CHAPTER TWO

The Book

Instead of being something said once and for all—and lost in the past like the result of a battle, a geological catastrophe, or the death of a king—the statement, as it emerges in its materiality, appears with a status, enters various networks and various fields of use, is subjected to transferences or modifications, is integrated into operations and strategies in which its identity is maintained or effaced. MICHEL FOUCAULT, THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF KNOWLEDGE

In "The Enigma of Edward FitzGerald," Jorge Luis Borges ponders the miracle that occurred when a nineteenth-century English eccentric came upon a manuscript of five hundred quatrains by a thirteenth-century Persian astronomer. In his translation of a selection of the poems, the Englishman "interpolated, refined and invented" to produce one of the nineteenth century's most popular works of European literature, assuring, as Swinburne observed, "Omar Khayyám a permanent place among the major English poets." The case calls for "conjecture of a metaphysical nature," and Borges wonders whether Umar was reincarnated in England or whether, around 1857, the spirit of Umar lodged in FitzGerald.[1]

Like the Rubaiyat, the work known in the West as *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* is the product of a chance meeting between a fourteenth-century Tibetan author and a latter-day eccentric, Walter Wentz of San Diego, California. Since its publication in 1927, it has been reincarnated several times. The Tibetan work known by this title, one of many Buddhist texts known by the name *Bar do thos grol* (literally, liberation in the intermediate state [through] hearing), is a *terma* (*gter ma*), a "treasure text," one of the thousands of works said to have been secreted by Padmasambhava during his visit to Tibet in the late eighth century, works that he hid in stones, lakes, pillars, and in the minds of future generations because Tibetans of the eighth century were somehow unprepared for them. Thus were they hidden to be discovered at the appropriate moment.

The *Bar do thos grol* is one such work. In its incarnation as *The Tibetan Book of the Dead,* it has been discovered and rediscovered in the West over the course of almost a century; five major (and several minor)[2] discoveries of this text, each somehow suitable for its own time, have occurred since 1919. Together they illuminate much about the various purposes that the *Bar do thos grol* has been meant to serve. Each of the five, in the order of their appearance in the West, will be considered here: *The Tibetan Book of the Dead,* by Walter Y. Evans-Wentz (1927); *The Psychedelic Experience,* by Timothy Leary, Ralph Metzner, and Richard Alpert (1964); *The Tibetan Book of the Dead,* translated by Francesca Fremantle and Chögyam Trungpa (1975); *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying,* by Sogyal Rinpoche (1992); and *The Tibetan Book of the Dead,* translated by Robert Thurman (1994). From its first incarnation in English in 1927, the work has taken on a life of its own as something of a timeless world spiritual classic. It has been made to serve wide-ranging agendas in various fields of use, agendas that have far more to do with the twentieth-century cultural fashions of Europe and America than with how the text has been used over the centuries of its history in Tibet.

The first and most famous of these is, of course, Evans-Wentz's work, which has served as the progenitor of the later versions to a greater extent even than the "original" Tibetan text. It alone has had a number of reincarnations, in the form of editions, each successive with more prefaces and forewords added to the text. Since publication in 1927 its various editions have sold more than 525,000 copies in English; it has also been translated into numerous European languages. Its full title is *The Tibetan Book of the Dead or the After-Death Experiences on the* Bardo *Plane, according to Lāma Kaṛi*

Dawa-Samdup's English Rendering. It was "compiled and edited by W. Y. Evans-Wentz." This was the first of four books on Tibetan Buddhism that Evans-Wentz would produce from lamas' translations; the others are *Tibet's Great Yogī Milarepa* (1928) and *Tibetan Yoga and Secret Doctrines* (1935), both based on translations by Kazi Dawa-Samdup, and *The Tibetan Book of the Great Liberation* (1954), based on translations done for Evans-Wentz by three Sikkimese.[3] The first edition of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* contains a preface by Evans-Wentz and a foreword, "Science of Death," by Sir John Woodroffe, an official of the British Raj who, during his tenure as judge of the High Court of Calcutta, became a scholar and devotee of Hindu tantra, publishing works such as *The Serpent Power* under the pseudonym Arthur Avalon. There is also Evans-Wentz's own extensive introduction and his copious annotations on Lama Kazi Dawa-Samdup's translation. The second edition (1949) contains an additional preface by Evans-Wentz. The third edition (1957) brought the book close to the form in which it is best known today, adding a "Psychological Commentary" by C. G. Jung, translated by R. F. C. Hull from the original German version that appeared in *Das Tibetanische Totenbuch*, which was published in Zurich in 1935. The third edition also contains an introductory foreword by Lama Anagarika Govinda. Finally, Evans-Wentz contributed a preface to the first paperback edition (1960).

Although the first sentence of Evans-Wentz's preface to the first edition reads, "In this book I am seeking—so far as possible—to suppress my own views and to act simply as the mouthpiece of a Tibetan sage, of whom I am a recognized disciple," the version of the book that we have today is filled with other voices (the various prefaces, introductions, forewords, commentaries, notes, and addenda comprise more than half of the book).[4] Together they overwhelm the translation, the increasing popularity of the work having compelled this unusual assortment of authorities to provide their own explanations of the text.

This amalgam of commentaries appended to a translation of a Tibetan text has become the most widely read "Tibetan text" in the West. Its initial appeal may have been due in part to the resurgence of spiritualism after the First World War and a renewed interest in knowing the fate of the dead. It was then that Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, for example, turned to spiritualism and tried to contact his son, who had been killed in the war.[5] But the text has proved remarkably resilient in subsequent generations, gaining far more readers in its English version (with subsequent translations into other European languages) than the Tibetan text upon which it is based ever had in

Tibet. Prior to 1959 "The Tibetan Book of the Dead" (or a Tibetan translation of this title) was unheard of among traditional Tibetan scholars. The Tibetan text upon which it is based, the *Bar do thos grol,* would have been familiar to scholars who knew the literature of the Nyingma sect; they would have recognized it as the name of a large genre of mortuary texts used by Nyingma lamas. The translation in Evans-Wentz's work is a portion of a well-known work in that genre.[6]

Before turning to Evans-Wentz's text, let me briefly summarize the *Bar do thos grol* for those of a younger generation who may not have committed it to memory. It is traditionally used as a mortuary text, read aloud in the presence of a dying or dead person. The text describes the process of death and rebirth in terms of three intermediate states or *bardos* (*bar do,* a Tibetan term that literally means "between two"). The first, and briefest, is the bardo at the moment of death (*'chi kha'i bar do*), when a profound state of consciousness called the clear light dawns. If one is able to recognize the clear light as reality, one is immediately liberated from rebirth. If not, the second bardo, called the bardo of reality (*chos nyid bar do*), begins. The disintegration of the personality brought on by death reveals reality, but in this case not as the clear light but in the form of a mandala of fifty-eight wrathful deities and a mandala of forty-two peaceful deities. These deities appear in sequence to the consciousness of the deceased in the days immediately following death. If reality is not recognized in this second bardo, then the third bardo, the bardo of mundane existence (*srid pa'i bar do*), dawns, during which one must again take rebirth in one of the six realms: in that of gods, demigods, humans, animals, hungry spirits, or in hell.

Prior to his encounter with the Tibetan text, Evans-Wentz studied another system of reincarnation. Born in Trenton, New Jersey, in 1878, he took an early interest in the books on spiritualism in his father's library and read both Madame Blavatsky's *Isis Unveiled* and *The Secret Doctrine* during his teen years.

The Theosophical Society was founded in New York in 1875 by Madame Helena Petrovna Blavatsky and Colonel Henry Steele Olcott. Its goals included the formation of a universal brotherhood regardless of race, creed, sex, caste, or color; the encouragement of studies in comparative religion, philosophy, and science; and the investigation of unexplained laws of nature and the powers latent in man. It was in many ways a response to Darwin, yet rather than seeking in religion a refuge from science, it attempted to found a scientific religion, one that accepted the new discoveries in geology

and embraced an ancient and esoteric system of spiritual evolution more sophisticated than Darwin's. The society was founded at the height of late-nineteenth-century America's interest in spiritualism, the belief that one could contact and communicate with the spirits of the dead through seances, materialization, automatic writing, and other techniques.[7] Madame Blavatsky was herself adept at these and other occult arts.

During the eighteenth century Europeans saw India as a land of origin; some claimed that Christianity had begun there.[8] During the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries India was increasingly displaced by Tibet, especially by occult movements, as the source and preserve of secret knowledge and as the abode of lost races. Some offered evidence that Jesus had spent his lost years there.[9] Madame Blavatsky herself claimed to have spent seven years in Tibet as an initiate of a secret order of enlightened masters called the Great White Brotherhood. These masters, whom she called Great Teachers of the White Lodge or Mahatmas (great souls), lived in Tibet but were not themselves Tibetans. Madame Blavatsky's disciple A. P. Sinnett explained in *Esoteric Buddhism*:

> From time immemorial there had been a certain secret region in Tibet, which to this day is quite unknown to and unapproachable by any but initiated persons, and inaccessible to the ordinary people of the country as to any others, in which adepts have always congregated. But the country generally was not in the Buddha's time, as it has since become, the chosen habitation of the great brotherhood. Much more than they are at present were the Mahatmas in former times distributed about the world. The progress of civilization, engendering the magnetism they find so trying, had, however, by the date with which we are now dealing—the fourteenth century—already given rise to a general movement towards Tibet on the part of the previously dissociated occultist. Far more widely than was held to be consistent with the safety of mankind was occult knowledge and power then found to be disseminated. To the task of putting it under the control of a rigid system of rule and law did Tsong-ka-pa address himself.[10]

Under the tutelage of the Mahatmas, Madame Blavatsky studied the *Stanzas of Dzyan*, which were to form the basis of her magnum opus, *The Secret Doctrine*. In volume five she writes:

> The Book of Dzyan—from the Sanskrit word "Dhyâna" (mystic meditation)—is the first volume of the Commentaries upon the seven secret

> folios of *Kiu-te,* and a Glossary of the public works of the same name. Thirty-five volumes of *Kiu-te* for exoteric purposes and the use of laymen may be found in the possession of the Tibetan Gelugpa Lamas, in the library of any monastery; and also fourteen books of Commentaries and Annotations on the same by the initiated Teachers.
>
> Strictly speaking, those thirty-five books ought to be termed "The Popularised Version" of The Secret Doctrine, full of myths, blinds and errors; the fourteen volumes of *Commentaries,* on the other hand—with their translations, annotations, and an ample glossary of Occult terms, worked out from one small archaic folio, the Book of Secret Wisdom of the World—contain a digest of all the Occult Sciences. These, it appears, are kept secret and apart, in the charge of the Teshu Lama of Tji-gad-je. The Books of *Kiu-te* are comparatively modern, having been edited within the last millennium, whereas, the earliest volumes of the Commentaries are of untold antiquity, some fragments of the original cylinders having been preserved.[11]

Throughout her career she (and, later, other members of the society) claimed to be in esoteric communication with the Mahatmas, sometimes through dreams and visions but most often through letters that either materialized in a cabinet in Madame Blavatsky's room or that she transcribed through automatic writing. The Mahatmas' literary output was prodigious, conveying instructions on the most mundane matters of the society's functions as well as providing the content of its canonical texts, which included A. P. Sinnett's *Esoteric Buddhism,* Madame Blavatsky's *The Secret Doctrine,* and, more recently, the works of Alice Bailey, dictated to her by the master Djwaul Khul, whom she referred to simply as "the Tibetan."[12]

The Theosophical Society enjoyed great popularity in America, Europe, and India (despite repeated scandals and a report by the Society for Psychical Research that denounced Madame Blavatsky as a fraud), playing an important but ambiguous role in the Hindu renaissance in India and the Buddhist renaissance in Sri Lanka. Its popularity continued after the death of its founders and into the present century, when in 1909 Blavatsky's heir, Annie Besant, chose a young Hindu boy as the messiah, the World Teacher Krishnamurti. He renounced his divine status and broke with the society in 1930. The death of Besant and other leaders followed soon after and the society fell into decline. Nonetheless, the Theosophical Society has had a profound effect on the reception of Buddhism in Europe and America during the twentieth century. Of *The Voice of the Silence,* a work Madame Blavatsky claimed to

have translated from the secret Senzar language, D. T. Suzuki wrote, "Here is the real Mahayana Buddhism."[13] Christmas Humphrey's 1960 anthology *The Wisdom of Buddhism* included only five works from Tibet. One was actually of Indian origin, but the last and longest was an extended extract from *The Voice of the Silence*. The scholar of Perfection of Wisdom literature, Edward Conze, remained a Theosophist throughout his life, telling Mircea Eliade that he considered Madame Blavatsky the reincarnation of Tsong kha pa.[14] The Dalai Lama's first book, *The Opening of the Wisdom Eye*, was published by the Theosophical Society.

At the turn of the century Walter Wentz moved to California, where in 1901 he joined the American Section of the Theosophical Society. Headquartered in Point Loma, it was headed by Katherine Tingley, known as the "Purple Mother."[15] At Tingley's urging, he enrolled at Stanford, where he studied with William James and William Butler Yeats. (Yeats had joined the Esoteric Section of the Theosophical Society in 1888 only to be expelled by Madame Blavatsky two years later.) After graduating from Stanford, Wentz went to Jesus College Oxford to study Celtic folklore. It was there that he added a family name from his mother's side to his surname and became Walter Evans-Wentz. After completing his thesis, later published as *The Fairy Faith in Celtic Countries* (1911), he began a world tour financed by income he received from rental properties in Florida. He was in Greece when the First World War broke out, and spent most of the war in Egypt.

From Egypt, he traveled to Sri Lanka and then on to India, where he visited the Theosophical Society headquarters in Adyar and met with Annie Besant. In north India he studied with various Hindu gurus, especially Swami Satyananda. In 1919 he arrived in Darjeeling, on the southern slope of the Himalayas in Sikkim. A great collector of texts in languages he never learned to read (he amassed a collection of Pali palm leaf manuscripts in Sri Lanka), he acquired some Tibetan texts from a British army officer who had recently returned from Tibet. These were portions of the *Profound Doctrine of Self-Liberation of the Mind [through Encountering] the Peaceful and Wrathful Deities* (*Zab chos zhi khro dgongs pa rang grol*), by Karma gling pa, also known as the *Peaceful and Wrathful Deities according to Karmalingpa* (*Kar gling zhi khro*). (One wonders how the course of Western history might have changed had Major Campbell, the British officer, given Evans-Wentz a monastic textbook on Buddhist logic, for example.) With a letter of introduction from the local superintendent of police, Evans-Wentz took these texts to the English teacher at the Maharaja's Boy's School in Gangtok, one Kazi Dawa-Samdup.

He was already acquainted with Western enthusiasts of Buddhism, having served as a translator for Alexandra David-Neel (who had received her Theosophical Society diploma in 1892).[16] She described him in *Magic and Mystery in Tibet*:

> Dawasandup was an occultist and even, in a certain way, a mystic. He sought for secret intercourse with the Dâkinîs and the dreadful gods hoping to gain supernormal powers. Everything that concerned the mysterious world of beings generally invisible strongly attracted him, but the necessity of earning his living made it impossible for him to devote much time to his favourite study. . . .
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> Drink, a failing frequent among his countrymen, had been the curse of his life. This increased his natural tendency to anger and led him, one day, within an ace of murder. I had some influence over him while I lived in Gangtok. I persuaded him to promise the total abstinence from fermented beverages that is enjoined on all Buddhists. But it needed more energy than he possessed to persevere. . . .
>
> I could tell many other amusing stories about my good interpreter, some quite amusing, in the style of Boccaccio. He played other parts than those of occultist, schoolmaster, writer. But, peace to his memory. I do not wish to belittle him. Having acquired real erudition by persevering efforts, he was sympathetic and interesting. I congratulate myself on having met him and gratefully acknowledge my debt to him.[17]

Evans-Wentz took his texts to Kazi Dawa-Samdup and during the next two months met with him each morning before the school day began. The translation that Kazi Dawa-Samdup did for Evans-Wentz was the germ of what would become *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. Their time together was brief. Evans-Wentz soon returned to the ashram of Swami Satyananda to practice yoga, where he learned to sit motionless for four hours and forty minutes each day. Though a student of several prominent neo-Vedantin teachers of the day, including Sri Yuketswar and Ramana Maharshi, Evans-Wentz seems never to have been a devotee of Tibetan Buddhism. Of his relationship with Kazi Dawa-Samdup, Evans-Wentz's biographer writes: "The few letters that have survived that they exchanged show a surprisingly distant and formal tone. Even in Dawa-Samdup's diaries there is no word to suggest otherwise. There is nothing at all foreshadowing the later declarations that the Lama was the guru of Walter Evans-Wentz, nothing about the 'teachings' the American was supposed to have received."[18]

Evans-Wentz returned to Darjeeling in 1935, after Kazi Dawa-Samdup's death, and employed three Sikkimese of Tibetan descent to translate another text for him, later published in *The Tibetan Book of the Great Liberation*. He remained a Theosophist and wrote for various Theosophical publications for the rest of his life, the last twenty-three years of which were spent in the Keystone Hotel in San Diego. He spent his final months at the Self-Realization Fellowship of Swami Yogananda in Encinitas, California.

Evans-Wentz subscribed to a version of reincarnation that was first put forth in 1885 in A. P. Sinnett's *Esoteric Buddhism* and elaborated (and "corrected") in Madame Blavatsky's *The Secret Doctrine* (1888). Having claimed to have studied the ancient *Book of Dzyan*, written in the secret language of Senzar, Blavatsky describes a system of seven rounds, seven root races, and seven subraces. The Earth has passed through three rounds during which it has evolved from a spiritual to a material form. We are now in the fourth round. During the final three rounds it will slowly return to its spiritual form. The universe is populated by individual souls, or monads, themselves ultimately identical to the universal oversoul. Monads are reincarnated according to the law of karma. During the fourth round, the monads inhabit the Earth in the form of seven successive races. The first was a race of spiritual essences called the "Self-born," who had no physical form; they inhabited the Imperishable Sacred Land until it sank into the ocean. The second race, the Hyperboreans, lived at the North Pole. They, too, had no physical form. The Lemurians, the third root race, were the first humans, although they had no sense of taste or smell. Their homeland, the vast continent of Lemuria, stretched across the Pacific to include Africa before being destroyed by fire, although remnants of it, Australia and Easter Island, still exist. The fourth root race inhabited the continent of Atlantis. An advanced race, they used electricity and flew in airplanes. Their civilization ended in the great flood.[19] The last subrace of Atlanteans was absorbed into the early subraces of the fifth root race, the Aryans. These early subraces included the Greeks, Egyptians, and Phoenicians. The Aryans later defeated the remaining Atlanteans, the "yellow and red, brown and black," and drove them into Africa and Asia.[20] As the Mahatma explained in *Esoteric Buddhism*:

> I told you before that the highest people now on earth (spiritually) belong to the first subrace of the fifth root race, and those are the Aryan Asiatics, the highest race (physical intellectuality) is the last sub-race of the fifth—yourselves, the white conquerors. The majority of mankind belongs to the

> seventh sub-race of the fourth root race—the above-mentioned Chinamen and their offshoots and branchlets (Malayans, Mongolians, Tibetans, Javanese, &c., &c.)— with remnants of other sub-races of the fourth and the seventh sub-race of the third race.[21]

In 1888 Madame Blavatsky found the seeds of the sixth subrace of the fifth root race already evident in the Americans, "the pioneers of that race which must succeed to the present Europeans."[22] Other Theosophists identified California as the center of this civilization. After twenty-five thousand years, the seventh subrace will appear. Eventually Europe and the Americas will be destroyed in a cataclysm, heralding the dawn of the sixth root-race of the Earth's fourth round.[23]

Since the midpoint of the Atlantean race a finite number of monads have reincarnated again and again, and will continue to do so throughout the entire cycle of evolution.[24] Only rebirth as a human is possible; animals may reincarnate as higher species, but never vice versa.[25] Those who evolve from the animal stage first take human form as what the *Stanzas of Dzyan* call the "narrow-brained," which includes South Sea islanders, Africans, and Australians. "Those tribes of savages, whose reasoning powers are very little above the level of animals, are not the unjustly disinherited, or the *unfavoured*, as some may think—nothing of the kind. They were simply those *latest arrivals* among the human Monads, which *were not ready*: which have to evolve during the present Round . . . so as to arrive at the level of the average class when they reach the Fifth Round."[26]

The 1927 preface to the first edition of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* must be read with Evans-Wentz's commitment to Theosophy in mind. He begins, "In this book I am seeking—so far as possible— to suppress my own views and to act simply as the mouthpiece of a Tibetan sage, of whom I am a recognized disciple." This is precisely the kind of claim that Madame Blavatsky made so often. He goes on to report that he spent more than five years "wandering from the palm-wreathed shores of Ceylon, and thence through the wonder-lands of the Hindus, to the glacier-clad heights of the Himalayan Ranges, seeking out the Wise Men of the East" (p. xix). In his travels he encountered philosophers and holy men who believed that there were parallels between their own beliefs and practices ("some preserved by oral tradition alone") and those of the Occident and that these parallels were the result of some historical connection (p. xix).

In the 1948 preface to the second edition Evans-Wentz emphasizes what

is a consistent theme in his annotations to the translation, that the West has largely lost its own tradition on the art of dying, an art well-known to the Egyptians, to the initiates of the "Mysteries of Antiquity," and to Christians of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. It was a pre-Christian tradition (as, Evans-Wentz claims in his addendum to the translation, the Tibetan art of dying was a pre-Buddhist tradition) that had been wisely incorporated into the rituals of "various primitive Churches of Christendom, notably the Roman, Greek, Anglican, Syrian, Armenian, and Coptic" (p. xiv), whose traditions have been ignored by modern medical science. The late lama and other learned lamas shared the hope, he says, that their rendering of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* would inspire the West to rediscover and to once again practice an art of dying, in which they would find the inner light of wisdom taught by the Buddha "and all the Supreme Guides of Humanity" (pp. xvi–xvii).

In the 1955 preface to the third edition there is no further mention of the rediscovery of an Occidental tradition. Instead, "To each member of the One Human Family, now incarnate on the planet Earth, this book bears the greatest of all great messages. It reveals to the peoples of the Occident a science of death and rebirth such as only the peoples of the Orient have heretofore known" (p. vii). This was the edition in which the commentaries of Jung and Govinda were first incorporated, and Evans-Wentz's preface takes due notice of their insights. Beyond that, the references to Hindu works, especially the Upanishads and *Bhagavad Gita*, already evident in the notes and epigraphs, seem to outweigh the references to Buddhism and Tibet. Jung's commentary, he says, demonstrates that Western psychologists have moved beyond Freud; they will "advance much further when they no longer allow the Freudian fear of metaphysics to bar their entrance into the realm of the occult" (p. ix). He repeats the view found in much of the spiritualist and Theosophical literature of the nineteenth century (which is held as well by the present Dalai Lama): that Western science will eventually evolve to the point at which it can confirm the insights of the East, most importantly, the existence of rebirth:

> Thus it is of far-reaching historical importance that the profound doctrine of pre-existence and rebirth, which many of the most enlightened men in all epochs have taught as being realizable, is now under investigation by our own scientists of the West. And some of these scientists seem to be approaching that place, on the path of scientific progress, where, as with respect also to other findings by the Sages of Asia long before the rise of

> Western Science, East and West appear to be destined to meet in mutual understanding. (P. ix)

It is when the current "heretical" psychologists adopt the methods of meditation and self-analysis taught by master yogins that "Western Science and Eastern Science will, at last, attain at-one-ment" (p. x). This leads him to a pronouncement worthy of Madame Blavatsky:

> Then, too, not only will Pythagoras and Plato and Plotinus, and the Gnostic Christians, and Krishna and the Buddha be vindicated in their advocacy of the doctrine, but, equally, the Hierophants of the Ancient Mysteries of Egypt and Greece and Rome, and the Druids of the Celtic World. And Western man will awaken from that slumber of Ignorance which has been hypnotically induced by a mistaken Orthodoxy. He will greet wide-opened his long unheeded brethren, the Wise Men of the East. (P. x)

In his 1935 "Psychological Commentary," C. G. Jung (who had read widely in the work of Madame Blavatsky's former secretary, G. R. S. Mead) says that *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* (which he consistently refers to as the *Bardo Thödol*) has been his constant companion ever since its publication in 1927 and "to it I owe not only many stimulating ideas and discoveries, but also many fundamental insights" (p. xxxvi). He thus sets for himself the modest task of making "the magnificent world of ideas and the problems contained in this treatise a little more intelligible to the Western mind" (p. xxxvi). He declares the Tibetan work to be psychological in its outlook, and begins to compare its insights to the more limited views of Freud. He makes extensive use of the three Tibetan terms used to describe the stages of death and rebirth. The first is *Chikhai Bardo* (*'chi kha'i bar do*), literally, the intermediate state of the moment of death, in which the various dissolutions that end in the dawning of the clear light occur. The second is the *Chönyid Bardo* (*chos nyid bar do*), literally, the intermediate state of reality, the actual period between death and the next rebirth during which the visions so vividly described in the text appear. The third is the *Sidpa Bardo* (*srid pa'i bar do*), literally, the intermediate state of existence, which occurs with the entry of the wandering consciousness into the womb, which is itself preceded by the witnessing of the primal scene of parental intercourse.

Jung argues that Freudian psychoanalysis, working backwards, has been able to discover only the last of the three bardos, the *Sidpa Bardo*, which is marked by infantile sexual fantasies. Some analysts claim even to have uncov-

ered intrauterine memories. It is at this point that "Western reason reaches its limit, unfortunately" (p. xli). He expresses the wish that Freudian psychoanalysis could have continued even further, to the pre-uterine: "[H]ad it succeeded in this bold undertaking, it would surely have come out beyond the *Sidpa Bardo* and penetrated from behind into the lower reaches of the *Chönyid Bardo*" (p. xlii), that is, Freud could have proven the existence of rebirth. Here Jung is reminiscent of classical Buddhist proofs on the existence of rebirth, in which it is claimed that one moment of consciousness is produced by a previous moment of consciousness, and that once it is conceded that consciousness at the moment of conception is the product of a previous moment of consciousness, rebirth has been proven. But more important for Jung is this opportunity to dismiss Freud before moving on to his own project. Some might judge this particular condemnation to be disingenuous, since Jung did not himself pursue the question of existence of rebirth (beyond the symbolic level) in the decades that followed.

But Jung offers his criticism of Freud only in passing as he moves on to his larger task, evident also in his other commentaries on Asian texts, that is, the incorporation of Asian wisdom into his own psychological theory. He begins with the suggestion that the Westerner read the *Bardo Thödol* backwards, that is, first the *Sidpa Bardo,* then the *Chönyid Bardo,* and then the *Chikhai Bardo.* The neurosis of the *Sidpa Bardo* has already been identified. The next step is to move on to the *Chönyid Bardo,* which is a state of "karmic illusion" (p. xliii). He takes this as an opportunity to interpret karma as psychic heredity, which leads quickly to the archetypes of the collective unconscious. Of the archetypes to be mined from comparative religion and mythology, he writes, "The astonishing parallelism between these images and the ideas they serve to express has frequently given rise to the wildest migration theories, although it would have been far more natural to think of the remarkable similarity of the human psyche at all times and in all places" (p. xliv). Thus, apparently in contrast to Evans-Wentz, Jung sees Asian yogins and the initiates of Greek mystery cults as having had no influence on one another. Instead their ideas are primordial and universal, originating from an omnipresent psychic structure. How else could one account for the fact that the very same idea, that the dead do not know that they are dead, is to be found in the *Bardo Thödol,* American spiritualism, and Swedenborg? (pp. xliv–xlv).[27]

The horrific visions of the *Chönyid Bardo,* then, represent the effect of surrendering to fantasy and imagination, uninhibited by the conscious mind:

"the *Chönyid* state is equivalent to a deliberately induced psychosis" (p. xlvi). Here Jung reiterates a warning that appears in almost all of his writings about Asia: that the Westerner who practices yoga is in great danger. The dismemberments that occur in the Buddhist hells described in the Tibetan text are symbolic of the psychic dissociation that leads to schizophrenia (p. xlvii).

Thus, a fundamental distinction between East and West is that in Christianity initiation is a preparation for death, while in the *Bardo Thödol* initiation is a preparation for rebirth, preparing "the soul for a descent into physical being" (p. xlix). This is why the European should reverse the sequence of the *Bardo Thödol* such that one begins with the experience of the individual unconscious, then moves to the experience of the collective unconscious, and then moves finally to the state in which illusions cease and "consciousness, weaned away from all form and from all attachment to objects, returns to the timeless, inchoate state" (pp. xlviii–xlix). This sequence, Jung says, "offers a close parallel to the phenomenology of the European unconscious when it is undergoing an 'initiation process,' that is to say, when it is being analyzed" (p. xlix). He closes with the statement that "The world of gods and spirits is truly 'nothing but' the collective unconscious inside me" (p. liii).

Jung thus uses the *Bardo Thödol* (as he did the other Asian texts about which he wrote)[28] as raw material for his own theories. Like the colonial industrialist, he mined Asian texts (in translation) for raw materials, without acknowledging the violence (both epistemic and otherwise) that he did to the texts in the process; reversing the order of the three bardos is but one example. He then processed these raw materials in the factory of his analytic psychology, yielding yet further products of the collective unconscious. These products were then marketed to European and American consumers as components of a therapy and exported back to Asian colonials as the best explanation of their own cultures.

The next preface to the 1948 edition was by Lama Govinda, one of the most influential figures in the representation of Tibetan Buddhism to the West. Lama Anagarika Govinda was born Ernst Lothar Hoffmann in Kassel, Germany, in 1895.[29] He served at the Italian front during World War I, after which he continued his studies at Freiburg University in Switzerland. He became interested in Buddhism while living with expatriate European and American artists in Capri, publishing his first book, *The Basic Ideas of Buddhism and Its Relationship to Ideas of God,* in 1920. (The work is apparently no longer extant.) In 1928 he sailed for Ceylon, where he briefly studied meditation and Buddhist philosophy with the German-born Theravada monk

Nyānatiloka Mahāthera (who gave him the name Govinda) before leaving to travel in Burma and India. While visiting Darjeeling in the Himalayas in 1931 he was driven by a spring snowstorm to a Tibetan monastery at Ghoom, where he met Tomo Geshe Rinpoche (Gro mo dge bshes rin po che), a Gelukpa lama. In his autobiographical *The Way of the White Clouds,* published over thirty years later, Govinda would depict their meeting and his subsequent initiation as the pivotal moment in his life. It is difficult to imagine what transpired between the Tibetan monk and the German traveler (dressed in the robes of a Theravada monk, although he seems not to have been ordained), who spoke no Tibetan, or what this "initiation" may have been (it was perhaps the most preliminary of Buddhist rituals, the refuge ceremony). Govinda's description of any instruction he may have received is vague. He seems, however, to have understood the term differently from its Tibetan meaning of an empowerment by a lama to engage in specific tantric rituals and meditations. In *Foundations of Tibetan Mysticism according to the Esoteric Teachings of the Great Mantra Oṁ Maṇi Padme Hūṁ* he writes, "By 'initiates' I do not mean any organized group of men, but those individuals who, in virtue of their own sensitiveness, respond to the subtle vibrations of symbols which are presented to them either by tradition or intuition."[30]

After making a pilgrimage to Mount Kailash in southwestern Tibet in 1932, he held brief teaching positions at the University of Patna and at Shantiniketan (founded by Rabindranath Tagore), publishing essays in *Mahabodhi,* the journal of a Buddhist society in Calcutta, as well as in various Theosophical journals. His lectures at Patna resulted in *The Psychological Attitude of Early Buddhist Philosophy,* and his lectures at Shantiniketan resulted in *Psycho-Cosmic Symbolism of the Buddhist Stūpa.* While at Shantiniketan he met a Parsi woman, Rati Petit, whom he would marry in 1947. (She also assumed a new name, Li Gotami, and like her husband dressed in the Tibetan-style robes of his design.) During the 1930s he founded a number of organizations, including the International Buddhist University Association, the International Buddhist Academy Association, and the Arya Maitreya Mandala. In 1942 he was interned by the British at Dehra Dun with other German nationals, including Heinrich Harrer (who would escape to spend seven years in Tibet) and Nyānaponika Mahāthera, another German Theravada monk best known as the author of *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation.*

In 1947 and 1948 Lama Govinda and Li Gotami led an expedition sponsored by the *Illustrated Weekly of India* to photograph some of the temples of western Tibet, notably those in Tsaparang and Tholing. (Li Gotami's

photographs, important as archives since the Chinese invasion, appear in Govinda's *The Way of the White Clouds, Foundations of Tibetan Mysticism,* and her own *Tibet in Pictures.*) During their travels they met a lama named Ajorepa Rinpoche at Tsecholing monastery, who, according to Govinda, initiated them into the Kagyu order. No sect of Tibetan Buddhism has such an initiation ceremony, such that the nature of this ceremony also remains nebulous. As with Tomo Geshe Rinpoche, Lama Govinda is mute on the teachings they received. Nonetheless, from this point on he described himself as an initiate of the Kagyu order or, as he often styled himself, "an Indian National of European descent and Buddhist faith belonging to a Tibetan Order and believing in the Brotherhood of Man."

Returning from Tibet, Lama Govinda and Li Gotami set up permanent residence in Sikkim, living as tenants of a house and property rented to them by Walter Evans-Wentz. During the 1960s their home at Kasar Devi became an increasingly obligatory stop for spiritual seekers (including the Beat poets Gary Snyder and Allen Ginsberg in 1961) until they were forced to put up signs around the property warning visitors away. With the publication of *The Way of the White Clouds* in 1966, Govinda's fame only grew, and he spent the last two decades before his death in 1985 lecturing in Europe and the United States. His last years were spent in a home in Mill Valley provided by the San Francisco Zen Center. In 1981 Govinda published what he regarded as his most important work, *The Inner Structure of the I Ching,* a work that he undertook because "We have heard what various Chinese and European philosophers and scholars thought about this book, instead of asking what the *I Ching* itself has to say."[31] His study seeks to remedy the situation, unimpeded and perhaps enhanced, it seems, by Lama Govinda's apparent inability to read Chinese. The book was published with support from the Alan Watts Society for Comparative Research.

Indeed, throughout his career Govinda seems to have drawn on a wide variety of Western-language sources but never on untranslated Buddhist texts. The translations of the Pali in his *The Psychological Attitude of Early Buddhist Philosophy* (first delivered as lectures at the University of Patna in 1935) are drawn from the British scholars Thomas and Caroline Rhys Davids and from his fellow German, Nyānatiloka Mahāthera. His *Psycho-Cosmic Symbolism of the Buddhist Stūpa* draws entirely on Western sources. In his book of essays, painting, and poetry published by the Theosophical Society, *Creative Meditation and Multi-Dimensional Consciousness* (which includes the essays "Concept and Actuality," "The Well of Life," and "Contemplative

Zen Meditation and the Intellectual Attitude of Our Time"), he cites Martin Buber, D. T. Suzuki, Alan Watts, Heinrich Zimmer, and Evans-Wentz. Nonetheless, he represents himself as a spokesman for Tibetan Buddhism in ways that are above all reminiscent of the Theosophy of Evans-Wentz:

> The importance of Tibetan tradition for our time and for the spiritual development of humanity lies in the fact that Tibet is the last living link that connects us with the civilizations of a distant past. The mystery-cults of Egypt, Mesopotamia and Greece, of Incas and Mayas, have perished with the destruction of their civilizations and are for ever lost to our knowledge, except for some scanty fragments.
>
> The old civilizations of India and China, though well preserved in their ancient art and literature, and still glowing here and there under the ashes of modern thought, are buried and penetrated by so many strata of different cultural influences, that it is difficult, if not impossible, to separate the various elements and to recognize their original nature.[32]

Like Evans-Wentz, who potrayed himself as a mere mouthpiece for Kazi Dawa-Samdup, Lama Govinda suggests that his musings derive from teachings he received from Tomo Geshe Rinpoche, to whom his *Foundations of Tibetan Mysticism according to the Esoteric Teachings of the Great Mantra Oṁ Maṇi Padme Hūṃ* is dedicated: "The living example of this great teacher, from whose hands the author received his first initiation twenty-five years ago, was the deepest spiritual stimulus of his life and opened to him the gates to the mysteries of Tibet. It encouraged him, moreover, to pass on to others and to the world at large, whatever knowledge and experience he has thus gained—as far as this can be conveyed in words."[33] The fact that this work contains an interpretation that appears in no Tibetan text may explain (as we shall see in the case of Evans-Wentz) why he describes them as "esoteric teachings."

In his introductory foreword to *The Tibetan Book of the Dead,* Lama Govinda, like Jung, draws on a psychological vocabulary when he says that "There are those who, in virtue of concentration and other *yogic* practices, are able to bring the subconscious into the realm of discriminative consciousness and, thereby, to draw upon the unrestricted treasury of subconscious memory, wherein are stored the records not only of our past lives but the records of the past of our race, the past of humanity, and of all pre-human forms of life, if not of the very consciousness that makes life possible in this universe" (p. liii). Govinda thus seems to combine Jung's notion of a collective and archaic repository of memory with Evans-Wentz's belief that *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* is drawn from the actual memories of Eastern yogins who could remember their past lives. Such knowledge, however, would crush those not trained to receive it; therefore, the *Bardo Thödol* has remained secret, "sealed with the seven seals of silence." Echoing Evans-Wentz's call, Govinda declared, "But the time has come to break the seals of silence; for the human race has come to the juncture where it must decide whether to be content with the subjugation of the material world, or to strive after the conquest of the spiritual world, by subjugating selfish desires and transcending self-imposed limitations" (p. liv). The remainder of his foreword is taken up largely with a defense of the authenticity of the Tibetan *terma,* the texts hidden by Padmasambhava during the eighth century, and an argument for the purely Buddhist nature of the *Bardo Thödol,* untainted by Bönpo influence. On this point, as we shall see, he appears to part company with Evans-Wentz.

Sir John Woodroffe's foreword is noteworthy for its persistent attempts at finding in the Hindu literature, particularly the Hindu tantric literature to which Woodroffe was so devoted, parallels and even precedents for the doctrines set forth in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead.* He pauses, however, to include an obligatory swipe at Tibetans for the way in which they mispronounce Sanskrit mantras (p. lxxix).

Evans-Wentz's own lengthy introduction begins with a note explaining its function, which is worth quoting in full:

> This Introduction is—for the most part—based upon and suggested by explanatory notes which the late Lāma Kazi Dawa-Samdup, the translator of the *Bardo Thödol,* dictated to the editor while the translation was taking shape, in Gangtok, Sikkim. The Lāma was of the opinion that his English rendering of the *Bardo Thödol,* dictated to the editor while the translation was taking shape, in Gangtok, Sikkim. The Lāma was of the opinion that his English rendering of the *Bardo Thödol* ought not to be published without his exegetical comments on the more abstruse and figurative parts of the text. This, he thought, would not only help to justify his translation, but, moreover, would accord with the wishes of his late *guru* (see p. 80) with respect to all translations into a European tongue of works expository of the esoteric lore of the great Perfectionist School into which that guru had initiated him. To this end, the translator's exegesis, based upon that of the translator's *guru,* was transmitted to the editor and recorded by the editor herein.

The editor's task is to correlate and systematize and sometimes to expand the notes thus dictated, by incorporating such congenial matter, from widely separated sources, as in his judgement tends to make the exegesis more intelligible to the Occidental, for whom this part of the book is chiefly intended.

The translator felt, too, that without such safeguarding as this Introduction is intended to afford, the *Bardo Thödol* translation would be peculiarly liable to misinterpretation and consequent misuse, more especially by those who are inclined to be, for one reason or another, inimical to Buddhistic doctrines, or to the doctrines of his particular Sect of Northern Buddhism. He also realized how such an Introduction as is here presented might itself be subject to adverse criticism, perhaps on the ground that it appears to be the outcome of a philosophical eclecticism. However this may be, the editor can do no more than state here, as he has stated in other words in the Preface, that his aim, both herein and in the closely related annotations to the text itself, has been to present the psychology and teachings peculiar to and related to the *Bardo Thödol* as he has been taught them by qualified exponents of them, who alone have the unquestioned right to explain them.

If it should be said by critics that the editor has expounded the *Bardo Thödol* doctrines from the standpoint of the Northern Buddhist who believes in them rather than from the standpoint of the Christian who perhaps would disbelieve at least some of them, the editor has no apology to offer; for he holds that there is no sound reason adducible why he should expound them in any other manner. Anthropology is concerned with things as they are; and the hope of all sincere researchers in comparative religion devoid of any religious bias ought always to be to accumulate such scientific data as will some day enable future generations of mankind to discover Truth itself— that Universal Truth in which all religions and all sects of all religions may ultimately recognize the Essence of Religion and the Catholicity of Faith. (Pp. 1–2 n. 1)

This remarkable note accomplishes many tasks. First, it locates the authority for the contents of the introduction that is to follow not in Evans-Wentz but in the translator, the Tibetan lama. It is the lama's oral teachings that provide the basis of Evans-Wentz's words. Indeed, it raises the level of authority one step higher by invoking the power of lineage, stating that the exegesis derives from the lama's own guru, and that it was transmitted first to Kazi Dawa-Samdup and then from him to Evans-Wentz, in the tradition of guru to disciple. Evans-Wentz, then, has for the most part, as he states in his

own preface to the first edition, acted only as the mouthpiece for his lama, only occasionally "incorporating such congenial matter, from widely separated sources, as in his judgement tends to make the exegesis more intelligible to the Occidental." He reports that the late lama called him his "living English dictionary" (p. 78). As we shall see, there will be much such congenial matter, especially concerning the theories of karma and rebirth, and concerning "symbolism," matter that deviates significantly from the contents of the *Bardo Thödol* but that is represented by this note as having the sanction of the lama and the lama's lama. For Evans-Wentz is claiming for himself the status of the initiate; he is setting forth the teachings "as he has been taught them by qualified initiated exponents of them, who alone have the unquestioned right to explain them." He thus vouchsafes that right for himself as the student of these masters, although whether his reference here is to Tibetan lamas or Mahatmas is unclear.[34] At the same time, in the final paragraph, he professes as well the authority of the scholar, the anthropologist who is concerned with "things as they are," unconcerned with the articles of any particular faith. Thus he claims for himself both the authority of Eastern religion (through his Tibetan lama) and Western science (through his Oxford degree). His task is the accumulation of scientific data, data that will one day lead all sects of all religions to see the Essence of Religion. One assumes that by this he means Theosophy.

Evans-Wentz begins the body of the introduction by claiming an "ultimate cultural relationship" between the *Bardo Thödol* and the *Egyptian Book of the Dead*: the germ of this teaching has been "preserved for us by a long succession of saints and seers in the God-protected Land of the Snowy Ranges, Tibet" (p. 2). He launches immediately into a discussion of symbolism, claiming that "some of the more learned lāmas" have believed that "since very early times there has been a secret international symbol-code in common use among the initiates, which affords a key to the meaning of such occult doctrines as are all still jealously guarded by religious fraternities in India, as in Tibet, and in China, Mongolia, and Japan" (p. 3). It is this supposed code that will allow him to make his most dubious deviations from the Tibetan text. Symbol codes, he notes, are not unique to Buddhists but have been used throughout the world, in Egyptian and Mexican hieroglyphics, by Plato and the Druids, by Jesus and the Buddha. In the case of the Buddha, his disciples have over the centuries preserved teachings of his that were never written down, teachings that form "an extra-canonical, or esoteric Buddhism" (p. 5).

Throughout the introduction, he refers to occult teachings known only to initiates of the esoteric tradition. Again, all of this takes on new meaning when read through the lens of Theosophy, in which symbolism is of central importance. One quarter of the fifteen hundred pages of the 1888 edition of *The Secret Doctrine* is concerned with symbolism, of which Madame Blavatsky writes, "The study of the hidden meaning in every religious and profane legend, of whatsoever nation, large or small—pre-eminently the traditions of the East—has occupied the greater portion of the present writer's life."[35] It is therefore easy to see why Evans-Wentz would have sought the esoteric meaning in all that he read. In this pursuit he would even be encouraged by Tibetan lamas, at least the lamas whom Madame Blavatsky claimed to know. In 1894 she published in *Lucifer* a letter she had received from one of the Mahatmas, "Chohan-Lama of Rinch-cha-tze (Tibet) the Chief of the Archives-registrars of the secret Libraries of the Dalai and Ta-shü-hlumpo Lamas-Rimboche." In discussing the Tibetan canon, the Chohan-Lama explains (in a passage no Tibetan scholar of the nineteenth century could have written):

> Could they even by chance had seen them, I can assure the Theosophists that the contents of these volumes could never be understood by anyone who had not been given the key to their peculiar character, and to their hidden meaning.
>
> Every description of localities is figurative in our system; every name and word is purposely veiled; and a student, before he is given any further instruction, has to study the mode of deciphering, and then of comprehending and learning the equivalent secret term or synonym for nearly every word of our religious language. The Egyptian enchorial or hieratic system is child's play to the deciphering of our sacred puzzles. Even in those volumes to which the masses have access, every sentence has a dual meaning, one intended for the unlearned, and the other for those who have received the key to the records.[36]

Evans-Wentz then launches into a discussion of the symbolism of the number seven, for the bardo lasts for a maximum of forty-nine days, seven times seven. The number also has symbolic meaning in Hinduism, in Hermetic writings, and in the Gospel of John. In nature, seven is important in the periodic table and in the "physics of color and sound." This proves that the *Bardo Thödol* is "scientifically based" (p. 7).[37] In his discussion of the esoteric meaning of the forty-nine days of the bardo, Evans-Wentz refers the

reader to several passages from Madame Blavatsky's *The Secret Doctrine*, to which he adds, "The late Lāma Kazi Dawa-Samdup was of the opinion that, despite the adverse criticisms directed against H. P. Blavatsky's works, there is adequate internal evidence in them of their author's intimate acquaintance with the higher *lāmaistic* teachings, into which she claimed to have been initiated" (p. 7 n. 1). Later in the introduction he writes, "In other words, the *Bardo Thödol* seems to be based upon verifiable data of human physiological and psychological experiences; and it views the problem of the after-death state as being purely a psycho-physical problem; and it is therefore, in the main scientific" (p. 31). His view, then, seems to be that the *Bardo Thödol*, or at least its esoteric teachings, is most ancient, confirmed by the saints and seers of all the great civilizations of the past. The judgment scene, for example, has parallels in ancient Egypt, in Plato's *Republic*, and in "the originally pagan St. Patrick's Purgatory in Ireland" (p. 37). At the same time the esoteric teachings are also most modern, waiting to be confirmed by visionary scientists of the future. This is a conviction that later exponents of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, especially Leary and Thurman, would reprise in subsequent decades.

As mentioned above, Evans-Wentz's most creative contribution to the introduction to *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, and the point least likely to have been endorsed by "the late Lāma Kazi Dawa-Samdup," and, most especially, by Dawa-Samdup's teacher, is the interpretation of the doctrine of rebirth.

In standard Buddhist doctrine one finds descriptions of a cycle of birth and death, called *saṃsāra* (wandering), which consists of six realms of rebirth: gods, demigods, humans, animals, ghosts, and hell beings (although sometimes the realm of demigods is omitted). The entire cycle of rebirth in which the creations and destructions of universes are encompassed has no ultimate beginning. The realms of animals, ghosts, and hell beings are regarded as places of great suffering, whereas the godly realms are abodes of great bliss. Human rebirth falls in between, bringing as it does both pleasure and pain. The engine of samsara is driven by karma, the cause and effect of actions. Like other Indian religions, Buddhist doctrine holds that every intentional act, whether physical, verbal, or mental, leaves a residue in its agent. That residue, like a seed, will eventually produce an effect at some point in the future, an effect in the form of pleasure or pain for the person who performed the act. Thus Buddhists conceive of a moral universe in which virtuous deeds create experiences of pleasure and nonvirtuous deeds create experiences of

pain. These latter are often delineated in a list of ten nonvirtuous deeds: killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, divisive speech, harsh speech, senseless speech, covetousness, harmful intent, and wrong view. Buddhist texts include extensive discussions of the specific deeds that constitute these ten nonvirtues and their respective karmic weights.

These deeds not only determine the quality of a given life but also determine the place of rebirth after death. Depending on the gravity of a negative deed (killing being more serious than senseless speech and killing a human more serious than killing an insect, for example), one may be reborn as an animal, a ghost, or in one of the hot or cold hells, where the life span is particularly lengthy. Among the hells, some are more horrific than others. The most torturous is reserved for those who have committed one of five heinous deeds: killing one's father, killing one's mother, killing an arhat, wounding a buddha, and causing dissent in the community of monks and nuns.

Rebirth as a god or human in the realm of desire is the result of a virtuous deed, and is considered very rare; the vast majority of beings in the universe are said to inhabit the three unfortunate realms of animals, ghosts, and the hells. Rarer still is rebirth as a human who has access to the teachings of the Buddha. In a famous analogy, a single blind tortoise is said to swim in a vast ocean, surfacing for air only once every century. On the surface of the ocean floats a single golden yoke. It is rarer, said the Buddha, to be reborn as a human with the opportunity to practice the dharma than it is for the tortoise to surface for its centennial breath with its head through the hole in the golden yoke. One is said to be reborn as a god in the realm of desire as a result of an act of charity: giving gifts results in future wealth. Rebirth as a human is said to result from consciously refraining from a nonvirtuous deed, as when one takes a vow not to kill humans. The greater part of Buddhist practice throughout Asia and throughout history has been directed toward securing rebirth as a human or (preferably) a god in the next lifetime, generally through acts of charity directed toward monks and monastic institutions.

For Evans-Wentz, however, this is only the exoteric teaching; the esoteric doctrine is quite different.[38] "In examining the Rebirth Doctrine, more particularly as it presents itself in our text, two interpretations must be taken into account: the literal or exoteric interpretation, which is the popular interpretation; and the symbolical or esoteric interpretation, which is held to be correct by the initiated few, who claim not scriptural authority or belief, but

knowledge" (pp. 39–40). He concedes that the exoteric view, "accepted universally by Buddhists, both of the Northern and Southern Schools—as by Hindus," is that consciousness can be embodied in a subhuman form in a lifetime after, even immediately after, embodiment as a human. This view is based on "the untested authority of *gurus* and priests who consider the literally interpreted written records to be infallible and who are not adept in *yoga*" (p. 42). That "the brute principle of consciousness in its entirety and the human principle of consciousness in its entirety are capable of exchanging places with each other" is, for Evans-Wentz, an "obviously irrational belief." Yet this, he concedes, is the view that the *Bardo Thödol* conveys, when it is read literally.

The esoteric view, "on the authority of various philosophers, both Hindu and Buddhist, from whom the editor has received instruction," is quite different. The human form is the result of evolution, as is human consciousness. Thus, just as it is impossible for an animal or plant to devolve into one of its previous forms, so it is impossible for "a human life-flux to flow into the physical form of a dog, or fowl, or insect, or worm" (p. 43). Thus, "man, the highest of the animal-beings, cannot become the lowest of the animal beings, no matter how heinous his sins" (pp. 43–44). Such a view was believed by the esotericists to be quite unscientific (p. 48). (Note here Colonel Olcott's rendering of Buddhist doctrine in his 1881 *The Buddhist Catechism:* "143. Q. *Does Buddhism teach that man is reborn only upon our earth?* A. As a general rule that would be the case, until he had evolved beyond its level.") There can be gradual progression and retrogression only within a species. Only after ages of continual retrogression would it be possible for a human form to revert to the subhuman. Evans-Wentz claims that this was the view of the late lama, and he quotes him speaking of "a mere faded and incoherent reflex of the human mentality," an utterance difficult to imagine from a Tibetan lama, whether in English or Tibetan. What Evans-Wentz found particularly remarkable, however, was that the lama "expressed it while quite unaware of its similarity to the theory held esoterically by the Egyptian priests and exoterically by Herodotus, who apparently became their pupil in the monastic college of Heliopolis" (p. 45).

It appears that Evans-Wentz held to the conviction throughout his life that in Buddhism rebirth as an animal is impossible, referring readers of his 1954 *Tibetan Book of the Great Liberation* and his 1958 *Tibetan Yoga and Secret Doctrines* to this exposition in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead.* Commenting on an incident in the life of Padmasambhava in *The Tibetan Book of the Great*

Liberation in which Padma Tsalag is reborn as a fly, Evans-Wentz explains, "While the many, the exotericists, may accept this strange folk-tale literally, the more spiritually advanced of the Great *Guru's* devotees interpret it symbolically, as they do very much else in the Biography as a whole, the fly being to them significant of the undesirable characteristics of the unbridled sensuality associated with Padma Tsalag."[39]

But if this is the true teaching, why does the *Bardo Thödol* appear to teach otherwise? "The *Bardo Thödol,* as a Doctrine of Death and Rebirth, seems to have existed at first unrecorded, like almost all sacred books now recorded in Pali, Sanskrit, or Tibetan, and was a growth of unknown centuries. Then by the time it had fully developed and been set down in writing no doubt it had lost something of its primitive purity. By its very nature and religious usage, the *Bardo Thödol* would have been very susceptible to the influence of the popular or exoteric view; and in our opinion it did fall under it, in such manner as to attempt the impossible, namely, the harmonizing of the two interpretations. Nevertheless, its original esotericism is still discernible and predominant" (pp. 54–55).[40] Thus, it seems that even the sacred teachings of the lamas, preserved for centuries in Tibet (Evans-Wentz argues, in contrast to Govinda, that the essentials of the text are pre-Buddhist in origin [pp. 73, 75], perhaps deriving from the Atlantean age), were subject to degeneration when the esoteric knowledge was committed to writing; the higher teaching of the *Bardo Thödol* is confused, perhaps, "because of corruptions of text" (p. 58). But the true meaning is still accessible: if the "Buddhist and Hindu exotericists re-read their own Scriptures in light of the Science of Symbols their opposition to Esotericism would probably be given up" (p. 57).[41]

Thus, the *Bardo Thödol* is a reshaping of ancient teachings handed down orally over the centuries, recording the belief of countless generations concerning the postmortem state. Once written down, corruptions inevitably crept into the text, such that it cannot be accurate in all details. Yet it remains scientific in its essentials. "In its broad outlines, however, it seems to convey a sublime truth, heretofore veiled to many students of religion, a philosophy as subtle as that of Plato, and a psychical science far in advance of that, still in its infancy, which forms the study of the Society for Psychical Research [which had condemned Madame Blavatsky as a fraud]. And, as such, it deserves the serious attention of the Western World, now awakening to a New Age, freed, in large measure, from the incrustations of medievalism, and eager to garner wisdom from all the Sacred Books of mankind, be they of one Faith or of another" (pp. 77–78).

The book ends with his opinion that "the greater part of the symbolism nowadays regarded as being peculiarly Christian or Jewish seems to be due to the adaptations from Egyptian and Eastern religions. They suggest, too, that the thought-forms and thought-processes of Orient and Occident are, fundamentally, much alike—that, despite differences of race and creed and of physical and social environment, the nations of mankind are, and have been since time immemorial, mentally and spiritually one" (p. 241).

This sentiment engendered a reincarnation of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* not forty-nine days but thirty-seven years later (in 1964) in the form of *The Psychedelic Experience: A Manual Based on the Tibetan Book of the Dead,* by Timothy Leary, Ralph Metzner, and Richard Alpert (later to become Baba Ram Dass). It was their claim that the oneness, both mental and spiritual, that Evans-Wentz had proclaimed could now be confirmed through the use of psychotropic drugs. Thus their book is a guide to the use of hallucinogens in which the various stages of death, the intermediate state, and rebirth described in the *Bardo Thödol* are transposed onto the stages of what at the time was called an "acid trip." "If the manual is read several times before a session is attempted, and if a trusted person is there to remind and refresh the memory of the voyager during the experience, the consciousness will be freed from the games which comprise 'personality' and from positive-negative hallucinations which often accompany states of expanded awareness."[42] Their book has generally been forgotten, invoked perhaps only by collectors of Beatles esoterica who might remember that the opening lines of "Tomorrow Never Knows" on the 1966 album *Revolver* come from this book: "Whenever in doubt, turn off your mind, relax, float downstream" (p. 14).

The book's premise, now well-worn and easily dismissed but perhaps exciting in 1964, is stated at the outset:

> A psychedelic experience is a journey to new realms of consciousness. The scope and content of the experience is limitless, but its characteristic features are the transcendence of verbal concepts, of space-time dimensions, and of the ego or identity. Such experiences of enlarged consciousness can occur in a variety of ways: sensory deprivation, yoga exercises, disciplined meditation, religious or aesthetic ecstasies, or spontaneously. Most recently they have become available to anyone through the ingestion of psychedelic drugs such as LSD, psilocybin, mescaline, DMT, etc. . . .

> Here then is the key to a mystery which has been passed down for over 2,500 years—the consciousness-expansion experience—the pre-mortem death and rebirth rite. The Vedic sages knew the secret; the Eleusinian initiates knew it; the Tantrics knew it. In all their esoteric writings they whisper the message: it is possible to cut beyond ego-consciousness, to tune in on neurological processes which flash by at the speed of light, and to become aware of the enormous treasury of ancient racial knowledge welded into the nucleus of every cell in your body. . . .
>
> The present moment in human history (as Lama Govinda points out) is critical. Now, for the first time, we possess the means of providing the enlightenment to any prepared volunteer. (The enlightenment always comes, we remember, in the form of a new energy process, a physical, neurological event.) For these reasons we have prepared this psychedelic version of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. The secret is released once again, in a new dialect, and we sit back quietly to observe whether man is ready to move ahead and to make use of the new tools provided by modern science.[43]

Leary and Alpert believed, at least in the early years of their work with LSD, that the experiences of the mystics and the yogins of the world's religions were essentially the same, that they were insights into the fundamental and eternal truths of the universe, truths that are now being or will soon be confirmed by modern science, but were already known to the sages of the past. "Indeed, eastern philosophic theories dating back four thousand years adapt readily to the most recent discoveries of nuclear physics, biochemistry, genetics, and astronomy" (p. 20). Furthermore, those same experiences could be induced through the use of psychedelic drugs. In order to put the Tibetan text (or, more precisely, Evans-Wentz's book) to such use, it was necessary for the authors to decontextualize it from its traditional use as a mortuary text. To effect this change, they, like Evans-Wentz before them when he found Theosophical doctrines there, resort to the trope of the esoteric meaning: "The concept of actual physical death was an exoteric facade adopted to fit the prejudices of the Bonist tradition in Tibet. Far from being an embalmers' guide, the manual is a detailed account of how to lose the ego; how to break out of personality into new realms of consciousness; and how to avoid the involuntary limiting processes of the ego; how to make the consciousness-expansion experience endure in subsequent daily life" (p. 22).

The book is dedicated to Aldous Huxley and begins with tributes to Evans-Wentz, Jung, and Lama Govinda. It then moves through the three

bardos set forth in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, providing its own gloss. Thus here the first bardo, the bardo of the time of death (*'chi kha'i bar do*), during which the mind of clear light dawns, is called the Period of Ego Loss or Non-Game Ecstasy. At this first stage of the psychedelic experience the voyager has the opportunity to see reality directly and thereby achieve liberation, with liberation defined as "the nervous system devoid of mental-conceptual activity," and thus able to see the "silent unity of the Unformed" (p. 36). The authors then translate the Tibetan imagery into their own:

> The Tibetan Buddhists suggest that the uncluttered intellect can experience what astrophysics confirms. The Buddha Vairochana, the Dhyani Buddha of the Center, Manifester of Phenomena, is the highest path to enlightenment. As the source of all organic life, in him all things visible and invisible have their consummation and absorption. He is associated with the Central Realm of the Densely-Packed, i.e., the seed of all universal forces and things are densely packed together. This remarkable convergence of modern astrophysics and ancient *lamaism* demands no complicated explanation. The cosmological awareness—and awareness of every other natural process—is there in the cortex. You can confirm this preconceptual mystical knowledge by empirical observation and measurement, but it's all there inside your skull. Your neurons "know" because they are linked directly to the process, are part of it. (P. 36)

The second bardo, in which visions of peaceful and wrathful deities occur (*chos nyid bar do*), is called the Period of Hallucinations. The authors again translate the Tibetan deities that appear during this stage into their own vocabulary, renaming the visions of the sixth day, for example, the Retinal Circus. During this stage the voyager is told not to become attracted or repulsed by the visions that occur, that he or she should sit quietly, "controlling his expanded awareness like a phantasmagoric multi-dimensional television set" (p. 47). Indeed, television (and to a lesser extent robots) provides the dominant metaphor for the author's gloss of the experience of the bardo.

> The fact of the matter is that all apparent forms of matter and body are momentary clusters of energy. We are little more than flickers on a multi-dimensional television screen. This realization directly experienced can be delightful. You suddenly wake up from the delusion of separate form and hook up to the cosmic dance. Consciousness slides along the wave matrices, silently at the speed of light.

> The terror comes with the discovery of transience. Nothing is fixed, no form solid. Everything you can experience is "nothing but" electrical waves. You feel ultimately tricked. A victim of the great television producer. Distrust. The people around you are lifeless television robots. The world around you is a facade, a stage set. You are a helpless marionette, a plastic doll in a plastic world. (P. 66)

Consistent with their reading of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* as an esoteric guide to the use of psychedelic drugs, Leary, Metzner, and Alpert see the third and final of the three bardos not as an explanation of the process by which the spirit of a dead person is reborn in one of the six realms of samsara (as a god, demigod, human, animal, ghost, or denizen of hell), but rather as an instruction on how to "come down" when the effects of the drug begin to fade. The third bardo is thus called the Period of Re-Entry. "In the original Bardo Thodol the aim of the teachings is 'liberation,' i.e., release from the cycle of birth and death. Interpreted esoterically, this means that the aim is to remain at the stage of perfect illumination and not to return to social game reality" (p. 77). All but the most advanced, however, must return to one of six "game worlds." Thus, like Evans-Wentz, the authors of *The Psychedelic Experience* offer their own version of the Buddhist doctrine of rebirth:

> The Tibetan manual conceives of the voyager as returning eventually to one of six worlds of game existence (*sangsara*). That is, the re-entry to the ego can take place on one of six levels, or as one of six personality types. Two of these are higher than the normal human, three are lower. The highest, most illuminated, level is that of the *devas,* who are what Westerners would call saints, sages or divine teachers. They are the most enlightened people walking the earth. Gautama Buddha, Lao Tse, Christ. The second level is that of the *asuras,* who may be called titans or heroes, people with a more than human degree of power and vision. The third level is that of most normal human beings, struggling through game-networks, occasionally breaking free. The fourth level is that of primitive and animalistic incarnations. In this category we have the dog and the cock, symbolic of hyper-sexuality concomitant with jealousy; the pig, symbolizing lustful stupidity and uncleanliness; the industrious, hoarding ant; the insect or worm signifying an earthy or grovelling disposition; the snake, flashing in anger; the ape, full of rampaging primitive power; the snarling "wolf of the steppes;" the bird, soaring freely. Many more could be enumerated. In all cultures of the world people have adopted identities in the image of animals. In childhood and in dreams it is a process familiar to all. The fifth

> level is that of neurotics, frustrated lifeless spirits forever pursuing unsatisfied desires; the sixth and lowest level is hell or psychosis. Less than one percent of ego-transcendent experiences end in sainthood or psychosis. Most persons return to the normal human level. (P. 83)

This reading is at wild variance with the way in which the doctrine of rebirth is understood in Tibet, or any other Buddhist culture. The Buddha appeared in the form of a human, not as a god, and was superior to a god because, unlike them, he was free from future rebirth. Like Evans-Wentz, Leary, Metzner, and Alpert are also committed to the view that the human level is the most common abode, whereas in Tibet there is a well-known saying that the number of beings born in the unfortunate realms of animals, ghosts, and the hells is like the number of stars visible on a clear night, while the number of beings born as gods, demigods, and humans is like the number of stars seen on a clear day. This insistence on rejecting a literal interpretation of rebirth in favor of psychologizing the six realms would persist in future incarnations of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead.*

The next section of the book, "Some Technical Comments about Psychedelic Sessions," includes detailed instructions on the amount of time to be cleared on one's calendar; the setting, including the choice of lighting, music, furnishings, art work, and food (preferably "ancient foods like bread, cheese, wine, and fresh fruit"); the number of people who should make the voyage together, including their personality traits; the qualifications for the guide, the person (or ideally two people, one high, the other straight) who will serve as air traffic controller; and, of course, the dosage. "The dosage to be taken depends, of course, on the goal of the session. Two figures are therefore given. The first quantity indicates a dosage which should be sufficient for an inexperienced person to enter the transcendental worlds described in this manual. The second quantity gives a smaller dosage figure, which may be used by more experienced persons or by participants in a group session" (p. 101). Voyagers are instructed to study the book closely before embarking, even tape-recording portions to be played back at appropriate points during the voyage.

Yet the authors close with an instruction regarding "religious expectations": "Again, the subject in early sessions is best advised to float with the stream, stay 'up' as long as possible, and postpone theological interpretations until the end of the session, or to later sessions" (p. 104). What the authors fail to acknowledge, however, is that their apparently clinical reading of the

psychedelic experience is itself a richly theological interpretation, a theology founded, like that of Evans-Wentz, on the conviction that there is an ancient brotherhood of mystics who, throughout history and across cultures, have shared in an experience of gnosis. What Leary, Metzner, and Alpert add to Evans-Wentz is the conviction that the harmony between science and religion that Evans-Wentz could only prophesy had now become true, and was accessible to all through the use of LSD. They assume that there is a deep structure in human consciousness that has remained the same across time and space. This remains a topic of debate among anthropologists, who would ask us to consider to what extent even the idea of "consciousness" is translatable cross-culturally. Leary, Metzner, and Alpert assume further that the states of consciousness described in Buddhist texts are records of meditative experience. Here scholars of Buddhism would ask to what extent one might regard the baroque pure lands described in the Mahayana sutras as the records of a vision experienced in meditation. Should they be taken instead as literary descriptions, not unlike the paradise described by Dante?

But the fundamental assumption that supports the view that there is a structural similarity between the results of Buddhist meditation and those of drug use is that Buddhism is compatible with science, that the Buddha knew long ago what scientists are only now beginning to discover, that Buddhist meditators gained access to the deepest levels of consciousness long before scientists invented chemical agents that demonstrated the existence of such states. What is it about Buddhism that would make us draw such conclusions? When we read the claims of Hindu fundamentalists that locomotives and rocket travel are described in the Vedas or that the beam of light emitted from Śiva's brow is really a laser, we smile indulgently. But when we read Buddhist descriptions (products of the same time and the same culture that produced the Vedas and Śiva), descriptions, for example, of a universe that moves through periods of cosmic evolution and devolution, we assume that this is simply something that physicists have not yet discovered. This assumption would reappear in future incarnations of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead.*

The second English translation of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* was published in 1975 by Shambhala Publications as part of its Clear Light Series, dedicated to Evans-Wentz. The translators were Francesca Fremantle and Chögyam Trungpa, a prominent incarnate lama of the Kagyu sect who gained a large following in the United States beginning in the early 1970s.[44] Unlike previous and subsequent translations, the translators' and editors' commentaries did not equal or surpass in length the actual translation of the

Tibetan text. Trungpa provides a relatively brief, twenty-nine-page commentary devoted largely to how to recognize while living the visions (which he calls "projections") described in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead,* with much emphasis on overcoming duality. It is a highly psychologized reading, with much talk of neurosis, paranoia, and unconscious tendencies. Fremantle explains, in terms reminiscent of Leary, Metzner, and Alpert, that "It is noticeable that several of the words which best express the teachings of Buddhism are part of the language of contemporary psychology, for the attitudes of certain schools of Western psychology often come closer to Buddhism than do those of Western philosophy or religion. . . . Concepts such as conditioning, neurotic patterns of thought, and unconscious influences, seem more appropriate in this book than conventional religious terms."[45]

Their decision to psychologize the text is evident throughout. For example, in Tibetan texts on the dying process, one of the early stages described is that in which the physical elements of earth, water, fire, and wind dissolve in succession, one into the other. An eighteenth-century Tibetan text states, "when the power of the wind that serves as the basis of the physical earth constituent declines, and it dissolves into the water constituent, the external sign is that the strength of the body is lost, that is, one says, 'I am being pulled down,' thinking that one is sinking into the earth. Similarly, when the water constituent dissolves into the fire constituent, the external sign is that the moisture of the mouth and nose dry up and the lips become puckered. When the fire constituent dissolves into the wind constituent, the external sign is that warmth of the body gathers from the extremities at the heart and one's luster deteriorates. The external sign of the wind constituent dissolving into consciousness is a gasping for breath and one makes a wheezing sound from [the breath] collecting unevenly within."[46] Leary, Metzner, and Alpert took the instructions on the bardo out of their traditional context of death and made them into a description of hallucinations. In discussing these stages of the dissolution of the elements, Trungpa also moves the discussion away from the experience of death, explaining that these dissolutions happen every day:

> Such experiences happen constantly. . . . First the tangible quality of physical, living logic becomes vague; in other words, you lose physical contact. Then you automatically take refuge in a more functional situation, which is the water element; you reassure yourself that your mind is still functioning. In the next stage, the mind is not quite sure whether it is functioning

> properly or not, something begins to cease operating in its circulation. The only way to relate is through emotions, you try to think of someone you love or hate, something very vivid, because the watery quality of the circulation does not work any more, so the fiery temperature of love and hate becomes more important. Even that gradually dissolves into air, and there is a faint experience of openness, so that there is a tendency to lose your grip on concentrating on love or trying to remember the person you love. The whole thing seems to be hollow inside.[47]

It is not surprising, then, to see that Trungpa reads the six realms of rebirth as "different types of instinct," and that each of the traditional descriptions of the abodes of rebirth are "a psychological portrait of oneself." The cold hells are thus "the aggression which refuses to communicate at all."[48] We learn that (contrary to the experience of many pet owners) "the animal realm is characterised by the absence of sense of humour."[49]

In 1992 a second best-selling book of the dead was published, this time by Sogyal Rinpoche, a Tibetan lama living in California. *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* is described on the dust jacket as "a spiritual masterpiece" that "brings together the ancient wisdom of Tibet with modern research on death and dying and the nature of the universe." Sogyal intends the book as "the quintessence of the heart advice of all my masters, to be a new *Tibetan Book of the Dead* and a *Tibetan Book of Life*."[50] To date, the book has sold over three hundred thousand copies. Part of its appeal is certainly its approachable style, so different from translations of Tibetan texts or transcriptions of teachings by contemporary lamas.[51] The work is filled with Sogyal Rinpoche's reminiscences about great masters he knew in Tibet and how they died, but there are many such stories available in the current popular literature on Tibetan Buddhism. The book contains classic Buddhist teachings illustrated by classic stories, also available elsewhere. But there is much here from genres of literature not included in the standard lineage of teaching. There are approving citations from the works of Elisabeth Kübler-Ross on "death and dying," Ian Stevenson on "cases suggestive of reincarnation," and Raymond Moody on the "near-death" experience. The Brazilian Minister on the Environment is quoted on the threat to the environment posed by modern industrial society. Accounts of the deaths of ordinary people are interwoven with scenes of the passing of great masters, illustrated by quotations from Milarepa, Padmasambhava, and the current Dalai Lama. But Sogyal's points are also supported by citations from other masters. There

are quotations from Montaigne, Blake, Rilke, Henry Ford, Voltaire, Origen, Shelley, Mozart, Balzac, Einstein, Rumi, Wordsworth, and the Venerable Bede, which together create a cosmopolitan eclecticism around Sogyal's message, as if what the book conveys is not a Tibetan Buddhist tradition but a universal message, a perennial philosophy, that has always been known to those who know, a secret brotherhood not unlike Madame Blavatsky's Mahatmas. Indeed, the vast popularity of Evans-Wentz's and Sogyal's versions may derive from the way they homogenize the Tibetan text into an ahistorical and universal wisdom. (The Tibetan text is so thoroughly appropriated in Sogyal's work that its translation need not be included.)

Sogyal Rinpoche has said that Tibet is lost, that all that remains is its wisdom.[52] He places that wisdom in a global and ahistorical spiritual lineage of thinkers that no other Tibetan author has ever cited. Referring to a revered contemporary Tibetan lama, Sogyal writes, "Whenever I think of him, I always say to myself, 'This is what St. Francis of Assisi must have been like'" (p. 109).[53] This is the kind of statement that makes the reader suspect the presence of a ghost writer, and Sogyal acknowledges the assistance of Patrick Gaffney and Andrew Harvey, who perhaps collaborated with him as Evans-Wentz did with Lama Kazi Dawa-Samdup. In this case, however, the author named on the spine of the book is the Tibetan, not the Westerner. Harvey is a best-selling author on the spiritual, a term that by the beginning of this decade meant something different than it had in Madame Blavatsky's day. "Spiritual" no longer refers to contact and communication with the spirits of the dead. Instead it evokes an ethos beyond the confines of the merely religious, pointing back to that which was the original life blood of religious traditions but was ultimately free from them, confined as they were by institution and by history. The spiritual was instead at once both universal and personal, accessible not only through the experiences of the mystics of the great "world religions" but also, perhaps in a more pristine form, through Asian traditions or through shamanism, nature worship, or the cult of the goddess, what was once regarded as primitive.

It is to the spiritual seeker that Sogyal's book, like Evans-Wentz's before it, is directed. And, indeed, the parallels between the two books are striking. Both speak of a universal message known to mystics of all traditions but preserved most perfectly in Tibet; both speak of the urgency of transmitting this teaching to a modern world in crisis, rich in knowledge of the external but bereft of the ancient science of the internal; both are collaborations between a Tibetan and a Westerner, with the determinative role of the latter

largely effaced. And like Evans-Wentz (and Leary and Trungpa), Sogyal provides his own reading of the Buddhist doctrine of reincarnation. Although he concedes that the realms of rebirth "may, in fact, exist beyond the range of perception of our karmic vision" (p. 112), he is more interested in the way in which the six realms of rebirth "are projected and crystallized in the world around us":

> The main feature of the realm of the gods, for example, is that it is devoid of suffering, a realm of changeless beauty and sensual ecstasy. Imagine the gods, tall, blond surfers, lounging on beaches and in gardens flooded by brilliant sunshine, listening to any kind of music they choose, intoxicated by every kind of stimulant, high on meditation, yoga, bodywork, and ways of improving themselves, but never taxing their brains, never confronting any complex or painful situation, never conscious of their true nature, and so anesthetized that they are never aware of what their condition really is.
>
> If some parts of California and Australia spring to mind as the realm of the gods, you can see the demigod realm being acted out every day perhaps in the intrigue and rivalry of Wall Street, or in the seething corridors of Washington and Whitehall. And the hungry ghost realms? They exist wherever people, though immensely rich, are never satisfied, craving to take over this company or that one, or endlessly playing out their greed in court cases. Switch on any television channel and you have entered immediately the world of demigods and hungry ghosts. (P. 113)

Perhaps Sogyal believes that his audience would recoil at a literal rendering of the doctrine of the six realms of rebirth—as physical realms where beings are reborn after death. That may be why he locates them instead in North America, with gods in California and demigods on the East Coast.

The most recent translation of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* is, according to the title page, "*Composed by* Padma Sambhava, *Discovered by* Karma Lingpa, *Translated by* Robert A. F. Thurman." It was published in 1994 as part of the Bantam Wisdom Edition series, which also includes translations of the *Tao Te Ching,* the *Bhagavad Gita,* the *I Ching, The Book of Five Rings* (a book on swordsmanship by the seventeenth-century samurai Musashi Miyamoto), a book of "mystical poetry" by Rumi, and a book on unlocking the Zen koan. The placement of the *Book of the Dead* among these world spiritual classics is in itself indicative of the radical decontextualization that the Tibetan text has achieved.

In the preface, Thurman describes his initial reluctance at doing yet another translation of the so-called *Tibetan Book of the Dead.* His own research had centered on another genre of Tibetan literature that deals with death, "an ancient tradition of spiritual techniques every bit as sophisticated as modern material technologies," which he found in the works of Tsong kha pa, "founder" of the Geluk sect.[54] In comparison, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead,* which derives from the Nyingma sect, was not as clear and systematic; it seemed "less relevant." He eventually decided, however, to undertake the project when he realized that "people who are dying need something more clear, usable, and accessible than those translations" of Evans-Wentz and Fremantle and Trungpa (p. xx). Like the Evans-Wentz version, about half of Thurman's work is taken up with his own commentary and glossary. The former includes sections such as "Tibet: A Spiritual Civilization," "Buddhism in Summary," "The Body-Mind Complex," and "The Reality of Liberation." In the latter, karma is glossed as "evolution," *gotra* (lineage) as "spiritual gene," *abhidharma* as "Clear Science," and *ḍākinī* as "angel."

Thurman's choice of translation terms supports his larger project of representing *The Tibetan Book of the Dead,* and Buddhism in general, as scientific rather than religious (he renders *vidyadhara*—literally, "knowledge holder," a class of advanced Indian tantric masters—as "Hero Scientist": "they have been the quintessential scientists of that nonmaterialist civilization" [p. 110]). For Thurman Tibet's civilization was unique. While the West has devoted itself to the investigation and conquest of the material world and outer space, the direction of Tibetan society has been inward and its product has been generations of spiritual adepts who have studied spiritual technologies (tantras) and have become "inner world adventurers of the highest daring" (he calls them "psychonauts") who have "personally voyaged to the furthest frontiers of that universe which their society deemed vital to explore: the inner frontiers of consciousness itself, in all its transformations of life and beyond death" (p. 10). As a product of this society, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* (or, as he renders the Tibetan title, the *Great Book of Natural Liberation through Understanding in the Between*) is not a Buddhist approach to death and dying, but a scientific description of the death process, derived from the research of psychonauts. Tibetan views on death are no more or less religious than modern Western views on the structure of the solar system (p. 18). In fact, Buddhism is not a religion; the Buddha did not found a religion. Instead, he founded an educational movement in which reality is "freely open to unprejudiced experience" (p. 16). He founded educational and research institutions (these institutions are referred to by others as monasteries and

convents) in which "the study of death, between, and rebirth processes in particular, was conducted by researchers within these Mind Science institutions, the results being contained in a huge, cumulative scientific literature on the subject" (p. 17).

Thurman then argues in favor of the existence of rebirth and against those "emotional annihilationists," "closet cosmic escapists," and "materialist scientists" who dogmatically dismiss evidence of the postmortem continuity of consciousness in order to preserve their belief in nothingness. He still finds Pascal's wager compelling. Pascal argued that if God exists, then his existence is incomprehensible. Thus, it is impossible to know with certainty whether or not God exists. If God does exist, the consequences of belief and disbelief are profound, both for the present and for eternity. To believe that God exists, therefore, is the prudent and reasonable course, in which nothing is lost and everything may be gained (*Pensées* 343).[55] Thurman simply substitutes belief (or faith) in "rebirth" for "God." From here, it is a short step to accepting the Tibetan view:

> A nourishing, useful, healthful faith should be no obstacle to developing a science of death. In developing such a science, it behooves the investigator to consider all previous attempts to do so, especially those traditions with a long development and a copious literature. Of all these, the science of death preserved in the Indo-Tibetan tradition is perhaps the most copious of all. (P. 27)

Having argued for the scientific value of the Tibetan system of rebirth, Thurman must, like previous translators of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead,* deal with the specific question of the existence of the realms of gods, ghosts, and hell beings. Thurman is the only translator of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* who did not collaborate directly with a Tibetan lama in the rendering of the text into English. And he is the only translator who rejects the "metaphorical" view of the realms of rebirth, arguing that the Buddhist heavens and hells are just as real as the realm of humans. "Those who have remembered their own previous lives have reported this to be the case. And it makes logical sense that the life forms in the ocean of evolution would be much more numerous than just the number of species on this one tiny little material planet we can see around us nowadays" (p. 33).

How are we to account for Thurman's unique position in the history of the text? According to Evans-Wentz, Lama Kazi Dawa-Samdup supported

the "esoteric" view of rebirth as an evolutionary system in which regression to the brutish realms was impossible. Leary and his collaborators, following the Evans-Wentz translation, extended the metaphor further, arguing that *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* was really about life. From this they concluded that it could profitably be read as an account of an eight-hour acid trip. Trungpa Rinpoche portrays the realms of rebirth as psychological states. Sogyal Rinpoche uses his discussion of the six realms as an opportunity to lampoon California surfers and New York bankers. Only Thurman appears to believe what real Tibetans believe.

Evans-Wentz, Leary, Trungpa, and Sogyal can all interpret the six realms of rebirth as a matter of popular belief rather than fact because they have no contract with the practices of ordinary Tibetans.[56] Their investments have been made elsewhere: in Theosophy for Evans-Wentz, in LSD for Leary, in transpersonal psychology for Trungpa, in the New Age for Sogyal. Only Thurman seems invested in a more literal (perhaps "orthodox") presentation of Tibetan doctrine. Precisely because he is not Tibetan, he was not born into the lineage that naturally bestows authenticity but must derive his authenticity from other sources. These include his scholarly credentials, his ordination in 1965 (since lapsed) as the first American to become a Tibetan Buddhist monk, his description of himself as a "lay Buddhist," his characterization by journalists as America's leading Buddhist, his occasional role as unofficial spokesperson for the Dalai Lama (who does not speak of rebirth symbolically), and his position as the Jey Tsong Khapa Professor of Buddhist Studies at Columbia University. Taken together his credentials accord him an official status, a certain orthodoxy, that would not constrain a Tibetan lama living in America, such as Sogyal, for example. His active role in the Tibetan independence movement is a further impetus for his identification with a central tenet of Tibet's endangered civilization. Thus for Thurman rebirth is not a symbol; it is, or will be, a scientific fact.

But his identification with Tsong kha pa provides its own problems. Here and in other works Thurman represents the life and works of Tsong kha pa as the pinnacle of Tibetan civilization, ushering in a renaissance. He writes elsewhere, "After the renaissance led by Tsong Khapa, the spiritual synthesis of Tibetan Buddhism was complete."[57] Although many Tibetans associated with the Geluk sect of Tibetan Buddhism (of which Tsong kha pa is regarded retrospectively as the "founder") would probably not object to this characterization, those of other sects would. The problem is that the *Bar do thos grol* is a Nyingma text. This does not deter Thurman, however, from interpreting

the work as if it were a Geluk text. His discussion of the "Ordinary Preparations for Death" is drawn not from the extensive Nyingma literature on the topic (some of which is available in English)[58] but from Tsong kha pa's "three primary aspects of the path" (*lam tso rnam gsum*). His discussion of the "Extraordinary Preliminaries" is drawn, again, not from Nyingma literature but from the standard presentation of the Geluk. Thurman is aware of the problem, explaining it away in a spirit of ecumenism:

> There are numerous Tantras used in the different Tibetan Buddhist orders, all inherited from the creative pioneer work of the great adepts of India. . . . All these Tantras emerge from the same path of transcendent renunciation, the enlightenment spirit of universal love, and the wisdom of selfless voidness [i.e., Tsong kha pa's categories]. . . . That they present the process of achieving this one goal of supreme integration of Buddhahood variously as Great Perfection, Great Seal, bliss-void indivisible, and so on is a difference of conceptual scheme and terminology, not a difference of path or its fruition. (Pp. 73–74)

Thus, it is all the same, except that Tsong kha pa's version is the best, one that can be fruitfully applied in any situation. In outlining simple mindfulness meditation, Thurman explains that the meditation object should be chosen according to one's beliefs. "If you are a Christian, an icon of Christ. If you are a Moslem, a sacred letter. If you are a secularist, a Mona Lisa, a flower, or a satellite picture of the planet" (p. 55). When it comes to more advanced stages of tantric practice, however, other traditions are somewhat bereft:

> The genuine shaman knows of the dissolution process, knows of divine allies and demonic interferences, and usually finds a ground of benevolence and trust, some sort of Lord of Compassion. The monastics of all ages have experimented with journeys of the soul, and some have lived to recount their experience in useful works. Sufi and Taoist adepts have given instructions and maintain living traditions. The Tibetan tradition can be used by any seeker in any of these traditions for its systematic technologies and its penetrating insight. (Pp. 80–81)

The technology is thus available to all presumably because it is, simply, the truth. It is no longer necessary, as it was for the other translators, to read the Tibetan text as symbol in an effort to find an accommodation between Buddhism and science, part of the endless attempt that goes back to Blavatsky and beyond to neutralize Darwin. For Thurman, Buddhism is science.

In each of the previous incarnations of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, the text is always read away from itself; it is always pointing at something else, at a meaning that requires so much elaboration that the translation of the Tibetan text (except in the case of Fremantle and Trungpa) is dwarfed by introductions and commentaries; in Leary and Sogyal's renditions the Tibetan text is so superfluous that it need not be included at all. Despite the claims of the translators, their readings are not symbolic (in either the Romantic or the Peircean senses of the term): missing is the requisite arbitrariness between the symbol and the symbolized. Instead the book is read as a code (a system of constraints) to be deciphered against another text that is somehow more authentic, or perhaps as an allegory for another, anterior text with which it can never coincide; *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* is construed as referring "to one specific meaning and thus exhausts its suggestive potentialities once it has been deciphered."[59] For Evans-Wentz, the urtext is Madame Blavatsky's *The Secret Doctrine*, itself her decoding of the *Stanẓas of Dẓyan* from Senzar, the secret language. For Leary, Metzner, and Alpert the text was the script for the paradigmatic acid trip; for Trungpa it contained the tenets of transpersonal psychology; for Sogyal it embodied the language of self-help in the New Age; and for Thurman the Nyingma text was forced into a Geluk template. For each, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* must be read against something else in order for its true meaning to be revealed.

But, ironically, perhaps each of these modern interpretators was in his own way traditional. For the Tibetan work called the *Bar do thos grol* is a treasure text (*gter ma*) said to have been written long ago, in the eighth century, during a time when the people of Tibet were unprepared to appreciate its profundity. So it was hidden away, only to be discovered six centuries later. Even then it was revealed to its discoverer in the secret *ḍākinī* language, a kind of code that only he was able to decipher and translate into a public language. It was necessary, then, for the discoverer, finding the text at the prophesied moment, to become a kind of embodied ghost writer, translating it in such a way as to make it meaningful for its time, creating a text that is original because it is already a copy.