"THE MURDERER OF BANGKHUNPHROM": THE SEMI-COLONIAL SIAM AND ITS EARLY LITERARY ADAPTATIONS[1]

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Abstract

It has been widely acknowledged that translation played an important role in the process of colonization. Colonizers often used it to reinforce their hegemony over the colonized who, in turn, employed it to encourage either submission to or resistance of that hegemony. Focusing on Vajiravudh's translation, or more precisely adaptation, of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," this article illustrates how the story reflects not only the desire to be civilized like Westerners but also the strategies that the Siamese elite employed in order to achieve the trappings of civilization, namely the construction of a primitive Other and the imitation of Europeans. These strategies were, however, inherently problematic. Imitation did not, for example, pave the way towards acceptance but reinforced instead the stereotype of the mimicking natives. The article shows, however, that the Siamese elite were able to use the tactic of adaptation, both literary and otherwise, to navigate through these problems and negotiate their relationship with the West.

Introduction

Translation played an important role in the colonizing process. The colonizers often translated important texts such as religious and legal documents into local languages in order to allow the colonized to consume these texts and more importantly to submit to their authority. Vicente Rafael (1988) gives an example of this use of translation in his book *Contracting Colonialism: Translation and Christian Conversion in Tagalog Society under Early Spanish Rule*. He writes that in the 16th century Spanish priests not only translated the Bible into Tagalog but also preached in that local language so as to facilitate the conversion of the local people, which was synonymous with the submission to the divinely anointed Spanish King. So translation enabled, in this case, both conversion and colonization simultaneously (Rafael 1988: 154–166). Venuti (1998) also writes in *The Scandals of Translation: Towards an Ethics of Difference* that in the first decades of the 20th century the Dutch attempted to undermine the nationalist movement in Indonesia by translating adventure romances that were filled with racist stereotypes such as novels by Rider Haggard and Jules Verne. They hoped, by so doing, not only to decrease the readership for radical writings but also to encourage the Indonesians to absorb the racist idea that they were inferior to white men and therefore needed to be guided by them (Venuti 1998: 167).

Translation was not, however, a tool exclusive to the colonizers. It was also employed, to various ends, by the colonized.

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Venuti argues that for them "translation fashions images of their hegemonic others and themselves that can variously solicit submission, collaboration, or resistance" (1998: 159). To illustrate the use of translation as resistance, Venuti (2005) points in his article "Local Contingencies: Translation and National Identities" to the example of China. In the second half of the 19th century China was faced with both military and commercial invasion by foreign powers. After losing the Opium War to Britain in 1842, China had to grant economic and political privileges to several Western countries who then established colonies in various ports. Later in 1898–1900 the local movement against the foreign presence known as the Boxer Uprising had to be repressed by an international force. In this social and political climate, Lin Shu and Yan Fu started translating Western literary works in the hope of encouraging their fellow countrymen to adopt some of the ideas that were espoused in these works and that they believed would enable them to resist foreign invasion. Lin Shu's preface to the novel *The Spirit of Bambatse* by Haggard suggests, for example, that "such Western literary texts are valuable because 'they encourage the white man's spirit of exploration' and can instill a similar 'spirit' in his Chinese readers" (Venuti 2005: 187).

Although Venuti focuses here on the discourse of resistance, one may perhaps question whether these translations do not demonstrate, at the same time, a kind of admiration or even desire for the hegemonic Other. In order to explore the complexities and ambiguities that are involved in the act of translation, we will turn to the example of Thailand. Thailand or Siam was, as mainstream accounts of its history invariably emphasize, never formally colonized by European powers. What these narratives often neglect to point out, however, was the fact that Siam was, similar to China, forced by these very powers to make several political and economic concessions. Thus, the country was more properly a semi-colony rather than a fully independent nation. [3] This semi-colonial status meant that translation was no longer a simple affair of "soliciting submission [...] or resistance" against the hegemonic others as Venuti argues. It became a complicated matter that involved both the Siamese nobility's desire for and wariness of farangs or Europeans. This paper seeks to understand the complex role that translation played in Siamese history by examining Prince Vajiravudh's translation[4] of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (Poe 1969). The first portion of the paper will focus on Poe's short story. It will interpret the tale as a struggle between a primitive Other and a white man and will investigate the strategies used by the former in order to overcome the oppressive self/Other, civilized/uncivilized binary in which he finds himself inextricably caught. The second section of the paper will then examine Prince Vajiravudh's translation of the story. It will argue that since this translation involved major changes to the characters and the story-line, it qualifies more as an adaptation and exemplifies a different and perhaps more effective means that the Siamese elite were, as

[3] A semi-colony has been defined by Tamara Loos (2006: 2) as a country whose status is between that of a sovereign state and a colony, a country that is "neither fully under the authority of a foreign power nor completely in control of its own population or territory."

[4] Prince Vajiravudh (1881–1925) became the Crown Prince of Siam in 1894 and ascended the throne as the sixth King in the Chakri dynasty in 1910.

semi-colonial rather than colonial subjects, able to employ in their dealings with farangs.

"Aping" the white man: the attempt to transcend the self-other binary in Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue"

One of the most intriguing features of Poe's tale is the fact that the perpetrator of the horrific double murders turns out to be an escaped orang-outan. The choice of this particular animal is telling because it was often compared in the eighteenth century to the primitive people that the Europeans were encountering for the first time either directly during their travels to the colonies or indirectly through accounts of those travels. English naturalist Robert Dunn argued, for example, that the brain of an African, "in marked resemblance to the orang-outan's, developed auspiciously at first but never proceeded past that of the Caucasian in boyhood" (Haller 1971: 35). Friedrich Tiedemann, a German anatomist, similarly claimed that an African's brain "closely resembled the structure of the brain of the orangoutan" (Haller 1971: 35). Given this association between "the man-like beasts and the beast-like men of Africa," (Haller 1971: 30) one could argue, as critics such as Nancy Harrowitz and Ed White[5] have done, that the ape in Poe's tale is not just an ape but rather a representation of the racial and primitive Other.

This interpretation is further corroborated by the fact that Poe's portrayal of the figure appears to conform to contemporary views of the racial Other. Eighteenth-century naturalists believed, for example, that the natives in the colonies were morally inferior to them and their own people. Carl Linnaeus did, for instance, describe the *Homo Afer* as "phlegmatic, cunning, lazy, lustful, careless, and governed by caprice"[6] (Haller 1971: 4). The same sentiment was echoed by plantation owners in Jamaica. According to them, their African slaves were "an inferior species" who "were 'addicted to stealing,' practiced 'low cunning and contempt of truth,' and were possessed with 'the greatest aversion to every species of labor.' The blacks were, in other words, lazy thieves and liars" (Baker 1970: 434). This conflation between the racial and the criminal Other is also found in Poe's tale where we have, on the one side, an orang-outan who commits two gruesome murders and, on the other, a law-abiding detective who subsequently solves these murders.

Poe further conforms, in his portrayal of the murderous ape, to the contemporary belief that the racial Other was irrational or lacking in reason. In his attempt to justify the war against the American Indians, for instance, Francisco de Vitoria, a Spanish theologian, jurist and professor, wrote that "these barbarians are not altogether mad," but "they are not far from being so" (Todorov 1999: 150). In a similar manner, the narrator of Poe's tale concludes, when asked to reflect on the

[5] Please see, for example, Nancy Harrowitz's "Criminality and Poe's Orangutan: The Question of Race and Detection" and Ed White's "The Ourang-Outang Situation."

[6] Carl Linnaeus introduced in *Systema naturae* a taxonomic system that divided mankind into four major groups based on skin color, namely Homo Americanus, Homo Europaeus, Homo Asiaticus, and Homo Afer. Linnaeus' book was first published in 1735 and was revised and republished through the eighteenth century. The edition cited by Haller was published in 1806.

qualities of the murderer such as the "agility astounding, [the] strength superhuman, [the] ferocity brutal," that "a madman [...] had done this deed—some raving maniac, escaped from a neighboring Maison de Santé" (Poe 1978: 558). The narrator has obviously arrived at the wrong conclusion because an orang-outan rather than a madman has committed the murders. Dupin, the detective, still says to him, however, that his idea is "in some respects [...] not irrelevant" (Poe 1978: 558). By so saying, the detective is clearly drawing parallels between madmen, who are obviously defined by their lack of reason, and the murderous ape, who stands, as we have seen, for the racial Other.

This characterization of the primitive Other is, then, used to separate him from his civilized counterpart, thus creating a binary between the reasonable self and the unreasonable Other. In his description of one of the two victims, a journalist reports that "her throat [was] so entirely cut that, upon an attempt to raise her, the head fell off" (Poe 1978: 538). In the very next sentence, he describes how her body "was fearfully mutilated [...] as scarcely to retain any semblance of humanity" (Poe 1978: 538). The head is normally understood to be the seat of reason. Thus, the fact that a body without a head is considered "inhuman" seems to show that it is reason that characterizes civilized men and separates them from an unthinking ape and all that is associated with it.

Given the clear dichotomy that Poe constructs between the civilized self and the primitive Other, one can perhaps interpret the crime that the ape commits as an attempt to transcend this seemingly insurmountable binary. Several critics have argued that this crime involves not only the murder but also the rape of the two women. Leo Lemay points, for instance, to the testimony of the physician that the large bruise on the daughter's stomach is produced by the pressure of a knee and that "the murderer of the older woman must have been a 'very powerful man,' wielding a 'large, heavy and obtuse weapon'" (1982: 177). He calls attention, moreover, to the newspaper account of the drawers in the women's apartment that have apparently been rifled through and argues that the repetition of the word "drawers" implies that it may refer to panties rather than a piece of furniture. Given these subtle suggestions, the reader is encouraged, according to Lemay, to imagine the ape as a sex maniac who rapes and murders the two women.

While I agree with Lemay's sexual reading of the crime, I would like to offer a different account of its motive. Instead of imagining the ape as a sex maniac who is driven to commit his crime by his inner compulsion, I would like to propose that he might be viewed as a primitive Other who deliberately rapes the women in order to overcome the self-Other binary in which he finds himself. The raping of the white women is, in this account, an attempt to mix with the white race and to produce offsprings who would resist any easy identification of them as white or non-white, civilized or uncivilized. They would, in other words, challenge the purity of the white race upon which is predicated the seemingly rigid self-Other bifurcation.

In addition to the rape and murder of the two women, which obviously constitute the main acts of violence in the story, I would also like to suggest that there is another crime that the ape commits in an attempt to transcend the self-Other binary in which he is inextricably caught. This criminal act

takes place in the sailor's apartment right before the orang-outan escapes on to the streets of Paris. Poe writes: "Razor in hand, and fully lathered, [the ape] was sitting before a looking-glass, attempting the operation of shaving, in which it had no doubt previously watched its master through the key-hole of the closet" (Poe 1978: 565). Shaving is, within the context of the story, clearly associated with the civilized ways of the Europeans, thus the ape's imitation of this particular act can be interpreted as an attempt to leave its primitive condition behind and to enter into the state of civilization. Had it been successful in doing so, the ape would have threatened the superiority of white men by demonstrating that civilization was not their exclusive domain. Thus the seemingly innocuous act of shaving takes on, in the story, the enormity and gravity of a crime against the white race.

The ape fails, however, in its attempt to overcome the self-Other opposition and is, at the end of the story, captured and punished for its crimes by being "imprisoned" in a zoo. Its owner is, by contrast, not held accountable for willfully taking the animal from its natural habitat and for irresponsibly keeping it in his Parisian apartment. He is even rewarded with a considerable sum of money when he sells the animal to the zoo. It seems then that the hierarchical order implicit in the self-Other dichotomy is restored after having been temporarily threatened by the ape and its crimes. Given this bleak ending, it may come as a surprise that Prince Vajiravudh of Siam chose to translate the story at a time when he and his fellow members of the ruling class were anxious to overcome the sense that they were, in Westerners' eyes, primitive and barbaric. I will, however, attempt to show in the next section how this act of translation actually exemplified one of the strategies that the future king employed in order to achieve this very goal.

Negotiating with the West: Vajiravudh and the Siamese Sherlock Holmes

Thailand or Siam has long prided itself on being the only country in southeast Asia that was never formally colonized by a Western empire. As several scholars have pointed out, however, this does not mean that it was fully independent. In the 19th and the early part of the 20th centuries, the country was faced with a great amount of political and economic pressure from different foreign powers especially from the British and the French empires who were occupying its neighboring countries. This pressure has, in traditional Thai historiography, been interpreted as a threat to the country's independence. In order to deal with this threat, the Thai monarchs attempted to modernize the country so as to minimize the colonial preconditions. The fact that Siam was, in the end, able to avoid colonization proved, in this master narrative, a testament to the exceptional vision and talent of the Siamese kings.

Despite its dominance in conventional Thai historiography, the need to escape colonization was, as Thongchai Winichakul (2000) argues, only part of the reason behind the country's attempt to modernize. In "The Quest for Siwilai: A Geographical Discourse of Civilizational Thinking in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth-Century Siam," Thongchai argues that the ascension of European powers and the defeat of India and China, the old axis mundi, gave rise to a new consciousness of the world in which each country was hierarchized according to its level of

civilization. It was, therefore, necessary for Siam to try to acquire the guise of civilization in order to avoid the embarrassment and the indignity of inferiority. This "desire and anxiety to keep up with the world" was, Thongchai argues, a significant albeit often overlooked motivation behind Siam's attempt to fulfill the requirements of modernity and civilization (2000: 534).

How then did the Siamese elite try to become "civilized"? Thongchai asserts that they did what the European colonizers did, namely they constructed an Other against which to define themselves. Thongchai writes that in order to construct this Other, the Thai elite travelled the country and wrote ethnography on the different peoples that they encountered. The first group of people that they met during their travel lived along the borders of the country and were called "chaopa, literally the jungle people or people of the wilderness" (Thongchai 2000: 535). According to Thongchai these people appeared to the Siamese elite strange and uncivilizable. By contrast, the second group of people encountered on these ethnographic expeditions were uneducated and backward but not completely incapable of achieving the state of civilization. They were the "chaobannok" or the loyal, backward subjects who lived in the rural areas of the country. Against these two groups of uncivilized people, the Siamese ruling class was able to define itself as more modern and civilized.

In addition to this construction of the primitive Other, the Siamese elite also tried to achieve the semblance of civilization by emulating the West. As mentioned above, Siam had to contend, in the nineteenth century, with a new world order in which civilization was the defining factor. Since Europe was universally perceived as being at the very zenith of this civilizational order, the Siamese elite felt that they had to imitate the ways of the Europeans in order to remain relatively superior both within the region and within their own country. King Chulalongkorn's two journeys to Europe in 1897 and 1907 were perhaps ones of the clearest examples of this attempt at imitation. The trips were, as argued by Thongchai, "a genuine quest to experience the source of [civilization] firsthand" (539) and involved, as documented by Maurizio Peleggi, "the acquisition (through purchase and gifts) of luxury goods such as paintings and sculptures in Florence, porcelain sets in Sèvres, Tiffany vases in London, Fabergé *objets* in St. Petersburg, and jewelry in Berlin" (26–7). This attempt not only to familiarize themselves with but also to imitate the tastes and consumption patterns of Europeans was, according to both Thongchai and Peleggi, a way in which the Siamese elite tried to present themselves as modern and civilized.

This desire on the part of the Siamese nobility to position themselves in the civilizational order is clearly reflected in "Phu rai kha khon thi Bangkhunphrom"[7]

[7] According to Rattanachai Lueangwongngam, the story was first published under the pen name of Nai Kaew Nai Kwan in 1905. It was part of a series called *Nithan Thong-in* which consisted of fifteen short stories that were published in *Thawi panya* journal from 1904-05. Prince Vajiravudh later revised eleven of these stories and published them under the new pen name of Ramchitti in the weekly newspaper *Dusitsamit*. The revised stories, which appeared from April - December 1921, were given the new name of *Prapruttikan khong nai Thong-in Rattananet* (*The Adventure of Mr. Thong-in Rattananet*). Rattanachai published these stories in book form under the

(The Murderer of Bangkhunphrom), Prince Vajiravudh's adaptation of Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue." The story revolves around a Thai detective named Nai Thong-in Rattananet whose help is solicited by the local police when they are stumped by the mysterious murder of Nai Rod. In the end, Nai Thong-in is able to solve the murder and to reveal that a pet orang-outan of a farang is responsible for the crime. Although the Thai detective is clearly not of noble birth (hence the commoner title Nai), he arguably stands, as Rachel Harrison (2009: 344) argues in "'Elementary, My Dear Wat'—Influence and Imitation in the Early Crime Fiction of 'Late-Victorian' Siam," for the Thai aristocracy or more precisely for Prince Vajiravudh himself. Harrison writes: "Crown Prince Vajiravudh and his fellow ruling elite were deeply motivated by a quest for knowledge that was in turn a quest for power" over the many unruly Others within the country. Thus, the detective who embodies the ideals of superior reason and intellect can easily be seen as standing in for this elite group of Thai nobility.

In order to situate Nai Thong-in within the civilizational hierarchy, Prince Vajiravudh arguably used the same techniques that he and his fellow members of the aristocracy employed in real life. He did, namely, construct a primitive Other against which his literary alter-ego appears all the more civilized. This Other takes the form of the murderous orang-outan that is conveniently found in Poe's original tale and that is described in Vajiravudh's adaptation as child-like and incapable of language. The narrator calls it, at one point, a "tua-buea," which is a mythological creature whose defining characteristic is the lack of kneecaps and language capability (Vajiravudh 2006: 169). Stereotypes of primitive people often include their supposedly child-like qualities and their unintelligible languages. It is not surprising, therefore, that the narrator should also call the animal a "khonpa," a variation of the term "chaopa" that, as mentioned above, was used by the Thai elite to describe the primitive and uncivilized Other that they encountered along the borders of the country (Vajiravudh 2006: 169).

In comparison to this orang-outan, Nai Thong-in, who can in no way be described as child-like and who speaks at least two languages, naturally appears more civilized. He appears, in other words, much closer to the farang figure, whom Prince Vajiravudh seemed deliberately to introduce as a point of comparison, for the owner of the orang-outan in Poe's original tale is actually of the same nationality as the detective. This proximity to the farang who, as mentioned above, is perceived to be at the very top of the civilizational order is arguably achieved through imitation. An example of this imitation is the use of last name. Although Thai people did not have last names at the time that the story was written, Prince Vajiravudh decided to give his detective one. So instead of the simple Nai Thong-in, the detective becomes Nai Thong-in Rattananet.[8] This act of giving his detective a last name could be seen as an attempt to imitate a European custom so as to make him appear civilized. Walter Vella (1978) proposes the same idea in *Chaiyo! King Vajiravudh and the Development of Thai Nationalism* when he

same name in 2006, and the references in this paper are taken from this edition.

[8] Rattananet roughly translates as "gem-like eyes" and obviously refers to the detective's extraordinary power of observation.

writes about the 1913 law that required every Thai person to acquire a last name. The real reason behind this law was, Vella argues, the emulation of the West, the supposed paragon of civilization. He writes: "Vajiravudh's syllogistic reasoning is clear: Western countries were progressive; Western countries had surnames; Thailand, to be progressive, must also have surnames" (1978: 131). "The King came closest," according to Vella, "to stating the equation that surnames equal progress" when he wrote: "Now we have surnames and it can be said that we have caught up with people who are regarded as civilized" (1978: 131).

As we have seen, Prince Vajiravudh employed in "Phu rai kha khon thi Bangkhunphrom" the same strategies that he and his fellow members of the ruling class used in real life to situate themselves in the civilizational hierarchy. Both of these strategies were, however, revealed to be inherently problematic. There was, first of all, a persistent sense among the Thai elite that they were perhaps not as different from the primitive Other as they would like to imagine. When King Mongkut stipulated in 1851, for example, that anyone who had an audience with him had to wear a shirt, he said: "Aside from the inferior Lawa people, Laotians, and chaopa, people from other major countries all wear shirts. Since Siam is also a major country, the Siamese people should also wear shirts instead of following the example of their chaopa ancestors" (Thiphakorawong 1961: 6, my translation). The King was aware, as this statement makes clear, that some of the current practices of his people were primitive and barbaric in the eyes of the farangs. In order to convince these farangs as well as himself and other members of the Thai nobility that they were no barbarians, the King not only abolished these practices but also projected them into the remote past and on to distant ancestors.

The fact that the Thai elite tried to repress certain characteristics that were considered barbaric or to project them on to their chaopa ancestors arguably explains why the narrator of "Phu rai kha khon thi Bangkhunphrom" feels that the ape is different and yet uncannily familiar. The narrator says when he first sees the animal: "the perpetrator of the crime is not human at all, although his similarities to humans are unsettling"[9] (Vajiravudh 2006: 169, my translation). "His hands and feet are," he continues, "very much like those of humans, and the way he sits down and stands up is eerily reminiscent of a human being"[10] (Vajiravudh 2006: 169, my translation). From these descriptions, it is clear that the orang-outan represents for the narrator something very much akin to what Sigmund Freud terms the uncanny. According to Freud, the uncanny is not something new or alien but something that is deeply familiar that has been alienated from us through the process of repression. Thus, when we re-encounter it, we invariably experience it as frightening and uncomfortably strange. [11] Given this definition, we may perhaps interpret the ape as representing a part of the Thai elite. It is a part that has been deemed primitive or barbaric and has consequently been repressed. Thus, when it returns in the form of the orang-outan, it inevitably takes on the characteristics of the uncanny.

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[9] "อ้ายผู้ร้ายที่นายทองอินจับมาล่ามโซ่ไว้กับต้นไม้ในสวนนั้นไม่ใช่คนเลย, แต่ต้องรับว่าคล้ายคนจนออกรู้สึกในใจชอบกล"

[10] "มือเท้าคล้ายคนมาก, ถึงท่าทางนั่งลุกก็คล้ายจนใจหาย"

[11] For more details, please see Freud's 1919 essay entitled "The Uncanny."

The attempt on the part of the Thai nobility to construct a primitive Other against which they appeared civilized was, as has been shown, frustrated by the persistent sense that they were perhaps not as radically different from this Other as they would like to imagine. Equally problematic was their effort to achieve the semblance of civilization through mere imitation of the West. As we saw in the previous section, the ape in Poe's original tale tries to transcend the self-Other binary by imitating the civilized ways of his European master. This imitation does not, however, lead to acceptance, and the animal is, in the end, restored to his "rightful" place in the hierarchy. In Prince Vajiravudh's adaptation of the story, it is, as we have seen, not the orang-outan but the detective who has to overcome the binary opposition that is potentially invoked by the introduction of the farang figure. If he does so simply by *aping* the white man, we may question if he will not remain in the eyes of the Westerners a barbaric Other who is no different from the ape in the tale. Vajiravudh himself was fully aware of the complications involved in the act of emulation. After he became King, he wrote in an essay called "Latthi ao yang" (Cult of Imitation): "Westerners are naturally flattered when they are emulated. They look benevolently upon their imitators as one might upon a puppy who has learned how to sit. But no matter what the puppy may think of himself, he remains a puppy and never a human being" (1994: 44, my translation).

It seems then that the Thai elite were faced with a dilemma. If they remained unchanged, they would appear backward and primitive not only to themselves but also to the white man. If, however, they attempted to acquire the guise of civilization by emulating the West, they would still appear very much like a primitive Other or an ape who can only imitate humans but can never become one. To find a way out of this dilemma, I would like to suggest that the Thai nobility attempted not simply to mindlessly adopt the ways of the West but to adapt them as they saw fit. Thak Chaloemtiarana (2007) writes in his article "*Khwam mai phayabat khong khru liam* lae khwam than samai khong thai thi pen panha" [*Khwam mai phayabat* and the problematics of Thai modernity] that the Thai people routinely took ideas and innovations from the West and adapted them to fit their own culture. He gives the example of the use of cutlery. Thai people used to eat with their hands and only started using cutlery after they came into contact with the West. They did not, however, exactly imitate the way Westerners used forks and knives, which they felt was ill-suited to the kind of food that they were used to consuming. Instead they adapted the Western custom and used instead forks and spoons, leaving out the knives almost completely (2007: 70). Another example of adaptation is the "raj pattern" shirt. King Mongkut first stipulated, as mentioned above, that the Thai people should start wearing shirts like other civilized people. King Chulalongkorn later remarked when he visited Burma and India in 1871 that the Western suit was unsuitable to the tropical climate. So the king adapted it and came up with a white button down shirt with a high collar that later earned the name "raj pattern" (Phaethong 1997: 91).

In addition to these Western customs, the Siamese elite were also exposed to Western literary works, which they attempted to translate in order to allow the rest of the literate population to get to know the West. They often chose, however, not to translate these works faithfully, for to do

so would be to show a kind of stifling respect for them and their authors as well as to risk the wholesale adoption of their ideas. They attempted, therefore, to adapt these works as they saw fit. Thak writes in "Making New Space in the Thai Literary Canon" that "Thai translators do not always see themselves as technicians of language, but as artists, authors, and composers" (2009: 95). "In fact, the first Thai author/ translators exercised," according to Thak, "freewheeling agency by including their own stories and ideas that exceeded what was actually in the novels themselves" (2009: 95). It is this agency on the part of the Thai translators that arguably allowed them and their readers to negotiate with the West. Thak writes: "many translated works wrote into their compositions the equality or even the superiority of Thai culture over Western culture and practices" (2009: 96). "Even though it was clear," Thak continues, "that the west was superior in many aspects, there was no need for the Siamese to feel totally inferior. To emulate the west did not necessarily mean to submit to the west" (2009: 96).

"Phu rai kha khon thi Bangkhunphrom" is a good example of this kind of literary adaptation. It is, as we have seen, based on Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," which revolves, as argued above, around the relationship between the white man and his racial Other. To translate the story faithfully might be to risk endorsing the superiority of the Westerners and their suppression of the more primitive people. So Prince Vajiravudh adapted the story, transposed it to the Thai setting, and allowed a Thai detective to solve the crime. He did, moreover, make the owner of the orang-outan a farang who has to ask for the Thai detective's help in capturing the animal. While Nai Thong-in and the Westerner converse in English, which potentially points to an imbalance of power between the two, their conversation is translated into Thai in the story, and the pronouns that Prince Vajiravudh chooses for the detective and the owner of the ape reflect not only the highest respect that the two characters have for each other but also the equality between them.

Translation was an indispensable tool in the process of colonization. Critics have noted how European colonizers used it to reinforce their hegemony over the colonized who, in turn, employed it to encourage either submission or opposition to that hegemony. The case of Siam has shown, however, that translation often played, for those who were in an inferior position in the power relations, a more complex role than simply to enable submission or resistance to colonial rule. As semi-colonial subjects, the Siamese (or more precisely the Siamese elite) desired to become civilized like the Europeans but were, at the same time, aware that they could not achieve this semblance of civilization through mere imitation. Thus, the Siamese nobility often chose, as we have seen in the case of "Phu rai kha khon thi Bangkhunphrom," to adapt Western texts rather than risk showing a stifling respect for the texts and their authors as well as the wholesale adoption of their ideas through a faithful translation.

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