

WRITING AND IDENTITY IN  
THE SHORT STORIES OF  
SIDAORU'ANG  
(1975-1990)

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis makes the theoretical assumption that literary analysis will consider the interaction between the reader, the writer and the texts.

The Introduction explains the significance of Sidaoru'ang and her short story writing in the context of contemporary Thai literature and of academic studies of the literature of South East Asia. It discusses some problems in addressing the various audiences who may find this work of interest. In addition it outlines the theoretical approach taken in this study.

Chapter One discusses Sidaoru'ang's own personal background, defining the significant events and influences which led her to begin writing short stories in the 1970s.

Chapter Two provides synopses and an analysis of Sidaoru'ang's short stories published in the initial stage of her literary career, between 1975 and 1976. It sets these works in the context of her own development as a writer and within the troubled political climate in which she was working.

Chapter Three examines the effects of the aftermath of October 6, 1976 on Sidaoru'ang's fiction. It goes on to discuss the broadening range of themes with which Sidaoru'ang began to deal as her interests moved away from political activism and towards the family and motherhood.

Chapter Four attests to a much stronger identity in Sidaoru'ang herself, both resulting from, and conveyed in, her writing. In this period of her career, from 1983-1986, her major

concern lies with themes of isolation and incarceration, silencing and suppression, sexual inequality and madness.

Chapter Five concentrates largely upon the highly experimental form of Sidaoru'ang's writing during the 1987-1990 period of her work. As a result of having consolidated her literary career Sidaoru'ang's stories demonstrate a more playful and experimental approach to themes which have interested her since the 1980s.

In conclusion this thesis asserts that the relationship between Sidaoru'ang's own identity and her short story writing is one of complex interdependence. The act of writing serves the purpose of allowing Sidaoru'ang to assert herself in an environment very different from the one in which she originated; and her short stories themselves are often investigations of highly personal issues which contribute to the consolidation of her identity.

Appendices include a detailed list of the publishing history of each of Sidaoru'ang's short stories, a list of literary awards made to Sidaoru'ang, and translations into English of four of her texts, one from each period of her work delineated in Chapters Two-Five.

## NOTE

1. Thai words are romanized according to the Library of Congress system, with the simplification of some its less accessible features.
2. Thai authors are referred to by first name in references and bibliography.

For Anne and Colin

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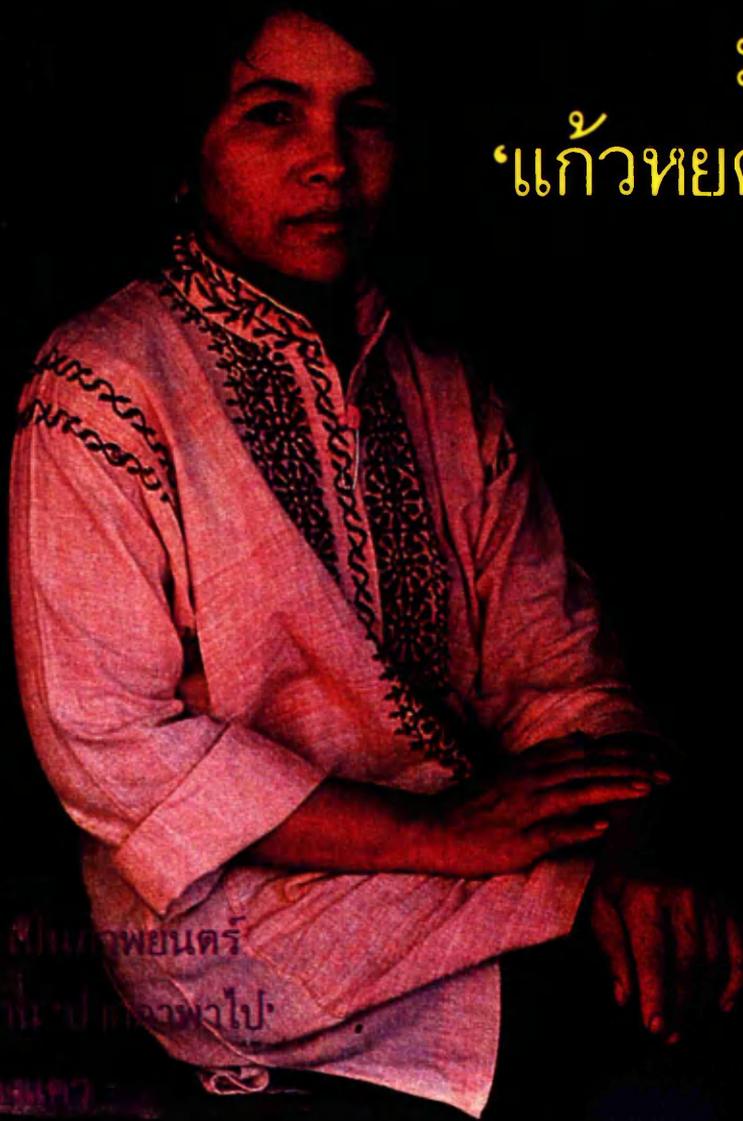
# ตามหาหนังสือ

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ศรีดาวเรือง  
จากกรวดทรายไร้ค่า  
มาเป็น  
'แก้วหยดเดียว'



เมื่อ: ๒๕ กรกฎาคม ๒๕๒๓  
กรวดทรายไร้ค่าต้องกลายเป็นแก้วหยดเดียว

ต้องหารหนังสือของเธอ

- เยี่ยมบ้านเกิดสุวรรณเณร
- หลงไปทางสะพาน
- เข้าบ้านเดี่ยวทิพย์ ใต้ถุน

## INTRODUCTION

*There is no single meaning to any work of art; this is true not merely because it is better that it should be true, that is, because it makes art a richer thing, but because historical and personal experience show it to be true. Changes in historical context and in personal mood change the meaning of a work and indicate to us that artistic understanding is not a question of fact but of value.*

Lionel Trilling<sup>1</sup>

Sidaoru'ang is a contemporary Thai, female writer, well-known among the Thai intellectual élite, though enjoying a more limited popularity with the reading public in general.<sup>2</sup> Her class background, her minimal education and her experience as a manual labourer from the age of twelve until her early 30s, define her as an unusual member of the Thai *literati*. Nevertheless, these factors have also proved excellent qualifications for her early tales of Thai working-class experience. Sidaoru'ang's career as a writer has developed both despite, and as a result of, her early background. It has evolved from taking an initially conventional approach, which captured the social and political *Zeitgeist*; it has broadly focussed on an examination of the themes of women's experience in Thailand; and it has matured into a highly innovative and experimental treatment of both form and content.

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<sup>1</sup> Lionel Trilling, 'Freud and Literature', in *The Liberal Imagination*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981, pp. 46-47.

<sup>2</sup> It is important to note that reading fiction has never enjoyed the same popular appeal in Thailand that it has in the West and that novels and short story collections are not normally published in print runs exceeding two thousand.

This is the third thesis in Thai literature, written at the School of Oriental and African Studies, to deal with the topic of a single author. Kwandee Rakpongse's study of Do'kmaisot was completed in 1975, and David Smyth's thesis on Siburapha provided a thorough and timely survey of this writer's work and career in 1988.<sup>3</sup> While little literary criticism of Do'kmaisot's work was available for Kwandee to comment upon, Smyth was able to draw more heavily upon extant material on Siburapha, written by Thai critics.

With regard to Sidaoru'ang, two Thai critics have specialized in following her career, namely, the academic, Phinyo Ko'ngtho'ng, and the journalist, Phailin Rungrat.<sup>4</sup> In addition to this, a Sinakharinwirote University M.A. dissertation, produced in 1991 by Suphap Sitthumma, specifies some features of Sidaoru'ang's work up until 1986.<sup>5</sup>

The aim of this thesis is two-fold. It provides an analysis of the development of Sidaoru'ang's *oeuvre*, set within the social, political and psychological context in which it was created. Contiguous to this are the broader statements this thesis has to

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<sup>3</sup> See Kwandee Rakpongse, *A Study of the Novels of Mo'm Luang Buppha Nimman-heminda (pseud. Do'kmaisot)*, SOAS: University of London PhD thesis, 1975; and David A. Smyth, *A Study of the Major Fiction of Kulap Saipradit (pseud.)*, SOAS: University of London PhD thesis, 1988.

<sup>4</sup> Phailin Rungrat is the pseudonym of Chamaipho'n Saengkracang, who also writes as Natsini Witthutthirasan.

<sup>5</sup> See Suphap Sitthumma, *Wikhro' ru'ang kho'ng Sidaoru'ang chuang po' so' 2518 thu'ng po' so' 2529*, (An Analysis of the Work of Sidaoru'ang between 1975 and 1986), Mahasarakham: Sinakharinwirote University, 1991.

make about the complex interrelationship between writing and identity, and, more specifically, on the nature of writing as a woman in Thailand.

In the fields of English and Comparative Literature, the past twenty years have witnessed significant advances in the theoretical approach to textual analysis. Whilst these changes have had a dominant influence in Europe and North America, their application to Thai literary studies has been minimal.<sup>6</sup> One of the principal objectives in writing this thesis has been to acknowledge new ways of examining Thai literature and to take account of the applicability of post-structuralist, feminist, psycho-analytical and reception theory to Thai cultural analysis.

As a result, the thesis addresses several audiences. It is written, primarily, for those involved in the study of Thai literature, privileging the non-Thai student over the Thai native. Nevertheless, Thai academics will, hopefully, also find the theoretical approach to a familiar subject-matter enlightening. Finally, the aim has been to locate Thai literature in general, and the work of Sidaoru'ang in particular, in an inter-regional and international context of comparative literary studies.<sup>7</sup> This varied

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<sup>6</sup> There are, of course, some exceptions to this. See, for example, C.J. Reynolds, 'The Author Function and Thai History' in Asian Studies Association of Australia Review, 10 (1), 1986, pp. 22-28; and Suwanna Kriengkraipetch, 'Women - - Warriors: Dual Images in Modern Thai Literature', in William Burgwinkle, Glenn Man and Valerie Wayne (eds.), *Significant Others: Gender and Culture in Film and Literature East and West*. Literary Studies East and West, Selected Conference Papers, Volume 6. Honolulu: College of Languages, linguistics and Literature, Univeristy of Hawaii and the East West Center, 1993, pp. 31-45.

<sup>7</sup> Some steps have been made towards this goal in the English translation of and introduction to a selection of Sidaoru'ang's short

audience addressed in this thesis has necessitated compromises, and certain assumptions have been made with regard to readers' previous knowledge.

An intrinsic feature of this study of the career and work of Sidaoru'ang, is that it is being produced outside the culture of focus, by an outsider in relationship to that culture. While this implies certain shortcomings and insufficiencies, it conversely broadens the scope of analysis and permits new and different interpretations to be made.<sup>8</sup>

This creates some problems for the study of Thailand, where a strong aversion to confronting the embarrassing, contrary or unpleasant, has long underpinned social stability; and where the denial of intense emotional expression, instilled through Buddhistic notions of non-confrontation, non-interference, and detachment from worldly concerns, has contributed to a tradition of reverential rather than controversial intellectual discourse, in which:

The importance of keeping up appearances, and of  
the presentation of respectfulness, unobtrusiveness,

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stories in Sidaoru'ang, *A Drop of Glass*, translated and introduced by Rachel Harrison). Bangkok: Duang Kamol, 1994.

<sup>8</sup> The view of Edward Said is pertinent here, that it is wrong to assume, for instance, that 'only women can understand feminine experience, only Jews can understand Jewish suffering, only formerly colonial subjects can understand colonial experience.' (See Edward W. Said, 'The Post Colonial Intellectual', *Salmagundi*, 70-1, Spring-Summer, 1986, p. 49.) Rather, Said advocates 'interference, a crossing of borders and obstacles, a determined attempt to generalize exactly at those points where generalizations seem impossible to make.' (See Edward W. Said, 'Opponents, Audiences, Constituencies and Community' in W J T Mitchell, *The Politics of Interpretation*, Chicago and London, 1983, pp. 7-32.)

calmness, of avoiding saying things in opposition to what is expected not only organizes social interaction but penetrates even into the psychological attitudes of the Thai towards themselves.<sup>9</sup>

### What is Thai Literature?

The Thai words *wannakhadi/wannakam* do not correlate precisely with the Western term 'literature', and they occupy a different position within their own cultural context. In his ethnographic interpretation of modern Thai literature, Herbert Phillips observes that there is no 'institutionalized consensus among writers and readers as to the purposes and priorities of contemporary writing.'<sup>10</sup> Suffice it to say, that:

Thai do not subscribe to an inherent goodness of the innovative or creative.<sup>11</sup> Rather, what is important from a Thai point of view is that literature clarify or reveal that which is obviously real but unrecognized; that if it makes people think about what previously was improper (or dangerous or irrelevant) to think about; that it gives shape, meaning, and identities to things.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Alphonso Lingis, 'Lust', in *Abuses*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1994, p. 125.

<sup>10</sup> Herbert P. Phillips, *Modern Thai Literature. With an Ethnographic Interpretation*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987, p. 57. In reference to the reader Phillips notes that he/she is usually of urban middle-class or upper class background (ibid., p. 53.). Writers generally assume their readers to be conversant in classical Thai literature, to which frequent references are made (ibid., p. 14.), but may underestimate their potential to comprehend subtle messages (ibid., p. 32.).

<sup>11</sup> In support of this argument Phillips notes that patents were not introduced into Thailand until as late as 1981, although this may be 'as much a result of economic and legal pressures as for an institutionalized recognition of the value of creativity.' (Ibid., p. 9.)

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 15-16.

The Buddhist tradition of recitation of religious parables by monks has also bestowed strongly didactic features on Thai literature, whereby stories serve an educational purpose, often teaching prescribed moral values and correct methods of behaviour.

It is also necessary, however, to acknowledge the influence of Western ideas on the development of twentieth century Thai intellectual thought, to which the development of Thai novel and short story writing can be ascribed, (though scholars, such as Wibha Senanan and Phillips, refute this).<sup>13</sup>

More recently, it has become increasingly difficult to consider the development of Thai literature, and prose fiction in particular, in an 'isolated' Thai context, devoid of outside influence. Contemporary Thai writers are concerned with their appeal to the inter-regional as well as the international literary field and, while the annual SEAWrite award has played its part in stimulating this, so too, have the greater opportunities for Thai fiction to be translated into foreign languages (most notably English, German, French and Japanese). Moreover, works by authors of international acclaim are also available in Thai translation, whilst literary magazines such as *Loke nangsu'* (Book World) have regularly published interviews and articles on

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<sup>13</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 69 and Wibha Senanan, *The Genesis of the Novel in Thailand*. Bangkok: Thai Watana Panich, 1975., p. 8 and p. 21. Whilst preferring to see the Thai short story as 'a product of a literary evolution in the cultural tradition', and the novel as a mutation from this evolution, Wibha claims only the spoken drama as a 'totally new form suddenly introduced into the literary scene by Thai scholars returning from England.' (*Ibid.*, p. 45.)

other Asian novelists and poets, as well as those from Europe, North and South America.

### **The Writer and the Reader**

This thesis adopts the view that writing is part of a process of self-discovery, one in which '... the writer meets everywhere only *his* knowledge, *his* will, *his* plans, in short, himself. He touches only his own subjectivity.'<sup>14</sup> Affiliated to this is the psycho-analytical theory that *all* writing is an attempt to come to terms with the loss of a love object, to retrieve it and to maintain control over it. Basing his observations on the child's attempts to accommodate the distressing experience of separation from its mother, Freud has argued that the actions of a writer share similarities with those of a child at play, i.e. dedicated to a world of fantasy.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> See Jean-Paul Sartre, *What is Literature?*, (translated by Bernard Frechtman), London: Methuen, 1978, p. 29. (First published in French in 1948.)

<sup>15</sup> As Freud writes: 'A strong experience in the present awakens in the creative writer a memory of an earlier experience (usually belonging to his childhood) from which there now proceeds a wish which finds its fulfilment in the creative work. The work itself exhibits elements of the recent provoking occasion as well as of the old memory ... You will not forget that the stress it lays on childhood memories in the writer's life ... is ultimately derived from the assumption that a piece of creative writing, like a day-dream, is a continuation of, and a substitute for, what was once the play of childhood.' (Sigmund Freud, 'Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming' in David Lodge, *Twentieth Century Literary Criticism. A Reader*, London and New York: Longman, p. 41. My editing.)

The act of writing fiction is equated with the *fort-da* game, which Freud interpreted as a ritual method of expelling and recalling the mother, whose absence was, in reality, a source of great distress to the child. For further details see Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, London and Vienna: The International Psychoanalytical Press, 1922, pp. 11-14. See also Rachel Harrison, 'Birth, Death and Identity in the Writing of Sidaoru'ang,

Although psycho-analytical theory is based upon essentially Eurocentric perceptions of social organisation, Niels Mulder, in his observations of everyday Thai life, does testify to the strong bonds between the child and its mother, or surrogate mother. Mulder describes the mother-child union as 'a pivotal relationship and an ideological pattern that gives stability to the Thai experience and way of life.'<sup>16</sup> In drawing attention to mother's milk and mother's indulgence, late weaning and undemanding toilet training in patterns of Thai childrearing he notes that, 'There are no good reasons why the experience of indulgent nurture and tolerance should not engender high dependence, personal insecurity, doubt, vulnerability...'<sup>17</sup> He defines the mother as the symbol of moral goodness (*khunngam khwamdi*), ever-giving, caring and self-sacrificing towards 'her dependents who rely on her for stability and continuity in life. She is a refuge, a haven of safety ... At mother's side one is safe.'<sup>18</sup>

Psycho-analytical theory argues that, in cases where a mother's active interest in her child is replaced by a passive disinterest, children respond by internalizing a substitute maternal image. Although the desired aim of this internalization is to provide psychological unity and identity with the mother, the

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1975-1990', in Manas Chitakasem, *Thai Literary Traditions*. Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Press, 1995, pp. 103-4.

<sup>16</sup> Niels Mulder. *Inside Thai Society: An Interpretation of Everyday Life*, Bangkok: Editions Duang Kamol, 1990, p. 64.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25. Mulder supports this argument with reference to the fact that the sustaining earth, rice and water are all represented in the feminine in Thai, as in *mae thorani*, *mae phosop* and *mae nam*. To this list I would also add the figure of *mae phra khongkha*, to whom Sidaoru'ang refers in two or three of her stories.

actual result is one of emptiness and depression, which may be exhibited in a variety of ways, including intense intellectual activity and artistic creation.<sup>19</sup>

Sartre's understanding of the purposes of writing, as a means for the author to render him or herself recognizable to others and essential in relationship to the world,<sup>20</sup> is also germane to the Thai cultural context, in which anthropologists have noted the importance of belonging to one's surroundings and environment.<sup>21</sup> The distinguished literary critic, Suchat Sawatsi, stresses the relationship which Thai writers, artists and poets have traditionally had with their court patrons and which, he argues, is replaced in contemporary culture by capitalism. Thus he defines the author as an individual with no particular social status beyond that of a person pitched in battle 'against the powers with which he involves himself.'<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> André Green refers to this as the 'dead mother complex'. See André Green, *On Private Madness*, Maddison, Conn.: International Universities Press, 1986, p. 160. Green's observations echo those of Melanie Klein on reparation that, '... symbol formation is the outcome of a loss, it is a creative work involving the pain and the whole work of mourning.' See Melanie Klein, quoted in Janice Doane and Devon Hodges, *From Klein to Kristeva*, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1992, p. 73.

Influenced by these views, Julia Kristeva recognizes the value of 'matricide' for psychic health, stressing, however, the greater difficulty that women have in accomplishing this. See Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1989.

<sup>20</sup> Sartre, op. cit., p. 29 and pp. 26-27.

<sup>21</sup> See Phillips, op. cit., pp. 39-60, and Mulder, op. cit., passim. As Mulder writes, 'To suffer rejection means that one has to operate in a dreaded, unreliable, amoral world and consequently to live in the equally dreaded area of personal loneliness. The desire for positive acceptance and identity within a trusted small world is therefore enhanced by the spectre of loneliness ...' (Ibid, p. 69.)

<sup>22</sup> Suchat Sawatsi, 'What is a ....?', *The Bangkok Post*, May 2, 1982.

Rather than view the Thai writer as the 'mediator' of a text, however, Suchat identifies the author as its principal 'owner':

No matter what his point of view in looking at the world or his artistic ability may be, we cannot deny his status as a producer of written work. No matter what his objective in writing, whether it be financial, artistic or otherwise, the greatness achieved by the resulting work depends on the writer himself and the amount of talent and creative ability he possesses ... No matter what his goals in writing are, each writer has the right to understand his creation before the reader. He knows that an artistic piece of writing depends on his complete understanding of the characters he creates. The refusal to understand one's creation leads to irresponsibility ...<sup>23</sup>

Suchat's clear expression, in this excerpt, of the writer's authority over the text is one that sits uncomfortably with his interest in Sartre's opinions on literature, among them the notion that it was the reader, and not the writer, who gave the words of a text their significance:

On the one hand, the literary object has no other substance than the reader's subjectivity; Raskolnikov's waiting is *my* waiting which I lend him ... His hatred of the police magistrate who questions him is my hatred which has been solicited and wheedled out of me by signs ... Since the creation can find its fulfilment only in reading, since the artist must entrust to another the job of carrying out what he has begun, since it is only through the consciousness of the reader that he can regard himself as essential to his work, all literary work is an appeal. To write is to make an appeal to the reader that he lead into objective existence the revelation which I have undertaken by means of language.

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid. (My editing.) In accordance with Suchat's view, Phillips' study of the role and function of literary figures from an anthropological perspective, also designates their texts as 'the product of the motivation and imagination of an individual author.' (See Phillips, *op. cit.*, p. 39.)

Thus, the writer appeals to the reader's freedom to collaborate in the production of his work.<sup>24</sup>

Terry Eagleton supports Sartre's expression of the authority of the reader when he writes that we 'always interpret literary works to some extent in the light of our own concerns.'<sup>25</sup> This challenges the Western, liberal-humanist tradition in literary criticism, in which the role of the reader is to listen respectfully to the voice of the author, manifested through the text, as a result of which process the reader learns, and is able to improve him/herself.<sup>26</sup>

Psycho-analytical literary theory has argued that the reader treats the text and its characters as figures of the past, onto which one transfers ones own dominant fears and wishes:

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<sup>24</sup> Sartre, op. cit., pp. 31-32. (My editing.)

<sup>25</sup> Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory. An Introduction*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989, p. 12. Eagleton's arguments are based, to some extent, on an understanding of the functioning of ideology proposed by the French Marxist philosopher, Louis Althusser, whose view was that societies reproduce themselves ideologically, participate in, and are consequently controlled and repressed by the dominant ideology - albeit often at an unconscious level. (See Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses' in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster, London: Verso, 1971.)

<sup>26</sup> The move from author-centred studies of the nineteenth century to text-centred studies was made by the Russian Formalists in the 1920s. More profound changes in the emphasis in literary theory from the text to the reader were made by the Constance School in the 1960s and, in particular, by Wolfgang Iser, who argued that in reading there is an interaction between the text and the reader and that the text always contains 'gaps' that only the reader can fill. This the reader does by drawing upon his/her knowledge of the world and of literary conventions. This is supported by the post-structuralist thinking on authorship of Barthes, Foucault and Derrida. See, in particular, Roland Barthes' seminal essay, 'The Death of the Author' in *Image, Music, Text*, London: Fontana, 1977, pp. 142-148.

The analytic concept of transference is transferred to the reading situation: transference responses are the unconscious attitudes we bring towards other people because we cannot help but repeat our loves and hates of those first significant others who helped make us what we are. In the analytic space, to which the reading space is seen as analogous, this intense relationship is re-created ... In reader-centred theories ... it is the reader's transference to the author's transference that is at stake, what is known as the counter-transference, because it is a reaction to another's transference: in other words, it is not the author's fantasies that are at issue, but the reader's ... the reader uses a text as he or she would a life situation, as material for the continuing formation of his or her identity.<sup>27</sup>

A psycho-analytical interpretation of reading incorporates Jacques Lacan's speculation that a dyadic, mother-daughter relationship may exist between the text and the reader; or that this may even extend to a triangular, Oedipal relationship between reader, writer and text, each with their own unconscious. Working within this Lacanian framework, both Julia Kristeva and Hélène Cixous see writing and reading as mutually interchangeable and inter-relational activities, with the text as both production and product. As Cixous notes:<sup>28</sup>

Writing is actually a kind of alliance between writer and reader. The reader within myself and the reader outside. Readers don't realise enough how much they

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<sup>27</sup> Elizabeth Wright, 'The Reader in Analysis', in James Donald (ed.), *Psychoanalysis and Cultural Theory. Thresholds*, London: Macmillan, 1991, pp. 163-6. (My editing.)

<sup>28</sup> Julia Kristeva, 'Word, dialogue and novel' in *Desire in Language*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989, pp. 64-91 and in Toril Moi (ed.), *The Kristeva Reader*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990. Kristeva also postulates a psychic aspect of writing as trace of a dialogue with oneself (in the form of another), in which the writer takes on the dual identity of subject of enunciation and subject of utterance. (See Kristeva, 'Word, Dialogue, Novel', in Moi, *ibid.*, p. 45.)

are implied in the writing, how much they are at work, how much they write. They give rebirth.<sup>29</sup>

For Cixous, reading, as much as writing, implies 'self discovery, and much of her focus is consequently upon women and identity:

Perhaps the best way to describe a 'feminine' reading is to say that it implies 'opening' the self to what the text is saying, even if this is puzzling or painful or problematic. It entails reading to see how a text is made, by exploring all the various resources for meaning a writer has at their disposal: the writer's intended meaning, as well as the 'other' meanings that contradict, complement, unsettle or dislodge this meaning. It involves standing back from the text and looking at its overall construction; it entails reading at the level of the words themselves, at the level of the syntax, the syllables and the letter-patterns, the rhythm and punctuation. It means asking who and what made this text and why. It means acknowledging that I as a reader participate in the on-going process of the text's creation; it means recognizing that my reading is itself a product of certain questions, blind spots, needs, desires and that these motivations are constantly changing.<sup>30</sup>

It is this approach to reading that I have attempted to make myself conscious of and to use in the analysis of Sidaoru'ang's *oeuvre* which follows.

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<sup>29</sup> Hélène Cixous, 'Difficult Joys' in Helen Wilcox, Keith McWatters, Ann Thompson and Linda R. Williams (eds.), *The Body and the Text. Hélène Cixous. Reading and Teaching*, London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990, p. 26.

<sup>30</sup> Susan Sellers, 'Learning to Read the Feminine' in *ibid.*, p. 192.

Sidaoru'ang as a glass factory worker, c. 1960



## CHAPTER ONE

### THE WRITER, SIDAORU'ANG

*There is something of a foreignness, a feeling of not being accepted or of being unacceptable, which is particularly insistent when as a woman you suddenly get into that strange country of writing where most inhabitants are men and where the fate of women is still not settled ... So sometimes you are even a double exile, but I'm not going to be tragic about it because I think it is a source of creation.*

Hélène Cixous<sup>31</sup>

Sidaoru'ang, the pen-name of Wanna Sawatsi (née Thappananon), was born on December 14, 1941 in Bang Krathum, Phitsanuloke province. She was the third child of Samro'ng Thappananon and Thalom Unlapatho'n and one of ten children.<sup>32</sup> Samro'ng was the son of Luang Suranarong (Rang Thappananon), a military officer in the Royal Guard.<sup>33</sup> For reasons unknown he left Bangkok while still a young man and, although an outsider by class, origin and education, he settled in the market town of Bang Krathum and married the only daughter

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<sup>31</sup> Cixous, 'Difficult Joys', op. cit., pp. 12-13.

<sup>32</sup> The nickname she currently uses is Nit, although at her family home she was referred to by the nickname Yong, meaning 'to be afraid' or 'timid'. In magazine interviews and in biographical data published with collections of her work Sidaoru'ang gives her year of birth as 1943, sometimes adding that she was not entirely sure if this was correct. In a personal interview in September 1992 she admitted that her correct birth date was 1941 and that her husband's embarrassment at the fact that she was a full four years older than he had obliged her to reduce the age difference for public consumption.

<sup>33</sup> He was discharged following the overthrow of the Absolute Monarchy in 1932.

of a local family. He subsequently spent most of his working life as a low-level official at the local railway station, while his wife supplemented the family income as a sweetmeat vendor.

Sidaoru'ang's relationship with her mother was an uneasy one and in interviews, she describes her as both uncommunicative and punitive:

We always had to do exactly what mother told us and if there was anything we didn't understand, like where she was going, then we couldn't ask since that was adults' business and children were not supposed to ask about it. If mother had visitors, we had to go and play under the house and not bother the adults. So I loved my father more than my mother. Even though I wasn't all that close to him and we didn't see much of each other, my father never hit us or told us off.

... When my mother used to tell me off, she used to beat me. She was always beating me and it was a terrible thrashing she gave every single time. Sometimes she used to use a great big, long stick that she'd take hold of in both hands. We would all get a beating ... but I knew that she loved us all the same.<sup>34</sup>

The warmer relationship which Sidaoru'ang enjoyed with her father is reflected in several of her short stories, in which he is portrayed with considerable tenderness and affection. The main nurturing role in the family, however, was taken by her maternal grandmother, who also appears as a character in Sidaoru'ang's fiction.

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<sup>34</sup> See 'Bai wan sao kap Sidaoru'ang' (Saturday Afternoon with Sidaoru'ang) in *Dichan*, (I), year 12, issue number 276, August, p. 242. Other references to Sidaoru'ang's relationship with her mother are given in interviews with the magazines *Thanon nangsu'*, (Book Road), year 2, number 9, 1985, passim., and *No'n nangsu'*, (Bookworm), year 1, number 3, 1988, pp. 3-11.

Sidaoru'ang's interest in reading began when she was in her third year at primary school, although economic hardship obliged her to leave in the following year, at the age of eleven, and to find work to help support her family.<sup>35</sup> Despite this, she continued to read the books and magazines which her father bought for her on his infrequent visits to Bangkok. These included comedy stories, adventure stories and fairy tales, although the only name of any note which she remembers from this period of her reading was that of the comic novelist, P. Inthapalit.<sup>36</sup>

In 1954, when Sidaoru'ang was twelve years old, her mother decided to send her to Bangkok to look for a job to contribute to the family income. Her early days in the capital were unhappy ones, marred by feelings of isolation and of having been abandoned in a harsh world to fend for herself. Moreover, she missed her family, although her two older brothers were already working in the city by the time that she moved there. Sidaoru'ang spent the two years which followed working as a live-in nanny. She never actually received her 100 baht per month salary for it was sent directly by her employer to her mother.<sup>37</sup> The little free time that she had was spent reading serialized love stories and tragedies published in journals such as *Daruni*, *Si sapada* and

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<sup>35</sup> Sidaoru'ang is unusual among Thai writers in having had only minimal early schooling.

<sup>36</sup> In an interview in 1979 with the literary magazine, *Lok nangsua* (Book World), Sidaoru'ang added that country people 'don't read introductions, they just read the story and then throw it away or use it to beat their children, so that it is often ripped and torn before they have even finished reading it.'

<sup>37</sup> *Dichan*, op. cit., p. 242.

*Deli me wan can* (Daruni, *The Weekly and Monday Daily Mail*).<sup>38</sup> She did not have enough money to buy the magazines for herself but would sneak a look at those belonging to the family for whom she worked.

While Sidaoru'ang was working in Bangkok her father committed suicide by hanging himself, ill-health having led him to feel that he was a burden to his family, whom he could no longer support. The distress caused to Sidaoru'ang by this event was clearly profound:

Usually I'm a fighter, so there's nothing really terrible in my life. The time I was most upset was when my father hanged himself. I wasn't living at home then and by the time I got back he had already been cremated. I was so disappointed, for I had not seen how ill he was. I knew nothing about it. This is just the way that country folk think - that however the person dies you just want to be able to see them and to touch them for the very last time. But I wasn't able to. By the time I arrived all I saw were his ashes. We sprinkled them in the canal.<sup>39</sup>

Sidaoru'ang's lack of opportunity to ritually mourn the death of her father was compounded by the fact that her mother would not permit her father's remains to be kept inside the house, despite the fact that he had been responsible for having it built.<sup>40</sup>

Although Sidaoru'ang rationalizes her appreciable feelings of grief by the remark that they are the 'ignorant' responses of a

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<sup>38</sup> See 'Kaew yot ngam - Sidaoru'ang kap nak ciaranai mu' achip chu' Suchat' (A Beautiful Drop of Glass - Sidaoru'ang and a professional diamond-cutter called Suchat), in *Thanon nangsu'*, year 2, issue number 9, 1985, p. 20.

<sup>39</sup> *Dichan*, op. cit., p. 250.

<sup>40</sup> Personal interview, September, 1992. According to traditional Thai belief a person who commits suicide will haunt the house if he is taken back into it.

country person, her inability to address these emotions appropriately can be argued to have been a significant unconscious stimulus to her creativity.<sup>41</sup>

Her interest in writing fiction began shortly after her father's suicide, when Sidaoru'ang remained in Bang Krathum and worked as an ironing girl. At the age of fifteen, she wrote her first short story, a moralistic tale entitled *La ko'n khon bap* (Goodbye to Sinners). It dealt with a teenager who would not obey her mother, as a result of which the mother ran away from home to become a Buddhist nun.

Sidaoru'ang expressly wrote the story as an act of self-reproach for the frequent arguments she had with her mother, for which she felt she deserved to be punished.<sup>42</sup> A psycho-analytical interpretation of this piece not only encompasses Sidaoru'ang's unexpressed grief at the death of her father but also the long-standing tension that existed between her and her mother, and her consequent tendency to low self-esteem.

She entered *La ko'n khon bap* in a literary competition organized by a local newspaper but, although the newspaper

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<sup>41</sup> Cixous, has argued that, 'From the outset writing serves as a necessary means of repairing the separation from a place or a person caused either by exile or death. Writing does the work of bereavement, of reconstituting the loss, and of keeping the memory of the precarious.' She refers here to the act of writing in general and not necessarily writing specifically about someone who has died. See Sarah Cornell, 'Hélène Cixous and *les Études Féminines*' in Helen Wilcox et. al., op. cit., p. 32.

Cixous talks about this in relation to her own acts of writing, which began with her childhood and particularly with the death of her father and she describes the way in which writing, for her, seems to offer a means of counteracting the finality of death. See Cixous, 'Difficult Joys', in *ibid.*, pp. 5-30.

<sup>42</sup> Personal interview, September, 1992.

printed her name among the list of entrants, the story itself was not published. Despite the pride she felt at seeing her name in print (alongside that of the local deputy district officer), this early rejection deterred her from writing further short stories for many years.<sup>43</sup>

Unsettled at home, Sidaoru'ang moved to the provincial capital of Phitsanuloke, where she worked as a curry vendor in the local market. She returned to Bangkok in 1960 and spent two years working first in a glass factory, at Phasi Caroen in Thonburi, and later in a hemp factory.<sup>44</sup>

Sidaoru'ang's ability to subsequently find well-paid and much sought-after jobs as a maid with expatriate families indicates a certain degree of initiative on her part.<sup>45</sup> It was during

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<sup>43</sup> Personal interview with Sidaoru'ang, September, 1990. Her concern about her poor handwriting was grave enough to make her believe that she could never be a writer and she took the opportunity to learn how to type as soon as she had enough money to pay for lessons.

<sup>44</sup> At the glass factory the various jobs which she performed earned her a basic one hundred and twenty baht per month, all but twenty of which she sent home to her mother. She was obliged to work seven days a week, but her wages were cut by four baht per day if she were absent due to sickness. She supplemented her basic salary by working an overtime shift from 6pm until midnight, so gaining herself an extra three baht per shift.

During her employment at the glass factory she rented a room nearby, which she shared with four or five of her colleagues. The room was bare and functional, without the provision of mosquito nets or mats upon which to sleep. Sidaoru'ang had only one set of clothes, which she would wash each night in ditch water and lay out to dry for use the following morning.

<sup>45</sup> The post which she took in 1963 as a maid in an American household constituted a substantial improvement in her working conditions. For her labour she was paid the not inconsiderable sum of four hundred baht per month and was consequently distressed to lose the job after a week's absence through illness. She then successfully sought employment as a maid with another Western family, this time earning six hundred baht per month. Her good fortune was, however, short-lived, for she was dismissed from this

this time that Sidaoru'ang received news of the death of her mother from lung cancer, as a result of which she went back to Bang Krathum, and worked as a charcoal burner for a local ironmonger.

Following that, she again returned to Bangkok, where she took on a number of different jobs, changing employment frequently. She began as a seamstress on a piece-work basis in a clothes factory, where, because of the difficulties of travelling to work, she chose to sleep at her work place, on the factory floor among the sewing machines. At other times in her working life in the capital Sidaoru'ang sold curry and sugar cane in the market and took a number of jobs in restaurants. She was invited by a friend to work as a prostitute but refused on the grounds that, despite the obvious financial benefits, the risks were too great, and her current employment was satisfactory. Moving to a restaurant in the Saphan Khwai district of north Bangkok, she was employed first to wash up, then as a kitchen hand, then as a cook, and finally as a cashier.

After the death of her mother and the consequent end of her responsibility to send most of her income home, Sidaoru'ang spent much of her free time studying. Intent on self-improvement, she joined classes in dressmaking (for which she received a diploma), typing, and English. More unusually, for someone of her background, she took driving lessons, although

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second job for helping with the laundry, rather than report the woman whose job it was to do the work.

she knew it was unlikely she would ever be able to afford a car. Even more surprisingly, she learned to shoot.<sup>46</sup>

Moreover, she became a voracious reader of weekly magazines and serialized novels. As a factory worker she had joined with room-mates to share in buying books and magazines. When she used to purchase books she would do so purely according to the title, having, in her own view, no informed awareness of who was a 'good' writer and who not. She once purchased a book by M. R. Khu'krit Pramot, called *Phu'an no'n* (Bedfellow), partly for its salacious-sounding title and partly because of Khu'krit's reputation as a respected writer, with royal connections.<sup>47</sup>

If Sidaoru'ang's literary interests lacked focus and sophistication during this period, this was not because the contemporary literary scene was not a vibrant or exciting one. The suppression of serious writing that followed Field-Marshal Sarit Thanarat's rise to power in 1957 had gradually eased by the end of the following decade.<sup>48</sup> In 1963, following Sarit's death, the magazine

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<sup>46</sup> Sidaoru'ang used to take money to her grandmother at Wat Pho. On one occasion when she was there she saw people learning how to shoot so she applied for a course.

<sup>47</sup> Personal interview, September, 1990. Sidaoru'ang later read two of Khu'krit's classics, *Lai chiwit* (A Collection of Lives) and *Phai daeng* (Red Bamboo) which she enjoyed considerably more.

<sup>48</sup> On coming to power, Sarit immediately introduced legislation which severely curtailed the freedom of writers to express radical views, his most effective weapon being article 17 of the interim constitution. Those writers who were not subsequently arrested on suspicion of communist sympathies either fled the country, went into the jungle to join the communist party or renounced 'radical' writing altogether. (For further details see Phonsak Cirakraisiri, *Wannakam kan mu'ang*, (Political Literature), Bangkok: Samnak phim Graphic Art, 1979, p. 191; and Manas Chitakasem, 'The

*Sangkhomsat parithat* (The Social Science Review) appeared. It comprised articles, poems and short stories challenging traditionally accepted political, social, economic, historical, religious, sexual, educational and literary views, and it played a significant role in articulating the radical ideals which later manifested themselves in the anti-government protests of 1973.<sup>49</sup> The magazine was widely read among intellectuals and students and, by 1968, had assumed the role of 'the intellectual voice of the

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Development of Political and Social Consciousness in Thai Short Stories', in Jeremy H C S Davidson and Helen Cordell (eds.), *The Short Story in South East Asia: Aspects of a Genre*, London: The School of Oriental and African Studies, 1982, p.77. Manas points out that Khamsing Sino'k was exceptional in successfully escaping censorship and that he produced some of his most socially critical short stories in the period from 1958-1960. (Ibid., p.77.) Nevertheless, he too gave up writing altogether between 1960 and 1969.)

The Sarit regime also brought pressure to bear on publishers and newspaper owners to print articles opposing communism and fines were imposed upon those who refused to toe the government line. (See See Bamrung Suwannarat and Chusak Ekaphet, *Wannakam sangkhom lae kanmu'ang*, (Social and Political Literature), Bangkok: Klum khon mai, 1980, pp.202-205.)

In this political climate creative literature lost all traces of social and political consciousness and concentrated on themes considered by radicals to be bourgeois and 'escapist'. Chai-anan Samudavanija notes, however, that Sarit's censorship 'did not cause the public any noticeable concern. The readership did not miss political literature because it was heavy, less entertaining and was criticised on the grounds that it lacked artistic value and readability.' (See Chai-anan Samudavanija, 'Cotmai thu'ng khon run mai', (A Letter Addressed to the New Generation), in *Khwan khit itsara* (Free Thinking), Bangkok: Samnak phim Phikanet, 1974, p.3.) For a full account of the effects of the Sarit regime on literature see Suchat Sawatsi, 'Naew khit nak khian thai 2488-pacuban' (Thai Literary Thinking Between 1945 and the Present), in *Wannakam phu'a chiwit*, (Literature for Life), Special edition 2, June 1973, pp. 20-38.

For a detailed survey of the origins and development of the radical tradition in Thai literature see Yuangrat Wedel with Paul Wedel, *Radical Thought, Thai Mind: The Development of Revolutionary Ideas in Thailand*, Bangkok: Assumption Business Administration College, 1987, passim; and Sidaoru'ang, *A Drop of Glass*, (translated and introduced by Rachel Harrison), Bangkok: Duang Kamol, 1994, pp. 15-30.

<sup>49</sup> Manas, op. cit., p. 83.

nation.<sup>50</sup> When Suchat Sawatsi took over editorship of the journal in 1969 it soon became, 'the single most important outlet for nonconforming opinion ... '<sup>51</sup>

In his days as a student at Bangkok's Thammasat University Suchat had already made a name for himself as a budding writer, participating in a literary group known as *Phracan siaw* (The Crescent Moon).<sup>52</sup> His first poem, *Tawan* (The Sun), had been published by the group in 1967, and his first short story, *Songkhram* (War), appeared in 1968 in the weekly magazine *Sayam rat sapada wican* (Siam Rat Weekly Review).

The members of *Phracan siaw*, together with those of Sinlapako'n University's, *Num nao sao suay* (Ghastly Guys and Pretty Chicks), founded by Khanchai Bunpan and Sucit Wongthet, soon established themselves as the representatives of the 'new wave' in Thai literature in the era immediately prior to October 1973.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> See Chai-anan Samudavanija and David Morell, *Political Conflict in Thailand. Reform, Reaction, Revolution*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Oelgeschlager, Gunn and Hain, 1981, p. 140.

<sup>51</sup> Benedict Anderson and Ruchira Mendiones, *In the Mirror: Literature and Politics in Siam in the American Era*, Bangkok: Editions Duang Kamol, 1985, p. 28.

<sup>52</sup> Fellow members included Witthayako'n Chiangkun, Wisakhanthap, Nikhom Rayawa and Surachai Canthimatho'n.

<sup>53</sup> For details of their work see Manas, op. cit., pp. 85-6. A number of events in Thai political history between 1968 and 1973 had a considerable effect upon the development of radical literature: they included the announcement of the new constitution on 20 June, 1968, which led to increased activity on the part of intellectuals, politicians and students to cooperate in alleviating the distress of the ordinary people; the elections of 10 February 1969; the establishment of the National Students' Centre of Thailand on 1 February, 1970; and political activities and protests mobilized by student activists in the 1970-3 period. (See Bamrung and Chusak, op. cit., pp. 207-210.)

The sense of disappointment and alienation felt by young writers of the 1968-73 era was, in Suchat's view, expressed in their 'search for answers amidst the confusion of society'; a confusion that stemmed from what he saw as an absence of real democracy, from Thai foreign policy, from the Vietnam War and from serious shortcomings in tertiary education.<sup>54</sup> Suchat's own response to these problems was to focus on the quest for freedom that could be made by the individual. His belief that Man was essentially complex, temperamental and anarchic was one that did not fit closely with Buddhist philosophical traditions and was rather more inspired by his interest in Western thought, most notably the existentialism of Sartre and Camus.

Suchat's earliest short stories, poetry, plays and articles -published as a collection in 1972 under the title *Khwam ngiap* (Silence) - experimented with stream of consciousness, blank verse and symbolism and directly challenged traditional and bourgeois social values.<sup>55</sup> In the introduction to the first edition of *Khwam ngiap* Kamon Kamontrakun divides Suchat's work into three phases.<sup>56</sup> The first, Kamon argues, concentrates on doubts about life and its meaning, the problems of death and the search for ultimate truths, all of which create a sense of alienation from

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<sup>54</sup> See 'Phop Suchat Sawatsi' (Meet Suchat Sawatsi), in *Pacarayasan* (The Intellectual Review), 8:1, February-March, 1981, p. 59.

Both Sucit Wongthet's *Ku pen nisit naksu'ksa* (I am a Student) and Witthayako'n Chiangkun's *Chan cu'ng ma ha khwam mai* (So I Come in Search of Meanings) dealt with this latter theme. Both poems enjoyed considerable popularity during the students' revolt against authority and tradition in the first half of the 1970s.

<sup>55</sup> Suchat Sawatsi, *Khwam ngiap*, Bangkok: Samnak phim Nangsu', 1972. Second edition published by Samnak phim Karan, 1988.

<sup>56</sup> See Kamon Kamontrakun, 'Kham thalaeng kan phim khrang raek : 1972', (Introduction to the first edition, 1972), in *ibid.*, pp. 24-5.

the outside world. Each of the works from this period share a humanitarian concern for the suffering and unhappiness of others. In the second phase of his work Suchat experimented with new techniques and symbols, using excerpts of dialogue, in the style of the European Futurist and Surrealist movements. The third phase demonstrates a wider interest in the 'external' world, with discussions of survival techniques in a changing social environment, and the lack of self-confidence and the emotional alienation precipitated by the uneven distribution of wealth. In Suchat's view it was these situations which pointed to the absurdity of human existence.<sup>57</sup>

By the time the campaign for democracy in Thailand began to gather momentum in 1972-3, Suchat Sawatsi had already established himself not only as a prominent, avant-garde intellectual, writer and editor, but also as a social and political activist.

On October 14, 1973 the dictatorial military regime of Prime Minister Thanom Kittikachon and his deputy, Praphat Charusathian was finally toppled as a result of massive, student-led demonstrations. The period which followed was a significant one, marking the establishment of closer links between students, peasants and workers and the emergence of a new political and social consciousness. Concerted efforts were made by newly-established pressure groups to tackle the wide-ranging social and economic problems which affected the rural and urban poor - problems of landlessness and debt, unemployment, labour

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., pp. 24-25.

migration from the countryside to the capital, harsh working conditions, and the inadequate provision of healthcare, education and welfare facilities.<sup>58</sup>

It was in this context that Sidaoru'ang first came into contact with Suchat, when she heard him addressing a strike rally at a textile factory. Although not politically committed herself, she was greatly impressed by the warm, friendly atmosphere of the meeting, in which the speakers deliberately sat among the workers in an effort to demolish social barriers. Prior to this, she had believed the activists to be troublemakers, but thereafter she came to see them as both well-intentioned and approachable.

On a later occasion Suchat called by chance at the restaurant where Sidaoru'ang worked, in order to discuss workers' rights with the staff. When he subsequently became a regular customer there, he learned of Sidaoru'ang's interest in literature and gave her a number of books, including his own, *Khwam ngiap*. Despite her efforts, the book made little sense to her, and when a friend enquired what she was reading she replied that she was not really sure, and that her only certainty was that it could be classified as *klo'n* (blank verse). She

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<sup>58</sup> John S Girling, *Thailand: Society and Politics*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1981, p. 197. Chai-anan and Morell also indicate that: '... new popular confidence in the people's own power to bring about significant social and political change was the most significant result of the October 1973 incident.' (Chai-anan and Morell, *op. cit.*, p. 156.) A total of 264 pressure groups was formally created from 1973-6. The groups were involved in 390 incidents in which demands were made and protests voiced against the government. These new groups were particularly active between late 1973 and early 1974. For a full account see *ibid.*, p. 156.

persevered with it, however, and with the other books that Suchat gave her.<sup>59</sup>

Sidaoru'ang's first impression of Suchat, that he was a rather strange man, was due, in part, to his long hair. Despite warnings from her friends to keep her distance, she remained in contact with him, observing that, 'he spoke so nicely, like someone who read a lot. He did not speak very naturally, like the way ordinary people speak to each other, and that made me feel that I wanted to get to know him better.'<sup>60</sup>

Aware of the fact that she was far less well-educated than Suchat, Sidaoru'ang continued her efforts to learn as much as she could, this time in order to keep pace with her new-found friend. From her reading she began to develop a greater understanding of him and their relationship grew stronger:

I thought that if we shared the same tastes then we would be able to talk more and to communicate properly with each other. He gave me books as if he were giving me presents. I was pleased and at that time I used to go to study typing, which I had started shortly before I met him. I don't know why I went to learn. I suppose the lessons were cheap and it wasn't far from the restaurant where I worked. And Suchat was nice, so he trained me to type his manuscripts and that's how we became closer. Not long after that he suggested that we should try living together and view marriage in a new light (in the way suggested by Witthayako'n Chiangkun).<sup>61</sup> As far as I was concerned, as long as we loved each other I had no

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<sup>59</sup> Personal interview, September, 1990. These books included *Wirachon asia* (Heroes of Asia), which rather unexpectedly, also included the life story of Che Guevara, and a book on the Vietnam War, where Sidaoru'ang learned, for the first time, the difference between Vietnam and Viet Cong.

<sup>60</sup> Personal interview, September, 1990.

<sup>61</sup> Witthayako'n had translated and edited an American text about the acceptability of cohabitation as opposed to traditional marriage.

objection to us trying to live together first.<sup>62</sup> As long as I disregarded the idea that virginity had any kind of financial value attached to it then it was all right to simply live together and there was no need to work out the 'damages'. We were the ones to make the choice. If we ended up feeling disappointed then that would be that and we would have no one to blame but ourselves. And apart from that, I think Suchat was slightly afraid that I might be the kind of woman who would tie him down, because he was also in love with another girl at the time. So we planned to try living together first, with the proviso that if Suchat felt unsure about whether or not the relationship would work he might have to leave. He was the one to suggest all of this and, once we had talked it over, I thought his ideas were reasonable and agreed to try it out. I thought that if we could get along together then I would try and keep up with him and that if I couldn't we would inevitably grow apart and should not then stay together. But when we did live together I was always thinking that one day he would go and that if I was just myself he was bound to go and live with someone else more suitable. I was quietly afraid but I just soldiered on and we decided that perhaps we could live together successfully after all.<sup>63</sup>

Sidaoru'ang and Suchat initially lived together in accommodation which she had rented near the restaurant where she worked. Eventually, however, Suchat's ever-expanding book collection obliged them to move to the house in Thung Si Kan, on the outskirts of north Bangkok, which had originally belonged to Suchat's mother. Surrounded by this wealth of books, both Thai and Western, Sidaoru'ang was once again able to indulge her love of reading; and her relationship with Suchat constituted an important incentive for her to learn enough to engage his keen

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<sup>62</sup> Sidaoru'ang says that they talked about marriage half-jokingly sometimes and afterwards they laughed about it. 'We were free then and had no parents left, but we still had relatives. But no one was interested, so we didn't have to tell anyone and we thought we'd come to the right decision.' See *Dichan*, op. cit., p. 245.

<sup>63</sup> Personal interview, September, 1990.

intellect: 'I tried to keep up with him on some issues and read the books that he chose for me. I read a lot of literature and followed politics. After a while I could talk to him about all kinds of things and understand him and nothing was too weighty.'<sup>64</sup>

Sidaoru'ang claims that during the 1970s, although she read widely, she was not directly influenced by the work of any one particular writer.<sup>65</sup> Nevertheless, she was impressed by the novels of Siburapha and Seni Saowaphong and the poetry of Cit Phumisak and Nai Phi (Atsani Phonlacan), all of whose works were republished in the early 1970s, following suppression under the Sarit regime.<sup>66</sup> These included Siburapha's *Con kwa rao ca*

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<sup>64</sup> Personal interview, September, 1990.

<sup>65</sup> In this sense she differs from other writers of her generation; contemporaries such as Atsiri Thammachot and Wat Wanlyangkun venerate an older generation Thai writers, both recognizing their own contribution to and defining themselves as part of a clearly determined literary tradition. Personal interviews with Atsiri and Wat, July/September, 1990.

<sup>66</sup> Following the uprising, leftist literature was openly sold at Bangkok's bookstalls and on university campuses. In his analysis of the cultural and ideological consequences of October 1973, Anderson states that: 'On the left, an almost giddy sense of exhilaration, iconoclasm and creativity was born. For a time it seemed that one could say, sing or do almost anything.' See Ben Anderson, 'Withdrawal Symptoms: Social and Cultural Aspects of the October 6 Coup', *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, 9 (3): 1977, p. 15.

Sathian reports that during this period over 80,000 copies of a text revealing details of military and police relations (*O.T.R. Antharai*) were published; 100,000 copies of a text exploring the death of King Rama VIII; 20,000 copies of *Pratyaniphon kho'ng Mao Tse Tung* (The Thoughts of Mao Tse Tung), the majority of which were sold at an exhibition on Red China at Thammasat University; and six editions within two years of Si Ubon's book *Che Guevara*. See Sathian, *No'n nangsui*, op. cit., p. 103.

A number of books recorded and commemorated the 1973 uprising; sophisticated essays and articles were written about strategies of political manoeuvre and survival; and a plethora of books on communism included *Khabuan kan kho'mmiwnit haeng prathet thai* (The Communist Movement in Thailand), edited by Suchat Sawatsi. (See Sathian, *ibid.*, p. 108.) Sathian provides the

*phop kan ik* (Until We Meet Again) and Seni Saowaphong's *Pisat* (Ghosts) and *Khwam rak kho'ng Wanlaya* (Wanlaya's Love).<sup>67</sup> On reading the latter, Sidaoru'ang recorded in her diary that, 'Wanlaya is very firm in her beliefs and does not want to be the kind of wife who simply belongs to her husband. She thinks about the construction of a new idealism and respects those people who work for the benefit of the wider world.'<sup>68</sup>

All these novels shared similarities, in that their main protagonists were of humble origin, imbued with the need to fight against the old order for social and political change. Their interpretation of 'love' was not limited to that between two people but instead extended to a more general concern for mankind, a theme also characteristic of the work of Nai Phi. Nai Phi's poems stressed, in simple vocabulary and form, the need to fight for the common people, to avoid solipsism and to oppose war. One of his best-known works, *Isan* (The North East), first published in 1952, depicted the physical and emotional harm caused to the poverty-

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information that *Santhi Prachatham* (Popular Justice), by Puay U'ngpako'n was printed twice and sold out on both occasions; *Panha lae thang o'k kho'ng prathet doy phatthana* (The Problems of Underdeveloped Countries and their Solutions), by Witthayako'n, sold 90% of its copies; *Lokathat yawachon, pratya sangkhomniyom* (The Views of the Younger Generation and Socialist Thought), by Anut Aphaphirom, sold very quickly, as did reprints of the work of Pridi Phanomyong.

<sup>67</sup> For a detailed analysis of the major fiction of Siburapha see David A. Smyth, op. cit. and David Smyth, 'The Later Short Stories of Siburapha' in Jeremy H.C.S. Davidson, *Lai Su Thai*, London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1987, pp. 98-115.

<sup>68</sup> 12 February, 1975. This is a significant observation, given the themes of several of Sidaoru'ang's short stories and the comments upon gender relations which they embody.

stricken farmers of North East Thailand by drought and by the corruption of local politicians.<sup>69</sup>

In addition to writing fiction, radical writers working in the aftermath of World War II also contributed, through journals and magazines, to discussions about the political purpose of Art and Literature, Udom having been one of the first to acknowledge the paucity of thorough and rigorous literary criticism available in Thailand.<sup>70</sup> These works were also widely republished in the early 1970s. Intellectuals such as Siburapha, Seni Saowaphong, Atsani Phonlakan, Udom Sisuwan and later Cit Phumisak had all been influenced by socialist realism in China and the Soviet Union. By far the most important theoretical text to be made available in the 1970s was, however, Cit Phumisak's *Sinlapa phu'a chiwit*, *sinlapa phu'a prachachon*, (Art for Life, Art for the People).<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> See Chonthira Klatyu, *Wannakhadi puangchon*, (People's Literature), Bangkok: Samnak phim Khlet Thai, 1976, p.110. *Isan* was first published in *Sayam samai* (The Age of Siam), issue number 256, 16 April, 1952.

<sup>70</sup> Writing under the pseudonym of Bancong Bancoetsin, Udom's articles on literary criticism produced between 1947 and 1957, were collated and published under the title *Sinlapa wannakhadi kap chiwit* (Literature and Life) in 1975. A number of Cit Phumisak's articles on traditional Thai literature were published as collections; *Bot wikhro' wannakam yuk sakdina*, (An Analysis of Literature in the Feudal Era), for example, was produced by the student's group *Chomrom nangsu' saeng tawan* (The 'Rays of the Sun' Literary Circle) in October, 1974 (and again in March, 1975); and the pieces which he wrote between 1956 and 1957 for the column *Sinlapa wican* (Art Criticism) in *Pituphum* (Fatherland) magazine were reprinted by *Fai sinlapa watthanatham so' co' mo'* (S.C.M. Art and Culture) in 1974 (and again in 1978).

<sup>71</sup> Written under Cit's pseudonym, Thipako'n, *Sinlapa phu'a chiwit*, *sinlapa phu'a prachachon* originally appeared as two separate texts which were amalgamated and republished by a student group at Thammasat University's Faculty of Journalism in 1972.

For a detailed discussion of the ideas put forward by these radical theorists see Sidaoru'ang, *A Drop of Glass*, op. cit., pp. 15-30.

In addition to editing and republishing older radical texts, students and young journalists were active in producing their own

More recently, a younger generation of critics, which included such people as Sathian Canthimatho'n and Anut Aphaphirom, strove to re-awaken the debate on progressive literary theory. In one of his pieces, published under the pen-name Thatsana Saengngam, Anut defined the meaning of *wannakam nam nao* (Stagnant Literature), a term first used by the critic and university lecturer Cu'a Sathhawethin in a seminar at the close of the 1960s and adopted by the new generation of writers 'to express their distaste for fictional works they considered to have offered little of social value and to have old, unimaginative plots and themes.'<sup>72</sup>

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books and magazines. Among these was *Wannakam phu'a chiwit* (Literature for Life). Initially published in 1972 as a fortnightly journal and sold at 3 baht per copy, it went out of print in September 1972 and reappeared as a monthly magazine in May of the following year under a new editorial board and at the increased price of 6 baht. *Wannakam phu'a chiwit* contained a variety of articles on and excerpts from the work of the earlier generation of Thai writers, such as Siburapha, Suwat Woradilok and Sot Kuramarohit; and translations from foreign writers, such as Lu Hsun, Mao Tse Tung, Pablo Neruda, Kahlil Gibran, John Steinbeck, E.M. Forster, Jack London, Yevgeny Yevtoshenko and Maxim Gorky; the lyrics of *phleng phu'a chiwit* (Songs for Life); poetry, short stories and articles on such topics as politics, *phapayon phu'a chiwit* (Cinema for Life), the role of theatre, the role of art in contemporary society; and regular quotations from Cit's *Sinlapa phu'a chiwit*. One of the features of the magazine most inconsistent with its content was its cover designs, of such subjects as naked women on horseback or crawling through marshland. See, for example, *Wannakam phu'a chiwit*, 3 July, 1972 and *Wannakam phu'a chiwit*, undated, 1972. Since such illustrations are not repeated inside the magazine one can only assume that they were introduced as an incentive to the inquisitive reader.

<sup>72</sup> Manas, op. cit., p. 89. According to Anut, 'progressive' literature was that which was of use to the people, whilst works which duped them were 'stagnant', concerning themselves solely with the private actions of the individual, dealing only in part with truth and reality, or sometimes deliberately distorting it, being generally rooted in the existing state of values and being hostile to change. Anut argued that too much literature concentrated on the 'unhealthy' themes of sexual activities, romance, inheritance, feelings, emotions and the

Against this literary backdrop, Sidaoru'ang could not fail to absorb the ideas of her progressive contemporaries. In addition to the writings of literary critics, she also acknowledges Wat Wanlyangkun, Mala Khamcan, Camlo'ng Fangchonlakit and Khamsing Sino'k as writers of her own generation whose work she greatly admired and enjoyed.<sup>73</sup>

Inquisitive about the different approaches of writers in other countries, and observing that their efforts were often more sophisticated than those of Thai short story writers, Sidaoru'ang also began to develop an interest in foreign fiction in translation. Among the works which impressed her most were the short stories of Guy de Maupassant and the novels of John Steinbeck and Gabriel Garcia Marquez.<sup>74</sup> Like many of her contemporaries,

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quest for personal satisfaction. What, he asked, was the value of '... describing a great mansion, whilst the majority of the population live in grass-roofed huts; or talking of the love of a man who has had both his legs amputated whilst one can count the number of people in the world who actually fit this description.' See Thatsana Saengnam, 'Wannakam praphet 'nam nao' lae thi mi chai 'nam nao' (Literature of the 'Stagnant Water' genre and that which is not 'Stagnant Water') in Sathian Canthimatho'n, *Khlu'n luk doem*, (The Old Wave), Bangkok: Samnak phim Maeng sap, 1973, pp. 114-115. Instead, he argued that social activities, such as the production of food and utilities for society, political battles for the independence of the Nation or for democracy, academic arguments or scientific research were far more worthwhile themes - the ones with which modern literature should concern itself.

A further explanation of the term *nam nao* is provided in the lead article of *Wannakam phu'a chiwit*, 5 August, 1972, pp. 2-4.

<sup>73</sup> The entry in her diary for 3 February, 1976 refers to the fact that she read a collection of poetry and short stories by Wat, upon which she commented, 'He writes very well, and uses beautiful language, not harsh like my own.'

<sup>74</sup> Personal interviews with other writers of the post-1973 generation all indicate that Guy de Maupassant made a particularly

whose careers as writers were consolidated shortly after October 1973, Sidaoru'ang enjoyed the works of Lu Hsun and Maxim Gorky, especially Gorky's novel *Mother*, about which she wrote at length in her diary:

It is a wonderful book, about lives that have always been lived under oppression, where the characters just grin and bear it and only complain about what they cannot endure. In the end they find a solution by helping themselves, which is very hard ... It is difficult because the writer intended his work to be read by labourers, who find things hard to understand. The book would be difficult for Thai workers to read and they would have to try very hard to understand it. Gorky describes the reality that a man who is suffering and in hardship tends to find a way out of his predicament through doing things which make him forget reality - by drinking, cursing his wife and children or even simply resigning himself in the belief that this is God's Will. The story clearly shows that labourers know as much as the bloodsuckers. The peasants begin to suspect that the landowners have taken their land away from them. At the beginning there is no hope and it is frightening for those who have never contemplated it before. But society is held together by the belief that those who do right will succeed. The story portrays the depth of the mother's emotions as she gradually begins to understand and changes from an old lady and a useless vehicle for her husband to vent his wrath upon. The only thing Mother loves is her son, Pavel. When she listens to his ideas she begins to understand and she joins in with helping others too. At first it is only her son she cares about, but she changes that love into love for all who are suffering. She thinks she must hurry to act and works in place of her son. But society's battle is neither a simple nor a speedy one. Gorky points out the final aim.

After reading the book I feel as if I too have travelled along that path with the characters in their fight.

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strong impression. This was not usually because of the content of his work, but for the way in which he structured his short stories.

The entry in Sidaoru'ang's diary for 13 August, 1976 also records that she read *Peyton Place* by Grace Metalious, and that she had grown very fond of 'descriptive' fiction.

After Sidaoru'ang began living with Suchat she gave up work, at his insistence. With more time and with ready access to a vast range of books, she began to experiment, once again, with her own creative writing. Suchat encouraged her to become more self-assured,<sup>75</sup> and it was to him that she gave credit in the introduction to her first collection of short stories, *Kaew yot diaw* (A Drop of Glass) for having inspired in her the patience and self-confidence to write; 'I am very lucky to have met someone whom I love and who has encouraged me and given me confidence and who has devoted himself to me tirelessly. I think that is where my creative ability began.'<sup>76</sup>

The entry in Sidaoru'ang's diary for 14 July 1976 also records that, 'I finished typing and proofing my novel *So'n klin*.<sup>77</sup> It took about 5 months. But if Suchat hadn't helped by giving me advice and support, it wouldn't have been any good. Then again, he says he'd do the same for any writer.' In one interview Sidaoru'ang even went as far as to say that, had she not met Suchat, she would merely have become a market vendor with a dozen or so children, though this response was somewhat directed by the question asked of her.<sup>78</sup>

While Suchat's influence was doubtless of great importance in the initiation of Sidaoru'ang's writing career, other

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<sup>75</sup> Personal interview, September, 1990.

<sup>76</sup> Sidaoru'ang, *Kaew yot diaw*, Samnak phim Met Sai: Bangkok, 1983.

<sup>77</sup> *So'n klin* is the name of the key, female character in the novel. It means 'tuberose'.

<sup>78</sup> See *No'n nangsu'*, op. cit., p.11.

factors were simultaneously involved. For someone from a family background which lacked warmth and intimacy, who was then transported from the world of semi-skilled factory labour to the periphery of Bangkok intellectual circles, the deeply personal experience of writing was, in part, a device by which to transcend social obstacles and to consolidate her own identity. The view of Western feminist theorists that writing is a way in which women might find the opportunity to explore new identities and to escape culturally fixed categorisation is concomitant with Sidaoru'ang's experience in this instance.<sup>79</sup>

A more radical, feminist interpretation would even deem the circumstances of Sidaoru'ang's relationship with Suchat to be destructive of her self-confidence and stability, inducing an obligatory false-consciousness (a consciousness of her self not as she actually was, but as Suchat desired her to be) in order that she might gain his approval and consequent support. Sidaoru'ang has recalled, with some sadness, that Suchat was reluctant to commit himself to their relationship, fearing that she might restrict him in some way. Moreover, he was still in love with a girl he had known from his university days at Thammasat.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> See Morag Shiach, *Hélène Cixous. A Politics of Writing*, London and New York: Routledge, 1991, p. 26.

For further details on feminist literary criticism and identity see Harrison, 'Birth, Death and Identity', op. cit., passim. See also Toril Moi, *Sexual, Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*, London and New York: Routledge, 1988, passim.

<sup>80</sup> Personal interview, September, 1990. Suchat had fallen in love with a woman he had known at Thammasat University. However, when she married a mercenary who had fought in the Vietnam War Suchat realized that they had strong ideological differences. Until that time Suchat had always informed Sidaoru'ang that he had another girlfriend and that one day he would leave. Sidaoru'ang accepted this and envisaged protecting herself against the emotional

Suchat's hesitancy was also demonstrated by his unwillingness to publicly recognize Sidaoru'ang: prior to their move to Thung Si Kan, he avoided introducing her to his friends and, if they met her, they, in turn, did not dare to ask who she was; and on occasions when she attended his public lectures she would leave on her own the moment they had finished, not having been invited by Suchat to remain with him and talk to colleagues in his literary and social circles. It was only after the violent coup of 6 October, 1976 that the question of personal safety obliged Suchat and Sidaoru'ang to formally register their marriage, Suchat feeling concern that, were he to be arrested for his widely-known radical sympathies, Sidaoru'ang might have been left with nowhere to live.<sup>81</sup>

The nature of Suchat Sawatsi's influence upon the initiation and development of Sidaoru'ang's career as a writer is a highly complex one, illustrated in part by the circumstances under which she produced her first piece of creative writing since their relationship began. Some months after they had been living together, Sidaoru'ang recorded, in the form of a short story, a dream she had had. When Suchat saw what she had been writing he was surprised by the extent of her ability and helped her to rework it into a poem, entitled *Kluay* (Bananas), which was published in 1975 in the literary magazine *Puthuchon* (The Common Man). Suchat subsequently advised Sidaoru'ang that, rather than work from her imagination, she should write

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pain this situation precipitated by asking him to leave before he was actually ready to do so.

<sup>81</sup> Suchat and Sidaoru'ang were formally married on 14 October, 1976.

'documentary realism' based upon her own life experiences as a factory worker.<sup>82</sup>

Suchat was clearly speaking from the informed and experienced perspective of an editor, offering genuine advice about how Sidaoru'ang's work might be published and appeal to the audience of its day. Nevertheless, feminist theorists such as Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray, who emphasize the importance of dreams as a source of 'true' self-expression, would interpret Suchat's influence as a restraint of the female imagination by a more rational 'masculine' order.<sup>83</sup>

As a result of Suchat's advice that she write 'documentary fiction' Sidaoru'ang produced a short story entitled *Kaew yot diaw* (A

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<sup>82</sup> Personal interview, Bangkok, 1990. See also *Thanon nangsu'*, March 1985, p. 20.

<sup>83</sup> Following Lacan, Hélène Cixous has argued that women come to self-awareness only as a subject that is constituted through an alien ('masculine') discourse (Lacan's Symbolic Order), as a result of which they are linguistically marginalized and therefore muted. The only way in which woman can therefore remain in touch with her primary identity is by gaining access to her asexual or bisexual unconscious. (Lacan's Imaginary or Kristeva's semiotic) as the repository of material that has been repressed in the process of sexual differentiation. Because Cixous favours the expression of the repressed she places particular value on myths and dreams, referring to the latter as a form of 'night writing' in which we all participate. See Cixous, 'Difficult Joys', op. cit., p. 22. Freud also viewed both art and literature as an, albeit harmless, illusion, standing in contrast to reality and sharing some of the characteristics of the dream.

For explanations of the Lacanian terminology used here see Malcolm Bowie, *Lacan*, London: Fontana Press, 1991, chapter 4. Also Madan Sarup, *Jacques Lacan*, New York and London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992, chapter 7. And Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, (translation by Betsy Wing), Minneapolis and Oxford: University of Minnesota Press, 1986, p. 164 and pp. 167-8.

For definitions of Kristeva's semiotic see Moi, *Sexual, Textual Politics*, op. cit., pp. 161-167.

Drop of Glass), based upon her experiences as a glass factory worker in the early 1960s, and it was subsequently published in the April-May 1975 edition of *Sangkomsat parithat* (of which Suchat was still editor).<sup>84</sup> The story's central character, Anong, is a thinly disguised depiction of Sidaoru'ang herself, while that of the student activist, Aet, is reminiscent of Suchat.<sup>85</sup>

Anong goes about her various jobs with great willingness and efficiency, receiving a pittance of a wage in return, the large part of which she sends home to her parents. Her working day is long and arduous and her living quarters cramped and squalid. On one occasion Anong accompanies Na Liang, the factory van driver, on his delivery rounds, only to witness his unfair dismissal at the end of the day because he has stopped off for lunch en route. Anong threatens to resign in sympathy and the situation escalates beyond the control of the management as tempers begin to flare. Aet, who is working part-time at the factory, gives a provocative speech to the gathered crowd of workers, instilling in them the desire for mass rebellion. The story closes with the image of all the workers from the glass factory gathered together in protest and with their fellow workers

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<sup>84</sup> See *Sangkomsat parithat*, year 13, issue number 2, April-May, 1975. The entry in Sidaoru'ang's diary for Thursday 1 May, 1975 states: 'Today is Worker's Day and workers all over the world are holding mass celebrations in a show of their strength. I have had my first story, *Kaew yot diaw*, published in *Sangkomsat parithat*. I am so pleased. Thank you so much ... Saigon has fallen and the Viet Cong have won over South Vietnam.'

<sup>85</sup> This is the nickname used by Suchat Sawatsi.

from nearby hemp and sugar factories filtering through to join them.<sup>86</sup>

Although the details of Anong's life in the glass factory are based upon own Sidaoru'ang's own life, ironically, the only non-autobiographical element of *Kaew yot diaw* was the direction taken by the workers given the circumstances of a colleague's unfair dismissal. Whilst the factory worker Sidaoru'ang had not, in fact, incited a mass uprising, she had, over a decade later, taken a braver direction in her fiction. The 'radicalisation' of Sidaoru'ang's life as a factory worker was pure fiction that belonged to the dreams of post '73 Thailand<sup>87</sup> and bore no relationship to the reality of her working life in the previous decade, when the Sarit regime had prevented any expression of labour unrest whatsoever.<sup>88</sup>

In its references to workers' dissatisfaction with their unfair conditions of employment and its acknowledgement of their desire to protest, *Kaew yot diaw* held great appeal for the readers of *Sangkhomsat parithat*. What stylistic and linguistic shortcomings the story was believed to have were overlooked in favour of its authentic content. In a review of *Kaew yot diaw* in the daily newspaper, *Prachachat* (The Nation), Duangdu'an

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<sup>86</sup> For a full translation of this story into English see Sidaoru'ang, *A Drop of Glass*, op. cit., pp. 79-88.

<sup>87</sup> A total number of 577 labour disputes took place in 1973, 73% of which occurred after October 14, and in 1974 358 strikes were recorded involving numbers in excess of 100,000. See Chai-anan and Morell, op. cit. p.188. There were fewer strikes during 1975 and 1976, but each one lasted for considerably longer and the average number of man days lost per strike increased significantly.

<sup>88</sup> There is evidence that some wild cat strike action was taken during the period in which Sarit was premier, but that there was nothing more substantial or widespread than that. See *ibid.*, p.186.



Pradapdao<sup>89</sup> wrote that its author must surely have had some first-hand experience of work in a glass factory: 'Even though her work is not of excellent quality it is still more convincing than that of other petty bourgeois writers.'<sup>90</sup>

Following the publication of *Kaew yot diaw*, literary circles began to buzz with speculation about the identity of Sidaoru'ang, although they were to be kept waiting for several years before they were to know conclusively the real identity of the writer. In the meantime, a variety of suggestions were put forward; that the pen-name was used by an established writer, who did not wish to reveal himself, for either personal or political reasons,<sup>91</sup> by a student or intellectual interested in the study of workers, and who had obtained information from close observation of the factories,<sup>92</sup> or even by a whole group of Thai writers, hoping to avoid identification.<sup>93</sup> There was a general assumption that

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<sup>89</sup> A pseudonym used by Sathian Canthimatho'n.

<sup>90</sup> See Duangdu'an Pradapdao, 'Ru'ang san 18 thu'ng yuk kho'ng Sidaoru'ang laew ru'?' (Short stories of 1975. Is this the age of Sidaoru'ang?) in Prachachat Daily Newspaper, 14 September, 1975. The 'artistry' of writing in the 'Literature for Life' genre had long been a subject for debate. Writing under the alias of Bancong Bancoetsin, Udom Sisuwan had commented that although the content of the works was often faultless, constraints of time available for writing often meant a certain crudeness in approach and prevented quality of form from matching that of content. (See Bancong, *Sinlapa wannakhadi kap chiwit*, (Art, Literature and Life), Bangkok: Samnak phim Sai Thip, 1981, p. 128.)

<sup>91</sup> See *Thanon nangsu'*, op. cit. p. 33. Suggestions were made that the writer in question may be Raphipho'n (the pen-name of Suwat Woradilok) or Caru'k Chomphupho'n, or even Suchat himself. (See *Thanon nangsu'*, number 9, March, 1985, p. 22.)

<sup>92</sup> See Camrat Thano'mmit and Thira Yutthawan in 'Sidaoru'ang; miti mai khong kammachip' (Sidaoru'ang; the new face of the labourer), in *Lok nangsu'*, year 2, issue number 7, April 1979, p. 31.

<sup>93</sup> It was rumoured that this group of writers had entered the jungle following the events of 6 October, 1976. Adding fuel to this supposition was the fact that *Wirachon han kla* (Brave Heroes) - the

Sidaoru'ang was a man, since few women had produced work with a political or social theme.

With her pen-name Sidaoru'ang alluded to the importance of both her relationship with her father and with Suchat. A 'daoru'ang' is a small, yellow flower, closely resembling a marigold, which Sidaoru'ang recalls having collected for her father when she was a child. In light of her father's suicide, and of its relationship to her writing, it is noteworthy that Sidaoru'ang traces the origins of her pseudonym back to him, not only in interview but in the text of one of her stories, *Pho'* (Father):

'Hey, look what I've got,' his daughter called to him one day, waving a plant at him that had come out in little yellow flowers with serrated edges.

'What sort of plant's that?' he asked.

'I've no idea. I got it over by the jetty. There's loads of them over there.'

Father came out of the house, looking intrigued.

'Don't you know what kind of flower it is?' he asked her. 'Well, we'd better give it a name, hadn't we? ...

How about *Daoru'ang*?'

The girl laughed happily.

'Hey! That's *my* name,' she said.

Both father and daughter laughed and he patted her gently on the head.<sup>94</sup>

This is literary licence. Whilst 'daoru'ang' flowers are reminiscent of Sidaoru'ang's childhood, their name was in fact identified to her by Suchat and not by her father:

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influential voice of the Communist Party of Thailand - gave their full approval of Sidaoru'ang's work, among that of other writers.

<sup>94</sup> Sidaoru'ang, *A Drop of Glass*, op. cit., pp. 74-75.

Both Khun Suchat and I thought of my pen name. I thought of this, that and the other. I thought of flowers. I thought of my father...I think I thought of my father a lot.<sup>95</sup> I used to collect flowers for him and they were yellow. Khun Suchat worked out that they must have been *daoru'ang* flowers. That was my father. And then the *Si* was a bit from him as well. All the famous, old writers had *si* in their names. So Khun Suchat called me *Sidaoru'ang*.<sup>96</sup>

The prefix *si* implies honour and dignity, and was suggested by Suchat since it appears as a syllable in his own surname and also occurs in the pseudonyms of many other Thai writers, for example, Siburapha. Both words have feminine overtones in Thai.

In the months which followed the publication of *Kaew yot diaw* a number of radical, progressive magazines published Sidaoru'ang's new stories. Among them were the literary periodicals *Puthuchon*, *Akso'rasat phican* (The Literary Review), and *Prachachon* (The People);<sup>97</sup> and even the well-established

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<sup>95</sup> The words 'thought of' in Thai (*khit thu'ng*) can also be translated as 'to miss' or 'to long for'. This sentence could therefore alternatively be translated as, 'I think I missed my father a lot.'

<sup>96</sup> *Dichan*, op. cit., p. 241.

<sup>97</sup> The short stories, *Chai pha lu'ang* (The Hem of the Yellow Robe), *Pho'* (Father), and *Phuak nai pa* (The People in the Jungle) were first published in *Puthuchon* in May, July and October 1975, respectively.

*Wao bon fa* (A Kite in the Sky), *Sing thi long thun* (The Investment) and *Khrang nu'ng nan ma laew* (Once Upon a Time, Long, Long Ago) were all published in *Akso'rasat phican* in 1975.

*Raeng ngan kap ngoen* (Labour and Money) was published in *Prachachon* in July 1975.

women's magazine, *Satri san* (Women's News) published *Phit wang*, (Disappointed), in November 1975.



## CHAPTER TWO

### THE EARLY SHORT STORIES : 1975-6

*Most women do someone else's - man's - writing, and in their innocence sustain it and give it voice, and end up producing writing that's in effect masculine.*

Hélène Cixous<sup>98</sup>

Between January 1975 and September 1976 no fewer than fifteen of Sidaoru'ang's short stories were published in a variety of magazines, journals and newspapers. They encompassed a range of key themes, many of which were to recur in later works, and they drew heavily upon the experiences of her own life.

Following the success of *Kaew yot diaw*, Sidaoru'ang produced a number of short stories dealing with factory workers and labourers. She retained some of the original characters in a sequel - *Raeng ngan kap ngoen* (Labour and Wages) - first published in July 1975.<sup>99</sup>

In this story Anong, Aet and Uncle Liang agree to join a demonstration that is to be held on Labour Day (May 1), despite the fact that Liang's son is a policeman on patrol in the protest area. Some workers voice their concern about the difficulties of feeding their children if they lose their jobs as a result; others admit they

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<sup>98</sup> Hélène Cixous, 'Castration or decapitation?', translated by Annette Kuhn, in *Signs*, 7, 1, 1976, p. 52.

<sup>99</sup> First published under the title *Phiang sing diaw* (Only One Thing), in *Prachachon*, the title was changed when it was included in the collection *Kaew yot diaw*.

would prefer to take a day's holiday and watch *likay*<sup>100</sup> instead. Anong raises the issue of the need for women to be paid at the same rate as men for doing the same work, but the other workers are more interested in making plans for Labour Day. A disagreement between Liang and his son regarding Liang's wish to attend the demonstration concludes the story, Liang seeing the need to go against his son's wishes and instead show loyalty to his fellow workers.

*Raeng ngan kap ngoen* attracted unfavourable comments from the critics; Duangdu'an Pradapdao was far less complimentary about this piece than he had been about *Kaew yot diaw*, arguing that it lacked imagination and adhered too rigidly to the prescriptions of 'Literature for Life'.<sup>101</sup>

Rasami Phaolu'angtho'ng felt, on the other hand, that Sidaoru'ang had implanted more in the story than mere straightforward radical commentary. Her criticism, however, lay in the story's sketchiness of characterisation, inappropriate choice of dialogue and weakness of plot, with what Rasami saw as a rather unsatisfactory ending:

Even though she leaves the reader thinking that some terrible fate may become the father and son, which affects the reader's responses, because she does not provide us with enough background information about them the story then seems to be divided into two parts, without any link between these

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<sup>100</sup> *Likay* is a form of popular Thai drama, something akin to pantomime. For further details see Micheal Smithies, 'Likay, a Note on the Origin, Form and Future of Siamese Folk Opera' in *Journal of the Siam Society*, January 1971, volume 59, part 1, pp. 33-63.

<sup>101</sup> Thai critics refer to stories of this type as *tam sut*, literally, 'following the recipe'.

two parts, beyond the fact that they are all workers in the same factory.<sup>102</sup>

Conflict between family members brought about by outside political events is similarly a theme of *Phit wang* (Disappointed). First published in November 1975, it was written in the form of four letters from a divorced mother employed at a Bangkok textile factory to her schoolboy son, whom she works to support.<sup>103</sup> The influence of Gorky's *Mother* on Sidaoru'ang's writing is clearly discernible in this story.

Having herself left school at the age of twelve, the mother tells her son of the pride she feels that he has had the opportunity to complete his education. In subsequent letters she describes her recent involvement in strike action and the support received from student activists: 'My dear child', she writes, 'you would not believe that such a country bumpkin, such a poorly-educated woman like me, could stand up with a microphone and let out all my pent up bitterness for all to hear. I myself can hardly believe it.'<sup>104</sup> The final letter alludes to the disappointment the mother

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<sup>102</sup> See Rasami's article written under the pseudonym of Camrat Thanommit and Thira Yutthawan, op. cit., p. 38.

<sup>103</sup> First published in the magazine *Satri san*, it was reprinted in the same year in *Anuso'n phru'ttha 18, nangsu' pracam rongrian satri mahapru'ttharam* (The Annual Magazine of Mahapru'ttharam Girls' School, 1975). Sidaoru'ang initially entitled the story *Sia dai* (A Crying Shame), but this was changed by *Satri san*. The original title was chosen in reference to a story of the same name by the writer 'Nida' and which concerned a mother mourning the changes she had observed in her daughter as a result of what she deemed to be the evil intentions of her daughters' friends to transform her into a 'leftist'. Sidaoru'ang's version of the story was an ideological reversal of the original story, *Sia dai*. See Camrat and Thira, op. cit., p. 50.

<sup>104</sup> Sidaoru'ang, 'Phit wang', in *Kaew yot diaw*, op. cit., p. 144.

feels at finding her son to be very different in his ideals; his wish is to become a policeman rather than a teacher, so that he can avoid having to work as hard as his mother and can make more money than she. She concludes that, however much he might have learned at school, the lessons that she has learned in the outside world have been far more meaningful ones.

This closing message clearly has autobiographical resonances for Sidaoru'ang and there is a sense in which she casts herself in this story as a 'mother' to her readers, the plurality of whom is suggested in the closing paragraph: 'It is such a very great pity that one child has lost their way.'<sup>105</sup>

*Phit wang* was the first of Sidaoru'ang's short stories to be published in a mainstream magazine (*Satri san*), the readership of which would have been moderately well-educated and wealthy, (though perhaps less politically and socially aware than that of *Sangkhomsat parithat* or *Puthuchon*). Like many of her stories to follow, *Phit wang* illustrates the didactic features of Sidaoru'ang's work (and of Thai radical literature in general) and reflects the author's view that life experience is as valuable as formal education.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., p. 147.

<sup>106</sup> The response of Thai critics to *Phit wang* was, however, that it failed to convey enough detailed information for an uninformed reader to fully empathise with the mother's cause. Rasami argues that: 'Sidaoru'ang emphasises the struggle of the mother, who is a labourer, with hardly any reference to the son, who is so far away from her. As a result there is no evidence of any relationship or bonding between the mother and the son, only a string of criticisms and lectures offered to a stranger who happens to be referred to as the son.' (See Camrat and Thira, op. cit., p. 50.)

This tendency in *Phit wang* for Sidaoru'ang to preach a political message reflects an increasingly strong political conviction in her early work that is at its most strident in *Phuak nai pa* (The Insurgents),<sup>107</sup> narrated by a female clerk in a mining company. An accident kills a number of workers, including a heavily pregnant woman and the aged parents of a young man, who subsequently sells up and leaves.<sup>108</sup> The mine owner's failure to attend their funeral or pay proper compensation indicates the low value he places on his workers' lives and welfare.

Some years later, in the aftermath of 14 October, 1973 the narrator explains that little has actually changed:

And then what they call 'the 14th of October' happened and I don't know just how much it did to change the country but I do know myself that I was still a clerk in the mining company, just the same as ever, that my wages were the same as ever and that working there was as dangerous as ever.<sup>109</sup>

The mine owner has chosen to stand for election and, one day, while he is away campaigning, the young man orphaned in the accident returns to the mine, heading a small band of armed insurgents. He discusses with the workers issues concerning their living conditions, wages, welfare provisions, compensation

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<sup>107</sup> First published in *Puthuchon* in October, 1975.

<sup>108</sup> The image of the mother-to-be, crushed by rocks and whose unborn baby flows out together with her liver, kidneys and intestines is a startlingly chilling one. Given that Sidaoru'ang had written this shortly after having an abortion it may have been an image which expressed her own feelings of having lost part of her self along with the aborted child. For further details see Harrison, 'Birth, Death and Identity ...', op. cit., pp. 95-98.

<sup>109</sup> Sidaoru'ang, 'Phuak nai pa', in *Kaew yot diaw*, op. cit., p. 131.

rights and so forth, stressing their need to stand united, yet clarifying that he has not come to persuade them to join the communists in the jungle. The story closes with the mine owner failing to secure election to parliament.

*Phuak nai pa* essentially concerns itself with conflicting political ideologies, revealing something of Sidaoru'ang's ambivalence about adopting a partisan political line in her work.<sup>110</sup> Personal interviews indicate her reticence to dictate an overt political ideology, and a preference for allowing the reader the intellectual space to decide how best one might respond to the situation she depicts.<sup>111</sup> In *Phuak nai pa* the narrator clearly

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<sup>110</sup> The theme of political ambivalence reappears in *Saphan bun* (The Bridge of Merit), in which a suburban housewife is unable to attend a meeting held by a candidate standing for election as local mayor since she must prepare the evening meal for her husband and children who are returning from training as Village Scouts. That evening, after heavy rainfall, the family are visited by a long-haired young man asking for money or old wood to help build a bridge to cross the floods in the *soi* (side-street). He explains that their donations will bring them merit, not in the next life, but in this one. The husband tells him to go away.

In contrast the husband is a willing participant in the village headman's *kathin* (saffron robe donation) procession to the temple. As the procession crosses the bridge the housewife, who is at the rear, looks resentfully at her husband who is at the head and, as she passes the bridge builders, she unwittingly stoops in a show of respect to them.

<sup>111</sup> Personal interview, September, 1990.

Rasami is rather critical of this approach, identifying it as a general shortcoming in Sidaoru'ang's work:

Sidaoru'ang does not tell her readers how society or those people came to be in that situation, or how it has originated. Nor does she point out how we should go about rectifying the mistakes which have been made in our society. It may be because she sees herself as just being one small person who is close to her surroundings and to some types of people. And there are not many writers who just introduce fellow members of their society to the reader. And pointing the way out for the characters or to the reader requires a further stage which is not easy to perfect because, apart from needing to have some understanding of the

opposes the ideology of the capitalist mine owner, presenting him as a parsimonious and inhumane character; yet neither does she explicitly ally herself with the insurgents. *Phuak nai pa* is the first of Sidaoru'ang's stories to make reference to the Communist Party (albeit indirectly). While *Kaew yot diaw* and *Raeng ngan kap ngoen* both propose direct confrontation, this action is a response to the abuses of the capitalist system, which are pointed out and articulated by student activists rather than by organized insurgents. In *Phuak nai pa*, however, Sidaoru'ang instead places the guerillas in the role of advisers to the working people. Disobeying their employer's warning not to associate with insurgents based nearby, the miners are depicted at the end of the story in easy interaction with them, both parties sharing the same interests at heart. No pressure to join the communists is applied, and there is no cause for one group to fear the other. This empathy and mutual understanding is highlighted by the fact that it is one of the miners' sons themselves who has joined the communists and later returned to 'educate' his 'brothers' (significantly referred to in the text as *phuak diaw kan* - 'those of the same ilk, the same background'). The narrator's response is to listen to their speeches, then to compromise and decide to exercise her democratic rights in not electing the mine owner to parliament.

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problems presented from beginning to end, one must also find a way of giving the story a conclusion in keeping with the contents. Otherwise the conclusion can easily turn out to be incongruous with the rest of the story. (See Camrat and Thira, op. cit. p. 52.)

While her choice of action lies within the democratic process, it fails to accord with the cynicism she expresses earlier in the text, that the 'successful', pro-democracy demonstrations of October 1973 have done little to change the everyday lives of the ordinary workers. Her apparent suggestion, that constitutional reform has been inadequate, and her subsequent portrayal of the communist insurgents in a supportive, non-aggressive role, would indicate a degree of confidence in the latter as capable of offering viable solutions.

The ideological confusion of this story is coupled with a difficulty in identifying the dominant character in the narrative; at times it is the young man, whose personal experience has led him to avenge the death of his parents by joining the insurgents, and who is portrayed as a 'good' character, one who has suffered and who desires justice; at other times the narrator dominates, with her passive observations of events and her pragmatic response to them.

The narrator's choice to tread a middle path in *Phuak nai pa* is echoed in the geographical metaphors of the text and Sidaoru'ang makes full use of the images of mine and jungle in an approach to symbolism which indicates an increasing sophistication in her work. The mine is a deep pit in a valley, an exploded landscape, excavated by the capitalist for the wealth that it offers, sinking ever lower as the process continues. Like the mine, those who work in it are similarly exploited, diminished and destroyed in the process.

The landscape in which the narrator first encounters the group of communist insurgents is also a significant one. She drives along a narrow cliff face where cars cannot pass each other and where turning back has become impossible. On the right is a deep abyss. The narrator watches as armed men pass her on the hillside to the left and then drives slowly past them. The metaphor recurs in the closing section of the story where the young man refers to the 'jungle' as a place which the mine owner is not able to fell without permission and which lies beyond his influence. The jungle is continually under threat from the destructiveness of capitalism but the invasion of wild, unclaimed territory can proceed only so far as its encounter with the realm which is under communist control, and no further.

A reading of *Phuak nai pa* according to its metaphors would suggest rather more sympathy for the insurgents than for democratic processes, and should perhaps be taken as a reflection of Sidaoru'ang's covert support the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT). Her dilemma over whether to join their ranks was not simply a literary one but also a real political one. Although the story was published a whole year before October 6, 1976 when many students and left-wing activists were obliged to flee Bangkok and swell CPT ranks, a number of writers and intellectuals had already joined the party. The decision of whether or not to join the Party was uppermost in the minds of many Thai intellectuals who

directed their energies at campaigning for the redress of social, economic and political injustices.<sup>112</sup>

Of Sidaoru'ang's writing on the subject of the labourer *Mu'* (The Hand), first published in May 1976, is widely considered to be one of her most successful stories.<sup>113</sup> The title refers to the mangled hand of the unnamed narrator, a female, middle-aged, former factory worker who now makes a living selling plastic for recycling; it is at once a universal symbol of the worker and of the brutality of the narrator's working life.<sup>114</sup> As she scavenges for plastic bags in a rubbish tip, amidst the pouring rain, she comments upon her rough, bruised and septic hands (one of which is without fingers) and her eyes, stinging from the dirt.

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<sup>112</sup> Given the potential danger of writing a piece that was in overt support of the CPT, Sidaoru'ang masks her sympathies in *Phuak nai pa* with a pragmatically 'democratic' conclusion. Even so, *Phuak nai pa* was published in the ultra left-wing literary magazine, *Puthuchon*, where no attempt was made, in any part of the journal, to 'soften' a hard-line support of 'revolution'. Moreover, the work of Sidaoru'ang's contemporaries, such as Wat Wanlyangkun's novel, *Tambon cho' mako'k*, (The Village of the Olive Grove), was, by comparison, much more extreme and partisan in its political allegiance.

*Tambon cho' mako'k* was first published in instalments between October 1975 and April 1976 in the radical newspaper *Athipat* (Liberty), the newspaper of the National Students' Centre of Thailand. See Wat Wanlyangkun, *Tambon cho' mako'k*, Bangkok: Samnak phim Samanchon, 1990

<sup>113</sup> See Camrat and Thira, op. cit., p. 40. *Mu'* was published in *Athipat* under the full title *Mu' thi lu'a mai thao kan* (Hands, Of Which Only One Remained). For an English translation of the text see Sidaoru'ang, *A Drop of Glass*, op. cit., pp. 99-106.

<sup>114</sup> In her analysis of the career of Tillie Olsen, Deborah Roosenfelt notes that the use of the imagery of hands and fists uniting in revolution characterizes much of the writing of the leftists during the America of the 1930s. See Deborah Roosenfelt, 'From the thirties: Tillie Olsen and the radical tradition', in Judith Newton and Deborah Roosenfelt (eds.), *Feminist Criticism and Social Change*, New York and London: Methuen, 1985, pp. 216-248. There are considerable similarities between Olsen's aims and career and those of Sidaoru'ang.

Her sense of social isolation and the long-forgotten experience of embracing another human being is activated by a group of school children who run past her. She recalls running away to the city to begin a life of her own, a life marred by tragedy when her husband is killed in a road accident and her daughter runs away from home, leaving her alone and impoverished. She has worked on a building site, ripping her hands as she shovelled the earth; in a restaurant, where she cut her fingers repeatedly as she chopped the meat; in a mill, where she damaged her eyes and her ears; and at a battery factory, where a visiting doctor reported traces of lead in her blood and prescribes the remedy of a week's rest. At her final place of employment, a soap factory, an industrial accident left her without any fingers on one hand (to which she refers as half of her life) for which she was paid compensation of a mere 100 baht per finger and dismissed. Now, at the end of her life, the woman muses that if anyone dared describe her as a useless old woman she would defiantly shake her mangled hand at them.

The last in a series of stories about the lives of female factory workers, *Mu'* differs from its predecessors in its depiction of a woman in isolation rather than in the context of a group drama, no longer young and optimistic about the potential of joint action, but middle-aged, alienated and destroyed by her life experience. It is, in this sense, the most pessimistic of Sidaoru'ang's early works.

Although Sidaoru'ang's first success as a writer came with her autobiographical and politicised tales of factory workers, she soon began to explore other controversial topics that even the more radical members of Thai literary circles had tended to avoid. Her treatment of the national religion in *Chai pha lu'ang* (The Hem of the Saffron Robe), first published in May 1975, received a mixed reception, some labelling it morally offensive, others welcoming its frank discussion of corruption in the Buddhist *sangha* at a time when the behaviour of the clergy, and in particular their political allegiances, were beginning to come under scrutiny.<sup>115</sup>

The young narrator of *Chai pha lu'ang* comes from a rural, lower middle-class family, who, as devout Buddhists, invite a new monk from Bangkok to take a meal at their home. Once there, the monk behaves inappropriately, displaying an all-too-worldly interest in their house and in the food they offer him. He even asks for a donation of 1000 baht by scribbling this sum on the donation envelope which is ordinarily left blank for the donor to give whatever he/she deems fit. The son, however, sees this and himself offers ten baht to avoid his parents' being pressured to give more. When he tells his mother about the envelope she is unable to believe that a monk could exhibit such *kilet* (worldly desire). The son consequently reconsiders his view of religion and, in particular the custom of ordination which is deemed to provide sufficient merit for his parents to go to heaven when they die by

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<sup>115</sup> Rasami claims that the only other writers who had chosen to deal with this theme were Niwet Kanthairat (who wrote three short stories on related issues) and Chatcharin Chaiwat, who wrote the poem *Thet mai mi thammatt* (The Sermon is Unjust). See Camrat and Thira, op. cit., pp. 48-49.

clinging, as the title of the story suggests, to the hem of his saffron robe. Instead, he asks himself, 'What if I'm not ordained, providing I behave well, and I don't depend on anyone else. Won't that be as good a way of helping religion?'

When the family subsequently moves to Bangkok they again encounter the monk, who has become abbot of a nearby temple.<sup>116</sup> They visit him, only to be snubbed in favour of a well-dressed couple who are arranging a party to celebrate his new appointment. The mother asks herself, 'Is this the dwelling place of those who live by the Buddhist precepts? He once told us to make merit and all would be well. But what about the poor who give things up in order to make merit? Who are the ones who build the big temples for such as him to occupy?' She thus decides that there is no need for her son to be ordained, noting her only wish to be that he love all people, regardless of their financial and social status.

The family reject the monk's corrupted Buddhism and turn to a more secular philosophy, one that stresses personal responsibility and integrity. The broad appeal to love others reworks the theme of *Kaew yot diaw*, *Raeng ngan kap ngoen* and *Phuak nai pa* from a moral rather than a political perspective, each story attacking tradition and begging a reassessment of existing hierarchies.

Not only does *Chai pha lu'ang* question the validity of the *sangha*, but it also casts doubt upon the degree to which Buddhist

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<sup>116</sup> The location is, in fact, Phasi Caroen, the location of the glass factory where Sidaoru'ang had worked, and an area where she had once lived.

teaching can be adequately conveyed by the use of Pali language and obscure ritual:

All the children sat around with their legs neatly tucked to one side and their palms pressed together, raised at first to their eyebrows and then lowered to their chests. They cleared their minds, for the adults had told them that if they were to try and make merit with minds that were not at peace then their efforts would be without result. Everyone focussed respectfully upon the monk and heard from him the precepts, understanding some of what was being said because they had heard it before at school. But when it came to presenting the food, father did not speak Thai, but Pali. Everyone sat with palms together, listening intently, even though nobody understood what on earth was being said.<sup>117</sup>

As in *Phit wang*, Sidaoru'ang's focus on teaching and education in this story can, in part, be associated with the idiosyncratic understanding of education that her own particular experiences in life had given her. Her interest in the ways in which information could meaningfully be conveyed to ordinary people was reflected in the aims of her own fictional writing, for Sidaoru'ang purposely adopted a prose style that was simple and unpoetic, with the aim that this would most clearly convey the content of her 'documentary' fiction. The use of realistic dialogue also increased her reputation for authentic representation of the lower classes.

At this stage in her career Sidaoru'ang had hoped that, by making the form of her work accessible to ordinary, poorly-educated people and by addressing its content to the reality of their everyday lives, her writing might most appeal to them. In this

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<sup>117</sup> Sidaoru'ang, 'Chai pha lu'ang', in *Kaew yot diaw*, op. cit., p. 41.

sense she misjudged their literary tastes and her success remained restricted to an educated, intellectual élite , of which she herself was in the process of becoming a member. When Sidaoru'ang showed *Kaew yot diaw* to her former factory colleagues, including her younger brother Sarot, it was greeted with a mixture of surprise and derision.<sup>118</sup> They saw no reason to be interested in it, dealing as it did with a plot and characters which were all too familiar. If working people had any time or money to spend on reading material it would be on escapist fiction - precisely the kind of writing which 'progressive' critics deemed useless.

In the context of Sidaoru'ang's failed attempt to speak to both peasantry and proletariat, *Wao bon fa* (The Kite in the Sky) can in part be interpreted as a story in which the author unconsciously acknowledges her own doomed attempts to fulfil her 'high-flying' literary ambitions.

Set in a small country town on a railway line (much like the one in which Sidaoru'ang grew up) it focuses on a young boy

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<sup>118</sup> Sidaoru'ang makes reference to this in one of her later short stories, *Tam pai kha Suriya nai pa oey* (Go Slay Suriya in the Jungle), published only three years after *Kaew yot diaw*: In it she writes, 'I remembered one of my fellow workers to whom I had shown my story and who, once she had finished reading it, had said to me in all sincerity: 'What's all that about then? I don't know what you're on about. How on earth can glass come in drops?' See Sidaoru'ang, 'Tam pai kha Suriya nai pa oey' in *Kaew yot diaw*, op .cit., pp. 257-258.

In the same story Sidaoru'ang also admits that: 'Every time I take my stories to an editor and they get published, I feel secretly proud of having created something, but now - now I'm not really so sure whether my work comes to the attention of the people I write about and whom I wish to be my readers.' See *ibid.*, pp. 251-252. For a translation into English of this story see Sidaoru'ang, *A Drop of Glass*, op. cit., pp. 89-98.

called Choke who works as a hired labourer.<sup>119</sup> All of his earnings he is obliged to give to his mother, who, like Sidaoru'ang's own mother, squanders it on drinking and gambling. Choke wants a kite, and to earn the money to buy one he goes to collect the oil that drips from the early morning goods train as it stands in the station. In the process, he is crushed and killed.

As with the short stories which Sidaoru'ang wrote prior to this, *Wao bon fa* deals with the unfulfilled dreams of the underprivileged and their right to a better life, symbolised by the kite which connotes the simple wish to 'fly', to dream, to momentarily escape a material world characterized by hard work and poverty:

Choke wanted to run and jump and fly his kite against the wind, high, high into the sky. But the odds were stacked against him, the same odds that were stacked against all poor children like him who were not like kites flying against the strong wind. Choke's life was not pointing in the direction of great heights, like a flying kite.<sup>120</sup>

Whilst the reality of Choke's life is that of working in the paddy fields to contribute to the family income, his fantasy is the child-like aspiration to own a kite. This fantasy represents an attempt by Choke to assert control over an existence in which he has little agency or choice; it is a statement of the need to escape with the aid of an object which is, by its very nature, not earthbound.

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<sup>119</sup> The meaning of the name Chok- 'Luck' or 'Fate' - is significant in the context of the story. The Thai term *chok* gives no indication of whether the luck is good or bad. It has the potential to be realized in either way.

<sup>120</sup> Sidaoru'ang, 'Wao bon fa', in *Kaew yot diaw*, op. cit., p. 61.

Choke's desire for the freedom to 'play' is one so desperate that he pays the ultimate price for it, with his life.

The central character, Carin, in *Sing thi long thun* (The Investment) bears a resemblance to Choke, in the sense that she too has aims and ambitions that cannot be fulfilled.<sup>121</sup> Carin, a country girl, has been sent by her father to study in a Bangkok dress-making school. Despite differences of social status, all the pupils share a common hope for a better future.

In order to establish a 'good' reputation in the fashion world the school follows a European syllabus, teaching its pupils how to make bathing costumes and aprons. Carin makes a *chut ratri* (an evening dress), which she can display as a mark of her skill in the shop she plans to open in her home town; and although the *chut ratri* fails to be chosen for the school's fashion show, which is dominated by the expensive costumes of the more wealthy students, Carin still passes her exams. When she returns home, dressed in a bright green shirt and trousers and looking quite different from everyone around her, she feels rather out of place. The array of unusual clothes she has brought with her attracts laughter and the comment from members of her family that they look like *likay* costumes.

When Carin opens a dressmaking shop, although the local people take pride in her skills, their requirements are only ever for simple work clothes in drab colours. Carin advises one

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<sup>121</sup> The story was first published in the April-May 1975 edition *Akso'rasat phican*. It was adapted and reprinted under the title *Cak chut ratri thu'ng nang ek likay thai wat* (From Evening Dress to *Likay* Costume), in *Lok nangsui*, October, 1981.

customer to have a dress made for a special occasion, but the customer cannot afford the expense. She instead offers to loan the woman the *chut ratri*, but the woman refuses, commenting on its likeness to a *likay* costume. From that day on the *chut ratri* remains hanging in Carin's shop window.

*Sing thi long thun* primarily addresses the clash between Western, urban and rural Thai culture. The dressmaking school is the source of new ideas concerning the types of clothes its pupils are taught to make; and it is an environment in which women from varying parts of the country and of various class backgrounds congregate to learn new ideas. They are both country people, learning the fashion culture of the city, and Thais absorbing the tastes of the West.

Carin's role within the narrative is to transport these newly-acquired tastes back to a traditional environment. Although the clothes she has learned to make in the city are, to her, aesthetically pleasing, vibrant and exciting, they are of no practical use in her home town. On the other hand, Carin does not have sufficient wealth or status to compete with some of her fellow classmates, who plan to open shops in the city. And her failure to gain entry to the school's end-of-year fashion show is illustrative of this:

Carin knew only too well that the fashion show, as it was called, was the highest aspiration of all the girls at the school and that the special outfit she had made and of which she was so proud was still not good enough to enter because it was made of cheap cloth and considered by the school to be very ordinary.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Sidaoru'ang, 'Sing thi long thun', in *Kaew yot diaw*, op. cit., p. 71.

What is considered far too plain to be accepted for the show, is held by Carin's own family and neighbours to be fit for *likay* only. The *chut ratri* becomes symbolic of an intermediary object, fitting neither one 'culture' nor the other. Carin's education has rendered her a misfit in her home community, while her humble background has prevented her from gaining access to the new community for which she has been trained.

Clearly there are parallels here between Carin's experiences in *Sing thi long thun* and those of Sidaoru'ang herself, who returned to Bang Krathum on home visits after several years in Bangkok, including having taken evening classes at a dressmaking school there. As in *Wao bon fa*, the mother is again presented as an unsympathetic and restrictive character. But other incidents from Sidaoru'ang's life are rewritten in the text, Carin's father acting more positively and supportively than her own father had:

Right up until her teens Carin had had to do all kinds of housework, from cooking the rice, getting the water, doing the shopping and looking after her little brothers and sisters. She had to do nearly all the work that should have been her mother's because she was the eldest child. But now she had left all that housework way behind her. Her father wanted her to have a career after she had left school at the age of only eleven. But her mother offered no other opinion than that expressed in the words, 'Why does she have to go? She'll be getting married soon anyway.'<sup>123</sup>

Given the autobiographical elements of *Sing thi long thun* it is possible to read this text as a metaphorical portrayal of

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid., p. 65.

Sidaoru'ang's own problems as a writer, influenced by Western literary traditions. Like Carin, Sidaoru'ang finds that, as a result of her own life experiences, she is an intermediary between two traditions, attempting to appeal to the social group from which she originated, yet through her newly-acquired language as an intellectual. Carin's misfortunes as a dressmaker parallel Sidaoru'ang's own difficulties in producing a piece of work relevant to the common people; and the enthusiasm with which Carin returns home to show her family the clothes she has learned to make mirrors that felt by Sidaoru'ang when she first showed her stories to members of her own family and class background. Although proud of her accomplishments, no one in Carin's family wishes to wear her creations, just as no one in Sidaoru'ang's family wished to read her stories.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> As a result of this dilemma Sidaoru'ang, like Carin, is completely successful in neither sphere. Carin's dress/Sidaoru'ang's fiction is considered by the dressmaking school/literary critics to be ordinary. In terms of form and content Sidaoru'ang's early work could not match the sophistication of that produced by better-educated, middle-class writers. In *Sing thi long thun* the reason for Carin's timely passing of the course is due to the fortuitous help of a teacher much in the way that Sidaoru'ang's own access to the mode of literary production was through her connection with Suchat Sawatsi.

Such an interpretation may help to make sense of the rather strange digression about the teaching of dance at the dressmaking school and the seductive behaviour of one of the young, well-known and very popular dancing teachers. The inclusion of events described in this section come as a jarring diversion from the main flow of the narrative and they hold no apparent significance in relation to the final outcome of the story. Sidaoru'ang explains in the opening line of this section that: 'In fact, Carin would never have come into contact with a place such as that, had it not been for the lessons she took at the dressmaking school.' The sentence seems to express something of Sidaoru'ang's own ambivalence about her association with the literary world, as represented by the 'dressmaking school'. She goes on to describe the dancing teacher who is handsome, young, rather short and has a dark complexion

Keen to point out the inadequacies of Sidaoru'ang's early short stories, Rasami Phaolu'angtho'ng interprets *Sing thi long thun* as a comment on the corrosive effects of 'modernization' on traditional Thai culture. In Rasami's view it reflects society's false values that the ideal woman had to be beautiful and to dress extravagantly;<sup>125</sup> it criticises the proliferation of institutions whose certificates are seen as a guarantee of quality; and it attacks the dressmaking profession, as one which women without any education or status can pursue, alongside minor wives and members of the petit- bourgeoisie.<sup>126</sup>

In stark contrast, Phailin Rungrat describes *Sing thi long thun* as yet another of Sidaoru'ang's short stories to introduce new ways of thinking about life and society, one which opposes tradition and criticises a society that fails to encompass a more modern lifestyle.<sup>127</sup>

The interpretation made by both Rasami and Phailin are subjective, phrased in terms of the issues which were pertinent to discussions among student activists and social reformists of the time, but overlooking the essential opacity of Sidaoru'ang's text. In its notions of cultural change and exchange, *Sing thi long thun*

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(closely resembling Suchat). His words to her in the text ('Come on, copy my steps carefully. Don't stare down at your feet.') seem to parallel the underlying tone of their dialogue as tutor and pupil in literature.

<sup>125</sup> For a further discussion of changing views of women in the late 1960s and the 1970s see Harrison, 'The Writer, the Horseshoe Crab, his 'Golden Blossom' and her Clients: Tales of Prostitution in Contemporary Thai Short Stories' in *South East Asia Research*, September 1995, Volume 3, Issue 2.

<sup>126</sup> See Camrat and Thira, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

<sup>127</sup> See Phailin Rungrat, 'Kaew yot diaw lae bat prachachon'. (A Drop of Glass and Identity Cards) in *Sayam rat sapada wican*, Year 31, Number 21, pp. 32-4.

is somewhat pessimistic, none of the characters or the standpoints they represent being portrayed in a positive or successful light. The conclusion, with each group having reached a tolerable, if rather depressing *impasse*, is much more likely to represent the reality of Sidaoru'ang's own feelings about her writing career at that time.

Many of Sidaoru'ang's early stories exhibit a persistent tendency to blend a political/moral message with more deeply personal elements of her own life, and in several works the personal even outweighs the political. Nowhere is this better illustrated than by one of her earliest pieces, *Pho'* (Father), an account of the life of Sidaoru'ang's own father, Samro'ng.<sup>128</sup> Although part of the text deals with Father's political and moral stand as a man willing to stand up against his 'superiors' in support of ordinary workers, this is essentially an emotional, rather than a politically committed piece of writing, and the glimpses which it offers into Sidaoru'ang's relationship with her father are clearly of great significance to her as a writer.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> The story was first published in *Puthuchon*, July, 1975.

Open references in the text to the town of Bang Krathum, to members of her family and to her own name *Daoru'ang* belie the note at the beginning of Sidaoru'ang's collection of short stories, *Kaew yot diaw*, which claims that any resemblance to real events or characters is purely coincidental and is unintended by the author. For an English translation of the story see Sidaoru'ang, *A Drop of Glass*, op. cit., pp. 65-78

<sup>129</sup> In contrast the only significant references to her mother in this story are negative ones, i.e. Mother's unchallenged decision to send *Daoru'ang* away to work in Bangkok; and the fact that she fails to support Father's decision to protect the railway porters.

Rasami reads *Pho'* primarily as a character portrayal of an ordinary person, revealing Father's own distinct identity and, through him, providing a more general picture of the society in which he lives. She claims that the reader is consequently able to develop a deep sympathy and understanding for an idealized, working man.<sup>130</sup> In reality, this is a less than accurate assessment since Father appears in the text as something of a misfit, a gentle subversive, and a largely solitary figure, not originally from the area in which he has now settled.<sup>131</sup>

The same character makes his reappearance in a slightly later story, *So'ng mu' rao mi raeng* (Our Two Hands Have

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Sidaoru'ang is likely to have intended *Pho'* to imitate Maxim Gorky's classic novel of revolutionary zeal, *Mother*. Like Gorky's 'Mother', Sidaoru'ang's 'Father' stands up for workers' rights and encourages strike action.

Several readers also remarked on the similarity between *Pho'* and a Russian short story about a father who worked on a railway, written by A. Serafimovich, entitled 'The Switchman' and first published in Thai translation in *Sangkhomsat parithat* in 1975. Sidaoru'ang claims, however, that she did not read 'The Switchman' until her own, very similar story had already been published, and that she read it only in response to people's observation of the similarities.

<sup>130</sup> See Camrat and Thira, op. cit., p. 40.

<sup>131</sup> An example is provided in the following excerpt from the text:

One day the station master called Father in to see him.

'*Thao Kae O* says you play it too close to the book with him. Come on. You know how well he and I get on together. So just go easy on him, will you. And just remember, when we've got problems, he's the sort we can rely on.'

Father contemplated the awkward situation that loomed before him.

'But really, Sir. We should stick to the rules. Even if he's just a bit over on the weight, it all adds up you know. I don't make anything out of it. And it's the ones who do the loading that get a rough deal.'

The station-master sighed heavily.  
(See Sidaoru'ang, *A Drop of Glass*, op. cit., p. 70.)

Strength).<sup>132</sup> As in *Pho'*, the father in this text displays similar intelligence and determination when he engages in a quest to increase supplies of clean drinking water to the community in which he lives.

With the help of his two eldest children, Daeng and Nu, but without the support of the local community,<sup>133</sup> Father begins to dig a well behind his house. The role of his youngest child, Can, is to harvest rice and help Granny Ut sell fish by the jetty.<sup>134</sup>

When Father has dug deep enough to discover water his fears are that the well might collapse. The whole family rally together to make bamboo slats to hold the well up, but they are unable to work quickly enough and the well collapses before they can complete their task. Although Daeng and Nu have to leave home to work as labourers in a neighbouring district, Father does not despair; instead he continues to make bamboo meshes and the story closes with a scene of him, Mother and Grandmother, struggling against all odds of success.

Like *Wao bon fa*, *So'ng mu' rao mi raeng* concentrates on the problems of the rural poor and upon the driving desire of one of the characters to overcome the less-than-satisfactory reality of daily life. Yet while *Wao bon fa* speaks of the dream of a child for play, *So'ng mu' rao mi raeng* refers to the desires of an adult for a

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<sup>132</sup> The story was first published in *Athibat* in January, 1976. The majority of readers would have been young, socially concerned Bangkokians, for whom *So'ng mu' rao mi raeng* would have offered a greater insight into village life and village mentality (the lengthy description of fish preparation and sales being indicative of this).

<sup>133</sup> It is noted, also, that Father has moved to the area from Bangkok.

<sup>134</sup> Although the word Granny is used as a prefix, there is no evidence that she is a blood relative of the family.

practical improvement in living standards. Father's persistent digging, against the advice, and without the support of, his neighbours, is the metaphorical digging for a better life, his search for clean water the symbol of a longing to improve a society that has become 'shallow and dirty'. Against an essentially pessimistic conclusion, a small note of optimism is struck in the family's perseverance and cooperation in the continued search for water.

*So'ng mu' rao mi raeng* does not fit the typical 'Literature for Life' mould, for the hero is virtually an outsider in his own community, a community which is ignorant and resistant to change. Neither does Sidaoru'ang romanticize or idealize the local people in this story, her portrayal of peasants and the urban poor in general sharing more similarities with the work of Khamsing Sino'k than Siburapha. Rather than encourage Father in his efforts, his fellow villagers merely ridicule him, content in their continuing use of the shallow, dirty canal water. Their complacency is revealed in the words of the old village women:

'Even if it's cloudy you can still drink it. Just think of it as being good for you. Think about it - we make medicine from pee and red ants. And when people have red eyes we put drops of children's pee in them. And anyway, all this is, is buffalo shit and buffalo pee. What's wrong with that?'<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Sidaoru'ang. 'So'ng mu' rao mi raeng', in *Kaew yot diaw*, op. cit., p. 159.

The inability of the local people to organize themselves efficiently is highlighted by their uneconomical division of labour in the preparation of fish for sale:

Granny Ut's house on the canal bank was the place the fishermen went to sell their *chon* fish. However much they wanted to sell, Granny Ut would agree to buy the lot and she would pay slightly less than the market price for it. The poor people from all along the railway track nearby would wholeheartedly volunteer their services to help Granny Ut gut and scale the fish. There were never less than a dozen people to help her. They would all sit round in a circle, each armed with their own chopping board and knife, and then the minute the fish were tipped into the middle, everyone would make a grab for them, bashing the head of the fish to show that they were the ones who had got hold of the fish first.<sup>136</sup>

Given her first-hand experiences of life in the country it is not surprising that Sidaoru'ang should subvert the recommendations of radical critics in her own, idiosyncratic interpretation of rural 'Literature for Life'.<sup>137</sup> *So'ng mu' rao mi raeng* would have provided a salutary warning to its middle-class intellectual readers not to idealize the peasantry and might also have raised awareness among social activists of the obstacles which faced them in their effort to help and to educate rural communities. Moreover, it shows that, until such basic issues as that of drinking water have been tackled, country people cannot be

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid., p. 157.

<sup>137</sup> Rasami observes that while Sidaoru'ang portrays the urban working classes in an idealistic light, her depiction of rural peasants is more balanced and true-to-life. 'All Sidaoru'ang's characters have a sense of humour, endurance, sincerity and selfishness. When asked whether her references to the negative aspects of the peasantry were intentional, she responded that this was exactly how she saw the peasantry in reality.' (See Camrat and Thira, op. cit., p. 45.)

expected to focus their attention upon issues of national or international significance (the family demonstrates its lack of interest in the radio news of Thai-Lao border disputes in the opening scene of this story) and as long as their attention to greater issues is distracted they are disempowered at the level of national politics.

Sidaoru'ang continues with the next stage of her autobiographical accounts of her childhood (appearing as the child, Can, in *So'ng mu' rao mi raeng*) with *Bang thi wan nu'ng khang na*, (Perhaps, One Day in the Future), first published only a month later.<sup>138</sup> In this text Can has left home to work as a maid in Bangkok. On her day off she catches a bus to Sanam Luang, thinking the name sounds familiar.<sup>139</sup> Upon arrival she hears a loudspeaker inviting a crowd to a seminar on the subject of 'Thai politics after 14 October', after which there is to be a performance of *lakho'n phu'a chiwit* ('Theatre for Life') and a film. The young girl speculates about the meaning of *lakho'ng phu'a chiwit* and, lacking in self-confidence and expecting to be told to leave at any moment, she tentatively ventures into the auditorium of Thammasat university. She observes that, unlike at rural *likay* performances, no one is collecting money at the door, and she wonders what a university really is. Can is conscious of the coarseness of her hands and feet and feels inelegant among the people that surround her.

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<sup>138</sup> *Bang thi wan nu'ng khang na* was first published in 1976.

<sup>139</sup> Sanam Luang or the Phramane Ground, was the scene of most student demonstrations and protests between 1973 and 1976 and is overlooked by the Grand Palace at one end and by Sinlapako'n and Thammasat universities to the side.

Inside the auditorium Can observes five speakers seated in front of a plain black curtain that is, in her view, drab compared with that seen in *likay* performances. At the top of the curtain hangs a poster with the words: 'I love Thammasat because Thammasat has taught me to love the People.'<sup>140</sup>

The first speaker addresses the audience on the beauty of socialism, the constitution, and the lack of change in the old structures of the civil service and another, bearded man (possibly a reference to Suchat) interrupts with the opinion that the only solution lies in economic change. Can is unable to follow the details of his arguments clearly.<sup>141</sup> She recalls an incident at work the day before when her employer had threatened to cut her wages or dismiss her.

When the seminar is over Can is lost in contemplation of the new ideas she has heard, and she hopes to be able to return to Thammasat again. Now she walks confidently and fearlessly, her head held high in the realization that she herself is one of the People to which the Thammasat banner referred, and that one day in the future Thammasat might also love her.

The note on which *Bang thi wan nu'ng khang na* closes leaves Can empowered by her dawning political awareness and allows Sidaoru'ang the opportunity to return to her favoured theme of the value of education. On this occasion she alludes to the broad education gained through the experience of attending

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<sup>140</sup> *Chan rak Thammasat phro wa Thammasat son chan hai rak prachachon.*

<sup>141</sup> This appears to be an allusion to Suchat Sawatsi during his days as a student activist and public speaker.

university, extra-curricular in nature and administered by radical student activists, an education in political, economic and social consciousness.

Again there is evidence in this story of Sidaoru'ang's attempts to communicate with two potential audiences; on the one hand the working-class Bangkokians, those like Can, engaged in domestic service; and on the other members of the student movement, whom she wished to inform about the degree of ignorance among those people they most wished to help.

*Bang thi wan nu'ng khang na* lends whole-hearted support to the student movement and its references to socialism clearly cast it as a solution to the social and economic ills of the poor (of the type depicted in *So'ng mu' rao mi raeng*). As one speaker at the seminar exclaims: '... Some people say that socialism is bad. But think, for example, of a plant. If a plant is no good and has very poor seeds then it will not flourish. It is precisely because this plant is good that it is so beautiful.'

As in *Phuak nai pa* geographical metaphors are used to support a political message in the text; feeling empty and sad, Can walks to the bus stop to catch the bus to Sanam Luang. A huge, open space stretches out before her to the left, symbolizing the sense of freedom she is about to experience by the awakening of her political consciousness.

References at the beginning of the story to the alienation Can feels and her empathy with a blind child playing the *ching* (small brass cymbals) whom she sees begging at the roadside before she boards the bus, represent a new departure in

Sidaoru'ang's style of writing. A reference to a myth in which eels turn into mongeese appears both at the beginning and again at the end of the text, operating as a metaphor for Can's newly-acquired confidence and strength.

The final story in this series of works which represents the dawning of Sidaoru'ang's own political awareness is *Su'ng ro' wan ca taek thamlai* (Which Awaits Destruction), a pessimistic tale reflecting the author's growing awareness of the limited possibilities for effecting real social change.<sup>142</sup>

The story deals with the failure of the then Prime Minister, Khu'krit Pramot's *Tambon* Development scheme.<sup>143</sup> Uncle Caew shatters the narrator's initial optimism about the effectiveness of such a scheme with his account of the realities of its application:<sup>144</sup>

'Folks like us - we don't have a say. They tell us they've used the money to make a new path, but, in fact, what they've really done is just put another path on top of the old one. All they've done is dig up the

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<sup>142</sup> The story was published shortly after *Bang thi wan nu'ng khang na*, in the February-March 1976 edition of *Akso'rasat phican*. For a translation of this text into English see Sidaoru'ang, *A Drop of Glass*, op. cit., pp. 117-124.

<sup>143</sup> In 1975 2500 million baht of government funds was allocated to 5023 *tambon* councils for use in specific local projects such as the construction of roads, irrigation canals, wells etc. For a full account see Chai-anan and Morell, op. cit., passim; Girling, op. cit., pp. 202-204; and Andrew Turton, 'The Current Situation in the Thai Countryside', in Caldwell, Fast and Turton, *Thailand, Roots of Conflict*, Nottingham: Spokesman Press, 1978, pp. 118-9.

<sup>144</sup> The narrator's name, Nong, is a variation of Anong, as in *Kaew yot diaw* and *Raeng ngan kap ngoen*. Nong is similarly a Bangkok factory worker, this time on a visit back to her home area. There is an implication here that *Su'ng ro' wan ca taek thamlai* is, at least in part, a sequel to the two earlier stories of factory workers written by Sidaoru'ang in 1975. Anong/Nong lives up to the meaning of her name - 'beautiful woman' - referring, in this case, not to her physical beauty but to her moral and political ideals.

land on either side and then filled it in again. It might be all right in the dry season but, once the rains get under way, it'll be as sloppy as pig shit. The only ones to benefit are those who get the job of doing the digging - and then they only get paid a pittance anyway. After all, you know how many folks are out of work. It's only the contractors that make a packet. They get one price from the government and then they tell us another.'<sup>145</sup>

Uncle Caew's criticism of the block grant scheme centres on the widespread corruption that is typical of patron-client power structures, and on the minimal achievements that can thus be made from small-scale funding. Nong's dawning recognition of how few options are open to such people as Uncle Caew leads her to reassess her earlier condemnation of his illicit gambling. Although she does not agree with his breaking the law, she accepts that the law is undermined by police corruption.

The Bangkok slum to which Uncle Caew and his family eventually move, brings together the rural peasants in a new urban context, blending the lower classes of both town and country into one indistinguishable mass of suffering, but also of potential strength. Nong's reference to this slum as, 'One of the many slums, where people gather from every direction, one where the seeds of endless problems collect, one which awaits destruction, one which awaits a new life, whilst living on in hope'<sup>146</sup> would imply that social and political change can only be activated via a process of destruction from the bottom up. The principals of socialism espoused in *Bang thi wan nu'ng khang na*

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<sup>145</sup> Sidaoru'ang, *A Drop of Glass*, op. cit., pp.117-118.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., p. 124.

seem here to have been temporarily abandoned in favour of Marxist-style revolution.

*Su'ng ro' wan ca taek thamlai* is the last of Sidaoru'ang's short stories in the early period of her career to deal with an overtly political theme; along with *Kaew yot diaw*, *Raeng ngan kap ngoen*, *Phuak nai pa* and *Bang thi wan nu'ng khang na*, it forms a body of work in which a prescriptive, leftist ideology is tentatively espoused. These stories form the best illustrations of any claim to portray Sidaoru'ang as a writer in the 'Literature for Life' genre. This description is, however, complicated by her refusal to paint an idealized picture of the peasants and the proletariat, and by a significant element in Sidaoru'ang's writing of the deeply personal and the apolitical. Stories such as *Pho'* provide early examples of this but as Sidaoru'ang's career developed she became increasingly interested in the themes of birth and motherhood. Whilst *Khrang nu'ng nan ma laew* (Once Upon a Time, Long, Long Ago) provides the earliest example of this, a second and more obviously autobiographical tale is also to be found in *Rakha haeng khwam tai* (The Price of Death).

*Khrang nu'ng nan ma laew* tells the story of a naive peasant girl, Noi, whose desire for an 'easy' life leads her into voluntary prostitution. Through ignorance and carelessness, Noi becomes pregnant, and medicine which she purchases to abort the baby is ineffective. Her friend's subsequent description of the alternative methods of abortion open to her terrifies Noi into acknowledging the gravity of her predicament. When the *mo'*

*tamyae* (local, untrained midwife/abortionist) is unsuccessful in causing Noi to miscarry, Noi falls ill and the story closes with her lying on the floor of a hospital already full of patients, and being scolded by a nurse for having allowed the baby to die inside her womb.

*Khrang nu'ng, nan ma laew* is a cautionary tale, in which the author concludes, somewhat accentuatedly:

This tale teaches that ... sexual oppression due to ignorance on all levels is a problem which must be eradicated by joint effort, once and for all, through education. So, please do not hope that a story such as this might be a source of happiness or joy.<sup>147</sup>

Sidaoru'ang doubtless based this story on her own experiences working as a cashier in a 'closed doors' restaurant which also employed prostitutes in the guise of waitresses.<sup>148</sup> In the voice of Noi's female friend, Sidaoru'ang adopts a rather patronizing tone towards Noi, her practical advice tinged with irritation at Noi's lack of responsibility.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Sidaoru'ang, 'Khrang nu'ng nan ma laew', in *Kaew yot diaw*, op. cit., p. 124.

<sup>148</sup> The term used in Thai for this type of restaurant is *ran ahan pit pratu*.

<sup>149</sup> The harsh treatment which the character of the prostitute suffers at Sidaoru'ang's hands is not one that is paralleled in the work of her male contemporaries. The theme of prostitution was a popular one, especially in the 'Literature for Life' genre and was touched upon by a great number of male writers. Their approach was a much more 'sympathetic' one, though tinged with inevitable elements of voyeurism, misogyny and power-play. While such stories professed to lament the woes of the prostitute's life, the details therein offered the male reader a vicarious pleasure that is in no way evident in *Khrang nu'ng nan ma laew*.

For further treatment of this story see Harrison, 'Birth, Death and Identity in the Short Stories of Sidaoru'ang, 1975-1990', op. cit. and Harrison, 'The Writer, the Horseshoe Crab, his 'Golden Blossom' and her Clients', op. cit.

A notable contrast exists between the way in which Sidaoru'ang portrays Noi's aspirations, her dreams of wealth and the risks she takes in pursuit of them, and Choke's aspirations in *Wao bon fa*, Choke's tale being related with a sympathy that is evidently lacking in the depiction of Noi. This disproportionately harsh attitude to the subject of female aspiration may be, in part, a product of cultural conditioning (serving to indicate that, at least for this stage in her career, Sidaoru'ang was not consistent in presenting a case for a more liberated female), and, in part, with woman's potential to conceive: Noi's recklessness not only brings her own life into danger, but implies the creation and subsequent destruction of a second life - that of her unborn child.

*Khrang nu'ng nan ma laew* is the first of a number of stories by Sidaoru'ang that deal with issues of pregnancy and childbirth, and may have held some connection with her own personal experience of abortion at around the same time, possibly operating as an act of self-punishment, as she had intended in *La ko'n khon bap*.

The still-birth of Sidaoru'ang's first child can also be seen as a motive for writing *Rakha haeng khwam tai* (The Price of Death), an autobiographical account of the birth and death of her younger brother when she was still a child in Bang Krathum.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> When asked in an interview with the magazine *No'n nangsu'* to explain her fascination with the characters of mother and child Sidaoru'ang replied that, 'It's to do with a feeling of attachment (*phuk phan*) which I have had since my first child was born and then died.' (See *No'n nangsu'*, year 1, volume 3, June, 1988, p.11.)

The story opens with the scene of the narrator, Yong,<sup>151</sup> staring at the dying body of her brother, whom she has tended from birth. A flashback to the time of his birth recalls the details of his delivery by the local, blind midwife, Granny Ut.<sup>152</sup>

Now, at the age of nine, Yong's brother is dying as a result of accidentally falling into the local *khlo'ng* (canal). The doctor refuses to attend the scene of the accident and instead insists the child be brought to his clinic. There the doctor further insists on a down payment of 80 baht before he is prepared to begin treatment with an injection, the need for which is, in any case, dubious. Not having any money with him in the circumstances the child's father goes to borrow some from a nearby friend. By the time he returns to the clinic his son is dead.

Although the poor provision of medical services in rural areas, and the inhumane response of the doctor give this story an air of socio-political criticism,<sup>153</sup> these are not the main themes of the story. *Rakha haeng khwam tai* primarily serves to mourn the passing away of a dead child, one whom the narrator feels to be like her own. In writing this, the author mourns not only the death of her little brother and of her own still-born baby child, but

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<sup>151</sup> This was Sidaoru'ang's family nickname as a child.

<sup>152</sup> Phinyo Ko'ngtho'ng asserts that this scene would have been totally unfamiliar for many younger readers and that *Rakha haeng khwam tai* is highly informative on aspects of country life. See Phinyo Ko'ngtho'ng, 'Watthanatham chao ban naew prachachon' (The Local Culture of the Ordinary People), in *Phasa lae nangsu'* (Language and Literature) April-September, 1986, pp. 41-52.

<sup>153</sup> Phinyo points out that the death of the child not only highlights the poor provision of healthcare in rural districts and the inhumane behaviour of the doctor, but also says something about local beliefs and customs. The other villagers explain the little boy's death by the fact that his mother brought him into the house after he has fallen in the water, and that this runs contrary to tradition. (Ibid., p.44.)

also, at a deeper level, the passing of the naive child in her own self, in the face of social injustices and political atrocities.

*Rakha haeng khwam tai* was the last of Sidaoru'ang's short stories to be published in the 1975-6 period, characterized by a rapid rise in the number of acts of political violence and hostility between left and right wing activists.<sup>154</sup> The aggression and instability of the times is reflected in Sidaoru'ang's vivid images of pain, blood and death - the body of the bloated, drowned child from whom runs a mixture of blood and water in *Rakha haeng khwam tai*; the dying mother and the dead foetus in *Khrang nu'ng nan ma laew*; and the fleeting image of the pregnant woman crushed in the mining accident in *Phuak nai pa*.

Sidaoru'ang's early stories reveal a split in the nature of her heroines that appears to correspond with her own ambivalence

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<sup>154</sup> Among the most shocking of these was the burning by Border Patrol Police of the north eastern village of Ban Na Sai in January 1974 in which one thousand three hundred inhabitants were ordered out of their homes and several villagers were burned to death, including a six year old child. (See Chai-anan and Morell, op. cit., p.169.) The two year campaign of 'public intimidation, assault and assassination' referred to by Ben Anderson ('Withdrawal Symptoms ...', op. cit., p.13) as the precursor of the bloodshed of 6 October, 1976 ensured the persistence of high levels of violence. Anderson provides detailed references to the polarization of left and right wing groups in Thai society in the mid 1970s, and of the aggression that was articulated against the latter by the former. He draws particular attention to the assassination by professional gunmen of Dr Boonsanong Punyodana in February 1976, to the launch of the slogan by Pramarn Adireksan in the Spring of 1976 of 'Right Kill Left', and to the views of the Buddhist monk Kittiwuttho that no demerit would be gained by the murder of communist sympathizers. See *ibid.*, pp. 13 and 24; Chai-anan and Morell, op. cit., *passim* and, in particular, Chapter 9. See also Harrison, 'Birth, Death and Identity', op. cit., *passim*.

towards personal involvement in political and social action. Her female protagonists can be divided into two categories - namely those who are passive, politically-uninformed, external observers of the suffering and hardship of others; and those who have themselves suffered and chosen to actively involve themselves in the correction of social and political ills.<sup>155</sup> Only the female factory workers are sufficiently empowered with the strength of character and commitment to struggle for change.

While these two groups may be considered representative of Sidaoru'ang's growing political awareness, they are also indicative of her inability to permit her women characters to respond to, and to tackle broader issues beyond those of immediate family significance.

Rasami observes that: 'Sidaoru'ang's characters, if they are analysed case by case, do not mostly suffer from complex conflicts ... and especially internal conflicts ... The struggle of the characters is related to their confrontation of the problems with their environment rather than struggles with themselves.'<sup>156</sup> She goes on to note that Sidaoru'ang is more interested in external problems because of her tendency to concentrate on the lower classes. This is not to say, however, that Sidaoru'ang's emphasis on the lives of ordinary people is without depth, simply that her

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<sup>155</sup> The first group includes Can in *So'ng mu' rao mi raeng* and *Bang thi wan nu'ng khang na*; Daoru'ang in *Pho'*, Yong in *Rakha haeng khwam tai*, the friend in *Khrang nu'ng nan ma laew*, the narrator in *Phuak nai pa*, the housewife in *Saphan bun* and, to some extent, Nong as she appears in *Su'ng ro' wan ca taek thamlai*. In the second group Nong as she appears in *Kaew yot diaw* and *Raeng ngan kap ngoen* is clearly active, as are the mother in *Phit wang* and the bag lady in *Mu'*.

<sup>156</sup> See Camrat and Thira, op. cit., p. 52.

work depicts a magnified picture of all of the details of Thai society, making a demand upon her readers to examine those issues which have never previously interested them, or which they may have overlooked.<sup>157</sup>

Phinyo describes the peasants in Sidaoru'ang's early works as having;

... quite a warm lifestyle, amongst neighbours who still show some good will and are not left to suffer difficulties and fight injustice alone, like with other writers. Sidaoru'ang shows a lively picture of country people rather than a cruel, hopeless one. The events in their lives are therefore like something familiar which might happen at any time in their daily lives.<sup>158</sup>

They are, however, cowed by the economic system and fall between two streams of culture. On one hand they cling to their long-held, traditional beliefs and make merit in the hope of happiness in the next life, without ever questioning the status quo: on the other hand there are elements of 'information' from the outside world filtering into the village, bringing new ideas and approaches that often conflict with the old. 'They are therefore confronted by the capitalist economic system, which weakens the relationship between relatives and instead founds new relationships based on benefit.'<sup>159</sup> As a result, neither way of thinking has complete control over the lives of the local people.

Phailin Rungrat divides Sidaoru'ang's stories into two major categories - those which provide some kind of reflection of

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid. p., 52.

<sup>158</sup> Phinyo, op. cit., p. 42.

<sup>159</sup> Phinyo, op. cit., pp. 49-50.

real life and those which challenge widely-accepted customs and traditions, and instead offer an alternative philosophy of life, more in keeping with the times.<sup>160</sup> Of these two categories Phailin goes on to note that the former deliver their message more clearly than the latter, and she comments that some stories, while proffering new ideas, might also, simultaneously, present a picture of someone in society who had inspired a new way of thinking. Sidaoru'ang's most successful stories, Phailin feels, are those which concentrate upon the subject of families, old people and women, since they reveal the sincerity of her aims as a writer, her portrayal of the poor and her enthusiasm in sharing her own experience of life with her readers.<sup>161</sup>

Both Phailin and Rasami agree that the progress Sidaoru'ang made in terms of style was erratic but that, all in all, she proved her ability to write well in the first two years of her career.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Phailin Rungrat, in *Sayam rat sapada wican*, Year 31, No. 21, 1988, pp. 32-4. Phailin refers to *Saphan bun* as a particularly clear illustration of this genre. Phinyo also refers to this story as a work in which custom or ceremony (in this instance that of donating *kathin* robes to the monks) plays the part of bringing members of the local community together. It represents charity work for the Nation, Religion and the King and for the next life and is primarily a business activity, organized by the host to boost his social standing above and beyond which it has little association with faith in the 'good' behaviour of the people. Phinyo observes that Sidaoru'ang's characters are largely Buddhists, whose long-held tradition is to make merit as a passport to future happiness, even though the implication of *Chai pha lu'ang* is that Sidaoru'ang herself has reservations regarding religious tradition. See Phinyo, op. cit., p. 45.

<sup>161</sup> Phailin, op. cit., pp. 32-4.

<sup>162</sup> Rasami goes on to comment at length on Sidaoru'ang's stylistic development:

The quality of Sidaoru'ang's work depends on the margins that she sets for herself in her stories and in her choice of style for relating such stories. She is weakest when she chooses a tight structure compared

The violent events of 6 October, 1976 brought a temporary halt to the publication of Sidaoru'ang's work and, in the year that followed only one short story appeared in print. Her life disrupted during the aftermath of the bloody coup, Sidaoru'ang had less time to write in this period, whilst many politically partisan journals which published her work had, in any case, been obliged to cease operation.

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with when she simply allows events to proceed with a momentum of their own and writes of the condition of people's lives or of society. The latter is her strong point because she is able to portray values, customs and culture through the eyes of an observer, without being too partisan. But if Sidaoru'ang chooses to adopt a clear stand-point on issues which she has strong feelings about, such as medical ethics (in *Rakha haeng khwam tai*) or, most frequently, the problems of factory workers, then she does not feel the need to steer a middle path and this is what affects the balance. In stories dealing with workers, for example, Sidaoru'ang becomes a speech maker who sees the world only in terms of black and white. This may be because of her bitter, real-life experiences, but when interviewed about whether she has ever known any reasonable employers, her answer is that, although there may be a few good ones, the majority have more bad points than good. It is with opinions such as these that she stresses the negative side of the capitalists, so directing the reader towards a need for justice for those who are oppressed or taken advantage of. In this sense Sidaoru'ang resembles other writers who place their emphasis upon action rather than a deep analysis of the many-sided nature and psyche of the capitalists. (See Camrat and Thira, op. cit., p. 51.)

Sidaoru'ang and Mone



## CHAPTER THREE

### FROM POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS TO MOTHERHOOD: 1977-1982

*The beginning of the history of a writer is not motherhood. Writers begin as sons, male or female, but later they may become mothers when they come to think about what writing is ... Later ... you may become a mother whether you are a man or a woman ... And then you know that you are going to give birth to all kinds of persons.*

Hélène Cixous<sup>163</sup>

The few stories which Sidaoru'ang wrote in the immediate aftermath of October 6 1976 were not published until well over a year later. Unlike many of their contemporaries, Sidaoru'ang and Suchat did not leave Bangkok to join the Communist Party of Thailand following the right-wing coup. Instead, Suchat went into temporary hiding, returning to visit his wife at their home in Thung Si Kan only occasionally, when he deemed it safe enough to do so. Shortly after, both moved to the house of a Western friend, where they lived incognito for several months, Sidaoru'ang posing, doubtless very convincingly, as a maid, and Suchat as a gardener.

Three of Sidaoru'ang's short stories published during the 1977-1982 period of her career dealt directly with her own personal experiences of October 6 and with the impact it had upon the lives of writers, activists and ordinary people. *Phu'an chan yang mai*

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<sup>163</sup> Hélène Cixous. 'Difficult Joys'. p. 29.

*klap ma cak nai mu'ang* (My Friend Has Not Yet Returned from the City)<sup>164</sup> is a disturbing, autobiographical account of the anxiety she experienced as she waited at home for her 'friend', a character representing Suchat, to return from the demonstration. This provides Sidaoru'ang with the opportunity to relate her own version of the coup events, offering an alternative to the sanitized reports broadcast on government radio and alluded to in the text. Though she herself was not present at the demonstration, her own misfortunes, and those of the students under attack, are linked symbolically in the story through a piece of wood that pierces the narrator's hand while she is burying something in the ground, and a stake driven through the heart of one of the protesters, a photograph of which is described in the text. At no point is there an explicit reference to what the narrator is burying, her furtive digging thereby arousing the reader's suspicions.<sup>165</sup> The majority of readers, who were already aware of the impact of the October 6 on leftist intellectuals and their work, would immediately have understood the 'things' to which she refers as books and papers which had to be hidden to prevent them from being seized and burned<sup>166</sup> and to ensure the safety of the

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<sup>164</sup> The story was first published in March 1978. For an English translation, see Sidaoru'ang, *A Drop of Glass*, op. cit., pp. 125-133.

<sup>165</sup> The mood of furtiveness in the story is enhanced by Sidaoru'ang's descriptions of the tall trees, of the ever-rising moon, of the narrator's fear that the neighbours may be spying on her and of the snake she unexpectedly glimpses in the undergrowth.

<sup>166</sup> Several days after the coup a list of books were formally banned by the government because of the threat they were thought to pose to national security. They are listed in *Bananukrom sing phim tong ham* (Catalogue of Banned Publications) in Thammasat University, Bangkok. This list comprises 146 offending publications.

owner. The evasive term 'things' lends the books an air of the illicit, while, at the end of the text, in referring to both the books and their owner as 'friends', the identity of both becomes merged, both under threat and in danger of perishing.<sup>167</sup>

In *Kho'ng khwan haeng phaen din* (Salt of the Earth), Sidaoru'ang again describes the fear and uncertainty that many felt in the days that followed October 6, although in this story the narrator is a young man rather than a woman. One night, shortly after the coup, he realizes that it is too dangerous for him to stay at home. His thoughts turn to his girlfriend, a student activist of middle-class, Chinese parentage (to whom the title of the story alludes), who has spent her vacations with fellow students, trying to help peasants build a local school, and lending a hand with harvesting rice. Although the students' lack of experience proved more of a hindrance than a help, the narrator nevertheless feels proud that his girlfriend has tried to learn about the life of peasants like himself. Now his girlfriend's father - a journalist who has spent some time in prison under a previous dictatorship - has decided to return to China with his two eldest sons, while his wife is to stay in Bangkok with the remaining children.

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See also *Prakat krasuang mahatthai ru'ang kamnot chu' ekasan lae sing phim thi ham mi hai phu du* (Declaration of the Ministry of the Interior on the subject of Banned Books) in *Ratchakitcanubeksa*, Volume 94, section 97, 19 October 1977, special edition pp. 3-16.

<sup>167</sup> The narrator states in the text: 'It is to save the life of these 'friends' of 'a friend of mine' that I undertake this essential task.' (See Sidaoru'ang, *A Drop of Glass*, op. cit., p. 133.) Sidaoru'ang's use of the term 'friend' mirrors also Suchat's tendency to refer to her in public as a mere 'friend' and reveals her sense of hurt at his detachment.

Rather than depict details of the coup itself, *Kho'ng khwan haeng phaen din* focuses on the impact it had upon people's lives and the real sense of disillusionment and despair that it provoked, not only among left-wing sympathizers, but also among many ordinary people. Similar in theme to *Su'ng ro' wan ca taek thamlai*, this story also highlights the failure of the student movement to improve the lot of the rural poor. Coupled with this, is the theme of nationalism, with the daughter of Chinese parentage preferring to remain in Thailand, despite its political horrors, because she sees it as her true homeland. As in *Raeng ngan kap ngoen* and *Phit wang*, a key protagonist is faced with the choice between loyalty to the family and loyalty to a cause, the latter prevailing on each occasion. The story can be seen as a reaffirmation of the values of the student movement at a time when many activists were demoralized and disillusioned.

Although the narrator in the story is male, there are elements which identify him with Sidaoru'ang, namely that he is of peasant origin, has once worked as a labourer, and now appears to be a writer. (There are, in addition, elements of his girlfriend's character which share similarities with that of Suchat.) Many of his comments in the text echo Sidaoru'ang's own feelings about her newly-forming relationship with Bangkok's intellectual élite, who would have comprised the readership of this story. Thus the story records Sidaoru'ang's genuine appreciation of the efforts made by the idealistic young

middle-class audience, while at the same time asking them to acknowledge their own limitations.<sup>168</sup>

The last of Sidaoru'ang's October 6 stories, *Klo'm khwan mae* (A Mother's Lullaby), was published in the mainstream weekly women's magazine *Siang satri* (The Voice of Women),<sup>169</sup> whose readership was, likewise, largely middle-class and from Bangkok. Based on a newspaper report that Sidaoru'ang read two years after the event,<sup>170</sup> *Klo'm khwan mae* relates the responses of two mothers to the deaths of their children during the October riots - one a student activist, the other, a member of the right-wing, Red Gaur militia.<sup>171</sup>

The activist's mother feels aggrieved that some people's children have survived, while hers was killed by a single bullet. Some of his friends who were arrested during the riots are now due to be released from prison, and she draws some comfort from the sense that they are like her own son. On the morning of their release she goes to the prison and sees them emerge and greet their mothers, some crying, some smiling at their victory, others saddened by the memory of friends who died to protect them. She knows that the mother in the house opposite, on the right-hand

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<sup>168</sup> Rasami Phaolu'angtho'ng criticised *Kho'ng khwan haeng phaen din* on the basis that its tone was one of a friend telling a story, that it lacked any depth of emotion which might have incited the reader to better understand the thoughts of the characters, and that it therefore had little impact in terms of presentation. (See Camrat and Thira, op. cit., p. 48.)

<sup>169</sup> See *Siang satri*, year 1, no. 5, 8-14 November, 1978.

<sup>170</sup> Rasami observed that, because of this the story bore close resemblance to journalesque and that its rather unimaginative tone rendered it more a report than a piece of fiction. (See Camrat and Thira, op. cit., p. 49.)

<sup>171</sup> For further details on the Red Gaurs see Girling, op. cit., pp. 210-211 and pp. 213-214.

bank of the canal, has also lost her son in the riots; nevertheless, she understands little of the reason for his death, but for the fact that he had been asked by officials to help create a disturbance to provide an excuse to attack the university.

The narrator asks the readers to remember the 'two mothers' and their very different pasts, who have been made enemies by their sons' different political outlooks. Following this the narrative takes the form of excerpts of speech from both mothers. The mother of the left-bank believes that all children are innocent and is shocked, not only at having to identify her son's body, but also that such violence could erupt among Buddhists. The mother of the right bank recalls her son having been one of three hundred Red Gaurs sent to provoke a fight in which they, too, were arrested and shot. Believing that the crime figures had dropped since the creation of the Red Gaurs, she had accepted his death as the price for preventing the country from falling into chaos. The mother on the left bank mourns her son's death and vows that, although she is growing old, she will never take sides and will always listen to both parties.

Like several earlier examples of Sidaoru'ang's creative writing, *Klo'm khwan mae* serves the purpose of mourning. This it achieves on several levels. It is the story of a mother mourning the death of her own son (and attempting, as part of this process, to transfer her feelings of maternal love onto other 'children' involved in the October demonstrations; it is the story of a society mourning the tension that was apparent in Thailand in 1976 and which culminated in the violence of October 6; and it examines the

coup and its aftermath purely in terms of human suffering on both sides of the political divide, for which the banks of the canal provide a simple metaphor. The ultimate message of this story is one of reconciliation - not that the past should be entirely forgotten, but that old wounds and bitterness should be allowed to heal in a rejuvenated spirit of forgiveness, and of tolerance for other people's differences.<sup>172</sup> The sense of grief is only counteracted at the end of the story by the mother's resignation to her son's death, her acknowledgment of the fact that he has died in the cause of progress and her belief that he will be reborn. Here a recurrent theme in Sidaoru'ang's work is echoed, namely that the ordinary people are always the victims of political machinations, disempowered by forces beyond their control: in *Klo'm khwan mae* it is the state authorities who have both massacred the left-wing student activists and manipulated the right-wing Red Gaur into facilitating the attack.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> Despite this, *Klo'm khwan mae* clearly speaks more directly to a readership whose experiences, however vicarious, were of a left-wing rather than a right-wing affiliation. Although Rasami gives the impression that this story addresses the lives of the two mothers with equal weight (see Camrat and Thira, op. cit., p. 49), Sidaoru'ang actually emphasizes the experiences of the mother on the left-bank. Most of the events are related from the perspective of the mother on the left-bank, interspersed only occasionally by the experiences of the mother on the right-bank or by comments from the narrator. Moreover, the term 'mothers' children', placed in inverted commas and given a seemingly universal tone is, in fact, only ever used as a description of those children involved on the political left and not to those on the right.

<sup>173</sup> Sidaoru'ang's repeated use of inverted commas is an attempt, albeit cumbersome, to highlight symbols of universality in the text. She contrasts the experiences of the imprisoned students with those of their relatives by referring to the former as those on the 'inside' and the latter as those on the 'outside'. More complex, however, are her descriptions of the imprisoned students, looking sky-wards and wondering about the extent of the fog which surrounds them. The

Beyond its political theme, *Klo'm khwan mae* also portrays an ideal Mother. While Sidaoru'ang's earliest pieces tended to depict a punitive or, at best, unsympathetic mother figure, this story is the first to offer a warmer version. This may be explained in terms of Sidaoru'ang's own emerging instincts as a mother, doubtless also encouraged by the increasing stability of her relationship with Suchat; and in terms of her own ability to create her own, protective internal mother.

The title of the story, *Klo'm khwan mae*, has a double meaning; it is open to interpretation, not simply as a lullaby sung to a child by a loving mother, but also a lullaby that might comfort a mother herself. While *Klo'm khwan mae* mourns the death of a child (in much the same way as *Rakha haeng khwam tai*) so, too, the writing of this text attempts to exorcise some of the sadness felt by the author about the political upheavals Thailand had suffered during this period. The whole story operates as a lullaby to the 'child' in the reader by the 'mother' in the writer and as a lullaby from the 'mother' in the writer to the 'child' within herself.

Sidaoru'ang's own desire for a metaphorical 'child', embodied in her creative writing, and her wish for a real child are

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polluted city, buried in fog, thus becomes symbolic of the prison itself, whilst there are suggestions that the maze of streets in the 'outside world' is a dangerous jungle. There are also several references to rain and to water, namely that the rain is falling more heavily this year than last, though it fails to make the flowers bloom; and that the water in the canal is, by the end of the story, on the point of overflowing. This might serve to parallel the endless tears wept by the mother for her dead child and her imprisoned 'children' and the total sum of grief is registered by the brimming canal which, at the point of overflow, will link both right and left banks together.

documented in the autobiographical tale *Nam ta lai ngiap* (Tears that Flow in Silence), in which a woman gives birth to a baby which dies shortly after. Through flashback, the reader learns of a dispute between the woman and her husband on the subject of beginning a family. The husband argues against it on economic grounds, and although his reasoning sounds plausible, his wife is quick to construe from it that, in reality, he does not love her. The wife's testing of her husband's resolve, by pretending to him that she has removed her IUD without his prior consent, reveals both her insecurity in the relationship and her resort to manipulative behaviour as a test of his affection. It is not until some time later that both parties agree to have a child.

Prior to giving birth the woman is referred to as *phu pen phanraya* (wife), though her title changes at different points in the text. Once she has given birth she becomes *mae* (mother), only to revert to her title of *phanraya* when she is told that her child has died. *Nam ta lai ngiap* opens with a description of the woman in premature labour in a private hospital and in which she is referred to as *sing thi no'n bon tiang* (the thing lying on the bed) and *thoe phu thuk mat khaen kha* (the woman tied by the arms and legs):

The heavily pregnant woman who was lying on the bed was turned over on her side with her back arched. A man holding a needle came up close and said to her,

'Brace your back to take the needle. Don't shrink away from it.'

The sharp needle was jabbed and pressed into her backbone two or three times until the person administering the treatment was satisfied. She gritted her teeth and braced her back to take the needle as she had been ordered, although it did not

hurt for long. Her legs and her stomach began to go numb and heavy.

'How is it?' one of the men in green robes asked.

'I feel a bit sick', she replied. She stared up at the two enormous clusters of lights which were hanging above her as if in observation of her empty, naked body which was presently tied tightly by hands and feet to the bed.

'If you feel sick then breathe deeply. The doctor's bringing you a urine tube.'

The woman tied by the arms and legs nodded and at the same time someone placed a plastic mask over her nose. Following orders, she began to breathe in and out deeply.

Shortly afterwards her senses told her that only her mouth, her ears and her thoughts remained in operation. She could hear the voices of the people in green robes who surrounded her. They were chattering on about the day to day events that were happening in the outside world, that lay beyond this place. Although she could only faintly hear their voices, the green cloth which separated her head from her body meant that she could not actually see them.<sup>174</sup>

Her very vivid description of the process of labour evokes a sense of alienation and disembodiment, while human contact within the delivery room is restricted to the purely functional.<sup>175</sup> The woman's dehumanized status is implied not only by the earliest reference to her as 'a thing' lying on the bed, but also by the way in which she is told to roll over on her side, and in which she is literally tied down. Through this restraint of her physical freedom, she is effectively subordinated to authority and denied

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<sup>174</sup> Sidaoru'ang, 'Nam ta lai ngiap' in *Bat prachachon*, Samnak phim Met sai, Bangkok: 1984, pp. 95-96.

<sup>175</sup> The use of the passive (which I have endeavoured to retain in the translation) is uncommon in Thai and reserved only for instances where the action is considered by the recipient to be unpleasant.

free will. Her body belongs, not to herself, but to the medical staff who attend to her; and this is symbolized by the green cloth which separates her head (and her remaining senses of speech, hearing and thought) from her numbed, de-sensitized body that lies within the boundaries of the medical staff, of authority and 'split off' from the remainder of her 'self'. There is a sense here in which this detachment from the body of the mother-to-be returns her to the state of early infancy where, as a child, she has no sense of her own physical self, neither is she able to compound a sense of her own physical boundaries or to visualize her own body as mirrored in the reflection of an 'other'.<sup>176</sup> The words used to describe her body - *plao* (empty) and *plu'ay* (naked) - are also a haunting choice, given her pregnant state.

When the child is finally removed from the woman's womb someone comments that it is underweight and the fading sound of its crying informs her that it is being taken away without her even having seen or touched it. Not only is access to her own body denied, but also access to that of her child. As the anaesthetic wears off, her numbness begins to disappear, but she still has no real awareness of the birth.

A short interior monologue follows, narrating in the first person the mother's thoughts of her impending death, of the separation from her newly born child, of her lack of either happiness or sadness and of fading consciousness:

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<sup>176</sup> For the psychological significance of this in terms of the construction of identity see Harrison, 'Birth, Death and Identity', op. cit., passim.

'If I have to die in the next few minutes ... Well ... What does it matter ... If I die, I die ... at least my child has been born and his father can admire him. It's time for me to close the curtains of life. What can you do when your time's up?... I must be a bit selfish for thinking this way, but it's just normal. When you lose something of value, you have to learn to accept it ... It can't be helped ... I hope it doesn't take him long to get over it ... I am no longer aware of anything or anyone ... happiness, suffering ... it's all slipping away from me ...'<sup>177</sup>

A secondary theme is introduced in the third section of the story, dealing with the couple's hopes of receiving superior treatment if they can afford the expense of a private hospital. In reality the hospital appears to have concentrated all its energies on the provision of piped music, dimmed lights, telephones and television, all of which alienate the woman and make her feel as a stranger among strangers. Moreover, the hospital is noisy and unhygienic, with the sterile baby unit located next to the toilets, and the services it provides inefficient and uncaring. When the husband is left to inform his wife that their child has died, a nurse immediately enters to enquire what she should do with the baby's body. The husband is so angered by the nurse's insensitivity that he tells her to leave, but she is insistent upon receiving instructions, so reflecting the hospital's function as a business, where its patients, like so many of the characters in Sidaoru'ang's early stories, are mere victims of a fully operational capitalist system.

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<sup>177</sup> Sidaoru'ang. 'Nam ta lai ngiap, op. cit., p. 98.

Thematically linked to Sidaoru'ang's interest in birth, mothering and death, and to her portrayal of the impact of capitalism, is a slightly later short story, *Bun Songkran* (New Year's Merit), into which details of rural life are also interwoven. A young mother's love and concern for her sick baby daughter is portrayed at some length, when she visits the doctor, after deserting her husband following an argument. Convinced from experience that his wife will eventually return, the husband continues with his work in her absence, drying bananas.<sup>178</sup> It is the time of the *Songkran* (Thai New Year) festival and as the woman walks back from the clinic with her child she shields her from inebriated revellers and teenagers in the street who are throwing water at each other. The author notes that entrepreneurial capitalism has already encroached upon the traditional celebration, with water sold from the back of a van rather than people collecting it from the nearby river. The primary significance of the water-throwing festival in *Bun Songkran* appears not, however, to be as a comment upon social change, but as a metaphor for change in the lives of the dominant characters in the text, - the woman, her child and her husband. As the woman makes her way through the *Songkran* celebrations her mind is occupied with thoughts of her family - of her husband working hard alone at home, of her resolve to return to him on the next train and of the joy she feels when she hears her daughter

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<sup>178</sup> The story goes to great length to describe the process by which this is done. Dried bananas are a speciality of Bang Krathum, Sidaoru'ang's home town, and it is probable that she based this story on a family that she had known or heard about there.

call her 'Mummy'. Much of the narrative focuses upon the bonding between mother and child, which far outweighs the intimacy that exists between husband and wife. (There is also a sense in which the woman's care for her daughter appears to create conflicts with her husband, since she argues that she is unable to help him work and watch over their daughter at the same time.) But the *Songkran* celebrations, symbolizing the activities of the world outside, impose themselves on the insular world of the mother-daughter couple to tragic effect, when a reveller throws water at the driver of an oncoming car and it swerves, hitting her and killing her child.

*Bun Songkran* not only portrays the intimacy of the mother-daughter relationship, but also the husband's self-absorption within the marital relationship. He is annoyed that she is unable to help him with his work drying bananas and later, when he begins to feel concern that his wife has not yet returned, the reason given is that he has no one to cook for him. When he eventually sees her coming along the road, his thoughts turn to the food she will have brought for him; he is disappointed to notice the empty basket, and it is only afterwards that he registers the absence of his child.

As a portrayal of family life *Bun Songkran* highlights the practical nature of the husband/wife relationship and contrasts it with the warmth and affection that both parents have for their daughter. The tragedy of the child's death is consequently rendered more poignant and the closing line, noting a worsening

of the weather, symbolizes, perhaps rather crudely, the family's prospects for the future.

The importance of the nuclear family is similarly highlighted in *Mae kho'ng Po'm* (Po'm's Mother), although this short story examines motherhood from the perspective of good child-rearing practices.

Po'm is a bright, happy, well-behaved little girl from an urban, middle-class family, whose parents send her to boarding school at the age of four because they do not have time to look after her and because her mother genuinely believes that the school will improve Po'm's prospects in life. After several months however, Po'm actually seems to have lost much of her childlike inquisitiveness. The once warm relationship with her mother now becomes a more distant one; and when her mother comes to visit, she insists that Po'm first greet her with a formal *wai*, before hugging her.<sup>179</sup> Despite Po'm's obvious unhappiness at the school, her mother reasons that it is still better for Po'm than to be at home and she readily convinces herself that she must endure the pain of separation for the sake of her child's future.

A subsequent breakdown in Po'm's parents' marriage gives her less contact with either of them. Po'm's father's new wife tells her that her mother has remarried and no longer loves her. When Po'm's father is murdered by his new wife, Po'm is allowed time from school to attend his funeral. Still she does not know why her mother has disappeared, though some people say she has been

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<sup>179</sup> A *wai* is the traditional Thai greeting, with palms together beneath the chin.

killed. At the age of almost twelve Po'm is always sad and her teachers find her slow and unenthusiastic about her studies.

In the closing paragraphs, one of Po'm's teachers is identified as the narrator of the story. She asks Po'm whether she prefers being at school or at home. After a lengthy silence, Po'm eventually responds that she does not know. The narrator tries to ascertain the real cause of her unhappiness, but ultimately, the reader is left to decide whether the blame lies with the school or the home.

As Sidaoru'ang became a more accomplished writer and gradually moved further away from her working-class background, the characters in her stories began to reflect the values of the new circles with which she was now coming into contact. Moreover, in the political context of the early 1980s, the interest of middle-class readers in tales of working-class hardship was fast diminishing and with the gradual return of student activists from the CPT and their re-absorption into mainstream Bangkok society, themes of urban, middle-class dilemmas became more attractive. *Mae kho'ng Po'm* addressed an audience primarily of the same class background as Po'm's own family. It is the first of Sidaoru'ang's apolitical stories to deal with social problems, yet break with the tradition of linking them to the rural poor or to urban factory workers. It criticizes the emotional restraint that lies behind the family's desire for Po'm to be well-brought up and well-educated and defines the importance of the mother-child/parent-child bond for emotional and intellectual well-being. When the family unit disintegrates, Po'm is rendered

an increasingly isolated figure, unable to comprehend the situation in which she finds herself.

Although *Mae kho'ng Po'm* focuses primarily on the experiences of Po'm rather than on the mother, who is the focus of the title, the story can also be seen to be in part an exploration of motherhood and parental responsibility, issues to become of increasing importance in Sidaoru'ang's thoughts as a writer.

Sidaoru'ang's own search for a warm mother-daughter relationship is reflected in the proliferation of semi-autobiographical tales dealing with an emotionally more constant 'mother' figure, that of her own (maternal) grandmother.

*Yai kap thahan num* (Grandmother and the Soldier Boy) opens with the author's reminiscences of her childhood, always waking to the sound of her grandmother grinding betel, her silhouette reflected against the lamp. Every night Grandmother would check that her three, motherless grandchildren were warm enough and protected from mosquitoes. She would rise early to cook the rice, although she would not wake the children until she had been to market and prepared their breakfast. The narrator fondly remembers how her grandmother would bathe her, how she would warn them that the geckoes would eat their livers if they did not go to sleep, how she would sing lullabies, tell them old wives' tales, and cook them delicious food.

Some years after the narrator has been sent away to work in a factory, at the age of eleven, she invites her grandmother to live

with her in the city. The old lady refuses, but pays occasional visits instead. On one occasion, while waiting at Bangkok's railway station, she is patronizingly greeted in North Eastern dialect by a handsome young soldier. He is shocked by the familiarity and self-assuredness of her reply and he walks away without continuing the dialogue. 'He must have got the shits,' the old lady mutters, further failing to acknowledge him as a social superior.<sup>180</sup> Grandmother's response to the soldier is a direct and friendly one, symbolising the down-to-earth and practical approach which gives her such towering strength in life; and the response of the narrator to her Grandmother provides a clear statement of the pride she feels in her own rural origins.

*Yai kap thahan num* is principally a vehicle for a detailed description of Sidaoru'ang's own grandmother, in much the same vein as her earliest character portrayal, *Pho'*. Rasami Phaolu'angtho'ng emphasises the difference between the two stories however, in that, while Sidaoru'ang portrays her father as one of life's underdogs, she presents her grandmother as a character of enormous strength and resilience.<sup>181</sup> Her selfless

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<sup>180</sup> Sidaoru'ang, 'Yai kap thahan num' in *Kaew yot diaw*, op. cit., pp. 346-7.

<sup>181</sup> See Camrat and Thira, op. cit., p. 44. Rasami goes on to say, however, that:

Nevertheless, if we look further than the personal nature of Father and Grandmother we might find that the role expected of both of them is different. Society expects Father to take on the burden of being the head of the family and he has to go out and fight with things when he has no way of winning, whilst Grandmother is just an old lady who can do more than the role which others set for her or hope from her and still not have to go out and face the machinations of power that Father has encountered. Therefore, were Grandmother to fall

care of her grandchildren is akin to Father's selfless commitment to his work in order to give his family material support. At no point in the text does the narrator mention her real mother, instead indicating that she and her siblings are motherless and would refer to their grandmother as *mae* (mother).

While *Yai kap thahan num* portrays a robust old lady, a later story, dealing with the same character, *Krasae samnu'k kho'ng yai* (Grandmother's Stream of Consciousness), focuses on Grandmother's weakness and failing health. As the title suggests, the story is related from the perspective of an old lady in her eighties who lives upcountry with her granddaughter and her mentally-ill son. Although she herself suffers from severe stomach pains and can smell a sickly odour emanating from her body, she fears that a visit to the doctor will not only be expensive but will involve the embarrassment of her having to remove her clothes. The old woman's only concern is for her son and her granddaughter, whose mother is dead and she supports them by taking on occasional work preparing bananas. The type of work and the existence of a nearby railway track firmly locate the story in Sidaoru'ang's home village of Bang Krathum, emphasising its autobiographical connections.

The son's mental illness worsens and, following a fight with a drunken neighbour, he is further ostracized by his fellow villagers. Somewhat reluctantly, the old lady decides to have him committed to a mental hospital in Chiangmai. On the train she

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into the same situation as Father, she too would have had to have withdrawn from it. (Ibid., p. 45.)

sits on the floor to avoid his gaze, liquid oozing from her stomach and tears of shame in her eyes for having betrayed his trust in her to care for him. She cannot bear to look up at him as he is led away upon arrival at the hospital.

The events of *Krasae samnu'k kho'ng yai* are based upon autobiographical material and deal, in part, with the dilemma of making a moral decision.<sup>182</sup> While Grandmother resolutely believes that her son is not insane, his fight with a neighbour makes it evident that he may be a danger, either to others or to himself. Grandmother's own failing health makes it increasingly difficult for her to look after him, but while putting him in a mental hospital is a practical measure, it is also a seeming betrayal of trust. Sidaoru'ang's choice of love and bonding between family members as a theme in connection with her grandmother, serves to emphasize the depth of emotional commitment between the two.

Although there is no indication that the character of the old lady in *Bot sonthana kho'ng yai* (Grandmother's Conversation) is based upon Sidaoru'ang's own grandmother, there are some similarities of form between this story and *Krasae samnu'k kho'ng yai*, in that both relate events from the perspective of an old

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<sup>182</sup> Sidaoru'ang actually accompanied her sick grandmother to Chiangmai when her younger brother was taken to the mental hospital.

The note of moral decision-making is one that also characterises Sidaoru'ang's other biographical pieces; in *Pho'*, for example, Father is faced with the moral dilemma of supporting the porters or currying the favours of local influential traders or of fulfilling his duties at work or saving the life of his child that he sees playing on the railway track.

woman, the latter through her thoughts and stream of consciousness.

*Bot sonthana kho'ng yai* is essentially a rustic family drama, spiced with ill-tempered repartee, bawdy humour, drinking, and gambling. It culminates in the tragic death of the adolescent grandson, Lat, who mistakenly drinks refined oil for moonshine. Thematically, this story provides a further example of Sidaoru'ang's treatment of the subject of ignorance, supported by the characters of the Grandmother and her daughter. Her son-in-law, Thit, is aware of the value of 'education'; he exposes his wife's limited mathematical skills and comments that his daughter, Rung, must study hard at school so that she will not be stupid like her mother; and later there is some discussion about whether a recipe for candied bananas should be written down or simply stored in the memory.<sup>183</sup> But for all his rhetoric, Thit lacks real respect for education, telling Rung that she has merely been sitting comfortably in a classroom, and that now she is the one who must run and fetch him a drink from the local store. And it is Thit and his son, Lat, who manifest the greatest ignorance by their consumption of oil in the belief that it is moonshine, the latter paying for it with his life.

*Bot sonthana kho'ng yai* exemplifies Sidaoru'ang's growing interest in creating atmosphere entirely through dialogue. The subjective, stream of consciousness form which this story takes bears similarities with such pieces as *Mu'*, *Nam ta lai ngiap* and

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<sup>183</sup> References to the involvement of some family members in the preparation of candied bananas again locates the story in Sidaoru'ang's home town of Bang Krathum.

*Krasae samnu'k kho'ng yai*, or the rustic and abusive monologues of Uncle Caew in *Su'ng ro' wan ca taek thamlai*. Yet it is also innovative in the sense that it is constructed entirely from dialogue. No indication is given as to which lines are spoken by which characters, so that the reader is left with a sense of being caught in the midst of a family drama.

In *Wat khru'ng nu'ng, kammakan khru'ng nu'ng* (Half Temple, Half Committee), a comedy about the interference of local lay people in ecclesiastical affairs, Sidaoru'ang is also interested in the interaction between members of a community. Set at a funeral, the story opens with a cast list: it comprises Yai (Grandmother) Cun, nicknamed 'the host'; Yai Khloi, nicknamed *yom thut*<sup>184</sup> (or the messenger of Phra Yom, the God of Death) because she befriends every corpse, no matter whether she knows the person or not; Yai Yone, nicknamed 'the committee' since she is involved in all activities associated with the temple; Yai Cang, the cook; Ta Yong, alias the organizer of ceremonies; and Luang Phi, alias Pu Some, a monk.

The four old ladies, Yai Cun, Yai Khloi, Yai Yone and Yai Cang, help to organize the funeral of a poor labourer held at the temple. When the ceremonies are complete and the corpse cremated Yai Cun adheres to local, lay belief that, seven days later, the dead person will always return home in whatever form he or she is reborn.

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<sup>184</sup> Defined as the person whose role is to lead the deceased to Phra Yom, the God of Death, to await the verdict on his past life.

*Wat khru'ng nu'ng, kammakon khru'ng nu'ng* in part depicts the contrast and conflict between traditional beliefs and those of mainstream religion, in which the local people seem strangely unaware of much of the detail of orthodox Buddhism. As in *Chai pha lu'ang*, Sidaoru'ang points to the failure of religious institutions to communicate with the local people. The host's mishearing of the formal word for 'die' (*tham kan kiriya tai*) in the monk's sermon for the words 'to die of a drug overdose' (*kin ya tai*) is not only tinged with humour but highlights the gap in communication between the two parties:

'Hey, my husband never took drugs. Why did the abbot say he died of drug addiction?' the wife of the dead man whispered anxiously, afraid that people would misunderstand and would turn to gossip. 'Passed away, not died of an overdose. That's what they say for anyone who dies. It's the monk's language,' Yai Cun explained, and the young widow gave a broad smile.<sup>185</sup>

This division is further exemplified by Yai Cun's participation in the ceremony to observe the return of the dead man reincarnated:

'I told you. You don't believe me, eh? I told you to get some firewood ready so that when it comes it can take a burning ember to light its path. Or do you want it to go around in the dark?'

It was the voice of Yai Cun from next door. She had been telling the woman from the first moment her husband had died that she should light a fire in front of the house every night so that the dead man's spirit could use it to light his path. The dead man's wife came down from her house and spoke with a smile.

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<sup>185</sup> Sidaoru'ang, 'Wat khru'ng nu'ng, kammakon khru'ng nu'ng', in *Bat prachachon*, op. cit., p. 177.

'But the abbot said in his sermon that the spirit couldn't go anywhere for seven days, so why could it come here?' Yai Cun hitched up her skirt and sat down on a tree trunk at the edge of the house, her wrinkled breasts exposed to the gentle wind.

'The monks have their beliefs and we have ours. Where's the harm in that?'<sup>186</sup>

Thematic similarities can be identified between *Wat khru'ng nu'ng*, *kammakan khru'ng nu'ng* and *Mae Phra Khongkha, Thao Kae Bak lae ma*, (Mother of the Waters, Thao Kae Bak and the Dog)<sup>187</sup> which, like *Chai pha lu'ang* before it, is critical, not of religion itself, but of religious institutions and their worldly attachment to money and material goods. Moreover, it depicts the invasion of the temple, the traditional centre of morality, by the culture of capitalism, focussing as it does upon the festival of *Loi Krathong* and the way in which it is co-opted by the local temple into a money-making venture.<sup>188</sup> Everything in the *Loi Krathong* festival organized at the temple revolves around money. There is a charge for entry to the temple grounds, for participation in all the organized events (such as a singing competition, a competition for the best *krathong* and a *likay* performance) and for the *krathongs* themselves. A pond has been specially constructed, into which water is being noisily pumped. The harnessing of natural waters into an artificial pond where they can be exploited for material gain is a significant symbol of

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<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 183.

<sup>187</sup> For a translation of this story into English see Anderson and Mendiones, *op. cit.*, pp. 169-177.

<sup>188</sup> *Krathong* are small boats made of either decorated banana leaves or, nowadays, polystyrene, and containing candles which are lighted before the *krathong* is set to float on the water.

the loss of 'authority' of the pagan goddess of the waters, Mae Phra Kongkha, to that of the temple.<sup>189</sup> So, too, is the moment, at midnight, when the waters are customarily held to be at their most auspicious and the pump is turned off, leaving people to drink and make libations with the dirty water that is left behind.

People readily pay to participate in the festival activities in the belief that their donations will bring them merit. Any loss is to be borne, not by the temple, but by the donor and local money-lender, Thao Kae Bak,<sup>190</sup> while any profit is to be donated by him to the temple. For the villagers, *Loi Krathong* provides an opportunity to ask Mae Phra Khongkha for a good rice harvest so that they can pay back the money they owe to Thao Kae Bak. For Sidaoru'ang, the capitalist is still the villain, just as in her earliest stories, *Kaew yot diaw* and *Phuak nai pa*. Thao Kae Bak has total control of the local economy, using the villagers to, in effect, make religious merit for him, while at the same time ensuring his prosperity through their financial dependence on his money-lending services. It is through them that he caters, not only to his material benefit, but to his spiritual welfare in the afterlife.

The story is told through the experience of Tho'ng Muan, a young village girl who, following the festival, has a nightmare that she goes to heaven feeling content, but then sees a woman's

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<sup>189</sup> Benedict Anderson has a slightly different interpretation of the significance of the artificial pond. In the introduction to his translation of the story he claims that its purpose is to retrieve the 'used' *krathongs* so that they can be resold. See *ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>190</sup> Thao kae is a word of Chinese origin, referring to a merchant or trader of some considerable status and influence. It is often rendered in English as 'towkay'.

*krathong* bursting into flames, a sure sign of bad luck, and temple officials telling her to hurry up and pay in order to make merit.<sup>191</sup> Tho'ng Muan's dream symbolizes and, once again, emphasizes the dual nature of the festival, the superficial guise of entertainment masking its financial objectives.

Sidaoru'ang's frequent recourse to the ugly or grotesque as a technique by which to emphasize her ideas is illustrated in *Mae Phra Khongkha, Thao Kae Bak lae ma* by a mangy dog which defecates on a pile of discarded *krathongs*. Despite the influence of Thao Kae Bak on the lives of the local people, it is the dog which makes the final, derisory comment.

Phinyo Ko'ngtho'ng takes *Mae Phra Kongkha, Thao Kae Bak lae ma* as one of ten stories in which Sidaoru'ang offers a clear picture of local village culture.<sup>192</sup> In Phinyo's view, by assuming responsibility for the organization of the event, Thao Kae Bak benefits from the faith which the local people hold in traditional beliefs and customs; and Phinyo goes on to argue that the abbot's hope that Thao Kae Bak will donate any profit made to the temple, shows village society to be the victim of local capitalists. But while Phinyo acknowledges Sidaoru'ang's sceptical attitude to the concept of merit, he fails to recognize that the charade played out by Thao Kae Bak is with the full complicity of the temple, which thereby validates the exploitation of the villagers.

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<sup>191</sup> Tho'ng Muan's name translates as 'circulating money', so adding to the sense of capital gain.

<sup>192</sup> See Phinyo Ko'ngtho'ng, 'Watthanatham chao ban ...' op. cit., pp. 41-52.

Phinyo does argue, however, that *Mae Phra Khongkha* ... has much to say on the nature of the relationship between local people and their 'superiors'. He explains that the lower classes are repressed, both by their traditional beliefs in merit-making and in propitiating the spirits, and by the vulnerable position they occupy at the bottom of the capitalist system. Moreover, they fail to question the possibility of assuming control or altering the status quo. As Phinyo indicates:

... they still have their old fashioned conscience and accept the beliefs of the ancient past and they make merit in the hope of gaining happiness in the next world, without ever questioning why things are as they are ... But at the same time Sidaoru'ang's locals accept civilization. News from the outside world filters into the village until eventually new and different things become commonplace for them ... Between the old-fashioned, *sakdina* type mentality and the economic system of capitalism which has spread to local society no one side has absolute influence over the local people's lives. People therefore unknowingly accept both sides and although they still accept their old beliefs, the observance of customs is for fun and keeping up appearances and eventually becomes a business.<sup>193</sup>

*Bat prachachon* (Identity Cards) also deals with the attempts of a rural community to adapt to a changing cultural and political context, providing a humorous portrayal of the inefficient bureaucratic processes introduced to issue identity

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193 Phinyo Ko'ngtho'ng, op. cit. Unlike Phinyo, Rasami Phaolu'angtho'ng does note the distrust of the *sangha* evident in *Mae Phra Khongkha*. *Thao Kae Bak lae ma*. Rasami is generally complimentary about the story, praising it for its sophisticated symbolism and its sense of humour. Nevertheless, she bizarrely interprets the *krathong* as a metaphor for the profit made by *Thao Kae Bak* which is of no use to anyone except the dog.

cards for voting in the general election of March 1979. The story does not have a political message as such, its aim being to satirize bureaucratic inefficiency and the paucity of arrangements made for the smooth running of the election process.

Like *Su'ng ro' wan ca taek thamlai*, *Bat prachachon* highlights the disparity between government planning at a theoretical level and its practical application in the face of conflicting local interests and ignorance.

Although Sidaoru'ang is dealing with serious social issues in each of her stories about 'communities' she imbues them with an overriding sense of humour and of local colour. *Bat prachachon*, for example, describes the pomp with which the smartly dressed district office caretaker plays the national anthem and solemnly raises the flag in the morning, only to finish the ceremony by kicking a couple of dogs lying at the base of the flagpole. Despite their difficulties, Sidaoru'ang's rural communities are stoic, comic and resigned to their ill-fortunes in a sense that makes each of these tales much more than simple examples of *wannakam phu'a chiwit* social realism.

One of Sidaoru'ang's most acclaimed short stories to fit this mould is *Khon dai ya* (The Grasscutter), winner of the W. N. Pramuanmak prize for literature from the *Samakhom phasa lae nangsus' haeng prathet Thai* (The National Association for Language and Books) in 1978. The story was evidently popular,

having been twice reprinted and twice published in English translation.<sup>194</sup>

In the cool, early morning mist the Grasscutter rubs his dry, cracked skin with his rough hands to relieve the pain of the cuts inflicted on him by the sharp grasses. He wonders to himself why townspeople appear to suffer less than country folk. As he works he overhears Yai Chom, the coffee vendor and organizer of the local shares game, involved in a fierce argument about repayments and accusations of cheating.

By afternoon the sound of arguing has faded, but two little girls from the neighbouring house, can be heard singing the nationalist songs they have learned from the radio. Their mother has left them alone while she has gone out, either to visit their father, who is being treated in hospital for alcoholism, or to play cards. The Grasscutter is aware that the girls' mother has returned home when he overhears the lottery results being announced on her radio. She screams with excitement at having won 300 baht.

At the end of the day, the Grasscutter collects his wages, three baht of which he spends on rice wine that he drinks down in one gulp at Yai Chom's coffee shop. In the market he selects rice and some other foodstuffs, including a duck egg and a packet of monosodium glutamate. The total cost is 23 baht and 25 satangs but, having spent 3 baht on rice wine, he only has 22 baht left. In the choice between the duck egg and the monosodium glutamate

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<sup>194</sup> See Appendix One for full details.

he takes the latter and spends his remaining 50 satang on sweets for his children.

On his way home the Grasscutter sees an Indian selling beautiful, brightly-coloured sweaters. Clutching the toffees in his hand he wonders why he has chosen the monosodium glutamate rather than the egg and why he only ever has enough money left to buy sweets and never to buy sweaters.

Thai critics praised *Khon dai ya* as much for its form as its content. Yupho'n Saengthaksin commented, for example, that, 'The style of writing in this story is very natural, no matter whether one judges from behaviour or from the words or conversations of the characters. The portrayal of the lives of these people seems realistic and lively and is very atmospheric ... In the space of a few pages, Sidaoru'ang is capable of providing a clear depiction of the lives of a group of villagers with whom she brings her readers into close contact, recreating both sounds and images.'<sup>195</sup>

Sidaoru'ang weaves these other characters into the narrative of *Khon dai ya* via the perceptions of the Grasscutter, whose day-long labours form the focal point of the text.<sup>196</sup> Rasami observes that Sidaoru'ang is, as a result, successful in drawing

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<sup>195</sup> See Yupho'n Saengthaksin, *So'ng wannakam* (Reflections of Literature), Bangkok: 1981, extract published in Sidaoru'ang, *Bat prachachon*, op. cit., introduction, page unnumbered.

<sup>196</sup> In the words of Nitthaya Matsawisut, Sidaoru'ang 'creates an atmosphere and takes us through the story via the sense of hearing of the main character who, at the beginning, is just an outside observer who overhears the state of life around him ...' See Warasan phasa lac nangsū' (Journal of Language and Literature), 1982, quoted in the introduction to Sidaoru'ang, *Bat prachachon*, op. cit., introduction, page unnumbered.

the reader's interest towards a character whose daily life is actually exceedingly dull, her technique resembling that of Khamsing Sino'k in its presentation of characters in their environment, devoid of analysis, value-judgement or moral intervention from the author.<sup>197</sup> This represents a significant change in approach from such works as *Phu'an chan yang mai klap ma cak nai mu'ang*, *Kho'ng khwan haeng phaen din*, and *Yai kap thahan num*, all of which are related through the eyes of the narrator, a thinly disguised representative of the author herself.

Rasami is uncharacteristically complimentary about *Khon dai ya*, writing of it that;

This is an extremely good story, both in terms of artistry of writing and of the points presented together with their hidden meanings which many Thai writers do not aim for. Instead they concentrate their attentions on creating 'Literature for Life', the content of which must concern the oppression of workers by their employers, peasants being tricked into losing their land or slum dwellers being chased away from their homes. The result is that the numerous stories produced are all rather similar.<sup>198</sup>

The majority of Thai critics commenting on the story identified its key theme as one of the choice to be made by the poor Grasscutter over which provisions to retain and which to reject. In an excerpt from a Thai secondary school textbook it was stated that, 'The main point of the story is the fact that the Grasscutter has to choose between two things. In the end he chooses the one

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<sup>197</sup> See Camrat and Thira, op. cit., p. 43.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid. p. 44.

which appears to be neither useful nor of value, and even he himself does not understand why he has made such a choice.'<sup>199</sup>

For Rasami, the fact that the Grasscutter chooses the monosodium glutamate rather than the egg, indicates the sad reality of the lives of poor, guileless villagers who are the victims of advertising. Moreover, she interprets the Indian sweater-vendor as a symbol of the entire system of credit flourishing in Thai society, whereby people are enticed into consuming items which are both unnecessary and overpriced.<sup>200</sup> Rasami's idiosyncratic reading cannot be based upon any close analysis of the text, which makes no mention of advertising; while she may be correct in her assumption about why poor people buy monosodium glutamate in general, her comments stray beyond the boundaries of Sidaoru'ang's work.

Seri Wongmontha's interpretation of the piece is, by contrast, much more accurate, when he writes that, '*Khon dai ya* reflects the life of someone with little hope and who needs to spice up his mundane daily life ... Sidaoru'ang knows how to write in order to reflect that Man does not just experience 'need', but also 'want' and 'desire'.<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> *Kan an ngan praphan chapho ru'ang. Nangsu' rian wichakan phasa thai chan m.s. 3.* (Reading Fiction. Thai Language Study Text, secondary level 3), published by Krom wichakan, krasuang su'ksathikan (Ministry of Education) in 1980 and quoted in the introduction to *Bat prachachon*, op. cit., p. unnumbered.

Nitthaya Matsawisut also views *Khon dai ya* from the same perspective. See the introduction to *Bat prachachon*, *ibid.*

<sup>200</sup> See Camrat and Thira, op. cit., p. 44.

<sup>201</sup> See Ratthasatsan, 1982, quoted in the introduction to *Bat prachachon*, op. cit.. Seri goes on to say that, 'The presence of such 'desire' makes it difficult to live on mere basics and if the government is still unable to respond to the fundamental needs of

The essential quality of the monosodium glutamate which the Grasscutter chooses in place of the duck egg, is that it enhances flavour but contains no substantial nutrients, and may even be positively unhealthy.<sup>202</sup> In nutritional terms the duck egg has much more value; but the banality of the Grasscutter's life requires a means, albeit artificial and empty, of adding 'extra flavour', functioning in a similar way to the rice wine which the Grasscutter takes as the antidote to a long day's work, or to the sweets he buys for his children. All three items provide pleasure and excitement, yet they also leave the Grasscutter with insufficient funds for the practical requirements of protein to eat and warm clothes to wear. His choice of monosodium glutamate is his own humble attempt to escape reality, equivalent to that of the local share players and lottery gamblers that he has overheard throughout his working day.

While the experiences of the Grasscutter can be argued to mirror Sidaoru'ang's own sense of being an outsider, *Luk chai khon sut tho'ng* (The Youngest Son) is its counterpart, in that the isolated character it depicts is modelled on her husband, Suchat.<sup>203</sup> Written partly in epistolary form, it concerns the

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the people how can one expect people who experience 'desire' to be happy.'

<sup>202</sup> This point is also made by Phinyo Ko'ngtho'ng when he stresses that the monosodium glutamate and the duck egg must be read as symbols, the former being something of no real value but which adds flavour, the latter being good and wholesome. Phinyo argues that in fact people should be entitled to have both items but since the capitalist system does not permit this for the poor they attempt to lengthen their lives with empty dreams. The capitalist system tempts people with pretty but useless items and simultaneously denies them purchasing power for such items. See Phinyo, op. cit.

<sup>203</sup> Personal interview, September 1992.

response of a youngest son to the funeral arrangements made by his two eldest brothers following the death of their mother.<sup>204</sup>

Despite the mother's unconventional wish that her own funeral be marked with a minimal show of mourning, her two eldest sons are determined to conform to social norms, arranging a big funeral which will enhance their own public standing. The funeral arrangements they make are not a manifestation of their own, firmly-held beliefs in tradition, but are instead a mechanism for social advancement. During the funeral rites one of the elder sons even smuggles alcohol into the temple premises in order to be able to play the part of a generous host and offer his guests a drink, even though this is strictly forbidden. He excuses his own indulgence on the grounds that he is grief-stricken by his mother's death. The date of the cremation is then farcically delayed because one of the brothers' important guests is unable to attend on the day already fixed:

It was the last night of prayers and the following afternoon they were to cremate the body. But then the second eldest brother came over in a fluster, saying: 'We can't go ahead with the cremation tomorrow after all. We've invited some important guests who aren't free right at the moment. So it'll have to be on Sunday instead.'

'Come off it. You can't do a cremation on an even-numbered date,' the eldest brother complained.

'That doesn't matter. It's up to us whether we do it on an odd or an even-numbered date. The main thing is we'll have to put it off until the boss comes. And he's free that day,' the second brother retorted.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> For a full translation of this story into English see Sidaoru'ang, *A Drop of Glass*, op. cit., pp. 153-162.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 161

Phinyo Ko'ngtho'ng argues that *Luk chai khon sut tho'ng* reflects a recurrent theme in Sidaoru'ang's work, that of the importance of honour, social standing and financial status.<sup>206</sup> Moreover, he interprets the story as an illustration of the breakdown of tradition, where trying to please the local *thao kae* or one's boss precipitates the adaptation of customs and creates conflict within the family. The relatives of the dead woman, Phinyo notes, do not appear to receive the same quality of reception offered to the employers of the two eldest brothers:

A long list of names had been written up on the blackboard indicating who had been the host at each night of prayers since the old woman had died. On the first night it had been the eldest brother and his wife; on the second the next brother down and his wife; the third the eldest brother's boss, the fourth the second brother's daughter's section head at work; the fifth the eldest brother's daughter's boss; the sixth an old school friend of the second brother; and the seventh ...<sup>207</sup>

In similar fashion to *Mae Phra Khongkha* ... the story illustrates how custom and tradition can be harnessed to a new set of values based on social and financial gain. The charges written on the temple blackboard for various funeral paraphernalia - such as renting out the funeral pavilion, the provision of pavilion attendants, robes for donation to the monks, collection of the ashes following cremation, and even the provision of pepsi-cola - reflect the temple's business acumen, while the final item on the list symbolizes, more than any other, the newly-

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<sup>206</sup> Phinyo, op. cit.

<sup>207</sup> Sidaoru'ang, *A Drop of Glass*, op. cit., p. 160.

forged association between religion, capitalism and changing traditions.

It is not only the temple, however, which stands to make financial gain from the funeral, but also the immediate family of the dead woman. The sense of greed which this stimulates is illustrated by comments made by one of her daughters-in-law:

As far as collecting the money goes I'd just like to ask if you expect me to spend the money the guests have given me? Because if you do, then when we're invited back to one of their ceremonies in the future, who on earth's going to help me pay them back? That's what I'd like to know. You know what it's like; they give me 50, so next time I'll have to give them 60. And if they give 200 I'll have to give 300. No one's going to help me out, I can tell that. I'm right, am I not? So just don't any of you get the notion we should be pooling all the money. Do you realize how much money I've lost so far on this whole business? There were the flowers for the coffin; I was the one who had to order the wreath and that cost 500 baht. Then printing up a photograph to go in front of the coffin cost 60 baht, and I was the one who had to go and place the order. So I'd just like to ask you who's interested in helping me pay for all of this? If I'd not bought those flowers to go on the coffin then what would people have thought of us? The whole affair would have done nothing for our reputation. And the photograph would have looked awful if I'd not taken charge. We should be taking note of how other people do things. Otherwise goodness knows what they might think.<sup>208</sup>

Textual details such as this undermine Phinyo Ko'ngtho'ng's interpretation that the funeral in *Luk chai khon sut tho'ng* provides an instance of people being joined together by sharing in a ceremony.<sup>209</sup> Rather, the emphasis lies in the sense

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<sup>208</sup> Sidaoru'ang, *A Drop of Glass*, op. cit., pp. 161-162.

<sup>209</sup> Phinyo, op. cit.

of alienation experienced by the youngest son and, to a degree, by his mentally-retarded brother, as they struggle to cope with their own feelings of grief.

The thematic content of this story is supported by a narrative form in which the viewpoint of the dead mother is conveyed via the letter written by her youngest son. This letter is also the principal medium of communication for the youngest son himself (his own beliefs and those of his mother thus becoming inseparable) since he is never portrayed in verbal communication with anyone in the text, other than his retarded brother.

Sidaoru'ang's interest in characters who are atypical and who differ from their immediate community is similarly revealed in *Mu't laew sawang* (Light After Dark). In this story the level-headed, practical Oy begins her working life as a prostitute in order to support herself and her child. Later, however, she is able to leave the profession, in order to work as a bus conductress where she also becomes a campaigner for workers rights.<sup>210</sup> Based on her experiences of working as a cashier in a 'closed-doors restaurant' (a restaurant-cum-brothel) *Mu't laew sawang* is one of Sidaoru'ang's earliest stories to deal with the position and experience of women in society in general, and with prostitution in particular, exemplifying some of her ambivalence in regard to this subject.

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<sup>210</sup> For a full translation of *Mu't laew sawang* in English see Sidaoru'ang, *A Drop of Glass*, op. cit., pp. 107-116.

Oy's vivid descriptions to the narrator of the variety of acts she is asked by drunken clients to perform are sufficient to indicate that her job is neither easy nor pleasant:

'Some people just don't realize. They think it's easy for women like me to earn a living. They think all you have to do is dress up nicely, lie flat out on your back, legs spread, and just wait for the money to roll in. My God! Where's the fun in that? They want to do all sorts of things to you - turn you over on your stomach, turn you over on your back, do it standing, do it sitting. You've got to do whatever you're told. It's once in a blue moon you end up with someone half normal.'<sup>211</sup>

There is a clear implication in the text that blame for the existence of prostitution lies not with women who take on such work, but with the clients who avail themselves of their services:<sup>212</sup>

'The kind of blokes that come in here think they're better than the likes of us. They think that just because they've got the money to go out on the town, they can force us to do whatever they want. That's my opinion anyway. I don't know whether I'm right. If they really are better than us then why should they want to go out to places like this.'<sup>213</sup>

Sidaoru'ang depicts Oy as a victim of circumstance, defiant in her struggle for recognition as a human being, in her own right. She is a woman with a heavy burden of responsibility,

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<sup>211</sup> Ibid., p. 110-111.

<sup>212</sup> For a fuller treatment of this subject see Harrison, 'The Writer, the Horseshoe Crab ...', op. cit.

<sup>213</sup> Sidaoru'ang, *A Drop of Glass*, op. cit., p. 112.

oppressed by society in general and by men in particular, and convinced that she alone can guarantee her own survival.

While the cashier/narrator becomes less sceptical and more sympathetic towards Oy when she learns more of her background, she is initially reluctant to listen as Oy begins, uninvited, to relate the tale of her unfortunate past. Even when she has come to believe that Oy is 'different from the others' this trust in her is a fragile one:

Oy had not been working in the restaurant much over three months before she began to look more cheerful, like a young girl whose head had been turned by first love. I just thought sadly to myself how they all end up down the same track. They all swear blind they'll never forget, but they always do in the end.<sup>214</sup>

Subsequently, the narrator is keen to dissociate Oy from the other 'waitresses' in the restaurant, as if to identify her as a better individual. Oy dresses differently, for example, and wears her long hair loose in an unpretentious fashion that makes her seem girlish, innocent and pure, so distinguishing her from her colleagues. Yet, in contrast to this, are the occasional phrases which elicit sympathy for all the women working in the restaurant:

... not only were the flowers covered in dust and cobwebs, but that they had also been gnawed by plagues of rats: not so unlike women's bodies, reluctantly engaged in the sexual fulfilment of strangers.<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>214</sup> Ibid., p. 111.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid., p. 108.

The title of the story, *Mu't laew sawang* refers as much to the change in attitude of the narrator as it does to the change in the nature of Oy's employment. This is acknowledged in the text when the narrator notes that, despite having taken a somewhat parental attitude towards Oy in the restaurant, she had in fact learned more from Oy than vice-versa. No longer does she see Oy as the one 'in darkness' but rather society itself for its unenlightened attitude to girls like Oy. Oy's circumstances highlight the need for these attitudes to be questioned and reassessed. In response to the narrator's reminder that society is unforgiving in its judgement of people with a past such as Oy's, she responds:

'I may have been a whore, but I didn't get my money for nothing. I wasn't as well off as some women who just hold out their hands and ask for money off their husbands and then go off and gamble it all away. Are they still going to despise me for being no good when I've been down and then managed to fight my way back up again? Sure, if my stomach was full and I still went out to earn my living that way, then they'd have the right to complain.'<sup>216</sup>

Oy refers here to the reputation which follows her to her new job as a bus conductress. In this job she remarries, becomes closely involved in campaigns for better working conditions and is consequently run over by a bus at her employer's instigation. It is the experience of attending Oy's funeral, meeting Oy's new husband and learning of the unfairness of the arrangements for compensation which draw the narrator out of her own darkness

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<sup>216</sup> Ibid., p. 114.

and into the light of greater understanding, an understanding that leads her to be profoundly moved by the entry in Oy's diary for May 1:

'The leader spoke so well. All workers should take pride in themselves. We may sell our labour, but one thing we shall never ever sell is our souls.'<sup>217</sup>

The changing status of women in Thai society and their reaction to this change is similarly a theme in *Prapheni thi yok loek* (Outdated Customs). In this story Cinta is a young girl, married to a drunkard who beats her, but to whom, in keeping with tradition, she nevertheless remains faithful. At *Loi Krathong* she stands alone in the river and, begging the Goddess of the Waters to witness her bruised body and praying for the strength to remain loyal to her husband.

Eventually Cinta leaves him and begins a new relationship.<sup>218</sup> The remainder of the narrative takes the form of a conversation with her neighbour, which the narrator simultaneously describes as a conversation with herself.

The neighbour complains that her husband is unfaithful and asks about Cinta's new partner. She replies that she does not wish to call him her husband and asks that he be referred to as her 'friend'. The neighbour is incredulous, because within this friendship the couple live and sleep together. Cinta explains that, as a result, no one loses and each may exercise free will without

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<sup>217</sup> Ibid., p. 107.

<sup>218</sup> The details of how this comes about are not given in the text and the plot is somewhat weak at this juncture.

any sense of coercion or duty. The neighbour is confused by the concept of absence of duties and promises. Cinta explains that they share the task of cooking and that, as far as making obeisance is concerned, her 'friend' believes that men's and women's bodies are of equal value and that their feet have equal worth.<sup>219</sup> No promises have been made for the future since Cinta believes that when men make promises they cannot usually keep them. Every day he goes out to work and, by choice, she stays at home and does the housework: 'I am not a new-style woman who denies her own personality,' she says. In a sense, the behaviour pattern of Cinta and her husband is still old-fashioned, but with a new interpretation.

The neighbour enquires if Cinta's partner has promised to be faithful or if he would object to Cinta having a relationship with someone else. Cinta replies that all she asks is that they respect each other and to agree that neither party has the right to prevent the other from being free. The neighbour then asks if they plan to get married. Cinta says that if that means living together happily then she is already married. She believes it a good idea for couples to cohabit first to develop mutual understanding and respect for each other's differences.

The neighbour asks what will happen should Cinta become pregnant. Cinta responds that it is a serious issue, which they have already discussed and prepared for. The neighbour smiles

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<sup>219</sup> This is a reference to a tradition whereby Thai women are expected to make obeisance at their sleeping husband's feet before they themselves lie down to sleep. Feet are considered to be the lowest and most debased part of the body.

and walks away saying: 'I don't know. Your relationship might succeed but mine might not.' To which comes the response, 'Hey, who are you speaking to? To me? Or am I talking to myself?'

Although Cinta still suffers a certain lack of confidence she has begun to make her own choices in life. She now believes it possible to reject some customs and that, even if they may not immediately be destroyed, eventually they might naturally be 'blown away by the wind'.

*Prapheni thi yok loek* turns away from political themes with which Sidaoru'ang had frequently dealt and looks instead to new methods of solving social ills by examining problems at the most fundamental of levels - that of male-female relationships. At first glance it might pass as a feminist treatment of the traditional Thai institution of marriage, and the opening section of the text, dealing with Cinta's life with her first husband, would certainly support this. The young Cinta is described as;

... an ordinary young girl, naive, easily cowed and the apple of her father's eye; and it was because of all this that she made the mistake of becoming the wife of a 'man' when she had barely even begun to menstruate and had hardly even known what 'menstruation' was.<sup>220</sup>

The blame for her unhappy and hasty choice of marriage partner appears to lie with Cinta's parents for bringing her up as a rather compliant and over-polite young woman, unable to protect herself against maltreatment by her husband. Only

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<sup>220</sup> Sidaoru'ang, 'Prapheni thi yok loek', in *Kaew yot diaw*, op cit., p. 329.

repeated exposure to his brutality brings an end to Cinta's feminine compliance.

Even so, Cinta's choice, at this point, is not to embark upon a process of self-discovery in her own right, but to instead embrace a 'new-style' relationship. She attempts to convince herself/her 'neighbour' that such an arrangement permits both parties to enjoy free-will and to respect each other as human beings. Sidaoru'ang presents this new relationship as one of progress, of casting off the old, traditional customs and moving forward in terms of women's rights. Nevertheless, questions remain in her mind with regard to her partner's prescriptions for this modern, bohemian style of living as a couple.<sup>221</sup>

This ambivalence, revealed in the dialogue between the two women, is one that is supported by an interview given by Sidaoru'ang on her own partnership with Suchat Sawatsi, prior to their legal marriage in 1976. Sidaoru'ang uses the device of Cinta's conversation with her 'neighbour' to indicate the two aspects of Cinta's (and undoubtedly also her own) character, caught between tradition and the need for change. References to the neighbour as *khon nan* (that person) and *khon doem* (the former person) can be interpreted as a past aspect of herself from which she had developed. Much of the underlying sentiment expressed in this text, and particularly in the conversation that constitutes its final section, deals with the birth of an altogether

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<sup>221</sup> This becomes clear in Sidaoru'ang's later work, especially in the series of stories under the generic title *Chao Yak* (The Demons), which refer to the nature of the relationship between Thotsakan and Sida, based upon the author's own relationship with her husband. See Chapter 4.

new character in Sidaoru'ang's work, as well as in her own life - that of a more mature person, less willing to be led by others and more able to listen to and follow her own ideas, feelings and convictions.

Nowhere is this better illustrated than in one of Sidaoru'ang's last short stories to be published in the 1977-82 period - *Fan rak kho'ng Sai Rung* (Sai Rung's Dream of Love). Sai Rung develops a strong sense of her own individuality and identity through the vivid dreams she has at night and from her fertile, day-time imagination, for in the personal dramas she creates, she is both actor and spectator. The sense of freedom she thus experiences is far removed from her everyday reality and is secured by the knowledge that it is personal only to her.

Once, in her dreams, she falls in love with a bearded young man (though the text highlights that this is love *for* the man, rather than shared *with* him) whom she kisses, caresses and surrenders to the pleasure of loving. Trying in vain to pull him out of her dreams, Sai Rung is forced to accept that in the morning she must part with her love. But later she sees the man from her dreams actually walking past her house and she learns that he has recently moved in next door! When Sai Rung recovers from the shock, she sets about cleaning her entire house in case he should walk past again and look inside. She examines herself critically in the mirror and begins to take greater care of her appearance.

A year passes and the dreams continue, though in reality Sai Rung never speaks to the man next door. Sometimes, when she passes him on her way to work, her heart races and her cheeks colour. She tries to swing her hips and walk with a good posture, but, when she actually sees him, she hides her face and pretends to look for something in her bag. Sometimes, on the bus to work, when she sees an accident she imagines that, if he were the injured person, she would rush to his aid, he would regain consciousness, squeeze her hand and look gratefully into her eyes. She imagines that if there were a minor train crash, without any serious injuries, the electricity on the train would be cut amidst the panic, and he would hold her in the darkness.

Sometimes Sai Rung no longer knows whether she is dreaming or not. As it begins to rain on her way home she fantasizes that if she had an umbrella, she would invite him to share it and he might put his arm around her. She would draw close to his chest, which she imagines might be covered in soft hairs.

When the man's wedding is announced everyone comments upon how well-suited the couple are and Sai Rung receives an invitation. Her heart sinks and then, even in her dreams, she meets only with disappointment and fear. Once she dreams that she wishes to catch a train but, however fast she runs, she is not fast enough. She wishes to fly but she does not possess enough strength in her arms to do so. Sometimes she dreams of a terrifying snake, stretching forward its neck and slithering towards her which she hits with a spade; and then she

wakes up in a fright; and sometimes Sai Rung appears between the bearded man and his bride with a sullen look on her face.

One day the man walks into Sai Rung's house, but Sai Rung dare not greet him and hides. In her dreams, however, he still makes her happy and in her dreams he continues to visit her, time and time again.

Many years later Sai Rung still dares not look at the man of her dreams directly. Instead she wishes to keep him as an image floating faraway, but which she can summon up whenever she wishes.

*Fan rak kho'ng Sai Rung* discusses at a very personal level the resources an individual has to impose their own private fantasies upon external reality. Moreover, the borders between fiction and dream are blurred when, in the closing stage of the text, the bearded young man from next door is cited not only as an inspiration for Sai Rung's dreams, but as an inspiration for the entire story. This interrelationship passes comment upon the role in which the creation of fiction might play in Sidaoru'ang's own life and refers back to her earliest attempts to find a ('feminine') voice in writing in her own dream-poem, *Kluay* (see Chapter 1).

*Fan rak kho'ng Sai Rung* indulges a long-repressed desire to create a story from elements of unrestrained imagination. It is not only a story about a woman's infatuation with a man created in her own fantasies, but also the beginnings of an attempt in women's writing in Thailand to address the subject of female sexual desire.

Because of these elements, *Fan rak kho'ng Sai Rung* can be classified as Sidaoru'ang's closest attempt so far to write 'popular fiction', devoid of deeply moral or didactic content and with a rather frivolous tone. It was published in 1982, at a time when the majority of the student activists who had joined the Communist Party of Thailand, had left the jungle and returned, politically disillusioned, to mainstream Thai society. The dream that society's problems could be solved by the ideologically committed had finally come to an end, taking with it the hopes that had been pinned upon art and fiction as weapons in a political struggle.

Ironically, the title of the story alludes to two previously published works that were socially and politically committed. The first, Seni Saowaphong's novel *Khwam rak kho'ng Walaya* (Walaya's Love), was one of the forerunners of socially conscious fiction which attained great popularity among the student activists of the early 1970s. The second was a short story, *Khwam fan kho'ng Kalaya* (Kalaya's Dream), by Wat Wanlyangkun which clearly referred to Seni's work as an inspiration for its title. The former dealt not with the love of a young woman for a man, but for society and for justice and, as such, it was a highly moralistic text with a clear social message to young people. The latter was both socially and politically committed in its portrayal of a North-Eastern girl, Kalaya, who is saved from near rape by her insurgent sister.

Sidaoru'ang's reworking of Seni and Wat's texts, in the form of a sentimental imaginary love for a man to whom she never actually speaks, shares something of the features of their

stories, in the sense that all three deal primarily with the rights and identity of women. Seni had attempted, in his novel, to define a new role for women, one which did not bind them to the conventions of marriage, to love, in the sense of loving a husband, to child-rearing and to home-building. Instead, he created Walaya as an intelligent, well-educated young middle class woman whose chief interests lay in helping disadvantaged members of society. Taking this to the extremes that characterized the political climate of Thailand in the late 1970s, Wat made his heroine a communist insurgent as a solution to mistreatment that had befallen her at the hands of the military. But while *Khwam fan kho'ng Kalaya* is presented as an attack upon the mistreatment of women by men, its political overtones are much more important than any gender-based themes.<sup>222</sup>

In *Fan rak kho'ng Sai Rung* Sidaoru'ang instead places complete emphasis on feminine consciousness and a particular female sense of identity, derived from the ability to recreate the feminine self through dreams. Sai Rung's dreams relate to anxieties about her identity; chasing the train and never being able to catch it is more symbolic of a search for a complete sense of self than it is of the unsuccessful chase of a lover; so too is her dream of appearing as an unwanted extra between a seemingly

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<sup>222</sup> Wat does not, for example, empower Kalaya as a character by allowing her to defend herself against her attacker by shooting him with the gun she has been given by her communist sister; instead, he has the sister come to Kalaya's rescue and induce her to join the Party as her only possible protection. It is significant that Kalaya's attacker is not just a man, but a soldier, and hence the final struggle between the two characters is not merely a woman's fight for survival in the face of threat from a man, but the survival of left over right wing political factions.

contented couple.<sup>223</sup> Later on, this same sense of anxiety with regard to men takes the form of a nightmare that Sai Rung has about a snake which extends its head towards her in attack. The sexual overtones of the dream are evident and appropriate in the context of the awakening sexuality of a young woman whose day-time fantasies concern the possibility of embracing a man she envisages to have a chest of soft hairs.

The subject of female sexual desire is one not commonly discussed in Thai society, less so in literature written by women. *Fan rak kho'ng Sai Rung* is, in this sense, a brave departure from tradition, illustrating Sidaoru'ang's persistence in innovation. That it is also a very personal piece of writing, revealing much of her own sense of femininity and questioning her own role as a woman is undeniable.<sup>224</sup>

By the close of the 1977-82 period of Sidaoru'ang's career her work exhibits a much stronger sense of identity. In the immediate aftermath of the rightist coup of October 1976, Sidaoru'ang's work still retained strong political overtones. Within a short time, however, her treatment of subject matter became both more complex and less idealistic. Particular to this is her treatment of

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<sup>223</sup> See R.D. Laing, *The Divided Self; An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness*, Penguin Books, 1977, p.79.

<sup>224</sup> What little description is given in the text of the young man's physical attributes denotes him as the bearded character who makes his appearance in several of Sidaoru'ang's works and who resembles her own husband Suchat.

the community, both rural and suburban, and of the place of the individual within that community.

A second strand, also evident in Sidaoru'ang's earliest works, but attaining greater prominence between 1977 and 1982, is the discussion of mothering, pregnancy and childbirth. This can be read, in part, as a reflection of Sidaoru'ang's own life experiences at that time. Additionally, it can be interpreted metaphorically, at the level of the author learning to mother herself in the 'absence' of her own real mother (and the substitution of her grandmother in that role). The development of a mature, feminine identity is central to the content of Sidaoru'ang's writing in the early 1980s and is a theme that becomes dominant in almost all of her work after this date.

Sidaoru'ang, Suchat and Mone



## CHAPTER FOUR

### WORDS, SILENCE, ISOLATION AND INCARCERATION, 1983-1986

*It is by writing ... and by taking up the challenge of speech ... that women will confirm women in a place other than that which is reserved in and by the symbolic, that is, in a place other than silence. Women should break out of the snare of silence. They shouldn't be conned into accepting a domain which is the margin or the harem.*

Hélène Cixous<sup>225</sup>

By the early 1980s, when Thailand had moved out of the most troubled period of its recent political history, Sidaoru'ang's work took a more introspective turn and the experience of being a woman became a primary theme in her writing. Not only did she embrace more fully the subject of female fantasy and sexual desire first approached in *Fan rak kho'ng Sai Rung*, but she also began to explore in greater depth the themes of motherhood, female genealogies, female speech and speechlessness, isolation and the limitations and possibilities of the female role in the family. Much of Sidaoru'ang's writing during this period makes mention of the female body and reworks ideas established in *Nam ta lai ngiap* where fragmented images of the female body are associated with physical pain, emotional suffering and with silence.

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<sup>225</sup> Cixous. 'The Laugh of the Medusa', in Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (eds.), *New French Feminisms*, New York and London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1981, p. 251. Cixous' reference to the 'symbolic' in this quotation is a use of the term in its Lacanian or Kristevan sense. (For further clarification see Introduction.)

Prior to the publication of *Fan rak kho'ng Sai Rung* Sidaoru'ang's only references to women and sexuality were through female prostitution. Although she acknowledges the unpleasantness of the work which these women undertake, her early treatment of female sex workers is a largely negative one. Noi in *Khrang nu'ng nan ma laew* is reckless and ignorant, while Oy in *Mu't laew sawang* is the exception to the rule, the individual who, through strength of character, can lift herself out of the moral 'darkness' of an immoral profession.

From 1983, however, a more sympathetic portrayal of prostitutes emerges in Sidaoru'ang's work. In *Kulap daeng nai tho khao* (Red Rose in a White Toilet Bowl), a rose found in the toilet bowl of a brothel at the end of the story symbolizes the prostitutes themselves, the tiny drops of water on its petals offering a glimpse of freshness, despite the ugly surroundings.<sup>226</sup> The strength of *Kulap daeng nai tho khao* lies in its portrayal of the isolation of the community of prostitutes from the outside world, through descriptions of the environment in which they live:

The air in the building smelt damper and fustier than it did at night, for at night time the air freshener that was sprayed into the rooms helped to stifle it. The cigarette smoke that lingered all night long mingled with the dampness for the floor downstairs was a mixture of cement and earth. Through the back window could be seen row after row of vegetables growing all around. But there was no way out.

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<sup>226</sup> It is, as Phailin Rungrat has commented, a rather heavy-handed symbol that is too clearly explained within the text. See Phailin Rungrat, 'Matsi', *Sayam rat sapada wican*, year 34, number 9, pp. 40-41.

Here, in this place, it was not simply the bodies of the women alone that were impure, but even the foul and stinking air that they breathed ... the only exit was from a room downstairs which was open for the sale of drinks and had a juke box ... *a distant dream* ... to see the broad horizon. All that concealed it was the wall of the building. The building faced south and it seemed as though the sun never shone into that corner.<sup>227</sup>

The sense of claustrophobia created by the description of trapped smells and undiffused cigarette smoke is contrasted with the scene of a bright, fresh world of nature that lies outside and into which there is no entry. Not that the prostitutes are detained against their will; rather the physical environment is intended as a metaphor for the fact that, by the nature of their work, they are denied admission to mainstream society. The women are trapped within their own, 'impure' bodies and the nature of their work makes it impossible for them to reclaim the right to purity.

The isolation and loneliness of such women is more thoroughly explored in a slightly earlier story entitled *Nuan kap Lo'm lae khuat nam nai mu'* (Nuan, Lo'm and a Bottle at the Ready). Abandoned by her husband, Nuan turns to prostitution. The story opens with a very explicit description of her attempts to entertain a client too drunk to remove his own clothing. He commands Nuan to undress him and then lies naked on the bed, expecting her to give him sexual satisfaction. As Nuan hesitates in contemplation of the distasteful task ahead of her he rolls over and pulls her down on top of him and she catches the smell of

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<sup>227</sup> Sidaoru'ang, 'Kulap daeng nai tho khao', in *Matsi*, Bangkok: Samnak phim Than tawan, 1987, pp.124-5.

alcohol and sweat. The sex act that follows offers little in the way of pleasure to either party and, after floundering around on top of her for a while, he loses patience and tells her to stop crying and to masturbate him so that he can get dressed and go home.

At home, Nuan is briefly involved in a relationship with Lo'm, a young neighbour, but he eventually leaves her to marry his long-standing girlfriend. Her empty and desolate existence is evoked in several descriptions of her lying alone, listening to the distant, passing traffic:

It is late at night. A cool wind blows across her face, her sad eyes concealing their dark beauty. Beneath the murky shadows of the bread-fruit tree in front of the house the sound of distant lorries came closer ... and then faded.

Nuan thought of the last night that Lo'm had called on her, so long ago, so long she could scarcely remember. The young woman tried to listen out for other sounds apart from those of the lorries. The sound of footsteps along the pebble road, the sound of a key in the lock, the sound of someone knocking at the door, the sound of someone whispering to her. All those familiar sounds had gone for ever, gone with her separation from her husband.<sup>228</sup>

One night, Nuan is woken by the sound of a man's voice outside. It reminds her of the drunken client who had cursed her for her failure to satisfy his desires. She remembers having been unable to do as he had ordered and that, in his anger and irritation, he had thrown her from the bed. The story ends with Nuan seizing a nearby bottle and raising it threateningly in self defence. Nuan's recourse to violence marks the beginning of a

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<sup>228</sup> Sidaoru'ang, 'Nuan kap Lo'm lae khuat nam nai mu', in *Bat prachachon*, op. cit., pp. 279-280.

truly positive portrayal in Sidaoru'ang's work of the prostitute as a woman who is wronged against and mistreated and who may respond to this abuse with self-justifiable violence. The text does not provide clarification as to whether this is how Nuan had actually responded to the client or whether this is a fantasized solution to the encounter.

While the potential for violent confrontation had always been an undertone of Sidaoru'ang's earlier, politically-engaged work, more recently it has begun to manifest itself in personal relations, as the conflict between men and women has become an increasingly dominant theme in her writing. In *Leng duay ta khwa - hai sun na yu ku'ng klang cut sun lang* (Take Aim)<sup>229</sup> Sidaoru'ang draws on her knowledge of firearms to describe how a woman equips herself to deal with a rapist who is terrorizing the neighbourhood. The need for self-protection in an environment of increasing crime against women is in sharp contrast to the traditional image of women as gentle, patient mothers; and the story suggests that violence is an acceptable means of self-defence for them.

The problems of the use of violence are more intricately explored in the award-winning story, *Ngu kiaw* (The Mating Snakes).<sup>230</sup> *Ngu kiaw* examines the link between sexuality, male dominance and violence that is apparent in both *Nuan kap Lo'm lae khuat nai mu'* and *Leng duay ta khwa*. The subject of mating

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<sup>229</sup> The full title refers to the terminology of shooting instructions.

<sup>230</sup> It was elected best short story of the year in 1986 by the The National Association for Language and Books (*samakhom phasa lae nangsu' haeng prathet thai*). For an English translation of the story see Sidaoru'ang, *A Drop of Glass*, op. cit., pp. 147-152. See also appendix 5.

snakes was noted by Phailin Rungrat to be a highly original one for a short story and she praised it for its symbolism.<sup>231</sup> She interprets it as a tale of destruction and war, in which the male snake represents a larger power or country, the female a weaker one. The third party, the woman onlooker, is confident that she knows right from wrong and is willing to intervene to uphold her moral stand-point, so transforming herself into a fellow murderer.<sup>232</sup> The large snake, Phailin suggests, may represent Russia, the little snake a Third World country, and the observer the United States; but she admits that it might also be understood as a broader comment on the nature of Man in general and his potential for extreme violence.<sup>233</sup>

It is indeed possible to read *Ngu kiaw* in this way, especially given that so much of the imagery in the text is of violence and aggression and that each of the characters is in some way involved in acts of brutality. Doubtless because of a certain cultural modesty among Thai critics, Phailin fails to make any mention whatsoever of the sexual connotations of the story, despite its title, the main events of its narrative and the phallic symbolism of the snake.<sup>234</sup> But that is not all. Much of the writing is highly charged with eroticism:

The muscular body of the male snake was splattered from head to tail with black mud. It repeatedly

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<sup>231</sup> See Phailin Rungrat in *Fa mu'ang tho'ng* (The Golden Sky), year 12, issue no. 134, June 30, page unnumbered.

See also Phailin, 'Matsi', op. cit., pp. 40-41.

<sup>232</sup> Phailin, *Fa mu'ang tho'ng*, op. cit., page unnumbered.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid.

<sup>234</sup> See Chontira Klatyu, op. cit., p. 5.

opened its mouth and closed it around the female snake's tiny head, tussling with it and grabbing it playfully between its jaws. Watching them, the young woman thought how lovely they were, as they tumbled around, playing the part of passionate lovers. Although her tiny, rounded body was exhausted, the female snake still shook her head clear of her partner's grasp. The male did not give up, but renewed his tight and powerful grip, so entwining them in a single strand, over a foot long. They then flopped back down into the mud at the bottom of the ditch and once more began to clasp and wrestle with each other with unbridled passion.<sup>235</sup>

The young woman's own awakening sexuality is alluded to as she spends the whole day watching the mating snakes, fascinated and enthralled by them. Ultimately, however, she is to be appalled by the violence committed against the small, female snake by its larger, male partner.

*Ngu kiaw* can be interpreted, not simply as a comment on the interrelationship of sexuality and violence and male domination of the female, but also on the aggressive, smothering nature of 'love'.<sup>236</sup> In her description of the mating snakes the author portrays the blending of identities, the absorption and assimilation of the loved other and the attempt by one to prevent the existence of the other as a separate being.

The struggle for identity is noted, by Julia Kristeva to be rendered fragile within the context of love and love-making, a

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<sup>235</sup> Sidaoru'ang, *A Drop of Glass*, op. cit., p. 148.

<sup>236</sup> This point is illustrated in the behaviour of certain animals, an instinct for destruction being mingled with the sexual urge, to the extent that some animals may even slay the object of their pleasure during copulation. See Julius Evola, *The Metaphysics of Sex*, London and the Hague: East-West Publications, 1983, p. 86.

state in which the limits of the individual identity vanish.<sup>237</sup> Instability prevails, since 'the individual is no longer indivisible and allows himself to become lost in the other, for the other. Within love, a risk that might otherwise be tragic is accepted, normalized, made fully reassuring.'<sup>238</sup>

Male dominance is exhibited in *Ngu kiaw*, not only by the male snake, but also by the little boy, who derives pleasure from the act of killing birds with a catapult that he wears slung regally around his head like a crown, symbolic of his celebration of power. Female resistance to this domination is displayed by the female snake and by the woman onlooker who identifies with her. Upon witnessing the death of the smaller snake, 'the young woman immediately felt a wave of nausea come over her, as if she herself had a snake lodged in her very own throat,' and she consequently exacts vengeance on the surviving male, as if partly in revulsion at the extremes to which unrestrained sexuality can lead.

The theme of death recurs in *Cotmai thi mai thu'ng phu rap* (The Letter Which Never Arrived), written in the form of letter to the deceased female writer Suwanni Sukhontha.<sup>239</sup> As in *Ngu kiaw*, this text functions to recollect the dead, female body and explores

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<sup>237</sup> Julia Kristeva. *Tales of Love*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1987, p. 2.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>239</sup> Ellen Moers discusses the importance of women absorbing ideas from earlier women writers, often when they have very little in common but for the fact that they are women and share an innate sense of understanding because of that. See Ellen Moers, *Literary Women*, London: The Women's Press, 1986, Chapter 3, 'Women's Literary Traditions and the Individual Talent'.

the possibilities of a tangible, feminine 'being' through the establishment of female literary genealogies.

Sidaoru'ang's admiration for Suwanni's work extends to a desire for contact with her:

Even though I am not an artist like you, I like drawing pictures in my head and from now on I will imagine that we have already had the opportunity to meet and get to know each other.<sup>240</sup>

Although the two writers never did meet, many of Sidaoru'ang's short stories were published in *Lalana*, the women's magazine of which Suwanni was editor until her murder in 1983. Attempts by Sidaoru'ang to establish literary links with Suwanni are also evidenced in a later story, *Dae thoe thuk khon* (Dedicated to You All), in which a young drug addict meets a fellow addict named Namphu at a rehabilitation centre. Namphu was the name of Suwanni's own son, who died of a drug overdose while still a teenager and about whom Suwanni wrote an autobiographical novel.

Sidaoru'ang's intertextual reference to Suwanni's work can be construed as an attempt to combat her sense of isolation within Thai literary circles by affiliating herself with another woman writer.<sup>241</sup> While many Thai writers have a keen sense of

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<sup>240</sup> Sidaoru'ang, 'Cotmai thi mai thu'ng phu rap', in *Matsi*, op. cit., p. 25.

<sup>241</sup> Herbert Phillips stresses the importance of group (or *phuak*) affiliation among Thai writers: 'While membership of a *phuak* is not permanent, their composition at any one time is reasonably clear, and readers and other authors sometimes know a particular writer's *phuak*, his past *phuak*, and the broad outlines of various *phuak* loyalties and rivalries.' (See Phillips, op. cit., p.16.)

literary community and find it important to have literary 'friends, enemies, admirers and detractors',<sup>242</sup> Sidaoru'ang is perhaps uniquely independent, operating as she does on the periphery of literary groups, and having only vicarious contact with them through Suchat. It is this which has earned her the nickname *ai mong* or 'the ghost' among Thai literati.

Sidaoru'ang's approach to Suwanni in *Cotmai thi mai thu'ng phu rap* echoes the patron-client relationships that characterize not only Thai society, but also the Thai literary world.<sup>243</sup> In her fantasies of meeting Suwanni, the author of the letter sees herself as an inferior, a younger, lesser writer, whose voice trembles when she telephones Suwanni's office, and who is too shy to speak in any encounter she imagines having with her.

In the letter Sidaoru'ang draws attention to the fact that she and Suwanni are both from the same province, and that they may have shared common childhood memories of temple fairs, rafts on the river, bougainvillaeas and ant's eggs. Perhaps, she speculates, Suwanni and her children might have eaten curry and rice at the stall where Sidaoru'ang worked as a young woman in Phitsanuloke. The shared background of the two writers permits Sidaoru'ang to include a section of reminiscences about her home province, a nostalgic element that runs through much of her fiction.<sup>244</sup> And this evocation of her childhood surroundings

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<sup>242</sup> Ibid. p. 39.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid., p. 40. According to Phillips younger writers often make requests to senior ones for guidance and training in their careers. As an example of this he refers to Khamsing Sino'k, who approached the senior writer, Siburapha in the early 1950s.

<sup>244</sup> *Thang sop phan* (On the Path to the Funeral Pyre), *Lan yai* (Grandmother's Grandchildren) and *Rakha kho'ng yai* (The Worth of

and the exploration of the relationship between memory substances and the past can be read as an attempt on Sidaoru'ang's part to reclaim and maintain access to her own identity.<sup>245</sup>

With the death of her grandmother in 1983, Sidaoru'ang's final links with Phitsanuloke were severed. Her attention turned instead to her immediate family, her neighbours and the friends and literary contacts whom her husband chose to entertain at their home in Thung Si Kan. The birth of her son, coupled with her social isolation formed a focus point for the content of much of Sidaoru'ang's short story writing in this period of her career. Many of the female characters in her stories appear in some way isolated, marginalized and rejected by mainstream society. Both *Banphaburut kho'ng khrai* (Whose Ancestors Are They?) and *Rakha kho'ng yai* (The Worth of a Grandmother) exemplify this with regard to old women who have outlived their 'usefulness'. In the former, an old beggar woman has a heart attack and dies outside a house where a lively wedding party is taking place. The communal gaiety of the wedding, with everyone dressing up and sharing food together contrasts sharply with the isolation of the hungry beggar woman. The guests are aware that she has died outside but their sense of compassion is tempered by the feeling

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a Grandmother) provide further examples of the nostalgic element of Sidaoru'ang's work in the 1983-6 period.

<sup>245</sup> Susannah Radstone, 'Remembering Ourselves : memory, writing and the female self', unpublished paper from a conference on Feminist Methodologies held at London University's Senate House, January 17, 1992.

that she is a bad omen. Finally the hostess is unable to contain her irritation:

'Bloody hell ... She couldn't go and die any other day could she. It just had to be today of all days. And she had to go and do it right there in front of my house. Damn it ... And what kind of children did she have that would leave their parents to die like a dog in front of my house?'<sup>246</sup>

The story closes with the hostess confidently predicting that she will die in better circumstances because she has children and, most importantly, money to donate to the temple.

In *Rakha kho'ng yai*, the grandmother's children and grandchildren discuss arrangements for her funeral in her presence and what they might do with the income from her land once she has died. In both stories the old women are not only physically excluded - one from mainstream society, the other by her own family - but they are also verbally marginalized. The old woman in *Banphaburut kho'ng khrai* says nothing throughout the narrative and dies in silence, leaning against a tree. In *Rakha kho'ng yai*, the grandmother does not actually speak until three-quarters of the way through the story, which, up to that point, consists of dialogue between the other family members. As they sit in animated discussion, she, by contrast, lies with her back towards them, the vigour with which she pounds at her betel nuts offering the only indication of her anger. When she finally comes to speak, it is not about her feelings, but to remind her drunken

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<sup>246</sup> Sidaoru'ang. 'Banphaburut kho'ng khrai'. in *Bat prachachon*, op. cit., p. 353.

grandson to put up the mosquito net before he sleeps and to scold him for drinking so much. Her emotional responses to the loneliness of old age are not externalized but are relayed, either through interior monologue ('Why am I the only one left?'), or by the narrator ('The old lady was dizzy. She felt as though her world had been overturned ever since she had heard the news of her youngest sister's death. She could not understand why she had outlived all her brothers and sisters.')

Although this story is primarily a social commentary on the treatment of the old, it also holds deeply personal connotations for Sidaoru'ang herself. *Rakha kho'ng yai* contains autobiographical references<sup>247</sup> not evident in *Banphaburut kho'ng khrai* and marks the last of a series of short stories that recall memories of her own grandmother which proved an important stimulus to Sidaoru'ang's writing.<sup>248</sup>

The importance of the grandmother-figure in Sidaoru'ang's writing is further witnessed by *Lan Yai* (Grandmother's Grandchildren), which retells the events depicted in an earlier work, *Krasae samnu'k kho'ng yai*.<sup>249</sup> The events covered in these two stories are essentially the same, but are related from different perspectives. While the first is told from the viewpoint of the grandmother, taking her son to a mental

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<sup>247</sup> The family live by a railway track and the old lady's daughter has died of alcohol abuse.

<sup>248</sup> In representing the grandmother in her fiction Sidaoru'ang brings her back to life, publicly mourns her death and is finally able to bury the memories of her. The cathartic effect of writing is especially important given that Sidaoru'ang's bond with her grandmother was closer than with her mother.

<sup>249</sup> See Chapter 3.

institution in Chiangmai, the second is narrated by the adult granddaughter who arrives from Bangkok to help take her brother into institutional care. She recalls the immense guilt she felt about her impending betrayal of her brother:

I saw him sitting there quietly, looking alternately, first at his Grandmother and then at me. I felt a stabbing pain in my chest. My sense of shame had to battle chaotically with my sense of responsibility each time he stared at me. <sup>250</sup>

And when the party arrives at the mental hospital the narrator relates how she 'stood, hands together, like the one who leads a murderer out to his punishment.'<sup>251</sup>

In *Lan Yai* the narrator plays an active role in the despatch of her brother to the mental home and Grandmother, although she accompanies them on the trip, is considerably weaker physically. Her illness is named in the mind of the narrator as cancer and the inevitability of her death is revealed: 'Grandmother's remaining days thus became days of pain and agony which have distressed me ever since.' The element of strength and perseverance that are seen in the grandmother of *Krasae samnu'k kho'ng yai* have evaporated in *Lan yai*, which leaves her as a dying women and in *Rakha kho'ng yai* which shows her fully resigned to death.

Sidaoru'ang pursues the theme of psychological disturbance and consequent social rejection in *Ma hai* (My Dog Has Disappeared).

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<sup>250</sup> Sidaoru'ang, 'Lan yai', in *Bat prachachon*, op. cit., p. 262.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid., p. 267.

Fifteen year-old Thoek's mother has died and his father remarried. Through neglect he slides into delinquency, stealing and glue-sniffing. No one in the community appears able or willing to help Thoek come to terms with the death of his mother and to express his feelings. His insecurities are revealed in an exchange with a neighbour, Pa Phut, in which he confesses that he misses his mother, that everyone thinks him mad and that he fears Pa Phut is trying to poison him with her food. Pa Phut dismisses what he says and, in an effort to console him, simply tells him only that his mother has now been reborn and that he must eat the food she gives him. Following his attack on a girl who rejects his advances, Thoek is arrested and imprisoned. Upon his release, he is found sitting amidst a circle of children that have gathered round to watch him slit the throat of a dog he has beaten to death. He skins it and discards all that is not edible, roasting the flesh that remains. Having eaten half of the dog, Thoek wanders off for a while, only to find that, on his return, the remainder of the dog has disappeared. Thoek passes from house to house, asking if anyone has seen his dog, addressing them by the pronoun *fa bat*, used for low-ranking members of the royal family.

Sidaoru'ang's interest in finding an outlet for repressed emotion, especially for those who need to mourn the death of a close relative, leads her to an implicit criticism of Thai social conditioning. In *Ma hai* Thoek's 'madness' is in every sense a rational response to the trauma of his life experience, while that of his family and neighbours can be seen as dysfunctional, in

failing to accommodate his pain. Thoek's consequent lapse into delinquency and delusion at the close of the text, which leads him to incorrectly address others as members of the royal family, highlights his own delusions of grandeur and the inability of the community to confront the uncomfortable.<sup>252</sup>

The marginalization of members of not only the old and the mentally ill, but also the weakest and most vulnerable in society is a theme which Sidaoru'ang pursues in many of her stories. In *Lom thi plian thang* (The Wind That Changed Direction), a whole community is threatened by plans to develop the land they live on. The landowner is believed to have deliberately started a fire in the area in order to evict local people and then build a shopping complex and housing estate. When the wind changes direction the local market is saved from destruction and the flames are instead fanned towards a slum area. The suffering of the community which results from this is personified by the pitiful woman, pathetically clutching a solitary Buddha image. The Buddha image is likened in weight to an infant which she has rescued because it was unable to rescue itself. While, in this closing image of a woman clutching a 'childlike' statue, Sidaoru'ang evokes a strong, maternal image, Phailin Rungrat chooses to interpret it as a criticism that people tend to cling to religion for comfort rather than to use it for social good, and that they put blind faith in images.

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<sup>252</sup> The fate of teenagers turning to delinquency is also discussed in *Dae thoe thuk khon*.

These themes of motherhood and blind religious faith are further explored in *Matsi* (Matsi), combining with this the subject of sexual inequality. Sidaoru'ang draws upon the text of the well-known *Vessantara Jataka*, the story of the last life of the Gotama Buddha before he was reborn in his final incarnation, as Prince Siddhartha. The story is traditionally interpreted as a parable about Buddhist charity. Vessantara has two children by his wife, Matsi, whom he subsequently gives away, as proof of his perfect generosity. Sidaoru'ang subverts the traditional interpretation and rewrites it as a tale of sexual inequality in a contemporary setting.<sup>253</sup>

Sidaoru'ang's story takes place in a Bangkok police station, where Matsi, a poorly-educated, nineteen year-old woman, is being interviewed by an officer. She has been arrested for having abandoned her three children at a bus stop and in the station she still refuses to take them back, quoting the words of the *Vessantara Jataka*, that our children do not actually 'belong' to us. Matsi also asks why the children's father has not been arrested, since he has left both her and their children and run away with another woman. She says that she plans to become a nun so that she can fully detach herself from her children. In the course of the interview she reveals the contentment she has derived from listening to the *jataka* sermon. The policeman cannot understand why, if she goes to the temple, she does not care for her children, but Matsi, seated in a meditation posture,

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<sup>253</sup> This recourse to classical sources, also evidenced in Sidaoru'ang's *Chao Yak* series, is common practice among contemporary Thai writers. See Phillips, op. cit., p.14 and p. 241.

remains adamant that she will abandon her children again if she is forced to take them back. The policeman points out that if she rejects her children they will grow up to be delinquents and offers to help find Matsi work and lodgings and somewhere to care for the children during the day, providing that she agrees to look after them at night:

The police officer chanted<sup>254</sup> on and on as if he wished to complete the story in one whole day, just like the *Vessantara Jataka*.<sup>255</sup>

She drew in deeply on her cigarette as if deep in thought, looking down at her shirt buttons.

'Yeah, that's all right. But I'd have to work really hard.'

'Well, really! Everyone has to work. Most people want a job and can't get one. I'm a policeman and I have to work.' He was so angry but he tried to speak slowly and calmly, like a monk giving a sermon.

'Well, it's just that I've never worked before.'

'Well, I never. I suppose the minute you were old enough, you just got married did you and then he had to keep you until he'd had enough of it, is that it? That's what it's like, you know.' The voice of someone giving a sermon had become the voice of someone in uniform.<sup>256</sup>

Matsi cries and begs to be allowed to become a nun but the policeman is convinced that she has no sense of social responsibility and is simply using religion as an excuse for an easy life. Matsi complains stubbornly, as if she has no understanding of the policeman's sermon. In response to his claims that no one leaves their children in order to become

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<sup>254</sup> The word used in the text is *rai* meaning 'to utter a magic incantation'.

<sup>255</sup> The *Vessantara Jataka* is recited in its entirety on one day in November of each year.

<sup>256</sup> Sidaoru'ang, 'Matsi', in *Matsi*, op. cit., p. 119.

ordained, Matsi asks why men are able to do it and quotes the case of Vessantara. It is at this stage that the police officer orders Matsi to be taken to a doctor, his final words being, 'When you get the results come back and report to me.'<sup>257</sup>

When first published *Matsi* sparked some controversy because of its unconventional interpretation of the *Vessantara Jataka*. Moreover, the publication of an extract of the *jataka* story on the back cover of the *Matsi* short story collection published in 1987, only served to fuel disapproval.<sup>258</sup> Phailin points out, however, that *Matsi* is not the story of a woman who rejects her children because she does not love them, but the story of a woman who is mentally disturbed and who has misinterpreted the teachings of religion:

The author points to Matsi's madness when the police inspector asks one of his juniors to take her to the doctor's. The reason she can argue coherently about the *Vessantara Jataka* is because the story is embedded in the subconscious of all Thais, whether they understand about Vessantara's final loss or not.<sup>259</sup>

But while Phailin writes that, 'It is a very brave step that has been taken by Sidaoru'ang in opposing a 'faith' which is so deeply embedded,'<sup>260</sup> she is surprisingly reluctant to see the story as a feminist critique of religion.

The story highlights the inequality of social responses to mothers and fathers and their duties towards their children; the

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<sup>257</sup> Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>258</sup> See Phailin Rungrat, 'Matsi', op. cit., pp. 40-41.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid., pp. 40-41.

<sup>260</sup> Phailin, 'Matsi', op. cit., pp. 40-41.

fact that men do leave their children in order to become monks is not questioned by society; neither is the fact that Matsi's husband has left her and her children for another relationship questioned by the law. The moral criticism of Matsi is that she rejects the bond between mother and child that is deemed by society as sacrosanct and which renders her therefore even worse than a prostitute. Although the text allows Matsi as much opportunity to voice her opinions as it does the police officer, he is, nevertheless in a position of authority. Sidaoru'ang draws an analogy between his speech and a sermon, the implication being that Matsi is placed in the position of someone who listens but does not contribute, who should respect the man in authority, not answer back with her own reasoning. Matsi is yet another of Sidaoru'ang's marginal characters, by her gender and by her apparent madness. The story effectively questions social and religious values, particularly those surrounding the nature of motherhood.

The theme of motherhood remains a constant source of inspiration to Sidaoru'ang's writing, though never unproblematic. Since the 1980s her stories of pregnancy, birth and parenting continue to be linked with the images of death, as they were shown in some of her earliest works. Published two years prior to *Matsi*, *Thoi kham lae khwam ngiap* (Words and Silence) concerns a young woman who visits a clinic to have an illegal abortion. When the door of the clinic is opened to the girl she simply stands there, motionless, gazing vacantly at the slum *sois*

(side-streets and alleyways) which are bustling with vehicles and people, her own sense of isolation in contrast with the chaos that exists around her.<sup>261</sup> It is only when the abortion is under way that the girl comes to fully grasp the enormity of her actions, and to realise for certain that in the future, she does want to have a child. The implication in the text is that she has sought an abortion on this occasion because of the instability of the political situation. She is therefore a victim of external events, in much the same way that Matsi is a victim of her idiosyncratic understanding of religious teaching. The position of weakness which these women find themselves in precipitates a situation in which they are rendered 'voiceless', and this is alluded to in the closing words of *Thoi kham lae khwam ngiap*; 'The words and the silence seemed so far apart, like dreams and reality which had a dividing line at the point of long memory.'<sup>262</sup> The words she hears and which have an impact upon her, are the words of the 'doctor', that the operation is finished.

The birth of Sidaoru'ang's own child in 1981 led her to write *Ta Nu* (Ta Nu). The child, like Sidaoru'ang's own son, is born with a defective heart, and the story portrays her own experience as a mother, haunted by the continual fear that her son might die.

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<sup>261</sup> '... the chaos of the slum complex seemed small in comparison to that in the heart of the young girl who had arrived there.' See Sidaoru'ang 'Thoi kham lae khwam ngiap', in *Bat prachachon*, op. cit., p. 333.

<sup>262</sup> See Sidaoru'ang, 'Thoi kham lae khwam ngiap' in *Bat prachachon*, op. cit., p. 340.

Sidaoru'ang explores the strong bond between mother and child, the relationship made the more poignant by Ta Nu's isolation, for he is an only child with no playmates in the area and is marginalized by his ill-health. The child's handicap draws comments from neighbours and advice upon traditional remedies to improve his constitution, which the narrator, unlike her husband, understands to be well-meant.

The strong bond between Sidaoru'ang and her son, Mone, reflected in *Ta Nu*, has a major influence upon much of the fiction that she wrote after his birth. This is discernible in three main areas of her work; namely in a number of stories that can be read, at one level as legends or fairy stories written for children; in narratives told from the perspective of Mone himself; and in a series of six stories entitled *Chao Yak* (The Demons)<sup>263</sup> which take as their three principal characters a father, mother and son named Thotsakan, Sida and Hanuman respectively, after the key protagonists of the Thai version of the *Ramayana*, the *Ramakien*. The *Ramakien* is a well-known Thai classical text and most Thais are therefore able to recognize the characters and the moral values espoused in the story.

In the *Chao Yak* series, numerous autobiographical references make it possible to interpret them, in part, as a depiction of Sidaoru'ang's own family.<sup>264</sup> The similarity of her own pseudonym and that of the *Ramakien* heroine Sida is obvious,

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<sup>263</sup> Published over a three year period between 1983 and 1986.

<sup>264</sup> Phailin Rungrat also notes the similarity between the family in the *Chao Yak* series and that of Sidaoru'ang's own family. See Phailin, 'Matsi', op. cit., p. 40.

while her husband comically becomes the ten-headed demon king Thotsakan, and her son, Sida's saviour, the monkey-king Hanuman.

The characters in these stories are representative of any ordinary middle-class, middle-aged, middle-income Thai family of the 1980s and the issues which Sidaoru'ang raises in relation to them are ones that might apply to any family in this social group. The first story of the series, *Thotsakan kap Nang Sida* (Thotsakan and Sida) opens with an argument between Thotsakan and Sida resulting from Thotsakan's need to be respected as 'the head of his family', a title which embodies for him the concept of being a good husband and father.<sup>265</sup> Marriage has led him to give up his personal pleasures of playing chess and *takro'* (football played with a rattan ball) or of riding around on his bicycle chatting up women in front of the local cinema. The birth of his son has even caused him to give up drinking and smoking. Although his meagre salary does not permit extravagance the family is well provided for and Thotsakan takes pride in his social standing.

As time passes, although Thotsakan sincerely loves his wife and child, he feels tired after work and he grows moody. Sida is described as being suddenly seized with the strange idea that she wishes to rebel against him. Her rebellion takes the form of wanting to go out to work so that the family does not have to rely upon Thotsakan as the sole bread winner. Sida's suggestion that

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<sup>265</sup> This would seem to support Chodorow's notion that male identity is more rigid than that of women. See Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psycho-analysis and the Sociology of Gender*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978.

she take on sewing work at home causes disagreement, her husband seeing it as a threat to his identity, and fearing that he will be ridiculed for not being able to support his own wife and son. Moreover he is concerned that there will be no one to do the housework and the cooking.

Thotsakan's response to make the family happier is to purchase a colour TV, a gas stove and a three piece suite on credit, but this only increases Sida's sadness and silence. She again raises the issue of taking on sewing work at home and, although she wishes to add that she loves him, the words simply will not come out. Thotsakan is unable to sleep, so anxious is he that his status and role appear to be diminishing.

In addition to taking on sewing work at home, Sida makes sweetmeats with the help of her son. At first Thotsakan is irritated because, when they are busy, he feels excluded and questions his place in his own home. Eventually, however, he learns to accept the situation and instead begins to help them.

*Thotsakan kap Nang Sida* presents the issues of economic hardship and change experienced by an ordinary Thai family and suggests a way in which these problems might be solved. Embodied within this solution, however, are key ideas regarding changes in the role and identity of males and females within modern Thai society. And this is a theme which persists throughout the remaining five stories of the *Chao Yak* series.

Sidaoru'ang's choice of characters from the *Ramakien* is, in this respect, a particularly apposite one, since they are deemed by Thai scholars to embody the ideal of manhood and womanhood

and to emphasise the fidelity of the latter.<sup>266</sup> In the original *Ramakien* Sida is the wife of Rama, who faithfully accompanies her husband into exile, is abducted by the ten-headed, demon king, Thotsakan, and is taken by him to live in the southern kingdom of Langka. Plagued by Thotsakan's pleas that she become his wife, she steadfastly remains loyal to Rama and is on the point of committing suicide rather than yield to Thotsakan's desires, when Hanuman brings her news that Rama is still alive. Thus Sida regains the will to go on living.

In contrast to Sida, Thotsakan is perceived in the *Ramakien* to embody immoral behaviour and lack of virtue and is the antithesis of the sense of justice which Rama represents. The high-spirited Hanuman serves Thotsakan only in order to win his trust and is in effect, on the side of good, not evil.

In the five *Chao Yak* stories published after *Thotsakan kap Nang Sida*<sup>267</sup> the key protagonists bear a much closer resemblance to Sidaoru'ang's own family. In *Sida dap fai* (Sida Extinguishes the Flames), Sida suspects Thotsakan of having an affair with another woman. Her sense of vulnerability is expressed in her jealous fantasies that her rival must be a pretty, intellectual career woman, unlike Sida, who is a country labourer, only

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<sup>266</sup> Srisurang Poolthupya, *Thai Customs and Social Values in the Ramakien*, Paper 11, Thai Khadi Research Institute, Thammasat University, Bangkok, 1981, p. 2. Srisurang relates this to the fact that Thai women are expected to be faithful to their husbands, although the same requirements for fidelity do not apply to Thai men. She goes on to say 'A Thai hero, whether in fiction or in real life, usually has many wives or many amorous exploits.' (Ibid., p. 25.)

<sup>267</sup> These are, in chronological order, *Thotsakan prap cingcok*, *Sida dap fai*, *Thotsakan long suan*, *Songkhram roke* and *Phyakho'n kho'ng khu'n*.

brushes her hair and washes her face once or twice a day, and never wears ironed clothes or expensive make-up, since all her time is devoted to housework and earning a living.<sup>268</sup>

In *Thotsakan prap cingcok* (Thotsakan Punishes the Geckos) it becomes clear that Thotsakan works as a writer. In this, and subsequent stories, his love of reading and of collecting books is acknowledged. *Thotsakan prap cingcok* is a humorous account of how he and the rest of his family attempt to battle with the infestations of geckos and mice in Thotsakan's private library. Although Hanuman appears in all the stories, he remains a secondary character, the main focus being on the relationship between Thotsakan and Sida. In the three years that the series evolved, he seems to grow progressively younger, appearing as a teenager in *Thotsakan kap Nang Sida*, a child in *Phyakho'n kho'ng khu'n* (Phyakho'n kho'ng khu'n) and a baby in *Thotsakan long suan* (Thotsakan Does the Garden).

Sidaoru'ang's discussion, in the *Chao Yak* texts, of the problems of day-to-day family life in modern, urban Thailand, are clearly drawn from her own, first-hand experiences. To depict these issues with reference to the characters of the *Ramakien* sheds additional light upon Sidaoru'ang's perception and portrayal of emotions in these stories. In *khon* (masked drama) performances of the *Ramakien* both demons and monkeys are masked, whilst human characters are not. All characters show their emotions by gestures rather than by their facial expressions, those who do not wear masks keeping their faces calm and

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<sup>268</sup> Sidaoru'ang, 'Sida dap fai', in *Matsi*, op. cit., p. 40.

expressionless. None of the characters speak with their own voice, but are spoken for by speakers or singers. To translate these concepts into Sidaoru'ang's fictional depiction of her own family life implies a sense of alienation and lack of open emotional expression. The male members of the family are 'masked', their facial expressions hidden and their moods revealed by gesture, while Sida is unmasked and vulnerable, her requisite role to be visibly expressionless and calm. This she fulfils in several of the texts. In *Sida dap fai*, for example, the story opens as follows:

'Sida, I'll be home late tonight.'

It was, in fact, what Sida had expected him to say, simply that she had not been able to predict quite how he would phrase it. She looked up at the husband whom she loved so dearly. Her heart beat fast and she tried to restrain all her emotions which came to her, uncontrollably. She responded somewhat evasively, feeling as though a sharp spear had impaled her, making her stoop and hide her face.<sup>269</sup>

By the time Thotsakan is due to leave the house Sida has recomposed herself, and even manages a smile as she comments how smartly dressed he is, despite the irritation he has provoked in her. While Thotsakan is out, Sida takes a furtive look inside his diary and finds the entry for that day (14 October) to bear the woman's name, Mantho.<sup>270</sup> Sida lies face down in the dark, showing no interest in her son, Hanuman, and feeling irritated by the sound of commercials for washing powder on the television

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<sup>269</sup> Sidaoru'ang, 'Sida dap fai' in *Matsi*, op. cit., p. 36.

<sup>270</sup> In the *Ramakien* Thotsakan is given the angel Nang Mantho by Phra Isuan, whose 'beautiful body made him forget everything else as he flew on, blinded by love.' See Ray A. Olsson, *The Ramakien: A Prose Translation of the Thai Ramayana*, Phrae Phittaya, Bangkok, 1968, p. 40.

which he is watching. She articulates her depression by failing to wash the clothes, leaving them instead to soak in a basin, and piling up the dirty pots in the kitchen sink.

Sida's sadness is, however, conveyed to Thotsakan, when he arrives home that evening, by Hanuman who whispers to him that Sida has been crying for almost the entire day, and has even left him to wash up all on his own.

In *Songkhram roke* (The War Against Disease) Sida's response to Thotsakan's statement of fact about how happy they are and what a nice house they own, is to 'smile ceremonially'. It is customary for her to agree with her husband's interpretation of their life together, though her insincere smile masks more complex sentiments. But when Thotsakan comments, late in the same story, how pleasant it would be for him to have one or two more women to come and live with them and to love and understand him, Sida dismisses it as 'a fantasy that all men have' and that '... she too has the right to entertain similar fantasies.'<sup>271</sup>

In each of the above examples Sida is shown to have restricted cultural space within the family context, in which to express her emotional responses. There are episodes, however, when she attempts to voice herself in occasional outbursts of tears, irritation, ill-temper and fantasy. At the end of *Sida dap fai*, for example, Thotsakan is infuriated by Sida's confession that she has read his diary, and his anger causes Sida to momentarily forget his sexual betrayal of her with a masseuse. Sida

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<sup>271</sup> Sidaoru'ang, 'Songkhram roke' in *Matsi*, op. cit., p. 91.

immediately loses the upper hand in the argument and is left ruefully reflecting upon how effectively Thotsakan has been able to reverse the situation.

Thai heroes, whether in fiction or reality, are renowned for their amorous adventures, while heroines must be virtuous and faithful;<sup>272</sup> and in this sense Sidaoru'ang's updated Sida is close to her *Ramakien* role model. In several other stories in the *Chao Yak* series Sidaoru'ang's characters act according to traditional stereotypes, with Thotsakan flirting with Apasara, the daughter their neighbour Rama, in *Phyakho'n kho'ng khu'n*, or fantasizing about having other wives.<sup>273</sup>

What is retained of the original sense of the *Ramakien* is that Sida has been abducted by Thotsakan, not in any literal sense, but in that her life with him has cast her into isolation and imprisoned her in a role of restricted emotional expression. Thotsakan's abduction of Sida, and her subsequent incarceration

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<sup>272</sup> Srisurang relates the story of Wantho'ng in the Thai epic *Khun Chang Khun Phaen* as an example of a woman who is executed for not being able to choose between Khun Chang and Khun Phaen as a husband, and for claiming that she loves them both. 'In Thai society faithful women are compared to Sita, while unfaithful women are compared to Wantho'ng.' (Srisurang, op. cit., p. 26.)

There is a tentative implication in the argument between Thotsakan and Sida in *Sida dap fai* that Sida is resentful of Thotsakan's freedom to go out in the evening, while she does not enjoy the same degree of sexual freedom.

<sup>273</sup> Thotsakan's tendency to dream is something that appears to alienate Sida, who notes that, in the face of danger, 'Thotsakan changed from a dreamer to someone acting with reason. It was for this that Sida loved and was proud of him.' See Sidaoru'ang, 'Phyakho'n kho'ng khu'n', in *Matsi*, op. cit., p. 219.

Sidaoru'ang devotes an entire story (*Khwam suk sam chan* or 'Triple Layered Happiness') to a middle-aged writer who finds difficulty in deciding which direction his life should take and how to choose between dream and reality. In the end he chooses to remain in his old life with his wife and ailing child.

in his garden in Langka in the original story, bears similarities to the life which Sidaoru'ang herself led after 1976, spending most of her time at home and developing an interest in growing plants and flowers in the garden.<sup>274</sup> In the *Ramakien* Sida lives in exile from the world of Rama (i.e. the world of Visnu incarnate, Visnuloka, or Phitsanuloke, the name of Sidaoru'ang's own birthplace), and instead resides in Thotsakan's palace in Langka, a land to the south. The reality of Sida's emotional and geographical isolation is illustrated at one point in *Thotsakan kap Nang Sida*, when Thotsakan suggests that the family could economize by Sida visiting home less often.

As in the *Ramakien*, Sidaoru'ang's Sida is saved from despair by the presence of Hanuman, whose presence offers the hope of happiness. While there are some clear and illuminating parallels to be drawn between Sidaoru'ang's series of stories and the classical *Ramakien*, there are other instances where Sidaoru'ang deliberately subverts the original. Rama, for example, the hero and personification of justice in the original text, is depicted in *Thotsakan prap cingcok* as a representative of Indian market-traders, a disliked and distrusted minority in

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<sup>274</sup> She is placed in the garden in scenes from *Thotsakan long suan*, *Songkhram roke* and *Phyakho'n kho'ng khu'n*. *Songkhram roke* gives some details of Sida's gardening activities. See *Matsi*, op. cit., p. 89. This interest in the garden and in nature then persists in Sidaoru'ang's short story writing up until the present day, *Ao thoe, ao thoe* (Okay, Go On), being one clear examples of the garden as a source of inspiration. While Phillips might explain such an interest in nature and environment (shared by many of Sidaoru'ang's contemporaries in the literary world) in terms of Buddhism, the act of turning to cultivate one's own plot of land after so many years of emotional hardship and of political and social turmoil has the ring of Voltaire's 'Candide'.

Thailand.<sup>275</sup> The effect of this is comical, reducing the noble hero of the original to a disreputable and wily trickster.

Moreover, the initiation of the relationship between Sidaoru'ang and Suchat provides no evidence of abduction on his part and, if anything, points to a strength of her feeling which he did not entirely reciprocate. Suchat Sawatsi himself originates from the province of Ayutthaya, which, in the *Ramakien*, is the kingdom of Rama, and not of Thotsakan.

Nor in the *Chao Yak* series does Thotsakan personify evil (although the analogy with the demon still remains). Instead he is a rather irrational, moody and immature husband, with a fierce temper but also a great deal of compassion. What Sidaoru'ang effectively achieves by narrating these tales through the eyes of Sida, and by turning a traditionally formidable Thai demon into a childish, uneven tempered but also deeply lovable character is to empower Sida at the expense of Thotsakan, and to simultaneously empower herself as a woman and a writer.

In the opening of *Thotsakan kap Nang Sida* a photograph of Thotsakan in his younger days describes him as follows: 'A close look at both his eyes revealed a difference between the two, for one was flashing with rage and anger, and the other looked soft and

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<sup>275</sup> Although this is usually argued to be the result of Indian involvement in money-lending ventures, the same feelings are not expressed with such ferocity towards the Chinese in Thailand for similar activities. Distrust of Indians is imbued in children from an early age when they are told to be good, on peril of the *khaek* or Indian catching them. The Thai saying that, if encountered by a cobra or by an Indian it is the Indian that should first be slain, adds to such xenophobia.

gentle, kind and understanding.<sup>276</sup> Nowhere are Thotsakan's mood swings better illustrated than in *Songkhram roke* where the sudden change of events in the narrative parallel Thotsakan's sudden alterations in temperament. The story opens with Thotsakan engrossed in arranging his books and singing along to his jazz records, while Sida tends to the garden. When he comes outside and contemplates the beauty of the garden he muses over the idea that, if plants can eat fertilizer and grow they might also have feelings, and should never therefore be cut. This moment of peaceful reverie and Thotsakan's burst of compassion are interrupted by the appearance of the neighbour's dog which steals Thotsakan's snack of salted beef. His cordiality immediately evaporates and he chases the dog with a spade, his genitals comically revealed by an unexpected gust of wind. Once inside the neighbour's garden he strikes their wash basin with his spade and harangues them for not having trained their dog effectively. Thotsakan's outburst against both dog and neighbour shatters the peace of the garden and, to Sida, appears extreme and inappropriate. She nevertheless placates him by preparing beer and snacks, and a sense of calm is restored. But Thotsakan's peace is interrupted once more, this time by the invasion of a group of children shooting at birds with catapults. Once again he leaps up, this time managing to check his anger by reasoning with the children to sell him the bird they have just injured; but when the children ignore him and run away, Thotsakan turns

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<sup>276</sup> Sidaoru'ang, 'Thotsakan kap Nang Sida', in *Bat prachachon*, op. cit., pp. 285-6.

blue in the face with rage, and again grabs his spade, banging it against a tree as he shouts at the children never to venture near his garden again. Thotsakan returns to his drinking, but further interruption comes in the form of a child banging at the gate, saying that the neighbour's dog has bitten someone in the street outside. Contrary to expectations, Thotsakan now tells the children to leave the dog alone. The accumulated events of the day seem to have led to a change in Thotsakan's attitude.

It is perhaps because the later *Chao Yak* stories are based so closely upon Sidaoru'ang's own husband that the character of Thotsakan is one of the best developed in any of her works. There is some sense of irony here, given that he is named, not as a human being at all but as *co'm yak* - King of the Demons. Not only is Sidaoru'ang's Thotsakan a very human and unpredictable mixture of anger and compassion, he is, at times, immature, spoilt, boastful, self-obsessed and moody. These aspects of his character are sometimes revealed with humour: in *Thotsakan prap cingcok* for example, Thotsakan's ill-temper about the infestation of geckoes in his library is expressed through a description of his face as 'jutting out' (*ngam*) and that, had he had ten faces (like the real Thotsakan), each one of them would have been 'jutting out'. In *Songkhram roke* Sida's request for him to climb a tree to pull down a troublesome creeper precipitates a comic portrayal of him hitching up his loin cloth and of Sida's escape inside the house lest she glimpse 'anything that might offend the eye'. When Thotsakan returns from his successful venture he displays his scars with enormous self-pity. And in

*Phyakho'n kho'ng khu'n*, when Thotsakan contemplates the purchase of a horse in order to take some exercise, Sida muses that it will be the animal, and not the demon, who receives the exercise. When he then turns to a plan to rear buffalo instead, Sida quietly smiles to herself at the thought of him straddling such a beast:

'If we had a big plot of land we could easily raise four or five of them and we could milk them. That would be good, wouldn't it? Then I could have lots of children and if I had lots of children there would have to be lots of milk. Or otherwise we could use the buffalo dung to make gas for cooking with and we could sell the baby buffalo. Do you think you could raise buffalo? Hanuman would love it,' he thought, on behalf of his son.<sup>277</sup>

Much of Thotsakan's emotional immaturity is revealed in his relationship with Sida, whose role is frequently one of placating and humouring him. This she achieves with a mixture of mirth, indifference and irritation. *Thotsakan long suan*, for example, catalogues Thotsakan's selfish and ineffectual attempts to help his wife in the garden, an experience which she finds less helpful than if he had kept to his original plan of going to buy second-hand books at Sanam Luang.<sup>278</sup> At the opening of the story Thotsakan comes outside and sees Sida working in the garden:

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<sup>277</sup> Sidaoru'ang, 'Phyakho'n kho'ng khu'n', in *Matsi*, op. cit., p. 214. Throughout this story humour is derived from the way in which Hanuman reports the events in the narrative as if he is a television presenter.

<sup>278</sup> A similar scene is enacted in *Cao Lo'* when the (male) narrator points to an interest in the garden that is shared with his wife, but which is demonstrated by the fact that he brings plants home for her from the Weekend Market, and not that he actually helps her to plant them.

'Do you like planting things and cutting down the grasses?' Thotsakan smiled and looked at his young wife affectionately. 'You see. You won't be disappointed to have loved me. If you like gardening then I've plenty for you to do.'

Sida glanced away angrily and felt extremely irritated. She carried on working without saying a word. He came down to look for a moment or two and then announced, 'Right then, I'll be off.'

'So why did you come down then?' Sida couldn't help asking. He turned round to reply while carrying on walking:

'To give you a bit of moral support.'

Sida was so angry that she was stuck for words.<sup>279</sup>

Although Thotsakan does go out, he soon returns, having changed his mind and decided to help Sida instead. As a result, Sida is obliged to stop her own work in the garden to prepare tools for him, which he wields with minimum competence and maximum ill-humour. Not long after he has been digging, he begins to sweat profusely, to turn red in the face and to become breathless. Nevertheless, he insists that he is really enjoying himself and promises that from now on he will come to help his wife in the garden more often. Shortly after, Thotsakan stops to look around him and announces:

'Hey, no one has come to look.'

'Come to look at what,' Sida wondered, turning to see.

'Come to look at me helping you to work. I don't see any women's libbers coming to look.'

'Well really. Isn't it enough just for me to see you.'

'Mmm. I suppose so.'

Thotsakan threw down the spade immediately, pulled his loin cloth off his head and wiped his eyes with it. Sida quickly took note of his mood, fearing that he would go into a sulk.<sup>280</sup>

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<sup>279</sup> Sidaoru'ang, 'Thotsakan long suan', in *Matsi*, op. cit., p. 51.

<sup>280</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

In response to Sida's suggestion that he should stop and have a shower to wash off all the mud that has flicked up from his spade and covered his head, Thotsakan quickly agrees and rushes inside, leaving his wife to collect up the tools and hurry into the kitchen to make preparations for his meal.

*Thotsakan long suan* is not merely a tale of Thotsakan's patronizing attitude towards his wife, and his failure to help her effectively, but also of his unwillingness to take any responsibility for the housework:

Yesterday morning Thotsakan had not even washed his face before coming and leaning against the kitchen door and watching his wife doing the washing up. His expression was one of exhaustion, even though he didn't pitch in with the dishes.

'Oh, all this work of yours. Why don't we pay someone to help out? I hate to see you doing all this work on a holiday like today. Morning and night. You should be bright and cheerful, but just look at you. You look terrible. And this is with only one kid to look after ... People can say it's taking advantage of women if they want, but I'll tell you straight, I don't like helping with the housework.'

Sida was in a hurry because she could see steam coming out of the kettle ... As soon as she had washed last night's dishes she would have to pour the hot water into a flask and then start making the soup and frying the salted beef that the Demon King liked so much. She would be finished at around the same time that the rice was cooked. But when she caught sight of Thotsakan's sulky, grumpy face she began to lose her temper. She was suddenly seized by tiredness and exhaustion and she spluttered out the words, 'I don't much like it either, but I have to do it. If you want me to sit around and dress up nicely then come and do it yourself. How about it? When you've finished in the kitchen you can wash the clothes. I've already put them in to soak. Go on. Then when you've

finished we can eat. The train for work doesn't leave until 8 o'clock does it?'<sup>281</sup>

Sida's emerging voice of protest within the family context is one that parallels Sidaoru'ang's own increased self-confidence which was doubtless derived, in part, from her experiences of mothering her son, Mone. A number of stories in the *Matsi* collection are described by Sidaoru'ang as 'children's stories' which she wrote, primarily, as entertainments both for and about her child.<sup>282</sup> *Phaendin tho'ng* (The Land of Gold) for example, tells the tale of two weaverbirds living in a garden where they feel safe because the owners of the garden fend off any children intending to shoot them. One day, however, the man returns home from having ritually freed some birds and fish at the temple with a bag of fried weaverbirds. When the weaverbirds in the garden see this, they fly away, agreeing that Man is an animal beyond comprehension. The moral of the story is made explicit in its closing paragraph:

... this short story teaches all the birds to better know themselves because all the sky in which they fly has an owner and is as highly-priced as the land down below.<sup>283</sup>

The personification of the weaverbirds, and their preoccupation with land ownership, suggests other levels of

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<sup>281</sup> Sidaoru'ang, 'Thotsakan long suan', in *Matsi*, op. cit., pp. 52-3.

<sup>282</sup> Nevertheless these stories were not published in children's books or magazines but were only made available to an adult audience.

<sup>283</sup> Sidaoru'ang, 'Phaendin tho'ng' in *Matsi*, op. cit., p. 329.

interpretation, including the prevalence of land speculation and Man's destruction of the environment.

These themes and ideas are taken up by Sidaoru'ang in two later short stories, *Tai rom mai na pa haeng nu'ng* (Once in a Forest, Beneath a Shady Tree) and *Lom thua* (The Wind Tour), both of which bear close resemblance to the work of the renowned Thai poet and short story writer Angkhan Kalyanaphong: Sidaoru'ang's debt to Angkhan is openly acknowledged in *Lom thua*, which begins with a quotation from one of his verses.

*Tai lom mai nai pa haeng nu'ng* attempts to provide an explanation as to why geckoes run along the walls of people's houses. The story is set in the distant past, at a time when people, animals and flowers were all capable of communicating in the same language. During a natural forest fire an elephant, a lion and a gecko beat their retreat. When they come to a stream the elephant crosses, without first checking how deep the water is. From the safety of the other side it calls to the tiger and the gecko to follow. The gecko finds the water too deep and hastens to persuade the lion of the danger. Cautiously the lion wades into the water, with the gecko clinging to its tail. When they arrive at the other side the lion proclaims that both the elephant and the gecko are correct in their opinions about the depth of the water, since it is relative to their size. The lion and elephant choose to go their separate ways and, not knowing to whom it should cling, the gecko instead sticks to the walls and ceilings of people's houses.

Personification is used in *Lom thua*, in which Sidaoru'ang gives human qualities to two drops of water whom she calls Sot

and Chu'n ('Fresh' and 'Moist'), as well as to a water jar, a pond, a lotus, the sunshine, the clouds, black smoke and to the wind. Perhaps one of Sidaoru'ang's most imaginative stories to date, *Lom thua* charts the adventures of Sot and Chu'n as they are whisked from a washing line by the rays of the sun and taken on a tour in a cluster of clouds propelled forward by the wind. Beginning in the south, the Wind Tour passes over the sea, over Sanam Luang which is shadowed by black smoke, and over the drought-stricken North East, where many rain drops descend to dampen the fields below. Sot and Chu'n choose, however, to continue their journey, so engrossed are they in the views of Nature. Their pleasure is interrupted when Black Smoke - the polluted fumes from the factories - joins the tour, en route to a development project further along the coastline. Unable to stand the smell, Sot and Chu'n decide to leave, making their landing in a dirty drain beside a slum.<sup>284</sup>

Suchat Sawatsi has interpreted *Lom thua* as a depiction of himself and his wife and their failure to join the ranks of the Communist Party of Thailand in 1976 since, at the time of publication, reference to the word 'tour' was synonymous with the clandestine tours organized for people to visit friends in areas under CPT influence.<sup>285</sup> He notes that, while Sidaoru'ang had wished to leave Bangkok after the 1976 coup, he himself had not. For Suchat this is symbolized in the text by the failure of Sot and Chu'n to disembark from the Wind Tour over the drought-

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<sup>284</sup> For a full translation of this story in English see Sidaoru'ang, *A Drop of Glass*, op. cit., pp. 135-8.

<sup>285</sup> Personal interview with Suchat Sawatsi, September, 1990.

stricken North East, areas of which were both a Communist stronghold in the late 1970s and which were also badly in need of aid and development. As it is described in the text: 'Fresh and Moist wished to live their lives in freedom and to gain more from their journey, so neither of them wanted to stop off anywhere.'<sup>286</sup>

Whilst Suchat's interpretation holds good for this section of the narrative, a larger proportion of the text deals in effect with the problems of urbanization, modernization and destruction of the environment, as personified by the ugly nature of Black Smoke, who is heading for a coastal development project. Unlike Sidaoru'ang's earliest stories, *Lom thua* no longer discusses the factories in terms of the ills of their employees, but attacks them as a source of pollution. The smoke which prevents Sot and Chu'n from having a clear view of Sanam Luang is not the smoke of gunfire aimed at student activists, but that of industrialization.

Contrary to Suchat, Sidaoru'ang stresses *Lom thua* as primarily a children's story, inspired by one she had read when she was learning English, and the humour of which she had immensely enjoyed.<sup>287</sup>

A sense of humour and the pleasure of writing for children is also evidenced in the final two stories included in Sidaoru'ang's Matsi collection - *Kem phaen thi* (The Map Game) and *Loke kho'ng Nome* (Nome's World). Both are innovative, not so much for their content as for their form, marking a significant development in Sidaoru'ang's approach to writing which was to

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<sup>286</sup> Sidaoru'ang, 'Lom thua', in *Matsi*, op. cit., p. 251.

<sup>287</sup> Personal interview with Sidaoru'ang, September, 1990.

become more pronounced in her work after this period. *Kem phaen thi* is based upon a child's puzzle, with pieces for each of the provinces of the central plain of Thailand. Operating from the perspective of a child, Sidaoru'ang merges the distinction between the real world and the make-believe by allowing the symbolic action of a child to have an effect upon reality. A seven year-old boy, Riya, is staying with his grandparents and takes a dislike to a visitor, Mr Nothayat, who behaves with arrogance towards his grandfather. Mr Nothayat has recently become very rich and now scorns the old man who had once been his teacher. Riya goes to play alone with a puzzle-map. He removes the piece that represents Mr Nothayat's home province of 'Phusanrubi' and places it in his pocket, before packing the game away. When Mr Nothayat attempts to return home that evening he becomes hopelessly lost and his unexpected encounter with the jungle brings back memories of the struggle, starvation, fear and low social status that have characterized his early life. Nothayat in turn begins to question the reality of his own wealth within a narrative where everything retains an element of the illusory and the transitional, supported by the way in which Sidaoru'ang forms anagrams of the names of the provinces. ('Phusanrubi', for example, is an anagram of Suphanburi.)

In one sense Sidaoru'ang has retained her traditional themes of wishing to empower the powerless in this story,<sup>288</sup> where a little boy is able to chastise the arrogant Nothayat by the

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<sup>288</sup> The power of children is also a central theme in Sidaoru'ang's novella entitled *Dek bin dai* (Children Can Fly), first published in 1989.

simple removal of a jigsaw piece. The sense of Riya's power (derived through his ability to fantasize) is conveyed when he goes to play on his own, on the thirteenth floor of the apartment block in which his grandparents live:

Riya always enjoyed going up and looking at the view around the building.  
He could see the tiny little houses, so far away in the distance, so small and low.  
It was here that he felt like a giant.<sup>289</sup>

The importance of Sidaoru'ang's relationship with her son, Mone, cannot be underestimated as an influence in her writing of this period, and it is likely that this, and other stories, were inspired by the experience of raising him and entertaining him. *Loke kho'ng Nome*, for example, makes direct reference to his name by way of an anagram that Mone himself created in his first faltering attempts to write.<sup>290</sup> The story is interspersed with illustrations, including Mone's own self-portrait with his own mis-spelt signature beneath. Other illustrations are taken from pictures in children's books, especially from reading primers; a medical drawing of a baby on an artificial respirator alludes to Mone's poor state of health; and a professional drawing of a train is followed by Mone's own drawing of a train, both of which refer to a passage in the text describing his fascination with the railway. These inclusions in the text serve to indicate the significance of *Loke kho'ng Nome* as a story, not so much for a

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<sup>289</sup> Sidaoru'ang, 'Kem phaen thi', in *Matsi*, op. cit., pp. 280-281.

<sup>290</sup> Personal interview with Sidaoru'ang, September, 1990. The Thai letters 'n' and 'm' look very similar and are often mistaken for each other by foreign students learning to write the Thai script.

child, as about a sense of the world that is perceived by a child. The intimacy of the mother-child relationship is implicit in this story, in which Sidaoru'ang interprets, represents and intermingles with the environment in which Mone lives. (The sound of her typing is, for example, interspersed with the sound of Mone imitating passing trains.) Sidaoru'ang's reference to her son's relationship to her as a mother and a writer in the following passage is not only central to the narrative, but to much of the development of Sidaoru'ang's own writing career:

That afternoon Mother asked Nome if she could do some work.

'I love you. I'll hold you for a while and then would you mind if I did a little work?'

Nome nodded and the sound of typing struck up. Nome didn't like his mother typing but he liked playing at typing to imitate her. He would pretend to press the keys. Sometimes, when his mother was working Nome would have to be on his own. His father would be out. His father went out to work and came back late. The typewriter was very noisy and Nome didn't much care for it. He said they'd have to buy a new one since that one was old and noisy.<sup>291</sup>

The years between 1983 and 1986 were a crucial period in the development of Sidaoru'ang's own identity as a mature woman, and this is clearly reflected in her literary output. Framing much of her discussions in terms of female 'communities' and genealogies, Sidaoru'ang raises key issues relating to female identity within a patriarchal society, namely female anger, violence, sexuality, madness, isolation, incarceration, silence and

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<sup>291</sup> Sidaoru'ang, 'Loke kho'ng Nome', in *Matsi*, op. cit., p. 301.

words. Thus her writing becomes both a successful expression of her female identity and a means of consolidating this identity through self-expression.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONSOLIDATING AND MULTIPLYING IDENTITIES, 1987-1990

*Women ... must steal what they need from the dominant culture, but then fly away with their cultural booty to the 'in between', where new images, new narratives, and new subjectivities can be created.*

Morag Shiach<sup>292</sup>

By the latter half of the 1980s Sidaoru'ang had become an established writer on the Thai literary scene, a number of her short stories having won literary awards and prizes.<sup>293</sup> Moreover, she had attracted the attention of international audiences with translations of her work in eight different languages.<sup>294</sup> Regular reviews of her work appeared in the national press, with the well-known critic Phailin Rungrat discussing each of her publications in *Sayam rat sapada wican* (Siam Rat Weekly). From 1985 Sidaoru'ang's association with Suchat Sawatsi was openly acknowledged and interviews with the couple periodically appeared in literary journals and women's magazines. As a result of her success as a writer, Sidaoru'ang became freer to 'play' with notions of identity and to re-work her earlier themes in a more sophisticated literary form. The humour already evident in some of her earlier short stories, such as *Yai kap thahan num*, *Wat khru'ng nu'ng kammako'n khru'ng nu'ng*, *Bat prachachon*,

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<sup>292</sup> Shiach, op cit., p. 23.

<sup>293</sup> See Appendix 2.

<sup>294</sup> Namely, English, Polish, Danish, German, Japanese, Chinese, Burmese and Malay.

the *Chao Yak* series and her children's tales, becomes a more firmly established feature of her later work. As with the earlier stages of her literary career, the environment in which Sidaoru'ang produced her short stories was evidently inseparable from the form and subject matter of her texts.

*Nang sao mam* (Miss Mam),<sup>295</sup> one of the stories published in the 1987-1990 period of Sidaoru'ang's career, in the *Phap luang ta* (Illusions) collection, serves to illustrate many of the key characteristics of Sidaoru'ang's writing at this time. It refers, implicitly, to her sense of dislocation from her rural origins and to the affectations of modern, city life; it deals with changes in identity; and it is written in an experimental, yet humorous style that has some features of 'magic realism'.<sup>296</sup>

*Nang sao mam* tells the story of a pretty young country girl whose intelligence wins her a place at university in the capital. However, she soon finds it impossible to behave in the same manner as she would have done in her home village, since social mores in the city are considerably different. The very fact that she comes into contact with so many different people makes it impossible for her to be as friendly and as generous as she has been taught to be since birth, and she becomes irritated by the obligation to help each person that she passes, as this leaves her

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<sup>295</sup> 'Mam' is a colloquialism from a country girl who moves to the city and takes on the mannerisms of a city girl, but is still, nevertheless recognizable as a country girl.

<sup>296</sup> The term 'magic realism' was first used in 1924 in reference to a certain style of painting. It was adapted for use with reference to literature rather later.

no time for herself. Increasingly, it becomes a challenge to keep up the appearance of a warm and pleasant human being.

During a seminar, one day, a puff of white smoke clouds the classroom and, when it has cleared, everyone's lips are revealed to be permanently frozen into a forced smile, making them look uncomfortable and unable to speak. When the young woman later returns to her home village her face startles her old neighbours, who rename her 'Miss Mam'.

Changes in the young girl's life are highlighted by the different pairs of glasses that she wears as the narrative progresses; when she leaves the village, she wears white glasses with clear lenses, perhaps in indication of a sense of naivety; her arrival in the city is marked by a change to pink-rimmed glasses which convey a sense of fun and liberation; and her return home by a pair of dark glasses that might indicate concealment, mystery, perhaps even loss of innocence.

*Nang sao mam* satirizes the self-importance of the educated Bangkok élite, ridiculing the institutions of formal education from which Sidaoru'ang has felt herself to be excluded. Of equal interest to the content of this story is its form, realistic for the most part, though in places adopting the convention of a fairy story or legend.<sup>297</sup>

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<sup>297</sup> The opening lines, are for example, as follows:

Long ago, in a distant country area ...

A peasant family gave birth to a daughter who had a beautiful, fair complexion, a face as pretty as an angel ...

See Sidaoru'ang, 'Nang sao mam' in *Phap luang ta*, Bangkok: Kamphaeng, 1989, p. 58.

While the text criticises formal institutions of education, it remains, both in terms of style and content, very much part of the Thai tradition of didactic fiction. The magical element of the story occurs during a seminar organized by and for a group of intellectuals:

... on that occasion a miraculous event took place among the audience and the speakers, that was, a cloud of thick, white smoke came down in front of their eyes and however hard they peered they were unable to see a thing ... apart from the cloud of thick white smoke itself.

Everybody choked on the whiteness as they scrambled to escape.

And so their determination to find a conclusion to the matter they were interested in came to an abrupt and sudden end.

When the thick, white smoke had begun to clear everyone's face could clearly be seen ... and everyone was taken aback, and shocked by the sight that the faces of everyone around them had changed.

Everyone was pursing their lips at everyone else.<sup>298</sup>

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<sup>298</sup> Ibid. pp. 60-61. As an experiment in magic realism the passage has nothing of the literary or political weight of practised exponents of this technique such as Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Salman Rushdie, Gunther Grass or Milan Kundera. In his treatment of magic realism David Lodge points out that all the writers most renowned for using it 'have lived through great historical convulsions and wrenching personal upheavals, which they feel cannot be adequately represented in a discourse of undisturbed realism.' (See David Lodge, *The Art of Fiction*, London: Penguin Books, 1992, p. 114.)

Although Sidaoru'ang can be said to have been deeply influenced by the political upheavals of the 1970s in Thailand, and to have experienced the trauma of her father's suicide, her brother's incarceration in an institution for the insane, a stillbirth and the birth of child with heart disease, her own magic realism may not have the same overtones as those of its international proponents. It is conceivable, however, that Sidaoru'ang drew her inspiration from an acquaintance with the work of such writers. Marquez' 'One Hundred Days of Solitude', for which he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1982, was soon after translated into Thai and was widely read and well reviewed. The work of both Milan Kundera and Gunther Grass was discussed in the literary magazine *Loke nangsu*' (for which Sidaoru'ang also wrote occasional reviews) and Grass was himself a guest of the Sawatsi household when he visited Thailand in 1981.

The white smoke in *Nang sao mam* effects a comical change in the facial features of those in the room, which at once changes their identity, marking them out as different from ordinary people and, at the same time, making them an object of ridicule:

Even though they separated and went their different  
ways like bees leaving the nest, they still had to meet  
other people  
in the street  
on buses  
in offices  
in the temple  
in the university  
in the brothel.<sup>299</sup>

The use of vertical listing, perhaps influenced by Thai writers' experiments with concrete poetry, highlights the sense of urban claustrophobia, the reference to the 'brothel' comically juxtaposed with the sacred temple and the hallowed university. Furthermore, the technique satirizes academic writing, with its tendency to reduce everything to a form of listing in an attempt to both understand it and render it understandable.<sup>300</sup>

At an earlier point in *Nang sao mam*, Sidaoru'ang employs this same technique, with almost poetic cadence, to describe the characteristics of the young woman:

*thoe ram*  
*thoe rian*  
*thoe phian khon khwa*

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Alternatively, Sidaoru'ang's use of magic realism (and in contemporary Thai fiction in general) has close affinities with the traditions of oral and classical literature.

<sup>299</sup> Sidaoru'ang, 'Nang sao mam', in *Phap luang ta*, op. cit., p. 61.

<sup>300</sup> Listing is a key feature of much academic prose in Thailand, as it is in bureaucratic reports and papers.

The natural rhythm of these words suggests the mechanical nature in which she carries out her studies, and is reminiscent of the rhymes and ditties which Sidaoru'ang includes in earlier stories such as *Bun songkran*. Sidaoru'ang employs this device of altering the tempo of the prose, not only in this story, but in several others of the period. Her increasing awareness of, and interest in the aesthetics of writing is noted by the editor, Watchira Buasan, in the introduction to the *Phap luang ta* collection.<sup>301</sup> Watchira points out that, whereas the language of the earliest collections was clear and simple, Sidaoru'ang's later stories exhibit a much wider range of technical devices. Criticism during the 1970s of her simple, straightforward style of writing reflects a Thai preference for the ornate and elaborate, which are regarded as fundamental to 'literary artistry' or *wannasin*. Sidaoru'ang's attempts to improve the aesthetic qualities of her work, despite her lack of formal training, seem to be based as much on notions of Western fictional writing, however, as they are on imitation of Thai 'masters', and interviews with the author testify to her interest in both cultural streams.

In a further example of vertical listing in *Nang sao mam*, Sidaoru'ang outlines the ideal qualities of a young woman, clearly alluding to the text, *Sombat kho'ng phu di* (The Qualities of a Good Person), published by the Ministry of Education in 1959.<sup>302</sup>

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<sup>301</sup> See 'Note from the Editor, Watchira Buasan' in *Phap luang ta*, op. cit., pp.11-14, passim.

<sup>302</sup> The list is quoted in Herbert Phillips, *Thai Peasant Personality*, London: University of California Press, 1974, pp. 44-45.

Whenever she went anywhere or saw anything that  
she could help someone with, then she would always  
have to help ... what a bother,  
To help as best one could,  
To help as one knew how,  
To help as one had always been brought up and  
taught to do.  
But sometimes she just wanted to ignore everything  
... She helped some people to survive ... But  
sometimes they weren't actually worth helping ...  
and that was the truth of it  
But then good girls should not think such things  
Good girls must help other people  
Good girls must love other people  
Good girls must give to and support other people  
Good girls must ...<sup>303</sup>

The implication of leaving the last line incomplete is that,  
in reality, the demands made on a 'good girl' are interminable.

The same listing of aspects of womanhood is used by  
Sidaoru'ang in a story published several months earlier than  
*Nang sao mam*, and entitled *Mali rai* (Tainted Jasmine).  
Although *Mali rai* does not employ vertical listing as such, the  
piece consists entirely of a long list of the different activities and  
uses to which *mali* or jasmine is put in modern Thai society.  
Whilst, at one level, Sidaoru'ang refers to jasmine quite literally,  
as a flower of veneration, she simultaneously utilizes its symbolic  
value in Thai society as an image of womanhood, and especially of  
motherhood. A number of passages in the text are indicative of  
jasmine's gendered identity:

Jasmine has become a symbol of great value, clean  
and beautiful, pure and perfect; and although her  
name, and other derivations of it, may even be used  
among the prostitutes in brothels, yet she is still  
crowned in glory. Whatever derivations of her name

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<sup>303</sup> Sidaoru'ang, 'Nang sao mam', in *Phap luang ta*, op. cit., p. 60.

are used, Jasmine is still the same cool, sweet-scented Jasmine, never fading. She labours hard, like every other woman in the world.<sup>304</sup>

*Mali rai* catalogues the jasmine flower's loss of purity when fertilizers and insecticides are introduced to increase production. It highlights male hypocrisy in selling jasmine to make money, while despising the flower, now that it is tainted, just as prostitutes are despised.

The concept of the tainted woman recurs in *Banthu'k kho'ng No'ng Nu* (My Diary), written, as the title suggests, in the form of entries in the diary of a young woman. The diary is addressed to No'ng Nu's mother and confesses how she has used her childlike seductiveness to win the attentions of four men, with whom she has sexual relations and by whom she eventually becomes pregnant. Whilst humouring each of the men in order to procure from them what she can, No'ng Nu nevertheless decides that she can love none of them. She subsequently discovers she is suffering from a rare and incurable disease, from which she dies while giving birth to her child. The text is interspersed with illustrations of sperm and of an unborn baby in a womb, representing the unborn child of the diarist on her deathbed. An addendum beneath the picture gives the words of the child, begging its mother to carry on living, while a final paragraph in the form of an interjection from Sidaoru'ang as the author of the story (not the diary) explains that these are, in fact, the words of the child and are not included in the text of the diary.

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<sup>304</sup> Sidaoru'ang, 'Mali rai', in *Phap luang ta*, op. cit., p. 54.

The effect of this authorial intrusion, which appears in brackets at the end of the piece and in smaller type face, is to destroy the illusion created throughout *Banthu'k kho'ng no'ng nu* that it is an excerpt from a diary, and not a short story. By implication, the role of the reader is also altered, from the implied exclusivity of being made privy to the contents of a young woman's diary, to the more widely-shared experience of having purchased a book or magazine. Sidaoru'ang's own claim to control over the text is traditional, rather than postmodern, serving to invite sympathetic interest in the characters and their fortunes and referring to them as if they are real people.<sup>305</sup> Moreover, No'ng Nu's informal tone, akin to speech, serves to draw the reader inside the text and invites closer emotional involvement with her confession.

With the exception of the final paragraph, the diary relates events from the perspective of the young woman to her mother,

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<sup>305</sup> Postmodern writers, on the other hand, refer to them as characters in a novel, as if they were not real. (See Lodge, *The Art of Fiction*, op. cit., pp. 11-12.)

In the context of English literature Lodge explains that the device of authorial intrusion, '... detracts from realistic illusion and reduces the emotional intensity of the experience being represented, by calling attention to the act of narrating. It also claims a kind of authority, a God-like omniscience, which our sceptical and relativistic age is reluctant to grant anyone.' (Ibid., p. 10.) Lodge goes on to point out that the response to this of modern fiction was to turn instead to a presentation of action through the consciousness of the characters. (Ibid., p. 10.)

At other points in *Banthu'k kho'ng No'ng Nu* the boundaries between reality and fiction are also blurred. When No'ng Nu discovers that she has a rare and serious illness, she reminds the reader that, were this a film, then all the doctors would be trying to cure her, but this is real life and they are leaving her to die. The reader is informed then that he/she is in the 'real' world as opposed to the illusory one of the cinema, only to have this sense finally shattered and to be told that he/she is in the 'real world' of fiction.

thus placing the reader of the story in the dual role of both the mother to whom the text is addressed, and outside reader. The word *mae* or 'mother' may also mean 'you' in the context in which it is used. This theme of the confusion of identities - of the identity of the writer in the text, of the reader and the mother, and of the child with its multiple fathers - is one that is of paramount importance to Sidaoru'ang's stories in the *Phap luang ta* collection, relating at times to her preoccupation with the interplay between birth and death.

The birth of the child at the point of the mother's death, implied at the end of *Banthu'k kho'ng No'ng Nu*, echoes both Buddhist notions of karma and traditional folkloric beliefs in rebirth, themes which are more fully explored in *So'ng mae* (The Two Mothers). Published slightly earlier than *Banthu'k kho'ng No'ng Nu*, it portrays the complex relations and jealousies of two women living on a suburban housing estate.

A married woman has two small daughters, one of whom is crippled with polio. The former girlfriend of the woman's husband, now also married, has no children, though it is rumoured that she dreams of raising the crippled daughter of her neighbour. The daughters are often left alone to look after themselves while their mother goes out to work to earn extra income. Problems arise when the other woman gives birth to a baby on the same day that the crippled daughter of the first woman dies. The mother of the dead child believes her neighbour to have caused the death and that her daughter has been reborn in the care of another. This suspicion is confirmed when the baby

proves to have an identical birthmark to the dead girl. All that the first mother can do in the circumstances is to resolve to care for her remaining child properly, as a result of which she gives up her job outside and becomes a full-time housewife.

While elements of the *Chao yak* stories appear critical of the claustrophobic nature of women's existence in the home, in *So'ng mae* there is an implied criticism of women who go out to work. This contradiction reflects something of Sidaoru'ang's own ambiguity, balancing her desire for freedom and financial independence on one hand with an unshakeable love and responsibility towards her sick child on the other. In this sense, the story serves a very personal function for the author, as a warning (to herself) about the dangers of leaving the home environment.

The frustrations of such a commitment to house and home are, however, revealed in *Manlika* (Manlika), a middle-aged housewife who longs for the moment when the house is empty and she is left alone to enjoy the freedom this permits:

Manlika felt as though she was now falling into an abyss of silence. The air that she breathed was so pure and clean and she had the right to own that air, so much so that she could not refrain from thinking that even if she chose not to breathe ... she had full rights to do that if she wished.<sup>306</sup>

On this day, in her solitude, Manlika's sense of release is expressed in liberating laughter and in dancing disco-style on her own as she had seen teenagers do on television. As the time for

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<sup>306</sup> Sidaoru'ang, 'Manlika', in *Phap luang ta*, op. cit., p. 33.

her family's return draws nearer Manlika dreams of travelling far away, but insteads she takes some tranquilizers, puts on some more face powder (a mask?) and feels the medicine begin to take effect as her husband steps into the house and begins complaining.

Once again the technique of vertical listing is employed with respect to the various household members, and where each of them has gone:

some have gone camping,  
some have gone shopping,  
some have not yet returned from the temple  
some have gone to the cinema  
leaving only Manlika in the house all alone.<sup>307</sup>

Presentation of the family members' whereabouts in this format gives a sense of their numbers being unlimited, and of the weight of their presence in contrast to Manlika's solitary presence in the last line of all. While it is not unusual to find the repeated use of 'some' (*bang*) running throughout a sentence in Thai, the vertical division in the above example highlights the contrast between the 'some' of each line and the singular Manlika at the end.

Manlika's husband, Withan, reminds her to lock the door after he has left, an action which closes her off from the outside world and locates her firmly within the boundaries of the home. As a result she feels that:

When people left the house they all became part (*suan nu'ng*) of the outside world which was so different from her own.  
People.

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<sup>307</sup> Sidaoru'ang, 'Manlika', in *Phap luang ta*, op. cit., p. 31.

Work.  
Chaos and confusion.<sup>308</sup>

Here the separate lines given to the two items, 'people' and 'work', which, for Manlika represent the outside world, emphasise her own sense of detachment from the real world; and her horror of this is alluded to in the last line.

This technique is developed in *Lekhanit po' so'ng* (Grade Two Maths) where the repeated reference to key nouns linked with arithmetical symbols (+, -, x, ÷ and =) reduces the relationships within the family depicted to a mere formulation, as illustrated in the closing lines of the text:

Father 0  
+  
mother 0  
-  
children 0  
x  
lovers 0  
÷  
the gods 0<sup>309</sup>

This is followed by a speech bubble emerging from a small photograph of Sidaoru'ang (one which appears at the end of each short story in the *Phap luang ta* collection) proclaiming, in reference to the lottery, that 'the numbers have been announced.'

Sidaoru'ang uses mathematical symbols in this story to ridicule society's obsession with numbers - its preoccupation with

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<sup>308</sup> Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>309</sup> Sidaoru'ang. 'Lekhanit po' so'ng', in *Phap luang ta*, op. cit., p. 73.

gambling, card-sharping, the state lottery and *huay* (local lotteries).<sup>310</sup> At the same time, in linking family members by mathematical symbols, she presents a profoundly nihilistic view of family life.

*Lekhanit po' so'ng* is the story of an unemployed, paralysed man who stays at home while his modern, dynamic wife goes out to work. He invests all his intellectual energies in consulting the spirits as to which numbers will win the lottery. When the numbers are due to be called they appear in the text following a large grey star, within which are written the words, 'The day the *huay* numbers are out.' As a result, the text, in places, takes on the appearance of a strip cartoon.

When the spirit fails to provide the winning numbers for the lottery, the narrative technique apparently reflects the husband's mental breakdown:

He was mad, definitely mad. There was absolutely no doubt that he was mad. That is what his wife and children thought.

Mad + mad - mad x mad ÷ by mad

Father 10

-

children 200.<sup>311</sup>

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<sup>310</sup> In Sidaoru'ang's earlier writing, the obsession with numbers is one which drives a mother to leave her children and drive up country to seek the advice of a fortune teller in *Khon dai ya* and which is in part responsible for the break up of a marriage in *Mung* (The Mosquito Net).

<sup>311</sup> Sidaoru'ang, 'Lekhanit po' so'ng', in *Phap luang ta*, op. cit., pp. 70-71. There is a sense of continuity here with Sidaoru'ang's earlier work, with regard to her inclusion of rhymes and ditties in such short stories as *Bun songkran* and *Wat khru'ng nu'ng, kammako'n khru'ng nu'ng*.

The structure of the first sentence in the above example bears a resemblance to speech, to the thoughts and words of the wife and children in which repetition of the word 'mad' (*ba*) depicts their amazed response to his behaviour. The serious issues of family breakdown, and the tensions created by the father are thus made comical, broken up by intervals of sums and calculations. This is a device used repeatedly throughout *Lekhanit po' so'ng*, and although it is, in this sense, a form of repetition it differs from the technique of immediate repetition of words and phrases used in *Manlika* and in *Khon kae, khon liang dek, yai, yai mae mot, khun mae - chuay phom duay* (Better the Devil, discussed below).<sup>312</sup>

Although reduplication is already a natural feature of the Thai language, the doubling of phrases is less common. In *Manlika*, for example, the word *mu'an* ('just like') is used three times in a sentence relating to the way in which Manlika's initial feelings of unremitting love for her husband have gradually been whittled away: 'Withan still needed her, just like he always had ... just like he always had, just like each time he needed anything.'<sup>313</sup> In this instance repetition provides the sense of continuity from past to present, a continuity of Withan's feelings and needs, in contrast to Manlika's own feelings of lack of continuity. The sentence is one that describes the situation from Withan's own viewpoint - his needs, his love, his words, sounding

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<sup>312</sup> For an English translation of this story see Sidaoru'ang, *A Drop of Glass*, op. cit., pp. 173-180.

<sup>313</sup> Sidaoru'ang, 'Manlika', in *Phap luang ta*, op. cit., p. 32.

over and over again, and silencing Manlika's own by the very multiplicity of their presence in the text.

The pompous arrogance of the (male) narrator of *Khon kae, khon liang dek, yai, yai mae mot, khun mae - chuay phom duay*<sup>314</sup> is conveyed with similar recourse to repetition, this time by the device of the Thai *mai yamok* (word repetition symbol) which, rather than being used in the normal fashion, once after a word in order to double it, is instead written four times after numerous words spoken by the narrator. Words are traditionally reduplicated in Thai for the purpose of creating onomatopoeia or for adding emphasis. Although Sidaoru'ang uses 'multi-reduplication' for comic exaggeration, it also has more serious undertones. In the following passage, for example, she highlights the decline in the quality of daily life for urban Thais, while the narrator's comment, in parentheses, explicitly draws attention to the use of reduplication:

Sometimes people, people, people, people would agree with me on some counts. Every day, although we all work away, work away, work away, work away, both husband and wife we still have to buy things on credit. Life is work. Work is money. Money is money, is money, is money, is money, is money. (The repetition symbol used four times here indicates just how hard I have to work, you see.)<sup>315</sup>

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<sup>314</sup> The narrator's mode of speech is also ridiculed in the extremely long title of the piece, indicated to be in his own words by the concluding phrase *Chuay phom duay* ('Help me please').

<sup>315</sup> Sidaoru'ang, 'Khon kae ...', in *Phap luang ta*, op. cit., p.77.

What is lost in translation is the dual meaning of *ngok*, which indicates both nervousness or anxiety, and also greed.<sup>316</sup> The sense is thus conveyed that people are working in a constant state of tension, and both fueling and gratifying their obsession with money. This distaste for the materialistic values of contemporary Thai society recurs in many of Sidaoru'ang's other short stories in this period.

Among the other words repeated in the text by means of the quadruple *mai yamok* is the word 'Thai',<sup>317</sup> which receives this treatment on two occasions, one occurring in the very last line of the text:

*phom yin di ton rap kan liang du baep thai thai thai  
thai laew khrap phom.*

('Now I swear to you, I'm only too pleased to go along with the very, very, very, very Thai ways of raising children.'<sup>318</sup>)

*Khon kae ...* is a story, related by a pompous, young father who takes pride in his modern, Western outlook on life and sees traditional Thai ideas as old-fashioned. He has firm views about maintaining the boundaries between his small, nuclear family and his other relatives:

At home there are just us and the children. We do not have lots and lots and lots and lots and lots of relatives, like they do in a certain, number one pop song.

In fact, darling little Pak and darling little Pla's grandmothers are both still alive, although they

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<sup>316</sup> Mary Haus, *Thai-English Student's Dictionary*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 1980, p. 102.

<sup>317</sup> Others are *yoe*, *no'ng*, *lan*, *khoi*, *un*, *khrai*, *ngok*, *ngoen*, *yai phong*, *cho'p*, *yon*, *noi*, *thaew*, *fang*, *pip*, *tuk*, and *cing*.

<sup>318</sup> Sidaoru'ang, 'Khon kae ...', in *Phap luang ta*, op. cit., p. 81.

don't live in Bangkok. Nor has it ever crossed my mind to suggest that they should come and live with us, either. After all, once you invite one you could end up with the lot. The whole extended family might descend on you - brothers, sisters, nephews, nieces, the lot! And I don't like having crowds of people round the house.<sup>319</sup>

Difficulties are involved in living as a nuclear family, in that his wife and he both work and are unable to collect their children from school. This provides the old sweetmeat vendor, Granny Pho'ng, with the opportunity to befriend the children, much to their father's irritation. Granny Pho'ng subsequently abducts Phak and Pla and, when they are eventually recovered, their father is forced to review his ideas about childcare and invites both grandmothers to come and live with them. Hence his concluding sentence: 'Now I swear to you, I'm only too pleased to go along with the very, very, very, very Thai ways of raising children.'<sup>320</sup>

*Khon kae* ... is written in the 'skaz' tradition - a chatty, informal style whereby the narrator addresses the reader, using colloquial syntax and vocabulary to create the illusion of spontaneous speech:<sup>321</sup> For example:

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<sup>319</sup> Sidaoru'ang, 'Khon kae ... ', in *Phap luang ta*, op. cit., p. 76.

<sup>320</sup> Ibid., p. 81.

<sup>321</sup> Lodge identifies repetition of words, the use of slang phrases, exaggeration, simple syntax, and typically short or abbreviated sentences as characteristic features of 'skaz' and notes that the style was first used by novelists in the United States in attempt to escape from the inherited literary traditions of England and Europe and was used in stories about runaways. (Lodge, *The Art of Fiction*, op. cit., pp. 18-19.)

*Tho ... man nabu'a naramkhan lae mai pen satsuan  
... mai mi thi romaentik na si khrap. To'n wai dek  
phom eng ko mai khoey yu kap ya ru' yai mu'an kan  
... mai cho'p.*

*Phut trong trong ... phom mai khoi khun kap  
khon kae nak!*

(My goodness, it's such a nuisance and so irritating.  
It's as if the place isn't your own any more. And  
there's no space for a bit of romance either. When I  
was a kid I never lived with either of my grannies ...  
Nor did I want to either.

I'm telling you straight ... I'm not all that at  
one with old people!)<sup>322</sup>

Another story written in the racy style of free-flowing speech, *Phap luang ta kiaw kap kan plian sappanam* (An Illusion Concerning the Alteration of Personal Pronouns) further explores the theme of identity. It is divided into four sections, each numbered and with a different title, based on the perspective of the various narrators. Section one is entitled *phuak rao* ('we'); section two *chan* ('I' - female); section three *phom* ('I' - male); and section four a unity of the three - *phom - rao - chan* ('I - we - I').

'We' are the regular passengers on a commuter train whose observations of the relationship between a young man ('he') and a young woman ('she') who always travel together, introduce the story. The background information and the context of the relationship are related in sections two and three from the perspective of the young woman and the young man respectively. The only other character to whom they refer is another 'he', always enclosed in inverted commas and who is the husband of

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<sup>322</sup> Sidaoru'ang, 'Khon kae ...', in *Phap luang ta*, op. cit., p. 76.

the young woman.<sup>323</sup> *Chan* is used throughout the text to represent the young woman, with the exception of the very last line of section four, where it appears to refer to the author: 'I - wrote this story from memory of a story that a man once told me'.<sup>324</sup>

As in *Banthu'k kho'ng No'ng Nu* the final word is that of the author, whose sudden appearance in the text destroys the previous illusion of this being a 'real' story that she has created, both by her intervention and her explanation of the origins of the piece; nevertheless, her explanation does not clarify whether the 'story' that the man related to the author was a true or a fictional one. The borders between reality and fiction that *Phap luang ta* and many of the pieces in the *Phap luang ta* collection wish to blur is alluded to in the penultimate line of the text: 'Which parts are true ... which parts are untrue ... and which parts are an illusion?'<sup>325</sup>

*Phap luang ta* does not attempt to relate the *same* event from different angles, but instead retains a largely chronological approach. By narrating the story through the eyes of different characters, Sidaoru'ang offers the reader different perspectives on events, thereby evoking a wider range of moral or emotional responses. This polyvocality within the narrative underlines the characters' alienation from each other, their inability to communicate reciprocal love constituting the main theme. While

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<sup>323</sup> The woman's child is also mentioned but is referred to as *luk* (child) and not by a personal pronoun.

<sup>324</sup> Sidaoru'ang. 'Phap luang ta kiaw kap kan plian sapphanam', in *Phap luang ta*, op. cit., p. 99.

<sup>325</sup> Ibid., p. 99.

the woman and her husband appear loving, their marriage is a sterile one and she fails to feel any real love for him until he is killed in a road accident; and while the couple on the train appear to be husband and wife, they are not:

She and I looked like a sweet, loving couple - there could have been no couple sweeter.  
Never ever again ... never any more ... apart from we two.  
Actually, I should say, we three.<sup>326</sup>

Here the word *rao* ('we'), used in the first instance to represent the passengers on the train, comes to stand for the threesome of the husband, his wife and her companion on the train.

The 'companion' goes on to say:

We three ... in fact it was more than that ... our lives were fixed by the railway timetable ... our closeness came twice a day, morning and night ... changing in and out of roles ... like changing pronouns depending on whichever are suitable in the Thai language.<sup>327</sup>

The artificial nature of the 'role' change implied here is mirrored in the frustrations of the 'love' relationships at play between the three characters. The woman eventually rejects a prolonged partnership with her travelling companion, noting that he does not understand her love for her child and only sees from his own, selfish perspective. The man's own comments in the following section support her observations:

When she was with me I felt as if I were important ...  
as if I were her only love (...)

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<sup>326</sup> Ibid., p. 97.

<sup>327</sup> Ibid., p. 97.

I thought of it from my own perspective ... she would just have to see things my way ... she would have to see it my way ... she would have to accept me just like I had once accepted her.<sup>328</sup>

The implication here is that the care and affection that the young man had originally bestowed freely upon the woman are beginning to be withdrawn and that her choice, in the circumstances, is to reject his offer to live with him and to remain on her own. Thus the story closes with each of the characters isolated from the others, not only in their relationships, but also in the physical presentation of the story. This conclusion is supported by the narrative form, each character commenting on the others, yet restricted to the confines of their own section of the text. They are not in vital exchange or communication with each other, but rather with the reader. Moreover, the lack of real unity between the couple on the train is highlighted by the fact that the other passengers never refer to the couple as 'they', but always separate them in a linguistically artificial way, as 'he and she'.

Notions of fluid identity boundaries are also at play here, in that although the story professes, at a superficial level, to portray the lives of several different people, the use of identical forms of speech for each character or set of characters undermines this.<sup>329</sup> What speaks from the text is in fact only *one* voice, and the full

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<sup>328</sup> Ibid., p. 98.

<sup>329</sup> The conversation between Cinta and her 'neighbour' in *Prapheni thi yok loek* is indicative of the fact that Sidaoru'ang has experimented with the idea of representing different aspects of one character in the form of dialogue.

title of the story supports this. In section one of *Phap luang ta* the passengers pass comment:

We travelled on the same train.  
We felt as if we were all members of the same family.  
At least ... he and she and we were each of us in the  
same train ... sharing a joint fate, or, in any case, a  
similar one.<sup>330</sup>

What the railway passengers refer to here is a sense of shared identity, derived from being on the same train. And this is reiterated at the end of the story with reference to the woman's husband, or 'he':

'He' was someone whom we did not know.  
We didn't have any details about 'him'.  
We know only that 'he' liked driving a motorbike ...  
and we like going by train.<sup>331</sup>

'He', the husband, is excluded by the fact that he does not travel by train, although several instances in section three of the text refer to a fluidity of identity between 'phom' and the husband:

... when we got off the train every day it felt as if I was handing her over to him in the evening ... almost as if I was her owner ... yes, that's it ... I was just leaving her in his care for him to look after her properly ... When you drive home on the motorbike ... be careful.<sup>332</sup>

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<sup>330</sup> Sidaoru'ang, 'Phap luang ta ... ', in *Phap luang ta* , op. cit., p. 89.

<sup>331</sup> Ibid., p. 99.

<sup>332</sup> Ibid., p. 96. There is an interesting change of addressee in this sentence which begins as a narration to the reader and ends as a warning to the husband to drive carefully.

When the woman becomes pregnant by her husband the young man on the train takes so much care of her that he makes all the other passengers believe she is *his* wife.<sup>333</sup> He states that:

I had travelled on the train with her since before she had got pregnant and then I used to assume that when I was with her I was her owner. When she got pregnant I was the father who had to protect and look after the child in her womb. I was the one who had given her all kinds of advice about how to get pregnant until eventually she did ... Her child was my child ... Like a fighting fish that stares into the eyes of its partner until it gets pregnant.<sup>334</sup>

And, following the death of the woman's husband, the young man muses, 'Perhaps ... perhaps ... before his spirit leaves his body he himself will experience a feeling similar to my own, and after that he will eventually become me.'<sup>335</sup>

The linked concepts of identity and train travel in *Phap luang ta* are also implicit in a number of Sidaoru'ang's earlier works.<sup>336</sup> Both in her childhood and in her life with Suchat,

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<sup>333</sup> This is told from *his* perspective and not from that of the other passengers so that this is a statement of how he *thinks* he makes them feel and not necessarily how they actually feel.

<sup>334</sup> Sidaoru'ang, 'Phap luang ta ... ', in *Phap luang ta*, op. cit., pp. 97-8.

<sup>335</sup> Ibid., p. 99.

<sup>336</sup> A clear reference is made to this in the novella *Noen mafu'ang* (Noen Mafu'ang) which is dedicated to, 'the railway line, the path which causes so many lives to change.' See Sidaoru'ang, *Noen mafu'ang*, Bangkok: Than tawan Press, 1987, p. 15.

*Fan rak kho'ng Sai Rung* is of particular interest with reference to *Phap luang ta* ... since it refers to one of Sai Rung's sexual fantasies of being in a railway carriage with her imaginary lover when the train they are travelling on is derailed and she is thrown into his arms in the darkness.

Given that Sidaoru'ang's own father worked on the railway and that her childhood memories are of watching trains passing through the sleepy town of Bang Krathum from one large town to another, the railway is of understandable significance to the author.

Sidaoru'ang has always lived near the railway line, and it has become a source of captivating fascination for their son Mone, exemplified in his drawings and in the illustrations and text of *Loke kho'ng Nome*.<sup>337</sup> For Sidaoru'ang the railway stands as a metaphor for change in identity or status. In *Phap luang ta* the train is responsible for creating a certain 'community' (of *phuak rao, phom* and *chan*), whose existence is governed by the railway timetable, and which comes into being twice a day, five days a week.

The regularity of the passengers' presence on the train is mimicked by the regular patterns of their speech, which in turn imitates the rhythm of the train wheels on the track. Sentence repetition is used in conjunction with vertical listing to produce the illusion of unrestrained chatter coupled with the sounds of the railway:

We have seen him and her for some time.

We catch the same train ... the same train as he and she.

The friendship between him and her has grown, developed and flourished and we are witness to it.

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It was the means by which she left home to work in the capital, a move which symbolically marked the transition from child to adulthood; the means by which she always travelled from Bangkok back to her home town, on such significant journeys as the return for her father's funeral; and it was the means by which she took her brother from the security of his own home to the mental institution in Chiangmai, formally acknowledging his 'madness'. Each of these journeys has been related in Sidaoru'ang's short story writing, and, in addition to these autobiographical texts, such works as *Wao bon fa* and *Fan rak kho'ng Sai Rung* also include scenes on the railway.

<sup>337</sup> The railway has also proved of inspiration to Suchat himself, who once wrote a story entitled *Rot fai dek len* (The Toy Train). See Suchat Sawatsi, *Khwan ngiap*, Bangkok: Samnak phim Karan, 1988, pp. 199-208. The story was first published in *Witthayasan parithat* (The Academic Studies Review), 1970.

We are mere gossips about what the relationship between him and her might be ... how far it has developed.

What is the relationship between him and her? How far has it developed? How far has it gone?

What is the relationship between him and her? How far has it gone? How far has it developed?<sup>338</sup>

The environment of the train, and the journey it implies, are most significant with respect to the young woman, *chan*, since this is the vehicle which takes her away from her loveless marriage and permits her to lead a life outside this experience:

It seemed as though he was happy to have married someone he loved.

As for me ... why oh why did I have to marry someone who loved me.

As for me ... my working life outside the house helped reduce the boredom ... for me.<sup>339</sup>

Themes of gendered roles, the power of fantasy and the liberation of new identities are also central to *Chuiapha:Suphapburut kang keng nai* (Chuiapha : The Gentleman of the Underpants) which blurs the border between illusion and reality in a postmodern, urban setting.

Chuiapha (an anagram of *phuchai* or 'Man') is a handsome young actor who works on television commercials. The story opens with a description of his role in a commercial which he performs with his beautiful partner; Hingpun (an anagram of *phuying* or 'Woman'). They are simultaneously likened to

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<sup>338</sup> Sidaoru'ang, 'Phap luang ta', in *Phap luang ta*, op. cit., p. 88.

<sup>339</sup> Ibid., p. 92.

characters from the *Ramakien*, and described as 'representatives of the modern people'. In this futuristic setting, the scent of the product they advertise filters out through the television sets and into homes throughout the nation.

Chuiapha is described as working three minutes per hour, every hour, every day, the implication being that he performs the same commercial, live, each time that it is broadcast. He believes himself to be the person who refreshes, enlivens and forges a unity between people throughout the country.

As Chuiapha is eating his 'modern' lunch of bread and palm sugar that his wife, Yannapha (an anagram of *phanraya*, meaning 'wife') has prepared for him, he spots a beautiful 'angel' whose name is *Nang Pha Anamai* (Mrs Sanitary Towel), in keeping with the commercial in which she performs. She is taking part in a Thai drama where she plays a barren queen who is consequently sent into exile by her husband, the king. Her rejection by the palace appears to correspond with a disappearance 'off-stage' where Chuiapha sees her and, at one and the same time, becomes involved in the 'drama'. He runs after the 'angel' and addresses her using the royal language which he tries to remember from his days of watching *likay*. When she stops, Chuiapha offers her some of his bread and sugar and she comments upon how delicious it smells and how modern it is. Her fluffy little dog rejects his share, declining the opportunity to become a 'modern' dog.

The sound of the bleeps on Chuiapha's digital watch remind him it is time to return to advertising sanitary towels.

Dressed in the white coat of a doctor he picks up a sanitary towel and demonstrates how to place it inside the tiny panties of Hingpun. Unfortunately, Chuiapha's mind is still on the 'angel' and he accidentally places the towel upside down, with the glue side up.

The response of the television viewers is presented in the form of a list. Some sigh, some rest their eyes, some predict what will happen next, and others go to the toilet.

A flashback to three years earlier reveals that, as a teenager, he had achieved fame by playing the part of a young man who helps his friend's wife fold her washing, noting that she uses the same washing powder as at his house. The camera catches a close up as he folds her *pha thung*<sup>340</sup> and freezes the frame as he folds the woman's underpants.

As a result of the success of this commercial, in which Chuiapha defies traditional male taboos of handling women's undergarments, he achieves nation-wide fame. He is seen as a symbol of sexual equality, is widely discussed by feminists, and comes to be known as 'The Gentleman of the Underpants'.<sup>341</sup>

In his new role as companion to the 'angel' in the serial drama Chuiapha fights with evil demons and punishes the wicked. The 'angel's' fluffy dog reminds him of his own, magic dog which can speak, lives at home with Yannapha and whom he

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<sup>340</sup> A cloth worn by women as a wrap around skirt.

<sup>341</sup> Even today, in Thailand, men and women are careful to wash lower undergarments separately and the lower garments of women's clothing must not come into contact with any items of male clothing at any time during the washing process.

calls *mah* (an anagram of the word 'dog'), with the 'h' at the end to make it appear to be Sanskrit.

As the drama progresses Chuiapha begins to feel that, although the 'angel' is beautiful, he needs someone who understands him and that she, in fact, is rather stupid. All he wants is an ordinary woman and he dreams of returning to the days when he simply folded housewives' underpants.

A week before episode 113, Chuiapha meets a sage who foretells that the fortunes of the 'angel' will soon improve and that for him, if the results of a market survey reveal that his 'underpants' story is not effective because young people no longer wear any, then the scriptwriter, Sidaoru'ang, will be obliged by her employer to make him die during the performance of his duties.

Chuiapha cannot help feeling rather down at heart, little consoled by the fact that his fame will come only after death and that, meanwhile, everyone will continue to watch the adventures of the 'angel'.

The real reason that Chuiapha has suddenly to die is because the commercial is not a success. A new advertising agency which was once a competitor of the 'Sanitary Smells' agency, has risen to great heights, with impressive new slogans and new actresses. Chuiapha's old catch phrase 'Romance smells fragrant' has been eclipsed by a new sense of artistry in advertising that has created the phrase 'Silent - Pretty - Dry!' so rendering Chuiapha unemployed.

Chuiapha returns home to be greeted by the smell of *pla ra*<sup>342</sup> which, from now on, he will have to dip his bread in instead of palm sugar. Yannapha greets him silently while Chuiapha's magic, smiling dog has the final word in *rachasap* - 'Are you very tired daddy?'

*Chuiapha* is a satire on modern Thai life, vastly different in approach to the social commentary in Sidaoru'ang's earliest works. Humour is created by the numerous topical references to commercials, television dramas and so forth, comprehensible to a contemporary, urban Thai readership, with access to television, and an awareness of changing trends and fashions among young Bangkokians. It is a postmodern text, marked by the characteristics of intertextuality, eclecticism, self-referentiality, parody and pastiche and dealing with the postmodern subject matter of the nature and power of the 'image' in contemporary society.<sup>343</sup>

In *Chuiapha*, Sidaoru'ang takes this society as the basis for the creation of her own idiosyncratic *mélange* of fiction and reality. The name of her character, Chuiapha, (*phuchai*) has a sense of the universal, appropriate for someone who should be named in the text as a modern-day representative of the people. His taste for modern trends is exemplified by the fact that he likes eating bread and palm sugar for his lunch rather than traditional

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<sup>342</sup> *Pla ra* has the stigma of being low class, peasant food from the North East, the antithesis of bread and palm sugar.

<sup>343</sup> See Jean Baudrillard, 'The Order of Simulacra' in *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, London: Sage Publications, 1993, pp. 50-86; and Peter Brooker (ed.), *Modernism/Postmodernism*, London and New York: Longman, 1992, pp. 151-160.

foods such as the *pla ra* that he is faced with in unemployment. Reference to Chuiapha's wife and home leads the reader to believe that he exists as a real person, outside the context of the television world of make-believe, but even this is confused by the presence of his magic, speaking dog, pretentiously named Mah. In the studio Chuiapha moves between commercials and serialized drama as if the two were 'real' events rather than performances.

What Sidaoru'ang in part depicts is the development of Chuiapha's career, his appearance in a commercial leading to the offer of a part in a drama. This is represented, in the story, however, by a device in which Chuiapha *literally* moves between the two forms, performing the commercial for three minutes every hour as though it were a live event, and being summoned back from his adventures with the 'angel' by the bleeps on his digital watch that remind him to return to advertizing sanitary towels. Chuiapha's lapse of concentration caused by his reverie on having been given the role in the drama of protecting the 'angel' and his subsequent boredom with the plot, with the 'angel' and with not being rewarded by the Gods for his brave protection of her give the appearance of his experiencing *real* feelings about the working life he is leading, rather than responses that are scripted by the writer. The end of his 'real' career is foretold within the drama, by the sage in the jungle, wherein the link between his advertizing ventures and Chuiapha's role within the drama is re-established.

Added to this is Sidaoru'ang's own presence in the text, as a television script writer named Sidaoru'ang, the writing of the

script paralleling the unfolding of the narrative. Sidaoru'ang is keen to note, however, that, like Chuiapha, she too is not a free agent, but is 'employed' to write the story. The fates of both Chuiapha and Sidaoru'ang are in the hands of the advertizing agencies who control television 'entertainment', based on their underlying aims to sell products. In an updated and much more sophisticated version of Sidaoru'ang's earliest works the theme of the all-pervasive power of capitalism over culture persists.

A number of literary devices also serve the purpose of illusion and fantasy within *Chuiapha*. The language of the narrative frequently parodies that of advertizing, as in the description of Chuiapha's partner in the sanitary towel commercial: '*Nam kho'ng thoe khu' Hingpun ... phu yao yuan bat ta phiw phan num lamai klin ho'm chu'n.*' ('Her name was Hingpun; enticingly attractive; soft and sensitive skin, fragrant and refreshing.')<sup>344</sup> In addition Sidaoru'ang addresses the reader directly, making regular asides from the narrative:

Watch and see what happens ... all you folks at home.  
The reason Chuiapha has to say his farewells  
in such a hurry this weekend  
the real reason behind the event  
is because the sales figures for the product  
being advertized are not going up. That's why it is,  
everybody.<sup>345</sup>

This is frequently used to comic effect, such as in the excerpt describing Chuiapha's failure to place the sanitary towel the correct way up and which ends in the words:

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<sup>344</sup> Sidaoru'ang, 'Chuiapha', in *Phap luang ta*, op. cit., p. 42.

<sup>345</sup> Ibid., p. 50.

Oh dear. I don't know, Chui, what's to be done with you?

Now there'll be trouble ... If you don't believe it, then just wait and see.<sup>346</sup>

In both these examples Chuiapha is referred to as though he were a real person. Perhaps Sidaoru'ang draws some of her inspiration here not just from Western postmodern fiction but from traditional Thai shadow theatre (*nang talung*) in which the puppeteer might address the puppets he controls. In *Chuiapha* the writer, Sidaoru'ang, has an element of control over her characters, but the real control, as stated above, lies with the advertizing agencies who choose the language which characters such as Chuiapha will speak:

Chuiapha is in a uniform similar to that of a doctor and as he prances around he picks up a sanitary towel which he raises up in front of his face. His lines are only five seconds long ... and he has to go as fast as he possibly can.

Romance smells fragrant ... slip it in cheerfully ... tight fitting and secure ...<sup>347</sup>

Chuiapha's words are not enclosed in inverted commas. Nor is any other part of this text. As a result, words spoken by him, in this case to advertize the sanitary towels, are doubly the words of the text. Their potential here for *double-entendre* provides a source of comedy in which Sidaoru'ang subverts the influence of the all-powerful advertizing agencies.

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<sup>346</sup> Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>347</sup> Ibid., p. 46.

Although none of the characters in *Chuiapha* has a direct voice of their own, the multiplicity of cultural 'voices' in the writing style of this piece, such as the juxtaposition of advertizing slogans and *likay*-style *rachasap*, resembles the Bakhtinian notion of 'dialogism'.<sup>348</sup> Parody is achieved when the linguistic style is incongruous with the action, as in the case of the above example from *Chuiapha*, in the slogan<sup>in</sup> which Chuiapha recites within five seconds the qualities of the sanitary towel.<sup>349</sup>

*Chuiapha* is about the relationship that certain modern forms of Art/entertainment have upon the lives of the people that Sidaoru'ang addresses in this story. By naming Chuiapha and Hingpun the new representatives of the People the implication is that they are more influential at the level of capturing the popular imagination than are politicians or representatives of political ideologies. (This is not a feature which is peculiar to Thailand. *Chuiapha* was written at a time when the President of the USA was a former movie actor.) The pervasiveness of such characters into the home is indicated by the author's address to the whole gamut of family members that might be watching the television

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<sup>348</sup> The Russian Formalist, Mikhail Bakhtin classified the language of lyric poetry as 'monologic' because its single, unitary style presented a single world view. With this he contrasted the varied and multiple voices of the novel which 'talk to each other and to other voices outside the text, the discourses of culture and society at large.' (See Lodge. *The Art of Fiction*, op. cit., p.128.) In Bakhtin's own terminology, when the language of a text both describes an action and imitates a particular style of speech or writing, the result is known as 'doubly oriented discourse'. (Ibid., p. 129.)

For a fuller treatment of Bakhtin and implications of his theory see Ken Hirschkop and David Shepherd (eds), *Bakhtin and Cultural Theory*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989.

<sup>349</sup> Although the same restrictions on the advertisement of sanitary towels that apply in Britain do not apply in Thailand, the subject is still a sensitive one.

drama; and by the fact that the characteristics of the product being advertised on the television are communicated not only by sight and sound, but by actual sense of smell that is transmitted through the set.

The main forms of entertainment which appeal to the popular imagination in this piece include fantastic television drama and commercials, but there are also passing references to *likay*, to well-known singers, and to the *Ramakien*, though not to modern fiction!

A discussion of the place of fiction, of writing and of the community of writers receives Sidaoru'ang's attention in a series of five short stories at the end of the *Phap luang ta* collection, under the generic title *Chomrom wan suk* (The Friday Club). The title refers to an all-male literary clique, defined in the opening paragraph of the first of the first of the series - *Nak khian khwam cam su'am* (The writer with the Fading Memory):

Our Friday Society is a group of five or six male writers. Sometimes some don't turn up, sometimes there are more than that, sometimes friends of friends of friends of writers are invited to come along and join in eating, chatting and arguing about ideas. There are usually all kinds of different things to discuss at the meetings, with everyone trying to get their word in.<sup>350</sup>

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<sup>350</sup> Sidaoru'ang, 'Nak khian khwam cam su'am', in *Phap luang ta*, op. cit., p. 115.

The lengthy descriptions Sidaoru'ang provides of each of the members of the club are masked by tantalising comments to the reader that each has been given a nickname to prevent the reader trying to guess their real identity.

Sidaoru'ang takes a humorous look at the activities of this group, narrating the tales through the voice of one of their number. As a result she speaks in part with her own voice, and in part under the guise of a male writer. In *Fai* (The Mole), for example, the members of the 'Friday Club' whom she defines clearly resemble her husband Suchat and herself:

To start with I want to introduce all five members of the club, of which I am the founder member. [ ... ]

Oh, and please don't forget I've given them all false names and no trying to guess who's who ... they're all just friends ... so how could you guess?

The famous writer sitting next to Am is called 'Khun At'. He's getting on a bit and he's from Ayutthaya. He's a nice person and he's been writing longer than I have, even though he's younger than I am.

[ ... ]

Oh, and myself? Well, I write some pretty miscellaneous kinds of stuff and well, I like writing all kinds of things really. The only problem is, it doesn't sell very well.<sup>351</sup>

The method by which Sidaoru'ang includes herself in the text allows her a fictional transformation into a member of a group from which, in reality, she is excluded. Her sense of resentment as a result of this exclusion is referred to in numerous extracts throughout the series; in *Fai* for example, she states that, 'In the literary world there are always people (men,

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<sup>351</sup> Sidaoru'ang, 'Fai', in *Phap luang ta*, op. cit., pp. 126-7. (My editing.)

that is) who get together to enjoy themselves into the small hours.'<sup>352</sup>

In each of the stories Sidaoru'ang's persistent, good-humoured ridiculing of the 'Friday Club' grants her a voice which exclusion from the dominant group has denied her. Although the *Chomrom wan suk* series appears to address the group identity of male writers in Thailand it therefore also comments on the place and role of women in relationship to men. In *Bulan loi fa* (Bulan the Angelic), for example, the party of writers visit the seaside resort of Hua Hin where they picnic on the beach:

That evening we had a supper of roasted seafood, so delicious because it was so fresh. The only trouble was, there wasn't any chilli dip to go with it ... Fancy that ... No one had brought their wife with them to make any - not even me.

Well, when you go out on a trip all there are are lovers and groups of friends - male friends, that is.<sup>353</sup>

Reminded by the mention of chilli dip, one of the writers, Than Karan, begins to sing the praises of Bulan:

... I'll bet my life on it that there's no one in the world who can make a chilli dip as good as Bulan can.'

A young man from the publisher's who was grilling the seafood for us looked disbelievingly at Than Karan ... and I didn't believe him either.

'Really? Well, when we get back can I have a taste and see. Who is this Bulan you're on about ... Is she a writer? ... Is she pretty?'

'Yes, she's pretty all right,' said Than Karan, loud and clear. [...]

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<sup>352</sup> Ibid., p. 125.

<sup>353</sup> Sidaoru'ang. 'Bulan loi fa', in *Phap luang ta*, op. cit., p. 152.

'She's a wonderful cook. She makes delicious coffee. She's extraordinarily beautiful, respectable in her behaviour and what's more, she can type no less than a hundred words a minute.'<sup>354</sup>

Among this all-male group one of the common talking points is the subject of women, and Sidaoru'ang takes every opportunity to ridicule men's expectations of them. In the above extract Bulan is praised for her cooking abilities, her beauty and her typing; the question of whether or not she is a writer is instantly forgotten and, significantly, remains unanswered.

In *Fai*, Sidaoru'ang parodies the extremes of male misogyny through the technique of magic realism when a newly-wed writer talks of his beautiful wife, Kamlai with whom all the writers are in love and on whom they have based the heroines of their work. The impression Sidaoru'ang gives in these stories is that men live in a world of fantasy, one in which they idolize women from a distance, but where their real wives are preoccupied with catering to their everyday needs:

My wife doesn't bother us. Once she's finished serving up the snacks for us she hurries off with the kids and goes and watches TV and she doesn't make a reappearance until its time to clear away.<sup>355</sup>

Overcome by Kamlai's beauty, the narrator compares her with his wife:

... She's not like my wife ... for a moment I compared my wife with her but then I had to abandon that line of thought because another plate of snacks arrived ...

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<sup>354</sup> Ibid., pp. 152-3. (My editing.)

<sup>355</sup> Sidaoru'ang, 'Fai', in *Phap luang ta*, op. cit., p. 125.

Hey ... Hang on a minute. My wife's not that bad looking!<sup>356</sup>

In a story attached to the end of *Fai* a 'fictional writer', Arunrote Ropchana, recreates Kamlai as a serial killer of men, slaying them with a 'powerful' mole on her genitals responsible for causing anything from earthquakes, floods, and volcanic eruptions to the Iran-Iraq war and conflicts in Lebanon and Nicaragua.

It is not only the 'Friday Club's' attitude to women which Sidaoru'ang wittily exposes, but also their dependency on the copious consumption of alcohol to maintain social cohesion between group members. In *Nak khian khwam cam su'am*, for example, she observes that:

Our society drinks alcohol at intervals, that is, once a week.

Well ... Not exactly ... because that's not counting the days when we have 'business' and we go and drink at other people's houses.

Like I said, all the favourite writers that you've heard about for so long have a few drinkers' tales to tell. Some say that drinking and writing are life's pleasures. Some say the reason they write at all is so they can earn some money to buy drink. Some, some don't relate it to work or money but simply say that once they're drunk they can 'create happiness' with all kinds of supernatural powers. Some get up and fall asleep in the bathroom, some get into battles over who can urinate the furthest and the most, and some miss their aim. There's all sorts!<sup>357</sup>

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<sup>356</sup> Ibid., p. 127.

<sup>357</sup> Sidaoru'ang. 'Nak khian khwam cam su'am', in *Phap luang ta*, op. cit., p. 117.

In *Fai* the various responses of the writers to drunkenness are listed as hurrying home to vomit, or simply vomiting on the spot and then falling asleep, covered by a gigantic mosquito net which the narrator's wife keeps specifically for this purpose and which acquires a certain ceremonial status.

As suggested by the title, *Khon khi mao* (The Drunkards) portrays a writer nicknamed by the 'Friday Club' as Khun Lao (Mr Alcohol) in reference to his heavy drinking. When Khun Lao brings a young Western woman who is a translator to the narrator's house, he becomes very drunk and falls asleep, leaving someone else to escort the woman back to her hotel:

The fact that she had travelled several thousand miles just to end up with a bunch of drunks was the Thai custom. It must have looked such a 'mess' at my house, from all angles and in all senses of the word. The Thai custom is that it was one of my wives who wondered when on earth they were going to shift their bums and get off back home!<sup>358</sup>

And in *Nak khian khwam cam su'am*, the narrator returns home following a heavy bout of drinking, only to be woken the next morning by his wife, informing him that one of his writer friends has spent the night asleep downstairs in the same mosquito net as her younger sister. It transpires that the friend has broken into the narrator's house and fallen into a heavy,

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<sup>358</sup> Sidaoru'ang, 'Khon khi mao', in *Phap luang ta*, op. cit., p. 137. Lao also fails to remember that when he got up to go to the toilet he mistakenly went into the room where the narrator's wife was watching television and urinated into her wardrobe, thinking it to be the toilet.

drunken sleep under the first mosquito net he saw, oblivious to the fact that a young woman is already sleeping there.

Clearly conveyed in this story is the distaste that the wife has for the drunken behaviour of her husband and his friends and the contrast between the orderly behaviour of the female characters and the rowdy disorderliness of the male ones.<sup>359</sup>

The *Chomrom wan suk* series is a testimony to Sidaoru'ang's position in the Thai literary world, some fifteen years after she had made her debut as a short story writer. Much of her career can be seen as a perpetual struggle to establish a place for herself within this community, inspired by it, yet also sufficiently distant from it to limit its constraints upon her. Sidaoru'ang's struggle is evidenced, not only in the subject matter of her short stories, but in the development of her writing style, her *Phap luang ta* collection providing an example of some of the most experimental and innovative writing in contemporary Thailand, and resulting from her own, very unusual place on its literary scene.

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<sup>359</sup> When the husband arrives home late at night he is careful not to fall asleep in the bathroom (although his comment that the bathroom is a nice place to sleep would indicate that he does have some past experience) and is careful to wash away as much of the smell of alcohol as he can, knowing that his wife dislikes it.

## CONCLUSION

A survey of the development of Sidaoru'ang's literary career, traced through detailed analysis of her short stories up to 1990, reveals a complex interrelationship and interdependence between the author's own identity and her texts.

A number of factors combined to inspire Sidaoru'ang to become a writer of fiction and to subsequently shape her fictional writing. They are, most notably, her father's encouragement of her interest in reading from an early age; her encounter with the literary critic and left-wing activist, Suchat Sawatsi, in the early 1970s; and the opportunity provided for her in the political climate of post-October 14 1973 to record her real life experiences of work as a labourer and thereby captivate the socially-conscious audiences of the day.

At a more complex level, however, additional factors are implicated in Sidaoru'ang's coming to writing. Working within a psycho-analytical and feminist theoretical framework, these can be discerned as her 'exile' to Bangkok from home at the age of twelve; the unmourned death of her father, by suicide; the uneasy relationship which Sidaoru'ang enjoyed with her mother; and the struggle to find favour with a highly-regarded and publicly acclaimed partner in a relationship which was, initially, unstable.

The short stories which Sidaoru'ang wrote following the publication of her first piece, *Kaew yot diaw*, in the journal of which Suchat was editor, can be seen, in part, as an effort to impress him; in part to place herself within the male-dominated

literary circles in which he participated; and in part as a covert attack upon him through which Sidaoru'ang might reassert herself in a relationship in which she often felt powerless.

Her earliest works were, on Suchat's advice, largely documentary in style, based upon the real-life experience of the author and aimed at a combined audience of left-wing intellectuals, student activists, peasants and workers. Upon discovering that the working classes did not read her stories and, having gained greater confidence and ability as a writer, Sidaoru'ang went on to develop both the form and content of her pieces. This was in part the outcome of the violent coup of October 6 1976, when the right-wing government issued restrictions on publishing houses. Little of Sidaoru'ang's work was published in the immediate aftermath and, as social and political idealism began to wane, she began to concentrate on more private subject matters for her stories.

Again, Sidaoru'ang made use of autobiographical material in her literary investigation of the experience of being a woman that was to occupy her writing hereafter. In addition to creating several tales based on recollections of her maternal grandmother, Sidaoru'ang also wrote about pregnancy, abortion, miscarriage, birth and mothering. The significance of the birth of her child that was to die several days later, and of the birth of her son, Mone, with heart disease in 1981 is paramount in the development of Sidaoru'ang's literary career after this date.

The careful application of feminist and psycho-analytical literary theory (with due regard to their Western origins and

prejudices) allows for parallels to be drawn between Sidaoru'ang's mothering of herself, of her son and of her texts, each associated with birth and rebirth of a strong sense of identity.

In the final phase of Sidaoru'ang's *oeuvre* the strength of identity which Sidaoru'ang has derived from the development of her life, and both examined and consolidated in her fiction, results in the freedom to investigate multiple identities in writing, and to present them in a highly playful, innovative and confident form. It is this complexity of style and content that characterizes her work to the present.

## APPENDIX ONE

### PUBLISHING HISTORY

#### *Kaew yot diaw (A Drop of Glass)*

First published in *Sangkhomsat parithat* (The Social Science Review), 13: 1 January-March, 1975.

Reprinted in (a) Natsini Witthuthirasan, *Wikhro' wannakam naew prachachon*, (An Analysis of People's Literature), Bangkok: Sayam wannakam, 1976; (b) Sidaoru'ang, *Kaew yot diaw*, Bangkok: Samnak phim Met sai, 1983.

Translated into English in Sidaoru'ang, *A Drop of Glass*, (translated and introduced by Rachel Harrison), Bangkok: Editions Duang Kamol, 1994.

#### *Chai pha lu'ang (The Hem of the Saffron Robe)*

First published in *Puthuchon* (The Common Man), monthly magazine, May, 1975.

Reprinted in (a) Chonthira Klatyu (ed.), *So'ng Thai*, (Thai Reflections), Bangkok: Su'ksit Sayam, 1975; (b) Suchat Sawatsi (ed.), *Thanon sai thi nam pai su khwam tai : Ruam ru'ang san ruam samai kho'ng thai*, (The Road to Death : An Anthology of Modern Thai Short Stories), Bangkok: Duang kamol, 1975; (c) Sidaoru'ang, *Kaew yot diaw*, Bangkok: Samnak phim Met sai, 1983.

Translated into English by Louis Setti in Bangkok Post, Sunday 27 December, 1981; translated into Japanese in Yujiro Iwaki, *Ruam*

*ru'ang san ruam samai kho'ng thai*, (An Anthology of Modern Thai Short Stories), Tokyo: Juji Imura, Toyota Foundation Project, 1982.

*Wao bon fa* (The Kite in the Sky)

First published in *Akso'rasat phican* (Literary Review), year 3, issue 2, July 1975.

Reprinted in (a) *Khorat Daily Newspaper*, year 2, issue no. 230, pp. 23-24 August, 1975; (b) *Ying yuk mai*, (Modern Woman) weekly newspaper, 25 February - 3 March, 1983; (c) *Sidaoru'ang, Kaew yot diaw*, Bangkok: Samnak phim Met sai, 1983.

*Sing thi long thun* (The Investment)

First published in *Akso'rasat phican*, year 2, volume 11-12, April-May, 1975. Reprinted (a) (under the new title - *Cak chut ratri thu'ng nang ek likay thai wat* - From Evening Dress to Likay Star) in *Lok Nangsu'* (Book World), year 4, volume 1, October, 1981; (b) *Sidaoru'ang, Kaew yot diaw*, Bangkok: Samnak phim Met sai, 1983.

*Pho'* (Father)

First published in *Puthuchon*, July, 1975.

Reprinted in (a) *Sidaoru'ang, Kaew yot diaw*, Bangkok: Samnak phim Met sai, 1983; (b) *Nangsu' anuso'n 'Thammasat khrop ro'p 50 pi'* (Journal to Celebrate 50 years of Thammasat University), Bangkok: Thammasat University, 1984. Translated into English

in Sidaoru'ang, *A Drop of Glass*, (translated and introduced by Rachel Harrison), Bangkok: Editions Duang Kamol, 1994.

*Raeng ngan kap ngoen* (Money and Labour)

First published (under the title *Phiang sing diaw* /Just One Thing), in *Prachachon* (The People) monthly magazine, year 1, volume 3, July, 1975. Reprinted in Sidaoru'ang, *Kaew yot diaw*, Bangkok: Samnak phim Met sai, 1983.

*Khrang nu'ng ... nan ma laew* (Once Upon a Time, Long, Long Ago)

First published in *Akso'rasat phican*, year 3, volume 5-6, October-November, 1975.

Reprinted in Sidaoru'ang, *Kaew yot diaw*, Bangkok: Samnak phim Met sai, 1983.

*Phuak nai pa* (The Insurgents)

First published in *Puthuchon*, October, 1975. Reprinted in Sidaoru'ang, *Kaew yot diaw*, Bangkok: Samnak phim Met sai, 1983.

*Phit wang* (Disappointment)

First published in *Satri san* (Women's News), weekly magazine, year 28, volume 31, November, 1975.

Reprinted in (a) *Anuso'n Phru'ttha '18, Nangsu' pracam rongrian satri mahapru'ttharam*, (Annual School Magazine of

the Mahaphru'ttharam Girls' School), 1975; (b) Sidaoru'ang, *Kaew yot diaw*, Bangkok: Samnak phim Met sai, 1983.

*So'ng mu' rao mi raeng* (Our Two Hands Have Strength)

First published in *Athibat* (Liberty). 20-22 January, 1976.

Reprinted in Sidaoru'ang, *Kaew yot diaw*, Bangkok: Samnak phim Met sai, 1983.

*Bang thi ... wan nu'ng khang na* (Perhaps, One Day in the Future)

First published in *Asia* weekly magazine, volume 109, 28 January-3 February, 1976.

Reprinted in (a) *Nangsu' anuso'n 'Thammasat khrop ro'p 50 pi'*, Bangkok: Thammasat University, 1984; (b) Sidaoru'ang, *Kaew yot diaw*, Bangkok: Samnak phim Met sai, 1983.

*Su'ng ro' wan ca taek thamlai* (Which Awaits Destruction)

First published in *Akso'rasat phican*, year 3, volume 9-10, February-March, 1976.

Reprinted in Sidaoru'ang, *Kaew yot diaw*, Bangkok: Samnak phim Met sai, 1983. Translated into English in Sidaoru'ang, *A Drop of Glass*, (translated and introduced by Rachel Harrison), Bangkok: Editions Duang Kamol, 1994.

*Mu'* (The Hand)

First published (under the title *Mu' thi lu'a mai thao kan*) in, *Athibat*, 4-6 May, 1976.

Reprinted in (a) *Chiwit ban rao* (Home Life) monthly magazine, year 1, volume 12, December 1979; (b) *Mu'* for translation into Polish in 'An Anthology of Asian Writers'; (c) Sidaoru'ang, *Kaew yot diaw*, Bangkok: Samnak phim Met sai, 1983. Translated into English in Sidaoru'ang, *A Drop of Glass*, (translated and introduced by Rachel Harrison), Bangkok: Editions Duang Kamol, 1994.

*Saphan Bun* (The Bridge of Merit)

First published in *Asia* weekly magazine, volume 132, 14 - 20 July, 1976.

Reprinted in Sidaoru'ang, *Kaew yot diaw*, Bangkok: Samnak phim Met sai, 1983.

*Rakha haeng khwam tai* (The Price of Death)

First published in *Chiwit* (Life) weekly magazine, year 1, volume 7, 13 September 1976.

Reprinted in (a) *Banthit Thammasat* (Thammasat Journal), year 1981; (b) Sidaoru'ang, *Kaew yot diaw*, Bangkok: Samnak phim Met sai, 1983. Translated into English under the title 'The Price of Death', by M. L. Usnisa Suksawat and published in the Bangkok Post, Sunday edition, 10 July 1983.

*Mae Phra Khongkha, Thao Kae Bak lae Ma* (Mother of the Waters, Thao Kae Bak and a Dog)

First published in *Lalana* (Lalana) magazine, issue 117, November 1977.

Reprinted in (a) *Loke nak khian*, (Writers' World), Bangkok: Samakhom nak khian haeng prathet Thai (The Writer's Association of Thailand), 1983; (b) Sidaoru'ang, *Kaew yot diaw*, Bangkok: Samnak phim Met sai, 1983. Translated into English under the title 'Mother of the Waters, Towkay Bak and a Dog' by Benedict R. O'G. Anderson and published in the Bangkok Post, Sunday edition, 18 March 1982; reprinted in Benedict R. O'G. Anderson and Ruchira Mendiones, *In the Mirror*, Bangkok: Duang Kamol, 1984.

*Tam pai kha Suriya nai pa oey* (Go Slay Suriya in the Jungle)

First edition in *Setthakit-kan mu'ang* (Economics and Politics) weekly magazine, year 1, volume 7, 9-15 February 1978.

Reprinted in Sidaoru'ang, *Kaew yot diaw*, Bangkok: Samnak phim Met sai, 1983. Translated into English in Sidaoru'ang, *A Drop of Glass*, (translated and introduced by Rachel Harrison), Bangkok: Editions Duang Kamol, 1994.

*Phu'an chan yang mai klap ma cak nai mu'ang* (My Friend has not yet Returned from the City)

First published in *Klum naksu'ksa thai nai Swiden*, (Thai Writers in Sweden), March 1978.

Reprinted in (a) *Matichon* (The Voice of the People) weekly magazine, year 4, volume 1323, 11-17 October, 1981; (b) Sidaoru'ang, *Kaew yot diaw*, Bangkok: Samnak phim Met sai, 1983. Translated into English in Sidaoru'ang, *A Drop of Glass*,

(translated and introduced by Rachel Harrison), Bangkok: Editions Duang Kamol, 1994.

*Khwan ngiap thi roem ton* (The Silence which Begins)

First published in *Sayam rat sapada wican* (Siam Rat Weekly) magazine, year 14, volume 43, 23 April 1978.

Reprinted in (a) *Sip ru'ang san sang san thai* (Ten Creative Thai Short Stories), Bangkok: Samnak phim Noppharat, 1979; (b) *Sidaoru'ang, Kaew yot diaw*, Bangkok: Samnak phim Met sai, 1983.

*Kho'ng khwan haeng phaen din* (The Salt of the Earth)

First published in *Phanraya* (Wife) monthly magazine, year 1, volume 6, June 1978.

Reprinted in *Sidaoru'ang, Kaew yot diaw*, Bangkok: Samnak phim Met sai, 1983.

*Khon dai ya* (The Grasscutter)

First published in *Setthakit-kan mu'ang* weekly magazine, year 1, volume 7, 3-9 April, 1978.

Reprinted in (a) *Kan an ngan praphan chapho' ru'ang* (Reading Literature), T 322, Secondary School Year Level 3, Ministry of Education, 1980; (b) *So'ng Wannakam: Ruam ru'ang san lae bot wican* (Reflections of Literature. Collected short stories and articles), Bannakit Press, 1981; (c) *Sidaoru'ang, Kaew yot diaw*, Bangkok: Samnak phim Met sai, 1983. Translated into English and published under the title 'The Grass Cutter' in The Bangkok

Post, Sunday Edition, 12 December 1982; reprinted in *Thai Pen. Anthology : Short stories and Poems of Social Consciousness*, Samakhom phasa lae nangsu' haeng prathet thai, 1983.

*Man ma kap kan lu'ak tang (It Comes with the Elections)*

First published in *Wan wela thi phan loey : loke nangsu'* (The Passing of Time : Book World), Short Story Edition, Duang Kamol, May 1978.

Reprinted in Sidaoru'ang, *Kaew yot diaw*, Bangkok: Samnak phim Met sai, 1983.

*Prapheni thi yok loek (Outdated Customs)*

First published in *Lalana*, volume 122, July 1978.

Reprinted in Sidaoru'ang, *Kaew yot diaw*, Bangkok: Samnak phim Met sai, 1983.

*Yai kap thahan num (Grandmother and the Soldier Boy)*

First published in *Setthakit-kan mu'ang*, year 1, volume 31, 31 July-6 August, 1978.

Reprinted in Sidaoru'ang, *Kaew yot diaw*, Bangkok: Samnak phim Met sai, 1983.

*Klo'm khwan mae (Mother's Lullaby)*

First published in *Siang satri* (Women's Voice), year 1, volume 5, 8-14 November, 1978. Reprinted in Sidaoru'ang, *Kaew yot diaw*, Bangkok: Samnak phim Met sai, 1983.

Mae kho'ng Po'm (Po'm's Mother)

First published in *Chiwit ban rao* monthly magazine, year 1, volume 61, January 1979.

Reprinted in *Sidaoru'ang, Bat prachachon*, Bangkok: Samnak phim Met sai, 1984.

Prapheni thi phoem khu'n (Multiplying Customs)

First published in *Sai cai* (Heartfelt) magazine, year 1, volume 2, 15 February 1979. Reprinted in *Sidaoru'ang, Bat prachachon*, Bangkok: Samnak phim Met sai, 1984.

Bun kho'ng yai (Grandmother's Merit)

First published in *Khlu'n hua doeng : Loke nangsui'*, (High Waves: Book World) Short Story Edition, September 1979.

Reprinted in *Sidaoru'ang, Bat prachachon*, Bangkok: Samnak phim Met sai, 1984.

Mu't laew sawang (Light After Dark)

First published in *Phet nam ngam : Loke nangsui'*, (Prize Jewels: Book World) Short Story Edition, September 1980.

Reprinted in *Sidaoru'ang, Bat prachachon*, Bangkok: Samnak phim Met sai, 1984. Translated into English in *Sidaoru'ang, A Drop of Glass*, (translated and introduced by Rachel Harrison), Bangkok: Editions Duang Kamol, 1994.

Nam ta lai ngiap (Tears that Flow in Silence)

First published in *Lalana*, April 1981.

Reprinted in Sidaoru'ang, *Bat prachachon*, Bangkok: Samnak phim Met sai, 1984.

*Luk chai khon sut tho'ng* (The Youngest Son)

First published in *Lalana*, June 1981.

Reprinted in (a) *Dae ... phu thi yang yu : ruam ru'ang san lae bot kawi thi chana loet lae khao ro'p pracam pi 2523-2524* (To Those Who Remain : Winning Collected Short Stories and Poems of 1980-81), Samakhom phasa lae nangsua haeng prathet thai, 1982; (b) Sidaoru'ang, *Bat prachachon*, Bangkok: Samnak phim Met sai, 1984. Translated into English in Sidaoru'ang, *A Drop of Glass*, (translated and introduced by Rachel Harrison), Bangkok: Editions Duang Kamol, 1994.

*Bun songkran* (New Year's Merit)

First published in *Fu'ang nakho'n* (City News) monthly magazine, volume 3, April 1983.

Reprinted in Sidaoru'ang, *Bat prachachon*, Bangkok: Samnak phim Met sai, 1984.

*Wua Lampho'ng* (Wua Lampho'ng)

First published in *Matichon* weekly magazine, year 5, volume 1558, 6-12 June 1982.

Reprinted in Sidaoru'ang, *Bat prachachon*, Bangkok: Samnak phim Met sai, 1984.

Wat khru'ng nu'ng kammako'n khru'ng nu'ng (Half Temple, Half Committee)

First published in *Matichon* weekly magazine, year 5, volume 1613, 1-7 August, 1982.

Reprinted in Sidaoru'ang, *Bat prachachon*, Bangkok: Samnak phim Met sai, 1984.

Krasae samnu'k kho'ng yai (Grandmother's Steam of Consciousness)

First published in *Loke nangsui*, year 6, volume 1, October 1982.

Reprinted in Sidaoru'ang, *Bat prachachon*, Bangkok: Samnak phim Met sai, 1984.

Bat prachachon (Identity Cards)

First published in *Sayam rat sapada wican*, year 29, volume 21, 14 November 1982.

Reprinted in Sidaoru'ang, *Bat prachachon*, Bangkok: Samnak phim Met sai, 1984. Translated into English under the title 'The Identity Card' and published in the Sunday edition of The Bangkok Post, 3 April 1983.

Bot sonthana kho'ng yai (Grandmother's Conversation)

First published in *Lalana*, year 9, volume 239, December 1982.

Reprinted in Sidaoru'ang, *Bat prachachon*, Bangkok: Samnak phim Met sai, 1984.

Lan yai (Grandmother's Grandchildren)

First published in *Mu' rangwan : ruam ru'ang san kho'ng nak khian mu'a rangwan* (Prizewinners. An Anthology of Prizewinning Short Stories), Samnak phim No'n.

Reprinted in Sidaoru'ang, *Bat prachachon*, Bangkok: Samnak phim Met sai, 1984.

*Nuan kap Lo'm lae khuat nam nai mu'* ( Nuan, Lo'm and a Bottle at the Ready)

First published in *Phi ar*, (PR), Year 12, volume 1241, February 1983.

Reprinted in Sidaoru'ang, *Bat prachachon*, Bangkok: Samnak phim Met sai, 1984.

*Chao Yak: Thotsakan kap Sida* ( The Demons: Thotsakan and Sida)

First published in *Loke nangsui'*, Year 6, volume 6, March 1983.

Reprinted in Sidaoru'ang, *Bat prachachon*, Bangkok: Samnak phim Met sai, 1984.

*Thang sop phan* (On the Path to the Funeral Pyre)

First published in *Thanon nangsui'* (Book Road), Year 1, Initial volume, June 1983.

Reprinted in Sidaoru'ang, *Bat prachachon*, Bangkok: Samnak phim Met sai, 1984.

*Chao Yak: Thotsakan prap Cingcok* (The Demons: Thotsakan Punishes the Geckoes)

First published in *Lalana* , Year 11, volume 257, September 1983.

Reprinted in Sidaoru'ang, *Bat prachachon*, Bangkok: Samnak phim Met sai, 1984.

*Thoi kham lae khwam ngiap (Words and Silence)*

First published in *Matichon* , Year 6, volume 2038, 2 October 1983.

Reprinted in Sidaoru'ang, *Bat prachachon*, Bangkok: Samnak phim Met sai, 1984.

*Banphaburut kho'ng khrai ( Whose Ancestors Are They?)*

First published in *Phi Ar* , Year 1, volume 8, February 1984.

Reprinted in Sidaoru'ang, *Bat prachachon*, Bangkok: Samnak phim Met sai, 1984.

*Mung (The Mosquito Net)*

First published in *Phuying 24* , (Woman, '24), Year 1, volume 9, March 1984.

Reprinted in Sidaoru'ang, *Bat prachachon*, Bangkok: Samnak phim Met sai, 1984. Translated into English in Sidaoru'ang, *A Drop of Glass*, (translated and introduced by Rachel Harrison), Bangkok: Editions Duang Kamol, 1994.

*Ta Nu (Ta Nu )*

First published in *Satri san* , Year 36, volume 51, March 1984.

Reprinted in Sidaoru'ang, *Bat prachachon*, Bangkok: Samnak phim Met sai, 1984.

Cao thi din ( Lords of the Land)

First published in *Thanon nangsu'* (undated).

Reprinted in Sidaoru'ang, *Bat prachachon*, Bangkok: Samnak phim Met sai, 1984. Translated into English as 'Lords of Land' by M.L. Usnisa Suksawatsi in *Bangkok Post* , 22 January 1984.

Cotmai thi mai thu'ng phu rap (The Letter Which Never Arrived)

First published in *Matichon* , Year 7, volume 2234, 15 April 1984.

Reprinted in Sidaoru'ang, *Matsi* , Bangkok: Samnak phim Than tawan, 1987.

Sida dap fai (Sida Extinguishes the Flames)

First published in *Lalana*, Year 12, volume 273, August 1984.

Reprinted in Sidaoru'ang, *Matsi* , Bangkok: Samnak phim Than tawan, 1987.

Ham khao wat (Carried Into the Temple)

First published in *Saithip* (The Spiritual Path), Year 1, volume 2, 26 October 1984.

Reprinted in Sidaoru'ang, *Matsi* , Bangkok: Samnak phim Than tawan, 1987.

Ro't (Escape)

First published in *Saithip* , Year 1, volume 14, 15 February 1985.

Reprinted in Sidaoru'ang, *Matsi* , Bangkok: Samnak phim Than tawan, 1987.

Songkhram roke ( The War Against Disease)

First published in *Lalana* , Year 13, volume 115, September 1985.

Reprinted in Sidaoru'ang, *Matsi* , Bangkok: Samnak phim Than tawan, 1987.

Rakha kho'ng yai (The Worth of a Grandmother)

First published in *Fa mu'ng tho'ng* (The Golden Skies), Year 10, volume 115, September 1985. Reprinted in Sidaoru'ang, *Matsi* , Bangkok: Samnak phim Than tawan, 1987.

Matsi (Matsi)

First published in *Hai khlas*, (High Class), Year 3, volume 25, December 1985.

Reprinted in Sidaoru'ang, *Matsi* , Bangkok: Samnak phim Than tawan, 1987.

Kulap daeng nai tho khao (Red Rose in a White Toilet Bowl)

First published in *Phuying keng* , (Clever Girl), Year 1, volume 7, December 1985. Reprinted in Sidaoru'ang, *Matsi* , Bangkok: Samnak phim Than tawan, 1987.

Dae thoe thuk khon. (Dedicated to You All)

First published in *Lalana* , Year 14, volume 317, 10 March 1986.

Reprinted in Sidaoru'ang, *Matsi* , Bangkok: Samnak phim Than tawan, 1987.

Lom thi plian thang (The Wind That Changed Direction)

First published in *Matichon sut sapada* weekly magazine, Year 9, volume 2976, 27 April 1986. Reprinted in Sidaoru'ang, *Matsi*, Bangkok: Samnak phim Than tawan, 1987.

*Ngu kiau* (The Mating Snakes)

First published in *Fa mu'ang tho'ng*, Year 11, volume 121, April 1986. Reprinted in Sidaoru'ang, *Matsi*, Bangkok: Samnak phim Than tawan, 1987. Translated into English in Sidaoru'ang, *A Drop of Glass*, (translated and introduced by Rachel Harrison), Bangkok: Editions Duang Kamol, 1994.

*Cao lo'* (Cao Lo')

First published in *Phu'an nak an*, (Reader's Friend), Year 1, volume 3, June 1986. Reprinted in Sidaoru'ang, *Matsi*, Bangkok: Samnak phim Than tawan, 1987.

*Khvam suk sam chan* (Triple-Layered Happiness)

First published in *Thanon nangsui'*, Year 4, volume 1, September 1986. Reprinted in Sidaoru'ang, *Matsi*, Bangkok: Samnak phim Than tawan, 1987.

*Leng duay ta khwa* (Take Aim)

First published in *Fa mu'ang tho'ng*, (The Golden Skies), Year 11, volume 124, August 1986. Reprinted in Sidaoru'ang, *Matsi*, Bangkok: Samnak phim Than tawan, 1987.

*Phayakho'n kho'ng khu'n* (Phayakho'n kho'ng khu'n)

First published in *Lalana* , Year 14, volume 328, August 1986.

Reprinted in Sidaoru'ang, *Matsi* , Bangkok: Samnak phim Than tawan, 1987.

*Ma hai* (My Dog Has Disappeared)

First published in *Phu'an nak an* , Year 1, volume 7, November 1986.

Reprinted in Sidaoru'ang, *Matsi* , Bangkok: Samnak phim Than tawan, 1987.

*Phaendin tho'ng* (The Land of Gold)

First published in Sidaoru'ang, *Matsi* , Bangkok: Samnak phim Than tawan, 1987.

*Tai rom mai na pa haeng nu'ng* (Once in a Forest, Beneath a Shady Tree)

First published in Sidaoru'ang, *Matsi* , Bangkok: Samnak phim Than tawan, 1987.

*Lom tua* (The Wind Tour)

First published in Sidaoru'ang, *Matsi* , Bangkok: Samnak phim Than tawan, 1987.

Translated into English in Sidaoru'ang, *A Drop of Glass*, (translated and introduced by Rachel Harrison), Bangkok: Editions Duang Kamol, 1994.

*Ru'ang kho'ng so'ng pan* (The Two Pans)

First published in Sidaoru'ang, *Matsi* , Bangkok: Samnak phim Than tawan, 1987.

*Ru'ang lu'k lap kho'ng phu muat* (The Secret of the Robots)

First published in Sidaoru'ang, *Matsi* , Bangkok: Samnak phim Than tawan, 1987.

*Kem phaen thi* (The Map Game)

First published in Sidaoru'ang, *Matsi* , Bangkok: Samnak phim Than tawan, 1987.

*Loke kho'ng Nome* (Nome's World)

First published in Sidaoru'ang, *Matsi* , Bangkok: Samnak phim Than tawan, 1987.

*So'ng mae* (The Two Mothers)

First published in *Fa mu'ang tho'ng* , Year 12, volume 136, August 1987.

Reprinted in Sidaoru'ang, *Phap luang ta* , Bangkok: Samnak phim Kamphaeng, 1989.

*Manlika* (Manlika)

First published in *Satri san* , Year 40, volume 20, 9 August 1987.

Reprinted in Sidaoru'ang, *Phap luang ta* , Bangkok: Samnak phim Kamphaeng, 1989.

Chuiapha: suphapburut kang keng nai (Chuiapha: The Gentleman of the Underpants)

First published in *Kradangnga*, (Cananga Tree), Year 3, volume 25, September 1987. Reprinted in Sidaoru'ang, *Phap luang ta*, Bangkok: Samnak phim Kamphaeng, 1989.

Mali rai (Tainted Jasmine)

First published in *Nari '87*, (Lady '87), Year 5, volume 6, October 1987.

Reprinted in Sidaoru'ang, *Phap luang ta*, Bangkok: Samnak phim Kamphaeng, 1989.

Nang sao Mam (Miss 'Mam')

First published in *Fa mu'ang tho'ng*, Year 12, volume 141, January 1988. Reprinted in Sidaoru'ang, *Phap luang ta*, Bangkok: Samnak phim Kamphaeng, 1989.

Lekhanit po' so'ng (Grade Two maths)

First published in *Hai khlas*, Year 4, volume 47, March 1988.

Reprinted in Sidaoru'ang, *Phap luang ta*, Bangkok: Samnak phim Kamphaeng, 1989.

Khon kae, khon liang dek, yai, yai mae mot, khun mae - chuay phom duay! (Better the devil ...)

First published in *Lalana*, Year 16, volume 367, 10 April 1988.

Reprinted in Sidaoru'ang, *Phap luang ta*, Bangkok: Samnak phim Kamphaeng, 1989. Translated into English in Sidaoru'ang,

*A Drop of Glass*, (translated and introduced by Rachel Harrison),  
Bangkok: Editions Duang Kamol, 1994.

*Ngu hang khat* (The Snake with the Missing Tail)

First published in *Su anakhot*, (To the Future), Year 8, volume  
379, 8-15 June, 1988.

Reprinted in Sidaoru'ang, *Phap luang ta* , Bangkok: Samnak  
phim Kamphaeng, 1989.

*Phap luang ta kiaw kap kan plian sapphanam* (An Illusion  
Concerning the Alteration of Personal Pronouns)

First published in *Thanon nangsu'* , Year 5, volume 2, August  
1987.

Reprinted in Sidaoru'ang, *Phap luang ta* , Bangkok: Samnak  
phim Kamphaeng, 1989.

*Banthu'k kho'ng No'ng Nu* (My diary)

First published in *Fa mu'ang tho'ng* , Year 12, volume 136,  
August 1987. Reprinted in Sidaoru'ang, *Phap luang ta* , Bangkok:  
Samnak phim Kamphaeng, 1989.

*Chomrom wan suk: nak khian khwam cam su'am* (The Friday  
Club: The Writer with the Fading Memory)

First published in *Kradangnga* , Year 3, volume 21, April 1987.

Reprinted in Sidaoru'ang, *Phap luang ta* , Bangkok: Samnak  
phim Kamphaeng, 1989.

Chomrom wan suk: fai (The Friday Club: The Mole)

First published in *Phuying '24* , Year 5, volume 5, November 1987.

Reprinted in Sidaoru'ang, *Phap luang ta* , Bangkok: Samnak phim Kamphaeng, 1989.

Chomrom wan suk: khon khi mao (The Friday Club: The Drunkards)

First published in *Can* (Moon), Year 1, volume 1, November 1987.

Reprinted in Sidaoru'ang, *Phap luang ta* , Bangkok: Samnak phim Kamphaeng, 1989.

Chomrom wan suk: siaw chiwit khon den (The Friday Club: A Quarter of the Life of a Famous Person)

First published in *Kradangnga* , Year 4, volume 32, June 1988.

Reprinted in Sidaoru'ang, *Phap luang ta* , Bangkok: Samnak phim Kamphaeng, 1989.

Chomrom wan suk: Bulan loi fa (The Friday Club: Bulan the Angelic)

First published in Sidaoru'ang, *Phap luang ta* , Bangkok: Samnak phim Kamphaeng, 1989.

## APPENDIX TWO

### PRIZEWINNING STORIES

*Khon dai ya* (The Grasscutter)

*W. N. Pramuanmarok Prize* for outstanding short story, 1978.

*Samakhom phasa lae nangsua' haeng prathet thai nai phra boromarachupatham.*

*Man ma kap kan lu'ak tang* (It Comes with the Elections)

*Cho' karaket prize, Loke nangsua' magazine, 1978.*

*Ngu kiaw* (The Mating Snakes)

*Samakhom phasa lae nangsua' haeng prathet thai prize* for outstanding short story, 1986.

## APPENDIX THREE

### A DROP OF GLASS

A bell rang out insistently, telling all the workers - men, women, children and old people alike - to finish their break and go back into the factory. They were all carrying tin cans for their drinking water, since the factory did not allow them to use glasses at work. A young woman of nineteen, and a man slightly younger than her, hurried into the glass-sorting room. Both set to work speedily and in silence. The young woman picked up each glass, held it to the light and examined it closely. If she found any bubbles or scratches in it, she put it into one box; those which were perfects she put into another.

In the middle of the factory stood two furnaces for melting the glass. The round one produced much purer glass than the other. The deftness with which she sorted through the glasses and put them in their respective boxes showed how skilled the young woman was at her job. And all the time she chatted away to her workmate.

'Hey, Thawin, I reckon the foreman will soon be thinking he's made a bit of a mistake getting us to sort through these glasses.'

'Why? It's good isn't it? Sorting glass is a great job. Better than polishing it. At least this way we don't have to sit here, with our hands stuck in water and sand for most of the day. Cutting is no good either - you get too hot. And you get even hotter doing the blowing.'

'No, I didn't mean we had to work any harder than anyone else. All I meant was - the manager's going to end up with a lot fewer good glasses, that's all. Why do they get so many good glasses when other people do the checking and yet, when we come and do it, there never seem to be that many good ones? If some of these were sent out as perfect the factory would get a terrible reputation.'

'Oh, come off it. You worry too much Nong. The way you go on about it, anyone would think it was your own bleeding factory. Just get on with the job and stop going on about it. You're only on 140 baht a month. And how much of that do you pay out in rent?'

'20 baht.'

'How much do you send back home?'

'100.'

'So that leaves 20. You live on that, can you? It's a good job they give us our meals, at least, otherwise we'd never make ends meet, that's for sure.'

'But I don't think it's right. If we're going to do the job, we've got to do it properly. Whichever way you look at it, the money's not enough - but then I've always got my O/T. The foreman reckons there's some extra work going at 30 baht a month if anyone wants to clean out the workers' loos. He's going to take someone on for the job. It's got nothing to do with the factory. You never know, I might just go for it. It's all right for you. You can manage. You've got somewhere to live and your parents have got a job here. But what about me, all by myself?'

'If you're so all by yourself, how come you don't just spend your money on yourself then, instead of sending most of it back home?'

With nothing more to say to each other, the two simply laughed. A short time later Dom, the head of the box-making section, who worked by the door to the glass sorting room, walked in and took a look at what was going on in there.

'Hey, Nong. I can't find a good worker to give me a hand making up some boxes. There I was thinking you were perfect for the job and then the foreman went and moved you into glass sorting. And now look what's happening - we can't get the boxes out on time. You lot won't have any boxes to put your glasses in soon. Oh well, you'd better just get on with it I suppose.'

'Hey, just listen to that!' cried Thawin. 'That's the first time I've heard you say anything good about anyone. I've never noticed you say anything nice about me whenever I helped you before,' he joked, smiling so broadly that he showed his two gold teeth he was so proud of. Dom was in a good mood and threw his cigarette butt over to the young man. To replace the cigarette he had given away he hunted in his pockets for his bottle of snuff.

'You can laugh, young man. You couldn't make the grade if you tried.'

Anong glanced up briefly at both men, without pausing from her work. There was a glimmer of a smile on her lips as she held the glasses up to the light to check for flaws, and then pushed them into the cardboard slots in the boxes, four or five at a time. She put one row in upside down and the next the right way up,

packing them in alternate rows like this until the box was full; she then shut the lid quickly, picked up the box and piled it up on top of all the others.

'If you spend all your time just standing round here then there definitely won't be enough boxes, will there? Once I've been through this basketful of glasses I'll come and give you a hand, okay?'

Dom walked off, leaving the room filled with the aroma of his snuff. One of the glass blowers who was standing at the furnace shouted out jovially:

'Hey, slowed down again then have you? Nong, don't go believing old baldy. Bald men! Never believe a word they say.'

The place was filled with laughter. Even the bald man who was the butt of the joke laughed along too.

Sometimes, at night, when the four room mates weren't all working overtime, Anong walked back home alone. It did not frighten her, even though her room lay some way behind the factory, over a ditch, in amongst a thicket of coconut palms. By the time Anong arrived back, everyone else was usually asleep. The room was empty and bare, with little in the way of furniture, but for a lamp, made out of an old tin can, that glowed away in the corner. No one would bolt the door until the last of the tenants had returned.

Anong put her friend's sarong, still wet from having been washed, around her while she removed her shirt and trousers.

She could then wash them in the ditch. She used plain ditch water, for she had neither soap nor washing powder, and once she had finished she washed herself and brushed her teeth in the ditch water. Her next step was to put out the lamp and lie down next to her friends on the wooden floor. It may not have been spotlessly clean, but it served its purpose. When they did come home together, these women, all of different ages, and from different regions of the country, would fall asleep at almost the same moment. Whenever Anong woke up alone in the night, she could not help wishing she had a proper bed to lie on, with a proper pillow and mattress. She did not even have a blanket or a mosquito net. The only thing any of them had to cover themselves was a sarong, which they knotted at the chest. And even that tended to slip off during the night.

The following morning they would all get up and wash their faces, comb their hair and put on the clothes they had washed the night before, and which had not had long enough to dry properly overnight. Then off they would go to work. It wasn't long before their clothes dried from the heat in the factory. Anong was always being put onto different jobs, never staying at any one job for long. She was glad to do the work, and glad to be capable of doing it. But that morning she saw the manager, waiting in front of the office, with a long face. The moment he set eyes on Anong he rushed straight up to reprimand her.

'Anong, if you carry on rejecting glass at this rate, how much good glass am I going to end up with? Damn and blast it. You've rejected glasses which are perfectly okay. And how many

good ones are left? These glasses have to have a foreign trademark put on them. It's only the really bad stuff we put a Thai label on. They have different price codes. I thought the foreman said you were good at your job. How come? If all my workers were like you, I'd go out of business!

Anong stared down at the floor in silence. She did not argue back. Nearly all the workers were even more afraid of the manager than they were of the company chairman, who was a Thai police officer. The manager was Chinese. So was the foreman, except he was much kinder than any of the others.

'Foreman, get someone to go through this load of glasses again, will you?' the manager said. 'Yeah, okay,' came the foreman's response, as he walked over towards them. He then whispered to Anong: 'You go with the van and give a hand with the deliveries, will you.'

And so Anong was able to get away from the manager, although not without the trace of a tear trickling softly down her face.

That day, the factory's Volkswagen van drove around, delivering all kinds of glass - everything from lamps and vases to imitation Emerald Buddhas. They called at all the shops which had placed orders and it was afternoon before they had finished their rounds. Realizing that it was getting late, Mr. Liang, the driver, pulled up and they stopped for lunch by the roadside. Mr. Liang was many years Anong's senior, and he couldn't help consoling her when he saw how sad and miserable she had been all day.

'Come on, Nong, don't let it get you down. We're just poor people and we have to go along with what they say. You can take it. Just ignore them. We've all got something or other that makes us feel low, you know. I'm just the same. Sometimes I have to take to the bottle to drown my sorrows. But then you're a girl. There's nothing you can do. The only thing for you to do is not let it bother you. Just get on with your work, that's the best way.'

When Liang tried to console her, it only made Anong cry all the more. Wichai, the delivery boy, who couldn't be bothered to deliver the glass on foot and had come with the van instead, joined in the conversation:

'Oh, come on now, Liang. I've seen Nong working and I can't help feeling sorry for her. Some days you see her sorting through the glass. Or polishing glass. Some days she's making boxes. When the cook's off, the foreman sends her to do the cooking. She cleans the office and now she's doing deliveries as well. I think she lets them get away with too much as it is. She should just put her foot down and tell them she can't do it, and let that be the end of it. Making boxes isn't bad. She should just stick with that. At meal times Nong can't eat as fast as the others. Me and the other lads have to serve up her food for her, otherwise she wouldn't get enough to eat every meal time.'

'Really?' said Liang, who never did any other jobs apart from the driving. He was surprised. Anong gulped at her food, but it simply stuck in her throat. She thought back to some of her friends, who had also come down to Bangkok from the country. Some had come to work and others had gone on to study. Several

of them had probably got into university by now. But she had grown up into a young woman and she still didn't even know which buses went where.

'Where the hell have you been, Liang? How come it's taken you nearly the whole day to deliver those few things?' boomed the manager's voice.

'I stopped off for lunch.'

'Oh you did, did you? Look here, Liang. Just you remember. When you've finished your deliveries you're to come straight back to the factory. You never know, there might be something else that needs delivering urgently. You can get something to eat while the van's being loaded. You've got to know how to organise your time when you're working, not just abandon everything whenever you feel like going off for something to eat. What would happen if you started drinking and then had an accident in the van? It doesn't bother me if you all go and get yourself killed, but what sort of state would my van be in?" The manager went on and on and on, and the longer he went on the more it showed : his only real concerns to be those of profit and trade. Anong and Wichai crept off and sat down by the side of the van, listening in on what was being said, and leaving their colleague on his own to answer to the manager. It was a strange situation, considering that Mr. Liang had been the one to warn Anong that very afternoon to grin and bear everything.

'Oh, come on Sir. We were hungry. For God's sake, just see it from our point of view for a change,' Liang said, raising his

voice and looking miserable. The manager was boiling with rage. Turning round, he bellowed: 'Foreman, foreman. Come over here and sort this out, will you. Just get rid of this man. Don't listen to a word he says.' He strode off to the office and slammed the door behind him. The foreman tapped Liang on the shoulder and led him out of sight of the office. They both walked over towards the piles of white sand and of salt which were used to make the glass. Anong and Wichai followed on behind.

'Foreman, Sir, if Liang gets the sack, then Wichai and I will leave too.'

The foreman was Chinese, but he had lived in Thailand ever since he was a child. His family lived on the outskirts of the city, surrounded by Thais. He and Liang were neighbours from the same village and, although the foreman's Thai sounded rather strange at times, he had the soft voice of a kind hearted, elderly man. He turned and looked at Anong disapprovingly.

'Why be so stupid? I've not got you wrong, have I? You're not the sort to talk a load of nonsense, but if you insist on saying this, and lots of other workers end up doing the same, then all the work will be ruined. The manager could have you arrested. He'll say you incited the workers to strike.'

'The manager's gone too far. My God! Is that shabby, old van really worth more than somebody's life? I try to do the best I can, but he's still not satisfied.' Anong sobbed, tears flowing down her face. Her three room mates walked over to see what was going on, and then went away again, only to return moments later, with many other workers who all gathered round to watch.

Until the shift was over ... In front of the factory, the sound of whispering spread, rising in a steady crescendo until it reached a roar as the workers vented long suppressed resentment at their oppression. As fellow workers from nearby factories walked past on their way back to their lodgings, some stopped to listen to what was going on; and news of the event was passed around by word of mouth. The foreman walked round to the front of the factory, his face revealing his anxiety.

'You lot just quieten down a bit, will you? What on earth do you think you're doing? Liang's not kicking up a fuss. I know you're all friends, but what can I do - I just work here, like everyone else. I'm an old man. If I get the sack, what am I going to do then? There's nothing you can do. Just believe me, will you? The company chairman's a policeman. How can you lot stand up to him?' The foreman looked as if he was in a real state over how the whole incident had escalated to such proportions. Although Anong was angry, she didn't know what to do next.

'I think there *is* something we can do,' came the voice of a young man who had not been working at the factory long.

'I mean, why should we have to wait for someone else to do something?' he said. 'We must try to help ourselves. I only come to work here when I've got a break from college, but it's not taken me long to realize how much they take advantage of us.' At first most of the workers were shocked that someone should dare speak out with such open criticism. Soon after, the numbers of people grew and grew, and they were joined by some of the locals, who had come along to see what was going on. 'It wouldn't be possible

without our dreadful civil servants making the whole thing so much easier. That's the worst of it. Just stop and think for a moment. There are children in the factories only 9 or 10 years old. They have to collect the glasses that have just been blown and take them round to the front of the furnace, one at a time. They work nine hours a day. Just think how far they walk in a day once you add up all those journeys back and forth. Last week one of the workers spilt some molten glass on his hand, shrivelling his skin and contorting all his fingers. And how much compensation did he get? None! On top of that the manager even laid into him for being a clumsy, careless oaf, and said there was nothing he could do to help. Anyone who knows anything knows that this factory has no welfare provision of any kind; we don't get the cost of our hospital treatment paid, we don't get a fair wage, nor any compensation if we're involved in an accident or if we get the sack. We virtually have to fight one another to get at the food. This is *our* country you know. And who are the ones forcing us into this misery? Where do *they* come from?'

Liang, the foreman, Anong and everybody stood there in silence, looking and listening to him as if they had only just seen his true face for the first time. That evening, the workers remained in front of the factory, talking together till late into the night .

The next morning the owners of nearby factories came to speak to the manager of the glass factory, shouting, as always.

They all had a laugh at something as they stood there in the office and looked out through the door and windows at the factory workers, alongside whom stood the foreman. A little later on the foreman walked into the office.

'Excuse me, Manager, Sir. To keep the peace I'm asking you just once to take Liang back to work again and to review the wages of those who have worked here a long time and who do a good job.'

'Right! That's it. You've gone too far. Get out! I've got nothing to say to you. You're supposed to be Chinese too, aren't you? And here you go, siding with the workers. Hey, someone call the Chairman here, will they?' The foreman smiled respectfully and spoke softly, despite the manager having turned his back on him.

'Sir, I *am* Chinese, but I was born in Thailand and lived here before *you* did. I've mixed with the workers long enough to share some understanding with them. If you spoke nicely to them then everything would be fine.'

The manager waved his hand to dismiss him from the room and he was consequently obliged to leave. He went to tell the workers what had been said. Later on that morning, the number of workers - men, women, children and old people, as well as those who had just turned up to see what was going on - began to swell, and by the time the news broke that the foreman had been given the sack, yet more people had arrived. The owners of the nearby factories looked at all the workers and were alarmed at what they saw, for there were not just workers from the glass

factory, but also some of their own workers, from the sugar factory and the sacking factory nearby.

## APPENDIX FOUR

### MY FRIEND HAS NOT YET RETURNED FROM THE CITY

It is October, and the sun is setting. Darkness has already begun to descend upon the outskirts of the city, and all appears to have fallen silent along the path that everyone calls 'the ant track'. Only very occasionally does someone walk by, on their way to or from the village. And a faint light glimmers from the nearby houses.

It is the second night of the waning moon, but it has not yet appeared above the horizon. I recall that it is only two days since the end of Buddhist Lent which means that I have only a couple of hours to do my work before the moon appears above the treetops and its misty light exposes me to the dangerous gaze of suspicious eyes. The violence which erupted yesterday is still rousing people to endless acts of madness, and I can no longer rest assured of my own safety, nor that of my friend. Where can he have gone? Why has he not yet returned? Where can he be?

My friend has not yet returned from the city and confusion still reigns at the Pramane Ground and at the university, that scene of madness and violence. The confusion is made worse by the announcement from a new clique in the military that they have seized power. I am so worried about my friend. The violence has been going on for two full days now. Why has he not yet returned? Has something terrible happened in the city which has not been reported on the news?

What should I do? There's something I must do. He knows what it is. So do I. And there may not be much time left to do it.

Two young couples and their young children live over to the east of my place, next to the ditch. They won't have finished their meal yet and the people in the next little house along, across the ditch, still haven't gone to bed. A shallow, gloomy light glimmers from both houses. The shadows of the leaves flicker quickly back and forth over the walls. It may still be too early in the evening for me to begin my task. A man with dark glasses is sitting on a long bench on the verandah, peering at the book he is reading. Rumour had it that he is a Village Scout<sup>360</sup> and an ex-mercenary, who fought in Laos. He rents the house with his younger brother, who is a sergeant-major in the army. I saw the sergeant-major leaving the house early this morning, wearing his uniform. And he has not yet returned home either. He must have received orders to be on the alert, because of the coup and the declaration of

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<sup>360</sup> The Village Scouts were an anti-leftist, vigilante organization first established in 1971 by an officer in the Border Patrol Police and taken under Royal Patronage three years later. The organization originally operated in villages and provincial towns, but by early 1976 it had extended its activities to Bangkok, where it drew its support from the middle classes, fearful of a communist takeover. (The wives of army generals, business leaders, bankers and even members of Royal Family participated in Village Scout training programmes, alongside vendors and labourers. See Chai-anan and Morell, *op. cit.*, p. 244.) By mid-1978 2.5 million men and women, over 5% of the population, had completed the Village Scout training programme, which involved learning first aid techniques, songs, cooking, physical exercise and serving food. Each group of trainees was divided into teams of 10-15 and had to present plays based on historical events which reflected nationalism and patriotism, many with sharp, anti-leftist overtones. (*Ibid.*, p. 243.)

martial law throughout the country. He'll have had to join up with his battalion and now something terrible could happen to him at any moment too.

That's right. Something terrible could happen to absolutely anyone, even me, just sitting here waiting at home.

The moon has not yet risen.

I turn and look westwards, in the direction of several little wooden houses. One of them is owned by a woman whose husband has left her. The house on this side is much darker than the one on the other side for, not having had electricity connected, they use only tiny oil lamps.

Every day, when the sun has disappeared behind the treetops to the west, the woman collects up all the little odds and ends she sells to the local children and hastily rounds up her own children to bath them and give them their dinner. At nightfall she closes the door and the windows and puts the children to bed. Tonight I can tell that her children are already asleep, for all is quiet, though the traces of lamp light still visible mean that she herself has not yet gone to bed. I don't think she's in the least bit interested in the political situation or in anyone or anything for that matter, other than simply making sure that her family all have enough to eat, by making sweetmeats or else by sitting and folding paper bags out of old school-books to put the sweetmeats in and sell the following day. Everyone knows full well that she is afraid of ghosts. and does not like to open the door or go out

anywhere at night. So I am quite relieved that she, for one, will not be sitting there watching what I am doing.

Praying for the moon not to come up just yet, I tiptoe down the steps, put on my flip-flops, find my spade and walk round to the back of the house, intending to make a thorough re-investigation of the area around the chilli plants.

Yesterday evening I hid some 'things'. I put them in a plastic tub, sealed the lid and tied the tub up tightly. I dug a hole deep enough to bury the tub in carefully, and then made it look as if I had planted chillies on the mound, which was well covered with earth. But, late last night, the rain bucketted down so heavily that I wasn't really sure whether or not I had buried them safely enough.

I walk over to the morning-glory plot, near the chilli mound and, all of a sudden, I get the shock of my life when I catch a fleeting glimpse of a snake. The sight of it turns my body momentarily limp, and my brain numb. Then both my hands inadvertently jerk up in front of my chest and I hold my breath. It is as if I have breathed my last, and my mouth falls open, aghast. The snake is as long as my arm, and as fat as a child's wrist. It slithers swiftly from out of the grass at the edge of one of the furrows in the vegetable patch, and disappears into the chilli mound where I have buried the 'things'.

After I have regained my nerve and realized what has happened, my courage has virtually drained away and I decide to creep back to the house. I sit down, exhausted and feeble, on the mats we use to sleep on at night and which are laid one on top of

the other. I close my eyes and lie there, motionless, as if to drive away the nightmare image which even I myself do not fully recognize. I am frightened because I recognize it as fear. It is definitely fear.

Definitely. I am afraid. So afraid that I dare not think back to that mound of chilli plants behind the house. It is only when I recall that there may not be much time left, and that something far worse than snakes may be awaiting me, that I make up my mind.

'Come on. It has to be done. I must do it, no matter what. I'll have to ignore the fact there is a big snake out there, or that there's some light coming from the neighbouring houses. I must do that job. I must get it done. The house and the branches of the trees all around will help to conceal me and block out the light, but if I don't move quickly enough, and the moon rises high into the sky then I may not be able to do what I planned.

I stand up and grasp my right shoulder for it's not all that strong and you can hear the bones often cracking every time I move or carry heavy things. The doctor says my joints are getting worse, that there is a heavy build up of tartar, which make lifting painful.

Come along, then. This time I go barefoot, pick up the spade and, bobbing up and down as I work, I avoid the light which flickers through the trees. Sometimes I conceal my shadow against the house posts, the water jars or the mango trees. The sweat drips off my hand as I grip the handle of the spade. When I near the mound of chilli plants, close by where I 'buried' my

'things' the night before, I use my left hand to sweep the soil slowly aside and I begin to dig a new hole.

I try to dig the hole as quietly as I can. A faint sound of singing filters through from a neighbour's radio, and although the song is one that arouses hatred among men,<sup>361</sup> ironically it now helps me to conceal my activities, and gives me greater peace of mind.

The moon inches its way up, almost scaling the treetops. Even though it is a waning moon, its brightness is frightening in the cloudless sky. Treading as softly and as carefully as I can, I tiptoe back up into the house to bring 'some things' down.

'What a disgrace! Why should I have to behave like this in my own home?'

I feel a sharp, stabbing pain in my palm, going right through to the back of my hand. A rusty old nail, buried in amongst some bits of wood beneath the soil, must have pierced my hand while I was digging. Once again the blood flows over my rough palms. Even though the nail has left no mark on the back of my hand, my hand is already bruised from getting banged on the

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<sup>361</sup> Sidaoru'ang makes reference here to the song entitled *nak phaen din*, or 'The Scum of the Earth', composed in 1975 by an army officer who worked at the army television station. The song was played every day on the radio and television during the 1975-6 period and a recording distributed to schools throughout the country. The song had an enormous impact in crystallising pervasive latent attitudes toward the leftists on the part of many Thais, helping identify them with the communist threat and increasing acceptance of violent repression of the scum. (See *ibid.*, p. 252, footnote 1.)

edge of the hole several times, as I bend to carry on digging the hole until it is about three feet deep. Because of the darkness it is impossible to know how deep the hole is while I am still digging it. And that is how I manage to bang the back of my hand against splinters of wood, bits of glass and solid lumps of earth at the edge of the hole and why my blood now flows freely from the gashes.

There's so much blood, but I'll just have to ignore it. Time is not on my side. I may not have any time left at all, who knows? Time passes us by, and the same fate awaits us all. Ill fortune may be watching us and waiting to swoop, like a savage eagle eyeing its hapless prey.

The water level in the hole I am digging rises higher and higher, until it only has another six or seven inches to go before reaching land level. And then I will just have to resign myself to the fact that some of the 'things' may be damaged by such a high water-level. After all, I am being forced into making this extraordinary choice. The song 'Scum of the Earth' playing on a neighbour's radio carries through the air, its harsh and bloodthirsty tones immediately followed by an unbelievable message:

'... The National Administrative Reform Council recognises the calamity which has befallen us at present, as have the general public. That is to say, a group of people comprising student factions have insulted the Thai nation by their intention to destroy the institution of the monarchy. Such actions are part of the Communist plot to seize power in Thailand. When police officers endeavoured to arrest them, the students retaliated with

deadly weapons. Students, along with the Vietnamese Communist terrorists, fought with the police, killing and wounding a great number of them and of innocent bystanders. This terrible incident is proof that the present government is unable to maintain law and order by constitutional means. If the Nation is allowed to remain in such a state of flux then she and her people will encounter yet greater dangers and the situation will be beyond easy rectification.'

A wry smile crosses my face as I listen to their announcement. The way they phrase things is truly laughable. For a start, their words, 'Students fought with the police, killing and wounding a great number of them and of innocent bystanders.' And then, 'The present government is unable to maintain law and order by constitutional means.' Followed by, 'If the Nation is allowed to remain in such a state of flux then she and her people will encounter yet greater dangers. The National Administrative Reform Council therefore recognizes the need to seize control.'

I really can't help laughing when I hear the way they phrase things.

For me, the images of the bloodbath that took place only two days ago remain imprinted upon my mind. Although my only experience of the incident has been through the newspapers and from what some people have told me, their pictures and their words are firmly fixed in my mind, haunting me, compelling me to anger and to a thirst for revenge. Such images: that of four students, some not yet dead, some being dragged along on a rope

by a crowd of madmen and piled up in the middle of the road, whereupon tyres are heaped down on top of them, then petrol poured upon them and set ablaze, the flames leaping up into the air. Their mutilated bodies are like those of pitiable beasts, limbs scattered in all directions. But in the photographs it transpires that people are standing round, watching, and some are even smiling cheerfully. There is even one man impaling his unlucky victim through the heart with a stake. My God! How can they bring themselves to do such things! Later on, I heard it said that the victims' relatives wept and wailed before the crowd.

'Please, let me take the body. He's a relative of mine,' they cried. But the madmen's only response was to roar back, 'You bastards. What d'you say, eh? You want the body, do you? It's a bloody good job I didn't get rid of the lot of you.'

I have seen pictures of people who were burned, kicked, beaten, impaled and hanged. But to cap it all there was one photograph of a policeman with a cigarette hanging out of his mouth, raising his pistol and taking aim. He seemed as relaxed as a child at a temple fair, preparing to fire; but the look of evil on his face saddened me, and I could feel nothing but terror when I noticed that standing alongside him was a man in a T-shirt, wearing a host of Buddha amulets around his neck.

And there were other photographs too: I recall one of a young man, his face drenched in blood, shouting out for help whilst he supported a young girl whose face was covered in the tears of utter fear and shock. And, my God, yet another picture I'll never forget: one of a poor girl who was pulled naked across

the ground by the crowd of madmen as a sacrifice to their folly, and then simply left lying there, in all her immoral nakedness. And I will not forget the female students who were forced at gun-point by scores of lumbering men to remove their clothes while the male students lay helpless, face down in the dirt, or crawling beneath the feet and gun barrels of their oppressors.

I remember, remember like I'll never ever forget. Was it these young students who were supposed to have fought with the police? Was it really they who took recourse to the 'deadly weapons of war'?

- Who said so?

- How could such acts of barbarous madness have taken place?

- Why do we kill each other, without so much as making each other's acquaintance first?

I choose the books which are of particular value and closest to my friend's heart. The ones he loves with his life. And I put them into the plastic tub and close the lid tightly, before sealing it with several layers of tape to keep the water from getting in. The big plastic tub is so tightly packed that it weighs heavy. It is quite an effort to lift, and I stagger down the steps with it. It is to save the life of these 'friends' of 'a friend of mine' that I undertake this essential task.

The waning moon appears above the treetops, and its soft, beautiful light illuminates the mound of earth. Everything sleeps motionlessly, in the silence, but I will wait just a fraction longer, wait for all my neighbours to fall asleep. Wait for the waning moon to clear the treetops and rise up beyond the clouds. Wait a little longer. Wait, no matter how much longer it takes.

I am coming to the rescue of 'friends of a friend' of mine. Helping 'them' is like helping my friend ...

Oh, my dear, beloved friend, where are you hiding, so late at night? Why have you not come back? Why have you not yet returned from the city?

## APPENDIX FIVE

### THE MATING SNAKES

'Bugger it, they're bloody hot!' the little boy screeched, as he gathered up the mud balls he had moulded and laid out to dry in the sun, and shoved them into the pockets of his khaki school shorts. Around his head he had slung a catapult, giving him a rather regal air. He left the house, feeling free, as if he hadn't a care in the world - for his mother had gone out for the day.

It was March, the dry season, and the village was without water.

A young woman, crossing the ditch, paused to take a look at the mud which had been dug out the day before. She had gone there with the intention of collecting some earth to pile up around the roots of the trees. Having stopped to say hello to the boy with the catapult, she took a good look around her. Suddenly she sensed that there was something moving, something wriggling about in the black mud at the bottom of the narrow ditch.

A shiver ran down the young woman's spine.

'Aah! A snake!', she cried out, jumping back a few paces into the long grass around the edge of the ditch. Her eyes fixed upon the slimy coil lying in the ditch, before her. She hardly dare let it out of her sight, for fear of it slithering off and somehow managing to make a re-appearance magically in the undergrowth behind her. Her fear was an illogical one, but

terrifying nevertheless. As the young woman stared all the more closely, she realized that the coiled mass was not one snake but two.

Black mud in the narrow ditch ... *two snakes intertwined in courtship.*

The young woman was concerned that her movement might have disturbed the creatures' concentration, as they writhed around together in pleasure and she's often heard it said that if you interfered with snakes when they were courting you were simply asking for trouble.

The young woman was twenty five years old, and yet it was the first time she had seen snakes locked together in such a manner. She watched in silent amazement, hardly blinking. The muscular body of the male snake was splattered from head to tail with black mud. It repeatedly opened its mouth and closed it around the female snake's tiny head, tussling with it and grabbing it playfully between its jaws. Watching them, the young woman thought how lovely they were, as they tumbled around, playing the part of passionate lovers. Although her tiny, rounded body was exhausted, the female snake still shook her head clear of her partner's grasp. The male did not give up, but renewed his tight and powerful grip, so entwining them in a single strand, over a foot long. They then flopped back down into the mud at the bottom of the ditch and once more began to clasp and wrestle with each other with unbridled passion.

The patch of mud at the bottom of the ditch which the two snakes had taken for their own had turned into a little well, the size of a basin, about a span wide. And their amorous activities had given the mud at the edge of the well a shiny, polished complexion. The young woman felt uneasy. She did not know quite what to do - whether to carry on looking or to go away.

The big, male snake turned over on his side, so giving a clear display of the black and red stripes that lined his stomach. It made the young woman shudder. Her imagination ran wild, as she tried to picture what their offspring might look like; for the poor, female snake appeared to be of a different breed. Then she started to feel embarrassed at having watched the snakes and, for some reason (even she herself was not sure what), she abandoned her original intentions to dig up some earth, and chose, instead, to go straight home.

Shortly afterwards, however, she stole back out to take another look at the scene, the very private scene, one which sent a shiver down her spine each time she saw it. For she could not quite decide whether it was attractive or repulsive.

All day long, from dawn till dusk, a sound akin to thunder, but in shorter bursts and harsher in tone, issued forth from the military temple. Cremation services were always held each year at the temple for those who had lost their lives in battle and the time for this had come round again. The service stressed the evils of murder and war.

When the little boy had returned from hunting pigeons with his friends to find that his mother was still not back from the cremation, he grabbed his kite and ran out into the field.

*The couple in the ditch still hadn't finished; and it was probable that they had begun long before anyone had noticed them*

...

The wind blew the tall grass and wafted the soot from the cremations across the rice fields. The cool breeze was refreshing, despite being unclean. A handful of children, who had been flying their kites, stopped and walked over to see what was going on in the ditch. Their chatter was so loud that the young woman feared it might disturb the courting couple so she told the children to be quiet and then crouched down again, ready to stop them from harming the snakes. They did as they were told and, once they had got bored with watching, they all went back home. But the young woman remained there, alone, still watching, with the same sense of excitement that she had felt all day.

By dusk the mud had turned thick and sticky in the heat, so lending the snakes (which had been thrashing around together in it the whole day long) a heavy, slothful appearance. It was then that she began to notice something, something of which she could not quite be sure ... The big snake appeared to open wide its mouth, and suck the little one's head inside. The female snake's tiny, rounded body, which the young woman had seen resisting since morning, lay silent and motionless, without a glimmer of

defiance. It lay completely still and offered no response. And then the big snake made as if to swallow her down.

The young woman immediately felt a wave of nausea come over her, as if she herself had a snake lodged in her very own throat. What was happening? Why was the big snake swallowing the little one down? Surely it couldn't be so? It was as if the world had come to a sudden halt and gone into reverse - spinning back towards the dawn, and on and on, to the previous day.

The scene, which, throughout the day, had been marked by warm embraces, was now turned on its head, and transformed into one of astonishing terror. The young woman suddenly began to feel threatened, for she was surrounded in all directions by undergrowth, just the place in which vile snakes might hide.

It was then that she made a decision. Her eyes flashing with the hatred and revulsion that burns in Man's subconscious, she grabbed hold of a brick that was lying at hand. Not for a single moment did she think that she might miss....

'Smash!'

The great brick smashed down onto the snake, catching only its tail end in the soft, muddy earth. The wicked murderer was merely startled. It regurgitated its prey, yet showed no sense of its own guilt whatsoever.

She aimed another brick at the snake ... and missed!

The young woman's heart was racing, pounding away in her chest like a beating drum. Her hands and feet turned cold. No more bricks remained, but the battle was set to continue.

War gives slaughter some legality. And, by the same token, one can both slaughter, and be slaughtered, without reproof. Although the young woman realized her advantage, she was still not sure when or where her enemy might launch an offensive; the quicker she could overcome the snake the better it would be for her. She scrambled around in search of weapons and came across a shovel, just the right size for her grip. Then, leaping into the ditch, she smashed wildly at the snake, with all her might. She smashed at its body, its head and its neck, which was rearing up over the bricks, in readiness to attack.

Smash. Smash. She smashed the snake so hard that the shovel crumpled and lay broken in her hands. The vile snake was smothered in the earth, motionless, alongside the corpse of its hapless prey.

The young woman's pulse slowed and a warmth seemed to spread out to the tips of her fingers and toes. An air of safety prevailed as she glanced down at her hands - hands which had just dealt with the murderer.

But who was the murderer?

She turned to look around her. The air was sultry and close in the dim, evening light of March and she was dripping with sweat. She dared not clear the remains of the couple from view, dared not look at them again. Instead, she turned round slowly and trod carefully, as if in an effort to touch only that earth which was pure, the earth of a world which had never known fighting and death.

She was seized by a feeling of uncertainty about what she had done. She began to ask herself: Was it really right that this should have happened? *Who was the murderer?* She did not know, nor did she wish to know, despite thinking that, perhaps, she *had* once known, before all this had happened.

*Sounds could be heard from the temple - one akin to the lighting of flares, the other of firecrackers Both were from cremations of those who had lost their lives in battle.*

## APPENDIX SIX

### BETTER THE DEVIL ...

To set the scene:

My name is Sumit.

My wife's name is Sumitra.

We have two daughters, one named Phak, the other named Pla.

Our children mean the world to us. They both attend a state primary school, about three kilometres away, run by the Bangkok Metropolitan Authority: One is in the first year, the other in the third year. Sumitra and I go to work in the city so we entrust our two dear children to the school bus. Of course, we have to consider all possible outcomes; so we have taken out life insurance for our children, as school rules now dictate.

The school bus can't come right up to the house because the road is not good enough so the children catch it further down, by all the shops. We know everyone from round there, so Sumitra and I can rest assured they will not come to any harm.

At home there are just us and the children. We do not have lots and lots and lots and lots and lots of relatives, like they do in a certain, number one pop song.

In fact, darling little Phak and darling little Pla's grandmothers are both still alive, although they don't live in Bangkok. Nor has it ever crossed my mind to suggest that they should come and live with us, either. After all, once you invite one

you could end up with the lot. The whole extended family might descend on you - brothers, sisters, nephews, nieces, the lot! And I don't like having crowds of people round the house. My goodness, it's such a nuisance and so irritating. It's as if the place isn't your own any more. And there's no space for a bit of romance either. When *I* was a child *I* never lived with either of *my* grandmothers. Nor did I want to either!

To tell you the truth, I'm not really all that *au fait* with old folk!

The sound of our laughter, the sound of my wife, myself and the children (and us alone!) - now that's what I like. That's what I call a happy family. I'm not bothered if people want to comment that I'm rather Westernized in my ways, not taking in lots of relatives to live with us. To my mind a man's family is (or should be) *his* business. And no one else's! And if people want to think me selfish, and not really really really really very Thai in my ways, then they can just go on ahead and think it. I'm not the only child my mother (or my mother-in-law) has. Why don't the rest of her children ask her to live with them either? I send her money every month for living expenses. And what about my brothers and sisters? How come I'm always accused of being less Thai in my ways than they are.

I know Sumitra would like her mother to come and live with us, but she knows what I'm like so she's never bothered to ask me. That's one of the nice things about her - it's why we get along so really well together. And anyway, my mother-in-law likes fussing over little Pla so much that I really, really, really,

really couldn't stand it. I just don't like it when old people fuss over children. Whenever she comes down from the country, she goes off and buys some fish for our dinner. Look! I just don't like fish! I worry in case the bones get stuck in my little Pla's throat.

Once, we went to visit her up-country. It was before little Pla had started school. Sumitra put little Pla to sleep on a wooden board and then sat fanning her because it was so hot. I don't know what came over my mother-in-law but she went and got a cloth soaked in water and wiped Pla down with it while she was still fast asleep. And that wasn't all, either. She poured some water onto a board near to where my darling little Pla was lying asleep, wiped it down with a cloth and then picked little Pla up and laid her down to sleep on the new board she had cooled down. She mixed some talcum powder in some water and wiped it all over Pla's little body. But she didn't have time to finish, because my darling little Pla woke up and didn't feel sleepy any more. Sumitra never said a thing about it, and I was lost for words. I was so incensed I never wanted to visit her again. And I only ever visit my own mother once every few years.

Other people might see eye to eye with me, you never know. Every day, Sumitra and I work our fingers to the bone, and even then we still have to buy things on hire purchase. Life is work, work is money, money is money, oh lovely, lovely, lovely, lovely money. (My use of the word lovely four times shows just how hard I have to work, you see.)

Oh yes. Frankly speaking, I certainly don't have the time to go visiting old people any more often than I do ... and that goes for visiting my mother-in-law and my own mother too.

My children should be able to live without the presence of old people. And, on top of all that, I'm afraid that old people won't bring my children up the right way. They don't know anything about the progressive ways that are recommended in all the books on modern child care.

But then again, you see, my little Phak and little Pla have ended up making the acquaintance of an old lady who lives at the crossroads where the school bus stops. Her name is Granny Pho'ng. Every day the children say how kind Granny Pho'ng is. They go on about her all the time. She gives them some sweets in the morning and a drink on their way home from school. *And* she tells them fairytales. Every day I hear them going on and on and on and on and on about Granny Pho'ng, I feel like I almost know her myself. But the reason I don't stop them from seeing her is because she hasn't taken it into her head to come interfering with us at home. I caught a glimpse of her once and she looks clean enough.

Another reason I don't stop them seeing her is because she sells sweet-stuffed *rotis* and the children really, really, really, really love them.

You see, although I don't really like socializing much and don't want the burden of having old people around the place, the very minute I set eyes on Granny Pho'ng taking her tiffin carrier off to temple every Buddhist sabbath, or see her wrinkly old face

smiling at her little customers and her neighbours, she reminds me of my mother. Granny Pho'ng seems kind and humble, perhaps even rather lonely at times: the kids all tell me she lives on her own. She is about the same age as my mother. Whenever I see her I can't help thinking of my own mother. My mother likes going to the temple too. And she is kind too. And I suppose now she must be pretty lonely as well.

I haven't been to visit her for over two years now.

The last time I went it was the year of the Snake. There was a rumour going round that anyone born in the year of the Dragon, the Horse, the Goat or the Snake would have bad luck.

So as a result we had to make merit and donate the equivalent value in money to our own age plus a year, to the appropriate Buddha deity, depending on the day we were born.<sup>362</sup> It was supposed to guarantee you'd live a little longer. At least, that's what some people said. But nobody in my house was born in those particular years anyway, so we all got off scot free in any case. Soon afterwards it was rumoured that a terrible criminal was driving around in a car and capturing people in remote spots to suck their blood. Up until then there had been so many tales about people getting their blood sucked that it had become a pretty commonplace story. There was nothing new or exciting about it. But this time it was that much more exciting, because rumour had it that someone had stumbled across some pasty, dishevelled

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<sup>362</sup> There is a Buddha image, each in a different posture, for every day of the week.

corpse, which had been discarded on wasteland by the side of the road. The villain had a car with blacked out windows, and people also said that there had been a row of containers laid out in the car, for putting the blood in. Among all the various possible explanations, put forward by young and old alike, came speculation that the villain must have been a foreigner in search of blood to help his troops, who had been injured in fighting on the border. Others suggested it was a Thai who had deceived his compatriots and sucked their blood so he could sell it to the foreigners. Thai blood fetches a good price these days. Everyone trusts Thai blood for we're always hearing that song about how thick and of what excellent, top quality Thai blood is ... And it's free of AIDS to boot!

Sumitra and I are not the kind of people to believe in anything too easily. We listened to the suggestions just long enough not to appear unfriendly; and all the rumours made it perfectly clear that the blood sucker didn't care about whether his victims were adults or children.

Well I never! Containers full of Thai blood. Surely someone must be planning on opening a restaurant and using the blood to stir fry with beansprouts!

August the 21st, a day I shall never forget.

That was the day when I experienced the feeling of having no feeling at all, as if my brain had gone dead; like the pile of rubble that remains when someone has burnt down your home.

That evening Sumitra and I arrived back from work, laden with bags of sweetmeats for the children and bags of food. But we couldn't see either of the children. Normally little Phak was always the one to bring her little sister home and unlock the house, before we arrived. But that day the whole place was shrouded in silence and all I could hear was the beating of my own heart.

At first Sumitra and I took a good look around the house and its surrounds, round all the wells and ditches, and through the undergrowth. Although I was fairly certain in my belief that they wouldn't have been so naughty as to go and play in the water and then fall in, I still couldn't rule it out as a possibility. Children will be children. And the more you stick to modern methods of bringing them up to be free, then the more they stop wanting to be children any longer and see the attraction of all kinds of things.

Anyway, if the children *had* fallen into the water, where should I start looking? There were wells and ditches all over the place, and if the children had gone and drowned they weren't likely to pop up and tell you where to look, were they?

I sat there for quite some time, absolutely speechless and clutching onto my bag of sweetmeats, even though all the next door neighbours had come along to lend a hand in searching for the *corpses* of my children. Oh, how I loathe that word. No. No, I shan't use it. Even if the children have stopped breathing, I still won't use the word 'corpse' in reference to my dear little Phak and dear little Pla. Absolutely not!

All our neighbours went searching in the ditches; one in one ditch, a few in another. Like a misty vision from a bad, bad dream.

For quite some time I actually forgot my own wife. I didn't know what was going through her mind at that moment, what she was doing, or where on earth she had gone.

The next day we did everything we could think of. We reported the disappearance to the police; we went to consult the fortune teller; we asked the newspaper (the one with the colour front page) to cover it in the news; we even made a pledge to the spirits. Oh yes - even me, a thoroughly modern man, making pledges to the spirits. If all that remained of our children was their souls, then I begged them to come and tell us so in a dream, to tell us what on earth had happened.

Who was it who had treated my little Phak and little Pla as if they were worthless?

I will avenge them with my life.

I will avenge them.

Many days passed and we heard no news.

During this time I believe I heard that Granny Pho'ng had gone back home to the country. But why should I take any interest in the well-being, whereabouts or death of a little old lady? The thought of Granny Pho'ng lingered in my mind no longer than a

fraction of a second. She made me miss the children all the more because they loved sweet-stuffed rotis.

They loved Granny Pho'ng's sweet-stuffed rotis.

The mystery unfolds ...

Three weeks having passed me by in abject suffering, the mystery began to unfold. It was headline news in the newspaper (you know, the one with the colour front-page that goes about behaving as if it rules the world.) The police told Sumitra and I to go and collect our children from Had Yai, of all places.

Amidst the confusion of the other parents, not to mention our own relatives and all those who had gathered round to get a look in, came groans of pity and pleasure, blended with curses directed at the old woman-cum-childminder-cum-granny-cum-witch. The evil one.

'Mother. Help me please!' I cried. I know it seems a little strange and out of keeping with my character for me to say that.

I hugged little Pla close to my chest while Sumitra nursed little Phak and stared back in shock and resentment at old Granny Pho'ng, who was sitting there in a cell in Had Yai police station.

'Now where will you go, you old cow, when you want to make merit on the Buddhist Sabbath?'

Neither of us could say a thing. Nor could the children. All they could do was moan and blub as they hid their faces from

kind, old Granny Pho'ng who used to make them sweet-stuffed rotis.

Little Phak and little Pla have now made a safe return to our warm embrace. It's unbelievable. The minute we got back from Had Yai I proposed to my mother and my mother-in-law that if either of them wanted to come and live with us, all they had to do was say. We'd like an old person to come and keep an eye on all the other old people. We want the children's own grandmother as a childminder.

And now I am happy to go along with the Thai way of raising children.

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