

LES MOUCHES FANTASTIQUES, 1917



Elsa dans sa jeunesse, frontispice d'Elsa.



Miss Gidlow and walking cane.
Mlle Gidlow avec sa canne.

« Miss Gidlow », dessin tiré de *Factory Facts*, 1917, revue interne de la Canadian Rubber Factory; reproduit dans *Elsa / Come with My Songs*, de l'*Autobiography of Elsa Gidlow*, Booklegger Press, San Francisco, 1986).



Photo de Marguerite Desmarais, son premier amour, Elsa p. 91.



Elsa à San Francisco à 27 ans, Elsa, p.201.



Photo de Roswell George Mills, Body Poetic, May 1982 p. 28.



Elsa dans sa jeunesse, frontispice d'Elsa.

Vers la fin de l'automne 1917, parmi les reportages de guerre, le *Montreal Daily Star* publie une lettre demandant s'il existe un groupe de discussion pour jeunes écrivains. Quelques semaines plus tard, une réponse signée Elsie Gidlow annonce la mise sur pied d'un tel groupe et invite les gens à adhérer. En fait ces deux lettres sont écrites par Gidlow, une jeune femme de dix-neuf ans qui veut se lier à des esprits libres. Elle invite les douze correspondants à se réunir chez ses parents, rue Delormier. Le groupe compte quelques écrivains, un peintre et aussi des importants qui ne seront pas invités par la suite. Il y a aussi un jeune homme efféminé, Roswell George Mills, qui tient la chronique du cœur au *Star* sous le pseudonyme de Margaret Currie et qui devient le meilleur ami et le mentor de Gidlow. Les deux amis vont aux concerts, critiquent leurs textes et rêvent ensemble. Ils lisent les ouvrages du sexologue Havelock Ellis et du champion des droits des femmes et pionnier de l'émancipation homosexuelle Edward Carpenter.

Une autre membre du groupe, Marguerite Desmarais, une femme mariée et plus âgée, devient la première amante d'Elsie. D'autres écrivains et des musiciens, dont des francophones, en font également partie. Ils publient une petite revue, d'abord sous le titre *Coals from Hades*, qui deviendra plus tard *Les Mouches fantastiques*, d'après le nom qu'ils donnent au groupe. En même temps Gidlow commence à publier des textes comme les deux poèmes que l'on voit ici, parus dans le *Canadian Bookman* et dans *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*. C'est le début de sa carrière d'écrivaine professionnelle. Après la fin de sa deuxième relation lesbienne avec une femme qui s'appelle Estelle, Elsie et son ami Roswell décident de partir pour New York, où ils s'installent à Greenwich Village. Changeant son prénom pour celui d'Elsa, elle déménage ensuite en Californie en 1926. Elle y restera jusqu'à sa mort en 1988. Elle publiera en tout quinze ouvrages dont une merveilleuse autobiographie et deviendra l'égérie des écrivaines lesbiennes des nouvelles générations.

Wasted Nights

By ELSIE A. GIDLOW

All those silent, mystieried midnights
That passed us by;
Those slender, silver, sencreely world-born hours
That we let die!
No wonder the moon, that pale soul of sadness,
Smiled from her sky.

I have almost wept to see them
All dying so,
Draped in their shrouds of stars, like virgin maidens,
Pale, pale as snow;
Wept tears for them slipping away, unknowing,
From us who know.

I have cried for all their beauty
That scarcely seemed
Nature's beauty, so fine it was, so finished
It subtly gleamed.
Yet—those nights might have been far less dear
Than those I dreamed.

« Wasted Nights » d'Elsa Gidlow, tiré du *Canadian Bookman*, avril 1918, p. 38.

In late autumn of 1917, amid the war reports in the *Montreal Daily Star* newspaper there appeared a letter of enquiry whether there was any kind of group for a young writer wanting to discuss her work with her peers. Several weeks later a response was published in which Elsie Gidlow announced the formation of such a group and invited enquiries. Both letters had been written by nineteen year old Gidlow as a ruse to bring together kindred souls, and all twelve respondents were invited to a meeting at her parents' home on Delormier. Among them were several women writers, a painter, and several obnoxious borses who were discouraged from returning. There was also an effeminate young man named Roswell George Mills, who wrote a personal advice column in the *Star* under the pseudonym of Margaret Currie, and who quickly became Gidlow's friend and mentor.

The two attended concerts, showed each other their writings, and talked about their future dreams. Among the books they shared were works by pioneer sexual reformer Havelock Ellis and Edward Carpenter, an early advocate of women's emancipation and homosexual liberation. Gidlow's group included an unhappily married middle-aged woman, Marguerite Desmarais, with whom Elsie had an affair the following year. Their circle expanded to include other writers and musicians, including francophones. They published a little magazine, originally called *Coals from Hades*, and later *Les Mouches Fantastiques*, the informal name by which the group was known. Gidlow began to publish her writing, including these poems which appeared in the *Canadian Bookman* and *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*, and was beginning to establish herself as a professional writer. Following the breakup of her second lesbian relationship with a woman named Estelle, Elsie and Roswell decided to move to New York, where they shared lodgings in Greenwich Village. Elsie, who later changed her name to Elsa, moved to California in 1926 and lived there until her death in 1988. She wrote fifteen books, including a marvelous autobiography, and acted as mentor to younger generations of lesbian writers.



Peut-être le seul exemplaire des *Mouches Fantastiques* ayant survécu ?

NEVER ANY FEAR

I shall never have any fear of love—
Not of its depth nor its uttermost height,
Its exquisite pain and its terrible delight.
Never, never shall I have any fear of love.

I shall never hesitate to go down
Into the fastness of its abyss,
Nor shrink from the cruelty of its awful kiss.
I shall never hesitate to go down.

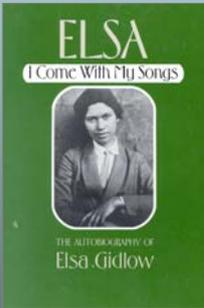
Never shall I dread love's strength
Nor any hurt it might give;
(Tender love is a sick fugitive),
I shall never dread love's strength.

I shall never draw back from love
Through fear of its vast pain,
But build joy of it and count it gain.
I shall never draw back from love.

I shall never have any fear of love,
Nor shrink weakly from its touch;
I have loved too terribly and too much
Ever to have any fear of love.

Elsie A. Gidlow

« Never Any Fear » d'Elsa Gidlow, *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*, vol. XV, oct.-mars, 1919-20.



Couverture de l'autobiographie d'Elsa Gidlow, Booklegger Press et Druid Heights Books, San Francisco, 1986.



Elsa dans son jardin en 1965, Elsa, p. 286.



Lucien Lacouture, le bien nommé couturier montréalais, Elsa et lui Louis Gross, un autre de leur compatriote, à Coney Island en 1922. Collection GLEST Historical society.



Livres dont Elsa et ses amis discutent.

