

Darkness Within

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Attestation of Authorship

"I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning"

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Darkness Underneath

Introduction

Darkness Underneath is an exegesis accompanying my creative thesis, *Darkness Within*, a young adult novel about a group of people going through major life changes following the death of Violet, a young woman who committed suicide. *Darkness Within* is a character-based novel which explores themes including dysfunctional family, sexuality, suicide, societal pressures and expectations in the context of Thai culture. The novel is also a very personal piece of work. Therefore, in this exegesis, I would like to discuss the background and conceptualization of the important characters and also the influences behind the work which include literature, mainstream media, and general attitudes towards specific issues of Thai society.

Origin

Darkness Within is a young adult fiction with multiple narrators. The main narrator of the story is Nylah while the focal character is Violet. The narrative mode of the story is third-person subjective. The story is told by each character in chronological order which began after the death of Violet while the parts involving Violet are told with a series of flashbacks.

Darkness Within was born from my personal experiences and frustration regarding many issues I had been struggling with growing up. When I first conjured up the plot, I wanted to tell a story about the hopelessness and despair of young adults towards the status quo in Thai society which appeared unchangeable. I also wanted to discuss some underlying issues Thai youth had to go through. Although the novel has gone through a lot of changes from its original concept, I am pleased with the current outcome as it contains the topics I want to talk about. Though I doubt its marketability in Thailand due to its themes and the language barrier, I hope the novel finds its place and hopefully sparks more open discussion and eventually lead to more understanding in certain subjects discussed below.

Process of Writing

I have spent collectively one year and six months altogether writing this novel, during which a number of struggles occurred including the use of English language as a non-native writer, the complexity of the work, and the difficulties in handling male and homosexual characters.

The first and most persisting difficulty I encountered while working on the thesis is English grammar. It is certainly a challenge to write a novel in the language I only acquired by learning in schools taught by non-native English speakers. As a foreign student who uses English as a second language, I often have trouble finding the right words or phrases to use due to this limitation. My style is obviously juvenile compared to other books containing similar themes. There is also a problem regarding my grammatical structures such as tenses and the use of symbols. Nonetheless, the problem was resolved with an editor.

However, writing in English as a second language has its upside. By writing in English, it provides me with more freedom to write about controversial subjects as it acts as a natural barrier against criticism by a certain group of people. Even though English is a compulsory subject in Thai school system, not many people are capable of using it fluently. This is especially true for the older generation for whom English wasn't perceived as an important or particularly useful skill. Therefore, those who might be able to read this creative work would be the younger generation with exposure to English as an international language and culture or adults with higher education and understanding.

There are also difficulties regarding cultural backgrounds in the work. As the story is set in Thailand, it is not easy to portray the complexity of the society in a non-Thai language to non-Thai readers who have not experienced it. And it is even more complicated by the fact that Thai society has drastically changed in recent years. Most notably, Thai youths have become a lot more westernized and a lot more influenced by western pop culture, particularly American pop culture, and the society is still trying to balance between the internationalization trend and its own conservative cultural context.

Another difficulty I faced while working on the thesis is rather personal. I had been dealing with family matters over the past few years which affected me mentally. Since this creative work is a very personal piece of writing to me, there were times that I was not emotionally or psychologically ready to do it. It's also a depressing story and it was really not fun to write about and definitely not easy either. Aside from the family issues, other subjects such as sexuality, mental illness, and suicide are also subjects I

deeply care about, but subjects which still lack understanding and social awareness in Thailand. I had to be careful not to be too preachy or judgmental and try to let the audience decide for themselves.

In addition, I had a major struggle portraying male characters, particularly regarding the idea of sexual relations. I wanted to avoid writing them as evil characters but rather typical human characters who had their own logic. I also had some difficulties portraying relationships between a same-sex couple. Since I am heterosexual I do not fully understand the nature of same-sex relationship and tend to over-write it. Fortunately, I was able to closely observe it from a friend of mine and her girlfriend.

Characters

Darkness Within is a character-based story. Although I had a plot drafted, I started off with the character design which became the wheels of the novel. Every character represents a type of person existing in today's society which I hope readers can immediately recognize and relate to.

- Nylah

Nylah is the main protagonist of *Darkness Within*. She was a lesbian. The character was based on a close friend of mine who is also a lesbian and is struggling in similar circumstances to Nylah. I personally like her personality and thought her unique and honest quality would make her identifiable for audiences as a narrator.

One question that I believe would always be raised is why I chose a homosexual character as the protagonist in a non-queer novel. And my answer would always be 'Why not?' If I were to be completely honest about it, the reason would be that I did not see Nylah as a lesbian, but rather a human being who happened to be female and happened to be romantically involved with other females. Being lesbian is not her whole identity; it is only a part of who she is.

However, as I continued to write and explore the relationship between the lesbian Nylah and people around her, I felt more strongly committed to having a lesbian as the main character of the story. Arguably, lesbians are a marginalized minority within the homosexual minority in Thailand. Although the society in general appears to be highly tolerant towards lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community, lesbians are still the least accepted and understood. Many people still believe lesbians are not authentic and they are changeable in terms of their preferences. This could stem from the fact that there has been very little to no existence of positive lesbian representation in mainstream media and there have also been very few examples of (at least publically) successful lesbian individuals.

What I would like to achieve by having Nylah as the main narrator is to expand the boundaries of LGBT characters in Thai literature and media which often portray LGBT as one-dimensional stereotypical characters.

- Violet

Violet can be considered both a deuteragonist and a focal character. While Nylah is visibly the main protagonist, Violet is the central character of *Darkness Within*. Every

character in the story is related to her. Her role is also to act as a catalyst, forcing each character to go through changes which become their character's arc.

Since I started writing this story, I have intended to never use Violet as a narrative voice. I do not want to tell the story from the perspective of a suicidal person because I felt there have already been a lot of fictions like that. I want to tell the story from the point of view of those around the person who committed suicide - what they thought had happened, what were their reactions, how this suicide affected them, and what they learnt from it.

I intentionally do not explicitly state why Violet kills herself as I would like the readers to make their own interpretation. The main message I would like to get across is to not judge. This is because I feel that the society and even people closest to the deceased are often quick to judge without sympathy or any attempts to understand. So after learning what each character knew about Violet, readers can make their own judgment regarding her suicide.

Since I knew that I was writing for English-speaking readers, I intentionally used English names for all the characters. However, in the final draft, I decided to change names of the older generation into Thai names to differentiate conflicting views between the two generations. The English names for the younger generation also show the internationalization trend both in Thailand and in the world.

- **Matt**

Violet's younger brother is arguably the character of the story who undergoes the most development. At the beginning of the story, he was a typical good kid who was rather naive about his family's abusive nature. Matt was a golden boy and his relationship with his father was far better than Violet's. He also failed to acknowledge the physical, mental, and emotional abuse that had been ongoing on his family until he was forced to face it. His character then dramatically matured and he started to recognize the toxic nature of his family.

I modeled this character on the type of ignorant people I often encounter in real life - people with the notion that 'Since it did not happen to me, it does not happen to anyone.' Then I put that character into a situation they have to acknowledge something very confronting that does happen and explore the nature of the experience.

- **Lilith**

Lilith is another character that is very close to my heart. She represents a woman who attempted to meet every expectation of a modern woman in a conservative cultural environment. In the story, Lilith was a working woman who was supposedly financially-independent, but she also felt the need to get married and started a family. As a wife, she was expected to be an obedient follower to her husband and serve him unconditionally. She also cared deeply about how others perceived her as shown when she is unable to divorce Watit even when she wanted to.

Lilith also represents the type of mother whose character is very common but has rarely been talked about - a mother who ‘does nothing.’ In Thai mainstream media, there have only been two types of mothers - good mothers and bad mothers. A good mother does everything right. She understands her children, supports them, teaches them the right things, and does everything in her power to protect them. Meanwhile, a bad mother is either making her children become corrupted through immoral teaching or simply abusive and hurtful. Lilith was neither. She excluded herself from the situation and refused to recognize the problems her children were going through. Her character was then challenged when her daughter committed suicide.

Out of all the characters in the novel, Lilith is the character I wanted to grow the most. She had always been in the position to stop and change things but she chose to do nothing. Violet was the perfect catalyst for Lilith to actually do something to stand up for herself and protect those she loved.

Future Plan

Due to the time limit, there have been several characters I feel I left underdeveloped. For future drafts, I would like to flesh out the stories of Matt, Trevor, Cream, Megan, and Watit. I would like to take readers to learn more about Matt and his role in the family prior to the events in *Darkness Within* - how he was raised, what made him the person he was, and also his relationship with his father. I also acknowledge that Watit is currently the most one-dimensional character in the story. To be honest, I think his position now is more of a tool than a character. He is used as a tool to catapult Matt and Lilith’s character development.

For Cream, I would love to flesh out her relationship with Nylah as a lesbian couple in Thai society. Originally, from my first draft, Nylah was single because I wanted to make a point about how not every LGBT individual needs to be with another person for them to be identified as homosexual. I also wanted to show that LGBT

individuals are capable of having genuine platonic relationship with people of the same gender. However, for later drafts, I felt there needed to be a character Nylah can interact with in order to show exposition. It has to be a character she can confide in and trust whole-heartedly. It also has to be a character of her equal. Thus, the birth of Cream.

I never intended for *Darkness Within* to be a queer novel. But I think there is something that needs to be addressed about the attitude of the general public regarding lesbian couples and the pressure they receive from their family and the society.

As for Trevor and Megan, when I designed their characters, I had already figured out who they were. However, since their stories are more focused on peer pressure, I decided to drop their parts in order to focus more about pressure from family. In future drafts, however, I would like to experiment portraying their relationship with Violet where she was a villain instead of a victim and explore the possibility of using either character as an unreliable narrator.

Literature Review

As *Darkness Within* was drawn from my personal experiences, influences on the work came from various sources, including novels, mainstream media, and cultural contexts. In this part, I would like to subdivide the influences into two categories - literature review, which includes written and non-written media; and Thai social attitude towards certain subjects.

Although it does not technically influence my work, Jay Asher's *Thirteen Reasons Why* (2007) has great similarity to my novel. Like my novel, *Thirteen Reasons Why* is a young adult fiction that contains the theme of depression and suicide. Hannah Baker was already dead when the story begins and the narrator of the book is Clay Jensen, Hannah's classmate and love interest. After Hannah committed suicide, Clay received a shoebox filled with cassettes. It was from Hannah explaining the thirteen reasons why she decided to take her life and how everyone mentioned in those tapes and whom the tape will be sent to was in some way responsible for her death. In his novel, Jay Asher adopted the dual narration style of story-telling to let the readers understand Hannah's point of view and reactions of people close to her. Clay also acts as a more neutral narrator which I also intend my main narrator - Nylah - to be. He knew Hannah and also knew every person mentioned in Hannah's tapes so he can describe their character outside of the tapes to justify that Hannah's point of view wasn't twisted by her own mind.

Thirteen Reasons Why, however, is better described as a suspense novel rather than a suicide novel because of the way it was written. Jay Asher admitted that he wrote so in order to allow people who might have a hard time stepping beyond their own ideas about certain subjects to explore the lives of others (Asher, 2007) - a notion I also wish to achieve with *Darkness Within*.

Beth J. Lueders' article about 'Emotional and Verbal Abuse' (2002) is used as a reference to build up vital characters in the story. Emotional abuse is difficult to define. It is based on power and control. Signs of emotional abuse include rejecting and ignoring a person's value or presence; ridiculing, degrading, humiliating them; controlling through fear and intimidation; and using a person for personal gain and advantage. And the effects of emotional abuse include a fear of being natural; a loss of self-esteem; self-doubt; social withdrawal; and depression. Verbal abuse takes on many forms such as criticizing, insulting, name-calling, belittling or threatening. Disparaging jokes and withholding communication are also verbal abuse. Verbal Abuse is highly common and often leaves deep effects on the victims. Trivial comments that seem to be

soon forgotten by the speaker. But at a critical moment, they could make or break a life. Verbal abuse also frequently plays a role in a violent crime.

The Thai TV series produced by GTH, *Hormones: The Series* (Sugmakanan, S, 2013-2015), was the first of its kind as a story with multiple protagonists. *Hormones* revolved around a group of high school students as they were going through changes and problems of the youth. Each episode is told by different narrator and each has different theme ranging from typical love life and disagreement among friends to more serious matters such as physical abuse, rape, and suicide. The series can be considered a coming-of-age series as each character matured after they were put through hardships. It is also the first series released in mainstream media that openly discusses about realistic problems among teenagers and received critical acclaims after it went on air. It is also very successful commercially.

There are a number of episodes that contains similar themes to those in *Darkness Within*. One particular character, Dao, opens discussion about a typical Thai parenting style called ‘Tiger Parent.’ Dao is a first-year high school student when the story begins and her character is defined by having a strict and oftentimes overbearing mother. Throughout the first and the second seasons of the series, a majority of Dao’s life is dictated by her mother who tells her what to do, where to go, what to study, and whom to hang out with. In season 2 episode 10, Dao reaches a breaking point when her mother berates her after she has a fight with a bully at school: she destroys everything she can get her hands on and screams at her mother until she passes out. The event becomes a turning point for her mother who starts to recognize her mistakes and tries to amend herself in the following episodes.

In addition, Dao is also a lesbian and due to her mother’s strict personality has an on-again, off-again romantic relationship with her best friend, Koi. As their relationship slowly comes to light, they are bullied by their peers and later decide to conceal their sexuality when questioned by adults. Later in season 3, they come out to their parents. Dao’s mother surprisingly takes the news well as she already has doubts about it. Koi’s father, however, perceives it as a joke, believing his daughter is not serious and is just confused because she hasn’t found the right man.

The friendship and conflict between two female characters - Sprite and Kwan - shows the contrast between two polar opposite types of women in today’s westernized society. Kwan is a perfect girl who always seems to do the right thing. She represents the conservative role-model from a Thai cultural background. Sprite, on the other hand, represents the free-spirited modern woman who is more open about sex. At the

beginning of the first season, Kwan refused to speak to Sprite after she found out about her best friend's sexual relations with various boys. Towards the end of the season, each woman learns to accept and respect the other for who they are.

In season 3, First is introduced. He is a boy who always tries to make everyone laugh, many times at the expenses of someone else as he often steps over the line with his pranks. The episode which focuses on his character (season 3 episode 8) reveals that First grew up in an abusive family. His father physically attacks his mother every time he gets upset; after that, they reconcile by having sex, which First often witnesses. In the following episodes, First is shown aggressively bursting in his anger when he feels frustrated, similar to his father's action. Another episode also shows him having make-up sex with his girlfriend after their fight. His story shows the impact of one's family and how it can shape one as a person.

Other characters whose storyline are similar to those of *Darkness Within* are Toei, a tomboyish girl who is almost raped by her teacher; Phu, a sexually-confused boy who is arguably the first pansexual character featured in Thai TV series; Oil, a quiet girl who is neglected and ignored by most of her classmates and her own family; and Jane, an honest and straightforward girl who grew up in the United States and feels out of place when she has to come back to Thailand.

Another series containing similar themes is *Wai Sab Saraek Kad* (Krootnak, S, 2016), a TV series about Sai, a counseling psychologist at a school who attempted to heal a group of troubled students in the school. This group consists of Minny, a social media-addict; Wai, an aggressive boy who tends to use violence to solve problems; Tang-Mae, a depressed girl who often cuts herself; Shogun, a chronic liar; and Pick, a shop-lifter. Although these five students have different issues which Sai tries to correct, their problems can actually be traced back to each family. The series stresses on the importance of family structure and emphasizes on the role of parents in modern society. In almost all the cases, Sai can not thoroughly help the students as the parents refused to change or even admit there is a problem with their family. In the end, each family has their own happy ending. However, the series ends with a suicide of a girl who seems to be a 'perfect' student to reaffirm its message that even someone who appeared completely normal may be broken inside.

Thai Social Context

- Dysfunctional Family

Dysfunctional family is a major theme of *Darkness Within* and it can be considered the central theme. A dysfunctional family is family which conflict, misbehavior, neglect, and abuse on the part of the individual parents occur continually and regularly, leading other members of the family to accommodate such actions. (Stoop & Masteller, 1997) In *Darkness Within* there are two clear examples of dysfunctional families - Violet's and Nylah's.

Violet's family appears to have universal features of a dysfunctional family. Both parents show unhealthy parenting signs which include lack of empathy and understanding, unfair treatment of family members, and extremes in conflict. In Nylah's family, her mother shows signs of manipulation and emotional blackmailing, forcing both her children to act the way she wanted. The only functioning family shown in the story is Kyle's where he received support from both parents.

Although the families displayed in the story are dysfunctional, they are sadly considered a typical, albeit troublesome, Thai nuclear family. As generations have grown up within this arrangement they perceived such arrangements as normalcy. The issue can be traced back to Buddhism which has become a fundamental part of the country's cultural background. In Buddhism, one of the most upheld virtues is called *Katanyu*. It is a sense of gratitude and obligation a moral individual must have towards someone who has helped them. Although the word can be used in many cases, it is usually aimed to teach a child of their duties towards their parents. There is no equivalent word or phrases in English I can find that can perfectly capture the meaning of *Katanyu* as it is not a simple case of appreciation. *Katanyu* is a life-long debt a child must shoulder which can never be repaid enough.

Due to this religious notion, parents' misbehavior and abuse can often be justified and normalized while children are usually expected to unconditionally love and obey. According to a Buddhist doctrine, the constitutional duties of a child towards their parents include providing economical support and continuing the family's name. Although the doctrine is certainly well-intended, it can also be used to socially, emotionally, and psychologically blackmail children to accept and obey every demand of their parents, even at the expense of their own well-being. There have been countless tales of children having to follow their parents' orders even when they believe they were wrong. If children refused to do so, they would be seen as 'unfilial' by not only the family members, but also the society in general.

In March 2016, news made headlines in Thailand about ‘Mae Pranom’, founder of a renowned chili paste brand who sued her eldest daughter and current CEO of the company, Siriporn, for cheating her and illegally taking over the business (Online Reporters, 2016). According to reports, Pranom wanted to sell a part of the company but her daughter disagreed. Society and social media were quick to criticize the daughter’s action, saying it should be the mother’s right to do as she pleases with the business she started without taking legal practices into consideration. Although evidence later showed that the daughter’s action was legal and Pranom may have been in the wrong, the dominant view still remained unchanged. The opinion a large number of people shared was that no matter what the mother had done, as a child, she was supposed to serve and obey. With such strong belief, family obligation can become a burden in a child’s life. Other problems then followed.

An example along similar lines in the book is where Violet, Nylah, and potentially Monika are manipulated by their parents to study in the field of their parents’ choosing and not from the choice of their own. There is also a history behind the reasons why Violet attempted to please her parents by applying for medical school and why Nylah’s mother wished for her children to study in the field of science.

There has been an ongoing trend that being a doctor has a higher social value than other occupations. Every year, during the period of university admission, there would be a number of articles praising students who are able to enter medical school. These students are also often the national top scorers. However, in 2015, the top scorer, a female student ‘Prang’ from Bangkok chose to study Mass Communications, sparking a heated debate over her choice (Daily News, 2015). The criticism can be divided into two major groups. The first was doubting her parents’ method of upbringing and questioning why they did not encourage her to become a doctor. The second and bigger group was admiring the family for their support of their child’s decision.

- **Homosexuality**

Back in 2013, I mentioned to a Thai friend that I was writing a novel with a lesbian protagonist, the first question she asked was, ‘Is there going to be a male love interest?’ I said no and explained that my character really is a lesbian, as in she is interested in female. The follow up question I received was, ‘Then why is she not romantically attracted to Violet?’ Although the questions were rather ignorant, I think they perfectly capture the attitude general Thai public has towards a lesbian individual. I do not blame the friend for her lack of understanding regarding LGBT community. Her perspective

reflected the representation of lesbianism in mainstream media. Even though Thailand is often seen as a haven for LGBT people, there is an underlying discrimination against homosexuals and high regards for heterosexuals. And among various LGBT groups existed in Thailand, lesbians have very little to no presence.

There has been an ongoing mindset that lesbians are temporary and convertible. In the few movies or TV series that feature a character that has traits of a lesbian or a tomboy, she will later become more feminine when she meets ‘the right man.’ There is a complex reason behind the mindset as in fact, a lot of lesbians chose to marry men later in life in order to have a normal family either due to their own sexual fluidity or to show Katanyu towards their parents. During the past year, however, there have been a growing number of movies and TV series that present LGBT characters as actual humans rather than the stereotypical stock characters and are well-received publicly. TV series such as *Diary of Tootsies* (Thongaum, P, 2016) and a mini web series *Gay Ok Bangkok* (Phukhaothong, T, 2016) are also created and produced by people within LGBT community. Nonetheless, lesbians still remain non-existent.

The lack of knowledge and understanding regarding sexual identity also expands to female-to-male transgender. While male-to-female transgenders in Thailand are widely recognized, it is not the same for female-to-male. Not long ago, a female-to-male transgender posted a shirtless picture of himself online and received backlashes from people who deemed it inappropriate and refused to accept that he is now a male.

Additionally, since lesbians are seen as changeable, their sexuality is often not taken seriously by their family. They are also more exposed to a higher level of violence, particularly sexual violence, within the family if they come out. Some lesbians experience ‘correctional rape’ by, or arranged by, their own family members. For example, in 2012, a man was arrested for repeatedly raping his 14-year-old daughter. He claimed that he had done so as a punishment because his daughter was a lesbian (Sanook, 2012). With the aforementioned issues, I want to use Nylah as a character who breaks the boundary of a lesbian character.

- **Suicide and Mental Illness**

Suicide is a major theme of my story and it comes from my personal experiences regarding the issue. When I first conceptualized the idea of *Darkness Within*, I was depressed and suicidal. And at the time, there was nowhere I could turn to without being judged. If someone said they had mental illness, it would be the fault in their character. If someone attempted or committed suicide, they would be shamed. It seemed everyone

was so ready to judge without trying to understand what was going on in one's life. No one seemed to care to ask investigative questions.

The scene where Nylah saw nasty comments regarding to the news of Violet's suicide is a typical scene anyone can witness online, not only in Thai social media but worldwide. The most famous one would be the suicide of Amanda Todd, a 15-year-old Canadian girl who committed suicide after being bullied both physically and online. Prior to her death, she posted a video on YouTube, telling her experience of being blackmailed and bullied which went viral following her departure. Even after her death, a number of people still left hurtful and derogatory comments about her on the video (Wikipedia).

However, surprisingly, during the past few years, general understanding towards people with mental illness and suicide has been growing exponentially. One particular incident is the case of Singha, the guitarist of a band Sqweez Animal who committed suicide in July 2015 (Coconuts Bangkok, 2015). Although there had also been some hurtful comments, with some condemning his action, his death also significantly raised awareness regarding the issue as a lot of doctors, psychiatrists, and even celebrities step up to educate and communicate about the subjects (Thongthao, 2015).

Nonetheless, portrayal of suicide in Thai media is still very lacking. Suicide is often used as a resolution either for love-sick protagonist(s) or guilt-ridden antagonist(s) but it is normally not explored as a recurring problem. Interestingly, portrayal of female suicide is often related to love and sex while suicide in males is attributed to love, career, and honor. In 1987 film, *Saphan Rak Sarasin* (Sarasin Bridge), the opposition against their marriage by their parents led the young lovers to suicide jump from Sarasin Bridge. In 2004 horror film, *Shutter*, Natre committed suicide after she was raped and Tun also jumped off the rooftop out of guilt and in order to escape from the haunting of Natre.

The only novel I have read that explored the causes and consequences of suicide is *Raeng-Ngao* (Shadow) (Weerachon, N, 1986), where the heroine, Munin, tried to seek the truth and revenge for her twin sister, Mutta, who committed suicide. There are also a few queer movies that portray suicide of homosexual individuals and the cause is often the hardships homosexuals have to go through in life.

For Violet's suicide in *Darkness Within*, I would like to show the causes leading up to the 'permanent solution.' Violet grows up in a dysfunctional family where she was abused and neglected. She then was betrayed by her friends and lover and also felt disconnected from her best friend. In the end, she chose death. And just like in real life,

no one actually knows why Violet committed suicide. Each character can only make an assumption and figure out what they can acquire from this incident.

Readership

Darkness Within is aimed towards young adult audience who would likely recognize the story as reality for themselves or someone they know. Since it is written in English, it is also targeted at audiences who are familiar with Thai cultural context but have also been exposed to Anglophone culture.

During the time I had conceptualized and written *Darkness Within*, I strongly believed there was no market for a story like mine in Thailand. This was because almost all, if not all, marketable Thai novels revolve around romance between a heterosexual couple. With the exception of comedy and horror, fictions in every other genre are always the story of a man and a woman as they battle through hardships and fall in love. Even in queer novels, romance has remained a major theme. Therefore, a multiple-protagonist story like mine may fail to attract an audience.

However, during the past few years, there have been a growing number of films and TV series with unconventional themes, telling substantial stories and not focusing on romance. Many of them also enjoyed huge success both commercially and in critical aspect. With this changing trend, I think *Darkness Within* may be able to gain publishing opportunities and find its place in the Thai market.

Although I still have doubts about the marketability of my novel, I believe the story's strengths are its relatability and lifelike quality. Since the majority of the novel is based on reality of Thai nuclear family and culture, I believe readers could recognize the character or the situation or the emotion as something that they have encountered and are able to relate to.

In addition, since the novel is written in English, it may open an international market. I believe there has never been fiction dealing heavily with Thai culture written primarily in English language. Therefore, it may attract foreign readers who are interested in Thai young adult fictions.

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Appendix

Thai-Buddhist funeral

A Thai Buddhist funeral typically lasts between three to seven days, depending on the family of the deceased, and can be divided into three major parts - the Bathing Rite, the Chanting Ritual, and the Cremation Ceremony. The funeral is almost always held at a temple and almost all temples in Thailand provide a number of pavilions called "Sala" for this event. The attendees are required to wear only black and white clothes. They are also expected to bring a wreath or give some money to the family. Except for the Cremation Ceremony, other parts of the funeral are held in the evening, typically from 18:00 to 20:00. The hosts or the family will provide light dinner to the attendees which will be served after the ritual is finished each day.

The Bathing Rite is held on the first day of the funeral and is attended only by family members and closest friends of the deceased. It is usually held on the date the death or the immediate next day.

After the body of the deceased has been prepared, it will be laid on top of a long pedestal in a sleeping position. The right arm will be extended on its side. During the rite, the attendees will pour scented water on the hand and ask for forgiveness from the deceased.

The scented water is prepared by mixing perfume and flower petals (usually rose, jasmine, and marigold) with water.

Once the bathing is done, a small white rope is tied around the feet and the hands of the body. A lotus and joss sticks will be put between the tied hands. Then, the body will be put into a coffin. Sometimes, a coin will be put into the deceased's mouth. It is believed the coin can be used as payment at the gate of the afterworld.

The coffin will be nailed and sealed and then put on a high table. A portrait of the deceased will be put in front.

The Chanting Ritual is held daily on the evening of the next three to seven days. Typical guests are usually invited and will attend during one of these days, although close friends, relatives, and family members may be expected to attend every day. Each day when the guests arrived, they will pay respect to the deceased and waited for the chanting which is led by monks. It is also common for the host or one of the family members to knock on the coffin, an act of calling for the deceased to receive merit from the monks.

Following the final day of the Chanting Ritual, the body will be either buried or cremated, depending on the family. If it is buried, the coffin will be moved to the graveyard of the temple or other cemetery of the family's choosing. There, the coffin will be tied with holy white rope and then buried. If it is to be cremated, the cremation can be held immediately on the final day or anytime after that. Traditionally, the body will be kept at the temple for a period of time, from 100 days to a year, before the Cremation Ceremony is scheduled.

The Cremation Ceremony is the biggest event for a Thai funeral. It is usually held late afternoon or early evening. On the date, the coffin is transferred to the crematorium on a moving cart. Monks will lead the cart, along with friends and family, to circle around the temple three times anti-clockwise before the coffin is taken up inside the crematorium. During this event, a eulogy of the deceased is recited. There may even be some kind of souvenirs, most likely a prayer book or a biography of the deceased, for the guests.

During the cremation, fire will be lit and guests will be given a paper flower called "Jan" which they will put in the fire. The ceremony ends here for most attendees while family members will stay and collect the ashes. The ashes may be put in one or several urns which family and relatives will bring home or they could be put in the temple's cemetery. Most Thai families put ashes of all their ancestors in the same cemetery which makes it easy for them to pay respect to all the deceased during important religious days. However, some families collect ashes and then float them in the river or scatter them up in the mountain. There are a number of beliefs regarding this ritual, some believe that in this way, the spirit of the deceased will travel smoothly to the afterworld. The others believe that the spirit can travel to where they want to when their ashes are scattered.