

# Characters in Modern Tibetan Fiction Set in Pre-1950s Central Tibet: Aristocrats, Common Folk and Others

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**L**iterary characters play a central role in fictional stories and examining characters in modern Tibetan literary works is both productive and revealing.<sup>1</sup> In this article characters are examined in two literary works which depict life in Tibetan society before Tibet was invaded by the People's Liberation Army of the Chinese Communist Party in the 1950s. However, both stories were written in Tibet later under Chinese Communist rule. Tibetan traditional society is represented in the two novels by looking back to the past through the lenses of a later, different time. Therefore, when examining them, one has to bear in mind the general situation of writing and publishing in Tibet under the People's Republic of China (PRC): there can be some norms or restrictions of a political nature to the content and topics of the literary works and thus complete freedom of expression cannot be expected.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Information on the limiting and guiding nature of party policy can be found, for example, in Shakya 2004: 86–93 and Schiaffini-Vedani 2008: 216. A situation can also occur when a literary work is first published, but then for some reason it is found unacceptable by the authorities. See, for example, Hartley and Schiaffini-Vedani 2008: xvi concerning the banning of an essay collection *Xizang biji* ("Notes on Tibet") by Weise ('Od zer) in 2003, and the reaction of the authorities to the private publishing of Tshe ring don grub's novel *Rlung dmar 'ur 'ur* (*The Red Wind Scream*) described in Erhard 2013: 114.

1. *The Two Novels*

Two works are discussed in this article. The first is dPal 'byor's (1941–2013) well-known novel *gTsug g.yu* ("The Turquoise Head-Ornament"). According to information provided about the author's life in rNam sras's book about modern Tibetan prose, Glang mdun dPal 'byor was born in Lhasa and studied both in India and then later at the Institute of Nationalities in Beijing. He published his first literary work in 1980, when he also started to work on *gTsug g.yu*.<sup>3</sup> The novel has 15 chapters and appeared in Lhasa in 1984,<sup>4</sup> published by the People's Press of Tibet. For my research I have used the second edition, published in 2003. It is considered to be the first modern Tibetan novel originally written in Tibetan.<sup>5</sup> In his essay about his writings dPal 'byor himself tells how he wished to write to his readers in their own language in a style which would not be too complicated for ordinary farmers and nomads to comprehend.<sup>6</sup> For his literary works dPal 'byor was honoured with several literary prizes.<sup>7</sup> He was active in several writers associations.<sup>8</sup>

The other novel is Brag gdong bKras gling dBang rdor's (b. 1934) *bKras zur tshang gi gsang ba'i gtam rgyud*.<sup>9</sup> It is set in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and its main events are depicted as taking place approximately in the 1930s and 1940s.<sup>10</sup> Brag gdong bKras gling dBang rdor was born in the region of rGyal rtse and information on him is provided in the catalogue on contemporary Tibetan writers

<sup>3</sup> rNam sras 2005: 135–137. See also his brief biodata in mTsho sngon bod yig gsar 'gyur khang 2006: 2.

<sup>4</sup> This year is given by dPal 'byor himself in his essay about his writings (dPal 'byor 2006: 4) and also in rNam sras 2005: 137. However, the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of *gTsug g.yu* from 2003 gives the year of the first edition as 1985.

<sup>5</sup> For information on dPal 'byor and his life and works, see rNam sras 2005: 135–137 and mTsho sngon bod yig gsar 'gyur khang 2006: 2. rNam sras also mentions that a Chinese translation of *gTsug g.yu* has appeared published in parts as a series in the magazine *Bod kyi rtsom rig* (rNam sras 2005: 137). See also Erhard 2011: 425–26. On November 29, 2013 the Tibetan website mChod me bod kyi rtsom rig dra ba published the news of dPal 'byor's death on the previous day.

<sup>6</sup> dPal 'byor 2006: 4–5.

<sup>7</sup> As told in rNam sras 2005: 135.

<sup>8</sup> See mTsho sngon bod yig gsar 'gyur khang 2006: 2 and Erhard 2011: 426.

<sup>9</sup> I am grateful to Veronica Leo for bringing me a copy of *bKras zur tshang gi gsang ba'i gtam rgyud* from Dharamsala.

<sup>10</sup> There is an exact indication of time in the fifth chapter of the novel. In its beginning 'Brug rgyas tells how he marked with signs on the wall the time of his arrival in prison, which was "Wood Pig (year), the 2<sup>nd</sup> day of the 11<sup>th</sup> month" and in the English translation of the novel the year 1935 is given in brackets. (Brag gdong bKras gling dBang rdor 1997: 57; Tailing 1998: 75). In Chapter 3 of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Part, 1938 is mentioned as the year when Pad ma starts her studies in the English school in Darjeeling (Brag gdong bKras gling dBang rdor 1997: 183).

edited by Hor gtsang Klu rgyal. He went to school both in rGyal rtse and Lhasa and later worked as a teacher in these places. He also held some other positions in Central Tibet, including working in the Tourism Bureau of Tibet Autonomous Region (Bod rang skyong yul skor cus).<sup>11</sup> Like *gTsug g.yu, bKras zur tshang gi gsang ba'i gtam rgyud* (1997) was also published in Lhasa by the People's Press of Tibet. The author states in his foreword that he started writing the work in 1993<sup>12</sup> and that before its publication in book form the novel was published serially in the Tibetan literary magazine *Bod kyi rtsom rig sgyu rtsal* between 1994 and 1995. The book was translated into English by the writer himself and appeared in 1998 in Beijing under the title *The Secret Tale of Tesur House: A Tibetan Novel, A Chronicle of Old Tibet*. I have mainly used the Tibetan original for my discussion of the novel, but also made some use of the English version, especially when translating quoted passages, the titles of persons, and so on. Brag gdong bKras gling dBang rdor has also engaged in other literary activities. He has written and translated school books, translated a book about Tibet from Chinese into English, compiled a dictionary and written a book in English *A Tour Guide's Diary*, as told in his biodata in the catalogue of Tibetan contemporary writers and their writings.<sup>13</sup>

Both writers were born before the 1950s, and it was thus possible for them when they were children to see how life was in Tibetan society in those days. However, both novels were written much later, *gTsug g.yu* in the 1980s and *bKras zur tshang gi gsang ba'i gtam rgyud* in the 1990s. Both writers locate their stories in places that are familiar to them. Part of *bKras zur tshang gi gsang ba'i gtam rgyud* is located in India, but the author is familiar with life and conditions in India having spent several years studying in an English school in Darjeeling.<sup>14</sup>

In this paper I discuss how the main characters are depicted in these two novels and how the relations between different social

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<sup>11</sup> Hor gtsang Klu rgyal 2012: 48.

<sup>12</sup> In his essay about *bKras zur tshang gi gsang ba'i gtam rgyud*, he mentions that he started writing it only after his retirement in 1992. He also tells how he first started to translate Shakespeare's *Hamlet* into Tibetan, but then decided to write a literary work of his own, resulting in *bKras zur tshang gi gsang ba'i gtam rgyud*. (Brag gdong bKras gling dBang rdor 2011: 1.) This essay, published on the website mChod me bod kyi rtsom rig dra ba in 2011, was originally published in *Bod kyi rtsom rig sgyu rtsal* in 2001 (4: 62–67) as catalogued in the Byara Database of the Latse Library.

<sup>13</sup> Hor gtsang Klu rgyal 2012: 48.

<sup>14</sup> This information is also given in *ibid.*: 48.

classes are represented.<sup>15</sup> My main focus is thus on characterization and the representation of relations between characters in fiction, and by examining the characters in the two novels I wish to provide some information on Tibetan modern literature. I do not try to examine aspects of actual Tibetan life in those times (nor do I claim that the novels would actually represent aspects of real life)—that is the task of some other fields of Tibetan studies such as social historical research.

I will make some critical use of the notion of literary type deriving from Marxist literary criticism, which has been widely employed in Tibetan literary critical writings, and also some use of an approach from Western narrative theory, namely James Phelan's rhetorical theory of characters. According to Phelan's views, characters can be understood as combinations of three components: the mimetic, the thematic and the synthetic.<sup>16</sup> These components are helpful in discussing the various aspects of literary characters in both Western literature and in Tibetan literature as well. The mimetic component refers to the qualities of the character which make him/her a possible person. The thematic component relates to the idea that the characters have some significance, that they represent something. The synthetic component is related to the way in which characters are fictional and artificial constructs, and thus the synthetic component is always found in fictional characters. These components may stand in different relations with each other. The synthetic component may remain in the background or be more noticeably foregrounded, and the mimetic and thematic components may sometimes be less developed by the writer.<sup>17</sup>

In accordance with Phelan's theory of components, when speaking about the mimetic component of characters in this article, it is not meant that this aspect of the characters would be some kind of direct imitation of traits of people in that time in Tibet. Instead, the mimetic component is understood as a collection of traits which appear to the reader in a way that they *could* be real, but are not. Mimetic traits help the reader create an image of the character in his/her mind by giving information on, for instance, the character's appearance,

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<sup>15</sup> dPal 'byor himself has mentioned "the complicated relations" between different social categories of people in traditional Tibetan society as one of the topics of his novel, describing these categories as ranging from "high ministers to low beggars." See dPal 'byor 2006: 4.

<sup>16</sup> See Phelan 1989: 2-3.

<sup>17</sup> Phelan 1989: 2-3, 11-14. For description of the three components of characters, see also a more recent article by Phelan and Rabinovitz 2012: 111.

behaviour, way of speaking and personality traits.<sup>18</sup> They are fictitious and, as mentioned earlier, the synthetic component is always present in fictional characters. Although a character might have abundant mimetic features and when appearing in the narrative may cause a feeling of “realness” in the reader, this is an illusion.<sup>19</sup> By examining and comparing characterization in these two novels, the paper will also throw light on the question: do the two works share features in how they represent people of different social classes, or does the character construction in the two works differ in some essential ways?

Both novels have been previously researched. dPal 'byor's *gTsug g.yu* has, for example, been discussed separately by Franz Xaver Erhard, Tsering Shakya, and rNam sras, and Françoise Robin discusses both novels along with several others in her article about Tibetan historical novels.<sup>20</sup> However, I feel there is still a need for more discussion especially on the characters in these two novels.

## 2. *Servants and Aristocrats in dPal 'byor's gTsug g.yu*

I shall first discuss characters in dPal 'byor's *gTsug g.yu*. As suggested by its title, a certain very special turquoise jewel plays an important role in this novel. Its main character, dPal ldan, arrives in Lhasa with his father, and the two offer a turquoise jewel to the statue of Buddha in the Jo khang temple. They stay in the house of a merchant whom his father knows, and dPal ldan becomes an unpaid servant to the merchant's family. Before the death of his father, dPal ldan hears from him about the sufferings his family experienced at the hands of a greedy local district commissioner (*rdzong dpon*), who had tried to obtain the turquoise jewel for himself. dPal ldan's parents had had no

<sup>18</sup> For Phelan's explanation of what is meant by the mimetic component, see Phelan 1989: 2. He writes: “To identify the concept implied in the phrase ‘this person,’ I propose that we recognize a second component of character, what I will hereafter call the *mimetic*.”

<sup>19</sup> See *ibid.*: 11. For a discussion of mimetic and synthetic components and the illusion present in realistic fiction, see Phelan and Rabinowitz 2012: 113.

<sup>20</sup> See Erhard 2011; Shakya 2000, 2004, rNam sras 2005: 135–151 and rNam sras 2006, and Robin 2007: 29–30. Hartley and Schiaffini (2008: xxi) also mention *bKras zur tshang gi gsang ba'i gtam rgyud*. There is also a short essay about *gTsug g.yu* by dPal ldan in a book compiled by mTsho sngon bod yig gsar 'gyur khang (2006) about contemporary Tibetan writers and their writings. According to information in the Byara Database of the Latse Library, there is also an essay by bKra shis dbang 'dud about *gTsug g.yu* in *Bod kyi rtsom rig sgyu rtsal* from 1986 (6: 92–97) and an article by Mā li hwa (Ma Lihua) discussing *bKras zur tshang gi gsang ba'i gtam rgyud* in the same literary journal from 1999 (3: 99–104).

choice but to escape from their home region. dPal ldan connects his father's heart problems to the sufferings caused by the district commissioner, blaming him for his father's death, and vows revenge.<sup>21</sup> What follows are dPal ldan's attempts to find the district commissioner and his efforts to take revenge, first by seeing justice served through legal means and, when that fails, by making an unsuccessful attempt to kill the aristocratic general (*mda' dpon*), who by then he has come to understand is the same former district commissioner.

In this novel, which is narrated by an external extra-diegetic narrator,<sup>22</sup> the servants are represented as positive characters and the aristocrats as negative. As also pointed out by other scholars,<sup>23</sup> the main character in this novel can be viewed as a type or a typical character (or "model figure") which is often found in socialist realist literary works. The Tibetan critic rNam sras has characterized dPal ldan as "a model of a wonderful slave."<sup>24</sup> The notion of typical characters comes from Marxist literary criticism and was mentioned by Engels in a letter to Margaret Harkness in 1888. He connects realism with "the truthful reproduction of typical characters under typical circumstances."<sup>25</sup> In Tibetan, the concept of a typical or representative character is *dpe mtshon mi sna*<sup>26</sup> (or *tshab mtshon mi sna*). In Tibetan literary critical writings this concept has been quite widely applied, its use ranging from reference to typical characters or types in socialist realist sense to characters in fiction written in various styles, who can be interpreted as representing a more general issue or phenomenon in society. According to some Tibetan theoretical writings about literature, such as Bu bzhi's *rTsom rig gzhung lugs* (2007) and Klu thar rgyal's *rTsom gzhung spyi bshad* (2008), for something to be considered "typical" or "representative" (*dper mtshon rang bzhin can*), it must have both its special own nature as well as some general characteristics.<sup>27</sup> Tibetan critics have also discussed the

<sup>21</sup> dPal 'byor 2003: 77.

<sup>22</sup> As a result of this narrative technique, the audience understands many matters before dPal ldan has any idea about them or about which he cannot have any knowledge.

<sup>23</sup> Erhard 2011: 427; Shakya 2004: 148.

<sup>24</sup> *ngo mtshar can gyi zhing bran zhig gi dpe gzhi*, rNam sras 2005: 149.

<sup>25</sup> Engels 1888 in Eagleton 2006: 39.

<sup>26</sup> Bu bzhi in his book *rTsom rig gzhung lugs* explains that the concept of *dper mtshon snang brnyan* derives from the Greek word 'tupos,' and in brackets after the Tibetan concept he gives the English word 'type' (Bu bzhi 2007: 256). In theoretical Tibetan writings the term *dper mtshon mi sna* is also used (see, e.g., Klu thar rgyal 2008: 188).

<sup>27</sup> Bu bzhi 2007: 263. Klu thar rgyal 2008: 188–189. Klu thar rgyal enumerates three essential qualities for a character to be considered a type: "1) the necessity of having special qualities revealing the character's own nature, 2) being able to

connection of typical characters and their typical environments.<sup>28</sup> It seems to me that the use of the expression 'typical or representative character' is nowadays understood in Tibetan theoretical writing to cover a wide array of characters. These characters can be interpreted as representing something, for instance an idea, phenomenon in society or a class of people, in a literary work, and do not necessarily represent a socialist realist type or model character.

I shall now look at the synthetic, mimetic and thematic components of dPal ldan and certain other characters in *gTsug g.yu*, showing how these components relate to the notion of a typical character. dPal ldan is, of course, a fictional character. However, the style of the work is so apparently realistic that the synthetic component of his character may remain unnoticed at first reading.

The mimetic component of dPal ldan includes features such as his name, descriptions of his appearance (e.g., his worn-out clothing) and descriptions of his work as a servant (e.g., house chores and other tasks). These and other descriptions help the reader form some idea of his character as both honest, diligent and obedient but also naïve, as he is often unable to discern the motivations behind others' words. He likes to help others; he and bDe skyid, the servant girl of the merchant's family, are on several occasions depicted as assisting each other in many ways. However, a negative shadow is cast on dPal ldan's character when he is shown to ponder thoughts of revenge. He has hatred in his mind, which is aroused by hearing about the sufferings of his family.<sup>29</sup> Later in the story this hatred leads him to attack his enemy mDa' dpon, the former district commissioner.<sup>30</sup> Though the commissioner survives the attack, dPal

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manifest a complex and coherent personality, and 3) being endowed with the characteristic of generalizing and encapsulating the essence or nature of social life." 1) *thun min rang gshis mngon par gsal ba'i khyad chos dang ldan dgos pa dang/ 2) sna mang rnyog 'dzing che la gcig gyur rang bzhin ldan pa'i gshis rgyud kyi khyad chos mngon thub pa/ 3) spyi tshogs 'tsho ba'i ngo bo'am chod nyid gsal ston gyi thog nas yongs khyab kyi rang bzhin dang snying bsdus kyi don snying che tsam yod pa'i khyad chos ldan dgos te/* (Klu thar rgyal 2008: 191).

<sup>28</sup> Bu bzhi 2007: 261–262; Klu thar rgyal 2008: 192–194.

<sup>29</sup> dPal 'byor 2003: 66–78.

<sup>30</sup> In this novel some of the aristocrats are repeatedly referred to by their titles rather than their personal names. Even though referring to a character by title is a mimetic trait which helps to identify the character, its use is more generalized and thus can be viewed as a feature associated with types. (I am grateful to one of the anonymous referees for drawing this to my attention). However, the way in which mDa' dpon is referred to with a generic term rather than his personal name can also be viewed as working towards the development of the plot—dPal ldan does not first understand that mDa' dpon is the former district commissioner against whom he seeks revenge, but comes to realize that these two are one and the same person only later in the story.

Idan ends up striking another person with his knife in a fight which immediately follows.

Some of the good qualities associated with dPal Idan's nature are also connected to the character of bDe skyid, namely honesty and helpfulness. She is also dressed in worn-out clothes. Of course each character has some individual qualities, such as their different names, and bDe skyid is a young woman who has a long, black plait of hair, expresses her feelings quite openly through songs and often thinks carefully before she speaks. Overall, however, their mimetic traits resemble each other to a great extent and in both stories these features contribute powerfully towards thematization. Thus, their general and typical elements could be viewed as more strongly developed and emphasized in comparison to their individual features. Their mimetic and thematic components function together to convey the idea of poor but honest servants who deserve good treatment, yet nevertheless suffer in a society which is characterized by social inequality and injustice. Although in this novel the differences between characters from different social classes are fictional representations, nevertheless some social classes in traditional Tibetan society have of course been more highly appreciated and considered 'higher', as shown in Heidi Fjeld's research on social categories in Tibet.<sup>31</sup>

One scene depicting social inequality can be found in chapter 2 of *gTsug g.yu*, when dPal Idan, bDe skyid and the merchant's daughter Ye shes mkha' 'gro are still teenagers. One evening they spend time together dancing and singing in the courtyard. However, the merchant's wife does not like her daughter spending time with servants and she stops their play, commenting that her daughter would get polluted by spending time with the other two.<sup>32</sup> Here, a class difference is perceived between people engaged in trade and servants. dPal Idan's and bDe skyid's reactions and thoughts about what just happened are revealed in the following passage:

Ye shes mkha' 'gro and we are similar in being children of the same age, but since the social statuses of people are different, we are scolded as beggar children. Moreover, by saying that Ye shes mkha' 'gro gets polluted when she stays just for a while with us means obviously that we are regarded as very dirty. We have not been doing any improper deeds such as telling lies or slandering or stealing. We felt very sad thinking what could be the reason why others looked

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<sup>31</sup> Fjeld 2005: 25–34.

<sup>32</sup> In Tibetan she says: *nga tsho'i bu mor grib shor gyi red* (dPal 'byor 2003: 27).



down upon us like this.<sup>33</sup>

The merchant's daughter Ye shes mkha' 'gro is depicted as a kind-hearted, sympathetic person in the novel. However, her mother, gSal sgron, the merchant's wife, is depicted in a negative light as a person who looks down on and mistreats persons in servant positions.

In the characterization of the aristocrats, their mimetic features are also used to contribute towards thematization in the novel. The aristocrats are depicted as class-conscious<sup>34</sup> and rich: they dress in beautiful clothes and are concerned about obtaining the wonderful turquoise jewel and living in magnificent houses. They are also represented as corrupt: they cooperate with each other to hide the truth when it might be harmful to them. dPal ldan's enemy, the aristocratic general (mDa' dpon), is depicted as someone who can convince people with attractive but deceptive words. He is so cruel that he can take a child from its mother, who herself later dies in suspicious circumstances.<sup>35</sup> When he understands that dPal ldan is planning revenge, the general causes him to be put in prison and sends a murderer after him. Accordingly, this aristocratic character is depicted in very negative terms—he is a type of rich person who misuses his position for his own benefits, causing sufferings to the poor. However, his representation is not completely without nuance—he is depicted as agreeing to teach privately the merchant's daughter Ye shes mkha' 'gro (who is revealed to be actually mDa'

<sup>33</sup> *ye shes mkha' 'gro dang nga tsho ni lo mnyam gyi byis pa 'dra 'dra yin rung mi dang mi yang rigs mi 'dra bar nga tshor sprang phrug ces gshe gtong ba ma zad/ ye shes mkha' 'gro nga tsho dang mnyam du tog tsam bsdad par yang grib shor gyi red zer ba ni nga tsho ha cang gi btsoq pa zhis tu rtsi ba ni smos mi dgos pa red/ nga tshos rdzun dang khira ma bshad pa dang/ yang na brku rgyag pa sogs tshul min gyi bya ba ni gang yang byas med/ gzhan gyis nga tshor mthong chung 'di ltar byed pa'i rgyu mtshan gang yin nam snyam ste sems pa ha cang skyo po byung/ (ibid.: 27–28).*

<sup>34</sup> One proverb illustrating an upper-class way of thinking about the differences between different classes of people in society during those times appears twice in the novel, with times in chapter 8. Once it is uttered by a merchant's wife when criticizing her daughter Ye shes mkha' 'gro for her unwillingness to visit 'Jigs med grags pa, the son of an aristocrat referred to with his title Sa dbang chen mo and instead spending time with dPal ldan. The second time the same proverb is used by Sa dbang chen mo when he advises his son to avoid the company of the merchant's daughter, who according to him belongs to "the ordinary people" (*dmangs rigs*). The proverb goes: *seng phrug lus stobs chung yang seng ge'i rgyud/ ab sog ral pa rdzig kyang sgo khyi'i rgyud/ skye sa rus khungs med na spre'u yin/ rigs rus 'chol bar spyad na dud 'gro yin/*, which in English is: "Though a lion cub has little physical strength, it is of the race of lions. Though an apso has magnificent fur, it is of the race of pet dogs. If one does not have a family with authentic lineage, one is a monkey. If one mixes the races, one is an animal." (*Ibid.*: 150–152, 154–157.)

<sup>35</sup> See *ibid.*: 52, 63–64.

dpon's own daughter) and dPal ldan, who accompanies her to the private tuition sessions, also learns some writing skills from mDa' dpon. Thus mDa' dpon first acts kindly towards him before he realizes that dPal ldan is actually seeking him out. After that his attitude changes completely even though he first tries to hide it.<sup>36</sup>

The novel contrasts the aristocrats and the rich, who are depicted as enjoying a wide variety of food at a wonderful party, and the poor, who sometimes do not even have *rtsam pa* [roasted barley flour] to eat.<sup>37</sup> The aristocrats and servants are portrayed in a relation of enmity and struggle: in the novel dPal ldan and the aristocratic general mDa' dpon try to kill each other, though without success. dPal 'byor's representation of the relation between aristocrats and servants in his novel would seem to have been influenced at least to some extent by socialist realist style and the requirements of the communist policies of the time in which it was written. An idea of the importance of literature to serve the needs of ordinary people is conveyed in Mao's *Talks at the Yenan Forum on Literature and Art*. An explanation is also given on how to serve the masses: "To serve them, we must take the class stand of the proletariat and not that of the petty bourgeoisie."<sup>38</sup> In *gTsug g.yu* the contrast between aristocrats and servants and the way in which the servants are depicted in a heroic light appears to be in line with this guideline. However, the novel shows the aristocrats in pre-1950s Tibet to be so powerful, that even though they engage in negative deeds, their positions remain unaltered and the servants fail to receive fair treatment.<sup>39</sup> The position of dPal ldan and bDe skyid does not improve during the story, although the ending can be considered positive as dPal ldan is not caught by his enemies and he and bDe skyid manage to escape from Lhasa, carrying the turquoise jewel with them.

### 3. *The Harmonious Family in Brag gdong bKras gling dBang rdor's bKras zur tshang gi gsang ba'i gtam rgyud*

Brag gdong bKras gling dBang rdor's *bKras zur tshang gi gsang ba'i gtam rgyud* (*The Secret Tale of Tesur House*) is a fascinating and complex novel which catches the reader's imagination. The novel follows the adventures of its four main characters, which lead to the formation in Lhasa of a new household and family, called the bKras

<sup>36</sup> See *ibid.*: 46–61, 196–200, 211.

<sup>37</sup> dPal ldan is depicted thinking about this in *gTsug g.yu* (*ibid.*: 113–114).

<sup>38</sup> Mao Tse-Tung 1962: 12–13.

<sup>39</sup> See dPal 'byor 2003: 246, 281–283.

zur tshang or bKras zur House. The book is divided into two parts: the first part has eight chapters and is titled '*Grul pa'i mtshan mo'i har sad* ("A Traveller's Nightmare"); the second part has nine chapters including an afterword (*mjug byang*), and is titled *Pad ma* after the heroine of the novel.

The story is narrated by a first-person narrator and focalizer<sup>40</sup> called 'Brug rgyas. He is from a poor family that lives on the lands of an estate in rGyal rtse. He is sent as a muleteer (*drel pa*) of the aristocratic bKras rab family to Lhasa. En route, he happens to arrive at the scene of a terrible tragedy in a postal relay station which also functions as an inn for travellers. There are several dead bodies in the postal station, though one wounded man is still alive. 'Brug rgyas helps the man, whom he does not recognize at that time and takes him to the next postal station. Only later does he realize that he has known this man since childhood. He is the son of Lord bKras rab, referred to in the story as "Elder Master." However, in the next postal station the postman's wife tries to kill them both, and 'Brug rgyas shoots her in self-defence without any intention of killing her. The woman, however, dies, this terrible event being witnessed by her little daughter, who becomes one of the main characters of the story and is later renamed "Pad ma" (literally, "lotus"). On his later trip, 'Brug rgyas sees that the little girl has been reduced to beggarhood and wishes to help her. He takes her with him to Lhasa to join the household where he lives with Elder Master and his wife mTsho rgyal. They send Pad ma to study in India and there she develops the idea of a wool trade between India and Tibet, which turns out to be such a good business that the family becomes rich. When Pad ma reaches adulthood, she and 'Brug rgyas get married. The end of the novel is very tragic, but I won't reveal it here so as not to spoil the reader's excitement of reading the story himself/herself.

Thus, the story has four main characters who come from family backgrounds of different social status. What is special is that they are depicted as deciding to form one family and to co-operate and help each other on equal terms. mTsho rgyal, the Elder Master's wife, is also a member of this new family.<sup>41</sup> The narrator, the muleteer 'Brug rgyas, is from a poor family that is in debt and must pay the

<sup>40</sup> The term focalizer is used in reference to perspective in a literary work. For the meaning of this concept, introduced by Gérard Genette, see Neumann and Nünning 2011: 31–32.

<sup>41</sup> In this article less attention has been paid to her character, since the role of the other three main characters appeared to me to be even more central in the story. However, in his essay about this novel the writer himself has included her among the main characters and writes how all four are indispensable for the story (Brag gdong bKras gling dBang rdor 2011: 2). These four are all members of the new bKras zur tshang family.

rent of a field in the form of work to the estate. Because the story is told through this first-person narrator, the reader only learns about events when they are known to the narrator character. This narrating technique also has its limitations, and thus a colophon (*mjug byang*) is added to the story, explaining some matters which were not known to the first-person narrator.

The mimetic features of the character of 'Brug rgyas include the fact that he appreciates honesty in people and work, and has a non-prejudiced and open-minded nature and concern for others. Even though he ends up shooting two people in the story, it is for reasons of self-defence and the character is depicted as feeling distraught about these killings. In fact, after shooting Pad ma's mother, 'Brug rgyas contemplates suicide. He had no intention of killing her, but had just tried to wound the hand in which she was holding a knife. These suicidal thoughts resurface later in the novel in a moment of extreme suffering,<sup>42</sup> and a tendency towards suicide is one of the qualities connected with his personality. In the character of 'Brug rgyas, some of the same qualities are represented which in *gTsug g.yu* were associated with the two servant characters: 'Brug rgyas is depicted as obedient and hard-working, willing to help others and he values honesty. In an essay the author himself has told about his particular sympathy for this character, who according to him is courageous but humble in manner.<sup>43</sup> The open-mindedness of this character can also be interpreted as contributing towards thematization in the novel: this relates both to the theme of the development of trade in the story and that of his relation with a girl from a family of blacksmiths. The theme of trade development can be viewed as one aspect of the larger theme of modernization. As discussed by Tsering Shakya, the new theme of modernity started to appear in Tibetan literature in the 1980s.<sup>44</sup> However, in *bKras zur tshang gi gsang ba'i gtam rgyud* this theme appears in a story located in time almost half a century earlier in traditional Tibetan society in relation to the activities of the bKras zur tshang family.

Considering the character of 'Brug rgyas, a special surprise which is clear to the reader only towards the end of the story, is that 'Brug rgyas becomes a writer and is the author-character of the very story that the reader is holding in his hands. This foregrounds the synthetic component: the reader knows that this authorship by a character is fictitious and only possible in the story-world, since the reader knows the name of the real author of the novel, which is

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<sup>42</sup> See Brag gdong bKras gling dBang rdor 1997: 307.

<sup>43</sup> Brag gdong bKras gling dBang rdor 2011: 3.

<sup>44</sup> See Shakya 2000: 34–38.

printed on the front page. Thus, the story is also a *künstlerroman*, a story about becoming a writer: 'Brug rgyas has had an exciting life and experienced terrible suffering and he wishes to tell others about it. Even though he was illiterate earlier, he later learnt some letter-writing skills from Pad ma. He stays in a retreat hut in a mountain hermitage and reads and writes there, and as a result he produces a book manuscript.

One aristocrat in *bKras zur tshang gi gsang ba'i gtam rgyud* behaves differently to the aristocrats in *gTsug g.yu*. The Elder Master (*sras sku bgres*) in this novel is from an aristocratic background, but leaves his family house and heritage, and to the opposition of his parents marries a girl who has been a servant in their family.<sup>45</sup> The Elder Master is also depicted as a generous and considerate person who does not wish the other three main characters, who come from a lower social class, to be especially respectful towards him. This character is thus very different from the greedy, deceptive and cruel aristocratic type we find in *gTsug g.yu*. Therefore, the Elder Master does not appear to be a typical aristocrat in the earlier socialist realist sense. Also, his synthetic component becomes particularly noticeable in Chapter 6 of Part Two, when he and 'Brug rgyas are introduced by Pad ma as the actors (*byed po*) of Part One: "A Traveller's Nightmare."<sup>46</sup> Of course, here it is left open to interpretation whether with the title of the first part of the novel refers to fiction or to a kind of "real life" story of the fictional story world.<sup>47</sup>

Especially interesting is the character of the little girl from the postal station, Pad ma. Her mimetic component is well developed. She is depicted as an outstanding person with many good qualities.

<sup>45</sup> I suspect that this kind of marriage between an aristocrat and an ordinary person would have been special or at least less common in traditional Tibetan society. Fjeld reports that in contemporary Tibetan society some parents still oppose marriages between ordinary folk and aristocrats, although attitudes have changed in modern Tibetan society and marriages between persons of different family backgrounds are common. Using a range of sources Fjeld gives some information on marriage practices in traditional Tibetan society and writes that people usually married a person from a similar kind of family background, although romantic relations did exist between people from ordinary and aristocratic family backgrounds (Fjeld 2005: 73–79, 83–89).

<sup>46</sup> See Brag gdong bKras gling dBang rdor 1997: 241.

<sup>47</sup> There is the feeling of someone telling a story also in the beginning of part two of the novel, when the narrator starts like this: «'grul pa'i mtshan mo'i har sad» *mdo rdzogs/ 'on te thun mong du shes par 'dod pa'i don zhig gam du lhags pa ni/ bu mo chung chung gang du yod dam/ zhes pa de'o/ de la lan zhig 'debs par brtsams na tshig gi phreng bar spel ba'i gtam rgyud 'di skad yod pa gsan par zhu/* (Brag gdong bKras gling dBang rdor 1997: 146). The same passage is given in English in Tailing 1998: 163: "The tale *A Traveller's Nightmare* is finished. But a question in common remains unknown. 'Where is the little girl?' The answer is yet another tale."

Even though she is very young at the time, she is able to talk courageously and honestly in the court proceedings about the tragic event of her mother's death. She is also diligent in any task she does, and is so intelligent that she is able by means of symbols to keep a record of the sale of the bKras zur tshang shop even before she learns to read and write. Her open-mindedness becomes evident when she is able to conceive the idea of starting to sell wool to a British factory in Calcutta. Her appearance, her name and her personal qualities help us to identify her as a certain kind of person in the story world, in line with Phelan's mimetic component of character. It can be noticed that several of these features also contribute to the formation of her thematic component. She comes to represent a type of model heroine who overcomes the difficulties caused by her family background and develops into an educated and appreciated member of society.

Pad ma's good qualities would seem to exceed that of real people in real life. However, she cannot be regarded only as a model character, for her lively depiction with rich mimetic features gives her character an individual nature. Her character might, nevertheless, be considered somewhat artificially constructed, the synthetic component being rather foregrounded in the way she is depicted as falling in love with the first-person narrator, 'Brug rgyas. Although he acted in self-defence without intending to kill, he is after all the person who shot her mother. Pad ma is a fictitious character, and it is possible to construct characters in fiction who differ in one way or another in their capacities for feeling and emotion in comparison to normal real life persons—fictional possibilities also make for exciting reading. This incongruence foregrounds the synthetic component of this character: The reader starts to wonder whether such a person could exist in real life or is it a question of the writer playing with the fictitious nature of characters.<sup>48</sup> The portrayal of characters as plausible persons who could exist in real life is usually connected to the notion of typical characters,<sup>49</sup> so in this sense the character of Pad ma appears somewhat unusual and thus the occasional foregrounding of her synthetic component also gives her some individual features.

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<sup>48</sup> In his essay the author mentions how important it is that stories have some wonderful or surprising elements (*ngo tshar dang ldan pa'i rkyen*). He gives examples of some events in the plot which the reader is unlikely to have anticipated happening (Brag gdong bKras gling dBang rdor 2011: 3).

<sup>49</sup> Klu thar rgyal (2008: 195–196) and Bu bzhi (2007: 260, 263) both mention how writers take inspiration from real life to create typical images, although they may modify them in imaginative ways, such as gathering together the characteristics of several people into one character, or viewing life through special aesthetic insights.

Like dPal ldan in dPal 'byor's *gTsug g.yu*, Pad ma becomes an orphan.<sup>50</sup> However, in her quality of not harbouring any bad thoughts towards the persons who killed her relatives in self-defence, Pad ma in this sense differs greatly from dPal ldan. The theme of revenge does occur in *bKras zur tshang gi gsang ba'i gtam rgyud*, but the character who takes revenge in a terrible way is a negative character and not one of the main characters.

The story, especially its second part, also has generic features of a female *bildungsroman*. In it Pad ma develops from a poor, dirty beggar child with lice in her hair<sup>51</sup> into an attractive, well-dressed and much admired young woman. Her looks are described on several occasions during the story: her image is vibrant and the narrator depicts her dressed in various styles of clothing. It can be said that she turns into a *sras mo sku zhabs*, a young Mistress—a term which is also used in the novel to refer to her when she starts her studies in India.<sup>52</sup> However, her background as a blacksmith's daughter causes her trouble at first. She has to be withdrawn from a school in Lhasa<sup>53</sup> because parents of other pupils start taking their children out of the school for fear that they will be polluted by being near someone from a blacksmith's family.<sup>54</sup> When Pad ma asks 'Brug rgyas about the reason why her schooling stopped so abruptly, the first-person narrator replies:

It is difficult to understand. Those stupid people do not do what they should be doing, but unnecessarily keep talking about who is an aristocrat, who is an ordinary person, who is a blacksmith and who is a butcher. Because of this the school teacher came to our house and

<sup>50</sup> Tsering Shakya (2004) has made some insightful observations on protagonists who are orphaned or semi-orphaned in relatively early modern Tibetan literature in stories such as rDo rje rgyal po's *Ye shes lha mo dang mgar ba stobs rgyal* (*Ye shes lha mo* and *Blacksmith sTobs rgyal*), 'Jam dpal rgya mtsho's *sKal bzang me tog* (*An Auspicious Flower*) and dPal 'byor's *gTsug g.yu*. According to him, the orphan protagonist could be viewed as an archetype of the "new socialist man" in Communist literature (see Shakya 2004: 136, 148).

<sup>51</sup> See Brag gdong bKras gling dBang rdor 1997: 153–157.

<sup>52</sup> Brag grong bKras gling dBang rdor 1997: 183.

<sup>53</sup> Alice Travers's article contains a great deal of valuable information about private schools in Lhasa before the 1950s. Based on various sources, she discusses how pupils in these schools came from different backgrounds, including commoners and the nobility and pupils of both sexes could join (Travers 2016: 126–128). However, she does not discuss whether children from lower-class families like blacksmiths went to these schools.

<sup>54</sup> See Kapstein 2006: 182–183 on the association of pollution with some lower-class sections of Tibetan traditional society. See also Fjeld 2005: 49–50, 79. Fjeld explains that these beliefs about pollution may restrict certain areas of social contact with persons of lower class, for instance, sharing cups, sexual relations and marriage.

you had to be withdrawn from the school.<sup>55</sup>

He criticizes how people pay unnecessary attention to the family background of a person, highlighting the inequality and discrimination between different social classes in traditional Tibetan society. In Heidi Fjeld's *Commoners and Nobles* she presents a story that happened in more contemporary times in Western Tibet. Although in this real life story from more contemporary times the children did not need to be withdrawn from school, it does show that they faced problems even though only one of the parents had a blacksmith family background.<sup>56</sup> In *bKras zur tshang gi gsang ba'i gtam rgyud*, Pad ma is sent to a school in Darjeeling in India to provide her with an education and to improve her social status. She is a good student who progresses faster than a grade a year. When returning to Lhasa after her studies, many people want to meet her and she is depicted as a much admired person. Thus, here the novel presents a view that no matter what kind of family background and social status one is from, it is possible to improve one's social status through education, and one's economic status through business, becoming rich after being poor. Some of the evil characters in the story are relatives of Pad ma and are also from a blacksmith family background. Choosing to have both a positive heroine and negative characters involved in terrible crimes coming from the same social class and family background appears to convey a view that any person can become well-educated and an appreciated member of society and their status is not predetermined by their family background.

Pad ma is depicted in a lively way, and her behaviour, her laughter when they arrive in India and her way of dressing and arranging her hair all give the impression that her character has been depicted in considerable mimetic detail. Partly these mimetic details also have a thematic function: for example, describing her attractive appearance gives the reader the idea of her transformation from a

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<sup>55</sup> *gang shes/ lkug pa de tshos dgos pa'i las ma las par mi dgos pa'i su zhig sku drag dang/ su zhig phal pa yin/ su zhig mgar ba yin/ su zhig bshas pa yin lugs kho na gleng bzhin sdod/ rkyen de la brten nas slob grwa'i dge rgan rang tsho'i khyim du slebs nas/ khyod slob grwa las 'then dgos pa byung ba red/* (Brag gdong bKras gling dBang rdor 1997: 168). This is quite a literal translation of the passage. I did not supply the translation in Tailing 1998: 192 here, for the simple reason that my copy of the English version of the novel is slightly unclear in this place and some letters are not visible in the inside margin of the page.

<sup>56</sup> The story was told to her by someone telling about the difficulties that his friend of ordinary background encountered when marrying a woman from a family background of blacksmiths. The most difficult problem appeared to be that their children became socially isolated from other children at school. See Fjeld 2005: 80–81.



poor child into an educated and beautiful adult woman. Pad ma has both typical and individual features, the artificial or constructed nature of her character making her appear highly individualistic. The individualistic quality achieved with foregrounding a character's synthetic component appears somewhat different from individual qualities of typical characters. Typical characters can of course possess individualistic features, but these usually draw some inspiration from qualities of people in real life. Often this can be achieved through a writer's observation of real people, who then combines into one person the features of several individuals.

Although they are from different social and family backgrounds, the relations between the four main characters are friendly and close in this novel. I suspect that it would be unlikely or at least very uncommon that an aristocrat, a servant girl, an ordinary muleteer and a girl from the family background of blacksmiths could truly have formed a family and household together in this way in Tibet during the 1930s and 1940s. Blacksmiths were considered low-class in traditional Tibetan society and the idea of being polluted was connected with them, so it sounds very open-minded of 'Brug rgyas and the Elder Master to choose to take the little girl Pad ma into their family.<sup>57</sup> The family group with its new members could be considered somewhat idealistic and even viewed as an artificial and fictional creation. The family as a group seems to represent the idea of equality and harmonious co-existence and co-operation of persons from different social status. The family is, moreover, progressive: they develop together their business and trade and even take an interest in establishing a factory in Tibet, which is not however permitted by the conservative people in the administration. While each of the three characters are defined by their different mimetic features and nature, some of their qualities, such as open-mindedness, also function as thematic components in how they contribute to the theme of the development of trade relations and progress.

#### 4. Summary and Conclusions

To summarize the preceding discussion, several observations were made concerning the characters in both dPal 'byor's *gTsug g.yu* and Brag gdong bKras gling dBang rdor's *bKras zur tshang gi gsang ba'i*

<sup>57</sup> Still in contemporary Tibetan society, as reported by Fjeld (2005: 81–83), there may be opposition from friends and family if a person from an ordinary family background would like to marry someone from a low class background, such as a member of a blacksmith's family.

*gtam rgyud*. There are both shared features and differences in the characterization in these two novels.<sup>58</sup> They both have a main character coming from an ordinary or lower-class section of society. dPal ldan is from an ordinary family and works as a servant, whereas Pad ma comes from a family of blacksmiths, a group whose social status was considered an outcaste in traditional Tibetan society. In both novels, the main character becomes orphaned during the story. However, their reactions to their situation are quite different: dPal ldan wishes to take revenge, whereas Pad ma falls in love with the person who has shot her mother, and befriends the person who has shot her father. Both of these shootings in the *bKras zur tshang gi gsang ba'i gtam rgyud* were in self-defence, in situations where the (fictional) lives of the characters had been in danger. There is also a difference in the family background of the main characters: Pad ma's parents had been working in a postal relay station and had been involved in terrible crimes against innocent travellers, whereas dPal ldan's parents are depicted as good religious people who become innocent victims of a greedy aristocrat who wishes to obtain a valuable turquoise jewel from them by any means. The contrast is noticeable, and the crime-tainted family background of Pad ma serves to highlight the transformation her character undergoes when she receives a good education. It is possible to estimate from some details in the story that during her schooling she has learned to read and write, to do calculations with numbers, and to speak English. She also acquires new ideas about trade from the family of her British classmate when she visits them in Calcutta and sees their factory. Together with the rise in her educational level, her appearance also undergoes improvement and she is depicted as turning into a beautiful woman and even wears Western dress in the form of jeans.<sup>59</sup> That said, it is clear that she had a good character since childhood, and has always been honest and truthful. Considering the way in which Pad ma's development into an educated young woman has been depicted in the second part of *bKras zur tshang gi gsang ba'i gtam rgyud*, the novel has some generic features of a *bildungsroman*.

Another difference in the two novels is that the principle evil characters come from different social classes. In *gTsug g.yu*, the aristocrats are depicted as deceptive, cruel or corrupted, whereas in *bKras zur tshang gi gsang ba'i gtam rgyud* the principle evil characters are the blacksmith brothers, two of whom work as postal station workers. The novel also suggests that the district governance is corrupt. However, in the *bKras zur tshang gi gsang ba'i gtam rgyud* we

<sup>58</sup> Although the original abstract of the conference paper emphasized the differences, there are also some shared features in the characterization.

<sup>59</sup> See Brag gdong bKras gling dBang rdor 1997: 201–214, 231.

can find a character who is an aristocrat but is nevertheless represented positively: he befriends the other main characters, who come from lower social classes, and even marries a girl with a servant background. The aristocratic Elder Master can thus be considered an untypical representative of his class, at least if compared to the aristocrat characters in dPal 'byor's *gTsug g.yu*.

The two novels have different kinds of narrators. In *gTsug g.yu* there is an external narrator, who often has information or knowledge which the main character dPal ldan is not yet aware of. In the *bKras zur tshang gi gsang ba'i gtam rgyud* there is a first-person narrator, who is also a character in his own story. He tells only what is experienced or known to him and additional information which is not known to this first-person narrator is only supplied in the "afterword" to the novel. Even though the novel was supposedly written by this character narrator and character writer, the brief afterword is not written by him, but is narrated by an external narrator.

In the *bKras zur tshang gi gsang ba'i gtam rgyud* we paid attention to how the family group formed by the main characters also functions as a kind of combined unit presenting an idealistic picture of equal relations between people from different social classes living harmoniously together and helping each other. This kind of family unit could be interpreted also having a certain artificial or synthetic nature. In *gTsug g.yu* the servants help each other whereas hostile relations exist between the servants and the upper-class aristocrats and merchants.

When examining the characters in the novels Phelan's three components of character are helpful when discussing the different aspects of these characters. Paying attention to the mimetic components of characters, it is apparent that in *gTsug g.yu*, the servants shared many mimetic features: both are depicted as generally good, obedient, honest and helpful, and both dress quite poorly. At the same time, dPal ldan's character is overshadowed by his negative quality of harbouring a wish to revenge. However, in the *bKras zur tshang gi gsang ba'i gtam rgyud*, the three main characters possess quite different mimetic features, lending each an individualistic flavour. Thus the Elder Master is an open-minded aristocrat who marries a servant girl—quite unlike the evil district commissioner in *gTsug g.yu*. In the character of 'Brug rgyas, a muleteer who becomes a writer of a novel, there is an element of surprise.<sup>60</sup> The character of Pad ma, a poor girl from a low-class

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<sup>60</sup> His tendency to suicidality may also be viewed as an individual characteristic, although two other characters in the novel also end their life through suicide.

background who becomes a well-educated and successful businesswoman and a young lady, also has the individual quality of being able to befriend and love even characters who caused the death of her parents. It was also observed that the synthetic component of the characters is foregrounded in *bKras zur tshang gi gsang ba'i gtam rgyud*, whereas it remains hidden in *gTsug g.yu*. The foregrounding of the synthetic component in the former novel may at times remind the reader of the fictive nature of characters and events, whereas in the latter novel the mimetic illusion is more likely to be preserved while reading even though the reader knows that the story is fictitious. In *bKras zur tshang gi gsang ba'i gtam rgyud* the social status of the heroine is greatly improved, although her end is tragic. In *gTsug g.yu* the status of the servants does not improve at all, and their only means to manage in life is to escape from Lhasa.

As discussed, the typical or representative characters have both individual and general features. In both works characters can be found who have some qualities of typical or representative characters, but the extent to which individual and generalized features are depicted is different. The characters in *gTsug g.yu* appear to a greater extent typical, whereas in the *bKras zur tshang gi gsang ba'i gtam rgyud*, even though Pad ma can be considered in some sense a model character, she has some more individualistic qualities. In both *gTsug g.yu* and *bKras zur tshang gi gsang ba'i gtam rgyud* the main characters' (and in the latter also the family unit's) mimetic and thematic components are developed. The mimetic component seems to be more carefully developed in the character of the lively Pad ma than in that of dPal ldan. This gives her a more individualistic appearing nature, which, however, also possess some qualities of a model character. In fact, her goodness is represented to an almost excessive degree, which may give her some artificial features and may foreground at times her synthetic component to the reader. This foregrounding of the synthetic component makes her fictitious nature more prominent and also contributes some individualistic nature to her character, making her appear to be somewhat different from a real-life person. Also the character of 'Brug rgyas, the muleteer, has some qualities which appear to be common with the servant characters in *gTsug g.yu*, namely he is hard-working and values honesty. In *bKras zur tshang gi gsang ba'i gtam rgyud* the group of characters making up the new family of *bKras zur tshang* can be viewed as representing the idealistic co-operation of people from different social classes in a socialist society which works towards progressive goals. However, this vision of harmonious co-operation is projected onto the traditional Tibetan society from the past. Thus the group of characters in this novel can be considered representative

as a whole, even though each of the main characters have their own special individual features.

In general, it could be suggested that if most of the mimetic features also contribute to thematic functions and if several of the mimetic features of different characters of persons from the same social class resemble each other, the character may appear to be more a person who represents a class of people and less a special person with individually unique qualities. However, if a character has rich mimetic features which make them especially vivid and vital (as was the case with the character of Pad ma), or qualities only possessed by an individual character which are different from other characters of the same social class (as was the case with the Elder Master being a kind aristocrat and 'Brug rgyas the muleteer becoming a writer), the individual side of the character is more salient and emphasized. Also foregrounding the synthetic component in the character (as in the case of Pad ma being almost "unbelievably good" and 'Brug rgyas functioning as the supposed author of the story) gives this character some unique quality and makes it different from the character types found in socialist realism, who are usually depicted in their typical environments in a realistic manner. The synthetic components of characters sometimes appear noticeable to the reader in the *bKras zur tshang gi gsang ba'i gtam rgyud*, whereas in the realistic *gTsug g.yu* they remain unnoticed and in the background. The mimetic component seems to be largely subordinated to the thematic component and works in its service in *gTsug g.yu*. The fact that the characters in *gTsug g.yu* appear to be more typical than in the other later novel could also be connected to the earlier time of writing of *gTsug g.yu*: in some Tibetan literary works published in the 1980s, the influence of socialist realism seems to be stronger than in many later works.<sup>61</sup> The socialist realist style of writing also had an influence on characterization with its ideal of characters being types or typical characters. In *bKras zur tshang gi gsang ba'i gtam rgyud* the main characters also have the quality of being open-minded and interested in economic progress, nor do they discriminate between people of

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<sup>61</sup> The other early Tibetan modern novel published in 1982 in Tibetan (but originally written in Chinese) is 'Jam dpal rgya mtsho's *sKal bsang me tog* [An Auspicious Flower]. It has been studied by Yangdon Dhondup, who points out that the style of the novel could be characterized as revolutionary romanticism in line with the views presented by Lan Yang on this style. She writes that according to Lan Yang this style was influenced by Mao's *Yan'an Talks* and socialist realism (see Yangdon Dhondup 2004: 84–85). If we consider a later Tibetan monumental novel published in 1999, bKra shis dpal ldan's *Phal pa'i khyim tshang gi skyid sdug*, its style is different from these two early modern Tibetan novels and it depicts the life of Tibetan villagers in a realistic style. For information on bKra shis dpal ldan's novel in English, see Shakya 2004: 151–174.

different class background, which makes each of them a representative character. They can be seen to function as representing ideas of modernization and equality between people.

Both novels represent traditional Tibetan society as a society characterized by lack of equality between different classes of people, and both see the need for this situation to be corrected, but they do this in different ways. *gTsug g.yu* shows the inequality and contrasts the social classes,<sup>62</sup> while *bKras zur tshang gi gsang ba'i gtam rgyud* creates a vision of a harmonious group of people from different social statuses forming a family in which the members co-operate with each other. In *gTsug g.yu*, the main characters also have their individual features. Similarly, in *bKras zur tshang gi gsang ba'i gtam rgyud*, the characters also possess some special features, which are sometimes quite surprising and even mysterious. But ultimately the main characters of *bKras zur tshang gi gsang ba'i gtam rgyud* come together as a harmonious family, and this has the thematic function of conveying the idea of equality and co-operation between people. These people are also depicted as open-minded towards the development of business and improved infrastructures. The theme of progress in the later novel could be influenced by the ideas of modernization which were politically favoured after the 1980s, though the novel is set fifty years earlier in the 1930s and 1940s.

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<sup>62</sup> rNam sras also interprets *gTsug g.yu* as representing the kind of relations between different classes of people in the pre-1950s Tibetan society. To him the novel criticizes problems in traditional Tibetan society and expresses a wish for improvements, including gaining equality and justice. He also mentions that the novel represents aspects of traditional Tibetan culture, such as the celebration of festivals (rNam sras 2006: 8).

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