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Turrell V. Wylie (1927–1984)

Turrell V. Wylie, Professor of Tibetan Studies in the Department of Asian Languages and Literature at the University of Washington, Seattle, died on August 25, 1984, after a brief illness. His untimely passing has not only deprived the University of Washington of the leadership of its program in Tibetan studies, but has also meant a major loss for Tibetan and Buddhist studies both in America and throughout the world.

Terry (to use the affectionate version of his name by which he was always known) was associated with the University of Washington for most of his adult life. After taking a B.A. there, he went on to a Ph.D. in Chinese, meanwhile also beginning the study of Tibetan language and literature that was to become his principal scholarly field. Studying with G. Tucci in Rome, Terry soon became one of the very few American scholars in the field whose training combined solid linguistic preparation with a rigorous command of text-oriented philological discipline. His many notable publications in such areas as Tibetan historical geography and the early history of institutionalized Buddhism in Tibet set new standards for Western studies of Tibet, as did his many years of devoted teaching at the University of Washington, where he was never too busy with his own work to help a student with a text, often spending many extra hours each week tutoring both undergraduates and graduates. Terry was able to present his last completed scientific paper, a comprehensive text-critical study and translation of the Tibetan passport first edited by Csoma de Kőrös, at an international conference on Tibetan and Buddhist studies held in Bloomington in March, 1984. Even at the time of those meetings, his illness had already made serious inroads, but few of those participating realized how much it cost him in physical courage to come to Indiana and present his paper. The same fortitude, and concern above everything else for the feelings of others, characterized him throughout his final difficult days.

Administration also claimed much of Terry's time and energy. After the Chinese invasion of Tibet and the subsequent Tibetan national uprising of 1959, Terry became deeply involved in the work in international relief undertaken by the Rockefeller Foundation, attending a number of the international conferences that devised ways in which to assist the Tibetan refugees. He travelled widely in northern India in order to locate a number of Tibetan

religious and scholarly leaders whom he was eventually able to bring back with him to Seattle; here, under Terry's unflaggingly energetic leadership, they not only formed the nucleus of Seattle's still-thriving Tibetan community, but also sparked a notably vigorous period in Tibetan and Central Asian studies at the University of Washington, where many of them were employed as teachers and research scholars for a number of years.

Terry's warm personal rapport with the Tibetans whom he met in India, and particularly with the members of the diaspora community that he helped bring to Seattle, grew out of his own awareness of the universality of human dignity, and his profound understanding of the meaning of life. At a Memorial Service held at the University of Washington on October 9, 1984, Jigmie Yuthok, speaking on behalf of the Seattle Tibetan Community, characterized Terry in the following words:

As a scholar in the truest sense of the word, whose life-long research in the histories of Tibet and China led him to discern fact from fiction, he stood up for the truth of Tibet's independent status and spoke out at every opportunity even in the face of overwhelming opposition from numerous vested interest groups. He was not the one to compromise anything for the Truth. To the Tibetans here in particular, he was a great teacher, a mentor, a patron and an affectionate brother whose kindness and generosity had nurtured the first batch of Tibetans that he brought to Seattle in 1960 to grow into a thriving little community that it is today.

As a friend he was the most forgiving, affectionate and caring person that I have ever met in my life. Even after minor disagreements and disappointments he was the one to forgive first, he was the one to offer encouragement and he was the one to care for the health and welfare of all his friends. As a scholar his life was a success story, defined not in the terms of name and fame, wealth and power, but rather of richness of experience and depth of character in the search for Truth and Knowledge.

Still other indications of the high regard in which his beloved Tibetans held Terry is the name that the Dalai Lama bestowed upon him in an audience held in Dharmasala in 1960, Bkra-shis-bsam-'phel, a name that is now inscribed on the stone that marks Terry's grave in his native Durango, Colorado. His Holiness also took the extraordinary step of sending a personal message of condolence to Terry's family and friends, through Tenzin Tethong, His representative in New York, in the following cable:

To the bereaved family members and those gathered at the memorial services for the late Dr. Turrell Wylie his Holiness the Dalai Lama conveys his sincere condolences. Dr. Wylie's strong and genuine feelings for the Tibetan people and their just cause will long remain deeply appreciated. In the death of Dr. Wylie we have lost a true friend and a distinguished scholar of Tibetan studies. His Holiness further offers his deepest prayers.

Nor shall those of us present at the simple, private service of commitment held in Seattle before Terry's remains were taken to Durango, ever forget the enormously touching sight of the many Tibetans who attended reverently and prayerfully advancing toward his coffin to adorn it with *kha-btags*, as one last expression of their love, affection, and respect.

Those of us privileged to have known Terry not only as a scholar and as a colleague but also as a friend will never forget his unflinching good humor, his devotion to his beloved wife and family, and the wide range of the extra-academic gifts and interests that distinguished and enriched his life. From his student days in Rome, he gained an enviable fluency in demotic Italian that several subsequent visits to Italy enhanced and perfected; from his days in Italy too came his deep affection for painting and for sculpture, as did his discriminating tastes in food and wine. He took great pleasure in sharing his knowledge of the world of Italian culture and art with visitors to Rome; I fondly recall him showing me the two magnificent Caravaggio altarpieces in the Cerasi Chapel of Santa Maria del Popolo with as much pride and enthusiasm as if he had been their owner. Himself a talented amateur painter in oils and sculptor in wood and stone, he found in the plastic arts not only the enjoyment of passive contemplation, but the rewards of active creativity as well.

Everyone everywhere who ever met Terry Wylie could not help but immediately become his friend; and everyone who met him, anywhere in the world, always loved him. This, perhaps his greatest gift of all, only makes it all the more difficult to cope with the loss we have sustained.

Roy Andrew Miller

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