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DAUGHTERS OF THE CARNIVALIZED NATION IN JEAN-PIERRE RONFARD'S SHAKESPEAREAN ADAPTATIONS *LEAR* AND *VIE ET MORT DU ROI BOITEUX*

Québec theatre abounds with Shakespearean adaptations (not counting translations, another genre entirely). Jean-Pierre Ronfard's texts contributed significantly to this corpus of adaptations which seek to appropriate "le grand Will" to work through Québécois issues. In *Lear* (1977) and *Vie et mort du Roi Boiteux* (1981), we see the evolution of the importance of nationalism and feminism before and after the referendum. The nation is destroyed by Rabelaisian carnival, but carnivalesque death is always associated with regeneration, which, in Ronfard's works, is entrusted to regal daughters in whom we can find hope for the reconstruction of the nation once its bastardry has been celebrated. Ronfard's plays also comprise a metafictional critique of Shakespeare himself who literally enacts the theory of the death of the author while giving birth to another Shakespeare who is entirely Québécois.

Des adaptations de Shakespeare abondent au Québec (sans parler de traductions, un tout autre genre). Les textes de Jean-Pierre Ronfard ont contribué de façon significative à ce corpus d'adaptations qui cherchent à approprier « le grand Will » au service des enjeux québécois. Dans Lear (1977) et Vie et mort du Roi Boiteux (1981), on voit l'évolution de l'importance accordée au nationalisme et au féminisme à la veille et au lendemain du référendum. La nation est rasée par le carnaval rabelaisien, mais la mort carnivalesque est toujours associée à une régénération, qui, chez Ronfard, est confiée aux filles royales, chez qui on peut trouver espoir d'une reconstruction de la nation une fois que sa bâtardise ait été célébrée. Les pièces de Ronfard porte aussi une critique métalittéraire sur Shakespeare lui-même qui met en pratique littéralement la théorie de la mort de l'auteur, tout en faisant naître un autre Shakespeare entièrement québécois.



Jean-Pierre Ronfard's *Lear* (1977) and *Vie et mort du Roi Boiteux* ["*Life and Death of the Limping King*"] (1981),¹ adaptations of

Shakespeare's *King Lear* and *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.² Rabelaisian carnival dominates every aspect of these two Shakespearean adaptations;³ food, drinking, rampant sexuality, and references to the grotesque lower body abound in every scene, but, since it is temporary, the result of carnival must ultimately be the reinstatement of social order.⁴ For Mikhail Bakhtin, carnival is also about "death as renewal" (51), a regeneration of the social order which Ronfard locates in a generation of heirs both genealogically tied to the past and oriented towards the future. When the collapse of the nation precipitated by absentee male rulers finally reaches its nadir at the close of both plays, that is, when there is no old order left for the carnivalesque to reverse, only the daughters of the former rulers remain to take responsibility for the fate of the nation and lead it to a brighter future. Ronfard's plays thus highlight the interdependence of nation and gender in contemporary Québec drama, and the different relative weights accorded to nation and gender in each play reflect the evolving social and political importance of these issues on the eve and in the aftermath of the first referendum on sovereignty. In addition, Ronfard's carnivalesque approach to adaptation illustrates the artificiality of the signifier "Shakespeare" as the embodiment of high culture, simultaneously appropriating and undercutting *le grand Will's* claim to cultural authority.⁵

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% to 40.4% over 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 favour of a focus on gender relations and sexuality until the nation finally acquires a new ruler at the end of the play. 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 1970's and the increased social presence of women's issues following the temporary decline of the national question after the referendum.

Lear was performed at the *Théâtre expérimental de Montréal* in January 1977—just two months after the historic election of the PQ to power on 15 November 1976—and published in the TEM's own journal, *TRAC*, in April of the same year—shortly before the instauration of Bill 101, the *Charte de la langue française*, on 26 August 1977. The play's truncated title immediately informs the reader that it is an adaptation, devoid of the regal decorum of Shakespeare's *King Lear*. The adaptation conserves the basics of Shakespeare's main plot but very little of the text. The cast of characters is also trimmed to the bare minimum, but the parallels to Shakespeare are obvious: *Le Roi* (who, unnamed, is only addressed as king or father) is King Lear; Josette is Goneril; Violette is Regan; Laurette/*Le Fou* is Cordelia/The Fool; Corneille, a woman, assumes the parts of Kent and Gloucester; while her son, Hector, is the adaptation's Edmund figure. Ronfard adds two new characters: two "Shakespeares" work the stage lighting while drinking half-pint mugs of beer in the play's technical booth-*cum*-tavern. The drunken Shakespeares signal from the outset the adaptation's parodic undercutting of the Bard's authority and set the tone for the carnivalesque debauchery that ensues.

Ronfard's *Vie et mort du Roi Boiteux*, subtitled as "une épopée sanglant et grotesque en six pièces et un épilogue," was first published in two volumes in 1981.⁶ The epic's six plays were gradually performed between July 1981 and June 1982, and the entire fifteen-hour drama was performed from morning to night at the *Expo-Théâtre* at Montréal's *Cité du Havre* on 24 and 26 June, as well as at Bishop's University in Lennoxville on 3 July, and in Ottawa on 11 July 1982. The adaptation sprang from a collective initiative by the *Nouveau Théâtre Expérimental* to create a play entitled *Shakespeare Follies* following a study of Shakespeare's complete works with the four other permanent group members (Robert Claing, Robert Gravel, Pol Pelletier, and Pierre Pesant); they conferred the writing of this project to Ronfard who created *Roi Boiteux* instead. The epic is a feminist adaptation of Shakespeare's War of the Roses tetralogy (1-3 *Henry VI*, *Richard III*) in which the male characters from the York and Lancaster families are replaced by warring women of the Ragone and Roberge families. Like the absent King Edward III underlying Shakespeare's history plays, the warring families have a common ancestor, *Le vieux père Roberge, Roi de l'Abitibi*, but a split occurred prior to the play when his oldest daughter, Angela Roberge (married to the supposedly insane Filippo Ragone) committed suicide by driving into a brick wall, for which the other Roberge

sisters blame their Ragone in-laws. The adaptation's dramatic action takes place in a fictional working-class neighbourhood of Montréal named l'Arsenal that the characters also imagine as a royal kingdom.

The parallels between the plots of Shakespeare's tetralogy and Ronfard's six-play epic are too extensive to enumerate,⁷ and the associations between Ronfard's characters and their Shakespearean counterparts are frequently in flux; however, several correspondences stand out between the characters of both authors' works. Richard Premier (Premier being his surname, not a regal designation), who limps in an orthopaedic shoe, is Richard III. Marie-Jeanne Larose, who is seduced by Richard in the presence of the body of her dead husband, Alcide Premier, corresponds to Lady Anne. Richard's older brother Alcide evokes both Edward IV and Clarence, with Alcide's death from thirst on a mountain-top ironically parodying Clarence's dream of drowning. Shakespeare's Queen Margaret resembles most closely Madame Emma Roberge, a widow with a biting tongue, but Margaret also manifests herself in Filippo Ragone *dit le Débile* whose crippled body and crazy persona mask his wisdom and perceptiveness, as well as in Lou Birkanian, a magical witch who dies when nobody listens to her fanciful tales anymore. Peter Williams, a pastor who dies at the hands of cannibals, evokes Henry VI, the religious king who is metaphorically eaten alive by the blood-thirsty nobles surrounding him. His wife Judith drowns her madness with mud and flowers in a nod to Ophelia. Their son, Roy Williams, a businessman who prostitutes his own sister to Richard and then leads a mafia that controls the butchery industry and the local police, embodies the most violent traits of Richard III and functions in the plays as Richard Premier's *doppelgänger*. Their mutual friend Freddy Dubois, who follows Richard loyally at first, resembles Buckingham. Finally, Moïse, whose far-removed, bastard lineage makes him an unlikely candidate to be king, who is largely absent throughout the play, and who leads his horde across the sea and kills Richard with an arrow, resembles Richmond, later Henry VII. For the fifth and sixth plays of *Roi Boiteux*, Ronfard creates a new character with no Shakespearean counterpart, Claire Premier, Richard's daughter. Like her counterpart Laurette in *Lear*, Claire inherits a decaying nation which only a woman can save.

Lear opens with the first Shakespeare's consternation, "Notre pays est malade, profondément malade" (6); here and throughout the abstract term "country" forcibly evokes Québec.⁸ The accuracy

of his assessment is immediately confirmed when the king emerges from behind crumpled newspapers to divide up the nation he wishes to bestow on his daughters and the reasons for the nation's sickness are revealed: the king lacks agency; as such, the nation is in a survivalist mode and consuming itself in order to remain barely alive. The nation is represented, rather than by a map, by a pizza that the first two daughters begin to eat, literally acting out their self-interested consummation of the nation's resources in disregard of the needs of its people. The nation's decline is also signalled by the king's unwitting revelation that his regal power is nothing more than an empty signifier devoid of real authority. He pitifully requests that his daughters profess their love for him "dans cette belle langue qui nous reste encore, signe et symbole de notre pouvoir ancestral" (7).⁹ Language is one of the only remnants of the nation's historical strength, but since it is never used performatively by the king, even the national language is nothing more than a symbol; the former power of the nation's ancestors now lacks agency. While language is frequently the ultimate signifier of cultural difference, culture itself has been reduced to nothing more than an ineffective life support system for the nation's heritage. In the king's own metaphor, "La culture [...] nous relie au souffle et au sang des ancêtres comme les tuyaux de toutes les couleurs entretiennent à l'hôpital l'existence du moribond momifié dans ses bandelettes" (28).¹⁰ As little more than artificial respiration for a terminally ill nation, culture can only prolong survival, but it cannot heal the nation's sickness or endow it with agency. In this brief moment of clarity, the king recognizes that survival is not progress. From its outset, then, Ronfard's adaptation adopts a nationalist, perhaps even sovereignist, stance through its assertion that the abstract, and arguably Québécois, nation should not content itself with the status quo.

The king's symbolic, self-inflicted disempowerment, which represents the nation's collective loss of agency, results in a national lack of direction since the king's approach is survivalist. The striking image of culture on life support as a futile prolongation of death works in the play as a criticism of the common survivalist approach to Québécois nationalism prevalent in the late 1970's. The adaptation denounces here what is forcibly a colonized attitude towards independence—that the priority of nationalism is to preserve the dying remains of the past rather than to build a better future. When Corneille seeks reassurance about the ability of the king's daughters to run the country (one of whom is writing to a nuclear power plant while the other mastur-

bates loudly in the corner), the king replies, “Les charges de pouvoir, je connais ça. Bien content d’en être débarrassé [*sic*]” (16).¹¹ By throwing away his responsibility to maintain and exercise authority, the king also strips his subjects of the agency necessary to heal the wounded nation. The king’s lack of direction (in the sense of leadership) causes the collectivity to lack direction (in the sense of goals). The nation needs to reclaim agency to achieve goals oriented towards the future; that is, it must stop conceiving of political power, and by extension sovereignty, as a responsibility which is too heavy to carry, a burden to be happily surrendered. Rather, the nation must see kingship/sovereignty as a privileged opportunity to create something enduring that goes beyond individualist, masturbatory pleasures, such as those which Josette and Violette seek.

In justification of his abdication of sovereignty, the king claims that the new order inaugurated by his daughters is completely “normal” (16), but what is really normalized by his abdication is disorder. The nation has entered into a prolonged state of carnival-like topsy-turvyness. Carnival, in Bakhtin’s terms, normally celebrates a “temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order,” marking “the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions” (10), and it creates a parallel “second-world” (11). However, at the beginning of *Lear* the established order has been completely replaced by disorder because the daughters were already carnivalesque before they were consecrated as the new national rulers, so this “second world” shows no signs of being “temporary.” Michael Bristol argues that carnival has “*both* a social and an antisocial tendency” (25). In *Lear*, Josette and Violette embody carnival’s antisocial elements since their self-gratification is antithetical to the strengthening of the community that ought to emerge from carnivalesque disorder. Carnival does not serve its intended purpose of creating a free-for-all zone alongside order; rather, it replaces it entirely for the duration of the play.

Josette finally recognizes near the end of the play that disorder reigns completely, but it is then too late for her to reinstate the order that existed prior to the king’s abdication. Although she derives personal pleasure from specific carnivalesque elements, carnival is “not an individual reaction” but for “all the people” (Bakhtin 11). When Josette realizes that carnival is in fact a collective event that encompasses the entire community, she suddenly becomes critical of it because she understands that it endows the people with liberty to subvert her authority:

Il faut que ça change! [...] Des folles excitées, seins au vent, bourrent le crâne de leur [*sic*] leurs congénères et commencent à nous casser les oreilles avec leurs slogans démagogiques : ‘le vieux pouvoir est mort!’, ‘vive le droit des peuples à disposer de tout!’, ‘le jour se lève...la couleur du ciel change...saluons la naissance d’un nouvel ordre!’. Et c’est moi, (*gémissements de Violette dans son lit.*) enfin moi et ma sœur, c’est nous qu’on attend pour le réaliser ce fameux nouvel ordre. Imbéciles! L’ordre est l’ordre. Il n’a pas à être nouveau ou ancien. L’ordre n’a pas de couleur. (54)¹²

The half-naked women demand that the nation embody the true spirit of carnival, which is democracy, since one of its principal features is the equality of everyone through the temporary abolition of socially constructed rank, class, age, and gender norms. The people’s slogans, which Josette qualifies as demagogic, sum up the democratic principles that underlie carnival, that is, the rule of the people by the people rather than by social superiors, and the new, second-world order that is born out of the death of the established order. Josette’s futile protest that order is order lacks credibility due to the hypocrisy of the sudden rejection of her own carnivalesque nature and due to her reluctant acknowledgement that her sister, who is fully engaged in carnivalesque sexuality at that moment, shares her social authority. Everything around her confirms the difference between carnivalesque democracy and the authoritarian control that she seeks to impose. Moreover, her claim that order has no colour resonates strongly in a Québécois context where order is often symbolized by “flag wars” in which the differences between red, federalist order and blue, nationalist order affect most aspects of democratic life. In the context of the recent PQ election and a pending referendum on independence, Josette’s reactionary response to a new order becomes a parodic criticism of those who fail to see the differences, and the advantages, of a new order in which the people have the right to control their own affairs.

The carnivalization of the nation and the creation of a new order are embodied in the character of Hector. A bastard, and thus the personification of illegitimacy’s triumph over order, Hector is significantly “baser” than his Shakespearean counterpart Edmund. Edmund questions the socially constructed nature of an order that categorizes humans as either base or legitimate, but he nonetheless strives to ascend within that order through the acquisition of his father’s lands and titles. Edmund criticizes the system for excluding him, but he does not seek to topple it. Hector, on the other hand,

relishes bastardry and strives to reverse the social order so baseness may mark the nation. Hector literalizes his valorization of baseness when, after entering pulling a “*seau de merde*” (18), “*il se met à lancer des boules de merde partout, particulièrement sur le trône, sur la cage des shakespeareas-techniciens et au plafond*” (20).¹³ This scatological scattering of the abject incites Hector to invoke the “*temps dénaturé*” in a soliloquy reminiscent of Edmund’s plea to Nature (1.2.1-22), but rather than attempting to elevate the base to a status equal with the legitimate, Hector praises the ability of the base to soil and overthrow social order entirely: “*Vive la bâtardise / Qui bouleverse les lois / Qui souille les églises / Et détrône les rois*” (20-21).¹⁴ His concluding cry of “*Les bâtards au pouvoir !*” provokes the uprising of a horde of protesters who take up his slogan (21).¹⁵ The facility with which Hector creates a popular uprising confirms that the reversal of the social order for which he advocates has already begun. Bastards can be in power because the king has renounced the responsibility of sovereignty, thereby allowing them to instate a new carnivalesque and democratic social order. The play thus advocates a popular uprising in which bastards, that is, oppressed working-class Québécois,¹⁶ could rule themselves according to their own will. Yet, written only six years after the October Crisis, the play also cautions against such a popular uprising getting out of control, turning to violence, and destroying the nation even as it seeks to heal it. Through its invocation of carnival, and thus a notion of cyclical chaos and order, the adaptation also calls for a necessary return to an order that is strengthened by the democratic principles underlying carnival itself.

This state of carnival also affects the gender relations in *Lear*. Carnival typically subverts gender hierarchies and permits a fluid exchange whereby sexed bodies may temporarily occupy their opposite gender role, most notably by adopting drag, which Judith Butler argues parodies heterosexuality by exposing the social constructedness of gender itself (174, 187). Ronfard’s adaptation uses carnival both to reverse gender roles and to reveal the performativity of gender. The reversal of gender roles already occurs in Shakespeare’s *King Lear*; Lear is emasculated by Goneril and Regan’s appropriation of the phallus when they begin to exercise his regal authority. Ronfard’s adaptation literalizes this theme with a crudeness typical of carnivalesque sexuality when the king soliloquizes upon his downtrodden state: “*je suis fourré, jusqu’à l’os. [...] Violette, par dérision, a fait rajouter aux armoiries royales un pénis de sinople sur fond de gueules qu’elle prétend m’avoir dérobé à jamais. C’est dur*” (24).¹⁷ The

term “*dérision*” occurs frequently in Ronfard’s Shakespearean adaptations, especially in *Roi Boiteux*, and it captures the carnivalesque spirit found in the tone of the texts themselves, as evidenced here by the pun on “hard” that can refer to both the king’s difficulty in accepting his emasculation and the firmness of Violette’s appropriated phallic symbol.

The performativity of gender is highlighted frequently in Shakespearean comedy by characters who pass successfully as the opposite sex, notably Cesario in *Twelfth Night* and Ganymede in *As You Like It*. In Ronfard’s *Lear* though, the carnivalization of gender and the exposure of its performativity take a sinister twist in the course of a long dialogue between the king and Corneille. As in Shakespeare when Lear doesn’t recognize Kent, the king asks who Corneille is, to which she replies that she is a woman, which the king then surmises “*n’est pas grand chose*”; that is, not much of anything (32), or, in a throw-back to Shakespeare, nothing more than a “nothing” or a vagina (1.1.90).¹⁸ When Corneille adds that she is the king’s old accomplice, he ignores her gender so that she might fulfill his desire to reminisce “*entre hommes*” about their last exploit: “(*D’un seul coup elle prend une voix avinée, une attitude de corps de garde, une face de salaud. Elle replace des couilles imaginaires.*) [...] On s’est dit: ‘[...] on en a dans la culotte, oui ou non? Bien sûr qu’on en a. Deux belles grosses, comme grand-père” (33).¹⁹ On one hand, the king’s assertion that a woman is nothing makes the category of “woman” an empty signifier, thereby reaffirming “man” as the only gender which can lay claim to meaning. On the other hand, Corneille’s effortless transition from the materiality of *zir* female sexed body to the performance of a male one, that is, *zir* adoption of a transgendered identity through the growth of imaginary balls, demonstrates the fluidity and social constructedness of gender.²⁰ Corneille’s gesture of grabbing *zir* balls like a man confirms both *zir* masculine gender identity and *zir* entrance into the boy’s club of male homosociality of which the king is the guardian, and it highlights that all gender is a simulacrum of social norms.

The sinister twist to the adaptation’s carnivalization of gender comes at the climax of Corneille’s story about their conquest of a village and arson of abandoned warehouses in which local women were hiding:

Elles arrachaient leurs vêtements qui leur brûlaient la peau. Nues, elles sautaient sur place comme des sauteuses estropiées. Elles se sont groupées en un tas au

milieu des nôtres qui rigolaient de leur bon coup. 'Heïe! C'est moi le roi!' Tu as crié. 'À moi la fleur!' Tu as tombé culotte et toute l'armée a vu. Toute l'armée t'a vu dans toute ta puissance. Elles y ont passé l'une après l'autre. Écartelées par quatre soldats qui se relayaient. Tu étais infatigable [*sic*]. Tu riais de plaisir. Tu hurlais de rage et de fureur. Et ça y allait. Et ça y allait. Tu as enfourché la dernière en bâillant à te décrocher la mâchoire. Et tu t'es écrasé au sol, endormi tout d'un coup. Je t'ai recouvert de mon manteau. Quand tu t'es réveillé, au petit matin de la victoire, la fille sous toi était morte.

(Pendant tout le récit, Corneille et le roi se taponnent, se frottent, s'excitent l'un l'autre. Corneille chevauche le roi et l'épouse. Ils finissent écrasés à terre.) (35)²¹

Corneille's fluid transition from biological woman to performative man leaves *zir* in a problematic position (much like that experienced by contemporary FTM's) because *zir* gender identity is unfixed, floating in a liminal space between the material body that the audience sees before them and the "almost but not quite" mimicry of masculinity (to adapt Bhabha) which fails to mask it (86).²² The reader is thus forced to question where Corneille's gender allegiances lie in this brutal gang rape with which *zie* was complicit. The text (and its accompanying photographs of the original performance in which *zie* is smiling) implies that *zie* has fully adopted the identity of a male soldier and that *zie* derives pleasure from the king's and, by association, *zir* own show of virility. *Zie* shows no sympathy for the raped women or even the one who dies under the king. *Zir* transition across gender lines and initiation into male homosociality, with the sexual privilege of potential rape it confers, appears to be complete.

Yet, Corneille's entry into the world of male homosocial bonding is complicated and undercut by the image of *zir* female body sexually straddling the king in a re-enactment of heterosexuality. The mutuality of the sexual exchange in which they excite each other indicates that Corneille's masculine identity does not interfere with *zir* female body's ability to derive pleasure from heterosexual interaction. However, *zir* re-enactment of heterosexual intercourse further complicates interpretation of the story. On the one hand, *zie* occupies the role of the story's women, making the tale itself a rape fantasy from which *zie* derives excitement. On the other hand, *zir* physical position astride the king that ends with them lying together exhausted on the ground (presumably with *zir* still on top) re-enacts the king's crushing of the girl underneath

him at the same moment that *zie* recounts that part of the story. This reading constitutes another gender role reversal by which Corneille becomes the king and the king becomes the dead girl that he had raped. Alternatively, if the king continues to ignore Corneille's female body and interacts solely with the masculine gender identity that *zie* performs, then their mutual sexual excitement is no longer heterosexual at all; instead it is a homoerotic slippage from the homosocial bond of soldiers into the realm of physicality. I would argue that all these multiple and contradictory levels of interpretation are in fact at work in the scene simultaneously. The scene thus performs the performativity of gender itself by highlighting the impossibility of fixity in a scene whose disturbing textual content is undercut by the carnivalesque reversal of all gender norms.

Roi Boiteux gives even greater attention than *Lear* to gender issues but instead of carnivalizing gender it focuses on the harsh social reality of widowhood through the play's matriarchs—Madame Emma Roberge, Catherine Ragone, Judith Williams *née* Roberge, and Lou Birkanian—who are referred to as “les quatre reines” (2.6.125). All become widows, and their diverse reactions to this marital status, and sexuality in general, speaks to the overall complexity of gender relations and possible roles for women within the world of the play, as well as the different competing constructions of “woman” in circulation in Québec at the time of the adaptation's composition, ranging from the bitter, radical separatist to the emotionally detached, power-hungry businesswoman to the traditionally passive Yvette who resurged during the referendum campaign.

Emma Roberge articulates a gynocentric, separatist discourse, rejecting free sexuality in favour of another kind of liberty, the social power enjoyed by men. Like Shakespeare's Queen Margaret, Emma's anti-male rants are as much born out of a protectionist necessity as they are from her bitterness at having been wronged. Catherine Ragone, after being called “une coque vide, un nom sans répondant” in her widowhood (2.6.128),²³ decides to use her sexual body to manipulate men for social and political power, transforming her status as an empty shell into a form of agency. Judith's self-sacrificing complacency to a disempowered domesticity figures her as an “Yvette”: that is, one of the women, named after a dutiful, young girl from Québécois schoolbooks, who celebrated their own domesticity and protested against sovereignty on the eve of the 1980 referendum in reaction to Lise Payette's comparison of Québécois women to “Yvettes”

because their education made them docile and afraid of change.²⁴ Judith's vulnerability also locates her as a site for colonial desire, that is, a colonial man's desire for the white woman upon which he can enact symbolic violence against his colonizer through miscegenation. As the site of the ritualized violence of decolonization, Judith signifies only insofar as she is a symbol of her husband Peter's colonizing mission. Lou Birkanian, the queen most closely associated with carnival, extols the advantages of a separatist, homosocial community of women, but rather than seeking to overthrow patriarchal rule the women of Lou's homosocial community subvert it with carnivalesque heterosexuality and achieve mutually satisfying results for both sexes. Lou's story of her childhood exposure to sexuality and the adventure of her wedding night are both marked by carnivalesque laughter, which she locates as the source of her liberty but which is absent in the nation around which the epic is centered (3.6.174).

Lou's embrace of carnivalesque sexuality affords her, of the four matriarchal, widowed queens, the most personal liberty to operate outside the bounds of socially constructed order. The adaptation thus valorizes free sexuality, both for the purpose of carnivalesque laughter and pleasure and for personal power and strength. This dual valorization of unfettered sexuality for both pleasure and power manifests itself in the incestuous homosexuality of both the Nelson twins and Claire Premier in whom the adaptation situates hope, rebirth, and liberty.

Sandy Sparks and Nelson Trapp, fraternal twins in Lou's care, resemble the double beings described by Aristophanes in Plato's *Symposium* who were split asunder by the gods and constantly seek their other half because they are incomplete without it. During their childhood, they compose a hermaphroditic being on the playground (2.3.118), and in their youth they have an incestuous sexual relationship that neither can live without (3.4.165). In the fifth play, the twins are trapped with their friend Freddy Dubois on a raft in the middle of the Pacific Ocean for eighteen days in an adaptation of the story of Noah's ark. Freddy tells them that he would like to marry them and wants the three of them to all make love together. Both Sandy and Nelson accept, express their love for him, and, as the three unite to form "une figure à trois," a dove approaches and drops an olive branch (5.11.172). Freddy claims that the olive branch is a sign of the beginning of a new world, and, indeed, when they open their eyes they discover land. In rewriting biblical myth, the adaptation posits unrestrained sexuality, including the homosexuality between Nelson and Freddy and the incest

between Sandy and Nelson, as a source of salvation rather than destruction. In fact, the love between Sandy, Nelson, and Freddy is the most enduring relationship of the epic, for, even after Nelson is killed, Sandy and Freddy carry Nelson's body with them everywhere they go. Nelson's pointless death to save a father whose own unrestrained sexuality was fickle and loveless serves to heighten the reader's sympathy for this trio whose incestuous and homosexual desire belies a love that endures beyond the grave, the only such love of the epic. As Freddy points out, the trio's love, blessed by the heavens, embodies the potential for a new world order. The breakdown of the socially constructed norms of traditional sexuality through its greatest taboos creates a free space for the construction of a new national order. In fact, their new world is a paradise until confronted by an old world order dominated by taboos and superstition that falsely locates the trio's potential for regeneration in their material bodies (i.e., Nelson's blood) instead of in their transcendent love.

Moreover, the Sandy-Nelson-Freddy relationship, and later Catherine-Claire's, also directly contradicts Jean-Cléo Godin and Pierre Lavoie's assertion in the epic's introductory essay of "l'absence, dans l'œuvre de Ronfard, de l'homosexualité, très présente dans la littérature québécoise contemporaine" (20n12).²⁵ There are several additional episodes of homoeroticism in the epic, such as Annie's desire for Swedish women with honey breasts, Amazons, and Marie-Jeanne Larose (2.3.111-13), Annie's desire for Circe reminiscent of Helena and Hermia in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (5.9.159), and Richard's boast that no man could help being seduced by a picture of his naked body (4.3.36). Godin and Lavoie's claim may stem from knowledge of authorial intention (nine years later, Ronfard published a critical article denying the existence of a specific homosexual identity and its relevance to theatre),²⁶ but homoeroticism pervades the text of *Roi Boiteux*, as it does in *Lear* between Corneille and the king.

Sexual liberty, including incestuous homosexuality, as the source of national regeneration is equally embodied by Claire Premier, one of the nation's two rightful, female heirs. The power to rule the nation is transmitted sexually to Claire by her grandmother, Catherine, thus bypassing completely the male heir, Richard, who is ruled by his mother but unable to exercise political agency himself. This matrilineal transfer of power takes place in a photography session in which every click of Claire's camera intensifies the sexual exchange of power from her grandmother to herself. Claire symbolically captures

Catherine who willingly surrenders, emotionally and sexually, for the only time in the epic:

D'un seul coup, Catherine se lève et joue avec un abattage extraordinaire le rôle de mannequin photographique. Elle prend toutes les poses possibles, depuis celle de la grande dame contemplant l'univers jusqu'à celle de la putain de bas étage. Elle et Claire font un numéro éblouissant. Elles s'amuse, rient, courent, tournent sur elles-mêmes, se pressent l'une contre l'autre. Claire fait vraiment l'amour avec son appareil-photo. En poussant des gémissements de chattes en chaleur, elles finissent par rouler à terre. Claire, sexe contre sexe, les jambes de Catherine nouées dans son dos, prend un dernier cliché de la tête de Catherine extasiée. Entre Richard Premier qui voit le tableau. [...] Catherine pousse un immense gémissement d'orgasme. (6.10.294)²⁷

Thus, when Claire exits and Richard finally kills his mother in a futile attempt to appropriate her power to rule the nation, it is too late because Catherine has already abdicated it to Claire through their incestuous, homosexual bonding.

The epic's conclusion revels in an ambiguity that presents the reader/audience with two legitimate daughters surviving to claim the nation's throne, depending, oddly enough, on the epic's performance schedule. According to authorial, prefatory instructions in the published text, the epic's epilogue is only supposed to be performed when the epic as a whole has been played in one day, but the epilogue should be omitted when each play is performed on a different day. Thus, performed as "théâtre-feuilleton" or leaflet theatre (1.36), Claire Premier emerges as the new leader of the nation following Catherine's and Richard's deaths because, despite Leila's daughter holding the dying Richard in the second last snapshot of the play, Leila's daughter mysteriously disappears from the final shot. The final snapshot of Richard's dead body, with the blind monk who represents Fortune behind him, indicates that nobody else remains to lead the nation except for Claire who took the picture. Her omniscient position above the carnage of the horde signals her objective perspective and ability to rule rationally over the collectivity, in contrast to the self-interested narcissism that drove Richard to seek his mother's power. Claire emerges as the rightful ruler of the nation both through matrilineal descent and through a concerned interest in the needs and suffering of others (her grandmother's need for release and Richard's painful

death) that inspires collective empathy (the photographs are transmitted to the audience). Since concern for others is precisely what has been lacking in the largely narcissistic and capitalist world of the play, Claire represents hope for a better future of the nation. She has received the right to rule from Catherine and Richard, but unlike them she has remained innocent and uncorrupted by the knowledge that she is heir to power.

If, however, the epilogue is included in the performance of the epic, then Leïla's daughter emerges as the new, legitimate ruler of the devastated nation. As the daughter of Leïla and Alcide Premier, Richard's older half-brother and first son of François Premier, Leïla's daughter's claim to the throne takes precedence over Claire's (in a situation that echoes the disputing genealogical claims traced back to Edward III in Shakespeare's tetralogy). The reader has no prior knowledge of Leïla's daughter before she appears in the closing scene as a snake-charmer leading Moïse's horde against Richard, but in the epilogue she magically destroys the entire neighbourhood, including Claire's pictures and Moïse's café. Moïse's destruction by Leïla's daughter aligns with the carnivalesque spirit that permeates the play. As the bastard and thus underdog hero of the epic (in echo of Hector in *Lea*r, Lou sings the praises of bastards [4.5.107]), Moïse can lead a popular revolution that topples the despotic old order of Richard, but he cannot lead the nation because he cannot create the new order to which carnival is supposed to return. Leïla's daughter, on the other hand, symbolizes new order because she is descended through Alcide from François Premier and his first wife, Augustine Labelle, both of whom are outsiders to the genealogical feud between the Ragone and Roberge families. She thus descends from a line of immigrants external to the epic's power struggle over the rule of the neighbourhood/kingdom. Leïla's daughter is further marked as immigrant other by her birth in Azerbaijan and her exoticism as a snake charmer. Like Claire, Leïla's daughter embodies hope for a new social order through the contribution of her exotic otherness and through her obliteration of a stale patriarchal power struggle by wiping out the male heads of each family, Richard for the Ragones and Moïse for the Roberges. Even her name, or lack thereof, as "Leïla's daughter" marks her as the representative of a new order, since her genealogy emphasizes the matrilineal.

In a Québécois context, Leïla's daughter's conquest speaks to a greater social acceptance of otherness in light of the losing referendum that pitted francophone sovereignists (such as René Lévesque) against francophone federalists (such as Claude Ryan,

Robert Bourrassa, and Pierre Elliot Trudeau), both of whom descended from the same *pure laine* roots. In this way, the referendum parallels the family feud around which *Roi Boiteux* is based with the Roberge family, represented by Moïse, the abandoned son who leads a horde of bastards, as the sovereignists, and the Ragone family, represented by Catherine, epitomizing colonial mimicry through her denial of her roots, as the Québécois federalists. Catherine describes the Roberge family as a “sale race” [dirty race], despite the fact that her mother was a Roberge, which makes her a Roberge by blood if not by name (2.3.119). The denial of her maternal roots through her assertions that she is purely Ragone, which she considers superior, belies her colonial mimicry; she is “almost but not quite” Ragone, in Bhabha’s terms, and her frequent outbursts against the Roberge family expose her own self-hatred. Her rule over the court is merely that of a *comprador*, a derivative stand-in for the outside colonizing force of the Ragone family that acquired the Roberge gold mines by conquest of her mother, Angela. In this, Catherine Roberge-Ragone evokes the ruling Québécois federalist elite that holds its own people in tutelage in the interests of the exploitation of its resources by an outside (neo-)colonial force, the Canadian federal government. Catherine Roberge-Ragone denies her Roberge heritage in the name of Ragone, thus resembling *pure laine* Québécois federalists who deny the heritage of their birth in order to extol the ideal of a federal Canadian identity. However, as neither Roberge nor Ragone, Leïla’s daughter transcends this feud and illuminates the ridiculousness of such debates on ethnic origin. Leïla’s daughter’s unexpected conquest represents, then, the arrival of immigrants and international culture and the explosion of the Roberge-Ragone/sovereignist-federalist binary that dominates the genealogical table prefacing both volumes of the epic. The literal explosion of the neighbourhood/kingdom provoked by Leïla’s daughter in the epilogue creates a third space and opens possibilities for a new social order based on the contributions of a plurality of ethnic identities. This emphasis on an internationalist perspective is in keeping with the entire fifth play of the epic with its intertextual nods to Homer’s *Odyssey* and to Captain James Cook’s exploration of the South Pacific. *Roi Boiteux* explores international cultural exchange as a contribution that may enrich national identity without threatening or destroying it. The explosion caused by Leïla’s daughter does not destroy the national community (as the continuing radio broadcast proves), only the rigid identity paradigms that

were perpetuating rancour. This conclusion to the play does not discount national identity or sovereignty, but speaks to the need for exterior influences to renew the debate.

The ambiguous conclusion thus produces two very different readings of the adaptation, but one constant remains: both Claire and Leïla's daughter are daughters of the nation's legitimate rulers. (The inheritance of the nation by these two women also explains why Richard is never able to govern alone the nation to which he thinks he is entitled: his attempts at rule are both profoundly colonialist and misogynist, as parodied when he "discovers" Circé's island, addresses her as "poupée" [doll], and unsuccessfully attempts to interpellate her into a master-slave dialectic [5.9.156].) Thus, in one of the epic's two conclusions, women carry the potential for national renewal through uninhibited homosexuality, and, in the other, women bring the potential for national renewal through increased internationalism and cultural openness; in either case men cannot rule without recognition of women's strength and contribution to national development. The six-play conclusion favouring Claire's rule carries greater weight, however, for several reasons. The Claire-ending connects strongly to the Sandy-Nelson-Freddy relationship through the valorization of homosexual desire in loving relationships. Moreover, the epic's predominant emphasis on carnivalesque sexuality throughout, rather than the more limited treatment of international exploration, favours the six-play conclusion and Claire's succession. As François Premier observes, "Partout Éros triomphe, le sexe, le cul" (3.10.188).²⁸ Internationalism is primarily contained within the fifth play and relegated elsewhere to subplot characters. While sexuality is a function of carnival, internationalism is a function of magic realism, and the entire Odyssey of the fifth play is undercut when, upon the characters' return, the reader learns that their global voyages were merely an illusion (5.21.216).

Ronfard's *Lear* also concludes with a daughter's inheritance of national rule, although less ambiguously than in *Roi Boiteux*. Whereas in Shakespeare the responsibility of rebuilding the nation falls to Albany who offers it to Edgar,²⁹ in Ronfard's adaptation no counterparts exist for these two characters, and the only character still alive at the end is Laurette, the Cordelia figure:

Tout le monde est donc mort sauf Laurette. Elle arrive revêtue d'une grande chemise blanche, pieds nus, cheveux dénoués; elle n'a plus son maquillage de fou. Elle passe au

milieu du charnier et se dirige vers le trône, au bout du tapis rouge. Elle y monte, s'y installe et d'un beau geste tranquille, elle tire la langue et la tient entre le pouce et l'index. Elle s'immobilise. (70)³⁰

The only rebuilder of the destroyed nation is a pure woman (as symbolized by her large, white shirt), but she has been silenced and rendered immobile by both the men and her own sisters. The nation lacks solidarity, as do the gender relations typified by her sisters; therefore, she is unable to speak or to act on behalf of a community (either national or sororal) which does not recognize her participation. In their own self-destruction, the rest of the characters also destroy the possibility of the rebirth which is normally the outcome of carnival. Within the confines of the play, there is no return from the carnivalesque second-world to another new social order. Yet, despite her silence, as the lone survivor and an angelic figure, Laurette represents hope since she escapes the fate of both of her Shakespearean counterparts: Cordelia who dies and the Fool who inexplicably disappears. Although the final scene is desolate, the image of Laurette's purity stands out remarkably in contrast to the death/absence of her Shakespearean counterparts. She symbolizes the potential for rebirth which may be actualized beyond the limits of the play.

The reader can find hope for change and regeneration in Laurette's character at the end of the play because it is located in her from the beginning through her steadfast surveillance of the affairs of the nation and refusal to accept an unjustified exile (contrary to Shakespeare's Cordelia). When the king banishes her for failing to speak during the love test, Laurette tells herself that it is out of the question to "faire du tourisme africain quand c'est ici que ça se passe" (13).³¹ In opposition to the references to African decolonization in earlier Québécois adaptations of Shakespeare, such as Gurik's *Hamlet, prince du Québec* (1968), Laurette's statement marks a turn in nationalist discourse. Whereas Gurik's adaptation valorizes African decolonization, in keeping with a trend of Fanonism-inspired Québécois nationalism in the 1960s to draw parallels with Africa, Ronfard's adaptation emphasizes that it is here, in Québec, that things are happening. It is no longer the time to study quietly international events from the outside like a tourist; it is now time to be in the center of the action, and Laurette implicitly accepts the challenge by refusing exile. In an adaptation about the destruction of the nation due to the patriarchal ruler's divestiture of power to women, it is telling that Ronfard's ending figures a woman as the

only potential healer of a sick nation in need of rebirth. Contrary to the Roman Catholic doctrine of *la revanche des berceaux* [revenge of the cradle] pervasive until the Quiet Revolution,³² Laurette's contribution is not located in her womb, as in the comic closure typical of most Shakespearean plays. Rather, by stealthily adopting a disguise as the Fool and overseeing the affairs of the nation from her safe space perched above "*toute la scène agrippé au haut d'une colonne*" (38),³³ Laurette demonstrates her wit, her strategic intelligence to survive dire situations, and her recognition of the need to rebuild the nation once the horde has passed.

Laurette's adoption of this progressive, action-oriented attitude from the outset thus supports reading her as a source of regeneration. Even the silence with which she ends the play cannot entirely diminish the potential that she embodies since she held her tongue in the exact same manner during the love test, that is, at a moment of resistance to the king's capriciousness when silence may represent inner strength. Once the king and her sisters are dead at her feet, the closing image of her in her self-imposed silence is imbued with uncertainty, and the reader may envision that her liberation from the conditions leading up to her silence will free her from it. Her potential to take action to rebuild the nation remains unconstrained, like her flowing shirt. While Leanore Lieblein claims that the king's dying words, "Le reste est silence" (68) from *Hamlet* (5.2.363), indicate that "the father (Lear? Shakespeare?) proves unable to empower his child's speech" ("Shakespeare" 274), I would argue that Lear's dying words strengthen the reading of Laurette as a national leader. Neither Hamlet's nor Lear's death indicates that everything is silent or that the dramatic action has come to a close. Like the soon-to-be silent Hamlet, who implores his trusted friend Horatio to "[r]eport [him] and [his] cause aright / To the unsatisfied" (5.2.344-45), here Lear emphasizes his silence in order to encourage that his tale be told by someone close to him whom he can trust to oversee the rebirth of the state after his death. Liberated from the king's patriarchal rule that was responsible for her initial silence, at the end of the adaptation Laurette has leave, like Horatio, to "speak to th'yet unknowing world / [...] / Of carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts, / Of accidental judgments, [and] casual slaughters" and thus instate a new order in the aftermath of the carnivalesque chaos that has just ensued (5.2.384-87). She embodies the potential to return from carnival's "second-world" and to breathe new life into the nation now that its baser elements have been both celebrated and expunged.

Lear's conclusion is also marked by an unexpected, if not parodic, regeneration of another sort, one which dramatizes the theory of the death of the author. After all the other characters have died (except Laurette who is still offstage), the two Shakespeares mysteriously decide to engage in a sword fight punctuated with the typically British, decorous words exchanged by Hamlet and Laertes. The duel consists of four brief exchanges taken from Laertes and Hamlet, which are the only words in the text reproduced in English. The reproduction of the "original" English text lends more authenticity to these lines than that accrued upon the two Shakespeares' previous scenes in French translation. The fact that both Shakespeares slide interchangeably into the role of *Hamlet's* heroic title character compounds this authenticity while blurring any distinction between the two author-characters.

The stage directions indicate that they stab each other and both fall down dead, but after Laurette returns onstage the adaptation ends on a note of magic realism with Shakespeare's return from the dead: "*Coup de théâtre: l'un des Shakespeares, en gémissant se redresse, arrache l'épée qui le perforait, se traîne [sic], agonisant, vers la cabine d'éclairage et dans un dernier élan de vie, éteint les lumières, en disant: / 2 : Calvaire!*" (70).³⁴ The death of Shakespeare by Shakespeare and his spontaneous regeneration function as a metaphor for both the ambivalence inherent in the theory of the death of the author and the ambivalent status of Shakespeare in Québécois adaptations. On one level, this scene reinscribes the bard's canonical authority through the implication that nobody can kill off Shakespeare entirely, not even Shakespeare himself; he will continue to pop up when we least expect it, if not in one incarnation then in another. On another level though, this scene undercuts that same authority by highlighting how easily Shakespeare can be appropriated by Québécois playwrights. Shakespeare's pronunciation of a typically Québécois blasphemy with his dying breath, in contrast to the Elizabethan English spoken during the preceding duel and the "standard" French of the opening scene, confers on Shakespeare an "authentic" Québécois identity, that of the *pure laine*, francophone, beer-drinking, working class. Rather than being crushed by the weight of Shakespeare's canonical authority, Québécois popular culture has turned the tables on him and forced Shakespeare to adopt its own discourse. While Shakespeare as both historical author and fictional author-character gets the final word in the adaptation, his blasphemy is a sort of baptism that culturally

marks the signifier 'Shakespeare' as distinctly Québécois—vulnerable to appropriation and hence “dead” as an author, despite his continual regeneration.

The tenuous balance between so-called “authentic” Shakespeare and his appropriation within the Québécois context is the subject of several other intertextual moments in the adaptation. During the equivalent of Shakespeare’s storm scene, the fool hides in the rafters and pours water down onto the two Shakespeares who, 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)*” (46-48).³⁵ The excerpt from Shakespeare’s *Richard III* is in fact “authentic” insofar as it is a literal translation with no additions or cuts that alter the meaning of the source text (1.4.1-33), and the authenticity of the translation, which renders the passage recognizable with or without the above stage directions, permits the passage, and the adaptation as a whole, to lay claim to a certain amount of Shakespeare’s canonical authority. Nonetheless, the authority of this “authentic” text is undercut by the informal reference to Shakespeare by his first name, by the mocking jab at the stereotype of the British weather, and by the two Shakespeares’ ironic obliviousness to the fact that they are being drowned, like Clarence, by water that the Fool describes as “*pipi de chat*” [cat pee] (50). This carnivalesque association of Shakespeare with the grotesque lower body also takes place at the end of the horde’s protest when “*le roi contemple une boule de merde qu’il tient dans sa main, dans une posture qui rappelle Michel-Ange, Rodin, l’Hamlet traditionnel*” (21).³⁶ In both cases, the reduction of Shakespeare from cerebral philosopher to a target of the products of the grotesque lower body serves to undercut the popular conception of his “greatness” within a false high culture / low culture hierarchy.

The grotesque body is, of course, a dominant feature in Shakespeare’s works, as Bakhtin points out (11), but in the popular imaginary Shakespeare’s name tends to be associated with high culture to the convenient exclusion of the bawdy and carnivalesque elements of his plays. In fact, Ronfard’s *Lear* plays upon, even as it subverts, the popularity of this false perception of a high culture/low culture binary with “Shakespeare” as signifier of “universal human greatness” (and other hyperboles of the like) in contrast to the carnivalesque and the grotesque of low culture. The protest by the horde of pro-bastard supporters culminates in the opposition collapsing in on itself: “*Sur leur trajet, ils rencontrent les*

deux shakespeares sorties de leur cage par curiosité. Deux mondes sont confrontés. Silence. Immobilité. Question : Qu'est que nous faisons tous ici ? Chacun s'abîme dans ce vide théâtral plein d'angoisse métaphysique" (21).³⁷ The confrontation of Shakespeare and carnival as two diametrically opposed worlds that collapse when they come into contact with each other strengthens the high culture/low culture binary. Yet, it is precisely this event that provokes the king to adopt the persona of Hamlet in his contemplation of the ball of shit. The onstage confrontation of Shakespeare and carnival can thus be interpreted as an invitation for the reader to examine more closely the carnivalesque that is already part of Shakespeare and the grotesque that lurks behind the high culture image of "Hamlet" as signifier of literary greatness.

Both Ronfard's *Lear* and *Vie et mort du Roi Boiteux*, then, 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. Both adaptations employ carnival, and to a lesser extent magic realism, to parody the diseased state of the nation and the fixity of traditional gender roles, ultimately suggesting that the rule of women, or at least a greater social recognition of their potential, is the only way to heal the nation's ills. By positing that national development is dependent on the instauration of gender equity, and thus highlighting the interdependence of issues of nation and gender, the adaptations participate in a crucial social and political debate of their time, as the referendum's Yvette scandal brought forcefully to the fore. As well, Ronfard's adaptations take *le grand Will* down a peg in order to expose the carnivalesque that has always been present in his "high culture" plays, while also baptizing "Shakespeare" as distinctly Québécois. ❁

NOTES

- 1 This and all subsequent translations are my own. I have chosen to translate as literally as possible (including idioms) in order to highlight the differences between the word choice of Québécois adapters and the Shakespearean source text.
- 2 I have excluded *Falstaff* (1990) from this study of Jean-Pierre Ronfard's Shakespearean adaptations because the text does not contain enough original content to make it relevant here as an adaptation. *Falstaff* abridges and combines the plots of Shakespeare's *1-2 Henry IV* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor* in an almost literal translation. The play contains only one original speech, Falstaff's closing

monologue on *la joie de vivre*. In this sense, *Falstaff* is also carnivalesque, but it does not deal with issues of nation and gender.

- 3 I define “adaptations” as texts exhibiting additions (although not reductions for the purpose of playing time), transpositions, or translations which alter significantly the content or meaning of the source text and thus produce a new reading of the play beyond that produced by changes at the level of production. 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-medium adaptations, such as plays to films, necessarily involve a double process of adaptation to account for differences between genres and media.

While Ronfard’s works, especially *Roi Boiteux*, have garnered much critical attention to date including a special issue of *L’Annuaire théâtral* (2004) and two issues of *Jeu* (1983, 2004), almost all critics have focused on his plays in production to the exclusion of the text, despite both plays having been published. See, for instance, Bouchard, Chassay, Féral, Lapointe, Lavoie and Lefebvre, Le Blanc, and Vigeant. In *Sociocritique de la traduction*, Brisset briefly discusses *Lear* in the context of translation, which she doesn’t distinguish adequately from adaptation, and she too primarily addresses elements of the stage production or plot issues. In “Shakespeare à l’Arsenal,” Lafon reads *Roi Boiteux* also mainly through its basic plot structure, from a psychoanalytic—hence arguably anti-feminist—perspective, claiming that *Roi Boiteux* “sert à dénoncer l’impasse du pouvoir des femmes” [“serves to denounce the impasse of women’s power”] (94). This article contests Lafon’s claim and seeks to fill the void of close textual readings of Ronfard’s adaptations and their Shakespearean sources.

- 4 Carnival has been interpreted by some scholars as a subversion of social order; others see carnival as a safety valve for the release of social tension which is sanctioned by the dominant social order because it re-emerges strengthened and solidified. Among Shakespearean critics, Michael Bristol claims carnival “in no way excludes the possibility of coherent social protest” (25), while Stephen Greenblatt sees carnival as “a release of pent-up frustrations, a safety valve that would enable the participants to return with renewed obedience” (66). Early modern historian Natalie Zemon Davis suggests carnival can “act both to reinforce order and to suggest alternatives to the existing order” (123). The debate about whether carnival is subversive or a safety valve is thus far-ranging and has not been resolved among critics. Apart from this debate, Québécois critic André Belleau describes Québécois literature, particularly the novel, as strongly influenced by Rabelais and highly carnivalesque, citing the works of Marie-Claire Blais, Roch Carrier, Jacques Godbout, and Jacques Ferron among other examples (54-

- 55). For further work on carnival in North American francophone literatures, see Bourque and Brown.
- 5 *Le grand Will* is a common nickname for Shakespeare employed by many playwrights in Québec, and this oxymoronic expression sums up their relationship to him. In Québec, Shakespeare is a great 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, “Re-making” 178-79). The irreverence of their approach to the bard, resulting in part from their cultural distance from the British canon, means that Québécois adaptors are more apt than English Canadian playwrights to resist the possible contamination, assimilation, or effacement of their local culture by Shakespeare’s often overwhelming influence.
 - 6 “A bloody and grotesque epic in six plays and an epilogue.”
 - 7 See *Le Blanc* (131-32) for a list of plot parallels, some of which I reproduce here in the list of characters, but some of which oversimplify the two plays and overlook other important similarities.
 - 8 “Our country is sick, profoundly sick.”
 - 9 “In this beautiful language that we have left, sign and symbol of our ancestral power.”
 - 10 “Culture [...] ties us to the breath and the blood of ancestors like the many-coloured hospital tubes maintain the existence of the dying man who is mummified in his bandages.”
 - 11 “I know about the weight (responsibility) of power. Very happy to be rid of it.”
 - 12 “It has to change! [...] Excited, crazy women, breasts to the wind, are filling the skulls of their fellow creatures and are starting to bust our ears with their demagogic slogans: ‘the old power is dead!’, ‘long live the right of peoples to order everything!’, ‘day is breaking...the colour of the sky is changing...welcome the birth of a new order!’. And it’s I, (*moans from Violette in her bed*) [*sic*] well I and my sister, it’s we that they expect to bring about this new order. Imbeciles! Order is order. It doesn’t have to be new or old. Order has no colour.”
 - 13 “*Bucket of shit.*” “*He starts throwing balls of shit everywhere, particularly on the throne, on the cage of the Shakespeare-Technicians and on the ceiling.*” Stage directions are italicized in the texts and appear as such hereafter.
 - 14 “Unnatural time.” “Long live bastardry / that knocks down laws / that dirties churches / and dethrones kings.”
 - 15 “Power to bastards.”
 - 16 The association between carnival and Québec’s (neo-)colonial status occurs in other nationalist works, the most notable example being Pierre Falardeau’s film *Le temps des bouffons* (1993) about the annual Beaver Club supper at the Queen Elizabeth hotel in Montréal. Falardeau invokes carnival when he implicitly compares Québec and Ghana, but he mocks the notion of carnival since it is temporary and has no lasting political effect: “On est au Ghana en 1957, avant

l'indépendance. [...] Chaque année, les membres de la secte [des Haoukas] se réunissent pour fêter. [...] En 1957, le Ghana, c'est une colonie britannique... quelques rois nègres pour faire semblant, mais les vrais maîtres sont anglais. [...] La religion des Haoukas reproduit le système colonial en plus petit, mais à l'envers. Les colonisés se déguisent en colonisateurs, les exploités jouent le rôle des exploités, les esclaves deviennent les maîtres. Une fois par année, les pauvres mangent du chien. Une fois par année, les fous sont maîtres. Le reste du temps, les maîtres sont fous" (73). ["We are in Ghana in 1957, before independence. [...] Each year, the members of the [Haoukas] sect gather to celebrate. [...] In 1957, Ghana is a British colony... a few nigger kings to pretend, but the real masters are English. [...] The Haoukas' religion reproduces the colonial system smaller but backwards. The colonized disguise themselves as colonizers, the exploited play the role of exploiters, the slaves become masters. Once a year, the poor eat dog. Once a year, the fools are masters. The rest of the time, the masters are crazy."] See "*Le Temps des bouffons, Prise 2*" in *La liberté n'est pas une marque de yogourt* for the complete text of the film's voice-over commentary (73-76).

- 17 "I'm fucked to the bone. [...] Violette, in mocking disregard, has had added to the royal coat of arms, against a heraldic red background, a green-blazoned penis that she claims to have stolen from me for forever. It's hard."
- 18 In addition to its most well-known usage in *King Lear*, this sense of "nothing" signifying "lack" and hence "vagina" also appears at the end of *Measure for Measure* when the Duke rhetorically asks Mariana, "Why, you are nothing then: neither maid, widow, nor wife?", and Lucio confirms the pun on "nothing" with his witty interjection, "My lord, she may be a punk, for many of them are neither maid, widow, nor wife" (5.1.177-80). An early modern woman whose sexuality is not properly controlled and sanctioned within the heteronormative economy of marriage is nothing; that is, a prostitute, an empty hole or used-up vagina, or damaged goods whose economic value is nothing.
- 19 "(*All at once, she takes on an inebriated voice, a guardsman's attitude, and a shithead's look. She adjusts her imaginary balls.*) [...] We told each other: '[...] we've got 'em in our pants, don't we? Of course we've got 'em. Two beautiful big ones like grandfather'."
- 20 "Zir" is a gender-neutral pronoun popularly employed by queer and transgendered persons to replace the gendered pronouns "his" and "her." The respectful pronoun to use for transgendered people, people who pass, and drag kings and drag queens is the pronoun of their adopted gender. In keeping with this practice, the correct address for Corneille should be "he" while passing as a man to the king. Gender-neutral pronouns avoid the need for multiple pronouns for the same character, but their relative unfamiliarity with readers (which is indeed part of the point) creates another type of

confusion within an essay. The following chart provides an example of gender-neutral pronouns and the gendered pronouns to which they correspond:

Subject	Object	Possessive Adjective	Possessive Pronoun	Reflexive
zie	zim	zir	zirs	zimselb
he	him	his	his	himself
she	her	her	hers	herself
they	them	their	theirs	themselves

No consensus has been reached in popular queer culture as to the definitive usage of gender-neutral pronouns and several variations exist. See Williams for a comprehensive overview of the debate, various pronoun sets, and their etymological origins.

- 21 “They were ripping off their clothes that were burning their skin. Naked, they jumped in place like crippled grasshoppers. They huddled together in the middle of our guys who were laughing at their good luck. ‘Hey! I’m the king!’ You yelled. ‘The flower’s mine!’ You dropped your pants and the whole army saw it. The whole army saw you in all your force. The women went by you one after the other. Spread eagle by four soldiers who took turns holding them down. You were tireless. You laughed with pleasure. You screamed with rage and fury. And it went on. And it went on. You mounted the last one yawning wide enough to dislocate your jaw. And you crashed on the ground, instantly fast asleep. I covered you over with my coat. When you woke up, in the early morning of victory, the girl under you was dead.

(During the whole story, Corneille and the king touch, rub, and excite each other. Corneille straddles the king and wears him out. They end up exhausted on the ground.)”

- 22 I develop more fully the theoretical cross-over between Bhabha’s idea of colonial mimicry and current approaches to gender imitation that do not adequately distinguish between cross-dressing, drag, and passing in an article entitled “Cross-Dressing, Drag, and Passing: Slippages in Shakespearean Comedy.”
- 23 “An empty shell, a name with no guarantor.”
- 24 The schoolbook text cited by Lise Payette, who sparked the scandal by calling Claude Ryan’s wife an Yvette, is as follows: “Guy pratique les sports, la natation, le tennis, la boxe, le plongeon. Son ambition est de devenir champion et de remporter beaucoup de trophées. Yvette, sa petite soeur, est joyeuse et gentille. Elle trouve toujours le moyen de faire plaisir à ses parents. Hier, à l’heure du repas, elle a tranché le pain, versé l’eau sur le thé dans la théière, elle a apporté le sucrier, le beurrier, le pot de lait. Elle a aussi aidé à servir le poulet rôti. Après le déjeuner, c’est avec plaisir qu’elle a essuyé la vaisselle et balayé le tapis. Yvette est une petite fille obligeante.” (qtd. in Fraser 247-48). [“Guy plays sports, swimming, tennis, boxing, and diving. His ambition is to become a champion and win lots of trophies. Yvette, his little sister, is joyful and nice. She always finds a way to please her

parents. Yesterday, at dinnertime, she sliced the bread, poured water on the tea in the teapot, she set the sugar dish, the butter dish, and the milk. She also helped to serve the roast chicken. After dinner, it's with pleasure that she dried the dishes and swept the rug. Yvette is an obedient little girl.”]

25 “The absence, in Ronfard’s work, of homosexuality, very present in contemporary Québécois literature.”

26 In “En contrepoint” (1990), Ronfard writes: “Du coup, marchant dans les rues, j’ai commencé à m’interroger : est-ce que l’homosexualité au théâtre, dans la pratique du théâtre est intéressante? À quels niveaux? Est-ce que moi, ça m’intéresse? / Commençons par moi. Peut-être parce que je suis hétérosexuel, donc enfoncé sur ce plan dans ce qu’on appelle la norme, l’homosexualité m’intéresse, privé-ment, au même titre que la cuisine végétarienne, le zen, le vélocipédisme et l’idéologie des non-fumeurs, c’est-à-dire assez peu. [...] Je refuse le slogan fasciste et bondieusard qui affirme que la vie privée est politique. J’avoue d’ailleurs sur ce point une naïveté totale, probablement par manque d’imagination. [...] Bref, je ne sais jamais qu’un tel est homosexuel, juif ou philatéliste [...]” (123). [“At once, walking down the street, I started to ask myself : is homosexuality in the theatre, in the practice of theatre, interesting? On what levels? Does it interest me? / Let’s start with me. Maybe because I’m heterosexual, and thus stuck in what we call the norm in this regard, homosexuality interests me, privately, as much as vegetarian cooking, zen, bicycling, and the ideology of non-smokers, which is to say very little. [...] I refuse the fascist and fundamentalist slogan that the personal is political. In fact, I confess total naïveté on this point, probably from a lack of imagination. [...] Briefly put, I never know if so and so is a homosexual, a Jew, or a stamp collector [...]”]

While such statements by playwrights may be insightful into their personal views, I would argue, in keeping with theories of the death of the author, that they should not influence how critics interpret their texts. Ronfard’s *Roi Boiteux* clearly does valorize homosexuality through the relationships of Sandy, Nelson and Freddy and of Catherine and Claire. Although they are not reflected in the text, Ronfard’s personal views do point, however, to a broader social disregard or disdain for queers, which, if not homophobic is at least clearly heterosexist.

27 “*All at once, Catherine gets up and acts with extraordinary brio the role of a photographer’s model. She strikes every possible pose, from the magnanimous lady contemplating the universe to the second-rate whore. She and Claire do a dazzling number. They enjoy themselves, laugh, run, spin around, press their bodies against each other. Claire truly makes love to her camera. While heaving moans of cats in heat, they end up rolling around the ground. Claire, genitals against genitals, with Catherine’s legs wrapped together around her back, takes one last headshot of Catherine in ecstasy. Enter Richard Premier who sees the*

- scene. [...] Catherine heaves out an immense orgasmic moan.”
- 28 “Everywhere Eros triumphs, sex, ass.”
- 29 Or not. Albany may be either “restoring Edgar and Kent to their titles and power as nobles so that they can *sustain* order in the realm” or “inviting them to govern jointly with him” (Foakes qtd. in Shakespeare, *King Lear* 5.3.319n), an offer which is further complicated by the change between the Quarto and the Folio of the final speech prefix from Albany to Edgar.
- 30 “*Everyone is thus dead except Laurette. She arrives wearing a large, white shirt, barefoot, hair loose; she no longer has on her fool’s make-up. She goes through the center of the mass grave and finds her way to the throne at the end of the red carpet. She climbs up, settles herself on it, and in a beautiful, quiet gesture, she pulls out her tongue and holds it between her thumb and index finger. She freezes.*”
- 31 “Go on a tour of Africa when it’s here where things are happening.”
- 32 *La revanche des berceaux* was the policy of the Roman Catholic Church which insisted that the survival of the French language and Catholicism in North America, and hence the fate of the French Canadian/Québécois nation, rested on a mere numbers game of producing as many children as possible (regardless of the burden of this practice on individual families). During the Quiet Revolution, which coincided with the invention of the birth control pill, the younger generation decided that the Church had no place in the bedrooms of the nation (prior to Trudeau’s famous declaration to the same effect about the role of the state).
- 33 “The whole stage clutched to the top of a column.”
- 34 “Coup de théâtre: *one of the Shakespeares, groaning, gets up, pulls out the sword that was penetrating him, drags himself, dying, towards the lighting booth and in a last burst of life turns off the lights while saying: Fuck!*” “Calvaire” translates literally as the martyrdom on the road to the cross. Québécois curses generally derive from religious terms in contrast to anglophone curses which are mostly rooted in sexual imagery.
- 35 “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).”
- 36 “The king contemplates a ball of shit that he holds in his hand in a posture that invokes Michelangelo, Rodin, the traditional Hamlet.”
- 37 “On their path, they meet the two Shakespeares having come out of their booth out of curiosity. Two worlds confront each other. Silence. Immobility. Question: What are we all doing here? Everyone is engulfed in this theatrical emptiness full of metaphysical angst.”

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