

Female Ghosts in Thai Contemporary Literature

Orathai Piayura *, Marasri Sorthip
Department of Thai, Khon Kaen University,
Khon Kaen, Thailand
*Corresponding Author: opanya@hotmail.com

ABSTRACT

This article examined the representation of female ghosts in Thai contemporary literature, *Buangsabai* and *Ward*. The novels were written by Pakhinai, a Thai male writer. The study found that Thai traditional value about sex was strongly represented in these novels. The characters in these stories believed in monogamy but had to face death penalty judged by patriarchal society after their sexual misbehavior. The selected novels were analyzed by gender and sexuality approach with the illustration of Thai contemporary social contexts.

Keywords: Thai Literature, Female Ghost, Pakhinai

Introduction

Most Thai ghost novels presented female ghosts. There were hardly novels about male ghosts. The stories of female ghosts always involved women's love and sexual behavior in the patriarchal context. As ghost fictions reflected superstitious beliefs of people within Thai society and presented characters out of human love and desire, they became rapidly popular (Nuchanart&Orathai, 2015:1). The main purpose of this kind of genre was entertainment but didactic element was included unavoidably.

Pakhinai is one of Thai famous ghost fiction writers. He became famous after his series *Jet Wan Jorng Wen* (Literally meant seven days of revenge) and a novel *Nang Chada* (Literally meant a head dressed lady) were made television dramas; they were commented as the most horrified Thai dramas of the decade (ibid.). The two shows received positive feedback from the audience. The novel "Nang Chada" was listed as the best-selling book. *Buangsabai* and *Ward* were not listed as Pakhinai's bestselling books but they were scary and shared the similarity of female ghosts' destiny.

The Methodology

This research was a qualitative and documentary research. The selected texts were selected by purposive sampling. Gender and sexuality perspective was applied to the analysis as the theoretical framework. The research question was how the female ghosts were presented in a novel written by male author.

The Synopses

Buangsabai

Buangsabai is a story about a woman named Pootjeep. She was born in an upper class family but fell in love with a slave in her compound. She left her family to live a poor life with the slave because she was so much in love with him. Later on, she was killed by that slave and his lover. They tied her neck with a long cloth (*Sabai*) and buried her under a tree. Seven years later the cloth which was used to tie her neck was dug up and her spirit was free. She went to the slave and his lover for revenge.

Ward

Ward is a story about a woman named Petplaplueng. She committed adultery with a gynecologist when she was trying to have a baby. The gynecologist was a friend of her husband who was also a doctor. Petplaplueng was pregnant and the father of the child was her lover. She died during the abortion process. Her spirit was angry and full of hatred. She hunted those who killed her or involved with her death.

The Analysis

According to Harrison (2000b), a good woman in Thai society was supposed to be monogamous and sexually well-behaved, the main female characters in both of the selected stories tried hard to be accepted as good women. Pootjeep from *Buangsabai* fell in love with a slave and lived a poor life with him after she slept with him. The following quote illustrated her loyal.

“I don’t find it difficult at all my dear Ming. I’m happy to live in a small hut with you. I want to be with you wherever you are.” She looks at the low class slave with loving eyes and hugs him tight.” (Buangsabai, 2014:121)

She also had to hide her feeling of love and desire in order to be accepted as a good woman. This could be illustrated from the following quote:

“My dear Ming, you frightened me! I thought it was a burglar.” Pootjeep said to the slave who had already taken the space in her heart. She tried hard not to show her feeling to him. (Buangsabai, 2014:89)

The above quotations exemplified the good woman qualifications of the main female character of *Buangsabai*. However, she was killed later on by the man she loved and his lover, a female slave in her compound.

The death of the main female character of the story could be interpreted as the moral of the story that a woman in Thai society supposed to live her life according to the social norm. If one failed to do so, one would be sentenced to death. Pootjeep was perceived as a good woman for her honesty that she sacrificed for the man she loved. After she lost her virginity to him before marriage, she was not qualified as a good Thai woman anymore. Therefore, she was killed, as a punishment from patriarchal society, for not able to control her sexual desire.

The same thing happened to the main female character of *Ward*, Petplaplueng. She lived her life up to the normative standard by not having sex before marriage and being faithful to her husband. However, her life as a good woman was destroyed by a man who was a doctor friend of her husband. She was trying to resist him but could not after he said he had loved her for a long time as exemplified:

“I love you Pet. I have loved you for such a long time, and I know that you also love me. I can tell from your eyes.

“My dear doctor, please don’t. I am married, and my husband is your friend.” While refusing him, her heart is so weaken. She has never felt like this when being with her husband.

“Pet ... I love you.”

FEMALE GHOSTS IN THAI CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE

This last sentence melts Petplaplueng's heart. She finally allows him to have sex with her. (Ward, 2012:95-96)

Petplaplueng enjoyed having sex with her lover for not very long because she later on found herself being pregnant. Her lover congratulated her for able to have a baby but Petplaplueng was worried as she felt like she had done bad deed and soon people would find out. Following is the illustration of the scene:

“Darling...this is not a thing to congratulate. I am a married woman; if Tri finds out; I can't imagine what will happen. He is hot-tempered man; he will definitely report to the medical council. You will lose your job, and I will be ashamed and will be labeled an unfaithful wife! Petplaplueng said voicelessly; the teardrops were falling down from her restless eyes. (Ward, 2012:97)

Her lover asked her to keep her pregnancy as a secret and he killed her during the abortion process.

Again, a female character was sentenced to death by the male author after her sexual misbehaved. Both Pootjeep and Petplaplueng could not help themselves or fight back as being women in patriarchal society. They could only get their revenge by trying to kill those men once they became a ghost. It could be argued that a 'good woman' in Thai society had to be sexually behaved. Once any woman in such a society lost their control of sexual desire, they are not qualified as a good woman and deserved to die. It was impossible for women to fight back while they were still alive. They had to become a ghost to gain enough power to compete with male power.

Conclusion

The female sex role in Thai society was prescribed for women via women's stereotypes. These stereotypes derived from Thai traditional beliefs and values which inevitably patriarchal (Orathai Piayura, 2011:40). According to Durant and Fabb (1990), women were presented the way society wanted her to be in ways restricted by conventional stereotypes (Durant&Fabb 1990: 43). The author of the selected stories had delivered his didactic message that people should sexually behaved to conform social norm. A 'good woman' in Thai society had to be sexually behaved. If a woman in lost her control of sexual desire, she is not qualified as a good woman and deserved to die. Both Pootjeep and Petpaplueng were sentenced by the Thai male author to die because they did not control their feelings for love and desire, which was not 'the normative standards of society' (Lee and Newby, 1984, quoted in Whitehead, 2010:18).

References

- Durant,A and Fabb, N. (1992). *Literary Studies in Action*. London: Routledge.
- Harrison, R. 2000b. *The Disruption of Female Desire and the Thai Literary Tradition of Eroticism, Religion and Aesthetics*. Tenggara: Journal of Southeast Asian Literature; 41: 88-125
- Kanjanaa Kaewthep. 1992. *Maan haeng akhati ('Biased curtain')*. Bangkok: Gender Press.
- Orathai Piayura.2011.*Si Phaendin and the Construction of the Female Gender Role*. Humanities and Social Sciences Journal, Khon Kaen Univeristy. Khon Kaen: Klangnanawittaya. Vol.3.pp35-50.
- Pakhinai).2012).Ward).8th edition). Bangkok: Kaokadot.
- Pakhinai).2014).Buangsabai .Bangkok: Kaokadot.

FEMALE GHOSTS IN THAI CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE

Whitehead, S. 2010. *Men and Masculinities*. Cambridge: Polity Press.