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Past Inscription:

The Mythopoetics of Angkarn Kalyanapong

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Notes Bibliography

> So nowadays when people have been touched by some hardship, they say, 'We've had it, it's given out on us!' They recall the original primary word(s) but they don't understand what they mean. (Collins, Agganna Sutta, 630).
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> As a matter of fact, how can you count poetry? It's just like this ... you can't count the grains of sand on a beach or the trees in a forest ... poetry is part of my heart beat, part of my breath ... when I die I'll either be a spirit or a deity ... I am a *'kawi'* (poet). (Angkarn, Interview from *A Contemporary Siamese Poet*).

What is the status of myth and language in modern Thai poetry? Radical Thai poets from Cit Phumisak to Khomthuan Khanthanu search classic Thai epics, archaic Brahmin oaths, and core Buddhist sutras for the origins of poetry. Buddhist reform poets and writers, like Sulak Sivaraksa, find poetic vision in the foundational texts of empire and religion. It becomes apparent that the texts of the past, their myths and forms, bear weight in the expressions of modern Thai poetry. The role of the past appears as a source of inspiration, meter and language. Yet it also reveals a portentous path for writing into the future. The Thai

poet Angkarn Kalyanapong is often called the doyen of contemporary Thai poetry (Chetana, "Sense," 12). [1] Angkarn's poetry calls upon the poetic conventions of the past and the potent myths of both Buddhism and the Thai State. In examining the use, rewriting and recreation of myth in contemporary Thai poetry, Angkarn's poems *WakThalee* (Scoop up the Sea) and *CaarukAdiit* (Past Inscription) present a fertile ground between the evocation and exploration of mythopoetics by the poets of revolution and the poets of reform.[2] The purpose of this study is to explore the poetry of Angkarn and the myths he accesses, yielding a framework of the relationship of myth to poetry.[3]

In order to better understand the use of the myth in contemporary Thai poetry, the work of Sulak offers an excellent frame for a study of Angkarn. Sulak is, in part, responsible for the myth of Angkarn as a national and international poet. Angkarn's first collection of poems was published under Sulak's encouragement and, in addition, Sulak has worked to promote and translate Angkarn's poetry (Manas, 47). It is in Sulak's vision of the past that one can find a companion or comparative approach to Angkarn's mythopoetics. Donald K. Swearer, in "Sulak Sivaraksa's Buddhist Vision for Renewing Society," explores Sulak's use of a Buddhist past that offers paths for contemporary reform.

> For many people today the confusions of the present seem to promote a nostalgia for the past. In some cases the nostalgia is an escape back to a romanticized, secure, comfortable and less threatening time. For others the past provides a critical perspective form which to inform the present and guide the future. The latter use of the past typifies Sulak's view of the Buddhist tradition. It is a "living past" with the power to inspire people to be more generous and compassionate, and to incite societies to be more just and nonviolent (Swearer, 39).

The past is caught somewhere between escape and action. It is important to note that both escape and action are tensions within an approach and appreciation of the past -- within nostalgia. Even when turned towards action, the past, inscribed into tensions under nostalgia, produces and provides only the distance for a 'critical perspective.' As poetry delves deeper into myth, it can yield much more than perspective. Although this work is not about Sulak or Buddhist reform, Sulak's distance from and use of the past can provide some tentative first terms for this study.

In his appropriation and appreciation of the past, Sulak concentrates on several core texts. The Buddhist historical moments that are of primary concern to Sulak are: "King Ramkhamhaeng's model of benevolent, righteous kingship; King Lithai's synthesis of Buddhist cosmology, politics and ethics; King Mongkut's neo-orthodox Buddhist revivalism; and Buddhadhasa Bhikkhu's reformist Buddhism, especially his utopian ideology of Dhammic socialism" (Swearer, 40). It is important to point out that these historical moments (and figures) were periods of poetic productivity as well. King Ramkhamheang's Sukhothai inscription is considered one of the most potent vestiges of Thai poetry and the Thai State and is often referred to as the first pillar/post (*laknung*).[4] King (Phya) Lithai is accredited with the sermon *The Three Worlds*, a text that accesses classical Buddhist cosmology and "may well be the earliest elaborated Therevada cosmology" (Swearer, 41). Although Sulak uses these texts for their ethical import, especially in outlining the effects of virtues and vices, these core texts also inform Angkarn's myth making. The Thai poet Angkarn Kalyanapong explores/exploits the past as a source of myth, language and poetic convention. The poems, *WakThalee* and *CaarukAdiit*, yield Angkarn's mythopoetics at the intersection of myth, language, and poetic convention.

What are the terms and tensions of mythopoesis? In order to understand Angkarn's relation to the past and his use of myth, it is important to set some limits to the relation of myth to language.

> **Mythopoeia**: (Gr 'myth-making') the conscious creation of a myth. In literature, the appropriation and reworking of mythical material, or the creation of a kind of 'private' mythology (Cuddon, 527).

This first definition informs our discussion of Angkarn. Angkarn's use of myth must lie somewhere between myth-making, as mythopoesis, and convention (and its re-working) of myth, mythopoetics. The answer to this dilemma of definition revolves around the status of language and the past in the poetry of Angkarn. The literary theorists Paul de Man and Jean Luc Nancy provide a framework for this questing after mythic language.

In *The Inoperative Community*, Jean-Luc Nancy points out the properties of mythic language. "It [the language of myth] is no longer the language of their exchanges, but of their reunion -- the sacred language of a foundation and an oath" (Nancy, 44). Mythic language, then, is the language of sacred foundations which produces and acts. Angkarn's poetry accesses this sacred language. The poem *WakThalee* calls upon the language of the *Agganna Sutta*, the Buddhist creation myth, the *Oong Kaan Chaeng Nam*, the Oath of Fealty (the Water Oath), and the *Ramakian*, the Thai rewriting of the Indian epic Ramayana and the foundational text of the Chakri dynasty (the current Thai dynasty) (Nitaya, 322). Thus, Angkarn's poetry already sets itself within the limits of sacred language. In *CaarukAdiit*, Angkarn evokes the place and time of mythic inscription and the inscriptions of classical Thai poetry. It is this moment and monument of inscription that allies itself to Nancy's scene of myth.

> It is not just any scene: it is perhaps the essential scene of all scenes, of all scenography or all staging; it is perhaps the stage upon which we represent everything to ourselves or whereupon we make appear all representations, if myth, as Levi-Strauss would have it, is primarily defined as the which or in which time turns into space (Nancy, 44-5).

Through Nancy's work, myth can be set as the sacred language of foundation which creates a special relationship between time and space. An exploration of Angkarn's poetry must pay attention to how these poems deal with sacred language, foundations and the past.

Paul de Man presents another understanding of myth. In his reading of Schlegel, de Man refers to Schlegel's understanding of myth and poetry. "And then he [Schlegel] says 'This is the origin of all poetry, to suspend the notions and the laws of rational thought and to replace us within a beautiful confusion of fantasy in the original chaos of human nature (for which mythology is the best name)'" (de Man, 181). Yet in de Man's study of Schlegel, he reveals that this chaos of nature is not one of beautiful symmetry. The language of myth, the authentic and authenticating language, is radical and arbitrary. "The authentic language is the language of madness, the language of error, and the language of stupidity" (de Man, 181). De Man's reading points out the unreliability of mythic language. In a search for mythic language, the search must always be interrupted by the madness and errors of language.

This study has outlined two approaches to myth, one of sacred and foundational language and the other of the authentic confusion of language, yet both these languages suffer interruptions. Sulak's vision of the past presents a model of these interruptions. In Swearer's discussion of Sulak, the past and the myth are always in the distance. But it is this distance that provides both the trajectory of escape and of action. The mythic texts remain locations of critical distance from the present. This view of the past highlights the difference between mythopoesis as the immediate and unmediated place of myth and action and mythopoetics with critical distance to re-work the myth as potential for action. For Nancy, the interruption of myth is a central point.

> It is here that things are interrupted. The Tradition is suspended at the very moment it fulfills itself. It is interrupted at that precise and familiar point where we know that it is all a myth (Nancy, 52).

Nancy's interruption of myth is what denotes the lack of myth-making; myth no longer has the power to fashion the world.[5] Myths no longer make, instead they, themselves are re-made and re-fashioned. De Man's reading of myth returns to mythopoetics, myth as trope.

In his discussion of the trope of irony, de Man presents some interesting rhetorical considerations for myth.

> "A pattern of words that turns away" -- that turning away is the trope, the movement of the trope. Trope means to "to turn," and it's that turning away, that deviation between literal and figurative meaning, this turning away of the meaning, which is certainly involved in all traditional definitions of irony, "such as meaning one thing and saying something else," or "praise by blame," or whatever it may be -- though one feels that this turning ways in irony involves a little more, a more radical negation than one would have in an ordinary trope such as synecdoche or metaphor or metonymy (de Man, 164-5).

Considering the mad and arbitrary signification of mythic language pointed out by de Man, it seems that mythic language 'turns away.' Myth as the telling language and as the language that creates or makes is, potentially, its own trope of language. For de Man, the mythic language can never escape its rhetorical position as 'mythic language.' Thus in approaching Angkarn's poems, the nature of language (sacred and mad) becomes an essential key in discerning Angkarn's myth-making or rhetoric of myth.

With these paradigms in consideration, Angkarn's poetry can help probe the relationships of myth, language and poetry. *WakThalee* is considered one of Angkarn's best poems and is often cited as source text for understanding the aesthetics of Angkarn's poetry (Chetana, "Art," 218-9). Yet the images and beauty of the poem fall before the potency of his language and his re-writing of myth. Before turning to the exploration of Angkarn's poems, it is necessary to confront the layers of Angkarn's reception and interpretation. Angkarn's poetry directly confronts the poetic traditions of classical Thai poetry.[6]

> Of course it would be easy to look at Angkarn's poetry as breaking with convention since his attitude towards the world is very different from that of ancient poets. Angkarn regards all things in the universe as equal, whereas the convention classifies both animate and inanimate things as good or bad, high or low, godly or earthly, king or commoner, heroes or villains etc. (Manas, 47).

According to Manas, Angkarn's confrontation of classical conventions is both a break with the past traditions but also an adherence to them. Angkarn's breaks with tradition occur within poetical convention.[7]

> This does not mean, however, that the poet ignores the rules of convention or creates his own rules. For Angkarn, who has studied deeply the convention which he regards as Thai heritage, the basic structure of the form is observed but the minor interior arrangements may be manipulated and altered (qtd in Manas, 49 from Suchitra, 76).

It is this tension between poetic convention and creation that marks Angkarn's works. Angkarn's poetic forms seem to take on convention at the level of poetic creation. It can be said that Angkarn, in his study of archaic and classical poetry has recreated the poetic forms. As Manas has pointed out, Angkarn's poetry is markedly different than that of classical poets. Whereas ancient poetry classified and divided the world into its separate orders and hierarchies, Angkarn's poetry breaks down these orders making them universally equal. In this movement and moment, Angkarn re-inscribes the world (and perhaps recreates it).

Angkarn, himself, points towards the relationship of language to creation and myth to poetry. An appreciation of Angkarn's understanding of 'the work of poetry' is essential to this enquiry. In one of the quotes that starts this study, Angkarn responds to a question about the number of poems he has written:

> As a matter of fact, how can you count poetry? It's just like this. you can't count the grains of sand on a beach or the trees in a forest ... poetry is part of my heartbeat, part of my breath ... when I die I'll either be a spirit or a deity... I am a 'kawi' (poet). (Angkarn, Interview from *A Contemporary Siamese Poet*)[8]

In Angkarn's answer to this question, lies the foundation of his understanding of the relationships of poetry, language and myth. The counting of poetry is an impossible task. Poetry (and language) has a correlation to nature. Poems are (somehow) equal to sand and trees, countless in their multitude but beating a rhythm in breath and pulse. Poetic creation is a presence that is bound to the body of the poet and carries over into celestial abodes.

The word *kawii* is especially significant. This word denotes a poetic presence that is related to creation and language. A poet is a *nakkawii*, a person of poetry, while a poem is a *botkawii*, a piece or part of poetry. It is the presence of the poetic that marks the poem and the poet. Although *nak* is contemporarily defined to mean expert and authority, as a part of language it is a 'bound stem' that creates an 'agent noun' (Haas, 260). The poet is the bound agent of the poetic, of poetry. *Bot* is a noun that signifies the text, the lines and the subject (of discussion), yet it also quantifies the sections of proverbs, lessons and verse (Haas, 280). Poems, thus, partake of and are part of the poetic. Poems are separate pieces of and the subject of poetry. But what is this poetic, this *kawii*?

Kawii is a Thai word that includes all the different forms and genres of poetry and song. *Kawii* is etymologically from Pali and it is this link that provides a deeper understanding of the creative potency of poetry. Pali is the language of Thai Buddhism and Buddhist texts. It is the sacred language of the Buddha and the language of sutras and sermons. Poetry is of the sacred tradition, of birth and death, and of creation and enlightenment. Thus when called upon to count and account for his poetry, Angkarn answers (can only answer) 'I am a bound agent of poetry and the poetic.'[9] In response to the parameters of myth and language set forward by Nancy and de Man, it seems that the poet and poem retain the foundational nature of language necessary for mythopoesis and the distance from poetry to poet is the beating heart, punctuated (and perhaps interrupted) by breath.

As the poet and poem are part of the creation of the world, it is only fitting to look at Angkarn's recounting of the coming into being of the world. Angkarn's poem *WakThalee* (Scoop up the Sea) is, in part, a recreation of the Buddhist creation myth, the *Agganna Sutta*. The *Agganna Sutta* (also called "The Discourse on What is Primary") is a speech/sermon of the Buddha that recounts the creation of the world and this sutra is later incorporated in the cycle of time and creation in *The Three Worlds of Phra*

Ruang. In the *Agganna Sutta* the world comes into being through a series of steps involving the de-evolution of spirits into material being. These steps revolve around the coalescence of spirit matter into earth essence. "Then (on one such occasion) an earth essence spread out on the waters" (Collins, 629). Once this essence appears it is only (or not yet) a matter of time before consumption (and greed) begin the advance to materiality. The physical description of this consumption depicts the material effect of this first cause.

> Then, monks, a certain being, greedy by nature, thinking "What can this be?", tasted the earth-essence with his finger. As he tasted the earth-essence with his finger he was pleased, and Craving came upon him. Other beings imitated that being, tasting the earth-essence with their finger(s). They too were pleased, and Craving came upon them. Then, monks, these beings started to eat the earth-essence taking (big) mouthfuls of it with their hands. (Collins, 629)

In this description, greed and physicality are conjoined. The physical actions of scooping this essence, its mouthfuls and handfuls, lends and leads the world into its divisions of being, labor, wealth (caste and class). It is through the consumption and greed that materiality, differentiation and order are put to the world.

With handfuls of "earth-essence spread out on the waters," the creation of the world begins.

Scoop up the Sea[10]

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Scoop the sea onto a plate              feasted with white rice
Grasp for a handful of stars            mixed with salt to eat
Watch the crabs and oysters circle      dancing, singing folk songs
Chameleons and millipedes fly           to eat the sun and moon
A toad mounts the golden palanquin      floating tour on currents of heaven
A bull-frog goes with him               Angels flee into a coconut husk
Earthworms seduce maidens               Apsaras who sleep in the sky
Every cell and spore                    raises their face shining success
Gods bored with celestial mansions      swoop to earth to eat shit
Praising waste that has a               taste wonderful in surplus of words
Jungle groves and thickets              can speak deep philosophy
Sawdust murmuring in sleep              calculates the weight of shadows
Who, wonderful, can reign the sky       Who remains, earthly, low, a buffoon
World of avarice and drunken wrath      Fools, Let's possess excess -Euy[11]
                                                    Angkarn: 2533 B.E
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The title and first line of this poem carry with them the first cause of the world's materiality and suffering. The word *wak*, to scoop, starts the poem and references the physical action of scooping mouthfuls by hand, the arc of the action and the verb leading to the mouth that consumes (and speaks). Angkarn's poem exists at the nexus of poetry, language and myth drawing on the foundational text, words and action of the world's origin.

Thematically and linguistically *WakThalee* invokes the language of sacred beginnings. Considering Nancy's sacred language and mythic scene, *WakThalee* calls out and upon myth. The sacred language that the Buddha speaks is spoken in the poem and the poet speaks the words of that telling. The poem

articulates the scene and language of origin. The first lines of the poem set the primal scene, the mythic action by which the world comes into being. As pointed out by the research of Manas, Angkarn engages the orders and hierarchies of archaic poetry. In Angkarn's order of the world, the differentiation of being is accounted for but is also upset. Beings are divided and differentiated, but in the act of creation/ consumption they are also confused. Interestingly enough, this confusion seems to evoke de Man's view of mythic language as "madness, error and stupidity." This topsy-turvy world is one of "avarice and drunken wrath." The essence of the world and its consumption are the result of fools. The mythic scene is one of chaos, abundance and abandon.

The first action of the world's origin and division is immediately turned around. The mythic consumption of earth-essence is turned back towards the sky as the handfuls grasped are those of stars.

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Scoop the sea onto a plate    feasted with white rice
Grasp for a handful           of stars mixed with salt to eat
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It seems that the mythic scene, its primal essence, is also already interrupted at the moment of its (re-) enunciation. This movement and moment mirrors the 'turning away' of de Man's trope and the 'interruption of myth' of Nancy. The first action and first words turn away from the myth and towards the stars interrupting the de-evolution of being.

Again the poem is caught between mythopoesis and mythopoetics. In addition to the *Agganna Sutta*, this poem evokes its own abundance of foundational texts and poems. The language of the poem also invokes the *Oong Kaan Chaeng Nam*, the Oath of Fealty (the Water Oath) and the *Ramakian*, the Thai rewriting of the Indian epic Ramayana which is also the foundational text of the Chakri dynasty (the current Thai dynasty) (Nitaya, 322). Angkarn's mythic scene is one of confusion, not only of the creation myth, but also of all foundational myths. The abundance of myth creates problems for interpretation because the mythic abundance plays as the creation of myth or the technique of myth.[12] In order to essay this problem, it is necessary to address myth's presentation (presence) in language.

At the same time as these myths are evoked, invoked and inverted, the poet inserts idiom (Nitaya, 322). Idiom presents an interesting new turn. The idiom itself is a play with(in) language but Angkarn plays with this play. Angkarn (bound to poetry) plays within the play of language. This idea bears more analysis. Angkarn's play within the free (loose) play of language reinforces the abundance of myth with an abundance of sound and sense.

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Gods bored with celestial mansions     swoop to earth to eat shit
Praising waste that has a              taste wonderful in surplus of words
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The primal myth of creation is bound to slip within language and a surplus of sense-taste which includes the denigration of the earth-essence to bodily waste. This movement which makes earth-essence equal to shit and seemingly turns away from the myth also speeds the myth up; shit is the result of the materiality of being. The consumption of the sea is a shitty choice based on greed and as eating will eventually produce itself.

In order to get at the language of myth, it is necessary to consider the implications of "a taste wonderful in surplus of words." There is slippage in language at this moment in the poem. The Thai text creates even more concerns as alternate translations yield "taste most wonderful than telling words" and "taste

wonderfully superlative to/at the telling worlds." This moment of indeterminacy of language is also the location of language "at the place of the telling words." Thus Angkarn presents us with a language of confusion and excess. In a telling moment Angkarn reveals his own relation between language and earth:

> We [Angkarn and his mother] would take turns to read out aloud, my mother and I. Once when I recited the sad parting of Inao and Busabe, my mother began to cry. I'm very sensitive, you know ... sometimes I cry too. Before my birth, my mother had a craving for the soil. She ate the soil, the earth ... and then I was born ... and the earth became part of me (Angkarn, Interview from "A Contemporary Siamese Poet").

Angkarn, the poet, suffers the words of indescribable taste. Earth and language are at the mouth. Is this the mythic unification of time and place, soil, shit and song? At this moment of slippage, the cry is expressed.

The *Agganna Sutra* also presents this slippage in language at or around the time of myth. In addition to the repetition of consumption, the myth repeats the slippage of language. After a long time of consumption, the earth-essence is exhausted.

> When it had disappeared, they came together and lamented, "Look (*aho*) the (earth) essence (*rasam*) (has disappeared), look.the essence." So nowadays, when people have tasted something good they say, "Oh the taste, oh the taste!" (*aho rasam*). They recall the original primary word(s), but they don't understand what they mean (Collins, 630).

Nancy's definition of mythic language and mythic scene bears more on this moment in the text than, perhaps, the recounting of the myth itself. It is at the moment of absence that language (and song) becomes most present within the myth. The cry becomes a language of union in the myth and the sound of lamentation. The cry and utterance are related to the withdrawal of abundance. The remnant of the mythic scene lies within language, but it is a language that slips from meaning and emerges from sense.

The final lines of Angkarn's poem mirror this union based upon absence and abundance. Throughout the poem, there is a vacillation in address. The poem begins with an elusive address. The statement (or command) 'scoop the sea' does not refer to the reader or a figure in the poem. This ambiguity is followed up with lines of descriptive chaos with the figures identified by name: chameleon and toad, apsara and angel. This descriptive frame alters the immediacy of the first lines and converts them into a retelling of mythic events. This determined chaos is upset by the final stanza.

The first two lines of the final stanza begin with an open address which is also the question: "who?" It is important to note that this 'who' could also be 'anyone who?' The poem upsets the determined description of the world as retelling and potentially makes the poem a recreation (or creation). 'You' could be the 'who' of which the poet speaks and the poem addresses. It could be you who scoop sea and dines but it could also be anyone. The final lines (a translation nightmare) are filled with hortatory (command) participles but with no term of address and superlatives. Into this drunken world of consumption a strong command is given to the yet ambiguous addressee. The final line is one of union and cry. Each syllable is a command to consume the excellent abundance of the mad world and is the equivalent of 'now,' 'hurry,' and 'let's.' The union is implicit in the mad rush of intoxication and greed and ends with a breathy cry. The final syllable euy is a stable component of poetry and the complement of meter. It is often used to fill out metrical forms, but is often ignored in translation. This syllable is used to show endearment and intimacy to most nouns and names. *Euy* elicits union and lament. Thus the poem

ends with the soft sounds of intimate abundance.a final cry and gasp.

Returning to the *Agganna Sutta,* the withdrawal of meaning continues throughout the sutra as the world gets ordered and takes shape. In two more instances meaning withdraws, beings come together and cries are uttered. The second cry again occurs around consumption while the final cry is uttered around intimate union.

> When it had disappeared, they came together and lamented, "We've had it, the creeper has given out on us!" So nowadays, when people are touched by some hardship, they say, "we've had it, it's given out on us!" They recall the original, primary word(s), but they don't understand what they mean (Collins, 630).

This second interruption of the myth with language repeats the original formula presenting both a new cry and a poetic convention.

> As they were looking at each other with intense longing passion arose in them, and burning came upon their bodies; because of this burning they had sex. When the (other) beings saw them having sex, some threw earth (at them), some threw ashes, others cow-dung, (saying) "Away with you and your impurity, away with you and your impurity!", "How could a being do such a thing to another being?" So nowadays, people in certain areas, when a bride is being led out, throw dirt, ash or cow-dung. They recall the original primary (actions) but they don't understand what they mean (Collins, 631).

This final cry of the *Agganna Sutta* returns us to the confusion of Angkarn's poem. The seduction of Asparas (celestial dancing maidens) by earthworms and the intoxicated cavorting of the animals recreates the burning passion of the beginning of sex. It is important to note the terms of these cries. While the first cry was one of the loss of taste (or words that could correlate to taste), the second cry is one of hardship and suffering. It appears that with each successive cry meaning and abundance further withdraw into and away from language. The final cry is both an abundance of passion and the absence of purity and of order, but is yet the next necessary step in the evolution of humanity. This final cry (of sex) loses even words and language returning to the hoarse cries and actions of passion and intimacy. Thus the mythic scene of language is also the poetry of sense, suffering and sensuality. At the mythic scene of language and creation, language is already in withdrawal and already an utterance of excess and an interruption.

The *Agganna Sutta's* status as sutra presents interesting concerns for this study of myth. These concerns stem from the sutra's framing and interpretation. Interestingly, this sutra is often considered a humorous lesson from the Buddha, yet it is also a poignant discussion of language and creation (Reynolds, personal interview). The discourse on what is primary begins with an argument about class (about the best caste and the best body) by those who have renounced caste (Collins, 627-8). Thus the myth is already framed (although perhaps of later addition) as a sermon on class and caste. The Buddha disrupts (interrupts) this argument with a recollection and a telling of how the world came into being.

The sutra's framing both inserts and strips away the distance of the mythic scene. "At that time there is nothing but water, (all) is darkness, (just) deep darkness" (Collins, 629). The appearance of the "earth-essence" marks the cycle of creation leading to being and language. Interestingly enough, the appearance of the consumption substance also marks the beginning of seasons and time.[13]

> Then, monks, monks these beings started to eat the earth-essence taking (big) mouthfuls of it with their hands. As they did so their self-luminosity disappeared. When their luminosity disappeared, the moon and sun appeared; when the sun and moon appeared, the twinkling stars appeared; when the stars appeared, night and day appeared; when night and day appeared, the seasons and years appeared. Thus far, monks, did the world evolve (Collins, 629).

In this cosmology, the world, time, material and language come into being with greed and consumption. This world is not denounced by the Buddha; it is the nature of the universe to "expand and contract" and to come into being (Collins, 629). The emergence of time in the recounting of creation creates distance between the myth and language.

As a religious text, the sutra is subject to Buddhist hermeneutic and exegetical practices. Whitman's account of Christian allegory provides some perspective to the interruption of this particular myth.

> The word *allegoria* also refers frequently in Christian exegesis to one particular transfer among a series of allegorical transfers from the literal sense: the 'allegorical' meaning, the 'tropological' or 'moral' meaning, and the 'anagogic' meaning (Whitman, 267).

In addition to the distance implied in the framing of the 'discourse' and the stripping away of time to the primal myth and its subsequent creation of time, the myth (and Angkarn's poem) must now contend with the moral and rhetorical interpretations of the text. The structure of the sutra lends itself to allegorical interpretation, as the Buddha (in the framing) is using this myth as a parable to demonstrate the creation (and unimportance) of class and caste. Morally the world is an impure place and caste a product of greed, suffering and sex.

As "the discourse of what is primary" describes the progression into being, the question of what is primary lingers to the end. In the final section of the discourse, what is primary turns out not to be what has come to pass, what has come to be past and cried for, but an action located in the present:

> Of these four classes, monks, he who is a monk, an Arahant, who has lived the (holy) life, laid down the burden, attained the true goal, in whom the fetters of existence are destroyed, who is released by Right Wisdom - he is properly called what is primary among them. (Collins, 634).

The primary of action displaces the primal scene of poem, myth and language. The ethical interpretation supports the myth's withdrawal into language and "myth as myth" and converts the creation into a rhetorical device for making disciples less argumentative.

Yet even these ethical interpretations cannot completely distance the interruptions of the poem and the myth. Angkarn's poem does not make judgements on the moral abuses of the world and its wrathful intoxication, instead the final cry of the poem revels in its own ambiguity and abundance. This tension is supported by the final framing of the *Agganna Sutta*. The sutra winds down with the verse of a Brahmin which is re-sung by the Buddha (repeated twice).

> For those who rely on clan, the Ksatriya is the best in the world; (but) the person endowed with wisdom and (good) conduct is the best in the whole universe (Collins, 634).

The sutra ends with a verse, which is not created but is re-sung. Although this verse contains moral and ethical conducts the final words of the sutra mirror Angkarn's last and lost cry: rejoice. "The Blessed One said this. Vasettha and Bharadvaja were pleased, and rejoiced in the Blessed One's words" (Collins, 634). Poem, myth and sermon are disrupted by language and the call/cry to join in. Thus, although it seemed that the sutra as sutra already presents itself in distance from the mythic scene and as allegory, the eruptions and interruptions of language destabilize its retelling and invoke instead a (re-) creation of the myth of language and poetry.

For this study, there is one final treatise on the creation of the world. *The Three Worlds According to King Ruang*, presents a final step in the stripping away of myth from language. *The Three Worlds* is a 14th century cosmological treatise on the nature of kingship and righteous behavior. Sulak's nostalgic use of this treatise (and of Angkarn) further presents the tension between mythopoetics and mythopoesis. For Sulak, the myth exists as a place of critical perspective from which to alter the future. Thus, time (as timeline and separation) and distance are essential in his understanding of myth. Time, in this account, precedes creation and language (Reynolds, 321). Sulak's desire for critical perspective needs myth as a convention (of ethics and rhetoric) and not a disruption. *The Three Worlds* presents the creation myth as a logistical, geographical and temporal account, but even within this account, language (through repetition) disrupts the necessary distance. This text, more than any other, is a detailed differentiation of the world (three worlds): the divine, the human and the hellish. Within these three worlds, only at the end does the creation myth rear its disruptive tongue.

This account of the creation is an embedded one. The evolution of materiality and impurity is strictly tied to ethical and moral concerns. The account of creation begins with a textual retelling of the digression to materiality (Reynolds, 321-3). But another telling disrupts this retelling.

> The peoples see what has happened and are surprised and marvel. They then meet, consult and speak as follows. (Reynolds, 323).

Again, at this moment in the creation myth, the myth returns to language. The communal retelling is embedded with and repeats almost word for word the textual retelling. But in these moments, time is an aspect not a tense (before, after and already) disrupts the description of the previous account. This retelling (and interior recreation) of the myth is bound to the conversational complaints of the group united in surprise and worry. Their language efforts are disrupted by recall and absence, by the disruption of language. It is in these two counts of the myth that the difference between Sulak's positioning of the past and Angkarn's possession by it reinforce the intersections and interruptions of myth, language and poetry in Angkarn's work.

Throughout this study of Angkarn's poem, language reveals the tensions between mythopoetics and mythopoesis. *WakThalee* breaks between the conventions of poetry and poetry's play within language. Angkarn's poem (and the sutra) revel in and reveal not the myth of the world's creation but language of myth and the myth of language. "It is such because this authentic language is a mere semiotic entity open to the radical arbitrariness of any sign system and as such capable of circulation, but which as such is profoundly unreliable" (de Man, 181). The final cry of the poem and the eruption of language break down language, as communication, into creation. The surge of this mythopoesis exposes language as the lost and last cry of suffering in ambiguous (undifferentiable) union. The intersection of poetry, language and myth that Angkarn channels is the crash of language back upon itself.

One final turn: what are the intersections of the writing of poetry, language and the past? In his article "The Sense of the Past in the Poetry of Angkarn Kalayanapong", Chetana Nagavajara points towards the immediacy of the past in the works of Angkarn. "The past that matters so much to poet here is a very remote one, not of historic, but rather of pre-historic, primordial and cosmic dimensions" (Chetana, "Sense," 15). The past of Angkarn is in the immediacy of language and its disruptions. For Chetana, Angkarn's possession and interruption by language yield an unfortunate "tyrannical power over the present" (Chetana, "Sense," 23). Yet this tyranny is not unfortunate, it is the potential making of poetry and language.

> The sense of the past, in this case in not characterized by representational faithfulness, for a poet, and not a historian, is at work (Chetana, "Sense," 23).

The poetry of Angkarn is of the earth and of language and, as such, reveals and revels the slippages and interruptions of the myth of language. In bondage to poetry, Angkarn can only yield to language. The inscriptions of poetry and myth are the unmediated and undecipherable interruptions and deceptions of language from the mythic earth.

Past Inscription[14]

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This world fakes a large library          scripts old and new to be read
Amusing stories on each leaf              of many kinds, under the sea and sky
Past inscription hidden in earth          in stone all writings of the sun
The earth-mother is kindhearted           teaching more than can be understood
Water letters stored in cliff shadows     stream scripts tell excessive tales
Evolutionary animals dried and dead       leave philosophical legacy of thought
Much value in every element and grain     comparable to brilliant diamonds
Emeralds would have what value            lacking sand and dirt
Everything balanced worth                 weighed on scales to a mote
Earth and sky contest  in thought         that imaginative spirit exceeds
Some places beautifully aesthetic         hide language, poetry pure
rhythmic songs of jungle seas             brew immortality gainst ages' tides
Hone vision razor sharp                   choose wisdom skilled and brave
Study languages of earth, water sky       searching for bliss that endures
To meet life's meaning                    written testimonies in smoke
Use creation to shine life                for immortals conquer death
Placed above a minute                     then supernaturally beyond
To be born sacred surplus                 worth every breath that does not fade
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The earth tricks itself out in languages immeasurable that possess the poet and propel the poem. The aged stone chronicles of empire and poetic convention vie against the ageless rhythm of the sea of language crashing upon (and eroding) attempts at inscribed meaning.

Endnotes

[1] An initial note on orthography, transcription and references: the Thai poets' names are transcribed into English following standard practice in Thai literature and other translations. There is inconsistency within cited texts as I have stayed faithful to the citation -- this indiscrepancy indicates a certain

indeterminacy in contemporary scholarship regarding Thai writers and poets. In transcribing Thai titles into English I have endeavored to follow vowel lengths and consonants, following Haas. Thai poets, writers and scholars are cited by their given name and listed in the bibliography given name first followed by family name as is the accepted style for Thai authors within Chicago style and the Library of Congress.

[2] The term mythopoetics, in this work, stands for the intersection of poetic conventions (language and meter), myth and the rewriting or recreation of myth. For this study, it is a working term for the exploration of the tensions in language and poetry that appear around the invocation of myth.

[3] Angkarn's poetry offers an excellent initial model of the contemporary use of myth in poetry because of his high standing as a contemporary poet and that Angkarn's rewritings seem to be independent of the political and social motivations of other contemporary poets. In addition, Angkarn's poetry is often 'put to use' by different political and social movements, highlighting the importance of myth and poetry in Thailand.

[4] The poet Khomthuan Khanthanu uses the meter of this inscription and rewrites its definition of the Thai state in the poem *PharaSawathi* (City of Devils). This poem mimes the meter and language of the original inscription but converts it into social critique of the inequities of Bangkok (Krungtheep -- City of Angels). The title of the poem comes from Buddhist scripture outlining improper (unvirtuous) city life.

[5] The *interruption of myth* is Nancy's response and interpretation of Bataille's absence of myth.

[6] Manas Chitakasem's "Poetic Conventions and Modern Thai Poetry" places Angkarn (and Naowarat Phonpaiboon and Khomthuan Khanthanu) within and in response to the genres and traditions of classical Thai poetry. His study points towards a need for further investigation into the core poetic texts of the Thai tradition and the rewriting and recreation of this tradition by contemporary Thai poets. Texts of special importance to this study are the *Cindamanii*, a treatise on versification, and the *Klon Konlabot Siriwibunkiti*, a *klon* poem which constructs and outlines the possibilities and potentials of the klon as a verse form.

[7] Angkarn is known for his manipulation of the *klon 8* form of Thai poetry. Although the style calls for meters of eight syllables, Angkarn often uses 7-11 syllables in each line although still adhering to the exterior and interior rhyming conventions.

[8] This interview has already been translated into English and I do not have access to the Thai copy, yet I suspect that the word translated as written may be the word '*taeng*' which has special implications for poetry and song. It implies to create not just to write.

[9] This etymological approach and the following readings of Angkarn's poetry and the *Agganna Sutta* are influenced by the methodology of Agamben's *Language and Death*.

[10]My translations of these poems and the research of this article emerge from my dissertation (in progress). I was first initiated into the study of contemporary Thai poetry as a research assistant with the Thailand Research Fund's Research Program: "Poetry as an Intellectual and Spiritual Force" from January to September of 1998.

[11] Interestingly enough, the end lines of these poems appear differently in different poetical and critical

editions. It seems as if the poem is of uncertain ending.

[12] The mythic abundance and surplus of language become increasingly important openings into the study of contemporary and classical Thai poetry.

[13] It is at this intersection of sacred, language, poetry, and myth that yield Rimbaud and Holderlin as excellent companion works for an appreciation of the poetry of Angkarn and provide avenues for future comparative work.

[14] For comparison please consult alternative translations of both poems *WakThalee* and *Caaruk Adiit*. Alternative translations of *WakThalee* are available in Manas (pg 48), Three Thai Poets (pg 15) and Angkarn (pg 41). An alternative translation of *Caaruk Adiit* is available in "A Sense of the Past in the Poetry of Angkarn Kalayanaphong" by Dr. Chetana Nagavajara.

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