
Abstract

This dissertation explores the ethical formation of persons depicted by the 15th century text entitled the Liberation Life Story of Drukpa Kunley (‘Brug pa kun legs kyi rnam thar). My analysis examines the Drukpa Kunley Namthar from a perspective that considers writing as a spiritual discipline akin to other practices of spiritual formation such as prayer, meditation and confession. Drawing on the work of such theorists as Paul Ricoeur, Michel Foucault and Alasdair McIntyre, I argue for a position whereby life-writing functions to form ethical persons. Using Drukpa Kunley’s namthar as an outstanding example of this ethically-formative function of literary activity, I examine the text’s presentation of what it means to be an ethical person and how such persons arise through a particular way of interacting with the world.

In considering the Drukpa Kunley Namthar, I explore questions about authorial intent, textual agency, and the readers imagined by the text. In addition, I highlight three principal themes developed within the text: exposure of hypocrisy, joyful acceptance of truth, and an unstinting examination of authority. These themes are expressed through both content and form: the narrator openly discusses them, and the text itself creates an experience for the reader that resonates with these themes through its repeated shifting among diverse literary forms and genres. I refer to this strategy as a cacophony of genres, and my assertion is that this
effects an *ethic of disruption*, a condition that challenges the reader and draws into question conventional ways of seeing and being in the world.

Finally, this dissertation explores and advocates for a model of scholarship that approaches the study of a text as an ethnographic encounter. This model, which draws on the work of anthropologist Michael D. Jackson, considers the usefulness of intersubjective practice for scholars of religion and other fields. I propose that this model for studying texts, which engages with a wide range of agents and influences—including our own—can yield deeper and more relevant insights into our objects of study.