

Boys and girls fall into small clutches—
some play *reak*¹ and *bikom*,²
some sing in the trees,
others sprawl in the shade.

When the sun streaks across the horizon,
the birds disperse and fly
in ordered flocks to their nests
and the herders lead their cattle home.

When darkness settles upon the plain
insects, geckoes, and frogs rock this kingdom.
A million stars drop everywhere,
and farmers fall asleep in peace.

¹*reak*: a children's game, similar to chess, which is played primarily by boys.

²*bikom*: another children's game, resembling jacks, played almost exclusively by girls.

OATH OF ALLEGIANCE (1952)

I. Motivation

During my childhood	the country was in chaos.
It was the war of liberation	and the Viet Minh infiltrated.
The French colonialists	chained innocent Khmers
	while Khmers killed Khmers.
It was desperate—	I looked at the sky, it was high.
Because I was a farm child	I didn't understand anything.
Often I felt miserable—	I was feeling compassion for my people;
	they had no leaders.

