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## Metaphor, Sexuality and the Teaching of Thai Literature

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### ABSTRACT

Writing in a genre with as taboo a subject as sexuality in Thai literature could only be accepted by using metaphoric style because the issue of sex is viewed as an embarrassing subject and one not to be discussed publicly in Thai society. The erotic scene was one of the important elements in traditional Thai literature. Most of the great Thai classical literature had erotic scenes, all written by male writers and widely accepted as canonical literary works. As eroticism was an important element of Thai literature, it was reconstructed in textuality process through different periods of time and became a compilation of cultural textuality. This study examines the Thai erotic literature written in verse by male writers from the early Ayudhdhaya period to the Rattanaosin period, chronologically. The result of the study revealed the re-production of metaphoric love making scene texts in Thai literature over different time spans related to other texts of the same kind in some way or another. However, the sexual metaphors were found to be challenging for the new generation students of Thai literary classes.

*Keyword:* Metaphor, Thai, Literature, Sexuality

### 1. Introduction

As the sex act is considered to be embarrassing and dirty in Thai society, the authors of Thai literature had to avoid negative criticism by putting it in an artistic way and use metaphor to avoid crudeness. As metaphor is a figure of speech which makes an implicit, implied or hidden comparison between two different things or objects that have some common characteristics between them; it is widely used for the extension of meaning in every literary genre, especially poetry (Yuwapa Chaisinwattana,2001:26). This metaphoric style of erotic composition became the model for other literature after *Lilit Pralor*, the first Thai classical literature with love-making scene written in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Most Thai literature then must have a love-making scene which became a tradition for this type of composition. This is supported by Thai literary critic Pong Payajak;

“Aesthetics in Thai classical literature depend on the ability of the author in describing nature, the beauty of the characters and many other things.... including erotic scenes” (Pong, 1998:35).

The metaphoric love making scene texts in Thai literature over different time spans related to other texts of the same kind in some way or another. Although Thai students in literary classes were familiar with these metaphors, they still find them enjoyable and amusing. However, the students would not be able to interpret the contemporary erotic texts without having been educated about the lovemaking scene from *Lilit Pralor* or its network of textual relations. This confirms the argument of Graham Allen (2011) that ‘The act of reading plunges us into a network of textual relations. To interpret a text, to discover its meaning, or meanings, is to trace those relations’ (Graham Allen, 2011:11).

### 2. Sexual Metaphors in Ayudhdhaya Period (14<sup>th</sup> Century)

Sexual metaphors were found in an erotic part of Thai literature, for the first time, in *Lilit Pralor* in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The story itself were not an erotic story but rather tragic. There were lovemaking scenes of the main characters of the story which gave the erotic nature to the story. However, it seemed as if people in the *Lilit Pralor* period of time, were open about sexual intercourse. This could be seen from the description of the love making which was very detailed. In addition, the prince evaluated the taste of sex with the two princesses that it was so wonderful. He even criticized their female sex organs that they were nice and clean and better

than the ‘heaven hills’. This could be argued that the sexual attitude of either the author or people in the society in general in that period of time was rather controversial. The illustration of sexual controversy and metaphoric love making scene could be seen from the following extract:

บุษยามานคลี่คล้อย	สร้อยแลสร้อยซ้อนสร้อย
เสียดสร้อยสระศรี	
ภุมรีคลึงคู่เกล้า	กลางกมลยรรเย่า
ยัวร์องขานกัน	
สรงสระสวรรค์ไปเพียง	สระพระนุชเนื้อเกลี้ยง
อาบโอเอใจ	
แสนสนุกในสระน่อง	ปลาชื่นชมเด่นดอง
ดอกไม้บัวบาน	
ตระการฝั่งสระแก้ว	หมดเผ้าผองผองแพ้ว
โคกฟ้าอุทยาน	

“The flower is opening its petal. The carpenter bee is nuzzling in the middle. They make noises together. (The prince said) “Bathing in the pond in heaven is not as good as in your pond. Your flesh pond is so smooth. It is very enjoyable in your pond. The fish is happy and jumps to touch the lotus. The bank of the precious pond is amazing. It is nice and clean. Even the hill of heaven cannot compare with it. The flower is opening its petal. The carpenter bee is nuzzling in the middle. They make noises together. (The prince said) “Bathing in the pond in heaven is not as good as in your pond. Your flesh pond is so smooth. It is very enjoyable in your pond. The fish is happy and jumps to touch the lotus. The bank of the precious pond is amazing. It is nice and clean. Even the hill of heaven cannot compare with it.”

The sexual metaphors found in the above extract were as followed:

Source domain	Target domain
1. Flower (opening its petal)	1. Vagina (ready for the intercourse)
2. The carpenter bee (nuzzling in the middle)	2. Penis (penetrating)
3. The fish (is happy and jumps to touch the blooming lotus)	3. Penis

The above metaphors were seen for the first time in the mentioned text, then became common in various genres of literature in later periods.

### 3. Sexual Metaphors in Rattanakosin Period

The notion of the vagina being compared with flowers has been repeated again and again in several pieces of Thai literature. The illustration could be seen through the classical literature, Ramakian, composed by King Rama I in 1797 which was the Early Rattanakosin Period or about three hundred years after the composition of Lilit Pralor.

อัศจรรย์ลั่นฟ้าลึกรีกโครม	กลางโพยมพยับมืดเมฆา
เปรี้ยงเปรี้ยงเสียงสนั่นคะนองสาย	พริ้วโรยโปรยปรายลงหลายท่า
ชลธิ์ท่วมนองท้องสุธา	หม่อมจางแหวกว่ายในสายชล
โกสุมปทุมมาลัยก็บานแบ่ง	ผีกล้วยบังใบอยู่ใต้ต้น
แมลงผึ้งภุมรินบินบน	คลั่งเคล้าเสาวคนธ์มณฑาทอง
ถ้อยทีปรีดีเปรมเกษมสันต์	ผูกพันประดีพิพัทธ์ไม่ขัดข้อง
รสรักประจักษ์ใจในทำนอง	ทั้งสองสมถวิลยินดี

The sky was suddenly thundering, wonderfully.

Then it rained heavily

The river was flooded

The fish was swimming in the river

The lotus is blooming, hiding under its leave

The carpenter bee is nuzzling in the middle of the golden flower.

The lady did not defy.

Both of them are happy together

The sexual metaphors found in the above extract were as followed:

Source domain	Target domain
1. Lotus (blooming)	1.Vagina (ready for the intercourse)
2. The carpenter bee (nuzzling in the middle of the golden flower)	2.Penis (penetrating)

3. The fish (is swimming in the river)	3.Penis
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Although the composition time of the two literatures was long apart, the sexual metaphors were still almost identical. In some literature a flower or a lotus were used to refer to a woman, not specifically a vagina. For instance, in the song *Bua klang beung* (literally means the lotus in the middle of the pond) composed in 1950 or Contemporary period of Rattanaosin;

อนาถเหลือล้ำ

บัวบานเหนือน้ำ

อยู่ห่าง คน

ลับตาอยู่จน กลางบึง

ได้แต่ชะเง้อ ละเมอ รำพึง

เจ้าอยู่ถึงกลางบึง ปล่อยให้ผึ้ง เขยชม

What a pity,

The lotus is blooming

In the middle of the pond

Far away from people

I can only look

And see that you let the bee fondle you

(Bua klang beung, sung by Mantana Morakoon in 1950)

The lotus in this song refers to a woman who has no chance to meet a nice man to marry her. The bee in this song refers to a man who is not worth marrying or does not intend to marry a woman, just fondle her and then fly away. Although the lotus in this text did not refer to a vagina, it still represented woman as a sex object, something to be 'fondled' by a man. The notion of comparing a woman or a vagina to a flower is repeated from text to text.

Apart from repeating the same metaphors, the phenomenon of sexual intercourse is also repeated;



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