

his superior skills (p. 96). While this exhaustive study on Wak Hai Cheng Bio persuasively demonstrates the temple's heritage value and illuminates its place in Singapore's urban history, what should also be lauded is the wealth of references on documented epigraphs and bibliographic material for either follow-up research or to support related scholarly investigations.

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DOI: 10.1355/sj39-3n

Out of the Shadows of Angkor: Cambodian Poetry, Prose, and Performance through the Ages. Guest editors: Sharon May, Christophe Macquet, Trent Walker, Phina So and Rinith Taing. Series editor: Frank Stewart. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2022. 352 pp.

This volume is a comprehensive collection that spans the entire literary history of Cambodia from the earliest inscriptions to the present. The text includes around a hundred different examples of Cambodian writing that are organized in two main sections: classical (611–1930 CE) and modern (1930–present). The first group of texts

from the classical period are organized chronologically. The second group of texts are organized by genre—poetry, fiction, non-fiction and performance—and include an excerpt from a contemporary graphic novel. Marking the transition between different periods and genres of writing are nine compelling black-and-white prints of oil paintings by Cambodian artist Theanly Chov from his series *Surviving*. A colour reproduction from *Surviving* is also used for the book cover. Indeed, the collection as a whole makes the case that Cambodian writing has not only survived but is thriving.

The volume is an ambitious project whose 352 pages comprise a double issue of *Manoa: A Pacific Journal of International Writing*, edited by Frank Stewart and published by University of Hawai'i Press. Previously, in 2004, *Manoa* published a collection of Cambodian writing entitled *In the Shadow of Angkor*, which focused on contemporary writing and included several brief interviews conducted by the guest editor, Sharon May, who is also one of the guest editors of this volume. The titles of the two issues refer to the prominence attributed to the temples of Angkor, thereby overshadowing the appreciation of Cambodia's rich literary heritage.

Since the approximately one hundred examples of Cambodian writing are all presented in English, the volume, technically speaking, is a monumental translation project. To accomplish this formidable task, May enlisted the talents and expertise of four additional guest editors to create a “dream team” of gifted translators and experts on Cambodian literature.

One of the guest editors is a brilliant postdoctoral student named Trent Walker, who produced the translations and insightful introductions to all but one of the nineteen examples of writing from the classical period. These include translations from Sanskrit, Pali, Old Khmer, Middle Khmer and modern Khmer to produce some of the first English versions of the most important texts of Cambodian classical literature, such as the *Reamker*, the Khmer version of the Indian epic the *Ramayana*, and *Kaki*, King Ang Duong's Khmer translation of the Thai classic verse novel. Walker also contributed one of the four introductory essays to the collection, which provides

an overview of the history of the Khmer language, some of its key linguistic features and a concise explanation of the metres and rhyme patterns of Khmer poetry.

Another guest editor is Christophe Macquet, a native of France, who was the coordinator of the translation programme at the Royal University of Phnom Penh for ten years. As with Walker's translations, Macquet's translations of important Cambodian modern writers, such as Soth Polin and Khun Srun, from Khmer to French are also among the first of their kind.* In the modern period section of the volume, Macquet collaborated with May to produce translations of fifteen out of the sixteen poems in the first half of the poetry section. (One poem by Kong Bunchhoeun was translated by Walker.) Among these are poems by Suy Hieng, Khun Srun and Pich Tum Kravel, which provide a general sense of Khmer poetry since 1930.

Since the volume is primarily intended for English readers of the Cambodian diaspora, many of the selected writings in the modern section were produced by Cambodian writers whose families fled Cambodia and were resettled in such places as the United States, France, Canada and Australia. The second half of the poetry section includes poems written in English by Chath pierSath, BK Tuon, Princess Moon and Greg Santos, among others. Their works speak to the experience of liminality, displacement and trauma as they struggle to come to terms with their "hyphenated identities" and traumatic past.

Two of the guest editors on May's dream team are Cambodian writers who were born and live in Cambodia. Rinith Taing is a fluent English speaker and award-winning journalist who contributed translations of *Ty Chi Huot* (Sky of the Lost Moon) in the fiction section and *Bunchan Mol* (Political Prison, about Mol's imprisonment by the French during Cambodia's struggle for independence) in the non-fiction section. The fiction section begins with perhaps the most well-known Cambodian novel, *Wilted Flower* by Nou Hach (pp. 129–35), translated by the acclaimed *New York Times* best-selling novelist Vaddey Ratner. Ratner, who survived the Khmer Rouge period as a young girl before being resettled in the United States

with her mother, also wrote the book's foreword, which relates the story of her mother's attempt to resurrect the arts in the Khao-I-Dang refugee camp and sets the tone for the volume.

Rounding out May's dream team is Phina So, the founder of Kampu Mera Editions, which has published several collections of new Cambodian writing in Khmer, including the first collection of modern Cambodian feminist writing. In addition to her role as guest editor, So contributed an important essay in the non-fiction section about her experience as a publisher in Cambodia, as well as an interesting short story about the changing meaning of Khmer words that reflect changes in life experience.

In the final section of the collection, under the rubric "Performance", Macquet and May collaborated again to translate several examples of Cambodian song lyrics, including "Champa of Battambang" by the renowned singer-songwriter Sinn Sisamouth, as well as excerpts from a Bassac folk opera and an Ayai folk theatre piece.

This review only skims the surface of this ambitious project that involved a transnational collaboration of over fifty contributors and countless hours of painstaking translation and organization. As Sokunthary Svay, a founding member of the Cambodian American Literary Arts Association based in Lowell, Massachusetts, states in her introductory essay,

The works in *Out of the Shadows of Angkor* stand alone but would go well alongside the literature of other Southeast Asian countries, such as Vietnam and Laos, and the many ethnic communities that reside in the region. I would also urge educators to include in their curricula—in tandem with this literature—the diasporic works of immigrant groups in the U.S. and to juxtapose them with African American Literature. As members of a relatively new diaspora who came to the U.S. as a result of war, we would do well to discuss those connections to learn how others have coped, survived, and thrived. (p. xiv)

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NOTE

- * Mr Macquet has also translated French texts into Khmer, such as *Le Petit Prince* by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry and a novel by the celebrated French writer Marguerite Duras, who was born in Vietnam (French Indochina) and lived briefly in Cambodia during the colonial period.

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