

**Beyond St-Henri:  
Redefining the Space of the 'Nation' in Gabrielle Roy's The Tin Flute**

A thesis  
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies  
University of Manitoba  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts

by  
Georgia Simone Fakiolas

August, 2006

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FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES  
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**BY**

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**A Thesis/Practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of The University of  
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OF  
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## ABSTRACT

This thesis maintains that, for Gabrielle Roy, a dialogical “space” of national identity can be achieved through the renegotiation of national and cultural pedagogies. Homi Bhabha’s poststructuralist theory of the nation allows us to read the contradiction between escapist desire and language-based class-consciousness in The Tin Flute as a concealed gap between “pedagogical” narratives of origin and “performative” articulations of identity. Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of fiction’s “surplus of humanness” also helps us to see how the characters’ desires overleap the novel’s socio-historical setting. Emmanuel’s eventual rejection of war and nationalism can therefore be read as an anticipation of the dialogism I locate in Roy’s semi-autobiographical prairie novels, a reading of which makes up my second chapter. In Tin, however, Florentine, Jean and Azarius do not attain this space of identity; their escapism presupposes an “organic” attachment to St-Henri, and to the rural French-Catholic homestead and imminent Quebec “nation-state” that constitute its purported geographical “origins”.

This reading of The Tin Flute contests readings that identify a “failure” of francophone collective identity in the novel. These readings assume a nineteenth-century, romantic view of national identity as the product of an organic language common to its geographical “point of origins”. In doing so, they ignore the modern, dialogical model of identity that characterizes Roy’s own artistic development. Because dialogue with cultural “others”, as in the prairie novels, leads to new perspectives and greater perception, one learns to re-examine and reconstruct one’s past. This ability to become “other” to oneself thus provides a dialogical alternative to the nationalist “fatherland”, by creating what Bhabha calls a “Third Space” of enunciation, or identification.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I owe a world of thanks to my advisor, Dr. David Williams,  
for his boundless moral support  
and for always reminding me what's at stake in fiction, theory and life.

I am also indebted to Dr. Yasmin Jiwani at Concordia University, who offered me  
encouragement during the last year of my undergraduate.

A special thank-you to my aunt, Dr. Jo Durup, for showing me the ropes.

And to JP, for being by my side every step of the way.

## **DEDICATIONS**

**I dedicate this thesis**

**to my mother, who made travel a priority in our life,  
and to my father, who taught me to embrace difference.**

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## CHAPTER 1

### Towards a “Third Space”:

#### **Historical, Critical and Theoretical Contexts for Reading The Tin Flute**

In its ideological shift from French-Canadian to Québécois identity in the latter half of the twentieth century, Quebec appears to have shifted its “home” space from a rural, traditional, Catholic territory to an urban, modern, secular territory of class-consciousness and political distinctness. Ironic as it may seem, the traditional, rural, Catholic French-Canadian identity was originally promoted not to justify civic nationalism (the form Quebec nationalists have resisted since the 1960’s) but in order to reinforce French-Canadians’ “place” in Canadian culture and in the Canadian nation-state. It was between 1936 and 1939 – just before The Tin Flute’s inception – that premier Maurice Duplessis led the conservative Union Nationale. After a brief hiatus he led the party again from 1942-1959. Writing on the cusp of the Quiet Revolution, Jacques Brazeau explains how the French-Canadian identity was deeply conservative in its rural, Catholic values. He adds that this conservative identity, particularly the emphasis on the French language, in turn facilitated Anglo-Canadian and American trade relations and consequent anglophone economic domination. For instance, Brazeau points out that bilingualism in the private sector did not benefit the francophone majority (157), but instead ensured a language-based division of labour and privileges:

La connaissance de l’anglais est demeurée suffisante afin que l’anglophone accède à des postes de responsabilités administratives et techniques et elle est [même] devenue nécessaire pour que le francophone ait accès aux positions moins importantes de liaison. [Knowledge of English gave anglophones access to jobs in

which they would have a certain degree of administrative power, and it [even] became compulsory in order for francophones to occupy less important positions].

(158)

It is difficult to know whether Duplessis implicitly discouraged francophones from learning English, or whether learning English would have promoted socio-economic equality. However, the notion of language as “la gardienne de la foi” (“the guardian of the faith”) certainly suggested that French was, above all, a language of tradition and community rather than a vehicular language.<sup>1</sup> Thus excluded from the major areas of economic life, French was ghettoised, as were francophones like Roy’s St-Henri characters.

If the period of Duplessis’s reign is known today as “la grande noirceur” (“the dark ages”), it is because the promotion of French-Canadian values was, according to many, the result of Duplessis’s political and economic alliance with the French Catholic Church. Despite economic and social incentives to learn English – and as Brazeau notes, the willingness of francophones to do so (158) – the Catholic Church and Duplessis depicted the conservation of the French language as noble in its own right. With reference to D. J. Lee’s 1949 study “The Evolution of Nationalism in Quebec”, Evelyn Kallen notes that French-Canadian nationalism was predicated on the slogan “la survivance” (“survival”) and “was essentially conservative and past-oriented, favoring [sic] relative isolation as a means of preserving group boundaries” (149). She adds that

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<sup>1</sup> Discussing the relations between territory and the four types of language in Henri Gobard’s linguistic model, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari define vehicular language as “urban, governmental, even worldwide language, a language of businesses, commercial exchange, bureaucratic transmission, and so on, *a language of the first sort of deterritorialization*” (in Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature. Trans. Dora Pavan. Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1986: 23, emphasis added).



the result was a form of cultural nationalism that aimed primarily to maintain the status quo and to ward off anglophone (cultural) assimilation (193-4). Brazeau's contemporary, Jean-Charles Falardeau, published a 1967 essay on Quebec cultural policy that criticizes the power of the Church over French-Canadians' consciousness. Because the clergy had been Quebec's "chefs naturels [natural leaders] since the 1840s" (Falardeau 180), there was little distinction between spiritual, cultural and political decision-making. This said, Hubert Guindon makes a pivotal remark when he notes that "[r]etrospectively, it is now clear that what was revolutionary about the Quiet revolution was the liquidation of the Catholic Church as the embodiment of the French nation in Canada" (104).

While the Quiet Revolution would challenge the Church's power, it maintained the idea of a natural link between language and identity. The only difference now was the purpose of Quebec nationalism; instead of upholding clerical power and Catholic values, nationalism from the 1960s onward justified Quebec's cultural, political – and later, territorial – sovereignty. Preservationist slogans like "la survivance" ("survival") and "la langue, gardienne de la foi" ("language, guardian of faith") gave way to the pro-active mantras, "Il faut que ça change" ("Things have got to change") and "maîtres chez nous" (Kallen translates this to "masters in our own home" [193]; a more accurate translation is "masters of our own domain"). These "liberal" slogans, as Kallen calls them, stressed the need for a distinctly Québécois, self-fashioned identity. She notes that in the context of Quebec's increasing industrialization, urbanization and political modernization, Quebec francophones felt the need to control both "internal [provincial-level] institutions" and "relations with the outside" (194). Thus the French Catholic Church would no longer have the upper hand on social and welfare services (Kallen 194), the most important of

which was language education. For the new Québécois nationalists, control over language education meant not only an internal control over identity formation and public administration, but over Quebec's image on the world stage.

By the 1960's, it became apparent that the French Catholic Church – however well-intentioned and committed to proto-nationalist ideals – was more concerned with its own “survivance” than with that of the Québécois people. This revelation came largely by accident. In a famous 1960 document entitled “Les Insolences du Frère Un Tel” (“The Insolence of Brother Anonymous”), Pierre-Jérôme Desbiens (a.k.a. “Un Tel”) shocked Quebec educators by arguing that education, religion and identity in Quebec were being impoverished by the preponderance of joul, or Québécois slang:

Le joul ne se prête pas à une fixation écrite. Le joul est une décomposition . . . Cette absence de langue qu'est le joul est un cas de notre inexistance, à nous, les Canadiens français. . . . *Le langage est le lieu de toutes les significations*. Notre ineptitude à nous affirmer, notre refus de l'avenir, notre obsession du passé, tout cela se reflète dans le joul, qui est vraiment notre langue.

[Joul does not lend itself to print fixities. Joul is a decomposition . . . The absence of language that is joul reveals our own non-existence as French-Canadians. . . . *Language is the site of all significations*. Our ineptitude when it comes to affirming our identity, our refusal of the future, our obsession with the past, all this is reflected in joul, which is in fact our language]. (27, emphasis added)

Desbiens claimed that French would allow people in Quebec to overcome the servility imposed by anglocentrism (27) and the supposed “primitiveness” of joul (25). That is,

French would allow the Québécois to properly signify their identity by defining themselves in and through print. What “Les Insolences” unwittingly revealed, however, was the overarching role of the Church in Quebec education. When Desbiens described language as a common good that the state must protect (29), the state he was referring to was one ruled by the clergy.

It was in retaliation to such claims that Falardeau later stressed the need for language to articulate a world-class (read: national) culture. According to Falardeau, the French language had not previously been used to convey the civilization or mentality of the Québécois (145). For him and others, French therefore had to become a language of cultural identity: “Répétons-le à satiété: notre culture sera française ou elle ne sera pas.” [Let us always remember: Either our culture will be French or it will not be at all” (147).]<sup>2</sup> Language and identity, as both medium and message, were celebrated as one.

In this way, the French language became what Slavoj Žižek calls a “national Thing” or source of [national] enjoyment (195). As such, it would reinforce cultural and political boundaries. Kallen explains that a sense of ethno-linguistic territoriality underpins the idea of a “state” of Quebec (195). For instance, while bilingualism and biculturalism increased among francophones throughout Canada, unilingualism and uniculturalism increased among the Québécois (Kallen 195). Unilingualism and uniculturalism were therefore used as forms of cultural mapping, that is, as ways of ensuring a geographically-enclosed cultural distinctness. When it came to francophone cultures outside Canada, though, Québécois nationalism reinforced solidarity and

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<sup>2</sup> This proclamation is a metonym for author Claude-Henri Grignon’s claim in *L’Action nationale*: “Notre culture sera paysanne ou elle ne sera pas [our culture will be rural or it will not be at all]”. See p.10 in Gilles Marcotte. “‘Restons traditionnels et progressifs’, disait Onésime Gagnon.” *Études françaises* 33:3 (1997-1998): 5-13.

similarity much more than dispersion and difference. Falardeau, for instance, wrote that it was pivotal for Quebec to maintain ties to francophone nations outside Canada, especially France (147). This statement shows that in the context of Québécois nationalism, the French language is hardly an arbitrary trait. If language would determine the identity of the Québécois during the Quiet Revolution, then territory would provide a sense of historical continuity and material concreteness to language. By the end of the 1960's, the French language became a birthmark symbolizing Quebec's geographical and historical ties to France. As the bond between language and territory thus solidified, a new understanding of the Québécois people started to emerge.

#### Nationalism in Royan Criticism

For a number of Gabrielle Roy's critics, this shift from French-Canadian traditionalism to Québécois nationalism is already implicit in Bonheur d'Occasion / The Tin Flute two decades before the Quiet Revolution. Interestingly, a key subject of debate today is the relevance of Roy's work to Quebec nationalism. Although Ismène Toussaint maintains that Roy's own political and cultural identification as a French-Canadian precludes the possibility of any nationalist sentiment in her work<sup>3</sup>, Gérard Tougas, André Brochu and Gilles Marcotte suggest that the novel's realism and use of joul indicate Roy's recognition of Quebec's cultural (hence political) distinctness (in Ben-Zion Shek, *La critique gauchiste* 55-56). Overall, we can distinguish two intertwined critical

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<sup>3</sup> In "Gabrielle Roy et le Nationalisme Québécois", Toussaint identifies in Roy an acute "anti-indépendentisme" stemming from her English education, her complex relationship with immigrant communities, and a number of alleged character traits, including a lack of self-confidence and a utopian desire to transcend regional, linguistic or national boundaries. Patrick Socken is one of the many critics who view Roy's "utopia" more positively, as "Le pays de l'amour" ("the country of love"). See Paul Socken. "The Influence of Physical and Social Environment on Character in the Novels of Gabrielle Roy." DAI 38 (1974): 3489A. Ph.D. thesis. University of Toronto.

tendencies: an emphasis on “lost” traditional values, and an interpretation of class-consciousness in nationalist terms. Though critical writing on The Tin Flute thus suggests a tension between traditionalism and modern nationalism, it also reveals the importance of language and territory to both views of Quebec identity.

Earlier readings of The Tin Flute were, though not overtly nationalist, clearly influenced by faith in a language-based class-consciousness. In his 1968 article entitled “Poverty and Wrath: A Study of The Tin Flute”, W. B Thorne reads individual(ist) desire as a form of escapism from the oppressive St-Henri. His reading of the novel exhibits typically post-Duppleussian overtones when he suggests that true escape requires a collective effort. The characters’ individual desires are therefore only politically viable insofar as they build a homogeneous movement against “the Establishment, symbolized in Westmount” (10).

Wilson J. Clark also reads the characters’ collective identity as the result of class-consciousness, though he forcefully argues that neither is realized in The Tin Flute. Clark’s main criticism of Roy is that she depicts poverty through a bourgeois lens – that is, by denying her characters’ will or capacity for subversion. He argues that, while Roy offers a moving social portrait, she discourages action against poverty by depicting the Lacasses’ “daily struggles” (40) rather than “[poverty’s] roots in our political and economic subservience to U.S. imperialism and Anglo-Canadian colonialism” (33). While this statement is certainly questionable,<sup>4</sup> Clark also misreads Roy’s characterization. Ignoring both the impending storm at the end of the novel and Roy’s

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<sup>4</sup> We need only recall Alphonse’s poignant speech: “Achetez des cigarettes, du bon gin hollandaise, des petites pilules pour le mal de tete, des manteaux de fourrure. . . . Oui, des tentations, c’est ce que la société nous a donné” (Bonheur d’Occasion 59) / “Buy cigarettes, buy good Dutch gin, buy little pills for your headache, buy a fur coat. . . . Yeah, temptations, that’s what they’ve given us” ( The Tin Flute 57-58).

1947 speech “Retour à Saint-Henri” (“Return to Saint-Henri”)<sup>5</sup>, Clark criticizes Roy for giving her characters a “happy end”. He then proposes a direct link between poverty and identity in St-Henri, by concluding that “[t]he *essential* quality of the residents of Saint-Henri is not that they wish to cross over to Westmount but that they aspire to achieve national liberation and independence” (40, emphasis added). Clark thus assumes a distinctly nationalist view of Québécois identity, at the expense of a thorough discussion of Roy’s artistic vision.

Two decades later, Ben-Zion Shek criticizes Clark’s reading of The Tin Flute – namely, his abstraction of St-Henri poverty – by reinforcing a link between Gabrielle Roy and Quebec nationalism. Shek takes issue with what he calls “gauchiste” (“leftist”) and “gauche” readings of Roy’s novels. He contests such criticism not only on the grounds that it is reductionist and generalizing (62), but also on the grounds that it de-politicizes Roy’s text. Unlike Toussaint, Shek insists that The Tin Flute did, in fact, affect the development of a Quebec social conscience (62). Shek suggests that, for this reason, Paul Dubé is wrong in claiming that Gabrielle Roy had “jamais participé aux mouvements politiques et sociaux qui ont modifié la société québécoise [never participated in political and social movements that shaped Quebec society]” (Morisset 238 in Shek 62). Though Shek rightly identifies the political relevance of Roy’s novel, he perhaps too hastily reads Roy’s realism as a transparent representation of Quebec identity. For instance, he dismisses Myo Kapetanovich’s criticism of Florentine’s appearance as “un mépris et pour

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<sup>5</sup> Roy was the first female fellow of the Royal Society of Canada. In her inauguration speech, she presented a miniature sequel on the lives of The Tin Flute’s characters. Roy’s objective was to show that nothing in St-Henri would improve: Emmanuel dies at war and Azarius goes back to work as a taxi driver. See Jeanette Urbas and Lin Wilson, trans. and eds. “Saint-Henri revisited [by] Gabrielle Roy.” Journal of Canadian Fiction 24 (1979): 78-88.

le peuple et pour le genre réaliste [disdain for the (Quebec) people and for realism]” (64). In doing so, Shek implies that one can and should read The Tin Flute’s content as a transparent reflection of “*québecitude*”.

Though Ellen Reisman Babby’s lucid structuralist analysis seems to challenge this idea, she maintains a nationalist concern with the development of a distinctly *modern* Quebec identity within linguistic and territorial boundaries. Like many studies dealing with the relevance of urban space (Sherill E. Grace, Paula Gilbert Lewis), Babby suggests that the novel’s urban setting prevents the characters from achieving collective or national identity. She points out that Roy’s text is characterized by the spectacular – for instance, elements of Montreal’s environment (such as the mountain dividing St-Henri and Westmount) that structure one’s reading of the characters and their desires (53-55). Because of its porous semiotic and linguistic system, argues Babby, The Tin Flute links the arbitrary nature of language to a lack of linguistic or cultural origin (118-119). This aspect of Babby’s argument usefully identifies, in theoretical terms, the unreliability of Roy’s text as a transparent representation. However, Babby naturalizes the notion of an original collective identity and a transparent representative code when she concludes that Roy’s characters must (read: can) conquer the “intermediary stagelike [sic] barrier” of mediated verbal and nonverbal language (119-120). Babby suggests that this “barrier” is constructed by social and geographical confinement; as we shall see, Paul Perron’s later work on commercially “mediated” desire (211) more explicitly links this marginality to capital and urban life. While Babby’s attention to the problem of linguistic mediation is laudable, however, her closing remarks on the “Quebec narrative” and the “quest of the

québécois people” (120) suggest that the articulation of collective identity must occur within a defined geographical space and in a single common language.

With great subtlety, Paul Perron reworks this same idea in his 2003 reading of The Tin Flute in Narratology and Text: Subjectivity and Identity in New France and Québécois Literature. Perron’s principal claim is much like that of Sherril E. Grace, whose reading of the urban/rural binary as male/female suggests that “Gabrielle Roy holds out little hope for human beings trapped in the urban chain of their own devising” (198). Perron’s narratological approach to reading the urban environment emphasizes the ways in which movement affects the characters’ ability to signify identity. For Perron, the characters’ constant movement throughout the city fragments the object and event perceived by the desiring subject (219-220). The urban environment is one in which characters are “manipulated” by uncontrollable external [social, economic, political] forces (Perron 227). Like Babby, Perron suggests that the characters are caught between traditional and modern identities; while Jean and Florentine represent the egoism and non-reciprocal desire fostered by and in the city (213-215), Emmanuel’s humanism (216) and Rose-Anna’s sense of duty (215) fail to represent viable alternatives for the St-Henri inhabitants. Yet he does not say where or how a more fluid identity might emerge.

Instead, Perron concludes that, since Roy’s characters are already “weighed down” (227) by traditional values, identity must be constructed consciously and collectively. This identity depends largely on the family, which, torn by war, must rebuild itself “through and by means of a perceived common language, race and origin” (256). Perron usefully acknowledges that the individual self is now “opened up to the external world” (256), yet maintains that the individual urban subject must “conform” to



a single linguistic, racial and religious symbolic order in order to avoid marginalization and isolation (xv). This assumption ignores the arbitrariness, and consequent fluidity, of language, race and religion – and by extension, the individual level at which these categories are contested.

As a rule, Québécois criticism produces a complex and ambiguous message about the novel's depiction of Québécois identity. For Roy's biographer, François Ricard, the novel is apparently as nationalist as its author; he describes Florentine as a reflection of Roy herself, specifically, of “son désir d'élévation . . . son idéalisme et . . . ses rapports problématiques avec son milieu d'origine [her desire for ascendancy . . . her idealism and . . . her problematic relationship with the place she comes from”] (Gabrielle Roy 261). While this reading of Florentine is consistent with Toussaint's insistence that Roy was unapologetically anti-separatist, Gérard Tougas suggests that the publication of Roy's first novel led to a new public interest in urban francophones. Tougas argues that, by depicting Quebec francophones as interesting and worthy of study (149), Roy's novel led to the emergence of a Québécois self-image: “En un mot, un rite de passage collectif eut lieu à partir de 1945 [Simply put, a collective rite of passage took place starting in 1945]” (149). His remarks on the novel's socio-historical effects give Roy's novel an important nationalist resonance despite her own political standpoint.

While criticism before the Quiet Revolution tends to glorify Rose-Anna's rural values (Melançon 461), later work is primarily concerned with the emerging post-war identity represented by Jean and Florentine. In a seldom-cited, yet important, study of the novel's depiction of North America, Jean Morency suggests that the commercial, urban Québécois identity is ideologically American. He associates Jean with the Promethean

figure in American novels like Moby-Dick, and argues that Jean is the quintessence of all that is *not* Québécois (nor French-Canadian, for that matter):

Personnage révélateur d'une conscience plus moderne et états-unienne, Jean Lévesque incarne même une certaine éthique protestante du travail fortement empreinte de puritanisme . . . Ce puritanisme s'accompagne d'un certain autoritarisme qui ne va pas sans rappeler celui de l'Achab melvillien ou de tous ces personnages de la littérature états-unienne qui expriment un individualisme foncier sur le mode du pouvoir et de la conquête.

[As a character who reveals a more modern and American consciousness, Jean Lévesque even embodies a kind of protestant work ethic that is strongly imprinted by Puritanism . . . This puritanism is accompanied by a certain authoritarianism that does not fail to recall that of Melville's Ahab or of all those characters in American literature who express a die-hard individualism in modes of power and of conquest]. (73)

Although Gilles Marcotte also reads Jean as an embodiment of pure individualism, he does not limit the novel's nationalist implications to this single character. Marcotte argues that, while Jean and Rose-Anna respectively represent urban modernity and rural traditionalism, Florentine embodies Quebec's transitional state, its vulnerability (413) as it moves from the local and familial to larger physical and ideological spaces. In this way, Florentine functions as the type of character Lukács associates with "true realism" (409). For Marcotte, Florentine is such a figure because, unlike the modern Jean, the traditional Rose-Anna or the idealist Emmanuel (411), she is a liminal figure who is no bigger ("pas plus grand") than her historical era (413). For Marcotte, Florentine's inability to be

bigger than (hence separate from) her own historical era allows Roy to metonymize the contradictory Duplessian discourses of rural values and economic growth in Bonheur d'Occasion. He thus reads Roy's use of realism as part of a dialectical relationship between artist and historical context: "Il n'y a pas de réalisme en soi; le réalisme . . . est une réponse à quelque provocation de l'Histoire [There is no realism as such; realism . . . is a response to a provocation of History]" (408). It thus seems that, for Marcotte, Roy's novel depicts no less – and no more – than Falardeau's "culture en devenir" (147).

### Romantic Nationalism's "Imagined Community"

This said, we must consider, at least briefly, how criticism that assumes Quebec nationalism in The Tin Flute may already be ideologically committed to a nationalist pedagogy. In what ways does such criticism blur the fine line between critic and text? If nationalism is less about historical contingency than it is about ideology and rhetoric, then what matters is not whether critics' personal beliefs underpin their analyses, but whether these critics operate within or outside the discourse of a *particular kind of nationalism*. The particular discourse of Quebec nationalism has much in common with a romantic form of nationalism, heavily theorized in the late eighteenth-century by the German nationalist Johann Gottfried von Herder. Criticism on The Tin Flute often reflects Herder's view of language as a projection of, or compensation for, territory – however unwittingly this view may be assumed. A useful way to understand Herderian nationalism is through Benedict Anderson's idea of an imagined community constructed through print. As we shall see, the Herderian-Andersonian view of language both characterizes and produces romantic nationalist readings of The Tin Flute, as well as

scholarly discussion on the role of Roy's fiction. Readings that detect a "failure" of identity in The Tin Flute are consequently based on two major assumptions: that language in the novel fails to project francophone territory into a national cultural space; and, that the novel cautions against such failure.

The idea of the nation as a cultural rather than a civic territory lies at the heart of romantic nationalism. In his sympathetic study of nationalism and the Quebec question, Ray Conlogue explains that cultural nationalism stems primarily from a sense of shared ethnic (or in this case, linguistic) identity, a "common language, literature and history" and a "collective cultural heritage" (21). Conlogue importantly adds that romantic nationalism is based on the idea that language and culture result from the association one might have with one's physical environment (23). If the relationship between person and environment can foster linguistic and cultural particularities, it is because this relationship is ostensibly unique, much like Žižek's "national Thing". Yet cultural nationalism does not seek to preclude, but rather to redefine the political nation in territorial terms. While the rhetoric of "cultural distinctness" uses geographical origin to identify the truth-value of language and culture, it also uses culture (much as Anderson uses print-language) to delineate the borders of geographical territory. As Conlogue points out, the Romantics who developed the concept of cultural nationalism had a different understanding of the nation than Enlightenment thinkers, for whom the nation was "little more than a contract" (23). For Romantics, the cultural nation had "an inherent [natural] right to become a

political nation” because the community within it shared the language and culture of a particular territory (23).<sup>6</sup>

The link between language and territory – hence, national identity – was therefore seen as natural. According to Herder, the *volk* is itself an organic entity since it grew out of the relationship between humans and their natural environment (Williams, Imagined 18). In one of his most important essays, “On Diligence in the Study of Several Learned Languages”, Herder argues that, since one’s first language is the language in which one thinks (33), a national identity based on a common worldview is inevitable. Herder thus assumes a natural link between language and thought:

If . . . each language has its distinct national character, it seems that nature imposes upon us an obligation only to our mother tongue, for it is perhaps better attuned to our character and coextensive with our way of thinking.

(Selected Works 30)

Although he also describes the learning of foreign languages as a means of enriching oneself and connecting to others in a “great chain of learning” (30-31), Herder remains silent on the ways in which languages have influenced each other as a result of migration, conquest, revolution or treaties. For instance, he celebrates poetry as a marker of national culture (33) rather than as a tool for linguistic experimentation. That Herder’s penchant was for epic poetry is especially telling. According to Mikhail Bakhtin, the emergence of the novel in response to the epic coincides with Europe’s shift from its existence as a “socially isolated and culturally deaf semipatriarchal society” towards one of “international and interlingual contacts and relationships” (11). The ensuing

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<sup>6</sup> This is precisely the argument underpinning the movement for Quebec sovereignty. An advocate of cultural nationalism himself, Conlogue argues that Canada’s “civic nationalism” (20) is a political imposition on the Québécois and a denial of cultural identity for English Canadians.

polyglossia of this new cosmopolitan era would incite a re-evaluation of the relationship between language and object (Bakhtin 12). This questioning of linguistic truth-value would end what Bakhtin calls “the period of [coexisting yet separate] national languages” (12). Yet it is this archaic period that Herder celebrates when he describes translation as simply a means of “[keeping] the goal of our fatherland in sight” (33)<sup>7</sup>.

For Herder and other cultural nationalists, language could only underwrite a “fatherland” if it were anchored in print. As Eric J. Hobsbawm points out, speakers of German were geographically dispersed throughout Europe during most of the nineteenth century (cited in Williams, *Imagined* 18). One consequence of this dispersion was the emergence of regional differences among German-speakers, to the extent that German’s linguistic “purity” was threatened (this later happened in Prague, for instance, where the influence of Czech gave rise to Prague German<sup>8</sup>). The objective of German nationalism was therefore to transcend geographical dispersion and consequent regional differences by ideologically unifying individuals across space. For Herder, the German language would, by virtue of its “natural” properties, help accomplish this goal. However, German could not do this in its spoken form. If the intended nationalist message was to convey an unchanging cultural identity, the means of communication had to exhibit these qualities

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<sup>7</sup> Herder’s use of the term “fatherland”, much like the commonly used terms “motherland” and “mother tongue”, exemplifies the extent to which cultural nationalist rhetoric relies on notions of family and birthright. In his essay *Do We Still Have the Public and the Fatherland of Yore?* (written to commemorate the opening of a new law court), Herder reminds individuals of their “natural” identity, hence, of their “natural” legal and civic duties. (See *Selected Writings*.)

<sup>8</sup> Deleuze and Guattari describe Prague German as a language of “deterritorialization” (17) because it reveals a disconnect between Prague Jews and their rural Czech roots, between Prague Jews and Germany, and, most importantly, between Germany and the German language. For Franz Kafka to have written in German was therefore a politically subversive act, since it flaunted the Prague Jews’ ability to “rework” (25) a language spoken by the “oppressive [German] minority” (16) who expelled them from Herder’s “fatherland”. See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature*. Trans. Dora Pavan. Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1986.

as well. Dialects, regional accents and other linguistic variations reveal the mutability of oral language, and, in so doing, preclude the possibility of any organic, authentic national consciousness. Conversely, the printed text allows for the standardization of language and the mass distribution of a uniform idea. Print, namely that which was produced and distributed in a mass market, consequently became the unifying factor that would not so much replace, as reify, territory.<sup>9</sup>

In the hands of romantic nationalists, print furthered the myth of linguistic and territorial origins by glorifying the past through fictional representation. According to Bakhtin, this nationalist use of fiction is epitomized by the epic genre. The epic's "national heroic past", he argues, encapsulates "'beginnings' and 'peak times' in the national history . . . fathers and founders of families . . . 'firsts' and 'bests'" (13). Rather than occurring in an evolutionary process of identity-formation, this fictionally-represented past forms a temporally isolated "space" of identity. As Bakhtin puts it, the past in epic fiction is thus "*walled off* absolutely from all subsequent times, and above all from those times in which the singer and his listeners are located" (14-15, emphasis added). For romantic nationalists, then, print enabled both the preservation of an *essential* cultural identity, and the propagation of this identity across time and space. In his discussion of newspapers, for instance, Anderson notes that "the [reading] ceremony he [the individual] performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (even millions)

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<sup>9</sup> Noting Hegel's observation that newspapers have replaced morning prayers (35), Anderson argues that there is a direct correlation between the rise of print capitalism and the increasing secularization of nationalism. This was the case as much during the Quiet Revolution as in nineteenth-century Europe. What Anderson calls "dynastic time" (24) was God's Eternity communicated through a "sacred monarchy" (21) and measured by cycles and seasons. The modern nation, however, can only persist if it forms a "continuity" (11) with a distinguishable past, present and future. The mapping of time via clock and calendar allows for such continuity, by creating a sense of what Walter Benjamin terms "homogenous empty time" (in Anderson 24). If time is no longer part of God's pre-existing Eternity, it must be made meaningful with human events and accomplishments. This continual need to "fill" time is arguably the central purpose of the modern nation and nationalist rhetoric.

of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion” (35). Thus, while the epic’s formal qualities reveal a language and discourse of tradition (Bakhtin 16), a contemporary audience / readership is required to constitute the nation’s imaged community.

In Quebec, the desire to construct such a community through fiction and literary criticism was pivotal both before and after the Quiet Revolution. During the years of the Union Nationale, the clergy and other ideological state apparati used print to communicate supposed universals. The conservative marriage of Church and territorial identity was embodied no better than in the *roman du terroir*, or “novel of the land”. Such novels (of which the most renowned are La Terre paternelle (The Paternal Farm), Les Anciens Canadiens (The Canadians of Old), and Maria Chapdelaine [Perron, xiii]) communicate a monolithic ideological message: Tradition and territory are the lifeblood of the French-Canadian identity. Without these, such novels imply, there can be no sense of collective – hence individual – purpose. Characters in these novels find it impossible to define themselves once they leave the ideologies of their rural, Catholic milieu; their struggle is not to adapt to new surroundings, but to realize the importance of what they have left behind. Thus, as Perron puts it, individual desire and “all heterogeneous values are neutralized and eliminated” (xiii). Such resistance to change, however, led nationalists like Falardeau to criticize French-Canadians’ conservative use of print. Falardeau and others wanted to reverse the language / identity paradigm so that the former would shape the latter. Yet for the traditional French-Canadian identity to become a Québécois “culture en devenir [culture in progress]” (Falardeau 147), fiction would have to depict identity not in an absolute past, but in real time.



For many critics, this is what Gabrielle Roy accomplished with The Tin Flute, the first major French novel to depict an urban environment. Still, Roy's social realism is often read as a cautionary reinforcement of rural values. Perron, for instance, suggests that Roy depicts the rural-urban shift as a loss of those values. For a number of critics, it is because of the ever-moving city that characters have lost ties to rural (ideological and geographical) roots. For others, however, the city's physical and temporal instability does not signify a loss so much as a (re)construction of identity. Rather than depict the environment as a static backdrop, Roy maps space through movement. This has led critics such as Myrna Delson-Karan to suggest that Roy also maps time. Delson-Karan seems to identify in Bonheur d'Occasion's realism the same "simultaneity across [Walter Benjamin's notion of] 'homogeneous empty time'" (Anderson 25) that Anderson attributes to the modern nation. Keeping Benjamin's notion of time in mind, one can read "*The Tin Flute*" as "nation", "chapter" as "time", and "art / artistic" as "history / historical":

*Bonheur d'Occasion* est composé de chapitres autonomes. Chacun représente une entité artistique parce qu'il relate une histoire complète ou décrit un évènement précis. (. . .) Gabrielle Roy crée la forme artistique et l'unité par la juxtaposition des scènes à partir desquelles le lecteur fait la synthèse du roman.

[*The Tin Flute* is made up of autonomous chapters. Each represents an artistic entity because it relates an entire story or describes a precise scene. (. . .)

Gabrielle Roy's unified art stems from the reader's synthesis of juxtaposed scenes". ] (in Toussaint, Les Chemins 92)

The print-form of the modern nation does require that events be unified by a shared territorial, political and / or ideological space. Similarly, the juxtaposition of events in Roy's novel culminate in a single image. The Tin Flute thus mirrors the "structure" of the modern print nation – however inadvertently.

Even so, The Tin Flute could also suggest how fiction might *produce* the modern nation by interpellating the reader. Anderson argues that, by "seep[ing] quietly and continuously into [the reader's] reality", fiction fosters a "confidence of community in anonymity" (35-36). This understanding of fiction is primarily a response to realist images as represented in transparent language, such as the images Roy uses to convey St-Henri poverty:

Rose-Anna s'aventura au long des taudis de briques grises qui forment une longue muraille avec des fenêtres et des portes identiques, percées à intervalles. . . . Une nuée d'enfants dépenaillés jouaient sur les trottoirs au milieu de détrit. Des femmes maigres et tristes apparaissaient sur les seuils malodorants, étonnées de ce soleil qui faisait des carrés de lumière devant chaque caisse à ordures. D'autres posaient leur nourrisson sur l'appui d'une fenêtre et leur regard absent errait. Partout des carreaux bouchés de guenilles ou de papiers gras. Partout des voix aigres, des pleurs d'enfants, des cris qui jaillissaient, douloureux, des profondeurs de quelque maison, portes et volets rabattus, morte, murée sous la lumière comme une tombe. (Bonheur 100-101)

Rose-Anna ventured along in front of the slum of grey brick which forms a long wall with identical, equidistant doors and windows. [. . . ] A crowd of ragged

children were playing on the sidewalk among the litter. Women, thin and sad, stood in evil-smelling doorways, astonished by the sunlight. Others, indoors, set their babies on the windowsill and stared out aimlessly. Everywhere you saw the windows plugged with rags or oiled paper. Everywhere you heard shrill voices, children crying, cries of misery coming from the depths of this house or that, doors and shutters closed, dead, walled up against the light as if it were a tomb.

(Tin 97)<sup>10</sup>

The anonymous plurals in this passage – children, houses, voices – represent a world any intended reader could fathom. The imagined community seems to expand as fictional time and space become “real”.

Anderson points to this phenomenon in his analysis of Noli Me Tangere, a novel by the “father of Filipino nationalism” (Anderson 26), José Rizal. Like the people and houses in The Tin Flute, the town and townspeople in Noli Me Tangere anonymously represent a para-textual existence. The characters’ discussion of a dinner party occurs in the reader’s “real” calendrical time, so that the action occurs in the collective temporal space of the communal “meanwhile,” rather than in a distant and disconnected past. As Anderson puts it:

It should suffice to note that right from the start the image (wholly new to Filipino writing) of a dinner-party being discussed by hundreds of unnamed people, who do not know each other, in quite different parts of Manila, in a particular month of a particular decade, immediately conjures up the imagined community . . . [T]he casual progression of this house from the ‘interior’ time of the novel to the

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<sup>10</sup> The pronoun “you” should not be read as a direct address to the individual reader, since it is here translated from the French third-person pronoun “on”. The latter term more clearly suggests the plurality of readers, since it signifies “people in general” and is also used as a colloquial substitute for “we”.

‘exterior’ time of the [Filipino] reader’s everyday life gives a hypnotic confirmation of the *solidity of a single community*, embracing characters, authors and readers, moving onward through calendrical time.

(Anderson 27, emphasis added)

The above commentary on the Rizal passage could easily apply to Roy’s novel, since both texts seem to depict a “single social space” through a “succession of plurals” (Anderson 30). In Noli Me Tangere, as in The Tin Flute, interpellation ostensibly occurs when this social space confounds fiction’s “internal” plurality with the reader’s “external” plurality. For Anderson, it is this blurring of boundaries between text and reader that evokes the romantic nationalist mantra, *e pluribus unum*.

#### Hybrid / Dialogical Nationalism

Still, Bakhtin’s identification of novels’ “stylistic three-dimensionality” and “multi-linguaged consciousness” (11) emphasizes dialogism within the text and between text and reader – thus offering a model that profoundly troubles the idea of The Tin Flute as a mouthpiece for any collectivist *unum*, be it French-Canadian or Québécois. While Anderson makes a compelling case for the nationalist potential of fiction, the issue of who should exploit this potential remains unanswered in his unitary model. Moreover, Anderson ignores how the nationalist “script”, in fiction and elsewhere, yields alternative and even subaltern readings. David Williams importantly points out that what romantic nationalists failed to anticipate was the central finding of twentieth-century structural linguistics: that language is not a territorially-rooted organic entity, but an ever-changing social construct (Imagined 19). Hobsbawm goes so far as to argue that the “nationalism

of language” is not rooted in communication or culture, but in “problems of power, status, politics and ideology” (110). Thus, while Anderson naturalizes the myth of national cohesion, his chief theoretical opponent, Homi Bhabha, contends that the plurality of the *unum* merely reiterates the “less-than-one” of individuals (“DissemiNation” 155).

Bhabha’s theory of hybridity and the nation thus provides an important framework within which to re-read Roy’s work. If the national “sign” is, as he argues, ever subject to metonymic re-interpretation, we might argue that identity for Roy’s characters is rooted neither in traditionalist rural Quebec, nor in an emerging Québécois class-consciousness in St-Henri. I will propose that, instead, it becomes possible when individual desires dialogically question and redefine French-Canadian and Québécois nationalist pedagogies. Roy’s novel thus depicts a national space that is internally split between Anderson’s “sociological solidity” (Bhabha, “DissemiNation” 155) and complex *processes* of identity-formation. This space of national identity is characterized by antagonism –within the individual, between individuals, and between the people and the nation. In Roy’s novel, the individual subject’s “I want for me” (Perron xiii) signals a breaking-away from the family and community, and thus obliterates the possibility for a homogeneous, organic source of identity. Thus Jean, Florentine and Azarius experience a destabilization of identity that is much like that of the young Lacasse children when they move from one apartment to another:

Chez nous, c’était un mot élastique et, à certaines heures, incompréhensible, parce qu’il évoquait non pas un seul lien, mais une vingtaine d’abris éparpillés dans le faubourg. Il contenait des regrets, des nostalgies et, toujours, une parcelle

d'incertitude. . . . Il sonnait au coeur comme une fuite, comme un départ imprévu; et quand on l'entendait, on croyait entendre aussi, au fond de la mémoire, le cri aigu des oiseaux voyageurs. (Bonheur 289)

Home was an elastic word and even meaningless at times, for it evoked not a single place but maybe twenty shelters scattered through the neighbourhood. It was rich in regrets and nostalgia, and it always meant uncertainty. . . . It sounded in your heart like an unforeseen departure, a flight, for when you heard it you could imagine that you also heard the shrill cry of migratory birds. (Tin 276)

The “uncertainty” associated with a temporary home is the same uncertainty Roy’s characters feel when they counter traditional discourses of collective identity with the enunciation of desire. To better understand this oscillating space, or “zone of occult instability”, as Fanon calls it (in Bhabha, “DissemiNation”154), we must first examine Bhabha’s view of the nation, beginning with its theoretical origin in the Derridean supplement.

#### Poststructuralism, Language and National Identity

Given Jacques Derrida’s influence on Bhabha’s work, it might be useful to view the notion of Derrida’s supplement as itself a supplement to the Herderian understanding of language. As we have seen, Herder’s “nation” is a “natural” organism which language transparently represents. Nation and language are thus understood, respectively, as signified and signifier. What Derrida does, however, is to disrupt the “organic” hierarchy between signifier and signified. He argues that, because language has no origin, meaning constantly changes into something new (Of Grammatology 1820). Such is the case, for

instance, with the term “nation” in post-1960 Quebec: while “nation” signifies “country”, “country” also signifies “land”, which can in turn mean “territory”, hence “property”, “ownership”, and finally, “sovereignty”. As this example illustrates, meaning is always *deferred* by the process of becoming *different* – hence Derrida’s term *différance*, a French pun on both words (1818).

Unlike the Herderian assumption that language must either evolve (through print) or degenerate (through dialect), *différance* suggests that language is instead subject to *freeplay*. The infinite substitution of meaning within a finite lexical / semiotic field exposes the non-existence of a(ny) central meaning:

The movement of signification adds something, which results in the fact that there is always more, but this addition is a floating [transient] one because it comes to perform a vicarious function, to supplement a lack on the part of the signified.

(“Structure” 886)

The nation is therefore a “floating” sign as well, since it inadvertently exposes the void from which the idea of nation “originates”. What Derrida’s supplement thus challenges is not just Herder’s territorialization of the nation, but the idea that a nation could have any *single* origin – territorial or linguistic – beyond historically-located politics and epistemology. Despite this arbitrary nature of any linguistic “source”, however, language is far from meaningless. Rather, the notion of *freeplay* reveals language’s susceptibility to pluralism, dialogism and polysemy.

Dialogism and polysemy are precisely what we see in the novel form, which supplements tradition with personal experience. Bakhtin argues that, because the novel is a developing genre, it depicts reality as a process of temporal development (7). In

addition, the incommensurable gap between the novel's protagonist and the narrative's socio-historical categories (37) exemplifies the disjuncture between object and language that is propounded by the polyglot "interillumination" of languages (12). The novel's temporal progression from one textual reality to another, as well as its speculation on the unknown (32), suggests that reality in the novel "bears within itself other possible realities" (37). In this way, the novel obliterates the "epic distance" (17) from which the world of fiction appears as a temporally-isolated and self-contained truth. Because objects are represented in the present – and by extension, the future – meaning undergoes the inevitable metonymy that characterizes Derridean *freeplay*. "Through contact with the present," writes Bakhtin, "an object is attracted to the incomplete process of a world-in-the-making, and is stamped with the seal of inconclusiveness. . . . *all the semantic stability of the object is lost; its sense and significance are renewed and grow as the context continues to unfold*" (30, emphasis added). Thus, in the novel, both the content and notion of an "absolute past" are undermined and rendered inconclusive.

Given the epic's relevance as a form of national tradition, it now becomes clear how the novel might trouble the "semantic stability" of national(ist) narratives. Drawing on Derrida, Bhabha explains that one constructs the nation's "sociological solidity" ("DissemiNation" 155) by concealing the split between "pedagogical" narratives of identity and "performative" acts of narration. Bakhtin points to this concealment when he notes that in epic fiction, author, audience and protagonist see the protagonist identically, so that "[t]he one doing the depicting coincides with the one being depicted" (32-33). Derrida suggests that to expose this gap between text and context, one must recognize the linguistic, ideological and discursive limitations of the political moment *in and for which*



one writes (“Structure” 880). The intention is not to replace the dominant historical narrative, but to expose its inherent tautology as the product of socio-historical contingency. As Bhabha puts it, the supplement of minority discourse “adds to” a pedagogical history without “adding up” to a singular narrative (“DissemiNation”155). This said, the novel’s inconclusiveness leads to a constant “re-thinking and re-evaluating” (Bakhtin 31) not only of its content but of the very means by which its meaning is constructed. More specifically, the narrative “impulse to continue” and the “impulse to end” (Bakhtin 32) show that the characters’ “surplus of humanness” transgresses the fixed socio-historical categories represented in literature (Bakhtin 37). The socio-historical category in fiction is consequently exposed as little more than a still-life image – or, to borrow Einar Haugen’s term for language, a “cultural artefact” (in Hobsbawm 110).

It is therefore by exposing the gap between pedagogy and performance – and not by (re)producing Anderson’s “sociological solidity” – that Roy contests the overarching values rooted in language, territory and tradition. The “surplus of humanness” in The Tin Flute contributes to what Bhabha calls a “supplementary question” (“DissemiNation” 155) or “Third Space” (Location 53) since the characters’ desires reveal an incommensurable gap between the heterogeneous St-Henri people on the one hand, and the image prescribed by a rural identity and / or language-based urban class-consciousness on the other. While desire does stem from lack – of money, food, love, dignity or, indeed, collective identity – it also suggests the possibilities, imagined and real, of existence beyond a rural French-Canadian identity or a St-Henri class-consciousness. Yet the novel’s ominous ending suggests that these realities cannot be

found through the “bonheur d’occasion” (“second-hand happiness”) of material wealth. As clouds gather on the horizon, Roy points her readers in two directions: towards the postwar misery she describes in “Retour à St-Henri”, and – far from a *retour* – towards the outward-looking, but as yet unfulfilled potential for travel, change and re-evaluation of the self. Although The Tin Flute’s characters stop short of achieving this third space, they anticipate the “space” of Roy’s enduring prairie novels, which will be discussed in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER 2

### Matriarchal Estrangement from the “Fatherland”:

#### Biographical and Aesthetic Contexts in Roy’s Prairie Novels

*When God gives us a venturesome heart, it is in order that we may know better than others all the beautiful countries He has made. . . . [F]reedom is one of the roads on which to journey towards him. (Street of Riches, 67-68).*

Perhaps the most telling feature of Gabrielle Roy’s autobiography, Enchantment and Sorrow, is that this work was never completed. The text begins in what Williams calls a “defense” for having left St-Boniface (“Seminar”), and progresses into a narrative about her loneliness, communion and eventual artistic epiphany in Europe. In the final pages, Roy portrays herself on the cusp of her new life as a writer in Montreal. There is more to be told, especially regarding The Tin Flute’s creation, publication and critical reception. Yet Roy’s death in 1983 caused the narrative to stop short of this third phase of her life. The reader is therefore left, like the narrator-protagonist, at both the end and the beginning; in other words, we now re-live Roy’s need to interpret her own move from “rural” roots to cosmopolitan centres, and to recreate her identity. This cycle of regensis – whereby descendants figuratively “give birth” (Road 129) to ancestors by recreating their stories – constitutes the “Third Space” in which Roy’s identity as a writer emerges.

In this chapter, I will show how La Petite Poule d’Eau (Where Nests the Water Hen), Rue Deschambault (Street of Riches), La Route d’Altamont (The Road Past Altamont) and Ces Enfants de ma Vie (Children of my Heart) collectively trace the development of both her artistic self and her artist’s understanding of national “space”.

This development begins with a premise of cultural plurality and cosmopolitanism, progresses into the recognition of internal strangeness via travel, and ends with the emergence of an artist whose genealogy includes characters – and readers – of all backgrounds. The chronology of Roy’s life and autobiography therefore culminates with a model of identity-formation that differs radically from that of Romantic nationalism. We have seen that in Herder’s patriarchal “fatherland” model, a fixed cultural identity is transmitted through language from a nation to its inhabitants, and from ancestors to descendants. For Roy, however, identity is perpetually recreated as the living reconstruct their stories and thus “give birth” to the ancestors who have created them. Similarly, contemplative readers “give birth” to the writer whose work creates the readership. This reciprocity suggests that Roy’s identity-formation model is both dialogical and matriarchal, for, as Agnès Whitfield writes of Children of My Heart, Roy presents self-identification as occurring “with, or precisely beside, the other, within a matriarchal social construct”<sup>11</sup> (222). Yet in order to be “reborn” outside one’s family, community or nation, one must redefine these categories in terms of nurture rather than “organic” (that is, biological) connection. As we see in Enchantment and Sorrow, this entails the acceptance of strangeness<sup>12</sup> at home, the willingness to become “estranged” by leaving home, and, finally, the creation of a new “home” and family in one’s art.

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<sup>11</sup> Whitfield uses the term “matriarchal” in order to emphasize the binary between nature (organic, heredity relationships) and nurture (a reciprocal ancestor/descendent relationship). However, my own use of the terms “fatherland” and “matriarchal model” does not imply that dialogical identities are essentially female or matrilineal. I use these terms not because they represent fixed gender categories, but because romantic nationalism’s paternal metaphor seeks to naturalize an artificial hierarchy between inhabitant and territory. The construction of this “organic” link in part serves to justify territoriality (at least insofar as it protects the territories of romantic nationalists). It is worth noting, however, that the mother figure is also associated with language and territory in the terms “motherland” and “mother tongue”.

<sup>12</sup> The terms “stranger” and “strangeness” are here associated with two intertwined concepts: that of being culturally foreign, and that of being unknown. In “Figures de l’étranger”, Yannick Resch explains that for Roy, there is no distance between the self and “l’étranger” (the stranger). As Julia Kristeva would argue,

“Enchantment and Sorrow” and the (Re)Birth of the Artist

If the French title of Roy’s autobiography reverses the sequence of “enchantment and sorrow”, it is because La Détresse et l’Enchantement (1983) begins with the need to escape an oppressive French-Catholic community. “Le mot d’ordre était de survivre,” / “The watchword was survival,” writes Roy, “et la consigne principale, même si elle n’était pas toujours formellement énoncée, de ne pas frayer avec l’étranger” (La Détresse 139 / “and the principal standing order, though it was never formally pronounced, was not to fraternize with the outside world” (109). The need for self-preservation was, of course, partly due to Franco-Manitobans’ marginalization in a predominantly English Canada. Roy learned as much as a child during regular trips to Winnipeg with her mother: “Cette humiliation de voir quelqu’un se retourner sur moi qui parlait français dans une rue de Winnipeg, je l’ai tant de fois éprouvée au cours de mon enfance que je ne savais plus que c’était de l’humiliation” (La Détresse 13) / “The humiliation of having someone turn to stare when I was speaking French in Winnipeg was something I’d felt so often as a child that I no longer realized it was humiliation” (Enchantment 4). However, Yannick Resch remarks that Roy’s sense of exile and solitude also leads to a cosmopolitan moment when she hears different accents around her (“Figures” 78). Within the shared space of non-English “otherness”, Roy wonders whether it is not natural to feel like a stranger, “les uns chez les autres” (La Détresse 13) / “on someone else’s ground” (Enchantment 5), and begins to see an alternative to her community’s belief that group-belonging necessitates a common language (Resch 79). Above all, the notion of shared intrinsic strangeness subverts St-Boniface and Quebec’s constructions of

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strangeness is an intrinsic condition of the self, which necessarily surfaces through interaction with others / Others. See Julia Kristeva, Strangers to Ourselves. Trans. Leon S. Roudiez. Columbia UP, 1991.

“l’*étranger*” as a threat to one’s identity. Instead, as Resch argues, the stranger or foreigner becomes associated with family: “[I]’*autre* qu’il soit un immigrant ou tout simplement un inconnu, entre dans le texte à travers un vocabulaire qui évoque proximité ou parenté [the other, whether an immigrant or simply a stranger, enters the text through a vocabulary that evokes proximity or parental kinship]” (78). Roy’s next step is therefore to leave St-Boniface and find her identity on “someone else’s ground”. She must become “strange” to her (former) self.

This said, her subsequent departure to Europe is neither a rejection of – nor a return to – national or cultural roots; rather, it is an attempt to re-examine her roots and identity in light of other peoples, cultures and languages. What Roy seeks is to change the isolationist discourse through which French-Canadian identity had been constructed. As Williams puts it: “It’s not just the English who make them [Franco-Manitobans] feel like foreigners, it’s the French who make them feel like prisoners” (“Seminar”). Roy escapes without abandoning her Franco-Manitoban heritage; to justify having left her mother, she reframes this heritage in a long line of family wanderers and French explorers (Williams, “Seminar”). As Williams explains, her goal is to “save” herself as well as her community. Roy’s cultural justification is therefore necessary for the “birth” of her artistic self.

Marie Francoeur explains that, while the sharpening of perception through a sense of foreignness abroad is the first phase in Roy’s identification process (157), “*la prise de conscience de la dimension collective du moi est une étape décisive dans la construction de toute personnalité [the realization of the collective dimension of the I is a decisive step in the construction of any personhood]*” (162). Francoeur goes on to argue that Roy resolves her anxiety about her distant cultural past by creating a compensatory “*patrie*

[fatherland]” in her art, so that “la beauté du verbe [the beauty of the verb]” might redeem “la détresse sans mots de tout un peuple [the wordless sorrow of an entire people]” (165). Yet giving a voice to Franco-Manitoban sorrow does not fully define Roy’s new conceptual “space”. As Cécilia Wiktorowicz explains, Roy’s purging of guilt in Europe allows for a symbolic reconciliation with the parents she has left in pursuit of her own rebirth (192)<sup>13</sup>. Of course, this reconciliation never fully resolves the ambivalence Roy would continue to feel regarding her family, her inability to deny “le désir que j’avais peut-être toujours eu de m’échapper, de rompre avec la chaîne, avec mon pauvre peuple dépossédé” (La Détresse 243) / “finding in my heart that perhaps I’d always wanted to break the chain, escape from my poor dispossessed people . . .” (Enchantment 193). Yet symbolic reconciliation helps Roy redefine “home” in artistic terms, as a space of endless creation, interpretation, and recreation.

The idea of a new cultural identity without geographical boundaries therefore works in tandem with that of regenesis through her polyglot readers. When she discovers her “vif désir d’écrire” (La Détresse 391) / “burning urge to write” (Enchantment 316) in rural England – where the view from her window makes her feel “soustraite peut-être à la condition de servitude qui est le lot de tout être” (La Détresse 402) / “free from the bondage that is every human being’s lot” (Enchantment 325) – Roy finds herself reborn

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<sup>13</sup> Wiktorowicz provides a brilliant reading of Roy’s appendectomy narrative as a symbol of her “rebirth” and consequent indebtedness to her parents. Because the hospital scene symbolizes the birth of Roy’s trans-historical identity, it is an enunciative re-appropriation of the birth discourse formerly reserved for family members (184). Roy’s sense of guilt after a surgery for which they have paid a hundred dollars therefore suggests that she recreates her identity by rejecting her family. As Wiktorowicz puts it: “. . . ‘prendre’ implicitement des ressources familiales pour ‘naître’ suggère que Gabrielle opère en même temps la ‘déstruction’ de ses parents, contribuant ainsi à leur ‘capture’ par la dysphorie [to implicitly ‘take’ from the family’s financial resources in order to ‘be born’ suggests that Gabrielle is, at the same time, working towards the ‘destruction’ of her parents, thus contributing to their ‘capture’ by dysphoria]” (186). I would add that, because this “destruction” of her parents coincides with the alteration of her body through the amputation of an inner body part, the symbolism here further stresses both her reinvention *from within*, and her departure from biological origins.

into a cycle in which “the linear and temporal act of reading becomes as well the spatial act of juxtaposition, becomes our last, best way of ‘catching up’ with that other whom we are destined to become” (Williams, Confessional 190). Like her penchant for open spaces, this belief in self-reconstruction through narrative stems from her childhood. Early on in the autobiography, an innocent exchange between mother and daughter anticipates Roy’s mature artistic credo:

- [Maman]: Après tout, que s’usent les histoires qui racontent la vie, elle-même usure, c’est bien naturel. . . .

- [Roy]: Les histoires usées, que reste-t-il donc? . . .

- [Maman]: D’autres histoires à inventer ou à bâtir. Ou bien la même vieille histoire toujours, mais refaite à neuf. (La Détresse 152)

- [Maman]: ‘[I]t’s only natural for stories about life to wear a little thin. Just like life . . .

- [Roy]: Stories wearing thin! What am I supposed to do about it? . . .

- [Maman]: Make up new stories or combine old ones. Or keep telling an old one but made over so it’s new.’ (Enchantment 120-1)

Roy then explains that her path in life can never lead to “ce que l’écrivain, dans sa naïveté ou pour se donner le change . . . nomme: Fin” (La Détresse 152) / “what writers . . . naively or in self-delusion call ‘The End’” (120). The temporal concept of eternity is instead transposed into a spatial figure by images such as the “ciel démesuré” / “endless” prairie sky, with its “illusion de l’infini” (La Détresse 132-33) / “illusion of infinite space” (Enchantment 104). We therefore witness something like a Freudian slip when Roy



accidentally spells out “espérance” (hope) instead of “espace” (space) (Enchantment 325). Ultimately, the hope in question is for a conceptual space in which her story can be shared with an audience whose demographic and cultural plurality not only recreates, but also multiplies, her identity.

#### Inter-Generational Relations as Cosmopolitan Plurality in ‘Where Nests the Water Hen’

The setting in Roy’s first novel after The Tin Flute – the Little Water Hen – biographically, historically and textually symbolizes conceptual rebirth through the multiplication of identity. Biographically, the northern region of the Water Hen (also spelled “Waterhen”) represents Roy’s first voyage into the unknown, for it was in this secluded community that she worked as a young summer schoolteacher. Although Roy initially felt isolated “dans ce coin du monde qui en paraissait totalement à part” (La Détresse 226) / “in a corner of the world that seemed so totally cut off” (Enchantment 179), the region would not only delight her, but provide the solitude necessary for “une meilleure connaissance des êtres et des choses” (La Détresse 210) / “a better understanding of people and things” (Enchantment 167). The Little Water Hen was therefore the backdrop for Roy’s transformative rebirth following her departure from home.

Historically, it is also the backdrop for inter-racial mixing between the French settlers (the *coureurs de bois* and *coureurs de plaines*) and native women (these women would have belonged to what has been named the Waterhen First Nation, now the Skownan First Nation). Consequently, the Waterhen / Skownan region was literally the birthplace of a Métis population, and survives as the Skownan First Nation reserve. As

we learn from Luzina, the *coureurs de bois* and *coureurs de plaine* were also the Toussignants' ancestors. The region is therefore textually significant as well, for it has given the family a rich history of cultural *métissage*. If *métissage* entails the exchange of cultures and a consequent doubling of identities leading to hybridity, identity is created reciprocally – hence, matriarchally. As we will later see, Luzina Toussignant represents a matriarchal locus of identity not only physically, as an itinerant pregnant woman, but also symbolically, as a mother who multiplies her children's identities by enabling them to learn from, communicate and ultimately share with others.

It is therefore no surprise that Roy depicts the Little Water Hen as a geographically-isolated district in which community life is the principal occupation and source of happiness. Incidentally, it is the community's isolation and simple way of life that foster communication and human connection. We learn that the Capucin is “polyglotte et exceptionnellement loquace” (La Petite 11) / “polyglot and loquacious” (Where Nests 7), and that, for Luzina, “rencontrer des gens aimables était le véritable agrément du voyage” (La Petite 25) / “meeting likable people was the real pleasure of traveling” (Where Nests 17). Though escape is certainly appealing to Luzina, whom we are told, “[il] y avait bien quelque plaisir . . . à quitter l'horizon désert de la Petite Poule d'Eau” (La Petite 16) / “took some small pleasure in getting away from the empty horizon of the Little Water Hen” (Where Nests 11), she and the Capucin need not travel far for cross-cultural communion. Roy tells us that, despite being “l'une des régions les moins habitées du monde, un triste pays perdu” / “one of the world's least peopled regions, a sad, lost land”, Northern Manitoba contains “des représentants d'à peu près tous les peuples de la terre” (La Petite 157) / “representatives of almost every race on

earth” (Where Nests 110). Cross-cultural encounters then do more than simply entertain the travelers; they create a sense of connection with others / “others”. Roy tells us that Luzina’s encounters reveal that “la nature humaine est partout excellente” (La Petite 30) / “human nature everywhere is excellent” (Where Nests 21) and that, at Rorketon, the Capucin felt that “[I]l lui semblait s’approcher singulièrement de Dieu dans cette si fraternelle confusion des langues et des visages” (La Petite 172) / “he drew singularly close to God in this so fraternal a confusion of languages and faces” (Where Nests 121). These two concepts – that of overarching human goodness and that of the diversity of God’s creatures – initially recall the Romantic nationalist mantra of the One within the Many. Yet Roy’s “One” in Where Nests the Water Hen is no modern nation; it is what she will come to see in The Road Past Altamont as “Le Pays de l’Amour” (the Country of Love).

While this “country” is one of growth and discovery, it does not undergo the same linear development as the modern nation; the district of the Little Water Hen actively retains elements of its current state at the same time as it “progresses” towards the industrialization and formal education that seep in from the South. Recalling Luc Bureau’s 1984 reading of the Québécois space, Guy Lecomte describes the Little Water Hen as oscillating between a pre-existing state of harmony, or Eden, and a Utopia that perpetually progresses through culture, ethics and human ingenuity (97):

De là [se trouve] une oscillation permanente entre l’élection et l’exclusion, un jeu dialectique qui se développe tout au long du roman entre les forces que nous pouvons appeler centripètes ou, du moins, forces de fixation, voire de regression, et des forces centrifuges qui appellent au dehors et qui finiront par l’emporter

[Here lies a permanent oscillation between election and exclusion, a dialectics that develops throughout the novel between what we might call the centripetal forces or, at least, forces of fixation, or even regression, and the centrifugal forces that call to the outside world and that end up bringing it in]. (98)

Lecomte argues that, oscillating between Eden and Utopia, the Little Water Hen is a closed world into which one can be elected or from which one can be excluded (98). He then suggests that the Tousignant children's journey towards knowledge brings them closer to Utopia and the future, while excluding Luzina (104). However, Guy Lavorel stresses that Luzina remains connected to the community's future because she also acquires knowledge through perspective (92), and realizes that "chaque nouvel enfant représente le nouveau départ du cycle de la vie, celui que le monde enseigne aussi dans sa pluralité [each new child represents the new starting point of the cycle of life, that which the world also teaches in its plurality]" (92). The community's past and present histories eventually coexist in the inter-generational relationship between Luzina in the North and her educated children in the South. Oscillation thus becomes hybridity, which Roy closely allies here with cultural plurality. It is plurality that allows the Little Water Hen to perpetually reconstruct its identity, for, as Lavorel argues, it propels a (re)discovery of the self following conversion and adaptation. However, while "conversion" suggests a severance with one's past beliefs, the term "transformation" more accurately describes the journey of Roy's characters, whose openness to the future transforms the future and themselves.

Although education presents the Tousignant family with new ways of understanding national identity, accepting new ideas does not mean relinquishing old

ones. For, while one's transformation certainly involves the *adoption* of new values, it entails not only one's *adaptation to*, but also the *adaptation of*, these values. When Mademoiselle Côté tells the children that they are "surtout des Canadiens Français" (La Petite 74) / "above all, French-Canadians" (Where Nests 53), Josephine and little Edmond do not relinquish the regional identity they have grown up with. Edmond reminds us that even this small part of Canada once belonged to France. This lesson propels Luzina into thoughts of her family history, and she soon realizes that her children come from a line of travelers: "Il s'était trouvé une Bastien et un Tousignant du Manitoba qui avaient dans leur sang le goût des ancêtres, coureurs des bois et coureurs des plaines" (La Petite 76) / "A Manitoba Bastien woman and a Manitoba Tousignant man had turned up who had in their blood the same tastes as their ancestors, *coureurs de bois* and *coureurs de plaine*" (Where Nests 54). At this point, the region comes to signify something other than isolation and simplicity; it becomes the destination of her settler ancestors and, more importantly, the place of gathering and historical recreation, in which they would be "rejoint[s] dans l'île de la Petite Poule d'Eau par les ancêtres, les anciens Tousignant, les Bastien, le Bas-Canada, l'histoire, la France, La Vérendrye, Cavalier de la Salle" (La Petite 76-77) / "rejoined, on the island in the Little Water Hen, by the forebears, the former Tousignants, the unknown Bastiens, Lower Canada, history, France, La Vérendrye, Cavalier de la Salle" (Where Nests 55).

Although this new understanding of regional identity in a larger national context is soon interrupted by Miss O'Rorke, the homemade union jack flag is a symbol of the Tousignants' adoption / adaptation of her loyalist patriotism. In response to the "discours patriotiques qu'ils [les enfants] n'en comprenaient pas" (La Petite 93) / "patriotic

speeches which they [the children] did not understand” (Where Nests 65), Luzina tells the children to take advantage of the opportunity to learn English. Just as Miss O’Rourke’s demand for a flag becomes an opportunity for Luzina to learn how to sew one, the schoolteacher’s patriotism gives the Tousignant children an opportunity to enrich themselves. Language is presented as enriching knowledge, but in light of the Capucin, we might also conceive it as a means of enriching communication. For Lavorel, the Capucin can only communicate his religion by first recognizing the sense of charity and concord between speakers of different languages (86). Language acquisition is a key to this metaphoric country of love, in which various national histories coexist and are consequently renegotiated. This said, English patriotism is adopted only to be *adapted* into a bilingualism that characterizes the children’s education, growth, and potential future openness to cosmopolitanism.

For Luzina, however, the acceptance of change comes hard, for it requires her acceptance of a future where her children must go South (Lecomte 103). As Roy stresses, civilization and progress “soufflaient de ce côté-ci comme le vent du dégel” (La Petite 64) / “were blowing in this direction like the thawing spring breeze” (Water Hen 45). Indeed, the South symbolizes consumer riches – embodied by the catalogues that Nick Sluzick grudgingly transports – but it is also where knowledge can be renewed and enlarged. Like the community’s growth, which requires a cyclical renewal through younger generations (Lavorel 92), the children’s growth requires a cyclical renewal of information. The influx of schoolteachers from the South assures this renewal, since each teacher brings knowledge from a world outside the Little Water Hen. The schoolhouse thus becomes a space of plural ideas and identities, and it is no wonder that Luzina

imagines the third teacher “sous l’aspect de presque toutes les nationalités” (Poule d’Eau 101) / “in the guise of almost every nationality” (Water Hen 72). Roy thus presents the inter-cultural relation between student and pupil as an important part of education, of the need to convert or change in order to communicate with others / Others.

Luzina fully realizes the importance of cross-cultural communication when, leafing through the Department of Education magazine, she sees Edmond’s letter to a boy in New Zealand, and feels a surge of pride that he can communicate with someone so far away:

- “Une lettre si bien écrite, et même pas dans sa langue! dit Luzina.

...

Eh bien, voici qu’ils [les enfants] en faisaient: ils écrivaient jusqu’en Nouvelle-Zélande; ils se faisaient connaître au loin; ils avaient des amis ailleurs de par le monde.” (Poule d’Eau 121)

“So well written a letter, and not even in his own language!” said Luzina

[...]

Well, this is what use they [the children] had for them [grammar and spelling]: . . . they made themselves known afar; they had friends elsewhere, in distant parts of the world” (Water Hen 86-87).

This moment is pivotal for Luzina, for it marks her own transformation as she faces a future in which she does not fully belong. She feels that her knowledge has been surpassed by her children (Lavorel 91). When her children leave, the cycle of renewal is ultimately assured; the Little Water Hen will have a future in Edmond and especially in

Josephine, who wants to extend her “grande amitié pour le monde” (Poule d’Eau 135) / “affection for all of humanity” (Water Hen 96) by becoming a teacher in Mademoiselle Côté’s footsteps. Still, little Claire-Armelle’s handwriting on the envelopes of Luzina’s letters to Edmond and Josephine reminds us that Utopia and Eden continue to inform each other<sup>14</sup>.

#### Internal Strangeness and Travel in “Street of Riches” and “The Road Past Altamont”

While growth through cross-cultural connection is achieved through the outward movement of travel in Where Nests the Water Hen – and later, in The Road Past Altamont – Street of Riches shows that individual transformation also requires the domestic to become “foreign”. Rosmarin Heidenreich likens the semi-autobiographical Rue Deschambault to the *bildungsroman* or “novel of [self] discovery,” since novels of this genre are characterized by a temporal and psychological distance between the narrating “I” and the narrative “I” who undergoes a process of self-discovery (478). According to Frank K. Stanzel (1976), the primary purpose of the *bildungsroman* is to address the effects of the outside world on the self (in Heidenreich 487). While the hero’s self-discovery in the *bildungsroman* usually occurs through travel, though, Roy’s heroine in Street of Riches stays close to home (Heidenreich 480). For this reason, Heidenreich argues, Roy inverts the genre of *bildungsroman* so as to depict the distinctly female experience of discovering the foreign within (480). This may certainly be the case, since stories like “The Two Negroes” recount the introduction of the strange and / or the

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<sup>14</sup> Lewis calls Luzina’s annual return home a “direct route” leading to a specific outcome, yet it also introduces the “circular route” of education, civilization and progress – that is, the cycle of her children’s births and departures. Luzina therefore represents a bridge between two ways of life, or, as Lewis puts it, an “attempted reconciliation between circular and direct routes” (Literary 210).



foreign into one's world (Resch 83). However, Christine also travels with her mother, Eveline, in a vignette entitled "Les Deserteuses"<sup>15</sup> / "The Gadabouts", and their journey can be read as more than the result of what Hendenreich calls "un domaine paternel déterminé, où l'accès au monde extérieur lui est interdit [a pre-determined paternal world in which access to the outside world is forbidden her]" (485).

If the trip to Quebec renders "foreign" to Christine the father she thought she knew (Hendenreich 482), the domestic sphere also loses its status as a wholly familiar / familial space. So it is not surprising that, as Resch points out, the "strange" or "foreign" in Royan fiction does not connote distance ("Figures" 79), but closeness and openness to dialogue ("Figures" 82). This said, travel in Street of Riches is not so much about adventure as it is about homecoming, or a journey towards that which is already close to oneself.

Christine's (re)discovery of her home and identity starts at the beginning of the novel, upon the arrival of "The Two Negroes"<sup>16</sup>. The black boarder not only allows Eveline to prove Madame Guilbert a die-hard racist, but marks what is presumably Christine's first close encounter with racial difference. The backdrop for this encounter is Deschambault Street, which Roy initially presents as a symbol of family solidarity and community isolation:

Lorsqu'il fit construire la nôtre, mon père prit comme modèle la seule autre  
maison qui se trouvait alors dans cette petite rue Deschambault sans trottoir

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<sup>15</sup> The literal meaning of "les déserteuses" is "the women who desert / abandon / take off".

<sup>16</sup> Although the English term "negro" or the French term "nègre" are generally not socially acceptable in current times, the French term was commonly used when Roy wrote Rue Deschambault and when Henry Binsse translated the text two years later. Though Binsse may simply have been writing in the language of his day, it is likely that he also wanted to maintain the essence of original French expression, however uncomfortable that expression may make readers today. Although Roy refers to the character solely as the "negro", I will only use this expression in quotation marks, and will refer to the character simply as "the boarder".

encore, fraîche comme un sentier entre des buissons d'aubépine, et, en avril, toute remplie du chant des grenouilles. Maman était contente de la rue, de la tranquillité, du bon air qu'il y avait là pour les enfants, mais elle protesta contre l'imitation servile de la maison – un peu éloignée de la nôtre heureusement – de notre voisin [.] (Rue 9)

When he built our home, my father took as model the *only other house* then standing on the brief length of Rue Deschambault – *still unencumbered* by any sidewalk, as *virginal* as a country path stretching through the thickets of wild roses and, in April, resonant with the music of frogs. Maman was pleased with the street, with the quiet, with the good, *pure [wholesome]* air there, for the children, but she *objected to the servile copying* of our neighbor's house, which was *luckily not too close* to ours. (Street 1, emphases added)

From the outset it is clear that, in addition to providing lodging, the house is a marker of family identity and a barrier between the family and the outside world. Though it would not have been uncommon for fathers to build houses for their families, the image of Christine's father building her house affirms his role as "head" of their household. This also points to the patriarchal and patrilineal boundaries of Christine's identity. It is therefore relevant that her father built the house on a street whose emptiness lent it an air of purity. Yet the "servile copying" of the neighbours' house undercuts the idea of the household as an independent, organic entity; moreover, the neighbours' mere presence is unwelcome. At first, so is the presence of the boarder, whom Eveline says should arrive at night in order to avoid being seen (Street 4). Yet only shortly thereafter does she have a

change of heart: “[À] present que j’ai mon Nègre, je voudrais bien l’avoir accepté dès le début par pure philanthropie” (Rue 17) / . . . [N]ow that I have a Negro,” she tells Madame Guilbert, “I wish I had accepted him from the outset out of pure philanthropy” (Street 6). We therefore forget that this openness was propelled in part by a somewhat malicious, though very comical, obsession with outdoing Madame Guilbert.

Unlike Madame Guilbert, who expects a black man to ““keep his place”” (Street 8), Christine’s family and the boarder communicate through acts of reciprocal sharing. In exchange for teaching the boarder French, Christine receives money that is especially precious in the context of her poor community: “J’étais payée tous les trois mots. . . . Pendant les Guilbert avaient de sérieuses difficultés d’argent” (Rue 20) / “I was paid for each three words. I had glimpses of the fortune I would make teaching French. . . . Meanwhile, the Guilberts were having serious money trouble” (Street 7). Yet such exchanges are not simply commercial; they occur as manifestations of mutual goodwill. Christine informs us that “nôtre Nègre nous enseignait la Bonté” (Rue 23) / “our negro gave us lessons in kindness” (Street 9) by holding yarn while Eveline knits, by generously bringing candies from Vancouver and gloves for Agnès.

Perhaps more meaningful and important than material gifts is the cross-cultural and inter-linguistic nature of his relationship with the family. Just as Christine shares her language and culture, the boarder shares stories pertaining to his distant origins:

Ils se parlaient de l’Afrique. Sans doute pour faire plaisir à ma soeur, notre Nègre se tâchait de se rappeler de vieux souvenirs, à demi conservés dans sa famille Jackson, d’esclaves en enchères, de rafles, par des hommes cupides, de pauvres Noirs surpris dans leur village de paillotes. . . (Rue 25)

They [Odette and the Negro] talked about Africa. Doubtless *in the hope of pleasing my sister*, our Negro tried to bring back old memories, vaguely handed down in the Jackson family, of slaves on the auction block, of raids by rapacious men, of poor black folk taken by surprise in their strawhut villages. . . .

(Street 11, emphases added)

It is unclear whether *pleasing my sister* means satisfying her curiosity, enriching her knowledge, or merely entertaining her with stories. Regardless, the act of sharing cultural information forms a bridge between individuals who are racially and linguistically different, yet who may have known similar experiences of marginalization and oppression. Though this is not to equate the history of African-American slavery to the experience of Canadian francophones, it does allow us to read the boarder's storytelling as a personal disclosure – that is, as a gift of oneself. It is not unlike Wilhem's disclosure of affection to Christine, when, despite being ridiculed, he would bare his head upon seeing her. Yet unlike Wilhem's other means of disclosure – his performance of Thaïs – the boarder's disclosure helps to forge positive ties. It is for this reason that his departure causes Deschambault street to “[miss] its Negroes” (Street 14) as much as it later misses the Italian woman, who represents “le soleil de l'Italie qui s'en va de notre rue!...” (Rue 195) / “[t]he sun of Italy . . . today . . . leav[ing] our street!” (Street 119).

Christine's understanding of the foreign expands during her trip to Quebec, which now allows her to see her own home and parents as foreign. This understanding of strangeness as internal to oneself differs significantly from the almost parental adoption

of cultural outsiders<sup>17</sup>. Although Eveline's initial motivation is to "live through some adventure" (Street 49), the expedition physically and psychologically decentres her and Christine; because Quebec represents another time and space, they move towards a world in which their own home and life are seen differently. Even before they arrive in Quebec, the very prospect of travel changes Christine's perception of her mother. The child is unpleasantly surprised that her mother would want "autre chose qu'être captive de moi et de la maison" (Rue 90) / "anything except being eternally chained to me and the house" (Street 50), yet she accepts this idea as Eveline begins to appear younger during the train ride. Of course, Christine's new understanding of her mother is only the first step in the discovery of internal strangeness, for the connection made with Édouard's relatives forces Christine to re-evaluate her father and her Manitoba roots.

Christine's troubling encounter with her father's Québécois relatives makes him the uncanny product of a double spatial and temporal existence; he is at once in Quebec, as the subject of a discourse about his past, and in Manitoba, the agent of a current life that is still haunted by this past. Christine's Aunt Ursule paints an image of Édouard that is nothing like that which Christine was brought up with; his work for the government is no longer described in terms of the benefits to immigrant settlers, but as in terms of his being "vendu au roi d'Angleterre" (Rue 108) / "sold out to the King of England" (Street 62). Ursule's comment not only presents a new opinion of Christine's father, but also introduces a new discourse – that of French-Canadian solidarity – through which to

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<sup>17</sup> Although the language of possession reads as a colonizing and paternalistic gesture, several things are worth keeping in mind. The narrator suggests that while her father worked for the ministry of colonization, his use of first-person pronouns signified a familial bond between him and those who would have been considered "outsiders" to Canadian society: ". . . this word 'immigrant,' rather than signifying a stranger, took on a curious value of blood relationship" (145). Resch reiterates this idea in his reading of the foreign / strange in Roy's literature.

view his work and decision to go West.<sup>18</sup> What Ursule thus does, is to locate the spatial axis of Édouard's identity in Quebec while reducing Manitoba to a geographical and cultural periphery. When Eveline concedes to her and Aglaé's belief in Quebec's superiority, Christine "n'y comprenai[t] rien" (Rue 109) / "was dumbfounded" (Street 63). Compensatory praise of Édouard's pride only confuses Christine more about how to understand her father. For this reason, she is later unable to write him a postcard from Saint-Anne-de-Beaupré: "il me semblait ne plus très bien le connaître, et j'étais gênée de lui écrire, presque autant qu'à un étranger" (Rue 110) / "[ . . . ] I somehow felt I no longer knew him very well, and it embarrassed me to write him . . . almost as much as if it had been to a stranger" (Street 64). Bombarded with her father's past, Christine is unable to reconcile this foreign aspect of her own origins with her present life.

While the postcard may not prove as solid a bridge between Édouard's past in Quebec and his new life in Manitoba, the return to St-Boniface re-establishes a connection. The westbound train symbolizes Christine and Eveline's twofold discovery: the past may lead to the present, but the present also gives life to the past. This is precisely what Eveline confesses to Édouard about their journey:

- Oui, Édouard, jusqu'à ton passé, jusqu'à ton enfance. . . Sans le passé, qui sommes nous, Édouard? demanda-t-elle. . . Des plantes coupées, moitié vivantes!

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<sup>18</sup> Madeleine Ducrocq-Poirier points out that St-Boniface in Street of Riches represents both a rural francophone milieu and an open land for immigrants and settlers. See Madeleine Ducrocq-Poirier. "L'Art de la nouvelle chez Gabrielle Roy dans *Rue Deschambault*." Un pays, une voix, Gabrielle Roy. May 13-14, 1987. Ed. Marie-Lyne Piccione. Talence, France: Éditions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme d'Aquitaine, 1991.21-26. p.23.

Peut-être, fit maman, les generations mortes respirent-elles encore autour des vivants en ce vieux pays du Québec (Rue 120-21)

“Yes, Édouard, *back* into your past, *as far* as your childhood. . . . Without the past, what are we Édouard?” she asked. “Severed plants, half alive! . . .”

[“] Perhaps,” said Maman, “the generations of the dead still breathe around the living in that ancient land of Quebec! . . .” (Street 71, emphasis added)

Roy’s image of the dead “still breath[ing] around the living” is appropriately uncanny. Yet if they continue to exist after their time on earth, it is only within what Williams calls “a living heir” (Confessional 187). Thus, the journey to and from Quebec is not merely a visit to a mythical family past, but a reconnection of this past to both the living parent and the child.

In Roy’s next semi-autobiographical novel, The Road Past Altamont, Christine realizes that travel does not merely allow one to move backwards and forwards between separate spaces, times and selves, but also to reconstruct family history and identity. Foreign territory thus functions in the same way as age, offering new ways of seeing the past as one gains new perspectives. So while the novel deals primarily with Roy / Christine’s coming-of-age through her separation from her mother (Robinson 143), it is also about recreating one’s mother through storytelling, as we have seen in Enchantment and Sorrow. Lori Saint-Martin sums this idea up well when she describes the text as “un récit portant sur les mères qui créent les filles qui créent les mères [a story about mothers who create daughters who create mothers]” (29). By the end of the novel, we learn that the act of “catch[ing] up” (Road 30) with one’s ancestors means finding a place “outside

time” (Road 129), where one is perpetually at the beginning, ready to re-evaluate the past and recreate it. For Roy and for Christine, this place is one of artistic, rather than organic creation.

Following the death of her grandmother, the “time-haunted, death-haunted” Christine (Williams, “Lecture”) initially wants to recuperate the past by traveling to Lake Winnipeg with the elderly Monsieur St-Hilaire: “Un impossible désir en effet me tenait, et c’était de lui voir dans ‘son’ temps dont je m’imaginai peut-être qui lui ressemblait” (La Route 70-71) “For an impossible desire had come over me,” she writes, “to see his time – which I imagined as resembling him – restored to him now” (Road 63). For a child who fears old age, the lake represents a time in which the old man is no longer so many years “ahead” of her. This temporal gap is represented in spatial terms, for, after subtracting her age from his, Christine envisions “quelque étendue de temps” (La Route 85) / “a stretch of time” (Road 78). This stretch is much like the distance she imagines when the old man awakes from his nap and, temporarily confused, looks at her from what seems like “plus loin encore que si tout le lac Winnipeg eût été entre nous” (La Route 79) / “greater distance than if the whole of Lake Winnipeg lay between us” (Road 72). The narrator confesses that, in light of their age gap, “[j]e suppose que je ne pouvais supporter cette joie d’être au commencement cependant que lui était à la fin” (La Route 83) / “I suppose I could not bear the joy of being at the beginning while he was at the end” (Road 77). Yet Monsieur St-Hilaire teaches Christine an important lesson: the lake does not represent a static past, but a cycle of ends and beginnings:

- . . . La fin, le commencement . . . et si c’était la même chose au fond!

Il regarda lui-même très loin en me disant cela, et répéta:



- Si c'était la même chose! . . . Peut-être que tout arrive à former un grand cercle, la fin et le recommencement se rejoignant.

(La Route 75)<sup>19</sup>

“ . . . The end or the beginning. And if they are fundamentally the same . . . ”

He was looking into the distance as he spoke, and now repeated, “if they are the same. . . Perhaps everything finally forms a great circle, the end and the beginning *coming together*.”

(Road 68, emphasis added )

Thereafter, Christine realizes that she would – figuratively and literally – have to carry on without him.

However, it is by experiencing the world's “vastness” (Road 78) that she might fulfill the cycle of her own life while also imitating Monsieur St-Hilaire's. He tells Christine to visit the Pacific and Atlantic oceans (“puisque au fond ils sont à peu près de même nature” (La Route 85) / “[s]ince fundamentally they are of the same nature” (Road 79), and to explore European cities such as London, Paris and Amsterdam. His suggestion that she visit the small city of Bruges prepares her for what Williams calls a “sacramental means of overcoming time” (Confessional 183), for the old man asks Christine, “Et quand tu y seras, penses-tu un peu que c'est moi qui t'aurai envoyée voir Bruges?” (La Route 86) / ““And when you're there, will you think for a moment that it was I who sent you to see Bruges?”” (Road 79). Christine is all too eager to visit Bruges, so much so that she is saddened by “toutes ces années où il me faudrait attendre” (La

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<sup>19</sup> The language in Roy's original French text allows us to read the word “beginning” as denoting new beginnings – not simply a return to the past. The word “recommencement” means “to start again” or “to re-start”.

Route 85) / “all the years I would have to wait” (Road 80). Still, geographically re-tracing the forebear’s life does not necessarily preclude living one’s own. For Williams, Monsieur St-Hilaire’s stories of the “country of love” are a patrimonial gift of an “experience of love” (Confessional 183). Of course, in the Royan context, love is not so much romantic as it is fraternal. Christine is adamant about visiting this “country”:

“J’irai, puis j’y resterai. Je me promènerai partout dans ce beau pays” (La Route 87) / “I’ll go and I’ll stay. I’ll travel all over that beautiful country” (Road 81). The “place” of her future thus becomes familiar, for it is now a vast trajectory where she is already destined to recreate the experiences of the “other” as her own.

In the third part of the novel, entitled “The Move”, Christine tries prematurely to retrace her mother’s childhood experience of travel by spending a day with Florence Pichette and her father, a professional mover. Given her own family’s westward migration, it is not surprising that Christine sees her travel experience as part of a greater cycle. This idea comes from her mother while she describes her attraction to the prairies: “. . . on doit tenir ça de famille. Au fond, je me demande s’il y a eût jamais des gens aussi naturellement voyageurs que nous tous” (La Route 100) “Such things must run in families, for I wonder whether there have ever been such born travelers as all of us” (Road 49). But Christine does not simply want to partake in family tradition; the true attraction of travel is its promise of rebirth, of a “transformation du monde et des choses – et sans doute de moi” (La Route 101) / “transformation of the world and everything in it – and undoubtedly of myself” (Road 96). This transformation seems to occur when she and the Pichettes journey through Winnipeg in a horse-driven cart, and she feels herself splitting into past and present, mother and daughter. This splitting suggests the extent to

which her mother is part of her identity, for, as Saint-Martin suggests, the possibility for substitution within a close mother-daughter relationship reveals “les frontières mobiles du moi [the mobile borders of the ‘I’]” (33):

Car je me dédoublais volontiers en deux personnes, acteur et témoin. De temps en temps, j’étais la foule qui voyait passer cette étonnante charrette du passé, puis j’étais le personnage qui, de haut, considérait à ses pieds ces temps aujourd’hui.

(La Route 104)

... I had a tendency *to divide into two people*, actor and witness. From time to time I was the crowd that watched the passage of this astonishing cart from the past. Then I was the personage who considered from on high these modern times at her feet. (Road 97, emphasis added)

This moment is positive for Christine, who becomes a double of herself (Williams, “Lecture”) in what she likens to “un lent film majestueux” (La Route 104) / “a slow, majestic film” (Road 97) about the past.

However, the experience only gives way to disenchantment about journeys that lead nowhere. The day sours when, in her “plus jolie robe” (La Route 101) / “prettiest dress” (Road 96), Christine discovers travel in the harsh light of poverty. For the Pichettes, traveling in a cart is hardly romantic or nostalgic; it is a financial obligation for themselves and for families who cannot afford to pay their rent. As such, the horse-cart journey does not lead to a renewal of life or identity, but only to a repetition of poverty. At an earlier point in the novel, Christine expresses relief that there is always a past and a future, “ces deux portes ouvertes” (La Route 48) / “those two open doors” (Road 42). What these doors represent for Christine is an escape from the present with which she

believes most people are “peu satisfaits” (La Route 48) / “little satisfied” (Road 42). For the poor, however, the cycle of moving and eviction imposes a tyrannical present; Paula Gilbert Lewis notes that house moves such as those in “The Move” simply “return families to their original state of existence” (Literary 207). Thus, as Williams puts it, circular time here “does not necessarily mean escape” (“Lecture”). What “The Move” instead shows is how circles can confine one to a state of perpetual exile as was the case with Christine’s grandmother (“Mémère”).

Christine experiences a version of this tyrannical present as the day continues to decline. At the Smiths, Florence’s refusal to share her lunch is the first instance of the unkindness bred by poverty. It is precisely at the moment that Florence bites into her bread that Christine’s hunger is enhanced by another sense of lack: that represented by the soiled mattresses pathetically exposing the Smiths’ cycle of exile. All this does is to make Christine feel worse for those around her, including the whipped horses who travel back and forth, and the little dog who is left behind. The abandoned dog, “pleurant de peur au seuil de la grande ville” (La Route 108) / “whimpering with fright on the edge of the big city” (Road 102), also represents the isolation of one’s exile in unknown, uninviting territory. While the lake had revealed a sunny horizon where the end and the beginning might meet, the dark prairie horizon is threatening, “teintée de rouge violent, l’immense plaine songeuse et triste” (La Route 110) / “with angry red . . . the [vast], pensive, melancholy prairie of my childhood” (Road 103). It is against this ominous horizon that the Smiths continue the cycle of poverty, in a house whose lack of foundations serves as a reminder and symbol of endless hardship. Incidentally, it is soon after the Smith children protest, “Ce n’est pas ici chez nous. Oh, allons-nous-en chez

nous!” (La Route 110) / “This isn’t our home! Oh let’s go back home!” (Road 104), that Christine returns to her mother, and seeks to be pardoned for the “grand tort mystérieux” (La Route 112) / “great mysterious wrong” (Road 105) of having been cursed with the family’s “mal du départ” (La Route 112) / “departure sickness” (Road 106).

Nevertheless, by the time she is grown up, Christine realizes that her “sickness” will give her the ability to gain new perspectives, to attain new points of beginning, and ultimately to recreate the women who have created her. This realization occurs after she and her mother find the Pembina hills. For Christine’s mother, the hills represent the land that was left behind – but hardly forgotten – in Quebec:

Rien là [au Québec] à tant regretter. Pourtant de ce paysage laissé en arrière à tant l’origine de notre famille, il fut grandement question toujours, comme si persistait entre nous et les collines abandonnées une sorte de relation mystérieuse, troublante, jamais tirée au clair... (La Route 117)

There was nothing in this [the hills in Quebec], I felt, to be so much missed. Yet we were still deeply involved with this countryside that had been left behind at the beginning of our family, as if a mysterious relationship persisted between us and the abandoned hills that had never been quite settled. (Road 109)

Although coming to terms with family demons here means recovering ancestral land, the Pembina hills represent an alternative “settling” of the past. Because they are in Manitoba, the Pembina hills provide a spatial substitute within which Christine’s mother can revisit her youth. As Williams suggests, this unexpected discovery thus symbolizes one’s unexpected transformation in old age (“Lecture”). As during the train ride in Street of Riches, Christine’s mother seems to become young again. Christine describes her as

appearing to have a “joyeuse âme d’enfant” (La Route 127) / “joyous, childhood heart” (Road 119) when she sees the hills, and notes, later on, that her mother’s subsequent memories of the hills made her face seem “absent du présent” (La Route 127) / “withdrawn from the present” (Road 137). Christine worries, however, that a return to the beginning of one’s life is also a step towards death, and does not want her mother’s “petite ronde” (La Route 127) / “round” (Road 119) to be completed. After all, the discovery of the hills does not simply return the elderly woman to her past in Quebec; it recreates this past of her younger self in present-day Manitoba.

Moreover, if the past is fluid enough to be relocated geographically, it can also be reconstructed in memory. While the child Christine views her past as fixed, and imagines her grandmother as having “toujours été vieille” (La Route 25) / “always been old” (Road 19), she learns, as a young adult, that perspective allows one to reconstruct family history. The geographical locations of past events therefore gain new meaning as well, perhaps even allowing one to renegotiate the very notion of “home”. This is precisely what results from Christine’s mother’s storytelling:

Ce vieux thème de l’arrivée de mes grands-parents dans l’Ouest, ç’avait donc été pour ma mère une sorte de canevas où elle avait travaillé 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. (La Route 132)

The old theme of my grandparents' arrival in the west had been to my mother a sort of canvas on which she had worked all her life as one works at a tapestry, tying threads and commenting upon events like fate, so that the story varied, enlarged, and become more complex as the narrator gained age and perspective. Now when my mother related it again, I could scarcely recognize the lovely story of times past that had so enchanted my childhood; the characters were the same, the route was the same, and yet nothing else was as it used to be. (Road123)

Christine's mother justifies transforming the story by suggesting that it changes "à mesure que nous-mêmes changeons" (La Route 133) / "as we ourselves change" (Road 123). It is therefore through the lens of perspective that Christine's mother attempts to understand her own mother's loss in moving to Manitoba. After relating her latest version of the story, Christine's mother reminds her brother Cléophas that, while the West was once their future, "c'est notre passé" (La Route 134) / "Now it's our past" (Road 125). The exchange between Eveline and Cléophas is pivotal, for Christine realizes that her mother has inherited Mémère's creative powers, and can now recreate her by means of a dialogue that reaches across time. Christine notes, for instance, that Cléophas' lack of imagination has made him the "moins capable" (La Route 136) / "less able" (Road 127) of understanding Christine's grandmother. Ultimately, Eveline's ability to "weave" the past through imagination is what inspires Christine to write. And so she enters that "space" which Maman has described where, "Every day now as I live my own life it's as if I were giving her a voice with which to speak" (129). Christine/Roy comes to understand that she is ultimately a medium for voices "other" than her own.

Art and Cyclical Regenesi in “Road” and “Children of my Heart”

By the end of Road, Christine realizes that she must eventually give her mother and grandmother a voice as well – except that the descendants to whom these stories are passed on include the entire world. As was the case for Roy in Enchantment and Sorrow, Christine’s creative power surfaces as her need to write. For this reason, Christine decides that she must first (re)create herself as an artist. Because the birth of her artistic self here coincides with the beginning of adulthood, Roy draws an important parallel between artistic and biological maturity, and between artistic and genealogical creation. This means that, like psychological and physical maturation, artistic maturation is a painful encounter with the unfamiliar. Christine’s recognition of her deep desire to travel is therefore uncanny and frightful, rather than familiar and comforting:

Je l’avais entendu déjà, parfois, l’appel insistant, étranger – venant de nul autre que moi pourtant – qui . . . me commandait de partir pour me mesurer avec quelque défi imprécis encore que me lançait le monde ou que je me lançais à moi-même. J’avais réussi jusque-là à m’en délivrer, puis . . . [j]’étais tentée de demander: “Qu’es-tu, toi qui me poursuis ainsi? . . .” mais je n’osais pas, apercevant que cet être étranger en moi . . . c’était aussi moi-même. (La Route 143)

I had already heard at times the summons, insistent and alien – coming from no one but myself, however – that . . . commanded me to set out to measure myself against some challenge . . . that the world flung to me or I flung to myself. I had succeeded until then in freeing myself from this stranger. Then . . . I was tempted



to ask, “Who are you who pursues me so?” but I did not dare, for I knew that this foreign being within me . . . was also myself. (Road 132)

Though it eventually leads to a matriarchal model of dialogue with the “other”, Christine’s artistic self emerges by way of patriarchal force: Christine describes her inner voice as a “he”, a “tyrannical possessor” who is “quite insensitive” to her and to others (Road 132). Like her coming-of-age, the development of her artistic self requires a necessary departure from the familial / familiar. Realizing that St-Boniface is no longer the bastion of her identity, she feels like a stranger in Manitoba; it is no longer her “place” (Road 134). Perhaps to convince her mother – or even herself – Christine argues that she might feel less like a stranger in France, which she believes is the “vieille mère patrie” (La Route 147) / ““ancestral country”” (Road132) where she will feel more ““at home”” (Road 136). The only “home” Christine attains, though, is the art in which her mother is dialogically reborn.

The temporal space of artistic maturity also mirrors that of adulthood, in that creation – and the development of identity – is ongoing. Thus, the destabilization of Christine’s identity coincides with the “extreme vulnerability” that she describes as “one of the most necessary stages to self-knowledge” (Road 139). So, while her rebirth in Europe symbolically separates mother and daughter, Franco-Manitoban and St-Boniface, it also reiterates the cycle whereby the end and the beginning are one. As Christine Robinson explains: “Pour la fille écrivaine, c’est l’écriture qui permet cette ‘remise au monde’ de la mère [for the daughter-writer, writing is what allows this “rebirthing” of the mother]” (146). Robinson adds that Roy must enter her mother’s world without losing herself (146). In this way, Christine gives birth to Maman just as Maman gives birth to

Mémère: “À celle qui nous a donné le jour, on donne naissance à notre tour quand, tôt ou tard, nous l’accueillons enfin dans notre moi” (La Route 139). / “We give birth in turn to the one who gave us birth when finally, sooner or later, we draw her into our self” (Road 129). It is perhaps fitting, then, that Roy ends The Road Past Altamont by briefly uniting death and genesis in her juxtaposition of a mother’s passing to the advent of a daughter’s new life.

This said, Children of my Heart more fully dramatizes the reciprocal nature of the relationship between the artist / mother and the audience / descendants. Writing in her later years, Roy recounts her experiences with several memorable children at the beginning of her career as a schoolteacher. In this way, the elderly writer figuratively “returns” to her youth in memory, while also being “reborn” as a textual character. Yet, as Whitfield points out, Roy defines her identity here within a “female creative model” (216). This model is not that of a traditionally male romantic egoism, but of a distinctly female autobiographical tradition whereby “the author defines her own self in relation to an ‘other’” (212). As we shall see, however, Roy’s “matriarchal” (Whitfield 222) model is not just “relational”, but explicitly dialogical in the way that it shifts self and “other” into a conceptual “third space”.

As Marie Bartosova-Jack suggests, Roy figuratively gives birth to the children in Ces Enfants by describing them as unique and gifted individuals (360), in contrast to their being mirror images of their parents or siblings. Instances of the latter images can be found in Roy’s description of the Demetriooff boys as “[donnant] l’impression de voir multiplier l’éclat rayonnant des pull-over ensoleillés” (Ces Enfants 62) / “an endless multiplication of flashing red sweaters,” (Children 62-3), and in her later explanation that

the youngest Demetriooff wrote because of the pressure of “des générations loin en arrière” (Ces Enfants 72) / “generations long past” (Children 71). Yet Bartosova-Jack points out that Roy undercuts notions of genealogical determinism by emphasizing the children’s smallness and fragility (353). These qualities ostensibly set them apart from the authoritative parents, older siblings and lofty ancestors with whom they are normally associated. Roy’s first encounter with the youngest Demetriooff, for instance, reveals a vulnerable and solitary figure:

Tout à coup, au milieu de l’allée lumineuse, sa tête noire découpée dans du soleil comme un visage d’icône dans son nimbe doré, surgit un petit garçon, à ma vue à ce point saisi qu’il demeura figé sur place. . . . c’était un Demetriooff. . . . il était le portrait de tous ceux que j’avais pu voir dans la cour de l’école, en plus malingre encore, en plus souffreteux, en plus craintif peut-être. (Ces Enfants 65)

Suddenly, in the middle of the lighted corridor, his black head showing in the sun like a face from an icon with its gilded halo, there appeared a little boy, so astounded at the sight of me that he was rooted to the spot. . . . He was a Demetriooff. . . . he was the image of all the others I had seen in the schoolyard, but even more puny and ill-fed, perhaps more timid. (Children 65)

We learn that what makes this Demetriooff boy distinct is his ability to write. Roy later realizes that while the child does not yet understand the meaning of the symbols, this gift is enough to earn the rare happiness of his father.

The child’s gift is therefore one that can be shared with others. This is also the case with Clair, who is reborn when Roy describes him as a model pupil, whose

satisfaction with finishing his schoolwork is also his teacher's "récompense" (Ces Enfants 20). The Christmas gift-giving episode more explicitly shows how Roy, as Clair's teacher within the text and as his artistic "creator" outside it, ascribes unique gifts to her young pupils. While the other children present her with material presents – a pound of chocolates, a pair of small knit slippers and an apple, Clair remains empty-handed. Roy therefore asks her to give her the non-material gift of a child's smile, "le plus beau cadeau du monde" (Ces Enfants 30) / "the nicest present in the world" (Children 31), and the child happily obliges.

It is perhaps Nil, however, who best shows how the children's unique gifts lead to the rejuvenation and rebirth of others. After he sings to Roy's mother – who is "bien plus vieille que sa mère" (Ces Enfants 43-4) / "much older than his" (Children 44) and suffers from a broken hip – it appears that his voice has the power to help to restore health in old age. "Bien sûr," / "Of course," explains Roy, "Je ne dis pas que Nil fit un miracle" (Ces Enfants 45) / "I don't claim that Nil performed a miracle" (Children 45). Straight from the lungs, however, youth literally breathes new life into a decaying, motionless body. Nil's singing can therefore be likened to a resuscitation of the dead, or, perhaps more conceivably, a rejuvenation of one's ageing self. This happens again when Nil sings for the elderly at a nursing home. Roy describes the performance as having rejuvenated the elderly more than she had intended:

Et le spectacle tragique de la salle se terminait en une espèce de parodie, les vieillards s'agitant comme des enfants, les uns prêts à rire, les autres à pleurer, parce qu'ils retrouvaient si vivement en eux la trace de ce qui était perdu. (Ces Enfants 47)

And the tragic spectacle of the audience ended in a kind of parody, with old men as excited as children, some on the verge of laughter, others of tears, because they were rediscovering so vividly in themselves the traces of what was lost. (Children 48)

The elderly reliving their youth is an uncanny sight for the young schoolteacher, who vows never to bring Nil back to the home. Yet a return to youth is precisely what occurs to Roy the writer through the evocation of the children in her text, and to Roy the teacher in the final story.

The section on Médéric is perhaps the most relevant in Children of My Heart, since teacher and pupil here exchange knowledge at a temporal crossroads where the boy foresees his future at the same time the young woman recalls her childhood. Roy's figurative rejuvenation here reflects that which is suggested by the text's narrative structure. As Whitfield explains, Children of my Heart is structured in reverse chronological order, so that she grows "younger" while her male students grow older (217). Any traces of a patriarchal teacher-pupil relationship thus evolve into a matriarchal relationship based on a mutual exchange of knowledge. Yet for mutual exchange to occur, Roy must regain the "extreme vulnerability" (Road 139) of being uncertain and in-between life stages; she must possess the fragility earlier ascribed to her small pupils. This fragility surfaces in light of Médéric's apparent power and sexual maturity. He consequently exchanges his knowledge of the natural world (that is, the sexual or romantic knowledge implied) for the academic knowledge and self-knowledge he still lacks.

Still, Roy emphasizes the impermanence of their shared crossroads, by highlighting the strangeness of Médéric's adolescence and of her own newfound adulthood. Indeed, Médéric is about "a head taller" than his teacher and "at least that far ahead in other aspects of life" (Children 114). She is so intimidated by the presence of a young man (we later learn that she does not visit houses where only men live) that she wraps her skirt around her body while approaching him. Yet Roy undercuts the archetypal masculine image of a worldly cowboy with that of a lonesome adolescent on horseback, whose ride symbolizes "l'aveu d'une solitude comme il ne peut y en avoir aussi profonde qu'aux derniers jours presque de l'enfance" (Ces Enfants 120) / "the admission of a solitude that is never so profound as in the very last days of childhood" (Children 116). She later describes him as awkward in the new suit he wore during the dinner at his home. Of course, Roy's perception of Médéric may very well stem from her own need to define herself as an adult. Early in the narrative, for instance, she watches the children play in the prairie fields, and, using a typically Royan spatial metaphor, admits: "J'en étais . . . à peine sortie des rêves de l'adolescence, si mal encore résignée à la vie d'adulte que . . . lorsque je voyais apparaître mes petits élèves sur la plaine fraîche comme l'aube du monde, j'avais l'impression que j'aurais dû courir vers eux, me mettre à jamais de leur côté et non les attendre au piège de l'école" (Ces Enfants 122) / "I . . . had just passed my adolescent dreams, and was so resigned to my adult life that sometimes, I wanted to run toward them and place myself forever on their side instead of waiting for them in the snare of school" (Children 118). The young schoolteacher is therefore not so different from the boy "habillé en jeune homme" (Ces Enfants 147) / "dressed up like a man" (Children 140). She is, in fact, a woman-child dressed up like a teacher, and she

eventually “returns” to her more youthful ways by becoming both a peer and a “student” of Médéric.

The combination of companionship and romantic / sexual discovery characterizes what Whitfield calls “love without conquest” (219), and the scene with the trout brims with allusions to female sexual discovery. At the stream, Roy’s discovery occurs when she touches the live trout in the water. This tactile experience is new for the young woman, and she describes it as something that makes her feel “le même ravissement que Médéric” (Ces Enfants 139) / “just as ecstatic as Médéric” (Children 133). The passage points to a common trope for female sexual discovery: that of a young woman brought into unfamiliar natural surroundings by a man<sup>20</sup>. Regardless of whether Roy was intentionally using this trope in Children of My Heart, the thrill of a new experience in the presence of a male who is *not* a child, suggests the forbidden nature of adolescent love and sexuality. We find evidence for this in her mention of the villagers’ “regards désapprobateurs” (Ces Enfants 141) / “disapproving gaze” (Children 135) as she and Médéric gallop past them. Indeed, the sexual nature of her discovery is confirmed at Médéric’s house, when his father undercuts her professional role by sexualizing her: “Le possible des maîtresses avant vous, c’était pas grand-chose, je l’admets. Mais vous qui êtes jeune, fine, et, permettez-moi de vous le dire, jolie à ravir, votre possible n’est-il pas irrésistible?” (Ces Enfants 152) / “The best the other teachers could do before you, it

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<sup>20</sup> In her analysis of the trip to Lake Winnipeg in The Road Past Altamont, Robinson describes the “interdit maternel [maternal forbidden]” as an expedition to unknown natural surroundings, guided by a man, during which the woman’s appetite for food is satisfied (144). Though Christine and Monsieur St-Hilaire’s ages makes it difficult to accept Robinson’s suggestion that their trip is an allegory for sexual discovery, the trope certainly applies to Médéric and Christine, whose “appetite” for knowledge of the natural world is tied to sexual curiosity.

wasn't much, I'll admit. But you're young and smart and, if I may say so, pretty as a picture. Is your best not irresistible?" (Children 143).

Yet Roy's sexual discovery does not bring her any closer to Médéric than his coming-of-age brings him to her. They grow increasingly distant after the dinner at his house, and only partially reconcile within a more hierarchical, one-way nurturing model. We then see a role reversal, for Roy realizes that it is Médéric who is new to romantic love. The author now presents herself as the experienced adult, and Médéric, the fragile child she nurtures:

Enfin . . . je vis naître l'étonnement, l'émerveillement, la souffrance du premier amour, tout frais éclos en un coeur humain – la plus fragile, la plus chancelante des jeunes vies – ne sait encore qui il est et frémit de peur, de joie, et de désir incompris. Si je n'avais moi-même tout juste passé par là, aurais-je compris de quoi souffrait Mederic . . . ?" (Ces Enfants 174)

Finally . . . I saw the astonishment, the wonder, and the suffering of a first love which, in its budding stage, does not yet know itself by name and trembles with fear and joy and misunderstood desire. If I hadn't just been through it myself, could I have known what Médéric was suffering from . . . ?" (Children 163)

After Médéric seems to faint from sheer infatuation, Roy places his head against a bench so that he can recuperate. This matriarchal and maternal gesture symbolizes how they have "crossed over" each other's ages. Médéric has moved from a state of presumed sexual knowledge and physical maturity to one of childlike vulnerability, while Roy has



“returned” to adulthood after having revisited her adolescence. The junction having been crossed, both characters must emotionally – and physically – go their separate ways.

Although this happens when Roy leaves town at the end of the narrative, Médéric’s presence suggests that her experience will live on through him at the very point of her departure. This passage therefore reads not only as a sentimental recollection of heartbreak, but also as a brilliant spatial symbol of inter-generational regensis. At the “junction of the lines” (Children 170), Roy leaves behind a “living heir” who possesses the knowledge of her experiences. As she moves further into oblivion, he searches for her and runs to catch up. As Roy stresses in The Road Past Altamont, this catching up always occurs too late, and the disappeared / deceased can only be brought back to life through narrative and artistic creation. Creation, however, never occurs only once, nor do the bouquet’s flowers and “le jeune et fragile été, à peine est-il né qu’il commence à en mourir” (Ces Enfants 185) / “the young and fragile summer, barely born but it begins to die” (Children 171). The author’s history and identity therefore lives on in her “children”, both within and outside the text.

In this way, Roy provides in her dialogical narrative a matriarchal compensation for the pain of departure. Lewis describes Roy’s characters as torn between a desire for stability and nurture, and an “obsessive need . . . for travel on the open road” (Literary 203). She adds that Roy’s characters towards the late nineteen-seventies would come to fear travel (224). Indeed, departure may have come to signify death for the ageing writer. It is perhaps for this reason that Roy becomes increasingly present in her texts as she gets older; the works we have examined reveal a shift in point-of-view and genre from limited omniscient / fiction (Where Nests the Water Hen), to first-person / semi-autobiographical

(The Road Past Altamont, Street of Riches), to first-person / autobiographical (Enchantment and Sorrow, Children of my Heart). This increased “textual presence” may certainly have helped preserve Roy’s personal and family history in the reader’s mind.

However, this does not mean that the omniscient narrator in Roy’s earliest novel precludes the importance of the reader’s interpretation. As Williams notes, it is the reader who is left with the responsibility of “juxtaposing all the disconnected and *contradictory* moments of the novel” (Confessional 190, emphasis added). When we turn back to The Tin Flute, we notice something similar – that her view of identity is not registered in the “realism” of its social portrait, but through the dialogical images of identity that remain unwritten in – and hence, outside of – the text’s images of St-Henri. Much like her prairie novels, then, The Tin Flute reveals a profound need to define oneself through a dialogue – one that refuses to be limited to language, land and family.

### CHAPTER 3

#### **Collectivism, Individualism and Dialogism: Three Social Spaces in The Tin Flute**

If the matriarchal model of dialogical identity in Roy's prairie novels provides an alternative to both the rural homestead and the Quebec nation-state, then it comes as no surprise that this third space lends her most geographically and historically specific novel a strong transnational significance. Bonheur d'Occasion was quickly translated into over a dozen languages, and Roy was both the first French-Canadian novelist to win the Canadian Governor General's Award, and also the recipient of France's Prix Fémina. Indeed, as Lewis suggests, Roy the author aimed to surpass the categories of "Québécois", "Western Canadian" and even "Canadian" (Literary 10). While The Tin Flute was praised for its "universal appeal" in English Canada (Sirois 472), however, such universalism was twisted into a nationalist pedagogy in (and about) Quebec. As Patrick Coleman notes, "the harshest criticisms of The Tin Flute have come from critics convinced that Roy's tentative approach to writing has little relevance for the politically and culturally confident Quebec that emerged from the Quiet Revolution" (91). Such was also the argument of Ismène Toussaint, who, as we might recall, describes Roy's universalism and commitment to Canadian biculturalism as evidence of her naïveté about (and detachment from) Quebec's cultural and political development ("Gabrielle Roy").

Given Roy's strong sense of Quebec's cultural plurality and complexity, however, we might contend that she clearly foresaw the possibility for more dialogical modes of identification in Quebec. For instance, Roy did not view Montreal's urban modernity as a threat to an idyllic, rural French-Catholic past, but instead praised the urban "cross section of ethnic groups", and maintained that Montreal was "l'oeuvre de deux nations

[the product of two nations]” (Lewis, “Female Spirals” 73). This appreciation of Quebec’s internal strangeness, or its intrinsic “otherness”, certainly reflects Roy’s creation of a third space of identity through her art. This said, it seems that Roy saw in Quebec a profound need to recognize and engage in dialogue with the stranger within – and not merely to “progress” in linear fashion from one fixed identity to another.

The relationship between the people and what Bhabha calls the “historical institution of the nation-state” (“DissemiNation”152) is then my governing question in reading The Tin Flute. As we have seen in Chapter 1, Quebec can be understood as existing in double-time: that of the pedagogical, historical time of the *peuple*<sup>21</sup> on the one hand, and, on the other, that of the people’s heterogeneous, lived articulations of identity. This latter “time” of Homi Bhabha’s “enunciation” contests the myth of a geographically-defined, temporally-linear “organic” nation, by supplementing it with various individual histories and identifications. As Roy’s own artistic development suggests, it is individual history that disrupts the metaphor of “organic”, culturally-homogeneous community, and causes past identities to be metonymically transformed in the present. In The Tin Flute, however, it is the individualism of each of the characters that resists collective identification in an effort to escape the limiting circumstances of religious, social and economic life. While such articulations of individual desire trouble the older “folk” narratives of tradition and heredity, however, they do not produce a collective identity though francophone class-consciousness, either. What is produced by the desires of the central characters – Florentine Lacasse, her father Azarius, and Jean Lévesque – is a

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<sup>21</sup> French for “the people” (the term Bhabha uses) and for the German *volk*. The word “people” is used frequently in Bonheur d’Occasion, yet is less frequent in the English translations by Alan Brown and Hannah Josephson. Interestingly, however, Brown’s use of the term “working class” speaks to the nature of collective francophone identity in St-Henri.

“surplus of humanness” (Bakhtin 37) that can neither be channeled into a “new” time of collective displacement nor assimilated into the historical “fatherland”. This surplus requires a third space in which the people and the nation-state may dialogically inform each other – a space quite distinct from Rose-Anna’s geographically-confined collectivism and even Emmanuel’s “universal” humanism.

In this reading of The Tin Flute, I begin by discussing Rose-Anna’s spatio-temporal confinement as an image of the collectivist narrative of inherited identity, and then argue that Florentine’s resistance to an “organic” identity is an instance of performative enunciation. Next, I show how Jean Lévesque’s ambitious new life creates a narrative of isolated identity, mostly at the expense of his connection to others and of a dialogue between the performative present and the pedagogical past. Jean’s unwitting abandonment of his unborn baby anticipates Azarius’ escape from his own paternal role, symbolizing a severance of the tie between fatherland and “people” at the same time that it reinscribes Azarius into the narrative of Empire. I then discuss how Emmanuel’s humanist response to the war reverts initially to a nationalist discourse that also obscures and thus threatens to silence the people. Only at the end of the novel, after Emmanuel recognizes the split between “people” and Empire, does Roy show the need for dialogue between – and hence, within – the competing spaces of collectivism and individualism. Before analysing Roy’s novel, however, we must briefly review two aspects of Bhabha’s argument in relation to the space of St-Henri: the role of minority discourse, and the possibility for heterogeneity in fictions of the “nation”.

### Bhabha on Minority Discourse and National Heterogeneity

Crucial to Bhabha's argument in "DissemiNation", and to our understanding of The Tin Flute's social setting, is the way in which minority discourse, such as that of St-Henri francophones, redefines the concept of "national time". Bhabha argues that, since minority discourse emerges from a state of "cultural instability" (152), it challenges the "genealogies of 'origin' that lead to claims of cultural supremacy and historical priority" (157). Minority discourse does this by reiterating the "minus" or "less-than-one" (155) of the people's present(s) / presence. We begin to see the inherent *lack* of national cohesiveness<sup>22</sup> that motivates pedagogical constructions of a national temporal "origin". What minority discourse does, then, is to expose the very movement of the national sign, or, as Bhabha puts it, "the repetition of [pedagogical History] in [the institution of the State]" (157). This reiteration of national pedagogies *within the nation-state* shows that national identity is never fixed, but is always ambivalent, perpetually "oscillating" (157) between signifier and signified, or between present realities and past ideologies. The notion of cultural authority is thus little more than concealed cultural authorship. It is not surprising, then, that "a 'true' national past . . . is often represented in the reified forms of realism and stereotype" (152).

Yet, despite Bhabha's association of realism with nationalist pedagogies, his renegotiation of Benedict Anderson's narrative "meanwhile" unwittingly suggests new possibilities for the genre's plurality and apparent synchronicity. While Anderson's "meanwhile" is marked in both the novel and the newspaper by a cumulative accretion of identifications ("DissemiNation" 159), Bhabha makes it a temporal space in which

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<sup>22</sup> Bhabha aptly sums up the idea of the less-than-one in the following quotation from Lefort: "Number breaks down unity, destroys identity" (in "DissemiNation" 161).

present identifications never quite “add up” to a unified identity (“DissemiNation” 159). And so, even when adhering to national pedagogies, the arbitrariness of collective identification inadvertently reveals a time that is anterior to the people’s “will to nationhood” (“DissemiNation” 160). Citing Renan, Bhabha explains that this will requires that one *will have forgotten* certain aspects of the nation’s past (“DissemiNation” 160). This “syntax of forgetting”, as Bhabha calls it (“DissemiNation” 160), exposes the gap between a supposedly pre-existing, transcendent national history, and the present time of forgetting. As we will later see in our reading of Jean Lévesque, the act of forgetting paradoxically reveals the arbitrary nature of identity at the same time that it seeks to conceal it.

In spite of Roy’s apparent attempt at “naïve realism”, it turns out that her depiction of St-Henri self-consciously reveals the gap between the performative time of the characters’ individual desires, and the pedagogical time of francophone communal identities<sup>23</sup>. This gap is particularly apparent when it is viewed in spatial terms. According to Marta Gudrun Hesse, The Tin Flute is a narrative of individual, social and global concerns (19), and these three levels of identity are represented spatially by the individual body, the neighbourhood, and the world. Initially, Roy’s description of St-Henri may seem consistent with the idea of a francophone “sociological solidity”, to use Anderson’s term: “[N]ul quartier de Montreal n’a conservé ses limites précises, sa vie de village particulière, étroite, caractérisée, comme Saint-Henri” (Bonheur 298) / “[N]o part of Montreal has kept its well-defined limits or its special, narrow, characteristic village life as St.Henri has done” (Tin 284). However, just as this social space is defined in

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<sup>23</sup> While the francophone identities in The Tin Flute cannot be termed “national” or “nationalist”, we have seen in Chapter 1 how pre-1960 urban and rural identities led to the idea of a cultural and political “state” of Quebec, even though this idea has yet to be materialized.

relation to the larger space of the world, so is it defined in relation to the psychic and physical spaces of the individual body. St-Henri hosts articulations of desire that, as enunciations of *self*, reconfigure its collective “time” of identity. That is, the succession of plurals that Roy evokes through her socially-representative characters – and their multiple desires – interrupts the traditional rural and urban pedagogies of the novel’s social setting. St-Henri therefore exists on a double temporal plane, encompassing that of an anterior francophone communal identity, and that of more recent identifications that point to wider geographical spaces.

It is this association of “performative” time with exterior space that contests the possibility of an organic link between the characters’ identity and the territory of St-Henri. Given the lack of social cohesion within its boundaries, St-Henri fails to provide the “sociological solidity” of a true collective identity; Roy thus questions the validity of place alone as an adequate “space” of identity, and troubles the notion of geographical origins. One symbol for the arbitrariness of geography is arguably *la dompe* (the dump) – a community built not on solid ground but on waste, and easily destroyed by fire. To escape the “dump” of St-Henri is the common objective of Florentine, Jean and Azarius. By articulating their escapist desires, they contest the very narrative in which francophones are supposed to move from rural traditionalism to urban class-consciousness of national/ist solidarity. St-Henri is therefore not so much the bastion of a new geographically-rooted identity, but, as Jean Morency puts it, “un mélange hétéroclite de ville et de campagne, de mouvement vers l’ailleurs et de repli sur soi [a heteroclite mix of city and country, of movement towards the outside world and of caving in on oneself]” (69).



Spatio-Temporal Confinement and “Organic” Collectivism: Rose-Anna

While identity in Roy’s prairie novels stems from a matriarchal model of cultural dialogue with the “other”, francophone identity in The Tin Flute appears to be linked to St-Henri’s culturally-confined inheritance of family. Rose-Anna is therefore prevented, ironically, from fulfilling her domestic role within a matriarchal model; confined to the home and her own thoughts, she cannot “give birth” to new, dialogical identities for her children. Instead, her children face one of two extremes: to relive her experience of francophone poverty and thus sink into a faceless collectivity, or else, to abandon this existence altogether through the temporal caesura of escape. Her mental and spatial confinement therefore results in her children’s physical and socio-cultural confinement, whether they stay in, or leave, St-Henri. Either way, Rose-Anna serves to naturalize the notion of an “organic” narrative of identity. Hence, even after Florentine and Eugène leave home, they still read St-Henri identity as having an absolute, unchanging narrative, one that excludes the time of their new beginnings in life.

While travel promises to make one “other” to oneself, Rose-Anna’s confinement to St-Henri engulfs her in the faceless many-as-one. Roy thus associates her with the “people” perhaps more than any other character. Unlike the “hommes du peuple” (Bonheur 45) at the *Deux Records / Two Records*, however, Rose-Anna is not part of a heterogeneous network of communicating subjects. Rather, Roy situates her in the realist context of endless repetition and drab uniformity. While house-hunting, for instance, Rose-Anna is one woman amongst many; Roy adds, “Elles étaient déjà nombreuses celles qui cherchaient un nouveau logis; dans quelques semaines, elles seraient des centaines” (Bonheur 95) / “[The women looking for houses were already numerous and]

[i]n a few weeks there would hundreds of them on the march” (Tin 95). Just like the houses she sees in St-Henri, which cannot be distinguished one from another, Rose-Anna is part of a drably homogeneous crowd. By juxtaposing the image of the crowd with that of the houses, Roy suggests the women’s isolation from each other via their spatial confinement. This produces an inverted image of collectivism, in which the unification of individuals for a single shared goal becomes the separation of people having identical (but competing) personal goals. Roy reverses this image later, however, when Rose-Anna realizes that what she really hates about the war is the hurt it causes “des femmes comme elle. Des femmes du peuple” (Bonheur 240) / “women like herself, women of the people” (Tin 231). Roy suggests that the war’s abuse of the working-class leads to a shared pain amongst women of various nations, projecting Rose-Anna into a symbolic sisterhood in which she might come to know others through herself: “Elles les connaissait bien, soudain, toutes ces femmes des pays lointains, qu’elles fussent polonaises, norvégiennes ou tchèques ou slovaques” (Bonheur 240) / “All at once she knew them well, all those women in far-off countries, whether they were Polish, Norwegian, Czechs or Slovaks” (Tin 231). These working-class women are collectively entrapped within a narrative of hereditary, class-based oppression, whereby “[u]ne époque passait, une autre venait, c’était toujours la même chose” (Bonheur 240) / “[o]ne age passed away, another came, and nothing changed” (Tin 231). Rose-Anna therefore realizes that her geographical confinement to a poor neighborhood is also her temporal confinement within a global cycle of “hereditary” poverty. This cycle is not one of metonymic alteration or recreation, but of repetition culminating in a single historical narrative, irrespective of language or place.

This “organic” narrative is not simply that of a “rural past”, but of an urban, transitive present that both entraps and silences the rural female subject. Gilles Marcotte, for instance, contrasts Azarius’ apparent youth with Rose-Anna’s embodiment of all that is old; her loyalty, love and compassion are “*venus du fond des âges se perdre dans la ville [brought in from the furthest ages to be lost in the city]*” (411, emphasis added). The male decision to escape pedagogical time, and to create new, isolated identities in other places, symbolically ages Rose-Anna even more, by relegating her to a space in which she cannot renegotiate and thus alter her gender role. As Patricia Smart points out, women in Bonheur d’Occasion are invariably reduced to silence (18), and much remains “*indicible [ineffable]*” about their aspirations (19). Thus, Emmanuel’s father, M. Létourneau, can *voice* conservative views on ““La race, la famille...”” (Bonheur 140) / ““The French-Canadian race. . . the family. . .”” (Tin 133) because of his geographical mobility and gender privilege, while Rose-Anna’s isolation silences her, giving her no tools with which to contest his collectivist ideals. Her silence makes for a permanent condition of spatio-temporal isolation, as Gerald Mead suggests:

House hunting, childbirth, death of a child, loss of children and husband: these scenarios are simply affirmations, *repetitions, accumulations* of the same situation, to the point that solitude becomes, unavoidably and permanently, Rose-Anna’s destiny. (123, emphasis added)

It is this experience of entrapment in repetition that characterizes the St-Henri narratives of collectivist identity and hereditary poverty – which Florentine, Jean and Azarius all desperately seek to escape.

Escape from Heredity as Performative “Time”: Florentine and Jean

Referring to Lukács’ theory of grand realism, Marcotte describes Florentine as the prime symbol of emergent identification (412) and cultural transition in Quebec. Yet by reducing Florentine to a bit part in a linear Québécois narrative, he does not let her assume her part in the disjunctive time of the people’s enunciations. Indeed, for Marcotte, Florentine is “pas plus grande que son époque [no bigger than her era]” (413), and this subsumes her into the nationalist discourse of the many-as-one. Read as the less-than-one, however, Florentine refuses to bear the burden of representing an era, and instead reweaves notions of the “era” by representing her *self*. Though Florentine does not question her national identity in any overtly political or social way, her constructed, seemingly “artificial” identity contests both rural Catholic and urban working-class female identities.

The performance of her sexualized *self* through makeup, clothing and social pretensions, introduces a new temporality to the St-Henri narrative of socio-economic determinism and heredity. This said, it is through her description of plurals within a linear, realist narration that Roy gives us the performative time of Florentine’s identity-construction, of her desire to show the world “qui c’était que Florentine!” (Bonheur 138) / “who Florentine was!” (Tin 131). The identity Florentine cultivates through self-beautification and gender performance is much more valuable, in her eyes, than the “faiblesse héréditaire” (Bonheur 17) / “hereditary weakness” (Tin 16) into which she has been born: “[s]ur ces traits enfantins fortement maquillés, se superposa à cet instant l’image de la vieille femme qu’elle deviendrait” (Bonheur 17) / “On her childish features, heavily made up, could be seen, briefly superimposed, the image of the old woman she

would become” (Tin 15) . Given this vision of a pre-destined future, it is no wonder that, each time she puts on her makeup, Florentine masks and surveys her face in the hope of remaking her identity.

While motifs of makeup, clothing and mirrors all suggest the constructedness of Florentine’s identity, the latter best represents her fascination with the suddenness of the image. At the Létourneaus’ house, for instance, she is amused not only by her reflection but by her multiplication “sous divers angles dans la glace à trois panneaux” (Bonheur 132) / “from different angles in the three-paneled glass” (Tin 125). Florentine can be instantly doubled, even tripled, by means of the image, and it is during this crucial scene that she realizes how a new identity might lead to a new start in life. Mediated and instantaneous, the image occupies a separate space and a separate time. Like the new, mass-produced silk dresses that cost Rose-Anna her job as a seamstress (and that lead Florentine to look down on her own handmade frock), the image in the mirror fascinates Florentine precisely because it is new, is made in the present. The idea of the present as unique and separate is pivotal if Florentine is to escape St-Henri.

In addition to being a symbol for Florentine’s mediated and “artificial” identity, the mirror motif is also a structuring device that allows us to read her in performative time. Ellen Reisman Babby describes this structuring device in terms of the spectacular (67), while Paul Perron suggests that the mirrors’ manipulation of point-of-view serves as a form of narrative focalization. Babby and Perron ultimately point to the same thing: Roy’s projection of Florentine, through point-of-view, into a distinct space both *within* the text and *of* the reading process. We can conceive this space temporally by way of the term “anthropomorphic time”, which Perron uses to describe the time of the observer and

actors as it is manipulated by the narrative eye, or “observer-focalizer” (221). We experience something like anthropomorphic time when, in these mirror scenes, Roy removes Florentine from the novel’s linear narrative and literal social setting, thus doubling the “time” of the story.

The dining scene at the expensive restaurant with Jean exemplifies this type of temporal disjuncture. Roy begins by immersing the reader in the space and time of the restaurant, a symbol of inequality between those who possess wealth and cultural capital, and those who do not. Florentine’s socio-economic background is magnified in a series of *faux pas*: ordering a main course before soup; pulling out her makeup and comb; putting on too much lipstick and perfume; drinking a cocktail in one large gulp. The “meanwhile” of class-based identity continues with an enumeration of gourmet courses: “Les plats *se suivaient*: le potage Julienne, les hors-d’oeuvre, une entrée de filet de sole, l’entrecôte, la laitue, les pâtisseries françaises” (Bonheur 83, emphasis added) / “The courses came and went [followed one another], the *potage Julienne* [soup], the hors d’oeuvres, the filet of sole, the steak, the salad, the French pastries” (Tin 81). This description of foods in the order they arrive, structures our reading of time in the elite social context of the restaurant. However, when Florentine stops to stare at herself in the mirror, she is condensed into a single, photographic moment: “Elle s’y voyait, les yeux brillants, le teint mat et clair, les traits dilués; . . . elle en avait l’air en s’approchant de Jean de vouloir sans cesse lui communiquer son instant de triomphe” (Bonheur 83-84) / “There she was, her eyes shining, her complexion smooth and clear, her features slightly blurred; . . . every time she leaned forward she seemed to want to communicate to him [Jean] her moment of triumph” (Tin 81). It is in this moment, and not in the linear

narrative of the evening's progression, that Florentine *produces* herself as a flirtatious, socially-ascending woman. As Babby puts it, “[t]he mirror image presented to Florentine enables her to act out her role (*perpetuate her fiction*) with Jean Lévesque” (67, emphasis added). While the restaurant requires Florentine to dress properly, drink discreetly, and above all, to hide the “attirail de beauté” (Bonheur 82) / “artillery of beautification” (Tin 80), her reflection tells her to relax and take on a familiar tone with Jean; in sum, to adopt “modern” ways that disrupt older, class-based gender narratives.

As an enunciative gesture, Florentine's modification of her behaviour does not “break” the time of hereditary poverty; instead, it supplements this time with that of individual desire. For this reason, she reiterates St-Henri even as she seeks to escape it. The embarrassed and subsequently aloof Jean is unimpressed by Florentine, whom he sees merely as a fragment of her social class: “Elle est comme toutes les autres, pensa-t-il” (Bonheur 25) / “She's just like all the others, he thought” (Tin 23). Jean possesses another set of tools with which to read Florentine's identity. Perron clearly sums up this idea when he states that, “when she attempts to project an image of self, the other reads the constructed body through a system of signs that escapes her” (211). Jean's system of signs reduces her individual desire to the pedagogical time of a francophone working-class identity, of hereditary poverty and of inevitable confinement to one's home and community.

However, defining the young woman in contradistinction to himself allows Jean to contest the narrative of hereditary poverty as well. His perception of Florentine and the “people” constitutes his own performative – and rather narcissistic – self-identification: “Elle était sa misère, sa solitude, son enfance triste, sa jeunesse solitaire” (Bonheur 213) /

“[S]he was his own poverty. His solitude, his sad childhood, his lonely youth” (Tin 205). As Jean tells Emmanuel – *en anglais*, no less – he is “*Out for the big things*” (Bonheur 307). Thus, while Florentine is still partially bound to her family, Jean has already eschewed his familial roots in order to become a self-made man<sup>24</sup>. Sherill E. Grace contends that success in the city necessitates this denial of origins and of human connection (197). This is not difficult for the orphan Jean, whose biological parents died shortly after his birth, and whose adoptive mother was emotionally distant. Yet, the time of Jean’s identification is also haunted by a myth of origins, for “[u]ne hérédité mystérieuse triomphait en lui. De deux inconnus, morts peu après sa naissance, il tenait cette force qui l’éveillait” (Bonheur 210) / “A mysterious heredity was expressing itself triumphantly in him. From two strangers who had died shortly after his birth he had inherited this awakening power . . .” (Tin 202). Emotional repression thus becomes the language of Jean’s enunciation – and isolation, its syntax.

As we have seen with Florentine, Jean expresses his desire to escape St-Henri by disassociating himself from its inhabitants and from all forms of collective identity. As Marcotte puts it, Jean is “l’individu par excellence”, having interiorized the values of ambition and success that characterize modern urban life (410-411). Roy initially represents this isolationism when, at the *Deux Records* (*Two Records*), Jean sits apart from the “hommes du peuple” for whom he feels “une espèce de mépris” (Bonheur 45) / “a growing contempt” (Tin 44). The men’s discussion of the war allows Roy to explore Jean’s rejection of nationalist collectivism:

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<sup>24</sup> Morency describes this view of identity as distinctly American, and likens Jean to the Melvillean figure of Ahab (73).



“Nous autres, on nous dit que l’Allemagne veut nous détruire. . . . Mais moi, je n’ai pas envie d’aller tuer un gars qui m’a jamais fait de mal et qui peut pas faire autrement que de se laisser mener par ses dirigeants.” (Bonheur 46)

“We’re saying Germany wants to destroy us. . . . All I know is, I don’t want to go killing some guy that never did me any harm, and who hasn’t the choice but to do what he’s told [by his leaders].” (Tin 44)

Jean’s reasoning does several things simultaneously. At one level, it distinguishes “the people” from the image of the nation-state, so that “Germany” is reduced to the individual soldier, “some guy”. By stating that this soldier is led not by transcendent truths, but by the political will of his leaders, Jean in fact reveals the split between the pedagogical time of national history and its performative construction. Although Azarius therefore calls Jean a pacifist, the seemingly humanist young man states that there are no pacifists, only profiteers masquerading as “des bons patriotes” (Bonheur 47) / “good patriots” (Tin 45). By the time he leaves the restaurant, it becomes clear that Jean’s rejection of a collective francophone identity merely replaces national territory with the even more narrow space of individual self-interest.

The boundaries of the individual are nonetheless transgressed when Jean enters the cloistered space of the Lacasse home – and, later, of Florentine’s body. Perron describes the house’s space as “non-closed / [sic] to outside influences of every sort” and argues that, within this space, “the family can aspire to no collective goals” (226). While Perron makes a valid point, however, he overlooks the house’s power to structure Jean’s experience of the temporality he has, until now, repressed. While Jean has easily been able to construct his identity while roaming the urban streets, the home’s confines now

enforce an equally confining linear narrative of identity. The Lacasse home thus becomes an uncanny reminder of his need to forget history, and Jean is forced to face the historical lack behind his self-made, modern identity. Roy depicts the constructed nature of Jean's identity through the daily household objects he sees in disgust: "L'humble arrangement domestique d'objets si nécessairement confondus avec les gestes de la vie, le gênait" (Bonheur 212) / "The humble arrangement of things, reminiscent of a certain kind of life, upset him" (Tin 204). This "certain kind of life" is that of the working-class people, who embody the actions – manual labour, perpetual child-rearing, frequent moving and endless emotional turmoil – which underlie human survival. The exposure of the gap between image and construction troubles Jean to the extent that "[i]l voulut fuir" (Bonheur 212) / "[h]e would have liked to run away" (Tin 204).

Yet, he is unable to escape, and finds himself in the arms of Florentine, who "cherchait à le conquérir" (Bonheur 213) / "was . . . trying to conquer him" (Tin 205). Eventually, he and Florentine fall onto the leather sofa on which she and her younger sister sleep each night. By locating the sexual act in a familial space, Roy gestures towards the baby that Florentine and Jean will create. She then relates the concept of origins to francophone identity, by evoking images of the Catholic Church, emblem of communal space (we might recall that, after Emmanuel's party, the St-Henri couples decided, "Allons à la messe ensemble" [Bonheur 143] / "Let's go to Mass together!" [Tin 136]). Here on the family sofa, Jean and Florentine are surrounded by the stares of the Madonna and saints, and engulfed in the sound of church bells. Finally, their private act is linked to the public image of "le faubourg imprégné de la grande paix du dimanche" (Bonheur 215) / "the neighbourhood imbued with its Sunday calm" (Tin 206). Jean's

increasing spatial confinement in the Lacasse home thus mirrors his backward (regressive) reading of the Québec narrative; now, in an even more confining space, he faces the rural, French-Catholic origins of St-Henri identity – and feels hopelessly trapped.

It is therefore after this incident that Jean decides to escape the “time” of St-Henri by escaping its space. Remembering to forget becomes more important to him than ever: “Et il sut qu’il s’en prenait non seulement à des souvenirs particulièrement désagréables à son amour-propre, mais à toute une partie de sa vie, qui, ce soir peut-être, finissait” (Bonheur 218) / “And he knew that he was attacking not just a memory that was painful to his own conceit, but a whole section of his life, which, tonight, had ended” (Tin 210). Forgetting, however, remains difficult, as we learn when Jean tells himself, “Abattre!” (Bonheur 218) / “Knock it all down!” (Tin 210). Yet the prospect of geographical escape helps to heal the wound of this temporal caesura. Jean’s departure is foreshadowed in the underground drains, which rumble with the sound of exodus, and make him feel “absolument libéré” (Bonheur 221) / “liberated” (Tin 213). It is Jean’s walk through the streets, however, that links new temporalities to geographical displacement. As Perron suggests about Jean’s previous walk in the opening chapter, Roy’s combination of memory and movement projects the character’s past into a heterogeneous and unpredictable future:

The movement of the exploratory memory of the observer-actor or enunciator invites the reader to return to an anteriority, to . . . reassembl[e] the dispersed fragments of the past, giving them signification and direction while projecting them into a realizable future. But the textualization of the fragments of the past by

the observers during their travels . . . must incorporate the *surplus* and the *heterogeneous* in the urban network by producing in the trajectory of the existence of the characters possible openings and instituting a ‘more’ and ‘another’ that . . . diversify their experience while also signaling the memorable. (225-226, emphases added)

We may therefore read this later walk as itself constitutive of Jean’s new temporality, though his past is, paradoxically, made “memorable” to the reader through the “‘more’ and ‘another’” that come with escape. This seems to be the case at the end of the chapter, when Jean applies for a job outside St-Henri while contemplating – somewhat regretfully – having to leave Florentine. Nevertheless, Roy’s subsequent shift from the Florentine-Jean narrative to that of Rose-Anna’s family suggests that the past is not quite so “memorable” to Jean, who has apparently succeeded in escaping St-Henri’s hereditary francophone poverty. A key symbol for Jean’s escape from heredity is, in fact, the unborn child he never learns he has.

As we shall see in the following section on Azarius, this lack of connection between parent and child – between creator and image of identity – shows how escape precludes a dialogical space and “time” of identification. For Perron, the family suffers in Roy’s novel because it is “amputated” (216) of its “physically fit, adult male subjects” (219). If Perron’s emphasis on the loss of men ignores female strength – namely, Florentine’s persistence and Rose-Anna’s “inépuisable reserve” (*Bonheur* 286) / “inexhaustible source of energy” (*Tin* 273) – it does provide a useful metaphor through which to understand the former’s disconnection from paternal “origins”. Escape through

war not only isolates the individual as much as escape through wealth does; it comes at the additional expense of the escapee's re-entrapment in the time of the "fatherland".

#### Escape to War as Patricide and Re-Patriation: Azarius

Perron is one of the few critics – if not *the* only critic – to read Florentine's marriage to Emmanuel as her wanting to give the child "a paternal name" (212). Florentine's desire for origins surfaces again when, at the St-Lawrence river with Emmanuel, she begins to describe her memories of her father (Chadbourne 72). Yet, while Florentine apparently seeks to replace one patriarchal identity with another, Emmanuel ultimately rejects this paternal notion of identity. His rejection is a response to the French-Canadian "culte national" (Bonheur 314) that his own father propagates from a distance (for instance, he had tried to dissuade Emmanuel from joining the army) and that Azarius participates in by wanting to liberate France. Following Azarius' military "Salut!" (Bonheur 313) / "I salute you!" (Tin 298) when Emmanuel leaves the restaurant, the latter realizes the hypocritical contradiction between his father's loyalty to "ancestral" France and his rejection of the call to arms. Unlike M. Létourneau's "seule fidélité au passé" (Bonheur 314) / "mere fidelity to the past" (Tin 298), the individual's decision to fight (or not to fight) marks a performative moment of identity-construction. Emmanuel therefore realizes that going off to war is not simply a "natural" occurrence within an overarching national narrative. He comes to see that his own decision was largely a response to empty humanist rhetoric; he appreciates, for instance, that "la détresse régnait dans le monde avant la guerre et qu'on la soulage autrement qu'avec la

guerre” (Bonheur 314) / “suffering had existed before the war, and that there are means other than war to relieve it” (Tin 299).

Unlike Emmanuel, Azarius fails to see that war does not provide an escape from geographically-defined identity, but merely from one’s own paternal role. He maintains an organic link between France and French-Canadians, whom he identifies as “Français de France, mais partis de France” (Bonheur 311) / “French from France but we left France” (Tin 295). Thus, while Jean may seem to lead other escapist men to liberty (Morency 70), Azarius’ escape from his paternal role and cultural milieu brings him no closer to a new “time” of identity; he merely seeks a return to mythical origins so that he may be free of the need to actively construct his identity. What therefore obstructs collective identity in The Tin Flute is not the absence of the father or fatherland *per se*, but the ability to identify oneself by *questioning* one’s “paternal” cultural roots. Emmanuel eventually shows us that the war not only leads men towards their death (Lewis, “Female Spirals” 74) by tempting them with the illusion of a new beginning, but actually re-assimilates them into the pedagogical time of Empire.

Like Jean, Azarius equates geographical escape with the prospect of a new beginning, which Roy represents through the motif of youth. We learn early on that, despite being about forty years old, Azarius “entraît dans l’âge mûr avec toute l’ardeur retardée de sa jeunesse” (Bonheur 43) / “was in the prime of life with his strength intact, perhaps even all the ardour of his youth” (Tin 42). Roy also stresses the importance of youth through Azarius’ comments on war at the *Two Records*. In the first *Two Records* scene, Azarius presses Jean to agree that young men should go to battle, and sighs, “Ah, si j’avais encore mes vingt ans!” (Bonheur 46) / “I tell you, if I was twenty again. . .”

(Tin 44). He makes a similar comment to Emmanuel near the end of the novel. It is therefore not surprising that, rather than guide his teenage son, Eugène, Azarius follows in Eugène's footsteps. When Azarius finally shows himself in uniform to a stunned Rose-Anna, she sees him "si jeune qu'elle en fut troublée mortellement" (Bonheur 393) / "looking so young it broke her heart" (Tin 372). This symbolic rejuvenation is consistent with Azarius' movement away from a home in which he is the father, and towards a place where he will submit to patriarchal authority as one of the army's "boys".

This youth motif also suggests his abandonment of present responsibilities in favour of more abstract ideals. Morency identifies in Azarius a constant battle between the call of the open road, on the one hand, and the imperatives of being a husband and father, on the other (71). Like the seventeen-year-old Eugène when he is home on leave, Azarius sees his home "less as a haven than as a prison", to quote Hesse (19). However, he is not bothered by the space of the home, but by his role within the narrative of working-class domesticity. The war and mass consumerism – both projects of Anglo-imperialism – have robbed Azarius of his identity as a provider. This identity has been replaced with what Lewis calls the "inadapted Québécois" who wishes to escape the present (Literary 9). Azarius' harsh realization is therefore the loss of his sense of *appartenance*:

Et puis, brusquement, il y avait eu une fêlure dans sa vie. . . . Il n'était plus bâtisseur, et il se voyait mal tout à coup dans des ouvrages qui ne lui ressemblaient pas. Il apercevait un homme qui devait être lui et cependant qui n'était pas lui. (Bonheur 165)

Then came a sudden break in his life. . . . He wasn't building now, and saw himself vaguely in a series of jobs that had nothing to do with him. He saw a man that must be Azarius, but was not. (Tin 157)

Daily life in St-Henri thus becomes a time of alienated existence, and the only hope is that of a "new" time of self-identification, a sudden return to youth and the past. Like Jean, however, Azarius feels that he cannot identify himself so long as he is physically bound to St-Henri. The Lacasse family represents both this physical connection to St-Henri, and its circumscription of Azarius within the domestic narrative: "Il souhaita n'avoir plus de femme, plus d'enfants, plus de toit" (Bonheur 168) / "He wished he had no wife, no family, no roof over his head" (Tin 159). His desire to be "[l]ibre, libre, incroyablement libre" (Bonheur 393) / "[f]ree, free, unbelievably free" (Tin 371) is therefore the paradoxical desire to create a new narrative of identity in which he can return to his past self.

Azarius justifies his escapism by insisting that the war is for democracy, and that France must be dutifully saved by her descendants. Roy explains that Azarius and other "hommes du peuple" possess "un mystérieux et tendre attachement pour leur pays d'origine . . . une vague de nostalgie quotidienne qui leur trouvait rarement à s'exprimer mais qui tenait à eux . . . comme leur langue encore naïvement belle" (Bonheur 311) / "a mysterious and tender attachment for the land of their origin, a vague but constant nostalgia that was seldom expressed but that was as close to them as . . . their language with its naïve beauty" (Tin 296). France persists as a sign of linguistic and cultural origins – and for this reason, Azarius equates it with the "original" self he believes he has lost. Yet he fails to see that patriotism is as geographically confining and democratically



homogenizing as francophone class-consciousness in St-Henri. By confounding patriotism with humanism, Azarius becomes a victim of Empire; his humanist ideals, “furthered by war” (Perron 217), merely cause him to re-circulate himself as capital for the project of “a dominant male society / state” (Lewis, “Female Spirals” 75).

It is this realization that Emmanuel makes when he finally recognizes the ties between humanism and nationalist pedagogy.

#### Humanism and the Call of the Local: Emmanuel

In his discussion of Quebec’s transition from rural to modern identity, Marcotte argues that Emmanuel cannot take charge of social change (411-412), being socially and physically removed from St-Henri’s people and their problems. Indeed, from the beginning of the novel, Roy contrasts the people’s nostalgic conservatism and everyday survival with Emmanuel’s humanist, universal concerns. At Ma Philibert’s, Emmanuel realizes that he has nothing in common with his former schoolmates because his enlistment has emphasized the social gap between them. “Si tu veux faire le héros, c’est ton affaire” (Bonheur 57) / “If you want to play hero, that’s your business” (Tin 55) says Boisvert. “. . . Mais nous autres, qu’est-ce-qu’on a eu de la société?” (Bonheur 57) / “But what about us, what did we get from society?” (Tin 55). Emmanuel contends that war will destroy the power of money, which utterly determines the lives of the people. He feels isolated from the “people”, however, and feels a need for human connection that “devenait, à chaque permission, plus aigu et plus marqué” (Bonheur 65) / “grew stronger on each furlough” (Tin 63). His marriage to Florentine partly fulfils this need for connection, since he sees her as “plus près du peuple que lui” (Bonheur 389) / “closer to

the people than he was” (Tin 376). His perception of Florentine is, of course, obscured by his view of the people as an organic social unity, and he reads her individual opportunism in socialist terms, as a “révolte” (Bonheur 317) / “revolt” (Tin 301) against poverty. Emmanuel’s downward gaze onto St-Henri from Westmount therefore indicates, as Babby argues, his willingness “to accept a more mundane existence” (55), and he believes that living among the “people” will bring his humanist ideals to life.

Like his marriage to Florentine, however, Emmanuel’s connection to the people is false, and he comes to see that nationalism’s use of humanist discourse victimizes the people instead of saving them. He thus discovers the split between the nation-state and everyday life, that is, between pedagogical and performative time. Although Perron argues that Azarius and Emmanuel both link national identity to language, to race and to religion (228), Emmanuel’s understanding of nationalism is problematized by the time he goes off to war. He discovers that nationalism, having apparently won over Pitou and Azarius, subsumes individual histories within that of the Empire / nation-state:

“L’Empire! songea Emmanuel. Pour qu’un territoire garde ses limites! Pour que la richesse reste d’un côté plutôt que de l’autre!”

Maintenant un groupe entier chantait:

- *There’ll always be a merry England.*

“Oui, mais moi, mais Pitou, mais Azarius! pensa Emmanuel. Est-ce pour merry England, est-ce pour l’Empire que nous allons nous battre? . . . Non, non, se dit-il avec véhémence, je refuse de me mettre sur le plan patriotique et nationaliste.

*Suis-je le seul?”* (Bonheur 399, last emphasis added)

The Empire, he thought. For the Empire, so that a territory can keep its old boundaries. So that wealth stays on one side rather than the other.

A whole group had started to sing:

*There'll always be an England. . .*

Yes, but what about Pitou, what about Azarius? Is it for merry England and the Empire we're going to fight? . . . No, no, no, he thought vehemently, I'm not going to put myself on any patriotic, national bandwagon. *Am I the only one?*

(Tin 377, last emphasis added)

It is at this moment that Emmanuel distinguishes the people's participation in the war from imperialist objectives; Florentine had reached this conclusion earlier by telling Emmanuel that he only joined the army because it suited him. Azarius and Pitou have ironically risked their lives in a gamble to survive in St-Henri. Yet, for Emmanuel, no humanist goal can be met if the war simply exploits this situation.

Although Marcotte suggests that Emmanuel is a spokesperson for Roy's own humanism (411), the failure of humanism as an alternative to collectivism and escapist individualism reiterates a void that still needs to be filled, a potential dialogue that still needs to take place between "the people" and the nation. The curtailment of dialogue ultimately appears to be a destructive force, represented by the storm brewing in the clouds on the horizon. This said, any hope for a third space lies not in Florentine's move to a better house, but in Emmanuel's outward movement as the train brings him towards an end to imperialism's notions of "fatherland"<sup>25</sup>. Roy's only hint at an alternative form

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<sup>25</sup> Interestingly, Florentine seems more willing to accept her father's sacrifice than Emmanuel's. She believes that her father's going off to war is "la plus belle chose qu'il a faite dans sa vie," (Bonheur 404) / "the most beautiful thing he ever did in his life" (Tin 382), while Emmanuel's return is "tout naturel" (Bonheur 403) / "natural" (Tin 381).

of identity – and possibly the only positive moment in the novel – is when Emmanuel has an epiphany in response to an elderly woman in the crowd. Unlike the other characters, whom Roy so frequently associates with the commonality of the “peuple”, the old woman symbolizes an uncanny “third space”; she is a stranger who is “perdue parmi des étrangers” (Bonheur 400) / “lost in this crowd which paid her no attention” (Tin 378), and her age suggests death, or at least unknown new beginnings. While she is initially absorbed by the populace, however, she is singled out in the communicative act that constitutes her enunciation: “Un jour, ça prendra fin” (Bonheur 400) / “Some day there’ll be an end” (Tin 378). By mouthing these words, the old woman tells Emmanuel to destroy war, and this infuses him with a new truth.

It is not the content of this message, but the inner dialogue it represents, that concerns us here. If we read the uniformed Emmanuel as the “merry England” which Roy has earlier substituted for all nations – “En Allemagne, en Italie, en France, partout ils chantent” (Bonheur 399) / “They’re singing in Germany, in Italy, in France” (Tin 377) – his silent dialogue with the elderly woman can be read as daily life’s first “performative” renegotiation of “pedagogical” national fixities. What is crucial about this dialogue is that it is internal; the old woman’s words are mouthed “rien que pour lui” (Bonheur 400) / “for him alone” (Tin 378), which suggests that her message is really Emmanuel’s. Roy therefore vindicates Emmanuel’s attraction to “l’inconnu” (Bonheur 107) / “the unknown” (Tin 104) when he realizes that the uncanny “other” is already within the self. For, it is ultimately through inner dialogue that a third space of identity can emerge.

Finally, that Roy’s uncanny stranger is female anticipates the matriarchal model of dialogical identity that she would soon develop in her prairie novels. Identity is no

longer “handed down” from generation to generation, but renegotiated through inter-generational reinterpretation. What Roy suggests, then, is not only a mutual exchange between the uncanny performative and the uniformed pedagogical, but also a blurring of the boundaries between ancestor and descendant. Unlike Rose-Anna, who is locked into an organic cycle of poverty, the uncanny old woman participates in a history of inter-generational dialogue. While she arguably “gives birth” to new ideas by communicating them to Emmanuel (moreover, her age makes her his “ancestor”), he also constructs her significance by speaking the words on her lips. This act of interpretation is much like that of Roy’s reader, who must engage in a dialogical (re)creation of identity. Roy thus interrupts both the linear chronology of the narrative, and the linear narrative of francophone identity. The cyclical regeneration of their identities – the old woman is recreated in Emmanuel and he is recreated through her “words” – creates a new, matriarchal temporality in which their desire for peace, as a “surplus of humanness”, can now challenge organic, territorially-defined history from within. Thus, Roy ends The Tin Flute with two characters who are – to, reappropriate Marcotte’s words – bigger than their era.

## CONCLUSION

In response to literary criticism insisting that The Tin Flute is, or should be, a coherent signifier of francophone identity in Quebec, I have argued that the novel suggests an alternative to the geographically-confined space of the “fatherland” of romantic nationalism. This alternative space is that of artistic and dialogical, rather than biological and monological, creation. Because the performative renegotiation of one’s origins exposes the constructedness of nationalist pedagogies, identity is no longer wholly dependent on language, territory and heredity. As we have seen, this dialogue between past pedagogies and present performativity allows for a more “matriarchal” model of identity.

A deeper understanding of Roy’s matriarchal model could come from future work on the diminution of father figures and the consequent dissolution of gender boundaries in The Tin Flute. For Babby, the apparent general absence of father figures in Roy’s novels represents the search for lost origins (118). Yet, if the physical and / or emotional departures of Jean, Azarius and Emmanuel anticipate the alternative father of Roy’s prairie fiction, would a nationalist myth of origins really be necessary in order for a performative renegotiation of identity to take place? To answer this question, one must consider how notions of “fatherland” are either reinforced or challenged by The Tin Flute’s defective father figures. I have argued that, while escape from one’s paternal role may provide some men with a “new beginning”, it does not change the face of collective identity in the novel. Feminist modes of inquiry might suggest that the absence of men in traditional paternal roles dissolves patriarchal social structures, and hence, the fixed gender roles that underpin an “organic” cultural or national identity. The possibility for

fathers to share in Roy's "matriarchal model" is certainly suggested by characters like Emmanuel, who seek the end of fatherlands (and whom Patricia Smart describes, incidentally, as an androgynous figure [20]).

Given the prevalence of the mother-daughter relationship in Roy's prairie novels – especially in The Road Past Altamont and Street of Riches – further research might well focus on parent figures in these novels in contrast to parent figures in The Tin Flute. In Street of Riches, Christine's father is both a stranger to his daughter, and an embodiment of dialogue with cultural "others". Christine realizes in "The Gadabouts" that her father – an officer of immigration for the Dominion government – is a different person to her than he is to his Québécois relatives. Her consequent inability to comprehend his polysemic identity comes as a shock. In The Road Past Altamont, however, it is her grandfather's thirst for travel and new beginnings that Christine seems to have inherited. Yet, if Édouard's model of identity is what allows Christine to reconstruct Maman and Mémère's lives – as well as her own, as a writer – do the "new beginnings" of Azarius and Jean necessarily fall short? Do absent father figures in The Tin Flute necessarily preclude the possibility for dialogical modes of identity-formation?

Moreover, if mother-daughter relationships are integral to novels that depict a matriarchal model of identity, would Rose-Anna's role as a *mater dolorosa* add anything of value to this model? While Rose-Anna's matriarchal role in The Tin Flute is limited by her spatial and emotional confinement, she and Florentine do maintain a powerful and highly nuanced relationship. That Rose-Anna and the pregnant Florentine are the only active parents still remaining in St-Henri may suggest a legacy of matriarchal, intergenerational recreation. Florentine's desire at the end of the novel is not only to start

a “vie nouvelle” (Bonheur 404) / “new life” (Tin 383) for herself, but also to create a new life for her mother. Her agency thus seems to renegotiate geographically-confined identities, by interrupting the narrative of the “femme du people” with an individual need for *recommencement*. Yet, there is room for debate as to whether Florentine constructs an identity that is collective or is dialogical. Is it really possible to renegotiate ancestral or cultural origins in the absence of the patriarchs? Or, does The Tin Flute hint at a world in which fatherlands and patriarchies exist only in a distant, abstract past? Comparative work on the absence / presence of father figures in Roy’s prairie novels and in The Tin Flute could help to answer these questions.

Work on the absence / presence of rural origins might also deepen our understanding of Roy’s matriarchal model, by highlighting the St-Henri francophones’ constant dialogue with their rural past. A number of critics note that Roy’s own experience as a French-Canadian has informed her representation of immigrants, ethnic minorities and other French-Canadians as “alienated” figures: Tatiana Arcand and Ook Chung describe the immigrant or ethnic minority in Roy’s work as alienated from her/his homeland and from the society in which s/he now lives; others, such as Yannick Resch (“La Problématique”) and André Vanasse, also show how urban life in The Tin Flute creates a similar sense of displacement for the French-Canadian. As with immigration to another country, the rural-to-urban shift removes the francophone from a traditional narrative of rural identity. However, instead of a “new” identity rooted in francophone class-consciousness, The Tin Flute’s characters (especially Rose-Anna) continue to be haunted by their “lost” rural origins. Thus, even for native city-dwellers like Azarius and Florentine, the difficulties of adjusting to urban life becomes a “consistent process of



surmounting the ghostly time of repetition”, as Bhabha says of the nation (“DissemiNation”143).

Rose-Anna’s return to the country nonetheless shows that this “ghostly time” is that of newly-unfamiliar rural origins. Thus, while Babby reads the visit to the country as a symbol for “Rose-Anna’s return to her origins, her heredity” and “the Quebec urban dweller’s provisional return to his former rural homestead” (118), one must also read the country as an *unhomely* place that contradicts nationalist myths of origin. Rose-Anna’s initial eagerness to visit her family stems from a nostalgic desire to recover her “lost” origins and her “true” self. Yet her attempt to do so is futile, and she feels like a stranger to both her family and herself. Much like Florentine at the end of the novel, Rose-Anna is not free of her “organic” roots; she feels deeply indebted to her mother, for instance, and is bothered that her own children do not look as healthy as Réséda’s. This suggests that Rose-Anna does want to “belong” – or at least feel accepted – in her former hometown. Once there, however, she confronts an image of her life that differs dramatically from her present identity. For example, Rose-Anna does not encounter the warm reception she envisioned, but is confronted with an “étrange accueil” (199) / “strange greeting” when her brother Ernest notices that she is pregnant. This comment is “strange” because it tells Rose-Anna that her pregnancy is no longer a sign of her piety, but of her poverty. Having started a new life in the city, she can no longer fully identify herself according to rural values. It would therefore be worth examining how Rose-Anna’s rural French-Catholic virtues serve to increase the distance between her urban Lacasse present and her rural Laplante past<sup>26</sup>. One might also consider whether Azarius, as an absent husband and

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<sup>26</sup> It is interesting that Rose-Anna’s “organic” family name is Laplante (“the plant”) and that she was separated from this identity after becoming a “Lacasse” (“casser”, “to break”).

father, helps to foster a nostalgia for the past that prevents Rose-Anna from seeing it for what it is.

Another question of interest is how marriage in The Tin Flute could facilitate or impede dialogue between past and present, and between different regional, cultural and / or class groups. Interestingly, it seems to be the men who disconnect the Lacasse women from their “organic” familial and cultural roots. Florentine refuses to accompany her family to the country so that she can seduce Jean, while Rose-Anna’s city life with Azarius has made her an outcast within her own family: “[Sa mère] avait toujours dit: ‘Ton Azarius, ta famille, ta Florentine, tes enfants, ta vie.’ Pour Azarius, un citadin, elle avait eu encore moins d’amitié que pour ses autres beaux-fils, tous de la campagne” (Bonheur 203) / “[Her mother] had always said, ‘Your Azarius,’ or ‘Your Florentine, your children, your life. . . .’ She had felt even less warmth for Azarius, a city boy, than for her other sons-in-law who all came from the country” (Tin 194). That these “failed” husband figures create a rift between the women’s past and present lives suggests, once again, an identity that could be dialogical rather than organic. Yet the geographical confinement that these women face as wives, mothers and lovers also presents an obstacle to identity-formation, relegating the women and their children to a narrative of inherited identity.

In what ways, then, is Emmanuel’s marriage to Florentine as confining (or not) as Rose-Anna’s marriage to Azarius? Indeed, Florentine’s financial freedom is the direct result of her legal and emotional attachment to a man whom she does not love. She thus becomes dependent on him for her physical and social survival. However, given Roy’s own decision to marry a bi-sexual man whom she did not love romantically, would

Florentine's marriage set her free, as Roy was, from the narrative that traps Rose-Anna? An analysis of the link between Emmanuel's response to patriarchal nationalism and his role as a husband and father "of convenience" might show how the dissolution of gender roles could also dissolve the fatherland in Roy's novel.

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