

SĪBŪRAPHĀ AND SOME UPS AND DOWNS IN A LITERARY CAREER

by

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Kulāp Sāipradit, or "Sībūraphā" as he is perhaps better known, is one of the most important figures in the Thai literary world of this century. His claim to fame is threefold: his novel, Lūk Phū Chāi (A Real Man), first published in 1928, is often cited as the first Thai representative of the genre; he was also one of the first Thai writers to use fiction as a vehicle for social and political criticism; and as a journalist, he edited many of the most important daily newspapers in the early 1930s, as well as himself launching a number of magazines and a daily paper. But the popularity, success and influence which Sībūraphā achieved at an early stage of his career, were even from the beginning marred by setbacks. Some of his early ventures into publishing were to prove financially disastrous; he frequently ran into trouble for what he wrote, both with newspaper owners and the government; he was imprisoned twice, the second time on a charge of treason; and he eventually felt obliged to spend the last sixteen years of his life in exile. Recent years, however, have seen a revival of interest in Sībūraphā. While his earlier, more romantic works have enjoyed a steady popularity from the time when they were first written, the change in the political climate in the last decade has brought many of his later, more "political" writings - both fictional and non-fictional - back into circulation. His later short stories in particular, appear to have been reprinted several times - more than a quarter of a century after they were first written. Taking as their main themes social injustice and contemporary political issues, these stories have played a part in influencing a new generation of more socially aware writers. The main part of this paper will be devoted to a more detailed look at some of these stories.

Brief biographical details

Sībūraphā was born in Bangkok in 1905. He attended the prestigious Thepsirin School, and what little is known of this period of his life suggests that he came from a reasonably comfortable background. While he was at school,

he became interested in writing and journalism, and it was in this profession that he was to make a living, albeit at times a rather precarious one, for most of his life. On leaving school, he went to work on the Sēnā Sū'ksā magazine issued by the Department of Military Education. Here, it seems, he first began to develop a dislike for the military, apparently for their condescending attitude towards civilians working for them. He nevertheless reached the position of Assistant Editor before deciding to sit for the translator's exam at the Mapping Department. He duly came out on top, but was to suffer another reversal at the hands of the authorities, who, it is said, relegated him to second place because his family background was not quite acceptable. From this time onwards, Sībūraphā turned his back on the chance of a secure career in government service and instead pursued his own journalistic leanings. He soon rose to the position of Editor of Thai Mai, one of the largest Bangkok dailies of the period. However, he managed to offend the owners of the paper with an article entitled "Humanism" and was forced to resign. After some months of free-lance writing for a number of different Bangkok papers, he was invited to assume the editorship of Prachāchāt, a new paper launched in the wake of the 1932 coup. But despite its influential backers, Prachāchāt was not immune from the ire of the authorities; the paper was subjected to temporary closure on at least two occasions in 1933, and in 1936, Sībūraphā, by now disillusioned with the results of the 1932 coup, resigned in protest at continued government censorship of the press and interference in editorial policy. Following a year's study-leave in Japan, Sībūraphā launched a new daily paper, Suphāp Burut in 1938, using the same name as his short-lived but apparently successful magazine of almost a decade earlier. With his own mouthpiece, he no longer had to fear offending the sensibilities of newspaper owners. He was one of the few who dared to criticise the government over the Indo-China

incident of 1940; the following year he published a serialised history of the 1932 revolution which was subjected to fierce attacks over the government radio and eventually censored; and his vociferous opposition to Thailand's entry into the Second World War on the Japanese side finally led to his arrest and imprisonment, which only ended with a change of government in 1944.

In 1947, Sībūraphā left Thailand for Australia, where he was to stay for eighteen months. This period in Australia is generally regarded as a turning point in his literary career, for while studying Political Science in Melbourne, he appears to have become influenced by Marxist thought. The next three years were a prolific period with several non-fiction works and translations being published in addition to a steady output of short stories and a short novel. In 1952, however, he was arrested and sentenced to thirteen years and four months in prison; a newly-introduced anti-communist act provided the Phibun government with the opportunity to clamp down on anyone with suspected leftist sympathies, and Siburapha, who had been particularly active both in the Thai branch of the Stockholm-based Peace Movement and in his condemnation of Thailand's involvement in the Korean War, was clearly a prime target. He was actually released under a general amnesty in 1957 and a few months later received an official invitation to visit Russia, and then the following year, China. However, while he was in China, Sarit seized power in Thailand, and aware that he would almost certainly be imprisoned if he returned, Sībūraphā chose to seek political asylum. He remained in China until his death in 1974. Little is known of this last period of his life, although he did broadcast for the "Voice of the People of Thailand", the radio station of the Communist Party of Thailand which operated from within Chinese territory.

The stories

Between his return from Australia in 1949 and his arrest in November 1952, Sībūraphā published at least thirteen short stories. Since 1973, many of these stories have appeared in collected editions, often published by various groups of students. For example, a volume entitled Rūam Rū'ang San Rap Chai Chīwit Khōng Sībūraphā (Sībūraphā's Collected Short Stories for Life) (Sībūraphā 1974b) containing six short stories, first appeared in April 1974 sponsored by a group of students at Chiangmai University. It went through a second printing just two months later, and a third edition appeared the following year. The events of late 1976 delayed the fourth reprint, which didn't appear until 1979. This new **edition** included an additional four stories and a longer introduction, consisting of essays by three different critics (Sībūraphā 1979). Another collection in which seven of these same stories appeared, was also published in 1974, under the title of the first story in the collection, Khō Rāeng Nōi Thōe (Give Us a Hand), the sponsors of this edition being another group of students calling themselves Nāew Rūam Naksu'ksā Tōtān Čhakrawandiniyom² (The United Front of Students Against Imperialism) (Sībūraphā 1974a).

Social inequality and the sufferings of the poor provide the background for most of the stories in these collections. Sībūraphā frequently gives detailed descriptions of the low quality of life of the working class, the cramped and smelly living conditions, the long hours of physical toil and the ever-present threat of sickness with its consequent loss of wages. His workers - whether farmers or factory workers, samlor-drivers or servants - are **honest**, hard-working folk who are generous and reasonable by nature. Often the plot involves them in direct confrontation with an exploiting ruling class represented by snobbish aristocrats, hard-nosed businessmen and corrupt civil servants; and frequently, at one or more points in the story, the

working class hero steps forward to deliver the author's message in an eloquent and passionate appeal.

One of Sībūraphā's best known short stories is Khon Phūak Nan (Those Kind of People); the people of the title are the poor and the story itself, is essentially an attack on the attitudes of the privileged élite. The story consists of three separate incidents and the resulting confrontations that occur between M.L. Chōmchailai, an aristocratic but progressive-thinking girl of twenty and her snobbish, conservative parents. The story opens with her father trying to persuade her to continue her education in America, believing, as he does, that a Thai who hasn't been abroad for a part of their studies is a nobody in society:

He even went on to say that there was no need for a girl to study anything too demanding. So Chōmchailai ought to go to America for two or three years, study make-up and then come back with some kind of diploma and speaking English. That would be quite sufficient. (Sībūraphā 1979:78)

The idealistic Chōmchailai is less than excited at such a prospect and reminds her father that foreign-educated Thais have had little success in solving the fundamental economic problems of society.

The second incident, which is linked to the story by a flashback, occurs when the cook's little daughter becomes seriously ill. Chōmchailai begs her own mother to send the child to hospital in the family car, but her mother is horrified by such a suggestion:

Before when they were sick, if they needed to go to hospital, they didn't go by car, did they? So how did they manage to survive then without any great trouble? Tiu, (Chōmchailai's nickname) don't go getting yourself involved so much with those kind of people; they'll start forgetting themselves. And as for sickness, they've long been used to that, and they've got their own methods of treatment. If they hadn't, they'd all be dead by now. Just look at the people up-country; they've never seen a doctor or a hospital. How do they manage to survive for generation after generation? (Sībūraphā 1979:82)

The little girl dies a few days later, despite Chōmchailai secretly managing to get her to the hospital. Chōmchailai is convinced that if the child had

come from a wealthy family and received immediate medical attention, she need not have died.

Chômchailai's friendship with Bao, the son of the family's driver provides the final incident in which Sībūraphā attacks the attitudes of the wealthy élite. Having had little success in matching their daughter with a young man of suitable background, Chômchailai's parents are outraged to find their daughter spending time talking to the intelligent, industrious and idealistic Bao. He is ordered to leave the house, and the story ends with their farewells and the thought **flashing** through Chômchailai's mind that she might one day choose one of "those kind of people" to be her life's partner.

Like most of Sībūraphā's stories, Khon Phūak Nan deals in black and white categories; the characters are not subtly drawn, nor were they intended to be, for like the story itself, they exist solely for the purpose of conveying the author's views on social inequality. This story, nevertheless, remains one of the author's more satisfactory later works of fiction. It is economically written within a tightly constructed framework; the lapses and inconsistencies which often mar other stories dating from the same period are absent as are the lengthy monologues which are sometimes used to compensate for an inadequate plot.

While Chômchailai's parents are thoughtless, narrow-minded snobs, the rich man in Khō Rāeng Nōi Thōē is a much more striking personification of cold-hearted exploitation. While it might be argued that Chômchailai's mother's callousness stems from ignorance and thoughtlessness, the villain of the second story is an entrepreneur whose scornful disregard for the welfare of the poor derives from the low market value of their labour. Māēn, a poor farmer lies sick, and too poor to afford the medicines that will cure him, he sends his wife to the house of the wealthy businessman to ask for a loan. She is turned away empty-handed, despite the fact that Māēn and his parents

before him, have often been hired for odd jobs by the owner. Māen's friends gather together and raise the money and in due course he recovers. The story ends with a dramatic reversal of the situation, when the rich man's car gets stuck in the mud late one night as he is rushing his wife to hospital. It is now his turn to beg for assistance, and the author is clearly alluding to the potential power of a politically aware working class when Māen and his colleagues are at first inclined to leave him to solve his own problems. Sībūraphā, however, being very much a moral writer, allows his hero to relent and the grateful businessman's wife declares that he is nearer to Buddha than the rich such as herself and her husband.

An important theme running through this story is the gradual awakening of political consciousness among the poor. Anger at the rich man's attitude creates a feeling of solidarity among Māen's friends which enables them to raise the money for his medicine. Later, Māen, who had previously never thought very much^{about} the distribution of wealth in society, gives voice to the author's indignation in a lengthy speech to his friends:

Who is it who builds these houses...? Isn't it us poor people?
 ... Who is it, who grows rice to feed the whole country? And
 who saves us from starving to death? It's us poor farmers again
 ... Who is it, who builds the canals and roads? Isn't it us
 who build them? (Sībūraphā 1979:204-6)

Khao Tū'n (He's Waking Up) is another story in which the poor hero comes to question things that he has always taken for granted. This time it is a samlor-driver called Am and the story takes as its background the economic deprivation of the North-East and American military aid to Thailand. Am stops to listen to a group of fellow samlor-drivers discussing what they can do to help their friends and relatives back home. At first there seems to be little agreement as to what to do, and when one suggests that they make a small financial donation, he is immediately attacked for talking like a communist, while another suggests that it will get them into a "nice bloody mess" because it is tantamount to getting mixed up with politics.

At this point another driver steps forward and in rousing words demands:

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

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

We sweat and toil away in the scorching sun, wading through mud in the middle of paddy fields, exhausted almost to the point of dropping; the rice ripens and then do you know where it disappears to and where all the money goes? Why do we have to live on the breadline? I'm not clever enough to tell you how it disappears, but one thing I do know for sure is that our rice or our fruit can't just disappear into thin air. And I'd say that it flows into the hands of those people that you dream are going to help us. My God! You leave your parents, you leave the rice fields, none of you for very long, and then you just go and forget all about the past. (Siburapha 1979:223-4)

This lengthy speech has its effect and a collection is quickly made.

In making his own small contribution, Am finds a new sense of meaning in life, which is prompted by the discovery that he can be of genuine use to his fellow men. When his wife reminds him that he has promised to take the children to Sanam Luang to see American arms being paraded in a ceremonial handing over to the Thai government, he can no longer view the excursion in the same innocent light:

Do you want me to take you and the children to see them showing off the weapons they use for killing innocent people?... I don't want to see my children getting any pleasure out of weapons that are used for killing. I saw the pictures in the paper of those Koreans who got blown up by petrol bombs. I was horrified. Those pictures really shocked me with the cruelty of war. They made me hate war. I don't want to see any show of force in support of war - I'd like to see a show of force in support of peace.

(Siburapha 1979:226)

Writing at a time when Thai troops were fighting on the U.N. side in Korea, Siburapha scarcely endeared himself to the authorities with such outspoken anti-war sentiments; still less so with his ending to the story, in which

Am and his wife are about to join the Peace Movement - an organisation which the government was to claim was a mere façade for communist subversives. Indeed, a month after the appearance of Khao Tū'n in October 1952, Sībūraphā was arrested and shortly afterwards, sentenced to a prison term of thirteen years and four months.

Prakāi Mai Nai Dūangtā Khōng Khao (The New Light in his Eyes) which appeared some sixteen months before, covers much of the same ground as Khao Tū'n - that is, the selfishness of the rich, political awakening, the Peace Movement and the author's own opposition to Thai involvement in the Korean War. It lacks, however, something of the vitality and directness of the later story. For one thing, the alcoholic aristocrat who has fallen on hard times never seems a very plausible character for a radical conversion, and his credibility is further undermined when he is made the butt of some humourous remarks by the young factory workers who rescue him as he lies out in the rain in a drunken stupor. But Sībūraphā is not one to let a weak plot dilute his didactic mission, and he is always capable of using the single realistic episode to make his point about morality. In this story, as the old drunkard lies there, exposed to a torrential downpour, a wealthy young couple pull up briefly, and, assuming him to be a labourer, make derogatory remarks about the working class before driving on to their society function. The poor factory-worker pair are rather more concerned, but when they attempt to flag down a passing car in the hope that the driver will assist, they are reprimanded at gunpoint for stopping a VIP's car. When they finally decide there is no alternative but to spend the last of their own hard-earned money on hiring a samlor to get the stranger home, the samlor-driver, moved by their act of kindness, refuses to accept any payment.

In addition to the variation on the Good Samaritan parable, Prakāi Mai Nai Dūangtā Khōng Khao also provides an example of practical, grass-roots political activity; the two factory workers are already committed

peace activists, and they spend all of their free time collecting signatures for their anti-war petitions from people at bus-stops and in cinema queues. At the same time as putting across the anti-war message, the story aims to show that peace activists are not dangerous subversives, but ordinary, hard-working, compassionate people; and it implies, that by voicing their opinions, ordinary people might be able to influence government policy. If the old drunkard's signature on the peace petition - hence the "new light" of the title - seems scant reward for the workers' diligence, and a rather flat conclusion for the reader, the author has at least had the satisfaction of getting his message across, when the girl factory worker says,

I think that the people are beginning to wake up... Now when you ask them to sign the petition demanding the five great powers to make peace, you don't have to spend so long explaining as you did when there was the first peace petition. Most people seem well aware that for their own good, and for that of *their* family and country, they must do something or other in support of world peace. They've begun to realise that whether they choose peace or war is up to the people themselves, not simply a matter for two or three people to decide. (Sibūraphā 1979:240-1)

But commitment to high ideals and a desire to improve the lot of one's fellow men, are, by no means the exclusive preserve of the working class in Siburapha's stories; nor would it be fair to say that the author is primarily concerned with class struggle and strengthening class divisions. What does concern him, is that people, whether rich or poor, should behave in a virtuous and compassionate way towards fellow human beings. Chōmchailai, in Khon Phūak Nan, is a clear example of how a rich person should behave; and there are minor characters in a number of other stories, such as the man who gives ointment to Am in Khao Tū'n and the judge who helps pay for the tram-driver's son's education in Ai Nū Long Thāng ("Nipper's Got Lost"), who readily fulfil the traditional obligations of the more fortunate towards the less. This idea of the "virtuous man" is more fully developed in two stories, Nak Bun Čhak Chāntan ("The Saint from Shantung") and Khao Lū'ak Lāmbārēnē Nai Sayām (He Chose His Lambaréné in Siam); in both stories, the author avoids the

issue of class and class conflict, instead attempting to use his heroes to set an example to readers by their selfless devotion to others.

The hero of Nak Bun Čhāk Chāntan is Alan Norton, an Australian volunteer worker in North China; the story is told in the first person by Nātāyā or "Netti", a Thai girl studying medicine in Australia. She meets Alan when he returns home on a brief fund-raising mission, in which he gives talks on the plight of the people in China. The lecture, and Alan's subsequent conversations with Netti, provide the author with the opportunity to inform readers of the current situation in China, the hardships endured by the people there and the efforts of certain foreign individuals to alleviate their sufferings. But contrary to the author's intentions, the story holds the reader's attention, not because of the inspiring example that Alan Norton sets, but rather through the successful interweaving of a romantic plot. This is a quite deliberate device, employed in several of the stories, but judging from the title of this particular one, it seems to have achieved undue prominence. Netti, an apolitical and socially unaware student, is deeply impressed by Alan's idealism, and from there, in Siburapha's world, falling in love is only a step away. Netti's deliberate flouting of Thai social conventions - romance with a 'farang', inviting him to go dancing, and then as they walk home late at night, agreeing to his request to put his arm round her waist "for warmth" - while reflecting to some extent the author's own progressive attitudes towards women, cannot fail to excite the average reader's interest for less lofty reasons. Romance continues with Alan's "true confession" of how his engagement to Emma was broken off, and the amateur psychologists among Sībūrāphā's readers will be left wondering whether it was a **damaged ego** or genuine heartbreak that caused Alan the greater pain. Later, Alan and Netti discuss the nature of love, and it comes as no real surprise at the end, when she promises to take her medical skills out to China as soon as she has finished her studies, the implication being,

that they will marry and live happily ever after, caring for the poor in China. While the story does to some extent "reflect the spirit of internationalism making sacrifices for the disadvantaged", it drifts away from this theme and settles into a comfortable little romantic story that could scarcely offend anyone.

Aware, perhaps, that romance had led him to stray, Sībūraphā made a more disciplined attempt on the theme of virtue personified a few months later in Khao Lū'ak Lāmbārēnē Nai Sayām . As one might guess from the title, the life of Dr. Albert Schweitzer provides the inspiration for this story. After studying medicine for ten years in England, Pan, the hero, returns home determined to set up a hospital and free school in his native Phetchburi province, despite the prospects of a successful career in the civil service. Three years pass, and the narrator comes across Pan's name in the newspaper as the newly-elected M.P. for Phetchburi. At first, he assumes that Pan has simply abandoned his ideals in favour of the easy path to wealth and fame; later, when they meet, Pan assures him that his "Lambaréné" is making slow but steady progress, but that he himself has decided to enter politics in order to further spread his vision. The story ends with Pan expressing the hope that he will be able to fuse the qualities of two other doctors whom he (and Sībūraphā) greatly admired - Dr. Albert Schweitzer and Dr. Sun Yat-Sen - in bringing justice and an improved standard of living to the rural people.

With no female characters in the story, there is no danger of romance distracting the reader from the sight of virtue; however, it's never very exciting to read about pure unadulterated goodness, and with the social criticism somewhat muted, the distinctly vague nature of the Utopia that is supposed to be flourishing somewhere in Phetchburi and the over-lengthy and rather irrelevant biography of Albert Schweitzer, there is little to

really attract the reader.

Unlike Khao Tū'n and Prakāi Mai Nai Dūangtā Khōng Khao which are essentially attacks on very specific aspects of the government's policy, Sībūraphā turns his attention to traditionally respected institutions in the stories Kham Khān Rap (Answer My Call) and Kae Thī Phlat Fūng (The Sheep that Strayed from the Flock). The former consists of a discussion between two university students, Thanong and his girlfriend. As they walk together, hand in hand, he questions the purpose and élitism of the university; he sees it not merely as a sterile institution with inflexible rules which deny real freedom of thought, but as an integral part of a system which perpetuates social injustice:

As long as we think only of ourselves - that is by settling down to study so as to get a piece of paper to sell to the highest bidder in the market place for cheats and tyrants, we're praised for being nice, quiet, polite kids. But if we spend some of our time thinking about other people, thinking about the suffering, the oppression and the injustice that exist here and there, about the swindling, the bankruptcy of morality and the decay in our society, and we complain or speak out in all sincerity about our dissatisfaction, then we're met by reproachful looks and accused of being disruptive kids and real trouble-makers. (Sībūraphā 1979:225)

The story ends with Thanong revealing that he will drop out of university, just two months before his final examinations and try to find a "new way"; marriage to his girlfriend is to be postponed, although she does not appear unduly upset by this, nor, despite the conventional things she has been saying, does she seem unwilling to wait until he has sorted himself out.

Kae Thī Phlat Fūng deals with the problem of foreign-educated students who return home full of knowledge and ideals, eager to play a role in the development of the country, only to bump up against an inflexible bureaucracy. The story opens with a female first person narrator (who subsequently disappears altogether from the story) sailing back to Thailand after studying in Australia; the Norwegian captain of the boat tells her of two other young

Thai students he had known, who had also studied in Australia. The first, Hathai, arrived home to find his fiancée on her death-bed, and as a result, threw himself, body and soul, into improving worker's conditions by establishing cooperatives. He ran into trouble with the authorities, was arrested, and by the time his name had been cleared, he had spent six months in prison. During this time, much of his work was undermined, and as a result, Hathai, the sheep who strayed from the flock by trying to fight against the system, has become disillusioned and turned to drink. Anop, likewise, is an idealist when he returns, but he quickly discovers that his colleagues in the department where he works are too busy with their own petty jealousies, back-stabbings and internal intrigues to take any interest in developing the country. A senior colleague, in advising Anop to be a little more flexible and realistic in his attitudes, sums up the author's criticisms of the bureaucracy:

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

(Sibūraphā 1979:106)

Anop gradually comes to see the futility of trying to change things by himself and joins the flock. The Captain bumps into him one evening in a nightclub and notices that Anop no longer talks of improving his country, but only of enjoying himself in extravagant style. The story ends on a profoundly pessimistic note, with the Captain consoling Anop:

It's not your fault, Anop. I understand only too well.
But I hope you won't go too far. (Sibūraphā 1979:111-2)

Some final observations

Sibūraphā's main aim in the short stories discussed here was clearly social criticism. His problem, like that of any fiction writer with a consciously didactic mission, was how to dress his message in a sufficiently palatable form for it reach beyond a merely partisan audience. The use of contemporary issues in itself guaranteed to some extent the ordinary reader's curiosity; but a much more conscious device is the author's use of romance, sometimes merely hinted at, at other times an integral part of the plot. In Khon Phūak Nan, for example, the suggestion of romance between Chōmchailai and Bao - a potentially classic example of the rich girl-poor boy theme - is subdued and restricted to a romantic thought flashing through the girl's mind at the very end. Neither Prakāi Mai Nai Dūangtā Khōng Khao nor Kham Khān Rap involve much in the way of plot development, and to compensate for this, the author gives us two young couples - the factory workers and the students - knowing that ordinary readers are automatically curious about what goes on between boys and girls, even if it amounts to very little. Indeed, in the latter story, even the reader totally uninterested in the shortcomings of tertiary education is likely to find some incentive to read on to the next page where there is always the hope that the couple's flouting of convention and the boy's rebelliousness may lead to interesting consequences. In Nak Bun Chāk Chāntan, the romantic element clearly got out of control and dominated the whole story. In Kae Thī Phlat Fūng it is confined to a single tear-jerking episode encapsulated near the beginning, in which Hathai's fiancée dies just hours before his boat docks; criticism of government inefficiency is forgotten for several pages as some standard romantic conventions are introduced; first there's the rather whimsical touch of asking the girl to wear the same dress she had worn on the day of departure five years ago; then there are the premonitions of impending doom - a ghostly sighting on

board the ship, the family waiting at the quayside dressed in black, and the mistaking of the younger sister for the dead fiancée; and then finally, the death-bed scene, complete with ice. Of course, there is a practical side to this which goes beyond merely catering to popular taste, for if we shed a tear in sympathy with Hāthai at his loss, then perhaps we will sympathise too, with his ideals, cooperatives and all, and not jump to hasty conclusions that he's a communist trouble-maker.

But in spite of such attempts to cloak his message in respectable fictional guise, Siburapha's later short stories frequently fall victim of their author's own clumsiness or carelessness, doubtless due in no small part to the pressures of meeting deadlines and the numerous other projects in which he was involved at any one time. Thus, for example, the author digresses for almost a third of the story on the life and career of Schweitzer in Khao Lū'ak Lāmbārēnē Nai Sayām; we see apparent confusion in the treatment of time (or at best, unconvincing use of the "flashback" technique), notably in Kae Thī Phlat Fūng and Khao Tū'n, and in the former, the author changes from first to third person narration without warning (and one suspects, without realising), the female "I" of the first two or three pages disappearing never to return.

One could continue to list similar inconsistencies, but these would not help to explain why these later short stories have enjoyed, relatively speaking, considerable popularity in recent years. Doubtless, the "forbidden fruit" factor and the controversy attached to the author's name play their part; but the fact remains that even in the least tightly constructed stories, the author's voice of idealism carries an appealing freshness and vitality which enables readers to overlook or often simply not notice the literary qualities of the story. This has led, or perhaps more accurately, is leading to a reassessment of Sībūraphā as a writer. His traditional

reputation as a popular romantic novelist is now, as a result of the widespread availability of his later works, being matched by his renown as a social critic and writer of "political fiction". As a result, the name "Sībūraphā" has become almost synonymous with progressive ideas to the extent that it seems to have become something of a symbol in itself. Student groups have sponsored reprints of his works primarily out of sympathy with his ideals, and the dedication pages of many of these recent reprints bear inscriptions such as, "For Sībūraphā" as an act of homage by the sponsors. The 1975 edition of "Behind the Revolution" goes a stage further in linking Sībūraphā's name in a triple dedication with the names of Khr̥ōng Chantawong, a left-wing politician executed as a communist in 1962 and Čhit Phūmisak, a left-wing intellectual murdered in 1966.

Despite the fact that he is no longer deemed a danger to society, Sībūraphā continues to be a controversial figure in modern Thai literature; indeed, he is likely to remain, for some time, the rope in a literary tug-of-war between two groups of critics, one emphasising the artistic merit of his early novels, the other stressing the significance of his post-Australia works.

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NOTES

1. For fuller biographical details in English, see Batson 1981.
2. The examples are taken from works available in the library of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London; this is not intended to be a comprehensive listing.
3. Sathīan Čhantimāthōn in Sībūraphā 1979:35

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