Kukrön Mangdar is unable to kill on his own. There is a reversal here reflecting the change in status between the two former brothers before and after Kukrön Mangdar's successful avenging of their elder brother's death. Before this is done, Kukrön Mangdar feels shame (*ngo tsha*) at the idea of Kyangrön Ngoktra seeing him ridden by a man—basically a fulfillment of his earlier curse. Once the man has helped him kill the yak, though, he glories in its death, has a trophy tied to his mane, and wants to show off (*ngom*) his victory to his elder brother Kyangrön Ngoktra, essentially to shame him for his cowardice.

This episode is also notable for the sharing of the yak's carcass between horse and human, constituting something not unlike a sacrificial feast.³⁹

38. *rta / khug ron rmang dar la myi rma bu ltam shad bchibste / stag ral gzig ral ni skyes gyi ring la dregs / / rta bo ni brang mnan te / / yul phyi 'brog rgyad gosu byon na / nu khug ron rmang dar 'i mchid nas phu bo ngo tsha na rgyang ron rngog bkhra la ngo tsha 'is rta'i ngo khob shig rmang gi ngo khob shig ches mchi na / / myi rma bu lda[m] shad gyIs rta'i ngo bkhob rmang gyi zhal bkab te / / yul pyang kha smam brgyadu mchis na / / pha 'br[ong] gyag skar ba dang de ru mjalo / / myi rma bu ldam shad gyis / khu lo ni sbyangs gyIs mdzad / dbya[-] dkar ni pongs la bkbrol te sngun na chi thud thud na 'brong gyag skar ba thud thud pyi na ci breng [---] na nu khug ron rmang dar breng breng / myi rma bu ldam shar gyis mchog gar ni dra bkhug glu dmar [ni] ldang bzar te dad ~~du~~ dgu gyasu bab na nam mdzong gyon du pyung dad dgu gyon du bab na nam mtshong gyosn du byung ~~ni~~ te 'brong gyag skar ba ni de ru bkhum mo / / nu khug ron rmang dar 'i mchid nas / / pu byams kyi ni lan lono yid ke gdang phyam byams gyi lan lon / / stang gi snying chodo / 'brong gyag skar ba stang gyI snying chodo / / rta pu sha ni nus lono ro kbrag ni khong du 'thungso ldag sha ni [mching] gyIs gnyero / da gyag sha ni lhu ru gshogs shIg gyag lgo ni rasu dros shIg / rnga ma ban [---] ni rta kho bo'i rngog la thogs shig / / da pu la ngom gdab na rgyang ron rngog bgra la ngom [---] zhes mchi nas / / myi rma bu ldam shad gyis gyag sha ni lhu ru bkerald gyag lko ni [rasu] draste / rnga ma ban chig rta khug ro rmang dar 'i rngog la bthags te /; 1104–119.*

39. I've avoided the word "sacrifice" to describe the horse's slaughter in these funerals because, as I've argued elsewhere, in

Having cut out the despised heart and having repaid the love of the elder brother, they went to the land Miyul Kyiting, Mayul Tagyé. Then, after some time, as for the man Mabu Damshé, *dü* demons came down from the sky and cut *si* demons rose from the earth and...cut... the *sin* demons loosened the fastenings. The virile lord died, the excellent turquoise crumbled. The lord died, he died from... The turquoise crumbled, it crumbled from his head. The virile lord died, the beloved was lost, and he was no more.⁴⁰

This marks the decisive turn, and the full transformation of what might otherwise be an etiological myth of horse domestication into a ritual antecedent tale about the role of horses in funerals. On balance, the third act of the tale, which concerns the partnership between horse and human, emphasizes the man Mabu Damshé's side of the pact, which results in the killing of the yak and the resolution of tension created in the second act. Only here at the end does it turn to the horse Kukrön Mangdar's duties toward the man Mabu Damshé, which can only be discharged upon the man's death. His death is described using a formula for death found in ritual antecedent tales and oracular responses, in which the *dü* (*bdud*) demons descend from above while the *si* (*sri*) demons rise from below. It also employs another recurring formula that pairs a dying lord and a crumbling or broken turquoise in a poetic evocation of death and loss that emphasizes the importance of this type of stone and its connection with vital forces. The pairing of loss and death also goes back to the fundamental obligations of family members to search for their lost and to bury their dead.

The tale now shifts to the end of its third act and to its coda.

*Pha*⁴¹ Shenrab Miwo and Durshen Mada built [the various funerary structures and arranged them properly]... As the beloved companion, the younger brother Khukrön Mangdar was courageous in crossing the passes and broad in crossing the fords. He established the lord in a high place, and they grazed on northern grass alike and...together.

In ancient times, it was excellent, and now it shall be successful. Today, look-

this tale “the horse occupies the place paradigmatically held by the gods. If there is a sacrificial animal in this tale it is undoubtedly the yak, which the man kills and then offers to the horse. To wit, the yak's body is divided according to the horse's commands, and the horse requests and receives a choice part, while the man cuts the meat into pieces, presumably to eat”; Dotson 2018, 286.

40. *stang gyi ni snying bchad byams gyi [ni lan] blan // yul myi yul skyi mthing smra yul thag rgyad du mchiso // da re shig re shig na [myi [rma bu ldam] shad ni gnam nas ni bdud [4 syllables possibly rubbed out] / nas bchad // sa las sri lag+ng ste chags / sgrogs ni srin gyis bkhrōl te rje ni dpan te nongs gyu ni bzang grugs rje grongs ni g[---] las grongs gyu grugs ni dbu las grugs / rje dphan te ni nongs sdug ste ni rlag gyi [---] myed nas /; 1119–24.*

41. While *pha* is usually translated with “father,” it is also known to refer to a class of ritual specialists; see Huber 2020 vol.2, 11–12.

ing to tomorrow, you the beloved companions and dear mounts, also be like that! Courage—show it at the pass! Breadth—show it when crossing the ford!⁴²

The end of the tale resolves its third act, with the horse Khukrön Mangdar carrying the man Mabu Damshé to the Land of the Dead. Just as these two are exemplars or even archetypes of the partnership between horses and humans, so too the priests who are summoned to perform the funeral are also exemplary priests for those who perform these rites.

The end of the tale further glorifies the horse by stating that horse and human will enjoy the same station in the afterlife, and graze on grass together. This point is even more explicit in other ritual antecedent tales, where the image of the grass-grazing man in the Land of the Dead uses the trope of the wild, the strange, and of reverse domestication as a succinct, iconic statement of the unknowability of death.⁴³ This clear assertion of posthumous equality for horse and human is the closing image of the tale prior to the statement of relevance, and it crowns the horse in glory for its role as man's "beloved companion."

The tale closes with a coda including the formula that applies its events to the present ritual situation for which it is intended and of which it is a part. This also includes a shift in voice to the second person hortative, "you." The "you" directly addressed in this way are the horses that are killed in order to serve as mounts to the Beyond for the human deceased as part of a funeral rite. One may read this as indicating that the entire tale has been explicitly told to these horses. As we will see, however, the tale operates on different levels and for different audiences, only some of which include horses.

The last two and a half lines of the manuscript are covered in conservators' gauze and tape, making it difficult to discern the tale's full ending.⁴⁴ Our tale has come to an end more or less satisfactorily, however, with the statement of relevance applying the ancient antecedent to the present context of its telling.

Audiences Living and Dead, Human and Equine

42. *pha gshen rabs myi bo dad dur gshen rma dad bas la ni rgyal skos lung du [---] bchas / ste gshin ste nyer bu ni bchas rtan bang rtan khod mo ni bkhod de bzang ni se la b[---] sa ni gral du dngar te // do ma snying dags su nu khu rmang dar 'is chab gang ni la ru b[---] ba ni rabs du bsbogste // rje gral ni mtho gxyer byang rtsI ni gad mnabs mtshungs [---] mtshungs mnyams dang ni mnyamso // gna 'I ni pul pyungo da 'i la ni la bsagso // de [ring ni] sang lda na phyugs spo ma nyedu do ma snying dags khyed rna+ms ~~nam~~ khyang da de dang 'dra de dang [---] gyIs / chab grang ni la ru mdzod chig yang ba ni rab du sbogs shig /; r124–30.*

43. Dotson 2018, 284–85.

44. These lines are as follows: *stan pha ngag ni na shi[---] nyen chig dro dpyid nyi ring pho nang nas nub 'chug shig / gzha ring [---] [---] [mjalo] gsa[-] [---] [phabag] bdag [---] [---] ['tshal] dang da mjalo // ya[-] [---]; r130–33.*

The fascinating contents of this text, not least with regard to the relationship between horse and human, and with respect to the ontology of death for each, are relevant to a literary and rhetorical analysis. In particular, the intended or explicit listeners addressed at the end of the tale are horses that will be, or already have been, slaughtered in order to carry the deceased over the passes and fords that separate the land of the living from the Land of the Dead. The performative setting for this tale would have most likely been a funeral in which the deceased and his or her family members were present, along with ritual performers and their assistants. Here one would also expect living or dead horses, and other animals such as sheep, which also play a role in the journey to the Land of the Dead. Reading or listening from the perspective of this explicit audience would therefore be to adopt the perspective either of a horse or of a dead horse. In more practical terms, however, it is to read or listen from the perspectives of humans addressing horses through cultural-and-genre-specific codes of persuasion during a time when such rituals were performed, that is, in eighth- to tenth-century Tibet.

In fact, one can be more precise about this tale's various audiences with recourse to a typology of audiences outlined by Peter Rabinowitz. Rabinowitz developed this typology in order to analyze fictional works, but he also applied it to music, and it is adaptable to ritual and historiographical genres as well. Here I will introduce the four audiences before adapting them with relevance to "The Tale of the Separation of Horse and Kiang." The first of Rabinowitz's four audiences is the "actual audience." In his context, these are the flesh-and-blood people who have the author's book in their laps. Rabinowitz's second audience is the "authorial audience," about whose beliefs, knowledge, and familiarity with conventions the author has made certain assumptions.⁴⁵ Rabinowitz observes that "[s]ince the structure of a novel is designed for the author's hypothetical audience (which I call the authorial audience), we must, as we read, come to share, in some measure, the characteristics of this audience if we are to understand the text."⁴⁶ Some authors—Rabinowitz singles out Joyce and Nabokov—write for an authorial audience that is out of reach of nearly all of their readers. More relevant to our context, "historically or culturally distant texts are hard to understand...because we do not possess the knowledge required to join the authorial audience."⁴⁷ This pertains to my remarks above about attaining an approximation of "traditional literacy" in order to appreciate ritual antecedent tales. Rabinowitz's third audience is the "narrative audience," a fictional construct for whom the novel, its world, and its assumptions are *real*. To determine the narrative audience one might ask, "[w]hat sort of person would I have to pretend to be—what would I have to know and believe—if I wanted to take this work of fiction as real?"⁴⁸ The narrative audience of *Cinderella*, for instance, believes in fairy godmothers, and this distinguishes it from

45. Rabinowitz 1977, 126.

46. Rabinowitz 1977, 126.

47. Rabinowitz 1977, 127.

48. Rabinowitz 1977, 128.

the second audience (the authorial audience), which recognizes a fairy godmother as a fairy tale topos and not as someone one meets in one's daily life.⁴⁹ The fourth audience is the "ideal narrative audience," another fictional construct that "believes the narrator, accepts his judgments, sympathizes with his plight, laughs at his jokes even when they are bad."⁵⁰ It differs from the narrative audience in that the latter, while also taking the world of the novel as real, may not go along with all of the narrator's judgements. We shall see an instance of this difference below when we use this typology to sort, among other things, the equine audience from the human audience.

Adapting Rabinowitz's four types of audience to a textualized oral performance that is directed at an audience that comprises both horses and humans, as well as living and dead listeners, some adjustments must naturally be made. The concept of author, for one, is to be replaced by that of performer, or even that of the tale, which would here stand for the collective performative tradition rather than the individual genius of a given performer. Working backwards through the four audiences, the ideal narrative audience of "The Tale of the Separation of Horse and Kiang" is the living or dead horses to whom the tale's closing exhortations are directed. It is they who accept this tale as real, who feel pride in the account of their divine genealogy and their ancestor's descent from the heavens, who lament the death of the elder brother, relive the traumatic feud with the brother Kyangrön Ngoktra, and celebrate along with the younger brother Khukrön Mangdar when the yak is killed. It is they who accept the irreversible nature of the break between brothers, leading to the speciation of horses and kiangs. Parallel to this, or just following it in a sleight of hand that will be explored below, the horses also accept the irreversible and binding nature of the pact with the man Mabu Damshé, as a result of which they willingly die to serve as "beloved companions" for his human descendants.

If the tale's ideal narrative audience is equine and perhaps dead, its other imaginary audience - the narrative audience - is human. Both of these audiences know the world of the tales, from its vertical topography of heavens to its horizontal geography of plains, pasturelands, lands of humans, and lands of various types of demons. They also know its gods, kings, healers, villains, and priests, as well as the various formulae and topoi. Whereas the tale caters to the ideal equine audience by its being mainly about horses, and through its very title, the human narrative audience is more concerned with the final part of the tale. One might even say that for the human narrative audience the bulk of tale, up to the killing of the yak, is subordinate to, or in the service of, explaining how horses came to serve as "beloved companions" in the context of slaughtering horses at a funeral. The tale's title would for them be something like a misnomer in the sense that while the tale does include the etiological tale of how one ur-species split into horse and kiang, this is not what the tale is *about*. In this sense, just as the pact between Khukrön Mangdar and Mabu

49. Rabinowitz 1977, 129.

50. Rabinowitz 1977, 134.

Damshé has two sides and two sets of obligations, so too the tale's audiences include the two constituencies - equine and human - of this pact, each with their own interests and concerns. Also, keeping in mind Rabinowitz's observation that the narrative audience need not go along with all of the author's judgments, the tale's human narrative audience might dissent from the statement that horse and human will be established as equals in the Land of the Dead. For them, this may well be viewed as pabulum intended for the ideal narrative audience of horses.⁵¹

The authorial audience (Rabinowitz's second type of audience) is, for the performer, comprised of human listeners who are familiar with the genre of ritual antecedent tales (*rabs*), and therefore know their ritual-spatial universe, their topoi, and their formulae in much the same way as the human narrative audience knows them. One difference is that the authorial audience is aware of this tale as a tale, and this reflexivity or self-consciousness is where we may perceive something of "the literary." This authorial audience might be aware, in fact, of the myth of the speciation of horse and kiang as a free-floating folktale that has been repurposed as a ritual antecedent tale with the addition of the horse's pact with man. The authorial audience would also be well aware of the gap between their own experiences, in which horses do not converse with them, and the world of these tales. This authorial audience may also perceive the tale's dual focus on both horses and humans and understand the tale to be "winking" at them, in the sense that they perceive that the tale isn't so much about the speciation of horses and kiangs as it is meant to persuade horses to lay down their lives for the sake of humans.

The actual audience of people and animals assembled for the tale's performance and for the funeral rite would run a gamut. Some would ably join the authorial audience by their familiarity with the genre. Others might even try to cross over into the narrative audience insofar as they find that doing so might be necessary for reasons of ritual efficacy. (In a literary context, one might call this a "strong reading.") Many would presumably be ignorant of the topoi and formulae. Some might find the horse Khukrön Mangdar to be tragic or gullible. Others, similarly to Rabinowitz's example of the readers of *Lolita* who, failing to join the authorial audience, look up Humbert Humbert's murder trial in a newspaper, might propose dates for when the horse brothers and the man Mabu Damshé actually lived.⁵²

On the topic of actual audiences, we have the benefit of recent ethnographic examples of eastern Bhutanese audiences of ritual antecedent tales. Toni Huber observes that audience and performer often have divergent understandings of the meanings of passages in the tales, but quickly cautions

51. This is not, I should add, to contradict my earlier analysis of this image as an instance of the "iconography of the strange," that points to the incommensurability of the state of being alive with the state of being dead. It is rather to recognize that audiences would not be univocal in their understanding of this arresting image.

52. These are the same readers, incidentally, who react to the royal *gshegs rabs* by proposing dates for the "first Tibetan king" Nyatri Tsenpo (gnya' khri btsan po). The formative role that ritual antecedent tales played in the formation of Tibetan historiography has been discussed in Dotson 2016, 79, 105–107.

that “[m]eaning can often be overrated by outside observers.” The point, he states, is not what the tale means, or even how it is performed, but that it is performed by an authorized performer—in his example, a “*bon* shaman.”⁵³ This is an important observation that should temper any assertion that the audience need necessarily identify with or “embody” the figures in the tales.⁵⁴ That being said, I will now turn precisely to bodies and affect, but will do so at the level of the bodies of the ideal equine narrative audience and the human narrative audience, both of which are themselves imaginary constructs called into existence by the assumptions of the tale.

Real and Imagined Audiences and Bodies

The proximity of these different types of audiences reveals something about the nature of a given work. If the actual audience and the authorial audience are virtually identical, then this should mean that a work is accessible and easily understood; if the authorial audience and the narrative audience are almost the same, then this indicates that a work is realistic rather than fantastical; and if the ideal narrative audience differs markedly from the narrative audience, then this may be an indication of irony or a similar device whereby the ideal narrative audience believes something in the tale that the narrative audience knows to be false. It is in the distance between these latter two audiences, outlined above as equine and human, respectively, that we find the creative tension in this tale. I think it would be a mistake, however, to view this as irony, or as a bald assertion of humans’ guile and horses’ gullibility. While such sentiments are not totally absent, these are outweighed or at least tempered by the story’s emotional arc.

Emotion, of course, is felt in the bodies of actual listeners, and the conceit of this tale is that it is meant to pull at the heartstrings of the ideal narrative audience, which is comprised of dead or soon to be dead horses, while it in fact (or also) elicits an emotional response from the human (narrative, authorial/ “performative,” and actual) audiences. Appeal to emotion can be seen here as a code of persuasion, and one that involves a narrative sleight of hand as the tale moves from its first three acts to its resolution at the end of the third act and its turn toward the funerary in the coda. David Velleman’s observations on body and emotion are relevant here to this emotional code of persuasion. He writes that a story “enables its audience to assimilate events, not to familiar patterns of *how things happen*, but rather to familiar patterns of *how things feel*.”⁵⁵ Among the emotional scenes that create this visceral understanding are Kukrön Mangdar’s heartfelt desire to

53. Huber 2020 vol. 1, 235–36.

54. The prospect of “identification” or “embodiment” in such cases is something that I have mentioned in the past, in the context of looking at these ritual practices as being possibly aligned with, or in conversation with, tantric Buddhist practices; Dotson 2008, 46.

55. Velleman 2003, 19.

avenge his brother to “pay back his love,” the disappointment and anger in the irrevocable split between the two horse brothers, and the exultation at the killing of the murderous yak. These episodes, marked out by dialogues, create an emotional arc that Velleman sees as essential to fostering a sense of understanding and of closure.

Having made subjective sense of historical events, by arriving at a stable attitude toward them, the audience is liable to feel that it has made objective sense of them, by understanding how they came about. Having sorted out its feelings towards events, the audience mistakenly feels that it has sorted out the events themselves: it mistakes emotional closure for intellectual closure.⁵⁶

Velleman’s observations here apply to the emotional arc of the ostensive feelings of the horses who are this tale’s ideal narrative audience (those who, in Rabinowitz’s words, laugh at all the author’s jokes). The satisfying emotional arc of defeating the hated yak, fulfilling one’s duty to one’s brother, and being established as man’s equal in the Land of the Dead all signify or even create in the imagined equine listener a parallel satisfaction with his/her exalted fate. The emotional response to the resolution to the third act (the horse’s revenge), in other words, spills over into the coda (the horse being willingly slaughtered as part of the horse-human partnership).

This is the logic of how narrative persuades the horse that its slaughter at a human funeral is not a grudging fulfilment of the horse’s pact, but a preordained exultation initiated not by humans, but by the heroic horse ancestor Khukrön Mangdar. Turning to the human narrative audience—which is also imaginary—the same logic that persuades the ideal narrative audience of horses doubles as the logic by which the human narrative audience is emotionally satisfied with the story’s resolution and emotional arc. They, as a result, accept the utility of the pact between horse and human and the necessity of slaughtering horses in these funeral rites. It is thus through the animal’s persuasion, or more precisely the human imagining of the horse’s being persuaded, that humans are also persuaded. A major difference here is that the human narrative audience is not persuaded to be willingly slaughtered, but rather to accept the horse’s (or horses’) slaughter as a necessary part of preparations for the post-mortem journey. Here one should recall that animal sacrifice in funerals was a major point of contention as Buddhism gained ground in Tibet toward the end of the eighth century.

Conclusions

56. Velleman 2003, 20.

The “Tale of the Separation of Horse and Kiang” is a work of both simplicity and of extraordinary richness. This guided reading has pointed out its use of various poetic devices common to the genre of ritual antecedent tales. It has also teased out some intriguing structural parallels and reversals. The vertical descent and the horizontal journeys of the horses, and of the middle horse brother in particular, are like an ancestral or royal *shekrap* (gshogs rabs)—a specific type of Tibetan etiological myth best represented in the myth of the descent of the first Tibetan king. This equine descent is something like the inverse of the man Mabu Damshé’s journey at the end of the tale across fords and passes to the Land of the Dead. There is also the obvious contrast between the mare mother’s unwillingness to be seized and tamed by the goddess and the younger horse brother volunteering to be domesticated by the man Mabu Damshé in exchange for his help. Additionally, there is the inverse nature of the pact between horse and human wherein the man Mabu Damshé offers death (of the yak Drongyak Karwa) and the horse Khukrön Mangdar offers life (in the Land of the Dead). In a further contrastive parallel, the curses that Khukrön Mangdar exchanges with his brother Kyangrön Ngoktra lead to a rupture of not only their brotherhood but of their “specieshood,” whereas the pact between Khukrön Mangdar and the man Mabu Damshé transforms the horse into a “beloved companion” (*do ma snying dags*). This is not far removed from the ritual of “blood brotherhood” (*shag rag*) through which one’s friend may take on the duties—finding one when one is lost, attending to one’s funeral when one dies—that are customarily the province of blood relatives. It is a further testament to the intimacy of the relationship between horses and humans in early Tibet.

An application of Peter Rabinowitz’s typology of four audiences reveals how the tale operates on different levels, simultaneously appealing to an ideal narrative audience of equine listeners, an ideal human audience that takes the world of this tale as real, a literary/performative audience that is familiar with the genre of ritual antecedent tales, and an actual audience of readers and listeners ranging from those who are ignorant of these tales and their genre to those who know them well. At one extreme, the imaginary equine audience is persuaded by the story’s emotional logic, and agree to be slaughtered in order to serve as “beloved companions.” At another extreme, some in the actual audience might pay no attention to the tale, or might be opposed to the slaughter of horses in funerals. Another actual audience—you who are just now finishing this article—is by now better equipped to understand the other audiences for whom this tale was performed. What you take from this, whether it be skepticism, horror, acceptance, or indifference, aligns you also with the older actual audiences of listeners—both human and equine—whose responses would run their own gamut.

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