

A Study of
THE MAJOR FICTION OF KULĀP SĀIPRADIT
(pseud. 'Sīburaphā')

David A. Smyth

Presented for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
of the
University of London
(School of Oriental and African Studies)

1988

ProQuest Number: 10672608

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO ALL USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.



ProQuest 10672608

Published by ProQuest LLC (2017). Copyright of the Dissertation is held by the Author.

All rights reserved.

This work is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code
Microform Edition © ProQuest LLC.

ProQuest LLC.
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 – 1346

ABSTRACT

The name Kulāp Sāipradit or 'Sībūraphā' has in recent years become increasingly familiar to the western student of Thailand. Information about his life and literary work nevertheless remains fragmentary and superficial. This study is an attempt to familiarize the western reader with the life and major works of a writer who is today widely regarded by Thais as one of the country's major novelists.

The Introduction explains briefly who Kulāp is and sets out some of the limitations of the western writer in examining the works of a Thai novelist.

Chapter I synthesises information about Kulāp's life from a variety of Thai sources and sets this against a background of events within Thailand at the time.

Chapter II looks at five of Kulāp's early novels, all of which appeared within a space of about twelve months. Written to a formula, these works brought rapid fame to Kulāp and can be taken as being indicative of popular taste of the day.

Chapter III examines Kulāp's two most acclaimed novels and looks closely at what various Thai critics have said or - sometimes equally significantly- left unsaid about them.

Chapter IV deals with Kulāp's later more radical fiction in which he often quite openly criticised government policy, and which led to these works being out of print for nearly two decades.

Chapter V concludes with a brief look at the resurrection of Kulāp's later works, his promotion as a symbol of radical thought in the early 1970's and his present incorporation into Thai

literary genealogies.

The Appendix includes a translation of one of Kulāp's most highly regarded novels, Khāng lang phāp (Behind the Painting) and two of his later short stories, Khon phūāk nan (Those Kind of People) and Khao tū'n (He's Waking Up); in addition, there is a list of some of his better known novels and short stories.

NOTE

1. Thai words are romanised according to the Library of Congress system.
2. Thai authors who write in English are entered under their first names for bibliography purposes.

CONTENTS

	page
Abstract	2
Note	3
Acknowledgements	5
Introduction	7
Chapter	
I Life and Times	9
II The Early Novels	37
III Two Classics	78
IV The Later Fiction	119
V The Promoting of 'Sībūraphā'	153
Appendix	161
A Behind the Painting	162
B Those Kind of People	284
He's Waking Up	296
C A list of Kulāp Sāipradit's better -known novels and short stories	309
Bibliography	311

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Manas Chitakasem, for his help and encouragement over a period of many years, dating back to my first faltering steps in the Thai language. I have learned much from him and benefited greatly from his patience, wisdom and support.

I would also like to acknowledge a debt of gratitude to Professor E.H.S. Simmonds and the late Peter J. Bee, who in the course of my undergraduate studies, did much to stimulate my interest in language and literature.

I spent six happy and memorable years in Thailand which were invaluable in improving my command of the language and understanding of the culture. I would like to take this opportunity to record my gratitude and thanks to former colleagues and students at Thammasat University and Srinakharinwirot University (Prasarnmitr) from whom I learnt so much. To Professor Seni Wilawan, Head of the Faculty of Archaeology, Sinlapakorn Univeristy, who offered me every encouragement in pursuing a higher degree, I would also like to express my thanks.

I have benefited also from the insights of many western colleagues, and would like to acknowledge in particular, Alec Bamford, Charles Phillips, David Russell, Carl Springer and Martin Grose.

Scot Barmé and Mrs. Judy Stowe were most kind in making available to me their unpublished research.

Finally, I would like to say thankyou to my family for their support and encouragement while this study was in progress; to my wife, Somsong, I am particularly indebted, for the many hours spent clarifying linguistic problems and discussing texts, and much more importantly, for creating the happy home environment in which this work could be completed.

INTRODUCTION

Kulāp Sāipradit or 'Sībūraphā' has enjoyed a chequered reputation in the Thai literary world. A popular and accomplished writer of romantic novels at the beginning of his career in the late 1920's, he was by the late 1940's writing a politically radical type of fiction which highlighted social injustice and inequality within Thai society and often criticised quite explicitly the government of the day. Imprisoned for a second time between 1952 and 1957, Kulāp soon afterwards sought asylum in China where he remained for the rest of his life. For a decade after his departure from Thailand his name was virtually taboo, although a few of his early novels remained in print. In the early 1970's he was rediscovered by a new generation of liberals and progressives, and in the years immediately following the 'Student Revolution' of 1973, his later fiction was energetically promoted; among young writers and critics there followed a widespread re-appraisal of his work and significance in the development of the Thai novel. Today, the signs are that the radical image promoted during the early 1970's has been toned down and Kulāp is gradually being accorded respectability and a solid niche in the history of the Thai novel.

This study is addressed primarily to the western student of Thailand who wishes to know something about an important Thai writer without having to undertake the time-consuming task of reading his works in the original language. With a growing tendency among western scholars to slip in a brief reference to Kulāp, it will hopefully prove informative to the political scientist, social scientist and historian, as well as the student of Thai literature.

Certain assumptions underlying the writing of this thesis should be clarified at the outset. In the first place, I have assumed that the reader will not be familiar with Kulāp's fiction. Considerable space has therefore necessarily been devoted to summaries of the texts, for without these, subsequent discussion would become meaningless; in certain cases, these differ quite markedly in emphasis and detail from existing published summaries of the same works.

Secondly, I have assumed that it is fundamentally unsatisfactory to know about a writer without being able to read his works; thus translations of one of Kulāp's most acclaimed romantic novels and two of his later 'political' short stories - selected to give some impression of the range of his writing - have been included in the Appendix as an integral part of the present study.

Thirdly, I have assumed that the western writer addressing a western audience is as much a 'cultural middle man' as a literary critic; as such, an important part of his role lies in explaining what Thais have said and thought about a writer and examining such views in their social and historical context.

Finally, acknowledgement of the westerner's limitations in attempting to write about Thai literature must be made. Language and culture represent a formidable barrier, while depth and breadth of reading are achieved only over a period of many years. The present study thus deliberately avoids any broader comparative view of the Thai novel and limits itself to what at this stage is the more realistic goal of a detailed study of a single writer and his work.

CHAPTER I
LIFE AND TIMES

Kulāp was born on 31st March 1905, the second and last child of Suwan and Sombun Sāipradit. His father, a native of Bangkok, was employed as a clerk in the State Railways Department, while his mother came from a family of farmers in Suphanburi Province. The only other child was a daughter, Čhamrat, born in 1902.¹

At first the family lived at the home of Suwan's parents, later moving to rented accommodation in the Hua Lampong area. Before long, tragedy struck: Suwan became seriously ill, and despite the administrations of his father, an expert in traditional medicine, and several other doctors, he died, at the early age of thirty-five. At the time, Kulāp was just six years old. Years later, the inadequacy of medical provisions for the poor was to be a recurrent theme in Kulāp's novels and short stories.

After the death of her husband, Sombun decided that her daughter should train as a classical dancer and actress in order to help with the family income and offset the cost of sending Kulāp to school. She herself, opened a small dress-makers shop at home to further supplement the family budget.

Kulāp's formal education had begun at the age of four at

¹Little is known about Kulāp's early years; much of the early biographical material in this chapter is taken from Lōk Nangsū'. 1978. 2:2. pp.35-7.

Wat Hua Lampong School, where he remained until he had completed the four grades of primary education. He then spent two years at an army cadet school, before transferring to the prestigious Wat Thepsirin School, where he continued his education for a further eight years.

Thepsirin School was to have a profound effect upon his development and thinking. From a modest background himself, he found himself mixing for the first time with the sons of the rich, the titled and the privileged. Here he witnessed the snobbery and pettiness that was to characterize the behaviour of most of the villains of his fiction throughout his life; and here, also, he developed the polite, rational, and 'gentlemanly' manner that remained even in his later defiance of the government.

Despite the disadvantages of his background and domestic responsibilities, Kulāp did well at school. It was at Thepsirin that he first developed an interest in writing. By the early 1920's, many of the larger Bangkok secondary schools were producing school magazines, while individual teachers would often encourage their pupils to produce class magazines of their own. With the growing popularity of prose fiction, such outlets were to provide a useful stimulus for hopeful young writers, eager to try their hand at the new genre. Indeed, among Kulāp's contemporaries at Thepsirin, who co-operated on the class magazines, Sī thēp and Darunsān, were M.C. Ākātdamkōeng Raphīphat, Cha-ēm Antarasēn, Sot Kūramarōhit and Sanit Čharōenrat, all of whom were to make a name for themselves in the Thai literary

world during the next decade.²

By the time Kulāp left school in 1923, he was determined to become a writer. But writing, whether as a journalist or writer of fiction, was a precarious occupation even at the best of times, and few, if any, could hope to live purely off the pen. Kulāp's first job was as an English teacher at a language school owned by a wealthy printing shop owner, Tāengmō Čhantawim. For almost two years Tāengmō provided Kulāp and his colleagues with work, encouragement and financial assistance, as they struggled to establish themselves as writers. In addition to the language school, Tāengmō also owned a translation office which was managed by an established writer, Kōson Kōmonāchan, who wrote under the pseudonym, 'Sīngōenyūang'. Kōson was eager to encourage young writers, and one of the best ways, he felt, was to introduce them to western novels, which they would attempt to translate into Thai. Thus, Kulāp and the other hopeful young writers spent their days translating and their evenings teaching. Their mentor meanwhile bestowed pen-names upon his most promising pupils, each name beginning with the honorific title, 'sī'; thus it was that Kulāp became 'Sībūraphā', a pen-name he continued to use for fiction throughout his career.³ Kulāp and his colleagues were by now writing film paperbacks - summaries and translations of the plots of the newly imported foreign films which were rapidly becoming popular in the early 1920's; at the same time,

²Kwande Rakpongse. 1975. A Study of the novels of Mōm Lūang Bupphā Nimmānhēmindā (pseud. Dōkmaisot). Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of London. p.36.

³The prefix 'sī' is of Sanskrit derivation, meaning 'auspicious'. Among Kulāp's colleagues, Cha-ēm Antarasēn was called 'Sīsēnan', Sanit Charōenrat was 'Sisurin' and Charan Wutthathit, 'Sīchomphū'.

Kulāp was also sending his work to popular magazines such as Phāpphayon sayām, Sap thai and Sēnā sū'ksā lae phāe witthayāsāt.⁴

The language school was not a success; while there was no shortage of students, collecting fees proved a perpetual problem. When it became quite obvious that the school was financially unviable, Tāengmō stepped in and suggested that Kulāp and his friends concentrate their efforts on producing a magazine instead. The result was a magazine called Sān sahāi, which was well-received by the public. But as with the school, there were always problems collecting subscriptions and payments, and when Tāengmō withdrew his support after nine months, the magazine folded.⁵ The staff were forced to split up and go their separate ways, several of them joining better established newspapers and magazines.

Kulāp himself joined the staff of Sēnā sū'ksā lae phāe witthayāsāt and was soon an assistant editor. But since the magazine was produced by the Officer Cadet School, and relations between military and civilian staff were strained, he found his prospects for further advancement blocked. He decided to sit the examination for a post as translator in the Royal Thai Survey Department, but, apparently, having come out on top, he was relegated to second place, because they wanted either someone of a more aristocratic background or an army officer to fill the position.⁶

⁴Kwande, loc. cit.

⁵P. Watcharāphōn. 1966. Chomrom nak khīan. Bangkok: Rūamsān pp. 418-22.

⁶Chanit Sāipradit in Lōk nangsū' . 1978. 2:2 p.29

As a result of these setbacks, Kulāp abandoned both thoughts of a secure future as a civil servant and his position at Sēnā sū'ksā..., instead devoting his energies more seriously to writing fiction.

In October 1928, Kulāp's first full length novel, Lūk phūchāi (A Real Man) appeared. Unlike many of the early Thai novels, it was not serialised in a weekly or monthly magazine prior to being issued in a single volume edition. But this was not an act of faith by a publisher prepared to back a little-known writer; Kulāp himself, was the owner of the publishing company, Sannak phim nāi thēp prīchā. The complementary interests in writing and publishing were to be a feature of Kulāp's literary career, affording him a degree of independence few other writers enjoyed. But such freedom came at a price, with quality sometimes being sacrificed out of a necessity to fill pages and meet deadlines. Lūk phūchāi, nevertheless, proved to be a tremendous success and provided Kulāp with the encouragement to take his writing more seriously. Within little more than a year, a further four novels appeared, as well as several short stories, which established him as one of the most popular writers of the day.

In June 1929 Kulāp launched a new fortnightly magazine called Suphāpburut (The Gentleman). The blend of journalism and fiction, which included the serialisation of Kulāp's novel, Prāp phayot, was well received by the reading public and within

a few months, circulation had reached 4,000.⁷ Suphāpburut differed from most similar publications of the day in that it was very much a co-operative venture by a small group of like-minded writers, several of whom were former colleagues of Kulāp from his Thepsirin and Sān sahāi days. With little financial backing, the writers, who often used several different pen-names to create the illusion of a broader range of contributors, were additionally forced to arrange the printing themselves, examine the proofs, distribute the magazine and collect subscriptions. Under such circumstances it is perhaps not surprising that Suphāpburut survived for less than a year. Nevertheless, the loyalty and respect that Kulāp had earned from his colleagues was to remain apparent for several years after the demise of the magazine, as members of the 'Suphāpburut Group' followed Kulāp from one newspaper to another, as he either resigned or was dismissed.⁸ Their first move was to Bangkōk kān mū'ang, an off-shoot of the much larger Krungthēp dēlī mē. At the time, the paper was on the verge of collapse, and Kulāp, who had by now begun to make a name for himself, was hired to inject new life into it. This he attempted to do by giving the paper a different coloured heading each day, and by trying to woo former devotees of Suphāpburut. However, his tenure at Bangkōk kān mū'ang was to be short-lived, the paper being closed down temporarily after

⁷P. Watcharāphōn, op.cit., pp.427-8

⁸See, for example, the testimony of Chun Praphāwīwat in "Kulāp Sāipradit kap khana nak praphan klum Suphāpburut" in Lōk nangsū'. 1978. 2:2 pp.72-80

he authorised the publication of a report which caused offence to members of the minor royalty. The author of the original report described the incident which had prompted the closure in the magazine Lōk nangsu' (Book World), adding that Kulāp had not wanted him to edit his original version:

Our paper printed a story which infuriated Krom Phra Sawat. It was a story covering the wedding between M.C.Sōphanakāndai and Phra Ong Chao Ying Mayurachat at Klai Kangwon Palace in Hūa Hin. I was a civil servant at the court, so was present, and I saw one incident where Phrayā Sombat Bōrihān fell as he was about to present a bag of money to the bride and groom. It was fairly heavy, about 15 'chang' (1'chang' - 600 grammes) and Phrayā Sombat was rather small, so that he fell, just as he was presenting the money. Other newspapers reported the wedding in the usual way, but Bangkōk kān mū'ang reported that Phraya Sombat had taken a tumble in front of the throne. This infuriated Krom Phra Sawat, who summoned Nai Lui Khiriwat, the owner of the paper. Kulāp, too, was summoned and questioned. And so Kulāp pointed out that it was a basic principle of reporting that anything unusual was news, and that if Phra (sic.) Sombat had carried on walking, it would not have been news, but since he had taken a tumble, then it was.

But Kulāp and his colleagues were by no means the only ones to show a less than reverent attitude towards the ruling élite. Indeed, throughout the late 1920's and early 1930's criticism of an often surprisingly direct nature surfaced in the pages of various newspapers. Thus, for example, Sayām riwiw in its 'Letters to the Editor' column, printed the following, question and answer doubtless both emanating from the same pen:

Question: Why are local goods...less widely available than foreign goods? What is the cause, and what can be done to solve it, once and for all?

⁹Phayōm Rōtchanawiphāt in an interview in Lōk nangsu'. 1978. 2:2 p.47.

Answer: We would answer in all sincerity that royalty or privy counsellors are the cause. The way to solve it once and for all, is for those people we have mentioned to abandon their preferences as an example to others.¹⁰

Another paper, Thai num, dating from the same period, offers a clear example of the rising tide of popular democratic sentiment of the day:

That society is split into separate categories of nobles and ordinary citizens is something which is neither right nor proper. Indeed, the belief that nobles are the lords and ordinary citizens the servants, is utterly and completely erroneous. The nobles are 'Public Servant'(sic.), that is, they are the servants of the people.¹¹

And even the King himself was not beyond the range of the more outspoken sectors of the press:

It is not just ordinary uneducated citizens who are holding back the progress of the country. Even a king who is less than astute is a danger to his country. To be a king nowadays,¹² requires preparation throughout the period of heirdom.¹²

Eventually, in 1930, legislation was introduced to restrict the freedom of the press; editors were subject to stringent pre-conditions, detailed applications for licences had to be submitted, civil servants were barred from writing for newspapers and overseas news that might be detrimental to Thailand's foreign relations was banned.¹³

¹⁰ Chotmāi thu'ng bō kō . Sayām rīwiw 28 June 2470 (1927) quoted in Phōnphirom Iamtham. 1977. Botbāt thāng kām mū'ang khōng nangsū'phim thai 2475-2488. Bangkok:Thai watthanā pānit. p.28.

¹¹ Thai num 8 July 2470 (1927), quoted in ibid., p.27.

¹² Thai num July (n.d.) 2470 (1927), quoted in ibid., p.27.

¹³ ibid., p.31.

When Bangkōk k̄an m̄'ang re-opened, it was without Kulāp and his associates. But a new opportunity soon presented itself, when Kulāp was invited to become editor of a newly launched daily, Thai mai, in 1930. Despite the new press laws, newspapers continued to voice their dissatisfaction with the government, with Thai mai quickly establishing itself as one of the most outspoken in its demands for democratic reform. In its pages, readers - and rulers - were, for example, informed of the dire consequences that had befallen European monarchs, and most ominously, the Tsar, who had failed to adapt and modernise. The benefits of democratic government were extolled, and in reporting Rama VII 's trip abroad for eye treatment, the paper added to its good wishes the hope that he would learn all about democracy while he was away, so that he would be able to implement it on his return.¹⁴

Kulāp's stay at Thai mai was to be equally short-lived; after less than a year, he and members of his group resigned in what has been described as the first major walk-out in the history of Thai journalism.¹⁵ There remains some confusion in the details surrounding Kulāp's departure, but essentially, it stemmed from a disagreement with the owners about editorial policy.¹⁶

¹⁴ibid., p.32

¹⁵Suphā Sirimānon. 1978. "Khwām song čnam: chīwit lae k̄an t̄ō sū khōng Kulāp Sāipradit, Lōk nangsu' 2:2 p.67.

¹⁶Thanūan Čhātuprayūn (pseud. 'Thanālai'), a contemporary of Kulāp claims the trouble stemmed from an article by Kulāp entitled Manutsayaphāp (Humanitarianism) which the owners refused to allow him to publish. Thanūan claims that Kulāp then took the article to Sī krung, who did publish it, but were promptly closed down for their pains. Lōk nangsu' 1978. 2:2 pp.44-6.

After leaving Thai mai, Kulāp's financial position was precarious.¹⁷ He returned to writing fiction while contributing political articles to various newspapers, including Sayām rāt, Sī krung and a newly-launched weekly, Phū nam, which included many members of the 'Suphāpburut Group' among its writers.¹⁸ It was in Sī krung that he published an article entitled Manutsayaphāp (Humanitarianism) which resulted in the paper being temporarily closed. By all accounts the article was not particularly outspoken. Rama VII himself expressed interest in it and subsequently even approached Kulāp through intermediaries about editing a newspaper he was planning to launch to counter the influence of other newspapers which were being used as mouthpieces by different factions within the government. Negotiations were conducted in the utmost secrecy, and after agreement was reached, an audience with the King was arranged for 27th June 1932 at Hua Hin Palace.¹⁹ However, three days before the scheduled audience, the coup took place which brought an end to the absolute monarchy in Thailand. Although the King's secret project was aborted, Kulāp's fortunes took a turn for the better in the immediate aftermath of the coup when he was appointed editor of

¹⁷Yot Watcharasathian. 1973. Kulāp Sāipradit nai khwām song cham khōng khāphačhao. Sangkhomsāt Parithat 11:7 p.65. Kulāp records the financial hardships of the journalist-hero who resigns from a newspaper in protest at internal censorship in the story Tham ngān tham ngōen (Working, Making Money).

¹⁸Kulāp's introduction of the 'Suphāpburut Group' to readers of the first issue of Phū nam, is quoted in Sutthirā Sukniyom. 1979. Mālai Chūphinit lae phonngān praphan chōeng sāngsan. Bangkok:Kānwēk. pp. 23-4. It also contains brief details of several other newspapers of the period on which Kulāp and Mālai worked together.

¹⁹Phayōm Rōtchanawiphāt in Lōk nangsu' 1978. 2:2 p.49.

another newly- launched newspaper, the daily Prachāchāt, owned by M.C. Wan Waitthayākōn. Aware of the need for government reform, M.C. Wan planned to use his paper to disseminate ideas about democracy. In order to do this, however, he needed journalists with experience and credibility; thus, once again, many of the old names from Suphāpburut came together under Kulap's leadership to produce the paper.

While the publication of Lūk phūchāi provided Kulāp with a breakthrough as a novelist, the next four years were to see him put aside romantic fiction and concentrate on political journalism. Indeed, it would have been surprising if he had done otherwise, for with the tide of opinion in favour of democratic reform growing throughout the late 1920's, the prospect of contributing to change that would undermine the existing hierarchical power structures, which blocked the advance of able men of humble backgrounds such as himself, must have seemed both challenging and worthwhile. But in his rise to prominence in the newspaper world, he did not abandon fiction altogether. In 1932, just prior to the coup, he published the novel, Songkhrām chīwit (The War of Life) which has proved one of his most popular and enduring works; although inspired by Dostoevsky's 'Poor People', it is perhaps most notable for the author's outspokenness on social inequality and injustice.

Despite the abolition of the absolute monarchy, the new government headed by Phrayā Manōpakōn showed little inclination to introduce sweeping changes. Press restrictions were more stringently enforced, and newspapers that dared to question government policy were liable to be promptly closed. Prachāchāt, under Kulāp's editorship, suffered such a fate on two occasions in mid-1933 for demanding more information about the sudden resignation of four prominent military members of the government, officially, for reasons of health. Although tension between the government and the press was eased for a while after Phrayā Pnahon ousted Phrayā Manōpakōn in a further coup in June 1933, the domination of the liberal civilian faction within the government by the military, rapidly changed the political climate and the mood of optimism with which many had greeted the overthrow of the absolute monarchy. Kulāp became cynical and disillusioned about the ruling clique. In the novel, Čhon kwā rao čha phop kan ĩk (Until We Meet Again), written in 1949, the hero says of the 1932 coup,

The people who carried out the coup simply ousted the former group which had held power, and ascended the throne in their place. At the beginning, it looked as if they tried to clean away the filth, but before long, greed began to blossom in their hearts, and eventually they became infatuated with their own paradise. So instead of destroying the paradise which was a symbol of injustice, they went and summoned the assistance of those who had formerly occupied that²⁰ paradise, and together, they fiercely defended it.

while in another major novel, written in 1957, he attempted to

²⁰ 'Sībūrāphā'. 1975. Čhon kwā rao čha phop kan ĩk. Bangkok: Nāew rūam čhulā. p.37.

portray some of the alarming repercussions of the event, including police raids on newspapers, arbitrary arrests and loss of jobs.²¹ Kulāp continued to work for Prachāchāt for four years, and during this period, the paper built up a reputation for reliability at a time when press freedom did not exist. These years coincided also with changes in Kulāp's domestic circumstances. In 1935, he married Chanit Princhānakon, a graduate of the Faculty of Arts at Chulalongkorn University, and herself a writer and translator of some note.²² He also enrolled as a part-time student at the newly-opened Thammasat University, from where he graduated with a degree in Law.

In May 1936 Kulāp went to Japan for a year to study the Japanese newspaper industry.²³ That country provided the setting for his most famous and stylistically most accomplished novel, Khāng lang phāp (Behind the Painting), which appeared the following year, after his return to Thailand. Although impressed by the efficiency and technical development he witnessed there, it was the human side of progress which always interested him much more. Speaking through the hero of Khāng lang phāp, Kulāp remarked,

I think that finding a way for people to use their free time in a harmless way is one of the main factors in making Japan a strong nation ... The government make it possible for the people to buy worthwhile leisure like this (i.e. public parks) at a low cost and with

²¹ 'Sībūrāphā'. 1976. Lāe pai khāng nā : phāk matchimmawai. Bangkok: Chomrom nangsū' udomtham.

²² Chanit translated a number of western classics into Thai, under the pseudonym 'Juliet', including works by Victor Hugo and Jane Austen.

²³ This was probably sponsored by the Japanese government and part of a deliberate programme to foster closer ties with Thailand. see E.T. Flood. 1967. Japan's Relations with Thailand: 1928-41. Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Washington.

every facility provided. Even those on a low income have the chance to find relaxation. When I first came to Japan, I didn't think about it, but now that I've been here several years, I'm very well aware of the benefits. Most Japanese know their country well; they're hard-working and their children aren't lazy or dull because they occupy themselves in their leisure time in a useful way.²⁴

On his return to Thailand, Kulāp relinquished his post at Prachāchāt and returned to free-lance writing. With his editorial freedom increasingly eroded by an owner who had no intention of incurring the wrath of the government, and not wishing to create bad feelings with M.C. Wan, who had sponsored his wedding and given him a plot of land to build a house on, resignation was the only honourable solution.²⁵

Little over a year later, Kulāp was given the backing to launch a new daily paper, which like his first successful venture of a decade earlier, bore the name Suphāpburut. Phibūn had by this time replaced Phahon as prime minister and the government increasingly took on the appearance of a military dictatorship. Suphāpburut was one of a small number of newspapers to adopt a consistently critical stance towards the policies of the Phibūn government. It was in this paper, between May and June 1941 that Kulāp published his serialised history of the 1932 coup, Bū'ang lang kān patiwat (Background to the Revolution), which was based largely on interviews with Phrayā Phahon. The article sparked off a tremendous controversy as the government interpreted it as an indirect attack. They tried to stop it, first

²⁴Sībūraphā'. 1938. Khāng lang phāp. Bangkok: Nāi thēp prīchā pp.103-4.

²⁵Yot. 1973. loc. cit.

by persuasion and subsequently by concerted attack in the media. Several members of the Assembly expressed astonishment and concern at what appeared to be a serious over-reaction by the government which could alienate the people. Phibūn, however, stuck to his position, and after a month-long controversy, finally issued an order forbidding publication of further instalments .²⁶

The relationship between press and government continued to be an uneasy one. The war in Europe had become an excuse for imposing further restrictions on newspapers: greater powers of control were invested in the Police Department, patriotic slogans affirming loyalty to Phibūn became mandatory and stringent financial conditions were imposed, which forced smaller papers out of business or into amalgamation.²⁷ Disenchantment with the government's dictatorial stance and rapprochement with Japan was limited to anonymous leaflets and seldom surfaced in the press; when it did, it was ruthlessly crushed. The first major swoop on journalists took place in June 1942 and Kulāp was among the twelve arrested. He spent more than two years in

²⁶Phibūn wrote a number of personal requests to Kulāp, asking him to withhold his articles. Kulāp politely declined and when the government radio propaganda programme, Bot sonthanā khōng Nāi Man-Nāi Khong broadcast a series of attacks on Kulāp, he responded to their charges in the pages of Suphāpburut. These responses have been reprinted in the introduction to, Kulāp Sāipradit. 1975. Bū'ang lang kām patiwat. Bangkok: Būraphā daēng.

²⁷Suphāpburut was amalgamated with Prachāmit, owned by Sanit Charōenrat, an old friend from Thepsirin days.

prison before eventually being released in the latter half of 1944.²⁸ Later that year he became president of the 'Thai Journalists' Association.

In 1947 Kulāp and his wife went to Australia to study the newspaper industry there.²⁹ Although not formally registered as a student, he also spent time studying Political Science at Melbourne University.³⁰ Apart from Australia's discriminatory immigration laws aimed at keeping the country white, Kulāp's impressions of the country were generally highly favourable.

²⁸Details of this incident are frustratingly meagre. Two journalists were sentenced to life imprisonment (Phōnphirom, op. cit. p.66), but there is no mention of precisely what prompted Kulāp's arrest, the charges against him, nor the sentence. Astonishingly, many of Kulāp's friends and colleagues appear to have been unaware that he was imprisoned for part of World War II (see, for example, Yot. 1973. op. cit. pp. 61-7). For comment on the implications of this to speculations about Kulāp's development as a writer, see Chapter V.

²⁹The trip was apparently financed through a loan from the Asia Bank, which Frīdī helped Kulāp to obtain, partly in recognition of Kulāp's assistance to the war effort. Supnat Sukhonthāphirom. 1985. "Ramlu'k thu'ng Sībūraphā" in Ramlu'k thu'ng Sībūraphā dōi phū'an ruām khuk 2495-2500. Bangkok: Santitham. p.6.

³⁰Some three decades later, Kulāp's tutor, Dr (now Professor) Alan Davies recalled discussing with Kulāp the need to modernise and democratise the Thai political system, and also Kulāp's interest in Marxist writings, which had been proscribed in Thailand between 1933 and 1946. This almost led to Kulāp's deportation, when following a visit to his flat by an Australian security officer who spotted a large pile of Marxist literature, he was reported to the Immigration Department. It was left to Davies and a colleague to write on Kulāp's behalf, explaining that such literature was part of the required reading. (S. Barmé. 1982. The Novels of Kulāp Sāipradit(?). Unpublished undergraduate dissertation, Australian National University.).

On his return to Thailand in February 1949, he published a series of articles under the title, Khāphačhao dai hen mā (I have seen), in which he described a society and government very different from his own, where wealth was evenly distributed, workers earned a fair wage, the people were reasonably well-informed by a reliable media, and where the government implemented policies for the benefit of the people and showed a particular concern for the less fortunate sectors. Here, too, he was able to observe at first hand, ordinary people banding together to help each other, be it to achieve some political goal or for some purely humanitarian purpose.³¹ Australia was living proof that a more just and egalitarian society was possible; it also wakened him to the political potential of workers and the realisation that it was the responsibility of ordinary people to effect change:

... if we want to be regarded as citizens who believe in the sovereign power of the country, then citizenship itself demands that we take some interest in political affairs. So I would like to express here the view that if we people see something bad or wrong in our country, which holds us back or which causes harm and suffering to our fellow countrymen, and we want to eradicate it or find a solution to it so as to bring something good and beautiful into the lives of the people and the country, then we should not just wait for the politicians to fix things for us, or

³¹ 'Sībūraphā'. 1975. Khāphačhao dai hen mā. Bangkok: Fāi wichākān sō.chō.mō. A whole chapter is devoted to strikes, describing the effects of worker solidarity and the co-operation from other unions in extracting fair agreements from employers (pp. 135-146); perhaps closer to Kulāp's heart, however, is the anecdotal chapter describing the essential decency of ordinary Australian people through various incidents, such as search parties sent out to look for lost children, collections made to send a sick child to America for a life-saving operation and sacrifices of a day's wages to help the starving (pp. 55-88).

wait for some miracle or other to come along and help us. If we simply wait, without doing anything to help ourselves, we may have to wait endlessly. We citizens are ordinary people, capable of changing and controlling our destinies, of controlling things as we wish, if we take an interest in our circumstances and those of the country, and show resolution and cooperation. This is what democracy is all about.³²

The immediate post-war years were a turbulent and uncertain phase in Thailand's history. At home, there was a succession of short-lived civilian governments, the King was found dead with a bullet through his head in mysterious circumstances, and coups and coup plots gradually became an integral part of the domestic political scene. On the international front, Thailand, having emerged from World War II on the wrong side, was attempting to rebuild its reputation in the international community. One important part of this process was to gain admittance to the United Nations Organisation, but in order to avoid Russia exercising her power of veto, the 1933 Act Concerning Communism had to be repealed.³³ An immediate effect of this legislation, was the registration of the Communist Party of Thailand - or a part of it³⁴ - and the sudden proliferation of radical publications,

³²ibid., pp.10-11 (from the Foreword to the second edition, 1951).

³³Following the repeal of the Act on 11th October 1946, negotiations on the establishment of a Soviet Legation were initiated. A legation was eventually setup in Bangkok in May 1948.

³⁴Yuangrat (Pattanapongse) Wedel. 1982. Modern Thai Radical Thought: The Siamization of Marxism and its Theoretical Problems. Bangkok: Thai Khadi Research Institute, Thammasat University. p.369. Prasōet Sapsunthōn was the leader of the registered party; the 'real' party remained underground and escaped the purge that followed Phibūn's return to power.

including the CPT weekly, Mahāchon (The Masses) which began to appear in 1947. With Thailand increasingly dependent on America, and America at the time espousing liberal views and championing freedom of speech, Phibūn, who had returned to power through a military coup in 1948, was in no position to clamp down on writers in the way he had been previously. It is no coincidence that the works of 'radical' novelists and critics such as Kulāp himself, Sēnī Saowaphong, Sīrat Sathābanawat, 'Dāo Hāng', Itsarā Amantakun and 'Intharāyut' all appeared within a period of three or four years;³⁵ it was indeed 'a brief golden era for the radical groups that had been silenced and forced underground since 1933.'³⁶

Thus, Kulāp returned to Thailand at a time when there was greater freedom of speech than he had experienced since the last days of the absolute monarchy. Almost immediately he became political editor of Aksōnsān, a new monthly with radical leanings.³⁷ Shortly afterwards, he set up a new publishing company of his own, once again reviving the old Suphāpourut name, and for the next two-and-a-half years he wrote prolifically. His work during this period was varied in form but nearly always focussed on some aspect of social injustice. Besides the short novel, Čhon kwā rao čna phop kan ĩk, a dozen or so short stories and a record of his

³⁵These writers were, like Kulāp, to be rediscovered in the early 1970's by a new generation of student radicals.

³⁶Yuangrat, op. cit., p.87

³⁷Aksōnsān was launched in April 1949 under the editorship of Suphā Sirimānon and included articles on current affairs, literary criticism and social theory as well as fiction among its contents. It closed in November 1952 after both Kulāp and Suphā were arrested.

impressions of Australia, Kulāp also translated and adapted several works from English into Thai. Of these, most notable, perhaps, was a series of articles in Aksōnsān based on the work of Emile Burns, which much later were to be reprinted in part under the title, Pratyā khōng latthi māksit (The Philosophy of Marxism).³⁸ At the time of their first appearance in 1950 they were one of the major sources of information for Thai radicals interested in Marxist thought.³⁹ This period also saw the publication of his translation of J.J. Kenneally's 'The Inner History of the Kelly Gang and their Pursuers', in 1952, Kulāp tellingly changing the title for his translation to Khao thūk bangkhap hai pen khunčhōn (He was Forced into Banditry), and translations of the first part of Maxim Gorky's 'Mother' (Māe) and Chekhov's 'In Exile' (Nai yām thūk nērathēt).⁴⁰

Kulāp, however, was not content to sit back and play the type-writer radical. In Australia he had seen the potential of popular involvement in campaigning for change, and now, in Thailand, with a hitherto unprecedented degree of freedom of speech, was the opportunity to try to do something. He participated frequently in public debates and seminars, many of them at Thammasat University, on such subjects as the role of art in society, the status of

³⁸ Rungwit Suwannaphichon. 1979. Sībūraphā:sī māeng wannakam thai. Bangkok:Phāsikō. pp.140-41. Rungwit mentions the titles of several of the early articles in the series and points out that when the United Front of Chiangmai University Students sponsored the publication of Pratyā khōng latthi māksit in 1974, they printed only six of the later articles, representing just one third of the original series of eighteen articles in Aksōnsān.

³⁹ For accounts of the transmission of Marxist thought to Thai radicals, see Yuangrat, op.cit., and C.J. Reynolds and Lysa Hong. 1983. "Marxism in Thai Historical Studies". In Journal of Asian Studies, XLIII:1 pp.77-104.

⁴⁰ For remarks on the influence of Gorky and Tolstoy on Thai radicals of the period, see Yuangrat, op.cit., pp.280-81

women, censorship of the press and peace. Most significant of all, he became involved in the Thai chapter of the international 'Peace Movement'. The Peace Movement was ostensibly a worldwide organisation set up in the late 1940's to campaign for the preservation of peace and nuclear disarmament, although from its inception, it was viewed in the West as merely a front for communist propaganda. These goals were to be achieved by a massive mobilisation of popular support through the collection on a global scale of signatures to peace petitions. Following the outbreak of the Korean War, the cessation of hostilities in that country became one of the movement's major objectives.⁴¹ In Thailand, internal opposition to the government's decision to send troops to fight in Korea had already surfaced in the press, but it was not until April 1951 that a Thai branch was formed, under the chairmanship of Dr. Charōen Sū'bsāeng, with Kulāp his deputy.⁴² Innocent and idealistic as collecting peace petition signatures at bus stops may appear to the outsider, to the Thai government of the day, it was anything but that.⁴³ It was

⁴¹For further details of the Peace Movement, see F.Claudin. 1975. The Communist Movement: From Comintern to Cominform. Harmondsworth: Peregrine Books. pp. 576-86. On the subject of collecting signatures, the author says that of the 500 million collected from 79 countries, 400 million came from 11 eastern bloc countries.

⁴²For a good account of the Thai Peace Committee and what became known as the 'Peace Coup', see Wiwat Khatithamnit. 1985. "Kabot santiphāp". In Warasān thammāsāt 14:2 pp. 5-58. An editorial strongly opposing Thai involvement in the war taken from the paper Dēlī Mē 5th July 1950, is quoted on p.12.

⁴³Peace activists who spend their spare time collecting signatures are portrayed in the short story, Prakāi mai nai dūangtā khōng khao (see Chapter IV).

not simply that such activity represented a direct criticism of government policy; far more seriously, it was seen by the government as an implementation of communist policy, and the movement itself, a mere front for communists. The evidence seemed overwhelming: the membership included prominent journalists and politicians with known leftist sympathies, while Peking was linking it with the CPT in propaganda broadcasts to Thailand, and also broadcasting criticisms of the government made by a Thai delegation to the Asia and Pacific Congress of the Peace Movement in 1952.⁴⁴

The government's initial response to the Peace Movement was to attack it in the press by emphasising its communist links.

This sometimes merely led to escalation:

Having read the announcement opposing the search for peace, we do not understand who peace belongs to. Who is it, that creates peace, that seeks the quiet and calm which benefits the majority and which all desire? (Peace) is mankind's greatest need ... That being the case, why do we have to make distinctions about whose peace it is? Peace can come from anyone if it is the peace of the majority.⁴⁵

The onset of the Cold war, however, was to gradually change the climate within Thailand and strengthen Phibūn's position. Democratic ideals now came a distant second to staunch anti-communism as the favourite characteristic America sought in her allies. So, after dealing with the more immediate internal threat

⁴⁴Members included Prasōet Sapsunthōn, a former M.P. and nominal leader of the CPT, Khroṅ Chantawong, another ex-M.P., from the North-East, later executed as a communist, Kulāp himself, who had spent a life time criticising Thai governments, and whose wife was apparently now employed by the Soviet Legation (P. Shirk. 1969. "Thai-Soviet Relations". In Asian Survey 9:9 p.690.); for further details of the membership, see Wiwat, op.cit., pp.14-15.

⁴⁵Dēli Mē 18th Nov. 1951. quoted in ibid., p.12

to his position posed by military factions, Phibūn was able to turn his attentions to the smaller fry without jeopardising the American aid on which Thailand was becoming increasingly dependent.⁴⁶ Further constitutional restraints were removed after the Radio Coup of 29th November 1951, and for Kulāp, who was already under surveillance by the Thai Special Branch, and many others who shared his views, it was merely a matter of time before the government found a pretext to silence them.⁴⁷

That pretext came with Kulāp's much publicised trip to the North-Eastern provinces of Surin, Sisaket and Khonkaen, where together with other members of the Peace Committee, writers, journalists and students, he distributed blankets and medical supplies to victims of the recent floods. The Peace Movement itself, had long since exhausted its popular momentum, partly because of official disapproval and partly because it had been unable to make any impression, either on the war in Korea or the Thai government's policy.⁴⁸ Thus, the relief mission to the North-East was part of an attempt to re-activate the public

⁴⁶The unsuccessful coup attempts of 26th Feb. 1949 (Grand Palace Coup) and 29th June 1951 (Manhattan Coup) brought bloody fighting to the streets of Bangkok and resulted in considerable loss of life. Further coup plots or alleged coup plots on 1st Oct. 1948 and 27th Jan. 1950 provided a pretext for removing potentially dangerous rivals. For a fuller discussion of this period, see Thak Chaloeontiarana. 1979. Thailand: The Politics of Despotic Paternalism. Bangkok: Social Science Association of Thailand, Thai Khadi Institute, Thammasat University. pp. 2-78.

⁴⁷Fak na Songkhla. 1985. "Dae Khun Kulap Saipradit". In Ramlu'k thu'ng Siburapha dōi phū'an rūam khuk 2495-2500. Bangkok: Santitham pp. 55-6.

⁴⁸In Thailand, 152,531 signatures to peace petitions were collected. (Wiwat, op.cit., p.23). In the story, Prakāi mai nai dūangtā khōng khao, Kulāp refers to civil servants' fears of losing their jobs if they signed the petition. (see Chapter IV).

conscience, with an appeal launched for donations to be handed in to certain newspaper offices.

Kulāp was arrested on 10th November 1952, the day after he returned to Bangkok. It was part of a major swoop on internal opposition which resulted in more than 100 people being arrested within the space of a few days. The government justified its actions in an announcement reported in the press two days later:

From the investigations of the Police Department, it appears that there is a group of persons who have conspired illegally to arouse hatred between Thais in order to create divisions and self-destruction, by various strategies, such as inciting class divisions along the lines of capitalist and worker classes, encouraging hatred of the country's foreign allies, which may be detrimental to foreign relations, and undermining the discipline of soldiers whom the government has sent to fight in Korea in accordance with its commitment to the United Nations Organisation. Following a period of unrest within the country, they would use force to change the system of government to a different one - and not a democratic one - by bringing in foreigners to help overrun Thailand.⁴⁹

Inevitably, Kulāp's North-East mission was interpreted in some quarters as a deliberate attempt to out-face the government and stir up hostility in a region that had long been politically sensitive for Bangkok based administrations.⁵⁰ Equally inevitable was Kulāp's insistence, some days after his arrest, on the

⁴⁹ Wiwat, op.cit., p.18. For a list of the more prominent people arrested, see ibid., pp.18-19. Phibūn had by this time already begun to clamp down on left-wing critics. The newspaper, Mahāchon had been closed down and the editor arrested on charges of inciting unrest, and the editor of another paper, Santiphāp, suffered a similar fate. In addition, members of the Thai delegation to the Peking-held Congress of the Asia and Pacific Peace Movement, led by Prasōet Sapsunthōn, were arrested on their return to Thailand and charged with illegal exit from the country and passport irregularities.

⁵⁰ e.g. Sayām Rat, 19th Dec. 1952. quoted in ibid., p.21.

integrity of his motives:

Our mission to the starving people in the North-East, which was undertaken before many witnesses, was made openly before both monks and officials of the country, who went along to observe at all times. Even the newspapers reported events in detail. What I have told officials is what has appeared in the papers. My faith in peace and love for my fellow men is pure, and is not a breach of the law in any way whatsoever.⁵¹

In January, over half of those arrested were released, while on February 26th, proceedings were begun against the remaining forty-two. It was not until 15th March 1955 that the court delivered its verdict: all except five were found guilty and most, including Kulāp, were sentenced to twenty years imprisonment, subsequently reduced by one third for their 'helpful' testimony.⁵² An appeal was lodged, but before it came to court, the government introduced an amnesty to commemorate the twenty-fifth centennial of the Buddha's birth. Kulāp was released on 20th February with the first batch of pardoned prisoners, having spent a total of 4 years 3 months and 10 days in prison.⁵³

In prison, Kulāp was far from idle. He was made chairman of the education committee set up among the new prisoners, and with

⁵¹ Sayām nikōn 28th Nov. 1952. quoted in ibid., p.24.

⁵² Chit Wētchapasit. 1985. "Khabot santiphāp". In Ramlu'k thu'ng Sībūraphā dōi'phū'an rūām khuk 2495-2500. Bangkok: Santitham. pp.16-20. The charges included, planning to overthrow the existing government and introduce a new economic and political system, using the Peace Movement to incite hatred among the people for the government for its policy in Korea and accusing it of neglecting the people of the North-East.

⁵³ Articles by Suphat Sukhonthāphirom and Karunā Kusalāsai in Ramlu'k thu'ng ... mention the role of Sang Phatthanōthai, a former 'wāi Man' of Phibūn's radio propaganda dialogues (cf. p.23 note 26), as an intermediary in attempting to secure the release of Kulāp.

two fellow inmates, he gave lectures on politics.⁵⁴ It was in prison, too, that Kulāp wrote the first part of the novel Lāe pai khāng nā (Look Forward), which was conceived as a trilogy, and in which he attempted to provide a panoramic view of Thai history, dating from the last days of the absolute monarchy, through the experiences of a young North-Eastern boy studying and later working in Bangkok.⁵⁵ About a year prior to his release, Kulāp sought permission for political prisoners to be given instruction in meditation and the Dharma.⁵⁶ He was sufficiently knowledgeable in this area to be invited to write for the journal Wipatsanāsān published by Wat Mahāthāt. After his release, the monthly articles that he had written under the pseudonym, 'Ubāsok' were reprinted in a volume entitled Udomtham.⁵⁷

⁵⁴Suphot Dāntrakūn.1985."Khun Kulāp Sāipradit". In Ramlu'k thu'ng Sībūraphā dōi phū'an rūām khuk 2495-2500. Bangkok: Santitham pp.94-5.

⁵⁵The second part of Lāe pai khāng nā was serialised in 1957, but ended prematurely and the third part was almost certainly never written. (see Chapter IV).

Kulāp's novels continued to be printed when he was in prison, although Suphat Sukhonthāphirom (Suphat, op.cit., p.9) mentions Kulāp sending articles to newspapers under a pseudonym to avoid police detection.

⁵⁶This was under a programme set up by the Committee for the Psychological and Moral Training of the People. Several of Kulāp's fellow prisoners thought it was an absurd and irrelevant idea but eventually succumbed to his persuasion. (Suphot, op.cit., p.101)

⁵⁷When Sarit came to power in 1958, copies of Udomtham were seized and the work banned as a communist book masquerading as religion. (ibid. p.106)

Kulāp's interest in Buddhism was nothing new. In 1946 he had travelled to Surat Thani Province to meet Putthathat, one of the country's most respected monks. (for further details, see Rungwit, 1979a. op.cit., pp.79-87). Kulāp's fiction often criticises those who see Buddhism as extending no further than adherence to superficial rituals.

Released from prison, Kulāp once again returned to writing; much of his political journalism during this period appeared in the pages of Sān sēri, Piyamit and Prachāmit under the pseudo-nymn 'Itsarachon', while the second part of Lāe pai khāng nā was serialised in Piyamit.⁵⁸ In October 1957, he was invited to visit Russia to join celebrations to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of the revolution; the Police Department's co-operation in the issue of a new passport at short notice indicates that there was tacit official approval of the trip.⁵⁹ The following September he led a delegation of twelve writers and journalists to the People's Republic of China at the invitation of the Chinese National Cultural Association. While there, he received a further invitation to an Afro-Asian Writers' Conference in Tashkent. On his return to Peking, he learned that Field Marshall Sarit Thanarat had seized power in Thailand in a military coup, and that his fellow delegation members, who had returned earlier, had been arrested at Don Muang airport on charges of communism.⁶⁰ Kulāp therefore decided to remain in China rather than return to inevitable imprisonment. He died there of heart and lung disease on 16th June 1974 after sixteen years in exile. Among tributes sent to a memorial service in

⁵⁸ Many of his articles on politics were reprinted in a single volume entitled, Kān mū'ang khōng prachāchon (Politics of the People) at the end of 1957. It was reprinted under the title, Adīt thī pen botriān (The Past Which is a Lesson) in 1979 (Bangkok: Klum saeng thian).

⁵⁹ Rungwit, 1979a, op.cit., pp.144-5. At the time, Pote Sarasin headed an interim government.

⁶⁰ Thawanwōn Woradilok. 1985. "Āthit dap thī pakking". In Ramlu'k thu'ng Sībūraphā dōi phū'an rūām khuk 2495-2500. Bangkok: Santitham. pp.125-6.

Peking, were wreaths from Chou En-Lai and Pridi Phanomyong.

Details of Kulāp's last sixteen years in China are very vague. Much of his energies appear to have been devoted to writing for the Thai language service of Radio Peking. His broadcasts covered such topics as his impressions of China and interviews with various people.⁶¹ Western sources generally attribute Radio Peking's Thai language attacks on the Thai government to Kulāp.⁶² He continued to take an active interest in literature, participating in a conference for Asian and African writers, held in Peking, lecturing on Thai literature at Peking University, and translating (from an English version) the Chinese novel, 'Revolutionary Family' into Thai, under the title, Māe nak patiwat.⁶³

⁶¹Pan De Ding. Personal communication, dated 3rd November 1986. I would like to take this opportunity to express my thanks to Professor Pan De Ding, Professor of Thai at Peking University for providing information about Kulāp's years in Peking.

⁶²e.g. D.D. Lovelace. 1971. China and 'People's War' in Thailand, 1964-1969. University of California, Berkeley: Center for Chinese Studies. also, D. Weatherbee. 1970. The United Front in Thailand. University of South Carolina, Columbia.

⁶³Pan De Ding, op.cit.

CHAPTER II
THE EARLY NOVELS

When Kulāp left school with the ambition of becoming a writer, prose fiction in Thailand was still in its infancy, dating back little more than two decades to the turn of the century.¹ The novel itself, had first been popularised through translations of works of well-known contemporary western writers by Thais who had received a western education.² An increasingly better-educated middle class meanwhile stimulated the demand for reading material, and as the number of magazines expanded to satisfy an ever-widening audience, so, too, did the opportunities for the aspiring writer to publish his work.

By the mid 1920's the reading public's tastes were undergoing a significant change, as one prominent writer and perceptive observer of the literary scene was to note:

This is a time in which the world is changing, and the ideas and tastes of people are consequently changing as the world revolves. Seven or eight years ago, you will probably recall, we used to like reading western novels that had been translated into Thai. Real Thai novels

¹For accounts of the early Thai novel, see, Suphannī Warathōn. 1976. Prawat kām praphan nawaniyāi thai. Bangkok: Mūnṅitthi khroṅkān tamrā sangkhomsāt lae manutsayasāt.; Wibha Senanan. 1975. The Genesis of the Novel in Thailand. Bangkok: Thai Watana Panich.; Kwandee, op. cit., pp. 8-74.

²Among the most popular writers translated into Thai during the first two decades of the century, were Marie Correlli, Charles Garvice, Sir James Barrie, Arnold Bennett, Edward Benson, Guy Boothby, Conan Doyle, Alexander Dumas, Emile Gaboriau, Anthony Hope, William Jacob, Hall Caine, A.W. Marchmont and H.G. Wells.

Correlli and Garvice were particularly popular, each having several works translated. (for details, see, Suphannī, op. cit., pp. 85-6.

were hardly written, even to the extent that some people wrote Thai novels using western heroes and heroines in order to appeal to readers. But nowadays it is the exact opposite; now we prefer Thai stories to western stories. This being the case, various monthlies nowadays are making an about-turn so as to please their readers; that is, they are searching like mad for Thai stories to publish³... But finding real Thai stories is not so easy ...

Indeed, such was the demand for Thai stories, that many magazines not only openly solicited contributions from their readers, but actually depended upon them for survival.⁴ While talent and determination were undoubtedly major factors in his success, it was against this background of a fundamental change in public taste that Kulāp rose to prominence in 1928, after a five year apprenticeship that had included its fair share of frustration, failure and financial insecurity. That he was able to produce five novels and several short stories within little more than twelve months, effectively secured his reputation as a writer, both in the public's mind and among fellow writers.

Romantic fiction probably accounted for 90% of all Thai novels written during the early decades. Particularly popular was the rak sōk - the sad, romantic - story, described by one Thai critic thus :

The main aim of this kind of novel is to arouse the emotions. The hero of the story encounters various serious obstacles. The ones that always recur are to do with

³Lūang Sārānupraphan (Nūan Pāchinphayak), quoted in Suphanni, op. cit., p.179. He was one of the generation of Thai novelists who preceded Kulāp. His two most popular novels were Phrāē dam and Nā phī. Later he became editor of the magazine Sēnā su'ksā lae phāe wittayāsāt for which Kulāp worked early in his career.

⁴e.g. Thawī panyā and Thai khasēm; the editors' respective appeals for contributions are quoted in ibid., p.62,74.

status, way of life, and love. It might be love between a young boy and girl, or it might be a love triangle between two girls and one boy or vice-versa. Characteristic forms of behaviour which always recur in rak sōk novels,⁵ are snobbery, deception, treachery and self-sacrifice.

It was a formula which suited Kulāp and his own experiences of snobbery lent his works an added realism. But like most novelists of the day, he regarded his first and foremost duty to be the provision of a well-constructed plot, with characterisation having to take second place. That he, and other writers, often had to fall back on highly improbable coincidences in order to tie up all the loose ends necessary for a satisfactory resolution, appears to have been accepted by readers as a convention of the genre and not something which damaged the credibility of the work.

All of Kulāp's early novels use a variation of the hero-villain-heroine triangle; villainy is essentially a sexual transgression and the plot is built around the villain's attempt to lure away a girl to whom the hero has already laid claim. A vital ingredient to the plot is a serious misunderstanding between the hero and heroine, often leading them to marry, or nearly marry, the wrong person. The reader is let in on the cause of the misunderstanding from the outset, and watches from above, the actors' struggles to make sense of events around them and the author's ingenuity in manipulating the situation to produce the right ending.

Action in Kulāp's novels is minimal and frequently occurs off-stage; most of the pages in each novel are taken up with

⁵ibid., pp.248-9.

characters talking about their thoughts and feelings. Despite Kulāp's interest in the inner lives of his characters, they still invariably lacked psychological complexity. Heroes are upright, hard-working, strong-silent types, with a strong physical presence, while villains are typically extravagant, smooth-talking womanizers; neither show any change or development in the course of the novels. Heroines, unlike male characters, do undergo a small change, usually as they become disillusioned with the villain and more enamoured with the hero; as a result, they often seem passive onlookers, strangely amoral, as they wait to be impressed by the claims of rival suitors.

One of Kulāp's first and most popular novels was Lūk phūchāi (A Real Man), which is sometimes cited as the first Thai novel proper.⁶ Essentially, it plots the romantic vicissitudes that befall the hero, Mānōt, as he rises from childhood poverty to achieve a position of eminence in society and, eventually, the promise of matrimonial happiness.

⁶This claim appears to originate from an over-simplification of Wibha (op.cit., pp.82-111) who merely takes 1928-29 as a convenient starting point on the grounds that this was the time when the first works of three famous novelists, Kulāp, M.C.Ākāt-damkōeng Rāphīphat and Dōkmaisot, appeared. Suphannī accords Lūk phūchāi no particular historical significance nor any particular prominence in her study.

In fact, there is no published evidence to prove that Lūk phūchāi was even the first of Kulāp's 1928 novels. The novel's importance seems to be twofold: firstly, it was undoubtedly highly popular and did much to establish Kulāp's reputation; secondly, unlike many other novels of the day, it was issued in a single volume without prior serialisation, and by the author's own publishing company.

Lūk phūchāi : a summary

At school, Mānōt is victimised by other children, especially Khīrī, because of his humble background. He is befriended by two girls in his class, beautiful Ramphan, from a wealthy family, and plain-looking Lamīat, from a background similar to his own, who both offer their support when Mānōt is unjustly punished for fighting with Khīrī. The four children move on to different secondary schools, but Mānōt once again becomes a victim of Khīrī when the latter trips him in a race during an inter-schools sports meeting. On completing secondary education, both Mānōt and Khīrī enter law school, where Mānōt is befriended by Thamṅng, whose wealthy family make Mānōt welcome at their home and help to find him a much needed job to support his studies. Khīrī continues to be antagonistic towards Mānōt, but Mānōt does well in his studies, passing Part I of his exams, while both Khīrī and Thamṅng fail.

In the course of Mānōt's visits to Thamṅng's house, Āphā, Thamṅng's sister, becomes attracted to him. Lamīat meanwhile sends Mānōt a letter congratulating him on his success, and when Mānōt goes to visit her, he discovers that she has by now blossomed into a most attractive young woman. Shortly afterwards, Mānōt accompanies Thamṅng's family on holiday to Hua Hin, and there, by chance, encounters Ramphan. During the next few days their friendship is quickly renewed, to the point that Mānōt inadvertently lets slip to Ramphan the true depth of his feelings for her. But when he invites her round to meet Thamṅng

and Āphā, things misfire badly: Ramphan takes an instant dislike to Āphā, and is hurt and jealous that Mānōt should pay so much attention to her. Mānōt unwittingly makes a further miscalculation when he writes to Lamīat from Hua Hin, referring to Ramphan in glowing terms, which merely reduces Lamīat to tears.

After returning to Bangkok, Mānōt finds that to his dismay and bewilderment, Ramphan now treats him with icy reserve. Thamṅōng then comes and confides in him that he loves Ramphan, and unaware of Mānōt's own romantic interest, begs Mānōt to sound out Ramphan's feelings on his behalf. Faced with this dilemma, Mānōt decides to sacrifice his own interest out of loyalty and gratitude to his friend. Ramphan is stunned that Mānōt, who had first told her he loved her, then, a few days later, had apparently been flirting with Āphā before her very eyes, should now come with the news that Thamṅōng wanted to marry her. Eventually she agrees, but out of a sense of duty to her mother rather than because she has any feelings for Thamṅōng.

Three months after the wedding, Thamṅōng offers to return the favour by sounding out his sister, Āphā on Mānōt's behalf. Mānōt, however, neither loves Āphā, nor wishes to marry her; but placed in an awkward position, and not wanting to cause offence, he once more sacrifices his own wishes and allows himself to become reluctantly entangled. The arrival of a letter from Lamīat merely deepens his gloom as he realises she really loves him. All of Āphā's attempts to make Mānōt happy flounder as he buries himself, night after night, in his studies, hoping to win

a scholarship abroad that will offer lengthy respite from the unhappy match. She begins to despair of ever gaining his love and affection.

Mānōt wins the scholarship, and on the quayside, just before the ship sails, he confides in Thamṅng that Āphā is two months pregnant. Lamīat has also come to see him off, and in a brief moment alone, he assures her of his lasting affection for her, although both know nothing can ever come of it. At the last moment, Khīrī appears, predicting that the next seven years will bring considerable change to Mānōt's life.

With Mānōt out of the way, Khīrī becomes a frequent visitor to Āphā's house. He schemes his way into her affections and leads her to suspect that Mānōt had only married her for her money, and that he really loved, and had slept with, Lamīat. Āphā's confidence in her scholarly husband does not need much undermining, and within weeks, she is giving herself, body and soul, to Khīrī. When they elope together, it is left to Thamṅng to break the news to his best friend, but fearing the disastrous consequences this might have on Mānōt's studies, he decides instead, to answer all Mānōt's letters to Āphā himself, and sign them with his sister's name as if nothing had happened.

After seven years, Mānōt returns to Thailand, a doctor-of-law. He accepts the news of Āphā's desertion with stoicism, but he is concerned for his child, of whom there is no news; and he thanks Thamṅng for trying to spare his feelings. Mānōt becomes a

frequent visitor at the home of Thamṅng and Ramphan, and a favourite of their daughter, Ramphai, who bears a striking resemblance to her mother. One day, while baby-sitting, he discovers Ramphan's old diary hidden between the pages of a book and there learns for the first time of her true feelings for him. At that moment Ramphan returns, and in an emotional scene, she too learns that Mānōt had loved her all the time.

There is a gap of a further eight years. Khīrī and Āphā have settled in Khorat where Khīrī has turned to crime to finance his gambling and extravagant lifestyle. After a violent robbery, Khīrī is arrested, together with his son, Khamron, who is also a member of the gang. Khīrī is sentenced to twenty years in prison and his son to four years borstal training; passing sentence is Thamṅng, by now a provincial judge. Mānōt, meanwhile, has risen to be head of the Appeal Court, and has been granted the title, Phra Wisut. Āphā pays him a private visit to plead for the release of their son. Mānōt agonizes for several days before deciding that he must uphold the law, no matter what the personal cost. Āphā then reveals that Khamron is not in fact Mānōt's son, as she had led him to believe, but Khīrī's, and that the child she was carrying at the time of Mānōt's departure overseas, was a girl, Rakam. Rakam subsequently comes to live with Mānōt, while Āphā turns to religion for solace. Thamṅng and Ramphan return to Bangkok with their daughter, who is by now a stunningly beautiful young girl. Romance blossoms between Mānōt and Ramphai and the

novel ends with the news of their wedding and forthcoming honeymoon.

Wibha is the only critic to have written at length on Lūk phūchāi and since the publication of her thesis, her views have been repeated and rephrased a sufficient number of times to have become the orthodox interpretation of the novel.⁷ Wibha makes two main points about the novel; firstly, she sees in it a glorification of the idea of the self-made man:

It is quite clear that 'Sī Būraphā', having felt dissatisfied with the social atmosphere in which he was living, proposed, not a new kind of society, but a new kind of hero, an altruistic self-made man. The formal structure of the society itself, as the author took it, whether he meant it or not, rendered promises to a man of integrity to become successful, respected and happy, regardless of his former economic or family background. In order to climb the social hierarchy, 'Sī Būraphā' proposed education to be taken as a supporter, and government offices as the ladder for such a man.

and secondly, whether the author intended it or not, an articulation of the 'Siamese Dream' of the day:

Because the novel was warmly welcomed, it meant that somehow the author's dream was shared by the reading public. It can be said then that, at any rate, Lūk phūchāi represented the dream of modern Thai youth. To ordinary people living their youth in the 1920's, the story of Mānōt's life, problems and success looked real, plausible and promising.

Such an interpretation derives from Wibha's fundamental assumption that Kulāp wrote with a more serious purpose than

⁷ ibid., pp.83-91.

⁸ ibid., p.86.

⁹ ibid., p.88.

merely to entertain:

As its title implies the quality of being a gentleman and the story illustrates the qualifications of such a kind of man, one can see that the author was more serious in his imaginative writing than most of his contemporaries whose work normally evolved around the theme of melodramatic love, mystery, or detection.¹⁰

This is open to question;¹¹ Lūk phūchāi is in fact built entirely around the theme of melodramatic love, although Wibha does not acknowledge this as a principal ingredient of the story:

Lūk phūchāi tells a story of a self-made man, who, through modern education he received both in Thailand and from abroad, got a good job and became successful in life. His high social status, one can see in the novel, is the result of his working hard and his being virtuous.¹²

Indeed, years later, writing in the foreword to a reprint of the novel, Kulāp himself was to say that at the time, he wrote purely because he wanted to:

I wrote Lūk phūchāi two or three years after I had left school. At the time I hardly knew anything apart from what was in the school curriculum that I had followed. I had an extremely limited knowledge of the world; when I wrote the book, the only kind of life I could say I really knew, was that of a schoolboy, and any other kind of life was just a blur as far as I was concerned. Consequently, I had never considered reprinting this

¹⁰ ibid., p.83

¹¹ That is not to say that Kulāp did not regard the novelist's vocation as a serious one; indeed all the evidence suggests that he took his role as a writer very seriously. But at the time he almost certainly viewed the novelist's prime responsibility as being to entertain readers, albeit within a moral framework.

¹² ibid., p.83. Since most novels were romantic stories anyway, it may have seemed unnecessary to remark upon. For the English-speaking audience, however, (to whom the work is presumably addressed) who are probably familiar with neither Lūk phūchāi nor other novels of the period, it is a significant omission which can create an entirely misleading and erroneous impression of the novel.

book after it first appeared in 1928. At that time I knew nothing of the literary principles of any school, nor that there even existed different schools of thought. As far as I can remember, I had no idea what those principles were. What drove me to write at the time when I was still learning, was simply the desire to do so. Perhaps it was that I was able to deduce the principles from observation or by reading any old books that I was able to get my hands on at the time. It must have been the same for many other young writers who began writing novels 25-30 years ago.¹³

The description of Mānōt as a 'self-made' man, is similarly open to debate, for as Barmé points out, it is through the intervention of Phrayā Manūn, Thamnōng's father, that Mānōt is able to find work when he leaves school.¹⁴ From that point onwards, Mānōt enjoys the permanent patronage of Phrayā Manūn's family, celebrating his exam success with them, accompanying them on holiday, marrying the daughter, accepting a house from his new father-in-law, and finally, after the disastrous first marriage, marrying Phrayā Manūn's grand-daughter. Of course, Mānōt probably does work hard, too, but his path to the top is via the traditional route of patronage. If Kulāp had really been trying to say that education could pave the way for mere carpenters' sons to rise to the top, it seems more likely that he would have dwelt more on Mānōt's own efforts in his work and studies, and eliminated any helping hand, especially from one already occupying a higher position in society.

Lūk phūchāi certainly has its flaws as a novel, but some of those cited by Wibha derive from some initial rather debatable

¹³'Sībūraphā'. 1954. Lūk phūchāi. Bangkok:Phrāē phitthayā. pp. khṅ-ngṅ. This extract is from the foreword to a 1944 reprint of the novel, which was included in the 1954 Phrāē phitthayā edition.

¹⁴Barmé, op.cit., pp. 20-21

assumptions, and disappear if the novel is treated as a straight-forward piece of romantic fiction, written with little more serious purpose than to entertain readers. Thus, to take one example, Wibha seems puzzled when the very parts of the novel which according to her interpretation could reasonably be expected to be afforded some prominence, are in fact, almost a complete void:

But, while the achievement of Phra Wisut reflected the dream and ambition of young men in the 1920's, the most vital part of his experiences were rather superficial. One sees only a vague picture of what he had been doing, and how he reached the top so successfully. Somehow he was out of the scene for some fifteen years during the transitional period. That is, no one knows of his experiences as a student of Law in France during the period of seven years, nor does one know of what he had been doing in the eight year interval between his return and the day when he became a judge who was to make the final verdict for Khiri's case.¹⁵

The time leap of fifteen years, broken in the middle only by two chapters, in which Mānōt returns from Europe and adapts to his new circumstances, may indeed be a structural weakness, but the author's thinking behind it was perfectly logical: quite simply, events within that period were irrelevant to the solution of the plot and the conclusion of the novel. The author was not interested in whether Mānōt was studying into the early hours of every morning while in Europe, nor how he made it to the top when he got back home: all he was interested in, was how Mānōt would get his girl - and which one!¹⁶

¹⁵Wibha, op.cit., p. 88.

¹⁶Mānōt is the archetypal man who succeeds in everything but love. Thus, it is only his romantic involvements that can hold the reader's attention. The novel can only end happily when he is on the point of achieving success in this last elusive field.

Wibha similarly misses the point when she observes that Lamīat was created 'simply as a spare part in case the author needed another female character to change the tune of the plot' and that she 'contributes very little to it.'¹⁷ Although her role is small, it is essential to the romantic intrigue. She is the poor-plain-girl-next-door, whose strengths are her loyalty and sense of service; as such, she is deliberately contrasted with rich-but-homely Ramphan and rich-and-flighty Āphā. For almost half of the novel, the author successfully strings the reader along, making each in turn appear the most likely spouse for Mānōt in the future.

With the re-appearance of Kulāp's later more radical fiction in the early 1970's and a growing awareness of his political beliefs, it is not surprising that some writers should look back at his early work for signs of the emerging social critic.¹⁸ Wibha draws attention quite correctly to several instances where the author's views on social inequality are expressed in no uncertain terms. At one point, Kulāp describes how Mānōt's humble background isolates him from other children at school because,

those children were always told by their parents not to lower themselves by mixing with the children of the poor¹⁹ for fear that the poor children would lead them astray.

¹⁷Wibha, loc. cit. Wibha's comments suggest she believed the author had not got a very clear idea of the plot in his mind before he put pen to paper. While such suspicions are justifiable about some of Kulāp's fiction, Lūk phūchāi, for all its complexity, is very carefully constructed.

¹⁸What is surprising, perhaps, is how few they are!

¹⁹'Sībūraphā'. 1967. Lūk phūchāi. Bangkok:Phadung su'ksā. p.8. Also quoted in Wibha, op.cit., p.87.

while elsewhere, he describes with some bitterness, the likes of Khīrī:

The older he grew and the more he came to know the world, the more knowledgeable Khīrī became. Thus, for example, he saw that behaving in a superior manner, adopting an attitude of pride and self-importance, and looking down on and being nasty to children of the lower classes, were all qualities which the children of the gentry should adopt.²⁰

Wibha is not content to leave it at that, however, and sees a preoccupation with class conflict on the part of the author, permeating the whole novel. Commenting on the fact that the villain is from the upper échelons of society, she observes,

With or without the author's intention, Khīrī was created, to a great extent,²¹ to symbolize the general wickedness of the nobility.

ignoring the fact that ninety per cent of the characters in Kulāp's novels (and those of other writers of the period), be they heroes, heroines or villains, are from similar backgrounds. Ramphan, the wealthy heroine, 'is to be regarded as exceptional among people of her milieu';²² and the awkward fact that Thamng

²⁰ ibid., p.32 . Also quoted in Wibha, op.cit., p.87. A further example in which the arrogance and condescension of the rich and powerful is strikingly illustrated, occurs when Khīrī's father, a high-ranking official in the Ministry of Education goes round to Mānōt's house and demands an explanation for his son's injuries:

'If you didn't hit Khīrī, why is it his eyebrow is cut then? ... You're a proper little bit of low-class trash, going about causing mayhem and telling lies.'

When he heard the words, 'low-class trash', Nāi Ōeb (Mānōt's father) felt a sudden piercing sensation in his heart ... Even though it was true that Nāi Ōeb's position was only that of an ordinary carpenter who could just about scrape together a living, Nāi Ōeb himself knew perfectly well what honour was. (ibid., pp27-9)

²¹ Wibha, op.cit., p.86

²² ibid., p.87. This is in fact how Thamng describes Ramphan to Mānōt, contrasting her traditional demeanour with that of more modern girls.

is not only rich, but also good,²³ is conveniently ignored, Wibha seemingly suggesting that his main function in the novel is to highlight the relative merits of the rich and poor, with him placing a distant second to Mānōt each time:

From the portrayal of the main characters, one can see quite clearly that 'Sī Būraphā' had an idealistic outlook towards common people, but an envious feeling in relation to the nobility. To satisfy his latent envy, he could have shown that, everything else being equal, a son of a carpenter and a son of a rich nobleman might climb up the same ladder and reach the top just as well. But, 'Sī Būraphā', perhaps being too wrapped up in his aspiration, made the son of a carpenter stand one step higher than the latter in the government office. Thamṇōng was created obviously to serve this purpose. Mānōt passed the first examination in the Law School, went abroad on a government scholarship, and later was promoted to the rank of 'phra', whereas Thamṇōng failed in the first round, never went abroad for higher education, and when the story ended he held only the rank of 'luāng'.²⁴

While there can be no dispute about the facts of the novel, to then interpret the portrayal of Thamṇōng and Mānōt as a miniature political fantasy of the author's represents a massive distortion of the text. In the first place, there is not a shred of evidence to suggest that Kulāp was envious of the nobility.²⁵ Thamṇōng, furthermore, is totally lacking in the alleged 'general wickedness of the nobility', while from a purely practical point

²³At law school, Thamṇōng becomes involved in a fight to protect Mānōt's honour after Khīrī and his friends have been making derogatory remarks about Mānōt. When Mānōt passes his exams, Thamṇōng shows neither envy nor resentment, and throughout the novel, although sometimes misguided, he does all in his power to help Mānōt.

²⁴Wibha, loc. cit.

²⁵'Envious' and 'latent envy' are unfortunate choices of word which might be seen as an attempt to discredit Kulāp and draw attention away from the serious points he was making. It must be remembered that Kulāp was personally very successful in his career. His outrage at injustice in Thai society never led him to believe that to be rich was to be bad.

of view, the author could hardly allow his supporting character to match, let alone overshadow his hero.

Despite its popular reception, Lūk phūchāī really suffered from too ambitious a time scale. Since it covers a span of thirty years in the space of twenty-six chapters, detail is necessarily selective and inevitably unsatisfactory for some readers.²⁶ Not surprisingly, the most successful part of the novel are the middle chapters, where, within a matter of weeks, Mānōt becomes captivated by Lamīat, Āphā and Ramphan in turn.

Such a huge time-scale also meant that characterisation suffered and there was little scope for psychological development; since Mānōt, Thamnōng, Ramphan and Lamīat are good from the outset, and Khīrī is bad, we are expected to assume that their behaviour will always be that way.²⁷ In Khīrī's case, this is unsatisfactory. Clearly intended to be a dramatically villainous character, a kind of Iago-like malcontent, motivated by all that is base in human nature, he remains about as menacing as a small-time school bully. With Khīrī making no appearance between Chapters five and eighteen, the author has to launch a conscious campaign to remind the reader of his malevolence, with several references to a supposed romantic rivalry with Mānōt for the hand of Ramphan, although this is allowed to fizzle out before it can cause any

²⁶ We might, like Wibha, be side-tracked into wondering how Mānōt fared in Europe; or whether Lamīat ever got married, or how Ramphan and Thamnōng weathered the inauspicious start to married life.

²⁷ Āphā is the only character of any ambiguity. See following page.

further plot complications. When he finally reappears, sowing seeds of doubt in Āphā's ears and then seducing her, he is still not as menacing as the author intended, because Āphā is a willing party, Mānōt does not care two hoots for Āphā, and Khīrī himself, although supposedly acting purely out of revenge²⁸ (for Mānōt being more successful than him), nevertheless, it seems, really does love her.²⁹

Āphā, too, represents a problem. Apart from supplying romantic interest, she is clearly intended to represent the modern Thai girl, in contrast to the traditional Ramphan, the latter recording in an anguished diary entry,

The power of love has drawn me to you (i.e. Mānōt) like this. But you don't feel a thing for me, only for Miss Āphā, that modern girl with the flirting eyes. Does the world no longer need quiet, modest girls like me?³⁰

Although Āphā is disparaged at one point for her gaudy attire,³¹ she does little, prior to succumbing to Khīrī's charms, to arouse the reader's antipathy,³² and makes every effort, albeit to no avail, to make her husband happy. But the reader is not supposed to be swayed to sympathy for her, just because of her husband's total indifference to her feelings. Indeed, quite the opposite, for after her elopement with Khīrī, the author reveals

²⁸ Sībūraphā', 1967a. op.cit., p.298

²⁹ ibid., p.299

³⁰ ibid., p.224

³¹ ibid., p.102

³² We have no reason for suspecting that Āphā was actually flirting with Mānōt. All we are told is that Mānōt pays her all his attention; Ramphan's subsequent diary entry is consistent with her feeling jealous and slighted.

with almost grotesque satisfaction that Āphā's misdeeds have exacted their physical toll:

Fifteen years ago she was a fresh rose ... now, even though it was true she still retained traces of physical vigour, the damage to her honour and reputation mocked her beauty every single minute.³³

But that is not enough, for Mānōt proceeds to rub salt into the wounds with appalling self-righteousness and a total lack of awareness of any responsibility he may have had for the way things turned out:

'These last fifteen years have changed you a lot.'
 'Yes, I'm old now. I'm getting on for thirty-four.'
 'Thirty-four,' Phra Wisut repeated. 'You look like someone of forty. That's karma for you.'
 'Yes, karma,' Āphā murmured, like one in a daze. 'I did something very shocking and very awful. Although earth hasn't punished me, nature has, very severely.'
 'Uncanny,' he said, glancing sideways at her, as if he thought it served her right. 'You, too, realise then, that you did something very wrong.'³⁴

Without any doubt at all, the reader is supposed to sympathise with Mānōt for the great hurt he has suffered, and the dignity with which he has borne it. Perhaps, too, we are supposed to admire his forbearance in his treatment of Āphā; at least he does not murder her, as another of Kulap's heroes does, when spurned by the woman he loves!³⁵

Despite his relative inexperience and the confines of the genre, Kulāp showed considerable inventiveness and ingenuity

³³ 'Sībūraphā', 1967a. *op.cit.*, pp. 340-1.

³⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 361-2.

³⁵ Prayūn in Mān Manut; see this chapter.

in the novels that appeared at much the same time as Lūk phūchāi. With the exception of one, a romantic comedy, all were serious romantic stories that set out to engage the emotions of the readers. Of these, the shortest, and perhaps least successful, was Hūa čhai prātthanā (The Heart's Desire) in which a misunderstanding between the hero and heroine, almost leads to the heroine marrying the villain.

Hūa čhai prātthanā : a summary

Wārī, a 19 year-old from a wealthy family is on holiday in Sri Racha with her aunt and 23 year-old Thanong, a distant relative, who has been living at Wārī's house since he was 16. Wārī and Thanong are joined on a boat trip out to Koh Sri Chang by the maid, Nōi, and a local girl, Lamōm, with whom Wārī has become friendly. On the return journey, a storm damages the tiller and Thanong courageously dives into the shark-infested waters to repair it. The next day Wārī learns that Lamōm is married, but after being deserted by her husband, she has come to the quiet coastal town in search of peace and seclusion.

On the journey back to Bangkok at the end of the holiday, Wārī's car gets a puncture. A passing vehicle is flagged down and when the driver catches sight of the beautiful Wārī, he is only too eager to offer the party a lift. However, he mistakes Thanong for a servant and says he will come back later and pick him up with the baggage; when informed by Wārī of Thanong's true identity, he addresses his apologies to Wārī, rather than Thanong, thereby compounding the snub.

The 'good samaritan' turns out to be Withūnphan, a wealthy young man with good connections and a prestigious position. He soon becomes a regular visitor at Wārī's house, where his impeccable manners are admired by all, except Thanong and Nāi Qn, the driver. Wārī accuses Thanong of being churlish because he was mistaken for a servant; he counters that she only finds Withūnphan attractive because he flatters her and praises her literary efforts, regardless of their quality. It transpires that, unknown to either Thanong or Wārī and her family, Withūnphan has a reputation as a womanizer.

One day, Thanong is supposed to accompany Wārī to the theatre with Withūnphan, but to Wārī's annoyance, he excuses himself. When she returns late that night, she notices a light on in Thanong's study, and inside, a female figure whom she recognises as her maid, Nōi. Suddenly the two silhouetted figures appear to embrace, a sight which shocks and upsets Wārī.

Unknown to Wārī, however, Nōi's presence in Thanong's room has a perfectly innocent explanation: while taking him some food, she spots a poisonous centipede in the room and grabs hold of Thanong in terror. After he kills the creature, she leaves, although being secretly fond of him, not until she has lingered for a while. But to Wārī, the scene has appeared very different, and after a night of fitful sleep, she questions Nōi about what was going on in Thanong's room the previous night. Not satisfied by Nōi's frank and truthful answer, she asks Nōi if she loves Thanong. Nōi reluctantly admits she does which upsets Wārī even more, for she

too, loves him, but being a woman, dares not declare her true feelings.

Now hurt because she feels that Thanong does not love her, Wārī begins to see more and more of Withūnphan. She hopes that this will somehow sting Thanong into action, as well as offering her some consolation on the side. But the plan misfires; Thanong thinks that she really is going to marry Withūnphan so puts up no fight, while Wārī discovers that she does not really love Withūnphan as much as she loves Thanong. Thanong, for his part, is also very fond of Wārī, but keeps his feelings to himself because he comes from a more humble background than Wārī, and feels he has no chance when competing against Withūnphan's wealth and status. The rift between the two widens, and Thanong suffers a serious breakdown in his health. Critically ill, he is confined to bed, where Nōi and Nāi Ūn devotedly nurse him. Wārī does not appear at his bedside for two days, and when she does finally pay him a visit, Thanong's effusive praise for the care that Nōi has lavished on him, is like another dagger being driven into her heart.

Thanong recovers in due course, but by now, Wārī is preparing for her wedding to Withūnphan. She writes to tell her friend Lamōm of the news. Thanong cannot bear to be around the house at this time and decides to leave. He goes to bid farewell to Nōi and Nāi Ūn; Nōi is desperately upset when she learns that he intends to go away, perhaps for ever, and from her reaction, he realizes that she loves him. In an emotional farewell, he tells

her that his heart is not free to love her, other than purely as a friend.

The next day a servant reports that Nōi has gone missing. When it is discovered that Thanong has also disappeared, everyone jumps to the conclusion that they have run away together. The news does little to raise Wārī's spirits. Then a letter arrives from Lamōm with astonishing news and a photograph of Withūnphan standing beside Lamōm and a six month-old child. When Withūnphan arrives to see Wārī, whom he is due to marry in three days time, she confronts him with the evidence of his earlier marriage. He is forced to admit his deceit after failing to bluff his way out, but then begs Wārī to agree to go ahead with the marriage, claiming that he is now a reformed character. Her decision to break things off is, however, irrevocable.

The following day Nāi Qn runs up to Wārī with a letter from Thanong which he had forgotten to give her. In it, Thanong reveals at great length the strength and depth of his feelings for her. Together with Nāi Qn, Wārī dashes off to the friend's house where they suspect Thanong may be staying, and from there, to the station, where he is on the point of leaving for the North. Wārī sees him on the train just as it pulls out of the station; but as the last carriage draws out, they see Thanong at the end of the platform, walking back towards them.

Fifteen days later, Thanong and Wārī are sitting together chatting nappily and going over the events that have occurred. They wonder what has become of Nōi, but with their own wedding

only two days away, their thoughts do not linger on her fate. A month after their wedding, Nāi Q̄n brings news that Nōi has become a nun and now stays at a temple in Thonburi. In fact he himself had grown fond of Nōi, but it was too late, for she had a heart only for Thanong. Thanong and Wārī go to the temple to offer alms to Nōi; they feel upset when they see her, but she puts on a bright smile when she realises that they have grasped her predicament. As they leave the temple, Thanong comments on the purity of Nōi's love.

Although Hūa čhai prātthanā is only a third of the length of Lūk phūčhai, its plot, while much less complex, operates on much the same principle, with misunderstanding and unlikely coincidence essential ingredients and characterisation lacking in complexity and of secondary importance. Despite a couple of cleverly executed scenes, perhaps inspired by imported films of the day,³⁶ the author's touch is frequently heavy-handed. Thus the reader learns far too quickly of Withūnphan's reputation with women,³⁷ while speculation that Nōi and Thanong have eloped never excites the reader, because Thanong has already said he cannot love her. To make matters worse, the author attempts to pump more emotion into the story, firstly by allowing Thanong to almost succumb to a fever brought on by unrequited love, and

³⁶ e.g. Wārī's view of the silhouetted figures of Thanong and Nōi, apparently locked in embrace, and Thanong's appearance at the end of the platform as the train draws away from the station.

³⁷ Other villains in Kulāp's early novels are no less transparent; in Hūa čhai prātthanā, however, there are not the plot complexities to compensate for, or justify such early exposure.

secondly, by chiming in from time to time with comments like,

O all ye gods of heaven and earth, how much further³⁸
are you going to keep torturing these young lovers?

The main weakness of Hūa čhai prātthana is that its appeal to readers' emotions is too flimsy. The reader is expected to feel sorry for Thanong, not because of any dire economic hardship he faces, but because of his own inhibitions about his background. But while this is an understandable emotion, it is not explored in the least, and becomes merely a convenient means of engineering the necessary misunderstanding. Poverty itself, becomes a much more real and central element in the novel, Lōk sanniwāt (Life's Destiny) which deals with the hardships, economic and romantic, that befall two orphaned sisters.

Lōk sanniwāt : a summary

Thanat calls on his girlfriend, Samōn, to tell her that he intends to stop seeing her. This is not because he has found someone else, but rather because of poverty, which, he says, will ultimately destroy their love. He plans to go away and seek his fortune and then return when he is wealthy. Just then, the landlady arrives demanding the rent. Samōn has already asked for a postponement the previous month, and her excuse this month, that the owner of the school where she teaches has not yet paid her, is met with scornful disbelief by the Chinese landlady, Hūi, who launches into an angry tirade about the unreliability of Thai tenants compared with Chinese.

³⁸'Sībūraphā'. 1968a. Hūa čhai prātthana. Bangkok:Phadung su'ksā. p. 87

After swearing eternal love for Samōn, Thanat departs, and eventually manages to secure a well-paid job as a labour supervisor in a logging company. In a letter, he tells her of the kindness of the owner and also warns her to beware of Banlēng, the landlady's son, who has a reputation as a womanizer.

A couple of weeks later, Samōn receives another visit from Mūi, but once more manages to postpone the rent deadline amidst threats and insults. She decides it would be better if she and Cha-am, her seventeen year-old sister, moved out, as Thanat had suggested, so she calls on a friend to inquire about the possibility of moving in with her. While she is out, Banlēng stops by to chat to Cha-am. Cha-am, being at an impressionable age, is an easy target for the sophisticated charmer, readily succumbing to his flattery and the apparent concern he shows for the trouble his mother has caused the sisters. Samōn returns just as he is leaving, and when he has gone, lectures her younger sister on the ways of men and warns her just exactly what Banlēng is up to. That night she sits up late pondering over the problems that face them; but after dozing off, she is suddenly awakened by Cha-am screaming 'fire'. A cat has knocked over their lamp, and in no time, the blaze is out of control. Police arrive with the landlady, who accuses Samōn of starting the fire deliberately; they are further incriminated by their packed belongings, which they were to take to the friend's house, and as a result, Samōn is sentenced to two years in prison, which is halved in view of her previous good record. Samōn is devastated by the verdict, but Mūi thinks it much too lenient; Cha-am meanwhile goes to live with the friend.

When Samōn receives a visit from Cha-am, she anxiously inquires whether Banlēng is still pursuing her. She is reassured by her younger sister's answer; but Cha-am feels uneasy at having lied, for in fact, she is seeing him regularly.

Three months pass, and a sad and weary-looking Cha-am is cleaning a house. She is now married to Banlēng, but the idyllic life he promised has not materialised. She has aged by five or six years in this short space of time, and far from living in a grand home of their own, they rent a small house which Banlēng absents himself from frequently and for lengthy periods. When he does return, he is critical, argumentative and generally disagreeable. On one such visit, Cha-am takes a spirited stand against him which leads to a violent row in which he strikes her. He is about to deliver a second blow, when the owner of the house, Prawing, arrives on the scene, and after a brief fight, has Banlēng unceremoniously bundled off the premises. Cha-am is allowed to stay on and before long, she and Prawing fall in love. Burdened with guilt at not having seen her sister since marrying Banlēng, and shame at her disastrous marriage, Cha-am cannot bring herself to declare her feelings for Prawing. The accumulated emotional stress results in a breakdown which proves fatal. Before her death, however, she tells Prawing everything, including her love for him and her sister's unfortunate imprisonment. She asks him to take care of Samōn when she is released from prison.

As soon as Samōn comes out of prison, she hurries round to her friend's house, only to find the friend moved out some months earlier. She buys a newspaper, and there, by chance, finds Thanat's

name printed in large letters in an advertisement announcing the opening of his new company. She goes round to the premises, is delighted to recognise Thanat, and when the celebrations are over, asks to be taken to his office. He is shocked to see her, for he has had no news of her for over a year. Her pleasure at seeing him is reciprocated with somewhat less enthusiasm, and when a well-dressed young woman, Pramān, comes into the room, it dawns on Samōn that Thanat is already married. She faints. With the help of his wife, and a colleague called Prawing, Thanat takes Samōn back to his house. Far from callously abandoning her, he had assumed that she had died, and then, only after a long period of despair had he married the daughter of his boss.

It subsequently emerges that not only is Thanat's colleague the same Prawing who had promised Cha-am that he would look after her older sister, but that he is also the half-brother of Pramān. Husband and wife encourage Prawing to come and visit Samōn frequently, and as she recovers, romance begins to blossom between her and Prawing. On the same day that news of their wedding appears in the newspaper, there is another item reporting a shoot-out between police and an opium smuggler, who is killed; the dead man's name is Banlēng. A couple of weeks later an old lady comes round to Prawing's house, begging for work. There is none to give her, but Prawing takes pity on her and says she can stay anyway; the old woman proves to be none other than Mūi, Samōn's former landlady.

Although the ending of Lōk sanniwāt is excessively contrived, the novel marks an interesting development in Kulāp's writing as he deals, for the first time, with the encroachment of harsh economic realities upon the lives of his characters. In his fiction, at least, he had not yet come to tackle the causes of poverty, but his awareness of its effects is apparent in the words of Thanat:

... and you say poverty doesn't matter as far as our love is concerned, that it's no obstacle. But you don't yet know what lies behind the curtain of poverty. It's something I've never shown you. But just listen a moment, Samōn, and I'll show you that poverty is like a bees' nest, harboring all kinds of misfortune. Poverty lies at the core of things just as much as love. Poverty provokes contempt, anxiety, a limited outlook, unhappiness, ignorance and so on. Put simply, poverty for the most part offers the exact opposite of what love has to give. But I know that there is one other evil effect of poverty, my darling. When I say 'evil', I mean poverty can destroy love. Even if it doesn't destroy it suddenly, it is likely to destroy it gradually, like rust gnawing away at a piece of metal until it is completely eroded away.³⁹

Perhaps the most surprising thing about Lōk sanniwāt is Kulāp's indulgence in popular anti-Chinese sentiments in his portrayal of Mūi, the landlady. Her financial ruin is clearly to be seen as just deserts for her vindictiveness after the fire and attempts to collect rent on rent day. It is a rather crude piece of stereotyping which is in stark contrast to his sympathetic attitude towards the Chinese community in Thailand in his later years. Whether this was genuine prejudice, a deliberate pandering to popular sentiment, or merely thoughtless racialism, it is difficult to know.

³⁹ 'Sībūraphā'. 1968b. Lōk sanniwāt. Bangkok: Phadung su'ksā. pp. 13-14.

Mān manut (An Evil Man) follows the same basic formula, only in this instance, the love match between hero and heroine is initially thwarted by the treachery of the hero's best friend, who marries the heroine after his own wife, whom he has rejected, dies of a broken heart. Only divorce and the villain's retreat to monastic orders can pave the way to a happy ending, but even then, not before murder and suicide have accounted for the lives of two of the supporting actors.

Mān manut : a summary

Lūāng Kōson, a wealthy twenty-nine year-old, has been a confirmed bachelor ever since an unhappy affair years earlier. His sister, Amnūai, and her husband, Khunsī Burirak hope to remedy this by introducing him to Rēnū, a beautiful girl from a well-to-do background. As soon as he meets her, Lūāng Kōson rediscovers an interest in women. Returning from his club one night, he learns from the taxi-driver of the meagre wages and long hours the latter endures in order to save enough money to marry the girl he loves; this, and a further incident, when he overhears the maid at his friend's house exchanging confidences with her boyfriend, further whet Lūāng Kōson's romantic appetite. He confides in his friend, Phra Ārī, that despite having met Rēnū only twice, he has fallen hopelessly in love with her and wants to marry her.

A few days later Lūāng Kōson attends the theatre with Rēnū, her mother, and his sister and brother-in-law; Phra Ārī goes

too, but his attendance is merely a pretext for catching a glimpse of Rēnū, so that he can then offer Lūāng Kōson the benefit of his expertise on women. He, too, is stunned by her beauty, which he feels far outshines that of his wife.

Lūāng Kōson's infatuation soon becomes intolerable, and on the urging of his sister, he pays Rēnū a visit. When he arrives at her house, he is informed that she is occupied with a male visitor, but just as he is leaving, feeling rather peeved, she calls to him from a window and invites him in. Inside, he finds Phra Ārī, who quickly departs, leaving the two to chat alone for a couple of hours.

Back at Phra Ārī's house, the maid, Māen, waits anxiously for her lover, Prayūn. He says he cannot marry her yet because he has no money, and urges her to be realistic about the need for a secure financial basis if their love is to flourish. He announces that he is going to work in the logging business in Kamphaengphet, and promises to be back within two years to marry her. They swear eternal love and fidelity and then Prayūn departs. Phra Ārī returns and finds Māen still sitting there, alone in the moonlight. He stops to talk to her, and then shocks her by stealing a kiss, unaware that his wife is watching from the window.

Eventually, after a sojourn in Sri Racha, Lūāng Kōson manages to express his feelings to Rēnū, and learns, to his relief, that they are reciprocated. But then comes news that he is to be sent on a study tour overseas for a year. He is deeply upset

at the prospect of separation, but Khunsī Burirak and Phra Ārī console him by assuring him that they and their wives will keep an eye on Rēnū and make sure she does not get too lonely. He goes to see Rēnū to tell her of his impending departure, but in the end, he cannot bring himself to break the news to her.

Four months later, with Lūang Kōson in England and Khunsī Burirak up-country on business, the sole, but almost daily visitor at Rēnū's house is Phra Ārī. Phra Ārī's wife is all too well aware of her husband's activities and her health begins to decline as a result. One night, after he returns late from Rēnū's house, she chides him scathingly for his irresponsibility, warning him that his behaviour will be the death of her. When he persists in seeing Rēnū, she duly expires.

Rēnū, meanwhile, has been doing her best to forget all about Lūang Kōson. She reads through an old letter from him, in which he renounced all claim to her, telling her that there was no point in continuing when they were to be apart for so long. She has been deeply hurt, for she feels that a year is not such a long time to wait if they really love each other. With his wife now dead, Phra Ārī wastes no time in seeking the approval of Rēnū's mother in formally wooing her daughter; being a widow, she is only too pleased at the prospect of such a wealthy and eligible son-in-law and offers her full approval. Rēnū, who has never had any romantic feelings towards Phra Ārī, is at first shocked, but later agrees to the match, more to spite Lūang Kōson than out of love.

khunsī Burirak returns to Bangkok and is shocked to learn of the turn of events from his wife, for Luāng Kōson has given him no indication of any change in his feelings for Rēnū. Immediately he goes round to see Phra Ārī, and there is an angry exchange between the erstwhile friends. Phra Ārī insists that Luāng Kōson sent Rēnū a letter effectively terminating their relationship, but Khunsī Burirak is sceptical. He visits Rēnū and then writes Luāng Kōson a long letter; in the meantime, he begs Rēnū not to go through with the wedding plans until she has heard what Luāng Kōson has to say. But all his efforts are to no avail. On the day of the wedding, Khunsī Burirak and his wife are out of Bangkok, and when they return the next day, there is a letter waiting for them from Luāng Kōson. Khunsī Burirak rushes round to show Rēnū the letter, but finds the newly-weds have already left on their honeymoon. It is some weeks later that he eventually delivers the letter, which contains the startling news that Luāng Kōson had certainly not attempted to cool off the relationship; he declares that Phra Ārī must have forged the letter from his original, which he had asked Phra Ārī to convey to Rēnū on his behalf. As proof, he encloses a copy of his original letter, which was almost three times the length of the one in Rēnū's possession. Rēnū is horrified at the way in which she has been tricked into marriage and treats her husband with icy disdain from that moment onwards. Luāng Kōson meanwhile returns from England; he accepts the situation calmly, revealing that he has already spoken with Phra Ārī and forgiven him. He plans to leave government service

and the prospects of a successful career and go away somewhere in search of peace.

With Rēnū feeling only hatred and contempt for him now, Phra Ārī's wedded life is far from bliss, and he soon begins to turn to the maid, Māēn, for solace. One evening, while Rēnū is out at the theatre, he summons Māēn, tells her of his intention to divorce Rēnū, and asks her to become his new wife. Although she has promised to wait for Prayūn, she is nevertheless flattered by the offer, especially as she fears Prayūn may himself discard her once his economic situation improves.

Lūang Kōson wanders around the country, eventually ending up in Kamphaengphet, where he bumps into the taxi-driver who had so impressed him with his hard work and romantic idealism some two years earlier. It is none other than Prayūn, Māēn's lover. The two become friends. One day Lūang Kōson reads in the newspaper of the divorce of Rēnū and Phra Ārī. Noticing that he appears rather distracted by something in the paper, Prayūn scans the report and learns that Māēn is about to be married to Phra Ārī. They both decide to return to Bangkok immediately

At midnight on the eve of Māēn's wedding, she agrees to a secret meeting with Prayūn; but despite his pleas, she refuses to change her plans, even offering him 500 baht to go away quietly. He becomes angry and desperate, his pleas turning to threats as he warns her that she has got twelve hours to think it over. If she still will not change her mind, he warns her ominously, it will mean death.

A few days later, Phra Ārī is sitting reading a newspaper report under the heading, 'Murder and Suicide at the Wedding of Phra Ārī'. The report reveals how Prayūn had appeared in the middle of the ceremony and shot his estranged lover before turning the gun on himself. There is no obstacle between Rēnū and Lūang Kōson now, and as the wedding preparations are made, he provides the newspapers with a sympathetic background story on Prayūn and himself sponsors the dead man's funeral.

A year later a child is born to the couple. Then a letter arrives from Phra Ārī, revealing that he intends to spend the rest of his life in the monkhood. He wants his property to go to Khunsī Burirak and financial donations to be made to Chulalongkorn Hospital in memory of his first wife, to the temple where he stays, and to Lūang Kōson's own son.

The first quarter of the novel offers little hint of the way the plot will later unfold. There is a light-hearted touch about it, as if the writer had romantic comedy in mind, with the eternal bachelor being won over by the charm and beauty of the heroine amidst much prodding and encouragement by friends and relatives. The re-awakening of Lūang Kōson's romantic interest as a result of him, a member of the nobility, observing the devotion and self-sacrifice of a lowly taxi-driver, and overhearing the exchange of sweet words between a maid and her lover, is essentially comic, as is his sudden and total infatuation with Rēnū; even when he seeks Phra Ārī's advice, the reader experiences

no sense of irony nor impending tragedy, and it is only when Phra Ārī begins to compare his wife unfavourably with Rēnū, that the first foundation stone for a change of mood is laid. This lulling of the reader into a sense of complacency makes the subsequent development of events the more dramatic. Phra Ārī is himself a more subtle creation than Khīrī, Withūnphan and Banlēng. Unlike the other villains, the reader assumes Phra Ārī is good at the beginning of the novel and then actually witnesses all his treachery, including the manner in which he faked Lūāng Kōson's letter to Rēnū.

Nasty a villain as Phra Ārī is, it is Prayūn whose actions are the most deadly, and the most disturbing because they are condoned by the author. His violent outburst, which so conveniently rounds off the story, is no heat-of-the-moment crime of passion as is clear from his exchange with Hāēn on the eve of her wedding:

'But if you choose Phra Ārī, it means that you're not true to me, that you've deceived me into spending two years of suffering hardship - and I can't forgive you for that. Let me tell you, quite seriously, that if you choose Phra Ārī, it will be tantamount to choosing death.'

'Are you going to kill me?' she asked immediately in alarm.

'If you marry Phra Ārī.'

'Please don't go threatening me,' she said angrily.

'I'm not scared.'

'If you think I'm just threatening, that's up to you. I can't stop you,' Prayūn said seriously. 'But as my parting words, I maintain that people like Nāi Prayūn never say anything which isn't the truth.'⁴⁰

Far from expressing the slightest disapproval of such machismo, the author has Lūāng Kōson provide a glowing tribute to the dead

⁴⁰ 'Sībūraphā'. 1967b. Mān manut. Bangkok: Phadung su'ksā. pp. 231-2

man.⁴¹ Poor Maēn, whose only 'crime' was to change her mind, is left damned by Prayūn's denunciation and instantly forgotten by the author, who then glibly moralises that all of Phra Āri's sufferings are a result of his misdeeds.⁴²

Prāp phayot (rendered variously in English as 'The Subjugation of Pride'⁴³ and 'The Taming of the Shrew'⁴⁴) was a much more light-hearted work, which revealed Kulāp's talent for witty dialogue. The story tells how a young man sets out to win the heart of a beautiful but wilful girl and how she reluctantly falls for his charm.

Prāp phayot : a summary

When Kōmon hears from his friend Rangsan of the arrogant and wilful manner in which the beautiful Yūānčhai treats all men, he decides to take up the challenge of trying to win her affection. As part of his plan, he gets a job as a lowly clerk in the large bookstore which Yūānčhai manages for her parents.

A few days later, Kōmon and Rangsan meet at a theatre, where they see Yūānčhai sitting some distance away with a man. Rangsan, noticing Yūānčhai's apparent intimacy with her companion, remarks that she has a habit of leading men on. Also next to Yūānčhai is her younger sister, Yāčhai, who is a quiet, studious girl.

⁴¹For a discussion of Thai machismo, see, N. Mulder. 1978. Everyday Life in Thailand: An Interpretation. Bangkok: Duang Kamol.

⁴²Kulāp's treatment of female characters throughout his early novels would scarcely endear him to feminists.

⁴³Kwande, op.cit., p. 514.

⁴⁴Wibha, op.cit., p. 154

Lūāng Mahitthamrong, Yūānčhai's male companion at the theatre, visits her a couple of days later to invite her to another performance. Her tepid reaction to the 'lakhōn rōng' performance they have seen and her unwillingness to attend a 'lakhōn phūt' performed by university students, establish her as a difficult lady to court, and Lūāng Mahitthamrong's subsequent attempts to flatter her are met with gentle mockery. By contrast, Kōmon, despite his apparent lowly status, shows no hesitation in standing up to Yūānčhai, contradicting her and correcting her in a way to which she is quite unaccustomed. Despite this, she finds herself reluctantly attracted to him.

Yūānčhai and Kōmon are both invited to a society wedding party, although she is unaware of his presence. She and all the other guests are confidently expecting Lūāng Mahitthamrong to propose the toast as he is the highest ranking among the guests. But he is pre-empted when, at the crucial moment, Rangsan rises to his feet and announces that Kōmon will offer a few words on behalf of the guests. Yūānčhai is peeved to see her companion outfaced so easily, and in order to redeem himself, Lūāng Mahitthamrong decides to impress everyone by delivering a speech in English, despite having drunk too much. Yūānčhai is highly satisfied, and tries to turn the tables on Kōmon by inviting him to make a speech in English. But Kōmon declines, announcing that he has no hope of matching the eloquence of the author of "Toasts and Anecdotes" from which Lūāng Mahitthamrong had plagiarised his speech.

At work, Kōmon matches Yūānčhai, sharp word for sharp word, and even takes it upon himself to lecture her about the way she should behave and the nature of love. Far from earning him a prompt dismissal it wins him her grudging respect and friendship. She subsequently invites him to take part in a short play that is to be performed at Yāčhai's birthday party, much to the displeasure of Lūāng Mahitthamrong who has himself been assigned the role of hero; then a few weeks later, with a big fancy dress ball looming, she takes it upon herself to teach Kōmon how to dance, in her office. Lūāng Mahitthamrong derives little comfort from the scene when he interrupts a lesson by chance one day; nevertheless, it is with him that Yūānčhai attends the ball, she as Cleopatra and he, Mark Anthony. They create quite a stir, as she had hoped, but while he is away at the bar, a stranger in pirate attire with moustache approaches. He flatters her, dances with her and so captivates her with his charm that all thoughts of Lūāng Mahitthamrong, or for that matter Kōmon, completely disappear. She goes out to the garden alone with the 'pirate' and after chatting for some time, they exchange tokens of friendship. Just as they are about to return inside, he steals a kiss. She is furious, slaps him round the face and hurls away the ring he has just given her. He remains unperturbed by her reaction.

The following day Yūānčhai is confused and upset. Lūāng Mahitthamrong arrives, furious about the events of the previous night. He has seen all that has happened and refuses to accept that she was an unwilling victim. Relations between the two are

soured beyond repair and he goes off drinking with his friends, and telling everyone that she slept with the 'pirate'. Sitting at a nearby table is Kōmon. He demands that Luāng Mahitthamrong retract his words and when the latter refuses, a fight ensues, in which Kōmon is seriously injured by a flying bottle of Johnnie Walker. A co-worker comes to his assistance and his assailants beat a hasty retreat.

When she learns what has happened, Yuānčhai rushes straight round to Kōmon's house. She is furious to learn how her reputation was besmirched, but grateful to Kōmon for defending her honour. While she is adjusting his pillow, she notices the brooch she had given the 'pirate' as a keepsake. The whole story of Kōmon's strange courtship then unfolds; they both confess their love and Kōmon says he will ask his father to see Yuānčhai's parents about making formal betrothal arrangements.

The major comic element in the novel lies in the dialogue which is frequently brisk and witty; a single example, from Kōmon's interview for the post of clerk gives some idea of the humour, although it inevitably suffers dilution in translation:

'What's your surname? I can scarcely read what you've written.'

'Dusitsamit.'

'Dusitsamit?' she repeated. 'That's funny. How come you have the same name as Dusitsamit magazine?'

'I don't. Dusitsamit magazine has got the same name as me, because my name existed before the magazine.'

'In that case, it must be an old family name.'

'Yes, probably.'

'But I've never come across it before. This is the first time. Why isn't it well-known like other names?'

'That's something I've never investigated, nor do I see any point in doing so ... but it may be that none of my ancestors were great womanizers.'
 'Oh, so you mean that if a family name is widely known, it's because there were womanizers among the ancestors?'⁴⁵

Another source of humour is the reversal of traditional roles of authority, resulting in Yuānčhai's decisions constantly being questioned by the lowly hero. Her mounting frustration and anger at his insolence are amusing because he is always right and because the reader feels that her come-uppance is no more than her shrewishness merits. If there was any serious point, it perhaps lay in trying to teach the modern woman a lesson, for by being too strong and independent, she risked compromising her position.

While all of Kulāp's early novels were written primarily to entertain, they also embodied a highly moralistic view of the world, in which virtue was generally rewarded and evil punished. It was because they followed such principles that Kulāp could regard himself as a serious novelist. Prāp phayot does not quite fit this mould; for all their wit and apparent sophistication, Kōmon and Yuānčhai behave like spoilt children, with a flippant approach to life. While this was justifiable in the context of the novel, it clearly came to disturb Kulāp, who later refused permission for the novel to be reprinted, despite a generous financial incentive, on the grounds that it had little to offer the reader.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ 'Sībūraphā'. 1972. Prāp phayot. Bangkok: Phadung su'ksā. pp.17-18. Dusitsamit magazine was a short-lived publication issued by Rama VI between the end of 1918 and 1921.

⁴⁶ Phaisān Mālāphan. 1985. "Sībūraphā āchayākōn phū plōi nok phirāp". In. Ramlu'k thu'ng Sībūraphā dōi phū'an rūām khuk 2495-2500. p.139. Phaisān recalls that while imprisoned together, Kulāp was offered the extraordinarily high price of 7,000฿ for the rights to Lūk phūchāi and 5,000 ฿ for Prāp phayot.

Today, looking back at Kulāp's early novels, it is easy to be dismissive of their contrived coincidences and naive view of life. In their day, however, when the novel was still in its infancy, their tightly constructed and well-balanced plots made them highly regarded by readers and fellow writers alike. In the mid-1960's they were all reprinted in a major re-issue of Kulāp's early fiction by the Phadung su'ksā publishing company; since then, however, Lūk phūchāi is the only one among the novels discussed in this chapter to have been consistently reprinted and to have attracted widespread attention among literary historians. By and large, Kulāp's early novels do not have a lot to say about Thai society of the period. Rather, they are the works of an obviously talented and ambitious writer, eager to make his mark on the literary world of the day.⁴⁷ Their main interest to the critic today is as popular representatives of the early Thai novel and as a yardstick from which to measure Kulāp's subsequent development as a writer.

⁴⁷The literary scene of the day is one thing which Kulāp's novels do record in some detail, with several references to writers and works. For example, Ramphan and Mānōt in Lūk phūchāi talk about Marie Correlli's novels, referring specifically to 'Wormwood', 'Vendetta' and 'Thelma', all of which had already been translated into Thai; in the same work, we learn that Ramphan's bookshelves include works by Scott, Dickens, Correlli, Hall Caine, Greek philosophers and a biography of Napoleon Bonaparte, as well as magazines such as Lak witthayā, Phadung witthayā, Thawī panya Sī krung and Dusit samit, while she also expresses admiration for the plays of Rama VI. Prayūn, the taxi-driver in Mān Manut, quotes from one of the characters in Correlli's 'Vendetta', while Yūānchāi comments on Rama VI's play, Lām dī, in Prāp phayot. Kulāp's fascination with the literary world is further witnessed by the fact that there are characters with modest literary aspirations (Ramphan in Lūk phūchāi and Wārī in Hūā chāi prātthana), characters working in the book trade (Yūānchāi in Prāp phayot and Thanat in Lōk sanniwāt) and visits to the theatre (in Mān manut and Prāp phayot).

CHAPTER III
TWO CLASSICS

By his mid-twenties, Kulāp had, within a very short space of time, established himself as a popular novelist and short story writer. Few writers, if any, could make a living out of writing fiction alone, and like many of the other early novelists, Kulāp had for several years worked on newspapers, both as a writer and on the production and distribution side as well. The short-lived but popular Suphāpburut magazine, which appeared at the same time as the early novels, did much to bring Kulāp's name to the attention of newspaper owners, and his rise to literary prominence coincided with spectacular advances in his career in journalism. These increased responsibilities and Kulāp's own growing interest in political journalism inevitably had an effect on his fictional output, and though he continued to write novels and short stories throughout the decade leading up to World War II, he never became the prolific writer of best-sellers that had seemed likely at the end of the 1920's.

Despite other preoccupations, however, Kulāp retained a serious interest in the art of literary creation, and two of his novels of the period, Songkhrām chīwit (The War of Life) written in 1932, and Khāng lang phāp (Behind the Painting) written in 1937, are widely regarded by Thais as classics of the genre. The two

works are very different, the former, an epistolary novel with a strong current of social criticism running through the romantic correspondence, and the latter, a tragic romance, set largely against an exotic background. Both works show the author as having moved away from the complex plots that characterised his early novels, and attempting instead, to create characters of greater depth.

Songkhrām cñīwit comprises thirty-three letters exchanged between Raphin, a lowly government official with literary aspirations, and Phlōēn, a girl from a wealthy background who has fallen on hard times since the disappearance of her father and her mother's death. The bond of mutual sympathy becomes one of love; but it is broken when Phlōēn discards him and marries a wealthy film director instead.

Songkhrām chīwit : a summary

The novel falls into two distinct parts. In the first, amounting to almost two thirds of the book, the characters of Raphin and Phlōēn emerge, as they describe their feelings for each other and incidents in their lives that have made a strong impression upon them. Raphin is an earnest romantic, whose lowly position and impoverished background have made him acutely sensitive to his own inadequacies; he dreams of being a great writer for all the 'wrong' reasons - so that he can charm Phlōēn with sweet words, gain her admiration and become a famous person - but he fears his lack of education and a familiarity with literature that does not stretch beyond the occasional 'film book' and cheap

sex-novel, will prove to be almost insurmountable obstacles. In his opening letter he describes the run-down room he rents, with its rickety furniture and newspaper pin-ups on the wall, remarking that even the garages and stables of the wealthy are more habitable than his dwelling; and he concludes that only country folk, untainted by urban distractions and extravagances, know what real happiness is. By contrast, Phlōen seems eager to enjoy life and snatch happiness while she can; she says she is too young to take an interest in the Dharma, displays a worldly scepticism about the value of offering food to monks, and becomes jealous to the point of tears when she sees a former school friend now looking more glamorous than her because of the expensive clothes she can afford.

As the correspondence unfolds, the contrast between Raphin and Phlōen becomes rapidly and almost completely blurred; pleasantries and intimacies are exchanged at the beginning and end of letters, but the greater part of each letter is devoted to some form of comment on society. Such comments echo many of the themes raised only briefly in the earlier novels: the misery of poverty, the extravagance and wastefulness of the wealthy, the selfishness of man towards man, especially rich man to poor man, and the foolish vanities of the privileged élite. Where Songkhrām chīwit differs, however, is in the fact that the social criticism is much more strident, and with no plot complications to distract either author or reader, it completely dominates the correspondence. Four

particular incidents will serve to give some flavour of the work and an impression of the author's technique.

In the first incident, Rāphīn describes how he had seen a woman offer food to monks outside her house, but then refuse to give either animal scraps or old clothes to a beggar and his young child. As she drives them away, she cries,

Why should I? I offer food to the monks and then I have to give alms to the likes of you, too, do I? Do you think you're worth as much as those monks then? ... You know, when I offer food, I want merit, so that when I die, I'll go to heaven next life. I'm no millionaire or tycoon who can go throwing money around without expecting something in return.¹

Rāphīn comes to the aid of the helpless pair, ripping off his own shirt to replace the child's tattered rags and declaring,

There's still at least one person left in this world who will help without expecting something in return.²

He tells Phlōēn now he felt elevated by this sacrifice:

When I got home that day, I really felt pleased with the contribution I had made. I felt strangely comforted by the cold. This, surely, is the merit or heaven that old woman wanted so badly. But whether she felt anything like this or not, I very much doubt.³

But where Kulāp would have been content to let matters rest at this point in the early novels, in this instance he pursues it relentlessly, explicitly criticising the thinking that frequently masquerades as piety:

She makes merit because she hopes to go to heaven, which in truth, she herself cannot be sure exists, nor where it is. She simply hopes. And just the hope makes her try to accumulate what she calls 'merit'. So this wretched woman's

¹ 'Sībūraphā'. 1949. Songkhram cniwit. Bangkok: Suphāpurut. p.28.

² ibid., p.30.

³ ibid., p.32

alms-giving is clearly worth about as much as playing the lottery. The lottery can help to make people richer without them having to do anything worthwhile whatsoever; and giving alms can help this old woman to get to heaven without her having to do any good deeds either. Giving alms is like playing the lottery. Is there any Buddhist more pitiful than this?⁴

In the second incident, Phlōēn relates an event from earlier in her life when her circumstances were more comfortable. She describes how she had been riding home in the rain one day, feeling annoyed with the old Chinese rickshaw man for going so slowly, when she suddenly began to realise that he, too, was a fellow human-being:

Even though he was from a different country with a different language, a country which we Thais, and everyone all over the world tend to look down on - even though he was a 'čhek', and a 'čhek' with a lowly occupation - it doesn't make him anything other than a human being like us, does it, Raphin? He was an old man, out there in the rain, working hard and shivering from head to toe; he's an old man made from flesh and blood and with feelings, like my parents, like everyone's parents. A country and an occupation can't change human beings into animals, can they, Raphin?⁵

The third incident is considerably longer, and in theme and tone resembles the short stories Kulāp was to write in the late 1940's and early 1950's. Once again it is Phlōēn who describes and comments on the situation; the rather excitable character of the first few letters, who smashed a mirror because she was not as beautiful as she would have liked to have been, and who coveted expensive clothes, has by this stage been almost wholly imbued with the spirit of the author. When a neighbour is forced

⁴ibid., pp.33-4

⁵ibid., p.76. 'čhek' is the derogatory term for 'Chinese', corresponding approximately to the English word, 'Chink'.

out of his job as a low-grade civil servant because his unswerving honesty brings him into conflict with his superiors, she asks,

Is it possible to be loyal and honest towards our civil service duties and towards those who destroy the civil service?⁶

Three months later the honest neighbour is still unable to find work and so becomes a taxi-driver; but his fortunes take a further slide when he becomes seriously ill with tuberculosis. Phlōen's own father had suffered from the same disease, but was cured by a 'farang' doctor; the young man's family and neighbours are unable to afford such a luxury, however, and he dies, leaving a widow and two young children. Seeing the corpse laid out, Phlōen wonders why men struggle so hard to accumulate worldly possessions when all become equal in death; on a more practical level, she realises that her father survived because of money:

My father was suffering from the same illness. He was even much weaker than the young man who lived near us. But he escaped death because he actually had the money to pay for a 'farang' doctor to treat him. If Father had been poor, he would certainly have met his Destiny then. You know, there's no such thing as Destiny, really. Destiny has only one meaning, and that is whether you have enough money to pay the doctor or not. If we can only pay the local herbalist to treat us, we can be sure that every one of us will have a short life ... I can guarantee that this dear friend died of a lack of medical treatment; indeed, he died of poverty. If there had only been money to pay for a good doctor to see him, he would have lived for a long time.⁷

But again, Kulāp does not let matters rest, as Phlōen delivers a withering attack on the ethics of the medical profession:

... I believe that the fact that doctors take so much interest in treating their wealthy patients and show so much concern, is really that they are afraid the patient

⁶ ibid., p.140

⁷ ibid., pp. 157-8

might die. And they are afraid, because if the patient does die, they won't have the chance to treat him any more, so they'll lose out ... If a patient hasn't got any money for the doctor, then the doctor can't be concerned for his life.⁸

In the fourth and final incident, Phlōen, having expressed the hope that Raphin will be able to follow in the footsteps of his hero, Dostoevsky, and become a great writer, recounts a cautionary tale about the fate of a young writer who was a friend of her father's and had been a frequent visitor at their home:

He was a journalist. What he wrote was regarded as highly outspoken and this led to a cruel fate. He was charged and sentenced to eight years in prison for writing what the Supreme Court judged to be seditious articles

For many days people talked about the fate of this young writer. Some felt sorry for him, some felt he got what he deserved and some thought he was a fool. My father himself understood and sympathised deeply with the young man and was profoundly upset. I, too, felt sympathy towards him for his honesty. But human beings make mistakes, my darling. It always cokes me when I think of that unfortunate young man's youthful face and his sparkingly honest eyes. Dostoevsky was much luckier than him in that Tsar Nicholas changed his verdict. But this young man was not even given the slightest chance. It's right what you said, you know. What everyone needs is a chance. This writer is still in prison now. His youth is now dead and gone. Even if he were released, there is no way he could thrive. Thailand doesn't encourage people to have faith in opportunity. Thailand only curses people who do wrong. Thailand is still sadly lacking in arousing sympathy and compassion among its people. Thailand cannot be a perfect country all the time it lacks these things. That's what my father and his friends used to⁹ say whenever they talked about that poor young man.

Her advice that Raphin should be careful in pursuing a career as a writer continues with the warning that Thailand would not

⁸ ibid., p.159.

⁹ ibid., pp. 244-5

appreciate a 'Thai-Dostoevsky':

Thailand is a Buddhist country. It's a country where everything has to be done just right. I think that you are a person who loves truth and justice a great deal. Just be very careful of that 'great deal'. Dostoevsky's 'Memoirs from a Dead House' changed his life for the better, but a Thai 'Memoirs from a Dead House' wouldn't do you any good at all, that's for sure, and it would bring only bitterness. And another thing, Thailand doesn't have memorials to individuals like Puskin, to which they could invite you to deliver an address so that you would become the darling of the whole city. And Thais aren't yet sufficiently conscientious to set aside their plates of food and follow your funeral procession. So you mustn't forget the proper way of doing things, and then you'll get on, in the Thai way. In Thailand you might experience the same misfortunes as Dostoevsky, but you won't have the same good fortune he had, believe me ...¹⁰

Two other characters figure briefly in Raphin's early letters, one a wealthy work colleague named Kēyūn and the other, a successful young writer-philosopher called Dusit Samittōpakṇ. The former serves to highlight the unequal distribution of wealth, and while he is far from being a bad character, even lending Raphin books, Raphin cannot come to terms with the gulf that separates them. In minute detail he compares the price of each item of Kēyūn's clothing with his own; he notes that a hundred of his cigarettes cost the same as one of Keyun's cigars and is amazed by the enormous restaurant bills and monthly club fees his wealthy colleague incurs. But while Raphin feels that Kēyūn is from another world, he refuses to accept the traditional Buddhist apology for social inequality:

No matter how hard and how closely I look, I cannot see what reason there is in the world which supports such a massive gulf between Nāi Kēyūn and Nāi Raphin. Bad

¹⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 246-7. As Kulāp explains through Raphin, Dostoevsky first achieved fame with 'Memoirs from a Dead House', which was a fictionalised account of his time in prison and later exile in Siberia.

karma from a previous life? Why do we have to talk about previous lives? We have not a single shred of evidence to prove there is a past or future life, nor what corner of heaven or hell we came from, nor whether we performed good deeds or evil deeds before being born as humans. No one can tell us this. There's no god nor angel who can help us recall our previous lives. When we talk about karma in former lives or future lives, we¹¹ are just trying to console ourselves or console others.

Dusit, by contrast, is a man of substance, and Raphin eagerly tells Phlōen everything about him, from his taste in books and attitude to writing as a profession to his romantic disappointments; but most important of all, Raphin quotes, at length, his friend's views on social inequality, materialism and the petty foibles of the élite, Dusit thereby becoming an additional mouthpiece for the author.¹² Dusit regards men as being like animals, with the strong devouring the weak; but many rich people, he says, continue to accumulate wealth for the benefit of their sons and grandsons, completely unaware of the extent of poverty within the country, although there are others who are aware, and take a brave and sympathetic attitude towards the poor. But if Dusit is determined to be fair it certainly does not make him an apologist for the élite: he describes with relish the obsequious behaviour of

¹¹ ibid., pp. 91-2

¹² Dusit reappears in two later(?) works, a novella entitled Tnam ngān tham ngōen (Working, Making Money) and a short story, Phū thī mā ēnāk lōk bōrisut (A Man from the World of the Innocent) which probably both date from the mid-1930's. In the former, he is twice disillusioned, first when the newspaper tries to censor his article, and then when a girlfriend proves to be interested solely in money. He concludes that they are living 'in an age where money is almighty God, an age where people respect money more than virtue, an age where virtue without money is pointless.' ('Sībūraphā' 1968c. Rūam rū'ang ēk. Bangkok: Phadung su'ksā. pp. 177-8). In the short story, Dusit's by-now cynical attitude about money-grabbing women is contrasted with the naive young narrator's belief that the improbably named 'dancing girl', Chumphet ('Kiss') loves him for himself. Only afterwards does he learn that the writer was correct in his judgement of the girl.

impoverished nobles who attend his 'soirées' and ridicules the manner in which wealthy people get their names in the newspapers:

If you read the papers regularly, you may have often come across news of someone or other marrying someone else, and maybe you will have seen a photograph of Mr. So-and-so or Miss So-and-so in the paper. If you don't know much about this, you're bound to be puzzled and start asking yourself, 'What's special about Mr So-and-so or Miss So-and-so that society should show such great interest in them?' In the end, you might blame it on your own ignorance that you don't know anything about such eminent persons. But on the contrary; if you were to keep searching until you died, you'd never find out what it was about Mr. So-and-so or Miss So-and-so. In fact they are so undistinguished that you wouldn't know who they were. The newspapers publish the picture of Mr. So-and-so or Miss So-and-so because the father of Mr. So-and-so or Miss So-and-so, who's got money, asks them to put it in, or else¹³ they pay the papers a fee for the announcement.

It is Dusit who introduces Raphin to the works of Dostoevsky and 'Poor People' in particular. Raphin is interested in the Russian writer because both have suffered hardship and poverty; indeed, such is Raphin's - or rather the author's - enthusiasm, that Phlōen is subjected to a ten page lecture on the life of Dostoevsky, complete with comments on the difference between his work and that of Turgenev, Goncharov and Tolstoy!¹⁴ The purpose of the lengthy Dostoevsky digression was probably both to educate the Thai reading public and to show that poor people, given the opportunity, are capable of achieving greatness.¹⁵

¹³ Sībūraphā', 1949, op.cit., p.203.

¹⁴ ibid., p. 231. English translations of all four Russian writers were available at the time, but Kulāp probably paraphrased the introduction to 'Poor People' for this part of the novel. The reader cannot help but picture sweet Phlōen combing her hair and admiring herself in the new mirror so thoughtfully replaced by Raphin and wondering what on earth all those fellows with funny sounding names had got to do with it!

¹⁵ Kulāp's taste seems to have broadened from Garvice and Correlli, but he is ever ready to recommend a good book (see p. 77, note 47). On several occasions he wrote mini-biographies of individuals he admired, Albert Schweitzer's life, for example, occupying a long digression in the short story, Khao lu'ak lāmbāreñē nai sayām (see Chapter IV).

in the second part of the novel, comprising the last third of the book, external events begin to encroach more and more upon the private world of Raphin and Phlōen; practical considerations and desperate protestations of love, rather than noble sentiments and moral outrage come to dominate the pages of their correspondence. Although we never learn how Raphin and Phlōen came to be acquainted, their letters are, from the outset, full of expressions of affection and tenderness with a goodly dose of moral sermonizing; Raphin advises, lectures and encourages Phlōen in coping with her reduced circumstances and she responds with sympathy and devotion, encouraging Raphin in his literary ambitions. An early dramatic event occurs when Raphin is overcome by 'some mystical force' and kisses Phlōen, thereafter describing the act and his feelings in lingering detail. Subsequent letters confirm that she has not taken offence, and as their letters become couched in increasingly affectionate terms, marriage appears to be a foregone conclusion. It seems the perfect match, their romantic attraction supported by shared outlook and moral values. Then suddenly, out of the blue, Raphin is pleading with Phlōen not to take up an invitation to go into films, for he cannot bear the thought of her acting out amorous scenes with the leading male. She points out how desperate her situation is, with her aunt sick and insufficient funds, despite Raphin's assistance, to meet the medical expenses and finally makes it clear that she has made up her mind to go into films. Raphin is hurt

by her determined show of independence and tells her so, but in her reply, she merely expresses regret that he should decide to take it this way.

From this point, events move rapidly, although with none of the letters dated, the timescale is imprecise. Phlōen's next letter reveals that the first reel has been completed and that everyone was delighted with her performance. She assures Raphin that there is no danger of the hero falling in love with her in real life, but then proceeds to reveal that the director has been showing more than just a professional interest in her, taking her out to buy clothes, to hairdressers and restaurants, and giving her lifts to and from work. She receives an advance of 200 baht, half of which she spends buying Raphin English books and some new suits. At the end of the letter she adds a note saying she will be away shooting scenes in Songkhla for three weeks, but hopes to see him before she leaves.

Raphin's next two letters are full of the desperation and doubt of a man who senses the girl he loves is about to leave him and can do nothing about it. He cannot understand why there has been no letter from her, nor can he any longer keep his suspicions about the director's intentions to himself. He tries to hide his jealousy, reasoning that it is not who loves Phlōen that matters, so much as whom she herself loves. He tells Phlōen that he has every confidence in her, but warns that he will happily break the director's neck if he as much as lays a finger on her, even in jest.

The bombshell finally comes with Phloen's reply. She insists that she really loves Raphin; but then she confesses that she has been stringing him along all the time as a result of a vow she had made following a romantic disappointment, never to be straight in affairs of the heart. She relates how a few years before, as a beautiful and intelligent young girl living in privileged surroundings, she was admired by all and destined to study medicine in Europe; how at the age of seventeen she fell in love and was engaged to a young man from a similar background; how her father was accused of embezzling money and fled to China, leaving her family ruined; and finally, how the boy's family had immediately broken off the engagement once the scandal appeared in the newspapers, the boy himself making no further attempt to see her after that. This experience has left her hardened and bitter and she has resolved that she will marry only when it suits her. Winai, the film director, has proposed marriage, and while she confesses that she loves no one as much as Raphin, she fully intends to go ahead with the marriage, for in the wealthy director, she has found a means of regaining her former life-style. She ends by telling Raphin to forget the old Phloen whom she says no longer exists; she wishes him well with his writing and suggests he use their story for his first novel, enclosing all of the letters he had written to her in the hope that they might be helpful.

Raphin can scarcely believe it is true. It is only the returned letters and a subsequent note inviting him to come and say a last

farewell and enclosing a gift of 1,000 baht to help him publish his books, that finally convince him that it is not all some terrible trick. The novel ends with him pathetically pleading with her not to abandon him.

The most puzzling thing about Songkhram chīwit is Kulāp's portrayal of Phlōēn. Why, when she has seemed so idealistic, does he allow her to emerge so fickle and devious? As a contemporary reviewer remarked, "Sībūraphā kills Phlōēn, the 'ideal' of the story, in cold blood."¹⁶ Witthayākōn Chīangkūn, a young critic writing in the early 1970's acknowledges that Phloen's about-face "might be difficult to accept, or might appear ridiculous for people nowadays in 1973,"¹⁷ but rather than dwell on the literary shortcomings, he attempts to explain away the inconsistency in terms of the Siam of the 1930's:

But if, as we read, we try to imagine Thai society in 1932, which was a time when the nobility was still firmly entrenched and position in society, or 'honour', was still highly regarded, then we ought to see the 'possibility' of Phlōēn being forced by the values of the day to make such a decision. However, as Sībūraphā deals with Phlōēn's decision rather too briefly, it may make readers (regardless of the age-group they belong to) fail to really see the appropriateness of such a decision, especially so, since from the outset Sībūraphā portrays Phlōēn as a strong-minded girl with ideas of her own, which seems to conflict very much with her decision at the end. If this story were written by any other male Thai writer, this lack of clarity might very easily lead readers, especially female readers of today, to regard the writer as being prejudiced against women. But since Sībūraphā is one of only a few male Thai writers to always view women fairly and respectfully, we should look beyond this

¹⁶ Mālai Chūphīnit. "Wichān songkhram chīwit" in Phū Nam, April 1932. Quoted in Trisin Bunkhačhōn. 1980. Nawaniyāi kap sangkhom thai (2475-2500). Bangkok: Sāngsan. p. 73.

¹⁷ Witthayākōn Chīangkūn. 1973. "Klap pai ān nawaniyāi khōng Sībūraphā. Sangkhomsat Parithat 11: (July 1973) p. 69.

ambiguity and examine this work rather in terms of its reflecting the values of society at the time when he wrote it.¹⁸

Another writer to take a detailed look at the character of Phlōēn is Rančhūān Intharakamhāēng, in an essay that formed part of a series of character sketches from popular novels.¹⁹ Writing several years before Witthayākōn, she retells the story in melodramatic fashion, ignoring all the serious things that Phlōēn has to say, and embellishing or changing details to suit her style of writing. In her version of the story, Phlōēn becomes a slave to her own alleged vow that "she would marry only for status, wealth and personal comfort":²⁰

... Phlōēn didn't love him (the film director) That was absolutely certain! But this young director was the person who could make her 'vow' come true Love was a matter of the heart and Phlōēn wanted to give it only to Raphin But 'marriage' was to do with the 'vow' which Phlōēn won't abandon. Phlōēn agrees to sacrifice love and harden herself to the cries of her heart which tells her, 'I want Raphin, I want only Raphin' Phlōēn forces herself to be master of her heart,²¹ but she allows herself to be the 'slave of her vow!!

If attempts to explain Phlōēn's character have been less than satisfactory, the blame should perhaps in this instance lie at the feet of the author rather than the critics. Ultimately, however, the reader has, like Witthayākōn and Rančhūān, to make some sense of the character. It boils down to a choice between seeing Phlōēn

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 69. It is interesting to note the way Witthayākōn raises the question of Kulāp's attitude to women but then almost immediately rejects the path along which his thoughts are leading him. He was writing at a time when Kulāp's later (c. 1950) writings on the position of Thai women were being recirculated; had he read more of Kulāp's earlier works, he might have been drawn to a different conclusion.

¹⁹ Rančhūān Intharakamhāēng. 1965. *Phāp chīwit čhāk nawaniyāi*. Bangkok: Phrāē phitthayā. pp. 103-117

²⁰ *ibid.*, p. 108. Although presented as a quotation, Phlōēn never actually says this.

²¹ *ibid.*, p. 116. The author's punctuation is preserved.

either as a selfish, calculating bitch, who callously humiliates the adoring Raphin, or as an ordinary Thai girl, intelligent and humane, who ultimately chooses the easy option, rather than spend her life struggling. Either way, Phlōēn emerges with little credit. Had she simply changed her mind and abandoned Raphin on the strength of her brief acquaintance with the film director, the reader would have had no hesitation in branding her fickle, materialistic and hypocritical;²² that the author goes a stage further, by having her declare that from the outset she has not been straight with Raphin, is utterly damning. Indeed, her claim that she really loves only Raphin, far from being the tragic outpourings of a tortured soul trapped by cruel destiny or nasty society, has the hollow ring of one trying to break off a futile relationship with the minimum amount of mess. The speed and efficiency with which she manages the practicalities of the break-up - the return of his letters, the suggestion about the novel and the 1,000 baht to publish it (and discourage him from making a nuisance of himself at some time in the future)²³ merely fuels our disgust with her behaviour.

An issue which has pre-occupied Thai critics is the link between Songkhrām chīwit and Dostoevsky's 'Poor People'.²⁴ When Sittichai Sāēngkračhāng claimed in the foreword to his Thai translation of 'Poor People' that Kulāp had been inspired to write

²²Maēn, in Mān manut, was murdered for a similar change of mind.

²³Maēn also tries to 'buy off' Prayūn.

²⁴For a detailed comparison of the two works, see Phailin Rungrat. 1979. "Chāk 'Rak khōng phū yāk rai' khōng Dōstōyefskī thu'ng 'Songkhrām chīwit' khōng Sībūraphā." In Lōk nangsū' 2:7 pp.61-8.

Songkhram chīwit by the Russian novel, he was by no means the first to draw such a conclusion; indeed, with the frequent references to both Dostoevsky and 'Poor People' in the Thai novel and certain similarities between the works, it would be short-sighted to do other than acknowledge some influence. Sittichai, however, went a step further, claiming in his foreword,

... although Sīōraphā's Songkhram chīwit was at one level a work of revolutionary content for Thai literary circles, when compared in terms of profundity, Sībūraphā's work cannot match the greatness of Dostoevsky.²⁵

These comments provoked an angry response from Rungwit Suwannapnichon, Kulāp's most energetic promoter in recent years, who fumed,

This is the justice which one young translator in our present-day society²⁶ gives to one of the best writers in our society.

It also prompted a fascinating response from Yot Watcharasathian, a long time friend, collaborator and later publisher of Kulāp's novels, who offered a startlingly different explanation for Kulāp's motives in writing Songkhram chīwit. Dismissing all the earnest theorising and speculating that has grown up around the work, he claimed that the novel was written in response to a romantic rebuff.²⁷ He relates that Kulap had been involved in a lengthy correspondence with an admiring female reader which went

²⁵Sittichai Saēngkračhāng. 1978. Rak khōng phū yāk rai. Bangkok: Dūāng kamon. Quoted in Rungwit, 1979a, op.cit., pp.24-5.

²⁶Rungwit, 1979a, op.cit., p.25

²⁷Yot Watcharasathian. 1979. "Mūnēt thī Sībūraphā khian rū'ang 'Songkhram chīwit'". In Lōk nangsū' 3:2 pp. 39-43.

on for over a year before he actually met her. She was the daughter of wealthy and influential parents and it was only Kulāp's reputation as a writer that made it conceivable that such a barrier might be bridged. Then, without warning, he received news that she had become engaged to someone else; she wrote to him a few days later, telling him she loved him, but that her parents wanted her to marry someone else and there was nothing she could do about it. Yot describes Kulāp's reaction to the news in the magazine Lōk nangsū' (Book World):

Such circumstances inevitably arouse feelings of anger and bitterness in the person who experiences them, even to the extent that he may ignore all sense of moral values and in many cases even become a murderer. But Sibūraphā was a gentleman, a real upright man, so there was no question of him taking revenge in a way that would endanger her. All he wanted, was to write a story as a reminder of an experience that still aroused feelings of pain and bitterness in him, which he could finish as quickly as possible, publish straight away in a volume, and send to her as a wedding present prior to her wedding day, or at the latest, on that day.

In order to spend the least time writing it, and to describe satisfactorily the pain and bitterness resulting from the class system, he chose the epistolary form, which an eminent writer, Nō Mō Sō, had used as early as the end of the reign of Rama V, in writing Chotmāi Chāng wāng Ram. Later, when he [Kulāp] brought out the magazine Suphāpburut, M.C. Tōi Chumsai used this form in writing Chotmāi Khun Ari and Chōt Phrāēphan (Yākhōp) did likewise in Chotmāi Chao Kaeo. The first two works were letters from fathers giving advice to their children, while the third consisted of letters written by a young man to the girl he loved, although the content was humorous. Apart from these, the Russian writer Feodor Dostoevsky also used the epistolary form for one of his stories, Poor People, which he [Kulāp] had bought and read long before. This book deals with the feelings of bitterness and resentment of a young couple who are poor and oppressed by the upper class which was the kind of experience which Sibūraphā had encountered.

It took Kulāp only a month to both write and publish it (with the assistance of Būnthōng Lēkhakun, manager of the newspaper Prachāchāt) and when the first book was ready, he asked Būnyū'n T. Kōmonbut or San Thēwarak, to act as his envoy, and deliver it to the lady, Khanitthā Suwanthat.

It is absolutely certain that if he had not experienced the

pain and bitterness of this affair, as I have related, then Songkhram chiwit by 'Siburapha' would never have appeared, for after the 1932 Revolution, when he was working for the newspaper Prachachit, Kulap channelled all his thoughts into one direction, 'politics'. He did not consider writing stories based on love between young couples until 1936. At that time Kulap was in need of money to build a house on the land which M.C. Wan Waithayakon had given him, so he went back to writing a romantic novel, which went on sale as his last novel, that is Khang lang phap.

As the only friend of Siburapha still alive, and having seen the author of the Thai translation of 'Poor People' write in his foreword that Siburapha wrote Songkhram chiwit as a result of being influenced or inspired by this work, even making a detailed comparison of the two works, I think it is essential to present the facts for all to know, as I have done above. People should also understand, that Thai society at the time when Siburapha wrote Songkhram chiwit, bad as it might have been, was not as bad as Russian society in the days of Tsar Nicholas nor even Thai society nowadays; and most important, they should also understand that he did not write it to compete with the Russian author, so it is not the most appropriate thing to go comparing them.²⁸

A word which occurs frequently in Thai discussions of Songkhram chiwit is 'humanitarian': Chua Satawethin calls it 'the first Thai humanitarian novel',²⁹ which is echoed in Trisin's description of it as 'the starting point for a humanitarian consciousness',³⁰ while Rungwit observes that the work 'illustrates rather clearly the humanitarianism of Kulap Saipradit'.³¹ 'Humanitarian' is in many ways a rather inappropriate choice of word, for when applied to a novel, it suggests a work which, to quote Chua, 'evokes a sympathetic attitude towards the weak and poor'.³² Doubtless the writers had in mind the descriptions of

²⁸ ibid., pp. 42-3

²⁹ Chua Satawethin. 1974. Prawat nawaniyai thai. Bangkok: Suttthisan Kanphim. p. 110.

³⁰ Trisin, 1980, op.cit., p.79. see also p.74.

³¹ Rungwit, 1979a, op.cit., p. 10.

³² Chua, op.cit., p. 112

the beggar and his child, the Chinese rickshaw man, the dismissed civil servant and the imprisoned writer. But with the exception of the Chinese rickshaw man, it is not sympathy so much that Kulāp is trying to arouse as anger; he wants the reader to share his fury at the injustice that causes such pitiful events. In labelling the novel 'humanitarian' critics have unduly diluted what Kulāp was saying and, for whatever reasons, underplayed its 'political' content.³³ The most extreme example, perhaps, is Chū'a, who while acknowledging the importance of the content, devotes the greater part of his essay to pointing out the stylistic excellence of the work:

The first Thai humanitarian novel was Songkhrām chīwit which was so well written, that he was praised by all his fellow Thai novelists as the master of this type of novel. It was first published in 1932 before the change from the absolute monarchy, and is now forty years old; yet it remains fresh and new like the novels of today. Apart from this, there are no other novels of the same type which even bear comparison with it. This story is worthwhile both in its ideas and its use of language. It sparkles in its eloquence, especially in its expressions of everlasting love, to the point of making you sob and sigh in emotional exhaustion.³⁴

He begins with a quite gratuitous quotation from Rāpnin's last letter:

Reading this famous work again, one gets the full flavour of it. Sībūrāpnā says, 'If I were a bird, I would fly after you and follow you everywhere. Even if I were hit by an arrow in mid-flight, I would try to fly straight to your lap. And when you, my darling, had wiped away the blood and tears, I would close my eyes and die happily'. This lament comes from the mouth of Rāpnin Yuttnasin, the hero, who is discarded by the heroine, Phlōen, who then goes and marries Nai Winai Buranakiat, a wealthy film director.³⁵

³³The 'humanitarian' label originates from Rāpnin's words quoted on p. 99. For further comment on the 'diluted' interpretation of Songkhrām chīwit, see Chapter V.

³⁴Chū'a, op.cit., p. 110. Kwandee (op.cit., p.62.) describes the language as 'unrealistic' and 'ornate'.

³⁵ibid., pp. 110-11.

He goes on to stress the appeal the romantic language held for young people:

Sībūraphā wrote Songkhrām chīwit using new expressions in the style of good quality foreign novels. Emotions are beautifully expressed, no matter whether they are feelings of love between a young couple or feelings of hatred for high class society. A mere two characters are able to show readers a wonderfully broad philosophy of life. Young readers are captivated by Sībūraphā's expressions of love to the point almost of memorizing them as if they were their own.³⁶

and if that is not enough, just for good measure he adds,

The influence of this work on young people was considerable because it was an unusual love story. The expressions of love are all exquisite and the endings to the letters are admirably surprising, gradually increasing the romantic current. Kaphin and Phlōēn end their letters, alternately, with 'I love you, Phlōēn, more than anyone', 'The same way as you feel about me', 'I love you alone, Phlōēn', 'As before', 'As always', 'Always yours, Phlōēn', 'I love no one as much as you', 'Yours, Phlōēn, until the end of the world', 'I love you and worship you', 'And one more kiss, darling', 'And I kiss you with my heart' ...³⁷

Many people would agree with what Čhū'a says; it is what he leaves unsaid, or mentions only in passing - and not for lack of space, for in addition to a certain repetitiveness in his remarks, he also manages a lengthy and irrelevant digression on the life of Dostoevsky - that mars his comments on the work.

Despite certain similarities to the early novels, Songkhrām chīwit marked a significant change in Kulāp's attitude to fiction. Where earlier he had been primarily interested in entertaining his readers, in Songkhrām chīwit his views on the role of the writer are more serious and clearly expressed in the words of

³⁶ ibid., p. 112.

³⁷ ibid., pp. 113-4.

Phlōēn:

I'm waiting for the day when you become a writer. It's not wealth, I'm hoping for, but rather that you will be able to help to teach these people about the responsibilities appropriate to their standing as human beings.³⁸

Kulāp's firm belief in the value of reading is likewise explicitly stated, this time through the mouth of Raphin:

Now I can tell you that I see what a tremendous benefit reading is. I don't think for one moment that there is anything more worthwhile for us. I really love books. I love them passionately. They sow the seeds of humanitarianism in our feelings, which, surprising as it may be, is quite certain. I must try to write a book for the happiness and advancement of everyone.³⁹

Kulāp certainly does attempt to 'sow the seeds of humanitarian-ism in our feelings' in Songkhrām chīwit, but that is only part of the story;⁴⁰ there is a lot more anger in the work than most critics have been prepared to admit, some even ignoring all the serious issues voiced and seeing the work purely as a romantic novel. Whether politics comes into the down-playing of the content of Songkhrām chīwit or not, it has certainly suited critics from both the left and right, who have been able to plot a neat, linear progression in Kulāp's literary development, slotting the work into a 'middle period' where his artistic talent developed and his social concern was born, prior to being devoured or properly harnessed, depending on the critic's sympathies, by Marxist influence.

³⁸ 'Sībūraphā', 1949, op.cit., p.78

³⁹ ibid., p.85. Raphin even remarks disparagingly that the wealthy Kēyūn 'really only reads for pleasure.' (ibid., p. 138).

⁴⁰ It is important to realise that Raphin and Phlōēn are used to arouse our romantic pity, not our social concern; their complaints about their circumstances are often trivial or self-pitying. Kulāp intended our 'humanitarianism' to be directed towards the beggar, the rickshaw man, the dismissed civil servant and the imprisoned journalist.

While Songkhram chīwit seemed to herald the emergence of a radical novelist, Kulāp's other famous novel of the 1930's, Khāng lang phāp, represented a distinct retreat to the purely romantic novel. His reasons were practical: he needed money to build a house.⁴¹ At the same time, the political climate and stringent press censorship that had led him to resign from Prachāchāt were not, perhaps, the most conducive for developing some of the ideas he had expressed in Songkhram chīwit. For all that, Kulāp produced, in Khāng lang phāp, a work of considerable skill, widely regarded not only as his most artistically accomplished work, but also as one of the best novels to have been written in Thai. It is the story of the youthful infatuation of a Thai student for an older married woman who is visiting Japan with her husband. Her return to Thailand and the passage of time cool his ardour to the point where he feels indifferent; it is only when he returns to Thailand later, and she is on her deathbed, that he learns that his original feelings had been reciprocated.

Khāng lang phāp : a summary⁴²

In the introductory chapter, Pari, the wife of the narrator, Nopphōn, asks him about the rather ordinary water-colour painting that he has recently hung in his study. It is a landscape with two small, indistinct figures seated together on a rock and the word 'Mitaké' inscribed in the bottom corner. Nopphōn, trying to

⁴¹Yot, loc. cit.

⁴²A full translation of the novel appears in Appendix A.

sound natural, tells his wife that a friend gave it to him, and she lets the matter rest after expressing her own lack of enthusiasm for its merits. The picture distracts Nopphōn greatly, for it evokes vivid memories of a past that his wife knows nothing of. The picture, he confides to the reader, was painted with the artist's life, and behind it lies a story full of sadness.

While a student of Banking at Rikkyo University, Nopphōn receives news from one of his father's friends, Čhao Khun Attnikānbōdi that he intends to visit Japan shortly with his new wife, Mōm Rātcnawong Kīrati, and would like Nopphōn to find a house for them to rent. From the letter, in which Čhao Khun had referred to his new wife's sheltered background, Nopphōn assumes that M.R. Kīrati will be a rather stuffy middle-aged woman and he is quite taken aback by her youthful appearance when he meets them.

Nopphōn's university term has ended and he spends much of his time with Čhao Khun and his wife, the latter especially, for Čhao Khun often asks him to keep his wife company while he himself is out on business or at some social function. Nopphōn and M.R. Kīrati quickly strike up a close friendship, she showing an almost maternal concern for his welfare, while he discovers her to be not only beautiful, but also a charming, witty and intelligent companion. What puzzles Nopphōn more and more as he gets to know M.R. Kīrati, is why such a good-looking and intelligent woman should have chosen to marry an old man in his fifties. The first real hint of sadness in her past comes when they are out walking one day, and Nopphōn, at her invitation, attempts to guess her age. When

ne guesses her to be about twenty-six, she reflects sadly how life had seemed so full of hope nine years ago when she was that age. Nopphōn concludes that despite appearances, she had not really wanted to marry Chao khun. He does not pursue the matter, but turns it over in his mind, together with other thoughts about their friendship, not the least being the fact that the thirteen year difference in their ages seems to present no barrier to their relationship.

A few days later Chao khun attends an evening function; his wife excuses herself on the grounds of feeling unwell and he asks Nopphōn to come round and keep her company while he is gone. It is a lovely moonlit night and the two of them decide to go out for a walk to the nearby park, where they take a boat out on the lake. Seeing her stretched out in the boat in a white silk kimono, Nopphōn feels he has never before seen anyone as beautiful as M.R. Kīrati. She talks of her love of painting and asks him about his plans for the future. He replies that he is concerned only with building a career, and has no thoughts of marriage at this stage, but he feels uncomfortable at having concealed the existence of the fiancée his father has found for him back in Thailand.

After some time in the boat, M.R. Kīrati complains that it is beginning to get chilly and that her feet are getting cold, whereupon, to her astonishment, Nopphōn removes his scarf and places it round her feet, explaining, 'your feet are more beautiful than my neck, so they should be given more care and attention.'⁴³

⁴³ 'Sībūrapnā'. 1938. op. cit., p.70

After a couple of hours in the boat, they return to the lake-side, long after all the other couples. Čhao Khun arrives back at the house about half-an-hour after them, and neither mention that they have been out while he was away. That night Noppħ̄n again finds it difficult to sleep as he relives the moments when he held M.R. Kīrati's hand to help her out of the boat and when she replaced his scarf around his neck when he was leaving the house.

The scene shifts to Kamakura, a seaside resort where Čhao Khun and his wife have gone for a few days. Noppħ̄n has been invited to go, too, and while the old man spends much of his time socialising with Japanese and American guests at the hotel, he is left to entertain M.R. Kīrati, accompanying her on walks, and on one occasion, swimming with her among topless Japanese ladies. On the last day of their stay, there is a ball. Čhao Khun is enjoying himself immensely, drinking and dancing with the other guests, and readily consents to M.R. Kīrati and Noppħ̄n going outside for a last walk. Once they are alone, she tells Noppħ̄n how nappy her husband is that the two of them get on so well together, but he is certain that Čhao Khun must feel jealous. He feels embarrassed when M.R. Kīrati reminds him that there is nothing in their friendship for her husband to object to. But then she admits that age creates a barrier between people and that she can only love him as a child might love a kind old man. Happiness is more important than love, she believes, and since her husband does not really demand love from her, and she feels she has no right to it, they are able to live together in contentment. Noppħ̄n is eager to find out why she married Čhao Khun, but she tells him it is time to return.

As Nopphōn becomes more and more emotionally attached to M.R. Kīrati, he begins to fear the day when she will return to Thailand. One day, when Čhao khun is due to meet the Thai ambassador, the two of them set off by train for a day trip to a small resort called Mitaké. Once they reach their destination, they quickly lose the crowds, and before long find themselves alone in an idyllic spot, surrounded by trees and wild flowers with a stream running nearby. They play happily like children, jumping from rock to rock, and he weaves her a garland of wild flowers, while she places a single flower in his button-hole. Nopphōn asks her again why she married, and this time M.R. Kīrati tells him of her stifling childhood as the daughter of a noble, where she was virtually shut away from the real world; she relates how it had only been through the events of later years and the books she had been given by her elderly English governess, that she had really begun to think about her life. But as the years passed and her sisters married, she gradually lost hope of ever finding matrimonial happiness, until one day, at the age of 34, she was urged by her father to accept the offer of marriage from one of his widower friends, lest it be her last chance. She recalls his attempts to console her with talk of 'fate' and her own feelings of distaste, disbelief and sadness at the prospect of such a match. Eventually, however, she had agreed, partly to please her father, but more as a means of escaping from the narrow confines of her world. She ends her story declaring quite emphatically that she cannot love an old man who 'has no future, only a past and a present.'⁴⁴

⁴⁴ibid., p.137

As they prepare to leave, Nopphōn helps M.R. Kīrati to her feet, holding on to her hand longer than necessary; a moment later he pulls her close to him, kissing her and telling her he loves her. She frees herself from his embrace, and as he returns to his senses, she reminds him gently that they have to face up to reality. She warns him to act naturally when they reach home, but to his relief, Čhao Ahun has not yet returned. Nopphōn does not go straight back to his lodgings but stops off at a coffee shop, where the beer and a Japanese hostess provide momentary relief from the emotional intensity he has experienced in the last few weeks. That night he lies awake again, but this time he somehow feels confident as he wonders whether M.R. Kīrati loves him.

Although M.R. Kīrati persuades her husband to extend their stay by two weeks, the day of departure soon arrives. Early on the last morning, she goes to Nopphōn's room in the hotel where they are all staying, to make a last farewell in private. Although Nopphōn is desperate to know whether she loves him too, she will not answer his question directly; but as she is about to leave his room, she takes off her silk scarf and gives it to him as a souvenir. Once on the boat, there is only a brief moment alone; again, Nopphōn asks urgently if she loves him and again, her reply is evasive. Both have tears in their eyes when he finally leaves the boat.

Once back in Tokyo, Nopphōn spends much of his time writing long intimate letters to M.R. Kīrati as he relives the emotional intensity of the last couple of months. She replies regularly, advising him, among other things, not to waste too much time

thinking about her. As he settles back into his studies, however, the pain of separation gradually eases. As time passes, and their exchange of letters becomes less frequent, he comes to realise that he no longer regards her as any more than a friend; and when news comes of the death of Chao khun, he sends his condolences as a friend, not a lover who sees an immovable obstacle suddenly cleared from his path.

Nopphōn continues his studies in Japan for a further two years before going to work for a Japanese bank. He corresponds only infrequently with M.R. Kīrati now and finds it difficult to know what to write. Just prior to departing for Thailand, he receives a letter from her, warning him that things will have changed after so long apart, yet even so, she barely conceals her disappointment at receiving so little news from him. When his boat docks in Thailand she is there waiting at the quayside, standing a little apart from his family and friends; they all board the vessel and he is introduced to his fiancée for the first time and finds her singularly unremarkable. M.R. Kīrati is still beautiful, but he cannot help feeling surprised that she should choose to wear the same dress she had worn on the first day in Tokyo.

He tells her, somewhat hollowly, that they will never have to be as sad as they had been on the day they had parted, but she replies poignantly that separation is not the only cause of sadness. He expresses eagerness to see her again, but she persuades him to spend time with his family first. That evening, he learns from his father that M.R. Kīrati has had further proposals of

marriage, but has rejected them and shunned society.

It is a further five days before Nopphōn manages to find time, between making arrangements for his future career, to visit M.R. Kīrati. She now lives in a house of her own, the garden of which has been laid out in Japanese style; the substantial sum of money she inherited on her husband's death has saved her from having to return to her former sterile way of life in her father's home. Two months pass before Nopphōn pays a second visit, and he is aware of M.R. Kīrati's disappointment at his lengthy absence. He tells her of his forthcoming marriage and she is shocked when she realises that he had been engaged even before they first met. He has little enthusiasm for the marriage, and this, and his whole-hearted dedication to work, he attributes to the unrequited love he felt for her six years previously.

On the day of the wedding M.R. Kīrati is sick and unable to attend; Nopphōn visits her with his new bride a few days later, and notices that she looks sick and pale. A further two months elapse and Nopphōn returns from work one day to find M.R. Kīrati's aunt waiting at his home. She tells him that M.R. Kīrati is seriously ill and that whenever a visitor calls, she always asks if it is Nopphōn. He hurries round to her house, where the doctor informs him there is no hope; a relative tells him that she has insisted on getting dressed and made-up before receiving him in privacy. Although pleased to see him, she tells him that he has never understood her, nor even himself. From under a pillow she takes a small picture she has painted of the scene at Mitaké and gives it to him as a wedding present. He wonders why she has

given him such an insignificant gift, but she explains that for all its flaws it was painted with her heart and soul. It was at Mitaké, she says, that she first began to love Nopphōn, and has loved him ever since, even though she realises his own feelings have changed. A week later, with Nopphōn at her bedside, she dies. Too weak to speak at the end, she writes her last words to him: 'I die with no one to love me, yet content that there is someone I love.'⁴⁵

Although Kulāp was returning to the safe ground of the romantic novel, Khāng lang phāp proved to be a much more mature and sophisticated work than any of his early novels. Gone were the neatly manufactured plot, the contrived misunderstanding and the hero-villain rivalry with its predictable outcome; and gone, too, was the rigid distinction between right and wrong that limits the reader's intellectual involvement in the dilemmas of the early characters. With all the ingredients for a sordid and salacious tale of an affair between a respectably married older woman and a young student who both have adultery on their minds, Kulāp leads the reader to suspend judgement and look into the thoughts and feelings of the two main protagonists in order to try to understand why they behave as they do. That many readers would doubtless raise an eyebrow at the mention of 'affair' or 'adultery' is perhaps indicative of Kulap's success in Khāng lang phāp; as one Thai critic has put it,

... readers accepted it was written in a realistic way but with such delicacy that it did not appear morally

⁴⁵ ibid., p.257

wrong. It had a truthfulness with which the reader sympathised and identified, and not the kind which arouses hatred or contempt.⁴⁶

It is Kulāp's skill in persuading us to accept M.L. Bunlū'a's 'truthfulness' that elevates khāng lang phāp above the ordinary popular, sentimental, romantic novel. There are several factors that contribute to this success. In the first place, the main characters are more complex than those in any of his earlier works, each having their own little human failings, and both possessing some sense of humour. At another level, issues of fundamental concern, not just to aristocratic women like M.R. Kīrati, but to all women, are articulated; these include the fear of being left an old maid, of losing one's beauty, of being trapped in a joyless marriage and fears about the frailty of men's love. Most important of all, perhaps, Kulāp attempts to deal with emotions with a degree of honesty seldom found in this kind of fiction. Thus where separation in the world of the romantic novel merely fuels the intensity of love, in Nopphōn's case the pain gradually heals, as it usually does in real life, and the letter-writing which had once offered such emotional sustenance becomes a tiresome duty. With passion dead he can feel only embarrassment. When he meets M.R. Kīrati again in Thailand, outwardly he tries to pretend that nothing has changed, while inwardly he is deliberately refusing to acknowledge the significance of her choice of dress, or later, the present of the painting; and he expresses eagerness to see her while using work as an excuse for his infrequent calls. When he is

⁴⁶M.L. Bunlū'a *Thēpyasuwan*. 1974. Wikhro rot wannakhadi thai. Bangkok: Khrōngkān tamrā sangkhomsāt lae manutsayasāt. p. 122.

finally forced to admit to M.R. Kīrati that his feelings have changed, he says that he has simply denied his own true feelings at her request and for her sake. We may share Nopphōn's unease at being confronted with such an awkward situation and sympathise with his attempts to spare M.R. Kīrati's feelings; but the lie is all too transparent, because he has earlier admitted how his feelings cooled of their own accord. Indeed, if what he said were true, such heroic self-denial would drag the novel into the sickly depths of sentimentality. But even at the end, Kulāp manages to avoid this, for Nopphōn neither rediscovers his love for M.R. Kīrati as she lies dying nor expresses any guilt or any regret or any sorrow or anything very much at all. Instead we find him peculiarly detached in his emotions, for his love for M.R. Kīrati has truly died and cannot be revived simply to tidy up the plot or round off the novel conveniently.

Realism, relevance and honesty are important ingredients in a good novel; but Kulāp was still faced with the problem of persuading readers that a woman such as M.R. Kīrati might be attracted to a man so much younger than herself⁴⁷ so that they would sympathise with her predicament and admire her self-restraint. This he does by arousing a feeling of growing antipathy in the reader towards M.R. Kīrati's husband. Čhao Khun is in fact a perfectly harmless creature whose only serious fault is his age; yet he is portrayed in an ever more grotesque and ridiculous light, to the point where the reader ignores M.R. Kīrati's little deceptions

⁴⁷M.L. Bunlū'a in *ibid.*, pp. 122-23, recalls how an educated male acquaintance failed to grasp precisely this point.

and welcomes her brief affair. At first M.R. Kīrati is matter-of-fact about her feelings towards her husband:

I like him in the way a child should like a kind old man ... You've seen what I am and what Chao Khun is. There's a big difference in our ages. It's like a large mountain acting as a barrier to the love between us and preventing our love from meeting ... I don't believe in love between two different generations. I don't believe it can really exist.⁴⁸

But as she goes on to explain why she thinks he does not love her, she evokes an image of a pathetic and impotent old man:

His love has dried up with old age. His days of loving have passed. Now he doesn't know how to love, because he has nothing to love with - to give me the love I want.⁴⁹

She betrays a sheer physical repugnance for her husband as she tells Nopphōn of her reactions when her father first suggested the match:

I dressed myself up immaculately and sat in front of the mirror in my bedroom and for a long while I examined my physical appearance with painstaking care. I still had the figure of a young girl and my looks were unblemished. It was awful to think that this body which was still young and fresh with beauty would have to be wedded to a man of 50.⁵⁰

And just for good measure, she adds,

It seems I've already told you once that there is no way I can love him. Of course he's a really good man, but what do I want with an old man? He wants to eat his fill and go to sleep and to enjoy himself in his own way. He has too little time left for building ideals in life. He's not interested in moonlight and lakes or even sweet words. He has no thoughts of or dreams of beauty. He has no future, only a past and a present. So how can you expect love to blossom? Even a rose won't bloom on a concrete road.⁵¹

⁴⁸ 'Sībūraphā', 1938, op.cit., pp.86-7.

⁴⁹ ibid., pp. 90-1. The liquid metaphor is inadequately conveyed in the English; in Thai, the word 'nam rak' (literally, 'water of love') is used rather than the more common 'khwām rak'.

⁵⁰ ibid., p. 132.

⁵¹ ibid., p.137.

The irony is not lost on the reader that the age difference between Čhao Khun and M.R. Kīrati is almost identical to that between M.R. Kīrati and Nopphōn.

The average reader of a novel is primarily concerned with 'what happens next'; even in a novel like Khāng lang phāp which employs a flashback-technique there has to be some element of suspense. What keeps the reader turning the pages in Khāng lang phāp is not the beautiful language or atmospheric settings, but rather the thrill of illicit love; part of us, of course knows that M.R. Kīrati is far too respectable and sensible and virtuous to go damaging her reputation, but there remains a flirtatious side to her character and a willingness to deceive her husband that yet raises some doubts about her loyalty. The façade of a happy marriage is relentlessly stripped away in her own descriptions of her husband, but as she gets to know Nopphōn, a sense of conspiracy begins to permeate their relationship. After their evening boat trip, Nopphōn observes,

M.R. Kīrati and I each came to the conclusion that there was no need to inform Čhao Khun of the details of our evening excursion, and because we were both in agreement, we didn't offer each other any explanation.⁵²

On the day of their trip to Mitaké, M.R. Kīrati deliberately invites Nopphōn round to meet her before Čhao Khun wakes up.

Nopphōn recalls how,

she invited me round to the house at 7 o'clock which was a time when Čhao Khun was still in bed. Together we prepared some snacks and put them in a box along with one or two other items we might need to make our trip as enjoyable as possible.

⁵² ibid., p.71

M.R. Kīrati seemed to enjoy herself very much while we were getting things together. We left the house at half-past-eight, not before M.R. Kīrati had gone up to Chao Khun's bedroom to say goodbye again. She came out smiling happily. 'He's woken up,' she said. 'He said he had intended to help us get things ready, and hadn't thought we'd be running off before daybreak. I said to him, "What do you mean, 'daybreak'? It's gone eight o'clock already". But we weren't trying to sneak away from him, were we, Nopphōn?' she said, laughing.⁵³

And then on the last day of her stay in Japan, M.R. Kīrati slips into Nopphōn's hotel room before anyone else is up and about, so that she can make her farewells in private and give him her scarf as a souvenir. What if Chao Khun had seen her emerging from Nopphōn's room, we ask ourselves, or if he had realised it had taken her one-and-a-half hours to prepare her lunch-time snacks with Nopphōn, or if he had arrived back before them on the night of the boat trip when M.R. Kīrati was supposedly feeling unwell? The reader is only too well aware that it is a dangerous game that M.R. Kīrati is playing.

Most comment on Khāng lang phāp by Thai writers draws attention to the aesthetic merits of the work which are seen to lie largely in the careful construction of the work and the 'poetic and evocative language'.⁵⁴ M.R. Kīrati is regarded as the central figure, and her life typical of the stifling existence endured by a certain class of women at the time.⁵⁵ Although she is a 'loser'.

⁵³ibid., pp. 101-2

⁵⁴M.L. Bunlū'a, 1974. op.cit., p. 124.

⁵⁵Kulāp apparently took M.C. Wan Waithayākōn's younger sister, Phranāng Laksamī Lāwan as the basis for the character of M.R. Kīrati. (Phaisān, op.cit., p. 124)

in love';⁵⁶ M.L. Bunlū'a finds a 'better-to-have-loved-and-lost' message in the novel.⁵⁷

In a radically different interpretation of the novel which appeared in an essay entitled Dū wannakhadī čhāk sangkhom, dū sangkhom čhāk wannakhadī (Looking at Literature from Society, Looking at Society from Literature)'P. Mū'angchomphū',⁵⁸ argued that M.R. Kīrati and Nopphōn should be seen respectively as symbols of fast disappearing and useless class and the rising commercial class which replaced it. The essay, first published in 1949, has been reprinted frequently since the mid-1970's and has visibly influenced many literary critics of the last decade; for this reason it is worth quoting the comments on Khāng lang phāp in some detail:

I like Khāng lang phāp by 'Sībūraphā' because of the way it reflects the state of society to come, which even if it is not very clear, is still sufficient for us to see. I don't know whether this was what 'Sībūraphā' intended or not, because he once said on this subject, that he wrote the book from studying the life of only one woman. Although it is true that it is important what Sībūraphā's intentions were, what is even more important than this, is the life of the 'one woman' whom Sībūraphā studied; and whether this involved the events of her life, her thoughts, or her relations with other people, we must regard it as a product of society, unfolding in accordance with the times and environment of that age. The portrait of life which the author presents from the beginning to the end, although beginning with 'sweet' love and ending sadly, and being written in a romantic form, which he has attempted to endow with an artistic quality in order to move the heart of the reader, is still just one view of society amongst countless others. The writer is merely the one who chooses the picture which he thinks represents life. The only problem

⁵⁶ Rančhuān, op.cit., pp.245-254.

⁵⁷ M.L. Bunlū'a, 1974. op.cit., p. 124

⁵⁸ 'P. Mū'angchomphū' is a pseudonym of Bančhong Bančnōetsin, which in turn is believed by some to be the pseudonym of Udom Sīsuwan, a radical literary critic and journalist imprisoned in 1958, and who after his release, went underground.

is whether the writer is conscious in his choice, or to what extent he is. As far as the ideas he expresses are concerned, they are inevitably a reflection of society and the life which the writer studies and which constitute the external environment which determines the writer's ideas.

The life of M.R. Kīrati, the main character in Sībūraphā's Khāng lang phāp was a good choice on Sībūraphā's part and is well written. M.R. Kīrati is from the upper class of the old society. The old style of 'gratitude' forces her to endure tragedy. The various teachings she has received are no help to her in finding real happiness in life, and even her skill in beauty care cannot save her from a bitter death. We may shed tears of pity for the unfortunate M.R. Kīrati, but at the same time we ought to hold back a little, and ask why M.R. Kīrati has to face such sorrow. Is it because of a destiny shaped by God? Of course not. It is society that does that moulding. If we compare the life of M.R. Kīrati with the state of the upper class ten years ago, which was when Khāng lang phāp made its appearance on the literary scene, then the tragedy of M.R. Kīrati amounts to a portrayal of the destruction of the upper class. The political star of the upper class (sakdina) declined in unison with the fading away of their life-style. The search of this class for new freedoms was similar to M.R. Kīrati's search for freedom, which ultimately ended in failure. What the upper class encountered was the same as M.R. Kīrati, that is, a sterile present and a vanishing past. All of these images are embodied in the sterile and barren ideas of Chao Khun Atthikānbōdī, her husband, who is approaching his sixties and already old and outdated. The struggle of the upper class is the same as the struggle of M.R. Kīrati. Despite her 'gratitude', her 'virtue' and her skill in beauty care, it does not help to make the past or her beauty return ... The words, 'I die with no one to love me, yet content that there is someone I love', can be regarded as symbolizing the thoughts of the upper class who were happy and proud in the past when they prospered well under the old system of farming on the backs of other people.

As for Nopphōn, who becomes involved in M.R. Kīrati's life and plays a part in creating the tragedy in Khāng lang phāp, he is an individual appropriate to the time. From what Sībūraphā portrays, we can see that Nopphōn is dishonest. He builds romantic castles in the air, and then destroys them in cold blood. It is not hard to find real people in society with the same character as Nopphōn, even nowadays. Nopphōn studies Banking at Rikkyo Univeristy in Japan. This was a subject that suited society's needs at the time. At that time, Thailand was the target of imperialist Japan's dumping policy. What flourished in Thailand was trade, not industry. Trade inevitably involves foreign relations, and at that time the important country was Japan. Trade which depended on foreign goods inevitably gave rapid rise to a class of compradore capitalists in Thai society.

When Nopphōn went to Japan, it coincided with the 'Great Friends' era. Nopphōn studies Banking as a result of the compradore capitalist society which needs a circulation of money more than a circulation of goods, because our country has no firm industrial base. There are more banks in Thailand than industries. This is an economic sign of our country. The dishonesty of Nopphōn is the dishonesty of the compradore capitalist class which flourished after the end of the absolute monarchy. This class was concerned only with making profits, which is exactly Nopphōn's aim, for he is concerned largely with his own advancement. Any tenderness which occurred at Mitaké is destroyed and forgotten. The past is undesirable to Nopphōn; what he wants is the present.

From the changes in society, let us look at the development of human relationships. Just as Nopphōn cannot love and take M.R. Kīrati as his wife when he is a young man with a bright future, and M.R. Kīrati is almost forty, old and with no future, so, too, the compradore capitalist class who occupied the positions in society formerly held by the upper class, could not accept an old system to govern them. What Nopphōn or his class are constantly aware of, is 'beauty', which M.R. Kīrati or the old society perpetuated; but appearance is transient and illusory, something that is easy to love and easy to forget.⁵⁹

For all its originality, however, P. Mū'angchomphū's interpretation of Khāng lang phāp amounts to little more than a series of bold but unsubstantiated assertions which the reader is expected to accept in good faith. Like much that has been written about Kulāp, it has to be seen in the context of the times; in 1950, when the essay appeared, Kulāp was on the one hand trying to write stories aimed at raising social and political consciousness, while on the other, enjoying wide acclaim as a writer of romances set among the élite. What P.Mū'angchomphū has in effect achieved is a reconciliation of this contradiction, making it acceptable for radical critics to admire Khāng lang phāp by suggesting there is rather more to it than a sentimental love story. No Thai critic

⁵⁹ P. Mū'angchomphū, "Dū wannakhadī čhāk sangkhom, dū sangkhom čhāk wannakhadī". pp. 249-55. In 'Intharayut'. 1979. Khō khił čhāk wannakhadī. Bangkok:Rungrū'angsin.

has attempted to refute the symbolic interpretation of the main characters, and Trīsin's study of the novel wholeheartedly endorses it:

Even though there was nothing new in presenting the life of a woman oppressed by customs, the idea of having the woman from the old society confront the new world in order to portray the "death" of the values of the "old world" embodied in the novel form, can be regarded as a further step in the development of the Thai novel.⁶⁰

It is M.L. Bunlū'a who points out that in a way, we know more about Nopphōn than M.R. Kīrati, since he is the filter through whom our perceptions of her are processed.⁶¹ Most Thai writers, however, including M.L. Bunlū'a, focus their attention on M.R. Kīrati and her 'tragedy' rather than treat the novel at face value as the romantic 'confession' of a sadder and now wiser man. This is a significant omission. At one level it fails to take account of the fact that the novel is as much about a young man's awakening to the frailty of his emotions, as about M.R. Kīrati's unhappy life. At another level, it does not acknowledge that it is left to the readers to determine to what extent they are going to accept Nopphōn's interpretation of events. With sufficient textual evidence to support quite different interpretations of the personalities of Nopphōn and M.R. Kīrati, Khāng lang phāp, uniquely among Kulāp's novels, rewards re-reading.

Soon after the appearance of Khāng lang phāp, Kulāp was given the backing to launch a new, daily Suphāpburut which occupied much

⁶⁰Trīsin, 1980, op.cit., p. 128.

⁶¹M.L. Bunlu'a, 1974, op.cit., p. 121.

of his energies for the next four years. After that, his imprisonment, the World War II paper shortage, and a study trip to Australia were further distractions and almost a decade passed before he returned seriously to writing fiction.

CHAPTER IV
THE LATER FICTION

In the four years between his return from Australia in 1949 and his imprisonment in the 'Peace Coup', Kulāp wrote prolifically, both fiction and non-fiction. The novel and dozen or so short stories he wrote during this period are noticeably more 'political' than the pre-war fiction on which he had built his name as a writer. Since these works followed closely on his return from Australia, where Kulāp had 'studied' political science at Melbourne University, many observers have drawn the conclusion that Kulāp underwent some kind of political conversion or radical awakening while in Australia. While this is both an overstatement and a simplification, there is no doubt that Kulap's ideas about literature and the role of the writer had changed radically from the days when he was trying to break into the Thai literary world at the end of the second decade of the century.¹ In the foreword to the novel Čhon kwā rao čha phop kan ĩk (Until We Meet Again) written in 1950, Kulāp stated quite explicitly that he was writing for readers 'who want books to feed their minds and not just ones for pleasure and fun';² while in the afterword to the 1954 reprint of Lūk phūchāi, the influence of Marxist literary

¹ see Chapter V.

² 'Sībūrapnā'. 1975. Čhon kwā rao čha phop kan ĩk. Bangkok: Nāew rūām čhula. (kham thalaēng khōng phū tāeng, n.p.)

theory is quite apparent:

... in an age when it is believed that the aim of the novel lies solely in being an instrument of pleasure for the reader, there has been some broadening of its boundaries, namely by the inclusion of what might be called ethics or morals in the novel. But even when it comes to ethics and morals, there are still those who protest that these are not the concern of the novel, that it is not the duty of the novel to improve morals and that the novel depends on the writer's dreams alone. Even if he takes readers to the abyss of hell, he must be allowed to do so, because "art is something lofty and pure and the artist like one seated on the back of a royal garuda floating above the clouds. And sometimes it goes even further than this, to the point where it becomes a person's salvation or nirvana, that is, something without beginning, without end, coming from nowhere, and going nowhere, something profoundly miraculous. Such words are nice and bright and cheerful and should please writers and artists; but if there is just one thing missing from these words, it is the truth! ... Thus, the novelist's belief that he is portraying life realistically is something which needs to be considered. We think that we have portrayed life as it is, but it may not be the truth as most people see it. It may be the truth in the rich man's way of thinking, but it may be false and deceptive in the view of the poor beggar. Writers may feel quite certain that they have used their literary art honestly and sincerely in portraying life, and that they have no desire whatsoever to use their art as a means of giving pleasure to or eulogizing the moral righteousness of any minority. But no matter how confident we are of our integrity, it still may not be able to prevent us from losing our way. Even though we have no wish to overlook the truth about the lives of the majority, we can easily do so without realising it.

When we abandon our old and firmly-held belief that the only function of the novel is to provide pleasure to the reader (because in fact the novel has a much wider function and responsibility), when we realise that the novelist's attitude towards life and the world is an important factor in making his novel something of value or something worthless, something which creates good or harm for the people, when novelists correct their attitude to one which is in line with and blends with the aims and wishes of the people, and when we have really examined these problems and are prepared to welcome facts and new ideas in analysing and improving our attitudes, then we can escape from being lost, if we are lost.³

³'Sibūraphā', 1954, op.cit., pp. 10-17 (kham thalāēng khōng phū tāēng)

It is these post-Australia works, together with the novel Lāe pai khāng nā (Look Forward), part of which was written in prison, that are the most controversial of Kulāp's fiction, and which for many years were not available to readers.⁴ It is only since 1973 that they have become widely known and since then, their frequent reprintings have contributed to a radical re-assessment of Kulāp's literary achievement.

Čhon kwā rao čha phop kan ĩk is the shortest of Kulāp's major novels, running to little more than 100 pages in recent paperback editions. Set in Australia, the story is told by Dorothy, an ordinary working girl who becomes friendly with Kōmēt, a wealthy young Thai studying in her country. In lengthy conversations, she learns of the injustice that exists in Thailand and how he has, through the influence of the remarkable and idealistic Nancy Henderson, reformed his former hedonist ways and become eager to contribute to social justice in his country.

Čhon kwā rao čha phop kan ĩk : a summary

Dorothy first meets Kōmēt on a bus tour, when they share a table at one of the stop-off points. She is impressed by his knowledge of Australia as he tells her about the Labour government's subsidies for tea and the state road-building projects initiated at the end of World War I to provide employment for returning soldiers. At a later stop-off point, they meet up again, and with a timely rain shower appearing, they both huddle under Kōmēt's rain coat, he putting his arm around her waist as they walk back to the bus.

⁴Witthayākōn Chīangkūn. 1984. Čhan čhu'ng mā hā khwāmmāi. Bangkok: Ton Sak. p. 30. Witthayākōn mentions that as a student, (in the mid-sixties) he had only read Songkhrām chīwit and khāng lang phāp among Kulāp's novels, and none of the later works.

Dorothy regrets not having exchanged addresses with Kōmēt but by chance meets him some weeks later at the golf-course, where they are assigned to the same foursome. After the game he tells her something of Thailand; he speaks of the kindness of the country folk and the beauty of the countryside, but when Dorothy naively remarks that she wishes she were a Thai farmer, his tone changes dramatically:

You're not sufficiently capable of putting up with the injustice that would assault your eyes every day, injustice which has gone on for centuries, right up until nowadays, and today, even at this very hour, no one is interested. Just listen to what I have to tell you, Dorothy, and you'll abandon, once and for all, any thoughts of wanting to be a farmer in Siam. If after you'd listened, you still wanted to go, you'd become a revolutionary in one day, and you might be imprisoned or simply shot because no one would understand you.

He goes on to point out how badly the rural majority of the population are neglected by the government, highlighting in particular the lack of even the most basic medical facilities with the consequent ever-present fear of disease, and the enormous wage differential between the rulers and the ruled:

What the farmers of that bright moon-lit land fear more than the atomic bomb is sickness. They fear malaria, dysentery and every kind of illness, because when they are sick, they have no hope of seeing a doctor or going to hospital for treatment because these two things don't exist among these poor people. When they go down with any serious illness, they have to rely on natural remedies for treatment, or magic spells and charms, which are all risky. There are enough hospitals in Siam, but they exist to serve only a small country...

My country is like any other country; the government spends money on the military, the police, government, education, trade and various other things. But the emphasis in expenditure is different. The incomes and wage levels set in my country over a long period of time have created a tragic situation which still exists even today. In your country, a minister receives a salary, which, after tax, is no more than the combined salaries of five

⁵ 'Sībūraphā', 1975, op.cit., p. 51.

milkmen or bread-delivery men. In my country, prior to the revolution, a minister had a salary equivalent to that of 150 bread-delivery men, and if his salary was compared with that of a farmer, then one minister received a salary equivalent to that of 400-500 farmers. Businessmen and other high-ranking government officials similarly received salaries far removed from those of farmers and labourers.⁶

When Dorothy asks why the people don't rise up and do something about the injustice, Kōmēt tells her that they did, in 1932, but that nothing very much changed:

The people who carried out the coup simply ousted the former group which had held power and ascended the throne in their place. At the beginning, it looked as if they tried to clean away the filth, but before long, greed began to blossom in their hearts and eventually they became infatuated with their own paradise. So instead of destroying the paradise which was a symbol of injustice, they went and summoned the assistance of those who had formerly occupied that paradise, and together, they defended it fiercely. Consequently, my people today have to read rotting books full of things centuries out of date. What change there is, is the change in the name on the cover with a little bit of dusting down.⁷

A couple of weeks later kōmēt invites Dorothy out to supper and tells her something of his own background. He comes from a wealthy family and has spent a dissolute youth, typical of young men of his background, prior to being sent out to Australia by his parents to smoothen out a few rough edges. She learns that Kōmēt was at first interested only in pursuing a similar playboy lifestyle and that education was merely a means of building up his own image so that he would be admired back in Thailand as an overseas-educated person and accepted among the exclusive societies of returned students:

Thai society would be wide-eyed, high class girls would be happy to link arms with him, and everyone would regard

⁶ ibid., pp. 53-6.

⁷ ibid., p. 37.

him with admiration, as one of the cream of the crop or élite of Thai society, because he had been educated abroad, could speak English, had western friends and came from a wealthy, aristocratic family. Such are the essential qualities laid down by Thailand for those who are to be called "phū dī" or 'high class' or the ruling class of the country.

Once in Australia, however, Kōmēt found people unimpressed by his wealth and family status, and one young woman, Nancy Henderson, who was to have a profound effect upon his life, pointed out to him that having wealthy parents was nothing to be proud of, even if they had managed to acquire their money legitimately:

When you say that on your parents' death you will come into possession of all their wealth, just remember that the truth is, you have no right to use that wealth for which you have not sacrificed a single drop of sweat, nor to pile up countless luxury goods on your lap while others live in poverty. What right do you have to act big and oppress other young men who set themselves up through their own hard work and effort and are then labelled 'low class', while you, without having done a thing in your life, are labelled "phū dī" and 'high class'. Besides, nowadays there is no country which believes in justice which will allow people who do absolutely nothing to completely control what others have created. They might do in your country, but I'm warning you, my friend, injustice is being swept away, from every corner of the world. It will be swept away in your country, too, and you may see it in your lifetime.

When Kōmēt protests that his father's money has all been honestly earned within the boundaries of the law and that he has paid all his taxes, Nancy retorts that a law is not necessarily just:

Don't go thinking that everything written down in the law is righteous. Whatever the law says, every citizen must obey, but that doesn't mean that it is necessarily right. The person who writes the law, usually does so to protect his own interests, and if the minority write the law, the majority will probably not receive fair treatment. If the

⁸ *ibid.*, p.48. "phū dī" is an awkward word to translate; literally 'the one who is good', it roughly means, 'gentry' or 'aristocracy'.

⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 58-9. Strictly speaking, this is Dorothy repeating verbatim Nancy's words. As in the cinema flash-back, the narrator is momentarily forgotten as the reader is taken back in time.

real people wrote the law, then they would get justice. But that might disturb the benefits of the minority. Any law which protects and promotes the benefits of the minority and creates injustice for the majority, is a law which was neither written¹⁰ by the people, nor in accordance with their wishes.

Kōmēt comes to see the truth in Nancy's words and admires her for her independence and idealism. She devotes her free time to helping others, particularly the Asian immigrant community in Australia, and has some caustic comments to make about her own government's immigration policies; her friends include numerous political dissidents and refugees, and by meeting these, reading the books she lends him and observing the way she conducts her own life, we learn that Kōmēt's own attitudes have been radically transformed. With Nancy's encouragement, he enrolls at the University of Melbourne to study Economics, and struggles painfully through the first two years of the course. At the end of the second year, he and Nancy plan to go away on holiday together to Philip Island; but Nancy's strenuous life-style has finally caught up with her, and she is hospitalised, terminally ill with T.B. On the last time she sees Kōmēt, she tells him that her life would have been meaningless if she had not spent it trying to help others. When the nurse breaks the news of her death to him, she tells him that Nancy's last words were "Philip Island".

Aware of this sadness in his life, Dorothy feels a greater affection and admiration for Kōmēt. They meet frequently over a period of months and she is saddened when one day he tells her he will soon be returning to Thailand. One evening, after they have been out dancing, she asks him if he had been in love with Nancy.

¹⁰ ibid., pp. 60-1.

He replies that his own understanding of the meaning of love had changed during the time he had known Nancy; where once he had viewed love between man and woman in purely selfish terms, he has come to believe that love

... begins with sacrifices, not demands. If we love a person, it shouldn't be the case that we think of what we can get from that person, but rather, of what we can give that person because of our love.¹¹

But Nancy has opened his mind further, to think of love in even broader terms:

What is called love between a man and a woman, if it exists, is a very small and narrow kind of love. Nancy made me aware of a more far-reaching kind of love, for mankind; a love for those born less fortunate and in poverty, who even so, have feelings the same as us more fortunate people. When they face cold weather, they need clothing just like us; when they are hungry, they need food; when they are sick, they need proper medical treatment; when they are shot, they bleed in agony; and when they die, their loved ones weep for them. Maybe it was because Nancy had learnt about such great love and maybe it was because our love was just one tiny speck in the midst of this great love, that she never once spoke of her love for me.¹²

Kōmēt passes his final exams and he and Dorothy make a day trip to Philip Island prior to his return. She asks him about his future plans once back in Thailand and he tells her why he will not be following the path of most returned students and taking up a career in government service:

I don't think the Siamese civil service will welcome the ideas and theories I have studied here. The powerful and influential classes in Siam don't want to learn about new conditions and new ideas. They like to refer to the old ways of doing and thinking, even though the situation in the country and the world has changed totally from what it was. It's true that some of the old ideas and ways did bring results, but by this, I mean they were effective and appropriate

¹¹ ibid., pp. 90-1.

¹² ibid., pp. 91-2.

for that time. The reason the ruling class in Siam remain content to cite old ways and old ideas is because it's both easy and in their interests; but it's not in the interests of the country, nor the majority of the people ...

There have been hundreds of Thai students who came to study western knowledge before me. Some of them used their knowledge for the benefit of the country; but most of them used it to enhance their own status and that of their class. Few tried to use it to find a way of improving the status of the majority.¹³

Instead, he hopes to convert his parents to his new ideas and persuade them to donate their money for setting up public libraries in rural areas; then after a year or two travelling around Asia, to familiarize himself with the lives of people in different countries, he hopes to return to make a positive contribution to Thai society. The novel ends with Kōmēt and Dorothy making their sad farewells at the quayside. Kōmēt says he hopes he might return one day, and when he has gone, Dorothy reflects that knowing him has given her a new respect for coloured people.

Kulāp undoubtedly succeeds in feeding readers' minds in Čhon kwā rao čha phop kan ĩk; whether he leaves them feeling satisfied they have read a novel, is another matter, for as Witthayākōn remarks,

Sībūraphā tried to explain in detail the problems of the majority of Thai people at that time, so that it becomes more like an article than a novel.¹⁴

Kulāp starts with a reasonable enough idea of criticising Thai society through the voice of Kōmēt, and the attitudes of the élite, through Kōmēt's former attitude. He uses a narrative

¹³ ibid., pp. 95-7.

¹⁴ Witthayākōn, 1975, op.cit., p.70.

technique almost identical to that of Khāng lang phāp, where the story is told retrospectively by the narrator, while conversations are presented in direct speech as if they are occurring in the present. In Khāng lang phāp the technique works; in Chon kwā rao čha phop kan ik it does not. The vital difference is the narrator. In Khāng lang phāp, the narrator, Nopphōn, also happens to be the main character, so his narration has a significance of its own, as the reader wonders to what extent it is influenced by his wish to emerge in a favourable light. Dorothy, by contrast, is not intrinsically interesting, and her role extends little beyond feeding Kōmēt the questions to launch his monologues; while her romantic potential is perhaps understandably underplayed, it means that the novel stands or falls by its ideas alone.¹⁵ Critics sympathetic to Kulāp's ideas are inclined to praise it, often quite lavishly, while those at the opposite end of the political spectrum simply ignore its existence. When it first appeared, 'P. Mū'angchomphū' vigorously defended it against the possible charge that it might lack artistic merit:

When art encounters the hardship and suffering of the people, it is bound to lack the lingering sweet taste favoured by those who have long been the parasites on society. But that does not mean that the art is diminished. On the contrary, such art is more meaningful and offers us a tool¹⁶ for seeking out or leading us towards the truth of life.

More recently Witthayākōn has suggested that for all its artistic shortcomings, it might profitably replace some of the old classics

¹⁵If Kulāp seems to change his mind about how to deal with the romantic thread after the arm-round-the-waist first chapter, it may be due to the ten month interval that elapsed between his writing the first and second chapters. ('Sībūraphā', 1975, op.cit., kham thalāeng khōng phū tāeng, n.p.)

¹⁶'P. Mū'angchomphū', op.cit., p. 262

in the secondary school literature syllabus,¹⁷ while Rungwit has described it as Kulāp's 'best exotic novel',¹⁸ and Trīsin has accorded it the accolade of Thailand's first 'novel-for-life'.¹⁹

With all of Kulāp's later fiction and indeed, comment on it by critics, the western reader has to bear in mind the political situation within the country at the time. Čhon kwā rao čha phop kan ĩk and 'P. Mū'angchomphū's essay were written at a time when, after nearly two decades of stringent censorship, there was a limited degree of freedom of speech; Witthayākōn, Rungwit and Trīsin, writing more than two decades after the appearance of Čhon kwā rao čha phop kan ĩk were rediscovering works that no one had dared to reprint in the intervening years. Divorced from this context Čhon kwā rao čha phop kan ĩk loses much of its power and the comments of its admirers appear somewhat naive.

The short story proved a rather more suitable genre than the novel for what Kulāp wanted to say. With a narrower focus, it makes less demand on sustained characterisation or plot development, while by its brevity, it saves the committed writer from the pitfalls of repetition or digression. Kulāp's better short stories of the period were highly effective in conveying the author's moral outrage at the injustice within society and their eloquence, and sadly, their relevance, has scarcely been diluted in the almost forty years that have passed since they first appeared.

¹⁷ Witthayākōn, 1973, op.cit., p. 72.

¹⁸ Rungwit, 1979a, op.cit., p. 42 ; Rungwit is comparing it with Khāng lang thāp .

¹⁹ Trīsin, 1980, op.cit., p. 311. This is a reference to the 'literature-for-life' movement which flourished in the early 1970's. Writers of this school stressed the social responsibility of the artist and many consciously imitated Kulāp's later fiction which was regarded as a model.

Two of Kulāp's best short stories are Khon phūāk nan (Those Kind of People) and Khō raēng nōi thōe (Lend Us a Hand) in both of which he attacks the attitudes of the privileged élite. In Khon phūāk nan, the people referred to in the title are the poor; the story itself consists of three separate incidents and the resulting confrontations which occur between Mōm Lūang Chōmchailai, a titled but liberal-minded girl of twenty and her conservative parents.²⁰ The story opens with Čhao Khun Sīsawat, her father, trying to persuade her to continue her education in America, his attitude being typical of that of many of the thousands of parents who have sent their children overseas for higher education:

Čhao Khun Sīsawat was of the opinion that if you were a Thai, then you could not really command respect if you had not been to study in America or England, so he advised his daughter to continue her education in America. He even went on to say that there was no need for a girl to study anything too demanding. This being the case, Chomchailai ought to go to America for two or three years, study make-up, and then come back with some kind of diploma and speaking English. That would be quite sufficient.²¹

Chōmchailai is not interested in buying the education that would further enhance her status, and she points out that despite the hundreds of Thais who have studied abroad and brought back specialised knowledge, there has been little change in the lives of the majority. Her father is reluctantly forced to admit that his idea of progress - new buildings, wide roads, neon lights and fast cars - does not extend beyond the suburbs of Bangkok.

The second confrontation, which is linked to the story by flashback, occurs when the cook's little daughter becomes seriously

²⁰ A translation of Khon phūāk nan appears in Appendix B.

²¹ Sībūraphā'. 1979. Rūam rū'ang san rap chai chīwit khōng Sībūraphā. Bangkok: Panča. p. 78.

ill. Chōmchailai wants to rush the child to hospital immediately in her parents plush car, but her mother will have nothing of it; the child is a scruffy little urchin, she says and then proceeds to argue that poor people do not have the same needs:

Before, when they were sick, if they needed to go to hospital, they didn't go by car, did they? So how did they manage to survive then, without any great trouble? Tiu (Chōmchailai's nickname), don't go getting yourself involved so much with those kind of people; they'll start forgetting themselves. And as for sickness, they've long been used to that, and they've got their own ways of treatment. If they hadn't they'd all be dead by now. Just look at the people up-country; they've never seen a doctor or a hospital. How do they manage to survive for generation after generation? And as for Granny Khrām (the cook), well, she's a hundred times luckier than those kind of people in being able to live in the city amongst people of our class. She even gets too much medicine and ²²up-to-date advice - far more than people of her class need.

Despite Chōmchailai's own secret efforts in getting the child to hospital, the little girl dies; Chōmchailai is convinced that she would have lived if she had been born into a wealthy family such as her own, and had been given proper medical treatment from the beginning.

Chōmchailai's friendship with Bao, the son of the family's driver is a further source of conflict within the family, through which Kulāp again attacks the attitudes of the élite. Such is her parents' disapproval of this innocent friendship, that they banish Bao from the home. An industrious, intelligent and idealistic young man, Bao explains his imminent departure to Chōmchailai thus:

My crime is that I'm not from the same class as his daughter and he thinks it is sinful for ²³his daughter to come and talk with people like me.

²²ibid., p. 82.

²³ibid., p. 87.

While the purpose of the story is to show up the likes of Chōmchailai's parents as narrow-minded snobs, Kulāp cannot allow them to prevail; Bao does not slink away dejected and defeated, but marches off proudly, determined to change society, while Chōmchailai gazes after him in admiration, hoping that one day she will marry a man like him.

A much more striking personification of a cold-hearted exploiting class is the rich man in Khō rāeng nōi thōe; whereas Chōmchailai's mother's attitude, not that it excuses it, derives from ignorance and thoughtlessness, the rich man's callous disregard for the suffering of the poor is based on the market value of labour. At the beginning of the story, Māen, a poor farmer, lies sick at home, too poor to buy the medicines necessary to cure himself. His wife goes to the nearby house of the rich man to ask to borrow 100 baht to buy medicine; Māen's parents once worked at this house, and Māen himself has often been hired for odd jobs by the owner, so it is reasonable to hope that some assistance might be forthcoming. In fact Māen's wife is turned away the first time because it is dark, and when the owner consents to see her the next day, he is unmoved by her pleas, telling her it is not his responsibility. Māen's friends gather together and raise the money and in due course he recovers. The situation is then dramatically reversed when the rich man's car gets stuck in the mud late one night as he is driving his wife to hospital. He is forced to beg for assistance from Māen, which Māen eventually feels obliged to give, but not without reminding the rich man how he had failed to help him when he was in need.

An important theme running through Khō rāēng nōi thōē is the gradual awakening of political consciousness among the poor. Anger at the rich man's attitude creates a feeling of group solidarity among Māēn's friends, and between them they raise the money for the medicine. Later, as they all sit around talking at Māēn's house, the conversation turns to labour, money and power; Māēn asks,

Who is it, that builds these houses and even the beautiful palaces? Isn't it you, the poor? ... Who is it, that grows rice to feed the whole country and saves us from starvation? It's you, the poor farmers again ... Who is it, that builds canals and roads? Isn't it you who build them? ... How are all these things built? Is it with money or labour? I never thought about this problem before until I heard about the contemptuous things that man from the green house said.²⁴

Khao tū'n (He's Waking Up) is another story in which the poor hero comes to question things he has always taken for granted, but this time Kulāp's target is more specific.²⁵ Am, an impoverished samlor driver, rents a single room in a slum area, which he shares with his wife, two young children and mother-in-law. The daily struggle for survival is made harder when he has to find the money to repair the damage done to the roof in a typhoon; to make matters worse, he injures himself while helping a friend and, like Maen in the previous story, is forced to stop working for a while. Eventually he recovers, thanks to a donation of medicine by a kindly old man, and the story progresses from the documentary description of the overcrowded living conditions of the poor to the author's main point. Am arrives home late one lunchtime to find his children waiting impatiently for him, as he has promised to take them to

²⁴ibid., pp. 204-206.

²⁵A translation of Khao tū'n appears in Appendix B.

Sanam Luang to see the official handing over of weapons by the American government to the Thai government.²⁶ He explains to his wife that he had met a group of fellow samlor drivers from the North-East who were discussing the famine in their home provinces. One of them had suggested making a small collection and sending it as their contribution to alleviating the problem, but voices were raised in objection; one said they had little enough money of their own as it was, and helping others was leading them towards communism, while another supported him, saying it was best to leave it to the rich, for fear that politics would start coming into it and leading to a 'nice bloody mess'. Stung by these words another driver stands up and in rousing style demands,

What the hell's it got to do with politics? It's about helping our starving brothers. But if that's what you're going to call politics, then I'm all for it! A nice bloody mess, I call it, if we don't help. All we're talking about is helping - why should that get us into a bloody mess? And if that's what you call a bloody mess, then a bloody mess is alright by me. And you, whoever it was, who just said wait and let the rich people help our brothers - have you ever seen them ever once stretch out a hand to help us? ...

When we were still living with our parents and grandparents, working in the ricefields, the rich made money and rice available for us to borrow. Did they ever help us? When you fell upon hard times, when you had no rice to eat or grow, and they gave you rice, did they do it because they loved you? And when you had rice, how much of it did they take away? How many times their original loan was it? Don't you see? And you've still got the nerve to say wait for the rich to help us!

We sweat and toil away under the scorching sun, wading through mud in the middle of the paddy-fields, exhausted almost to the point of dropping; the rice ripens and then do you know where it disappears to, and where all the money goes, and why we have to live on the breadline? I'm not clever enough to tell you how it disappears, but one thing I do know for sure is that our rice and fruit can't just disappear into thin air.

²⁶ An American military delegation visited Bangkok in August 1950 and on October 17th a Military Assistance Pact was signed whereby Thailand would receive 30 million dollars of U.S. military equipment. Khao tū'n appeared in October 1952.

And I'd say it flows into the hands of those people who you dream are going to help us. My God! You leave your parents, you leave the rice-fields, none of you for very long, and then you just go and forget all about the past.²⁷

Such eloquence carries the day; a collection is made and they march off to the newspaper office to hand in their donation. Am's own small contribution has awakened in him a new sense of meaning to life and an awareness that he can be of genuine use to his fellow men. A passenger he picks up outside the newspaper office talks of the power of the people, and when he gets home, he realises that he can play a role in influencing events within the country, too. When his wife reminds him of his promise to take the children to see the weapons, he no longer sees the outing in the same light as before:

Do you want me to take you and the children to see them showing off weapons for killing innocent people? ... I don't want to see my children getting enjoyment out of weapons that are used for killing people. I saw the picture in the newspaper of those Koreans who were blown up by petrol bombs. I was horrified. That picture really shocked me with the cruelty of war. It made me hate war. I don't want to see a show of force in support of war.²⁸ I'd like to see a show of force in support of peace.

Writing at a time when Thai troops were fighting on the U.N. side in Korea, Kulāp scarcely endeared himself to the authorities with such blatant anti-war sentiments; still less so with his ending, in which Am and his wife are going to join the Peace Movement, which the government regarded as a mere façade for communist subversives.²⁹

²⁷ 'Sībūraphā', 1979, op.cit., pp. 223-4 .

²⁸ ibid., p. 226.

²⁹ see Chapter I p. 29.

Indeed, Khao tū'n was to be Kulāp's last short story, for less than a month after its appearance in Piyamit in October 1952, he was arrested and imprisoned in the 'Peace Coup'.

Prakāi mai nai dūāngtā khōng khao (The New Light in his Eyes) also appeared in Piyamit but some sixteen months earlier. It covers much the same ground as Khao tū'n, that is, the political awakening of the individual, the selfishness of the rich, the Peace Movement and the author's opposition to Thai involvement in the Korean War. It lacks, however, the vitality and directness of the later story, and the alcoholic aristocrat who has fallen on hard times never seems a very plausible - or particularly desirable - convert to the Peace Movement. As he lies in a drunken stupor slumped against a tree at Sanam Luang and exposed to a torrential downpour, a wealthy young couple pull up briefly, and assuming him to be a labourer, make derogatory remarks about the working class before driving on to their society function. The poor factory-worker pair are rather more concerned, but when they attempt to flag down a passing car for assistance, they are reprimanded at gunpoint for stopping a VIP's car. However, when they decide there is no alternative but to spend their own hard-earned wages on hiring a samlor to get the man home, the samlor driver, aware of their act of kindness, refuses to accept any payment.

In Australia, Kulāp had been deeply impressed by the level of popular participation in political activity, and had come to see this, not simply as the right of the individual but his responsibility. The Peace Movement, with its attempt to mobilise

popular support on a global scale, appealed to kulāp's desire to involve people in grass roots political activity and stir up a broadly based sense of moral concern for society. In Prakāi mai nai dūāngtā khōng khao he was deliberately campaigning for the Peace Movement by making the two factory workers committed peace activists and showing them spending all their free time collecting signatures at bus-stops and cinema queues for their anti-war petitions. At the same time as putting the anti-war argument across, the story shows that members of the Peace Movement, far from being dangerous subversives, are ordinary, hard-working compassionate people, and it implies that, by voicing their opinions, ordinary people might be able to influence government policy. If the old drunkard's signature on the peace petition - hence the 'new light' of the title - seems scant reward for the workers' efforts, and a rather flat conclusion for the reader, the author does at least succeed in getting his message across when the girl factory worker says,

I think that the people are beginning to wake up ... Now, when you ask them to sign the petition demanding the five great powers to make peace, you don't have to spend so long explaining as you did when there was the first petition. Most people seem well aware that, for their own good, and for that of their family and country, they must do something or other in support of world peace. They've begun to realise that whether they choose peace or war is up to the people themselves, not simply a matter for two or three people to decide. Those people who refrained from signing the petition were mainly government officials; they said they'd dearly like to do something to bring peace but that by signing, they would be putting their jobs at risk. Several told me that they were looking for a chance to leave government service where they were forced to sell their freedom so cheaply. People are gradually beginning to understand that if

government is going to be government by the people, or democratic, then its policies must be those of the people, and the rulers of the country must respect those policies.³⁰

Kulāp created ordinary working class heroes such as Baḡ, Am, Māēn and the couple from the factory as a conscious reaction to the profound pessimism he personally felt about the existing state of Thai society. Such characters recognise the need for change and are prepared, by their words or deeds, to challenge the existing order. In the first short story published after his return from Australia, Kae thī phlat fūng (The Sheep that Strayed from the Flock), Kulāp had no such message of hope or inspiration to offer, as he shows how the system corrupts and destroys the idealism of two young men returning from abroad, eager to put their knowledge to good use in improving their country. One is wrongly imprisoned after becoming involved in setting up workers' co-operatives, while the second, Anop, is warned of the futility of trying to effect change by a senior colleague:

I admire all of these plans of yours. I'm sure they must be very good. And if they could be implemented, they would doubtless benefit the country greatly. But the trouble is, who are you going to tell them to? Haven't you heard what people are talking about nowadays? They're talking about corruption. And they're not saying corruption is a terrible thing. Rather, they're wondering how they can find a way of soliciting a bribe, because if they do, just once, they can hit the jackpot in a much bigger way than if they worked their guts out for the government for five or ten years. It's worth it. People curse you for two or three weeks and then you quit. After that the power of your wallet makes you a big man in society. Don't you realise, in Thai society people don't despise dishonesty nearly as much as they do poverty?³¹

³⁰ 'Sībūraphā', 1979, op.cit., pp. 240-1.

³¹ ibid., p. 106.

In due course Anop joins the flock, succumbs to bribes and abandons all thoughts of improving anything but his own position. The story ends on a deeply pessimistic note; in a night club Anop meets a Norwegian ship's Captain he had known in his more idealistic days, and begs him not to judge him too severely; ominously, the Captain replies,

It's not your fault, Anop. I understand only too well.
But I hope you won't go too far. I feel sorry for
your country.³²

A similar sense of disgust with the direction of society is apparent in Ai nū long thāng (Nipper's Got Lost) and kham khān rap (Answer My Call). In the former, a tram-driver's son, as named of his humble background, is persuaded to join an opium-running venture in the hope that it will make him as wealthy as his class mates. He is fatally wounded shortly before taking up a much coveted place at university leaving the author to moralise,

His brief life, once innocent and beautiful, had fallen a victim of the greed and dishonesty, the wrongdoing and shamelessness towards sin which had overwhelmed society during his lifetime.³³

In the latter, the hero sees the university as a sterile and élitist institution, denying students freedom of thought and complicit in the perpetuation of social injustice:

As long as we think only of ourselves - that is by settling down to study so as to get a piece of paper to sell to the highest bidder in the market place for cheats and tyrants, we're praised for being nice, quiet, polite kids. But if we spend some of our time thinking about other people, thinking about the suffering, the oppression and the injustice that exists here and there, about the swindling, the bankruptcy of morality and the decay in our society, and we complain or speak out in all sincerity about our dissatisfaction, then we're met

³²ibid., p. 111-12.

³³ibid., p. 194.

by reproachful looks and accused of being disruptive kids and real trouble-makers.³⁴

Despite the outspoken criticisms in some of his later short stories, Kulāp was far from a narrow-minded ideologue condemning everyone from a certain background. What concerned him much more than ideology was that people, whether rich or poor, should behave in a virtuous and compassionate way towards their fellow human beings, and especially, those less fortunate. In two stories of the period, Nak bun čhāk Chāntan (The Saint from Shantung) and Khao lū'ak Lāmbārēnē nai Sayām (He Chose his Lambaréné in Siam), Kulāp avoids pointing the finger of blame in any direction and attempts to write purely 'inspirational literature'.

The hero of Nak bun čhāk Chāntan is Alan Norton, an Australian volunteer worker in China during the late 1940's. The story is told by Nātaya ('Netti') a Thai girl studying medicine in Australia, who meets Alan when he returns on a brief fund-raising mission. Through his public lectures and in private conversations, Netti is awakened to the plight of the Chinese people and the efforts of a few foreign relief workers to alleviate their suffering. Romance appears to blossom between them and Netti promises to take her medical skills out to China as soon as she completes her studies.

The life of Dr. Albert Schweitzer provides the inspiration for the second story, Khao lū'ak Lāmbārēnē nai Sayām. The hero, Pan, returns from medical studies in England determined to set up a hospital and free school in his native Petchburi province. Later

³⁴ibid., p. 225.

the narrator of the story meets Pan again and since Pan has just been elected an M.P. for Petchburi, the narrator assumes that he has abandoned his ideals and is now pursuing a quick and easy path to wealth and power. Pan assures him his 'Lambaréné' is making slow but sure progress and that his entry into politics is so as to further spread his vision. The story ends with Pan expressing the hope that he will be able to fuse the qualities of two other doctors whom he (and Kulāp) greatly admired - Dr. Albert Schweitzer and Dr. Sun Yat Sen - in bringing justice and an improved standard of living to the rural people.

For all Kulāp's good intentions, neither Nak un Čhāk Chāntan nor Knao lū'ak Lāmbārēnē nai Sayām succeed as stories. In the former, the reader is distracted from the plight of the Chinese and the heroic efforts of volunteer aid workers by the budding romance between Alan and Metti; in the latter, the nature of the utopia that is supposed to be developing somewhere in Petchburi is left wholly vague, while the potted biography of Albert Schweitzer - amounting to over a third of the story - makes it difficult for both author and reader to decide what the story is trying to say.

After his imprisonment in 1952, Kulāp abandoned the short story and returned to the novel. In Lāe pai khāng nā (Look forward) he embarked upon an ambitious trilogy which was intended to provide a panoramic view of modern Thai history from the last days of the absolute monarchy up to the present. The trilogy was never completed: the first part, subtitled Phāk pathomwai (Youth) was

written in prison and serialised in the magazine Piyamit prior to being published as a single volume in the same year; the second, subtitled Phāk matchimmawai (Middle Age) was first serialised in 1957, and although it has been published as a complete volume, the abrupt ending suggests it was incomplete; the third volume, which would presumably have been subtitled 'Old Age' never appeared, but was obviously intended, since the whole novel appears in the form of a flashback, and the first chapter, before the flashback sequence begins, can only make sense in the context of a third volume.

The events of the first volume take place in the days before the 1932 revolution; set almost entirely within an exclusive boy's secondary school in Bangkok, it relates the experiences of Čhantā, a poor boy from the North-East who by chance is given the opportunity to study there, and the 'culture shock' and discrimination to which he is subjected, both at school and in the home of the nobleman whose son he is charged with 'minding' at school. The second volume takes up the story of Čhantā and some of his former classmates, from the immediate aftermath of the 1932 revolution to the outbreak of World War II.

Lāe pai khāng nā : a summary

The story opens with an unnamed old teacher looking back and reminiscing over his life and career;³⁵ at the end of the chapter, he compares a face in an old school photo of some 25 years earlier with that of the former pupil he has just seen outside the court.

³⁵The first chapter borrows heavily from James Hilton's 'Goodbye, Mr. Chips'.

The chapter bears no relation whatsoever to any part of either the first or second part of Lāe pai khāng nā as it exists in published form, but presumably would be relevant if the third volume had been written.³⁶

The focus of the story subsequently shifts to 16-year old Čhanta arriving at the prestigious Thēwētrangsarit School. The abbot of the temple school he formerly attended has managed to secure him a place in the household of a nobleman whose son attends the school, and Čhantā's job is to see that the boy does not get bullied. At first, Čhantā is over-awed by the élitist atmosphere of the institution with its impressive roll of King's Scholars and grandiose western-style paintings. He is befriended by Nithat, a bright pupil from a humble background, and through their conversations, the reader learns of the sacrifices Nithat's family have made for his education, of the victimization of Čhantā's father by local officials which led him to seek refuge in the monkhood, and of the hardships endured by Čhantā's mother before she died in an epidemic.

Despite the sumptuous surroundings of Čhantā's new home, his actual living quarters and diet are no better than before. He finds servant society no less rigid and hierarchical than that of the outside world as each clings jealously to petty privileges and enforces petty regulations on those beneath them. Most of the servants dislike Čhantā; they have learnt from their employers

³⁶Presumably the former pupil is Čhantā, and since the time is the early 1950's and the setting, a court, one might well speculate that Čhantā is about to be jailed, like the author, for some part in the 'Peace Coup.'

Rungwit (1979a op.cit., pp. 53-63) speculates about the real life models for some of the characters.

to despise anything and anyone from uncivilised rural areas, yet at the same time, they are jealous at the opportunity he has been given; and when Čhantā falls sick, the chief housekeeper would rather let him die than disturb the protocol from which she derives her own petty authority by calling a doctor for a 'servant'.

At school Čhantā also feels an outsider, for although it does not openly discriminate against the poor, the high fees effectively exclude all but a few pupils from poor or rural backgrounds. The whole ethos of the school is built around the values of the élite, and the headmaster's sermons are frequently spiced with derogatory comments about the lower classes and admonishments not to behave like them. One day, an incident occurs in which the headmaster catches one of Čhantā's classmates urinating against a school fence. The boy, Seng, who comes from a poor Sino-Vietnamese family, tries to explain that he had been helping a fellow pupil with his arithmetic when the bell sounded for lessons, leaving him no time to get to the toilet block. The headmaster refuses to listen and Seng accepts the scorn that is heaped on him with Christian stoicism. The matter is left in the hands of Khrū Uthai, a fair and idealistic young teacher, who fully exonerates Seng after learning the true circumstances. Nithat's comments to Čhantā about the incident reflect the anger he feels not only about the headmaster's attitude but the presumptions of divine right held by many of the rich.

A year passes and Seng is forced to leave school and support

his family following the death of his father. On his last day he bumps into the headmaster by chance. The head summons him to his office, expresses his sympathy and apologises for the way he treated Seng the year before.

A further year passes and Čhantā moves up to Grade 6. He is eager for the approval of the class teacher, Khru Wibunwanit, who is a traditionalist with a broad-minded outlook, but damages his reputation in a fight after coming to Nithat's aid. Nithat had become involved in an argument with another pupil about service to the nation. The other pupil, Rutčhirēk, comes from an aristocratic family and boasts of his ancestor's valour in saving the nation, a fact, he says, which is attested to in the historical chronicles; Nithat does not let this pass unchallenged:

I just want to point out to you and everyone else, that not everyone who sacrificed their lives to save our country and preserve its independence has got their name inscribed in the chronicles. Not all the Thai and Chinese soldiers who broke through the Burmese seige with Phra Čhao Tāksin and went on to save the nation, have got their names recorded in the chronicles; not all of the villagers of Bang Kračnan who fought so bravely against the Burmese, have got their names recorded; and not all the names are recorded of those men and women of Nakhon Ratchasima who were defeated and taken prisoner by the Vietnamese and subsequently rose up under Čhao Anuwiangčan to defeat the Vietnamese at Thung Samrit, nor of those citizens, both men and women, who defended Nakhon Ratchasima under Khunying Mō. Just because the chronicles don't record the names of large numbers of ordinary people who sacrificed their lives for our country, should we then think that we owe those brave ordinary people no debt? The ancestors of Čhantā and of many of us, may be among those brave people; it's just that the ancestors of ordinary people don't have their names recorded in the chronicles like the ancestors of Rutčhirēk.³⁷

Rutčhirēk takes offence at what he takes to be a slur on his

³⁷ 'Sībūraphā'. 1955. Lāe pai khāng nā. Bangkok: Suphāpburut. pp. 405-7.

family's reputation and is about to strike Nithat when Čhantā intervenes and knocks him out. Čhantā is threatened with expulsion for the incident although most of his classmates sympathise. A couple of weeks later Khrū Wibunwanit invites Čhantā and Nithat round to his house for tea and reveals that a neutral observer has confirmed Nithat's account of the incident; Čhantā's reputation is restored and he soon becomes the teacher's favourite.

The first part of the novel ends with Čhantā and his classmates approaching the end of their school careers; some, including Watcharin, Čhantā's charge, (who scarcely appears in the novel) are to continue their studies abroad, while Nithat intends to stay on for the last two grades of schooling; Čhantā himself is found a position as a clerk in his benefactor's ministry.

The second part of Lāe pai khāng nā is further subdivided into two sections, of sixteen and three chapters respectively; the brevity of the last section, the abrupt ending, and the non-appearance of the main character, Čhantā, strongly suggest that the work is incomplete. In this volume, Kulāp attempted to portray the effects of events between 1932 and the outbreak of World War II on the lives of some of the individuals who had appeared in the first part. Without the unifying school setting of the first volume, the second part appears fragmented and episodic; but while the reader may feel frustrated that significant changes in the circumstances of the main characters (e.g. the promotions of Čhantā and Nithat, and Čhantā's romance with Nithat's sister) are dealt with retrospectively in a single sentence, this fragmentation creates a distancing effect between reader and character which

enables the author to more effectively highlight the influence of historical events on the individuals concerned.

When Čhantā sees the ruin that the aftermath of the 1932 revolution has brought to his benefactor, he develops strong reservations about the new régime. His former teacher, Khrū Uthai, who is himself heavily involved with the coup group, persuades Čhantā that any such doubts are selfish ones, based on a fear that his own career prospects might be damaged. Čhantā remains in the same household for a while, where he is able to observe the reactions of a small section of a ruined élite. He becomes increasingly disturbed by the presence of the attractive servant, Prāng, but his proposal is rejected, as she is unwilling to contemplate the prospect of life up-country; she tells him quite frankly that she would rather be the minor wife of a rich man and enjoy the comforts of life in Bangkok.

Seng, the Sino-Vietnamese boy, has meanwhile started working for a daily newspaper, and during the course of the novel, the reader learns of army and police raids on the newspaper offices following the publication of articles critical of government policy.

Some time later Čhantā chances upon Prāng one day, outside a cinema, and scarcely recognises her. She takes him to an expensive restaurant, orders exotic delicacies and tells him of her life as a minor wife and dancing girl. She has learned the mannerisms and adopted the trappings of the élite, preferring such a life to the hardships of living up-country. Čhantā accompanies her back to her home, but refuses to allow himself to be seduced.

Doubts grow about the new government as it begins to arrest anyone viewed as a threat, including some senior members of their own party. Čhantā, Nithat and Seng go to visit Khrū Uthai to find out what is going on. He tells them of the split within the party between the military and civilian factions and admits that the former hold all the power. Over the last two or three years, he admits, the government has come more and more to resemble a dictatorship, with its censorship of books, restrictions on the movements of labourers and attacks on press freedom. Nithat refers to the government's preoccupation with military spending at the expense of economic and educational investment, and Khrū Uthai can only respond that at the very beginning, he believes the coup was intended to be for the benefit of the people.

Čhantā marries Phayōm, Nitnat's sister, and takes up a post as public prosecutor in his home province, Sisaket; Nithat meanwhile wins a scholarship to England.

The first section of the second volume concludes with a chance meeting between Čhantā and Tāen, a former school friend from the days when Čhantā was still at temple school. Tāen tells Čhantā of his life of crime and how a woman friend of two imprisoned labour leaders changed his life and restored his self-respect by offering him understanding and pointing out that society was as much to blame for his crimes. Čhantā is left to reflect that his life and Tāen's have run such different courses because, unlike Tāen, he had been given the chance to make something of his life. He tells his wife that the meeting with Tāen has left him feeling there is still hope for democracy.

The second section of volume two begins with events leading up to World War II. Seng interviews several prominent officials about Munich and the subsequent outbreak of war and is surprised by their opportunistic attitude and lack of ideals. However, his newspaper's consistent campaign against government abuses gains its first real success when the system of conferred nobility is abolished. Elsewhere, there is little to encourage optimism about democracy; in a letter to Nithat, Seng describes its disintegration with the government's ten year extension of the constitution and the introduction of laws on dress and other personal restrictions. The press is censored after the Japanese invasion, and when China declares war on Japan, the Thai government appeals to the Chinese community in Thailand for support in their realignment with Japan. Posters appear around the city criticising the government and the story ends abruptly with the police searching Seng's house.

After Kulāp's recent 'crusading' stories, Lāe pai khāng nā, in the first part at least, represented a return to a more conventional mode of fiction. It was not that Kulāp's ideas had changed, but simply that he was attempting to put them across in a more dispassionate manner. Like Čhon kwā rao Čha phop kan ĩk, Lāe pai khāng nā makes the urban-rural gap in Thailand a major theme; but whereas in the earlier work the reader learns of rural hardship from Kōmēt, a wealthy Bangkok resident studying in Australia, in Lāe pai khāng nā, Čhantā has actually experienced at first hand the inhospitable environment, the droughts, the crop failures and the fatal epidemics, thus bringing the experience

closer to the reader and hopefully engaging his sympathy more than Kōmēt's text-book knowledge could hope to. Elsewhere, too, Kulāp personalizes the issues; Čhantā's own experiences, both at school and in the household, serve to highlight the discrimination and prejudice against people from the provinces, the greed, laziness and selfishness of city folk, and the wasteful lives led by so many of them, be they masters or servants.

For all the author's attempts to dispense with the overt sermonizing that characterized Čhon kwā rao čha phop kan ĩk and many of the later short stories, many readers, even those sympathetic to Kulāp, find the work boring, the first volume being excessively long-winded and repetitious, with the content scarcely matching the author's epic vision, and the second part too fragmented to hold the reader's attention.³⁸ Even so, Witthayākōn has described Lāe pai khāng nā not simply as Kulāp's 'most important work',³⁹ a view enthusiastically echoed by Rungwit,⁴⁰ but also as 'one of the few very good novels Thailand has produced.'⁴¹ Witthayākōn sees the merits of the novel lying in the author's skilful portrayal of a cross-section of Thai society and his creation of incidents to highlight the gulf within it,⁴² while Rungwit makes little attempt to justify his enthusiasm.

³⁸The western reader is likely to be further repelled by the author's frequent resorting to sentimentality, for example in the repeated descriptions of Čhantā as 'this little traveller from far-away Khukhan', 16-year old Seng's tearful interview with the head-master, and Nithat and Čhantā sharing sweets and admiring each other's mothers.

³⁹Witthayākōn, 1973, op.cit., p. 68.

⁴⁰Rungwit, 1979a, op.cit., p. 47.

⁴¹Witthayākōn, 1973, loc. cit.

⁴²ibid., p. 70.

Witthayākṇ and Rungwit both write as committed promoters of Kulāp's work and their unqualified enthusiasm has to be seen in the context of Lāe pai khāng nā only just beginning to reappear on the market. With an apparent unwillingness among critics sympathetic to Kulāp to point out the flaws in the work, either for fear of undermining his literary resurrection or being labelled literary reactionaries, Witthayākṇ's verdict has been widely influential. Sukanyā Hāntrakūn is one of the few to have analysed the text in any detail and pointed out its shortcomings, drawing attention in particular to the flaws in the characterization and the author's tendency to over-write.⁴³ More recently, Trīsin, too, has been more cautious in her appraisal, recognising the author's intention in the work but aware, too, of its shortcomings.⁴⁴

Since 1973, Kulāp's later fiction has been readily available in Thailand, except for a period following the October 6th Coup in 1976. The period between 1973 and 1976 in particular saw frequent reprints of these works, often sponsored by different groups of students, both as a means of bringing the works to a wider audience and as an expression of their own identity and sympathies. His short stories, which were relevant and the more

⁴³Sukanyā Hāntrakūn. 1982. "Klap pai wi'chān 'Lāe pai khāng nā' khōng Sībūraphā'. In Lōk nangsu'. 5:10. pp. 22-31. The article first appeared in Sangkhomsāt Parithat in 1974; the 1982 reprint provoked an angry and pedantic rebuttal by Chaiwat Thōettham (Lōk nangsu'. 6:3. pp.64-70.) indicating the passions still roused by Kulap's work!

⁴⁴Trīsin, 1980. op.cit., pp. 401-17.

effective for their brevity, were especially popular and appeared and reappeared in numerous collections and anthologies.⁴⁵ Despite this proliferation of reprints of Kulāp's later fiction, many remain unconvinced of their merits; Čhū'a 's textbook on the novel, published in 1974, for example, makes no reference to Kulāp's post- Australia writings, nor does the volume on Thai literature produced by the Department of Fine Arts as part of a series on Thai culture published in celebration of the Rattanakosin Dynasty Bicentennial in 1982.⁴⁶

Kulāp's later fiction is clearly inseparable from politics; the works not only include his criticisms of Thai society and its rulers, but their circulation and evaluation, too, has been closely tied to the changing political atmosphere within Thailand over the last three-and-a-half decades. Whether they will eventually occupy a place in an officially approved canon of Thai literature, alongside less controversial works such as Khāng lang phāp and Songkhram chīwit, and whether they will lose their appeal as their 'forbidden fruit'-mystique fades, remains to be seen.

⁴⁵To take one example, a collection of Kulap's short stories under the title, Ruam ru'ang san rap chai chīwit khōng Sibūraphā first appeared in April 1974, sponsored by a group of students at Chiangmai University. It went through a second printing just two months later, and a third edition appeared the following year, each printing probably being 2,000 - 3,000 copies; a fourth, more comprehensive edition with an additional four stories, and introductory essays by three different critics appeared in 1979.

⁴⁶Čhū'a, op.cit., pp.35-6. Krom Sinlapakōn. 1982. Sinlapa watthana -tham thai Vol. 2 : phasā lae wannakhadi krung ratthanakōsin. Bangkok.

CHAPTER V

The Promoting of 'Sībūraphā'

The previous chapters have looked in some detail at Kulāp's major fiction, illustrating his development from popular romantic novelist to politically committed writer. Comments on individual texts quoted from Thai critics offer the westerner an interesting and sometimes surprising perspective on the work, but convey no real sense of Kulāp's standing in Thai Literature. Ideally, it is to literary histories and textbooks, to genre and author studies that we might turn for such information. In Thai, however, there is a marked paucity of such sources, for the novel has only relatively recently become the subject of serious academic study, and even today, is regarded by many scholars of literature as less respectable than traditional poetic genres.¹

Despite the lukewarm interest of academics, there have been various individuals, often themselves writers, who have taken it upon themselves to give the genre some sense of historical coherence within Thailand. Such efforts have usually taken the form of short biographical essays on famous authors with lists of their major works, but little or no critical commentary. This format is preserved in much writing on the novel today, whether in officially produced literary histories, textbooks or the works

¹Much of the serious writing about the novel in Thailand is being done by Master's degree students at Chulalongkorn and Srinakharinwirot Universities.

of individual critics. It is from a rather motley collection of such sources dating from the early 1960's to the mid 1980's that we can begin to see how important Kulāp has been perceived to be in the history of the Thai novel. Limited as such sources are, they nevertheless illustrate quite dramatically Kulāp's re-emergence from being a virtual 'non-person' in the days of Sarit, to nowadays being regarded, for whatever reasons, as one of the major Thai novelists.²

An early chronicler of the Thai novel is P. Watcharaphōn, who in three separate volumes in the early 1960's wrote short biographies of altogether nearly one hundred and twenty writers.³ Most of the well-known novelists are there, and many less well-known, too; but of Kulāp, there is only the briefest passing mention in the chapter on the 'Suphāpburut Group'.⁴ Kulāp was at the time regarded as a 'Dangerous Person', and the less said about him, the less likely one was to be tarred with the same brush.⁵ In 1963, Yot Watcharasathian also published a book on the novel, entitled Khwām pen mā khōng kām praphan lae nak praphan thai (The Development of Thai Writing and Writers) in which he records 'references to 'Sībūraphā' were slipped in.'⁶

²This study has relied entirely upon works available in the library of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, and in my own personal collection. A perusal of the bibliographies of published works on the Thai novel suggests that most writers rely on almost identical sources.

³P. Watcharaphōn. 1973. Prawat nak praphan. (Bangkok:Phrāe phittayā) (2nd. ed.; 1st ed. 1962); 1963. Thamniap nak praphan. (Bangkok:Phadungsu'ksā).; 1966. Chomrom nak khian. (Bangkok:Ruāmsān).

⁴P. Watcharaphōn, 1966, op. cit., pp. 418-28

⁵Yot Watcharasathian. 1976. "Sībūraphā:nak khian khōng prachāchon". In Prachāchāt. 7 Oct. 1976. p.50.

⁶idem.

By 1966, by which time Sarit was dead, such furtive name-dropping was no longer necessary. Phadungsu'ksā publishers launched a major re-issue of many of Kulāp's early novels, apparently at Yot's instigation, and in a discreetly-worded foreword that appeared in every volume, Yot even claimed that some educational institutions were using Kulāp's novels as set texts.⁷ Of course, no reference was made to Kulāp's life or circumstances, nor were there any plans to re-publish his later fiction.

The crucial factor in the resurrection of Kulāp was the 'Student Revolution' of October 1973.⁸ In the next three years his later writings, both fiction and non-fiction, were frequently reprinted and numerous articles were written about him.⁹ It was in these later writings that a new generation of Thai liberals and

⁷'Sībūraphā', 1967b, op.cit., pp.1-2 (Editor's foreword). Yot has said that he made every effort to ensure that 'Sībūraphā' was not forgotten during this period. Whether there was a conscious political motive or whether it was purely out of personal friendship and admiration is difficult to say. In the 1970's he wrote several articles on Kulāp for various newspapers and magazines.

⁸Rungwit (1979a, op.cit., pp. 16-17) says that the later works of Kulāp and other progressives began to circulate on university campuses in 1968 after a new constitution had been introduced.

⁹For a good account of the period in English, see Anderson's Introduction in B.R.O'G. Anderson and Ruchira Mendiones. 1985. In the Mirror: Literature and Politics in Siam in the American Era. Bangkok: Duang Kamol.

For an impression of the books being published during this period, see Akagi Osamu. 1978. "Research Note and Data on 'Pocketbook' Publication in Thailand, 1973-1976. South-East Asian Studies 16, 3:473-523

Reynolds describes an almost identical process in the resurrection of Jit Poumisak:

'The search for facts about Jit's life and the discovery of his work between 1973 and 1976 were part and parcel of an unearthing - a kind of cultural excavation of Thai literary and cultural history after World War II... His life/work and

progressives found their ideals eloquently and passionately voiced, while in his life, they saw a personification of the struggle for social justice within Thailand against a firmly entrenched establishment. Kulāp's death in 1974, while still in exile in China, merely added to the mystique about the man and fuelled interest in his writings.

The actual process of Kulāp's resurrection can be credited to the energies and activities of a small number of writers and intellectuals. Their enthusiastic promotion of Kulāp's later works was, in part, a deliberate attempt to stir up waves within the Thai literary establishment. One of these was Suchāt Sawatsī, who as editor of first Sangkhomsāt parithat (Social Science Review) and later Lōk nangsū' (Book World) welcomed contributions on Kulāp and his work, and in several anthologies of short stories drew attention to Kulāp's influence on the genre; another was Sathīan Čanthimāthōn, whose several works on modern Thai literature all accord Kulāp a position of prime significance;¹⁰ and most prolific of all, was Rungwit Suwannaphichon, whose articles on Kulāp have appeared and re-appeared in numerous introductions to Kulāp's works, in newspapers and in various journals and magazines.¹¹

It was in Sangkhomsāt parithat, under Suchāt's editorship

that of other progressive writers of the 1950s touched a nerve in the Thai youth movement, and the pursuit and discovery of that life/work became one of the activities around which the movement cohered.' (C.J. Reynolds. 1986. The Author Function in Thai History. Asian Studies Association of Australia Review 10:1 pp. 22-28.

¹⁰ Most notably, in his most recent work, Sāithān wannakam phū'a chīwit khōng thai.

¹¹ Rungwit's biographical essay on Kulāp, Kulāp Sāipradit: phayā wihok nai khakkhanān hāeng wannakam thai, for example, has been reprinted at least half-a-dozen times. In 1979 Rungwit published his essays on Kulāp in a single volume, Sībūraphā:sī hāeng wannakam thai; this is an invaluable source of biographical and bibliographical information about Kulāp.

that Witthayakṓn's essay, Klap pai ān nawaniyai khōng Sībūraphā (Going back to read Sībūraphā's novels) appeared just prior to the October 1973 student uprising. Slight as it may appear, this essay was important, not simply for rescuing Kulāp's later novels from obscurity, but for putting them on a par with his most widely acclaimed works, Songkhram chīwit and Khāng lang phāp - and in the case of Lāe pai khāng nā, going even further and claiming it to be one of the best novels in the language. This was a verdict that was enthusiastically endorsed by Sathian and Rungwit and quoted and paraphrased by many writers that followed.

Witthayakṓn's major re-alignment of Kulāp's 'great' novels carried strong political undertones and a view of literature that was by no means universal. Even so, it is an interpretation which, despite lingering reservations in some quarters, has gained a firm foothold in recent literary historiography.¹² Wibha's study of the early Thai novel meanwhile bestowed a suitably academic pedigree upon Lūk phūchāi,¹³ and from a synthesis of these sources, Trīsin produced a line-up of five 'major' novels;¹⁴ in view of the importance of Trīsin's book for students of Thai literature, it is likely that this is a judgement that will be perpetuated for many years to come, unless political circumstances should dictate otherwise.

¹²See footnote 46 on page 152. Another volume on modern literature published by the Department of Fine Arts (Krom Sinlapākṓn. 1977. Prawat nak khīan thai . Bangkok: Krasūāng Su'ksāthikān.) lists all of kulāp's later novels and best known short stories.

¹³Wibha, op.cit.

¹⁴Trīsin, 1980, op.cit. This view is stated more explicitly by Batson (B.A. Batson. 1981. Kulap Saipradit and the 'War of Life'. Journal of the Siam Society. 69. 58-73. It also underlies the organisation of the present work.

In the resurrection and promotion of Kulāp's later works some explanation for the author's apparently abrupt change of style was needed; readers had to be persuaded that Čhon kwā rao čha phop kan ĩk, with its lengthy sermons, and Lāe pai khāng nā which in its unfinished state amounted to little more than a serious school story, were somehow better than Khāng lang phāp and other more conventional earlier novels. Their 'forbidden-fruit' status certainly made this easier, and to this were added explanations of the works as 'steps forward' or 'developments' in Kulāp's thinking. The origin of this development seemed quite clear: Kulāp's 'radical' fiction appeared after he returned from Australia, where he had been studying politics, so he must have changed his ideas while abroad. This explanation is put forward with varying degrees of elaboration in most articles that have been written on Kulāp's life.¹⁵

Such an explanation is not entirely convincing : it conveniently ignores, firstly, Kulāp's oft-cited clashes with the government dating back two decades, secondly, the radical content of Songkhram chīwit, and finally, the brief period of liberalisation in the late 1940's which meant that Kulāp's post-Australia writings were not appearing in heroic isolation.¹⁶ Indeed, a rather different argument could be put forward, dating Kulāp's radicalism to the early 1930's, where Čhon kwā rao čha phop kan ĩk becomes a natural

¹⁵See, for example, Krom Sinlapakōn, 1977, op.cit., p. 195: '1947-1949 he went to study politics in Australia. This study trip had a great effect on his thinking and outlook which was reflected in his writings.'

¹⁶Sathīan (in Sathīan Čhanthimathōn. 1979. "Kulāp Sāipradit". In 'Sībūraphā' 1979. op.cit., p.34) is unusual in mentioning the literary scene at the time.

development from Songkhram chīwit, ignoring Khāng lang phāp as a purely commercial venture, and recognising that fiction writing had ceased to be a central part in Kulāp's life as early as 1929. Of course, such an interpretation of Kulāp's career is equally speculative and may or may not be nearer the truth than the more conventional view. But any such attempt to re-interpret his life has so far been irrelevant activity for Thai critics. The construction of a biography from the anecdotes and reminiscences of Kulāp's former associates and the resurrection of his later works were sufficient for those critics actively promoting Kulāp. In one sense, they had demystified Kulāp by breaking the taboo of silence that had built up around him during the Sarit years. Yet at the same time, the 'life' portrayed in their biographical essays, and the later works themselves, were immediately invested with a symbolic significance by their very defiance of the earlier taboo. The name 'Sībūrapnā', once associated in the public mind with 'communism' was now used by a different sector of society to evoke certain ideas and ideals and challenge certain presuppositions both about literature and society. Further research into that 'life' or revaluation of the texts was not merely irrelevant but potentially counter-productive.

The passage of time and changing circumstances affect the potency of symbols and the relative political stability of the last seven or eight years has seen a gradual incorporation of even Kulāp's later works into a literary mainstream. Academics

are beginning to defuse his controversial image, and one can well imagine that in a few years, Thai students of literature will be set essays tracing Kulāp's literary development 'with reference to the novels of the early and later periods'. Perhaps most ironic of all is the latest development in the promotion of Kulāp, which, to bring the process through a full cycle, has seen the republication of several of Kulāp's earlier novels.¹⁷

Whether the current trend will eventually lead to a more thorough investigation into the life of Kulāp remains to be seen. It would be nice to think so. For through the fragmented and partisan accounts of his life, we yet can glimpse a sight of a courageous man of high ideals, a man who spoke out fearlessly for his principles and fought for them through legitimate channels regardless of the personal cost. For that alone his memory is worth preserving.

¹⁷Sū Anākhōt (1986. 6,272: 55) reports on new reprints of Lūk phūchāi, Songkhram chīwit and Khāng lang phāp; more surprising is the reprinting of one of Kulāp's earliest novels, Phāchon bāp (c. 1929) advertised in Thanon nangsū (1987. 4,10: 99) which is probably part of a major paperback re-issue of Kulāp's early novels.

APPENDIX

BEHIND THE PAINTING

by

'Sībūraphā'

First published in 1937

It was not until two days after I had hung the picture up in my study that Parī noticed it. She did not show much reaction other than to pause and look closely at it for a moment before turning to me and asking, 'Where is it, this Mitaké?'

I was a little startled, but Parī did not notice.

'It's a lovely area of countryside outside Tokyo. People living in Tokyo often go there on Sundays.'

'Oh, so you bought it in Tokyo, then?'

I buried my head in the book I had been reading when Parī entered the room.

'No, a friend of mine did it for me.'

I felt uneasy about the way my voice had sounded, because it resembled that of an actor speaking guardedly on stage.

'That's what I thought. It would have been a bit strange if you'd had to buy it, because it's very ordinary. But then although I don't see anything very special about it, it may just be that I'm not up to appreciating its merits.'

'If you look at oil paintings like this from close up, you might not appreciate them, but viewed from a little further back, you might have a different opinion.'

Parī showed no inclination to do as I had suggested, nor to ask any more questions. I was glad.

The painting was mounted in a jet black frame and hung on the wall immediately opposite my desk. When I sat down to work, it was behind me. I had thought of hanging it up directly in front of me, so that I could see it when ever I looked up. But later, I changed my mind, being quite certain that if I were to follow through with my original idea, the painting would profoundly

disturb my peace of mind.

In actual fact, Parī was not far wrong in what she had said. The painting was ordinary. There was nothing striking about it, and it bore no comparison with some of the pictures hanging in the living room and bedroom, some of which were worth 100 yen. It was an oil colour, depicting a stream flowing past the foot of a mountain which was densely covered with trees. On the other side of the stream was a small path which passed over an overhanging rock, parts of which were tall, parts uneven with rocks of different sizes and where creeping plants and wild flowers of different colours grew in a line along the rock. Further down, on a large rock almost touching the water, sat two figures. The scene was depicted from a distance, and it was not clear whether there was a man and a woman, or whether they were both men. But one of them was undoubtedly a man. The words, "By the Stream" appeared at the top of the painting, the artist intending this to be the title of the picture. In the bottom corner, in small letters, was the word, "Mitaké", with the date below it, indicating that it had been painted six years ago.

The painting, then, was ordinary with nothing very striking about it. The artist's talent was modest, and while it was quite pleasant, it was not going to provoke cries of admiration from the viewer. Someone who appreciated the beauty of nature would have expressed some interest and appreciation, but that isn't a part of Parī's character. It is a pity, because it means that she and I are the exact opposite.

However, it is perfectly reasonable that neither Parī, nor anyone else should show any interest in the picture, for as Parī had said, it was a very ordinary picture. But I, and I alone

think the exact opposite, for I know all too well, the life that lies behind that painting, a life which has stamped its mark indelibly upon my heart. To other people, behind the painting there is only a sheet of cardboard, and after that, the wall. How else, then, could they see it, other than as just an ordinary painting?

When I am alone, I stare at that painting and I see the water trickle by lazily and then gather speed as its course descends. I can see even the pale Autumn sunlight. And the two people sitting on the overhanging rock, whom the artist has daubed in almost carelessly, I can see quite clearly. And even the long curling eyelashes of one of them, and the three bright red triangles drawn over the thin lips, giving their very thinness a wonderful charm. I know all too well that the picture was painted with the artist's life and not in some slapdash manner. I see every movement in that tranquil scene; and it seems so ordinary, every scene, every part, from the beginning to the final act on which the curtain fell so tragically, only recently.

When Čhao Khun Atthikānbodī took his wife, Mōm Rāčhawong Kīrati to Japan for their honeymoon, I was a student at Rikkyo University, and at the time, just twenty-two years old.

I had known Čhao Khun in Thailand, because he and my father were friends, and he had always been kindly disposed towards me. I had also met Khunying Atthikānbodī, and got to know her as well as Čhao Khun. About a year after I had gone to study in Japan, I was saddened to hear that Khunying Attnikānbodī had died of influenza. After that, I had no further news of Čhao Khun for two years, up until just recently, when I heard from him once again.

Čhao Khun Attnikānbodī wrote to me saying that he was coming out to Japan with his new wife, Mōm Rāčhawong Kīrati, and asking me to fix accommodation for him and make other necessary arrangements. He was intending to stay in Tokyo for two months.

When I say he was taking his wife to Japan on their honeymoon, these are my own words; in his letter, he said he needed a change of scenery and wanted to take a long trip to relax and enjoy himself for a while. The main reason for wanting to come to Japan, was to give his new wife a treat she would enjoy. Referring to Mōm Rāčhawong Kīrati, he had written, 'I both love her and feel compassion for her. She is not very familiar with the outside world, despite her age. I want to give Kīrati some experience of the outside world, not just in Thailand, and I want to make her happy and feel that marrying someone of my age at least isn't completely meaningless. I think, Nopphōn, that you will like Kīrati, just as

you did my poor deceased wife. But for people who don't know her, Kīrati is rather on the quiet side. But she is kind-hearted. There's no need for you to worry, though. I think Kīrati will like you very much. I've told her that, too.'

I had never met Mōm Rārchawong Kīrati before, and the little that Čhao Khun Atthikānbodī had said about her in his letter, did not tell me very much. I guessed that she was probably about forty or possibly a little younger. She was probably rather aloof, or at least somewhat reserved, in keeping with her aristocratic background, and certainly would not like lively noisy youngsters, which was not my nature anyway. She was probably a rather serious person, with little enthusiasm for enjoying herself in the same way as most people, and probably rather rigid in her ways, too, all of which made me cautious in my communications with Čhao Khun.

Čhao Khun had said in his letter that he had no desire to stay in a hotel, no matter how luxurious it was, even if it was the Imperial Hotel. He was tired of having to mingle with strangers when he had nothing to do, and having to get dressed up specially, whenever he left his room or took his meals. He wanted to rent a house where he would be completely free, and it did not worry him how much it would cost. Of the latter, I was well aware, because Čhao Khun was widely known to be among the richest men in the country, as well as being generous and kind-hearted. I arranged for him to rent a house in Oyamachinung District, which was a suburb not far from the railway. Travel into the city was convenient in every respect. The house I had arranged for him to rent was not very large, but it was one of the attractive ones in the district. From the outside, it had a western appearance, but inside, the rooms were partitioned and laid out and furnished in Japanese style.

The house was situated on a small hill and surrounded by a wall made of large rocks about two-and-a-half feet high. Beyond the rocks was an embankment about three feet high covered in lush green grass, with small shrubs evenly spaced along the top. Part of the inside of the grounds appeared to be covered with a dense green foliage of large and small leaves. In front of the house stood two large trees, their branches and thick foliage covering almost the whole of the grounds, making the house appear fresh and more attractive. I myself really liked it, and even though the owner wanted 200 yen a month for rent, I did not think it expensive for a nicely furnished house which had been well-looked after.

I arranged for a nice-looking servant girl to look after the house the Japanese way. In choosing a nice-looking servant, I did not mean that she was to look after Čhao Khun in any sense other than the normal duties. But I thought that if there was a choice between a servant with a face like an ogre and one with a clear, unblemished appearance, then the latter was preferable, since living close to beauty, whether in a human being or in a thing, helps to cheer us up. I was well aware that Čhao Khun Atthikānbodī was in a position to be choosy. I had to pay the servant more than the normal rate; the extra expense was not for her looks, but because I had to find a Japanese girl who could speak adequate English. Otherwise, both Čhao Khun and his wife would have found it troublesome.

The first day I met Čhao Khun Atthikānbodī and his entourage at Tokyo Station, was also the first great shock I was to experience in my acquaintanceship with his wife. When I first caught sight of the two women accompanying Čhao Khun, I guessed that the one

who was about thirty eight, neatly dressed, and a little stuffy and nervous, was probably Mōm Rā̄tchawong Kīrati. My assumption was based on the letter Čhao Khun had sent me. Her companion, on the other hand, looked young and radiant, and was elegantly dressed. Even at a first brief glance, her dignity stood out quite visibly to my eyes. I could not imagine who she was; Čhao Khun's eldest daughter, who had married several years earlier, I had already met in Bangkok.

My speculations, however, lasted less than a minute, because after I had exchanged a few words of greeting with Čhao Khun, he turned to the young woman, who at that moment was standing beside him, and said, 'This is my wife, Khunying Kīrati.'

His introduction almost made me start at my silly mistake, and I nearly forgot my manners and stared straight at her in order to dispel my doubt about what it was in her face that gave it away that she was Mōm Rā̄tchawong Kīrati, Čhao Khun Atthikānbodī's new wife.

She received my greetings with a graceful and gentle smile. The other woman meanwhile respectfully retired a couple of paces behind Čhao Khun. As I glanced at her once more, I suddenly remembered that in his letter, Čhao Khun had said that he would bring his cook out from Bangkok, too. I had completely forgotten. Ultimately, there could be no doubt as to who was who. Yet I still could not help feeling surprised that I had been so wrong in my anticipations about her age and appearance.

That day I was wearing my university student uniform, and that was the first thing about me that Mōm Rā̄tchawong Kīrati showed an interest in. She said it was nice and neat and that what she really liked was the colour - it was navy blue - which as it

nappened, was the same colour as she was wearing, her skirt and jacket both having a white polka-dot pattern. There was nothing ostentatious about the colour, yet it had an indescribably proud and dignified appearance.

As I ordered the car to slow down to enter the gates of the house, Čhao Khun Attnikānbodī leaned over and patted me gently on the shoulder and congratulated me for finding such a nice house. It was true that in the neighbourhoods we had driven through, there was not a house to match ours. Dressed in a kimono, the servant girl stood waiting at the steps in front of the house. She bowed in greeting when the car passed through the gates, and then bowed again two or three times, according to the Japanese way of showing great respect, when Čhao Khun and his wife got out of the car. He spoke a few words to her and she was able to respond in adequate English, which in turn, prompted a further expression of satisfaction on his part. Finally, when he had looked over the rooms and household furnishings, he expressed his delight and thanked me profoundly once more. I must confess, I felt very pleased to have arranged everything to his satisfaction without any omissions, for my organising abilities prompted Čhao Khun to praise me later to others as a clever chap, more circumspect than most other young men.

There was hot water prepared for baths and not a single detail had been neglected. They were both delighted from the moment they set foot in the house, and there had been no disappointments to spoil the mood. In the evening, I took them for a Chinese meal at the Ka-Co-Eng Restaurant, which was one of the most famous and luxurious restaurants in Tokyo. Both the setting and the food that

evening occasioned Čhao Khun to remark more than once, that he was reminded of Hoi Tian Lao Restaurant in Bangkok. When we arrived back at the house, their beds had already been prepared. I returned home that night, delighted that things had gone more successfully than I had expected.

TWO

When a person becomes intimately involved in our life, the events and feelings of that first day when we met them, leave a lasting impression upon our minds. That navy blue suit with its white polka dot pattern, and the white hat and shoes, was the first instance that the clothes a woman was wearing had made such an impression upon me. It was an outfit which I felt was so proud and dignified. Mōm Rārchawong Kīrati was plumpish without being large. She had a healthy radiant appearance with a soft complexion. Having seen her from close quarters on several occasions, I was even more convinced of her beauty. Her large black eyes sparkled beneath long eyebrows and her cheeks glowed with health; her tiny chin curved upwards slightly and had a lovely dimple on it. Her lips were long and slender, forming two red triangles at the top with a third beneath, making them more beautiful than anything. I have to confess, I had never seen such a beautiful pair of lips above such a small chin.

I knew perfectly well that Čhao Khun was a fine man, and I myself had the utmost respect for him. But despite this, I could not help but wonder what in the world it was that had induced such

beauty to become wedded to an old man of more than fifty. I felt curious, like any young man who wants to know and wants to understand what is going on around him. But my curiosity was casual and had nothing to do with any personal feelings for anyone. I could see that Mōm Rā̄tchawong Kīrati appeared quite happy and contented in her newly married state, and this whetted my curiosity still further. I was certain Mōm Rā̄tchawong Kīrati was not a widow because of her fresh and radiant appearance.

Mōm Rā̄tchawong Kīrati was a quiet person as Čhao Khun had previously informed me. On the journey from Tokyo Station to the house, which took about twenty minutes, she spoke to me a couple of times. When we arrived, I realised that she was even more delighted than Čhao Khun with the house that I had arranged for them. There was no doubt she was excited, but she kept her feelings in check as she wandered gracefully from room to room admiring the furnishings, without any trace of urgency or excitement. An occasional exclamation of admiration indicated her deep pleasure. She did not say very much, nor very often, yet I could see the happiness in her eyes. I realised then, that she was unlike most other women I had ever met.

During dinner Mōm Rā̄tchawong Kīrati inquired a little about my studies and my life in Japan; I was surprised that she did not ask about the entertainments and excitements Tokyo had to offer, which is what most visitors usually ask. But she listened with a smile as Čhao Khun and I chatted. She seemed to be older than me so I felt respect for her, yet her youth and good looks still aroused my curiosity.

Čhao Khun's trip to Tokyo with his wife happened to coincide with the hot season; the university term had recently ended, so I

was completely free. It was an excellent opportunity for me to put my time at his disposal, as and when he required it. Čhao Khun was less than delighted to find Tokyo as hot as Bangkok in April. However, that had been his decision and not my advice. But when he learned that by visiting Tokyo in the hot season, he was gaining the benefit of his trip coinciding with my university vacation, which could be very useful for him, he was satisfied.

I spent almost all of the first week with the pair of them; there were only two or three occasions when I did not have lunch or dinner with them. At the beginning of his visit, Čhao Khun had to go and visit various friends, both Japanese and Thai, including the Ambassador. In addition, he wanted to see what was going on in the country and visit various places, as is only natural for people visiting a country for the first time. I had to act as his regular guide, because, without a guide who could speak Japanese, getting about would have been difficult. In that first week, he went to several parties arranged in his honour by both Thai and Japanese friends. There were a considerable number of people at each party and I had the opportunity to attend on each occasion.

Thus it was, that within the space of a single week, almost all of the Thais living in Japan had had the opportunity to meet the pair of them. I knew that many were pleased to make the acquaintance of Čhao Khun Atthikānbodī; but I also knew that everyone was even more delighted by Mōm Rāčhawong Kīrati, even though she hardly knew anyone beforehand. Later, she told me that she could count all the people she knew in Bangkok in a very short time. It was not that Čhao Khun was inferior to his wife; as I've already said, he was a fine person. But Mōm Rāčhawong Kīrati was a woman of exceptional charm, and so people reacted to them with

different degrees of appreciation. The men were delighted to see such a good-looking Thai woman as Mōm Rārchawong Kīrati coming out from Thailand to visit Tokyo. It made them feel proud to see the Japanese gazing in admiration at the beauty of our women, which perhaps goes deeper than we realise. The Thai women present were no less curious and interested in Mōm Rārchawong Kīrati, but naturally they did not make a great deal of fuss; they, and some of the men, too, came up and asked me about Mōm Rārchawong Kīrati's background, prior to her marriage to Čhao khun Atthikānbodī. At that time, I was still unable to give any answer. The one thing which puzzled all of them, was what it was that had induced her to decide to marry her husband. People guessed that she could be no more than twenty-eight, and they could not get over the surprise that such a beautiful and charming woman of this age, should marry a gentleman of fifty, even if he was a fine man with the dignity and bearing of his years.

I myself, however, felt especially proud at the honour of being almost Mōm Rārchawong Kīrati's bodyguard. It seemed to me that she must have been aware now much everyone liked her. It was true she was often quiet, but everyone could see the happiness that filled her pale pink face.

As a result of spending almost all day long with them, nearly every day, a feeling of closeness between myself and Mōm Rārchawong Kīrati grew up rather quickly. I become fond of people quickly and everyone would agree that Mōm Rārchawong Kīrati was certainly someone who it would be nice to be fond of. Whenever I had the chance to be near her, she would often show touches of kindness towards me, for example, serving me when we were eating, as if I were a child. On one occasion, she noticed the stitching was coming loose on my tie, so she told me to take it off and then stitched

it herself; another time she noticed some mud on the cuff of my jacket, so she took it away and brushed it for me. Normally I took little interest in such matters, nor in such little niceties. However, as I had been abroad for three years with no family to pamper me, preoccupied with my studies and leading a frugal and arid existence, it had been so long since I had encountered such kindness; and meeting it at a time when I was lonely, I found it made an even greater impression upon me. This, I myself felt was strange. I could find no explanation for why I felt so happy sitting there close to Mōm Rāṭchawong Kīrati, waiting quietly while she stitched my tie, and answering her occasional questions.

THREE

Two weeks passed and the friendship between the two of us blossomed. I saw a completely different Mōm Rāṭchawong Kīrati. She was not particularly quiet and serious, and latterly with me, she appeared to be a rather good conversationalist and someone who wanted to enjoy herself. In her own way, she could speak on both serious and light topics. When she spoke in earnest, I had the feeling that she was much better read than me. It surprised me that Čhao Khun Atthikānbodī should think that his wife knew little about life and the outside world.

When she was enjoying herself, chatting alone with me, she would laugh loudly, her laugh full of vitality and a bright child-like

innocence, which echoed in one's mind long after. At such moments I felt that Mōm Rā́tchawong Kīrati was a very close friend. I felt a tremendous loyalty towards her

However, two weeks had passed and I was still unable to provide an answer to those who came asking me about Mōm Rā́tchawong Kīrati's life before her marriage, and why it was she had married Čhao Khun. It remained a mystery to me. No one would have thought she had married for love. It is not unusual to find such beauty wedded to a fifty year-old, it is true, but for such beauty and a fifty year-old to love each other is unusual, for love and marriage are two entirely different matters. The majority tended towards the opinion that the power of the god, money, had played some considerable part in this instance, just as in other cases, where the woman ultimately entered into marriage, unable to resist the pressure. But no one dared to express such an opinion about Mōm Rā́tchawong Kīrati's marriage with any certainty, because as far as anyone knew, she was very happy with her husband.

To my mind, Mōm Rā́tchawong Kīrati was enjoying her stay in Tokyo very much. Whenever there was a chance to go out, no matter where it was, I noticed that she would take a close interest in everything around her and that her eyes would sparkle with happiness. Such curiosity, however, was unusual for someone of her age and made her appear serious. As a result, it was difficult for those who had no opportunity to get to know her, to feel close to her.

A new understanding occurred in our relationship while we were out walking alone together one evening during the third week. That evening, Čhao Khun had gone out to play golf, and his wife had gone shopping at the Ginza. After she had returned and rested, she

invited me out for a walk. The road we were walking along was not far from the back of the house. It was a quiet road, shaded by trees on either side and hilly in parts. The fields below were lush green from the different kinds of vegetables growing there. It was quiet and peaceful with only the occasional lorry passing us. Mōm Rā̄tchawong Kīrati had been out for a walk near the grounds of the house a few times, and she had expressed the intention of one day walking some way down this road to have a look at the surrounding scenery. This was the first time that she had put that plan into action.

We walked for a long time that day, and by that time, we knew each other well enough for neither of us to waste time in silence as we had when we had first met. When we were alone together we had plenty of things to talk about; when one subject was exhausted there was another to take its place. Some things we talked about at great length, others only a little.

Two boys of about twelve or thirteen rode past on small bicycles, staring at us and grinning cheerfully. Mōm Rā̄tchawong Kīrati smiled at them.

'I feel so happy today,' she said, breathing in deeply the air around her, the soft smile still on her face.

'Why's that?' I asked. 'I was afraid you might be bored because there's nothing to see.'

'What do you mean, "there's nothing to see"?' she said, pointing to the fields with their pale green lettuces stretching out before us just off to the right of our path.

'Haven't you noticed the white of the leaves in the pale sunlight? What a lovely sight they are, like velvet. And the

young, chocolate-coloured aubergines, don't they make you feel as if they're young friends of your own age? And beyond them, don't the tall lettuce plants, with their tapering leaves blowing in the gentle breeze, help to raise your spirits?'

'You sound like a poet,' I laughed.

'Don't mock me. People say poets are old-fashioned. I'm no poet, but if you mean I'm a poet simply because I have old-fashioned ideas, then I admit it.' She smiled sweetly as she looked at me. 'It's true, you know, Nopphōn, these things really are the source of my happiness. You must have noticed those two children a moment ago, smiling cheerfully, and with chubby rosy cheeks and beautiful eyes. Ah, what else could be lovelier than that?'

'Now I know you're a philosopher.' When I said this, I was not joking.

'I'm going to keep quiet from now on, because you're just flattering me,' she said and walked on in silence.

'I was speaking the truth,' I said quickly in excuse.

'All the more reason then why I'm not going to.'

I stifled a smile and we walked on in silence for a while before she turned to me and spoke.

'I'm quite serious now. Wouldn't you agree with me how full of wonder each of those things I mentioned is?'

'I wouldn't contradict you at all and I agree with everything you said. The reason I was going to ask, was out of concern, because generally women aren't interested in such matters. But you're special.'

'First of all I'm a poet, then a philosopher and now someone special. You're really awful, today, Nopphōn. I'm just going to have

to be firm.

'What, in expressing your opinion that I'm awful?'

'Yes, that too. But I meant that I'm not going to talk about such matters any more.'

In her calm poise which was mixed with a certain child-like manner, I saw the incomparable charm and beauty of Mōm Rāṭhawong Kīrati. I simply admired and praised her from within my heart.

As we approached a village we came to a junction where there was a run-down coffee shop. Just as we walked past, a car drew up and two girls got out. Their faces were a deep pink colour and they stood there unsteadily. Two men got out after them. They had taken their jackets off because of the heat and were carrying them. The eyes of one of them were half-closed, while the other's were wide open and blazing. The two men put their arms around the girls and together, they staggered towards the coffee shop, veering first to the left and then to the right before disappearing inside.

'A young man like you must enjoy such spectacles,' she remarked when we had passed the junction.

I knew she did not mean it and was just pretending to be sarcastic but I replied quite straightforwardly.

'On the contrary. I really hate it.'

'Such ugly pleasures exist everywhere, Nopphōn, in every country. Why can't they behave themselves a bit better? It's not even dark yet. And why do they have to act that way in the middle of the street? Couldn't they wait until they're out of sight. Or perhaps they like to think they're being very smart.'

'I don't think the vast majority of people would think it was being smart. It's surely only a few people who behave that way. I've heard that in Thailand, since they opened up beer halls all over the capital, this kind of thing goes on late into the night. Is that so?'

100

'So I believe. But I've never seen it, and I've no idea what sort of scale it is on. I'd never have guessed that the kind of thing that happened a moment ago went on.'

'But the truth is, it seems to be fairly standard for coffee shops everywhere.'

'Nopphōn, you're my Columbus; you've brought me to a new world.'

'Are you sorry at being brought up against such sordidness?'

'I like art. I am as happy looking at millipedes and earthworms as I am looking at stars in the sky. No, I'm not at all sorry, Nopphōn. I'm grateful even. But when you take away art from a scene such as this, it disturbs me a little; but then again, it's good to be disturbed.'

'You're an artist too, perhaps both a painter and a writer,' I declared in astonishment, genuine astonishment.

'Nopphōn, please be careful with your words. Remember that in the space of less than half an hour, you've given me four different jobs already!'

'I think I'd be much cleverer, amazingly clever in fact, if I were to be near you for a year.' I did not hear her protests, so sure was I that I had spoken the truth.

She gave me a penetrating look out of the corner of her eye, as if to see if there were any other meaning in those words.

'You're so awful it's almost cute,' she said with a smile. 'So all you want is one year, then?'

'I meant at least one year,' I was quick to explain. 'But if I had the choice, there would be no limit.'

Mōm Rāṭchawong Kīrati laughed. But her laugh lacked its usual brightness.

'But I'm going to be here for only eight weeks and already it's the third week.'

'Time's passing so quickly,' I said quietly. 'I wish I were Hanuman.'

'So you could stop the chariot of the sun?'

'But it's just impossible. I don't suppose you'd object,' I continued earnestly, if I were to ask Chao Khun to extend your stay for a bit?'

'I follow the orbit of the sun. It's not for me to choose, it's up to the sun,' she replied in jest. 'But don't forget, your university term begins soon.'

'I haven't forgotten. But I can always come to you for my education outside university hours.'

After that, Mām Rāṭchawong Kīrati asked me about my studies. When she spoke about real matters, her manner appeared serious and I became like a little child rather than her friend. We walked on for a while and came to a crowded area where people were selling things and an endless stream of traffic flowed back and forth. It was not suitable for a quiet relaxing walk so we decided to turn round and go back. In no time, we returned to the beauty and tranquility of nature.

FOUR

It was evening and the sun was going down as we made our way home. Little children were playing in the gardens of their homes. We passed one house set in magnificent grounds. Two healthy and good-looking young girls were, with much laughter, walking and running a little child out of the garden and along a narrow path which led to the road we were walking along. The two girls reached the edge of the road just as we were passing.

As soon as we had passed, Mōm Rāṭchawong Kīrati spoke.

'What nice happy faces they had, the pair of them. Nopphōn, what do you think of Japanese girls?'

'I have to confess that I find their demeanour most attractive.'

'You don't think they're a bit too submissive for a man's taste, then?'

'No, I don't.'

'In that case, you must be less than a man. I understood most men liked audacious women, or at least those with a touch of audacity, and wanted some kind of wild streak or something distinctive in a woman's manner to prevent life from becoming boring.'

'You may be right. But I think there are many ways of making life interesting. I may be in a minority in seeing gentleness in a woman as one of life's pleasures.'

'You've been away from Thai girls for a long time. You're very much under the influence of Japanese girls,' Mōm Rāṭchawong Kīrati laughed. 'I think you're right,' she added in a more serious tone, 'and I admire your opinion, even though I have not the least expertise in such matters.'

When she had finished, I thanked her.

'I can't help thinking of the happy expressions on the faces

of those two girls a moment ago, ' she went on, almost wistfully. 'They were like well nourished plants bursting forth into bud, ripe with life and the freshness of youthful vigour. Such radiance makes me shudder a little when I think of myself.'

'I don't understand,' I said, genuinely curious, 'why the freshness of those two young girls should make you shudder. You yourself are amply blessed in this direction, perhaps even more so than those two girls.'

'Who taught you to say such things?'

'My feelings inspired me,' I replied at once, 'nor do I believe I'm the only one who is convinced of this.'

'But you don't know the reason for my anxiety. My beauty - if as you think, it actually exists, - can't be compared with that of those two girls. They are, as I said, like buds opening up into flower. Theirs is the freshness of the dawn; mine, if it still exists, belongs to the early evening, and will disappear soon. Now, surely, you can see why I have reason to say 'I shudder'.'

'No, I still don't see,' I replied with interest. 'I don't even agree with your comparison, when you say your beauty is like that of the setting sun. To me, yours is still that of the morning, and even if you won't call it of the dawn, it still has a long time to shine.'

'Ah, you really have such faith in me.' Even though she would not accept what I had said, her delight with my words was apparent in her voice. 'And that's why it is you don't realise your eyes are deceiving you. Don't you know, I'm no longer a young girl any more.'

'I don't think anyone would say a woman under thirty isn't beautiful, especially in your case.'

She stared at me with a look of victory in her eyes.

'You probably didn't realise I'm thirty-five.'

I was stunned by her words and stared at her quite inconsiderately. Then I laughed.

'You're pulling my leg. I know you're teasing me.'

'What do you mean? How old do you think I am, then? Come on, quickly, tell me how old you reckon I am.'

'I'd say there's no way you could be more than twenty-eight. In fact, you're probably only about twenty-six.'

'Twenty-six,' she cried, happiness sparkling in her eyes. 'You remind me how it was I felt nine years ago. I remember my feelings vividly. At the time, life seemed full of hope. I had not the slightest premonition nor fear that I would have to marry a gentleman who was on the verge of old age. It was part of my nature to dislike things declining and withering. I can say that sometimes I was afraid. But that was nine years ago.'

'And what's happened to you now?' I asked with growing curiosity.

'What's happened?' she asked, repeating my words slowly and gazing ahead with a distant look in her eyes. 'My youth and beautiful dreams all came and took their leave. Whether I should have let them go or not, wasn't a problem; I had to, myself. Besides that, as you can see, I married Chao Khun.'

I nearly asked whether she meant she was not happy in her marriage, but common-sense managed to prevail over curiosity. I realised it would have been impolite and perhaps a liberty to ask such a direct question.

'No matter how much I disliked things declining and withering, and how much I loved beauty, the fact is, nine years have passed. I wish I were what you guessed,' Mām Kātnawong Kīrati continued,

'but we can't deny the truth.'

'And what is the truth?'

'The truth is, I'm not the young woman of twenty-six you thought I was.' She smiled calmly. 'I wasn't fibbing or pulling your leg when I said I was thirty-five. I've passed what people call the 'half-way mark'. So I don't think I have any right to call myself a young lady.'

'Shouldn't I believe my eyes rather than your words?' I said, quite seriously.

'You really are the limit, today, Nopphōn,' she said glancing at me with a lovely smile.

'I beg your pardon for being the limit in all honesty. Hundreds and hundreds of people would refuse to believe you if you were to tell them you were thirty-five. Your youth and radiance is apparent even to someone with one eye closed.'

'As long, of course, as the remaining eye isn't blind,' she added mischievously.

'I really mean it.'

'Alright, Nopphōn. But just so you won't go around guessing people's ages wrongly, I'll tell you something. Women who know how to look after themselves and always take care of their health, can always look five years younger than they really are.

'But you must have been blessed by Indra, or bathed in sacred fire, like Puraṅg Acnā, to have been able to preserve your youth so amazingly well. I've never met any woman about whom I've ever been so wrong. Tell me, what's the special secret.'

'That's enough, Nopphōn, quite enough,' she said, waving her hand to prevent me from saying anything further. 'I'm not going to talk to you about it any more. You're just trying to flatter me, you know, Nopphōn, all the time, and that kind of behaviour spoils

you.

She looked serious and walked on in silence. If she had spoken to me like that during the first few days, with such an expression on her face, I would have felt very alarmed. But since we were close enough for me to understand what she meant when she spoke like this, I merely smiled.

We arrived home at dusk. Čhao Khun had not yet returned, so I stayed to keep Mōm Rāčhawong Kīrati company for a while. When she had bathed and changed her clothes, she invited me to take a bath before dinner. She would not countenance me looking grubby or less than spotlessly clean, so my protests met with no success. But why it was, that I felt strangely pleased by her concern for my welfare, I could not say.

The pleasure I had experienced talking to Mōm Rāčhawong Kīrati that evening lingered in my mind as I walked home. Her age was something I had only just learnt, and had come as a complete surprise, although I believed she was speaking the truth. If I had realised from the outset that she was thirty-five, which meant she was thirteen years older than me, I would surely have felt that she was much my senior, and I wouldn't have been able to become close to her in the way I had. But when we ended up becoming close friends her age was no more than a shadow of truth. I felt that Mōm Rāčhawong Kīrati was only three or four years older than me. When she told me her real age, it did not create a barrier or make the close friendship that I felt for her in the slightest bit more distant.

Nevertheless, some things she had said, I had been unable to understand, in particular what she had said about marrying Čhao Khun. Something she had said in passing had greatly aroused my curiosity. As I interpreted it, she had not married of her own free will; but I could not be certain whether my interpretation was correct. The

more I thought about her marriage, the more puzzling it seemed.

Eventually, after I had arrived home and gone to bed, I asked myself why it was that I kept thinking about Mōm Rāṭchawong Kīrati's private affairs. What business was it of mine to have to go sorting out such problems? It was true that I might well regard myself as one of her friends; but why was I worrying about her personal affairs, when she herself gave no indication of any concern, nor even called upon me for help in any matter whatsoever. Having asked myself such questions, I was unable to find any answers, so I tried to banish these futile thoughts, something which I felt would require a considerable effort on my part.

FIVE

Relations between myself and Čhao Knun and Mōm Rāṭchawong Kīrati continued as usual. One evening three or four days later, Čhao Knun received an invitation to a party. Mōm Rāṭchawong Kīrati said she was not feeling very well and so did not relish the thought of mingling among crowds of people, preferring to stay at home. Čhao Knun therefore asked me to stay and keep her company.

That night was the night of the waxing moon. After dinner, we both had the same thought in mind, that it would be utterly foolish at such a time not to go out and enjoy the moonlight for a while. I suggested that we ought to take out a rowing boat in the public park which was only about ten minutes' walk from where we lived. Mōm Rāṭchawong Kīrati agreed.

It was still twilight when we got there. There were crowds of

local people out strolling in the park. Some just sat there on benches watching others rowing on the big lake. We walked round the lake two or three times until we felt tired, and then decided to take a boat out. There were already about four or five boats on the water which was about right. That way the lake was not too noisy and crowded. I took the oars and Mōm Rāṭchawong Kīrati sat back. As we lost ourselves in conversation, I let the boat drift along on its own.

The moon was shining brightly. It was a wonderful sight, whether we watched its reflection on the surface of the water or whether we cast our eyes around the many different kinds of plants in the park. Mōm Rāṭchawong Kīrati was enjoying herself, and at times such as this, she talked endlessly of the beauty of nature. I agreed with everything she said, but it was not something I really took great pleasure in. In my lifetime, I had experienced the beauty of the night of the waxing moon on hundreds of occasions, but my eye had never before caught sight of any living creature in the light of the moon that looked as beautiful as the woman sitting before me at that moment.

To add a little to the pleasure of the outing to the park that evening, Mōm Rāṭchawong Kīrati was wearing a silk kimono with a bold red pattern against a white background, like a large bunch of chrysanthemums I had seen at Takarasuka Park the previous autumn. The moon was fully visible between the clouds. It shone down on the chrysanthemums all over her body, which made them seem alive. When she turned her face upwards, a gentle breeze blew through her hair so that it danced in the moonlight. The sparkle in her eyes was like a light calling all of my attention to that one spot.

She sat with her feet stretched out towards me, her pale slender ankles tapering into plump feet. She leaned back a little and abandoned herself happily to the beauties of nature.

'Don't you feel really nappy, Noppnōn, on a lovely night like this?' she asked softly, her eyes shining as she gazed straight at me. I was quite taken aback as I marvelled at her beautiful face.

'I'm indescribably nappy, more so than I can say in words,' I replied with enthusiasm.

'Doesn't it make you miss home a little?'

'I left home three years ago. I've missed it from time to time, but after a while, the feeling diminishes.'

'And you don't miss it at all.'

'No, at least, not at such times as this.'

'You're just the opposite of me. When it's quiet and my mind's full of the beauty of nature, like now, I can't help thinking of the things I love most. I think of my father, my mother and my younger sisters at home, where it was so happy and peaceful. I think of life ten years ago when we were all living at home together, and I think of my own life then, a life that was full of hope and happiness. You're very hard-hearted, you know, Noppnōn, not to miss it at all at times like these.'

I wanted to answer, and almost did, that in her presence, in the presence of such riveting beauty, I never thought of anything else and would have found it difficult to be able to. I dared not say this out loud, because I myself, was still not clear why I had such thoughts.

'I'm not hard-hearted at all, but I have to take my studies seriously. Besides, if I may speak quite frankly, at the moment

I'm enjoying myself being of service to you.' What it was that made me reveal something of my true feelings, I do not know.

'What a fine man of words you've become!' I looked the other way and she continued. 'How many more years do you have to study?'

'About five years. Because when I've finished my studies, I intend to find a job here for a while in order to get some experience.'

'That's a long time. You might end up becoming Japanese. You might marry one of those Japanese girls you admire so much and settle down here.'

'Oh, that's impossible,' I was quick to counter. 'It's true, I do admire Japanese progress and Japanese women, too, but that wouldn't make me become Japanese. I never forget, even for one moment, that I'm Thai and that I'm a part of a Thai nation which still lags far behind other countries. The reason I've come out here to study, is to seek progress for Thailand. Ultimately my goal lies in Thailand. And marriage, too.'

The fact that I mentioned marriage was because Mōm Rātcnawong Kīrati's remarks had reminded me of the girl who was my fiancée. Yes. She was just my fiancée, whom my father had picked out for me to guarantee that I would return and marry her, or at least as a warning to me not to get involved with women over here. Since she was merely my fiancée, and not a girl I loved, when I thought of her, it was not actually of her herself, but rather of what married life would mean to me in the future.

'Your aims are very praiseworthy,' she said, with sincere admiration. 'There are two major things that merit your attention in Thailand, and they are work and marriage. What plans have you

made?'

'I intend to specialise in Banking, because as far as I know, there are still very few people in Thailand who are interested in this subject. So that's where my future profession probably lies. As far as marriage is concerned, I have absolutely no plans. I think it's too serious a matter to get involved in at the moment.'

I felt slightly uneasy at not having told Mōm Rātcnawong Kīrati quite clearly that the reason I had no plans in this area was because the plans had already been made. Unless something unforeseen occurred, I would have to marry my fiancée, whom I scarcely knew, and for whom as yet, I had never felt either love or understanding. I do not know why I did not tell Mōm Rātcnawong Kīrati. Was I trying to keep it from her? I am not really sure. However, I did not lie to her or tell her something that was untrue. Perhaps I was not trying to hide anything from her, because I had not been asked whether I had a fiancée waiting for me in Thailand. But supposing she had asked, how would I have answered? My heart was pounding.

'You've got a wise head on such young shoulders,' Mōm Rātcnawong Kīrati said when I finished speaking.

Our rowing boat meanwhile was drifting gently in the middle of the lake. I picked up the oars and propelled it forward. I was in a state of some agitation and needed some movement which might prompt a change in the subject of the conversation. Our boat was following another in which there were two girls. They were singing softly in harmony, rowing slowly and gazing up happily at the moonlight.'

'They're singing nicely,' Mōm Rātcnawong Kīrati remarked quietly.

'They seem quite carried away by the song. It must be a very impressive one. Can you translate the words for me?'

'It's a song of consolation, not a love song, telling you to be contented with your station in life,' I told her when the two girls had ended their song. 'In the song, it says that if we are not sagura flowers, we shouldn't despise being another kind of flower; all we should ask, is that we might be the most beautiful of our kind. There is only one Mount Fuji, but all other mountains are not worthless. Even if we are not samurai, let us be the followers of samurai. We can't all be captains, because without sailors the boat won't sail. Even if we can't be the road, let us be the pavement. There is a place in the world and work for every one of us. However great or small that work may be, all of us for sure have something to do. If you can't be the sun, then be a star. Even though you weren't born a boy, don't feel slighted at being a girl. Whatever you are, be it, no matter what it is. The important thing is we should be it to the best of our ability, regardless of what it is.'

'It's a song with a very valuable message,' Mōm Rātcnawong Kīrati murmured when I had finished. 'And you translated it very nicely. I'd like to hear it again. The pair of them seemed to be enjoying it so much when they were singing it.'

'I notice that you seem to be happy with everything here in Tokyo,' I continued after we had passed their boat. 'Can you tell me why it is you're so happy?'

'Anything beautiful makes me happy. But then again, I tend to see beauty in almost everything. Just take the surface of the water with its small ripples around the edge. To me that's interesting. I love beauty because it arouses beautiful feelings.'

'In that case, you'd really enjoy it if you went to stay in a district of natural scenic beauty, like Nikko.'

'You're right, I really would. I'd like to go to Nikko to see the waterfalls and the moonlight shining on the mountain lakes. I'd like to go to a seaside district, too, and watch the boys and girls swimming and walking together along the beach, laughing and giggling. I heard Čnao Khun mention that he would take me to these places soon. There's no doubt I really would enjoy it.' She clasped her hands together and rested her chin upon them, a smile crossing her face as her eyes darted back and forth.

'I'd like to go to Europe, too,' she murmured dreamily. 'I'd like to see strange new kinds of beauty. I'd like to visit England and France in winter. I'd cross over to Switzerland and then go on to Norway to see the midnight sun. And I'd end my trip in Italy, spending most of my time in Rome and Florence where I could admire the paintings of Raphael, Leonardo and Michaelangelo, the three great masters.'

'You must be an artist then?'

'I love art. I do a bit of drawing.'

'Oh, I didn't know,' I exclaimed with a mixture of surprise and delight. 'It's incredible. You think everything's beautiful and you look at everything so carefully. You never told me.'

'That's because I was afraid of your taste. Besides, my level of ability is nothing to boast about.'

'How long have you been drawing?'

'For several years now. At least five or six years since I first began to feel lonely.'

'If you were to go to Italy and see some good examples and get some worthwhile instruction, maybe you'd become very famous like

those three.'

'There you go again. Don't try to put me on a pedestal, Nopphōn, so I will at least still be able to talk to you,' she scolded me and frowned. 'I draw because I really love art. In addition, I have my own special reason, and that is, that by devoting my interest to something, it helps to ease my loneliness a lot. It calms my mind. Have you ever thought, that mental activity is like physical activity? There's a constant flow of movement, except for when we're asleep. It's part of our nature that whenever we do something, we always have to think about it. We never stop. If we tried to be completely still, it would be like torture. You can try it now. Keep your hands still and sit perfectly still without moving any part of your body and without thinking of anything at all. You'll find it very uncomfortable. When you move, your movements are either beneficial to you, or not beneficial, or harmful. It's the same with thoughts. If we don't think in a beneficial way, then we think in a way that is not beneficial or that is harmful. Since our minds are perpetually active, I think that if we can find a distraction which is useful and which continually absorbs our thoughts, then life won't be worthless, and we ourselves will be able to enjoy our lives to a greater or lesser extent regardless of our position. It's no good just letting our thoughts wander; it tends to end in a feeling of boredom with life. Women in my position need a lot of things to help them in this direction. If I had nothing useful to think about, I would think about useless or harmful things for sure. It's only natural. And I can say that since I developed a love for art, art has become my good friend too. I've been going on too long. You must be bored.'

'It's been most enjoyable listening to you,' I said in all sincerity. 'I'd like to - but why is it when I offer sincere compliments it becomes something you fear? Or is it my sincerity which is frightening?'

'You've answered all your questions. Is there anything else you want me to answer?'

'You're just too clever for me. At everything. I can't keep up.'

'No, I think you're following your own path. You don't need to keep up with anyone. You should feel proud.' She paused for a moment and pulled the sleeves of her kimono in close to her body. 'It's not so humid, today,' she added. 'There's been a breeze all day long. My feet feel a bit chilly.'

I removed the scarf from my neck and covered her pure white feet with it.

'Oh good gracious!' she exclaimed and then laughed softly. 'Why have you covered my feet with your scarf. The two don't go together.'

'Didn't you know, your feet are more beautiful than my neck, so they should receive more care.'

Mōm Rāṭhawong Kīrati gave a deep sigh. It was a way of letting me know that she did not wish to argue with my compliments any more.

That evening we were the last to leave our boats. We were both astonished when we looked all round the lake without seeing any boat on the water other than our own. We were both surprised and amused that we had been enjoying ourselves so much that we had not realised when the others had returned to the bank. When I looked at the watch I carried with me, I realised that we had spent two whole hours in the boat.

'How could that be possible?' she asked in amazement.

'I was enjoying myself with you,' was my response.

'I thought it was only an hour at the most.'

'I'd have said only five minutes.'

That evening, Čhao khun returned home half an hour after us. Mōm Rāčhawong Kīrati and I each came to the conclusion that there was no need to inform Čhao Khun of the details of our evening excursion, and because we were both in agreement, we did not offer each other any explanation.

That night I found it difficult to get to sleep. I wondered how I was ever going to be able to when my heart was full of Mōm Rāčhawong Kīrati. Several questions sprang up unexpectedly in my mind. Had I ever in my life, met any woman more charming and beautiful than Mōm Rāčhawong Kīrati? Had I ever met a woman who had shown me the kindness and friendship that Mōm Rāčhawong Kīrati had? The answer to all these questions was negative, firmly and decisively negative.

But why was it that I was asking myself these questions? Why was it that I had to compare Mōm Rāčhawong Kīrati's beauty, intelligence and other good qualities with those of everyone else - or to be more precise - with those of all the women I had previously met? Why was I asking myself these questions? I tried to find an answer. But in the end, did I find one or not?

My search lost momentum and instead of a clear answer coming to my mind, my thoughts drifted on to my feelings for Mōm Rāčhawong Kīrati. As she had climbed out of the boat, she had held out a hand for me to support her. I held her hand lightly to steady her as her feet left the boat and stepped onto dry land. As I did so,

a strange feeling I had never experienced before ran through me. It was as if a strong hand had seized my heart and was shaking it until I felt quite shaken all over. This strange feeling possessed me momentarily.

'I can stand now. You can let go of my hand.' When Mōm Rāchawong Kīrati spoke, I realised I was still clasping her hand. I let go of that small soft hand with a start, but the strange feeling still pounded in my heart. What power dwelt in that tiny hand that had dragged me so far out of myself? What power was in that touch, that it still clung to my heart, even though I had left several hours ago?

When I was leaving, she came out to the main gate to see me off. As I was saying my farewell, she took my scarf, which I had forgotten, and wrapped it round my neck.

'It's breezy tonight,' she said. 'Make sure you don't leave your collar open. I'd feel sorry if you were to be ill as a result of keeping me company.'

'Will you be needing me tomorrow?'

'I'll have a think about it,' she replied in jest.

'Fine. Tomorrow I'll come round for your answer.'

'Good. You can come round for my answer every day.' She smiled happily and then said good-night. 'Oyasuminasai, my dear boy.'

'Oyasuminasai,' I replied with a sweet smile as my heart pounded and her soft melodious voice echoed in my mind.

These were the scenes and feelings which occupied my thoughts. The moon shone down through one of the windows, which I had opened slightly, onto my feet. It made me think once again of those pale slender ankles and plump feet.

Things carried on as usual, or if there was anything unusual, it was not of any great significance. A new situation which disturbed me, occurred at Kamakura at the end of summer.

Kamakura is a seaside locality about an hour's journey by train from Tokyo. It is surrounded on three sides by hills which are covered in lush green vegetation, the remaining side opening out onto the sea. It is a seaside district of both scenic beauty and historical interest. In addition, it has both Buddhist and Shinto temples and a beautiful large new Buddha image of great artistic merit, called in Japan, 'daibatsu' for which Kamakura has become famous.

On Saturdays and Sundays, the people of Tokyo often flock there in crowds to swim and relax, because Kamakura was near enough to be just a day trip; and at the weekends, especially, various amusements were arranged for the trippers to enjoy according to their particular tastes.

Čhao Khun had arranged to stay at kamakura for five days, which suited Mōm Rārchawong Kīrati and myself. We left Tokyo on a Wednesday. When we reached Kamakura, there were not so many people there because it was the end of the hot season. But the Kainin Hotel, the leading Hotel in Kamakura, was still full. I had already contacted them to make advance bookings, so we were greeted on our arrival and made very welcome. Čhao Khun and his wife stayed in a twin room suite which included a bathroom and sitting room, while I stayed in a single room. They were both delighted by the splendour and dignity of the Kainin Hotel.

By coincidence, Čhao Khun met some friends at the hotel. They were a Japanese and an American couple. As he had some friends to talk to, Čhao Khun was only too happy to allow Mōm Rātcawong Kīrati and me to slip away occasionally on our own.

Being together day and night at Kamakura brought us very close to one another. Some days our conversation would begin at the breakfast table and others, even before that. We were together nearly all the time, sometimes in a group with Čhao Khun's friends, and sometimes when we went out together. In the daytime we sometimes went out on a boat and other times sat and watched people playing about on the beach. In the evenings, I usually excused myself and went for a swim alone in the sea, because at that time, Čhao Khun normally liked to take a long walk along the beach, and I thought it only right that he should have time to enjoy himself alone with his young wife. Thus when he invited me to accompany them, I declined the offer, even though I could see he clearly meant it, with the excuse that I wanted to take a swim in the sea. Čhao Khun readily agreed.

One day Mōm Rātcawong Kīrati came down to swim with me. I could see she enjoyed it very much, even though from what she had told me I understood she was not normally very interested in going swimming. There is one embarrassing thing about taking a Thai lady swimming with Japanese people, and that is Japanese women are not very particular about covering the upper part of their bodies. They do not take very much care about their rather inadequate swimming costumes. Japanese girls may have a perfectly good reason for relaxing their caution in this matter, but our women who have been to the seaside, have all averted their eyes and complained. I was

afraid that Mōm Rāṭchawong Kīrati might have been bothered by it, but my fears were unfounded. She merely expressed her surprise without a word of complaint.

Our last night at Kamakura was on the Sunday. A grand ball was arranged at the Kairin hotel, as was customary on a Sunday night. People not staying at the hotel were allowed to join the merry-making if they purchased tickets from the hotel. That Sunday night, men and women crowded into the ballroom. Besides the Japanese, there were five or six Thais, including the three of us, and in addition, several Europeans, Americans and Filipinos among the crowd. Čhao Khun Atthikānbodī spent the evening enjoying himself like a young man. He took the floor for many of the dances, sometimes with white ladies, sometimes with Japanese, and uncorked several bottles of champagne. Mōm Rāṭchawong Kīrati danced two or three times with friends of Čhao Khun and sipped champagne, too. And I danced two or three times with a Japanese girl I knew and likewise, sipped champagne.

As it was our last night in Kamakura, Mōm Rāṭchawong Kīrati wanted to go for a walk outside. When Čhao Khun learnt of her wish, he readily consented, for he was thoroughly enjoying himself with all his friends. Mōm Rāṭchawong Kīrati invited me to go and see the various amusements. There was mini-golf and skating and we wandered around the sideshows before walking along the beach, gazing up at the stars above. Eventually we returned to the hotel and went and sat in the garden. Away from the crowd and alone together, surrounded by nature, our thoughts and feelings were absorbed in ourselves. The mixture of champagne and the soft atmosphere of the dancing had made me considerably more cheerful than usual. The sound of rumba

music echoed from the ballroom.

'Chao Khun must be really enjoying the dancing,' I remarked.
'The rumba music is so stirring.'

'But he surely won't dance the rumba. It looks too fast for a man of his age. But a young man like you must like it.'

'I'm not really interested enough in dancing to have any special preference. They're all the same to me.'

'I noticed you doing a slow fox-trot. I can see you're a good dancer.'

'That was because my partner was very good.'

'Who was she, your partner? She looked too tall to be Japanese.'

'She's the daughter of a wealthy merchant. You're right, her manner isn't very Japanese at all, because she was born in America and lived there until she was fifteen. She came to Japan only a year before me. That's why she doesn't seem very Japanese. When she first met me, she mentioned that she couldn't get on very well with her own countrymen, so she was happy to mix with foreigners. Whether she meant it, or whether she was just flattering us, she told me that she liked Thais in particular. She said there was something unusual about Thais, something cute.'

'She was judging Thais by you.'

'That's not what she said, nor what I'd want.'

'Nopphōn, you're a sweet and lovely boy.' At these words I felt my heart racing, but before I could reply, she continued. 'Earlier this evening, Chao Khun told me he was very pleased to see that you and I were getting on so well. He said you were a nice boy, and that he had been quite right in guessing that I would like you a lot.'

'Did he mean it quite sincerely when he said he was pleased?
Is it true he doesn't object to us being close?'

'Why do you ask?' she retorted. 'Is there anything in our
friendship to object to? And what makes you doubt the sincerity of
Čhao Khun?'

I was silent for a moment. 'I'm sorry. I don't know what came
over me that I should ask such a silly question. I haven't the
slightest reason for doubting his sincerity.'

'Are you sure?' Mōm Rāčhawong Kīrati asked.

I was silent once again, unable to answer immediately.

'What's the matter with you this evening? You're not so quick
with your answers as usual.' She patted me gently on the arm and
we smiled as our eyes met. 'Are you afraid Čhao Khun is jealous of
you?'

I was stunned. 'Why should I be afraid of that?'

'You haven't answered yet whether I guessed your thoughts
correctly or not.'

'You're like a fortune-teller.'

'How awful,' she laughed. 'Why should you think Čhao Khun is
jealous of you? Aren't you fully worthy of his trust?'

'Isn't that for you and Čhao Khun to answer?'

'Aren't your thoughts suitably innocent?'

'That's true. I shouldn't have any fears at all.'

'That's right. And since your thoughts are suitably innocent,
Čhao Khun is not a jealous kind of man.'

'I've known him a long time. He's a very kind man. That's why
you must love him very much.'

It was Mōm Rāčhawong Kīrati's turn to be silent.

'I like him in the way a child should like an old man.'

'You didn't say anything about love. I meant love between a husband and wife, between a man and woman.'

'You've seen what I am, and what Chao Khun is. There is a big difference in our ages. It's like a large mountain acting as a barrier to the love between us and preventing our love from meeting.'

'But love can exist between an old man and a young woman, can't it?'

'I don't believe in love between two different generations. I don't believe it can really exist unless we ourselves accept that it does, and that may be accepting something that's false.'

'But you're happy in your marriage, yet from what you say, you think that love between the two of you can't exist.'

'The happiness a woman appears to have gained might lead most people to think that love can exist between an old man and a young woman. But when women are sufficiently contented, they tend not to be interested in the problem of love, because it doesn't matter whether it is there or not. If they are contented, what else do they need? That's the way people live, many believing that love is the mother of happiness. But the way I see it, that's not always true. Love can bring bitterness and all kinds of hurt into our lives. But for those that do love, their hearts are engulfed with a wonderful sweetness which lasts forever. This isn't something I've experienced myself. I'm speaking from what I believe.'

'And what else do you want if you are contented with life?'

'I didn't say I wanted anything else. Or to put it bluntly as I guess you'd like, I didn't say that now, I still longed for love. By that, I mean I'm not desperately searching for love. I know I have no right to it. But I can't know whether love will come into

my life or not, nor guarantee that it won't, even though I'm not looking for it. It's true I may be happy, but please believe me, happiness can exist without love.'

'And if love were to come along, what would you do?'

'Oh, I don't prepare answers to questions like that in advance because it may never happen in my life. Dwelling on that kind of thing leaves you with no happiness. There's nothing sillier than worrying about something that doesn't exist or which is just a dream. Remember, a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush, and happiness without love is better than worrying about love without happiness.'

'And what about ^vChao Khun? Does he love you?'

'I can't answer for him. I know he's fond of me. Perhaps he loves me in the way an adult loves a child. But that's not love in the sense you mean, is it? I've already said, I don't believe in love between an old man and a young woman, so I don't expect him to love me deeply.'

'You mean he doesn't want love, that he's not looking for love, even from his own wife?'

'That's right, that's what I mean. And I believe that's the truth.'

'Why?'

'Because his love has dried up with old age. His days of loving have passed. Now he doesn't know how to love, because he has nothing to love with, to give me the love I need.'

'But why does he seem very happy with you, then?'

'You've got a bad memory. I've already told you, that you can be contented without love. He's in the same position as me.'

'If it wasn't for love, why did he marry you?'

'He wanted happiness just the same as others like him. Happiness is a thing man craves and will seek out right up until the last hour of his life, no matter how old he is. He married me because he believed it would bring him happiness.'

'And what about you? Why did you marry him, since it wasn't for love?'

'You want to know why I married him? Oh, that's a long story. There's not time tonight.' Mōm Rā̄tchawong Kīrati stood up. 'We've been out a long time, Nopphōn. Čhao Khun will be waiting.' I got up and as we started to walk back, she said, 'You've asked me a lot of things, tonight, Nopphōn. I've answered several questions that I shouldn't have, but I think you want to know about these things.'

'No,' I replied quite openly. 'I asked because I was interested in your life.'

'If I'd known that was why you were asking, I wouldn't have answered several of your questions. You shouldn't go taking an interest in my private life.'

'Surely you wouldn't deny that we're very good friends?'

'But that's no reason for you to go showing an interest in my inner feelings.'

'Well, I have shown an interest, and you've answered all my questions.'

'Because I was tricked.'

'You can be tricked by happiness.'

'I'm beginning to get tired of you.' Mōm Rā̄tchawong Kīrati tugged my arm to make me walk faster. 'A bit faster. I'm worried about Čhao Khun.'

SEVEN

Our stay at Kamakura had been enjoyable, especially the Sunday night, the last night.

From our conversation in the garden of the Kaihin Hotel that night, you will have seen how far relations between myself and Mōm Rārchawong Kīrati had reached. You are bound to have seen how close we were, and you might guess what would happen before long. But whatever your guess, I believe that it could be correct only in parts, because even I myself, who played the major role in the whole affair with Mōm Rārchawong Kīrati, was mistaken about the outcome of this strange business. It was a mistake which was to leave my heart shaken, right up to this very day. But let me continue my story.

When we returned from Kamakura, the rapport between Mōm Rārchawong Kīrati and myself was in full bloom. We both felt as if we had been the closest of friends for years. We forgot entirely that our friendship had been born and grown up within the space of a single summer. We never guessed that Autumn would arrive to see our friendship already in full bloom.

My initial position, which was merely as guide to Čhao Khun and his wife when they went out on business or sight-seeing, had rapidly changed. I had become an essential part in the day to day life of Mōm Rārchawong Kīrati, perhaps even the most essential. By that, I do not mean to boast, merely to tell the truth.

As far as I myself was concerned, I was increasingly aware that my own happiness had changed in a way which I could not myself understand. In the beginning, I had been content merely to be of

some use to Chao Khun on the grounds that I knew him from before. Later, that contentment became a need for me to have as much opportunity as possible to be close to his wife. Latterly, I have to confess, the reason I gave up so much of my time to be with him and his wife, was not out of consideration for him, but rather out of consideration for myself. But it is certain that Chao Khun did not know this.

After returning from Kamakura, my need had reached the point where I asked myself how I would face up to it when the time came for Mōm Rā̄tchawong Kīrati to leave Japan and return to Thailand. How could I face an existence without Mōm Rā̄tchawong Kīrati? I was already certain that I could not bear to see her leaving from Tokyo Station, because the train would carry away her face and tiny hand as it waved farewell to me, and out of sight, so quickly. I had already worked it out that I would have to be with her up until the last minute. I would leave Tokyo with her when she went to catch the boat at Kobé. I would have at least an extra ten hours to be near her, and I would have a last chance to wave a lingering farewell to her at the quayside. The large ocean-going vessel would slowly and gradually carry her into the distance, with none of the rapid powerful movements of a train, which I must have felt would be like snatching her cruelly from me. And I believed Mōm Rā̄tchawong Kīrati would also wish our farewells to linger as long as possible.

By now, the Mōm Rā̄tchawong Kīrati I had first met at Tokyo Station, who, despite her sweetness and gentleness, was rather serious and respectable, had disappeared completely from my mind. It was only by conscious effort that I could recall those first images of her. The most frequent image of Mōm Rā̄tchawong Kīrati which passed through

my mind, was of a young woman who behaved just like a close friend. She was a friend who was both very intelligent and kind towards me. She was the nicest, sweetest woman I had ever known, the one who had brought so much joy to my empty life that when I considered she would have to leave me soon, and I would have to remain in Japan for many more years without her, it seemed almost impossible.

Almost all of Mōm Rāṭchawong Kīrati's secrets had now been revealed to me, and if there was anything further which I wished to know, I could find out quite easily. By now, there was nothing I could not ask Mōm Rāṭchawong Kīrati and nothing she would not tell me.

The situation continued until the day when we went alone together to Mitaké. Several days prior to that, I had begun to feel that my mind was frequently slipping away from my body and into another world. It was a new world, which I saw for the first time in my life, a world glowing with beauty and happiness. The strangeness of this world seized my mind and filled it with such joy that I almost completely forgot my past. At first I tried to prevent my thoughts from straying into this unfamiliar world. I was afraid I might find something frightening hidden somewhere there. But then I gave up trying, telling myself that there was nothing I could do to stop myself. I was incapable of withstanding the allure and excitement of this new world. I had to give my youthful heart free rein.

Finally, the day came, when I stepped into that world myself, the day when my real life touched that world. I reached the top of Everest in my relations with Mōm Rāṭchawong Kīrati. I do not know how I managed it. I do not even know whether I meant to or not. I do not think I did. The moment of passion and intensity occurred at

Mitaké in the cool, gentle breeze of Autumn amid the lovely surroundings of nature. You probably remember the name Mitaké. You probably remember the picture I described. An ordinary looking picture with nothing striking about it at all. But now you are about to encounter the real life behind that picture.

EIGHT

It was a Sunday. Chao Khun had been invited to a reception by the Ambassador, and so on the Saturday, Mōm Rārchawong Kīrati had asked his permission to go and visit Mitaké with me. She arranged that I should go round and meet her at seven o'clock in the morning, which was before Chao Khun was up. Together we prepared some food in a basket and one or two other things we might need. Mōm Rārchawong Kīrati took a lot of pleasure in getting everything ready. We left the house at half-past eight, Mōm Rārchawong Kīrati not forgetting to go and say goodbye to Chao Khun in his bedroom once more. She came out smiling happily.

'He's just waking up,' she said. 'He said he was going to come and help us fix up the food and hadn't realised we'd be running away from him before daybreak. I said to him, "What do you mean, before daybreak? It's gone eight o'clock", but that we weren't meaning to run away from him, were we Nopphōn?' she said, laughing.

When we reached Chinyuku Station, it was crowded with men and women and noisy children, all waiting for the train. Mōm Rārchawong Kīrati had never travelled any distance by train on a Sunday, so

when she saw the crowds, looking as if they were going to some large public festival, she was most surprised. I explained that it was always like this at the big stations on a Sunday morning, because the Japanese loved to get out to the countryside. Consequently, there were dozens of places, both of natural beauty and those created by the authorities, and both within a short distance and further afield, which people might choose to visit, depending on their taste and means. When Sundays and public holidays came round, husbands and wives, young couples and parents with children, would all go off on outings to various such places.

'I think that finding a way for people to use their free time in a harmless way is one of the main factors in making Japan a strong nation,' I remarked eventually. 'The government make it possible for the people to buy worthwhile leisure like this at a low cost, and with every facility provided. Even those on a low income have the chance to find relaxation. When I first came to Japan, I didn't think about it, but now that I've been here several years, I'm very well aware of the benefits. Most Japanese know their country well; they're hard working and their children aren't lazy or dull because they occupy themselves in their leisure time in a useful way.'

When the train drew into the station, the crowds waiting there thronged into the carriages and the seats were all filled in a moment. I had no wish that Mōm Rāṭchawong Kīrati should join them in the scramble for seats.

'It's better to wait for the next one,' I told her. 'It won't be so crowded.'

'How many hours will we have to wait? It's a real bore.'

'In Japan we don't have to wait hours for trains. Another

five minutes and there'll be one along.'

M̄m Rā̄tchawong K̄irati straightened her clothes and by the time she had made up her face, another train had arrived. This time we managed to get seats, but only just, and there were others who had to wait for the one after that. We sat down next to each other on a seat for two. The Japanese on the same train stared at us in curiosity, for one thing because we were foreigners, and for another, no doubt, because of the grace and beauty of M̄m Rā̄tchawong K̄irati. There were lots of children running up and down the carriage chattering away incessantly to their parents.

'I'm tired but happy,' she said as the train moved off a moment later.

'I like the way the Japanese know how to use their leisure time, the way you explained. I hope that when you return to Thailand, you will make it possible for Thais to use their free time in a way which is both useful and enjoyable. I believe you could do it, because you've been educated abroad. Most people have great faith in the ideas of those who've been educated abroad.'

'So I've heard. That's the way I thought when I was still in Thailand. But when I became one of those studying abroad myself, and saw what my fellow students here were like, I felt that we were admired too much. We have a better opportunity than students in our own country, in that we see an example of progress which we don't have in Thailand. But if we don't take full advantage of this great opportunity, we won't have any special qualities to back up our claim to being better than others. Moreover, we have more opportunities for coming to grief than students in Thailand. The more prosperous a country is, the more distractions it has to lead you down the path to ruin. And as you see, we live here without any supervision.'

We have to battle against many distractions on our own. You can see how easy it is for us to lose that struggle. It's not all of us who win. There are both winners and losers. What special qualities do we have, what special rights, to march out at the head as if we are more special than anyone else in Thai society?'

'What you say is very true, Nopphōn. I don't know very much about those educated overseas myself. I only go by what I've heard. But when I got to know you, I became interested in those who study abroad. In all sincerity, I judge students studying abroad from you.

'You praise me too much. To tell you the truth, I don't like people to be too nice to us, nor to hope for too much from us, because if they're disappointed, they might blame us for deceiving them, even though, in truth, you've already seen that I have never thought of deceiving you.'

Mōm Rātnawong Kīrati laughed with delight and we chatted on about these problems for a while, and then onto other things admiring the scenery on either side of the way. Our journey took about an hour and a half. It was a journey which Mōm Rātnawong Kīrati said was not in the least bit boring.

About half of the passengers, ourselves included, alighted at Takae Station. As we left the station and approached the main road, we could see how beautiful the scenery was. There was a broad stream and rocky slope and our eyes were filled with the green of dense vegetation. Mōm Rātnawong Kīrati seemed very happy.

We walked around admiring the scenery and looking at the shops for a while and then stopped at one for a rest and a drink. I had told Mōm Rātnawong Kīrati that it was rather crowded there and that I would take her on further by bus, which would run parallel to the

stream until it reached the slopes of Mount Mitaké. There we would be alone together in the peaceful surroundings of nature. That was the destination we were heading for to go and enjoy ourselves. When we had rested and seen enough there, we continued on our way by bus for about a further forty minutes. The bus ran parallel to the stream, where the water was so sparkling and clean, that it was possible to see the jagged stones lying beneath the surface of the water. On the other side of the road, the slopes were bright green with the foliage of many different kinds of trees, both large and small. The bus drove past ordinary people who had decided to walk. All along the route there were old people, young men and women and children, all looking as if they were really enjoying their walk.

We reached our destination a little after mid-day. Few people had decided to come this far since all along the route there were resting places with magnificent views, which those who were not going so far would stop off at. So when we got off the bus and walked down the evenly sloping path, there were only two people who followed us, a middle-aged man and his son of about twelve. Whether he had come along to keep his son company, or whether he had brought his son to keep himself company, we did not know.

The path sloped down until eventually it reached the stream. We came to a waterfall which was the source of the wide stream we had passed earlier. The water poured down onto the stones and then flowed with a strong current in places, in a trickle in others, down into the stream which gradually became broader. The path that we walked along was surrounded by steep slopes that were bright green with various kinds of vegetation. We went down and stood on the stones so that the water flowed right past our shoes.

Both Mōm Rā́tchawong Kīrati and I were like a pair of children as we played about jumping from stone to stone. We could enjoy ourselves in complete freedom, because there, you could almost say, we had come to a new world, inhabited only by the stream, the rocks and the woods. The sun warmed us without being too hot. The middle-aged man and his son had disappeared from sight. Occasionally a couple would pass through our world, but they never stopped for long. Thus we were like Adam and Eve in that small world. I picked a purple wild flower and asked to pin it to her hair, and she picked a different kind, a red flower, and stuck it in the buttonhole of my jacket. Mōm Rā́tchawong Kīrati told me she was really glad that I had brought her to a place that was fragrant with the scent of tranquility and the beauty of nature. I told her I was very pleased to have had a part in bringing her happiness or bringing her to happiness.

I can still vividly recall my feelings that day. That I was happy and in high spirits goes without saying. But even so, certain feelings disturbed my happiness, causing my heart to beat faster in apprehension that something overwhelming would happen. Hour after hour they churned up and down in my heart. It seemed I tried to hold them back, but I felt it was almost beyond me. All I could do was wait. I was both exhausted and happy.

NINE

After lunch and a rest, we set off along the main path which led up the hillside. There were no houses along the way. Far ahead, high on the top of a hill, there were four or five huts, indicating that people lived there. They raised crops for their living, and that small territory on the top of the hill was their world. We reached our destination, which brought us to the summit of that hill, without encountering a single tourist on our way. We sat down to rest in the shade of the spreading boughs of a cedar tree.

I shall not describe in detail how we passed our time there. I shall say something of a conversation which revealed very clearly everything about Mōm Rāṭchawong Kīrati's life. Once again, I brought up the subject that we had talked about in the gardens of the Kaihin Hotel.

'I'd like to know what your reason was for deciding to marry Chao Khun.'

'You seem very interested in the business of marriage. Is it something you're getting yourself ready for?'

'No, no,' I hastened to reply. 'I wasn't thinking of getting ready for my own marriage. I'm not even interested in marriage in general. It's just you I'm interested in.'

'And why do you have to be interested in my personal affairs, which are private?'

'Didn't you say you thought of me as one of your closest friends, of whom there seems to be only one?'

'But why do you want to know?' she asked with resignation. 'My

life is one of misfortune. My reasons for getting married were those of a woman who has been most unfortunate in love. There's no example there for you to note, and it may make you feel sad, or feel pity, or feel it serves me right. In my misfortune there has been no pleasure at all. It's good that you should have got to know me in my present circumstances, and that should be enough. You shouldn't know too much about my past. It might spoil your happiness.'

'I'm not a coward, nor faint-hearted. The more I know it has to do with your misfortune, the more I feel I need to hear it.'

'Nopphōn, you're always so sincere,' she said, beginning to smile in an affectionate way. 'I never manage to put you off.'

'Your two younger sisters are already married, aren't they?' I began.

'They married seven or eight years before me. Now they're living happily with their husbands, and not old husbands, either. And not only happily, either, because they have both happiness and love, too.'

'It's very sad.'

'That my younger sisters are happy and love their husbands?'

'No. I'm very glad about that. I'm sorry about you.'

'Do you want to tell me what you think, or do you want to hear it from my mouth?'

'I'm ready and listening.'

'You already know that I married Čhao Khun without loving him,' Mōm Rāčhawong Kīrati began. 'What you want to know now, is why I married him even though I didn't love him. So that you'll understand quite clearly, I'll have to enlighten you on another important matter first, and that is the question of why I married at the age

of thirty-five. It's too old for a woman getting married for the first time. You must know, girls generally get married between the age of twenty and twenty-five, or at the latest, or at the worst, not after, or it shouldn't be after, the age of thirty. So why was it that I got married when I was nearly thirty-five? It's too old. You mustn't try to take my side by saying I still look very young. You have to admit that it really is too old, whatever the reason. You never raised this question before. Perhaps it was something you overlooked, thinking it wasn't an important problem. But I myself know very well that it is important, so important, in fact, that it might be regarded as the source of my subsequent problem, that is, the reason I married someone I didn't love. I'll give you answers to both of these problems, so that you'll understand me as clearly as if you were gazing at the sky on a cloudless day. I want to quench your curiosity so completely that you'll stop bothering me with questions.'

Mōm Rāṭchawong Kīrati paused and stared at me as I sat in a meditative posture right at her feet, paying close attention to her words. We were sitting on a large floral-patterned blanket, big enough for us to lie down, even though we did not. Mōm Rāṭchawong Kīrati sat leaning against the cedar tree, a cushion behind her back.

'I really would like to know why you waited so long before you got married. It was silly of me not to have asked.'

'You're silly because you're always flattering me for still looking so young,' she said, half in jest, half seriously. 'I have just got married, but it wasn't that I put off marriage. When I say this, you may well imagine that as a young girl, my life was full of strange and wonderful things, with its fair share of love

and sorrow. So in order not to let you waste your time guessing, for you'd be bound to guess wrong, let me tell you in advance, that in my life there was no love, no sorrow, no shedding of tears, no feelings of being transported to heaven, nor to the depths of hell, or anything exciting like that at all. My life was far removed from such things. My life consisted of ordinary events, too ordinary, perhaps, so that I felt disappointed and became a most unfortunate woman.

'I don't want to interrupt, but I find it hard to believe that in a life such as yours, where there is some major difficulty, there isn't at least something strange or unusual hidden away. I can't help wondering.'

'My dear boy, you should give up your studies and become a fortune teller, because you always know more about my life than I do myself.'

'When I was a girl,' Mōm Rāṭchawong Kīrati continued, 'I led a very narrow life. While I was growing up, I had no chance to enjoy myself the way ordinary girls do. I didn't intend to keep myself apart from other women at all. In fact, I was kept apart. I wasn't a Čhao, but the daughter of one. My father was a real Čhao Nāi. Before the end of the absolute monarchy, most Čhao Nāi, as you know, really behaved like Čhao Nāi. They lived in a different world. My father tried to make myself and his other children like him. At first, I went to school regularly, like anyone else. Then when I reached adolescence, he kept me shut away in his world. He protected me from contact with the outside world. I continued my education with an elderly English governess at home, or at the palace as it was called in those days. I learned about the outside world from my English governess and from elderly English women. There didn't seem to be much difference between my elderly

English governess and elderly Thai ladies. Her conversation consisted entirely of moral virtue and housekeeping and that kind of thing. It was fortunate that she introduced me to the existence of the magazines Vogue and McCall's which gave me advice on how to take care of and preserve my youth and beauty for a long time, so that it would be like the lasting freshness of the hydrantia.

'So I stayed at home, studying with my governess. Sometimes my father would send me to the palace to wait upon various senior princesses who were relatives of ours. As a girl, I spent several years in this manner. I lived in the world of Chao Nāi for so long, I scarcely had the chance to realise just how valuable youth is to the female sex, and that I should be using my youth for my own benefit. At the time, it seems I never asked myself whether it was right that we should shut away our youth from the eyes of the outside world, what good it did to our lives, and whether it was clever to keep hidden our most beautiful years. At the time I never thought about it, because we hadn't been trained to think. The path was fixed for us, and we had to walk down that narrow way in accordance with tradition.'

At this point, Mōm Rāṭchawong Kīrati paused for a moment and I seized the opportunity to interrupt.

'But that doesn't sound like the you I know. You're clever and thoughtful and much smarter than ordinary people like me.'

'Please don't say I'm cleverer than you or anyone else. If I can just manage to hold my own amongst others, that's good enough for me. It was events over the years that followed that taught me to think. And then my English governess used to find me good English books to read so as to awaken in me a love for books. And then I love art and every kind of beauty and so I came to be more reflective. I think I have a natural inclination in this direction, so it was

only for my own satisfaction that I took care of my looks and appearance at that time. I've already told you that I had no thoughts of doing anything to capitalise on my youth.'

'I sympathise with you being in such a position,' I interjected.

'But art came to my aid,' she went on. 'I have little time to spend pondering and feeling lonely. I have work to do almost all day long. I'm interested in drawing, and as you know, I spend a lot of time practising. I get a lot of pleasure from it. Besides that, I have another kind of regular job, and that is taking care of my looks so that they will last as long as possible. I have to spend several hours a day on my regular routine.'

'That's scarcely believable,' I said doubtfully. 'What do you have to do for several hours every day? One hour should be enough for powdering yourself, making up your face and putting lipstick on.'

She smiled, her eyes sparkling with high spirits.

'In fact there's more to it than you might think. You can't understand everything about a woman. Anyway, I hope you're not suddenly going to criticise me for wasting several hours a day on something useless. Have some sympathy for the female sex. We are made to be decorations, to please the world, and in order to perform this duty to the best of our ability, we have to preserve our appearance. Of course, that's not the only duty of the female sex. But you wouldn't deny, I'm sure, that it is one of them.'

'I certainly wouldn't disagree with you, because over and above virtue, men seek beauty in the female sex.'

'Even more than that,' Mōm Rāṭchawong Kīrati said emphatically. 'Sometimes a good woman is completely overlooked if she is not beautiful as well. When my youngest sister got married, although I sometimes used to dream of love, I lived on happily in hope for

a further two years, until my younger sister married the man she loved. It was at that time that I first began to feel that I was unlucky. At that time, I was twenty-nine and my younger sister was twenty-six. Her marriage and happiness pierced my feelings. Believe me, Nopphōn, I'm not jealous of my sister. I love her more than myself. But I felt pity at my own fate. Up until now, it's been difficult to tell you how I really feel, because it might have looked as if I were boasting or had some indecent thoughts in mind. Do you think you really understand me?'

'I'm your closest friend. I feel for you and understand you more than anyone.'

'Do you firmly believe in my virtue?'

'There can be no doubt on that.'

'Are you sure?'

'Absolutely, without the slightest wavering.'

'Your guarantee sounds as firm as a pledge, so I'll tell you my feelings in all honesty.' She gazed past me, her eyes still sparkling, it was true, but with a tinge of sadness. 'When I was twenty-nine, I was still beautiful and looked more radiant and youthful than my younger sisters. I was lucky to have been born with beauty, but unlucky to be without love. And it may have been because of that beauty that I was shielded from and prevented from making contact with the outside world more than my younger sisters. I wouldn't feel unfortunate if I'd been born plain. But when he bestowed beauty upon me, why didn't God, or whatever sacred powers there might be, open a way for me? Why did he cast my beauty aside, to loneliness and solitude? That beauty which I have struggled much harder than most women to preserve.'

When she reached this point, the sadness was clearly visible in her eyes.

'When my younger sisters were both married, I felt increasingly lonely. But when I considered my beauty and youthful appearance then, at the age of twenty-nine, I still had hopes of finding love and marrying a man whom I loved. Nopphōn, you mustn't think my frank account of my feelings indecent. Love is a wonderful blessing. It is the ultimate in life. Like everybody else, I liked to dream of love and marriage. I longed to talk about it and feel it for myself. In the new world of today, I wanted the opportunity denied to my younger sisters, of having my own home, from which I could make contact with the outside world. I wanted to have children on whom I could lavish the love and tenderness in my heart; I wanted my lap and my arms to be of use to others. And I longed for many other wonderful things which I could have attained if only I had found love.

'To reach the age of twenty-nine without finding love is bad enough. But I was the most unfortunate as far as this was concerned. Year after year, my dreams came to nothing. My hopes gradually faded, until at the age of thirty-four, Čhao Khun Atthikānbodī came into consideration.

'Čhao Khun and my father were very good friends. As he grew older, my father ceased to think very seriously about anything. So when Čhao Khun expressed a wish to marry his eldest daughter, who had been stuck around the house for a long time already, he was happy to grant Čhao Khun's wish. In all sincerity, he thought that Čhao Khun's request was the last remaining chance for me to get married. He feared that if I refused, it would be tantamount to saying "no" to marriage for the rest of my life. And if, in fact, that were to be the case, he would have been saddened by my fate. I

knew very well that my father loved me and felt concerned for me most of all his children. He wanted to see me married so I would have my fair share of happiness. He thought that for a beautiful woman like me to go through life without a husband was an unbearable agony. However, he merely advised me and implored me to accept Chao Khun's offer; the final decision was left to me.'

Her eyes met mine and she smiled a sad, frank smile. My heart melted before the sorrow in that smile and that beautiful pair of eyes.

'When I learned of Chao Khun's wish, I was stunned, and when I heard my father's advice and pleas to agree to marrying Chao Khun, I cried. I cried with a mixture of alarm and many other feelings. My father understood me very well. "My child," he said, to console me, "I don't underestimate you. I feel for you very much. You're the best and most beautiful of all my children. I'm more proud of you than I can tell you. I know perfectly well that a match with someone who is getting on in years, like Chao Khun, is not suitable. I would wish that you could marry a man you loved of an age and family background appropriate for you. But fate has dealt unjustly with you. It saddens me so much when I think what a good and beautiful girl you are. But now you're nearly thirty-five. Marry him my child, marry the man I suggest. Even though he's old, he's a good man."

I hardly said a thing to my father. I remember that I just cried. My father comforted me. He kissed me on the forehead in pity and then left me alone. That evening, I dressed myself up immaculately and sat in front of the mirror in my bedroom, and for a long while I examined my physical appearance with painstaking care. I still had the figure of a young girl and my looks were without blemish.

it was awful to think that this body, which was still young and fresh with beauty, would have to be wedded to a man of fifty. Was it true, that this beautiful figure could exist unloved, and with no hope of love. I didn't believe it was possible. But when I remembered how old I was, I felt alarmed once more. My tears flowed when I realised that Chao Khun's request was a symbol of the disintegration of my hopes, a symbol that my chance of finding love and marrying a man I loved had completely gone. My time was up.

'For two or three days after, my father didn't mention the matter. He waited quietly for my answer. I chose what under the circumstances was the most favourable time to think seriously about my decision. Eventually, I decided to accept Chao Khun's offer.'

'Why didn't you say no? You look so young and beautiful, even now,' I said in all sincerity. 'You were sure to find love if you'd waited a bit longer. You really should have said no.'

'You talk as if nothing had happened,' she said with a slight smile.

'The world is very cruel,' I complained.

'People might be cruel, but the world is lovely, isn't it, if you just look around you right now?' She paused and stared at me for a moment. 'I'm going to tell you the reason why I decided to agree.'

'I can't see any reason. I don't think it could have been a very good one.'

'My dear boy, please don't be bad-tempered and please don't forget that we're talking about something that is past, that has already happened. There's nothing for us to quarrel about.'

TIEN

Mām Rāchawong Kīrati continued with her story.

'My father's pleas were one reason why I considered Chao Khun's wishes with much less bitterness. I knew that if I refused, it would disappoint and sadden him very much. But that wasn't the main reason. The main reason was because I wanted to. I had had to spend a full thirty four years of my life in a confined world. I was thoroughly bored and lonely. Even a tiny bird leaves the nest when its wings are strong and flies around, seeing the great wide world. And I'm a person, and fully grown to the point of being on the downward path, so why should I stay in the same place? I wanted contact with the outside world. I needed a change in my life. I needed something that was different from what I had been doing for thirty-four years. The only thing that was going to help me achieve this, was marriage. I was most unlucky not to have love, but even so, was it being clever, to close my eyes and shut off my feelings to other things which might offer some measure of enjoyment?

'Since Chao Khun was a kind man, how was I going to be worse off? He was too old for me to marry, it's true, but who was it then, that I was waiting for? I might have been waiting for someone, but who was it? Where was I going to meet him? In fact, he might not have been born yet, or he might have just died. At the time, I very much needed something real. I decided to resign myself to marrying Chao Khun, because that was something real. I would achieve many of the things I wanted. I'm happy to have got to know and become familiar with many strange new things in another world. And I'm happy enough even without love.'

Mōm Rā̄tchawong Kīrati adjusted her position and sat up straight. She gave a deep sigh and wiped her eyes with her handkerchief.

'Nopphōn, I feel as if I've been in a dream while I've been telling you all this. I might have rambled on a bit, so I'm going to stop there.'

'I'm absolutely fascinated by your story. It may well appear just an ordinary one but it certainly held my attention. Can I ask you a few more things? Don't you think that one day, you might love Chao Khun?'

'I seem to have already told you once, that there is no way I can love him. Of course he's a really good man, but what do I want with an old man? He wants to eat his fill and go to sleep and to enjoy himself in his own way. He has too little time left for building ideals in life. He's not interested in moonlight and lakes or even sweet words. He has no thoughts nor dreams of beauty. He has no future, only a past and a present. So how can you expect love to blossom forth? Even a rose won't bloom on a concrete road.'

'Doesn't happiness without love seem rather arid, then?'

'Nopphōn, don't tie me up with so many questions. I can't breathe. Give me a bit of freedom.'

Her eyes met mine and she smiled gently. The sadness had disappeared from her eyes and there was a bright sparkle there instead. She took out a mirror and spent a moment doing her face and hair. I looked closely at her in awe.

'Are you happy, today?' I asked, my voice shaking slightly. She gave a slight nod by way of reply, and in her eyes, there was a hint of danger which increased my sense of wonder.

'It's getting late, Nopphōn. We'd better get ready to go back.'

She began to get up. 'Ooh, my legs are all numb because we've been sitting down too long. I'm hardly going to be able to walk back down.'

'I'll carry you,' I said. I got up and put my arm around her to support her. She declined my assistance in a quiet voice, but I took no notice. When she was on her feet, I was still holding her arm and standing close to her. 'Are you very happy?' I asked.

'Looking down to the stream from up here, I feel as if we've come up a very long way. I'm still wondering how I'm going to have the energy to get back down.'

I moved closer to her, until our bodies were almost touching. Mōm Rā̄tchawong Kīrati leaned back against the cedar tree. I knew that both our hearts were pounding fiercely.

'When we get down there, I'm going to do a sketch of two figures,' she said.

'I'm so happy when I'm close to you like this.'

'And when are you going to let go of me, so we can get our things together?'

'I don't want to move away from you yet.' I drew her body up close against mine.

'Nopphōn, don't look at me like that,' she said, her voice beginning to tremble. 'Let go now. I'm strong enough to balance by myself.'

My face buried itself against her soft pink cheeks. I no longer had the strength to restrain myself. I held her close to me and kissed her passionately. For a moment I was unconscious, lost in oblivion.

Mōm Rā̄tchawong Kīrati released my grip and gradually pushed me away from her. I did not resist. I had rapidly been transformed into a lamb. Mōm Rā̄tchawong Kīrati leaned back against the tree.

She was breathing heavily as if she had walked a long way and was tired. The pink in her face had turned a dark colour as if she had been burned by the sun's heat.

'Mopphōn, you don't know what you've done,' she said, her voice still shaking.

'I know I love you.'

'And is it appropriate then, that you should express your love for me in such a way?'

'I don't know whether it's appropriate or not, but love was stronger than me. It completely overpowered me and left me senseless.'

Mōm Rāṭchawong Kīrati gazed at me with a sad look in her eyes.

'Do you express your love at times when you're senseless? Didn't you know that there's nothing you later regret more than the things you do when you're senseless?'

'But I know for sure that I honestly love you.'

'And what meaning is there in expressing love when you're senseless?'

'I love you, genuinely, with my heart and soul. What I did, will remain imprinted upon my heart.'

'Do you think it will be profitable for your life if it is imprinted upon your heart?'

'In love, do we still think about capital and profit?'

'You might not and I might not. But love might think of us in such terms. Haven't you ever thought,' Mōm Rāṭchawong Kīrati continued, 'of the position I'm in and the position you're in?'

'I've thought of it a great deal.'

'And yet you still behave the way you did towards me a moment ago. You know, you acted in an unreasonable way and without any thought, as you've already admitted.'

229

I stood crestfallen with my arms folded.

'I feel absolutely terrible. I don't know what to say to redeem myself. All I know for sure, is that I was overcome by love. Even though it's true what I did was wrong, I'm subject to the laws of nature. I tried to escape them, but when I came face to face with love, I couldn't, and I was forced into a corner. I beg you not to bring reason into it, nor right and wrong. I have no answer. These came after the laws of nature and we are all subject to nature's laws.'

'Nopphōn, if the two of us were to spend the rest of our lives on the top of Mount Mitaké, then everything you say would be correct. But in fact, in a moment we'll go down this mountain and face other people. And before long, you'll have to go back to your studies and ambitious plans for the future. As for me, it's my duty to be loyal to Chao Khun, to follow him wherever he goes, to look after him and wait upon him like a good wife for as long as he still wants me and as long as he doesn't neglect his own obligations. You and I will soon have to part and each of us will have to mix in society, which is strict on matters of reason and right and wrong. So how is it you can want me not to mention these things? Do you think society would accept the laws of nature which you offer as an excuse? Nopphōn, please believe me. You must try to face up to reality. Truth is the only judge in our lives. Laws and ideals might be more attractive, but in practice, they are worthless.'

I felt I was facing a woman who was too rational and intelligent for me to keep up with. She should have been a character out of history instead of Mōm Rā́tchawong Kīrati, an ordinary woman of today.

'I'm very sorry if I've displeased you,' I said quietly. There was nothing else I could say.

200
'You upset me.'

'Please answer just one question. Do you believe I love you?'

'I believe you.'

'Are you very cross with me for what I did?'

'I've already told you, you don't know what you did. Some day you'll find the answer yourself, and you'll feel sorry.'

'Do you hate me now?'

'If you don't refer to what happened today again, I'll feel that you're still the same old Nopphōn, and will be, all my life.'

'And I may still love you with all my heart and soul?'

'That is your right. But as time goes by, you will happily relinquish that right of your own accord.'

'I'm certain my love for you will never fade.'

'At your age, people have great confidence in themselves. But we'll have to wait and see the outcome. I congratulate you on your confidence.'

'Are my feelings reciprocated?'

Mōm Rāṭchawong Kīrati moved closer and stood almost touching me. She placed her hands on my shoulders and said, 'My dear boy, I forgive you. We'll both forget what happened today. You must go back to being the old Nopphōn and be cheerful and happy from now on. Now let's hurry up and get everything ready to return. Chao Khun will be concerned if we're very late back.'

I felt there was an almost regal authority in her voice and I had not the courage to suggest otherwise.

Having spoken, Mōm Rāṭchawong Kīrati wasted no time in getting down to packing the things up into the bag. I stood for a moment with my arms folded, watching her absorbed in packing up, until she urged me a second time, whereupon I began to help her. On the way back, she chatted quite naturally about various things, as if the most significant event in our lives had not taken place on that mountain.

ELEVEN

When we got off the train at Shinyuku, the streets were already lit up.

'Nopphōn, you look downcast,' Mōm Rārchawong Kīrati warned me as we drove back to the house. 'You must be careful how you act when we reach home and don't be alarmed in front of Čhao Khun. We're a bit late getting back. If your manner is changed, he might begin to think.'

'Think what?' I asked, slightly alarmed.

'I can't guess what he might think, but it's better if we don't do anything unusual to make him think.'

I said I would try. When the cab pulled up in front of the house Mōm Rārchawong Kīrati stepped out lightly. My heart was pounding a little.

'Are you ready, Nopphōn?' she asked me softly.

I nodded and smiled in an attempt to convince her that I was not the sort to panic. The maid informed us that Čhao Khun had not yet returned from his party. I heaved a deep sigh of relief. At that point I really did cease to panic.

That night I left Mōm Rārchawong Kīrati at nine o'clock. I did not go straight home for there was nothing for me to return for. I would not have been able to concentrate on my books and even if I had tried to force myself to go to sleep, I would not have been able to, for my mind was brightly illuminated with various preoccupations. There was no point in going home. After leaving Mōm Rārchawong Kīrati's house, I took a cab back into town. Tokyo was all lit up. I got off in front of Winyo Park and wandered around

its large and beautiful gardens. I walked along, oblivious to my surroundings and fellow strollers. It was just that there was a path there, so I followed it, engrossed in my thoughts. When I began to feel tired, I went and sat by the edge of the lake.

Exhausted by the day's outing, I lay back and stretched out, trying to recall what I had done to Mōm Rāṭchawong Kīrati that afternoon on Mount Mitaké. I had held her close and kissed her passionately, and I had told her how much I loved her. Had I really gone that far? Had I really dared to tell Mōm Rāṭchawong Kīrati, the wife of Čhao Khun Atthikānbodī, for whom I had so much respect, that I loved her and kissed her, too? I had indeed, it was true.

Whether I was happy or sad at what I had done, burdened or relieved, I could not say for sure. Even so, I wanted to know. One thing I was certain of, was that I loved Mōm Rāṭchawong Kīrati with all my heart, loved her utterly and completely.

I tried asking myself whether I needed Mōm Rāṭchawong Kīrati or not. I felt that without her I would be so lonely and miss her so much. Could you call this, not needing her? Yet I had no right whatsoever to claim I needed her when she already belonged to someone else. In which case, was I going to snatch her away? I had no such intentions. I was still in the middle of my studies, and in addition, Čhao Khun was someone I respected. Besides, I was not so bold as to assume that Mōm Rāṭchawong Kīrati would ruin her reputation for the sake of my love, or perhaps also, for the sake of her love, too.

So I could not really say whether I was happy or not at what I had done to express my love openly to Mōm Rāṭchawong Kīrati. My mind was filled with confusion. Eventually, I came to the conclusion that it was not suitable to become too pre-occupied with these

problems in a quiet, peaceful place like this. I left Winyo Park and took a cab. Along the streets, still teeming with crowds, we drove, past one and out into another, with no clear destination in mind. Eventually I got the cab to drop me off at a coffee shop, a reasonable one that was not too low class.

In fact, I was not very familiar with such places. On occasions I had brought other people to this one. The reason I was bold enough to go in alone that day was because I needed a change and a bit of relaxation as a relief from all the problems in my mind. As I went up the steps, a lovely young girl came out to greet me. I was surprised when she said she recognised me, even though I visited the premises so infrequently. She explained that the reason why she recognised me so readily, was because I spoke her language better than any other Thais who went there. Besides, she told me, she clearly remembered my polite manners as well as my language. I thanked her.

About five minutes into my first glass of beer, I began to feel less burdened and more cheerful, as I chatted and joked with the girl in the usual way as she sat waiting upon me, pouring my beer and lighting my cigarette. My mind had turned to happier thoughts. The feeling I had experienced when I embraced Mōm Rā́tchawong Kī́rati and passionately kissed her, returned to me once more. I sipped my beer as I recalled those moments. Ah! How happy I was to think that I had won love, won the heart of such a charming and intelligent and wonderful woman as Mōm Rā́tchawong Kī́rati. Such thoughts gave me great pleasure and I chatted with the girl waiting on me and pulled her leg. A little more than an hour later, I left and walked home in a daze, not this time unuer the weight of countless problems, but as a result of the beer which had helped

to cheer me up.

Once I got home, I did not retire immediately, and it was past one o'clock before I finally went to bed. But one problem pursued me, even after I had closed my eyes: was I correct in thinking that I had won Mōm Rā́tchawong Kī́rati's love, that I had won her heart? Had Mōm Rā́tchawong Kī́rati told me so? I realised then, that Mōm Rā́tchawong Kī́rati had said no such thing. Eventually, however, I fell asleep, even though the problem remained partly unresolved.

TWELVE

The day we visited Mount Mitaké was the beginning of the eighth week. According to their original plans, Čhao Khun and Mōm Rā́tchawong Kī́rati were to leave Tokyo and return to Thailand at some time during that week. But a couple of days later, I learned from Mōm Rā́tchawong Kī́rati that Čhao Khun was happy to extend their stay in Tokyo by a further two weeks. During this period, there were two major items on their itinerary. Firstly, Čhao Khun and Mōm Rā́tchawong Kī́rati would spend two or three days at Atami in order to bathe in the hot springs and see the scenery, for which it was famous throughout Japan. And secondly, on the journey from Tokyo to Kobé, they would stop over at Osaka for two or three days, to see the progress of one of Japan's major industrial cities, and also, the Katakarasu Theatre, which was the biggest in Japan.

In the days that remained, I went to see Mōm Rā́tchawong Kī́rati and Čhao Khun just as before. I have to confess that latterly, when

I was with Mōm Rā̄tchawong Kīrati in the presence of her husband, my conscience was not as clear as it had once been, and I had to make a constant effort so as not to behave in an unnatural way. The churning feeling in my heart must have been no different from the feelings of a criminal who, having secretly committed a serious crime, then mixes among upright people.

It surprised me very much to see that there was nothing in the least unusual in Mōm Rā̄tchawong Kīrati's demeanour. She remained just as warm to me as before, whether her husband was there or not. The warmth she showed towards me in the presence of Čhao Khun in particular, frequently caused me alarm. However, the fact that she had behaved quite normally towards me throughout, was a relief to me, that she was still the same Mōm Rā̄tchawong Kīrati of before, and that she did not hate me after I had caused such a disturbing incident on Mount Mitaké. Once or twice, I tried to bring it up, but her response cut me short.

One evening at Atami, Mōm Rā̄tchawong Kīrati invited me out for a walk alone with her.

'There's only six days left.' We were talking about having to part.

'You keep counting the days, then, do you, Nopphōn?'

'I count every hour, every minute, almost every breath.'

'You're taking it much too seriously. I warn you, my dear, you might be ill. You must try to control yourself.' Her voice was full of kindness, a voice which pierced my heart even more deeply.

'I don't want to. I don't see any reason why I should have to suppress the love which arose spontaneously and purely, the love which is innocent and tragic. I can't do that to love.'

Mōm Rā̄tchawong Kīrati sighed. 'We can't escape reality, Nopphōn.'

'What reality?'

'The reality that we must part in six days time.'

'It's a very cruel reality,' I said bitterly.

'That's why I asked you to try to control your feelings.

Please believe me, my dear.'

'I'll try. But I don't think it will be any use.'

'We should never have met,' Mōm Rāṭchawong Kīrati said wistfully, more to herself than to me. 'In the beginning, it was so wonderful, but that beginning comes back to torture us in the end.'

'Is it torture for you, too?'

'It's the sorrow I feel for you, sorrow because you have been too honest with me.'

'I think honesty is an important part of true love,' I said, a little defiantly.

Mōm Rāṭchawong Kīrati collected herself and continued quite normally. 'If I had done something to displease you at the outset, things wouldn't be this way.'

'But I'm perfectly happy with my position at the moment. No matter how much pain love may cause us, it is a wonderful blessing in life, as you yourself said. I'm not wrong am I, in thinking that you love me in the same way I love you, with all my heart and soul?'

'Believe me, please Nopphōn, you must try to control your feelings.'

Ultimately, I received no clear answer from her lips while we were together at Atami.

We stayed at the Osaka Hotel for two days. Mōm Rāṭchawong Kīrati and I scarcely had a chance to make our farewells alone. Early

the following morning, which was the day we were to travel to Kobé, Mōm Rā́tchawong Kīrati knocked on the door of my room. When I opened the door, she seemed surprised to see me already dressed in a blue woollen suit with waistcoat and tie instead of in my nightwear.

'I didn't think you'd be up yet, because we were late getting to bed last night. Why are you all dressed up and ready to go? We don't leave before nine o'clock.'

'I know. But I couldn't sleep, so I got up and got dressed. And in a minute I think I'll go downstairs because I'm feeling a bit hemmed in.'

'It's cooler today than it was, and there's a thick fog. I hope you're not going outside now.'

'No, I'm not now.'

I closed the door and went and sat down on the chair in front of the desk which stood near the bed. Mōm Rā́tchawong Kīrati sat down on the edge of the bed. I was overjoyed to see her so early, even though I was a little surprised at what it might be, that she should want to see me at such an early hour.

In Mōm Rā́tchawong Kīrati's presence that morning, our last morning when we would be parted, my heart pounded violently. I sat there sadly, trying to compose myself. Mōm Rā́tchawong Kīrati did not utter a word. Thirty seconds passed in silence. Finally she spoke.

'We're leaving Osaka between half-past nine and ten o'clock. We'll have lunch at Kobé, at the invitation of a Thai friend there. The boat sails at two o'clock.'

At the last sentence, my heart missed a beat.

'When we get to Kobé, we're sure to be caught up in farewells all the time. We won't have another chance to be alone,' she added

in the same measured tone.

She paused for a moment. A lump rose in my throat. I avoided her eyes and blinked several times.

'I thought you'd want at least ten minutes so that we could say our own farewells, so that's why I came to see you so early.'

Her voice was composed. It filled me with such pity.

'That's what I wanted so much. I'm most grateful to you for giving me this opportunity,' I said and then fell silent.

'You must get down to your studies so that you achieve your ambitions. When I'm in Thailand, I'll pray for you.'

'Please think of me all the time. Please understand me and the love I feel for you.'

'I promise I will. Is there anything else, Noppḥṇ?'

'I have a million more words to say, but time is short. I'd like to choose just a hundred that would make you understand that full million, but I can't find the right ones.'

'Just say what you can. The rest I'll read in your eyes.'

My eyes met hers and I felt even more gloomy.

'Go ahead and read, then. I still don't know what to say.'

We gazed into each other's eyes for a moment. Finally Mḡm Rāṭchawong Kīrati got up and came and stood by my side. She put her hand on my shoulder and said, 'My dear, please, for the last time, take my advice. You left your home and country and came to Japan to study, not to love me. Keep your target clearly in mind and stick to it. Forget what has been between us over the last two months. Think of it as a dream.'

I took hold of her hand and stroked it gently.

'This is real flesh and blood. This is really you. It's certainly no image nor shadow in a dream. How am I supposed to

think of it as a dream? I love the flesh and blood so desperately.'

Mōm Rā̄tchawong Kīrati slowly withdrew her hand and turned her face away.

'Chao Khun may wake soon. In a minute I must go back to my room. Our time is almost up my dear.'

I rose to my feet. 'Do you love me?' I asked, my voice scarcely more than a whisper.

'I'm your closest friend,' Mōm Rā̄tchawong Kīrati replied as she took off her silk scarf and handed it to me. 'Please take this to remind you of me.'

She held out her hand to me. I could scarcely hold back my sadness and tears welled up in my eyes. I lifted her hand and kissed it. She made no protest.

Mōm Rā̄tchawong Kīrati lowered her head and was silent for a while.

'I must go back to my room. We'll meet again soon in the dining room. Please keep your feelings under control.'

When she had said this, she looked me straight in the eyes. Then she turned round and walked slowly towards the door.

We arrived at the quayside at half-past one. More than ten people, including both Thai and Japanese friends, had come to see Chao Khun and his wife off. We chatted together in a group in the saloon. I was not interested in any of them. All I did, was glance over at Mōm Rā̄tchawong Kīrati so as to transfer the image of her face into the depths of my heart.

The end had come. The ship gave a blast on its whistle and a bell was sounded to warn friends and relatives to leave the vessel. Chao Khun and his wife bade farewell to all of their friends in

the saloon. When they got round to me, Chao Khun shook my hand and thanked me at great length.

'I won't forget your kindness, young man. You've been most helpful to us.'

I felt my heart miss a beat at his last sentence and I didn't know what to say in reply. I was the last person that Mōm Rārchawong Kīrati said goodbye to. She held out her hand to me.

'Goodbye, my dear boy,' she said very quietly. Even so, her voice trembled and she paused, her lips pursed tightly.

'Please think of me, always,' I said.

'I will, always. Goodbye.'

'Goodbye.' I gritted my teeth and had to make an effort to hold back my tears for the honour of the woman I so loved.

'Goodbye.'

We followed the others out of the saloon. As we were about to leave the ship, Chao Khun became involved in another round of farewells. In the middle of this, I had a moment to be close to Mōm Rārchawong Kīrati and away from all the others.

She held out her hand to me for the last time.

'Do you love me?' I whispered, for the last time also.

'Hurry along now, Noppōn,' she said, and then covered up her face with her hand for a moment. 'Hurry, I can't stand it.'

She bit her lower lip. I did likewise. Our eyes were filled with tears, but we each made a supreme effort to fight them back.

'Goodbye,' I whispered finally.

When I let go of her hand, I felt as if my heart had attached itself to her lovely palm.

THIRTEEN

When I realised that the woman I loved so much, with whom I had been both night and day, had gone far away, not just to a different district or different town, where I might take a cab or train to see her, but to another country, and that I was not in a position to find my way to see her for five years, my grief and misery at such thoughts defied description.

On the train from Kobé to Tokyo, I felt torn apart when I thought of Mōm Rā̄tchawong Kīrati. I travelled overnight, and how the night-time made me think of her!

When I reached Tokyo the next morning, I went straight to Aoiyamachihang District to see her house. I felt as if I was visiting the grave of someone I loved dearly. It was as if Mōm Rā̄tchawong Kīrati had died. The front gate, which was about chest height, was locked. I walked quietly round the outside of the grounds, recalling how we had sat or walked here and there. The windows and doors of the house were all tightly shut and there was not a sound to be heard.

I sat down on a grassy mound beneath an overhanging vine on the spot where the two of us used to sit and chat in the evenings before Mōm Rā̄tchawong Kīrati retired to bed. I could still remember her sweet yet penetrating gaze in the bright moonlit evenings. Often I felt disturbed when I looked into those wondrous eyes. How long I was there, lost in thoughts of Mōm Rā̄tchawong Kīrati, I do not remember. The weather that morning was cool and overcast with no sunshine nor sign of improvement. As I rose from

the grass hillock and cast one more glance around the grounds of the house, I felt the tears come to my eyes. I felt a sense of sadness and parting even though it had only been the place where she had stayed.

I returned home and after supper, instead of joining the rest of the family in the living room to listen to the radio, or gramophone, or chat or read the newspaper, as I usually did, I excused myself and remained alone in my room. I was unable to join them in their relaxation because I felt for certain that I would be of no use to anyone. My mind was completely numb and I was preoccupied with just one thing.

I tried to find a way to relieve this obsession with M^ōm Rā^ātchawong Kī^īrati. I needed to find a way to unburden myself a little, instead of bottling up all my feelings inside until things became unbearable. But there was no one I could talk to. I still had sufficient sense not to tell anyone that I was madly in love with M^ōm Rā^ātchawong Kī^īrati, madly in love with a woman whose husband was my father's friend. I still had sufficient sense to realise that such an announcement would do harm to both myself and the woman I loved. I certainly would not have received much in the way of sympathy. There was only one way out, and that was to tell her how crazy I was about her. So that night, I wrote a letter to M^ōm Rā^ātchawong Kī^īrati. What follows here, was that first letter.

My dear Khunying,

I almost went out of my mind as you drew away into the distance and I could no longer make out the beauty of your face. I almost collapsed on the quayside when that tiny hand could wave no more. I don't know how I got back to Tokyo. I

returned that same night, feeling as dazed as if I were drunk.

I couldn't get through another night without you unless I can give vent to my feelings. I miss you so much, it's driving me out of my mind. It's overwhelming me. I have to unburden myself.

I can't swim across the seas to you, but I can reach you with this letter and beg you to listen to me one more time. This is no letter at all. It is a real person. When you reach home in Bangkok, and take it out of the envelope, please don't think of it as something at all remote. It's your Nopphōn. If you should kiss it just once, I shall feel the sweetness of that kiss, even though our bodies are thousands of miles apart.

As I write, you must have passed Moyi and now be beyond Japanese waters. I try to picture you in my mind. Perhaps you are sitting in the saloon, having just finished dinner. But I suspect you don't really want to be among a large group of people. You will let Chao Khun chat with the Captain and the other passengers. You, yourself, perhaps, will go up on deck to be alone. In my mind I see your subsequent movements.

Tonight, there is pale moonlight, but in the middle of the sea, there is nothing for you to cast your gaze upon, except the ripple of the waves and the stars in the sky. Out there in the middle of the sea, the world is only sky and water. Why have you gone up onto the deck? To think of me in peace, without being disturbed by anyone else? To think of home, in Bangkok? Or to enjoy the soft moonlight and cool breeze?

Oh, what a fool I am! Always my mind leads me to see your behaviour in such a way as to leave me feeling disturbed. But

in fact, it would be most unlikely that you would stand out on deck in the breeze on a night like this. Even not very far off the islands of Japan, it would be too cold, and there would be no reason for you to stand out there alone in the cold like that.

If you were in the saloon, you'll probably be walking along the side of the boat, down below, where you don't have to face too strong a wind. Perhaps you're leaning over the railing at the stern, where it is shielded from the wind, looking down into the sea and thinking about me a little, or perhaps a lot. Your Nopphōn is following you everywhere. I appear wherever you look. Can you see me there in the water? I am like the wake that follows a ship; that sparkle in the wash is the sparkle of my eyes. Can you see me?

If I could be granted one magical power, I would wish that I might be so transformed that I might enter your heart and know what you were thinking at all times, and how much you were thinking of your Nopphōn. Surely it wouldn't be that you didn't think of me at all?

I've just realised one awful truth, and that is, although I tried to ask you numerous times, you never gave me an answer as to whether you loved me or not. I know that your silence was not an indication that you rejected my love. But I wanted so badly to hear you say it out clearly. If you were just to tell me you loved me, I would consider it the most wonderful blessing I had ever received in all my life. Can you grant me that wish I beg of you?

You've already assured me that you won't forget to think

of me. But you should understand that I don't want you to think of me as a child you might take pity on or play along with. I want you to think of me as - what shall I say - can I say the one you love most of all, or the only one you love?

You may be wondering if I've gone out of my mind as I write this. I'm not sure either, whether a person who misses someone with every ounce of their feelings and says as much in all sincerity, is out of their mind or not.

I don't want to end this letter quickly, because I feel that while I am writing, our spirits are very close, and that makes me feel a little better, no matter how far away from me you are at present. But I don't know what else to write, because it would only be telling you how much I miss you all the time. So I should end my letter now and say goodnight. 'Oyasuminasai', my dear Khunying. Even sleep is something to be most grateful for. You can be sure I'll dream about you while I'm asleep.

With much love,

Nopphōn

When I had finished the letter, I read it through several times. It was not to examine how elegantly I had written; it was not my intention to write a letter to Mōm Rāṭchawong Kīrati in which style was the important thing. The reason I re-read it several times was to taste once again the sweet flavour of my feelings, sufficiently to raise my spirits and ease my sorrow. I remember I went to sleep quite easily that night, I was so exhausted. I dreamt a hundred dreams, but they were all scenes from the same dream or of the same person.

I bore with my sorrow and loneliness for a few days and when I could stand it no longer, I wrote another letter to Mōm Rāṭchawong Kīrati, while she was still at sea.

FOURTEEN

A little over a month after Mōm Rārchawong Kīrati had left, I received a letter from her. My mind had been in a turmoil for many days before I received the letter. Every afternoon when I returned home from the university, I would look at the letters in the mailbox, and when I did not find what I had been waiting for so anxiously, I would then have to go and ask other members of the household if there were any letter for me. I did this for so many days that it caused considerable surprise within the house, until the day came, when I received a letter from her.

I was feeling miserable that, as usual, there was no news from Mōm Rārchawong Kīrati. As I sat in front of the door taking off my shoes and feeling utterly lonely, Nobuko, the daughter of the owner of the house, ran up to me and handed me an envelope. I examined the handwriting on the front and having ascertained whose hand it was, I kicked off my shoes absent-mindedly and in such a hurry as to startle Nobuko. All I wanted to do was to rush to my room, close the door, lie down and relish the contents of the letter on my own. I thanked Nobuko briefly and went to my room, my face beaming of course. Mōm Rārchawong Kīrati's letter went as follows:

My dear Noppōn,

I have been home five days and have received your two letters. Although you wrote on different days, they both arrived together. In fact, I should have written to you without waiting to see if there was a letter from you, because I had to write quickly to thank you for your most valuable assistance and the kindness you showed me throughout my stay in Tokyo. The one thing I won't

thank you for, is for taking too much interest in me.

I didn't expect to get a letter from you so quickly. I suppose you'll be angry with me for not writing sooner, or is it that you're too quick writing to me? If I walk, but you fly, you can't really compare, can you? I hope you won't be angry with me.

However, I've already done a good deed in return, and that is that I'm writing this letter the day after receiving yours. I'm sure you won't be so hasty as to say I ought to have answered on the very same day. If you get rather impatient, please don't forget the fact that at home in Bangkok, I'm not free like you. I have lots of different jobs I have to do, which is something you possibly never realised.

The ardour that you expressed in your last letter suggests, I think, that the significance of the end of Autumn has not yet touched your heart. It was as if you had sneaked into Bangkok to write that letter. If you still haven't cooled down, I'm going to have to advise you to stay in an ice-box when you write to me next time. Or else you could wait until Winter and write from a place where it's snowing.

I say this, not because I treat your letter as amusing; I feel for you so much, so very much. But I know this madness will make you unhappy. I want you to be happy, no matter what.

On the journey home, I didn't feel particularly excited. I didn't eagerly count off the hours and days, as many do when they've been away from their homeland. Perhaps it was because I'd only been away a few months. Another thing was, there was no one in Bangkok whom I thought of every hour of every day. I missed my father and sisters, but not that much, just ordinarily.

But in leaving you, I have to admit that my mind was hardly at peace. I knew my departure would leave you alone and upset for many days. The feelings you describe in your letters were scarcely more than I feared. All I hope, is that you can keep them under control. Your intense feelings for me will gradually disappear in due course and eventually, I will cease to occupy a significant place in your life. Then happiness and innocence will return once more to your heart without the fetters of youth. I'm waiting and praying for that day.

Do you know, the way you described your feelings in those two letters has made you into a man I need to be wary of. You're no longer my sweet young friend Nopphōn. Your child-like charm has almost completely disappeared and you seem to have become quite a terrifying young man. From your letters I can scarcely recognise the Nopphōn I first met.

You must, my dear young friend, I beg you, try to come to your senses. You must keep your feelings firmly under control. You have the strength to do so if you try. It would be so tragic for you to be infatuated with such an unfortunate woman, long since abandoned by fortune and even now, not in a position to fulfil anyone's dreams.

Even though people would forgive you for your infatuation with the woman, you have to admit that this obsession is really meaningless. What point is there in being so obsessed with me when your desire has no chance of being realised? Is it the ocean that keeps me from you? Surely you know it's because I have ^vChao Khun that we are parted and live in separate worlds. There's no way we can meet, you know full well, don't you?

Nopphōn, why do you still dream of me? I can't help you. There's no one in this world who can help you. Life runs its course, that's true, but the gods have already paved it in advance. I neither ask you nor forbid you to think of me. But I do ask that you think of me calmly, like a close friend, or an older sister. What I don't want, is for you to become too emotionally worked up. Please don't think of me with the desire to seize my body and soul as your treasures. You already know that is impossible.

Please return to where you were, my dear young friend, to your books and dreams of a married life of honour and prosperity. You have a brighter more wonderful future than that woman who merely crossed the path of your life for a brief while. Please let me hope that my warning might have some effect.

I ask you to work hard at your studies. That is your only goal now. I, for one, shall always be interested in your success. My pleasure at wishing you a future full of great honour and prosperity, will be second to none, if I live that long.

I wait eagerly for the day when there will be news that your feelings have returned to normal. I hope such a time will come very soon, and from that day, I shall be happy and contented.

Although this letter is filled only with requests, I am certainly not going to forget to tell you that I accept your worthy feelings with pleasure and deep gratitude. I will remember them forever. There's no need for you to say it again. Think of me, my dear, think of me just a bit from time to time.

I've already written at great length, so I hope you'll

forgive me if I don't write about anyone else in this letter. But let me chide you a little, for not writing to Čhao Khun. Do you realise how careless it was, to be only interested in writing to me? I nearly had a fright when Čhao Khun asked me what you had said in your letter. If you'd been there at the time, I'm sure you'd have been really startled. Luckily, he's not the jealous type and I'm not easily alarmed.

Can I finish now, my dear? Čhao Khun is getting ready for bed and I don't want him to go asking questions unnecessarily.

Goodbye, my young friend. I think of you constantly. I will always.

With concern for your happiness,

Kīrati

This first letter from Mōm Rāčhawong Kīrati eased my agitated mind considerably. Her words cheered me up as much as if I had met her and heard them from her own lips. At first, I saw no point in her warning. I took no notice, regarding it merely as words of consolation. Mōm Rāčhawong Kīrati could not really have meant that I should cease to think of her so passionately. But later, after I had read her letter again and reflected upon it, I was inclined to think that there was something in her warning. Perhaps Mōm Rāčhawong Kīrati really did mean it.

FIFTEEN

After that, Mōm Rāṭchawong Kīrati and I continued to write to each other. As time passed, the pain of missing her, for several reasons, gradually diminished. In the first place, however much I loved her and however much I missed her, there was nothing I could do about it. Soon the tension I had felt began to ease, and another factor was that when the time came for me to devote my time to my studies, I had to use all of my powers of concentration which brought my mind back from the realms of passionate love to its former state.

Having suppressed my feelings once, it seemed as if I could do so perpetually. Following the first two letters which were filled with an outpouring of love and passion for her, I continued in the next few letters to describe my longing for her. But when I considered Mōm Rāṭchawong Kīrati's advice and the utter emotional exhaustion I had experienced when she first left, my passion was eased of its own accord. Thus, in subsequent letters I made no mention of longing for her, as I had at the beginning, and the interval between writing grew longer to the point where my mind had regained its former equilibrium. Writing to her became almost completely painless and might even have been described as writing simply to a close friend. And that was the way Mōm Rāṭchawong Kīrati wished it, as I understood at the time.

I had told her of my love and begged her in several letters to answer me in just one word. But no matter how lovely her replies were, she never ever mentioned love. This was another major reason

for making me think that Mōm Rā́tchawong Kīrati really did want me to forget what was between us, or at least, the incident on Mount Mitaké, where I had allowed my feelings to gush forth before her and had pressed my lips up against hers. That kiss still simmered in my heart. I had not forgotten it. Yet the memory was beginning to fade for various reasons I have already mentioned.

After two years, contact between Mōm Rā́tchawong Kīrati and myself had become so infrequent that scarcely a trace of the past remained in my heart. Letters which I had written to her every month without fail, became less frequent, and it seems that in that second year I wrote to her only three times. In fact I was increasingly burdened with my studies, and as I had recovered my mental equilibrium, I immersed myself in my studies and plans for my future career.

When I think back to the way I felt at the time, I myself am still surprised and unable to give an answer as to why Mōm Rā́tchawong Kīrati so quickly lost importance to me. I had been so besotted with her and regarded her as the most important person in my life. She was a woman I could not separate from my own life, because if she were separated, my life would no longer be complete. After two years had passed, all I knew was that she was just one of many close friends I had in Bangkok.

About six months later, I received news from Mōm Rā́tchawong Kīrati that Čhao Khun had passed away as a result of kidney disease. I shared her sorrow at hearing the news and quickly wrote to offer my condolences. After that, things carried on as usual. Čhao Khun's

death did not for one moment prompt me to consider that I might become involved in Mōm Rārchawong Kīrati's life in a manner significant both to her life and my own. It should have made me think of the former relationship between us once more. It should have done, it is true, but I do not know what devil it was, that blocked it from my mind. It is most surprising that, having learned the news of Chao Khun's death, I allowed things to carry on as usual. I had no inkling that an event of little significance to me was of the utmost importance to the life of someone else. Such is life!

I continued my studies for a further two years and successfully completed them. As I drew near to finishing, I had more contact with my family in Bangkok. My brothers and sisters, who had heard I was doing well and would soon be finishing and returning home, all wrote to express their joy; so too, did the girl I was engaged to. Father must surely have suggested she write, as a means of tying me down and warning me that there was already a girl waiting to marry me in Bangkok and that I should not go getting involved with any other women in Japan.

Truly, no one should have had to worry about me on that score. At the time, I was more preoccupied with the progress of my own career than anything else. I was not going to waste my time on any woman. I had hardly given a thought even to my own fiancée. I had no time for such things.

I was older now, it was true, but this had not focussed my thoughts on choosing a spouse. It seemed that the older I got, the more I kept away from the female sex; indeed, now I was mature, I avoided all other situations and concentrated entirely on my work.

The letter from my fiancée disturbed my peace of mind

and turned my thoughts to marriage. But it was not something I considered with any great excitement. I did not know whether I would love her, because we did not know each other well enough to be able to be fully committed in love. But then what is marriage? I was not very clear about it at the time. I thought vaguely that she must be a suitable enough partner. Otherwise, why would my father have chosen her to be my spouse, for he was no fool? At a suitable time after my return to Bangkok, he would probably arrange our marriage and I would raise no objections. Even though the marriage would not be built upon a basis of mutual love, I would gradually become close to her and before long, would feel fondness and love for her. She would look after the home and I would go to work and struggle against all difficulties for advancement in my career. There was not much more to marriage than this. That was the rather vague idea I had at the time. I did not think about it very seriously. I wrote a friendly letter back to her.

When I had finished my studies, instead of returning home immediately, I began training at a bank. During that time, I wrote to Mōm Rāṭchawong Kīrati, telling her how I was getting on. I did not write at any length, for the truth was, latterly, I was no longer very good at writing her long letters. Once I had said what I wanted to, I could hardly think of anything else to write. How strangely time changes our feelings.

So that you know how Mōm Rāṭchawong Kīrati felt about me, four years after we had parted, I would like to show you one of her letters of the time.

'My dear Nopphōn'. That was how she always began her letters, without fail. This is how she goes on:

I have received your letter telling me of your success. How can I tell you how absolutely delighted I am. If you had an elder sister, her pleasure at your success would scarcely compare with that which I feel. You know just how eager I have been for your success throughout the many long years when we have not seen each other. So if I boast of my happiness a bit too much, even though I am not exaggerating, you surely won't be cross with me.

I'm even more delighted to learn that you're going to stay over there and work for a year before returning to Thailand. In fact, that was your original plan, I was told when I went to Tokyo, and it just proves how strong your determination is. I expect you're determined in everything, not just your studies. The success that people like you achieve, even though it may seem beyond other people, is not beyond you. My praise is meant quite sincerely.

Another year until you come to Thailand and we meet again. You'll no longer be the young Nopphōn I used to know. It will have been almost six years since I left you. You were 22 then, so you'll be 28. My Nopphōn will be quite grown up, not a boy like before. You're bound to be very different; but it will be the difference that comes with growing up and thriving. Quite the opposite of me, whom you will also think different; but different in the sense of withering and fading. However, we'll surely recognise each other because we share certain memories we can never forget.

It's strange how latterly contact between us has become so infrequent. Two years ago, I still remember, I didn't hear from you more than three times during the year. But in fact, it was my own wish that you should have all your time for studying, without having to worry about writing letters back and forth regularly, so what you did was correct.

Nearly five years have passed without any great hardship. One year will go much more quickly and smoothly. I haven't any further words of advice, because you are your own master and it looks as if you manage even better than me.

I await your return, my dear, to see with my own eyes the progress in life my young friend has made.

Thinking of you always

Kīrati

I read her letter without any emotion. Of course I felt grateful to her, as if she were an older sister. She had given me advice and encouragement which had always been of great value to me. But the feeling of passion had died. Time had swept away my infatuation for her without me realising it.

I did not notice nor was I aware that Mōm Rāṭchawong Kīrati had concealed the depth of her feelings in that letter. Subtlety and discretion were at that time beyond my comprehension.

SIXTEEN

There were few people on the Mitsui Buchasankaicha Company's wharf on the morning when the vessel "Nachisanmaru" brought me in to Bangkok from Japan. This was because there were no more than seven or eight passengers on the boat, of whom I was the only Thai. Thus, when the boat came alongside, I was able to see quite clearly the group of people waiting to meet me.

The first person I saw was my father. He was standing at the front of a group of more than ten close relatives. There were four or five close friends of about the same age as me there, too. Among the group of relatives was a woman I did not recognise, but from the way she looked at me, she seemed every bit as interested in me as anyone else.

I saw no sign of Mōm Rāṭchawong Kīrati among the group. Only when I cast my eyes over the whole compound did I see a beautiful figure in a navy blue suit standing leaning against the door of a large saloon car. Then I saw the tiny hand waving slowly to me. I waved back happily, because even though she was standing some distance away, I recognised the figure as Mōm Rāṭchawong Kīrati.

Once the crew had fixed the gangway, all the friends and relatives who had come to meet me, boarded the boat. I stood by the gangway, ready to greet them. My father was the first to welcome me. He came straight up to me and hugged his eldest son with all the love and feelings which had been bottled up for eight years. I hugged him with the same feelings and then other relatives and friends crowded round and showed their feelings in a similar fashion. I cannot

describe my feelings that first morning I reached Bangkok. It was the happiest time of my life and I have never since experienced the same happiness and joy.

As I was greeting one lady a little uncertainly, my father came across and placed his hand on my shoulder and told me that this was my fiancée. Then I recognised her. She had a plain, ordinary-looking face, neither ugly, nor beautiful. Standing before me, her manner was shy and embarrassed. I am not good at making conversation and since we were only slightly acquainted, I merely said a few words and then she retired to let other people come and greet me.

Mōm Rā́tchawong Kīrati was the last to come and see me. She was wearing a navy blue outfit with a white floral pattern. It was the same colour she had been wearing when I first met her in Tokyo five or six years earlier. However, even though they were the same clothes that I remember from a long time back when we first met, surprisingly, that morning, I did not notice. It was surprising, too, that Mōm Rā́tchawong Kīrati should wear the same clothes when she came to meet me on my first day in Bangkok, that she had worn six years ago.

Her manner was still calm and graceful as before. The only difference was that she was even more graceful with the dignity of her age, which was now approaching 41. Although she had lost a little of her radiance, her charm and great beauty had not abandoned her. She was still striking in appearance.

Mōm Rā́tchawong Kīrati touched my hand and I squeezed hers with the joy and excitement I would have felt at meeting a sister who

had been away a long time. I was the first to speak.

'I've missed you a lot.'

'I've thought of you often, ever since we parted,' she said slowly and calmly, although I could see clearly the deep happiness in her eyes. I felt embarrassed by her words when I recalled that no matter how intensely I had missed her on occasions, my feelings had not remained constant, as hers had for me.

'I'm so pleased to see you again,' I continued.

'And I've been waiting for you. Waiting all the time.'

'You're so kind to me.'

'If what you say is true, then so I should be, shouldn't I?'

'I fear I'm not wortny. You're too kind to me,' I said laughing. I paid no attention to the effect my response might have upon Mōm Rārchawong Kīrati. Nevertheless, she was silent for a while.

'You're hurting my hand,' Mōm Rārchawong Kīrati said gently.

'Today it's not like when we parted at the port of Kobé.'

'Oh, I'm sorry,' I cried, releasing her hand immediately. 'It's Bangkok now and we don't have to part again. We don't have to go through such misery again.'

'Who knows, Nopphōn?' she countered softly, which surprised me a little.

'Well, I'm not planning to leave here again for the rest of my life.'

'But that's not the only cause of parting, nor the only source of sorrow,' she said, touching my arm. 'But let's not argue now. All your relations are wanting you.'

'You're as much a relation to me.'

'That may be so. But I still shouldn't keep you to myself today.'

Off you go, my dear, go and see your father.'

So together, we went straight to the saloon where most of my friends and relations were waiting. Some of them dragged me off to the cabin I had occupied at sea, to see what my living conditions were like and to help carry my things down off the boat. After that I was constantly surrounded by people and scarcely had another opportunity to speak to Mōm Rā̄tchawong Kī̄rati.

As we disembarked I invited her to continue our conversation at home.

'I must excuse myself, Nopphō̄n. You should spend all of your first day with your close relatives.'

'No relative is going to want me for the whole day.'

'Well, there's your father, at least. He's going to want several hours to chat with his son who's been away for seven or eight years. And there are others, too.'

'My father's not going to be so desperate to say everything in one single day,' I replied with a laugh. Even so, my manner remained composed.

'Let's meet another day, Nopphō̄n.'

'In that case, I'll visit you as soon as I can,' I said, deferring to her wishes.

The curtain fell all too quickly and unremarkably on that first day's meeting in Bangkok between Mōm Rā̄tchawong Kī̄rati and myself.

Most of that day was taken up with meeting people, with a short rest in the afternoon. In the evening after dinner, I talked with my father in the sitting room. At one point in our lengthy conversation the subject of Mōm Rā̄tchawong Kī̄rati came up.

'So you're very well acquainted with Khunying Atthikān, are you?' he asked, as we chatted aimlessly about this and that.

'You mean Khunying Kīrati? Yes,' I continued, when he had confirmed this. 'We're close friends. When she was in Japan, I was with Čhao Khun and her, visiting them and helping them nearly all the time.'

'It's a shame Čhao Khun Atthikān died so soon.' When he was alive,' my father continued, 'I heard him speak very highly indeed of his wife, and from what I've seen since he died, I think she's a lovely woman, well worthy of high regard.'

'I have great admiration for her,' I responded. 'Even though it wasn't very long, I got to know her very well. I've never met anyone as intelligent as her. I think she ought to marry again. And surely she won't be able to escape the intentions of someone.'

'I'm not so sure, because since the death of Čhao Khun Atthikān, I've heard that she takes little pleasure in society. She leads a quiet life and is held in high esteem by all of Čhao Khun Atthikān's close friends everywhere. Recently I heard that there was someone paying her a lot of attention, even, it seems, to the point of sounding her out on marriage. But she turned him down. People say she seems like someone hiding some secret.'

I listened calmly in silence and after that my father changed the subject.

SEVENTEEN

About five days after I had arrived in Bangkok I found a convenient time to pay Mōm Rāṭchawong Kīrati a visit. In fact, it was somewhat belated. I should have gone to see her much sooner, but I had several urgent matters to settle, largely concerning my career, which at that time pre-occupied my thoughts above all else.

I went to visit her at her home in Bangkokpi. It was a modest bungalow set in about three rai of grounds, surrounded by a thick hedge of morning glory with its green leaves and purple flowers. The house stood back some way, clearly visible on elevated ground. To the left was a large pond, and near the gate, a small pavilion standing among the flower beds with creeping plants growing all over it. It made a pleasant sight.

My first impression when I reached Mōm Rāṭchawong Kīrati's house, was that compared with the dozen or so I had passed on the way, it was one of the nicest in Bangkokpi. They were all lovely houses, but the setting and lay-out of the grounds were not as pleasant and as soothing as Mōm Rāṭchawong Kīrati's home. Looking at the flower beds which in places included large stones, I felt as if I had known this house for a long time. This was because of the design of the garden which was very similar to a Japanese design. Different plants were not laid out in strict groups, but were all mixed together. They grew in a dense mass, making it look like a natural garden rather than one that had been created. And even though it had, in fact, been deliberately created, it seemed as natural as the magnificent

gardens at Nikko, which I had visited so often.

The gate was already open. The car passed slowly through and as I looked among the flowers, I saw a woman's head appear by the orange jasmine bush. I recognised the hair style and ordered the car to stop before it reached the building. As I got out and stood there on the path, Mōm Rā̄tchawong Kīrati appeared from among the bushes and became fully visible.

'Nopphōn,' she called from the distance.

I raised my hat to her and took a short cut over towards her. As soon as I reached her, an alsatian, which had been playing nearby, ran up and stood right up against me, eyeing me fiercely. She bent over and patted it gently on the head. Then she called its name two or three times and it lay down quietly at her feet.

'That's a large and very frightening dog, you've got,' I began. 'It's looking at me suspiciously.'

She smiled.

'Towald is my bodyguard. There aren't many people living here, so we have to rely on Towald as our watchman. You're right, though. Towald is suspicious of everyone at first. I've explained to him now that you're my friend and you mean no harm.' As she finished speaking, Mōm Rā̄tchawong Kīrati patted Towald on the head and told him to run along and play somewhere else. He did as he was told.

'I should be receiving you inside,' she continued, looking up. We were standing by a garden table and chair which had been placed among the flower beds and which was where Mōm Rā̄tchawong Kīrati had been sitting before.

'I really like it here,' I said, putting my hat down on the table.

'It's nice and cool and it looks lovely with all these different kinds of flowers.'

'If you like, then, I'll receive you here.'

'I must apologise,' I said, when we were both seated, 'for not coming to see you sooner. It was because I had to go and see lots of important people about my job. I didn't want to waste any time.'

'I think it's quite right, Nopphōn, that you should think of your work before anything else.'

'I have to confess that over the last two or three years I've been really pre-occupied with the thought of work. It's not that I want money to fulfill any cravings for pleasure. The main reason is I want to work. I believe it will make me very happy if I can use the knowledge I gained from my studies in my work. It's this which might have left me deficient in certain other areas, such as socialising and, for example, coming to see you.'

'It's a deficiency which makes you even nicer,' she said with a smile. It was a smile of such tenderness and sweetness, a smile I had known long ago and which I recognised when I encountered it once more.

'You've really grown up, now, Nopphōn. Do you realise, there's scarcely a trace of a boy left in you?'

'I suppose I must have changed. But it's not something I'm really aware of myself.'

'You're a proper young man and you seem more serious than before.'

'I hadn't realised that. But as far as you're concerned, I see only a slight change.'

'I've aged a lot.'

'Well I don't think so. I beg your pardon, but how old are you?'

'Over 40.'

'Well I beg your pardon, but you still look very young...'

'What's all this, Nopphōn? Aren't you going to stop saying, "I beg your pardon"?' There was irritation in her voice. 'You sound as if I were always blaming you for everything. You really do seem to have changed a lot.'

'I was afraid I might say something I shouldn't.'

'Even so, there's no need to apologise when you've already said it. I'm not the woman you met in Tokyo. Nearly six years have passed since then. Unless you decide to flatter me too much, you can't say I still look like a girl.'

'But that's my honest opinion.'

'You're too biased, believe me, Nopphōn. I'm over 40 now. I'm well aware that I'm old.'

'It may be that you're more biased than me,' I remarked and then changed the subject. 'You must like it here, in this house. It's beautiful, just right for you. Please tell me what's been happening to you.'

She looked at me doubtfully.

'Do you think you're really still interested in what's been happening to me?'

'I've always been interested.'

'Now that you've returned to Bangkok and there is work and lots of friends you have to give your time to, I fear you may have very little time to be interested in what's been happening to me. Things are very different from when we met in Tokyo, aren't they, Nopphōn?'

I was inclined to agree with what Mōm Rāṭchawong Kīrati had said. I had neither the time nor the extravagance of feelings to think of her in the same way as before. Episodes from the past had faded from my memory. Even the incident on Mount Mitaké, which I had once thought such a significant event in my life, I now scarcely ever thought about. Everything seemed to belong to the past; it was as if that period had finished. Now, the new period which had begun in my life was the period of work and a new way of life was approaching. The truth was, there were no deep or strong feelings in my life like those that had been awakened six years ago.

As far as Mōm Rāṭchawong Kīrati was concerned, I could not work out whether she had said this purely out of a desire to express her true feelings or for some other reason. I did not know whether she too, had entered a new phase of life, or not.

'I think I'm sufficiently interested in you to hear what's been happening to you,' I said, thinking this a suitable response.

'Alright, I'll tell you, as an old friend, without thinking about what you might be now,' Mōm Rāṭchawong Kīrati said seriously. She paused for a moment to gather her thoughts.

'I should begin after the death of Čhao Khun. Just talking about his illness is so upsetting and I seem to have written to you about it already,' she said, slowly and thoughtfully. 'Nor do I want to talk about how sad I felt after his death. I'll tell you about the main things that have happened to me. In the first place, he made me wealthier by passing on to me about a third of his fortune in his will. The other two thirds were for his two children. In fact, I didn't expect to get a share, because I'd only lived with him for two or three years, and we had no children. Such kindness towards me

leaves me wondering whether I really deserved it. Nopphōn, do you think I'm lucky or unlucky?

'That's a difficult question to answer,' I replied cautiously.

'Exactly. I think it's a difficult question to answer, too.' As she spoke, her eyes drifted absent-mindedly. 'I had less than three years of married life before my husband died. Then I became wealthy, but at the same time, I have to live alone. Life seems puzzling, doesn't it, Nopphōn?'

'Why didn't you go back and live with your father?'

'I've lived with him for thirty-five years already. I love him dearly and I go to visit him and stay with him frequently. But I wouldn't go back to that kind of life. It was a life which crushed my fortunes, which was sterile and bitter, and which I'll never forget for the rest of my life.'

'In that case, you should opt for getting out and about and meeting people.'

'Indeed, I should. But I haven't.' She spoke as if she had some doubt about her decision. 'I'll tell you my story briefly. After Chao Khun died, I came to live here. Our old house passed on to his eldest son. I had no wish to continue living there, for one thing, because it was too big, and for another, because it would have been a constant reminder that Chao Khun had gone forever. Chao Khun had bought this plot of land several years before his death, and we used to say we'd build a little holiday home here. After he died, I set about having it done as we had planned. The only difference is, instead of it being a place to stay, it's my permanent home.'

'And it ought to be a house that gives great pleasure to its owner,' I added when she paused for a moment.

'It ought to,' she said, looking around the grounds with satisfaction. 'Everyone who comes here says how nice my home is and expresses envy at the peace and quiet I have. But I'm not sure whether they're right or not.'

'Apart from this lovely house, what else do you have to keep you happy?'

'You still can't stop asking questions,' Mōm Rā́tchawong Kīrati said with an indulgent smile. 'That may be all that's left of the Nopphōn I knew in Tokyo.'

'Am I asking too much?' I inquired politely.

'No, not too much. But very few people would have asked me that. You're good at thinking up questions, because it seems even I haven't ever given a thought to what I had to keep me happy. She paused in thought for a moment and then added, 'When I think about it, I can't help feeling surprised at myself, because my greatest happiness in the past, instead of being something real, which had happened to me, was merely a hope or anticipation of something. My life now is no different. Real happiness drifts along before me, while I follow along behind snatching wildly at it, waiting and hoping.'

'It seems, on the contrary, an exhausting life,' I remarked sympathetically.

'What can I do, Nopphōn? The powers that be in this world have determined that my life shall be so. No matter how I struggle, I can't escape, so I have to face up to my fate. Your life is worth much more than mine and it runs a much smoother course. In yours, there are only real things. You gain pleasure from events in the past and then forget them completely and move on to new experiences and new pleasures. This is the way it goes, changing systematically.'

My life is confused with fading dreams and memories. Sometimes there is happiness, but it is not something clear and definite. It's like a mistake. Sometimes I enjoy myself, sometimes I feel worn out. That's the way my life is and what I intended to tell you. But it would be hard for you to understand.'

'It's a strange, sad life, not easy to understand, either,' I murmured sincerely. 'Now that you're well off, why don't you use your wealth to make your hopes come true. Then you'd be happy.'

'Money has power, it's true, Nopphōn, but it's not everything. It happens that what I have been hoping for and anticipating is not something that can be obtained by the power of money. This is my great misfortune.' At this point, Mōm Rāṭchawong Kīrati rose. 'There you are, Nopphōn, let me finish my story there. It's more boring than interesting. I want to hear about you, now. We'll take a little walk and while we're doing so, please tell me about what you've been doing. After that, we'll go inside and I hope you'll stay and eat with me this evening, so I'll have the chance to hear about everything in detail.'

I did as she asked. We did not have much time for a walk before dusk fell. As we walked side by side through the extensive gardens, there was nothing to interrupt the mood. We were alone together in the stillness with an atmosphere which ought to have evoked the intense feelings of six years ago. But surprisingly, my feelings were not in the least affected. It was not that Mōm Rāṭchawong Kīrati had lost her former beauty and charm. Indeed, I could still recognise these quite clearly. But it was with admiration rather, and with no emotional involvement on my part.

I stayed to dinner and talked with her after until nine o'clock

when I left. Mōm Rā̄tchawong Kīrati told me she lived with an aunt and a niece, but as it happened, they had both gone to visit relatives that day and would perhaps stay overnight with them. Thus it was that I spent altogether four hours alone with Mōm Rā̄tchawong Kīrati. I enjoyed myself all the time I was with her, telling her about what I had been doing and listening to what had been happening to her, without a moment's boredom.

At the dining table the two of us ate and chatted beneath a bright lamp for over an hour. I noticed that Mōm Rā̄tchawong Kīrati's forty years were beginning to show in the wrinkles that appeared in places on her beautiful skin. But in her manner and conversation, she had not changed at all from the Mōm Rā̄tchawong Kīrati of old. She was as sweet and graceful as ever. While she was busy serving out this and that, I could not help recalling the kindness she had showed me in the past. Yet all I recalled was that she was like an older sister to me. My feelings were not set into passionate turmoil as they once had been.

Throughout those four hours, I could not fathom out what aim Mōm Rā̄tchawong Kīrati had in life.

EIGHTEEN

Because I was busy with my work, I did not go to visit her again after that until more than two months had passed, and my father had informed me that he had made arrangements for my wedding to take place in three months time.

When I knew the date of the wedding, I thought it my duty to inform Mōm Rārchawong Kīrati as a matter of courtesy. On my second visit, she received me in the living room, but even so, there was no one to disturb us or interrupt our conversation.

Although Mōm Rārchawong Kīrati had not intended to let me see that she was very disappointed that I had left an interval of two months between my first and second visits, I could see clearly from the very beginning of our conversation, just how disappointed and saddened she felt, that I had behaved differently to what she had expected. However, I myself was unaware of the cause of such feelings. Whether it was because her feelings for me were more than I had realised, or what, it was beyond my comprehension.

Despite what I had noticed about Mōm Rārchawong Kīrati's feelings, I made no reference to the matter, because I had no wish to make excuses about not seeing her very often because of being tied up with one thing and another. Such excuses might merely have made her feel more bitter, so I kept quiet my knowledge of her disappointment.

After we had talked about various things for a while, I brought up the matter I had come to tell her about.

'I've got some news to tell you, Khunying.'

'I hope it's very good news for you. It must be to do with some

advancement in your work.' She waited for my reply with interest.

'No. It is good news, but nothing to do with work. You would be very pleased if I were to be getting married soon.' I noticed that she was slightly shocked, perhaps because she had not been expecting such news.

'You're getting married?' she repeated uncertainly. 'It's the lady who went to meet you the day you arrived in Bangkok, isn't it?'

'Oh, so you knew about us all along, then?'

'No, I had no idea. I just guessed. Have you known each other long?'

'She's my fiancée.'

'Since when?' Instead of glowing with happiness, Mōm Rāṭchawong Kīrati's expression was full of doubt.

'Seven or eight years ago. A little before I left for Japan.'

'But all the time I knew you in Tokyo, you never said a thing about your fiancée to me.' Her voice registered her increasing doubts.

'Maybe it was because I myself wasn't in the least bit interested in the engagement.'

'And now you've resigned yourself to marrying a lady whom you've never been interested in.'

'It's my father's wish and I have no objections. In fact she's an educated lady from a suitable background. Marriage will give my life a more solid base than at present.'

Mōm Rāṭchawong Kīrati gazed at me for a moment before she spoke, with a look that was hard to interpret. 'You haven't told me your fiancée's name, yet.'

'It's Parī. Parī Būranawāt.'

'A pretty girl with a pretty name.' She smiled in an absent-minded and uncertain way. 'I do congratulate you.'

She held her hand out to me and at the same time, I said, 'You're the first to congratulate me.'

'I regard that as a great honour,' she replied modestly. We were both silent for a while, during which time I could not think of anything to say to her. Mōm Rā́tchawong Kīrati spoke first.

'What are your ideals in marriage?'

'I'm at a bit of a loss for an answer. I'm not very good at dealing with that kind of question.'

'You used to ask me all kinds of detailed questions and I never tried to get out of them, so now, when it's my turn, you can't, either.'

'I wasn't thinking of getting out of it. But I'm afraid I have no ideals in marriage to speak of.'

'I'm surprised you say you have none,' said Mōm Rā́tchawong Kīrati with a sigh. 'Are all men like you, Nopphōn?'

'Not everyone. But maybe most men,' I replied the way I felt. 'Men probably have ideals in work rather than other things. Like me, for example.'

'Do you love your fiancée?'

'We haven't known each other long. We both like each other well enough, and I hope we'll be able to love each other, when we are married.'

'Isn't love necessary for young people, then, before they decide to commit themselves to marriage.' Her question was full of surprise. 'All I've ever heard is "love, but don't get married", but here you are, Nopphōn, getting married, and going to love afterwards.'

'If there were mutual love before marriage, it would be even better. However, I think that love is too complicated and too painful.'

'What's made you see love in that light?'

'Because once I loved someone.'

'Please tell me all about it.' Mōm Rā̄tchawong Kīrati's eyes began to sparkle.

'You already know all the details. It happened when you went to Japan and went on until you left me and returned to Bangkok. At first, love brought happiness, but it ended in pain and suffering. Later on, I thought that I had allowed myself to be carried away by my feelings in a very inappropriate way. I should have loved and respected you as an older sister. I realised that I had behaved very wrongly. Ever since, I've tried to completely forget the events of that time. And at that time, too, I learnt just how much pain and torture such passionate love causes. I believe I'll never love like that again.'

Mōm Rā̄tchawong Kīrati gazed ahead with a distant look in her eyes. She said nothing.

'I didn't think I'd ever talk about this with you again,' I said. 'It makes me feel ashamed and hate myself.'

'People have different ideas about love, but I agree with you that love crushes and tortures our hearts, sometimes more than we can stand. You did the right thing, like everyone else who is able to escape from the torture and forget the past. But some fools may be incapable of doing as you did. Let me congratulate you once again.' She paused for a while and her eyes avoided mine. When she turned to face me again, she asked, 'Have you fixed a date?'

'My father said in about three months' time.'

' Let me offer my best wishes in advance. I believe in love, so I will wish that the two of you will love each other, whether before or after you marry, and that you will love each other deeply and within a short time.' She picked up the tea-cup in front of her and raised it rather vigourously, smiling brightly as she added, 'I drink to you, my dear friend, and to the love and happiness of the pair of you.' She took a sip from the cup and then put it down. 'I'll be the first to give any help at your wedding,' she added.

After we had been talking for some time, I noticed that she was not very well, but she seemed to be trying to hide it, so as to appear perfectly happy and cheerful to me. I did not let on that I had noticed, but simply hastened to take leave of her on the grounds that I had business to attend to. Even so, I had been talking to her for almost two hours. I was sorry that I had brought such important news at a time when she was not very well. Under normal circumstances, M^om Rā^ochawong Kī^orati would have shown much greater excitement and pleasure, and would not have allowed me to leave so quickly, for certain. That is what I thought at the time.

NINETEEN

I never for one moment dreamt that that visit to M^om Rāṭchawong Kīrati would be the opening of the final scene in her life. And how cruel it was, that this scene should have drawn to an end so quickly.

The marriage between myself and Parī, my fiancée, took place on the appointed day. I shall not go into details about the scale and splendour of our wedding. What did leave me feeling disappointed, was that M^om Rāṭchawong Kīrati did not come to the wedding. She sent someone round with a letter in the afternoon, to say she was ill and would not be able to attend. She sent her best wishes and said she would come to visit me when she was feeling better.

I had already planned to take my wife on holiday to Hua Hin for a fortnight. Before going down there, I took her to visit M^om Rāṭchawong Kīrati at her home. This was three days after the wedding. M^om Rāṭchawong Kīrati told us she was feeling a bit better and was planning to pay us a visit in the near future. I could see quite clearly, that she looked paler than before. When asked about her condition, she said she felt weak, but that on our wedding day, she had had a fever, too. She looked drowsy and did not say very much. She asked us to tell her about our wedding day, and listened in silence, except for the occasional question, and to ask Parī how she felt on that day. I spent about an hour with her and then left, fearing she might not enjoy our visit as she was not yet back to normal health.

'She's sweet and gentle and still beautiful,' Parī remarked, once we were outside. 'But she seems a little mysterious.'

Two months passed. One evening in December, a startling and revealing incident occurred. That evening I returned home from work and before I had time to change my clothes, a servant came and told me that there was a lady wanting to see me urgently. I hurried down to meet her in the living room. It was Mōm Rārchawong Kīrati's aunt who was waiting there for me with an anxious look on her face.

'You wanted to see me urgently,' I began.

'Khunying is seriously ill,' she said.

'Last time I saw her, she was getting better, wasn't she?' I asked with a mixture of surprise and alarm. 'What's the matter with her now?'

She told me that Mōm Rārchawong Kīrati had had mild tuberculosis for about two years. Previously, it had been understood that if she were well cared for, the condition would not suddenly worsen to the point where her life might be in danger, and that there was hope it might get better. But in the last couple of months, the course of her illness had changed and in the last two or three days her condition had deteriorated alarmingly. She had a raging fever and was frequently delirious, during which times she would talk of her trip to Japan with her husband, Čhao Khun, and often mention my name.

'Whenever anyone comes to visit her, before I even have a chance to tell her who it is, she always asks if it's Nopphōn. That's what she asks when she's fully conscious. When I say no,' she continued, 'she gives a deep sigh and says nothing. When I asked her if she wanted to see you, she shook her head and even said quite emphatically,

"Don't go round to Nopphōn. Don't go disturbing his happiness under any circumstances." But when people came to see her again, she asked about you again. I'm sure she badly wants to see you, but I don't know why she didn't want me to come round. I was rather doubtful and in the end I couldn't stand it any longer, so I slipped away and came round to see you. But I didn't tell her. I said the doctor had told me to go and buy medicine, but the doctor knew the truth about where I was going.'

I could scarcely believe it. Why had Mōm Rāṭchawong Kīrati's condition deteriorated so suddenly? And why had she kept calling out my name when she was delirious? But everything her aunt said was true. I did not ask any further questions once she had finished. I was deeply shocked and concerned for Mōm Rāṭchawong Kīrati's life. We hurried straight round to her house. When we got near, I was urged not to let her know under any circumstances that anyone had called for me. I gave my word.

I was led into the living room. A moment later the doctor looking after Mōm Rāṭchawong Kīrati came to have a word with me. He informed me that the patient's condition was hopeless; it was merely a matter of whether it was sooner or later. I also learned from the doctor that Mōm Rāṭchawong Kīrati's relatives had all expressed the opinion that there must be a special relationship between the two of us, and that for this reason, she ought to have a chance to see me before she died. I sat composed as I listened. Inside, my heart was filled with indescribable grief.

I waited for about ten minutes. Her aunt came out and told me that I had come at a good time, because Mōm Rāṭchawong Kīrati was

conscious and her condition reasonably normal.

'Is Khunying ready for me to go and see her yet?' I asked.

'Please just wait another moment. She's getting dressed.'

'Why does she have to get dressed?' I exclaimed in surprise.

'Didn't you say she was very ill? Even the doctor said as much.'

She sat down and explained. 'She is very ill, that's right. And I don't know why she wants to get dressed. I protested and pointed out that it was Khun Nopphān, a close friend, who'd come to see her and that there was no need to worry about getting dressed. She smiled - the first time I've seen her really smile since she fell ill - and brushed aside my objections. "It really is most necessary for me to dress up nicely to receive a dear friend. Suthān," she said, turning to her younger sister, "please help me to get dressed. Dress me up really nicely in the way you know I like. Please do my hair again and put my lipstick on the way I have it; and bring me some nice dresses from the wardrobe for me to choose. Suthān, please help me to look lovely again, just one more time before I die." She smiled weakly, but both Suthān and I looked sad and we could scarcely hold back our tears in our great sorrow. Eventually we had to give in to her wishes. Suthān is getting her dressed now.'

As she spoke, tears came to her eyes and I saw that she was trying to stifle a sob. The doctor lowered his head and listened calmly.

'She said to me, "Have you told him I'm very ill and close to death?" ' Mōm Rāтчawong Kīrati's aunt continued. 'I had to tell a lie for her sake, because I knew very well she didn't want you to know she was seriously ill. She was pleased and said, "That's good.'

Please just tell Nopphōn that I'm not very well. Don't alarm him." '

When Mōm Rāṭchawong Kīrati's aunt had finished speaking, the three of us were silent. The living room was filled with an air of desolate gloom. After a while, she got up and went to see whether Mōm Rāṭchawong Kīrati was dressed yet. About ten minutes later she came and told me Mōm Rāṭchawong Kīrati was ready, and led me into the patient's room. As I walked towards the room, I felt a sense of sorrow and loneliness, as if I were visiting the corpse of someone I loved dearly rather than a person who was still alive.

Mōm Rāṭchawong Kīrati was lying down in the bedroom. As I entered the room, I was stunned for a moment. I had been expecting to find a sick person near to death, lying in a dark stuffy room, full of bottles of medicine, with two or three people sitting there, weeping profusely.

But I had pictured things quite differently from the truth. It was about five o'clock and inside, the room was bright with the late afternoon light which shone through each of the wide open windows. Mōm Rāṭchawong Kīrati was sitting on the bed, propped up by a pillow, with her legs stretched out along the length of the bed. A white blanket with a green Chinese-style pattern covered the lower part of her body. She wore a blouse of the same colour and on top of that, a black velvet jacket. This was to prevent me from seeing any part of her body which might lead me to the conclusion that she was on the verge of death. Her hair and face had been carefully done and concealed the extent of her deterioration. At just a glance, the red triangle shape of her lips almost deceived me into thinking that there was nothing wrong with Mōm Rāṭchawong Kīrati at all.

On a small bedside table stood a crystal vase containing a bunch

of cheerful-looking fresh red christmas flowers. Two bird cages hung from the window with kiribun birds in them. The birds hopped about, chirping merrily. Everything in the room had been arranged tastefully. There was no sign that it was the room of someone terminally ill. I almost began to think I had been misled or something.

When she saw me standing there in the room, Mōm Rā́tchawong Kīrati put down the book she had been holding so as to show me she had been reading before I went in.

'Nopphōn, please come and sit here,' she said, indicating a chair by the bed. 'I'm a little unwell, so I have to receive you in bed.'

I was shocked when I heard her voice, because it was so hoarse and weak, I could scarcely hear her. I went and sat down calmly on the chair.

'I was concerned about you, so I've come to see you.'

'Thankyou so much. I knew you hadn't forgotten me.' She smiled cheerfully while turning her head in the direction of the woman standing keeping an eye on her at the head of the bed. 'This is Suthān, my younger sister, who's found love and happiness in marriage, as I once told you.'

I bowed in Suthān's direction.

'Everyone can go and have a rest now, including you, Suthān,' said Mōm Rā́tchawong Kīrati. 'Leave me alone with Nopphōn,' she added.

The others exchanged glances. I remained silent.

'Please don't be worried, because I'm not seriously ill.'

Suthān went over and had a word with her aunt. A moment later, the doctor whispered to me not to talk with her for too long or make her tired.

When everyone had left the room, Mōm Rā́tchawong Kīrati glanced in my direction with a look of contentment in her eyes. I pulled my

chair up close to the bed.

'I didn't think I'd see you today. I didn't think I'd ever see you again, even for one last time in my life.' She gazed at me, her eyes never flinching.

'I'm right here in front of you, now, and I'll stay as long as you want me,' I replied solemnly.

'That's impossible, Nopphōn, because you're not mine.'

'I don't understand what you mean.'

'That's right. You wouldn't understand, because you've never ever understood, right from the first day we met.' There seemed to be mockery in her eyes.

'Please tell me what else it is that I don't understand.'

'You don't understand anything. Not a single thing. You don't even understand yourself.'

I could not interpret her meaning. I looked at her uncertainly. She reached under another pillow and took out a sheet of paper.

'This is a painting I did myself after returning from Japan. I'd like to give it to you as a wedding present.'

I took the picture and looked at it with interest. It was an oil-colour, depicting a stream flowing past the foot of a mountain which was densely covered with trees. On the other side of the stream was a small path which passed over an overhanging rock, parts of which were tall, parts uneven with rocks of different sizes, and where creeping plants and wild flowers of different colours grew in a line along the rock. Further down, on a large rock almost touching the water, sat two figures. The scene was depicted from a distance. In the bottom corner, written in small letters, was the word, "Mitaké".

I tried to fathom Mōm Rāṭchawong Kīrati's motive in giving me this

small thing.

'It's not very good, Nopphōn, but my heart and soul went into it, so it's a fitting wedding gift for you.' When I looked up and met her eyes, she asked, 'Do you remember, Nopphōn, what happened there?'

I recalled the incident at Mount Mitaké quite clearly, and I was beginning to vaguely understand what Mōm Rārchawong Kīrati meant.

'I fell in love there,' I replied.

'We fell in love, Nopphōn,' she said, closing her eyes. 'You fell in love there, and your love died there. But for another, love still flourishes in a wasted body.'

Tears trickled down from beneath her closed eyelids. Mōm Rārchawong Kīrati sat silently in exhaustion. I looked at that body with fondness and terrible grief.

A week later, Mōm Rārchawong Kīrati died. I was present in those last dark hours, together with all her friends and close relatives. Before the end, she asked for a pencil and paper. She wanted to say a last word to me, but her voice had gone, and all her strength. Thus it was, that on a piece of paper she wrote, 'I die with no one to love me, yet content that I have someone to love.'

APPENDIX B

THOSE KIND OF PEOPLE

by

'Sībūraphā'

First published, March 1950,
in 'Sayām Samai'.

Mōm Lūang Chōmchailai emerged from the house carrying a work of foreign literature and went over to the summer pavilion which stood in the garden, some distance away. She sat down by herself, opened the book, and began to read. It was afternoon and there was a pleasant breeze. The 'tāew' tree in front of the pavilion had shed all of its leaves and was a mass of pink blossom. Everywhere was calm, except that is, in this girl's heart, as she sat there reading. She seemed unable to concentrate on her book and kept looking up and gazing ahead, lost in thought, until the sound of a car engine starting broke her reverie. A large, ivory-coloured vehicle drove off from the house, with Čhao Khun and Khunying Sīsawat Bōribān seated inside. Chōmchailai put her book down and just sat there looking thoughtful.

Chōmchailai was nearly twenty and at an age when most people can think only about love. But despite her background, her beauty and her charm, she had had little chance for such thoughts. Seeing her parents sitting there in that smart car which had just left the house reminded her of the ever-present conflict that existed between her and them. Although it did not appear to be anything very big, Chōmchailai could not help feeling that it ran rather deep.

It had all started over her education. Čhao Khun Sīsawat was of the opinion that if you were a Thai and you had not been to study in America or England, you were really a nobody. So he had advised his daughter to go and further her studies in America. He had even

said that she did not have to study anything too demanding, and that if she went to America for two or three years, studied make-up, got some kind of diploma and came back speaking English, then that would be good enough. He had guessed that a girl like Chōmchailai would be excited at the mention of America, which had been getting a lot of good publicity, both from American films and all the nice things in the shops, and seize on his advice eagerly.

But Čhao Khun Sīsawat was astounded when his daughter refused on the grounds that she did not want to go and study in America, and that even if she had, it would not have been just for the sake of getting a piece of paper and learning to speak English. She wanted something more real. Chōmchailai pointed out to her father that there had been hundreds of Thais who had gone to study in America and England, but that she could not see that there had been any change or improvement in the lives of the majority of the people.

'What's this you're saying, Tiw?' (for that was her nickname) said Čhao Khun Sīsawat in surprise. 'You mean you can't see just how much our country has changed and progressed? We have beautiful buildings and magnificent roads, we have bright lighting all over, and there are luxurious cars on the roads. The progress is almost miraculous. When I was young, I never saw things like this.'

An argument developed between father and daughter when Chōmchailai asked who it was that enjoyed the fruits of this progress. In the

end, Čhao Khun Sīsawat had to admit the truth in what his daughter was saying - that just beyond the outskirts of the city, there were no signs of any development, nor were there any bright lights. She told him that if the aim of studying abroad was merely to enable the educated and others of the same class to enjoy themselves in their own tiny group, then she did not want to go. Čhao Khun Sīsawat tried to soothe her. 'You shouldn't go worrying too much about those kind of people,' he said, referring to the people who lived outside Bangkok, the poor, and all those people who were not of the same class as Čhao Khun himself. 'They've always lived like that. They're used to it and they don't really need any more.'

This kind of explanation made Chōmchailai increasingly more certain that there was something very wrong about the kind of ideas her father had expressed. Why was it that people such as those in her circles enjoyed one way of life, while those kind of people had a completely different one? The only explanation there seemed to be, was, 'Oh, they've always lived like that. They're happy with their lot.' Chōmchailai would secretly ask herself, half in doubt, half mockingly, 'Who says they're happy with their lot? Is it them? Or is it the people who want them to be happy with their lot who say it?'

Two weeks prior to this, Chōmchailai had gone to chat with the cook. She learned that one of the cook's children had been ill in bed for five or six days, so she asked the cook what she had done about treatment. 'The child's got a tummy-ache and a bit of a temperature,' the cook said. 'I've bought some medicine for the stomach, and in

a couple of days or so, it should have cleared up.'

'But you can't be sure,' said Chōmchailai. 'It might not be just a simple stomach-ache and fever. There's a typhoid epidemic at the moment. And if it's typhoid, that's really dangerous. You should get a doctor to come and see her, or else send her to the hospital. You don't seem very concerned. Anyone would think you didn't care about your child.'

The cook was choked. 'My goodness, what makes you think I don't love my child? It's just that there's no time to think about it because I'm tied down with housekeeping all day long. I don't know any doctor, anyway, and even if I did get one to come, I'd never be able to afford the cost of the medicine or his fees.'

The little girl who was ill was seven. She lay there with her eyes open, listening to her parents without understanding what they were talking about. She did not realise how seriously ill she was, and thought she would soon be fully recovered as her mother had said as she gently soothed her. She had no doubts about her mother's love and she thought her mother was one of the cleverest people in the world. Chōmchailai went and knelt down beside the child who lay on a mat in the rather untidy and stuffy room. Her lips were dry and her eyes looked drowsy. She was very hot. Chōmchailai asked how she was and then told the cook that she was going to send the child to hospital quickly. Then off she went to see her mother, Khunying, to tell her that the cook's child had been lying sick for five or six days without any visit from a doctor. She suspected it was typhoid, so she was going to arrange for the child to be sent

to hospital and so wondered if she could use the driver to take her by car.

'Tiw,' cried the shocked Khunying, 'you're forgetting yourself just a little bit too much. You want to ferry cook's scruffy little child in our car? Well, I'm afraid I just can't allow it. And your father wouldn't be very pleased, either.'

Chōmchailai pointed out that the circumstances were unusual and that it was a case of getting a sick child to hospital. But Khunying Sīsawat would not listen. 'That's all very well,' she said, 'but I just don't see that there's any need. In the old days when people were sick and had to go to hospital, they didn't go by car, did they? So how was it they could manage? Tiw, don't go getting involved with them too much. They'll only start forgetting themselves. And as for this illness business, they're used to it, and they have their own methods of treatment. After all, if they hadn't, they'd all be dead by now. Just look at the people up-country. They've never ever seen a doctor or a hospital, so how is it they manage to survive, generation after generation? And people like Yāi Khrām, our cook, are a hundred times luckier than those kind of people, because they've come to live in Bangkok among people of our sort. They get more than enough medicine and up-to-date advice for people of their class, and they certainly don't need any more. So, Tiw, you shouldn't go interfering and getting worked up about those kind of people.'

Chōmchailai remained silent and took leave of her mother quietly. Her mother thought that her daughter had been convinced by her reasoning, but in fact, Chōmchailai was feeling somewhat distressed.

She was used to hearing people talk about 'those kind of people' and say, 'they don't need anything more, they're happy with their lot,' and 'they've been living their own way for donkeys' years.' She had heard it from her father, from her mother and from all her relatives. But she knew perfectly well that it was not true that 'those kind of people' did not need anything more. She was fully aware that the cook loved and cared for her youngest child as much as her own mother did for her, or any mother of her class would for her child, and that the cook wanted her child to receive proper medical care from a doctor or the hospital. But it was just that she had to work too hard and she received too little money to be able to give her child good treatment. What her mother had said, showed that she believed that the fruits of progress were the monopoly of her own class. 'Those kind of people' had no right, nor should they dare to talk about or ask for a share in them. Chōmchailai wondered where such an idea had originally come from and how it had continued to survive. That day she quietly arranged for the gardener to help take the cook's child to hospital by samlor. While the child was in hospital, Chōmchailai went to visit her twice. The poor little girl lay sick there for about ten days and then died. She had typhoid.

The cook was grief-stricken. She cried at the loss of the daughter she loved, and lamented that she had accumulated insufficient merit. It never occurred to her that she had lost her daughter because of poverty. It was nobody's fault and nobody could do anything about it, just as it had been when her husband deserted her. She had been taught that what happened in life rested entirely

upon fate and Heaven and Earth. Chōmchailai suspected that if that little girl had been her younger sister and her mother had been concerned and sent her to hospital right at the beginning, then the child might not have died. Perhaps Heaven and Earth would not have demanded that little girl's life.

These events made a deep impression on Chōmchailai and she could not help brooding over them. Chao Khun and Khunying Sīawat just could not understand that their attitude to life and that of their daughter, were worlds apart. They both tried to persuade and sometimes even forced Chōmchailai to mingle as much as possible among people of her own class with a view to finding a suitable future partner. Chōmchailai understood perfectly well what her parents had in mind, but at the same time she felt that her tastes were very different from the young men in those circles. She could not understand why they frittered away their lives, nor their idea that people who did so little work and had such an easy life should have the right to an overwhelming abundance of happiness to which their own lives gave proof.

Chōmchailai's spirits lifted when she met Bao, the son of their driver, Chū'n. Bao was nineteen and lived with his father at her house. He had had his elementary schooling at a nearby temple school and had then gone on to a private school. After finishing sixth grade, he had gone on to study about construction at a vocational school and would finish his course the following year. Chōmchailai enjoyed seeing Bao, because she felt there was more to him than the other young men in her own social circles. She noticed that his knowledge

and ideas went far beyond what might be expected from someone who had such a casual education as his. Bao told her that he usually spent his holidays reading books in a public library, and since he was a member of that library, he would borrow books to take home and read at night. When he was at the private school, his father had told him to pay attention to his studies, because he himself had not done so sufficiently when he was young and had ended up as a driver. Bao heeded his father's advice and had set his mind to his studies and read widely as he grew older. He knew that being a driver or doing other jobs where you used physical strength, were not lowly occupations and people who were employed in jobs that demanded physical labour, were not necessarily unable to improve their position, or without a chance of gaining the admiration and respect of the people. He had learned from books that the majority of people in Europe and America worked in factories, and he was proud of the fact that his father was a driver, a job which required some knowledge of engines and machines. He knew that workers in foreign countries had the opportunity to work their way up to a higher position by using their free time to study at evening institutes or at night classes. Or alternatively, they could seek knowledge from libraries. The people who occupied the top positions in foreign governments, right up to the level of Prime minister, included many, who, like his father, were from the working classes. Thus, he did not feel in the least bit discouraged that his father did not have the money to send him to university, even though it put him at a disadvantage compared with those of his own age who were fortunate enough to go.

'But knowledge all comes from books,' Bao would say confidently. 'If we really want it, it can't escape us. But if we don't really want it, then we won't get it, that's for sure, even if we do go and study at university.'

Chōmchailai thought that she and Bao could have become good friends if only he were from the same class as her. But since he was not, it was almost as if there was a barrier between them, and that the most she could do was to talk with him across this barrier. She could get no closer to him than this, and even this would draw disapproving looks from her parents. How had this barrier come about? Who had set it up? And was it right, or of any use to the people if it continued to exist. Chōmchailai thought that without such a barrier they would have got on well together.

Just as Chōmchailai picked up her book again and began to read, she noticed someone coming over towards her, carrying a large case. 'Goodness, it's you, Bao,' she called out in greeting, as the man drew near. 'You're all dressed up like a government official. Are you off on an inspection tour somewhere?'

In fact Bao did indeed look as if he was going on a long journey. He stood outside the pavilion, waiting until Chomchailai invited him in, and then went and sat down in a chair opposite her. As he sat there, Chōmchailai noticed the serious look in his eyes. She realised that there must be some special significance in him coming to see her dressed like that and carrying a large case.

'Where are you going, Bao?'

'I ... I thought I'd come and say goodbye,' he said with difficulty.

'Are you going up-country or on holiday somewhere?'

'No, not at all. I ... I just want to leave this house. I'm moving away.'

Chōmchailai sat silent with shock. She wondered what had made him decide to leave the house. And at the same time, she felt that if he left, it would mean losing a friend whom she thought she could get on better with than most.

'I didn't want to tell you,' he said, his head bowed. When he looked up again, he was more composed. 'My father said that Čhao Khun isn't very happy about my continued residence in this house,' he said. 'My crime is that I'm from a different class to his daughter, and he thinks it's sinful for his daughter to talk with the likes of me.'

'I know what my father thinks,' said Chōmchailai quietly. 'It's something I totally disagree with. Ever since I was old enough to think, he referred to you as 'those kind of people', and between his world and 'those kind of people', there stands a huge barrier. But I think that one day that barrier will disappear and the two groups will be able to mix freely and become one and the same group.'

'The barrier won't just disappear like that,' said Bao solemnly. 'Not until 'those kind of people' destroy it, and we all work together to build bridges, roads, houses, hospitals and schools which we can all use.'

'And not just people like my father,' Chōmchailai added. 'I'm really ever so sorry, Bao, that you have to go because of what my father thinks, which is something I utterly disagree with anyway.'

'But I'm not a bit sorry,' said Bao. 'Your words have given me greater strength to study, so that one day I might prove whether you are right or not.' Bao rose and said goodbye to Chōmchailai with a respectful 'wai'.

'What do you want to be in the future, Bao?' she asked.

'If I can, I want to be an engineer,' he replied gently, but with a hint of seriousness in his voice. 'I want to build whatever I can. But of course, before we can build, we may first have to tear down some things, or perhaps even many things. Otherwise it might be impossible to build.'

Chōmchailai watched him go. He was a well-proportioned young man and walked with a firm and resolute step. He reminded her of a warrior on the battlefield. The thought flashed through her mind that one day she might choose a warrior from 'those kind of people' to be her husband. She wanted a part in tearing down that massive barrier.

HE'S WAKING UP

by

'Sībūraphā'

First published, October 1952,
in 'Piyamit'

The row of huts stood on slimy, muddy ground. A large, smart saloon car pulled up in front. The gentleman who owned the vehicle had some business to attend to in the little soi at the side of the row of huts, but since his vehicle was a little too big to go down the soi, he had parked it there and got out and walked, leaving his pretty wife alone in the car. After about ten minutes he returned to find his wife sitting slumped over in the car, breathing softly and with a bottle of ammonia in her hand. His face paled in alarm as he thought that his wife had been mugged.

'If you'd been too long, I would have been completely unconscious in the car,' the lady moaned.

'Which way did they go?' he asked immediately, at the same time patting the back pocket of his trousers as if checking a weapon.

'Who?' his wife asked, also beginning to look anxious.

'The swines who mugged you.'

The lady gradually recovered as she began to see the funny side.

'Whatever made you think that? No one's mugged me.'

'Oh. So what's the matter, then?'

'It's the smell of all that slime under those filthy huts.

Get in quickly. It's making me dizzy. I don't know how these people can live here.'

The large, smart saloon car disappeared in an instant.

'How can these people live here?' That is what everyone says. But few people ask why it is they have to come and live like this.

Is it they themselves, or who, that makes them have to live this way?

Am and Nim, a young married couple, have been living in a dirty hut over a slimy swamp for eight years now, since war-time, without ever using or even knowing about ammonia. They are used to the smell of the slime which they have had to inhale for the last eight years, to the extent that they scarcely notice any difference from the smell of clean water in the canals and dykes. They are so used to it, that it is a part of their lives.

In front of their hut, and all along the front of the others, there is slimy mud. It has been like this every rainy season for many years and they are used to it. It is a part of their lives. Inside the cramped and tumble-down hut are five people, a samlor, bedding and the bare necessities of clothing, piled up against the walls, with two wooden crates for putting all the odds and ends and property essential to the lives of those five people. It looks as if they are all just travellers moving on from one place to the next, and this, merely a temporary refuge. Looked at this way, Am has been travelling and stopping off for twelve years and he never dreams that his life of travelling might end before he dies.

When all the members of the family are together, at daybreak and dusk, and with the samlor taking up a quarter of the space, it is rather cramped inside, resembling rather a temporary refuge from danger than a permanent residence. In fact, the day-to-day life of Am and his family is like a flight from danger. Every day he has to face danger, simply in order to survive from one day to the

next. Frequently he is disheartened at the thought of where the day's food is going to come from and what he is going to do about little Tum, his youngest, who has been lying feverish for three days and where the money is going to come from to buy old woollen blankets for the two children when the cold season comes this year. These are minor threats; from time to time there are even greater ones which affect his life.

On one occasion, a typhoon struck Bangkok. People called it 'Typhoon Songkrān'. The roar of the hurricane was terrifying as it howled through the trees and leaves. Dust and rubbish from the street were blown into their room, as if it had been poured in there by a machine. The room shook as if it were being rocked by an earthquake. The two children ran and clung to their mother and grandmother in fright as the two women rushed to close the doors and gather up their worthless possessions. Mother and children went and sat huddled in a corner of the hut, but Grandmother meanwhile lit a candle and prayed that the gods and heaven and earth would protect them. There was a crack of thunder over the roof and everyone shrieked and closed their eyes. When they opened them again, they all saw light from above pouring down into the room. Grandmother was happy, thinking it was some miraculous power from on high, revealing its might before their very eyes. When they looked up, however, they realised the storm had blown some of the tiles off the roof, leaving a large, gaping hole!

Yes, it is the landlord's duty to see to repairs. But in times when everyone is looking for a home to rest their heads and when rented huts the size of a garage or a stable are extremely difficult

to find, proper regulations get temporarily shelved. Thus the landlord's reaction was, if they wanted to stay there, they could repair it themselves, and if they did not like it, they could find somewhere else. It was difficult to see anything that Am and Nim did like, but moving would have been a hundred times more difficult. So Am just had to put up with the burden of repairing it himself. He had to take a day off work and run around borrowing money from friends to buy the materials for the repairs, and then carry them out himself. To some of you, this may seem a trifling matter; but for him, earning only enough to live from one day to the next, and with a family of five to support, it was a considerable burden.

Another major threat loomed. While he was helping a neighbour to carry some things, someone carelessly threw a jerry can, striking his foot. The corner of the can cut his foot opening up a small wound. If he or his friends had known the correct way of treating it, it would have remained just a small wound which would have healed within two or three days. But because he did not know, it took a long time and he had to endure even more pain than that caused by a bullet wound. In the beginning he put a kind of beeswax on it, which was used for treating various conditions ranging from insect stings to cholera. He applied it to the wound and then went out on his samlor as usual. After that, the wound festered and the infection spread, so he covered it with a dressing on the advice of a neighbour and remained at home. For half a month he was unable to go out to work, until a kind gentleman in the street learned of this and gave him some sulphur ointment. The wound gradually healed until he was able to ride the samlor again as before. How his family

had to struggle to survive from day to day when he was unable to go out to work filled one with pity. It was like when we catch a fish and put it down on the ground and it struggles to the very last ounce of its strength to find a way, any way it can, back to the water. That was how they struggled.

'Struggle until the scales go dry,' Am used to say to his friends.

As he limped around, worrying about how he was going to repay the debts he had accumulated while he had been off work, an evil thought flashed through his mind. In his mind, he saw the image of an individual in army uniform, lying in wait and holding people up in lonely spots. It was one quick way of paying off his debts. He could not see any other. But a moment later, the long life of honesty he had lived in the past appeared shining brightly before him. He shook his head decisively two or three times and the image of the fearsome man with a ruthless expression on his face and a weapon in his hand, standing hidden in a dark and lonely spot, disappeared, never to return. 'Amen', he cried, raising his hands above his head. On the first day that he was able to walk properly, he pulled his vehicle out of the garage, or rather his bedroom. When he placed his feet on the pedals and leaned forward, putting his full weight on the soles of his feet, he felt a tingling sensation all over.

'Oh, these old legs of mine, they're my life,' he reflected with delight, as if the thought had never occurred to him before.

'Oh, these old hands of mine, right here on these handlebars of steel. These old hands of mine, calloused and hard, they're my

life, the base on which my life and my wife and children's are built. These old things, right here.'

That afternoon, his son and daughter, who were between five and seven years old, were running in and out of the hut. Sometimes they would stand on the patio in front of the door, and shielding their eyes, peer up the street in the direction their father came when he returned from work. Grandmother came out and picked morning glory from the ditch opposite despite the glare of the sun. Mother was busy with something in the kitchen and the two children could be heard grumbling and wondering when their father would be back. Then they would take their scruffy little selves back into the kitchen, only to be shooed away again because of their incessant stream of questions which their mother could not answer. Then they would run back out to the front of the house and stare out in the same direction, grumbling and confiding in each other until they got fed up and went back inside.

The familiar sound of a bell rang out in front of their home, and the two children raced out, almost falling over and getting themselves covered in mud at the front of the hut. Once Am was standing on the patio at the front, the two children surrounded him, begging for sweets and asking all sorts of questions. He gave them a small packet of sweets and with a sooty cloth, wiped the sweat which was running down his face and hands like raindrops. He walked straight into the kitchen without answering the children's questions, and they forgot for a moment what they had been asking as they were engrossed in sharing out the sweets.

'Why are you late?' Nim greeted him. 'The children have been

waiting and grumbling a lot. They were worried they wouldn't be going to Sanam Luang.'

That afternoon, there was to be an official presentation of military hardware which America had sent to the Thai government. They had made announcements inviting the people to go and view the new weapons and it had also been announced that there would be monks blessing the weapons of destruction so that they might be successful and victorious. When the children heard the news they had begged their father to take them. As he had not taken them anywhere for several months, he gave in to their pleas and agreed to take them in the afternoon. Thus it was, that they had been waiting eagerly for their father since before mid-day.

'Have you had lunch yet?' his wife asked.

'Not yet. I'm absolutely starving.' He went over to the rice pot, scooped some rice out onto a heavily scratched tin plate and then sat down in the middle of the room while his wife went to the pantry. She took out a dish of 'nam prik' left over from breakfast and some salted fish of which only the heads remained. When Grandmother came in with some fresh morning glory, he rubbed his hands with delight.

As he ate, Am told Nim why he was late home. He told her that near mid-day he had parked his samlor in the shade near Khlong Lort. There were dozens of samlor drivers from the North-East taking a break there. They were talking in groups about the famine which their brothers in the North-East were suffering and which they themselves were all too familiar with. One of them suggested that each of them ought to make a small contribution and their collection be sent to

a newspaper, which could arrange for it to be distributed to their fellow North-Easterners up there. Someone interrupted. 'We bloody well don't have enough to live on from one day to the next,' he said. 'So how are you going to go helping others. if you're not careful, you'll end up a communist.' Someone else supported him. 'How much blood can you get out of a crab?' he demanded. 'It's better to let the rich help them. We shouldn't go getting involved. It'll get political and there'll be a right bloody mess.'

At that moment a fourth young man exploded. 'What the hell's it got to do with politics?' he demanded. 'It's about helping our starving brothers. But if that's what you're going to call politics, then I'm all for it! A nice bloody mess, I call it, if we don't help. All we're talking about is helping - why should that get us into a bloody mess? And if that's what you call a bloody mess, then a bloody mess is alright by me. And you, whoever it was, who just said, wait and let the rich people help our brothers - have you ever seen them ever once stretch out a hand to help us? Just take us, working here in Bangkok. Have you ever seen your rich people and your gentry give us any help? All they do is drive us away, don't they?

'When we were still living with our parents and grandparents, working in the ricefields, the rich made money and rice available for us to borrow. Did they ever help us? When you fell upon hard times, when you had no rice to eat or grow, and they gave you rice, did they do it because they loved you? And when you had rice, how much of it did they take away? How many times their original loan was it? Don't you see? And you've still got the nerve to say, wait for the rich to help us!

'We sweat and toil away in the scorching sun, wading through mud in the middle of the paddy-fields, exhausted almost to the point of dropping. The rice ripens and then do you know where it disappears to, and where all the money goes, and why we have to live on the breadline? I'm not clever enough to tell you how it disappears, but one thing I do know for sure, is that our rice or our fruit can't just disappear into thin air. And I'd say it flows into the hands of those people that you dream are going to help us. My God! You leave your parents, you leave the rice fields, none of you for very long, and then you just go and forget all about the past.'

Am told how there had been complete silence when the grave young man, who had spoken so earnestly, finished. Not a voice was raised in dissent, either from the first man or any of the others. After that voices murmured in discussion. While there was still some hesitancy, the first speaker spoke up once again and three or four people supported him. Eventually it was agreed that they would each contribute a baht or two and then they all marched off together to a newspaper office at Sao Ching Cha.

'I put in a couple of baht, too,' Am told Nim. 'When I came out of the newspaper office, I felt different from the old Am. All my life, I never dreamed I would be of any use to anyone. But now I've become someone capable of helping my brothers in the North-East with my own legs and my own arms.' When he came out of the printers, Am had intended to return home, but just then, a man hailed his samlor and asked him to take him across to the Thonburi side of the river. Am's passenger asked if he had been to the newspaper offices to complain about something. Am told him the story, and the man had

murmured, 'That's the people. That's what you call the power of the people.' Am had not really understood what he meant. 'I felt really pleased,' he continued, 'to be of some use, but I was discouraged too, at how few of our brothers in the North-East the small amount of money we collected will be able to help.'

The man told Am that the Peace Committee and some newspapers had for the first consignment collected 50,000 baht and several thousand garments amounting to a total value of 100,000 baht. The man told him that most of the money and other contributions had come not from wealthy and prominent people, but from the ordinary man in the street who stood on buses and trams and lived in a small home; they had come mainly from labourers or poor workers, from young people, women, clerks, employees, from ordinary people, both Thai and Chinese, from what the man had summed up as 'the people'.

What the man said was all new to Am. Gazing at the morning glory shoots in his hand, he said to his wife, 'They're like the morning glory I'm holding here, which Mother gathered from the canals, which grow everywhere. That's what the people are. It was like a dream, Nim, when he said that the money and things for helping our brothers in the North-East amounting to 100,000 baht came from poor people, ordinary people like you and me and not from the rich and powerful at all. People like me and you; what they call ordinary working people; the ones who create everything. I've just come to understand about the people and I'll remember it to my dying day. It's given me strength. It makes people like you, like me, like the kids, human beings of worth. And worth more, that man said, than

the rich who just scoop up the rice from our fields.'

As Am took the plates over to wash, the two children who had come to listen for a while, surrounded him and cried, 'When are you going to take us to see the weapons at Sanam Luang, Daddy?'

Am did not answer. When he had finished washing the plates and his hands, he wiped his mouth and hands on the edge of the 'phakhaoma' he was wearing. The children repeated their question. As Nim helped to clear away, he asked his wife, 'Do you want me to take you and the children to see them showing off weapons for killing innocent people?'

Nim turned and looked at her husband in wonder.

'I don't want to see my children getting enjoyment out of weapons that are used for killing people. I saw the picture in the newspaper of those Koreans who were blown up by petrol bombs. I was horrified. That picture really shocked me with the cruelty of war. It made me hate war. I don't want to see a show of force in support of war. I'd like to see a show of force in support of peace.'

'That's not your business,' Nim argued. 'It's the government's.'

'You misunderstand. People like you and me have misunderstood for a long time. I've realised now, that everything is the people's business. If the people want peace, the people can choose it. And are people like you and me going to go choosing a blasted war?'

'Where did you get these ideas from?'

'That man.'

'Am, you shouldn't go repeating his words like a parrot.'

'I am repeating his words, that's true. But now I'm speaking with my own consciousness, because what he said was true,' Am said seriously.

'Just look at this business about helping our brothers in the North-East. When the people combine their forces to help, even though they are poor, they can still provide enormous aid. The man said that when there were floods in the North the people had mobilized themselves to help. This was another example of the success of people power. So I believe that the power of Samson really does lie in the people, people like you and me.'

'And are you going to take the children to see the foreign weapons at Sanam Luang?' Nim asked in conclusion.

'He told me that it was the government's spending of the people's money, merely in preparing for war, which had brought hardship to the people to the extent that you can see at present. If our country is really dragged into the war, it will be hell for the poor. Even in normal times they can't solve the many hardships of the people. In time of war, the people would undoubtedly be ignored. I would be drafted to fight, not knowing whether I was going to fight to preserve the old hardships or what. As for you and the kids, you'd starve after that or get robbed or buried alive under a heap of bombs.'

Am shook his head. 'Let's not go enjoying ourselves looking at those bloody weapons,' he said in a loud voice. 'Let's not show interest in their preparations for war. Let's you and I join the Peaceniks and help restore peace so that the people can live in peace and contentment.'

He turned and called his two children. 'Come on, little 'uns. Get yourselves ready. I'm taking you to Khao Din to see the animals and feed them.'

APPENDIX C

A list of Kulāp Sāipradit's better-known novels and short stories

- 1924 Khon sawāt bāt čhit ('novel')
- 1926 Arai kan ('short story')
- 1928 Lūk phūchāi ('novel')
- Prāp phayot ('novel')
- Hūa čhai prātthanā ('novel')
- Lōk sanniwāt ('novel')
- Mān manut ('novel')
- 1929 Len kap fai ('short story')
- 1930 Amnāt čhai ('novel')
- Sāen rak sāen khāen ('novel')
- 1931 Khrai čha pen khon fang ('short story')
- 1932 Songkhram čhīwit ('novel')
- 1933 Lā kōn ratthathammanūn ('short story')
- 1934 Phačhon bāp ('novel')
- Tham ngān tham ngōen(?) ('short story')
- Khwām rak khōng putuchon (?) ('short story')
- Phū thī mā čhak lōk bōrisut(?) ('short story')
- Khū'n thī lū'm mai dai (?) ('short story')
- Phū'an tāng phēt (?) ('short story')
- Tai hon rāek (?) ('short story')
- 1935 Thāengthōng ('short story')
- Khāng khū'n khāng rāem ('short story')
- 1937 Khāng lang phāp ('novel')
- Kōn tāeng ngān ('short story')
- 1938 Nōp ('short story')
- 1939 Sing thī čhīwit tōngkān ('novel')
- Pā nai čhīwit ('novel')
- 1941 Nāng māew kap sārīkā ('short story')
- 1942 Suntharī ('short story')

- 1948 Māe yōt yupphadī ('short story')
- 1949 Kae thī phlat fūng ('short story')
 Nak bun čnāk chāntan ('short story')
 Mahāburut khōng čhantimā ('short story')
 Khao lū'ak lāmbārenē nai sayām ('short story')
 Klap mā hā māe ('short story')
 Yī yūan wā wē ('short story')
- 1950 Čhon kwā rao čha phop kan īk ('novel')
 Khon phūāk nan ('short story')
 Kham khān rap ('short story')
 Khō rāeng nōi thoe ('short story')
 Ai nū long thāng ('short story')
- 1951 Prakāi mai nai dūangtā khōng khao ('short story')
- 1952 Lung phrāhm hāeng kō lōi ('short story')
 Khao tū'n ('short story')
- 1955 Lāe pai khāng nā (phāk pathomwai) ('novel')
- 1957 Lāe pai khāng nā (phāk matchimmawai) ('novel')
- Other works undated: Sīa khwan sīa khon ('short story')
 Āhān hāeng chīwit ('short story')
 Khon khit ('short story')

NOTE

1. The above list is compiled from Rungwit's list in Rungwit, 1979a. op. cit., pp. 100-105. It is by no means complete.
2. The terms 'novel' and 'short story' are used to translate the Thai words nawaniyāi and ru'ang san respectively. In fact Amnāt čhai, listed as a 'novel', is considerably shorter than Tham ngān tham ngōen which Rungwit describes as a 'short story'.
3. Dating works is nazardous. Generally, dates given refer in the case of novels to the first appearance as a single volume; thus Phačhon bāp was serialised in 1929 but did not appear as a single volume until five years later. An exception is Lāe pai khāng nā (phāk matchimmawai) which was serialised in 1957 but did not appear as a single volume until 1973. Titles of works followed by (?) indicate that the work appeared at an unknown date prior to the year specified.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

A. WESTERN LANGUAGE SOURCES

- Akagi Osamu. 1978. Research Note and Data on 'Pocketbook' Publication in Thailand, 1973-1976. South-East Asian Studies 16,3: 473-523.
- Anderson, B.R.O'G. 1977. Withdrawal Symptoms: Social and Cultural Aspects of the October 6 Coup. Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars 9,3: 13-30.
- Anderson, B.R.O'G. and Ruchira Mendiones. 1985. In the Mirror: Literature and Politics in Siam in the American Era. Bangkok: Duang Kamon.
- Barmé, S. 1982. The Novels of Kulap Saipradit(?). Unpublished undergraduate dissertation, Australian National University.
- Batson, B.A. 1974. The Fall of the Phibun Government, 1944. Journal of the Siam Society 62,2: 89-120.
- Batson, B.A. 1981. Kulap Saipradit and the 'War of Life'. Journal of the Siam Society 69: 58-73.
- Batson, B.A. 1984. The End of the Absolute Monarchy in Siam. Singapore: Oxford University Press.
- Charnvit Kasetsiri. 1974. The First Phibun Government and its Involvement in World War II. Journal of the Siam Society 62,2: 25-88.
- Chetana Nagavajara. 1985. Literary Historiography and Socio-Cultural Transformations: The Case of Thailand. Journal of the Siam Society 73,1&2: 60-76.
- Claudin, F. 1975. The Communist Movement: From Comintern to Cominform. Peregrine Books. Harmondsworth, Middlesex.
- Davidson, J.H.C.S. and Cordell, H. (eds.). 1982. The Short Story in South-East Asia. London: S.O.A.S.
- de Fels, J. 1975. Popular Literature in Thailand. Journal of the Siam Society 63: 219-33.
- Dostoyevsky, F. 1969. Poor Folk; The Gambler. London: Everyman's Library.
- Flood, E.T. 1967. Japan's Relations with Thailand: 1928-41. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Washington.
- Flood, E.T. 1975. The Thai Left Wing in Historical Context. Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars 7,2: 55-67.
- Flood, E.T. 1977. Jit Phumisak: Profile of a Revolutionary Intellectual. Indochina Chronicle 54: 12-14.

- Glockner, U. 1967. Literatursoziologische Untersuchung des Thailandischen Romans im XX Jahrhundert. Freiburg.
- Kwandeek Rakpongse. 1975. A Study of the Novels of Mōm Lūang Bupphā Nimmān-nēminda (pseud. Dōkmaisot). Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of London.
- Lovelace, D.D. 1971. China and 'People's War' in Thailand, 1964-1969. University of California, Berkeley: China Research Monographs no.8.
- Manas Chitakasem. 1982. The Development of Political and Social Consciousness in Thai Short Stories. In J.H.C.S. Davidson and H. Cordell (eds.) The Short Story in South-East Asia. London:S.O.A.S. 63-99.
- Mattani Rutnin. 1978. Modern Thai Literature: the process of modernization and the transformation of values. East Asian Cultural Studies 17, 1-4.
- Morell, D. and Chai-anan Samudavanija. 1981. Political Conflict in Thailand. Cambridge, Massachusetts:Oelgeschlager, Gunn and Hain.
- Mulder, N. 1978. Everyday Life in Thailand:an interpretation. Bangkok:Duang Kamol.
- Mulder, N. 1983. Individual and Society in Contemporary Thailand and Java:An Anthropologist's Comparison of Modern Serious Fiction. Journal of South-East Asian Studies 14,2: 312-27.
- Phillips, H.P. 1975. The Culture of Siamese Intellectuals. In G.W. Skinner and A.T. Kirsch (eds.) Change and Persistence in Thai Society. Cornell. 224-257.
- Reynolds, C.J. and Hong Lysa. 1983. Marxism in Thai Historical Studies. Journal of Asian Studies XLIII,1: 77-104.
- Reynolds, C.J. 1986. The Author-Function and Thai History. Asian Studies Association of Australia Review. 10,1: 22-28.
- Rosenberg, K. 1981. Social Criticism in the Literary Work of Sībūraphā. (Paper read at the First International Conference on Thai Studies, New Delhi, 1981).
- Rosenberg, K. 1986. Sozialkritische Literatur in Thailand. Hamburg.
- Shirk, P. 1969. Thai-Soviet Relations. Asian Survey 9,9: 682-93.
- Simmonds, E.H.S. 1964. Some Aspects of Narrative Prose Fiction in Thai. In Proceedings of the Twenty-fifth(1960) Congress of Orientalists. Moscow. 4: 337-343.

- Skinner, G.W. and Kirsch, A.T. (eds.). 1975. Change and Persistence in Thai Society. Cornell.
- Smyth, D.A. 1984. Sībūraphā and some ups and downs in a literary career. (Paper read at the Second International Conference on Thai Studies, Bangkok, 1984.)
- Sulak Sivaraksa. 1970. The Role of Siamese Intellectuals. Sangkomsat parithat (Social Science Review) 8,2: 64-66.
- Thak Chaloehtiarana. 1979. Thailand: The Politics of Despotic Paternalism. Bangkok: Social Science Association of Thailand and Thai Khadi Institute, Thammasat University.
- Weatherbee, D. 1970. The United Front in Thailand. University of South Carolina, Columbia.
- Wibha Senanan. 1975. The Genesis of the Novel in Thailand. Bangkok: Thai Watana Panich.
- Wyatt, D.K. 1982. Thailand: A Short History. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Yuangrat (Pattanapongse) Wedel. 1982. Modern Thai Radical Thought: The Siamization of Marxism and its Theoretical Problems. Bangkok: Thai Khadi Research Institute, Thammasat University, Research Series No. 4.
- Yuangrat Wedel. 1983. The Thai Radicals and the Communist Party. Maruzen Asia. SEAS Occasional Paper no. 72.

B. THAI LANGUAGE SOURCES

- M.L. Bunlū'a Thēpyasuwan. 1971. Hūa liēo khōng wannakhadī thai (The turning point in Thai literature). In Wanwaitthayākōn chabap wannakhadī (Essays in honour of Prince Wan Waitthayakōn: Literature). Bangkok: Khrōngsān tamrā sangkhomsāt lae manutsayasāt. 55-157.
- M.L. Bunlū'a Thēpyasuwan. 1974. Wikhrō rot wannakhadī thai (Analysis of Thai literature). Bangkok: Khrōngkan tamrā sangkhomsāt lae manutsayasāt.
- Chai-anan and Chaisiri Samutwānit. 1973. Wannakam kān mū'ang khōng thai (Thai political literature). Sangkomsāt parithat (Social Science Review) 11,7: 73-8.

- Chaisiri Samutwanit. 1981. Wannakam k̄an mū'ang thai 14 tulā 16 -6 tulā 19 (Thai political literature, 14th Oct. '73 - 6th Oct. '76). Bangkok: Sāngsan.
- Chaiwat Thōettham. 1982. 'Lāe pai khāng nā': tō Sukanyā Hāntrakūn ('Lāe pai knāng nā': a response to Sukanyā Hāntrakūn). Lōk nangsu' (Book World) 6,3: 64-70.
- Chit Wētchprasit. 1985. Khabot santiphāp. In Ramlu'k thu'ng Sībūraphā... Bangkok: Santitham. 14-21.
- Chun Praphāiwat. 1978. Kulāp Sāipradit kap khana nak praphan klum Suphāpburut (Kulāp Sāipradit and the Suphāpburut Group of writers). Lōk nangsu' (Book World) 2,2: 72-80.
- Charat Rotčhanāwan (ed.). 1974. Chīwit k̄an tō sū khōng Kulāp Sāipradit (Kulāp Sāipradit's life of struggle). Bangkok: Klum phōey phrāe satčnatnam.
- Chū'a Satawēthin. 1974. Prawat nawaniyāi thai. (History of the Thai novel). Bangkok: Sutthisān k̄an phim.
- Ēmōn Niranrāt. 1979. Thatsana thāng sangkhom tnaī samai ratcnakān thī 7: phitčhāranā čnāk Dōkmaisot, Sībūraphā, P. Intharapālit lae Yot Watcharasathīan (Attitudes to Thai society in the seventh reign: a consideration from (the works of) Dōkmaisot, Sībūraphā, P. Intharapālit lae Yot Watcharasathīan). Lōk nangsu' (Book World) 3,2: 44-53.
- Fak na Songkhilā. 1985. Dāe khun Kulāp Sāipradit (To Khun Kulāp Sāipradit). In Ramlu'k thu'ng Sībūraphā... Bangkok: Santitham. 53-60.
- 'Intharayut'. 1979. Khō khit čhāk wannakhadī (Ideas from literature). Bangkok: Rungrū'angsin.
- Krom Sinlapākōn (Department of Fine Arts). 1977. Prawat nak khīan thai (Biographies of Thai writers). Bangkok: Krasūang su'ksāthikān.
- Krom Sinlapākōn (Department of Fine Arts). 1982. Sinlapa watthanatham thai lem 2: phāsā lae wannakhadī krung rattanakōsin (Thai Culture volume 2: language and literature of the Ratthanakōsin dynasty). Bangkok.
- Kulāp Sāipradit. 1949. Bannaphiphop khōng rao (Our literary world) In 'Ing-ōn' Rūam niyāi rak (Collected romantic stories) Bangkok. 1110-1123.
- Kulāp Sāipradit. 1975. Bū'ang lang k̄an patiwat 2475 (Background to the 1932 Revolution). Bangkok: Būraphā daēng.
- Kulāp Sāipradit. 1979. Adit thī pen botriān (The past which is a lesson). Bangkok: Klum sāengthīan.

- Nasini Withūthirasān. 1976. Wikhro wannakam nāeo prachāchon (Analysis of people's literature). Bangkok:Krungsayām wannakam.
- P. Watcharāphōn. 1963. Thamniap nak praphan (A manual of writers). Bangkok:Pnadungsu'ksā.
- P. Watcharāphōn. 1966. Chomrom nak khāian (Writers' club). Bangkok: Rūānsān.
- P. Watcharāphōn. 1973. Prawat nak praphan (Biographies of writers). Bangkok:Phrāe phitthayā.
- Prathip Mū'annin. 1976. Wannakam thai patchuban (Contemporary Thai literature). Bangkok:Sānsayām.
- 'P(hō). Mū'angchomphū'. 1979. Dū wannakhadī čhāk sangkhom, dū sangkhom čhāk wannakhadī (Looking at literature from society, looking at society from literature). In 'Intharayut', Khō khīt čhāk wannakhadī (Ideas from literature). Bangkok:Rungrū'angsin. 232-72.
- Phailin Rungrat. 1979. Čhāk 'Rak khōng phū yāk rai' khōng Dōstōyefskī thu'ng 'Songkhram chīwit' khōng Sībūraphā (From Dostoevsky's 'Poor People' to Sībūraphā's 'War of Life'). Lōk nangsu' (Book World) 2,7: 61-69.
- Phaisān Mālāphan. 1985. Sībūraphā:āchayakōn phū plōi nok phirāp (Sībūraphā: a criminal releasing doves). In Ramlu'k thu'ng Sībūraphā... Bangkok: Santitham. 128-88.
- Phōnphirom Iamtham. 1977. Botbāt thāng kām mū'ang khōng nangsu' phim thai 2475-2488 (The political role of Thai newspapers, 1932-45). Bangkok:Thai wattnanā phānit.
- Ramlu'k thu'ng Sībūraphā dōi phū'an ruām khuk 2495 lae sahatammik. (In memory of Sībūraphā by fellow prisoners 1952-57 and comrades). 1985. Bangkok:santitham.
- Rančhūān Intharakam_nāeng. 1965. Phāp chīwit čhāk nawaniyāi (Portraits of lives from novels). Bangkok:Phrāe phitthayā.
- Rančhūān Intharakamnaēng. 1975. Wannakam wičnan (Literary criticism) vols. I & II. Bangkok: Duāng Kamon.
- Rungwit Suwannaphichon. 1974. Kulāp Sāipradit:nak praphan thī thūk sāeng lū'm (Kulāp Sāipradit: a neglected writer) In Charat Rotčanāwan (ed.). Chīwit kām tō sū khōng Kulāp Sāipradit. Bangkok:Klum phōey phrāe satčhatham. 1-39.
- Rungwit Suwannaphichon. 1979a. Sībūraphā:sī haeng wannakam tnai (Sībūraphā:jewel of Tnai literature). Bangkok:Phāsikō.
- Rungwit Suwannaphichon. 1979b. Wannakam nāeo mai (The new literature). Bangkok:Chomrom naksu'ksā īsan mahāwitthayālai thammasāt.

- Sathian Čhanthimathōn. 1974. Khon khian nangsu' (Writers). Bangkok: Praphansān.
- Satnīan Čhanthimathōn. 1976. Nōn nangsu' (Bookworm). Bangkok: Khamphī.
- Sathian Čhanthimathōn. 1979. Kulāp Sāipradit. In Sībūraphā. Rūam rū'ang san rap chai chīwit khōng Sībūraphā. Bangkok: Panchā. 29-39.
- Sathian Čhanthimathōn. 1981. Sāithān wannakam phū'a chīwit khōng thai (The Thai stream of literature for life). Bangkok: Samnak sinlapa wattanatham.
- 'Sībūraphā'. 1938. Khāng lang phāp (Behind the painting). Bangkok: Nai thēppricnā.
- 'Sībūraphā'. 1949. Songkhram chīwit (The war of life). Bangkok: Suphāpburut.
- 'Sībūraphā'. 1954. Lūk phūchāi (A real man). Bangkok: Phrāēphitthayā.
- 'Sībūraphā'. 1955. Lāe pai khāng nā (Look forward). Bangkok: Suphāpburut.
- 'Sībūraphā'. 1967a. Lūk phūchāi (A real man). Bangkok: Phadungsu'ksā.
- 'Sībūraphā'. 1967b. Mān Manut (An evil man). Bangkok: Phadungsu'ksā.
- 'Sībūraphā'. 1968a. Huā chai prātthanā (The heart's desire). Bangkok: Phadungsu'ksā.
- 'Sībūraphā'. 1968b. Lōk sanniwāt (Life's destiny) Bangkok: Phadungsu'ksā.
- 'Sībūraphā'. 1968c. Rūam rū'ang ēk (Collected stories). Bangkok: Phadungsu'ksā.
- 'Sībūraphā'. 1972. Prāp phayot (The taming of a shrew). Bangkok: Phadungsu'ksā.
- 'Sībūraphā'. 1974a. Khō raēng nōi thōe (Lend us a hand). (collection of later short stories). Bangkok: Nāeo rūam naksu'ksā tōtān Čhakrawandiniyom.
- 'Sībūraphā'. 1974b. Rūam rū'ang san rap chai chīwit khōng Sībūraphā (Sībūraphā's short stories for life). Bangkok: Samōsōn naksu'ksā khana witthayāsāt mahāwitthayālai Čhāngmai.
- 'Sībūraphā'. 1975a. Čhon kwā rao Čha phop kan ik (Until we meet again). Bangkok: Nāeo rūam čulā.
- 'Sībūraphā'. 1975b. Khāphačhao dai hen mā (I have seen). Bangkok: Fāi wichākān sō. chō. mō.

- 'Sībūraphā'. 1976. Lāe pai khāng nā:phāk matchimmawai (Look forward: middle age). Bangkok:Chomrom nangsū' udomtham.
- 'Sībūraphā'. 1979. Rūam rū'ang san rap chai chiwit khōng Sībūraphā (Sībūraphā's short stories for life). (4th ed.) Bangkok:Pan̄cha.
- Sitthichai Saēngkračhāng. 1978. Rak khōng phū yāk rai (translation of Dostoevsky's 'Poor People'). Bangkok:Duāng kamon.
- Suchāt Sawatsī (ed.). 1974. Khabūankān khōmmiwnit nai prathēt thai (The communist movement in Thailand). Bangkok:Sangkhomsāt parithat
- Sukanya Hāntrakūn. 1982. Klap pai wičhān 'Lāe pai khāng nā' khōng Sībūraphā (Going back to examine Sībūraphā's 'Lāe pai khāng nā'). Lōk nangsū' (Book World) 5,10: 22-31.
- Suphā Sirimānon. 1978. Khwām song čham:chiwit lae kān tō sū khōng Kulāp Sāipradit (A recollection:the life and struggle of Kulāp Sāipradit). Lōk nangsū' (Book World) 2,2: 62-71.
- Suphannī Warathōn. 1976. Prawat kān praphan nawaniyāi thai (A history of Thai novel writing). Bangkok:Mūnnitthi khōngkān tamrā sangkhomsāt lae manutsayasāt.
- Suphat Sukhonthāphirom. 1985. Ramlu'k thu'ng Sībūraphā (In memory of Siburapha). In Ramlu'k thu'ng Sībūraphā ... Bangkok: Santitham. 1-11.
- Suphot Dāntrakūn. 1973. Khō thet čhing kiēo kap Kulāp Sāipradit (Facts about Kulāp Sāipradit). Sangkhomsāt parithat (Social Science Review) 11,8: 105-7.
- Suphot Dāntrakūn. 1985. Khun Kulāp Sāipradit (Khun Kulāp Sāipradit). In Ramlu'k thu'ng Sībūraphā ... Bangkok:Santitham. 90-106.
- Suthirā Sukniyom. 1979. Mālai Čūphinit lae phon ngān praphan čhōēng sāngsan. (Malāi Čūphinit and his fiction). Bangkok:Kānwēk.
- Trīsin Bunkhačhōn. 1980. Nawaniyāi kap sangkhom thai(2475-2500) (The novel and Thai society (1932-57)). Bangkok:Sāngsan.
- Trīsin Bunkhačhōn. 1982. Adīt patčhuban lae anākhōt nawaniyāi thai (The past, present and future of the Thai novel). Wārasān thammasā (Thammasat University journal) 11,1: 88-115.
- Thaēmsuk Numnon. 1978. Mu'ang thai samai songkhrām lōk khrang thī sōng (Thailand during the second world war). Bangkok:Duāng kamon.
- Thaēmsuk Numnon. 1981. Khabūankān tōtān amērikan samai čhōmphon P. Phibūnsongkhrām (The opposition movement to America in the time of Field Marshall P. Phibūnsongkhrām). Rūam botkhwam prawatisāt (Collected articles on history) 2: 50-83.
- Thawanwōn Woradilok. 1985. Āthit dap thī pakking (The sun has gone down in Peking). In Ramlu'k thu'ng Sībūraphā... Bangkok: Santitham 121-27.

- Witthayākṓṇ Chīāngkūn. 1973. Klap pai ān nawaniyāi khōng Sībūrāphā (Going back to read the novels of Sībūrāphā). Sangkhomsāt parithat (Social Science Review) 11,7: 68-72.
- Witthayākṓṇ Chīāngkūn. 1984. Chan chu'ng mā hā khwām māi (So I came in search of meaning). Bangkok: Ton Mak.
- Wiwat Khatitnamnit. 1985. Kabot santiphāp (The peace coup). Wārasān thammasāt 14,2: 5-38.
- Yot Watcharasathīan. 1963. Khwām pen mā khōng kām praphan lae nak praphan thai (The development of Thai writing and writers). Bangkok: Phrae phitthaya.
- Yot Watcharasathīan. 1973. Kulāp Sāipradit nai khwām song čham khōng khāphačhao (Kulāp Sāipradit as I remember him). Sangkhomsāt parithat (Social Science Review) 11,7: 61-7.
- Yot Watcharasathīan. 1976. Sībūrāphā: nak khīan khōng prachāchon (Sībūrāphā: the people's writer). Prachāchāt 3,151: 50-51.
- Yot Watcharasathīan. 1979. Mūnhēt thī Sībūrāphā khīan rū'ang 'Songkrām chīwit' (The reason Sībūrāphā wrote 'The war of life'). Lōk nangsu' (Book World) 3,2: 39-43.

C. JOURNALS AND MAGAZINES

i). Western language sources

Asian Studies of Australia Review

Asian Survey

Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars

East Asian Cultural Studies

Indochina Chronicle

Journal of Asian Studies

Journal of the Siam Society

Journal of South-East Asian Studies

South-East Asian Studies

ii). Thai language sources

Lōk nangsū'

Prachāchāt

Rūam botkhwām prawatisāt

Sangkhomsāt parithat

Sū anākhōt

Tawan mai

Thanon nangsū'

Wārasān thammasāt