

Frank R. Scott

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

I translated these poems because I thought them representative of the best work of the two French-Canadian poets I most admire. I also thought the poems so good in themselves that even in an English translation they might read well. To translate means to take words and phrases out of the space they occupy in the original composition, and to replace them with other words and phrases that have never quite the same shape or size or sound or meanings. Try as one will, the round hole is never wholly filled by the square peg of another language. The better the original poem the more it resists the attempt at substitution, and yet the more likely it is that its imperfect translation will be worth reading.

My principal aim in translating is to alter the poem as little as possible, and to let it speak for itself in the other tongue. This means a preference for literalness rather than for alternate renderings: for one poem in two languages, instead of two similar poems. This approach seems especially appropriate for the two poets here chosen because their own style of writing, in much though by no means all their work, prefers the rhythm of ordinary speech to a more formal and rhetorical phrasing.

The French text of the Garneau poems comes from the Fides edition (1949) of the *POESIES COMPLETES*, and the Hébert poems are from *LES SONGES EN EQUILIBRE* (1942), *LE TOMBEAU DES ROIS* (1953) and *POEMES* (1960). I have closely copied the original punctuation, or lack of it, except that in some of the Garneau poems I have used spaces in the lines where this seemed to bring out the meaning of a phrase.

As I have been assisted in these translations at various times and in various ways, especially by Micheline Ste. Marie, Jeanne Lapointe and by Anne Hébert herself for *LE TOMBEAU DES ROIS*, I am only part author of the English versions. This help I gladly acknowledge and deeply appreciate. The experience gained through this bilingual collaboration has been a very rewarding part of the work. I should also like to thank les Editions Fides for permission to publish the selections from Garneau, as I do Anne Hébert for the use of her poems. I hope this small example of French-Canadian poetry will awaken in its readers a desire to look more deeply into the original sources.

Source : *St-Denis Garneau & Anne Héber*, Vancouver, Klanak
Press, 1962, p. 9.