

book reviews

Garden in the Wind — poetic lyricism

by Judith Pratt

The newly translated fictional work by French Canadian author Gabrielle Roy, which first emerged in French in 1975, in reality defies aging. Consisting of four timeless short stories, *Garden in the Wind*, like its haunting title, leaves a lyrical reverberation in the reader which reinforces Roy's talent for poetic illumination of even the most mundane of occurrences.

For those who have been weaned in high school literature classes on *The Tin Flute*, this collection of stories deserts the familiar backlots and squalid side-streets of Montreal to bring the reader to the primal barrenness of the prairies which offers both pioneering achievement and desolate solitude to the characters. There is a singularity in Roy's poetic translations of the many



communities of the prairies.

The first story in the book is entitled "A Tramp at the Door" and echoes the insistent desire of all people to belong to a unit, whether of family or community. The portrait of the tramp, a figure in our urbanized lives now almost deceased, is finely drawn by Roy and serves to relieve tensions in the house he visits which would otherwise have continued to plague the solidarity of the family. The tramp, by pretending to be a relative, a ruse he uses at many doors, gains entry to the family circle and opens up unseen vistas in the minds of the family, of Quebec, unknown relatives, and long discarded events, all drawn cunningly from the father's memories. The story seeks to strengthen the importance of sympathy, family solidarity and the warmth and merit of memories, and to leave, after the tramp has departed, a revived sense of belonging.

The second story, "Where Will You Go, Sam-Lee Wong?" opens with an immigrant Chinese who is seeking a new environment where he can belong, through his memories of plains and omnipresent hills. He settles in a small prairie town, where "the whole village lay not only along the highway but on one side of it, facing the endless fields, as if prepared to wait till eternity for the curtain to go up," in the shadow of the foothills. Amid struggles with nature's forces and people's attitudes, he slowly establishes himself as one of the townsfolk by opening a restaurant. With the coming of the infamous Desert Bowl, Sam Lee Wong adjusts his pace to accommodate the very few patrons left in the town. With the

intuitive talent of a creative mind, Gabrielle Roy condenses into one sentence the desertion of the town by its inhabitants. "Nothing could have been more strange than to glimpse through the flying dust these weird processions, dimly seen and lost at once in the opaque daylight." After an oil discovery in the town, bureaucratic regulations and a friend's misinterpretation force Sam Lee Wong to leave the town called Horizon, to complete a cyclical process and to settle again in another town, also in the shadow of the foothills, hills with "the attitude of patience, of listening to some long story whispered up from the valley's hollow."

"Hoodoo Valley" represents the aims of the bulk of European immigrants settling in the Canadian west. In a relatively short story, Gabrielle Roy's lyrical imagery echoes the anticipation and despair of the immigrants as they spend what to displaced people appears as ages before alighting upon an area suitable for settlement. But this area, while enchanting the immigrant ambassadors' senses, is in reality a barren valley, suitable only for flowered weeds and startling shadows in the sunset.

The final story, "Garden in the Wind" deals with the identity of a dying European immigrant, who has related her life as a settler in Canada through the bloom and wan of her flowered garden. Unable to

communicate with her animalistic husband, she retreats, after her arbitrary chores, to her flowers. Through this character, Gabrielle

Roy achieves some of her best poetic imagery. By relating herself and her life to this garden, the old woman also feels imbued with a natural spirit, at the mercy of the "never ending moan: the prairie wind blows here like a sea wind, bringing the same unease, ceaselessly curling and whipping at the grasses as it does in water." In this

story, the leaves in the trees click together "like some festive castanets," and Canada's expanse is described by the woman, as she fades into death, as "a kind of limbo, between this life and the Eternal." By nurturing and loving her garden, the woman perceives that she has attained a form of immortality through her flowers, for they will again bloom and wave in the wind although she has died.

In this collection of stories, Gabrielle Roy exercises her wealth of imagery and poetic lyricism to present pictures of the Canadian prairies which strike with the glare of reality the senses of anyone who has visited Canada's west. Roy once again proves why she has won numerable awards in Canada, particularly in Quebec and assures herself of a niche in the annals of Canadian literary history.

GARDEN IN THE WIND

Gabrielle Roy

Translated by Alan Brown

faces of the Canadian plains which produces pictures of arid fields and lush aspen groves, often woven together to leave an after-taste of both dust and honey.

In a short forward to the book, Gabrielle Roy discusses the literary history of the four works, some of which have been revived from long discarded manuscripts. She notes that it was, in one case, the mere desire to bring to life a character she had once imagined that led her to write the longest of the stories, proving what immense power such a character, "begging to be given life" as she says, has over a creative mind. The route from visually experiencing a simple scene to the exaltation of creating a cast of individuals all intent on expressing the hope, joy and despair each of them discovers on the Canadian prairies is often long, discouraging and futile, but now and then a truly striking and haunting portrait will march to the forefront, demanding to breathe.

Throughout the four stories in *Garden in the Wind*, the theme of displacement and immigration dominates, drawing in sporadic flashes of hope and happiness to occasionally supplant the otherwise persistent loneliness and infertile lives found in the sparse

Cuban Revolution

The Cuban Revolution by Hugh Thomas, Fitzhenry and Whiteside 755 pages, \$12.05

Before 1959 Cuba was an all American country, that is Americans owned everything - the casinos, the trains, the oil, the commerce and even the baseball players. The USA also sold **everything** to Cuba.

The Cuban government, press, businesses, and police were all corrupt. Illiteracy reached 43%. There was little work and bad pay. The two burdens of corruption and economic dependence had one source - the USA.

The Cuban people rose to fight this exploitation and Hugh Thomas chronicles their "pursuit of Freedom" in this encyclopedic book, a history of Cuba since 1952.

Thomas' thorough research and lucid writing make this book an important document. He accurately points out some serious problems in present day Cuba, such as the Castro personality cult and the dependence on the Soviet Union. He also recognizes the concrete advances the people have made but he somehow concludes that a liberal society would serve the Cuban people better.



**IT DOESN'T HAVE
TO COME TO THIS
JOIN**

**the dalhousie
gazette**

**"do yourself and
your campus a real
big favor"**

3rd FLOOR SUB