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# AT THE EDGE OF THE FOREST: NARRATIVE, ORDER, AND QUESTIONS OF MEANING IN KHMER HISTORY AND SOCIETY

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Umberto Eco opened his 1994 Norton lectures, at Harvard, with the image of woods “as a metaphor for the narrative text, not only for the text of fairy tales but for any narrative text.”<sup>1</sup> In Eco’s lectures, the forest becomes a space in which authors and readers can wander and linger or pass quickly through. In contrast to the “actual world,” he suggested, fictional woods and worlds “... allow us to concentrate on a finite, enclosed world ... Since we cannot wander outside its boundaries, we are led to explore it in depth.” Yet wandering in the forest does not mean suspending our knowledge of reality. Rather, we have to “know a lot of things about the actual world” in order to interpret narrative.<sup>2</sup> Reading fiction, in Eco’s words, is thus a means

... by which we give sense to the immensity of things that happened, are happening, or will happen in the actual world.

This is the consoling function of narrative—the reason people tell stories, and have told stories from the beginning of time. And it has always been the paramount function of myth: to find a shape, a form, in the turmoil of human experience.<sup>3</sup>

This volume is concerned with narrative and consoling myths, and with forests, real and imagined. Theoretically, however, it is situated not inside the metaphorical woods but rather at the forest’s edge, in the netherland of trees, shadows, fields,

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<sup>1</sup> Umberto Eco, *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 1994), p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87.

houses, people, animals, spirits, and memories, where myths and scholarship run alongside each other, crisscross, and sometimes overlap, the space and time of “songs at the edge of the forest, as night comes on, ... *entre chien et loup*,” as historian David Chandler has phrased it. The image of forest’s edge underlying this volume comes from Chandler’s most provocative and influential historical essay, “Songs at the Edge of the Forest: Perceptions of Order in Three Cambodian Texts” (reprinted in this volume). The essays collected here are concerned with Cambodia’s history, culture, and religion, and how their study has been conveyed through Chandler’s ideas and work. In particular, these essays build on the theoretical and methodological contributions of “Songs” to explore the boundaries and twisting paths between narrative and history: in other words, what constitutes “story” and how it might serve as a scholarly source. These essays also query historical and contemporary responses to the kind of moral problems that Chandler’s 1978 essay examined from a narrative perspective, the problems of order and disorder and the disjuncture between what should apparently happen and what actually does. Finally, thinking through and with “Songs,” as well as some of Chandler’s other work, the authors included here reflect on the ideas and methods passed from one generation of scholars to another, the songs at nightfall transmitted through teaching, fieldwork, archival research, translation, and study.

Coming to Cambodia first as a US Department of State attaché, and then as a student of Khmer culture, history, and language, Chandler crafted the postcolonial field of Khmer Studies, and his work has had a profound influence on subsequent generations of scholars of Cambodia. His career has spanned the Sihanouk reign, the Vietnam War, the brief Lon Nol interval, the Khmer Rouge period, and the successive socialist and postsocialist governments since. But his historical work has spanned an even longer period; it was Chandler who devised the first, and to this date only, systematic history in English (and now also in Khmer) of the Khmer region. Following the completion of a still widely cited 1974 dissertation from the University of Michigan, “Cambodia Before the French: Politics in a Tributary Kingdom, 1794–1848,” many of his first scholarly works were centered on the early modern period, the precolonial history of Cambodia, in which he explored Khmer political relationships as well as the ways in which Cambodians themselves inscribed and gave meaning to their own concepts of power and history.<sup>4</sup>

One of Chandler’s most defining contributions to the field of Khmer studies is evident even in these early works. As Penny Edwards suggests in her essay in this volume, Chandler’s “particular gift as a historian” has been his “embrace and acute analysis of a broad range of materials, long before it was fashionable to mobilize multiple media in the interests of scholarly research.” His innovative use of unusual sources for constructing Khmer history encompassed treatments of geographical toponyms, folktales, Buddhist poetry, and accounts of merit-making ceremonies. Standing alongside his use of more “standard” historical documents, including inscriptions and diplomatic letters, Chandler’s use of such sources projects a distinctive historical voice into his work, one that is ultimately concerned with engaging the humanity of the historical subject and of representing—as much as is accurately possible—the emotions and experiences of his subjects. As Thompson

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<sup>4</sup> David Chandler, *A History of Cambodia*, 3rd ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000); and David Chandler, “Cambodia Before the French: Politics in a Tributary Kingdom, 1794–1848” (PhD dissertation, University of Michigan, 1974).

beautifully observes in her essay about this quality in Chandler's work of "capturing emotion in history,"

... unlike the soldier in the battlefield, emotion cannot be captured in any straightforward manner. It is the uncapturable that is captured here, like a photograph of perfume—the intangible but ever so real.

Chandler's most lyrical and widely appreciated work of history, "Songs at the Edge of the Forest: Perceptions of Order in Three Cambodian Texts," serves as a central reference point for all the works in this volume. An analysis of narrative and chronicle sources used for understanding the emotional experience of loss and warfare in the nineteenth century in precolonial Khmer society, this work contains methodological and theoretical insights that have had an enormous impact on students of Khmer culture. Written in 1978, on the eve of the Vietnamese defeat of the Khmer Rouge but before the extent of the Khmer Rouge atrocities were widely known, when Chandler himself was prevented by war and politics from returning to Cambodia, "Songs" is an attempt to write history that is about emotions as well as events. It reveals the history and feel of specific nineteenth-century circumstances in Cambodia while simultaneously asking the kind of larger questions that no one can ever clearly answer—about the perplexing nature of violence and disorder. Perhaps because of the ambiguities of the subject, Chandler seems to have drawn more self-consciously than usual on the other part of his life as a poet; the clarity and beauty of his writing in "Songs" has also been a part of its influence on subsequent scholarship.<sup>5</sup>

With its use of innovative sources, its distinctive historical approach, and fluid literary style, "Songs" exemplifies many of Chandler's most important contributions to the study of Cambodia. The first of these legacies is Chandler's insistence on carefully representing indigenous voices. Evident in his other work from this period (and later) as well, this approach was methodologically "edgy" at the time, part of a wave of new work by young postcolonial scholars who were moving away from the paradigm of Indianization as their framework for writing Southeast Asian histories and toward a recognition, appreciation, and skillful interpretation of indigenous sources. While current scholarship has in many ways returned to wider regional and even global lenses for viewing the cultural and historical contours of Southeast Asia, this work rests on the foundation of knowledge detailed in the path-breaking "autonomous histories" and "thick descriptions" of newly independent Southeast Asian nation-states and individual Southeast Asian villages that appeared in the 1960s and 70s, written by Chandler and others of his generation.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Since Chandler seriously returned to poetry writing in 2000, his poems have appeared regularly in the Australian literary magazine *Quadrant*; another is forthcoming in the US literary journal *SubTropic*.

<sup>6</sup> Laurie J. Sears, *Autonomous Histories, Particular Truths: Essays in Honor of John R. W. Smail* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin, Center for Southeast Asian Studies, 1993); James C. Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1976); Clifford Geertz, *Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight* (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1972).

Chandler's work on colonial society, as well as on earlier periods of Khmer history, led to the publication of his well-known *The History of Cambodia*, in 1983,<sup>7</sup> and *The Khmers*, co-authored with Ian Mabbett, in 1995.<sup>8</sup> His colonial-period writings further develop his interest in Khmer conceptions and the workings of power relationships in Khmer society. Yet, "until recently," Chandler has reminded us, the contemporary notion of "society" was absent in Cambodia. Society was "seen in familial, authoritarian terms rather than in terms of voluntary, supposedly "horizontal" associations."<sup>9</sup> Chandler's caution about the unreflective use of analytical categories for examining Khmer history that are incongruent with Khmer thinking is another of the ways in which his scholarship has strongly influenced the field. This trait also helps to explain the appeal of Chandler's own writings across disciplines, to scholars approaching problems in Khmer culture from a variety of perspectives. In this sense, Chandler is himself influenced by Paul Mus, whom he greatly admired and with whom he studied at Yale. Chandler (with Ian Mabbett) wrote that Mus's work on Indochinese cults showed how religious ideas and practices were symbolically interwoven to "bridge the gap" between local and translocal conceptions of authority. While Mus analyzed the cults in terms of their "marriage" of Indian and indigenous forms and ideologies, Chandler and Mabbett asserted that Mus was sensitive to the problems of historical representation posed by this claim:

We are probably entitled to think that people like the Chams thought of the relationship between Indian and local in their culture in rather the same way ... For them, their culture was a whole. From one point of view, we can regard it as wholly Indian; from another, as wholly local. It may seem to us most rational as well as most moderate to say that it was a mixture of the two, but in a sense it may be also most false. For the Chams, their culture was unique; they did not use our categories of thought. Any student of the history of Asian societies is constantly running up against such paradoxes, or mysticisms. It is certainly necessary for us to resolve and to analyse; but it is also necessary to recognize that the paradoxes as such may be important in the psychology, and therefore the history, of the communities with which we are concerned, and we must be ready to respond to them as they are.<sup>10</sup>

Like Mus's, Chandler's work exhibits an engagement with classic scholarly paradigms for the study of Southeast Asian culture, yet, at the same time, a continual questioning of them by virtue of an acute sensitivity, even before Foucaultian-influenced scholarship became *de rigueur*, to how much historiographical poetics and preoccupations alter the representation of historical events. Chandler's awareness of

<sup>7</sup> Chandler, *A History of Cambodia*, and revised editions, 1992, 1996, and 2000.

<sup>8</sup> Ian Mabbett and David Chandler, *The Khmers* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995).

<sup>9</sup> David Chandler, *Facing the Cambodian Past: Selected Essays 1971–1994* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 1996), p. 78 fn. 5, and pp. 304–305; David Chandler, *A History of Cambodia*, pp. 104–08.

<sup>10</sup> Ian Mabbett and David Chandler, "Introduction," in Paul Mus, *India Seen from the East: Indian and Indigenous Cults in Champa*, trans. Ian Mabbett, ed. Ian Mabbett and David Chandler, Monash Papers on Southeast Asia, no. 3 (Monash: Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University, 1975), pp. xi–xii.

his own shifting historical sensibilities, for example, emerges in the multiple drafts and versions of his essays “The Tragedy of Cambodian History” and “The Tragedy of Cambodian History Revisited.”<sup>11</sup> In the first of these two essays, Chandler traces out five historical factors that he believes contributed to the ongoing dimensions of “tragedy” in Cambodian history: Cambodia’s geopolitical location; its colonial experience; its “ethnic singularity”; the kinds (and conceptions) of leaders ruling it; and religiopolitical ideologies blending power, status, and merit.<sup>12</sup> Revisiting these “five factors” in a more politically optimistic prognosis in 1994, and then again in a less hopeful assessment later that same year, Chandler confesses that his experiences with the *realpolitik* of observing Cambodia over many years had shifted his historical perceptions:

Between 1990 and 1993 I visited Cambodia six times ... I came to Cambodia prepared to find elements of tragedy closely linked to the country’s recent past. I found some, as I expected, when I visited the Khmer Rouge interrogation facility and the prison in Phnom Penh ... known in the Pol Pot era by the code name S-21 ... Here, I kept telling myself, was runaway power, unchecked violence, meaningless malignity.

If S-21 held few surprises, I found unexpected elements of tragedy when I revisited Angkor for the first time in thirty years ... In the 1960s, when I had visited Angkor many times, Cambodia was in a seemingly charming, postheroic phase of its history; the ruins were beautiful reminders of past “greatness,” contrasted to the country’s powerless, but mesmerizing “charm.” When I returned to Siem Reap in 1992, I was struck not only with how much beauty the monuments conveyed, but also how so many of them, and Angkor Wat in particular, could also be read as expressions of unchecked power and control ... Wandering inside the temple and marveling at its grandeur increased my sense of powerlessness. This effect had been intended when it was built, and the ratio of builder to visitor remained in force.<sup>13</sup>

Chandler’s attentiveness to indigenous voices seems to have led him to the recognition that scholarly models were just that and not always compatible with life itself, which can prove considerably more difficult to comprehend. Like myths and stories, scholarly models are an effort to establish orderliness where it may not, in fact, exist. “Myths, whatever else they may do,” Chandler and Mabbett wrote, “are there to reconcile” and to make communal life seem whole and possible; “reality,” on the other hand, “with its political tensions and multiple cultural influences, is heterogeneous and divergent.”<sup>14</sup> It is this scholarly and ethical perspective, insistent on hearing and seeing the larger human meanings conveyed through local and indigenous voices, narrated in a historical voice, that has given recent scholarship in the field of Khmer Studies some of its most original and distinctive agendas. In particular, Ashley Thompson’s essay in this volume examines the implications of this

<sup>11</sup> Chandler, *Facing the Cambodian Past*, pp. 295–325.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 298–304.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 319–20.

<sup>14</sup> Mabbett and Chandler, “Introduction” to *India Seen from the East*, p. xi.

historiographical approach—which she names “engendering history”—as part of a scholarly inheritance from Mus via Chandler that likewise animates her own new work.

Chandler’s work, as we have suggested, also embodies a kind of history-writing that takes on questions that are not specifically historical, questions that reach well beyond apprehending particular historical moments and toward human experience writ large. It is in this respect that the “Songs” essay has had an enduring impact on recent students of Cambodia, many of whom have been trying—since 1979—to unravel the chains of cultural and historical circumstances and ideas that led Cambodians to the misery of the Khmer Rouge regime and its aftermath. Umberto Eco has suggested that fictional woods grant the freedom to a reader or writer to “trace his or her own path, deciding to go to the left or to the right of a certain tree and making a choice at every tree encountered.”<sup>15</sup> Yet while that condition of choosing one’s path may hold true in the fictional woods, the “actual world” does not always grant people clear choices, and sometimes none at all. One of the themes of Chandler’s “Songs” is an effort to examine how various conceptions of order and disorder revealed in narrative contrast with the ways in which real people—not readers and authors—have to live. In the actual world, people—like those in war-torn nineteenth-century Cambodia or living under the Nazi or Pol Pot regimes—must respond to choices that are not really choices, what Lawrence Langer has described as the “choiceless choice” recounted in the testimonies of Holocaust survivors.<sup>16</sup> Survivor testimonies, chronicles, and folktales can all provide accounts of reality that are not easy to interpret or even to hear. In “Songs,” Chandler explores the tension between what is experienced or lived and yet not understandable, and what can be told and explained about it that was not ever lived.

“Songs” is the touchstone for the essays in this volume, regardless of period or disciplinary approach, and for their contributions to theorizing narrative as a historical and cultural source. The narrative archive considered in this volume includes the more conventional forms we are accustomed to thinking of as narrative, such as stories and chronicles, as well as other kinds of innovative sources with narrative structures, including possession, memories, landscape design, religious buildings, murals, political theater, torture confessions, and medical prognoses. These essays draw on, respond to, and, in some cases, amplify the methods and theoretical aims of “Songs,” as well as its thematic focus on understanding the tensions between idealized and actual conceptions of order and disorder.

If Chandler’s work has spanned the decades stretching from the birth of national studies of Cambodia to the voids and question marks of the 1970s, when “Songs” was written, and, more recently, the rebirth of postrevolutionary Khmer cultural studies, this trajectory is not as linear as it might, from the outside, appear. Contemplating the recent scholarly representation of Cambodia sends us running back to Eco’s tangled imagery of woods, and to that strange liminal space at the edge of the forest between myth and reality and representation and actual world, where

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<sup>15</sup> Eco, *Six Walks*, p. 6.

<sup>16</sup> Lawrence Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), p. 26.

an apparently straight path turns out to be one that wraps back and around on itself. After 1979, the direction of Chandler's work, which had been focused on the difficult task of reading and representing historical sources from the nineteenth century and before, became absorbed with making sense of the DK (Democratic Kampuchea) regime. The interpretive path Chandler had been trodding before this turn was now densely shadowed by the aftermath of war and the politically and emotionally charged questions of genocide, superpower foreign policy, and the psychology and banality of violence and brutality. Since it was written right at the turn of the path, part of the salience and appeal of "Songs" is its treatment of nineteenth-century perceptions of order and violence in a manner that anticipates the complex interpretive tensions connected with understanding the DK period.

Since the end of the DK period in 1979, scholarship on Cambodia has been characterized—at first—by a justifiable confusion about what empirically happened between 1975 and 1979, and, later, by a more ongoing moral and interpretive dilemma concerning how and whether to judge or analyze, and how to write about, these questions. This confusion was compounded by the trauma of memory and the reality that the consoling stories that people tell to order their own narratives of trauma cannot always be their own stories.<sup>17</sup> Yet even as the facts about the DK years were being assembled, it became apparent that to begin to understand Cambodia's genocide required rethinking the past and its interpretation as well as the present. It also raised complex problems concerning the aims and methods of interpretation itself; this issue is evident, for example, in scholarly writings concerned with exhibiting images of Tuol Sleng atrocities.<sup>18</sup>

In the preface to the 1994 volume *Cambodian Culture since 1975: Homeland and Exile*, Chandler pointed to the irony that "the revival, or more properly the birth, of twentieth-century Cambodian cultural studies ... was a product of those nightmarish years" stretching from the latter part of the Vietnamese-American War that had engulfed Cambodia by 1970 through the DK regime and ending with the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia in 1979.<sup>19</sup> The worldwide attention generated by the violent cultural revolution of the Khmer Rouge and the deaths by execution, starvation, and sickness of close to two million Khmer—which too closely and frighteningly invoked the death camps of the Holocaust—led to an agonized appraisal in the international community of what had gone wrong in Cambodia.

The first wave of new work on Cambodia focused on reconstructing exactly what had happened between 1970 and 1979, based on the still limited sources available at the time. It moved from William Shawcross's widely read *Sideshow* in 1979, which viewed Cambodia within the context of US foreign policy in Vietnam, to

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<sup>17</sup> Charles Hallisey and Anne Hansen, "Narrative, Sub-ethics, and the Moral Life: Some Evidence from Theravada Buddhism," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 24,2 (1996): 305–28; Michael Vickery, *Cambodia: 1975–1982* (Boston, MA: South End, 1984).

<sup>18</sup> Rachael Hughes, "The Abject Artifacts of Memory: Photographs from Cambodia's Genocide," *Media, Culture, and Society* 25,1 (2003): 23–44; Lindsay C. French, "Exhibiting Terror," in *Representing Truth Claims*, ed. Mark Philip Bradley and Patrice Petro (New Brunswick, NJ, and London: Rutgers University Press, 2002), pp. 131–55; David Chandler, *Voices from S-21: Terror and History in Pol Pot's Secret Prison* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999); Judy Ledgerwood, "The Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocidal Crimes: National Narratives," *Museum Anthropology* 21,1 (1997): 82–98.

<sup>19</sup> May Ebihara, Carol Mortland, and Judy Ledgerwood, eds., *Cambodian Culture since 1975: Homeland and Exile* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. xi.

subsequent studies by Michael Vickery, Ben Kiernan, Nayan Chanda, Elizabeth Becker, and David Chandler, which traced the origins of the communist party in Cambodia and the rise of Pol Pot, analyzing recent Cambodian history largely through the international and national frames of Cold War relations and nationalism.<sup>20</sup> The scholarly absorptions of this period focused on questions of how colonialism, World War II, postwar efforts by the French to reexert colonial authority in Indochina, and the rise of nationalism gave way to a postcolonial political landscape dominated by the dynamics of the Cold War. This history, the resulting war in Vietnam, and that war's impact in Cambodia were all interpreted as crucial factors in what Chandler termed the Cambodian "tragedy."<sup>21</sup> Internally, scholars also began to examine Sihanouk's attempts to maintain social equilibrium by playing the various political factions outside and within Khmer society against each other; divisions between the small comfortable elite and the rural peasantry; and the ways in which the personalities of individual actors contributed to the rise of the Khmer Rouge.

Many Khmer survivors were themselves trying to articulate what had happened within the context of their own lives, and to alert the world to the continuing dimensions of the tragedy; among the most influential of these narratives were memoirs by Haing Ngor, Pin Yathay, and Teeda Butt Mam, all published in 1987.<sup>22</sup> The 1984 film *The Killing Fields*, which told the story of *New York Times* reporter Sidney Schanberg and his assistant, Dith Pran (played in the movie by Haing Ngor), moved Western audiences to ask for more analysis of how what became in popular parlance "the killing fields" could ever have come about.<sup>23</sup>

While most of the historical, political, and journalistic treatments of Cambodia written during the 1980s were focused on the monumental documentary task of understanding exactly what had occurred in Cambodia from 1975 to 1979—to whom, where, and when—a satisfactory accounting of "why" proved more elusive. Chandler turned to a closer consideration of this problem with the publication of his 1991 *The Tragedy of Cambodian History: Politics, War, and Revolution since 1945*. Tracing the historical antecedents of the Khmer Rouge period to the aftermath of World War II, he argued for the importance of focusing greater scrutiny on internal factors within Khmer society and history for understanding Democratic Kampuchea. While Chandler's work shifted attention to Khmer antecedents for the disastrous policies of the DK regime, historians were still divided over the issue of whether and how extremists or mad men within the communist party in Cambodia had "hijacked" the revolution. This question led Chandler to biographical research on the life of Pol Pot, resulting in his 1992 book, *Brother Number One: A Political Biography of Pol Pot*, which

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<sup>20</sup> William Shawcross, *Sideshow: Kissinger, Nixon, and the Destruction of Cambodia* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1979); Vickery, *Cambodia: 1975–1982*; Ben Kiernan, *How Pol Pot Came to Power* (London: Verso, 1985); Nayan Chanda, *Brother Enemy* (New York, NY: Free Press, 1986); Elizabeth Becker, *When the War Was Over* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1986); David Chandler, *The Tragedy of Cambodian History: Politics, War, and Revolution since 1945* (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 1991); and David Chandler, *Brother Number One: A Political Biography of Pol Pot* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992).

<sup>21</sup> Chandler, *Facing the Cambodia Past*, pp. 295, 297.

<sup>22</sup> Haing Ngor, *A Cambodian Odyssey* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1987); Pin Yathay, *Stay Alive My Son* (New York, NY: Free Press, 1987); Joan Criddle and Teeda Butt Mam, *To Destroy You is No Loss: The Odyssey of a Cambodian Family* (New York, NY: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1987).

<sup>23</sup> *The Killing Fields*, film, directed by Roland Joffé, Warner Home Videos, Burbank, CA, 1984.

placed Pol Pot “inside his own Cambodian context and inside a wider set of influences from abroad.”<sup>24</sup> Continuing analysis of this question also animated Ben Kiernan’s 1996 argument that racial hatreds lay at the root of the DK disaster and Alex Hinton’s 2005 study of the psychological underpinnings of violence in Khmer cultural conceptions.<sup>25</sup> From his biography of Pol Pot, Chandler himself turned to an even more complex dimension of explaining the inexplicable, a study of S-21 (more commonly known as Tuol Sleng), the DK prison-turned-museum that has become, in contemporary Cambodia, one of the central sites for constructing national narratives of DK horrors. In a painstaking and painfully detailed analysis of how the prison worked as a “total institution” in the lives of its victims and perpetrators, Chandler used this lens to explore how the DK regime conceived of the world, of “others,” and of themselves, revealing the regime at its worst and thus perhaps also with the utmost clarity. His examination of the banality and routinization of torture and violence at Tuol Sleng, woven together with his comparative treatment of similar atrocities in Nazi Germany, Stalin’s Russia, Mao’s China, North Vietnam, and Argentina, forces us to remember that “as a twentieth-century phenomenon, S-21 was by no means unique.”<sup>26</sup> Rather,

Explanations for S-21 that place the blame for evil entirely on “evil people,” which is to say on others, fail to consider that what all of us share with perpetrators of evil is not a culture, a doctrine, or an innate tendency to kill but our similarity as human beings and, in particular, our tendencies toward acculturation and obedience.<sup>27</sup>

If political histories of the Khmer Rouge period dominated the research agenda of much of the eighties, the birthing of Khmer cultural studies followed in the 1990s, in the wake of the movements of traumatized Khmer refugees from the Thai-Khmer border who fled to host countries like the US, France, and Australia. The Khmer diaspora generated a rush of new work by young scholars encountering survivors of the Pol Pot regime in border camps in Thailand, in health clinics in Dallas, and newly opened Buddhist temples in Paris.<sup>28</sup> The 1994 volume, *Cambodian Culture since 1975*,

<sup>24</sup> Chandler, *Brother Number One*, p. 4.

<sup>25</sup> Ben Kiernan, *The Pol Pot Regime: Race, Power, and Genocide in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge, 1975–79* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996); Alexander Laban Hinton, *Why Did they Kill? Cambodia in the Shadow of Genocide* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005).

<sup>26</sup> David Chandler, *Voices from S-21*, p. 144.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 154–55.

<sup>28</sup> For example, see Carol A. Mortland and Judy L. Ledgerwood, “Refugee Resource Acquisition: The Invisible Communication System,” in *Cross Cultural Adaptation: Current Approaches*, ed. Young Tun Kim and W. B. Gudykunst (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1985); John L. Marcucci, “Khmer Refugees in Dallas: Medical Decisions in the Context of Pluralism” (PhD dissertation, Southern Methodist University, 1986); Richard F. Mollica, Grace Wyshak, and James Lavelle, “The Psychological Impact of War Trauma and Torture on Southeast Asian Refugees,” *American Journal of Psychiatry* 144,12 (1987): 1,567–72; Frank Smith, *Interpretive Accounts of the Khmer Rouge Years: Personal Experience in Khmer Peasant Worldview* (Madison, WI: Center for Southeast Asian Studies, University of Wisconsin–Madison, 1989); Usha Welaratna, *Beyond the Killing Fields: Voices of Nine Cambodian Survivors in America* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993); Lindsay C. French, “Enduring Holocaust, Surviving History: Displaced Cambodians on the Thai-Cambodian Border, 1989–1991” (PhD dissertation,

that Chandler hailed as representing the “birth” of cultural studies for the field was, unsurprisingly, focused on cultural transition and revival in Khmer communities scattered across the globe. The tone of research on Khmer studies in this period was in fact set by the theme of “salvage ethnography,” akin to that done by Franz Boas and his students with Native American communities early in the twentieth century, when these scholars sought to record the knowledge of the “old ways” from elders before they died. Cambodia had been devastated by the Khmer Rouge and warfare, and thus the question that motivated many scholars working together with members of diasporic communities was focused on what remnants of Cambodian culture could be saved.

Since 1994, scholars from a variety of disciplines have returned to viewing Khmer life in different registers than the pressing and traumatic events of the 1970s permitted, while, at the same time, finding that both contemporary and historical events require rethinking in light of the Cambodian tragedy. Contemporary events cannot be understood without reference to the recent past; recent historical events take on new meaning in light of what followed. On a practical scholarly level, the challenge of locating sources for Khmer history, which was always difficult, has become even more problematic. The loss of Khmer artists and scholars and the rich intellectual culture they had created was one of the tragic outcomes of the Khmer Rouge regime. Sources such as manuscripts, temple murals, books, artifacts, and documents were also destroyed to a large degree. For the history of the Khmer Rouge period itself, the documents left behind are fraught with troubling interpretive problems. How does one respond to oral accounts of loss and violence or analyze largely fictional confessions extracted during torture? How does one begin to connect new scholarship and contemporary events to the prerevolutionary past?

Chandler’s “Songs” gave a new generation methodological and theoretical tools for trying to document and think with Khmer ways of interpreting Khmer experience. The scholars writing for this volume also draw on his other important works, including the books *History of Cambodia* and *Voices from S-21: Terror and History in Pol Pot’s Secret Prison*, and his essays “Maps for the Ancestors: Sacralized Topography and Echoes of Angkor in Two Cambodian Texts” and “Going Through the Motions: Ritual Aspects of the Reign of King Duang of Cambodia (1848–1860).”<sup>29</sup> The cross-disciplinary nature of the essays in this volume contributed by historians, anthropologists, and scholars of religion speaks to the continued influence of “Songs” for the questions that concern their authors: how did the past lead to and shape this particular historical moment (whether it be the Khmer Rouge period or the violence of nineteenth-century warfare)? How can this historical event be understood and represented as one that is both historically “true” and meaningfully human? How does one write about peoples’ experiences of suffering and change without reifying them, creating rigid characterizations of people who suffer timelessly and do not change?

Taken together, the essays in this volume make several major contributions to the study of Khmer history and society. First, inspired by and celebrating the

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Harvard University, 1994); Toni Shapiro, “Dance and the Spirit of Cambodia” (PhD Dissertation, Cornell University, 1994); Nancy J. Smith-Hefner, *Khmer American: Identity and Moral Education in a Diasporic Community* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999).

<sup>29</sup> Chandler, *Facing the Cambodian Past*, pp. 25–42, 100–118.

methods and themes evident in Chandler's "Songs," they employ a wide-ranging and varied narrative archive to analyze Khmer history and culture from the perspective of postcolonial, post-Cold War, and post-DK issues, questions, and approaches. Second, they explore questions of scholarship, subjectivity, and emotion in the representation of history, especially—though not always explicitly—as engendered by Khmer experiences of violence and turmoil during the past several decades. Third, the volume is thematically concerned with narrative, order, and the reordering of meaning, especially in response to social chaos. In this sense, the essays offer new perspectives on issues that have animated scholarly discussions of Southeast Asian societies for the last six or seven decades: how hierarchies and patron networks are constituted and changed; how and whether we should represent something we have come to refer to and understand as a diverse yet unified Southeast Asian "thought world"; and how the religious ideas of Buddhists have figured in and reconfigured this thought world.

Drawing on the themes of narrative, order, and the reconstitution of meaning, the essays in this volume also contribute new theorizing on narrative from the perspective of scholars using an array of narrative sources for understanding Khmer culture and history. In this respect, the shared insights that emerge include a methodological focus on tracing out the cultural contradictions, tensions, and paradoxes that the narrative form permits and perhaps even amplifies, and which—for the contributors to this volume—serve as productive sites for analyzing Khmer self-understanding and representation. For example, through his ethnographic account of a building project's self-reflexive bas-relief depiction of its own genesis, Marston examines the paradoxes inherent in the merit-making aims of the building project, which are simultaneously hierarchical and egalitarian, collective and individual, ancient and modern.

The essays as a whole are careful to emphasize that, although they are examining representations of shared thought worlds, they need to be seen as diverse and changing, not reified or static. This is the subject of Ledgerwood's essay, for example, in which she views the reemergence and reinterpretation of interlinking tropes of righteous leadership, power, and order in the political theater of a 1990 water festival. Narrative serves as an archive that permits "alternative readings of the past," in Edwards's words, or a way of "engendering history," in Thompson's. In this connection, it is also a way of allowing "emotion" in history—the legacy of Chandler that Thompson locates in the intellectual genealogy of Paul Mus's advice to Chandler and his classmates at Yale, "to reach out to Asia and touch it with the tips of your fingers."

Finally, drawing on Khmer evidence, the essays theorize about narrative, asking what it is about the narrative form that permits it to serve or be used as a way of reconstructing order and meaning, and what (in Eco's words) permits it to "console" and to express the inexpressible. Chandler's essay explores the ways in which Khmer narratives attempt to fill in "gaps in the world," by which he means to invoke "problems of meaning" that cannot be satisfactorily resolved. These gaps in the world include the experiences of violence, suffering, loss, grief, disorder, and trauma that figure prominently in many of the essays in this volume.

Using Chandler's "Songs" essay as a conceptual and methodological starting point, Part I of this volume, entitled "Gaps in the World," takes up that last question about how narrative helps to explain the inexplicable. The two essays by Anne Hansen and Alex Hinton included here grapple with the "consoling" function of

narrative, exploring why and how fictional stories can help us to address “gaps in the world.” Hansen’s reading of Khmer Buddhist essays about violence, its generation and cessation, and Hinton’s use of the fictional tale of *Tum Teav* to help read and analyze the fictionalized confessions composed by victims of all-too-real torture in the unimaginable setting of Tuol Sleng prison, are both concerned not only with problems of meaning but also with the problems of writing about the problems of meaning.

Drawing on the theoretical insights of Chandler’s “Songs” as a way to write the kind of history that enables us to see and appreciate peoples’ “... attempts to survive inside the framework of what occasionally went on,” Hansen, a historian of religion, considers the validity of Buddhist narratives as a historical archive with documentary and efficacious aspects in her essay, “Gaps in the World: Harm and Violence in Khmer Buddhist Narrative.”<sup>30</sup> Beyond documenting historical moments of the “out-of-control experience of violence,” the two narrative archival sources that Hansen examines—a nineteenth-century millenarian account of violence and purification in human history, and a cycle of stories about harm and violence from a 1920s Khmer ethical manual—were presumably not intended by their authors to serve as documentary “archives” nor as means of demonstrating “how Buddhists have analyzed abstruse causes” (two of the purposes for which Hansen uses the stories). Rather they were intended for other, more efficacious purposes: to “recall order through chaos, offer prescriptions for individual and collective morality, purify behavior, and reorient human history toward the Dhamma [teachings of the Buddha].”

The narrative ethical analyses of violence and order in Hansen’s work overlap closely with anthropologist Alex Hinton’s essay “Songs at the Edge of Democratic Kampuchea,” in which he insightfully applies Chandler’s method of using Khmer narratives to examine issues of moral order as a way to understand something of the nature of violence during the Khmer Rouge period and particularly the Tuol Sleng confessions. In his essay, Hinton draws not only on Chandler’s *Voices from S-21* but also on the “Songs” article to read the “tension between order and disorder—which encompasses the fluctuation between states of meaning and meaninglessness, purity and contamination, and clarity and blindness.” In this way, he examines the nature of violence in Tuol Sleng and in the regime itself. Drawing on one of the best-known of all Khmer narratives, *Tum Teav*, Hinton analyzes the actions and tropes of order and disorder in the story in connection with their Buddhist antecedents, suggesting the ways in which the story reveals “an idealized vision of a properly ordered society ... juxtaposed against the real world, where characters stumble and make terrible mistakes, leading to violence and disruption.” Reading Khmer Rouge radio broadcasts through the lens of the same Buddhist notions of purity, ignorance, and mindfulness evident in the *Tum Teav* story, Hinton offers an interpretation of DK violence and how it particularly manifested itself at Tuol Sleng.

Part Two of the volume, “Alternative Readings of the Past,” consists of three wide-ranging essays that represent new historical perspectives on and approaches to understanding Cambodian history. In different ways, all three of the essays question

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<sup>30</sup> Anne Hansen in this volume, citing David Chandler, “Songs at the Edge of the Forest: Perceptions of Order in Three Cambodian Texts,” in *Moral Order and the Question of Change: Essays on Southeast Asian Thought*, ed. David K. Wyatt and Alexander Woodside (New Haven, CT: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1982), p. 71.

older rubrics for Cambodian history. Ashley Thompson, Sokhieng Au, and Penny Edwards call on us to examine Khmer history more broadly, from outside the borders of our usual conceptual boundaries. Thompson, Au, and Edwards treat quite different periods and topics. Thompson discusses late twelfth- and early thirteenth-century inscriptions about a queen's summoning of her husband through mediumship and other forms of spiritual prowess, and how they relate to memories of the DK period and possession stories from the past and present. Au deals with the accommodations between French and Khmer representations of leprosy in colonial medicine. Edwards analyzes the place of twentieth-century representations of landscape in the rise of Khmer nationalism and identity. Yet all three authors cross boundaries, challenging our usual expectations about what kinds of sources we can use and what kinds of assumptions we can draw from them. All three want to examine Khmer history through a wider disciplinary perspective that moves the significance of particular moments in Khmer history beyond Cambodia and area studies and into the larger theoretical consideration of gender, memory, medicine, modernity, and comparative colonialisms.

Challenging and innovative in its analysis of possession narratives as historical sources, Ashley Thompson's essay, "Performative Realities: Nobody's Possession," takes up the paradox acknowledged in the scholarly refrain that women in Southeast Asia have "relatively high status," while, at the same time, few female voices are discovered in its histories. Tracing her own intellectual genealogies of work on gender relationships and possession through both Mus and Chandler, Thompson suggests how their questioning of the colonial paradigm of an Indianized Southeast Asia and their emphasis on "the mysterious and exhilarating domain of *feeling*" opened up for her "new possibilities for engendering Southeast Asian history." Her essay argues for viewing possession as "an indigenous way of making history: history in the broadest sense, as a social locus for communal memory and forgetting. ... a representation and interpretation of past events that itself constitutes an event to be interpreted in turn, a process of unearthing archives that produces an additional archive." Reading (and rereading) multiple cases of possession in the DK period and after, through oral accounts, and, in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, through inscriptions, Thompson explores how possession can "make things happen," how it can make history in the sense that it causes changes and transformations not only in individuals' lives, but also in larger communal and political ways, how it offers a form of resistance to political violence, and gives voices to those who have died or who are usually silent. The process of engendering histories, she suggests, does not simply "reerect" older historical interpretations by shifting women's voices to the forefront. Rather, it "widens and deepens" our historical perspectives and understandings, allowing us to bring out "the universal implications of irreducible cultural singularity" that she finds inspiring in the writings of Mus and Chandler.

Through a comparison of contrasting representations of lepers in different types of colonial-era narratives, in "The King with Hansen's Disease: Tales of the Leper in Colonial Cambodia," Sokhieng Au charts the divergences, shifts, and syntheses that occurred in Khmer and French social and medical prognoses and treatments of leprosy as a result of colonial interventions in Cambodia. On a theoretical level, her essay also examines how narrative addresses and constructs meaning; she contends that stories portraying a certain vision of social order simultaneously represent and recreate it, since narrative in general functions to "both constitute and reflect human experience." The narratives she records and analyzes reveal the boundaries and

interactions between thought worlds and real bodies (especially men and women, diseased and healthy) at different moments in the colonial world. But importantly, Au's narrative work on the figure of the leper identifies new historical sources for understanding the construction of meaning in colonial societies and also helps us move beyond a simple binary reading of colonial history in the dichotomized terms of colonizer/colonized. Different lexicons of meaning (found, for example, in a range of biomedical, Buddhist, Christian, French, and Khmer literary works) suggest the multiplicity not only of different interpretive options available for actors to construct meaning in the colonial world, but also the possibility that one individual—"the anticlerical French doctor" who had, in spite of himself, "internalized" images of the Biblical leper, or the "Khmer man trained as a western doctor" who believed simultaneously in germ theory and moral lapses as explanations for the causation of the disease—could inhabit more than one thought world at a time. And it was "just so" with the image of a leper, who could exist as a character in more than one story at a time. Au's reading of leper stories reflects back on the work of representing "others" in the narratives that historians construct. Just as (in Au's essay) leper stories can be seen to be "about leprosy" with the "disease itself ... [remaining] a secondary focus of these narratives" while their colonial authors appropriate these stories "to legitimate specific professional agendas," historians, too, write narratives that appropriate and construct representations of others that act as they want them to. Like Chandler's, Au's methodology of exploring multiple, intersecting, and sometimes conflicting "alternative readings of the past" tries to uncover and highlight, rather than whitewash, the messiness and shifting boundaries of meaning amid the cultural flux of the early twentieth century in Cambodia.

In her lush essay, "Between a Song and a *Prei*: Tracking Cambodian History and Cosmology through the Forest," Penny Edwards is also concerned with new tellings of history and new sources for understanding Khmer perceptions and movements. Like Thompson and Au, and like Chandler in "Songs" and "Maps for the Ancestors," Edwards wants to examine "indigenous narratives of Khmer history," but her reading of these sources is undertaken through a comparative lens that lets us focus on larger human concerns. She draws on the Khmer story studied by Chandler, "*Reuang Damnoek Kaun Lok*" (The Story of the Origin of the Child-of-the-World Bird) to analyze the tensions between European and Khmer conceptions of space, landscape, and territory as they change from the nineteenth century into the era of independence and through the DK period. Her essay carefully avoids presenting Cambodian conceptions of the forest (*prei*) as reified "traditional" views that are supplanted or erased. Instead, it contrasts Khmer notions of *prei* with European ideas of dark and frightening, and later romanticized and ordered, spaces and suggests how these conceptions both clashed against and influenced each other within the context of colonial modernity. She concludes with a consideration of further perceptions and reinterpretations of the *prei* in the DK regime, and after, as a site of brutal memory, as "a place not for flights of birds or fancy, but a place smothered with too many memories, collective and individual, of death, denial, and destitution." As in many of the other essays that follow, her method of reading stories considers the continuity of certain cultural tropes within the clear context of cultural change. While stories about boundaries between *srok* and *prei* provide a historical lens through which to view Khmer understandings of order, the reading must be continuously adjusted: "as societies change, so does the cultural literacy required to make sense of such tales." Following Chandler, Edwards contends that

despite the derisive way in which sources like “oral history, legend, normative poems, and song” were viewed by some colonial scholars and officials, the extent to which they “persisted in the daily lives of most Cambodians” made them productive sources for supplying “alternative readings of the past.” While Edwards describes these sources as “alternative readings of the past,” we also employ her phrase in this volume more broadly—to invoke the stories that historians themselves tell about history.

The volume concludes with the section “New Songs,” a play on Chandler’s reference to the ethnographic work of Fredrik Barth, where he found the imagery of “songs at the edge of the forest, as night comes on.” These three essays combine recent ethnographic research with innovative readings of past and contemporary Khmer discourses on reconstituting order.<sup>31</sup> All three essays are concerned with analyzing the redeployment of enduring rituals, tropes, and paradigms in the rituals, architecture, social structures, and narratives the authors have encountered in their work on contemporary postrevolutionary society. The discussions move back and forth between current political and social realities and the realm of social and religious representation and imagination that Erik Davis terms the Khmer imaginaries (*imaginaire*), the “mental universe” of “social symbols, significations, tropes, and themes” that make it “possible for people who speak the same language to understand the words that come out of each other’s mouths.”

Drawing on Chandler’s use of a narrative about religious building to understand how nineteenth-century Khmer tried to reconstitute meaning and order following experiences of social chaos, and on his own extensive ethnographic expertise on contemporary Cambodian society and religion, John Marston’s essay, “Constructing Narratives of Order: Religious-Building Projects and Moral Chaos,” considers the highly conspicuous phenomenon of contemporary religious-building projects since the Pol Pot period. In particular, Marston examines how contemporary building projects self-reflexively appropriate Buddhist prophetic themes and images of the Angkorean past to establish legitimacy. In the aftermath of social turmoil, he suggests, one of these building projects self-consciously draws on images of national suffering, unity, purification, protection, and the greatness of the past in its effort to “realize social organization (and moral order) in practice” and open up “possibilities for a Cambodian future.” Like Ledgerwood, Marston points to some of the ways in which major themes associated with Khmer identity and history—Angkor as the essence of Khmer civilization, the spiritual power of forest hermits, Buddhist prophesies of decline and regeneration—are used selectively by Khmer in constructing new postsocialist identities. One set of bas-reliefs that Marston examines fuses socialist realism with Angkorean stylistic features, invoking the Buddhist tradition of merit-making through religious-building projects and the idea of religious commitment as a means of reversing prophesied social moral decline, in this case implicitly associated with the international standing of the Khmer nation. This multi-layered, reflexive, and sometimes self-contradictory narrative captures the ambivalent experience of the present social order that Marston sees as especially evocative of Khmer self-representation today.

“Ritual in 1990 Cambodian Political Theatre: New Songs at the Edge of the Forest,” by Judy Ledgerwood, is a revealing analysis of a “royal” ritual performed by

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<sup>31</sup> Chandler, *Facing the Cambodian Past*, pp. 98–99, citing Fredrik Barth, *Ritual and Knowledge among the Baktaman of New Guinea* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1975), p. 267.

the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) triumvirate of Heng Samrin, Chea Sim, and Hun Sen at an astrologically auspicious time in November 1990, at the royal palace in Phnom Penh. The essay examines the multivalent and, as recognized in Marston's work, strikingly reflexive ways in which contemporary Khmer are invoking order and constructing identity, power, and meaning in the postsocialist state. Following Chandler's analysis of the nineteenth-century Khmer king Ang Duong "going through the motions" of asserting the legitimacy of his new reign through ritual acts associated with kingship, Ledgerwood views the PRK leaders as "political actors seeking to redefine and employ key symbols in a competition for power." The 1990 water festival invoked not only Buddhist practices and symbols, such as merit-making through giving alms to monks and the planting of a Bodhi tree, but also the Angkorian past, Brahmanic court rituals, the toppling of the Khmer Rouge regime, and seasonal ceremonies in Europe. As the 1990 ceremony was reconstructed, it highlighted the "scientific, rational, 'modern' facts" about flooding, the reversal of the Tonle Sap, and soil fertility, while omitting other features of the ritual's religious meaning and social saliency. Yet the subtext of the ceremony simultaneously drew on the Buddhist millenarian prophesies referred to by Ledgerwood, Hansen, and Marston, linking agricultural fertility and prosperity to righteous political leadership and legitimacy.

The volume ends with Erik Davis's evocative and "imaginative" essay, "Imaginary Conversations with Mothers about Death." Davis's essay "takes flight" from his conversations with David Chandler (the real and changing person), and "imaginary David," the author of "Songs," who took shape in Davis's mind through the imagined dialogue that grew out of reading that essay and writing this one. Davis suggests that reading "Songs" left him, like others, with insights into the existence of a "shared world of Khmer culture" that came into focus through Chandler's reading of the "occult connections" between a variety of unorthodox sources. Drawing on this conviction, the work of another of his "intellectual mothers," Steven Collins, and on the ideas of Jacques Lacan and Carlos Castoriadis, Davis argues for a way of viewing both continuity and reinterpretation of symbols in a Khmer thought world through the interpretive devise of the imaginary, or *imaginaire*. In particular, he wants to track the "remarkably stable" existence of "symbols of motherhood, sustenance, and death" whose reading allows us to see "various, but not infinite, moral judgments" arising within a shared universe. Reading back and forth between two Khmer stories about characters who reconstitute meaning after loss and an ethnographic story from his recent fieldwork about an elderly woman who must do the same, Davis suggests that the stories help us to see how Khmer have in the past and continue now to view social relationships, dependence, and patronage. His discussion of dependence and mothers also enables him to move from Khmer thought worlds to scholarly thought worlds concerned with Cambodian history and culture, and to the relationships of dependency between scholars and their "intellectual mothers" who nourish us with "imaginary conversations" that give birth to new historical narratives. "[T]here is a way in which this work is not entirely mine, no matter how much a part I may have played in realizing it," Davis writes. "Rather, it emerged from conversations with a David founded at a particular moment in his own thought," through the writing of "Songs."

Davis's reflections on the regeneration of scholarly ideas and stories are a fitting end to the volume. His remarks also convey the breadth and length of the influence

of Chandler's "Songs" on the field, more than twenty-five years after it was first written. Davis, a PhD candidate in religious studies at the University of Chicago, was finishing his dissertation fieldwork in Cambodia as he wrote the conclusion to his essay. Having named Chandler as one of the "mothers" of his ideas, he elegantly closes his essay with observations of a *Châmroaen Ayu* ("life-increasing") ceremony taking place outside his window, where he hears a religious teacher "singing a hymn in praise of mothers, whose lives have nourished our own ..."

The recognition of the boundaries and limits of our own fragmented perceptions is, of course, a preoccupation of the historian's vocation. In the tangled border between fictional forest and real people's lives, it is sometimes difficult to keep sight of what is most important about representing historical ideas and people, the "touch" and feeling that Thompson discusses in this volume, which also intersect with what Eco describes as the "consoling function" of fiction, the ability to remember and shed light on "the immensity of things that happened."<sup>32</sup> Yet, drawing on what we have learned about interpretive paths from Chandler, we find scholarly representations of a society or history to be better, or at least more true, when they contain a reflexivity about how they are like reconciling myths and how they are like reality. "A myth is ... efficacious to the extent that it succeeds, by symbols, in identifying with each other, things that in fact are different, often blandly asserting contradictions."<sup>33</sup> As ethnographers and cultural, literary, and religious historians attempting to represent reality, we have learned that what really happens can be surprising and unclear, defying reconciling explanations, tragic, inspiring, capturable in fragments and moments, and often impossible, as Chandler concludes in "Songs," to explain adequately. Our efforts to express and find meaning in what has happened not only connect us to the historical people we study, they help us more fully to comprehend the narrative, symbolic, and analytical capacities that make us all human, what Chandler evocatively describes as "no more, and of course no less, than songs at the edge of the forest, as night comes on ..."<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Eco, *Six Walks*, p. 87.

<sup>33</sup> Mabbett and Chandler, "Introduction," to *India Seen from the East*, p. xi.

<sup>34</sup> Chandler, *Facing the Cambodian Past*, p. 99.