

JOURNAL OF EASTERN
TOWNSHIPS STUDIES

REVUE D'ÉTUDES DES
CANTONS DE L'EST



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UN MOT SUR RALPH GUSTAFSON ET CE NUMÉRO SPÉCIAL DE LA *RECE*

Né, élevé et en grande partie éduqué dans les Cantons de l'Est (à Sherbrooke et à l'Université Bishop's) avant la Grande dépression, et revenu passer à North Hatley les dernières années de sa vie (1963–1995), Ralph Gustafson fut le témoin de cette totale transformation de la société et de la vie québécoises. Poète de grand talent, il ressentit, expérimenta et écrivit sur sa terre natale. Il était également, de nombreuses références dans ces articles l'attestent, un érudit, un homme du monde dont les longs séjours à New York, Oxford et Londres lui permirent d'observer, dans une perspective nouvelle, la culture et la société qu'il désirait pour son pays.

Ce numéro spécial de *RECE* célèbre et analyse l'oeuvre de Gustafson. Il suggère des interprétations originales : ses tentatives infructueuses pour écrire un roman; sa vie, et la vision de Betty, sa femme de longues années; ses affinités avec le Sherbrookoïse Alfred DesRochers. Tous les articles apportent une lumière nouvelle sur son processus de création. Bien que Gustafson soit peu étudié en tant qu'écrivain québécois, nous espérons que ce numéro saura raviver l'intérêt pour ses écrits, et pousser plus loin l'analyse de cette oeuvre qui amena *son* langage et *sa* poésie à devenir partie intégrante de *notre* héritage collectif.

— Jonathan Rittenhouse



“TAKE/THAT GREEN STICK!”

A TRIBUTE TO RALPH

Wendy Robbins

University of New Brunswick

Fredericton

This special issue of JETS/RECE is all about Ralph Gustafson (1909–1995) and the counterpointed vision of strife and compassion, of discord and harmony, to which he gave voice and shape. His epiphanic stories, critical musings, and crafty poems, written over the course of a long, productive, and distinguished life, span our century. Ralph’s writing, writing about Ralph, writing about Ralph’s writing, it’s all here... tongue twister, table of contents, and tribute.

This volume has 86 years; this volume yokes mourning and mourning; this volume notes “things past, or passing, or to come”; this volume is local and global. This volume is love. Love of Ralph and Ralph’s love. Love of nature, of art, and, sometimes, of humanity’s goodness—an achievement, a grace, not a given.

What this issue commemorates is not Ralph’s death, peacefully at home, at a ripe old age, nursed by his beloved Betty. Rather, it commemorates his life and his lasting art. Writing about death (and life) a long time ago, in *Sift in an Hourglass* (1966), Ralph proposed that we “Cross him! Take/That green stick!” In the poem, the stick is easily understood as a penis, signifying spiritual union in sexual love. The penis is also a metaphorical pen (or is it the other way around?). Such “pithy paradox” would no doubt please the Old Master.

In this special collection are memories, new critical perceptions, and poems—about, for, and actually even by Ralph (his poems, another’s translations). The memories are not solemn or solidified; they form a syncopated, sincere tribute to a writer whose legacy of intricate, enduring poems repays the effort of “an elsewhere/Crazy, nearer look.”

At this time when we, in Canada, are searching to articulate and preserve a sense of country, Ralph’s poems of place and his eloquent definitions of Canadian identity should become required reading. “In the Yukon,” “Wednesday at North Hatley”—the best of Ralph Gustafson equals the best of Canadian literature. “In the Yukon,” the

last of his *Rocky Mountain Poems* (1960), a poem about Canadian identity, starts and ends with the land, “the north/Going to what no man can hold hard in mind, / The dredge of that gravity, being without experience.” “Wednesday at North Hatley,” from *Corners in the Glass* (1977), yokes together, in quintessentially Canadian fashion, strength and gentleness, both in the white landscape of winter and in the spirit of the lone walker. “Softly the snow/Falls. Chance is against him./But softly the snow falls.” Ralph glossed this in an interview: “What you’ve got is a sense of challenge which requires a certain amount of fortitude... but also a gentleness. My memories of winter are of a snowfall rather than a blizzard. I suppose you subsume that and you express it in your poetry as your Canada.” In his humility, gentleness, and unsung greatness, Ralph Gustafson is a Canadian original—jagged, allusive, a Tom Thomson of text.

In the preface to his famous and much reprinted *Penguin Book of Canadian Verse*, Ralph, a long time ago, composed a list of objective correlatives and attitudes which, he felt, distinguished us from both the U.K. and the U.S.A.:

“What is Canadian? The specifics of contemporary Canadian poetry are these:

The sea, primal, challenging, present.
 Diving, literal diving, diving back to; an astounding
 engagement with water dived into,
 Green: as an amazing engagement: green blood, green
 air, green out of the white of winter.
 Hills, despite the prairies, granite and the antagonist,
 the Laurentian Shield.
 A hatred of cruelty, of cruelty to cruelty.
 Women make men.
 The eye: symbol and active agent.
 Concern with fish symbolic; not religion.
 War is not a natural condition.
 A laughter toward tourists.
 Little longing for diviner regions.
 (Only one Mountie—in a satire; one snowshoe.)”

Here, now, is a quick sketch of the territory in front of you in this mammoth issue of JETS/RECE. First, you will find two articles setting Ralph’s work in context—one comparing him with a Québécois counterpart, Alfred DesRochers, and the other pointing to those of Ralph’s poems which seem most likely canonical. Next comes a verbal collage, pieced together from the contributions of more than two dozen people from across Canada and even abroad—relatives, friends,

academic colleagues, writers—who responded to a request for very succinct expressions of what they will remember and cherish most about Ralph. This is followed by an interview with Betty Gustafson, who steps forward as more than muse while shedding light on her fabled hearth and home and on Ralph's poetic process. The final piece is a compelling introduction to Ralph's early, unpublished, regional novel, "No Music in the Nightingale," which owes much to turn-of-the-last-century Townships' mores and to D.H. Lawrence's colliers, yet remains uncannily in tune with ethical and ecological concerns of the 1990s. The specially chosen photographs add a suitably visual element to this keepsake publication which highlights a richly sensuous poet and verbal musician who was, in the beginning, son of a pianist and a photographer.

Looking to the future, much remains to be done to fully understand and assess Ralph's work in all genres. What may be anticipated? Surely a biography, a new critical evaluation of his place in world literature in English and in twentieth-century Canadian literature, and a further collection of his letters. If you have letters in your possession, or know the whereabouts of correspondence that has historical, autobiographical, or literary interest, please contact either Betty Gustafson or me.

Jonathan, Betty, and I have all been deeply touched by the personal notes and messages that accompanied many of the submissions to this special issue, and we wish to thank you all. What is as clear as a lake even now is Ralph's place, indelible, in the heart of the Townships and of his myriad dear friends, near and far.

POÉSIE, SOURCE DE VIE : ALFRED DESROCHERS ET RALPH GUSTAFSON

Patricia Godbout
Université de Sherbrooke

Les paysans, sentant fléchir leur torse fort,
S'en reviennent des champs, dans l'ombre de l'Orford
—*Alfred DesRochers*

And the wind shall be sickly in Annapolis,
On the Massawippi water: truth
Shall be sour on the mouth of poets
And the lover's mouth
—*Ralph Gustafson*

Dans un numéro de la revue de traduction poétique *Ellipse* consacré à la poésie de Ralph Gustafson et d'Alphonse Piché, le poète et traducteur D.G. Jones conclut son avant-propos en citant deux vers de Wallace Stevens qui illustrent, selon lui, la similitude entre ces deux poètes :

Natives of poverty, children of malheur,
The gaiety of language is our seigneur.¹

Ces deux vers peuvent également mettre en lumière ce qui unit Gustafson et un autre poète né, comme lui, dans les Cantons de l'Est autour de 1900, Alfred DesRochers. Voilà en effet deux poètes appartenant à une même génération littéraire et à un même coin de pays, qui ont en commun un grand amour de la langue et de la poésie. «Ma joie ou ma douleur chante le paysage»,² écrit l'un, tandis qu'on peut lire sous la plume de l'autre : «Poetry is the saving grace».³

Pour connaître la vie d'Alfred DesRochers (1901–1978), il faut lire l'excellente introduction rédigée par Richard Giguère dans son édition critique d'*À l'ombre de l'Orford* et de *L'Offrande aux vierges folles*, parue dans la très belle collection de la Bibliothèque du

Nouveau Monde (1993), dont je reprendrai ici les grandes lignes. Alfred DesRochers est né dans le rang 6 de Saint-Élie-d'Orford, dans une famille déjà nombreuse. Son père, Honorius Desrochers, était un homme de chantier qui passa les deux tiers de sa vie dans les bois. Il mourut en 1913, à l'âge de 45 ans, alors que son fils Alfred n'avait pas encore célébré son douzième anniversaire de naissance. L'année suivante, sa mère, Zéphirine Marcotte, elle-même née au Rhode Island, émigre avec ses enfants à Manchester, au New Hampshire, mais elle y restera moins d'un an. Au retour, Alfred, qui avait fréquenté durant quelques années l'école de rang de Saint-Élie, doit commencer à travailler pour contribuer au gagne-pain familial. Il ne pourra reprendre ses études qu'en 1918 à Trois-Rivières, où il sera pendant trois ans l'élève des Franciscains du Collège séraphique. C'est là qu'il commence à faire des vers, qu'il envoie à sa soeur Angéline. L'été, le jeune Alfred est tour à tour ouvrier dans une usine de munitions, une manufacture de produits textiles et une scierie.

DE L'ORFORD À OXFORD

Ralph Gustafson (1909–1995) est né à Lime Ridge, près de Marbleton. Son père, Carl Otto Gustafson, était un immigrant suédois venu rejoindre son frère, dynamiteur à l'emploi de la Dominion Lime Kiln, installé depuis peu dans cette région qui lui rappelait sa Suède natale. Au moment de la naissance de Ralph, dans la maison de ses grands-parents maternels, sa famille habite Sherbrooke, au-dessus du studio de photographie de son père, rue Wellington Nord.

Très tôt, Ralph Gustafson fait preuve d'une inclination naturelle pour la poésie, le dessin et la musique. Il écrit son premier poème à l'âge de huit ans et apprend à jouer du piano de façon largement autodidacte. À quatorze ans, il entreprend l'écriture d'un roman resté inachevé, *Westward Ho, with Columbus!* Bien qu'il soit lui aussi d'origine modeste, Ralph Gustafson connaît un parcours académique beaucoup plus suivi que celui d'Alfred DesRochers. Après avoir fréquenté la *Sherbrooke High School*, il s'inscrit en effet à l'Université Bishop's, dont il ressortira diplômé en littérature anglaise en 1930, à l'âge de vingt-et-un ans, et armé d'une bourse d'études lui permettant de fréquenter la très prestigieuse Université d'Oxford, où il s'empressera de se rendre.

Entre-temps, la famille Gustafson s'est installée au 18 de la rue Wolfe, à Sherbrooke (aujourd'hui 252, rue Belvédère Nord, juste avant le pont Cabana qui enjambe la rivière Magog). Le jeune poète en devenir était sensible aux beautés naturelles de ce site, dont il

parlera beaucoup plus tard dans un article intitulé «Some Literary Reminiscences of the Eastern Townships», non sans une pointe d'ironie par laquelle il nous rappelle que la source première d'expression de tout écrivain n'est pas tant le monde qui l'entoure que les livres qu'il a lus :

not a thirtieth of a mile from my boyhood home on Wolfe Street is the gorge through which the Magog River roars. Its cliff is the Lovers' Leap. Below the Leap is the canyon's whirlpool. Obviously, one can get carried away. Legend, fact, and beauty are everywhere for the writer in the Eastern Townships; drama and the scene to put it in. I don't know why I wrote about Christopher Columbus.⁴

À deux pas de là, au 22 de la rue Georges, emménage la famille Desrochers en 1923 (aujourd'hui 842, rue George). Cette même année, le jeune Alfred publie ses premiers poèmes dans le quotidien *La Tribune*. Comme il l'écrivit lui-même beaucoup plus tard, il était alors «commis-quincaillier de jour, *baudelairien et rimbaldiste* de nuit». ⁵ En 1925, il épouse Rose-Alma Brault, de Rock Forest, avec qui il s'installe au 20 de la rue Georges. À cette époque, il est à l'emploi de *La Tribune*, où il se fait la main comme chroniqueur littéraire et musical, traducteur, puis rédacteur sportif et directeur des correspondants.

Ainsi, pendant une certaine période au cours des années vingt, Gustafson et DesRochers ont habité côte à côte, dans un quartier qui restera majoritairement anglais jusqu'en 1940, bien que la ville dans son ensemble soit à majorité française depuis la fin du XIX^e siècle. C'est d'ailleurs dans la rue qu'ils ont appris les rudiments de «l'autre langue», avant de parfaire leurs connaissances auprès des maîtres d'école et des grands auteurs.

UNE GÉNÉRATION DE TRANSITION

Écrivains d'après la Première Guerre mondiale, DesRochers et Gustafson appartiennent, de l'avis même de DesRochers, à «une génération de transition». ⁶ La fin des années vingt débouche en effet sur une crise économique sans précédent qui accélère l'effritement des valeurs fondamentales du libéralisme classique et dont personne ne ressort indemne. Ce contexte de crise inspire à certains écrivains des oeuvres à caractère social qui témoignent de la misère des ouvriers et des chômeurs urbains. C'est le cas notamment de Jean Narrache (Émile Coderre), avec qui Alfred DesRochers a entretenu une longue correspondance littéraire. En poésie canadienne-anglaise, on trouvera entre autres chez F.R. Scott, premier traducteur d'Émile

Coderre, une critique aux accents souvent satiriques d'un système fondé sur l'illusion d'une ascension sociale accessible à tous.

Pour Clément Marchand, auteur des *Soirs rouges*, les ouvriers nouvellement arrivés à Montréal sont «des rois déchus»,⁷ la grande ville ayant détruit leur fierté et leur courage ancestraux. Cette même idée, on la retrouve chez DesRochers, qui se dit lui-même «fils déchu de race surhumaine»⁸ désireux de fuir la cité «dont le bruit [l']importune».⁹ Le poète est habité par une conscience aiguë d'être témoin de la fin de la société traditionnaliste canadienne-française telle que ses pères l'avaient connue et telle qu'ils avaient tâché de la lui transmettre. «Alfred DesRochers, écrit Jack Warwick, fut le premier écrivain à reconnaître en toute lucidité que le valeureux héros de la forêt n'était qu'un anachronisme».¹⁰ Si on peut encore lire sous la plume de Robert Choquette en 1925 : «J'ai la vigueur de mes aïeux»,¹¹ le poème liminaire d'*À l'ombre de l'Orford*, paru à peine quelques années plus tard, affirme sans ambages :

Par nos ans sans vigueur, je suis comme le hêtre
Dont la sève a tari sans qu'il soit dépouillé,
Et c'est de désirs morts que je suis enfeuillé,
Quand je rêve d'aller comme allait mon ancêtre;¹²

Il est difficile de ne pas voir dans cette nostalgie des ancêtres l'écho des valeurs de survivance canadienne-française si chères à Lionel Groulx. Mais alors que le chanoine effectue une reconstruction épique de l'Histoire dans laquelle le héros est le peuple, investi d'une mission de préservation de la culture française,¹³ la poésie de DesRochers, elle, est la voix d'un individu qui ne peut plus se définir par sa seule appartenance à la lignée et qui témoigne d'une douloureuse difficulté d'adéquation au monde.

Dans des vers de facture classique, DesRochers parle de choses aussi peu parnassiennes que la cueillette des navets et des pommes de terre. «Il surmonte, si l'on peut dire, son immense culture, écrit André Vachon, et trouve le courage de regarder, puis de nommer, l'un après l'autre, les êtres et les choses qui l'entourent.»¹⁴ Dans une lettre à DesRochers qui lui avait soumis un de ses poèmes, Émile Coderre lui conseille justement de cultiver cette voix personnelle : «Oui, vous savez être classique! lui écrit-il, mais continuez à ne pas l'être trop et à être ce que vous êtes : original, vivant, plein d'idées neuves et d'imagination!»¹⁵

DesRochers manifeste souvent dans sa poésie des talents de peintre. Nombre de ses sonnets sont de véritables tableaux où le poète déploie une palette mélancolique :

L'argile retournée, au bas de la colline,
 Parmi le chaume étend ses nuances tabac,
 Et la forêt, sur qui le jour vernal tomba,
 Entremêle à ce brun des teintes de sanguine.¹⁶

Par sa poésie, DesRochers relie ses aspirations intellectuelles à son héritage de vie pionnière. Ce fut sans doute la manière qui s'offrait à lui de poursuivre les errances des coureurs de bois, «[c]hasseurs, trappeurs, scieurs de long, flotteurs de cages,/Marchands aventuriers ou travailleurs à gages»¹⁷ qui peuplaient ses rêves.

LES ÉCRIVAINS DE L'EST

Alfred DesRochers a publié l'essentiel de son oeuvre poétique en l'espace de deux ans, à la fin des années vingt. Son premier recueil, *L'Offrande aux vierges folles*, est en effet paru en 1928 et le second, *À l'ombre de l'Orford*, l'année suivante.¹⁸ C'est donc dire que la création poétique forte et originale de cet écrivain des Cantons de l'Est s'est concentrée sur une période relativement courte, durant laquelle il ne se contenta d'ailleurs pas de s'occuper de sa seule production littéraire. Durant les années vingt et trente, DesRochers était l'animateur et le rassembleur d'un groupe d'écrivains (Jovette Bernier, Éva Sénécal et bien d'autres) constituant un véritable mouvement littéraire dont la réputation dépassa vite les frontières de la région.¹⁹ Ces «écrivains de l'Est» entretenaient aussi des liens étroits avec d'autres écrivains de l'époque, comme Robert Choquette, Alice Lemieux, Clément Marchand et Émile Coderre.

Il n'est pas inutile de rappeler que DesRochers était également grand lecteur de littérature de langue anglaise et traducteur. Ayant fait ses premières armes dès 1925 au quotidien sherbrookoise *La Tribune*, il ira plus tard exercer cette profession au Parlement du Canada en 1944, de même qu'au Service français de la Presse Canadienne, à Montréal, en 1953. Dans sa bibliothèque très bien garnie, se côtoyaient ouvrages littéraires français et canadiens-français, dictionnaires, livres sur la traduction, et quantité d'oeuvres littéraires britanniques, américaines et canadiennes-anglaises, parmi lesquelles figurait *Alfred the Great: A Poetic Drama* de Ralph Gustafson.²⁰ Parlant des principaux courants littéraires qui avaient exercé une influence sur lui à ses débuts, DesRochers écrit dans un court texte paru en 1961 : «Le surréalisme français et l'imagisme américain : Amy Lowell, Ezra Pound, *H.D.* (Hilda Doolittle), Carlos William, c'est l'air du temps de ma jeunesse.»²¹

Il va sans dire que les imagistes américains occupaient aussi une

place de choix sur les rayons de la bibliothèque personnelle de Ralph Gustafson, qui connaissait en outre la littérature française d'ici et d'ailleurs et avait lu DesRochers, dont il traduisit d'ailleurs trois poèmes.²² Dans «Some Literary Reminiscences of the Eastern Townships», Gustafson cite un poème de Frank Oliver Call, qui avait été son maître à l'Université Bishop's, avant de s'exclamer : «How very close this sonnet is to those of Alfred Desrochers; how very close the love of the Quebec land is to both English-speaking and French-speaking Canadians!»²³ On pourrait tout aussi bien faire un rapprochement entre les sonnets d'*À l'ombre de l'Orford* et certains poèmes composant les deux premiers recueils de Gustafson lui-même, *Flight into Darkness* (1944) et *Rivers among Rocks* (1960).²⁴ Un poème comme «Quebec Winterscene», par exemple, témoigne de l'attachement profond de Gustafson pour le coin de pays qui le vit naître et grandir, trait qu'il partage certainement avec DesRochers :

And the snow trodden round the yard,
Soiled with boots and fetched cordwood,
Straw ravelled near the barn —
The long snow of the fourfold land.²⁵

«All great writing springs out of the writer's own, intimate, experienced, loved backyard.»²⁶ C'est en connaissance de cause que Gustafson écrivit ces lignes en 1981, lui qui avait parcouru le monde et vécu à l'étranger pendant plus de trente ans, avant de revenir vivre dans les Cantons de l'Est et d'y cultiver son propre jardin.

Comme le raconte Dermot McCarthy dans son livre *A Poetics of Place. The Poetry of Ralph Gustafson*,²⁷ à son arrivée en Angleterre en 1930, Gustafson est un jeune maître ès arts en littérature anglaise, formé à l'école romantico-victorienne, qui veut devenir poète. Il ne connaît pas encore la nouvelle poésie américaine et britannique des années vingt, qui s'insurge contre le romantisme, et que le groupe montréalais du *McGill Fortnightly Review* a contribué à importer chez nous, afin de supplanter une tradition poétique victorienne «dégénérée», aux relents de colonialisme, perçue comme étant hostile à la liberté créatrice. C'est donc loin de la scène littéraire canadienne que Gustafson découvrira Ezra Pound et les autres tenants de l'imagisme, esthétique mettant l'accent sur la force de l'image poétique et sur la musicalité du vers davantage que sur sa rigueur métrique. Il sera tout particulièrement touché par la remarquable habileté de William Carlos Williams à dépeindre avec fraîcheur et compassion les petites choses de la vie.

ENTRE LONDRES ET NEW YORK

Après avoir complété ses études à Oxford, Gustafson revient au pays en 1935 pour enseigner à Brockville, mais au bout d'un an, il remet le cap sur Londres, où il demeure jusqu'à l'éclatement de la Deuxième Guerre mondiale. En 1940, Gustafson est à New York, à l'emploi des *British Information Service*; son travail consiste à câbler à Londres, tous les soirs, un compte rendu de la presse américaine à l'intention du cabinet britannique. En outre, depuis un certain temps déjà, il collige des textes de poésie canadienne-anglaise en vue de constituer une anthologie qui témoigne de la richesse de la poésie moderne. On le met alors en contact avec Allen Lane, fondateur de la maison d'édition Penguin, qui songe justement à publier une compilation de poèmes d'auteurs canadiens pour les soldats des forces armées. Allen confie aussitôt le travail éditorial à Gustafson : en 1942, paraît la *Pelican Anthology of Canadian Poetry*, anthologie qui connaîtra de nombreuses rééditions au cours des décennies suivantes.

Dans la préface de la première édition, Gustafson donne les critères qui ont servi au choix de chaque poème : «If it deepened experience, caught the heart and mind with beauty [...]—and was technically exciting—in it went.»²⁸ Rendre notre expérience du monde plus prégnante, permettre à la beauté de pénétrer notre cœur et notre esprit au moyen de techniques d'écriture poétique stimulantes : voilà qui résume bien les hautes exigences que Gustafson s'est imposées à lui-même comme poète. «...[T]o shape this heterogeneous world of experience so that, in its existence of harmony and order, the poem be praise though what it communicate is suffering»,²⁹ telle est, selon lui, la tâche dévolue au poète. Sa poésie témoigne en effet de cette présence amoureuse au monde et d'une célébration éclairée de sa beauté, avec tout ce qu'il comporte de souffrance et de mort :

So we cut branches two
Days ago. Take great precautions.
Go carefully through a door. Stand
Among deathbeds as though among heroes,
Pausing in winter along windy corridors
With the knowledge ahead of us, to wrap our throats.³⁰

Du point de vue formel, Gustafson évite la facilité qu'on associe souvent à la poésie contemporaine. Il ciselle ses poèmes, remarquables par leur concision, leur rythme et leur musicalité : «The music a poem makes, écrit-il, contains more of the poem's meaning than its logic and syntax.»³¹

En 1963, Gustafson devient professeur de littérature anglaise à l'Université Bishop's et s'installe à North Hatley, où il passera les trente dernières années de sa vie, aux côtés de sa femme Betty. Auteur très prolifique, il a publié au total une trentaine d'ouvrages, dont deux recueils de nouvelles et un de textes de prose sur la littérature et la musique.

Gustafson et DesRochers font ainsi partie tous deux d'une génération arrivée à l'âge adulte à l'orée de la Deuxième Guerre mondiale, au moment où le siècle vivait ses plus grands bouleversements. Bien qu'issus de cultures différentes, ils avaient un grand nombre de références culturelles communes, en raison sans doute de leur ouverture à la culture de l'autre groupe avec lequel ils avaient grandi. Leur oeuvre témoigne d'un grand attachement aux Cantons de l'Est, leur région natale. Chez DesRochers, cet amour est teinté de la conscience d'un pays qui, comme l'explique André Vachon, «a *refoulé*, depuis le temps des grands-parents, et au-delà, de ces demi-dieux explorateurs, colonisateurs, soldats d'empire dont parlaient l'Histoire et la Géographie de l'école primaire». ³² L'oeuvre de Gustafson se caractérise, quant à elle, par sa grande aptitude à saisir l'essence poétique d'un lieu, qu'il s'agisse de la Place Saint-Marc, à Venise, ou des bords enneigés du lac Massawippi.

ABSTRACT

Both natives of the Eastern Townships, poets Alfred DesRochers and Ralph Gustafson were clear-sighted observers of the profound changes that shook the twentieth century. During the twenties, their homes were in the same Sherbrooke neighbourhood, where French and English families lived side by side. Both read the literature of the "other" language with keen interest.

DesRochers (1901–1978) knew he was witnessing the end of traditional French-Canadian society, a knowledge evidenced in his poetry, imbued with his love of the Orford region. Gustafson (1909–1995), who spent some thirty years outside the country, was also deeply sensitive to the beauty of his corner of the world and expressed its poetic essence in his abundant, highly formal oeuvre.

NOTES

- 1 D.G. Jones, «Foreword», *Ellipse*, n° 47 (1992), p. 7.
- 2 Alfred DesRochers, *À l'ombre de l'Orford. L'Offrande aux vierges folles*, Montréal, PUM, Coll. «Bibliothèque du Nouveau Monde», p. 156.
- 3 Ralph Gustafson, *Plumets and Other Partialities*, Victoria, Sono Nis Press, 1987, p. 16.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 132.
- 5 A. DesRochers, «La tentation surréaliste», *Liberté*, n°s 15–16 (mai–août 1961), p. 627.
- 6 A. DesRochers, *Paragraphes*, Montréal, Albert-Lévesque, 1931, p. 173.
- 7 Clément Marchand, *Les Soirs rouges*, Trois-Rivières, Éd. du Bien public, 1947, p. 28.
- 8 A. DesRochers, *À l'ombre de l'Orford...*, p. 155.
- 9 *Ibid.*, p. 139.
- 10 Jack Warwick, *L'Appel du Nord dans la littérature canadienne-française*, Montréal, HMH, coll. «Constantes», 1972, p. 120.
- 11 Robert Choquette, *À travers les vents*, Montréal, Éd. Édouard Garand, 1925, p. 47.
- 12 A. DesRochers, *À l'ombre de l'Orford...*, p. 156.
- 13 Voir à ce sujet l'analyse très éclairante du discours groulxiste faite par Pierre Popovic dans *La contradiction du poème. Poésie et discours social au Québec de 1948 à 1953*, Candiac, Éditions Balzac, 1992, p. 55–65.
- 14 André Vachon, «Gaston Miron, ou l'invention de la substance», dans Gaston Miron, *L'Homme rapaillé*, Montréal, PUM, «Prix de la revue *Études françaises*», 1970, p. 137.
- 15 A. DesRochers, *À l'ombre de l'Orford...*, p. 88.
- 16 *Ibid.*, p. 187.
- 17 *Ibid.*, p. 155.
- 18 Deux autres recueils de moindre portée littéraire sont parus dans les années soixante : il s'agit du *Retour de Titus* (1963) et des *Élégies pour l'épouse en-allée* (1967).
- 19 Pour une étude approfondie de ce mouvement, consulter J. Bonenfant *et al.*, *À l'ombre de DesRochers. Le mouvement littéraire des Cantons de l'Est 1925–1950*, La Tribune/Éditions de l'Université de Sherbrooke, 1985.
- 20 Livre paru à Londres en 1937. On peut consulter l'inventaire de la bibliothèque d'Alfred DesRochers dans *À l'ombre de DesRochers...*, p. 195–257.
- 21 A. DesRochers, «La tentation surréaliste», *Liberté*, n°s 15–16 (mai–août 1961), p. 627.

- 22 Il s'agit des poèmes «La boucherie» («The Butchering»), «Le dérochage» («Stoning Land») et «L'appel au souvenir» («Appeal to Remembrance») parus dans l'anthologie préparée par John Glassco, *The Poetry of French Canada in Translation* (Toronto, Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 80–82. Ces traductions ont été reprises dans un numéro d'*Ellipse* (25/26, 1980) consacrée aux poètes des Cantons (Townships Poets), p. 10–15.
- 23 R. Gustafson, *Plummets...*, p. 134. Ce texte était d'abord paru dans le numéro d'*Ellipse* consacré aux poètes des Cantons (voir note 22).
- 24 En fait, un premier recueil, *The Golden Chalice*, était paru à Londres en 1935, mais Gustafson ne l'incluait pas dans la liste des titres à son actif.
- 25 R. Gustafson, *Collected Poems*, vol. I, Victoria, Sono Nis Press, 1987, p. 59.
- 26 R. Gustafson, *Plummets...*, p. 138.
- 27 Dermot McCarthy, *A Poetics of Place. The Poetry of Ralph Gustafson*, Montréal et Kingston, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991.
- 28 R. Gustafson, *Plummets...*, p. 107.
- 29 *Ibid.*, p. 91.
- 30 R. Gustafson, *Selected Poems*, Toronto, McClelland & Stewart, 1972, p. 54.
- 31 D. McCarthy, *A Poetics of Place...*, p. 35.
- 32 André Vachon, *op. cit.*, p. 134–135.

THE ROAD TO NORTH HATLEY: RALPH GUSTAFSON'S POST-COLONIAL ODYSSEY

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In memory of John Pengwerne Matthews, 1928–1995.

In the autumn of his career, in a 1981 memoir entitled, "Some Literary Reminiscences of the Eastern Townships," Ralph Barker Gustafson (1909–1995) reflected on his first dreams of literary success: "As a neophyte, how I longed to be thought one of this valour of warbling authors indigenous to the summer waters and winter snowdrifts of the Eastern Townships!" ("Some," 130). The words carry a scintilla of emotion, illuminating the extent to which the rural, anglophone *Cantons de l'Est* of Québec, the 'inscape' which nurtured the tyro poet, informed his vocation. Accordingly, following a three-decade-long, genteel exile, involving shuttlings among Oxford, London, and New York City, Gustafson returned, in 1963, to the demesne of his childhood, settling with his wife, Elisabeth, in North Hatley, beside Lake Massawippi. Here he wrote the poems that won him distinction and the poems that should accord him immortality. But the enthusiastic nostalgia of Gustafson's memoir obscures the truth that the road to North Hatley had not been an obvious one for the ambitious, younger poet to take. The "warbling" of an indigenous tradition did not come naturally to him. For this reason, Gustafson's career exemplifies the (post-) colonial dilemma that the Trinidadian-born, Canadian poet Marlene Nourbese Philip sketches in the introduction to her collection of poems, *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks* (1989): "... I have come upon an understanding of language—good-english-bad-english english, Queenglish and Kinglish—the anguish that is english in colonial societies..." (11).¹ This "anguish" arises from the difficulty of attempting to domesticate an imperial English—its legislated grammar, diction, and traditions—that is to say, to make it one's own. The necessary emancipation, or rather decolonization, must

be won in the forum of form. Intriguingly, Gustafson published poetry for some two decades before arriving at this solution.

One of the last, important, pre-1914-born, English-Canadian poets to commence his career with a sense of colonial anxiety in regard to both the British poetic heritage and the seemingly manifest American destiny, Gustafson had good reason for worry. Neither the British nor the American canons had much room for Canadian interlopers, and a commanding Canadian canon, as such, did not exist. Hence, as a beginning poet, Gustafson faced the possibility of winning either an annihilating obscurity within the dominant Anglo-American canon (the fate of Bliss Carman) or, worse, a celebrated mediocrity within the local (the fate of Frederic George Scott.) Though High Modernist techniques signalled a way out of this quandary, Gustafson seems to have presumed, at first, that their adoption necessitated the disappearance of the local (save for token, revocable moments). Indeed, by juxtaposing Gustafson's 1944 poems with those published in 1960, one becomes conscious of a sharp schism in his work, between the High Modernist-orthodox poems of the Fierce Forties—with their 'distracted' imagery—and the downhome-in-North Hatley (and elsewhere) lyrics of the Seditious Sixties and later. Arguably, the wispy universality for which Gustafson strove in 1944 gave way to a grounded localism in his later poetry. Significantly, it is these plainer pieces that occasion his unassailable grandeur. Because his *oeuvre*, especially in the first decades, evinces philosophical wrong turns and poetical dead ends, it is instructive to examine the ideological barriers that Gustafson encountered on the twisting road, *via* Europe and New York, to North Hatley. Gustafson's odyssey and final homecoming reveal the perils that beset one of the major pioneers of a Canadian Modernism.

I

A shooting war was devastating Europe, North Africa, and the Pacific Rim, when Gustafson, a thirtyish, debonaire litteratus-about-Manhattan, with two respected books of respectably romantic poetry to his credit, trained critical fire upon the provincial Philistines occupying English-Canadian poetry. Introducing his apprentice *Pelican Anthology of Canadian Poetry* (1942), Gustafson, sounding as militantly peremptory as the Rev. J.S. Woodsworth, outflanks his parochial foes:

A Canadian poet can no longer consider that his poem derives importance solely because it is written; his increasing individuality has outgrown a former imitativeness of the pre-1914 English poetic convention; he has a critical familiarity with poetic advances in the United States and England; a kinetic sensitivity to his social environment—these factors have produced a Canadian poetry which is urgent, which can exist as poetry while remaining (not only geographically) distinguishable as Canadian. (Qtd. in “Story,” 107)

Perhaps the *citoyen du monde* rhetoric—“increasing individuality,” “critical familiarity,” and “kinetic sensitivity”—is more like A.J.M. Smith, another Manhattanized Canuck, whose theories sculpted Gustafson’s Forties’ poetics. In any case, Gustafson’s Preface, inked in January, 1941, exudes the clairvoyant passion of a Canadian determined to avoid the hacking cough of a rheumatoid provincialism. The Preface is neither the Regina Manifesto nor *What Is to Be Done?*, but it does imply a yearning to sweep away the trashy, maple leaf patriotism that too many English-Canadians thought requisite for a *Canadian* poetry. Gustafson lectures his readers, “‘Canadianism’ is not a poem” (qtd. in “Story,” 107). His selections for his anthology were judged, he warns, “not by historical significance nor by ‘Canadianism,’ but in terms of vitality: is it *alive* or *dead*?” (qtd. in “Story,” 107). Colonialism was, it seemed, dead. Paradoxically though, Gustafson was imbibing the modernist *cum* aestheticist tenets of Smith and the new wave in American and British poetry. His Preface suggests an adherence to what Smith termed a cosmopolitan tradition²—and to metropolitan schools in New York and London. Nevertheless, Gustafson remained a partisan of Canadian poetry:

Most non-Canadians will be surprised to learn that Canadian poetry exists at all. It is my hope that this anthology will persuade them to an eager acknowledgement. (Qtd. in “Story,” 107)

But his prime interest was *Poetry*, its national origins excised: “I am hoping, above all, that the poems herein will become synonymous with *pleasure*—startle with a fine excess of beauty” (qtd. in “Story,” 107). This point recurs in his third-person memoir, “The Story of the Penguin” (1983), where, recalling his internship in poetry at Bishop’s University, near his hometown of Sherbrooke, Québec, he expresses admiration for his then poet-professor Frank Oliver Call, who combined “the conventional world of poetry with the coming world of modern poetry” (“Story,” 102). As a youth, he suspected that his Canadianness provided a vantage point from

which to wage ink-stained, guerilla war upon legions of Babbits. He planned, as an undergraduate, "to make a book of modern Canadian poetry that would shake the literary ignorance of the English-speaking world" ("Story," 103). He would oppose poetic "wrongheadedness" wherever it appeared ("Story," 103).

Strange it is, then, that after landing in jostling, rumours-of-war New York, his brain bristling with chivalric schemes for tilting at wrongthinking poets, that Gustafson concocted a curious blend of nationalist assertiveness—"Canadians can write fine poetry"—and liberal worldliness—"individualism extirpates hokey localism." Yet, this premiere contradiction within Gustafson is responsible for his likewise divided achievement. By cleaving to cosmopolitanism to elude the late colonial present, Gustafson was tempted to compose, in his first mature book, *Flight into Darkness* (1944), a poetry that eludes the quotidian, the referential, the—Québécois—home-ly. It was not until the appearance of *River among Stones*, in 1960, that Gustafson, at last addressing native terrain, began to realize his true potential. If he had set out in the Forties to conquer *le monde des Anglais* by demonstrating an anchorless mastery of Modernist poetics, by 1960 he seemed to realize that these poetics would have to be enacted in service of the local. He would have to exchange metaphysics for meat and potatoes, so to speak.

This conflict between local/provincial and universal/cosmopolitan orientations could not be dodged. It was the precise crisis confronting all English-Canadian critics and poets of the war years. Perhaps Gustafson was doomed, then, to embrace the Medusa of universality and watch it turn a portion of his *oeuvre* to stone. For one thing, his *Pelican Anthology* reached an English Canada whose literary critics were deciding that its intellectual subservience to Great Britain (and, for some, the United States) entailed literary mediocrity. Hence, B.K. Sandwell in a *Saturday Night* review in 1942 asserts that the collection, given "its sustained high level of accomplishment together with its extreme accessibility, will go a long way to check the occasionally insufferable condescension of the British intellectual toward the Canadian" (qtd. in "Story," 106). Though Gustafson's anthology gave writers like Sandwell reason for cheer, an academic 'Gang of Four'—Northrop Frye, E.K. Brown, W.P. Wilgar, and Smith—continued to denounce the mil-queteast, derivative, outmoded quality of English-Canadian poetry in a constellation of damning essays. For instance, in *On Canadian Poetry*, published in 1943, Brown deprecates the nation's "colonial spirit" (13) and its adoption of imported standards, both "artificial

and distorting" (14). Brown complains that Canada is "colonial not only in its attitude towards Britain, but often in its attitude toward the United States" (18). Frye, also writing in 1943, contends that Canadian colonial feeling—"a frostbite at the roots of the Canadian imagination"—fostered "creative schizophrenia"—manifestations of divided consciousness—and "prudery," namely, "the instinct to seek a conventional or commonplace expression of an idea" (208). In "Poetry and the Divided Mind in Canada," a 1944 essay, Wilgar detects "divided loyalty" and a "split personality" within the English-Canadian poet (271). He or she wavers between the "almost invariably unsuitable thought processes of the present-day British poets and the uncomfortable knowledge of an understanding for and a sympathy with the matter and manner of American poetry..." (271). The hapless Canadian feels "pulled" both towards traditional, British metres and the ram-bunctious liberty of American form (271). Smith chased his disciple's *Pelican Anthology* with his own *The Book of Canadian Poetry*, published in 1943 in the Modernist citadel of Chicago. In his Introduction, Smith separates mukluded poetasters from stylish sophisticates. The "natives," in his species of imperial categorization, comprise nature poets and regional and populist poets. Cosmopolitanites utilize, in contrast, "the poetry of ideas, social criticism, of wit and satire" (29), genres representing "the universal, civilizing culture of ideas" (5).³ Their modernism radiates "intellectualism ... and a merging of personality into a classicism of form..." (28). These dualisms—the division between poets/critics and a mass audience perceived as Philistine, the colonial "double-aims" that seem to vitiate creative endeavours, the essential distinguishing between backwoods "natives" and bookish cosmopolitans—demarcate, in the 1940s, the English-Canadian poet's incessant and *oeuvre*-threatening marginality.

This perception had its effect on Gustafson. He had not journeyed from the backroads of the Eastern Townships to the glistening Meccas of Anglo-American poetry to play a neon-veneered *habitant*. Thus, he took his place in the "cosmopolitan" section of his mentor's *Book of Canadian Poetry*, "the section the bumpkin adherence of Canadian critics deplored" (as he remarks, with a dose of caustic self-interest, some forty years later ["Reflections," 119]). Sensing that it would likely be impossible for a great poet to arise from the Dominion, that culture slumped in an obdurate, narcissistic inferiority, Gustafson chose to ground his poetic in an overarching intellectualism. Ironically, by doing so, he displayed

calculated, even colonial, obeisance to a parent, still-imperial tradition, favouring its most Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-American manifestations in *vers libre*. Assuredly, he fuses, in his early verse, the aural, hyper-stress techniques of Gerard Manley Hopkins with the hieratic, glissando eloquence of T.S. Eliot, Hart Crane, Wallace Stevens, and W.H. Auden, and he de-emphasizes the local and the colloquial—that is to say, the Canadian—until late in his career (when he naturalizes the clarity of Ezra Pound, the jocularity of Williams Carlos Williams).

Flight into Darkness establishes Gustafson's affinity with the critiques of English-Canadian poetry extant in the Forties. Spurning the attractions of a tawdry parochialism, he exalts a chaste intellection, a studied complexity, in hermetic, well-shaped, verbal icons. The local appears in these *objets d'art*, but prettified by a screen of Latinisms, Hellenisms, and arabesque periphrases. Three poems—"Excelling the Starry Splendour of this Night," "Mythos," and "Flight into Darkness"—typify Gustafson's heroic effort to create a nominally Canuck poetry that would resist the potentially humiliating limitations of localism. The poems stage a play of influences, with Hopkins assuming stardom, and the others—Eliot, Crane, Stevens, Auden—glimmering in his excess light.

Reproduced in Gustafson's *Collected Poems* (1987), "Excelling the Starry Splendour of the Night" offers a Hamletesque meditation, in ten quatrains, on mortality. Full rhyme is repressed, but the poem demonstrates an aggressive commitment to intricate, hide-and-go-seek patterns of half-rhyme, inner rhyme, consonance, assonance, and alliteration that almost out-Hopkins Hopkins:

Whereby what mortal crevice, coign of skull
Shall man be less, than all, this whole
And aggregate of god; snuff
With a pinch of logic, proof? (*Collected*, 19)

A puzzle-solving-like pleasure may be derived from ascertaining how certain word arrangements ("crevice" and "coign"; "skull / Shall"; "all" and "whole"; "skull" and "whole"; "aggregate" and "god"; "snuff" and "proof") might suit a handbook of rhetorical techniques. Essentially though, the poetic devices become poetic vices. An 'instress' of technique, so to speak, darks the 'inscape' of sense:

Come cranking, then, to him, test-tube, text,
Within thy claw. No man that's sneezed

But will from all thy groans and gravings
Pluck the paradox! (*Collected*, 20)

This is superficial Hopkins, artificial metaphysics. Instead of the Victorian poet's spontaneous awe before God's fierce grandeur in nature, an awe that compiles mysterious congeries, Gustafson essays a fastidious cleverness that dissolves into a prolix incoherence. The poem is unsettlingly finessed, derivative, and cold, from a writer too infatuated with an unassimilated aesthetic. Its clearest lines are, tellingly, organic, vivid: "He shall / This day surely plant turnips, // Fiddle with a shoestring: tomorrow serve / A grasp of gravel with his deeds" (*Collected*, 19). Regardless of their tactility, the poem's setting remains generic, the tone flat or, on occasion, falsely inflated. The work is a literary exercise, not a vision of life.

"Mythos" further reveals the deleterious impress of Hopkins upon Gustafson's sensibilities. Demonstrably, the poet still does not know that the central tradition must be altered—like light passed through gravity—by his own environment. He still seems innocent of the truth that Hopkins cannot be utilized in quite the same way by an anglo Québécois poet as he may be employed by a British (or, for that matter, Mauritian) poet. Because this insight has not yet been gleaned by Gustafson, "Mythos," recycles the errors of "Excelling." Its strophes display a poetic intelligence riven of a diction that it can call its own:

Spurt of crimson plunged in foam
his daring down (Star-dazed dare!
Hurl then, hurtle the headlong winds
Nor haggle joy in the gasping lungs,

Moon-managed gallant of gales! Go,
Greet the giant grapple of sun.
On cunning wax and quill let Daedalus
Limp shaking precautious beard.) (*Collected*, 24)

Though it appears accentual-syllabic, the poem's metre enacts the strong-stress rhythm of the Anglo-Saxon line; each hemistich bears two hammer-blow beats. Greek myth is recast, jarringly, in the metre of the *Beowulf* bard and of Hopkins. Stridently convoluted, starkly pretentious, the poem aspires to an imagined rather than a realized cosmopolitanism. Too unoriginal perhaps, or too indiscriminately unoriginal, it compacts with an obscurantist, Fallstaffian bomphiologia:

(What Theseus-love shall penetrate,

Plunge the mazing green miraculous
 To monstrous centre, nor burst the green
 And beast with bomb to no-solution
 Wisdom lost? O we have need
 The other way, trammelling the heart

With faith, omphalos of globe and guerdon.) (*Collected*, 24)

In his 1983 memoir, "Red Wheelbarrows," Gustafson labels "Mythos" a species of verticalism, and his fealty to this 'school' earned him a place in Eugene Jolas's *Vertical: A Yearbook for Romantic-Mystic Ascensions* (1940) "along with international names" ("Red," 125).⁴ The 'romantic-mystic' rubric does not redeem, however, the ostentatious failure of this twelve-quatrain poem, in which alliteration plods toward uneuphonious parimion. The poem represents, not a synthesizing vision, but a tin ear. It is a case of style over reason.⁵ In fact, the work is open to the charge that J.M. Cohen lodges against Hopkins: "[the] highly conscious attention to texture ... replaces concentration on the intellectual argument of [the] poem" (169).

The ambitious title poem of the 1944 collection, "Flight into Darkness," pays homage to the cerebral, *poésie pur* style of Stevens. The poem's title echoes the terminus of Stevens's oft-reproduced poem, "Sunday Morning" (1923): "Downward to darkness, on extended wings." Moreover, Gustafson adopts Stevens' strategy of suggestive elusiveness: "And yet, coming on sun across/An alien street, stand suddenly surprised—/As Galileo, before his midnight window..." (*Collected*, 23). For all its seven sextets, though, "Flight" flounders in the metaphorical chaos of an attempted metaphysics:

Was it today we fumbled spiral of spring,
 Clutched at the throat the knot of accurate winds,
 Noose and thong of beauty slung? (*Collected*, 22)

The third strophe is an exemplum of slavish imitation:

Who now, regretting June with adult smiles,
 Set nodding with a finger Buddha's porcelain head:
 Hearing of marvels in the township, turned
 Expensive keys against the empty street,
 From possible cars saw moon eclipse the sun,
 Cautious glass before our eyes. (*Collected*, 22)

Gustafson means to achieve the mysterious undertone that identifies Stevens'; but, curiously, a debt to Crane also emerges, due to

the poem's recourse to a painstaking obscurantism. Thus, Cohen's criticism of Crane applies equally to Gustafson: the poet's words "seem to be used only for their sound, and in order to convey the illusion of profundity" (166). Lines of less opaque writing, especially "Yesterday yesterday! the hills were bare of snow, / The hackneyed maple broke with leaf, the bough / Sprang colour along the sweetened air" (*Collected*, 22), disrupt the dominant attitude of insistent preciousness. But they are not enough. In sum, "Flight Into Darkness" flies from luminous immediacy into sacerdotal abstraction:

For we remembering our defense refused
The mirror's prosecution, praised the speaker
On the chairman's right: within the files,
Found brief anger for the anonymous clock,
Looking up, the calendar on startled walls—
Withdrawing truth from blundering sleep. (*Collected*, 22)

This poem exemplifies the debacle awaiting a poet who plumps for rhetoric over an *engagé* diction. What Gustafson needed was direct speech, *and* the judicious use of local reference, but, in 1944, he had not yet found out this insight.

Notably, four decades after the appearance of *Flight into Darkness*, Gustafson was to insist that he had always recognized that "Poetry is in local things. I realized it then; have always realized it" ("Red," 128). But the poems contradict the poet. In 1944, the local did not entail for Gustafson the empathy with concreteness that it would entail for him later. The language, the referentiality, of the poems reviewed above eschews close observation of "local things." Rather, Gustafson is vulnerable to the criticisms that Australian poet Judith Wright aims at her poet forebear, Furnley Maurice (a veritable case study of Frygian 'creative schizophrenia' in the Australian context). For instance, Wright notices that Maurice swung "sometimes in the same short poem from colloquial vigour to cliché and poeticism, as though he was listening with one ear to the voice of conscience embedded in the minor Georgians and with the other to what was happening around him: an ambience which he was never quite able to trust or translate" (Wright, 54). Gustafson may even be critiqued in the terms that the *bolekaja* critics—Chinweizu, Jemie, and Madubuike—wield against anglophone African writers, dismissing their "old-fashioned, craggy, unmusical language, obscure and inaccessible diction; a plethora of imported imagery..." (qtd. in Ashcroft *et al.*,

128). Irrefutably, a fatal, colonialism-induced, split-consciousness scores much of Gustafson's Forties verse. In attempting to address this mortal duality, he is too often Sisyphus, not Hercules.

But *Flight into Darkness* is not, it must be said, total darkness. Here and there, Gustafson uncovers glimmers of a 'native' voice. Three works are crucial in this regard: "Crisis," "Quebec Sugarbush," and "Prologue to Summer." In all of them, there is a diction seemingly localized in provenance, a grappling with substantives, a more or less, unmediated clarity.

Gustafson recognized, later, that "Crisis" marked a decisive shift in his poetics. In his 1985 essay, "Reflections on a War Not Ended," he cites it as an example of his attainment of a demotic tone:

To have impact, the rhetoric had to be held in, plain statement the key:

Cherish them now for they shall not be yours:
The lathe pressing to the hardwood maple's heart
The whetstone and the standing corn
The single thought.

You shall harvest (moths circling the moon)
And you shall still work a work with your hand
But you shall say: This harvest's bitter
The fingers blunt.

And the wind shall be sickly in the Annapolis,
On the Massawippi water... ("Reflections," 118)

Gustafson's appreciation of this poem is correct: its first ten (and twelve) lines are amazingly mimetic, free of cant. A dropping off into platitudes does occur in the last four strophes: "Your cities shall reap greed and there will be / Smoke above the wall and no / Word to say" (*Collected*, 29), and Auden's "September 1, 1939" (1939) voice bulldozes through some lines:

The stolid labour at the sunburnt husking
The annihilating hands of lovers and the short
Laugh, the coward dark of cupboards
Shall find you out. (*Collected*, 29)

Nevertheless, the poem employs successful homebound details. Gustafson asserts, rightly, that, "for all the Biblical approximation of the poem toward rhythm and phrasing, the poem out of Europe is nothing but the Eastern Townships of Quebec in imagery" ("Reflections," 118). In other words, it accesses the universal

through the local. It is surprising, then, that though "Crisis" dates back to the Nervous Thirties, Gustafson did not exploit its poetic truths until the twilight of his career.

"Quebec Sugarbush," like "Crisis," is half-abstract: "Something more than signature / (The huge sedition of the hills) / To sterile peace..." (*Collected*, 38). But its other half is finely realized: "The close conspiracy of hollows / At the brittle ribs of snow, / The broken pool" (*Collected*, 38). Hints of elemental roughness indicate a domesticated diction. In "Red Wheelbarrows," Gustafson cites the poem to support his claim that he had always known that "Poetry is in local things.... I was writing about water-barrels and Quebec sugarbushes: Where buckets are sweet with sap drives / Telesphore of the crimson tuque / His barrel from pail to tree." ("Red," 128). Even in this strophe, though, "Telesphore" (an apparent neologism cobbled from "tele," "spore," and possibly, "metaphor"), seems a Hopkinsesque throwback to the vice of abstraction.

"Prologue to Summer" is, indubitably, the finest poem in *Flight into Darkness*. Its hyphenated compounds, assonantal rhymes, and three-stress, accentual metre, though traceable to Hopkins, are neatly utilized, that is, *nationalized*, by Gustafson. The landscape specifics articulated in the poem belong not just to Poetry, or even the Eastern Townships, but to Gustafson himself. A truly original style emerges here. The diction—"garbles," "Flake of sun," "slime," "leaf-mould," "Belly-up stinking," "ice / Rotted"—is grounded, corporeal, valid:

Under the gangrened stump
Slugs drag slime,
The fieldmouse gnaws
The crust of air. (*Collected*, 39)

This visual clarity is a welcome advance over the opaque intellection of "Mythos." An unhesitant sensuousity, a beautiful feel for the actual, animates these lines, which foresee the openly 'Canadian' verse of 1960 and later:

Smell!—the leaf-mould smokes,
At the water-edge flapped
By the waves a fish
Belly-up stinking. (*Collected*, 39)

Only in the final strophe does a throw-away, disruptive rhetoric appear:

Male-naked the air. Compel!
 Urgent the deed, urgent
 And muscular the dream
 Invaginate! (*Collected*, 39)

Whether Gustafson realized it or not, his reputation-preserving canon would come to consist largely of 'provincial' works like "Prologue."

II

Gustafson progressed towards his first major poems, those of 1960, through continued attention, throughout the Fearful Fifties, to contemporary critiques of Canadian poetry and partisan devotion to new tangents in Modernism. An initial devotee of Brown, Frye, Wilgar, and Smith, he had applied a cosmopolitan aesthetics to his verse in order to cleanse it of any hint of English-Canadian provinciality, but had also rendered it, thereby, pallid and irrelevant. The adoption of modernist poetics could not eliminate, by itself, a colonial mentality. Like Smith, Gustafson and others seem to have merely exchanged the staid romanticism of Victorian verse for the unlovely obscurantism propagated by Eliotian *vers libre*. In reaction to this apparent failing, critic John Sutherland, introducing *Other Canadians*, his 1947 anthology of ostensibly socialist Canadian poetry (a corrective riposte to Smith's *Book of Canadian Poetry*), charges that Canadian intellectualism had reinforced colonialism:

Our poetry is colonial because it is the product of a cultured English group who are out of touch with a people who long ago began adjusting themselves to life on this continent. The lack of all rapport between the poetry and the environment is one of the factors accounting for the incredibly unreal and ethereal quality of some of the new poetry. (Introduction, 57)

Attacking the high-toned, English-Canadian poetry of the day, Sutherland maintains that an indigenous poetry cannot be constructed by the *virage* toward High Modernism. He prefers a "hard-fisted proletarianism" (influenced by urban American poets), that will obliterate "the dividing wall between the author and the people" (Introduction, 60). Similarly, in 1962, scholar John Matthews denounces the persistence of an anxious academism in Canadian poetry:

Many contemporary Canadian poets are concerned with recording universal experience, with little reference to the local scene. Intellectual and esoteric in its imagery, their poetry sets up barriers against all but a comparatively few readers. (149)

The estrangement of English-Canadian intellectuals from their own immediate contexts is, Matthews suggests, a consequence of their post-coloniality. In addition, their obeisance to foreign taste diminishes their imaginative power: "With their eyes firmly fixed upon the parent tradition more than upon the object before them, they have been chasing, prematurely, a universal which cannot exist for them until it grows from local roots" (95).

Gustafson was conversant with such criticisms, for, in his Introduction to the *Penguin Book of Canadian Verse*, published in 1957, he does not condemn "Canadianism." *Au contraire*, his Introduction traces a genealogy of poets whose virtue is their primordial Canadianness, a quality connected to their engagement with a northern landscape of snow and maples. Yet, in implicit reply to Sutherland's critique of cosmopolitanism, Gustafson defends the tactics of the Forties:

The poet cannot be asked to find his national identity before the factors that present it to him exist. Canadian poets identifiable as such, have had to wait for Canada. (Qtd. in "Story," 108)

If English-Canadian poets, including himself, had sought their legitimacy from London, New York, and Chicago, Gustafson protests, the fault had not been in themselves, but in the failure of Canada to articulate itself as a nation. Even so, thanks to the Forties' poets, Canadian poetry had come of age:

The Canadian poets of the forties demanded dignity, personal and social, buttressed it, defended it, and published it.... They are accomplished technically. Their phrasing is Canadian. It is becoming increasingly apparent that Canada has a poetry that is distinctly her own. (Qtd. in "Story," 111–112)

Gustafson refused to mourn the poetic practices of the Forties and he launched a covert assault on Sutherland; still, his 1957 Introduction marked a shift from Smithian cosmopolitanism. For instance, nineteenth-century poets like Charles Mair and Charles G.D. Roberts earn his praise for, respectively, attentiveness to "details of homes and nature around him" (qtd. in "Story," 110) and "sensitive evocation of the rural scene" (qtd. in "Story," 110). In 1941, "poetry" took precedence over "Canadianism"; but, in

1957, it resided in the felt details of Canadian life:

[A] method of thought, pattern of feeling, distinguishes the verbal texture of the modern Canadian poem. The "phrasing," the "fin-gering" ... is different; the Canadian "phrasing" is not the American, it is certainly not the English. (Qtd. in "Story," 112).

Given comments such as this, and Gustafson's cataloguing of the "specifics of contemporary Canadian poetry" (qtd. in "Story," 112), it is clear that his aesthetics had shifted in an inchoately nationalist direction by the late Fifties. He could now value a local verisimilitude.

This point is further supported by his Foreword to the 1966 version of the *Penguin Anthology of Canadian Verse*, where Gustafson announces that "Despair is universal over the question of who everyone is. It is necessary to know" (qtd. in "Story," 114). Gustafson admits, then, a nationalist concern for self-identification. Accordingly, "The dialogue of the new Canadian poets is of the greatest interest" (qtd. in "Story," 114). In developing a native technique, English-Canadian poetry had veered "from the Yeats/Eliot axis to the Pound/Williams axis" (qtd. in "Story," 114), from abstract superficiality to "no ideas but in things." Now, "Immediacy and objectism are the demands; freedom from the traditional prosodic formalities" (qtd. in "Story," 114). As usual, Gustafson's global pronouncements apply with as much (or greater) force to himself as to anyone else. Hence, his critique of wayward turns in the new poetry is an amazing instance of oblique self-criticism of his own Forties' verse. For instance, he now recognizes that "poetry ... carries a burden of logical meaning" (qtd. in "Story," 114); "dead" poetry is, then, "inaccessible" or composed of "unholy," unnatural phrasing (qtd. in "Story," 115). Importantly too, Gustafson insists upon the necessity of maintaining a coherent syntax and metre. "Without the drama of syntax there is no tension"; metre must consist of "instinctive physiological *and* ... intellectual pacing" (qtd. in "Story," 115). By 1966, then, Gustafson had rejected or radically revised his 1941 insistence upon technique over content; now "the Canadian occupation [of poetry] is distinguished and distinguishable" (qtd. in "Story," 114).

Gustafson's conditional embrace of local/national themes is richly evident in *River among Stones*, his first publication of 1960. A Smithian, intellectualist ethos is still on display, but is now mitigated by a refreshing, Pound/Williams-observant sensuousness.

The promise of "Prologue to Summer" is, herein, fulfilled, not in all of the 1960 poems (including those of the later volume, *Rocky Mountain Poems*), but in enough that one can mark Gustafson's grappling with particularized geographies, autobiographical histories, thereby forging an expansive localism conveyed with colloquial vigour.

The new approach even informs "Legend," a poem which, though dependent upon classicist machinery, employs a specific diction:

... whoever has got up,
 Standing, certainty under his adjusting heels,
 And height tugged by the tide, ocean rinsing
 From flank and belly, ravelling loins with wet (*Collected*, 43)

Here *vers libéré*—a loosened blank verse—and a demotic tone engender a poem whose universality is versed in physicality. To be sure, not quite enough of a grounding in the diurnal occurs; a degree of obscurity returns:

He, that salt upon his time's tongue,
 Knows, standing the margin ocean and sand,
 Ilium toppled thunder his ears, what's left
 Of Helen naked drag between his toes. (*Collected*, 43)

Gustafson is still too literary, too stilted, but his heart is in the right place.

In fact, a triumvirate of Quebec-set poems figure Gustafson's maturity: "Quebec Night," "Quebec, Late Autumn," and "Quebec Winterscene." In these works, Gustafson seeks to hallow a way of life in a memorable space and to convey this existence through sinuous diction and naturalistic imagery.

"Quebec Night" differs positively from both "Flight into Darkness" and "Mythos." Unlike "Flight," it is a poem of fine-tooled specifics, à la Williams' "Red Wheelbarrow" (1923):

The red logs
 crisp on the outside,
 the wood solid, being new,
 are chained to the sleigh.
 The runner drags a cleat for the hill up,
 and the snow is pleated in the logs,
 the snow in the far woods
 falling (*Collected*, 60)

Here is vernacular speech, indigenized rhythms. Each line exhibits an Imagist exactness, an aesthetic victory undergirded by the balance of line-length and pictorial activity. Released from the enervating dualism that had once been his lot, Gustafson, reconciled to his New World/Anglo-Québécois inheritance, wins an uncompromised, beautiful colloquiality. The two- and three-beat, accental lines spurn the tortuous stutterings of "Mythos."

"Quebec, Late Autumn," a poem consisting of seven, occasionally half-rhymed quatrains, strays radically from the styles of "Mythos" and "Excelling." Eschewing the unconvincing metaphysical allegiances of the 1944 poems, the 1960 lyric records a single, resonant location and life. The plotted revelation of a precisely rendered world draws the reader progressively into the poem:

Suddenly now the ragged oak
And maple overnight are fire,
The green sluice falters in the elm. (*Collected*, 61)

The verbs derive from tactile experience—"Cider wets the wooden mill, / The rafter hangs with cobs of corn," and express an unstinted concreteness—"The zinc pail holds a hoop of ice / Standing in the milking stall" (*Collected*, 61). The procession of cold weather images recalls Shakespeare's "Winter" (from *Love's Labours Lost*), in which "Tom bears logs into the hall, / And milk comes frozen home in a pail." Alliteration is called upon, but it is controlled. Nothing extraneous is admitted to the poem; its lines attain a photographic quality: "The morning's pulleys in the cobweb / Freeze, the pump drips icicle" (*Collected*, 61). The known (local) world acquires a poet, and provinciality vanishes in scrutinizing the provincial life.

"Quebec Winterscene," Gustafson's first, great poem, establishes the revolution that had taken place in his poetics by 1960. Abandoning the old, vague language, he eyes his own environment of rural Québec. Hopkins still haunts the poem—"harvest / Helps over, buckled" (*Collected*, 59)—but his ghost is an invited guest, not an incubus. A straightforward tone dominates the whole: the elitist mask is lost. Exact is the mimesis: "Dipper icy a man drinks gasping" (*Collected*, 59). The poet descants, *sans cant*, of "snow trodden round the yard" and "Straw ravelled near the barn" (*Collected*, 59). There is room, suddenly, for the recognizable, the workaday, the familiar:

At dusk, acres clamped cold,
 Threshold and clearing everywhere white
 To the distant scribble of alders, across
 The frozen field snakefence
 Like charred music; sky only harvest
 Helps over, buckled, with taste of tin
 Dipper icy a man drinks gasping (*Collected*, 59)

Here is the rasp of existence. Unforced, the poem arises from the poet's experience, the revelation of his own backyard:

Sweat of warm barn-work a hazard
 Once out, door-to, headed for house. (*Collected*, 59)

Lovely, *très* lovely, this clipped poiciologia, this loving attentiveness to rudimentary parrhesia and energia. The alliteration at play in the poem is largely unobtrusive, as is the four-stress metre: "The long snow of the fourfold land" (*Collected*, 59). Speech rhythms drive the poem, which echoes the expression of a speaker standing outdoors on a frigid day. These cadences possess an agonizingly piercing music. *Vers libéré* and strict statement, both elements of mastery, signal the synthesis that the poet has achieved between his environment and his inherited language. Furthermore, a hint of miraculous discovery pervades the piece. The speaker senses unfolding, "a history happening," the landscape gravid with incipient event (*Collected*, 59). When a train "pulls past," sounding a "heard warning," the speaker experiences an epiphany, namely, the recognition that the only possible reply to the train is "the local heart" (*Collected*, 59). The poet's identification with the local symbolizes the end of his alienation from himself. His identification with North Hatley is of a piece with Roberts' annexation of the Tantramar Marsh or, nearer in time and space, A.M. Klein's domestication of Montréal: the poets locate a space that promotes the fusion of the personal, the literary, and the social. Gustafson's resolution of his former imperial/colonial "schizophrenia" permits him to sing from "the country in the heart," in Australian poet A.D. Hope's meet phrase (11).

From 1960 on, then, Gustafson exploits once-scorned "provincial" images and demotic speech patterns in his poems, obtaining a sensuality (especially in his canticles for the Gala-like Elisabeth) that had hitherto evaded his grasp. His later fine poems—even those which are latently metaphysical—build upon his initial, auspicious recognition of the apt essentialism of "the local heart." In technical terms, in "Quebec Winterscene" and his other good

poems, Gustafson reconnoitres a synthesis between what Edwin Fussell designates the British tradition of order and the American tradition of liberty (11).⁶ With “Quebec Winterscene,” then, Gustafson begins to utilize an ordered liberty—in metre, imagery, and diction. He indulges in the informal formalism that signifies the English-Canadian compromise between its U.K. and U.S. influences.

Gustafson imagined that his “greatness” derived from his cosmopolite leanings, that is to say, his having lived, like Smith, “elsewhere other than beside the village pump” (“Reflections,” 119). In actuality, commencing with “Quebec Winterscene,” he wrote much of his best poetry about life around, near, beside, the proverbial pump. Twenty-five years after the appearance of *River among Stones*, Gustafson affirmed that local details never *necessitate* provincialism; after all, “the eastern Townships around Lake Massawippi were ‘international’” (“Reflections,” 118). In his 1981 essay, “Some Literary Reminiscences of the Eastern Townships,” he cites F.R. Scott “exploring the countryside around the several Hatleys; to examine his wood-chopping and bird-feeding...” (“Some,” 135). Even Smith “shaped experience with what the landscape and the inscape of his district gave him” (“Some,” 136). Gustafson even chides an early Eastern Townships poet, Frederic George Scott, for having committed the sin that Gustafson also practiced, namely, abstraction: “He should have nailed my attention with something within my experience and not in heaven—a road out to Lime Ridge where I was born, say, and ‘the creak of a lumberman’s sleigh’” (“Some,” 135). In the October of his career, Gustafson knew the value of empirical observation.

Finally, Gustafson recognized that “all great writing springs out of the writer’s own intimate, experienced, loved backyard” (“Some,” 138). Suitably, then, he locates the source of his poetic achievement in “the Eastern Townships I was born to and grew up in” (“Some,” 138). One poem in particular underlined his discovery of the local:

I have a poem about that; about the isolated railway serving station serving the countryside around the village of Compton; about the longing of a boy to know the world but whose tug of the heart is to his birthright. The poem is called “Quebec Winterscene.” (“Some,” 138)

Only after learning to observe the “‘thisness’ of this world, the *quidditas*, the haeccity” (“Poetry,” 30) was Gustafson able to find a

unique voice, one strong enough to address the larger world. Once he recognized that the central tradition is only a clutch of words, a way of seeing, that he could use and alter to meet his own empirical needs, he was able to carve out a place for himself in that tradition. Dissolving the self, “the local heart,” into poetry, Gustafson salvaged the schizophrenia or anxiety of being a non-British and non-American poet who wrote in English. Thus, he moved from “Quebec Sugarbush” to “Quebec Winterscene”; he found in ‘Canada’ the ‘Poetry’ that he so exalted.⁷

With the foregoing analysis in mind, a *forensically* rigorous edition of Gustafson’s *best* poems must now be compiled. If we privilege his concise, colloquial pieces, beginning, perhaps, with “Quebec Winterscene” (or “Prologue to Summer”), the ‘final’ list should include “In the Yukon” (1960); “Into the Tonquin Valley” (1960); “On the Flanks of Carnarvon” (1960); “On Mountain Summit” (1960); “Aspects of Some Forsythia Branches” (1966); “Columbus Reaches Juana, 1492” (1966); “The Valley of Kings” (1969); the englishings of Alfred DesRochers and Anne Hébert (1970); “Hyacinths with Brevity” (1974); “Wednesday at North Hartley” (1977); “Red Square” (1978); “Country Walking” (1979); “The Things of This World are OK” (1980); “Among the Wheatfields” (1981); #46 from *Gradations of Grandeur* (1982); “Hearing the Woodthrush in the Evening” (1984); “Hunter’s Moon” (1984); III, V, VII, VIII, IX, and XI from *Twelve Landscapes* (1985); “Winter Arrival” (1987); “Cinquains of a Sort for E.P.” (1989); “D. G. Jones” (1989); “A Window Lighted” (1991); “Somewhat of Lilacs” (1991); “Love Poem” (1991); “Interlude” (1991); #1 from “Tuscany to Venezia” (1991); “Evidence for the Time Being” (1991); “The beauty of the world is not over” from *Configurations at Midnight* (1992); “That Day in January” (1994); “The Moment Is as Her Presence Is” (1994); “Winter Solstice” (1994); “At the rue de Buci One Evening” (1994); and a few dozen others culled from, especially, the later works. These poems prove Gustafson’s centrality to the Canadian Modernist canon; these poems will keep his name from dust.

RESUME

Inconstestablement, Ralph Barker Gustafson (1909–1995) mérite d’être élu au panthéon des meilleurs poètes canadiens du XX^{ème} siècle. Il résista néanmoins avec force et ardeur à la théorie esthétique qui fonda ses plus belles pièces—une foi en un lyrisme réaliste à

savoir locale—esthétique qu’il n’adopta qu’avec réticence, et ne pratiqua qu’avec parcimonie. L’oeuvre de Gustafson n’atteint ainsi ses sommets que de façon intermittente, avec les améliorations stylistiques les plus évidentes entre la seconde moitié des années quarante et le début des années soixante. Cette période marque à la fois l’adultération de l’influence cosmopolitaine d’A.J.M. Smith (par l’adoption d’un nationalisme nouveau) et le retour intellectuel (et plus tard physique) vers ces Cantons de l’Est québécois qui l’avaient vu naître. Cet article retrace les impératifs critiques qui ont poussé l’odyssée post-coloniale du poète, d’un modernisme désengagé à un très beau “provincialisme,” de Londres à Manhattan à North Hatley, scène de ses plus grands poèmes.

NOTES

- 1 Frantz Fanon asserts that “Every colonized people ... finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation; that is, with the culture of the mother country” (18). Gustafson’s pyrrhic struggles to harness domestic rhythms to ‘imperial’ models demonstrates this proverb’s veracity.
- 2 Smith’s concepts of separate “native” (or provincial) and “cosmopolitan” (or intellectual) traditions in Canadian poetry debuted in his anthology, *The Book of Canadian Poetry* (1943), where he categorizes poets according to these labels.
- 3 The categories self-destruct of course. For one thing, the “contemporary and cosmopolitan literary consciousness” (3) that Smith accords modern poets has always been part of Canadian poetry. Moreover, Smith’s modernist “natives” include E.J. Pratt, Earle Birney, and Dorothy Livesay, all of whom gleaned poetic ideas and influences from abroad. “Cosmo” moderns like Margaret Avison, P.K. Page, Gustafson, and Smith himself are represented by poems replete with imagery reflective of Canadascapes. Thus, Smith’s terms denote a politics of literary judgment. “Cosmopolitan” suggests a desirable, learned assimilationism; “native” portends a doltish, essentialist provincialism.
- 4 In *Revolution of the Word: A New Gathering of American Avant Garde Poetry* (1974), editor Jerome Rothenberg dismisses Jolas’ achievements as “spotty, & his language experiments & platforms (verticalism & trilingualism, the revolution of the word, language of night, etc.) naively one-dimensional” (148). Whatever the cogency of Rothenberg’s critique, Jolas’ principles offered Gustafson no enduringly useful aesthetic.
- 5 Perhaps its weaknesses inspired Gustafson to omit “Mythos” from his second grouping of elect poems, *The Moment Is All: Selected Poems 1944–83* (1984).

- 6 Gustafson's career demonstrates the search for an English Canadian middle way respectively between what Fussell calls "English regularity" and the American tendency to favour a libertarian "free verse ... as inevitable as the Declaration of Independence" (11–12). If the problem of the early twentieth century for Canadian poets was the pentameter, the solution was not necessarily a Poundian 'heave'.
- 7 Gustafson prized the local in his latter career, but he was still capable, in 1982, of publishing a book of poems, *Gradations of Grandeur*, modelled on Crane's highfalutin *Bridge* (1930). Furthermore, Gustafson seems never to have exploited a single localism from the Eastern Townships, not even the "by gurry!" exclamation associated with Massawippi. See Lewis J. Poteet, *Talking Country: The Eastern Townships Phrase Book* (1992): 27.

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PREFACE TO VISIONS FUGITIVE

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Los Angeles, California

Visions Fugitive is Ralph Gustafson's last book of poems, completed not long before his death in May, 1995. While it was in progress he referred to it as "More Unread Poems," an uncharacteristically direct admission of his frustration with his place in the world of poetry and with poetry's place in the world. Illness spoke in that unhappy title, atypically for Ralph, who had come through close battles with mortality more than once before without spiritual depletion. Like many of his friends I refrained from advising him not to stick with so bare and pessimistic a title in the hope that it was only provisional. So in fact it was, and eventually he settled on *Visions Fugitive*, a resonant choice in many ways, the obeisance to Prokofiev and his piano pieces of the same name not least among them. (Prokofiev spelled the second word in the title of his Opus 22 piano pieces with an "s" at the end, and would have pronounced the title in French. Ralph omitted the "s" and wanted the title pronounced in English).

With *Directives of Autumn* (1984) Ralph published the first of several books that he would write during the last decade of his life. Among the others are *Winter Prophecies* (1987), *Shadows in the Grass* (1991), and *Tracks in the Snow* (1994). They are dominated by images of fall and winter and wrestle single-mindedly with the great questions of death, God, evil, as well as the joy and passion of being alive. "The endless search, question," begins "Wheel of Fire," the first poem in *Directives of Autumn*, with its Shakespearean title and its characteristic description of the earth as "astringent and sweet." If on the one hand it is perfectly easy to see the world that way—the horror and the glory of it—on the other, for a poet, it is immensely demanding to hold that paradox in focus through poem after poem, book after book. It was part of Ralph's deep humanity and his greatness as a poet that he was able to do just that, never to give in to execration or sentimentality, however

attractive each sometimes is. The other book of his last decade, the autobiographical *Configuration at Midnight* (1992), ends with the line "Sensation claims me, I leave my love," as beautiful, ambiguous, and heart-breaking a declaration of the paradox that is the world as I can imagine.

Visions Fugitive provides no definitive answers to the questions Ralph posed again and again through his late books. He knew that the questions were unanswerable anyway, that in a deep sense the life of the mind and the life of the body depend on the creative tension produced by irresolution and the imponderable. Perhaps the tone in this final book is more sombre than usual, despite the epigraph ("And the sun shall rise / And be as a grace") and the discovery that persistence itself is a kind of redemption ("Meditation About Being Continuous"). The opening travel poems lack Ralph's usual joy at visiting foreign places, and the hospital poems that conclude the collection leave us with images of illness and unbelief.

That is fair enough, although these poems do exhibit a far different cast of mind from the few evidences in the book of Ralph's more usual relish ("No, it won't do, extinction, / Inevitable impoverishment, I won't accept it—"). Even poetry itself, long the most essential of Ralph's carrion comforts, is mostly absent as a subject; and behind his brief "In Memoriam" for E.J. Pratt ("For a Poet") I cannot help but hear a *clamabo* for himself ("What did it get you, old friend? / Erasure.").

The poems in *Visions Fugitive* do not testify directly to any foreknowledge that Ralph might have had that this would be his last book. There are bits of the private past re-remembered vividly here and there (his first date with Betty, his wife to be, for example, in "What Happened") as well as fragmentary notes of teleological confession in phrases like "Eden, an offhand / Prohibition" or "The world / Worse, ourselves unreconciled." Only the final few poems tip over into a slightly grim withdrawal from the world, a place which his last few books never entered, for all their concern with the great themes of old age. Certainly "One dies / unfinished," as Ralph has it in "The 'Lurking Abyss'"; but up to that final point his love of life is as acute as ever, as poems like "Sensualities" and "Each Knows of It" show.

It is unfair to whittle a poet's work of a lifetime down to a representative poem, much less a single line. All the same, I have long thought that the opening line of Ralph's poem "Winter Prophecies" embodied much of what his poetry is about: "Beyond

all wisdom is the lonely heart." There is wisdom in this last book, as always, for Ralph was an infinitely wise poet. Yet finally it is the lonely heart which predominates, by itself as the heart always must be, contemplating life and death and solitude, in love but ultimately unrequited, and beautifully articulate.

RALPH GUSTAFSON: A COLLAGE OF MEMORIES

compiled by Wendy Robbins
University of New Brunswick



Photographed by father, C.O. Gustafson

TWO GUSTAFSON POEMS

Translated by Mel B. Yoken

New Bedford, Massachusetts

Quebec Night

The red logs
crisp on the outside,
the wood solid, being new,
are chained to the sleigh.
The runner drags a cleat for the hill up,
and the snow is pleated in the logs,
the snow in the far woods
falling

Nuit de Québec

Les bûches rouges
crissent au dehors,
le bois solide, renaissant,
sont enchaînées au traîneau.
Le coureur entraîne un tasseau jusqu'au haut de la colline,
et la neige est plissé dans les buches
la neige au loin dans les bois
tombant

From Sweden

This troubled heart be still.
The forest is at rest
And no bird calls.

Far is summer from these snow.
The earth of any need
Is distant now.

Still be they striving. It is night.
Across the snow a man goes home—
Whose window burns its simple light.

De Suède

Sois tranquille coeur inquiet,
La forêt est au repos
Et il n'y a pas de chants d'oiseaux.

L'été est loin de ces neiges.
La terre libre de tout besoin
Est à présent lointaine.

Efforce-toi de continuer. C'est la nuit.
A travers la neige un homme rentre chez lui—
Dont la fenêtre allume l'unique lumière.

**FLAP OF THE FLAG
FOR RALPH GUSTAFSON**

Chad Norman
Burnaby, B.C.

Sounds, so far, remain free of monetary cost.
Some would disagree, saying "What about Music?"

I can speak of a gate, what meets & sees off
those who enter & exit what obviously is a prison.

I pay nothing to hear that unforgettable song.

Inside the strung wire a constant hum,
lives being used to pay the price for crimes;
like the gate, each ready mouth waits,
to open or close, letting you in,
setting you free. Sound, asking to be heard.

When the morning offers a horizon of flags,
complete & pleasing with wind, it is for the eye.

When the snowfall is no longer perfection,
the human come & gone, footprints tell no story.

A radio plays. Damn this country's media!

The prison, out of the way, listens to static.
At the gate a guard wears a Walkman.

A radio plays. No story. No song. A poet is dead.

To dictate what's important for the listeners,
what's worthy news—
who's behind this repeated offense?
For a country to grow it must be told
the poet was alive, go & find out why.

How often we come to know the murderer,
the liar, the hero,—even the clown;
we can fill ourselves with the coverage of them all.

The poet is still dead.
Not a word about the man. Why?
No sensational crime. No new tracks in the snow.

He did not live in Hollywood, home was North Hatley,
a world within this country Canada
where the poets can leave, if we let them,
without a sound, without a cost.

It has taken the flap of the flag
to remind me
how temporary freedom is,
why he spent his life serving
the emptiness of a piece of paper.

HOW LUCKY I WAS

Fredericka Boulton

Victoria, B.C.

How lucky I was to have Ralph as my “grown-up” and accomplished 1st cousin (our mother’s being sisters and Ralph being 8 years older than I!)

I have always admired his poetry as well as his great knowledge of music. His books have travelled all over the world with me. I fully appreciated them in War Times when I was overseas in the Air Force.

I remember one of his friends saying that those who never knew Ralph will never know how much they have missed.



Photographed by father, C.O. Gustafson

THE OXFORD DAYS: PERSONAL MEMORIES

Iris Saunders Robbins*Pointe Claire, Quebec*

My long friendship with Ralph began aboard the “Empress of Australia,” enroute to Great Britain, in 1930—Ralph on his way to Oxford, I on my way to boarding school in England, preceded by a long summer visit with my grandmother.

We got along famously—I knew nothing of his work at the time, although in the years that followed I became one of his greatest fans (and I own all his books of poetry). He was a romantic figure ... tall, dark, and handsome, as one might have imagined Keats or Byron to be.

We went, together, to the Oxford Commencement Ball, with Lew Stone’s orchestra, Al Bowly signing “Blue Moon,” and the biggest strawberries I have ever seen. It was a wonderful night! A large group photograph was taken in the early morning in the garden.

Another high point was the Oxford and Cambridge Boat Race dance, held at Claridge’s Hotel in London. It was a glittering affair! ... And I have as a souvenir a framed caricature of me, done by an artist at the ball. We had an excellent view of the finish line of the famous race—from the roof of a prominent building (arranged by my uncle).

While Ralph remained in England, during which time I pursued professional diplomas in dance in London, we kept in spasmodic touch. We had a lot of good times. Ralph spent Christmas holidays at my grandmother’s home. He enjoyed reading Chaucer in the garden in the summer, and he played the piano for our enjoyment.

While he was travelling on the Continent, he wrote a personal poem to me in one of his letters. As Betty says, I knew Ralph before she did; however, she is the one with the lasting influence on his life. I have memories of his friendship and a wide appreciation of his work.

RALPH GUSTAFSON

William C. McConnell
West Vancouver, B.C.

In late life Ralph wrote what was seemingly a simple poem. At least I thought so until its impact riveted my attention to its heart:

There is only one great grandeur:
 Her returning. The grocery tote
 Is filled with two green cabbages
 Crisp with wet, tightly closed
 Sprouts, stretched string beans,
 And four tomatoes, on top.

Not a person can dismiss what all
 That amounts to Cezanne has it
 On a wooden framed canvas somewhere.

A poem? No, much more than that. An exquisite love poem written in the last years of his long, richly productive life devoted to scholarship, teaching, poetry, editing, music, travel, but, most of all, his wife and friends. A strong man, seldom aware of his own strength.

He wrote me in the early years of the Second World War, inviting me—a young and relatively unknown writer—to contribute to a book of prose and poetry he was editing for Penguin Books to be called *Canadian Accent*. Years later I reciprocated when Klanak Press published his *Rocky Mountain Poems* (and he and his wife, Betty, spent part of their honeymoon at our Burnaby Lake home.)

Characteristically, neither of us changed a word or a comma in the other's work.

But we didn't meet until 1954 at the Kingston Canadian writers' conference. Subsequently, when my legal work took me to New York (where he continued for some years his Wartime duties heading the British Information Office), his urbane knowledge of music and art, even the arcane world of contemporary dance, relieved the stress of daytime legal conferences.

By happy chance my law partnership employed, during the seventies, a young gifted lawyer who had, in his own words, "been lucky to win a hockey scholarship to Bishop's University and studied under that gifted teacher and poet, Ralph Gustafson." He insisted that his new love for literature, art, and music was also the result of his scholarship and affirmed what many of Gustafson's students had already

related, that Ralph's inspired teaching had cast their lives in a richer direction.

Ralph's immediate presence may be missed. But not his gifts, not his prose, and certainly not his poetry.



Photograph by P. Freeman

**NOW WHENEVER SOMEONE SAYS YOUR NAME:
A RECOLLECTION**

In memoriam Ralph Gustafson

Raymond Souster

Toronto, Ontario

Ralph, now whenever someone says your name,
or it's quoted in some literary review,
I've been taken back in memory more than once
to that Hades-hot August evening rush hour
(how hot was it? Would you believe
even New York cabbies were in miserable moods!),
when Lia and I took an airless taxi
across town from LaGuardia,
first through the shimmering sweat-box that was Queen's,
then into the twice-dead, breathless canyons of Manhattan,
ending up in front of a faded hotel marquee, which their ad
in the *Globe* of a week before had hooked us
with its cunning phrase "right in the heart
of picturesque Grammercy Park."

Well, granted it may have been picturesque
in 1910 or before; but now as the oppressive
near-dusk was thankfully lowering,
and we walked inside our hotel and across the lobby,
I'm sure the first faint alarum-bells
must have sounded inside us. Nevertheless,
we checked in without any trouble at the desk,
then followed a bellhop carrying our bags
onto an elevator, which reeked of some disinfectant,
and slowly clicked off the floors to the eighth,
where we were introduced to a dimly-lit hallway,
with our bellhop stopping halfway down and selecting
a door with an indistinct number which unlocked for him,
and we waited while he dumped our bags on the floor,
then clicked on the lights as we stood in the doorway
with unbelieving looks as the first whiffs of a strong, musty odour
laced with antiseptic spray struck our unprepared senses,
smacking us squarely first between the nose,
then the eyes which met the dark-green wallpaper

smear'd with oil or grease stains much too prominent
for even the half-dark of this room to hide...

It couldn't have taken us more than a long ten minutes
after we'd paid off the bellhop and were alone,
to vote thumbs down on this miserable excuse for a room,
with Lia almost right away saying, look, I don't think I can stand
being in here for another hour, never mind the whole night,
and she didn't need to say one word more, I'd become
as convinced as her that we'd drawn a real lemon.
I'd better get busy on the blower
before it gets any later, I said, but struck a snag right away,
there was no yellow pages book in our room,
only the huge four-inch regular monster. So, I remember,
I had to leave her there alone, go down grab a phone in the lobby,
and under "hotel" finding pages of listings, making it
a real crap shoot. So for the next fun-filled hour
everyone I talked to sounded very nice, very patient,
only it seems there were several large conventions in town,
so each place was booked solid, some longer than a week.
I finally put down the phone, wondering how she'd take the news
when I went back to our lousy room. But right about then
I had my one break of the day. Your name, Ralph,
for some reason, flashed brightly on my radar screen.
You still might be in New York, I reasoned, remembering now
how I'd tried to phone you in '46 when Bill Goldberg and I
had hit the Big Apple on a shoe-string,
with Louis Dudek's one-roomed,
Amsterdam and 125th Street apartment,
All ours for a three-day flop.
I believe you were listed
under a Central Park South location then,
but your telephone rang and rang
and nobody answered. So I never had the pleasure
of meeting you then. Now it was 1952,
and here I was ringing you again.

Hoping against hope that someone would answer,
so you might be able to pull off a miracle for us,
I said inside Thank the Lord as you yourself finally answered,
your calm, even voice reassuring from the start.
Next, I tried to shorten our tale of woe,
but still must have talked your ear off.

That's rotten luck, Ray, you said. It's pretty late, I know,
 but there's got to be something available
 in a big town like this. Just let me get back to you,
 and relax, I'll do the worrying for a while.

So feeling much relieved, I rode the elevator back up,
 told a nervous wife (who'd been wondering where I'd got to),
 that you'd gone to work for us,
 and if anyone could dig up a room at this hour
 our poet friend with his B.I.S.* background
 would be sure to snare something.

And, wonder of wonders, less than half an hour later,
 our phone rang suddenly, making us jump in our chairs.
 And it was you, Ralph, telling us we were in luck,
 you'd lasooed us a nice room up at the Great Western,
 a hotel Jack Dempsey'd once owned, right next
 to the Carnegie Hall rehearsal rooms.
 I think you'll like it, I've stayed there myself,
 so pack up your things,
 I told them you'd be there in an hour.

And not that much later the two of us were admiring
 the huge, high-ceilinged room on the fourth floor
 of our great new hotel. Still marvelling
 at the monster hulk of a bathtub
 raised four inches off the floor, with the world's
 largest hot-and-cold running faucets. And I lost no time, Ralph,
 in phoning you back to stammer out our heart-felt thanks,
 and of course with my big mouth flapping simply had to tell you
 of our elevator ride as we checked out
 of our Grammercy Park disaster. The elevator man
 looked surprised to see us leaving (or was he?),
 and told us quite matter-of-factly
 about the fellow Canadian ("from Toronto like you"),
 murdered in his room in early afternoon.
 It seems he'd brought a stranger back with him,
 got fatally stabbed for his stupidity.
 I still recall your words, Ralph: "it's a good thing
 you got out of there tonight. Now I hope you'll feel
 like joining me for lunch tomorrow; if you both eat Oriental food,
 there's a great place down in the Village."

Words we could expect, I suppose,
from our saviour of the moment,
our friend forever after. Your many kindnesses
have stayed with us and warmed us,
are even warmer in our hearts today.
Ralph, we wish you somehow could have lived forever!

**British Information Service*



Photograph by Alfredo Valente

**AFTER THE SNOW STOPPED: A BRIEF REFLECTION ON
RALPH GUSTAFSON AS POET AND FRIEND**

Marya Fiamengo

West Vancouver, B.C.

Ralph Gustafson was a cherished friend. He displayed in his life and in his work a restrained grandeur of mind. Reflecting on his distinguished oeuvre prompts some random observations of what in his work mirrors his characteristic civility of demeanour. Both the poet and the man displayed a spirit at once erudite, cultivated and civilized.

To meet him whenever he visited Vancouver was to share in the rich expanse of his imagination and the wide taste of his interests. Ralph and Betty stayed at the Sylvia Hotel. Inevitably we made our way from the hotel over the notorious traffic choked Lions Gate Bridge to the calm cool of a Chinese restaurant at the top of Capilano Road near the Cleveland dam. There, surrounded by mountain peaks, not far from the subdued rush of mountain river water, we shared the pleasure of food enhanced by the spice of lively literary gossip and debate.

Another vividly etched memory has its origins in Winnipeg. One year the Annual General Meeting of the League of Canadian Poets happened to coincide with Orthodox Easter. Ralph, Betty and I made our way to the Easter Eve vigil at a Russian Orthodox church near our hotel. There we prayed for the recovery of Gerry Lampert, the League's Executive Director, who had collapsed that afternoon from a heart attack. We held our newly lit candles in hopeful hands. As we meditated on Gerry's condition our candles, caught in some passing current of air, were extinguished. Returning to the hotel we heard Gerry had died while we were at the service. The incident struck a chord of eerie shared sorrow in each of us.

As I reread Ralph's work, that mysterious synchronicity impinges on my memory. Ralph Gustafson's poetry reverberates with a recognition of the unfathomable complexities of human mortality: its mystery and its wonder. "The sad joy of the world" of which he writes in *Landscape With Rain*.

Among his many vivid poems, one that stands out most strongly for me is the innovative sonnet "In the Yukon." Here Gustafson captures both the essential feel of Canadian wilderness and the

complexity of the human condition. "In the Yukon" is a microcosm of Gustafson's poetic concerns. While cosmopolitan in taste and interest, he was a Canadian first with a Canadian's response to experience. Love of wilderness leads to reflections on the many faceted profundities of the human situation. Much as he loved the natural beauty of the Canadian landscape depicted with vital vividness in *Rocky Mountain Poems*, Gustafson was equally sensitive to the nuances of history, the aesthetics of pleasure in the world of art, music, architecture, the reverberations and the tragic ramifications of the impact of history on individual lives.

Gustafson's compassion is acknowledged in *Soviet Poems*, a collection which expresses the ubiquity of human misery, and the ability of people to endure, to transmute misery into ordinary happiness. Mankind is imperfect, he observes in "The Old Woman." Politicians and bad manners leave a detritus on perfect peace. Yet the old woman is happy. She sweeps for a few kopeks, for lentils for her soup. She prompts the question:

"What is this Moscow
this humanity?"

Nowhere is the elegant critical astuteness of Gustafson's mind more apparent than in *Plummets*, a collection of essays which warns, among other considerations, against contempt for the formal elements of poetry. When innovation is carried to the point of inaccessibility, when "broken prose is thought to be rhythm: syntactical incoherence is declared to be communication" then the social effect of poetry is defeated. The effect is anarchy, a state where signed cigarette butts become art, not the artifacts of a decaying society.

In *Landscape With Rain*, Gustafson writes of the "far scent of a downward wind" which builds "structures of outlasting music." This music sounds in an effortless lyric distillation in the perfected craftsmanship found in *Tracks in the Snow*, his final book. Spare, direct, clear, each poem is an arrow precisely, unerringly directed. Each hits its target with delicacy and grace of execution. "Translucent, tender?" the "Answer insoluble" of the poem "Venetian Dusk" when "Gracious the light of evening touches the water" directs us to a memory of "outlasting music." The poem "The Moment Is As Her Presence Is" encapsulates moments of happiness with which "Empires can't compete."

The wit of "Sermon For The Day," the sheer exuberance of "At The Rue De Buci One Evening," the consummate wisdom of

"Cezanne And String Beans," the range of milieu—Venice, Paris, New York, North Hatley—give to *Tracks in the Snow* an eloquent dimension. Everywhere the poet speaks of the man he is; and that man speaks to the human extension in all of us. All we remember "is the meaning" because "Of Course Seeing The World First Is Necessary." Gustafson shows us the world. Generous, courteous, calm, he takes us with him as far as he can until "The snow stopped and there was release." Ralph Gustafson's release is our fulfilment.

Circles and Painted Horses

In Memoriam — Ralph Gustafson

*...The painted horse
goes into that darkness where all circles go.
—Patrick Lane*

The painted horse. Darkness.
I write of concentric circles
turning into light. Summer
grief turns those circles dark.

My circles spin. A vatic silence
speaks to the poet of the carousel.
He draws those sinuous charts
of darkness where all circles
go. His painted horse faithful
as the sun returning after rain
emerges grave with augury.

In childhood
I loved cold. Longed for
the inviolate of snow. Evening
ultimates of violet light. Now
late and large in life I know
the harder core of ice.

Old friends
clear in the heart and dear
as the bells of morning climb
the painted horses. Ride soft
eyed into galactic distance.

Leave me to gaze
at mullioned windows. Lookouts
of memory. Framed by the lattice
of time shared. Windows lit
by the flicker of a heart bright
with the patina of farewell.

Slow horse. Fading
anchored rider. Reins restive with
longing for pattern. Design to defeat
depredation. Respond to the silver
of water. The firm earth of healing.
Green gratitude in the arms of sleep.

A MEMORY OF PROFESSOR RALPH GUSTAFSON

Heather Haas Barclay

London, Ontario

Volume 1, No. 1—a new view of Canadian literature so we thought, and with gentle iconoclasm (remember, we were all for the psychedelic revolution in 1969) named our publication *nuevue*. In our flourish for poetry, love, and art in the Canadian garden of culture we 20 year-old students thought we had both discovered and dug it. I, later and greyer, recognize the source of so much of our confident energy.

Agreeing to be Honorary President of *nuevue*, our poet-professor, Ralph Gustafson, included the roles of mentor, teacher, contributor, arbitrator in his position. Never, however, did Ralph undertake to direct us. What he gave is what poems, projects, and people most require. To complete this thought, a story....

Along with other Canadian poets, Ralph suggested we contact Earle Birney for a submission which arrived in due course. As 20 year-old cultural missionaries, acknowledgement was not our strong point, and because Earle had been writing quite a bit longer than we had been acclaiming, he demanded we return his unacknowledged poem. Ralph typed a suggestion on that distinctive typewriter of his (with the ever-new black ribbon and the hopping “a”) that you “write your own apology & say how grateful you are to be printing” the poem. Done. Some weeks later, in a snow-storm, Ralph and I bundled off to hear Earle read at the University of Sherbrooke. Afterward, and over the requisite dry sherry, Ralph took my arm and steered me toward Earle.

“This young woman,” Ralph said to Earle, “is the editor of *nuevue*.”

No more than that, but in the saying Ralph chose his being verb carefully. And I, for long after, thought with respect to Ralph: Yes. I am.

RALPH GUSTAFSON, AS REMEMBERED

David Anido*Ottawa, Ontario*

I remember Ralph Gustafson as one of the two or three teachers who illuminated and strengthened my consciousness of being Canadian. He was a quiet man of strong and solid opinion. "Canada is the great world northern, and there is no South to melt into...." Ralph had a global vision with a deep sense of his local roots.

Ralph instilled the concept of the indivisibility of the Canadian spirit, as it belongs in the world. No separatist politician on a soap-box will ever have the lasting power of the ethics and wisdom of this poet. That he lies buried on a hill in North Hatley, Québec, is neither coincidence nor mistake. There is no "south hatley" to melt into, nor a separate territory to take his grave artificially out of Canada. This green hill is not "far away."

I remember Ralph standing on the Alban Hills near Christchurch, New Zealand, looking down over the South Pacific. He saw the peace of that Pacific world, and compared it to the war of the Prague Spring in Czechoslovakia that had so touched his sense of human freedom. We discussed the imperial Japanese war machine that had threatened New Zealand and Australia, but that war had been won. There was Canadian and allied blood in these warm southern waters; the price of freedom. Ralph travelled worldwide to touch these epiphanies.

I remember Ralph at a Canadian Studies Conference in Sicily where he was guest of honour with Irving Layton. This odyssey took Betty and Ralph from the Straits of Messina (Scylla and Charybdis) to the Cathedral of Palermo, then south to the ancient Greek city of Syracuse. The Fiat 125 sedan that took him was fast for the roads, but slow for his imagination. His native wit buzzed. He commented on the skill of the driver who navigated the wonderfully erratic Italian traffic, and reflected as much on things modern as things ancient while the orchards and olive groves shot by. We arrived back in Messina in time for dinner having circum-navigated Sicily in a day.

I remember Ralph and Betty at their home in North Hatley just after a chimney fire had blackened the living room. Ralph gave me two books on Arthurian legend "that had survived the fire." Betty

told him not to exaggerate. In the corner of the room, recordings and music scores sat on shelves reminding me that, for Ralph, music and poetry were part of the great holistic language of the human spirit. He was an oracular voice of that spirit in a country where heroes often elude due fame.

The Eastern Townships, perhaps even more than my first years in Labrador, remain the heart and hearth of my citizenship. More than any other person Ralph Gustafson has reinforced that such a sense of place can never die. Ralph wrought magnificently for Canada and our future. At Bishop's University his memory deserves permanent study and appreciation for future generations.



Father and son

RALPH GUSTAFSON: MUSICIAN AND MUSIC CRITIC

Howard Brown*Lennoxville, Quebec*

I used to hear the CBC music broadcasts by Ralph Gustafson before knowing him as a colleague at Bishop's University. Listeners to his programmes were aware that here was a Canadian poet and music critic with an extraordinary knowledge of pianists and their recorded repertoire. Further, the selections were drawn mainly from his own collection of rare 78 rpms, gathered with a sure sense of style and interpretation.

At his home, he delighted in playing for visitors highlights of performances by a range of artists. Inevitably, one sensed that he would like to have these fine traditions made available to others. And so, in 1971, the *Gustafson Piano Library* was created, a non-profit archive of his records which were transcribed to tapes. The production was done by Derek Oppen and myself over a period of ten years, with requests by institutions and individuals coming from North America and abroad. It is interesting to note that the pianist, Marc-André Hamelin, speaks of the pleasures the series gave him in his formative years.

Ralph and his wife Betty were good travelling companions. Together we attended the Wagner "Ring" Cycle at Bayreuth in 1969—my first visit—but one of many for them when he covered the Festivals for the CBC. In October, 1970, a group of Bishop's students travelled with Ralph and Betty to New York for a concert by some dozen world-renowned pianists on behalf of the *International Piano Library*. Earl Wild, Rosalyn Tureck, Alicia de Laroccha, Jorge Bolet, Guiomar Novaes headed the galaxy of names. Remarkably enough, the first three pianists gave recitals at Bishop's. What 'pull' Ralph must have had to arrange for artists of such stature to perform in our Concert Series! Those heights have been hard to match ever since.

TWO OCCASIONS, TWO POEMS

Robert Gibbs
Fredericton, N.B.

The two occasions I remember best are: the weekend I spent at the Gustafsons' for an arts festival going on at Bishop's (just after the FLQ crisis); and the visit I made to the Brontes' home in Haworth with Ralph and Betty, when we were attending a conference on Canadian literature at Leeds in 1975. The two poems commemorate those occasions.

For Betty Gustafson in Memory of Ralph

Look, you have had love and though
 Now alone, the birds are swift
 In the grain where ripe fulness is

—from "Early Summer" in *Twelve Landscapes*

1

The initials are the same
 his and mine but not
 ear or eye or heart
 I can make no claim

I'd have to wear a jeweller's
 eyeglass screwed in
 to fix as he fixed
 onto and into crocuses
 through cracks in tiles
 mosaics Greek and Venetian
 on his globewide glebe
 fixed them in his viking scop's
 scope true and blue

And what an earpiece I'd
 have to affix or implant

to finger his figures
his giques across fissures
pointed and counterpointed

And when I read the poems
I can hear him still
startled and wary bemused
and rueful tongue on tiptoe
to come fresh upon
trilliums in Maytime

2

We walked he and you
and I me teasing him
about his scrutineering and
poems already com-
positioning themselves in his head
words jostling and
jockeying for their say

We walked from the tourist-treked
rectory with its low-beamed
chambers and its rook-black
cabinet whose twelve-apostle
panels Charlotte wrote about

We walked up to the moor
above the slates me
teasing him out of
exhilaration at being
there at that height
and outlook in wuthered-over
heather October-coloured with
him and you and so much love

For Ralph Gustafson Writing on Pierre Laporte

On St. Valentine's Eve
soundless rain drills the snow
baring dark pools on the winterfast lake

Below me somewhere a man taps at a poem
too faint almost to hear
yet in his silences

I can half discern the shapes
he has found no words for
freezing his hands above his keys

They say there's no frost in the ground
and that any sudden letting go
will carry everything with it

roads bridges and low lying houses
The still rain and fingers withheld
set me dreaming of his words

as two converging streams
elegance and serenity
twin stairways of this very house

that nevertheless go down
to that locked in place pitchblack
that car trunk close around me

and I too must clutch at and hold
with fingers well blooded
the dead man's torn throat

RALPH GUSTAFSON

Alex K. Paterson

Chancellor, Bishop's University

Throughout his career as a Professor at Bishop's University, Ralph Gustafson was enthusiastic, interested, and always interesting. His recognition as an outstanding poet, of course, gained him the respect of students and faculty alike. I considered him a friend and inspiration, and I know that many on and off the Bishop's campus admired both Ralph and his work. He is greatly missed.



At home in North Hatley

RALPH GUSTAFSON

Cary Fagan*Toronto, Ontario*

When my wife, Joanne Schwartz, and I decided to found a small publisher of limited edition books in 1985, Ralph was the first author we approached. Ralph sent us his wonderful sequence *Twelve Landscapes* and we accepted it immediately. Hesitantly I sent off a couple of suggested changes and was surprised to see how readily Ralph responded to them. It was not a question of either pride or humility, but of making the best poems possible.

In the summer before the book appeared, Joanne and I visited Ralph and Betty in North Hatley, and that was the real beginning of our friendship. They came to Toronto for the launch of *Twelve Landscapes* and Ralph signed each copy at the same table where we had sewn and bound them. After that we would always get together whenever the Gustafsons came to Toronto, and once we were fortunate to all be in New York at the same time—the city was a shared passion with us. Always the talk would turn to recent poetry and Ralph, becoming quite indignant, would inevitably complain that poetry these days wasn't musical enough!

I was amazed by the seeming effortlessness of Ralph's writing in the last decade of his life. He wrote many beautiful poems in those years (I am particularly fond of the sequence "Tuscany to Venezia" in *Shadows in the Grass*) and they seemed to pour from him like melodies. Reading them aloud, as I often did with a new book of Ralph's poems, I understood just what he meant by musicality.

RALPH GUSTAFSON: A MEMORY

Donald Winkler*Montreal, Quebec*

Ten years ago, winter, North Hatley. We are filming Ralph Gustafson. Of our crew of six, four are young women. The snow lies fluffy, plentiful on the ground. Each morning our apprentice must bounce up and down in the back of the van to help us mount the short steep hill leading to Ralph's house. Inside, all is warm and cozy. The talk is of poetry, memory, music, landscape. Ralph's baby-grand looms large at one end of the living room. We have him play. Between takes, he switches, mischievously, from Chopin to Gershwin. The crew gathers round. Young women on either side of him stand over his shoulder. One turns pages. They are charmed, he is in his element. Warm light plays on him as he plays, while outside, the light declines. His fingers come to rest on the keys. The audience applauds. Pause. The camera is ready. The moment is all.

MEMORIES

Sonja Skarstedt*Montreal, Quebec*

In 1987 I founded a literary magazine called *Zymergy*, and was always on the lookout for prospective contributors. In the spring of 1988, during a miniature arts festival at Montreal's Galerie Daniel, the poet Raymond Filip introduced me to Ralph Gustafson. After feasting, for the first time, on the poet's dynamic, articulate reading of his poetry, I raced to make my inevitable request: would Mr. Gustafson consider sending a poem or three to *Zymergy*?

"Why, most certainly!"

Ten days later, he followed up that exuberant reply by mailing *Zymergy* five fresh masterpieces. Thus began an occasional yet lively correspondence: Ralph Gustafson was that rarest of individuals—a gifted and acclaimed writer who, despite a hectic schedule, took the time to communicate with the "little" people. Because of Ralph's generosity, *Zymergy* attained a spark of immortality, a respect all of its contributors could take pride in.

Two years later, we had an opportunity to visit Ralph and Betty Gustafson at their North Hatley home: we drove with a friend who was compiling a series of interviews on famous Canadian poets. While Ralph devoted the afternoon to his interviewer, Betty enticed us into a brief walking tour of the North Hatley that had shaped so many of Ralph's poems. Lake Massawippi sparkled up at us as we stepped along the curving autumnal road, its roadside trees filled with crab apples whose unvarnished reds brimmed with country tartness: a banquet to fill the six senses of a poet.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to record these memories.

WHAT I REMEMBER

Robert Ford

I considered Ralph Gustafson the best poet of our time in Canada, in a classic sense. His experiments were classical, but they were modern at the same time, and I felt a great rapport with him even before we met—for years before we met, indeed. We were writing in the same style in a sense, that is classical but modern.

We only met from time to time, but we corresponded for ages. I felt from the very beginning—from the very first poetry of his that I read—that this is for me. I remember right up until his death we corresponded, and I continue it with Betty.*

*(*This note was dictated to Wendy Robbins by Robert Ford by telephone from France, January 8th, 1996, on his 81st birthday.)*



Louis Dudek, Ron Everson and Ralph Gustafson at Way's Mill's, June 16, 1984.

LIVING IN THE HEART

Ron Smith*Lantzville, B.C.*

On the wall of my study hangs a black and white photograph of Ralph Gustafson. He has his back to the sea, which edges up to my front garden, his silver hair swept back by the wind. I cherish this image; it captures the profile of my friend speaking, perhaps reciting a poem to a cosmic audience. He loved being a writer. I look to this picture for inspiration and guidance, remembering he knew the power that words hold to move us to tenderness. Amazingly, his poetic will endured right to the last moment. Over his lifetime, his intricate poems became less complicated and increasingly exquisite. They reveal a man who was genuinely wise, a man who was equally aware of the serenity and violence in human nature. What people often miss is the wry smile, the chuckle that plays counterpoint to the major melodies.

Images from his poems come to mind: a piano (Chopin or Schubert seated before an ethereal keyboard), cathedrals, the Plaka (where Ralph walked, aware of those who had passed that way so long ago and where he heard the singing of their voices), the Rockies, books and records, his and Betty's garden, the lake. I see him in his raincoat, looking like a character who has just stepped out of a frame in *The Third Man*. I imagine him curled up before a winter fire with a bowl of popcorn and a glass of milk. A nightly ritual he took delight in confessing. A man of sublime and routine tastes. Complicated. Compassionate.

I'll remember his smile, the turn of his head toward Betty, and the knowing light lit so brightly in their eyes. "What is real is what the heart has." This line is not a poetic conceit—Ralph lived each moment in his heart. He also knew there is much we desire to say for which we can never, never find words. We can only add to the bloodline that reaches into the past and future, as Ralph Gustafson did so frequently, with grace.

I turn and look back over my shoulder; I hear him speaking his beautiful poems.

MUCH DESERVES REMEMBERING

Douglas Fetherling*Toronto, Ontario*

There is much about Ralph Gustafson that deserves remembering. He was highly civilized but never pompous, and he was a genuine cosmopolite: one of those rare Canadian writers who never stops being a Canadian but is equally at home in British and American culture. My dealings with him, though too few and too brief, were made memorable by his kindness as well as by his striking appearance. He was a handsome man, square-jawed and broad-shouldered, blessed with a mellifluous voice and a thick mane of luscious white hair. He seemed to have known everyone (ascending the talent scale) from Somerset Maugham to Ezra Pound, and he would recall the past ironically, as a means of putting his interlocutors at ease. As a reader, I was always pleased to note that as his long career progressed, it grew more various, and that in time he published two collections of short fiction and one double-decker gathering of essays. He was also a capital letter-writer, as can be seen from *A Literary Friendship: The Correspondence of Ralph Gustafson and W.W.E. Ross* (ECW, 1984), edited by Ralph's (and my) loyal friend Bruce Whiteman. Next to poetry, Ralph's cultural love was classical music, which is often alluded to in his poems and one on which he broadcast authoritative commentaries on CBC Radio. One of the last things he said to me was that he hated to see the standard of classic music reviewing in the *New York Times* decline.

IN MEMORIAM RALPH GUSTAFSON

Andrew P. MacDonald*Lennoxville, Quebec*

Ralph Gustafson was a dear friend whom I had the good fortune to first meet during my time as Composer-in-residence at Bishop's University in 1988. We got together in the fall of that year to discuss which of his poems I would use for a new composition I was writing for soprano, choir and string orchestra. The piece, which I called *The Birth of Spring*, is a depiction of the evolution from the cold stillness of winter to the vibrant emergence of spring, and I composed it as we progressed through those seasons.

Ralph was ecstatic about having his poems set to music. As we all know, he was a great authority in musical matters, and told me that he heard his poems in a fresh, new way in my settings—a way which he thoroughly enjoyed. He often spoke to me about the *verbal music* in poetry and when I read his poems I heard melodies and harmonies that were new to my ears. As I wrote the music down, I soon realized that a radical change was occurring—a change in my musical language characterized by an avoidance of complexity and an inclination towards greater purity of gesture and clarity of line. This new development continues to this day, and I attribute it to the influence of Ralph's work.

A few years later, I pull together another "suite" of Ralph's poems, including some of his last pieces from the *Tracks in the Snow* collection, in my composition, *Green Steps in Sunshine* (1994). Written for former National Ballet primaballerina Veronica Tennant as narrator/ percussionist/ dancer and virtuoso clarinetist James Campbell, the work is imbued with Ralph's youthful optimism, his emphasis on the simple joys of life and the ever-returning suggestion of regeneration, especially through recurrence of the colour green. *Green Steps* has been performed many times since its premiere in August of 1994 and audiences have been genuinely moved by Ralph's elegant insistence on the importance of "fixing the green steps," of "cardinals and clothespins" and of the "great gay dawn" as it

breaks over

The eastern hills, pink and ashen

The billion brilliance of the burning sun!

The title is, of course, drawn from the poetry itself, but whereas the “green steps” are on the surface an outdoor staircase, I intend them also as a picture of youthful dance—those first steps of wonder swirling in simple sunshine.

I want to compose much more music for Ralph’s poetry. In it I find sweet hope for our troubled times, and if through my compositions I can help spread Ralph’s message to the wider world, there may yet be some hope for our planet, some hope for “a concordance between heaven and earth.”



A poet reads.

RALPH GUSTAFSON AND “THE NEED OF GRACE”

Christopher Wiseman*Calgary, Alberta*

I forget who it was who called fine architecture “frozen music,” but it is a superb figure and one which reminds me of Ralph Gustafson—his love of music, the subtle turns and phrasings of his poems, the constant references to music in his work, the sense that any minute, poised on the edge of action and sound, his poems will come alive as song. Music. But, as well, paintings, buildings, museums, cities, landscapes, all held suspended, explored, lovingly configured in Ralph’s poetry. Places, but they become, through the music of lyric (or even the bitter anti-repression poems) the places of the heart where harmony keeps living. “If the music was not in jeopardy,” he wrote in his 1972 *Selected Poems*, “I have occasionally altered a word or a phrase.” Music more than fact. Cosmopolitan more than local. A poetry of wisdom and of grace.

My title comes from a generous blurb Ralph gave me for a book cover, in which he writes of “the true area of poetry—the wise adjustment of past emotion to the present need of grace.” A lovely, provocative statement, worth much thought. Certainly he was a poet of grace and a man of graciousness, and “the present need of grace” is even more acute now he is gone.

The last time I saw Ralph was after a reading he gave at the University of Calgary, during which, to the delight of the large audience, he chatted freely between poems, charming and challenging, not hiding his passion for music, poetry, art, the great human achievements, or his contempt for the trite and for those who would prostitute the things he loved. That evening he and Betty, my wife, and I had a long and, certainly for us, memorable dinner at Yervand’s—a favourite restaurant now sadly gone too—full of good talk, of what I can only call *Gemütlichkeit*. And, in that quiet, crinkly-eyed way, Ralph was the magnet, talking about his life, his favourite places and poets, and not holding back, either, his anger at shortsighted, ungenerous publishers. But mainly it was talk of things of grace and beauty and delight.

Ralph Gustafson was, to me, the famous Penguin anthology, the League of Canadian Poets. But, more than that, the man who believed that “poetry is an art and not a self-demonstration,” that

“the saving grace is poetry,” that the world is “no good without what music we can make of it.” His own under-rated poetry demonstrates these things with elegance, force and accessibility (how he hated the obscure and trendy), revealing, shaping, making sense of ourselves to ourselves. A cheap hostile review of his last book a couple of years ago made me, through my sad anger, realise even more what Ralph Gustafson meant by “the present need of grace.” I shall remember those words always. They are, to me, at the dignified and sophisticated heart of the man and his work.



Irving Layton, Ralph Gustafson and Al Purdy at University of Toronto, November 12, 1987.

TWO POEMS FOR RALPH GUSTAFSON

Gary Geddes

Dunvegan, Ontario

Mercury at Minus 20

The stove is damped so air constricted
whistles in the draft and mental casings creak
as they expand. Jays impatient and aggressive
at the feeder. Me, too, I'm on survival mode,
consume more carbohydrates than I need.
My body, slow, impolitic, resists
the old imperatives. I'll ski the back trail
yet, if temperatures permit. The crippled
cedars, permanently bent from wrapping
round a fallen maple as they grew, now
form a bold menorah that lights my spirit
as I pass. Meanwhile the cold dictates,
decrees this lethargy, this slow combustion
holding back an ice age in the blood.

The Quality of Light

The quality of light is what arrests the man
moving, by gradations, through the snowy field
on skis. He eyes the outlines of trail
broken yesterday, shaped and contoured
by the wind, wind that never sleeps
yet seldom tires of letting its cold tongue
sculpt and sweep a tentative world of forms.

Two steps behind, conserving energy
by keeping to the beaten track, the dog
takes bites of snow and contemplates
an archeology of smell. Spoons, markings
of its undomesticated kind who cross
this man-made path at random, making
their own incursions in the narrative.

As though sun's rays, denied by angle
and position of the earth their customary
part, ricochet a thousand times among
the mirrored crystals, emerging more intense,
more light than light itself, so the man,
stumbling from thought to thought, catches
balance, a blinking new-born Lazarus.

The sculpted troughs, too narrow now for use,
bind skis together at the harness, or nudge
one tip across another for a fall. The dog
looks on, one could almost say amused, though
not itself sure-footed on this stage. Both man
and dog recall how February storms
cause dunes of snow to curl like breaking waves.

Imagine them explorers in a vast Sahara
stepping from a blizzard of sand, half-stunned,
eyes asquint against abrasion. Flesh dreams
water, needing full protection from a sun
that burns whatever peeks from hair or cloth.
Light there is thick and granular and radiates
in ridges from the ground; here, the man

with bamboo poles extending from his arms
has learned to cover space by watching
his companion, by reaching back in time
to when four limbs propelled him. The rigid sticks
beneath his feet are unintersecting lines
in a parallel universe of cold,
where now he pauses, almost snow-blind, old,

and thinks of history every day rewritten
by revisionist monks, amnesiac
ideologues in flowing robes. He sees
them near stone-fences fast at work, pretends
scant notice, and ploughing his way
through a No-man's Land of ice, records
the wins and losses on both sides.

 AND NEVER TOO OLD TO BE WORTH LOVING

Don Coles

Toronto, Ontario

Ralph Gustafson has a poem which, the more I re-enter it, the more I think it speaks not only of the old and familiar conundrum of the unobserved tree falling in the forest, but even more movingly speaks of Gustafson himself and his perhaps-deepest wish, aim, dream—to shed the selfconscious ego altogether and just articulate natural existence, just show forth the geranium, the tree, the strain of music, the path up the mountain, the water out of the tap, “the whole nightshirt / Get-up and celestial existence of existence.”

Let me not romanticize this. Ralph’s ego was as big as anybody’s: in the last years of his life that ego was hurt by a whole bunch of things, which there’s little point in detailing but which boiled down to reviewers, publishers, booksellers, media-apparatchiks of various sorts, slighting him. Well, he *thought* they did. I agree with him, by the way. Reminds you, sort of, of Freud’s lament: “You think I am too old to be worth loving.” So that’s one thing and enough of it too.

But what I’m writing of here is not the man in his usual-guy hours but the man who, more than anyone I’ve known, walked and sat and drove and spoke with the awareness of poetry right up there close beside him. I don’t mean the awareness of a *poem*: lots of people apparently live like that, or say they do, and they tend to pose and overwrite, both. No, I mean the sense, which I believe Ralph had, that there is always, profoundly immanent in whatever’s visibly present or audibly going on, a value that nothing can ever surpass, a calm and unaggressive being-ness that will, in the end, triumph over all else, over all “the sham, the gather and sanctification, / Of cheapness, the handwashing...” This is what matters, this is the final wisdom, maybe, and now we’re back again where we started a minute or so ago with that ego and non-ego. Because this value in *things*, so Rilkean of course and so Gustafsonian, was there before any poet arrived and will be there after all poets leave again, and although a poet is greatly, greatly important to *us* in all this, because “someone / Has to be around to make the act of perceiving,” still it will matter, and matter incalculably, that that perceiver knows what’s really going on here

and knows where she or he stands in relation to it. The lines "...here were acts / Without man in them" are a cry of love, I think, it's *the* cry that I think echoes through Ralph Gustafson's poems, all thirty or so volumes of them, and it's because I'm pretty sure of this that I am able to believe that in spite of the disappointments and frustrations that are or will be for all of us our mortal lot, that this poet dealt with it all at the end and knew that all was okay, was well. He'd been one of the two or three most important figures in the rise-to-confidence of poetry in Canada; he'd edited the Penguin anthologies and ambassadored (gently, elegantly, nobody else could have done it with such style) on our behalf in Bayreuth and Venice and a bunch more places; he'd had a marriage than which nobody gets to have a closer or more cherished one; he'd advised and enlightened many. And now it had come to this, as he'd known it would:

Sun just reached the scarlet geranium
Set out in the antique fire-bucket.

Totally true. Nothing phony or inflated. And kind of beautiful.

RALPH GUSTAFSON

Arthur Motyer*Sackville, N.B.*

Canadian poet, private friend. Long ago I christened him *Ralphissimus*, the most Ralph there could possibly be, and Betty, his Elizabeth, his Gloriana. And that is the way they signed their dozens of letters and postcards to me thereafter. Ralph did not have to spend all his life looking for Gloriana: he found her early, they stayed together, and there was “joy in heaven like innocence and whitefalls of snow.”

Almost thirty years ago, when I asked him for my own copy of one particular poem, he said he had that terrifying sinking feeling that his poems had flopped: “The only things I can ever be sure of are rhythm and the verbal music.” And in another letter: “Perfection. O so wonderful but a spoiler too. Best to be a Swiss clock maker.” Perhaps. Perhaps. He was, indeed, a superb craftsman—we all know that—but beyond unparalleled technique there was unfailing vision to the very end. Put together, he was justified in his “hope for masterpieces, this lust to walk the globe.”

Citing Ralph for an honorary degree at Mount Allison in 1973, I spoke of his “passionate elegance,” a summation-phrase he said he liked about his work more than any other. “Elegance is out of fashion but it won’t always be—and you persuade me to more. Passion in poetry is now at loose ends, but life *will* be shaped.”

You were right, *Ralphissimus*. You have shaped our lives. There is joy in heaven, more than ever.

RALPH GUSTAFSON

Kathleen Harper*Victoria, B.C.*

I first met Ralph Gustafson in the summer of 1963, when we were both neophytes about to join the faculty of Bishop's University. We occupied adjoining offices, supported each at difficult times, and at the end of the first semester drank a toast together to celebrate the end of lectures. As I came to know him as a colleague and friend, I became more and more aware of his honesty, his sensitivity to the feelings of others, and his enormous capacity for appreciating life. He often said that poetry was the affirmation of life, and he showed his love of music and beauty and his wide knowledge of the classics in all he did.

Others will write of his fine poetry, his perception of character revealed in his short stories, and his good work in bringing Canadian poetry to the notice of other countries in the Penguin editions of his *Anthology of Canadian Poetry*. I would like to speak of our friendship over the years and his influence on the generations of students who enjoyed his lectures. Held in respect as he was across the country and indeed throughout the world, he was nevertheless a simple and modest man, always ready to encourage his students and talk with them about their own interests. He instilled in them a love of music and poetry, in itself no mean feat. From his lecture room would come bursts of laughter, as he lit up sometimes dry knowledge with his humour. Many of his students kept in touch with him for the rest of his life, and he always had time for them.

On Ralph's appointment as poet-in-residence, A.J.M. Smith wrote the following verse:

The leaden owl did erstwhile reign supreme
O'er all the darksome groves of Academe;
But now, a marvel! a green laurel springs
And from its topmost bough a linnnet sings.
Lo! as the black Professorate advance
In solemn Convocation, see, they dance!

This short verse captures a picture of Ralph as I want to remember him — a man without pretence, enjoying the many facets of life but having at the same time a sensitive awareness of the

tragedies and cruelty of the world and a corresponding fierce hatred of violence; a generous and kind man, who will always be remembered with love and gratitude by those who knew him; a man, in fact, who has not lived in vain.



Ralph Gustafson reading "The Trail under Mt. Michael" in front of his portrait by Rosengarten, National Arts Centre, Ottawa, September 16, 1981.

A POETIC TOWNSHIP VOICE

Phyllis Emery Skeats*North Hatley, Quebec*

Ralph Gustafson was a Canadian poet of extraordinary skill and sensitivity. He travelled, visiting much of the world, wrote of his experiences in those places, and always "came home" to write of his beloved Eastern Townships in Quebec.

In an interview with a former student Ralph stated: "I've reached the conviction that an artist acquires a style which is concentric with his personality, his knowledge and the instincts he is born with. The poem can be good formally but it remains far less rich without the man and the personality behind the poetry." Perhaps that is why many particularly enjoy his poetry dealing with nature and "his place." He had the art of making everyday happenings and objects into poetry, acts like pruning a bush, piling a woodpile, caring for growing things. He taught us to love these simple tasks along with him; like a lovely vision, they become almost sacred.

And then there were his beloved Lake Massawippi and North Hatley, which often appear in his poetry works like "At The Lake's Side" and "Wednesday in North Hatley."

I write not as a critic, but as a friend, and mother of two children who studied with him, both of whom learned much about literature and the "love of it" from Ralph while at Bishop's University. He was truly a gentle man and poet.

Go Softly, Ralph.
Go softly, Braveheart
to your Paradise.
Feel free to fly
at last.
For there are those of us
left here to read your
blueprints...your plans for
that earthly Paradise
you leave behind.
The gold crested waves at sunset
welcoming the shrieking gull
dipping to touch the gold...
the redbreasted harbinger of Spring

weaving that intricate nesting place
for future choirs.
The mighty oaks and loyal maples
sighing softly at eventide
all speak your language
of poetry...
The countenance of the pansy
always welcoming
as the tiger-lily guards your hill...
They will continue to tell of
your heart's delight with reverence and awe
of your beloved Lake Massawippi...and
"Wednesday in North Hatley"

A PERSONAL MEMOIR

Robert Chesterman*Vancouver, B.C.*

My first meeting with Ralph Gustafson didn't occur in Canada but in New York. The year was 1960. I had arrived in Vancouver three years prior as a youthful immigrant, when it was assumed by new friends and acquaintances that I was the possessor of a good English education and a firm grounding in music. It would have been closer to the truth to acknowledge a slight familiarity with literature, albeit with a genuine love of musical expression. I had not completed any formal education in the arts.

It is important to lay stress on these matters since Ralph was a strong influence on my own development. We were first drawn together through enquiries I was making about great keyboard virtuosos of the turn of the century. In these early years, I had, by some miraculous good fortune, landed a position as a neophyte producer for CBC's radio network. It was only a short time after a rapid initiation into program creation that I was encouraged to undertake a survey of "Masters of the Keyboard," both past and present. The director of radio on the West Coast at that time was Robert Harlow. He was also a writer, but not a poet. Yet by this link which seems to exist between so many who live by their imaginations, Mr. Harlow was able to suggest a certain Ralph Gustafson who might be useful in helping to prepare such a broadcast series. The only difficulty was that Ralph, although Canadian, resided in the United States.

Good fortune always seemed to surround me, however, for I had just married at this period and, like all young Englishmen with strong family ties, it was essential I take my adored bride back to London for those necessary if somewhat daunting presentations. Thus it was a journey that had to be made via New York. It was in the lobby of one of the grand hotels on Fifth Avenue, close to Central Park, that I first met this tall, distinguished gentleman. The location was chosen for convenience and identification, not because either of us pretended to a certain lifestyle. From the outset it proved to be an association full of good humour, a grand spirit of enquiry into many subjects, and, for me, a growing familiarity with the spoken and written word which extended far beyond the merely descriptive.

And so it began. First to be ushered in were such keyboard giants as Moriz Rosenthal, Josefs Hofmann and Lhevinne, the unbelievable transcriptions of Leopold Godowsky, and the legacy of Leschetitzky. All these were names to conjure with and yet, amazingly, their art was available through a vast record collection which Ralph and his beloved wife and companion, Betty, had discovered when spending hours rummaging through the stacks of old record stores and warehouses across Uptown and Downtown New York. It was the language which enticed the listener's attention when these programs were eventually broadcast. Here was a phraseology that captured the particular gifts of these legendary figures, shot through with poetic allusion and a knowledge and perception of the art of expressive piano playing. Ralph spoke of rubato as "that stealing of time within a measure"; and, responding to the suggestion, in his talk "Devil in a Cassock," that Franz Liszt was a religious fake, he wrote, "It is too bad. Liszt wrote Mephisto Waltzes: when he prayed, therefore, is there a smell of brimstone? The fallacy is extended that whenever he expressed a religious emotion in music he is counterfeit. Of course Liszt loved the world. All poets love the world; all composers. Liszt summed up the great sweep of his own age: the undisciplined, romantic nineteenth century: the story of the Faust legend. No one better personified the duality of hedonism and doom. To say that his hedonism is valid and his doom phony is to misjudge. When Liszt injected the Dies Irae, Day of Wrath, into the midst of his revelry, he was aware of the opportunity for some bony glissandos on the piano keyboard, but he also meant it."

From such moments my education proceeded apace, often in surprising directions. I discovered Ralph and Betty were inveterate travellers. After moving back from New York to the quiet, bucolic pace of North Hatley, the wintertime of a Quebec countryside must have been a chastening experience. Betty, born in Philadelphia, was a nurse. She met Ralph in New York in 1956 and from that time was a constant encouragement, whether as researcher, secretary, or travel advisor. So it was that the enticements of visiting far-flung outposts remained in full flight. Journeys were duly recorded in poetry and prose from Fiji, Bali and St. Petersburg. I recall Ralph telling me of the genuine fear of walking down a street in Tehran, and the omnipresent secret police, when the couple had come to Iran to experience the ruins of the great palace at Persepolis. Another lively occasion, of a different kind when we met abroad, was in Cambridge, amid the

splendours of King's College Chapel. Russia was at the opposite pole and from a later trip they made came the 'Soviet Poems' which I arranged to have premiered in Canada.

It is worth recalling my surprise when it was brought home to me the sharp difference in attitude towards Ralph's poetry that existed among those in control of arts programming at CBC Radio in Toronto. There was the indication of a lack of modernity and, apparently, not too much attention should be paid to a member of the old guard. When he received the Governor General's award for poetry in 1974, I was delighted.

Inevitably, our talk and correspondence always came back to music. I remember, when I was at the stage of getting a vague grasp of Wagner and those vast music dramas, I discovered the Gustafsons made the annual pilgrimage to Bayreuth. Somehow this also astonished me. I knew the sheer difficulty of obtaining entrance to the shrine, not to mention the expense. It was a subsequent pleasure that I was able to arrange for his further participation as a regular "correspondent." With it, of course, came more names. Naturally, Ralph knew the voices of Birgit Nilsson, of Wolfgang Windgassen, and of Gottlob Frick. But also, going way back, he could claim personal experience of Frida Leider, Lotte Lehmann, Melchior, Schorr—and Sigrid Onegin, for goodness sake. Then, what bliss, Beecham or Furtwangler conducting.

Now, with his talks on the Ring Cycle, instead of chatting up and condescending to a national audience, as has become the current broadcast custom, we were treated to the benefit of his wisdom and profound understanding of both the word and the music. This culminated with his report titled "Twilight at Bayreuth." It was 1976, the 100th anniversary of the first production of the "Ring." Pierre Boulez was the conductor, the youthful Patrice Chéreau the stage director. "The visual presentation was an endless imposition of gimmickry and parody. What we get for the idyllic opening was a distortion of the river Rhine into a hydroelectric dam of three sluices with their steamy commercial pollution, and three sleazy prostitutes as guardians of the gold. You can't have that, not because it transfers an old opera into contemporary social comment; you can't have it because the music doesn't say so. The argument is that simple. You can't have the joyous innocence of water and gold transferred into industrial pollution because Wagner's music tells us that there is no pollution until Alberich the dwarf denounces love for possession of the gold. So the obtuseness went on for four days—for the sake of social

commentary. In the early 1960s, Wieland Wagner translated the music into Jungian symbols, abstracting the primitive elements. In the present production, we have gone from the id to the super ego."

What this shows, of course, is that Ralph never lost the ability to put forward opinionated views with clarity and force when necessary. He was never old-fashioned. To be out of fashion was of absolutely no concern; also, I never knew him to be negative. What he reflected, always, was an enormous enthusiasm and interest in so many of life's deeper pleasures. I miss him.



"Quebec Winterscene"

BETTY GUSTAFSON: AN INTERVIEW

Wendy Robbins

Fredericton, New Brunswick,

9 January 1996

WR: We all know from reading Ralph's poetry, even if we didn't know the man, what a tremendous role you have played in his creative life, but I don't think very many people know a great deal about you. So I would like to ask you a few things, for the record, beginning at the beginning: where you were born, where you grew up, what your parents' occupations were, and where your family roots were—that sort of thing—to start with.

BG: I was born on November 4, 1920, in Philadelphia, and I was raised in a small town 12 miles north of Philadelphia, called Glenside. My mother was a stenographer for my father before she married him, and he was a lawyer. They had nine children—two did not survive, so that they raised seven children. We had a very, very lovely childhood and lived in a huge house with 22 rooms.

However, when the Depression came, my father was completely out of work, and it was a very hard life. I was eight at the time. It was very difficult on my older sisters and brothers, but we all survived it. My brother and sisters went to college, but I went into nursing at age 18.

WR: Was that what you had intended always to do?

BG: No, I wanted to be a lab technician, but there just wasn't any money. And my father felt I didn't have the grades. He didn't want to risk sending me to college, which would have been a two-year program, so I decided I would like to try nursing.

WR: What year did you leave high school?

BG: In 1938.

WR: Which high school was it?

BG: Cheltenham High School in Elkin's Park, Pennsylvania.

WR: Where did you go for your nursing training?

BG: I trained at Abington Memorial Hospital. It was a lovely colonial building and a very fine school with an excellent staff of doctors. They really had top people from Philadelphia who came to that hospital, and I got a wonderful training. I loved every minute of it. I was just thrilled to be a nurse.

WR: Are you somewhat sceptical about the academic training that nurses are required to have now, as opposed to the bedside, clinical experience you must have had?

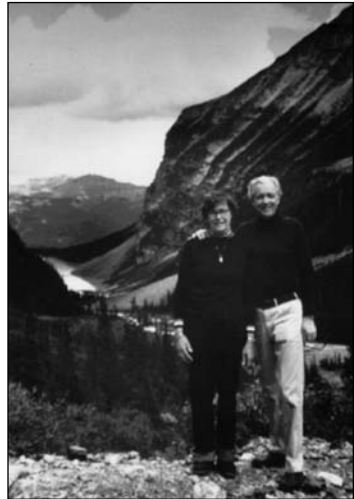
BG: Oh, I think it is much better to have a training school. At that time nursing wasn't a profession. You have to understand anatomy, physiology, and all those courses they teach you. At the same time, you had to go on the wards and observe and interpret it. In fact, Pennsylvania still has nursing schools and other states, thank God. I think university-trained graduates are much more educated; but they don't have the practical, bedside work care of the patient we had—and with technology they don't have the time.

We did shifts. We were on evenings, nights, and all shifts. And, in my ancient days, we worked 12-hour shifts with two hours off in between, 7:00 to 7:00. It was really hard.

WR: With that kind of devotion and those sorts of hours, at what stage along the way were you able to pick up an interest in music, because we all know that's something you and Ralph shared?

BG: Oh, that came with me. When I was a very small girl my father sent us to dancing school to make us graceful. But I was born in a wonderful town because we could get in by train to hear the Philadelphia Orchestra, and, of course, with the dancing experience and the music of ballet, I just fell in love with it all. Music was just part of me, and I went into Philadelphia when I could.

I was very fortunate because in high school there was a wealthy girl who had a car. We cut our late study period, and she would



*Ralph and Elisabeth Gustafson,
Trail of Seven Glaciers, Rocky Mountains,
August 8, 1980.*

take me to the orchestra. It just became part of me. In those days they broadcast the New York Philharmonic Orchestra and I would listen to it. My older sister had a great influence on my music, too. She taught me what to listen to and opened my eyes to different composers, and we read books on the lives of the composers.

WR: Who were some of your favourite composers?

BG: My answer is—the one I'm listening to now, but I do love Brahms, Schubert and Wagner.

WR: At what point did you actually start collecting?

BG: I collected records myself when I was in training in 1942. I can remember buying all the Rachmaninoff concertos when they came out. I fell in love with him.

WR: Where did you start working?

BG: I worked for 14 years at Abington Memorial and then moved to New York City and began working at the Presbyterian Hospital in the City of New York, and their affiliation was with Columbia University. The hospital was at 168th and Broadway, and the Teachers' College where I went for my degree was at 120th and Broadway. It was way downtown.

WR: It must have been quite a distinction to be placed in that particular Pavilion.

BG: I was very fortunate. You see, I went to New York in 1954. I wanted to get a degree in nursing. I was 33 and I thought you have to get educated to stay in this profession and get anywhere in it. I had no visions of getting married at that age. I was getting on, so I had to get my career going, and I loved it very much. Before I went to New York, I worked as a staff nurse, head nurse and a teacher, and then I worked for seven surgeons at Abington Memorial. I decided I had to go back to school and get moving. I had gone to the University of Pennsylvania for a while, but I quit when I worked for the doctors. Then I decided I had to get back to college—I wanted the degree.

WR: Around this time you first connected with Ralph. Can you tell me the story of what led up to your actually getting in touch with him?

BG: Yes. You see, I went to New York in 1954 and there were two nurses there. They were going to Venezuela for a holiday in Caracas, and at that time my lawyer brother was working there. So I

said to the nurse whom I had taught when I was in Philadelphia, "When you come over to New York City I will give you my brother's address in Caracas." So the morning that I met these two girls, they had been out for dinner with a man named Ralph Gustafson. And this friend of my former student said, "Oh, you would certainly get along with him. I'm going to give you his name, address and phone number. I want you to get in touch with him. I know you will like him, and I know he will like you. I can just tell."

I was so busy getting my degree from '54 to '56 that I kept this address and phone number, but I never did anything with it. And then in 1956 I was working with one of my teachers to apply for a scholarship for my Master's degree. Oh, it was a dream of mine. I had it all figured out. Unfortunately, on August 8, 1956, a letter came and said that the quota was filled and would I please reapply in the fall. Here I am 35. I had been breaking my neck working full-time. I had two months where I had to work 16 hours a day. Once in Harlem and then again at another hospital. I was so unhappy for some reason I opened my address book and there was "Ralph Gustafson, 2 W. 67th Street." I called him up, and this gorgeous voice came over the phone. I just about fell on the floor. And he had heard about me, but he couldn't ever get in contact with me because I always lived with somebody else. I had no phone number.

WR: What was the name of this person who had given you the address?

BG: Her name was Louise Luther. She was a nurse at Hanaman Hospital. The reason she met Ralph was because there was a Dr. Kugler from Montreal who came to Philadelphia and worked with a surgeon named Charles Bailey, a pioneer chest surgeon. Dr. Kugler knew Ralph in Montreal and he introduced Ralph to Louise. So, I went out with him and when we met it was as if we had known each other. I really fell in love with him when I met him and we talked all night long. He was my psychiatrist—he listened to me and was so very kind.

WR: And this is the date at the Park Plaza Hotel?

BG: That's right. He met me at the Park Plaza Hotel.

WR: That would still be in August of '56 then?

BG: It was August 8th. So we went dancing at the Tavern on the Green, and we had more talk, talk, talk, and dance. I won't tell

you what time of the morning—it had to be 4:00 or 5:00—he said to me, “Would you like to come see my apartment?” Anybody that knows Ralph Gustafson would be shocked at this one. I said, “What are you trying to do—seduce me?”



The poor man almost fell on the sidewalk; women to him were something on a pedestal, and he was shocked. But I said, “Sure.”

We went over to West 67th Street and we had some brandy, and I looked at his walls and saw all these 78 records. I said, “My God where did you get them?” He said he buys them from dealers. “Oh Ralph”, I said, “you are absolutely crazy. You can walk over to 49th and 9th Avenue and buy them in the Salvation Army, the Goodwill Industries, the Thrift Shops on 3rd Avenue.” They were all over the place. “There are lots of little junk shops that have these records.”

LP’s came in ’48, and this was ’56. There were still plenty of them around. We started record hunting, but we didn’t really start until October because he went to visit his father in August and I went to Philadelphia for the month of September to look after my father because he had cancer.

When I came back to New York City he started dating me. I took him to all these places that I knew where he would find records. We found a wonderful shop in Greenwich Village. Oh, it was a priceless story. The Rabbi who owned the store had two women who worked for him. One was Tilley and the other was Pauline. When we went in there, these girls would just go, “Oh, look, here’s this handsome couple. Let’s go.” If the Rabbi was in a good mood, he would sell you three 78s for \$1.00, which made them about 33¢ each. I think we got most of our really, really fine collection there. We found Bauer and Hoffman rare pianists of the golden age. One day the Rabbi said, “I’m going to let you down in my warehouse.” And he did. The place was filled from the floor to the ceiling with 78s. We were so excited.

Then in November Ralph went to England with the concert

pianist Ellen Ballon. But he wrote to me right away and also when he came back from that trip, off and on. Every time I saw him he would take me to night clubs. Can you see Ralph Gustafson in a night club? He took me to one called the Pink Poodle. On that night I can remember specifically he brought the poem that Ned Pratt liked so much about Mozart's grave and the funeral, "On such a wet and blustery night...."

WR: Ralph brought that one that night?

BG: Yes, he brought new poems every time we went out—I have a whole box of them on Queen Mary stationary because that's what he wrote them to me on.

WR: He was writing a lot of poems at that period?

BG: Yes, he did. Right away. He started writing more poetry right away.

WR: At the same time, of course, you found, not just a poet, but a Canadian poet.

BG: Oh, exactly.

WR: And he was quite well known. The early part of his career, his principal claim to fame was that early anthologizing of Canadian literature, so you must also have had an initiation into Canadian culture.

BG: Oh, yes. He's the one who taught me that Bliss Carman wasn't an American. He also taught me how to appreciate poetry. He always wrote poetry and even when he worked for the British Information Services for five years was still writing then. He had poems published in the *Sewanee Review* and often in American literary magazines.

WR: Yes, and he was in *Best American Short Stories* from time to time.

BG: The "Human Fly" was published in 1948 and "The Pigeon" in 1950. "The Pigeon" had been rejected 19 times until it was finally published in *The New Statesman*. After Martha Foley selected it for *Best Short Stories*, Robert Weaver selected it for his Canadian short story collection [1960].

WR: And then it was accepted and turned into a ballet.

BG: Yes. The music was written by a composer named Ronald Herder and the ballet was performed at Ohio State University and won a prize.

WR: It became his most famous one. Well now, your courtship went quite quickly; you met in '56 and you were married in '58 and

immediately toured Canada. Did you actually intend to move to Canada when you married Ralph?

BG: He always told me that he wanted to come home. He knew that one day we would move to Canada. But what happened when we did get married, we lived in two and one-half rooms. It was very lucky that the first year after we were married he got a Canada Council grant. I had a lovely '56 Chevy, which was one of the best cars made at that time. We loaded it up—we even took our record player.

So, getting back to the marriage. Oh, he married me very sweetly. He did the whole wedding. He went to evensong and rushed down the centre of the aisle—I still have the evensong program—and rushed up to Canon West and said “Will you marry me?” I was on duty and he called me and I really didn’t believe him. It took years for me to believe he really married me because this was such a remarkable man.

WR: It must have been rather hard to give up your nursing position in New York City for a life in sleepy little North Hatley.

BG: Ralph was very guilty about that. I said, “Look, you know what the Bible says. ‘Whither you goest, I will go.’ I am going with you. I love you. I’m your wife. I wouldn’t stay here.” However, I



Ralph and Betty Gustafson with Derek Oppen.

should have stayed another half year, because I didn't get any pension.

WR: At some point along there—I assume it's during the New York years [1956–58]—I believe you introduced Ralph to Harold Schindler.

BG: Yes, I did.

WR: Can you tell me a little about how that happened?

BG: I knew he was a great music critic. I think we must have met him in a concert. He took us back to his New York Times office where he was going to write up a review of the concert we had heard, and I think afterwards we went out and had a drink. It all just came out that he had a 78 record collection. We had a very close relationship with him. To this day I still write to him. We had wonderful times with him. He could get us tickets for piano concerts. We would pay for them, but I remember last time we wanted to hear Murray Perhia. He was given tickets and he didn't want them so he gave them to us. That was in the '90s. Of course, we always went down for concerts. We travelled every chance we got to get there for pianists and in 1991 Wagner's complete "Ring" at the Metropolitan Opera House. In fact, very early when we moved to Canada, I would call Harold and the man who worked for him would go buy us tickets to concerts. That's how close we were—we were really very good friends. In fact, one of the latest visits in Ralph's life we went to New York and met Harold and his wife. We walked. We went to his house and had a drink. We had never been in his new apartment. We had a very nice time. This had to be '92 or '93.

WR: Going back in time... When you first married Ralph and you were still living in New York, did you have the feeling you had married a music critic or an anthologist or a short-story writer or a novelist?

BG: I married a poet.

WR: That was clear even then?

BG: Oh, my gosh! He started writing poems like that! Oh, yes. I knew he was a combination of the arts—music, poetry, criticism—wanting to share poetry with everyone. He wrote verbal music.

WR: But there was that large amount of time between '44 when *Flight of Darkness* came out and *Rocky Mountain Poems*.

BG: But, you know, I found out later that he was writing poetry all

the time. Because a lot of that poetry in *Rivers Among Rocks* was written during that period [1944–1960]. He didn't have enough time to write as much, but he always worked on it.

WR: Before we talk about Ralph, let's just finish the story of Betty Gustafson a little more. You give up a really exciting nursing career, and you follow your husband to Bishop's, and you choose your house in North Hatley, which you are still living in. Can you tell me what it was like? Was it culture shock? It's a new country, it's rural.

BG: The rural part got me. Can you imagine living in New York City and Philadelphia—the suburbs you still had access to everything. I came to North Hatley, I didn't know a soul, I was 42 years old. Normally Ralph would work half the night getting the lecture ready. I was so worried about his health. It was very alarming. Very, very, alarming. But I asked him—we moved there in July of '63—and I said to him, "I want to go nurse here if I can get a job." "I don't want you to work," he kept telling me. I was going to go back to nursing because I felt, if anything happened to our health, I know from old experience, you've got to be on the inside of a hospital, you've got to know the doctors, you've got to know the nurses. You have a better chance finding out what is going on. You're not on the sidelines as a visitor.

WR: And all that proved to be prophetic, of course.

BG: Oh, it was the greatest thing that I did. It really was.

WR: Now, there was a time when you and Ralph contemplated having children, I think.

BG: We did right away.

WR: Was that right when you moved back to Canada?

BG: No. It was in New York. I got pregnant down there, twice. I tried once more in Canada. I just lost them. The doctor in Sherbrooke thought maybe I had an incompetent cervix. He gave me some tests. I said, "Look, doctor. I am 42. I think we better quit this." But I asked Ralph if we could adopt a nice Swedish kid. He said, "No, I don't want to raise other people's problems."

WR: So you regarded him as somebody still very much connected to Sweden then?

BG: Yes, he was half Swedish. I thought he was more Swedish in a lot of ways. He looked Swedish, and he just had the temperament, I felt.

WR: What do you mean by that?

BG: Well, they're terribly stubborn.... I just have a sense that they have a drive that is persistent in what they are going to do.

WR: Is there a dark side, too, of the Scandinavian upbringing?

BG: Oh, yes.

WR: Did Ralph have that?

BG: No.

WR: No. Because I always think of him as being so affirmative.

BG: There is a very dark side of Swedish people and that's why they are often alcoholics. Ralph had none of that. He just loved life so much. He just wanted to live forever.

WR: Now tell us about gardens, speaking about life and creativity. Your garden in North Hatley, your back patio, has been immortalized in numerous poems. When you first bought this little home in North Hatley, did it look the way it looks now?

BG: No, it was prettier. The people who had that garden, one was Scotch and the other was English, and they had created that whole back garden. They made the cedar fence, they put the slate patio in and the rock garden and flower beds. It was all done when we got there. We had two rose beds and then I think they must have had vegetables. And then the whole back was flowers. All down the side were the day lilies, which I still have and separate over time. Then I also have the rock garden; I frequently replace the bulbs and the roses on that bed. But, roses are very difficult to raise. Ralph gave it up. I had very productive years, but the trouble with my garden, or our garden, was to keep it up, because we used to go away. You can't leave a garden in the growing season, and you can't find a gardener to look after it. You just can't. Nobody wants to weed, so it suffered very, very badly.

WR: Was gardening your hobby and Ralph's equally or was that primarily your hobby?

BG: Both of us worked in the garden when we moved here. He loved the flowers. Before he was ill, he did like to get out there and dig and weed. He was very good. He cut the grass. He cut the cedar hedge. It was easy for him because he was tall, but he really did love the garden.

WR: He did tell me, though, that in knowing about wild flowers and bird watching, you...

BG: Yes, I was very much better at that. I loved the wild flowers. When we were out West in '59, I bought a book and I taught him all the wild flowers. I always knew birds because I was a great bird watcher as a little kid. I used to sit out back in a red dress hoping the birds would come because that is when I was told they would come. There was a bird sanctuary near where I grew up which I used to go to all the time.

WR: Why did you pick North Hatley? Was that because of its being an artistic community?

BG: No, it was an accident. I did not want a house on the campus. I knew Ralph. I understood him and I knew he wanted to be alone. That's another great Swedish trait. He didn't want anything to get in his way. I think that, once he married me, he realized that I was no competition for his life or his poetry. He could do anything he wanted and he did. He knew what to do with every minute of his life—never wasted a moment. How I envied him, but it's not my nature.

WR: So when you chose North Hatley it was because of the solitude, not because you knew anybody else living there?

BG: How that happened was, we came up and stayed with his cousin in Massawippi. Ralph had been corresponding with a man who had a house out in Ayer's Cliff for us to see, and I didn't like it. So, Margaret Mitchell [a first cousin] got in the car and took us to Lennoxville. We looked all over Lennoxville, but the houses were next to each other. Margaret took us to North Hatley, and there was a real estate woman there named Bliss Weldon. Bliss got us in her car, and we went over to the house we now have. It had been empty for two years because people didn't like the little stairs. You go up the front stairs and take little steps into the bedroom, and you turn right and go up little steps. She said the house was vacant because people didn't want that.

But Ralph fell passionately in love with it. The fireplace is so beautiful, nice field stone. It had hardwood floors, and it had a lovely view of Lake Massawippi. He was upstairs with the real estate woman and I was down in the cellar with his cousin. I said to her, "Oh, I hope he takes this." I went upstairs and he said, "We are going to live here." "Oh," I said, "its marvellous. I love it." The one drawback, over the 37 years, is that we have beaver board for the walls and it was very difficult to heat. He bought it. We've been terribly happy with it since 1963.

WR: I think there was a good luck story about how you paid off your mortgage quite quickly.

BG: Oh, is there ever a good story. Irving Layton came out to visit us in '64. First, I must say that Ralph was very, very intelligent; he made his mortgage so that he could cancel it if he got the money to pay. So, when Irving was there he said, "You know, Ralph, you are sitting on a fortune." Ralph had told him he had all these letters from correspondents from when he did the first anthology in 1942. Ralph said, "I am?" He said, "Oh yes, you have all those letters." "Yes," he said, "I have all the correspondence because I had to pay for all the copyrights." Penguin didn't pay them, Ralph did. Irving said, "I will put you in touch with this dealer and he will find a place to sell them."

The dealer said he would give us \$10,000. We drove in to get the cheque and this man said, "Well, I'm going to write out your cheque now for \$8,500." I, just out of the—for no reason at all—just opened my mouth and said, "What's the matter with the other \$1,500?" He said, "Well, that's my commission." I politely looked at him and said, "Well, you find your commission somewhere else. We're not selling." My husband has nothing to do with this. He's sitting in the corner and the guy gave us \$10,000. So, we were out in the car and Ralph said, "Why in the world did you say that?" I said, "Don't ask me. I just said it." "Well, good for you," he said. So we got home and we paid the mortgage. We only got \$10,000 for those letters which are probably worth \$80,000 or \$90,000. But still, we lived in that house 37 years with no mortgage, which was wonderful.

WR: It must have been difficult actually to come back. Whenever you have been a student in some place and come back it's...

BG: Yes, it was very hard. He was so naive he just thought everybody would like each other.

WR: Ralph was really a stimulus to the English Department in terms of creative writing. He worked for the Mitre and the Culture Club.

BG: Yes, it was a lively period. He had wonderful students then. He was the first Canadian teacher of literature to teach Canadian literature as a separate course. He felt by that time—the '60s — Canada had its own literature, so he taught that.

Ralph had all the connections with New York agents to get artists to play at Bishop's. He got wonderful artists who came here and played. Oh, they had wonderful concerts. Pianists mainly. Alicia

DeLarrocha played there and she's got a brilliant career. She tested out her playing at Bishop's because she had broken her finger or something in Montreal judging a contest there and the first concert she gave after the injury she played at Bishop's. There are many people who played there that have gone on to great things. Earle Wild played there twice. He just celebrated his eightieth birthday with a concert in New York.

WR: I remember Ralph inviting poets, too; for example, Frank Scott.

BG: Oh yes, he had poetry festivals. In 1967 when Centennial Theatre opened he had Jon Vickers, Celia Franca, Jean Gascon, A.J.M. Smith, and Robertson Davies.

Bishop's gave Yousuf Karsh an honorary degree in 1969. Karsh had gone to Sherbrooke High School. He came to Sherbrooke because his uncle had a photography studio and the uncle knew Ralph's father, C.O. Gustafson. Karsh was even in C.O. Gustafson's photography studio. Ralph gave a brilliant speech when he introduced him for a degree. He did it for Karsh the man and Karsh the photographer. Ralph had had his photograph taken by Karsh in New York City. I guess it was in the early '50's.

WR: What about your work during all of this? You did actually win the battle to go out to nurse again.

BG: Yes, I did. I started in January of '64. I was unemployed from July until January. The reason I got the job there was because there was a Scottish director of nursing named Aitkenhead at Sherbrooke Hospital. The poor woman would turn up on her toes if she saw hospitals today. She was so rigid and strict. She wanted an "older" nurse to look after this former director of Montreal General Hospital. I had never done much private work. When I took the job I thought, "Oh, I can give a bed bath."

Well, I went in to start private duty. In that year we worked 7:00 until 3:00, so I had to go into the hospital on 6:00 bus. Getting up in ... Boy it was cold then. The buildings used to creak it was so cold. I would flush up the partridges. Wow! It was something then in North Hatley. Anyway, I took this bus in; I walked in the front door and I was greeted by the night supervisor and taken to the patient's room and met the night nurse. Nothing about orientation. You just were there, and depended on other nurses to tell you where things were.

I was there two days, and the medical doctor looked at me and he

said, "You're new here, aren't you?" I said, "Yes." And he said, "What's your name?" I said "Mrs. Gustafson." He said, "You wouldn't know a Ralph Gustafson?" I said, "Dr. Quintin, I had better, I'm his wife." "Are you?" he said. And they became very good friends. The surgeon was Robert Paulette, but I didn't meet him then. I met him afterwards because I was doing private duty before I got a job there. In those days before ICU we did medical necessity—government paid for a private nurse when the patient couldn't. I did that. Then there was an opening on the staff. So I worked in every department except really scrubbing for an operation and maternity. Those were the two areas I never worked in the hospital.

WR: You were quite active in getting the union started.

BG: Oh yes, I was very active in helping start a union at Sherbrooke Hospital. In 1966 blue collar workers were forming the CNTU and wanted to include the nursing profession. Several nurses at the Royal Victoria Hospital felt since nursing is a profession we should have a professional union. Three nurses from the Sherbrooke Hospital went in to the Royal Victoria meeting in Montreal which was chaired by two nurses and learned the plan they had for establishing working conditions and salaries.

WR: So you only worked part-time from the time you took a staff job there, did you?

BG: Yes, I always worked part-time. Then I got onto temporary, part-time basis. I never worked permanent part-time because I wanted the summers free to travel with Ralph on his holidays.

WR: So you must have paid a financial penalty for that...

BG: I certainly did. We paid a very heavy one because I don't have any benefits from nursing. I was stupid because I should have bought into a retirement plan. Ralph said, " You don't need it. You don't have to do that." But I wanted to do it. I don't regret it because, fortunately, everything is alright. For doing something for nursing, I certainly got nothing out of it.

WR: How many years did you nurse in Sherbrooke?

BG: Twenty-one. I just missed the gold watch.

WR: One thing that you have observed that probably nobody else in the world observed would have been Ralph working on his poems. I am wondering if you could tell us a little about his process of composition.

BG: Oh, I certainly can. When I first married him, of course, I was working from 4:00 to 12:00 and he would be writing all the time. But when we moved to Canada and I wasn't working I could tell. And on trips. It was wonderful on holidays when we were travelling. I would describe him as being ready. His craft was so tuned by this time in his life, in Canada, he was what? in his early fifties when he moved here to teach, and his mind was just ready. Anything that would strike a match and he was off. At that time you just didn't make a sound. I never interrupted him. If the phone rang, I took it off the hook. Anything, to keep him quiet, isolated, and alone from the world. He always explained to me, "When the bitch goddess gets me, I've got to do it or I'll lose it." He even kept little pads by his bed at night to put lines down because he knew he would lose them; several times he did and never got them back. That is the way I saw his poetry.

He had his music and many, many times—later, towards the end of his life—he would turn on music. He would read Wallace Stevens or Seamus Haney or contemporary poets, Merrill—he liked James Merrill—and he would read these poets and then—it could be one way or the other—he would read first and play music or play music and then read. Always, every morning, he got up and read contemporary news. He read that *Time* magazine from one end to the other. He really had a pattern toward the later years of his life. That was when he retired, not teaching, had no poetry readings. Nobody paid any attention to him so he was free.

And the garden, as you know, his poems are just full of our garden. He would go out every afternoon. In the last year and a half of his life he would sit outside and enjoy nature—the sky, birds, trees. He was enjoying the beauty of life and capturing it in his poetry. He spent a lot of time revising his poems as well.

WR: And, he was very productive right up until...

BG: That's right. He wrote a poem four days before he died. He wrote a eulogy to Jean Sutherland.

WR: That would be the last poem?

BG: That was his last poem, and he put it in his *Visions Fugitive*. He also left another manuscript. I thought I would sit on it until his ninetieth birthday and then publish it.

WR: That would be the collected poems?

BG: No, his *Selected Poems*. He worked on those and revised, as he

said in that poem. He spent so much time revising. He did take his poetry when he was finished, or what he thought was finished, and put it in the bottom drawer and leave it there. Then he would bring it out again and go through this agonizing process of revising and many times leave the poem in the original form. I had waste paper baskets full of revisions.

WR: Did he test things out on you, Betty? Did he read them out to you, or did you do that for him?

BG: Yes and no. He would just ask me to read the poetry and I found a mistake in one of his poems. I don't know which one it was, but I was reading this poem and I said: "Ralph, I've tried and tried, but this poem just doesn't make any sense." He took it right away. He said, "I used the wrong word, no wonder it doesn't make any sense. Thank you."

WR: Did he like to talk to you about what he was doing, or, like most artists, did he keep it pretty private?

BG: He never, never, told me anything.

WR: You were his first reader?

BG: Yes. I would look at them. And, I would scan them for typos. I was awfully good at finding typos.

WR: I know about some of your roles. Obviously, you were his muse, you were his inspiration, Arthur Smith said you were his *ars poetica*. A long time back, you taught him about flowers and about birds; you shared your musical interests and you did all the nurturing work so that he would have the solitude and privacy and his hassock and the food to keep him going, and then you proof-read. I think also, at one point, you chose the title of one of his books.

BG: Yes, I did. We were in Chartres Cathedral, and the sun was coming through this gorgeous twelfth-century window. It was just beautiful. Just a shaft of light on the stone. The stone there is kind of reddish. So I said, "Oh, Ralph!" He was way on the other side of the cathedral, and I said: "Oh! come over here and see this fire on the stone." It was absolutely magnificent. Right away he screamed up, "That's the title of my next book!" He came rushing over, and there was this nice red light. It was really rose. It was so pretty.

WR: What did Ralph regard as his greatest success as a writer?

BG: His poetry.

WR: Any particular volume or poem?

BG: The ones he put in his *Selected Poems* are his favourite poems. He thought they were great. He really did. He used to be so discouraged. Those thin little hands of his would shut up his workbook and he would say, "Tell me why they don't read my poetry."

WR: That was going to be my next question—what would you regard as his greatest disappointment—that he didn't have a wider audience?

BG: Yes, very. I have to say he was very hurt. And I have to say fifty percent of it was that he didn't get back to Bishop's. I'm sure if they had asked him, he would have loved to have done poetry workshops with those kids, and he wouldn't have wanted to be paid. I know he would have given lectures on Wagner for the music department. I know it hurt him. And the other thing he was dreadfully hurt by the fact that he became a member, rather than an officer, of the Order of Canada. He was really, really hurt. His health was failing at the time and made him bitter. He was terribly hurt when Mel Hurtig did his first book [*The Canadian Encyclopaedia*] and Ralph didn't even have a separate entry.

WR: What is your favourite of Ralph's poetry?

BG: Oh, I really have to say the ones that he was writing to me in the very beginning when we went to the Rocky Mountains in '59. I just love all those poems so much. It was an experience that opened both our eyes to the beauty of the Rockies. Then going up to the Yukon he wrote that wonderful poem about Canada.

WR: "Into the Yukon." That's one of my favourites, too.

BG: I just love that poetry. And, of course, the other one is his signature like "Walking along the Seashore," "Prelude." Ralph's is "Wednesday at North Hatley." I know when he wrote that poem, Wendy, he had just had that horrible surgery in 1973. He might have written it while he was sitting in there. I don't know.

WR: You mean in the hospital?

BG: Yes. Before they did all the surgery to him. I remember distinctly when he came home he was working on that poem, and he could hardly sit up. I can recall distinctly Arthur Motyer came to see him with a friend of his. They came to visit Ralph, and he asked Ralph if he would accept a degree from Mount Allison that fall. Ralph said yes. Then, after they left, he asked me: "You know I have written this poem about Wednesday in North Hatley and I want to know what you think of this line. I changed it

from “the squirrel walks his narrow wire” to “the squirrel walks his slender wire.” I said, “I like ‘slender’ better.” It confirmed the change of the word he wanted.

WR: There must have been some difficult moments, though, being the wife of a federalist or Canadian nationalist like Ralph, while living in Quebec through the not-so-quiet revolution.

BG: The one in '80 was terrible for him. Not me, because I am an American.

WR: So you never took out citizenship?

BG: I've applied now. I'm a long time getting it. In '80 when I worked at the hospital I kept saying, “I'm American.” The French like the Americans, so I was safe. But he, it nearly killed him. An English Quebecer was just hated.

WR: And one who was so clearly pro-Canada and willing to be outspoken about it.

BG: Yes, there was Ron Sutherland and that Yvette movement we had was marvellous. Jean Sutherland—she's American, too—and she had five kids and she said, “I did not give my children to Quebec; I gave them to Canada.” Ralph was very firm in his belief that Quebec was part of Canada and wrote poems on that subject.

WR: Did you see yourself staying forever and ever in North Hatley?

BG: I have no idea. I take one day at a time.

WR: One final set of questions about Ralph's last year. He knew his age was advancing, he was what? almost 86 when he died. A longer span of years than most men have—and most women for that matter. He always had written about death from the time of his mother's death so prematurely when he was young. Death was always a subject that he was familiar with in his poetry, but that doesn't mean that it necessarily is something you are prepared for existentially.

BG: I think he knew, but he never would talk about it. That's another Swedish trait. Just didn't admit it. And I didn't admit it. But we both knew. I regret that we didn't talk because he had planned to change his will and I had no idea what he wanted to do.

WR: But in terms of an after life, was he...

BG: Oh, he believed in life after death and living life to the fullest. There was no way he didn't believe in God and living. As a child,

he went to St. Peter's Church in Sherbrooke. He went all the time and I see in his letters to his dad he was always going to church and I suppose because he was praying for his mother's soul. He grew up with religion. He used to be a server and carry the cross down the aisle because he was so nice and tall. I think he sang in a choir when he was younger. His mother did. She also played the organ. His mother and his sister, not his dad. His dad was a Lutheran so he didn't go to St. Peter's Church.

WR: Ralph had a Christian service, did he?

BG: Yes. There was no way he wasn't going to have an Anglican burial service. He was very religious. He believed in life after death. He tried to convince me of it. I can still see us on that Greek island tour. The stars, you could touch them. He was lecturing me, teaching me, trying to help me understand. "Who made those stars? How do you think they got there?" "I don't know I guess they blew off something, and there they are." He said, "Well, who made you?"...

He loved opera, he loved ballet, he went to every piano recital he could get to, he even liked going to zoos. We used to go to the Museum of Natural History a lot. He had great interests. As far as being religious, he lived his religion. He believed in it completely.

WR: So he's pretty confident he's going to see you again?

BG: Yes, he told me once he'd be with me in "the twinkling of an eye."

WR: Are there diaries that you've got still?

BG: Yes, I have everything.

WR: You have kept some diaries of your own, haven't you?

BG: Yes, I kept a diary of all our trips from 1958–1995. I have boxes of them and photographs of the trips as well. He took my diary of the Rocky Mountains trip and edited it. Oh, how I wish he had done more of them—it's so beautifully done.

WR: What is the most difficult part of being a poet's wife?

BG: Well, for me it wasn't difficult. I had no problems. I was working when he was working. He took me everywhere. He was very social in the early part. We went to university parties. And, of course, in New York he was working and I was working, and, on our days off, we did record hunting or going to the theatre, ballet, and concerts to hear pianists. We liked the same instruments

in music. He did teach me to like chamber music. The only time I really had trouble in the marriage was when he got sick in 1994 because you have to get out. You just can't stay there 24 hours.

WR: Is there anything that you would like to talk about that I didn't ask you?

BG: Oh, yes. About the founding of the League of Canadian Poets. The League of Canadian Poets was founded in 1966 in the garden of Ralph Gustafson. The people who were present were Ray Souster, his wife, Ron Everson and his wife, Louis Dudek, and Mike Gnarowski came afterwards because he isn't in the photograph but after I went to work at 3:30 they discussed this whole thing and Ralph had told me that he wanted to make a guild with only 30 poets and keep it to the best poets in the country. Other poets agreed. Of course, this failed, and they ended up calling it the League of Canadian Poets.

WR: How did they come up with the idea?

BG: They were sick and tired of the Canadian Authors Association and the poor books that they had. Expo '67 was coming, so they wanted to form a decent poetry organization. They had to have a book published—that was the criteria. I think you had to have more than one published at that time and to have been writing for quite a while and been published. As far as I can recall, it was in competition. Earle Birney used to say that he had started it in Toronto at the same time. There was a gelling of minds in the poetry world; they wanted to find a decent place.

WR: Is there anything else?

BG: When Ralph put the poems in his manuscript he started with negative poems and ended the manuscript with affirmative poems—there is a future and we should be positive about life. I think how after his death I am really understanding his poetry more than I ever did. Ralph was a remarkable man and I feel privileged that he shared his life with me. I knew him 39 years and we were married 36½.



*National Gallery, Washington, D.C.,
April 2, 1989.*

IRONY IN LIME RIDGE: RALPH GUSTAFSON'S UNPUBLISHED NOVEL

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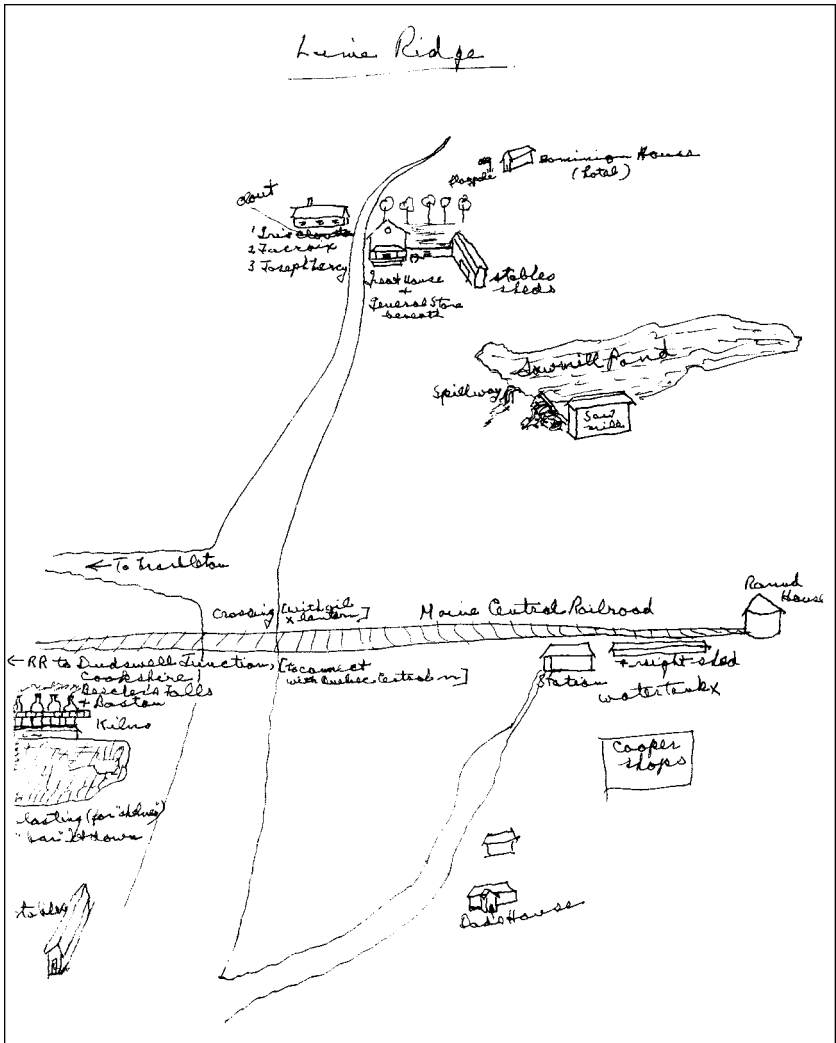
The hamlet of Lime Ridge, birthplace of Ralph Gustafson and setting for his unpublished novel *No Music in the Nightingale*, has vanished utterly.

Instead of a picturesque though somewhat dusty community nestled on the high ground above the St. Francis River about 40 kilometres east of Sherbrooke, there is a multi-million dollar mining installation dominated by a ten-storey lime rejuvenating kiln, towering storage silos, a funicular railway, and a huge quarry dynamited out of the gentle green Townships countryside. The predominating colour is a bluish, chalky grey, characteristic of limestone from the Devonian period. There are "Zone de Dynamitage" signs everywhere in the underbrush.

Limestone has been mined on this ridge since early in the nineteenth century when kilns were constructed of granite ferried down the St. Francis river and wood to fire them was hauled in from the Stoke mountains. You can still find three such kilns, one crumbled to the ground, another about to be split open by a birch tree in a clearing back of Florian Breton's farm on the northern end of Lac Miroir. The construction in 1887 of a rail spur from the Quebec Central line running through the St. Francis valley past Bishop Pond (later Mirror Lake) to the richer deposits a few miles up at Lime Ridge itself accelerated the development of the resource.

By the first decade of the century the village was considered quite prosperous. Although the town is gone, the 400-million year old ocean reef from which the lime is extracted is rich in high quality limestone. According to estimates made by Graybec, the company presently mining the lime, there is an estimated 100-year reserve, enough presumably to make one very big hole in the ground.

At some time during the nearly nine years from 1954 to 1962 that Gustafson wrote and rewrote the manuscript of *No Music in the Nightingale*, he drew a map of the Lime Ridge he remembered as a child, the village to which his uncle, a dynamiter at the quarry, and later his



father, who worked in the general store, emigrated from Sweden during the last decade of the nineteenth century. The map indicates a sawmill, a cooper's shop, a general store, the Dominion House Hotel, and a line of five bottle-shaped kilns next to the quarry. At the bottom right hand corner of the map there is a drawing of "Dad's House." Bisecting the main road through Lime Ridge is the Maine Central spur line to Dudswell Junction where it joined the Quebec Central line, providing rail transport of the processed limestone west to Montreal and south to the New England States. The map suggests a community in which mine, railway, hotel and homes coexisted on intimate terms. In

fact, *Lovell's Business Directory for the Province of Quebec 1910–11* gives the hamlet of Lime Ridge a population of 300 people while local historian Yanic Cauchon estimates that there were, at the turn of the century, about 40 well kept homes as well as a blacksmith and a flour mill. In the novel, Gustafson evokes not only the proximity of quarry and town (the name of which he changed to Lime Rock) but also the tendency of the former to swallow up the latter:

The five tall furnaces of the kilns dominated the hollow. The Company buildings displaced old William's town hall, the pit swallowed the grace of Dorsecroft. From the station this side of the turntable and roundhouse, the railroad was swung across the main street to the new loading sheds. Night glowed with the perpetual fires banked in the kilns; in daylight the heated air trembled over the chimneys. Around the kilns the foliage hung with a deposit of white lime; the turbulent brook emptying from the pond dam where the sawmill was, ran rockflour, boiling with the waste of the factory. In the centre of the village, traffic halted at the warning whistle while the greater blasts went off in the pit, tons of the hill trembling then sinking down, the foundations of the rock gone beneath.

By the end of the 1960s the swallowing process was nearly completed. Advanced technology reduced the need for unskilled labour, the demand for lime products increased with the post war boom, and the pit got larger. The nearby towns of St. Adolphe and Marbleton provided habitation while Lime Ridge slowly vanished. Dust, fumes and noise had made living in the community impossible. Although the original Gustafson home was still standing when the recently married Betty and Ralph Gustafson visited the area in 1960, it too was soon to disappear.

On one level, then, *No Music in the Nightingale* is an attempt to capture a departed past, a retrieval of a community in which the tensions between the imperatives of industry and the desires of those who wish to retain a more romantic attachment to the land could be effectively dramatized. More specifically, it is about ownership and its transference, through chicanery, from a line of original legendary settlers, the Dorsets, to the more mercantile and ruthless Henry Bradshaw, owner of the Lime Rock mine. When the two last remaining descendents of these antithetical families, Brand Dorset and Ann Bradshaw, find themselves drawn to each other, the action of the novel becomes dense with passionate and ironic possibilities. The fact that Ann also loves and is loved by the company dynamiter, Johnny Gulbranson, provides an additional complication. When Johnny sets out to block the machinations of Ann's father, the story moves to its

surprising and ironic climax. In fact, it is Johnny who becomes the focus of the novel's second main theme: the rejection of love. Ann, Brand and Johnny form a curious triangle of relationships which the novel explores with the kind of irony and indirection which characterized much of Gustafson's poetry.

* * * * *

The foreground action of the novel covers a two week period from the end of September to mid-October in the year 1911. Wilfred Laurier's Liberal government has recently been defeated on the issue of reciprocity, Roald Amundsen has reached the South Pole, the Balkans are beginning to stir against their Turkish overlords, and middle class Canadians are reading the latest work by Edith Wharton and Joseph Conrad. The opening chapter reaches back into Townships history to describe the initial landgrab engineered by Samuel Dorset, a United Empire Loyalist who arrives in Wolfe County from Boston in 1776 and proceeds by not entirely honest means to accumulate territory on a large scale. Succeeding generations of Dorsets, however, eventually lose their holdings to Henry Bradshaw who takes advantage of James Dorset's (Samuel's grandson) penchant for gambling by getting him to surrender the deed for the remaining land, which includes the lucrative mine site, in exchange for a loan of \$58,500 dollars. In fact, however, the signature which appears on the deed is not James', but his wife Melissa's to whom the property had been left by Old Samuel because he had no faith in his son's ability to hold on to it. Desperate for money, James forges his wife's signature, then, taking two years to lose nearly everything, blows his brains out. Melissa and her son Brand are left to survive in the local hotel in scandalous proximity to transient railroad men and rough mine workers.

Bradshaw has known all along that the signature is a forgery, as does his lawyer, the club-footed, cat-loving Cephias Bales, but both accept it, letting James proceed to his inevitable self-destruction. It is this secret which lurks in the background of the novel's main action and operates as a kind of fate to which the three younger characters are subjected, an impression accentuated by the fact that the reader knows the secret by Chapter 3, though not all its implications.

Unaware that he may be the rightful heir to limestone wealth, Brand Dorset arrives back from Montreal after years away at the study of law and encounters the nineteen year old Ann Bradshaw when he emerges naked from the lake below the last remaining Dorset possession, a hunting cabin on a bluff above Mirror Lake. This episode. rem-

iniscient of the kind of sudden sexual encounters which fascinated D.H. Lawrence, causes Ann to retreat quickly, less out of offended modesty than of anger at his contempt for her. Yet his Byronic loneliness has made an impression on her; Ann's life begins to divide between her growing attraction to Brand, which is not only physical but also vaguely impelled by a desire to right an historical wrong, and her genuine affection for Johnny Gulbranson, the company dynamiter, who has been courting her over the summer months.

When Henry Bradshaw discovers that his daughter has been consorting with the son of the man he ruined, he is not pleased. A widower who lost his wife when she gave birth to Ann, he presently lives—platonically—with his sister-in-law Marion Broughton in the kind of “wooden castle” which can still be seen in the Dudswell municipality. When Brand shows up at a church social to dance with Ann, Bradshaw leaves in a dyspeptic fury. It is clear to him now that he will have to make it easier for Johnny to have Ann than for Brand. He invites Johnny to dinner and offers to double his salary and place him in a supervisory position. He then directs Cephias Bales, the same lawyer who had witnessed the forged signature 20 years earlier, to offer Brand a substantial amount of money if he will sell his cabin and disappear. Bales, however, sees an opportunity to extort an even greater amount from Bradshaw by threatening to reveal the illegal transfer of deed and tries to draw Brand into the scheme, but the revelation of his father's weakness leaves the younger man stunned. When he shows up somewhat drunk at Johnny's hotel room, he offers him the cabin for next to nothing saying that he is going back to law studies. Johnny, who by now has pretty well decided to cede Ann to Brand, leave town and take up photography, points out that this gives Bradshaw the victory. In the meantime, Bradshaw, informed that Brand has refused the offer, decides to get rid of him by other means. He takes steps to purchase a sulphur mine at the head of Mirror Lake (fictional; there was no such mine) closed down years ago by the Dorsets because it smelled bad and killed the fish. Reactivating the mine will destroy the landscape Brand so dearly loves thus driving him away from the county and from Ann.

Hearing of this plan, Johnny decides to take direct action and accompanied by Mrs Broughton, who now feels her brother-in-law needs his comeupance, sets out to blow up the sulphur mine with dynamite stolen from Bradshaw's company, an act which will delay its opening for a good 18 months. While Mrs. Broughton waits outside the mine shaft, Johnny enters, sets the charge, discovers there is not quite enough wire for him to clear the scene, ignites the charge any-

way, and buries himself alive.

The principal actors arrive at the site of the disaster: Ann, guilt-ridden because she has spent the night in Brand's bed; Brand concerned that his friendly competitor is about to die; and Henry Bradshaw back from a trip to Portland, Maine. Brand is slugged by the rescuing mine workers because they confusedly see him as responsible; and Bradshaw, with suitable irony, is stoned by the same irate workers because they sense his guilt in the whole matter. He returns and burns the deed in expiation. Johnny Gulbranson remains trapped under tons of earth, calculating the amount of air left to him, his rate of its consumption and the probable time it will take for rescuers to reach him. The prognosis is not good.

* * * * *

Gustafson subtitled his novel "an ironic comedy" which, depending upon one's tolerance for melodrama, might be what the reader perceives in the preceding account. The ending certainly appears to provide the kind of incongruous reversal often achieved by an ironic plot: the dynamiter dynamited, victim of his good intentions, trapped in what he says with heroic irony "would make a good darkroom." Above ground there is repentance and expiation, some revenge too, accompanied by blows; underground, the good guy counts the useless contents of his pockets and writes a farewell note to Ann requesting that she not mourn. Whether this ending is designed to suggest the futility of fighting the Bradshaws of the world, the tendency of the land to swallow up people who mess about with it, or simply the advisability of getting out of the darkness of mining and into the light of photography (or art), are questions which the plot leaves open for readerly speculation.

Or is it a form of cosmic revenge for Johnny having rejected love? In a handwritten note among his papers, Gustafson stated that the novel's theme was the rejection of love. When he sought a title for his manuscript,* he eventually found it in Shakespeare's early comedy *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, a play which is in turn based on a story demonstrating the superiority of friendship over love. In Shakespeare's take on this theme one of the gentlemen lovers, Valentine, offers his lady, Silvia, to his competitor Proteus as a gesture of brotherhood even though Proteus has just tried to rape her. In Shakespearean terms, this appears to be acceptable behaviour; certainly the lady in question has virtually nothing to say about her treatment. Gustafson may well have decided to correct the story, issuing a

tongue-in-cheek warning that he who hands over blonde nineteen year old girls to brooding dropouts from law school had better be prepared to have the world cave in on him.

Johnny Gulbranson, laconic, witty, and quietly amused at the absurdities of small town society, is the kind of man you would expect to be able to handle dynamite. He prefigures more recent handlers of high explosives, Patrick Hazen of *In the Skin of a Lion* and Kip Shand in *The English Patient* by Michael Ondaatje, who arrived at Bishop's University shortly before Gustafson took up a position there. (Did they discuss dynamite, one wonders, after class?) Like Ondaatje, Gustafson is interested in the metaphorical implications of dynamite. His hero is in the process of declaring his independence from social and industrial constraints by becoming an artist. As a photographer, he will concern himself more with capturing the luminous qualities of the landscape on film than with blowing up what lies beneath the surface. The character is based on Gustafson's own uncle Johnny who worked as a dynamiter for Dominion Lime company when he first arrived in Canada. The interest in photography, however, is transferred from Gustafson's own father who left work in the Lime Ridge general store to take up photography, first in Marbleton and then Sherbrooke.

The character of Brand Dorset has wider cultural associations. Brand and Dorset are traditional Townships names. But Gustafson also had in mind the young Marlon Brando of the 1950s, a picture of whom appears in the manuscript box of *No Music*. Like the Brando of *The Wild One* or *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Brand Dorset possesses a certain animal magnetism which draws Ann to him in spite of her love for Johnny. Unlike Brando, however, Dorset is associated explicitly with the fulness and beauty of nature, a theme Gustafson would later develop magnificently in *Rocky Mountain Poems* (1960). Here is Dorset caught in the aesthetics of September light:

The sun was gone but the sky spread an interception of crimson from the sun not yet set beneath the rim of the farther hills. Eastward, the evening was silver. Brand stood at the pump in the beauty. The lake lay unmoved, the gold of the birch along its edge doubled in the water. It was the instant of stillness that came at the close of autumn. He sensed an attainable peace: loss and completion.... He felt the need of sensualness, of assertion to be free of himself. He placed the pail under the lip of the pump. The links were stiff. The water flooded over the pail's rim. He raised up, breathing heavily.

Bracketed by these two male figures is Ann, a young woman

endowed with good looks, a quick wit, and a brand new motor car painted, in Mrs. Broughton's words, a "proclamatory red." Once she has sensed Brand's attraction, as well as the natural charm of his cabin in the hills, she finds the Victorian scrollwork on her house detestable and her father's interference and pomposity quite irritating. Like certain female figures from the work of D.H. Lawrence (one of Gustafson's acknowledged influences), she questions the social and religious conventions of the time, a virgin seeking her gypsy, prepared at the end to make a complete break with her father by moving out to Brand's cabin by the lake. It is she, really, who gets most fully victimized by the events of the novel, left at the end alienated from her father, inheritor of a tainted fortune, deprived of Johnny's intelligent love, and possibly committed to an uncertain future with Brand.

Given such character and plot material, it is no wonder that Gustafson imagined the book as the basis for a film script. "There is a first-rate movie story in it," he wrote to his agent Diarmuid Russell on September 8, 1956. Add in a set of vivid minor characters: the unconsciously witty and surprisingly daring Mrs. Broughton, the conniving Cephas Bales, a jovial, Dickensian clergyman, an impudent servant named Zed Sample, and numerous brief satirical portraits of small town types, and the potential director has plenty to work with. But the book never found a publisher, let alone a producer interested in transforming this evocation of Townships society into the kind of thing that Merchant-Ivory Productions have done for E.M. Forster. Why did the book remain in the darkroom?

The answer lies in Gustafson's reluctance to write in a fashion easily accessible to the reader. Reports from publishers' readers, many of which Gustafson kept, and some of which he responded to, found the writing "clotted," "dense," "obscure," "distorted," and "ugly." Although he worked through three drafts to respond to these criticisms, to make the book more "commercial" as he put it, the style remained a barrier to acceptance. His claim that the language was "deliberately disproportionate in order to achieve satire" (Letter to C.H. Brooks of Heath Publishing, Nov. 27, 1955) did not mollify his exasperated readers. After rejections from Viking, Scribner's, Heath and other American and British publishers, Gustafson turned to Jack McClelland in Toronto whose personal reaction to the novel was favourable despite negative reports from his readers, one of whom, Conway Turton, in an eight page critique of the work, expressed perplexity with individual sentences, noting "sprained" syntax, awkward turns of phrase and puzzling word choices. "The effect of the difficulties," she wrote, "is cumulative. One becomes tired of trying to make

sense of one riddle after another. In reading a poem, one is braced for the effort, knowing that it will pay off shortly, and in full. But the sentences and paragraphs of a prose work are another matter." McClelland was nevertheless prepared to publish the novel on the condition that an American or British publisher could be found to supplement what he thought would be a thin Canadian readership. The search was unsuccessful, and when Gustafson received an offer to teach at Bishop's University in 1963, the novel was permanently shelved.

Style is not the only problem with the novel; character motivation and behaviour are often hard to track. The emotional complexities of Ann's divided love for two men is not plausibly explored; Brand remains much too remote and abstract a figure to be a believable Brando type; Johnny's surrender of Ann is so diffident as to be nearly indiscernible; the behaviour of the angry miners at the story's end comes without adequate preparation. There is, in addition, an overall improbability in the speech and behaviour of the characters, if we are to accept them as creatures of the year 1911. They often speak and behave in ways which are more appropriate to mid-century sophisticates than Edwardian townshippers. Gustafson's comment in a letter to Jack McClelland, July 26, 1962 that he was not writing an historical novel does not absolve him of creating bewilderment in the reader. If the novel is also satire, then surely we need targets that are plausible and recognizable as belonging to the year 1911. Instead we get caught up in a rarefied artifice in which the characters speak and relate to each other at a frequency which requires very fine tuning on the part of the reader. Much is left unsaid; much of what is said is done so in a very oblique and laconic manner. Gustafson's cerebral approach to his characters, consistent with his satiric mode, makes involvement with their fate a matter of continual effort on the part of the reader.

No Music in the Nightingale is a hybrid narrative which attempts to fuse elements of romance, satire and melodrama utilizing irony as the bonding agent. Gustafson has set aside the conventional language of such successful short stories as "The Pigeon" and "The Human Fly" and undertakes an intense struggle to discover what words in prose narrative can be made to do under extreme pressure. Even though he hoped for a commercial success, he was too much the artist to resist trying out the devices which he had already begun to perfect in his poems: sudden verbal shifts to different psychic ground; imagistic moments of intensely vivid perception; dry wit and tightly wound diction; a general effect of compression worthy of Robert Browning at his most intricate. In the final analysis, the world of Lime Rock was of less importance to Gustafson than the wordscape he created in his

mind's eye. He was, after all, a poet.

NOTES

- * The title comes from a line in Valentine's speech proclaiming his love for Silvia in the first scene of Act 3:

What joy is joy, if Silvia be not by?
 Unless it be to think that she is by
 And feed upon the shadow of perfection.
 Except I be by Silvia in the night,
 There is no Music in the Nightingale.

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EXCERPTS FROM *NO MUSIC IN THE NIGHTINGALE*

Ralph Gustafson

CHAPTER 8

Ann Bradshaw has learned that Brand Dorset has slugged Phlem Haverstock in the local saloon for having insulted her. She takes her new "Runaround" (Gustafson may have had a 1910 Studebaker in mind) up to Brand's cabin to express her gratitude. This is their first meeting alone together.

Three small boys appeared from outside the side window.

"You going to take it out, Ann!"

"Going to try to, Potiphar."

"Will it work, Ann?"

"Blow the horn!"

"Where will you go, Ann?"

The car had been shipped in by freight—three months late for the summer—from the United States. News of its purchase seriously influenced the elections. Motor vehicles of various construction had invaded the centre of the Townships and had appeared on the roads of the valley, but the Bradshaws' was the first of them to be permanently stationed in Lime Rock. The threatened delivery became inextricably imbedded in the established party platforms. Social strata buckled. The voice of the farmer rose in wrath from milking-stool and market-stall. The Maple Leaf Unmechanized Forever was flung down in challenge. The Tories already wobbling in strength headed for the ballot boxes without Protection. Though true blue and a Child of the Empire, Dorothy Dryer-Thompson wavered in her allegiance at the thought of the Bradshaws having one. A delegation of his Tory cohorts waited on Henry Bradshaw. They filed out of his office behind the billiard room edified. The damnation of the new-fangled combustion engine was shoved down the throats of the county Liberals as an anti-progressivism. The county Liberals, lacking a motor-car, being unable to afford one, with their other issues went down to

defeat.

Ann pushed open the shed doors. She had learned to drive, accompanied by a chauffeur and a trained mechanic, in Portland. With the manufacture of the self-starter for the automobile, Henry Bradshaw had bought her one. It was a touring model with top lowerable to clement conditions of weather. To its servicing, Henry Bradshaw assigned the chief engineer of the lime kilns. The engineer had left it headed out, the area of the yard was clear in front.

"Has it got a magneto, Ann?"

Ann got in behind the wheel. "I don't know, Dickie."

"Gee, Ann. You don't know?"

Zed came flying from the stable.

"You gointa start that thing?" he yelled.

"Will you take us for a ride, Ann?"

"I sure will, Potiphar. Tomorrow." She adjusted the spark control and fuel, and the boys went out and climbed on the wood-pile. Ann turned the ignition on and contacted the starter.

Zed jumped back. "Stall doors open!" he yelled, tearing into the stable.

Those on the street in front went to the far sidewalk. Ann eased the roaring machine out into the yard and to the road, and the road being empty of animals, honked the horn for the three boys, and turned the wheels up the hill and gave the motor the gas. The car gave a lurch, responded toweringly, taking the slope, gathered speed and went up over, the great weight of the vehicle vanishing. The line of spruce fell behind, the black of the hedges went by and out, the slanting stretch to the meadows swung in and ahead. Ann felt her nerves thrill. She increased the accelerator. The touring car gripped, settling in power, the wind slapping around the shield, pushing, tumbling her hair, the cold in her eyes. Ann pulled the lever to the stub. The motor roared. The car leaped, swerved, went forward, the body rocking. The hills of the lake came to her. She felt her mind clear, her intellect certain, her breath deepen. The smashed saloon window was wonderful. She took a swift look behind. Miles-high the dust swirled under. She must be going forty miles an hour. She had never driven so fast. She settled into the wind. The hard road hit up at her. She thought of Brand's life-story. It was glorious. Only she should have worn goggles. She thought of the meanness of human beings in general. Fortunately she met no wagon.

The car bounced over the townline culvert. She was spoiled, Ann decided. She had hardly thought of the car's arrival. She loved the present, the magneto, the brass struts and the pink horn, the terrible red

and the gold levers. She admitted the truth. She was not saving Brand—she wanted to see the inside of the cabin. She was sure there were no curtains and dishcloths on a line to go with the dark beard and the male passion. She relaxed the gasoline. It was too fast... She must lend Brand Thyrza. Thyrza would be enraptured. He did talk beautifully—after the first few buried-vault minutes. The car lurched. Ann's hand went down on the accelerator bringing the car in line, her lone grip tightening on the wheel. Your life hangs on a tire! It was wonderful. She passed along the upper meadow. The cold on her cheek was snow-or would be. She slowed down. She reached the corner. The radiator had not blown steam.

She bumped over onto the passage into the woods. She drove ahead the length of the car, the underparts of the car rasping, and saw it would be impossible. Ruts mounted and dropped, the middle was full of rocks. The engine missed, coughed forward, and stalled. She turned off the switch, pulled tight the brake at the side and left the car where it was—getting out and starting up the wagon-trail on foot. She had wanted to walk here.

The trail was deep with leaves. The colours had fallen and only the dark of the hemlock was about her and the green of the firs and the tall pines. The air smelled of resin and her feet in the leaves broke like a hush the silence. Before her, on the path, a rabbit looked and leaped from sight. She saw the strippings of the deer on the saplings. She wondered for a moment, there was no bird.

The larch deep in the woods kept its spare gold.

She loved life.

She put aside the world.

The blue of the lake came between the trees. The water was cold, unbroken, the far shore frayed and seen and the hills bare.

Brand was standing, the weight of a rock between his hands, his legs apart either side at the end of a low wall extending from the corner of the cabin along the front edge of the back field. The acres had been ploughed. The brown lay ribbed to the farther woods. At the sound into the leaves of the clearing he looked up. His shirt's red patched the field.

He had on breeches, high lumber boots.

He put the stone onto the ragged slant being built and straightened. He drew his forearm across his brow. Ann stopped in the shallow, waiting near the place where she had dismounted a week before when Brand came out of the lake. The scent of brush burned tinged the air. The happiness that she had kept from her, that she had not let herself have at the sight of the blue of the lake and the thought of

the existence of the cabin, not knowing whether she was wanted, reached her—in the way Brand did not care about the stone but about being caught stranded, not able to bathe, on a wall. Or he wouldn't care, Ann ended up, back where she'd started from, not knowing him. He came to her across the yard toward the slope.

She stood in the golden leaves. She felt her cheeks burn—at her being there, produced by the chivalry in the saloon, almost before breakfast, before he had time to shave—making him state it. She was inescapable. He stopped on the ledge above the leaves.

"The field needed holding," he said—with or without submission of the mud on his boots.

Ann studied the hydrography. The earth at one point, under the rain, spread down almost to the pump. His hands were a deep mud colour; and the sides of his breeches.

Brand left the night to Ann.

Haverstock and the rye had been beneficiaries of the experience. He got back to his original sin at the bar—the incarnation he was able to put it in in preference to the palm trees—Ann standing in the windrow of leaves deepened against the bank. The carnality achieved its obscenity in wedlock.

Ann looked up from his mud for him to stop letting her be still arriving.

"As soon as the rain stopped..." he said.

He hadn't shaved. Ann refused being missionary and out of countenance. The side of his temple, streaked with dirt where he had drawn his arm, looked ridiculous. He had almost kissed her as something easier to get through—or she thought he was going to. "The wall is beautiful. And I haven't stopped arriving," Ann said. She made him give her help.

Brand helped her to the level.

"I needed the mud—or something," Ann said. She looked at her hand. It had removed most of Brand's mud.

Brand looked at her hand.

"And I'm glad about the saloon," Ann said.

"You can wash your hand."

"Johnny told you?" he said.

He wanted her to come.

They went to the easy slope. He had even been running his hand through his hair.

"How did you get here?"

She liked him almost as much for what he didn't say.

"By car."

They went up the incline to the cabin.

"The car came?"

"You knew about the automobile?"

"Dryer-Thompson. he predicts catastrophe."

"Johnny says it lost honest toil the election. I didn't dare bring it into the trail over the rocks. Do you drive?"

"Not in one direction. You left it at the road?"

"It's not only a car but scarlet."

"You are now sleeping with me." He pushed the door. "There's the kitchen sink, or the pump."

"I wanted to see inside," Ann confessed.

Brand stood by her as she looked. The room was filled with light. The ceiling and beams had been varnished and rugs were spread. The pewter of William's day had been brought up. Pictures by Krieghoff hung on the shorter wall. Books lined the alcove to the angle of the roof on each inner side of the wide sleeping couch.

On the iron dogs a fire smouldered, deep chairs cornered the fireplace. Ann stood blankly. "Oh, Brand, it's wonderful." She went to the window at the far end over the bluff—the lake beneath, and the hills beyond. Brand cut the mud off his boots on the edge of the step outside. He went to her.

"I want it," Ann told him.

She stopped. She coloured. The bluff and the cabin were the one thing they hadn't got. She looked at Brand's eyes. The grey eyes perhaps brimmed with assistance.

"You haven't been in before?"

"Johnny's inhospitable. I'm colouring."

He was to have had the anger and lived it. The cabin instead was his.

"This is where I walk out of the lake."

Ann became aware that Brand loved her.

"Brand, my hands are mud."

Brand took her to the kitchen. The ploughed field was beyond its window.

"This is the kitchen, twelve feet." He turned the tap.

He got a towel.

Ann washed her hands, cleaning with the square of white soap too big for them out of the dish at the side.

"It's cold!"

"It's spring water."

"What do you do to bathe!"

Brand watched her. "Stand with kettles. From the stove, in a wash-

tub.”

“I should think so!”

He gave her the towel. He washed his hands.

“At the Advent, a horse. Here, mud.”

“Baylord was sophisticated... I’d try on your temple, Brand.”

He searched the square mirror.

“It’s mud.”

Her affection grew.

He rinsed his face, bent over, and put his fingers through his hair. The thickness fell back to the same thickness.

It was the first time they had been alone together. It was the first time, Ann realized with strangeness, that she had really spoken to him. She expressed completely a longing to understand what had never been his, and with him now where the water washed his shirt too, what was his and what he did—the hurt she had tried to know, and his solitude, the fire burning in the cabin, and his defensiveness, destructive with himself, with the towel, but with his hands from the stones of his wall. He wasn’t like what he had to be. The anger for him that had only been hers suddenly became his as well. She felt it hurt her in its silence as she remembered what she had heard of his mother and the boy who had lived with her. She wondered: Brand must be like his mother. She could recall only remotely the figures the little girl had seen pass by in the hotel, the dark boy who was tall and the lady with him who was a mother. He turned to her and she then remembered—the grey of his eyes was the grey of the tiny frond caught forever in the amber of the locket her mother had had. Brand had but to move, Ann knowing, to hold her— and then with a movement almost of the shyness of an animal’s shyness, he sought for her the battered packet from his breeches’ pocket, deep, so that his eyes fell from her.

“I...”

He presented the packet of cigarettes whole for her to take from. He dug, Ann’s hand removing one, in his left pocket a match; struck their light.

Ann wondered if she really must always so desperately help Brand out. She put the blurred end beyond her nose into the little pillow of flame. She drew in.

Brand lighted his.

She held the smoke, holding her breath. It went up the back of her nose, going up to her eyes. She felt panic strike.

Brand watched the paroxysm.

“Girls don’t do this,” Ann inserted, her eyes crying.

He got a glass of water.

She caught her breath. Her eyes were burning. The taste was horrible... Brand was laughing—in his frond-coloured eyes. He gave her the glass of water. She drank. He reached for the cigarette in her other hand.

Ann made a gulp, protesting. "No. I may like it," she said.

Brand left the cigarette. "You have to exhale, every once in a while."

Ann finished her swallow. "Well, I have to know," she said. She gave him back the glass. "You know why I did it, don't you?"

"Yes," Brand said.

Ann blinked clear her eyes. "Now, several lumps of sugar, please."

Brand looked at her.

"For Baylord, Brand," Ann said.

He got down cubes from a bag, put them in his pocket. They went out across to the stables the other side of the yard. Brand discreetly waited ahead while she pressed out the spark of her cigarette and its ashes on a slab of rock on his stone wall. He rid himself of his. They entered the darkness of the stable. Baylord positioned, contacting the boards of the stall, Brand speaking, going over. The stallion stood, delicate, then came forward, the head tossing, the nostrils dilating. Brand let the horse abuse his hand. He gave Ann the sugar. She put three lumps on her stretched palm; then three others. She stroked the nose, the muzzle softly pushing, asking. "He knows." The stable was warm with the smell of the hay and the richening. There was the smell of the musk of leather. The light fell remotely from the window high in the gable. Brand put his arm around her and brought her to him... His mouth rested and Ann let his lips rest in their difference and they had moved apart, the light falling quietly in the room of the barn and the moment as quietly moved from, the stillness come again with the sound of the step of the horse in the stall. Ann touched the worn part of the saddle on the near stall. It was as if to touch time. The steel discs of the harrow at the back cut the shadow. Brand hooked the door. The sun was bright, the combings sharp gold where the hay had been brought in. They walked across and down to the shore of the lake.

He sat, the pebbles in his hand, telling her of the past, exacting scorn and destroying it with sensation. He spoke of the cabin and something of what he had got from the hotel. The proposition was reality, what you are left with once you start with it. She watched him take the stones at his side. He could not drive through to himself except through what he possessed. He meant, in his case, one suicide

and a death. He demolished facility. He took the stones from the beach, holding them and dropping them, the flesh imprinted. He did not recommend symbols. He did not speak of her father. He made it so that she should not speak. He got up. He held the last stone. "I should be Trappist." He tilted his hand of the stone, going to the water's edge. He drew up the drifted limb that was there. He turned back to her. "No, Brand." He did not let her tell him, getting her up from where she was.

"Can you make pancakes?"

She hid her piled-up appreciativeness so that she would not distinguish him. "Yes. I can," she defended herself.

They walked up the slope.

Brand looked at her.

"I can, Brand."

"I'm without Selda."

She vanished the last of her emotionalism for him. "Who's Selda?"

"Selda Finch. She was to cook something that could be cold. They're the farm at the lake-end. Her grandmother's mother died."

"I'm sorry. I mean about the great-grandmother. Does she cook for you?"

"Socks mostly."

Brand did not even see the holes. "Apart from the cooking," Ann mentioned.

"She does both," Brand said to her.

Ann said, "Oh."

Over the meal Ann learned that most of the law was illegal and that what living was for was music, and that Brand had not ploughed his own field. Baylord's pedigree being long enough. He was awkward that it was usual he should be near her. He ate hungry from his wall. His hands demanded for themselves touch. He spoke without adverbs, keeping his sentences free from emotion. It made them passion. She knew the rightness Brand had accepted if to love her came.

They went out to the field, along the inner side of the ploughed land—Brand taking for her his sweater she said she would not need. He lighted a cigarette.

The sun was not yet down to the ledge of cloud on the horizon, the sky over them blue. The air was cold with the stillness before snow in the northern fall of the year. The sun could be looked at; the blue fooled.

"I will need it. Brand."

He stopped with her, handed over the wollen pullover. He had on a leather jacket; buttoned.

He watched the entanglement. He put out his cigarette and got her head through the hole. The pullover's length went below her seat. Her hands had not appeared.

"Well," Ann told him though he still did not jeer.

He folded back the ends of the sleeves. He helped her on with her coat.

"And now I'll suffocate."

At the end of the field he stopped her. He pointed. Into the woods was a cart-road, overgrown with grass and bush. Outside its tall grass stood a pheasant. It stood, one leg tentatively advanced, the head cocked listening, the long tail motionless, the plumage brown and green and black and the necking white. Ann held her breath. It might have dropped out of a Chinese fairy-tale.

Then it was gone.

They spoke in the hush of the bird.

"It was beautiful."

"We altered the light."

By the covert, the grass was still. They walked on, into the old road between the woods.

"Brand, how can you shoot them?"

"Instinct in us."

"But it's lovely."

"That's why."

The grass brushed, closed around their feet.

"I don't understand."

Brand glanced at her. "To possess it."

"The loveliness?"

He did not reply.

"But then it's killed!"

"Sometimes."

They walked secluded in the road and then at the side where the pines grew down to the roadway and the undergrowth was gone, the ground and the floor in the forest smooth and tarnished with the rust of the shed needles. At the end of the grove the woods stopped and they joined the crossroad coming up from west of the meadows and on their right mounting the steep hill at the head of the lake. It turned out of sight.

"Where does it go?"

"To the old sulphur mine."

"Does sulphur have mines?"

"Usually." They went up the road. "The working's scabrous." He took a switch of alder at the side of the road. "My grandfather had it

sunk. To sell to the pulp-mills in Eastriver. He shut it down when the drainage soiled the lake. He'd already built the hunting lodge. He got his emotions mixed."

"I'm glad he shut it."

The slope at the edge of the road steepened. They came above its trees. The lake spread away in the folds of the hills to the right beneath them. A mile down the nearer shore, on its jut of land, they saw the cabin. The lake seemed darkened and far.

Around the bend the road crossed a narrow, deep gully by a plank bridge and they came on the workings of the mine. The hill was cut back to form a plateau. The slant-roof chemical house stood up against the cliff in the recess next to the gully. It had three storeys. The planks were blackened, the windows hammered shut with boards. A deposit of slag went back over the edge. Vegetation stopped near it.

"I don't like it, Brand."

They went across the entrance of the mineshaft in the base of the cliff. The open oblong was black. Squared timbers in the mouth held off the weight of the face and the hill.

"How far in does it go?" She was afraid of it.

"Not very—I think. They didn't work it long."

"Does Daddy own it?"

"Yes."

Ann took her eyes from it. "It should be just hill." She turned from the opening.

They paused on the plank bridge, above the swiftness of water in the gully. The stream came down from springs high above in the woods, dropping precipitously, going to the lake, meeting the water below in a freshening a hundred yards above the cabin. A coldness touched them. On the distant lower hills the hardwoods were bare and the firs exposed. The year was done. Ann felt how strongly her mood was ruled by the earth. She hated mortality.

Brand said: "When will you come again?"

Ann brought her eyes to the boards of the bridge.

Between the separations could be seen the height to the rush below.

"Don't fall in love with me, Brand."

"Johnny would make us seem?"

She did not know. Brand accepted sensation.

"We knew with the sweater. In the barn, you were against me. The harrow or the light was itself."

Brand made answers true. She wanted Brand to have love. Beneath

her was the rush of water. Her being true was why she had touched the saddle. Brand did not compare anything.

"Don't put it into speech," Brand told her.

"I don't want anything destroyed."

"No."

They walked on, off the plank bridge.

At the top of the pines, he lighted a cigarette.

The sun was down.

"The sweater smells of your tobacco."

"It's warm?"

Down in the pines it was cold; far under the forest, dark. The corridor of sky above the wagon-road was still a part of light. He thought of the virtuosity for her to come.

"You will ride here? The deer are driven," he crossed his question.

"Daddy? Yes, Brand."

He preferred perfection.

"They are down early." They walked between the road grass and the woods. "You are cold. The fire will be out."

Ann shook her head. "I'm not. I wish there was snow."

"You are north."

"There should be violent colour then snow. At once."

"This is protection," Brand said, handling the irony.

Ann thought of botany which she did not know much about. The woods seemed waiting. Under the pines there would hardly be snow.

"Will you keep digging?"

"For food. And to the barn."

"Winter is not what they say: Not-summer," Ann said.

He felt himself against what she said. There should be deception.

"It will be unbelievable here. It must be a deep winter," she defied meteorology. Ann laughed. "That's religious."

It roused in him a desire to commit her.

At the grass Ann went ahead of him, her hands deep in her pockets. He felt his consent to himself drag deeper. They passed the covert of the pheasant. He noticed the place of brushed grass. The ploughed field was dark. In the cabin, he relaid the fire. "The john's up by the stable."

Ann went to the house. It was chilly.

Outside, she stood under the sky. She let her mind choose as Brand's did. The stars seemed to pull down. She went in. She removed Brand's pullover. He came in with wood. She used his comb. "Aunt Marion will think I am lost."

"She's your mother's older sister?"

Ann laughed. "I've never thought of her with older . . . I suppose she is."

"You're not like her."

"I'm supposed to be like her grandmother, according to Aunt Marion. Her grandmother changed to Church of England because she liked the prose in the English prayer book. Aunt Marion means that as approval." She watched him at the fireplace. He lighted kindling under the logs. The glow of the flame moved on his jacket's surface. He rose.

"I meant physically."

He had left his jacket buttoned.

She said gently: "No. I am not."

"You won't need the sweater?"

"No." She put on her coat.

They walked down the wagon-trail. The sky was not yet night, a moon was in it, pale and disrelated. Brand walked the other edge of the road. She hated his trail back and was grateful to him.

They came to where the car was. The thing stood, unaccountable. Ann got behind the wheel.

Brand viewed the scarlet vehicle. He came to her. "It's Babylonian."

Ann set the ignition. "It's awful. I love it."

"Won't you need lights?"

"No. I can see."

Ann connected the electricity from the batteries. There was no response. She pushed again on the new self-starter. The same thing ground. She tried grinding it longer.

Brand moved from his position. "Where's the crank?" He went to the tool-chest on the running-board and got out the crank and went to the head of the car. "Lower the spark and raise the gas lever." He affixed the crank—then heaved up the resistance on the handle. The engine's weight turned up over. He connected again—and bore down circumferentially. "Try choking her," he called. He gave the interior an unintermitting interconnection. "God damn it!" he said. Ann sat meekly behind the windscreen. Brand unbuttoned the top of his leather jacket.

He went out of sight and the car rocked.

He stood up.

"Ann, have you got the ignition on?"

Ann said yes.

She felt the laughter coming.

Brand stood in front of it a minute.

He went to the side of the hood and undid the clamps. He folded

back the cover and studied the engine.

"It's cold," he stated.

Ann thought she might venture it. "Brand, do you know what you're doing?"

"No," he said. "Do you?"

They tried once more and then set off down the road.

"Do you suppose it will be there all winter?" Ann asked.

They stopped to examine Brand's thumb. The skin was off the inside of the lower phalangeal section.

"It cost mints, I believe," Ann said, enjoying herself. "The red paint was extra." The stars were brilliant. Ann thought of the proclamation in the forest. "Do you suppose Dorothy Dryer-Thompson already knows? It's like a fig-leaf is."

"Do you mind?"

"You can't remove them, Brand."

"Is there a mechanic you get?"

"Johnny will fix it. I'll get him on the telephone."

"I'll see him," said Brand.

"You will?"

"I owe the hotel for a window."

Brand must be starved. The lights of the village scattered in the valley. She was furious that she mustn't ask Brand even though she would, to come in to eat. The house light stood, white and electric, on the crest. It would not occur to him to think of anything but the hotel. She looked peacefully at him in the red shirt and leather jacket.

She got Brand's grey eyes.

The country was deep night, the lower meadow miles. "Brand, don't those boots weigh a ton?"

He slackened his pace. "You've walked eight miles. I didn't think."

"Will you walk back?"

"I'll get Johnny to come. He can stay."

At the driveway to the house, she left him. She felt his eyes search her—and then he had said good-night. She watched him descend to the village. She would always protect him. She turned to the house. She detested scrollwork. She was dead with tiredness.

A note was on the silver tray in the hall.

Ann dear—I am at the Wheeler Worthingtons'. The invitations of the Worthingtons does escape me. We were both to come. Do remember you had a headache. And that Thyrsa is to give you hot chicken broth, motoring is so uncertain.

M.

Thyrza appeared from the back of the hall.

“I’ll have a tray, Thyrza. In bed.”

“There’s cold veal.” Thyrza watched her go up the stairs. She had done it. It was the sort of aura we get, Thyrza saw, that gives us away.

CHAPTER 11

In an effort to make Johnny Gulbranson, a pitworker, a more acceptable candidate for his daughter's hand, Henry Bradshaw invites him to dinner, together with the local rector, his wife and a precocious daughter. His intention is to make Johnny a supervisor and raise his salary.

The preliminaries in the parlour went well enough. Johnny met Bradshaw in front of the horsehair sofa. Johnny guessed he shouldn't have grabbed the auto horn. Bradshaw remarked that Ann had told him that it ensured the safety of the driver. Johnny mentioned that he was glad to hear about the foot. Ann interrupted the ambiguity with the sherry. Brand was not brought up.

The Dryer-Thompsons produced their middle daughter Druselda. She had just got in from Great Forks from a session with the dentist. Emaline and Deirdre had holes in their teeth that detained them in the city. Mrs. Broughton asked Mrs. Dryer-Thompson to repeat the news. Emaline was learned and Deirdre, beautifully brought up. Druselda showed her bands. They were clamped on the lower teeth as well as the uppers. Druselda was pubescent and led her class in latin. Henry Bradshaw had refused to harbour any Dryer-Thompsons, major or minor, but put up only a temporary flat rejection of Mrs. Broughton's fixed table, being able to look over Gulbranson as well burdened by Dryer-Thompsons as without, and eat his meal better, not having to contribute to the gabble. Dorothy Dryer-Thompson, who had strict reservations about Norwegian pit-workers at the dinner table, unbent nobly at Henry Bradshaw's employee's instant concern for Druselda in asking to see what the child had gone through and in comparing dental work with her. Ann blessed Johnny.

Thyrza and her sister Violet whose asthma was improved waited on table; Mrs. Thrums the charwoman relieved in the kitchen. Mrs. Broughton put Dorothy Dryer-Thompson on Bradshaw's right and then Johnny; herself at the other end; and then the Rector and Ann. She shoved Druselda in between herself and Johnny. The menu was bouillon, ramekins of baked tuna fish breaded, roast duck with orange and giblet gravy, candied sweet potatoes with peas and creamed cauliflower, a green salad, and for desert a chocolate soufflé with whipped cream. Mrs. Broughton was sure Johnny would not get it at the Dominion House. Mme. LeDuc had made corn muffins and there was apple-sauce, roasted almonds and a Burgundy got out of Henry from the cellar. As the hot bouillon might have brought on a recurrence of

the toothache in Druselda, the cook was instructed to cut up a fresh fruit cup with sugar for the child which unfortunately was invalidated by the cherry on top, Druselda being allergic to drupes. The courses seemed most rich when eaten in conjunction, but Mrs. Broughton was pleased with the effect of her table for Johnny, the silver and glass caught by the candleflame and the Worcester pheasant centrepiece on the linen cloth entirely masculine.

Ann's dress was lake green, her throat enclosed by an innocent and chaste collar with a small ribbon. Johnny thought of Mozart and harpsichords. He had to keep placing her in a row-boat threading worms to keep her in touch with experience. The sexual life of mankind he had theoretically instructed her in overpowered the harpsichords and candlesticks. Ann kept reminding him with her eyes across the table. He concentrated on the line of fire struck by the candleflame in the pendent prisms, and for solid ground, Mrs. Dryer-Thompson. Though he guessed he supposed he had, Johnny came to the conclusion that Bradshaw had had nothing to do with Ann. Just the temper. Bradshaw, Johnny could see, wasn't so sure of himself. The side-whiskers had too much prominence. He had got himself repressed. He would have liked to shoot ducks with Dorset and would have ended up tangled in the bulrushes. Johnny guessed he sort of liked him. He embezzled gold mines for Ann and did not know which way to love her; he was not particularly moved by widows but drew the line at orphans. Johnny decided to embrace him but to decline a partnership in the Lime Company. Ann, perhaps part of the crook in the painting over the sideboard, was what her aunt was. Johnny planned if he could not have the niece to have Mrs. Broughton. They would ride around in an open carriage.

Bradshaw had summed up Johnny quicker. A tow-headed humanist with no money. In love with Ann but with not a chance except to get mothered. He should have been Dorset...

The conversation turned topically through the early frost and seasonal colds, Amundsen and the Arctic, to Mrs. Broughton's recommendation that the Rector provide more heat for the congregation in the Church of the Advent. Arthur Dryer-Thompson who was in the mood of the Old Testament and pointed up the interchanges, could not resist, at this point a little audacious comment or two on the interconnection between furnaces and the latest ladies' fashions. Ann was all for less clothes and particularly whalebone which Mrs. Dryer-Thompson pronounced one of the frameworks of society and referred to Johnny. Johnny was about to guess that it all depended what you had to hide when he was saved by the concise statement of Druselda

that she loathed corsets. Everybody halted under the impact of the same mental question, and, with a reprimand from the girl's mother for the vulgarity of the word, the conversation deflected into other channels. They got to the duck.

Dryer-Thompson toasted the ladies. "Excellent Chambertin, Henry, excellent!" he complimented the cellar. "Won't do to let in Carry Nation, eh?" The woman attacked establishments dispensing intoxicants with an axe.

"She's dead, Arthur," Mrs. Dryer-Thompson stated.

The Rector reflected that he had read of the passing of the temperance leader. "So she is. Buried her hatchet, eh?" He raised his Burgundy. "The spirit marches on!"

Henry Bradshaw did not care for puns. Mrs. Broughton quickly thought of some subject other than violence in saloons, saying in the interval: "I do think they should be restricted."

"What? Puns?" Bradshaw asked.

"Of course not. Women. Do tell us how you voted in the election, Arthur," Mrs. Broughton asked. Arthur was incessantly Tory.

"Women and the secret ballot! An inconsistent question, Marion, most inconsistent," Dryer-Thompson remarked, chuckling.

"Nonsense, Arthur," Mrs. Dryer-Thompson drove in, though somewhat aside from the point. "The women of Canada should have grasped the helm long ago."

Bradshaw wanted to know for what port.

Johnny was interested too but ate his duck.

"The port of good government," said Dorothy Dryer-Thompson.

Bradshaw doubted if the government would get through a debate.

Dryer-Thomson leaned back in a short roar. "Point of order, Dotty," he explained to her, conjuring up chaos in the House of Commons. "Country could never afford it."

"I think Mrs. Dryer-Thompson is right," Ann said heatedly. "It's just being male thinking of a woman as some sort of an ornament incapable of a thought in her head in this day and age, outside of keeping a man looked after and fed so he can do her thinking for her."

Dryer-Thomson sprang to the moment, gallantly tapping the cloth. "Hear, hear!"

"They only think they do, dear," Mrs. Broughton reminded her.

"Splendid, Ann," Mrs. Dryer-Thomson furnished.

Ann had more to say. "It's all very well for you men to think you have a grasp of civilization because you control money and build railroads all over the map and fool yourselves you have done something

just because you're doing it, but it will just be banks and railroad stations you get to without women having the vote — and other than men in office," she added.

Dryer Thompson gave a silent whistle. "The cabinet, Henry," he warned.

"Well," Ann said qualifyingly, left resplendent suddenly.

"I am not sarcastic, my dear," Dryer-Thompson said to her.

Johnny had been hauled over the subject before on the lake in a sunset.

"The vote," Bradshaw said, guiding her, "is manipulation; the authority for the skullduggery, the provision of experience. This dinner or Dryer-Thompson there, producing it."

"He isn't let near the stove," answered Ann.

"Exactly," underscored Mrs. Dryer-Thompson.

"I protest," objected Dryer-Thompson. "My culinary talents are maligned, maligned."

"Don't be an ass, papa," Druselda said.

"Druselda!" her mother gasped. "One word more and you shall leave the table instantly."

The Rector seemed in doubt for a moment.

"Oh, all right," conceded Druselda conveniently. "How would you have voted, Ann?" she asked, scooping cauliflower into her. "If you got that chance for your experience."

Mrs. Broughton looked down at the other end of the table. Bradshaw looked at Druselda.

"Certainly," Ann said, "not for Armand Lavergne going around as if Quebec weren't between the Pacific and the Atlantic. It's unforgivable, the Catholics stabbing Laurier in the back and the English Conservatives playing up to the nationalism so that they could do it."

"A vote for Borden isn't a vote for peasoup," Bradshaw said, removing the Conservative vote from the French-Canadian.

"Peasoup and pontoots," Druselda said, embellishing Bradshaw's vernacular.

Dryer-Thompson thought best to pass over the clarification. Bradshaw purpled. Mrs. Dryer-Thompson maintained an eradicating composure. Johnny liked Druselda. "Mme. LeDuc had the most extraordinary story!" Mrs. Broughton shook up the table. "Of British naval officers," she said less urgently. "In the dead of night carrying off Telesphore and TiJean to war if the young men hadn't concealed themselves in the LeDuc hayloft." She wished Henry would take a drink of water.

Ann watched Johnny going on eating duck.

"Extraordinary," Dryer-Thompson followed on Mrs. Broughton's lead, "how these tales are swallowed in the parish, our neighbours the French beating the English over the head with the Empire."

"The Sun will never set," Mrs. Dryer-Thompson produced firmly. Bradshaw swallowed his potato.

"It does seem that Mr. Laurier has been in power long enough," Mrs. Broughton said, submitting the stranglehold for discussion.

"It isn't a question of power, Auntie."

"So that's how you'd have cast, eh?" the Rector turned to Mrs. Broughton. "A ballot for Borden, Henry."

"Borden split the country," Ann said. "His stand was in effect the English voting so that the French could split Quebec off from the rest of Canada."

"An uneasy alliance, Ann," Dryer-Thompson admitted. "An uneasy alliance. Couldn't have got Laurier out of Ottawa without a little push from our colleagues the Romans."

The answer was worse than none to Ann. "Why should you want to get Laurier out? I don't think it's only disgraceful. I think it's stupid. He's made Canada."

"He was against the British navy, Ann," Mrs. Dryer-Thompson informed Ann gently, still indulgently disposed because of Ann's eloquence on the suffrage question.

"Why? Because he wants Canada to have one?" Ann gave the answer.

"I think we can leave that to the British Admiralty," rejoined Mrs. Dryer-Thompson, feeling the seven seas secure about her.

"But you can't," said Ann. "How can we ever feel like ourselves if we vote against it?"

"British subjects in Canada," said Mrs. Dryer-Thompson somewhat less indulgently, "have allegiance in that order."

Ann felt herself concerned deeply. She did understand that to be Canadian was to be British. But the position was at fault too, somewhere in what she believed, in what she must think, though she could not explain it. "I'm not against being British or wanting to be or putting with ours that freedom first," she said, trying to know as she spoke. "But there's something more than that. There's a Canadian freedom too, that's the same thing but that the first won't work without, that all this that's happened in the election is against; Quebec for only Quebec, and not standing on our own feet, and acting as if Canada isn't ours to have if something else and other allegiances don't have it first. Canada isn't somebody else's to give back to us so we can have it, it's here, and ours; and to be made as we ourselves are

and without any excuses while we do it and part of the same freedom everywhere it's Greece or Lime Rock," Ann ended lamely, aware that the table had listened.

"Bully," said Druselda.

"Good, Ann, good," Dryer-Thompson said quietly, his eyebrows bristling. He had felt like a Canadian himself these last few months in a sort of bastard way. "You've got a statesman, Henry," he told him. "Won't be a young man with a vote in the country left us. We can't afford it. The eloquence was Pierian. You have learned, my dear, truly."

Ann's smile came into being. "From Johnny. In a rowboat."

Mrs. Dryer-Thompson fortified her opinion that the relationships which had come into existence around the Bradshaw household were exceedingly odd. "Hardly the British navy," she removed herself agreeably.

"Fishing," Johnny told her. "It fathoms politics. Ann had the whole election figured between fish."

"Really," Mrs. Dryer-Thompson wanted to know.

"You should hear Johnny on Reciprocity," said Ann not thinking.

"On what, dear?" Mrs. Broughton inquired. Ann was inspiringly radiant, though a little flushed.

"Free Trade," Bradshaw told her. Bradshaw had eaten his duck. He had invested a quarter of a million dollars in railroads, the sentiment and the Empire had been neither here nor there in the elections. The pitch was Eastern Canada's control of freight traffic. "And what are your views on Free Trade, Mr. Gulbranson?" he inquired colourlessly. "Apart from the Ministry of Fisheries."

Johnny smiled. "Not exactly Free Trade. Just Reciprocity."

"Enough to get one American foot in the door," Bradshaw rehearsed him.

"No. Not a foot. A hand," Johnny said.

"Not that William H. Taft," exclaimed Mrs. Dryer-Thompson incredulously.

"I guess he heads the American government," Johnny admitted.

"Why! He'd have us become a United State!" Dorothy Dryer-Thompson expostulated.

"What price a Canadian, eh, Ann?" Druselda popped in from between her fists, her elbows propped on the table. "Your serve, Mr. Gulbranson," she told him, going back to concentrating.

Mrs. Broughton rang for Thyrza and Violet to clear the condiments. She did wish the child's precociousness extended to closing her mouth while she chewed.

Johnny thought it as well to retire from Reciprocity. Getting goods easily into and out of the needy Canadian west by way of America sort of led to the head of the table. Behind the Tory flag waved the eastern Canada railroads. Johnny grinned. "Guess the election closed the issue before it opened. Seems we'll remain Canadian," Johnny predicted.

"I should think so," said Mrs. Dryer-Thompson.

"Paddle our own canoe, eh?" Dryer-Thompson put in heartily. Of the right stuff, this Gulbranson, Dryer-Thompson told himself. Like to see him get on. Not the same roots as Ann. But might yet make Bradshaw the right grandfather...

"An ambiguous procedure," said Mrs. Broughton, pushing the canoe forward as a subject of conversation but disturbed by Violet's asthma.

"Is that a political comment?" asked Bradshaw.

"It wasn't," said Mrs. Broughton, following up the amusement. "But it will do. Neither is civilized."

"I question the canoe, Marion," said Mrs. Dryer-Thompson heavily. "A stirring symbol of our forests and streams despite its savage origin. I have found it quite predictable."

"Not like your hayburner, eh, Henry?" said Dryer-Thompson, helping himself to the soufflé kept in opposition by Thyrza and bringing up the Runaround which had been at the lake and Bradshaw's foot.

There was a pause. Bradshaw waited for the soufflé.

"That's unfair, Mr. Dryer-Thompson," Ann spoke. "You haven't been in it."

"You are an expert on transportation, Mr. Gulbranson," Bradshaw suggested.

Johnny had had less inclusive dinners. "The canoe only threatens the occupant," he tried out. He looked at Ann.

Ann looked at her father's face.

"How long have you been driving, Mr. Gulbranson?" Mrs. Dryer-Thompson stiffly inquired from the left.

"Pagan from start to finish," Dryer-Thompson rumbled. "Never build for the Lord's stable, eh, Henry? Should have been in your stall with your sins instead of paying for them."

"Less overhead," Bradshaw advised him.

"Sermon was redundant," declared the Rector. "Whole show wasted. Who remembers the Text, eh?" He thundered his eyebrows and reviewed his parishioners.

Mrs. Broughton put him out. "No one would, Arthur. I wish you wouldn't concoct your Texts, and stick to the Testaments."

"It's a Runaround, isn't it, Ann?" asked Druselda.

Ann nodded dismissively.

"Red. Isn't it," Druselda said.

"Have more whipped cream, dear," Mrs. Broughton said, planting the sauceboat in front of her.

"It seems to me," Mrs. Dryer-Thompson proposed, "the motor-car should be confined to the turnpike."

Ann took over the exhaustion of the subject. She engaged the Rector. "You haven't said when you'd let me drive you."

The Rector took reflection. "A moot point, Ann. A moot point... We're up for a canonry. This might well put us ex cathedra, as it were."

"Probably."

"The thing has an electric starter?"

"Inside."

"How many miles per hour?"

"Forty and up."

"Then I'll do it, by Jove. Tomorrow at three at the rectory. Thought it was less."

"Horrors," said Druselda.

Bradshaw finished his dessert, he put his serviette to his lips. Ann was carrying it impeccably. Dorset wasn't yet in the car.

"I have three small boys," said Ann, "who want to come besides you. Dickie, Potiphar and an adjutant. I promised them the day before Daddy let the horse run away with him."

Johnny liked it.

"Excellent," said the Rector. "Won't open my mouth, ecclesiastically."

Ann looked at Johnny. She wanted Johnny to come. His hair had escaped the water he had combed it with.

"Where will you drive?" Bradshaw asked.

"Do wear your muffler, Ann," said Mrs. Broughton.

"Past Father Goujard's," decided the Rector. "Provide Aimé with a homily for his R.C.s next Sunday. Then ice-cream cones at the Junction. Should we have inserted an automobile warning in The Sentinel, d'you think?"

"Certainly not, Arthur," said Dorothy Dryer-Thompson.

"I'll come, Ann," Druselda informed Ann.

"Of course, Drusy."

"School, Drusy, school!" her father reminded her.

"Those three boys aren't."

"You've missed quite enough being in Great Forks," said her moth-

er.

"They're too young to go to school, Druselda," Ann said. "Saturday. We'll take Mr. Gulbranson."

Johnny worked Saturday but he did not say so.

"Next year I'll really know the country," Ann said.

"Flying school, Ann! Flying school!" Dryer-Thompson predicted.

"With a recommended chauffeur, Ann," Mrs. Dryer-Thompson trusted and corrected. "One does consider The Woman at the Wheel on Tour fast."

"Thought you wanted to run the country," said Bradshaw.

"That is utterly different," Mrs. Dryer-Thompson returned. "A vote is not Ann at the wheel of a car."

"Drive slowly, dear," Mrs. Broughton resolved the question. Dorothy was wearing. She rose, for the parlour.

"Votum," said Druselda.

"What, dear?" said Mrs. Broughton.

"Vevere," said Druselda. "To desire," she said, up.

Mrs. Broughton looked at her.

The women passed through the dining-room door for the parlour. Thyrsa and Violet cleared and placed ashtrays.

Bradshaw set the port and the humidor from the sideboard on the table; re-seated himself—the Rector pulled his chair from the table, Johnny sat down. Bradshaw filled his own glass and shoved the decanter at the Rector.

"Splendid girl, Ann. Splendid," the Rector said. He poured himself port. He passed the decanter to Johnny. "Hope to officiate one day, Bradshaw."

"I suppose you do." Bradshaw indicated the cigars.

Johnny smoked a cigarette.

Bradshaw through his draw looked at Johnny—the forehead was sweating.

Johnny was aware of it, the room was warm.

Dryer-Thompson put out his match. "Fine Canadian," he said of Ann. "Couldn't have spoken with more spirit. Not afraid of sentiment. The self-consciousness at the end indicted us, Henry."

"You don't conceal the grace, Arthur," Bradshaw said.

"Stock-in-trade," Dryer-Thompson stated. "Expected of me. Only way the churchgoer prays. Head's heresy. I'm as scared stiff of sentiment as you are, Henry."

"That is improbable."

"Here's the girl! Thinks with her head what she feels with her emotions and has the outrageous damnable nerve to speak the result. I tell

you, Bradshaw, there wasn't a man on the hustings the last ten weeks dared tell us the election existed for the truths of the heart and the country for the Golden Rule and the place to start both, where we sit here on our breech in Lime Rock and nowhere else!" The Rector's hand came down on the cloth.

Bradshaw removed his cigar. "The election was close."

Johnny looked at Dryer-Thompson. The instruction of Bradshaw's remarks was being missed. Bradshaw took in Johnny's look. The Rector went on: "Not a finer duty becomes us, than Ann with the vote. The youth of the country at the helm. Conservatism moving on!" The Rector drew on his cigar, without result. He applied a fresh flame. "Power will soon be out of our hands, Henry," he said, between puffs.

"I hope to move it on to Ann," said Bradshaw.

"Youth of the country, thinking, feeling, moulding our destinies! Think I was hatched here, eh, Gulbranson?"

"Just made it myself," said Johnny.

"Your mind seems to run north and south, Gulbranson," Bradshaw said unexceptionably.

Johnny laughed. "Impatient to get east and west."

"Still part of the Empire, eh?" Dryer-Thompson said for him.

"How much do you make a week, Gulbranson?"

Bradshaw said it.

Johnny's mind went to his pay-envelope at the wicket down Lime Creek Road, then to the dinner—then to Ann. The diversion was successful. He said: "A hundred and twenty a month." His hand went to the ashtray.

"Fifty," said Bradshaw.

Dryer-Thompson again held up his cigar. He finished putting it in his mouth... Henry's move was confoundingly characteristic. He gave the boy time to find himself. "How much do you, Henry?" Dryer-Thompson shot.

Johnny was not liking it.

Bradshaw watched the courtesy. "How much do you think you're worth?" he suggested.

Johnny found love invalidating.

Dryer-Thompson jibed, it was the wrong haul on the right man. "He's after modesty, Gulbranson. Turn a deaf ear and drink his port—openly think that'll hold us our own."

Johnny said: "I'll take triple or quit." The evenness of tone was not unnoticed by Bradshaw.

Dryer-Thompson roared.

Bradshaw appreciated the indifference. He had offered contempt.

"It's double. You overestimate me."

Johnny looked up. He saw that Bradshaw gave it to him.

Ann came into it; but the decision was on its own. "You should stick to thirty. The dynamite does the work."

"Thunderation," said the Rector. "The information is worth double."

Johnny tried to sort the reasons.

Bradshaw defended his intelligence. "You are taken out of the pit, in charge of personnel. The wine is successive. To embarrass you into acceptance. See Haverstock."

Johnny's eyes went to the porcelain pheasant. His mind went back to the floor in front of the fireplace, the rain on the windows. This was Bradshaw buying-in his errors. The duck dinner took him out of the front seat with Brand... He preferred the pit.

"Well done," growled the Rector heartily. He lifted his port.

It crossed Johnny's mind that he had two hundred and forty dollars.

"What do you plan generally to do, Mr. Gulbranson?" Bradshaw said. He rose.

"Dislodge Bradshaw here," said the Rector. "I have a file at the rectory might do it." He pressed out his cigar.

"Fish," said Johnny.

Bradshaw's mind passed over to Mirror Lake. He said: "Ann tells me."

"Well, gentlemen," the Rector said, up, hands on his midriff. "The ladies. The ankle is well turned, Henry. Well turned."

Bradshaw followed him to the door of the dining-room into the hallway. "You sentimentalize profit, Thompson."

CHAPTER 19

Johnny Gulbranson, together with Henry Bradshaw's sister-in-law, Marion Broughton, plans to render a local sulphur mine inoperative by blowing it up. Bradshaw has purchased the mine to use as a weapon against Brand Dorset.

Johnny put the dynamite to blow up the place in the back of the buggy in a suitcase. He sat forward on the leather seat of the buggy, a sweater on under his blue suit and a bowler on the back of his head. He had chosen Zed's mellowest mare, Florabelle. He liked them sentimental. He had had Corm Shingle, Zed's livery man, set Florabelle aside on his way to work. Corm reckoned she was good for the Junction and back if Johnny did not press her; Florabelle was given to the founders, a rheumatic affection of the muscles of the chest in horses. Johnny mentioned that he was going to the Junction—in an opposite direction to the mine—just in case of bloodhounds later. He left the suitcase behind the casing in the dynamite-shed at the far end of the kilns. At noon, he drove Florabelle around, took out the bowler for his trip, got into the sweater and packed the explosive. The yard was deserted. He put in eight cartridges of dynamite, packed in a plunger, a fifty-yard coil of wire, fuses, a flashlight, a pair of pliers, and a glove. He did not know where the glove came in, but it was on the shed bench. He assigned the inclusion to a vision he had of Mrs. Broughton plunging the plunger.

He tightened in the contents with a piece of canvas. He picked up a crowbar and the suitcase and carted them to the buggy. Apart from marrying Ann, he was set.

He drove Florabelle down Lime Creek Road. At the corner of Grantland Road, he turned up for the butcher's.

Mrs. Broughton was standing behind a side of beef hung in Greenfield's window. Johnny hauled up Florabelle.

Mrs. Broughton made a sign with her mesh handbag and withdrew from view. She reappeared in the doorway of the butcher shop. "And a half pound of liver," she said. Greenfield was right behind her. Mrs. Broughton said: "Oh." She said: "There's Mr. Gulbranson. You can drive me home." She advanced across the sidewalk. Mr. Greenfield came with her. He wore a straw hat and a collarless pink shirt attached on a stud above the expanse of his apron. "Mr. Greenfield is just going off to his dinner," Mrs. Broughton suggested to him.

"Saw you behind the sirloin," Johnny said. He put his bowler back on and the reins in a tie around the bottom of the whip as insurance against Florabelle, and got down. "How are you, Clem?"

"And see that the fish is filleted," said Mrs. Broughton, giving her hand to Johnny.

"I was going round by the bank," Johnny mentioned. Mrs. Broughton looked ready for the Klondike. She had on a sewed feather hat, a heavy dotted black veil gathered together under her chin securing the headdress, woollen gloves, overshoes, a warm cloth coat over a black taffeta travelling dress and a light ornamental fox fur around her neck. The fur looked frivolous.

"You two aren't thinking of elopin', by any chance?" Clem asked, his hand on his whiskers.

"We are not going anywhere. Give me your arm, John," said Mrs. Broughton.

Johnny assisted Mrs. Broughton onto the platform of the carriage. "Waiting till June," Johnny said.

"Haven't seen Johnny in a bowler since the undertaker's funeral."

"He has worn it for the drive," said Mrs. Broughton unhelpfully. She arranged herself. "It is particularly becoming."

"Counting on your discretion, Clem," Johnny said.

Greenfield roared. "Oughta disguise that there suitcase, Johnny," he advised.

Johnny looked at it. "Always forget to," said Johnny.

Greenfield roared.

Johnny got up.

"What you got in it?" Clem asked and waited.

Johnny disentangled the reins and the whip. "Dynamite."

Greenfield roared.

"Do hurry up. There's Caroline Saunders," Mrs. Broughton said.

Johnny drew out the whip backwards.

Caroline Saunders descended articulately from across the road. "Marion! How sweet!"

Johnny gave Florabelle a prod.

"This winter!"

Johnny and Mrs. Broughton jerked as the traces hit.

They went up the street. Mrs. Broughton waved.

Caroline stopped in the middle of the road. She raised an arm. "At the Dorcas, Marion!" she called.

Mrs. Broughton adjusted herself. "Really. With Clem Greenfield's roaring I thought we should have the town with us. I spent an odorous half hour outwitting him. Caroline, of course, is too hearty to be

intelligent. Do urge this beast to greater effort, John, before we meet anyone else. Where on earth did you pick it?" Florabelle had relapsed to normal.

Johnny brought her up to a trot. "Isn't the heroic type, I guess," Johnny admitted. "Sensitive, though," he said. The wheels of the buggy joggled off the frozen ridges of the road.

"Well. We might have made a more dashing picture. I do wish Clem Greenfield wouldn't hang what we eat about the ceiling. It's most revealing. The dynamite is in the suitcase?"

Johnny said it was.

"And in sufficient quantity," Mrs. Broughton trusted.

Johnny thought so, for the work in hand.

"And it won't go off before we get there."

Johnny looked at his co-conspirator with a kind of reverence. The suitcase was bunted up against the corner at the back. Mrs. Broughton sat efficiently, her hand on the seat-rail. "No, not till it's fired."

"I should hate to have it wasted. Were you observed?"

"The men were at lunch."

"Then we are clear." Mrs. Broughton settled her hands in her lap; they passed the last of the doorways. "I put on clothes that attract no attention."

Johnny glanced at the armament. "Sure you have enough on?"

"I put on a jumper," Mrs. Broughton informed him. She looked ahead. "Really. To think that all this protects Henry. If it was not for Ann, I should have the whole thing published in *The Sentinel* in their outrageous type. I was awake until this morning."

Johnny renewed Florabelle. They left the end of the street. The road now led on up past the farms to the forest-line and to the mine. "What did you tell Ann? That you were out to lunch?"

"Ann was still asleep. She must have had a most exhausting evening with the drifts."

"Ann went to Brand's?"

Mrs. Broughton thought of the disregard required to answer the question. "The blizzard did not seem to matter."

Johnny wondered what had happened to Brand's determination to leave. Ann had got there. He had a sense of destruction. He clacked Florabelle's posterior. "Guess we have Henry tied up," Johnny said.

Mrs. Broughton did not answer. They were in open country; the farms stood back in their shelters of trees and the snow left by the storm lay white on the fields and along the banks and the ditches. The sky was cold.

Johnny said: "You worried?"

Mrs. Broughton kept from imposing her troubles, then she said: "Ann. I am worried about the cabin."

"Ann is intelligent," said Johnny.

"I don't want her to have to go on in this way—divided by the lake."

"No."

"Ann will be guilty. She will mistake passion, she will use it as a declaration that she is not guilty, or be ashamed. I so want Henry to come to his senses so that Ann will not be misinformed."

Johnny said: "I think Ann knows."

"So much depends on Brand."

"Brand has been hurt. He knows about love."

"You are sure?"

"He wants to pull out."

"Henry thrives on guilt. Ann must also have and want her home."

Johnny thought of Bradshaw thriving for twenty years. "Got to count cynically on human nature, people remembering the time they hadn't sinned so much. He has forgotten he is trusted," said Johnny. "He only needs time. Now Ann's in love. Seeing Ann happy and Brand around. He may get Brand turning Dorsetcroft into more lime, once the ghost of Dorset's father is offstage." Mrs. Broughton, like him and despite her fox fur, was under stress. "The situation needs a grandchild," said Johnny.

"I think of Ann's mother. My sister was a very lovely person. Very like Ann, when she was young. Henry is still giving her the world, as he is giving it to Ann..." Mrs. Broughton got at her veil. "Do make this animal do something else but reminisce."

"Florabelle?"

Johnny tenderly touched Florabelle's hind cheek with the tassel.

"In love, giving oneself is enough." Mrs. Broughton unlumped her veil. "Henry is always such a depressing subject—as everything is that has to be compensated for. Don't ever be compensated for." She dragged at her hat. "Or take up veils."

"Too chaste."

Mrs. Broughton got it knotted again under her chin and sat back. "I have never learned how to speak through them. Florabelle's doing much better."

"She responds to love."

They passed over the downslant of road, Florabelle's hoofs trotting and her mane lifting, the air brisk on the carriage, the top of the whip in the stock bobbing. They left the ploughed fields for the upper meadows. The afternoon was without sun but the sky wide and the

light over the country open and clear. On the near horizon the hills surrounding the lake were crisp and powdered with snow. They skirted the farther edge of woods above the meadows and began the gradual climb of the road leading up to the mine. Florabelle became aware of her years. They went by the entrance into the disused road to the cabin. Underneath the boughs of the thick pines the ground was bare, in the sheltered cut snow piled on the bent grass.

"I don't see how Ann can be content to live on snowshoes in there half the year."

"I thought you were ignoring the world for love?" Johnny said.

"I should much prefer civilization."

"Hard choice," reflected Johnny.

Florabelle hauled the carriage up the steepening slope. The side of the woods fell away, the tops of the fir trees levelling, the lake coming into view. The lake lay cold and distant at the base of the hills, the surface black and unmoving.

"I suppose it's beautiful in summer," conceded Mrs. Broughton.

"Contains fish," said Johnny.

They crossed over the plank bridge spanning the gully. The water rushed down the ravine, noising the silence.

Johnny pulled up Florabelle.

Mrs. Broughton looked at their destination. "I refuse to let you go in there."

The blackened building stood up against the cliff. It poised in its own dirtying. Threads of rail led from under its boarded door into the square opening of the shaft in the hill.

Johnny admitted: "Looks kind of depressing." He got down from the buggy, taking the reins.

"It's just like a place Henry would gloat over."

"Afraid it was old man Dorset perpetrated it," said Johnny. He led Florabelle over to the side of the plateau, placing the carriage away from the mouth of the shaft and the horse's back to it. He undid the checkrein; gathered the lines and tied them to a tree—loose enough so Florabelle could gather any refreshment.

And this... drains to the lake," said Mrs. Broughton, "when it works."

"Ruin the fishing," said Johnny.

"Yes," said Mrs. Broughton. "Blow it up. Are you sure you know how, John?" she said with deep concern.

"Ought to," said Johnny.

Mrs. Broughton thought of Johnny at the edge of the underground sea of sulphur. "I'm not at all sure. Undo the bridle. I shall talk to Henry."

"Henry's not such a good listener. You're exhilarated, Marion." He went up to the seat. "Here. You hold the bowler." He gave Mrs. Broughton his bowler.

"I don't want your bowler. This won't do Ann a bit of good."

Johnny grinned up at her. Mrs. Broughton declined the badinage. Johnny put his foot on the carriage lift. He kissed her and let himself back down. "There's a second charge—you can push the plunger. You should have had eight children, Marion."

Mrs. Broughton thought, no, just one.

Johnny lifted out the suitcase from the back of the buggy and laid it on the ground. "First time I've done this free of charge." He opened the suitcase and removed the canvas. He took out everything but the dynamite. "Kind of small-gestured on our part, though—using Bradshaw's dynamite." He began hitching together the leads of a couple of fuse-caps.

"I think I shall come with you," Mrs. Broughton announced. she laid aside Johnny's bowler and got up in the carriage; she was certain there was peril.

Johnny put down his pliers. He helped her to the ground. "You are worse than Ann," Johnny said.

"I shall carry the suitcase."

"You stay here. I don't need the suitcase." He bent down to his fuses.

"Why?"

Johnny looked up at her— she was worried. "You think I'd take a chance, for Henry's mine?"

"You would for Ann."

"The place is dirty," he truthfully said to her. "If there are bats, I have to look after you."

"That is the only reason?"

"I'll be back in fifteen minutes." Johnny completed the connections, put the pliers in his back pocket. "Watch for the cloud of dust, the next thing'll be me." He put the coupled fuses into the side pocket of his jacket.

Mrs. Broughton watched him bravely, the fingers of her hand tapping. "How far do you have to go in?"

"Under the crown of the hill ought to do it." Johnny set the detonator upright and checked the terminal. "Enough to block the sulphur. Then we'll blow up the entrance." Johnny surveyed the cartridges; he put four in his empty pocket.

"That's the dynamite," said Mrs. Broughton.

"You sound like the Slow Movement. Ammonium nitrate. Good

for the sins of the world."

"It does seem a radical profession."

Johnny hung the coil of wire over his shoulder, he picked up the crowbar in the middle and then the detonator by its handle in one hand, and took the flashlight in the other.

Mrs. Broughton set aside her claims on him. "This is too generous of you."

"Thinking of the bass," said Johnny.

"I shall never forgive Henry his past. Nor Ann, what she has of one, though I must say you look scientific."

"You chat with Florabelle," said Johnny to Mrs. Broughton.

He went over to the hillside. Dirt would be a change from limestone. He entered the tunnel. He wondered what damned fool left the shaft exposed, he had been ready to crowbar his way in. He examined the supporting timbers at the entrance. They were square timber, strong enough, but spent by neglect and weather—like Bradshaw's past. A single cartridge would bring the whole hill down. He went from the entrance; threw his torch on. All the props were square timber, broad-axe hewn. The passage was not much above his head, the supported ceiling hard earth, hung with cobweb. Dry, anyway, thought Johnny. But the whole shooting-match stood on its last legs, abandoned half a century. Bradshaw would have to re-timber. That is, Acme would. He saw a fresh cigarette-end on the ground.

He went in deeper, the darkness closing behind him, the chilliness getting through to him, the rails under his feet leading away, faintly threaded by his flashlight, into the dark ahead. In one area the timbers were newer, had been replaced. There was a smell. Something had died. After a couple of minutes—he guessed, under the height of the hill—there was a bend in the tunnel. Johnny threw his light ahead. There was no divergent working; the tunnel went on.

He put down his load, cast the light on the supports and beams. The whole bend would cave in.

He set the torch across the top of the plunger with the shaft of light aimed on the side of an upright; placed the cartridges and fuses along the rail. He took the crowbar over, drove into the earth of the tunnel's side making a bore next to the supporting timber. The earth gave solidly. He made a good penetration; did the same the other side of the tunnel. He inserted two cartridges in each and a cap shell and tamped the charge. He joined the leads of the fuse caps to the end of the coil of wire.

He thought of nothing apart from what he was doing, except that Ann would have got to the cabin about the time it was snowing heav-

ily....

He unwound the coil of wire backward along the floor of the gallery, the flashlight under his arm; then got the crowbar and detonator. He hitched the wire to the terminal. He was back about a hundred and fifty feet and around the bend; there was another fifty, seventy-five, behind him to the exit. Bradshaw skimped on coil wire.

Johnny said a prayer for the past and pushed down on the plunger.

There was a stillness: then a shaking and a hollowing roar and the floor shook and the backblast of air met him, whipped dirt and a reverberating shaking roar and dirt.

Johnny ducked his head. The whole goddamned hill was in the tunnel.

He protected his eyes—the roaring scaped down, and in the poise, the silence, the liquid in the bone of his ears warned him. He swung round, taking air in his lungs. He had started for the opening as the entire length of the shaft ahead of him quietly closed in. He checked dead. His eyes went up—then the pulling roar struck him. He scrambled back. The foot-square timber snapped like a match. He felt himself tilted, the rending clapped on his ears, his eyes blind. He went over, his foot against something. Then it was quiet, in diminishing.

He waited, the hill over him.

He pulled his feet to him, out of the heavy softness that held them; drew, where he lay, his forearm across his face.

Goddamned fool, he told himself.

The roof did not come down. He went alive. His mind held his soft belly, his loins, his lungs. He breathed softly... Then he moved, feeling around him—he put his hand to his pocket; in panic to his trouser pocket; he took out the box of matches. He struck a match. His eyes dazzled, then focused, he held the match off from them. Above his head, the cracked-through length of beam hung breached on him. He clutched away, the match killed. He moved until the ground was hard, a cold width of metal ran through his palm.

He kept looking up. He pulled himself together. He had left the matches. He retched up phlegm mixed with dirt, expectorating. He needed a drink. He stretched out his arms, feeling. He listened. Then he got up. He walked back, his hand searching the wall on his right, moving carefully over earth. His toes stubbed the heavy softness. He knelt down and began groping. He found it at once. He pushed forward the contact button.

The beam flashed the side of the wall and the angle of slide-in. Johnny directed it to the ceiling; to the sides again. It looked as if it would hold. The replaced timbers did it; he kneeled in the renovated

section. He turned the flashlight back of him down the gallery where the charge had been set off.

He had perhaps twenty feet of space.

Mrs. Broughton kept her eyes on the tunnel. There seemed to be a soundless exhalation and then the report, more a muffled vibration than an explosion. She peered for Johnny to come through the dust—then the front of the hill moved, subsided, the square vanished, the top turned over, tons of the hill face sliding and thundering and engulfing, boulders tossed, dirt striking her, the horse reared. She stared. A tree came down the cliff. Mrs. Broughton said: "Johnny."

Her fingers clutched her skirt as though she was about to run. Then she was at the side of the hill, climbing up the slide, bent over to steady her to reach him, her feet burying in the earth, going back with the give, stumbling on the stones, the mesh bag torn from her wrist, her hands taking hold of the earth. A part of the slide gave and she went forward on her stomach dragged back down, the earth going in her mouth and up her clothes and twisting her aside. She sat up. She tore off the veil.

"John."

She rolled over, getting up. She looked at the wall of earth, then went across, trampling her skirt, to where Florabelle was, still tied to the tree.

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