

# *Five Kings: Adapting Welles*

## Adapting Shakespeare in Québec

Jennifer Drouin and Fiona Ritchie, McGill University

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### Abstract

*Five Kings: L'Histoire de notre chute* is an ambitious adaptation in French of Shakespeare's two tetralogies of history plays. As the title suggests, the creators have been influenced by Orson Welles's adaptation of the same name, and in the program notes they express their desire to pick up where Welles left off. We can therefore read *Five Kings* as an attempt by these four adapters to stake their claim as artistic professionals and redoubtable Shakespearians. The *Five Kings* creative team is to be congratulated for managing to stage the entire sequence of Shakespeare's eight history plays in the same five-hour time frame in which Welles staged the second tetralogy. Besting Welles is no mean feat.

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*Five Kings: L'Histoire de notre chute*, by Olivier Kemeid. A production of Théâtre PAP, Théâtre des Fonds de Tiroirs, and Trois Tristes Tigres in coproduction with the Théâtre Français du Centre National des Arts (Ottawa) and the Théâtre de Poche (Bruxelles). *Director*, Frédéric Dubois. *Artistic Direction*, Patrice Dubois. *Lighting and scenery*, Martin Labrecque. *Costumes*, Romain Fabre. *Original Music*, Nicholas Basque and Philippe Brault. *Video*, Silent Partners. *Movement*, Estelle Claretton. *Cast*: Olivier Coyette, Jean-Marc Dalpé, Patrice Dubois, Hugues Frenette, Jonathan Gagnon, Gauthier Jansen, Park Krausen, Louise Laprade, Marie-Laurence Moreau, Étienne Pilon, Isabelle Roy, Vlase Samar, and Emmanuel Schwartz. Espace Go, Montréal, QC. 8 November 2015.

(A film clip is available in the HTML version of this document.)

*Five Kings: L'Histoire de notre chute* is an ambitious adaptation in French of Shakespeare's two tetralogies of history plays, telling "the history of our fall" (although the French word "histoire" has retained the playful double sense in early modern English of both "story" and "true events").<sup>1</sup> As the title suggests, the four creators of *Five Kings*, Olivier Kemeid (a Governor General's Award-winning playwright), Patrice Dubois, Frédéric Dubois, and Martin Labrecque, declare themselves to have been influenced by Orson Welles's adaptation of the same name, and in the program notes

they express their desire to pick up where Welles left off. Welles only realized the first part of a projected two-part sequence: his *Five Kings* (staged in 1939 and reconceptualized as the film *Chimes at Midnight* in 1966) covers just the second tetralogy, but nevertheless lasted for five hours on stage. Richard France writes in his Preface to the printed text of the play that Welles seemed "to stage this sprawling compilation of Shakespeare and Holinshed as little more than a worthwhile challenge to his own redoubtable skills, to be judged on how well he managed to acquit himself in the performance of so Herculean a labor. It would have seemed utterly presumptuous for a lesser figure merely to tackle so massive an amount of material" (France 1990, 170). We can therefore read *Five Kings* as a similar attempt by these four adapters to stake their claim as artistic professionals and redoubtable Shakespearians. Furthermore, they are grappling with the legacy of Welles himself, a long-standing interest of Patrice Dubois and Martin Lebreque. In 2003, they produced a play called *Everybody's Welles pour tous*, in which Dubois's character spends his life researching the great actor and director (Leroux 2009, 154-55). The *Five Kings* creative team is to be congratulated for managing to stage the entire sequence of Shakespeare's eight history plays in the same five-hour time frame in which Welles staged the second tetralogy.<sup>2</sup> Besting Welles is no mean feat.

The creators were also influenced by the rich tradition of Québécois adaptations of Shakespeare. In an interview with the magazine *L'actualité*, Kemeid reveals that Jean-Pierre Ronfard's epic six-part play *Vie et mort du Roi Boiteux*, which he read at age nineteen, influences his theatrical style in terms of its "dimension épique, la langue qui emprunte à tous les registres, ce savoir encyclopédique et jouissif, cette verve rabelaisienne, cet humour mêlé à un grand sens du tragique" [epic dimension, the language which borrows from all registers, this encyclopedic and pleasurable knowledge, this Rabelaisian verve, this humor mixed with a great sense of the tragic] (Duchesneau 2014). In the entire canon of Québécois adaptations of Shakespeare, of which there have been at least thirty-five re-writings since 1960 (Drouin 2014, Appendix), *Five Kings* most closely resembles *Vie et mort du Roi Boiteux* in its ambitious scope. *Roi Boiteux*'s six parts were originally performed in 1981, either as a single fifteen-hour marathon or spread out over six nights, with a different conclusion depending on the performance schedule (for a full analysis of this play, see Drouin 2014, 112-32). Kemeid's monumental adaptation of Shakespeare's octology certainly achieves this epic quality, and it evokes Ronfard's work in its irreverence, particularly in the debauchorous Falstaff scenes and the campy *Richard III* part of the play, derision being characteristic of Québécois adaptations in general but especially of Ronfard's work.

Of course achieving such brevity involves brutal cutting. *Richard II* is covered in less than an hour, the two *Henry IV* plays and *Henry V* in an hour and a half, the three *Henry VI* plays in an hour and a quarter, and *Richard III* in forty-five minutes. The relatively short run time is also achieved by limiting the breaks given to the audience. During the intermission, an on-site catering service offers sustenance, but at only twenty minutes long there is barely enough time to use the washroom, let alone eat. Each half of the performance is punctuated by a five-minute break, but the audience is asked to remain in their seats. The concision of the text works in part because the plays have been updated to a modern setting: the action begins in the 1960s and ends in the present day. While the aim of the broad chronological sweep seems to have been to move from the optimism of the 1960s (evidenced in the bright, warm lighting of the opening segment) to a bleaker view of the contemporary moment (suggested by the black and red tones of the stage design at the end of the play), this interpretation was somewhat hampered by the renewed sense of optimism experienced by many in Canada at the landslide election of new Prime Minister Justin Trudeau the night before the opening of the show's run. This link with contemporary events took on additional significance, given *Five Kings*'s emphasis on the dynastic relationships between the characters and the fact that Justin's father, Pierre Elliott Trudeau, was also a notable Canadian Prime Minister. His reign lasted more than fifteen years spread over three decades, making him Canada's third longest serving PM. Both Trudeau *père* and Trudeau *filis* are Québécois. Moreover, Pierre's wife and Justin's mother, Margaret Sinclair Trudeau, also hails from a political dynasty, her father having been the charismatic Liberal federal minister James Sinclair. *Five Kings* expands on the women's roles in Shakespeare's history plays by incorporating the dynasty of Amasia women into four of the five segments of the play.

As the characters in *Five Kings* have been reimagined as businessmen rather than monarchs and the performance does not, like that of Welles, seek to recreate a historical chronicle of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries à la Holinshed, the drastic cuts are easier to stomach. Kemeid has associated each king with an element (snow, fire, iron, sand, blood) in order to differentiate them and to give each segment a unique character,<sup>3</sup> similar to Robert Lepage's use of natural elements and colors as a structuring device in his work.<sup>4</sup> The five parts of the performance have been retitled accordingly. The sections do indeed offer Kemeid's reading of the essence of each king, which contributes to the distillation effect. Furthermore, the elemental characteristics ascribed to each monarch reveal their individual flaws, developing a sense, shared by other recent productions of the histories, that Shakespeare's kings are compromised heroes corrupted by power.

We here offer brief descriptions of each section and conclude with a discussion of *Five Kings* as an adaptation of Shakespeare. There is a great deal of rich contextual material on the show's blog which might elucidate the rationale behind some of the performance choices.<sup>5</sup> However, we focus here on what we saw in the performance we attended and on pointing out some of the more significant elements of *Five Kings*. Our descriptions are based on the performance rather than on a detailed study of the printed text, although we quote from the script when citing lines from the play. It should be noted, however, that the published playtext diverges from the stage production at times, a significant instance of which we will discuss below.

### *Le Roi de neige (Richard II)*

The staging of the first play in the sequence begins demurely with a line of actors barely moving down the stage, step-by-step, slowly, blankly staring straight ahead. Once we as spectators overcame our trepidation that we might be in for five hours of minimal stage movement without interaction between characters, it became apparent that this was something of a Brechtian performance of classical French theater. The few stage directions that do accompany this segment (e.g., "*Il prend Aumerle dans ses bras.*" [*He takes Aumerle in his arms.*]) are projected on the back wall of the theatre as text for the audience to read (Kemeid 2015, 35), but the actors do not perform the actions. Only towards the end of the piece, when the advancing line of actors has reached the furthest point downstage, does Richard Plantagenêt (Richard II, played by Étienne Pilon) begin to move more fluidly, leaving the formality of the line to sit down casually on the edge of the stage. Even after Richard breaks formation, the line of actors remains otherwise intact, turns around, and returns upstage just as slowly as before. More naturalistic stage movement only begins as Richard's death approaches and the actors are forced to move to carry off this bit of stage business. In this sense, the opening section of the play strongly evokes, and surpasses, the early modern bare stage that depended on the imaginative abilities of Shakespeare's audience.

In this production, the depiction of Richard departs from the contemplative and often effete portrayal of the character to which contemporary audiences are accustomed. Here, Richard is a self-assured businessman, relatively in control of the situation for most of the play. Richard is not as stern and menacing as Aumerle York (Patrice Dubois), who is clearly the most powerful man on stage, but is more commanding than Henry Lancaster (Bolingbroke, played by Olivier Coyette), who as a stocky man with a slow demeanor lacked the vigour with which he is normally associated.

This section of the show closes with the energy that will characterize the next one: a scene between Percy Northumberland (Gauthier Jansen), and his wife Kate Mortimer (Park Krausen), who stands out by speaking English in an otherwise francophone production. *Five Kings* conflates

Shakespeare's Kate Percy with his Lady Mortimer, who speaks only Welsh while her husband speaks English. In the adaptation, this bilingual coupling seems also to stand in for Henry V's later wooing of Katherine. Percy and Kate jump into each other's arms and partially undress onstage, alluding to their passionate sexual relationship and foreshadowing the free love atmosphere of the next piece.

### *Le Roi de feu (1 Henry IV and 2 Henry IV)*

While the first section of the play is set in February 1965, and is evocative of the age of Lester B. Pearson and JFK in the costuming of the characters, the next section jumps to November 1974 and has all the flare of an era associated with hippies, free love, alcohol, drugs, and excess. When characters from the previous piece enter, they provide a stark visual contrast; for example, Aumerle in his stiff 1960s business suit is juxtaposed with Harry Lancaster (Hal, played by Emmanuel Schwartz), who is dressed in a more relaxed '70s outfit consisting of a brown corduroy jacket, lime green shirt, and bell bottoms. *Le Roi de feu* opens with a soliloquy by Falstaff (Jean-Marc Dalpé), who calls for lots of beer and interjects Hamlet's line "Words words words" (Kemeid 2015, 78), implying that the rest of the play is dull in comparison to his humorous disposition. The audience therefore does not encounter Harry immediately but is instead encouraged to respond to Falstaff and his merry-making. The energy of this section contrasts sharply with the previous one as Falstaff and Harry move dynamically across the entire stage.

Harry is clearly depicted as a carefree party animal, happy to participate in Falstaff's debauchery and not particularly concerned with his father or any expectations he might have to fulfill, at least until the Gadshill robbery. Although Harry does deliver a mostly complete version of his speech about "glitt'ring o'er [his] fault" (1.2.213), it is not a soliloquy. Rather, Harry stands on a bar reminiscent of Studio 54 surrounded by Falstaff, Ned (i.e., Poin, played by Étienne Pilon), Lola (Doll Tearsheet, played by Louise Laprade), Barmaid (Mistress Quickly, played by Marie-Laurence Moreau), and Danseuse (an additional female character, played by Isabelle Roy). At the end of the speech, Harry turns to deliver the final lines about becoming "un astre sublime" [a sublime star] to Falstaff (Kemeid 2015, 84). The same part of the bar also serves as a spot from which Harry and the other revellers snort lines of cocaine. After the Gadshill episode (which is not staged), Falstaff engages in a fair amount of stage business in his attempts to obtain his criminal dossier from Maître Shallow (Jonathan Gagnon), who here appears immediately after the robbery as a sleazy, middle-aged notary, stringing Falstaff along with promises that he will get the charges dropped.

During the party scenes, the disco-inspired atmosphere is marked by songs that stand out from the rest of the script, since they are in English: "Those were the days my friend" (rather than the French equivalent of the same song, "Le temps des fleurs") as well as "Good Morning Starshine" from the musical *Hair*. Indeed, Harry has long hair like a Vietnam draft-dodger, which he keeps long even after he promises his father that he'll live up to his expectations in battle against Percy. Later, the deathbed scene is also delivered in a serious manner, emphasizing their father-son relationship and Harry's potential as a future leader. Notably, *Five Kings* retains Harry's banishment of Falstaff, but the adaptation softens it slightly by removing the threat of a death sentence for coming within ten miles of the king's person. After Falstaff, alone onstage, feebly tries to convince the audience that the banishment was just for show, we never see him nor hear about him again, the reported deathbed scene in *Henry V* having been cut.

### *Le Roi de fer (Henry V)*

This brief segment opens in September 1990, towards the start of the First Iraq War. Harry marries Ines Amasia (Isabelle Roy), who is dressed in a chic orange jumpsuit, which simultaneously evokes both a '90s businesswoman's power suit and, more disturbingly, the uniform later worn by prisoners at the Guantanamo Bay detention camp. She accepts him in an attempt to unite their two nations. The country in question shifts from Québec to a more generalized North America, at war with Ines's unspecified Arab country. The historical combat between England and France is thus replaced with a global conflict designed to appeal to a contemporary audience, ironically erasing the anglophone-francophone hostility traditionally found in Québécois culture. The projections at the back of the stage reflect this Gulf War context, showing distorted footage of ground targets from the air. Strobe lighting and the sound of gunshots add to the militaristic effect. The text is very short compared to the length of Shakespeare's *Henry V*; from the decision to invade, we jump immediately to the breach, which becomes a brief camp scene. After the military audio-visual effects that replace the Battle of Agincourt, we suddenly move to the wooing of Ines, a scene devoid of romance in stark comparison to the earlier depiction of Percy and Kate. Joan La Pucelle is transposed into this play to become Jihanne (Marie-Laurence Moreau), who is clearly portrayed as a religious extremist.

Two Arab characters (Ines and Jihanne) stand in for all Arabs in this play. While this seems problematic, it is not dissimilar to Shakespeare's inclusion of only a handful of French characters to represent an entire nation in *Henry V*. More questionable is the fact that at least one of the actors playing an Arab character in *Five Kings* does not appear to be Arab herself: the blonde hair of the actress playing Jihanne (who also portrayed Hizia Amasia in the first section of the show) peeks

out from under her hijab. However, this casting decision was presumably made by the director, Frédéric Dubois, rather than the author, Kemeid, who is Québécois of Egyptian descent. Aumerle finally loses power in this segment, leading to the rise of Suffolk (Gauthier Jansen). In this sense, this section of *Five Kings* functions primarily as a bridge between the two tetralogies.

### *Le Roi de sable (1 Henry VI, 2 Henry VI, and 3 Henry VI)*

Over the course of this piece (set in 2002, at the same time as the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan), a series of portraits projected onto the screen at the back of the stage makes the transfer of power clear. First we see Harry Lancaster (Henry V) seated (his legs spread and arms resting powerfully on the boardroom chair in the same pose in which he ended the previous segment, just before the intermission), with his son, Harry Lancaster Jr. (Henry VI, played by Jonathan Gagnon), standing at his shoulder. This gives way to a portrait of Harry Jr. still in the same position, almost cowering behind the chair, but with his wife, Mariam Amasia (Isabelle Roy), now on the throne. Finally, we see Cécile York (Louise Laprade) powerfully flanked by her three sons, Édouard (Hugues Frenette), George (Étienne Pilon), and Richard (Patrice Dubois). The specter of Harry Lancaster (Henry V) reappears onstage, the same actor (Emmanuel Schwartz) now performing the part of the revolutionary Jack Cade, his combat gear demilitarized and paired with a modern-day activist's hoodie. This doubling neatly reminded us of the fine line between reactionary and revolutionary behavior. Indeed, doubling was used throughout the production to draw links between characters and to give a sense of history as repetition rather than progress.<sup>6</sup> The centerpiece of the set for this section is a large table which serves as both a banquet and a boardroom table. Jihanne the jihadist now becomes a suicide bomber who attempts to blow herself up on this table in order to end the civil war. She is shot down by soldiers, but the bomb still explodes. A similar attempt to implicate the female characters deeply in the violence of the play can be seen in the fact that Mariam murders Rutland York (Vlase Samar) by slitting his throat. Towards the end of this section, the temporal setting jumps forward, and the current date (8 November 2015) is projected on the screen at the back of the stage. Elements of *Richard III* are also interpolated here: Richard's wooing of Anne Warwick (Marie-Laurence Moreau) takes place at the end of this segment, over the corpses of both Harry Lancaster Jr. (Henry VI) and her father, Warwick (Jean-Marc Dalpé). Édouard has just raped Anne but Richard one-ups his brother, revealing his subtler (although no less brutal) attempts at gaining power in preparation for the final section of the show.

### *Le Roi de sang (Richard III)*

Whereas the central table in the set of the previous piece evoked media representations of the boardroom, including Donald Trump's cut-throat drama *The Apprentice*, the show's final section now explicitly uses trashy television staging by employing a mash-up of reality TV and soap opera styles. A camera and microphone are placed downstage center, and the image is projected on the screen at the back of the stage, distorted so that the close-up image of the person speaking is repeated half a dozen times, each iteration off from the original by about a second, creating a kaleidoscopic effect which makes us question the truth of what we see and hear. Several characters use this close-up camera to address the audience in a personal vein reminiscent of the *Big Brother* diary room. Richard usually positions himself in the center of the stage for his soliloquies, which are delivered directly to the audience in a manner akin to Kevin Spacey's character Frank Underwood in the Netflix series *House of Cards*, whose breaking of the fourth wall is widely acknowledged to have been inspired by Shakespeare's *Richard III*. The family dynamics of the piece put us in mind of an extreme version of *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*, but the performers also employ an exaggerated emotional acting style strongly redolent of soap opera. This style is emphasized when, after moments of intense emotion onstage, their faces go blank and their bodies relax as they exit, although they remain in the audience's view. Indeed, "dead" characters continue to stand on the margins of the platform stage after their deaths have been announced by Buckingham (Olivier Coyette). The name of this reality show/soap opera is projected on the screen at the back of the stage: *York*. Every time Richard pulls off one of his schemes, we see a close-up on this screen as he turns his head to the camera with a smug look and the words "directed by Richard York" (in English) appear, emphasizing both his role in orchestrating the action and his theatricality, in keeping with Shakespeare's character.

Prior to Richard's election "à la direction de notre Conseil" [to the head of our Council] (Kemeid 2015, 236), however, the play establishes an interesting, yet problematic, parallel between Richard and Pierre Karl Péladeau. PKP (as he is popularly known) is a multimillionaire who inherited the Québecor media empire from his father before becoming a Member of the National Assembly of Québec on 7 April 2014 and then the leader of the sovereignist Parti Québécois on 15 May 2015, after a long leadership race that culminated in what many considered a coronation rather than an actual election. *Five Kings* first links Richard and PKP by having Buckingham list the diverse groups whose vote Richard is courting: "Syndiqués assistés sociaux organisations caritatives groupes environnementaux associations transgenres cercles bouddhistes et regroupements d'artistes" [Union workers, welfare recipients, charitable organizations, environmental groups, transgender associations, Buddhist circles, and artistic collectives] (Kemeid 2015, 230). Repeated mentions of the union vote constitute an ironic

wink to a Québécois audience familiar with PKP's history of locking out striking workers. Second, the general populace demands someone "pour nous sauver" [to save us] (Kemeid 2015, 232), a popular refrain in Québec every time a leader for any party is chosen. Indeed, Buckingham asserts, "Notre pays sera sauvé" [Our country will be saved] (Kemeid 2015, 231), setting up Richard-cum-PKP as the "sauveur" [savior] commonly sought in Québec politics. Third, Richard emphasizes his marriage to Anne Warwick as a strategic move to help him win votes with the general public, and their marriage evokes the media hoopla surrounding PKP's marriage to television star Julie Snyder on 15 August 2015. Only after the marriage to Anne, on the eve of his election, does Richard finally give a version of Shakespeare's "Now is the winter of our discontent" speech (1.1.1), approximately two-thirds into the *Roi de sang* segment of the play. Finally, in his election pitch to the public, Richard states that his program rests upon his deepest and most intimate conviction to make "notre pays un pays riche sécuritaire / et / Indépendant" [our country a rich, secure, and Independent country], punching the air with his fist on the word "Indépendant," a clear reference to the same gesture made by PKP on the day he announced his candidacy for the National Assembly during the 2014 election campaign. This action was so widely discussed in the media that many critics attributed the PQ's election loss solely to his raised fist. Having delocalized Québec in the parallels with the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, this section brings *Five Kings* back into a Québécois context, but not without troublingly aligning the leader of the primary nationalist party at the time of the play's production with Shakespeare's most Machiavellian murderer.

The *Roi de sang* section follows some productions of Shakespeare's play in portraying Mariam (Margaret) as a dishevelled and confused version of her former self. A significant departure from Shakespeare occurs in the play's ending, however. Rather than offering his kingdom for a horse, this Richard ends the play in an emotional encounter with Cécile, offering his kingdom in exchange for his mother's love. Just as the audience thinks she might give it to him, Cécile, standing behind the seated Richard, pulls out a knife and slits her son's throat. This is one of the most striking changes to the printed text of the play, in which the other female characters (Élisabeth, Anne, and Mariam) fall on Richard's body and begin to stab it in a collective attempt to annihilate him. Cécile's solo murder of her son in the stage ending departs not only from Shakespeare's text but also from Normand Chaurrette's 1991 adaptation *Les Reines*, both of which portray the women as a collective force to be reckoned with. The show ends with the play's subtitle projected onto the screen at the back of the stage: "L'histoire de notre chute," the history of our fall.

## Adaptation

Kemeid opens the introduction to the published text of the play with the bold assertion that *Five Kings* "n'est ni une traduction, ni une adaptation de ces pièces" [is neither a translation nor an adaptation of these plays] (Kemeid 2015, 7), a claim that is repeated both in the program notes and on the production blog. However, in the "Correspondance" section of the production website (which reproduces emails between members of the artistic team over the course of their five years of work on the piece), the word "adaptation" is used thirteen times, with Kemeid using the term in reference to adaptations by other authors and artistic director Patrice Dubois using the term consistently in reference to their own project. Clearly, there is not a consensus about the meaning of the term among the four co-creators of the piece, with Kemeid seeming to use it in a sense synonymous with that of an innovative staging that remains loyal to the text and Dubois using it in a sense consistent with the way that we, the authors of this article, interpret the concept. Strangely, however, in the same set of email correspondence, Kemeid nonetheless uses the word "adaptation" to refer to his *Oedipe* (2013) (*Five Kings* Artistic Collective 2015). We would argue that *Five Kings* certainly fits our definition of "adaptation" and also constitutes an "appropriation" at points because of its socio-political agenda, particularly in the allusions to Pierre Karl Péladeau and to the Trudeaus.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, Kemeid says, "Le texte déploie son propre univers, se nourrit de l'époque actuelle, brise et recompose l'arbre généalogique des Yorks et des Lancaster à sa guise, trahit et honore à la fois sa source originelle, fait théâtre de tout roi"; in sum, for Kemeid, "Il s'agit donc d'une réécriture" [The text deploys its own universe, feeds on the current era, breaks and reconstitutes the genealogy of the Yorks and Lancasters as it sees fit, at once betrays and honors its original source, makes theater out of each king; it is thus a re-writing] (Kemeid 2015, 7). For us, this type of "re-writing" lies at the heart of the definition of "adaptation."

Kemeid also writes of losing himself in the Shakespearean forest, trying to hack his way out, and risking ending up in the exact same place from which he started (Kemeid 2015, 8).<sup>8</sup> Clearly, *Five Kings* represents a huge effort in grappling with both the length of these eight Shakespeare history plays and the status of the dramatist himself. Kemeid describes how "les oeuvres fascinantes de Shakespeare nous auront servi de port de rassemblement pour regarder, du point de vue de notre temps, les traits de nos sociétés, de nos cultures et de notre humanité" [Shakespeare's fascinating works will have served for us as a meeting point to look at, from the point of view of our time, the characteristics of our society, of our cultures, and of our humanity] (*Five Kings* Artistic Collective 2015). Conceptualizing Shakespeare as a vast forest, full of countless trees, each of which has something to say about our humanity, is in keeping with the Québécois characterization of Shakespeare as "le grand Will" (Drouin 2014, 3-4), a sort of friendly giant whose transhistorical

and transcultural status is a given. Shakespeare's cultural capital is acknowledged and employed in order to lend weight to the *Five Kings* collective's exploration of the sociopolitical issues of the last five decades. Furthermore, the production's faithful use of specific elements of the Shakespearean source in an updated setting is evidence of an assumption that, arguably, is widely shared by many practitioners, including Welles, that Shakespeare provides a guarantee of artistic quality. Although the observation that Shakespeare's plays speak to all of humanity across time and space is not particularly original and may seem similar to the attempts of many theater directors simply to set the plays in a different geographical locale or another time period, the breadth of *Five Kings* goes well beyond such transpositions and datings. In finishing the work that Welles started by producing the eight plays in a sequence designed to be seen in one sitting, Kemeid, the Dubois brothers, and Labrecque make Shakespeare's octology tangible to a contemporary Québécois audience whilst elucidating recent North American history. What is more, the production succeeds in drawing sharp distinctions between each historical moment, both in the early modern period and the present day. Ultimately, *Five Kings* shows us that it is unnecessary to ask "Why adapt Shakespeare in Québec?"; the question is rather "Why not?"

### Notes

1. We are grateful to Patrick Leroux and Leanore Lieblein for their helpful commentary on a draft of this essay.
2. To our knowledge, no staging of the entire cycle has achieved such concision to unite the eight plays into one show. Michael Boyd's "Glorious Moment," a 2008 event for the RSC, staged the eight plays separately over four days. Even Tom Wright and Benedict Andrews's *The War of the Roses* for the Sydney Theatre Company in 2009 lasted eight hours, and its two parts could be watched on different days. In Québec, *Five Kings*'s main predecessor is Jean Asselin's 1988 eight-hour production of the second tetralogy, *Le Cycle des Rois*. Unlike *Five Kings*, these two latter examples are stagings of Shakespeare's text in condensed form, rather than adaptations.
3. "Ça m'a permis de qualifier chaque roi, d'y coller un élément qui fait sens, qui m'a servi tout le long de l'écriture comme fil conducteur, comme énergie, comme champ lexical." [It allowed me to qualify each king, to glue to them an element that makes sense, that served for me throughout the writing process as a narrative thread, as energy, as a vocabulary] (*Five Kings* Artistic Collective 2015).
4. We are indebted to Patrick Leroux for this observation.
5. This article cites material from the fivekings.ca website, including a blog and email correspondence between the four creators. Since that website is no longer available,

we provide here a PDF archive compiling the entire website as it appeared online on 25 June 2015 (*Five Kings* Artistic Collective 2015). See also the 126-page dossier of media coverage ([http://issuu.com/theatrepap/docs/rapport\\_de\\_presse\\_five\\_kings\\_final?e=1675609/31846286](http://issuu.com/theatrepap/docs/rapport_de_presse_five_kings_final?e=1675609/31846286)) and the dramaturgical notebook ([http://issuu.com/theatrepap/docs/cahier\\_dramaturgique\\_fk/1?e=1675609/30811351](http://issuu.com/theatrepap/docs/cahier_dramaturgique_fk/1?e=1675609/30811351)).

6. Alice Dailey offers a detailed discussion of the ways in which doubling emphasizes history as repetition in the RSC's performance of the octology as the "Glorious Moment" (Dailey 2010).
7. For us, adaptations are "additions [. . .], transpositions, rewritings, or translations that alter significantly the content or meaning of the source text"; going a step further, an appropriation is "an adaptation in which the author uses the source text in order to advance a socio-political agenda, to make the source author's text her own for a particular purpose. As such, all appropriations are de facto adaptations, but all adaptations are not necessarily appropriations since some adaptations may be concerned with making aesthetic, contextual, poetic, or structural 'improvements' to a text" (Drouin 2014, 63-64, 45). For a detailed theory of both terms, see Drouin 2014, 42-67.
8. The program credits Kemeid as the author of the text "d'après [after] Shakespeare." In the printed text, he notes that he began with French translations of Shakespeare by Jean-Michel Déprats, "puis nous nous sommes attaqués à la source même, épaulés par une armée de dictionnaires, d'ateliers, de spécialistes, de conférences, de recherches en tout genre" [then we attacked the source itself, helped by an army of dictionaries, workshops, specialists, guest lectures, research of all kinds] (Kemeid 2015, 8).

## References

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