On Lovemaking

Prince Thammathibet
translated by Chris Baker and Pasuk Phongpaichit

Prince Thammathibet (Chaofa Kung, Krom Sena Phithak), eldest son of King Borommakot, was among the most famous poets of the 18th century. He wrote a cycle of poems using the rhythms chanted by oarsmen in royal water processions. By abandoning the complexities of court verse, these verses achieved an affecting realism. The shortest of these, once omitted from collections of his work, is Bot he sangwat, “On Lovemaking.”

Each segment is labelled with a different rhythm. The first is khlong, a poetic meter, here best read as an intimate murmur. The second is chalawa he, a slow chant when the boat leaves its mooring, best read in long sighs. The third is mulawa he, a fast chant when the boat is midstream, best read with some energy.

บทเห่สังวาส

อดล
* พี่ชมพี่เชยแล้ว พลางถาม
เจ้ามั่นอย่าความ ไปพร่อง
เจ้าอีบัญมั่นเชยมา เขินพี่อยู่ดู
ผิวพวกดำมะอย่าข้อง ขัดแคล้นต้องเลยฯ

Now I’ve enjoyed you, I enquire,
but you murmur no sound, not a word.
Are you mute from fear, or shy of me?
Turn your face here. Don’t fret, fear, fight.

ข้าสาวเท่
* พี่ชมพี่เชยพกลาง พิถามนางเจ้าไม่อือ
เจ้าอื้ออย่าพิลึก พิถามนางความจริงนาง
* พิศวงทรงรวยรูป พลางกอดจูบลุบคาง
จุดที่ทุกข์ก้านพิศรื่อง
* พิศพักร์รกับพี พิศาสพักร์รกับชม
* ใครเห็นเป็นขวัญเนตร ลืมทุกข์เทววาจิตจิต
มาดุดุด détail

Now I’ve enjoyed you, I enquire, but you murmur no sound. 
Are you shy of me? I beg you, tell me the truth. 
Dazzled by your beauty, I clasp, kiss, stroke your neck and chin, 
pluck your thin breastcloth, ply you with pleasing caresses. 
Seeing a figure so loveable, a face so alluring, 
a waist so elegantly slender, a spirit so appealing to a man, 
anyone given such a gift for the eye, forgets all their sorrows, 
desires a maiden’s perfect body, cannot forego love for one minute.

Prince Thammathibet was the designated heir of King Borommakot. In 1757, he 
was brought down by court intrigue, either because he was plotting to oust his father, 
or because his siblings framed him to undermine his chance to succeed. He confessed 
under torture that he had relations with four of his father’s consorts, and these ladies 
implicated him in a coup plot to assassinate his father and many others. Thammathibet, 
the four ladies, and others involved all died as a result of flogging. In the royal chronicle’s 
account, he expired after the 180th stroke.¹