

a brownness that didn't exist before.

This is from the poem "Losing One's Name," in which he writes of adopting "Sam" in favor of his given Khmer name. Because Americans mispronounced his name so often, he settled for a nickname that would serve as a constant reminder of his otherness.

At the opposite end, in "Coming to Terms," after a hard semester teaching English at a small liberal arts college in upstate New York, at the office to input his grades, a weary staff person assumes he is a student filing a complaint:

You wonder what students think when you
unmistakably Asian, perpetually foreign,
economically uncertain, set foot in their English classes.

His place in this country, in the college, in the department, as an inheritor of the Khmer and English languages comes into question.

At a more subdued level is the theme of his profound and overwhelming love for his grandmother. He plays with images and realities that he may have had if his parents survived. But ultimately, as his final poem "Gruel" concludes, he never questioned that he was loved through his hardest, darkest times. Particularly under the regime when they had nothing to eat, his grandmother "saved for [him] / the thickest part of her rice gruel."

There is an absence of poetry from Cambodians in the United States, aside from U Sam Oeur, who authored *Sacred Vows* (Coffee House Press, 1998), translated by Ken McCullough. Oeur writes as a first generation Cambodian whereas Bunkong Tuon writes from a more ambivalent place of the 1.5 generation. Tuon is in a position to gather aspects of both homelands (original and adopted) to form an identity that extends beyond a historical narrative. For him, home isn't easily defined. He creates boundaries and (poetic) lines, negotiating the violence of his country's past and his own personal loss, to the experiences gained as someone who came of age in this country, with all its complexities as a brown Asian refugee. In *Gruel*, the poet is, once again, a storyteller.

* **Orlando Ricardo Menes.** *Heresies*. University of New Mexico Press.

REVIEW BY TOM GRIFFEN

Orlando Ricardo Menes's fourth book of poetry, *Heresies*, is an exquisite follow-up to his 2013 Prairie Schooner Book Prize-winning collection, *Fetish* (UNP). It compacts his past experiences, religious beliefs, and historical opinions into a lush journey through his magical imagination. In an interview with *West Branch Wired*, Orlando Ricardo Menes said, "I cannot bear any type of disassociation, division, fragmentation. I have a passion for amalgamation, not just as a trope but as a way of thinking, a style of living." *Heresies* embodies this statement.

Most of *Heresies* is written in long-lines of free verse, sometimes with a slanting rhyme scheme that wanes just as it makes itself known. In "Toussaint L'Ouverture Imprisoned at Fort de Joux," Menes propels readers forward with scattered sounds that hold echoes, "my plantation / of snow where trees shiver without leaves, my icy cell where wind / cuts like blades of cane, jailers tapping taunts on iron bars." Or, as in "St. Dollar Welcomes Cuban Refugees at the Freedom Tower," irregular cadence links unlikely imagery:

Scrap love of country, junk all
pieties. Your Lady of Charity marches in olive green down the
Malecón, your apostle Martí a dummy blathering the communist
creed. Homesick? Drink a cuba libre on the beach.

Lines of independent melody repeatedly soften alarming moments, for example, "then back to port the nuns snag orphans," and, "Let's fry his juicy eyes, boil the brain."

Traditional forms also make an appearance. "Ghazal For Mango," dedicated to Derek Walcott, suggests that death occurs at the moment perfection is achieved. "To Indians, the dying geezer is / a mango about to drop." And "Cuban Villanelle" is an antipastoral homage replete with promiscuity, child abuse and violent revenge. Here, the built-in repetition works like so many of Menes's own craft decisions, to achieve a lush complexity devoid of pretension.

Heresies contains a prudent and meticulous sequencing of forty-nine poems. Nearly half have a Catholic saint in the title, such as: "St. Catejan, Patron of Gamblers" and "St. Cecilia of the Andes, Patroness of Musical Butchers" and "St. Rose Counsels the Washerwomen of Lima." Some of these saints are the tutelary spirit of the named trade; others seem to be the poet's invention. Heavenly advocates intercede with the human realm and invoke the importance of the natural world. "Water is the / parchment of angels, & I read their scribbles in purls, ruffles, rings & / eddies, prophecies that sizzle in my ears." The saintly counsel accepts human folly and contradicts parochial doctrine. "To abstain is mortal sin. Beware of teetotalers / who scorn the Eucharist, tempting with grape juice or ginger beer, / heretics who deny that God's clouds rained alcohol, life's water, on / the seventh day. Praise be to His seven spirits: gin, vodka, whiskey, rum, tequila, brandy & schnapps."

Menes weaves Yoruban *orishas* with Christian icons, placing them in variance of established norms. Though these "heresies" usually pit one ideology against another, they ought not be considered renunciations. A devout sensibility mixes with stern reality, giving the poet accessible language to better understand and communicate this tangled existence. In "St. Primitivo, Patron of Heretics, Exhorts His Catechumens," he writes "Utility is holier than ritual. Put those fonts / to good use as bird baths, those missals as mulch, those catafalques / as oxcarts."

After mentioning Richard Crashaw, the seventeenth-century metaphysical

poet whose work is also influenced by Spanish mysticism, Menes asks, "Isn't irreverence a sign of holiness?" Then, as if suggesting religion could be more engaging, Menes states, "If I had my own creed, the Mass / would be a spectacle of gaffes, riddles, puns, tricks, tongue twisters, even slapstick, the Three Stooges my Trinity." He claims, "their liturgy / of jokes the surest path to grace in a fallen world."

Menes frequently uses limestone as a faith metaphor; patient, porous, and brittle, it is vulnerable to natural elements. He writes, "The poorest among you know that / happiness springs from hardship. How well you mill limestone into / flour, make cheese from tree sap. You are by instinct tame, obedient, / piety the mortar between your bones." He transforms pig iron into gold, "ploughing the raw bullion into limestone's watery womb."

Heresies hordes detail, combining fact and fiction, and lets symbols accumulate as they do in a culture. It weaves bodily and religious imagery, arousing readers to examine their own beliefs. "Catechism requires / kneeling on coarse sand, stones in outstretched hands, / any moaning punished with cod-oil purges, / priests who whip while singing the Benedictus." Menes's reverent inspiration stems from the mundane, generally eschewing the holiness of sacred objects. "You want to be pious? Hang laundry from the paschal / cross. Grow basil in a pyx. Knead dough on the altar. What is incense / anyway but a smog of piety?" Images conjure Latin American and Caribbean culture, colonial influence, and spirituality, questioning their often conflicting histories. Menes's "baroque" style channels the word's etymological stem, the Portuguese *borocco*, meaning "imperfect pearl." His tone goes beyond the obvious conflict of old and new; the poet's faith is indisputable even if his commentary is derisive.

Heresies is an intense and masterful undertaking that requires careful dissection. It begs to be read aloud, and slowly. Menes's prolonged energy is audacious, his lines crowded with lavish design and sudden turns of imagination. A close analysis, however, legitimizes his verbal gymnastics. "Vent your troubles at my altar of hooch. Confess with wine, rugged / rijoas & ribeiros. Guzzle shots of faith, drafts of hope, charity's / highball. Why should worship be temperate? Swill, jag & quaff." Though dabblers may be discouraged by an abundance of descriptors, engaged readers will undoubtedly learn something new. Menes's lines resemble the circuitous efforts of human communication, at times tragic and sullen, at others lighthearted and witty. The outcome is a demanding inquiry that celebrates identity and individuality. This work reaches while it sings.

Eva Saulitis. *Prayer in Wind*. Boreal Books (Red Hen Press).

REVIEW BY KATE PARTRIDGE

In her second book of poetry, *Prayer in Wind*, the poet, essayist, and biologist Eva Saulitis merits her paraphrase of Simone Weil: "attention is prayer." The