

## **Naming the Unspeakable: Representing Rape in Thai Literature** **Chutima Pragatwutisarn**

Rape is one of the most under-represented crimes in Thai society. Silence about rape is mainly caused by the cultural norms that stigmatize women and blame them for the assaults. In her content analysis of rape news circulating in Thai society, Suwannee Kalayanasant (1993) finds that:

The media constructs either the eccentric behavior of the rapists or the tempting rape victims as the motives for rape. In addition, the media constructs the location of the rape with the atmosphere of darkness and isolation. This representation of rape by the media reinforces the patriarchal ideology that restricts women to the domestic sphere and to the traditional roles of wife and mother.

Similarly, Juree Vichit-Vadakan (1999) notes how the propensity towards sexual violence amongst the public is exacerbated by the media that normalize its threatening effects. In her discussion of the rape scenes in Thai soap operas, Juree states that the rape of the heroine usually occurs when the hero is in a drunken state. The heroine as a victim of rape feels anger and hostility towards the hero only to find herself gradually falling in love with the man who raped her. "This theme," says Juree, "seems to absolve the wrong-doing of rape, almost as if drunkenness is an excuse for sexual misconduct and that rape motivated by love is excusable. It also seems to imply that rape victims could learn to love their assailants" (p. 198). The representation of rape by the media reinforces the rape myths that large segments of Thai society widely endorse. Under such circumstances, the disclosure of rape becomes a difficult task the victim must face as she struggles to articulate her experience.

Self-inflicted silence is the response of many women to the violence they experience. Women's stories of sexual abuse reveal the paradoxical nature of the representation of trauma. As Brenda Daly (1998), an incest victim, reports:

The poisonous lesson of my childhood was that I could speak, I even could cry out, but no one would hear me, no one would listen. In what sense, then, did I possess language? What was the point of speaking and writing if no one listened? At the same time, I wanted more than anything else, to be heard and believed. (p. 5)

Victims are torn between a strong desire to tell their stories and an equal impulse to conceal them. They realize that their traumatic experience is unspeakable, resistant to, and yet dependent on, narrativity. Their narrative structures reflect the process that Harvard psychiatrist Judith Herman (1992) describes as “the conflict between the will to deny horrible events and the will to proclaim them aloud... People who have survived atrocities often tell their stories in a highly emotional, contradictory, and fragmented manner which determines their credibility and thereby serves the twin imperatives of truth-telling and secrecy” (p. 1). In contrast with scholars and academic researchers who easily turn rape into a topic of discussion, those who have direct experience of rape have difficulty recalling their traumatic past, and many avoid talking about it altogether.

Also, when rape is committed by family members, it is closely guarded as a family secret. According to Juree, Thai women from the upper classes may avoid sexual violence caused by non-family members more easily than their middle and lower class sisters. “However,” says Juree, “sexual assault and rape within the family and among acquaintances do occur among upper socioeconomic classes in Thailand as they also happen in other countries. But to preserve family honour and stature in society, such events tend not to be made public but are dealt with through internal mediation and negotiation” (p. 186). Denying that rape could have occurred in the family helps those in the upper class “keep face” in society at the expense of the rape victims. Moreover, since the family is considered the most important social unit in one’s life and since children have been taught to obey their parents, many abuse victims, feeling themselves responsible for breaking up the family, refuse to report their assaults to the police.

Many point out how breaking the silence is an act of self-empowerment for abuse victims. As Susan D. Rose (1999) argues,

In the process of breaking silence, survivors are not only finding their own voices; they also are collectively creating new narratives that challenge the individual and collective denial of abuse and the reproduction of violence. In dialogue with others who can bear witness, survivors are redefining the experiences that once rendered them powerless” (p. 165).

For the abuse victims to break this silence, it is not simply a matter of articulating their experience. Victims recounting their own stories challenge the cultural myths about sexual abuse and begin the process of recovery. Others, however, show how breaking the silence involves risk as well as promise. As psychiatrist Dori Laub (1992) explains, “If one talks about the trauma without being truly heard or truly listened to, the telling might itself be lived as a return of the trauma—a re-experiencing of the event itself” (p. 67). The ‘truth’ about the abuse is complex. It is not easily told and, when hesitantly articulated, it may include silences and gaps that are open to misinterpretation by listeners. Linda Alcoff and Laura Gray-Rosendale (1996) cite the case of TV talk shows to illustrate how the victims’ resistance is eradicated from their discourse in public recounting which involves the host directing the guests’ narratives and experts interpreting the narratives for the audience.

It is the danger and promise of speaking out that I want to explore in this paper. Democratization and women’s activism are two important factors that raise awareness of women’s issues in Thai society, including sexual violence against women and other minority groups<sup>1</sup>. There is an increasing number of literary works dealing with the issues of sexual violence. However, one of the dangers emerging from the breaking of silence in the public sphere is that there is a tendency to read the stories of abuse victims as an “authentic” account—one that records the triumph of the abuse victims over repression. Therefore, freedom and expression are placed in opposition to politics and repression. However, as Michel Foucault (1990) reminds us, speaking is not always liberating and the proliferation of sexual narratives is also an effect of power. In his critique of what he calls “repressive hypothesis,” Foucault says,

Sexuality must not be thought of as a kind of natural given which power tries to hold in check, or as an obscure domain which knowledge tries gradually

to uncover. It is the name that can be given to a historical construct: not a furtive reality that is difficult to grasp, but a great surface of network in which the stimulation of bodies, the intensification of pleasures, the incitement to discourse, the formation of special knowledges, the strengthening of controls and resistances, are linked to one another, in accordance with a few major strategies of knowledge and power. (pp. 105-06)

In this sense, the emerging voices of abuse victims are not in opposition to repression but are embedded in the discursive flow of power; they should be understood as effects of negotiations. The rape victims when telling their stories are using discourses available in the dominant culture to construct their experiences. Ken Plummer (1997) says, "Rape is always historically and culturally specific, and how it is understood depends upon the framework of storytelling" (p. 63). I have selected two novels, *On the Mouth of the World* (2003) and *Behind a Cloud-Patterned Screen* (2002), to discuss how rape is represented in a Thai literary context and how knowledge about rape produced in these texts is caught within power relations. The issue here is not to define women's stories of sexual abuse as an expression of truth but to understand the relation of production and consumption which frames them for us.

*On the Mouth of the World*, written by SEA Write award-winner Anchan<sup>2</sup>, is Jon's personal narrative about Ang, his lover. In the opening paragraph, Jon asks the reader to bear witness to his account about Ang whose story may inspire in them unknown and unidentifiable feelings. Jon begins his narrative with a depiction of Ang as a young, beautiful, upper class woman who flaunts her sexuality and has affairs with countless men. Unlike Ang, Jon presents himself as innocent and inexperienced. In his account, Ang is the one who introduces herself to him and finally seduces him. Upon discovering that Ang is pregnant after one of her affairs, Jon offers to marry her and adopt her fatherless child. Ang rejects Jon's offer and reveals a secret: her past sexual encounters with her stepfather, her grandmother's driver and her school teacher. In her account, Ang presents herself as the seducer instead of the seduced. Ang's final confession details her seduction of Jon. After listening to Ang's story, Jon decides to leave her. He meets another woman and then marries her after learning of Ang's tragic death. Unable

to forget her, Jon names his new born daughter "Ang" in memory of the woman he loved most.

Jon is not only a narrator but also an interpreter of Ang's story. His narrative focuses on Ang's physical appearance: "Besides her beautiful name, Ang possesses an unforgettable beauty. Her face is oval, her nose is high, her cheeks are full, her eyebrows and chin fit in with the other features on her face" (p. 14). However, he finds that there is something sinister about Ang's beauty. Her eyes, Jon warns us, "are molded not from sweet honey but from the boiling water of melted iron" (p. 15). Encountering this ambiguity, Jon splits her into the stereotyped opposition of good girl / bad girl. In Jon's imagination, Ang appears to be an innocent girl when Jon desires her:

Ang is standing humbly, wearing a shirt and a cream color long skirt. She looks like a sweet, lovely girl...with rosy radiant cheeks...holding a pure white rose... That day I became a greedy pig devouring its food although Ang surrendered her body to fulfill my hunger. (p. 55)

However, the image of an ogress substitutes for the image of a naïve girl when Ang expresses her excessive sexual desire:

We are attracted to each other again. But this time it is Ang who is the initiator. She stripped me off naked and pushed me to lie down on the bed and have sex with me...As I lay down looking deep into her eyes, I felt shocked because it seemed that through those mirrors I saw an ogress smiling back with its watery mouth before jumping out to devour my flesh and blood—an image that caused my hair to stand up suddenly. (p. 68)

Jon's depiction of Ang reflects the traditional Thai belief that a good woman has no sexual appetites. While it is possible for Thai men to boast about their sexual adventures, women are forbidden to speak about sex or to express their sexual feelings. Those who violate these norms are highly stigmatized and are frequently discussed in

terms of disgust and abhorrence. As a result, when Ang expresses herself as sexually active, she is compared to an ogress who devours food disgustingly.

Though the story ends with Jon's abandonment of his lover and her tragic death, the ending is justified by narrative devices that support the reader's identification with the male protagonist. Jon reads Ang's confession as an expression of truth rather than paying attention to the contradictions embedded in her account. For Jon, Ang reveals through her narrative the truth of who she is: a whore, an ogress, a seducer. Since its focus is on the dark force of Ang's sexual desire and seduction, Jon's reading denies the reader an interpretation of childhood abuse that might otherwise be denoted. Jon consequently allies himself with those who, he believes, were seduced by Ang, and sympathizes with them:

I think of her stepfather, her grandmother's driver, her female schoolteacher, hundreds of Ang's lovers including me...Each of them will know very well as I did that those eyes have the power to turn a man into an animal. No matter where or when they find themselves, each knows very well that neither a god nor any sacred being can save them for even a single moment when left with the person who possesses those eyes (p. 152).

Though Jon reveals a moment of his doubt about Ang's stories, he quickly dismisses it. By reading Ang's story as one of her sexual desire, Jon also claims his own innocence. After all, like others, he is a sympathetic victim of seduction.

Jon's narrative demonstrates what happens to the heroine when she transgresses sexually. Ang was found dead and her body bears the evidence of rape and torture. Her death is a logical end to the patriarchal plot in which a fallen woman has only two choices: redemption or death. In Ang's case, she has fallen and does not repent her sin. She rejects the bond of marriage Jon offers and insists on writing her own plot. Since Ang is beyond redemption, she logically deserves a violent death at the end. Thus, what the narrative highlights is not Ang's pain but rather Jon's pain and suffering from the loss of his lover. However, his loss is redeemed at the end by having Ang return to him in the image of an innocent child. Jon's narrative is brought to a satisfactory closure by the violent erasure of the woman's story and her body. Not only is her death

appropriated as a warning for transgression and punishment; it also serves another purpose of Jon's narrative in maintaining what Katheleen Rowe Karlyn (2004) calls "core beliefs about the benevolence of patriarchy, the sanctity of the family, and the tradition of romantic love," which is often invoked to defend sexual abuse (p.76).

### **The recovery of woman's story and the world of the rape survivor**

Although Ang's voices are heard in the narrative, it is Jon who is the author and interpreter of her story. Reading Ang from a masculine point of view, Jon misrepresents her as a woman whose perverted sexual desire causes her violent death. Thus, the tragedy of the story is not Jon's loss of his beloved but his failure to recognize a woman's story and consequently his inability to understand Ang. Maria Lugones (1994) uses the term "world' -traveling" as a metaphor for the production of knowledge that implicates both self and other. For Lugones, to know the other, it is imperative that we leave our world and meet them in their own contexts. Lugones' 'world' -traveling is a critique of what she calls "arrogant perception" —an act of attempting to "graft" the others' substance onto one's own without "the possibility of identification" (p. 128). Like an arrogant observer, Jon "grafts" Ang's story onto his own but his inclination is to reinforce his privileged status, rather than provide himself with an occasion to question his masculinity.

Since Ang's story is embedded in Jon's, to listen to her voice it becomes necessary that we approach Ang's story from the other side. This can be done by re-reading Jon's account of her story from the woman's point of view in order to uncover what has been buried or silenced that makes Jon's narrative possible in the first place. When re-read from the other side, that which appears to Jon as insignificant and irrelevant now takes on significant meanings. One of the recurrent images in Ang's account is the presence of a mysterious world. In a dream she told Jon, Ang discovers herself in a strangely familiar world where everything exists in opposition to the real world like images in a negative film. Ang discovered this world when she was young and lived abroad in her stepfather's house. At a party held by a neighbor for Cathy, a girl who was killed in an accident, everyone brings a green balloon because Cathy's mother believes that her daughter is not yet dead but lost in another world. When the green balloons with the birthday cards reach that world, they will turn red. The presence of the other world in

opposition to the real one fascinates Ang and she dreams of the balloons taking her away to this other world. Ang discovers that she herself can create that world when she builds a snow palace on the beach one winter's day:

The image of the palace on the snow covered beach amid the bellowing sound of the waves arouses my feeling of wonderment. The image looks like a scene in an absurd drama where objects are out of place and contradictory. At that moment, I knew that the green balloon brought me here...on the mouth of the earth where the palace is made of snow instead of sand, where the sunlight is black while the shadow is white...From that day on, the balloon takes me along to wherever it floats ... It takes me to a place unknown to the rest of the world. Why is this possible? Because that place exists in the dark recesses of my mind" (pp. 105-06).

Ang's escape to "a place unknown to the rest of the world" is associated with the trauma of childhood abuse. Her confession includes a scene in which she describes her first sexual encounter with her stepfather:

I saw myself climbing the curve of painful feeling until I reached the highest point in the sky and saw a bunch of balloons within my reach. At that moment, pain split my body apart...and I thought the last minute of my life was approaching. Then, in that last minute, I would lose the balloons I was looking for. Realizing this, I struggled to grasp the balloons before I ran out of breath and saw that they gradually changed their color. ...Then, a new feeling enveloped me... This feeling was an intense as the pain that had spread all over my body. But I began to forget most of the pain and remembered only the new feeling which was so arousing that I could not stop myself crying out" (pp. 127-28).

Although Ang does not define her experience as rape, it is clear that the experience is one shared by many rape victims. Susan D. Rose (1999) uses the term "dissociation" to describe how victims of sexual abuse seek safety by transcending their body.

Dissociation, which gives rise to a form of temporary transcendence, is one of the major defense mechanisms resorted to by traumatized children. The mind or spirit leaves the body and the child may come to feel no pain, may leave the scene entirely, neither experiencing the abuse at the time nor remember it afterwards. The escape from the self—from what is being done to the self—creates a safe space, a retreat. It may be temporary or longerlasting, depending on the severity and frequency of abuse. (p. 167)

Ang's response to extreme fear and near-death experience can be seen as dissociation. The dream-like quality of her experience results from her being so violated that she psychologically escapes in order to avoid destruction. Her focus not on rape, not on her body, but on the outside—the other world where everything is opposite to what is perceived as reality, might be seen as her effort to protect herself in the midst of pain.

Ang's secret world unknown to the rest of the world is shared by many raped women. Rape is a world-shattering experience because it brings not only pain and suffering to the victims but also changes their perception of reality. The abuse victim often discovers that the father the protector is also an attacker. Similarly, home as a place of comfort and protection often becomes a venue for violence. When taking into account the presence of the other world, the re-reading of Ang's story discloses the stark reality of sexual abuse embedded in Jon's account of her story as one of her own sexual desire. In other words, hidden behind Ang's fantasy of seduction is the traumatic story of a helpless child unable to escape from sexual violence.

How, then, to make sense of Ang's seduction fantasy? The scenario she narrates to Jon with great pleasure contrasts sharply with the reality of sexual violence. Ang wants to tell Jon what happened to her in the past, yet in her confession, she instead recounts a story in which she becomes an agent of seduction. The contradiction in Ang's story is a result of the struggle of the abuse victim for self-expression in the context of the production and reception of women's accounts of sexual abuse. One aspect of the struggle in women's abuse narratives was their resistance to positioning themselves as passive victims. Avoidance of victim status is reflected in their refusal to label themselves as abuse victims and their experience as abusive (see, i.g. Hesford,

1999; Hooks, 1989). By narrating an account in which she is seductive, Ang is able to challenge those who are looking for a story of female victimhood in order to reinforce the stereotypes of female powerlessness.

However, her reversal strategy is still limited because it maintains her resistance within the confines of patriarchal ideologies. Moreover, her denial of abuse makes invisible the problem of sexual violence against women. If exploring the darkness in order to claim the part she left behind as a child is for abuse victims “a strategy—a therapy—for emotional, spiritual, and cognitive survival” (Daly, p. 42), any hope of healing for Ang is also denied. In rejecting the vulnerable and violated part of her self, Ang assumes the role of the abuser. Though she pretends not to be affected by the abuse, she does in fact suffer from post traumatic symptoms including nightmares and sleeplessness, risky sexual behavior, risk taking and suicidal impulses, and promiscuity. Ang’s death is not an outcome of her perverted sexual desire but of her self-denial and inability to heal.

My discussion of Anchan’s novel shows how the politics of representation affects the telling of sexual stories. Here, Ang’s story of sexual abuse is subjected to misreading and to appropriation by Jon, the male narrator, for self-constitution. In this section, I want to turn to a discussion of *Behind a Cloud-Patterned Screen*, a novel by contemporary female writer Piyaporn Sakasem<sup>3</sup>. Unlike Anchan’s novel, Piyaporn’s work focuses on the issue of rape from the perspectives of female characters who are abuse victims and from an omniscient narrator who sympathizes with them. Thus, Piyaporn presents the heroine of the novel as a character in her own right rather than a product of the male narrator’s imagination as the reader finds with Ang. Despite the author’s concern about sexual violence as a serious issue and her sympathy for abuse victims, her representation of sexual violence is still problematic. By prioritizing gender over other categories, the author subsumes differences among rape victims under the bond of female relationships and their shared experience of sexual vulnerability.

*Behind a Cloud-Patterned Screen* is the story of a pure, innocent, beautiful and young woman called Fah. Because her parents died when she was still young, Fah was raised by her grandparents, Doctor Jit and Val, and grew up in the highly protective home of an upper middle class family. Fah appears to be the perfect woman many men have dreamed of. After she graduates, her grandparents make arrangements for her to marry

an eligible young man, Kris. However, Fah shuns Kris’s sexual advances and runs away on their wedding night. A subsequent investigation of her strange behavior reveals the dark reality of sexual abuse hidden behind her facade of perfect purity.

Through the voices of her female characters, Piyaporn criticizes the rape myths that distort the reality of sexual violence. She emphasizes that women of all classes and all types of personalities are vulnerable to sexual violence. As she makes one of her female characters say,

What culture has informed us about rape is definitely not true. Rape can happen at any time and in all circumstances and social classes. Not a single woman may settle comfortably with the belief that rape will never happen to her in her lifetime. ... Not a single woman, no matter what circumstance she finds herself in, will be confident about her own safety as long as she is living in the world of different sexes!” (p. 266).

The author’s conviction that rape is an imminent danger that can happen to anyone at any time is reflected in her decision to present the heroine in the novel as a rape victim and to interweave the heroine’s story with the stories of other female characters who also share the experience of sexual abuse.

In the story’s main narrative, the author explores how patriarchal, familial ideologies perpetuate sexual violence in society. Among Thai people, especially those of the upper classes, virginity is highly prized as a feminine virtue and is closely guarded before a woman is married<sup>4</sup>. The valorization of female virginity makes it difficult for women to break the silence about their sexual abuse. Rape which brings about the loss of virginity becomes a stigma and women who were raped tend to see their body as unclean or impure and therefore question their suitability as future wives and mothers. As a member of the upper middle class, Fah’s grandfather, Doctor Jit wants to hide the sexual abuse that occurred to his granddaughter when she was young. In an attempt to make her forget the past, he not only changed her name but also reconstructed a new memory for her. Thus, Fah grew up believing that her parents were killed in an accident and that she herself was injured in the head and stomach. Dr. Jit’s denial of sexual violence could be regarded as a desire to protect his granddaughter from the pain of

her traumatic experience. However, it could also be a result of societal pressures on members of the established patriarchal family to maintain family honor and prestige.

Kris' s reaction to Fah' s history of sexual abuse is similar to Dr. Jit's. Kris takes pride in his rationality and good judgment, reflected in his decision to choose Fah as his wife. As the narrator says, "He reasonably evaluates everything, measures all the consequences of his decision, considers appropriateness, and then chooses only the best, the most profitable for himself" (p. 31). A young, middle class entrepreneur, Kris adheres to patriarchal, bourgeois ideologies which take precedence over love and understanding in his arranged marriage with Fah. His idealism, however, is shattered when he discovers that Fah, the woman he believes to be the best and perfect choice, has a flaw. Beneath her perfect appearance is something mysterious and unknown that manifests itself through her irrational behavior. This dark reality troubles him; it not only reminds him of the shaky ground upon which he lays his faith in masculine idealism but also forces him to realize his own liability to imperfection. Like Jon, the protagonist in Anchan' s novel, Kris distances himself after his discovery. Fah recalls the barriers erected between Kris and her "as if their intimate relationship during years of their engagement had never happened!" (p. 320).

Another cause of the perpetuation of sexual abuse is the judicial system. The author explores this issue in two subplots of the novel: Jiranan' s and Dao' s stories of sexual abuse. An upper middle-class young woman like Fah, Jiranan is out-going, modern, independent and self-confident. She was assaulted by Jim, a man she knew through an introduction by her friends. Disappointed and humiliated by her indifference to him, Jim sexually assaults her for revenge. Through Jiranan' s story, the author rewrites the popular stories of rape which are fundamentally about "male sexual release and women' s provocation" by showing how the story is actually one of "power and gender rather than sex and desire" (Plummer, p. 67). She was rescued but decided not to report the assault to the police. "All abused women," says the narrator, "are caught between the desire to assert their rights as humans and to claim equal rights and justice for themselves, and their impulse to let things go and forget the abuse" (p. 274). The fact that society tends to blame the victim rather than the abuser for the crime and that the law discriminates against abuse victims in a manner that would not be tolerated by victims of other crimes deters women from seeking justice for themselves: "Even such

a woman as Jirana—a self-confident woman who always makes claim and insists on getting what she wants must accept her defeat in this case" (p. 275).

Jiranan is more fortunate than Dao, a factory worker who was gang raped by her coworkers. Unlike Jiranan, Dao was aided by a support group organized by women and filed a lawsuit against her perpetrators. Her courage to bring the case to the public eye reveals the socio-economic differences among victims of abuse. Given the fact that women could be held in shame and disgrace, no one is willing to take the risk of reporting the crime. However, it is easier for Dao to come out and seek justice because as a member of the working class she has not much to lose when compared to Jiranan whose revelation may destroy her social status and her family' s reputation. Despite her refusal to be silenced and her determination to identify both the abuse and the abuser, the slow, laborious process of the trial she went through exhausts her. The difficulty for Dao in reporting the crime is compounded by the callousness and machismo she encounters from police and lawyers. They doubt her motives and seek to discredit her by pointing out her drunkenness when the gang-rape occurred. The torment, both physical and emotional, that she goes through finally forces her to find an easy way out by accepting the compensation money and dropping the charges against her perpetrators.

What also differentiates Piyaporn' s novel from popular accounts about sexual violence found in the media is that its focus is not on the event of rape itself but on its effects on the victims and on the process of healing. As the narrator says,

Rape is not incidental in one' s life. From women' s point of view, rape is compared to murder. Rape is violation—an act that dehumanizes the victims. What matters about rape is not the loss of virginity...but the psychological damage, the social disgrace and the loss of honor the rape victims suffer. (p. 396)

The author explores the traumatic effects rape has on victims' lives and their journeys to recovery through her heroine' s story. Citing Judith Herman (1992), Jane Kilby (2002) states that "the experience of trauma is most likely forgotten by the very people expected to remember, the force of the event being such that the victim is left without any memories to speak of. Amnesia is deemed to be the ordinary response to traumatic



event” (p. 205). As a rape victim, Fah does not remember the traumatic experience of repeated victimization, though she has a vivid memory of her childhood. However, the traumatic past does not totally go away. Her mysterious behavior, such as her fear of sex and her blacking out, are signals of a troubled mind which later identified as rape trauma syndrome. The traumatic past, therefore, is not something one easily recovers from. Thus, the healing process involves a reunion of the split self rather than the forgetting of the past.

Fah’s journey towards self-recovery is not just an individual act but a collective process. Because her memory of sexual violence was blacked out, the recovery of the past is aided by two close family members: Doctor Manta and Grandma Val. The story details how Fah collaborates with these relatives to search for clues to her past. The process of recovery brings her close to other rape victims, especially to Dao, a factory worker and a victim of gang rape. By participating in a rape support group for women and witnessing the pain and struggles of other rape victims, Fah comes to realize that “she is struggling but not alone. There are many other women out there who like her are struggling” (p. 400). This statement signals a shift from the “I” of the heroine to join the “we” of the women who are raped on the basis of a shared experience of gender oppression. A sense of hope grows out of their dialogues with other women as they together redefine the meaning of sexual violence and transform themselves from passivity to self-empowerment.

The journey to her past brings a new knowledge or consciousness to redefine her self and her relationship with others in the present. Fah realizes that the denial of sexual abuse in the name of patriarchal protection brings more harm to the abuse victim. She exposes the underside of protection by showing how a family’s honor and prestige could be maintained only at the expense of the silencing of sexual abuse and the continued oppression of women. At the moment that the crucial piece of evidence will be discovered and the truth about the past emerges, Manta wants to spare Fah from the pain of self-discovery. However, Fah insists that the past be disclosed, reminding him, “Don’t you realize that you are over-protective of me like my grandpa, Doctor Jit” (p. 430). Her new knowledge empowers her to seek a divorce from Krit, her husband, declaring to him that “I have changed into a new person; I am no longer the same woman as the one you wanted to marry” (p. 474). The divorce from Kris marks her

growth and maturity. By rejecting Kris, Fah also rejects the pretension and hypocrisy of the middle-class idealism that Kris values more than love and understanding of his wife.

Should we read the coming to consciousness of a heroine who is sexually victimized during childhood in terms of repression/ liberation? Does this mean that the author’s role is to give voice to universal female consciousness? Fah shows her strength and determination to be healed; however, as Ken Plummer reminds us, “*The power to tell a story, or indeed to not tell a story, under the conditions of one’s own choosing, is part of the political process*” (p. 26). While rape remains unspeakable for Ang, the heroine in Anchan’s novel, in Fah’s case the opportunity to speak out against gender oppression is afforded and even encouraged by her family members who help her search for the past, by the psychiatrist who assists her in healing, and by a support group for female victims of sexual abuse. Not only the presence of a group of sympathetic listeners and supporters, but also the fact that her perpetrator and her grandfather are all dead, provides her with the safe environment that makes possible the telling of her rape story. However, her openness is selective and limited to a small circle of family members, close friends, and organized groups of women. She does not tell her story publicly and politically<sup>5</sup> Because society still holds prejudices against rape victims, Fah seeks protection from the dangers of speaking out in public by offering her knowledge to some but not to all comers.

Also, the author has not created a literary work which transcends time and place. Piyaporn draws a lot of her material from Rape and Sexual Abuse in Thai Society: a Hotline Study (2000), written by psychiatrists Ornanong Intarajit and Narin Karinchai. She also structures the heroine’s story using what Ken Plummer calls a “major pattern [of telling sexual stories that] has proliferated and developed most rapidly in the latter part of the twentieth century” (p. 49). Plummer argues, “Rape stories…were once hard to tell. They still are. But over the past twenty years a new story has become more and more heard, more and more visible. This takes the initial suffering, breaks the silence around it (usually with the help of other women) and then uses the traumatic experience as a mode of radical change—to become a survivor” (p. 51). As a carefully constructed discourse, the representation of rape in Piyaporn’s novel is historically specific.

The emergence of Piyaporn’s novel should be considered within the social and political context of production and circulation. *Behind a Cloud-Patterned Screen* has



received positive popular acceptance. Piyaporn is admiringly praised for her efforts at breaking the taboo against sexual violence. This taboo-shattering is most evident in her portrayal of a heroine who is raped. Traditionally, no one else, except the male protagonist, could break the virginity of the heroine, so the heroine remains chaste and virginal until she meets and marries the hero. Piyaporn breaks this literary tradition by presenting a heroine who is raped when she was young. However, it must be noted that although Fah is no longer a virgin, she is not yet a “wife” . She leaves Kris, her husband, on the night of their marriage and does not consummate it with him. When we disregard the fact that she is raped, she is eligible for Manta, the hero of the novel. In addition, the author also takes care not to include any details too distasteful for the sensibility of her middle class target audience. According to Kathleen C. Basile (2005), the impact of rape on the victims’ behaviors includes “alcohol and drug abuse, risky sexual behaviors, and smoking” (p. 112); Piyaporn selects for the heroine those psychological effects such as the fear of sex and fainting which her middle class readers find acceptable. Therefore, the reader could still identify and sympathize with the heroine because she is otherwise a perfect embodiment of feminine virtues except that she was raped.

The author focuses on female consciousness as an outcome of women’ s shared gender oppression. All female characters in the novel are aware that as women they are vulnerable to rape and other sexual assaults. However, the positive response to universal female consciousness tends to override the multiplicity of differences among women and the ways in which female consciousness reinforces and conflicts with other forms of consciousness. The problem of universal female consciousness is reflected in the treatment of two sexually abused characters: Jiranan and Dao. Both function in the novel as foils to the heroine. Jiranan is described as an independent, modern and outgoing woman. She contrasts sharply with Fah, a conservative, virtuous heroine. As a result, the reader feels less sympathy for Jiranan than for Fah, even though Jiranan’ s story is appropriated to highlight the courage of the heroine in her breaking of silence. Doa’ s story is important in that it highlights the failure of the legal system to bring justice to women who want to fight back against sexual violence. The pain and suffering she goes through parallels that of the heroine’ s journey of self-discovery. However, it is not Dao, but Fah, the heroine, on whose pain the novel focuses and who needs healing.

For example, Manta compares the fear reported by a rural girl to the fear in Fah’ s case. The fear of the rural girl is of little importance to him because it does not interfere with her everyday life, while the fear expressed by Fah is perceived as more urgent because it threatens to disrupt her married life. Here, the rape is a tragic loss for Fah whose value lies in her sexuality, not for Dao, a factory worker, whose value is measured by her labor.

### Conclusion

In this paper, I examine how sexual abuse has been a silent issue in Thai society. In our culture, it is men who have occupied the privileged position. They are the ones with the authority to define reality. Although in some cases abuse victims are encouraged to tell their stories, the complexity and ambiguity of their narratives are reduced by the literary convention that takes the emerging voice of the rape victims as authentic in opposition to social repression. It is such a framing of the women’ s sexual stories as “repressive hypothesis” that we should reject. According to this hypothesis, one is led to believe that rape stories are the psychological outcome of oppression. The critics valorize the emergent voices of rape victims as expressions of truth. By concentrating on the self as authentic, they overlook social determinations about production and consumption which would allow us to interrogate the persistence of discrimination in relation to other factors such as class, ethnicity and so on.

What *On the Edge of the World* reveals is that it does matter who speaks of rape. Ang’s story of abuse is suppressed when framed by the patriarchal plot of Jon’ s narrative and consequently it remains an untold story. To unearth the voice of the female abuse victim in the novel, it is necessary that the reader pays attention to silences, dreams, and other gaps deemed as insignificant and irrelevant by Jon, the male narrator. Ang’s voice, emerging from the struggle between the rape victims’ desire to tell their story and the authoritative discourses intent on silencing them, is complex and ambivalent. In her confession, Ang not only tells Jon of her traumatic experiences but also withholds from him some parts of them. Her account is a contested site where speech and silence, the real and the fantasy, are intertwined. However, Jon (mis)reads Ang’ s account as an expression of truth, denying any complexity and ambiguity in Ang’ s story as part of her struggle to make sense of rape and identity.

In *Behind a Cloud-Patterned Screen*, Piyaporn explores how the silence about sexual violence is a result of a privilege of the ideal over the actuality in the dominant culture. Instead of looking at sexual abuse as an aberration of the norm, Piyaporn insists that we need to question its place and purpose within that norm. Violence is denied in the story and its denial allows the unequal power relations between men and women to continue. By placing the experience of women before the ideal, we acknowledge the reality of sexual violence and no longer regard it as a taboo but as a serious problem that needs to be solved. The author also explores the coming to consciousness of the female characters who share the experience of sexual abuse. In the novel, changes in consciousness arise from negotiations. It is “not a matter of finding the one, authentic or monolithic self, but rather of recognizing the multiplicity and complexity of one's experiences and the continual evolving of identity” (Rose, p. 171). When taking into account the cultural framework in which stories of sexual abuse are produced, we are able to disclose the prejudices embedded in the author's representations of sexual abuse.

#### Note

<sup>1</sup>The contemporary period in Thai society is characterized by the establishment of women's groups and organizations in response to national and international interests in women's issues. They were successful in calling for the enforcement of new laws to protect basic women's rights. However, as Amara Pongsapich. (1997) points out, the concern about women in Thai society had not been dealt with seriously until international pressure brought these issues concerning women forward.

<sup>2</sup>Anchan is the pen name of Anchalee Vivatanachai. Her collection of short stories entitled *Anyamane Haeng Chewit* (Jewels of Life) was chosen for the 1990 S.E.A. Write Award.

<sup>3</sup>Piyaporn Sakasem is the pen name of Nuntaporn Santikasem. She graduated from Chulalongkorn University and currently works as a teacher. She is one of the most prolific writers of the contemporary period.

<sup>4</sup>As Sumalee Bamrunsook (1995) maintains, “Central Thai women have long been taught to regard their virginity as the most precious possession in their life. ‘Women are good or valuable only when they are virgins’ was the ideal in *Suphasit So' n Ying* [Thai didactic literature for women]. Parents, teachers, writers, and advice columnists have continued to prescribe this concept to young people” (p. 127).

<sup>5</sup>According to Ken Plummer (1997), “[Coming out] can be seen to capture four critical process (which are not a fixed sequence): coming out personally, in which a self-conversation emerges which clarifies who one is; coming out privately, in which the first steps are to tell specific others—family, friends, work peers—in delimited spheres; coming out publicly, in which many others are now told the story, and indeed it

may become public knowledge out of the self's own control; and finally coming out politically, in which the story is sued very widely as a means of social change” (pp. 57-58).

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Suwannee Kalayanasant (1993). *A Content Analysis of Rape News. Unpublished master's thesis*. Chulalongkorn University, Thailand.

## 語りえないことへの呼びかけ：タイ文学に見るレイプの語り チュティマ・ブラガットウティサーン

性的虐待が文学研究で取り上げられるようになったのは最近の現象である。しかし、性的虐待の物語の稀少さはタイ社会で性的虐待がほとんど起きていないことを意味するものではない。性的虐待の語りの最も重要なテーマの一つは、虐待の体験者たちが見せる、自らの物語を語ることへの欲望と、その物語を語り得ないことに対する無念さとの狭間の緊張である。性的虐待の問題は、それを表現する媒体としてだけでなく、虐待の意味性を構築し挑戦する役割を果たすものとしての言語の問題と切り離すことはできないのだ。重要になるのは、語りと事実の間の呼応関係ではなく、ある歴史的状況のもとに物語が生産され消費される、その文化的枠組みの中に虐待の語りを位置付け考えることだろう。文化的現象としての性的虐待の語りの登場は、体験者の声と支配的言説の間に緊張を生み出し、そこにおいて私たちは体験者の役割と支配的文化における治癒力を考察することができる。

この研究では、性的暴力がタイ社会で声を奪われていた理由を、SEA賞の受賞者であるアンチャンの最新小説である *On the Mouth of the World* (2003) におけるレイプの表象を通じて考えたい。この小説は性的問題を正面から取り上げた数少ない文学作品の一つである。前書きの中で作者は執筆意図をタイ社会に置いてタブーとされてきた性的問題に光を当てることだと明言している。この小説は、アンという名の女性の物語が男性のナレーターのジョンによって語られる。ジョンによれば、アンは上流家庭に生まれた若く美しい、性的魅力のある女性である。彼女は反伝統主義者であり、ジョンを含む数え切れないほどの男性と遊びまわり関係を持つことで性差の既成概念を超越している。物語の転換点は彼女が妊娠に気付いた時点である。自分が父親かもしれないと考えたジョンは、彼女を助けようと考え結婚して家族を持とうと彼女に申し出る。しかし、彼女はその申し出を断り、代わりに子供時代に体験し現在のセックスに対する中毒を招くこととなった、義父や祖母付の運転手、自分の教師との性体験を告白する。アンの語りを聞いたジョンは彼女から離れる決意をする。彼は自分の語りを、おそらく変質的な性的欲望によって引き起こされたであろう彼女の悲劇的な死の報告と、ニーという女性との結婚から生まれた女の子をアンと名づけたことで締めくくる。

この小説はタイ社会における性的虐待の典型的な受容と理解を表現した模範的なテキストとして読み解くことができる。アンについての物語であるが、彼女の物語の書き手となり自らの視点から彼女を解釈し評価するのは、男性の語り手であるジョンである。彼の語りにおいてジョンはアンを善良な少女か悪い少女のどちらかとして捉え、彼女のセクシュアリティに対する不安と、それを従属させたいという自らの欲望をその2項対立に反映させる。自らの物語

を語ることを押し通し父権的社会からは容認されていない役割を身に着けることで、アンは困難な状況にある女性を助け出す英雄というジョンのロマン主義的概念を打ち壊し、彼の物語が直線的な語りと整った結末を達成することを妨げる。アンの死は、既存文化の語りに自らの物語をはめ込むことを拒否する女性への父権の暴力を象徴していると言えるだろう。フェミニスト批評がもたらした解釈戦略によって、アンの物語を読み直し、男性的な語りの中に埋め込まれた女性のプロットを再発見することが可能になった。知識生産の状況に注目することによって女性の物語を発掘することができるのだ。奇妙に近しさのある虐待体験の世界から響くアンの声は、変質的な性的嗜好を持つ墮落した少女というよりは、無力で怯えた性暴力の被害者の物語を語る。この小説における真の悲劇は、アンの語りを読み理解することができず、結果として彼女を救うことに失敗するジョンにある。

性にまつわる物語を語ることは簡単ではなく、リスクと期待が共に伴う。明白にレイプの証言であるアンのジョンに対する告白は、彼女が自分自身を誘惑の対象ではなく誘惑者であると主張する、ねじれた結末がある。一般的には物語の虚構性の証明と見なされるこのような矛盾は、被害者が自らの体験に意味性を与えようとする苦悩を表わしているのだ。ここに見られるのは、体験を乗り越え生き残るための被害者の関与と戦略だけではなく、虐待側が無垢を主張し虐待された側が恥と罪悪感を背負うというレイプの神話を被害者自身が内在化するという、複雑な過程である。つまり、学者や専門家が沈黙の打破を抵抗の現われとして称揚するのに対し、アンの告白から浮かび上がることは、レイプの言葉と男女間関係性の支配的構造が女性の抵抗を通じて自らを語り続けているということである。