AN ANALYSIS OF THE PRESENTATION OF THE ARTIST AND OF ARTISTIC CREATION IN GABRIELLE ROY'S NOVELS

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by

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SCOPE AND CONTENTS:

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the development of the artist's personality and his reactions when confronted with both the reality of his talent and the realities of society. The process of artistic creation itself and the problems of understanding and communication that confront the artist will also be examined. Finally, some comment will be made about how Gabrielle Roy herself, as a creative person, has confronted some of the problems that have arisen in her own life.

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Introduction:

- Biographical details about Gabrielle Roy
- The problem defined
- The choice of the novels

There is always a key to an author's work. Usually this key is provided by the author's life, or a particularly significant episode thereof. Despite the attitude of some modern critics, I believe that a short biographical study of the person whose work we are about to read will, as a rule, greatly add to our understanding of the text before us. An unprejudiced immersion into an accumulation of words and sentences is capable of conveying a meaning and of fulfilling its primary function of communication on an abstract level. Complete as this immersion may be, however, it will never provide the same valuable emotive insight and understanding that the knowledge of an author's background, and, therefore, presumably of his motivation, can shed on his work. This is especially true of Gabrielle Roy since the works mainly examined in this thesis are essentially of a 'biographical' nature. But it also applies to her other works: with the exception of La Montagne secrète, for example, all her novels contain a suffering and sacrificing mother either as a central figure, or, at least, as one of the main characters. The reason for this seemingly 'unnatural' preoccupation is to be found in her biography.

Gabrielle Roy herself has chosen to reveal various aspects of her background--mainly in Rue Deschambault[1] and La Route

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[1] Gabrielle Roy, Rue Deschambault (Montreal: Beauchemin, 1967). This edition is used throughout the present thesis and will subsequently be referred to as RD. (original date of publication: 1955).

d'Altamont[2], and in several interviews.

Born in 1909, Gabrielle Roy is the last of eight children. The youngest child in the family was already seven years old. She grew up among adults and was, therefore, early confronted with the problems of adult life. Nevertheless, her childhood was a relatively happy one. She spent it in the security of the massive house her father had built on rue Deschambault--on the outskirts of Saint-Boniface--and one of the principal determinants of her outlook on life, which she freely admits to, is the happy security and peaceful serenity she experienced during her childhood:

> Mon enfance au Manitoba fut entourée d'une paix profonde. . . . ce qui s'est le plus profondément gravé en moi au cours des premières anneés de ma vie à Saint-Boniface, ce fut une impression de sécurité. Cette sécurité qui donne à la vie un passé de douceur, attesté par des récits, des souvenirs, et aussi par la solide assise d'un ordre social et moral éprouvé.[3]

Her ancestors had been pioneers, migrating first from France to Quebec, then from Quebec to the Canadian West. We can see from her own life that this spirit of adventure, this urge to travel, was not lost in her. Even when she was still a child,

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2 Gabrielle Roy, La Route d'Altamont (Montreal: Beauchemin, 1969). This edition is used throughout the present thesis and will subsequently be referred to as RA. (original date of publication: 1966).

3 Gabrielle Roy, "Souvenirs du Manitoba", dans le Devoir, (Nov. 15, 1955).

her mother accused her of being 'vagabonde', . . . and if a physical journey was out of the question, her imagination took her on the most extraordinary voyages.

Her father was a lively and enterprising civil servant, who became rather taciturn after he lost his position for political reasons, and though there undeniably was a bond of affection between father and daughter--a bond which only later, after his death, she fully understood--it was mainly to her mother, an active woman, full of 'joie de vivre', that she felt her strongest attachment. Constant reference in her novels to the role of the mother in general, and to her own in particular, would in itself constitute ample evidence, but Gabrielle Roy herself acknowledges her mother's determining influence: "Que serais-je sans le souvenir de ma mère? Si elle n'avait pas été ce qu'elle a été, serais-je capable d'écrire ce que j'ai écrit? J'en doute."[4]

She grew up in a small community, among people cherishing nostalgic memories of France and Quebec, and struggling continuously to maintain the integrity of their language, their culture and their faith. Her education followed the typical French Canadian pattern: she attended the 'Académie St-Joseph', a convent school in Saint-Boniface. She revealed herself as a studious and brilliant

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[4] Alice Parizeau, "Gabrielle Roy la grande romancière canadienne", dans Chatelaine (Fr. ed), (April, 1966), p. 123.

pupil, and already she delighted in telling stories to her friends.

Having made up her mind that her contribution to society would be to teach, she obtained a teaching certificate from the Winnipeg Normal Institute and her first assignment took her to Cardinal, a predominantly French-speaking village near Somerset. Afterwards she also taught at the Institut Provencher, a bilingual school, only a short distance from her home. In the summer of 1937 she then spent two unforgettable months teaching at the 'Ile de la Petite Poule d'Eau' which provided her with the basis for a later novel.

During her years as a teacher she wholeheartedly participated in school activities. She also gratified one of her long cherished dreams by organizing plays at her school. Moreover, she herself played with a theatrical group in Saint-Boniface, and later with the more famous 'Cercle Molière' in Winnipeg. Twice she participated in the 'Festival d'Art Dramatique' that took place in Ottawa.[5]

Soon, however, her spirit of adventure and the urge to explore took hold of her again: the attraction of Europe, and particularly France, "la Métropole", became too strong. She had, perhaps, only one regret--leaving her mother behind.

Paris was a disappointment; more pleasant were her

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5 Later, in London, she takes courses in dramatic art. Although she is quite talented as an actress, her voice is too frail for the stage and she decides to concentrate on a career as a writer, rather than on one as an actress.

souvenirs from her 'vagabondage' in Southern France where, like Pierre Cadorai, she tried to recapture what she left behind in her native country.

Back in Canada in 1939 at the eve of World War II she was more than ever determined to pursue a career as a writer. In fact, while still in Europe, she had already submitted several articles to the daily la Liberté of Saint-Boniface, and during her stay in France, the weekly Je suis partout had accepted several articles on Canada. In Montréal she had articles published in le Jour, le Canada, la Revue Moderne, la Revue Populaire and le Bulletin des Agriculteurs.

However, Gabrielle Roy was not content with a career as a journalist and during the war, she worked on a novel which was first published in 1945 at the Editions Pascal in Montréal. This book, Bonheur d'occasion[6], was an instant success: it received official recognition by the Académie Française and the Literary Guild of America, Hollywood bought the film rights and in 1947 it received its final consecration by being awarded the Prix Femina; the same year, Gabrielle Roy also became the first woman to be appointed to the Royal Society.

It was not, however, in Gabrielle Roy's nature to enjoy

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6 Gabrielle Roy, Bonheur d'occasion (Montreal: Beauchemin, 1967). (original date of publication: 1945).

being the focus of public attention:

> On doit publier deux livres sur moi, dit-elle. Cela me fait un peu peur. Pourquoi cette attention? C'est trop. Je crois que quand ces ouvrages paraîtront je vais me sauver. Je vais partir. A la campagne, en Europe n'importe où. C'est curieux à quel point les gens tiennent parfois à me voir. A me parler. J'ai reçu la visite de quelqu'un qui voulait absolument que j'écrive un roman. Un roman dont il m'apportait l'histoire. Ce monsieur estimait que je devais traiter de ce sujet plutôt que d'un autre. Etrange, n'est-ce pas? On ne devrait pas être traquée de la sorte. Qu'ai-je fait, en somme . . . j'écris. J'aime écrire. Cette année je vais faire paraître un recueil de nouvelles. C'est ça qui compte.[7]

The same year she married Dr. Marcel Carbotte and, as Gabrielle Roy herself seems to admit, because of her newly found popularity and the persistent attention the public was lavishing on her, they both left for France shortly afterwards and remained there for three happy years. "Nous avons vécu heureux, ayant le choix de la solitude en forêt--à deux pas de chez nous--ou du théâtre, du spectacle à Paris--à quinze kilomètres de distance."[8]

While in France, she wrote, in 1950, La Petite Poule d'Eau, the fruit of her idealized reminiscences of her two month summer teaching assignment in North-Western Manitoba.

7
Alice Parizeau, art. cit., p. 140.

8
Ibid., p. 121.

After returning to Canada, Monsieur and Madame Carbotte spent a year in Montreal and finally settled in Quebec. Ever since, Gabrielle Roy has led a rather quiet and secluded life, shying away from the most overt public attention generally bestowed on writers of her talent. Only on a few rare, unfortunately too rare, occasions has she granted interviews or addressed an audience.

However, it appears that her works are usually explicit and adequately express the whole of Gabrielle Roy: her feminist views, her religious attitude, her social and even political convictions and, more important yet, a penetrating analysis of herself. Gabrielle Roy, in her life and work, is guided by her great affinity with the spirit of human individuality and the problems confronting the individual in society. The case of the creative mind and its relationship to society is a very special one, of the greatest personal interest to Gabrielle Roy. It is thus only logical to assume that her 'biographical' novels, including La Montagne secrète,[9] are in fact her attempt to understand herself.

Two general tendencies emerge from her novels: Firstly, her awareness of social problems and her great concern with human

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[9] Gabrielle Roy, La Montagne secrète (Montreal: Edition HMH, 1968). This edition is used throughout the present thesis and will subsequently be referred to as MS. (original date of publication: 1961).

suffering in general and, more specifically, the lot of the French Canadian woman and mother. In this context, her love for mankind and her awareness of the suffering endured everywhere becomes apparent; therefore, it is hardly surprising to find her novels suffused with a mixture of 'maternal' love and human tenderness. Secondly, her urge for self-analysis, even self-justification, becomes apparent; it is a burning desire to understand her own evolution as a creative artist. She undertakes this pursuit of herself on two distinct levels: on the one hand, she retraces her youth and examines some of the determining factors of her vocation; on a deeper, more subtle level, she grapples in La Montagne secrète and La Route d'Altamont with the more esoteric problem of the artist's mental attitude, attempting to expose the very process of artistic creation itself.

Thus, this is what I propose to examine: What is Gabrielle Roy's vision of the artist as a person, and how does she view the process of artistic (that is in her case, literary) creation.

Gabrielle Roy confronts the first question by retracing her own youth with particular emphasis on the necessity for loneliness and solitude, a fertile imagination and an indefinable spark of genius, a gift from God. She focuses on the problem mainly in Rue Deschambault and La Route d'Altamont; Pierre Cadorai, in La Montagne secrète, as a person, also confirms the characterization of the artist that has emerged from her own 'biography'.

The intricacies of the mental processes involved in the act of creation, the ecstatic vision and the agony of the quasi impossibility to communicate, are best expressed in La Montagne secrète. Of course, one level of the analysis cannot be completely divorced from the other and "La voix des étangs" in Rue Deschambault, or her allegory of talent in the title story of La Route d'Altamont, for example, are instances where the physical and the mental merge.

I have largely ignored Gabrielle Roy's other novels for, although she touches upon the themes of creativity and originality, they are not the main object of these works. The circumstances giving rise to the creative urges of some of the characters[10] in those novels would only distract from my main purpose: to examine the creative person and analyse the process of artistic creation as presented by Gabrielle Roy in her novels.

In the main works considered here,[11] Gabrielle Roy defines the artist, that is, the creative person, both in terms of his relationship to other people, especially those to whom he is strongly attached, and also in terms of his loneliness and isolation; but she also defines him in terms of his perception and understanding

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10 An example would be Alexandre Chenevert's unsatisfied urge to write and to communicate his despair.

11 Rue Deschambault, La Montagne secrète, La Route d'Altamont.

of Nature.

The creative process is primarily regarded as an excursion into an imaginary world, producing not an objective reproduction, but an attempt at a subjective rendition of a vision; the problem for the artist thus becomes primarily one of communicating his subjective perception by transposing it into a concrete material reality. Therein lies perhaps one of the greatest difficulties encountered by the artist: if his message is too objective and thus too easily understood, it will be considered of little artistic, or only of documentary value; if, on the other hand, it is too subjective, that is when the artist is not able to adapt himself and the symbolism he uses to the reality of the world, the message will be considered meaningless or, even worse, insane.

In her efforts to understand herself and her talent, Gabrielle Roy is usually concise and direct, approaching the subject without the extravagant and unnecessary symbolism so often found in modern novels. She restricts her use of symbolism to instances where ordinary modes of description would fail her because of the non-existence of the vocabulary to describe unequivocally what she wishes to communicate--or simply to record--in a terminology that can be understood by everyone.

Rue Deschambault is a simple, straightforward narrative of the development of a perceptive and imaginative young girl into a young woman who has to come to grips with the sometimes

harsh realities of adult life.

The same could almost be said for La Route d'Altamont, certainly for parts one ("Ma grand-mère toute-puissante"), two ("Le vieillard et l'enfant") and three ("Le déménagement"). However, as Gérard Bessette has pointed out in his "La Route d'Altamont, Clef de La Montagne secrète"[12], part four is wrought with a deep rooted, yet subtle symbolism that could easily escape one's attention during a mere cursory reading. All four stories could, of course, be taken entirely at their face value. This interpretation, however, appears as too obvious, too simple, and, as will be shown later, at least partially wrong.

Even in "Le déménagement", one of the first three stories, one which Bessette dismisses as rather dull, it is easy to see a story of the disillusionment of the young idealistic girl who, during her apprenticeship of life, is confronted with the sad sameness of organized existence in society. Change is an accident, almost non-existent, and poverty is just as grim in one section of the city as in another.

In La Montagne secrète, the symbolism is unavoidable for want of an adequate terminology. Gabrielle Roy herself points out this "maladresse des mots" (RA, p. 204). How indeed is one

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[12] G. Bessette, "La Route d'Altamont, Clef de La Montagne secrète" dans Livres et Auteurs Canadiens 1966, pp 19-24.

to write in concrete terms about the abstract, almost alien, but certainly intricate process of thought in an artist's mind while he is in the act of creating? The mountain, the hunt and killing of the old caribou stag, even Pierre's trip to France, at first appear as just so many unanswered questions, which are left to the reader to solve. It appears that Gabrielle Roy, at the time of writing La Montagne secrète, had not quite resolved some of the questions to her own complete satisfaction, or more likely, perhaps, she had not yet found the terminology to express herself unequivocally about the subject.

In fact, she never really does confront the problem to the reader's entire satisfaction. It appears that in her mind the 'mystery' is solved and does not warrant any further intensive attention: as Bessette points out, a certain rephrasing and synthesis of this 'mystery' becomes apparent in La Route d'Altamont for those who see the light. Her latest book (La Rivière sans Repos), a collection of small stories on Eskimo life, almost completely ignores the subject.[13]

In the two following chapters I shall examine the development of the artist's personality and her reactions when confronted with both the reality of her talent and the realities of society. Furthermore, the process of artistic creation itself and the problems

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13 The outstanding exception is Thaddeus, the grandfather. He is, however, a character of only secondary importance.

of understanding and communication that confront the artist will also be examined. Finally, in the conclusion, some comment will be made about how Gabrielle Roy herself, as a creative person, has confronted some of the problems that have arisen in her own life.

Chapter I: Rue Deschambault and La Route d'Altamont

- Childhood experiences and growing awareness of her talent.

- Maturity and confrontation with the realities of life.

Rue Deschambault is a collection of eighteen short stories which are connected by their characters, chronology and general purpose, in which the author, under the pseudonym of Christine, relives her childhood and her adolescence. In these stories, the reader participates in all the experiences that mould a child into an adult; we witness the unfolding of the child's imaginative life and her intense involvement, but also her pseudo withdrawal into a world of fantasy and, sometimes, of nostalgia. All these experiences are clearly some of the factors that influenced the artistic activities which Gabrielle Roy herself was to follow, and which later find their best expression in La Montagne secrète.

All eighteen stories contribute to some extent to enlighten the reader about the 'shaping' of the adult Christine, of the artist and teacher who, in her own way, is trying to contribute to the improvement of mankind and the human condition. Christine is, however, the central figure in only six of the stories. These six stories, especially "Ma coqueluche" and "La voix des étangs", are instrumental in shedding light on what determined Gabrielle Roy in her vocation. Among the twelve remaining stories in which Christine does not play the main part, a few, such as "Les deux nègres" or "Un bout de ruban jaune", contribute very little in increasing our knowledge of Christine as a creative person and as a potential

artist, except perhaps as far as revealing her imagination. Most, though, contribute to a greater or lesser extent in revealing some of the factors that have shaped the adult Christine.

In "Mon chapeau rose" Christine appears as a child who cherishes her freedom and wishes to preserve it at all costs. During a vacation on her aunt's farm, she quickly becomes bored with the monotonous routine of the daily farm chores and longs for new experiences. The swing in her aunt's yard provides a temporary escape by giving her a vision of pleasanter things beyond the walls of her place of confinement and, for a moment at least, she is happy:

> Quand j'étais assez haut dans le ciel, j'étais contente. Mais chaque fois que je redescendais l'escarpolette, je me trouvais dans un jardin minuscule, enfermé de tous côtés. . . . Là-haut, je retrouvais la grand'route, des collines bleues et aussi la maison des vieux pelotonnés sur leur perron.
>
> (RD, p. 42)

Similarly, in "Les déserteuses", Christine's mother does more than just dream about the freedom she had lost by accepting the responsibility of a family. It has not been easy either; years of conformity to her role as a wife and mother have dulled in her, perhaps not the spirit of adventure itself, but certainly the physical urge to explore: "Pour une femme qui tenait à la liberté, que de chaînes elle s'était faites!" (RD, p. 98). However, her escapade is only a temporary one and soon she returns to her husband and home

perhaps not much wiser, but certainly much happier for having seen 'La Métropole'. Even her husband's usually reserved composure breaks down at the memory of his youth:

> Papa eut une larme à l'oeil, qu'il oublia d'essuyer. Timidement, il demanda d'autres détails: le vieux pommier contre la grange existait-il toujours? Restait-il quelque chose du verger? Et maman les lui donna vrais et touchants. Sur son visage, les souvenirs étaient comme des oiseaux en plein vol.
>
> (RD, p. 122)

Soon enough, though, a mere vision is not sufficient anymore for Christine: she has to be there in person, be close to those old people she has seen on their porch and whom, in her imagination, she has known forever. Dreaming is not enough and actual physical escape becomes imperative; reality supersedes the happiness that a vision or dream can provide. However, the gate her aunt locks every morning to prevent her 'vagabondage' appears to be an insurmountable obstacle to her atavistic urge for exploration and adventure. Significantly enough, it is an old man, not simply 'an adult' or somebody her own age who makes possible her escape;[1] and while her worried relatives are looking for her, she spends the rest of the afternoon together with the old man

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[1] Also, her relationship to those old people is already to some extent symbolic of the role her mother plays in her life. She dwells more extensively on this later in the book, but especially in the title story of La Route d'Altamont.

and his wife in a more pleasurable manner than if she had been with other children. "Quelle belle après-midi! C'est à peine si les vieux m'ont osé poser des questions. . . . Nous avons été très bien tous les trois ensemble sur la galerie à nous regarder et à rire sans bruit, rien que des yeux et du coin des lèvres." (RD, p. 44).

Later, in "Le vieillard et l'enfant" in La Route d'Altamont, Gabrielle Roy more closely examines her strange affinity with old people---also evident in "Ma grand-mère toute-puissante"---with a proustian concern for the passage of time, as has already been pointed out.[2] In a way, trying to understand these old people, who have already had the experience of a long life, is as close as she can come to understanding her own possible future:

> Sans doute n'avais-je pas encore clairement compris que tous nous finirons ainsi, que ce sera là notre dernière image de nos êtres les plus aimés, mais je pressentais plus près d'elle que j'en étais moi-même les vieux visages ridés. Etait-ce donc cela, cette espèce de prescience que j'avais de leur disparition proche, qui me les rendait si chers? Mais alors, eux, les vieillards, pourquoi auraient-ils été pareillement attirés vers moi? Ne serait-ce pas qu'il est naturel aux petites mains à peine formées, aux vieilles mains amenuisées, de se joindre? . . . Mais là encore, qui expliquera ce phénomène tout aussi plein lui-même de mystère que celui de la vie, que celui de la mort dans un cercueil.
>
> (RA, pp 67-8)

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2 This 'proustian' aspect of Gabrielle Roy's work was first noted by G. Tougas in a short review of La Route d'Altamont (The French Review, vol. XXX, No. 11, Oct. 1956, pp. 992-93) and Michel Gaulin later expands on the same subject in a review of La Route d'Altamont (Incidence, No. 10, April 1966, pp. 27-38).

There is a certain inescapable responsibility in this relationship between young and old---the responsibility for the young to learn and for the old to teach, to communicate their experience of life. For it is not just new words that Christine learns from M. Saint-Hilaire, but an outlook on life and, by extension, on death. Her tutor, with the wisdom peculiar to the very old, has come to accept death as just another stage in the cycle of life when he answers Christine's question:

> ---L'éternité des temps, c'est quand on meurt?
> ---Mais non, c'est la vie qui ne finit plus.
>
> (RA, p. 110)

However, old age betrays M. Saint-Hilaire as it had earlier betrayed Christine's grandmother by depriving her of her creative genius, and Christine is not convinced: from what little experience she has, she can only conclude that old age and death are synonymous with the decline and the extinction of whatever spark of creative genius she may harbour. Thus she wants to retain both the experience of a long life and the purity of youth: "Mais je ne voulais pas vieillir, je voulais tout savoir sans vieillir; mais surtout, j'imagine, je ne voulais pas voir vieillir autour de moi." (RA, p. 133).

Later in her life, in "La tempête", when she is lost with her cousins in a snowstorm and, simply to while away the time, they talk about their plans for the future, it almost seems natural for her to suggest: "---Si nous choisissions plutôt de mourir ensemble

avant de devenir vieux, laids, bougons! Rien de plus facile! Nous n'aurions qu'à partir à pied dans la tempête. . ." (RD, p. 228).

In "Ma coqueluche", her illness, which should in fact distress and sadden her, becomes for Christine, a child whose mind is as yet unprejudiced, another invaluable experience, an opportunity to discover Nature's charms which the casual or unmotivated observer often misses:

> J'ai découvert en ce temps-là presque tout ce que je n'ai jamais cessé de tant aimer dans la nature: le mouvement des feuilles d'un arbre quand on les voit d'en bas, sous leur abri; leur envers, comme le ventre d'une petite bête, plus doux, plus pâle, plus timide que leur face. Et, au fond, tous les voyages de ma vie, depuis, n'ont été que des retours en arrière pour tâcher de ressaisir ce que j'avais tenu dans le hamac et sans le chercher.
>
> (RD, p. 73)

She soon realizes that this discovery was only possible because of her forced temporary solitude, while her sole defence against boredom was an intensified perception of the world surrounding her, and withdrawal within herself. Thus, she also discovers that 'solitude' is not really the depressing feeling she thought it to be, but that, in fact, complete happiness is not possible without it:

> Mais en moi-même, où je pouvais plonger à tout instant, si proches de moi qu'elles auraient pu rester invisibles, là étaient les pures merveilles! Comment ne sait-on pas plus tôt qu'on est

> soi-même son meilleur, son plus cher compagnon? Pourquoi tant craindre la solitude qui n'est qu'un tête-à-tête avec ce seul compagnon véritable? Est-ce que sans lui toute la vie ne serait pas un désert?
>
> (RD, p. 73)

Being a child--and still innocent of any knowledge of the world's miseries--she easily grasps these 'pures merveilles' which children do not purposely seek to understand and which, when adults, they desperately attempt to recapture, even though the essence of the mystery has long since eluded them. Conformity to organized society, as they grow up, has caused their slow but unavoidable blindness to the natural beauty of the world.

The discovery has become the starting point of Christine's (Gabrielle Roy's) career: to try to recapture those moments of paradise, the pristine innocence and the joy of understanding. This becomes her 'Hidden Mountain', the vision of which she is henceforth trying to recapture. But what does a vision of the future matter at a time like this; at this moment of total euphoric bliss she was ". . . libre, si légère, toujours en voyage!" (RD, p. 75). Similarly, when Christine and M. Saint-Hilaire are confronted with the natural beauty of Lake Winnipeg, she is overwhelmed by an ecstatic, almost undescribable feeling of joy, which intellectually, she cannot yet fully appreciate.

> Par la suite, j'ai appris évidemment que c'est le propre même de la joie, ce ravissement dans l'étonnement, ce sentiment d'une révélation à la fois si simple, si naturelle et si grande

> pourtant que l'on ne sait trop qu'en
> dire, sinon: "Ah, c'est donc cela!"
>
> (RA, p. 116)

It is the emotion Pierre Cadorai must have experienced when he sank to his knees in front of his Mountain--a moment of bliss that wipes away years of suffering and makes living worth while again . . . or impossible to bear. Already, however, she cannot help but ask the question she later answers with Pierre Cadorai's death: ". . . est-ce qu'à tout ce bonheur j'avais seulement le droit de survivre? . . ." (RD, p. 76)--total understanding, total happiness also require total sacrifice.

In "Wilhelm", Christine, a young adolescent now, is for the first time confronted with the 'love' of the adult world and the disillusionment it so often brings:

> Jusque-là j'avais pensé que l'amour devait
> être franc et limpide, chéri de tous et
> faisant la paix entre les êtres. Or, que
> se passait-il? Maman devenait comme une
> espionne, occupée à fouiller ma corbeille
> à papier; et moi, parfois, je pensais d'elle
> qu'elle était bien la dernière personne au
> monde à me comprendre! Etait-ce donc là
> ce qu'accomplissait l'amour! Et où étaient
> nos belles relations franches, entre
> maman et moi! Vient-il toujours une
> mauvaise époque entre une mère et sa fille?
> Est-ce l'amour qui l'amène? . . . Et
> qu'est-ce, qu'est-ce que l'amour? . . .
> Est-ce son prochain? Ou quelqu'un de riche,
> de séduisant?[3]
>
> (RD, pp 204-5)

The strict common sense of the adults finally prevails over

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[3] My underlining: already in La Route d'Altamont Gabrielle Roy thus gives an indication of her doubt about her love for her mother, an idea which pervades La Route d'Altamont and which also constantly occurs in her other works.

youthful romantic dreams. . . and she conforms to social pressure.

Just as disappointing as her first romance is her first real desire for worldly possessions in "Les bijoux". It seems like a rather typical 'crisis' in an adolescent's search for identity--Christine's "quête folle" (RD, p. 212)--which is in all points comparable to the artist's search for truth. From the one extreme of her coquettish passion for cheap jewelry, she goes to the other, just as unreasonable, of complete self-denial:

> ... je voulus l'égalité sur terre, ...
> Et puis je me suis précipitée à genoux;
> j'ai fait pénitence. Mais mon âme était
> encore comme folle: N'exigeait-elle pas,
> sur-le-champ, que je parte pour l'Afrique
> soigner les lépreux!
>
> (RD, p. 215)

But it is her mother's gentle reproach that has taught her the most valuable lesson, "qu'être soi-même est justement la chose la plus difficile." (RD, p. 213). Christine, the adolescent, is still confused. She doesn't yet have the confidence which clear self-awareness gives to the mature Gabrielle Roy:

> Du reste, comment aurais-je su alors qui
> j'étais! Cette fille méconnaissable à
> mes propres yeux, que je voyais dans ma
> glace, à laquelle je demandais conseil,
> de qui j'attendais mille surprises, cette
> fille énigmatique, chaque jour plus folle,
> n'était-elle pas pour l'instant la plus
> vraie des divers moi-même?
>
> (RD, p. 213)

Very closely related to "Ma coqueluche" is "La voix

des étangs". It is very short (only five pages) but along with the story of her illness and "Gagner ma vie" (see pp. 28-30) it is, perhaps, the most important in enlightening the reader. She is barely sixteen, somewhat more mature now inasmuch as she starts seriously questioning herself about her future.

In "Petite misère", primarily one of the few stories in which her father plays a central role, the attic had become for her a place for introspection and meditation. Soon her tears no longer flow because she feels rejected by her father, but simply because " . . . je sentais en moi comme chez les grandes personnes assez de lâcheté pour me résigner à la vie telle qu'elle est . . ." (RD, p. 35). It is another indication of the long struggle for identity between the Christine of her dreams and the real Christine, the Christine of the future. In the womb-like security of her attic she thus wonders:

> Que serais-je plus tard? . . . Que ferais-je de ma vie? . . . Oui, voilà les questions que je commençais à me poser. Sans doute pensais-je que le temps était venu de prendre des décisions au sujet de mon avenir, au sujet de cette inconnue de moi-même que je serais un jour.
>
> (RD, pp. 218-9)

She finds part of the answer in these "immenses pays sombres que le temps ouvre devant nous," (RD, p. 219) and in the resources of her own mind.

> Ainsi, j'ai eu l'idée d'écrire. Quoi et pourquoi, je n'en savais rien. J'écrirais. C'était comme un amour soudain qui, d'un coup, enchaîne un

> coeur; c'était vraiment un fait aussi
> simple, aussi naïf que l'amour.
> N'ayant rien encore à dire . . . je
> voulais avoir quelque chose à dire . . .
>
> (RD, p. 219)

This is perhaps the way back to the Paradise she glimpsed during the days of her 'coqueluche'. Indeed, it all seems so easy, but slowly her mother brings her back from the dangerous heights of her dream by adding to the vision of bliss also a vision of hardship, suffering and solitude:

> ——Ecrire, me dit-elle tristement, c'est
> dur. Ce doit être ce qu'il y a de
> plus exigeant au monde . . . pour
> que ce soit vrai, tu comprends! N'est-ce
> pas se partager en deux, pour ainsi dire:
> un qui tâche de vivre, l'autre qui re-
> garde, qui juge . . .
> Elle me dit encore:
> ——D'abord, il faut le don; . . .
> Et c'est un don bien étrange,
> continua maman, pas tout à fait
> humain. Je pense que les autres ne
> le pardonnent jamais. Ce don, c'est
> un peu comme une malchance qui éloigne
> les autres, qui nous sépare de presque
> tous . . .
> . . .
> ——Ecrire, me dit-elle, est-ce que
> ce n'est pas en définitive être loin
> des autres . . . être toute seule,
> pauvre enfant!
>
> (RD, p. 221)

And although she cannot yet fully understand this, Christine accepts her mother's warning: "Comment maman pouvait-elle dire si juste? A mesure qu'elle parlait, ce qu'elle disait je le sentais vrai, et déjà comme enduré." (RD, p. 221). But traces of her dream linger on and before awakening to the reality of her

own future, her hopes remain alive:

> Mais j'espérais encore que je pourrais tout avoir: et la vie chaude et vraie comme un abri -- intolérable aussi parfois de vérité dure -- et aussi le temps de capter son retentissement au fond de l'âme; le temps de marcher et le temps de m'arrêter pour comprendre; le temps de m'isoler un peu sur la route et puis de rattraper les autres, de les rejoindre et de crier joyeusement: "Me voici, et voici ce que j'ai trouvé en route pour vous! . . . M'avez-vous attendue? . . . Ne m'attendez-vous pas? . . . Oh! attendez-moi donc! . . ."
>
> (RD, p. 222)

Of more immediate concern, also touched upon in "Petite misère", is Christine's perception of the relationship of the adults around her to their world. It is not, to say the least, an inspiring picture, worthy of unquestioning imitation: freedom of choice is gone and adults generally have resigned themselves to faithful role playing. One of the most striking results of their lack of freedom, from Christine's point of view, is their boredom and, perhaps, only the slightest attempt on their part to regain the carefree life of their youth: " . . . toutes les grandes personnes que j'ai connues en ce temps-là paraissaient s'ennuyer. Moi, je ne m'ennuyais pas . . . Sans doute possédais-je encore quelque chose que je ne savais pas avoir, mais, lorsqu'on l'a perdu, toute sa vie on cherche à le retrouver!" (RD, p. 92).

It is not surprising, with these examples before her, that she is trying to preserve both the reality and the illusion

of her childhood and youth, shunning the adult world and its yoke "[d']avoir trop d'explications à donner . . ." (RD, p. 99). As we have seen, the conflict within her becomes more intense as she grows up.

It is finally in "Gagner ma vie", the last of the stories that is directly concerned with Christine, that some of the confusion about herself is ended when Christine recognizes the material necessity for at least a small measure of conformity to the rules of society.

In her beloved attic, her retreat from the world, she dreams of her future: "Je jouais à l'artiste, ignorant encore que l'écrivain est l'être le plus indépendant -- ou le plus solitaire!" (RD, p. 250). The attic is a place for dreaming, a gateway to fantastic worlds, but it is also a place for weighty decisions. It is in her attic that her mother confronts her with some of the more unpleasant realities of an adult's responsibilities; for example, the necessity to earn a living, with all the tyranny this entails. Her disillusionment when her immediate dreams are shattered is great at first:

> Gagner sa vie! Comme cela m'apparaissait mesquin, intéressé, avare! La vie devait-elle se gagner? Ne valait-il pas mieux la donner une seule fois, dans un bel élan? . . . Ou même la perdre? Ou encore la jouer, la risquer . . . que sais-je! Mais la gagner petitement, d'un jour à l'autre! . . . Ce fut, ce soir-là, exactement comme si on m'avait dit: "Par le seul fait que tu vis, tu dois payer."
>
> Je pense n'avoir jamais fait découverte plus désolante; toute la vie assujettie à

> l'argent; tout travail, tout songe évalué
> en vue d'un rendement.
>
> (RD, p. 251)

But again, thanks to her mother, she sees the necessity for compromise: she will teach and thus be able, in a more limited way perhaps, to communicate some of her ideals: where the teacher only transmits and 'shares' already existing knowledge, the artist innovates and thus transmits--or at least attempts to transmit--new ideas, concepts or perceptions; by its very nature, the task of the artist is, of course, the more difficult one. Both teacher and artist have to be dedicated to their duty--duty by choice for the teacher, duty inherent in his art, as Pierre (Gabrielle Roy's artistic self) discovers in La Montagne secrète. Gabrielle Roy approaches her first assignment in a spirit reminiscent of her general attitude towards suffering humanity, free of the baser mercenary thoughts that unfortunately are all too often the sole motivation of today's teachers:

> . . . j'avais accepté le marché, je
> voulais que ce fût un engagement loyal.
> "Tu me donnes tant en salaire, moi je
> te donne tant d'heures de travail . . ."
> Non, ce n'était pas ainsi que je
> voulais engager l'affaire avec le village.
> Je lui donnerais tout ce que je pourrais.
> Et lui, que me donnerait-il en échange?
> Je l'ignorais, mais je lui faisais
> confiance.
>
> (RD, p. 254)

However, her responsibility as a teacher is just as great as her responsibility as an artist; hers is the task of shaping those young, still virgin personalities . . . and hers is also the

responsibility for a better future: "Il y avait, dans leurs yeux fixés sur les miens, une confiance parfaite. Je suppose qu'ils m'auraient crue si je leur avais dit que la terre est peuplée d'ennemis, et qu'il faudrait haïr beaucoup de gens, des peuples entiers . . ." (RD, p. 260). And her 'reward' is greater yet: not only does she gain some measure of insight into human nature, which will later be invaluable to her, but she also realizes that, despite the sadness and misery so common in the world, there is hope for a brighter future: "Est-ce que le monde n'était pas un enfant? Est-ce que nous n'étions pas au matin? . . . (RD, p. 260).

Eleven years after Rue Deschambault, Gabrielle Roy publishes La Route d'Altamont, another book dealing with the same subject--that is, the factors that influenced her life since her childhood. There is, however, an important difference: in the meantime, Gabrielle Roy has also written La Montagne secrète and she seems to have answered (at least to her own satisfaction) some questions about her talent and herself as an artist; and the maturity she has gained (although it almost seems absurd to talk about a fifty year old author as gaining maturity) is certainly reflected in the four stories (especially in the title story) of La Route d'Altamont by the much deeper, more subtle insight into her life and the forces that have shaped her.

In the first 'chapter', "Ma grand-mère toute-puissante",

she re-examines the role of Man as a creator of things, in fact becoming a 'god' in the universe he shapes or at least imagines. In this story Christine, still a very young girl, spends a few days with her grandmother who, from bits and pieces of otherwise useless materials which she seems to have saved for just such an occasion, 'creates' the most beautiful doll Christine has ever seen--an achievement only rivalled by God's creation of the world itself. The grandmother herself takes pleasure and pride in her work: ". . . grand-mère . . . s'animait à retrouver du moins intactes les infinies ressources ingénieuses de son imagination. Ah, c'était bien là notre don de famille, nul doute!" (RA, p. 19-20). However, imagination alone is not enough. Christine's mother certainly had imagination but "le talent créateur . . . ce don de Dieu" (RA, p. 21) was missing. After her grandmother, Christine has received both a genial imagination from her family and the talent to 'create' from God. In fact, the artist or creative person can, as Gabrielle Roy realizes, be compared to God: it is not matter that Man creates, but ideas. 'Matter' is nothing but a vehicle of communication to express a novel perception or an original concept. Grandmother certainly does not object to being compared to God: ". . . elle n'était pas offensée de ce que je l'avais comparée à Dieu le Père." (RA, p. 28). It is not really a question of competition between God and Man, but rather a question of how much

Man's creation contributes to His creation.[4]

This theme had been touched upon in "Le Titanic": is it presumptuous for Man to want to 'create'? should the act of creation be left to God if His creature does not want to incur His wrath? is this perhaps the Original Sin that made Man no longer content with a purely passive role and endowed him with an irrepressible curiosity and urge to explore? Christine's Uncle Majorique is convinced that Man was given the freedom to create that which is in his power to create, and even the vengeful M. Elie is forced to admit that ". . . non, il supposait que ce n'était pas mal, [de construire un bateau solide]" (RD, p. 83).

Gabrielle Roy realizes that everyone contributes; even her father, as 'agent colonisateur' helped in this design. But a few, like herself, have the gift of innovation, of original thinking--a special talent that sets them apart from the rest of mankind in a ". . . solitude hautaine et indéchiffrable de qui est occupé à créer." (RA, p. 23). The revelation of this talent or gift often comes early in life, as with Christine (Gabrielle), although its full implications are seldom understood immediately. And often, when the 'burden' he carries is finally understood by the artist,

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4 Gabrielle Roy has treated this question in more detail in La Montagne secrète.

he blames God for granting his secret wishes: "--Pourquoi aussi nous écoute-t-il quand on lui demande des choses qui plus tard ne feront plus notre affaire? Il devrait avoir le bon sens de ne pas nous écouter!" (RA, p. 14).

Christine, like most children her age, is impetuous in her desire to enjoy what life has to offer. As yet, little does she heed M. Saint-Hilaire's warning: "--Pauvre petite enfant! . . . Tu avancerais la montre si c'était possible. Moi, je la retarderais." (RA, p. 141). Thus the journey she undertakes with the old man is not merely a physical one; her imagination races far ahead of her, unerringly searching for an ideal that remains always out of reach . . . until she has learned to accept the reality of the present: "--Car, quand tu auras fait le tour des choses, disait-il, que tu auras visité les villes et les monuments, les musées et les palais, quand tu auras vu les océans et les montagnes, sais-tu donc que tu auras envie de mieux encore?" (RA, p. 142). Pierre, in La Montagne secrète, always wanted "mieux encore", even after he had found his Mountain, and, similarly, Gabrielle Roy was not content with the experiences which her own country had to offer. This spiritual and physical restlessness is one of the sacrifices the artist has to make if he wants to attain his ideal. Pierre's sacrifice to his art is total in the end but, as will be shown later[5], the price to be paid is too high for Gabrielle Roy.

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5 See conclusion

What Christine earlier suspected in "Les déserteuses" becomes clearer to her after M. Saint-Hilaire's explanations. To a large extent, it is not only the outside world that she has to overcome, but something within herself--the spark of genius--has to respond to her passion for adventure to make these adventures more than just a dream: "Je pense avoir aussi quelque peu compris qu'il ne suffit pas d'avoir la passion de partir pour pouvoir partir; qu'avec cette passion au coeur on peut quand même rester prisonnier toute sa vie dans une petite rue." (RA, p. 148).

"Le déménagement", the third story in La Route d'Altamont, is largely a recall to reality symbolizing in all probability the artist's romantic naiveté and the deception it can cause him: some of Christine's illusions are destroyed, but her experience of life increases.

"Etre à la dérive au fil de la vie! Ressembler aux nomades! Errer dans le monde! Rien de tout cela qui ne me semblât félicité." (RA, p. 157): "Le déménagement" is yet another hymn to the life of 'vagabondage' that the young girl wants to lead in real life, just as she leads it in the vast spaces of her imagination. Just as her mother had been, she is now "Attirée par l'espace, le grand ciel nu, le moindre petit arbre qui se voyait à des milles en cette solitude." (RA, p. 163). But the end of what she at first thought of as a romantic journey is a bitter disillusionment, a harsh confrontation with the miseries of life, from which she had largely been sheltered, and from which henceforth she

will seek to escape: ". . . je ne m'étais pas encore rendu compte que tout ce côté usé, terne et impitoyable de la vie que m'avait aujourd'hui révélé le déménagement, plus que jamais allait gonfler ma frénésie d'évasion." (RA, p. 184).

Little by little, and largely with the help of her mother, as we have seen in Rue Deschambault, she gives up some of her dreams to face some of the realities of the world, and in La Route d'Altamont it is a more adjusted Christine (or Gabrielle) that we find--a girl who has almost learned to accept her talent, and to adapt it as much as necessary to the reality of the society she lives in.

In the title story, undoubtedly the most important and meaningful of the book, Gabrielle Roy extensively dwells on the origin and nature of her talent, exposing the problems, and rejoicing at the potential rewards.

She realizes that "peut-être faut-il être bien seul, parfois, pour se retrouver soi-même." (RA, p. 206), but, to fully understand herself, she also realizes that she must first understand her relationship with her mother.

Her mother's passion for adventure is finally crystallized in the dream-picture of her 'collines perdues'. Finding this 'hidden mountain' she half remembers, half imagines, will give a meaning to her life, make bearable all the sufferings and deprivations hitherto endured. "C'est la hauteur inattendue, quand on l'atteint, qui

justement donne du prix à tout le reste." (RA, p. 192). Quite by chance, Gabrielle Roy indeed 'discovers' these hills of her mother's dreams--she has found the road to Altamont, the road leading to her mother's happiness. This road is her intuitive and capricious talent which has led her to become the extension and materialization of her mother's aspirations.

"Quelquefois encore je rêve à quelqu'un d'infiniment mieux que moi que j'aurais pu être. . ." (RA, p. 235). This person is Gabrielle Roy, who is still somewhat astonished at her mother's quiet conviction: "N'as-tu donc pas encore compris que les parents revivent vraiment en leurs enfants?" (RA, p. 236).

By finding the path to her mother's fulfilment, Gabrielle Roy has, at the same time, found the key to her own mystery. Thus ". . . les petites routes rectilignes, inflexibles, qui sillonnent la Prairie canadienne et en font un immense quadrillage au dessus duquel le ciel pensif a l'air de méditer depuis longtemps quelle pièce du jeu il déplacera, si jamais il se décide." (RA, p. 195) become symbolic of the choices to be made in one's life. The traveller can choose to remain on the well-trodden paths of routine and conformity, and lead a 'safe' but completely predictable life, or he can choose adventure by opting for a path that looks at first to be the most improbable and has only been chosen because of some "sorte de signe intelligible" (RA, p. 196), the inborn genius of the artist-explorer. By letting herself be guided solely by her intuition, she achieves more than she would

if she trusted a deliberate judgement--and she achieves a happiness that she can only explain by her ". . . confiance illimitée en un avenir lui-même comme illimité." (RA, p. 198).

She has discovered that rather than desperately trying to shape her own destiny, it is better by far to submit with full confidence to fate: ". . . il faut se fier à la route justement." (RA, p. 230). Her intuition, her talent is to be trusted and it will not let her down.

> Et une fois encore, par de petites routes taciturnes, de croisement en croisement muet, sans réfléchir, sans hésiter, comme si ce pays où j'allais ne fût pas sur la carte mais seulement au bout de la confiance; une fois encore, entre les herbes sifflantes et la terre qui poudrait en gestes tristes de chaque côté et comme en rêve, de carrefour en carrefour je conduisis ma mère droit dans les collines, . . .
>
> (RA, pp 223-4)

But again, concurrently with the question of her talent, re-emerges the question of her isolation from the remainder of mankind. Is it possible to 'create', to fully submit to one's talent without the sacrifice of human companionship? In La Montagne secrète, Gabrielle Roy has answered this question in the negative; only occasional human contact--one would almost be tempted to say 'contamination'--can be tolerated by the artist without impairing his creative abilities. In La Route d'Altamont she even suggests that being an author has meant her retreat from 'social' life--a

fact also documented in her biography:

> Que je me souviens bien de cette année de ma vie, la dernière peut-être où j'ai vécu tout près des gens et des choses, non pas encore un peu retirée d'elle comme il arrive malgré tout lorsqu'on s'adonne à la vouloir exprimer. Tout a existé simplement pour moi cette année encore, à cause de devoirs exacts et raisonnables qui me soudaient à la vie.
>
> (RA, p. 232)

She has paid the full price for her 'gift'. After emerging from her childhood dreams into the reality of the world, she has gone one step beyond, acknowledging the existence of this reality, but no longer belonging: ". . . les passants qui me frôlaient, c'est à peine si je les entendais venir, si je leur voyais un visage; la neige, c'est à peine si je comprenais qu'elle tombait sur moi; moi-même, au reste, j'étais occupée par une sorte d'absence, si l'on peut dire . . ." (RA, p. 234). Her talent has become her master and words have become her tyrannical tools:

> Je fus quelque temps encore à l'aise dans la vie . . . non pas un peu de côté. Et puis, après, rarement ai-je pu y revenir tout à fait, voir encore les choses et les êtres autrement qu'à travers les mots, lorsque j'eus appris à m'en servir comme de ponts fragiles pour l'exploration . . . et il est vrai, parfois aussi, pour la communication."
>
> (RA, p. 233).

Even her thoughts become reluctantly subservient to her exacting talent; no longer her own, they become an obligation:

> . . . quelque temps encore, je connus la liberté de mes propres pensées -- et ceux qui la possèdent connaissent-ils assez leur bonheur? Elles ne me paraissaient pas assez importantes pour les arrêter en route, leur imposer une halte, les retenir, m'en servir; libres, elles allaient leur petit chemin joyeux.
>
> Maintenant, dès qu'elles me viennent, je m'imagine qu'elles sont un peu pour les autres, je les fouille, les travaille. Ainsi me sont-elles devenues une fatigue.
>
> (RA, p. 233)

Already in "Le vieillard et l'enfant" Christine reminded us that in school she excelled in writing about the plains of Manitoba and later, in "La Route d'Altamont", she remembers that "C'est de ces soirées se déroulant comme des concours de chants et d'histoires que date sans doute le désir, qui ne m'a jamais quittée depuis, d'apprendre à bien raconter, tant je pense avoir saisi dès alors le poignant et miraculeux pouvoir de ce don." (RA, p. 213). Why, God, do you grant us our wishes?

It seems hardly necessary to point out the difference between the earlier biographical reminiscences of Rue Deschambault and the four stories of La Route d'Altamont, especially the title story. Time per se cannot be responsible. Something else has occurred: six years after Rue Deschambault a new book appears. This book is La Montagne secrète, in which Gabrielle Roy no longer solely concentrates on the person and the external influences she is subject to; she goes deeper, trying to fathom the mind of the artist. How does the artist perceive? Why? How does he transpose

his vision into a more palpable reality that he can share with others? Is 'communication' at all possible--even desirable? These are some of the questions Gabrielle Roy tries to answer in La Montagne secrète.

Chapter II: La Montagne secrète

- The artist's mystic quest
- Confrontation with his ideal
- Understanding and the problem of communication

La Montagne secrète, can be said to be both a physical and spiritual odyssey which Gabrielle Roy clearly intended to be a summation of her own artistic (literary) quest. It depicts the artist's elevation towards the ultimate act of creation, rivalling by its originality that of God and, at the same time, his struggle with human limitations that he can only conquer to his own satisfaction on the brink of death.

In La Montagne secrète, Gabrielle Roy tries to overcome her own limitations through the use of "stylized characters, allegorical narratives, symbols which are clearly intended to convey a message about the artistic vocation."[1] In fact, as has already been pointed out, this could hardly be avoided because of the very nature of the subject Gabrielle Roy intended to examine.

For ten years already (MS, p. 21) Pierre has been wandering through the savage expanses of Canada's North. For as long as he can remember, he has been searching for the answer to a question he does not really know how to ask . . . yet. "Hâte-toi, Pierre: le temps est court, le but lointain." (MS, p. 21): relentlessly he is forced onwards by a demon within himself. Though he is still young, the path before him is long and arduous, merciless . . .

In vain, he has been trying to define his quest: "Qu'est-ce en somme qui l'intéressait? Le côté solitaire, abandonné des

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[1] J. Warwick, The Long Journey (Toronto, 1968) p. 90.

choses? Peut-être pas toujours. Alors quoi? Cela le vexait d'être à ses propres yeux une telle énigme. (MS, p. 24). Almost immediately, and perhaps all too easily, an answer suggests itself; perhaps "Sa vie n'avait-elle d'autre but que d'arracher quelque chose en passant au vide effarant, à l'effarante solitude qu'il traversait?" (MS, pp. 24-5). This solution cannot yet satisfy Pierre, although basically it is the answer he is looking for.

As Professor Warwick very succinctly points out,[2] Gabrielle Roy, in La Montagne secrète, appropriates herself the theme of the 'voyageur' and 'happy savage' so common in pre World War II French Canadian literature, to emphasize the affinity between Pierre and Nature. Moreover, his natural genius now guides him better than any amount of formal art education ever will. Everything is still as simple to him as following the current of the river. "Etre d'impulsion et d'élan, il ne savait pas encore comment il obtenait ses effets." (MS, p. 25). His inborn talent defies analysis and has to be accepted as is, by faith. This, of course, Pierre cannot do. Although his present sufferings are small compared to those that the future holds, he has already sacrificed too much. He is determined to pursue his quest--and his simple life--even though "Des moments d'angoisse, surtout la nuit, l'avertissaient

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2 Ibid. p. 93

qu'il n'en serait pas toujours ainsi; il avait même parfois l'impression que la vie ne se montrait douce dès le départ qu'aux fins de l'attirer peu à peu vers quelque passage redoutable." (MS, pp. 25-6).

At this stage, Pierre is at the turning point of his life. The demon within him, ". . . ce coup de vent qui met en branle les facultés créatrices." (MS, p. 28) is always alert, always ready to lure him on with yet another tempting vision.

> D'abord, il eut l'impression d'un vaste paysage, d'une splendeur étrange et froide; il ne le voyait pas véritablement; il le connaissait pourtant, à la manière dont se révèlent à quelqu'un qui rêve éveillé des aspects inconnus du monde. Sans doute ne s'agissait-il que d'un paysage -- il entendait pourtant l'appel d'une beauté qui n'existait pas encore, mais qui, s'il en atteignait la révélation, le comblerait d'un bonheur sans pareil. A une distance indéterminée, quel était donc ce bonheur à venir dont il recevait déjà une telle chaleur d'âme?
>
> (MS, p. 28)

The trap is baited and the famished prey has picked up the scent. Pierre will be irresistibly drawn to his unavoidable fate.

His odyssey affords him not a single moment of rest. During the day he travels on relentlessly, and even at night there is no peace for him in his dreams.

In Fort-Renonciation,[3] one of humanity's pitiful

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3 The name itself is significant; Fort-Renonciation is symbolic of his state of mind and of the opportunity Nina represents to renounce his quest and to give in to his more human desires.

encroachments on this wilderness, he meets Nina, a young girl prematurely awakened to life's realities. Later, much later, she becomes for him a symbol of family life, of something that might have been. At present, however, denying the desires of his senses, the only thing he sees in her is a little of humanity's miseries worthy to be captured by his pencil. Her hopes and ideals, her desire to travel to the Rockies, are a pale reflection of his own hopes and dreams, but in fact, she also helps him to define his own vision more clearly--"Seulement, il ne savait pas encore où se trouvait sa Montagne." (MS, p. 39).

If Pierre was attracted to Nina, feeling "solidaire de tout ce qui appelle au secours" (MS, p. 39), he quickly realizes in Sigurdsen's company the necessity to kill so that he himself may survive. Also, for the first time, "le mystère de la vie et de la mort lui paraissait allier ici plus que jamais les hommes et les bêtes." (MS, p. 44). Already he is haunted by the sad, accusing eyes of his kill; just as much as Nina herself, they reflect some of the truth he is looking for. It is, however, not nearly enough. "Pour atteindre ce terrible vrai, il commençait à s'en apercevoir, il y a lieu quelquefois de forcer un peu le trait, de souligner. Que les choses se mettent à en dire un peu plus dans l'image que sur nature, là était sans doute le souhait absorbant de son être." (MS, p. 47). Pierre becomes aware that it is not enough merely to reproduce, but that his work must be

imbued with his personality; and from that moment on, "Pierre servait un maître qui n'était pas le seul cruel besoin de vivre." (MS, p. 52). In fact, he learns complete self-denial; his material wants and needs become subservient to his spiritual quest.

Pierre has awakened to the gift that sets him apart from other men and he suffers because of it--and he knows that his future will bring more suffering.

During his first year in camp with Sigurdsen, he contracts scurvy because of improper nourishment. He is left alone by his partner, who tends the traps, and at the peril of his own life procures for him the necessary vitamin C. For Pierre, this enforced solitude is a period of introspection, made even more penetrating by the strange lucidity conferred on him by his illness. His quest has now become a duty for him and its non-fulfillment a source of anguish and guilt: "Enfin, ne le rejoignit plus que le sentiment d'un vaste tort inexpiable." (MS, p. 55). It almost overwhelms him, but at the peak of his suffering he reaches a new plateau of awareness:

> Avait-il donc jamais auparavant vu des couleurs? Leur enchantement éclatait en sa tête, sans commander de formes, libres et pures, en elles-mêmes un chant de la création. Couleurs, enivrement, long cri profond de l'âme éblouie. Ah! que pouvaient donc en ce monde si dur signifier les couleurs?
>
> (MS, pp. 56-7)

So far, his only tool of expression and transposition has been a

pencil. He realizes its inadequacy now, when he tries to recapture the chromoplastic splendor of the setting sun. This revelation is only possible after the endurance of suffering. From a physiological point of view, his senses are 'sharpened' because of physical deprivation. Spiritually, self-improvement becomes associated with suffering and is apparently possible only because of it--one balancing out the other. Pierre lives what might be termed a 'Jesus complex' which will become more evident as he progresses on his pilgrimage of self-sacrifice. He discovers his duty to mankind: perhaps not to save it, but to bring a semblance of hope and happiness to those who do not have his 'gift'; " . . . ce que les hommes attendent de gens de sa sorte, c'est par eux d'être réjouis et soulevés d'espérance." (MS, pp. 57-8). His dissociation from the 'ordinary' human being is almost complete. If, in the future, he still tolerates an occasional and temporary relationship with 'their kind', it is only as a concession to his 'human origins' and to the material needs of the life he has chosen. Yet it is this society which he partly rejects that provides him with the means to achieve his ideal: now it is Steve who brings him the much desired coloured pencils; later, society will provide him with oils and, later yet, it will be instrumental in his journey to France.

The revelation of colour during his illness seems to have opened for him the door to a new world of hitherto unsuspected

perceptions.

> Pierre découvrait qu'il y avait place en lui, au delà de l'amour des couleurs, pour l'enivrement des sons, pour le spectacle de la nuit, des étoiles, pour combien d'autres délectations! Cette soudaine joie de vivre élargissait d'ailleurs sa perception d'autres sources de joie encore, qui venaient à leur tour aiguiser son attention. Il perçut que la joie de l'homme doit être inépuisable, qu'aucune vie ne serait jamais assez longue pour dire ce qu'à elle seule elle en peut contenir.
>
> (MS, pp. 67-8).

For the time being, Pierre paradoxically feels closer than ever to other human beings. After the crisis of the winter, he spends a summer of appeasement with Steve and his family, forgetting for a moment his 'urge' that is still only barely defined. However, he also realizes that his coloured pencils are equally inadequate tools and that perhaps the only way to do justice to his models is to 'recreate' them on canvas.[4]

The companionship of Pierre and Steve has served to show the difference between the artist and other men, of whom the trapper is an example. Their values are antipodal; whereas Sigurdsen is in essence materialistically inclined, Pierre is more concerned with

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4 It is perhaps interesting to note here the similarity in the evolution of artistic expression between Pierre and Gabrielle Roy. Pierre Cadorai starts with pencils and when he realizes the inadequacy of this medium of expression he 'graduates' to oils. Similarly, Gabrielle Roy has written several short stories before she realizes her ambition: to write a full-fledged novel. Pierre does not want to acknowledge the value of these drawings that he produces with so much natural ease, and he persists in attempting to create a masterpiece on canvas. Although he finally succeeds, the price--his life--is too high in Gabrielle Roy's eyes: after Alexandre Chenevert, she reverts to the short story form (three out of her last four works are collections of short stories--the exception being La Montagne secrète.)

such abstract values as the beauty of an autumn sunset or the suffering of a dying animal. Sigurdsen's appreciation of art is limited to the purely sensuous pleasure he derives from viewing Pierre's work. The artist's torment will forever remain beyond him: "Incompréhensible pour lui, la souffrance de son compagnon lui devenait intolérable à voir." (MS, p. 78).

Pierre's old preoccupations, his need for solitude, take hold of him again: "Pierre se taisait, souffrait. Comment faire comprendre à l'amitié que pour se connaître mieux, mieux mériter d'elle peut-être, se mieux accomplir, il lui fallait partir seul." (MS, p. 79). Painting is his sole obsession and a challenge he cannot ignore. As writing for Gabrielle Roy, it has become a ruthless tyrant, almost an enemy, but one which the artist has to contend with continuously, in a battle without issue. "Ainsi cette boîte de peintures! . . . Steve faillit lui envoyer un coup de pied, irrité contre cela qui était sans doute à tous deux leur ennemi." (MS, p. 80). This inner drive more than once compromises his physical safety and well-being, but to satisfy the cravings of the mind, this sacrifice is not too great. And, as if to remind him of the necessity for sacrifice and suffering if one is to achieve the heights lesser mortals can barely imagine, disaster strikes again. Nature lulls him into a false sense of security as he engages an uncharted but enchanting river and loses everything when he comes upon some unavoidable rapids. In one instant, the fruit of years

of suffering is annihilated. Thus, past glories and achievements do not count; they are almost worthless except for the contribution they make in shaping the future which alone is important and worthy to preoccupy our minds.

It is the beginning of another long calvary at the end of which his quest will almost be ended. Again he travels across vast plains, which correspond to the quasi-emptiness, the non-fulfillment within himself. However, the Ungava country is also a mountainous region, holding the promise of a goal in sight. Pierre has gained experience and he has become " . . . rompu à la solitude." (MS, p. 92). He also has achieved a certain measure of fame across the vast emptiness of Canada's North, where he has become known as "L'Homme-au-crayon-magique" (MS, p. 93). By now his body has definitely become the slave of his quest to capture and recreate the ultimate beauty. Over the past years he has stoically endured all the sufferings that seem to have been 'mysteriously' inflicted upon him.

> . . . dix fois peut-être, lui avait été
> ravi le produit de sa vie. Il avait
> fait des centaines, des milliers sans
> doute de croquis. Que lui en restait-il?
> Les rapides lui en avaient pris; d'autres,
> c'étaient les débâcles de printemps;
> d'autres encore, des bêtes les lui
> avaient déchirés; et, parfois, des hommes.
> (MS, p. 98).

His will to attain his final goal survives all assaults and he understands now that it requires a special communion between

Man and Nature to create beauty. His yearning for perfection has become greater than ever.

> Sa douleur vive, sa vraie douleur, elle ne lui venait pas cependant d'avoir perdu tout ce qu'il avait fait, mais bien plus de n'avoir rien encore réussi de si parfait que, même l'ayant perdu, il eût été heureux de l'avoir accompli.
>
> (MS, p. 99)

Sometimes, like a mirage, a vision of himself in the midst of a family---HIS family---appears to him. Appealing as the temptation may be, he does not yield to it; his nature rebels against it. Sometimes he longs for the company of men---wanting to be just a man among other men. But each time the demon within urges him on to accomplish a task he has not yet completely defined.

A hundred times he has almost given up his search in despair and then, miraculously, his 'Mountain' ". . . que le soleil rouge embrasait et faisait brûler comme un grand feu clair." (MS, p. 100) appears before him at the end of another arduous day. Intuitively he knows that the quest for his 'graal' is ended---in awe he sinks to his knees.

This last day on the journey is in fact a synthesis of his entire quest: he is on a difficult and slippery path, tired, and wanting rest and peace, almost giving up. The little cove where he stays for a moment is inviting; it is perhaps the last place to allow him to rest comfortably before nightfall---but his inner drive

urges him on and the time and setting are perfect for him to make his discovery. It is a combination of many factors that has made the Mountain appear as glorious as it does. Had he come along the same path at any other time, he would have missed its resplendent beauty . . . or, maybe, it was just his state of mind, his hopes and longings, that made him ready for his 'vision'. All of Pierre's previous life has been a long and sometimes perilous preparation for this moment; after the recollection of his sufferings, he is psychologically ready to confront his ideal.

From this moment on, he will try to understand the meaning of his discovery and he realizes that the 'quest' in fact is never really ended. He now has to answer to his own satisfaction what his role as an artist ought to be, and discover whether he can ever do full justice to his model. Pierre has found his ideal; now he has to capture it on canvas for, just as the Mountain had no real existence before he set eyes on its splendor, the artist cannot be satisfied until he has in fact 'recreated' his model; totally recreated it after examining all the various aspects that his mind suggests.

Despite all his talent, Man's means are limited and a perfect reproduction of God's creation is perhaps an even greater achievement than His original act of creation. Orok, in the unspoiled simplicity of a savage, expresses both the agony and

the ecstacy of Pierre's talent:

> . . . il . . . comprenait à quel point il était difficile de manier tout cela à la fois: les couleurs, les pinceaux, la masse rétive du roc, le ciel et le reste, il lui venait une plus grande estime encore à l'égard des ébauches faites par Pierre. A cet homme Dieu devait parler mieux qu'à Orok. Il n'y avait pas à en être envieux. Dieu parlait à qui il voulait. Du reste, ce n'était pas toujours souhaitable d'être celui à qui Dieu parle. Ne s'expliquant pas nécessairement avec clarté, Dieu était néanmoins mécontent de n'être pas compris.
>
> (MS, pp. 107-8)

It is the burden of the artist that his quest is not only for himself, but mainly for others. By 'liberating' himself, Pierre feels that he also 'liberates' some other people.

After his first few moments of happiness at having captured on canvas the essence of the mountain's splendor, he hesitates: a change of light, and suddenly his work does not appear quite perfect any more. For an instant, he had seemed content to return from his self-imposed isolation to the community of Man in order to share this splendor. But even the slightest suggestion of imperfection totally nullifies this intention. Pierre can present to his fellow men nothing less than perfection itself. In doubting himself, he is his own worst enemy; little does it matter that others assure him that his work is as near to perfection as is humanly possible; he cannot be satisfied and

he has to try, and try again--always discovering new, hitherto unsuspected aspects of his mountain. H. P. Bergeron in L'Art et l'Intuition Intellectuelle expresses very well Pierre's (and, let us remember, Gabrielle Roy's) problem in more general terms:

> Toute intelligence créée, à l'instar de l'intelligence divine dont elle est l'image, cherche à s'exprimer. L'intelligence humaine ne saurait se contenter d'un verbe, intérieur, accident fugitif; il lui faut une sorte de verbe substantiel, un peu comme, selon une analogie lointaine, le Verbe Eternel est le Verbe Substantiel du Père. Il lui faut un verbe qui soit de la même nature qu'elle, c'est-à-dire esprit dans la matière, c'est l'oeuvre d'art. Voilà pourquoi tout grand artiste n'est jamais pleinement satisfait de son oeuvre, voilà pourquoi il s'acharne à créer oeuvre sur oeuvre, car aucune n'arrive à exprimer, à incarner pleinement son intelligence.[5]

Pierre's perception of the Mountain is his alone, and finally the boundaries between reality and imagination become blurred: the Mountain is no longer God's mountain, but his own--he is recreating beauty as he perceives it with the eye of his mind. His doubts have made him bridge the gap between 'copyist' and 'creator'. He does not quite realize it--and Pierre Cadorai, the artist, never really does--but it is his own conception of ideal beauty that he tries to recapture from the vast plains of his mind. The mountain itself is at first a mere catalyst to release his genius from its last bonds; only then

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[5] H. P. Bergeron, L'Art et l'Intuition Intellectuelle (Ottawa, 1968) p. 13.

does it become a symbol for something greater. Pierre is so captivated by the mountain that he forgets reality. He lives a half-dream where he only barely perceives the immediate material necessities. The Ungava has become a deadly trap for him with the mountain as a bait from which he cannot tear himself away, no more than a doomed insect can escape the fatal perfume of a venus fly-trap.

The appearance of an old caribou stag finally succeeds in calling him back to reality.[6] At first he feels pity for this old, abandoned animal; however, he quickly realizes that his only chance for survival is to kill it. It is thus the artist's right, even duty, to be selfish and to make others suffer in his pursuit of the ultimate truth.

His survival is not made easy, however. The caribou does not particularly like its role as a sacrificial animal and desperately tries to prolong its life and its suffering. Pierre is filled with sadness at the cruelty of this world where the living have to kill, literally and figuratively, to remain alive. But he now realizes that it is his duty to remain alive for the future and for the potential of creating that lies within him because "La mort du présent n'est rien; c'est la perte de l'avenir en soi qui est déchirante." (MS, p. 124). Even when Nature

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6 The similarity of the roles played by the caribou and Christine's mother is self-evident. This point, along with the other most prominent instances of parallelism in the three works examined here will be discussed in more detail in the conclusion.

destroys his work once again, perhaps as an expiation for allowing him to live for the future, he cannot let it discourage him. In a sense, his life and his work are no longer his own. Even though he has not achieved the absolute perfection to satisfy himself, he contributes to the enlightenment of others who are even farther removed from the Truth: ". . . l'Homme-au-crayon-magique qui semblait travailler à élucider le mystère de la vie, de plus en plus aux autres le découvrait." (MS, p. 127). Still, he wants only to remain in the community of Man if the contribution he has to make is considered worthy--by him. But despite his own wishes, destiny, this time in the guise of Father Le Bonniec, persists in reclaiming him for society. The priest partially understands the conflict that rages within Pierre:

> --Des protestataires, murmura-t-il, comment se fait-il que tout ce que se fait de plus beau dans ce monde soit un acte de protestation. Créer, se dit-il, comme s'il ne le découvrait qu'à l'instant, n'est-ce pas de toute son âme protester? A moins . . . à moins, ajouta-t-il, songeur, que ce ne soit une secrète collaboration . . .
>
> (MS, p. 131)

--and thus, helps him to understand another facet of himself. Father Le Bonniec (that is, society) also becomes indignant when he learns of the artist's destitution.

> Du regard il saisissait aussi l'extrême dénuement dans lequel naissaient ces croquis: la bougie fumante, le vilain papier d'emballage, la chambre exiguë, la solitude, et son âme se gonflait

> d'indignation. Etait-ce là manière de traiter cet enfant rare entre les hommes, celui qui ouvre leurs yeux, celui qui ouvre aussi entre eux de grandes portes soudaines de communications. Mais rien ne doit être trop beau, trop riche pour ces créatures.
>
> (MS, p. 133)

Pierre has now been 'discovered' and belongs to the public. To consecrate this 'rebirth' he will undertake a pilgrimage to Paris, Mecca of the Arts. " . . . depuis longtemps déjà, il ne vivait plus que pour peindre, peindre, peindre . . . Mais avait-il au moins le talent que son âme exigeait? (MS, p. 149). Increasingly, Pierre doubts that his talent can satisfy the cravings of his mind. "Mais le temps fuyait, lui, avait grandi, le temps fuyait, et lui, de plus en plus avait à apprendre." (MS, p. 149). Paris, Pierre hopes, will teach him what he still has to learn and provide all the missing answers. But the city, the man-made jungle 'crushes' him and leaves him more helpless than the most savage of Nature's forests could have done.

He visits the Louvre and his first contact with the great masters is an overwhelming experience: "Pauvre de lui, d'avoir désiré peindre!" (MS, p. 156). Among the paintings that impress him the most, is a self-portrait by Rembrandt, a man who was not afraid to show himself ravaged by age and suffering in order to satisfy his passion for capturing the human soul on canvas. Later, when Pierre decides to leave something of him-

self behind, it is undoubtedly the memory of this portrait that influences his choice. More than ever, he is subjugated by a ". . . tourment de défaite, de doute de soi." (MS, p. 157).

For too long now, he has enjoyed a quasi-symbiotic relationship with an unspoiled Nature; he now belongs to Her and feels out of place in this other jungle of stone and concrete. It is only on the banks of the Seine, with his back to 'civilization' that ". . . il aurait pu se sentir à peu près lui-même et à sa place." (MS, p. 159). Again, Pierre is also reminded that his odyssey is not only a physical journey: ". . . entre moi et les Beaux-Arts s'étendait une distance infinie: les Territoires du Nord-Ouest, les savanes du Nord manitobain, l'Ungava; de plus la route à faire en moi-même." (MS, p. 164). The last leg of his journey is a purely spiritual event that concludes with the understanding of the Self by the artist.

Again, as so often before, Destiny has intervened in Pierre's favour. Mephistopheles does not want to relinquish his victim now that the end is in sight, and Pierre's last wish is about to be granted: having so far been rejected by most painting academies, he meets a young man who is going to introduce him to one of the 'masters'. Although his paintings make a favorable impression on Augustin Meyrand, from the 'Académie Meyrand', it is his collection of drawings that is admired the most; they are closest to Nature and the 'unspoiled' Pierre. It is in these

drawings that his natural talent finds its fullest expression. The 'master' understands Pierre's quest and the dissatisfaction he still experiences. "Toujours donc la même chose, pensait-il. Le talent que l'on a à profusion ne console pas de celui que l'on préférerait. Quel être bizarre que l'homme! N'est-ce pas toujours un peu sa peine en son oeuvre qu'il chérit." (MS, p. 174). But Pierre is not yet quite ready to accept his talent without question, without the challenge that has given his life its meaning.

As Gabrielle Roy has experienced with writing, 'creating' is an arduous task when it becomes necessary to subject it to rules, and to the tyranny of a public: "Peindre n'était plus qu'un long exercice ardu." (MS, p. 179). Pierre persists, however, remaining subservient to his 'Mountain'--his ideal: "S'il s'astreignait à des exercices si pénibles, si absurdes, s'il y perdait toute liberté et presque son identité, il savait bien que ce n'était que pour plus tard mettre au service de la Montagne tout ce qu'il aurait ici appris." (MS, p. 180). This 'Mountain' is the focal point of his "résonance intérieure avec l'univers" (MS, p. 180) and, moreover, he no longer divorces the object of his vision from its purpose--that of creating beauty.

Despite his spiritual preoccupations--or perhaps precisely because of them--Pierre longs for the vast open spaces he has known in Canada's North. For a while he finds release on

a hike through France's less populated areas; but even there he is reminded of his purpose.

The room he rents when he is back in Paris becomes for him a part of Canada, as it looks more like the interior of a trapper's cabin than the room of a Parisian boarding house. Pierre nears the end of his calvary. He is oblivious to purely material needs and desires, and stays aloof of the common people who indulge in them: "Laissons cela aux hommes, (disait-il), pauvres hommes, ils n'ont que cela." (MS, p. 197). He has totally become ". . . un homme dont le but à atteindre est en son âme." (MS, p. 198). In his paintings, he now reminisces about the past while working toward the climax of a last ambitious project: "Un dernier mot définitif, un tableau final: ce rêve le tenait." (MS, p. 199). This will be his last 'gift' to the world--and to himself. "Il approchait de son but--l'ignorant encore, mais assuré qu'en le voyant, il le reconnaîtrait." (MS, p. 203).

It is finally Stanislas who formulates the important truth Pierre could not accept at first: ". . . l'art c'est de couler de la vie dans un moule, au détriment, il est vrai, d'une part de la vie, et, du reste, chacun selon son moule." (MS, p. 206). The inadequacy of the medium and the bias introduced by the artist's psyche make a perfect reproduction of a model impossible. In fact, the artist 'recreates' the model, and it becomes part of his universe, rather than being an inherent part of God's own Creation. This is,

then, the problem of the artist who, at the outset has already achieved success, but without realizing it and in fact without wanting to realize it; and he forever searches for an ideal that does not exist as conceived.

Pierre wants to leave something personal behind: he paints his portrait and finally, in his dying moments, he succeeds as well with oils as with pencils--significantly enough, when he attempts to reproduce a world that only he can perceive, painting it in a way that can perhaps only be fully understood by him; leaving behind an enigma similar to the smile of the Mona Lisa. Pierre has indeed achieved an absolute, but finds it impossible to share it: his self-portrait is only half understood by another artist and, except for a strange disquieting effect, is meaningless to the doctor who comes to treat Pierre.

However, Pierre has thus satisfied his personal need, and he realizes, perhaps even somewhat bitterly, that his 'duty' towards his fellow man is even then not yet fulfilled, and his last act is an act of redemption. The artist is indeed disinterested; his 'sacrifice' is gratuitous--Pierre wants it to be gratuitous. At the imminent approach of death, he again wants solitude: "J'ai besoin de comprendre; et on ne comprend presque jamais que seul." (MS, p. 218). He wants to return to his Ungava to die--and he does, in his last offering to the world. His mountain,

his ideal, reappears to him in a last vision, now totally his. Now he also has the ability to share, but no longer the opportunity, for as he 'returns' to his savage Paradise of Canada's North, death prevents him from completing his last work. Thus, Pierre's life ends with a personal triumph . . . and a partial failure to communicate his experience: the artist can never do more than indicate an approach he has found favorable to the solution of some of life's mysteries, and perhaps clarify the meaning of a few essential concepts; but, the final, most difficult task of understanding, must be left to each individual to solve for himself.

Conclusion:

- Parallelisms in Gabrielle Roy's novels
- Gabrielle Roy in her novels

Judging from the dedication at the beginning of La Montagne secrète, we might at first be tempted to believe that Pierre Cadorai is nothing but a pseudonym for Gabrielle Roy's friend, the painter, René Richard. Like Pierre, M. Richard spent some time travelling in Canada's North, from where he brought back a few works that appear to have greatly enchanted the author. However, it becomes quickly evident that Pierre is much more than that. He has, of course, no physical existence at all, but is rather the embodiment of a 'Symbolic Artist'— an extension of Gabrielle Roy herself.

The author divided La Montagne secrète into three distinct parts. The first might be entitled 'Learning and growing awareness of talent'; the second, 'Revelation of an ideal'; and the last one could simply be titled 'Understanding and atonement'. Each section of the life of this symbolic artist corresponds directly to one or several episodes of either Rue Deschambault or La Route d'Altamont. The parallels between the life of Christine (Gabrielle) and that of Pierre are not consistently easy to detect, but nevertheless exist throughout those novels.

In the first part, for instance, Christine, just as much as Pierre, wants to 'escape' into a world of her own. For Pierre, however, the journey is at first only physical whereas Christine, despite all her 'vagabondage' is largely forced to make use of her

imagination and to resort to dreams in order to find adventure. Later, just as Pierre seeks "l'exiguité intérieure", expressing it in Paris by his choice of a room reminiscent of the narrow confines of a trapper's hut, Christine similarly seeks out the womb-like security of her attic.

The parallelism becomes even more obvious at the climax of part one, when Pierre 'discovers' colour as a new dimension of perception and expression. He is ill and forced into an introspective solitude when his trapping partner has to leave him. There are no distractions to keep him from making the essential discovery. His surprise is probably greatest for never having become aware of something so essential before--his joy is, nevertheless, indescribable: it is as if plasticity had been suddenly revealed to a two-dimensional creature; his scope of perception has reached a new plateau whose importance is unrivalled, even by his later discovery of 'oils' as a medium of expression. Similarly, in "Ma coqueluche", Christine was forced into solitude by her illness and her only means of 'entertainment' was an introspective reflection on the tinkling of some glass laminae her father had hung on the porch. But at the same time, she also learns to <u>really</u> look at nature, both with her senses and her mind; and the world that is revealed to her has all the splendors of Paradise.

It is, however, between parts two and three of <u>La Montagne secrète</u> and <u>Rue Deschambault</u>, but especially <u>La Route d'Altamont</u> that this parallelism is most evident.

One of the simpler incidences is the question of 'remuneration': just as Father Le Bonniec was indignant over the treatment received by Pierre, Gabrielle Roy is indignant when she herself is faced with the necessity to earn a living, and cannot simply and leisurely pursue the avenues her talent dictates to her. Similarly, Pierre's reluctance to attach a sale price to his work can be compared with Gabrielle Roy's identical reluctance in "Gagner ma vie". Moreover, when Pierre is 'discovered' for the public, success is followed by official recognition, the awarding of prizes and a journey to France--a development almost identical with Gabrielle Roy's own experience after the success of Bonheur d'occasion.

More complex, and also more significant, is the parallelism of the 'Mountain' and the caribou hunt with other episodes, mainly from "La Route d'Altamont". The initial discovery of the Mountain, for instance, is for Christine the revelation of Paradise in "Ma coqueluche", and also " . . . le pays qui s'ouvrait devant moi, immense, rien qu'à moi et cependant tout entier à découvrir" of "La voix des étangs" (RD, p. 219); but it is also mirrored in her mother's longing for and discovery of the hills of Altamont, when Christine's (Gabrielle's) intuition--that is, talent--lets her discover the road to her mother's happiness.

When Gérard Bessette asked Gabrielle Roy in an interview:

"-Pour Pierre Cadorai, qu'est-ce que

la montagne symbolise?"

she answered:

> "Je ne sais trop au juste . . . en tout cas, lui-même a à le découvrir . . . et par conséquent moi aussi."[1]

Pierre will discover the meaning of the Mountain when he is close to death in Paris; Gabrielle Roy will discover its meaning first through Pierre's experience and then in La Route d'Altamont.

In France, the stages of Pierre's wanderings are almost similar to those of Gabrielle Roy's.[2] And just as Pierre discovers that " . . . ce que l'on croyait loin va se découvrir avoir tout le temps été proche", (MS, p. 208) so, too, Gabrielle Roy realizes that what she thought she could only find in France, has always been in her native country just waiting to be recognized or, rather, be appreciated at its just value. But it is too late and some of Gabrielle Roy's guilt feelings undoubtedly stem from this 'useless' pursuit that indirectly cost her mother her life.

The Mountain is thus not as much another identity

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1 Gérard Bessette, "La Route d'Altamont, clef de La Montagne secrète", Livres et Auteurs Canadiens 1966, p. 21

2 Moreover, they could also be identified with Pierre's roving after the 'kill' of the caribou, with the mountain becoming a symbol of the Canada she left, 'killing' her mother while in France.

Gabrielle Roy substitutes for her mother, as Gérard Bessette would have us believe in his "La Route d'Altamont, clef de La Montagne secrète"; it is rather the materialization, or symbol, of the artist's ideal. In fact, Mountain and mother are antagonists, since Gabrielle Roy's search for her ideal will indirectly cause her mother's death. Gabrielle Roy also discovers for herself these hills she stumbles upon after her talent unerringly guides her through the maze of Manitoba's country roads, since in fact she is the materialization of her mother's aspirations. Thus Gabrielle Roy gives her mother another lease on the future through the potential she herself holds.

However, Gérard Bessette rightly points out that the caribou stag[3] that Pierre mercilessly hunts down is indeed the symbolic representation of Gabrielle Roy's mother: the old is sacrificed to allow the young to fulfil the potential it holds. The parallelism between the pursuit of the caribou and the period prior to, and just after, Gabrielle Roy's departure for Europe, is too evident to be overlooked. The stag does not give up easily: Gabrielle Roy's mother first tries to dissuade her daughter from embarking on a career as a writer, then from going to Europe. Gabrielle Roy, too, is tenacious; her one great 'weapon' in her argument with her mother is her need to find her own Mountain, not just for herself, but "parce qu'elle éprouvait alors et

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3 Again, Gabrielle Roy has substituted male for female, as she did when substituting Pierre for herself.

éprouve toujours le besoin de donner aux autres ce qu'elle a appris et compris elle-même."[4] However, just as Pierre runs out of ammunition for a 'clean' kill, Gabrielle Roy runs out of words to convince her mother, who simply does not want to understand her, to lose her. But Gabrielle Roy is ready to sacrifice everything, even her mother, to complete her quest.

"Alors s'éveilla chez Pierre comme une haine envers cette bête qui n'en finissait plus de mourir" (MS, p. 119): possibly it could even be argued that Gabrielle Roy did indeed 'hate' her mother for being an obstacle to her desires. However, this hardly seems likely considering what is known of her personality. Moreover, she expresses it as a lack of love, rather than an actual aversion: "On n'aime jamais assez les vivants et on ne se donne jamais assez de mal pour les connaître. Mais cela, on ne le découvre que quand il est trop tard. Quand ils sont morts. Ai-je assez aimé ma mère? Je ne sais vraiment pas. Je ne sais plus."[5] Thus, acknowledging her lack of love becomes rather an excessively harsh statement about herself, arising out of a magnified feeling of guilt about her mother, whom she thinks she might have neglected.

The letters she writes from France are as deadly as

4
A. Parizeau, "Gabrielle Roy, la Grande Romancière canadienne", Chatelaine (Fr. ed), (April, 1966), p. 118

5
Ibid., p. 137

Pierre's blows with the ax that finally bring down the old, stubborn animal--but again, Gabrielle Roy only realizes this much later.

Guilt, although Gabrielle Roy does not acknowledge it directly, is an important factor that influenced her career as an author: three books are directly concerned with the subject and the others have a 'suffering' mother as a central figure.

Pierre recognizes himself in the dying caribou and Gabrielle Roy is the continuation of her mother; but Pierre is also, symbolically, the artist she herself wants to be. Thus what finally emerges is a multiple identity complex--mother-caribou-Pierre-Gabrielle Roy--linked together by love, guilt, doubt and the quest for an artistic ideal. It is represented physically by Pierre's self-portrait, which acknowledges all the forces with which Gabrielle Roy's mind has to contend. In it, are combined the love she feels for her mother and the guilt over her death, the doubts of the artist and the ultimate vision of beauty and truth. It is thus the mirror image of the artist's inner world: Pierre (Gabrielle) identifying himself with his ideal, but also acknowledging his due to the caribou (the mother).

The death of the caribou thus symbolizes the 'immolation' of the mother and is followed by the artist's efforts to resurrect this sacrificial being. Moreover, for the same reason that the caribou has to die to allow Pierre to survive physically,

Pierre has to die to allow Gabrielle Roy to survive spiritually--it is her self-inflicted punishment to atone for the guilt she felt over her mother's death. Pierre (that is, Gabrielle Roy's artistic self) thus becomes the sacrificial animal which the author offers to expiate her guilt.[6] Writing is no longer the pleasure she once conceived it to be. Rather it has become an addictive need and obligation: "Ecrire, c'est un besoin, ... C'est presque physique. On ne peut éviter de prendre la plume. De toucher à la page blanche qui est là, étendue. Toute prête à recevoir . . . Et on écrit justement parce qu'on veut partager avec les autres. Parce qu'on a ressenti, ou compris, la vérité de certains êtres et qu'on doit le dire."[7] It is significant that, prior to 1966, her last three novels were primarily concerned with herself and the spiritual peace she hoped to achieve.

What finally emerges from Gabrielle Roy's autobiographical work is a bipolar world of opposing forces among which the artist is torn in a struggle for a true identity. In a simplified form, this world is, symbolically, "Le jour et la nuit" of Rue Deschambault represented by her mother on the one hand, her father on the other. It is a confrontation between woman and man, young and old, child

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6 See also footnote 4, p. 49: Pierre, that is, Gabrielle Roy's artistic-literary-self, is henceforth 'sacrificed' and she reverts to the short story, rather than the novel, as a mode of expression.

7 A. Parizeau, "Gabrielle Roy, la Grande Romancière canadienne", Chatelaine (Fr. ed), (April, 1966), p. 120.

and adult, present and past, destruction and creation, reality and dream.

The artist facing this potentially hostile world is by necessity a solitary being: his talent--a gift of God to a privileged few--sets the artist apart from other men. Gabrielle Roy's autobiographical novels make it clear that she considers the artist's confrontation with the rest of the world to arise from the necessity to face the reality of society while, at the same time, he first must learn to live with his 'stigma', and secondly he must live up to the demands it imposes upon him. Concurrently, he also has to satisfy his own personal quest for his ideal, eventually culminating--if the quest has been successful--in a deeper understanding of some of the basic truths of the universe. With the artist's awareness of his own talent and the subsequent revelations it makes possible, comes the growing sense of responsibility towards those who have rejected him because they are blind to the essential truth. In fact, he becomes a teacher or, more precisely, a prophet and 'visionary' whose task to communicate and to share his 'truth' is perhaps also his most difficult accomplishment.

This state of conflict between the artist and his environment extends to the artist's inner world. In Gabrielle Roy's case it is guilt over her mother's death--which can be equated to Pierre Cadorai's doubt of himself--that clashes with her quest

for truth.[8] Guilt--or doubt--provides a focal point around which the artist's creative effort becomes concentrated while his 'quest' is, at the same time, pursued with intensified vigor. Despite Pierre's sacrificial death, Gabrielle Roy has never overcome her guilt. It is still directly evident in La Route d'Altamont; it also remains indirectly apparent in her latest book, La Rivière sans Repos, an uncomplicated narrative of Eskimo life of quasi sociological value. The central figure of the main story is a mother sacrificing everything for her child, with little reward, except the satisfaction of having sacrificed herself for her son's success in life. It is thus Gabrielle Roy's 'guilt' that recurs as a central theme in all of her novels; it is constantly reworked and disguised, but always present. From Rose-Anna (Bonheur d'occasion) and Luzina (La Petite Poule d'Eau) to Elsa (La Rivière sans Repos), a mother suffering and sacrificing herself for her children recurs as the main character or, at least, as one of the most important ones.

Bonheur d'occasion, her first novel, also remains her most important. In it, and in Alexandre Chenevert, she has exhaustedly tackled the problems of life in society--it is her

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[8] There is also an element of 'guilt' in La Montagne secrète. It is, however, Pierre's doubt of his own ability that is the driving force behind his search for perfection after he has found the Mountain, just as guilt is largely responsible for Gabrielle Roy's urge to write after her mother dies.

contribution to the betterment of mankind--and it would appear that any further treatment by her of the same general problems could only be a rephrasing of earlier works.[9] The scope and content of La Rivière sans Repos seem to support this view. However, the future should enlighten us on this matter . . .

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9 Incidentally, this problem seems to confront many an author who has a 'message' to present to the public--as in the case of Langevin, for instance--and wants to do so without being redundant.

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