

**Femininity and Masculinity
in Three Selected Twentieth-Century
Thai Romance Fictions**

Sasinee Khuankaew

School of English, Communication and Philosophy
Cardiff University

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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this study is to examine a popular Thai genre of the novel, romance fiction, with a focus on the modes of subjectivity and discourses of femininity and masculinity to be found in Thai romance novels between the 1940s and 1990s. The thesis also seeks to locate the various socio-cultural contexts of Thai society, which influence the constitution of Thai gender relations and the transformation of gender norms. Additionally, it attempts to address the issue of the usefulness of Western theories of gender and romance, which are widely regarded in Thailand as tools of Westernization and new forms of colonialism. This study suggests that Thai gender relations are complicated, since there are several disparate aspects that influence the constitution of male and female subjectivity. Western influence is one of these aspects that help define femininity and masculinity, while domestic beliefs also play a salient role as palimpsests that are not easily erased. Thus, the representation of various modes of gendered subjectivity in romance fiction concurrently indicates both changes in and the reproduction of discourses that define an 'essence' of gender identity that accords with traditional Thai cultural beliefs including the deep-rooted idea that the primary purpose of writing is didactic.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The initial reason why I chose my thesis topic, *Femininity and Masculinity in Three Selected Twentieth Century Thai Romantic Fictions*, is because I enjoy reading Thai romance fictions and as I looked more closely at the genre I realize that it could throw light on gender in Thailand, constructions of “Thainess” and question of Westernization. The texts that I have selected for detailed analysis come from different decades and are substantial novels of over 500 pages that can be read as representative of the genre in the decades in which they were published which range from 1940s to the 1990s. These three romantic fictions can be read as in many ways representative of the three periods in which they were written and as pointers to historical changes in Thailand in the Twentieth Century. In 1940s, when the first book *Wanida* (1941) was written, modernization and Westernization had only recently reached the shores of Thailand. It was first published a decade after the overthrow of the absolute monarchy and this is likely to be one of the reasons why the Thai government under Prime Minister, Plaek Phibunsongkram, was able at last to implement significant modernization schemes that affected Thai identity, including gender relations. In 1960s, when *Diversion to Heaven* was written, capitalism had newly arrived in the country in the wake of the Thai government’s support for industrial development that began in 1957. At that time Thailand began to be industrialized and one result of this was the economic growth of the 1980s. However, in 1997 the country encountered an economic crisis which later spread to other Southeast Asian countries. This was just a year before the third novel, *Swan Snare*, was published. For these reasons, it seemed that the three selected novels would be likely to portray discourses and ideologies that throw light on shifts in gender relations in these important decades of the Twentieth Century alongside

more sedimented discourses of gender. When I began my work in gender studies, I was surprised to discover debates and criticism by Western feminists about romance, the genre I used to take for granted and pick up in my free time. I was already aware that romance fiction, whether written or filmed, and the media more generally had some influence on the reader or viewer, but that kind of assumption came from what I had heard from other people and from my experience that the representation of men and women in the Thai media is usually portrayed too idealistically to fit reality. The encounter with Western studies of romance and feminist theory in particular really has broadened my horizon.

In the course of this research, I learned that romance is a genre imported into my country around the second half of the nineteenth century and I have made an attempt to experiment with reading the Thai genre from feminist perspectives. However, I have found that reading a Thai romance with feminist theory is truly a complicated process, especially in the case of theories that I had not learned about before in Thailand. This turned my interest to the strength and limitations of feminist theory in a Thai context because I realized that the constitution of gender relations depends greatly on how a particular society prescribes gender norms. My hypothesis was that romance narratives are the site of ideologies which can reflect social expectations of reality, regardless of the fact that romance is an imported genre in Thailand. Consequently, I developed the following research questions for my study: 1) What are the dominant forms of gender relations and constructions of femininity and masculinity in Thailand from the 1940s to the 1990s when the three selected fictions were written? 2) Had the impact of Westernization, in particular the reception of Western feminism, spread and changed gender norms in Thailand during this period? 3) Do Thai writers produce their own specifically Thai romance novels? 4) Have these novels changed between the 1940s, 1960s, and 1990s? 5) To what degree and in what ways are Western feminist theories and Western

concepts of romance useful and compatible with a Thai context? In this introduction I look at social constructions of gender and gender relations in Thailand in the periods 1940-1990, Westernisation and changing gender norms, the specificity of Thai romance and the usefulness of Western feminist and literary theories for analyzing Thai romance.

Dominant Forms of Gender Relations and Construction of Femininity and Masculinity in Thailand from the 1940s to 1990s: The Political and Economic Background

In order to place my chosen texts in their specific socio-historical location, it is important to start by looking at the socio-economic and political contexts of Thailand in the twentieth century when these three selected romantic fictions, *Wanida* (1941), *Diversion to Heaven* (1965-1967), and *Swan Snare* (1998) were written. In the 1930s, Thailand underwent a dramatic political change. In 1932 the political system was changed from an absolute monarchy into a constitutional democracy due to the effects of strict austerity programs to modernize the country and its economic difficulties after the First World War¹. In this democratic era, the women's movement was active, fighting for sexual equality and job opportunities in the public sphere (Satha-Anand 2004a; b, p.17).

In the 1940s, Thailand was affected by the economic hardship of the Second World War and post-war era. In response to the political environment prevalent at the time when the first romantic fiction, *Wanida* (published in 1941), was written,

¹ It appears that administrative centralization and education were among key variables in the overthrow of the absolute monarchy since the civilian and the military that brought about the change in the political system were regarded as "new men" and many of them received Western education. However, the civilian and the military that cooperated in the change later had different ideas and interpretations of democracy. Pridi Phanomyong, the civilian leader, was regarded as more liberal and was keen to initiate social reforms while Plaek Phibunsongkhram, the military leader, was more for rightwing nationalism and was attracted by military leaders such as Benito Mussolini and Chiang Kai-shek (Anderson and Mendiones 1985) .

Plaek Phibunsongkhram, the then prime minister, issued cultural mandates in pursuit of nationalism. This affected traditional Thai ways of life, including gender relations. For instance, men and women had to change to names that made their gender explicit and had to dress according to their biological sex. Specifically, women were encouraged to assume a westernized look and Western modes of behaviour especially when they took part in social activities. Chaladchai Ramitanon, a male lecturer in Women's Studies at Chiang Mai University, recounts in his book *The Introduction of Women's Studies and Feminism* that Phibunsongkhram's cultural schemes also worked well and were effective because they were *sanuk* (enjoyable) and were repeated again and again; especially the many songs with nationalist sentiments (Ramitanon 2012).

In the 1950s, Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat adopted a new economic growth model and gave high policy priority to tackling insurgency, which largely resulted from impoverishment in the Northeast. From the 1960s-1970s, when *Diversion to Heaven* was written, the Thai government launched several economic development programmes, including economic infrastructural projects such as roads, dams, and railways, which were built and expanded. The country also welcomed foreign investment. The economic development programs, the expansion of national education, and the mass media played important roles in the cultural change in Thailand at this time (Kriengkraipetch and Smith 1992). According to Kriengkraipetch and Smith, in their study of value conflicts in a changing Thai society, as reflected in contemporary Thai short stories², the conflictual values that emerged by the 1990s occurred: "between the old and the new, between the haves and the have nots, ... between traditions and modernity, between religiosity and secularism, between contending schools of ideology, between aspirations and

² They do not include romantic stories with a Cinderella style narrative because "their themes and contents were usually limited within a narrow frame of life. Their characters were flat and boring" (ibid., p.13).

frustrations, between alienation and hope” (ibid., p.9). As regards the theme of gender role conflicts faced by women, they argue that Thai women in the past were not overburdened with forms of discrimination; however, they also accept that men and women were not equal. They further assert that women at present, both educated and employed, cannot really escape from role conflicts: “their newly acquired status has put them in situations of role conflicts that are no less frustrating” (ibid., p.15).

In the last decade of the twentieth century, Thailand confronted large-scale socio-economic changes. In the 1980s, Thailand’s economic growth was remarkable with a rate averaging about 8 per cent per annum and 80-90 per cent of the labour force were women (Thomson and Bhongsvej 1995)³. It appears that development towards the beginning of the twenty-first century affected women in several ways. The literacy rate increased (from 60 per cent in 1960 to 91.3 per cent in 1990) despite the fact that the majority of Thai people did not have a very high level of education, especially women. According to Thomson and Bhongsvej, however, education means more than the prospect of good employment, it is also a potential source of a better spouse because of the opportunity it provides to meet more qualified men. Besides conventional expectations of a loyal wife and a dedicated mother, a woman has also been expected to “earn supplementary income for the family” (ibid., p.48). The average age at the time of the first marriage from 1980-1990 was 22.7 years and women usually married in their twenties which was

³ The female labour workforce increased significantly in 1970s. According to Chitra Ghosh, Thai women were not ashamed to report themselves as working women unlike their female counterparts in other Southeast Asian countries. They were free to work and there was a small percentage of unemployed women at that time (Ghosh 1990) . This is in accordance with previous records, since the Ayutthaya period, that suggest that Thai women also constituted the majority of the trading and labour workforce. Thus, Thai women, regardless of those ‘inner’ women in the palace or noble women, have shared a public arena with men. Yet, this does not mean that Thai women enjoy more freedom since mechanisms to control and dominate women also operate. Hegemonic forms of femininity work excessively, especially those of the female trilogy of a grateful daughter, a loyal wife, and a sacrificing mother. It is of note that class also plays a crucial role in this hegemony.

older than in the past when people married at a younger age⁴. The divorce rate has increased up until the Twenty-First Century, especially in urban areas. I concur with Thomson and Bhongsvej when they argue that the financial autonomy of Thai women and the decline of family-based societies, particularly arranged marriages, are reasons for the higher divorce rate. A couple with an arranged marriage is unlikely to divorce because their marriage is familial and social. By this, I mean they have reasons other than love to marry each other, especially financial reasons. In this regard, it is difficult for a couple to get a divorce, unlike in the case of those women who choose their husbands. The status of widowhood is also not castigated as it used to be and women can remarry at will. Family structures have also changed from the extended family to a more nuclear family due to a couple's financial independence and more migration to work in the capital.

Since the 1970s, the rate of the female involvement in the labour force has been very high. Ghosh shows that the female work force in Thailand increased from 44.5% to 47.0% during 1972-1978. However, these women "are placed in the category of those 'inadequately utilized' in terms of hours of work, income from work or nature of work" (ibid., p. 77). Many women did not earn enough to live on⁵ because of their level of education which was generally lower than that of men, especially in the 1970s and 1980s. This explains why female labour was concentrated in great numbers in manufacturing, commerce, and other services. In private firms, women were provided with unskilled or low skilled jobs with lower wages compared to men⁶. The situation in the government bureaucracy was not better and "appears to be even more discriminatory" (ibid., p.78) and very few women worked at the management level. Not surprisingly, Thai women have also

⁴ In an urban area, the average age could be two or three years later.

⁵ Those who could not earn sufficiently were female migrants from rural Thailand.

⁶ Ghosh's statistics show that in 1978 women received one-third less pay than men.

performed double roles as “house-keepers and workers, as wage earners or unpaid workers” (ibid., p.94).

However, before the turn of the Twenty-first Century, Thailand faced a severe economic crisis in 1997, which affected the country’s economy and culture. According to Arnika Fuhrmann, in her PhD thesis *Ghostly Desires: Sexual Subjectivity in Thai Cinema and Politics After 1997*, 1997 was a period of cultural and economic loss and the late 1990s was a period of “resurgent cultural nationalism” that brought conservative discourses on sexuality back to Thai society (Fuhrmann 2008, p.29). After the economic crisis in 1997, the Thai government reevaluated their economic plans and cultural nationalism. Since then self-sufficiency has been promoted to cope with the economic catastrophe and the notion of Thainess has been propagated in an attempt to bring in quintessential Thai ways of life in the struggle against economic difficulties and globalization. Focusing on gender and sexuality, Fuhrmann claims that normative prescriptions for sexuality were articulated as a means of intervention that might counteract the cultural loss that was caused by globalization. She does this in the context of her investigation of female ghosts in Thai films from the late 1990s to 2000s. Her study shows that since the turn of the Twenty-first Century, particularly after the Asian economic crisis, Thailand has had concerns both about its economy and about globalization as a threat to Thai identity.

The Women’s movement in Thailand was first started in 1932 by professional elite women (Phurisinsit 2002). According to Varunee Phurisinsit, a Thai female scholar, the women’s movement in Thailand has been associated with liberal feminism with a focus on seeking for legal and social equality in education, careers, and marriage. In the 1960s and 70s, Thai feminist activism was linked to Marxist politics, especially Marxist ideas of social justice combined with socialist feminism and liberal feminism. In the 1980s, there was a growth in the bourgeoisie, due to a

higher level of education and higher incomes, and a growth of the mass media. In rural areas, non-governmental organizations also expanded very quickly and many of them focused on women's issues such as battered wives and sex workers. Women's movement organisations that focus on lower-class women are based on the struggle for legal and social equality. However, Phurisinsit argues that these socialist and liberal movements do not really challenge or bring changes to the structure of Thai society and solve women's problems. For instance, there are female executives in the media and the cabinet, but these authoritative women persistently conform to heterosexual norms of traditional Thai women, which limit the real agency of women instead of challenging them. Phurisinsit points out that the myth that Thai women have a higher status compared to other nations may explain the limitations of the women's movement in Thailand. Apart from this, some organizations that receive financial support from Western countries might not have the freedom to work on indigenous issues; and thus, cannot develop new approaches to cope with local issues. She also mentions the absence of female solidarity in Thai society and mentions class position as another factor accounting for the lack of cooperation among Thai women in tackling women's problems.

Romantic Practices

Sumalee Bumroonsook, a Thai lecturer at the University of Durham's Department of Politics, has noted that courtship in Thai society from the 1930s to the 1960s required chaperones as company for women (Bumroongsook 2003). According to her study of love and marriage in twentieth-century central Thailand, Bumroonsook claims that in the early twentieth century, Thai courtship was clandestine with strict separation of the sexes, so courtship must have been secret and unknown to parents and elders. From the 1930s to 1960s, Thai women were encouraged to socialize with men and this was approved by King Rama VI, who received a Western education at Sandhurst military academy and via studies in law and history

at Christ Church College Oxford in England⁷. As a result of cross gender socialising, Western practices of femininity began to become mingled with traditional Thai femininity. However, during this time women still needed chaperones, either siblings, relatives, female friends, or servants, to accompany them for social activities. The decline in the practice of having a chaperone and encouragement to socialize across gender for both men and women points to the decline of parental influence in spouse selections. It also signifies more freedom for young men and women to choose their own spouses.

I will argue that there has long been an attempt to discipline and control Thai female sexuality through narrative discourses. From this perspective, literary discourses can be read as attempting to suppress female sexuality, for example traditional advice literatures like *Kritsana Son Nong* (The Advice of Kritsana to Her Younger Sister) and *Suphasit Son Ying* (Words of Wisdom for Women) which were written by male poets in the early Rattanakosin period (1782-1932)⁸. These traditional 'advice literatures' reflected men's expectations and concerns about women's roles and behavior to a such an extent that they contained invented female ideologies with which to dominate women⁹. It is not surprising that these literatures did not approve of premarital sex. Notwithstanding this, as Bumroonsook points out practice in real life was otherwise: "Traditional advice literature in Central Thailand frowned upon premarital sex. However, evidence reveals that the practice of

⁷ It is noteworthy that abduction and black magic were used until the 1960s if courtship failed. Abductions could also be staged elopements or real kidnap. In the latter case, a woman might agree to become a kidnapper's wife after forced sexual contact or a woman could deny an offer of marriage if she saw no possibility of living with the man who kidnapped and abused her sexually. However, I would argue that abduction and forced sexual affairs are violent devices to silence and oppress women, even though some women would later come to love their husbands/kidnappers.

⁸ It was when the Chakri Dynasty stabilized the kingdom after periodic conflicts with neighbouring countries.

⁹ As they were written in poetry, they are easy to remember because of the rhythms and rhymes. Also some appear in other forms such as novels from time to time and are also taught in schools, especially *Suphasit Son Ying* which was written by Sunthorn Phu, a UNESCO great world poet. I still remember some parts of them that I learned by heart up until now.

premarital sex has existed in every stratum of the society” (ibid., p.49). In *nitai juk juk wong wong* or traditional Thai romance, premarital sex is evident even though the sexual intercourse scenes are not explicit, see for example *Phra Aphaimani* written by Sunthorn Phu (1821-1845). Bumroonsook claims that Thai scholars interpret premarital sex as “an outlet against the strict moral code regarding sexuality in Thai society” (ibid., p.49). It is doubtful however that this actually reflects behavior for most readers outside the narratives since commoners appeared to have looser norms of conduct on sexuality regarding premarital sex. I concur with Bumroonsook when she contends that the authors of these texts would not approve of premarital sex outside of the narrative fantasy and even condemned it, as in *Suphasit Son Ying*. Based upon this assumption, I think the sexual intercourse scenes are mere narrative devices to attract the reader. I have also made the same observation as Bumroonsook that narratives in most of the Twentieth Century do not portray explicit sexual intercourse scenes between the hero and the heroine. It is the female rivals that the hero can have sex with, but not the heroine.

By the turn of the Twenty-first Century, the number of unmarried women in Thailand had increased; thus, this factor can be seen as both informing and reflecting changes in gender relations in Thai society. The fact that Thai society has shown prejudice to unmarried women does not actually reflect the mounting number of unmarried women. Based on research for her M.A thesis entitled *Understanding Never-Married Women: A Case Study of Educated, Urban Women in Thailand*, Kulcharee Tansubhapol reports that “social and economic development, higher education, and Westernization are all factors that lead Thai women to delay marriage – or refuse it altogether” (Tansubhapol 2002, p. 66).

Westernization and the Changing Gender Norms in Thailand

Westernization and Western theories have affected Thai society to a great extent. To begin with Westernization, the government was forced to open up the country in 1855 because of the gunboat diplomacy of the British and ended up with the Bowring Treaty that allowed free trade by all foreigners¹⁰. This brought tremendous changes to the country and has been called the beginning of Thailand's modernization, which affected and led to changes in essential aspects of Thai society, such as the bureaucracy, national education, and literature. These institutions and practices also played an important role in the construction of Thai gender relations in several different ways. From the second half of the Nineteenth Century to 1932, the year in which constitutional democracy replaced the absolute monarchy, Thai kings, Rama IV to Rama VI, engendered policies and arrangements to cope with colonialism and imperialism. These policies and administrative arrangements affected gender relations implicitly. For instance, the abolition of the practice of husbands selling wives in the reign of King Rama IV and the enactment of compulsory national education for girls and boys alike in the reign of King Rama V helped improve women's position within the social realm because the abolition of wife selling can be regarded as stopping crime or violence against women. Granting both boys and girls education enhances their abilities to earn a living by giving them access to proper paid jobs and professions. However, literature produced from this era to the present has seemed to confine and restrain female agency instead of enhancing it. This effect is achieved through discursive practices prescribed by the male elite, that restrict women immensely within the private realm and attempt to guarantee the perpetuation of the ideology of women's value as inhering in the roles

¹⁰ A gunboat policy is the policy that uses military force, especially a fleet of ships, to blockade a less powerful state for its resources.

of daughter, wife, and mother¹¹. Later, after the overthrow of the absolute monarchy, Field Marshal Pibulsonkram, who was the prime minister from 1938 to 1944 and from 1957 to 1958, established cultural schemes to counteract the potential effects of Western colonization and influence that were in concordance with the royal schemes. These also affected gender relations in ways that accorded with what the existing patriarchal order and authority demanded.

In *Wanida* (1941), the heroine is portrayed as having an inappropriately high lifestyle, which is signified by her eating Western food, bread and coffee for breakfast, instead of eating rice in the morning, for instance. To elaborate, the book itself is believed by Wor Winijchaikul to be an adaptation of a Western story enhanced by the author's adept skill in making it appear very Thai. *Diversion to Heaven* (1965-1967) seems to present a more modern concept of Thai femininity. It was written around the time of Marxist ideas flourishing in Thailand. The heroine is represented as a working woman who shows ambition as regards her career prospects and holds on to social values such as hard work and independence. However, she is very far from what Western critics might call a feminist because she is depicted as a 'real' Thai woman whose feminine value is strongly linked to virginity. In the book, Western sexuality is criticized and regarded as loose, whereas the heroine preserves her body from men. As for the issue of feminism, according to Jarupa Panitchapakdi's study of the representations of women in Thai soap operas, which considers the work of screenwriters and directors, Patravadi Mejudhon, a progressive Thai female screenwriter and director "does not see feminism as an adequate framework to explain her works and is in fact critical of Western feminist discourses and their purported relevance to the Thai context" (Panitchpakdi 2007,

¹¹ For instance, King Vajiravudh (1910-1925) wrote stories and plays during his nation-building that have had a great influence on gender norms. Thamora V. Fishel studies one of his fictions, *Hua-jai chai num* (The Heart of a Young Man), and has found that the writer shows desire for the West as the site of modernity with regards to nationalism, gender roles, sexual norms, and ideals of beauty (Fishel 1999, p. 165). However, his image of modern women, according to Fishel, is "circumscribed by bourgeois notions of domesticity and sexual respectability" (ibid., p. 162).

p.16). Despite the fact that Mejudhon's previous works portray strong female characters who challenge conventional norms and ideologies, she has more recently become more conservative but sophisticated, insisting on Buddhism as her main approach. Yet, Thai Buddhism appears incompatible with feminism in many respects, such as the prohibition of female ordination or the hierarchical order between monks and nuns that can be interpreted as the subordination of women. I would argue that feminism has been regarded with skepticism, like other forms of Western knowledge and practices since the time of colonization. To some extent, this scepticism reflects the elite's sense of constructing and maintaining the nation's identity. This may indicate subtle fear of colonization in every form including the digital forms that have become ubiquitous via globalization.

In accordance with the female screenwriter and director quoted above, another male scholar, Chetana Nagavajara advocates the need to develop 'a home-based theory', articulated by him as a vague idea of in-house theory that may illustrate the uniqueness of the country and Thainess. He expresses reluctance to embrace Western theory for its inability to fully understand the concepts of both Us and Other in the Thai context. His scepticism towards Western theory is clear from his arguments that Western knowledge is attractive, but full of ambition to dominate the 'other' (Nagavajara 2006, p.19)¹². He draws a parallel with music to advocate a spiritually based practice of what he refers to as the aesthetics of preserving mind and body and argues that this can also apply to Thai ways of life, not just music. He affirms that Thais prefer accentuating concrete practices to constructing abstract theories and claims that theories are implicit or reside in practices and that this presupposition is known by both Thai teachers and students. On this particular point, Thongchai Winichakul, a well-known Thai professor of history at the

¹² He points out that Thai society is basically horizontal. Community is the most effective area for powerful, informal education. He suggests a model of Thai culture as a culture of the bass xylophone, which means the excellent or the master will play a secondary role while a young, prominent student will play the main one.

University of Wisconsin-Madison, interestingly proposes a concept of bifurcation as a Thai intellectual strategy to cope with the fear of the West. This strategy defines Western society as the worldly, inferior, while it acknowledges Thai culture as the spiritual, superior, and this conceptual framework has been deployed to cope with the West up until the present, regardless of its simplicity and imprecision (Winichakul 2010, p. 136). Drawing on this model, it is possible to argue that this bifurcation is identical to a patriarchal binary system that defines women as belonging to a lower hierarchy of the worldly. Interestingly enough, as an historian, Winichakul contends that conceptual bifurcation, which also emerged in Bengal in the late nineteenth century, is another imported Western way of thinking that came to Thailand in the Nineteenth Century and “has become a normative rationality, a fixture in the Thai mentality” (ibid., p. 139). Nagavajara’s proposal for an in-house theory that is based on spirituality, suggests that this bifurcation has already become the norm by which to approach the West, the ‘Other’. As a prominent scholar in literary criticism, Nagavajara upholds rather conservative perspectives on Thai literature. Accordingly, like most Thai literary scholars, his academic study does not include a genre such as romance.

In general, I have observed, like many contributors to the volume *Disturbing Conventions: Decentering Thai Literary Cultures* (Harrison 2014), which mention the conservativeness of Thai scholars, who are usually also nativists, that there is a strong desire to construct what Chetana Nagavachara calls a ‘home-based theory’ without a clear conceptualization of how or what it will be. This raises the question of whether it is possible to really develop a home-based theory. As in my own research, Rachel Harrison also suggests that it is the Bangkok elite who invented Thai identity or Thainess in order to secure a specific national form of identity. I would add that its origins lie in the effects of the Western threat to the country in the early Bangkok period. I would further argue that it is not helpful to maintain prejudice

against all Western wisdom¹³. Chaladchai Ramitanon also argues that the idea that feminism is an imported theory and might not be compatible with Thai society, indicates reductionism and ignores the context of Thai society that has long imported goods, doctrines, and theories from other cultures (ibid., p.17-18).

I have found that anthropologists' perspectives are important as regards gender issues and the appropriateness of Western theories to Thai society. Pranee Wongtes, a Thai anthropologist, stresses that Western theoretical frameworks and theories are not universal, and for this reason they might not be able to analyze every society, especially when it comes to gender relations (Wongtes 2006, p.4). She asserts that the Western analysis of gender relations, which is based on hierarchy and binary oppositions may not work with Southeast Asian societies where binary conceptions of 'difference' are not an emphasis. Wongtes does not claim that female status in Southeast Asia is higher than that of women in other parts of the world as some Thai and Western anthropologists have observed, but insists on the insignificance of gender differences in many aspects of life, particularly in agriculture and trading. She assumes this to be a reason why gender is not a popular subject to study in Southeast Asia. Accordingly, she points out that the bilateral system in kinship in Southeast Asia might form another type of gender relations unlike the patrilineal system in the West. She argues that essentially, the conceptualization of 'power' in Southeast Asia is not similar to the West. According to Southeast Asian people, 'power' is a sign and it is invisible. Power is not to be used as in the West, but collected or gathered instead (ibid., p. 36). In this regard, she argues for a review of using Western theories and frameworks or for taking them up with great caution. I think Wongtes' remark is intriguing because cultural

¹³ The recent coup d'état (2014) that resulted in reduced ties with Thailand by Western countries brought anger to many Thais who posted on their Facebook accounts their desire to ban Western products. Some comment that these people should stop using Facebook since it is American.

and historical contexts are rendered important for the analysis of gender relations as in the poststructuralist positions that I take.

I would argue not only that Western theories play crucial roles in Thai society, but that Western gender norms also affect Thai practices regarding sexuality. When looking at Thai female sexuality at the present time, Thai standards of sexuality have assimilated the Western norms of female sexuality to a great extent yet these norms are regarded as Thai in origin (Songsamphan 2004, p. 164). Chalidaporn Songsamphan claims that Victorian control of sexuality has had an influence in most societies, but it may not be the same in different societies and she asserts that “the Thai version has been localized and adjusted to the context” (ibid.). This is due to the fact that resistance to and contestation of sexually hegemonic femininity and masculinity have occurred from time to time. Songsamphan states that only the main ideology has been totally successful and I would say that the quintessential practice is to remain chaste before marriage.

Although Thai universities provide both undergraduate and graduate programs in women’s studies and gender studies, Thais do not have what the Westerners call ‘popular feminism’ which I understand as the wide acceptance of feminist ideas in the West. The situation of feminism in Thailand is more limited and being a feminist is not a popular stance since it connotes a sense of aggression which is an undesirable feminine quality in Thai society. Despite this, aspects of feminism may be included in texts used in teaching in the Humanities or Social Sciences. Moreover, the impact of Western feminism can be seen in several aspects of women’s lives, especially in the law that women can maintain their surnames after marriage registration, which has been in force since 2005. Yet, gains have been limited. Indeed, I concur with Suwanna Satha-Anand that despite the women’s movement and organizations or university programmes, these appear not to really empower women since “major legal and political decisions still reflect

the centrality of male dominance and the image of women in the media still reflects patriarchal values” (ibid., p. 18). This is also true of the romance fiction to be analysed later.

Thai Romance Novels and their Specificity

It is worth noting that the selected novels are long and the price ranges from 6-10 pounds¹⁴. *Wanida* and *Swan Snare* have about 500 pages while the longest is *Diversion to Heaven* which has 787 pages. The length and the price of the novels suggest that, in the Thai context, reading romance novels is the leisure activity of the middle class.

In the Thai language, romance novels are called *niyay-pha-fun* (novels that induce dreams); this connotes the sense of fantasy or illusion, which is linked to dreams. For this reason the meaning of romance in Thai is similar to its Western counterpart in that romance is largely fantasy. Satien Junthimatoorn, a Thai freelance journalist and editor, explains that *niyay-pha-fun*'s plots are about the love of the protagonists who are from different social classes. The story recounts the hero's or the heroine's life difficulties in the beginning and the story ends with the protagonists' happiness. He points out that the important elements of this type of novel are coincidences (Wongthanachai 1999). Accordingly, Bunleua Theppayasuwan, a Thai lecturer in literature, affirms that the story of *niyay-pha-fun* usually portrays the protagonists as faced with some difficulties at the beginning and in the end they gain happiness. She contends that the author of *niyay-pha-fun* is pleased to illustrate a more beautiful life than a miserable flawed life to the reader and this is regarded as not real or even surreal. The protagonists are occasionally exceptionally good so that the reader will admire them; and specifically, the villains

¹⁴ Thai money is called baht and the exchange is approximately 47-49 baht = 1 £ (the exchange rate in 2013). According to the National Statistical Office (www.nso.go.th) the average household income per month was about 23,236 baht, that is about 503.37 pounds, in 2011.

are evidently bad. The villains can be transformed to become good people or be punished for their vile behavior (Theppayasuwan 1992). By claiming that coincidental events are essential to *niyay-pha-fun*, Junthimartorn suggests, like Theppayasuwan, that the story, is fantasy.

Another Thai scholar, Aim-on Chitasophon, defines Thai classical romance literature as unrealistic stories which are about love, adventures and loyalty to the royal family with a focus on entertainment. They sometimes also maintain the Buddhist trilogies of impermanence, suffering, non-identity and the principle of samsara¹⁵ (Chitasophon 1992). Specifically, Chitasophon's definition of romance literature is similar to the Western romance in the medieval period that tells stories about chivalry and knights' adventures. The term traditional Thai romance usually refers to the royal tales, known in Thai as *nitan juk juk wong wong*¹⁶, usually written in a poetic form. They are called *nitan juk juk wong wong* because the protagonists are normally members of the royal family (either a prince or princess). Typically, as Thanathat Kongthong claims in his study of the disguise of characters in the *nitan juk juk wong wong* and TV series, *nitan juk juk wong wong* starts with the displacement of the major character(s), love and courtship are followed by separation from the loved one, adventures, and the return to rule the kingdom at the end (Kongthong 2006). As he observes, *nitan juk juk wong wong* usually reproduce

¹⁵ Samsara is the cycle of life that starts with birth to death and the cycle repeats itself again and again via reincarnation. A religion such as Buddhism sees that this cycle causes suffering and then suggests stopping this cycle in order to attain Nirvana.

¹⁶ These poetic tales usually contain the words *jak* or *wong*, for example, *Wongthewarat* and *Jaknarai*. Thanapol Limapichart, in his essay about the royal Thai society of literature, contends that the Thai elite expressed "dismissive criticism" of *reuang jakjak wongwong* because it appears that the publishers were Westerners and commoners, despite the fact that the authors were Thais. Remarkably, they were popular although the elite rendered them as trivial and inferior (Limapichart 2014). *Reuang jakjak wongwong* is also known as "*reuang pralome loke*, a story type that contained supernatural events and unrealistic characters" (ibid., p.42). Thanapol claims that the "dismissive criticism" towards popular genres such as *reuang jakjak wongwong* is the elite's response to historical transformations which are, "the rise of print capitalism and the emergence of the modern public sphere that had challenged the Siamese ruling elite's authority and their ability to control political discourses and literary production" (ibid. p. 44). Accordingly, romantic fictions are also called *reuang pralome loke* regardless of the fact that they do not include the supernatural and characters are more contemporary.

the belief in the law of karma as in the representation of displacement of the protagonists, especially of the hero, from his home kingdom as bad karma. Once the protagonists have compensated for their bad deeds, they can return home and acquire true identity and position. In his analysis, Kongthong has found significant similarities between *nitan juk juk wong wong* and the present-day narratives such as those found in TV series (even in the Twenty-First Century), particularly in the guise of the main characters.

As to the concept of love in Thai romance, it is also a key element of Thai novels both in *nitan juk juk wong wong* and *niyay-pha-fun*. There is evidence that Thais' notion of love has undergone change. Nithi Eeoseewong interestingly states that from his historical study of the first half of the Rattanakosin period (1782-1932) based on literature, it is clear that the conceptualization of love as seen in the portrayal of characters had changed from that of the Ayuthhaya period (1351-1767) (Eeoseewong 2004a). According to him, written literature of Ayutthaya, or what he calls "*Wannakam Sakdina*" (bourgeois literature), portrayed reasons for the protagonists to "love and live together" because they are suitable partner for each other in terms of politics, economics, or the complication of their karma or divine destiny rather than simple individualistic love (ibid., p.389). I would add that these reasons for suitability allowed men to practice polygamy. As a man, Eeoseewong argues that love has more than one form and individualistic love appeared more vividly in the beginning of the Rattanakosin period and later has become the mainstream form of love in Thai novels. Those who love for other reasons turn out to be villains while individualistic love is portrayed as 'pure' and 'natural'. He explains the change as due to the emergence of the bourgeoisie in Thai society.

The Usefulness of Western Feminist and Literary Theories in Analyzing Thai Romance: Towards a Methodology

Despite the arguments of Thai scholars to the contrary, I draw on both Western theory and some Western analyses of romantic fiction useful in my study of the changing nature of Thai romance between 1940s and 1990s in order to consider their relevance. In this thesis, I employ George Paizis's model from a book entitled *Love and the Novel* (Paizis 1998) to analyze the selected romantic fictions because he provides useful frameworks with which to investigate romance based on the genre's politics and aesthetic values. In different ways, this research has developed in dialogue with Western approaches to romance. Paizis is a scholar who makes an attempt to produce a methodology, a textual analysis, to explore how romance is related to society and the specificity of romance as a genre. For this reason, his study is systematic when compared with the work of other scholars or feminists who tend to critique and examine romance. However, I do not follow all aspects of his model, but adopt key narrative elements that are essential in the representation of the characters, since I intend to look at the construction of characters from a feminist perspective. For this reason, I combine some aspects together and separate Paizis' chapter on characterization into two distinct topics in my own analysis. I also integrate a feminist' reading of romance both to support my arguments and to create a dialogue with my arguments at various moments in the thesis. Following Paizis' model, my chapters covers five topics: "Time and Place", "Female Characters", "Male Characters", "Love and Marriage", and "Conflicts and Solutions".

The textual analysis starts with the front cover, which Paizis insists is a key component of the genre, that is, the reader can tell that a book is a romance from its front cover, which presents the image of the protagonists' relationships through the illustration with a particular background. In the Western context it is the cover, with

its illustration, its reference to the publishing house, the often colour coded sub-genre of romance (for example hospital romance) and its place on the shelves of the bookshop that must advertise the novel in order to attract the reader as best as it can. For this reason the front covers of Western romance are an important marketing tool. The images shown on the cover are carefully designed as regards the postures in the illustration of the protagonists, the background that indicated the location of the story, clothes that signify social status and even appearance that implies reproductive viability. None of these aspects are depicted on the front cover of the Thai romantic fictions in this research.

Instead of indicating 'time' as another important aspect of romance, Paizis employs 'temporalisation' to refer to time that produces meanings in the narrative and defines it thus: "Temporalisation is the indicators of time which a novel uses to achieve its ends. The main function of temporalisation in the novel is to create the illusion of reality; by inscribing the story of the text in time it is naturalized and it is made to appear real" (ibid., p.58). The realism of time is important because it evokes the reader's engagement with 'the illusion of reality' which comes in the form of modern, linear time. However, Paizis mentions that the traits of temporalisation in romance are also "affective, cyclical, and reproductive" (ibid., p.61) in theme. His particular attention to time falls on the beginning and the ending of the story, which culturally has a prominent role. Generally, Western romance begins around May and ends before Autumn, at the end of Autumn, or in Winter. According to Paizis, the time of the ending signifies a period of reproduction, the settlement of the protagonists to form a real family. Nature and time seem inextricably linked in ways that produce indications of the meanings of the romance that enable the reader to decode the symbolism of the texts. On this basis, Paizis points out that time and nature "are appropriated to the heroine and are used not only to signify drama or achievement but how the heroine appropriates these elements" (ibid., p.62). Yet,

specific dates are not given and the use of time is not very strict, although Paizis mentions that the time of the action of the narrative is basically less than one month.

Localisation is Paizis' term for place, which has its value and significance to the story via the convention of giving the name of a place or the description of topology. In so doing, localization suggests context to the reader and through the text the denotation and connotation of values that depend on cultural contexts. He proposes that the significant traits of localization are to be found at the first meeting and the last meeting of the protagonists and the places for these particular meetings are required to be exotic, utopian and realistic as these are "the parameters of localization" (ibid., p.66). The word 'exotic' implies travel and moving from one place to another, "and the movement of the heroine tends to be away from her own place to the man's, which is where she finds or makes utopia" (ibid., p.67). This suggests that romance is the heroine's quest, something she acquires by leaving her familiar, comfortable place for another unknown, strange place of the hero, through which Paizis contends that her displacement or quest is initiated for the "emotional, cultural or material development of the self" (ibid.) with no connection to the hero. Places are regarded as symbolic and signify a subtle essence, which must be intelligible in order for the reader to understand the implicit ideologies. Viewed more widely, the connotations of place may refer to the struggle for an upwardly mobile change of social class for the woman, a new patrilocality, or even a return to the heroine's roots. On a smaller scale, localization is used to represent modernity, ancient spaces, tradition, refinement and much more.

Paizis provides a productive framework for the analysis of characterization in Thai romantic fictions, even though I do not use all of his categories. Paizis contends that characters' positions in romantic fictions articulate an imbalance between power and 'quality' and that both protagonists must prove themselves to each other and to the reader. The construction of conventional signs, such as male

and female characterization are analysed in detail in chapters 4, 5, 6, starting with names, physical appearance, spiritual traits and social positions. All of these are regarded as 'qualities' and assumed to represent the nature of men and women. These qualities, I will argue, reflect aspects of the social and cultural expectations of desirable male and female traits at the particular time the fictions were written¹⁷.

In his investigation of the depiction of the first meeting of the protagonists of Western romance fiction, Paizis draws on a concept of love found in Balzac's *Le Prince de la Boheme*, published in 1840, which he traces back to the Seventeenth Century. In this model, there are two types of love: love at first sight and gradual love as shown in the table:

Type	Passion-love	Marriage-love
Nature	Thunderbolt	Gradual fusion
Origin	Destiny/Chance	Choice
Mode	Recognition	Knowledge
Effect	Sympathy	Esteem

Figure 1: Balzac's two types of love (ibid., p.109)

Love at first sight, based on passion, is regarded as unpalatable since it connotes relinquishing agency by surrendering to an unknown force, destiny, or nature. The basis of passion-based love requires the Other to "satisfy desire or appetite ... the

¹⁷ These romantic fictions are considered contemporary because the constitution of gender expectations via the relationships of the hero and the heroine has been passed on from the 1940s, 1960s, and 1990s in another form of media, the TV serials. The expression by La Rochefoucauld, a French moralist in the seventeenth, is well-known and controversial: "many people would not have fallen in love had they not heard of it" (Illouz 1999, p. 162). Although his maxim came from a moralistic and religious point of view, Rochefoucauld is aware of the power of narrative to construct subjectivity and influence modes of behavior. I contend that the discourse is likely to have an effect upon people who receive the messages by any medium.

relationship is potentially destructive” (ibid., p.110) and is similar to a master-slave relationship. Marriage-based love or gradual love, on the other hand, involves one’s choice and active intervention and this implies the use of conscious knowledge and rationality and the control over one’s emotion. This type of love raises esteem and autonomy which passion-based love denies and in doing so appears as anti-social. On the issue of these two types of love, I do not think that Paizis’ account is convincing enough and I will go on to argue that the idea of understanding passion-based love as destiny or force of nature is Eurocentric in the sense that due to the advent of science and the decline of religious faith in the West, there seems to be an attempt here to make a clear distinction between concreteness and abstraction. Since the scientific revolution in Europe in the seventeenth century, science has developed immensely and some types of science put great effort into controlling or conquering nature, as opposed to learning about it. Nature has been relegated to a lower status and what is linked to nature has also been relegated as is the case with the concept of passion-based love, for instance. My point of disagreement with Paizis is the sharp distinction that he makes between these two concepts of love and the way he ascribes higher status to marriage-based love, which does not fit the socio-discursive relations of Thai society. While the distinction between the two types of love may help the process of analysis of Thai romances, this needs to be detached from value judgements about which type is better than the other. The relationship between the two types of love is both too complex to be treated in this way and it also relates integrally to the social construction of desirable forms of love and relationships.

To elaborate further, in her chapter on “The Lost Innocence of Love: Romance as a Postmodern Condition” Illouz (Illouz, 1999) draws on in-depth interviews with 50 men and women about types of love. Her respondents viewed gradual-love as ideal for their married life, but in their memories of romantic relationships most of

them recall the one that is regarded as passion-based love. It is noteworthy that 'ideal' is used in different ways. Illouz's informants use 'ideal' in its first meaning: "satisfying one's conception of what is perfect; most suitable" (Oxford English Dictionary) i.e. gradual love while 'ideal' in the second meaning as "existing only in the imagination; desirable or perfect but not likely to become a reality" (Oxford English Dictionary) is generally linked to passion-based love. This implies a paradox within individual consciousness of love and relationships and as Paizis also recognizes, "Daily experience is conflictual and contradictory" (ibid., p.122).

I also take up the idea, suggested by Paizis that the obstacles in romance create tension which serves to separate the protagonists. The conflicts are dramatized by building "the contradiction between 'appearance' and 'reality'" (ibid., p.126). The appearance refers to the hero's presuppositions about the heroine such as being loose, making an advance to him, or being a man-hater. The hero's charges against the heroine are based on social reality and the heroine has to prove her real essence and integrity through her actions. This 'essence' is normally regarded as sacrifice, weakness, intellectual inferiority, domesticity, and sexual passivity. On this basis, Paizis argues that obstacles should rather be seen "as tests of an initiation ceremony marking the passage of the heroine to full adulthood and the values she develops are those necessary for success to achieve the same goals in society" (ibid., p. 132). He insists that a man or the hero is not the heroine's quest, but esteem and status as a subject.

Western Theory

In general, the impact of feminism has affected Thai women's lives in several positive ways. The social and political emancipation of Western women with their demands for equal pay and women's suffrage has influenced the working conditions of Thai women. According to Chitra Ghosh, in her book *The World of Thai Women* (Ghosh 1990), the rapid economic growth after 1950 expanded the labour market

and allowed more women to work in industry and business. The growing labour market needed to recruit women and this resulted in changes in familial and social structure such as a more nuclear family-based pattern and female financial independence. As Ghosh points out, both the working and living conditions of Thai women from the 1950s to the 1970s were poor, with long hours in factories (from the age of twelve) with very low rates of pay and extra unpaid household work. Feminism, arrived in the country in the 1980s and has helped improve these conditions via activists and educated, especially Western-educated, Thai women. It can be said that the working and living conditions of female Thai labourers have improved a lot up until the present.

In the case of Thai romantic fiction and its theorisation issues appear to be more complex. Traditionally, Thais, both women and men, read for aesthetic reasons or for aural pleasure since stories in early Bangkok were written as poetry. In this regard, to a great extent reading is an imported practice and theories of reading bring about confusion and ambiguity in Thai readers; and this, I argue, is almost always true of other forms of occidental thinking and invention, including feminism. Rachel Harrison, in the introduction to her edited book *The Ambiguous Allure of the West: Traces of the Colonial in Thailand*, mentions the “relative lack of openness to theoretical engagements” (Harrison and Jackson 2010, p.8), particularly in Thai literary studies. Her remark is accurate since some well-known scholars such as Chetana Nagavajara criticize Western theories as inappropriate to Thai socio-cultural contexts. It is also true that Thai scholars invest considerably in the traditional aesthetics and ethics of Thai literature, concentrating on these rather than other approaches that are engaged with Western critical theory. The lack of theoretical engagement, particularly with Western theory, makes it difficult for me in approaching Thai literary criticism to conduct research on romance using feminist perspectives, because romance has been marginalized as well as feminism itself.

However, I contend that the importance of contextualization cannot be ignored and should not be underestimated. Harrison gives the example of the work of a Thai scholar, Cholthira Satyawadhna, who made an attempt to analyze Thai literature using Western methods of modern literary criticism in 1969. I have read that Thai scholar's analysis and would say that although she uses psychoanalysis and the concept of sado-masochism to analyse Thai literary classics *Khun Chang Khun Phaen*, *Sangthorng* and *Phra Aphaimani*, the analysis is not very convincing. I perceive these classics as folktales which focus more on action and plots, than on characterization. Yet, this may also reflect my lack of expertise or even my prejudice in approaching theories such as psychoanalysis because I always have queries about psychoanalysis because it seems to me to be based a great extent upon Western mythology. I do not deny the similarity of some themes such as killing one's own father, which also appears in local folktales. However, I cannot accept as a truth or universal theme the focus on the sexuality of both men and women using the framework of psychoanalysis, especially the Oedipus story. The theory itself is problematic, while I find Lacan's mirror stage with its theory of lack as the principle of subjectivity as more convincing, despite the fact that Lacan's theory is very complex. I do not oppose Western theories as do some Thai scholars; rather, I have seen the usefulness of them, but would argue that those who use them need to be aware of how Western theories have been developed in specific contexts that draw on specific assumptions and ways of thinking.

Another intriguing remark comes from a Thai scholar, Thanet Wongyannava, who explains the characteristics of Thai intellectuals' attitudes to using Western theories in his essay *Wathakam: The Thai Appropriation of Foucault's "Discourse"* arguing that:

From the Thai perspective, so long as an idea or a theory is useful or practical it will be accepted and warmly welcomed. Indeed, Thai scholars like

to compare understanding academic texts to eating, often describing books as either “digestible” (*yoi dai*) or alternatively as “indigestible” (*yoi mai dai*) and causing (intellectual) indigestion (*mai yoi*). Once a foreign text is edible and digestible it is accepted into the Thai intellectual world (Wongyannava 2010, p. 154).

In this essay, Wongyannava points out that many Western philosophers such as Derrida and Althusser are welcomed in Thai academia; however, these philosophers’ works are also often regarded as too abstract by Thai scholars and “Philosophy as a theoretical practice seems beyond the more tangible intellectual universe of Thai social scientists, whose works have always been conducted primarily in the form of empirical research” (ibid, p. 160)¹⁸. Wongyannava is right in saying that Foucault’s analysis is accepted in Thai academia because Foucault takes historical sources as a basis for his analysis rather than presenting his thoughts in the form of pure theories or philosophical concepts. Focusing on feminist theories, I also have difficulties using theories and concepts that are substantially abstract. From the outset of my research project, the process of selection and deletion has operated constantly, and I think in part the process reveals the critical resolution of Wongyannava’s quotation. The usefulness of theories and concepts lies to a considerable extent in their accessibility or their being digestible or not for Thai scholars. For instance, in the case of psychoanalysis and gender construction, I have seen psychoanalysis as problematic since it is rather Eurocentric and phallocentric, particularly in its portrayal of feminine “lack”. Yet, it is true that I have not read enough of other Western social theorists such as Gilles Deleuze or Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels whose works have influenced the

¹⁸ Thanet, teaches Political Science at Thammasat University, and I would argue that his observations can also be applied to research in humanities and I strongly agree with Harrison’s claim that there is a greater resistance to Western theory in the humanities, especially in the study of Thai literature.

development of feminist theory¹⁹. In the case of those theories I have found useful, I tend to appropriate aspects of them instead of utilizing them directly because of my awareness of different cultural contexts.

Drawing on romantic fictions, Paizis argues that there are two distinctive feminist perspectives on romance that he calls the “manipulative theory” and a more “progressive” one that allots positive quality to romantic fictions. I do not think that this is a helpful binary and moreover, the term “manipulative” is a very negative way of dismissing all theories that argue that fiction has real effects on the subjectivity of readers. Crucially the idea that there are only two sides with which to align one’s work reflects a dichotomy in thinking that I do not feel comfortable with, as I have already outlined above. In the case of romantic fiction, I both adhere to the theory of social construction of gender and I acknowledge the agency of the reader/audience and the role of pleasure as essential dimensions of any media. As a reader of a romantic fiction, I would contend that the discursive practices of romance do affect the reader, offering guidelines to acceptable or unacceptable femininity and masculinity.

I always feel nervous about applying Western feminist theory in my analysis. Basically, I am not certain where my standpoint is because on the one hand I admire Western scholars who have developed theories and approaches but on the other hand I also have doubts about the extent to which I can use these fascinating theories in the Thai context. For example, in accordance with Western feminists, I understand patriarchy as a way of describing/referring to particular inequality between men and women. However, I do not think that Western and Thai contexts of patriarchy are similar. The limitations of existing Thai scholarship which lacks an

¹⁹ It appears that the case of Deleuze may result from being too philosophical and thus indigestible for Thais, but the case of Marx and Engels is rather political because for Thais, communism has been regarded as crime, so their work is not prevalent, but limited to those who study political science.

adequate social history of gender is a major obstacle to scrutinizing the role of gender in Thai cultural texts. Moreover such an analysis also requires attention to the contexts of how gender intersects with differences of class and ethnicity. Some Thai and Western scholars (Hunsavat 2001 and Esterik 2000), for example, point to the higher status of Thai women in economic and agricultural realms. In the course of recent decades the situation of work on gender in Thai academia has improved as Thanet points out. More works by various Western theorists have been translated and have helped spur indigenous studies of gender. Although these are still small in number, it is a start and even though it will take longer time for such work to bear fruits in Thai academia, this thesis is a part of that process.

In my research I am working from a theoretical position that assumes the following:

1. Meaning is both social and plural;
2. Meaning is produced within discourses that are material practices that are also relations of power;
3. Discourses produce and shape subjectivity within specific contexts;
4. Subjectivity is plural and changing.

In the thesis I attempt to analyse the modes of subjectivity and discourses of femininity to be found in Thai romance between 1940s and 1990s, placing those romances in relation to Thai discourses of gender. I aim to contribute to the development of a Thai-specific feminist cultural analysis.

The thesis contains the following chapters. Chapter 2 looks at gender relations in Thailand since 1940. In order to understand the continuities and changes in Thai gender relations in the second half of the twentieth century, it is necessary to look back to the history of gender in Thailand before the Second World War. Chapter 3 looks at feminist theory in relation to romance and the Thai context; at Thai

scholarship on romance and at Western feminist reading of romance. Chapters 4,5,6 offer readings of important examples of Thai romance from the 1940s, 1960s, and 1990s. The final chapter draws together changes in the representation of gender in three selected Thai romantic fictions and provides a conclusion.

Chapter 2

Gender Relations in Thailand

'Masculinity' and 'femininity' refer to the sets of cultural and social representations of a particular society that prescribe expectations of men and women (Pilcher and Whelehan 2004). These representations are based in material discursive practices. Generally, the expectations are based on the social meanings given to sexual bodies and are strongly linked with biological reproduction. Thus, femininity and masculinity are cultural constructions that require ongoing interpretations and can be redefined as time and contexts changed. According to Pilcher and Whelehan, discourses of femininity and masculinity have effects on bodies, personalities, and a society's culture and institutions. Since femininity and masculinity are social and cultural products, historical narratives play a role in legitimating the heteronormative laws governing femininity and masculinity. Similar to Western societies, as suggested by Foucault, in Thailand the monarchy exercised power over men and women in a pervasive way in order to maintain the power of the monarchy and the state. The process of constructing knowledge led to the development of disciplines and discourses that exercised control over bodies.

Drawing on Foucault's account in *The History of Sexuality: Volume I* (Foucault 1976b), the incitement to discourse, that is, the putting of sexuality into discourses that are also relations of power, is visible in the case of Thailand. According to Thai history, important periods in the constitution of power/knowledge relations as regards gender include Sukhothai (1238-1583), Ayutthaya (1351-1767), and Rattanakosin (1782-1932). However, this chapter will limit its focus to the Sukhothai (1238-1583) and Rattanakosin (1782-1932) periods because they can be regarded as more important eras for establishing cultural conventions of gender. The hegemonic constitution of gender in the Sukhothai draws heavily on Buddhism while

the constitution of gender in the Rattanakosin period seems to be a consequence of the impact of imperialism and Westernization.

The roots of contemporary conservative Thai gender norms and values can be found in literary texts dating back to the Sukhothai kingdom, over 700 years ago. *Traiphummikatha* or “Three Planes of Existence,” attributed to the king, depicts an image of the perfect woman or ‘Nang Kaew’. Religion and monarchy were closely linked and the moral codes and norms of Buddhism were established to sustain conformity to the kingdom. The *Traiphummikatha* is considered to be the first Thai Buddhist literary work and it blends traditional beliefs and influences (Works 1992). It is said by historians and literary critics to have had a strong and long-lasting influence on Thai society influencing moral codes, though it has also been widely criticized for its prejudice and, particularly, for the idealistic image of woman that it constructs. Here, as more widely in Thai society, the principles of *karma* are important aspects in the construction of gender. Thus, it is not surprising that a Buddhist inspired image of a perfect woman should have strong and long-lasting influences on Thai society becoming an important basis for hegemonic discourses of gender. The excerpt below offers an illustrative account of the Perfect Woman from *Traiphummikatha*.

The Blessed Woman is neither tall nor short, but of the perfect height. She is dear and precious to everyone, and has a complexion so clear and smooth it is as if her skin had never been touched by even a single speck of dust, like a lotus flower touched by beads of water. She is endowed with all of the good qualities pleasing to everyone on earth...Her face is flawless and glowingly beautiful. Her skin is as soft as cotton which has been fluffed a hundred times and moistened in the clear oil from the joint of a yak...Seated on a golden pillow below him, she will fan him and pleasingly massage his feet and his hands. She never lies on the royal bed before the Emperor

does, nor does she ever leave it after him. Before she does anything, she will inform her husband first and when given permission, she will then proceed. Never has she ever disobeyed her husband... (p. 28-29)

This image became a central one in the collective ideology of proper Thai womanhood that continues to affect the discursive field of gender. History suggests that from the beginning Thai sovereign power employed literary discourse as a technology of power with which to control the body of the population – particularly women.

While the history of gender relations in Thailand has yet to be written, I would argue that King Ram Khamhaneng's writing in the Sukhotahi period throw light on the cultural discourses in circulation during his reign and that some of the meanings and values defined here persist into the present, including the issue of gender. According to these writings, men and women had complementary roles as both the king and the queen took part in battles and this image became important to the ideology of Thai gender relations. The National Identity Board Office of the Prime Minister²⁰ insists that Thai men and women clearly have equal status in ways similar to King Ram Khamhaneng's writing which is an earlier founding text that portrays a mutual relationship between men and women rather than the image of The Perfect Women which was written later. It seems that there is no sharp distinction made between femininity and masculinity since it is said that both men and women fought together in battle and worked together in rice fields. They shared roles. It is likely that in Southeast Asian cultures in this period, the line of demarcation between two sexes was blurred. In this regard, a Western social scientist such as Penny Van Esterik finds complexity of gender relations in Southeast Asia and seeks to understand gender identity in a context where "women enjoy high status" (Esterik

²⁰ This institution was set up in 1977 with its purpose "to inform the public about royal activities and development projects; outstanding and positive features of Thailand and its people; positive role of religion in the country's social development" (Tiranasar 2004).

1996). Similarly, Winzeler has investigated sexual status in Southeast Asian society from the perspective of agricultural production, the domestic and political orders, and demography and found that both men and women have equal participation in agriculture and thus, “the elaboration of status distinctions or levels of political organization are poor predictors of social positions of men and women” (Winzeler 1996, p. 169). Furthermore, Yot Santasombut – a Thai social scientist – affirms that in previous periods the Northern Thai kinship system was matrilineal especially among peasant cultures (Santasombat 2005). For instance, a bridegroom had to move into a bride’s house after marriage and women played more active roles in economic activities. It seems that the subjugation of Thai women did not derive from the development of the state or the invention of the Thai alphabet (1283), but largely from a religion – Buddhism – as can be seen from the portrayal of gender relations in the first Thai religious canonical text *Traiphummikatha* from 1345. If the written account of women’s position in this text reflected common practices, it is highly likely that the court established gender discourse in order to guide or direct women rather than to repress them.

The use of literary discourse to construct gender norms and values by the sovereign became more extensive in the reign of King Rama VI (1910-1925); however, in this particular period the attention given to gender norms has to be understood in the context of the threat of Western colonization. The event of the First World War during the reign of King Rama VI brought home the threat raised in the previous reign. The monarchy responded by promoting Siamese nationalism and attempting to modernize the country in various ways including its gender and sexual norms. Thamora V. Fishel (Fishel 1999) examines the depiction of gender relations in two fictional accounts: *Hua-jai Chai Num* (The Heart of a Young Man), written by the king himself, and *Si Phaendin* (Four Reigns), written by a member of the Thai elite, M.R. Kukrit Pramoj. According to Fishel, King Rama VI and Kukrit

linked transformations in gender and sexual norms to questions of national identity. Unlike his father, King Rama V, who countered the threat of colonization with administrative and political reform, King Rama VI chose to modernize the country with a focus on Siamese lifestyles and customs. The king encouraged the practice of monogamy and the constitution of modern forms of Siamese female identity. Correspondingly, the elite who were educated abroad introduced some Western practices linked to fashion and lifestyle to the country. On this basis, the king and the bourgeoisie worked together to transform practices of inter-gender socializing and male-female relations. It might accurately be said that the pattern of modern Thai gender relation, to an important degree, has been acquired through modernization and Westernization.

It is clear that the king's ideas about inter-gender socializing were implemented to a greater extent in the case of Thai women than Thai men. He sought to modernize women's images by drawing on Western models of clothing and Western hairstyles. Women were encouraged to grow long hair instead of wearing short hair so that they would look different from men. Chewing betel-nut was discouraged while polishing teeth was encouraged. Women who conducted themselves according to Western manners at social functions were appreciated as 'modern women'. In consequence, more and more women spent time outside the home, accompanying their husbands to social events or going out to the theatre. The king also issued a law for ordinary citizens to be given surnames and ordered that the surnames would pass through the paternal line. Previously, only a few members of the elite had surnames. This would serve to diminish the power of the bilateral and matrilineal kinship system, creating a stronger sense of identity that could only be achieved through paternal line. Accordingly, women's titles and forms of address were changed to become like those in the West. Thus, there are two

titles for women, *nang-sao* (unmarried) and *nang* (married)²¹ while only one title is applied to men. This raised questions about the assumed equality between men and women before modernization; for instance: Why do women need a specific title that signifies married status while men do not? What if a man were to lie to a woman that he was still single in a culture in which polygamy was widespread? Moreover, although it may seem that from the reign of King Rama VI onwards, women's status was subject to modernization along Western lines and they began to have more education, some activities were still rigidly reserved for men, such as the King's Wild Tigers Corps. Evidently, women also had a supplementary role in relation to men in nationalist discourse where they were expected to act as nurses or mothers who instilled in their children a patriotic spirit rather than exercising agency in the public sphere. Thus, women did "have a role in nationalism, but it was always an adjunct one" (Fishel, p. 158), such as fundraising for the Wild Tigers Corp. I think the discourses of women as 'an adjunct one' is similar to the comparison of women as the hind legs of the elephant which represents followers and inferiority. Although at the turn of the twenty century, the saying that women are the hind legs of elephants was questioned, especially by women; in practice a lot of married Thai women believed that for social issues they had complementary roles to their husbands. Thus, women 'liberated' via modernization were still circumscribed in their 'freedom' and subject to notions of domesticity.

Thai Buddhism and Gender Relations

The underlying assumptions affecting gender relations and gendered 'social roles' in Thai society may be traced back to the architectonics of Buddhist philosophy. In the words of a Thai anthropologist Pranee Wongtes, the patriarchal system in Southeast Asia works together with imported religious ideology to limit women's

²¹ In the past, the titles used to address commoners in central Thailand were *nai* for men and *aum-daeng* for women, both married and unmarried.

roles to supporters of the mainstream religion while leading roles belong to men (Wongtes 2006, p. 97). Thai Buddhism (Theravada) has quite distinctive characteristics. It draws on two levels of teaching, the mundane (*logiya*) and the supramundane (*lokutara*). Mundane teaching is centred on the concept of karma, according to which good deeds bring good fortune while bad deeds result in misfortune as a punishment. Karma can also be reflected in the appearance of men and women; that is, beauty signifies merit stored in the course of a previous life. Similarly, being born into the upper or lower class signifies something about one's merit. However, social status can be changed because the emphasis lies on how one performs in the present, which is regarded as the most significant moment. Moreover, one's gender depends much on karma too. In Thailand, *Kathoeys* have been a recognized third gender alongside men and women for a long time. This phenomenon can be traced back to Ayutthaya period (1351-1767), which referred to *kathoeys* in traditional laws, The Law of the Three Seals, and can also be seen in the pre-modern northern Thai legend that depicted the gender system as tertiary, consisting of men, women, and *kathoeys* (Jackson 1999). According to Peter A. Jackson, Thais' tolerance of *kathoeys* may derive from Thais' ability to 'interweave' and 'negotiate' as in the case of blending discursive strands from Buddhism, Brahmanism, and animism. Additionally, I think the reason for Thai tolerance of *kathoeys* lies in the belief in the law of karma according to which *kathoeys* are people who suffer from the sin of adultery from their previous lives. Thus, Thais tend to have pity for them instead of contempt, but this does not mean that Thai parents want their children to be *kathoeys*. In effect, this means that it is tolerated to a degree, especially nowadays when the society has become more individualistic.

Beyond Buddhist attitudes to the mundane, another type of teaching is pure philosophy with its chief goal of *Nirvana*. According to Buddhist doctrines, both men and women bear full humanity and have rights to attain Nirvana equally. However,

Thai Buddhist texts such as *Traiphummikatha* depict the subordinate role of women due, scholars argue, to the assimilation of Brahmanic ideals that were the main cultural belief in the court. It is widely recognized that Brahmanism itself is an important source of women's oppression reproduced through its idealistic concept of a sacrificing, devoted wife (Esterik 2000). Core Buddhist philosophy lays stress on three major concepts, suffering, impermanence and no true-self. The ideal of 'no true self' has been correctly stressed by Western scholars such as Esterik who argues that the teaching does not deny the existence of the 'self' as such, but construes the self as an empty container. Additionally, Esterik is right to say that the concept of no true self helps people "to understand that there are no personality traits attributed to men or women" (ibid., p.80). For this reason there are no fixed male or female traits, but people put on masks prescribed by cultural expectations at specific times and places. These expectations are based to a considerable extent on the sexual division of labour as regards the binary logic of "natural" men's and women's roles. But since there is a Buddhist belief in another life, it is possible that one may have traces of one's previous life in one's personality and this creates room for gender fluidity in roles and characteristics that are not really fixed.

According to the Thai scholar, Pattana Kitiarsa, who explores Thai religions, these are more complex than they may seem to be (Kitiarsa 2005). Officially, the national religion is Buddhism, but Kitiarsa argues that "Thai Buddhism" needs to be examined in the light of the concept of "hybridization". He argues that the Thai religious system is "composed of Theravada Buddhism, folk Brahmanism, and animism or supernaturalism" (ibid., p. 462). This hypothesis is plausible since all Thais are accustomed to the idea of the existence of many spirits, such as spirit guardians of land, water, or agriculture. Every Thai house has a spirit-shrine altar and some communities have an institutionalised belief in ancestor spirits to whom they have to pay respect as a rite. Spirit mediums are still widely approached for

medical and supernatural treatments as well as for personal reliance on issue such as communication with dead relatives or how to have a more prosperous business. It is important to note that local spirits are mostly female. Similarly, Brahmins have played a crucial role in cultural rituals such as the Royal Ploughing Ceremony held annually in Bangkok²². As for Buddhist monks, they play important roles in Thai society as leaders in religious rituals and in some remote areas as leaders of a community. In addition to this, they have also taken on teaching roles because in the past Thai education was located in the temple, where men learned to read and write during their monkhood. Thus even today it can be seen that most public schools are located in the same area as temples, especially in rural areas. Thai Buddhism does not only engage with religious practices, but also with magic, a traditional belief in Thai society. Some monks give amulets to villagers to protect them from bad luck. Many men prefer to have tattoos done by monks, since they believe that the tattoos will have a magical power to protect them.

However, Barbara Watson Andaya claims that the success of Buddhism in Southeast Asia is partly due to its appeal to women (Andaya 2002). Her explanation for this points to the use of maternal metaphors in early Buddhism. Since the cult of the mother was strongly entrenched in early India from where Buddhism came to Thailand, there are stories of the Buddha's past existences featuring mother-nurture themes. It is highly likely that the cult of the mother was also widely practiced in early Southeast Asian societies. In his study of myths and legends of the Tai people, who are ancestors of ethnic groups across Southeast Asia including Thailand, Prathom Hongsuwan insists that all the myths and legends refer to a woman as a major creator, not a man (Hongsuwan 2008). Particularly in Thailand,

²² Royal Ploughing Ceremony is the royal rite practiced in many countries in Southeast Asia for an auspicious beginning of the rice growing season usually happens in May. Members of the royal family, such as the king or a prince, usually preside at the event. In this ceremony court Brahmins sow rice seeds and offer sacred cows food to eat. They will predict the abundance of crops from what these cows eat.

ancient spirits that governed the land are female (Wongtes 2006). Citing from Thai medical texts, Andaya demonstrates that:

...even an unborn child was aware that much was owed to a mother's kindness, and that birth carried with it the inescapable duty to demonstrate gratitude. The motif of maternal protection and sacrifice is also evident in popular literature, like the *Lilit Phra Lo*, an epic Thai poem conventionally dated to the fourteenth century; here, the hero says to his mother 'Less than a wife is [sic] a hundred lovers, /Less than a mother a thousand wives. /Hard it is to give birth and rear a child, /To you, dear mother, so much is owed (Andaya 2002, p. 20)

The use of maternal metaphors is also evident in the kindness-milk-mother association. It has long been a traditional Thai belief that a man needs to undergo ordination as a monk in order to show gratitude and meritorious action towards his mother. It is worthy of note that this period of monkhood is preferably required before marriage because otherwise the merit will go to a wife, not a mother. In this regard, monkhood is associated only with a mother. Arguably, this was a way of integrating exported Indian Buddhism into a society, which was once guarded by female spirits. However, Kirsch points out that the unequal status between men and women is due in part to Theravada Buddhism having only male ordination. While male ordination is rendered as "Other-Worldly", the position of a woman is regarded as "worldly". Dhammanandha Bhikkhuni, a Thai woman who received her ordination from Sri Lanka, also asserts that this may result in gender exploitation and a binary and incorrect belief system among the religious; that is, it can evoke guilt-consciousness where daughters are concerned (Bhikkhuni 2007). According to her interpretation, it is Thai Buddhism that oppresses women, not Buddhism in general because the Lord Buddha allowed female ordination in his time.

The notion that Theravada Buddhism is a central site of gender discourses in Thai society has been debated among scholars both Thai and foreign. A. Thomas Kirsch (Kirsch 1985) points out that Buddhism helps to naturalise the sexual division of labour in Thai society: women specializing in economic-entrepreneurial activities, men in political bureaucratic activities. As a hierarchical social order, Thai Buddhism places women at the bottom of the Buddhist hierarchy, because they cannot be ordained: even nuns do not receive much respect from laymen. This emphasizes the disadvantaged status of women in Buddhism.

However, Keyes argues that Buddhism in Thai culture does not relegate women to inferiority. Likewise, Tannenbaum contends that Buddhism is not a primary explanation for inequality in Thai culture (Tannenbaum 1999). She claims that social rank or status is the primary concern while gender is secondary and that it is possible for a woman to be ranked higher than men because of her social status. Dhammanandha Bhikkhuni explains that Buddhism in Thailand can be viewed topographically at two levels. The first one is the spiritual entity, which does not contain gendered bias in itself. But the second level, which deals with general practices and concerns social and political relations, has become the cause of female inferiority: as in the refusal to establish a *bhikkhuni sangha* (nuns' order) in Thai Theravada Buddhism which is regarded as an instance of inequality between Thai men and Thai women (Satha-Anand 1999). However, Chatsumarn Kabilsingh (Kabilsingh 2000) contends that this might be the result of Hindu or Chinese influences, since pre-Buddhist Hindu and Chinese societies were patriarchal. This sounds plausible as ancient Thai monarchies exchanged some practices with the Chinese due to trading and took over certain hegemonic beliefs from the Chinese. To a certain degree, Hinduism may also play a role. It is therefore, difficult to pinpoint if Buddhist philosophy in itself is a part of the patriarchal oppression of women but Buddhism as practiced in Thailand certainly is. Following Foucault,

religious discourses certainly seem to play a partial role in gender-identity construction in Thai society, but with different mechanics or deployments of power from Western societies.

Tannenbaum (1999) also argues that Buddhism is not the sole discourse which aids understanding of the image of Thai women but also discusses the issue of sexuality – more particularly virginity. In her fieldwork with Shan peasants in Thailand, she has found that sexuality, for both men and women, is part of the normal life cycle and virginity is not seriously taken into account. For these peasants, sexuality merely results in marriage and the bride price payment is not very high; instead, it is taken as a traditional rite. Buddhism is not regarded as an important element in the practice. Tannenbaum is skeptical about when, where, and why virginity becomes an issue, as virginity seems to entail a modern view of a desirable female image²³. She argues that Thai identity might be less essential and more dynamic because Thai identities and statuses can be changed quite easily; she gives simple examples of how Thais change their names and surnames (or even change their looks by having plastic surgery). Thus, perhaps fixed concepts of identity or subjectivity are not appropriate to Thai society since there is always fluidity and flexibility in almost every aspect of life, including sexuality. A heterosexual man can have sexual intercourse with *kathoe*y (a third sex) merely to release his sexual desire; and unlike in Western societies where the Catholic Church controlled sex by means of confession, Thai Buddhism provides five broad precepts for commoners to abstain from: taking life, taking what is not given, sexual misconduct, false speech, and drinking. Thais interpret sexual misconduct as only referring to adultery. The religious precept on sexuality does not explicitly confine men and women to virginity. Obviously, Thai men and Thai women's sexuality is

²³ Based upon her experience, people in Shan village conceptualize sexuality as a part of normal life for both men and women, that is, men and women are regarded as active sexual beings.

derived from a particular interpretation of the precept on sexuality. My presupposition is similar to Tannenbaum's in that I believe that Buddhism might not be an adequate framework from within which to completely understand gender relations since, like gender difference in Chris Weedon's work, Thai gender relations are also an effect of relations of knowledge and power which permeate all areas of life. (Weedon 1999). Other factors that are involved in the constitution of gender identity, such as class and ethnicity should be acknowledged because of the hierarchical nature of Thai society.

A significant cultural element in understanding Thai socio-cultural relations and practices is the conception of time and context, *kalatesa*. It connotes the idea of properness and appropriateness that brings balance and orderliness in social relations. It has its root in Pali and Sanskrit. *Kala* means time, while *tesa* means place or space. Esterik (Esterik 2000) notes, "*Kalatesa* is very much concerned with surfaces, with appearances, but in Thai society these surfaces matter" (p.39). Her presupposition is interesting and remarkably convincing as regards social expectations of how people express themselves when having interpersonal interactions. What is missing from Esterik's analysis is the conception of roles that underlie Thai social relations. In fact, these are the cultural codes used to navigate people's behaviour, when dealing with others who are different with regards to class, race, age, and gender. In the case of sexuality, Jackson claims that Thais do not prohibit talk about sexual matters on condition that they are spoken of at certain times and in certain contexts or *kalatesa* (Jackson 1999). I concur with Jackson and would add that sexual terms and expressions vary according to the class of the speaker. For example, *hee*, (female sexual organ), is a taboo term in the public

sphere and *awaiyawa seup-phan*, (reproductive organs), is a more formal academic term²⁴ (Laphimon 2012a).

Wife-husband relationships

In 1999 Saengtienchai et al. conducted focus group discussions with Thai men and Thai women to explore extramarital sexual relations in Thailand (Saengtienchai et al. 1999). Drawing on the discussions, it is clear that single men have considerable freedom to visit prostitutes and the practice is considered as normal and appropriate. Accordingly, a survey of the sexual behavior of Thai teenagers shows that young adults – both men and women – tend to accept male freedom when it comes to commercial sexual relationship (Tienthai 2005). Moreover, Thai women tend to tolerate extramarital commercial sexual relations. They prefer their husbands to have casual relationship with prostitutes to their taking a non-commercial sex partner. This is in line with Fleet's findings when she claims that Thai informants tell her that "visiting a prostitute was a better alternative than having to deal with a minor wife" and "I was told by many women that the answer lay, in part, in understanding that "taking minor wives" is a "tradition" in Thailand" (Fleet 1998, p. 17-18).

From focus group discussions, it is clear that Thai women do not consider it as normal or appropriate for married men to have extramarital relationships. It appears that while Thai women do not really want to accept extramarital relationship as a legitimate tradition, undoubtedly, most men accept the practice as normal. However, both men and women reflect the view that non-commercial extramarital sex, or having a minor wife, is another story that might bring serious consequences. Specifically, there is evidence that elite Thai men have practiced polygyny for centuries. The practice is interpreted as a sign of power, virility and wealth. In

²⁴ I remember feeling so embarrassed and a bit angry when my grandmother, an old, rustic, naïve woman, used the expression to signify my sexual organ. I thought she was not well-educated, and this was why she used such a rude, obscene word.

consequence, many rich, authoritative men have minor wives regardless of the monogamy law. Fleet convincingly argues that:

The minor wife system in Thailand, although it has changed a great deal over time, continues to exert a very real pressure on many Thai women's sense of well-being, regardless of whether that threat is real or imagined, and to threaten stable family life in Thai society (ibid., p.19).

It is more reasonable to assume that wives do not want to accept any kind of extramarital sexual relationships, since the relationships may threaten women as regards emotions, financial income, and health. The fact that women allow their husbands to engage in commercial sexual relationships may imply inequality between sexes especially as regards sexuality, suggesting that men, to a certain degree, can have sexual outlets with other women while female sexuality is restricted to marriages.

Knodel et al. uncovered more detail about the characteristics of wife-husband sexual relationships, choice of spouse, and the significance of prior sexual experience from group discussions and in-depth interviews with Thai men and women (Knodel et al. 1999). To some extent, their general observation, that men have more sexual freedom than women and female sexuality is restricted by the cultural norms of virginity, is true. In the case of sexuality, both Thai men and women agree that men tend to have stronger sexual desires than women; thus, they are seen as needing occasional sexual outlets. In this sense, stronger sexual desire in men appears to be assumed to be men's nature. Interestingly it is clear from the discussions and the interviews that women show recognition of sexual desire, but believe that they can control sexual feelings better than men. This assumption can perhaps be linked to the point made in the above as to why single Thai men, or even the married ones, can freely visit prostitutes. A practice that seems to extend

male capacity to enjoy sexual freedom offers an analogy of men's sexual appetite and their appetite for food in relation to which some women assume that men "require a 'change of taste' (*plian rot-chat*)" (ibid., p. 97).

On the issue of desirable attributes in a good spouse both men and women agreed upon the importance of understanding and getting along with each other (ibid., p.100), though what they mean by this seems to be gender specific. Men expect their wives not to question or complain when they go out drinking with friends. Women expect their husbands to state where they are going and when they will return home. As Knodel et al. remark, this reflects a persistent conflict between both sexes in their perspectives on marriage. This may be due to the discrepancy in their attitudes that result from cultural beliefs about femininity and masculinity, which explain the distinctive nature of men and women in ways that include the discussed higher level of sexual desire in men. Generally a good male spouse is expected to support his family both financially and emotionally while a good female spouse should be responsible for the care and emotional support of a husband and children. It is important to note that at present, in the Twenty-First Century, more and more women are gaining higher education and entering the workforce in almost every profession. Most of them do not have to depend financially on their husbands. Because of this, modern women may not regard the ability to earn money in men as more important than being a responsible mate.

It can be observed that female fidelity is understood differently in Thai society. As suggested above, male fidelity is associated with a small amount of freedom for extramarital sexual relationship – with a preference for commercial partners – while female fidelity in marriage "is taken for granted rather than unimportant" (ibid., p.102) because infidelity is viewed as totally unacceptable. Despite this, for many men female virginity is not considered important in a wife. In general, they prefer virgins because they are concerned about their pride in being the first to have sex

with their wives, and they fear the resumption of prior relationships which might indicate possible future infidelity. Despite this, it would seem that premarital sexual history is not taken too seriously in women in contrast to extramarital sexual relationships. Male virginity, on the other hand, is never an issue for women in choosing a husband since prior male sexual experience is regarded as normal. Thais are accustomed to the proverbial metaphor “the fore legs of the elephant” which refers to men whereas women are referred to as “the hind legs”. According to Panitchpakdi, the preferred qualities of Thai femininity are being proper (*riaproi*), sweet (*onwann*), and not a loose woman (*rak nuan sanguan tau*) (Panitchpakdi 2007, p.34). However, modern Thai women have been required to perform well in both the public and the private sphere since the modernization of the country when women began to work in the public realm and this has remained a female expectation up until now. As more and more women are educated, the majority of them have professional jobs, but many of them still have a lot of domestic burdens including housework, as well as the well-being of their husbands and children. This is in line with what Somsuk Hinviman concludes from his interviews with women about their free time: that Thai women spend most of their time after work on their husbands and children while men spend their free time without regards to their family (Hinviman 2001, p.23). This may be due to the sense of fidelity to home and family that women internalize from cultural and social norms. Domestic activities limit a woman’s freedom to have real time to herself and as one of Hinviman’s interviewees says, she does not understand why she is busy most of the time (ibid., p.22).

Rachel Harrison (Harrison 1999) argues that the definition of good and bad Thai women is inextricably linked to the family, the institution that constructs women’s role as daughter, wife, and mother. Because of this, female sexuality is confined within marriage and whatever takes place outside conjugal marriage is

considered as promiscuity or prostitution. “Good” Thai women are expected not to allow men access to their bodies while this expectation is not applied to men. However, as Suchada Taweessit shows in her research, some women attempt to transgress the border lines defining good women, but they cannot really overcome the orthodox image of a good woman – an honest wife and sacrificing mother (Taweessit 2000). She convincingly argues that this is due to the hegemony of representations that draw on idealistic discourses that circulate in Thai society. Romance would come under this heading. Because of this, the analysis of representation of men and women and the discourses implicit in the representations need serious and systematic study.

***Mia noi* (a Mistress or Minor Wife)**

Mia noi has always been a problematic issue in Thai gender relations, an existing predicament which challenges the marriage law. Traditionally, only elite men could afford to have mistresses because of their stable financial situations. Thai kings, before the overthrow of the absolute monarchy, are good examples of elite men who had many wives. In the case of Thai kings, it is not surprising that they had several wives, but in the case of elite men, it seems that cultural beliefs provided room for this practice. In *Siamese Memoirs: The Life & Times of Pimsai Svasti*, Pimsai²⁵ a Thai lady who grew up and was educated in England from 1936 to 1951, described her encounter with Thai traditional and cultural beliefs that were exotic and foreign to her (Svasti and Amranand 2011). The issue of married life is also included in her book and one of the interesting parts is about *mia noi*. Her observation is worth quoting here to give an illustration of gender relations in twentieth century Thailand:

²⁵ Pimsai wrote short essays, which she intended to publish as her *Siamese Memoirs*, but was murdered before she could finish the book. Her son, Ping Amranand, collected the essays and wrote some essays to complete the book, partly to defend his mother's legacy from her gardeners who told the press that she had mistreated them.

A minor wife in this country is socially accepted by everyone except for the senior wife's friends. It is not as shameful or as wicked as being a mistress in Western countries. In previous times it was a humane way of coping with the problem of single women. Younger sisters or cousins were brought to live in the house as companions and they eventually slept with the husband. All stray girls were thus provided for and we never had the sad problem of spinster maiden aunts (Svasti and Amranand 2011p.171-172).

This quotation suggests that the status of *mia noi* was viewed as acceptable as a means to financially help women who were not married. It can be assumed that unmarried women in the past may have had difficulties in life in many ways unless they married, yet the status of *mia noi* is inferior to the first wife, especially as regards her financial situation because a *mia noi* could not claim rights to her husband's property after his death; but could only retain what he had given to her and no one could take this away. Svasti's grandmother even told her that a woman needed to choose a woman for her husband when he started to stray in case he should choose by himself and that might cause problems in a family. The grandmother picked her single cousin for her husband and they had good relationships until the grandmother died. Unlike her mother, Pimsai's mother divorced when she found out that her husband had a *mia noi* and her aunt castigated her for disobeying her mother. Pimsai's aunt thought it was silly for a woman to get divorced because her husband had *mia noi* and said, "That's the trouble with you young people who go abroad. You come back with these foolish Western ideas. It's a wife's duty to keep her husband happy and if that means taking a young girl to sleep with, then she must see to it" (ibid.,p.170).

The issue of *mia noi* reveals Thai cultural beliefs regarding male superiority. Traditionally, it signifies men's power and charisma as shown in the characteristics

of heroes in Thai folklores. In Thai *Khun Phaen*, a well-known Thai lead male character in classical folklore is a womanizer²⁶. This male character is represented as a skilful man in both love and war. Because of his competence in fighting in war, he is promoted and admired by the king. His distinctive characteristic is being *jao chu* (a womanizer) and while the term can be applied to both men and women “Thai society permits men, not women, to be *jao chu*” (Chonwilai 2012a, p. 46). As explained above, this is due to the belief that men have stronger sexual needs; thus, it allows men to have a sexual outlet either by having a *mia noi* or paying a visit to prostitutes while women are ideally expected not to have sex before marriage and are not allowed to have extramarital relationships at all. Even though Thai law at present only allows a man to have one wife at a time, in actual practice many Thai men still maintain the practice of having mistresses (ibid., p. 45). It is because of the belief in male virility, that many Thai women allow their husbands to have commercial sex rather than having non-commercial sexual relationships or a *mia noi* (Saengtienchai et al. 1999). Moreover, mistresses in the Twenty-First Century do not have to depend financially on their male sexual partners or husbands; in contrast, some *mia nois* support their husbands with money. The issue of *mia noi* is a sensitive, serious issue for women who experience involvement with minor wives. The fact that a man can take a *mia noi* regardless of his wife’s consent is a real threat for a woman. A wife has the right to turn to the law for a divorce and ask for money from her husband for parental custody, but this may not be what a woman really wants once she is married to a man she loves and when the marriage is not arranged as in the old days. Having non-commercial extramarital relationships is not common, although some Thai men and women may perceive men as having *carte blanche* in this respect according to cultural beliefs about men’s sexuality. This

²⁶ Unlike most heroes in Thai folktales, Khun Phaen is a commoner, but because of his charm he has five wives. However, the term has become rather outdated as more terms have superseded it, such as, playboy, Casanova, *phraya the khrua*, and *seua phu-ying* (Chonwilai 2012a).

particular belief signifies inequality in gender relations by promoting male sexual virility and suppressing and confining female sexuality, and this causes uncertainty and vulnerability in married life because of the perceived lack of fidelity. In Pimsai's grandmother's case a major and a minor wife could live peacefully together in polygamy because women in that period were socially programmed to live under that condition. But in the Twenty-First Century, when a sense of individuality is regarded as an essential element of subjectivity, *mia noi* has become something more distressing and intimidating, a sign of female inferiority especially regarding her sexuality.

However, in the Twenty-first Century, a new term has emerged that signals the changing of gender relations, *kik*. Monruedee Laphimon explains the word from several sources such as the *Royal Institute Dictionary of New Words*, and from articles. I found the meaning, described in a 2004 research study, to be the common one that Thais accept. It is derived from *kuk kik*, "to show affection", and refers to a more than friendly relationship, but not (yet) a boyfriend or a girlfriend. Both men and women can have a *kik*, whether they have sex or not, and this depends on mutual agreement. It is a casual relationship which can end anytime when one party want to finish it. This phenomenon transgresses the traditional norms of relationships and has shaken institutions that control and direct social values such as the Ministry of Culture, because having a *kik* is said to threaten morality and cause difficulty in controlling premarital sex – something that bourgeois culture still regards as unacceptable. This phenomenon expresses a transgression in gender relations, a contestation of sexual mores, and sexual politics within relationships. It may be a sign of increasing equality in relationship since not only men can have a *kik*; this is a new signifier of promiscuity that allows women to share the practice that was once reserved for only men. Whatever else it may be, it shows that gender and sexuality can be complex and dynamic and have no essentially fixed characteristics.

As Bechstedt has shown, the Thai social system is hierarchically structured, although there is no caste system as in India. It has to be remembered, however, that in the past the class system was more obvious and the *sakdina* system²⁷ is a good example of the historically hierarchical structure. However, because of educational and economic development, social hierarchy has been undermined to some degree and has become more unstable, especially as the society has become more complex and dynamic – as is the case of the Twenty-First Century. Drawing on Esterik's assumption that Thai culture has the characteristics of a palimpsest (discussed below), I would argue that past ideologies never fully disappear, but more meanings and interpretations are added to them. Thus, traditional cultural beliefs still play a role in modern Thailand and have not been fully eradicated. For this reason, the investigation of Thai romance novels cannot be fully actioned without looking back to Thai historical-cultural contexts regarding gender relations. This is also important because Western ideological concepts and theories are not fully adequate tools with which to analyse cultural products such as Thai romantic fictions.

Specifically, there are some Western scholars who study Thai identity, including gender, and employ Thai history and philosophy. Many of them are anthropologists, whose works are worth examining in this thesis. To start with, Craig J. Reynolds observes that Thai elites guided and constructed national Thai identity through the period of Western imperialism (Reynolds 1999). He suggests, using the notion of hybridity to investigate the Thai social formation and in debating ideas of 'authentic Thai' (*Thai thae*) versus 'synthetic Thai' (*Thai thiam*), an important theme in the last decade of the Twentieth Century. He offers an illustration of this point by looking at the image of Thai women from the Miss Thailand and Miss Universe

²⁷ A hierarchical social system started in the Ayudthaya period (1350-1767) based on the amount of riceland and manpower under one's control. It divides people into classes, the rulers who owned rice fields and the commoners who worked for them.

contests in 1988 when a Thai beauty queen – Phornthip Nakhiranyanok – won the Miss Universe. With a Thai body, she possesses beauty that meets Western standards, speaks fluent English and is comparatively tall compared to other international contestants. The fact that she was raised in Los Angeles raises the question as to whether she has an “authentic” Thai identity.

In *Materializing Thailand*, Penny Van Esterik offers a way of thinking about Thai gender (Esterik 2000). According to Van Esterik, Thai gender is a ‘palimpsest’ because new discourses are piled onto the old ones. In this sense, the old discourses have not gone away, but become the roots of contemporary discourses and results in major contradictions in conceptions of Thai gender in the present. Van Esterik demonstrates that Thai gender cultures involve the integration of gender complementarity, heterosexual hierarchy influenced from Hindu-Buddhist patriarchal culture, and Western gender understandings brought in to modernize the country during the age of imperialism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries. She asserts that Thai gender is strongly linked to surface presentation which is closely related to nationalist discourse and modernization. Buddhism also plays a role in this surface representational culture as the religion believes that previous lives predestine the look of people in their current life. If they lived very worthy lives, they will have attractive appearances; on the other hand, the opposite also applies and they will not be beautiful if they were not good enough in their previous life. Because of this, Thai female beauty has significant meaning at both national and individual moral levels. Moreover as Peter Jackson emphasizes in his review of Van Esterik’s book, contextual time and space (*kala-thesa*) are of great importance to the operation of Thai images. The splits between public images and private practices are not perceived as contradictions, since Thais view these differences as the result of normative demands related to contextual time and place.

Van Esterik illustrates other aspects of the difference between Thai sex-gender discourses and Euro-American sex-gender discourses. As mentioned, she views Thai gender identity as based solely on the body or on surface presentation while deep identity is hidden and inaccessible in accordance with the belief system of Theravada Buddhism. Knowledge of time and space – *kala-thesa* – is an important element in interpersonal relationships. Moreover, regionally specific discourses of gender have been blended with dominant state discourses instead of being suppressed or erased. Furthermore, Thai gender identity has blurred boundaries as Thais acknowledge the existence of a ‘third sex’ (*kathoei*). She suggests looking at the importance of action and practice rather than the categories and concepts which apply in Western approaches. In her view, conceptions of Thai gender cannot be limited to the issues of gender and sexuality, but other variables such as age, wealth, or merit should be taken into account. Thai gender identity shows significant fluidity as sexual practices can be changed and transformed. She insists that the study of power in relationships is very important and offers an effective way to develop adequate understandings of Thai gender identity.

Given this, I find Judith Butler’s theory of the performativity of gender useful. In her approach, which draws heavily on Foucault within a framework that develops Adrienne Rich’s concept of compulsory heterosexuality, Butler offers an account of gender that relies on the repeated bodily performance of historically and socially specific discourses of gender (Butler 1988). Gender identity is the product of a specific history and culture which continually exercise its power and individuals embody these cultural and historical meanings which are collective. Butler asserts that “ ‘I’ that is its body is, of necessity, a mode of embodying, and the ‘what’ that it embodies is possibilities”. To some degree this reminds me of the idea of subjectivity in Buddhism. Basically, Buddhism is a religion, which attempts to stop sufferings. Buddhist teachings insist on impermanence and the doctrines of no-self.

John M. Koller asserts that the idea of no-self may mislead people into thinking that Buddhism is nihilistic (Koller 1963). Rather, Buddhism recognizes the existence of body, mind, and the ego-self, "I". To stop sufferings, one has to detach from the "I". In other words, the "I" or the ego need not be born. I would like to suggest that in Buddhist philosophy there are two conceptions of "I", one that consists of a body (and perhaps mind) and the other that contains its attachment to the world or the ego-self. The bodily "I" has the ability to assume and reject roles that suit it in a specific time and context. To some extent, the bodily "I" in Butler's perspective can be read more or less similar to the bodily "I" in Buddhism with the important exception that Butler would not subscribe to the idea of hidden, deep inner identity. The idea that both discourses share is that what we are, is what we do and this includes gender. In this respect, Butler's viewpoint is in accordance with Buddhist philosophy: one does one's gender.

Peter A. Jackson, a social scientist who has expertise in Thai studies, also suggests Butler's concept of performativity as a way of understanding the patterns of Thai subjectivities. He suggests that Foucault's theory identity formation in the West may not adequately apply to Thai identity: "The lack of a confessional culture in Thailand means that the mechanisms of identity formation that are the core of Foucault's account of modern Western forms of subjectivity are absent" (Jackson 2004, p. 209). He argues that Thai culture does not have an idea of speaking one's truth or one's true being and subjectivity emphasises social status rather than individual personhood. His observations based on his research are that Thais emphasise behaviour and speech and that they have a greater interest in contextual time and place. In many ways his argument is convincing. Thais are taught to perform according to time and place and interpersonal relationships are inextricably linked to social status. It might accurately be said that unlike Western culture, the image or surface is regarded as important while the inner self is never

considered to be important. As discussed briefly above, Buddhist philosophy plays a crucial role in the constitution of identity. Broadly speaking, the law of Karma signifies the relational, mutual dependence of all beings. Thus whether an interpersonal relationship will go smoothly or not depends much upon performances. Thais treat other people according to their age, social status, and sex. What seems to be most important is performance. Thus, in some respects Butler's concept of performativity can explain the construction of Thai identity. However, what might be new in my approach to examining discourses of Thai identity, particularly gender identity, is the move to consider the concept of sedimented acts.

In Butler's theory, gender is the performance that the body performs (Butler 1988). One does gender according to the stylized repetition of acts through time. She compares a subject to an actor who performs according to the given role "in the mode of belief". Rather than being a passive performer, an actor does interpret the given role. However, the mode of embodying cannot be separated from a set of cultural and historical possibilities. That is, the society already provides a variety of discursive practices while a performer selects and discards those discursive practices within a cultural frame of gender. Butler states that "the body is a historical situation,...and is a manner of doing, dramatizing, and reproducing historical situation" (ibid., p.521). She puts an emphasis on repetition, which I think is an important factor in the constitution of gender identity. The repetition of discourse may appear as normal or everyday as Butler points out:

Consider that there is a sedimentation of gender norms that produces the peculiar phenomenon of a natural sex or a real woman, or any number of prevalent and compelling social fictions, and that this is a sedimentation that over time has produced a set of corporeal styles which, in reified form,

appear as the natural configuration of bodies into sexes which exist in a binary relation to one another (ibid., p.524).

In this thesis I am interested in examining the gender discourses that have been repeated and sedimented within Thai society. In so doing it is necessary to look at historical ideas of gender identity in order to uncover those sedimented discourses that have been incorporated in romance novels since written in the representation of male and female characters. I hope that my study may contribute to the understanding both of romance texts and Thai society adding to the argument that gender is never purely biological, but culturally, historically, and even fictionally produced.

Thai Romance and Gender: *Phet* (Sex, Gender, and Sexuality)

My research suggests that the meaning of the terms gender and sexuality were debated and finally translated into Thai and used widely in an academic arena within the last decade or at the turn of the Twenty-First Century²⁸. This means that both terms are new in Thai society while 'sex' has been used without translation as a term for 'sexual intercourse' for a long time and it can be said that all Thais in the late Twentieth Century know that '*mii sex*' means 'have sex'. Specifically, Thai has a single, broad term '*phet*' to denote 1) biological sex, 2) gender, 3) sexuality, and 4) sexual intercourse (Jackson and Cook 1999). Thus, *phet* is a Thai notion that includes all tenets of sex, gender, and sexuality and Thais can derive more than two identities from the term (Jackson 2012).²⁹ Because of the polymorphous nature of this term, many Thais find the stratified meanings of the Western concepts of

²⁸ Gender and sexuality were translated in the 1990s. Gender is rendered as *sathanaphap thang-phet*, *phet-sathan*, *phet-phawa*, *phet-saphap*, and *phet-saphawa*. Among these, *phet-phawa* has gained acceptance among Thai feminist academics while sexuality is translated as *phet-withi*.

²⁹ It is still ambiguous to say that Thai society is more open to identities that deviate from a heterosexual norm, since despite tolerance of a third gender, Thais believe, like other cultures, that male and female are natural sexes.

gender and sexuality bewildering. This points to the difficulties of translatability and its limits in the academic arena. In a Thai context, there is a field of study called '*phet-seuksa*', literally 'the study of *phet*', similar to 'sexology' in English, which has been taught in schools since 1980s. According to Jackson and Cook, the field is indigenous in its concerns and "appears to have emerged in response to a set of perceived 'sexual problems', often reflected in sensationalist press reports of sex crimes and the growing visibility of transgendered and homosexual people" (ibid., p.5). In this regard, I would say that the focus of *phet-seuksa* lies in sexual differences, mainly in the biological sense, birth control, and sexual transmitted diseases. It is an institutional means to instil peripheral knowledge about *phet* in an academic and serious way.

Sexuality and Roles

Thai normative discourses on sexuality are imposed upon men and women equally, but in distinctive ways. Present-day Thai society puts emphasis on monogamy as a good practice of sexuality that needs to be based on love and to have procreation as its goal. This is an expectation for both heterosexual men and women. While other sexual identities such as *kathoeys*³⁰ are tolerated, they have been stigmatized and condemned especially by heterosexual men. Male expectations are built upon biological differences or 'natural' differences that usually support male superiority. Men have long been considered as having a stronger sex drive and to be leaders both in public and private life (including in the initiation of sex). Thus, Thai society expresses a sexual double standard because to a certain degree it accepts deviant male sexual behaviour such as having extramarital relationships because of the belief in a higher sexual drive in men. As leaders in sexual affairs, men have freedom to acquire sexual pleasure to experiment and practice taking the lead with

³⁰ As discussed above, this is an indigenous, broad term that refers to a gender identity other than that of heterosexual men and women.

women and to ascertain that their female partners will have physical pleasure, despite the fact that mainstream discourses of sexuality do not indicate a concern with sexual pleasure, but with procreation. In contrast, normative discourses confine female sexual freedom considerably, as Sulaiporn Chonwilai and Pimpawun Boonmongkon (Chonwilai and Boonmongkon 2012) describe in their analysis of gender relations focusing on language and discourse in Thai society:

They [women] are expected to maintain their virginity/hymen (the same word, *phrommajan*, is used for both in Thai) until they give it to a man they love and marry; be chaste (*rak nuan sa-nguan tua*) before marriage; neither talk about nor show interest in sexual matters; nor reveal their sexual desires or take initiative in sexual matters; not dress in a sexually provocative (*po*) way; not love or have sex with other women; and not remain single, because that would constitute *kheun khan* – becoming a spinster – and signal their lack of ideal feminine characteristics, which would, in turn, mean no man would want to look at them. Finally, their value is measurable in money, through the bride price (*sin sort*) payable to their parents by the bridegroom prior to marriage. This means women are still expected to abide by traditional values of respect, obedience, and gratitude toward their parents (ibid., p.22).

These are normative discourses that still set the parameters of behaviour for Thai women, especially through the media, including romance fiction, regardless of societal changes and contestations.

As shown above, the Thai conception of love and marriage has traditionally been inextricably linked to men's and women's families, especially in the case of women whose guardians conventionally need to approve of their love and marriage. Unlike elite women who have followed the court practice of having women move in

with men's families, in the case of commoners – particularly in the North and Northeast – men have lived with their wives' family because daughters are expected to look after their parents. For this reason, ordinary women in the past did not marry out like the elite or noblewomen, who married and moved out following the Chinese practice. There could be cases when a man and woman loved each other and decided to elope, but later they always came back to apologize to the woman's guardian for her abduction. The parents would make a decision about whether or not to allow them to be husband and a wife. Generally the woman's parents would agree to their cohabitation, but if they were offended by their elopement, they could make their daughter marry a more suitable man. Therefore, love and marriage specifically depended on parental consent and female autonomy in love and marriage seemed impossible, since a woman's role was to look after her parents when they were getting old. The role of a grateful daughter has not faded away as times have changed. In Thai society both men and women are still expected to take the role of grateful children especially women who, unlike Chinese women, cannot leave their own family behind. A Thai woman has to assume a double role: taking care of her parents and her husbands' parents. This notwithstanding, in the Twenty-First Century men and women have a more private life and more opportunities for choosing spouses for themselves since arranged marriage is now widely viewed as out-dated. Despite this, the cultural expectation that children look after their parents still exists, and many people still send money back to their parents every month or give their parents money on special occasions like the Thai New Year. In this respect, the notion of gender is strongly connected to roles, based primarily on families, more than on sexuality as in Western society.

It can be said that parents and guardians take a primary role in controlling, investigating, and negotiating female sexuality in Thai society. As mentioned in the above paragraph, conventionally a woman needs consent from her parents and

guardians for marriage, i.e. for legitimate sex. That is to say sexuality, especially that of the female, is under the parents' and guardians' surveillance. In the Thai context, a man is required to pay a bride price, *sin sort*, to a woman's parents. According to the Thai Royal Institute's definition of *sin sort*, it is a fee for *khan am non* (breast milk fee)³¹ that a bridegroom has to pay to her parents or guardians, literally her mother (Chonwilai 2012c). The issue of *sin sort* is controversial because on one hand it is regarded as a matter of showing obligation to a woman's parents; on the other hand, it connotes that a man can buy a woman, a problematic cultural practice or a sign of intense patriarchy which leads to questions about other social issues such as prostitution. Chris Lyttleton attempts to explain the Thai social practice of giving *sin sort* to a woman's parents as a result of patron-client relations which is a social identity in Thai society (Lyttleton 1999). He claims, "...the combination of intimacy and gender inequality inherent in heterosexual relationships means patronage can seldom be usefully disentangled from emotional and physical exchange" (ibid., p.37). As regards this point, it might accurately be said that traditionally, Thai female sexuality is an object of economic negotiation that needs to be kept under parents' surveillance. In this particular practice, familial relationships put an emphasis on a role that every member of the family is expected to perform and the roles are socio-economically allocated according to gender.

Gender relations in Thailand are tied in with role expectations in complex way some of which result from religious values of gratefulness and self-sacrifice for one's family. Hans-Dieter Bechstedt (Bechstedt 2002) has a similar impression about Thai identity. Bechstedt did his research in rural Thailand between 1985-1986, looking at socialization among rice-growing villagers of Thailand's upper central plains. The research revealed mothers' expectations, (from 63 female

³¹ This may be another cultural aspect of a cult of the mother in the country because only the mother can breast feed a child although in practice the money is paid to a woman's guardians regardless of whether they are men or women.

informants), of their children in the light of their gender. Generally daughters are raised to be home-oriented and prepared for a spousal role. Sons are expected to study diligently to become white collar workers if their parents can provide money for their education. If not, they can study via monkhood which is regarded as important for every man. Both sons and daughters are expected to be aware of their parents' sacrifice and it is the children's obligations to look after their parents. The child-parent relationship in this sense is like a debt-investment relationship. Accordingly, children are taught to show respect, obedience, and conformity to their parents, especially mothers, the more so because traditionally motherhood has been eulogized and marked as of greater importance than fatherhood. In this regard, a woman can attain respect and esteem via her sacrificing role of a mother, while a wife's role is taken for granted and is inferior to her husband's in many ways. Bechstedt clearly explains the hierarchical structure of Thai identity:

Nevertheless, respectful submission to the authority of elders, such as parents or other family members, teachers, the Buddha and other religious symbols, the king and the Thai government – all considered to be essential to Thai identity or 'Thainess' – is first instilled into the child by parental teaching and later reinforced by the process of the child's secondary socialization, namely, school education. Such behaviour is reflected in the child's attitude of deference, submissiveness and passivity towards an adult (ibid., p.245).

Indeed, the hierarchical system is a significant aspect of Thai society and it expresses itself in many other ways, such as in self-reference words or pronouns addressed to people according to status, age, or rank. These aspects of Thai social relations, like others outlined above are central to understanding the gender politics of Thai romance that I discuss in the chapters 4-6. In the next chapter, I go on to look at romance and the adoption of Western theories, particularly feminist theories

with reference to postcolonial theory, to examine a non-Western cultural product such as Thai romance.

Chapter 3

According to Romance

Feminist Theory and Its Application to Gender Relations

As argued in Chapter two, there is little documented indigenous feminist tradition in Thailand. Sanoh Charoenporn, a Thai scholar, notes in his analysis of Thai women in literary works that presumably the women's movement started in the reign of King Rama V (1853-1910) as there were female journals and periodicals written by educated female writers at that time (Charoenporn 2005, p.6). Virada Somswasdi, teaching at Chiang Mai University Faculty of law and Women's Studies Center, mentions that the discipline of women's studies was first established in Thailand in 2000 while the school of women's studies in Western countries started earlier (Somswasdi 2006). This implies that feminism is an influential set of theories from Western societies and was brought into Thailand by educated people³². Given this, it is important to ask to what extent there might be some useful applicability of Western theory to the Thai context. While some critics are concerned about neo-colonialism in Western theories and question Western theorists,³³ many Western feminists are also well aware of the dangers of Eurocentrism or phallocentrism, as Mary Eagleton points out when discussing the conceptualization of the three terms: female, feminist, and feminine, "Feminism, constructed on the narrow basis of white, middle-class, Anglophone or Francophone women, has, at best, a partial relation to other women; at worst, it actively oppress them" (Eagleton 2003, p. 154). I am well aware of the importance of Eagleton's point since Western and Eastern societies have developed their own histories and philosophies as I have discussed above.

³² For example, Varunee Phurisinsit claims in her 2002 book that feminism is new, and often regarded negatively in Thai society and suggests employing Western feminist theories – as tools to explain and understand women's in equality because Thai society pays little attention to such issues (Phurisinsit 2002).

³³ For example, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in her well known essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (Spivak 1988) and Chandra Talpade Mohanty 1991.

However, I have found many of the assumptions of feminism convincing and some theories might help explain aspects of Thai society productively, as in my uses of Butler in the previous chapter. In general, feminist theory is based on the hypothesis that patriarchy oppresses women: as Chris Weedon argues, “Feminism is a politics” and the starting point for feminists is “the patriarchal structure of society” (Weedon 1997, p. 1). In this regard, it can be assumed that feminism may be a result of the structure of the society that grants men superiority and relegates women to lower status in many cultures, including Thailand. As suggested in Chapter Two, the discursive field of gender relations in Thailand, in which religion, state, the family, education, class and work are central, becomes increasingly complex from the beginning of modernization.

As Eagleton’s work suggests, Western theory may be problematic in explaining gender inequality in general, since social, cultural and historical specificity is important. Despite this, I am convinced and fascinated by some Western theories that have broadened my horizon of knowledge. Thus, I have found that Michel Foucault’s approach to the interconnection of discourse and power pragmatic in examining gender relations in Thai culture. Foucault’s work is an important tool for feminists to draw on to theorize gender and power and I have also found that Judith Butler, who develops queer theories after Foucault, is very persuasive, especially her performative theory of gender and her critique of the heterosexual matrix, the more so given that Thailand recognizes three genders. The recognition of the third gender refutes the Western heterosexual norms of men and women that have to conform according to a sexed body and to a certain degree shows that naturalness of sexes does not really exist. As for Foucault’s work, his explanation at the beginning of *The History of Sexuality Volume I* on the ‘Incitement to discourse’ (Foucault 1976a) is in some ways similar to what has happened in Thailand, although details may be different. Before the Nineteenth Century Thai

sexual practices were not strictly controlled and appeared quite lax compared to the last decade of the Twentieth Century³⁴. In the late Nineteenth Century, with increased contact with the West, including Thai royal state visits to several Western countries, Victorian discourses of sexuality came into the country and become more widely available with printing technology. Many of them were adopted by the Thai elite and used as a constraining measure to control the Thai elite female's sexuality. It is noteworthy that the Victorian discourses of female sexuality which restrained sexual activities were matched to the traditional sexual practices of Thai ladies, their sexuality confined by economic and political purposes. Thus, in many cases Thai princesses had to marry men the King/her guardians chose for them in order to sustain the relationships between kingdoms. Since the sexuality of elite Thai women was strongly linked to conjugality and political purpose, and any sexual intercourse occurring outside family institution was regarded as a crime, Thai elite females' virginity was strictly policed³⁵. During the period of modernization, Victorian discourses of restrained sexuality reinforced the elite female norms, which gradually spread to the lower social classes. These Victorian discourses were widely disseminated to the bourgeoisie and have remained the dominant discourses of female sexuality up until the Twenty-First Century. Yet, there are some disparities when looking in detail at socio-cultural aspects of sexuality between the West and Thailand. For example, Foucault describes how in Western culture sex was associated with sin. This had its origins in the Catholic Church and Foucault argues that the Catholic practice of confession becomes the main technique for the production of knowledge about sexuality and a science of sexuality in the West. In

³⁴ There is still some evidence left in rural Thailand where virginity and premarital sex are not regarded as crucial discourses of gender relations among laypeople.

³⁵ Tamara Loos shows in her study of Thai legal history and rape before 1935 that it was the woman's guardians who gave consent to a woman's marriage, not the woman. If there was sexual intercourse before marriage, a woman's guardians would make a decision if the man in question would suit the woman according to their respective social statuses. In this regard, Loos argues that Thai law at that time seems to "disregard the woman's experience of the sexual encounter" (Loos 2008, p. 29).

contrast, in Thailand sexuality has been regarded as a private, natural matter which should not be spoken about. Crucially Buddhism does not engage directly in the control of sexuality. In this regard, it can be said that sexuality might not be repressed, but obscured in Thai society. Yet, this still suggests that sexuality is something that should be hidden, a theme that I will look at in my analysis of the novels in chapters four, five and six.

Foucault is very clear when he reveals the likely mechanisms of power that produce the discursive field of sexuality in the West, but these mechanisms work differently in different cultures. Presuppositions about sexuality in the West are very distinctive when compared to Thai perception of sexuality. As mentioned above, Thais have not regarded sexual affairs as sin but as natural practice for laypeople. Thais do not have a tradition of religious-based confession about sex as in non-secular Western culture, so the policing of sex has not been so intense. However, having ancestor spirits police young people's sexual affairs can be regarded as a mechanism to control their sexualities. In practice, however, there has always been room for young people to have premarital relationships first before asking for forgiveness from a woman's parents and their ancestor spirits. While Foucault points to the importance of the medicalization of sexuality in the West, medicine, as an institution, did not begin to concern itself with the discourse of sexuality in Thailand until 1970s when contemporary medicine replaced traditional medicine.

Social Institutions and Gender Relations

Key institutions and practices play crucial roles in shaping attitudes to sexuality in Thailand. To begin with, Buddhism is pivotal. As discussed in the previous chapter, Penny Van Esterik argues that it is at the core of Thai gender because "Buddhism matters to Thai people in many different ways, and is a key component of Thai identity" (Esterik 2000, p. 65). Esterik argues that careful distinction should be made

“between Buddhist institutions and Buddhist logic; Buddhist practice and Buddhist beliefs; and popular Buddhist texts and canonical Buddhist texts” (ibid., p. 68). This distinction should be taken seriously because to say that Buddhism is at the core of gender asymmetry in Thai society might be too simple. Thai scholars, for example Yos Santasombat warns against the claim that Buddhism is a core cause of Thai female inferiority (Santasombat 2005). Santasombat writes that the idea of linking the asymmetry of gender relations in Thailand to Buddhism is one-dimensional and too simplistic and suggests looking at historical contexts and class as key factors for the link (ibid., p. 21). However, as Esterik suggests, I have also found that Thai popular Buddhism and Buddhist institutions play a crucial role in shaping Thai society and gender relations. As regards Buddhist influences, Esterik observes that Thai permissiveness, tolerance, non-involvement in others’ affairs and non-violence can be regarded as aspect of Buddhist philosophy that promote traditional gender relations in Thailand (ibid., p.66). I concur with the first two points because as regards sexuality, to some extent Thais have some freedom in their sexual practices, especially Thai men who can have extramarital relationships, while Thai widows have not been thought as effectively deceased by their communities as happens in other part of the world. Thais have also expressed acceptance of homosexuality, to the degree that they acknowledge that homosexuality exists; yet bias and contempt remain widespread. However, it is unconvincing to argue that Buddhism shapes Thai society in a way that transcends other social institutions and practices by suggesting that Buddhism makes people more tolerant and non-violent because other forms of social censure such as vicious gossip and condemnation remain widespread and rape cases are shown in the local news almost every day. The role of Buddhist institutions such as monkhood that exclude female ordination and other forms of discrimination towards women and feminine values can still clearly be observed. Yet it is worth noting that the situation of women in Thai

Buddhism has gradually improved as can be seen from the recognition of female monks despite the fact that they received their ordination in Sri Lanka.

In Santasombat's view, religion and rites are the main means of social control in pre-industrial society while in industrial society, law is dominant (ibid., p.4). The legal system in ancient Thailand seems to have supported the rights of Thai men over Thai women. For instance, when a couple divorced there was a tendency that a wife and her children would not be granted alimony since Thai law privileged a husband when it came to family assets (Satha-Anand 2004a, p. 17). As Tamara Loos has noted in her essay "The Politics of Sexual Violence in Siam" "the interpretation of sexual intercourse as marriage, rape, or otherwise depended on the negotiation between a woman's guardians and the man in question" (Loos 2008, p. 28). Based upon this interpretation, the situation of Thai women under traditional Thai law before the nineteenth century reveals the lack of female agency and female subjugation to a great degree, despite the fact that in practice guardians might ask consent from women, especially on an issue such as marriage. As Suwanna Satha-anand shows, historically the Thai state regarded men as "crucial and primary' for the strength of the state ... Thai Family Law in the 19th and early 20th century, clearly considered women as dependents on their male members, not free agents" (Satha-Anand 2004a, p. 27). This tendency persists throughout the Twentieth Century. Even in 1996, Snitsuda Ekachai wrote a column in the *Bangkok Post* in 1996 claiming that Thai Family Law "robs Thai women of their rights to own property, while Thai men who marry foreign women do not face a similar disadvantage ... for fear that it will allow foreigners to use more powerful purchasing power to "swallow" Thailand" (Ekachai 2003, p. 108). Ekachai's call for an amendment to the law was taken into account in 1999.³⁶ Accordingly, Thai Family

³⁶ At the time of writing Thai law allows Thai women with foreign husbands may own property such as real estate in Thailand on the condition that the property is the woman's private property, bought with their own money, not their husband's.

law has undergone changes and been adjusted to avoid sexual bias and prejudice and it seems promising that the Law, as an institution, can provide for more equality between sexes. This is due to the fact that feminist activists have fought for women's rights in Thai legal system. However, as Associate Professor Somchai Preechasilapakul, a law lecturer, has shown in his article "*Khwa-m-pen-phua/mia"-kap-kan-longthod* (Husbandhood/Wifehood and Punishment), Thai judges presuppose that domestic violence, and wife-battering in particular, is "normal, used to be regular and always happens" (Preechasilapakul 2008, p. 68). Based upon this assumption, battered wives who fight their husbands with weapons and sometimes kill their husbands are found guilty of murder. According to Preechasilapakul, this justifies wife-battering as natural and reflects the traditional expectation of women that they should tolerate their husbands' misbehaviour. However, it is worth noting that traditional Thai law also provides some room for women, noble and plebeian, to enjoy property rights (Patana 2004). However, I would insist that asymmetry in gender relations does exist in Thai society even though in general male and female relationships in Southeast Asia seem in many ways complementary and female status could be assumed to be higher than in other parts of the developing world, such as India, for example.

I am far from certain about the view that Thai female status is equal to that of men in the practice of the law, for example I have observed that Thai judges' presuppositions about domestic violence are problematic and this might reflect the role of family, another important institution that shapes gender relations and gender identity. I concur with Kate Millett's assertion that the family is patriarchy's major institution (Macey 2000, p. 291) and argue that as in other societies, patriarchy is the root of gender inequality in Thai society; yet, the mechanisms of patriarchy vary according to the particular context of Thai society. Thus, I cannot agree with Thai scholars such as Santasombat who warn Thai feminists about using Western

feminist theories and concepts such as 'patriarchy' to explain Thai society. While to a certain degree I accept his point that context is essential to the investigation and explanation of highly complicated issues, such as gender, I would argue, as a feminist, that I am more inclined to Western feminists' views that 'patriarchy' is a problematic structure that results in multiple forms of socio-economic inequality between men and women in most societies. 'Patriarchy' as a concept is indispensable and is a basis from which to tackle issues of gender. To say that the concept of 'patriarchy' is Western and should be handled with care might be an intellectual trap that leads scholars to turn a blind eye to the social construction of gender that is not a straightforward process and involves relations of power.

The Thai family is a crucial institution that helps to maintain the status quo. Suwadee T. Patana asserts in her historical study of Thailand that male domination and female subordination can be traced back to the early Rattanakosin period (1782-1932). She suggests that women's reproductive and productive roles are central in forming both Thai women's ideologies, beliefs and subjectivities and social values more widely that have become the basis of gender relations in Thai society (Patana 2004). Motherhood has long been honoured and highly respected. Thus even in the Twenty-first Century, a son is expected to become a monk for a period when he is ready, in order that his mother be granted merit to facilitate her passage to heaven after she passes away. A daughter, as she cannot be a monk, is taught to have a sense of respect and be obedient to her parents. In general, both a son and a daughter are taught to be grateful to their parents since children are still regarded as "an investment for their future" (Bechstedt 2002, p. 244). For this reason I think the value of motherhood has been emphasized and it has long been a moral obligation for children to support parents, particularly their mother, financially and emotionally or as Bechstedt understands it, there remain debts between parents

and their children after the children are adults. In a case of an ideal daughter, Bechstedt's essay notes that traditionally she:

has to assist her mother with household duties and with taking care of the younger siblings. At about the age of twelve, a well-mannered young lady should not wander around alone, or converse with any young man that she may happen to meet. She will be urged by her parents to play with other children of the same sex. By behaving in such a way, there will not be any reason for gossip, and the adolescent daughter can present herself as a desirable marriage partner. (ibid. p, 244)

The quotation shows that, traditionally, Thai girls' bodies and sexuality have been protected for the reason of marriage and procreation by avoiding association with men and boys once they enter puberty. Significantly, many lower-middle class Thai women have been required to work outside the home in order to earn additional income to supplement their husbands' income. Male incomes are not adequate for sustaining a family and for this reason women have had to play productive roles in the workforce, as well as fulfilling their reproductive roles. Thus, girls have been prepared to take on familial and mothering roles at a young age "to develop task competence, which by early adolescence will be almost on a par with that of the mother and will make an essential contribution to the operation of the household" (Ghosh 1990, p. 90). In this regard, Thai women seem to be overloaded with both public and private responsibilities, which can be interpreted as mechanisms that imprison women within patriarchal discourses.

The above paragraph suggests that marriage has traditionally been the most important thing in a woman's life and that these values have been reproduced within the institution of the family to serve the ideology of the centrality motherhood and wifehood. This conception of woman has also been reflected in Thai literature, such

as *Traiphumikhatha*, from Rattanakosin period (1782-1932) onwards, which both prescribes and defines desirable attributes of femininity. Thai literature in this period represented the subordination of women in various ways. Many conduct books were written by men and they echo men's expectations of women through the guidelines that they offer to proper conduct, represented in books such as *Kritsana Son Nong* (The Advice of Kritsana to Her Younger Sister), *Suphasit Son Ying* (Words of Wisdom for Women), and *Owat Kasatri* (The Teaching for Women) (Ghosh 1990, p.57). As motherhood has been honoured in Thai society and marriage has been fundamental, women's chastity and respectability have been policed, especially through these hegemonic forms of Thai culture. These hegemonic cultural discourses are still in circulation regardless that they were structured and created in the Nineteenth Century. This is due to the fact that this canonical literature has been taught in schools up until the present. Thus, these literary discourses of gender are mostly reproduced and disseminated to young people via compulsory education by a much respected institution that is traditional at its core.

The dissemination of hegemonic gender ideologies is also an important dimension of the media. Thus, Patana contends that the popular media passed on the changing expectations of women to the upper and middle classes during the formation of women's new roles at the turn of the twentieth century (Patana 2004, p. 68). At that time there were articles in newspapers, magazines, journals, books, and pamphlets that encouraged women to take on roles as men's intellectual companions alongside traditional roles in the home. Discourses of gender identity gradually changed in the course of the Twentieth Century as various historical studies by both Thai and foreign scholars on the subject of gender identity formation demonstrate. I would argue that rapid change occurred alongside the increased power of new discourses, especially via the media. In the old Siam, the meanings and values that determine hegemonic gender relations were passed on orally

through narratives and the ways in which they were told. In the modern period in the Bangkok era (1851-1925), the dissemination of hegemonic discourses appeared in the written media, such as short stories, novels, magazines and literary texts. Some of which, including plays, were performed on stage in the palace. At the time of writing with radio and television broadcasting, and most importantly the internet, gender identities and gender relations have undergone tremendous reinterpretation and transformation³⁷. However, I would argue that despite dramatic changes in society, traditional ideologies are still in circulation and subject to regular repetition. For example, in most Thai TV series in the Twenty-First Century, it is almost the norm that the heroine is a virgin who can only have a sexual affair with the hero. The heroine usually wears light, natural makeup and is modest while her female rivals put on thick makeup and behave extrovertly. This suggests that Thai media still reproduce and reemphasize patriarchal values of female virginity and modesty. Yet, in the Twenty-first Century, the media has also started presenting heroines with strong personalities; but they still hold firmly to traditional female values: those of a good wife, obedient daughter, and sacrificing mother. Those characters with deviant characteristics are punished while conformists are rewarded. This shows that, in order to sustain patriarchal values, Thai social institutions continue to reemphasize and disseminate traditional expectations of men and women that have been ideals for Thai men and women for centuries. These social expectations set norms that reinforce a gender division of labour that is based on biological definitions of gender.

Turning to literature, my research suggests that in the West, many feminists were concerned in the 1970s and 1980s about the obstacles female writers have encountered. As Mary Eagleton argues in her book, *Feminist Literary Theory*: “Most of the work on gender and literary production has looked at the *problems* of female literary production” (Eagleton 1987, p. 43). The underrepresentation of female

³⁷ Radio broadcasting was initiated in 1927 in the reign of King Rama VII while television broadcasting started in 1955 and the Internet came to the country in 1996.

writers in the canon and in literary institutions is a significant aspect of feminists' research and criticism, since it is argued that women writers often bring different experience and perspectives to light in their work and help question and reshape gender relations. In the UK, women's access to publishing was hard fought over. The case of Emily Bronte might suggest how the literary institutions during the nineteenth century disregarded the female author. She had to use an ambiguous pen name, Ellis Bell, for publication. There is no evidence that Thai female writers in the past had to hide their identities because of fear that their works might not be published or socially accepted. However, there were other ways of marginalizing women's literary voices. For example, during the Fourth reign (1851-1868), there was a literary work written by a Thai female poet, *Khun Suwan*, which parodied Thai romance and a rumour was circulated that the author was insane. In her text the author shows creativity in using words that do not have obvious meanings in Thai. Yet, the reader could still understand the story from the context in which the words were used and it was written in a fine Thai poetic form. It is highly likely that her creativity was confused with insanity because she rebelled against Thai social expectations at a time, when the world of literature was occupied by men. She ridiculed the Thai canon in which Thai romance was written in poetry, some of it by the Rattanakosin monarchs. In this case education was not her obstacle to success as a writer, but social acceptance was, and she was accused of insanity for creating a parody even though it was well-written. This brings to mind Foucault when he explains how the bourgeoisie marginalized the mad and conceptualized madness. *Khun Suwan's* writing undermined patriarchal, royal literature of the time and in so doing she was called 'mad' because of her subversive literary work. It is a punishment for anyone who would disrupt the status quo.

The combination of deeply rooted traditional values and a repressive state apparatus have meant that feminist agendas in Thailand have often been developed

via emulation, notably of the West. Feminism, as a social movement in Thailand, has not had a strong platform. It is hard to find names of prominent Thai feminists like Mary Wollstonecraft or the Pankhurst family in the UK. This is due to the fact that Thai women could access only formal education and became literate at the turn of the twentieth century in the reign of King Rama V (1868-1910). Moreover, during the 1960s and 1970s when second wave feminism spread in the West, educated Thais were more concerned with the Thai political system and changing the military regime. University students formed independent groups for political change and this led to the student uprising in 1973, an event where there was bloodshed. Notwithstanding this, issues such as equal rights, equal pay, abortion and female ordination in Thailand are very similar to issues that Western feminists have fought for. For this reason, it is possible to claim that the political agendas that Western feminists have argued and fought for are relevant in other cultures. Yet, since feminist modes of organization and ideas have been imported from the West, they have met with strong resistance since not all Thais are open to foreign epistemologies such as feminism. Feminism is viewed rather negatively and doubtfully by many Thais, both men and women. They tend to think that Thai men and women are equal in aspects such as education³⁸, the number of female parliament members and wages. It can be said that in general Thai men and women have been satisfied with their gendered social roles apart from the idea of polygyny, which was a general practice of elite men before the Twentieth Century. Specifically, Thais conceptualize gender relations as equal, but different.

Western feminist theories, from a Thai perspective can be seen as both thorough and bewildering. I concur with Eagleton when she reminds us that gender

³⁸ For instance, the number of undergraduate students at Chiang Mai University according to the Registration Office, updated on the twenty-eight April 2014 shows that the number of male students is 10387 while the number of female student is 16752. The only faculty that has more male students is Engineering. The number of students, including master students and PhD students, is 34664; 13433 are men and 21231 are women (Registration Office 2014)

politics are complicated and “class, race, sexuality (and other power relations) will be, on occasions, as important as or more important than gender and always interrelate with gender in complex formations” (Eagleton 2003, p. 156-157). In the Thai context, class plays an important role because hierarchy is the essence of the society. For example, different Thai pronouns indicate age and the relationship of people in a conversation. For this reason, I am inclined to think that a Thai subject is constituted not only by discourses of gender and sexuality, but also by the position of a person in the society. Here I think relativism plays a crucial role because it is a major part of Eastern philosophy manifest in the idea that things are complex and interconnected. Preoccupied with the realization of a particular position within the community, a Thai subject tries to perform her subjectivity in a way that harmonizes with the environment that (s)he belongs to. It is in such a context that a Thai subject is formed and this situation seems unlikely to change. The arrival of Western feminism brought with it many questions about the structure of the society, such as patriarchy, binary oppositions, and body politics. Previously Thai society rarely raised questions about gender relations. It has long been acknowledged that fights in the family and wife battering exist, but it has been regarded as personal and private. As in the West, women needed to challenge the public/private divide. Thus, as argued in chapter two, the personal began to become political once feminism came into the country in the second half of the twentieth century. The frameworks offered by feminist theories cover a wide range of knowledge, crucially posing questions about the nature of men and women and the construction of gender identity. These theories are relatively complex and perplexing to many Thais and their effects have given rise to a paradigm shift in Thai society because few people previously raised questions about its political structures, including patriarchy. Thongchai Winichakul, a Thai Professor of Southeast Asian History, shows that during the 1960s the Thai education system instilled into children that Thai society was calm, harmonious, orderly, and hierarchical and these ideologies remain

working until the present (Winichakul 2014). Thus, to disrupt the status quo of the society is regarded as problematic. As Winichakul described, I would also argue that Thai society hardly provides room for anomaly or aberration, regardless of the fact that Thailand has been intermittently under military regime. For this reason, it appears that Western theories have an ambivalent place in Thai society since critical thinking is required to analyse social, economic and political issues that the Thai state has claimed are in good order. Likewise, the accessibility of Western feminism to a Thai readership is often problematic. Significantly, theories are often based on Western philosophy, which is remarkably different from Eastern philosophy.³⁹ For this reason, it is difficult to really understand some Western theories as Westerners do. In part this marks the Eurocentric perspective of such theories.

For this reason I am not convinced that feminism, as a social movement and as a theory, is yet legitimately and successfully established in Thailand. Since the arrival of feminism, women who raise questions about the structure of the society are regarded as aggressive; thus, they have been regarded as undesirable by the wider society. A lucid example can be taken from *The Representations of Women in Thai Soap Operas: The Contestation of Gender Ideologies and Cultural Identities* by Jarupa Panitchpakdi (Panitchpakdi 2007), who has found a conflict between feminism and Buddhism in a soap opera written for the screen and directed by Patravadi Mejudhon. In this particular soap, *Tom* (Mud), a mother character is portrayed unconventionally as an imperfect mother, exhibiting characteristics that are opposed to Thai Buddhism that preaches the values of motherhood as fundamental for women, together with wifedom. This female screenwriter and director, who received a Western education and is regarded as a progressive woman, nevertheless depicts in her later work a storyline that can be read as an

³⁹ Especially theories that are based on psychoanalysis and Western (ancient Greek) mythology such as Freudian theory.

attempt at rehearsing Buddhist teachings for the audience which express suspicion of a feminist framework. This female director's premise is in accordance with that of Chetana Nagavajara, a Thai professor of Thai and Western literature, who asserts that knowledge from the West is attractive and systematic and full of ambition to dominate others (Nagavajara 2006). He warns against emulating Western theories in a superficial way, but suggests that one has to understand both 'the motherland' and 'the other's land' in order to use theories effectively. His requirement to understand different contexts sounds sensible. However, his presupposition that Western theories have ambition to dominate others may be less appropriate in the twenty-first century, since post-colonialism has raised awareness of such issues worldwide and postcolonial theory attempts to address questions of context. Both Chetana and the female director Mejudhon, as known and leading figures in Thai society, reveal their religious and conservative bias, shared by many Thai elites and the bourgeoisie, who have great pride in the uniqueness of the Thai identity and traditions as regards ethics and an independent Thai culture, and later this pride is passed down to the ordinary or the lower class.

In a more positive light, I have seen some promising signs that result from adapting Western feminism to Thai society despite the suspicion of feminism described above. It appears that Thai people are more eager to learn about gender relations than in the past. For example, same-sex marriage is a current issue that many activists are trying to legalize. In this context, there have been TV documentaries ("Undersigned Love" and "Why can't (they) Marry?" made for a programme called *Watthanatham-choop-pang-thod* (Batter-fried cultures)⁴⁰ and shown on July 31st and August 7th 2013, respectively. These include homosexual couples on TV articulating their opinions about same-sex marriage. The programs presented positive images of these couples and since their major audience is the

⁴⁰ The programme has as its goal to present cultural issues in a 'digestible' and pleasurable style.

bourgeoisie, they can be regarded as progressive in themes. The issue of legalised prostitution is also discussed extensively in newspapers. Many people with modern views tend to support the idea. Furthermore a law prohibiting marital rape was passed in 2010 and Thai society does seem to be more concerned about equality between men and women, despite the fact that many conservative people still claim that Thai society does not relegate women to inferior positions. Nopphorn Prachakul (Prachakul 2009) observes that power asymmetry still exists in many aspects of Thai culture and in ways of life. In some areas the patriarchal structure of Thai society has been relatively untouched, leaving its real mechanisms of gender asymmetry unquestioned. Issues that deal with Buddhism, for example, cannot really be spoken about in public and that is why the tensions between conservative, religious and modern views continue.

From my observations, I would argue that the idea that the personal is political is still limited to a small group of women in academia, despite the fact that Women's Studies has been established as a school in Thai universities since 2002, at Chiang Mai University and Thammasat University. According to Suwanna Satha-anand in her edited book *Women's studies in Thailand: power, knowledge and justice* (Satha-Anand 2004a), Women's Studies in the academic realm began with the initiatives of the United Nations (UN) in the 1970s. On this basis, it can be said that Women's Studies in universities is, to a great extent, an offspring of Western feminism. It is an influence from the outside that opens up the conceptualization of agency and the subjectivity of Thai women. I would contend that this has happened because of the lack of notions of agency and subjectivity in Thai society, although Satha-anand points out that the first women's movement can be dated back to 1860s.⁴¹

⁴¹On this occasion Umdaeng Muan (Miss Muan) petitioned the king to choose her own husband because her parents sold her to another man and forced her to marry him although she already had a lover. She won the case and later the Royal Decree was passed to prohibit selling daughters without their consent.

According to Weedon the meaning of 'subject' as defined in the Oxford English Dictionary is 'the thinking and feeling entity, the mind, the ego, the conscious self' while 'subjectivity' "refers to the conscious thoughts and feelings of the individual, her sense of self and, ...it encompasses unconscious meanings, wishes and desire" (Weedon 2003, p. 112). In Western theory subjectivity is linked to questions of agency and identity. 'Experience' and 'identity' are terms that frequently play an important role in feminist discussion. As a Thai woman I would claim that Thais understand the meaning of 'experience' more clearly than that of 'identity', particularly national identity which has become known in academia only in the last few decades, mostly in the Social Sciences. Regarding experience-based theories, a woman's subjectivity is formed "by her observation of and practical engagement with the world" (ibid). On this basis, Thai women also understand 'experience' as what one encounters and undergoes which can influence the shaping of one's disposition. As for identity, that Weedon succinctly defines as "a woman's conscious sense of who she is", I would claim that not many Thai women know the word 'identity', but every Thai woman from every class knows who they are according to their social roles. What they might not know is that these roles are prescribed by society.

In his introduction to a thesis on Thai women in contemporary literature by Sanor, a male Thai researcher, Prachakul points out that literary representations of women portray them as subjects who have a certain level of agency and subjectivity. However, the female characters' choices are still motherhood and wifehood. According to Prachakul, this can be explained by seeing Thai women as 'objectified subjects'. Sanor also inserts real women's voices in his research. These voices echo the objectified subjects of women in Thai literature for whom motherhood and wifehood are the essence of professional Thai women at the turn of the twenty-first century. According to Nopporn Prachakul, this confirms that patriarchy occupies significantly firm ground in Thai society. It is also possible that

the image of progressive, professional women might be the mechanism used by Thai patriarchy to recuperate threatening images of women, tying them to the status quo during periods of economic necessity when women become important to the labour force. I would argue that Western feminist theories cannot really access the deep structure of Thai gender relations, but the impact is only at the surface level, since the trilogy of women as a daughter, a mother, and a wife still plays an important role in the media and official discourses. The image of a superwoman seems to be the present ideology of a good Thai woman who can handle responsibilities both in the private and the public realm. In this regard, women, both the upper and the lower classes, become overloaded with excessive burdens, since work in the private realm is not regarded as real work, and thus the need for gender politics in Thai society continues.

Thai Scholarship on Romance

Within the Thai academic realm, other types of popular culture have been studied such as folk songs or traditional performance. In literature, many short stories and novels have been studied excessively, but most of them are books that have received critical recognition or realist texts that portray serious social issues. In this regard, romance is taken for granted, like female sexuality, which exists, but is not discussed.

In Thailand romance has been widely regarded as inferior to social realism. Thai literature has three forms; poetry, prose, and drama. It is worth noting that in the past only poetry was used to narrate stories, while prose was used in more formal written work such as religious and official documents and announcements. Narrative fiction was first introduced in the 1920s. Drama is also a relatively recent introduction as plays were brought into the country and made known around the turn of the Twentieth Century and King Rama VI (1880-1925) is the person who

introduced Shakespeare's plays to Thai society⁴² (Tungtang 2011). Prose fiction is thus a quite recent development in Thai society. From my vantage point, I understand Thai literature as a masculine discourse. Writing itself is masculine because men occupied literary writing from the beginning via education while the first women's school, established by an American missionary, only appeared in 1874. It is only the female elite who could have private education but this was not a normal practice. Contemporary publishing suggests that Thai men seem to prefer serious writing or realist genres of literature, while most of the romance novels published since the 1940s have been written by female authors. Thus, romantic fiction has come to be seen as feminine while realistic fiction is masculine. This might not be different from Western culture where romance is regarded as a female genre and has been a topic of a debate between those who disdain it and those who value it. However, I have found that academic works on Thai romance are very rare; it usually appears only in short paragraphs in essays on Thai literature. It is highly likely that this is because romance is understood as a female genre, and in consequence Thai scholars do not pay much attention to the genre and take it for granted, unlike in the West where popular culture has become an object of study since the second half of the Twentieth Century.

The lack of interest in the romance genre may result from the nature of Thai literature and the historical contexts of Thai society. According to Chetana Nagavajara, Thai scholars' major task is to investigate the literary work in terms of its aesthetic aspects and this implies that aesthetic values cannot be applied to literary narrative such as romance. He asserts that the task of literary criticism is "to give opinions on an artwork, contexts of artistry and/or other related factors in order to establish comprehension of meaning and realization in the value of the piece of

⁴²The king himself translated some of Shakespeare's plays in the first quarter of the twentieth century and had them produced on stage. The introducing of Shakespeare was rendered as Westernization of the country during the threat of colonialism.

work and other artistry; besides, it may also include perspectives on the relations of art, life, and the society” (ibid., p.61). As a prominent scholar in literary criticism, he upholds rather conservative perspectives on Thai literature. It can be observed that, like most Thai literary scholars, his academic appreciation does not include a genre such as romance. In the introduction to her edited book, *Disturbing Convention: Decentering Thai Literary Cultures*, Rachel V. Harrison describes Nagavajara as a representative of an elite Thai scholar who undertakes “the convention of veneration” (Harrison 2014, p. 29). I have gained the same impression from reading his work because he constantly emphasizes Thai literary identity as regional and therefore unique in itself, while warning against the use of Western theory and calling for a theory from the motherland instead. In his essays, he recalls his experience in childhood of traditional Thai performance, *Likay*, which instilled in him great affection for Thai theatre and music. Drawing on his writing, and the fact that he is engaged closely with traditional arts, it is clear that his youthful experience was the basis of his academic life later. Other scholars may not have the same appreciation of traditional performance, yet as an emeritus professor and a senior research scholar, his voice is louder than others, and so is his power in academia in dictating what he conceives as real Thai culture and valuable Thai cultural forms.

The Thai novel was first seen in Thailand in 1920s and Thai novels were for a number of years regarded as inferior and worthless. According to Rutnin in her *Modern Thai Literature*, before the 1950s, the novels were disliked by middle-class parents (Rutnin 1988). They were barred from the shelves of the libraries as librarians regarded such novels as being for mere entertainment and pleasure or *nangsu an len* (books for pleasure reading), not for academic pursuit. This signals that novels for a long time were not recognized as “literature” or *Wannakhadii*, a term which connotes superiority and is applied to texts that are said to depict the essence of society. Even an author such as Krisna Asoksin, whose work is

examined in this thesis, mentions in an interview that reading novels was prohibited by school and parents because of the presupposition that novels are about sensuality and libido, and thus, could arouse desire, particularly sexual desire among young adults (Rungrut 2000). According to this belief, it was assumed that in Thai culture sexuality, especially the sexuality of upper-middle class women, must be strictly controlled and confined.

Chusak Pattarakulvananit, an Associate Professor of English language and literature at Thammasat University, makes an intriguing observation about Thai fiction. He proposes three types of Thai fiction: namely proletarian fiction, popular fiction, and creative fiction (Pattarakulvanit 2002). In this argument, proletarian fiction is cheap and the plots are uncomplicated. The focus is on telling a story and on dialogues between characters. He calls this proletarian fiction (*Nawaniyai Choaban*) because in general the intended readership does not have a high level of education and tends to pick up the book that he/she likes without much concern about the author. Popular fiction is usually published as a series in female periodicals and magazines. Most of the readers are educated and plots are complicated with a variety of subplots. Once the installments of the stories come to an end, they are published in book form. The last type, creative fiction (*Nawaniyai Sangsan*), usually appears in pocketbooks. Their plots are serious, solemn and very complex. For this reason, the readership is limited to educated people. Focusing on popular fiction, Pattarakulvananit contends that it is not possible to change popular fiction which is usually described dismissively as ‘fictions of stagnant water’ (*Nawaniyai Namnoa*). Here, Pattarakulvanit is implicitly referring to the pleasure the reader acquires from the romance although he does not clearly explain why this particular pleasure attracts great numbers, especially women, or what its essence might be. Pattarakulvananit simply points out that romance is disdained as ‘novels for chasing a wife/husband’ (*Nawaniyaiha phua ha mia*) with an unchangeable

formula as “A man meets a woman. A woman is piqued. A man finds ways to reconcile. A woman becomes soft-hearted. A man becomes hard-hearted. A woman finds ways to reconcile. A man plays hard to reconcile. A woman seeks forgiveness from a man. A man forgives her. Finally, they marry” (ibid., p.25). He also claims that romance dominates the reading market. According to Pattarakulvanit, the three selected romantic titles studied in this research belong to the second type: popular fiction. Although the formula he delineates does not seem sophisticated, many Thai romantic stories do conform to elements of it. I would argue that the formula Pattarakulvanit describes is a rather reductionist generalization when it comes to describing the plots of romance. By describing the plots in short sentences, Pattarakulvanit makes them sound rather weak, and romance is portrayed as too simple although the tone in his essay is neutral rather than dismissive.

Prachakul is among the few Thai scholars who analyses narrative fiction by integrating Western theories into his excellent knowledge of both Thai and foreign literature (Prachakul 2009). In so doing, he can be regarded as more progressive than the previous generation of scholars such as Nagavajara. Focusing on romance, Prachakul asserts that the genre establishes the roles of the characters vividly and these roles affect the individual qualities of the characters. For example, the protagonists’ roles are to love each other and seek happiness in their love while the female rival’s role is to be an obstacle to that love. For this reason, the protagonists are portrayed as ‘good’ both in appearance and temperament in order to attract each other. However, he insists that it is possible to subvert or parody traditional conventions of romance. Prachakul also makes an intriguing remark suggesting that middle class Thai readers tend to misread literary works as documentaries. He argues that it is not fair to approach them in this way, because this is to judge literary works using values imported from outside the literary realm

which are governed by the bourgeoisie's values of "facts-reality" and "usefulness". He contends that it is the Bourgeoisie's obsession with the genre of realism and their attempt to apply this to all fictions that are aimed at pleasure reading that is at issue. He insists that the fictional world is just a world of signs; and thus should not be taken seriously. In my analysis of gender in three major romantic fiction stories I seek to move beyond this binary opposition according to which literary texts should be regarded as either serious realism or as mere fiction that is not in any sense serious.

Prachakul also points out that each genre has its own conventions and admits that the conventions are inextricably linked to social values with which the reader is already familiar (ibid., p.193). For example, the image of an artist is usually over emotional. Here, Prachakul is referring to stereotypes in the novel as derived from and reproducing what the reader thinks things should be like even in realism. In consequence, Prachakul argues that both romance and serious novels cannot really change or challenge social issues because the images are taken from a problematic society. While I concur with this, because it seems that his aim in writing the essay is to inform the reader to take fiction as fiction, not as reality, I believe that fiction can challenge as well as reproduce social values. Prachakul also argues in defense of romance that as indicated above Thai society is too obsessed with realism as a norm. Accordingly he believes that those who criticize romance plots and conventions do not realize that romance is not realism. He claims that the analysis of a text as "realistic," "similar to reality" and "appropriate" (ibid., p.197) might only reflect the critic's perception and bias and could actually be nonsense. I would argue that in fact condemnation of romance actually reinforces the social bias of a hierarchical society.

Since Thai romantic fiction represents some features of social life from a world 'outside', it is important to ask whether it is possible that the audience may conflate

the fictional world with reality by identifying themselves with the protagonists. One might also ask why identification matters if the audience can really make a distinction between reality and the world of sign? Perhaps the ideological power of romance relies precisely on the pleasure of reading a familiar value-laden narrative in a more recognizable modern setting. I would argue that it is not easy for the reader to separate these two worlds since narrative devices such as the settings, conversations, and the portrayal of characters adopt codes of realism. This is overdetermined by cultural assumptions, above all, Thai writers and readers presuppose that literature, in general, is a source of moral education (Rutnin 1988).⁴³ When narrative fiction first came into Thailand in the early 1920s and a prince wanted to try writing a short story, using a temple as a setting and having monks as the main characters, the abbot of the temple felt humiliated and submitted his resignation to the king (ibid.). This shows that Thais had not yet become used to the new genre of fiction with realistic settings and characters. Unlike contemporary fiction, narrative fiction in the past told stories of princes and princesses in verse form and the stories feature mythical creatures, the use of magic, spells and charms. This suggests that Thais drew clear distinctions between the fictional world and the real world since the supernatural was an important part of narrative fiction. The arrival of realist novels can be regarded as an abrupt change for Thai audiences, since it suggested that they could no longer easily read fiction as mere fantasy.

The development of fictional writing in the country was not a gradual indigenous process and the elite who imported novels into the country were men who were interested in more realistic novels rather than romance novels. It became a convention in Thai literary circles to prefer realist novels. In other words, realism

⁴³ It is notable that in traditional Thai culture literature was regarded as sacred because it served religious purpose. Monks would read the inscription on palm leaves on religious occasions. Besides monks, the monarch also wrote high literature in praise of the king and the religion.

became the mainstream genre of narrative fiction read by both men and women, despite the fact that romance had previously been read widely. In the preface of Bunleua Theppayasuwan's *Wann Wannakham (Glasses for Literature)*, Nagavajara informs the reader that Theppayasuwan fought boldly to have novels on the shelves of school libraries because, at that time, around the 1970s, novels were still regarded as entertainment and devoid of any academic value (Theppayasuwan 1992). This indicates that novels in general, and romance in particular were long regarded as inferior forms of literature. Moreover, it suggests that it was the elite Thai male who chose and constructed the cultural standard of what constituted literature by promoting one genre and suppressing another and this is one reason why romance has long been perceived as a literature of no value. What Prachakul complains above about, in fact, results from the socio-cultural relations in the society. I concur with Prachakul's analysis to a large extent, but my research for this thesis suggests that it is too simplistic to dismiss romance as mere harmless escapism for pleasure. From a feminist perspective outlined in the first section of this chapter, there is more than just a simple, transparent discourse at work here. I am concerned with the representation of men and women as stereotypes with inherent natures in romance fiction because, as I will argue, it influences the gendered construction of subjectivity and identity in Thailand, especially for women who are its major audience.

Western Feminism and the Romance Genre

From my reading, I have gained the impression that Western feminists argue among other things, for female writers' rights in the world of literature, for example, as Virginia Woolf contends, women can write like Shakespeare if they have education and a room of their own (Woolf 1969). In Western histories of literature, as in Thailand, canons were constructed by men, while women's literature was barely recognized until feminists started to intervene and reshape them. This implies a

gender hierarchy in the literary world and for this reason, some Western feminists especially in the 1970s and 1980s argued for literary histories of women's writing and their canons. They also turned their attention to inclusion in philosophy and history, reinterpreting them from a feminist perspective. New forms of female writing were also produced. Helene Cixous' much acclaimed work, *The Laugh of the Medusa* (Cixous et al. 1976), is an example that encourages women to produce innovative literary work, and to create their own story since in the past men have consistently written histories that exclude women and the feminine. She asserts in the first paragraph:

I shall speak about women's writing: about *what it will do*. Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies – for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text – as into the world and into history – by her own movement. (p. 875)

However, when it comes to romance, Western feminists often express ambivalent feelings towards the genre. Ann Barr Snitow, for example, makes a claim in 'Mass Market Romance: Pornography for Women is Different' (Snitow 1979) that she does not mean to "remove a Harlequin romance from the hands of its readers to replace it with an improving novel that includes a realistically written catalogue of woman's grief under capitalism and in the family" (ibid., p.138). She asserts that her purpose is to diagnose the romance, particularly Harlequin romance. However, from the points she makes, Snitow affirms that Harlequin romances still "reinforce the prevailing cultural code: pleasure for women is men" (ibid., p. 139) and agency and independence in female characters is "a mere counter in the sexual game" (ibid.). Unlike Snitow, Alison Light questions the conceptualization of romance as mere oppressive ideology (Light 1984). She insists that women are not victims or slave of

their sensibilities. Using a psychoanalytic framework, Light sees romance as a tool with which to harmonize gender relations, especially among teenage women and middle-aged housewives, who might not be satisfied with relationships in real life. She states:

Romance imagines peace, security and ease precisely because there is dissension, insecurity and difficulty...All the more so because inside a boring or alienating marriage, or at the age of fifteen, romance may be the only popular discourse which speaks to the question of women's sexual pleasure (p. 143).

According to Light, pleasure derived from romance is escapism but to call it escapism "is not to underestimate the effects of a literary discourse" (ibid., p.144). In her reading of romance, Light is more concerned with the agency of the reader. Consonant with Light's view, I think what is wrong with romance is not the discourses it reproduces as regards gender relations; instead, it is the world outside the fictional world that appears oppressive to women. Where pleasure is concerned, I have found that both Snitow and Light agree on the idea that the pleasure of reading romance exists in a magical, enigmatic feeling of falling in love. Snitow calls this "the first phase in love" (ibid., p. 137) and Light, in a more sexually explicit way, describes it as "a permanent state of foreplay" (ibid., p.143).

Rosalind Coward argues that fantasy in novels such as romance tends to express admiration for men's power (Coward 1986,1996). According to her interpretation of the admiration of male power, small children would adore those whom their welfare depends on and typically it is the Father. Coward further explains that this happens at a pre-adolescent stage and when children grow up they have to struggle for independent and autonomy, both men and women. However gender relations appear asymmetrical; that is, to gain power men have to

deny women's equality. But she claims that is why the novel occasionally depicts men's power as adorable. Romance also portrays men as sexually active while women are passive. However, she asserts that the heroine is not entirely powerless because at least she has the power of the mother. This is because fantasies in the novel are "very obviously about a certain transfer of power, from the man to the woman" (ibid., p. 191) although the heroine's power is exclusively linked to the power of the mother, as seen from a theme of "women being attracted to cripples, or having fantasies about nursing men through illness during which the man suddenly realizes that 'what he's been feeling is love'" (ibid., p.192). I would argue that this desirable social element binds women to the public realm, as well as securing her position as the Angel in the House. The role of a sacrificing mother can also be interpreted as a traditional type that chains women to the private sphere.

Does romance strengthen or weaken patriarchy via such representations? Is the pleasure they offer a source of power or oppression? Why do feminists have such ambivalent feelings towards romance? What about the pleasure of reading? These are important questions and I would argue that romance, and gender relations as a site of politics, are always vexed issues and it depends much on the specific context within which each person reads. It seems to me that the roles of feminist and ordinary woman conflict unless one understand the female reading subject as complex and often contradictory, as it is theorized in poststructuralist theory. Knowledge about or the interpretation of such an issue as romance depends on a variety of details such as class, age, and education. As long as romance exists as a genre, ambivalent attitudes towards it are likely to prevail.

In an influential book, *Reading the Romance* (Radway 1984), Janice A. Radway contends that the romance novel takes part in female identity construction within the realm of patriarchy:

the romance originates in the female push toward individuation and actualization of the self, but because it is written by women who have been engendered within a patriarchal family characterized by exclusively female “mothering”, that drive is embodied within the language and forms created and prescribed by patriarchy. Consequently, to achieve *female* selfhood in the romance, which is an expression of patriarchal culture, is to realize an identity in relation not merely to one but to two important others [her male partner and her mother]. The romance does deny the worth of complete autonomy. In doing so, however, it is not obliterating the female self completely. Rather, it is constructing a particular kind of female self, the self-in-relation demanded by patriarchal parenting arrangement (ibid., p. 147).

In this regard, women locate themselves within patriarchal discourses of femininity, particularly of motherhood, which restrained them rather than creating real sense of autonomy. In her empirical research Radway reveals how American housewives read the romance and what ‘failed’ and ‘ideal’ romance novels might be. According to Radway’s informants, romance reading is a “declaration of independence”, a private activity that signifies the denial of women’s expectations as wives and mothers for a short time. In this regard, I am inclined to agree with Radway when she claims that “romance reading is a profoundly conflicted activity centered upon a profoundly conflicted form” (ibid., p.14). It is not fair to assume that women who read romance are masochistic although discursive ideologies found in romance often appear problematic. Reading romance is complex both as regards the act of reading and its affect upon the audience. Radway suggests that “we as feminists might help this [the dependent status of women on marriage as the source of female fulfillment] change along by first learning to recognize that romance reading originates in very real dissatisfaction [with women’s marriage lives and asymmetry in gender relations] and embodies a valid, if limited, protest” (ibid., p.220). The next step is to develop

strategies to cope with dissatisfaction and encourage protest in a form of actual relations while finally creating a new form of fantasy. Radway makes an attempt to understand the complexity of a genre that she views as problematic. I agree with her that the genre is complex, but it is not easy to form a new fantasy for women and I would say that romance is unlikely to disappear.

George Paizis concludes that the debates about romance in the late 1960s and 1970s, at the advent of the Women's Liberation Movement (WLM), are centered on the ideological effects of romance, freedom in invention versus formula dictated by the market, and high versus low class cultural consumption (Paizis 1998). According to Paizis, the defenders of romance claim that romantic fiction is "a piece of harmless escapism", while the detractor perceives it "as a means of insidious social control" (ibid., p. 40). Clearly this characterization of feminist writing on romance masks the complexities of debates. As regards the idea that romance is a form of female pornography, I agree with Ann Barr Snitow when she questions whether Harlequin romances are indeed pornography. She argues that there is nothing related to female pornography in these texts. I would accept the idea that some romance is arousing much like other forms of female erotica, but is there anything wrong if some women use romance as a sexual outlet? I think we live at a great distance from the Nineteenth Century when, as Foucault delineates, sexuality was strictly policed and controlled (Foucault 1976a). If men use pornography for pleasure, why cannot women? I do not think that a critic such as Peter Parisi is sensible when he claims that "Harlequin romances are essentially pornography for people ashamed to read pornography" (quoted in Snitow 1979, p. 151). I am more inclined to think like Luce Irigaray that female sexuality may be different from male sexuality. For some women, reading romance may be a better source of sexual arousal than a pornographic book.

Pamela Regis's *A Natural History of the Romance Novel* (Regis 2003) also presents interesting perspectives on romance. Regis' s view of romance is in many ways positive. From her research into the accusations made against romance, Regis suggests that the indictments of romance are that it:

extinguishes its own heroine, confining her within a story that ignores the full range of her concerns and abilities ("muffle the main female character") and denies her independent goal-oriented action outside of love and marriage ("quest," "idiosyncratic histories") and that it binds readers in their marriages or encourages them to get married; it equates marriage with success and glorifies sexual difference (ibid., p. 10).

According to these two major charges, what seems problematic about the romance novel is love and marriage. She defends the genre by arguing that it is about women's freedom (ibid., p. xiii). What Regis has undertaken is to query the explanatory power of feminist theory when it seems to go along with mainstream cultural theory in attacking the romance genre. She does not view love and marriage in the form in which they are presented in romance as oppressive.

As well as considering feminist critics, it might also be fruitful to take romance authors' standpoints and perspectives into account. Jayne Ann Krentz, an editor of the volume of essays *Dangerous Men and Adventurous Women: Romance Writers on the Appeal of the Romance* (Krentz 1992a) claims that the contributors to this book, who are also romance writers, deliver essays making arguments around three themes. Firstly, they deny the idea that the reader uses romance "as a substitute for action in the real world" (ibid., p. 5); thus, the reader does not confuse the fictional world and reality. Secondly, the effect of romance is to empower women instead of repressing them and the reader realizes this fact through the representation of the heroine who will win in the end. Lastly, instead of conforming to the patriarchal

power of men, romance challenges male power by portraying the qualities of the heroine as similar to the hero in other genres. Accordingly, in her essay, "Trying to Tame the Romance: Critics and Correctness", she insists that certain plots work for romance and this limitation of plots "is not considered a sin" (Krentz 1992b) when compared with other genres. The idea of the particular conventions of romance is similar to the way in which Prachakul discusses romance in the Thai context above. Krentz points out that for romance to work as a genre it must include a plot about the relationship between the heroine and the hero. Thus, the romance plot cannot really escape focusing on how they develop the relationship; and sub-plots, such as social problems, family bonds, or adventures, appearing only as incidental.

As regards Krentz' defense of romance, I am skeptical of the argument that romance does not have any effects upon the reader. Having studied and trained within the parameters of feminism and critical and cultural theory, I would like to contend that discursive practices also operate at the level of the unconsciousness, through the repetition of experiences of readers. This includes every detailed aspect of life and mode of experience. By simply saying that the reader is not confused by the relationship between fiction and reality is not sufficient. Likewise, it may depend to a large extent on how one's particular society perceives the narratives. In the case of Thailand, people tend to the presupposition that books are sacred, since Thais have been taught to pay respect to books especially to textbooks. I remember dropping textbooks on the ground or unintentionally stepping over them. As a child I was once told to lie on the ground and *krap*, by lying both palms, on the books and I always feel guilty when I step over books even today. Moreover, Thai writers, especially famous novelists including romance writers, usually write with didactic purposes, so the audience also learns to expect lessons from the stories they read. This explains why some people may tend to take the representation of the leading protagonists as ideal characters.

I am also more inclined to think that the concept of romance novels empowering women is overstated. This does not mean that I have contempt for romance like some critics in the twentieth century. I understand romance writers like Jane Austin or the Thai romance writer Krisna Asoksin (born 27 November 1931) as portraying their heroines as possessing qualities that they think are good and which they make no attempt to denigrate. I will explore these characteristics of heroines in the next three chapters. At this point, I insist, as does Foucault, that the power of social and cultural discourse is pervasive and is obscure in its operation. Yet, as Linda Barlow and Jayne Ann Krentz contend, while “romance readers do not confuse fantasy with reality” (Barlow and Krentz 1992, p. 21), it may be the case that they confuse gender ideologies with gender norms. Here, I mean that the reader may take idealized notions of femininity and masculinity from the representations of male and female protagonists as patterns of how men and women should perform in real life. It is not a question of identification with the characters, but of how gender norms are deduced from the text. In this argument, the reader is not unintelligent, but it is the operation of discursive practices may mean that both the reader and the author are unaware of socio-political aspects of the construction of gender.

Applying Western Ideas to Thai Romances

Western theories have both strengths and limitations when applied to different cultures. As far as strengths are concerned, the West appears to have an efficient system of developing theories. Knowledge has been recorded and organized in a way that can be further expanded. Its clear limitation is its Eurocentric character, despite the fact that more and more Western scholars are becoming concerned about this limitation. For example, from a Thai perspective Freudian analysis of the role of the fear of castration in the acquisition of gender appears unconvincing. The

discourse on penis envy and the sense of loss in females sounds very patriarchal. It is understandable that Freud's assumption in his theory came from intense observation from several cases in his life time. It is still worth wondering however, if he would have found something different in different societies in other parts of the world. Founding cultural narratives with their specific gender dimensions of how God created the world or the genesis is also different in many parts of the world. For instance, Northern Thailand's narrative of the genesis narrates the story of a female goddess who roams through the world and lives from the smell of flowers until one day she meets her male partner and they have three children, a boy, a girl, and a *kathoe*, the third gender⁴⁴. I have to ask how Western scholars can explain the submissive role of woman and yet be blind to the third gender in this context? Such blindness would suggest that to define women in terms of lack and subordination derived from the Western discourses is often not appropriate for women from other parts of the world. Western narratives are not universal since founding myths from different societies tell different stories. In the case of Thai society, the imposition of a binary gender system may not be able to fully explain a society which also recognizes *kathoe* as another type of gendered subject despite the fact that this third gender has been regarded as inferior to heterosexual men and women. Thus, I would argue that the recognition of specific cultural contexts and differences are indispensable and the use of Western theories cannot be undertaken at the level of pure imitation. The Thai critic must engage with Western theories carefully and critically, adopting them as necessary to the Thai context.

I am, however, very impressed by how Western scholars have studied romance; they have studied it systematically in the academic context, while in Thailand a few feminists have looked at it, but their papers have not been published.

⁴⁴ In Western terms this term would encompass all LGBT subjectivities.

Ann Barr Snitow, in *Mass Market Romance: Pornography for Women is Different*, explains Harlequin romance as follows:

Since all action in the novels is described from the female point of view, the reader identifies with the heroine's efforts to decode the erratic gesture of 'dark, tall and gravely handsome' men, all mysterious strangers or powerful bosses. In a sense the usual relationship is reversed: woman is subject, man, object. There are more descriptions of his body than of hers ... though her clothes are always minutely observed. He is the unknowable other, a sexual icon whose magic is maleness. The books are permeated by phallic worship. Male is good, male is exciting, without further points of reference. Cruelty, callousness, menace, are all equated with maleness and treated as a necessary part of the package (Snitow 1979, p. 144).

In Thai romance, most romantic fictions are also told from the female point of view, although most of them are not written in the first-person. Authors usually use the omniscient third-person point of view, but this arguably has the same effect because the reader tends to identify with the heroine whose thoughts and feelings are revealed to the reader more than those of the hero. As for the attributes of the protagonists in Thai romance, there are more descriptions of the heroine's body than of the hero's and the typical attributes of the protagonists can also be different from those found in Western romance. Besides, the emphasis on the heroine's physical beauty, her proper demeanor is also important because according to Thai culture, an ideal woman should be attractive both in her physical appearance and behavior. It is possible to have a deviant female protagonist, but the reader will understand this as an enthralling element of romance and the heroine will be recuperated by more traditional Thai values when the hero wins her over. The heroine in *Swan Snare* discussed in Chapter Six, who is transformed by the hero, is a good example of this. However, it is doubtful whether Thai romance reverses the

subject-object position of a female character. I would say that in most romantic fiction, the heroine is still an object of the male gaze which shapes her development and agency. This can be read as implying that the position of a man is superior to that of a woman even in a fantasy world such as romance. It reflects the disturbing fact that the position of women as inferior and objectified still exists in Thai society. The fact that romance reproduces woman as a male-defined object for whom appropriate gendered behavior only allows limited agency does not, however, detract from the pleasure to be gained from reading such fantasy. The hero is represented as desirable in many ways. The first two romantic novels in this research, *Wanida* and *Diversion to Heaven*, emphasize the moral qualities of the hero, whereas the third book, published in the 1990s, pays more attention to the sexiness of the hero and his physical appearance. It is possible that the author of the latter, who is known to like reading Western novels, has been influenced by how Western romance novels portray the hero. It may also reflect changes in Thai society by the 1990s, according to which men are more often regarded sexually and are also subject to objectification.

A range of similarities and differences can be found between Thai and Western romance. For instance, in Thai romance sexual passivity is still the ideal for the heroine, whereas in contemporary Western romance, it is possible to find sexually experienced heroines. In Thailand female virginity is still regarded as an essential component in the excitement of romance. In her study of Western romance in the 1970s, Snitow observes two reasons why the heroine wins the hero: “first, because she is an old-fashioned girl (this is a code for no premarital sex) and, second, because the hero gets ample opportunity to see her perform well in a number of female helping roles” (ibid., p. 136). This is also true for the majority of Thai romance novels between the 1940s and 1990s. According to Thai culture, virginity is essential for the heroine. In the same vein, the heroine’s ability to take

care of household chores is desirable and becomes an essential quality of a typical heroine. This reflects deep-rooted social and cultural expectations, despite the fact that in real life neither men nor women follow the gender codes underpinning a genre such as romance. Another similarity between Thai and Western romance is the shadowy portrayal of most other female characters. Only the role of the female rival may be presented in more detail while other supporting female characters are not described in detail. However the female rival receives less attention than the heroine. The three long novels selected for detailed analysis in this thesis were written by well-known female authors and have been made into TV series. Thus, they tend to have more complicated plots and subplots than magazine-like Harlequin novels. For example, in *Diversion to Heaven*, the heroine's mother is present throughout the storyline and is not a mere peripheral presence. Unlike Harlequin novels, in Thai novels the heroine is not totally alone although she has to move into the hero's realm in order to win her man.

As suggested above, Western elements of romance do not always fit Thai romance despite the fact that the romance genre was imported from the West. As with other Western imports, romance was adapted by Thai writers to produce a hybrid Thai literary form. Working on romance, I have put great effort into understanding a term 'romance', which provokes such radical disagreements among scholars, especially feminists. In so doing I went back to the definition of 'romance' in the Western literature, as it first appeared in the Middle Ages and look at development of what is called traditional romance. As in Thailand, traditional romance in Europe was written in the form of verse and was metrical. Mabel Irene Rich in *A Study of the Types of Literature* explains that "In the romance the imagination has full swing" (Rich 1937, p. 390). This means that the author can be highly imaginative and "many of the circumstances were not only highly improbable but really impossible" (ibid., p.387). She also claims that romance in this sense, with

knights and dragons, for example, is still popular among children because their imagination is at its peak. I understand her to see romance as almost pure imagination, not observation. She asserts that in traditional romance, plots have no development. Accordingly, in an attempt to make a distinction between the novel and romance, Northrop Frye asserts that the difference between them is characterization. In romance, the producer of the work “does not attempt to create ‘real people’” (Frye 1969, p. 32) and a romantic novel is “just romantic enough for the reader to project his libido on the hero and his anima on the heroine, and just novel enough to keep these projections in a familiar world” (ibid.). I, therefore, have the impression that for these scholars, romance itself is inextricably linked with ‘imagination’ and in general, imagination is not conceived by scholars as ‘real’.

This might throw light on why the genre was seen as inferior to other forms of writing in Thailand when it appears in prose. According to Mary Eagleton, the novel, in its early years, was regarded as lacking in status and tradition and demanding little intellectually; thus it was viewed as a suitable form for women (ibid., p.89). The idea that the novel is a female genre still works today in Thailand, regardless of the fact that there are both male and female authors who write novels in genres other than romance. In her discussion of the history of novel writing, Eagleton argues that in the West, middle and upper class women from the Eighteenth Century onwards had more leisure time, so they could write in privacy at home. For this reason, the novel became linked to the private sphere. The majority of Thai female novelists have also been elite or upper middle class women because a national education scheme was only established formally in 1921, when compulsory primary education for both boys and girls was introduced (Terwiel 1989, p. 106). In order to write and published novels women must have considerable education and adequate free time to write for both pleasure or for a living.

The sense of disdain for romance in Thailand reflects in part how it is marketed. For example, I still remember how a cheap form of romance appeared in a very thin paperback and was sold for 10 baht while a more sophisticated romance in a paperback was sold for around 100-250 baht. Using Pattarakulvanit's classification outlined above the former might be classed as proletarian novels and the latter as popular novels. I used to read these cheap romances and remember that the stories were almost always the same and the plots were not well-developed. Soon enough I got bored with formulaic stories and turned back to the popular romance novels which have more sophisticated narratives and more complicated arrangements of characters, plots and gender conflicts. It is possible that because the cheap romance did not develop satisfying narratives, it has disappeared from bookstands in the last few years.

Another point to bear in mind in studying Thai romance is the traditional myths on which Western romance is based. Krentz contends that the formulaic sources of romance derived from well-known myths and legends such as the tale of Persephone or *Beauty and the Beast*, claiming that they are the stories of "brave women taming dangerous men" (Krentz 1992a, p. 113) Pamela Regis adapts this idea to describe one of the narrative elements that she sees fundamental to romance, "the point of ritual Death".⁴⁵ She compares the tale of Persephone's escape from the kingdom of death to bring abundance to the world with the heroine's escape from the dilemmas she faces, not *real* death. She argues that these myths and legends and fairy tales are the basis for Western popular stories.

It is unconvincing to say that this idea of Western traditional myths, legends, and fairytales really applies to the Thai context. According to a Thai scholar, Prakong Nimmanhemin, similar plots for both Thai and Western folk tales are the stories of Cinderella and Oedipus with the details of the stories varying according to

⁴⁵ The point of ritual death is when the union between the protagonists seems impossible.

different contexts (Nimmanhemin 2000). *Pla Boo Thong* (The Golden Fish) has a similar plot to Cinderella. A prince falls in love with the heroine, but her mother-in-law and her daughter, who are female rivals, set up a plan to kill her, but the heroine is brought to life again with magic and the two female rivals are punished by death by the prince. *Phraya Kong, Phraya Phan* (King Kong, King Phan) is a legend that is related to a temple ruin in Nakhon Pathom and the story has been dated back to 7th - 11th Century A.D. when Phraya Kong was a ruler. His beautiful wife was pregnant, but a royal fortuneteller told him that his son would kill him and take his throne. Phraya Kong ordered servants to kill his newborn baby, but he was saved and named Phan. He was adopted by a king in another kingdom and later Phan took an army to invade Phraya Kong's kingdom and kill him. However, the queen remembered her son and Phan regretted his sin and ordered a temple to be built to expiate his sin. In the present a Cinderella plot is undoubtedly a basis for both Thai and Western romance. As regards the tale of *Beauty and the Beast*, I cannot think of a similar plot in a Thai folktale, but in the case of romantic fiction, I have seen some books which have a similar plot according to which courageous heroines win dangerous, wounded heroes. I have observed that this is another effective device for the heroine to show her power, especially the power of the mother to nurse and cure a wounded man as Coward discussed above.

It appears from this chapter that I have more to say about the strengths and limitations of what Western feminists and scholars argue about romance than about one work of Thai scholars. This might be due to the fact that in the West romance has been an object of study for many decades while in Thailand it is a new area which is only rarely referred to in a few essays which do not take romance as their major focus. There are a few researchers who employ feminist perspectives to examine TV series, many of which are adapted from romantic fictions such as Kanjana Kaewthep (Kaewthep 1992) but no in-depth studies of written romance. I

would argue that it is important for Thai academia to expand its horizon of knowledge to include romance and to make students and the wider public aware of how feminists and scholars view romance so that they can better understand its role in the reproduction of gender relations in Thailand.

Chapter 4

Wanida

Wanida was written in 1939 by Wannasiri (1895-1991), and published in 1941 by Phew Suksawat Na Ayutthaya⁴⁶ after the political change from absolute monarchy to constitutional monarchy in 1932⁴⁷. There is an account that suggests that she first wrote this first novel for personal reading, but decided to publish it six months later. According to Wor Winijchaikul (Pitipattanakosit 1992), twentieth century Thai fiction can be categorized into two genres, depending on its initial publishing format, either as a serial in magazines or a paperback book. She explains that if the fiction is published in a magazine, it usually appears as a long novel and takes over a year to reach the conclusion of the story. She further argues that this more or less determines that magazine fiction will be romantic instead of realistic because the reader cannot concentrate on serious issues in fiction for such an extensive period. In contrast realist fiction regularly appears as short stories or short novels and in paperback form. *Wanida* belongs to the first type because it originally appeared in a magazine and is regarded as light, fanciful, with the purpose to entertain. The author started writing novels at forty-four and produced continuous works from then onwards. Wannasiri was a member of the royal family, her father had the royal title Mom Luang (M.L.) and her husband had the title Mom Choa (M.C.).⁴⁸ As an elite

⁴⁶ There is no record of the publishing house that published her book in 1941. The latest book was published by Pimkham publishing house under Satapornbooks, a publishing company. Satapornbooks, which was founded in 2000, owns seven publishing houses and four of them publish novels in paperback. Pinkham publishing house publishes 'educational' female books, and novels under the slogan, "Publication is a radical change to thoughts and society" (<http://www.satapornbooks.co.th/Content/AboutUs.aspx>, accessed 19 February, 2015). The other three published novels for teenagers with different themes and for young adults aged from twenty.

⁴⁷ According to Rutnin, after the establishment of democracy in 1932, Thai literature moved closer to realism (Rutnin 1988, p. 37) BoonKhajorn (Boonkhajorn 2004) observes that novels written between 1932-1957 actively reflected social issues and the conflict of cultural codes and norms, but this reformed trend faded when Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat sized power in 1958.

⁴⁸ Mom Chao (M.C.) is the royal title of the grandchildren of the king whose grandmothers are the king's consorts, not the queen. Mom Ratchawong (M. R.) is the royal title of the Mom Chao's children. Mom Luang (M.L.) is the royal title of the Mom Chao's grandchildren.

lady, she received education from Rajini School, a royal school established by Queen Prasripatcharindara, a consort of King Rama V, in 1904. She was an educated upper-class woman who more than likely enjoyed reading romantic fictions and later started writing her own.

Wor Winijchaikul, a Thai novelist and a scholar, suggests that *Chokma Wassana Kua* (Luck Comes, Fortune Fortified), a translated Western romantic fiction, must have been an influence on Wannasiri's *Wanida* and Dok Mai Sot's (royal title M.L. Bupha Kunjara)⁴⁹ *Nit* (1929) in terms of the overall plot of these novels. In the early stage of development of Thai prose fiction translations and adaptations⁵⁰ of foreign stories were the primary sources published in journals and periodicals. As Thais became accustomed to the genre they adapted stories giving them Thai characters and settings. *Wanida* and *Nit* are believed to be adaptations of *Chokma Wassana Kua* which was published serially in a Thai journal in 1907. However, it has not been possible to discover more about *Chokma Wassana Kua* because unless original texts were written by famous or well-known authors such as Shakespeare or Rabindranath Tagore, the bibliographical information about their authors and even the titles in the original languages were omitted and lost. Rutnin observes that the Western stories that were translated and adapted at the dawn of Thai prose fiction are popular novels and "usually of very low literary value", but mentions that Dok Mai Sot's work is an exception (Rutnin 1988p.22). In this regard, if Wor Winijchaikul's assumption is right, both Wannasiri and Dok Mai Sot wrote in the shadow of Western novels.

⁴⁹ Dok Mai Sot is regarded as the first influential woman novelist of Thailand who wrote about familial issues in upper-middle class society with a liberal-minded and independent female heroine of her time. Her renowned novel is *Phuu Dii*.

⁵⁰ I feel uneasy about calling early examples of adaptations or translations Thai fiction. I find that Steven Connor's 'retelling' is a practical term since it covers all idioms: "reworking, translation, adaptation, displacement, imitation, forgery, plagiarism, parody, pastiche" (Connor 1996, p. 166)

In Thailand, the publishing format has played an important role in establishing narrative genres and thus it is not adequate to simply dismiss novels initially published in magazines. I would argue that both Dok Mai Sot and Wannasiri wrote good novels. Dok Mai Sot started her writing career 10 years earlier than Wannasiri and developed her plots and characterization to suit a Thai context and touched upon the social issues of the upper-middle class. This gives her credit as the first influential Thai female novelist. I personally read *Wanida* before knowing that it was an adaptation and I did not feel that it was foreign to me. While reading, I sometimes came across some surprising points but ignored them because it was written a long time ago and I thought they could be due to a different social context. Thus, I was surprised to realize that Wannasiri emulated almost every detail of the original text in terms of plots, characters, and even the dialogues. The settings and names of characters are adapted to become Thai and she wrote in her own writing style which explains why it reads well. The text suggests that, she must have had a good grasp of most aspects of Thai society before she rewrote the original. Moreover, the issue of discordance between a mother-in-law and a daughter-in-law which features in *Wanida* is a stock romantic device, as is a love triangle, which the plot also depends on.

It is likely that romance novels that have been reproduced as Thai TV series, became well-known via the medium of the book and front covers were designed accordingly. This is the case with all three books. *Wanida*'s latest cover published in 2008 is in a sepia colour with small delicate white drawing to signal its subgenre as a historical romance or what is known as a period romance in Thai. It is important to note that Wannasiri did not write *Wanida* as a historical romance, but as a contemporary romance at the time of printing. The cover shows the name of the publisher at the top followed by the title in a larger typeface. The caption below the title "Proving true love with heart" suggests, on the one hand, a conflict in a romantic

relationship and a cliché of romantic fiction on the other hand. It also creates a sense of enigma regarding the text and invites the reader to explore the story. The illustration, which is rudimentarily symbolic, portrays a picture of an old limousine and a magnolia which signify that the story of Wanida, the heroine's name as the title denotes, happens in the past and, thus, connotes a sense of nostalgia for an earlier age. The bottom of the page gives the author's name.

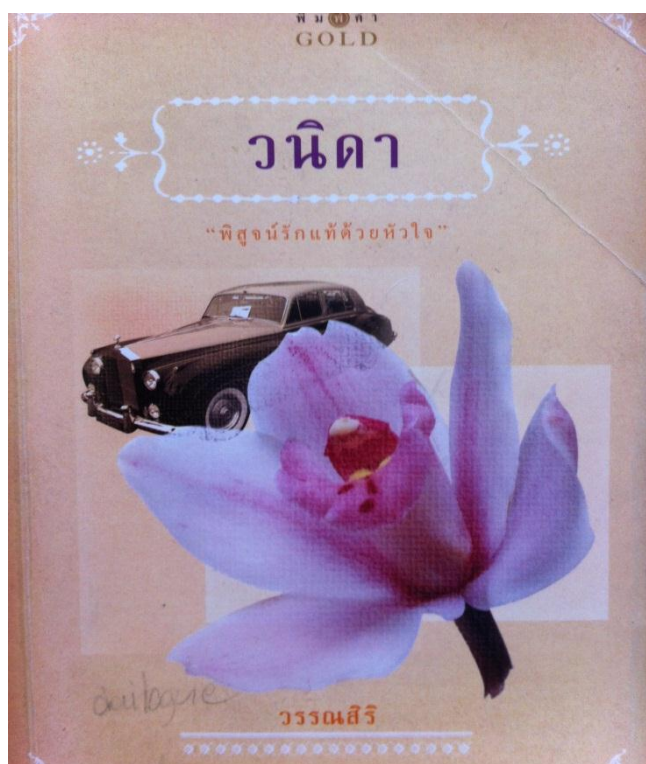


Figure 2: *Wanida's* latest cover published in 2008

Wanida has two parts. The first part tells a story about the relationship between the hero and the heroine: how they love each other, solve all of their conflicts, and have a very happy familial life. The second part is titled “an extra” or a supplement, telling the story of the hero's brother who starts a conflict for the protagonists. In the supplement, the love story of the hero's brother is narrated, but it serves to highlight the heroine's intelligence and prudence while presenting the hero's brother as a weak person, a hero's foil. For this reason the following analysis will focus mainly on the first part of the story. I will, however, consider how the

supplement relates to what has gone before. The first part has 319 pages and the supplement has 159 pages. The price of the latest paperback copy is expensive in the Thai context, 280 baht, about £6 pounds sterling.

Time and Place

The first chapter briefly introduces characters that are important to the development of the plot. The novel opens with a conversation between the heroine's father and the hero's brother at the heroine's house. It presents the poor financial situation of the hero's family through the hero's brother, who reveals that the family is not affluent any more. Also, it throws light on the protagonists' personalities by contrasting the hero's characteristics with his brother who indulges himself with drinking, gambling, and having fun. The first episode also describes the heroine in a short paragraph and gives the background of the heroine's father: his relationships with his family, his job, and a brief story of the heroine's grandmother, who married the hero's grandfather and is accused of committing adultery.

The actual encounter between the hero and the heroine is in episode six. In episode five they marry, but because it is an arranged marriage which both the bride and the bridegroom are forced into, they do not look at each other and rarely talk to each other. The wedding is set by the heroine's father, seven days after the hero went to meet him. Timing here is quite unusual, because the reader learns that two days after the hero leaves the house, the heroine's grandmother falls ill and the next morning she dies. The text does not say anything about the funeral, but merely mentions the heroine's sadness at losing her grandmother; yet even her death cannot postpone the wedding, which she is unwilling to go through with because she does not know the groom at all. This reflects the status of the heroine, signifying that she is from an upper class because she cannot choose her own husband. It is the practice of the upper class family in Thai society that parents or the guardians of women would decide for the women whom they should marry to. Upper class Thai

women rarely had a chance to choose their own mates while lower-class women had more opportunities to choose their own husbands. It is also possible to argue that time as depicted here is used to dramatize conflicts between the protagonists. The first encounter occurs after five days of marriage and it is the heroine who is curious about the hero's ignorance and neglect of her. The heroine has asked to see the hero several times, but her request is refused. On the evening of the fifth day she sneaks into the hero's room to ask why he has married her. The hero is so angry that he drags her back to the door after a fierce argument and the reason for the marriage is not revealed. He shuts the door in her face, so the heroine has to get through the window, climbing from the outside of the building to the hero's room. This is the most violent confrontation between the hero and the heroine and it happens only once because the more the hero comes to know the heroine, the more he is impressed with her qualities and falls in love with her. The first encounter is dramatized by coinciding with the breaking of a storm, a meteorological feature that implies a dramatic situation and conflict between them. When the hero shouts at her that the real reason for the marriage is to pay off his brother's debt, the heroine feels really humiliated. At the end of this episode, the heroine climbs back through the window without fear of the storm and this dramatizes the tension between them and makes the hero feel worried about her so that he goes to knock at her door and walks around the house to check if she has fallen or not. The encounter scene suggests the connection between nature, such as darkness and storm, and the protagonists' temperaments. As the narrative progresses, the relationship between the hero and the heroine is developed continually via dramatic, significant events that reveal the protagonists' integrity; this will be illustrated later in the section of characterization. Altogether it takes two years for the love recognition scene to be realized.

Localisation in *Wanida* shows both conventional and atypical aspects. Typically, romance is associated with the geographical displacement of the heroine, and her quest. Thus it is she who has to depart to a familiar, safe place, to find herself in an unknown world, like the hero in mediaeval romances. As a stereotypical female, the location where she accomplishes her quest, quintessentially love and marriage, is the hero's place. This is the case in *Wanida*, where the heroine moves in as his wife. However, instead of presenting the hero's world as bringing her magnificent prospects or a wonderful house, his home is portrayed as being in a shabby condition, because the family is not wealthy as it used to be. The heroine's house, on the contrary, is depicted as more elegant because the heroine's father is affluent so that the heroine's voyage to the husband's house seems not to satisfy her physical comfort. Class is a crucial factor here. Despite its shabbiness, the hero's home is a symbolic sign for a location in the upper social hierarchy in a conventional romance. Thus although the heroine's father is wealthier, his social position is lower and that explains why he comes up with the idea of an arranged marriage, to heighten his social status and acquire admittance to the social realm from which it is suggested he will have access to an extensive powerful domain. This is due to the fact that those from a royal or powerful family would be respected and honoured in Thai society. Thais regard family names as important partly from the believing that people from well-known families might inherit valuable properties and assets; or if they are not wealthy, they still have connections with the authorities and powerful, respectable people who would grant some benefits to people who are closed to them, especially before the 1960s when the marriages of the upper-class were linked to familial prosperity. In Thai society, connection is important, even in the Twenty-First Century, although the value of family names has declined. Even though the hero's house is depicted as old and suffering from lack of care, the area around the house is spacious. As in the Harlequin romance novels, the heroine is the character who will transform the hero's

world into one that is more loving and beautiful. In *Wanida*, the heroine likes gardening and she grows both plants and flowers, which the hero secretly admires. It can be assumed that the heroine will renovate the house later although the hero moves out to live with the heroine in a house that the heroine's father builds for them in order to avoid conflicts with the hero's mother. It is quite clear that the heroine is not portrayed as an underdog who does not have any power or agency. In *Wanida*, she at least has financial stability and her father still provides her with money and jewellery so she can buy food and other things on her own. She does not depend on the hero for her economic needs; yet, it is unclear as to whether this means that her social status is higher.

Based upon Paizis' theory of localization, there are two values at work in this text: denoted value and connoted value. The denoted value presents the setting while the connoted value implies subtle meanings directed at affectivity and sensibility in the reader. In *Wanida*, there are not many settings and all of them are houses, signifying familial relationships. From the opening episode, *Wanida* invokes the structure of the 'ideal' romance as Radway summarizes it, 'the heroine's emotional isolation and her profound sense of loss' (Radway 1984, p.135). This occurs because the story removes her from a familiar realm associated with her family and childhood to an exotic place, a house of her bridegroom who is considered a stranger to her. By placing the heroine into a totally new place, the text drives the sense of dramatization through a bewildered, disoriented, and confused heroine about whom the reader will want to know more and find out how she is going to deal with this perplexing situation. As regards the first encounter scene described in the above paragraph, the hero's bedroom signals a utopian space for love and procreation. Although it is the heroine who is brought to his house, her coming or rather 'invasion' can be read as threatening his territory, as is shown in the first encounter in episode five, when the heroine gets into his room without his

permission. One might expect that the hero would acknowledge the emotional danger caused by her appearance on the scene. Instead the protagonists avoid each other. The heroine stays in her room most of the time and leaves the scene when she sees the hero. The hero avoids her by not allowing her to see him and by staying elsewhere whenever possible. In this case, Radway is half right in indicating the heroine's sense of loss when moving to a new place, but she does not offer an explanation for the hero, whose territory is invaded by the heroine who turns his place into a utopic space. For example, Wanida's house is depicted as a magnificent and well-decorated place, while the hero's house, especially the surrounding environs, shows signs of abandonment that imply the downward social mobility of the hero's family, especially of their financial status. But *Wanida* does not provide much actual description and exposition of the setting.

Whether or not Wannasiri emulated a Western story, *Wanida* presents a credible social context in an imagined space of 1930s' Thailand. After the overthrow of the absolute monarchy, three social systems remained: the royal families, nobles – high officials – and commoners⁵¹. The hero's family can be classified as belonging to the second group because he is a major general, a powerful, honoured profession, while the heroine is regarded as a commoner because she has no connection to any royal or noble family. It was a Thai practice that all Thai men had to do the "king's service", noble and elite men as officials and commoners as service labourers. Thus, trading was in women's hands, specifically upper class women, while international-trading fell to non-Thai people such as the Chinese (Onozawa 1999). Onozawa asserts that up until the end of 20th Century, well-to-do Thai women have continued to acquire financial stability in commerce, especially in real estate. She postulates that Thai women's financial freedom is a distinctive Thai characteristic compared to other Asian cultures because they can inherit property

⁵¹ Slaves began to disappear when King Rama V abolished slavery in 1874 and the abolition succeeded in 1905.

and have full rights to manage their property, something that is reflected in *Wanida*. As regards the management of Thai women's property, Onozawa refers to this economic-role as a "silent investment". In *Wanida*, the hero is an official, a career that connotes serving the king while the heroine inherits her grandmother's belongings according to her will and it turns out that her poor grandmother leaves her a very good fortune although she does not deal with selling and buying things. The novel portrays the heroine as wealthier than the hero from the beginning to the end and the portrayal of the heroine, especially of her financial status, is believable and familiar to all Thais. It is worth noting too that from 1932 onwards, the social status of the royal family and noblemen diminished while the rise of a new class, the middle class, became important. Thus, the novel, whether copied from an original or not, is convincing for Thai readers because it does not deviate from the Thai social context.

Female Characters

The heroine's name is eponymous, signifying that she is a focal character and that the world of the novel revolves around her. *Wanida* is a name that does not indicate elegance; on the contrary, it is rather a common name. In this respect, her name may have a narrative function: to imply harmony in her characteristics. Her ordinary, non fanciful name is compatible with her social status, because she is a daughter of a merchant, not a *phuudii*⁵². Thus, her social status is lower than the hero's and may be lower than the female rival who works as a lady-in-waiting. The female rival works in the palace for one of the princesses, and it is therefore to be assumed that she is well-educated and qualified because the palace is the institution which is regarded as gracious, and impeccable. Those who work inside the palace are

⁵² Penny Van Esterik explains *phuudii* as "people of quality, dignity, and propriety" (Van Esterik, 2000 p.47). In Thai context, *phuuddi* also connotes a higher social hierarchy in addition to desirable dispositions.

rendered as cultivated with strict rules of etiquette. Palace people, including common people who work for the royal family, are regarded as proper and respectable. As an ordinary woman, the heroine has to prove that she is a woman of quality to both the other characters and the reader in a more realistic way. In other words, the plot must not undermine the credibility of the reason why the hero turns to her although he already has a fiancée whom he dearly loves from the beginning. Accordingly, the hero's mother, another female rival, who initially appears very hostile, alters her views and comes to accept and favour the heroine in the end.

Another social aspect is what she wears, since in the Thai context this also connotes personality. The heroine does not often appear in colorful, bright garments since she prefers wearing common, unfashionable clothes and this signifies her modesty. Unlike her social status, her financial status is stable and she has freedom to spend money on her own from her father's allowance and inherits a fortune from her grandmother. Because of this, she occasionally wears precious jewelry, such as a diamond, which implies her good taste and wealth. In this way, the heroine's characterization is depicted as distinctive enough to attract the reader but not too grand to prevent the reader from identifying with her. Since she may not be as beautiful as the other female rival, physical appearance is not privileged as very important in the text. The conventional narrative in romantic fiction allocates the heroine's social and physical attributes to align with the fictional time and context. It also conforms to reality sufficiently to engage the reader. As Frye argues in *The Secular Scripture* (Frye 1976), the principles of male-oriented society assume that a woman stays chaste and carries out her goal with a low profile or modesty. The focal point of the representation of the heroine, thus, is in her good nature or moral actions that declare her qualities in order to receive sympathy from other characters, particularly the hero, and the reader.

In *Wanida*, the heroine derives her identity from her social role rather than sexual role. This is due to the fact that female sexuality was an unspoken issue in the period in which the book was written. A proper upper-class Thai woman must be restricted to her trilogy of roles as daughter, wife and mother, regardless of her desire. Wanida is portrayed as upright and determined to prove her paternal grandmother's innocence in the accusation of adultery. This is her purposeful and modest goal for marrying the hero, the goal that is based upon her docility to her father and her gratitude to her grandmother. Although she is disappointed with the reason why the hero marries her (because of the debt), she does not plead for his love, especially when she knows that he already has a woman that he loves. She stays under the same roof with the hero, avoids him and keeps busy with household chores, e.g. cleaning, cooking, or gardening, following the role of a housekeeper. In this respect, she performs her social role embodying what Paizis calls 'social presence'. Unlike the heroine, the female rival's identity is linked more to her sexual role and she clings to the hero most of the time. At the beginning of the story she is placed in the palace where she works. This is the only scene in which she is portrayed at her workplace. After the hero marries the heroine, she is placed with the hero's mother and stays with her as an ally to persecute the heroine at the hero's house. In addition to this, during all of her stay with the hero's family, she uses her sexuality to please the hero, to make sure that he will not change his mind about loving her. The female rival kisses the hero, hugs him, and gives him access to her body while the heroine preserves her body and avoids him. Even when the protagonists are reconciled, the first kiss on the heroine's forehead is described as "gentle and sentimental" (Wannasiri 1941, p.282). As the heroine has a tendency to adhere firmly to her social role while her female rival explicitly uses her sexuality to influence the hero, this creates a clear distinction between the two women locating them within different discourses of desirable and undesirable femininity. It is notable that the female rival can also do domestic tasks and has the potential to look after a

house because she was trained in the palace, but she abstains from work that affects her good looks, such as cooking. In this way, she is portrayed as superficial, and lacking the qualities of a real housekeeper. Moreover, in the Thai context, the portrayal of her, which is linked to her sexuality, is negative when compared to that of the heroine, whose social role and behaviour imply her qualities of a good wife and a potential mother.

It is likely that, as a narrative sign, the heroine is portrayed as ordinary in order to attract the reader and to create a sense of identification between the heroine and the reader. Thus, in *Wanida* the heroine's appearance is not described as outstandingly beautiful; rather her beauty is depicted as natural, not sensual like her female rival's. She is in her twenties, as is her female rival, who is already the hero's fiancée. The heroine is described as beautiful in a low key way with a soft, gentle voice and dignified manners like those of her grandmother. While the female rival's beauty is not described in detail, it is signified by her efforts to attract and please the hero and it can be assumed that she is well aware of her looks. The text creates a paradox because the heroine is misunderstood and suspected of wanting to catch the hero to be her husband. The hero's fiancée, his mother and even the hero at the beginning of the story, hold this view of her. The text suggests, however, that it is actually the female rival of similar age who intends to entrap the hero by presenting herself as sexual while the heroine is asexual. Conventionally, the female rival would be read as having priority over the heroine because she is the hero's fiancée. Thus, she is entitled to ask for and protect her rights to the hero and he promises her that he will initiate divorce proceedings as soon as his brother can pay his debt – and that means about two years. However, it seems hard to give the female rival full sympathy because she shows no courage or sympathy towards others unlike the heroine. The hero, as well as the reader, is in the position to observe both the heroine's and the female rival's reactions towards occurrences that develop towards

the climax of the narrative and bring the story to the point at which the justification of the hero in choosing the heroine at the end becomes clear. Both the heroine and her rival are eligible in this game of love, but only the most qualified one can win and it is the heroine, an ordinary woman who is not trying to get a man and who affirms her traditional Thai female virtues, who is able to win the hero's heart. In Paizis' word, it is a matter of 'intention versus innate qualities' (Paizis 1998p.82). Because the heroine possesses qualities that are desired by social norms, she can win the hero, while the female rival, who shows strong intentions to marry him, fails to win him because she lacks the socially desirable qualities.

In Thai romance the most qualified heroine is the one who conforms to the traditional Thai concept known as *Nang Kaew* (the perfect woman). At the end of the story when the heroine wins the heart of her mother-in-law, who has been the heroine's most tiresome female rival, the hero compliments her with great admiration by saying, "...You were afraid that your quality is not equal to mine. But what you did today indicates what you said you didn't have. I look at you and I already know that you are *Nang Kaew*" (Wannasiri 1941, p.322). This shows the talent of the author because she can weave a Thai social conception of ideal femininity into the Western story which is believed to be the origin of *Wanida*. *Nang Kaew* is accepted in Thai society as a venerable notion which can be traced as far back as the Ancient Kingdom, which is regarded as the authentic Buddhist source of Thainess defined by Sukhothai (1238-1583). This Buddhist cosmology portrays the concept of the Righteous Sovereign who possesses the five precious gems and one of them is the Perfect Woman,⁵³ which has been discussed in Chapter 2 on pages 35-36. It clearly delineates the power relations between the Perfect Woman and the Sovereign, the gender hierarchy between the powerful man and the subservient woman. To a great extent, *Nang Kaew* is the expression that connotes hegemonic

⁵³ Other gems are the Competent Chancellor, the Valiant General, the Noble Elephant and the Mighty Steed.

cultural discourse. It disguises the sense of gender asymmetry and expresses itself as qualified female body or social expectations of women. Such discourse hides the mechanisms by which it governs and controls femininity. Thus, in praising the heroine as *Nang Kaew*, neither the hero nor the heroine is aware of how the discourse leads to the subjugation of women. It conceals hegemony and its power to govern women's behavior and thinking. The hero is proud of his wife while the heroine is proud and happy to hear his praise. It appears to me that the traditional constitution of gender is repeated and passed on incessantly in the forms of discourse that chain women to wifehood and motherhood. It should be noted that Thai women are not expected to perform literally as the 'Blessed Woman' since, following poststructuralism, it is important to emphasize that the meaning of a word can be changed and redefined in different discursive contexts (Weedon 1997). This, notwithstanding, the description of *Nang Kaew* has been applied in different ways at different times to prescribe how excellent women should perform their roles, especially those of the wife and mother.

As an idealized woman, *Nang Kaew*, the heroine of *Wanida* is portrayed exclusively in the domestic sphere, which emphasizes her familial roles. Her first role is that of a grateful daughter who is under an obligation to follow what she is told to do by her father. She has to marry the hero without seeing him beforehand. When the hero's brother comes back and pays the debt and the hero beseeches her to stay, she asks her father to make the decision for her. Not only does she give respect to her father, but also to her mother-in-law who is one of her female rivals. Her mother-in-law is depicted as a vicious old woman who relays the story about the heroine's grandmother's adultery and almost stabs the heroine with a knife. She accepts the heroine in the last episode when she goes to visit her sick grandson and realizes the heroine's "sweetness, prudence, and domestic aptitude" (Wannasiri 1941, p. 320). As mentioned in the analysis of the use of localization,

there is only one short scene presenting the heroine going out to have dinner with her husband and two other friends after they move out to live on their own. Mostly, she is depicted in a domestic realm and busy with household chores. She helps others with work, saying she likes working because it builds up her physical strength (ibid., p.140). She does not go out on her own, but asks her maid to do errands such as shopping for her. In this regard, she is an exemplary Thai housewife. As for her parenting capacity, she is excellent at childcare, a quality confirmed by her mother-in-law's admiration and acceptance. In all the three major female roles in hegemonic discourses of desirable femininity, as daughter, as wife, and as mother, she performs perfectly.

The portrayal of the heroine and her female foils suggests that these female characters reflect the desirable and undesirable female traits of the society of the day. Elaine Showalter reminds us that the stereotypes and limited roles of women are "what men have thought women should be" (Showalter 2001p.101). This perspective suggests that the representation of characters in fiction is the product of patriarchy, signifying what qualities men want and do not want in women. Essentially, these patriarchal discourses are also circulated in the real world, but they undergo resistance, negotiation and negation from time to time since, as Foucault insists, where there is power, there is resistance. In furthering the reproduction and naturalising of patriarchal discourses, fiction can be a good tool, drawing on the stereotypes and binary oppositions which are regarded as inevitable in a genre such as romance. This does not mean, however, that the author is not aware of unfair, hierarchical discourses, but rather that they disguise themselves as common sense in a male-oriented society and thus largely become accepted. I would argue that this explains why most of the heroines in Thai romantic fiction appear to be socially sanctioned ideal types.

Male Characters

In *Wanida*, the characteristics of the hero portray him as a protector, although he is said to be hot-tempered and a destructive type. *Wanida* does not have a male rival, but a male foil, who is the hero's younger brother. The male foil, who is also a soldier, is a profligate young man who spends life carelessly on excessive drinking and gambling. As a result, the hero has to negotiate the debt with the heroine's father and this results in a marriage between the hero and the heroine. For this reason, the male foil can be read as worldly and materialistic while the hero is depicted as moral in his disposition. The male foil is also in his thirties like the hero, but his social and personal attributes are childish compared to those of the hero. The second part of the book tells the story of the hero's brother and the failure of his marriage. After his first wife dies, he feels so sad and lonely that he cannot live his own life. He laments the death of his wife and is beguiled by his old, sly, friend to marry his sister who is greedy and jealous. His second marriage causes him to lose a large amount of money, but the heroine helps him catch the thief, his wife. The hero's brother is depicted as weak and shallow rather than villainous when compared to his brother, who is more responsible and mature.

The hero's characterization as a protector displays his position in the social hierarchy. He inherits a small legacy from his uncle who was an aristocratic man and uses the same surname. Thus, he has a great sense of responsibility, prescribed by Thai social norms, to protect the honour of the family and show regard to everyone in his domain, from his mother to the servants. Feeling a need to protect his family name, he decides to marry the heroine. Although he does not love her, he takes her as another person under his guardianship and is fair to her because he cares about how an outsider such as the heroine will regard his family, especially as he is the head of the household. For this reason, he cannot allow the female rivals, his mother and his fiancée, to treat her unfairly and harshly. It is the

female rivals who make him feel sorry for her when they are unkind and cruel towards her, especially the female rival of the heroine's age, who displays jealousy and cruelty in front of him. Seeing how the heroine is maltreated, he comes to protect her and this develops his compassion and love between them. In accordance with his role, his physical attributes follow a typical masculine pattern, although the text does not describe in much detail his physical appearance, rather presents the hero's social attributes as more important than his economic situation. His morality is portrayed from time to time and this is emphasized more than his body. At this point, it should be observed that for the heroine both physical and moral qualities are equally important while morality is more in focus for the hero. This may imply his higher position in the hierarchy of the romance novel in which the requirements of acceptable female qualities are more demanding than those of male qualities.

Critics of romance argue that the heroine's uppermost moral value is virginity and the hero's is his honour (Frye 1976). According to Rukmanee et al. (Rukmanee et al. 2007) in their study of honour in Thai literature, there are three significant things that engender the upholding of honour: ancestral lineage, role, and gender. As members of a hierarchical society, Thai people do care about their ancestral lineage because it indicates identity and status in society, especially for the upper class. In Thai society, a family name can bring respect to a person and for this reason, the assessment of one's performance is linked to a considerable extent with pedigree. Thus, the hero in *Wanida* decides to marry the heroine because the heroine's father threatens to sue his brother and this will affect the family name, which has existed for a hundred years. He acknowledges that "it is his direct responsibility to protect the honour of the family by sacrificing his happiness and love" (Wannasiri 1941, p. 31). Besides, he shows his substantial concern for the reputation of his family name by expressing himself as a just person when his

mother and fiancée maltreat the heroine, since just behavior is necessary in order to protect the honour of his aristocratic bloodline. In Thai literature, social role is given more emphasis than personal desire and appetite, especially for the hero. In *Wanida*, the hero is a major general, a respectable profession that directly serves the king. As such, it is regarded as honourable and important (because of its links to the king, the summit of the hierarchy). According to his social role as a soldier, he is at the top of the hierarchy, compared to the heroine who is just a merchant's daughter. Regarding his pedigree and career, the hero takes his place as a highly regarded person whose behavior must connote justice and courage. This explains why he helps the heroine retrieve her grandmother's reputation for adultery although this means that he has to break with his mother who lies about the heroine's grandmother. As for gender values regarding honour, Thai women are ideally expected to remain chaste, *rak nuan sa-nguan tua*, while Thai men are assumed to protect their people, especially those who are under their guardianship, and to fight courageously for other social values, such as justice or nationalism. As regards these characteristics, the hero has all the qualities that relate to honour in Thai literature.

Being aware of the honour due to his family line, the hero is depicted as having a highly developed sense of pride. Thus, when the heroine nurses his sick servant while he is away and even takes a doctor home to treat the servant, the hero feels irritated because she has assumed what he takes to be his own responsibility. Apart from provoking the feeling that his pride is hurt, it is also possible to read the heroine's kindness as a threat to him, since she invades his personal realm by taking his servant to her side. He can be read as hating the feeling that he owes her anything, a woman whom he has had to marry without love and who then destroys his pride in offering protection to his subordinates. When the

heroine is sick, or when she travels with his family to a house in the suburbs, he insists on paying for her, considering that she is under his care.

For the hero in *Wanida*, honour is expressed via roles: as the patriarch of the house, as husband, and as father. His first two roles are emphasized more than his fatherhood, because the romance genre takes as its focus the courtship between the hero and the heroine rather than established married life. The protagonists have a son in the last episode of the novel and it functions as the heroine's triumph over her mother-in-law. For reasons of romantic convention, it is quite usual that the roles of the hero should be restricted to the first two aspects. The hero's role as head of the family is portrayed in the above paragraphs, as a protector of the family name and provider of the household economy. By giving money to his mother for her personal expenses every month, it can be said that his role as a grateful son is a supplement to his leading role as head of the household because it is mentioned only once in the text. As a husband, he treats the heroine as one of his people although he detests her at the beginning of the narrative. He treats her fairly and honours her. For instance, he does not allow her to do what is considered a servant's job such as serving food at a party when his mother, a female villain, orders her to. Since he realizes that the heroine is married to him as a hostage for his brother to pay a debt, he feels sorry for her and develops his positive feelings towards her because of her feminine values. By the end of the novel, he is an ideal man who is portrayed as loving his family, his wife and his son. An additional role that the hero displays is manliness as he explains to his mother when the heroine gets injured and he helps her, "Besides a husband's role, I take manliness as another role. It is not only Nid (the heroine) that I help, but also others because I cannot abandon even bad people" (ibid., p.223).

If representations of the hero and the heroine are derived from socio-political projections of ideal men and women, the representation of the heroine in *Wanida*

embodies almost all desirable attributes of ideal women while the representation of the hero contains some elements of an ideal hero. Having taken up the idea of idealistic attributes of the heroine from Anne-Marie Dardigna who “claims the attributes of the heroine in romantic fiction have not changed much in the last three hundred years” (Paizis 1998, p.91), I have found that the heroine in *Wanida* is young, beautiful, and feminine. She does not act vainly, but shows great humility, obedience to her father and her husband, and patience. However, the representation of the heroine does not portray her as a woman without agency. Indeed, she marries the hero because her father tells her to do so, but he lies to her and claims that the hero proposes to him – claiming that – the hero wants her. When she finds out later that the hero is not content with the marriage, she feels humiliated. In actual fact, she would not have married him if she had known the truth. The text reveals, “If she had known this before, she would have died instead of marrying this man” (Wannasiri 1941, p. 67). Her characterization as a willful woman is expressed in fragment throughout the story which contradicts what Dardigna argues. The characterization of the hero in *Wanida* is also slightly different from Dardigna’s model. The hero is portrayed as physically virile and athletic. He is described as aggressive, but never depicted as using his physical strength to harm anyone. He shows his anger through his gestures, such as his eyes or facial expression. He also possesses tolerance, another moral value of an ideal man. Specifically, he is cultured, a descendant of an aristocratic family with a respectable profession. However, he is not ambitious, a quality that tends to belong to his foil. As a man at the top of the social hierarchy in *Wanida*, it is not clear that he is dominating. The struggles he has with the female villains, his mother and his fiancée, usually end with his triumph and this is because of his rationality and justice. Certainly, he is depicted as a man with a warm and generous heart, who always seeks happiness and peace for his dependents. Overall, the focus of the hero’s and the heroine’s attributes lies in a morality which is a desirable quality for

both of them; the qualities that they demonstrate are socially-produced as desirable in hegemonic Thai gender discourses. Having moral qualities, the protagonists accrue power that will gain them respect and love from their spouses or other people.

In this novel, one can see that the heroine has economic freedom; thus, potentially her sexual freedom is under her own control instead of being manipulated by the hero. Despite this, the textual evidence analyzed above suggests that the portrayal of the heroine subordinates her to the hero. Not only her social class but her younger age signify lower status and also connotes readiness for procreation. The textual evidence suggests that it is ambiguous as to whether her beauty attracts the hero, but it is certainly her femininity that appeals to him. Her beauty is depicted from the outset when the heroine's father looks at her proudly, "Wanida is a beautiful girl with a good shape, excellent manner, and gentle speech" (ibid., p.12). If both beauty and femininity connote female power, *Wanida* shows that the emphasis is more with the latter. The text allows the autonomous agency of the heroine to the extent that her ideal femininity is still preserved and she has to prove herself by her appropriate behaviour. Generally, femininity is inextricably linked to those moral values required of a wife and a mother by a patriarchal society. For this reason, the moral qualities of the heroine are the central concern of romance novels, but in this case it cannot be claimed that she is merely passive or surrenders to the hero, because the hero himself has to prove his moral qualities to the heroine too

Love and Marriage

Paizis delineates two types of love in romance fiction taken from Balzac, passion-love and marriage-love (see Chapter 1) and to a large extent *Wanida's* conception of love is the latter, the one that leads to real abiding, durable love or marriage.

Wanida reverses and subverts the role of passion love. In Paizis's theory, the nature of passion-love is associated with the first sight of the protagonists while love that results in marriage has to develop gradually. The effect of passion-love is sympathy, but the effect of marriage-love is esteem. In the case of *Wanida*, the text starts with a marriage, but the reader acknowledges it as a fake one because the protagonists did not know each other before. In this sense, their arranged marriage can be regarded as 'destiny', produced by an external, uncontrollable force that binds them together and this is what usually falls under the category of passion-love. In this case, however, the external force is not attraction but coercion which acts as a narrative device that functions as a means to get the protagonists together before they develop their relationship and turn to a real marriage-love. On the whole, *Wanida* presents the type of love that is not individual and destructive, but social and constructive.

The nature of the relationship between the protagonists in *Wanida* shows the great extent to which the accumulation of love and respect comes from the protagonists' moral qualities and is rendered social. Because the conventions of the romance genre concern power and specific gendered qualities, it is a generic norm for the protagonists to express and prove their qualities as desirable people who deserve to succeed in the quest for happiness. For a romance genre, the quest of the protagonists, especially the female, is love, a significant aspect that propels her to access the identities of a wife and a mother. It is social instead of individual (in the sense that motherhood is regarded as an indispensable facet of social institutions such as the family). For this reason I am convinced by the idea that to a certain degree women's fictions tell stories of mate selection and mating commitment (Whissell 1996) by suggesting types that are desired by the public outside the fictional world. I would suggest that Northrop Frye's view is incontrovertible in the arguments that he makes, that generally, the romance genre

takes the form of comedy. However, Thai romantic fiction tends to negate love at first sight which is a common projection in comedy, and emphasize the gradually developed relationship instead. It might be argued that the fictional world takes the real world more seriously when one considers characterization. In other words, romantic fiction borrows partially from reality to create its plot, characterization, etc. to make its conventions more realistic. This does not mean that love at first sight cannot be found in Thai romance novels, but gradual love is more accepted because it requires more plot to account for it and to reach its happy ending and it is arguably more didactical socially. This is because gradual love conforms to cultural expectation of roles, especially for a woman, that marriage is a familial issue rather than an individual issue as discussed in Chapter 2.

Although the protagonists' marriage in *Wanida* appears as destiny, it is the site of the encounter and the conflict between the protagonists and connotes marriage-love, not passion-love. The source of the external conflict, the arranged marriage, engenders internal conflict between them. Opening with an arranged marriage is exciting enough to catch the attention of the reader because the reader recognizes that a dilemma such as an arranged marriage is significant in the protagonists' life, the more so as the hero already has a fiancée and the heroine feels that she is not ready for marriage. Moreover the hero, his mother and fiancée are the characters that relentlessly push the heroine towards crisis. The heroine has to affirm her moral values in dealing with the immediate problems caused by her female rivals until the end. She overcomes both ritual death and deadly dilemmas, which are the results of her destiny to marry the hero. The destiny to meet and marry are the focal points through which the plot develops tension and obstacles between the protagonists who choose to react to those obstacles. The obstacles that both the hero and the heroine have to deal with lead to each other's acknowledgement of their respective moral qualities. The gradual love that develops

between them is constructive and expresses the agency of the protagonists to choose what to do and to realize the integrity of the other person in their own time. For this reason, their relationship can be read as equal, not as a master-slave relationship like that of passion-love.

The novel portrays the result of the protagonists' love as esteem because their love is rarely excessively sexual. The text hardly portrays sexual scenes between the protagonists. The hero is depicted as kissing the heroine just once on her forehead; he also hugs her near the end of the book. In this regard, their sexuality is hidden – especially in the case of the heroine. As for the hero, he has a fiancée whom he promises to marry once his brother has enough money to pay the debt. Thus, he is depicted as being with her most of the time after work and he expresses his affection to her by touching, kissing, and hugging her. In a Thai context, it can be said that this constitutes excessive sexuality between them and this would be socially regarded as negative. The hero, as a proper hero, does not show any signs of sexual interest, such as gazing at the heroine. Both of them try to avoid each other when they coincidentally meet. As for physical contact, the hero touches her body only when she has accidents and cannot help herself, a sign of his gentleness. The relationship between them is not that of a hunter-predator. Moreover, it is the hero who declares his love for the heroine first when his brother pays the debt to the heroine's father. The transformation of the hero from hatred to attraction and love is the heroine's triumph, the power of her will and morality. For the hero, his esteem lies in having a well-qualified wife and for the heroine it is having a husband who really loves her.

As regards the fact that the hero already has a fiancée prior to his marriage to Wanida, it should be noted that their love is depicted as passion-love while the love that develops through the relationship between the hero and the heroine is marriage-love. The female rival expresses her feelings that the hero is everything to

her: her hope for a good social life, her desire, and her emotional affection. In attempting to realize these hopes, she is depicted as trying to please him with her body although the text does not suggest that they have a physical affair. This relationship is depicted in ways similar to the patriarchal master-slave mode of relations. She needs the hero, the Other, to fulfill her physically and emotionally and this implies that the hero is subject to her desire. In terms of hegemonic Thai culture, such behavior signifies that she decreases her value and also objectifies herself by sexually pleasing the hero. In part, she is a slave of his sexual desire. It is however ambiguous and hard to decide if she deserves failure in love because she has prior claims on the hero when compared to the heroine. Using the two types of love as a framework, it seems reasonable to say that her passion-love destroys her as a character. It is unhealthy, too individualistic and results in jealousy. While it is known in their social circles that the female rival and the hero are engaged, it is regarded as more socially acceptable for the hero and the heroine to be husband and wife following a proper wedding ceremony. I think the characterization of the female rival as a jealous person is not as important as the fact that the relationship between her and the hero is full of passion, a mode of love which cannot last very long, compared to marriage love based on the more moral qualities of the heroine. The way that the female rival loses in this love game certainly signifies the importance of love as social. Yet, the text does not deny the existence or importance of passionate love to marriage. Rather it locates the origin of the relationship between the hero and the heroine in destiny, because to a certain degree passion is a necessary element in a romantic fiction. As Paizis argues:

The narrative does not function therefore so as to deny 'passion-love'. Rather it functions so as to raise two kinds of obstacles: socially engendered internalized mechanisms – 'warning bells sounded in her mind'... – and external ones, resulting from social circumstances of prejudice,

disadvantage, gender inequality – an imbalance of ‘power’ and ‘quality’
(Paizis 1998, p. 119)

On the whole, I would argue that marriage-love, which is rendered more desirable by the text than passion-love, contains male, authoritative characteristics. I would say that marriage-love, which “expresses the means of harmonizing the individual with society” (ibid., p.117), appears as a legitimizing ideology based upon thoughts and reason, head not heart, i.e. on patriarchal conceptions. This reminds me of Helene Cixous’ set of binary oppositions in ‘Sorties’:

Activity/passivity,

Sun/Moon,

Culture/Nature,

Day/Night,

Father/Mother,

Head/heart,

Intelligible/sensitive,

Logos/Pathos.

Form, convex, step, advance, seed,

Progress.

Matter, concave, ground-which supports

the step, receptacle.

Man

Woman (Cixous 2001)

Marriage-love appears to encompass the terms on the left side of this set of binary oppositions which traditionally signify superiority and maleness. On the other hand, passion-love contains the characteristics of the right side which are regarded inferior and female. I would also argue that passion-love is closer to female sexuality and language which Luce Irigaray conceptualizes as plural, but which appears indiscernible and 'somewhat mad from the standpoint of reason' (Irigaray 1985, p.29). In this respect, passion-love and female sexuality, which are presented as emotional, sensual, and chaotic, are not compatible with socially acceptable Thai norms of gender. In so far as the categories above of these two types of love are drawn from Balzac, a man whose writing betrays patriarchal values, the way that marriage-love is preferred could be read as the reproduction in the text of bourgeois-patriarchal ideas. This patriarchal conception of love is pervasive within a female genre such as romance; perhaps as an example of conformity to the male orientated social standards that female authors internalize. Thus, Toril Moi points out that both Irigaray and Derrida affirm the construction of patriarchal criteria in aesthetic works with the implication that "anything conceived of as analogous to the so-called 'positive' values of the Phallus counts as good, true or beautiful; anything that is *not* shaped on the pattern of the Phallus is defined as chaotic, fragmented, negative or non-existent" (Moi 2002, p.66). This may explain why marriage-love is more acceptable and desirable in romantic fiction; that is, romantic fiction is the by-product of patriarchal society, which forms the pattern of gender relations in accordance with male-oriented discourses.

Conflicts and Solutions

In Thai society marriage is one of a few personal events that are assumed to be essential to one's life and it is thus significant for both characters and for the reader of *Wanida*. The first meeting on the occasion of their marriage is the starting point for a conflict between the hero and heroine. In romance, it is crucial for the hero and the heroine to meet in contexts that allow them to prove their uniqueness to each other. An arranged marriage is a potentially conflictual situation for both the hero and the heroine because they are strangers to each other. For the relationship to develop positively, both have to demonstrate appropriate qualities. For the protagonists, especially the heroine, their lives change on marriage. For the hero of *Wanida*, the issue is one of marrying the woman he has been biased against from the beginning. Once they are married, he sees her as an intruder into his private life. For the heroine, marriage means her displacement into the hero's realm which creates uncertainty and a sense of loss.

The first meeting of the protagonists in *Wanida* functions as a means to keep them together, but at the same time drives them apart. The marriage compels them to live in the same house by having the heroine move in. Physically they are close; emotionally they are far apart. To reconcile this situation, there are relentless barriers that they must overcome, mostly caused by the female rivals. The heroine has to struggle with the hero from the beginning when he avoids seeing her while she wants to know the real reason for his marrying her. He suspects her virtues because he is forced to marry her. After realizing that she is not the type of girl who chases upper-class men to marry them, his opinion of her becomes more positive. He understands her situation as a hostage to his brother's debt and feels sorry for her. In this respect, the heroine overcomes the hero's prejudices from the very beginning, approximately about a week after their marriage. For this reason, he tries to protect her from his fiancée and mother who relentlessly put her in difficulty. The

threats against the heroine by the women he loves become the hero's conflict because he himself has to choose which side he will stand with. Because of his characterization as a proper hero who acclaims justice, he chooses rationality and impartiality. The more the hero knows the heroine and helps to extricate her from dilemmas, the more they fall for each other because they each reveal moral attributes which they respectively find desirable.

It can be said that *Wanida* is a text that does not place great emphasis on appearance over other values. The text does not describe the hero's visual interest in the heroine by depicting his gazing at her. It seems that he does not really look at her and almost totally ignores her, although the text describes the heroine's beauty. On the contrary, the hero admires her natural abilities in activities such as playing the violin or gardening. In this regards, the heroine is not trapped by appearance because the hero does not make any assumptions about how she looks.

The heroine's goal seems to be the retrieval of the reputation of her grandmother instead of love, and to achieve her goal she makes sacrifices. She has an accident and is hurt when she investigates the charge of adultery. She states that it is worth doing even if she has to sacrifice her life. Marriage and love are not something she longs for. She does not want to marry the hero, saying she is not ready; moreover, her grandmother tells her that being a wife is unpleasant. Since she cannot avoid the situation, she tries to perform well in her role as a housekeeper by expressing her kindness and care to the servants and she keeps busy doing household chores while trying to find a chance to achieve her goal. This implies her strong will and sense of purpose when it comes to achieving her goal while love is represented as a by-product of that.

As mentioned above, the heroine's major obstacles are the female foils, not the hero. The hero's fiancée appears relentless because she is jealous of the

heroine. However, the heroine and the female rival do not often confront one another because the hero tries to prevent and hinder a conflict between them. The most insurmountable obstacle is the hero's mother who almost stabs the heroine when the hero declares that he loves her and will not let her leave him. The hero's mother surrenders in the very last episode when she visits her grandson and the heroine treats her well. The heroine's moral qualities touch her heart, especially the heroine's ability as a nurturer and a wife.

Conclusion

It can be argued that *Wanida* is a romantic fiction that portrays the heroine in a traditional tripartite way: as daughter, as wife, and as mother. Although the heroine does not yearn for love and marriage, the subtext of the novel suggests that a qualified person like her deserves these without struggle; and that all that she has results from her inner essence of femininity. On this basis, she is, in terms of Thai romance fiction, a stereotypical female character. However, the text does not portray her as only passive because, as a woman at the beginning of the Twentieth Century, she dares to fight, especially for her grandmother. The text includes what Linda Barlow and Jayne Ann Krentz call "the celebration of feminine wisdom and power" (Barlow and Krentz 1992, p.16) As the plot develops, the heroine expresses considerable courage and wisdom and finally wins the hero at the expense of his fiancée. The wisdom and power that she shows are depicted as derived from her feminine, ideal attributes (related to the tripartite female topology) and seem to go no further than that. In this respect, the text can be read as being trapped within Thai ideological discursive practices and the heroine's wisdom and power are recuperated back to traditional norms of femininity. Moreover, the way that the hero calls her *Nang Kaew* emphasizes a feminine ideal formulated by traditional conventions and patriarchy.

Arthitaya Charuchinda (Charuchinda 2012) conducted research studying the discourses of femininity in fifty-four Thai novels during the regime of Field Marshal P. Phibulsongkhram from 1938-1957, including *Wanida*. According to Charuchinda, discourses of femininity in this period can be summarized under four main points. Firstly, the discourses acknowledge differences between men and women in biology, but not in their minds. That is men and women are not different in terms of mental qualities. Secondly, women are linked to the concept of civilization with proper dress, education, and jobs. Thirdly, wifely and motherly roles are emphasized. Fourthly, in terms of citizenship and the interest of the state, women are regarded as important, especially because of their gender-specific social roles (this last aspect is rather vague and repeats the third one). *Wanida* may not appear to be strong on the second point because the heroine does not have a career, but as for education and dress, she is portrayed as a well-educated woman who knows how to perform in the right time and right place, or *kalatesa* in Thai. The portrayal of the heroine does not stray from the conventions of the other fifty-four romance novels despite the fact that *Wanida* is a retelling of a Western romance novel.

As potentially a hybrid text, it seems to me that Wannasiri, the author, is capable of successfully retelling a Western romantic fiction narrative. One visible point is when she refers to the concept of *Nang Kaew*, the Thai Buddhist perception of ideal women. The descriptions of localization and other details such as places and transportation are also excellent. The major point that indicates the text to be a retelling of a Western story is the use of the surname because the enactment of Thai surnames started in the reign of King Rama VI at the beginning of the Twentieth Century. For this reason, it is not realistic for the hero to be so proud and concerned about his surname or to suggest that it can be traced back a hundred years as the text claims. However, the text's use of surnames is acceptable by the 21st Century when Thais take surnames to signify social and economic status.

There are some other points that the author seems also to have overlooked. For example, the heroine is portrayed wearing shoes in a house and even lies on her bed. This is not a normal practice for Thai people because shoes have to be taken off before entering a house. Only slippers are allowed. Another small point is the breakfast. Bread, butter, and coffee seem to be normal as breakfast. It is unlikely that people at that time preferred having Western style breakfasts. However, the food the heroine cooks and light meals or appetizers are Thai.

Chapter 5

Diversion to Heaven

Diversion to Heaven was published in 1965. It is a long novel of 787 pages and priced at £9.60. Like most of Thai novels written in the Twentieth Century, before publication as a paperback, the novel was published in a magazine to which the author sent each chapter. The instalments appeared from 1965-1967. The high price may be because the author is prolific and had become well-known. Her novels adopt a realistic mode plots for the depiction of characters. Krisna, as a successful professional novelist, is scrupulous about style in writing her novels which are well written with aesthetically pleasing language that is smooth to read. Both the dialogue and descriptions of places, unlike that of some younger authors, whose novels have plots with less depth, is based on research into the subject matter. Generally, Thai romance novels are more expensive when compared to magazines, unlike in Western countries where the pricing of novels and magazines are not so different. Because of this, the publishers also produce an in-between product that gives an abridged story sold at a very cheap price before novels, which have been made into TV series are broadcast. This is for those who are keen to know the story before the TV series ends. However, some readers may go back to the novels either by buying books or borrowing them from the library because the abridged versions are too short and often not identical to the original novels. Returning to the novels offers the reader the experience of similarities and differences between what is broadcast on TV, producing extra pleasure.

Diversion to Heaven is a romantic fiction which concentrates on two protagonists, without a real villain or rival. *Diversion to Heaven* does not portray its main characters in a very typical way for romance. This is because the text allows

the reader to see the development of the characteristics, akin to a *Bildungsroman*⁵⁴, and for this reason it can be said that the novel contains the characteristics of both romance and realism. The plot of *Diversion to Heaven* revolves around the male and female morality of the protagonists. The heroine moves to live in the hero's house because her sister, who was once madly in love with the hero, marries his father. After the father's death they have to live in the same house to meet the conditions of the father's will despite the fact that the hero fiercely hates all his in-laws while the heroine's sister secretly cares about him and longs for him. Living under the same roof, the hero, who is of an arrogant and indifferent disposition, develops his sexual interest in the heroine instead of her sister, while she tries to avoid him and constantly has heated arguments with him. One night when nobody is in the house, he rapes her as punishment for her arrogance and stubbornness towards him. This act is also revenge on the heroine's sister who has inherited half of his father's assets. It is, in essence, a story that deals with the personal fears and conflicts of the hero who has difficulty in establishing relationships with other people until he encounters true love and true femininity in the heroine.

In semiotic terms, the front cover of *Diversion to Heaven* is quite simple. This is significant since as Janice A. Radway's (Radway 1984) romance informants reveal, readers take titles and covers as clues to the book's content in making a decision about buying a romance novel. To some degree, they judge a book by its cover. Thus, the front cover plays a significant role in creating the first impression; as George Paizis affirms, the cover contains an offer, suggesting what the book is, attempting to attract the reader. *Diversion to Heaven's* title is located at the top of the book cover and it is about half an inch in size, which is big enough to catch the eye of the reader. Below is the author's name in smaller letters. The title gives a sense of the enigma of the text since the reader can decode the meaning of

⁵⁴ It is a type of the novel which has a focus on the development of a main character's morality.

'heaven' as referring to happiness, but 'diversion' sows the seeds of suspicion in the reader and this encourages the reader to want to know more about the story inside. The author finally gives an answer to this enigma at the end of the story in a dialogue between the hero and the heroine. The cover illustration is located under the author's name: two reddish roses on the yellow background which makes the red roses more prominent. There is no elaborate design. Red roses with thorns signify love and passion, which may come with tension and strife, while bright colours may signify or guarantee happiness at in the end. The cover of *Diversion to Heaven* does not follow the rules of Western illustration on front covers because it does not present relational images between a hero and a heroine; it rather uses a simple metaphor from which the reader can decode the meaning.



Figure 3: *Diversion to Heaven's* latest cover published in 2007

Time and Place

As mentioned earlier, because of differences in geography, temporalisation functions differently in Thai romance novels from Western novels. According to Paizis, two key and contrasting moments in romance fiction are the opening and final scenes in which time plays a crucial role. The importance of temporal settings depends on our cultural understanding of time. For instance, Spring is the favourite time of the year for romance in Western countries, while in Thailand the seasons are more static and the temperature all the year round does not change much. The favourite season for Thai people seems to be winter when the temperature is lower

than thirty degrees Celsius and can sometimes decrease to below twenty degrees Celsius in the northern part of the country. In Western romance novels the flow of the seasons usually has meaning, since many novels use May as the first month of the romance. The end of summer signifies the ending of courtship and autumn and winter are times for marriage and reproduction. Thai romance novels do not have this time cycle, and privilege winter but, like Western romance novels, the use of time in Thai romance is not very strict.

The first episode of *Diversion to Heaven* opens with an accident in late evening from which the story will develop. Significantly, it introduces all the main characters and establishes a flashback to establish the relationships between them. The flashback delineates the conflict between the heroine's sister and the hero which will develop as the plot progresses into the conflict between the hero and the heroine, misunderstanding, revenge, and resolution of the conflict. Temporalisation in the novel works in an interesting way since the reader knows the cause of the conflict from the beginning and this creates suspense within the first sixteen pages as to how the story will develop. Since the writer wrote the manuscript for a periodical – altogether forty-five episodes – the first episode is important since she needs to attract the reader's interest. It allows her to hook the reader's attention via a short piece of writing and this flashback is an efficient tool with which to give the background of the story. For this reason, time in the first chapter is used to show a chain of causes and effects, the connection to the past and the expected conflicts that will occur in the future. Time moves between the present and an incident in the past approximately three to five years previously. The heroine's sister was at college during the flashback, and the incident in which the hero's father killed her fiancé, happens in the present of the text. As for the closing scene, it begins in the evening, before the night of the protagonists' wedding. Specifically, it is the time before the wedding party when the hero gives the heroine all his precious jewellery

and lets her choose what to wear at the party. The scene denotes the success of the heroine and points to happiness after the party, their first night for sensual pleasure.

At the beginning of the novel the description of setting denotes what the place is and implies its importance to both narrative and reader. In *Diversion to Heaven*, the main setting is the hero's house, somewhere in a wealthy area of Bangkok. It is not exotic, but realistic. However, it can be said that exoticism seems to inform the heroine's perception of the hero's house to which she has to move (episode seven) with her mother, sister, and brother. The displacement of the heroine to the hero's house brings a sense of exoticism to both the heroine and the reader by its foreignness. I would thus regard the displacement of the heroine to the hero's place as exotic because the hero's domain is strange and foreign to the heroine. In plot terms, it is in moving to his house that she finally acquires true love followed by marriage. The hero's house is what the heroine transforms into a utopia for both herself and the hero. *Diversion to Heaven*, like Western romance novels, establishes the journey for the heroine to a place, which is normally the hero's house. This can be regarded both as a patrilocal move and the heroine's appropriation of the place that she will occupy at the end of the story. In many romance novels the actual cause of the heroine's displacement is depicted as economic factors. This proves to be true in *Diversion to Heaven*. Further when the heroine agrees to marry the hero, she becomes a share owner of his splendid house and his wealth, in comparison to the beginning when she and her family do not have their own house.

Characters are an essential and structuring element in the narrative. As in Western romance, characters in Thai romance serve the purpose of the narrative. However, as in realist fiction, which tells us something about reality (Iser 1980), characters also tell us something about real people. Fernando Ferrara (Ferrara

1974) argues that fiction is often a communication of ideas and values through characters and that stories are better-structured than reality. He therefore suggests the study of character as a structural system and emphasizes three levels: the surface structure, the middle structure, and the deep structure. Ferrara asserts:

At the level of realization, character manifests itself through a complete set of traits that are meaningfully correlated and form a self-regulated and productive system with the other layers of the structure. There is also a meaningful relation to its various contexts: with the fiction in which the character is placed, with the intention of the author and with the sociocultural system which the character expresses (Ferrara 1974, p. 255)

According to Ferrara, the significant contexts are the type of fiction concerned, the author's intention, and socio-cultural system. As an example of romance genre, *Diversion to Heaven* depicts the protagonists during their reproductive years. The genre establishes their major goals as love and family and the ways in which the conflicts between them delay the realization of these goals. The intention of the author may be impossible to determine, but it appears that *Diversion to Heaven* emphasizes love and warmth in the family as an essential need for a man. The socio-cultural contexts of the novel are significant in the sense that they affect the author's choice in adapting prominent cultural codes and norms of a society at the time the fiction is written. I understand the project of the text and socio-cultural system to be derived from the genetic imprint in society which links the socio-cultural context to the deep structure of the novel.

Ferrara's model for the structural analysis of fiction is an effective tool, and following this model I will not separate the structure of the characters and analyse them in isolation but I will consider the characters in relation to one another like Paizis does. Ferrara's character structural system is useful for my analysis because

he links texts to socio-cultural contexts – the deep structure – which Paizis does not explicitly include in his book. As regards characterization Paizis affirms: “Beyond the framing of the character by way of temporalisation and localisation, characterization includes the quality and nature of the protagonists’ names, their physical and spiritual qualities as well as indicators of social position or rank” (ibid., p. 74). For this reason I will link Paizis’ approach to Ferrara’s and attempt also to look at the deeper structure of the fiction, that is, at the set of values that emerge and their relation to socio-cultural contexts.

Female Characters

In *Diversion to Heaven* the heroine’s name is Narin, which is not high class in the Thai context, but sounds attractive. Her family call her ‘Rin’, an abbreviated name for daily use. It is worth mentioning that the names of female characters in the novel do not indicate much difference between the heroine and her rivals. They reflect Thai naming practices in which people either favour the rhyme of their children’s names or prefer their children having the same initial letter. In *Diversion to Heaven*, the author chooses the former by having the female protagonist’s name rhyme with her sister’s name, Leela. Names do not really show negativity or positivity, but in Thai romance novels, the heroine’s name tends to be more attractive in sound and pronunciation. This indicates special attributes in her character and connotes her distinctiveness. One can observe that the female protagonist in most Thai romance novels does not have a name taken from everyday life; even if she is from the working class. This emphasizes the fact that her character is a creation with the object of attracting the reader’s attention via her unique, memorable name. Unlike her first name, the heroine’s surname is not much in focus since Thai people call each other by their first names while surnames are mainly used to refer to family lines. Surnames are more important for men both in actual reality and in fiction

because surnames bear the economic and social status of men, with women usually choosing to use their husband's surname after marriage.

As regards the social status of the heroine in Thai romance, the heroine tends to be socially inferior to the hero. In *Diversion to Heaven*, the heroine does not have a good higher education. She graduated from a well-known vocational school of home economics and her family is depicted as poor since it has to rent a house and none of the sisters has received a university degree. However, I would contend that for women in the 1960s, the heroine's and her sister's education are good. They may be categorized as lower-middle class, career women. For her career, the heroine works in an office which sells sewing machines and her job is to give sewing lessons, make artificial flowers and supervise at a counter. She is so admired by her boss for her beauty and diligence that he wants to take her as his second wife. However, the heroine never accepts his offer, but as an employee she hides her discontent and thinks of leaving to look for a better fortune on her own. It sounds strange that the heroine has to tolerate her boss whose desire is regarded as contemptible by most women. In *Diversion to Heaven*, it seems that the author does not touch on the social dimensions of the issue though she has elsewhere⁵⁵ and it seems to function as a narrative element that reveals the heroine's traits, showing her integrity in that she does not take a short-cut to economic stability. Interestingly, Paizis points out that in romance the female rival's socioeconomic status is often much closer to the hero's. This can be seen in *Diversion to Heaven* in which the other female rivals who date the hero are from the upper class and have better education, but also demonstrate frivolous adornment and modern looks. Significantly, they are not portrayed as career women.

⁵⁵ Krisna wrote a novel, *Nam Sor Sai (Water Crumbles Sand)*, which mainly criticizes male promiscuity and negative consequences of having extramarital relationships in 1969.

The role of the female rivals in *Diversion to Heaven* is relatively insignificant because they are not major sources of conflict. The heroine does not encounter them, except in the form of her elder sister whose role is rather passive because she does not really show the negative disposition typical of female villains, choosing to suppress her jealousy. The text uses the age of the heroine as a narrative device, portraying her as younger than both the hero and female rivals, and thereby connoting her innocence. The heroine is also portrayed as three to four years younger than her sister, that is twenty-three years old, and she turns twenty-four later while her sister is twenty-seven. Thus both the heroine and her sister are in their twenties and of marriageable age. The major difference between the two sisters can be identified as their quests. In the case of the heroine's sister, she is looking for love. She has had feelings for the hero since she was in school, while the heroine seems to not really love anyone. In this regard, the heroine is more innocent than her sister because she does not show her desire for any man. The heroine's sister, on the contrary, realizes her sexuality and passion for the hero and even after her husband dies still secretly maintains her desire for the hero, although she does not demonstrate it, since she knows that it is not socially appropriate. For this reason the heroine's sister can be read as more forward in her sexuality and for a Thai readership, this implies negative connotations when compared to the heroine's innocence, shyness and the fact that her major goal is only her career. Unlike other female rivals, however, the heroine's sister does not seduce the hero; she merely expresses her conscious ambition to marry him. The hero's father, the husband that she has to marry, is old and she experiences desperation for a new marriage after her husband dies.

In *Diversion to Heaven* the heroine's beauty is presented not as stunning, but as natural and feminine. In the novel, the heroine's and her sister's beauty are compared as follows:

Narin's beauty is not similar to Leela's. Leela is outstanding for her fair complexion, but her face and some elements make this appear as 'quick beauty'. Her beauty easily becomes insipid when stared at. There is no 'emphasis' to impress a watcher. Narin, on the contrary, is a woman whose beauty is not gorgeous at first glance, but at the second, and the more one looks; one sees many interesting elements in her, such as her face or her movement. If one has more time to look at her, one will realize that she possess 'profound beauty'. Her honey complexion is spectacular. Her big, black eyes are steely and prudent. They show no agitation (Asoksin 1955-1967,2007, p. 47)

It is unclear from the text whether or not the heroine is aware of her beauty and its effect on others, but she does not appear vain in her effort to attract men. Unlike the hero's girlfriends, she seems to quietly acknowledge her beauty and does not really think too much about it. Her alluring appearance and disguised sexuality, however, attracts many men, including the hero. The hero's girlfriends are more fashionable and appear in frivolous clothes and hairstyles. The heroine wears a short, simple hairstyle. She does not wear make-up, but merely applies baby powder to her face, combs her hair, and uses a lip gloss. She wears more make-up only for a special occasion. This affirms for the reader that she is innocent and she has no intention of captivating a man. The text even reveals her size and her shape: size S with well-proportioned body measurements of 33-21-34 inches. This is known to both the hero and his love rival. As for her clothes, the heroine usually wears ordinary, smart clothes that she sews herself. As in Paizis's analysis of Western romance, the heroine's love for her clothes is depicted as serving her personal pleasure, not her ambition to seduce a man, unlike the hero's ex-girlfriends. In Thai social terms the portrayal of the heroine's appearance is natural while her female rivals are contrived.

However, I would argue that *Diversion to Heaven* is not completely consistent in the depiction of the heroine's appearance since at the beginning of the novel, the reader is informed that the heroine is not outstandingly beautiful, but moving on to other chapters her beauty is emphasized more – especially her natural beauty, which attracts every man around her – together with her ability in cooking, sewing, and doing feminine chores. This can be read as linked to the novel as a *Bildungsroman* which connects developing female beauty to her wider attributes. This approach does not conform to the Western romance pattern. Thus, Janice A. Radway in her analysis of Western romance argues that in romance novels female beauty is inextricably linked to sexuality because it arouses male desire (Radway 1984, p. 126). In this novel it is linked to sexual innocence on the part of the heroine. The author seems to realize the importance of her heroine's beauty, but it is not possible to pinpoint whether narrative constraints or social constraints play the main role in the creation of the heroine's beauty. On one hand, the author may want to create an image of a good girl who pays attention to other matters besides beauty to express her sophisticated personality rather than suggest her shallowness. On the other hand, it is a standard romantic narrative device that the heroine should impress the reader with her beautiful appearance. Both factors shape the author's need to create the appeal of her heroine. Since the boundary between romance and realism is not clear-cut in this novel, the heroine must possess exceptional qualities to bewitch the arrogant hero in order to convince the reader of the possible relationship between them. In mainstream romance novels, the key quality is usually her beauty and femininity.

Male Characters

As mentioned above the hero's social and personal status in Thai romance is usually superior to that of the heroine, a feature that is especially marked in

Diversion to Heaven. To start with his name and surname, the hero's surname connotes an upper class position in the social hierarchy such as that of a noble family or a wealthy family. As for his personal qualities as a pursuit-worthy man, Paizis' mode of analysis would suggest that this is in tension with his dominant position since both his sterling qualities and dominant position are culturally specific. Thai culture is patriarchal; thus, the hero's surname is given more emphasis in the text because a woman is expected to use her husband's surname after marriage. In real life, surnames are pointers to people's class and class plays an important role in Thai society. In Thai romance, belonging to the upper class is also signified by the hero's look, profession, clothes, and accessories, all of which are depicted as attractive. The hero in *Diversion to Heaven* has a modern sports car, which he likes to drive very fast and of which he is very proud. He is a relatively high ranking government official, a job regarded as sustaining a high degree of social stability and bringing honour to his family. It is notable that it is a desirable Thai social value to work as a government official due to the fact that merchants in earlier periods tended to belong to Chinese families and they were judged as inferior to Thai people. Almost as a rule, the archetypal Thai romantic hero is older than the heroine. In *Diversion to Heaven* the hero is thirty years old, six or seven years older than the heroine, which in social terms is an ideal age gap. Because of his father's wealth and his cleverness, he is sent to study abroad where he receives a master's degree. He is described as a handsome, attractive man with an arrogant look like a prince (Asoksin 1955-1967,2007, p. 23). All these manifestations of his social superiority enunciate the place in the social hierarchy of the hero and his masculinity.

The first impression that the novel offers of the hero in *Diversion to Heaven* is his impressive appearance which is contrasted with his personality. His physical qualities are typical of Thai cultural norms of masculinity. He is not very muscular

compared to his love rival, but he is very handsome. Like the heroine, he is an object of sexual desire. His personality is presented as less attractive and in need of change. He is depicted as acting arrogantly because of his pride at having a good education, a wealthy family, and good looks. Some minor characters say that he is much too vain because he does not pay attention to people of a lower social status but ignores them by giving them a shrug, walking away, or pretending not to listen. Even when he really cares, he pretends to be indifferent. Among his psychological weaknesses is the way he resorts to drinking alcohol when he is depressed and unhappy. He is a hard drinker and is temperamental. Seeing the heroine with a male rival, he becomes jealous.

Diversion to Heaven does not have a male villain, but his love rival who is portrayed as more stable in characteristics than the hero, who demonstrates the characteristics of a villain himself. On this basis one could argue that the hero in *Diversion to Heaven* is a dark hero. Generally in romance, the hero's traits should be in accordance with those of the heroine, but the achievement of this state of affairs can be delayed until the end of the novel since setbacks in the development of the key relationship are a narrative technique employed to create tension or drama. *Diversion to Heaven* chooses this device to move the plot forward until the hero is transformed into a better man through the heroine's feminine qualities. The hero in *Diversion to Heaven* is portrayed as having too much vanity at the beginning until towards the very end he acknowledges that the heroine is pregnant. Steven Schoen suggests three rules for the depiction of real-seeming and believable characters: consistency, complexity, and change (Schoen 2000). The consistency of the hero in *Diversion to Heaven* lies in his power to protect and control, but the form this power takes is changed into a more affective one, that of a sacrificing father and a loving husband. The hero has a complex personality that only the reader knows, while other characters do not have privileged access to his character. The hero's

flaws are shown to come from the death of his mother, a turn of plot which is used to justify his fear of loving and losing someone. Shortly after his mother's death, the hero's father marries another woman and the narrative explains that the young hero, then in his teens, is heartbroken and this turns sorrow into hatred. He is changed by the heroine into an affectionate man after she has taught him a lesson for his excessive arrogance and misbehaviour by leaving him to suffer from his conscience after her flight. She helps prove his deeper moral value, which is an essential trait for him, as a hero.

It is clear that the hero is the focal character who drives the plot, not the heroine. The author suggests that *Diversion to Heaven* is just "a banal novel recounting a human's life and the hero is the main, primary character". She transforms the hero through the process of suffering failure after failure. Thus, the hero learns of his own faults and he has to demonstrate his efforts at putting things right according to the cause-effect relation of the narrative codification and justification of coherence (Ferrara 1974) which leads to the outcome of the story. All the events in the novel motivate his development via his inner conflicts until he reaches his goals of love and a warm family. The hero's goals are also a theme of the novel; he is the one who decides what to do in order to create the family he wants to have. The cause-effect relation also justifies the hero's misbehaviour, depicting it as rooted in the way he was brought up with money, not love. Thus, he does not know how to love and acts as a villain while his true self is virtuous. Characterisation by means of thoughts help the reader to know his goal of being loved and cared for, and how badly he suffers and struggles for it.

As the hero in *Diversion to Heaven* is the focal character, he is the one who moves the plot forward and from this perspective the novel is about his quest, not the heroine's. Generally, classical romance is about the pursuit of the heroine's quest. *Diversion to Heaven*, on the contrary, is about the hero's quest for love and

family, while the heroine's pursuit of happiness and success, in economic terms and sexual desire, becomes secondary. This is another narrative technique that helps ensure the success of a romantic fiction written from the hero's perspective. What is interesting here is the interpretation of 'love' from the hero's point of view. It is a well-known convention in Thai romance that, for the heroine, love is linked to economic and social advancement. *Diversion to Heaven* seems to affirm that for a man love is linked to the acquisition of a heaven-like home with lovely children, preferably male, and a virtuous, honest wife. On this basis it can be said that for a man 'love' equals an early patriarchal capitalist concept of home and family where a woman can provide him a shelter from the cruel outside world of competition; a world that keeps a woman in a private sphere to please and console a man – the mode of patriarchal capitalism that keeps women inside the home for men's happiness. This can be understood in relation to the expansion of capitalism into Thai society, including the countryside since the 1950s (Walker 2012) and in this period the National Economic Development Board was officially established (Tantiwiranond and Pandey 1997). Since then the national economic planning has been drawn towards urbanization and industrialization. Significantly, Tantiwiranond and Pandey claim that the first two economic plans, at the time of writing *Diversion to Heaven*, were predominantly concerned with macro-economic growth and women were excluded⁵⁶. Thus, it can be assumed that in this particular period, desirable roles for women are that of the Angel in the House. Because of this, the portrayal of the protagonists' love, to some extent, reflects the ideal image of the family, the institution that was threatened by the economic condition that was inclined to become more capitalized and industrialized.

⁵⁶ Women were included in the Third Plan (1972-1977) under issues of family planning and population control while female development was encompassed from the Fourth Plan onwards.

Paizis contends that the reader is also active; thus, theories of romantic fictions as escapism and theories of manipulation are not adequate because they leave out the role of the reader (Paizis 1998). In his reading, feminist ideas of romance that see it as, for example, a patriarchal means of control which promotes female identification with subservient roles, impart a view of female readers as passive. On this point, I would argue that the reader is undoubtedly active, but this agency is more complex. What must not be overlooked are ideologies found within the discourse of romance novels. The ideologies need to be questioned, interrogated, and elucidated because the socio-cultural contexts of texts always impact on the construction of characters in one way or another. I would argue that the significance of pessimistic readings of romance ideologies by prominent feminists is important and cannot be overlooked. Focusing on Thai society, I would suggest that ideologies in romantic fiction have not yet been subject to critical analysis despite the fact that some romantic fiction novels have been remade as TV series and *Diversion to Heaven* has been filmed as many as four times, with the last TV version in 2007⁵⁷. In her analysis of fiction, Ferrara explains that the traits characters display can be categorized as those that are “intrinsic (referring to the physical or mental characteristics of the C [character]) and [those that are] functional (relation to C and his contexts and to its function in relation to them, i.e., to its surrounding world and to the other’s C)” (Ferrara 1974, p. 259). Ferrara contends that the construction of characters can be both compliant with or opposed to the traditional types of character found in the dominant culture. From my own vantage point, I would expect that the discourse of gender within each romance novel written at different times would change; but I am rather concerned that such traditional novels still play a role in contemporary culture, particularly in the twenty-first century. How can we understand this continued appeal and its effects? In this context I am concerned with the adequacy of a concept of mere repetition which can

⁵⁷ The first TV version was in 1972.

disguise shifts in the actual process of reading that come with changes in audience and imply different ways of being an active reader. Because of this, I persistently attempt to read what I have found as ideological in *Diversion to Heaven* and interrogate this in the light of different readings.

The intriguing issue is the rape scene, which has been debated widely among the audience of romance. At issue in this discussion has been the question of whether they are appropriate or lurid. Following Paizis' argument the novel can be seen as similar to the work of American romantic writer, Laura Kinsale who distinguishes between placeholding and identification. Placeholding is described as a technique that serves as "only a vehicle for the reader to enter the narrative, but needs do little more than that; the reader does not need to identify with the heroine, only to imagine herself in her place. Therefore, the weight of the narrative can be carried by the hero" (Kinsale 1992, p. 98). Where a text uses the strategy of placeholding, the reader does not identify with the heroine, but identifies herself with the hero and this explains why rape scenes are acceptable in romance novels, as well as some of the hero's other darker qualities. Eric Murphy Selinger in his article "Rereading the Romance" comments on rape in the romance novel in an interesting way. He argues that the fantasy of female triumph over brutality is more the focus than "a fantasy about some secret pleasure in it" (Selinger 2007, p. 319). Both these two points of views construe rape as a tolerable narrative device in romance. The concept of placeholding seems to work well in accounting for the reader as an active agent who has masochistic attributes.

However, I do not quite agree that the reader identifies herself with the hero as Paizis' text appears to suggest. If placeholding and identification are two distinctive relations between the reader and the text, it is possible that the reader does not identify herself with any character at all during her reading or alternatively s/he may identify with more than one character at a time. As for Selinger's point, it is

difficult to make assumptions about which fantasy the reader does engage in if we respect the reader as active, but it is not inconceivable that the reader might imagine that the heroine discovers masochistic, sexual pleasure with the hero when he uses physical force on her. In order to meet the conditions of romance, this would require that the protagonists develop some positive feelings towards each other as a result of the dramatized scene of rape. This may explain why the heroine in *Diversion to Heaven* starts to feel strange and hurt when her sister curses the hero and is afraid of him being injured when having a small fight with his rival. Her feelings towards him are changed after the rape, which happens only once in the text. However, the heroine is depicted as also realizing that rape is a crime and for this she cannot really forgive him.

Although the text displays the punishment that follows from his crime, I cannot accept the idea that rape is a source for positive emotional feelings between the protagonists; and thus, rape scenes between the protagonists are deeply problematic and reproduce a subordinate role for a woman despite the fact that the reader does not identify with the heroine. In terms of Thai social norms, rape in the novel may have a link to reality. According to Sumalee Bumroongsook in her study of mate selection in twentieth-century central Thailand, abduction and black magic were used when courtship failed until the 1970s (Bumroongsook 2003). Abduction was committed by men while black magic was reported as a practice of both men and women. In Bumroongsook's study, abduction was common in rural area and could be a staged elopement. Of course, many times abductions were real and although Bumroongsook does not mention 'rape' in abduction or kidnapping, I am certain that rape, as a violent crime against women, did occur when the kidnapping was not a staged elopement. It was a means to silence women and their guardians as stated in Bumroongsook: "The woman's parents, seeing that their daughter and her reputation had already been blemished by the abductor, would have no other choice but to forgive him. In some cases, marriage ceremonies were held

afterwards to save the honor of the woman's parents" (ibid., p. 47). In this regard, women who were victims appeared invisible in the sense that they could not speak if they really wanted to marry men who abducted them. However, the heroine in *Diversion to Heaven* dares to reject the man who raped her; yet, she keeps the rape secret from her family because she feels too embarrassed to let everyone know that she has been blemished. The text shows that she is, to some extent, independent and confident while the hero has to suffer from the crime he committed. To be fair, the writer does not exploit her heroine, but to a considerable extent portrays the heroine's sense of agency even though a happy ending in the end still reproduces patriarchal features of asymmetrical relationships between Thai men and women.

Love and Marriage

In *Diversion to Heaven*, the meetings between the protagonists are significant for the plot since they drive the development of conflicts between them. Paizis contends that such meetings highlight the imbalance of 'power' and 'quality' between the characters. In *Diversion to Heaven* their first meeting is at the hero's house, a place that is his territory to which the heroine and others have been invited. Because of his arrogance, the hero does not pay much attention to those who he regards as poor and unimportant, including the heroine. The first meeting reveals the hero's power as an owner, making the guests leave when he appears. The first really clear sign of his intentions occurs in his house on his father's wedding day. This time the heroine's attractiveness catches his eyes. In the first place, it is the colour of her dress, described as the most beautiful he has ever seen, that captivates his eyes from a far distance. For this reason, he snatches binoculars to secretly gaze at her. The gaze arouses his sexual attraction towards her, it is the first time that he really looks at her. This incident shows again the

hero's power over the heroine, his right to gaze at her. It also reveals there might be something sinister about his personality besides his arrogance.

The first meeting of the protagonists in *Diversion to Heaven* is far from love at first sight. As mentioned above, their first meeting occurs at the hero's home and both of them intentionally avoid looking at each other. Their first meeting produces repulsion in both the hero and the heroine. The hero's arrogance and insolence are causes of the heroine's revulsion, while the hero suspects the heroine's family as gold-diggers who covet his father's money. From their first meeting, the protagonists' power and quality seem to be unequal; the social superiority of the hero is in contrast with the social inferiority of the heroine. The sense of inequality in power and its effect at their first meeting, thus, initiate conflicts and move the plot on. The hero's attraction develops when he has a close look at the heroine for a second time. This attraction is not mutual since the heroine does not realize that the hero is looking with interest at her. At the second meeting the sight of the heroine is depicted as a source of fascination for the hero. Their previous meeting has evoked upheaval in the protagonists which results in repulsion on her part, from which the need for transformation narratively derives.

Diversion to Heaven seems to acknowledge the elements of passion-love as important. In *Diversion to Heaven* the heroine's beauty in a magnificent dress can be read as connoting her sexual attraction to the hero. Although the text does not reveal his feeling towards her, we can infer that he is allured by her beauty because he snatches binoculars to have a closer look at her. This can be read as constituting the first impression of her appearance prior to which he has not been aware of it at all.

The concept of two types of love can be applied to both protagonists. Taking passion-love and marriage love, the heroine's notion of love in *Diversion to Heaven*

appears to belong to the second group. When asked by her mother if she loves the man who is courting her, the heroine asks her back if she would like her daughter to love a man first. She explains that a woman should restrain her feelings towards a man to protect herself from disappointment in love. With this attitude, liking is possible, but it must be the man who loves her first. This reflects the social expectation in Thai society that women disguise their desire and sexuality keeping it for only suitable men. This implies the use of the brain, not heart, to acquire love and it is a question of marriage-love instead of passion-love. However, from the perspective of the hero, who used to have a playboy life, only love without calculation is true love. He tells the heroine's sister that the heroine is his first love, and that all the others were women that he just had reasons to associate with. The concept of love for its own sake is often emphasized and this is passion-love rather than marriage-love. Although Paizis points out that passion-love and marriage-love are irreconcilable, *Diversion to Heaven* depicts passion-love as the essence of love that leads to marriage. It is idealistic love that is the focus. The plot itself leads the reader to this assumption, since the characterisation of the hero is of a man who has enormous pride in his wealth and looks down upon poorer people as less human beings. This attitude is grounded in the social conditions of Thai society at that time, when Thailand was in the period of change economically and socially and the gap between the rich and the poor was greater. *Diversion to Heaven* seems to inform the reader that money is not everything and the value of a person depends on his morality. The heroine is the representative of a woman who comes from an ordinary family but reaches the social expectations of a good woman according to the religious belief of having a good conscience and remaining chaste. While the hero occupies a higher social position, his morality is in a question. At a time when capitalism was first permeating the country, the author introduces the idea that in love and relationships, true love can and should exist and that such love must be without calculation. In reality, it is reasonable to assume that passion-love and

marriage-love are contradictory in nature and seem incompatible, but in this novel passion-love is reconciled with marriage-love.

Conflicts and Solutions

Obstacles are an important narrative device that moves the story between the hero and the heroine forward logically and dramatically before ending happily. In most romance novels obstacles are rooted in the misunderstanding or misinterpretation of the qualities of the protagonists – particularly – of the heroine by the hero and she needs to prove her quality. However, *Diversion to Heaven* compels both the hero and the heroine to prove their qualities – especially the hero. The primary obstacle for the hero is himself, while the heroine's obstacles are generated by the hero. From their first encounter both protagonists form assumptions about each other from visual impression or appearance. As stated above, the hero does not really look at the heroine because she is one of the guests who he dislikes and he expresses his contempt by looking over their heads. The second time that he has a close look at her is when she moves into his house with her family. Their unwelcome arrival to live in his house brings about a conflict between them because he suspects her sister (along with her family, including her mother and her brother) who marries his father to be fortune hunters.

The structure of *Diversion to Heaven* involves conflicts of power, morality and social status, like Western romance novels, echoing aspects of such classical texts as *Pride and Prejudice*. The conflicts of power and status are found both within and between characters. The dark hero corrupts all the qualities of a good hero and performs wrongdoings as if he were a villain himself. For this reason, he struggles immensely to prove his value to everybody, especially to the heroine. In accordance with romance conventions, the heroine also needs to prove herself to the hero who is not certain from the beginning of her worth, but later realizes her moral and social

value. It takes the hero a longer time to prove his virtuous qualities, his true self is not his social one. Like other heroes in romantic fictions, the hero in *Diversion to Heaven* is at the top of the narrative hierarchy as regards his education, wealth, and social status. He is superior to the heroine in many ways, but his weak point is his moral qualities, which are conventionally regarded as equally important for both the hero and the heroine. As Paizis points out, the position of hero in romance should not be regarded as only symbolic of his power, since it also has “inner mechanics”; for example, when his wealth is acquired from hard work. However, *Diversion to Heaven* presents the hero as also sharing those attributes of the male rival in romance such as high living and promiscuity and even absence from work, for example, when the heroine runs away and he does not feel like work. However, what seems to be a fundamental positive value of the hero in the novel is his shame at his sin, while the value of the heroine is her femininity and virginity.

As for female power, *Diversion to Heaven* shows that the heroine can transform the hero into a better man by means of her virtues, which are linked to traditional Thai feminine values and the qualities of a good wife and a mother. The heroine is depicted as good at sewing, a competent dressmaker, an excellent cook, a kind teacher, and a proper Thai woman, who intends to remain chaste until married. Radway affirms that female beauty denotes a heroine’s sexuality, while others such as Paizis contend it acts as a symbolic representation of female power. I would add that in Thai culture beauty can be regarded as virtue. This explains why at the beginning of the novel her beauty is not much emphasized, but further into the texts her beauty and her properness are mentioned both by the narrative voice and by other characters. It is a Thai belief that one’s appearance results from one’s previous karma especially from a previous life. Further Penny Van Esterik (Esterik 2000) proposes the importance of considering the preoccupation with surfaces in Thai society. Surface is really a powerful matter in Thai society and it embodies

beauty for both men and women. However, I am also inclined with Paizis to argue that an author is unlikely to create a heroine who is too distant from the reader by depicting her as too good to be true, although to some extent her beauty is necessary. As for her other qualities, I concur with Paizis when he argues that “As far as the moral qualities of the heroine are concerned, she does not fit into any traditional mould or model supposed to signify or reinforce female passivity” (ibid., p.104). Her qualities as a wife and a mother do not connote weakness or passivity. In this way a positive ideal image of a beautiful wife and a generous mother is evoked.

Although moral qualities are an essential attribute for both the hero and the heroine in romantic fictions, *Diversion to Heaven* portrays social values that are related to female qualities with more variety than those that relate to the hero. The most important discourse of femininity is to be chaste (*Rak nuan sa-nguan tua*), which the text always portrays as a desirable attribute, while Western culture that allows access to the body is regarded immoral.⁵⁸ It is a normative value for women “to exert restraint in their contact with the opposite sex, to refrain from gestures and verbal expressions that are obviously sexual, to make sure that men cannot sexually violate them, and to never enter into a relationship with someone else’s partner” (Laphimon 2012b, p. 34). *Rak nuan sa-nguan tua* literally means to love and reserve a body. *Diversion to Heaven* illustrates this social belief through female characters – especially the heroine. It is shown that men, too, are proud of their wives when they realize that they are virgins. In contrast, women of easy virtue, giving men access to their bodies, are condemned as degenerate. Thus, for example even such contact as men and women holding hands, the way they dance

⁵⁸ Between 1950s and the 1960s Americans established military camps in Thailand and brought their interpersonal relationship culture to Thailand such as dating, dancing, or holding hands in a public place. During this time there was a concern over male sexual prerogative and female purity because of fear of a possible American influence on Thai women.

with intimacy or even the state of widowhood are regarded as not suitable for a *kunlasatri* (a virtuous woman). In contrast, this idea is not applied to men and the text even mentions that men can have an adventurous life outside home while women cannot.

The heroine is acknowledged for her properness and this is echoed by other characters many times in the text. The concept of *kunlasatri* in *Diversion to Heaven* also prescribes that women hide their feelings towards a man, especially attraction and love. This is why the heroine's sister is condemned by the hero when she shows her passion for him, while the heroine is praised for being a *kunlasatri*. Moreover, because of this concept, which both men and women internalize, the heroine's sister also thinks that she is not good enough for her fiancée, just because she had feelings for the hero. The notion of hiding a thought from men is believed by the heroine to arouse a man's eagerness and interest in her. The text suggests that it is female nature to think too much and talk too much; thus, women usually reveal their secrets and this may indicate that they cannot be trusted. Women are expected to engage with trivial matters, while men are expected to engage with more important matters. As regards her virginity, the heroine is compared by the hero to superb food, after he takes her virginity by force⁵⁹. After having sex with her, the hero does not want to turn to other women who for him are now banal. But the social belief in *rak nuan sa-nguan tua* means that the heroine feels she has an unwashable stain on her body, since she has lost her pride and virtue. As for her other characteristics, from the hero's point of view, her diligence, properness, and discreetness are sufficient qualities. His reasons for ending relationships with his ex-girlfriends are selfishness (asking him to pay for everything), and being too possessive, too fashionable, and demanding. Indeed, the heroine in *Diversion to*

⁵⁹ In the Thai context, sex is compared to food, a basic requirement for men.

Heaven more or less follows the elite discourse of the “virtues of the good, dutiful woman who exemplified grace, beauty and self-control” (Laphimon 2012b, p.46).

As for a man’s qualities, some Thai normative values are applied to men as well as women. Appearance is an important aspect to start with. As stated above, ideas of female beauty derive from Buddhist beliefs, yet Buddhism exercises its rule over both men and women equally. For this reason, the belief in beauty as something that is a result of good deeds in former lives also applies to men. Van Esterik affirms this view and states, “It is ethnocentric and Eurocentric to assume that beauty of form is relevant only to women” (Esterik 2000, p. 155). Accordingly, the hero’s magnificent handsomeness is portrayed in *Diversion to Heaven*. Other Buddhist beliefs are considered equally crucial for men and women, such as fear of a sin committed. The hero’s sexual force exercised on the heroine is regarded as a sin, committed on a virtuous virgin. The heroine’s flight is a proof of his immorality. If he does not show remorse and still displays promiscuous sexual behaviour, he will not be forgiven by the heroine. As for Thai beliefs about men’s nature, they include the idea that a man has a tendency to be pleased with the easy and stops searching for the difficult. Once a man realizes that the difficult is precious, he may lose it. Arrogance in a man is condemned in the text. It is suggested that a vain woman looks better (*naa-du*) than a vain man. However, there is no social norm that requires the hero to love or reserve his body like the heroine. The concept of *rak nuan sa-nguan tua* is not bestowed on him; in contrast, he is expected to initiate a relationship with a woman and to take the opportunity for sexual activities before and even after marriage. However, *Diversion to Heaven* expresses responsibility for a family as a required quality for both the hero and the heroine.

In *Diversion to Heaven* the hero’s and the heroine’s morality is acquired from their conscience and comes from their state of being. Paizis makes an interesting observation about Western romance novels that suggests that morality is ‘doing’

rather than 'being', for example, the hero's wealth is often obtained from hard work. Western heroes, thus, are independent and usually portrayed as self-employed. Unlike Western heroes, the hero in *Diversion to Heaven* is dependent financially because his work as a government bureaucrat, while prestigious, does not make a lot of money and his lifestyle is too expensive. Because of this, his father has to provide an allowance for him every month to cover expenses on clothes, club membership, and other miscellaneous expenses. The text suggests that his sense of morality comes from within him and is a matter of good conscience. The conception of good conscience is a major quality for both protagonists, but it is emphasized in the case of the hero whose conflicts result from too much pride and arrogance. As he has characteristics of a villain, he has to prove himself through the ability to distinguish right from wrong, virtue from vice. These are more or less cultural abstractions, which have a psychological effect in the form of remorse for previous actions. In this sense, conscience is inherent. As regards the Buddhist belief in previous lives, conscience is an accumulation of knowledge of virtues and vices and the law of karma from many previous lifetimes will form these attributes. Thus, true quality in *Diversion to Heaven* is inner quality, while other outer qualities are only supplemental and of less importance, such as an extravagant lifestyle or excessive drinking. Not surprisingly, the hero's conscience shows complicity with social norms – especially of female virginity, which is regarded as a female value. Once the hero dishonours this female value, as a 'good' person, he must show regret and try to take responsibility for his actions. As for the heroine, her good conscience is not in question since she expresses her positive values repeatedly. It can accurately be said that for this novel 'being' leads to 'doing', not the other way round although the idea is sometimes conflated. The hero's failures to achieve his goal, love and family, result from his blindness to internal values. He pays attention more to external values or appearances, which are not the essence of life as suggested by the novel.

To a certain degree the obstacles in a romance novel need to reflect some aspects of reality so that the reader has enough clues to follow the plot (Paizis, 1998). The heroine in *Diversion to Heaven* tackles the hero's prejudice against the lower-class by proving that she is not a fortune seeker and is independent enough not to surrender to his wealth and looks. The hero struggles to transform his negative attitudes towards others caused by the false perception of his social position. The heroine is the key person in the hero's quest and influences the ways in which he overcomes his obstacles. The hero's personal conflict represents the contradiction between traditional social values and capitalist/Western values⁶⁰. His taste for Western culture is questioned, especially his taste for women while the heroine remains a traditional Thai woman who maintains her chastity, which is conflated with virtue. In this regard, the hero's conflicts represent social conflicts over the extent to which Thai society should adopt Western culture or conserve its own tradition and values. Not surprisingly, the text suggests that the latter is the better choice.

The solutions to the obstacles that arise inevitably from the conflicts between the protagonists, reemphasize the socio-cultural stereotypes of both men and women. The heroine's inner self is grounded in an ideal type who performs well in domestic roles. She possesses all the abilities of a housewife, she works hard, is good at cooking and doing household chores. In addition to this, she keeps a firm hold on her chastity and feels proud of herself. After having forced sex with the hero she feels impure and too embarrassed to talk with any men pretending that she is still pure. As regards the struggle over power and gender qualities, the heroine in *Diversion to Heaven* declares to the hero on the last two pages that she loves a dictator who uses his power correctly and wants him to politely command her

⁶⁰ During the 1950s and 1960s there was a tension over Westernization and female purity in the face of Western culture because Thai government cooperated with the West, particularly the U.S., in fighting communism. At this particular time Thailand encountered enormous change in the economy and society.

because “A man is always a man. He can be polite, humble, and generous, but he must have a spirit of a leader” (Asoksin 1955-1967,2007, p. 787). Clearly, the narrative invokes traditional patriarchal attributes and values of domestic responsibility and sexuality. As regards other personal attributes, the heroine is also depicted positively, such as in her ambition for a career, strong-mindedness, pride, and in her mental strength.

Conclusion

It should be acknowledged that the portrayal of the heroine is not subordinate to the hero in every aspect. Although *Diversion to Heaven* reproduces a socio-cultural stereotypes to depict normative female images, it does not portray the heroine’s pursuit of a man, but of self-esteem. The heroine is described as a strong-minded woman who is financially independent and her ambition is all about her career advancement. From her point of view, she dreams of having financial stability by working, not by seeking a shortcut even though her boss offers her the chance to be his mistress and will guarantee her financial security. She has an ambition to work for a while and later start a small business. Her plan is not too big or too idealistic; instead, she is practical and decides to do things when she sees the possibility. She thinks that work is one of a person’s good values. As for a dream of love and marriage, she does not really seek for it and is depicted as an independent choice maker. In accordance with her perspective about work, her dream for a man is not for an ideal, she simply wants someone who is compatible with her, a man from the same class and one whom she can respect morally. This shows that good qualities are a requirement for both men and women. If Western romance novels before the 1990s depict sacrifice, physical or mental weakness, and sexual passivity as Paizis claims, *Diversion to Heaven* does not present the heroine’s weakness at all. She never surrenders to the hero’s wrongdoings. Indeed, she makes sacrifices for her baby, but the text also indicates the hero’s sacrifice for the child. As for the

heroine's sexual passivity, it is a cultural restraint, which is deeply rooted in Thai society, even in the literary world, as it is widely assumed that love is not restricted in Thai literature, but sexuality is. For this reason, the heroine in Thai romance novels does not initiate sexual affairs and, extrapolating from Paizis's study of the heroine in Western romance novels, in a similar way, is not expected to make sexual advances. I would like to argue that it cannot be assumed that in not initiating a relationship, the heroine is sexually passive. It is merely a narrative element that represents expectations of male and female relationships. It is not adequate to draw a firm conclusion about female passivity. The heroine does not hesitate to give up the hero when her worthiness is in doubt, as shown from her flight from the hero. Thus it can be argued that this is similar to the way in which Paizis interprets Western romance novels. He contends that the quest of the heroine is for esteem and the hero is her reward.

I concur with Paizis that the reader of romance novels is not passive. It is not possible that the reader will like a heroine who is weak and has tendency to be a victim. Why would readers need a passive heroine if they read romance novels either as an escape or her pleasure? On the contrary, a passive heroine causes anxiety and is not realistic, especially in a contemporary world where the effects of the feminist movement are all around. To a certain degree I would say that for women, reading romantic fictions is not much different from men reading a superhero genre – specifically it gives a sense of victory over the obstacles to their goals. For the heroine, her obstacles may derive from female rivals or the hero himself, while for the hero his external obstacles tend to be male villains. If Radway is right in her assumption that female readers read romance novels to avoid cruel reality – especially with regard to male and female relationships – this supports the hypothesis that in the world outside the novel, to some extent, men, including husbands, generate anxiety for women. By the same token, the obstacles for men in

their real life, as portrayed in the superhero genre, may result mostly from other men. Since the romance genre is about love and relationships, romance novels need to reconcile conflicts between the hero and the heroine and negotiation between men and women is necessary and inevitable, unlike in the superhero genre where the hero can eliminate his villains regardless of their sex. On this basis, both genres whose service is to give pleasure, tackle difficult conventional obstacles differently. However, it is important to point out that romance novels in their deep structure contain cultural ideologies which can tell us much about the society in which they were written. It is difficult to say definitely through textual analysis alone whether the romance genre really denigrates women or boosts female esteem or does both. What cannot and should not be denied is that the ideologies represented in the genre stem from socio-cultural values, which are reproduced through particular discourses. Yet, reception further depends on how the reader interprets those discourses.

Chapter 6

Swan Snare

Swan Snare was first published in 1998, the same year as its first TV version was broadcast. In the case of *Swan Snare*, it appears that the novel was so popular and enthralling that it was adapted as a TV series immediately after the author finished the story unlike *Diversion to Heaven*. According to the publisher, almost all of Kingchat's (the author's) romantic fictions have been produced as TV series. *Swan Snare* has been filmed twice in 1998 and 2009, respectively. The book version I am using was published in 2009, and was the twelfth edition, published in the same year that the second TV version was broadcast.

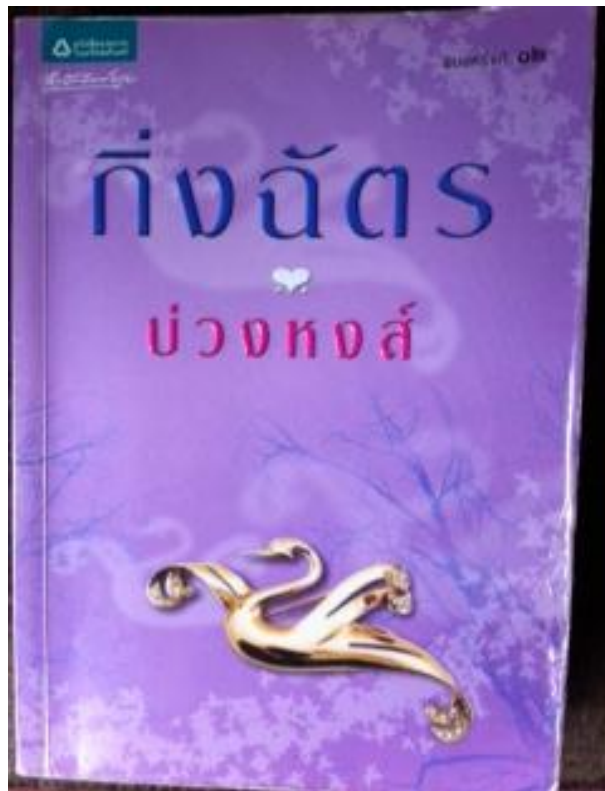


Figure 4: *Swan Snare*'s latest cover published in 2009

Swan Snare is a successful popular fiction as can be seen from its twelve editions within ten years. Its marketing is interesting. Like other Thai romantic fiction, the

cover is quite simple and not particularly striking, with an image of a gold swan brooch, which is the heroine's favourite piece of jewelry. The brooch looks very ordinary and while the text tells the reader that it is a Cartier brooch, the brooch on the cover is not very elegant, compared to the collection of brooches on Cartier's website. Also, the colour of the cover, purple, does not suggest any particular romantic meaning. Its background might be the sky because the reader can see high branches of trees. In a Thai context, this can be read as signifying height and being beyond reach. This reflects influences from Chinese and Indian culture. In ancient China, a swan was the symbol of the empress while a dragon was that of the emperor. In Hindu mythology, a swan is the greatest bird in Himmavanta forest, a legendary forest in Hindu culture. Drawing on these ancient empires, Thais conceptualize the swan as rare and venerable. The author's name is bigger than the title of the book itself. It comes before the title and is in blue while the title is in pink. In the middle, between the author's name and the title, there is a small white heart, a simple sign of love. On the left at the top, there is the name of the publisher while the Thai number of publication is on the right. Evidently, the packaging in itself is not attractive enough for the reader to choose the book. What seems to be a significant feature is the prominence given to the author's name, unlike with the cover of *Diversion to Heaven* or *Wanida* and this implies the author's fame. The illustration of a swan brooch signals the message of femininity, elegance, and attractiveness, while the title gives a sense of enigma: what is trapped? A swan or another person? Since a swan may signify an elegant, beautiful woman, it might be the heroine who sets the trap or she may be trapped herself. Both seem possible. In this regard, the title challenges and invites the reader's skills in interpretation. This contrasts with the simplicity of the cover which shows a significant object which is a major symbol in the story.

Time and Place

Like Western romance novels, temporalisation in *Swan Snare* focuses on the present time and the narrative is linear in structure⁶¹. The initial meeting between the hero and the heroine happens in the first chapter. It is an immediate encounter that induces affection in the hero for the heroine. After that, flashbacks are used from time to time to provide the background, mostly of the heroine, who becomes “a swan with broken wings”. The plot takes place over a few months from the initial meeting between the hero and the heroine to their reconciliation in the happy ending scene. Unlike Western romantic fictions, where the favorite time of love is in the spring, *Swan Snare*’s temporal setting is mentioned as taking place in the winter, between November and February, conventionally the most romantic season of the year in Thailand. The temperature in winter feels like summer in England. Dates are not specific; the text just implies the season, days of the week, and time of the day.

As regards the parameters of localization – exoticism, utopia, and reality (Paizis 1998) – *Swan Snare* contains all these major elements. The main setting is a province in the North, Chiang Rai which is not a capital city in the region, but the northernmost province. In this regard, it connotes a sense of exoticism and enigma. Chiang Rai is a tourist destination, a gateway to Myanmar and Laos, so it is credible for the hero to run a hotel business in that province. This conforms to the generic conventions of verisimilitude in Thai romance according to which the hero usually owns an auspicious business, in this case, a five-star hotel in Chiang Rai with another friend. For this reason, it can be read as an ideal space for their meeting, promising a future of luxurious love and a sybaritic relationship, especially for the heroine. In a similar way, the heroine’s displacement into the hero’s realm tends to

⁶¹ The goal is to create an “illusion of reality; by inscribing the story of the text in time it is naturalized and it is made to appear real” (Paizis 1998, p. 58). On this basis, romance novels must simulate reality to a great extent, including the social contexts and values of the period in which the novel is set.

be also rendered as ideal. It signals the heroine's victory in coming to possess both the hero and his assets. This strengthens her financial position and social status. In the case of *Swan Snare* and the heroine's power of transformation, it is doubtful that the displacement of the heroine to the hero's space turns the location into an ideal space as in the other two novels, because the heroine is not a typical, idealised woman. Rather, her character is depicted as disruptive and thus, different from the heroines in *Wanida* and *Diversion to Heaven*. The novel can be read as depicting how the heroine's character enables a blossoming into love; she does transform the space, but not with her domestic abilities. However, her moving to the hero's realm does produce significant conflicts at the beginning of the story and the heroine has to undergo an ordeal resulting from her impulsiveness and selfishness. Later, she becomes more mature and well-developed in her personality. In this sense, the development of the heroine's character seems to be realistic because she is gradually changed by the experiences she encounters along her journey. In general, the author produces verisimilitude in the localisation that combines elements of exoticism, utopia, and reality.

Female Characters

The text opens with a sketch of the heroine, depicting her at a party that she finds boring. It can be observed that the names of female characters in Thai romance – especially those in the leading roles, often sound beautiful and grandiose compared to the supporting characters. As a narrative device, names are used to signify social status and in Thai romance novels, they are the symbolic site for the struggle over power. In this regard, the names of the heroine and her rival are impressive in terms of sound and spelling since they belong to the upper-middle class. The supporting characters' names are simpler orthographically and less complex reflecting their lower social status. Thus, their names do not contain borrowed words from Pali,

Sanskrit, or Khmer like those of the upper class. The number of syllables in the names is two or three, but Thais prefer abbreviated names or nicknames to signify intimacy. For instance, the hero calls the heroine Pim instead of her real name, Pimlapach, which contains three syllables. The female rival calls herself Wee instead of Mathawee, the three-syllable name. Surnames seem to have no importance at all in the novel because the reader knows the characters only through their first names.

The novel implies that the age of the heroine is about twenty-two or twenty-three and her rival is a few years older, about twenty-six. According to the conventions of Thai romance, the older age of the female rival suggests more wickedness in her character. The heroine and the female foil are similar, but different. The text reveals some similarities between these two female characters in terms of their characteristics, but the female foil shows more insincerity and dishonesty in her attributes. In both romance and in real life, a woman's early twenties are seen as ideal for marriageability and procreation. The older age of the female foil, implies her experienced, negative disposition, such as the characteristics of being snake-like and seductive. From the heroine's point of view, the foil, her ex-step mother, is an ambitious, calculating woman who marries her father for money because her job as a model is not going well anymore. The heroine believes that after marrying her father, "Mathawee flirts with several men and embarrasses Dad" (Kingchat 1998, p. 9). The heroine's view may be affected by bias towards her similar-aged stepmother, but the reader acknowledges that the heroine's view is right in many respects, such as the female foil's intention to seduce and flirt with the hero when she meets him. In this regard, the difference between these two female characters is between intention and morality. The female foil expresses herself as a willful person who comes with plans and never acknowledges her wrongdoings. The heroine, on the other hand, is impulsive but

shows obedience to the hero's commands and values, and repentance for her wrongdoing. In general, the heroine's age signals naivety which is a desirable feature in Thai society for a young woman.

Interestingly the heroine appears to be in opposition to the traditional image of a "good" Thai woman. This is because her father is a businessman, who is wealthy enough to grant her an extravagant life; thus, the heroine is a spoilt person and becomes self-centered. She expresses her confidence through her movement and posture. She always walks elegantly, with a swanlike movement and straight back and shoulders. Her father imbues her with the idea that she is as elegant as a swan and gives her a Cartier swan brooch on her fifteen birthday, "A swan is elegant in every manner, flying, swimming, feeling happy, or even feeling angry, its posture is always graceful ... like you, my daughter" (ibid., p.7). Drawing on this, the heroine becomes an egotistical, haughty person who spends money extravagantly on her beauty and convenience. Other people, except her father, get bored with her self-centered personality; therefore, she rarely gets a chance to appear on the catwalk; the only thing she can do for a living after her father goes bankrupt and kills himself. The depiction of the heroine's personality is not a usual portrayal of a romance heroine as compared to the other two in the romances from earlier decades. Yet, the plot is credible in the social context of Thai society in the last decade of the Twentieth Century. At this time the birth rate was decreasing since people were having fewer children as the society changed from agrarian to become more industrial. Thus, the need for labourers to work in the rice fields had decreased. Furthermore, having many children was seen as linked to poverty; and for this reason birth control had become successful in Thailand (Frazer 1992).

Because of her personality, the heroine is regarded as unqualified to be a wife or a mother, as her fiancé's mother announces with contempt when her son breaks off the engagement (p.76). This is due to the fact that Thai women are expected to

preserve traditional culture and mores and pass them down to their children. Such a deviant person as the heroine would seem incapable of handling this heavy responsibility. Moreover, she is depicted as dressing revealingly in a way that expresses her body, and is criticized as '*po*'. According to Sulaiporn Chonwilai, an activist and independent researcher, the word *po* "implies a negative, judgmental connotation, suggesting inappropriateness" (Chonwilai 2012b, p.70), whereas, for example, 'sexy' has more positive connotations. The dresses that the heroine thinks of as sexy, which are mostly bought from expensive Western designer houses, are read also as '*po*' or inappropriate by others in a Thai context, since a good woman is expected to cover her body instead of revealing it. In this respect, the condemnation of Western sartorial culture is similar to the condemnation of Western culture in *Diversion to Heaven*. Accordingly, it can be argued that Thais have continuously regarded the West as a source of threats. However, in *Diversion to Heaven*, Western behavior is condemned by the narrator and the heroine while in *Swan Snare*, it is condemned by supporting characters, not by the hero who appears to adore her beauty as expressed through her looks and her style of dressing. Her self-centeredness, extravagance, laziness, and her mode of dress create the heroine's image as in contrast with stereotypical Thai heroines usually found in Thai romantic fiction. Typically, the conventional and hegemonic representations of the heroine are based upon "being proper (*riaproy*) and sweet (*onwann*) the hegemonic discourses in the case of upper-middle class women, and not a loose woman (*rak nuan sanguan tau*)" (Panitchpakdi 2007, p.37).

However, the text suggests that of all qualities, morality is the core characteristic of the heroine. Like other romance novels, *Swan Snare* presents a female foil as "the negation of the protagonist's positivity" (Paizis 1998, p. 75). The heroine and her foil are portrayed similarly in terms of appearance and characteristics. Both are beautiful although the heroine is described as more

stunning. Both used to work for a modeling agency, but the female foil decides to marry a rich man after realizing that new faces and younger aged women are replacing her. She is ambitious for economic reasons; thus, she decides to marry the heroine's father who is rich, and divorces him after a few years. Before deserting him, she takes most of his money and assets and opens her own designer house with his money. Consequently, it can be assumed that she is a calculating, heartless person who will do anything for money, including hunting for a rich man and using him for her own benefit. When working for the hero at his hotel, she makes advances on him, such as holding his arms or wearing shorts to catch his attention. She is depicted as dishonest and untruthful because she lies to the hero, especially about the heroine. In order to gain his attention and to implicate the heroine, she pours hot soup over herself and charges the heroine with doing it. Without a witness, everybody believes her because the heroine shows her grudge towards the female foil, while the female foil is clever enough to hide her hatred. These two beautiful women are extravagant, confident, and proud. The difference is the heroine's impulsiveness, the trait that brings her trouble, which mostly results from her grudge towards the female foil. Although both the heroine and the female foil share some negative characteristics, the heroine's tend to be less pronounced while her foil's are much more radically negative. The characterization of the heroine can be read as a narrative device in constructing the conflict between the protagonists, and engendering engagement on the part of the reader in the sense that she is a "real" woman who can make a mistake and should be forgiven. This, in turn, creates a sense of sympathy towards the heroine. Moreover, the "proper", archetypal heroine has been portrayed excessively in most romantic fictions. Having a slightly disruptive heroine can be seen as a means of spicing up the novel to increase its publishing potential. In general, a genre that has a major purpose to entertain, such as romantic fiction or soap opera, usually drives plots via similarity and difference. In this sense, the heroine's disruptive characteristics are similar to women in the real

world, while she is different from the conventional types of heroines. This motivates interest and surprise in the reader.

Because her disposition is honest and moral according to Thai upper-middle class society, the reader is encouraged to acknowledge the heroine's uncertainty and hesitation from the first moment when she is offered the job of tricking the hero in order to get a cassette and some documents for a male villain. This is because her conscience knows that it is wrong, and she "has never been involved with illegal and unethical jobs" (p. 37). She wants to quit the job several times on account of her attraction to the hero, but she cannot. She has no other recourse and the male villain promises her a large amount of money, which is enough to pay her debts. When the hero exposes her plan, she feels guilty and embarrassed because her moral conscience tells her that her actions are wrong; thus, she accepts the consequences with courage. This means that she has to accept a job which is regarded as "low" or socially inferior: a waitress. This menial job is both a punishment and a means of earning a wage because she does not have money to pay for her stay at the hero's hotel. Working as a waitress, she learns to live with other people, have sympathy for those who are from a lower social class, work as part of a team, and be more patient. Following romantic conventions, she proves her true identity and finally regains her social status and extravagant lifestyle via the hero. Unlike the heroine, the female foil does not show guilt at all for her wrongdoings. She hurts herself and blames the heroine. She even sets up a plan to have an ugly, old man rape the heroine. When the hero comes to ask about it, she lies to him and even when the hero knows the truth, she still insists that she wants the heroine, once her step-daughter, to have a better life by being a mistress of the wealthy old man. In this regard, she is depicted as snake-like, malicious and deceitful. In contrast, in accepting that she has done wrong, the heroine is shown to be upright.

The heroine's stunning beauty can be read as a form of power that attracts 'a perfect man' such as the hero. To illustrate this point, Esterik, in her study of representations of gender in Thai society, asserts that – beauty is one of the five powers of women and men from the Buddhist cannon (Esterik 2000, p.155). However, the power of the heroine in *Swan Share* appears to be not as strong as the hero's because it does not help her escape from a terrible situation. This may imply that mere ideal physical appearance is inadequate. There are other qualities that are regarded as equally important such as refinement and deportment. Probably for this reason, the heroine has to stay and work at the hotel to prove her other qualities while the hero still maintains his higher place in the social hierarchy. His social status indicates quality suggesting that he is a suitable person to judge the heroine's character. However, it can also be said that the heroine's beauty is a factor which guarantees that the hero cannot really let her go. He wants her to stay under his gaze for a little longer. During her employment at his hotel, she undergoes transformation to become a really gracefully swan because of the desirable qualities that she develops, such as becoming down-to-earth, having sympathy for other people, getting along with colleagues whom she hitherto had disdained for their lower class status, and learning to love her job. Ultimately, she passes these tests. On this basis, the text suggests that the heroine's inner-being is as important as her appearance or even of greater importance than her external looks. The heroine's superficial feature, her beauty, is the first element of her power. Her inner qualities are the deeper or the real essence of her power. However, it is important to note that the heroine cannot be changed overnight. She remains a disruptive woman, but she becomes clever enough to know when to hide her feelings and when to show them. This is in accordance with the Thai concept of *kalatesa*, the acknowledgement of time and place which determines the politeness and appropriateness of one's social performances, which is the essence of traditional Thai identity. As regards the tension between the heroine's appearance and inner

qualities, it is quite clear that the latter are more important than her appearance and are her true source of power. The initial ambiguity of her inner qualities suggests that the novel resembles the archetypal story of an ugly duckling that transforms into a beautiful swan at the end. Thus, the contest between the power of physical beauty and inner qualities is the driving narrative element of this novel.

Male Characters

In keeping with the conventions of Thai romantic fiction, the hero in *Swan Snare* is an alpha male in his thirties who occupies a higher position in the social hierarchy than the heroine and possesses virility. As in the case of the heroine, his name, contains Pali and Sanskrit to suggest sophistication. His surname is not given or mentioned at all. The importance of a family's name is stated once in the text when the heroine recalls her memory of her ex-fiancé. She recalls how, "She never loved him. She may like his good-looking appearance, but the essence of the engagement was suitability, and the fame of the old bloodline that would glorify her reputation in the society" (Kingchat 1998, p. 57). This suggests that the importance of a family's name or a surname still persists into the twenty-first century, but it has arguably also become less significant in the years since Thai society switched to full consumerism with the economic growth of the 1980s. Since then middle and upper class Thai women have tended to have access to higher education and good professions. Both men and women delay marriage and as in other Asian countries such as Japan, the number of single women is increasing. Marriage has become unnecessary financially and not compulsory as in the past when women had to depend on men.

Swan Snare presents male villains sporadically; one villain appears for a short while and then another comes into the narrative in order to highlight the hero's positive qualities. The first 'bad man' appears in the first scene where the heroine goes to a party. He tries to flirt with her and asks for a sexual affair. The heroine

gets very angry and crushes her high heel on his foot. This man appears only in the first episode, serving as a narrative device to signify the heroine's stunning beauty, her sexual attractiveness and her impetuous morality. The second villain is the man who hires the heroine to steal from the hero's safe. He, like the female villain, is portrayed as snake-like. He lies to the heroine, claiming that the material that he wants is love letters that his wife has sent to the hero, who is flirting and deceiving her as a part of a business plan. Seeing the heroine's hesitation, he sends his wife to the heroine's house to lie and cry. Having met the first 'bad man' and having been dumped by her fiancé, the heroine feels sorry for her. She still does not want to take the job until she almost runs out of money and from the newspaper also sees that the female villain is arranging a fashion show at the hero's hotel, so she decides to work for him. This man promises to pay her even if she fails. However, he does not do so, and consequently the heroine has to stay at the hero's hotel for about two weeks working as a waitress. This second man can be regarded as the most immoral male character in the novel. He is the hero's economic rival who uses a criminal plan to get what he wants by deceiving the heroine. The third male foil is the heroine's fiancé. He does not play much of a role in the text. The heroine just tells the hero that her fiancé has broken off the engagement because he knows that the heroine's family is bankrupt and her father has committed suicide. From this point onwards, the heroine's financial status declines immensely because there are huge debts that she has to pay after her father's death. She sells everything, including their house and maintains only an old car and the swan brooch. The heroine's fiancé is malicious enough to lie to everybody that he has already had an affair with the heroine. The last bad male character is a wealthy, old man who attempts to follow the female rival's plan to seduce the heroine as one of his mistresses. This old man is depicted as ugly, fat, and bald; a typical stereotype of a rich, married man who likes to collect beautiful women in his harem, as usually

shown in TV series⁶². He offers money to the heroine if she will become one of his mistresses, but is refused scornfully and sarcastically. He gives up, but because the female rival wants to destroy the heroine, she secretly asks him to come to the hotel and promises him that he will get her. They plan for him to sexually assault the heroine. He tries to rape her, but she gets away.

These four men demonstrate negative character traits. The first and the last man want only the heroine's body; thus, for them the heroine is a mere object of desire. They do not really care for her autonomy as a person; what she is or what she wants. Her employer is a typical character, a heartless businessman who uses deception and lies to achieve his goal. For him, the means are not as important as the end. He is the representative of a morally-corrupted man. The heroine's fiancé is represented as a selfish person who only cares about materiality. In fact, both the heroine and her fiancé are similar in terms of their material compatibility, that is, they are attracted to each other by social status and wealth more than love. That is the reason why the heroine's fiancé comes to see her at a funeral ceremony to break off the engagement, saying that the heroine would do the same thing to him if bankruptcy were to befall him. Although the heroine responds that it is not true, the reader is told: "But deep down in her heart she accepts that he is right. She never loved him" (*ibid.*, p. 57). The heroine's fiancé lacks the most importance essence of romance, love. He, like the other two men, just takes the heroine as a sexual object.

The hero, on the other hand, contains all the elements that these foils lack. In terms of his character traits, his overt attention towards the heroine can be read as signifying his sincerity towards her. Before he knows that the heroine has a plan to steal something from him, his approach to her is full of politeness and integrity.

⁶² From my observation, this typical ugly old man in Thai romance usually has a Chinese look. Therefore, it can also be read as reflecting Thais' perception of the Chinese as 'the Other' in an unpleasant way. The Chinese in Thailand have often been linked to economic capital, because of Chinese people's success in the business world. Chinese men are able to pursue extramarital sexual activities (Bao 1999) .

Before exposing her plan, he signals to her that she can talk about everything to him. However, the heroine declines to confess the plan because of her material situation. The hero still gives her another chance to leave his hotel when her plan is uncovered. Unfortunately, the heroine does not have money to pay her bills. As a consequence, he comes up with an offer for her to work in his hotel with the secret goal of transforming this narcissistic woman into a better person. In this regard, he shows his deep care for her inner-being more than her superficial beauty. He cares for her personality, the deeper structure of a person⁶³. Although it is made clear from the opening scene that he rests his eyes on her because of her stunning beauty and he says to her many times how beautiful she is, the reader knows that he is concerned about some of her flaws and that he thinks he can correct them. In this sense, his feeling towards her is not one-dimensional like the bad characters who want her only to satisfy their sexual desire. Significantly, this also signifies his intellectual superiority and the confidence of an alpha male in his ability to shape the heroine into the type of woman that he desires.

The hero is depicted as an honest, capable businessman who embodies male qualities, power and virility, and expresses them through his daily practice. His hotel venture demonstrates his ambition and initiative, which is crucial to his attracting a business partner. When questioned about his decision to invest in the hotel business, this partner comments:

He looks slender and dandy, but he has good eyes. He has accurate business intuition and instinct, which I have seen many times. If he says what is good, it is; and if he says it isn't, it isn't. I ask him how he knows

⁶³ The construction of masculinity in this novel is idealistic because in practice "Thai men have traditionally enjoyed a high degree of sexual freedom in which they are encouraged as well as expected to express their sexuality" (Knodel et al. 1999, p.94). According to this, it is likely Thai men appear to be *jao-chu* (womanizer or philanderer). Regarding the *Swan Snare's* hero, he is thought by the heroine as *jao-chu* as a result of the lie she was told and how he approaches her quickly on the first day she arrives at his hotel. However, because he is the hero of the romantic fiction, he is obliged to show his love and care to only one woman; that is the heroine.

about it and he says he just looks at it. When he went to see a piece of land and with a brief glimpse he said it was a good place to build a hotel, I had to believe so” (ibid., p. 89).

The hero's determination to run a hotel business, which implies his social and economic ambition, is a hallmark of a man at the summit of the social hierarchy in contemporary Thailand. He is different from the heroine's employer who is morally corrupt, a character trait that is made clear when he threatens to force landowners to sell land to him and hires the heroine to steal from the hero because he is certain that the heroine's beauty can lure the hero and the heroine can take the things he wants. This suggests that the male villain can also be read as manipulating the heroine's beauty as an object, a bait, to achieve his wicked goal while the hero runs his business in an honest way. The lack of morality of the villains emphasizes the hero's moral quality that is as important for the hero as for the heroine.

The depiction of the hero's masculine attributes in *Swan Snare* illustrates a striking shift in the hero's characterization when compared to the heroes in the previous fictions, *Wanida* and *Diversion to Heaven*. The hero is described as “beautiful”. Yet, other physical attributes are not depicted much since they are not essential, as in the case of the heroine whose beauty is one of her central qualities. These attributes are achieved via repetition, particularly of his beauty and dandy like characteristics, in the text. He is portrayed as having a small piece of hair that clings to his forehead. This suggests he has long hair and it would conventionally signify effeminacy in the Thai context, which is not quite usual for a hero in romantic fictions in general, especially in the West. In traditional Thai romance, especially in Ayutthaya period (from the fourteenth to the – eighteenth century AD), *Phra Lo* (King Lo), for example, is depicted as radiantly beautiful and his beauty is described more than the beauty of the two heroines. However, the other qualities he possesses still follow conventional attributes of a hero that “is to combine the

qualities of the hero and villain in one character” (Paizis 1998, p.85). For those who wound him, he can turn to his “dark nature”. Hurt by the heroine, he administers her punishment and a lesson like a heartless person. As a lover, he is gentle and considerate and has the characteristics of a new man⁶⁴ which Gill Rosalind describes in her discussion about the new and changing forms of masculinity, thus: “The ‘new man’ is generally characterized as sensitive, emotionally aware, respectful of women, and egalitarian in outlook – and, in some accounts, as narcissistic and highly invested in his physical appearance” (Gill 2003, p.37). To a considerable degree the hero in *Swan Snare* shares these attributes of a new man as they have emerged in Western magazines, but he is not portrayed as a narcissistic person or as spending much time on his physical appearance. He is a sensitive, emotional man when he starts flirting with the heroine. Even when he apprehends her perfidious plan to steal or when he sees how the heroine endures the difficulties which he has assigned her, the reader is encouraged to acknowledge his broken heart and pain. From the beginning of the novel to its end, the hero shows his respect towards women, especially the heroine. He does not care for other women, even though the female villain tries to seduce him. Yet, for the hero, despite his beauty, power and social status are the hallmark of his identity rather than his appearance. But possessing characteristics of a new man, it is predictable that he will acquire the image of a progressive father, a child-centered man, after having a baby. Drawing on these aspects it can be suggested that he is a tripartite figure – the new Father and Husband, as well as the Boss.

Significantly too, *Swan Snare* depicts homosexuality, which is not found in the novels from earlier decades. Thailand has been known for its intellectual tolerance

⁶⁴ In her book about prostitution in Thailand, Leslie Ann Jeffrey asserts that the image of a “new man” was constructed in 1990s because at that time there was a struggle over the competing discourses of the state and masculinity, mainly because of the threat of HIV. Thus, the image of a “new man” was depicted as one who was “faithful to his wife and cared for his children. He applied rational, technocratic reason to governance rather than seeking self-enrichment or self-aggrandizement” (Jeffrey 2002, p.97).

of homosexuality. However, this does not mean that the situation of the homosexual in Thailand is better than other countries since the right to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) marriage is still not granted; the picture of discrimination towards lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender in Thailand is quite blurred, since unfairness or violence against homosexuals is not reported. In fact, they are perceived with 'pity' for their bad Karma in previous lives and are often made fun of because typically homosexuals appear more "womanish" than real women in manners and appearance. *Swan Snare* portrays a homosexual man who looks almost like a woman in size and shape of the body, clothes, and social behaviour. From his appearance, some waitresses think he is a woman. This character overtly presents himself as a woman and as the type of homosexual who has a female look and is common in Thailand, where it is difficult to distinguish between a biological woman and a homosexual. In contrast, in Western romances, "Homosexuality in romance novels tends to be occulted rather than be portrayed in a positive or negative light" (Paizis 1998, p.89). Here Paizis is suggesting that homosexuality in Western romance novels seems to be hidden and unknown. Thus, homosexuality is not stereotyped as "good" or "bad", but it can also be read as meaning that the existence of homosexuality is not recognized. In *Swan Snare*, a homosexual character is portrayed as an employee and friend of the female villain; thus, the portrayal of this character tends more towards a negative light, as helper to a female villain. The homosexual character has a male name, but he prefers the womanish name that his friends call him. In a typical stereotyping of the Thai homosexual, he likes making high-pitch noises, attracting attention from men by his pretentious, overacting demeanor and the use of his voice. The text describes the homosexual character as "deviated from nature", a person who is loyal to people he loves no matter whether they are, right or wrong: "On the contrary, if he despises someone, ... that animosity is abnormally fierce too" (Kingchat 1998, p. 295). Thus, the text suggests that the homosexual is a sexual deviant, a cross gender and the

homosexual's psychology and behavior tend to be different from straight men and women. The homosexual character's job in the novel is a designer, which is another typical job for homosexuals, along with those of a makeup artist or a stylist in Thailand. He dresses like a woman, wearing a very short skirt and uses makeup. The portrayal of a homosexual man in a romance novel in the last decade of the twentieth century may imply that homosexuality has become more acceptable and open, or it might be that homosexuals feel more confident about expressing their gender orientation, due to the changing values of society and adoption of the Western concept of gender equality.

Love and Marriage

The relationship between the protagonists starts according to typical romantic conventions. The first meeting can be regarded as love at first sight, depicting the hero's attraction to the heroine at a party. In this sense, the heroine's beauty is her power and a hallmark of the heroine's qualities. However, *Swan Snare* suggests that this power is a two-edged sword because it draws both good and bad men to her. This is crucial to the plot in the first episode when the heroine is at a party and a man approaches her. He expresses his sexual attraction and intentions towards her which enrages her, so she decides to leave the party. At the front door, she bumps into the hero who is coming to the party and it is he who starts a short conversation with the heroine who is rushing to escape. Evidently, it is the hero who spots the heroine before she is aware of his gaze, since she is hurrying away. It is he who takes the first step, as required by the rules of romance. Between them, the hero performs the role of the gazer, while the heroine is gazed at and this asymmetrical voyeurism happens throughout the story, especially when the heroine has to work at his hotel. In this respect, the text creates a sense of a prey/predator relationship between the protagonists, which is predominantly sexual. The

seemingly asymmetrical relationship is a basic narrative device in romance as Paizis asserts, "The contrast of hunter/hunted gives the narrative the dimension of a quest (although subsequently the roles are reversed)" (Paizis 1998, p. 113). For the hero, the first meeting creates attraction while the heroine experiences repulsion, informed by her exchange a few minutes before meeting the hero, and from her experience with her fiancé who has abandoned her.

In terms of her quest, the heroine overcomes impediments and is transformed. The transformation of the heroine can be read as the process of "alter-ing oneself" or becoming the other as Kristeva describes it (Toye 2010). In this regard, the heroine works in alliance with the hero, who teaches her a lesson, helping her to meet the social standard of ethics, especially of the hero. In other words, she changes herself to become like the hero in morality and in order to please the hero because she has feelings for him. This kind of feeling might be 'passion' in Paizis' perception of love though according to him passionate love is less desirable because it reduces a person to an object, which means the loss of identity.

In contrast to Paizis' theory and writing from a feminist perspective, Toye suggests that love needs an object (Toye 2010). According to Toye's study of the concept of love in the work of poststructuralists such as Scarry or Kristeva, these feminist poststructuralists refer to only one type of love, passion, and seem to be uninterested in the other type of love that Balzac defines as marriage-love, which is perceived by him as superior. Toye points out that for some feminists the signifier 'love' is problematic in so far as it tends to be associated almost exclusively with women and is regarded as embarrassment or taboo. She calls for the reconceptualization of love and suggests 'love' as an ethical concept while trying to theorize 'love' based on poststructuralist feminist theory as implicating ethics, politics, and aesthetics. Toye shows that 'love' can be alternatively replaced with other associate words such as 'care', 'benevolence', 'romance', 'passion', or

'friendship'(Toye 2010, p.42). Only 'friendship' is ambivalent as to whether it also applies to women, since its primary association belongs to men while the first four terms are unarguably linked primarily to women. It is not surprising that 'love' has been used against women and resisted because it "is read as an ideology that operates as a kind of 'opiate of the masses', especially in relation to the social construction of femininity" (Toye 2010, p.41). In my view, passion-love is more feminine than marriage-love. I support Toye's argument that the concept of love should not be taken for granted as a trivial, feminine issue and I argue that the resistance to passion-love is the resistance to women's love and its inferior status reflects women's inferior status in ethics and mores. This is in line with Hekman's discussion about men's and women's ethics that she draws from Gilligan. Gilligan examines the essential binary ethics of 'justice' and 'care'. Justice is regarded as a form of masculine ethics, while care is regarded as feminine. Within Western society justice is perceived as superior to care because "rationality and universality stand out as the key attributes of the moral sphere"(Hekman 1995, p.35). 'Care', which is an alternative word for 'love' and implies relationality, is thus regarded as inferior and belittled.

Yet while the concept of love in *Swan Snare* seems to privilege passion-love, marriage love is not denied. From the first meeting, the hero is attracted by the heroine's beauty and forthright manner when he runs into her at a party. Later the hero approaches her when she comes to stay at his hotel because he wants them to know each other more. He declares his attention to her after only twenty-four hours of her stay, but the heroine does not feel the same way, since the male villain has told her that the hero had blackmailed him and moreover, previously she had met men who only wanted her sexually and casually. When asked by the heroine for the reason of his declaration, he says, "I know you are a beautiful, attractive woman and a bit mysterious. And you frankly speak of what is in your head" (Kingchat 1998,

p. 54). This implies that the hero's moral preference is for sincerity and that this explains his wounded feelings when the heroine betrays his love and adoration. Moreover, the hero declares that when it is a question of a woman he likes, he never cares about her job or wealth. He uses his instinct, "To put it more sweetly, I follow my heart, not head" (ibid., p.59). He cares for love. This contrasts with the traditional binary opposition, whereby the heart is rendered as feminine, while the head is masculine, subordinate to the hypernym of "knowing". It emphasizes the construction of the hero as effeminate when compared to the traditional Western hero. When compared with the previous Thai romantic fictions under examination, *Wanida* and *Diversion to Heaven*, they too seem to portray more traditional masculine heroes.

The novel depicts passion-love as a quality that cannot be removed. The heroine once had a fiancé, and expected this to result in marriage, but it did not. According to Paizis' distinctions between passion-love and marriage-love discussed in Chapter 1, the relationship between the heroine and her fiancé contains elements that should actualize into marriage-love on the one hand and passion-love on the other. With regards to marriage-love, they court each other for a period of time and decide to become engaged. This indicates that engagement is a choice they make after gradual fusion, or gradually knowing each other for some time. The decision to become engaged must seem reasonable to both otherwise they would not make the commitment. This implies thoughts or knowledge about the other person whom the heroine and her fiancé respectively choose. As for love, both the heroine and her fiancé seem unable to reach that state because there is no sympathy or real esteem between them. Everything is motivated by self-interest. For this reason the engagement lasts for months and the heroine's fiancé breaks it off a few days after the heroine's father commits suicide due to bankruptcy. At the funeral the reader can read from the heroine's thoughts that she accepts that she does not love him.

She may be attracted to his looks, but the reason for the engagement is appropriateness and the requirements of her socialization. It might be said that all is done from the head, not from the heart and this results in the relationship's failure.

Swan Snare suggests that it is only the hero who awakens the heroine's sexuality. Despite having a fiancé for several months and being touched by him, the heroine has no desire for him. But when the hero touches her cheeks, his touch arouses her deep sensual feelings. This connotes the idea that the hero's gentleness is of importance when compared to her fiancé, who shows frustration at not possessing her sexually, or to the man at the party who asks her to go out to have sex with him. The heroine in *Swan Snare* is portrayed differently from the heroines in the first two romantic fictions. She is rendered 'a modern woman' who experiences life abroad for many years, so she does not reserve her body from all physical contact like the other protagonists. She gets used to holding hands or arms, or kissing on the cheek with her fiancé. In this regard, she is not a type of a *rak nuan sa-nguan tua* woman, which literally means to love and reserve one's body. Laphimon gives the best explanation of the term:

It reflects the normative values and expectations that Thai society has for women, and its invocation calls for women to exert restraint in their contact with the opposite sex, to refrain from gestures and verbal expressions that are obviously sexual, to make sure that men cannot sexually violate them, and to never enter into a relationship with someone else's partner. For a married woman, this ideal also implies being faithful and loving one's husband (Laphimon 2012b, p.34)

In Laphimon's definition, the term applies to both single and married women alike. Laphimon claims that in the past Thai women followed its literal meaning by reserving their body. With the emergence of the Western concept of virginity, it "was

linked to idea of preserving virginity, *phrommajari*" (ibid., p.35). Some Thai historians also believe that the idea of preserving chastity came in the mid Nineteenth Century during the modernization of the country (Eeoseewong 2004b). However, I am not concerned here with the origins of the term. I refer to the term only in its meaning in the present, i.e. that it "tends to refer mostly to a woman maintaining her virginity before marriage" (Laphimon 2012b, p. 35), as the heroine in *Swan Snare* is depicted as doing.

The crucial point is that this concept of *rak nuan sa-nguan tua* is regarded as a female moral value which seems to be deeply rooted. As a reader of romantic fictions myself, I can see clearly that the majority of Thai romance novels present chaste heroines. Only the hero is legitimated in having an affair with the heroine, if the plot allows for such a scene. Most of the sexual liaisons involve the rape of the heroine by the hero as depicted in *Diversion to Heaven*. As for the virginity of the heroine, in her defense of romance novels, Jayne Ann Krentz contends that the most popular romances present virgin heroines and insists, "This virginal quality has nothing to do with making the heroine a "trophy" for the hero. Nor is it used as a moral issue" (Krentz 1992b, p. 111). In Western culture, virginity may not be an important feature of femininity anymore but it is taken as a narrative device for the convention of romances; but I would argue that it is still a moral issue in Thai culture, something that the heroine in *Swan Snare* still has left to be proud of even though she loses all her assets due to the death of her bankrupt father. Thus, maintaining chastity, her *rak nuan sa-nguan tua*, is undeniably linked to female honour and virtue, at least for the heroine. Similarly in her study of modern Thai film in 1992, Annette Hamilton implies that *rak nuan sa-nguan tua* is a conventional concept "Even today any form of physical contact, such as holding hands in public, is frowned upon. Respectable girls simply cannot have relations with foreign men, or they will be taken at once to be prostitutes" (Hamilton 1992, p. 271). As can be seen

from Hamilton's observation, the confinement of sexuality in Thailand to a form of familial ideology was still strong in the early 1990s and continues to decline in the Twenty-First Century.

The fact that the heroine is not persuaded to have premarital sex with her fiancé can be read as her refusal to acquiesce to his power because he is not a suitably morally qualified man. Given that romantic fiction involves the contestation of power and gendered human qualities, the heroine's protection of her virginity from her fiancé can be regarded as her unwillingness to 'lose' her power, her control of her own body, to him, since it has long been thought that male sexuality is inextricably linked to power in Southeast Asian societies. In this regard, Nithi Aeusrivongse, a Thai historian and philosopher, suggests that "sex, seen through the lens of Thai concepts of masculinity, is as much an expression of power and position as it is the physical act of love" (Eeoseewong 2004b, p.11). Based upon the elite's practice of polygyny, he believes that it signifies power since having an affair is described as 'gaining' for men and 'losing' for women,

When a man and a woman consummate their love, it is viewed as a matter of gain and loss: the man gains while the woman loses, and much more than just her virginity ... what the woman is actually losing is a measure of control over her life, control which is transferred wholesale to the man (Eeoseewong 2004b, p.12 - 13).

As a historian who considers preservation of virginity as Western, Nithi asserts that in the past having an affair with a man meant having him as a husband and the quality of a husband to-be was regarded as important:

Since women in ancient times thought they would become wives of the men they slept with, the character of their husbands had much more effect on their lives than did virginity. But in modern times this thin pane of tissue has

become unreasonably valued, and a “good girl” is expected to save it for her husband to be (Eeoseewong 2004b, p.70)

I would contend that nowadays people who live in the countryside still have the idea of husband-wife relationships based on having sexual affairs even though the couple do not declare themselves as a wife and a husband or marry. The heroine in *Swan Snare* might not be certain about her fiancé’s quality, so she delays the affair with him. Whatever it is, both in the fictional world and reality, sexuality is a matter of power and quality.

Conflicts and Solutions

In *Swan Snare*, the conflicts between the protagonists are gradually intensified to create the suspense of the text. At first, the heroine is allied with the male villain to steal from the hero’s safe. She is lied to and made to believe that the hero is a promiscuous man who has committed adultery with the villain’s wife. The heroine accepts the ‘illegal job’ for a number of reasons: because she herself hates this type of man, because her ex-stepmother whom she hates is named as working for the hero and for the most solid reason is that she is running out of money. Fortunately, from their first meeting the hero starts to show affection towards the heroine, partly due to her beauty and partially due to her upright, unpretentious characteristics; and this gives her a smooth route to succeed in the task, even though she ultimately fails.

The dilemmas that the heroine has to encounter start from the beginning. The text shows her great hesitation about accepting the job because she realizes that it is immoral to steal. The male villain tries to seduce her to act on his plan by sending his sobbing wife to implore her to steal love letters (which turn out to be threatening letters to kill the hero) and cassettes. However, her lack of cash drives her to

defraud the hero. By showing her great hesitation and her internal conflicts, before and during her stay at the hero's five-star hotel, the text signals the sense of morality in the heroine's character, plus the fact that her actions are based on the lies that the villain and his wife tell to her. Literally, this couple is the primary external force that starts conflicts between the protagonists. The heroine, thus, has to prove her quality to the hero so as to demonstrate whether or not she is good enough to be chosen as his wife.

I am convinced that the code of the quest in romance novels is the quest for esteem as Paizis asserts (Paizis 1998, p.136), and it is a convention of romance that betrothal or the promise of marriage is one narrative element.⁶⁵ Like Radway's claim about the heroines in Western romance novels, the heroine in *Swan Snare* has a negative social identity and a sense of loss. Her father commits suicide because of bankruptcy and has left her almost nothing except a swan brooch. An extravagant and partially educated heroine feels pressured to survive on her own. She has no friends or relatives to turn to and the society does not offer her any condolence due to her high level of pride. It is understandable why she accepts such a job, because her esteem is diminishing and she wants to regain it. This more or less reflects aspects of reality in Thai society during the last decade of the Twentieth Century according to which money matters in almost every aspect of life, since Thailand had been transformed to an industrialized economy from the 1950s and 1960s. Losing wealth, for the heroine, can be regarded as equal to losing esteem because she cannot buy brand names and designer products, which connote her social status. According to the heroine, esteem is strongly linked to money and she feels humiliated when running out of money (Kingchat 1998, p. 107). However, her esteem is truly lost when the hero angrily exposes her plan and

⁶⁵ Pamela Regis, in her book *A Natural History of the Romance Novel*, identifies eight narrative elements of the romance novels: society defined, the meeting, the barrier, the attraction, the declaration, point of ritual death, the recognition, and the betrothal (Regis 2003).

offers the sole solution for her to pay the bill to his hotel by working as a waitress. At this point, her esteem seems gone and she has to endure much adversity to regain her esteem and to prove her quality to the hero.

The ways in which the heroine tackles the obstacles she faces cannot be claimed as representing stereotypical patterns of social and cultural values. In his observation of the means of overcoming the obstacles, Paizis points out that they seem to reflect the subordinate role of women in society: sacrifice, weakness, the private sphere, and sexual passivity. In *Swan Snare*, the heroine makes no obvious sacrifices. She compensates for the debt she incurs and for the wound she causes the hero. According to *The Oxford English Dictionary*, sacrifice as a verb means “An act of giving up something valued for the sake of something else regarded as more important or worthy”. According to this definition, the heroine does not sacrifice herself to become the hero’s employee. In her case, her decision to work as a waitress does not demonstrate her sense of autonomy, rather she is forced to do so for economic reasons. She has another choice, selling the swan brooch, but she chooses not sell it because the brooch reminds her of her dead father, and it is the most valuable object she has that signals her once high social status. Yet, she almost sells it at the end of the book at the point of ritual death where she misunderstands that the hero already has a fiancée, but this cannot be regarded as sacrifice in the *Oxford English Dictionary* sense. It is her anger and disappointment towards the hero that affects her action. The incident that turns a model into a waitress is a narrative device used to intensify the conflict between the protagonists in order for them to learn more of each other and reveal the true quality of their characters, particularly that of the heroine. Thus, it is not clear that the heroine sacrifices her self in order to obtain love or a hero. In this regards, *Wanida* is more vivid in depicting the heroine as a sacrificing daughter, and wife. This can indicate

the changes in Thai society to a more individualistic society due to the socioeconomic change from the 1940s to the 1990s.

As for weakness, the heroine in *Swan Snare* shows significant weaknesses according to contemporary values, especially excessive materialism which has become a source of societal conflict since the 1950s and 1960s⁶⁶. As the daughter of a wealthy businessman, the heroine has never encountered financial difficulty all through her life. She spends money carelessly and extravagantly to fulfill her material gratification and high-class lifestyle. When she realizes that she does not have enough money to spend, she turns to working for a villain, who can be regarded as her intellectual inferior. However, her choice in working for the villain depicts a form of economic social conflict in that economic reasons can induce people into an alienating path such as stealing, or turning to prostitution. Jeffrey asserts that the prostitution problem in Thailand, while economically driven, "is very much viewed as the product of cultural decline in the face of growing Westernization and globalization" (Jeffrey 2002, p. 49-50) and that foreign hegemony should be blamed. Similarly, the text also seems to imply that the heroine's choice to work for the villain is a result of social and cultural change and decline; thus, the heroine's 'wrong' decision should be forgiven since her wrongdoings result from external force rather than her real inner quality. The heroine confidently believes that money can maintain her upper-class identity and all the humiliation that she encounters results from deprivation of money, but the hero argues, "You are wrong. Money is not the answer for everything ...And if I go bankrupt, I will find an honest job. Definitely, I will never be such a thoughtless person as to pick the job that deceives and steals from other people like you did!" (Kingchat 1998, p. 107-108). He blames her for her

⁶⁶ Leslie Ann Jeffrey, in her study of gender and prostitution in Thailand, mentions that the 1950s is the period of Westernization in Thailand due to the fact that American army had its base in the country and "The 1960s were a period of enormous economic growth and social change in Thailand" (ibid., p. 32).

moral weakness for choosing a short-cut instead of perseverance and honesty. The fact that she fails to detect fraud implies her intellectual inferiority to the hero.

As a woman in the last decade of twentieth century Thailand, the heroine is presented more in a public sphere than in romances from earlier decades. A single woman without parents, like the heroine in *Swan Snare*, has the freedom to go anywhere she wants. Yet, her characterization is established via isolation and a sense of loss which Radway classes as an aspect of romance (Radway 1984, p. 135). All the decisions are hers. However, it is incorrect to say that her agency is paramount, especially since she is subject to the hero's voyeurism for most of the story. Moreover, the hero says that if she really has a boyfriend or a husband, he cannot let her out of his sight because she is so stunning and attractive (Kingchat 1998, p. 55). This suggests that he cannot and will not allow her to be in the public realm alone. Whatever the reason, the heroine's future with the hero seems to be more restricted and thus retrogressive. It reinforces the fact that the conflict between the public and private realm in gender relations continues to exist. Notwithstanding this, the novel presents the heroine's acknowledgement of her affections towards the hero, while the other two novels do not depict the. In this regard, the heroine in *Swan Snare* appears to be more aware of her sexuality. This might be the influence of the Western media that show a female sense of autonomy in several facets of life, including sexuality and desire. In contrast, the heroine in *Wanida* is placed in an arranged marriage from which she cannot escape and later develops her affection for the hero from his upright qualities. The heroine in *Diversion to Heaven* is raped by the hero; and thus, torments him until he is visibly transformed into a proper, generous man. *Diversion to Heaven* does not portray when the heroine starts to have affection for the hero. The reader knows from the text that the heroine's heart feels warmth when the hero is around to take care of her while she is pregnant. Both *Wanida* and *Diversion to Heaven* rely on the reader assuming the heroine's

love and affection for the hero – the texts are not explicit. On the other hand, the heroine in *Swan Snare* is braver in overtly accepting her feelings towards the hero. However, this becomes another personal conflict for the heroine when she feels she is losing control because of his touch and goes to steal things from his safe the next day. Her retreat from the hero's touch, his sexual urge, may be read as signifying her refusal of her passion, which is regarded as passive; or it may also signify that she is afraid that the hero just has sexual interest in her and is not in love. From the heroine's point of view, the hero is still a stranger who has a bad reputation for promiscuity. It is unlikely that the heroine suppresses her sexuality because she is afraid of becoming an object. Rather, the conflict with the hero restrains her desire for him; increasing the plot's tension. In this sense, it is inaccurate to claim that the heroine has a restricted role or is sexually passive.

As regards sexuality, the novel attempts to present a modern image of the heroine who like conventional female stereotypes uncovers her sexuality in many ways such as in her sartorial sensibility, and behavior. Nevertheless it seems that the heroine is at least aware of her sexuality, even if she remains chaste by not letting a man gain full access to her body and not showing her sexual feelings towards anyone, including the hero. For this reason, the hegemonic representation still plays a crucial role in portraying the heroine, as a good woman, with a traditional concept of *rak nuan sanguan tua*. However, it may be more appropriate to read her representation as the outcome of various contestations and struggles of social and gender ideologies.

Conclusion

From my research I have the impression that *Swan Snare*, unlike the other two romances, can be read as a sort of comedy, especially through the portrayal of the heroine's character. On this point Northrop Frye asserts, "A romance is normally

comic, in the sense that usually the heroine's wiles or whatever are successful and the story ends with marriage or some kind of deliverance" (Frye 1976, p. 92). According to Frye, the folktale is the original of romance, stories told to entertain or amuse, while myth is a more serious type of story and usually entails religious beliefs. He affirms that romance is a genre with its own conventions and has a vertical perspective, avoiding ambiguities and simplifying moral facts. In *Swan Snare*, the heroine's folly is accepted with affection by the hero and, correspondingly, by an implied reader like me, who acknowledges her rectitude and naivety from the text while the hero senses that she is truly a moral person although her external characteristics are to be conceited and deceptive. These external characteristics of the heroine cause her many troubles and causes the reader to laugh at her, but one cannot help but feel supportive towards her in her quest to overcome all the dilemmas that she faces until the reconciliation between the protagonists. The heroine, with the attendant social antagonisms and oppositions/conflict she must face, is the major character that makes the story amusing and creates much of the pleasure within the novel.

Frye refers to the hierarchy of verbal structures as outlined by the Platonic revolution⁶⁷, at the bottom is, "the literature designed only to entertain or amuse which is out of sight of truth, and should be avoided altogether by serious people" (Frye 1976, p. 21). He is thus aware of the social anxieties towards romance that regard it as a waste of time, a violent stimulus that may encourage masturbation for those who use it as a means of escape, and a form of voyeurism. Yet, according to Frye romance is a form of popular literature that "is neither better nor worse than elite literature, nor is it really a different kind of literature: it simply represents a different social development of it" (Frye 1976, p. 28). His point is clear, which is that romance is a different kind of literature with its own literary values and functions.

⁶⁷ Plato explains the differences between myth and fable by stating that the latter is used to make the ruled believe and follow the ruler; thus, indicates a hierarchy of verbal structures.

From my vantage point, I understand that popular culture has its own values and as a romance reader, I sometimes need leisure time to read an entertaining romantic fiction and I do not have to take it too seriously. However, I am convinced by Western poststructuralist theorists such as Foucault or Butler who argue that discourses play crucial roles in shaping and constructing identities. All sources of printed media work to transport and communicate particular messages to the reader and sometimes the senders and receivers of the messages can forget or be unaware of the meanings, values and power relations that texts reproduce. Others may be critically aware of the ways in which discursive practices work and not agree with the meanings and values of texts, but both the market and the complex and contradictory construction of gendered subjectivity leads them to comply with the role of popular culture in reproducing conformity to ideological hegemony. For this reason, products of popular culture such as romance novels appear incompatible with critical feminist theories that have the political objective of equality. I cannot go so far as to propose any answers to this clash. My task here was to explicate the representation of men and women in Thai romantic fictions, written at different historical moments to show the sedimented representation of gender norms in these texts. relating them to broader discourses of gender. I have quite a serious, pessimistic perception that these sedimented discourses might become discursively concretized or codified as “common sense” which has a pervasive effect upon gender identity, especially through representation in the media. Christine Gledhill, in her examination of representation in soap operas, asserts that fiction is pervasive even though a fictional world is generally perceived as a split from reality. With a focus on soap opera, Gledhill affirms that the frequency of exposure to soap opera affects the audience because it “offers a fictional experience which audiences encounter as part of a routine in which fiction and everyday life intertwine” (Gledhill 1997, p.340). In my view it is crucial to decode the effects of media representation on identity formation. The three romances selected for detailed analysis in this

thesis have been made into TV series and the stories at least are still meaningful and have resonances right up to the present day.

The semiotic representation of characters shows that masculinity and femininity have been constantly redefined and shaped. What I have found from my detailed textual analysis is the change in cultural prescriptions of femininity and masculinity, particularly in the last book, *Swan Snare*, which was written before the turn of a new century. However, it is important to note that the change appears at the level of what Ferrara calls 'the middle structure' or personality, but hardly ever at the level of deeper structures of characterization which engage social values. The characterization of the main characters, especially of the protagonist, still adheres firmly to the romance genre and certain Thai cultural values. Generally, as a device of the romance genre, characterization depends on ideology and will rarely be the other way round. In the Thai context, the cultural value of femininity is strongly linked to virginity; thus, almost all the heroines of romantic fictions cannot have sexual affairs with other male characters, except heroes. In Thai romance, the characterization of female beauty and personality can change over time as it caters to socially induced changing tastes and pleasures of reading, but not in ways that oppose certain conventional values.

Chapter 7

Changes in the Representation of Gender in Thai Romantic Fiction from the 1940s to the 1990s

In her remarkable book, *A Literature of their Own*, Elaine Showalter raises the issue of women's appropriation of a masculine genre, arguing that women's writing is "the still-evolving relationships between women's writers and their society" (Showalter 1977, p.12). Yet, she admits that the first phase of women's writing is the imitation of the predominant male literary tradition. This is true of romance because it used to be a masculine genre (Radford 1992). Barbara Fuchs contends that romance appeared in the Twelfth Century in narrative poems, with an adventure or a quest concerning aristocratic characters such as kings, queens, or knights. According to Fuchs, romance is about ideology, based upon ascendant religious or social ideals as derived from normative values such as chastity and fidelity. This raises the question of why these values also became women's values. Showalter points out that men who spoke for women, such as John Stuart Mill, talks of their perceptions that women were in the shadow of "male cultural imperialism" when discussing literature (ibid., p. 4). This implies that middle and upper class men are at the summit of a class and gender hierarchy in literature with the power to define appropriate gender roles while women occupy the lower strata with access to pre-defined roles.

As my analysis of Thai romance in the previous chapters suggests, the work of female authors in Thai society in the Twentieth Century, to a great extent, expresses male dominance, particularly as concerns normative values related to femininity. These have been constituted by men to serve specific forms of gender relations and divisions of labour which have become more complex with modernization. In her historical analysis of gender, *The Flaming Womb*:

Repositioning Women in Early Modern Southeast Asia, Barbara Watson Andaya analyses the constitutions of gender norms and gender expectations in Southeast Asia as follows:

The spread of imported religions and philosophies, the emergence of more centralized states, the strengthening of class divisions, and expanding links to a global economy all required individual societies to reconsider their expectations of women ...Working in tandem with religious authorities, state authorities developed and promoted concepts of male-female relationships that still resonate today (Andaya 2006, p. 230).

Thus, Andaya suggests that imported religious philosophies and globalization are underlying factors in the construction of a regulatory hegemony of gender in the Twentieth Century. My own research has supported this argument but also shown the continuing importance of long-term sedimented Thai discourses of gender. Like Andaya, I understand authority as male oriented and my particular interest lies in the religious philosophies through which I argue men have played a crucial role in gender prescription via religious disciplines. A good example of this was the case of *Traiphummikatha* discussed in Chapter two, which was written by a man, King Thammaracha Lithai around A.D. 1345. This distinct, religious book was the basis of the king's means of administration. Yet, religious philosophies from this book have persisted in Thai culture and have continued to influence Thai writers, including female authors such as Krisna Asoksin, the author of *Diversion to Heaven* (1965-1967) in the Twentieth Century. As Rutnin mentions she is "a devout Buddhist, (who) usually ends her novels in a moralistic way" (Rutnin 1988, p. 59). My research has shown that the concept of The Perfect Woman from *Traiphummikatha* is still in used in *Diversion to Heaven* (1965-1967) with reference to the heroine.

As regards women's experience and autonomous self-expression, I am inclined to concur with Showalter that female novelists have been aware of their experience and autonomy, but they might rarely recognize that the foundation of their experiences are substantially intertwined with the religions and philosophies that they uphold. For example, Krisna Aoksin states that she writes from her experience, from what really happened to her or her understandings and thoughts about her experience. Describing the writing process, she says that at the beginning of writing a novel, she has difficulty in creating a plot, so she "picks up from impressions taken from somewhere else" (Rungrut 2000, p.18). She says that her inspiration to write comes from her reading of *Jane Eyre*. According to Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, the character of Jane Eyre can be read as rebellious, and feminist. Since Krisna Asoksin mentions this book as her inspiration, it is not surprising that the heroine in *Diversion to Heaven* possesses some progressive attributes, such as a strong will and desire to choose her own mate and ambition for her career, even though she is portrayed as traditional as regards her sexuality, a feature that reflects the author's standpoint as a didactic Buddhist. According to the three stages for women writers suggested by Showalter, *Diversion to Heaven* can be regarded as Feminist, *Wanida* is Feminine and *Swan Snare* is Female. The portrayal of the heroine in *Wanida* follows Victorian conventions of femininity more than the other two texts, while in *Swan Snare* the heroine expresses more awareness of her femininity and sexuality, despite the fact that she has to uphold the feminine normative value of chastity. Changes in the representations of gender in Thai romantic fictions also reflect Showalter's formulation that:

First, there is a prolonged phase of *imitation* of the prevailing modes of the dominant tradition, and *internalization* of its standards of art and its views on social roles. Second, there is a phase of *protest* against these standards and values, and *advocacy* of minority rights and values, including a demand for

autonomy. Finally, there is a phase of *self-discovery*, a turning inward freed from some of the dependency of opposition, a search for identity. (Showalter, p. 13)

Gender and Characterization

The characterization in the three romantic fictions that I have analysed in detail in this thesis follows Thai gender norms and while some distinctive elements are to be found, these discrepancies can be read as due to changing temporal contexts. Anne-Marie Dardigna, in her observation of the portrayal of women in Western romance, claims that the representation of the heroine has not changed much for three hundred years from the time of the classic fairy tale, *Griselda*, written by Perrault in the Seventeenth Century to contemporary romantic fictions (Paizis 1998). Paizis indicates that Dardigna's analysis is an example of work that resorts to what he sees as manipulative, feminist theory, which contends that the representation reinforces female subservience. The aspects that are thought of as typical for the heroine are: youth, beauty, humility, lack of vanity, obedience, patience, and not being willful.

In general, the heroines in the three selected romantic fictions are in their early twenties. This seems to be a fact for romantic fiction that signifies a proper age for marriage and procreation. They are presented beautiful, but *Swan Snare* which was written in 1999, depicts a more beautiful heroine compared to the other two. This may imply that beauty becomes a more important quality at the turn of the Twenty-first Century, an interpretation that is supported by the fact that plastic surgery has become widely accepted. This is in part an effect of the extension of beauty marketing. The first two heroines from *Wanida* and *Diversion to Heaven* are portrayed as more modest than the self-centered heroine in *Swan Snare*, the heroine from *Wanida* expressing the highest degree of modesty. This suggests that

modesty, as a female quality, evolves over time like other forms of social practices. These romantic fiction novels show that modesty has changed its meaning and so too has the degree to which the heroine has to hold on to traditional norms of modesty as time has passed. Accordingly, compared to the first two books, the heroine in the third novel is represented as vainer. She cares too much about her physical appearance while the other two heroines look more 'natural' and are not portrayed as using a lot of make-up. When it comes to obedience, it is the heroine from the second book, *Diversion to Heaven*, who boldly fights the hero and fiercely rejects his use of unjust masculine power in his rape of her, forcing him to change and prove to her his reformed moral values. As for the heroines in *Wanida* and *Swan Snare*, the former shows a lot of respect for the hero, but she also fights for matters that she considers as unjust. The latter appears more troublesome since she attempts to steal from the hero and this connotes illegal and immoral traits in the face of which she has to prove herself good enough. Following Paizis's idea that characterization is the contestation between 'power' and 'quality', my analysis shows that both the male and female protagonists in these three romantic fictions need to prove themselves to each other as the right person for each other. How this occurs depends on the moral aspect of each character. If they appear to be weak in morality, they have to make the reader know that they can change and that immoral conduct is not inherent in their character. Patience seems to be a crucial element for all the heroines. The heroine in *Wanida* waits for the right time to prove her grandmother's innocence and expresses great patience towards the hero's fiancée, who is her female rival. This is despite the fact that the female rival hurts her emotionally. The heroine in *Diversion to Heaven* demonstrates her patience in transforming the aggressive, revengeful hero to a more loveable man and this takes over a year. In *Swan Snare*, the heroine has to endure work she regards as inferior and finds it difficult to adjust herself to this work. On the issue of willfulness, I have found that all the heroines in my research show significant determination in

achieving their goals. They are portrayed as passive in initiating relationships with men, but in their personal and social goals they are considerably determined.

Dardigna also outlines the ideal hero, which she distills from the prince in *Griselda*. Firstly, the hero appears athletic, as this signals his male virility. In Thai romantic fiction, the portrayal of the hero as athletic is not so obvious; yet, physical appearance may refer to his physical prowess. In this regard, I tend to think that portraying the hero to be in his thirties might be adequate when it comes to signalling his masculinity and economic stability. But overall Thai men, as they appear in the Thai romantic genre, are not depicted as very muscular when compared to the Western heroes. Secondly, the hero in romance is represented as aggressive. The first and the second romantic fiction novels portray the heroes as aggressive men; however, while the hero in *Wanida* is told that he is aggressive, he rarely expresses his aggressiveness to the heroine. The hero in *Diversion to Heaven*, on the other hand, is presented as an aggressive person and exercises his aggression when he rapes the heroine. The hero in *Swan Snare* is also aggressive, but his aggressiveness is limited only to his professional, not his personal life. Thirdly, the hero is cultured but this is not an obvious trait in the portrayal of the Thai hero. He does not display qualities like appreciation of art, but connotes good taste by his profession, the places he occupies, and his manners. Fourthly, the hero is expected to be ambitious. In the three romantic fictions studied here, the hero's ambition is not expressed clearly. As in Paizis' study of romance, I found that the hero's rival is more ambitious than the hero. The hero of the most recent romantic fiction, *Swan Snare*, shows his ambition while the other two novels do not mention the hero's ambition in their professional lives at all. This might be due to societal changes in Thai society, because the heroes of the two earlier romantic fictions follow the traditional pattern of images of Thai men in romance in that they are government officials, so their social and financial statuses are guaranteed. In

contrast, the hero of *Swan Snare* is a businessman, a new occupation for men in Romance fiction that sprang up in the last decade of the Twentieth Century. Fifthly, an important mode of representation is the hero as dominant. Of the Thai romantic fictions studied for this thesis, the hero's dominance is clearer in the most recent book. This is due to the plot which presents the heroine's arrival at the hero's hotel as motivated by her malicious intention to steal. For this reason, the text suggests, the hero takes on a role as a dominating man who teaches her a lesson and helps her to become a better person of a type that he desires. This contrasts with the hero in *Diversion to Heaven* who is taught to be a good man by the heroine. Sixthly, the quality of the hero as a warm and generous man can be found in all three romantic fictions, particularly in *Wanida*. In *Wanida*, the hero is shown to be kind to his dependents, while the second and the third books present the hero's gentleness towards the heroine, but clearly not when it comes to other supporting characters. This also relates to the last idealistic trait of the Thai romantic hero, that of a seeker of happiness for his people. As a generous man, the hero in *Wanida* is depicted as taking care of all the members in his family, including servants, and the heroine is his best helper. In contrast, the hero in *Diversion to Heaven* is portrayed, as a dark hero, who is self-centered and demanding towards his servants. In *Swan Snare*, the hero does not have a clear role as regards this point although he owns a hotel and has a lot of workers.

As in Bumroonsook's delineation of gender relations in courtship in Chapter 1, the heroine in *Wanida* is portrayed as spending time with friends in the first few chapters but these female friends disappear altogether after the heroine's marriage. The heroine does not go out even for shopping, but asks her maid to do errands for her instead. She is portrayed mostly in the private sphere, her husband's home, doing household chores. Unlike the heroine in *Wanida* (1941), who comes from a well-to-do family, chapter five argues that the heroine in *Diversion to Heaven* (1965-1967), who has a profession and comes from a lower-middle class family, is more

independent since she does not require the escort of a chaperone and even moves out to live on her own when the conflict with the hero is at its peak. Even so, Bumroonsook points out, "It was still a big issue in the 1960s for a woman to go out alone with a man, even though that man was a friend, a boyfriend, or a co-worker" (Bumroonsook 2003, p.42). Dating was frowned upon until the 1970s when it became a normal practice for young people, and was regarded as a chance to get to know potential eligible partners. For this reason, the heroine in *Diversion to Heaven* never goes on a date with any man. Bumroonsook has noted that in the 1970s and 1980s dating was practiced only by couples in a serious relationship. It can be assumed that by the 1990s dating had been accorded more social acceptance and for this reason the heroine in *Swan Snare* (1998), analysed in chapter six, is freer to date and flirt with men. However, these characteristics are portrayed as evidence of her idiosyncrasy, which is regarded as rather loose behavior and becomes the subject of gossips among her colleagues. This shows that to some extent traditional values and norms are subtle and have not disappeared from the Thai mentality as regards female sexuality. Significantly, Thai romance depicts how all the heroines preserve their bodies well and only the heroes can access their bodies sexually. The image of good women in Thai society still follows this conventional ideology even in the Twenty-first Century. My research would suggest that the impact of Westernization was limited and affects Thai practices at a superficial level, including the issue of gender relations.

What intrigues me most is the portrayal of the heroine, her characterization. It is made credible that the heroine belongs to a Thai context in the sense that her moral qualities and values are those that can be regarded as traditionally Thai. As regards the text as a retelling, does the portrayal of the heroine in *Wanida* imply that desirable female values are universal? Or is it the author's talent in writing that enables her to create a character that suits the local context? If it is the former, it is important to question the whole of Thai society and the perpetuation of universal

patriarchy that is established in idealised images that are made to appear immanent. As discussed above, the qualities of characters can reflect the realistic circumstances outside the fictional world since in this fiction the attributes of characters are taken from real life, especially in the case of the heroine. Does this mean that these images, as modes of femininity in particular, have been reproduced and repeated incessantly and continuously? If so, female agency leads nowhere, but echoes patriarchal discourses. The representation of characters, then, is always political and seems unable to escape from patriarchal constraints.

The heroine is usually portrayed as possessing good characteristics such as courage, intelligence, and gentleness. However, it is difficult to deny that all the heroines' desirable attributes are derived from the world outside fiction, from the world when social and cultural expectations of women play a very crucial role in the constitution of femininity and masculinity. In the Thai context these socio-political aspects are profoundly conservative. For this reason, I would argue that Thai romance novels cannot really empower the reader despite the fact that the stories account for the heroine's bravery and intelligence as well as the hero's. The ambivalence among feminists remains because there is no definite answer as to whether romance really harms women or whether it is mere pleasure and fantasy. Answers depend on specific socio-historical context and the context of reading. It does not seem credible to me that the formula of romance will change radically in Thailand because the reader is familiar with it and expects to consume it the way it is, despite the fact romance is widely disdained in Thai society.

Conclusion

According to Paizis, contemporary Western romantic fictions express gender norms and qualities in more complicated ways. In accordance with Paizis, I would argue that gender norms and conventions can be malleable and romantic fiction narratives as cultural products reflect aspects of reality at the time when they were

written. They are also sites of identity construction that work through fantasy. Thus, the changes in narrative discourses, especially from traditional to modern society, might develop in an opposite direction from lived experience because to a great extent, romance is precisely a fantasy: initially the author's fantasy. This explains why stereotypes have been constantly reproduced and much of the pleasure of reading generic fiction lies in the retelling of the familiar. This is especially the case in a genre such as romance, with its long established conventions for presenting love and the relationships of the protagonists. However, to produce a convincing narrative of love and romance also requires attention to reason and the construction of the plot must be believable and the reader must be able to identify with it. To produce this effect, the author needs to represent traits and attributes that are desired and expected from both men and women. Not surprisingly, these aspects are idealized, but relate to the societal definition of desirable men and women within that particular context and time.

Yet, the transformation of characters can be found. The heroine in *Wanida*, possesses qualities of high tolerance of weaknesses and immoral deeds, together with virginity. In addition, she is a tolerant person and this is her outstanding characteristic besides her generosity. She is so kind and tolerant that the hero leaves the female rival and his family in order to be with her. Later in *Diversion to Heaven*, I label the portrayal of the heroine as a 'little feminist' (I borrow here from Pat Kirkham and Sarah Warren in their analysis of film versions of *Little Women*). The heroine in this book becomes more financially independent and has a strong will to pursue her career. She expresses her dislike of arranged marriage and this shows a high sense of agency. Yet, she values virginity highly as the essence of her life and possesses the qualities of a good housekeeper. *Swan Snare* presents a heroine who is not submissive and leads her life in a more Western style, partly because she used to study in the West. She drinks wine, while a 'proper' Thai woman should not touch

any alcohol according to religious beliefs. She wears a sexy swimming suit and beautiful dresses that provoke everybody, especially men, to look at her. But she is also an upright person who dares to argue, while the heroine in *Wanida* chooses to tolerate others' misdeeds and the heroine in *Diversion to Heaven* prefers not to argue but her action suggests she will not conform to things she thinks are not right. According to these transformations in characterisation, I would argue that to some extent the representations of women reflect the Thai gender relations at particular historical moments. As shown in Chapter two in different times and contexts, social expectations of both femininity and masculinity changed.

However, there are some discursive practices that have become "sedimented" acts, to use Judith Butler's term. In her ethnographic study regarding gender relations and sexuality of thirty-seven women who work in factories, Suchada Taweessit reveals that modern Thai gender and sexuality have become more fluid and dynamic. Her study shows complexities and conflicts between traditional conventions of femininity and the desire of individual women who want to transgress normative forms of norms of femininity that oppress them. Crucially, these women, despite the fact that they transgress some femininity norms, such as flirting, still express conformity to other discursive practices and norms. Taweessit argues that her findings show that to some extent Thai women are still chained to conventional forms of femininity and they may or may be not aware of this subordination (ibid., p. 222). Moreover, she found that women who violate norms of femininity usually encounter states of confusion, stress, or alienation. This shows that mainstream femininities are still working and have become sedimented. While discourses of traditional femininity have been negated and challenged, women are still under the influence and domination of mainstream norms of aspects of femininity and patriarchal laws of gender relations.

As I have employed much of Paizis' model of textual analysis, there have been times when uncertainty came into my mind, since he is quite convincing in arguing that romantic fictions do no harm to women as other 'manipulative' theorists have claimed. However, after my analysis of the second novel, my viewpoint was inclined to lean towards the feminists whose feelings towards romance novels are ambivalent. The issue that feminists, including me, are concerned with is discursive practices that disguise themselves as 'natural' traits of femininity, something displayed as common sense that can govern both the mind and body of the audience. This is because the argument that, "As readers and teachers and scholars, women are taught to think as men, to identify with a male point of view, and to accept as normal and legitimate a male system of values, one of whose central principles is misogyny" (Fetterley 1977, p. xx) still largely holds for Thai society. The fact that women have been taught to think and act like men does not mean that I am not aware of the sense of agency of women as both authors and readers. I would argue that maturity and experience can play a very crucial role in how one perceives ideologies provided by a popular genre such as romance; and most importantly, how much room and free time women have to contemplate the narratives that they consume.

In my own experience, I have encountered the politics of representation. The first time I read *Diversion to Heaven* was in my junior high school. I remember the heroine in *Diversion to Heaven* rarely puts on any make-up, just baby powder and a lip-gloss. I followed her style in not putting on any makeup for many years because I learned from romantic fiction that a proper woman should not wear thick makeup and only the female foil does. There might be other representations and forms of socialization that continue to shape me as what I am now, a middle-class professional Thai woman apart from familial impacts and other social influences. Drawing on Butler's work in *Gender Trouble*, 'representation' "serves as the

operative term within a political process that seeks to extend visibility and legitimacy to women as political subjects ... and is the normative function of a language which is said either to reveal or to distort what is assumed to be true about the category of women” (Butler 1989, pp. 3-4). I have seen my own transformation from a girl submissive to discursive practices to a more critical person because I have had a chance to study and understand the mechanism of socialization through discourses that I encountered when I studied abroad. Before that time the discourse at work in fiction had been intelligible for me because the characterization, localization, and temporalisation, and dialogue had resonance in daily life and the religious philosophy of Buddhism. Paizis mentions in his book from time to time that in romances, ‘realistic’ elements from the outside world are necessary for the aspirations of the reader or to hook the reader via believable proofs of the ‘real’, not fictional world. For this reason, reading romance is a complicated action because on the one hand the reader understands that the story is not real; on the other hand, ‘realistic’ elements enable identification within the story. Representation is immeasurably political because “gender is a product of social doings of some sort ...gender is constituted through interaction” (West and Zimmerman 1987, p. 129). I regard the interaction with narratives in any form as sites of gender construction and agree with Butler’s contention that the repetition of discursive practices is the mechanism for the cultural reproduction of identities. Drawing loosely on Butler, my concern in this thesis has been with the repetitions in Thailand of discursive practices within romantic fictions that construct normative gender values. I would insist that the representations in question have effects upon the audience, as in my own particular case.

Importantly, even though I have a deep concern about the politics of representation, I do not think that romance authors should be blamed for the texts that they produce. In accordance with Showalter, I think women’s writing:

... comes from the still-evolving relationships between women writers and their society. Moreover, the “female imagination” cannot be treated by literary historians as a romantic or Freudian abstraction. It is the product of a delicate network of influences operating in time, and it must be analyzed as it expresses itself, in language and in a fixed arrangement of words on a page, a form that itself is subject to a network of influences and conventions, including the operations of the marketplace (ibid., p. 12).

What is missing can be an author’s self-awareness of the mechanisms of cultural intelligibility that have constituted their standpoint and identities. My own standpoint is in line with Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore’s statement about a feminist’s standpoint: that it is not necessary to “read in order to praise or to blame, to judge or to censor”, but “to assess how the text invites its readers, as members of a specific culture, to understand what it means to be a woman or a man, and so encourages them to reaffirm or to challenge existing cultural norms” (Belsey and Moore, 1997 p. 1). This last goal is ideal and challenging for me because of the national traits of Thai society that do not promote critical thinking, especially concerning sexual politics, the question of what feminism is or even about politics in general. It is worth quoting from the first book that introduced me to the world of romance criticism, *Reading the Romance* by Janice A. Radway. She finishes her impressive book saying:

Although the ideological power of contemporary cultural forms is enormous, indeed sometimes even frightening, that power is not yet all-pervasive, totally vigilant, or complete. Interstices still exist within the social fabric where opposition is carried on by people who are not satisfied by their place within it or by the restricted material and emotional rewards that accompany it (Radway 1984, p. 222).

Indeed, there is always room for resistance.

My thesis has explored the usefulness and limitations of Western feminist theories to the study of Thai romantic fictions. While it is in many ways useful, it does have some limitations. Even though the romance genre was imported to Thailand from the West at the beginning of the Twentieth Century, it took a few decades for the genre to be fully appropriated and to begin to display Thai specific elements, especially in terms of characterization and localization. Working on this thesis, I have found that Western feminism has its strength in deciphering and deconstructing patriarchal systems that disguise their mechanisms in narratives which have been circulated within the society such as romance. In other words, Western feminism is a good framework within which to uncover subtle meanings which appear as common sense; and thus, have been adopted by men and women as if they were truth because they become sedimented ideologies. Western feminism also raises awareness of the production and circulation of modes of femininity and masculinity within a society through many institutions, particularly the cultural forms and practices among which I include the objects of my study, three romantic fictions. I would insist that Western theories are pragmatically useful for the Thai critic, but one needs to consider specific and different social contexts as of paramount importance. Moreover one needs to understand the selected theories well enough to be able to employ them to study another society in every aspect. For example, the Western tendency to categorize men and women differently according to their biological organs which underpins much Western literary and cultural studies (Alsop et al. 2002) does not fit Thai society which has three genders. In my case, this thesis would not have been conducted if I had not started with my preoccupation with feminism which is an approach that I have been interested in for some time.

As for the model I adapted from Psizis's, I found distinctive features of Thai romance that do not follow all the rules that Paizis delineates. The Thai romantic novels selected for analysis in this research do not present the protagonists or their relationship on the cover, but pictorial representation shows symbolic objects which connote the story of the texts instead. In this regard, it seems that Thai publishers do not pay much attention to the production of the front covers but rely on the reputation of the authors whose works are prolific and well-known, unlike in the Western romance market which is more competitive and where individual named authors are less important in selling romances. Based on Paizis's conception of temporalisation, Thai romantic fictions do not make a clearly focused use of time like Paizis describes above, but resort to the continuity of the story in a simple linear time frame. This is due to in part to the geographical fact that Thailand does not have clearly defined seasons as in the West. Yet, in Thai romantic fictions, nature is used to dramatise the story to a moderate degree and is linked to the heroine more than to the hero. Traditional discourses of gender see women as closer to nature and worldly things than men. In contrast men are linked to spiritual things, which is why all Thai men and boys are expected to spend a period as a monk and why some temples exclude women from the central building.

Localisation plays a prominent role in Western romance and this is also true for Thai romantic fictions. In all three narratives, selected for detailed analysis in this thesis, the heroines have to move from their personal realms to the heroes' arenas at the beginning of the narrative and as the conflicts between them are intensified and developed. The novels from the 1950s and 1970s clearly present the heroines moving in as a sign of the heroes' prospects and as utopian in the sense that the heroines bring promising love and stability to the heroes' familial lives. However, the displacement of the heroines cannot be assumed to be activated through their own agency because the journeys of these three heroines do not come from their own

choices. The first book portrays the heroine who is obliged to move in with the hero because of an arranged marriage. In the second book, the heroine's family pleads with her to live with them in the hero's house. The heroine in the third book reluctantly makes a journey up to the north because she is short of money. In this regard, their journeys signify romantic conventions of destiny or mysterious forces that drive them to meet their loved ones. Because of these perplexing forces, the heroines' initial movements cannot be read as being for their own emotional, cultural, and psychological development of self as in Western romantic fictions. Also, the main readership of Thai romance is not similar to the typical Western readership. Instead of being working and lower middle class, the majority of the Thai romance readership belongs to the upper middle class because they have more leisure time and can afford books. This notwithstanding, the second and the third books connote the ascension of the heroines to the upper class via relationships with the heroes as in Western romance novels and this works well as regards the socioeconomic Thai context. As for the point of ritual death, I have found that this element is universal for both Thai and Western tales. It dramatizes stories to climax; in fact, it is another narrative device derived from misconceptions and misunderstandings as popular Thai folktales do not have a similar story.

Notwithstanding this, in the course of detailed analysis, I have found a great degree of difference from Western norms in Thai socio-cultural contexts, modes of femininity and masculinity and different perceptions of gender. For instance, Thais tend to link gender with roles while Western culture combines it with sexuality. For this reason history plays a crucial role and I had to go back to study Thai history in every decade to investigate situations in each period that might affect the establishing of gender relations and the process of Westernization that has had an impact on gender identities, especially for women. Having done this, I was then in a better position to analyse the ways in which these are reflected in the discourse of

the three selected romantic fictions. Thus, I see Western theories, particularly feminist theories, as good tools with which to examine and expose mechanisms of patriarchy despite their limitation when it comes to accessing the deep structures of Thai gender relation. Thus, I would suggest that the concept of hybridity best describes the practice of integrating Western or other foreign theories with an indigenous culture.

Thai romance novels both replicate elements and transform aspects of Western romance. Prachakul makes an intriguing argument that the image of Thai men in literature in the Twentieth Century has changed from being promiscuous, outgoing, and casual to being more serious, monogamous and domesticated (Prachakul 2009). What he implies is that the influence of Western culture has reformulated the image of Thai men to resemble heroes as portrayed in Western novels. He even claims that Thai women in the past might have been prepared to accept a promiscuous husband, since this has historically been a masculine ideal. The romance novel brings in a new image of men for women whose fantasies rule out polygamy. According to Prachakul, most Thai men do not read romance, so they are not witnesses to the image of a new romance hero. Thus whilst the new image of men has replaced the image of traditional Thai men, according to Prachakul, real people have not been changed in similar way and this is where gender conflicts start. Where polygamy is concerned, the majority of Thai women reject it as a degrading and oppressive practice. Although it is well-known that polygamy has been practised up until now, Prachakul's argument that romance serves as a basis from which women could challenge the practice makes good sense in the context of Thai culture.

The changing representations of characters in the three selected romantic fictions signify transformations in the construction of gender although some traditional values remain. In the last decade of the Twentieth Century female

characters have more roles in public arenas, particularly in occupations which used to be reserved for men. Yet, discourses of gender derived from important, long-standing social institutions, such as the monarchy, Buddhism, the family, and the media. Traditional female values, such as chastity, and 'proper' behaviour and gender specific characteristics become sedimented discourses. The thesis has shown that while a female value such as 'being chaste' is regarded as imported from the West during the Victorian era, it becomes an expectation for a proper Thai woman that reoccurs consistently in romantic fiction. This indicates the flux of discourses and accordingly implies that class is a facet that is indispensable to any analysis because those who embraced Victorian discourses of femininity were the upper classes and in Thai society it is the upper classes who become models for the lower-class modes of behaviour. What seems to be all pervasive is the emphasis on the female trilogy of roles as a daughter, a wife, and a mother. In particular, a wife role is highlighted in the texts since, in the genre more widely, Thai romance has as its main focus gender relations between a man and a woman. In this regard, Thai romantic fiction narratives prescribe the desirability of women. The narratives work as codes for each role, in ways that reflect dominant social expectations of genders. My research suggests that the transformations in the representations of gender in the three selected romantic fictions are to be located at the level of superficiality while the real 'essence' of gender in Thai society, which I take to be the triad of roles, still remains. In this regard, I am led to think of Penny Van Esterik when she makes an attempt to describe Thai society using the concept of palimpsests and claims that "Past ideologies reoccur and influence later ideologies by adding layers of new meanings, new interpretations which then become commentaries on these changes" (Esterik 2000, p.41). Thus, it can be said that the status quo is not really shaken or disturbed and it is probably the characteristics of Thai culture understood as a palimpsest that play the most important role, especially in romantic fiction.

This does not mean that meanings cannot be changed, but it is a question of how one will change them and how long it will take for that change to be realized. In Thai culture, it is quite difficult to bring about any fundamental change in social structures because most Thais deny patriarchy as a source of inequity between sexes. A part of my objective in writing this thesis is to produce an awareness of the politics of the representation, which I think is a good starting point from which to disrupt the patriarchal structures of Thai society. Yet, the pleasure of reading romance is still to be regarded as an important lived experience. I believe that reading a romance can be both the source of pleasure and the source of criticism for every reader. As a romance reader, I prefer reading it as a resisting reader.

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