

You or me who pretended to know?

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Author's/Translator's Introduction

Phana P.

The current movement for democracy in Thailand was inaugurated with a protest organized by FreeYOUTH (เยาวชนปลดแอก) on 18 July 2020 at the Democracy Monument in Bangkok. On that day I was working in my office and knew that I would be late to the demonstration for sure. At that time, the issue of the monarchy was not one of the main issues of the protest; the initial demands of the protests were for General Prayuth Chan-ocha to resign and new elections to be held, the 2017 Constitution to be revised, and the state to stop harassing activists. A little over two weeks later, reform of the monarchy became central to the movement after lawyer-poet Arnon Nampha, dressed as a wizard, raised the issue of the monarchy's role in society at a Harry Potter-themed protest on 3 August 2020.¹

Going on stage around midnight during the protest, I asked a personal question "I love the King. In what contexts can it be used?"²

In the first draft, which I have translated here, the poem ended with the sentence "Let's hate each other then." I subsequently developed the poem into a theatre scene after reading it out loud to a few friends. After that, I used several different forms of performance to deploy this poem to address this issue as part of the Thai pro-democracy move-

¹ Arnon's speech has been published in English translation by PEN International: Arnon Nampha, *The Monarchy and Thai Society* (London: PEN International, 2021), available for download here:

<https://pen-international.org/news/thailand-pen-international-releases-booklets-speeches-thailand-protest-leaders>.

² The "I" used was the informal "กู" in the original text, a phrase resonant with the "We love the king" (เรารักในหลวง) campaign.

ment.³

The king and institution of the monarchy paradoxically play a role and have a status in Thai politics that can be characterized as “The king can do no wrong because the king can do nothing.” But the king (himself) is a human. Can or cannot our personal feelings be dominated and determined by the state? This is a question I have as a human. I can love someone and I can not love someone all on my own. Let’s hate each other. This couldn’t happen, right? That is what I want to shout out. That’s why the title is “You or me who pretended to know?” (In Thai, “คุณหรือฉันที่ดันทำเป็นเส่รู้”). This is what I want to say to those who hold power. Let’s push each other away, don’t let us become enemies. If you can say “We love the king,” then I should be able to say “I do not love the king.” Both sentences are equal. No matter what happens, we should be able to talk about the monarchy in public without facing criminal prosecution.

³ The most recent performance can be viewed here, beginning at 16.44: <https://youtu.be/mwxK2eL812g?t=1004>.

You or me who pretended to know?⁴

Phana P.

*A transcript of a poetry reading on the #FreeYOUTH stage
Midnight on Saturday, 18 July 2020
Democracy Monument, Bangkok*

(Phana walks on stage to receive the mic)

Hello, have you heard?
Heard that the new generation protestors are not rude.
I'm going to cut you out of the script.
The poem is called "You or me who pretended to know?"

I love the king. In what contexts can it be used?
Dear dictator
So don't call it "love"
It's just pleasing the king.
Acquiescence
Ridiculous

Dear dictator & monarchy
How do you analyze your dissatisfaction with our answer?
You only have one question from us.
It's useless now, monarchy.
You know it's useless
Can't love each other
Let's hate each other, then.

(A shout from downstage, "If you just don't love each other,

⁴This poem was first read outside the Bangken Police Station on 7 August 2020. The Common Sense Poetry Network printed it in a leaklet on 15 October 2020. The poem, and its iterations, are also available online here: [https://illmaninbookstore.medium.com/คุณหรือฉันที่ดันทำเป็นเสร์-
poetry-on-the-wall-17559d0cc2e9](https://illmaninbookstore.medium.com/คุณหรือฉันที่ดันทำเป็นเสร์-
poetry-on-the-wall-17559d0cc2e9).

do you have to hate each other?)

“That’s right. It’s a question that everyone has to answer for themselves. Just don’t love each other, so we have to hate each other, right?”

(Phana answers the question and thanks the audience.)

(Encore!)

Dear king & dictatorship

If we just don’t love each other then do we have to hate each other?

We choose to love or not to love.

Just as you choose to love or not to love him too.

Dear dictator & monarchy

No monitor, No one staring

There is only space to express love and unlove.

About the Author/Translator

Phana P. has worked as the project manager of Thong Lor Art Space in Bangkok and as an independent producer since 2015. In 2019, Recently he worked on artist engagement and was co-curator of the music programmes during on the project 'The Low Fat Art Fes Vol.03. In 2020, his first book of poetry was published in Thai (ฉันไม่รู้ว่าคุณคิดถึงเธอหรือเปลือกของเธอ) by Awlbook (To order, see: <https://www.facebook.com/commerce/products/3488696837874907>). He organizes poetry readings for the Common Sense Poetry Network (เครือข่ายกวีสามัญสำนึก | <https://www.facebook.com/Commonsensepoetrynetwork/>) in Thailand's pro-democracy movement. He can be reached via email at: p.pethsumrich@gmail.com.