

Allison Mitcham

THE LITERARY ACHIEVEMENT OF GABRIELLE ROY

Fredericton, N.B.: York Press, 1983. Pp. 38. \$6.95

Reviewed by Theresia Quigley

Gabrielle Roy is chiefly known as a Quebec writer of undisputed importance. Indeed, as Allison Mitcham points out in her recently-published study, *The Literary Achievement of Gabrielle Roy*: "Some critics in French Canada have even gone so far as to state that French-Canadian literature really came of age just after the Second World War—and specifically after the publication of *Bonheur d'occasion*" (p. 24).

Mitcham certainly gives due credit to Roy's "Montreal" novels, *Bonheur d'occasion* and *Alexandre Chenevert*, stating that they are "more carefully plotted than the rest of her work," and that *Bonheur d'occasion*, in particular, had an extraordinary impact on Canadian literature. Nevertheless, her study gives at least equal prominence to the largest part of Roy's achievement—her western writings. It is this aspect of Mitcham's book, as well as her careful analysis of the author's work as a whole, which is most valuable to students of Gabrielle Roy, since it clearly establishes her as a Canadian writer with interests outside Quebec. These include the Inuit, the Indian, as well as the vastly diverse immigrant population of Canada.

Interestingly enough, Mitcham claims that Roy's western roots strongly influenced her important "northern" novels, *La Montagne secrète* and *La Rivière sans repos*. To prove her statement, she points to the striking similarities between certain descriptive passages of the tundra in *La Rivière sans repos* and the prairie in *Un Jardin au bout du monde*. She maintains that it is the rugged, harsh environment of both these areas that becomes for Roy "a testing ground where the individual may, if he has sufficient inner strength, acquire wisdom and self-knowledge" (p. 10).

This is, of course, strongly reminiscent of Henry David Thoreau's views on the therapeutic effects of "wildness." However, surprisingly, it is not Thoreau nor, for that matter, any other North-American literary figure who, in this study, emerges as having had the greatest influence on Gabrielle Roy. It is, instead, the French writer Antoine de Saint-Exupéry to whom, according to Mitcham, Gabrielle Roy is "most closely related and indeed perhaps most deeply indebted" (p. 28). Throughout her study she stresses Roy's preoccupation with the loss of individual freedom through the imprisoning effects of modern civilization with its materialistic pursuits and expectations. In this, Mitcham explains, Roy echoes Saint-Exupéry. For both writers freedom is "associated with mobility and withdrawal from the city to places which have never, or rarely, felt the touch of man" (p. 28). While Saint-Exupéry sees the possibility of freedom in the sky and the desert, Roy sees it in the Canadian wilderness.

This is not to say that similarities between Roy and other North-American or even British writers do not exist. Indeed, Mitcham's study is remarkable in that it draws clear and often surprising comparisons both thematical as well as stylistic between Roy's work and that of such noted writers as Dylan Thomas, John Steinbeck, Saul Bellow, Steven Crane, and Ernest Hemingway. A number of Canadian writers also figure prominently in this comparative study of Gabrielle Roy's work, notably, Yves Thériault and W. O. Mitchell. The latter is singled out for his ability, like Roy's, to write with tenderness and humor; while Thériault's resemblance to Roy can be found mainly in his northern characters Ashini, Ikoué, and Tayaout who are much like Roy's Thaddeus, Ian, and Elsa (*La Rivière sans repos*).

Mitcham's book displays a thorough knowledge and a sensitive understanding of Roy's work. This is particularly evident in her comments on the writer's attitude towards her characters. Roy, she states, had a real affection for her characters but particularly for her children and her childlike adults. She points out that through her children, in this case Médéric in "De la Truite dans l'eau glacée" (*Les enfants de ma vie*), Roy "with seeming simplicity uncovers the universal susceptibility of the individual in his solitary struggle for self-realization" (p. 21). She also emphasizes the importance that Roy placed on the truthful representation of life. When discussing the "western" novels, which have been criticized for their lack of dramatic development,

she states that these novels are nevertheless gripping accounts because “the impression of truth is so strong that these fictional accounts seem more than true to life than actual reports” (p. 13).

According to Mitcham then, truthfulness, humor, gentleness and tenderness are the characteristics that best describe Gabrielle Roy’s writing. Her study awakens in the reader the desire to explore more fully the varied aspects of the writer and to read and reread her work.

Frederic Joseph Svoboda
*HEMINGWAY AND THE SUN ALSO RISES:
THE CRAFTING OF A STYLE*

Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1983.
Pp. xii + 152.

Donald R. Noble, ed.
HEMINGWAY: A REVALUATION

Troy, N.Y.: The Whitston Publishing Company, 1983, Pp. 282.
Reviewed by Raymond S. Nelson

Using materials in the Hemingway Collection at the John F. Kennedy Library in Boston, Frederic Svoboda traces the growth of *The Sun Also Rises* from Hemingway’s first sketches of the story through its published form. From Hemingway’s original thirty-two page journalistic account of experiences at the Fiesta of San Fermín together with other actual persons (Lady Duff Twysden, Pat Guthrie, Donald Ogden Stewart, Harold Loeb, and Hadley Richardson Hemingway) through a series of revisions and galley proofs, Svoboda traces the growth of the novel. Svoboda pursues Hemingway’s “theory of iceberg composition” and his determination to avoid conventional “literary signs” as he interprets Hemingway’s steadily growing self-confidence as a young writer discernible in successive stages of composition.

Svoboda reviews Hemingway’s “beginnings and backgrounds” briefly, reminding the reader of the nature of Hemingway’s work up until 1925: quite a good number of journalistic articles, a few poems, and *In Our Time*. Svoboda then concentrates on “the most difficult job of revision” (p. 43) which Hemingway undertook at Schruns, Austria, during the winter of 1925 and 1926. Last, Svoboda demonstrates that Scott Fitzgerald persuaded Hemingway to alter the beginning of the novel, cutting about one and a half chapters (3500 words). After such a systematic and thorough analysis, Svoboda offers a short chapter in which he assesses the “significance” of *The Sun Also Rises*. “The book,” he says, “shows Hemingway’s maturation into an artist of the first rank in his ability to integrate and interrelate all the varied elements of the novel...” (p. 114). Svoboda shows the gradual shift from the real people who shared the week at Pamplona to the fictional counterparts with whom readers of Hemingway are familiar. He also reveals how Hemingway steadily cut most of Jake’s theorizing on form and style which early drafts of the manuscript contain.

Two other significant elements of the book are the many photocopies of variant readings of the text, deleted portions, and photographs. In three appendices Svoboda describes the manuscripts, the original opening of the novel that was cut from the galleys, and a letter from F. Scott Fitzgerald. All of this material is vital to the argumentative force of the book and to the clarity of the discussion. An index helps to make the book a useful research tool.

Svoboda organized his study well, focusing on significant developments as Hemingway formed his first novel. Svoboda goes beyond the development of this particular novel; he traces the growth of the young writer at work on his first long work. Thus, *The Sun Also Rises* is a critical work in the maturation of one of our major authors of the twentieth century.

The Crafting of a Style is readable and the author accomplishes his purpose. It has most interest for students of *The Sun Also Rises* but it does have a broader implication, particularly