

GABRIELLE ROY PRIZE ACCEPTANCE and BARBARA GODARD TRIBUTE:

Gabrielle Roy Prize, ACQL Reception  
Congress of the Social Sciences and Humanities  
Concordia University, May 28, 2010

Thank you so much for this great honour. I accept it humbly also on behalf of my beloved and much missed colleague, Barbara Godard, whose dream child this book project is, and what a privilege it was to work on it with her for several daunting, inspiring years.

For those of you who haven't yet heard, I am sad to be the bearer of the sad news of Barbara Godard's passing away in Toronto on May 16, so very shortly before she could come here to accept this honour today, with me, in person.

While this book was originally conceived as a critical assessment and celebration of Canada's modernist women poets and their achievements and legacy, it has also become, now, a memorial tribute to Barbara herself, whose fierce, generous, enabling presence inspired several generations of writers, artists and critics to pay precise critical attention to the work of experimental writers and artists among us, and to theorize and contextualize their work in illuminating and further enabling ways.

Many of the writers and artists Barbara Godard championed were women, and many of the colleagues and graduate students she mentored and collaborated with so generously were also women. And so it is fitting that her career should end with the Gabrielle Roy Prize from the forward-thinking, culturally activist Association for Canadian and Quebec Literatures – an organization she was strongly involved with from its inception in 1974 – for our collaborative anthology, *Wider Boundaries of Daring: The Modernist Impulse in Canadian Women's Poetry*, which champions Canadian women's experimental modernist writing and cultural work in 16 insightful critical essays, written by Canada's best established and emerging feminist critics.

This prize clearly belongs to these contributors as well as the editors, and I would like to name them here: Ann Martin, Christine Kim, Sandra Djwa, Bina Toledo Freiwald, Kathy Mezei, Marilyn J. Rose, Lianne Moyes, Pamela McCallum, Peggy Lynn Kelly, Pauline Butling, Candida Rifkind, Sara Jamieson, Anne Quema, Miriam Nichols, Katherine Quinsey and Elena Basile.

And thank you also to the editors at Wilfrid Laurier University Press, who were so instrumental in transforming our essay collection into a beautiful book, especially Lisa Quinn and Brian Henderson.

And now, I am most honoured to give a short tribute in memory of Barbara Godard, on behalf of ACQL, and thank you, Wendy and Catherine, for the invitation to do so.

Barbara Thompson Godard, Professor Emerita, Avie Bennett Historica Chair in Canadian Literature and Professor of English, French, Social and Political Thought and Women's Studies at York University, was a much loved and admired critic, editor, translator, teacher, and mentor to hundreds of graduate students, colleagues, artists, writers and friends. She died peacefully two weeks ago, in the loving company of her family. She was 69 years old.

Barbara was educated at the Universities of Toronto and Montreal, and Bordeaux, in France, where she attended seminars by Lucien Goldmann and Roland Barthes. She began teaching at York University in 1971 and assumed a tenure track position in the department of English in 1976. She quickly acquired a national and international reputation as a sharp, encyclopedic thinker, with a keen eye for experimental and liberatory strategies, and talent for creative interventions in and across a broad range of theories and disciplines, including post-structuralism and semiotics, avant-garde textual practices, women's writing and visual art, First

Nations poetry and theatre, translation studies, archives, memorials, and the history and changing politics of cultural production.

Barbara held a Research position with ACQL in its early years, and Sandra Djwa, the first Chair, remembers what formidable strength she brought to the inaugural national conference in 1974 as energetic, bilingual, extensively knowledgeable on-site manager, and how influential she was, inheriting the Chairship along with Kathy Mezei the following year, in setting the research directions and agenda of ACQL for many years to come.

Barbara Godard was centrally involved in creating a national intercultural women's research and writing network in Canada during the formative years of the feminist movement. In 1981, she hosted the ground-breaking Dialogue Conference/Colloque Dialogue at York University, initiating the prolific and intensely collaborative work of Canadian women scholars and writers of the past three decades.

Barbara's bilingual anthology, *Gynocritics: Feminist Approaches to Canadian and Quebec Women's Writing*, was published in 1987 and received the Gabrielle Roy Prize for that year – and it is marvelous, really, that her extensive work in so many areas since then, including this one, has come full circle, in receiving this prize for the second time here today.

Barbara Godard has received numerous other awards and honours during her illustrious career, including the Association of Canadian Studies Award of Merit and the Vinay and Darbelnet Prize of the Canadian Association of Translation Studies.

It is of course impossible to do justice to Barbara Godard's extensive CV in this context, which includes a formidable 8 books, 80 book chapters, over a hundred articles and catalogue entries, and editorial involvement in more than 20 journals! There are many other people more

qualified than I to champion these many achievements, and you will be seeing numerous tributes to her extraordinary work appearing in the next while.

Instead, I would like to end this short appreciation by reading two poems. The first is a poem by Dorothy Livesay, which forms the visionary and elegaic frontispiece and title source of *Wider Boundaries of Daring*. This poem served as iconic inspiration during the long years of the anthology's making, and also speaks presciently to the present moment, in remembrance of Barbara Godard's heroic, often radically under-supported visionary cultural labours:

*We Are Alone by Dorothy Livesay*

We are alone, who strove to be  
Together in the high sun's weather.

We are bereft, as broods a tree  
Whose leaves the river sucks forever.

We are as clouds, which merge and vanish  
Leaving breathless the dead horizon –

We are as comrades, whose handshake only  
Comes rare as leap-year and mistletoe morning.

Each one ploughing a one [wo]man clearing  
Neither one alive to see

In wider boundaries of daring  
What the recompense might be.

The second poem was written by me, and I first read it at the Barbara Godard Symposium in Toronto last December. I wish to add here, on a personal note, how difficult it is to realize that our much loved and admired friend, mentor and colleague Barbara is no longer with us, the information sinks in only a little at a time, she will be so greatly missed, with her keen-sighted

eyes, fierce generous heart, formidable mind and radiant smile, though I think we can all agree, with gratitude, that she has left her mark indelibly among us.

In this life

*for Barbara Thompson Godard*

In another life she lifts her  
slender arms up, up, and  
flies toward the stars, long  
silver hair streaming behind  
her, diamonds glittering  
across the blue black sky.

A nightingale cries.  
In this life nightingales cry  
all night long in the  
rose trees, piercing the  
withered bushes with their  
song, their longing, urging  
the spurt of new sap, buds,  
blossoms, blush, spring.

In this life she is not so  
much warrior as grandmother,  
goddess, sister, queen,  
smiling benignly over  
her sleeping garden,  
the trembling hibiscus,  
lilacs, breathing,  
amaryllis, alyssum,  
clematis, magnolia, white  
petals wavering, moonlit,  
in the slight breeze.  
Scent of hydrangea  
wafts through the windows  
of her many mansions,  
temperate, tropical,  
igniting the dreams  
of her thousand children,  
asleep, inflaming them  
with passion, poetry, love.

In this life, she is not so much  
warrior as queen, there is  
not a war on, neither between  
rich and poor, women and men,  
light and dark, beige and brown,  
there is more a swirling,  
whirling, unfurling  
of the dream of beauty  
and laughter, there is more  
the dance of yin and yang,  
as the children wake up,  
one by one by one by one,  
a spiraling, a slow unfolding  
of what is yet to come,  
the hopes of the grandmothers  
bearing astonishing delicious  
fruit, bright blossoms,  
new seeds –

In that other life she is  
warrior as well as queen,  
there is a war on, there are  
many wars on. She sails  
through the ranks of her  
numerous armies, her women  
warriors, handing them canvasses,  
paintbrushes, pens, dancing  
shoes, handing us tactics,  
and arguments, and inspirations,  
handing us blueprints  
of that other life, the one  
we are moving toward,  
together, in whose garden  
we are sleeping, perfectly,  
and coming awake