



CRITICISM

VOLUME

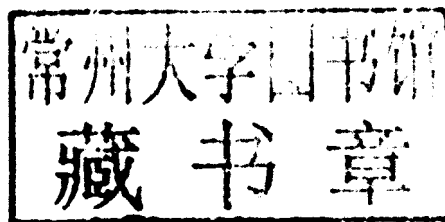
126

Poetry Criticism

*Excerpts from Criticism of the Works
of the Most Significant and Widely
Studied Poets of World Literature*

Volume 126

Michelle Lee
Project Editor



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Poetry Criticism

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- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author and the critical debates surrounding his or her work.
- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The first section comprises poetry collections and book-length poems. The second section gives information on other major works by the author. For foreign authors, the editors have provided original foreign-language publication information and have selected what are considered the best and most complete English-language editions of their works.
- Reprinted **Criticism** is arranged chronologically in each entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over time. All individual titles of poems and poetry collections by the author featured in the entry are printed in boldface type. The critic's name and the date of composition or publication of the critical work are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the source in which it appeared. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included.
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Glen, Heather. "Blake's Criticism of Moral Thinking in *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*." In *Interpreting Blake*, edited by Michael Phillips. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978. 32-69. Rpt. in *Poetry Criticism*. Edited by Michelle Lee. Vol. 63. Detroit: Gale, 2005. 34-51. Print.

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Anne Hébert

1916-2000

Canadian poet, novelist, playwright, and short fiction writer.

INTRODUCTION

Known as one of twentieth-century Quebec's most prominent writers, Hébert is recognized for such award-winning novels as *Les chambres de bois* (1958; *The Silent Rooms*), regarded as a classic of French-Canadian literature, as well as for ground-breaking poetry collections including *Le tombeau des rois* (1953; *The Tomb of the Kings*) and *Mystère de la parole* (1960). Studied as both a modernist and a feminist writer, Hébert played a vital role in the transformation of French-Canadian poetry around the middle of the twentieth century. This change involved the abandonment of neoclassical, intellectual French models in favor of a more distinctive poetic expression, one that is personally evocative and revealing of the inner essences of the poetic personae. Among Hébert's most prominent poetic themes are isolation, the burden of the past, the conflicted and divided self, silence, self-discovery, rebirth, and death.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Hébert was born on August 1, 1916, just north of Quebec City in the Canadian countryside village of Sainte-Catherine-de-Fossambault (now Sainte-Catherine-de-la-Jacques-Cartier). Sickly for several years as a youth, Hébert was taught at home by private instructors and she read widely in both English and French. Her interest in literature was encouraged by her father, Maurice, a well-known poet and literary reviewer, whose friends included some of the best minds of Quebec. Hébert found inspiration as well in her cousin, poet Hector de Saint-Denys Garneau, and for a time she was affiliated with his journal, *La Relève*. Hébert eventually attended the Collège Notre-Dame-de-Bellevue and the Collège Mérici in Quebec and, by the early 1940s, she began publishing poems in such periodicals as *La Relève*, *Esprit*, and *Les gants du ciel*. She published her first poetry collection, *Les songes en équilibre* (*Dreams in Equilibrium*), in 1942, then concentrated on writing stage plays, screenplays, and radio broadcasts for more than a decade. During this

time she also completed one of her most famous short stories, "Au bord du torrent" ("Beside the Torrent"), which first appeared in 1947 and was later revised and retitled as "Le torrent" (1950; "The Torrent") for a collection of the same name. *The Tomb of the Kings*, written after the sudden death of Saint-Denys Garneau in 1943 as well as the death of Hébert's younger sister in 1952, encompasses themes of desolation, emptiness, and despair. It contains the highly praised title poem, which references Greek mythology and ancient Egypt and involves the female narrator's triumph over death. Throughout the ensuing decades, Hébert produced a number of novels and garnered several awards, including the Prix de la Province de Québec and the Prix France-Canada, both for *The Silent Rooms*, and the coveted Governor General's Award in 1961 for *Poèmes* (1960; *Poems*). She won the Governor General's Award again in both 1975 and 1992 and in the latter year published a collected volume of her poetry spanning four decades, from 1950 to 1990. Hébert died of bone cancer in Montreal, Canada, in 2000.

MAJOR WORKS OF POETRY

Winner of the Prix David in 1943, *Dreams in Equilibrium* equates dreams with absence and loss and identifies happiness as a fleeting and momentary experience. A number of verses allude to creation narratives and to English naturalist Charles Darwin's theory of evolution, setting what is seen as a corrupt, technologically dependent modern era against the idea of an uncontaminated, untainted past. Many critics note that the volume exhibits the beginnings of a search for self-understanding on the part of the poet, a trend they claim characterizes much of Hébert's later poetry. According to a number of scholars, these later poems, collected in *The Tomb of the Kings* and *Mystère de la parole*, are increasingly innovative and display a movement away from regionalism toward universal psychological states. This later poetry is more freely formed, mixing concrete, everyday language with traditional poetic devices such as similes, personification, and imagery.

Many of the twenty-seven poems of *The Tomb of the Kings* feature a narrator struggling to understand herself, yet at the same time, fearing the possible pain involved in such a thorough examination of the self.

The poems explore themes of desolation, destruction, and despair, as well as the emotional and psychological shackles binding the modern individual. To this end Hébert employed images of body parts, such as the hands and the heart, locked rooms, birds, and water, such as fountains or rain. Reviewers have been impressed by these images, often describing them as stark, dramatic, and compelling. Of particular note is the title poem, about the female narrator's confrontation with death and/or the unconscious. Published in 1960 as part of the anthology *Poems, Mystère de la parole* constitutes a powerful, direct confrontation with reality and a rejection of death. Featuring themes of creation and rebirth, the poems celebrate a rediscovery of language, as the "word" equals redemption, and life itself is affirmed through the use of language.

CRITICAL RECEPTION

One trend in scholarship on Hébert's poetry analyzes her literary impact in light of the political and cultural conditions of 1960s Quebec, a time when members of French separatist groups were seeking independence from Canada—a time some historians describe as a "renewal" of Quebec society. Hébert's poetry, many scholars maintain, takes as its starting point the unique position of French-speaking Quebec in North America and addresses a pervasive theme of the region: the idea of the divided self. In Hébert's poetry, this self, long in silence and solitude and unable to confront the past, suffers from an isolation that results in sterility, bleakness, and ignorance. Focusing on *The Tomb of the Kings*, Delbert W. Russell details how the poems in the volume deal with feelings of alienation and fear over self-analysis or any confrontation with the past, as the narrator tries to avoid full knowledge of reality. Expressing a wish to retreat into absolute silence and shrink from life, the narrator ultimately experiences a final "embrace of death," which leads to the joining of the body and soul, though not without suffering. According to Jean-Cléo Godin, *Mystère de la parole* exhibits a "transformation" in Hébert's poetry, as the poet's emphasis on language in this volume demonstrates a movement away from themes of isolation and imprisonment to the notion that words can be redemptive. A number of critics discuss the way that Hébert's work is informed by her belief in the power of poetry to speak the "truth," thereby becoming restorative and life-giving, as it confronts and recreates the past, revitalizing both poet and reader.

Adopting a feminist reading of Hébert's poetry, Kathleen Kells focuses on the poet's two "Eve" poems—the first appearing in *Dreams in Equilibrium* and the second in *Mystère de la parole*. Claiming that Hébert

challenges conventional representations of Eve as the cause of original sin, Kells explains that in the first "Eve" poem, Hébert depicts Eve as an innocent sexual being. In the second poem, published eighteen years later, Hébert again defies the concept of a female-instigated original sin by recasting Eve's sexuality as "vitalizing" and life-giving. Emile J. Talbot calls Hébert's 1951 poem "La fille maigre" a modern, feminist poem with a powerful female sexual aggressor; the critic contends that "La fille maigre" completely inverts the male-dominated tone of a seventeenth-century poem entitled "Contre une dame trop maigre," by Baroque poet Jean Auvray. The earlier poem revolves around the male persona's disgust over an overly thin (and thereby sexually repulsive) woman, while Hébert's response features a domineering woman, whose thin, skeletal physique is seen by the poet as prized and cherished.

PRINCIPAL WORKS

Poetry

- Les songes en équilibre: Poèmes* [*Dreams in Equilibrium*] 1942
- Le tombeau des rois* [*The Tomb of the Kings*] 1953
- Mystère de la parole* 1960
- **Poèmes* [*Poems*] 1960
- Le jour n'a d'égal que la nuit* [*Day Has No Equal but Night: Poems*] 1992
- Œuvres poétiques, 1950-1990* 1992
- Poèmes pour la main gauche* 1997

Other Major Works

- Le torrent* [*The Torrent*] (novellas and short stories) 1950; enlarged edition 1963
- Les chambres de bois* [*The Silent Rooms*] (novel) 1958
- †*Le temps sauvage, La mercière assassinée, Les invités au procès* (plays) 1967
- Kamouraska* (novel) 1970
- Les enfants du sabbat: Roman* [*Children of the Black Sabbath*] (novel) 1975
- Héloïse: Roman* (novel) 1980
- Les fous de bassan: Roman* [*In the Shadow of the Wind*] (novel) 1982
- Le premier jardin: Roman* [*The First Garden*] (novel) 1988
- L'enfant chargé de songes: Roman* [*Burden of Dreams; also The Child Filled with Dreams*] (novel) 1992

Aurélien, Clara, *Mademoiselle et le lieutenant anglais: Récit* [Aurélien, Clara, Mademoiselle, and the English Lieutenant] (novel) 1995

Est-ce que je te dérange?: Recit [Am I Disturbing You?] (novel) 1998

Un habit de lumière: Roman [A Suit of Light] (novel) 1999

Later Collected Novels (novels) 2001

**Poèmes* contains the poetry collections *Le tombeau des rois* and *Mystère de la parole* as well as the prose piece *Poésie solitude rompue*.

†Hébert's verse play *Les invités au procès* was broadcast in 1952 on Canadian radio. *La mercière assassinée* was written as a television drama in 1959, and *Le Temps sauvage* was first performed on the stage in 1963.

CRITICISM

Jean-Cléo Godin (essay date 1970)

SOURCE: Godin, Jean-Cléo. "Anne Hébert: Rebirth in the Word." *Yale French Studies*, no. 45 (1970): 137-53.

[In the following essay, Godin discusses Hébert's role in the development of French-Canadian literature, focusing particularly on the evolution of Hébert's poetry from themes of silence, isolation, and death to those of rebirth and renewal.]

If we were to believe some critics and contemporary writers, 1960 would be the year I of Quebec and its literature. Through their laziness and apparent scorn for a literature already more than a hundred years old, the constant reference by critics to this date as the departure point of a new and bountiful literature whose popularity abroad is continually growing might lead us to believe that everything began in this decade, and that ten years ago there occurred a sudden break with the past. This obviously is not true, and the date cited is only a convenient historical reference point. On the other hand, it is important to realize the significance of a date which marks the beginning of an exceptional period of renewal, if not of actual rebirth. In politics, 1960 witnesses the beginning of what is commonly called the "tranquil revolution" that is now in the process of transforming Quebec society. The same holds true for literature, which, since that time, has come of age with unexpected strength and vigor, expressing the profound identity of a people just discovering itself. The phenomenon of change is particularly evident in poetry, which sings of a country to be discovered and defined, of a life to be lived intensely. More particularly, in giving back to the word its ancient meaning, in rediscovering the creative logos

and the almost magical power of incantation of the word, poets seek to name the country of Quebec, and in their own special way, to possess it. A cursory glance at only a few titles indicates the extent of the movement: from the *Premier Mot* by Gâtien Lapointe to the *L'Age de la parole* by Roland Guiguère, and from the *Pays sans parole* by Yves Préfontaine to *L'Afficheur hurle* by Paul Chamberland, all of these works affirm the identity of the country by proclaiming it.

The phenomenon is both surprising and paradoxical. For if, as Ferdinand de Saussure states, the mother tongue (*langue*) is the foundation of the language (*langage*), and it is language alone which is the object of literature, how could one exist without the other? We must admit that Quebec has not yet formulated its own "doctrine of the vernacular" which has been called "the cornerstone of every great literary doctrine." The paradox is all the more astonishing since this "age of speech" coincides here in Quebec with the significant, if limited experiments of certain novelists and poets who have chosen to write in "joual" (a name scornfully given to the popular language, "joual" being slang for *cheval*) with the avowed aim of provoking an awareness of the situation. All of which means that, owing to an accommodation demanded by the tragically ambiguous situation of the people of Quebec ("a persisting thorn in the side of the American continent"), the mother tongue and the literary language of Quebec are evolving in parallel fashion with each continually influencing and even defining the other. Moreover, the majority of writers avoid entirely the issue of defining exactly what constitutes the language of Quebec, because the language they use in their writing is basically standard French. Writers who are partisans of "joual" and writers of standard French have a common meeting-ground, which is that all are searching for a means of expression that is both characteristic of and true to the group with which they identify.

It is only in very precise terms therefore, that one must discuss "poetry of the word" with regard to young poets of Quebec who began to publish around 1960, because the topic concerns at once a political theme—the birth, or the emergence of a country still in formation—and a new definition of poetic language in which the expression of a collective consciousness and the expression of the obviously personal inspiration of each author are reconciled. The prodigious outpouring of poetry is, by its volume, a recent phenomenon in Quebec but it has been prepared by a long and clear-cut evolution. And, in this evolution which involves, let us say, authors from Saint-Denis Garneau to Préfontaine and Giguère, it is certain that the work of Anne Hébert³ marks the most important

stage of development. Rich and diversified, her work taken as a single entity demonstrates very clearly the transition from a period characterized by solitude and silence to one which we could call, following the example of Roland Giguère, "the age of the word."

For Saint-Denys Garneau, who published *Regards et jeux dans l'espace* in 1937, and for Anne Hébert, whose first collection appeared in 1942, the point of departure was much the same. Each of these poets, related by family ties (they were cousins) as well as by a spiritual affinity, first wrote of morbid and alienated solitude. The word served then to express only silence. The word shrouded itself in silence; language was as frustrated as men themselves were in such a milieu, at once thwarted and yet aware of their essential condition. The critic Gilles Marcotte defines the poetic undertaking of Saint-Denys Garneau in these well-chosen words: "In the work of Saint-Denys Garneau, poetry, in a single movement, exploits its liberties only to fabricate its prison, explores possibilities and reveals the impossible, gives of itself and holds back, as though discovering in the hidden reaches of language a sovereign interdiction."⁴ His poetry not only reflects the solitude of the man and the failure of a life's work; with a calling that is almost promethean, it simultaneously denounces and represents the insidious and stifling influence of a whole society. The poet engages in an undertaking quite doomed to failure, because the very instrument of his liberation, language, remains imprisoned and impotent. Saint-Denys Garneau was unable to break into true freedom, and died before seeing the moment of liberation that he had prepared.

It is at this precise point that the poetry of Anne Hébert diverges from the work of her predecessor. "With what morbid pleasure," she writes in 1960, "did we subsist in absence and in dream, almost to the point of absurdity."⁵ By its existence, such an observation correctly implies that in her own poetry there is to be found a cycle wherein birth and the spoken word prevail over death and silence. Indeed, in all of her work anterior to this date, Anne Hébert was unable to escape the interdiction that seemed to afflict language like "the violent undertow of an act of transgression."⁶ But now in a short piece entitled "Poésie solitude rom-pue" which she places at the beginning of *Mystère de la parole*, we find a definition of her new attitude toward poetry: "I believe in the salvation which comes from every word that is exact, lived, poured forth. I believe in solitude that is broken like bread by poetry."⁷ From solitude to broken solitude, from silence and the inability to live, to life joyously proclaimed by the word that names and chants, such is the evolution that

characterizes our contemporary poetry, and it is already discernible in the work of Anne Hébert, which I would like to examine.

In a text published elsewhere and in terms which allow obvious crossreferences to the rest of her work, the poet herself has sketched this evolution: "But see how the dream approaches speech. The word made flesh. Possession of the world. The earth ready to be grasped and named."⁸ That is to say, between *dream* and *word* there is at the same time continuity and dialectical opposition: in approaching the level of language, dream assumes a value which until then was foreign or forbidden. The transformation enacted is profound, because the "word made flesh," aside from the fact that it is rooted in a sociological environment and thus is no longer a *disincarnated* literature, confers on the new poetics that I have defined a truly religious and even mystical function. Moreover, the titles of her first collection of poetry, *Les Songes en équilibre*, and of the last one to be published, *Mystère de la parole*, oppose and complement one another in the very same way and indicate, by themselves, the poles of this evolution. A quick examination of her earliest works reveals the thematic web which, as it touches on dream and speech, is progressively modified and prepares the way for the new theory of poetry defined and practised in *Mystère de la parole*.

From the beginnings of her work, dream (*songe*: nearer in meaning to daydream, than to dream or reverie in the Bachelardian sense) clearly refers to the exploration of a hidden life, similar to the secret life of childhood; but the exploration remains close to home, secluded, withdrawn within its own boundaries. "Astonished poet / Who clasps in his hands / Clay and mystery."⁹ The writer plumbs the depths of her own interior universe, until she arrives "There where it is deaf and replete / Mystery and unconsciousness,"¹⁰ thus pursuing a primary quest for self-knowledge. But with the very movement to seize a secret life, as the hand grasps "clay and mystery," there is acknowledgement of loneliness. "This kind of child / living inside out,"¹¹ when he comes across charm in childhood that brings joy to memories, discovers all the more that life escapes him. Dream is the descent into hell, the exploration of sterility, exile to one's inner self, access to a world which is one's own but which an age-old fate has kept inaccessible: dream is the latent word, or the word held back, but also the refusal to communicate or speak out.

It would be impossible to understand fully this dialectic of dream and word without considering its obvious social implications. It is not surprising, for example, to find in one of Anne Hébert's texts sentences such as the following (which I am re-

quoting), where the words *absence* and *dream* are closely related, if not even synonymous. "With what morbid pleasure did we subsist in absence and in dream almost to the point of absurdity." The poet speaks here of the collectivity of Quebec when she says "we," and the context of this quote indicates unequivocally that the poet opposes speech, or the word, to dream and to absence. Moreover, in the best-known stories by Anne Hébert, "Le Torrent" and *Les Chambres de bois*, the opposition is explicit.

In the first story, the author creates a tension between two characters, mother and son, both of whom are cut off from life, but one of whom dominates the other. In addition, the two communicate only by glances and suppress any word that is not in itself an instrument of repression. The son even states about his mother that "speech was not in the nature of things for her" and that she "spoke to him only to scold before inflicting punishment."¹² But even this limited kind of communication is fragile and easily menaced. One day the son revolts against his mother, and she becomes insane with desperate rage and beats the child until he is rendered deaf by her blows; the walls of the prison close in on him and all communication through language (the expression of revolt, thus of the will to live) becomes impossible. "This woman," remarks the son, "has not said a word to me since the terrible day when for the first time I opposed her will."¹³ Rejected by the mother and now inaccessible to the son, the word, the instrument of knowledge and of life, is from that time on replaced by the dream and by the extreme solitude of these two beings. Beyond that, there is only death, the end result and perfection of dream.

The story of Catherine and Michel, in *Les Chambres de bois*, shows a similar development. Even before the arrival of Lia, Michel's sister and Catherine's rival, the rupture between the man and wife is foreshadowed by silence and dreaming. "He became more and more taciturn, and his golden eye fixed, like a burnt-out sun, drove his wife into her own parallel dreams."¹⁴ Given over to dream, as though they were absent, exiled, and alone, isolated though side by side, with all means of exchange shattered, they live on as strangers to one another. One day, in an effort to break the "intolerable silence" Catherine screams "a long piercing cry like that of a young girl just stabbed,"¹⁵ and Michel for once hears her cry. However, a primitive and all-encompassing scream is anything but speech or language. At such a level, communion remains impossible, and it is "in the third person" that Michel answers his wife, "reproachfully and betraying his fascination,"¹⁶ as though she were someone else, or were elsewhere. Communication is then established between Lia and Michel. "The brother and sister

enjoyed the privilege of speech, light and elliptical, speech from which Catherine was excluded, but which became engraved in her heart as a fierce and sacred sign of Michel's mysteriousness."¹⁷ Once more Catherine attempts to end the silence by a long cry for help, but "no one heard Catherine's cry";¹⁸ she, though desperate to communicate can only withdraw deeper and deeper into her "parallel dreams." Moreover, the expression of her hopelessness approaches the motif of deafness that we found in "Le Torrent." She "closed her eyes, did not speak, and welcomed deafness like a balm,"¹⁹ thereby shutting herself into the most restricted of all solitudes, the absolute silence of refusal to hear the spoken word.

Thus, an analysis of Anne Hébert's most famous narrative (which, incidentally, is considered, and perhaps rightly so, as "the first great classic of contemporary French-Canadian literature"²⁰) clearly shows that the themes of alienation and of the inability to live coincide with the refusal of speech. Nevertheless, the dialectic of dream and speech which in her prose stories resolves itself into clear absolutes—life and speech opposed to death and silence—unfolds in a much more complex fashion in her poetry. As we may expect, two terms of the conflict again confront one another in her definition of poetry. For if it is obvious that "above everything else, poetry is words,"²¹ poetry is also, in a more general sense, and especially in the work of Anne Hébert, *revery*, intimate song of the self and of the world, along the channels of memory. To define poetry in this manner, however, leads to a kind of overlapping of meanings which transforms the basic dialectic, at least its original terms; but by the end of the poetic evolution which goes from *Songes en équilibre* to *Mystère de la parole*, dream and speech stand in fact once again irreducibly opposed, testifying to a complete transformation of poetic doctrine.

The title alone of the first collection of poems indicates an orientation and a quest. The poems are so many "dreams," (*songes*) i.e. imprecise evocations of a visionary world. "What did I dream of just now / When I felt so good?"²² She dreams of childhood, and especially of glimpsed-at but fugitive moments of happiness, as for example the flute "Which we could have / Lost in the forest / And which would let / Flow its music,"²³ But the music, symbol of a joy invoked to redress a shattered balance, is very liquid and terribly distant. Thus we soon realize that the poetry of *Songes en équilibre* is itself fleeting and seeks less to "speak" life than to refuse it. The poet who "manages symbols / with his hands unbound"²⁴ does so almost as a game. Play of light and shadow, of word and object; these murmurings are no more than whispered confidences, and the realities they evoke exist elsewhere:

Wretched poem that I write,
Clearing where I thought
To invite so many exotic treasures,
Some from nearby.²⁵

What is the need for “exotic treasures” if not because the poet finds in herself only a “child who is going to die”²⁶ and because this poetry which aims to be a “simple mirror” reveals to her that she is “complete and alone” but deprived and sterile, with a “wistful heart which fills her whole being.”²⁷ Fragility and deprivation are reflected in several images. For example, in “*Musique*” poetry seems “less than a song, / Not even a voice,”²⁸ that is, a timid word barely uttered. And poetry is such because “the universe bends and slips / In the hand”²⁹ of the poet. Poetry, a “sorry game,”³⁰ has hardly more stability than an arabesque, which is itself a reflection on the impossibility of defining and dominating life; never does poetry assert and define itself as “word / In the fullness of its meaning.”³¹

The poetry of Anne Hébert progresses only gradually toward a new definition of itself. But beginning with the first poems published in *Gants du Ciel*, in 1944, animation and inspiration are more evident. To speak in the poet’s own terms, dream approaches the word: poetry becomes the work of affirmation, for Anne Hébert has understood that “bound to the requirements of language, neither the poet nor his work can be created without the freedom that is as necessary to the life of the expression as expression is to life.”³² It is with *Mystère de la parole* that the transformation is complete, but *Le Tombeau des rois*, published seven years earlier, already announces clearly what is to come at a later date. This coincides interestingly, with a recognition of the role of the poet in society: if from now on the dream “approaches the word,” it is because the poet accepts her responsibility to exorcise and to become the prophet of her milieu. In that way, too, “with Anne Hébert, poetics is freed from the psychological”³³ in order to take on an eminently lucid social conscience, yet without casting aside its independent and personal character.³⁴

However, if signs of the transformation that is occurring are noticeable in *Le Tombeau des rois*, we would seek in vain for images of new-born life and of the word that affirms, creates, and proclaims; on the contrary, everything is silent and desolate, sparse and lonesome, dead and dry. The famous image of the “thin girl” with bones of “watchful cares / and odd pities,”³⁵ or again the image of the “small dead girl . . . lying across the threshold”³⁶ indicate both the poet’s coldly lucid awareness of death and her “austere, dry and broken language,”³⁷ a language of such beauty incidentally, that it earned the praise of

Pierre Emmanuel. Elsewhere in the poems, there is only a house or closed up room, a wall, a bedroom in bare wood, night and silence. Nevertheless, two poems—the first and the last—disclose a distant hope. Thus, the “gesture” which begins “In the root of my wrist . . . that is being created / And whose profound enchantment I cannot foretell,”³⁸ as barely sketched and scarcely revealed, yet announces a forthcoming liberation. Hope here is slim though, for we are still in a country where “No tree of speech puts forth its silent roots.”³⁹ Still, the frank and clear-cut acknowledgment of surrounding emptiness constitutes a foundation for the creative word, just as the acknowledgment of failure precedes future success; poetic speech is thus based upon a rejection of falsehoods, and upon the almost clinical recognition of a social situation. Likewise, in the poem which gives its title to the collection, despite the strength of images that bespeak sterility (the “blind falcon,” the “taciturn bird,” the “secret labyrinths”), liberty and affirmation of life are clearly announced. We see this, first of all, in the distance that the poet places between herself and the child (who also represents her):

In what dream
Was this child shackled by the ankle
Like a fascinated slave?⁴⁰

This time it is the poet who speaks to herself “in the third person,” as Michel did to Catherine, thus detaching herself from the image of a child imprisoned by a *dream* who of course is analogous to the prisoner, the cripple, the woman, the child, that recur constantly in *Les Songes en équilibre* and *Le Tombeau des rois*. However, the most explicit sign of the advent of a new life, of language rediscovered, is given to us at the end of the poem:

What ray of dawn wanders here?
How is it that a bird trembles
And turns toward morning
Its ruined eyes?⁴¹

There is no doubt that the blind bird turning its look toward dawn signifies the poet who rejects silence and death in favor of a poetry of communication; better yet, to use the words of Anne Hébert, the image reflects a new faith on the part of the poet in the “salvation that comes from every word that is exact, lived, poured forth.”

How would it be possible not to connect this new theory of poetry to Anne Hébert’s reflections on “The Status of the French-speaking Canadian in North America” which appeared at the same time as the publication of *Mystère de la parole*, either of which may be considered a “classic” in its genre?⁴² Sharply criticizing the “complacency for what is imprecise” which prevents the people of Quebec from asserting