

INTRODUCTION

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Miss Roy's second gift, heightening and completing the first, is her flair for capturing with an uncanny fidelity the accent and idiom of French Canada (whether rural *patois* or Montreal *argot*). Unhappily, the reader of the English translation must take this gift largely on trust, for the market-place French of Quebec is no more to be translated than such familiar English as: "I'm feelin' kinda droopy"; or, "Yer loaded, aintcha, ya lush!" If the translator attempts a formal transcription, all of the relaxed simplicity and the comic overtones of the idiom disappear. On the other hand, if the translator attempts to substitute the nearest equivalent in English slang, much of the flavor of both speaker and setting is lost. We must be prepared, then, to believe that certain awkward expressions are not Miss Roy's blunders but the inevitable defeats of translation.

A prime example of this problem is the translation of profanity which, in French, often employs religious expressions. *Mon dieu!* we know, is such a commonplace of French idiom that it merely means "good heavens!" or perhaps "ye gods!" But when Azarius, at the moment of the family's most desperate need, tells Rose Anna that he has not bothered to apply for a job, how shall we translate her response—*Doux Jésus, non!... Azarius?* Certainly the literal meaning—*"Sweet Jesus, no!"*—suggests the crudity of the barrack-room. Rose-Anna's cry is prayerful and agonized: it means "Dear Lord", or "Gentle Saviour."

Very often, however, the French comes through beautifully by undergoing a sea-change. Gabrielle Roy's title, for example, has no English equivalent. *Bonheur d'occasion* suggests, at best, the rather feeble "chance happiness"; but it also implies "grab-bag" happiness, "bargain" happiness, and "false" happiness. The translator, bowing to the impossibility of any literal translation of this expression, has chosen an image from the novel which sums up exquisitely the mingled joy and pathos of the story. The tin flute—symbol of little Daniel's hopes and disappointments—distills in a single image the whole substance of the life of the Lacasse family. It is a life of frightening difficulty, whose music comes from an instrument of tin, procured only when the player is past the point of playing. But *love* is at the heart of this symbol; it is love that gives the tin flute its meaning and value.

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Source : Hugo McPherson, «Introduction», dans Gabrielle Roy, *The Tin Flute*, University of Toronto, 1958, p. xi-x..