

# Gabrielle Roy and Translator Harry Lorin Binsse

## How Their Disputes Shaped The Texts

In a letter to her sister Bernadette on 3 May 1962, Gabrielle Roy announced a break with her translator Harry Lorin Binsse (*Letters* 45). The decision seems unjust. Almost single-handedly, Binsse had established Roy's critical reputation among anglophones the world over. Following her debut in *Bonheur d'occasion* (1945), translated by Hannah Josephson, he translated into English four major works: *Where Nests the Water Hen* (1951), *The Cashier* (1955), *Street of Riches* (1957), and *The Hidden Mountain* (1962). His dismissal, therefore, raises questions about the production of her work in English. First, how had Binsse come to be the official translator of the young French-Canadian celebrity, winner of France's coveted Prix Femina? What was his philosophy of translation? What insights does a study of this partnership afford into Roy herself, in particular as a self-styled authority on the English language? And, finally, how did their debates over Binsse's work, which continued in Roy's obsessive interrogation of its details after his death, affect the final form of the books?

Answers to these questions, which illuminate both literary history and translation studies in Canada, can be pieced together from old interviews, letters, and various other archival documents. At the time of Binsse's association with Gabrielle Roy, he was a Canadian living in Pointe au Pic, Quebec. Although he had taught English, he came to public attention as a translator working for Harcourt, Brace in New York.<sup>1</sup> His impressive credentials included a translation of *Sous le soleil de Satan* by Georges Bernanos (Ricard 316). The most relevant biographical information about Binsse, however, can be found in his own unpublished, undated article entitled simply

“Gabrielle Roy.” It appears to have been written between *Street of Riches* (1957) and *La Montagne secrète* (1962). The few facts about her life which he provides are not worth rehearsing, but of real interest is his description, both anecdotal and critical, of their teamwork. First, he was selected to translate *Where Nests the Water Hen*, not by Roy but by Harcourt, Brace, the firm which employed him and which had the English-language rights to her work. Only after the contract had been negotiated did she meet him. His memoir describes their first encounter, Roy at that time an exhausted young author hiding from the world and Binsse a translator with an eye for detail:

The first time I met Gabrielle Roy must have been in the early spring of 1951, for I remember patches of dirty snow in the shaded areas along the way as well as the early tulips around the Montreal West railway station. The previous summer I had been commissioned by Harcourt, Brace in New York to translate her second book, *La Petite Poule d'Eau*, and I had the better part of it ready for the printers. There remained a few scattered details on which I wanted to consult the author, since I felt sure that these minor difficulties could be much more quickly settled by an hour's chat than by tedious correspondence.

Mademoiselle Roy was living in Verdun, in a new and shiny house that was a part of a new and fairly shiny subdivision, possessing neither the charm of the country nor the advantages of the city, and a distressingly expensive taxi ride from everywhere. Since she was, however, still convalescent from a serious illness and under compelling necessity to do as little and see as few people as possible, her quarters pleased her. At least they were sunny and easily kept clean and open to the air. She herself gave an impression of bone-weariness, of someone who is beginning once more to be alive after a long and exhausting trouble, but someone still deeply in need of rest.<sup>2</sup>

How skillfully Binsse evokes that bygone spring day and Roy's airy, clean-swept quarters, not to mention the snapshot of the author herself, frail and slightly querulous. In an interview with Joan Hind-Smith in 1973, Roy conveyed an equally vivid impression of Binsse. His “mild eccentricities and his casual manner of dress, with buttons hanging loosely from jackets disinterestedly arranged about his rotund frame” (*Three Voices* 94) seemed to amuse her. She also recalled how, while he finished translating *Where Nests the Water Hen* in her living room, she kept him fuelled with coffee and cigarettes (*Three Voices* 94). Roy gave Hind-Smith to understand that she and the now deceased Binsse had worked well together, confirming the impression in Binsse's essay.

Some years earlier, however, Roy had painted a different portrait of Binsse. A “terrible procrastinator” was what she called him in a letter dated 16 March 1954 to Bill Deacon (qtd. in Ricard 379). To Joyce Marshall on 13

October 1968, she denounced him as “such a liar” (Joyce Marshall Papers).<sup>3</sup> And shortly after his death in 1971, Roy referred to him affectionately as “poor dear old Binsse” (August 23, 1973, Joyce Marshall Papers). *De mortuis nihil nisi bonum*—especially when the remarks were on record.

A closer look at her collaboration with Binsse, however, reveals a more nuanced view. Early on, she liked him well enough to visit his sumptuous home in Pointe au Pic—inherited from his mother and later converted by him into a restaurant—a visit described in a letter which she wrote on 23 July 1953 to her husband, Dr. Marcel Carbotte (*Mon cher grand fou* 338). Later her respect for Binsse was evinced in her protective concealment from Hind-Smith of her motive for changing translators. The official reason was that Binsse was otherwise engaged. Hind-Smith’s summary of the change from Binsse to Marshall is innocently worded: “The translation [of *La route d’Altamont*] was done by the Toronto writer Joyce Marshall, beginning a continuing collaboration and close friendship. Harry Binsse had accepted a full-time job with the Quebec government and has since died” (*Three Voices* 115). It is impossible to know whether Hind-Smith’s observation that Marshall’s translations were “crisper and closer to English construction than those of Harry Binsse” (115) was her opinion or Roy’s, although her praise of his “fine sensitivity” (115) sounds very much like Roy.

Despite her compliments, Roy still had reservations about Binsse. To Bernadette, she privately complained of the “tiraillements” (*Ma chère petite soeur* 64), that is, the struggles, that led her finally to quit him. These conflicts no doubt arose in part from his personality, those delays and lies about which she had complained. Comments on the partnership found both in Binsse’s manuscript and in Roy’s correspondence make clear, however, that these “tiraillements” were also sparked by their different views of the job at hand, both being committed to the best possible English version of her work and prepared to do battle with the other to achieve that goal.

Some of the tension between them was no doubt caused by Binsse’s idées fixes about art and translation. His memoir contains no minutely reasoned philosophy of his craft; in fact, he felt quite unequal to such a formulation, remarking of certain problems that beset the translator: “If I could analyze them I could also write the definitive treatise on meaning in art, and I can do neither” (9). But his random comments on the subject still provide vital clues as to his *modus operandi*, beginning with the “immediate problem,” the first objective of every translator—fidelity (9). Few translators or authors would disagree with Binsse’s saying that nothing extraneous be

imposed on the original work, and nothing essential omitted from it (9). His insistence that “flatness” should be avoided “like the plague” (9) is somewhat problematic; so too is his belief that a good translation must “sing the same song” (9) as the original. What if the original is itself spare and unmusical? Should the “target” language, into which a work is translated, attempt to convey those qualities, even at the risk of seeming flat? Binsse’s musical phrasing constitutes a negative answer to that question. His desire that prose should “sing” also explains his approval of Roy’s “heroic abandonment” of *joual*, the unrefined colloquial French used by the working-class people of Saint-Henri, which she reproduced in *Bonheur d’occasion*. He criticized her imitation of it as a “sedulous aping” (9) that might amuse those who knew the original but was “a fearful stumbling block to those who don’t, [and] a curse to the poor translator” (9). Dialect of this sort “imprisons the book within the walls of merely regional significance” (9). The more realistic fiction is, Binsse argues, “the more will the melodic line be needed to replace the camera and the tape recorder” (9). As a specimen of just such a melodic line, Binsse quotes—and not just once, but twice—Roy’s statement about the inviting, unspoiled world of northern Manitoba, as opposed to the ruins of post-war Europe: “It was only very far away at the end of the world, in a tiny human community, that hope is still truly free” (7,9). No commentary is provided; to Binsse, the merits of Roy’s exquisite line were self-evident.

Binsse’s preference for melodic prose was conspicuous. Roy remarked to Bernadette that his translation of *La Montagne secrète*, although beautiful, was “perhaps more lyrical than the original” (*Letters* 45). Well read in English, Roy rightly discerned more poetic effects in Binsse’s translations of her works than the original warranted, making it a poor match for her limpid and unadorned French style. Far more serious was the matter of inaccuracy. How they handled their disagreements Binsse vividly recorded. He depicts himself, for instance, as not in the least resentful at having his mistakes corrected. He was grateful that Roy had saved him from making in *Where Nests the Water Hen* “several of those egregious blunders that are the curse of the translator, blunders of which you are blissfully unaware until they are called to your attention and which you then cannot see how you could possibly have committed” (1). The rest of the passage recalls the correction of one such error which had to do with the two distinct meanings of the expression *à l’étage*, a story of his own ignorance which, cheerfully self-deprecating, he contrasts with the author’s sophistication:

One of [these mistakes]—probably the worst—was on the very first page of the book. The sentence was of the essence of Gabrielle Roy: her sly and wonderfully dead-pan raillery at what is ludicrous in the works of man. “L’une des maisons a bien une porte de devant, à l’étage, mais comme on n’y a jamais ajouté ni balcon, ni escalier, rien n’exprime mieux la notion de l’inutile que cette porte.” This I had rendered: “One of the houses had indeed a front door, on floor level, but since no one had ever added either a porch or steps, nothing could better express the idea of uselessness than this very door itself.” The trouble with this flat pomposity, of course, lay in my having missed the meaning of à l’étage, which placed this silly door a flight up from the ground; she was describing a ludicrous variety of death-trap at one time not too infrequently seen in remote Canadian settlements; a little minor surgery saved both my sentence and her humour. (1-2)

Although Binsse accuses himself here of “pomposity,” his admission of incompetence suggests just the opposite. Moreover, while he is happy that Roy’s “minor surgery” saved his reputation, his main goal in correcting this mistake was preserving the author’s “sly and wonderfully dead-pan raillery at what is ludicrous in the works of man,” a statement which showed Binsse’s humility and critical finesse.

Binsse’s gratitude for Roy’s help was not reciprocated when he queried her inaccuracies. One was the proper sequence of Tousignant children in *Where Nests the Water Hen*. It is impossible not to find funny, even if Roy did not, Binsse’s account of how firmly he insisted that these things be made to come out right in English, if not in French:

For some reason Mademoiselle Roy had failed to keep numerical track of [the Tousignant children] as she wrote, so that in one chapter a given child would be the sixth, in another the fifth—let us say—of the tribe. Perhaps no reader would ever notice such a matter, but lesser errors than these have found their damning way into the *New Yorker*, and I was resolved to straighten out the Tousignants’ proper sequence. At this point poor Gabrielle gave up. Unhappily, she explained, when she had finished the French manuscript at St.-Germain-en-Laye about a year earlier, she had felt too wretched to check for such things. Well, they were in the French text. Do as you wish to fix them up in the English. And she probably felt like adding: Leave me in peace! (2)

One has only to check the first chapter of both the French and the English first editions to see that Binsse got his way. The French statement beginning “Des sept beaux enfants” (14) in English reads, “Of their eight handsome children . . .” (12). Roy’s unhappiness with Binsse’s interference is interesting. He sensed, no doubt rightly, that she found his corrections off-putting, either because the errors seemed too trivial, or perhaps because evidence of her own carelessness upset her.

A similar response can be detected in Roy's handling of Binsse's request for the "explicit authority to change" (2) in *Where Nests the Water Hen* the botanical anomaly of various flowers which matured at different times being simultaneously in bloom:

In the description of the mass celebrated at the Tousignants' by the Capuchin priest toward the end of the book, we find the table which was to serve him as an altar had been decorated by Mademoiselle Côté, the cherished French school teacher, with "lys tigrés, églantines sauvages roses et blanches, sabots de la Vierge, et marguerites des champs." The time of year was late July. Daisies and wild roses would do, but the lilies were blooming a bit early and the lady slippers far too late. There stuck in my head a similar omnium gatherum that had made me howl with glee while reading *Forever Amber*, and my conscience balked at letting such an error creep into a far finer book. Gabrielle Roy seemed puzzled and appealed to her husband, who is both doctor and scientist, "Marcel, you know more about these things than I. Don't they all bloom at the same time?" He tactfully replied that, when his attention was called to it, he really didn't think they did, and I was duly authorized to revise Mademoiselle Côté's flower arrangement more in accordance with botanical probability. (2-3)

Roy's resistance is again worth noting. Faced with another slip in the original, she tried to enlist the support of her husband Marcel, who was knowledgeable about plants. But her attempt to prove Binsse wrong proved fruitless. The error was acknowledged, and the translator was "duly authorized" to put different flowers on the altar in the English version.

One final triumph of this kind was recorded by Binsse, this time in the "ichthyological department," as he put it, in the novel *Alexandre Chenevert*: "There I insisted that brook trout and pike would never amicably share the same waters, and again I was duly authorized to substitute more mutually friendly species of fish" (3). Here too Binsse was "duly authorized" to make changes, hardly an enthusiastic or grateful response by the author. Perhaps Roy's lack of graciousness arose in the thought of a Binsse-like response to these errors by her French audience. Then too she might have been aware of just such a weakness in her writing. According to critic Paul Genuist, Roy's sister and fellow-author Adèle had the same reservations as Binsse about *La Petite Poule d'eau*, although the inaccuracies she detected went far beyond Binsse's few strictures: "C'est justement ces réalités précises, toponymique, botanique, zoologique, historique, ou psychologique, qu'elle reproche à Gabrielle de ne pas avoir observées dans son ouvrage" (Genuist 79). Of course, as Roy's own biographer François Ricard has justly observed, Adèle had an animus against her successful younger sibling, which often led her to

find fault where there was none. In the matter of Roy's carelessness about facts, however, perhaps Adèle and Binsse were right.

One final clue that Roy did not take kindly to Binsse's corrections was his rationale for them, the tone of which is both defensive and conciliatory:

All this may seem rather petty, and probably it is, but it constitutes a part of the job of translating a work of literature from one language into another. Few people realize what a terrible test of any book conscientious translation must necessarily involve. A translator is forced to analyze and scrutinize a text as no other reader can possibly be [forced to do]—even the author's own worst enemy. And under this scrutiny the least carelessness, the least bit of slipshod work in the original aches like a splinter in the palm of your hand. (3)

Such professionalism is impressive. Yet Binsse ends the paragraph on an ingratiating note, saying the "relatively trifling" nature of his disagreements with "Gabrielle" (note the cajoling use of her first name) was a "great tribute to her excellence as a writer and story teller" (3). He concludes with the gallant declaration, "Only the most competently written books can give rise to such small troubles" (3). The entire passage reads like a peace offering.

In one area of their work together, however, Binsse and Roy appear to have been allies—the choice of English titles. "Titles are truly a headache" (4), he wrote. Not surprisingly, he found fault with all of Roy's, the sole exception being *Where Nests the Water Hen*. Indeed, he took umbrage at one critic's remark that it recalled "such distastefully Canadian titles as *Roughing It in the Bush* or *Clearing in the West*" (4). But a literal translation of the French title, Binsse argued, was unthinkable:

Literally, *La Petite Poule d'Eau* is *The Little Water Hen*. To this I objected most strongly, first because it seemed to me to suggest a child's book, and second because it had about it a Chinese flavour, the reality of which I could not rationally justify, but which I felt was definitely there. How many people, moreover, have ever heard of the Water Hen River, Lake Water Hen, and the rest—let alone the Big Water Hen and the Little Water Hen? Who, indeed, knows that there is a specific kind of bird known as a water hen? The title finally chosen at least overcame these difficulties. And since the country—discovered by the reader to be the Water Hen Country—was the book's one unifying link, it seemed best to stay with what we had chosen. (4)

The "we" referred to in the last line, clearly Roy and Binsse, might also have included Denver Lindley, the pair's "devoted American editor" (3). When Binsse goes on to say that Roy's other English titles "please me no better—perhaps worse" (4), however, it is not clear just whom he means to accuse. *The Tin Flute*, he argues, does not "fit the book" (4), but that decision was

not his. What really irked him was the imposition of the title *The Cashier* on his translation of *Alexandre Chenevert, caissier*, a choice that was “just plain bad. First of all *cashier* is not *caissier*; a cashier is an important person in the banking hierarchy; poor Alexandre never reached such heights. A *caissier* is a mere teller—all responsibility and no authority. Flat though it is, I should have preferred something like *The Little Man*, or, as in the French, his name” (4).

The person who chose the inapt title might well have been the same party who abbreviated the English title which Roy herself had provided for *Rue Deschambault*: “*Street of Riches*, finally, is happier than the other three; it was Miss Roy’s own suggestion, but with an extra adjective which I thought and still think an improvement—*Street of Infinite Riches*” (4). This person could only have been someone from Harcourt, Brace. Binsse preferred titles that were aesthetically right to those with sales appeal: “One could write a book about titles. They are vastly important, not only from the point of view of sales and avoiding public confusion, but for the author’s own satisfaction. A writer who cares two pennies about style will care deeply about sound, for that is certainly a good half of style, and all the more will he want his book’s title to sound right” (3). The person who had offended both translator and author, then, was probably an agent from the publishing house whose job it was to pick titles that would make a book sell. Denver Lindley would not seem to be a likely candidate, given Binsse’s reference to him as “our devoted editor,” although Binsse was capable of using flattery in the midst of censure.

While Harry Binsse’s memoir about Roy sheds valuable light on both a little-known side of the author and on certain aspects of their collaboration, Roy’s comments on Binsse are equally revealing. Of particular interest is a detailed series of remarks which she made on his efforts in *The Hidden Mountain*, prompted by an opportunity in 1973 to make some changes to the novel. To do so, she enlisted the help of her translator at the time, Joyce Marshall. As Roy’s unpublished correspondence with Marshall reveals, the author made several important decisions about what of Binsse’s work should be kept, changed, or deleted. In a letter of 13 October 1968, Roy admitted that her partnership with Binsse had become impossible. It had to end, even though her refusal to retain him had alienated her American publisher: “. . . it was I who refused Mr. Binsse—a friend of the firm, thus causing a certain irritation at the start.”<sup>4</sup> In another letter written a few months later (19 January 1969), Roy observed that her principled objection against



having Binsse, the company man, translate her books had strained her relationship with Harcourt, Brace: "As a matter of fact, I more or less felt a switch in their attitude ever since I fought so hard—two or is it three years ago?—to have my own translator . . ." (Marshall Papers). Despite Roy's emphatic rejection of Binsse, however, an examination of the changes which she both made and refused to make to his work shows a surprising affection for it<sup>5</sup>.

Why, over a decade after its first appearance, Gabrielle Roy lavished attention on a few touch-ups to *The Hidden Mountain* and not to Binsse's other works needs explaining. When her Canadian publisher, McClelland and Stewart, reprinted the book as part of the New Canadian Library series, they appended to it a fault-finding introduction by Mary Jane Edwards that upset Roy. Usually mild in the criticisms she made of others, Roy heatedly denounced in a letter to Marshall the psychoanalytical theory which Edwards had derived from a Quebec writer named Gérard Bessette as "not only a gross lack of intelligence, taste and judgment, but a sort of villainy" (3 January 1973). Edwards had also bluntly spelled out other deficiencies in the novel, including "the translator's poor choice of English equivalents of French phrases" (*The Hidden Mountain* 1974, n.p.). Roy's distress was understandable. After all, Edwards' assessment was not tucked away in some obscure academic journal but given a place in the book itself, thereby shaping every reader's opinion of it. Once the problem was brought to the attention of Roy's publisher, Jack McClelland, he expressed his indignation on her behalf and informed Malcolm Ross, who at that time was in charge of the introductions to the New Canadian Library series, that a change was in order:

Through a close friend of Gabrielle Roy's I have learned that she is privately very upset about the introduction to *The Hidden Mountain*. I just read it and I don't blame her. Most authors of my acquaintance would have stormed with outrage. Gabrielle Roy, as you know, is a quiet, modest reserved person and has chosen not to make an issue of it, but it is clear from her friend that she is upset and somewhat confused why a publishing house would put a book in the New Canadian Library and then proceed to destroy it.

I have read the introduction carefully, and in actual fact slightly over a third of the introduction is devoted to criticism of the translation and criticism of the work itself. The criticism is always somewhat qualified with praise but it's nonetheless bloody direct in terms of its references to other reviews and in my opinion at least highly subjective and highly questionable. . . . I hope you will agree that we are going to have to do something about this one. I suggest this not because Gabrielle is an old and dear friend but because the principle is wrong. I am unalterably opposed to interference with free critical opinion of our books. I am also opposed as a publisher to limiting the potential of a major work with a substantially unfavourable critical introduction. It makes no publishing sense. (*Selected Letters* 190-91).

In the end, Ross replaced the Edwards' preface with an appreciative essay of his own, one that greatly pleased Roy who told Joyce Marshall that it "compared to the other, as a star to the flicker of a cigarette butt" (undated Christmas card, Joyce Marshall Papers). As important to Roy as the introduction, however, was the chance McClelland gave her to improve upon Binsse's translation, thereby repairing her damaged reputation.

In making these emendations, Roy did not have to worry about offending Harry Binsse, now deceased. Oddly enough, however, she seemed to want to preserve the integrity of his voice. To her co-revisionist, Joyce Marshall, she wrote warningly, "Of course, I don't advise big changes, your style and Mr. Binsse's being quite different, each with its particular quality" (7 August 1973). Shortly afterwards, she thanked Marshall for help in introducing changes without altering too much the original: "I'm in debts of gratitude for such precious rightening up—yet without interfering at all, one might say, with poor dear old Binsse, only, it seems, purifying his work" (22 August 1973). This statement suggests that, in the main, Binsse's work was acceptable.

What also reveals Roy's attachment to Binsse's translation is that this "purifying" of his work was chiefly concerned with trivial details, such as the careless re-echoing of a word within a given line. Most of Roy's corrections or queries, like those of Joyce Marshall, are recorded on an undated set of correction sheets which, with their correspondence, are found in the Joyce Marshall Papers. In one such observation, for example, Roy complained to Marshall, "There were so many [of the word] 'each' in these 2 paragraphs. I had to eliminate some." The original line had begun, "Cured, happier than ever if only because his eyesight was as good as ever . . ." (*HM* 1962, 78); Roy deleted one of the "ever"s, with the improved sentence reading, "Cured, happier even than before . . ." (*HM* 1975, 78). She chafed at the recurrence of the word "soul" in the sentence, "Yes, such was the deep desire of every life, the longing of every soul: that someone should care enough about that soul once in a while to recall it to mind." (*HM* 1962, 123). She asks Marshall if "this [repeated word] can be deleted without grammatical fault . . . [for I am] finding the repetition tedious and wishing to somewhat quicken that sentence." Marshall's more polished phrase, "that someone should care enough to recall it to mind" (*HM* 1975, 123), solved the problem. Roy was also exasperated by the repetition of the less obtrusive word "as" in the fragment "keeping as close together as they could under a rain as fine as mist" (*HM* 1962 160). "Does it bother you?" she enquired of Marshall. "Can you easily improve this?" Marshall's notation "fine mist

of rain” written beneath Roy’s query made its way into the 1975 reprint, doing away with the redundant preposition.

A more substantive emendation was made to a Parisian word whose local meaning had eluded Binsse completely. At the very beginning of chapter 18, the artist Pierre asks for direction to the Louvre both from housewives fetching their milk and from people whom Binsse puzzlingly calls “the denizens of the gutter” (*HM* 1962, 127). In the original, Pierre had put his enquiries “aux ménagères qui allaient chercher leur lait, aux boueux” (153), this final word being later revised by Roy to read “éboueurs” (rev. ed. 153). As Roy explains to Marshall, she had missed Binsse’s “denizens of the gutter” error, but was at a loss to know what to substitute for it: “Here, Binsse made a mistake I hadn’t taken notice of until now. I used the word ‘boueux,’ meaning, in the Paris argot, garbage collectors. The French can be boueux, boueurs, or éboueurs. I hate ‘garbage collectors.’ Would something like this do: ‘get their milk or else those who gather the refuse’ or have you a better expression [?]” Marshall must have suggested the word “scavenger,” for Roy registered dissatisfaction with the proposal: “I don’t think *scavenger* would do. Somehow it sounds much too strong a word for the context. Of course I mean the people who pick up the garbage for the city, just that.” But then the word “garbage,” she hastens to add, would be “too common” in that scene, as if *déchets* of Paris were somehow more refined than other rubbish. In the final version, Roy got her way, with Pierre seeking directions to the Louvre from “men gathering the refuse” (rev. ed. 127).

So far, Roy’s requests for alterations in the English version of *La Montagne secrète*, for the most part minor, seem reasonable. Other quarrels with Binsse’s version of things are more perplexing, particularly since his wording is not only perfectly good English, but also a faithful rendering of the original. A case in point is the way in which he turned Roy’s “la souffrance de son compagnon lui devenait intolérable à voir” (78) into “his companion’s suffering had become intolerable to him” (*HM* 1962, 62). Roy objected to this translation, saying, “‘Intolerable’ is much more than I mean.” By way of improvement she ventured the following alternatives: “Perhaps a ‘trace or a hint of derision’ would do, or ‘his companion’s suffering had become to him (impossible) or (intolerable) to live with’” her use of Binsse’s word softened, as she seemed to think, by the addition of “to live with.” In the end she rejected all of these possibilities, including the re-implementation of the intolerable “intolerable,” crossing them out on her sheet of corrections. What Marshall finally adopted was Roy’s final suggestion—“his companion’s

suffering had become to him impossible to live with” (rev. ed. 62)—minus the reflexive use of “to him” which, as Marshall pointed out, “is not necessary to complete [the] thought in English.” The substitution of “impossible” for “intolerable” recalls the origin of the dispute, making one wonder what the fuss was about. How, after all, was Binsse’s “intolerable” so unacceptably “much more” (as Roy claimed) than her original “intolérable”?

Other faithful equivalents by Binsse are likewise scrapped. “Do you agree to delete ‘But it was subtle’[?],” Roy asked Marshall; in the revised version, the sentence is made to vanish altogether. Yet the fault could hardly have been with Binsse’s understanding of Roy’s “Mais c’était subtil” (154).

Similarly, Roy objects to the phrase “l’irréalité, le pathétique d’un songe” being rendered “the lack of reality, the pathos of a dream.” She preferred to substitute “‘elusive’ quality or elusive something else.” Roy’s “elusive quality of a dream,” arguably more elegant than Binsse’s “lack of reality,” was adopted by Marshall. But if his wording in this case was uninspired, is it not because the original “l’irréalité . . . d’un songe” was uninspired as well? It is hard to escape the feeling in this instance that Roy’s criticism of Binsse’s translation was indirectly a criticism of the original.

This theory seems especially plausible when applied to Roy’s censure of Binsse for his “flat” translation of the tricky latter part of the following line: “Voici que l’œuvre de Pierre était un peu comme avait été la montagne avant qu’il ne la contemplât; belle peut-être, mais qui le savait[,] qui la connaissait?” (112). Obviously attentive to the different antecedents of “le” and “la” in this rhetorical question, Binsse wrote, “but who was aware of that, who knew it?” (91). The ambiguity of “it” is a problem, since it is not clear whether the mountain or Pierre’s work is meant. The same ambiguity attaches to the pronoun “la” in the source text, since both of the preceding nouns “œuvre” and “montagne” are feminine. Roy agonized over this one, offering Marshall several options:

Could you work in something like this: “but who was aware of that, who cared,” even “who knew about it?” might be better. The French ends, “mais qui le savait, qui la connaissait?” Always the same difficulty of translating a sentence ending on a verb (in French giving it so much strength). [O]r again “but who was aware of that, who knew that it had come to life?”

I’m really stuck here. Please try your best.

In the end the revised version read more flatly than Binsse’s ever did, not to say imprecisely: “. . . but who knew about that, who cared?” (91). What the French text suggests is that Pierre’s artwork, like the mountain, lacked an

audience. A more accurate interpretation would dispose altogether of the gender-based pronouns for the sake of clarity: Pierre's work was "beautiful perhaps, but who knew that, who was even aware of his work?" When collated with the French, Binsse's line might seem slightly off, but "who cared" introduces an altogether new semantic twist.

The same dissatisfaction with the original wording is implied by Roy's handling of another excerpt. In the line, "More even than if one had done a wrong, committed some wicked act?" (143), she finds the words "wicked act" more than she meant, or "too strong." Yet the French basis for this "error" by Binsse is a sentence which reads, "Plus que si l'on eût fait le mal, commis quelque méchante action?" (173). Once again the comparative reader is at a loss to see how the meaning of the phrase "méchante action" was perverted by its exact echo in English. The solution in the revised English edition was to transpose the verb "committed" to the first part of the sentence and to delete the last half altogether: "more even than if one had committed a wrong" (143). This change suggests that, to both Roy and Marshall, Binsse's troublesome two words were completely inappropriate. On looking into the French edition published, slightly revised, three years later, one finds that the entire sentence was removed (*La Montagne secrète* rev. ed., 173). This small discovery confirms one's suspicion that Roy's "purifying" of Binsse's wording was in actual fact an oblique attempt to purify her own. Given her personality, Roy's reaction is understandable. The revision of any of her translated words inclined her to see certain inadequacies—both real and imagined—in the original text. Like James Thurber when told that his stories read better in translation, Roy too might have quipped: "I know. I tend to lose something in the original" (qtd. in Weschler 63). Over time, Roy became aware that she was an unhealthily compulsive revisionist. When offered the chance by Jack McClelland in 1978 to work on a new translation of *Bonheur d'occasion* with Alan Brown, she flatly refused, saying that she had "goose-flesh" at the very thought of having once more to confront the original: "Either I would want to write it all over again, which is impossible, or throw it in the furnace" (*Selected Letters of Jack McClelland* 220-21). Official revisions to the translation, as Roy painfully learned during the revamping of *The Hidden Mountain*, represented a final opportunity indirectly to tinker with the original product. For this reason she often ended by making in English a different statement altogether. In an interview with Donald Cameron, Roy gave an extremely illuminating account of how her fussing over the English version of a

story to be published in *Maclean's* ended in the creation of a wholly different story:

I had an experience years later when I had a short story translated for *Maclean's* magazine. The translation came to me, and I found it very awkward and rough, so I sat down just to straighten it up a bit. Having re-written the first two paragraphs I had to continue, because I had given it a slightly different orientation and I couldn't leave it alone. So I went on, rewriting the whole thing actually, and strangely enough the story became quite a different story. As I wrote it in French, it was bittersweet, neither completely sad nor completely gay, tending perhaps towards the melancholy. It became quite amusing in English, and quite lighter, almost frivolous. (*Conversations* 130)

In Roy's rewriting of Binsse, one sees the very same impulse to refine the original. Her fiddling with his English reveals a displeasure with the French words she herself had used to begin with.

On balance, however, Roy seemed generally pleased by Binsse's work in *The Hidden Mountain*. Indeed, despite her high regard for Joyce Marshall's judgement where good English was concerned, Roy did not give her *carte blanche* to alter Binsse's translation. In a letter of 22 August 1973, she wrote, "Thank you deeply, Joyce. I agree with very nearly all your suggestions. Strangely enough, I rather like: 'In a vast and lonely expanse he alone was to be seen.'" As the archives show, Marshall had wanted to replace "lonely" with "forlorn," presumably to avoid the distracting assonance of "lonely" and "alone," but Roy was charmed by Binsse's poetic touch: "The repetition there [of] lonely, alone pleases me" (22 August 1973). The French, by contrast, was spare: "En une immense et solitaire région il parut" (81). As Roy had noted to her sister, Binsse's style was indeed often more lyrical than the original.

The same penchant informs Roy's approval of her translator's literary diction. For example, the latter half of one particular sentence—"Pierre eut de nouveau le sentiment que la vie est trop brève, une goutte pour la soif inaltérable de qui l'aime"—was given a rhetorical flourish by Binsse: "a mere drop to quench the unslakable thirst of him who loves it" (155). Noting that Roy had marked the word "unslakable," Marshall proposed two alternatives, but the author apparently ignored both. On her own typed list of changes, Marshall questioned whether this was an oversight or not: "[page] 155—1<sup>st</sup> line—you marked but did not list—'quench the perpetual thirst' or 'slake the unquenchable thirst.'" In a letter Roy replied, "I outlined *unslakable* only because never having seen the word, I meant to look it up. I think I'll keep it" (22 August 1973). Whatever other reservations that Roy may have had with Binsse's work, she had a weakness for his elegant phrasing.

When reading a fluently translated work, most people rarely wonder about how well it preserves the original, the translator's voice being indistinguishable in their minds from the author's own. A similar equation of Binsse with Roy might have occurred, had not long-overlooked archival documents, like a lost piece of film footage, exposed their old quarrels, in the process illuminating both the texts and Roy herself. Behind what appeared to be an accomplished set of translations, we now see an uncertain author nervously picking at and unravelling their very fabric. Archival data also permits us to attribute a more complex motive to Roy's dismissal of Binsse than was suggested by her vague complaint about "tiraillements." Her endless tinkering with his translations often revealed an uneasiness with her own original, a sense that she had somehow overshot the mark. In the final analysis, the reconstruction of Roy's partnership with Harry Binsse is a cautionary tale, a reminder that translation is always a betrayal, not only of the source text, but also, as Roy's obsessive rewriting shows, of an imaginative vision that proves somehow too elusive for print.

#### NOTES

- 1 Mr. Claude Le Moine, the former archivist of the Gabrielle Roy Papers at the National Library of Canada in Ottawa, told me that he himself had been taught English by Harry Lorin Binsse.
- 2 "Gabrielle Roy," 1. All spelling errors in Binsse's typescript have been silently emended. This document is found in the Gabrielle Roy Papers, National Library of Canada. The copyright to all unpublished materials contained in these archives belongs to the Fonds Gabrielle Roy, to which I am indebted for permission to quote.
- 3 Joyce Marshall Papers, Bishop's University Archives, Bishop's University, Lennoxville, Quebec. I am grateful to Bishop's University Archives for allowing me to quote from this collection. See Everett.
- 4 Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are mine.
- 5 After completing this article, I came upon Sophie Montreuil's "Re(re)dire: *The Hidden Mountain* revu par Gabrielle Roy et Joyce Marshall," in *Gabrielle Roy Réécrite*, ed. Jane Everett and François Ricard, Editions Nota Bene: Québec, 2003. Working in happy ignorance of each other, Sophie Montreuil and I looked at very different aspects of the revision of *The Hidden Mountain*. Through selected excerpts from their correspondence, Sophie Montreuil argued that the authority to make changes in that novel had been constantly renegotiated by the two women. By contrast, I used the same correspondence as a gloss on the changes themselves, my goal being to discuss the significance of these changes in the larger context of Roy's love-hate relationship with Harry Binsse's translations of her work.

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