

ANNE HEBERT'S LE TOMBEAU DES ROIS: A FEMINIST READING

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## ABSTRACT

During the forties, when Anne Hébert was writing the poems of Le Tombeau des rois, Québec writers and critics (most of whom were male) were consumed by the oppression of the Duplessis era. Hébert's cousin, Hector de Saint-Denys Garneau felt so greatly the pressure to live a life defined by the Other, that his pain not only produced great anguish, but inspired very notable poetry. His metaphor of the French Canadian as a caged bird resurfaces in Hébert's work. In fact, the motif of the bird appears throughout Le Tombeau des rois. The bird as a guide, although blinded, leads the heroine to the place where she must confront death: the tomb. The tomb or cave is, however, not only the place of death, but also of rebirth. The tomb becomes the "womb" of the Mother where sisters and brothers are reborn. Images of sacrifice, of rebirth, reappear constantly in women's literature and mythology. The aim of this thesis is to reinterpret these motifs and others found in Anne Hébert's poetry. It is part of the feminist project to revise the mythology of Patriarchy so that women and women's writing might be 'read' authentically. This approach is an attempt to break down the critical walls which have defined Anne Hébert in a closed, patriarchal way.

Anne Hébert was writing while the oppressive forces of the Catholic Church suffocated women and men who were desperately

searching out their own identity. Women were defined as either "mothers" or "virgins". Mothers had the responsibility to maintain the French language and culture, while unmarried women, were burdened with the guilt of their "evil sex"; women were metaphorically stripped of their flesh so as not to be "temptresses". In Le Tombeau des rois, the heroine is torn between being the "good girl" and breaking free from the "house" which has confined her. Other women writers express the same struggle in their texts. I have attempted to search out some of the images and motifs which connect Anne Hébert to modern women writers, to pick up an intertextual thread which weaves through these texts and connects Hébert's own texts. By making these connections, I have attempted to highlight a hidden subtext, an "écriture au féminin" which has been concealed by the dominant criticism of her work.

Traditional critics of Anne Hébert's poems and prose have agreed that this woman has played an important role in the struggle for national identity. That is one interpretation. I have emphasized that women have been doubly exploited, and that Hébert's struggle towards the "feminine" has been hidden beneath the surface of traditional criticism. To crack the calm surface of the status quo, to dive down into the deep, unmapped waters, to follow the thread back to the "womb", is to accompany this author on her quest in Le Tombeau des rois.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	11
Acknowledgement	v
Epigraph	vi
Introduction	1
Notes	18
Chapter 1	22
<u>Shattering the Mirrors: Following the Thread     back to the Mother in "Le Tombeau des rois"</u>	
i. The Father's House: Breaking down the Walls	22
ii. To Eve Reborn: a Journey back to the Mother	34
iii. Women's Writing: Telling the Truth	41
iv. Beyond Culture: the Other side where Sisters Chatter	48
v. Diving into the Wreck: Discovering the Womb	58
Notes	63
Chapter 2	
<u>Out of the Womb: a Process of Rebirth</u>	69
i. Light: from Penetration to Resurrection	69
ii. Towards the Mother: an Act of 'Re-telling'	75
iii. The Bird: the Liberating Agent	80
Notes	102
Conclusion	
<u>And Our Story is One</u>	107
Notes	120
Bibliography	122

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But there come times-perhaps this is one of them-  
when we have to take ourselves more seriously or die;  
when we have to pull back from the incantations,  
rhythms we've moved to thoughtlessly,  
and disenthral ourselves, bestow  
ourselves to silence, or a severer listening, cleansed  
of oratory, formulas, choruses, laments, static  
crowding the wires...

But in fact we were always like this,  
rootless, dismembered: knowing it makes the  
difference.

Birth stripped our birthright from us,  
tore us from a woman, from women, from ourselves  
so early on  
and the whole chorus throbbing at our ears  
like midges, told us nothing, nothing  
of origins, nothing we needed  
to know, nothing that could re-member us...

Homesick for myself, for her...

"Transcendental Etude"  
Adrienne Rich

## Introduction

During the 1940s, when Anne Hébert was writing the poems included in the volume Le Tombeau des rois, the epicentre of French Canada was what Denis Monière terms a "nationalisme de survivance qui consistait à défendre des droits acquis, à préserver la religion catholique et la langue française."<sup>1</sup> Until the Quiet Revolution, the family was not only the centre of this culture, but also the key to maintaining and developing the culture's identity. Marie Couillard notes that the father/husband of the family had been given an "autorité consacrée par l'Eglise et légitimée par le Code civil",<sup>2</sup> whereas the mother/wife was accorded a certain prestige by being "l'âme, le coeur, le noeud vital."<sup>3</sup> As Paula Gilbert Lewis points out in Traditionalism, Nationalism and Feminism, the patriarchal society dominated by the Catholic Church had "traditionally imposed upon women the role of guardians of francophone culture, that is, of religion and of the French language, itself guardian of the faith."<sup>4</sup> As a result, women's reality became enclosed "within the literary archetype of the all-powerful mother, resigned to her destiny" (*ibid.*) of being a faithful servant to man and God and the bearer of those children who would continue the search for a solid national

identity. Patricia Smart reminds us that through this "revanche des berceaux" the clerics believed that French Canada could establish a strong identity and autonomy.<sup>5</sup>

The clerics and historians of the past were aware of the gradual assimilation of the French Canadians by English Canada. The Earl of Durham had claimed in 1839 that this was "un peuple sans histoire ni littérature"<sup>6</sup>, a remark which caused historian François-Xavier Garneau and many others to fight for their survival through appropriating their own language and valorizing their culture. In 1867, the poet Octave Crémazie believed that if French Canadians spoke a language that was theirs only, and not some poor replica of another, then perhaps they might break free from their imprisonment:

Ce qui manque au Canada, c'est d'avoir une langue à lui. Si nous parlions iroquois ou huron, notre littérature vivrait. Malheureusement nous parlons et écrivons d'une assez piteuse façon, il est vrai, la langue de Bossuet et de Racine. Nous avons beau dire et beau faire, nous ne serons toujours, au point de vue littéraire, qu'une simple colonie.<sup>7</sup>

Lorraine Weir refers to Michèle Lalonde's poem 'Speak White' as an example of the dilemma of the colonized writer who must learn the language of another to be "visible within the dominant paradigm".<sup>8</sup> This is the Québécois experience, and Weir suggests that it is also woman's; that she is the underground writer "who lives within a culture whose voice and

language can never be authentic for her." To speak white, to speak man, is "to be consumed by it."(*ibid.*) According to Weir, women have been "defined out" of the masculine paradigm and can only enter into it by "being compromised, perhaps destroyed" and instead of being liberated by this compromise, they experience "an introjection of violence into the self."<sup>9</sup>

In the mid 1800s, French Canadians, in order not to be "defined out", had to preserve the language of their ancestors as best they could, but were impeded by the English. The flow of clergy was interrupted and French travellers were not allowed entry to the colony.<sup>10</sup> Gérard Tougas points out that it was not surprising, as a result, that French Canadian writers, "dont la langue était menacée, cherchassent refuge dans la tradition littéraire française."<sup>11</sup> By emulating French masters, by remembering the past, "les poètes, les historiens et les romanciers canadiens du XIXe siècle auront fait plus qu'imiter des modèles français: ils se seront trouvés en eux."<sup>12</sup>

To be defined by another, to be other than oneself, became unacceptable to some writers and academics like the historian and cleric l'abbé Groulx. In the beginning of the 20th century, Groulx anticipated the possibility of never finding a specificity of the French Canadian identity<sup>13</sup>; this anxiety foreshadowed the rage which was to explode in the 60s. Anne

Hébert screamed out in 1963, in "Fin du monde" from her poems Inédits, "Je suis le cri et la blessure, je suis la femme à ton flanc qu'on outrage et qu'on viole." Along with others searching for their own voice, Hébert believes in "la solitude rompue comme du pain par la poésie." (Poèmes p. 71)<sup>14</sup> Writing is the only way not only to find one's identity, but also to reject the violation of the tyrant, that mysterious 'on' who could be one of many oppressors. Gérard Tougas reminds us of one of the main sources of oppression well ensconced in French Canadian writing. The imitation of French models had become "la source de la médiocrité de la littérature canadienne."<sup>15</sup> To break that mirror, which was reflecting a false and fragmented image back to the Québec readers, became a goal of the French Canadian writer. To refuse to 'speak white' or 'French', but to begin to "décrire le Canada tel qu'il [l'auteur] le voyait"<sup>16</sup>, was to begin to speak as and for oneself. In 1931, Albert Pelletier questioned how one can express oneself

de façon originelle et vivante dans une langue académique que nous ne parlons pas, que nous n'avons jamais pratiquée que dans les livres? C'est imposer à nos écrivains l'obligation ...de rendre ce qu'ils voient, éprouvent, ressentent de neuf et de singulier, par des souvenirs livresques...Et si notre patois devient trop difficile aux académiciens, eh bien, tant mieux; c'est que nous aurons une langue à nous...Si les Français veulent nous lire, ils nous traduiront, comme ils traduisent la littérature provençale<sup>17</sup>.

Like Pelletier, other writers began searching not for a lost

voice but for a voice that had never been theirs, for their own tongue; for a language which would express their own reality and not "des bariolages [et] une littérature de pâles reflets".<sup>18</sup> After the Second World War principles, morals and religion all had to undergo revision<sup>19</sup>. Fernand Dumont remarks that French Canadians found themselves frozen in a neutral spot; un "point zéro entre le passé et l'avenir"<sup>20</sup> from which they could look back at the "vieilles nostalgies muettes et [à] l'utopie de l'avenir."<sup>21</sup> Dumont's emphasis on speaking, on breaking the silence and ridding oneself of earlier 'balbutiements'<sup>22</sup> is a common thread which has been weaving through Québec literature since the War.

In 1948, with the publication of the manifesto Refus global, there was an explosion of rebellion against the past, a refusal of a history which had sterilized, ordered and muted French Canadians. Under the leadership of Paul-Emile Borduas, this publication was to be the catalyst to "éclater les cadres traditionnels de la poésie canadienne."<sup>23</sup> Guy Robert, notes that the individual, empowered by the collective, began to have the force to "se débarrasser de tous les colonisateurs qui lui pèsent"<sup>24</sup>. Fernand Ouellette speaks of rebirth, as well as of "un refus de la vie souterraine"<sup>25</sup>, of a night or darkness which had suffocated the French Canadian, and kept him from finding his true voice and speaking his own experience.

Women writers in Québec shared this experience of oppression, and tentatively began to reveal the history of their own oppression whose roots are deeply embedded in the powerful forces of the Church. Catholic doctrines had imposed "une religion qui dompte la chair"<sup>26</sup> and demanded quiet, obedient submission to God and to man. And yet, in early writing, women writers were beginning to test the boundaries of their oppression. Patricia Smart remarks that women were relegated to the status of being "other"; bound by their patriarchally defined role of "mère mythique", and excluded from the patriarchal lineage of God the Father to God the Son<sup>27</sup>, they began to whisper their secrets to each other. This 'bavardage' between women is an exchange of words which does not necessarily lead to a final signification, to closure or even to sense. This burbling, a 'balbutiement' amongst themselves, this "foule de riens féminins" surfaces in Laure Conan's Angéline de Montbrun (1884).<sup>28</sup> It proved impossible, though, to escape totally from the powers which had defined women as muted, submissive creatures. As in the case of Hébert and Conan, women exhibited, in their writing and in their heroines, a tension between being the good, quiet, little girl and a woman screaming her rage. The pull in two directions is evident in Conan's choice of wording in Angéline. In one instance, Conan's revision from the original edition reveals her awareness of the Church's power over her. The author yields to this power and changes an image of God's breaking her

to one of God's grace of silence. Laurent Mailhot notes the change: "'Puisque Dieu a commencé qu'il achève de me briser' (édition originale) sera remplacé par... 'Dieu m'a fait cette grace de ne jamais murmurer.'"29

Woman has been silenced since her beginnings. This silence had been imposed long before the silencing of the French Canadians. According to Frances Beer, woman has been morally crippled and made mute by the dominant powers since Eve's disobedience to God. Woman has been perceived as temptress, as "janua diaboli" or devil's gateway, since the days of Jerome, Anthony and Augustine<sup>30</sup>. Her identity has been defined by men. Temptress and witch or virgin and princess have been women's alternative roles, isolated or burned if the one, and stripped of flesh and passion if the other. Woman was defined in the Middle Ages by clerics like Andreas Capellanus, as "a liar, a drundar, a babbler, no keeper of secrets, too much given to wantonness, prone to every evil"<sup>31</sup>. And having believed this, woman has become silent, has entered, Madeleine Gagnon remarks, "dans les règles du jeu de nos conquérants; nous les avons même aimés, ces règles et ces conquérants et nous les aimons encore"<sup>32</sup>. Gilles Marcotte interprets Conan's "style de couventine" as having 'played the game'. The muted voice, however, reveals "l'abîme du désespoir" and "la grande clarté du désabusement"<sup>33</sup>. Marcotte explains that this "néant", this "déréliction" in which Angéline is confined is the result of

"l'interdiction parfaite et absolue" of the fathers who "forment écran devant la vie à vivre, devant le présent [...et] tirent à eux toute l'existence disponible"<sup>34</sup>. The father creates this "abîme" into which the daughter slides and where she remains mute, absent. Metaphorical cages - the city, an apartment, a subway, a cave, the earth, her body, a house - heroines, present and past, have been caught in these patriarchal constructs. To break free from them has been an on-going, frustrating struggle, that for each woman alone has been a seemingly impossible task.

In her recently published book Ecrire dans la maison du père, Patricia Smart suggests that in women's writing there begins "une transformation dans la structure de la Maison du Père [...] apportée par une énergie". This energy perhaps finds its source in the "rapprochement [qui] s'est effectué entre les personnages féminins - filles et mère, soeurs, amies ou amantes"<sup>35</sup>. The phenomenon of women speaking with women, breaking the silence, and thus shattering the Father's house, was but a weak tremor when Conan was writing. Madeleine Gagnon notes that women caught in this prison, "n'avaient pas bien des choix: mères ou putains; ou vierges ou folles"<sup>36</sup>. The Church and patriarchy had defined this reality for Conan, as for French writers such as Colette, Sand and others. But even so defined, they wrote. "Nonnes ou folles. Lueurs en tous cas. Quelques voix se sont inscrites malgré tout - hors tradition -

dans l'histoire [...].une histoire à déterrer, à déchiffrer."37 To reread, to bring back these "aïeules écrivaines" is, for Gagnon, to be part of them, to expose a "trace de vie"(ibid.) which connects us with our foremothers, a 'fil' which weaves woman's history, woman's story, together into a new pattern of the light and dark which women have experienced then and now. This heritage has to be brought to the centre of the tapestry from the margins, shattering the old stories and telling new ones. The goal is to break free from what Marcotte defines as "la femme-idéale et la femme-péché, l'orgie et le ciel bleu"38, to reject "la Sagesse", the image of a "terre-mère" who "dispense en abondance...la nourriture", but whom men must possess and conquer39.

Anne Hébert is among the heritage of women's voices to be evaluated, and was herself expressing a re-evaluation of the feminine. A women speaking to women, yet caught in Québec's struggle to find its own voice, she wrote the poems of Le Tombeau des rois during the decade which precedes its publication in 1953. The 40s were years of change. Mailhot notes that male writers, like Hébert's cousin Saint-Denys Garneau, Alain Grandbois, Gaston Miron, Roland Giguère, and Gatien Lapointe, were breaking syntax, upsetting the linear and the chronological, searching out contrasts and oxymorons which would "Dérouter, dépayser, défigurer, puis rétablir l'horizon, retrouver le centre"40. Or, suggests Miron, they would

"reprendre quelque chose de détérioré; ramasser la paille qui a servi à protéger les champs de la gelée, mais qui peut encore servir"41. In L'Homme rapaillé, Miron sees writers (most of whom were men) caught between "la volonté d'écrire et la nécessité de parler, entre la célébration et le combat". It was in this era that poets were beginning to create a poetry which was "asymétrique, déchiré"42. Needing to shout out their oppression, which the Church had imposed, these men finally began to exhibit, in their writing, their fragmented souls. In the 60s Paul Chamberland, in Terre Québec ('64), produced a poetry which Mailhot describes as "raturée, brisée, piétinée"43. The critic remarks that Yves Thériault, in Cul-de-sac ('61), wrote "en lignes brisées et en spirale ...construit sur le vertige - la composition (discours délirant, fragmenté...) est elle-même une crevasse, comme celle où agonise le héros-victime"44. Chamberland interpreted ioual as a "sous-langue" which symbolised "la langue en partie défaite d'un peuple défait". The use of ioual, shared by this fragmented people, symbolically attempted to "tuer en soi le colonisé."45 And yet, Anne Hébert has always written in impeccable French. How can her poetry be situated in relation to the emergence of iconoclastic, nationalist texts?

Clément Moisan describes Hébert's poetry as the expression of an interior solitude which recounts this "drame collectif"46 of French Canadians. He claimed that Hébert is

caught in a dream, subjected to a magical force to which "comme le faucon aveugle du 'Tombeau des Rois', elle se soumet, elle accepte dans cette descente au tombeau d'aller à la rencontre du réel"<sup>47</sup>. Moisan reminds his readers that Hébert and others at that time had been trapped in what Giguère called "La Grande Noirceur", during the Duplessis régime (1936-60)<sup>48</sup>. Poets and artists trying to find expression for their oppression in new art forms were pushed underground, situated in the margins. Paul-Emile Borduas and others involved with the 1948 publication of Refus global found themselves searching desperately for a light, while cloaked in darkness. Giguère explains that for the poets of the 50s, for this collective "nous", "il y avait quelque chose de clandestin...Nous étions un peu comme des taupes qui creusions un tunnel vers la lumière...Sans public, sans galerie, sans éditeur, sans rien d'autre qu'une belle et jeune révolte, nous avions tout à faire et nous faisions tout"<sup>49</sup>. The resemblance of this metaphor of the poet to Hébert's "faucon aveugle" (P,61) making its way through the darkness of the tomb, glimpsing that "reflet d'aube" (P,63), is hard to ignore.

Madeleine Gagnon notes that women have also been pushed underground, that woman's speech, her language "est à repérer dans un hors-texte encore in-défini, dans les marges de la page...hors du discours repéré et connu [...] Une non tradition."<sup>50</sup> She claims that there is "une histoire à

déterrer, à déchiffrer"<sup>51</sup>; this implies a "réhabilitation", a "re-centrement" as women must deconstruct man's projections of woman as well as effecting a "résurrection de nos mortes mal lues"<sup>52</sup>. The parallel is obvious between the French Canadian and the woman, both having been jammed into the margins, or underground, both searching for their own voice, their own language, both fighting the oppression of the Church. Hébert, speaking in the feminine through her female heroine, to both the female and male reader, has been interpreted, for the most part, from the male perspective, from the perspective of the oppressed French Canadian. But male French Canadian scholars are part of the patriarchal tradition which has defined woman and her writing from outside, maintaining a myth which ignores woman's reality as she might have experienced it, leaving it out or misrepresenting it. Perhaps the confusion is because men speak a different language. Barbara Godard suggests that to men, women's speech is "non-sense" because it is outside the language of patriarchy, the language of logic and of male experience. The flux, the shifting connections, articulated, not in full sentences, but in short, elliptic suspended fragments, are women's experiences<sup>53</sup>. In reference to Daphne Marlatt's writing, Godard expresses the writer's attempt to resist closure, and any one authenticating signature<sup>54</sup>. Hébert's male critics not only interpret her language as their own, but analyse with great scrutiny and finality the images and motifs the poet presents. The language, the experiences

and the myths belonging to patriarchy, until after the Quiet Revolution, drowned the struggle of women in the national struggle; men and women together were a colonized people who have together been oppressed by religious and political authority.

It is a myth which, Christl Verduyn suggests, has been challenged since the 1950s<sup>55</sup>. Woman has been presented as Eve, the temptress, but is expected to act like the Virgin, a male mandate which is contradictory and "generates a schizophrenic state of affairs, to be explored (and rejected) by women writers"<sup>56</sup>. This self-doubling, representing self-estrangement, is widespread in the works of Quebec and English-Canadian women writers<sup>57</sup>. According to Verduyn, "The motif of the Double dominates the novels and poetry of Anne Hébert"<sup>58</sup>. Where the narrator is pushed to the extreme, "the double borders on disincarnation, the negation not only of the inner self but especially of the outer, physical self. This [is a] typically Hébertian theme"(*ibid.*).

The physical self, the body, becomes fragmented and must be repossessed<sup>59</sup>. Nicole Brossard explains that for man, writing is a means to "retrouver son corps", whereas for women, "écrire consiste à décoller de son corps, à libérer de son propre corps...tout l'appareil de caractéristiques physiques et psychiques que l'homme lui impose pour s'assurer un meilleur

usage d'elle"60. Women must, then, shatter this male construct that they see in the mirror, as Margaret Atwood suggests. Woman as a Subject cannot be a reflection of the role she has played in society, in the family61. Verduyn claims that woman's alienation from her body, from herself, is the reflection of woman as Object in the eyes of the Other,62 echoing Simone de Beauvoir's famous definition of the feminine as essentially Other, non-Subject.

Jennifer Waelti-Walters describes the typical heroine as playing the princess. She is passive, long-suffering and patient because someday she will be saved by a prince63. The heroine lives outside her desires, since she has been taught that good women have no right to self-generated desire. The image she reflects is one of woman as virginal, absent, dependent, silent64. What lies boiling beneath the surface of this image, behind the flat mirror reflection, is another story, what Weir calls a "subtext", which "lies submerged, the camouflage effective"65: it is woman's story, woman's rage. Hébert stated in an interview with Marci McDonald that her "violence is authentic. I don't invent it. It must exist within me. I'm very conscious of it now - and surprised too. Of course I could write gently [...] Instead, it comes out rarely in life, only in my writing. But I must have accumulated such rage."66 Hébert does not seem to be aware of her rage until after it has been pointed out to her, but Weir suggests

that authors are not always fully aware of the hidden message, the subtext, sealed to all who have not yet learned to read; to all but a particular "interpretive community", the term Weir borrows from Stanley Fish<sup>67</sup>.

Anne Hébert might or might not be part of a particular feminist interpretive community. While writing Le Tombeau des rois, the poet was engulfed in a cultural context which not only demanded that the great writers of the time 'write'/'speak' their oppression, but that they do so in a new way that shattered the coherent, linear text which had constituted writing for their foremothers and fathers. To break the code of the hierarchy, to speak 'his' own language, was the intent of the French Canadian searching for that new identity later to be called 'Québécois'. Hébert was the female counterpart in this struggle, and the subtext lying below the surface of her text of national identity is a watermark, what Mair Verthuy calls a "filigrane"<sup>68</sup>, whose faint design marks and identifies woman.

There is no doubt that Anne Hébert played an integral role in the rebellion against the Catholic Church. The stranglehold of the Jansenists had indeed been choking the life from all French Canadians. Le Tombeau des rois was written in the context of paternalistic and hierarchical oppression and Hébert's critics were quick to interpret her poetic images and

motifs within that context. The search for a voice, a language, a name that was one's own, was the goal of the French Canadian. Hébert cracked open the walls which enclosed, she shattered the silence which denied, and she entered on a quest, not just for herself, but for the collective "nous", for all Québécois.

And yet, Anne Hébert is not just a Quebecker, but as well, a woman. Women in Québec were becoming more and more aware of their oppression; the distinction between their oppression as Québécois and as women was beginning to surface in very apparent ways. The voicing of this double exploitation in prose and poetry began to challenge in new ways the powers of tradition, of the Church, of Patriarchy. Hébert, a woman speaking through the voice of a female narrator to 'mankind' and to 'womankind', to Québécois and to Québécoises, uses images and motifs in Le Tombeau des rois which carry multiple meanings and connotations. In my reading, I will be drawing together some of these multiple interpretations of male and female critics, of feminists and non-feminists and integrating them with my own feminist explorations. Rather than objectively analysing these images in a systematic, poem by poem examination, I will be following the narrator on her quest to find her original identity; this feminine "I" makes the journey back to the "womb" for all women, including the female reader. I will attempt to show intertextual associations of

the obstacles and tools that she comes across during this journey with those found in Hébert's later poetry ("Mystère de la parole") and prose (Kamouraska, Les Enfants du Sabbat and Héloïse). Le Tombeau des rois seems to set the mould for all of Hébert's later work. Other intertextual links I will establish are with the images and motifs found in the texts of other women. Interestingly, most of these women writers are creating texts many years after Le Tombeau is published. The intertextual "thread" weaves backwards and forwards in time, between Québécoises and anglophone writers.

Adrienne Rich claims that "Birth stripped our birthright from us,/tore us from a woman, from women, from ourselves", and that we know "nothing/of origins, nothing we needed/to know, nothing that could re-member us". "Homesick for myself, for her"<sup>69</sup>, bemoans Rich, women must find comfort with their sisters; they must share this experience, "herstory". The female reader of Anne Hébert, and the female critic of this woman poet, are also "consoeurs" in this "herstory". Following the meandering intertextual "thread" of women's writing, this reading of Le Tombeau des rois rubs against the grain of logical, objective, academic, literary analysis. Yet, to read and to interpret literature in new, transforming ways, is to accept the "unwritten" invitation that perhaps, even unwittingly, the writer offers to her/his readers. I have accepted such an invitation to follow the heroine through the

depths of the cave, on the search which, as Christine Downing suggests, will lead us to Her, the Goddess, and thus back to ourselves and to other women<sup>70</sup>. And perhaps it is then that reader, critic, women and men can emerge transformed.

### Notes

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3. Couillard 47.
4. Paula Gilbert Lewis, Traditionalism, Nationalism and Feminism, ed. Paula Gilbert Lewis (Wesport: Greenwood Press, 1985) 9.
5. Patricia Smart, Ecrire dans la maison du père: l'émergence du féminin dans la tradition littéraire du Québec (Montréal: Québec/Amérique, 1988) 30.
6. Guy Robert, Littérature du Québec: poésie actuelle (Montréal: Déom, 1970) 18.
7. Laurent Mailhot, Que sais-je: la littérature québécoise (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1974) 8.
8. Lorraine Weir, "Toward a Feminist Hermeneutics: Jay Macpherson's Welcoming Disaster," Gynocritics/Gynocritiques, ed. Barbara Godard (Toronto: ECW Press, 1987) 63.
9. Weir 63.
10. Gérard Tougas, Histoire de la littérature canadienne-française, 41ème ed. (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1967) 3.
11. Tougas 7.
12. Tougas 11.
13. Tougas 103.

14. Anne Hébert, Poèmes (Paris: Seuil, 1960) 71.  
 All further references to Anne Hébert's poetry will be taken from Poèmes and will be noted after the quotation by P, and the page number, or by the page number alone when the reference is obvious. Poèmes is comprised of two sets of poems: "Le Tombeau des rois" and "Mystère de la parole" (which contains a brief work of prose, "Poésie, solitude rompue"). References to the poetry or prose in "Mystère" will be indicated within in the text by title and then in brackets by P, and the page number. Since Le Tombeau des rois is the primary work cited, it should be assumed that, unless indicated in the text, the quotation refers to this work in Poèmes. Le Tombeau des rois contains the title poem, "Le Tombeau des rois". The set of poems will always be underlined, whereas the poem will be in quotation marks.

Other works by Anne Hébert to be cited are:  
Kamouraska (Paris: Seuil, 1970), abbreviated as K, within the text; Les Enfants du Sabbat (Paris: Seuil, 1975), ES; Les Fous de Bassan (Paris: Seuil, 1982), FB; Le Torrent (Montréal: Beauchemin, 1950), T; Héloïse (Paris: Seuil, 1980), H.

15. Tougas 116.

16. Tougas 133.

17. Albert Pelletier, Carquois (Montréal: Librairie d'Action canadienne-française, 1931) 23.

18. Pierre de Grandpré, Histoire de la littérature française du Québec III (Montréal: Beauchemin, 1969) 8.

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20. Grandpré 20.

21. Grandpré 22.

22. Grandpré 22.

23. Tougas 152.

24. Robert 26.

25. Robert 224.

26. Tougas 160.

27. Smart, Ecrire 30.

28. Smart, Ecrire 26.

29. Mailhot 36.

30. Frances Beer, "the Continuity of Female Stereotypes: from Recluse to Bunny," Canadian Women's Studies 1.1 Fall 1978: 40.
31. Beer 40.
32. Monique Roy, "Femmage: Madeleine Gagnon," Canadian Women's Studies 1.1 Fall 1978: 51.
33. Gilles Marcotte, Une Littérature qui se fait 2 (Montréal: HMH, 1962) 16.
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35. Smart, Ecrire 334.
36. Roy 51.
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55. Christl Verduyn, "From the 'Word on Flesh' to the 'Flesh made Word': Women's Fiction in Canada," American Review of Canadian Studies 15.4 (1985): 449.
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63. Jennifer Waelti-Walters, Fairy Tales and the Female Imagination (Montréal: Eden Press, 1982) 11.
64. Waelti-Walters 85.
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66. Marci McDonald, "Anne Hébert: Paris is the Place to Chart Woman's Rage," City Woman Spring 1981: 61.
67. Weir 66.
68. Maïr Verthuy, "Y a-t-il une spécificité de l'écriture féminine?," Canadian Women's Studies 1.1 Fall 1978: 76.
69. Adrienne Rich, The Dream of a Common Language (New York: W.W. Norton, 1978) 75.
70. Christine Downing The Goddess: Mythological Images of the Feminine (New York: Crossroad, 1981) 5.

## Chapter 1

### Shattering the Mirrors: Following the Thread back to the Mother in "Le Tombeau des rois"

#### 1. The Father's House: Breaking down the Walls.

According to Jean LeMoyne, Saint-Denys Garneau died in 1943, not from a heart attack, but from a "contagion" which had been running rampant in French Canada for a century.<sup>1</sup> France had left her new colony to fend for herself, for the most part. What she did leave behind was the stifling ideology of the Roman Catholic Church; by 1830, the population was described as "une masse rurale dominée par le clergé"<sup>2</sup>. One of these clerics, abbé Casgrain, preached a morality that, not only had the people following "les sentiers qui mènent à l'immortalité"<sup>3</sup>, but also creating a literature whose mission was to "favoriser de saines doctrines"<sup>4</sup>. Seizing the treasures of the past - the religious dogma, the literature of France - only augmented the oppression by defining the people from 'without', by denying them any self-established identity. In addition to this effacing of autonomous selfhood, the clergy encouraged a lifestyle which would assure the salvation of the

soul. Both the glorifying of a history (which was not theirs) and the striving for an after-life (which was only a utopian promise), led the French Canadian to a life threatened by assimilation and based on refusal of life. As Albert Le Grand puts it, "Ce refus du présent toujours lié à une méfiance de la vie et du réel s'explique [...] par ces pressions soutenues"<sup>5</sup>. Saint-Denys Garneau had been well indoctrinated: "'Ainsi, dans mon adolescence, une sorte de désir que mon corps finisse à la ceinture.'"<sup>6</sup>

This denial of desire, of the body, this absence, led to a frustration which initially enlivened Garneau's poetic genius, but led ultimately to his death. Jean LeMoynes had a heated response to his friend's murder:

Je ne peux parler de Saint-Denys Garneau sans colère, car on l'a tué. Sa mort a été un assassinat longuement préparé [par les religieux catholiques...] Des morts-vivants, des victimes d'eux-mêmes, des malades réduits à leur pauvre peur, mais à une peur malheureusement douée du génie de la contagion.<sup>7</sup>

This illness, which was to instil in the people a sense of weakness and incompetence, was set in motion by the Jansenist ideology (*ibid.*). In reference to Anne Hébert's writing, Samuel de Sacy notes a sense of self-condemnation and self-effacement, in her language which is "dure, décharnée, dépouillée, celle justement de la condamnation du poète, celle du jansénisme."<sup>8</sup> And yet these two cousins were among the

first to throw open the doors of the cage which imprisoned their people, to break their solitude by writing, to discover and name their oppression. Emerging in their writing, Hébert saw a ray of hope in the darkness, in "ce visage obscur [...] ce coeur silencieux [...] cette parole confuse qui s'ébauche dans la nuit, tout cela appelle le jour et la lumière." (p. 71)

Anne Hébert found herself caught in the collective "rude aventure de survivance"<sup>9</sup>; she had taken "childhood tea in the cloistered small-town parlors [...], recited her lessons behind convent walls [...], smiled the sweet smile of the guileless"<sup>10</sup>, but all this concealed the rage which was to explode in her writing. As Marci McDonald reveals, women in Québec had the choice either "to be a nun or be a mother", the choice of "the paternal shelter of the veil over a bleaker fate - playing obedient womb to ten or fifteen children in grinding poverty."<sup>11</sup> For women to reject these choices was more than difficult; they did not obtain the right to vote until 1940 and even still, women's issues were not part of the general consciousness until the 60s. Hébert's Québec was still "stunted in the steely grip of the Church when Angel and Devil still stalked the prewar land of Maurice Duplessis with all the impact they once had over France in the Middle Ages."<sup>12</sup> Below the calm surface, rage boiled for all French Canadians. But for the patriarchal Church to define women as the submissive mother or obedient nun, either patiently sewing or being

stripped of all her desires, was to reinforce the already popular myths of Eve the Temptress and Mother Mary the Virgin.

Women who defied the Church's prescribed roles, these "femmes qui se sont refusées à ce rôle de mater dolorosa ou de femme-objet, et qui [...] ont contesté cette tradition de sacrifice"<sup>13</sup>, were expelled from what Patricia Smart has named, "La Maison du Père". These witches, adulteresses, hysterics, murderers, these 'Eves' that Denise Boucher calls "les fées", broke through the walls which had enclosed them. They thus exposed the words which had been defining them, the powers which had been controlling them, the mirrors which had been reflecting the image of a princess, of a virgin, of Mother Mary holding her dead Son. Hébert reveals the stifling darkness that had been lurking behind the walls of the "chambre de bois", the "château", the "tombeau" and beneath the calm surface of the water. "Il fait si calme/Sur cette eau." (E,19) According to Coral Ann Howells, underground spaces, the tomb of the kings or the Métro in Hébert's Héloïse, represent "the world of the past which disrupts and destroys the world of the living."<sup>14</sup> The convent in Les Enfants du Sabbat is abandoned for the 'cabane' where desires finally flow freely, where the dead come back to life, where Mary becomes the Eve who had been buried by the Church. This Eve comes back from the dead near the end of Kamouraska: an unidentified woman who had been buried alive surfaces as symbol of power, notes Smart, but

still as a victim of the culture<sup>15</sup>:

Dans un champ aride, sous les pierres, on a déterré une femme noire, vivante, datant d'une époque reculée et sauvage. Etrangement conservée. On l'a lâchée dans la petite ville. Puis on s'est barricadé, chacun chez soi. Tant la peur qu'on a de cette femme est grande et profonde. Chacun se dit que la faim de vivre de cette femme, enterrée vive, il y a si longtemps, doit être si féroce et entière, accumulée sous la terre, depuis des siècles! On n'en a sans doute jamais connu de semblable. Lorsque la femme se présente dans la ville, courant et implorant, le tocsin se met à sonner. Elle ne trouve que des portes fermées et le désert de terre battue dont sont faites les rues. Il ne lui reste plus qu'à mourir de faim et de solitude. (K, 250)

Women like Hébert, writing "bien avant les féministes de nos jours, [...et] inscrivant les traces de leur propre subjectivité dans le langage littéraire", have exposed "l'écho d'une mémoire ancienne" which finds its source in "l'origine maternelle"<sup>16</sup>. Smart suggests, in re-reading familiar texts, women's texts like Hébert's, that we use what Nicole Brossard has called a new angle of vision. Brossard wants readers and critics to position themselves so that "le corps opaque du patriarcat" does not block this new vision<sup>17</sup>. This new perspective reveals potential, multiple new readings of familiar texts. It also reveals the 'origine maternelle' which can be traced through women's history and literature. Sisters see each other for the first time, "les femmes tuées" are unearthed and brought back to life. Generations of "mères

mortes", no longer silenced by patriarchal culture, finally release "le cri délirant proféré par l'épouse parfaite"<sup>18</sup> whose womb has been incessantly filled for centuries, or by "la fille maigre" whose sensuous flesh has been carved away from her sterile bones. This absence, remarks Albert Le Grand, finds "sa plus essentielle nudité dans les poèmes du Tombeau des rois."<sup>19</sup>

Denis Bouchard, in his study, Une Lecture d'Anne Hébert, interprets the bastard son of Le Torrent as "le symbole de tous les Québécois."<sup>20</sup> As the child of "la mère terrifiante", François has little power to throw down the chains which have now grown roots, which have entangled him from within. (T,36) The male child, isolated, emptied, absent, is the metaphor for a Quebec which had been "abandonné par les Français [...et] abatardi par les Anglais"<sup>21</sup>. In Le Tombeau des rois, the heroine is a child who has not only been chiselled into the barest, purest model by Church doctrine, but also must fight with all her force "la menace d'Eve". Having been defined as both Virgin and Eve, women in French Canada have carried with them, according to Bouchard, "la conscience de l'échec du mâle"<sup>22</sup>. Being fertile mother, virgin daughter and erotic temptress, the heroine in Hébert's work exists in a schizoid state. Complicit at times, she retreats into the safe convent or room, into "la plus étanche maison" (E,45) of the Father. To hide her head under a rock or squeeze herself under the

protective shell of a pebble (P,45), not to move for fear of disturbing the wall of silence which surrounds her (P,44), to polish her bones as if they were precious metals (P,33), is to be an accomplice to the oppression which controls her.

In Kamouraska, the heroine's awareness, not only of her complicity, but as well, of this split of self, is more astute; Elizabeth says, "Je dis 'je' et je suis une autre." (K,115). Bouchard notes that this 'Autre', this other side of the Double frightens, and yet fascinates her<sup>23</sup>. At a given moment, the Hébertian heroine becomes aware of her two histories; one of patriarchy which has defined her as "Sans nom ni visage. Détruite. Niée." (K,215) Her existence is that of "une poupée mécanique, appuyée au bras du mari" where she must "penser à soi à la troisième personne" (K,71). Madeleine Gagnon suggests that women must deconstruct the patriarchy's alienating projections of women and delve into the concealed history of our mothers, a "travail de résurrection de nos mortes mal lues, de nos mortes non muettes."<sup>24</sup> These women have been fighting their oppression. Gagnon includes Louise L'Abbé, Flora Tristan, Colette, Sand, Conan in the list of those who have not remained silent. These "aïeules écrivaines"<sup>25</sup>, and more recent ones, like Guèvremont, Roy, Hébert, must come back to life, must be re-read from new angles, as Brossard has proposed. Women's history has been masked by patriarchal indoctrination and women have had no

Gabrielle Pascal explains that the Hébertian heroine will play two rôles; a passive, stifled victim finally will explode into violent revolt in order to get back her autonomy<sup>26</sup>.

The lack of control, this confusion in identity, their duplicity, all force women to escape to childhood to find their liberation. In Le Tombeau des rois the "petite morte", "cette soeur que nous avons", is "une enfant" (p,47,48) who has entered into "La Maison du Père". Lying dead "en travers de la porte", this sister emits life in the form of "une étrange nuit laiteuse", and "son odeur capiteuse." Patricia Smart in Ecrire dans la maison du père, suggests that this "petite morte" emits this "odeur capiteuse" as a very much alive trace of "la voix féminine". This vibrant thread links together women no longer defined as "Autre", but as "Même". And this is the turning point for the "femme-enfant", "la prise de conscience féministe"<sup>27</sup> which pulls her and her sisters out of their passive, domestic life:

Nous menons une vie si minuscule et  
tranquille  
Que pas un de nos mouvements lents  
Ne dépasse l'envers de ce miroir limpide  
Ou cette soeur que nous avons  
Se baigne bleue sous la lune  
Tandis que croît son odeur capiteuse. (P, 48)

Women share each others' stories. Defined finally within a homogeneous group, female identified, they are "Même" to each

other. They have been Other, forced to

....de vivre à l'intérieur  
Sans faire de bruit  
Balayer la chambre  
Et ranger l'ennui  
Laisser les gestes se balancer tout seuls  
Au bout d'un fil invisible  
A même nos veines ouvertes (p.47).

Now, the heroine and those unnamed multitudes of 'other' women, the collective 'nous', can begin to reinterpret the fatal sacrifice that "la petite morte" has suffered. This fate is shared among all women, but also has to be confronted individually, as is evident in "Le Tombeau des rois". Women's complicity in an affair with the 'Père', which Smart defines as an 'Electra' relationship, perpetuates Patriarchy's story. The impotent son is also complicit within an Oedipal relationship and yet this son still has a place in 'His...story' within the walls of the "la Maison du père"<sup>28</sup>. Women's story has been masked over so well that the 'nous' is afraid of this sign of death, of this uninvited "soeur". "Nous n'osons plus sortir depuis qu'elle est là". And yet, the "nous" becomes aware of a curious bonding, and of a "fil invisible" which, though not visible, is a trace, a thread linking the female collective of domestics with the sacrificial lamb, the dead girl. Smart interprets this new awareness, this linking as "un rapprochement", "une intersubjectivité nouvelle"<sup>29</sup> to be shared amongst all women in reconstructed sisterhood.

Albert Le Grand states that "l'odeur capiteuse" "engage la jeune fille dans ce sentier souterrain"<sup>30</sup>. A voyage is necessary, perhaps one similar to the one "la petite morte" has undertaken, one which might end in death, but will bring new life. Hébert ends Poèmes in with "Des Dieux Captifs" in which the penultimate stanza intimates a more positive conclusion than that of "Le Tombeau des rois", where the heroine is alone, as is "la petite morte", and, as a blinded bird, can barely squint out a glimmer of light, of hope. In "Des Dieux Captifs", death has been a reality, but life has conquered it, and is in motion, joining sisters and brothers in bright light, the new light of a new era:

La vie est remise en marche, l'eau se rompt comme  
du pain, roulent les flots, s'enluminent les morts  
et les augures, la marée se fend à l'horizon, se  
brise la distance entre nos soeurs et l'aurore  
debout sur son glaive.  
Incarnation, nos dieux tremblent avec nous! (P,  
105

The dead and the prophets are alive; the past of those who are 'Même' joins with the present, and the past of "l'Autre" is broken. Sisters rejoice in a new dawn and gods tremble. The time is new for both, but the barriers are torn down and men and women face together a long awaited "image habitable" (P,105). In "Vieille Image" (P,31), man and woman, ("nous") are followed ominously by the Oppression which has stifled all growth:

Et nous marchons  
Dans cet abîme  
Se creusant.

Les pas des morts  
Les pas des morts  
Nous accompagnent  
Doux muets.

Nous affichons  
Notre profonde différence  
En silence (v.10-19).

Together, these "Tristes époux tranchés et perdus" (P, 39), these two corpses, undertake the long journey to wholeness.

Fernand Dumont reiterated the journey of women and men as a new vision for Québec, in which Québécois(es) would be "engagé(e)s" and construct their own "nouvelles structures" for a new future<sup>31</sup>. René Garneau saw in Hébert's poetry, not only a "rétablissement...de la communication humaine"<sup>32</sup> between women and men, but also a break with the past, with "la Sagesse"<sup>33</sup>. Critics have used "la Sagesse" in the sense of "good behaviour", as a symbol for the oppressive traditions that stifled Quebecers. Indeed, during the writing of "Mystère de la parole", there is no reason for Hébert, in pre-feminist Québec, to be thinking in "La Sagesse m'a rompu les bras" (P, 92, 93) of anything else. The speaker claims that Church "Longtemps ...m'empoisonna des pieds à la tête" (v.11) and finally rebels in violence after having been the typical, passive, well-behaved "good girl". She erupts in a rage that

Hébert admitted did exist within her (see note in Introduction, p.7):

J'ai arraché la sagesse de ma poitrine,  
Je l'ai mangée par les racines,  
Trouvée amère et crachée comme un noyau pourri  
(v.14-16)

It might be significant that the poem "Sagesse" is part of "Mystère de la parole", a work published seven years after Le Tombeau, seven years more of passively thinking, waiting and patiently living out the oppression, before rage erupts in the active revolt of ripping this oppression out of her chest, eating then spitting out its bitter roots. The narrator not only has taken charge of her destiny, but has done it in a seemingly masculine way; fighting oppression with that which has maintained that very oppression: the power of the Word.

Women who have had power, although a distorted version of its masculine counterpart, have been the witches, the Eves who have had to denounce all who have been complicit in their oppression: all components of the patriarchal system, including the female components. In "Sagesse", the narrator becomes Eve reborn. She has jettisoned the traits which defined her and confined her and has appropriated those which have liberated her. Power to act, to speak, to shatter her alter-ego, "la Sagesse", this "très vieille femme envieuse/Pleine d'onction, de fiel et d'eau verte"(P,92). Gone

is Mary, "la femme douloureuse". As Pauline Julien sings in "Les Femmes":

Vous les exigez étoiles du matin  
Vases spirituels, mères sans tâche  
Vièrges vénérables, tous d'ivoire  
Vous REVEZ MESSIEURS BEAUCOUP<sup>34</sup>.

11. To Eve Reborn: a Journey back to the Mother.

To shatter these dreams which have defined, these vases which have confined and to follow the thread back to her roots, is woman's new task. The narrator proclaims this in stating boldly, "j'ai réclamé le fer et le feu de mon héritage." (P,92). The obstinancy of the narrator in "Mystère de la parole", and the desperate need to find her roots were not lacking in the heroine of Le Tombeau. And yet, in this work, the young girl is wondering why she polishes her bones, is still questioning who that dead girl is on the steps of the house, still asking, "Quel fil d'Ariane me mène/Au long des dédales sourds?" (P,59). In the last poem she begins to ask questions about this thread which will lead her, not just back out of the cave to safety, but to her foremothers, to her heritage. In his article on "Le Tombeau des rois", Pierre Kuntsmann suggests that "Je" is tied to this "fil d'Ariane" as a baby is to its umbilical cord which, in this case, is

attached to the past, to 'un jardin des ancêtres'<sup>35</sup>. Memory comes alive through this 'fil'<sup>36</sup>, memory of voices once whispered. And yet the heroine has ignored this thread. Caught in acts which are "coutumiers et sans surprises/Premiers reflets en l'eau vierge du matin" (P,13), she is not at all aware of this memory. "La nuit a tout effacé mes anciennes traces" (v.12) and what lies below "La surface plane" (v.15) of this "eau égale" (v.13) is "une eau inconnue" (v.17). Turbulent water ready to churn up desires, memories, "dont j'ignore encore/L'enchantement profond" (v.25) bubbles away under the flat, calm surface of tradition, of the Law of patriarchy. Nicole Brossard states that this "fil" must be recognized by women "comme trace du passé", that it open relationships between women, so that "chaque femme m'est familière, que nous sommes familières les unes aux autres"<sup>37</sup>.

The narrator is aware of this undercurrent, even if the heroine is not. Whether or not the two are one and the same, their points of view can differ due to the different time element; the narrator is telling the story about herself, the "je", at a different time than that of the actual experience—hence a certain acquired knowledge is intimated to the reader that the heroine does not yet have. Gérard Genette comments on the German terms "Erzählzeit", or narrative time, which can coexist with "erzählte Zeit", or story time. This temporal duality can cause distortions and confusion in the narrative

because the time of the story is a different time than that of the narration<sup>38</sup>. This confusion manifests itself in the narrator in "Nuit"(P,24). Again water is the motif, the agent, which sets in motion the inner turbulence between "Le silence de la nuit"(v.2) which surrounds her and which provides a quiet resting place where "je sombre"(v.16), and the "grands courants sous-marins"(v.4) which reveal a "Rythme sourd/Code secret"(v.9,10). There is safety and peace in "la continuité de la nuit/La perpétuité du silence"(v.14,15) and yet she is disturbed by what lies below the surface "de l'eau muette et glauque."(v.5) These undercurrents interrupt the calm, the complacency with a thumping of her heart "Qui s'illumine et s'éteint/Comme un phare"(v.7,8), but from which she can decode no message, "ne déchiffre aucun mystère."(v.11) Not wanting to be jostled out of the suffocating, but reassuring comfort of this "night" which lulls her to sleep, the speaker reveals her awareness of this "fil" which tugs at her heart. Below the surface lies the women's secret code to the the past, to their heritage, to freedom. But the heroine is not yet ready to leave her life of complacency, of complicity in the system. She is not yet ready to stir up the amniotic waters of the womb which, over so many years have prepared for yet another birth of another "Son". And yet, beginning to stir below the surface are those same waters, preparing finally for the rebirth of a 'daughter'.

To redefine what lies below the surface, to give these waters new functions, to enter the cave, not as a tomb which confines, but as channel, a uterus which provides a passage for rebirth, defies all tradition, all myth which has defined women. To enter into revision is not an easy task for any woman, least of all the Hébertian heroine. Gabrielle Pascal suggests that this moral and physical struggle often leads the heroine to psychic or physical illness or sacrifice<sup>39</sup>. The stress within the women in Le Tombeau des rois has no doubt been the result not only of their Jekyll and Hyde psychic state, but also of the confusion which is so blatantly manifested in "Nuit".(P,24)

Christl Verduyn suggests that once women have adopted their role of Virgin into their own values, then they become their own jailkeepers. So well trained not to break the Law of the Father, of the Church, of Patriarchy, and yet ready to burst with desire and passion, women have become schizophrenics. This state being a metaphor for the mind/body dichotomy, the Double has led the heroine to a dissociation from herself<sup>40</sup>. Hébert reveals this alienation of the body in two motifs throughout Le Tombeau des rois. The first is the fragmentation of the body into parts which seem foreign to her, which she objectifies, which she does not recognize as her own. The second is the reflection of these fragments of her body, in water or in mirrors. Verduyn indicates the importance for

women to repossess their bodies as whole structures, to repossess their female corporeality which for so long has been possessed and constructed by patriarchy<sup>41</sup>. To build a new identity, or to reestablish one that has been buried since women have been defined by men, women must shatter the reflection that patriarchy has constructed<sup>42</sup>. Women have looked in mirrors, in water, in windows and have never seen their own bodies. They have spoken, but have not heard their own voices. They have looked at their hands, their hearts, their eyes and have seen fragments of bodies which do not belong, which take on foreign, bizarre roles, which find themselves in unaccustomed places: a heart is a "fruit crevé" (P,29), a "visage rongé" is placed on a "table sans pieds" (P,30), eyes in a hand are "Comme des pierres d'eau" (P, 36), hands become planted "au jardin/Branches de dix doigts/Petits arbres d'ossements/...Et les feuilles fraîches/A nos ongles polis" (P,49), "doigts de sable" et "paumes toutes fleuries" are separated by an "immobile distance" (P,58) and finally, the heroine's heart is "au poing" trying to escape "la main sèche qui cherche le coeur pour le rompre" (P, 59, 61). In fact, the heroine's whole body is sacrificially consumed by being raped by the kings of the dead: "Ils me couchent et me boivent;/Sept fois, je connais l'étau des os" (P,61).

Yolande Villemaire and other women writers have been refusing this "ordre social ou 'le masculin l'emporte toujours

sur le féminin'", explains Louise Dupré. The "dénociation du viol, de l'oppression, de l'exploitation [et le désir] de se prendre en charge, de se constituer une autonomie"<sup>43</sup> have erupted from the depths of women who have taken on the task of "Re-vision". Adrienne Rich, in "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision", proclaims that women must begin "looking back" and "seeing with fresh eyes" that which has pushed us underground. "Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched, we cannot know ourselves."<sup>44</sup> This new angle of vision allows women to break free from the kings who consume the living-dead, passive, immobile and complacent. In reference to Julie in Les Enfants du Sabbat, Mary Jean Green states that the heroine is "le centre de la vie et existe si fortement parmi les mortes-vivantes, que cela devient intolérable" (ES,175): intolerable for the Church, the convent. But there is a true feminine force which surges up in Julie which forces her to revolt, to flee to the "cabane"<sup>45</sup>. There, the dead in Julie comes alive; the princess dries like, as Sylvie Gagné describes it in La Sourcière, "la dédicace fleur séchée entre les pages" and begins to move, "insiste à jouir, se souvenir, renouer avec l'inouïe."<sup>46</sup> The heroine of "Le Tombeau des rois" confronts the fantastic, the kings, even consents to the rape. Patricia Smart, in "La Poésie d'Anne Hébert: une perspective féminine", states that it is in "le consentement au viol" that "la passivité féminine est amenée à son ultime et plus terrible conséquence" and that this

"rencontre de la mort est vécue comme une noce étrange"<sup>47</sup>.

Philippe Haeck, whom, in the above article, Smart calls an 'homme féministe', exposes his vulnerability, by transgressing the rules of patriarchal criticism and of "masculine" writing. Men and women who commit this transgression, "pratiquent une brèche dans la forteresse des écritures masculines."<sup>48</sup> Haeck's writing style is an interesting mix of the linear, logical, straightforward, masculine stereotype with the subjective, fragmented, poetic, feminine one. Haeck's interpretation of the rape is very blunt. "Les 'sept grands pharaons d'ébène' qui 'me couchent et me boivent', qui crèvent mon hymen, qui me serrent à me rompre les os, ne sont plus que les morts d'un 'songe horrible'"<sup>49</sup>. Haeck rips open the protective surface of the crime by revealing the multiple rape. New interpretation is by itself a risk, but one which condemns his own sex of such a heinous crime, is indeed potentially an alienating one. Feminist critics might feel much more comfortable with Haeck than some of his more patriarchal counterparts. This critic has not only dared to name the offense in this particular case, but he has also bared his most vulnerable masculine self to ask questions, to include himself as a "je" or "me" with other victims:

je n'ai rien dit, quand ils ont eu fini de moi, je  
les ai assassinés: c'est ce crime qui me fait  
frémir, vivre à nouveau, je peux tourner mon  
corps-âme rompu vers le matin, peu à peu je

retrouverai l'usage de mes membres. Si j'ai frém  
d'horreur, aujourd'hui j'entrevois frémir de  
plaisir.<sup>50</sup>

Haeck is not being too presumptuous by including himself as a victim instead of as the rapist. He realizes that men and women have different discourses, speak different languages, but sees the importance, as Hébert did in "Des Dieux captifs", of men and women, sisters and brothers, joining hands to fight oppression. Each individual must "faire jaillir du désert son eau, [...] partager cette eau avec l'autre"<sup>51</sup> so that both might break the silence that "la grande noirceur", the domination of the Church, had imposed on the intellectual community from 1850 to 1950. Speaking "sans sujet" was both men's and women's reality<sup>52</sup>. And yet women's reality, Haeck admits, has been much worse.

### iii. Women's Writing: Telling the Truth.

Haeck explains that men have learned to read women's texts prepared to "subir des choses sentimentales, des rêveries de jeunes filles qui ne savent rien du monde, de la réalité, de jeunes filles qui n'ont que bercé des poupées". They have learned "à ne pas se plaindre, à être sourds aux plaintes, à être durs d'oreille, à ne pas entendre certaines voix"<sup>53</sup>.

Margaret Atwood notes that "The Quiller-Couch Syndrome", a thesis proposed at the turn of the century which has defined masculine and feminine writing in terms of opposites, has helped to reinforce the way men read women's writing. The thesis proposed that men's writing was clear, forceful and bold, while women's was vague, weak and unassertive<sup>54</sup>. This proposal is part of the patriarchal construction which Haec and others have been beginning to deconstruct.

Marie Couillard and Francine Dumouchel maintain that in the '70s Hébert, Blais, Brossard and Bersianik began shattering the mirror which had been reflecting back to all women their patriarchally defined form<sup>55</sup>. They deconstructed this model by using fantastic, utopian imagery. They created a literature which was subversive by turning away from "mimesis" and moving toward "poiesis", a writing of anticipation "proposant de nouveaux modèles à l'intérieur desquels les femmes pourront s'inscrire."<sup>56</sup> Barbara Godard suggests that Hébert has fit into the male canon of Québec writing because, until recently, she has been categorized as the voice of the 'Québécois'. Any new, feminist reading would include her in a non-canonical genre<sup>57</sup>. Perhaps looking for the subversive text, the "poiesis", in Hébert's writing published only after 1970 would deny any multiple or feminist reading of her earlier work like Le Tombeau des rois. But, after all, what critic would be looking for a subtext in the 60's or earlier, asks Maïr

Verthuy? None!58 At that time "critics were not ready. There were no pigeonholes for easy filing, no categories for easy numbering, no mental frameworks, no terms of reference...What did they know of feminism?"59 Why indeed would any of the critics even mention the gang rape in "Le Tombeau des rois"? The imagery in poetry could connote anything that was able to be interpreted by the reader. And all readers, all critics were able to interpret the language, the imagery in front of them as oppression by the Church and by the colonizers. Every other interpretation was stuffed behind the glass of the mirror, or in the dark, ominous depths below, waiting to erupt. Frances Jaffer takes a humourous yet serious approach to the situation:

The language of criticism: 'lean, dry, terse, powerful, strong, spare, linear, focused, explosive' - god forbid it should be 'limp'!! [...]. That limp dick - an entire civilization based on it, help the sun rise, watch out for the dark underground, focus focus focus, keep it high, let it soar, let it transcend, let it aspire to Godhead60.

Marie Couillard-Goodenough explains that that type of criticism produces "une lecture inapte à expliciter une identité féminine cherchant à se découvrir à partir d'elle-même", a discovery which is manifested in the body, and in the new myths, new images which belong to this identity61. Since the publication of Le Tombeau des rois, the male critics have

gained strength from one another, have protected themselves from falling into the dark, watery depths, by reiterating in a monotonous, linear, unimaginative fashion what the rest have said. But they too, caught behind the walls of "La Maison du Père", have had nowhere to go but around and around the same rooms of the house. Philippe Haeck has courageously broken down some of those walls.

Madeleine Ouellette-Michalska refers to Claude Lévi-Strauss, who, in his Mythologies, notes many distinctions between male and female roles. "'Les petites filles modèles'" are surrounded by "'l'omniprésence du Soleil et son aveuglante luminosité. Dans ce réduit où s'écoule un temps figé dans la circularité, il n'y a d'issue que la fuite.'"62 For the male critics of Le Tombeau des rois to interpret the "Sun" as anything but the oppressive forces of the colonizers, or of the Church, would have indeed been risky. They themselves were caught in this "chambre fermée". This tight space which cornered them, which froze them in circular repetition, inhibited any new interpretation. This "mur à peine.../Posé en couronne" (p.37 v.1,3) would never be seen as a metaphor for a "chambre" in "La Maison du Père", but only as a room in the House of their Jansenist fathers. Women were included as "men", their sex apparently not making any difference in this struggle. In "Poésie, Solitude Rompue" (p.67-71), there is no hint of feminist churnings. Hébert included herself in this

world of "l'homme"; women's oppression by the Church was a subcategory of "man's" oppression. And, even if there were some rumblings of "insectes prisonniers" (p.53, v. 29) below the surface, the quest for a national identity, for a self identity (for writers, potentially found in the 'phallic' power of the pen), loomed very large indeed. It was the quest of a people who, gorged with the blood of past centuries of victimization, was finally to stand erect and meet its oppressors head-on, to crack open the hardened, thick walls of the Catholic Church. With this raised consciousness, with this new thrust of power surging forth, what woman, feebly holding the 'pen', uncomfortably swooped up in the battle of the phalluses, would ever dare to openly mumble "femme"? Not Anne Hébert!

In "Un Mur à Peine" (p.37-38), the heroine is caught within the confines of "la haie de rosiers" (v.6) which is low enough that she can jump it, and loose enough to "L'enlever comme une bague" (v.7). And yet she remains behind the walls; "Seule ma fidélité me lie." (v.12) She blames herself for having made some kind of emotional deal with the past, with those who have constructed the walls. In her guilt and anguish she cries, "O liens durs/Que j'ai noués/En je ne sais quelle nuit secrète/Avec la mort!" (v.13-16) Wearing this "bague/Pressant mon coeur" (v.7,8), now married to her male oppressor, she is obliged to consummate the marriage, to tie those hard knots in

the darkness of the night. Penetrated by this "arbre crispé" (v.23), she lies patiently waiting, "feuillages/Des veines/Et des membres soumis" (v.24-26) with her "doigts sans aucun désir/Etendus" (v.31,32). For this woman, confined, penetrated, void of desire or will, but still reaching out to offer herself, to be the patient, submissive woman, there is no reward. She will take His seed, her womb full of His Son, and she will be sucked dry like an orange: "Mon coeur sera bu comme un fruit." (v.33) And then again, she will sit patiently waiting at "La source du sang/Plantée droit" (v. 21,22) extending her hands once more. "Elle ne les referme jamais./Et les tend toujours." (P,21 v.7,8).

Weighted down with "Tant de chiffres profonds" and "de bagues massives et travaillées" (v.11,12), her hands mesmerize her, "L'occupent et la captivent."(v.6) She has been caught in the trance. The heroine herself is unaware of her entrapment. The narrator refers to her as "Elle". The narrator herself, perhaps this "Je", not yet aware of her own imprisonment, distances herself from the heroine. It is "she" who is undergoing this suffering, not "I". And yet it is this distant "elle", this unidentified female who quietly suffers for the "nous", for her sisters:

D'elle pour nous  
Nul lieu d'accueil et d'amour  
Sans cette offrande impitoyable  
Des mains de douleurs parées

In the preceding poem, "Les Pêcheurs d'Eau" (P,19), "Cette femme assise" is this "elle". The reader does not have access to know if each "elle" is the same or a different woman/child. "Elle" might represent all women, suffering for the collective "nous", or each one may be an individual, each suffering, in a slightly different way, from the stifling heat of the Su(o)n, "Sous le coup de midi." What is interesting, is the developing relationship between the "elle" and the "je", when the "I" finally accepts her own suffering as that which she has observed from afar in the "elle". In "Pêcheurs", the narrator (the "Je") watches a woman "qui coud/Au pied de l'arbre" (v.18,19). Again, woman is placed in direct, subserviant relationship to the Tree. This "arbre droit" (v.13) which looms above her is the same tree under which she sits stripped of all dignity in "La Chambre de Bois", "Je suis nue et toute noire sous un arbre amer." (P,42) It is the same "arbre crispé" which sucks her dry "comme un fruit." (P,37) And all she and her sisters can do to gain some power in order to survive, is to imitate this tree, to "planter nos mains au jardin" (P,49) with the hope that their roots will take hold. The other choice is to wait patiently at the bottom of the tree, like the woman in "Pêcheurs", who "Refait, point à point,/L'humilité du monde,/Rien qu'avec la douce patience/De ses deux mains brulées." (v. 22-25), This dichotomy represents

the pulling between the introverted, submissive Mary who will hold forever the weight of her dead son, and the extroverted Eve who dares to cut off her own hands at the slight chance of empowerment in copying the Tree. But it does not work in "Nos Mains au Jardin" (P,49). Their fingers, brittle "Petits arbres d'ossements" (v.4) lay still, waiting for some small visitor to land, to give these "Branches de dix doigts" (v.3) a reason for existing. But, none comes. None is "pris au piège de nos mains coupées." (v.12) These self-mutilated women have again sacrificed themselves only to have their "mains fondues comme l'eau." (v.19) But, where is the anger? The "je" falls into despair; "Les clefs du silence sont perdues", her "coeur rompu" (P,23). The Tree still stands firm. As the male critics might say, the Church has won again over "man". And yet, this man is not a man, but a woman who now must muster all the strength she can, gather her body together to walk toward the place which goes below the roots of the Tree, the place which just might offer the wholeness and nourishment of the original Womb of the Mother.

#### iv. Beyond Culture: the 'Other' Side where Sisters Chatter.

Pierre Kuntsmann, in his study on "Le Tombeau des rois", does break from the norm by offering a Jungian interpretation

in which the child must descend into herself in order to return "au sein maternel". Jung calls this "la régression de la libido" which is an essential "retour à l'origine", "au point mort", "au degré zéro", but from which one must regenerate, emerge to "une seconde naissance". Kuntsmann calls this process "le passage à l'âge d'homme"<sup>63</sup>. Considering it is a female child who is about to descend into the tomb of the kings, attached by the umbilical cord to her ancestresses<sup>64</sup>, the image of a passage to manhood does not fit. Kuntsmann proposes the Egyptian myth that the pharaoh is the divine form of man and that this "père divinisé [...], phallus perdu (ou jamais obtenu), représente le trésor secret" of the masculine earth<sup>65</sup>. Like Hades assault of Persephone, the kings control the earth, and commit a rape to regain their power; what better way to locate their "phallus perdu"! For the limp to bounce back to life, for the dead kings to impose their power is seen as an essential step in "la formation de la personnalité"<sup>66</sup>. These kings waiting for their prey in their "chambres secrètes et rondes,/Là ou sont dressés les lits clos" (v.23,24), in anticipation, release "l'odeur [qu'il bouge en des orages gonfles" (v.21). Kuntsmann describes the storm as a male organ; lightening is "dieu et père par excellence, flèche phallique, symbole ambivalent d'amour et de haine"<sup>67</sup>. And it is by sexual union, by this sacred rape, that "le processus d'individuation" can occur and that "les longues heures que l'héroïne passe devant le miroir" become worthwhile. The girl

must pass through this mirror stage (according to Jacques Lacan), go beyond primary narcissism, in order to develop her identity<sup>68</sup>.

In The Subject of Semiotics, Kaja Silverman looks more closely at Lacan's notion of the Subject. According to the Jungian concept, sexual union will aid the process of developing one's self identity. Lacan stated that the human subject was originally an androgenous whole, but lost one half of its being. The loss occurred within the womb and wholeness can best be restored through heterosexual union<sup>69</sup>. With that interpretation of the rape scene in "Tombeau", both the dead kings and the young girl are well on their way to wholeness. Kuntsmann gives the impression that the heroine has been looking for this wholeness in mirrors, in reflections of herself. Silverman remarks that when the child looks in the mirror, the self is being defined through that reflection, an external image. This self-recognition is mis-recognition; "to know oneself through an external image is to be defined through self-alienation." Defining oneself totally in relation to this image, is to define oneself, not as Subject, but as Object<sup>70</sup>.

"Vie de Château" (P, 54) contains both the motif of the mirror and that of sexual union. It is "un château d'ancêtres" (v.1), of the past, of the dead. There is no "table ni feu/Ni poussière ni tapis" (v.2,3), nothing but "miroirs polis" (v.5)

which emit an "enchantement pervers" (v.4). There is nothing to do but "se mirer jour et nuit" (v.7). The first half of the poem is an impersonal description of this more than empty castle; a shell with mirrored walls, floors and ceilings reflecting nothing but itself, unless something, someone, interrupts the reflection. Barbara Godard suggests that men live in a world of narcissism, where the only reflection is of themselves, of the Law-of-the-Father. Women can only find freedom from this gaze by going beyond, below the surface of the mirrors where there is oxymoronic or multiplistic vision, or ....parody which subvers logical structures in the name of wholeness and multiplicity."<sup>71</sup> No sexual union, no rape is needed to find wholeness. Instead, shattering the mirrors of the castle, of the Father's house and going behind the broken glass to present woman's authentic self, is the way to a full identity. This is where "la petite morte" resides, "cette soeur" who, not without sacrifice, has passed through to "l'envers de ce miroir limpide" (P, 47, 48). This "envers du monde", is outside the House. Hélène Cixous suggests it is the place where "women return from afar, from always: from 'without', from beneath where witches are kept alive; from below from beyond 'culture'; from their childhood". It is the place to which women must return to escape being frozen by man's gaze. Little "girls and their 'ill-mannered' bodies imured, well-preserved, intact unto themselves, in the mirror. Frigidified. But are they ever seething underneath!"<sup>72</sup>

"La petite morte", at first "Comme un arbre de fougère plein de gel" (v.4), begins to defrost; bit by bit she looses her rigidity, "ses jupes mousseuses/D'où rayonne une étrange nuit laiteuse" (v.6,7) offer suppleness, softness, mouvement to the curious "nous" "à l'intérieur" (v.8) of the House. What was frozen, now "Se baigne bleue sous la lune" (v.19). The colour and rhythmic motion of this now living creature replace the static deadness of the frozen past. As if she had been buried alive like the unnamed women in Kamouraska, life overcomes death as she emits "son odeur captieuse" (v.20). Mouvement, odours, the senses come alive. 'Seething underneath', the dead awaken; little girls encapsulated in a frozen shell writhe like butterflies about to break free, cracking their encasement. And, what they leave behind are dead corpses, not only their own, but those of the Kings.

In "L'Envers du Monde" (P, 52, 53), the "nous", these "filles bleues de l'été" are tired, "Désertées de force"(v.4), "Dévorées de soleil/Et de sourires à fleur de peau." (v.6,7) Their lives have been slow "pas/De patience et d'habitude" (v.16,17) which have finally taken their toll. Their lovers, or the past, no longer interest them; having carried the burden of the past, they feel the weight of their oppression in male human form:

Nous tenons d'étranges lourdes têtes d'amants  
Qui ne sont plus à nous

Pèsent et meurent entre nos doigts innocents.

(v.20-22)

The weight of the low vowels in "pèsent" and "meurent", of the repeated nasals in "tenons", "étranges", "amants", "sont", "entre" and "innocents", and of the liquid /r/ and /l/, is overwhelming. And yet,

La voix de l'oiseau

Hors de son coeur et de ses ailes rangées

ailleurs

Cherche éperdument la porte de la mémoire

Pour vivre encore un petit souffle de temps.

(v.23-26)

The bird has been the companion of the heroine throughout her wanderings, suffering her pain, searching out her new destinations, crying out, voicing its complaint when she was not able. Here again, the bird comes not only to the heroine's rescue, but to all women. Muted, tired, this "nous", though finding comfort in their numbers, are unable to look for the door of memory which will bring them to their ancestresses. The voice of the bird, the only part of its body which has not been wounded, fragmented, searches out this door. The last hope to find rebirth, new sight, true Maternal nourishment from the original womb, comes from this isolated, small voice. And with this hope comes action from one of the "nous". The first step out of habit, away from the now "étranges lourdes têtes d'amant", is to decide to act:

L'une de nous se décide  
Et doucement approche la terre de son oreille  
Comme une boîte scellée toute sonore  
                                d'insectes prisonniers  
Elle dit: "La prairie est envahie de bruit  
  
Aucun arbre de parole n'y pousse ses racines  
                                silencieuses  
Au coeur noir de la nuit.  
C'est ici l'envers du monde  
Qui donc nous a chassées de ce côté?"  
  (v.27-34)

In this stanza, the lines flow syntactically smoothly which emphasizes a relative calmness; the girls are not yet aware of what they have discovered. There are two sections, the first of which is not defined by any punctuation (after "prisonniers"). The first three lines introduce the individual, as opposed to the "nous", who takes the step to search into the earth, cautiously approaches her ear to the earth, as one would to a belly full of child. She listens to the burblings, the rustlings below the surface, noises of life in the womb, of perhaps some "femme noire, vivante" (K,250). These first three lines present a paradox: life below the flat surface of the earth is teeming with life, new life, which comes from the "origine maternelle", from "une époque reculée et sauvage" (K,250). But, this newly defined womb is no longer the womb where "sons" of the "Father" have been reproduced; Nicole Brossard demands that we kill that "womb" so that henceforth production, not reproduction, becomes women's

role."73 Has the door of memory opened to the past which has defined women as prisoners within its mirrored rooms? Or, has the door opened to a past, long ago buried, and yet familiar, to a heritage where the first Mother, the original Eve, reigns? This original Mother, has been buried alive like the unidentified woman in Kamouraska. This woman, perhaps this Mother, forgotten over time, yearns for discovery, for unearthing. Her hunger for life "doit être si féroce et entière, accumulée sous la terre, depuis des siècles" (K,250). Is this place, the hidden, dark place where sisters cackle together? Madeleine Ouellette-Michalska suggests that women

s'efforcent de renouer avec une mémoire archaïque qui les remettrait en contact avec le féminin tu(e) en la Mère. Elles tentent d'inventorier des pistes, de repérer des traces, de prêter attention aux voix, mémoire et paroles perdues. La sur-impression de codes sur la réalité-femme rend difficile ce frayage des espaces souterrains"74.

This struggle between the masculine codes which have defined women and the innate desire to follow the "fil d'Ariane" back to the Mother, is underlined by a certain syntactic and semantic confusion. In "Et doucement approche la terre de son oreille/ Comme une boîte scellée toute sonore d'insectes prisonniers", there is confusion as to what the "boîte" is being compared with. Is the "boîte" buzzing with insects similar to "la terre", or to "son oreille"? Both are containers of one sort or another, both could be like a box

teeming with insects. The logical association would be with "la terre", but, the reader is not sure, and perhaps neither is the girl listening. In fact, the comparison might be between the action "doucement approche" and the subordinate adverbial clause, "Comme ....". In this case, the simile is linked to the verb and its adverb. The grammatical and semantic confusion of these two lines can only emphasize the unclear message of this "boîte...sonore". The narrator is just watching and can only guess what the girl is hearing. Perhaps the buzzing/babbling, of the "insectes prisonniers" can only be interpreted as speech if the individual enters into the earth and takes part in the conversation. The narrator and the rest of the observers stand back and observe. Only one approaches this place of different speech and can decipher three things: there is noise and life, there is no evidence of those silent, suffocating, vine-like roots of the Tree of Speech of Patriarchy, and this place is a different place from the world of Law and Order and Speech.

The girl who has approached the surface of the earth, who has taken the first step to dig below the flat, immobile, controlled layer of Patriarchy, does not use her sight, but her hearing. Sight, the gaze, loses its power outside the House. On the other hand, hearing and other senses take back their power when steps are taken to shatter the mirrored walls of the Father's abode. Here the girl hears and then speaks. What she

hears and then communicates to the others is, ironically, that "Aucun arbre de parole n'y pousse ses racines silencieuses". Here, under the surface, in the land of the Mother, the Tree of patriarchy has lost its power. Silenced in "l'envers du monde", these "arbres longs et chantants", these "grandes fontaines"(P,17) are now impotent. Their "écoulement de source"(v.13) is blocked and no longer able to purify "L'eau de ces bois sombres" (v.15). The flat surface needed for perfect reflection is rippled. Edson Rosa da Silva notes, that the movement of water creates chaos and folly, disturbs the dead and perpetuates new life<sup>75</sup>. Chaos, noise, movement in this "élément obscur et aquatique [...] s'oppose à la stabilité lumineuse et adulte de l'esprit"<sup>76</sup>. The once stable support for logic, for the Sun, for "les droits piliers" (v.17) is set into tremors by the buzzing below the earth. This nonsense, this chaos, this folly finds sisterhood in its relationship with water.

Michel Foucault makes a tie between the images of water and the fool. He states that the latter is "le Passager par excellence, c'est-à-dire le prisonnier du passage."<sup>77</sup> Prisoners caught below the calm surface of the water, these "insectes prisonniers" in "L'envers du monde", make their way through a land of folly where nothing is "immobile" or 'figé'(P,44), where there is no longer any fear that one will "heurter la paroi du silence" (v.8). Silence has been broken

and the passage to the Maternal origin has been cracked open. To follow the "fil d'Ariane", this thread of memory, back to the waters of the original womb, will be the next step for these "filles bleues de l'été". And yet, in "L'Envers du monde", as the young girl reaches out for the thread, all she finds is "ce doux ravin de gel en guise de mémoire." (v.37) Frozen, motionless, made up memory, it leads nowhere but back to womb of "la femme douloureuse", back to a past which has defined all women as Mary or as Eve.

v. Diving into the Wreck: Discovering the Womb.

To escape this past, the girl must look forward, and not "en vain derrière elle" (v.35). She must head toward the underworld, the cave, to wetness, to mud where, states Jean-Pierre Richard, "dans la sédimentation de ses boues ou dans la paix de ses eaux internes elle [la grotte] couve les germes du futur"<sup>78</sup>. It is a womb, notes Gayatri Spivak, where "pain exists within the concepts of normality and productivity"<sup>79</sup>. For male Québécois poets in the '60s and '70s, the earth was also the symbol of a fertile place, a place into which they could plant their roots, their seed. According to Pierre Maheu, it becomes their task to return to the mother, to "nous enfoncer jusqu'au bout dans nos régions obscures, de risquer

l'irraison pour retrouver nos racines, pour renouer le lien avec la terre mère."80 The earth becomes the place of security, solid base on which to build. As Jack Warwick explains, "Nommer une terre est une façon de la posséder"81. Again, women are slotted to fill male defined roles, roles which 'offer' something to men, to the system. Woman must again lie on her back and take the weight of the male. She is to be penetrated so that His roots might find nourishment and support. For Paul-Marie Lapointe, the tree is a brother whose roots must be planted in this earth82. Even Hébert stated that this tree, "l'Arbre de la Connaissance" must be "Debout" and "avoué à la lumière", that "La terre [est] à saisir et à nommer."83 To stand tall and strong on this earth which is "une femme qu'on possède et un lieu d'enracinement"84, is the first step for writers to fight their fears, to "'casser les barreaux à coups de marteau et en hurlant"'85, declares Yves Préfontaine.

Perhaps for the Québécois writers of the 60's, woman was the metaphor for "le pays" and the Tree in all its rigid, unshakable strength, the metaphorical symbol for the writer. And what went unnoticed to women writers like Hébert were the other possible connotations of these symbols: the Tree as Phallus (or Lacan's Symbolic Order) and the Earth, in a double role as that which is penetrated by the roots of this Tree- the place of masculine violation- and as that female place, the

womb, from which life of both men and women is nurtured and which offers her maternal source to women. This source of women's heritage is the place where the connecting thread, the "fil d'Ariane", the life-line that joins sisterhood together, receives its nourishment. But the patriarchal culture, remarks Annis Pratt, has been well "enclosed within our consciousness. In order to reach the world of collective imagery underlying the patriarchal overlayer we must travel along forgotten paths of memory."<sup>86</sup> We must instinctively find our way back the place from which we come, 'dive into the wreck', proposes Adrienne Rich. Our names are not in the history books, our myths have been adapted to make men the winners, but we must, suggests Rich in "Diving into the Wreck", plunge beneath the surface:

by cowardice or courage  
the one who finds our way  
back to this scene  
carrying a knife, a camera  
a book of myths  
in which  
our names do not appear.<sup>87</sup>

Pratt suggests that we retrieve those stories, those myths, those images and patterns which make up women's "collective psychic repository"<sup>88</sup> in order to deconstruct Patriarchy's 'revision' of women's original stories. These patterns, now fragmented, chopped, distorted, carry a distinguishable mark, an underlying pattern, barely visible, a "filigrane". Even

after distortion, after death, the original pattern remains. Charles Elliott, an economist and theologian, recounts the story of a man who had "died", but was revived. This man, Victor Solow, describes the wholeness he returned to, the sense of "I" which brought him a new subjectivity, a return to a familiar place long forgotten:

This new "I" was not the I that I knew, but rather a distilled essence of it, yet something vaguely familiar, something I had always known buried under a super-structure of personal fears, hopes, wants and needs. This "I" was final, unchangeable, indivisible, indestructible . . . while unique and individual as a fingerprint. "I" was, at the same time, part of some infinite, harmonious and ordered whole. I had been there before.<sup>89</sup>

We have been there before, the place of origin, the place of wholeness - the womb. Once immersed in this "eau inconnue" (P,13), in this amniotic fluid, we still rock gently in the "grands courants sous-marins" which reveal their "Code secret" (P,24). This code, this "filigrane", is to be uncovered in the feminine subtext which underlies all masculine reading of women's literature. Annette Kolodny has observed that the male reader finds this world full of strange and unfamiliar symbols. Nelly Furness furthers this notion in stating that the male reader will thus "dismiss those systems as undecipherable, meaningless, or trivial."<sup>90</sup> Meaningless, suggests Lorraine Weir, because the male reader has to see the whole picture, not the fragment, not the "half-said"<sup>91</sup>. Women's texts are written

with this stylistic strategy, "a strategy of camouflage which strives paradoxically for both concealment and revelation", a strategy of the "underground"<sup>92</sup>. The writer may or may not be aware of this strategy, and yet she has written it into her subtext. Miriam Waddington emphasizes that this underlying collective experience is a feminist experience. Even before the surging forth of the feminist movement in the 70s, every woman writing "was a feminist whether she knew it or not"<sup>93</sup>. Weir calls this strategy "private parallax" which, unlike "public parallax" -a masculine strategy of bringing everything to closure, to full-meaning-, is open-ended and yet demands a skill of reading. Weir borrows Stanley Fish's term, an "interpretive community" to describe those readers who can detect the camouflage of this subtext, and reveal new meanings to those symbols, to those "half-sayings"<sup>94</sup>.

Cracking open the "armoire secrète" (P,42) of the heroine of Le Tombeau des rois, lifting the veil of rain which covers "celle qui dort", reveals a "Séjour à demi caché/...Cour intérieure dérobée" (P,15). Her pain, her secrets lie hidden in these secret places which reveal only half of the story. To bring the embroidered margins to the centre, the wreck to the surface, the revisions of symbols and myths to Patriarchy, is to shatter mirrors, churn up the calm waters, break out of the "étanche maison", the "chambre fermée". Killing the womb of Mary, soiling "cet espace poli" (P,43), making her descent

below the roots which have sucked her dry, the heroine weaves her way back to her Mother. And searching for that "manque secret", what René Juéry calls that "structure absente qui existe hors de la structure"<sup>95</sup>, the heroine, with "Le taciturne oiseau pris à [s]es doigts", enters the "les tombeaux des rois" (P,59). According to Gloria Feman Orenstein, it is the individual who, by making this voyage, by taking a risk, is doing so "in the name of all women."<sup>96</sup>

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## Chapter Two

### Out of the Womb: a Process of Rebirth

#### 1. Light: from Penetration to Resurrection.

According to Northrop Frye, for man to enter into the "belly and bowels of the earth", to descend "into the labyrinthine and anatomical depths of a monster, where he encounters a female or dragon (or female dragon) and 'masters' it [her]", is the truest test of manhood. To penetrate this "lower, chthonic, and dreaded" space, this "cunning female"<sup>1</sup>, is both a source of pleasure and of repulsion for the hero. He rapes and then rejects, and she shudders in silence. In "Vie de Château" (P, 54), the narrator enters into the life of the heroine. No longer able to stand back and watch, she abandons the impersonal, distant description: "C'est un château d'ancêtres" in which "La seule occupation .../Consiste à se mirer" (v. 1, 6, 7). To help her friend escape, she commands this sister to throw her own reflection back at the mirrors which have been defining her. But, it is to no avail; the dead which have constructed these "miroirs polis" (v. 5), which lurk "sous le tain" (v. 12), wrap around the heroine, enter her. Even at the thought of rebellion, of confrontation, death, the past, this masculine power consumes her at his will:

Jette ton image aux fontaines dures  
Ta plus dure image sans ombre ni couleur.  
Vois, ces glaces sont profondes  
Comme des armoires  
Toujours quelque mort y habite sous le tain  
Et couvre aussitôt ton reflet  
Se colle à toi comme une algue

S'ajuste à toi, mince et nu,  
Et simule l'amour en un lent frisson amer.  
(v.8-16)

Pierre-Hervé Lemieux suggests that the repeated /c/ in "couvre", "colle" and "comme" and the combination of /g//l/ and mid-vowel /a/ in "algue" emphasize the insidious crime committed; these sounds make one "sentir toute la répugnance éprouvée comme si c'était un viol franc et net"<sup>2</sup>. The repeated /s/, /r/ and the nasals in lines 15 and 16 seem to emphasize the act of the rape; the crime is prolonged and committed with an apparently non-chalant attitude. Lemieux does not freely admit that these lines are describing a rape. His "comme si c'était un viol", a conditional clause, adds just enough colour to his analysis to raise the eyebrow of the reader. But on the other hand, it leaves enough room for him not to make a definitive, risky statement which would accuse the dead, masculine entity of his crime. For Delbert Russell, however, the dead image only possesses the subject as his object<sup>3</sup>. No rape is mentioned.

Lucille Roy is more bold than her male counterparts; she

interprets the Light as an instrument which penetrates, which "perce la chair". In the poem following "Vie de Château", Light is the source of power which destroys the body of the heroine. In the second stanza of "Rouler dans des Ravins de Fatigue" (P,55), "la pénétration de la vie intérieure par la lumière prend la forme d'un viol où la poitrine du sujet est 'crevée', son corps (cette 'cage de bouleau blanc',) rompu et les secrets de son passé 'éventrés'"4:

Vieux caveau de famille  
Eventré  
Cage de bouleau blanc  
Rompue  
Jeu de domino  
Interrompu  
Douce poitrine crevée

[. . .]

Grand cri de la lumière au-dessus de nous.  
(v.9-15, 19)

For Lemieux, the "caveau" represents a prison which is "rompu", a brokenness indicating "le terme de tout un genre de vie désœuvrée, celle de château". For him, the heroine's "poitrine" has been "crevée", not by violent penetration, but by "des dévastations antérieures [...], la rançon intime de toute cette révolte déchirante."5 The "caveau", an ancient, empty space surrounded by a fragile shell, and her "poitrine crevée", a tattered body pierced by some long-forgotten, unnamed forces, both deserve their fate, this payment for a fight they have lost. The great orgasmic cry from above

reveals the victory of the Sun. Lemieux interprets "le caveau", like "le château", as the place which holds the past, the laws, the powers which have denied French Canadians their own identity. Roy, on the other hand, has taken "caveau" and "poitrine" to be "body", woman's body which is crushed under the heavy weight of the Light "causant un état de faiblesse ou de fatigue. Toujours située au-dessus de l'être elle [la Lumière] semble tomber de très haut, telle une matière lourde qui s'abat sur la vie pour entraîner la mort"<sup>6</sup>. In "Inventaire" (P,29), Light's penetrating force enters into the hands of the heroine and empowers them to act. "Dans un réduit/ Très clair et nu" (v. 1,2) these hands, their "Lame vive et ciselée" (v.7) break smoothly into the heart of a unknown third party and seize her/his heart, this "Fruit crevé" (v.5). Roy's interpretation is that these hands, empowered by the Light,

s'insèrent dans la chair nue, pillant les secrets du coeur. Plongées à l'intérieur du corps, le 'crèvent' comme un fruit, la lumière et les mains du sujet violent conjointement le mystère de la vie, l'exposant impitoyablement au monde.<sup>7</sup>

The heroine's complicity with the Sun is somewhat out of her control. She has been seduced by the powers of this Light. Carl Jung states that celestial fire, "le père visible du monde, c'est le soleil"<sup>8</sup>. It is a Sun which has entered woman so that she too carries her own "soleil intérieur" which is "l'image du dieu". Jung claims that this penetration into the female

brings "la totalité transcendante, le soi."<sup>9</sup> As for Lacan, wholeness of self comes only through union of the male and female, a union in which the masculine entity enters, at his whim, planting his seed into the feminine. The Sun "est force génératrice, puissance de renouvellement et de vie"<sup>10</sup>, according to Maurice Emond. And yet this phallic power is destructive; it burns the earth "comme une forge"(P,43), and chars the hands of a woman (P,20).

In "Un Bruit de Soie" (P,57), the sun is the "éclat de midi"(v.3) qui "empêche de voir"(v.7). It eradicates all in the path of its rays, of its gaze:

L'éclat de midi efface ta forme devant moi  
Tu trembles et luis comme un miroir  
Tu m'offres le soleil à boire  
A meme ton visage absent.

Trop de lumière empêche de voir;  
                  l'un et l'autre torche blanche,  
                                  grand vide de midi  
Se chercher à travers le feu et l'eau  
                  fumée.

Les espèces du monde sont réduites à deux  
                                  (v.3-12)

Roy notes that the absent face

est métonymique ici de la perte totale de l'être.  
L'amant disparaît intégralement sous l'éclat du  
jour, car le 'miroir' qui le définit aux yeux du  
sujet n'existe qu'en fonction de ce qu'il reflète:  
la lumière elle-même.<sup>11</sup>

Here man and woman, "l'un et l'autre torche blanche", reflecting only the Light of the Su(o)n, devoid of identity, make their way, their "bras étendus" (v.15). The image of these "Serviteurs avides et étonnés"(v.16), blinded by God's wrath, is not dissimilar to that of Milton's Eve and Adam, who ashamed, "hand in hand, with wandering steps and slow,/Through Eden took their solitary way." (Milton's Paradise Lost, Book 12) And yet, it is the woman, at the end of this penultimate poem in Tombeau, who leads the way towards liberty. Taking responsibility for her lover, her sisters, those "filles bleues de l'été" "Désertées de force" and "Dévorées de soleil" (P,52), the speaker finds herself "Roulée dans ma rage" (P,56). She is no longer willing to plant her hands "au jardin" (P,49), to take "mes yeux/Dans mes mains/Comme des pierres d'eau/Et...[danser]/Les gestes des fous/Autour de mes larmes/En guise de fête." (P,36); no more pretending, no more offering "Les doigts sans aucun désir" (P, 38), or "la croix tremblante de mes bras étendus" (P,39). No longer she "fait miroiter ses mains comme des rayons", no longer "Les jours sur ses mains/L'occupent et la captivent." (P,21) Instead her hands act as subjects in "Un Bruit de Soie". As if they have a will of their own, the speaker's hands forcefully cut through the Light to reveal the remaining splinter of soothing shade, of Night, of the Womb:

Mes mains écartent le jour comme un rideau  
L'ombre d'un seul arbre étale la nuit à nos pieds

Et découvre cette calme immobile distance  
Entre tes doigts de sable et mes paumes toutes  
fleuries. (v.24-27)

Behind this foil of Light, "l'envers de ce miroir limpide/Où  
cette soeur que nous avons/Se baigne bleue sous la lune"  
(P,48), exists a shadow. Ironically, it is in the darkened  
light of this "ombre" that the speaker becomes aware, not only  
of the distance between his dislocated body and hers, but also  
of her newly blossomed power. His "doigts de sable" could  
easily crumble into a useless pile of dust, whereas her "paumes  
toutes fleuries", no longer sterile, abound with life and  
potential life-giving. She is finally the source of production  
of new seeds and not of reproduction or reflection of the Sun's  
light. These hands were once dislocated and useless, as Gérard  
Bessette suggests, "comme un mécanisme mal monté, mal joint,  
enclin à la désagrégation: dont les différents organes  
n'obéissent pas à une volonté, à une impulsion centrale"<sup>12</sup>.  
Now his fingers of sand still are dislocated and dependant on  
her regenerative powers for resurrection.

11. Towards the Mother: an Act of 'Re-telling'.

The powerful rays of the Sun have forced the speaker finally  
to fight back. Overcome, she slices open the curtain which

separates her from "l'Origine maternelle", Eve. In "Eve" in Mystère de la parole, (P,101-102), the narrator calls desperately to her, this "ventre premier"(v.14) asking her remember her daughters over the ages, these "filles dernière-nées, ... celles qui sont sans nom ni histoire, ... fracassées entre deux très grandes pierres". (v.19-21) This search for that lost voice, the need to find her own voice, to speak the truth, and her frustration in the ever loud silence which emanates from the depths, are reiterated in the prelude of Joy Kogawa's Obasan:

The speech that frees comes forth from the amniotic deep. To attend its voice, [...] is to embrace its absence. [...] The word is stone. [...] Unless the stone bursts with telling, unless the seed flowers with speech, there is in my life no living word... If I could follow the stream down and down to the hidden voice, would I come at last to the freeing word? I ask the night sky but the silence is steadfast. There is no reply.<sup>13</sup>

The heroine in "Chambre de bois" (P, 42-43), "cernée de bois ancien" (v.36) where there is "ni serrure ni clef" (v. 35), attempts to search out this hidden voice. Her strong statement, "Je vais coudre ma robe avec ce fil perdu." (v.22), reveals a decision she has made despite her imprisonment. The high vowels, /i/, /e/, the repeated stops, /k/, /d/, /b/, /p/, the use of the future tense, all indicate an imminent action, or at least, intent to search out the "hidden voice". Eve, first Mother, is the source of this "fil d'Ariane". It is Her

"regard sans prunelle" (P,100-102), not His, the Father's, which will catch the attention of her wandering community and it is this "laine rude" which will draw them back to her breast. And it is during the coming home, during the transgression which can only take place, as Maroussia Ahmed suggests, "Hors du cercle" (as in the "cabane" in Enfants, or in the "tombeau"), that the 'telling' begins to happen<sup>14</sup>.

Jan Montefiore speaks of the necessity to break the silence, by telling stories from one's own experience, authentic stories. Montefiore quotes Liz Lochhead's "The Storyteller"<sup>15</sup>:

No one could say the stories were useless  
for as the tongues clacked  
five or forty fingers stitched  
corn was grated from the husk  
patchwork was pieced  
or the darning done.

. . . . .

To tell the stories was her work.  
It was like spinning  
gathering thin air to the singlest strongest  
thread. Night in  
she'd have us waiting held/  
breath, for the ending we knew by heart.

To gather, in "the singlest strongest thread", this "laine rude", "fil perdu" (P,43), stories whose ending women know by heart, is a risk. Women have been for centuries telling their stories in secret ways so that only women could read, could understand. Their "tongues clacked" in nonsense, in a "code

secret" (E,24), their fingers embroidered in obscure patterns. These images recur in the poetry of Anne Hébert as they do in other women poets.

Margaret Atwood supposes that women writers, throughout the centuries, have been rewriting the stories of their ancestresses, of Eve, Mary, the Oracles, the Witches, the Medusas, the Goddesses, and retelling the episodes of their burnings and rapes, of their sequestered and indecent lifestyles. Their multiple depictions of women, other than of the Solitary Weeper, reveal the hidden stories<sup>16</sup>. Male writers have been representing women as either this passive Virgin Weeper, fruitful Mother, or devilish Whore, who might have been raped and then slain as a monster, or at least muted so as not to tell the Truth. Annis Pratt retells the story of the rape of Philomela by her brother-in-law Tereus who, after the crime, cuts out her tongue to silence her. And day after day Philomela sits quietly, patiently embroidering her story, the Truth. It is only her sister Procne who is able to decipher that truth, and in revenge, she kills their infant son and feeds him to her husband<sup>17</sup>. A woman is raped, silenced and he would be blameless, were it not for the victim's "telling" of her story, patiently waiting in her pain, and for another woman, a sister, being able to interpret the Truth concealed in the pretty embroidery. It has been a Truth, which has been masked over, mutilated, by women who have been telling a

'slanted' version, and by men, who have painted masks of gold over absent faces "à petits traits précis" (P, 59).

In "Le Tombeau des rois" (P,59-61), the heroine, this "fille maigre", so virginal, is raped seven times. The kings of the past find in her some "source fraternelle du mal" which attracts them to her and gives them an excuse to rape her. This "mal" is the impurity, the Whore which hides even below the shiny bones, scratched clean of any impure flesh. Every woman is born of Eve, and is a temptress. Jennifer Waelti-Walters makes the analogy of the princess whose double, the witch, lurks in her shadow<sup>18</sup>. The alternative, states Waelti-Walters, is "Cette femme qui coud/Au pied de l'arbre" (P,20), silenced by Patriarchy<sup>19</sup>, but beginning to sew stories, to chatter, to ask questions that witches might ask - to speak what has been forbidden<sup>20</sup>. And for that, the kings have found an excuse to rape her seven times. Because the heroine has redefined the cave, the tomb, as her womb, not as a void, a hole, a zero, a place of reproduction of more Sons, but as a source of woman's power, of production, of sisterhood, she can enter this tomb of the kings with increasing sureness<sup>21</sup>. By shattering this place constructed by Patriarchy, by the Law-of-the-Father, by the Kings, the heroine can enter into a new place, women's place, a place of transgression, the Womb. And her guide is the bird. "Cette espèce de roi/Minuscule et naïf" (P,19) having accompanied the heroine, has been "pris.../Dans

leurs filets mouillés" (v.2,3). This frail, Christ-like, silent figure, the little bird, appears here and there throughout Le Tombeau des rois in many roles: as a guide, a support, a voice, a companion for the heroine on, what Annis Pratt refers to as, a "blind, mapless quest down into the forgotten 'wreck'"<sup>22</sup>.

### 111. The Bird: the Liberating Agent

Standing at the entrance of the cave, the heroine can begin her journey, her bird on her fist:

Le taciturne oiseau pris à mes doigts  
Lampe gonflée de vin et de sang,  
Je descends  
Vers les tombeaux des rois  
Étonnée  
A peine née. (P, 59 v.3-8)

Pratt maintains that for women poets, the journey is a highly significant event in the search for identity. They are "setting forth on quests down into the previously 'dark' and 'horrific' centres of their psyches toward something that they want for themselves rather than as an offering to others, on a quest of solitary self-affirmation."<sup>23</sup> It is a journey that "la petite morte" had to travel alone so that she could break through to "l'envers de ce miroir limpide"(P,48). Gilles

Marcotte states that this other side, deep in the depths of the tomb, is the "réel" that the heroine must face "au risque de mort" which is "l'aboutissement de son expérience de la solitude. [...] Le poète se livre au réel, se livre à la mort comme une femme se livre à son amant, sacrifiant sa chair au jeu terrible de l'absence"<sup>24</sup>. And it is this bird, "le coeur même de l'existence" which leads the heroine, the poet to liberation. Marcotte's patriarchal interpretation of the poet giving herself to the dead as she would to her lover, is the only intimation he offers of a sexual encounter in the poem. In contrast, Denis Bouchard notes that the journey will help this "enfant curieuse [...] à dépasser à la fois le sentiment de culpabilité et celui d'une virginité indécente. [...] La femme comme objet se perd dans la femme insaisissable. Au lieu de se donner, elle tue."<sup>25</sup> Gabrielle Pascal admits the Hébertian heroine's need to succumb "à la tentation du meurtre"<sup>26</sup>. In order to survive, she must commit a crime. And yet, "Le Tombeau des rois" seems to be not just about a journey taken by a woman in order to find her liberation, her identity. It is also about that minuscule, modest, suffering bird who has accompanied her throughout her journey thus far. Finally named as "un faucon", he becomes her beacon. Ironically, it is "un faucon aveugle" (v.2), who is to show her the way into the darkness; ironic because the blind rarely do the leading of the sighted, and ironic because sight in the darkness is useless.

In "Eurydice", Rachel Blaü DuPlessis asks, "Where is the bird?" However, "fallen from flying"<sup>27</sup>, caught in a fisherman's net, or dead "Dans un bocage inconnu" (P,25, v.2), this bird still cries out trying to lead the heroine towards him in his secret place (v.12-16). This "cri rauque/D'oiseaux imaginaires" (P,56,v.11,12) haunts her childhood memory, the memory of a time before "L'amour [était] change en sel" (v.7), a time when her ancestresses, those "belles mortes" (v.6) were not yet buried and forgotten. According to Jean-Louis Major, the bird's "cri rauque" is emitted from some "monde intérieur"; it is a cry perhaps from these ancestresses buried deep below the surface. And it is perhaps this "coeur-oiseau [qui] est celui du locuteur féminin"<sup>28</sup>, who has taken the form of the lost mothers. It is a cry which aids "les filles bleues de l'été" (P,52,53) to find "la porte de la mémoire", the door to this "envers du monde" where murmur those ancient voices:

La voix de l'oiseau  
 Hors de son coeur et de ses ailes rangées ailleurs  
 Cherche éperdument la porte de la mémoire  
 Pour vivre encore un petit souffle de temps.  
(v.23,26)

As the bird is fragmented, its voice becomes the whole entity in itself. This body part becomes the crucial factor in setting in motion actions which will lead to new wholeness. One of the girls in "L'Envers du monde", follows the clue laid by the bird's voice. "L'une de nous se décide/Et doucement

approche la terre de son oreille" (v.27,28). The young girl takes action to seek out for herself and for her sisters, the door which will lead them to their ancestresses, to their Mother.

In "Le Tombeau des rois", the whole bird becomes a "Lampe gonflée de vin et de sang" (v.4). Lemieux asserts that the bird, swollen with light and desire, leads the heroine "aux racines mêmes de son psychisme, où le mal originel loge"<sup>29</sup>. To Lemieux, the heroine's struggle is to confront this "mal originel", an evil which, personified, might be named Eve. Defined as evil, this original Mother who lurks deep in the hearts, minds and histories of women and men, calls out from a deep, secret place. This monster of the night holds tight to a cord, a "fil d'Ariane", which links her to her daughters and great grand-daughters. According to Emond, "l'image de la sorcière est puissance féminine, puissance magique, puissance du mal et anti-pouvoir."<sup>30</sup> Women have taken on the darkness of this Mother. The young girl has been stained black; she is "une fleur vénéneuse absolue de la nuit"(ES, p.107), like her mother, her grand-mother and even "son arrière-grand-mère. Et son arrière-arrière-grand-mère" (ES,180). And perhaps entering deeply into her psyche, the womb which has been disguised as a holy tomb, a temple of Kings, the heroine will be able to shed the "algue" of Patriarchy. Jovette Marchessault redefines this "caverne", this "grotte", this "gouffre" as "un utérus inondé

d'eau lacrymale."<sup>31</sup> It is the place where women find speech, where, in "Eve" of "Mystère de la parole", "fils et ... époux pourrissent pêle-mêle entre [leurs] cuisses" (P, 101). This is the power of Eve, the "Mère aveugle", the "Source de larmes et du cri" who, holding the Truth, is the only one to share with her daughters Her story, their story. She is the only one able to explain "la naissance et la mort et tout le voyage hardi entre deux barbares ténèbres, pôles du monde" (P, 101). And her "frère", this "amant", with his "doigts de sable" (P, 58) which are sterile and dry, and his heart a "Fruit crevé", his face "rongé" and "jeté" (P, 30), accompanies her back "au sein maternel."

Pierre Kuntsmann offers a Jungian interpretation of the descent into interior space. It is "une régression de la libido" to the Mother, at which point there is a "seconde naissance"<sup>32</sup>. The libido, desire, leads both men and women below the surface, where the masculine meets the feminine. For the heroine, the masculine entity, appears as a stranger who seems to accompany her, to lead her. She questions in "La Chambre fermée" (P, 39-41) who this person could be. An unidentified masculine being has led her to this prison and the same one or another has been following behind, and the same or another has been complicit in this adventure. The heroine finds no answers to her questions. She has been blinded by some mysterious force which obscures the identity of these men.

Perhaps he or they are this force. Perhaps he or they are not captors, but friends. Her confusion is obvious, conveyed by the repeated interrogations, and by the unspecific pronouns and verb phrases "quelqu'un", "Il y a", "quel ami", "quelle nuit":

Qui donc m'a conduite ici?  
Il y a certainement quelqu'un  
Qui a soufflé sur mes pas.  
Quand est-ce que cela s'est fait?  
Avec la complicité de quel ami tranquille?  
Le consentement profond de quelle nuit longue?  
(v. 1-6)

Kuntsmann's asserts that this unidentified male "personnifie l'animus, l'envers de la personnalité féminine, les traits masculins qu'elle portait en soi dans son état de bisexualité primitif, qu'elle a bannis ou plutôt enfouis en son tréfonds"<sup>33</sup>. In order for women to find authenticity, they must confront this animus, the male reality, whether he is part of their psyche or of the outside world. In her article on the Canadian female hero, Lorraine Mullen states that the heroine must make "decisions and influence events, evinc[ing] characteristics usually considered masculine, such as courage, aggression and ambition" in order to overcome the masculine forces of the Kings and then to begin the restructuring of her society<sup>34</sup>. Or her journey will take her to the depths; she "must grow down"<sup>35</sup>, not to incorporate male power, masculine characteristics, but to find a "lost, archaic world of female power where memory and vision coalesce"<sup>36</sup>.

In her introduction to Gloria Feman Orenstein's article on the "New Feminist Shaman", Barbara Godard remarks on "la conscience élevée de la féministe contemporaine qui reprend contact avec ses aïeules disparues" so that she might find "sacred knowledge"<sup>37</sup>. Orenstein refers to Mircea Eliade's Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy to look at the structures of shamanism, that of a "journey to the Otherworld [which is] undertaken, during which a dialogue with tribal ancestors takes place"<sup>38</sup>. The result of such a journey is "a prophetic vision" of some major transformation, but not without a "severe dismemberment"<sup>39</sup>. The role of the feminist shaman is to exorcise the "Judaean-Christian patriarchal creation myth and all of its subsequent history" that have masked over the "matriarchal space-time of ecstasy"<sup>40</sup>. It is this "masque d'or sur ma face absente", these "fleurs violettes en guise de prunelle" which have painted over "à petits traits précis" (P,60) the "repressed female soul [...] that must be brought back to life", back to "an exstatic existence"<sup>41</sup>. To move, to "go down", to shake off the "immobile désir des gisants" (P,60) that paralyzes, freezes, sterilizes, is to shatter a perfect, ordered space where,

Les morts me visitent  
Le monde est en ordre  
Les morts dessous  
Les vivants dessus.

Les morts m'ennuient  
Les vivants me tuent. (P,36)

The voyage of the shaman puts this order off kilter. But, it is the "mythical bird" which guides the heroine through the life and death process. The shaman might take on animal characteristics and behavior. She "becomes an animal-spirit, and 'speaks', sings, or flies like the animals and birds"<sup>42</sup>.

Frank Scott, in his dialogue with Hébert on his translation of "Le Tombeau des rois", asserts that "prunelles crevées" is a violent image of mutilation.<sup>43</sup> And yet, Scott also suggests that Hébert "soulignait [...] une très exacte évocation de la fauconnerie: l'oiseau, dont on a crevé les yeux pour qu'il ne s'envole pas, et dont on se sert pour attirer d'autres proies."<sup>44</sup> Some unidentified being has mutilated the eyes of the "Lampe gonflée", perhaps afraid that this sight might lead, as Emond suggests, to "une prise de possession et une domination."<sup>45</sup> The bird has lost its eyes in trying to "appréhender le regard, [et...] les yeux [...] disparaissent."<sup>46</sup> Blinded and under the gaze of an unidentified stranger, the Hébertian hero or heroine is "réduit [e ...] au rang d'objet, [le regard] le [la] dépossède, l'humilie; la présence de ce regard inspire la honte et la culpabilité"<sup>47</sup>. The bird, seemingly a threat to the "gisants", suffers the direct mutilation. And yet the heroine has "des yeux d'enfant/Qui ne sont pas à moi." (P,43) Her sight is blurred by her "prunelles liquides" (P,34). And "l'oeil du Père, [...] l'oeil du roi, l'oeil de Dieu"<sup>48</sup>, this "lumière

mystérieuse, [...] lumière implacable et intolérable qui s'immobilise"<sup>49</sup> has frozen the heroine, like all women in a skeletal body.

In "De Plus en Plus Etroit" (P,44), "cette femme" is frozen by the "lente froide respiration immobile" of "cet homme de sel". He corners her, and from behind breathes his "Souffle glacé sur sa nuque". The power of his "regard" controls her from behind; she is the object of his desire, she is empty. He fills her with his gaze, defines her, and she, frozen, frightened to crack the wall which contains her, "ne bouge/De tout le jour/De peur de heurter la paroi du silence derrière elle" (6-8). She is there without being, without speaking, and her only escape, futile as it is, is to stare out the window where "Elle regarde passer des équipages amers" (v.5), or to sew, "point à point,/L'humilité du monde" ( P,20.v.22-23). Denise Boucher quotes words from Marie Noël which seem to summarize woman's state. These words and her mother's tears led her to break her silence:

Quand il est entré  
Dans mon logis clos  
J'ourlais un drap lourd  
Près de la fenêtre  
L'hiver dans les doigts  
L'ombre sur le dos  
Sais-je depuis quand  
J'étais là sans être  
Et je cousais je cousais je cousais<sup>50</sup>.

The woman "Au pied de l'arbre/Sous le coup de midi" (P,20, v. 19-20), struck by the power of the Sun, by the Father, by the Law, is the Mother described by Boucher. And she is the Mother that Marchessault describes as the one who "tricote, [et] se courbe de plus en plus. Ma mère tricote en se courbant parce que tout le reste se tient debout sur son dos"<sup>51</sup>.

According to Adrienne Rich, the Mother in patriarchy, defined by the Sun, Aten, a monotheistic deity<sup>52</sup>, is this "avid cave; between her legs snakes, swamp-grass, or teeth; on her lap a helpless infant or a martyred son"<sup>53</sup>. This cave, her vagina, this "creux de cet espace grave/Où veillent les droits piliers" (P,18), is inviting until the snakes, the "insectes prisonniers" invade the dark, deep space, the "coeur noir de la nuit" where soon "Aucun arbre de parole n'y pousse [plus] ses racines". And in her lap, this Mother holds "d'étranges lourdes têtes d'amants/Qui ne sont plus à nous/ [Qui] Pèsent et meurent entre nos doigts innocents." (P,53) The Mother as comforter, as receptacle, as monster, "'chthonic' or tellurian presence"<sup>54</sup> is lurking deep below the surface. She is the dragon, the Medusa "who has to be possessed, reduced, controlled, lest she swallow him back into her dark caves, or stare him into stone."<sup>55</sup> In Of Woman Born, Adrienne Rich looks beyond these definitions of the Mother, back to the prepatriarchal time when the cave was her internal body, when earth and womb were one, where water did not drown, but gave

life<sup>56</sup>, where menstrual blood was not woman's foul sewage, but nourishment, where breasts were not objects of desire, but subjects in the life-giving process. Far from this reality, Hébert's heroine sees herself as a "Vieux caveau de famille/Eventré/Cage de bouleau blanc/Rompue/...Douce poitrine crevée" (p,55). She is hardly the ancient Mother, whose menstrual blood and milk nurture and transform<sup>57</sup>. She is hardly the blossoming Tree of Prepatriarchy, whose nourishment comes from this vessel of the earth, the female body<sup>58</sup>. Rich stresses that women in Patriarchal times still are linked to the great Goddess, who is the spider spinning the thread from her own body, "Ariadne providing the clue to the labyrinth [...] or old spinning-women who cut the thread of life or spin it further"<sup>59</sup>. Women of the present must grab that thread and follow it, must continue sewing stories so that what was can begin to be again; that stories on the margins can come to the centre and be seen in new light; that, as Millett suggests, "the experience of all women everywhere becomes, in a sense, our communal property, a heritage we bestow upon each other, the knowledge of what it has meant to be female"<sup>60</sup>.

Ellen Moers looks at the bird metaphor as woman's reality. The bird is a tortured, caged victim, a crucified Christ<sup>61</sup> like "Cette enfant [...] liée par la cheville/Pareille à une esclave fascinée" (p,59). Caught in the cage of Patriarchy, this bird has become the metaphorical -and for Hébert, the metonymical-

sign of women. The spinster in Browning's "Aurora Leigh" had lived

A sort of cage-bird life, born in a cage,  
Accounting that to leap from perch to perch  
Was act and joy enough for any bird.  
Dear heaven, how silly are the things that live  
In thickets, and eat berries!  
I alas,  
A wild bird scarcely fledged, was brought to her cage,  
And she was there to meet me. Very kind.  
Bring the clean water, give out the fresh seed.<sup>62</sup>

The bird is a symbol of women caught in man's world, where "toutes femmes, tant que nous sommes, [ne sont] jamais prêtres, mais victimes sur l'autel, avec le Christ, encadrées, conseillées, dirigées par nos supérieur généraux, évêques et cardinaux" (ES, 55). This "faucon aveugle" is a woman caged, as was the woman who, accused of killing her husband in 1763, was not only hanged, but literally exposed in an iron cage at Lévis. Mary Jean Green recounts that the legend, echoed in Kamouraska, reveals the "envers" of the evil witch<sup>63</sup>. Wild, as the "wild bird scarcely fledged" in Browning, La Corriveau still lives in her death; attached to the shoulders of travellers, her ghost dances with the spirits of the past, with the spirits of her murdered Ancestresses. And finally she is free, through death, to return to her "virgin" state, not as "une fille maigre", but, as Rich explains, as was her Moon Mother virgin, this "woman who belongs to herself", this "she-who-will-not-have-a-husband"<sup>64</sup>.

The maiden Daphne did not will a husband, despite her father's desires, as well as her suitor's, Apollo. According to Thomas Bulfinch, she wanted to remain unmarried like the Moon Goddess Diana<sup>65</sup>. And still Apollo pursued her "like a hound pusuing a hare, with open jaws ready to seize[...] So flew the god and the virgin -he on the wings of love [and desire], and she on those of fear." Bulfinch recounts the pursuit and Daphne's escape; "Peneus", her father the river god, has pity, and turns her into a tree:

a stiffness seized all her limbs; her bosom began to be enclosed in a tender bark; her hair became leaves; her arms became branches; her foot stuck fast in the ground, as a root; her face became a tree-top, retaining nothing of its former self but its beauty.<sup>66</sup>

Transformed into something that she is not, into an "arbre/En ses feuilles/Et dessin figé du vent/Sur les feuilles" (P,19), frozen and hard, she is not the original Tree which can nurture and give life. The mother, Dryope, who had made the mistake of picking from the lotus plant -this plant being the nymph Lotus transformed- also becomes a tree at the whim of the male nymph. "In anguish she attempted to tear her hair, but found her hands filled with leaves. The infant felt his mother's bosom begin to harden, and the milk cease to flow"<sup>67</sup>. Emptied of her identity as Mother, frozen under the bark, all she can do is emit a faint "cri rauque" (P,56). Leaving one last instruction for her children, one last fine thread which will carry through to

future generations, like the weak, blinded bird, she  
"Respire/Et se plaint étrangement" (P,61). Only her children  
and her children's children can save her by remembering, by  
repeating, "My mother lies hid under this bark."(ibid.)

Ancestresses, mothers crying out beneath the bark, from  
behind the bars, emit cries of woe. Daphne, no longer free,  
now is remembered as Apollo's personal symbol -Mother of Trees-  
preserver of life; she "becomes a male god", as Rich claims<sup>68</sup>  
Kore or Persephone, raped and possessed by Pluto, becomes the  
property of the king of the Underworld, and becomes a mother of  
that place, bearing a son. Rich notes that there is still  
birth from death, despite the stifling grasp of Pluto<sup>69</sup>, this  
"étau des os" (P,61). But, Rich emphasizes, it is her mother,  
Demeter, who goes on a great journey, finds her daughter, makes  
a deal with the gods, with Death, so that Persephone might  
resurface from her darkness. Rising from the dark, like the  
bird, Persephone peers out from "Ses prunelles crevées" and  
returns to the light, to the "matin" (P,61). And yet, notes  
Bulfinch, Persephone will have total freedom only if she has  
not yet eaten anything of the Underworld:

but, alas! the maiden had taken a pomegranate  
which Pluto offered her, and had sucked the sweet  
pulp from a few of the seeds. This was enough to  
prevent her complete release; but a compromise was  
made, by which she was to pass half the time with  
her mother, and the rest with her husband Pluto.<sup>70</sup>

The compromise in "Le Tombeau des rois" is similar to that in the Greek myth; the heroine has had to pay the price for having eaten of the forbidden fruit. She has carried with her the sin of her Mother Eve. She has paid the consequences; followed, threatened, penetrated, she has undergone the sacrifice:

Ce n'est que la profondeur de la mort qui  
persiste,  
Simulant le dernier tourment  
Cherchant son apaisement  
Et son éternité  
En un cliquetis léger de bracelets  
Cercles vains jeux d'ailleurs  
Autour de la chair sacrifiée. (61)

Sacrifice to the "King of the Underworld", "propitiating the Lord of the Dead", Orenstein asserts, is part of the shaman's ecstatic journey. In order "to commune with the spirits of the ancestors in the Otherworld" she must face the demons of the dead and "perform a rite of exorcism"<sup>71</sup>. And this rite, reiterates Emond, is "un rite initiatique qui permet le passage de la mort à la vie, d'une nuit tragique à l'aube d'un jour nouveau"<sup>72</sup>. These rites which "comportent toujours des mutilations, des sacrifices, des morts, symbolique ou réelles, avant le triomphe final de la renaissance ou de la résurrection."<sup>73</sup> Pascal notes that Hébertian heroines, after having undergone

un désordre intérieur qui se traduit par le désespoir, des malaises physiques et même

psychiques, [...] ces différentes manifestations d'une révolte larvée marquent un tournant dans l'intrigue. Elles provoquent en effet une prise de conscience qui devient prise de pouvoir. Et le personnage féminin apparaît sous un jour nouveau.<sup>74</sup>

And yet the light, the morning is only a "reflet d'aube". Resurrection comes after death, but it is not yet. At the end of "Le Tombeau des rois", there are the beginnings of a revolt which is "assimilée à une transgression et identifiée à la mort". But, notes Pascal, it still seems a "vaine rébellion de l'héroïne qui se répète à l'infini"<sup>75</sup>. Searching desperately for liberation, in her folly, the heroine succumbs to all temptations, even that of "auto-destruction."<sup>76</sup> There is no liberation yet. Philippe Haeck interprets the flight of the bird, the bird itself in its fatigue, as the heroine caught in the Father's House. In "Rouler dans des ravins de fatigue" (P, 55), this "oiseau fou", caught in the "Vieux caveau de famille/éventré", exhibits feminine characteristics:

On sait que la psychanalyse est née de l'examen des femmes hystériques, des folles. Un oiseau se débat dans le vieux caveau de la famille [ce qui porte la malchance ou la mort], il vole, vole, l'air se fait rare, l'oiseau est fatigué, il ne sortira pas de la famille: soumis au père, au mari, au fils, c'est toujours l'air lourd de la famille. Quelle fièvre est réservée à celle qui veut éventrer la famille? Je commence à aimer l'haleine des femmes, j'y reconnais des histoires anciennes qui expliquent l'histoire moderne.<sup>77</sup>

Haeck sees that "la femme" "cherche éperdument dans son

histoire"<sup>78</sup>, for her roots. The linking of the present and the past, is still in process; like a birth not yet complete, there is pain and the passage is difficult. But the actual birth is stimulated by "la voix féminine [,ce] cri rauque, rauque parce qu'il remonte difficilement et qu'il remonte de si loin, de l'enfance"<sup>79</sup>. From the heroine to the bird's cry, to the "oiseau mort/Nul passage/Nul secours" (p.25) seems to open . And yet the bird has taken flight to accompany the heroine. According to Haeck, "Le vol des oiseaux imaginaires est peut-être la plus belle chose qui puisse nous arriver, une chose propre à nous secouer, à nous faire entendre des voix" (*ibid.*).

The bird is the transforming, liberating agent in Le Tombeau des rois. Searching for "la porte de la mémoire", "La voix de l'oiseau" quietly shows the way to "l'envers du monde" to the young girls. One of them puts her ear to the ground and listens to the mouvement beneath the earth. She cannot see, nor can the bird. Sight is not their privilege, but they can hear, as if for the first time, the babble of the "insectes prisonniers" below. Edmond Carpenter claims that where the "eye focuses, pinpoints, abstracts, locating each object in physical space, against a background [,] the ear [...] favours sound from any direction."<sup>80</sup> The space of the kings is visual. It is space which contains the thing. The heroine's space has been defined by the kings. But, it is the bird, with its soft complaint, it's pained cry, its voice, which opens her ears as

if for the first time. This auditory space is "a sphere without fixed boundaries, space made by the thing itself [...space which is] always in flux, creating its own dimensions, moment to moment."(*ibid.*) What one hears is not coherent speech, but muffled noises: "un bruit de soie" (57), "Fracas d'ivoire à mi-voix" (55), "le bruissement des peupliers/Qui font un chant liquide" (25) or this "coeur" which emits a "Rythme sourd" -a new "silence" (24) from this "voix intérieure" (26). It is silence and incoherent rumblings at once. Motionless and fluid at the same time, it is not language which has limits, or is defined, but is beyond language, moving toward a different "time". In Another Time, Eli Mandel suggests that beyond language there is "a rhythmic source in sound [...] that translates itself into music, not words. We reach toward these in the most intense and perhaps the most private moments of our experience."<sup>81</sup> But Mandel also says that there is "something queer[...] beyond articulation [which] is not to be trusted. Its unseen face may be that of a god, but more likely a beast."(*ibid.*). Devoid of speech and tradition, this is the place of chaos, where monsters lurk, where Medusa waits. In the words of George Steiner, it is a place defined as a vulgar "monkey-hutch of babblers and baboons"<sup>82</sup>.

Terry Eagleton interprets Julia Kristeva's concept of the "semiotic" as this speechless stage. It is a pattern of forces

in the pre-Oedipal state which is discerned "as a kind of pulsional pressure" full of "contradiction, meaninglessness, disruption, silence and absence. The semiotic is the 'other' of language". Fluid and plural, it is "opposed to all fixed, transcendental significations"<sup>83</sup>. It is, "rhythmic, onomatopoeic babble"<sup>84</sup>. Norman O. Brown refers to this place as Dionysian, as a place where Truth has been hiding, the "envers du monde". And yet,

truth is always scandalous, a stumbling block;  
truth is where we stumble or fall [...] The truth  
is in the error [...] The original mistake[...]  
The god of Delphi, who always spoke the truth,  
never gave a straight answer [...] He awlays spoke  
in riddles, in parables; ambiguities [...]that  
hearing they might hear and not understand.<sup>85</sup>

Women's babble is this truth, the "Rythme sourd/Code secret" which the heroine of Le Tombeau cannot yet understand: "Je ne déchiffre aucun mystère." (24). The heroine only can understand what Man has taught her; to see what He sees, to look only "dans ses miroirs polis" (54). Still dependent on sight, on looking into these mirrors for information, her ears have been deaf, not been able to tune into to the faint cry of the bird. She hears, but understands nothing of this undecipherable code. It is, as Eli Mandel suggests, a code of "the deep rythms of the universe" which begin to replace the stifling silence: "the sound of one's own blood coursing through one's veins and one's own heart beating."<sup>86</sup> These "grands courants sous-marins"(24) run through, what Norman O.

Brown calls, a "subterranean passage" emitting new "unspoken meanings": "bodily meanings, carnal knowledge"<sup>87</sup>, meanings whose sense will come from nonsense, babble. "To restore to words their full significance [...] is to reduce them to nonsense, to get nonsense or nothingness or silence back into words"<sup>88</sup>.

Women who have emitted this "nonsense", though, have been burned as witches. They have been labelled as demons and sorceresses, not to be listened to or trusted. The quick tongue of Eve, having tempted Adam into Sin, has been inherited by all women. Muted, so as not to lure or seduce men, and blinded so as not to be turned into stone like Lot's wife who looked back, women have turned to other senses. Emond observes what women are beginning to discover; "En fermant ses yeux de chair, elle [la femme] accepte la mutilation de sa vision profane pour mieux ouvrir son troisième oeil et déboucher sur une vision supérieure" [qui] "se double d'une faculté de percer les ténèbres"<sup>89</sup>. In Kamouraska, Elizabeth becomes aware of this new vision, its superiority, its liberating force: "Je persiste du côté des ténèbres. Je fouille les ténèbres. Je tatonne comme une aveugle." (K,242) Emond maintains that the Hébertian heroine can only "accéder à la voyance, à la souveraineté du regard divin [...] par la morte rituelle et [par] le 'vol magique'"<sup>90</sup> of the bird. So, the "faucon aveugle" with its "prunelles crevées", has taken flight and

accompanied the heroine through the shadows which have confined her. Blinded as well, her "prunelles liquides"(34), "pierres d'eau"(36), the heroine becomes accustomed to the "ténèbres", and she and the bird, this "roi/Minuscule et naïf", feminine and masculine together, envision another time, another place in a small "reflet d'aube". It is a new light, not of the Sun of God, but of the Mother. This light draws the heroine "deeper/into the living cave" where, as Rachel Blaü DuPlessis states in "Eurydice", she and her sisters will be reborn:

She will take shape and sprout  
a soft light far from the surface  
pushing outward, of her own power

stalk, ladder of climbing cells  
root, filling the corridors of rock  
flower, breaking the earth, fragrant, opening

seeds of Eurydice

She will brood and be born  
girl of her own mother  
mother of the labyrinth  
daughter  
pushing the child herself toward

great head, the cave large inside it  
great lips of a giant woman  
great cunt, fragrant, opening

seeds of Eurydice.91

Mothers, daughters have been empowered. Annis Pratt suggests "that not only recent and contemporary poets, but also our grandmothers and great-grandmothers may have found some way to encode a sense of self-affirmation and power" in their



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## Conclusion

### And Our Story is One

Anne Hébert, "fed up with other people's furniture", with other people's expectations of this attractive "grande fille sage", finally exploded in rage. Marci McDonald describes her as "some adult Alice [who] stepped through the looking glass of contemporary Québec [...] to reveal the hellish bowels of an underworld of the collective psyche where alienation tripped up all the timepieces and resentment was the eternal guest at the tea party."<sup>1</sup> Her wrath was indeed "reserved for the Church - with its stranglehold on education and life itself", but Hébert either had not recognized it as such while writing the poems of Tombeau, or did not dare challenge the system. Taught to turn the other cheek, Hébert kept deep inside what would have been "the greatest literary scandal" for which, one male critic noted, "We would have exiled her, if not hanged her."<sup>2</sup> What did emerge was a literature burning with anger, which tore open the "tombeau des rois", shattering the thin surface which disguised the layers of "an obscure world of revolts which often didn't see the light."<sup>3</sup> Thin girls are raped, male lovers have their faces stripped and replaced with mirrors so that even they become reflections of the Sun's penetrating rays (54), and kings of the dead live a hellish existence, searching

for any kind of appeasement to this eternal torment (61).

Jane Marcus states that woman's wrath, "comes from the devil while the fury of a general or a prime minister is heroic and godlike." For "divines and churchmen [...it is] a necessary attribute [signifying] strength in the strong, weakness in the weak. An angry mother is out of control; an angry father is exercising his authority."<sup>4</sup> Women have learned to bury their anger; faithful wives, wait out their torment in their "patience ancienne" (18), the "liens durs" of "la fidélité" have long ago been "noués ...Avec la mort"(37). Thomas Bulfinch reminds us that Penelope, waiting for years for her husband, Ulysses, to return from the Trojan war, had to fight off numerous suitors. Sewing by day, unstitching by night, and then resewing a funeral robe, Penelope was able to delay choosing another husband.<sup>5</sup> Wanting both to remain faithful to her husband (in case he might return), and to remain otherwise celibate, she patiently, "point à point" sewed her "humilité"(20). Her rage must have been boiling underneath. Beautiful Eurydice, having died from a serpent's bite, is rescued by her newlywed Orpheus. He is allowed to take her from Pluto as long as he does not look at her on their ascent out of the Underworld. Imagine the anger of Eurydice when this man, desiring to gaze upon his beauty, turns, looks and condemns her to Hell! And Antigone, faithful daughter to her crazed, blind father, faithful sister to her slain, unburied

brother, digs a grave with her bare hands. And, her uncle Creon, now king, his anger unleashed, has Antigone buried alive.<sup>6</sup> Imagine her rage. And yet, years later, some unidentified woman is uncovered, resurrected from the frozen earth (K, 250).

Women have remained silent, bit by bit finding ways to weave their 'his/story' into the centre. Marcus remarks that few women have been able to express this "angry truth-telling" as has Adrienne Rich, and that most women have, instead, in an indirect and nonthreatening way, offered only "beautifully mandarin or minor" art or discourse. Hortense Calisher has called this quiet, nice art "mental hysterectomy".<sup>7</sup> One way to relieve the pressure of not being able to 'shout out loud', is to escape. In Les Fous de Bassan there are warnings of rape and murder which come from the dead spirits of Olivia's mother and grandmothers. Olivia dreams of fleeing to a place where she can be once again with the maternal spirits.<sup>8</sup> She imagines the long awaited peace and community found in this place:

Je prendrai ma mère avec moi et je l'emmènerai  
très loin. Au fond des océans peut-être, là où il  
y a des palais de coquillages, des fleurs  
étranges, des poissons multicolores, des rues où  
l'on respire l'eau calmement comme l'air. Nous  
vivrons ensemble sans bruit et sans effort.  
(ES, 208)

Women writers in Québec have been finding ways to release

some of their anger and impatience, since Laure Conan's Angéline. Gagnon explains that Angéline, having refused to "être donnée et possédée [par les deux héros] enfin, héroïne, elle possède et donne."<sup>9</sup> Jovette Bernier, in La Chair décevante (1931), expressed a feminine emotional reality in her "telegraphic", elliptic, jazz-like phrases. Revealing in this way the depth of woman's emotions was considered immoral and it was radically new in Québec.<sup>10</sup> Blais remembers these women and others. She often thinks

aux femmes du passé, à toutes ces voix qui ont longtemps dormi ... à ces voix du passé dont on ne sait rien [...], voix de femmes, voix de jeunes filles, voix sans noms, épouses, mères, femmes inquiètes, craintives [...], voix coupables, peut-être complices de tant d'horreurs, voix révoltées mais coupables de silence, au temps où l'homme seul avait une vie, une histoire, car c'était lui, la voix, et nous, le silence.<sup>11</sup>

Jovette Marchessault's response to woman's oppression is to look back to a grandmother, who, untouched by patriarchal ideology, instills her values in her grandchild. It is this indispensable connecting thread which is the crucial 'fil d'Ariane' in women's story. It is the link between the past and present which the grandmother makes, acting as female sage and conveyor of private feminine truths and unorthodox wisdom.<sup>12</sup> Marchessault has grabbed hold of this "fil" and pulled herself, not out of the cave that has imprisoned her, but deeper inside a transformed and transforming place: the

womb of the maternal Origin. In La Mère des Herbes (1980), where the grandmother has rejected the values of Patriarchy, in Tryptique lesbien (1980), where the narrator sits no longer under a phallic symbol, but under "l'arbre-Mère-en-fleurs, dans la nuit vive de ma terre nouvelle" (76), in Saga des poules mouillées (1981), where women's history has been recast and Hébert, Roy, Guèvremont and Conan find themselves "beyond patriarchy [sharing] their dreams and fears, their love, their aspirations, their secret knowledge"<sup>13</sup>, Marchessault has escaped from the place of oppression and has, instead, re-entered the birth canal. These 'mothers' and 'grandmothers', Hébert, Conan, Guèvremont and Roy, these "insectes prisonniers" (P, 53), recast and reborn, emerge, ironically, from a daughter. And things are reversed in "l'envers du monde": regeneration of the living from the dead and of the dead from the living. At one time everything was in order, "les morts dessous/Les vivants dessus"(36); the thin surface of earth which separated the two worlds has now been cracked open, the order shaken. What lies revealed is the Underground which has consumed women, but now has itself been transformed into a place of production, of birth. The subtext, the "filigrane" has finally emerged with one woman finally having "decided" to "approche[r] la terre de son oreille" (53). And others followed. Grandmothers are exhumed blackened, yet living, (K 250) and daughters finally "écartent le jour [du Père Soleil] comme un rideau" and find "L'ombre d'un seul arbre [cet arbre Maternelle] étale"(P,

58) at the feet of women.

Maurice Emond recognizes this transgression, rebirthing, exhuming, renaming; it is a "renaissance perpétuelle", and an "éternelle jeunesse".<sup>14</sup> He notes that the fecond nature of woman's menstrual cycle corresponds to this rebirthing process, which again is linked to the moon's "phases tragiques, avec leurs mutilations, sacrifices et morts [...Cependant, elles] ne sont que temporaires [...et] annoncent les phases triomphantes du renouvellement, de la régénération et de la résurrection."<sup>15</sup> It is under the Moon that "cette soeur que nous avons/Se baigne bleue" (P,48). This "petite morte" has crossed over to "l'envers de ce miroir limpide". Perhaps the heroine in "Le Tombeau des rois" does not recognize the glimmer of light. Morning light, the "reflet d'aube", should be of the Sun. Posing questions after "les morts hors de moi, [sont] assassinés" (P,61), the heroine sees the bird shiver. The kings dead, the Patriarchal Sun losing its power, the bird, though blinded, has a newly discovered vision of a new light through its "prunelles crevées". The Moon in its own Dawn, in its morning, rises in this reversed world. The "ombre [qui] étale" has transgressed the Sun's space and has been empowered; a new light begins to be born.

Things are not what they were. In the words of J.C. Holland, it is "this strange bird singing the songs of another

shore"<sup>16</sup> that acts as communicator from a different place, that leads "les filles bleues de l'été"(p,52) to listen to the earth, to reveal the deeper meanings, existences ... the watermark. Toril Moi calls woman's masking of the Truth, "palimpsestic".<sup>17</sup> In writing, women have been consciously or unconsciously, willingly or unwillingly, hiding the subtext, the "filigrane", until the "La rage/Qui oppresse notre poitrine"(32) finally boils to the surface, until that small voice "de l'oiseau mort"(25) is "reçue.../Par la voix intérieure"(26) of women. The bird, regenerated with new vision, is no longer "ce roi/Minuscule et naïf" (20), but has been transformed into

une autre femme, plus petite, [...] tout comme si elle fût trouvée à l'intérieur de la femme en rose, la femme en rose étant vide et creuse, en abat-jour, faite exprès pour contenir une autre femme plus petite, plus ancienne dans le temps, qui, elle aussi, accouche d'une autre femme. Des femmes gigognes. Des poupées russes s'emboîtant les unes dans les autres (ES,p.103).

To 'dig up' women's 'true' text (history, "her/story", which has laid patiently underground, waiting for some brave soul to dare to approach and scratch open the surface), is perhaps a grander picture, (metaphor, "mise en abîme") of the heroine's listening to the earth and entering the tomb, digging up old bones and discovering new flesh. Enclosed in a sealed room, Elisabeth in Kamouraska relives her past and attempts to kill the dead. Marcel Fortin, in his recent article on the

criticism of Hébert's works, notes that this attempt is similar to that of the protagonist in "Le Tombeau des rois". Perhaps she and Elisabeth, tragically trapped in this small space, ironically are able to find some kind of freedom; in this cramped space, they transgress the Law with impunity<sup>18</sup> : "La tragique, dure vertu de la beauté suffisante, invente ses propres lois. Vous ne pouvez pas comprendre. Elle est au-dessus des lois ordinaires de la terre"(K,47). The protagonist discovers her own Law, one which allows her to have her own authenticity. In "Poésie, solitude rompue", Hébert speaks of "une oeuvre authentique [...] qui se contente d'être dans sa plénitude, ayant rejoint sa propre loi intérieure, dans la conscience et l'effort créateur, et l'ayant observée jusqu'à la limite de l'être exprimé et donné" (P,70-71). Hébert is referring to the freedom to write authentically for the first time. Again, the search for woman's Truth or Authenticity 'within' the story or the poem, is a metaphor, (an example of 'mise en abîme') for the journey of all Québécois(es) and of all women and men.

This story is a shared story. It belongs to Quebeckers, to women, to men, to all those who have been oppressed. It is a story about forgiveness. In A Handmaid's Tale, Offred represents women who have been penetrated, controlled, oppressed. And yet, like the bird, she quietly murmurs her "plainte":

Maybe none of this is about control. Maybe it isn't really about who can own whom, who can do what to whom and get away with it, even as far as death...Maybe it's about who can do what to whom and be forgiven for it.<sup>19</sup>

It is the story about Kateri Tekakwita, who, condemned by the French settlers in 1675 as a sorceress, turned back the Iroquois warriors by setting aflame her hand which turned into a bird of peace. Her body, woman's body, becomes that bird once again, a creative symbol of life over death.<sup>20</sup> It is the story of a woman who finally sheds the veil of the chaste "virgin" and dons the archaic robes of the "Virgin" who, according to Esther Harding, is free to choose to marry or not, to make love or not.<sup>21</sup> This Daphne is finally free to be, like Diana or Penelope, celibate. It is a story of the past and present and future.

Robin Morgan brings this story to the centre of her work. The story has now become a tapestry, no longer just the embroidered margins:

From the beginning  
there has been one story  
surviving all its versions.  
We who have lived and still relive its living  
here set down what we remember of the pattern -  
mere details of clues lost in the execution.  
Each of us has brought her own imperfect skill  
humbly to this work  
so that together our chanson de toile  
might weave the story[...]

for time to fade and weather stiffen.<sup>22</sup>

But it has been necessary that someone put her ear to the ground to begin deconstructing the "patriarchal tapestry" and, as Annis Pratt suggests, to let those embroidered edges "implode inwards."<sup>23</sup> It has taken the small soft voice of a bird, who, through its blindness, envisioned the light of the Moon barely visible "in the obscured sky". But as Offred looks out the window in The Handmaid's Tale, she is certain of the moon's presence. It is a "wishing moon, a sliver of ancient rock, a goddess, a wink".<sup>24</sup> The Moon is a sign of hope, as is the bird.

Annis Pratt underlines the importance of the bird. Part of the animal heraldry embroidered by Mary Queen of Scots during her long imprisonment, the bird became an emblem for her. It is the phoenix in flames with the inscription "en ma fin git mon commencement". Depicting her own captivity, she wove the emblem of a lion in a net, with hares leaping over it and of a hawk flying over a bird in its cage<sup>25</sup>; imprisoned and free, there is new beginning. The phoenix is the symbol of rebirth, the symbol of the Hébertian heroine who is reborn "sans cesse de ses cendres [...], de bûcher en bûcher, elle-même mortelle et palpable, et pourtant surnaturelle et maléfique" (ES,179). Gabrielle Pascal-Smith remarks that the Hébertian heroine, "d'abord asservie, [maintenant] se dresse comme un glaive."<sup>26</sup> Woman, standing tall, no longer hunched under a tree, finally

discovers in "ses deux mains brûlées" (P,20), the power to transform the giving of life to the bearing of new life.

Gwendolyn MacEwen has recognized this new story as an ongoing one: for if one woman can be brave enough to take us all on a new journey, then there is still hope found in the "reflet d'aube" flickering in the distance from the ancient rock of that new Moon:

do not imagine that the exploration  
ends, that she has yielded all her mystery  
or that the map you hold  
cancels further discovery  
I tell you her uncovering takes years,  
takes centuries, and when you find her naked  
look again,  
admit there is something else you cannot name,  
a veil, a coating just above the flesh...

I mean the moment when it seems most plain  
is the moment when you must begin again.<sup>27</sup>

The journey that we have just taken did not begin with the first poem of Le Tombeau des rois, nor did it progress logically, poem by poem, until the end of the work. Instead, we followed a woman on a quest for identity, for her own voice, for wholeness, for new sight. And yet, she vacillates between "elle" and "je" throughout most of the work; her voice is the faint cry of the bird; her body is fragmented and violated, even in the last poem; and in the last stanza, her vision, the bird's, is still flawed. The little hope that seems to exist

for a new future, is a distant, pale reflexion of light; but, yet, this barely visible glimmer is the beginning of a new era for the Québécois(es). The "I" finally speaking out in the first person is the first murmuring of one's own voice speaking its first words; the eyes are blinded, yet are able to detect light with a new vision.

Le Tombeau des rois has been analysed as a quest in which wholeness, voice and identity are finally found and appropriated by the Québécois(es). Anne Hébert was one of the many represented by the heroine on her journey. However, Hébert was not only speaking as a "Québécois", but, as well, as a woman. The Hébertian protagonist is a woman who is aware of her body, fragmented as it is; she is a woman, cornered in a room, who shudders as the cold, salty breath of a man breathes down her neck; she is a woman who patiently sews, with her burned hands, the humility of the world, of a world which is buried beneath the power, violence and egotism of the patriarchal one, the world of her ancestresses. The heroine, surrounded by a wall which encloses and constrains, tied by her fidelity to this patriarchal world of Law which constricts and confines, begins, bit by bit, to pay attention to the small voice of the bird. It is the bird which guides her back to her feminine and female origins. Not unlike Christ, this bird is sacrificed for womankind and for mankind. Through death is rebirth. The phoenix is reborn in the cave, the place of

reproduction: the womb, the place which patriarchal language has not permeated, the place where "babble" is understood.

The motifs of the sacrificial bird, of the weaver, the cave, of a secret coded language, are found in feminist literature, for the most part, written after Le Tombeau des rois. To use images and motifs found in other women's writing as an intertextual base from which to study this early work of Hébert, is valid from a feminist perspective. It is a perspective which I have extended to some of Hébert's later poetry and prose, by which I try to substantiate my analysis of the camouflaged feminine subtext. This lies hidden beneath the traditional analysis of Hébert's works, which focus on the search for a national identity.

This type of analysis is prepared to transgress Tradition, the Law. It proceeds to draw together clues from other women writers, not to clarify and narrow the interpretation of Le Tombeau des rois, but to reveal and offer another reading. It "re-members" fragments of stories from women's experience, revising metaphorically the image of the "tomb", a place of death, to the "womb", where there is rebirth. That is, according to Christine Downing, where men and women "return to the receptive, generative mother", to the goddess who is "the source of vision-and of lunacy, which is altered vision".<sup>28</sup> The Moon, which offers light, vision, is associated with what

is not understood - the lunacy of women's speech. To read Anne Hébert's poetry as an "écriture au féminin", is to share in her life as a woman and as a "Québécois", to link the story of Québec, and of all oppressed people, with women's experience. The story is one.

#### Notes

1. McDonald 58.
2. McDonald 60.
3. McDonald 59.
4. Jane Marcus, "Art and Anger," Feminist Studies 4.1 February 1978: 70.
5. Bulfinch 150.
6. Bulfinch 152, 149.
7. Marcus 93.
8. Green, "Witch 137.
9. Madeleine Gagnon, "Angéline de Montbrun: le mensonge historique et la subversion de la métaphore blanche," Voix et Images du Pays V 1972: 66.
10. Karen Gould, Mary Jean Green, Paula Gilbert Lewis, "Inscriptions of the Feminine: A Century of Women Writing in Québec," The American Review of Canadian Studies 15.4 Winter 1985: 376.
11. Gould, Green, Lewis 369.
12. Gould, Green, Lewis 377.
13. Orenstein 192.
14. Emond 148.

15. Emond 150.
16. Mandel 72.
17. Toril Moi, Sexual/Textual Politics (London: Methuen, 1985) 59.
18. Marcel Fortin, "La Réception critique de l'oeuvre d'Anne Hébert: histoire d'une célébration," Littératures No. 2 (1988): 111.
19. Margaret Atwood, The Handmaid's Tale (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1985) 144-45.
20. Gould, Green, Lewis 379.
21. Esther Harding, Woman's Mysteries, Ancient and Modern (New York: Bantam, 1973) 121.
22. Robin Morgan, Lady of the Beasts (New York: Random House, 1976) 108.
23. Pratt, "Tiger" 177.
24. Atwood 108.
25. Pratt, "Tiger" 176.
26. Gabrielle Pascal-Smith, "La Condition féminine dans Kamouraska d'Anne Hébert," The French Review 54.1 October 1980: 91.
27. Gwendolyn MacEwen, The Shadow-Maker (Toronto: Macmillan, 1969) 30.
28. Downing 13.

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