

## พลังแห่งการปลดปล่อยของอภิ班นเทิงคดีและการเล่าเรื่อง ในนวนิยายเรื่อง จุติ ของ อุทิศ เหมะมูล

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### บทคัดย่อ

บทความวิจัยขึ้นนี้นำเสนอการวิเคราะห์นวนิยายเรื่องจุติ (2558) ของอุทิศ เหมะมูล โดยผู้วิจัยมองว่า นวนิยายเรื่องนี้เป็นงานเขียนประเภทอภิ班นเทิงคดีที่มุ่งแสดงพลังแห่งการปลดปล่อยของวรรณกรรม การมองเห็นนี้มีรากฐานมาจาก การที่ผู้วิจัยได้ทำการศึกษาค้นคว้าแนวคิดและกรอบทฤษฎีสำคัญๆ เกี่ยวกับบทบาททางสังคมและการเมืองของวรรณกรรม บทความนำเสนอว่า นวนิยายเรื่องจุติใช้กลยุทธ์แบบอภิ班นเทิงคดีเพื่อดึงความสนใจของผู้อ่านไปที่ความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างเรื่องแต่ง กับ ‘ความเป็นจริง’ และเพื่อเน้นย้ำถึงความสำคัญของการสร้างรูปแบบการเขียนงานวรรณกรรมที่แตกต่างจากแบบเดิมๆ เพื่อสะท้อนปัญหาหรือวิกฤติการณ์ต่างๆ ของสังคมปัจจุบันได้ดี ยิ่งขึ้น การดึงความสนใจของผู้อ่านไปยังความเป็นเรื่องแต่งของงานวรรณกรรมและบทบาทของผู้เขียนในการโน้มน้าวชักจูงผู้อ่านยังสามารถทำให้เห็นความคล้ายคลึงระหว่างเรื่องแต่งและโลกแห่ง ‘ความเป็นจริง’ ที่อาจมีความเป็นเรื่องแต่งอยู่ นั่นคือในโลกแห่ง ‘ความเป็นจริง’ หรือโลกอกเรื่อง แต่งนั้น บอยครั้งมนูษย์เรกี มีการสื่อหือถ่ายทอดเรื่องราวด้วยภาษาและรูปแบบการ敍敍ผ่านทางเรื่องเล่าในลักษณะที่ไม่ต่างจากการที่นักเขียนสร้างโลกแห่งจินตนาการในนิยาย ที่สำคัญอีกประการหนึ่งก็คือ ผู้แต่งนวนิยายเรื่อง จุติ มีการปรับใช้เทคนิคบริขึ้นของการเล่าเรื่องมนุษปะเพื่อตอกลับอ่านจากน้ำโดยหวังสร้างความสั่นคลอนและซึ้งชวนให้ตั้งคำถามต่อเรื่องเล่าและอุดมการณ์หลักของสังคมไทย ปัจจุบันโดยเฉพาะชุดเรื่องเล่าและอุดมการณ์ที่สนับสนุนโครงสร้างอำนาจแบบไม่เท่าเทียม กรอบแนวคิดในการวิเคราะห์ของบทความนี้ได้มาจากการศึกษาค้นคว้าเกี่ยวกับอภิ班นเทิงคดี เรื่องเล่าตอกลับ และแนวคิดโลกในอุดมคติจากมุ่งมองของ รูฐ เลวิตัส

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## The Liberating Function of Metafictionality and Storytelling in Uthis Haemamool's *Juti*

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### Abstract

Drawing on key theoretical concepts and propositions regarding the social and political role of literature, this paper argues that Thai author Uthis Haemamool's novel *Juti* (2015) can be seen as a metafictional text that advocates the liberating function of literature. The metafictional strategies employed crucially function to foreground the relationship between fiction and 'reality' and to underline the need for different literary modes that can better reflect contemporary concerns and crises. By directing the reader's attention to the fictionality and authorial manipulation of literary narratives, the novel helps shed light on the possible fictionality of the everyday world and the fact that, in the world outside fiction, individuals also mediate their experiences and make use of narratives in a way that resembles the construction of imaginary worlds in fiction. Furthermore, the employment of oral storytelling devices for a counter-hegemonic purpose serves to destabilize and denaturalize dominant ideologies and grand narratives of contemporary Thailand, particularly the ones that sustain the hierarchical power structure. The reading framework is informed by studies in metafiction and counter-narratives as well as Ruth Levitas's conceptualization of utopia.

**Keywords:** metafiction, oral storytelling, counter-narrative, counter-hegemony, Uthis Haemamool

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## Introduction

The transformative role of literature and its benefits in enhancing critical thinking has been widely recognized. In her thought-provoking essay “In Praise of Political Fiction”, Rosie Scott (2008) convincingly argues for the power of political fiction in urging the public to become more alert to the issue of social justice and to empathize with the plight of the marginalized, the dispossessed, and the oppressed. To Scott, political fiction does not have to be about politics in its formal sense, as she regards ‘political’ as the quality to powerfully evoke readers’ empathy for those less fortunate than them or those who suffer from injustice and maltreatment (p. 34). Indeed, the belief that literature can evoke empathy and perform a liberating function has been held by many renowned thinkers and theorists. Antonio Gramsci, a world-renowned figure of the first generation of Western Marxists, advocated the role of literature in helping the subaltern formulate a new hegemony of the subordinate classes. Gramsci was critical of Italian writers whose works lack ‘nation-popular’ vision crucial to subordinate groups’ progress towards and the formation of a progressive hegemony (as cited in Bowelhower, 2002, pp. 197-198). Like other Western Marxists, Gramsci recognized that cultural hegemony promoted by dominant groups posed a crucial problem, but he believed that it is possible to undermine and replace it with the hegemony forged by subordinate groups through a ‘war of position’, which can be won through educational radical politics (as cited in Limon, 1983, p. 37). He also advocated the production of literature that embodies the national-popular vision, the kind of literature that “sinks its root into the *humus* of popular culture as it is, with its taste and tendencies and with its moral and intellectual world” (as cited in Boelhower, 2002, p. 193).

Gramsci's critique of cultural hegemony and his view of literature as crucial to social transformation have been widely recognized in academic circles. In her thesis, "From Subordination to Subversive: Feminist Fiction as an Instrument in Expanding and Changing the Social Meaning of Gender", Anna Paletta (1990) draws on Gramsci's theory of hegemony in her examination of feminist fiction that seeks to undermine the dominance of patriarchy. Paletta sees these feminist texts as challenging male hegemony and paving way towards a world in which women could free themselves from the oppression and restrictions of patriarchal values. These texts, according to Paletta, exhibit at least one of the following three important capacities: unmasking, resistance, and prefiguration (pp. 24-31). Unmasking is the attempt to reveal the disjunction between women's lived experiences and the images, language, and consciousness sanctioned by patriarchy. According to Paletta, in counter-hegemonic feminist fiction, unmasking brings the subordination and cruel realities of women living in a male-dominated society out of the shadow and shows how patriarchal social organizations negatively affect their lives. Unmasking also refers to the attempt to encourage critical consciousness and offer a new perspective towards male dominated patriarchal social organizations that impact on the lives of women. In other words, unmasking helps contextualize women's experiences and raise their awareness of the working of power relations in their society as well as their position or location in the social organizations. Regarding resistance, Paletta defines it as the rejection of and resistance to patriarchy, which often involves collective action and political activism. Prefiguration is defined as the way literary texts depict female characters as autonomous, independent, and active in their fight against oppressive systems and norms, thus offering possibilities for social and gender relations that are based on equality and other progressive values (pp. 31-37, pp. 50-51). In her thesis, Paletta also utilizes

Gramsci's conceptualization of 'good sense' and 'common sense' in her critique of patriarchy. 'Good sense' refers to the ability to make judgement and to have critical thought without relying on a fixed set of worldview or perception of life. 'Good sense' or critical consciousness is more developed than 'common sense', defined as incoherent, fragmented worldview or values widely, though passively, accepted or internalized by members of the subaltern classes (p. 10).

Similar to Gramsci, the Frankfurt school thinkers also recognized the role of literature as crucial to social transformation. According to Jose Limon (1983), these Marxist thinkers were aware of the inadequacies of classical Marxism and attempted to find ways to address the crudities and problems of Stalinist practice. The Frankfurt school focused their attention on culture as a lived experience of capitalism that works against the interests of the working class and they were pessimistic about the prospect of dismantling the hegemony of capitalist culture (pp. 35-37). Nonetheless, these theorists perceived the domain of art, seen as located in the margins of society and inimical to capitalist mass culture, as having the potential to help with the demystification of the hegemony of capitalist culture. They emphasized research, theory building, and critical analysis but viewed participation in the spheres of politics and labor with little optimism. As Limon observes, the Frankfurt school's approach is reminiscent of Matthew Arnold and Victorian intellectuals who valued the potentially emancipatory function of art and literary culture (p. 37). According to Herbert Marcuse, one of the most well-known Frankfurt theorists, art is intrinsically liberating because it has the power to "break the monopoly of established reality (i.e., of those who established it) to *define* what is *real*. In this rupture, which is the achievement of the aesthetic form, the fictitious world of art appears as true reality" (qtd. in Limon, 1983, p. 38). Marcuse also regards art as "committed to an emancipation of sensibility, imagination, and

reason in all spheres of subjectivity and objectivity.” Art, therefore, could serve as a “vehicle of recognition and indictment” (qtd. in Limon, 1983, p. 38). In sum, the Frankfurt school thinkers considered art and literary culture as capable of critically challenging capitalist mass culture.

Another well-known theorist who advocates the transformative role of literature is Northrop Frye. In his *The Educated Imagination* (1964), Frye posits that literature is vital in making possible the educated imagination that enables people to view reality with a perspective and dimension unavailable from any other resource (p. 55). According to Frye, the educated imagination also encourages us to “produce the vision of the society in which we want to live out of the society we live in”, and this kind of vision is pivotal as it gives us hope that a better world is not beyond reach (p. 76). Frye also perceives the role of literary critics as pivotal in making the constructive function of literary texts work to its full potential. To him, well-informed literary critics are crucial in enhancing the readers’ understanding of literary texts and their capacity in educating the imagination (pp. 56-57).

### **Objectives, Author Background, and Literature Review**

Drawing on the aforementioned theoretical concepts and propositions regarding the social and political role of literature, this paper argues that Thai author Uthis Haemamool’s novel *Juti* (2015) can be seen as a metafictional text that advocates the liberating function of literature. Embedded in the novel is a fictional world in which a character’s critical consciousness and resistance are enhanced through her engagement with metafictional discourse and oral narrative. The metafictional strategies employed crucially function to foreground the relationship between fiction and ‘reality’ and to draw attention to the possible constructedness of the latter. Furthermore, the employment of

oral storytelling devices for a counter-hegemonic purpose also serves to destabilize and denaturalize dominant ideologies and grand narratives of contemporary Thailand, particularly the ones that sustain the hierarchical power structure<sup>3</sup>

Before examining this novel in detail, some brief background about this author and his fictional works needs to be provided. Uthis Haemamool (1975-) is a well-recognized Thai author whose novel *Lap Lae Kaeng Khoi* [*The Brotherhood of Kaeng Khoi*] won the 2009 S. E. A. Write Award. In 2018, Haemamool was also honored with the Silapathorn Award in recognition of his notable contribution to contemporary Thai literature. In addition to *Lap Lae Kaeng Khoi*, his other novels include *Rabam Metoon* [*Gemini's Dance*] (2004), *Krajok Ngao/Ngao Krajok* [*Mirror/Mirror*] (2006), *Lak Alai* [*The Mourning of a Scribe*] (2012),, *Juti* [*Rebirth*] (2015), and *Rang Khong Prathana* [*Silhouette of Desire*] (2017). Haemamool's narrative techniques embody creativity and sophistication and his works often offer insightful critiques of contemporary Thai society and mainstream Thai culture. He is undeniably one of the most interesting young Thai authors whose writings deserve serious attention from literary scholars. Nevertheless, Haemamool's works have yet to attract vigorous academic debates; scholarly attention to his works virtually concentrates on his S. E. A. Write Award-winning novel *The Brotherhood of Kaeng Khoi*. To give

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<sup>3</sup> For more detailed discussion of dominant ideologies and master narratives of contemporary Thailand and the role of Thai fiction in challenging them, see Pissa-ard (2013). In that research report, I contend that political writings produced by various authors from Thailand and other countries in the Mekong region function as counter-narratives that seek to undermine dominant hegemonies. Uthis Haemamool's *Juti* can also be seen as performing a similar role to those works, but what makes this novel exemplar is its sophisticated attempt to employ both the literary mode and content as a means to question existing hegemonies.

example, in “*Lap Lae, Kaeng Khoi: Amnart khong rueng lao kap karn thamlai sang tua ton*” [“The Power of Narratives in the Destruction and Reconstruction of Identities”] (2009), Soranat Tailanga examines the relations between narrative forms, voices and identity construction in *Lap Lae Kaeng Khoi*. Focusing on the contestations of selfhood narratives and the way they are influenced by master narratives, Tailanga claims that the narrative strategies employed in this novel mirror the identity destruction and reconstruction of the protagonist who struggles to free himself from the restrictions and domination of patriarchy and heterosexual norms.

Another academic discussion of Haemamool’s fiction is Isaraporn Pissaard’s article, “Uthis Haemamool’s *The Brotherhood of Kaeng Khoi*: A Gramscian Reading” (2016). Drawing on Antonio Gramsci’s theory of hegemony, that article examines the novel’s portrayal of the maturation of the protagonist- narrator whose role resembles that of an ‘organic intellectual’ who renders subaltern experiences and lived conditions into a coherent and poignant narrative. The article also contends that *Lap Lae Kaeng Khoi* can be categorized as a work of national popular literature—a type of literature that sympathetically depicts contemporary realities of Thailand’s subaltern classes without sentimentalizing or idealizing them.

Haemamool’s work that appears most comparable to *Lap Lae Kaeng Khoi* is *Juti* (2015), a metafictional novel that tackles a number of crucial political and social issues of contemporary Thailand and attempts to suggest a way forward for a society riven by conflicts. Shortlisted for the 2015 S. E. A. Write Award, the novel was warmly received and reviewed. Sarinee Achavanuntakul, well-known author and translator, regards it as a page-turner that showcases its author’s superb writing skill. According to her review (2015), the employment of several unreliable narrators who belong to different eras effectively compels

the reader to reread their narratives so as to put them into perspective. Interestingly, contemplating the narrators' tones, narrative styles, and what they choose not to tell also reveals numerous competing messages.

Tomorn Sukpreecha, author, editor, and columnist, offers another positive review of *Juti*, which, in his opinion, is extraordinary in its grand and complex narrative structure that cannot be fully comprehended on the first reading. Sukpreecha (2015) observes that the novel revolves around the lives of ordinary people and their conflicts which, at first glance, appear mundane but are actually the reflection of deep rooted issues. According to Sukpreecha, the author ingeniously utilizes literary techniques in order to empower and privilege ordinary people's narratives, making it possible for those narratives to profoundly affect the readers.

As commended in the aforementioned reviews, *Juti* is a notable novel that deserves academic engagement. This paper therefore seeks to draw attention to and critically examine the novel, particularly its employment of metafictional strategies for a liberating function, and its attempt to integrate oral storytelling devices with the novelistic tradition.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Of note is that even though Haemamool's interest in metafictional techniques and the power of storytelling could also be discerned in his earlier novels namely, *Lap Lae Kaeng Khoi* and *Lak Alai*, it is in *Juti* that his mastery of metafictionality and other storytelling devices is most impressive.

## The Liberating Function of Metafiction and the Multiplicity of Reality

According to Patricia Waugh (1984), metafiction, a post-modernist mode of writing, can be defined as “fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality” (p. 2). She contends that metafictional writers seek to address the problem of how human beings “reflect, construct, and mediate their experience of the world” through the exploration of the fundamental structures of narrative fiction (p. 3). Metafictional writings also reflect postmodern authors’ keen awareness that language plays a crucial role in creating and maintaining our perception of everyday ‘reality’. As she puts it:

If, as individuals, we now occupy ‘roles’ rather than ‘selves’, then the study of characters in novels may provide a useful model for understanding the construction of subjectivity in the world outside novels. If our knowledge of this world is now seen to be mediated through language, then literary fiction (worlds constructed entirely of language) becomes a useful model for learning about the construction of ‘reality’ itself. (p. 3)

Waugh observes that metafiction partly originated out of increased social and cultural self-consciousness and the attitude that realism and other well-worn literary modes could no longer capture contemporary concerns and issues (p. 3, pp. 63-68). Metafictionists can therefore be seen as seeking to reinvigorate the novel (pp. 9-10, pp. 63-86) and they are guided by the belief that by directing the reader’s attention to the fictionality of literary narrative, the possible constructedness of the everyday world can be uncovered and examined (p. 2).

Significantly, metafictional writers also attempt to draw attention to the fact that life is constructed through frames, similar to the way novels are constructed (Waugh, 1984, p. 29). A frame can be defined as “a basic structure that underlies or supports a system, concept, or text” (Frame, n.d.). Werner Wolf (2006) offers another definition of frames as “basic orientational aids that help us to navigate through our experiential universe, inform our cognitive activities and generally function as preconditions of interpretation” (p. 5). Metafictional writers believe that what people recognize as real world and the world of fiction are mediated through frames. Through the examination, investigation, and subversion of the conventional frames of literary fiction that brings about frame-breaks, those writers hope to raise the awareness that frames play a crucial role in our perception and understanding of the world, and, as systems for measuring and understanding the world, frames have the power to determine the way we see things and imprison us (Babaei & Taadolkhah, 2013, p. 10).

Commenting on American author Kurt Vonnegut’s metafictional strategies, Abdolrazagh Babaei and Amin Taadolkhah (2013) note that they include, among others, the use of frame narrative, authorial intrusion, parody, and the inclusion of comments on writing (p. 12). Significantly, these metafictional devices are discernable in Uthis Haemamool’s *Juti* and I argue that they perform the crucial function of foregrounding the problematic relationship between fiction and reality and affirming the liberating power of fiction.

For a start, let us examine *Juti*’s frame narrative that embeds story within story in order to foreground a fictional universe in which an individual’s critical awareness can be enhanced through engagement with the metafictional discourse that potentially promotes emancipation. Significantly, the use of frame narrative also serves to highlight the multidimensional aspect of reality.

To illustrate, in *Juti*, the frame story, or the story that appears to hold other embedded stories together, is featured in the last episode of the novel that focalizes the consciousness and worldview of Maya, a young woman who decided to make a trip to her hometown after breaking up with her lover. The trip brings up memories about the folkloric tales recounted to her by her great grandmother and triggers her curiosity about past conflicts and agonies of her family. She later discovers two novellas written by one of her older relatives, a novelist named Prateep, who fictionalized his own life and the lives of his family members in his writings. Maya's deciphering of the thematic concerns as well as the narrative and intertextual strategies of Prateep's novellas can be seen as part of the metafictional technique of incorporating literary criticism or comments on writing with the practice of writing fiction (Haemamool, 2015, pp. 466-472). More importantly, the reading experience is a liberating act for her as it sharpens her ability to critically appraise, and eventually, to resist the impacts of grand narratives (Haemamool, 2015, p. 478). The act of reading also brings about Maya's greater understanding of her existence and identity (Haemamool, 2015, pp. 473-478). Arguably, Maya can be seen as an ideal reader and this concept will be examined later in this paper.

The last episode of the novel not only contains a frame story but also embeds a few framed stories, most of them are accounts of family history related to Maya by her father and an elder relative. The first four episodes of the novel can also be seen as framed stories, each employing a different focalizer, but all of them revolve around the lives and experiences of the members of Maya's extended family. The first episode makes use of oral storytelling strategies and focalizes the folkloric tales recounted by Maya's great-grandmother to her young audience, Maya's younger self being one of them. The second and fourth episodes are (as revealed later) the two novellas

that the older Maya discovers and reads, and the same set of characters, most of them Maya's older relatives, appear in both novellas. The third episode is possibly another novella written by Prateep, although it is not discovered nor read by Maya and the reader is not explicitly informed that Prateep is its author. In this episode, the protagonist-narrator is Prateep's mother and the events she recounts overlap with the ones taken up in the both the second and fourth episodes. Her perceptions of those events also tend to contradict with those voiced by the focalizers of episode 2 and 4. The use of frame narrative with multiple framed stories and focalizers thus creates a multidimensional display of events and thoughts and crucially helps foreground the multiplicity of reality.

### **Metafictional Devices and the Relation between Fiction and Reality**

In this section, I will examine the key metafictional devices employed in the framed stories that constitute the second, third, and fourth episodes of the novel, as well as the framed stories in the last episode of the novel. These devices include the laying bare of authorial manipulation and the fictionality of a literary narrative, the use of parodic undermining, and the integration of storytelling with comments about writing. Arguably, these metafictional techniques are employed for the key purpose of drawing attention to the relation between fiction and reality, particularly in order to raise awareness about the working of literary conventions and the construction of literary narrative. Such an awareness could potentially lead to greater understanding of how 'realities' are constructed in the everyday commonsense world. The other possible effect of such an awareness is the ability to question and denaturalize dominant discourses and practices of the everyday world of contemporary Thailand.

I will firstly start with the metafictional technique of laying bare authorial manipulation and the fictionality of a literary narrative in the second episode of the novel, which is entitled “Dr. Siam’s Adventure in the World of Conspiracy”. Told in first person narration, the protagonist-narrator is Dr. Siam, a 57-year-old man who claims that he wants to devote his life and work for ‘the people’ and to challenge the hierarchical bureaucracy and capitalist system that take advantage of and oppress the masses. While exploiting the first person narration convention, authorial intrusion and the use of lengthy footnotes undermining the credibility of the protagonist-narrator subvert the narration. Prateep the fictional author makes himself visible via the first footnote, telling the reader in his own voice that what s/he is reading and about to read is actually a novella he has written and that Siam is merely a character in it. The fictionality of the main narrative that features Siam as the protagonist-narrator is thus disclosed. The negative attitude of Prateep towards his protagonist- narrator, Siam, is also made clear through this footnote. In Prateep’s eyes, Siam, whose characterization is based on the lover of Prateep’s mother, is boastful and untrustworthy. Prateep’s dislike of Siam is also conveyed through the way he manipulates his protagonist-narrator’s narrating voice, making it appear ridiculous and stupid. Siam’s first person account is told in laughable Thai, and he repeatedly attempts to show off his [flawed] English. Here we can see the intentional exposure of authorial attitude that colors and influences the way the fictional author represents Siam in his fiction.

Siam’s first person narration is also undermined by other footnotes, which are narrated in the voices of people who supposedly know him. As suggested by the title of the episode, “Dr. Siam’s Adventure in the World of Conspiracy”, those people conspire to negatively judge and impose undesirable identities on him. Thus, the embedding of other people’ negative views of Siam as

footnotes seeks to further discredit him. Whilst the footnotes can be seen as representing the way narratives are discursively employed to establish certain hegemonic views that seek to marginalize and smear those perceived as the enemy or the Other, the laying bare of authorial manipulation of narrative conventions and strategies creates the awareness in the reader that the identities imposed on Siam are colored by bias and prejudice.

As the episode draws to its end, those who dislike Siam are shown as almost successful in defeating him and branding him as a villain. Siam is accused of having dangerous political views. He is hunted by a crazy mob who believes he is a traitor and a danger to national security with close association to a corrupt and self-serving political party.<sup>5</sup> At the end of the episode, however, Siam escapes from the mob, turns his back on the system that seeks to destroy him, and refuses to ask for forgiveness for the crime he has not committed (Haemamool, 2015, pp. 204-211, pp. 219-220). In doing so he succeeds in breaking free from the judgement, identities and ‘the reality’ imposed on him by the dominant discourses circulated in the world he inhabits. Siam’s resistance against the ruling discourses foregrounds one of the novel’s important themes that is developed more fully in the final episode.

Significantly, in showing how ‘reality’ in the alternative world of fiction can be constructed and manipulated, the novel draws attention to the possible constructedness of the everyday ‘reality’ of politically divided contemporary Thailand and the role of the ultra-nationalist discourse in scapegoating or demonizing the Other. In other words, the reader is alerted to the parallel between the fictional world and the everyday world, as in both worlds the

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<sup>5</sup> For Thai readers, it is quite clear that the political party alluded to here is the Thai Rak Thai Party founded by former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra.

employment and manipulation of narratives plays a vital role in constructing ‘reality’ and establishing certain hegemonic views.

Of note is that this episode can also be seen as a parody of Literature for Life, a type of realism that was particularly influential in Thailand during the 1970s but has become a rather outdated mode of literary expression. Some prime characteristics of Literature for Life include its attempt to promote social justice and its foregrounding of the role of self-sacrificing young protagonists whose main goal in life is to fight for the deprived masses. Social justice, the recurring thematic concern of the Literature for Life genre, is parodied through the portrayal of Siam as a self-proclaimed socially committed hero who is made to appear naïve and laughable. Arguably, the parodic undermining of the genre suggests the fact that the realities and concerns of contemporary Thailand cannot be adequately conveyed through this predominantly didactic and moralistic literary mode. As Waugh (1984) argues, parody can also be seen as an attempt to reinvigorate or give life to literary works and to find a new mode of expression for contemporary everyday realities that can no longer be captured by exhausted literary traditions (pp. 67-68).

In the third episode of the novel entitled “*Dao’s Predestined Fate*” parody is also employed to subvert the conventions of stagnant romance fiction and its TV adaptations. Furthermore, the use of parody in this episode crucially functions to underline the insidious impact of the patriarchal ideology inherent in seemingly harmless and escapist Thai romance novels and their televised versions. Told in first person narration, *Dao*, the protagonist- narrator of this episode appears at first glance as a passive and submissive woman who embodies idealized feminine qualities dictated by patriarchy. Indeed, the fact that her name is ‘*Dao*’, a highly feminine name, evokes in the mind of many Thais an image of a beautiful heroine in Thai romance novels of a bygone era.

However, as the episode is a parody, her ‘feminine’ characteristics are exaggerated to create comical and satirical effects.

Following the conventional plotline of a romance story, the episode revolves around the hopes, desires, and disappointments of Dao, the protagonist-narrator, but only to highlight the fact that those hopes and desires are ludicrously distorted by the patriarchal values she has internalized through her exposure to romance stories. Born in a rural village in the Northeast, Dao was virtually confined to home village until her marriage. We are told (through the narrating voice that is supposedly hers) that her parents did not let her go to school as they believed that formal education was useless for girls and they were afraid that allowing her to see the outside world at an early age would make it harder for them to discipline her. Thus, she was kept at home and had to help her parents with household chores. Because Dao cannot read or write, she initially relied on her father’s moralistic teachings and the male-dominated values imparted through radio dramas as something that helped her make sense of life. Later on, after her marriage to a controlling and abusive man, she is ordered by her husband to learn about the language and manners of Central Thai people from TV dramas. She then becomes hooked on them and sees them as an indispensable source of knowledge.

In trying to convey how much Dao is influenced by romance stories, her narrating voice is made to mirror the stilted language use of their heroines, creating a comical effect that undermines her reliability and credibility. In other words, throughout the episode, the use of dramatic irony is evident and the reader is supposed to join in with the implied author’s attempt to mock his protagonist-narrator’s ideological view point. Furthermore, the use of internal focalization is effective in depicting Dao as totally subjugated to the patriarchal ideology embodied in TV dramas. The reader is allowed to enter her mind and

see how she views her relationship with her domineering and controlling husband. She rationalizes his oppression and the restrictive rules as well as physical abuse he subjects her to by claiming that they are something natural and to be expected (Haemamool, 2015, pp. 265-266). In justifying the way her husband treats her, she identifies herself with heroines in TV dramas who endure mental and physical abuse from the heroes without complaining (Haemamool, 2015, p. 249). The use of dramatic irony, however, puts the reader in a superior position to that of the protagonist-narrator and enables them to see her perception of male-female relationship as distorted due to her internalization of patriarchal values. To put it another way, the episode succeeds in exposing framing and its impact on one's organization and interpretation of everyday 'reality'. As discussed earlier, Dao's perception of 'reality' is a result of her entrapment in a frame derived from patriarchy, and this frame functions as a system that she relies on to interpret and make sense of the world. This corresponds with the metafictionists' belief that everyday 'reality' is mediated and constructed through frames, which can warp or distort.

In the fourth and fifth episodes of the novel the attempt to show that metafictional devices can function to educate the readers about the nature of everyday 'reality' is reiterated. The fourth episode employs a metafictional strategy that simultaneously engages the readers in the storytelling and the commentary about the relationship between fiction and life, and together they constitute the main narrative that focalizes the point of view of Prateep, the fictional author of Episode 2 and the eldest son of Dao. The episode revolves around Prateep's attempt to write a fictional work out of his 'real life' experience, especially his sense of estrangement from his family and his struggle to deal with his mother and brothers' problems. The internal focalization reveals how Prateep is tormented by his relationship with his family

and is torn between anger against them and guilt. He tries in vain to help his youngest brother Maitree when the latter is charged with the attempted murder of a neighbor after a land conflict. He also feels hopeless about his younger brother who became a burden to his mother after he went bankrupt and was divorced from his wife. His frustration about his family is intertwined with his interest in fiction writing. He seeks to capture his family's dilemma and figure out the best way forward through the conventions of fiction, yet he admits that life is too elusive; it continues the way it wants without bothering whether it has already been expressed through fiction or not (Haemamool, 2015, p. 342). Life and fiction, according to him, seem to belong to different orders of the universe with their own sets of rules or conventions. Yet in reading this episode, the readers can also see that life and fiction have a close relationship. For one thing, Prateep himself claims in one of the footnotes of Episode 2 that he prefers to write about the people and the kind of life he knows and empathizes with best, implying that in his view the best fiction should stem from empathy or a direct experience with a particular kind of life (Haemamool, 2015, p. 132).

In its twofold attempt to educate the readers about the problematic relationship between fiction and life and to construct a fictional world that engages the reader, this episode can be seen as a metafictional text that self-consciously admits that it cannot capture life but it is able to evoke in the mind of the readers the imaginative reality that belongs to the world of fiction. This corresponds with Waugh's contention that fiction is quasi-referential and what it does is not capturing the 'reality' of the world outside it, but representing the discourses of that world (Waugh, 1984, pp. 3-4).

In the fifth episode, which is the last episode of the novel *Juti*, the role of a literary narrative as a means to help shed light on the way 'reality' in the world outside it is constructed is reinforced through the suggestion that in

the everyday world there are circumstances in which people are more or less engaged in employing narratives to express their own versions of ‘reality’. To put it another way, individuals could be acting in a way not dissimilar from a literary author whose fiction serves to create an imaginative reality in the minds of the readers. This is confirmed by Maya’s awareness that different versions of a traumatizing land conflict her family was engaged in are created by her father, Maitree, and her grandfather’s brother, Thai, and the fictionality of those accounts is possibly no less than the one depicted in Prateep’s novella. The juxtaposition of Prateep’s fictional account of the land conflict with other people’s accounts of the same conflict in Maya’s real world thus foregrounds the possible fictionality of real life narratives and the multidimensional aspects of ‘reality’. Furthermore, the inclusion of a framed story that dramatizes the conflicts between the red-shirted and yellow-shirted protestors and their attempts to construct differing and competing narratives to substantiate their political claims also encourages greater awareness in the readers about the possible constructedness of the discourses of contemporary Thailand’s everyday world where it is not always easy to differentiate fiction from reality (Haemamool, 2015, pp. 454-457).

### **The Ideal Reader**

In her attempt to define her identity and to explore her roots, Maya realizes the power of existing narratives and their role in defining individuals’ identities (Haemamool, 2015, pp. 474-477). Later on, her exposure to the metafictional discourse in Prateep’s novellas also enables her to recognize the importance of breaking free from those existing narratives (Haemamool, 2015, p. 478). Maya’s role can also be equated to that of a model reader whose critical thinking the reader is encouraged to empathize with. By creating one of

the most important characters as a role model, who, through her reading experience becomes more aware of the manipulating power of narratives, the pivotal role of the reader in perceiving counter-hegemonic possibilities is underlined.

Maya can also be seen as the ideal reader as she not only understands the key messages the (fictional) author intends to convey, but also interacts with and responds to them in a way that seems to correspond with what is implicitly indicated by the literary texts she has read. As posited by Ross Chambers, the text and the reader interact in a way that resembles the act of seduction and narrative techniques are employed by the author for the purpose of seducing the reader. According to Chambers, the text becomes readable and meaningful only when the reader is receptive to the text's seduction and utilizes the narrative strategies embodied in the text for her/his own desires as well as respond to them appropriately as implicitly indicated by the text **or the** implied author (as cited in Herman and Vervaeck, 2001, p. 123). Maya's reading experience can be seen as reflecting the successful transaction between seduction and desire. To explain, out of the desire to know more about the painful conflict between her family members, she tries to find Prateep's novels and her act of reading his novels can be seen as something done to fulfill her desire for greater knowledge related to her identity. Her appropriate response to the narrative strategies employed in Prateep's novels is exhibited through her increased critical consciousness or 'good sense' that enables her to resist the oppressive influence of narratives constructed by the older generations and assert her independence. She recognizes the importance of new kinds of narratives that truly reflect the identities and experiences of her generation. As she puts it,

Can you set me free me from those narratives that predate me? I'm merely a newcomer. Those narratives are so ancient and I'm not familiar with those things of the past.... Family feuds and clashes of the past also appear too archaic, too insane, and too barbaric to me. They slumber in the past where they belong. If you are curious, if the past is curious to know something about us, we also have our own narratives that are firmly located in our time to share. Our narratives are no better or worse than yours, but we have *hope and faith*... The heritage from the past still exists in our era. I haven't forgotten the past but I belong to the present. You have to set me free so that I can be reborn in my own narratives.<sup>6</sup> (Haemamool, 2015, p. 478)

Interestingly, the successful transaction between seduction and desire as dramatized through Maya's reading experience can be seen as serving as a role-model for the reader's reading experience, yet the reader is also invited to bring in meanings and interpretations that may not be fully articulated by Maya.

### Oral Storytelling and Counter-hegemony

In the previous section, I examined how the novel *Juti* employs metafictional devices and the figure of the model reader to demonstrate the potentially liberating and emancipatory power of fiction. This section will investigate the other outstanding aspect of the novel—the integration of oral storytelling with the novelistic tradition for a counter-hegemonic purpose, particularly to subvert and unmask dominant master narratives and to advocate utopianism. This recognition of the power of oral storytelling corresponds with

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<sup>6</sup> The translation is mine.

Areti Dragas's contention that the rise of the novel in the modern era does not lead to the death of the oral storytelling tradition, or as Dragas puts it, we have witnessed "the return of the storyteller in contemporary fiction" (Dragas, 2007, pp. 3-4). Furthermore, commenting on the counter-hegemonic potential of storytelling, Molly Andrews (2004) observes that storytelling could be deployed as a political act that seeks to formulate a counter-story that subverts master narratives. According to Andrews, a storyteller could be seen as attempting to establish her/his identity not as a lone individual, but as a member of a group whose values or beliefs do not quite fit mainstream cultural scripts. A storyteller may also make use of parts of dominant cultural scripts and at the same time seek to subvert them through one way or another. In other words, a storyteller, whether consciously or not, may actively participate in cultural practice in the attempt to make sense of her/his narrated experience by including, excluding, and subverting parts of the master narratives and dominant values. Thus, a counter-narrative formulated this way may not be fully oppositional to master narratives and may utilize some aspects of dominant cultural scripts for a subversive purpose (pp. 1-2).

Oral storytelling traditions often rely heavily on folklore. In an interesting article entitled "Western Marxism and Folklore: A Critical Introduction", Jose Limon (1983) claims that the Frankfurt theorists' enthusiasm about the liberating phenomenon of art could be viewed as elitist as it is accessible to merely the privileged few with economic and educational resources. Limon then contends that folklore could offer a way out for the Frankfurt school thinkers as folklore is by no means limited to the privileged few, but is shared collectively by members of a society (pp. 38-39). For Limon, folklore belongs to the masses and its counter-hegemonic elements could be utilized for constructive political ends. In a similar light, in "Gramsci, Good Sense, and

Critical Folklore Studies”, Stephen Olbrys Gencarella (2010) advocates critical folklore studies in which the emphases should be on criticizing some commonsensical elements of folklore and utilizing its ‘good sense’ elements. He remarks that the discipline of critical folklore studies is capable of both illuminating the role of folklore in constituting hegemony, and demonstrating the potential of folklore in helping the marginalized or the oppressed articulate their demands and desires. He also examines Gramsci’s view of folklore and argues that Gramsci did not have a totally negative view of folklore as he could see that folklore contains ‘good sense’ that could potentially perform a counter-hegemonic function (pp. 225-248). In “Constituting Folklore: A Case for Critical Folklore Studies”, Gencarella (2009) argues that folklore and rhetorical studies mutually benefit each other, as folklore can be considered a rhetorical practice, and similar to critical rhetoric, critical folklore studies should pursue three avenues for critique. According to him,

[t]he first is a critique of domination as it maintains and oppresses a vernacular or subaltern. The second is a critique of the dominant through critical address, perhaps even affirmation, of alternative practices of the vernacular or subaltern. The third is a critique of the vernacular or subaltern practices as they might contribute to, imitate, or even initiate structures of domination. (p. 185)

In the novel *Juti*, the employment of oral storytelling and folklore for a counter-hegemonic purpose is most evident in the first episode that foregrounds the role of Maya’s great-grandmother who can be seen as an archetypal storyteller, which according to Dragas (2007), is someone who belongs to the oral tradition and recounts her stories to a living audience to make sure that past memories are not forgotten. The stories she relates are both her own

stories and other people's stories, and her role is reminiscent of that of a historian and chronicler (p. 56). The episode opens with the long welcome speech of the grandmother upon seeing a group of young children, who soon become the audience of her tales. She then recounts to her young audience (including a younger Maya) what she claims to have encountered through her 'immortal' life (Haemamool, 2015, pp. 15-17). The tales she relates could be categorized as folklore as they bring to mind superstitious and animistic beliefs and age-old wisdom. The grandmother, who is the storyteller, can be seen as a member of subaltern classes. From the stories she recounts, she was once the soul of Earth, and had resided in animal form such as naga, tiger, and deer. All of these beings were hurt, endangered or destroyed by humans. She later becomes a woman who had to protect herself from men who wanted to exploit her sexually. One of her tales is about her life as a young woman and her relationship with a Lao military man who devoted himself to his ruler's cause to fight for his kingdom's independence. The two of them fell in love after she had saved his life. However, after she fell pregnant with his child, he went away to fight in another war, and never returned (Haemamool, 2015, pp. 80-93). At first glance, this tale appears as a combination of a love story and a superstitious tale. However, the grandmother's description of losing her husband and giving birth to a stillborn baby is heart-rending and it can be seen as seen as reflecting women's experience of suffering and how wars traumatically affect ordinary people.

Paralleling Andrew's observation about the storyteller's selective utilizing of a master narrative or mainstream cultural script for a subversive purpose, crucial to the grandmother's storytelling is the Buddhist master narrative whose script her storytelling draws upon immensely. The grandmother starts her story by talking about the beginning of life on Earth and the arrival of the Lord

Buddha into the ancient world she inhabits. Throughout her narration, the Lord Buddha is depicted as a sacred figure, and the grandmother longs for a chance to get close to him in order to listen to his teachings. Several of the tales she relates to her grandchildren also focus significantly on the Buddha's miracles, power and mercy. It is therefore noticeable that grandma's narration utilizes the Buddhist master narrative, which figures prominently in Thai imagination. Such a strategy could be seen as a way to make a counter-narrative appear familiar to the Thai audience as it relies on things they already know well and have been familiar with all their life. In other words, it reorients the audience to the contents of grandmother's story by first presenting to them a familiar script with its familiar contents and religious ideology before transforming it in a way that makes the audience consider this seemingly familiar script in a new light. As Molly Andrews (2004) argues, those who create counter-narratives often do not reject master narratives outright, but seek to insert some change into them while maintaining some aspects of them (pp. 1-2).

While exploiting some aspects of the Buddhist master narratives, the subversive aspect of the grandmother's tales is evident from the way they portray the relationship between Buddhism and the ruling class. Importantly, the tales can be seen as embodying a critique of domination, as they dramatize how the ruling class utilizes religion as a tool to legitimize its political dominance. For example, the grandmother relates to her audience a story supposedly recounted to her by an ancient sage about how rulers in the old days sought political legitimacy through the manipulation of Buddhist images and symbols. Many powerful rulers claimed that in their previous lives they were the goat of the Buddhist legend who was destined to be born again as a great ruler entitled with the divine right to rule (Haemamool, 2015, pp. 40-43). The grandmother also recounts an account of how one of the Buddha's footprints was concealed so

that it would not overshadow another one discovered by a king (Haemamool, 2015, pp. 57- 58). This can be seen as the unmasking of the manipulation of Buddhism for the creation of an ideology that helps maintain hierarchical power relations. These tales therefore, encourage ‘good sense’, or the ability to critically analyze things without being dominated by commonsensical views and dominant myths.

Through the tales she recounts, the grandmother is characterized as a retrospective storyteller whose view is panoramic and whose life span is across centuries. This also allows the readers to see, through the eyes of grandma the storyteller, the change, distortion and manipulation of values, norms, and beliefs through times, and thus reveals their constructed and political nature. This also creates the juxtaposition of the pre-modern view, as held by grandma, with the views of people nowadays, resulting in the potential disrupting, unmasking, and subverting of ‘common sense’ values and world-views that exist in contemporary Thailand.

Significantly, through the tales she relates, the grandmother figures as a proto-feminist with rebellious and independent characteristics. Her strength, fearlessness, and determination prefigure important characteristics of modern feminists who are not reluctant to challenge patriarchy and fight for their freedom and rights. The grandmother’s rebellious spirit can be most clearly seen through the tale in which she claims that she successfully freed herself and saved her twin babies from the murderous hands of an evil practitioner of black magic who had seduced her and imprisoned her as his mistress (Haemamool, 2015, pp. 100-102). Such characterization marks her as different from a stereotypical female figure whose life is restricted and confined by patriarchy. The grandmother also travels widely and fears nothing, thus she is by no means confined to the domestic sphere. She also criticizes the parochial

worldview and perceives travelling as a means to acquire knowledge (Haemamool, 2015, p. 110, p. 116). The character of the grandmother can be seen as embodying prefiguration, defined by Paletta (1990) as the way literary texts depict female characters as autonomous, independent, and active in their fight against oppressive forces (pp. 34-36).

Furthermore, among the folkloric stories told by the grandmother are stories that implicitly critique male hegemony that causes female subjugation. In these stories, the grandmother's feminist outlook is visible through her empathy with other female figures. Through the grandmother's perspective, the natural environment and Earth are sometimes personified as females who are exploited by men, and this can be seen when the grandmother tells a story about a big and beautiful tree that was cut down intending to be used as one of the royal capital pillars. When the tree trunk was later abandoned as a useless object and left to sink into a river, the female spirit that inhabited the tree was in great suffering (Haemamool, 2015, pp. 75-77). The grandmother empathizes with this female tree spirit as she once was also a female soul residing in a tree (Haemamool, 2015, p. 76, p. 78).

What is also interesting about the grandmother's tales is that they articulate a desire for a better way of living and for a better society. In examining this desire, Ruth Levitas's conceptualization of utopia proves highly useful. According to Levitas (2013), "utopia is the expression of the desire for a better way of being or of living, and as such is braided through human culture" (p. xii) and to her, this definition of utopia "generates a method which is primarily hermeneutic but which repeatedly returns us from existential and aesthetic concerns to the social and structural domain" (p. xiii). She notes that the essential element of utopia is "the desire for being otherwise, individually and collectively, subjectively and objectively" and that utopia should not be

perceived as a goal but as a method capable of enhancing holistic thinking “about possible futures, combined with reflexivity, provisionality, and democratic engagement with the principles and practices of those futures” (p. xi). She emphasizes that utopianism not only capable of mounting critiques of the existing world, but also “envisioning alternatives” (xviii). In sum, her primary goal is to posit that utopianism could lead to the transformation and reconstruction of society, making possible the emergence of a better society.

The desire for a better way of living and for a better society is articulated through the non-anthropocentric outlook of the grandmother’s tales, and her rhetorical skill and folklore play an important role in making this outlook tangible. This advocating of non-anthropocentric outlook is visible through the grandmother’s relationship with nature. She starts her story by claiming that she was initially a soul that resides under the sea until a great change happened to Earth and drastically changed its geographical aspects. Due to this change, her soul emerged from under the sea and inhabited a tree that grew into a gigantic one. The increasing height of the tree allowed her to be able to view her surroundings better and she enjoyed the beauty of the living beings and the inanimate world around her (Haemamool, 2015, pp. 17-18). This portrayal of the grandmother locates her as part of the ancient world and an intrinsic part of nature. After her tree was cut down, the grandmother’s soul left it and resided within the bodies of different forms of creatures such as naga, tiger, and deer, and this again emphasizes her close connection with nature and other living beings (Haemamool, 2015, p. 20, pp. 48-49, p. 55). When she eventually acquired a human form, her strong connection with nature was by no means severed and even her painful moments were shared and empathized by the natural environment. According to the grandmother, the names of several areas in Kaeng Khoi district originated from her actions. She recounts that, at

one point in her life when she was in deep sorrow and despair after losing her first baby, she decided to swallow the dead baby rather than letting vultures eat her. Unable to eat the baby's bones, she threw them in different directions, and wherever each bone dropped, the name for that place signified that it had become the witness of her suffering and loss (Haemamool, 2015, pp. 89-92). Of note is that the grandmother's place naming act was significantly different from that done by male rulers who named or marked territories for their own possession or to exercise their colonizing power (Haemamool, 2015, pp. 39-45, p. 95).

The traumatizing experience of losing her baby and of being condemned by other humans who witnessed the way she treated the lifeless body of her baby later triggered her temporary transformation into a rock (Haemamool, 2015, p. 93, p. 98). This transformation can be seen as symbolizing the grandmother's lasting bond with her inanimate and animate surroundings. It should also be noted that she often emphasizes her difference from other humans by often remarking that she is not human, as her soul belongs to Earth, and she merely resides in a human form until it can no longer stay alive (Haemamool, 2015, p. 60, p. 62, pp. 116-117). Unlike other humans who regard nature as being there for them to exploit for their own benefit and take possession of, the grandmother believes in the sacredness and power of nature and clearly disapproves of this anthropocentric tendency in humans (Haemamool, 2015, pp. 117-118). By emphasizing the need to respect nature and depicting the grandmother's harmonious relationship with nature, this episode offers a critique of anthropocentrism and encourages the imagining of a better society in which humans' relationship with nature is not exploitative. Of note is that the Buddhist master narrative is also employed in the grandmother's folkloric stories to promote the non-anthropocentric outlook. This can be seen from the way she describes the Buddha as a holy figure whose

mercy and compassion extends to all living creatures and whose power is exercised through his ability to influence the natural environ (Haemamool, 2015, p. 26, p. 27, p. 29) and to heal diseased or injured living beings (Haemamool, 2015, p. 20, p. 31). It seems that, to her, Buddhism and nature both figure as sacred and she sees Buddhism and the Buddha as advocating non-anthropocentric beliefs and goals.

In sum, while the grandmother's narrative may initially appear as the recounting of a personal trajectory, a closer look reveals that it is not a mere personal account, as it dramatizes not only an individual's experience but also the collective experience of the subaltern. Furthermore, the grandmother's storytelling can also be seen as a political and rhetorical act that seeks to unmask and subvert mainstream cultural scripts while at the same time utilizing parts of them so as to articulate a utopian desire that promotes a non-anthropocentric world view. In other words, her storytelling essentially functions as a critique of the dominant through the foregrounding and implicit affirmation of the practices of the subaltern and alternative worldviews.

It is revealed to us through the frame story in the last episode that storytelling also exerts significant influence on Maya's life. As a child, she listened to extraordinary tales related to her by her great-grandmother, who claimed that her life was immortal and that her soul had existed before other living beings originated on Earth. Almost twenty years later, Maya's memories of the tales recounted by her great-grandmother play a role in motivating her to take a trip back to her birthplace in order to find out more about her roots and the things she heard from her great grandmother. Like the novellas she has discovered and read, the grandmother's tales figure prominently in her critical appraisal of dominant ideologies and her act of resistance. Significantly, the non-anthropocentric worldview and feminism implicit in the first episode

of the novel are also advocated in the last episode through the characterization of Maya. Like her great-grandmother, Maya's vision of a better society is the one that seeks to challenge anthropocentrism (Haemamool, 2015, p. 433) and appreciates diversities and harmonious co-existence (Haemamool, 2015, pp. 482-483). She is also portrayed as modern woman who is critical of values that promote male dominance and gender inequality (Haemamool, 2015, p. 432).

### Conclusion

As examined in this paper, Uthis Haemamool's novel *Juti* can be seen as a work that advocates the liberating power of fiction through the employment of metafictional strategies and oral storytelling devices that function to create a counter-story that denaturalizes and destabilizes existing dominant discourses and master narratives. By directing the reader's attention to the fictionality and authorial manipulation of literary narratives, the novel helps shed light on the possible fictionality and constructedness of the everyday world and the fact that, in the world outside fiction, individuals also mediate their experiences and make use of narratives in a way that resembles the construction of imaginary worlds in fictions. Furthermore, the use of parody as a literary strategy that undermines earlier obsolete genres functions to foreground the need for a different literary mode that can better reflect contemporary concerns and crises. Significantly, the novel reveals that a literary text also needs a reader who appropriately responds to the implied author's 'seductive' strategies. Essentially, the figures of the reader and the traditional storyteller play a crucial role in prefiguring utopianism or the expression of a desire for a better way of being and living.

### Acknowledgements

This paper was developed from a research project funded by the Faculty of Humanities, Chiang Mai University, and I am grateful for this support.

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