and to other Palawan stories recorded by Revel. The book ends with a bibliography that will introduce the lay reader to Philippine tribal literatures.

The work of literature presented is part of a culture completely outside the Euro-Afro (Mediterranean)-Asian sphere, in spite of Arabic, Muslim, and Hindu influences mentioned below. Revel labels the story a "épopée," "epic," which is an ethnopoetic genre identified in the Euro-Afro-Asian culture area (which encompasses Christian Europe, Muslim North Africa, the Near and Middle East, Central Asia, and Hindu and Muslim India). The present reviewer doubts that non-Euro-Afro-Asian oral literatures can and should be classified with the same conceptual tools and measured according to the same scales as Euro-Afro-Asian oral literatures. Each culture and cultural area will have its own literary genres. In addition, there is a problem with the very definition of the ethnopoetic genre of epic in the Euro-Afro-Asian culture area, but here is not the place to discuss this problem (see JASON n.d., vol.I, Part A).

Another question I would like to raise concerns what the Mämiminbin story is about? Is it a story about winning a wife, or is it a story teaching that custom (*adat*) should be scrupulously observed? The question can be answered only in the framework of the whole repertoire of the Palawan oral literature—a repertoire that is unfortunately not at the reviewer's disposal.

To conclude, I humbly offer some practical suggestions. The reader would benefit from an alphabetic glossary with explanations of the Palawan terms and names scattered throughout the book. Such a glossary would reduce the number of notes and make it easier for the reader to look up quickly the meaning of a term that he forgot. At the same time, the linguistic properties of a term could be touched upon. For example, the term "*adat*" means "good manners," "custom," "customary law" (see page 393), while in Arabic *ʿâdât* means customs; and the term "*diwata,*" which can be translated as "Master of things," or "other being" (i.e., non-human higher force [see page 389]), is similar to the Hindi term *devata,* which can be translated as a "godling," or a "lower divinity." As the concepts that these two terms designate are rather central to culture (any culture!) and consequently to our understanding of the workings of a society, it is significant to know that they are taken over from specific other cultures.

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HINTON, ELIZABETH. *Oldest Brother's Story: Tales of the Pwo Karen.* Photographs by Peter Hinton. Chiang Mai, Thailand: Silkworm Books, 2000. v + 89 pages. 34 photographs. Paper US$14.95; ISBN 974-7100-91-6. (Distributed by University of Washington Press, Seattle, WA 98145-5096).

For anyone with experience in the northern Thai hills, this book will probably recall delight-

ful images of life in a hill village such as warm fireside interludes, villagers' smiling faces, the scent of the soil, and the green of the forests. It is a beautiful book of stories that the author collected during her sojourn in a Pwo Karen village in northern Thailand from 1968 to 1969 with her anthropologist husband Peter Hinton.

Besides the text, which includes eleven stories, the volume is valuable for the 35 (including one on the book's cover) black-and-white photographs by Peter Hinton. The stories were recorded by the author as they were told to her, mostly by a village elder who told them next to a fire. The author translated each story word for word with the help of villagers (especially children). The stories are arranged in five chapters, and each becomes a story within a story woven by the author herself. The larger story is one of life in the hills (including the love, happiness, sadness, weddings, and funerals of the people there) set against the annual cycle of swidden agriculture from burning to harvest. Villagers with their own woes and troubles appear and listen in rapt attention at each others' stories. Readers are therefore listening to the stories together with the villagers.

Great care has been taken to maintain the simple poetic beauty of the volume. Free of jargon and cumbersome terms, general readers without knowledge of Karen or northern Thailand, or any academic discipline, can easily read and enjoy the book. However, in order to maintain the simplicity and accessibility of the book, some things had to be sacrificed. For example, the photographs by Peter Hinton are an extremely valuable source of visual information, yet there are no captions. While many of the photographs are self-explanatory, and while prosaic captions might have undermined the poetic charm of the volume, perhaps a separate list of captions at the very end would have helped to add to the informative value of this book. Also, the author seems to have consciously avoided the academic procedure of using native terms with a glossary. Because all the terms have been translated gracefully in the English renditions of the stories, they are readable, poetic, and beautiful. But what is being translated and how is not always clear. For example, in chapter 3 there is a conversation by the villagers about the time when "the Lord Gautama created human beings." What was the original term for "Lord Gautama"? Sgaw Karen villagers in my research area never used the name Gautama or Buddha, but their own Sgaw Karen term for an owner deity they call Ywa. As in any translating enterprise, it is impossible to determine whether what they are referring to is what we think they mean. However, we want to strive to get as close to it as possible. A list of native terms for the key terms at the very end would have been helpful. This, I concede, is a comment from a reader who is probably not one of the author's main target readers. But the paradox is that readers, such as myself, who have been involved in the very same situations as the author are probably the ones most appreciative of this volume. Readers attracted to this book are most certainly people who not only appreciate the evocative simplicity of the book, but people who also want sufficient information on the book's subject.

Now let me introduce two of the recurring themes in the collection, which will illustrate how ethnographically valuable the stories are. One is the orphan theme: in seven of the eleven stories, the protagonists are orphans. It has been repeatedly pointed out that the Karen not only recount orphan stories, but themselves identify with orphans. In the past, orphans are said to have had special powers, and therefore were forced to live in the forest, outside of the human realm of the village. Where parental protection was gained by access to spirits through ritual, orphans who survived without such protection were believed to have had supernatural power. In the stories, orphans triumph over their adversaries as well as giants and spirits whom in some cases they befriend. In the end they are received back into the village, having won a beautiful bride, or they build a village of their own with friends. The orphans are endowed with supernatural power, wit, and courage. Within the stories, interestingly, the only ethnic character that appears is the Burmese overlord. Otherwise, there is

no mention of a "we" against "they." Considering the setting of the narration, it is self-evident that the protagonist is Karen, but more importantly, the image of the orphan immediately invokes sympathy and identification among the Karen listeners. There are stories in which Karen appear more explicitly, which is also mentioned in the villagers' conversations (chapter 3). In such cases, the Karen are older brothers while the younger brothers are white (the author refers to the European younger bother), and the most common story is that the older Karen lost some possessions endowed by a patron figure, while the younger white brother left with a book. Similar stories explaining the lack of literacy among the hill peoples abound in this region among various ethnic groups. In the Karen case, it goes hand in hand with the orphan image, depicting themselves as against the lowland literate kingdoms. In the stories in this volume, the lowland adversary is invariably the "Burmese overlord." Here again, the original Karen term would have helped. In stories in the Sgaw Karen villages where I conducted fieldwork, the orphans' adversaries were not ethnically specified but simply "*jaw pha*" (a term that means "ruling lords" and which is a derivation of a Shan term). They could be Shan, Burmese, or northern Thai, and it would be misleading to exclusively emphasize the Burmese as adversaries, at least among the northern Thai Karen.

The second repeated theme is the crossing over into the world of the forest, the spirits, or the world of the death. Many of the protagonists come and go between the two worlds (forest/ village, spirits/ human, or dead/ living) using magical power or other means. In some cases, deliberate death is chosen for lovers to meet in the world of the dead. Spirits can be either friendly or hostile, and dealings with the world of the dead can be extremely dangerous, but they are all a part of the reality of life in the hills. The stories illustrate this very clearly.

During fieldwork among Sgaw Karen in northern Thailand, this reviewer also came across innumerable stories in daily village life with similar themes. Not only did the villagers enjoy telling stories, they were also adept in citing stories upon occasion to make a point and persuade a listener in a conversation. Flexibility was seen not only in the narration of a story, but also in the story itself. Once I told a Japanese story, and soon one of the villagers who had heard it had remade it into a Karen story and told it to others. Similar flexibility of narration in real life situation is vividly depicted by the author.

Over three decades passed from the time when the stories were collected and the photographs taken for this book to the time of its publication. At the time of the original research by the Hintons, there was not enough knowledge of nor interest in life in northern Thai for this kind of publication. Today, however, there are not only foreign scholars, but also Thai academics, NGO workers, and concerned citizens who take great interest in the subject. There are now Thai language publications on Karen lore by Karen elders themselves. The greater interest in the Karen today makes this publication timely. Yet, the increase in interest has taken place during a time when the way of life of those who live in the northern hills of Thailand has changed profoundly. Despite the changes, it is perhaps true that, as the author claims in closing, "their way of life would seem to have an enduring viability." I believe that there is far more than nostalgic and sentimental value in such a publication. However, a reader familiar with conditions in the northern Thai hills and with the research of the past two decades on the people who live there cannot help but feel that the book deals with an eternal Karen time that has been lost somewhere on the way.

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