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The Search for the Sacred in Gabrielle Roy

Ann Elizabeth Sumsion

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

The Search for the Sacred in Gabrielle Roy

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Many anthropological studies have shown the prevalence of the sacred in primitive societies, manifested primarily in significant gestures such as exchanges, rituals, festivals, and the use of time and space. Some studies, in particular those of Roger Caillois and Mircea Eliade, have demonstrated that traces of the sacred, though seemingly displaced, remain present in modern and secular societies. This thesis will examine and bring to light these remnants of sacred behavior in the contemporary settings of the stories of Gabrielle Roy, focusing primarily on food-sharing, gift-giving, and festivals. Each analysis presented will detail how different aspects of the sacred are manifested in contemporary, though fictional, society, and each will permit individuals to identify ways in which modern man, whether religious or secular, is still very connected to sacred practices.

Keywords: Gabrielle Roy, Roger Caillois, Mircea Eliade, sacred, ritual, festival, gesture, religion, gift

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title Page	i
Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Table of Contents	iv
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER I: Ritual Food in Gabrielle Roy	8
Un jardin au bout du monde	9
De la truite dans l'eau glacée	13
CHAPTER II: Sharing as Gift	17
Petite Misère	18
Un vagabond frappe à notre porte	20
De quoi t'ennuies-tu, Éveline?	24
Où iras-tu, Sam Lee Wong?	26
CHAPTER III: Gabrielle's Holiday	32
La Petite Poule d'Eau	35
Le déménagement	36
Pour empêcher un mariage	39
La vallée Houdou	40
CONCLUSION	42
BIBLIOGRAPHY	52

INTRODUCTION

Gabrielle Roy said of God, “Personne... ‘n’ a réussi à me donner de Dieu une image qui s’élèvat au-dessus du médiocre’; tout ce qu’on [m]’a inculqué,...c’est la ‘terreur de Dieu, ou si tu veux, un manque de foi dans la certitude que Dieu m’aime, moi’” (Ricard, Gabrielle Roy: Une Vie 160). As we know, biographers have written about the position of Gabrielle Roy and her religious beliefs and practices (or the lack thereof, as the case may be), but they have left us with little to work with in the way of how these beliefs are woven into her works. She grew up under the tutelage of her devout Catholic mother, going to church regularly; and as a school teacher at a Catholic school, she practiced her religion at least outwardly, by attending mass and teaching catechism classes. However, it became apparent as she grew older that she did not share the inner conviction her mother tried to pass on. Despite her youthful rebellion, however, she became much more devout later in life when she was confronted with the deaths of family members; especially those of her mother, and her two sisters, Anna and Bernadette. Though she increased her activity in church services, her faith remained highly personal and did not often harmonize with the official doctrine of the church, her mother and sisters becoming the “petites saintes” she prayed to in times of need instead of those generally acceptable (Ricard, Une Vie 413-4, 448-50). Granting Gabrielle Roy’s personal relationship to religion, we are not discussing her relationship to religion as an institution, nor to the Catholic Church, but, rather in a much wider sense, her relationship to a phenomenon known as “the sacred.” This discussion becomes pertinent as we recognize that the sacred encompasses religious as well as secular society and that modern society, though claiming to be chiefly secular, displays behaviors astonishingly similar to those of primitive communities.

Since the 1930's, many studies have examined the sacred and profane aspects of primarily primitive societies. These theories include those put forward by Roger Caillois in Man and the Sacred, Mircea Éliade in Le sacré et le profane, Marcel Mauss in The Gift, and Claude Lévi-Strauss in Le cru et le cuit. Each of these studies brings forward very important aspects and differences of what is sacred and, in opposition, what is profane, but each seems to limit these aspects, to a certain degree, to the primitive cultures in which these phenomena are observed. These authors study the oppositions of the sacred and the profane in primitive societies, as anthropologists, not as ethnographers. As such, they study patterns across cultures rather than one or two specific cultures themselves, which is why their studies can be applied to various societies.

One might ask: "What is the sacred?" Roger Caillois identifies it as being in opposition to what is profane (13, 19), or, in other words, as being that which is not "of *common usage*" (25). It is

...related as a common property, solid or ephemeral, to certain objects (the instruments of the cult), to certain beings (kings, priests), to certain places (temple, church, mountain peak), to certain times (Sunday, Easter, Christmas, etc.). There is nothing which cannot become its resting place and thus clothe it in the eyes of the individual or the group with an unequalled prestige. The sacred is not something that can be taken away. It is a quality that things do not possess in themselves—[rather, it is] a mysterious aura that has been added to things.

(Caillois 20)

It is something which cannot be described, precisely because it is not part of the known world; therefore, to be understood, it must be looked at in opposition to what is known. Mircea Éliade

extends this definition by telling us that the sacred “s’oppose au profane” and that the manifestation of the sacred “C’est toujours le même acte mystérieux : la manifestation de quelque chose de ‘tout autre’, d’une réalité qui n’appartient pas à notre monde, dans des objets qui font partie intégrante de notre monde ‘naturel,’ ‘profane’” (Le sacré 17). It is exactly because the sacred can reside in objects or places or beings which can be profane that the appearance or substance of sacred things do not differ from the appearance or substance of those which are profane. In other words, a sacred stone or tree looks the same as the stone or tree which is not sacred (Le sacré 16-8). The difference resides in recognizing when “the sacred” has touched these things, and then in how they are treated afterward. Henri Hubert says that

It [the sacred] is the basic idea of religion....Myths and dogmas characteristically comprise its content, ritual reflects its qualities, religious ethics derives from it, priesthoods embody it, sanctuaries, holy places and religious monuments enshrine it and enroot it. Religion is the administration of the sacred. (qu’t d in Caillois 20)

In addition, Caillois indicates that

...the experience of the sacred animates all the various manifestations of the religious way of life. This...is, in effect, the sum total of man’s relationships with the sacred. Creeds reveal and assure permanence to these relationships. Rites are the means of proving them in practice. (20)

Each of these definitions seems to indicate that in order for the sacred to be present or recognized, there must also be the presence of religion. Here we must clarify that we have been defining “the sacred” as it existed and was experienced in primitive society. Therefore, one might ask why such studies are being cited as having to do with or significantly contributing to a study of Gabrielle Roy and her works, especially since we have already made it clear that she was not

particularly religious in any sort of organized or traditional way; and since we know that she is in no way connected to anything that could be termed “primitive society.”

Such a study becomes viable when we consider that, in addition to the studies of primitive societies and their relationship to the sacred, Éliade and Caillois also postulated that, despite the seeming lack of religious experience and fervor in modern society, and regardless of the existence or non-existence of organized religion, modern man relates to the phenomenon of “the sacred” in similar patterns of behavior whether he is religious or not.

Some of the patterns which interest us most are those which reveal primitive man’s relationship to himself and his community, such as rituals surrounding food-related activities as well as the exchange of gifts and the celebration of festivals. For the primitive man, every aspect of life was founded in community; in fact, his very identity was tied to his community (Caillois 131-3). And the sacred was not created by man, but rather given by the gods and recognized by man as divine and completely unlike any mortal or profane aspect of life.

As we become aware of such behaviors and put them in the context of how “the sacred” and “the profane” were experienced in primitive societies, this awareness becomes a lens through which we can examine Gabrielle Roy’s works. The studies of the primitive societies reveal oppositions of sacred and profane; of festival and ordinary life; of gift giving and gift receiving; and requirements imposed upon them as a result of these gestures. Each opposition identifies certain rules, rituals, and gestures which are attached.

As we have stated above, these oppositions are pertinent in Gabrielle Roy’s work because, Éliade tells us, there is no completely secular society. “Modern man” seems to have appeared when the structure of religion was removed from society’s accepted collective behavior. More interesting, though, is this suggestion that though the sacred seems to have been discarded in

modern society when religion was rejected, there are still traces of sacred behavior even in the most secular of societies. As Eliade said, “...Quel que soit le degré de la désacralisation du Monde auquel il est arrivé, l’homme qui a opté pour une vie profane ne réussit pas à abolir le comportement religieux” (Le sacré 27). These behaviors are identified not by religion, which is only one manifestation of the sacred, but rather by an attitude or “reverent feeling” toward certain things and people, toward gestures and relationships. In addition, they represent a highly personalized experience rather than the collective one of the primitive culture. This paradox of religious behavior occurs as man, seemingly secular, indulges in rituals and gestures as they are set apart from the rest of everyday life. These are emphasized in Caillois’ description of how the sacred becomes a very real part of any modern person, religious or secular:

That being, object, or idea is sacred for which man departs from routine, that he does not allow to be discussed, scoffed at, or joked about, that which he would not deny or surrender at any price....It is absolutely impossible to distinguish these attitudes from those of the believer, except in the way they are applied. They demand the same self-denial, and they presuppose the same unconditional personal involvement, a similar asceticism and spirit of sacrifice....It is sufficient to note that they imply the recognition of a sacred element surrounded by fervor and devotion, of which one must avoid speaking, and which one must try to conceal, for fear of exposing it to some sacrilege (insult, ridicule, or merely a critical attitude) on the part of the indifferent, or one’s enemies, who would not respect it. (132-3)

Religions require that certain and very specific ceremonies be performed in order for them to prove “efficacious” or, in other words, to have a transforming effect in the lives of those who

believe in them; and these ceremonies and rituals differ for each organization. The sacred takes us to a much broader realm than any particular religion. In primitive societies, a man's life and survival were tied to his community, and therefore all celebrations and rituals took place as a collective group, but because the world has become more fragmented in its requirements on man, there is no longer a place for such community-wide religious or sacred events in which all participate.

So often in Roy's works, it is individuals rather than communities which determine what is sacred and what is not. In other words, the sacred becomes whatever the individual man or woman is devoted to above and beyond all else. Instead of a collective time for ceremonies and rituals to be observed, there is an individualization of each, with the sacred and profane time and events meaning different things to different people. Instead of one god and one holiday, there are as many gods and as many holidays as there are people. Thus the sacred becomes internalized rather than having an external manifestation, though the affection and devotion remain the same, whether the sacred object is a matter of religion or of secular pursuit (see Caillois 132). "They demand the same self-denial, and they presuppose the same unconditional personal involvement, a similar asceticism and spirit of sacrifice" (Caillois 133). In the end, "[t]hat being, object, or idea is sacred for which man departs from routine, that he does not allow to be discussed, scoffed at, or joked about, that which he would not deny or surrender at any price" (Caillois 132). It is in this area that it is possible for believers and non-believers alike to take part in sacred rituals, in festivals, in sharing and exchanging.

Here also is where the primitive and modern experiences of the sacred are separated. On one hand, the primitive recognizes the sacred as an eruption into his world from a world which is so completely different from his own, that he must recognize it as a power beyond his own and

which must be divine. On the other hand stands the modern who, not willing to admit to another world than the reality before his face, creates the sacred experience himself by imparting significance to an event or a being or an object.

With this creation, comes the invitation or even requirement to believe, for without a personal investment in what is taking place, the experience appears to have no meaning, and therefore serves no purpose. What often occurs with the characters of Gabrielle Roy is that they pretend to believe, and by taking part in the ritual or event, they are led to real conviction. On the other hand, there are characters that believe and participate and then are met with disappointment and disillusionment when their participation does not lead to the desired transformation. It is almost like the “*pari pascalien*” in which Pascal claims that it is better to act as though one believes in God, for in the end if God exists, one will not lose what he might have had; but if one refuses to believe at all, one risks the loss of all, if God does indeed exist at the end. As we examine Gabrielle Roy’s works, it will permit us to look at the individualized sacred experiences of men and women, though fictional, in a modern world. We can and will see that even if Gabrielle Roy’s religion or personal faith are debatable, her awareness of the sacred, precisely in a secular society, is very evident, and as we will show in the following chapters, her characters take refuge in a sacred they have invented that needs to be approved or legitimized by certain rituals which seem banal and insignificant, such as food and meals, but which in turn act as a transforming process.

CHAPTER I

Ritual Food in Gabrielle Roy

Food is not neutral, culturally speaking, and it is deeply engrained in sacred gestures such as eating and food sharing. Numerous studies¹ done in recent years about food, food habits, table manners, and other food-related topics, show us that there is more culture about eating than we might think at first sight; food is not just a physical and non-cultural act. On the contrary, it is almost always important in its symbolic function, rather than in its literal description, especially as addressed in the works of Gabrielle Roy; this is why it may appear so “abstract” and the readers may have the feeling that food is not important. In fact, food may look like it is empty, but it can be used as an empty sign which can be filled with various meanings. It may not seem that food is discussed in many details, but this does not mean that food in Roy is not important. As Alan Warde indicates,

Food is...a significant means of cultural expression and is often used as a general means of commentary on contemporary culture....In addition, food is a matter of considerable psychological and emotional significance—as a whole range of phenomena, from the meaning of Mother’s cooking to illnesses like anorexia nervosa, indicate. / Because of this polyvalent significance, food practices can easily be used as a laboratory for the understanding of social relations. (22)

Food invites us to look at human relations, how time is divided and used, the division and definition of gender roles, and the preservation of cultural identity, among other things (see Warde 22). And as E.N. Anderson puts it, “Food transactions define families, networks,

¹ See, among others, studies by E.N. Anderson, Jean-Louis Flandrin, Timothy Morton, and Alan Warde.

friendship groups, religions, and virtually every other socially institutionalized group. Naturally, one group can try to use food to separate itself, while another is trying to use food to eliminate that separation” (125). As part of its social connotations, food is perceived in different ways by different people. Habitual exposure to food, or the apparent banality of it, may lead to indifference toward it or toward the miracle of its life-giving and life-sustaining qualities. It often occurs thus with objects or words or ideas or places which have been too often used, or spoken, or thought, or visited. The wonder of the first experience with the unknown fades as it is experienced over and over. But despite its ordinariness, food is almost always symbolic. Always, it denotes an acknowledgement of what it is to live in the world as human beings. It is the offering of food that acknowledges the recipient’s humanity and mortality, and asks in return for a similar acknowledgement.

Un jardin au bout du monde

Such an exchange and acknowledgement takes place between Stépan and Martha Yaramko in Gabrielle Roy’s short story, “Un jardin au bout du monde.” These two, but especially Stépan, progress from living everyday life in silence and monotony, to a beautiful exchange, still in silence, which sets aside resentment and allows communication. Food is the only exchange that the two experience; conversation has been absent between them for years. The story begins with an awareness that Martha is ill, but neither Martha nor Stépan knows how long she will live, so there is uncertainty, though on the surface life seems to continue in the same old way. Over the years, Stépan has lost hope in life and bitterly resents anyone who defies its dreariness and apparent injustice to mortals condemned to live it. He has seen his wife and children starve in years of drought, and during years of overabundance, he has seen grain rotting in the fields for lack of a market. Martha, on the other hand, resists the hopelessness she has

seen by taking care of her flower garden. Her hope in their continued promise of life is so strong that year after year, she nourishes her flowers, even as her own life's strength drains away.

She and her hope become the deepest source of ever-present resentment for Stépan, such that he ceases to communicate with her at all, except by way of animal-like grunts or other indistinct words and cries. The narrator compares his muttering to that of a fly or other insect because of his “bourdonnement” and it is implied that he is no longer even aware of the sounds coming out of his mouth.

Au loin, passa Stépan qui lui jeta des regards irrités, grommela, s'éloigna davantage, répandant au bout de leur terre le son rageur de propos hostiles—à longueur de journée on entendait cet indistinct bruit de paroles signalant son passage d'un endroit à l'autre....Les éclats de la voix maugréante se perdirent dans le vent chaud... (Un jardin au bout du monde 123-4).

Nor does Martha speak to Stépan except to call him for supper, using only his last name; she has not yet gotten to the point of calling “l'homme,” for she still remembers the love and affection they used to share and feels it would be an insult to their love, even though it seems to no longer exist. She describes him as having become “ensauvagé,” with no manners, and “Pour le faire courir, il n'y avait vraiment plus que l'appel à la nourriture, ainsi que pour une bête de ferme” (Un jardin 125). She refers to him in thought as the “vieil ours” or “l'homme,” both of them epithets which imply that he has become like an animal, even in his appearance, as is evident from the following description:

Était-ce encore un visage humain que Martha avait sous les yeux? Le front, la bouche, le regard, tout ce qui en des physionomies même rébarbatives est porte d'accès, chez Stépan se cachait sous du poil. La grosse moustache en herse

couvrait tout le bas du visage; l'effroyable brousse des cheveux de jour en jour s'étendait; d'énormes sourcils noueux et sombres la rejoignaient; au fond, veillaient des yeux de loup, défiants et sombres" (Un jardin 126).

He even eats like an animal, tearing at his food with his teeth as though it were just another part of life to be angry at.

Contrasted with her raging animal-like husband, Martha is a gentle, quiet little woman, who takes care of her flowers and her garden, although so weakened by her illness that she is barely able to carry the water buckets from the well to water her flowers and the rest of the garden. She spends her time wondering about the meaning of her life and pondering about whether or not her thoughts are worth anything. Much of what we hear in the narration is inner dialogue without open communication, whether it be Martha's or Stépan's thoughts about life, about Martha's illness, or even about whether or not to talk to each other. We see Martha thinking about all the little, temporary things she has done, including preparing meals and slaughtering chickens and pigs which have all been eaten, wondering if anything she has done has been worthwhile.

When Martha serves the first meal described in the story, she sets the table carefully and makes certain that all is in order, complete with flowers, despite the fact that Stépan does not care. "Parce que Stépan s'était ensauvagé n'était pas une raison pour renoncer aux bonnes manières" (Un jardin 124). He sits at the table and tears at his bread angrily and in silence. This non-communication becomes very significant at the end of the story, for we see that despite the fact that no words pass between them, there still exists a mode of communication through food and the sharing of a meal. The day that Martha can't get out of bed, Stépan realizes that she really is very ill and he takes her a bowl of gruel for breakfast. He feels compelled to speak, but

no words come—there has been so little communication for so many years that it seems silly to begin to talk now, with something as simple as “eat a little; it will do you good.” Martha also seems to want to speak, but does not. When she has taken a spoonful or two, Stépan feels reassured that she will be all right and that he will be able to nurse her back to health.

This simple gesture of making food for the other to eat is significant for several reasons. Stépan, rather than Martha, is the agent who makes and offers the food, reminding both of them that they need each other to survive. All of their married life, it was Martha who prepared the food and served it, and now, to see the roles reversed brings home to both of them that the love and care they had for each other at the beginning still exists. The food also becomes a symbol of the communication that has not been present between them, and although they still do not speak to each other, the food represents the affection they still have for each other. What is still more interesting is that when Stépan gives her the food and leaves the house, he notices that the chickens have gotten out of their enclosure and are playing havoc with the garden. He remembers how Martha seemed to be constantly chasing them away from the garden, and without realizing it, he imitates her movements as he rushes around trying to get them back into their pen. He begins to see and take care of the little chores he has neglected, like the chicken pen full of holes and junk littering the yard, and he even takes care of the flowers, covering them to make sure that they do not freeze. It is almost as if Stépan’s recognition of Martha’s sickness and the real possibility that she could die from it, and his response to it by offering her food, re-opens his eyes to life. In taking on Martha’s role as nourisher, he opens up the possibility for himself to see a continuation of the things that make life meaningful. He enters into communication with life again, after having rejected it for so long, by offering food, or that which gives life, to another human being. Mary Douglas, in speaking of such a gesture, states

that “No experience is too lowly to be taken up in ritual and given a lofty meaning. The more personal and intimate the source of ritual symbolism, the more telling its message. The more the symbol is drawn from the common fund of human experience, the more wide and certain its reception” (Purity and Danger 114). Such is the experience of eating.

De la truite dans l’eau glacée

The importance of food and eating in the discussion of the opposition between the sacred and profane exists in the very act of eating. As Caillois tells us, what is outside is profane. Ingested, food becomes sacred and set apart from the mundane and the ordinary which remains outside and profane. We divide our world into what is pure and impure, what is sacred and profane, what is messy and orderly; thus, food would be profane, as long as it remains outside of us, but it is made sacred by eating it according to a certain ritual. This explains such practices as prayer or some kind of consecration before eating. Paradoxically, though, there are occasions where food is left uneaten because of previous consecration to the gods; it has become sacred in that it is set apart from the ordinary food which can be eaten without fear of harm coming to the person who ingests it.

Such an experience occurs in the short story “De la truite dans l’eau glacée” in which there seems to be a certain ambiguity of rules where food is concerned. During their trip to the mountains to see the trout that had come into Médéric’s hands, the school-mistress and Médéric have a conversation which suggests that what is considered appropriate to eat for food is not always the same. Though some fish are deemed edible, it would appear that once an animal has trusted a human being, it can no longer be looked upon as food:

—Nous pourrions en pêcher sans peine pour notre repas, ai-je dit en badinage.

—Ah, mamzelle, ce serait un crime!

—Pourquoi donc?

—Mais... parce que... ici... elles sont con...fi...antes...

—Mais nous en pêcherons en bas pour les faire rôtir au poêlon comme tu me l'as promis. Où est la différence?

Il me considéra avec une vive surprise:

—Mais par que celles d'en bas ne seront pas en con...fi...ance avec nous. Elles auront la chance de se sau...ver. Ce n'est pas la même chose.

—Tu as bien raison. C'est loin en effet d'être la même chose.... (Ces enfants de ma vie 139-40)

It would appear that to eat anything with which one has formed a relation would be almost like cannibalism—like eating a dog or some other pet; it would be wrong to do so because they had made their acquaintance.

This scene can be symbolically compared with that of the dinner during which Médéric's father insults the school-mistress, and the scenes of Médéric at school, eager to learn and to gain the approval of his teacher. We could almost say that Médéric is like one of the trout, trusting innocently in the teacher's care; and she does care for him and handles him gently and lets him go. But his father takes advantage of his innocence and trust and "kills" them because Médéric, not knowing, doesn't have a chance to save himself; he doesn't recognize the danger. It is as if the father has had the same experience of holding the trout in his hand, but instead of letting it go, he squeezes the life out of it. He tries to do the same thing with the school-mistress, but she recognizes what he is trying to do and leaves before the meal is over. She refuses to eat with the man who has destroyed the confidence and trust of his son.

The significance of this refusal to finish the meal is made all the more plain when one looks at it in the context of Leon Kass's discussion of the meaning of a meal. In his book The Hungry Soul: Eating and the Perfecting of Our Nature, he argues that as humans, we find a way to separate ourselves from other animals by the way we eat. Eating is so much more than satiating our hunger; everything about it becomes a symbol of what it means to be human. For him, the "...meal is like a sacred rite, wrapped in mystery and guarded in secrecy....the human meal is an intimate gathering" (151, 153). It provides an opportunity for humans to come together in a very particular way. A meal is a kind of exchange between host and guest with appropriate conversation and manners established to enhance rather than detract from the social interaction. Unlike animals feeding around a trough, a meal is one of the indicators that humans are higher animals than other animals they share the world with.

If looked at in this context, Médéric's father breaks the rules of hospitality by playing on the trust and confidence of his son and the schoolteacher and then by twisting these to meet his own ends, consuming them, as it were. Instead of offering a comfortable setting for a meal, he creates a place of insult and of fear, leaving the guest with no choice but to leave. Instead of a human exchange, it has become almost brutal, as though the father is an animal and his son and the teacher are his prey; contrast this to the teacher and boy letting the fish go, acknowledging their helplessness because of their trust. As we examine the significance of the rejection, both the rejection of the father's brutality by the teacher and the rejection of the boy's and teacher's trust and confidence by the father, we begin to see a conversation emerge regarding the meaning of a gift and the need for reciprocity. Such a discussion will take place more in depth in chapter two of this thesis where we will explore the importance of sharing and reciprocation.

As we have stated before, our study of the sacred takes us beyond the biographical dimension of Gabrielle Roy's personal and religious faith. We approach her works as those of a modern writer who seems aware of the ways the sacred appears in a modern society and who is aware of the fact that whether or not someone adheres to an institutionalized or official church, there is always a quest for sacred meanings.

CHAPTER II

Sharing as Gift

When Marcel Mauss speaks of “the gift” in the anthropological sense, he sees it as a way for individuals or groups to prove their prestige, power, or generosity, in order to preempt another individual or group. In primitive societies, gifts could not be refused and neither could they be nonreciprocating, for if a gift were rejected, it would be a rejection of the person who gave it and it might also indicate an inability on the part of the intended recipient to return the gift proffered. Thus, to keep one’s reputation, one was obligated to accept and then return the gift in kind.

Several things characterize “the gift.” When a gift is given, reciprocity is expected and the obligation to return what was given, or something to take its place, is vital. As before mentioned, the reason for this is because every time someone gives something away, the thing given contains some of “the spiritual essence” of the giver. Because of this, the recipient must first accept and then return or replace that which is given; otherwise s/he would risk the dangers associated with consumption of the offering without return (Mauss, The Gift 10). In Mauss’s studies of the Maori culture, he observed that,

...the bond created by things is in fact a bond between persons, since the thing itself is a person or pertains to a person. Hence it follows that to give something is to give a part of oneself...[I]n this system of ideas one gives away what is in reality a part of one’s nature and substance, while to receive something is to receive a part of someone’s spiritual essence. To keep this thing is dangerous, not only because it is illicit to do so, but also because it comes morally, physically

and spiritually from a person. Whatever it is, food, possessions, women, children or ritual, it retains a magical and religious hold over the recipient. The thing given is not inert. It is alive and often personified, and strives to bring to its original clan and homeland some equivalent to take its place. (10)

In Gabrielle Roy's works, there are many instances of giving and sharing: people share food, stories, and time among other things. In each instance, we can see that where something is given, such as food, the recipient feels an obligation to repay the gesture.

Petite Misère

We see this sense of obligation to receive and return a gift in the story of "Petite Misère" in which the narrator Christine describes her father's misery and her own feeble health as a child. As a result of her health, her father calls her "Petite Misère," and even though it is almost always spoken with gentleness or kindness, she detests it as a reminder of her weakness.

One day, in a fit of annoyance or anger, her father calls her by that name and wonders aloud why he ever had any children; Christine takes it bitterly to heart, thinking that he is speaking specifically about her. She runs to the attic and hides there all day, refusing to go fishing with her brother, ignoring the calls of her friends to come and play, and even declining to eat when her mother calls her for supper. All day long, she anguishes over the "fact" (as she sees it) that her father does not love her, and never has, and she thinks she sees a future full of misery and regret before her. At the very end of the day, eventually deserted by everyone, after her mother has left for a party, her father comes to find her, telling her that he has made her favorite pie, rhubarb, and asks if she won't have just a little.

Previously, her mother has forbidden her to eat such heavy food because it makes her ill, but she understands that it is her father's way of trying to make up for the sorrow and heartache

he had caused earlier by his careless remark. And so they eat together, but neither can swallow very well. Christine calls the pie “une nourriture de plomb” and says that it is as though all her father’s misery and sorrow, the weight of his life, are contained in her slice of pie: “cette indigeste nourriture que ce soir, comme si c’était pour toujours, mon père m’offrait” (Rue Deschambault 39). Christine experiences severe indigestion because of the pie and the mother reprimands her husband for feeding the poor child such heavy food so late at night, for she (the mother) does not understand the exchange and the transformation which have occurred between her husband and daughter.

Throughout the entire story, Christine speaks of “le chagrin” which has overtaken her childish point of view, motivating her to refuse her customary games and activities and to reject her friends’ offers of play. She keeps asking herself how she could bring herself to participate in something so frivolous as play when such anguish exists. Over and over again, she chooses the weight of sorrow instead of putting it aside. It is, in fact, this anguish which demands the acceptance of her father’s offering.

As Marcel Mauss puts it,

....One does not have the right to refuse a gift or a potlatch. To do so would show fear of having to repay, and of being abased in default. One would ‘lose the weight’ of one’s name by admitting defeat in advance....In principle...gifts are always accepted and praised. You must speak your appreciation of food prepared for you. But you accept a challenge at the same time. You receive a gift ‘on the back.’ You accept the food and you do so because you mean to take up the challenge and prove that you are not unworthy. (39-40)

Her father has given her a symbolic gift, one which he cannot call back and one which she cannot refuse; it is the gift of adulthood. What else could Christine do but accept the gift, for it seems to be the only way she has to show her father that she acknowledges his effort to reconcile with her for what he has done? By doing so, she symbolically understands her father's sorrows, and as an adult, though still a child in age, she chooses to share his burden with him. She meets him on his level and he understands. They exchange the gifts of mature repentance and forgiveness as represented by the making of the pie and then the eating of it. But more importantly, this exchange has required that they both become something more than they were when they began, and such is the transformational experience of the sacred.

Un vagabond frappe à notre porte

Another example of exchange which brings about a ritualistic transformation occurs in the short story, "Un vagabond frappe à notre porte." The first of the meals exchanged takes place the first time the vagabond enters the house. He introduces himself as a family cousin, and most of the family is taken in by his charm, but not the mother. She retains her suspicion and does not willingly offer him food at the mealtime. In fact, she makes every effort to make it clear that his presence is not welcome. For example, "[Elle] remuait des casseroles avec un grand bruit inusité. Et parfois ses lèvres s'entrouvraient, comme si elle allait se décider à prononcer quelque parole blessante" (Un jardin au bout du monde 14). The stranger attempts to get some sign of acknowledgement or approval from her as he tells the father his relation to the family line, but she refuses his efforts. "Et il tourna son visage souriant du côté de ma mère qui fouettait sa pâte à crêpe. Il paraissait déterminé à lui arracher un regard, un sourire, une parole. Mais elle bousculait les préparatifs du souper pour éviter de prendre part à la conversation" (Un jardin 15). Throughout her preparations for the evening meal, the stranger continues to weave

his story of who he is and how he found the family; then at last, when the dinner is ready, the narrator says that

Ma mère mit alors les poings à ses hanches; elle dit très vite, sans regarder l'étranger:

—C'est prêt! Approcher, les enfants. Viens manger, Arthur.

Le chemineau se leva aussi, allègrement; il choisit une place contre le mur, s'y glissa en serrant sa veste de misère sur lui et, tout de suite assis, saisit sa fourchette (Un jardin 16-7).

It is as if the refusal by the mother to be willingly hospitable throws open the challenge Mauss speaks of for this strange man. It is obvious by her pot banging and defiant attitude that the mother does not believe his tale of being the long lost son of the long lost brother, “celui qui est disparu” (Un jardin 15). And here it is that the stranger takes the challenge, the “gift on the back” so to speak, with the promise to fulfill on his side of the unspoken bargain. In exchange for food and lodging and, ultimately, belief in his story, this vagabond offers a gift in return: stories.

—Oui, rêvait mon père, il y a bien des choses de là-bas que je n'ai pas vues.

L'homme attrapa un grand morceau de pain du bout de sa fourchette. Il le mordit au milieu, puis, souriant, la bouche pleine, il promit:

—Je vous conterai ça t'à l'heure (Un jardin 17).

With these words opens a whole series of tales about the old folks at home: aunts, uncles, cousins, parents, brothers, sisters, along with the spice of characters from the community.

Déjà, au reste, ces vagues parents que nous avons au loin, à travers le récit de notre visiteur semblaient tous avoir aussi changé de caractère, même Marcelline qui n'était plus rapace, mais prévoyante. Eustache avait hérité du bien paternel et

le faisait fructifier; il élevait ses enfants avec courage. Anaïs n'avait point sa pareille pour filer l'étoffe du pays et remplir ses bahuts de grosse toile. Pieuse, elle ne manquait jamais la messe sur semaine...La parenté était quelque chose de sacré; il n'y avait rien de touchant comme les membres d'une même famille qui se reconnaissaient à la voix et s'ouvraient les bras. (Un jardin 21-2)

The stranger will not be found wanting a recompense for the clothes, shelter, and food proffered him, albeit unwillingly. It is as if these tales of forgotten "parenté" become the commodity with which he fulfills his part of the exchange: stories for food. Thus he puts the family in his debt and there is a continual round of an obligation to reciprocate.

Il procédait par courtes étapes dans ses narrations, d'interrompant souvent au moment le plus pathétique ou le plus captivant, de sorte que pour entendre la fin de son histoire nous étions sans cesse disposés à lui accorder une autre journée d'hospitalité. D'ailleurs, nous fûmes amenés par nous-mêmes à le remarquer: si le récit de Gustave nous avait plu la veille, nous étions polis et bienveillants à son égard le lendemain. Mais, lorsqu'il nous avait déçus, nous savions d'une façon inconsciente et assez dur lui en montrer du ressentiment (Un jardin 26).

The mother and father continue to feed him and he gives enriching accounts of distant and neglected family members. This exchange occurs daily over several weeks; then the stranger leaves without a trace or indication of his intended destination. Unexpectedly, he begins to write them letters, continuing the news-bearing as he visits other more immediate family members. This exchange of stories for food and companionship becomes a ritual for the entire family and it creates a sacred context which is continued in the news and stories he shares in his letters; as long as there is belief, the cycle of reciprocation continues.

In the end, however, it is the element of belief or the absence of it that appears to break the cycle for a brief time. He spends year after year going from one cousin or uncle to the next, always announcing where he is by letter, sending news of what the family members are becoming. And finally, the letters stop all together; but the memory of Gustave lives on in the collective memory of this family, “les Trudeau.” The last appearance of this man is years later when he shows up on the doorstep in the dead of winter. This time there are no stories and no family meal. Though he is accepted genuinely as a long lost member of the family this time, he is ill and refuses anything except for a place to rest. He will not eat anything; instead, he becomes delirious and the mother gives him some of his own medicine, but it doesn’t help.

The father goes for the doctor and “discovers” that the man they have believed was family is a so-called “imposter,” who, over the years, has pretended to be the “long lost” relative to the families in whose homes he is taken in. The father is furious because he has been deceived and is ready to throw the stranger out and expose him to the police. But the mother, she whose hesitancy became the challenge to answer, is determined to preserve this man’s dignity. On one hand, the father loses his belief and with it loses all hope of keeping the gift the stranger gave him, of a family he loved and laughed with. On the other, the mother has gained a relative, a family member and the words “...Cousin Gustave!” will ring in her ears ever afterward, though this time the stranger does not acknowledge the appellation.

She will keep alive the cycle of reciprocity, even if the father’s loss of confidence has broken all possibility of a renewal of the happy times that had been when the vagabond really appeared to be the genuine article. The loss of faith and hope becomes a bitter end to the father of what had appeared a sweet and precious gift at the beginning. But to the mother, reluctant as she was at the beginning, becomes true family, regardless of blood relation. What a gift!

De quoi t'ennuies-tu, Éveline?

Another example of exchange occurs in the short story “De quoi t'ennuies-tu, Éveline?” in which the protagonist, Éveline, receives a telegram from her brother Majorique inviting her to come visit him in California. He gives her no explanation as to the reason of the sudden invitation, only that he is “à la veille du grand départ” (De quoi t'ennuies-tu, Éveline? 12) and that he wishes to see her. Her brother has been a great traveler, thus making it questionable about whether he is about to leave on another of his trips or whether he is about to die. She remembers at one point that Majorique promised her that one day, he would take her to California.

Un jour—elle était en ce temps-là une jeune femme avec une maisonnée sur les bras, plusieurs enfants tout jeunes et peu de temps pour ruminer ses regrets—un jour Majorique, en passant était arrêté la saluer. Comment avait-il su qu'elle désirait autre chose que tout ce qu'elle possédait, autre chose d'imprécis et pourtant de si exigeant à sa manière? Il avait pris entre ses mains le visage de sa sœur, scrutant les yeux: ‘De quoi t'ennuies-tu, Éveline?’ Et elle avait répondu: ‘Je ne le sais même pas, voilà qui est bien fou, n'est-ce pas, Majorique?’ —‘Peut-être de ce que tu n'as pas vu, hein, sœurette?’ Et au même instant elle avait saisi à quel point c'était vrai. ‘Oui, de ce que je n'ai pas vu et ne verrai sans doute jamais. Toi, tu vas partir bientôt, tandis que moi....’ Alors, serrant un peu plus fort son visage entre ses mains, Majorique lui avait promis: ‘Un jour, je te ferai venir, loin, là où je serai, peut-être en Californie.’ (Éveline 27-8)

And so, here she is on her way to California, and on the surface, it appears that this is the gift—a vacation to California. However, as we look further, we discover a whole series of sub-

exchanges hidden among the seemingly commonplace “events” surrounding a bus-ride across North America in the dead of winter.

Éveline begins her journey in Winnipeg, Manitoba, where it is thirty degrees below zero; dressed for winter, she boards the bus wearing a heavy coat, furred boots, gloves and several sweaters. Looking around, she does not recognize anyone, but soon many of the passengers begin to take an interest in her. She begins to share the story of where she is going, including her wonderment about the cryptic nature of Majorique’s message. As she does so, the rest of the travelers begin to share with her and their neighbors their own individual stories, beginning first with the reason for their travel and then expanding to stories and remembrances of different relatives. Many of the travelers take a particular interest in “la petite vieille dame habillée comme pour aller au pôle” (Éveline 34-5). As they leave the bus, she and her seat-mate, Madame Leduc, along with other fellow travelers, exchange addresses and invitations to come and visit when she has a chance. Strangers all at the beginning of the trip, by the time each one gets off the bus, each traveler has become a friend, united to the rest of the group, through Éveline’s interest and vivid stories. And Madame Leduc articulates for all of them a very special gift or exchange not so readily recognized, perhaps:

...je vais descendre bientôt et j’aurais eu de la peine de vous quitter sans vous avoir remerciée...

—Me remercier?

—Oui, pour vos histoires. Voyez-vous, elles ont ressuscité toute une partie de ma vie. Je ne savais même plus que j’avais encore des souvenirs de mon enfance au Québec. J’ai tout retrouvé grâce à vous.

Les yeux d'Éveline brillèrent de bonheur. Oui, elle comprenait très bien ce que disait Mme Leduc. Elle-même, ça lui était déjà arrivé de retrouver ainsi une partie de sa vie en entendant quelqu'un raconter la sienne. Quelle merveille que cela: quand on exprimait bien quelque chose de soi, ne serait-ce qu'une émotion, du même coup on exprimait une part de la vie d'autrui. (Éveline 51)

The stories shared by everyone become a communal exchange and transform strangers into friends, reconnecting each person with a part of their past, perhaps not so readily available before. As spoken so adroitly by Gabrielle Roy through Éveline,

...Ah, que les récits avaient le don de rassembler les gens, se dit Éveline. Mille fois dans sa vie elle en avait fait l'expérience. Dès qu'on remue un souvenir de sa vie, par là même on entraîne les autres à en faire autant. Et peu à peu le cercle rassemblé autour du conteur finit par être immense, immense. (Eveline, 41-2)

Où iras-tu, Sam Lee Wong?

In the short story of "Où iras-tu, Sam Lee Wong?," we find yet another example of exchange. Sam Lee Wong is a native of China and when he arrives in Canada, he is given the option of going wherever he chooses and the possibility of taking up one of two careers: a restaurateur if he is the first Chinese man in the town or a laundry man if he is the second. These roles were already in place for him to step into before he arrives, and he obligingly accepts the inevitable. The town of Horizon, his chosen destination, has no restaurant, and Sam Lee Wong sets up shop in an old building which had been used previously as a bank, an office for the municipality, and then as a granary, but which has since been abandoned. It is situated across from the train station, with a large front window and counter, perfect to adapt into a restaurant.

The building and each of its former uses shows an economic involvement of the community—a bank, a municipality office, a granary: each one a symbol of work and of a certain success, with a certain exchange. People use a bank to keep money they have earned or to borrow money to begin a new life. A municipality office is the place which houses the community’s governing body. And a granary symbolizes the actual fruit of the labors of those who had borrowed the money, who had purchased the land, and worked; and then who had grown the grain and sold it, thus perpetuating the process. Each of these “businesses,” which, incidentally for this town, have been housed in the same building, play a role in the building and strengthening of a community. It is interesting to note that the last and final use of the building is a restaurant, yet another symbol of coming together and of exchange, but on a more personal level. Instead of economic exchange, it is human exchange in the shape of conversation and food which creates a sacred experience understood only by those who participate in it. For them, Sam’s restaurant offers a place where identity is discovered and validated.

Sam Lee Wong and, thus, the restaurant, offer an invitation to come:

“Restaurant Sam Lee Wong

Good Food.

Meals at All Hours.”

Sam doesn’t depend upon the sign to draw in customers, however. He stands in the doorway and speaks personally to and smiles at each passerby. The first to accept his invitation to eat is Smouillya, the old Basque who can’t communicate very clearly because he is missing most, if not all, of his teeth, and he has an incomprehensible accent. Because of the difficulty he has in making himself understood, the townspeople avoid him for fear they will be stuck for hours listening to the seemingly interminable story of his life.

Il est pénible, il faut en convenir, en écoutant quelqu'un qui vous raconte avec élan quelque chose d'important, peut-être sa vie, peut-être ses malheurs, de n'en pas attraper un seul mot et de ne même pas savoir quelle mine prendre, apitoyée ou réjouie! C'est donc pour s'épargner de l'embarras que peu à peu les gens, sans réelle méchanceté sans doute, s'étaient mis à fuir le vieux Smouillya. (Un jardin au bout du monde 60)

At long last, Smouillya finds a listening ear in Sam Lee Wong. It becomes a sort of exchange for the two of them. Smouillya, without financial resources, comes to eat every day and, in addition to food, discovers companionship and an identity which had long since ceased to exist in the minds of the townspeople. In return, he offers his services as a writer and a penman, for despite the fact that he cannot speak coherently, he can write beautifully and with his writing, he gives Sam an identity which he has never before had, such as "Fils du Célèste Empire" (Un jardin 70) or "Sam Lee Wong, esquire" (71).

Smouillya becomes a regular customer, in part, he says, to show the town a good example of a loyal customer. Jim Farrell, the station master, whose young wife leaves him after they have a violent quarrel, is the next to join Smouillya at the two tables, for he tires of eating eggs three times a day for a week. The restaurant offers him a place where he can voice his tirades against women and their foolish ways without fear of retribution. With these two as regular customers, Sam's restaurant and its ever-present odor of fries and bacon begin to be considered as much a regular establishment as the local tavern, with customers coming daily for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Among the other "regulars," Pete Finlinson, of Iceland, joins them, though he seems more fascinated by the comings and goings of Sam Lee Wong than anything else, for he watches

Sam's comings and goings long after he has finished eating. He it is who seems to bring an awareness of the diverse culture of the group by listing the homelands of each of the regulars: Sam from "Far," Pete from Iceland, Jim from the Isle of Man, Smouillya from the Pyrenees, and Jacob from Quebec. Each of these customers seems nostalgic for their homelands and Sam's restaurant provides a safe place for them to recreate the important aspects of their identity. Sam accepts them as they come, "...des clients tristes, plus d'esseulés et de mécontents que de gens heureux..." (Un jardin 68).

In addition to all the discontented and disillusioned men that frequent his establishment, however, come the young folks, drawn by the ice cream soda machine and private booths that Sam installs. They get away with practically everything—broken dishes, spilled drinks, noise, and staying all hours of the night—and Sam caters to their every wish. To each of his clients, he offers a place where they are known and accepted. In fact, he seems to know them better than they know themselves: "Parfois, on pouvait avoir l'impression qu'il [Sam] était celui d'entre eux devant qui on se gênait le moins et que par conséquent mieux que personne au monde il les connaissait à fond" (Un jardin 68).

So here we find a sacred space, created by Sam Lee Wong, with gentle tolerance, which affords his clients the sense of safety to be who they really are. The need for recognition and for acknowledgement exists deep inside each of these characters. And the need is a hunger for the assurance that each individual is unique; that though they share common themes in life's experiences, their own experience is uniquely theirs, and it is valuable and worthy of telling. That is the gift Sam Lee Wong gives to his customers (at least his regulars). He acknowledges every one. And in exchange for this gift to them, they acknowledge and encourage him, but in a quieter way. They all go through hard times together, drought, winter, poverty, depression.

There is a bond created between Sam and his regular customers which provides security for each person involved.

Contrast this encouragement and acceptance with the view of the restaurant after the oil boom, where the townspeople are no longer the main clients. New people move in and the restaurant, because of the sheer volume of people, becomes a hub of activity. We see Sam trotting back and forth, over-cooking the order of steaks for one client because he has to draw cold water from the well for another client's order. There is a sense of frantic haste and intolerance which has neither existed in Horizon before nor in its restaurant. We see customers, seeing only unsatisfactory service, not willing to see Sam's restaurant for what it is underneath the shell of "fast food service." For them, the sacred cannot exist in this place, perhaps mostly because they are unwilling to find it.

Such an attitude of intolerance and examining only the surface value is especially evident in the inspector who comes to "take a look around." She takes note of the greasy table, the gum stuck on its underside, and the apparently undesirable food which she orders and doesn't eat after looking at it closely and plugging her nose. Though she refuses to eat the food, she does pay for it, but such an exchange is not enough to convince Sam of her sincere acceptance of and satisfaction with the meal. When the real inspector comes, all he sees is the grease and the unsanitary conditions of the restaurant, complete with moldy walls and Sam's bed in the back corner; he does not see beyond these things to the sacred aspects which Sam, through the restaurant, has provided to so many over the years.

In the end, the greed of the building owner is what stops it all, for he discovers that he could make more profit by tearing it down and selling the land than through the small monthly rent paid by Sam Lee Wong. And thus we see the restaurant as it began—an empty shell,

awaiting its future once again—its former sacred purpose misunderstood and unseen, except by few. Because its sacred aspects of exchange are not recognized, Sam Lee Wong must leave and find a new place to begin again, and he does so, despite his age and lack of resources. The last scene in the story describes his journey to the next town over, where he finds another empty building and, with good soap, a mop and a bucket, and a belief in what he has done thus far, he creates the possibility of the sacred being invested in another town and in other people.

Gabrielle Roy, in these stories, gives us the opportunity to examine the significance of exchange and sharing and the importance of belief in the investment of the sacred in a place or environment or substance. With the ritual of exchange comes the obligation to believe in it for there to be any real value in the gifts. Belief and action open the world; unbelief brings only blindness and frantic continuation of seemingly meaningless repetitive events. A gift becomes a gift only as it is shared and returned and then passed on again. And such are the experiences of Gabrielle Roy's characters—stories to be shared and shared again.

CHAPTER III

Gabrielle's Holiday

In the previous chapters, we have spoken of Gabrielle Roy's ability to capture the sacred in fictional circumstances in several different ways, including the significance of food and eating and the sharing of gifts such as food, stories, and time. Each of these circumstances has a transforming effect on the individual who has experienced them. And such is the sacred. Without transformation or renewal, events can only be solitary with no more meaning than the errant buzzing of a fly as it makes its way randomly around the room. This brings us to the final aspect of the sacred we wish to discuss in Roy's works: the "fête," or holiday, which is a kind of time break, presents a repository for the sacred and the profane in Gabrielle Roy. Instead of profane time, which rolls on without break or interruption, sacred time, imbued in the holiday according to Roger Caillois, is what makes time heterogeneous. He says that "...the festival, being such a paroxysm of life and cutting so violently into the anxious routine of everyday life, seems to the individual like another world in which he feels sustained and transformed by powers that are beyond him..." (98).

The concept of time for indigenous man is one of repetitive cycle; weekly, monthly, yearly events which constitute the rhythm of life. Rituals, ceremonies and sacred gestures find their place in this constant repetition, and each of these offer a break in the everyday routine. Mircea Éliade says this about the effect of sacred and profane time upon man: For the religious man, one who seeks to come close to "the gods" whoever they be, time is renewed by the reenactment of sacred holidays, sacred gestures, sacred rituals, for these are the activities that bring man into the presence of his gods, the divinities which guide and direct his life. Time in

this context is rich and full of meaning; sacred and holy, in other words. On the other hand, for a man who has separated himself from the sacred practices of his predecessors, such constant repetition of gestures and feasts and rituals becomes terrifying, because they are void of significance (Le sacré et le profane 94-5).

The festival was anciently known for its excess and riot during which old rules and limits were cast off and new ones created to match the exuberance, liberation, and rejuvenation. Masses of people gathered together, becoming unified in the “paroxysm of life” (98).

The festival...uproots [the individual] from his privacy and his personal or familial world in order to throw him into the whirlpool in which a frenzied multitude noisily affirms its oneness and indivisibility by expending all its wealth and power at one stroke...It is a time of excess. Reserves accumulated over the course of several years are squandered. The holiest laws are violated, those that seem at the very basis of social life. Yesterday’s crime is now prescribed, and in place of customary rules, new taboos and disciplines are established, the purpose of which is not to avoid or soothe intense emotions, but rather to excite and bring them to climax. Movement increases, and the participants become intoxicated. Civil or administrative authorities see their powers temporarily diminish or disappear....This fervor is also the time of sacrifices, even the time for the sacred, a time outside of time that recreates, purifies, and rejuvenates society. (Caillois 163-5)

Such is the festival as it was experienced in ancient time. We will be the first to admit that such violence and excess do not exist as such in the works of Gabrielle Roy. Caillois himself says that “One can scarcely find in complex and machine civilizations a single equivalent of this crisis

that cuts brutally into the monotonous heart of daily life, that is so extremely in contrast to it....” (165) except in the circumstances surrounding war. Though Gabrielle Roy addresses the tragedy and “glory” of war in Bonheur d’occasion, we will not analyze this work in the context of the festival. Rather, we will identify certain characteristics and the desired results of the holiday and identify these in several short stories, on a much smaller scale.

As Caillois mentions, the festival is “...the time of sacrifices, even the time for the sacred, a time outside of time that recreates, purifies, and rejuvenates society” (165). Its purpose is that of renewal and the transformation of used-up and worn-out profane time into a new cycle of time to be experienced. The aspect of the festival which we will apply to Roy’s works is that of the experience of rupture in every day or regular life. An event or a series of events occur, thereby transforming the known world into another, unknown and unexplored space. This “other world” is what is anticipated to break the homogenous time of routine.

We ourselves see this kind of time break or opposition when we consider the fact that we do not experience time in one long sameness. Our weeks are divided into seven days, with one sacred day (Sunday) being set apart, usually. Christmas, New Year’s Day, and Easter are also examples, but of a year rather than weeks being divided. We all anticipate the activities that each of these holidays offers, as a break in the routine of normal, everyday life and this same sort of anticipation can occur whenever there is an upcoming event which somehow breaks up the known routine. The important thing to consider here, in the context of the holiday or festival, is that with the time break was the expectation that there would be transformation and renewal by view of the fact that these events were a part of the rituals and sacred gestures practiced. In Gabrielle Roy’s works, there is the same expectation, but we will show that, many times (though not always), there is disillusionment instead of fulfillment of the expectation.

La Petite Poule d'Eau

La Petite Poule d'Eau offers a classic example of time rupture as we examine Luzina's annual visits to Rorketon. Life on the island is monotonous beyond description: she cares for the sheep and looks after her children and husband. Day after day brings the same loneliness: the water lapping on the shore of the island, the call of the water hens, the wind through the grass. There is an anticipated event, however. Almost every year, she has a baby and, every year, she travels to Rorketon to the hospital. Despite the uncomfortable journey and the discomfort of actually giving birth, these trips become her "vacances" as it were, breaking up the monotony of her existence.

C'était la mère qui voyageait le plus. Presque tous les ans, elle allait par nécessité à Sainte-Rose-du-Lac....Néanmoins, comme elle ne sortait environ qu'une fois l'an de son île, ce long voyage difficile, souvent dangereux, ce voyage épuisant, Luzina Tousignant en était venue à le considérer comme ses vacances....Au père Tousignant seul, elle annonçait, un beau jour, en le regardant drôlement, moitié rieuse, moitié affligée: "Mon congé approche." Puis elle partait. Et dans cette existence toujours uniforme, c'était la grande, l'unique aventure. (Petite Poule 14)

Between each of her trips, she anticipates a return to the city with all the pleasures it offers and when she arrives and delivers her baby, she takes great pleasure in observing life as it occurs in "la grande ville" of Rorketon, with its shop windows, its brightly-lit main street, its sidewalks and tall buildings and all the comings and goings of the locals, or, in other words, "l'intense vie qu'offrait ce gros village" (23). However, though she enjoys the break in the monotony, after a few days, she begins longing to return home. It is as though the voyage with all its anticipated offerings is enough to fill Luzina's need to experience a different scene or to taste a different life. The anticipation leading up to the trip and, afterwards, the remembrance of everything which

occurred, are reproduced in the stories Luzina tells her family, and it is the stories that offer the time break for the rest of the family: “À Rorketon, [elle] recueillait de quoi alimenter les récits qu’elle ferait à sa famille pendant des mois et des mois, jusqu’au prochain voyage, en fait” (Petite Poule 23). For Luzina, her “vacances” are what constitute the festival rupture into everyday life needed to rejuvenate not only herself, but also her family as she reminisces to them about her experiences.

Other examples of rupture and transformation by disillusionment, both in space and time, occur in “Le déménagement,” “Pour empêcher un mariage,” and “La vallée houdou,” among others. In each, Gabrielle Roy emphasizes anticipated events which set them apart from everyday existence. The rupture in everyday life or time becomes something to be anticipated and then looked back upon afterward, allowing the power of the event to influence time both before and after. However, unlike the experience Caillois describes, in which there is complete and total transformation and renewal as a result of the festival rupture, there is often a certain sense of disillusionment in Roy’s characters. It is as though they begin with the firm belief that transformation will take place in a particular way and then, as a matter of course, they discover an apparent falsity in their position. Yes, they are transformed, but it is the transformation that occurs when one realizes that all is not as one had anticipated.

Le déménagement

Such disillusionment occurs as a prevalent theme in “Le déménagement.” Christine, the protagonist, sees her neighbors leave home every Saturday, with their large moving wagon, and return at the end of the day and she imagines to herself how wonderful it must be for them to see the city and to help people move to better conditions. From her comfortable and well-established home, she perceives the mover’s world to be one of heroism and rescuing people from their

poverty and misery. She assumes that it must be seen in this way by those who assist in this noble work. She longs to have the same experience and she pleads with her mother to allow her to go, but her mother is adamantly opposed. Finally, one Saturday, she leaves home unbeknownst to her mother, expecting that the promise of the morning will be fulfilled. In other words, “nous partîmes dans cette heure fraîche du matin qui m’avait promis la transformation du monde et des choses—et sans doute de moi” (La Route d’Altamont 101). She experiences transformation, but in a way much different than she expects. First comes the transformation of her world from the well-situated homes on her street to more densely populated streets and then to an area described as more and more dilapidated the further they get away from home. The homes are described as little more than shacks thrown together, made from odds and ends. The solid, permanent, and settled situation of the well-to-do is contrasted heavily with that of the “pauvres gens qui glissent pour ainsi dire à la surface de l’existence, nulle part ne plongeant leurs racines. On n’a plus de toit. Oui, vraiment, pendant quelques heures du moins, c’est comme si on était à la dérive, au fil de la vie!” (Route 96).

As Christine sees the physical changes in her surroundings, she experiences a change in perception where people are concerned. She begins to see the mover as the bad-humored and ill-mannered man that he is and has always been, rather than the hero and rescuer of mankind she had imagined. She sees themselves (she, the mover, and his daughter) as bringing a portion of the past into the present in the form of their cart and horses, but the mover’s bad humor spoils the sense of enchantment she desires for the people who see them. He complains, curses, scolds, and otherwise changes her perception of him from a gentle giant to an unpleasant ogre.

The meal is a disappointment, as well. Florence, the mover’s daughter, does not inform her beforehand of the need to pack a lunch for the day; and even when Florence notices that her

“friend” has not brought anything to eat, she refuses to share more than a mouthful of what she herself has prepared. Even worse, she sits and seems to “lord over” the disillusioned visitor (Christine) for her lack of preparation. Though it is short, the meal indicates the attitude of the movers toward their clients in general—they are objects to be moved along with their furniture, without need of nourishment.

The juxtaposition of the expected enchantment of the imagined adventure and what happened in reality provides stark contrast. Christine says of the experience,

J’ai toujours pensé du cœur humain qu’il est un peu comme la mer, sujet aux marées, que la joie y monte en un flux progressif avec son chant de vagues, de bonheur, de félicité; mais, qu’ensuite, lorsque se retire la haute mer, elle laisse apparaître à nos yeux une désolation infinie. Ainsi en fut-il ce jour-là de moi.

(Route 109)

The disillusionment is even greater when Christine realizes that the fatigue and frustration that everyone has experienced are had for nothing. The family is not removed from their misery as she has imagined they would be. Instead of a habitat which would have become sacred by its separation from the poverty she has already seen, she sees the family move into a house, perhaps more poor and dilapidated than the one they had just left. She has anticipated sacred transformation for this family, but instead, she sees the profane (or, the Smith family and their poverty) fall back into, or never leave the profane realm as she had hoped and anticipated. It is almost as if it is the anticipation of the “festival” without the end result of time and space being renewed. And thus it is with this poor family:

Les enfants avaient faim; ils commencèrent de pleurer avec des voix geignardes, apeurées, sur un ton ennuyeux qui me rappela les pleurs du petit chien

abandonné....Bravement, malgré tout, Mrs. Smith ayant...mis la main sur un sac de farine, un poêlon et des œufs, se prit maintenant à faire à manger pour les siens. C'est cela, je pense, qui m'attrista le plus: cette pauvre femme, au milieu d'un désordre complet et presque dans le noir, commençant à faire sauter des crêpes. (Route 110-11)

Gabrielle Roy thus captures in these few words the great anticipation and the greater disillusionment when the world is transformed, not into something new and beautiful, but rather revealed as it really is, real poverty and misery.

Pour empêcher un mariage

A similar event occurs in the story "Pour empêcher un mariage" when Christine is traveling with her mother to Saskatchewan so that her mother can try to convince Christine's older sister, Georgianna, to not marry a particular man. Christine has never traveled outside the province of Manitoba and seems to think that everything changes when one leaves. She expresses her thoughts to her mother:

—Nous sommes en Saskatchewan? ai-je demandé à maman, et j'allais me sentir contente, parce que passer d'une province à l'autre me paraissait être une si grande aventure que sans doute elle allait nous transformer complètement, maman et moi, nous rendre heureuses peut-être.

Mais maman, qui aimait pourtant elle aussi l'aventure, ne me fit qu'un signe distrait, comme si c'était aussi triste en Saskatchewan qu'au Manitoba (Rue Deschambault 52).

The journey intended by the parents to save their daughter from an undesirable marriage is a failure in that respect. But it also fails to fulfill the hope Christine has, that traveling to a new

location would produce some sort of transformation; rather, it is the words “J’aime” which unexpectedly produce the change. Christine says that after hearing her mother and sister talk about her sister’s love for the man she wants to marry, she hears her sister say, “Je l’aime. Je vais me marier. Je l’aime...” (Rue 54) and ever after that, whenever she hears a person says “J’aime” she is afraid and her only desire is to protect the person who thus makes him or herself so vulnerable.

La vallée Houdou

In contrast to this revelation of vulnerable reality, the Doukhobor immigrants in “La vallée Houdou” (Un jardin au bout du monde) experience quite the opposite effect and instead of seeing what is really there, they see only the illusion. They came to Manitoba fed with “guarantees” that they would find a land of promise and of plenty, but they are sadly disappointed by the vast and empty plain. Their goal since arriving has been to find a place to live like that which they left behind in their native country, and day after day the chiefs search for something to break the monotony of the plains that will recall the beloved mountains, rivers, and forests of their homeland. One evening after a long day of searching, as the sun sets, they see a vision arise before them of green hills, valleys, trees, and running water. The setting sun is the instrument by which they discover this “sacred” spot—it creates an illusion of beauty and fertile ground, of river and forest. They are informed that the valley is bewitched at sunset and that what they see is only illusion, for what they are looking at in reality is the least fertile of any ground they could find. However, the change created by the sun is so abrupt and the contrast is so great that the chiefs are convinced that what they see is reality and they refuse any alternative. They insist on making this valley their home because, according to them, the sacred nature of it has been revealed and their belief in the illusion creates the reality. Thus we see that actual

transformation in reality is not so important as belief that transformation has occurred. Though the change only occurs at sunset, the Doukhobors are convinced that because it has happened even once, its effect will continue to exert its power.

Each of these stories combines the conflict between the attempted renewal and belief and the disillusionment that Gabrielle Roy seems to demonstrate in her works. There seems to be a promise of renewal offered by the festival-like rupture of a journey or visit which would transform the world and those who participate, but so often, there is disappointment, or, if there is renewal and transformation, it is at the cost of life as the characters know it.

CONCLUSION

In this thesis we have discussed the pertinence and demonstration of sacred practices in the secular society of Gabrielle Roy's works, in the form of gift-giving, story-telling, and the rituals surrounding the preparation and the sharing of food. Roger Caillois and Mircea Eliade both postulate that the sacred is accessible to and evident in secular as well as religious society because patterns of sacred behavior in the form of ritual and other gestures still exist. We have examined the fictional works of Gabrielle Roy in the light of this claim and have demonstrated that their (Caillois' and Eliade's) common observation does hold sway. Sacred behaviors, albeit areligious at times, do, indeed, exist in the secular society of her works. The question remains, however, of how these works fit into the bigger picture of Francophone literature. One may wonder if she stands alone in the seemingly subconscious portrayal of sacred behavior. We claim that she does not; that there are indeed other authors who preceded her who dealt with sacred or religious themes hidden in unusual ways in their fiction. The French Romantic movement is the literary period which seems to coincide most clearly with this phenomenon of undercover religiosity.

Historians and literary critics² claim that since the French Revolution, authors of French literature throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, but the Romantics especially, have attempted to fill the huge void left when the Church and the Monarchy were abolished as forms of public authority. Beginning with the Revolution, the secular state became the governing factor instead of ecclesiastical and monarchical authority. Among the changes that took place were those that forced the clergy to swear allegiance to the State, becoming no longer religious leaders, but

² See Frances Ferguson, Lynn Hunt, Dale Van Kley, Anca Mitroi, Henre Peyre, and Bernard Plongeron, among others.

instead merely “civil” servants (Mitroi, “Forgotten” 30) who were generously permitted to carry out their duties, but nothing more. Among very deliberate efforts to delegitimize religious symbols and power was the mandate to melt down church bells for coins and cannons and the religious use of them was ultimately banned altogether (Boutin par. 2). Religious leaders were no longer permitted to make public commentary on state law. In addition, state law permitted clergyman to marry, though the church defended its right to remove those who did from their office as priests (Plongeron 343-5). Eventually, under the reign of Napoleon, the strict denial of religion seemed to lift, but only the shell of what it had been remained. The loss caused by these changes is well-described by Francois-René de Chateaubriand when he says, “....Jamais un changement plus étonnant et plus soudain ne s’est opéré chez un peuple. De la hauteur du génie, du respect pour la religion, de la gravité des mœurs, tou était subitement descendu à la souplesse, à l’impiété, à la corruption” (“René” 176). Thus, it is easy to see how, “several centuries of Catholicism, a life that has its rhythm regulated by religious rituals, sacred holidays, and gestures—even if they are but a matter of habit, a form without a content—cannot be suddenly effaced. These gestures, these religious memories persist, and organize everyday life even when the belief in and regular practice of them have disappeared” (Mitroi, e-mail).

After the Revolution, writers had a complex and often paradoxical relationship to religion. The experience of it had left them disillusioned and searching for something to fill the void left when the State repressed all traces of organized religion as a voice of authority. For authors such as François-René de Chateaubriand, Théophile Gautier, and Prosper Mérimée, religion became something to be portrayed through symbolism rather than overt discussion, such as with sickness and ruined estates, vampires and inanimate objects come to life. Disguising religion in fiction gave these authors access to the rituals and traditions formerly practiced, but which had become

marginalized with the secularization of the government. In a way, this fictional “re-living” of religious practices served as the needed alternative.

The disguise of religion or referral to the Church took many forms. Often, there was reference to ruin and decay, suggesting the disappearance of religion with nothing to take its place. Chateaubriand’s “René” tells the story of a disillusioned young nobleman who is left alone by the death of his father; his mother died when he was born. The family estate has been sold and has fallen into disrepair and ruin. He and his sister, Amélie, live together happily for a time, but in the end she enters a convent and René discovers that it is because she loved him passionately. When he receives word of her death, he goes to America in search of peace of mind among the savages. He finds only solitude and regret for a wasted and empty life. This seems to echo the sentiment articulated by Alfred de Musset when he said, “Toute la maladie du siècle présent vient de deux causes: le peuple qui a passé par 93 et par 1814 porte au cœur deux blessures. Tout ce qui était n’est plus; tout ce qui sera n’est pas encore. Ne cherchez pas ailleurs le secret de nos maux” (qu’t d in Peyre, Qu’est-ce que 107). The regret and nostalgia for that which is no longer attainable as depicted in “René” is but one example of the limbo experienced by the romantics.

Other examples, especially in fantastic literature, include stories where “revenants” were depicted, which, when they vanished, left an uncertain void that could not be filled. Among the authors who found these subjects fascinating were Théophile Gautier and Prosper Mérimée. The beautiful, but deadly vampire of “La Morte amoureuse” (Gautier, La Morte), the charming Égyptienne in “Le Pied de momie” (Gautier, La Morte), the lovely coffee-pot turned danseuse in “La cafetière” (Gautier, La Morte), and the grotesque and frightening Black Venus in “La Vénus d’Ille” (Mérimée, La Vénus) are each striking “revenantes.” Most often, these characters took

the form of women who had died and been buried and then returned. Each story plays on an element of the fantastic, leaving the reader almost convinced, as are the fictional characters, that the haunting experiences actually occurred. Tzvetan Todorov claims that the fantastic is an element so carefully and realistically woven into the story that it leaves the reader questioning and yet convinced that the supernatural visit or experience did happen³. Such fantastic depictions take place frequently in Romantic literature in yet another attempt to reach the missing elements of a life that is impossible to grasp; nobility, prestige, wealth, and power were once the heritage of many of the Romantic authors, when first with the Revolution, and then with the fall of Napoleon and the Empire, they were cut off from their hopes of glory.

One may wonder what authors from the Romantic period have in common with Gabrielle Roy, a 20th century author from rural western Canada. In part, the answer to that question is found in their common experiences, for Roy herself experienced cultural and spiritual turmoil. As already mentioned, she was raised in a Catholic home, but she experienced an uneasy and complex connection to religion. She questioned her mother's total devotion to God and she doubted the reality of God's love for her. She was raised as a French-speaking immigrant in English-speaking Winnipeg, Manitoba. A change in political party led to her father losing his government employment, leaving the family nearly destitute. She was constantly searching for her identity as a Canadian, as a French-speaking and English-speaking woman, as an actor, as a teacher, as a writer. Like the 19th century romantics, she experienced the same kind of questioning of moral and cultural values with the onslaught of World War II. She was dissatisfied with her life of poverty, so she scrimped and saved her meager teacher's salary and eventually went to Europe to study acting. Although she was accepted to study with a

³ See L'Introduction à la littérature fantastique for a masterful treatise on the phenomenon of the fantastic in literature.

prestigious French actress in Paris, she discovered that acting was too superficial and did not contain the answers she was looking for—a play that was superb on-stage required hours and hours of rehearsal and repetition. The emotion portrayed was practiced and deliberate, not spontaneous. In her autobiography, she describes the process of discovering her true vocation, the search for truth in life rather than in the theater:

Je m'essayais toujours à peu près à la même place au milieu de la salle vide. Je voyais les acteurs aller et venir sur la scène tout en lisant dans un petit cahier que chacun avait à la main les répliques et sans doute les mouvements à exécuter. De temps en temps, j'entendais Georges reprendre Ludmilla. 'Non, mon petit, pas ainsi. Écoute, il faut te pénétrer davantage du personnage...' J'avais beau faire effort pour tout suivre et m'y intéresser, la tristesse me gagnait. La tristesse que m'a toujours inspirée une salle de théâtre presque déserte, alors que les acteurs en costume de ville vont à tâtons à la recherche des personnages et qu'apparaissent au grand jour les ficelles, les rouages, toute la mécanique impitoyable de la pièce....

Un jour, je manquai la répétition puis le surlendemain encore, pour aller m'asseoir plutôt auprès de mes vieilles tricoteuses de Luxembourg, que j'écoutais avec grand soulagement causer entre elles de choses quotidiennes. Plus je fréquentais le théâtre, et plus m'attiraient la simple vie banale des gens et leur langage si plein de riches trouvailles toutes palpitantes de réalité. Sans trop m'en rendre compte, je me rapprochais de ce qui allait être ma véritable, ma seule école.

Je manquais une autre répétition....[C]'était pour me remettre à errer sans but à travers la ville. Sans but? Peut-être pas tout à fait, puisque, sans l'avoir décidé

mais de mieux en mieux, je prêtais l'oreille de porte en porte, de chaise en chaise,
aux voix qui racontent la vie.... (Détresse 289-90)

Dissatisfied with the stage and its superficiality, she turned to life for the truth and authenticity she sought. When she returned to Canada near the beginning of World War II, she wrote only small pieces and stories for various magazines. She eventually got hired on as a permanent journalist and her goal as a writer gradually evolved into that of being the echo of “[les] voix qui racontent la vie,” in an effort to give voice to those who seemingly have no voice: immigrants, children, the elderly, common people living common lives with little or no fanfare. In the end, her writing became the vehicle for her questions; for her search for truth.

Most of this search took the form of working with her personal reality, her life⁴.

Memories and experiences became the material she molded into her stories. There is a pattern in several of her stories of an excursion or experience beginning with great anticipation and excitement, but as they develop, they appear to become drab and bland, and though the experiences portrayed contain the promise of mystery and playfulness and suspense, they become void of all meaning⁵. When the narrator in Roy's story “La Route d'Altamont” sees the hills of Altamont for the first time, she finds them fascinating, joyful, and full of suspense and mystery: “À présent, du reste, la petite route grimpeait visiblement, sans feinte, avec une sorte d'allégresse, par petits bonds joyeux, par à-coups comme un jeune chien qui tire sur sa laisse.... ‘Ah, maman a raison, ai-je pensé, les collines sont exaltantes, jouant avec nous un jeu d'attente, de surprise, nous tenant vraiment en suspens’” (Route 125). But then as she prepares to leave Canada to go to Europe, she perceives the hills that she once thought fascinating and alluring to

⁴ Much of her work is at least partially autobiographical, however, it is important to note here that her works are autobiographical in the sense that she has used her memory and personal experiences, but they are fictional accounts with truth woven in and around the fiction. See François Ricard's Gabrielle Roy: Une Vie (504-05) and “L'oeuvre de Gabrielle Roy...” for a more detailed discussion regarding “l'auto-fiction.”

⁵ See Chapter III of this thesis.

be only slight mounds rising out of the ground, small and insignificant compared to the vast unknown world she has yet to explore. Inevitably, it is the unknown that tantalizes and tempts and seduces one to leave the security of the familiar. What is to guarantee that her anticipated time in Europe will not end in the same way as her experience with the hills: in disillusionment, disappointment, and despair? It would seem that there is nothing that can be done to prevent it.

However, in her autobiography, La Détresse et l'Enchantement, she gives the key to overcoming the disappointment of too much familiarity. It is found in the retelling of an experience, re-weaving life, as it were, and in the re-creation, the familiar becomes new again. Roy tells of coming home from a play performance or a party and telling her mother all about it. She would describe the evening, the amusing events, the words exchanged. And, as is often the case when there is something funny, her mother would request one or two stories over and over again. But as she told them again and again, it seemed that they became less lively, less funny, in fine, less, period. However, with a renewal of inspiration, different details, or a different way of telling it on the part of the story-teller, the experience could take life again.

Un soir que maman me la [une des histoires] redemandait, je dis avec un peu d'humeur que cette histoire n'était plus drôle et ne valait plus la peine d'être racontée.

Maman convint qu'en effet la dernière fois que je l'avais contée, elle avait ri peut-être d'un peu moins bon cœur. Elle devint songeuse.

— Après tout, que s'usent les histoires qui racontent la vie, elle-même usure, c'est bien naturel.

Je me sentis vivement révoltée :

— Les histoires usées, que reste-t-il donc ?

Elle me fit un sourire encourageant.

— D'autres histoires à inventer ou bâtir. Ou bien la même vieille histoire toujours, mais refaite à neuf. (Détresse 152)

Thus, the most important part about the telling of a story is fidelity to the truth—integrity of character, integrity of facts, integrity of circumstances—one has to find the right way to tell the story so that it represents the truth. And if one retells the story, it requires re-weaving the facts, but still remaining faithful to the essential parts. This is brought to light when Christine, the narrator in “La Route d’Altamont,” describes her mother’s account of her parents’ settlement in the Canadian west.

Ce vieux thème de l’arrivée des grands-parents dans l’Ouest, ç’avait [sic.] donc été pour ma mère une sorte de canevas où elle avait travaillé toute sa vie comme on travaille à une tapisserie, nouant des fils, illustrant tel destin. En sorte que l’histoire varia, grandit et se compliqua à mesure que la conteuse prenait de l’âge et du recul. Maintenant, quand ma mère la racontait encore, je reconnaissais à peine la belle histoire de jadis qui avait enchanté mon enfance; les personnages étaient les mêmes, la route était la même, et cependant plus rien n’était comme autrefois.

Quelquefois nous l’interroignons:

—Mais ce détail ne figurait pas dans tes premières versions. Ce détail est nouveau, disions-nous avec une pointe de dépit, peut-être, tant nous aurions tenu, j’imagine, à ce que le passé du moins demeurât immuable. Car, si lui aussi se mettait à changer!...

—Mais justement il change à mesure que nous-mêmes changeons, disait maman.

(Route 133)

So it is that, in the world of Roy's works, the renewal comes in telling the same story or experience with new detail or according to a new perspective, so as to give it new life. Another example of this is found in the short story "De quoi t'ennuies-tu, Éveline?" when the character Éveline describes how, in the process of story-telling, a story retold exactly the same way every time loses its charm or the element of life which it contains the first time it is told.

Répétée textuellement, son histoire n'aurait pas été assez vivante. Pour bien raconter, elle le savait, il fallait d'abord être prodigieusement captivé soi-même, et à cela on n'arrivait qu'à force de renouvellement. Bien entendu, elle ne pouvait ni ne voulait changer les faits, mais leur interprétation ne variait-elle pas à l'infini? Du reste, ce qui faisait une bonne histoire, propre à saisir le cœur,...c'était malgré tout la vérité: vérité des personnages, vérité des lieux, vérité des événements. Aussi s'appliqua-t-elle plus fort que jamais à chercher la vérité de son histoire dans ses recoins les plus secrets. (Éveline 74-5)

Thus, the renewal of the event, or the world, comes in the re-creation of the past. Going back to Éveline's narrative, we can see that as she told the story of her parents and the new settlement in the west, this life became as though it were present to her, thus revealing the efficacy of the re-creation. "Bobonne apparut, raide et majestueuse, et François, avec sa politesse un peu vieillotte, et autour d'eux la plaine du Manitoba, son immensité presque terrifiante, comme si elle-même [Éveline] tout à coup venait d'en saisir toute l'ampleur" (Éveline 75). The immediacy or current aspects of the event, despite its distance and separation from reality, are what indicate that this is indeed the re-creation of the world, for the story-teller as well as the listener.

As we have discussed the experience of searching for truth in Roy's works, as well as other sacred rituals and gestures, we have become more and more convinced that sacred patterns do exist, and that it is in these patterns practiced in the lives of Roy's characters that these individuals make sense of life. The belief that one can transcend the mundane by setting apart a certain gesture or ritual is what validates the sacred, puts one in contact with the divine, and produces this actual significance in life itself. Each occurrence of sacred gestures, whether in gift-giving or sharing, or any other manner of ritual gesture, demonstrates the commonality of such experiences among human beings and though the seeming banality of the exchanges might lead one to believe that these are unimportant, to quote Mary Douglas again, "No experience is too lowly to be taken up in ritual and given a lofty meaning" (Purity and Danger 114). And Gabrielle Roy has indeed shown that human beings, though they may not practice the same rituals collectively, share a common bond of gestures that transforms their world and opens access to the divine.

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