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## Alexander Laban Hinton. *Man Or Monster? The Trial of a Khmer Rouge Torturer*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016.

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**Alexander Laban Hinton. *Man Or Monster? The Trial of a Khmer Rouge Torturer*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016.**

One of the most resonating quotes from Robert Louis Stevenson's 1886 novella *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* is, "All human beings, as we meet them, are commingled out of good and evil: and Edward Hyde, alone, in the ranks of mankind, was pure evil." In many ways, this characterization of Mr. Hyde as the epitome of evil, a morally iniquitous villain, is how we typify mass killers. One such killer who fits this description is Kaing Guek Iev (កាំង ហ្គេក អ៊ឺវ, aka. 江玉耀 *Jiāng Yùyào*, or more famously, "Comrade Duch"), the one-time head of the Communist Party of Kampuchea's (CPK) internal security branch at Tuol Sleng (S-21). A modern-day *Mr. Hyde*, this man seemingly detached from his inner *Dr. Jekyll*—a respected mathematics teacher and highly intelligent CPK cadre—to oversee the imprisonment, torture, and execution of an estimated twenty thousand people. Recently, Duch's trial, which is under the aegis of the United Nations-backed Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC), has garnered significant international attention. However, the forces behind his "heel turn" and an understanding of Duch the man, teacher, defendant, perpetrator, and monster, among other aspects of his multifaceted persona, has yet to enter the mainstream. Enter *Man Or Monster?* by Alexander Laban Hinton, the Director of the Center for the Study of Genocide and Human Rights and Professor of Anthropology and Global Affairs at Rutgers University, Newark. The author of the groundbreaking ethnography of the Cambodian genocide, *Why Did They Kill? Cambodia in the Shadow of Genocide* (2005), Hinton goes further in *Man or Monster?* with an "ethnodrama," which he describes as an ethnography containing dramatic structure and which "uses language and narrative structure to raise questions and evoke ambiguities that are often glossed over in expository writing" (p. 35).

To accomplish this task, Hinton expertly weaves trial proceedings, testimonials, and contemporary analyses of Democratic Kampuchea, thereby crafting an ambitious exposé of Duch's trial and the various forces behind collective memory of him. The book's title serves as a deliberate *vocare pro provocare* to "'stimulate a reaction' by 'provoking' thinking about the question itself and what, ultimately, it suggests about Duch's trial and the banality of everyday thought" (p. 288). And provoke deeper thought about Duch and his trial is exactly what the book does, as Hinton draws poignantly from Hannah Arendt's concept of the "banality of evil" to problematize and contextualize our framings of Duch as *man*, *monster*, or *both* or—as Hinton's study labors to show—a man who did monstrous things.

The book consists of ten chapters across two parts, with each chapter heading playing on the ambiguity that surrounded Duch and the roles that he played throughout his life. Accordingly, Hinton proceeds chronologically, moving from the trial's beginning to its end and intermingling trial proceedings with Duch's life-and-times. He uses what he calls an "ethnodramatic and more literary style, including the use of the first person narrative voice" to produce a "more polyphonic account...us[ing] imagery, language, and juxtaposition to convey key concepts" (p. 290). The chapters that comprise part one are on the trial's examination of the nature and form of S-21 before and during Duch's helmsmanship. Chapter one covers the opening stages of Duch's trial, introducing the major players, such as co-prosecutors Chea Leang and Robert Petit, both of whom "foreground[ed] origins, structure, and operation of S-21, Duch's degree of autonomy and criminal responsibility, and the profound dehumanization of his victims" (p. 53). The chapter also introduces defense lawyer François Roux, who framed Duch as a mere stooge. Chapter two details Duch's revolutionary career as it occurred against the

backdrop of the Cambodian revolution, with testimonials by François Bizot, a prisoner at M-13 under Duch whose account “affirmed Duch’s humanity [yet] revealed an excess that unsettled [the] articulation of Duch the man” (p. 83). Chapter three examines the establishment of S-21 and Duch’s role as a subordinate to the untrustworthy Nat, who Duch viewed as inferior to him in theoretical knowledge and immersion in the Communist canon, while chapter four details Duch’s strategic importance to CPK implementation, with him representing a hand-picked “counterbalance” to Nat at S-21 (p. 124). Here, experts such as Craig Etcheson challenge Duch’s defense, a self-framing of himself as a “passive, reluctant cog,” arguing that in fact, Duch was “an active, willing participant and an innovator” at S-21 (p. 126). Part one concludes by examining Duch’s time as an operator (alongside Nat and after) of S-21 and as its principle torturer and executioner. As the sixth chapter reveals, Duch used the interrogation skills that he learned while at S-21 to deflect indictments of himself, many of which cast him as a medievaesque sadist who withdrew from his own humanity to extract information from his prisoners. If nothing else, the chapters in this part portray Duch as a dedicated cadre who followed the brutal CPK line, as did many others, but his self-framing as “a man of noble qualities who, through circumstances and poor judgment, became trapped in a vortex of violence” falls flat against the evidence to the contrary (p. 69).

The chapters of part two, meanwhile, place the attention squarely on the victims, whose framings of Duch during the trial guide us toward the climactic final verdict. Chapter seven presents the civil parties’ closing arguments, including Cambodian painter and human rights activist Vann Nath’s gut-wrenching testimonial, in which he detailed Duch’s brutality towards him during his time at S-21. Chapters eight and nine detail the closing arguments by the prosecution (using ample evidence to debunk Duch’s self-portrayal as a passive cog) and the defense, respectively, with the latter stressing Duch’s humanity and that he was, as Duch’s defense co-lawyer Kar Savuth advocated, “the wrong man” (p. 216). The final chapter and epilogue bring us to the trial’s end, with Duch convicted of crimes against humanity, among a litany of other wrongdoings. Hinton succeeds in weaving personal testimonials of Duch by his captives with the legal proceedings and arguments of both sides. His conclusion posits Duch as a “thinking man” whose “thoughtless stance of effacing conviction,” as “reflected by his mathematics background, ideological rigidity, hyperrationality, tendency to strip away complicating detail to assert a narrower, categorized vision of the world, disempathy, and desire for ‘black and white’ truth,” ultimately predisposed him to commit the atrocities that he did (pp. 295-296). Thus in the end, Duch is both man *and* monster—a man conditioned by his experiences and training to detach from his humanity to become something monstrous.

Overall, *Man or Monster?* is a thought-provoking literary triumph by Hinton, whose expertise on contemporary Cambodian history is on full display. The material is accessible, and each chapter contains a wealth of biographical information on Duch that guides the reader towards a fuller understanding of Duch without *apologia*. The greatest strength of Hinton’s book is its narrative, as it blends vignettes of Duch’s experiences as told by the man himself or by his victims with the court proceedings and respective cases for and against his case. Hinton’s coverage of the in-court testimonials of Duch’s victims, in particular, plays to this strength. Though at times the narrative approach obscures the overarching point of a chapter, leaving the reader wondering what the chapter is trying to achieve beyond recounting events and testimonials, Hinton brings it all together seamlessly by each chapter’s end. One issue lies with Hinton’s take on Hannah Arendt’s “banality of evil,” which he recasts as the “banality of everyday thought” by proposing that a “failure to think in exceptional circumstances” obfuscates

that “the everyday ways we simplify and categorize the world [to] navigate complexity... parallels a key dynamic in the genocidal process” (p. 31). Unlike Eichmann, Duch was a thinking man who was very much motivated by ideology *and* career advancement; thus, “banality” falls not on Duch’s thought or actions, as they were far from “banal.” Hinton’s larger point about our framings of killers succeeds, however, and while this criticism is a minor issue with an otherwise stellar contribution to the field, it bears noting.

Indeed, *Man or Monster?* accomplishes what it sets out to do: provoke thinking about the titular question and contextualize as well as problematize framings of this particular mass murderer. To quote Stevenson once again, in reading this book I, not unlike Jekyll, “learned to recognize the thorough and primitive duality of man; I saw that of the two natures that contended in the field of my consciousness, even if I could rightly be said to be either, it was only because I was radically both.” Duch is both, but as Hinton shows clearly, to render facile the complex and multifaceted—Duch playing several roles or framings throughout his life—obscures the greater story to be told and makes it even more difficult to gain an understanding, if ever possible, of a man who did such monstrous things.

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