

a giant explosion on the pad,
a wheel bouncing down the road



Dream Central

THERE ARE PLACES AND TIMES that resonate for reasons unbeknownst to the conscious mind, yet continue to exist as focal points for the unconscious beyond daily understanding. Which is to say, I have no reckoning on why the Thames Valley Bus Station in Reading, as I experienced it in my daily journey to school in the mid-1970s, still has a regular part to play in my dream activity to the present day.

In the 1970s it was the half-way point of the morning journey where I would get off the Alder Valley number 43 from Woodley only to run up the hill to catch the next Reading Transport number 25 to Southcote, and then repeat the journey in reverse in the late afternoon. Missing the bus home meant a half-hour wait, if the buses were operating on schedule which was only 50% of the time, so I wasted a lot of idle hours there.

The place was constantly noisy from the engines of a dozen buses idling in their diagonal bays while they collected passengers. The functional 'architecture' surrounding this open space had to be as minimal as possible to allow air currents to disperse so much leaded exhaust, but it really wasn't sufficient: the noise plus the stench of fumes was sometimes overwhelming, so I'd often walk a quarter of a mile to the far end of Broad Street, stopping at the science fiction section of WHSmiths along the way.

Certainly there were occasions in the late 1970s when I was there at less busy times late at night, catching the legendary Last Bus to Woodley that was chock full of

drunk kids and wary adults. Eventually the bus station fell into disuse as the Alder Valley Bus Company went bust, and for what may have been three whole decades it sat empty and mostly unused, serving only as a short cut on my way to the train station through its cavernous interior, while city planners scratched their heads at a loss for what to do with it. It was finally torn down in 2016.

It is perhaps a convenient if unusual place to be the location for so much dream logic. It has served as a launch pad for rockets of the British Interplanetary Society, a storage depot for Russian nuclear weapons, a holding cell for escaped headmasters. I have hunted dinosaurs there, decked out the concrete stanchions in oil paints of rainbow colours, and watched a flock of sheep chase a pride of lions from the entrance to the exit. Found all my lost homework there, lost all my friends to plague, discovered God hiding out in fear of his creation. Odd that when I dream of it there are never any buses anymore, just empty space, as if it is nothing more than a blank slate, a tabula rasa for a dreaming mind untethered to reality.

Strange stories are still acted out there, and it now serves as a non-existent, unoccupied amphitheatre for my ageing psyche. As to why, it's probably for the same reason that I repeatedly dream of that school I journeyed to that was also torn down in 2016: I have unfinished business. I have no certain knowledge of what that business may be, but in the meantime I still do like to visit this place, whatever use to which it's being put.

a giant explosion... [the white notebooks #12] April 2561 / 2018

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above: Thames Valley Bus Station, Reading, 1960s, photographer unknown



Brave New World: A Revisitation

A couple of months ago I read a naïve and clumsy short story that is best described as “early John Russell Fearn”: ‘Superhuman’, from *Tales of Wonder* #1 in 1937. It’s not been reprinted much – only twice in fact in seventy-seven years, once in *Startling Stories* in 1941 and once in a cheap Wildside Press ebook collection in 2014, which is where I encountered it. It concerns the deliberate experimentation of a conscienceless scientist on his own newborn son in order to create a new giant master race. I’ll summarise: the son has his pituitary glands boosted, grows far more than normal in physical size and intellect, and along with his similarly enhanced girlfriend (who happened to live next door) they lay waste to London with mighty scientific weapons and giant fists, all in the name of power and the domination of the entire human race. I won’t spoil the ending, but you may be pleased to know there is one.

There were many SF stories written in the late 19th and early 20th centuries that concerned the fashionable idea of human perfection in the form of a master race; some of them may even have been good stories, or at least better than Fearn’s heavy-handed offering. But none surpassed the reach and popularity of Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World*, published in 1932, which went on to become (as Wikipedia accurately puts it) “one of the most significant novels of the 20th century.” To be fair to Fearn, he was only providing entertainment for pubescent teenage boys whereas Huxley’s tale of human perfection took on a less physical yet rather more sinister form, wrapped in the sugar coating of humour, rather more rigorous extrapolation, and far better storytelling.

I’m sure that when reading *Brave New World* at age eighteen, many of its subtleties must have passed me by. Back then, I knew nothing about Huxley and probably only read it that first time (in 1978) because it seemed to be on everyone’s shortlist of Science Fiction That Must Be Read, and I obligingly followed suit. I know now that what I certainly *did* miss was the feeling that Huxley, while exploring his imagined future with a sometimes fearsome zeal, perhaps also viewed what he was creating with increasing degrees of concern as the story grew more fully formed, between April and August of 1931. But to try to tell these moments apart means picking at the morass of Huxley’s complex personal politics, something I doubt I will ever desire or need to do.

A more informed re-reading of *Brave New World* in my late 40s was by far the better experience, and the

modern reader is also lucky to have an entire appendix to the book to explore, often bound as a separate work, in the shape of *Brave New World Revisited*. Neither of these works, however, have ever provided me with a sense of joy or hope for humanity, no matter how hard Huxley may have tried to do so in entertaining his reader. If the reader knows little or nothing about how Huxley came to write it, then what the reader gets is a straightforward yet darkly comical story about the genetic perfection of the human race, with caveats. That’s certainly how I must have seen it at first encounter. But as a re-read, it was something much more. *Brave New World* is nothing less than an excursion into a human termitarium, with horror suspended. Whatever repulsion the reader may feel is not something that Huxley actually went out of his way to elicit, but his awareness of the more repellent side to this utopia meant that they also sat uncomfortably alongside his unabashed enthusiasm for some of the other ideas he was actively championing, such as eugenics.

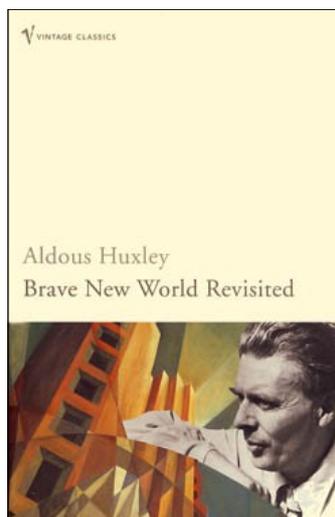
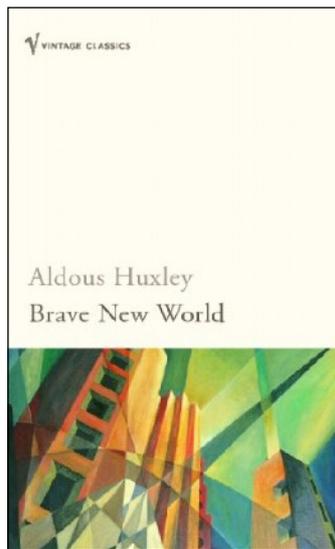
The novel’s introductory tour of the Central London Hatchery and Conditioning Centre sets an uneasy tone, but after the positive aspects of this mostly happy consumerist society are brought out for view as well, that unease then gets dismissed – or at least diluted as if with a heavy dose of *soma* – to calm the hackles that arise from a closer inspection of the structure of this seemingly perfect society. Early in the novel my attention became divided: it’s not particularly the minutiae of their daily existence in London that I remember, or Bernard Marx’s difficulty in fitting in with his society’s preconditioned obsession with casual sex, or his holiday in the New Mexico savage reservation and the Tarzan-like introduction of John to civilisation, nor even John’s ultimate fate. It’s the progress of Huxley’s ‘utopia/dystopia’ tightrope-walk that’s the single memorable thing about the novel, because the ambivalent questions he asks about this particular utopia are ones he certainly had to ask of himself while in the act of creating it.

Brave New World is deliberately dismissive of some of H.G. Wells’s utopian ideas of a perfectly functioning society, though it seems as if Huxley just replaces them with some pet utopian theories of his own. Eugenics, for one, plus his contempt for parliamentary democracy and his belief that society should be reorganised as a pyramid of mental abilities controlled by an elite caste of highly intelligent experts, able to coerce

the rest of the sub-normal human race into doing whatever they deem necessary. A ruling class, in other words, but a ruling class in a world where the organisational perfection of the human race has largely been achieved, with the by-product that war has effectively been abolished. That in itself might appear a worthy utopian aim, but many of the means by which it's achieved are problematic and objectionable ideas to consider with much seriousness today, though inevitably they do still surface from time to time around the world. When *Brave New World* was written, the ideas and political extremes of both left and right also had a more vibrant currency than they have had in the intervening years until the present day. Huxley's fear, shared by many, was of a collapse of civilisation more complete than the destructiveness of the "war to end all wars" that had been fought a little over a decade earlier, and many felt some drastic measures were needed to prevent such a collapse, one that, even after a second World War, has still never really come about. The view shared by Huxley and others was that humanity at large simply wasn't able to govern itself properly, and it had to be relieved of the burden it was clearly incapable of carrying. But who to appoint to lead? Well, who else but a biologically-created elite. Cue yet another hopeful, stillborn utopian ideal...

I was also not aware, before, how much the plot of *Brave New World* was influenced by Huxley's friendship with D. H. Lawrence, whose retreat to a more 'earthbound' life in New Mexico mirrors the pilgrimage made there by Bernard Marx with his on/off girlfriend Lenina. The two writers seemed well-placed, both geographically and philosophically poles apart in relation to each other, and I expect that while considering how *Brave New World*'s two mutually incompatible ways of life rubbed up against each other, this forced Huxley to take a questioning second look at the ethics of the scientific ideas he was championing. By the end, despite the necessity of the final bravura justification of their utopian/dystopian way of life by the Controller Mustapha Mond, Huxley in the end seems to come down on Lawrence's side despite all that has gone before.

Useful for all this consideration were the extras included in my 2008 Vintage edition: first is Huxley's foreword to the 1946 edition, in which he makes but one scant reference to eugenics yet glaringly fails to mention his enthusiasm for the idea at the time of writing, though this perhaps comes under the aegis of his opening sentence, "Chronic remorse, as all the moralists are agreed, is a most undesirable sentiment." Secondly, David Bradshaw's introduction teases out rather well the assortment of threads that must have interwoven in Huxley's head at the time of writing, and this is summed



up well with the words: "...it seems more likely that the composition of *Brave New World* proved so problematic for Huxley ... because he was unsure in his own mind whether he was writing a satire, a prophecy or a blueprint." Certainly, considering Huxley's pro- stance on some of the ideas he offers but not others, this sums up the novel's ambivalence rather well: sometimes you can never quite tell whether he's being serious or satirical, as these modes are quite effectively homogenised into the lightly comical style he adopted for the novel. But even with all the good stuff that it has going for it the bravely uncertain nature of Huxley's direction while writing, the mountain of food-for-thought he presents, and the impressive world-building which alone justifies its enduring reputation I still find this an awkward, hard book to like.

There is more to consider in the light of subsequent happenings that had an influence on Huxley's later appreciation (or should that be deprecation?) of his own work. The two relevant events that separate the publications of *Brave New World* and *Brave New World Revisited* in 1958 were the Second World War and the publication of George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in 1949, a novel which *Revisited* is in part a response to. Huxley's admiration for Orwell's novel is unbounded: he describes it as "magnificent", and often he contrasts and

compares the two as if to point out, unnecessarily, that *his* dystopia and by 1958 the optimistic aspects of *Brave New World* had been mostly discredited at least wasn't as evil as Orwell's dystopia. Huxley mostly takes a contemporary look at many of the themes of *Brave New World*, and it often reads as if he wishes he were wiser in hindsight. Unfortunately this long coda to the novel doesn't really inform today's reader with much that isn't already at the forefront of current human concerns and can be better explored elsewhere: overpopulation, state propaganda, the over-organisation of society, dictatorships, chemical persuasion, education for freedom. And of course there's eugenics: he tries to dodge this bullet abysmally, since his enthusiasm for it had long been on record and, as he conveniently *avoids* pointing out, the Nazis had since done more than just think about it. He cops out with "We are on the horns of an ethical dilemma, and to find the middle way will require all our intelligence and all our good will."

Whereupon appreciating Huxley then becomes a bit of an ethical dilemma in itself. You know, separating the art from the artist, and all that. *Revisited* doesn't particularly endear to me Huxley any better than *Brave New World* did, though it does show he continued to think about and question the same concerns despite never really coming up with answers that were useful to anyone other than himself.

Markers

lightly edited



WAHF...

Simon Bradshaw, David A. Hardy, Earl Kemp, Kate Orman, Alan Sullivan and Taral Wayne.

IAN SORENSEN, Motherwell, Scotland; 7 January 2018

I was struck by your description of the photo you wish you had of Randy because I've got one containing many of those elements taken in the car park of the Corflu hotel in Seattle in 2009. It's my favourite image of him. I'm just sorry it can't be as accurate as Banks's description of the cover of *Look to Windward* but I also think that was a later addition.



I liked your descriptions of meeting the rich and famous. I've always felt that meeting authors at conventions, people once thought of as remote and Olympian when a reader, has cured me of any feelings of awe when I see a celebrity. I like to think I speak to everyone the same way and have found that the few celebs I've met outwith fandom seem to appreciate a less fawning conversation than they usually get. (I also got a photo of George Martin in the green room at an Eastercon when he insisted I take a pic of him with one of the pretty actresses from *Game of Thrones* he had with him.)

Please keep sending *The White Notebooks*. You may even encourage me to go back to reading SF...

MARK PLUMMER, Croydon, England; 7 January 2018

Just yesterday I was finalising my fanzines-received list for 2017, adding in the last few items that have been sitting on my desk for the last couple of months. I've kept a list since 1998 when the first item was *Ansible* #126 on 8 January and the yearly total was 165. It's been a while since we've seen those sorts of numbers here. True, my system isn't entirely consistent year on year. In the early days I was routinely printing a large part of the efanzines output but now I rarely bother, and only count electronic fanzines directly emailed to us. So that partially explains why prior

to 2010 the annual total was always at least 100 and occasionally passed 200 whereas since 2010 it's only once gone through the 100 barrier.

Even so, 2017 which started with *The White Notebooks* #7 only saw 47 items, the lowest annual total since records began. A few once frequent regulars have now fallen by the wayside, at least to the extent that I rarely if ever see them. It's been a while since we had one of Steve Sneyd's handwritten *Data Dumps* (although I've seen something in *Ansible* about that), and the regular flocks of *Vanamondes* have diminished to the occasional rider with another piece of communication. Only Graham Charnock flies the flag for frequency.

Still, 2018's got off to a lively start such that *TWN* #11 arrived here on 7 January and still managed to be the fifth fanzine of the year. Not that I'm going to start bandying around words like 'renaissance'. We probably won't see anything else until the clocks go forward.

Still, good news that you're hoping to be in Toronto. We'll be there, all booked up and everything. I just checked the website and your not listed as a member, although I'll take from that the positive interpretation that maybe more people are going than are shown on the current membership list. Only 30 names so far, and of those only 21 attending including one chap I've never heard of, Kevin Grücock, although he's almost certainly not the wildlife photographer from Yorkshire who dominates a Google search for that name.

And the usual good selection of stuff in *TWN* #11, including that fine remembrance of Randy. Living in London, it's not uncommon to pass moderate celebrities in the street even if it's not an everyday occurrence. Often, especially with the lesser names, I find the inclination to stare comes because I know it's somebody I recognise and I'm trying to figure out whether it's somebody I do actually know, like somebody I once worked with rather than, say, the chap who does the weather forecast on BBC News 24. Fandom also creates a degree of immunity in that it's fairly routine to at least know people who are/were friends with moderate celebrities like George R.R. Martin, Neil Gaiman and Terry Pratchett. Not that I'd claim any genuine acquaintance myself but one of my tell-us-something-about-yourself-that-others-don't-know anecdotes for workplace workshops and training courses is 'The time I had to take George R.R. Martin out of a crowded party to a signing session where hardly anybody wanted him to sign anything' story from 1993.

I've just looked up a picture of Len Webster, author of *What We'll Leave Behind*. The name certainly creates a false impression. Without your explanation I'd probably have pictured a middle-aged white bloke with a moustache. Somebody a bit like Van Wyck Mason, going

by the photo of him on the Fantastic Fiction website.

~ Believe it or not there is another Len Webster who has written about Thailand, and he possibly does fit your preconception of him. (See the *TLS* accompanying this issue). He had a short story 'In Touch with the World' published in the defunct newspaper/magazine *The European* back in 1995, which for some obscure and forgotten reason I cut out and kept on file, because more than a decade would elapse before I had any motive to move to Thailand. Alongside the story his bio says "Len Webster was born and brought up in the English Midlands. He has worked as a journalist and a teacher in the UK, Turkey and Singapore. He spends a lot of his time in the north of Thailand." After some online searching I see he has a profile at Goodreads that inconveniently overlaps with the Thai/Australian Len Webster, and he has published a memoir/short story collection *Lone Wolf* about growing up in Smethwick in the West Midlands (plus he has other books of UK- and Singapore-based fiction). Never the twain shall meet, I expect. ~

DOUG SPENCER, Sheffield, England; 7 January 2018

I have not known what to say, or what to write, about Randy Byers. I couldn't find words I liked.

"Sooner or later," I thought, "someone will find the right words and set them down somewhere. Probably in a fanzine."

The White Notebooks #11 arrived, and there on the front page you've written "...and as a result I have probably felt more kinship with Randy than any other American fan".

I like those words, I like them a lot. Thank you.

STEVE JEFFERY, Kidlington, England; 9 January 2018

It was enormously sad to hear of Randy's death at the end of last year. It's obvious just how much he will be missed by anyone who knew him.

Not sure I saw the last issue, but I would definitely have been caught by your re-purposed Delany story title (I think I would also have remembered or commented on the *Struwelpeter* illo). Odd and enigmatic titles are some of the things that first drew me to Delany's stories. I'm a sucker for anything with a weird title – so something like 'Time Considered as a Helix...', or 'We, In Some Strange Power's Employ...' will have an almost magnetic attraction in same way as a book with a title like *St Lucy's Home For Girls Raised By Wolves*. I mean, how could you not want to pull something with that title off the shelf and take it home?

I re-read, or at least I started to re-read, *Stars In My Pocket Like Grains of Sand* (Look mum, he's doing it again!) last year, chasing down a thread about the use of gender pronouns in sf that was prompted by reading Anne Leckie's 'Ancillary' novels. Delany has a rather interesting and possibly unique variant on how he (or his characters) use 'she' and 'he'.

Can I add my ha'p'orth of praise for William M. Breiding's *Rose Motel: Fanzine Pieces 1980-2014*, which you mentioned at the end of #10, and several people comment favourably in the letters columns to #11? It's a very impressive and enjoyable collection, and I was surprised

and then hugely pleased that William sent me a copy.

We used to drink Red Mountain coffee, but now I alternate between freeze-dried Gold Blend (or super-market own-brand variants) and filter/cafétière ground coffee depending on time and inclination. The vilest instant coffee I have tasted though, must be a jar of Folger's instant coffee crystals I bought in a moment of desperation in the US. I went out and bought a coffee maker the next day.

What is cold brewed coffee? Am I missing something?

DAVID REDD, Haverfordwest, Wales; 9 January 2018

Seems we all wish to remember Randy Byers specifically as we knew him in person, however briefly, rather than through his works. That's how he was. You mention a mental picture of him on your Seattle trip as summing up his character, and similarly I think Graham Charnock got it right in *Vibrator* by simply sharing a photo of Randy's smile.

Famous Writing Persons – to barge in or not to barge? Neatly done on the George R.R. Martin tactic! I still regret having seen Peter Hamilton taking breakfast one Novacon when I thought about thanking him for all the smooth reading he'd given me, but didn't. Surely he had a more relaxing start to his day for being uninterrupted.

In fact a fair bit about books and authors this time. I see the Singapore Writers Festival still has a bookroom, a feature going out of fashion in the post-cultural West?

Your review of Van Wyck Mason reminds me that Simon Harvester must have tackled Thailand somewhere in his old 'Asia in Turmoil' thrillers, but I don't recall it. Harvester could embed really empathetic observation of eastern cultures into amazingly mechanical pulp plots, and I just wondered if you'd been able to assess anything of his from your own experience. (This authenticity query about 'Simon Harvester' keeps recurring to me even though I haven't read anything of his for decades. Forgotten his real name too.)

~ I've done a quick scan of his titles and he seems to cover just about everywhere in Asia except Thailand. Perhaps there's something hidden away in one of the less obvious titles. ~

Corflu should be my ideal convention, but missed chances to attend and now never will, through Circumstances. However I still treasure a San José card from Ron Bennett inscribed with BNF signatures such as Robert Lichtman and Dick Lupoff.

Sorry can't help British Space Opera (haven't read enough of it; and a family matter has put other projects on hold), but I do look forward to seeing the result.

JERRY KAUFMAN, Seattle, WA; 17 January 2018

I enjoyed the new issue, "Ashore no more..." I don't know the music of Suzanne Abbuehl, so I've put *The Gift* on through Spotify.

Yes, we're missing Randy. I've been digging through boxes of fanzines, looking for his articles for Luke

McGuff to consider for a Byers collection he's going to publish. I think I found one thing in an old *Zoo Nation*, and a fanzine review column in some other zine reminded me that Suzle and I published a piece by him in *Littlebrook #2*. By the by, I believe the license plate of the PT Cruiser you mention, "RESIST," was Denys Howard's idea. (In fact, it may actually be Denys's car.)

I don't believe I've had the opportunity to not disturb any famous writers outside of a convention. However, Suzle and I were virtuous after Corflu last year, when we spotted Patton Oswalt in an airport Starbucks where we got a snack. I did want to say hello and praise his multiple *Agents of SHIELD* characters.

I don't have any specific comments on the rest of the issue, so a general one, to wit, I enjoyed reading about your experiences and Thai reading.

Abduehl's music is pleasant and dreamy, but as I'm writing this and not listening to lyrics, I'll have to play the album again sometime.

See you in Toronto, by gosh.

JOHN BRAY, Orpington, England; 25 January 2018

I always envy people who can get on with strangers socially. I'm happy to ask questions after a talk, but not sure I'd buy them a drink at the bar. Fame always seems odd to me, I guess with my public school/Oxbridge background I could have pushed to interact with the famous more, but, like my old clothes, I prefer my old friends to cocktail parties.

I only met Randy once, for an afternoon in a bar, but I'm sure I could have spent many more with him.

JOSEPH NICHOLAS, Tottenham, England; 13 Feb 2018

At last to respond to the various issues of *The White Notebooks* you've been sending me—five in all, from #7 in January last year to #11 last month. It says much for my response to fanzines—yours isn't the only title that has been languishing in my in-box for many more months than I care to count—that I have to leave London behind and come to Albany in Southwest Australia, where I can be free of the distractions of home and thus free to concentrate on other things. Such as, er, lying around the back lawn in the sunshine, toasting my buns while scrutinising an improving history text (I brought eleven books with me on this occasion, and in less than three weeks have knocked off seven of them). But in a couple of days we leave Albany for a jaunt over to the Eastern States, first to visit sister-in-law Zena and family in Sydney and then down to Melbourne for a meet-up with various friends for a 70th/75th birthday party—after which it's back to the UK for me while Judith stays on in Albany for another three weeks. (Somebody has to go home to pay the bills and start sowing seeds for the 2018 gardening season, after all.) Which means that if I don't write you a letter of comment now, before social busy-ness intervenes, the moment will slip away and it may not be until I get back to London that I'm able to pick up the keyboard again. (Paying the bills and sowing seeds permitting, of course.)

"Oh look," begins your piece on the Genuine Thai Fake Benjanun Sriduangkaew in #9, "It's this thread

again." But all of it was completely new to me, possibly because much of it took place on LiveJournal, which I have not frequented for many a moon. (I had quite forgotten the person's reference-in-passing in the first issue of *Big Sky*.) Indeed, I'm a little surprised to hear that people are still using LiveJournal—I was a big user of it, in the early noughties, but then I took my eye off it for a few months and when I looked back I discovered that many of the people on it (that is, many of the people I counted as friends) had migrated to the-then-invitation-only Dreamwidth in protest at LJ's inconsistent application of some rather vanilla sexual censorship rules, followed by its sale to the Russians which seemed to mark its end as a platform of choice for western bloggers. For a time, I continued to post stuff to LJ that was too long for (and linked from) Facebook, but less and less frequently; and eventually stopped looking at it altogether. My LJ probably still exists (at any rate, I haven't deleted it!), but since I've saved all of what I consider my worthwhile posts in raw text format elsewhere I feel no particular urge to check back on it. I also do not feel—having read your piece about the Genuine Thai Fake Benjanun Sriduangkaew—any particular urge to go in search of the original material and read any of it myself. Ordinarily, one likes to rake over nasty stuff such as this just to check that it's as bad as everyone says (well, *I* like to rake over, etc. etc.), but life's too short. (Especially as we leave for Sydney in a couple of days.) I would only say that in my view someone who names themselves or their blog "Requires Hate" is deliberately looking to cause offence, and thus should be denied any attention at all (and inter alia thereby have conferred on them the oxygen of publicity that they clearly crave).

Also in #9, you have a lengthy and thoughtful piece about guns, in which you say that you won't buy your children toy guns. An excellent move—although when I was growing up, toy guns were kinda mandatory, because it was an era when western series—*Bonanza*, *Laramie*, *Rawhide*, *Bronco Lane*, *Gunsmoke*, *Wagon Train*, et al—featuring lawmen and other good guys who were fast on the trigger were still a staple of Sunday and Saturday afternoon television, and playing Cowboys and Indians was what young boys Just Did, with absolutely no understanding that shooting people equalled killing them equalled death... because, of course, you "took your shots", then got up and continued playing as if nothing had happened. (Except to break off the end of the string of exploded caps protruding from under the hammer of your toy .45 revolver.) Most if not all of those western series had disappeared from our television screens by the end of the 1960s, and having by then entered my teens I was no longer playing with toy guns anyway; it wasn't until a few years later that I encountered the considerably more violent and ambiguous spaghetti westerns that in the public imagination had overwritten westerns of the nobler-seeming *Magnificent Seven* and *High Noon* type. At that point, too, I had finally seen real weapons for the first time, at Munich airport in the wake of the Black September assassination of Israeli athletes at the 1972 Olympics; if that was intended to be reassuring, it was absolutely nothing of the kind, and merely reinforced the

hapless lack of attention and forethought on the part of the German authorities which had allowed the murders to happen in the first place. But I was, I'm pleased to say, never a member of the Combined Cadet Force or its various service-specific predecessors, in part because the secondary schools I attended didn't have them but also because I wasn't terribly interested in the various presentations that visiting branches of the military would mount at my schools from time to time – Royal Marines abseiling from helicopters, squaddies driving round the football field in armoured cars, and suchlike – because they struck me as transparently an attempt to persuade teenagers to abandon their lessons and join up for a life of parade-ground bull and boredom (at that time, incredibly, it was still possible for 16 year-olds to enlist in the Army for a minimum period of 16 years). I liked books and reading, not running through the mud in the rain. (Besides, I was growing my hair below my collar, irrespective of the imprecations of my parents – not at all what the military wanted.)

What a very young-seeming Kyle MacLachlan that is at the top of the second page of #10! Comparing him as he was in that damn fine television series *Twin Peaks* (the insuperable original, not the misconceived recent remake/sequel) with the way he looks now in *Marvel's Agents of Shield*, one can't help but think that he's experienced not just unavoidable ageing but – given how raddled he appears – that some plastic surgery has gone wrong somewhere. Acne it ain't. (Unless it's make-up and facial prosthetics.)

The 'Fridgeshanking' questions in #10 remind me of the "how long does it take to fill a bath" given the size of the bath/the flow rate of the tap/etc. problems that we were set in mental arithmetic at primary school. I could never manage any of them, being fairly hopeless at maths (at secondary school, I had to resit my 'O' Level – the former GCSEs – to eventually scrape an E grade pass), but I do remember the cleverness of one boy in my class pointing out variously that the bath wouldn't fill at all because the question said nothing about putting a plug in first, and/or that any second question about how long the bath would take to fill given a different flow rate/etc. could always be answered as "no time at all" because it was still full of water from the first question. The teacher was never very impressed.

I don't seem to have anything to say in response to #11, other than to second (third – fourth – ninety-somethingth) your remarks that Randy Byers was one of fandom's Good Guys who will be forever missed as long as there are people around to remember him. I wasn't at the 2003 Eastercon, but I do remember having a long and friendly conversation with him at some London party or other during his TAFF trip, even though it was the first time either of us had met face-to-face; and we met up again on various occasions afterwards. It was one of those typical fan relationships, where one can pick up the threads of a conversation with someone one hasn't seen for several years, and carry on as though those several years had not intervened at all. I remember in particular a dinner we had with him (and others) at a restaurant in Stoke Newington after the 2005 Worldcon, at which we all

consumed rather too much wine and went home feeling very light-headed. We ran across each other again a few days later, when he remarked that he had still felt drunk the evening following the dinner, 24 hours later. "Hmm," I said, "and your point is?" He laughed and laughed.

But I seem to be running out of things to say. The late afternoon advances: the ibis stream in to roost for the evening on the trees around Lake Seppings, the back lawn is in shadow, the galahs commence their evening assault on the fruits and fresh leaves of the cotoneaster, the sun sinks towards the tree-lined summit of Mount Clarence, and it may soon be time for dinner.

JAMES BACON, Iver, England; 19 March 2018

Sorry of course to read of the loss of Randy, a great fanwriter and brilliant fan.

Of course, typically, I did not realise that Randy liked sea turtles. I suspected so, as people posted them on his Facebook, but it was not a great time to ask, nor engage on them.

That is unfortunate, as it is one animal I could have chatted to him about, having seen Leatherbacks lay their eggs, and Loggerhead hatchlings scurry to the sea. The markings in the sand, amazing from both activities. The Leatherback shifting herself up the beach, making massive marks, like the tracks from a tank. I also saw a green turtle while snorkeling, but it saw us too, and scarpered pretty damn quick, the speed was quite incredible.

Anyhow, it makes for sad reading, and is a loss.

~ James, you wrote what for me was one definitive piece about Randy: 'Expecting Someone... Well, a Little Different' in *Chunga* #5. I hope it gets anthologised in Luke McGuff's upcoming tribute to Randy, but even if it doesn't it will always stand as great fanwriting.

So this issue's LoC pages start and end with Randy. It's actually helped me take stock of things and nudge me into some thoughts on my own mortality.

I still find it challenging to accept that Randy is no longer in the world. When his ashes are scattered, that's it, he's literally blown away, gone forever.

I'm trying to come up with names of other people I know who have had a similar fate and can only come up with one, my nephew's wife's father, who had his ashes scattered at sea here in Thailand (he lived quite close to us). With burials there is at least a reference point one can visit, such as the shared grave of my own parents which I try (and often fail) to get to when I'm in the UK. In that sense, a burial site may give us the false security that our loved ones are in some way still around, and I wonder how differently I'd feel if they'd been cremated and their ashes scattered. My wife wants to leave her body to science after she dies, and there is some Buddhist reasoning behind this decision. As for me, at age 57 and a half, I still haven't given it any thought – if my kids will have a grave to visit or if they will have to sense me around them blowing in the wind, or will have to remember scattering my ashes at sea.

It feels unfair that Randy has already had to make that choice, far too early. And here we are. Life goes on. ~



Somewhere Out in Space, a Dog Barked

Back by an almost complete lack of popular demand after their appearance in *Big Sky* #1 (March 2013), here's the latest culling of stray dogs that somehow wander unannounced into the fiction we read.

To recap: pick up just about any novel and you'll find a throwaway reference to a dog, barking in the distance. I've been collecting all sorts of examples of distant barking dogs since the mid-1980s, after I read a novel by Bel Kaufman called *Love, Etc.* (1979) in which a creative writing teacher leaves a comment at the end of a student's paper: "I suggest you do not end every story you write with 'Somewhere a dog barked.'"

The more recent encounters documented here include examples from the similarly-purposed *Slate* article '[Somewhere a Dog Barked](#)' in June 2010.

Keith closed his eyes and searched for troubled dreams. The dogs in the valley barked. And the dogs in the village, not to be outdone, barked back.

Martin Amis, *The Pregnant Widow*, 2010

The window looked out over the garden, which was still lit. A scent of flowers and wet grass drifted into the room. In the distance he heard a dog bark.

Roberto Bolaño, *2666*, 2004

In two days he'd be back on the train to New Jersey. There was a dog barking somewhere. He could smell beef and gravy on her breath.

T. Coraghessan Boyle, *Riven Rock*, 1998

Night again, pressing against the windowpanes. Silence except for the far wild yapping of the coyotes.

Fredric Brown, *The Far Cry*, 1951

Somewhere a dog barked, and it awakened me to my own physical condition.

Nic Brown, *Doubles*, 2010

A dog barks in the distance. We take off our shirts and pants and hang them on wooden pegs. He turns towards me, his shorts sticking out at the fly. 'That stuff makes me hot,' he says. 'Shall we camel?'

William S. Burroughs, 'Cities of the Red Night', 1981

There was no more rain, just an eerie stillness, a deathly silence. Somewhere a dog barked mournfully.

Jackie Collins, *American Star*, 1993

A dog was barking out there now, somewhere out across the fields towards town, but it was not *his* dog.

Gardner Dozois, 'The Peacemaker', 1983

There is a dog barking outside. The dog is going nuts.

David Eggers, *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*, 2000

She did not answer for a time. The fireflies drifted; somewhere a dog barked, mellow sad, faraway.

William Faulkner, *Light in August*, 1932

Somewhere in the hills, a coyote yipped.

Sheila Finch, 'Where Two or Three', 2010

From the linden tree shade, Kristy hears something in the afternoon breeze — a dog barking somewhere, my son in our car.

Richard Ford, *Independence Day*, 1995

The chink of milk bottles sounded from the street below, followed by the electric whine of the milk-float, fading down the street. A dog barked half-heartedly; obviously another insomniac.

John Gartland, *Orgasmus*, 1986

A dog was howling somewhere in the wastes of the hotel and the head-waiter signalled for the door to be closed.

Graham Greene, *Our Man in Havana*, 1958

The entire parking lot was empty, except for Jan's car. The glare of the security lights made the shadows deeper. I heard a dog bark way off in the distance.

Charlaine Harris, *Dead as a Doornail*, 2005

I threw myself on my back into the grass. I wanted to sleep. I couldn't. The howling of a jackal in the distance — I sat up straight again.

Franz Kafka, 'Jackals and Arabs', 1917

One car was even playing music — the thumping base [sic] drowning out the yaps of the distant police Alsatians.

Alex Latimer, *The Space Race*, 2013

Ripe chinaberries drummed on the roof when the wind stirred, and the darkness was desolate with the barking of distant dogs.

Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, 1960

She begins to tell him. The curtain in the kitchen window flutters gently, and a dog barks in the distance.

Henning Mankell, *The Eye of the Leopard*, 1990

The street throbbed around me. Nobody's fault but my own. The bark of a dog flew by.

Colum McCann, *Let the Great World Spin*, 2009

He walked down the street of the carpenters and it was silent now. A few voices could be heard from within the houses, and the bark of a dog.

Michael Moorcock, *Behold the Man*, 1969

Sounds travelled up from the street to reach his ears: an occasional shout, a dog's whiny bark, the revving of a bike.

O Thiam Chin, *Now That It's Over*, 2016

This is such a fine neighborhood. I jump the fence to the next backyard and land on my head in somebody's rose bush. Somewhere a dog's barking.

Chuck Palahniuk, *Choke*, 2001

Outside it was still snowing. From way across the community dogs were howling like banshees.

Alastair Reynolds, 'Nunivak Snowflakes', 1990

Village streets, muffled with snow, wait dumbly. Somewhere a dog barks, is silenced.

Keith Roberts, 'Weihnachtsabend', 1972

He got out of his old Cortina and slowly crossed the lawn, which was marked by black footprints. In the distance a dog barked insistently.

Kim Stanley Robinson, 'Before I Wake', 1989

With the help of fear and echoes and winter silences, that dog had a voice like a big bronze gong.

Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, 1969

During our worst dreams we are assured by a dog barking somewhere, a refrigerator motor kicking on, that we will soon wake to true life.

Tobias Wolff, *Old School*, 2003

It was too hot to walk. A dog barked, barked, barked down in the hollow. The liquid shadows went over the plain.

Virginia Woolf, *Jacob's Room*, 1922

MORE HIGGINS VARIANTS

Somewhere a pony whinnied.

— **Jack Higgins**, *Toll for the Brave*, 1971

Then from a different quarter came the faint ring, long continued, of an alarm clock. Distantly, a cock crowed.

Brian Aldiss, *Greybeard*, 1965

Outside, a rotavator hooted furiously.

Brian Aldiss, 'Who Can Replace a Man?', 1958

Far off in the distance, beyond the room, beyond the building in which the room is located, he hears the faint cry of a bird — perhaps a crow, perhaps a seagull, he can't tell which.

Paul Auster, *Travels in the Scriptorium*, 2006 [see next]

Far off in the distance, beyond the room, beyond the building in which the room is located, Mr Blank again hears the faint cry of a bird.

Paul Auster, *Travels in the Scriptorium*, 2006

Some place far off, echoing across the valley, a rooster crowed.

Philip K. Dick, 'The Defenders', 1953

Far off some place a bird sang, its voice echoing across the vast slopes and ravines.

Philip K. Dick, 'The Variable Man', 1953

A surface car slammed its doors, some place off in the distance.

Philip K. Dick, 'The Variable Man', 1953

A bird was crying out now, somewhere in the darkness, and they were walking through the fields, away from the road, cold mud squelching underfoot, the dry stubble crackling around them.

Gardner Dozois, 'The Peacemaker', 1983

I heard no other sound but the yowl of mating cats through the night.

Mo Francisco, 'Conquering Makiling', 2011

In the distance, a ship's horn sounded.

Colin Harvey, 'Don Sebastian's Treasure', 2011

Traffic on the avenue blocks away sent tiny sharp sounds to punctuate the stillness, and somewhere a baby cried.

Alan E. Nourse, 'In Sheep's Clothing', 1952,

He stood there alone and trembling. Another window slammed down. Somewhere a baby squalled, a mother hummed a lullaby, until a door closed off the sound.

Alan E. Nourse, 'Plague!', 1952

Somewhere very far away a bird cried.

Rachel Pollack, *Unquenchable Fire*, 1988

Something ululated in the distance, its tone inhuman yet disturbingly familiar.

— **Dariel R.A. Quiogue**, 'The Call of the Chained God', 2012

Far off in the night a bird chuckled fiendishly.

Gene Wolfe, *The Fifth Head of Cerberus*, 1972

A long, unsteady moment passed between us. The sound of a low flying airplane could be heard passing by overhead.

David Young, *The Scribe*, 2000

Milkshake Duck



Listopia

This fanzine was compiled between 8 January – 28 April 2561 / 2018. The title is derived from Elon Musk’s press conference after the launch of his Falcon Heavy: “I had this image of just a giant explosion on the pad with, you know, a wheel bouncing down the road. Like a Tesla logo landing somewhere with a thud.” That imagery may be pure Steven Spielberg, but the classy choreography of the twin booster landings (above) was pure Musk. The whole noisy, brief episode from start to finish was the most exciting and dramatic thing we have seen in rocketry in ages. Compare it to the dry, almost academic science on show in a NASA or ESA launch and it’s easy to see why Musk gets people enthusiastic. I was practically on the edge of tears while watching it all, so I hope we see much more spectacle like this.

This issue of *TWN* seems to have acquired a wildly split personality: rocketry, dogs, more on a lost friend, plus a side order of Soma – that’s just the way it came together.

I’ve delayed this issue by a month to put it on a new schedule: three times a year – April, August and December. I’ll borrow a tactic from that shill the Brexit Secretary David Davies and half-heartedly spin this as some kind of negotiating success – “Well it’s a positive in terms of numbers, you can’t deny that: it’s now every four months instead of three!”, and I expect my readers will just have to bow down and accept the absolute logical consistency of my argument. Also, “The ~~government~~ editor hinted at some kind of forthcoming change seven months ago in issue #10 of this fanzine, and this appropriate action is what was decided upon.” As has been pointed out elsewhere recently, just what kind of weasel-word is “appropriate”, here? As if this ~~government~~ editor would ever consider doing something that was “inappropriate”. The very idea.

I’d like to think this change will provide more breathing space between issues, but in reality I know that’s fake news too as I’ll continue procrastinating to an exceptionally high standard, resulting in the same pre-publication stress that I find myself working with already. *Plus ça change*.

Dream Central

This short essay came about after Eddie Cochrane posted a [link](#) to this and other photos of Reading in the 1960s and 1970s to the Reading Science Fiction Group’s Yahoo list.

Brave New World: A Revisitation

This is a merge and update of two book reviews I posted on Live Journal in 2009. As an aside, John Russell Fearn was far from being all bad, and I think he certainly improved over the decades that he was writing.

I still don’t feel inclined to read any more of Huxley’s science fiction, although I am sure there are many who would tell me this is a mistake.

MORE GENRE FANZINES RECEIVED / READ SO FAR IN 2018

- Alexiad* #96–97 LISA & JOSEPH MAJOR
Ansible #367–369 DAVE LANGFORD
Askance #43 JOHN PURCELL
Banana Wings #69 CLAIRE BRIALEY, MARK PLUMMER
Beam #13 NIC FAREY, ULRIKA O’BRIEN
Exhibition Hall #28 CHRIS GARCIA
CounterClock #31–32 WOLF VON WITTING
Inca #14 ROB JACKSON
Journey Planet #37–39 JAMES BACON, CHRIS GARCIA ET AL
Opuntia #401–410 DALE SPEIRS
Rat Sass #7–8 TARAL WAYNE
Spartacus #24–25 GUY LILLIAN III
Vibrator #2.0.47–2.0.48 GRAHAM CHARNOCK
The Zine Dump #43 GUY LILLIAN III

ANOTHER CORFLU APPROACHES. I’ll be flying from Bangkok to London to Toronto to spend a little more time in the city in which I briefly cohabited, in the 1990s. And two days later, fly back to the other side of the planet.

I feel flush with fan publications recently, old and new.

Perhaps the oldest is the rare *British Science-Fiction Bibliography*, created by Douglas W. F. Mayer in 1937, for which Rob Hansen put up scans at [fiawol.org.uk](#) in early April. This is almost certainly the earliest attempt at an SF bibliography made by a British fan, compiled and typed over 18 pages with books sourced from owned copies or those found in local Leeds libraries. Not wishing to show disrespect to Mr. Mayer at all, but very apparent are the limitations within which he chose to accomplish this rather quixotic project, from a standing start with no other bibliographic resources available. This led to incorrect or misleading entries (Karel Čapek is curiously included, as are Edgar Rice Burroughs and others non-Brits), plus there is the rather bland observation that a bibliography needs to provide dates. Nevertheless, let’s not be harsh: this was a work of genuine enthusiasm conducted at the age of 18. And he may rest assured that his work had not been completely swallowed up by later bibliographers until now: in our over-resourced time I was still able to find perhaps half a dozen editions listed that had no presence at all in the mighty ISFDB some eighty years later – a shortfall now corrected. So yes, this bibliography was not just a relic of early fandom, it still provided useful missing details, and a sincere “Thank You” from the future, Mr. Mayer.



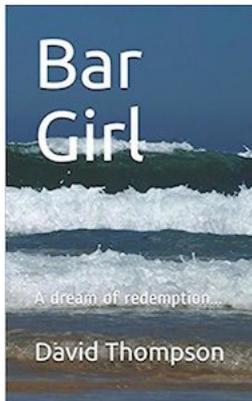
Shopping in Thailand is super-cheap and generally high quality. Bangkok is also safe. If you see anybody wearing camouflage and holding a machete, don't be scared. He's selling coconuts.

Bobby Lee

David Thompson

Bar Girl

2012 | Booksmango, ASIN B0090N4M1G, Free



Bar Girl is a free e-book from Amazon, and is a far better read than its tacky e-book cover might indicate. Despite the paperback cover of crashing waves being rather nondescript, it does have relevance to the life of the book's central character.

Siswan's life changed for the worse on her twelfth birthday, and the years were not kind to her at the hands of her brother and father. From a rural part of the country and from a

dysfunctional family, events determine that she has to cut loose and somehow make her own way in the world, getting help wherever she can find it. Will she succeed and keep herself safe in an industry that by definition preys on the vulnerability of beautiful teenage girls?

With a title that suggests the reader might expect a certain kind of seedy voyeuristic novel, *Bar Girl* thankfully does not go where you expect it to. Far from it: the author respects the purpose of the central characters he has created, and while they have faults they also have integrity. Thompson also leaves out geographical details, such that the story could be set in any Thai city; indeed it could be set in many places across South East Asia. But Siswan's journey from homeless teenager to a more worldly and altruistic bar owner feels realistic even if it is rather unlikely: a strong fragrance of wish-fulfilment runs through the novel. A few scenes are perhaps unnecessarily digressive; others tug on the heartstrings and make the reader root for the right people in the right way in the right places. *Bar Girl* may not be as tight and hard-hitting a novel as I would have liked on this kind of subject, but I can respect the kind of enlightening and ultimately positive tale that David Thompson has created. This is a thoughtful, gentle winner of a book.

Collin Piprell

MOM

2017 | Common Deer Press, ISBN 978-0-9950729-6-1



Canadian author Collin Piprell (also known locally as 'Collin with two Ls') has at last been swallowed up by his long-standing love of science fiction and given us something firmly within the genre's boundaries, so much so that it bears little resemblance to anything he has previously written other than its being set ostensibly in Bangkok, with the author's trademark sardonic humour firmly intact. So, let that

reassure you, we're very much off to a good start...

...Except that in *MOM*, this being a science fiction novel, Piprell has had to craft quite a bit of worldbuilding for his readers while at the same time setting the scene. We, on the other hand, might be asked for some patience and close attention as he does so, but we are more than adequately rewarded. The premise seems simple enough at first: the software used to run a Bangkok shopping mall in the near future has become sentient, and not to be trusted. Meanwhile the outside world has descended into a nanotechnological hell, and the flesh-and-blood few who actually live/work inside this mall are suddenly at risk when the barriers to the outside world start to crumble. Our protagonists seem constantly disorientated... just what or who actually is the Mall Operations Manager? A once-benevolent cyber-presence, or a psychopathic, misanthropic Canadian? Read on...

Piprell clearly intends *MOM* to be a bit of a mind-fuck, and it is. He draws on several recognisable influences, *Alice in Wonderland* clearly being one minus any cuteness, *Neuromancer* perhaps being another. But the end result is unique: even within the wider cyberpunk movement, you will probably never find anything quite as singular as *MOM*. Unless, that is, you seek out the sequels...

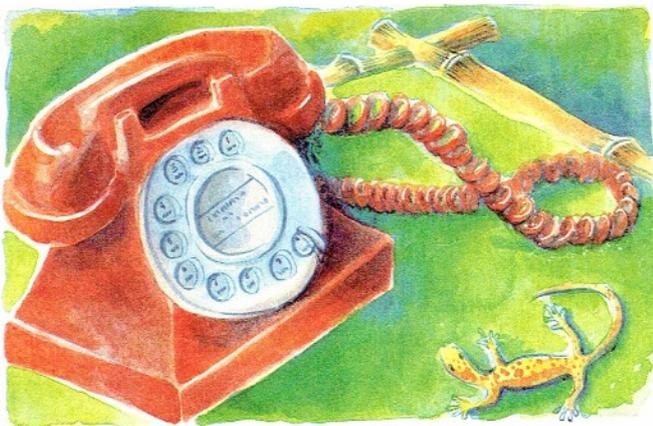
Len Webster

'In Touch with the World'

The European Magazine, 21 September 1995

Further to the deceptively-named Thai/Australian author Len Webster who I reviewed in the last issue of *TLS*, there is in fact another Len Webster who also knows Thailand, although not by birth: this gentleman was born in the English Midlands and has at least one [short story collection](#) to his name. I cut out and kept 'In Touch with the World' from *The European Magazine* in 1995, more than a decade before I ever considered living here. I'm no longer sure why I kept the story although I'm happy I did... and it was illustrated with the below watercolour.

'In Touch with the World' was submitted as an entry in *The European's* short story competition. It's a straightforward vignette that suggests a far wider picture, with a subtlety that becomes crystal clear towards its end.



CATHY BRETT ©1995 USED BY PERMISSION

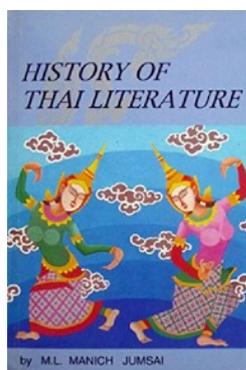
Since the single red telephone had been installed in the single shop in the Village of Wells seven months previously, the elderly Uncle Good has been waiting for a call from his daughter in Japan. Other villagers seem to get calls all the time, because every day he goes to the shop (which seems to only trade in vegetable and rice whiskey) he sees them chatter while waiting for his own call. What doesn't dawn on Uncle Good is that his poor hearing will be a hindrance: he's never actually used a telephone before. So when his daughter finally does make contact he can neither hold the phone properly nor even hear a word she says, and all he can do is suggest to the unheard voice on the end of the line that she writes a letter instead. So back home goes Uncle Good, with life in his small rural village going on as it ever did, with an unspoken acknowledgment that some things, in such places, may never yet change for many more years to come.

The story is a simple one that fills just one page, but it opens a window on the huge gulf that exists between the ways of unsophisticated folk living in the remote countryside and the ways of the educated next generation, who have raced ahead to embrace what their parents could never dream of. Even as Thailand has opened up to the outside world, the millions of older citizens left behind, with no literacy or numeracy skills to speak of, are easily forgotten. This story serves as a small, useful reminder.

M.L. Manich Jumsai

History of Thai Literature

1992 | Chalermnit, ISBN 974-85869-7-9



This is a rather personal point of view on Thai literature from Jumsai, with a lot of space given to many oral stories that date back centuries and for which few written records remain, all researched by Jumsai during his time working as a United Nations expert on Laos. If it were not for this slim book, many of these stories would indeed be lost forever, so, while not bibliographically author-

itative about the stories that *do* have a written history, this is still a very readable source of information on the general development of Thai stories, from its interior to all surrounding regions including Laos and Vietnam.

What stands out for me is that the historical background to Thai literature is fascinatingly peppered with stories that today might be regarded as speculative: travels in spiritual and supernatural worlds, mythology, plenty of ghosts and quite a bit of superheroics are all on show. Jumsai gives due respect to the influence (which was huge) of King Rama II on the development of Thai literature and literacy in general, followed by French missionaries' introduction of printing (which was only really put to use for the production of religious books), further followed by the American introduction of printing machines and Thai typesets in the early 19th century. King Rama V made vast educational reforms which meant textbooks became far more common, and the further advocacy for literature of King Rama VI in the early 20th century paved the way for what was to come in Thailand's enthusiastic embracing of the written word.

As for the structure of the stories themselves over time to the present the most notable change has been that an identifiably Western mode has largely overshadowed the influence of classical Indian literature, with prose increasingly replacing imaginative poetry as the preferred form for the expression of an author's imagination. As for the modern novel, translations of H. Rider Haggard's *She* plus the 'Sherlock Holmes' novels of Arthur Conan Doyle were notably popular and influential at the turn of the century. New authors supplanted poetic trappings to tell their stories in favour of a more direct narrative: they sold more.

All this makes for a history with plenty of interesting twists and turns and a strong dose of the speculative to keep me interested. I would like to read a more definitive history that does not have to give so much space to synopses of individual early stories which in turn influenced what was to come later, but in the meantime this book works well as a primer despite having no index something that would have proved particularly useful.