

From Vilified to Victorious: Reconceiving La Corriveau in Anne Hébert's *La Cage*

Jessica McBride

Volume 36, numéro 2, 2011

URI : https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/scl36_2art07

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

The University of New Brunswick

ISSN

0380-6995 (imprimé)

1718-7850 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

McBride, J. (2011). From Vilified to Victorious:: Reconceiving La Corriveau in Anne Hébert's *La Cage*. *Studies in Canadian Literature / Études en littérature canadienne*, 36(2), 129–142.

From Vilified to Victorious: Reconceiving La Corriveau in Anne Hébert's *La Cage*

JESSICA MCBRIDE

NOVELS, SHORT STORIES, PLAYS, SONGS, BALLETS, and even full-length movies: the legend of La Corriveau has permeated the literary and cultural landscape of Quebec for centuries. Until recently, little historical or factual information was available regarding the eighteenth-century murder case of Marie-Josephte Corriveau, also known as La Corriveau. Documents from her trial remained in British archives until as late as the 1930s and were not made public until 1947.¹ This scarcity of reliable information did not hinder fictional adaptations of her story, and in fact may have assisted in their abundance and creativity. These texts, along with tales from the oral tradition, have certainly transformed a rather banal incident of domestic violence into a myth of great proportions, which in turn has elicited reinterpretations of Marie-Josephte's (f)actual history as well as her mythical legacy. Many contemporary authors have offered their "translations" of this familiar legend,² and one such creation is Anne Hébert's play *La Cage*, first performed in 1989. While maintaining several of the myth's fundamental elements, the focus and many details of Hébert's text deviate from the qualities and characteristics that render the tale a sort of *lieu commun* in Québécois culture and literature. How, thus, must the reader receive and/or process these departures, not only from actual historical evidence, but also from the accepted, albeit invented, myth? How does one, or how *can* one, proceed with only the myth of a myth as a guide? In the case of Hébert's *Cage*, it appears that the answer lies in burying the traditional myth and the original mythical signification in order to give birth — to reconceive a new myth.

Marie-Josephte Becomes La Corriveau

As with many myths, certain basic elements of the Corriveau legend are grounded in historically accurate information, although propor-

tionately there is far more exaggeration and invention in her legend than actual biographical details. In his exhaustive three-part study on Marie-Josephte Corriveau, historian Luc Lacourcière offers readers an historically accurate vision of the woman who, he claims, “ait la plus mauvaise reputation [de] toute l’histoire canadienne” (“Le triple destin” 213). A simple *habitante* from Saint-Vallier, Quebec, Marie-Josephte Corriveau married her first husband in 1749 at the age of sixteen. Eleven years of marriage and three children later, her husband died. After a fifteen-month mourning period, she remarried another local farmer named Louis-Etienne Dodier, with whom she had no children. On 27 January 1763, Dodier’s lifeless body was found in his barn, apparently trampled to death by his horses. Upon initial examination, the officials determined the death had been accidental, but fuelled by neighbors’ comments and the ever-present rumor mill, authorities quickly began to suspect foul play on the part of Marie-Josephte and her father, Joseph Corriveau. It was claimed that Joseph and Louis often fought, and that Marie-Josephte was a drunkard who did not object to the occasional infidelity (“Le triple destin” 227). Two trials were held in order for “justice” to be served. The first charged both Marie-Josephte and her father with the crime, and took place between 29 March and 9 April 1763. Found guilty of murder after the first trial, Joseph later recanted his story and ultimately denounced his daughter as the lone criminal. She would consequently be tried and found guilty in an unusually expedited trial, which took place in its entirety on 15 April 1763.

Using a combination of historical and imagined elements, nineteenth-century authors such as Philippe Aubert de Gaspé, James Macpherson Le Moine, Louis Fréchette, and William Kirby created their own versions of the legend of La Corriveau. In fact, these fictional interpretations have shaped the Québécois perception of La Corriveau in a way that history could not have. So pervasive were these fictions that some Quebec historians even accepted and incorporated them into their historical texts.³ La Corriveau’s crimes differ marginally in each adaptation; however, whether or not she was truly guilty for said crimes never comes into question. In La Corriveau’s literary premiere, Philippe Aubert de Gaspé claims she “s’était défait de son mari, en lui versant, tandis qu’il était endormi, du plomb fondu dans l’oreille” (155). James MacPherson Le Moine’s *Maple Leaves* (1863) alleges that La Corriveau killed her first husband in just such a manner, but the events surround-

ing her second husband's untimely death are truly entertaining. In his version, Le Moine imagines that Marie-Josephte attempts unsuccessfully to strangle her sleeping spouse, since the former has "inserted his pillow where his neck had been, gently shaking it occasionally, and uttering now and then a stifled groan" (68). Favoring a more reliable approach, Marie-Josephte subsequently "batters his brains with a pitchfork," blaming the murder on the family horse (68). In possibly the most inventive adaptation, William Kirby explains La Corriveau's evil ways as a hereditary flaw, since her grandparents are infamous seventeenth-century Italian alchemist Antonio Exili and French sorceress La Voisin.⁴ This Corriveau is also exceedingly preoccupied with money and often displays a bizarre proclivity for misogyny. Ultimately, she too murders her husband — with molten lead like in de Gaspé's version — and is found guilty before an English court. Fréchette's Corriveau also murders both of her husbands, the first with molten lead and the second ostensibly with a blunt object to the head.

Although details relating to her crime(s) may differ, one constant seems to persist in both the oral and written legends of La Corriveau: her cage or "gibbet." According to Luc Lacourcière, "de tous les éléments de cette légende, c'est la cage de fer qui est le plus stable et probablement celui qui a le plus frappé l'imagination populaire" ("La Présence" 257). In many ways, this bizarre means of punishment can be credited with the transformation of a relatively pedestrian *fait divers* into a proper legend. The cage itself deviates from the typical punishment for murder under the French regime, which usually called for hanging the criminal, occasionally burning his or her body, and even more infrequently displaying the corpse for a limited period as a means of deterring future criminal activity. Abiding by their English methods of capital punishment, the officials who tried Marie-Josephte ordered that she be "hanged in chains wherever the Governor shall think proper" ("Le triple destin" 234). Although in England gibbets may have been "presque aussi frequents que [les] croix de chemins" in Quebec, and considered "comme un des éléments les plus pittoresques de la campagne anglaise," their use in Quebec instilled fear and inspired creation, albeit to the detriment of Marie-Josephte's reputation ("Le triple destin" 236).

Revisiting and Revising La Corriveau's Legend

The title of Anne Hébert's 1989 play, *La Cage*, would seem to signal its adoption of this fundamental element of the Corriveau legend; however, it is precisely with the iron cage that she subverts the accepted traditional myth. Instead of using a combination of history and fiction to vilify Marie-Josephthe Corriveau, Hébert selects some of the most ubiquitous, or what Lacourcière would call "stable," legendary aspects in conjunction with her own fictional creation to both dispel and denounce the nineteenth-century myth. Despite simultaneously implicating herself in and disassociating herself from the work of authors such as de Gaspé, Le Moine, Kirby, and Fréchette, Anne Hébert successfully buries and exhumes La Corriveau's (hi)story.

As previously discussed, all of the nineteenth-century authors envisioned a Corriveau who murders one or more of her husbands, an assumption with at least some basis in history. Considering the image of La Corriveau that these authors offer in their versions — "une femme de mauvaise vie, une méchante femme, une sorcière qui parlait au diable, qui dansait avec le diable, une femme vendue au diable" ("La Présence" 254) — the lack of interest in a possibly justifiable motive for murder is not surprising. However, in the second trial the accused did offer an explanation for her actions, as her deposition (translated into French by Lacourcière) illustrates:

Marie Josephthe Corriveau, veuve Dodier, déclare qu'elle a assassiné son mari Louis Hélène Dodier pendant la nuit alors qu'il dormait dans son lit; qu'elle l'a fait avec une petite hache; qu'elle n'a été incité ni aidé par aucune personne à le faire; que personne n'était au courant. Elle est consciente de mériter la mort. Elle demande seulement à la Cour de lui accorder un peu de temps pour se confesser et faire sa paix avec le ciel. *Elle ajoute que c'est vraiment dû en grande partie aux mauvais traitements de son mari si elle est coupable de ce crime.* (Lacourcière, "Le triple destin" 230; emphasis added)

Anne Hébert seems to find inspiration in this rare instance where Marie-Josephthe's own voice can be heard, albeit through several intermediaries.

An examination of the possible dynamic between Dodier and Corriveau, a discussion of no interest to the nineteenth-century authors, alerts Hébert's reader to an important change in focus and tone. Clearly

a marriage of necessity, Ludivine's parents in *La Cage* present her to Elzéar much as they might a mare or an ewe for sale at market: "Ma fille Ludivine n'a jamais été malade de sa vie, ni coqueluche, ni rougeole, rien de cassé, ni rien qui cloche, toujours vaillante et travailleuse, une créature dépareillée" (48). With the assistance of the town *marieuse*, Ludivine and Elzéar marry for obviously practical reasons. As a result of Elzéar's need to travel by himself deep into the forest each fall, he and Ludivine live together for only a short time. However, during this brief cohabitation, Elzéar quickly reveals himself to be a cruel and violent man. He terrorizes his wife, throwing a grass snake in her face, laughing "à s'en tordre les côtes" as she cries (49); he forces her to work long hours in the fields despite her fragile frame; and when autumn arrives, he leaves her indefinitely with orders to either think of him or simply watch the snow fall (50).

The reader immediately recognizes that despite some similarities, Anne Hébert's *Corriveau* resembles little the murderer, witch, or ghost presented by past tales. To begin with, in this adaptation, *La Corriveau* is the protagonist's married name, rather than her maiden name. By making this change, Hébert maintains a connection between the name "Corriveau" and cruelty, but transfers this association from wife to husband. In this interpretation, Hébert also portrays the union between Ludivine and Elzéar as *her* first marriage and *his* second, inverting widow and widower, a shift that largely negates much of the traditional myth's conceptual foundation. As a result of *La Corriveau*'s multiple marriages, as featured in the nineteenth-century adaptations, the number of murders she commits starts conservatively at one but can balloon to as many as eight. In addition, authors such as Fréchette claim that *La Corriveau* remarried after only three months of mourning her first husband, evidently indicating her lack of emotion and possibly even her guilt in his death. Hébert reverses and dismisses the suspicions used to create the traditional myth by eliminating these previous marriages, and she, in fact, redirects suspicion to Elzéar. Unclear as to the cause of death for Elzéar's first wife, and especially leery after discussions of his despicable behavior towards Ludivine, the reader questions what Elzéar's role may have been in his first wife's demise. The abusive relationship that Anne Hébert imagines for her *Corriveau* recalls past interpretations, allowing the reader to place it within the accepted nineteenth-century tradition; however, by inverting their roles — the former aggressor

becomes current victim and vice versa — the author forces the reader to arrive at new, completely altered conclusions in regard to La Corriveau's (hi)story and legacy.

On the surface, Hébert continues to adhere to the status quo while concurrently annihilating the myths of her predecessors by affording this woman, who according to nineteenth-century adaptations viewed “human love [only] as a degraded menial, to make men the slaves of her mercenary schemes,” a composite adoptive family (Kirby 366). Although historically Marie-Josephte Corriveau had three children with her first husband, her myth generally eliminates them, and even denies her the ability to reproduce, citing her sterility as motive for her villainous behavior. Louis Fréchette claims in his short story that despite eleven years of relative happiness, one ominous cloud darkens the union between Dodier and his wife: “Contrairement à ce qui se passe d'ordinaire dans les ménages canadiens en général si féconds, le jeune couple vécut seul et les petites têtes roses et blondes manquèrent à son foyer.” In Kirby's adaptation, “it was a barren union. No child followed . . . to create a mother's feelings and soften the callous heart of La Corriveau” (365). In the nineteenth-century texts, the fault for this inability to reproduce the “petites têtes” so important to a Roman Catholic society that would later attempt to avenge itself against the English majority through “la revanche des berceaux”⁵ always lands squarely on La Corriveau because of her unchristian, even evil behaviour. The couple's lack of children also renders the link between La Corriveau and possible witchcraft or supernatural powers more understandable and plausible, as traditionally witches tend to threaten both children and fertility.⁶ In fact, her infertility distances La Corriveau from any nurturing qualities not only common to but also expected in the exemplary Québécois wife. Stripping La Corriveau of her children as well as the ability to reproduce undeniably propels and restrains her in a realm where the woman can, will, and even must commit murder and other diabolical treacheries.

Hébert's Ludivine is also barren, as decreed by the Black Fairies who greet her at birth. These Fairies, along with their benevolent White Fairy counterparts, are responsible for bestowing both cursed and blessed gifts on Ludivine and her wealthy Anglophone counterpart, Rosalinde, when the girls first enter the world. As a consequence of the Black Fairies' “gift” of sterility, Ludivine is unable, as the wife and

virtual slave of her husband, to fulfill Elzéar's wish to follow familial traditions set forth by his father and grandfather:

J'ai l'intention de fonder une famille. Je veux faire comme mon père et comme mon grand-père qui ont peuplé tout le pays, à dix lieues à la ronde, sans jamais perdre une bouffée d'odeur dans les bois, ni un poisson frétilant dans la rivière, ni la moindre bestiole éclatant dans son pelage fauve, comme une fleur rouge au bout du fusil fumant. (48)

As in the nineteenth-century adaptations, no children will be born to the couple. However, Hébert places blame for this barren existence more on the part of the man and "destiny" than on La Corriveau. Indeed, Ludivine's barrenness appears predestined since, from birth, it was determined that her "ventre ne produira pas de fruit ni [son] sein de lait" (22); Ludivine also claims that it is her husband's use of force in the marital bed that causes her inability to reproduce, for Elzéar experiences a sort of cruel pleasure in controlling and terrorizing his wife. He even admits that "[il] aime [l]'entendre hurler de terreur, le soir, dans la maison fermée" (49). Finding herself in both an emotionally and geographically inhospitable, even barren, landscape, Ludivine recognizes and welcomes the fact that she cannot fulfill Elzéar's ultimate wish of continuing his lineage.

Although she, too, strays from historical fact, as did the nineteenth-century writers before her, Hébert alters the reader's perception of La Corriveau by suggesting that her character is fated rather for adoptive motherhood. Giving birth to biological children will not, in Ludivine's case, preclude maternal bonds from forming, as the White Fairies destine her to "cueill[ir] l'enfant sauvage dans les fermes abandonnées" (26). In fact, Babette, Ludivine's first "enfant sauvage" narrates her story to the audience, exposing a "filiation féminine . . . non seulement de famille mais aussi de récit [qui] se met en contraste avec la plupart des versions de la Corriveau où il y a un homme narrateur" (Slott 157). Adoptive motherhood proves extremely detrimental to the vision offered by previous adaptations of La Corriveau as antithetical to kindness or love, as it reinstates and amplifies maternal, nurturing qualities that the traditional myth expunged. Considering that the French-Canadian mother "is the only female archetype in Quebec literature" (Le Moyne 79), Hébert re-establishes Ludivine's bonds with her historical model,

while also scoffing at the societal and literary pigeonhole that reduces women to their reproductive capacities. Does the fact that Ludivine bears no biological children make her less of an exemplary “French-Canadian mother”? No, says Hébert: in fact, her Corriveau becomes the French-Canadian mother par excellence. Ludivine *must* be a mother despite her biological inability, rather than simply reproducing because her body is physically capable, as is clearly the case with the women who ask La Corriveau to take their unwanted children. A distressed woman, immediately after giving birth, tells Ludivine, “Vous voulez savoir ce que je vas [sic] faire à cette heure? Reprendre mon respire, pis prendre une bêche et creuser un trou derrière la grange là où sont déjà ses frères et sœurs. J’en peux plus d’élever des enfants. J’en ai déjà dix de vivants. J’aimerais mieux mourir que d’en élever un autre” (56). Ludivine’s motherhood comes to her despite this biological defect; she cannot help adopting the “enfants sauvages,” creating a more fulfilled, functional family unit than one formed through conventional, biological means. Because of this “destined” adoptive motherhood, Ludivine is actually transformed into an almost super-maternal figure, as compared to those women whose families are created out of duty and fear. In this way, Anne Hébert not only reconceives La Corriveau’s family, but also offers a depiction of motherhood that rejects the “coercive maternity” prevalent in women’s theatre at the time that Hébert wrote the play. Instead, the reader is presented with a new mythical Quebec mother, one who does not physically reproduce but who can still attain a certain level of *jouissance* that feminist proponents of *l’écriture féminine* found essential to the feminine search for identity during this period.⁷

Anne Hébert’s treatment of the murder committed by La Corriveau continues in this same vein, maintaining fundamental elements of historical fact and traditional myth, while remarkably changing their focus and tone. As previously discussed, Marie-Josephte committed, or at least pleaded guilty to committing, the murder of her second husband. Hébert’s Corriveau, too, admits to having killed her husband, in this case with a rifle. Despite this superficial similarity, however, Hébert’s protagonist’s defense is decidedly more acceptable, if not undeniably justifiable. In shooting her husband, she says she simply followed advice that he himself had offered before his departure: “Tu as vu le fusil au-dessus de la porte? Faut s’en servir si jamais un homme vient par ici rôder autour de toi” (50). Elzéar, described upon his return as the quint-

essential prowler, unwittingly justifies his wife's actions against him, rendering Ludivine completely innocent in the eyes of the reader, if not in the eyes of the law. This shift, as with the case of Ludivine's motherhood, markedly alters the expected message stemming from the traditional myth, or *lieu commun*, created in the nineteenth century. This Corriveau did not murder ruthlessly; instead, she defended her home and her family as her husband had instructed her to do. Surpassing even the actual historical claims of abuse that Marie-Josephite used to justify her crime, Anne Hébert's Corriveau acts out of self-defense *and* according to her husband's own mandate. The way in which the author subversively represents the crime mockingly contradicts, and ultimately eliminates, both the legendary and historical assumption of La Corriveau's guilt.

Despite this redirection of guilt, Hébert's text does not admonish Ludivine in the eyes of the law, corrupt as it may be. Ludivine, like Marie-Josephite and many of the Corriveau's of the nineteenth-century myths, goes to trial. However, Hébert again alters the reader's experience through playful, albeit biting, parody of an actual court trial. Still furious that Ludivine has rejected his sexual advances, Judge Crebessa — a universal representation of anglophone, male domination who also appears in *Kamouraska* — presides over what could be defined as a sort of fantastical kangaroo court. Testifying to her Pride, Envy, Greed, Extravagance, Gluttony, and Wrath are the personifications of the seven deadly sins themselves. Only Sloth cannot claim to have ever lived in Ludivine's heart, while the other deadly sins proceed to make obviously ridiculous allegations. Although the inclusion of such marvelous witnesses makes a mockery of the judicial process, Crebessa continues to degrade any semblance of justice when he quickly disregards the witnesses wishing to testify to Ludivine's innocence. He even admits, "Je règne sur la vie et sur la mort, tel est mon pouvoir et j'entends l'exercer sans faiblesse et dans la délectation la plus entière. Un jour Ludivine Corriveau a osé me braver, elle sera punie comme elle le mérite. Préparez la potence et la cage de fer" (107). Crebessa's presence also creates a sort of Hébertien intertext, linking one of history's most infamous women (Marie-Josephite Dodier) with one of Québécois literature's most infamous women (Elisabeth d'Aulnières). In her article "La Corriveau, historique et légendaire," Janis L. Pallister explains this connection, enumerating the similarities between the two historical

figures fictionalized by Hébert. Ludivine, Marie-Josephte, Elisabeth, and Eléonore d'Estimauville (the historical inspiration for Elisabeth) all become means of re-presenting history in a way that allows the feminine voice to be heard instead of silenced, while at the same time criticizing the role of oppressive male figures such as Judge Crebessa.

As she did in *Kamouraska*, Hébert mocks the English judicial system through these representations. The fantasies and outbursts Crebessa allows signal the absolute impossibility of a fair trial for Ludivine, echoing questionable practices used during Marie-Josephte's trial in 1763, as well as the "guilty before proven innocent" approach favoured by the authors in the nineteenth century. Contemporary historians and interested citizens have begun challenging Marie-Josephte's extremely expedited one-day trial, as well as the fact that she, her supporting witnesses, and even her lawyer were all monolingual Francophones, despite the proceedings being conducted exclusively in English ("Le triple destin" 215-16). In the event that the reader does not fully appreciate the extreme shift in focus at work in Hébert's adaptation, this absurd and exceedingly critical representation of Ludivine's trial certainly makes the message clear. In fact, Melissa McKay argues that "avec l'aide du monde imaginaire et fantastique, les personnages féminins [hébertiens] arrivent à récrire l'histoire, la remodelant selon leurs propres interprétations de la justice" (26), allowing Anne Hébert, too, to rewrite and *right* history's wrongs.

Ultimately, the transformation of La Corriveau's myth both starts and finishes with the most "stable" and essential ingredient in her legend: her cage. In an attempt to subvert past usage of the cage and to make a not-so-subtle critique of the Québécois woman's status, the gibbet punishes Ludivine not for the crime of murder but for having been born a female. In fact, Hébert's Corriveau and her counterpart from the upper class, Rosalinde,⁸ are both provided from birth with cages. Ludivine's iron cage, which awaits her after her trial, is a simple structure, devoid of ornament. Rosalinde will occupy her cage much sooner than Ludivine, at the age of fifteen, when she marries Judge Crebessa. This cage, described as a simple golden structure, commonly occupied by the woman after her marriage, is later hidden behind the facade of home and family that Rosalinde's husband forces upon her: "Allez! Camouflez-moi tout ceci! Dissimulez bien le fer et les barreaux. Que surgisse sous vos mains, habiles en déguisement, un joli manoir de

pierres roses, avec fenêtres et portes fermées et marteau de cuivre sur la porte. Que seule la clef de fer demeure intacte, reconnaissable entre toutes, dans ma main” (37). Simultaneously opposed and identical, these cages illustrate the Québécois woman’s destiny to be contained and guarded. Whether as a criminal or as a wife, the road ultimately leads to confinement at the hands of a man, presumably her husband, but also the patriarchal order as a whole. Ludivine, however, is able to escape this fate, never entering the cage prepared for her. Many scholars, although certainly acknowledging the feminist importance of Hébert’s interpretation of La Corriveau’s cage, emphasize more strongly the national political and historical ramifications of these revisions. English officials responsible for Marie-Josephte’s trial, as well as those in charge of “assimilating” French-Canadians, seem in contemporary critiques to be the primary targets in Hébert’s attempt at an alternative history (O’Meara 175-76; Pallister 336). However, the author’s reconception of La Corriveau’s myth actually places equal blame on both Crebessa and Elzéar, depicting both English and Québécois men as violent, manipulative oppressors of women. The historical context in which these events occurred is clearly paramount, but adequate attention must also be paid to the play’s universal critique of the patriarchal order in a more global sense. Again, La Corriveau’s most stable mythical element — her cage — illustrates this point. In stark contrast to the traditional myth, the murderer’s cage remains empty because the perceived criminal (the murdering witch woman) is, in fact, the innocent victim of both her universal fate as woman and her specific fate as a Québécois woman. Instead of offering an image of the cage as an anomaly for a violent criminal who happens to be female, Hébert seems to announce to her public that *every* woman has and occupies her own cage because she is “pour ainsi dire coupable par le simple fait d’être femme” (Slott 153). Although the cage, along with the use of the name “Corriveau,” allows the reader to relate Hébert’s adaptation to the historical and legendary personage, she uses these most fundamental of elements to obliterate her predecessors’ and history’s mistreatment of Marie-Josephte Dodier, as well as to show that these elements can signal liberation rather than imprisonment. Because she is confronted with this “milieu sombre et clos . . . , la femme [hébertienne] peut reformer son caractère et enfin arriver à renaître et refaire sa vie selon ses propres désirs” (McKay 25).

Hébert's Corriveau has a cage, of course, but she refuses it, rejects and metaphorically buries it, instead of being literally buried *in* it.

At the end of her trial, Ludivine reclaims her innocence and declares, "Je suis faite pour être vivante et non point morte et pendue par le cou. Qu'importe les maléfices originels, j'échapperai à mon destin, comme un petit poisson qui sort du filet par une seule envie de vivre" (107); however, the reader recognizes that this "seule envie de vivre" has received some assistance from author Anne Hébert. While she maintains many of the fundamental narrative elements of La Corriveau's legend, her text certainly demonstrates a shift from its fundamental conceptual elements, using a peculiar combination of history, myth, and fiction to arrive at what Harger-Grinling and Chadwick call "le réel profond" (12). As a result, Hébert produces a tale that appears almost unrecognizable, while remaining undeniably familiar and related to the legend on which it is based. In so doing, she steals from myth, this secondary semiological system, as myth steals from language. Hébert's myth becomes a third semiological system, which simultaneously builds upon and completely demolishes the myth from which it takes inspiration. No longer is La Corriveau viewed as a murderer but as a victim of her time, condemned and executed again, figuratively, in the nineteenth century by the many adaptations of her story. In giving La Corriveau a new, transformed mythological past, present, and future, Anne Hébert also gives her a voice and an identity, rather than simply attributing to her vice and infamy.

NOTES

¹ Holding author Philippe Aubert de Gaspé (*Les Anciens Canadiens*) responsible for the unfounded and unfavorable reputation of his homonym, in 1947, J.-Eugène Corriveau began a search for authentic court documents related to the investigation and trial of Marie-Josephte Corriveau (Lacourcière, "La Présence" 233).

² See, for example, Victor-Levy Beaulieu's *Ma Corriveau, suivi de La sorcellerie en finale sexuée: théâtre* or Andrée Lebel's historical novel *La Corriveau*.

³ For an excellent discussion of fictional contaminations in "historical" treatments of La Corriveau, see Lacourcière, "Le destin posthume de la Corriveau."

⁴ According to John Harris Trestail's book *Criminal Poisoning*, Antonio Exili was a professional poisoner who at one point worked for Queen Christina of Sweden. It was through Exili's teachings that Jean-Baptiste de Gaudin de Sainte-Croix assisted la Marquise

de Brinvilliers with her crimes. Catherine Deshayes Monvoisin, *dite* La Voisin, attempted to poison Louis XIV, but was unsuccessful. She was found guilty and burned at the stake in 1680 (Trestail 7-8).

⁵ “La Revanche des berceaux” was a policy promoted by the Catholic Church in an attempt to shore up the French-Canadian numbers against those of their new English neighbors. For an interesting discussion of “la revanche,” see Kevra.

⁶ *The Malleus Maleficarum*, the seminal text on witchcraft, first published in 1486, explains to what extent the witch poses a threat to families and to children in particular. Authors Kramer and Sprenger explain that as part of their pact with the Devil, witches are required to “offer up unbaptized children to Satan” (part 1, question 2). In some cases involving the most dangerous kind of witch — those who have the ability to injure — a more serious attack on the family takes place. Such witches will not only “cause sterility in men and animals,” they may also, “against every instinct of human or animal nature, [be] in the habit of eating and devouring the children of their own species” (part 2, question 1).

⁷ For an excellent discussion of representations of maternity in contemporary Québécois theatre, see Moss.

⁸ For a more extensive discussion of Rosalinde’s role in the play, see O’Meara.

WORKS CITED

- Fréchette, Louis. “Une Rélique.” *Nouvelles Cuentos/Short Stories*. Web. 9 July 2010.
- Gaspé, Philippe Aubert de. *Les Anciens Canadiens*. Quebec: Auguste Côté et Cie, 1877. Web. 9 July 2010.
- Harger-Grinling, Virginia and A.R. Chadwick. “Sorcières, sorciers, et le personnage féminin dans l’œuvre d’Anne Hébert.” *Études canadiennes/Canadian Studies: Revue interdisciplinaire des études canadiennes en France* 36 (1994): 7-12. Print.
- Hébert, Anne. *La cage*. Montréal: Boréal, 1990. Print.
- Kevra, Susan. “The Mechanization of Motherhood: Images of Maternity in Quebec Women Writers of the Quiet Revolution.” *Ameriquists* 4.1 (2007). Web. 9 July 2010.
- Kirby, William. *The Golden Dog*. Boston: Knight, 1896. Web. 9 July 2010.
- Kramer, Heinrich, and James Kramer. *The Malleus Maleficarum*. Web. 9 July 2010.
- Lacourcière, Luc. “Le destin posthume de la Corriveau.” *Les Cahiers des Dix* 34 (1969): 239-71. Print.
- . “La Présence de la Corriveau.” *Les Cahiers des Dix* 38 (1973): 228-64. Print.
- . “Le triple destin de Marie Josephte Corriveau (1733-1763).” *Les Cahiers des Dix* 33 (1968): 213-42. Print.
- Le Moine, James Macpherson. “Marie-Josephte Corriveau, A Canadian Lafarge.” *Maple Leaves*. Quebec: Hunter, Rose: 1863-1906. Print.
- Le Moyne, Jean. *Convergences*. Montreal: Fides, 1992. Print.
- McKay, Melissa. “Le Pouvoir masculin contrarié: La Confrontation entre la femme et l’histoire dans *La Cage* et *L’Île de la Demoiselle* d’Anne Hébert.” *Études francophones* 13.1 (1998): 19-28. Print.

- Moss, Jane. "Hysterical Pregnancies and Post-Partum Blues: Staging the Maternal Body in Recent Quebec Plays." *Essays on Modern Quebec Theater*. Ed. Joseph I. Donahoe, Jr., and Jonathan M. Weiss. East Lansing: Michigan State UP, 1995. 47-59. Print.
- O'Meara, Maureen. "Living with the Cultural Legacy of La Corriveau: *La Cage*." Pallister and Paterson, eds. 161-78.
- Pallister, Janis L. "La Corriveau, historique et légendaire." Pallister and Paterson, eds. 335-42.
- , and Janet Paterson, eds. *The Art and Genius of Anne Hébert: Essays on Her Works: Night and Day are One*. Madison: Farleigh Dickinson UP, 2001. Print.
- Slott, Kathryn. "La Remise en question de la Corriveau dans *La Cage* d'Anne Hébert." Pallister and Paterson, eds. 149-60.
- Trestrail, John Harris III. *Criminal Poisonings*. New York: Humana, 2000. Web. 9 July 2010.