

THE SHORT STORIES OF CAMBODIAN POPULAR TRADITION

The modern short story, complete in itself and commenting directly or indirectly on the society of the time, never became established as a literary genre in Cambodia as it did in neighbouring South East Asian countries.¹ Magazines in the last few decades sometimes serialised novels or novelettes and frequently published poems but the short story still meant for Cambodians the traditional legend or fairy tale. This first article in the present collection begins, then, where story-telling in all countries began, with the folklore. Let us go back in time and imagine these tales being told by a grandfather to a grandchild, as they sat on the verandah, or by a village elder to his neighbours as they relaxed in the cool dark of the evening.

The folk-tales are the equal of the modern short story in providing comment on the society for which they were created. But what was this society and to what distant century may these tales be dated? Jean Przyluski suggested (Martini & Bernard 1946:7) that the study of Cambodian folklore would throw light on Khmer culture before it was affected by Indian or Chinese influence. Certainly many tales are concerned with hunting and trapping animals and there often arises that important question of whether there will be any 'luck' for supper, a hint, perhaps, of a way of life which preceded the agricultural state? For the most part, however, the folklore shows us a Khmer community which busily cultivated the Mekong plain. The frequent appearances in the stories of spirits *anak tã* always associated with a specific locality such as a strangely-shaped tree-trunk or huge rock, also indicate the settled state. Yet this could well be in pre-historic times, since animist beliefs preceded the arrival in mainland South East Asia in the early centuries of this era of Brahmanism and Buddhism (Mus 1933:373). It is possible, therefore, that some elements of the folk-tales as we know them now may predate the Christian Era.

The folklore places us at close quarters with the Cambodian natural environment. We become acquainted with wild animals so well understood by the Khmers, particularly with those which threaten man and those which he tames. There is the forest, never far away, to which expeditions are made to trap elephants, find building wood, or slash and burn a clearing of cultivation. We are made aware of the border of the Tonle to which father and son may go for a few months to grow rice and make a little profit from the surplus against hard times. The Cambodians may have lived in such a world as this before outside cultures influenced them. However, there are many tales in which an established monarch figures. The presence of royalty brings with it the society of astrologers and mandarins, judges and generals, and here we recognise the influence of

India and China. No precise historical period is indicated – for what folk-tale gives its king a real name? – but we are in an Indianised state with the Hindu divinities, the king's court, the Buddhist monkhood and the law.

The story, then, may have as its back-cloth the timeless scene of the Cambodian countryside or the complex web of an organised kingdom; the hero may stay near home, weaving baskets or raising turtles, he may go by boat to China and seek his fortune or he may rise, step by step, to become king. Whatever the outcome of the tale, we usually begin in a village with the peasant in his little wooden house on stilts. Time and time again, the characteristic features of our hero's house are brought vividly to our notice. Under it, his wife's lover may hide at night hearing the secrets which he tells her. Inside it is a jar for salted vegetables which, when empty, is big enough for a man to hide in. We feel closely involved with our peasant hero as he strives against life's odds, accepting defeat with Buddhist resignation; in his gullibility he is constantly cheated by the wily adventurers whom he meets in the forest or passing through his village.

I shall introduce the stories by giving a description of ten major groups of tales with a brief reference to one or two incidents in each one. Some of these are composed of a series of episodes concerning one or two major characters; one is a well-known collection of stories of a type. I have tried to include the more popular stories and, in order to be as representative of the whole corpus as possible, have added two groups, animal tales and etiological tales, which are not traditionally regarded as specific collections or sets by the Cambodians themselves.

Ā khvāk'ā khvin (The blind man and the cripple)², is a series of episodes about two run-away slaves, each episode making a complete story.³ The cripple, carried on the shoulders of the blind man, directs his footsteps. After many adventures, in most of which they are the losers, they save a princess from being eaten by an ogre, are cured of their blindness and lameness (by hitting each on the eyes and limbs respectively as they fight about some gold!) and become first and second kings in the land of the princess. In one of their little adventures as they journey along they are tricked into buying a node of 'honey' which turns out to be excrement!

*Ā Lev*⁴ is the story of a horrid boy who is greedy for good food. So greedy is he that he tells his father, who is living at some distance from home at the time, that his mother has died and his mother that his father has died, just so as to enjoy two servings of funeral delicacies! He later persuades each separately to marry someone 'very much like the previous spouse' and thus engineers their re-marriage – and a wedding feast for himself. From his later life, which ends with his being a wealthy and respected member of the community, I will relate one incident. He and his father, walking along the road, see some Cham merchants approaching, laden with valuable merchandise. 'Run across the fields', he says to his father, 'someone is chasing you.' His father does so. *Ā Lev* calls to the merchants, 'That man is chasing after a deer with a broken leg. Help him to chase it and we'll share the deer.' All the Chams drop their precious goods and run after his father, while *Ā Lev* proceeds home with their merchandise!

Thmenh Chey (*Dhmenñ Jāy* or *Dhanañjāy*⁵) is a story known also in Burma and Thailand.⁶ *Thmenh Chey* is a poor boy who rises, first to be the servant of a rich man, then to attend upon the king and finally to be the most eminent man in the land. All this he does by his wits and in particular by outwitting his current master in verbal adroitness. When he becomes the servant of the rich man, for example, and has to follow behind the litter which takes his master to wait upon the king each day, the first time he arrives late 'because', his excuse goes, 'I didn't want to drop anything'. 'Next time, be quicker', says the rich man. Next day he arrives on time but without the rich man's betel; he dropped it but did not delay to pick it up. 'Next time, pick up anything which has fallen to the ground', says the foolish rich man. And next day *Thmenh Chey* arrives with horsedung which he saw drop to the ground! Later, when *Thmenh Chey* is the king's servant, he saves the country from the Chinese. They have sent a delegation of wise men to Cambodia and, unless someone there is able to answer three riddles, they will take over the country. *Thmenh Chey* has constantly infuriated the king by beating him in every battle of wits but now the king relies on him to save the situation. And this he does because when, in unwonted despair, he throws himself into the river, he hears the answers being discussed in a Chinese junk.

Judge Hare (*subhā dansāy*) is also a character who has a counterpart in other South East Asian countries; he is found in Laos and Vietnam and there are parallels between his adventures and those of the Malay *Pelanduk**. (Martini & Bernard 1946:8). Judge Hare stories fall into two categories: those in which this enterprising animal escapes death by a hair's breadth and those in which, as the judge, he solves law-cases between animals or men or both, making the right person win by irregular methods, usually by giving the guilty party a dose of his own medicine.⁷ Often a play on words or an argument which depends on clever wording is involved. Here is a paraphrase of one story. A man is about to lose his fiancée for the sake of whose hand he has endured the ordeal of soaking in water for three nights in succession. Jokingly he had stretched out his hand as if to feel the warmth of a fire on a distant mountain. The girl's parents said this was cheating and he now has to pay costs in the form of a meal for Judge Parrot and the parents. Judge Hare solves his problem by making him present the food without seasoning, putting the seasoning at the side of the dish. 'What on earth is in this stew?' asks Judge Parrot. 'It tastes of nothing.' Judge Hare then points out that the warmth of that fire could no more affect the young man's hand than the seasoning could affect the taste of the stew.⁸

*Mr. Whittling Knife*⁹ (*cau kampit pandoh*) and his brother are given advice by the abbot as they leave the monastery where they have been educated. His brother goes, as bidden, to China where he becomes rich. *Mr. Whittling Knife*, destined to become the ruler of two kingdoms, is told

* A *pelanduk* is a mouse-deer (*Tragulus kancil*, ~ *javanicus* ~ *pygmaeus*, etc.) found in Malaysian forests. The Malays regard it as a symbol of wisdom and intelligence whence it assumes the title role in a cycle of folk-tales, the Malay *cerita pelanduk* (Winstedt 1958:11-19). (Ed.)

to observe three maxims: not to fall asleep when others on guard do so; to keep an eye on his mother-in-law; and not to talk in bed. He visits his brother in China and has an adventurous return journey, arriving home to his faithless wife with valuable, magic possessions. A well-known incident in the story takes place when he disobeys one of the maxims and talks to his wife in bed, telling her that he has hidden his treasures at the foot of the wooden steps leading up to the house. When her lover, who has overheard this, has stolen the goods, Mr. Whittling Knife accuses the steps, taking them to court, and thus attracts the attention of the king. The king helps him to find the culprit who, they feel sure, is the wife's lover, as follows. He gives Mr. Whittling Knife a fine sarong for him to present to his wife to wear at a feast. She, as they anticipate, gives it to her lover, who wears it and is easily discovered.

*Kong the Brave*¹⁰ (*Gaṇ' Hān*) is, in fact, a shameless coward who gains a reputation for bravery when his two wives kill a tiger while he hides in a tree. He deals the dead tiger a few blows with a stick. 'Hm. You'll hit it when it's dead', say his wives. 'Women couldn't kill a tiger', says Kong the Brave. 'Obviously I must have killed it.' He thus begins a rumour of his own courage which he has to maintain. We find him later, sitting terrified on his elephant, having been commanded by the king to lead a battle charge; he accidentally jabs his elephant with his lance, it rushes towards the enemy, and once again he appears brave!

*Satra keng kantrai*¹¹ (*Sātrā kṇ kantrai*) is a collection of legal tales known also in Laos, Thailand and Burma. In each case the dispute cannot be solved by a mere judge and has to be referred to the king. His judgements are wise and fair. When two women claim to be the mother of one child, for example, he settles the case very much as Solomon did.¹² There is a great deal of repetition in the form of the stories, several, for example, being about two people meeting on a narrow road or bridge and neither being willing to give way. In one of these cases the king awards to the man whose house was on fire in preference to the man who was going home because his mother had died!¹³ Another case involves an umbrella which the owner had allowed another man to share on the way home. The latter carried it and, at the parting of the ways, would not give it up. The king's solution was to tear the umbrella in half, give half to each and send them home. He then ordered someone to follow them and listen as they spoke to their wives about it. Thus he discovered the real owner and made the other man give him a new umbrella.¹⁴

The story of the *Four bald men*¹⁵ (*manuss dammaek kpāl puon nāk'*) tells how they traverse the land looking for a wife – and some hair. In one episode of their story they find five turtles and want to divide them amongst themselves. However they do it, they always have one left over. A rather brighter individual comes along and offers to do it for them. He sits on one, shares out the rest perfectly and keeps the one on which he is sitting. It was suggested by Przyluski (Martini & Bernard 1946: 9) that this story may go back to a polyandrous society since the four bald men do in the end share a wife. From the way the tale is told nowadays, however, it

would seem that polyandry was not very usual. When they all propose to her the woman says to herself that it is a pity to offend three of them by choosing one and the arrangement would give her four good workmen. When they die, all in one accident, she has to pass them off as one corpse, telling her neighbours that the corpse has returned from the dead and that the incineration will have to be done again and more thoroughly. This she does until all four have been cremated.

Animal stories, some entirely concerned with animals, other involving humans too, form a large section of the corpus. The animals are humanised in that they think and talk. Two animals which are a genuine danger to man, the tiger and the crocodile, are presented intentionally in a false light. The tiger in the stories is a foolish creature. He runs away, for instance, when he hears the hare, who is hiding from him deep in a cane bush with only his wits to preserve him, declare, 'Dear me! I've eaten five tigers and I'm still hungry!'¹⁶ And the tiger tries to imitate the fish-eagle which seems to catch its food so easily. He just jumps off a branch and straight into the water, where he nearly drowns.¹⁷ The crocodile is portrayed as man's friend and is even regarded as a pet. One is kept at a monastery by the abbot. True, he does cause the death of his master but not intentionally. He is transporting him back home one day when he sees an enemy upstream. He swallows his passenger for safety while he fights his enemy and is quite dismayed to find, when he regurgitates him, that his master has suffocated.¹⁸ Among animals which are not a threat to man, the monkey is noticeably the one who is most disliked. He usually comes to a bad end. One monkey tries to give moral support to a frightened tiger by suggesting they tie themselves together with a creeper. When, as usual, the tiger runs away, the monkey is dragged to his death.¹⁹ Stories revolve round many other animals: the otter, the snake, the hen, the sparrow and even the worm, who outwits the crow by posing him difficult riddles on the understanding that if he cannot answer them he may have him to eat.²⁰ Similarly, the hare, that is, as we have seen, Judge Hare, is the subject of a number of tales in which, like Brer Rabbit, he saves his own life by his wits.

The tenth group consists of stories which explain the origin of the names of plants, place-names, and animals. Some are concerned with spirits; some are legends. A hill, the Phnom Ta Sên, is named after Grandfather Sên (*tā saen*) who bravely killed a rampaging elephant singlehanded and so saved the villagers' crops from destruction.²¹ An animal story explains the name of a bird whose cry resembles the utterance of the words, 'koun lok' (*kūn lok*) which could mean 'Your children, mother'. This bird is said to be descended from some babes in the wood, abandoned by their mother and looked after by the gods. Gradually the babes turned into birds; by the time that their mother returned to look for them, their ability to speak was restricted to the utterance of this cry.²²

I turn now to the examination of two themes which constantly recur in the structure of Khmer folk-tales, forming an essential part of the story. These are humour and deception. Various forms of humour are found. Farce and slapstick have a part to play, although the medium is narrative,

not drama. As one looks back on the reading of Cambodian popular folk-tales a number of entertaining sequences or situations come to mind which a Cambodian audience, familiar with what is coming next, would enjoy. It is, of course, a slow process to explain what happens, so the reader must exercise his imagination. To those familiar with the film cartoon the pace is slow. However, as the narrative builds up a farcical situation, the audience's or reader's anticipation of the comic predicament increases very much as it does during a Western play or film. There is a slapstick scene in a monastery when the pupil brings lunch to his teacher, the monk. The fish is nothing but bones resting on the rice because the pupil has eaten his master's fish as well as his own. 'Where's the fish?' 'Er – the flies ate it.' 'Well, swat the flies then.' And with a whack the pupil swats the fly on his master's nose!²³

Another sequence entirely worthy of Laurel and Hardy concerns a young man who does not know how to behave in polite society. His brother-in-law takes him to a party, telling him, 'Just do exactly as I do.' The young man tries hard to watch and copy. Unfortunately he fails to see that his brother-in-law discards anything uneatable in a napkin which is then removed. The young man chews his way through the shells of the shell-fish and residue of the sugar-cane. By this time the brother-in-law chokes with laughter at him. Alas! He is eating noodles at the time. When noodles appear through the nostrils of his brother-in-law, our young man throws down his chop-sticks and gives up high society.²⁴

A farcical situation arises when a prospective son-in-law is put through difficult tasks by the fiancée's father. The young man has to carry two sacks of rice, on a pole, a long way without grumbling. Having listened under the house at night, he knows that the girl's father is in fact in one sack. When they arrive at a footbridge over a torrent he takes his revenge for the tricks this unpleasant character has played on him by dangling him over the torrent and imitating the sound of a elephant about to trample the bridge to pieces.²⁵ Another memorable scene is created by the following steps. We begin with a man suspended from the lowest branch of a sugar-palm high above the ground. A basket-weaver, he was up there in the tree cutting leaves for his baskets and thinking about being rich and having slaves and about hitting and kicking them if they did not do what he told them to do. In his reverie he kicked and hit too hard so that he fell from his perch. However, as he hangs there along comes a man on an elephant. 'If you help me get down from here I will be your slave for life', he avows. The elephant-driver comes under the tree, stands on his elephant and can just reach the man's feet. He clasps hold of them but in so doing he inadvertently presses onto the back of the elephant, a signal for it to march on. It does so, leaving the two men suspended from the tree!²⁶

In Cambodian folk-tales incidents often occur which, if differently related, would be tragic but which are intended to be funny. The following situations are examples of this black comedy: the husband pouring boiling water into the jar in which he knows his wife's lover is hiding and, worse, later his wife touching the lover's shrivelled head, as, not knowing he is

dead, she tries to push him down out of sight;²⁷ the turtle falling to his death because, as he is being carried to a watery pool in the dry season by two helpful geese (they are flying along holding the two ends of a stick in their beaks and he is holding the middle in his mouth) people on the ground call out in surprise and he just *has* to open his mouth to reply.²⁸ The macabre is also represented humourously. Four stupid men are felling a tree. As it falls one of them tries to support it and is squashed to death, his mouth agape. The others admire his strength, not realising he is dead. 'Look at him, strong enough to hold the tree *and* smile!'²⁹ There is often a mixture of pathos in the comedy. The escaping slaves, the blind man and the cripple mentioned earlier, try to make their get-away at night in a boat but they sit facing each other and, although they row all night, they are still in the same place next morning having gone round and round! Infirmary provokes humour sometimes. An unfortunate leper meets his end as follows. A precocious child, who is about to be drowned in a sack for telling lies, sends the executioner back home for his book of lies (to be drowned along with him) and tells the passing leper that he has been cured of leprosy by staying in the sack for a day. The leper unties him and allows himself to be tied up instead...³⁰ Old age is also a subject of fun. An old lady is duped by the Cheeky Ā Ļev. He has manoeuvred her and her beautiful grand-daughter and all their belongings into a boat, ready to help them move to a better place to live. He sends her back on land to fetch the knife he pretends he has forgotten and, as soon as she is on shore, he sails away with the beautiful girl and all the goods and chattels.

Sheer stupidity is a major theme of these tales, and one which occasionally proves too much for Western students! A husband and wife suddenly realise how easily they can make a fortune. They will acquire all the treasure from the bottom of the sea, by emptying it bucketful by bucketful!³¹ A family of stone-deaf people persist in talking to each other about totally unrelated subjects, becoming angrier and angrier with each other because they assume the others are being rude to them.³² In another story, two men compete in setting traps. Whose trap will catch an animal by morning? The sensible man chooses a suitable tree and sets his trap at the foot of it. The stupid man puts his trap at the top of the same tree. Later he regrets this and goes back to transfer the animal now caught in the other man's trap to his own trap in the top of the tree. A law-suit ensues...³³

Here we move from humour to the second of the underlying themes under discussion, that of deception. Frequently the stupid person is tricked by a clever use of words. Cambodians love all kinds of word-play: puns, Spoonerisms, rhymes and riddles. In several stories the question of payment of a certain quantity of silver arises. The simple person has assumed this to be a 'piece' of silver but the trickster, for example, Ā Ļev or Thmenh Chey, declares he always meant a 'begging-bowlful'. The Sanskrit loanwords, *pāda* 'a foot; piece (of silver)' and *pātra* 'a bowl' are both pronounced the same in Khmer. Sometimes the precise wording of an argument makes it sound reliable when in fact it is specious. This is the case in a Judge Hare story. On one occasion Judge Hare is helping a man

who had brought back to life a tiger which had died of snakebite. The tiger does not believe he has been dead and intends to eat the man for putting all that ointment on him when he was asleep. Judge Hare persuades the tiger to re-enact the sequence of events, saying, 'You go back to sleep and if, when it is time to wake up you are not dead, then you may eat this man.' The tiger goes back to sleep, the snake obligingly bites again and this time the man does not bring the tiger back to life.³⁴ Another story concerns betting, a favourite Cambodian pastime. A man points to the cart of another and says, 'What's this?' 'A cart.' 'Are you sure?' 'Yes.' 'Sure enough to bet – and if I win I have your wife as my own?' 'Yes, of course.' The first man then points to various parts of the cart asking, 'What's this?' and thus 'proves' that it is all these parts but not a cart. Judge Hare of course retaliates in court by making the man 'prove' by a similar process that the wife he wants is non-existent.³⁵

It is not only by words, however, that deception is practised in the folktales. There is also deception by deed. For example, two adventurers come across a house where a funeral is about to take place. One pretends to be a relative from distant parts who expects to inherit all the estate while the other manages to slip into the coffin and speak, as with the voice of the deceased, confirming that the legacy does indeed go to his accomplice.³⁶ In another instance, the frog proves to the foolish tiger that he is a better hunter than the tiger, by showing the tiger a piece of charcoal (which he claims is a rhinoceros' horn); a fish-bone (which he says is an elephant's tusk), and the seeds of a plant (that is a tiger's eyes!).³⁷ And Ā Lev manages to rob five hundred pirates of their booty by undertaking to teach them magic. They must choose an island, dig a well and practise submerging themselves in water and reciting, as they do so, some magic Pāli-sounding syllables seven times over. After some practise they all have to submerge themselves at the same time – and at this time he sails away in their junk with all their goods, towing his own little boat along behind.³⁸

The various brands of humour and the delight in verbal trickery for amusement, which are so constantly revealed in these tales from long ago, may be instantly recognised by those who know the twentieth century Cambodians as being very typical of them as they are today. There may be other traits of the national Cambodian character which, since the folktales confirm them, may be assumed to go back far into their history. The Khmers of the folklore do not seem to resemble modern Cambodians at all, however, in their attitude to the institutions which most closely affect their daily life: the family, the law, the Buddhist religion and the throne. The family is seen often enough in the stories. We repeatedly meet particular groups: husbands and wives, parents and children, grandmothers looking after grandchildren and fathers-in-law considering prospective sons-in-law. Alas! What an unloving collection of characters they are! Wives are only mentioned when they are faithless. They cheat their husbands in every way they can think of and then have the nerve to come back to them. Deceived husbands abound but there are also many who simply leave home for years. Sometimes they marry another woman,

leave her, and return to the first wife. The parents of a boy who weeps all the time simply abandon him to the wild beasts (Leclère 1895: 99-111). A grandson beats his grandmother if his meal is not ready when he returns home.³⁹ What are we to conclude from this? In fact, family relationships are as dear to the Cambodians as to any race. The truth is that we have here just another huge joke.

The law is, in general, shown to be organised in such a way that right prevails. Lawsuits end in favour of the party whom we know to be innocent; efforts are made to find out the true facts. A crime may be re-enacted for this purpose or the statements of the accused may be taken down in writing to be shown to the judge. The guilty are given corporal punishment: gaols are not heard of very often. The stocks, which may be tightened uncomfortably, are instantly brought into use if no confession is forthcoming. Here we see some criticism of the law because we often know that the prisoner who confesses under this treatment is innocent. In one story a fisherman is put in the stocks because he is suspected of stealing the king's coronet which His Majesty had rather carelessly left in the forest. The fisherman admits guilt, but in fact a monkey was the thief. The story ends happily, however, because the whole sequence of events is staged again and the monkey criminal fortunately does the same as before.⁴⁰

If the law is not usually mocked, those who carry it out are. Judges are usually seen to be quite incompetent. We have seen that in the *Satra keng kantrai* judges cannot solve their cases and have to send them to the king. Even the Minister of Justice, as the following tale shows, was not necessarily appointed because of his superior legal competence! A thief, hiding at night under the house of a minor official, hears him bewailing the fact that he does not have the forty *riels* which he needs to give a 'gift' to the Minister of Justice. The thief is kind; he puts forty *riels* in a crack in the wall of the house. Long afterwards, when the official has risen to the position of governor, the thief is in gaol and, reminding the governor about a certain package of forty *riels*, gains his release. Later still, he helps the Governor to rise to be Minister of Justice by tracking down a murderer for him.⁴¹

Religion is not ridiculed as an institution. Although some stories may predate the advent of Buddhism, in the way they are now told Buddhism is ever-present, commanding respect and advocating a proper attitude towards right and wrong. When the good girl helps the tiger, she is rewarded with gold but the bad girl, who only helps the tiger for the sake of the reward, is given serpents.⁴² The monks themselves, however, are mercilessly ridiculed. Here are three examples. For payment Ā Ļev arranged an assignation between a monk and a Chinese, leading each to think that when he goes at dark to the appointed place he will find a beautiful girl.⁴³ Second, we find a country monk trailing home from market with his pupil. Having little money, they have bought the cheapest food: two huge bags of salt! The pupil leaves the master to carry it home and the latter finally hides it, to be collected the next day. And where does he hide it? In the water among the reeds where, next day, only the bags are left undissolved! Thirdly, the same

novice flatters his teacher into believing that he has now mastered the magic art of making himself invisible and persuades him to go visiting people in their houses not fully clothed.⁴⁴

The throne is an institution which is never very close to the heart of the folklore. Certainly there are some stories, often of Indian origin, which revolve round royalty. In such tales we can expect to come across all that royalty implies: the palace, the riches, the army, the four chief ministers, the astrologers, the queen and concubines and, usually, the king's beautiful daughter. It is very likely that the hero will marry the king's daughter and become king in place of her father. The appearance of a helpful deity of the Hindu pantheon, such as Indra, is quite likely. This kind of tale is very reminiscent of the classical literature of Cambodia and is in fact often a popular version of a story which is also told at great length in verse form. It presents to us the complete social range from king and court, *via* the rich man, to the peasant and slave.⁴⁵ In one folk-tale the deities, Good Luck and Bad Luck, take turns in influencing the life of a poor boy. Good Luck raises him up until he is king. Bad Luck then takes over and reduces him to the state he was in at the beginning, that of a buffalo-herd.⁴⁶

Yet, in the folk-tales generally, the royal family is not the centre of interest, and references to royalty or to the Brahmins who are associated with royalty are merely incidental. A young man may aspire to train in the art of magic and seek a teacher in the forest, as princes do. An ascetic may help an abandoned heroine. Astrologers may be consulted. Minor incidents like this, however, may even in some cases have been absent from the original story. For the most part, the king is a remote figure known to live in splendour and to be very wise, able to settle disputes with perfect justice. Neither his power nor his wisdom is mocked, but ridicule of His Majesty as a private person is known. He is presented as an aging father who is constantly non-plussed. His daughter, the princess, or her suitor, the hero, is far more likely to know what to do in any situation. The king, as we have seen, is made to look ridiculous by Thmenh Chey, and the king in love is quite a foolish figure. One such king falls in love with the Queen of the Flowers, whose palace is up in the sky. In order to reach her he has longer and longer ladders made. Finally, unable quite to reach her palace, he tries to jump across the intervening space and falls to his death (Leclère 1895: 99-111)!

In showing us the Khmers, living in the richly varied environment of their countryside, involved with their obligations to family, the law, religion and, more distantly, the king, the folk-tales are chiefly concerned with their immediate *milieu*. Insofar as they let us see the Cambodians looking beyond their borders, it is chiefly towards China, that great and powerful neighbour whom they have always feared and respected, that they are looking. It is to China, for example, that the Khmer hero goes to seek his fortune. Individual Chinese are often treated in the folk-tales in the way that the equally respected tiger is treated: they are represented as being rather foolish and not frightening at all. Even the Emperor of China is shown to be easily duped. Thmenh Chey impresses him so much with his

description of the marvellous Indri bird he claims to possess (and which is really just a toy kite) that the Emperor heaps handsome presents upon him! References to Thais and Vietnamese are noticeably lacking in the folk-tales. Perhaps they were too close neighbours for comment? A proverb, however, comments on both – and proverbs are a part of folklore. It says:

The monkey is constantly occupied with chewing,
The Thais with their textbooks,
The Vietnamese with their pretences,
The pure Khmers with the truth.⁴⁷

The reader cannot sit under a tree and listen to these tales being told, but he has at his disposal many texts and translations or versions.⁴⁸ Publication began in the nineteenth century when European travellers showed an interest in Cambodian folk literature (Aymonier 1878; Bastian 1868). Many of the folk-tales which were published by Aymonier and appeared later in the journal *Kambujasuriyā* and again in the early volumes of the *Prajum rīoēn breñ khmaer* – the adventures of Judge Hare, Ā khvāk'Ā khvin, Ā Ļev, the Four bald men, and so on – were taken directly from versions written on palm-leaf manuscripts and kept in monastery libraries. The style of these narratives is simple, conversational and repetitive, resembling a genuine, spoken performance. There are a few words or turns of phrase which by the middle of this century seemed old-fashioned but otherwise the language gives a very natural impression. Conversations are sometimes presented in a manner found in the Khmer eighteenth and nineteenth century verse-novels. Everything which is said by all speakers is written down in a thoroughly colloquial form, yet there is nothing to indicate which characters say which sentence and of course no inverted commas to separate the speeches.⁴⁹

The editors of the *Prajum rīoēn* encouraged people to send in local stories and legends from country districts for publication. The texts provided by some contributors were written down more or less verbatim from versions recounted by elderly narrators, while others were written specifically for publication in the *Prajum*. Both in the later issues of *Kambujasuriyā* and the later volumes of the *Prajum* it is not always clear whether the 'authors' who are named had edited a story from a local written or spoken source or composed their own versions. Among the numerous texts prepared by these various means for publication, a considerable difference of style may be detected reflecting a development of literary style which was taking place. As the reader proceeds through the volumes of the *Prajum*, the simple, repetitive style gradually disappears and the use of established, Sanskrit-derived library vocabulary creeps in. Finally, the 'new', Indian-based vocabulary of the 1950s and 1960s makes its appearance.⁵⁰ In the later volumes, where legends associated with places are told, descriptions of the place and its history sometimes precede the legend and introduce a style which suggests travel literature rather than folklore!

Whatever the differences in the style of presentation of the tales, however, certain narrative features characteristic of the folk-tale are maintained throughout. Chief among them is the naïveté of the narration of the story. We, the audience, have no surprises since all the steps of the story are revealed to us as they happen. We know that the material given by the faithless wife to her lover is so unique that when he wears it his recognition is inevitable. There is no attempt to tell the story so as to let us be as puzzled as he is when he is discovered. Nevertheless – and I think this is precisely because the audience knows what is coming – there is a distinct build-up of anticipation. A group of Cambodian villagers listening to a storyteller might be said to participate in the narration.

Khmer folklore has attracted admirers with varied comment. Solange Bernard has described the stories as being “riche de valeur humaine” and “propre à intéresser tous les hommes” (Bernard 1949a:918 or Bernard-Thierry 1955b:447). In his introduction to the translation of the Judge Hare stories (Institut Bouddhique 1970a:[8]), Leang Hap An expressed the hope that readers would catch the “fraîcheur naïve” of the narration. Bitard (1951:190) compared the tales with fifteenth-century French novels and demonstrated that to a certain degree they are intentionally satirical. Recent research includes a comprehensive analysis of a large corpus of tales (Thierry 1976) and two studies on specific aspects of Khmer folklore (Khing 1977; Thierry 1977). Bitard found in these stories an attitude – the attitude of the Khmer people – of determination to use one’s native wit and gifts and one’s spirit of adventure since these, rather than riches, position or education, would bring success in life. I urge the reader to look for himself. For me, the following proverb epitomises the principle which I find underlying much of Khmer folklore:-

Might may lie with the gods; wit lies with men.¹⁵

Short references are given to books or articles where i. texts, and ii. translations of tales, may be found. The abbreviations A, C, K and *PRBK*, used in the notes, are explained below under ‘References’ where full bibliographic data are given. *PRBK* references have the story number instead of page references because each edition has different pagination.

NOTES

1. I know of only two Khmer literary compositions which are the equivalent of the Western short story, Kim Phien 1962 and Rddhi 1972. It is possible, however, that many other short stories have been composed for circulation with underground revolutionary literature, as was the case in Laos and Vietnam.
2. i. A II: 1-8; C 2-5; K 1935 (5): 113-4; *PRBK* 2, No. 2.
 ii. A I: 1-3; Gorgoniev 1973: 78-88; Laporte 1971a; Velder 1971:204-24.

3. A similar tale is known in Burma and Indonesia (personal communication from my colleagues Professor Hla Pe and Dr. Ulrich Kratz (1973: 166-7) respectively). It is extremely likely, however, that for this, as for other tales mentioned below, many more comparisons might be made than those offered in this and following notes. Several motifs occurring in Khmer tales are to be found, for example, in the *Pañcatantra* (see n.28) and may, therefore, have parallels as far as way as Europe.
4. i. A II: 9-29; C 6-9; Huffman 1972: 141-88 (pp.164ff. contain vocabulary) *K* 1935 (6): 179-81; & 1941 (1): 31-3; (2): 32-5; (3): 32-4; (5) 21-6; (6) 25-6; (7): 24-6; (9): 25-6; (10): 24-6; (11): 24-6; (12): 23-6; *PRBK* 2, No. 15.
 ii. A I: 3-8; Gorgoniev 1973: 202-24; Hu'ong 1969: 341-4; Laporte 1971b.
5. i. A II: 67-115; C 20-30.
K 1936 (6): 181-9; (7): 71-7; (8): 139-45; (9): 195-206; (10): 53-62.
 1937 (1): 41-51; (4): 31-45; (5): 123-8.
 1938 (1): 67-75; (2): 149-56; (3-4): 57-66; *Rïoeh Dhanañjāy* 1964ab.
 ii. A I: 20-30; Bitard 1956; Monod 1932; 1943: 49-97; Soth Polin 1966: 77-98; Thu' 1975: 1, 367-81.
6. Professor Hla Pe confirms that this story is known in Burma where the hero is called "the quibbler". He, too, saves the country by answering riddles. For the story as it occurs in Thailand, and for Xieng Mai, a similar character, subject of a similar set of incidents, in Laos, see Bernard-Thierry 1955b: 450.
7. Adventures.
 i. A II: 132-159; C 31-44; Huffman 1972: 109-31 (pp. 119ff. vocabulary); *K* 1938 (10): 75-81; (11) 173-83; Midan 1933: 49-116; *PRBK* 2, No. 12.
 ii. A I: 34-41; Chấn 1962: 640-6; Gorgoniev 1973: 115-26; Hu'ong 1969: 403-17; Institut Bouddhique 1970a; Martini & Bernard 1946: 219-31; Midan 1928; 1933: 1-48; Monod 1943: 19-48; *Réalités cambodgiennes* 1971ab. Thu' 1975: 2, 196-208; 323-9; Tvear 1971.
 For tales in which the hare is a judge see nn. 8, 34, 35 and Chấn 1962: 647-9.
8. i. *PRBK* 2, No. 5.
 ii. Gorgoniev 1973: 141-2; Milne 1972: 47-9.

9.
 - i. C 10-19; *K* 1939 (1): 63-77; (2): 145-61; *PRBK* 2, No. 7.
 - ii. Hu'ong 1969: 324-5; Martini & Bernard 1946: 33-71; Milne 1972: 27-46.
10.
 - i. A II: 62-6; *K* 1947 (4): 45-53; *PRBK* 1, No. 4.
 - ii. A I: 19-20; Gorgoniev 1973: 151-6; Milne 1972: 51-5.
11.
 - i. A II: 170-254; *PRBK* 3 (whole vol.). See also n. 34.
 - ii. A I: 43-64.

Individual tales in Gorgoniev 1973: 254-324; Laporte 1969a; Martini & Bernard 1946: 171-84; Taupin 1886 (12 tales); Tvear 1969.
12.
 - i. *K* 1942 (1): 49-50; *PRBK* 3, No. 42.
 - ii. Martini & Bernard 1946: 179-80.
13. *PRBK* 3, No. 33.
14.
 - i. *PRBK* 3, No. 24.
 - ii. Martini & Bernard 1946: 181-2; Tvear 1969.
15.
 - i. *K* 1937 (12): 327-32; 1938 (12): 261-8; *PRBK* 4, No. 12.

For individual episodes, see *PRBK* 1, No. 9, and n. 26.

 - ii. Individual episodes: Bernard 1949: 1010-9; Bernard-Thierry 1953; 1955a; Chandler 1976: 5-6; Dik-Keam 1962: 108-9; Hu'ong 1969: 356-9; Institut Bouddhique 1970b: 65-9; Laporte 1970a; Martini 1949: 1020-6; Martini & Bernard 1946: 186-93; Velder 1971: 57-67.

The four men are not said to be bald in every version.
16. For texts and translations see n. 7 (adventures). This incident occurs just over halfway through the episodes.
17. i. *PRBK* 1, No. 21.
18.
 - i. *PRBK* 5, No. 19.
 - ii. Chandler 1976: 24-6.
19. For texts and translations see n. 7 (adventures). This incident occurs two thirds of the way through the episodes.
20. i. *K* 1935 (2-3): 63-6; *PRBK* 1, No. 23.

- ii. Gorgoniev 1973: 98-9; Milne 1972: 57-9.
21. i. *PRBK* 6, No. 12.
22. i. *PRBK* 4, No. 1.
ii. Chandler 1976: 8-12.
23. i. *K* 1939 (4): 43-6; *PRBK* 1, No. 12.
ii. Gorgoniev 1973: 157-63.
24. i. *PRBK* 1, No. 24.
ii. Gorgoniev 1973: 173-4.
25. i. A II: 41-8; *K* 1936 (3): 125-40; *PRBK* 1, No. 16.
ii. A I: 12-5; Dik-Keam 1962: 124-32; Gorgoniev 1973: 164-73; Soth-Polin 1966: 59-70.
26. i. *K* 1935 (2-3): 69-71; *PRBK* 2, No. 17. Different version in *K* 1935 (4): 171-4; & *PRBK* 2, No. 3.
ii. Chandler 1976: 15-6; Dik-Keam 1962: 108-9; Gorgoniev 1973: 195-7; Martini & Bernard 1946: 190-2. The story is also to be found in full-length versions of the *Four bald men*. See n. 15.
27. i. A II: 57-62; *K* 1937 (9): 327-37; *PRBK* 1, No. 6.
ii. A I: 17-9; Gorgoniev 1973: 244-9; South-Polin 1966: 13-22.
28. i. Ch. Chhum 1964: 124-5. ii. Poulichet 1913. This tale originated in the *Pañcatantra* No. 10, Book I, (Edgerton 1965: 61).
29. i. *PRBK* 1, No. 9.
30. i. A II: 29-32, *K* 1937 (10): 93-100; *PRBK* 1, No. 7.
ii. A I: 8-9; Dik-Keam 1962: 50-3.
31. i. *K* 1934 (6): 188-94; 1958 (1-6): 541-5; *PRBK* 1, No. 18.
ii. Chandler 1976: 1-3; Laporte 1968; Martini & Bernard 1946: 127-33.
32. i. *K* 1939 (7): 99-102; *PRBK* 2, No. 10.
ii. Gorgoniev 1973: 189-92.
33. i. *K* 1936 (11): 149-53; *PRBK* 1, No. 1.

- ii. Dik-Keam 1962: 59-62; Gorgoniev 1973: 147-50.
- 34. i. *K* 1936 (12): 255-8; 1937 (11): 201-3; *PRBK* 1, No. 8. The motif of this tale also forms the basis of story told as if it were part of the *Satra keng kantrai*: *K* 1939 (12): 283-6.
- ii. Chandler 1976: 22-3; Gorgoniev 1973: 133-6; Hu'o'ng 1969: 423-4; Milne 1972: 23-5; Tvear 167.
- 35. i. *PRBK* 1, No. 13.
- ii. Gerny-Marchal 1919; Gorgoniev 1973: 143-6; Tvear 1971.
- 36. i. *K* 1935 (12): 116-26; *PRBK* 1, No. 10.
- ii. Dik-Keam 1962: 114-8; Gorgoniev 1973: 225-31.
- 37. i. *PRBK* 1, No. 20.
- ii. Gorgoniev 1973: 89-95.
- 38. For texts and translations see n.4. This incident occurs about halfway through the narrative.
- 39. ii. Martini & Bernard 1946: 150-1.
- 40. i. Huffman 1972: 84-91 (pp. 88ff. vocabulary); *K* 1942 (4): 24-8; *PRBK* 3, No. 50.
- ii. Gorgoniev 1973: 320-4; Tvear 1970b.
- 41. i. *K* 1934 (1-3): 162-73; *PRBK* 1, No. 15.
- ii. Gorgoniev 1973: 232-8; Laporte 1969b; Martini & Bernard 1946: 203-12.
- 42. i. *K* 1935 (5): 109-12; *PRBK* 2, No. 1.
- ii. Gorgoniev 1973: 110-2; Milne 1972: 9-10; Tvear 1970a.
- 43. For texts and translations see n.4. This incident occurs about a quarter of the way through the narrative.
- 44. i. *PRBK* 1, No. 12.
- ii. Gorgoniev 1973: 157-63.
- 45. The story known as Neang Kangrey (*Nān Kañrī*), or 'The twelve girls', based on the *Rathasenajātaka*, is a favourite of this kind. See:
 - i. C 45-57; Pavie 1898: 325-34; *PRBK* 5, No. 16.
 - ii. Chān 1962: 1, 634-40; Laporte 1970bc; Pavie 1898: 27-51; 1903:

48-57; 1969.

46. i. K 1934 (1-3): 195-202; *PRBK* 1, No. 19.
ii. Gorgoniev 1973: 50-7; Laporte 1969c; Martini & Bernard 1946: 116-23.
47. /svā min pañ' pīem,
sīem min pañ' kpuon,
yuon min pañ' but,
khmaer suddh min pañ' bit/.
48. In addition to the translations mentioned so far the reader is referred to Nevermann 1956. It should be mentioned that translations are not necessarily based on any of the published texts and that they are often very free indeed.
49. See, for example, the story about setting traps (n. 33), in which husband and wife talk over their plans.
50. This body of about 3,000 words was invented in order to provide 'native' vocabulary for technical and abstract terms previously borrowed chiefly from French.
51. /ṛddhi nau debatā,
prājñā nau manuss./

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In the notes the following abbreviations are used:-

A. Aymonier 1878. C. Corbet 19? *K Kambujasuriyā*. *PRBK Prajūṃ rīoēñ breñ khmaer*. References in the notes to i. texts, and ii. translations are combined below with all other references.

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