

Gustafson should be read but not heard

The man sitting opposite me is grey-haired and speaks with the hint of a British accent - with the soft intonations of someone to whom language is a precious substance, the words of which are to be both chosen and spoken with precision.

He is a poet from the Eastern townships of Quebec; an English poet in the French milieu. "a remarkable and important poet" according to the *Tamarack Review* - and a man with singular belief in the force

and power of poetry in our time.

His name is Ralph Gustafson and he is not well-known in western Canada. As a result he spoke to only a small audience last Friday and emphatically pronounced his belief in poetry and its ideals: "I call poetry 'exalted pragmatism.' I go even further by saying that life is not a quotient from a computer. I claim that to go to a poet is to go ... as near to the truth as you can."

Although the tone of the

reading was often sombre and became tedious at times, it reflected Gustafson's idealistic vision of poetry and poets quite well. "I agree with Wallace Stevens who says that the poet should live in an ivory tower, but that the tower should have a beautiful view of the city."

Gustafson affirmed that poetry is "inside of life" and is a "moral procedure." He said that modern living placed its major emphasis on "objective, scien-

tific values" but that such emphasis actually moved man away from the truth. "In our times, do we really protect truth when we put a measure of gold studs in bronze or divide the circumference of a circle by the diameter?"

"We're into the age - not of romantic revival but romantic survival."

It seemed that Gustafson's comments concerning poetry were better than his poetry itself (at least the selection he chose to read) which is surprising, in that Gustafson is one of the most respected poets in Canada and winner of the Governor-General's Award, given in 1974 for his book of poems, *Fire on Stone*.

But Gustafson's poetry is meant to be read on paper ... and not heard out loud. It relies, to a large extent, on the visual image of the balck word in a particular position on the white page. Add to that the fact that Gustafson seems to lack a particular dramatic flair and was reading on a Friday evening to a small audience in the cavernous atmosphere of Humanities Lecture Theatre One ...

Another factor is that Gustafson's work is intellectual. Gustafson said he thinks twelve-tone music is "music from the

chin up." The same thing could well be said for his own poetry - it is poetry from and for an intellectual mind. It, indeed, reflects Gustafson's academic training, he holds bachelor and master's degrees from both Bishop's University in Quebec and Oxford University in England. His influential anthologies of Canadian writing, including the *Penguin Book of Canadian Verse*, and his many broadcasts on music for the CBC have made him widely known as an editor and critic.

But the thrust of the academic argument is that it makes his work difficult to understand and become involved with on a temporary and oral level. Gustafson says, "I haven't got the answer ... but if I can put the question into focus, then I've succeeded." This is probably as good a definition as any for the job of a poet. But unless one is given the time to move slowly through the work and enjoy the subtleties of the language, flow, and rhythm of the "focussed question" much of the value of poetry is lost. And so it was with Gustafson's work. Again one can clearly see that the bond which a poet (or author) establishes is a personal one through the written medium ... not from an oral performance.

by Kevin Gillese

Healthy eating continued from page 9

of animal products depends more on what they are fed than how or where they live.

Which conditions are most conducive to the well-being of the animal? This is a difficult question to answer. When may an animal be said to be happy? Some birds, bred for life in a cage, may thrive in a cage - provided their premises are not overcrowded, they have a wide visual territory, and so on.

Poultry on the floor may not be happy, if they are even slightly overcrowded, or if not enough feeders or waterers are provided, or if the lights are too bright, chickens may cannibalize each other - a bloody and effective way of expressing discontent. A hen should not have to wade through more than fifteen other birds to get to food or water, since she is not capable of recognizing more than that, and will attack anyone she does not recognize.

What constitutes inhumane treatment of animals is not clear cut. Some practices are definitely cruel, such as raising veal calves in dark pens on restricted diets as is done in some parts of the world, or blatantly starving weecergeese. But some practices fall into the grey zone. It may seem awful, to some people, to cut off baby turkeys' snoods, but it does prevent some bloody fighting when they get older. In many cases, the animals' behavior has not been sufficiently studied to know whether or not they are thriving or suffering or merely have a hangover from living "the good life."

One essential factor often overlooked by people who are against all intensive rearing of animals is that of labour. Allowing animals to range freely often requires more worker input, and is less amenable to mechanization, than raising animals more intensively. This too is a matter of degree.

Once we have accepted the fact that our whole civilization is integrally tied up with some degree of urbanization, we must also accept some degree of intensity in the raising of animals. This is necessary to even produce the amount of food required by us city dwellers.

On this continuum, the energy requirements of mechanization must be played off against the labour requirements of extensive animal production. Raising moose for milk in northern Saskatchewan and feeding them aspen slag may be much more sound energetically and ecologically than raising Holsteins and feeding them grain.

On the other hand, those who insist on chickens that are raised on the floor or range, under humane conditions should be required to spend several years working on a chicken farm at below minimum wage. Or, at the very least, to offer to pay higher prices for their eggs and campaign actively on behalf of a farm labourer's union.

Whatever the particulars, we cannot justify treating animals cruelly to serve our own ends. This argument is based more on logic. Consumers should

1) encourage research into farm animal behavior, 2) acquaint themselves with the results of this research, 3) acquaint themselves with farm management practices to see how these may or may not be cruel or frustrating to the animals.

Human co-operation

Food co-operatives are an excellent idea. Too often the practice falls short of the ideal. On the basis of the above discussion, a good food co-op should incorporate three essential concerns:

1) the efficient production of healthful food, 2) the well-being of the land, animals and farmers who produce the food, 3) supportive cooperation among people - de-alienation of society.

What does this mean in practice?

Supportive co-operation among people requires that the co-op be small, or at least be broken down into small groups. Beyond a dozen or so people it becomes impossible for everyone in the group to relate

on more than just a superficial level. The tendency then is to break down into smaller units of "close friends" or, especially in a co-op, to develop into an active core group of half a dozen or so people and a large group of "hangers on." The latter become outsiders to the co-op and become bored and sometimes frustrated by an apparent lack of effective power. The core group may be either gratified at its functional power or frustrated at having to do "everyone else's work." The solution to this problem is to pay the core group - the road to Federated Co-ops and Safeway - or break down into smaller groups. Any other solution seems to aggravate the situation.

The concern for efficient food production and the well-being of food producers means, among a great many other things, that local produce be preferred to shipped-in produce. This fosters co-operation among people who live in the same area and cuts out high-energy transportation costs. It may also nurture creativity in terms of dietary habits and food production. In Saskatoon, for instance, the heat "waste" from the power plant, which not only deprives citizens of the right to a frozen river in winter, could be used to heat a greenhouse - fresh vegetables all winter long!

Above all, people who wish to establish such an ideal co-op should educate themselves so they know what is nutritious, and what conditions foster the well-being of animals and the efficient production of food. A food co-op run on ignorance is no advantage over a super-market run on profits.

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