

CHARLES HALLISEY:

Therīgāthā: Poems of the First Buddhist Women:

(Murti Classical Library of India.) Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2015. £22.95. ISBN 978 067442773 0.

doi:10.1017/S0041977X15000828

The *Therīgāthā* has an important position for scholars of early Buddhism, since it is a compilation of poems by the earliest Buddhist nuns. It has often been mined for information about women's experiences in early Indian society in general and the Buddhist monastic community in particular, as well as for its Buddhist teachings and imagery. However, Charles Hallisey, the translator of the current volume, rightly points out that these verses are also poetry. In his introduction, he encourages us to "read the poems of the *Therīgāthā* for pleasure just as much as for any sociological or historical information they may contain" (p. ix) and he demonstrates how placing the verses in their wider Indian literary context helps to make our reading of them richer.

While emphasizing their value as literature, Hallisey does not ignore the Buddhist content of these poems. He provides a helpful introduction to the place of the text in Buddhist scriptural history and its limited reception history, as well as making a number of interesting observations about the structure and contents of the collection. As he points out, although the main structuring principle is of increasing number of verses, there is also a tendency towards a relational grouping of the poems, for example putting together all the verses about or by women who have lost children. Such groupings suggest that the text presents "less a single monastic order governed by a single rule (*vinaya*), than a collocation of smaller groups of women bound together by shared experiences and relationships of care and intimacy with one another" (pp. xxviii–xxix).

The text of the *Therīgāthā* used in this volume is taken from Dhammapāla's commentary as published in the Sinhala script printed edition in the Simon Hewaviratne Bequest Series in 1918. Helpfully, Hallisey preserves the chapter divisions and identifications of dialogue found in the commentary, which make for a very readable text. Hallisey also includes summaries of the lives of the nuns, as taken from William Pruitt's 1999 translation of Dhammapāla's *Therīgāthā* commentary for the Pali Text Society, which provide a colourful companion to our reading of the verses.

The translation itself is very readable, and is likely to have broad appeal. However, Hallisey deliberately takes some liberties with the translation in order to fulfil his aims of preserving the text's literary merit and making it available to a wide audience. On occasion the ways in which he strays from the text seem unnecessary as well as inauthentic. The most significant example of this is the decision to make explicit the connections between a nun's name and the content of the verse by adding a gloss not found in the Pali. For example, Hallisey adds the following to his translation of the opening verse:

Now that you live among *therīs*, Therika,
the name you were given as a child finally becomes you. (p.3)

Likewise for the next he begins:

The name you are called by means freed, Mutta. (p.3)

None of this is found in the Pali verses, but is rather an invention designed to make clear how the nun's name is used in puns in the verses that follow. Although some explanation of the name is certainly desirable, an alternative – and potentially less obtrusive – way of communicating this might be to provide the name's meaning in parentheses.

There are other examples of liberal translation that one could take issue with too. The translation of *sāhaṃ* as “Who I was then” (p. 61, verse 98) seems an unnecessary liberty. Likewise, the decision to translate *tevijjā* throughout as “the three things that most don't know” is a stretch of the meaning that doesn't really communicate more than the usual and literal “three knowledges”, since we still need to know what the three are. Another example is the translation of *āsava* as the depravities that “ooze out from within”. This may be a striking image, and not without etymological plausibility, but it goes against the more usual understanding of the term as “influx”, probably in reference to Jain karmic terminology.

While some aspects of this translation will therefore make some readers – especially scholarly ones – nervous, many other decisions about specific phrases are felicitous, and the overall result is a pleasant read. Until now, the only translation of the *Therīgāthā* on my shelf was the Pali Text Society's volume *Poems of Early Buddhist Nuns* (Oxford, 1989), which contains C.A.F. Rhys-Davids' emotive and extremely liberal translation alongside the dry and philologically rigorous translation of K.R. Norman. Hallisey manages to pitch his translation between these two extremes. Although Norman's extensive notes and philological commentary will remain of great importance to scholars, the present volume is certainly much more accessible to a non-specialist audience, and although the Pali is published alongside the translation, the translation is also perfectly readable alone. As a result, this volume is likely to become the standard *Therīgāthā* for use in classrooms and lecture halls, as well as for personal enjoyment.

This is the first volume that I have seen from the Murty Classical Library of India, a new series aimed at making India's literary classics available to a wide audience. The design is pleasing and the quality impressive. There are some annoying details, including some copyediting errors and a convention of placing footnotes after the opening words of verses, which interferes with the reading experience. Nonetheless, Hallisey's volume will no doubt contribute to the series' aims of reaching a wide readership, and I look forward to seeing more volumes in due course.

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THOMAS DE BRUIJN and ALLISON BUSCH (eds):

Culture and Circulation: Literature in Motion in Early Modern India. (Brill's Indological Library.) xi, 315 pp. Leiden: Brill, 2014. €125. ISBN 978 90 04 26447 2.

doi:10.1017/S0041977X15000658

Culture and Circulation presents a cross-section of some of the best recent scholarship on the early modern (1500–1800) vernacular literary traditions of Gangetic South Asia. The theme that ties these essays together is a concern with the cultural logic of the period: questions of circulation and hybridity as indices of an emergent proto-market society's literary cultural logic. The authors include many of the most talented members of the field of modern Indian literary studies. The diverse scholars