

POEMS BY TSERING WOESER (from *Tibet's True Heart*) -- <http://www.raggedbanner.com/toc.html>

Remembering a Battered Buddha

Twenty days since I left Lhasa
But still I see that statue of the Buddha with its face bashed in.
It was on a street vendor's stand in front of the Tromsikhang neighborhood office.
I noticed it from a distance.
I'd gone to Tromsikhang Market to buy *droma*,
But at the sight a sudden grief assailed me.
I drew closer—couldn't help it—to this thing so crushed:
It seemed alive, leaning against a shelf in agony,
The face hammered, an arm hacked off, the whole figure chopped off at the waist.
Hurting so bad, leaning against a rack of the goods
That surrounded it: soy sauce, bean jam, salad dressing, and roll after roll of toilet paper,
All introduced into our life long ago from inland China.
Around its neck an ornament, once exquisite, inlaid with colored stones,
And at its chest a wondrous beast with lion head and body of man,
Stacked on a fragmentary *chorten*.
In what sacred shrine or pious home were these things once venerated?
Hurting so bad and leaning against the rack of merchandise,
It emanated the calm of still waters, but pain stabbed into my marrow:
As I looked on in grief, I sensed a story being played out
That had both a present and a past.
I was moved by the shadowy fate that had brought us together,
As if melted snow from the high peaks had filled my being.
Hugging his knees, the peddler made a pitch:
"Come on, buy it! Don't the old buddha look grand?"
"When did it get beat up like this?" I asked.
"Cultural Revolution, obviously!" he glanced up, "Had to be the Cultural Revolution."
"How much?" I wanted to buy it, to take it home,
But this peddler from Jiangxi wouldn't budge from three thousand.
So with reluctance and regret, and many an afterthought,
I left that broken buddha streaming rays of pain.
I only took some pictures,
So when I miss it I can turn on my computer and have a look.
Friends say it may have been a brand-new buddha, wrecked thus
To fetch a higher price, and the link to the Cultural Revolution was a fiction.
Maybe so; but the hurt remains.
I wrote these lines to try to let it go.

On the Road

On the road with edgy mind,
I'll flee the chaos of this floating world,
Pick a place to settle,
Find choice words
To tell this passing turn of the Wheel.

On the road one meets by chance
Men and women of immense dignity;
One's natural pride is humbled.
The ruins that overspread Tibet with shadows dark as night
Have a nobility not found in ordinary men.

Among those encounters:
One dear to me, long-lost,
Brilliant, uncompromising,
Neglected.
I, too, am pure and honest;
Mine, too, a sincere and gentle heart;
I wish as seasons change I could change with them.
No need for gifts to one another;
We are the gifts.

On the road, an elder of my people says:
"Golden flowers bloomed on golden mountain;
While golden flowers bloomed, he did not come;
And when he came, the flowers had died.
Silver flowers bloomed on silver mountain;
While silver flowers bloomed, he did not come;
And when he came, the flowers had died."

On the road, walking alone.
An old book without a map,
A pen, not much to eat,
Ballads from a foreign land:
These will suffice. On the road,
I see a black horse
Who does not bow his head to graze but shakes his hooves,
Vexed that he can't run free.
Yet also, deep in meditation caves among the vast mountains,
The hidden forms of men.
What sort of heart will honor and revere them?

On the road, a pious mudra's not complex,
But it ill suits a tainted brow.
A string of special mantras is not hard,
But they're jarring, from lips stained with lies.

On the road,
I clutch a flower not of this world,
Hurrying before it dies, searching in all directions,
That I may present it to an old man in a deep red robe.
A wish-fulfilling jewel,
A wisp of a smile:
These bind the generations tight.

Lhasa Nights

O Lhasa, dreamlike nights!
A certain lotus may have never bloomed,
Sometimes a wineglass shatters at a tap,
Yet there are people, just a few—who blessed
Them with such spirit?—to whom this movable feast
Seems Paradise for banishment self-chosen.
If (imperceptibly) they weep, it's only
For a kinsman whom they couldn't keep.

O Lhasa, nights of woe!
A certain bluebird may have never chirped,
And sometimes garments are begrimed with dust,
Yet there are people, just a few—who spread
That plague?—who see bright fleeting Time as but
A pool wherein the posturing ego sinks.
Illusions countless, ever so seductive,
Can't lure a reincarnate kinsman back.

O Lhasa, nights like nowhere else!
A love there is that never came to pass,
And certain bloodlines gradually mixed,
Yet there's a man, perhaps just one—what kind
Of lightning bolt?—who makes a stifling fate
Serve as the hinge of reconciliation.
Upon the endless wheel of birth and death
I wish you would forever be my kin!

A Sheet of Paper Can Become a Knife

A sheet of paper can become a knife
—A rather sharp one, too.
I was only turning the page
When the ring finger of my right hand got sliced at the knuckle.
Though small, the sudden wound oozed blood,
A thread as fine as silk, and stung a little.
Startling transformation,
From paper into knife:
There must have been some mistake, or
Some kind of turning point.
This ordinary paper... a chill of awe.

The Past

This snow-clad mountain, melting, is not my snow mountain.
My snow mountains are the mountains of the past,
Far at the sky's edge, holy and pure:
Many a lotus, eight petals opening,
Oh, many a lotus, eight petals opening.

This lotus, withering, cannot be my lotus.
My lotus is the lotus of the past,
Enfolding the snow mountains, lovely,
Many a prayer flag, five colors fluttering,
Oh, many prayer flags, five colors fluttering.

The past, the past... such a past!
A host of divinities sheltered our homeland
As a lama keeps watch over souls,
As a mastiff stands guard by the tent.
But the host of divinities is long gone, now,
The host of divinities is long gone.

POEMS BY TSERING WANGMO DHOMPA (from *Rules of the House*) --
<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/tsering-wangmo-dhomba#about>

Bardo

A hundred and one butter lamps are offered to my uncle who
is no more.

Distraction proves fatal in death. A curtain of butter imprints
in air.

After the burning of bones, ashes are sent on pilgrimage. You are
dead, go into life, we pray. My uncle was a man given to giggles
in solemn moments.

Memory springs like crocuses in bloom. Self-conscious and
precise.

Without blurring the cornea, details are resuscitated. Dried yak
meat between teeth. Semblance of what is.

Do not be distracted, Uncle who is no more.

He does not see his reflection in the river. The arching of speech
over "s" as he is becoming.

Curvature of spine as it cracked on a misty morning. A shadow
evades the wall.

You are no more, Uncle who is no more.

Every seven days he must relive his moment of expiration.
The living pray frequently amid burning juniper.

Communication efforts require the right initiative.

Somewhere along the line matters of motion and rest are resolved.

Crows pick the last offerings. You are someone else, uncle no
more.

In between

Late for the feast. Let me guess, she said, everything worked against you.

Some pulverize experiences at the pool. When the air slaps, they flip into the water and speak of the excitations of distress. The stratagems of delivering an annulled emotion. And how is one to read a nod? Is a nod an exclamation?

Does one kiss after a nod?

A woman mutters something about the tea being too weak. The walls threaten to expose us, shadows pinch as we mutter jouissance, jouissance, while the university teacher said the use of the word was a considerable error. A most lamentable error, given half of us are illiterate and unattached. Think of words in their system of birth. Now do you see, the teacher said. Ah, see.

Dogs were barking for no reason.

Some of us went to the ghats and watched the dead burn. Woman in white wailed, her hair a dumb struck line against her rocking spine. We look for other distractions in a place of death.

In the afternoon meanings are extolled.

We are asked to name our loves. I will not, he said, use common language to talk of love. I will not jump into the substance without reinforcement. He took his body to the breeze and swayed till we begged him to stop. The rain subsided but we were still wet.

Thousands have died in a nod.

In the Event of Change

I am saying primroses lined the pathway of toothless hedges.

I am saying the ocean shimmered like corrugated steel in the morning sun.

The context of my story changes when you enter. Then I am dung
on the wall of the nomad's field. Then the everyday waking person.

I am nodding in your direction like fissures between dandelion fur.
Seeing in your manner.

I am speaking your pace. Slippage of silk slippers.

I say you are losing sight. I say your breasts are dry shells.

I am afraid of what I am capable of doing.

This is all a manner of stating how I prepare myself to be loved.

She Is

Her voice is a roundness. On full moon days, she talks about
renouncing meat but the butcher has his routine. And blood.

M's wisdom. Still reliable.

There are sounds we cannot hear but understand in motion.
Slicing of air with hips. Crushing grass, saying these are my feet.
I want my feet in my shadow. Suffice to meet desires halfway.

Quiet. We say her chakras are in place.

When the thermos shatters, she knows the direction of its spill.
She knows how to lead and follow. Know her from this.

Sounds we cannot hear. The wind blows and we say it is cool.

Night slips under the door. We are tucked into bed and kissed
a fleeting one. Through the curtains, her voice loosens like thread
from an old blanket, row upon row. We watch her teeth in the
dark and read her words. She speaks in perfect order, facing where
the breeze can tug it towards canals stretching for sound.

Her faith abides by the cycle of the moon. See how perfect she is.