

## book reviews

*Bernard Trink*

### On a roll

#### **Minor Wife**

by Christopher G. Moore

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and leading book stores, 475 baht

What distinguishes Christopher G. Moore from other foreign authors setting their stories in the Land of Smiles is how much more he understands its mystique, the psyche of its populace and the futility of its round residents trying to fit into its square holes.

Moore clearly loves the Realm and never stoops to take cheap shots at it, yet doesn't white-wash its faults. New readers may find his explanations of things Thai distracting—slang in the vernacular, English translation, noting the nuances—but his aficionados look forward to it.

Minor Wife is Moore's latest book. Once again the protagonist is his literary creation Vincent Calvino, a New Yorker who put down stakes in Bangkok two decades ago and has made his mark as a private eye. His best friend is police colonel Pratt, trained in the US.

Pratt is happily married, plays the saxophone, is somewhat of an art historian, quotes the Bard and is a fine cop. Calvino is happily divorced, is known in every watering hole in Fun City, and solves even more cases than the good colonel.

8K brings to mind Laura, loved by a number of men, any of whom could have killed her out of jealousy. Not to mention women who found her a threat when their spouses and boy friends became infatuated with her. Laura was a good girl who illustrated, 8K a demimondaine (8,000 baht her fee) who painted.

While it is possible to believe that the personae are real enough—a land developer, a yoga teacher, a raiser of fighting cocks, a tennis pro, a tough ex-cop from the States, a general's daughter—8K painting with the dexterity of Manet doesn't ring true.

Sanan, also a hooker, is the minor wife of the title. Well-to-do, Quinn is wed to a Thai-Chinese yet is a chronic womaniser. Sanan is his mia noi and he's set his sights on 8K. However she is sharing her favours with Tony, a doctor, and Darryl, brain-damaged as the result of a motorcycle accident.

There are others who might have cut her throat. Kob the drug-pusher and Narong who is Sanan's lover. Moore drags them before the reader as red herrings in turn. Clues range from tennis shoes to a condo's surveillance tapes to a video of Hemingway's Strangers on a Train.

Calvino's secretary Ratana is clever, efficient and devoted to him. This reviewer wishes that he had the good sense to realise that in his search for feminine companionship, he would do well to look closer to home. At least, he'd avoid the suffering of his morning hangovers.

Even when the culprits are arrested and incriminating each other, Calvino isn't satisfied. His gut feeling is that they were set up and continues the investigation. The author tells a good story, but more interesting are his discerning observations of the Thai mindset.

