

# Nationalizing Shakespeare in Québec: Theorizing Post-/Neo-/Colonial Adaptation

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## Abstract

Québec's political situation and multiple identities as a colonial, postcolonial, and neo-colonial nation make its adaptations of Shakespeare unique. By appropriating the canonical authority of Shakespeare's texts, Québécois adapters legitimize their local struggle for national liberation; however, this appropriation requires that they negotiate a fine line between the enrichment of Québécois culture and its possible contamination, assimilation, or effacement by Shakespeare's influence. This article proposes three reasons why Québécois playwrights choose to adapt Shakespeare more often than Molière: the indeterminacy of Shakespeare's texts; his "big time" status; and Québec's cultural distance from the British canon. These factors result in Québécois playwrights' irreverent, and hence liberating, approach to "le grand Will." Québec's overlapping post-/neo-/colonial identities make its relationship to Shakespeare distinct from that of English Canada. While Mark Fortier claims that Canadians are "undead" due to their ambivalence as settler-colonizers "from elsewhere," I argue that in Québec the national question eclipses forms of alterity in these adaptations of Shakespeare. Québécois adaptations tend to be oriented towards the creation of one multiethnic, national identity to which "others" must assimilate as the nation strives collectively for political sovereignty and legitimacy.

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## Shakespeare vs. Molière

It is common practice in Québec to contrast "la langue de Molière" and "la langue de Shakespeare."<sup>1</sup> Yet, in a Québec that prides itself on still speaking Molière's tongue, it is especially puzzling to find a remarkably rich history of adaptations of Shakespeare since the Quiet Revolution.<sup>2</sup> Since the beginning of this massive social reform in 1960, more than thirty such French-language adaptations of Shakespeare have been written in Québec — and an impressive number of translations and innovative stage productions have been performed, as well.<sup>3</sup> By uniting the Québécois language and Shakespeare's texts, Québécois adapters embrace cultural hybridity in order to appropriate the canonical authority of Shakespeare's texts and to legitimize their local

struggle for national liberation. However, this appropriation requires that the adapters negotiate a fine line between the enrichment of Québécois culture and its possible contamination, assimilation, or effacement by Shakespeare's often overwhelming influence. The paradoxical existence of Québécois Shakespeare, especially in the face of such cultural risks, raises therefore an important question: Why adapt Shakespeare and not Molière?

More so than Molière, Shakespeare has been appropriated by Québécois playwrights in support of the nationalist cause for three reasons. First, the indeterminacy of his texts makes them easily malleable to their political purposes, just as his plays have often been manipulated in service of various political agendas, transhistorically and transculturally. Without succumbing to notions of Shakespeare's timelessness, one can nonetheless argue that Shakespeare's texts are less locally and historically situated than those of other early modern writers, and are therefore more suitable to adaptation in other cultural and historical contexts — as they have been in India and Africa, for instance.<sup>4</sup> Although colonial importation is unquestionably an important reason for the endurance of Shakespeare's works in these locales, their colonial dissemination does not diminish the fact that their indeterminacy makes them more adaptable and subject to reinterpretation in different contexts than those of Molière, as indeed they are in Québec.

Second, Shakespeare has made what Michael Bristol calls "the big time"; that is, Shakespeare is a pop celebrity. As Bristol observes, "Other literary figures may achieve canonical status within the academic community based on claims to artistic distinction, but Shakespeare is unusual in that he has also achieved contemporary celebrity" (1996, 3). Shakespeare's dual authority within both the academic and the pop culture communities therefore lends credibility within the popular imaginary to the political agenda of authors who cite or rewrite his texts.

Canonical difference provides a third possible reason why Québécois adapt Shakespeare instead of Molière. The lack of investment in, and indoctrination by, the British literary canon, coupled with Shakespeare's big-time status, make his texts both worthy of adaptation and sufficiently culturally distant to become objects of play. Francophone audiences tend to be less familiar than anglophone audiences with the exact details of Shakespeare's text, so Québécois adapters expose themselves less to virulent attacks from critics concerned with fidelity to the source texts. While in English-speaking nations, Shakespeare might be more difficult to adapt without drawing the criticism of desecrating a classic, in Québec Molière is the more sacrosanct of the two and the more risky author for a playwright to tackle.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the adaptation of Shakespeare in Québec has the added bonus of constituting a subversive attack on English Canada — where bardolotry reigns more strongly and the British canon carries more cultural authority —

by transgressing the norms of the proper representation of an important cultural icon. In effect, Québécois adapters can use Shakespeare to stick it to the English (Canadians), so to speak. In Audre Lorde's terms, they are using the master's tools to deconstruct the master's house, as they simultaneously profit from and repudiate Shakespeare's canonicity. This is not to imply that some English Canadian adaptations may not also constitute a subversive attack on the British canon, but English Canada does not have the same multiple relationships to both Britain and another nation that Québec has with regard to Britain, English Canada, and even France.

Thus, while the appropriation of Shakespeare would normally carry with it cultural risks, as is the case in English Canadian and other anglophone postcolonial adaptations,<sup>6</sup> in Québec the adapters' cultural distance and indifference to British hegemony adds a playful irreverence to their texts that diminishes the risk of assimilation. This irreverent, and hence liberating, attitude of Québécois towards Shakespeare can be summed up in their nickname for him: "le grand Will." In Québec, Shakespeare is grand, a big-time author to revere, yet Québécois playwrights are not afraid to bring him down to size, to make him their own, and to develop an affectionate relationship with him on a first-name basis (Lieblein 2002, 178-99). In Québec, the colonial relationship to Shakespeare is multiple and unique. As a former settler colony of France (with a lingering colonial inferiority complex regarding the use of "standard" French versus *joual*),<sup>7</sup> and as a nation that was then conquered by the British only to be subsumed shortly thereafter into the Canadian confederation, which many Québécois consider to be a form of neo-colonial tutelage,<sup>8</sup> Québec has both been a colonizer of the Native peoples and has been colonized itself. Québec's ambivalent and overlapping identities as a colonial, neo-colonial, and postcolonial nation inform its Shakespearean adaptations. Québécois playwrights reinscribe the Bard's canonical authority when they appropriate it in order to highlight Québec's distinct cultural identity and to legitimize the nation's struggle for political independence; however, they are also able to play with his texts more freely since they do not belong to the Québécois canon.

Québec's overlapping colonial, neo-colonial, and postcolonial identities make its relationship to Shakespeare different from that of English Canada. In English Canada, Shakespeare has often been an important link between a settler colony and a distant, yet omnipresent, homeland. "Often employed as a bulwark against other 'undesirable' traditions or cultures," Irena Makaryk argues, in English Canada "Shakespeare has also served in many other capacities: as protector and symbol of high art, as morally edifying theatre, as an ally of solid British values, and as a tool of Anglicization, among others" (2002, 5). Makaryk's claim meshes well with Ric Knowles's "autobiographical narrative" in *Shakespeare and Canada*, in which he reveals his subject position as critic as a

"white, male, settler/invader [. . . who] stands as postcolonial subject" (2004, 14). Knowles recounts his subjective experience of feeling like Miranda when she expresses amazement at this "brave new world / That has such people in't" (5.1.183-84).<sup>9</sup> He points out that she is an "(almost) second-generation settler/invader [speaking], not about the new world, but the old one — or, more accurately, speaking about debased representatives of old world culture on a temporary sojourn in the colonies" (17), and as a teenager he, too, was awestruck by the old world colonial project, by the costumes, language, and accents of the actors in a production of Shakespeare in Stratford, Ontario. Knowles goes on to describe his "first pilgrimage to England," made "while working on [his] Ph.D.," "in search of authenticity, authority, cultural identity" on his "purchased-in-Canada Brit-Rail pass through train stations named after characters in Shakespeare's history plays . . . and . . . the real, authentic towns, cities, and rivers after which the colonial imitations and the parks of Southwestern Ontario were named" (19). Having made the same pilgrimage myself, I would argue that this colonial relationship to Shakespeare and the mother country remains largely true for Canadian scholars today. For English Canadians, the post- in postcolonial is never fully actualized when it comes to our relationship to Shakespeare; the *mythos* of the mother country haunts our cultural imaginary since Shakespeare and Dickens continue to occupy the Canadian big-time more than Margaret Atwood or Margaret Laurence — especially in our formative years, as we watch Mickey Mouse in Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* every year on CBC and hear countless tales of Romeo and Juliet long before the educational system may attempt to Canadianize our own personal literary canons.

For anglo-Canadian critics, such as Knowles and myself, engaging critically with Québécois adaptations of Shakespeare is risky business because the texts and the authors are so tied up politically and psychologically in the colonizer-colonized binary and the struggle for national independence from the cultural power from which the Canadian critic cannot dissociate him- or herself. The Bardolatry underlying the Stratfordian pilgrimages of young Shakespearean scholars testifies to its thorough grasp on the English Canadian cultural imaginary, so that even conscious attempts by critics to valorize an adaptation's alternative reading of its sources cannot help but situate the Shakespearean source text as the primary point of reference, to which all else must measure up, even when the critic is aware that not measuring up is the strategic goal of the adapted text. The Canadian adaptation *Harlem Duet* (Sears 1997), for example, writes back to Shakespeare's *Othello*, not Cinthio's source text, because even when the adaptation proposes an alternative reading so radically different as to be incomparable to the source text, the source text, which stands as the

point of reference for the adaptation, is always Shakespeare's rather than the sources he himself adapted.

The complicated colonial, neo-colonial, and postcolonial relationships at work in the context of Québécois adaptations become more apparent in comparison with the thematic emphasis of Canadian adaptations of Shakespeare. Knowles claims that Shakespeare's authority "haunts different collectivities within Canada differently, and has frequently been used, not only in the service of shoring up, but also of destabilizing unitary concepts of Canadian nationhood, even as 'Canada' has been used both to reinforce and destabilize unitary concepts of Shakespeare as universal (English) bard" (22). While it is true that different collectivities use Shakespeare to destabilize various unitary concepts within Canadian public discourse, such as race (as in Djanet Sears's *Harlem Duet*) or gender (in Ann-Marie MacDonald's *Good Night Desdemona, Good Morning Juliet* [1990]), no other regions or provinces of Canada do so in order to destabilize *national* identity itself. Unlike Québec, there is no theatrical history, let alone long-standing tradition, of adaptations of Shakespeare in Nova Scotia, for instance, much less for the purpose of nationalist identity affirmation, because, unlike Québec, other regions of Canada are not seeking liberation from federal, neo-colonial tutelage. Canadian nationhood is only destabilized by collectivities within Canada who consider themselves distinct nations separate from the Canadian national identity, that is, Québec and the First Nations. Daniel Fischlin cites in "Nation and/ as Adaptation," for example, Warren Graves's 1974 play *Chief Shaking Spear Rides Again (or the Taming of the Sioux)*, but even as the play criticizes Canada's neo-colonial dominance of its Native Peoples, it does so within the framework of a clash of nations within the *a mari usque ad mare* Canadian political structure without positing succession as the solution to neo-colonialism (Fischlin 2002, 328-30). Only Québécois adaptations employ Shakespeare for the primary purpose (above class, race, or gender issues) of reconstructing Québécois — and consequently Canadian — national identity.

The list of thirty-one playtexts to which I am referring as "Québécois adaptations of Shakespeare" are:<sup>10</sup> Robert Gurik's *Hamlet, prince du Québec* (1968); Jean-Claude Germain's *Rodéo et Juliette* (1970-1971); Serge Mercier's *Elle* (1974); Jacques Girard and Reynald Robinson's *Roméo et Julien* (1982); Jean-Pierre Ronfard's *Lear* (1977), *Vie et mort du Roi Boiteux* (1981), and *Falstaff* (1990); Michel Garneau's trilogy *Macbeth de William Shakespeare: Traduit en québécois* (1978), *La tempête* (1989), and *Coriolan* (1989), as well as his *Shakespeare: un monde qu'on peut apprendre par coeur* (1991); René-Daniel Dubois's *Pericles, Prince of Tyre, by William Shakespeare* (1986); Pierre-Yves Lemieux's *À propos de Roméo et Juliette* (1989); Normand

Chaurette's *Les Reines* (1991); Antonine Maillet's *William S* (1991); Reynald Bouchard's *Touchez pas à ma paroisse* (1994); Marco Micone's *La mégère de Padova* (1995); Michel Ouellette's *Songe d'une nuit* (1995); the 38 monologues event (1996); Jean-Frédéric Messier and Paula de Vasconcelos's *Le making of de Macbeth* (1996); Lük Fleury's *Richard moins III* (1998); Daphné Thompson's *Sauvée des eaux: Texte dramatique sur Ophélie* (2000); Larry Tremblay's *Roller* (2000) and *Guitare Tatou* (2004); Alexis Martin's *Dave veut jouer Richard III* (2001); Kadar Mansour's *Sous l'empire de Iago* (2002); Nancy Thomas's *Richard III ou la chute du corbeau* (2002); Madd Harold's and Anthony Kokx's *Henry. Octobre. 1970.* (2002); Yves Sioui Durand's and Jean-Frédéric Messier's *Hamlet-le-Malécite* (2004); Michel Nadeau's *Les mots fantômes* (2006); and Katy Veilleux's *Elsemeur* (2007).<sup>11</sup>

Detailing how most of these adaptations work to shore up nationalist identification would be too exhaustive for this article, but a snapshot of several major plays reveals the thematic evolution of these adaptations as a whole in relation to the changing discourses of the nationalist movement over the last four decades. From the Quiet Revolution until the present day, these adaptations reveal the progression, in nationalist discourse, from the rejection of defeatism in the 1960s to the issue of language in the 1970s, the post-referendum disillusionment in the 1980s, and the need for cultural and gender diversity in the 1990s in attempts to imagine the nation less monolithically.

### Limping, Bastard Kings

Soon after the Quiet Revolution, adaptations such as Robert Gurik's *Hamlet, prince du Québec* (1968) and Jean-Claude Germain's *Rodéo et Juliette* (1970-1) raised the question "To be or not to be free" in order to situate Québec's quest for sovereignty in terms of Hamlet's problem of ceaseless thought versus the need to take immediate action. In Québec in the late 1960s and early 1970s, nationalism was expressed largely in terms of taking action, *passer à l'action*,<sup>12</sup> and throwing off the defeatism of a *né-pour-un-petit-pain* attitude of self-deprecation.<sup>13</sup> This type of nationalism was manifested through anti-ecclesiasticism, neo-Marxism, and parallels with African decolonization in order to develop a more internationalist perspective in counter-balance to traditional nationalist discourses derived from Ultramontanism,<sup>14</sup> and this nationalism came to be articulated in terms of Québec's socio-political, linguistic, and economic inequality within the framework of Canadian federalism.

The use, quality, and even the existence of the Québécois language was a key debate in Québec during the 1970s, a debate to which Michel Garneau contributed significantly with

his "tradaptations" (to employ his own neologism) of Shakespeare. In 1977, the same year that the *Loi 101* language laws took effect and just four years after Québécois poet Michele Lalonde wrote "La deffence et illustration de la langue quebecquoyse," a manifesto for the defense and promotion of the Québécois language,<sup>15</sup> Garneau published *Macbeth, de William Shakespeare: Traduit en québécois*, the first and most radical of these tradaptations. In *Macbeth* and later *La tempête*, without changing Shakespeare's plot or characters (as do most contemporary Québécois adaptations), Garneau exposes the semiotic richness of the Québécois language by translating the text into an approximation of a seventeenth-century dialect (not unlike contemporary *joual*) spoken prior to the Conquest of New France by England in 1759. At the same time, he subtly adapts several geographical and historical details in order to conflate the action within the world of the plays with the Conquest as well as with the 1970s political context of neo-colonialism believed to have resulted from it. The overlapping spatio-temporal markers produce a triple layer of signification, simultaneously locating the play in either medieval Scotland or on Caliban's island, in seventeenth-century New France, and in contemporary Québec. Distinctions between the layers of this palimpsest are blurred since the three spatio-temporal contexts are all linked by a single nationalist discourse centered on the country's usurpation by a tyrant and its desperate need for liberation.<sup>16</sup>

Jean-Pierre Ronfard's plays *Lear* (1977) and *Vie et mort du Roi Boiteux* [Life and Death of the Limping King] (1981), adaptations of Shakespeare's *King Lear* and of *Richard III* respectively, employ carnival and magic realism to parody the bastardized state of the nation whose corruption and decay can be eliminated only by the rise to power of strong-willed women. Rabelaisian carnival dominates every aspect of these two adaptations; food, drinking, rampant sexuality, and references to the grotesque lower body abound in every scene. Ronfard carnivalizes the nation, rendering it grotesque through his focus on bastardy, a pertinent theme for a Québec nation still considered illegitimate as a full political entity, at best Canada's limping, bastard cousin. Of all Québécois adaptations, Ronfard's plays best illustrate the irreverence of the Québécois approach to Shakespeare.<sup>17</sup> Ronfard's two Shakespearean adaptations straddle a crucial turning point in Québec's history, the 1980 referendum on sovereignty-association, in which the "No" side won 59.6 percent to 40.4 percent for the "Yes." The Québécois population's struggle for political independence (the momentum for which was at a high point on the heels of the surprisingly strong, and first ever, Parti Québécois electoral victory in 1976), followed by their subsequent rejection of it, marks both of these plays. Whereas in the pre-referendum *Lear*, the declining state of the nation and the need to rescue it figure prominently, in the post-referendum *Vie et mort du Roi Boiteux*

the obvious degeneration of the nation is relegated to the background in favor of a focus on gender relations and sexuality, until the nation finally acquires a new ruler at the play's end. The later play's inquiry into women's independence in marriage and their political role in society corresponds to the historical rise of the feminist movement in Québec in the 1970s and the increased social presence of women's issues following the temporary decline of the national question after the referendum. Ronfard's adaptations figure daughters as the survivors, inheritors, and sources of regeneration for fictional, bastard nations that pass through the disorder of carnival and then hover on the precipice of a new social order which will be more inclusive of women, and to some extent immigrants — that is, of the "others" to whom carnival gives leave to rule.<sup>18</sup>

Since the 1990s, Québec has seen an explosion of no fewer than twenty-two adaptations of Shakespeare by a range of playwrights from various socio-cultural backgrounds, including the first adaptations written by women, queers, and immigrants, all of which share one important trait: an exposure of the need to redefine the nation more inclusively through greater cultural and gender diversity. (As we shall see, it is significant that this emergence of other voices only begins to appear in Québécois adaptations in the 1990s, especially following the second referendum.) No production better exemplifies the redefinition of the nation less monolithically than the 38 event (1996), a series of thirty-eight monologues about each of Shakespeare's plays written by thirty-eight different playwrights under thirty-eight years of age. Each monologue is a personal interpretation of a play, with little to no intertextual or thematic exchange among the thirty-eight texts. To a certain extent, the pluralist approach of the 1990s could be seen as a temporary turn away from the use of Shakespeare as a medium for nationalist discourses, since the Bard is appropriated in service of new socio-political agendas. For instance, in Pierre-Yves Lemieux's *À propos de Roméo et Juliette* (1989) a gay Mercutio blatantly asserts his homoerotic desire for Romeo; in Daphné Thompson's *Sauvée des eaux: texte dramatique sur Ophélie* (2000) a fictional female adapter tries to save Ophelia from her fate; and in Yves Sioui Durand's and Jean-Frédéric Messier's *Hamlet-le-Malécite* (2004), an aboriginal man seeks to play Hamlet while living the plot in his own life. While the cultural and gender diversity exhibited in these adaptations is laudable, the paradigm of the monolithic nation remains inescapable, as we see in a play such as Madd Harold's and Anthony Kokx's *Henry. Octobre. 1970.* (2002), which presents the English-French bitterness of the battle of Agincourt as ongoing in the modern era by situating the Hundred Years' War in the context of the 1970 October Crisis and portraying the French more favorably than the English.<sup>19</sup>

### Canada vs. Québec



By using Shakespeare to work through various stages of national(ist) identity in what sovereignists call *la longue marche vers le pays*,<sup>20</sup> Québécois adapters challenge a fundamental principle underlying modern Canadian nationhood: the belief in one multicultural nation *a mari usque ad mare* united in all of its diversity. In articulating a nationalist, and arguably sovereignist, discourse through the British Bard who has played such a pivotal role in the evolution of British North America into modern Canada, Québécois adapters undercut the success of that particular colonial project and expose its present-day composition as a false construct, a case of wishful thinking in which unity in diversity has not been achieved and the age-old divide of "two founding nations" that was so prominent at Confederation remains prevalent today.

Fischlin confirms that Canadian national identity may be nothing more than a false construct when he writes that "[n]ational identity is an imaginary entity, an ideality based on the simultaneous production and eradication of difference through the filter of communal values, in this case, putatively embedded in Shakespeare and the Shakespeare effect" (Fischlin 2002, 327). For Fischlin, Canadians have no essential national identity other than that which they socially construct through cultural production, of which Shakespearean adaptation is an important part. This adaptation tradition "links the iconicity of Shakespeare with the symbolic destiny, however illusory, of nation" (321). However, I would argue that national identity is not imaginary, even if the community constituting the nation is imagined. Fischlin agrees with Benedict Anderson that nations are imagined communities, but I would contend that the imaginary composition of that community does not invalidate or render illusory the subjective experience of a national identity by the community's individual citizens. While as Fischlin observes, the very definition of "communal" values obviously depends on the eradication of difference within the imagined community, in Québec these communal values are not embedded in Shakespeare, as they are in English Canada, because Québec does not have the same colonial relationship to the Bard, and its citizens possess a collective, subjective, settler/invader experience very different from that of English Canadians. Not being as closely entangled with Shakespeare as English Canadian settler/invader subjects, Québécois playwrights are freer to manipulate the effect produced by Shakespeare's authority in their call for national freedom.

Fischlin pursues this notion of the nation as a false construct in his claim that "[n]ation assumes assimilation into the authentic bosom of an originary identity, however spurious or illusory such an idea may be" (2002, 326). This assertion holds true in that Québécois nationalism claims an originary identity (be it derived from France, l'Île d'Orleans, or the Conquest), but I would claim that the rest of his argument does not apply to Québec when he adds:

The authentic, because it is always predicated on a belatedly assimilative effect, signifies an identity crisis by way of a dialectic that presumes and requires the inauthentic (that which is assimilated) in order to give it meaning. Shakespeare's assimilation by state (read 'authentic') culture is used as a bulwark against incursions in state culture by its 'inauthentic,' nomadic margins. (326)

In Québec, the "inauthentic" (or the bastard, in Ronfard's terms) is precisely what characterizes Shakespearean adaptation — the "inauthentic" nation which is not yet a state, and especially the inauthentic class, since the use of *joual* inscribes the adapted Shakespearean characters as working class. Inauthentic Québécois adaptations reverse Fischlin's Canadian paradigm and make that which is Québécois a marginal incursion into "authentic" Shakespearean culture.

Unlike Canada, whose history of "Shakespearean adaptation is coincident with its emergence as a nation-state" (Fischlin 2002, 321), Québec is a state-less nation whose history of Shakespearean adaptation precedes this political emergence. Shakespearean adaptation in Québec does not coincide with the ascension to full political statehood, although it does coincide with the emergence of renewed and more fervent nationalism, because nationalist playwrights may find in Shakespeare's authority validation for their cause, provided that they negotiate carefully the power relations inherent in their collaboration with him and avoid drowning out their own voices by the clamor with which Shakespearean authority resounds. Garneau's *Macbeth* typifies this search for balance between manipulating the power of Shakespearean authority and succumbing to it — as the long title of his play suggests, beginning with "*de William Shakespeare*" but ending pointedly and forcefully with "*traduit en québécois.*" In this case, Fischlin's claims about the nature of adaptation hold true: "Adaptations work both sides of this coin, whether confirming a myth of authenticity and origin or interrogating such a position through alternative and revisionary definitions of authenticity" (326). Québécois adaptations confirm the authenticity of Shakespeare's authority by relying on his cultural power, but they interrogate the English colonialism that his canon of works helped promulgate.

Fischlin sums up his argument with an assertion that "adaptation questions the essentialist qualities associated with Shakespearean authority, canonicity, and cultural value. In short, adaptations serve multiple positionings with regard to national self-identity as mediated by a cultural icon like Shakespeare" (2002, 328). While it is true that Québécois adaptations question authority and canonicity (to the extent that a national group can question a literary canon which is not its own and in which it does not have the invested stakes of those who helped form it), Québécois adaptations do not serve multiple positions within Québécois national self-identity. There are no

federalist adaptations of Shakespeare in Québec to construct a unified Canadian identity by anglo-Québécois, and certainly not by franco-Québécois. Instead, Québécois adaptations are all oriented in the same direction towards the creation and solidification of one national identity, of a sovereign people, which includes women and aboriginals and immigrants, but who are expected in these plays to assimilate to a mostly monolithic identity as part of one large, multi-ethnic, sovereign nation. Gender and ethno-religious difference are acknowledged and respected, but are not foregrounded in the collective body of texts because Québécois adapters are almost all men (with the exception of Maillet,<sup>21</sup> de Vasconcelos, Thompson, Thomas, and Veilleux), and their approach to nationalism is inherently masculinist. Women play crucial roles in the formation of the nation, but the collective survival of the nation takes precedence over the concerns of individual women characters, of which these plays have very few, with Maillet's *Shrew* being the notable exception of a resolutely feminist character.

In respect to this monolithic nation constructed both textually and socially, Mark Fortier's astute observation about Canadian identity, which I would agree holds true in that case, does not, however, apply to Québec:

[T]here is always something un-Canadian about being Canadian, that the from-elsewhere is part of being here. Shakespeare, therefore, is one manifestation of from elsewhere at work in Canada. As such, Canadians confront Shakespeare as the cultural undead, neither dead nor living, not a person but an other forming part of living personalities, if only as part of the sublime personality, the otherness of the past, the remains of which reside here. Canadians too, in their specific ways, are the undead, although as *noir* subjects they may not always realize this. (342)

Fortier's underlying premise does not hold true in Québec, where the notion of "from-elsewhere" did not truly appear until after the 1995 referendum campaign, at which point it entered nationalist discourse as damage control after Jacques Parizeau's famous statement on "l'argent et le vote ethnique" [money and the ethnic vote] that was based on a definition of "*nous*" [us] as *pure laine*.<sup>22</sup> After the referendum, the notion that Québec was *le pays de tous les Québécois* [the country of all Québécois] (to borrow the title of a collection by Michel Sarra-Bournet) began to enter academic discourse, but a general mistrust of sovereignists' claims of openness to the inclusion of people of multiple ethnic origins within the national project prevailed. Only very recently has the concept of "from-elsewhere" entered public discourse with great popularity, but the celebration of foreign origins was not in circulation at the time the majority of these

Shakespearean adaptations were written to the same extent that it was in the rest of Canada.<sup>23</sup> The reason that "from-elsewhere" was not current in Québec public discourses is nationalism: Canadian nationalism (that is, federalism) is disguised by the celebration of "multiculturalism" as a replacement for the discourse of "bilingualism and biculturalism," based on the notion of "two founding nations" (which ignores, of course, all the First Nations) that was in circulation during the early reign of Trudeau.<sup>24</sup> After the 1980 referendum, it became apparent that one way to diminish Québec's claim as a founding nation, on which its claims for greater political autonomy were based, would be to multiply the number of founding national identities which compose Canada (and indeed, many do outside of Québec, although the phenomenon is hardly as widespread as official discourse would have one believe and tends to be confined to the immigration of specific ethnic groups to specific geopolitical locations). Despite attempts to divert the idea of "two founding nations" to "multiculturalism," the binary approach pervades popular thought in Québec and, until recently, has overshadowed references to "from-elsewhere."<sup>25</sup>

Québec's relationship to Shakespeare as "undead," then, is different from that of Canada's because the lack of "from-elsewhere" testifies in general to a lack of alterity or otherness in Québec.<sup>26</sup> The "national question" has a totalizing effect that permeates the collective consciousness, so forms of alterity, such as ethnicity and gender, are eclipsed — without, however, being erased. Racial, gendered, and class-based otherness is not given its full place in Québec, in comparison to other Western societies in which national independence has long been settled, such as Canada and the United States, because the national question remains to be settled first. The preponderance of the national question over other social issues can be seen in the sheer number of nationalist adaptations of Shakespeare versus those that deal primarily with other topics.<sup>27</sup>

Québécois Shakespeare, therefore, is not the same thing as Shakespeare in Québec. Québécois adaptations of Shakespeare highlight Québec's cultural difference in a way that mere stage productions of Shakespeare in Québec cannot. The moment of departure from the Shakespearean source text by the adapter imposes a cultural specificity on the text that is also not to be found in performances of Shakespeare in Stratford, Ontario or England. While Canadian adaptations of Shakespeare struggle to wrest authority from an undead author, Québécois adaptations, because they run differently the risks of contamination by that authority and have a neo-colonial relationship to Canada in addition to a postcolonial relationship to Europe, appropriate it much more freely in service of the decolonization of the nation.

## Notes

1. The use of French accents on Québec and Québécois, although not always the standard procedure of translators in English usage, is a deliberate choice on my part in order to highlight the cultural specificity of Québec. Leanore Lieblein, Ric Knowles, and Daniel Fischlin all adopt the same practice.
2. The Quiet Revolution was a period of massive social reform that began in 1960 shortly after the death of Maurice Duplessis, whose reign was labeled "la grande noirceur" [the great darkness], and the arrival to power of Jean Lesage's Liberal party, whose slogan was "*Maîtres chez nous*" [Masters in our own homes].
3. I define adaptations as additions (although not reductions for the purpose of playing time), transpositions, or translations that alter significantly the content or meaning of the source text, as well as blatant re-writings. In drawing an admittedly fine line between certain translations and adaptations, I rely in part on Fischlin's and Fortier's theoretical discussion of adaptation in their introduction to *Adaptations of Shakespeare* (2000). Contrary to Linda Hutcheon (2006), I also limit the use of "adaptation" to dramatic playtexts whose trajectory from page to stage mirrors that of their Shakespearean counterparts because cross-generic adaptations, such as plays to novels, and cross-media adaptations, such as plays to films, necessarily involve a double process of adaptation to account for differences between genres and media. Hutcheon's broad use of "adaptation" across genres and media makes it an umbrella term that loses its theoretical usefulness.
4. Québec's colonial experience is not, of course, comparable to India's. After the British conquest of New France in 1759, the French were allowed to continue to speak their language and Shakespeare was never used pedagogically as a tool of cultural imperialism, as in India. Unlike the rest of North America even, Shakespeare was not a staple of the francophone literary curriculum. English, however, did become the language of commerce, and francophones were largely denied access on the basis of language to the higher levels of business and social power until the adoption by the Parti Québécois government in 1977 of the *Loi 101*, which made French the official language of work and business in Québec and gradually enabled francophones to achieve social and economic power comparable to that of their anglophone counterparts, who had heretofore been the ruling class.
5. Daniel Paquette, writer of *Mon royaume pour un cheval*, provided this reason for adapting Shakespeare in a telephone interview with the author on 17 January, 2007.
6. Is Canada postcolonial? Is Québec? The postcoloniality of settler colonies has long been contested and continues to be debated by critics today. In the collection *Is Canada Postcolonial?* (2003), edited by Laura Moss, several critics, notably Moss, George Elliot Clarke, Neil Besner,

Diana Brydon, Terry Goldie, and Stephen Slemon, theorize all sides of the question without arriving at a consensus; or, as Moss sums it up, they arrive at a "typical Canadian response": "an unequivocal 'yes. . . and no. . . and maybe'" or "'it depends'" (2003, 7). In Québec, and in French literary studies in general, the debate has lagged significantly behind for reasons explored seriously for the first time in a special issue of the journal *Québec Studies* in 2003, in which the response is much more categorical. Critics such as Robert Schwartzwald, Marvin Richards, Vincent Desroches, Amaryll Chanady, and Obed Nkunzimana, among others, all argue convincingly that Québec is postcolonial and that Québécois literary studies would be greatly enhanced by the application of postcolonial theory to Québécois texts. More specifically in terms of Québécois adaptations of Shakespeare, all the critical work on the subject by Denis Salter is heavily inflected by postcolonial theory.

7. *Joual* is Québécois working-class slang. The term *joual* is believed to come from the pronunciation of the word *cheval* [horse] in this dialect. While the term has been mistakenly attributed to the journalist André Laurendeau, its usage dates back much earlier, to at least the 1930s. Although previously stigmatized because it was spoken by the working class, *joual* began to be valorized after the Quiet Revolution, most notably by Michel Tremblay's play *Les Belles Soeurs* (1972; first performed in 1968), the first play to be written in *joual*, as well as in popular music, such as Robert Charlebois' songs, and even by some nationalists who saw it as a pride-worthy part of Québec's cultural heritage. In fact, some words considered *joual*, such as *moé* [*moi*; me] and *toé* [*toi*; you], are actually the pronunciations used by royalty prior to the French Revolution. Since Québec was cut off geographically from the rest of France, the Ancien Régime pronunciation remained in use in Québec despite evolving into its current form in France.
8. The application of the term "neo-colonial" to Québec would be contested by most Canadian federalists, but its use is relatively common in Québec. Most sovereignists argue that the Canadian government does indeed control Québec through indirect economic and political means, most notably through *le déséquilibre fiscal* [fiscal inequality], which restricts the Québec government's ability to enact policies in areas over which it has jurisdiction, such as health care and education. Some anti-democratic techniques include spying on Québec politicians and ordinary citizens, stealing Parti Québécois membership lists, and interference in the 1995 referendum through illegal spending and the facilitation of illegal voting. See *Enquête sur les services secrets*, *Le livre noir sur le Canada anglais* (3 vols.), and *Les Secrets d'Option Canada*, by former *Radio-Canada* investigative journalist Normand Lester, for further details on these and other events. Ostensibly, such approaches to Québec date to Lord Durham's *Report on the*

*Affairs of British North America*, published in London in February 1839, which claims that the French of Lower Canada, were "a people with no history, and no literature" who ought to be assimilated by means of English immigration as well as a union of Upper and Lower Canada, which would make the French a minority and appropriate Lower Canada's finances to pay Upper Canada's debt.

9. References to the works of Shakespeare come from the *Riverside Shakespeare* unless otherwise noted.
10. Since my definition of "adaptation" privileges text over performance, the year listed in parenthesis following each title is either 1) the date of publication, or 2) if the text has not been published, the date of composition on the author's manuscript, or 3) failing that, the date of the first production.
11. A notable exclusion from this list is the work of Robert Lepage, perhaps the most famous director in Québec and certainly the most successful on the international stage. As a director, however, he does not adapt Shakespeare's text so much as he stages the source text innovatively in performance. His two most original Shakespeare performances — *Romeo & Juliette* (1989), a bilingual production in collaboration with Gordon McCall, and *Elseneur* (1996), a one-man show — do not adapt the Shakespearean source text. *Romeo & Juliette* is a combination of the Signet edition in English and a literal translation in French by Governor General award-winning playwright Jean-Marc Dalpé. *Elseneur* is a literal translation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* that is innovative in so much as Lepage performed all the roles himself with the aid of elaborate technology. Other exclusions are Oleg Kisseliov's *Le Songe d'une nuit d'été* (1998), which is also a literal translation derived from François-Victor Hugo, as well as Tibor Egervari's *Le marchand de Venise de Shakespeare à Auschwitz* (1993) and Michel Philip's *L'ère des tempêtes ou Chacun pour soi!* (1996), neither of which are "Québécois" as I define it here (based on the author's birth, residence during the play's composition, or the site of the play's first production), although Egervari's play, first performed in Ottawa, could be considered "French Canadian." The Canadian Adaptations of Shakespeare Project (CASP) database search results list 175 entries as "French Canadian" adaptations, but this result includes all thirty-eight monologues from the 38 event as separate entries and does not always make a distinction between translation and adaptation, while including some stage productions as adaptations. In the latter two cases, further work is required to understand the relationship between adaptation and translation, and between adaptation and production.
12. "Passer à l'action," literally "to proceed to action," could be translated as "to take action," but it is a notably Québécois expression which loses in translation its underlying emotional force and

its double insistence on action with the verb "passer," "to proceed," which indicates a forward progression that is absent from the English expression "to take."

13. In "Entre deux joints" ["Between two joints"] (1973), co-written with RIN leader Pierre Bourgault, Robert Charlebois sings, "Ta sœur est aux États, ton frère est au Mexique / Y font d'argent là-bas pendant qu'tu chômes icitte / T'es né pour un petit pain, c'est ce que ton père t'a dit / Chez les Américains, c'pas ça qu't'aurais appris." [Your sister's in the States, your brother's in Mexico / They make money there while you're unemployed here / You were born for a [little] roll [of bread, as opposed to a loaf], that's what your father said / With the Americans that's not what you'd have learned.] The rejection of the *né-pour-un-petit-pain* attitude thus embodies the generational divide between youth of the Quiet Revolution and their parents (who grew up accepting that they should settle for less (a roll being less than a loaf of bread), as well as the new generation's growing internationalism. The song's chorus also states poignantly the need to *passer à l'action*: "Ent' deux joints, tu pourrais faire qu'qu'chose / Ent' deux joints, tu pourrais t'grouiller l'cul" [Between two joints, you could do something / Between two joints, you could move your ass].
14. From Latin, meaning "beyond the mountains," that is, the Alps, Ultramontanism, equally known as *Ultramontanisme* in French, was the point of view of Roman Catholics who supported the pope as supreme head of the church, as opposed to Gallicanism and other tendencies that opposed papal jurisdiction. Ultramontanism began in Québec in 1840 following the failure of the 1837-1838 Patriot Rebellions, and it peaked between 1867 and 1896. Ultramontane priests were strong advocates of the *né-pour-un-petit-pain* attitude. For an in-depth analysis, see Denis Monière's *Le Développement des idéologies au Québec des origines à nos jours*, especially chapters four and five.
15. Lalonde's manifesto is closely modeled after Joachim du Bellay's 1549 *Deffence et illustration de la langue françoise*. Du Bellay pleads for the aesthetic beauty of vernacular French and the use of French, rather than Greek or Latin, in the composition of poetry. Lalonde picks up key elements of du Bellay's text and expands the argument, first by situating the notion of language as a living tree in the specific historical context of Québec's linguistic isolation from France in the aftermath of the Conquest, and then how Québécois is not only as rich as *français de France* but also how it is less corrupted by anglicisms. She then identifies the two most common attitudes towards the Québécois language: one which ensconces the virtues of *français de France* while maligning *joual* and another, vice-versa, that extols *joual* to the detriment of all grammar.



16. This is, of course, a reductive reading of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and *The Tempest*. Like most adaptations, however, summary readings of the source text are precisely the interpretation against which the adaptation works, and this broad reading of the plot does, in fact, describe well the adaptation's use of the text.
17. One example of this irreverent play is Ronfard's *Lear*, in which two Shakespeare figures, huddled together under "*un parapluie typiquement 'british,' 'se lancent, avec verve et conscience historique [. . .] dans la grande narration du rêve de Clarence (authentiquement tirée de RICHARD III du grand William)*" while the Fool figure drowns them, like Clarence, with a rain of "*pipi de chat*" [*a typically British umbrella; jump into, with eloquence and historical attention, [. . .] the long narration of Clarence's dream (authentically excerpted from the great William's RICHARD III); cat pee*] (46-48, 50). This carnivalesque association of Shakespeare with the grotesque lower body also takes place when the Lear figure "*contemple une boule de merde qu'il tient dans sa main, dans une posture qui rappelle Michel-Ange, Rodin, l'Hamlet traditionnel*" [*contemplates a ball of shit that he holds in his hand in a posture that invokes Michelangelo, Rodin, the traditional Hamlet*] (21; italics in original stage directions).
18. For an in-depth discussion of Ronfard's two plays, see my article, "Daughters of the Carnivalized Nation in Jean-Pierre Ronfard's Shakespearean Adaptations *Lear* and *Vie et mort du Roi Boiteux*," *Theatre Research in Canada / Recherches théâtrales au Canada* 27.1 (Spring 2006): 10-39.
19. The 1970 October Crisis began when the Front de Libération du Québec (FLQ) kidnapped British Trade Commissioner James Cross followed by Pierre Laporte, Québec's Minister of Manpower and Labour. Laporte was strangled to death by his kidnappers (Francis Simard, Bernard Lortie, Jacques Rose, and Paul Rose, collectively known as the Chénier cell of the FLQ) after he cut himself on broken glass while trying to escape and began bleeding profusely. Refusing to negotiate with the FLQ, Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau invoked the War Measures Act, which suspended civil liberties and resulted in the arrest of almost 500 people without warrant. See Comeau, Cooper, and Vallières (eds.) for further details.
20. "The long walk towards [the achievement of] the country."
21. Antonine Maillet might, at first, appear somewhat out of place in the category of Québécois authors. Fischlin consistently situates *William S* in an "Acadian cultural context" because of Maillet's famous origins in Acadie (Fischlin 2002, 333). Yet this claim overlooks the fact that the play was written and first performed in Montréal, and, in fact, the play is not nearly as "Acadian" as her other plays, since it is written in so-called "standard" French rather than the Acadian language employed in many of her other texts, such as her novel *Pélagie-la-*

*Charette*. In addition, despite her ethnic origins, Maillet is not only a descendent of deported Acadians, but an example of the necessity for most Acadians and French-Canadian artists to "immigrate" to Québec. Québec remains the only francophone region of Canada to receive adequate funding for literature and the arts, in large part because it has the demographic base to be self-sustaining and has thus developed many funding agencies in parallel to the "Canadian" organisms, which are supposed to promote bilingualism and multiculturalism, but which inevitably fall far short of the demand necessary to sustain and promote French culture outside of Québec. It is precisely because of this cultural and economic reality that I have included Maillet's work among "Québécois" adaptations. She represents an important part of the Québécois population: French-Canadian immigrants from other provinces. (The music industry best illustrates this cultural and economic reality; we need only think of Edith Butler from Acadie, Zachary Richard from Louisiana, and, more recently, Wilfred Le Bouthillier, the winner of Star Académie, also from Acadie.) Finally, the argument that Québec is the only francophone region of Canada with adequate cultural and economic resources for francophones outside of Québec to follow a career in the arts also extends to academia. Notably, Maillet completed her doctoral dissertation on *Rabelais et les traditions populaires en Acadie* at Université Laval in Québec City in 1970 and was a professor at the Université de Montréal in 1975-1976.

22. *Pure laine* is generally translated in English as "dyed in the wool." The term refers to Québécois who are born and raised in Québec, speak with a Québécois accent, and show no traces of any particular immigrant origin.
23. For example, on the cultural front, the most popular male artist at the 2004 Gala de l'ADISQ was Rwandan-born Corneille, who is well-known for his song about immigration, "Parce qu'on vient de loin" ["Because we come from afar"]. On the political front, the Bloc Québécois's election in January 2006 of 4 MP's from cultural communities (of 51 elected) testifies to a concerted effort of the sovereigntist movement to build bridges with voters "from-elsewhere."
24. On an anecdotal side note, and to acknowledge fully the reinscription in this paper of the binary of English Canada and Québec as two founding nations, I couldn't help but be struck by the irony that I completed this paper on the eve of what I used to call, when I lived in English Canada, Victoria Day, but which has been officially decreed by the Québec government "La journée nationale des Patriotes" in recognition and celebration of the rebels who took up arms against the rule of Queen Victoria. I don't think, therefore, that an analysis of Canadian and Québécois adaptations within this binary is entirely unjustified today, 170 years after the Patriot rebellions of 1837-1838.

25. Joanne Tompkins proposes one solution to the problem of "multiculturalism" — a conceptual shift to "polynationalism". Tompkins' neologism "polynationalism" would "highlight the intersection of the competing forces of nationality, nationalism, ethnicity, identity, and subjectivity more accurately addressing the interdependent relationship of theories such as post-colonialism and feminism with multiculturalism. This would also rectify the frequent placement of multiculturalism in isolation or in opposition to a mainstream national paradigm. Polynationalism would not pretend to unite disparate groups that have hitherto resisted nationalist stereotypes; instead, it would reconsider relationships in contested space" (131, n. 7). In the context of Canada and Québec, polynationalism would require a return by English Canada to the concept of "two founding nations," which is still prevalent in Québec and which was the underlying principle of the Confederation at the time of its inception.
26. This lack of alterity, or conflation of various forms of otherness under one banner, can be seen in the terms used to describe one's linguistic origin. In Québec, one is either a *francophone*, an *anglophone*, or an *allophone*. *Allophone* literally means "other speaker" and is the category into which all immigrants are lumped together. Hyphenated identifications (such as Irish-American, for instance) are not used in Québec.
27. Gender does not truly become a central concern of Québécois adaptations until the 1990s, particularly in Pierre Yves Lemieux's *À propos de Roméo et Juliette* (1989), which features an openly gay Mercutio in love with Roméo, and Normand Chaurette's *Les Reines* (1991), which gives voice to the queens of Shakespeare's first tetralogy. None of these adaptations deals primarily with race, and class issues are always subsumed into nationalist issues since class divides tended to fall along linguistic lines until the effects of *Loi 101* began to change the workplace; even today the percentage of anglophones in Québec who hold a postsecondary degree (and presumably a higher paying job upon graduation) is noticeably higher than that of francophones.

### Online Resources

Canadian Adaptations of Shakespeare Project (CASP). Edited by Daniel Fischlin. <http://www.canadianshakespeares.ca>.

Centre Des Auteurs Dramatiques: Quebec Plays in Translation. [http://www.cead.qc.ca/eng/about\\_mission.html](http://www.cead.qc.ca/eng/about_mission.html).

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"Hamlet-Quebec discovers federalist duplicity cloaked in sovereigntist colours." Photo courtesy of Robert Gurik.

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