The relationship between censorship and stagings of Shakespearian drama is usually discussed in exclusively early modern terms. Annabel Patterson has established that playwrights during the period were obliged to develop specific ‘codes of communication . . . to protect themselves from . . . dangerous readings of their work’ and, as a consequence, they wrote with the Master of the Revels or Lord Chamberlain in mind. Post-Renaissance, and isolated examples notwithstanding, the general consensus in Shakespeare studies is that censorship—defined by Francesca Billiani as an ‘act, often coercive and forceful, that . . . blocks, manipulates and controls . . . communication’—is no longer relevant to critical discussion. But can the same confidently be said for the burgeoning field of global Shakespeare? While critics have occasionally recognised that local productions have incurred a censor’s interference, there has been no sustained engagement with censorship as a backdrop to regimes of adaptation world-wide.

This is despite the fact that, since the turn of the twenty-first century, several Shakespearian films, explicitly and implicitly, have been linked to censorship controversies. The most recent example, Vishal Bhardwaj’s Hamlet adaptation, Haider (2014), set in Kashmir, has been banned in Pakistan, the censors stating that the film runs counter to the country’s ‘ideology’. Perhaps more suggestively, in interview, film directors have cited censorship anxieties as a factor in their choice of the Shakespearian text. As Mario Kuperman, director of a Brazilian adaptation of Hamlet, O Jogo da Vida e da Morte (1971), explains: ‘I feared having my work banned or mutilated (I had an earlier play cut by the...
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censors), so I ended up deciding to film a classic. Darlene J. Sadlier, a critic working on the Brazilian imaginary, argues that the choice to adapt is often contingent: ‘Film adaptations, especially of the classics, tends to be ignored by the military regime, which regarded the process as simply the transposition of a literary work onto celluloid.’ Such examples remind us that film censorship thrives in war-torn locales, is often adopted as the default position by short-term governments, is quick to assert itself at times of military rule, and is a staple of systems underpinned by forms of religious orthodoxy. This article contends that censorship – and the possibility of censorship – needs to be recognized as a crucial factor in the production and dissemination of Shakespeare film throughout the world. But it also argues that censorship is complicatedly contextual in the operation of its mechanisms and processes. Critics interested in the relationship between Shakespeare and censorship, then, are obliged to take seriously the historically particular and locally situated restrictions shaping a particular appropriation. As Pierre Bourdieu summarizes, censorship is always ‘constituted by the ... structure of the field in which ... discourse is produced’.

As its case study, this article explores a sensational example of contemporary censorship – the 2012 controversy surrounding Shakespeare Tong Tai / Shakespeare Must Die, a Thai film adaptation of Macbeth (Illustration 40). Shakespeare Must Die translates Shakespeare into local modalities and imagery, adapting Macbeth to suit the conventions of Thai theatre and culture. The film comprises two 'Macbeth' narratives – a theatrical production of Macbeth is intercut with a second Macbeth unfolding in the external world – which, in a tumultuous dénouement, merge as one. A double first, the film is the first Thai Shakespeare film and the first full-length feature by a female Thai director (Ing Kanjanavanit – or Ing K., as she is more popularly known). Judged in juxtaposition with a Thai industry dominated by action films, lightweight romances, melodramas, popular comedies and Hollywood fare, Shakespeare Must Die occupies a unique place as an 'art-house' filmic experiment. Yet the film has attracted interest not because of its interpretive complexities but because of its censored status: all public screenings have been banned due to the Thai Film Censorship Board’s ruling (3 April 2012) which identified ‘content’ in Shakespeare Must Die ‘that creates divisiveness among the people of the nation’.

On 11 May 2012, a reinforcement of the ban issued in the wake of an unsuccessful appeal additionally noted that, although the film ‘has been adapted to take place in a fictitious country, it has elements that communicate the understanding that it is referring to Thai society. Furthermore, some scenes have contents that are in conflict with social order or good public morality, or may adversely affect the security of the state and the patriotic dignity of the nation.’ Inside a system in which film is vulnerable to censorship (the 1930 Film Act in Thailand remains the first point of legal reference), this version of Macbeth is deemed dangerous; its narrative is perceived as fomenting discontent, undermining the country’s pride, opposing the public good and jeopardizing national stability.

How might this judgement – and the Shakespeare film that has given rise to it – be explained? For Thailand, a nation that has never been directly colonized, Shakespeare is neither an educational import nor a signifier of the appurtenances of imperialism. In this sense, it is set apart from some other Asian countries in which adaptations of Shakespeare are deployed to address issues

7 Interview between the author and Mario Kuperman, 20 November 2012.
8 Darlene J. Sadlier, Brazil Imagined: 1500 to the Present (Austin, 2008), p. 247.
of post-colonial inheritance. As this article argues, part of the process of understanding this censorship involves appreciating the extent to which *Shakespeare Must Die* is moulded by the to-and-fro of political vicissitude and ideological disputes characteristic of Thailand in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The first part of the article explores the particular interpretive decisions afforded by *Shakespeare Must Die*, concentrating on Thailand’s political situation, issues of funding and
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I

Known for her ecological campaigns and political protests, Ing K. – an investigative journalist, activist, environmentalist and artist born in Thailand but educated in England – is no stranger to controversy. *My Teacher Eats Biscuits* (1998), for example, her documentary study of superstition, worship, belief and the commodification of religion, was banned on the grounds of social depravity and as an offence to Buddhism (a private screening was raided by police).13 Forms of censorship, then, have cut across the director’s career in ways that have defined her imaginative endeavour. Such professional experiences of censorship are, of course, intimately related to Thailand’s troubled political history. Since 1932 (when the country adopted a constitutional form of monarchy and an elected legislature), there have been nineteen successful and attempted coups and nineteen constitutions. Throughout this history of instability, states of emergency have been declared, bringing to mind Giorgio Agamben’s notion of the ‘state of exception’ in which ‘emergency has ... become the rule’ and is, further, ‘confused with juridical rule itself’.14 Presiding over the banning of *Shakespeare Must Die* was the coalition government of Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra. Yingluck, democratically elected in 2011, is the sister and


supporter of Thaksin Shinawatra, the leader of the Thai Rak Thai (Thais Love Thais) Party and democratically elected Prime Minister from 2001 to 2006. A populist politician who marshalled unprecedented working-class and rural support, Thaksin has nevertheless attracted accusations of corruption, cronyism, authoritarianism and human rights abuses.\(^{15}\) Using as justification Thaksin’s undermining of constitutionally mandated institutions, the military (traditionally associated in Thailand with old-guard loyalties, the royal family and the urban business community) overthrew Thaksin in a 19 September 2006 coup, annulling the constitution, dissolving Parliament and announcing a state of martial law: democratic elections were only re-established the following year.\(^{16}\) Two further governments ensued, in a period plagued by accusations of electoral fraud, conflicts of interest and judicial malpractice, before Abhisit Vejjajiva, the leader of the Democrat Party, became Prime Minister in 2008. It was during the premiership of the Democrat Party that *Shakespeare Must Die* was green-lighted. The film was funded by the Office of Contemporary Art, part of the Ministry of Culture, under the 2010 Thai Kem Khaeng (Creative Thai Film Fund) stimulus scheme, which, encouraging all manner of film work – including script development, distribution and educational schemes – had as its ostensible aim the highlighting of Thai cultural products.\(^{17}\) However, this government was also itself riddled with irregularities (charges included political favouritism, bribery and a repressive response to civil unrest), and it is possible that the resentment of *Shakespeare Must Die* and, in particular, its antipathetic construction of Thaksin, appealed to a new regime anxious to distinguish itself and bolster a claim to legitimacy.\(^{18}\) If this is the case, the current ban, then, marks a return to an earlier dispensation. Under the government of Yingluck, funding for film projects was shelved against a Bangkok backdrop of anti-government unrest, shootings, the attempted cancellation of a disputed general election, and, following the overthrow of Yingluck in 2014, the seizure of power once again by the military.\(^{19}\)

Michael Kelly Connors notes that, in response to a series of recent regime changes in Thailand, the crime of *lèse majesté* (an action, such as a verbal defamation or a written libel, that insults the sovereign) has ‘moved from being an offence against the monarchy to being an offence against national security’, resulting in exponential numbers of prosecutions.\(^{20}\) Coupled with the introduction of emergency measures, the rise in applications of *lèse majesté* legislation has had far-reaching effects on freedom of speech. Particularly contentious would seem to be any commentary that reflects back on the historical past. Writing on Thailand, David Streckfuss suggests that ‘history has gone into

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\(^{17}\) See Colleen Kennedy, ‘Interview of Ing K., Director of *Shakespeare Must Die*’, http://globalShakespeares.mit.edu/blog/2013.


\(^{20}\) Connors, *Democracy*, p. 133.
suspended animation . . . [and] verifiable historical events are erased or obscured’.21 In such a climate, memory becomes a fraught and conflicted category. What one constituency seeks to remember may become controversial or questionable when set alongside a state-approved version of the historical record. In this process, even acts of adaptation find themselves under a critical spotlight.

As adaptation, Shakespeare Must Die is immediately marked by its fidelity to Shakespearian dialogue; as the director affirms, ‘I [chose] to stick to Shakespeare word for word.’22 Cuts to the ‘original text’ are sparse, and vernacular additions (although significant, as will be seen, when they occur) are few in number. Shakespeare Must Die eschews verbatim to employ a literal but nevertheless poetically suggestive translation. Examples of incidental richness abound. However, as befits the idea of a literal translation, the subtitles to Shakespeare Must Die are almost wholly Shakespearian, and this often belies the inventiveness with which the play’s language is made accessible to a local imaginary. For example, Macbeth is Mekhdeth – the Thai translates as ‘one who would grasp at the clouds’, wonderfully suggesting over-reaching and an impossible trajectory of greed. Similarly, substituting for the ‘raven’ of 1.5.37 (as Ing K. reflects, in Thailand, there are no ravens, only ‘scruffy fun crows’) is ‘Ega Payayom Aiang’ or ‘The crowing Death Lord himself’, a stock figure from Thai fairy-tales that succinctly encapsulates notions of foreboding.23 In such resonant translations, a gap opens up between what is heard aurally and what is seen in the subtitle. Shakespeare’s language here occupies the status of a supplementary text; it functions in contradistinction to conventional subtitles, which, as Atom Egoyan and Ian Balfour note, typically represent ‘charged markers of . . . difference’.24 By contrast, subtitles in Shakespeare Must Die operate as an indication of the integrity of the translation process, as a reminder of sameness, and as an on-screen announcement of adherence to ‘source’. It is tempting to suggest that stressing authenticity is part of a pre-emptive strike against censorship. As one cast member, asked for his response to the censorship verdict, states, ‘The script is Macbeth . . . So I’m stunned . . . Unbelievable!’25 Shakespearian authenticity becomes both defence and displacing device – if the script is a literal translation of Shakespeare’s words, how, then, can it be controversial? In its linguistically respectful approach, Shakespeare Must Die showcases the extent to which ‘euphemization’ – to adopt Pierre Bourdieu’s discussion of ‘the structure of the field’ of censorship – ‘uses’ Shakespearian ‘language . . . to conceal repressed elements by integrating them into a network of relations which modify their value’.26 The means whereby the translation is effected take on an oppositional dimension, mediating the film’s political interstices.

If translation suggests the film’s conjuration of the censor, then so too does nomenclature. Shakespeare Must Die demonstrates a surrogate terminology – ‘Xanadu’ takes the place of England and ‘Shangrilla’ stands in for Ireland – that steers Thailand towards the territory of fabled ancient civilizations. In addition, drawing on romantic associations, the film gestures to locations linked with what is variously lost, inaccessible, paradisiacal and exotic. Scotland itself becomes ‘Atlantis’, an example both of the ‘dislocated “Scotland”’ that figures so prominently in . . . media adaptations of Shakespeare’s Macbeth’ and of a society that over-reached itself and disappeared into the ‘wild and

22 Interviews between Ing K. and the author, 14 April, 4 May, 12 August, and 19 September (2012). Unless otherwise stated, all quotations from Ing K. are taken from these interviews and appear in the text.
25 The comment is recorded in the documentary Censor Must Die (directed by Ing K. and Manit Sriwanichpoom, 2013).
26 Bourdieu, Language, pp. 139, 142.
Such associations are of a piece with Shakespeare Must Die’s water-centred aesthetic. For, referencing the ways in which Macbeth is haunted by the confounding properties of ‘yeasty waves’ (4.1.69), Shakespeare Must Die echoes the effects of the tsunami that ravaged Thailand in 2004, bringing to mind the fate — engulfment by water — of the mythical Atlantis / filmic Scotland. Water is everywhere in Shakespeare Must Die, from the ornamental pond on the golf course in which Bangkho/Banquo’s body is dumped to the swimming pool in which the Lady Macbeth figure hallucinates, and it invariably connotes the arbitrary operations of power. Such episodes bolster a universalizing notion of Macbeth’s ‘multitudinous seas incarnadine’ (2.2.60). Notably, the film’s water features are uncontrolled, suggesting, in their visceral visual impact, a country whose plight is registered in the physical appearances of its liquid landscape.

An impression of crisis is confirmed by the film’s opening, in which Macbeth’s ‘fog and filthy air’ (1.1.11) are summoned via a sinister mise-en-scène dominated by incense and smoke (failure and futility are intimated by the scene, an abandoned san pha phum, or spirit-house, littered with broken clay votive symbols). The opening privileges recognizably performative gestures as a worried-looking young woman progresses to a painted representation of the Hindu ‘war goddess’, Durga, astride a tiger and bearing a necklace of skulls. Propitiating Durga with a platter of food and drink, the woman enacts a ritual that recalls the ways in which, at the start of a traditional theatrical performance in south-east Asia, actors ‘pay obeisance to the gods who preside over theatre . . . [and seek] . . . self-protection’.29 Theatre is also prepared for in the camera’s movement through the empty void of Durga’s face to a presidential-looking individual. At once, the penchant of Thaksin, the previous Prime Minister, for white shirts, a black tie and sleek black business suits are replicated in Shakespeare Must Die’s complementary costuming of Dear Leader.30 Seated at table in a mansion’s gloomy ballroom, he listens to the sounds of a street protest, with heavy plasterwork and oppressive chandeliers indicating a decadent figure. Shakespeare Must Die continually invites its audience to identify Dear Leader as having failed in his leadership responsibilities. Germane here is the singular reading of §.5: an external scene discovers a group of protesters waving a sea of placards on which Dear Leader is pictured as a Führer-like demagogue (Macbeth is purposefully reworked, the inspiration for the episode being the reference to the ‘rabble’s curse’ (5.10.29) on a monster ‘Painted upon a pole’ (5.10.26)). The derelictions placed at his door — ‘Murder/Corruption/Greed/Lies’ — appear on the placards in crudely rendered letters, while the consignment of an effigy of Dear Leader to a bonfire provides testimony of anti-authoritarian sentiment. Fascistic images (a skull in a storm-trooper’s helmet) and sounds (the thud of jackboots) both indict Dear Leader as a modern tyrant and suggest the extent and range of an oppressive regime. Later, Dear Leader is imaged as a water-monitor in insets, the association with the meanings enshrined in the Thai term for the reptile, hia (evil persons and/or deeds), embracing both filmic and extra-filmic realms of suggestion.

Immediately after our introduction to Dear Leader, the scene shifts to the opening of a theatrical production of Macbeth in which a histrionic mode of delivery and ritualistic gestures recall likay (or Thai folk opera).31 The theatrical space is characterized by dark presentiments and unnerving images. Based on Caravaggio’s famous painting, a Medusa head adorning the theatrical performance...
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production’s curtains represents a monstrous replacement for the *rishi* head, or symbol of the divine spirits, traditionally placed on the back wall of the likay stage. Creatures of ill omen are deployed in narrative patterns, as when a shot of flapping bats spiralling outwards from a cave is recalled in the twirling black leaves of the painting *Exploding Flowers*, which is seen in the background as Khunying Mekhdeth / Lady Macbeth begins her incantation to the infernal ‘spirits’ (1.5.39); the impression is of an imminent release of malign forces. In many cases, such interpolations can be traced to Thai practices and beliefs. Hence, the theatrical production is dominated by a ‘Tree of Spirits’ (or Bodhi tree of Buddhist enlightenment) on which is placed a doll-like, garlanded figure; this is the so-called *kumarn thong* or ‘golden boy’, the ‘ghost’ of ‘sacrificed foetuses’ (Illustration 41). Not only does the figure establish arcane, black magic rituals as a motif of the theatrical production, it also surrogates for the ‘birth-strangled babe’ (4.1.30) of *Macbeth* and the larger Shakespearian preoccupation with abortion, child murder and projected infanticide. On stage, extravagantly dressed and elaborately coiffured witches exemplify the ways in which this film combines theatrical action with a *Macbeth* narrative external to the playhouse locale. Thus, scenes including Bangkho/Banquo’s feast, the sleep-walking, and the murder of Lady Macduff are split between theatrical and external perspectives, suggesting the fundamental coherence of the film’s two worlds: the tale of Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* is seamlessly pertinent in both.

Topically charged references link to the broader critique mounted in the theatrical production’s version of 3.5, Hecate’s address to the witches. In this instance, the ‘spirits’ are envisioned as uniformed schoolchildren (they are led on by a skeleton playing the role of a pied-piper) who, as they march about the stage, chant in unison: ‘Dear Leader leads to Nation’s Glory ... Dear Leader born to lift the masses ... Dear Leader brings happy-o-cracy’. The children, it is suggested, have been brain-washed and fallen victim to the ‘strength of ... illusion’ (3.5.28). The episode functions, in part because of the witches’ excited applause (they are present on stage approving their youthful charges), to critique a blind subscription to the state apparatus. But it also suggests a misplaced patriotism that reduces a country’s subjects to unthinking automatons; the elevation theme of the song’s banal lyrics is countered by the spectacle of the children moving in a series of ever-diminishing circles. If the children’s demonstration for Hecate points up an anaesthetized response, other moments in the film aim to provoke, via recollection, specific controversies of the Thaksin era. For instance, the ‘War on Drugs’ in 2003, which resulted in widespread extra-judicial killings, is alluded to in the ways in which *Shakespeare Must Die* realizes the killing of Lady Macduff. At an improvised roadside checkpoint, Lady Macduff and her daughter are stopped by the ‘Safari Suit Man’ (a Thai government agent identified by his threatening mien and dark blue fatigues), pulled from the car, assaulted and murdered. Slow-motion camera work, a scream, a shattered window and final silence are the chilling accompaniments to a murder whose identifying features evoke one episode in Thailand’s unpalatable human rights record.

Behind the episode, of course, lies the spectre of Mekhdeth/Macbeth, and, if *Shakespeare Must Die* is provocative in hinting at Dear Leader / Thaksin comparisons, it is no less attentive in drawing attention to unflattering correlations between Dear Leader and the central theatrical protagonist. Bryan Adams Hampton notes that *Macbeth* comprises a ‘series of “mirroring” moments, insistent doublings’, and it is this principle that the film uses

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32 For the *rishi* head, see Ghulam-Sarwar Yousuf, *Dictionary of Traditional South-East Asian Theatre* (Kuala Lumpur, 1994), p. 142.
34 Hecate appears as the cardboard representation of the goddess Durga, her empty face now filled by the female supplicant of the start.
as its *modus operandi*. All of the major cast members are doubled, with each actor undertaking a part in the film’s two environments (Dear Leader and Mekhdeth/Macbeth are played by the same actor, Pissarn Pattanapeeradej). Not only does the doubling method encourage audience comparison, it also stresses how the two enjoy twin-like relations. For example, at the moment when he honours and accepts Duncan’s blessing, Mekhdeth/Macbeth is represented as simultaneously coveting the monarch’s golden slippers. His will to power is juxtaposed with an inset in which a newly elected Dear Leader waves to supporters; the effect is to suggest ulterior motives and hypocrisy on both counts. More generally, *Shakespeare Must Die* vigorously eschews opportunities to allow an empathetic or even ambiguous reading of Shakespeare’s protagonist. Rather, Thai supernatual motifs and generic horror imagery serve to limn Mekhdeth/Macbeth primarily as the ‘butcher’ (5.1.35) of theatrical tradition who brings a ‘poor country’ (4.3.165) to ruin. Part of that figuration involves discovering Mekhdeth/Macbeth as variously oily, wild-eyed, fearful, easily led, self-satisfied, hectoring and cowardly: in addition, notable soliloquies, such as ‘My way of life / Is fall’n into the sere’ (5.3.24–5), are presented as terror-racked voice-overs that insist on audience alienation. At the same time, this Mekhdeth/Macbeth very much chimes with the ‘usurper’ (5.11.21) designation of Macduff’s final address. Elderly, smiling indulgently, and speaking slowly, Duncan is *par excellence* a divinely conceived sovereign, and here the film avails itself of the deep reverence that the Thai monarchy has traditionally been accorded. *Shakespeare Must Die* emphasizes

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Duncan’s role – his splendid robes and golden chada or crown are of a piece with the dignity of his performance – so as to stress Mekhdeth/Macbeth’s flaws as a subject. Additional insets of the murdered sovereign – one shows him as a vision with his wife and children – reinforce a sense of a familial crime of sacrilegious proportions. Characteristic of Shakespeare Must Die, then, is an elaboration of Macbeth that, via a chain of associations, calls into question Thai political leaders beyond the film’s narrative.

II

Particularly picked out for critique in Shakespeare Must Die is Dear Leader’s cultivation of media visibility (television broadcasts and public actions are repeatedly staged before a camera). In these respects, the meta-theatricality of the film is vital, allowing for an interrogative treatment of the mediated forms through which national debate is conducted. In this regard, it is notable that Thaksin, a director of his own telecommunications company, was able, for the first time in the Thai political arena, skillfully to use online and televisual electoral platforms. The film’s suggestion that television viewers are misled by ‘spin’ stands in stark contradistinction to the identification of the theatre audience as a discerning interpretive constituency. Hence, in the parts centred on the theatrical production, the camera continually pans to the faces of the spectators; via a doubled perspective, we watch the performance in the knowledge that it, too, is being separately appreciated. Russell Jackson identifies ‘theatre audiences on film’ as sites where ‘important social and emotional transactions take place’ and, indeed, in Shakespeare Must Die, reaction shots construct the audience as positively sentient – a moral barometer. At various points, an actor – notably, the porter – delivers a speech by descending from the stage, thereby drawing attention to the significance attached to audience response. Audiences are also visualized on-stage, as in the scene with Boonrod/Ross and the Old Man in which the latter wheels on a mobile coffee-stall, his vendor status establishing him as a witness and ‘man-on-the-street’. Highlighting what is at stake in audience engagement, Shakespeare Must Die reifies Brecht’s notion of a ‘political theatre’ that can ‘amaze its public’ and ‘provoke with its representations’, but it simultaneously – to adopt a formulation of Fredric Jameson – imagines theatre as ‘a figure for the social more generally’, showing how drama, in raising consciousness and contributing ideologically, might function as a catalyst for change.

If it is suggested that theatre can work in these instrumental capacities, then this is realized in the film’s explicit paralleling of the audience in the auditorium and the protesters on the street. Both, responding to the representation of Mekhdeth/Macbeth and the presence of Dear Leader respectively, chant ‘Get Out!’ and participate in imitative practices that confirm the theatrical production’s interventionist potential. Herbert Blau sees ‘the crowd as the consummation of the audience’, and Shakespeare Must Die exemplifies the notion in showing how a response to despotism within the theatre is replicated in popular actions outside. In particular, the movement of the forest of Dunsinane is visualized in the street protesters; their to-and-fro motion suggests the sway of uprooted trees, and their green headscarves reference new growth and the resurrection of the natural order. In these non-cast protesters, then, we see sketched the combined forces of Munkam/Malcolm and Mekhdub/Macduff’s ‘power’ (4.3.238). Judged in the light of the pseudo-newscast format of the protesters’ scene, it is possible to suggest that Shakespeare Must Die draws at this point upon communal memories of the massive street upheavals which, in the wake of the 2006 coup, brought Thailand to a standstill. That the

37 Russell Jackson, Theatres on Film: How the Cinema Imagines the Stage (Manchester and New York, 2013), pp. 15-16.
film explicitly references this period is confirmed in one of the early appearances of the witches. As they greedily tear apart and eat a heart-shaped sponge cake, footage from the disturbances accompanying the coup flashes up in the background: their excess and appetitiveness, it is implied, are played out in the political arena. *Shakespeare Must Die* is also sensitive to the coup’s violent aftermath. Between 2008 and 2010, there were sustained clashes between the ‘Yellow Shirts’ (street supporters of the People’s Alliance for Democracy Party and its association with the military) and the ‘Red Shirts’ (now disenfranchised supporters of the pro-Thaksin United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship party). Shakespeare Must Die, taking its cue from the play’s own colour scheme, indexes these events by privileging strategic flashes of red. Illustrative are the red mist that surrounds a distracted Mekhdeth/Macbeth and the red scarf worn by one of the hired murderers; these, it is suggested, are the identifying hues of the protagonist’s regime, as well as a ‘poor country’ (4.3.165) racked by ‘violent sorrow’ (4.3.170). In this connection, it is revealing that, shortly before the ban, on 26 March 2012, the producer of *Shakespeare Must Die*, Manit Sriwanichpoom, was summoned by the Film Censorship Board to answer a series of questions about the film’s distinctive use of colour. One member of the board noted that ‘the “Red Shirts” will say the film causes people to misunderstand them and perceive them as being prone to violence’. In a culture where remembering is a contested activity, *Shakespeare Must Die*’s colours are read as provocative, as stirring up unwelcome memories of the all too recent political maelstrom.

Arguably the most forceful connection between the theatre and the street is reserved for the film’s realization of 5.11, during which a plaster model of ‘Th’usurper’s cursèd head’ (5.11.21) is kicked about the theatre by an excited audience. Brutally dramatic in a way that ruptures traditional stage interpretations of the scene, the moment prioritizes audience involvement, as the laughing, cheering spectators attack the effigy with a sense of joyful

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release. In short, *Macbeth*, as it unfolds in the theatre, provides a narrative for an audience rising up, taking power into their own hands, and symbolically beheading a tyrant. Previous external insets of Dear Leader in his mansion now make sense; he has been forced into hiding, it is suggested, by the implications of the drama in his midst. Earlier, the radical potentiality of the drama is recognized on screen by the arrival in the theatre of pro-government supporters. After 2.4, the scene with Boonrod/Ross and the Old Man, the theatrical production cuts to an interval during which the ‘Safari Suit Man’ (he reappears later as the murderer of Lady Macduff) approaches the fictional director, played by Chatchai Puipia, a Thai artist, who is in conversation at the bar with Ing K., the film’s actual director. The intertextuality of the casting is indicative of the extent to which *Shakespeare Must Die* invests in self-referential registers, presumably reflecting traditional alliances between the People’s Alliance for Democracy Party, intellectuals, and academics. Iconic for his anti-materialist stance, as expressed in experimental sculptures, still-lifes and self-portraits, Chatchai Puipia stands in for Thai artists in general, sensitizing us both to the significance of his creations in the film (many of the paintings that appear are his own work) and to a ‘real-life’ community of creative practitioners. Exposing the doubling conceit, the ‘Safari Suit Man’ demands, ‘Your actor looks like our Dear Leader . . . Is this intentional?’ to which the theatrical director replies, ‘My job is to create the work; what you the audience may think is up to you.’ Privileging audience reaction over authorial intention, the answer highlights exactly the politics of reception that the film has made visible. Impelled to seek reinforcements, the ‘Safari Suit Man’ leaves the theatre at the line ‘And damned be him that first cries “Hold, enough!”’ (5.10.34), and ironically reappears at the line ‘The time is free’ (5.11.21) – on this occasion accompanied by a gang of red-scarfed thugs who assault the spectators, beat up the theatrical director, drag him away and subject him to an extended lynching. Through a final paradox of doubling, ‘Th’ usurper’s cursed head’ is mirrored in the theatrical director’s hanged corpse, ‘this most bloody piece of work’ (2.3.127). With such connections, the title of the film acquires its meaning, the charge thrown at the theatrical director by his executioner being that, as a representative of ‘Shakespeare’, he must ‘die’.

Recalling disturbances in Thailand of the mid-1970s, the lynching episode directly images one event in particular: the Thammasat University Massacre. On 5 October 1976, students protesting against the return to Thailand of a former military leader staged a satirical play which, detractors claimed, showed the Crown Prince in a mocking pose (photographs of the production were, in fact, falsified). In response to the perceived act of *lèse majesté*, armed groups supporting the military entered the campus of Thammasat University on 6 October and fired on, raped, mutilated and burned alive unarmed students suspected of communist sympathies. Over 300 students were killed (there have been no prosecutions), and a military junta assumed power soon afterwards. An index of the significance of the episode to *Shakespeare Must Die* lies in the ways in which it is prefigured at several points, not least when the camera glimpses the doll of a yellow gibbon (an offering for monks) hanging from the ‘Tree of Spirits’. The black heart-shaped face of the gibbon is replicated in the heart-shaped cake consumed by the witches, making of the theatrical production’s theatrical director a sacrificial figure, a totemic focus for the film as a whole.

The lynching episode casts a light back on previous censorship regimes. Although the Thammasat University Massacre was made internationally infamous by the work of Pulitzer Prize-winning photographer Neil Ulevich (who pictured a student hanging from a rope and being


beaten with a chair), inside Thailand the massacre, to cite Patsorn Sungsri, has 'not been recorded . . . at any level'.45 Interestingly, at the core of Ing K.’s address (on 5 July 2012) to the Foreign Correspondents’ Club of Thailand was an objection to the ways in which ‘stories’ in Thailand are dictated to by ‘law’; she makes the point that ‘we are not allowed to examine ourselves: our cultures, our wounds of history, our very soul’.46 Here, Shakespeare Must Die’s consistent disregard for those who stay silent seems relevant. As discussed earlier, subtitles generally respect Shakespearian dialogue, but there is an exception when, in the porter’s address, taking the place of the ‘farmer’ (2.3.4) and the ‘tailor’ (2.3.13), ‘whore academics’ and ‘journalists for sale’ are addressed. These shapers of public opinion are represented as failing to exercise independence of judgement: cowed or paid off, they have not honoured their professional integrity. Shakespeare Must Die endeavours to play a recuperative role in these respects, finding in Shakespearian language mechanisms for making evident what has been occluded. In this way, the film works as mnemonic practice. The memory work performed by Shakespeare Must Die suggests its function as ‘trauma cinema’, a species of representation that, as Susannah Radstone writes, has ‘come to be understood as a substitute, supplement, or support for modern memory’s atrophy, failure, or vicissitudes’.47 Macbeth, too, of course, is a drama of ghosts; the protagonist is himself haunted and, as the appearance of Banquo at the banquet discovers, massacres of the past return to plague the present (Illustration 43). And, because Shakespeare Must Die occurs at a juncture where history is fought over, its choice of Macbeth as the play to privilege is timely, if not politic.

The lynching episode is immediately followed by the emergence from hiding of Dear Leader; indeed, the montage suggests that the latter is facilitated by the former. Such incendiary relations between art and politics are confirmed when Dear Leader’s television broadcast places restrictions on artistic practice. ‘Brothers and sisters’, he

43 Mekhdeth/Macbeth and Khunying Mekhdeth / Lady Macbeth during the banquet scene. Courtesy of Jai Singh Films.

proclaims, ‘ill-intentioned people seek to create hatred and social division … I am forced to announce emergency rule … all publication, mass media and the arts, including public performance and exhibition, must be passed by the Public Relations Department’. In these formulations, not only is censorship tied to a ‘state of exception’, echoing the default position of a succession of governments, but anodyne versions of the arts are presented as key to the restoration of the status quo. As the witches watch the broadcast, the camera swirls giddily to a backdrop of the tangled carcass of Bangkok’s famous Siam Theatre, burned to the ground in 2010 by ‘Red-Shirt’ agitators.\(^{48}\) A dissolve to a prison cell (where the actors languish, having been forcibly removed from the theatre before the ending of the play proper) links the historical desecration of this Thai landmark with the break-up of Macbeth. Lying on the ground, clinging to the vestiges of theatricality (bloodied and torn costumes) and showing clear signs of having been beaten (bruised faces), Boonrod/Ross and Mekhdub/Macduf greet Munkam/Malcolm by his new title, openly referencing ‘Scotland’ for the first time and finding in the continuation of the production a newly resistant force. Eschewing the cuts often reserved for this scene, Shakespeare Must Die plays it in full, making of Munkam/Malcolm an afflicted hero who will not relinquish his Shakespearian responsibility, even in the most oppressive of conditions.

In part here, Shakespeare Must Die recalls the prologue-like cemetery ceremony, and realizes Munkam/Malcolm as agitating to bestow the actor’s traditional blessing on the audience. His line ‘So thanks to all at once, and to each one, / Prosperity and joy’, adapted from 5.1.140–1, is extended into and played as a kind of epilogue, replicating how, in the theatre traditions of south-east Asia, a performance is concluded with a prayer.\(^{49}\) And yet, given its embittered tone, this is no traditional act of devotion. Instead, the pledge ‘We will perform in measure, time, and place’ (5.1.139), with its emphasis on a performance still to ensue, is a defiant one: Munkam/Malcolm’s voice rises to a scream, and his hands shake the grille of his cage-like cell, pointing out a will to make Shakespeare heard. This is despite the fact that Munkam/Malcolm’s language is almost drowned out by the whirr of a helicopter and the wail of a siren, sounds of a ‘real’ protest that, taking place on the day of filming, Ing K. chose not to edit out; these are the diegetic supplements to Shakespeare Must Die that indicate the continuing ‘emergency’ situation that is the condition of the film’s possibility. And it is with the state of the country that we close in the soundtrack, a musical realization of Ross’s lament, ‘Alas, poor country, / Almost afraid to know itself. It cannot / Be called our mother, but our grave’ (4.3.165–67), complete with dark piano notes and minor chord changes. The code of ‘Atlantis’ having been abandoned, we confront ‘Scotland’, for which we read Thailand, and are invited to recognize Macbeth’s relevancies to a deeply entrenched and divided nation-state.

III

If Shakespeare Must Die ends by reifying a refusal to capitulate, this impulse is sustained in subsequent ‘real-life’ events. In the wake of the Film Censorship Board ban, there were concerted attempts by cast, crew, and production team to reverse the ruling. A 17 April 2012 ‘Letter to the National Board of Film and Video’ argued that the film had been disallowed from ‘working its truthful magic … [because] truth threatens the foundations of a tyrannical power’; it was signed by 514 co-complainants (academics, journalists, artists, dramaturgs).\(^ {50}\) Formal proceedings ensued on 30 May 2012. Ing K. and Manit Sriwanichpoom filing a petition with the Citizens’ Rights, Political Rights and Media Rights section of the National

\(^{48}\) In addition to the destruction of the Siam Theatre, 37 buildings were set alight, including the Central World shopping complex, over 90 died and 1,500 were injured. See Askw, ‘AFTERWORD’, p. 315; Terwiel, Thailand’s Political History, pp. 311, 312.

\(^{49}\) Brandon, Theatre, p. 222.

\(^{50}\) ‘Letter of Appeal to the National Board of Film and Video’, www.Shakespearemustdie.com.
Human Rights Commission, and this was followed up on 31 May 2012 with a petition to the Senate House Committee on Human Rights, Freedom and Consumer Protection. Although the latter two bodies have not been entirely unsympathetic (suggesting that amendments need to be made to accommodate greater freedom and expression in the spheres of film and media), to date, none of the appeals has been successful.

In addition to legal proceedings, resistance to the ruling took the form of staged public events, all of which had Shakespeare and Macbeth at their core. To mark the occasion of the delivery of the ‘Letter to the National Board of Film and Video’ on 17 April 2012, cast and crew staged a street protest outside Bangkok’s Government House. Assuming the role of Shakespeare in a pseudo-Elizabethan ruff, Boonrod/Ross proclaims the key ‘Alas, poor country’ (4.3.165) lament. Highlighting provenance and authorship through play, the protest showcases a kind of resurrection, the Bard coming back from the grave to castigate modern officialdom. Other cast members revive their filmic roles, appropriating lines from Macbeth that speak loudly to the current injustice. Khunying Mekhdeth / Lady Macbeth recites her ‘Out, damned spot’ (5.1.33) speech, resituating the ‘spot’ of the imaginary in the material praxis of censorship, while Mekhdeth/Macbeth cries ‘The devil damn thee black’ (5.3.11), impugning the banning of the film via site-specific theatre variations. Similarly playing with citation and double meaning are the formulations emblazoned on the placards, ‘To Ban or Not to Ban: That is the Freedom Question’ and ‘Shakespeare Must Live’. The protest uses Hamlet’s philosophical question as a rallying call, repeatedly name-checking Shakespeare to keep at the forefront the paradox of Bardic repression. In this way, the treatment meted out to a Shakespeare film becomes the rationale for launching a broader critique. A ‘Free Thai Cinema’ placard, in particular, demonstrates how Shakespeare stands in for political debate: the limbo-like situation of Shakespeare Must Die works as a test-case that reflects back on the state of Thai society as a whole.

The most sustained opposition to the censors’ verdict came in the form of Censor Must Die (directed by Ing K. and Manit Sriwanichpoom, 2013), a lengthy documentary that constitutes not so much a companion piece to the film as a riposte to the ban. Described as ‘part of our campaign to free Shakespeare Must Die’, the documentary intends ‘to influence attitudes, increase understanding, [and] persuade to action’.51 It follows the producer, Manit Sriwanichpoom, through a series of increasingly frustrating institutional encounters. The documentary shifts among various registers – black-and-white, half-tone and full-colour – whose effect is to suggest a journey through different realms of experience, none of which accords with each other or amounts to a coherent whole. Along the way, Shakespeare Must Die surfaces in extracts, the surrounding commentary feeding into those fragments and creating a defensive meta-narrative. In a typically impassioned inset, Sakul Boonyatat, who plays Boonrod/Ross in Shakespeare Must Die, speaks despairingly of ‘work of worth which is stepped on as worthless’ and of how the ‘artistic discipline’ in Thailand is always beholden to ‘propaganda’, shaped, as it is, by a condition of ‘fear’ and dictated to by ‘cultural fascism’. This affective set-piece gains credence from Sakul Boonyatat’s positions as a professor of drama and festival panel judge in ‘real life’.

Notably, Censor Must Die illuminates the extent to which the ban placed upon the film is shaped by a climate of political uncertainty. In the background of several shots, election broadcasts play out on television monitors, and unrest is thrown into sharp relief when the focus shifts to a rally objecting to the Reconciliation Bill – which would have allowed the exiled Thaksin to return to Thailand – being held outside Senate House. ‘You hold the people in contempt: we’re forced to resort to other measures’, a speaker exclaims, her complaint both echoing the situation of the film-

makers and making the point that, in contemporary Thailand, the dissatisfaction aroused by the verdict brought to bear on *Shakespeare Must Die* indicates a more expansive network of factions and grievances.

Because of the rally, Sriwanichpoom, confined within the parliamentary compound, finds his every attempted effort at escape blocked, his body becoming a cipher for *Shakespeare Must Die*’s own stalled momentum. Although on occasions we see the threatening undercurrent of governmental inertia (when the camera lingers on police shields thrown down on the pavement, for instance), dominating *Censor Must Die* are sequences which highlight the experience of delay. As Sriwanichpoom wanders through a series of vast internal architectural environs, it is easy to see how complainants lose their verve. Expressed in such visuals is the bureaucratic illogic of Thailand’s internal operations. The movement motif is given a particularly depressive turn when the producer is glimpsed wandering disconsolately past piles of papers – material manifestations of deadlock. Later, during one of his many journeys to lodge counter-arguments and appeals, Sriwanichpoom ironically finds himself stuck in a traffic jam next to Bangkok’s Democracy Monument. Giorgio Agamben notes that ‘He who has been banned is not . . . simply set outside the law . . . but rather abandoned by it . . . exposed and threatened on the threshold in which life and law, outside and inside, become indistinguishable’, an observation that *Censor Must Die* is consistently at pains to illustrate.52

At the close, in a serendipitous stroke of filmmaking, an elderly man, like the producer who has come before him, chafes at the chains of an institutional order. ‘I wish to see the Chief Judge’, he asks at the Administrative Court, adding, ‘Three years and still no judgment’. We do not know the nature of his grievance, although his blindness and disability hint at a history of Gloucester-like mistreatment. *Censor Must Die* finds in the figure of the unheeded, waiting citizen an emblematic everyman, a proxy for the predicament of

postponement. His echoing question – ‘How many more years?’ – stands as the epitaph for the documentary, encapsulating in its weary repetition the perils of attempting reform, and underscoring the ways in which delay functions as a covert mechanism with which to quell dissent. In this way, the documentary works as critique, indicting in its very length the inability – or unwillingness – of the system to reconsider the Shakespearian adaptation in its midst.

Although *Censor Must Die* might seem to offer a particular challenge in its cynical *exposé* of the workings of Thai institutions, the documentary – unlike *Shakespeare Must Die* – was passed for exhibition, the rationale being, according to the statement issued by the Film Censorship Board, that the ‘events’ represented within it ‘really happened’. The distinction is an intriguing one: the Board is able to affirm the ‘real-life’ events that followed *Shakespeare Must Die* but not the dramatization to which the film gives voice. Fictional projection, it seems, is more destabilizing. *Censor Must Die* has been shown at the Bangkok Arts and Cultural Centre and the RMA Institute, educational environments open to debating censorship judgements. Given that it contains extracts, afforded in such showings are other means of experiencing *Shakespeare Must Die*, local ways of accessing a film that, through the ban, has acquired an underground Bangkok following.

The ban has also precipitated international attention, granting to *Shakespeare Must Die* a certain aura and *caché*. A Western press seized on the censorship of an adaptation of Shakespeare as exceptional. Typical are headlines such as ‘Shakespeare est mort à Bangkok’, ‘Thai censors ban *Macbeth*’, and ‘Thailand’s Battle of the Bard’, which centre on the extraordinary disjunction between the fate visited on the film and Shakespeare’s standing as a revered playwright. And, in the wake of the controversy, *Shakespeare Must Die* is beginning to be screened outside Thailand (for instance, at the Cindi Film Festival, Seoul, in 2013; at the Asian Shakespeare Association Conference, Taipei, in 2014; and as part of a retrospective of all of Ing K.’s films at the Pompidou Centre, Paris, in 2017) to considerable acclaim.

At the 2013 Tripoli International Film Festival in Libya, the film was awarded both the Prix du Meilleur Film de Fiction and the NETPAC Prize for the Best Asian Picture. Via the act of denying the film public screenings in Thailand, the Film Censorship Board has created

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45 For the retrospective, see Nicole Brenez, ‘Rétrospective: Ing K., la “Démocratie cinématographique en action”’, *De Ligne / En Ligne: Centre Pompidou, Bibliothèque Publique d’Information* 22 (2017), 5–7. At the time of writing, the film has been screened most recently at the Close-Up Film Centre, London (31 March 2017).

46 See ‘*Censor Must Die* won’t be censored’, http://mekhdeht-cmd.blogspot.co.uk.
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the conditions for other kinds of visibility, stimulating interest not only in Shakespeare Must Die’s own ideological investments but also in the critical state of Thailand’s political milieu.

In a recent overview, Alexa Huang [Joubin] calls for the need for global Shakespeare studies to develop from ‘a catalogue of exotic objects into a critical methodology’. Available theories and current discourses of globalization, she comments, cannot ‘adequately deal with the issues of multiculturalism, multilingualism, diaspora, and identity raised by Shakespeare in his world-wide manifestations’.57 In part, the lack of methodology is linked to the ways in which easy assumptions are made about the field; all too often, it is suggested, an adaptation is judged according to ‘deterministic, linear, teleological histories … oriented towards preconceived end points’, the effect of which is to homogenize the example and to flatten the unique features of time and place.58 Censorship disrupts the narrative of Shakespeare in particular national contexts, revealing how his plays might function in strategic, but not straightforward, applications. As a paradigm of understanding, censorship is marked by a restless mix of impulses and effects: a phenomenon that is resolutely of the contemporary, it lies behind the production, or non-production, of global Shakespeares at multiple levels and colours categories of ‘Shakespeare’ and the ‘global’ in the process. Films such as Shakespeare Must Die are important, for they stimulate thinking about existing mechanisms of scholarly engagement and remind us how Shakespeare — and particularly Macbeth — retains a radical edge and a power to upset.

Indeed, Shakespeare Must Die follows in the footsteps of a number of recent adaptations, suggesting that Macbeth has become the play of choice in nation-states where questions of artistic freedom and cultural entitlement are actively debated. A film such as Sangrador (directed by Leonardo Henriquez, 2000), for instance, a Venezuelan adaptation of the play, implies via popular images of despotism an allegory of Hugo Chávez and his association with human rights abuses. Similarly, although working in different registers, Macbeth (directed by Bo Landin and Alex Scherpf, 2004), a Sámi-language adaptation set in the Arctic Circle, takes its cue from the play’s preoccupation with tyranny and absolutism. The film elaborates Sámi culture as in danger of assimilation, finding in the film’s linguistic and aesthetic decisions a plea for the preservation of an indigenous cause.59 As Shakespearian interpreter, Ing K. joins a long — but otherwise exclusively male — list of world filmmakers who have used Macbeth to attempt political intervention.60 Hers is a uniquely gendered position, and it is one that the film wishes to privilege. Included in the soundtrack to Shakespeare Must Die are snippets from the Rimsky-Korsakov symphonic suite Scheherazade, a musical adaptation of The Arabian Nights in which a sultan’s new wife avoids execution by entertaining her husband with stories. Aligning herself with a woman who is able to reverse a death sentence, Ing K. turns the spotlight towards her own status as a female artist in what is a ‘patriarchal cultural context’, invoking, to adopt Geetha Ramanathan’s formulation, ‘feminist authority’ in an effort to ‘overwrite [other] forms of cinematic power’.61

A salient and significant intervention, Shakespeare Must Die invites an audience to loosen the grip of the ‘hand accursed’ (3.6.50) that has been placed upon it, and to speculate upon a ‘Scotland’ that has been revivified for Thailand’s here-and-now. But responding adequately to this challenge insists upon a scrupulously gradated awareness of the work of adaptation, one which pushes at, and teases out, the

56 Alexa Huang [Joubin], ‘Global Shakespeares as methodology’, Shakespeare 9.3 (2013), 273–90; p. 280.
57 Huang [Joubin], ‘Global’, p. 287.
58 Huang [Joubin], ‘Global’, p. 287.
59 See Burnett, Shakespeare, pp. 112, 181.
complexities and contests introduced when, in Craig Dionne and Parmita Kapadia’s words, Shakespeare is ‘rewritten, reinscribed, and translated to fit within the local traditions, values, and languages of various communities and cultures around the world’. The act of adaptation, we now have to acknowledge, is not simply confined to aesthetics and translation – rather, it involves a concomitant absorption in issues of articulation and reception. For, to cite Ingo Berensmeyer, ‘any theory of cultural mobility needs to acknowledge the asymmetries, dislocations, and discordances that arise from shifting flows of exchange and lines of conflict’. Just recently, the Thai military junta has hit the headlines for censoring showings of The Hunger Games: Mockingjay, Part I (directed by Francis Lawrence, 2014), a film that in Thailand has been linked to student protest. The similar fates accorded this film and Ing K.’s adaptation should not blind us to the irony that very different constituencies stand behind the judgements. No one body in Thailand holds a monopoly on the exercise of censorship, and the verdict visited upon Shakespeare Must Die represents a salutary example of the non-linear relations that obtain between a Shakespearian adaptation and its sites of production.

65 There is no DVD of the film commercially available, although extracts are available on the MIT Global Shakespeares Video & Performance Archive website and on YouTube. It is hoped that this situation will change in due course. I would like to thank Ing K. and Manit Sriwanichpoom for the many courtesies and kindnesses extended to me during the writing of this article.