Review of *Between Languages and Cultures: Colonial and Postcolonial Readings of Gabrielle Roy* by Rosemary Chapman

Carol J. Harvey
*University of Winnipeg*

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Canadian author Gabrielle Roy (1909–1983) is usually recognized as one of Quebec's foremost writers. Although Bonheur d'occasion, the novel that launched her career in 1946, is set in Montreal, much of her subsequent work is set in the Prairies of her youth. Born in the small francophone town of Saint-Boniface, Manitoba, she spoke French at home but was educated in English, since French had lost its status as an official language of the province. This linguistic and cultural duality is fraught with many tensions, as Rosemary Chapman demonstrates in her recent book.

The theoretical framework encompasses insights from several critical theories. In chapters 1 and 2, Chapman views the Manitoba education system through the lens of colonial studies, examining Roy's experiences first as a student, then as a trainee teacher. She demonstrates how the complex knot of power relationships—Canada's place within the British Empire, the subordinate status of French in Manitoba, and the parallel education curriculum established by the Association d'Éducation des Canadiens français du Manitoba in order to resist assimilationist policies—affect Roy's linguistic and cultural identity. In chapter 3, Chapman draws on linguistic theories of bilingualism and diglossia to analyze Roy's writing. She notes the author's ambivalent relationship toward language, and the creative complexity this affords Roy as a bilingual writer, concluding that she is "between languages and cultures," a thesis further developed in chapter
4, which uses translation theory to examine traces of bilingualism in Roy’s work. Chapter 5, “Writing Canada: Finding a Place Between,” focuses on the cultural and linguistic differences of individuals Roy recorded in her journalism or imagined in her fiction, exploring questions of migration, cultural hybridity, and identity construction.

Of particular interest is the impact that Roy’s early experiences had on her writing, especially her sensitive representation of other minority groups. Though she left Manitoba in 1937 and settled in Quebec on her return, her work as a journalist in the early forties took her to immigrant settlements throughout western Canada. In her reportages and the fiction they inspired, the migrants’ experiences in maintaining a sense of self as they adjust to a new, dominant language and culture are not unfamiliar to western readers. New here are the critical insights Chapman brings to bear on the individual and collective politics of assimilation and resistance.

Chapman is thoroughly conversant with the multiple facets of Roy’s work: novels and short stories, works of fiction and autofiction, autobiography and reportages, and recent editions of her correspondence with other writers and translators. With the objectivity of the historian and the sensitivity to textual nuance of the literary scholar, she situates Roy’s specific experiences within the broader colonial context to produce an innovative and well-documented study of a writer between languages and cultures. Her work is a valuable addition to Roy criticism.

**CAROL J. HARVEY**

Department of Modern Languages and Literatures
University of Winnipeg